ForeWord Reviews

THRILLER

The Scavenger's Daughter
William G. Thompson
William G. Thompson
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The Scavenger's Daughter is a torture device invented during the reign of Henry VIII of England. It's a particularly nasty machine which works opposite the famous rack: it crushes a person, causing internal bleeding, broken bones and, eventually, death. It makes for a most appropriate symbol of what William G. Thompson focuses on in his novel of the same name.

In this emotionally charged debut novel, ex-FBI agent Jack Sturdevant is stunned by the news of a former lover's death. FBI Special Agent Carmen Eyas, working deep undercover in a Mexico-to-US human trafficking ring, attempted—without any hope of back-up—to arrest the American who was taking possession of a van-load of captured women and children in Chicago. Sturdevant is determined to find her killer— and if he can rescue more people from human traffickers, so much the better.

FBI Deputy Director L. Steven Wallace, however, intends to use Sturdevant for his own purposes. Like a puppet master, Wallace makes others dance to his tune while he remains in the shadows. But Sturdevant is a crusader in all the right ways, and he'll maneuver through any obstacle to get to his goal. Aided by another FBI agent and an ambitious journalist, among others, Sturdevant learns about a conspiracy at the highest levels of the federal government.

Jack Sturdevant is a passionate advocate for the victims of human trafficking. He's not perfect, but he's a smart, experienced agent. Corrupt officials attempt to remove him—permanently–but Sturdevant manages to avoid that fate through his own skills and the aid of those who care for him.

Sturdevant's hunt for Special Agent Eyas's killer is one ribbon of story in this novel; the other is the actions of the traffickers. An intricate web of deceit and desire for power catches trafficker boss-man Rolando Raul-DeJesus and his confederates, forcing them all to confront the past and how it has infected the present. These two strands are effortlessly woven into the lives of the trafficking victims, but never so that the reader gets lost. Thompson is consistent in maintaining each character's personality, giving each a "voice" all their own.

Of particular note are the bad guys. Though the reader isn't directly shown any good

points of any of these characters, Thompson is able to intimate at least a neutral if not positive side for each of them, letting the reader know that these men were not always evil.

This is one of the few novels in the thriller genre where the major female characters have some agency, which means they aren't damsels in distress. FBI Special Agent Laura Kallinger can take care of herself; journalist Alex Montoneros has covered conflicts around the world. They are nothing like each other, except in their feelings for Jack Sturdevant. The romantic elements of the novel never overtake the narrative, but some of the dialogue passages could have been condensed without removing their purposes.

The Scavenger's Daughter is a fast-paced, adrenaline rush of a thriller. The torture device serves as a metaphor for the psychological compression caused by corruption as well as slavery. Readers should save this novel for a long weekend, because it's difficult to put down.

J. G. Stinson