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Blood Island

H. Terrell Griffin
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Matt Royal has sold his share in the corporate rat race for enough money to live as a glorified beach bum in a Longboat Key condo near Sarasota, Florida. A former military man who's now an unofficial private detective, he doesn't really have to work for a living, but when his ex-wife asks him to locate her wayward step-daughter, Peggy, Royal never hesitates. After all, he's still in love with his ex.

Upon that tangled emotional web, Griffin builds a tale of confused youth, domestic terrorism, and single-minded devotion on both sides of the good vs. bad divide. The book deals with personal loyalty, overcoming the warrior mentality to live in a civilian world, and not letting the world's evils poison the soul. Royal's personal code of honor is sorely tested when his search for Peggy un-covers a murder plot aimed at him, and a terrorist ploy aimed at hundreds of innocents. Royal's response to these schemes has him walking a tightrope between the law and revenge.

Griffin is muscling in on territory claimed by John D. MacDonald and Carl Hiassen (among others) in their popular Florida-set novels. Comparisons are inevitable, but Griffin is taking a tip from Ernest Hemingway (once a Florida resident) and keeping things simple and direct. The result is a successful ride on the shoulders of a man driven by his love for a woman on whom he no longer has any claim. Royal uncovers what Homeland Security is most afraid of: homegrown destruction of the most insidious kind, the kind that masquerades as community. Griffin knows his locales, from Orlando and Sarasota to the Florida Keys, nailing the tropical atmosphere comprised of weather, bars, geography and people. He has the good sense to not go the kitsch route, so that Royal and his friends are real people and not caricatures from a Jimmy Buffet song.

Blood Island is Griffin's third Matt Royal novel, and he seems to have settled into a niche unoccupied by other writers. General mystery fans and Travis McGee addicts alike should enjoy this book. It certainly qualifies as a worthy beach read for those who want something besides fluff while they're baking in the sun—no matter where they are.
J. G. STINSON (October 13, 2008)

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