

Canuck crime writers shine

Canadian Club, Part Two

Suspended Sentences

by Jim Napier

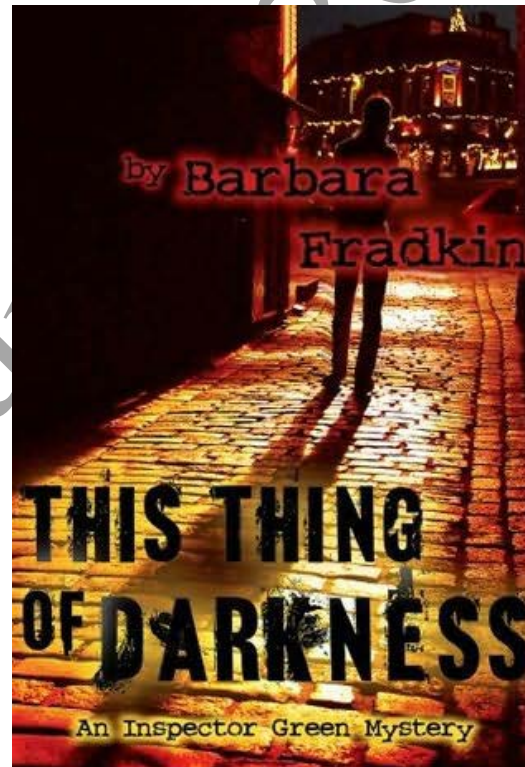
A few months ago I featured the novels of several fine Canadian crime writers. With many talented authors to choose from it was a tough call deciding whom to include, and inevitably some deserving writers were left out. So this week I'm continuing with that theme, focusing on other, equally well-established (including prize-winning) authors who base their tales in our native land, and whose novels make for enjoyable, even compelling reads. Winter is looming before us, and as it approaches we should all be thinking about laying in more than firewood and a season's supply of cream of wheat and cold remedies; a little nourishment for the soul will not go amiss. So curl up with a cup of steaming cocoa (or something stronger if you prefer), turn your back on the vicissitudes of the season, and lose yourself in the murderous machinations of some of Canada's best criminal minds.

Barbara Fradkin

This Thing of Darkness
(RendezVous Crime, 2009)

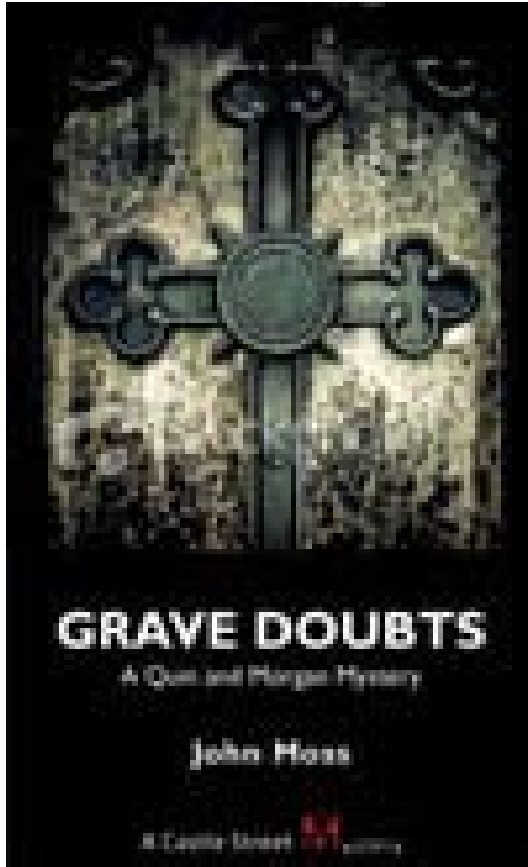
It's been far too long since we've been treated to a tale featuring the exploits of police detective Inspector Michael Green, head of Ottawa's homicide division. In his seventh and most recent outing Green is enjoying a family foray in the city's Byward Market when he is

called to a crime scene: the body of an elderly man has been found, beaten to death. Initially thought to be a mugging gone awry, Green's instincts are aroused



when he learns that the victim, Sam Rosenthal, had been a retired psychiatrist with controversial views about treating the ill and ending one's life. Compounding the mystery, Green discovers that an unidentified young woman had visited Rosenthal on a regular basis, and that the doctor had recently changed his will. Green resolves to track down the woman, convinced that she is the key to

