

Secret Worlds

Crime novel explores the realm of young adults

Suspended Sentences

by Jim Napier

Every society has its rituals for adolescents entering into adulthood. Some of these are explicit and formalised, such as graduation ceremonies, communions, and bar mitzvahs; others lie below the surface, such as norms for dressing and conversing with one's peers and elders. No wonder, then, that often young people are confused about their roles, and sometimes pattern their behaviour around the expectations of those around them. Disturbingly, however, others divide their world into compartments and enter secret worlds, a choice that may have tragic consequences.

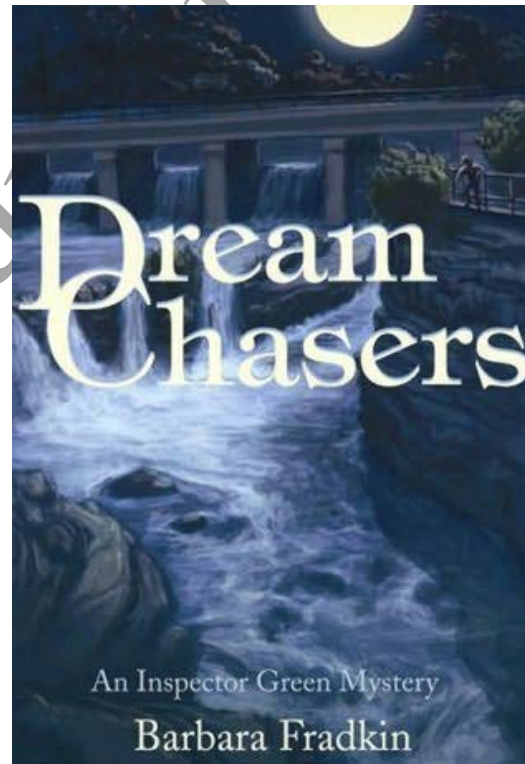
This week's pick examines this transitional and crucial stage of young people's lives, and demonstrates how little is needed for events to take an ominous and tragic turn.

Barbara Fradkin

Montreal-born Barbara Fradkin attended McGill University and the University of Toronto, and completed her doctorate in psychology at the University of Ottawa. Her numerous short stories have been widely published, and have garnered her three nominations by the Crime Writers of Canada for the Arthur Ellis Award for Best Short Stories.

Barbara's novels centre on Ottawa Police Inspector Michael Green, who in his private life is divorced, with a grown

daughter and a new partner. *Dream Chasers* is the sixth in the series. Her previous two novels, *Fifth Son* and *Honour Among Men*, each won the CWC's Arthur Ellis Award for Best Crime Novel of the Year, in 2005 and 2006. She is the only author ever to have won this award twice.



Barbara currently lives in Ottawa with, as she describes them, "assorted pets and children."

Dream Chasers

(RendezVous Crime, 2007)

Lea Kovacev is a seventeen-year-old Ottawa high-school student, a former Bosnian refugee who emigrated to Canada with her mother several years earlier to escape the violence in their native land. Now Lea has gone missing. Her mother, Marija Kovacev, insists her daughter is a good girl and wouldn't simply run away without telling her. But her mother's trust becomes leavened with fear when she learns that Lea has a serious crush on someone in her life, a secret she has zealously kept from those closest to her.

As head of the Ottawa Police unit for Crimes Against Persons, Inspector Michael Green is drawn to the case. Although he is on holiday he involves himself in the investigation, and when his own grown daughter, Hannah, fails to come home and doesn't answer her cell phone for several days, Green begins to fear the two cases might be connected.

Matters take an ominous turn when a school board counselor who had been looking into Lea's life also goes missing. It is not long before a backpack containing Lea's clothing is found near the banks of the Ottawa River. When the river gives up the nude body of a young woman, and an autopsy reveals she had taken drugs shortly before her death, Green wonders whether it is simply a case of death by misadventure, or whether a sexual predator is at work.

Probing the insulated world of high-school life, Green discovers that Lea had been rehearsing for a play involving a handsome drama teacher and a captivating lead actor. She also showed an interest in a talented local hockey

forward who was poised on the edge of a professional career. Which among these, Green wonders, lies at the heart of her disappearance, and where is his own daughter? As he confronts his troubled history with Hannah, Green struggles to fathom the complex worlds of secretive students and defensive school administrators, aspiring actors and ambitious athletes, professional sports agents and family hangers-on, and before the case is resolved not only Marija Kovacev's world, but Green's own, will be turned upside down.

Insightful and nuanced

Dream Chasers is a well-crafted, character-driven novel in which events flow from the personalities of the key players in the story. The author draws on her considerable experience as a family psychologist to weave an intricate tale about the often-tumultuous lives of youths on the cusp of entering an adult world. The result is an intriguing (if not always comforting) novel that sustains the reader and will resonate with parents. Insightful, nuanced, and entertaining, *Dream Chasers* might well be Barbara Fradkin's best novel to date.

Jim Napier can be reached at jim.napier52@gmail.com