

Book Review: The Gathering
By C.J. Tudor

I'm not into vampires. Never read any of the "Twilight" series books from the early 2000s. Don't even know much about Dracula.

So why did I read (and am now reviewing) C.J. Tudor's new murder-mystery "The Gathering" which centers on an ostracized community of vampires (spelled vampyr in the book) living in a small Alaska town?

Well, sometimes you have to step outside your comfort zone.

And in this case, I'm glad I did.

Detective Barbara Atkins, a specialist in vampire killings, is called to Deadhart, Alaska, a tiny town of 673 people, to investigate the death of a teenager who had his throat ripped out and all the blood drained from his body.

Sounds like a vampire at work, right?

And that's what virtually everyone in town believes, because they've seen it before: 25 years ago, to be exact. It led to an unauthorized cull (a selective slaughter) of three members of the vampire community, and drove the Colony (the name for a community of vampires) out of the area.

Now they're back. Old memories die hard. And the town folk are calling for blood (pun intended). Atkins must determine whether the teenager's death was, in fact, a Colony killing. She has her doubts, as well as a truckload of suspects, as she battles the elements and angry residents who are demanding she authorize a cull.

Tudor's narrative is excellent. Suspense builds throughout the book as every lead Atkins follows seems to bring her to a dead end. And the nice part (especially for a

vampire novice like myself) is you don't have to be steeped in vampire lore to understand the flow of events. Tudor makes sure to keep the playing field level.

But she will keep you guessing, as the unanswered questions abound:

What really happened 25 years ago?

Who is the woman being held captive? What's her role in the story?

What's Atkins' backstory? How does that affect her judgment?

I won't give anything away here, but I will share that based on the manner in which the story wraps, I will eat my shoes if there isn't a sequel in the near future. And while I'm not about to expand my vampire library, I will read it if Tudor writes it.

"The Gathering" earns 4.5 out of 5 stars. If you're into vampire books, you'll love it. And if you're a neophyte like me, maybe it's time to sink your teeth into one.