Bad Traffic: A Novel

Pastures Of Human Wreckage

Inspector Jian is a tough Chinese cop who thinks he's seen it all. But his search for his missing daughter takes him to the meanest streets he's ever faced -- in rural England. Migrant worker Ding Ming is distressed -- his gang master is making demands, he owes a lot of money to the snakeheads, and no one will tell him where his wife has been taken. Maybe England isn't the Gold Mountain he was promised. Two desperate men, lost in a baffling foreign land, are pitted against a ruthless band of human traffickers in this breathtaking thriller.

My Personal Review:
England's bucolic southern countryside stands in stark contrast to the brutality and depravity of the human slave trade in Simon Lewis's Bad Traffic, an extraordinarily intelligent thriller that rises above standard pop fiction fare and illuminates topics we'd just as soon pretend don't exist. It is a classic tale of good vs. evil wrapped in carefully crafted cultural anomalies - a modern day classic exposing humankind at its highest peaks and lowest valleys.

Inspector Jian is a tough and grizzled cop from northeastern China, a party loyalist with no qualms in cracking skulls for advancement of the party. He receives an inconclusive but panicked call for help from his young-adult daughter Wei Wei, living in England, and immediately packs up and heads out - the quintessential stranger in a strange land. While Jian is muddling through English society and customs strangled by a language he doesn't understand, Lewis in parallel tells the story of Ding Ming, a young Chinese immigrant and his young wife, lured from China to England for work and the promise of wealth unimaginable by a band of despicable human smugglers. Upon arrival, Ding and his wife are immediately separated - she will be picking flowers Ding is told - while he is raking the mud for shellfish. Predictably, Jian and Ming's paths cross and become intertwined in a fascinating tale that is variously heart-wrenching, blackly humorous, sordid, and violent. Lewis does a terrific job developing interesting characters and credible settings, capturing well the lives of the notorious
snakeheads and the suffering and deplorable treatment of their human cargo.

While the twists are too-heavily foreshadowed and the pace sluggish at times, the power of the story and the depth of the cast carries Bad Traffic to uncommon literary heights. Ultimately, this is the story of a fathers love for his daughter and a husbands loyalty to his wife, but Lewis deftly skirts the obvious potholes of sap and sentimentality and delivers an action packed thriller with the impact of a two-by-four across the forehead, closing with a climax worthy of the well-told journey that rushes to the payoff. Poignant, gripping, and ultimately satisfying, Simon Lewis and Bad Traffic are the real deals - a title and an author not to be missed.

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