

Harlan coben's thriller "the woods" book review

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Book review of The Woods

“ The Woods” is a thriller penned by Harlan Coben and was first published in the year 2007. Coben is known for his detective thrillers and out of the 20 books published by him so far, 10 feature the famous character of Myron Boitar. Harlan is based out of USA and some of his bestsellers include “ Gone for Good” and “ Tell No One”.

The story of “ The Woods” revolves around an incident which took place in a summer camp, in which four teenagers (Doug Billingham, Gil Perez, Camille Copeland and Margot Green) venture into the woods never to return again. Two of them are found dead and the other two go missing never to be seen again. The incident happened at the watch of Paul Copeland and Lucy Gold, his summer camp love. They had abandoned their post on that fateful night due to their romantic involvement with each other. One of the missing teenagers was Paul’s sister and his family never really gets over this incident, with his mother leaving him forever.

Two decades later Paul, who is now the county prosecutor for Essex and a widower with a six year old daughter Cara, is informed that a murdered victim has an item containing his name in his pocket. Paul, who never really got over the shock of the summer camp, finds that the victim is Doug, one of the teenagers who went missing and was presumed to be dead in the summer camp incident. He joins Lucy and together they try to find out what really happened that night and whether Camille is still alive. The story also has some small sub plots like the high profile rape case in which two white boys are accused of raping a black exotic dancer which is handled by Paul,

his struggle to raise a six year old daughter having lost his wife to cancer and his relationship with Lucy.

The book has a gripping storyline narrated in a manner which grasps the interest of the reader. The story revolves around the mystery as to whether Camille survived that night in the summer camp and if so why she did not contact her family for so many years, but there are many distracting side plays which takes the focus away from the main action. The characterization by the author is realistic. Particularly the characters of Paul and Lucy are portrayed realistically both during their adolescent age and as attorneys in the later part of the story. But a murder which happens two decades after the initial summer camp incident with the murder victim carrying an item with the name of Paul Copeland on it, seems unbelievable.

Paul is portrayed as a sad person and as the story moves to present day he looks less troubled with his past. But the body of Doug turns up and the memories of the past come to haunt him more frequently. Lucy also has trouble coping up with the events of that night and her troubles are accentuated by the fact that her dad owned the summer camp. The rekindling of emotions that take place when she meets Paul after all those years is somewhat predictable and as expected.

The reason behind Harlan writing this book is his obsession with missing family members who may still be alive and about old secrets. The following excerpt from the FAQ in his official website would explain this better.

“ I can tell you that the themes I love best involve family - the ties and bonds we all know. I enjoy stories where the past reverberates and sends shock waves to the present. I enjoy novels about old secrets and missing people

who may still be alive, about loss, about redemption.”

- Harlan Coben (<http://www.harlancohen.com/faq/>)

And Yes, “The Woods”, completely captures the trauma a family suffers when one of the family members goes missing and the thought that Camille may still be alive is what fuels Paul’s quest to solve the mystery. Overall the book is an action-packed nail biter, with an end which is quite unpredictable and a fitting finale for a gripping thriller.

Reference:

Harlan Coben. *The Woods*. 2007. Dutton.