Great Study Of Characters

Hampton Regis is a small harbor town on the southern coast of England, a place with an ancient history but long since passed over by its larger neighbors. There, in the year after World War I has ended, a tragedy is in the making - a woman's husband has been attacked and badly injured and the suspect, the man she loved before he left to go to war, has taken the wife and her maid as hostages. The desperate man, Stephen, threatens to kill the hostages unless the local police bring in a man he knew in the trenches - Scotland Yard Inspector Ian Rutledge. Rutledge, still struggling with his own demons from the war, fears that in stepping into the emotional struggle of these three people, he can't be objective. Their situation in a sense mirrors his own. As a result of Rutledge going off to fight, he too lost the woman he loved to another man. If, as Stephen claims, he didn't try to kill his lover's husband, then who did? And what has happened in this little town that is worth killing for? Once again, Charles Todd has placed the tormented, yet brilliant policeman into a situation that, while it brings back his haunted past, must be solved before a killer strikes again.

After eagerly awaiting this book and even having my husband pick me up a copy on a business trip to the US, I was sadly disappointed. I had noticed a downward trend in the last couple of books but the series seems to have taken a nose dive with this latest instalment. There were serious problems of logic and the plotline seemed to chase its own tail, going round in endless circles as if to stretch out the book. Many of the characters acted in an illogical and unrealistic manner and the whole hostage situation plotline was simply ridiculous. People just do not behave like that! This would have to be the worst book in the series so far.

Unfortunately, many aspects of this series are becoming repetitious. After solving so many murders one would think that Rutledges superior, Bowles, would do away with his vendetta even if only to stop himself from looking
ridiculous to others. His ongoing hostility towards Rutledge is starting to look trite.

And what about the role of Hamish? This is one aspect of the series that seems to have stalled completely. Whilst it began as an intriguing deviation on the murder mystery genre it seemed to reach it peak in `Legacy of the Dead and has been in decline ever since. Perhaps the authors should try something different such as was hinted at in A Long Shadow with the psychic Mrs. Channing.

What exactly is Hamish's role? Is he a genuine ghost, haunting his killer? Does he represent Rutledge's conscience which has become disembodied due to his war experience? Is Hamish the manifestation of Rutledge's sixth sense which makes him the superb Scotland Yard Inspector that he has become? Why not let Rutledge face his ghost and explore these possibilities, either through supernatural means such as at a séance or by scientific means involving medical therapy. Psychology was in its infancy and this in itself would provide an interesting sideline to a murder case.

There are so many aspects of this series that are yet to be explored and one can only hope that the authors do not settle for formulae writing and mediocrity. What started out as a fresh and exciting new take on an old Genre still has much untapped potential and I sincerely hope that the authors sit down, have a cup of tea and ask themselves where this series is heading.

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