

# In The Cold of the Night

## *John Farrow's latest another winner*

### *Suspended Sentences*

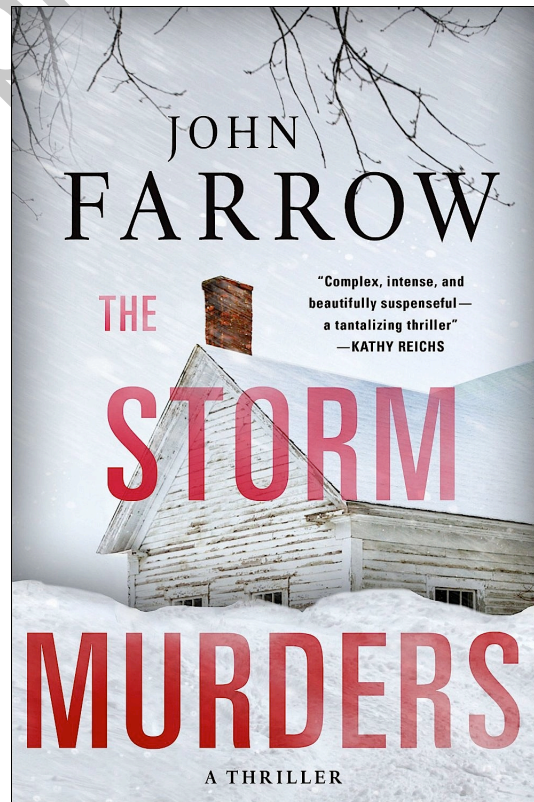
by Jim Napier

Montreal novelist John Farrow (Trevor Ferguson) has just launched the fourth in his Detective-Sergeant Emile Cinq-Mars series, and it's been worth the wait. Previous novels in the series include his seminal *City of Ice*, *Ice Lake*, and *River City*, and contain some of the most original Canadian crime writing around. This latest effort will only further cement his reputation.

Winter, in the countryside near Montreal. Two members of the Sureté du Quebec are called to a remote farmhouse where they find the bodies of a couple inside. Each has been executed by a single shot to the head. But before they can investigate further the officers are gunned down, and soon the scene-of-crime team is confronted by a puzzle: although it had recently snowed, there are no footprints leading away from the crime scene.

Sergeant-Detective Emile Cinq-Mars has retired but is finding himself at loose ends, wondering what to do with his newly-found time. When he is asked by an ex-

colleague to assist in the case, he is curious: it seems an FBI agent, Rand Dreher, has travelled to Quebec to look into the deaths. He reluctantly reveals that there have been other, similar cases in the US, with two common denominators: the ring fingers of the victims have been cut off, and in each case the killings followed a natural disaster.



A tornado in Alabama, a flood in North Dakota, a small earthquake

in California, and in New Orleans, the hurricane and flooding that came to be known as Katrina. Moment by moment the cases are becoming more puzzling. Confronted by the possibility of a cunning serial killer with a perverse modus operandi, Special Agent Dreher asks for their help in unravelling the pattern.

Intrigued by these deaths Emile Cinq-Mars accepts the task, and begins by looking into the murders that occurred in New Orleans. He is joined by his wife Sandra for what promises to be a bit of a holiday for them, but their arrival is marred by an encounter with a pair of pickpockets, and later, they find that their room has been searched. A New Orleans police detective named Pascal Dupree investigates the break-in, the local officer whom Cinq-Mars was to contact to review the killings.

Once he has arranged for their room to be changed and Sandra has settled in, he and Dupree go to

a nearby bar to discuss the killings. But when he returns to the hotel, Cinq-Mars discovers that Sandra has dis-appeared from their room. A frantic search of the hotel fails to turn her up, but in their original room, they make a terrifying discovery: the body of a man, his hands tied behind his back. And his ring finger is missing.

John Farrow has given crime-fiction fans something they haven't had for a long time: a well-conceived, well-written locked-room puzzle mystery combined with an engaging thriller that deftly explores the depths of human evil. While the solution will strike some readers as a bit contrived, the tale itself is well told and will hold the reader's interest. Farrow is a skilled writer, and in *The Storm Murders* he has brought his formidable talents to bear in creating an atmospheric, intense and sometimes graphic story that draws on recent history for its narrative power.

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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, 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*. He can be reached at [jnapier@deadlydiversions.com](mailto:jnapier@deadlydiversions.com)