

When the dead won't stay dead

Crime thriller showcases talented author

Suspended Sentences

by Jim Napier

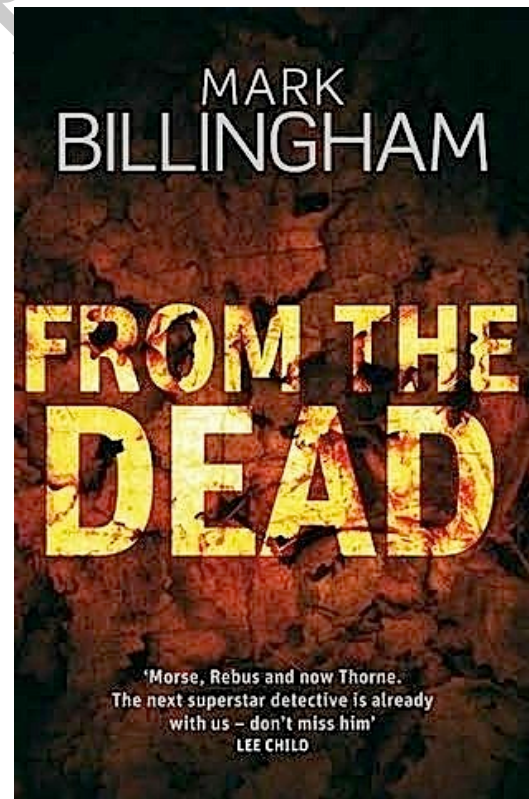
For all its trauma, we are accustomed to viewing a death as the turning of a page, the closing of a chapter; we may return to it in our thoughts—indeed sometimes we cannot help doing so—but it marks a seminal moment, one which we can move beyond.

Or does it? There are ghosts, and there are ghosts. For sometimes the dead just won't stay dead, and a page turned *can* be turned back—indeed, must be, although the results can mean even more dying. In this week's pick the author shows that one needn't believe in the supernatural to be haunted by the past. It is a compelling read.

Mark Billingham

With nearly a dozen novels to his credit Mark Billingham is hardly what you'd term a new writer. But Billingham ranks near the top of seasoned British crime writers, deftly combining the genre of police procedurals with well-crafted suspense thrillers. The 2001 launch of his debut novel *Sleepyhead* featured DI Tom Thorne, and earned him critical acclaim; it went on to become an immediate bestseller in the UK. He followed that success with *Scaredy Cat*, which was nominated for the Best Crime Novel of 2002 and won the Sherlock Award for Best Detective Novel by a UK Author. Establishing something of a pattern, Billingham's fifth in the series, *Lifeless*, was nominated for BCA's

Crime Thriller of 2006, and in 2009 he became the first crime writer to win the Theakston's Old Peculiar Crime Novel of the Year award twice. Often mentioned in the same breath as the works of Ian Rankin and Val McDermid, Billingham's novels are quickly earning him a global audience. No mere one-trick pony, his body of work also includes a chilling standalone, short stories, his musings about the craft of writing, a children's thriller, and his own take on the evolution of crime fiction. Did I mention that he also performs stand-up comedy?



Billingham and his wife live with their two children in North London, not far from the settings of his Thorne novels.

From the Dead
(McArthur & Co., 2010)

Recently released from prison after having served ten years for the murder of her husband, Donna Langford gets a serious shock in the form of several photos of the man, apparently very much alive. When she learns that her eighteen-year-old daughter has gone missing as well, Donna is convinced that he's abducted her, and hires a private investigator, Anna Carpenter, to locate them. When Carpenter approaches DI Tom Thorne for help, he can't believe his ears. The case was a particularly grisly one: Alan Langford had been handcuffed to the steering wheel of his car, then it had been set alight. They had the body—or at least *a* body—and Donna's confession, and Thorne had helped put the woman behind bars a decade earlier, convinced of her guilt. Weighed down by the insanity of it all, Thorne is torn between denying the woman's claims and ignoring the case, or reopening a file that he himself helped bring to a successful conviction.

But as he noses around Thorne discovers that crucial elements of the case were never pursued, and it is not long before key people, including the contract killer Langford's wife had hired, are murdered. Someone wants the past to remain buried, and his reach extends inside the prison walls. Which raises the question, who is sending Donna the photos, and why?

Already wearied by the many pressures put on modern-day policing and a less-than-impressive command structure he must deal with daily, only Thorne's

obsession to see justice done prevents the detective from packing it in. His commitment, however, will ensure that the circle of violence edges ever closer to his personal life.

One of Britain's leading crime writers

From a riveting opening to a climax with an unexpected turn, *From the Dead* holds the reader firmly in its grasp. Using multiple points of view Billingham heightens the tension without ever giving too much away. Never letting the reader lose sight of Thorne's unwavering moral compass, we are nonetheless carried along by the tale, wondering how justice can ever be attained.

• Already one of the strongest writers of suspenseful police procedurals around, Billingham's latest work firmly cements his place as one of Britain's leading crime-writers in an already very strong field. Tom Thorne is intense and flawed, and very much a work in progress; but beyond that he is that likeable anachronism, the cop totally dedicated to doing his job well. The secondary characters are spot on, the plot is original and spellbinding, and the writing is vintage Billingham. If you haven't encountered his works before, check him out; you won't be disappointed.

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