



19 Souls

J. D. Allen

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19 Souls introduces a memorable PI, grappling with a past he's not reconciled to.

Hard-edged Las Vegas private investigator Jim Bean takes on what he assumes is a by-the-numbers job locating a missing person, but he discovers too late that things are not at all what they appear, in J. D. Allen's fast-paced and thrilling *19 Souls*.

Bean is glad for the change when a search for a woman's drug-addicted brother takes him to Texas and Montana. After locating the man, Bean learns that a serial killer is after the both of them—and is determined to stop anyone who gets in the way. Using his personal private hacker, Ely, Bean coordinates with FBI agent Ava Green and the local police to track and find the ruthless killer.

The story unfolds from both Bean's and the killer's perspectives. Bean is an intriguing character; he hints at a youthful wrongful accusation that has mucked up his life. He's sardonic and smart, has a soft spot for the vulnerable, and does not easily play the fool.

The killer he's seeking is a vicious, deeply troubled individual who enjoys leaving a trail of bodies. The killer seems almost sympathetic in places—but then realization suddenly overwhelms, quickly burying those thoughts.

Bean's inner and outer dialogue is quick, snappy, and authentic to the profession. Descriptions entice: "The stench of cheap tobacco and two days' worth of Vegas sweat rolled off his skin."

Other characters are realistically and sympathetically drawn, including Double O, a bounty hunter who attempts to play matchmaker for perennial bachelor Bean; Dan, the frazzled and unnerved target; and Lynette, Dan's wheelchair-using, feisty mother.

The pace is earnest, as leads, tips, and information eventually congeal into answers; final pages are highly suspenseful and dramatic. Back-and-forth banter between Bean and Agent Green is enjoyable, as is talk between the men: "I ... um ... tripped and the FBI file fell on the copier."

Intended as the first in a series, *19 Souls* introduces a memorable PI, grappling with a past he's not reconciled to.

ROBIN FARRELL EDMUNDS (January/February 2018)

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