

# NIGHTMARE



## Hater

By David Moody

Thomas Dunne

288 pp, \$21.95

Anyone haunted by the final pages of H.G. Wells' *The Island of Dr. Moreau*, where the hero says, "I look about me at my fellow man, and I go in fear," will find themselves in familiar territory throughout *Hater*. British author David Moody tells the story mostly from the first-person point of view of Danny McCoyne, a middle-class suburban husband and father and 21st-century underachiever frustrated with his daily commute, mundane job and typical family squabbles. But his complacent world is shaken up by startling bursts of violence all over town—including a pub dinner disrupted by a vicious brawl and schoolchildren assaulting their teachers.

employs genre as a way of addressing societal ills, wondering if we've all become spoiled children on the verge of a catastrophic tantrum. But he's not above the twisted delights of EC horror comics, occasionally shifting away from Danny's perspective with mini-narratives of shocking violence: A businessman uses his umbrella as a bayonet to slash through terrified pedestrians, and, more gruesomely, a testicle vasectomy goes nightmarishly wrong.

Reading as though Raymond Carver penned an end-of-days scenario, Moody's minimalist style is never more chilling than when Danny hovers over his sleeping daughter, "petrified that whatever it is that's happening outside will eventually find its way into my home... I try to imagine this beautiful little girl attacking me. I try to imagine me attacking her." When the inevitable tragedy strikes, like an abrupt gut-punch, Moody radically shifts gears; while these rushed pages don't undermine the introspective, almost unbearable tension that precedes them, one wishes Moody had chosen to develop these ideas in a separate novel. But not to worry: He's already hard at work on a sequel.

—Jeremiah Kipp

## The Pilo Family Circus

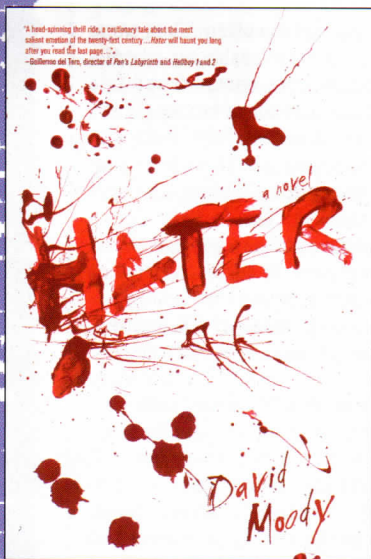
By Will Elliott

Underland Press

320 pp, \$13.95

You have two days to pass your audition. You better pass it, feller. You're joining the circus. Ain't that the best news you ever got? Steal from me again and I will cut your balls off."

That invitation, along with many insulting and nauseating puns, is left for our sniveling hero Jaime by three stalking clowns after they obscenely destroyed his house. It's a great representation of this first novel (previously published overseas in 2007), which won the ABC Prize for fiction in Australia. The unfortunate Jaime accidentally came across the Clown Division of the Pilo Family Circus, located in an alternate reality somewhere near hell, just as they needed a new apprentice. "The Ferris wheel loomed above against the starless sky, like the hunched skeleton of



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Parceled out in lean, economical prose, *Hater* offers a slow-burn depiction of the modern world consumed by revulsion. A disease randomly infects people with aggressive hatred, eventually leading to mob violence and martial law. Danny and his family retreat into the protective confines of their own home, but the *28 Days Later* scenario eventually finds its way right outside their door as a neighbor matter-of-factly sets his wife on fire in the middle of the street.

Not unlike Wells, Moody uses the horror genre as metaphor. *Hater*