



Clarion Review

Washout: A Folly Beach Mystery

Bill Noel

iUniverse

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Retired sixty-something Chris Landrum is back for another adventure in *Washout*, the latest entry in Bill Noel's Folly Beach Mystery series. In his former life, Chris was an HR administrator, but he has traded this corporate career for an easier living selling his photographs on the picturesque island of Folly Beach, outside Charleston, South Carolina.

But past experience has taught Chris that life in Folly Beach is anything but peaceful. In previous Folly Beach mysteries, Chris joined forces with his friends—the President-quoting, amusingly self-important Charles and the jumpy, ex-con hardware store owner Larry—to solve murder mysteries in the small community. This time, terror strikes closer to home when anonymous notes, painted in blood, threaten revenge and murder against Larry. Pressured by Charles, Chris and Larry once again swing into sleuthing action, bypassing the local law enforcement in their own search for the culprit behind the threats to Larry.

One of iUniverse's Rising Stars, author Bill Noel comes strongly recommended by the publishing company, and it is easy to see why. His experience as both a fine art photographer and a resident of the South (Louisville, Kentucky) come into play when he writes about Chris, a character with some similar experiences. Additionally, Noel has been honing his craft throughout the Folly Beach Mystery series, and *Washout* continues his tradition of well-edited, high-quality storytelling.

Washout takes readers further into Chris Landrum's life with sprightly prose and a generous helping of good humor. Through Chris Landrum's dry viewpoint ("My love of crowds was second only to my love of root canals"), Noel characterizes each of the story's personalities with wit and high spirits. Noel's narrative skills ensure that readers will wish to linger in Folly Beach, enjoying its ambiance, even when they are not following Chris on amateur detective duty.

In *Washout*, Noel crafts an almost perfect mystery novel. The briskly paced chapters introduce a swift, engaging flow to the plot, and characters have enough quirks to make them memorable, but not so many as to turn them into caricatures. The grim talk of revenge and murder is balanced by a loving depiction of the South Carolina island and its inhabitants.

Though it is objectively unlikely that multiple murders could occur in such a small community and that an informal gumshoe such as Chris Landrum could solve them all, Noel's latest charming entry in the Folly Beach Mystery series will convince readers that it's possible.

Elizabeth A. Allen