

#113 – The Alarming Clock, Michael Avallone BOOK REVIEW

Krauser PUA | 1 December, 2018 | by krauserpua



I suppose he had to fire a dud eventually, and novel five in the Ed Noon series is when Michael Avallone has finally written a pedestrian hard-boiled story. *The Alarming Clock* is entirely based around a single plotline: a Russian spy at the Department Of Defense has obtained secret codes to the US nuclear arsenal and engraved them onto the serial number inside a cheap clock. A group of former-SS freelancers are waiting to receive it when the seller gets cold feet and leaves the clock in Ed Noon's office. Noon was shopping for groceries at the time.

So, Noon gets back to the office, finds the package, and wonders what the hell is going on. There's a letter for him.

Mr Noon,

Imperative you hold this for me until I can contact you later. You may open package to inspect it but do not by any means let the enclosed leave your hands. Many people would kill you for this item but it can also make you a millionaire. A mutual friend sent me to you.

Will call soon

Roland Ritz

At first he mistakes the ticking for a bomb so he drowns the package in his sink, to ruin the explosives. Then he opens it and is puzzled that it's just a normal clock. The plot becomes a clock-hunt as Noon's instinct has him immediately hide the clock and replace it with his normal desktop clock. The Germans burst in, at gunpoint, and kidnap Noon together with the (wrong) clock. Everything that follows is Noon stalling them as he attempts to piece together why the clock is so goddamned important as the Germans and a team of fake FBI agents squabble and attempt to reclaim it.

The plot conceit is fine, it all proceeds logically, and it's not a bad book at all. However, it's missing the Noon flavour. Yeah he's held up at gunpoint, slugged on the head, and bangs a dame. Yeah, he cracks wise and pisses off the cops. But some vital ingredient is missing. This plays like a thriller rather than a hard-boiled detective story.



Russian spies are a cheerful bunch

Noon's neighbour, a clock repairman called Alec St Peter, gets it worst *[1]*. He's a WW2 vet whose hands were blown off while testing explosives. At first, Noon thinks the clock was meant for him.

I got organised. I turned the lights out in Alec St. Peter's office and went back to my own workshop. I tool Alec's metal hands with me. As I carried them into the mouse auditorium, I suddenly wondered what it must be like to have hooks instead of flesh and blood fists. Alec never talked much about them even if he seemed to be completely un-self-conscious about them. You can never really tell about cripples.

This is the kind of tone I like about Ed Noon books. You can't imagine Perry Mason thinking that way. The things which come to Noon's mind are always slightly off-kilter. The Huns had kidnapped Alec and beat the shit out of him. It's his imperilment that motivates Noon to give Jerry a bloody nose. His old ex-escort girlfriend makes an appearance too, and is soon kidnapped and almost raped by the Huns.

I dunno, I just can't get inspired to talk about this book. It was alright. I read it cover to cover during a 9-

hour bus ride down to Macedonia and it kept me diverted for much of that time. It did the job, nothing more. There weren't any themes or moments that jumped out at me as talking points. About the only thing worth mentioning is I don't like books that cast Nazis as automatic bad guys. But then again, Avallone always makes the Commies worse, so it balances out in the end.

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Unrelated WTF? Who takes life advice from THIS THING?

[1] Well, of the proper characters. Roland Ritz is shot dead in Noon's office and the Germans are gunned down in a shootout with cops at the end.

[2] Per month

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