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Thriller

The Blood of Tyrants
Peter S. Fischer
Grove Point Press
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A marvelous, teleplay-worthy tale of greed and political corruption … for the first twenty of twenty-one chapters.

Up until almost the very end, *The Blood of Tyrants* is a compelling thriller about greed-driven political assassins seeking to change the course of American government through intimidation and murder.

Peter S. Fischer, co-creator of television's acclaimed *Murder, She Wrote,* is a scriptwriter from the second golden age of television, the decades just before the advent of cable. In his political thriller *The Blood of Tyrants,* Fischer gives readers the same kind of crisp, snappy dialogue and steady paced action viewers came to love in the numerous hit mystery shows and historical miniseries for which he wrote.

Many of the lines delivered by his characters here mirror those Fischer wrote for the detective series *Columbo*. "What turned a really talented young investigative reporter into a poor excuse for Jerry Springer?" for example, is classic Columbo. So is this observation by the hero about a fleeting affair with a "zoftig" brunette: "they hadn't had much to say to each other, but then conversation wasn't the bedrock of their relationship."

Fischer's hero, ace reporter turned television scandalmonger Paul Castle (nee Paulie Castelli, a nice Italian boy from Queens), is at his core a good man and a better journalist. It just takes an old flame, Jennie Bovano, and a string of political assassinations to remind him of the person he once was. It doesn't hurt when Jennie comes to him one night dressed to kill, or that "her silk lounging outfit clung to her like paint on a new Mercedes."

Paul, Jennie, an FBI agent named Fowler Briggs, and others are brought together when a number of congressmen are murdered on the orders of a shadowy organization which calls itself SST—shorthand for "sic semper tyrannis," (thus always to tyrants), the infamous cry delivered

by John Wilkes Booth as he leaped to the stage after assassinating Lincoln. Despite being reminded by his co-worker Murray that “we’re an electronic sleaze show” and not “America’s Most Wanted,” Castle makes it his mission to uncover the plot and the men behind it.

For twenty very well-written chapters Castle hunts evil, greedy, selfish men who state they are seeking to clean up an admittedly corrupt and dysfunctional Congress for high-minded goals, but are proven to ultimately be acting only for their own interests. That hunt is classic investigative journalist turned amateur gumshoe, and Fischer tells the tale in a marvelous old-school television manner. Fischer keeps up the pace and banter, building his story to a climax—and then, at the very end, he falters.

The novel collapses in a heap in its final chapter. The author murders the ending with an unrealistic plot twist justified by his criticism of the current real-life president’s policies, which Fischer has decided are tantamount to socialist treason. This ruins what otherwise would be a great book. Not content with that fatally flawed finale, Fischer offers up an egregious epilogue to supposedly show how the bad guys’ murderous assault on democracy has made things right in America. Better he had just stopped with chapter twenty, for at the end he goes horribly wrong, betraying not only his character but also the trust of the readers whom he has brought so far on this journey.

Mark McLaughlin