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### ***The Standing People***

Joann Fastoff

Book Baby (2018)

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Reviewed by Carol Hoyer for Reader Views (01/19)

“The Standing People” is the fifth book in the Howard Watson mystery series by author Joann Fastoff. In this story, we find Special Agent Watson and several high-profile agencies trying to eradicate the illegal smuggling of highly prized rosewood and ebony timber out of Madagascar to other countries. From one corrupt family and government in China, Watson also encounters human trafficking of young females ages 13-17.

These operations are out of the realm of these agencies, and while it’s clear that these activities, which include bribing government officials and encouraging continued corruption, need to cease – what’s not clear is how to make that happen and who should be involved. If the illegal smuggling of trees continues, international security, not to mention the destruction of a country already near poverty will be devastating.

I found Howard Watson to be an interesting protagonist in that although he is dedicated to his work with the FBI, he is also a rogue. The softer side of Watson shows through the dialogues with his wife Carol and son Mark. The author provides very little history on Howard Watson when describing the character and readers will have to have read earlier books to gain this background information. There are also several characters introduced in short rapid blurbs in the beginning chapters, which gave me no clear idea as to who they were or why they were there. About midway through the book, there are some consistent themes and suspenseful activities, and the story moves in a smoother manner.

The plot on human trafficking is a current issue for all states and continues to increase daily. Families who live in poverty are of particular prey, with the promise of receiving money on the pretense that their daughters will live in good homes, be watched closely and given respectable jobs with good pay. Once the girls leave their family, they are never heard from again. After reading this subplot, I did further research on human trafficking and am surprised that many young women don’t know what to look out for.

I thought having former FBI experts weigh in on the accuracy of “The Standing People,” led to the authenticity of the subjects covered. I am impressed by the detailed yet easy way to set up codes so agents can communicate without being detected.

Overall, I think “The Standing People” by Joann Fastoff is a great story that provides readers with entertainment and food for thought. My only suggestion would be to encourage the services of a

professional editor. While the story is a good one, grammatical and formatting issues detract from the experience.