Clarion Review

Mystery

Tecumseh's Curse
W.C. Madden
Xlibris
978-1-4628-4662-7
Three Stars (out of Five)

What if a conflict in America's past came back to haunt its twenty-first-century citizens? When a man turns up dead in the Battle of Tippecanoe Park on the two-hundredth anniversary of the battle, a police officer assigned to the cause wonders if the murder could be the work of a Native-American ghost. Spirit or not, it certainly looks like bloodshed of the past is haunting Tippecanoe.

Tecumseh's Curse moves back and forth across time, from conflicts between American troops and Native Americans in the 1800s to a present-day string of murders. The story explores the history of a curse made by Tecumseh—a Native American who saw his people slaughtered at the hands of American soldiers—which says that every American president elected on an even year will die in office. In historical flashbacks, author W.C. Madden shows that Tecumseh's curse held true until president Regan was shot but not killed.

The book's present-day police investigation is as interesting as its historical exploration. Officers O'Mahern and Palmer set out to investigate first one murder, but soon face two more, all perpetrated with old Indian weapons. The officers' banter and growing working relationship make their chapters interesting.

However, the prose is sometimes hindered by redundancies and other problems. The author describes a personality trait or reveals a fact and then confirms that information by expressing it using different wording in the same sentence. Some of the dialogue in the present-day chapters is a bit stiff and unnatural; sometimes this occurs because of a forced formality and sometimes because the author uses dialogue to reveal relevant information to the reader. This technique slows the pace of the present-day chapters. In contrast, readers will be drawn to the historical sections, which are filled with rich detail and seem well suited to formal dialogue.

The highlights of the novel are the author's descriptions of presidential assignations,

which are drawn as rich, action-packed scenes. Even the curse victims who succumb to illness, like Presidents Harrison and Roosevelt, are given lyrical vignettes of their final hours.

The mystery of the present-day killer is skillfully handled, with few hints given in the first half of the novel and the question left hanging until almost the last moment. However, the scene of the final conflict seems a little rushed; the action and suspense of the concluding scuffle should have been drawn out for dramatic effect.

Overall, W.C. Madden's characters are well rounded and engaging, though the historical figures have more richness than the present-day police officers. *Tecumseh's Curse* is effective as both a murder mystery and historical fiction. American history buffs and fans of crime novels will find it appealing.

Molly Horan