Clarion Review

Thriller

Avalon Bay: A Jewelry Hunter Thriller
Ronald von Freymann
AuthorHouse
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Two Stars (out of Five)

While the small sleepy settlement of Avalon on Catalina Island, California, seems an unlikely place for a terrorist act, the Avalon Jihad's mission—to kill thousands of Americans on ferry boats—is one of a number of simultaneously planned attacks across the country. A coven of jihad terrorists, including Americans who've converted to Islam, converge on the peaceful town, and it's not long before their covert actions turn this tranquil community into a danger zone.

As the American front for the jihad group, Laura Mullholland rents a condominium on the island through Bill Watson. She uses her work with the island's conservancy to smuggle in weapons and explosive devices. Sloppy tactics reveal Laura's activities to what amounts to a hapless victim, and Laura is forced to kill her. Laura's act of violence draws attention to her traitorous actions and, in turn, to the presence of her cohorts.

As the Director of Military Response and Insurgent Tactics at Raytheon (and owner of a jewelry business, The Jewelry Hunter), Bill's wife, Jenn, is privy to military intelligence and has the ear of high-level military personnel. Bill and his assistant, Tiffany Castilingo, run Bill's small financial services company. Yet the actions of Laura and the group of Islamic terrorists thrust them all unwittingly into a chaotic situation that could have catastrophic consequences.

The opening pages of Ronald von Freymann's *Avalon Bay* offer the promise of intrigue and action, but the instances of time hopping that follow, which lack any continuity, undermine the author's efforts. For von Freyman, finding the right place to start proved to be the first challenge. *Avalon Bay* would have been a better book had it started on chapter three, when Laura first came to the island, and worked forward from there as opposed to the numerous switches in time. The story would also benefit from more fleshed-out character development to help the reader better identify with the players.

Perhaps the most jarring problem with the book is its dialogue, which is sometimes

stilted and forced, as it is when the author attempts to convey Jenn's desires to change professions: "I can't wait until I can be here with you full time and give more attention to my baby business. It's not as if my job at Raytheon isn't important or challenging, it is, but it's so frustrating. My effort all too often goes ignored. Jewelry is a hell of a lot more personally satisfying and certainly more fun than banging my head against the wall with the Department of the Army."

Additionally, von Freymann's writing is sometimes over the top, and it suffers from the curse of the telling-not-showing stigma of many beginning writers. Though this thriller does read at times like a textbook rather than a novel, the author's extensive research into Islam and Islamic terrorism is evident, enlightening, and engrossing. His insights, as voiced through his characters, prove to be an engaging part of the story.

Donna Russo Morin