

Golden Boy: A Review.

Michael Nava, Alyson Publications

Fred Pond

Michael Nava's *Golden Boy* packs a nice amount of action with a spattering of gay culture that feels comfortable and believable, though not forcing or categorically touching all areas of gay/lesbian lifestyles. This is Nava's newest book since *The Little Death*.

Here's the plot:

Henry, an activist gay lawyer in the bay area, is summoned to Los Angeles to take on an impossible murder case that seems to be all but decreed before his arrival. A young busboy has been slain, and a co-worker has been found passed out next to the body with bloody hands and a knife. Sounds pretty conclusive, doesn't it? The defendant is also gay, natch, and the murdered guy is straight(?), and Henry soon finds that even the public defender can't believe the accused when he insists he didn't do it, as he can't remember or explain what he was doing next to the corpse.

The author weaves humor and romance while exploring clues of the murder. For example, Henry, and the African-American detective he hires play off one another with jabs about their respective races and sexual orientations. Henry meets a future lover when investigating the scene of the crime. This comfortable weaving plus social commentary keeps the reading easy and interesting—I particularly enjoyed this description of a bar scene where Henry is stalking the killer:

This bar, The Keep, was on a Hollywood side street that had disappeared from the maps around 1930. There wasn't much to

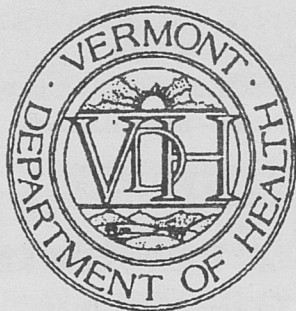
the place: a bar lined with stools where customers could sit and watch their reflections blur in the mirror as the night wore on, a small dance floor bathed in blue light, a few tables lit by orange candles. Posters of beefy naked men covered the walls. Many of the patrons were middle-aged or older, and the level of shrieking was pretty high. Definitely a pre-Stonewall scene.

Golden Boy reflects a realistic world. Henry has his challenges—he's a recovering alcoholic. The law school friend who called him to solve this mystery is dying of AIDS. Positive modeling of safer sex is included in the text.

This captivating, fast-paced mystery will keep you turning the pages faster and faster, and then leave you hungering for more when the book is finished. The book provides a positive framework for being gay in the real world.

This two hundred page winner of two Lambda Literary Awards compares to the popular Brandstetter mystery series which I understand are ending this year. I hope Michael Nava continues to write such captivating works. ▼

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