

What She Heard review/blurb

Robert Liddycoat, author of “Hit and Run,” “The Edge of Extinction,” and “The Emmett Wars” among other science fiction novels, has most most recently produced “What She Heard,” set in the coastal community of Seaside, OR, where the author lives. Starring an intriguing, malevolent character known only as “The Editor,” the tale, set in unidentified but seemingly contemporary times, is about as dark a tale as you might imagine should a specialized species of parasite overtake mankind, or at least one man.

“The Editor,” whose victims are referred to as “Edits” is a gun for hire, an assassin who has taken up residence in a seaside town where everyone who encounters him — in restaurants, primarily because a guy’s still got to eat — does their best to avoid interaction because this dude’s vibe is seriously negative. He’s described as neither a psychopath or a sociopath, but he is a killer for hire. He seems to have no other interests or purpose in life besides fulfilling his murder assignments. He receives these assignments and the handsome pay for it through a circuitous routing of messages and money from an offshore account. It’s never explained throughout the story who is doing the hiring or why certain people have to be killed. “The Editor” also never asks questions; he’s just there to do the job.

The action opens on a misty and somewhat miserable Halloween night. A young teenage girl who has her heart set on getting into a little trouble gets much more than she’d bargained for when she accidentally witnesses or at least overhears— “The Editor” doing a job. Her reaction — including weeks of catatonia — sets off a flurry of activity among a wide cast of characters including possibly corrupt law enforcement officers, an inept district attorney’s office, the witness girl’s own parents, a social worker, and even the NSA. At the heart of the story is the assassin, who one witness calls “a thing.” His abilities and actions are inhuman. He’s a man — if indeed he is a man — with no past and no future. About 100 pages into the story the reader learns he’s been stripped of his own free will and is in reality governed by a parasite living inside him; his true role in the world is to play host to an entity who derives its own nourishment from fear and human hopelessness.

The author returns thematically to a formula familiar to him regarding invasive, supernatural insects and plenty of gunfire. Disconcertingly, not just the actual name of the city where the action takes place is used in the story, but also the real names of its police department, the county sheriff's office, the names of actual hotels and restaurants and two newspapers, leaving the author and his publisher potentially open to lawsuits. Or perhaps this was done on purpose to generate publicity. One wonders if it is the author's intention to put the town on the map and draw special attention to it.

Lovers of thick plots and conspiracy theories will enjoy the story's endless twists and turns. Numerous legal and courtroom scenes appear to be drawn from popular television series and at times are just ponderous enough to burden the otherwise fast-paced action. A dead journalist is introduced right at the start and the professionalism and integrity of other journalists, newspapers, police officers, lawyers, in fact the entire U.S. judicial system are brought into question; in this universe, everyone is a crook, everyone is on the take, everyone acts solely through their own selfish interests and agendas. It's a given in this universe, that's how the world operates. Now introduce into this mix a stone killer, an assassin whose mind and body have been taken over by a parasite hired by a foreign entity to kill and you're left with a rich mix of dystopian calamity and sci-fi melodrama.

"What She Heard" is an enjoyable page-turning read with lots of twists and thrills.