

Fever Tree

Tim Applegate

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This resonant novel explores the intersections of truth and fiction.

Fever Tree, by Tim Applegate, takes its name from a band that, to people of a certain age, evoked the promises and disappointments of the late '60s and early '70s. Set during that era, the novel begins as Dieter, a man in his late twenties, takes up residence in the old hotel in Crooked River, Florida.

Dieter's reticence to discuss his past sets the town gossiping and ignites the paranoia of the local drug lord. Through flashbacks deftly intercut with the present, Dieter's story gradually becomes clear. When he meets and falls in love with Maggie, the tragedy that set him upon his journey is revealed. Crooked River is shown to be Dieter's limbo—the place where he comes to discover where he actually wants to go.

In addition to telling a compelling tale of loss and its aftermath, the novel explores the intersection of truth and fiction. Dieter is a novelist who at first is uninterested in writing any more. Gradually he begins observing the town and its residents and writing snippets about them. During a phone conversation with his sister, he reads her the first paragraph of *Fever Tree*, his new novel. Later, when he retreats into drugs and alcohol, he fears that he is too like the character in his previous novel, who did everything to excess, and who ended up “collapsed on a moonlit beach...blood streamed out of his mouth.”

Dialogue in the story is handled well, and an omniscient narration exposes aspects of the characters that they are careful to hide, generating empathy for them in the process. Even Maggie's boyfriend, a drug mule and bouncer described by Dieter as “a peacock with claws,” elicits a modicum of sympathy. Plot twists involving Dieter's friendship with a Mexican who is connected with Maggie's boyfriend add intrigue and suspense to the tale.

Fever Tree features strong, unique characters who face difficult challenges, and Dieter's story is sure to resonate with those who appreciate narrative depth. Misunderstandings, crime, and love all add to this story of self-discovery.

KAREN MULVAHILL (Fall 2016)

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