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CLARION REVIEW ★★★★☆ MYSTERY

Uncommon Collectables

Lisa Dewar
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Lisa Dewar breathes some fresh air into the police procedural.

With *Uncommon Collectables*, Canadian writer Lisa Dewar has mastered the art of the police procedural. A particularly nasty serial killer is on the loose in Las Vegas. Identifying and capturing the murderer is the primary task of two local police detectives, Devon Cartwright and Holland Grant, and the pressure to close the case increases with each new body found. These murders are the visible part of a conspiracy to change the balance of power in Sin City. Neither characters nor events are what they seem to be.

Since the release of *The Silence of the Lambs* by Thomas Harris in 1991, this character type has grown in popularity. It has been used so often—and sometimes so badly—that it's lost its edge. Harris thoroughly researched his novels featuring Hannibal Lecter, and combining two or more real-life serial killers' methods and motives led to a villain who's now an icon. Dewar has also solved the puzzle of how to create a serial killer character who has depth and presence.

Dewar's "The Collector" is a murderer who is seen but not identified until the book's final pages. Rather than end the story with the killer's capture or elimination, Dewar presents the culprit as one of several suspects. Threaded through the novel is a ribbon of shadowy dealings, hinting that there's more than murder going on, all of it illegal. Layer upon layer of facts and events combine to flesh out and add depth to the major characters, making each of them highly believable.

While oft-repeated spelling and punctuation errors can mar any reading experience, *Uncommon Collectables* is riveting despite them; the errors are speed bumps rather than brick walls.

Major characters are well-drawn, given life through their backstories and actions. The "CSI effect" is neatly sidestepped by a realistic depiction of forensics and police work in general. It's in the treatment of female characters that *Uncommon Collectables* stands apart from the average police procedural. Women of varying social strata and financial means are depicted, and their foibles and strengths are presented fairly equally. They have purpose and dimension. They aren't placeholders or eye candy. They matter.

James Patterson is known to write short chapters to heighten tension and set the pacing in his novels. Dewar uses the short chapter to great effect in her novel, too; instead of a headlong rush to the end, the pacing is fast but expertly held in check. The briefest of pauses between murders, the budding relationship between Cartwright and reporter Mehgan Bowman, the unknown caller who sends Bowman clues to the serial killer's identity, and the seeming endlessness—and vital necessity—of following procedures while searching for leads and evidence all contribute to the pacing.

Uncommon Collectables is gripping, intense, and full of surprises. A police procedural that reads like a thriller, it is recommended for the new and seasoned mystery fan alike.

J. G. STINSON (September 16, 2013)

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