

Visions

S. T. McCrea

iUniverse (Jul 27, 2018)

Softcover \$20.99 (334pp)

978-1-5320-5277-4

Visions is a polished detective story centered on the cost of doing the right thing.

S. T. McCrea's captivating paranormal thriller, *Visions*, pits a supernaturally gifted school teacher against the physical embodiment of evil.

A serial kidnapper targets a small-town school for months, taunting a local teacher, Sara. Sara has inherited a psychic gift that forces a mental connection to the abducted children but also bonds her to the kidnapper. The strain begins to wear her down as Samuel Hawk, a retired Navajo detective from Arizona, arrives to help the local police.

Samuel is operating under a tribal request to see if Sara's gifts are real and match a Hopi prophecy. She may play a large role in ushering the tribe through the upcoming apocalypse. Sara faces down a madman, struggles to protect her unborn child, and discovers the truth of her gift and her family's past.

There's an immediacy and engaging tension to this narrative, which unspools with slow unobtrusiveness from the moment Sara saves the first child. From there, the story weaves together three disparate plot lines that connect in a strong, cliffhanger conclusion.

Sara struggles to balance her gift with protecting herself and her child. Samuel's frustration stems from both the prophecy and intertribal conflict. The kidnapper's malevolent goals layer and feed off each other. Clashing motivations build and maintain tension, even between secondary characters, as when Sara fails to save one of the children and the town turns against her, even though another child's life hangs in the balance. The primary tension between Sara and the kidnapper anchors the narrative, but the dynamics between other characters also result in intriguing interactions.

One of the best realized characters is Sara's brother, Caleb, from whom she spent most of her life apart. Early sections paint Caleb in a negative light, but a subtly incorporated backstory changes this perception. Revelations pertaining to the siblings' shared past bolster the main plot.

Dialogue is snappy and distinct; it complements the narrative. The repeated mention of Sara's quickness at putting together clues is unnecessary; this is abundantly apparent in context already. Scene details are fleshed out naturally over the course of major events.

This is a strong title, setting a clearly defined path for the future of the series. The narrative builds up Sara and Caleb's origin story and lays out a central conflict and villain for the next book. Several unfinished threads, including around Samuel and the Hopi prophecy, suggest increased stakes, as well.

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JOHN M. MURRAY (December 10, 2018)

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