



The Rice Thieves

William Claypool

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The Rice Thieves has pretty much all you could ever want out of an action tale—love, violence, patriotism, and discussions about the importance of food production.

The Rice Thieves is an international caper featuring what could be one of the most innovative robberies ever committed to print. This spy story features action, sharp dialogue, and discussions about the global importance of a certain protein- and carbohydrate-rich crop.

Franco is a former US intelligence officer looking for the quiet life in New Zealand. Unfortunately, an old Navy friend pulls him into a major case involving the USDA and a secretive research facility in Hawaii. Beyond that, a pair of smugglers in Hong Kong have been on the receiving end of a new strain of rice that may hold the solution to China's growing demand for more rice production. What connects the two cases is a particularly nasty little devil inside the US government's secret plant development industry.

Once in the heart of China's Cantonese region, Franco stumbles upon a frightening nexus of genetic research, GMOs, spies, weapons, and members of the Chinese Communist Party. Although a work of fiction, *The Rice Thieves* could very easily happen tomorrow, even if a Frankenstein strain of rice cannot cure stomach ulcers. (However, in this book, the super strain can do just that.)

Author William Claypool deftly produces a thriller jam-packed with scientific facts and information. This is not the work of a dilettante; Claypool certainly knows his stuff when it comes to biology and biological research.

However, the main character, Franco, acts most as a cipher within the story. While he does briefly fall in love with a Maori beauty in the first few chapters of the novel, he quickly becomes more of an action hero as *The Rice Thieves* progresses. This doesn't make him a weak character, but it does keep him from directing the action. The same can be said for the Admiral, Franco's humorless boss.

The Liu brothers, on the other hand, are highly interesting and very entertaining characters. Dedicated to both making a profit and helping their country maintain its autarky in terms of rice production, these two smugglers prove to be serious threats to Franco's attempts to retrieve stolen US government property. Claypool's scenes in the hectic streets of southern China and Hong Kong are well wrought and absolutely fun.

The Rice Thieves is a solid and quick jaunt through the world of globalized crime. Claypool's writing is unadorned and sparse. Nothing gets in the way of the story, which contains all of the best attributes of a popular potboiler. *The Rice Thieves* has pretty much all you could ever want out of an action tale—love, violence, patriotism, and discussions about the importance of food production in the twenty-first century.

BENJAMIN WELTON (May 3, 2018)

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