

## Payback

**Robert Wangard**

Ampersand (Jun 18, 2014)

Softcover \$17.95 (320pp)

978-1-4675-4531-0

*A shocking opener establishes a sound basis for this flawless, action-driven mystery.*

A vendetta propels this eerie plot from a Civil War–reenactment battlefield in Michigan to a behind-the-scenes investigation that probes the bad side of human integrity. What one deserves can be a matter of perception in the deranged mind of a villain, opening the pathway to sinister behavior in Robert Wangard's *Payback*.

In another riveting Pete Thorsen mystery, the criminal intent is apparent, but the motive is not, when an acclaimed historian and professor is shot and killed during simulated battle. Thorsen, a defense attorney with the skills of an astute detective, faces the prospect of seeing his client convicted of premeditated murder unless he can find the guilty party himself.

Immaculate editing and perfect pacing set this exciting novel apart from the typical, and often plodding, genre mystery. A shocking opener establishes a sound and realistic basis for this action-driven story, presenting a horrifying situation, a vast number of possible culprits, and a flawless progression of clues. Organized and detailed, each chapter follows a coherent line of thinking, gradually building to a plausible explanation without conveying an abundance of facts too soon.

Early in the book, a clear-cut reason to turn the pages is established. “He stared at the crest of the ridge. The shot had to have come from somewhere up there, either from one of the reenactors or someone else hiding nearby. But if the shooter were someone other than a reenactor, how did he escape the attention of all of the men around him? And the watchful eyes of hundreds of spectators?”

Thorsen is portrayed with a professional background and a personal history—a rounded human being with attributes and faults. His sardonic sense of humor enhances the quality, while a romantic subplot spices up downtime breathers between important plot disclosures.

Stressed, and disappointed in the latest woman in his life, he succumbs to a familiar self-destructive ritual. “The next morning, Pete went for a run along the lake to quiet the annoying demons that were creating the pulsating beat inside his head. Killing an entire bottle of Pinot Noir had a way of bringing them out in force and they seemed reluctant to retreat.”

The author’s career in law has provided necessary realism to his intriguing crime fiction. *Payback* is his fourth novel.

Wangard’s straightforward, journalistic style integrates essential description with natural dialogue, providing a forum for debate as well as placing crucial information in every strategically implemented scene. He captures the mood, reveals his characters, and creates an entertaining experience for even a jaded fan of whodunit yarns.

JULIA ANN CHARPENTIER (September 2, 2014)

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