

Guilty Pleasures

The gentle side of murder...

Suspended Sentences

by Jim Napier

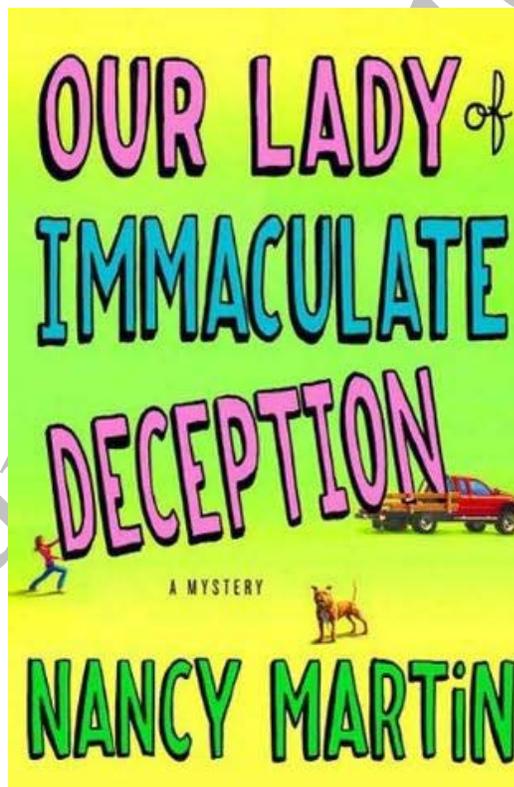
Chocolates, re-runs of *I Love Lucy*, a lie-in on a Sunday morning: why do we feel guilty about small indulgences? Why should we? It could be argued that small indulgences are actually good for us, adding a small bit of spice to our daily lives, making it less likely that our transgressions will be more serious. Ebenezer Scrooge disdained all small (or for that matter, large) indulgences, and until his epiphany (aided by several ghosts), his was a life wasted.

So, without apology, here are my recommendations for some simple good fun: not intended to pass social judgment, or offer profound insights into the human condition, here are half a dozen mystery tales perfectly suited for leisure reading, whisking us away from the tedious problems of the everyday world and introducing us instead to the gentle, often humorous side of murder...

Nancy Martin, *Our Lady of Immaculate Deception*

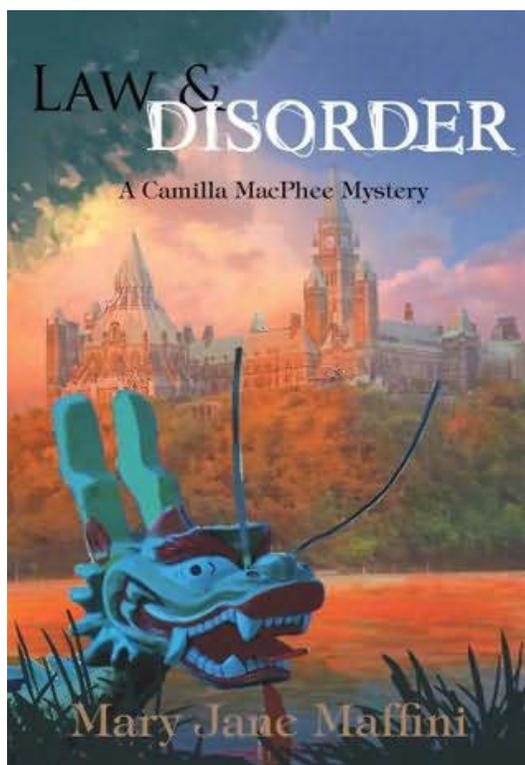
Minotaur Books, 2010

Bestselling author Nancy Martin is well known to her fans as the author of nearly four dozen suspense, romance, and cozy mystery novels. Her latest tale introduces Roxy Abruzzo, a sexy, outspoken niece of Carmine, a Pittsburgh Mafia boss. Trying (though not always too hard) to go straight, Roxy



runs an architectural salvage business, and she can't resist purloining an ancient Greek statue that isn't really hers. She'll pay for her sins by getting involved in the murder of the statue's former owner, the heir to a huge steel fortune, and before it is over she will have to call on her widowed aunt Loretta, a lawyer with big hair and short skirts, her assistant and friend "Nooch" Santonucci, and ex-marine (and former flame) Patrick Flynn, just back from Afghanistan. Combining black humour with fast-paced action, zany characters and off-

the-wall dialogue, Martin's fast-paced, earthy tale will earn her many new readers.



