

# The Mind of a Monster:

## *Peter James explores obsession and its aftermath*

---

### *Suspended Sentences*

---

by Jim Napier

Obsession comes in many forms. Most, thankfully, are minor idiosyncrasies, like collecting butterflies or putting on one's left sock first in the morning. But others go beyond the norm, focusing on others and turning their lives upside down. When the obsessed person is especially clever the results can be catastrophic, leading to conflict, and turning love into hatred. In *Want You Dead* Peter James explores the twisted attraction of a psychopath for a naïve young woman, exploring in detail his impact on her life and on all those around her. It all makes for fascinating, and chilling, reading.

Red Westwood is an attractive, and vivacious young woman in search of a lover. After a string of unhappy relationships she places a provocative advert with an online dating agency: *Single girl, 29, redhead and smouldering, love life that's crashed and burned. Seeks new flame to rekindle her fire. Fun, friendship and – who knows – maybe more?*

Not surprisingly, she doesn't have to wait very long for a response. Bryce Laurent seems to be the man of her dreams: smart, successful, willing and able to anticipate and satisfy Red's every desire.



Her mother, however, is not so sure. Hiring a professional investigator, she soon discovers that Bryce Laurent is a manipulative liar, not at all the person he claims to be. She presents her daughter with the facts, and floored by the revelations, Red breaks off her relationship with the man.

Fast forward several months. Red has moved on, trying to rebuild her personal life. She has met Dr. Karl Murphy, a GP and widower, and they seem to be a perfect match. In

Laurent's twisted mind, however, it's too late for that: if he cannot have her, no one will. But first he must make her suffer for what he sees as her betrayal, and that will involve bringing suffering to all those around her.

For the first time Karl Murphy is late for a dinner date with Red, and not without reason: the hapless doctor has been kidnapped and taken to the woods adjoining a local golf course, where he has been forced to write a note in exchange for his life. Having done so he learns a tragic truth: Bryce Laurent is not a man of his word. The doctor is doused with petrol and set ablaze. Laurent's only regret is that his screams ended too quickly. He would have liked to watch the doctor suffer more.

Dr. Murphy's death is only the first in a series of violent acts designed to bring Red's life crashing down around her. Laurent has also targeted her parents, even the restaurant where they had their first date. And as for any others who might get caught up in the carnage, well, they're just collateral damage.

Detective Superintendent Roy Grace and his team must somehow locate the elusive psychopath and put an end to his rampage, hopefully before even more lives are lost. They will not be entirely successful.

For all the violence and fast-paced action, Peter James adroitly delivers a layered tale, leavened with occasional black humour and a poignant backstory involving Roy Grace's long-missing wife, all seamlessly interwoven. Throughout the narrative we witness Bryce Laurent's delusional thinking, his insistence on blaming their failed relationship on everyone around Red except himself, and his determination to make her — make them all — pay for his suffering. Bringing events to a heart-stopping climax, James delivers an exquisitely-rendered portrait of a moral monster, and fits any number of demented persons we read about in the media with alarming frequency. James's penetrating profile graphically illustrates two time-honoured maxims: be careful what you wish for, and if it looks too good to be true, it probably is.

---

Originally published on *Reviewing the Evidence*, January 2015.

§Since 2005 Jim Napier's reviews and interviews have appeared in several Canadian newspapers and on various crime fiction and literary websites, including his own award-winning site, *Deadly Diversions*. He can be reached at [jnapier@deadlydiversions.com](mailto:jnapier@deadlydiversions.com)