

KIRKUS

REVIEWS

TITLE INFORMATION

INTERRUPTION OF THE COCKTAIL HOUR

A Washington Yarn of Art, Murder, and the Attempted Assassination of the President

Moore, Arthur Cotton

Manuscript

BOOK REVIEW

Moore's first foray into fiction (*The Powers of Preservation*, 1998) is a black comedy about a struggling artist who finds a killing device that might prove beneficial to his career.

Pete Preston is an ambitious painter but not a successful one. He makes ends meet by taking odd jobs, until the day he happens upon a calculator that, by simply pressing 5, kills whatever, or whomever, it's pointed at with a heart attack. Pete dispatches a few unwholesome characters, at least one in self-defense, but it isn't long before those haughty art critics, who so often denounce Pete's work for their own agendas (like a promotion), become targets. The novel, despite featuring a protagonist who ultimately (and correctly) defines himself as a serial killer, takes a tongue-in-cheek approach. The comedy is decidedly dark--there's a joke about a school where only the older students are permitted to carry guns--but many scenes are undeniably humorous, even when they stray from the main plot, like the story of the local "Crazy Couple" and their bumbling attempts to kill one another or Pete and his pals' cross-dressing for performance art back in the '70s. Moore doesn't handle the notion of murder with nonchalance: Pete often regrets the killings, regardless of how horrible the person may have been, and after a bookie witnesses Pete using his calculator, the painter doesn't take lightly an offer of millions to assassinate the president. The story is also quite profound, as the method of offing someone is so easy (and easy to pass off as accidental) that it focuses almost solely on the consequences of murder; Pete spends more time debating whether he made the right choice than worrying about being caught. There is, however, enough death to catch police attention, which adds dashes of suspense to the narrative. The author, an architect and painter, lovingly portrays both professions: an artist who's genuinely hurt by criticisms of his work and who enjoys pretending to be an architect at a cocktail party. The ending, even if readers can guess it, is wickedly funny.

Perceptive and droll; Moore paints his story in dark but striking colors.

EXCERPTING POLICIES

Please review Kirkus Media's excerpting policies before publishing any portion of this review online or in print for any use. To learn about proper attribution and to ensure your use is in compliance with our guidelines, we invite you to visit <http://www.kirkusreviews.com/indieexcerpts>.