

Killing Time

Michael Joseph Mahn

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In Michael Joseph Mahn's thriller *Killing Time*, a former district attorney and a writer are swept into a conspiracy in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina.

Hurricane Katrina left New Orleans in a state of chaos. The police are swamped with frequent discoveries of corpses that show clear signs of foul play. But an unusual crime scene at one of the few surviving hotels leaves them at a loss. The three victims have no recorded fingerprints and a small cache of weapons.

The police bring in two suspects: Henry, a retired district attorney, and the Kid, a writer with a convoluted, mysterious past. Henry is believed to be the person responsible for taking out the men (discovered to be proficient assassins); the Kid covers for him. Together, they recount the events leading up to the fateful exchange of gunfire.

But bizarre twists complicate these deadly circumstances: the Kid also reveals that he has definitive insights into the Kennedy assassination, necessitating a life on the run before he settled in New Orleans and befriended Henry. And Henry's story prior to his success in the US is rife with traumas and losses in Ireland. Their odd friendship, and their decision to find solace in their shared pain, centers the story.

Though it is prone to discursive elaborations, the book layers its mysteries well, switching between backstories and its present-day actions in a tension-inducing way that leans into the dynamics between Henry and the Kid. Still, the Kid ends up being the best-developed member of the cast: discovering hard truths shapes him, as do his life on the run and the repeated attempts on his life. He manages to evade each assassination attempt, but his luck is of the last-minute variety, and he adopts and abandons aliases so often that he loses his sense of self. His metacommentary on fiction writing is interesting but represents additional deviations, and the book's misspellings, run-on sentences, and focus on extraneous details mar its delivery.

Still, the book's foreshadowing is subtle and contributes to satisfying reveals. The police interrogation of Henry and the Kid, for example, is interesting in that Henry uses the exchange to gather information of his own, while the Kid feigns deafness to irritate the detective and waste time while recounting the events of the shootout. While the initial mystery fades in importance by the book's end, the incorporation of the Kennedy conspiracy is resolved in a rewarding fashion.

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JOHN M. MURRAY (January 11, 2023)

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