



The Robusta Incident

Jennifer Fales

Khenaton Rainey, Illustrator

Jennifer Fales (Jan 8, 2015)

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Comedy and horror merge in the best way in this zombified analysis of bureaucracy.

Jennifer Fales has penned a comedic horror novel about a chemist's scheme to turn a coffee corporation's employees into shuffling undead in order to be accepted into a secret evil organization. It's both a revenge fantasy and a worst nightmare for cubicle workers, and it rocks. Corporate bureaucracy comes under attack in *The Robusta Incident*.

Howard Danishefsky, a dissatisfied, disgruntled chemist for the Robusta Corporation, resents almost everything about his job—including his sharklike boss (and ex-lover), who is a target of his revenge. His absent father was part of a shady conspiracy called the Consortium of Evil, of which Howard aspires to become a member. He has finally come up with a plan that should guarantee him a spot with the Consortium, and he sets about implementing it with great vigor and an inflated ego. Howard is not a very nice guy.

Luckily for him, he's walking around with the advice of his deceased mother, Mimi, in his head. The conversation could be between Howard and a ghost, or between Howard and his conscience; it's not specified and doesn't need to be. Mimi's influence over him is firm but supportive.

Howard believes that the arrival of a voodoo queen and a seemingly ageless professor means the Consortium is interested in his plot. But with the help of a zombie-with-attitude whom Howard calls Sir Stinks-A-Lot, the chemist realizes his plot is flawed. From that point, the race is on for Howard to learn whether he can reverse the effects of his scheme.

Howard is an anti-hero who is nearly impossible to like, but this makes for compelling reading. His dead mother's voice is a character on its own, acting as an ameliorating element to Howard's evil caper. Mother and son were very close in life, and that bond is what keeps Howard from being an utter villain.

The pace of the story lags in places, and Howard's high opinion of himself sometimes grates on the nerves, but a certain amount of tension is needed to maintain his character's integrity. It's a tricky path to take, but Fales pulls it off.

The cover illustration of three characters standing in an office setting and not interacting in any way is less interesting than if they were engaged in action that depicted the relationship between them. This doesn't make the cover bad, just less evocative of the story.

All told, *The Robusta Incident* has a certain flair that is maintained well, despite the less-than-stellar qualities of many of the characters. They all have flaws, but this is what makes the book interesting and fun, particularly for anyone who's worked in a large room full of cubicles.

J. G. STINSON (March 2, 2015)

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