

Good Times and Bad Times

McDermid's latest bridges the gap

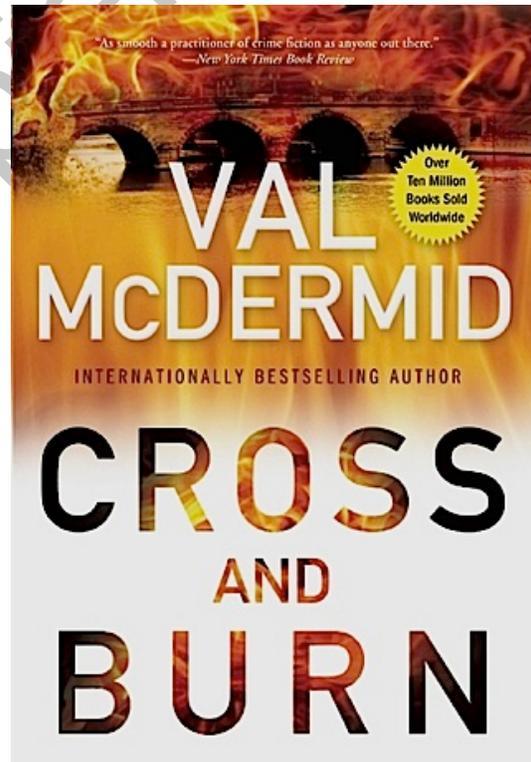
Suspended Sentences

by Jim Napier

After nearly two decades of following the complex lives and nuanced relationship between criminal profiler Dr. Tony Hill and DCI Carol Jordan, each new appearance has come to be as welcome as a visit by an old and valued friend. But every life has its good times and bad times, and Hill and Jordan are definitely at a bad point.

Cross and Burn begins with the horrific devastation that unfolded in the previous novel in the series, *The Retribution*. Carol's brother and his lover had been savagely butchered in their own home, murdered by a psychopath named Jacko Vance whom she and Tony had failed to catch in time to prevent it. The crime had been compounded by the mutilation and blinding of one of Carol's own team in a trap meant for her. Unable—or unwilling—to cope with her trauma, Carol wrestles with guilt and remorse. She struggles to put the tragedies behind her by walking away from police work altogether, and focussing on totally

renovating the converted barn where her brother and his partner died. It is a doomed attempt to eradicate all evidence of that horrific event: physically she has succeeded, but the memories will always remain.



Carol still holds Tony responsible for what had happened, by not anticipating in time Vance's perverse plan to make her suffer, and

for the past three months she has utterly severed herself from any contact with him. She is striving to define a new life, and for all their history that life does not yet — and might never again — include Tony Hill. But in trying to put her police work behind her Carol's copper's instincts have been relegated to a back shelf somewhere in her mind, and she is unaware that someone is stalking her.

Meanwhile, the city of Bradfield is trying to cope with the appearance of a new sociopath on the scene, who has been kidnapping, beating and murdering women and further mutilating their remains. When a local woman, mother to a teenage boy, and friend of DS Paula McIntyre disappears, McIntyre and her partner, Dr. Elinor Blessing, decide to take the boy under their wing while Paula fervently seeks to find the woman before something

horrible happens. But when another body is discovered, and one of their own comes under suspicion, old adversaries must work together to get to the bottom of things.

With its layered plot, compelling dialogue and McDermid's trademark characters, *Cross and Burn* is intense and utterly engrossing, and, for all its darkness, a joy to read. Narrated from multiple viewpoints that further heighten the suspense, the reader is torn between trying to finish the book in one go and carefully parceling it out, savouring both the tale and the consummate skill with which it is told. Her strongest work to date—and that's saying a very great deal—*Cross and Burn* is a delicious gift to readers for the new year, from the pen of one of the most talented crime writers around.

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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, and the *Montreal Review of Books*, as well as on his own award-winning site, *Deadly Diversions*. He can be reached at jnapier@deadlydiversions.com