

When Blackmail Obscures the Light *Sleuth battles to salvage pop star's reputation*

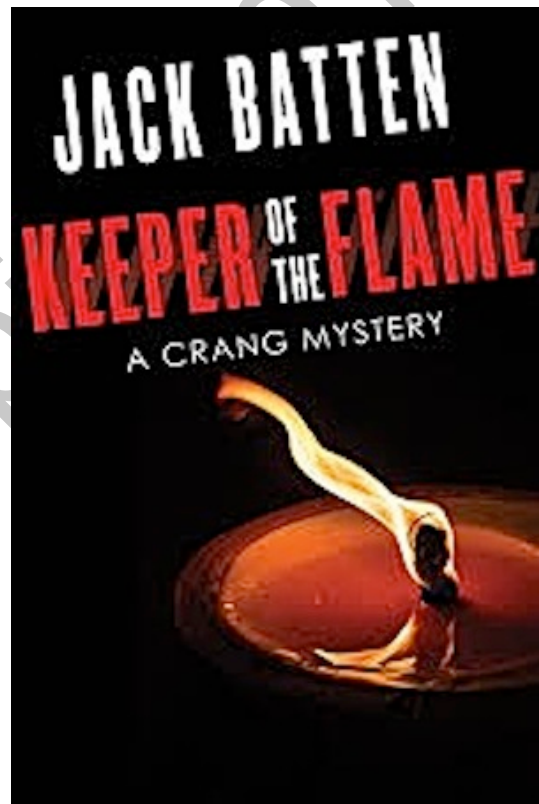
Suspended Sentences

by Jim Napier

Former lawyer-cum-writer Jack Batten has written nearly three dozen books, among which half a dozen novels form a fine mystery series featuring a Toronto criminal lawyer-turned-sleuth (which is possibly redundant) known to most of those around him only as Crang. Like his creator, Crang is an unabashed and knowledgeable jazz fan, but he finds himself a little out of his depth when he's hired to recover some compromising documents on behalf of a hip-hop singer and aspiring actor known in the trade as Flame. It seems the person who has these papers wants no less than eight million dollars to keep them from going public, a disclosure that could douse Flame's acting career before it catches fire.

Before long Crang finds himself matching wits with the Reverend Alton Douglas, a questionable minister with a shady past and, more ominously, a gang of thugs that make it all too clear that Crang's life is in jeopardy. Sure enough someone is murdered, and Crang is forced to ignore legal niceties in pursuit of the docu-

ments, a choice that puts him on a collision course with both the bad guys and the law.



Leavening this toxic mix is a subplot involving the love of Crang's life, Annie, who's just published a bio of the period character actor Edward Everett Horton. It turns out Annie's book is set to become the flavor of the month, and she finds herself in demand on talk shows from Charlie Rose to Ellen DeGeneres. The entertainment

realm is, however, a small world, and Annie finds herself mixed up with a key figure in the plot to blackmail Flame.

Crang is an engaging rogue, committed to doing the right thing but aware that it just might involve bending the law. His wise-cracking ways often get him into trouble, and more than once he's forced to call on some shadowy friends to help dig himself out. Populated with largely believable (if

sometimes gullible or downright pitiful) characters, and a plot that will resonate with anyone familiar with the pop music scene, *Keeper of the Flame* alternates between dark comedy and fast-paced drama, and is an entertaining tale that will send readers in search of previous books in the series.

Keeper of the Flame launched in April 2016, and is published by Dundurn Books.

Previously reviewed on _____

Since 2005 Jim Napier's reviews and interviews have appeared in several Canadian newspapers and on such websites as *Spinetingler*, *The Rap Sheet*, *Shots Magazine*, *Crime Time*, *Reviewing The Evidence*, *January* magazine, the *Montreal Review of Books*, the *Ottawa Review of Books*, and *Amazon.com*, as well as on his own award-winning crime fiction site, *Deadly Diversions*. He can be reached at jnapier@deadlydiversions.com



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