

DISCOVERIES

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Meade, Karl

ODD JOBS

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A bumbling, Canadian ne'er-do-well painfully learns to find his way in Meade's debut novel.

After years of aimless living punctuated only by occasional run-ins with the law, limo driver Marty Drysdale meets the girl of his dreams when she pulls him over for speeding. Opposites attract as Marty finds himself irresistibly drawn to Chick, a steely, crimson-haired Mountie with a "cold, clear face and blue eyes that looked right through you," and Chick eventually falls for Marty's ambitionless, down-to-earth demeanor and agrees to marry him. Not long after joining households, however, their innate differences drive the two apart, and Chick leaves their native Calgary after learning Marty can't father a child. Years later, Chick, no longer a Mountie, limps back to town unannounced, sporting a prosthetic leg, a young daughter, Susan, and a new husband, John "FitZ"

Fitzgerald, the scheming partner Marty had first introduced her to while Marty and Chick were still married. Chick's return shifts this heavily plot-driven narrative into overdrive, when Marty again takes up with FitZ, and FitZ clandestinely concocts the hair-brained scheme that Marty will write a screenplay based on robberies found in Chick's old case files. Trouble ensues when FitZ enlists the backing of some big-league thugs he plans to simply defraud, and then he coerces Marty into re-enacting the old robberies with him—hence the work's title—with results not unlike those in a Coen brothers' film. Though there are humorous moments—particularly as Marty and FitZ practically kill themselves during their hijinks—by story's end, Meade's plot grows increasingly convoluted and threatens to dwarf the compelling character development at the heart of the tale. In a refreshing twist, young Susan helps spark a redemptive softening of Marty's wizened heart and exposes the work's theme in describing the kinds of movies she likes—namely those where "the alien turns into a different being to trick you...but you know that underneath it is still the same alien coming to get you."

Gritty and fun, with a surprisingly rewarding finish, this dark comedy entertains throughout.