

The Sounds of Death

A.A. Pecora

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In A.A. Pecora's entertaining mystery, *The Sounds of Death*, a private detective finds himself in more than a few dangerous situations as he tries to solve a very personal crime.

Cody Thomas, a chain-smoking private investigator who is attempting to quit, is on a three-day stakeout in a hotel room in a seedy part of town. When one of his audio surveillance tapes with the "sounds of death" becomes police evidence in a murder investigation, he is determined to be the one to solve the crime. A former cop, he sometimes enlists the help of his former partner, and he sometimes works outside of the boundaries of the law.

The initial setup of the narrative is confusing, particularly when it comes to identifying Cody's client, but once that information is clearly established, there is never a dull moment. His detective work is described in detail in many places, but the reader is asked to go along with a few convenient coincidences and unexplained key plot points, such as how Cody gains access to the hotel room in which he places a bug, and how he even knows which room to bug. Explaining this aspect would have helped to establish the level of his detective skills early on.

Overall, the characters are strongly developed and likable, but there are a few contradictions. For example, Cody left the police force eight years earlier because he discovered certain cops were corrupt and his boss did nothing about it, but he himself is not a by-the-book detective. In fact, he is willing to use any means necessary to solve the crime and protect those he loves, including concealing evidence from the police and breaking into the crime scene. How he came to have the audio tape with the sounds of death is also ethically questionable.

The cover art with an x-ray of a skull gives the impression that the narrative is more graphic, more scientific, and darker than the fun caper Pecora has written. The back cover describes the story as modeled after Sherlock Holmes mysteries, but the tone and setting is more reminiscent of noir fiction. Although set in a contemporary era, the atmosphere of the narrative conjures images of a 1950s detective story, with the plot centering around mobsters and pervasive sexual themes, including prostitution and murders committed during sexual encounters. A character even refers to a woman as a "dame" at one point.

While it is clearly a modern-day narrative, there is a blurring of the time frame in places, such as when Cody makes a call from a cell phone after going to a public pay phone to look up a phone number—instead of using the Internet.

The inconsistencies and flaws in logic take readers out of the action temporarily, but the vividly described story brings them right back into Cody's world. The strongly developed relationships between Cody, his wife, and his former partner, along with the many unexpected plot turns, fully engage the reader and sustain interest throughout this suspenseful whodunit.

MARIA SIANO (September 26, 2012)

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