

Rockford moves to Boston?

Howard Shrier pens Beantown bestseller

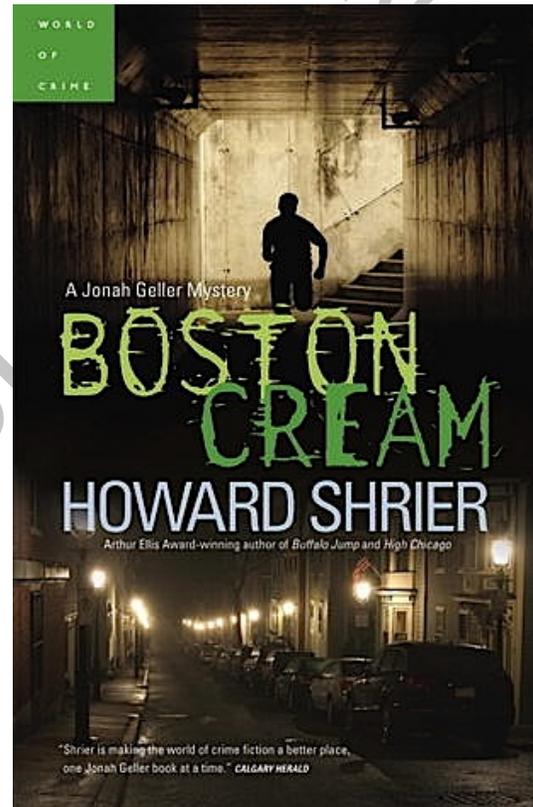
Suspended Sentences

by Jim Napier

CANADIAN CRIME WRITER Howard Shrier is on a roll. Making his debut in 2008 with *Buffalo Jump* he introduced readers to Jonah Geller, a gutsy Toronto-based Jewish PI with friends in low places. The book netted Shrier that year's Arthur Ellis Award for Best First Novel. The sequel, *High Chicago*, earned him a second Arthur Ellis, this time for Best Novel of 2009—an unprecedented consecutive win. Shrier's latest foray into crime fiction, *Boston Cream*, could very well make it a hat trick. With but three books under his belt the series has already been optioned for television. Think an updated version of "The Rockford Files" with a Jewish PI in the leading role. If the film version is anything like the books, it should be a real winner.

RECOVERING FROM A CONCUSSION at home in Toronto, PI Jonah Geller is approached by a distraught middle-aged couple who ask him to locate their son, Dr. David Fine. A transplant fellow at Boston's Sinai Hospital, Fine's been missing for two weeks. Still suffering from his injuries—and lying to his doctor—Geller is

reluctant to take on the case. But the couple's desperation gets to him, so he finally agrees.



KNOWING THAT JONAH'S NOT FIRING on all cylinders, his partner Jenn joins him on the case. Arriving in Boston they learn that Mike Gianelli, a police detective in nearby Brookline, where Fine lived, has come up empty. He's unconvinced that Fine hasn't simply taken a time out from a stressful job, and with no evidence of foul play, and given

that Fine is an adult he can't go much further. But David's brother Micah insists there's no way his brother—the buttoned-down, successful one—would suddenly and voluntarily drop out of sight, leaving his parents to twist in the wind. That leaves Geller with two glaring possibilities, neither of which is good: either Fine's been kidnapped or he's dead. Geller leans toward the latter.

Talking with Fine's roommate draws a big zero. But nosing around their apartment Jonah finds five thousand dollars stashed in a bag stashed in Fine's bedroom. This from a man who was working on a modest salary and who was, according to his roommate, obsessed with paying his parents back for his medical education.

Among the papers Jonah had brought with him was a poster for another missing man. An Indian shopkeeper, Harinder Patel, had also suddenly disappeared, just a week before David Fine. When he visits the shop to

talk with Patel's son Jonah shows him Fine's photo, and learns that the doctor had been there as well. Like Fine, Patel also had a fat wad of fifty-dollar bills, totalling five thousand dollars. What dark secret bonds two such disparate men together? Before the case is solved Geller will match wits with a deceptively likeable Rabbi, a desperate Congressman, and a menacing Irish mobster, and people will die.

CRIME WRITERS SHOULD LOOK over their shoulders: Howard Shrier started strong, and he's only getting better. *Boston Cream* is a well-paced, atmospheric tale, with assured writing, believable characters and engaging protagonists. The plot is rooted in events taken from the real world, and, as with Shrier's earlier stories, justice is often dispensed at the point of a gun. Too bad Jonah Geller won't be sticking around Beantown; *Spencer* fans would have had a worthy replacement.

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Since 2005 Jim Napier's reviews 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 *Type M for Murder*, as well as on his own award-winning site, *Deadly Diversions*. He can be reached at jnapier@deadlydiversions.com