Mary Jane Maffini, *Law and Disorder*

Rendezvous Crime, 2009

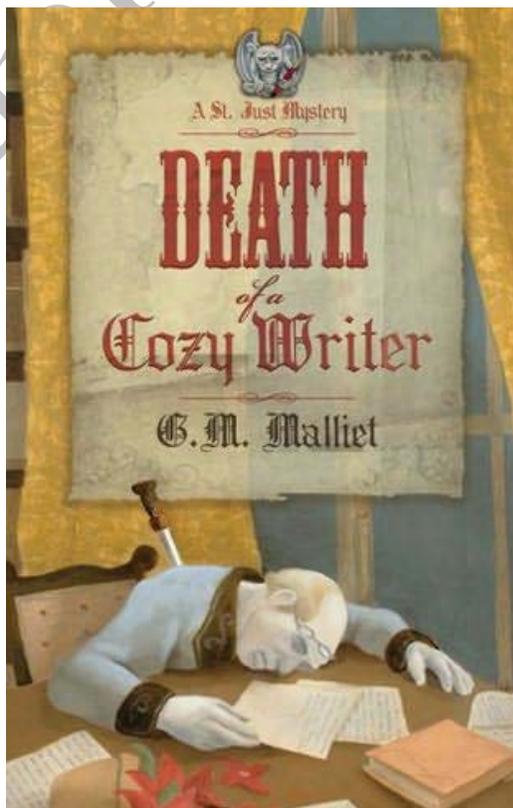
Last reviewed here for her 2009 novel, *Death Loves a Messy Desk*, Canadian author Mary Jane Maffini has returned with the sixth entry in her entertaining series featuring Ottawa-based victim's advocate Camilla MacPhee. With each chapter punctuated by wicked lawyer jokes ("How do you keep a lawyer from drowning? Shoot him before he hits the water."), *Law and Disorder* is a light-hearted look at the machinations of Lloyd Brugel, a jailed criminal kingpin charged with a fatal firebombing. Apparently he will do anything to avoid being convicted, including killing his own lawyer to delay his trial. But when Camilla and those close to her become targets, she begins to take things

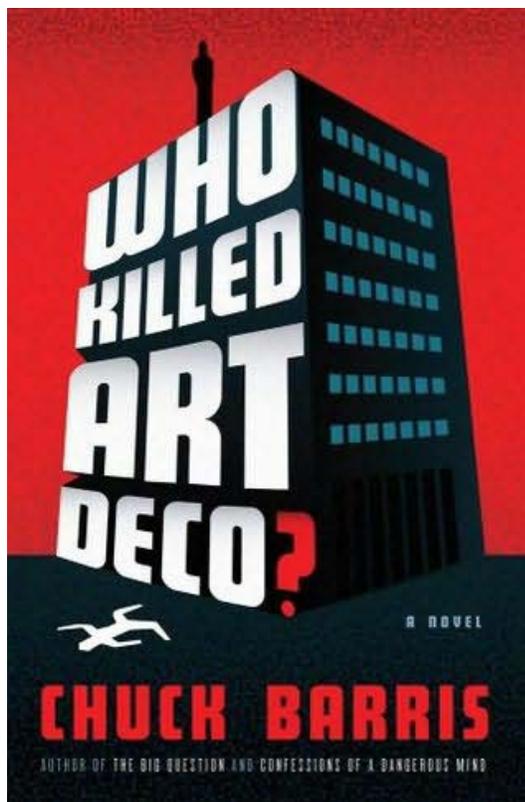
seriously. Maffini's irrepressible wit sparkles in this all-too-possible tale.

G. M. Malliet, *Death of a Cozy Writer*

Midnight Ink, 2009

Agatha Award winner G. M. Malliet is attracting a lot of attention for her British cozy series based on the exploits of Chief Inspector Arthur St. Just. In this tale, the first in her series, mystery author Sir Adrian Beauclerk-Fisk threatens to cut his four grown children out of his will. Then he drops the other shoe: he's engaged to a beautiful widow with a suspect past. But contrary to the reader's expectations it is the eldest son (and presumed heir) who turns up dead. An affectionate *homage* to the Golden Age of British crime fiction by a skilled writer rapidly attracting attention.





