

Justice Rendered: A Sheriff Elliott Mystery

Kit Karson

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A small town reels following a violent murder in the surprising mystery novel Justice Rendered.

In Kit Karson's gripping thriller *Justice Rendered*, a mysterious death throws a small town into disarray; everyone is a potential suspect, but no one has a motive.

Anderson, Montana, often has more tourists in town than residents. While most of its denizens get along well, Fred is despised by all. Most call him a "fat toad," and he often manages to be on everyone's bad side. His most recent infraction is the overspill of junk he lays across the sidewalk in hopes of making a sale.

While going to issue Fred a citation, the sheriff, Pete, finds his decomposing body. A fork was driven into his head, splintering his skull. While few cared whether Fred lived or died, it seems that no one had a reason to exercise such violence against him. With no true suspects, everyone faces suspicion; even a police deputy is considered.

The police investigation is stymied by unknowns and by the tight-knit nature of the community. Though people express some desire to help, Pete has to go deep to find the killer, and his investigation moves at a languid pace. Indeed, even the book's most prominent clues resist proffering insights. The murder weapon, the intensity of the crime, and the situation in which Fred's body was found are all considered, but these details reveal little.

In this series-continuing novel, Anderson's townspeople are fleshed out in terms of their eccentricities and in terms of the divide that exists between them and tourists. Past traumas, such as missing young women, are alluded to, helping to give shape to the community's lack of shock over Fred's murder. Surprises arise: A warren of tunnels and caves is used for smuggling, with the outlaws who control it following a rigid code of ethics.

Pete is a memorable hero with his own quirks. He wears a Stetson hat, but forgets it places and gets it dirty, as when "a minuscule smudge of chocolate" appears on its brim after morning donuts. Deceased Fred, meanwhile, is developed with references to his life before he came to Anderson, which featured sinister crimes. However, the related flashbacks are introduced in a jarring manner, and some bog the story down. Still, the eventual revelation of the killer's identity is punchy, adding new dimensions to Fred's villainy.

In the mystery novel *Justice Rendered*, a steadfast sheriff holds his small community together following a horrific crime.

JOHN M. MURRAY (January 31, 2025)

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