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CLARION REVIEW ★★★★★ GENERAL FICTION

The Pier: A Folly Beach Mystery

Bill Noel
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Chris Landrum expected a quiet retirement when he moved to the small South Carolinian island community of Folly Beach, but unfortunately, murder keeps interrupting his plans. Author Bill Noel's second entry in the Folly Beach Mystery series, *The Pier*, further follows protagonist Chris' amateur sleuthing.

When an antiques dealer is discovered dead off a local pier, Chris and friends know there is no way that the water-phobic man could have committed suicide as the police have concluded. With several relentlessly weird associates, including a man who photographs trash and quotes minor U.S. Presidents, a loud-mouthed realtor, and a burglar-turned-hardware store owner, Chris conducts his own investigation. The group's slightly illegal activities yield clues that point to murder and suggest that Chris and his associates are next on the killer's list.

The Pier evinces a professionalism not always seen among self-published efforts. The overall package is professional, with the text neatly arranged into short, brisk chapters. Not one typo or missing punctuation mark was found, and there was only one misspelling. *The Pier*'s quality is equal to that of any professionally published work.

The Pier succeeds as a mystery novel too. Noel writes with a fast-paced, easily read style, with plenty of humorous asides to characterize Chris' bemused, sarcastic point of view. As Chris and his friends make connections and form plans based on intuition, intelligence, and the occasional stupid risk-taking, the plot runs believably for the unofficial gumshoes: The characters are neither smart enough to solve everything right away, nor stupid enough to walk right into the murderer's schemes. With his smarts nicely calibrated at the average reader's level, Chris provides a good-humored, engaging entry into the world of Folly Beach.

As quite possibly the second most important character in the Folly Beach Mystery series, the island itself deserves mention too. Noel describes the weather, waves, and ways of small island life with familiarity and affection. If the population contains a statistically improbable number of eccentrics, Noel's flight of fancy in this area is offset by his detailed observations on the gossipy, weather-obsessed nature of a small town on the very edge of the Atlantic. The reader understands why Chris loves the place…but also why there might be murder and machinations among such a close-knit, nosy group.

A well-written mystery novel and portrait of a small town, *The Pier* should appeal to readers who like a scenic whodunit with plenty of character development and local color.
(October 6, 2009)

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