Clarion Review

General

Punishment and Sacrifice
John Reid
Lulu
978-1-4303-1440-0
Two Stars (out of Five)

Sometimes it's impossible to find crime fiction packed with plenty of genital mutilation child murder pedophilia incest necrophilia and splattered grey matter. *Punishment and Sacrifice* offers frustrated under-served sickos a holiday smorgasbord of graphic fringe taboos.

Dr. Jack Barker runs the Palmer Mental Health Institution and maintains a discreet service on the side for the grieving parents of murdered children—he sadistically punishes the killers who were let off easily by the justice system. The police led by Detective "Mad Dog" Mike Swanson use electronics and financial records to zero in on Barker and it seems like the book will have to end quickly. Barker is smart though he develops a protégé to create confusion and save on legwork. A teenage patient Billy Winfield has the right résumé: "He had killed his mother and father as well as raped and murdered four of his sisters ranging in age from two to twelve. Not to mention the decapitation…" Working in tandem no one out of diapers is safe.

The plot follows a cat and mouse structure expanded by the inclusion of a murky connection in the past of an amnesiac Detective Swanson. The idea of a sociopath channeling murderous urges through a twisted but consistent set of moral guidelines in service of society was the basis of Jeff Lindsay's nearly mainstream *Darkly Dreaming Dexter*. Barker's childhood of outrageous brutalization and jailhouse lock-ins is so severe that unlike Dexter he is unable to limit targets to only the guilty or even the questionably guilty.

Reid shows the cyclically replicating cause and effect of child abuse. He has both the protagonist and the lead antagonist editorialize about the American criminal justice system characterizing it as unconscionably weak after decades of liberal undercutting. The author has something valid to say but there is simply too much more gore. No evidence of gender favoritism though as at least as many young boys are violated as young girls. The story seems to serve the incidences of sexual violence rather than the reverse; the result is a mixed message of

condemnation and attempted titillation.

Elements of *Punishment and Sacrifice* are functional; the Arkansas backstory unfolds at the right speed. Still the ick factor obliterates all. The percentage of crime novel readers who want meticulous detail of the sodomization and flaying of a great many very small children must be tiny. I hope. John Reid works in the field of accounting near Bakersfield California. He expects to publish a sequel tentatively entitled *Family Values.*