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The Ball Crossing

J.E. Lindberg

www.jelindberg.com

The Ball Crossing may be set in Civil War times (1874: about a decade after its conclusion), but it's a murder mystery and detective story pure and simple, set in the unlikely state of sleepy Vermont and centering around a veteran still recovering from war a decade later.

The victim is Marie Ball, a young teacher who is stalked and killed. The event sparks a manhunt that throws Francis Hakey into same arena as his adversary Joseph LaPage, a madman who subscribes to no singular religion or perspective, but who lives on the edge of insanity. (The character LaPage is based on the historical serial murderer who brought his reign of terror to Vermont and New Hampshire during the time period in which the novel is set.)

Francis Hakey joins with his old friend Ephraim Perley, freedman Moses Chestnut and Marie's twin brother Alden to track down the killer; and it's here that supernatural elements enter the bigger picture, immersing the hunters in a deadly game that moves quickly beyond a horrific, singular murder to enter the realm of the surreal.

It's important to note that J.E. Lindberg's attention to strong characterization never falters. Even the short-lived victim, Marie, is given enough colorful description that she moves from a one-dimensional figurehead to a living, breathing character filled with ideals, purpose, and vision: "*Adjusting her expectations to the necessities of the local community had been a topic of discussion during Marie Ball's first meeting with the committee of the school district. True to her ideals, the young schoolmistress had not initially accepted the proposition that the value of the classroom education she offered, and the time required to obtain its benefits, should be secondary to the demands of sustaining the marginal existence that most of the small farmsteads tendered to the children born into that life. Though still determined to fulfill her calling to fan the briefest flame of enlightenment wherever it burned, her appreciation for the capacity of these stoic people to endure privation, to work endlessly without complaint, and to love their children unconditionally only deepened her respect for the choices they made as she grew to know the families of Franklin County, their way of being, and the hard land that often took more than it gave.*"

Personal ideals, morals and values are only one facet of a story line that probes each character in turn, building up their motivations, perspectives and beliefs to create believable protagonists whose concerns imbued the story line with fire and passion. Needless to say, these elements are intrinsic to not just a good read, but a superior