

A Lethal Question

Mark Rubenstein

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A patient poses a question to his psychologist: “Ya wanna know who clipped Boris Levenko?” It’s a query that a bevy of Russian and Albanian mobsters want answered, setting off a chain of mortal consequences in Mark Rubenstein’s spirited, fast-paced thriller *A Lethal Question*.

Bill is an unassuming professional who’s putting his life back together after the death of his fiancée. When competing mob factions discover that one of their own blabbed to Bill, he’s marked for assassination. Out of his depth, Bill is forced to give up his identity and go on the run in Manhattan, relying on his own wits. Fortunately, he has two allies: Rami, an enigmatic “fixer,” and Elena, the next-door neighbor who may be his emotional salvation (and is also handy with martial arts).

A Lethal Question moves at breakneck speed, each chapter packed with incidents. The book’s clear highlights are its pursuit sequences, as when Bill and Elena evade their would-be killers by the narrowest of margins. Bill may be more of an everyman than a fleshed-out character, but he’s sympathetic; his musings on how easily one can lose one’s identity and life on a whim give the story an existential charge. And the Albanian and Russian mob leaders who hunt him are sketched in with deft strokes; they may be evildoers, but they also have human sides.

The action is grounded and gritty, although Bill’s ability to dodge death (with plenty of high-kicking assistance from Elena) sometimes strains credulity. And the best is saved for last: a late twist snaps the plot into focus and results in a satisfying conclusion.

Set amid organized crime intrigue, *A Lethal Question* holds its own as a snappy suspense thriller.

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