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Clarion Review ★★★☆☆ THRILLER

Reclaiming Our Own

Christopher Irons
Pants-Free for Life (Oct 15, 2019)
Hardcover $26.00 (300pp)
978-1-73349-762-6

Grand sacrifices made to protect others dominate this action-packed thriller.

In Christopher Irons's thriller *Reclaiming Our Own*, military veterans go against a child kidnapping ring.

When his toddler nephew is kidnapped, Brett, a former Army Ranger, tries to intervene but is himself taken hostage. The lead FBI investigator in the case, Wade, is a childhood friend of Brett's and his army buddy. After Brett escapes his captors, he and Wade face down the nefarious human trafficking ring and find that it's part of a deeper conspiracy, one involving people with political and monetary power. Fights and gravel-voiced threats inform their unfolding investigation. Action scenes are frequent and the sense of danger acute. Grisly, sometimes sadistic, instances of violence arise.

The early brutal death of a supporting character reinforces the high stakes for the main characters. The supporting cast function less as full-fledged people than as narrative mechanisms; kidnapped children, though they're central to the story, are less constructed as individuals than they are included to further the plot. Domestic scenes of everyday interactions with the children at the beginning of the novel are more resonant. They help to ground the work's emotions.

Brett, who so values his time that he decides not to have children of his own, nevertheless is panicked when his nephew is kidnapped, his concern overriding that for his own safety. His development is rich and thorough. The villains' accomplices are humanized with details about their personal lives, families, and responsibilities, though the villains themselves are less dimensional, characterized through mustache twirling. A FBI agent who's in on the conspiracy assists the child abduction ring without clear motives.

The overarching kidnapping conspiracy comes to involve plots to assassinate senators, but this defies credulity. The ultimate mastermind is only mentioned a few times, and the mechanics of his plot are opaque. Other elements, as with Wade and Brett deciding to take an extrajudicial vigilante approach instead of going through proper channels, also muddle the story.

Straightforward descriptions of trips to the playground and brutal fights to the death push the novel forward, but dialogue carries the tale, and it's full of exposition. Conversations run too long, with characters bragging about their credentials, threatening others, and speaking with bravado. Debates over how much force to use, and on whom, take place. The children's speech is rendered phonetically and is touching.

Themes of making sacrifices to protect others dominate the action-packed thriller *Reclaiming Our Own*, in which veterans, law enforcement officials, and others work to protect kidnapped children.

JOSEPH S. PETE (November 26, 2019)

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