



Carolina Heat

Reed Bunzel

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Both the setting and the characters add real depth to balance with the suspense of a murder investigation.

Jack Connor and his Palmetto BioClean crew have been called to clean up the scene of an apparent, and very bloody, suicide in room 1701 of a local hotel. Unfortunately, the dead man owed a half million to Jordan James, Connor's best friend's father. In *Carolina Heat*, the suspenseful second book in the Painted Soldier Mystery series by Reed Bunzel, Connor is tasked with finding the money.

Connor, a heavily tattooed Iraq War veteran, starts off with talking to the family of the deceased and soon learns that there was just as much motivation for the man to be killed as there was for him to take his own life. The trail to find James's missing money leads Connor down a twisting trail of lowlife rednecks, ex-wives, and a large southern crime family known as the Dixie Mafia. Connor begins questioning how James is entangled with the deceased, while the body count piles up and his own life is threatened on several occasions.

Bunzel incorporates incidental trivia that accentuates his dry humor and casual writing style. While each character takes on his or her own personality through the effective dialogue and behavior, the descriptive details of the setting evoke vivid images and ambiance and depth. Connor becomes real as we follow him in his personal life nearly as much as we follow him on this latest case. His thoughts and feelings of confusion, frustration, and love are mixed in with the memories of what he saw in Iraq and the effects the war still has on him.

As the trail becomes more and more dangerous, it is still unclear who the murderer is, or even if there is one. Everyone is a suspect—including Connor, who keeps brushing up against law enforcement—until a final thrilling scene in which the marvelous twist ending is revealed. Bunzel has written a wonderfully balanced suspenseful thriller with humor and danger, love and friendship, death and healing.

SHANNAN SPITZ (Summer 2015)

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