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CLARION REVIEW ★★★★★ GENERAL FICTION

The Alpha Rogue

Anthony Odom

Anthony Odom (January 2010)
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Inspectors Box and Carl work as an efficient and effective team. No one in Los Angeles can match their record in tracking down and capturing fugitives. As Anthony Odom's *The Alpha Rogue* starts, Box and Carl suspect nothing unusual when they are drawn into a case where two witnesses have been murdered.

The situation grows more complex, though, when the three remaining witnesses are threatened. Fearing for their lives, the witnesses vanish without a trace. When Box and Carl follow the trail of the disappeared witnesses, they discover a cover-up among their own: The police are involved in the gruesome business-and not as saviors. With time running out, Box and Carl must keep the witnesses alive and expose corruption within the force.

Odom has spent thirty years in federal law enforcement. This is his first novel, and it carries out some good ideas. First, chapters are short, giving a sense of urgency to the proceedings. Second, most of the story is told in dialogue, allowing for a realistic, show rather than tell approach. These things set the stage for a naturalistic, fast-paced story. Unfortunately, *The Alpha Rogue* doesn't deliver.

The layout and formatting of *The Alpha Rogue* have problems. Quotation marks are frequently misplaced or absent; often, several characters speak per paragraph, confusing the flow of the narrative. Capital letters, commas, and apostrophes are also misused so that it is often unclear where sentences begin and end.

The actual content of *The Alpha Rogue* also suffers from glaring weaknesses. Adverbs or adverbial phrases ("in an inquisitive tone," "in a positive tone") appear after every character's speech, but no character's voice is sufficiently individualized. Eschewing distinctive personalities for Box, Carl, and any of the witnesses, Odom instead includes details such as the age, make, and color of everyone's car and their preferred brand of soft drink. When used judiciously, such information can be indicative of a character's personality and interests, but in *The Alpha Rogue*, the amount of unrelated description merely diffuses the forward momentum of the story.

Because of its on-the-page disorganization and its profusion of minutiae, *The Alpha Rogue* lacks reader engagement and the compelling forward thrust necessary for a neatly told, compelling procedural. Readers find themselves concentrating on misspellings or who is saying what, and are caught up in trivia, rather than the story itself. With its potentially exciting plot undermined by detail, *The Alpha Rogue* is hard to get into and even harder to stay with. If the formatting were cleaned up and the dialogue streamlined, the story would be shorter, swifter, and more effective.
(March 23, 2010)

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