In the sixth novel of this best-selling private-eye series, Jack Liffey probes the complex ethnic mix—Muslim, Jewish, Bahai, Christian, and secular—of the Persian communities in Los Angeles. A gripping tale that confronts youthful idealism with fervid fundamentalism, it lands bright, earnest Fariborz Bayat, who has gone missing from an elite L.A. high school with three other Persian-American boys, in a cell of Arab terrorists. Hired to find the boys, Liffey finds himself in a nightmare, unless he and Fariborz can thwart the cells plot to set off a dirty bomb full of radioactive waste high over L.A.

My Personal Review:
What is notable about John Shannon's Jack Liffey series is the author's depth of feeling and respect for young people. What is also of signal importance is the author's talent for creating thoroughly believable characters—even the villains. Take, for example, the fat man so immense that he requires two chairs to accommodate his width. In anyone else's hands, this creature would be a blob of amorphous evil—intent purely on doing his motiveless bad deeds. But with Shannon at the helm, we're presented with a history that makes the character so real that his behavior is genuinely shocking because we don't want to think that someone thoughtful and articulate can, given his intimate first-hand acquaintanceship with pain, proceed to inflict that same pain (literally) on someone else. Yet he does. And it feels very real; the reader shares Liffey's injuries—both physical and psychic. The same skill is at work in defining the young people in City of Strangers, especially the exquisitely drawn Fariborz who is a living, breathing portrait of internal conflict—a good soul on a crusade to awaken people to the wrongness all around them. As always, when Liffey ultimately makes contact with the young people he's been hired to find, there are deeply thoughtful exchanges. Never condescending, never patronizing, always self-deprecating, yet always
sensitive to their struggles—whether real or imagined—Liffey enters into their lives offering his battered heart and body as support for their sorrows. No one I've read has such a profound grasp on the issues that are central to the lives of youngsters approaching the treacherous border of adulthood. Liffey is a good man whose empathy is a poultice for the injured young, drawing out their pain and taking it into himself—like the archetypal sin eater. Then, gleefully, there are the apocalyptic views that are sprinkled throughout every Liffey adventure. This time out, sadly, there are no little rat-like dogs to be hated. But there is a billboard advertising Drive-Through Hi-Colonics. Relief Without Waiting. (Hilarious!) And there are a couple of bemasked individuals on the street, holding up a banner that says, "Open Up Area 51, Display the Alien Remains." Finally, happily, Jack has connected with the redoubtable Miss Rebecca Plumkill. And there are bits of a shredded foam pillow littering the bedroom. Now how, we have to wonder with amusement, did that happen? And aren't we glad that some warm light has managed to filter through the gloom of Jack's sorrows!

My highest recommendation.

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