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CLARION REVIEW ★★★☆☆ GENERAL FICTION

The Brink

Mark Fadden
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Drawing from current events, economic fears, and conspiracy theories, Mark Fadden crafts an entertaining political thriller on the theme of good vs. evil. Action and heroism keep readers turning pages as Texas Ranger Danny Cavanaugh returns in Fadden's second action-adventure novel. The story begins with a thwarted theft at the Library of Congress. The thief's booty is recovered and taken to the White House where it reveals a previously unknown eighth article of the constitution. From there, the story jumps to Danny Cavanaugh who is on the brink of suicide. He postpones his own death long enough to investigate strange lights coming from a nearby monastery. Nearing the structure, he encounters Sydney Dumas, a tall gorgeous French woman clad only in skimpy underwear. She is fleeing a detail of security guards determined to kill her. Danny saves her and listens to her conspiracy tale about the Group, an alliance of powerful, wealthy men and women who are planning to force the United States into bankruptcy and take over its leadership.

Danny and Sydney, a law professor, judge, and avid swimmer, head to Washington, DC, to tell the president what they have found. Sydney's nemesis, Stefan Taber, trails them and changes sides several times. The line between good and evil becomes so blurred that nearly everyone looks like a villain at one point or another. In fact, readers may not feel heartened at the end; it is unsure whether good has prevailed.

This is a nicely crafted thriller, and the author deserves his "Rising Star" status, but he doesn't quite deliver with this novel. The writing and the plot are pocked with errors and amateur mistakes. An overuse of similar names in the opening chapters may send readers rushing for paper and pencil to write up a who's who list. Many of these names are never seen again. The awkward handling of relationships, romance, humor, and character development may elicit more than one groan.

Uneven writing sometimes surprises readers with unexpectedly graphic descriptions. For example, in the opening chapter, a cop chases the thief into a fountain. The cop yells, "'Hands up!'….Joel nodded. He spread his jacket wide to show he had no weapon. As he did, the book inside tumbled down his body into the water. The cop's eyes exploded." The author means that he widened his eyes with horror, but readers will visualize the actual eyeball gore. Such awkward phrases jerk readers out of the scene more than once. Still, the dialogue works well, flows smoothly, and moves the story forward. Action scenes usually unfold in easy to follow increments with mildly suspenseful descriptions.

Predictable plot points and amateur mistakes undermine a promising read; yet anyone looking for another tale of a secret organization conspiring to overthrow the world will enjoy Mark Fadden's second novel.
DAWN GOLDSMITH (June 18, 2010)

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