



Prison Stories

Seth "Soul Man" Ferranti

"Prison Stories" is more notable for its author's prison story than for its literary appeal, but its outlaw rawness mixes well with hip-hop's street essence. Fans of Iceberg Slim's pimp tales or HBO's "OZ" series will really dig this.

A prisoner in America's war on drugs, writer Seth Ferranti is serving a heavy-duty sentence at a West Virginia federal penitentiary. The white middle-class dealer was arrested in the early 1990s for leading a suburban crew of LSD hustlers. Under federal drug laws, he faced a mandatory sentence of at least 20 years.

Tripping about his jail time, Ferranti faked his death and split. He parked his car near the Potomac River and left his jacket, an empty vodka bottle and a suicide note. His lame scheme proved thin and U.S. Marshals placed him on their 15 most-wanted fugitives list.

He eluded authorities for two years as he traveled across the country. The 22-year-old first-time, non-violent offender was eventually found in a Missouri motel room and sentenced to 25 years and four months. His charges fell under the "drug kingpin" law, which stipulated no opportunity for parole.

So there he sits, where he has been honing his writing skills. His work is not really my thing, but his grueling tales of prison existence say a lot about the society that creates such institutions and the people inside. His stories would benefit from some Kool G Rap ghostwriting, but his stories seem authentic and amusing. Beneath the vulgarity, the book exposes the prison actualities of monotony, physical danger and mental anguish. It also alerts the public to alarming issues about America's prison-industrial complex and cockeyed drug laws.

While entertaining and important for its "from-the-other-side" accounts, this certainly can't be compared to Mumia's compelling work from death row, or the attention deserved by Leonard Peltier or the countless black men that make up the country's enormous prison population.

Ferranti happened to be a white kid from the burbs who got caught hustling. He made it worse by fleeing. His sentence is certainly not justified by the crime and neither are so many others. Think about how many cats are in prison on drug charges. Think about the society that creates the drug game, crime, violence and then the laws. Think about how hip-hop glorifies it all. Ya'll think Lil' Kim's gonna make it? – Bret Duchon