ForeWord Reviews

MYSTERY

**The Killer Wore Leather**
Laura Antoniou
Cleis Press
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Laura Antoniou's novel *The Killer Wore Leather* is a mainstream crime novel set in the less-mainstream world of the S&M scene. The mystery itself concerns the murder of Mack Steele, the reigning Mr. Global Leather, who is fatally stabbed on the eve of a convention that will choose his successor.

Nearly the entire book takes place at the New York hotel where the leather and kink contest is being held, a wise narrative choice that keeps the story contained and gives potential suspects reason to interact with the victim and each other. Antoniou packs the hotel with characters representing a wide range of kinks and fetishes, from masters with slaves to leather-admiring bootblacks to furries and costume enthusiasts, and sets up enough potential motives for Steele's murder to give the police plenty to investigate. Steele was a sore winner and abrasive personality who got into quite a few arguments before his death, and key circumstances surrounding his murder—he was stabbed with a kind of knife that was mass produced as a contest souvenir and he was murdered in his own room with no witnesses save the killer—allow several suspects to seem plausible. A lesbian police officer, Rebecca Feldblum, and her newly assigned partner investigate the murder, while the convention continues and generates its own smaller plotlines.

As a murder mystery, much of *The Killer Wore Leather* functions smoothly, along the lines of a television crime procedural. Most of the book is written at a brisk, engaging pace that keeps the story going for a few hundred pages. The author has written a number of books about the fetish scene, which works as a double-edged sword here. She provides thorough and interesting detail on a variety of subcultures in the convention coverage, but at times that feels overstuffed and some of the subculture-based humor fits uneasily with the gravity of the central story. Subplots involving the detectives' personal lives and a cliched reporter character feel tacked on and underdeveloped, and the sheer number of red herrings eventually produces diminishing returns. Still, the main police investigation is a strong enough hook to keep fans of the genre engaged, and Antoniou does a fine job translating the leather and kink scene into a

difficult setting for the police to navigate. On the whole, *The Killer Wore Leather* is a competent mystery, but there's a stronger, shorter book housed inside.

*Jeff Fleischer*