



The Heartless

David Putnam

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David Putnam's thriller *The Heartless* asks a timeless question: how far would you go to protect a loved one?

Bruno Johnson, a deputy officer with the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department, thought he left all the blood and gristle of the Violent Crimes Team behind him when he took a job as a bailiff, at first in order to free up more time for Olivia, his fifteen-year-old daughter. Then Olivia is kidnapped by Louis Borkow, a fearsome killer, as part of a coldhearted revenge plan to hurt Johnson in the worst way possible.

A fast-moving page turner that sizzles toward its fulfilling end, the book is alternately sanguine and happy. Action is never in short supply: the battle between Johnson and Borkow involves frequent exchanges of flying lead, fast cars, and a life's worth of intrigue. Johnson is both all fists and all heart—a populist hero in the mold of American greats like Philip Marlowe, Shane, and “Dirty” Harry Callahan.

The prose is sharp and verb-heavy. Descriptors are kept to a bare minimum, while the dialogue is authentically that of the Los Angeles streets. Johnson talks like a hard-boiled cop and a determined father; Borkow talks tough, but his humor is morbid and his lines are grotesque. He is the type of criminal who does not care about the life of an innocent girl.

The novel feels more than it thinks, but what it lacks in intellectual sophistication, it more than makes up for with its incredible action, great characters, and engrossing, timeless story. *The Heartless* is a cop story that's perfect for all genre fans.

BENJAMIN WELTON (January / February 2020)

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