Clarion Review

Thriller

Three Days to Die
John Avery
Apticon Books
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Five Stars (out of Five)

Thirteen-year-old Aaron Quinn and his best friend, Willy, are in the wrong place at the wrong time. As a result, Aaron ends up in the clutches of a trio of vicious bank robbers, and must participate in their heists against his will. As the crime spree begins to snowball, Aaron learns that the sadistic leader of the gang, Johnny Souther, has vile plans for Aaron's plucky single mother, Ashley. Perhaps a chance encounter with a writer who is equipped with the wealth and gadgetry of James Bond can rescue Aaron and friends before Souther gets his way.

Avery opens *Three Days to Die* with a bang and then sprints toward the finish line with event following event in quick succession. The short chapters read like high-energy snapshots. The characters' emotions run high, and feelings jump off the page like scenes from a gritty action film. Avery's writing draws the reader to empathize with every character—even the villain—by giving each an element of pathos, along with a well-developed backstory.

Aaron has the right mix of boyish bravado, quick wits, and nervousness. He remains consistent throughout this rollicking ride, never seeming either babyish or wise beyond his years. In the wrong hands, Ashley could have been just a sexy damsel in distress who happens to be a mother, but the author's characterization balances her fortitude and vulnerability as she alternates between wanting Aaron to be a man and save himself, and desiring to be a protective mother to her only child. Even the wealthy stranger is shown as a caring and compassionate individual, not a mere *deus ex machina.*

The dialogue is full of zingy one-liners. It is also laced with profanity, but this might be considered by some as appropriate to the high-octane, life-or-death situations in which characters find themselves. Avery creates rich settings as well. The dark, dank, abandoned cannery in which most of the action takes place provides the ideal backdrop for narrow escapes, general nefariousness, and foul imprisonment. The author's juicy, immediate adjectives drop

readers right into the perilous milieus he constructs.

Debut author John Avery takes thriller lovers of any age on a heart-pounding, pulse-tingling ride in his first novel, and he does it with style.

Jill Allen