

## **PAINTERS**

*Crooks, Kooks, and Castaways in the World's Shallowest Occupation*

"First fact about painting: It's not fly fishing. It is not a metaphor for life. Painting is only as deep as dried paint, one-thousandth of an inch. But that one-thousandth of an inch protects and colorizes most of what humans construct on this planet, so what it lacks in depth it recovers in width, despite going largely unnoticed except by the people who put it there. The painters."

So begins John Burbidge's comical and poignant portrait of the men and women who apply the paint that exists all around us. Dressed in white as they spread their tarps and move their ladders, they could almost pass for invisible—until now.

Burbidge has toiled more than fifteen years in the trade. From his first day as a teenage rookie when he learned the most disconcerting rule of painting—you spend a lot of time up high with your hands full—he's aimed his brush, roller, and spray gun at everything from ritzy mansions to white-trash trailers, military barracks to college dormitories. He's gone underground to paint sewage treatment plants and hung from ropes to paint factory ceilings. He's probably inhaled enough lead, asbestos, and paint fumes to kill himself.

But he's not dead yet. And his inexorable battle against the trade's noxious derivatives and risky high work has been rewarded with a rich cast of characters encountered along the way. Ex-cons, addicts, even a guy with a hole in his head—these are the norm. But less expected are the educated painters, the failed writers and artists, the people who never imagined themselves stuck in a job society thinks is for simpletons.

From the first page of this entertaining debut to the last, you'll cringe at the plights of some painters while you laugh at the antics of others. You'll see painting in a light that belies its monotonous reputation, see it instead as a deceptively difficult profession where those capable of achieving truly excellent results are as rare as brain surgeons. And you'll come to understand, as the author finally does, that painting enjoys some significant advantages over other careers, and good painters have earned the right to be proud.