

The Whiskey Baron

Jon Sealy

Prohibition-era South Carolina is the setting of Sealy's debut, an assured work of literary suspense. In the mill town of Castle, work is beginning to dry up, but Lathan Tull keeps the alcohol in steady supply, running the bootleg whiskey trade with an iron fist. Nobody questions the arrangement—even weary Sheriff Furman Chambers, eager for a clean retirement, looks the other way—until two of Tull's men are killed in what appears to be a power grab by Mary Jane Hopewell, an outcast with designs of cutting into Tull's business. But the townsfolk—and Sheriff Chambers—aren't so sure: Mary Jane has always walked the line but never crossed over to violence. Tull seeks mortal revenge while Mary Jane goes on the lam but with one complication: his nephew has fallen in love with the whiskey baron's daughter. VERDICT "Violence is taking over everything," one character laments, and that feeling of a more simple and moral time being lost to the vagaries of man and industry pervades the whole novel. Though the book's climax is light on surprises, Sealy's finely drawn characters and evocative sense of place and time make this a memorable read, on par with the best of Daniel Woodrell and Ron Rash.

Copyright ©2013 Library Journals LLC, a wholly owned subsidiary of Media Source, Inc. Reprinted with permission.