



Fiat

Jeffrey D. Schlaman

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Nuanced characters add depth to this dazzling first in a series set in a political dystopia in 2016.

Set in a not-too-distant future where the United States is on the verge of financial ruin and complete collapse, Jeffrey D. Schlaman's *Fiat* touches on several issues in the news from the past few years, such as the Federal Reserve and interest rates, survivalists, and religious freedom.

In Schlaman's vision of the near future, the Federal Reserve is trying to save the economy of the United States. Unfortunately, global events and a crazy banker combine to make an impossible situation worse. Led by a libertarian president, the United States returns to the gold standard, and anarchy ensues. The One World Church is in an excellent position to capitalize on the collapse of the US economy, but more and more people see survivalist compounds as the only way to protect themselves from the collapse. Mary, her children, and a stripper they pick up along the way detail the destruction across the country as they travel to Uncle Al's compound near Elko, Nevada. Chaos reigns.

The themes of the novel are very timely. As the United States struggles with the lingering effects of the banking crisis, and fanatics continue to drive politics and policy, the events of the plot are not that difficult to imagine. Schlaman makes a brilliant choice setting his book in 2016. For the more skeptical among us, the story could read as a warning about a coming apocalypse: "When Chris walked out of the New York Fed building, he observed rows of New York City police men and New York State Troopers lining both sides of Thirty-Third Street and Maiden Lane, standing shoulder-to-shoulder in full riot gear."

Initially, a book about the United States economy might seem dull, but rest assured, this thriller is not. It moves from place to place and time to time with the help of chapter subheadings indicating when and where the story takes place. Shortened subchapters lend the entire plot a heightened sense of urgency. The narrative bounces around quickly but always presents the surroundings and situation clearly, making for a fast-paced and exciting read.

Several of the characters are clearly evil, but others are nuanced. Mary, the mother fleeing from tornado destruction, is one of the more subtle characters. Despite the fact that the first impression of her is a proper, staid mother figure, she displays a great deal of tolerance when forced to hang out in the back of a strip club. She even watches one woman give herself a bikini wax with very little comment.

Schlaman includes interesting detail. Throughout, there are mentions of music, movies, and books, giving the story a type of soundtrack/literature track to set the mood for events of the plot. Songs include music by AC/DC, The Clash, and music from *The Book of Mormon*, which is particularly fitting because of the religious themes.

Well-written, timely, and exciting, Schlaman's novel will appeal to many types of readers. The immediacy of Twitter and news messages send the audience on a speedy trip into the real-world impact of governmental decisions. This book is the whole package, and it's the first in a projected series.

LYNN EVARTS (February 12, 2014)

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