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Clarion Review ★★★★★ MYSTERY

The Rabbit Skinners

John Eidswick
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A troubled detective confronts an intimidating small-town mystery in this rewarding novel.

John Eidswick's police procedural thriller and mystery, *The Rabbit Skinners*, is gripping and intricately plotted.

After an FBI action goes wrong, agent James Strait ends up with a disabling condition, Meniere's Disease, and guilt over the death of innocent people. He returns to his hometown, expecting a quiet convalescence, but at the urging of local activists, and against his own misgivings, the veteran agent gets sucked into conducting an unofficial one-man investigation into the disappearance of a nine-year-old girl. This is despite resistance from the local police and FBI orders to drop the case.

The narrative paints a divided picture of Strait. His public persona is heroic. He's tall, powerful, handsome—a hometown football hero, a war hero who served in Afghanistan, and an FBI hero who appeared on the cover of *Newsweek* after saving countless lives. But Strait doesn't agree with that image. He judges himself for what he believes are needless deaths in the FBI operation, and he fears that his disabling inner-ear condition will sideline him permanently from the work that he loves.

That dissonance results in an emotionally vulnerable, sympathetic lead who is constitutionally unable to resist pleas for help. The occasional, unpredictable attacks of Meniere's Disease that render him helpless add to his fascinating characterization and to the story's suspense.

Other characters, even minor ones, are also colorful, from a one-eyed Native American homeless man with clues to the girl's disappearance, to the commanding tones and Japanese accent of the doctor who helps Strait with his condition.

The plot confronts Strait with an intimidating mystery, and with few resources and clues, reluctant witnesses, and a hostile local police force. Strait's uncompromising investigation is interesting and authentic, including crime-scene procedures, interviews, and even some undercover work. These procedural details, like the medical details that explain Strait's disability, keep the story believable.

A racial aspect contributes tension. Because the missing girl is black, the local activist community chalks up the police department's lack of interest to racism and is drawn to Strait as an alternative. His sleuthing turns up police corruption and white supremacists, disturbing facets of the story's small-town Arizona setting.

The writing is fast-paced, verbal, and descriptive. Much of the plot advances through snappy dialogue, and action sequences are rendered in sharp detail, down to their firearms and hand-to-hand combat. Chapter-ending cliffhangers make the book hard to put down.

The story rings true on many levels, from the suffering inflicted by Meniere's Disease and survivor's guilt to the details of professional detective fieldwork and the obstacles of bureaucracy. Themes of courage and strength in the face of

adversity and evil help to make *The Rabbit Skinners* entertaining and compelling.

GARY HENRY (January 24, 2019)

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