

Southern Illinoisan

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BEN GELMAN: NOVELIST WITH SOUTHERN ILLINOIS ROOTS RELEASES A CHILLING TALE

Jack Frerker's first published novel, "Heat," took place in the midst of a typical torrid Southern Illinois summer.

In "Solstice" (PAX Publications, 186 pages, paperbound, \$15), Frerker's second venture into detective fiction, it is December 21, the winter solstice and the longest night of the year. It is also icy cold.

Father John Henry Wintermann, a small-town Southern Illinois priest (who was also the hero of Frerker's first novel), has been called to Chicago to conduct the funeral service of a parishioner's mother, who died there.

One frosty morning outside the church he is visiting, Father John stumbles over the dead body of an old woman.

So begins an adventure which calls not only upon Father John's pastoral experience, but his amateur detective skills as well. Since he was the one who found the body, he becomes involved in dealing with the woman's daughter, Nancy.

It is just a few days before Christmas, when he is scheduled to conduct services in St. Helena's, his hometown church. So there is not much time to unravel the mystery surrounding the death of the old woman and the strange case of Michael, a young man who called to speak to Father John after the funeral he had conducted.

Michael says something about wanting to make a confession, but first he has a long story to tell that includes some facts about his father's service in the Korean War.

In any case, it turns out that Michael's story and the death of the woman outside the church are somehow connected.

The icy roads and the mystery he is trying to resolve combine to keep Father John in Chicago longer than he had intended.

But eventually, with Father John's help, the case comes to a satisfactory if somewhat surprising solution and he is able to make it home for Christmas.

A Southern Illinois native, Frerker is a retired priest now residing in western Washington state, so he is eminently qualified to sketch in the religious background of his novel.

His style of writing is matter-of-fact, so the story moves along smoothly, keeping the reader's interest.

If you would like to obtain a copy of "Solstice" and cannot find it in your local bookstore, you may send a check for \$18 (\$15 plus \$3 shipping and handling) to PAX Publications, 7710 56th Avenue NE, Olympia, WA 98516.

BEN GELMAN is the former Sunday news editor for The Southern Illinoisan and is an avid bird watcher.