



Framed

Robert Wangard

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Robert Wangard's Framed has elements of a classic crime novel, including an engrossing and surprising story line.

In Robert Wangard's fun, fast, and entertaining mystery novel *Framed*, onetime hotshot Chicago lawyer Pete Thorsen is roped into helping an old army buddy out of a difficult situation.

Pete, though still practicing law, left the big-city hustle behind to settle in northern Michigan. When his friend Jimmy Ray shows up to reminisce about the good ol' days, he proves to be an edgy antihero who gives off a vibe like he's working an angle. Quick on Jimmy Ray's heels are a North Carolina sheriff and his chief deputy with an arrest warrant.

While Jimmy Ray seems to play fast and loose with the truth, true nastiness enters the story when the North Carolinian duo appear. Pete takes pity on his old friend and files to block his extradition home. What follows is a portrait of an intelligent man working hard to do the right thing, knowing all the while that his pursuits won't end well.

Pete, both clever and realistic, proves to be a relatable protagonist. The antihero, Jimmy Ray, is his polar opposite, all cowboy hat, bonhomie, and braggadocio about a big-time career as a disk jockey, and even when not at center stage, he remains a catalyst. Supporting players and relationships add color to the narrative, including tension between a local sheriff and Pete.

While there is some violence lingering in the backstory, this is not a blood-soaked mystery novel. An increasingly ominous air pervades and culminates with C-4 explosives, but the narrative concentrates more on building tension than it does on eruptions, and that tension is well achieved.

The villains are believable, one egging on the other as they seek money and revenge. They are a nice take on the sheriff/deputy pairing, with a superior less competent than his chief. Conversations flow naturally, and the conflict and action maintain similar authenticity, overlaying the narrative with a real-life naturalness that gives the book a right-from-the-headlines true-crime aura.

Most of the story takes place in Michigan, brought to life with descriptions of its weather and landmarks, like a town diner where anyone who's anyone has breakfast, but Pete also wings off to North Carolina following clues. A complex conclusion solidifies this as appealing crime fiction.

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GARY PRESLEY (August 9, 2016)

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