

A Sleuth For All Seasons

Sherri Travis is back

Suspended Sentences

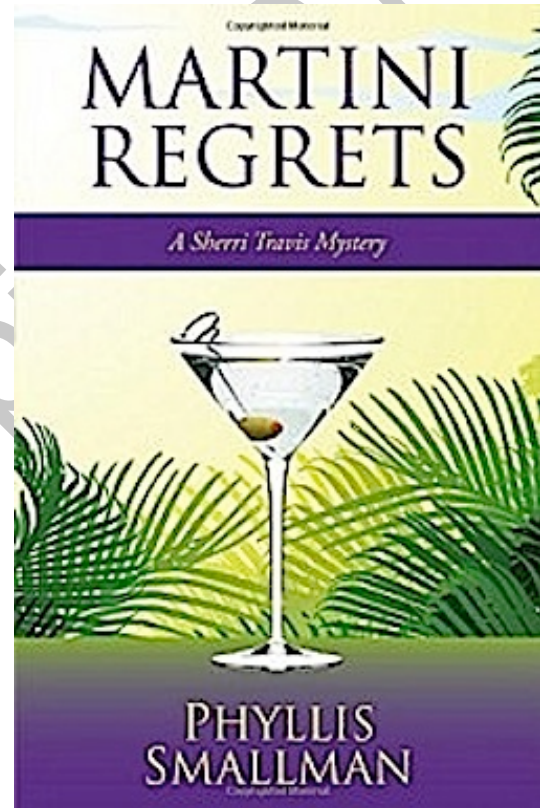
by Jim Napier

From running for her life in the Florida Everglades to sussing out murderers at a pricey charity ball, Sherri Travis is a sleuth for all seasons. In this, Sherri's sixth outing, readers are treated to a cautionary tale, with the terror winched up as Sherri's life takes a major turn—and not for the better.

It's late at night, and, not for the first time, Sherri has lingered over a drink with a longtime friend before heading home. Now she finds herself in the dead of night, heading across the Florida Everglades toward home, to the comforting arms of her longtime lover and fiancée, Clay Adams.

The Glades are no place to mess with, as Sherri well knows. The area is desolate, ruled by snakes and alligators and a sub-species of human life known as swamp rats, who use the wetland isolation to their own, often illegal, ends. Death is never far away. Sherri knows better than to cross the area at night, driving an aging pickup with half a tank of gas to boot; God knows her father, as well as Clay, has lectured her enough. But that's exactly where Sherri finds herself, and why she pulls off the main road toward a sign warning LAST

GAS BEFORE NAPLES, followed by OPEN 24 HRS.



After finding the small store with gas pumps out front, Sherri fills her tank and heads for the all-night store. What she walks into will be nothing less than life-changing, as a desperate young man pleads with her for a ride, and when she refuses, steals her pickup and strands her there, and the Sherri returns to the store after trying in vain to prevent the theft to find it

locked up and dark. She is on her own, and an earlier fragment of conversation from the store suggests there are bad people coming for the young man, people who very likely won't like finding a witness who can identify them.

Suddenly the sassy sleuth has gone from looking forward to tying the knot with Clay to having her plans shredded, and wondering whether she'll see her next dawn. But her pursuers are not easily put off, and before it is over, Sherri's life will be irrevocably changed

Martini Regrets marks the end of a hiatus in the Sherri Travis tales, when multiple-prize-winning author Phyllis Smallman put her Florida-based series aside to begin a new saga featuring a retired rock musician and set among the islands off the coast of British Columbia. Happily, the author didn't forget her amiable sleuth Sherri, a down-to-earth woman who owns and runs the Sunset Bar and Grill, a

restaurant and bar in Florida's Key West. *Martini Regrets* celebrates the return of this sassy yet vulnerable sleuth, and it's like an old friend coming home. It's impossible not to like Sherri, even while lamenting her devil-may-care attitude toward the many threats in her life, and marveling at her often-incredulous life decisions. Beyond the pull of character, though, is Smallman's writing, which has gotten better and better. She is one of a handful of writers whose skill defies you to put down their books unfinished. The setting and atmosphere are, even at their darkest, utterly captivating, the diverse and colourful secondary characters reflect the rich (some would say bizarre) spectrum of Floridian society, and her plots unfailingly plausible. Smallman's tales leave the reader (unfairly) finishing her latest book only to immediately demand when the next one will be available. Not to be missed.

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 site, *Deadly Diversions*. He can be reached at jnapier@deadlydiversions.com