



Clarion Review

Thriller

The Hanging Tree: A Novella

Michael Phillip Cash

CreateSpace

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Four Stars (out of Five)

A short but mesmerizing tale, this spine-tingling test of the human spirit quite literally takes on the ghosts of our ancestors in an attempt to neutralize their mistakes.

Supernatural entities threaten to suppress free will in this fate-propelled plot. A twenty-first-century story embarks on a frightening jaunt into the 1600s and early 1900s, delving into the disturbed emotions of five historical characters who cannot be laid to rest.

Beneath the boughs of an old tree in contemporary Long Island, a teenage girl must face the consequences of a sour relationship with her father, while a boyfriend whom she trusted succumbs to lusty temptation—or perhaps forces beyond his control: “Chad felt different there. His muscles pulsed with an energy he didn’t understand, like he drank too many of those energy drinks. His blood felt thick, sluggish in his veins; he was aroused. He looked down at Arielle, his eyes narrowed, considering what he would do with her. His thoughts felt foreign, yet he didn’t try to stop thinking them.”

This haunting novella explores the consequences of actions taken centuries ago in Oyster Bay, examining the long-term, karmic aftereffects. Creepy, without a doubt, but decidedly staged for maximum impact, *The Hanging Tree* teeters on the brink of horror without fully crossing over the genre’s boundary. The underlying purpose seems to be one of vague revenge—lessons learned and prices paid. In short, a curse must be dissolved before peace can be attained. Witchcraft is the solution.

A short but mesmerizing tale, this spine-tingling test of the human spirit quite literally takes on the ghosts of our ancestors in an attempt to neutralize their mistakes. Though written with a commercial rather than a literary slant, a philosophical question adds an intellectual element to this Halloween-style entertainment. What is free will?

Arielle, an innocent young woman instilled with the best intentions, must go beyond the basics of knowing the difference between right and wrong as she deals with dead people who perceive the world in a different light. Only a common-sense approach will resolve her nightmare. The story jumps at a rapid rate from the viewpoint of one character to the next, creating fear from more than a single perspective.

A strong command of language and the ability to rivet attention both serve to captivate, but the combination thrusts this eerie escapade into overdrive, conveying too much in too short a format. Nothing is wrong with this novella, yet the intriguing situation, which features multiple characters, may have been more appropriate for a novel. Scenes tend to be implemented at an unnaturally accelerated pace. Slick packaging and a standout cover depicting a leafless black tree against a crimson background sets this work apart from mediocre competition in genre fiction.

A resident of Long Island and a novelist with a degree in English as well as an MBA, Michael Phillip Cash has loosely based his story on a real-life tragedy surrounding an oak tree where an accident occurred in the early twentieth century. His familiarity with the region infuses his work with life and authenticity.

Julia Ann Charpentier