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Clarion Review ★★★★½ THRILLER

The Death Bet

A. K. Price
ebookit.com (Dec 13, 2013)
eBook $3.99 (381pp)
978-1-4566-1904-6

Coastal locales illustratively described bring an exotic setting to this fast-paced business espionage thriller.

Life insurance policies used to be peace of mind—a financial cushion—for a person's loved ones. What happens when life insurance policies are bought and sold and only provide a corporation with cash after the insured's death? Author A. K. Price's *The Death Bet* centers on the dirty dealings of a company that doesn't believe the insured are dying fast enough. His fast-paced thriller takes nearly retired insurance examiner Blaine Stone on a reluctant ride into the business of death.

Price puts together a nice package. Corporate espionage in the insurance industry is a hotbed of potential, and he makes the most of it. An investigation into the conservative First Granite Mutual throws Stone's finally settled life back into chaos. Occasionally, insurance lingo becomes overwhelming and confusing: "We need more detail on the existing book. We'd also like to see some sensitivities around life expectancies. You may have a large book, but if the trend is off, the size is meaningless." But grasping such passages is not vital to understanding the plot.

The story is set in several locations, and Price gives a good sense of place, creating settings with local characters and description: "Ramon, the night shift worker, cheerfully greeted Blaine and talked nonstop about Real Madrid soccer as he made Blaine's dinner. Ten minutes later, upon exiting with a chicken salad on a toasted roll with extra onions, his usual, Blaine spotted the Yankees man examining flower bouquets outside the bodega." The descriptions of the islands where much of the action takes place are also spot on.

There are a great many characters named, especially in the beginning of the book, which makes it challenging to keep them straight. Occasionally, one needs to flip back to figure out who someone is and what his place is in the corporate or governmental hierarchy. As the book moves forward, the extraneous characters fall away, and it becomes easier to keep track of everyone.

Stone experiences significant changes in the story. Initially, he is an insurance examiner who lost his wife five years prior and is currently looking at retirement. His struggle to let go of his wife is very realistic, and the love he felt for her is palpable. The new woman in his life and his adventures give him new perspective and help him grow.

The grammar and punctuation are clean, and the book is well edited. The cover is rather simple, but it does not mislead, as a majority of the high-tension action takes place on the islands off the coast of Connecticut and in the surrounding water.

The Death Bet is tailor-made for those who like business espionage with some high-octane thrills. Those who appreciate a dash of secret-society mayhem will also enjoy this book a great deal.

LYNN EVARTS (December 20, 2013)

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