

Written with the big-picture view of Doctor Zhivago or Winds of War—and likely to be one of the big books of the season.

(Author tour to Boston, Los Angeles, New York, Portland, Ore., San Francisco, Seattle)

▷ Ross, Adam

★ MR. PEANUT (star)

Love and hate are inexorably intertwined in the head of one unreliable husband.

The buzz has been building for a year about this debut novel by Nashville writer Ross, and it turns out it's one of those rare cases where the word-of-mouth is valid. The book that's been giving Stephen King nightmares is a Möbius strip of a novel, folding the unsavory

anticipation of American Psycho into a domestic drama straight out of Carver-esque America. Ross' main character is David Pepin, a video-game designer, entrepreneur and wannabe novelist. He loves his wife, Alice, who is struggling with overwhelming weight and food issues. And he fantasizes incessantly about killing her. "When they argued, they were ferocious," Ross writes. "They'd been married to each other for thirteen years and still went for jugulars and balls." Within pages of being introduced, Alice is dead after having ingested a single peanut, a food to which she was allergic. The lead suspect's story is full of holes, involving buying tickets to Australia that morning, suffering a car wreck and worrying that his marriage was over. The two investigating officers are pieces of work themselves; Ward Hastroll's wife has suddenly and stubbornly committed herself to bed, while the cleverly named Sam Sheppard carries the memory of his own wife's murder. "We tell stories of other people's marriages," muses Hastroll in the interrogation room. "We are experts in their parables and parabolos. But can we tell the story of our own? If we could, Hastroll thought, there might be no murders. If we could, we might avoid our own cruelties and crimes." Ross' language and the multifarious construction of his plot can be Byzantine, and there's little that's sympathetic about any of the players. But readers that ride out this unsettling head game to the end will find their time well-spent.

An intellectual noir novel that shows evidence of an original voice.

(First printing of 60,000)