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***Deadbeat Escapement* by John Ledbetter (Vikon Village Books, 2026) | 420 pages | Fiction // Satire
6x9 US Trade paperback (ISBN 979-8-218-94602-9): \$27 | eBook (ISBN 979-8-218-94735-4): \$9**

In an age drowning in synthetic realities and weaponized narratives, John Ledbetter's debut novel arrives as a blistering satire in the shape of a shadowy commission report, positing that our collective past may be more fabricated than experienced, and that inherited stories frequently serve those who hold the power to preserve them.

Deadbeat Escapement follows the King of the Freaks, Vito Paulekas, through an episodic reconstruction of his life and its possible entanglements with the Black Dahlia, Manson Family, and Zodiac cases. A parallel narrative reveals intelligence operatives commissioning the burn-book on Paulekas, one that the reader currently inhabits.

Deadbeat Escapement centers on Vito Paulekas, the self-styled Lithuanian-American artist, whose Beverly Boulevard basement became the unlikely ground zero for the global explosion of the mid-century counterculture movement. Paulekas emerges as one of contemporary fiction's most magnetic and enigmatic figures: a Cold War-era F.B.I. asset gone rogue who radicalizes a devoted troupe of dancing Freaks in his Hollywood basement studio. Charismatic yet dangerous, he walks the razor's edge dividing organic artistic rebellion from engineered social influence.

A keen observer of obscure LA history, author John Ledbetter meticulously reconstructs Paulekas's trajectory, phase by phase, from a Boston steamship stowaway to his Rasputinesque days as a radical dance impresario and sculptor, exposing the long, deliberate shadow Paulekas's orbit casts across the Black Dahlia murder, Manson Family fable, and the Zodiac Killer psyop.

A parallel narrative introduces two intelligence operatives who locate T-d, a reclusive young novelist in 1964 Mexico, and persuade him to pen a burn-book discrediting the outspoken hippie. As T-d excavates Los Angeles's illusory layers, he plots these forgotten historical ripples, transforming his exploitative dossier into an investigation of the occult, celebrity & crime, and an indictment of the seductive overlap of creative freedoms and government oversight; forcing the hermetic writer to choose between exposing the hovering machine or being absorbed by it.

The gravity of Ledbetter's prose pulls you into his dizzying literary vacuum, detouring only occasionally into fantastical passages such as "Intermission," where a freezing Van Gogh and Gauguin huddle around a failed furnace in their Arles Yellow House, swapping tales of public execution methods, haunting doubles, and the grotesque production of Vincent's choice pigment.

With maximalist flair, Ledbetter weaves meticulously researched history with vibrant and audacious speculative fiction, pushing sourced facts to the utter threshold of revisionism without abandoning his journalistic evidentiary rigor. The result: a book that is neither a conventional biography nor a convenient true-crime reconstruction, but an erudite counter-archive that restores the gaps, improbabilities, and inconvenient relationships that official histories routinely elide.

Disquiet but impossible to put down, this ambitious fever dream of a debut announces John Ledbetter as a formidable voice in modern American literature.

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