

Cheat The Devil

Jane Rubino

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Cat Austen may be the only heroine in mystery fiction who guiltily hopes someone will be murdered so that she won't have to take a romantic trip with her boyfriend. Cat gets her wish, and boyfriend Lt. Victor Cardenas must cancel their plans so that he can investigate what turns out to be the third victim of a serial killer in Atlantic City. As a starting point, Rubino does a nice job of exposing Cat's feelings of guilt over sex, grief, child-rearing, family and Catholicism, in general.

Cat comes from a large Italian-Catholic family. She has six older brothers, five of whom are cops, the lone holdout a priest. It is from this brother's parish, St. Agnes, where the murder victims are found. This enables Cat, a freelance journalist, to nose around in her boyfriend's murder investigation.

This novel's weakness is probably also its strength. Cat's six brothers, their wives, their children, her children, her mother, friends of the family, Victor and his siblings all have a role in this novel. There are seemingly a million subplots and minor characters and, yes, they do get in the way and they are confusing. But they also knit an elaborate tapestry of a loving and nosy extended family. The novel's ending is terrific and the motive for the crimes, like most of the very complex personalities and emotions involved, is intriguing and thought provoking.

MARK TERRY (July / August 1998)

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