ForeWord Reviews

Blood Atonement
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"I neared a moment of perfection," says Dahlgren Wallace. "My definition of perfection involves moving water, solitude, a fly rod, a dry fly, and a trout." Hooking the reader as readily as his main character hooks a trout, the author provides opening sentences in this first mystery novel that are a fluid and tempting lead into a book that is a unique blend of action, sport, suspense, and place.

The protagonist is a fly-fishing guide working for Fred Lather, a multi-millionaire rancher in Montana. When Fred tells Dahlgren to show billionaire Elden Eldenberry, and his wife, Susi, a good time, he does his best—until Elden is murdered mid-stream while Dahlgren is helping Susi fish around a bend in the river.

When it appears that somebody may be setting Dahlgren up to take the fall, he is forced to call upon skills he thought he had left behind when he retired from the Marine Corps elite Force Recon. As he tries to discover who would want Eldenberry dead, he crosses paths with a violent environmental group, a neo-Nazi militia, a colony of peaceful Hutterites, and a secret cattlemen's organization, each group with their own motive for wishing Eldenberry out of the picture.

Meanwhile, Dahlgren's boss is receiving threatening letters about the bison he is raising on his ranch, which are perceived as a health menace and economic threat. The intimidation is ignored until the Lathers' ranch manager turns up dead as well. Then, Dahlgren must figure out if the two murders are linked before he can figure out who is responsible. Help comes from the usual sources (his boss and the FBI), and from an unusual one, a chess playing Jewish deli-owner and scholar.

The state of Montana plays a central role in the story, as it is only here where neo-Nazis and religious communities live almost within shouting distance of one another, and where ranchers and environmentalists struggle daily over issues of land use and preservation.

Here, too, are the scenic rivers full of rainbow trout where Dahlgren finds his inspiration and peace. In the midst of all the murder and mayhem, and the building of suspense, Tenuto, whose short fiction has appeared in magazines such as *California Fly Fisher*, intersperses scenes of fly-fishing, lovingly detailed right down to the fishing flies. "I've always had luck with the

Royal Wulff," the novel reads. "Like most attractor flies it's flashy; peacock herl, red floss, brown hackle, and white wings, and it imitates exactly nothing in nature."

The rich description invites the reader to share the author's passion for fishing as well as a good mystery well told. Lured from the very first sentence, the reader is caught and held until the very end, and then carefully released—eager and ready to be hooked again for the next novel in the "Dahlgren Wallace" series.