



The Competition

Michael R. Shoulders

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This fast-paced novel could be represented in paint glass and stone as one of the bright unconventional buildings created by late Austrian architect Friedensreich Hundertwasser. Just as the Viennese designer favored labyrinthine spirals over straight lines—which he called “the rotten foundation of our doomed civilization”—so this thriller twists readers around corkscrew spirals of delicious mystery and intrigue. When washed-up architect William Travers hears of a competition to design a new Governor’s Mansion complex in Indianapolis on the existing grounds of Catholic Diocese property he feels this is his last chance.

The book opens with an outraged client hurling a coffee mug at Travers.

The door vibrated for five full seconds after she slammed it. Both men watched the door wondering if the frosted glass was going to melt.

‘You have a way of doing that to certain types of people you know’ said Chambliss.

‘Doing what?’ Travers said.

‘Ticking them off.’

‘We’re better off without her. We were getting nowhere. She just doesn’t get it.’

Chambliss shifted his mouse. ‘You didn’t have to tell her that her taste was...what did you call it...southern outhouse?’

‘No’ said Travers. ‘I think I called it outhouse chic.’

Winning this competition could solve Travers’ problems—financial reputation and self-esteem—catapulting him back to his rightful place as one of Indianapolis’s leading and most creative architects. But is he up to the challenge? In order to pull it off he’s going to need the help of his well-connected brother Edgar his fed-up mentor Ethan Langly and his distant daughter Molly who works for a rival Chicago firm—a large one with deep pockets. Worse yet a dark secret rots beneath the foundations of Immaculate Heart Monastery and Sanitarium threatening doom for Travers and his friends including the hauntingly beautiful woman he encounters by chance.

Although Travers’ character is more static than dynamic throughout the novel other characters do experience personal growth. It is a joy to watch one member of the design team in particular as this person changes slowly for the better.

Sly humor lightens the tension from time to time: “Travers had always wondered why [engineer Quimby] Walsh didn’t trim the little black hairs that sprouted from his ears and more annoyingly curled from his nostrils. He supposed Walsh in his own imitable way found them stylish. The engineer and his miserly wife cut each other’s hair to save money. Over the years the haircuts had begun to resemble each other giving the couple a dowdy gray bowl-cut look. The last time Travers saw her Walsh’s wife looked just like Quimby with slightly larger breasts.” The dialogue is crisp the pacing spot-on and the book refreshingly free of the proofreaders’ errors that plague so many first novels. A visually appealing and structurally sound construction: readers will definitely enjoy a tour through *The Competition*.

Michael R. Shoulders is an architect and city planner who travels between Southwestern Indiana and Longboat Key Florida.

HOLLY CHASE WILLIAMS (June 6, 2007)

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