

The Judge

Farin Powell

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Powell keeps the excitement in tune with a pitch-perfect delivery.

The Judge by Farin Powell expertly weaves a thrilling kidnapping plot, a love story, and courtroom drama into a page-turning tale that explores the unexpected chain of events set off by everyday decisions and actions.

Mourning the death of his wife and the mysterious disappearance of his daughter, Judge Walter McNeil is burdened by the secrets he has carried for years. Known for his strict sentencing, McNeil's lack of mercy comes back to haunt him when he is kidnapped by three ex-convicts who feel he is to blame for their wrecked lives. Unlikely allies criminal defense attorney Amanda Perkins and detective Aristo Manfredi must team up to save the judge from a death sentence. When the captors' plan goes awry, turning deadly, and the judge's secrets threaten to jeopardize his sanity, Perkins and Manfredi must solve the clues and unravel a complex web of intrigue in order to save more than one life.

The unique voices of Powell's well-developed characters add to the intriguing complexity of the story line. The characters are sympathetic and believably complicated. As in life, there are no "bad guys" and "good guys," only realistic people who commit bad and good acts based on their reactions to events out of their control. These actions and reactions create a domino effect that drives the narrative and provides almost nonstop, unpredictable action during the story. The judge's character, in particular, undergoes a satisfying (somewhat Ebenezer Scrooge-like) transformation through the book as he begins to see himself through the eyes of those around him.

The plot, though complex and intricate, is not overcomplicated. The author clearly illustrates each character and spends enough time cultivating individual personalities without bogging down the plot with superfluous exposition. The scenes shift easily and flow quickly into the next, which keeps the action moving smoothly without becoming jolting. Much of the plot centers around legal procedures, and Powell carefully elucidates any esoteric terms or technicalities through characters' dialogue without sacrificing narrative nimbleness.

From the courtroom to the kidnappers' lair, Powell keeps the excitement in tune with a pitch-perfect delivery of realistically motivated characters and a nonstop series of powerfully tense situations. There is no lag in the book, from the opening pages depicting the kidnapping to the thrilling conclusion.

Recommended for fans of courtroom and police dramas, suspense, and detective fiction, this well-balanced story will satisfy the need for drama and intrigue.

ROSE GARRETT (December 9, 2016)

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