

The Listeners by Anthony J Quinn

5 stars

A creepy psychological murder mystery.

Detective Sergeant Carla Herron has just started her new career in the Scottish Border town of Peebles. She is married to David and has a 3-year-old daughter, Alice and a baby son, Ben, who is 6 months old. She had suddenly decided on this new career with the agreement of her husband who agrees to work from home and look after the children.

Her first case after her fast track training course sends Carla to Deepwell Psychiatric Hospital to interview an inmate, Alistair McCrea, who describes in great detail the murder of Dr Jane Pochard, one of the psychotherapists at the hospital. He knows where the body will be found and that the corpse has been decapitated.

When Dr Pochard's body is discovered in exactly the way McCrea had described it, Carla desperately needs to find answers since McCrea is locked in a secure ward under 24-hour surveillance. She is thrilled to be allowed to head up the investigation together with the taciturn Detective Harry Morton.

Carla is drawn into the sinister world of Deepwell where the staff are unwilling to help the police with any enquiries, in particular the Director Dr Liam Barker. A previous inmate, Billy Chisholm, had been released from the hospital at the instigation of Dr Pochard. Carla discovers that there is a shadowy society known as The Holistic Foundation whose members are at odds with each other about how to treat inmates of the hospital. The theory of some members of this society believes that the criminally insane people all have repressed memories that can be drawn out of them which can explain why they have committed their crimes. More sinister however is that the inmates can be brainwashed into committing horrendous crimes by having thoughts implanted into them by their psychiatrists.

The whole concept of repressed memories was at times confusing but at the same time fascinating and the conflicting views of the various so-called experts in this field were quite frightening. Carla becomes so involved in the case that she spends nearly all her time trying to delve into the various areas arising especially when another member of the staff at Deepwell goes missing. As a consequence of this Carla's husband becomes very upset at her lack of care and attention to her young family especially when they all become ill. The strain of trying to hold down a pressurised job as well as looking after a family is very well-observed.

The plot is fascinating as it unfolds and discusses an area that I have never come across in any other book. It was both fascinating and absorbing and despite being quite a long book only took me a few days to read. It is one of those books where you need to find out the ending but do not really want the book to end.

I really enjoyed this book and would recommend it as a book that has a satisfying plot but also for the fascinating concepts that it tackles. The minds of criminally insane people must be a minefield for psychologists to understand.

It was described as a new series set in the Borders and I really hope this means that another book is in the offing. I would like to stake a claim to be the reviewer of any new book by Mr Quinn.

Dexter

Breakaway Reviewers received a copy of the book to review