

Wheels Within Wheels

When the system fails, what's a person to do?

Suspended Sentences

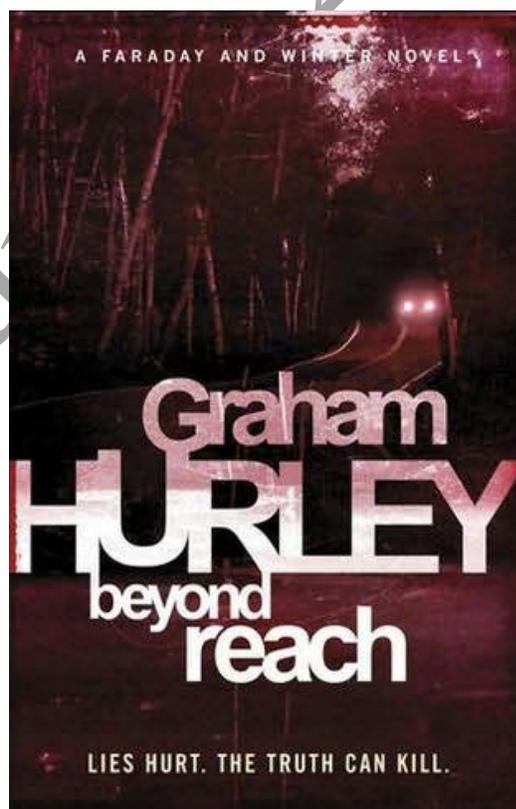
by Jim Napier

One of the minor travails of my job as reviewer is that there are far too many books – even counting just the good ones – to review them all. I last looked at British crime writer Graham Hurley in November of 2006, for his novel *Blood and Honey*. It went on to be shortlisted for the Theakston's Award for outstanding crime fiction. Hurley followed that with several others over the intervening years, this week's pick being the latest. His tales are noteworthy on several levels: they are impeccably well-researched police procedurals; but beyond that they are simply well-crafted stories, with engrossing plots featuring interesting characters and a strong sense of place, all told with a fine narrative tone. So with apologies to the author (and my readers) for neglecting several fine novels by Hurley, here is my take on his latest tale.

Graham Hurley

A prize-winning documentary filmmaker, Graham Hurley freely admits that his Cambridge education in Literature didn't provide him with the best basis for writing crime fiction. Instead he turned to his childhood experiences, including an addiction to classic feature films like *Bridge on the River Kwai*, to craft action thrillers revolving around events in Northern Ireland, the first Gulf War, and the minefields of Southern Africa that would help him to hone his craft. When he turned his pen to crime

fiction Hurley created the Faraday and Winter series, documenting the exploits of two CID officers in the Portsmouth Police. Over the course of several books these characters have evolved, giving them a dimension and depth that holds the reader's interest.



Hurley and his wife Lin have three grown sons and live in the Portsmouth area, where they can indulge their longtime attraction to the sea.

Beyond Reach
(Orion Books, 2010)

Portsmouth DI Joe Faraday has a lot on his plate. A police operation to bring down a local crime figure has gone pear-shaped, a hit-and-run has just occurred, and a 24-year old unsolved rape case vies for his attention. Add to that a disaffected colleague who's gone over to the Dark Side, working for the very same crime czar, and a lover who's gone to Canada and might not return, and it's not shaping up as a stellar week.

Faraday is all too familiar with the stresses of the job. From his vantage point the social system is failing dismally: good kids are going bad, and bad kids are literally getting away with murder. He wants to make a difference, but can't see that he's getting anywhere. Worse, when the system fails and victims take matters into their own hands, they face the very same legal machinery that failed them in the first place. Not for the first time Faraday questions his values and his career choice.

His day begins routinely enough, with the report of a hit-and-run death. Not an ordinary death, though: the victim was one Kyle Munday, a local young who had terrorized a nearby housing estate with the aid of his gang of disaffected followers and a vicious pit bull. Munday had been suspected of many crimes, not least the stabbing death of a young music student named Tim Morressey. Questioned by the police the gang members had stuck together, and in the absence of hard evidence the police had to cut them loose. So when Munday's body is found on a nearby roadway and debris nearby is traced to a vehicle owned by Tim Morressey's mother, Faraday's heart sinks: he hadn't joined

the force to crucify the victims of crime when the system failed them.

Meanwhile, life goes on in Portsmouth. In a decidedly more upscale residential neighbourhood Bazza Mackenzie smells trouble: he suspects his married daughter Esme – Ezzie for short – is having an affair. He tasks Paul Winter, an ex-cop on his payroll, to look into it. What Winter finds sends chills up Mackenzie's spine: not only is Ezzie cheating on her husband and children, she's doing it with a CID officer on the Major Crime Team. Bazza had been a heavy player in the local crime scene before he decided to put that all behind him and go legit, even to the point of creating a charity for local troubled youth. Major Crimes had tried to take Mackenzie down for his sins, but they'd made a proper bollocks of it, and he'd walked away laughing. But Ezzie was a lawyer as well as his daughter, and she knew the workings of his operations inside out; if she'd talked to the man she'd been sleeping with—well, it just didn't bear thinking about. Was this merely a case of monumentally bad judgment, or was Major Crimes still trying to stitch him up?

Back at the cop shop Faraday is handed a powerful new forensic tool that promises to help solve a wide array of cold cases. The boffins in forensics had developed a technique known as a DNA familial search. Instead of looking for an exact match from DNA evidence tying, say, a victim of sexual assault to her attacker, they had begun checking the evidence against profiles in their national database looking for similar family characteristics. The technique yielded hundreds, even thousands, of possible links, which field officers would then cross-check against other factors such as name and location to

narrow the list of suspects. The technique was expensive, and raised some complex human rights issues, but it had already proved its worth.

Armed with this tool, Faraday reopens a twenty-four year-old rape case. A young high-school student, Tessa Fogle, had been partying at the end of her exams and returned home to sleep. She woke up to find a man on top of her and screamed, then fainted. When she came round she phoned the police, and after questioning had been taken to the hospital for a forensic examination. It had yielded genetic evidence, but in 1984 the science of DNA was in its infancy, and the case had remained on file ever since. Faraday will solve the case, but with consequences that he could not have imagined.

Important issues, in an engrossing plot

Graham Hurley is quickly moving to the top tier of contemporary British crime writers. *Beyond Reach* combines an engrossing, layered plot with nuanced characters, and related in a refreshingly original voice. Beyond this, he raises important social issues dealing with social and moral decay and the conflict between principles and compromise, revenge and atonement. Whether you read crime fiction simply for entertainment or for a perceptive take on thought-provoking issues, you will enjoy *Beyond Reach*.

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