Clarion Review

Autobiography & Memoir

The Price of Honesty: The Terrible Confession of a Former Mobster
Robert Yugovich
AuthorHouse
978-1-4678-9076-2
Three Stars (out of Five)

Part confession and part cautionary tale, Serb mafioso Robert Yugovich's tell-all book of his life in crime is at times more rationalization than revelation. Although currently serving prison time, Yugovich is not particularly contrite about breaking the law or hurting people. What regrets the author does have are almost exclusively about how he put his family in danger.

As with similar mobster memoirs, *The Price of Honesty* offers the requisite "pimps, weapons traders and forgers" and "primitive, aggressive and not very educated" thugs, goons, drug-dealers, and killers. At times, this story of "an organization that nobody ever speaks about, but it is everywhere" is exciting and gritty, but the reader cannot help but feel that Yugovich is holding back, especially about the role he played.

The author, who writes under a pseudonym, served briefly in the Balkan wars of the 1990s before fleeing to Western Europe rather than continue to participate in those brutal conflicts. The episodes covering the war years are arguably the most honest and the best written parts of the book. Those scenes of horror and disillusionment set the stage for and explain his seduction into a life of crime.

He admits to smuggling prostitutes, cigarettes, and drugs, but he stops short of any admission of violent wrongdoing. Violence is always perpetrated by someone else. That he was so deeply involved with such loathsome, cruel, and murderous gangsters yet has no blood on his own hands seems unlikely.

"People said I had my wealth in a dishonest way and was a criminal," the author explains rather dismissively, "but I never felt like that. I did the same as most states in the world, but in a somewhat more honorable manner."

The people Yugovich worked for and with are far less "honorable." One such person is the brutal Joco, "a real gangster with plenty of power." Yugovich says of him that "one didn't

need to fear the devil but would need to watch out for Joco." Another is the drugged-out and explosively violent Attila, who warned Yugovich that "you cannot leave—not now, not ever. Everybody has to perform knowing that you pay with your life if you cause any harm to this organization."

The author, however, did not heed that advice. With a price on his head from his own associates due to some deals that went bad, Yugovich turned himself into the authorities as part of a deal to put his wife and children in a witness protection program. Unfortunately, says Yugovich, this is only a temporary respite. To save his family, he must present himself for an imminent gangland execution upon release from prison, and he portrays his intention to do so as an act of courage and honor.

While Yugovich hopes that his story will prevent others from following a similar path, his ultimate goal is more personal: to show his children that their father was not a "wicked man." To accomplish his goal, however, Yugovich appears to have left a good deal unsaid; *The Price of Honesty* may be selectively, rather than completely, honest.

Mark McLaughlin