

The Losers' Club

By Richard Perez

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By Tony Beckwith

One of the reasons we read books is to learn about the people and places that exist beyond the fringes of our own experience. By that measure, "The Losers' Club" certainly delivers.

The protagonist, Martin Sierra, is an aspiring writer with an undemanding day job, who spends his nights out on the streets of New York's East Village. He is looking for love, mainly in the wrong places, and uses the personal ads in the newspaper as his dating strategy. This is how he meets Nikki. To Martin's mild frustration, she's involved in an on-again-off-again lesbian relationship, but they are attracted to each other and manage to sustain a warm-blooded friendship that occasionally veers towards a deeper intimacy but never takes the plunge. The personal ads lead him to other women, and the ensuing relationships allow the author to take us on a tour of the clubs and bars in the Village.

Richard Perez has obviously spent a great deal of time in these places: he describes, in fascinating detail, the décor, the ambiance, the performers, and their performances. His narrative creates a montage of observations and descriptions against which to tell his story. Unfortunately, there isn't much of a story here, and the book leaves one feeling informed—and entertained—but rather unfulfilled.

As to the characters, perhaps one should keep in mind that the title of the book is "The Losers' Club." The people in Martin's small circle take themselves seriously, and they are quite well drawn. But they are not particularly interesting, and do not indulge in the sort of existential conversations that are usually associated with this genre and that would give this book the depth one wishes was here. "Yep . . .

Carnival of lost souls. That about summed up his world.” And “*Society’s indifference to human suffering.*” Pronouncements of this kind tend to materialize without much discussion or background, but the dialogue soon reverts to the mundane. Mr. Perez has shown he’s good with details, so perhaps his next book will take us below the surface of his world.

When Martin and his dates are prowling the Village they are accompanied by the author’s running commentary, and those are the best parts of the book. He communicates his characters’ speech in a very credible style (“*Just, I wanna be alone, I think.*”), evoking the shock tactics of street speak by not holding back on the expletives. Once in a while, Perez weaves in a little of his poetry, which is not grungy or punky at all, but rather a welcome change of pace. And he writes amusingly about waiting by the phone in his studio apartment, with its piles of magazine rejection slips mirroring the mood of his love life. It’s all a work in progress.

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