



Vermilion Drift

William Kent Krueger

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Some nights, Corcoran O'Connor dreams his father's death.

William Kent Krueger's gripping tale of suspense begins with a recurring nightmare, a gun, and a wound in the earth so deep and horrific that it has a name, Vermilion Drift.

When the Department of Energy puts an underground iron mine on its short list of potential sites for storage of nuclear waste, a barrage of protest erupts in Tamarack County, Minnesota, and Cork is hired as a security consultant.

Deep in the mine during his first day on the job, Cork stumbles across a secret room that contains the remains of six murder victims. Five appear to be nearly half a century old; connected to what the media once dubbed "The Vanishings," a series of unsolved disappearances in the summer of 1964, when Cork's father was sheriff in Tamarack County. But the sixth has been dead less than a week. What's worse, two of the bodies, including the most recent victim, were killed using Cork's own gun, one handed down to him from his father.

As Cork searches for answers, he must dig into his own past and that of his father, a well-respected man who harbored a ghastly truth. Time is running out, however. New threats surface, and unless Cork can unravel the tangled thread of clues quickly, more death is sure to come.

Vermilion Drift is a powerful novel, filled with all the mystery and suspense for which Krueger has won so many awards. A poignant portrayal of the complexities of family life, it's also a sobering reminder that even those closest to our hearts can house the darkest, and deadliest, of secrets.

Vermilion Drift Details

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Liz says

Rather than go on again about how much I love Krueger's writing, setting, and most of all his characters, I'm going to instead offer some excerpts which I believe demonstrate the spiritual vitality and wonderful imagery that are unfailingly contained within the pages of his books.

In Cork's experience there was nothing to compare with sunrise in the North Country. Across any lake on a calm morning, the crawl of the sun played out twice: first in the vault of heaven and again on the surface of the water, which was like a window opened onto another heaven at his feet. Five decades of life and he could still be stunned to silence by such a dawn.

As he knelt to drink, he saw a huge bird, a great blue heron, gliding over the lake, which was glass smooth and mirror perfect. The reflection of the bird crossed the reflection of the sky. Slowly, gracefully, the heron descended. In the mirror of the lake, its other self rose, and in a brief moment of rippling water, the two met. With a powerful sweep of wing, the great bird rose again and the other descended, and in a minute the sky and lake were clear again. The ripple of their meeting spread outward, however, and where Cork knelt at the lake's edge, the water undulated gently.

"Like the beads of that bracelet, all things are connected. The past, the present, the future. One long, beautiful work from the hand of Kitchimanidoo. You, me, those who have gone before us, and those who come after, we are all connected in that creation. No one is ever truly lost to us."

If you enjoy character-driven mystery series, do yourself a favor and try Cork O'Connor, which begins with *Iron Lake*. Although you can enjoy these books without starting at the beginning, there is a lot of character development that happens along the way and really enhances the experience.

Carl Brookins says

Authors of crime fiction, like authors working in any other genre, often use their talents to work through personal issues, sometimes intensely private issues. Although it is not entirely clear, the writer may be working through some family issues with this novel. Does that matter?

Perhaps. That depends on the result. In this case, the author, possessed of well-honed, significant writing talent, has produced a novel of finely wrought proportions, multi-layered with considerable depth. By that I mean that the characters demonstrate multiple levels of engagement, and the story itself works on more than one level. Almost every character who appears in the book is involved in the story in more than one way. Some of their levels are casual or socially related, such as what may be routinely expected of law officers in Tamarack County, the Northern Minnesota location of this novel. Other characters, Henry Meloux, for example and other Native Americans; Sam Wintermoon, appears, and of course, Cork's mother and his father, Liam, all have, at different times, visceral involvement in the story.

The problem, if there is one, is that this story is much more a novel of family and community relationships than it is a novel of suspense, or crime, horrific and awful though the crimes were. Death is always the ultimate judge, from whom there is no appeal.

