



## Clarion Review

General

### **Whoever Gets There First**

Karl L. Hultman

Lulu

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Four Stars (out of Five)

Boston police detective Steve Barrie's life unexpectedly takes an abrupt turn to the bizarre. Having a casual beer with his partner on a hot afternoon becomes a surreal nightmare when Steve finds himself at the wrong end of a gun held by a man he thought he knew.

This scene provides an eerie prelude to future events in *Whoever Gets There First*, author Karl Hultman's gripping first novel. Although Steve recovers from the events of that sweltering afternoon, his life is only beginning to heat up. The compelling tale involving organized crime and the drug trade is sure to keep even the most avid readers of police mysteries fully engaged.

Central to the story is a dangerous drug dealer who manages to lure even those who seem untouchable. As Steve attempts to bring everyone involved in the crimes and conspiracies to justice, he finds that his life depends on him placing his trust in the right people. His struggle to come to terms with the fact that his own colleagues may be corrupt accurately portrays the emotions involved in such a harrowing discovery.

Told in an authentic, believable voice, Hultman's novel is rich with intrigue and excitement. Readers familiar with the Boston area will recognize the accents and distinctive New England attitude that clearly come through in the characters and their interactions with each other. The dialogue is natural and adds to the smooth flow of the storyline.

Hultman also shines in his vivid and credible characterizations. Steve has the emotional strength expected of a cop hero, along with a layer of vulnerability that adds to his humanity. When reminded that failing to report what he discovers could result in his own prosecution, Steve counters, “To think I was just about to offer you coffee.” The reader learns that Steve’s occasional sarcasm is actually a coping mechanism in the face of difficult truths; which inspires empathy and adds to his realism.

By contrast, the oddly calm, cruel ruthlessness of the drug dealer will send shivers up the spines of readers as they realize the truth another character states so succinctly: “No one could cross the Mafia and get away with it. Ever. Except for this guy.”

The occasional typographical errors in *Whoever Gets There First* are regrettable, but easily overlooked given the strength of Hultman’s voice and story. More egregious are two occasions in which characters are referred to by incorrect names. Such carelessness is inexcusable in a novel that is otherwise meticulous in its attention to detail.

In spite of these oversights, Hultman has crafted an engrossing novel. It is a promising beginning to a planned series featuring Steve Barrie. Readers are certain to close this book and resolve to seek out the next installment.

*Jeannine Chartier Hanscom*