

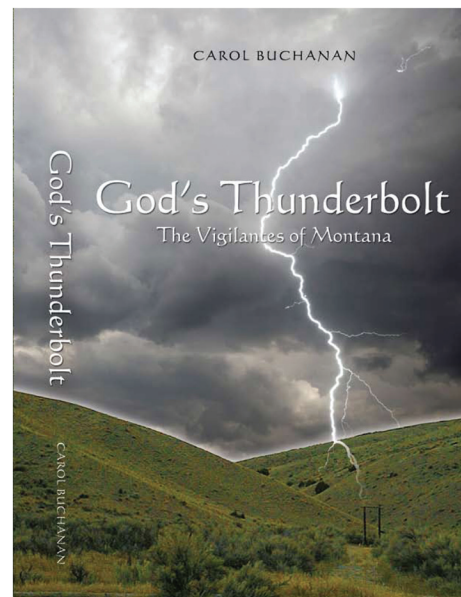
Self-Publishing Review

<http://www.selfpublishingreview.com/2009/03/12/gods-thunderbolt-the-vigilantes-of-montana-by-carol-buchanan/>

“God’s Thunderbolt: The Vigilantes of Montana” *Carol Buchanan*

Guest reviewed by Randall Radic, author of *A Priest in Hell* and *The Sound of Meat*. Read his review of *Luggage* by Kroger.

Montana has always fascinated me for strange reasons. Partly because there’s an alien quality to its physical beauty, as if a piece of Mars or Saturn had been towed in by some alien spacecraft millions of years ago. Once it was dropped off, the shipping manifest got lost and the aliens forgot about it. So there it sits. Another part of Montana’s appeal is the people who live there. For one, there aren’t many of them. It’s what’s called “sparsely populated.” For two, some of the people who do live there are... how shall I put it?...different from the rest of us. For example, the Luddites or the crew known as the Montana Militia. And not too long ago, there was a group of guys known as the Montana Vigilance Committee.



“God’s Thuderbolt: the Vigilantes of Montana”

Very recently, Carol Buchanan wrote a book (very accurate historical fiction) about the Montana Vigilance Committee. It’s called *God’s Thunderbolt*, which is a reference to divine punishment. Only in Buchanan’s delightful book, God eschews lightning and substitutes it with the Vigilance Committee.

The historical foundation for the book took place in 1863. Sheriff Henry Plummer formed a group of so-called “road agents,” who were to bring law and order to the lawless region of Bannack and Alder Gulch. Turned out the road agents were nothing more than thieves and robbers, who used their authority to do as they pleased. And what pleased them was stealing gold from miners, who more often than not ended up dead.

In response to the evil activities of the road agents, another group of men got together and formed the Montana Vigilance Committee. The members of this Committee agreed to uphold Common Law. In doing so, the Committee hunted down and executed 21 road agents. Showing no mercy and without qualm, they strung the gangsters up from the nearest tree, hanging them by the neck until they were dead.

In her novel, Buchanan takes these historical facts and weaves them into an exciting and very human story. The good guy in the story is Daniel Stark, who is a lawyer and radical abolitionist. He is the prosecutor in a murder trial. The trial exposes the road agents as nothing more than gangsters, who are part of a criminal conspiracy that has tentacles reaching throughout Montana. Daniel, inspired by the truth, joins the Vigilance Committee.

Happily for the story, Daniel has his own demons to battle while he's engaged in fighting the bad guys. Family shame haunts and drives Daniel, and he loves a woman who is married to another man. That man is Daniel's close friend and one of the bad guys. Will Daniel hang his friend from a tree to gain the woman he loves? You'll have to read the book to find out.

On the surface, it sounds a little overmuch, like a sickly sweet soap opera on steroids. And it probably would be, except for Buchanan's writing skills. She doesn't let her story spiral out of control and descend into gooey incoherence. Instead, she coalesces the elements of the story into noble form, infusing credibility and sympathy.

And it's obvious Buchanan did her homework. The depth of her research is evident in the book, but unlike so many historical novels where the facts keep getting in the way of the story, Buchanan's facts provide an elusive familiarity that are just right. Buchanan uses her historical knowledge as a setting for the story, not as the story. In other words, *God's Thunderbolt* is about people, who just happen to find themselves in a particular time and place.

Reading *God's Thunderbolt* is like reading Louis L'Amour in a dress, that is, it's as if Louis had been zapped by a feminine bolt of lightning as he sat down to write. It's a peculiar combination of qualities, for among its constituents is a subtle hallucinizer that won't let one put the book down.

So to paraphrase the little boy in the television commercial, "Buy it. You'll like it."