So, in my view, the problem is one of balance, or perhaps of categorization. The involvement of Cork O'Connor, now a private investigator, alone in Aurora, is mostly one of self-examination. The novel is one of Cork's journey of discovery. What was the meaning of his occasional nightmares? What were the issues that consumed and separated the O'Connor family in those last fateful months of Liam O'Connor's life?

The novel begins with Cork once again at odds with his Ojibwe heritage. His mother, remember, was a member of the tribe. He's hired by the owners of the Vermilion One and Ladyslipper mines to deal with threats against the mine. But then he's also tasked to try to locate a missing woman, sister of the mine owner. Lauren Cavanaugh has gone missing. Finding the missing woman opens a window on old unsolved crimes from a previous generation, from a time when Cork's father was the sheriff of Tamarack County.

Sorting through old albums, records and memories, fresh and repressed, takes up the body of the novel. As with all of this author's previous novels, the explanation is logical, satisfying and meaningful. Krueger, as always, is skillful in evoking the landscape, not just its physical self, but its atmosphere, its mystical presence and its influences on the people who reside there.

In the end, this thoughtful exploration of law, truth and justice and their profound

Michael says

I am glad that my Goodread friends led me to this author's series on detective Cork O'Connor as it satisfies my craving for books that evoke the struggles and rewards of life in particular rural places, in this case the iron mining region of northern Minnesota.

A detective story with a good-hearted hero who grew up there opens a great window on the perspectives of characters with divergent roles in the multicultural community, from hardscrabble miners and low-income residents of the town and nearby Ojibwe reservation to rich mine owners, clergy, and artists. In that role, Cork is challenged with righting wrongs in their conflicts with each other while swimming against the tide of forces that undermine precious traditional values.

In this tale, 10th in the series, Cork is no longer sheriff and is working as a private detective while recovering from a loss revealed in a previous book. (Though I experience no problem tuning into Cork with this as a first sampling of the author, this will spoil the drama of prior book for me or anyone else jumping in with this one). The mine owner Cavanaugh hires Cork to find his missing art dealer sister on the same day that he is tapped to help investigate anonymous threats against the partners in a scheme to use an old mine for storing nuclear waste.

These cases collide with the past when a set of women's bodies are discovered in a secret wildcatter's tunnel linking the reservation with the old mine. When Cork's work helps link the bodies to disappearances his father investigated as a sheriff 40 years in the past, his detective efforts lead him to pursue a painful digging into the lives of his own family, including those of his Ojibwe mother and tribal members who nurtured him as a boy.

O'Connor's father is the fount of his core values:

Cork's father had left a legacy that included a lot of intangibles. The idea that justice is imperative. ... That loyalty was the lifeblood of friendship. That the love of family was the deepest root that tapped your heart.

But his father's failure to solve the case of the Vanishings so long ago darkens his memory. Cork comes to feel his father's medicine man friend Henry Melroux must know something to elucidate the mysteries that now come to haunt him, but all he gets from him is more mystery:

"I need answers."

"No, you want answers," Melroux said, "Need is a different animal."

... "The truth is not hidden, Corcoran O'Connor. It has never been hidden. You simply are not yet ready to see it."

At a later point Melroux gives him his grandmother's bracelet, and his query as to why reaps the answer: *To remind you. Like the beads of that bracelet, all things are connected. The past, the present, the future. One long, beautiful work from the hand of Kitchimanidoo. You, me, those who have gone before us, and those who come after, we are all connected in that creation. No one is ever truly lost to us.*

Like a Zen-master, Melroux gives Cork another riddle, which devils him until he eventually resolves the cases:

In every human being, there are two wolves. One wolf is love, from which all that is good in life comes: generosity, forgiveness, acceptance, peace. The other is fear, which creates all that is destructive: greed, hatred, prejudice, violence. These two wolves are always fighting.

I am hooked on the great characters and story-telling in this series and look forward to properly delving into earlier entries from this talented author.

Mike says

Extremely enjoyable read - one of those that is surprisingly quick because the author's style is very narrative and approachable -- the kind of book you read out of pure pleasure for a story well told, with just enough twists to keep you interested. Although Krueger mentions in the author's notes that he took some liberties with geography, I feel like I learned a bit about a part of the country, and a way of life that I scarcely knew existed.

