

Testosterone

James Robert Baker

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Genius and madness can be very close. Or so says Dan Seagrave, the fictional voice in Baker's *Testosterone*. As the title suggests, the work is aggressive, edgy, and definitely male dominated, revealing a life fueled by love and obsession.

In the preface to the work, Baker states that what follows is the transcript of audiotapes that were sent to him by his friend Dan Seagrave. Recording his thoughts and actions as they occur, Seagrave is creating a "living novel." He has recently lost his home to a fire that he believes was set by his former lover, and is driving around Los Angeles seeking a visceral catharsis. "I'm a no-bullshit guy, and one angry queer, so don't f___ with me because I'm on a mission." His mission is to track down Pablo Ortega, the man who captured his heart and soul through his raw sexuality and psychological prowess.

While hunting down his obsession, Seagrave comes into contact with several of Pablo's former lovers whose own idiosyncrasies, and experiences with Ortega, are fitting for a Quentin Tarantino film-tough, raw, and bloody. Seagrave is horrified to learn of Pablo's sexual addiction, his work for the Chilean secret police torturing people, and his involvement in the cult of Palo Mayombe. Pablo's involvement in the cult includes kidnapping household pets for ritual sacrifice, which makes Seagrave wonder about the disappearance of his own dog. This quest ends with the purchase of a machete, a cooler placed in his front seat, and a chance encounter with Pablo Ortega.

Through his pacing and vivid descriptions, Baker, the cult author of *Tim & Pete* and *Adrenaline*, has created a vibrant and virile work detailing a man's downward descent into dementia. It is never quite clear what is reality or the product of an obsessed and disturbed mind.

This last novel of Baker's, a posthumous release, will be well-scrutinized by fans hoping for a hint at what caused Baker to take his life on November 5, 1997. Although the genius can be assigned, it's not at all clear if the madness is Baker's own. For the most part, the only clues embedded within the work point to Baker's perceptions of anonymous sex, body image, and the historical impact of AIDS.

PAUL J. WILLIS (November / December 2000)

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