Clarion Review

Thriller

The Vig
John M. Nuckel
CreateSpace
978-1-4663-8534-4
Four Stars (out of Five)

The cover of John M. Nuckel's *The Vig* is a montage of blurred images—a nice setup for a story that moves along in a gray, hazy world devoid of clearly heroic characters.

Frank McGinley, who passes for the hero in this mystery, is a tough, hard-drinking college dropout who is thoroughly disillusioned with his work in the financial world. Inadvertently, he stumbles across a scheme that is illegally raking in millions of dollars from various transactions in the trading houses on Wall Street; Frank is propelled into a world of murder, conspiracy, and, eventually, an uneven partnership with a complicated criminal investigator from the Securities and Exchange Commission. Along the way, Frank has a sensual encounter with a gorgeous but twisted assassin, Carla Pugliese.

The Vig, at a relatively compact 194 pages, packs into its dark contours the elements capable of sustaining several mystery novels. Nuckel is an able storyteller; he uses narrative well to provide not only complicated explanations of the plot but also the characters' background and motivations. Early in the story, Nuckel writes about his leading man: "Frank was crying because he had become the one thing in the world he never wanted to be. Frank was crying because he had become his own father."

Additionally, Nuckel manages to tell enough about Carla to make her a sympathetic character. The author makes it clear that abuse suffered at the hand of her father played a significant role in making her the pathological killer she has become. Frank, Carla, and the remainder of the cast are each realistic and well-defined characters who sustain the reader's interest throughout the book.

Nuckel can be faulted, however, for at times being overly ambitious with his narrative. He uses backstory and character introspection at the same time, when one or the other would suffice. And the point of view often shifts from one character to another. In a seduction scene,

the author relates Frank's thoughts and feelings; then he stops and retraces the action from Carla's point of view. This is confusing, and it deflates the importance and intensity of the first character's take on the scene.

Generally, the story is well-constructed and adequately edited. There are a few obvious errors, such as missing words or improper word order. All in all, though, *The Vig* is a good read. Nuckel appears to know his way around Wall Street and, armed with this insight, he has created a suspenseful and entertaining tale.

John Michael Senger