Clarion Review

General

The Netroom Predator
Nicholas Bain
978-1-4259-7798-6
Five Stars (out of Five)

Mike Alexander is a young Silicon Valley account executive who spends much of his free time chatting on the Internet. To SFJEREME and SILKLADY and his other friends in cyberspace he is SJMIKEE—an open-minded fun-loving guy who has gone so far as to take his clothes off at his computer during a round of sexy chat. Offline it appears that Mike has his priorities in order. He is devoted to his wife Karen a marketing prof at San Jose State and their sex lives seem to be mutually satisfying. He is also a successful account rep for Silicon Entertainment soon to be promoted to a lucrative vice-presidency. But after he introduces his best friend and co-worker Doug to the social and sexual possibilities of the internet cyberspace begins to invade reality and Mike becomes a suspect in a series of brutal murders.

Nicholas Bain's first novel could accurately be called a cyber-thriller although it is nicely unencumbered by hacker jargon or high technology specs. Bain sometimes takes readers into the chatroom where identity often goes no deeper than a screenname and a borrowed photograph. But his young upscale and sexually uninhibited characters are more often found lounging in the cafes bistros and brewpubs of the Bay area.

When Mike introduces SILKLADY or Melissa a blond beauty with whom he has chatted for years but has never personally met to his friend Doug Mike begins to have trouble keeping his private and professional lives separate from his SJMIKEE persona. Melissa is hot after Mike's body "anytime anywhere any place" and after she and Doug set up a surprise real life double-date with Mike and Karen Melissa tries to seduce Mike in the men's room of the upscale Italian eatery Palermo's in San Jose. On another double-date a weekend in Napa Valley while Karen is off getting a body wrap Melissa shows up naked in Mike's mud room. "Just take me Mikey!" she purrs.

But the greater threat to Mike and Karen's marriage occurs when someone using the screenname SJMIKEE brutally rapes NCALGAL or Sarah the young ex-wife of a TV evangelist

up in Burlingame. Later a Greenpeace fundraiser is raped and murdered in her San Francisco home and then a gay man is brutally raped and strangled in his sadomasochism playroom in the Castro district. In each case and in the several murders that follow the victim's computer is stolen but SJMIKEE's first rape victim Sarah has hired a private investigator to discover his identity. She also enlists the services of the Sisterhood of Justice a band of very tough women who enjoy castration as a form of punishment for men who victimize women. While the Sisterhood is certain that SJMIKEE is Michael Alexander—and no one else—Nicholas Bain keeps readers guessing at the serial killer's identity and purpose.

Joe Taylor