

Blame: A Casey Portman Novel

Linda Rocker

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This legal thriller knows its way around a courtroom as it weaves a tale of crime and responsibility.

Linda Rocker's novel *Blame* focuses on a court case in Florida and features a menagerie of characters all connected to one another through the trial. Part legal thriller, part crime drama, the book tells multiple stories about the concept of responsibility, using a writing style that's effective most of the way through.

Blame opens with the suicide of Jeffrey Klausner, a young man with a history of suicide attempts, a drug addiction, and a pregnant fiancée. Too late, Klausner realizes that he didn't leave a note. His suicide drives his parents to sue his doctor for wrongful death and his fiancée's family for custody rights, and the cases play out against an upcoming judicial election and a murder threat against a high-profile prostitute.

The novel is subtitled "A Casey Portman Novel," but that character, a bailiff, isn't the protagonist of the story—though her personal travails do intersect with several characters. Instead, *Blame* gives equal time to an array of people who have varying connections to the Klausner case. The characters are all introduced effectively, and their conflicts are equally well established, though a few of the third-act resolutions sometimes feel rushed or convenient.

The strongest scenes are those that revolve directly around the courts. Rocker uses her own legal experience to provide interesting context for how the system works in Florida, without the book becoming too heavy on exposition. The political considerations of the judges and lawyers—and how the case changes those dynamics—make for interesting reading, as do the scenes focused on jury selection, the discovery process, or the bailiffs' roles.

Nearly every chapter ends with a foreshadowing line, such as "Maybe. Maybe not," and "This time was no different." Checking in briefly with so many characters doesn't allow space to develop them all. Still, the book functions as a quick read, with some interesting elements and solid dialogue.

The story would benefit from having fewer plot threads and exploring them in greater detail, but the writing style is generally effective and the best parts are highly readable. The themes of blame and revenge are also explored well, with most of the book's plot lines in some way focusing on who is culpable for the characters' myriad predicaments. Readers of mainstream legal thrillers will likely enjoy *Blame*, as will general audiences looking for a fast genre read.

JEFF FLEISCHER (December 9, 2014)

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