

The Kafka Society

Ron Felber

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This larger-than-life protagonist and all his flaws make this tense adventure a thrill to read.

Jack Madson has an anger he can't shake: he fights, he regularly loses his cool, and he doesn't let up even when he knows what's good for him. Ron Felber's second novel in the Jack Madson thriller trilogy drops Madson right into another high-stakes adventure involving sex, murder, and corruption. Madson is left to dig for the truth, and it's clear to everyone that Madson's going to do what he has to do, whether it gets him killed or not. Felber's narrative zips spiritedly between raunchy and tense, making a fun read for those who'd like to imagine life in the fast lane, where beautiful women need rescuing, Wall Street executives get what's coming to them, and knock-out punches are thrown between sips of Glenlivet.

Felber's protagonist is a larger-than-life character: he takes a beating and wakes to have another drink. He's wildly successful with women, and toward authority he's quick with smart-alecky responses. But he's not without weakness. Madson relies heavily on prescription drugs taken recreationally—or in his case, one pill for courage, another for sleep. As a father and a friend, as a man trying to get back on his feet after losing everything, his never-back-down approach causes nothing but heartache and pain, not to mention frequent trips to a holding cell. But as an investigator trying to help an old schoolmate while at the same time being harassed over his involvement in a recent murder, Madson's tenacity keeps him alive and sometimes even gets results.

The story is at its most detailed in the descriptions of sex clubs Madson explores and in scenes where he exchanges hostile words with adversaries. It's lightest on the background of government agencies whose representatives fuel and profit from the underworld Madson encounters.

One compelling aspect of the novel is Madson's semi-awareness that his fight with the world comes from within. He seeks out an old friend for comfort. He knows that the kind of courage it takes to confront what he calls "emotional forces" eludes him. He remembers advice from St. Damian that "before a person can defeat Satan, he must first conquer himself." Despite all the excitement and carnage, this might be Madson's, and this novel's, true quest.

JENNIFER WILLIAMS (Fall 2014)

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