Clarion Review

Thriller

The Methuselah Man: A Wes Franklin Novel
Will Dresser
CreateSpace
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Four Stars (out of Five)

Stories centered on an immortal—someone who cannot die yet longs for death—are common in science fiction, yet Will Dresser chooses to jump genres by fitting this plot device into a political thriller. Oddly enough, he succeeds. Jared Kennan Cain may be as old as Ramses the Great, but in Dresser's *The Methuselah Man*, it is modern presidents, not ancient pharaohs, whose machinations draw this unkillable title character into the action.

With coups, counterintelligence operations, black market smuggling, terrorists, genetic engineering, and nuclear disarmament, Dresser crams a lot into this book. The subtitle honors the brilliant friend and agent of Secretary of State Crandall Forsyth, who mentored Franklin at Harvard and continues to rely upon him for special clandestine tasks. Franklin is an important character in *The Methuselah Man*, but he is not the only hero. He is part of a large and vibrant ensemble that includes a brave Marine general, a wily psychiatrist and his gorgeous assistant, and a mostly silent but intriguing bodyguard referred to repeatedly as "Aryana, The Persian Strongman."

No political thriller would be worth much without a good villain, and Dresser dishes one up in the personage of George Austin, a war hero, career politician, and very angry vice president of the United States. Chafed by playing second fiddle to the nation's first woman president, and genuinely concerned that her attempts to bring about nuclear disarmament would be a disaster for the country and for the world, Austin does what any good villain would do: he plots to kill the president and take over the White House.

Into this central plot steps Jared Kennan Cain, the immortal of the book's title. Cain is a fascinating character, and the stories he tells of serving Pharaoh Ramses at Kadesh, of riding with J. E. B. Stuart at Gettysburg, and of surviving the bubonic plague are intriguing. It is Cain, not Franklin, who rises from the pages of this novel; it is Cain with whom the reader will most

likely identify.

Dresser plays with multiple plot lines simultaneously, as is common in the genre, shuffling the deck in a typical manner and enabling readers to follow each thread as it unravels. Wry humor and a hint of sexual content are occasionally present. The author does include a few fairly standard one-liners, such as, “If God wants me back, He’ll have to come get me,” and “Tomorrow your questions will not be *answered*. Tomorrow your questions will only *begin*.” Dresser shows great restraint in using such lines selectively and infrequently, and to good effect.

Dresser could have written a standard political thriller without resorting to introducing Jared Kennan Cain’s immortality. Doing so might have made the story more believable, but this also would have made it more common. The Methuselah Man is both the best character and plot device in the book, and together they are what set this novel apart from a host of similar yet far less memorable works.

Mark G. McLaughlin