The hero's balancing act between the world of the modern Native American and the white man who lives in close contact with them is a fascinating cultural study in and of itself, and Kreusger manages to be realistic yet still very respectful of ways and customs that we can never fully understand.

This is the first of Krueger's work I have read, and I eagerly anticipate reading more.

Christy Lockstein says

Vermilion Drift by William Kent Krueger is the tenth book in the Cork O'Connor series. Cork is still recovering after his wife Jo's murder and is feeling a bit lost as all of his three children are far from home. No longer sheriff of Tamarack County, Minnesota, he's now a private investigator, hired to look into threats against an old iron mine that the government is considering as storage for nuclear waste. The local Ojibwa consider him to be betraying his own blood by working on a case that will damage the environment, but things get suddenly much worse when while searching the mine tunnel known as Vermilion Drift, he discovers six bodies, five of whom have been dead for over forty years, but one is the body of a woman he had just been hired to find. Even worse, two of the bodies were killed by a bullet that came from Cork's gun, the one he inherited from his father, another former Tamarack County sheriff. While there is lots of history in this superb mystery, it's not necessary to have read the previous books in the series (although after reading this, I certainly want to), because Krueger expertly weaves Cork's personal history with that of the town. He has a different personality from most detectives; while he does have the usual tendency of going rogue, he's more interested in talking to people and discovering truth than he is meting out personal justice. There are lots of twists and turns as well as red herrings to keep readers guessing and second guessing, and the resolution is satisfying and provides some long-term healing for Cork. Vermilion Drift is suspenseful without being overtly violent, and intelligent without being pretentious. It's a literary mystery with a stand-out hero.

Georganna says

Another trip to the Northland with Cork O'Connor. I like how these stories weave the grit and beauty of that country into the mysteries Cork encounters. Makes me miss trees.

Lynn says

A perfect blend of good and evil in this one. Light and dark forces fight for control of everyone and every issue. Best in the series so far.

Angela says

I wasn't sure how easy this book would be to read after events in the previous book. I shouldn't have been concerned. The mystery was just as compelling as the previous books.

Jonetta says

Cork O'Connor has entered a new phase of his life as his children are now away from home living their adult lives and Jo is gone. He and dog Trixie are living a solitary existence and his role as a security consultant/private investigator keeps him pretty busy. His current assignment is as a consultant for the Vermilion One mine, which is being considered as a nuclear waste site and predictably that's not going over well with members of the community. He's also hired to find the sister of Max Cavanaugh, the mine's

owner, as she hasn't been seen or heard from in a week.

After the last book, I lacked enthusiasm to start this one. However, it turned out to be a complex mystery, one involving all aspects I've come to love about this series...a strong sense of place and setting, community conflicts and cultural depth. And, we learn so much about Cork's past, particularly his parents and extended family, all playing a critical role in the present. The mystery was a serious puzzler with lots of layers and interesting characters. As usual, I found it difficult to stop listening.

This is another solid installment in a series that continues to keep me engaged and educated. I'm even getting used to Buck Schirner as the narrator.

Kris - My Novelesque Life says

Rating: 4 STARS

(Review Not on Blog)

Listened to on audio

I am still reeling from the last book, but this is a perfect book to help you get past it. This book blends current murders with cold cases - and Cork's past. We get to see what his parents were like when Cork was a preteen. I enjoyed this one and found myself just racing through it.

Phrynnne says

Number 10 in the series and I am giving it five stars.

Vermilion Drift is a nice blend of cold cases and a recent murder linked by the fact that the same gun was used in both. As usual Cork does his own investigating - cooperation is not in his vocabulary! Nevertheless he is a smart man and he solves the case with hard work and some intuition.

This is a new stage in Cork's life, one without the presence of a wife or children. His sole companion is Trixie the dog, but I think I detected the beginning of a new relationship. He also discovers a few secrets of his own from the past which are quite shocking, but their revelation will enable him to move forward.

