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Clarion Review ★★★★☆ THRILLER

Unyielding Destiny

Spiros Gratsias
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Unyielding Destiny *is a fascinating novel in which a mobster's story intersects with that of a district attorney's, resulting in questions about the nature of honor.*

In Spiros Gratsias's novel *Unyielding Destiny*, a criminal and a lawyer try to lead their lives with honor.

In the 1960s, Frank is a mobster, a Korean War veteran, and a prisoner at Alcatraz. He plans on being the first person to escape the island. During a vaccination program at the prison, he meets Scott; Scott's father, Roy, died saving Frank during the war. Frank feels remorse over the fact that a good man lost his life saving him; he forms a connection with Scott.

Decades later, Frank, having escaped prison, is a hitman for the mob. When he learns that Scott is now an assistant district attorney who's probing organized crime, he worries that their paths will cross again—with potentially unpleasant results.

Though its pictures of mob life are familiar, the drama between Frank and Scott takes this thriller in new directions, including into a compelling and extended thematic focus on the nature of personal convictions. Frank, though his deeds are unsavory, abides by a certain code; he values principles, bravery, and honor. As such, even though he is a killer by trade, he expresses admiration for people like Roy and Scott; he regards them as natural leaders who fight hard to protect what it is that they believe in.

At his opposite, Scott begins the story as a boy who loves baseball and who mourns his father's death; these values mean that he's compelled to seek justice in his adulthood. And a menagerie of secondary characters are used to flesh out the men's worlds, including a wealthy smooth-talker, smart-mouthed fellow prisoners, hard-boiled prison guards, Scott's mother, and a former school friend with whom Scott reunites as an adult. Among this cast: each exchange is effectual and subtly expository.

The story is told from both men's perspectives; it moves at a steady pace, revealing information that would otherwise be hidden through each of them. Deviations to cover historical milestones, including the Kennedy assassination and the Moon landing, extend the novel's pages, which are otherwise devoted to generating suspense and tension around Scott and Frank's potential reunion. Meanwhile, Frank comes to understand that wars don't just occur on battlefields—they also occur in people's hearts and souls. This growing sensibility culminates in the novel's dramatic final act.

Unyielding Destiny is a fascinating novel in which a mobster's story intersects with that of a district attorney's, leading to questions about what it means to be a person of honor.

KATERIE PRIOR (February 1, 2022)

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