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Clarion Review

Mystery

The Literary Six
Vince A. Liaguno
Outskirts Press
978-1-59800-695-7
Four Stars (out of Five)

Missing heads hot tub sex unspeakable secrets old boyfriends blood on the snow of stormy winter nights—Vince A. Liaguno's debut novel *The Literary Six* has all the right ingredients for thrilling and chilling.

The story opens on New Year's Eve 1982 in a smoky college bar where several friends members of a group of bookish self-admirers called the The Literary Six have gathered to plot the personal and professional demise of a loathsome English lit professor. It's their last year together for they're all seniors and they want to make a statement worthy of their legend.

Jump ahead twenty years and the group is gathering for its annual reunion—this year to be held at an island summer resort owned by Taylor Miller's husband Taylor being the only member of The Literary Six to have really made it as a writer.

The problem is that it isn't summer it's New Year's Eve and a nor'easter is blowing in threatening a brutal weekend for the college chums. Brutal not just for the weather: stowed aboard the luxury powerboat ferrying the merry group to Shelter Rock is a stalker a masked killer a man with a female human head for luggage.

A set-up full of atmosphere—jealousy alcohol money lust—and the story really takes off when the guests put on their party clothes and begin to disappear one by one a la Christie's *Ten Little Indians.* But getting to this point in the narrative has required a good deal of slogging through unwieldy sentence construction and awkwardly unnatural vocabulary. Redundancies anachronisms and a certain amount of wobbling between tenses also haunt the first half of the text. The entire book could have used a thorough and professional editing for it's obvious that Liaguno has the chops for action atmosphere and sex. Midway through when the language loses its self-consciousness in rush of good story-telling Liaguno shines.

He stood there in the middle of the walkway for a moment as they stared in horror. Then raising the pickaxe he smashed one of the overhead bulbs on his left then one on his right alternating as he moved toward them. A growing patch of darkness spread behind the would-be

executioner on the walkway.

Liaguno is a writer to keep an eye on. The murder is hot the sex is steamy and his sense of momentum from scene to scene spot-on. The series of short scenes movie-like that lead to the denouement deserves wholeheartedly the genre description HORROR.