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Reader's Report

Title:		Length:	310 pages
Author:		Draft:	Paperback Novel
Submitted by:		Locale:	New York
Submitted to:		Genre:	Comedy Thriller
Date Covered:	12.10.1999	Script Eval:	Recommend
Analyst:	Julie Saint-Anne	Writer Eval:	Recommend

	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor
Characterization	X			
Dialogue	X			
Story Line	X			
Structure	X			

LOGLINE

A series of miscommunications, and coincidental deaths, convinces top international assassins that mild-mannered entomologist and pest control technician Bob Dillon is an "Exterminator." His life is in jeopardy, and he doesn't even know it. With the aid of the city of New York (and all its craziness), his intimate knowledge of insects, and the world's top-ranked assassin, he outwits and outlives CIA agents, a French femme fatale, Bolivian hit squads, the Cowboy, the Nigerian, the Asian, and a transvestite dwarf who try to collect on the \$10 million hit contract.

SUMMARY COMMENTS

Very cinematic, very adaptable, very funny. A robust storyline, definitive point-of-view, and superior dialog. The absurd premise is well-grounded. The environment is optimized. Comic moments abound. Characters are so colorful, even the minor roles invite top-notch players. Action is non-stop. Tension escalates right up to the disappointingly pabulum denouement.

SYNOPSIS

Affable Bob Dillon has always had a dream of owning his own truck with a huge fiberglass bug on top, and killing pests with insect-eating insects instead of toxic chemicals. He loses his pest control job when he shoves a spray hose up his supervisor's nose. Now is the perfect time to start his own company. He doesn't know how he'll tell his wife. They're behind on the rent as it is. And Pratt, his scum landlord is breathing down his neck.

French contractor Marcel can't find a hitter for a job he has lined up. All the top assassins are busy. And #1-ranked Klaus, who is losing his taste for his work and his life, has turned down the job because it doesn't fit his single criterion of targeting someone who deserves to die — despite his huge gambling debt. Marcel takes out an ad in the NY Times. The \$50G weekend "Exterminator" ad catches Bob's eye. He sends his flyer to the Swiss address.

Marcel is impressed with the subtle humor of the Exterminator's flyer. He visits Bob, impressed by his flawless cover as a middle-class working man. Despite his protestations that he only kills "pests," Marcel believes he has hired Bob to kill the target. When the target dies in a car accident, Marcel UPSs \$100G to Dillon. The landlord intercepts the package and, ignorant of its contents, decides to hold it ransom for the \$320 rent Dillon owes him. CIA agent Wolfe decides Dillon would make a valuable government assassin.

Dillon gets his first customer. Promises his wife he'll use chemical poisons to assure he gets paid but, instead, he tries his experimental hybrid assassin bugs. It's a miserable failure. When Mary finds out he lied, she takes their daughter and goes home to her mother. Finally gets a meeting with a developer who offers to let him experiment on 4 of his buildings.

As he's preparing his "assassins," Wolfe shows up. They have the same seemingly coded conversation Dillon had with Marcel. Wolfe wants him to exterminate the head of a Bolivian cocaine cartel who isn't paying his "dues." Dillon protests: Really, I only kill rats. Wolfe: This is a very big rat. The Bolivian's brother Miguel kills the rat and blames the newly notorious "Exterminator." In a mock display of grief, he sends Ramón to kill the exterminator. The CIA UPSs \$1M to Dillon — again intercepted by the landlord.

Afraid that Dillon will put him out of business, Klaus flies to New York. Dillon sets up his tests, closely watched by Klaus and Ramón, who wires the building with explosives. Completely unaware, Dillon leaves before the explosion brings down the entire building. Klaus begins to think perhaps he really is just a garden-variety pest exterminator. Chases after Ramón, who's chasing Dillon in a jacked cab. Klaus kills Ramón. Miguel is not happy. Sends 3 of his best. Klaus dispatches them, as well.

Still oblivious, Dillon continues to set up his experiments at the developer's other buildings. With his last dollar, he stops into a bar for a well-deserved beer. Klaus befriends him. Tells Dillon what's really going on. They bond.

Miguel calls a press conference and announces a \$10M reward for the extermination of the Exterminator. The world's top assassins descend on the Big Apple. The 7-foot-tall Nigerian, the Cowboy, the alluring Chantalle, the Asian martial artist, and Reginald the dwarf. Klaus's gambling creditor insists he take the contract — or die a painful death. But, when he sees the Dillon family reunion, he just can't do it. Removes a pair of assassins, scoops the family into his car just as Bob's Pinto explodes. He tries to convince them they have to leave the country. Mary insists she must return to their home to retrieve a family heirloom, but agrees to wait for them at the track, promising she won't go home.

Still unconvinced of the danger he's in, Dillon insists on checking his experiments. Building #2: failure. Just as the Nigerian is about to drop him, Dillon drops a ceiling tile loaded with dead bugs on his head. Klaus and Dillon escape. No weapons. Dillon tells Klaus the city is their weapon, and leads the Nigerian on a chase into a Goodfellas-type restaurant, where he is promptly vented.

Building #3 proves another failure. The Asian assassin makes his presence known with a "throwing star." They lead him to the subway, where a lunatic with a big gun drops the martial artist.

