ForeWord Reviews

Blackbird, Farewell
Robert Greer
Frog Books
978-1-58394-250-5
(Oct 14, 2008)

When it comes to telling tales out of school, Damian Madrid is in the perfect position to sense who might know something about the murder of his best friend and teammate Shandell Bird. The college basketball superstar known as Blackbird was killed before he could cash in on his lucrative NBA contract. Damian takes it upon himself to start "running down angles" with the help of a "no-nonsense six-foot-one former combat marine" named Flora Jean Benson who normally works with his mentor, a bondsman, CJ Floyd. But with CJ away on his honeymoon, Damian is able to give into his "desire to play Superman, track down Shandell's killer on his own, and be a campus hero once again."

Although his heart's in the right place, his head is confused by the information which turns up—not only was his friend selling performance-enhancing drugs to kids in their Denver neighborhood, but he was apparently also shaving points in the playoffs. It takes Damian a while to figure out that the "game" he's involved in isn't basketball so much as a charade in which Blackbird was playing the part of the ultimate playboy, desired by women and envied by men for his supreme athletic abilities.

So who put him up to throwing the game? Who used him to push drugs? Damian's "disjointed investigation" brings him into contact with several unsavory characters including a Las Vegas mobster, a pothead reporter, a "double-dipping" girlfriend, a deadbeat father, a shady trainer, and a twisted sports psychologist who's writing a book on the "dark side" of superstar athletes, including Damian as "the gladiator athlete" known to be "competitive to a fault."

A pathologist and professor at the University of Colorado, Greer is the author of seven previous mysteries. Aimed at fans of African American detective stories, this series will also appeal to fans of college hoops and mysteries set in the west. Although billed as "a CJ Floyd novel," the book makes very little use of the bounty-hunting, antiques-dealing investigator, leaving the "snoop and probe job" in the hands of a less experienced stand-in who can't resist "insinuating himself into one of CJ's cases" and "sticking his nose into a dirty business like murder."

Trina Carter