

Victorian Villainy

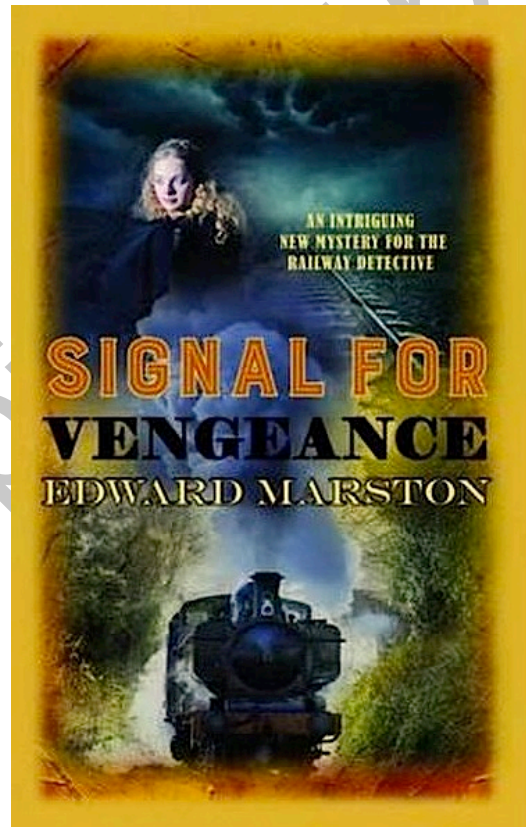
Railway mystery a riveting read

Suspended Sentences

by Jim Napier

The year is 1860, and when Scotland Yard Inspector Robert Colbeck is informed that a murder has taken place in Wimborne, Dorset, he is incensed to learn that another officer will be sent to investigate the crime, which takes place on the tracks of the London and South Western Railway. He knows both the area and the railway like the back of his hand, and believes the case should be his. But Superintendent Tallis is aware that Colbeck's wife is about to give birth, and believes it is only proper that her husband should remain at her side. After some debate Tallis reluctantly agrees with Colbeck, and sends the Inspector and his Sergeant, Victor Leeming, to look into the case.

It is a puzzling matter. The body of a railway policeman named John Bedloe has been discovered lying across the railway tracks, just minutes before a train was due to pass. He has been stabbed, and a corkscrew has been driven into his tongue. Someone is sending a particularly gruesome message.



Complicating Colbeck's investigation into the case, Ambrose Feltham, a local man running for major of the nearby village, believes Colbeck should report to him. It's only reasonable, he argues, as he is the person who asked Scotland Yard to investigate the death in the first place. Colbeck resents the man's attempts to manage the inquiry, and rebuffs

his interference. But Feltham is not easily shoved aside; he contacts Colbeck's superior, Superintendent Tallis, who travels to Wimborne to oversee the case.

Despite Feltham's efforts to dominate the inquiry it's not long before Colbeck and Leeming discover a possible motive for Bedloe's death. A cache of incriminating letters — maddeningly unsigned — is found, indicating that the man had been having simultaneous affairs with several married women in the area. Any one of the women — or their husbands — would have had ample motive to take revenge against the philanderer; Colbeck's challenge is to discover the identities of these women, deter-

mine whether their husbands knew of their infidelities, and discover which among them had the opportunity to act on their rage.

Author Edward Marston — aka Keith Miles in real life — is no stranger to readers of crime fiction. He is impressively prolific: over the past three decades he has penned over seventy books in a wide variety of genres. Typically traditional whodunits with little gore, his stories reveal a sharp ear for dialogue with the focus squarely on the plot. Marston's cunning tales are informed by a strong sense of atmosphere and attention to detail, and will appeal to readers in search of challenging puzzles in well-told stories set in earlier times.

First published on *Reviewing the Evidence*, September 2016.

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 Books*, the *Ottawa Review of Books*, and *Amazon.com*, as well as on his own award-winning crime fiction site, *Deadly Diversions*. His own crime novel is scheduled to appear in the Spring of 2017. He can be reached at jnapier@deadlydiversions.com