The cowboy can't locate Dillon's house. He asks a neighbor, the landlord. Pays him \$320 for the key. Now that he has his rent, Pratt gives the cowboy the 2 packages for his friend, Dillon.

Building #4's a failure, too. He wants to kill himself, but Klaus has a better idea. They realize Dillon must have been paid for the hits that happened without him. Where's the money? The landlord! They rush back to the house. They find Katy in Klaus's car. They see the Cowboy through the living room window, Mary bound and gagged on the couch. Klaus gets the Cowboy to open the door, and shoots him in the head. Put Mary and the UPS packages in the car. Dillon goes to gather his prized insects. The doorbell rings. The dwarf is dressed as a girl scout. Dillon pulls the killer queen bee from his pocket. The dwarf swats it, and her army goes after him. The dwarf is history.

Chantalle shows up. Dillon sprays her with a cockroach pheromone atomizer, and releases his 600 assassins, who perceive her as a huge roach. Before she drops paralyzed to the floor, Wolfe bursts in. He's figured out that Dillon is just a pest control guy. Figures \$10M is better than his pension. He's here to collect. Dillon shows him his special neurotoxin-secreting insect. Bingo.

But they'll never escape that \$10M contract. Klaus sets up a bomb and timer. When the police arrive to investigate the explosion, they find the bodies of 2 men, a woman, and a child (the dwarf).

The mission woman who gave Dillon soup and hope when he was desperate receives a UPS package with a check for \$50G to help her fix broken dreams. Klaus and Dillon set off in their brand new Chevy half-ton with a big fiberglass bug on top: Bob & Klaus's All Natural Pest Control. They're a success. A news article about killer bee deaths gives them a new goal.

ANALYSIS

Premise:

The perfect setup for a comic thriller: an innocuous man mistakenly (and unwittingly) caught in a web of quirky assassins and high stakes, international intrigue.

Storyline:

Logical, yet unpredictable, the story captivates with warmth, humor, and suspense.

Structure and Pace:

An evocative opening image clearly sets up the story's universe. The author's sense of dramatic timing is evident in his deft transitions and comic relief; cutting to each character's activity just when we need to know what that character is up to, and making us laugh at the height of tension. Gets in and out of scenes at the right moment. Acts are clear, with rising tension leading to disappointments, surprise, and accomplishments. Conflict motivates character motivates action motivates structure. Even the narrative gives us only the information we need. Exposition is minimized by couching it in humor.

Themes, characters, events, and props are reincorporated with fresh purpose each time they appear. For instance, when we first encounter Dillon's work room, we see the bug books on his shelf. When the CIA agent comes in, his take on the titles (*The Art of Death, Pest Poisons*) is entirely different.

The romantic subplot between the protagonist and his wife, however, is weak. Though supporting his family is Dillon's prime motivating characteristic, the author rightly wanted them out of the way for the main action. (They would have just been underfoot.) The "fight" that makes Mary leave, the mementos that bring her back, and sending her off with the package before the final conflict seem forced.

The denouement just falls off, too. They escape. Their dead enemies are mistaken for them. Then we see the mission lady getting a check, and the Bob & Klaus truck. Too expected, too pat, too easy, too boring.

Characterization and Dialog:

This is the author's greatest strength. The characters are uncommonly interesting, and crafted with bizarre, lovable detail and compassion. Protagonists experience arcs that propel the story. The villains may seem somewhat cartoonish and stereotyped, but just enough to satisfy the genre. Even the minor characters are painted with vivid, individualistic brushes. They remind me of the characters in *Undercover Blues*, *Innerspace*, and *See No Evil, Hear No Evil*.

Again, the romantic interest is his only weakness. The only boring character is Dillon's wife, Mary. Although daughter Katy is well-drawn, she has so little presence, it's as though the wife and daughter are there only to create Dillon's motivation. They have no compelling life of their own.

Adaptability:

The book begs for the screen. The images and action are so cinematic, I felt as though I was watching it as I read. The structure, too, is cinematic. Narrative passages visually tie the scenes together. Character "thoughts" and backstory are either irrelevant for film medium, or can easily be translated to images and action. (No need for distracting flashbacks, etc.)

The writer's style lends itself to the screen. His descriptions are revealing, germane to the storyline, visual, and translatable to image and dialog. Often unexpected, and always wry, his narrative and descriptions are fresh, clever, vivid, and powerful. I could practically open the book to any page to quote passages that demonstrate his unique point-of-view and flair...

"Strain Zero ... had the most unusual body type ... a powerful and squatty thorax perched on ... thin but surprisingly strong limbs — sort of like Danny DeVito's trunk perched on Manute Bol's legs."

"Klaus thought that if the wages of sin was death, then apparently the wages of death was a nice place in the Greek islands."

"Whereas a Bolivian in NY would be a fish out of water, a New Yorker in Bolivia would be a cockroach at a chicken dance. But of course none of that mattered anymore because Ronaldo was dead as a dodo."

The luggage conveyor that "dispensed Samsonite bags like a giant ... Pez dispenser."

"Their hearts were harder than trying to open an oyster with a wet bus ticket."

"There was some male bonding, but it wasn't too messy."

"The Nigerian followed them like an entrée after antipasto."

"It's alright, you can come out now,' Wolfe said as if he were the Good Witch of the West."

██████████ combines humor, tension, character, and dialog to create a warm, compelling, funny, twisted story that ends with a laugh and a smile.