

Tools of the Trade

Philip B. Persinger

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Tools of the Trade is an escapist novel that strokes and tantalizes imaginations while offering entertaining social and gender commentary.

Philip B. Persinger's *Tools of the Trade* is the absurd and comedic story of a rich man's battle against impotence and a business rival amid unusual circumstances.

The constantly pressing question of this comic novel is: how does the second richest man in the United States contend with impotence after recovering from prostate cancer? Moreover, how does he do this while being stuck with a name like Woody Steele? For those whose imaginations are impelled by such a predicament, this novel works toward answers.

Persinger is a playwright, and his talents there are apparent in this work. Its chapters are short, many running only a few pages, and they burst like bottle rockets, glowing quickly before they fizzle out.

The story opens quietly, in a well-appointed house in London staffed by a group of attractive maids. In but a few pages, it is revealed that the maids are actually men who pay to be there and to be disciplined. This is not the average British bed and breakfast.

Later, a similar house is opened in New York as the story continues to ricochet into its own strange world. The world of high-powered corporate finance is made to fit conveniently with BDSM, to say nothing of the old guy in the background harboring the explosive device.

The action is like a fast-moving mountain stream: cool, persistent, and, in places, suddenly treacherous. Nearly every character is dressed out of a high-fashion catalog, except apartment-building superintendent Tim. But even he is out of the ordinary, as when he appears at the bawdy house parlor decked out in an Indian headdress.

Often, it is hard to tell where the story picks up and the cartoon ends. Dialogue is snappy, biting, and unadorned, as when Mary Margaret, Woody's COO, confidante, and casual sex partner, responds to a compliment with "It's a company dress....You paid for it."

Persinger is adept at getting as much as possible out of terse sentences. He wastes little space on elaborate descriptions of rooms or people's emotions. Svetlana, the international movie star and granddaughter of a former Stalinist-era operative, is a complicated character who uses others as some people use a toothbrush. After a particularly tense chapter, Persinger describes Svetlana: "She does not wake up so much as come out of a coma." However, these entertaining characters are often hard to empathize with; they lead charmed lives that most can only dream about, and remain largely unknowable throughout.

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JOHN SENGER (May 23, 2016)

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