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THE WEATHERMAN

By Steve Thayer

Viking. 464pp. \$22.95

Steve Thayer's second novel, and second paean to the nobility of life in Minnesota, is a thriller with a protracted, unpredictable and highly satisfying ending.

With each new season in Minneapolis, another woman falls victim to a neck-snapping serial killer. The murders' link to the weather, plus a partial fingerprint, lead police to the Channel 7 newsroom and its obsessive weatherman, Dixon Bell. But *Sky High News* writer Rick Beanblossom believes Bell innocent and sets out to prove it, even though the men have a fundamental conflict. Both love aspiring anchorwoman Andrea Labore who possesses "the prettiest face in Minnesota

While Bell is the titular figure, Beanblossom is the novel's sole interesting character. A Pulitzer-winning journalist, Beanblossom wears a mask to hide the face burned off by napalm in Vietnam. He hasn't had sex in 20 years.

Other characters, sadly, get lost in Thayer's jumbled design. Although maintaining a taut suspense (we're uncertain of the killer's identity right to the final pages), Thayer has several editorial stances to promote—on abortion, capital punishment and the superficiality of television news—and the shrill grind of these axes obtrudes on his story. So, too, does overly hyperbolic description ("Raindrops began hitting like bombs") and Thayer's penchant for being inappropriately flip: "The great tornado wrote a new chapter on urban sprawl."

However, Thayer's done creditable research on prisons, newsrooms and meteorology, and he supplies a wealth of tense scenes, making this highly readable thriller fare.