



## Rendez-Vu

**Pete Liebengood**

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*This intensely readable and engaging mystery is full of rich cultural details.*

A thriller set in modern-day Sacramento, Pete Liebengood's *Rendez-Vu* is an emotional page-turner focused on contemporary journalism and its relationship with law enforcement.

Kimberly Vu is an ambitious young reporter whose dedication to her job is matched only by her love of style and the pride she takes in her appearance. She forgoes personal relationships and is wholly driven by her career—even romantically entangling herself with the Sacramento chief of police in exchange for receiving early tips about crime in the area. However, the book opens with the murder of the chief's wife, and Kimberly's values are immediately tested. As she seeks the truth and attempts to absolve her lover, she puts both her job and her life on the line.

This is a story set convincingly in the modern world, detailing the implications of new technology like drones on both news reporting and human interaction. As police departments around the country come under scrutiny for corruption, this novel is a timely one, giving keen insight into the power dynamics at play. *Rendez-Vu* puts television journalism under the microscope, as well, illuminating the importance of ratings over facts and style over substance, as well as the willingness to get a scoop at any cost.

Both the characters and the world of the novel are fully realized and refreshing. Kimberly, in particular, is exceptionally well written—her Vietnamese roots are explored with dignity and honesty, portraying the insular nature of the community and the sometimes dismissive attitudes of young people toward their cultures. Genuine, straightforward prose imparts understanding about immigrants' difficulties in finding homes abroad and provides a rich background for the fast-paced narrative. The text also evinces a keen ear for dialogue.

Not all characters are as thoroughly developed as Kimberly—nor do they necessarily need to be, as the main character is soon entrenched in a salacious murder mystery. Supporting characters are almost caricatures, as with the news station's drone pilot, who is geeky, awkward, and often oblivious. All are believable in their roles, though, and help keep the narrative realistic.

References to popular culture are sometimes awkwardly placed, and some of the portrayals of women—who are described in terms of their physical attractiveness and categorized as either appealing to men or not—are also problematic.

*Rendez-Vu* is a modern-day thriller that is as believable as it is entertaining. Liebengood's work is intensely readable and engaging, and is easy to devour in one sitting.

ALEX FRANKS (September 19, 2016)

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