

## Book Review: *Haiku* by Andrew Vachss

Andrew Vachss is a writer of unusual talent. He looks at things with an eye neither Western nor Asian, but some of each. His "Haiku" (Pantheon Books, New York, 24 pages, \$24.99), at the Carson City Library, is a study of how an aging martial arts sensei named Ho teams up with some down-and-sort-of-outers in New York City. He acts as a sort of quiet leader, seeing each of his band as injured and needing help. But this comes after Ho has fought in World War II and in postwar Japan helped American GIs into his world of martial arts. He comes to the United States and sets up a dojo to teach his unique form of the art. He is successful until a woman student named Chika is killed because he did not protect her with the right thinking and instructions. Thus his exile to Manhattan.

One of his mixed group --- a former gambler, a Vietnam vet, a silent man and others, including Brewster whose life is bounded by his meds for his psychotic condition and his collection of books stored in an empty building. Then the group finds that the library building is to be destroyed and Brewster will lose his anchor on sanity. The group watches a white Cadillac stop at a river pier, a woman get out and throws something into the river. That triggers a plot to save Brewster's book collection in which all will take part. How it turns out is almost unimportant; what matters is how Ho interacts with the group, with an ending that is enigmatic.

The writing is clean and clear, even if the meaning of it all is at times meandering. All in all, an excellent read of an entirely different kind. I suspect many who read it will find some aspect of their lives changed. No sudden awakening, just a more tenuous and sensitive approach to life.

---Sam Bauman