

The Secret Sign of the Lizard People

Kevin E. Buckley

FriesenPress (Jul 1, 2020)

(190pp)

978-1-5255-5963-1

The Secret Sign of the Lizard People is an eccentric satirical novel that thumbs its nose at the current world order.

Two homicide detectives stumble upon an alien plot in Kevin Buckley's humorous novel, *The Secret Sign of the Lizard People*.

An aspiring model is murdered, and the LAPD's greatest homicide detectives, Leafy and Beefy, are on the case. The clues lead them through the best and worst of California, from drought-dried sewers to a posh country club. They come to the realization that the model's death is only the tip of an insidious iceberg. The closer Leafy and Beefy draw to solving the case, the closer they are to unmasking the greatest conspiracy in human history.

The narrative jumps straight into the action with the discovery of the model's sensationalist demise. It starts off as a send-up of police procedurals, but becomes more and more absurd as it rolls toward its startling conclusion. The mystery unfurls at a good pace and demonstrates that Leafy and Beefy, regardless of whatever else can be said about them, are devoted and logical professionals. The reveal of the dead model's true (in)significance is a nice twist, while the text's variety of settings and suspects keeps it all interesting.

In the aggravating heat of a Los Angeles summer, Leafy and Beefy disagree about everything except the importance of fighting for justice. Their well-crafted personalities lend themselves to natural, fluid interactions, and they are enjoyable characters despite their numerous flaws. Even minor characters are distinctive and play their parts well.

Much of the humor is derived from snarky narration, wordplay, and puns. The book's potshots at the rich and famous, while they are often amusing and make cogent points, are only tangentially relevant. Better integrated are jabs at America's flawed criminal justice system.

Aside from dialogic pit stops, the focus remains on the mystery, though the questions raised by the nature of the conspiracy, and by side characters' off-screen actions, aren't always satisfied. The case's resolution is entertaining and unexpected, and last chapters feature destruction that Leafy and Beefy respond to with their usual nonchalance. Lingering questions are unanswered, and the fates of important characters are unknown.

Fanciful, brisk, and irreverent, *The Secret Sign of the Lizard People* is an eccentric satirical novel that thumbs its nose at the current world order.

EILEEN GONZALEZ (May 11, 2020)

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