ForeWord Reviews
Clarion Review

MYSTERY

Deceit: A Pete Thorsen Mystery
Robert Wangard
Ampersand
978-1-4675-4523-5
Five Stars (out of Five)

Author's strong command of language and ability to escort readers through a complicated plot make for a fascinating page-turner.

A former lover in the morgue is a nightmare even without the prospect of her murder tormenting a living man's existence, a gripping scenario that Robert Wangard investigates in the third, finely tuned installment of his Pete Thorsen mystery series. Emotions riddled with disbelief permeate this gruesome tale.

In his stomach-churning opener, Pete Thorsen must confront the death of Lynn Hawke, a captivating woman with whom he had a short-lived but intense relationship. Grief and shock alone will not answer the questions surrounding her presumed car accident on an icy road in Michigan. Pete is determined to solve a case that officials have deemed closed. Telltale warning signs propel him to seek resolution for Lynn's sake and for his own peace of mind. Gut instinct screams foul play.

Edited with meticulous care, *Deceit* incorporates characteristics typical of crime fiction, and the story proceeds in a clear-cut, organized manner. With a somewhat heavy reliance on dialogue to convey information, this novel will draw the reader into an eavesdropping position, which may appeal to fans of the interrogation style of mystery. The protagonist is methodical, perhaps more astute than law enforcement, and projects a calm air of determination in his pursuit of the facts.

Excellent descriptive detail sets a foreboding mood, essential in building the tension needed to capture interest: "The night seemed even darker than when he came in because his eyes hadn't fully adjusted from the inside light. As he approached his Range Rover, he heard the gravel crunch behind him. He heard it too late."

The book's sole idiosyncrasy, and perhaps its selling point, is a tendency to downplay negative responses to stress with deadpan comedy. Obviously, this technique is used to give

Pete the resilience and stamina required to complete his job. The author succeeds in inducing laughter, as well as mystery, creating a page-turner.

Wangard's tongue-in-cheek sense of humor is evident in Pete's reactions to bizarre tactics meant to redirect his focus: "She aimed the nozzle to Pete's left and fired a long burst of Mountain Breeze. Then she aimed to his right and let loose another burst." The timing is perfect as Lynn's business partner uses an ordinary household product as a gun to dissuade his intrusion into her office. Wangard continues, "Pete was thankful for her good aim and resisted the temptation to run to the door to gulp some fresh air."

Wangard's background in law has enhanced his series. He is also the author of a short story collection.

In *Deceit*, Wangard exhibits a strong command of language and the ability to escort readers through a complicated plot. The end remains a mystery until the final pages. This winning series shows potential for growth.

Julia Ann Charpentier