

Saving Amy

Chris Lawrence

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Chris Lawrence blazes a smoking-hot trail of action and excitement that's both thrilling and emotionally engaging.

Chris Lawrence's debut novel, *Saving Amy*, is a first-class thriller with an ensemble cast of four working to solve a riddle around the words "saving Amy." If the team succeeds, a cold-blooded killer with ties to a secret agency hidden deep within the US government will be caught, and an international plot will be exposed. It's an edge-of-the-seat, rewarding read, especially during the final page-turning chapters.

For forensic scientist Regan Riley, her relocation from over-busy Chicago to laid-back Charleston, Illinois, is anything but the idyllic move she imagined. On the first night at a campground near the Yates estate property she wants to purchase, she is startled awake by a distraught young man crashing through her site. It's Adam, and "Adam was running for his life."

Adam Yates, it turns out, is the autistic twin brother of Charleston sheriff Drew Yates, co-owner of the Yates estate. Adam has discovered a cure for breast cancer and has escaped from a gang of US government agents who have been torturing him for his secret formula at a hidden site on the Yates property. Unfortunately, Adam can't recall how much he's told his captors about the cure for his mom, Amy. "About saving Amy," he gasps before he's killed from a nearby gunshot, and Riley returns a gunshot of her own.

From the story's first episode on, Lawrence blazes a smoking-hot trail of action and excitement that moves back and forth between the Yates estate, Charleston, a nearby cemetery, and Chicago. As she sets up her new office, Regan focuses on the clues to Adam's riddle, strikes up a romance with Drew, and enlists help from her surrogate parents, Sam and Jo Henderson, who looked after Regan after her parents were killed when she was nineteen. A firearms expert and a specialist in latent prints, Sam and Jo provide insights into various clues along the way, as well as comic relief when needed.

Other characters, however, turn out to be less friendly, even deadly, as Regan gets closer to solving Adam's riddle. The primary villain, for example, guts Regan's favorite horse, leaving it to die in extreme pain from "a big, gaping hole in her left side." Prejudging Lawrence's characters, however, is dangerous since this author is so adept at laying false clues and pointing fingers at innocent bystanders. And when the time comes to reveal the murderer, Lawrence does so with a surprising twist and a major confrontation between the killer and Regan, with Sheriff Yates racing to catch up.

Even with a cathartic and satisfying conclusion, Lawrence leaves enough of a window open for a sequel, or perhaps even a series, with Regan, Sheriff Yates, and the Henderson's forming a team of high-intensity sleuths. Together, they are ready to douse the smoldering ashes of a government agency still intent on achieving ultimate power and control by manipulating Adam's discovery.

Definitely suitable for a general audience of thrill seekers, *Saving Amy* is emotionally engaging from its opening moments to its page-racing finish.

WAYNE CUNNINGHAM (October 8, 2013)

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