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CLARION REVIEW ★★★★☆ THRILLER

Red, White, and Dead Again

Jeffrey A. Friedberg
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In *Red, White, and Dead Again*, New Mexican native and former private eye Jeffrey A. Friedberg delivers a compelling sequel to *Red, White, and Dead*, his first thriller featuring Jack Vance, a skilled detective and fighter.

Forced into poverty, Jack finds he cannot refuse when a powerful crime family offers to pay him handsomely to recover the plans for a bomb deadlier than the ones used against Japan during World War II. The theft of the plans originally occurred during the Second World War, and Jack learns that someone bent on world domination wants to build the explosive today. While Jack hunts for the identity of this criminal mastermind and the crucial pieces for the bomb in the present, a related story is presented of teenage spies Shanna and Yaakov, who fall in love in 1945. Suffice it to say that Yaakov ends up falling for the very woman he was supposed to murder before fate and misunderstanding tear the couple apart. Will Jack be able to stop the bomb and reunite Yaakov and Shanna after all these years?

Much of the story alternates between Jack's mission in the present and the doomed love of Yaakov and Shanna in the past before the tales link together. The chemistry of the illicit love between the adolescents provides a balanced counterpoint to Jack's largely solitary search. Friedberg takes time to develop Jack, Yaakov, and Shanna into well-rounded characters while continuously ratcheting up the suspense. Readers are thrust into a world of constant peril along with the trio, and they will hold their collective breath waiting to see how the flesh-and-blood people they have grown to care for will surmount their latest obstacle.

Fans of wise-cracking loners will thrill to Jack's exploits. Anyone who likes their romance mixed with action will root for Shanna and Yaakov as their relationship unfolds like a high-octane version of *Romeo and Juliet*. Friedberg never lets the audience forget his characters are human by subjecting them to the foibles of conceit, despair, and confusion. Readers who love surprises will find themselves as blindsided as Jack is when the author presents each new plot wrinkle. For example, just when Jack thinks he has found the villain, it turns out that nothing is as it seems. The added mystery of exactly who the antagonists are adds a refreshing dimension. The plot threads all come together in the finale, though, as Friedberg ingeniously ties up all loose ends.

The author transports the audience to New Mexico as he writes with loving, reverent detail of his home state and its indigenous people. Friedberg makes the arid desert beautiful and the religion of the Native Americans holy. The only stumbling blocks in the novel are allusions to popular culture. Jack often quotes movies or TV shows, and readers who have not watched the material will be lost. Also, all characters in the novel speak in a mishmash of clichés.

These minor quibbles aside, *Red, White, and Dead Again* will appeal to aficionados of suspense and romance.
JILL ALLEN (June 18, 2012)

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