

## Twin River III: A Death at One Thousand Steps

**Michael Fields**

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(336pp)

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*From the first to last page, this action-packed, exciting mystery is never dull.*

"I'm no good at this." This utterance from weary protagonist Wesley Palladin, as he confides in his lover, Jane Romano, seems indicative of Palladin overall in Michael Fields's *Twin River* series. With *Twin River III*, Fields continues chronicling former mob enforcer Palladin's existence in the backwater Pennsylvania town of Twin Falls, where he's hiding out with his sidekick, the teenager Matt Henry. With his past coming back to haunt him and a new danger lurking, Palladin once again has to test his cunning and ingenuity in the face of evil.

While Palladin works hard to build a reputation as a respected member of the local community, old boss Don Scavone dispatches two underlings, Bengy and Pebbles, to Twin Falls to assassinate another of Palladin's former associates. Once Palladin intercepts them, he fears for his own life and for the safety of Matt, Jane, and Jane's son, Cody. On top of it all, there's another killer in Twin Falls. Abel Towers, abused stepson of the late Reverend Towers, is releasing his inner demons on the townspeople of Twin Falls in the form of kidnapping and murder. With the mob and a crazed killer in the same locale, Palladin has his hands full.

All of this makes for a complex plot. Fortunately, it's never dull, appearing to be tightly planned with short sentences and dialogue passages, and the pages turn quickly between action sequences. Levity is also a welcome surprise. Despite being a sleazy, porn-producing mob boss, Scavone's philosophy and affection for Sophia Loren—including chastising henchman Bengy by saying, "Don't use *whore* when you talk about Sophia. ... *Prostitute* is a more suitable word. ... We have strict standards"—is one strong example of how Fields makes room for humor within the suspense of the narrative.

While the narrative is well plotted and *Twin River III* is a page-turner, certain details and characters could be more creative. Although he has his funny side, Scavone doesn't appear much different from a typical action-story mob boss of the typical Cosa Nostra milieu. While Abel Towers is that one evil character one likes to read more on, his religious background—his brother was named Cain—seems to influence his horrible behavior in a religious-boy-victim-gone-amok manner.

The overall dark tone of *Twin River III* is fascinating and hard to ignore, and its overall atmosphere is exciting from the first to last page.

JAMES BURT (November 13, 2015)

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