Chuck Barris, *Who Killed Art Deco?*

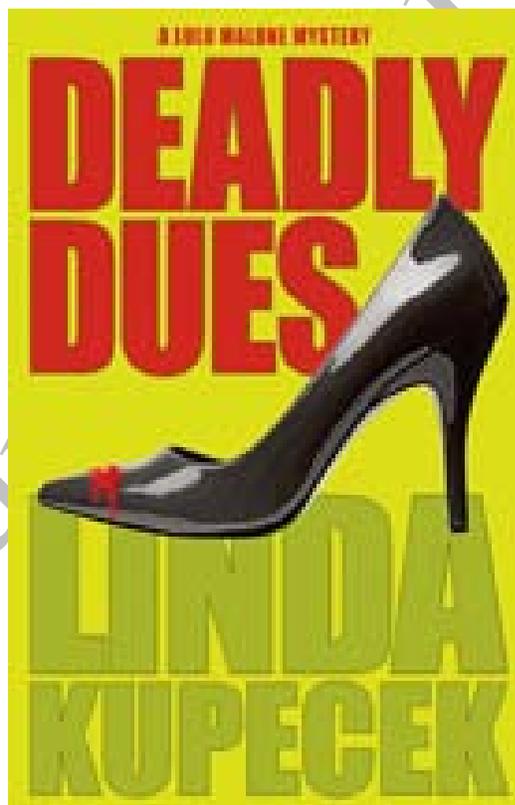
Simon & Schuster, 2009

If you've ever wondered what happens to retired game-show hosts, wonder no longer: Chuck Barris, creator and producer of such TV classics as *The Gong Show*, *The Newlywed Game*, and *The Dating Game* has turned his fertile, if more-than-slightly deranged, mind to writing novels. With three previous efforts under his belt Barris has served up a comic romp focusing on the heir to a vast fortune who is also the black sheep of the family. Suspects abound when Art Deco Jr. is found murdered in his Manhattan apartment, and include most of his scandalized family together with a recently-spurned lover, failed actor and gigilo Eddie Cotton. Novice detective Jimmy Netts is in well over his head in this darkly humorous tale by one of the most inventive writers around.

Linda Kupecek, *Deadly Dues*

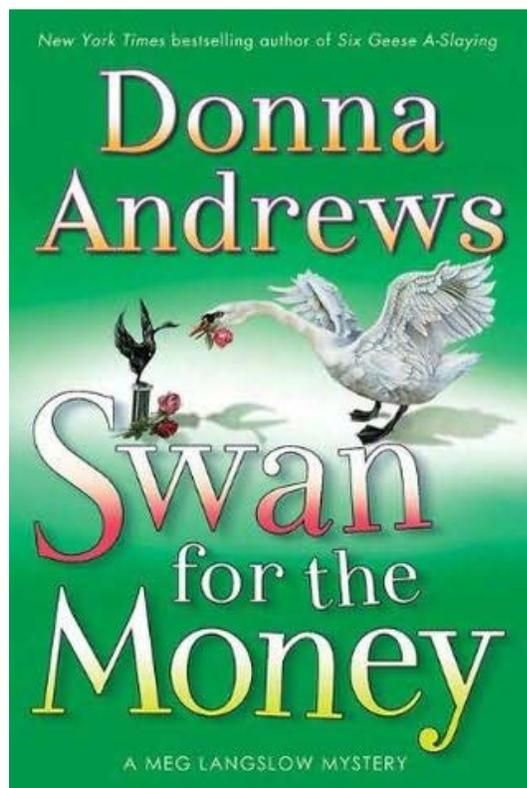
Touchwood Editions, 2010

Aspiring actor Lulu Malone is happily making ends meet as the TV spokesperson for a dog food company when, accompanied by several other entertainers, she finds the office manager of her performer's union, Stan Pope, dead at his desk, a letter opener protruding conspicuously from his back.



Stan wasn't well liked: over the years he'd sexually harassed, intimidated and lied to many of his union members, whose complaints about him had resulted in their being blacklisted for work. So it's no surprise that the members of the group decide to go their separate ways, leaving someone else to report his death to the police. But that same evening Lulu is visited by a masked thug accusing her of having something of Stan's. She's in the process of fighting him off when he

suddenly slumps to the floor, his head bashed in by a garden gnome, applied by person or persons unknown. This time she wisely decides to call the cops. A delightful, entertaining romp through lala land and the many eccentrics who make up the entertainment industry.



Donna Andrews, *Swan for the Money*

Minotaur Books, 2009

American crime writer Donna Andrews has been penning a series of award-winning cozies for some time now; this is her 11th such venture, earlier efforts carrying such titles as *Cockatiels at Seven*, *Owls well That Ends Well*, and *Crouching Buzzard, Leaping Loon*. 'Nuff said? When her retired parents enter the world of competitive rose growing Meg Langslow is initially pleased; but when she learns the lengths some people will go to in order to win the grand prize, she becomes

understandably concerned. And when the wealthy woman hosting the competition becomes a target for murder, well, you get the point: it's clearly a thorny issue. If you enjoy off-the-wall humour wrapped around a puzzle mystery with good-natured mayhem, give this talented author a try.

So dig out that box of shortbread cookies you've been saving since Christmas, brew up a hot cup of cocoa, send the kids off to the neighbours, and curl up with a nice cozy, secure in the knowledge that an occasional guilty pleasure makes life worthwhile.

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