

Not a Yellow Brick Road

Kirby's latest cranks it up a notch

Suspended Sentences

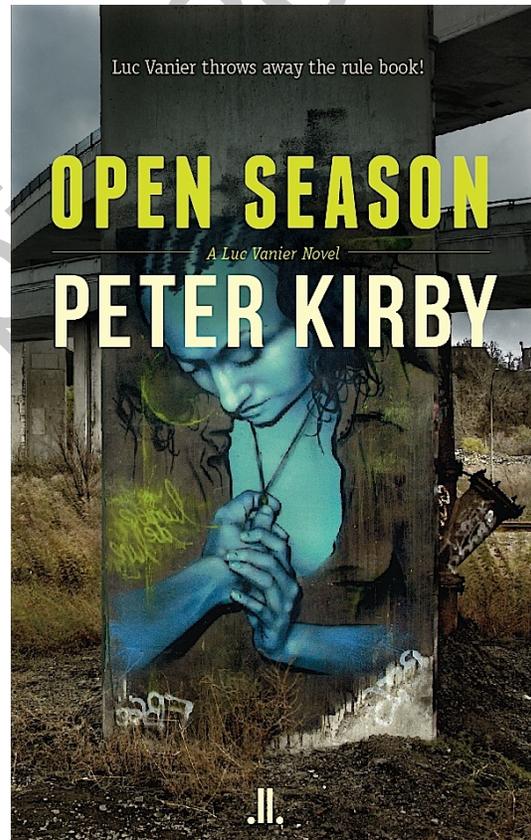
by Jim Napier

On a roll. In the brief space of three years Montreal lawyer Peter Kirby has found time to turn out yet another in his fine series of novels featuring Montreal Detective Inspector Luc Vanier, and each new addition is more assured, and more compelling, than the previous one.

What sets Kirby's work apart from the majority of other crime novels is that mere plot line is never enough; character is key, and allows the author to explore troubling social themes such as the treatment of the homeless, the clash of cultures in Montreal's diverse community, international trafficking in illegal immigrants, and of course the inevitable conflicts that occur within policing circles themselves when agencies compete for jurisdiction on a case or worse, want to sweep it under the table. In *Open Season* Kirby draws on current events to reveal a great deal about Canadian life, and as we have come to expect, his graphic account pulls no punches.

Katya Babyak is a recently-arrived illegal immigrant from Kiev who finds herself locked in a run-down apartment in Rotterdam, with only the occasional sandwich and a bottle of

water for company. It is the first leg of her journey to Canada, running from a past without promise, and only the memories of pain.



Katya arrives in Montreal, but it's not long before she discovers what others have in mind for her, and it's not her dreamed-of new life as a nanny for an upscale Canadian family. She's to work in the sex trade, effectively indentured to thugs who keep her in bondage to work off the cost of her

travel from Kiev (and increase their own profit), for as long as they want.

While Katya struggles to salvage her life, another crisis is unfolding in Montreal. A Guatemalan journalist named Sophie Luna has been fighting her own extradition as she works on a story to document the illegal trafficking in sex workers to Canada. She is fighting her deportation with the help of Roger Bélair, a Montreal lawyer. But before he can do anything she's snatched off the street and Bélair is injured, in plain sight of eyewitnesses. Soon afterwards the lawyer dies and his office is ransacked. Her captors are working quickly and ruthlessly to ensure the story stops there. Converging plotlines elevate the novel from what might have been a routine police procedural to a fast-paced suspense tale.

Enter Montreal Police detective, Inspector Luc Vanier. Vanier and his partner Sergeant Sylvie Sainte-Jacques of the Montreal-based Serious Crime Squad have been assigned the kidnapping case. Divorced and with an adult son living in Montreal, Vanier is in a relationship with Anjili Segal, a pathologist, and they are on the verge of stepping it up a notch. They're looking for an apartment together – something Luc is having difficulties coming to terms with, even though he's clearly in love with Anjili. As well, Vanier's son Alex has

returned from a tour in Afghanistan, and clearly traumatised by his experiences, a year later is still having problems adjusting to civilian life. These elements provide a further layer to Kirby's solid and engaging tale.

Open Season is a gritty narrative of the plight of vulnerable people trying to carve out a better life for themselves, and who wind up being imprisoned and exploited by hardened criminals who tempt them with the promise of a new beginning. It's definitely not a yellow brick road they embark on, and few of its travellers will ever find their way back to Kansas. Along their journey Kirby offers an informed critique of Canada's flawed refugee policy, and also throws a revealing spotlight on the federal authorities whose job it is to enforce it.

Is it too early in the series to call *Open Season* a breakout novel? Kirby's two previous Vanier stories were also deftly-crafted, well-told tales, but his latest work steps up the intrigue several notches, resulting in a perfectly plotted, nicely-paced, edge-of-your seat thriller that also has gravitas; and it has all the earmarks of a winner. In fact, only halfway into the present year it's not too early to earmark *Open Season* as quite possibly one of the best crime novels of 2015.

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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*

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