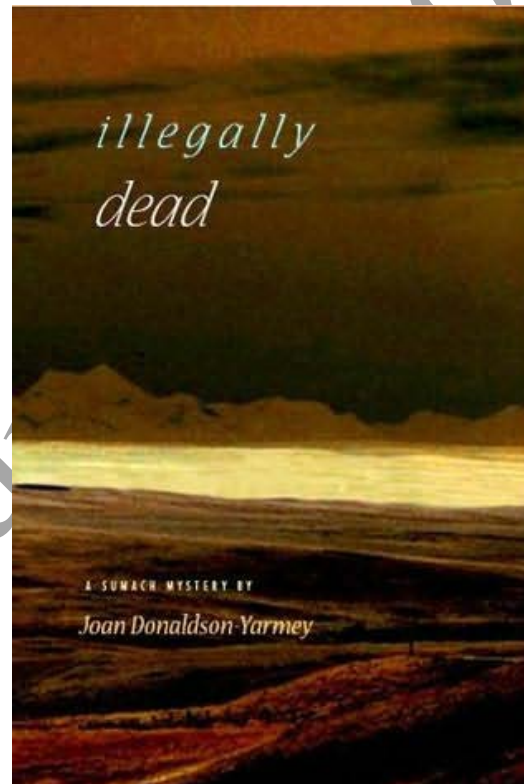
solving the case, but what he finds will lead him to question the very nature of justice. A fine tale, perhaps Fradkin's best yet, and characteristically raising profound social issues.



John Moss
Grave Doubts
(Dundurn, 2009)

A dark tale that raises the question, what is the difference between good and evil? Two desiccated, headless corpses dressed in period clothing are discovered in a gothic story that moves between a Victorian home up for demolition, the crypt of an abandoned church, and an isolated farmhouse on Georgian Bay. Even more incongruously, they are locked in an embrace: intimate lovers, frozen in time, apparently a message meant for the police. Toronto homicide

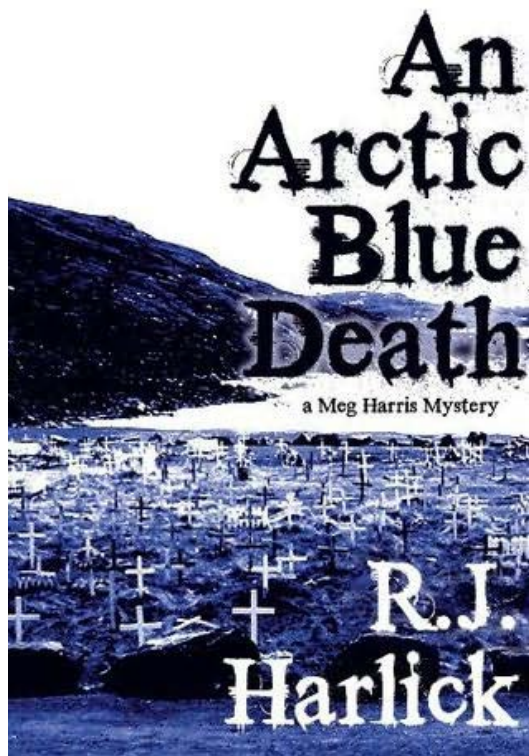
detectives Miranda Quin and her husband David Morgan are tasked with solving the bizarre crime. Their quest will take them into a depraved world of love, lust, and violence, and when the story is leaked to the papers the pressure on the pair to solve the case becomes more intense. Snappy dialogue, engaging characters, and a layered plot with a riveting climax combine to make this well-crafted tale a compelling read.



