

Instruments of Darkness

Thomas Foyle

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Fast-paced and exciting, the mystery novel Instruments of Darkness troubles through technological schemes via a balanced duo of investigators.

A technology-averse private investigator is framed by a mysterious hacker in Thomas Foyle's mystery novel *Instruments of Darkness*.

In the heat of New Orleans in August, private investigator Sean's home is raided by the FBI and Sean is arrested on suspicion of terrorism. A dam was breached using malware that originated in Sean's computer. The forty-three-year-old Luddite, who uses paper maps instead of GPS, is at a loss: Both the technology involved and the motives for using it elude him. Wondering if anyone from his past hates him enough to frame him, Sean teams up with the FBI special agent assigned to his case, Alex, to investigate.

Fast-paced and exciting, the novel follows as baffled, irritated Sean throws quips at his FBI captors in a scene that ably establishes his wry voice. He describes new settings with similar humor: A string of mansions looks "like a row of wedding cakes." Alex, meanwhile, is as proper as Sean is lax and as technologically efficient as Sean is inept. Their differences make for strong banter, as their methodologies could not be more different. They often have to compromise to work together. And Alex's type A approach conceals that she has her own complications to deal with.

Although they only begin working together out of convenience, Alex and Sean grow to rely on and care for each other; their problems become intertwined. Sean feels compelled to help Alex as she helps him. The evolution of their relationship is sweet, especially as Alex begins to soften Sean's rough edges.

Themes regarding technology's usefulness compared to its drawbacks pervade the book. Sean is most comfortable with technology from the twentieth century, which makes it difficult for him to understand and investigate the hackers. This disconnect makes room for Alex to explain the details and implications of the hacks.

As the book progresses, answers to its looming questions are proffered, though Sean is left with more questions each time. Bewildering events are aplenty, and Sean is tased, arrested, and held at gunpoint. Throughout it all, his propensity for sarcasm prevails; it is bestowed upon his various abductors equitably. He and Alex hold stakeouts, call in favors, and banter with police officers and suspects alike. The novel barrels toward a satisfying and violent conclusion whose stakes have steadily heightened.

A witty private investigator looks into a hacking event in which he was framed in the propulsive mystery novel *Instruments of Darkness*.

LEAH BLOCK (November 6, 2024)

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