

Target

Robert Wangard

Ampersand

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Murder, corporate mayhem, golf, musical oldies, and archery blend together in *Target*, a gutsy mystery that unfolds on the banks of Clear Lake in northern Michigan.

Pete Thorsen isn't getting much of a vacation, even though he took a month's leave from his work at a prominent law firm in Chicago to relax at his cottage on Clear Lake. The death of a recent acquaintance compels him to dive into an investigation, independent of the local police who seem to think Pete had something to do with the affair. Though Pete has little experience playing private investigator, he manages to rope a couple of his colleagues into acting as resources and researchers and finds several interesting links between the woman who died, various people from her troubled past, and the characters currently skulking around her hometown and surrounding area.

While trying to track down the killer, Pete stumbles upon a meth operation, angers his daughter's biological father, and meets a woman who might be the answer to the loneliness he's felt in the years since his wife died. He is also called upon to facilitate a client's sale of his company, a transaction the client wants to be swift and problem-free. Life is busy, and Pete hardly has any time to do the things he loves, like practice archery or listen to Patsy Cline.

Robert Wangard, former attorney-turned-mystery writer, proves adept at handling many characters and multiple plots lines with precision and clarity. His characters are well-defined and subtly etched with scars—both physical and emotional—that reflect a profound thought process behind their creation. In the hands of a less talented writer, Pete Thorsen may have come across as a caricature: a hotshot lawyer turned P.I. with ego to spare. But Wangard infuses his protagonist with interesting hobbies, a slightly tragic past, and a sparky sense of humor.

Wangard keeps the pacing of his novel quick but not so fast that readers can't keep up. He supplements the intensity of the main plot with several subplots, like the ongoing animosity between Pete and Wayne Sable, the biological father of Pete's adopted daughter. The subplots inform and shape the characters and the murder mystery, adding texture to the finished whole. Dialogue, description, action scenes—Wangard succeeds with aplomb on many different levels.

Target is a terrific debut novel by a writer to watch.

ANDI DIEHN (June 18, 2010)

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