

## The Fear of Winter: Book One in The Fear Of Series

**S. C. Sterling**

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*The Fear of Winter is a thrilling mystery novel in which the citizens of a Colorado town cope with their grief in a serial killer's wake.*

In S. C. Sterling's thriller *The Fear of Winter*, a father works to find his missing daughter, dealing with guilt over his perceived failings as a police officer, husband, and father.

In the late 1990s, a rural Colorado town reels from the devastation caused by a serial murderer, the Rocky Mountain Killer. At the same time, Tom, a police officer, is determined to find his missing daughter, Megan. Conducted with the help of a private investigator, Marshall, who also has strained relationship with his daughter, and Tom's assistant Hannah, who has never recovered from the death of her sister, Tom's investigation reveals uncomfortable truths about Megan and the unsavory world she was caught up in.

Across eight sections (if without distinguishable internal chapter breaks), each containing multiple, often seemingly unrelated, story lines, the book centers Tom's search for Megan. With prose that is clear and tidy, this stylish story is all about its compelling characterizations. There are deep insights into people's personal histories, and each person's past impacts the novel's forward momentum. Each person handles grief in their own way: there are instances of denial, anger, and reluctant acceptance. No matter how people react, though, the impact of the local tragedies on their lives is clear.

But the book's adjacent story lines are not always made to connect, and the transitions between them are rough. As new people are introduced to the story, the central mystery is sometimes obscured. And some secondary characters are left behind or have the details of their story lines muddled—as with the killer himself, Kevin Strand. At several different points, including during a conversation that takes place in prison, Kevin is confirmed to be incarcerated and awaiting execution for the Rocky Mountain killings. Elsewhere, Kevin engages in an abduction and still lives in society; but absent a clear sense of when that abduction occurred, the question of whether this is the same Kevin who is imprisoned is hard to answer. Nonetheless, the story holds attention as it moves at a steady pace toward its gripping conclusion.

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GAIL HOFFER-LOIBL (January 26, 2023)

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