

Suspense novel takes some detours

Take a scenic Oregon coastal town, add the infirmities and melancholia of two old retirees, and stir in a contemporary menace that is shattering the calm of their community. Those are the ingredients that Astoria author William Dean incorporates into his latest suspense novel, “The Ghosts We Know.”

The principal character, Harry Bolden, has been retired from the local police force for several years. He’s waging a losing fight with Parkinson’s disease but still has the get-up-and-go to grab his battered old chess set and head across the street to the local park to welcome all comers to a friendly game.

That’s where he meets Fred Von Stiller, an elderly, pipe-smoking gent with a formal bearing and a German accent. Both are widowers, and coming to the park to watch the kids play helps to distract them from their loneliness and the regrets that accompany old age.

But any sense of equilibrium shatters with the suicide of the 14-year-old who had grown up next door to Harry. He knew that the teen had been struggling recently, but when he’d reached out to see if he could help, the boy had rebuffed his efforts.

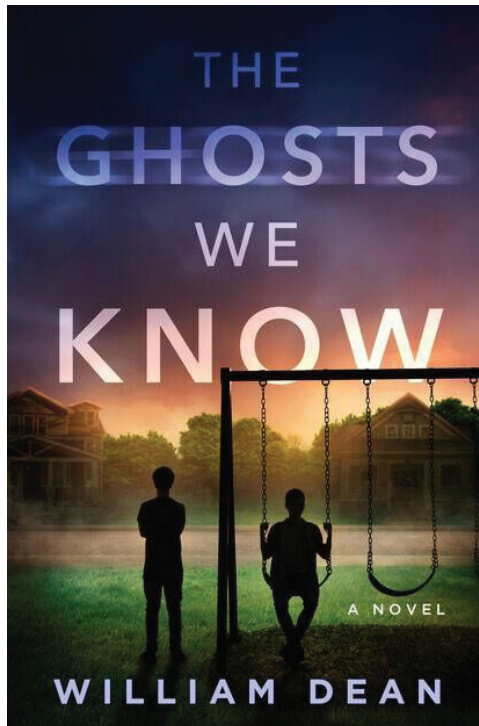
When another young teen vanishes without a trace, and that kid’s mother describes seeing similar indications of distress in her son, the entire community soon becomes gripped by the fear that someone is preying on their children. Now parents don’t let their kids go to the park to play anymore.

Harry grows impatient that his former colleagues down at the police station don’t seem to be coming up with any answers, so he begins his own inquiries, talking to everyone in the town he can think of, from the local postman to the vet with PTSD who lives down the street, to find out if anybody has noticed anything unusual in the neighborhood.

He enlists Fred, a fellow aging veteran, to join him in his escapades, but when some of their undercover sleuthing crosses the line, the two old fellows are unceremoniously hauled in by the cops and scolded for interfering in an ongoing investigation.

Unbeknownst to all, Harry’s blundering efforts have actually exposed some concerns and attracted the interest of a more sinister element.

“The Ghosts We Know” has all the of the elements required in a suspense novel of this



This week’s book

‘The Ghosts We Know’ by William Dean
Lonely Whale Press – 316 pp — \$12.99

type, and the friendship between Harry and Fred is a solid plus. So far, so good.

But the author takes things further. He adds complex backstories for both Harry and Fred. The two are both veterans of World War II, although they fought on opposite sides.

The story includes scenes from their wartime experiences. It includes dream sequences with their dead wives. It includes scenes from the point of view of the antagonists. And there’s a significant subplot about Fred’s estrangement from his birth family, which leads to some story detours before getting loosely woven into a final and improbable pursuit of the villain. These embellishments sometimes overwhelm the story. One more draft might have finessed some of these connections.

The Bookmonger is Barbara Lloyd McMichael, who writes this weekly column focusing on the books, authors and publishers of the Pacific Northwest. Contact her at barbaralmcm@gmail.com.

Cat Show to take place in Seaside



SEASIDE – Cats aren’t known for a love of water, but you’ll find plenty at the CFA Allured Cat Show and Household Pet Competition, held at the Seaside Civic & Convention Center on Saturday and Sunday.

Sponsored by the Emerald Cat Club of Vancouver, Washington, a member of the Cat Fanciers’ Association, the show will feature both pedigreed cats and household pets, subject to different judging criteria.

Find out more at <https://cfa.org>

CrosswordAnswers

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