

Reunion in Carmel

Tim Comstock

AuthorHouse (Jun 9, 2010)

\$21.00 (252pp)

978-1-4520-1410-4

In *Reunion in Carmel*, widowed Will Kempton, a former narcotics cop, flees the hard streets and rough memories of Jersey with his two young children to become police chief of the tiny tourist town of Carmel, California. His biggest headaches in Carmel are squeaky desk chairs, local blowhards, and parking tickets—until a series of murders and frightening intrusions wrecks the idyllic scene. It slowly becomes clear to Will and his outmatched police force that they are dealing with a madman who will stop at nothing for revenge. Will and his team race to stay one step ahead of the criminal, while keeping themselves safe and putting out fires in local politics. Tim Comstock's first novel is gripping, from its bone-chilling prologue to its heart-stopping conclusion.

The omniscient narrative style and precise descriptions of every character allow readers inside the players' heads as they get to know them as individuals. Readers will care about everyone, from the protagonist to the minor characters and murder victims. Comstock deftly imbues all with quirks and hopes. In a chilling masterstroke, Comstock gives the audience first-person access to the killer's thoughts before readers even know this man's place in the story. Hearing the murderer's thoughts simultaneously humanizes him and renders him even creepier; however twisted and disgusting this man's intentions are, readers learn that these impulses arise from deep suffering coupled with distorted thought processes.

The dialogue contains profanity and phonetic spelling to indicate dialect, and this clipped, rough speech is totally in keeping with the parlance of men under stress as they hunt for a suspect who hates the world. In an ingenious maneuver that heightens the suspense, Comstock plays out the drama over only a few days. Because readers are aware of every character's actions, they will groan at the near-misses and hold their breath during the confrontations. *Reunion in Carmel* moves at the pace of a well-crafted cinematic thriller, with Comstock effectively contrasting the bucolic setting with the horror of the crimes. Like any highbrow thriller, the novel possesses twists and turns—some expected and some not. The scenes which could have devolved into clichés instead play out in brilliant white-knuckle fashion. The book's only drawback is its unappealing cover.

Readers are advised to lock their doors and turn on their lights before picking up this novel.

JILL ALLEN (August 5, 2010)

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