



Substantial Justice

Daniel Ben-Horin

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Daniel Ben-Horin's black comedy *Substantial Justice* concerns humanity's best and worst traits.

In the 1980s, Spider makes an honest living as a mechanic and distracts himself from lost love with mind-altering drugs. Then, ten years after she left, Siobhan reappears in his life, drawn back to the West Coast to suss out whether mistreated workers need her legal representation.

Soft-spoken Spider and altruistic Siobhan are, by all accounts, not an ideal match, but death, violence, and disgruntled exes do nothing to dull their love; the two pick up right where they left off, forging their reconnection as violent white supremacists and hippies clash in the forests of California. It's smooth sailing until Spider's closest friend, Yosh, winds up murdered.

Yosh was a prolific marijuana dealer and a vitriolic radio show host with a long list of enemies. As Spider is swept up in the mystery of Yosh's death, an eclectic cast that includes biker gangs, a cartel operative, and lumber tycoons collides, their violence drawing Spider, who's connected to his community's seedier side, in.

The book's languid pacing results in ample time for characters to develop, and the text saunters back and forth in time to build up Spider and Siobhan's shared history. Aspects of Spider's personality are revealed at a natural pace, cropping up in quiet moments and informing his motivations.

Much focus is devoted to illuminating the time period: one in which technology was seeping in, but that also involved the aftermath of Vietnam. A cult blossoms around the burgeoning personal computer and internet and plays a pivotal role in the conclusion. Humor—imparted through Spider's laconic wit, snappy banter, and the comedy of the bumbling, racist villains—keeps the tone light.

Substantial Justice is a humorous thriller set in a tumultuous time.

JOHN M. MURRAY (May / June 2020)

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