Joan Donaldson-Yarmey
Illegally Dead
(Sumach Press, 2008)

Travel writer Elizabeth Oliver has a disconcerting habit of running into corpses. But navigating the Crowsnest Pass Highway that straddles the border between Southern Alberta and British Columbia, gathering material for a travel book on the region, she's determined to put all that behind her. Alas, some things are not to be. Arriving in Fort Macleod she learns that human remains

have been found in an old septic tank. Unable to resist a good puzzle, Elizabeth pokes around, trying to shed light on the death. Mining the town's rumour mill, Elizabeth discovers that an abusive husband had apparently run off with his married lover, nine years earlier. Are the remains grisly evidence of a spurned wife's or husband's violent revenge, or payback from any number of people who had cause to hate him? Before the case is solved the town will wrestle with the possibility of a murderer in their midst, grown children will confront their parents' complex past, and another victim will be claimed. A classic puzzle mystery, full of twists and turns in a unique setting.



R. J. Harlick
Arctic Blue Death
(RendezVous Crime, 2009)

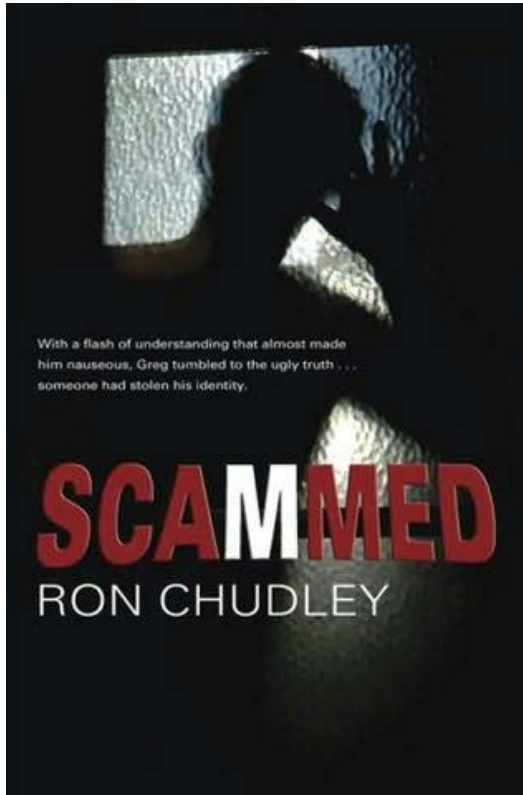
Fourth installment in the popular series featuring Meg Harris, a middle-aged refugee from Toronto who's settled into

her aunt's cottage in West Quebec. Unmarried, not university educated, and in her terms, plump, Meg constantly wrestles with her sister, an Ontario Superior Court Judge for the affections of their judgmental mother. When an envelope arrives from Iqaluit, the capital of Canada's newest territory, bearing an unsigned, cryptic message – “Your man okay” – it opens a flood of memories. Their father had disappeared on a flight to the Arctic in 1973. Neither he nor the remains of the plane had ever been found. Meg's sister is suspicious: she thinks the message is a seam to get money from their mother, and wants Meg to fly to the remote town to look into it. Reluctant at first to do so, Meg decides to make the trip. What she finds will not only give her cause to re-examine her feelings toward her father; it will also put her and others in mortal jeopardy. A well-researched, atmospheric tale that perfectly captures the unique culture of the Canadian North.

Ron Chudley
Scammed
(Touchwood Editions, 2009)

A timely psychological thriller about identity theft and revenge. When con men scam Greg Lothian's parents of their savings, their lives are turned upside down. But when they return to steal Greg's own identity, the normally law-abiding accountant uses his professional skills to exact revenge. He plots to set up the fraudsters themselves, counting on their greed to expose them. He's thought through the details with one exception: he hasn't reckoned on the fact that he's dealing with callous criminals who will stop at nothing to get what they want. When they finally meet face to face, Greg's

carefully-laid plans go awry, and he is forced to improvise to deal with his



enemies. When someone is killed, Greg discovers that even a con man can play hardball. Fast-paced action grounded in a cautionary tale.

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