As usual there are beautiful descriptions of nature, some great characters and intriguing events. I am thoroughly enjoying this whole series.

Glenna Pritchett says

This is a great series, and this particular book was especially good. I enjoyed finding out more about Cork's early life and his relationship with his father. Moving on to #11! :-)

LJ says

First Sentence: Some nights, Corcoran O'Connor dreams his father's death.

Max Cavanagh owns several mines, one of which is being studied by the Department of Energy as a possible site to store nuclear waste. In addition to protests causing Cavanagh worry, his sister, Lauren, has gone missing. Cork, hired to find her, does so but she is not alone. He locates her body in, what had been a closed off section of the mine, among five skeletons. The five skeletons are those of women known as "The Vanishings" who had disappeared decades ago, and two of the bodies contain bullets fired from the gun of Cork's late father.

Recently, I was involved in a discussion of prologues and how many of us are either annoyed by them or ignore them completely. It takes a writer as skilled as Krueger to write a prologue which contains an important thread which runs through the story. This is not a prologue to ignore.

Krueger has become one of my favorite authors. His skill with description take what could be a fairly ordinary scene, but instead comes alive with clear, visual images. We are able to go where the author takes us and be a part of that which is described to us. Even from those scenes where we might prefer to look away, we can't. That doesn't mean he is graphically violent; he's not. It is more that we feel the emotion of the scene and, thereby, understand it.

Because I read first for character is another reason why Krueger's writing appeals to me. He creates dimensional, interesting, relatable characters. I'll admit I wasn't particularly happy with the events of the previous book, "Heaven's Keep," but the transition to this book has been very effectively and tastefully handled and I now understand the purpose of those events. Cork's heritage is half Irish, responsible for his impatience and occasional anger, and half Ojibwa, which connects him to the people on the reservation, Indian history, and my favorite character Henry Meloux. It also provides the link to the mystical element in each book.

Before you walk away saying "I don't like woo-woo," wait. Mysticism and the spirit world are part of the Indian culture. They are also part--along with several other themes including that of what do we really know of our parents and the definition of evil--of what takes this book, and this series, beyond the normal and elevates it into something that makes you stop, think and consider.

Krueger is a very fine author who knows how to create characters, write dialogue, set a scene and, most of all, develop a plot. The story continually builds upon itself. It's a twisty road filled complete with suspense, emotion and startling revelations. I despise the cliché of "If you've not read this author yet, read him now," yet that is the way I feel. Even if you don't, be assured I shall be reading his next book as soon as it comes out.

VERMILION DRIFT (PI-Cork O'Connor-Minnesota-Cont) – Ex
Krueger, William Kent – 10th in series
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Brenda says

In the continuing story of Cork O'Connor's life, this book finds him stopped at a crossroads. He is at a loss and has to decide which direction he must take. Before that can happen, Cork's past catches up. He learns things about his childhood and his family that must be understood before he can move on. This was an excellent addition to the series, and I'm anxious to see what happens next.

Kathleen says

The 10th in the Cork O'Connor murder/mystery series introduces the role mining played in Northern Minnesota in decades past, triggering memories of my own. As a teenager in the 60s, I recall the huge iron ore carriers loading taconite in Marquette, Michigan. It takes a special sort of person to work in the dark tunnels of the underground mines.

On an unrelated investigation, Cork stumbles on five skeletons and a newly murdered body in one of those dark tunnels called the Vermilion Drift. And before you know it, Cork O'Connor, as a private investigator, is burrowing into the case of the 'Vanishings' that took place over 40 years ago, and the current murder as well. Four of the six victims were Ashtinabe Native Americans. Cork knew some of them as a teenager, causing him to remember that his father (the sheriff at the time) was deeply troubled by the Vanishings case. Why? Henry Meloux, the medicine man, is now in his 90s and Cork seeks his counsel to unravel the questions in his mind. Healing happens in the sweat lodge. [Krueger does an excellent job in describing this cultural tradition.] And this is what I like about Krueger's Cork O'Connor series—blending modern police methods with the spiritualism of Native American traditions. Recommend.
