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Review of Black Buck

Michael F. Russo

Askaripour, Mateo. *Black Buck*

DEBUT In Greek mythology, the overconfident Icarus sails gloriously through the heavens on magnificent wings of wax, rising too close to the sun and becoming painfully acquainted with Earth. Darren Vender requires no wings of wax or even hubris to accomplish his great fall, which is the essential problem with this ambitious debut novel, drawn partly from the author's life. The story begins with a promising premise: Darren is a highly intelligent but underachieving Black barista at Starbucks. He is satisfied with his life but is constantly urged by his mother to make something of himself. And here is where the narrative begins to wobble off the rails. The story goes through several sudden and implausible changes of direction. Darren is transformed without warning into a super-salesman, soon working to help other Black salespeople, and other characters change without explanation or credible transition, from innocent bystanders to hunter-predator types. A novel that begins to carry forward the spirit of Tom Wolfe's *The Bonfire of the Vanities* fizzles with a painfully contrived ending that reminds one of the unbelievably tortured (but hilarious) ending of *Tootsie*—but without the hilarity.

VERDICT Worthy evidence of potential yet to be fulfilled, and we look forward to the time that potential is realized.—Michael Russo, Louisiana State Univ., Baton Rouge