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The Crossbow Murder

Wayne Minnick
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The novel begins promisingly enough: at an open forum before the Georgia State senate regarding a bill to ban deer hunting, Harry Paulson, CEO of Edgeware Pharmaceuticals, is assaulted by an animal-rights demonstrator and doused with a bag of animal blood. The attacker, Basil Gearhart, is arrested for assault. The next day, Harry Paulson, while walking in the woods behind his house, is shot in the back with a crossbow bolt and killed.

Atlanta detectives Wade Davis and Leda Fulford are assigned to the case. They quickly establish that Gearhart had been released on bail in time to commit the murder. The more they learn, however, the more complicated the case becomes. Paulson's widow and two daughters are acting strangely. Do they know more than they're saying? What of Paulson's business associate, Roger Godwin, who has taken over control of the company? There were allegations prior to Paulson's death of a serious disagreement between the two over a pending lawsuit. Further investigation indicates Godwin may have had an affair with Paulson's wife. For that matter, Paulson was a known philanderer; perhaps his wife killed him.

Wade Davis and his partner, Leda Fulford, are engaging protagonists, and the seesaw attraction and repulsion between the two is interesting, if not completely believable.

Minnick has several strengths and weaknesses. His story, in general, is good. His writing, as well, is very solid. Unfortunately, his characters all speak as if they're Harvard graduates and Minnick has chosen to write even dramatic scenes in a very understated manner. The novel would have benefited from more tension. The ingredients are all there, but they go largely unexploited. On the other hand, the complex, ambiguous ending of this novel raises the stakes. Minnick's mystery plot was solid, but the reader is fairly certain to figure it out long before the end—except Minnick twists the plot at the climax in a very satisfying way, raising a number of moral arguments.

Although the novel may lack a certain feeling of typical mystery novel closure, it will stay with the reader a long time because of its unexpected ending.

MARK TERRY (July / August 2000)

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