FOREWORD REVIEWS THE INDIE WE LOVE.

Thriller

Punishment: A Legal Thriller
Linda Rocker
Wheatmark
978-1-60494-763-2
(July 15, 2012)

This legal thriller, focusing on how a convoluted pair of cases affect courthouse staff and criminals alike, benefits from the insider perspective provided by Linda Rocker, a legal professional.

Casey Portman is a bailiff with the West Palm Beach courthouse, and she couldn't be happier; she loves her work, admires the judge she assists, and is in the early stages of an exciting romantic affair with a handsome detective. However, a highly publicized murder case quickly disrupts everything. As Josiah Diemert prepares to stand trial for the alleged murder of his wife through a pit bull attack, a number of events shake the proceedings: a bomb goes off in the courthouse, the presiding judge falls mysteriously ill, and a bailiff is found murdered. It seems certain that these events are tied to the case—several parties, from the families of the victims and defendants to animal rights groups have high levels of interest in the outcome.

However, another case, that of a girl killed in a hit-and-run, becomes increasingly important as the perpetrator attempts to use his court connections to manipulate a favorable result in the chaos caused by the pit bull action. The story provides an interesting look into the inner working of the court, especially in the way jury selection and judging is decided. Many factors are weighed in the decision to continue with the case, rather than allowing a mistrial, and the reader is caught up in every detail. In another story these details could be dull, but when faced with the life or death situations presented here, every turning point is crucial, and the personal lives and opinions of every character matter.

Romantic relationships also serve as a theme of the book, with Casey's blossoming as others reveal their troubles: Judge Clarke struggles with depression because of her adulterous, untrustworthy husband and Judge Kanterman worries about her health and future in the wake of her husband's death. The effects of crime, in particular, and of money and power and trust, are highlighted, providing an interesting take on why some relationships work and why some don't.

Casey will have to consider these issues as her discoveries put her job and her love life at risk.

Linda Rocker worked as a lawyer and a judge, and her knowledge of the inner workings of the legal system during a thrilling case adds a layer of authenticity and suspense to the story, as the personal, political, and procedural details of the courthouse help to move the story along. While not every plot thread is tied up neatly and there is some telling over showing, the story is well paced and exciting, and the characters are unique, with fleshed-out backgrounds that drive the story beyond day-to-day events. A good choice for fans of legal and political thrillers, especially those looking for authentic details.

Heather Talty