

# Triple Cross Killer

By Rosemarie Aquilina, published by Fiery Seas Publishing (2017), paperback, 288 pages, \$16.76 (Amazon), also available on Kindle and Nook  
<https://www.fieryseaspublishing.com/>



Reviewed by Shelley R. Spivack

Crouching among lush Russian olive trees behind a garage, several blocks from his Siesta Key condominium, Nick Mosiah Archer waited patiently. Ocean brine tanged the air filling his lungs. He checked his watch. (p 9—Nook edition referenced throughout)

Reading these opening lines of Judge Rosemarie Aquilina's recently published crime novel, *Triple Cross Killer*, I imagined Nick Archer as a handsome and valiant detective whose exploits tracking a serial killer I would anxiously follow for the next several hundred pages. I sat back in my recliner, ready for Nick to be foiled by the tricky killer; I was totally unprepared for what came next.

Nick smashed the old man against the back of his wheelchair, wrapped strong fingers around his bony neck, and mumbled, "Just like an old turkey buzzard."

The old man struggled, but in less than a minute, he gurgled, his eyes bulged, and he went limp, hands falling to either side. (p 11)

Aquilina, an Ingham County Circuit Court judge who recently received international attention during the Larry Nassar sentencing hearings, proves herself to be a master of intrigue and suspense. A page-turner and a fast read, *Triple Cross Killer* travels between the icy streets of Detroit and the balmy shores of Florida's Gulf Coast. Along the way, readers become the sole witnesses to a series of bizarre murders that Nick commits in both locations.

Strangling his victims while evading teams of crafty detectives in each state, we soon learn that Nick is no ordinary killer. An airline pilot by day, Nick kills with a Robin Hood-like purpose. Imagining himself to be the savior of abused children, he finds his victims through letters youngsters have written to Santa. In each of these letters, a child has asked Santa for the abuse to stop. As Nick wraps his fingers around his victims' necks, he grants the children their Christmas wishes.

Since we know the killer's identity from the novel's opening pages, the book's strength lies not in the narrative of the murders but in the killer's manipulation of the characters who surround him. Two pairs of detectives—Abel Mendoza and "Rabbit" in Sarasota, and partners and sometime lovers Jaq and David in Detroit—scramble to put an end to a growing series of brutal murders. Yet Nick, with his precision-like method of killing and his uncanny ability to wipe each scene clean of his presence, continuously evades capture.

Adding to the drama is the introduction of Jaq's best friend, Rita Rose, an emotionally insecure former ER nurse recently assigned to work with the medical examiner in the Wayne County morgue. At the same time Rita is assisting with the autopsies of Nick's victims, Nick is courting her and convincing her to become his wife.

The murders multiply and while the detectives begin to unravel the mysteries, readers become equally entwined in Rita's self-destructive relationship with Nick. It is the

unfolding of this relationship that drives the rest of the story.

To tell more of the plot would spoil it for potential readers. So let it suffice to say that once I reached the book's last 100 pages, I could not put it down until reaching the final word.

As is the case with many mystery novels, portions of the plot and dialogue seem somewhat staged. These minor criticisms aside, Aquilina does not let the reader down. It is clear that during her years as a circuit court judge, she has carefully listened to details of forensic evidence and studied the characters of those who have appeared before her. She uses what she has learned on the bench to craft a suspenseful and stimulating work of fiction that can be enjoyed by both the average reader and those involved in the legal and criminal justice systems.

Avid readers, such as myself, will look forward to more titles flowing from Judge Aquilina's mighty pen. ■



*Shelley R. Spivack is an attorney/referee with the Genesee County Family Court and a lecturer in criminal justice at UM-Flint. She is a past president of the Referees Association of Michigan,*

*currently serves on the editorial boards of several state and local bar publications, and is the co-author of Implementing a Gender-Based Arts Program for Juvenile Offenders. Spivack earned her JD from Brooklyn Law School.*