

Gotham Tragic

Kurt Wenzel

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Kurt Wenzel : Gotham Tragic before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Gotham Tragic:

4 of 4 people found the following review helpful. Far from "Tragic"By E. A. SolinasKurt Wenzel avoids the sophomore slump in "Gotham Tragic," the oddly-titled follow-up to the witty "Lit Life." This time around, Wenzel dabbles in more than just the perils of being a writer, putting out questions about religion, culture and ethics, without bogging down the book itself.It's New York in 1999. Kyle Clayton was one of those incisive 80s authors who wrote hit cynical novels. Since then, life has been one boozy debauched streak. Now he has married an exotic Turkish woman, Ayla, and at her urging has converted to Islam (which seems to be the one part of her life where she follows tradition). Her family (best described as Mid-East hillbillies) is uncomfortable with him, and her dad HATES him. And his marriage to Ayla would be even more endangered if she knew he was planning to get a mistress.Around this same time, Kyle's latest short story comes out: a thinly-veiled retelling of his problems with Ayla's family, and his doubts about Islam. The story is a huge hit, but (a la Salman Rushdie) now militant Muslims are mad at him. Now Kyle is faced with a rapidly deteriorating marriage, a bigoted multimillionaire with some dirty secrets in his closet, and a devout doorman who has declared a fatwa against him (IE, he's going to hunt Kyle down and kill him). That is, if Kyle's father-in-law doesn't kill him first."Gotham Tragic" is the jaded New Yorker novel with a millennial twist, with plenty of humor and attitude. Not to mention weird plot twists -- there's a waitress whose aunt has supposedly written a book proving the existance of God. But Wenzel keeps a tight grip on his plot, and it never quite runs away from him. Some readers may be a little offput by the upbeat ending, but it doesn't come out of nowhere.Wenzel's humor just

avoids being silly at times (a Chinese teenager is called "Wey Tu Yung"). But it's to Wenzel's credit that he manages to do what Kyle set out to do. He tackles philosophical and religious questions and paradoxes -- and not just for Islam either, but also relating to Judaism and Christianity. In America at this time, that's especially hard to do in a novel without treading on some toes, but he manages to do it. Kyle grows up quite a bit over the course of "Gotham Tragic," usually in painful ways. His wife Ayla could use a bit more fleshing out, like the smart waitress/aspiring actress Erin. Don't be worried about stereotyped Muslims here -- there are Muslim characters of all types and stripes, open-minded or... well, like Ayla's dad. "Gotham Tragic" lightly walks the tightrope between satire and serious novel, only tripping occasionally over itself. Funny and witty novel, one of the most engaging ones of 2004 thus far. 2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Oh, grow up! By tripichik If he works very hard and is a very good (or bad) boy, Kurt Wenzel might grow up to be Tom Wolfe. Ok, a Tom Wolfe who prefers cocaine to acid, but it's all there: the insights into how race and religion color American life, the deft handling of dialogue and description, the delightful word choices ("diction" to those of us who teach composition), the perspective of the too-cool omniscient narrator. Hey, in some respects he out-Wolfes Wolfe: is not a Puissant Pixie more evocative than a Bottomless Tart? He's not there yet. I can't imagine Wolfe making the howling error I noticed on page 9: "Then he noticed the microthin headset that jettisoned her cheek" Sorry, Kurt. To jettison means to discard, to throw overboard. How can a headset discard a cheek? Similarly, see page 11: ". . . the text laid out spherically along the page like a pinwheel." All the definitions of sphere that I'm familiar with emphasize the 3-dimensional nature of the construct; it is physically impossible to arrange printed text on a flat page spherically. I would also quibble with the City's dining room being described as "tenebrous" on page 131 -- it's dark, yes, but not gloomy. That's okay by me. Wenzel is too young to be perfect. I'm content to wait. Like Browning, I believe "the best is yet to be." 4 of 5 people found the following review helpful. The sequel I was waiting for! By Sara Bentley After reading Wenzel's brilliant "Lit Life" I was left satisfied but was going to miss his bad-boy hero, Kyle Clayton. Thank God Wenzel has brought him back in "Gotham Tragic" - but with new twists. He's married a Muslim woman, also a brilliant turn of events. By the time you're through reading this novel about New York before the millenium turnover, you'll have seen a fatwa after Clayton, an elderly woman mysteriously writing a book proving the existence of God, a restaurant tycoon in the middle of an internet ipo disaster and much much more. And it's hilarious. 9/11 looms in foreshadowing which was wildly emphasized at a final party at the restaurant, City, which is where everything culminates at the big New Year's Eve party and bang - the you-know-what hits the fan. Wenzel's writing is succinct and clever, at times touching and sentimental for a New York before the big cloud. And I loved following Kyle Clayton for one more ride. He's the anti-hero, or as Wenzel calls him, the last great literary fool. Very fun and entertaining and still relevant literature in the way Bonfire of the Vanities was. A definite buy - you won't regret it!

From Publishers Weekly: Wenzel's funny, acerbic second novel chronicles the bubble period of the late 1990s in New York, a time when the city was awash in money, CEOs were still masters of the universe and restaurants were the new nightclub. The star of the book is Kyle Clayton, a New York writer with a bestselling novel under his belt (he was also the hero of Wenzel's first novel, the witty Lit Life). But Clayton's literary star has fallen since his acclaimed debut, and the former playboy has married a Turkish woman and converted to Islam, something that pleases the Muslim staff of City, a swank eatery where Clayton now spends much of his time. One of the owners of the restaurant is multimillionaire Lonny Tumin, a businessman a few years past his prime (he's a virtual carbon copy of Tom Wolfe's character Charles Croker from A Man in Full). Erin Wyatt, a beautiful aspiring actress whom Clayton had a brief affair with years ago, is now a waitress at City, and she manages to catch the eye of both Clayton and Tumin. A fatwa, a bogus IPO and a manuscript rumored to prove the existence of God fuel Wenzel's clockwork plot. Satirizing Manhattan while also providing an inside glimpse of some of its most powerful players, this sprawling, ambitious novel is mostly entertaining and smartly written, despite an occasional smugness and Wenzel's juvenile wordplay (for instance, a young Asian woman is named Wey Tu Yung). A too-quick resolution, along with some improbable plot twists-not to mention a saccharine happy ending at odds with the tone of the rest of the story-aren't enough to spoil the fun promised by this irrepressible and highly entertaining novel. Copyright Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.