

Grace Note

When a cold case turns hot

Suspended Sentences

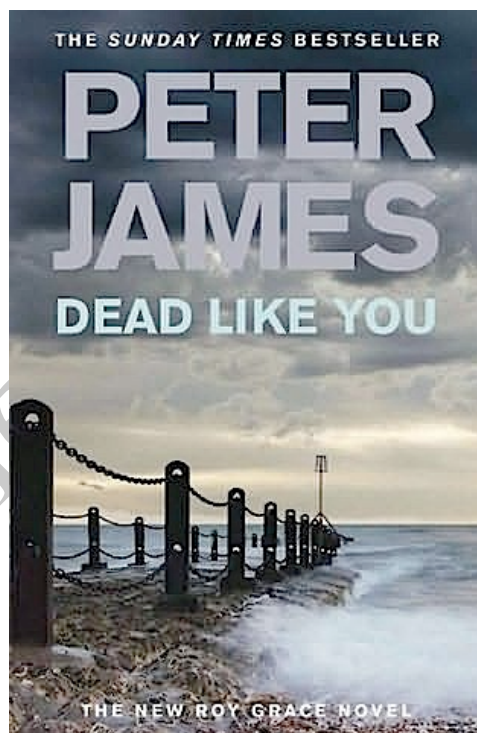
by Jim Napier

This week, a fine thriller that will keep you on the edge of your seat while perfectly illustrating that it's possible to write a compelling suspense tale without resorting to graphic and gratuitous violence. It comes from the pen of the gifted British author Peter James, and is the sixth and latest in his series chronicling the exploits of Detective Superintendent Roy Grace of the Sussex Constabulary.

**Peter James, *Dead Like You*
(Macmillan, 2010)**

Brighton, December 25th, 1997, and Rachel Ryan has been celebrating. Well, perhaps over-celebrating. Abandoning any hope of finding a taxi in the early hours of Christmas morning she makes her way homeward on foot through the rain. When she sees a man struggling to load a large object into a van she moves to help him. In an instant he overpowers and sedates her, and bundles her into his van.

Rachel had become the most recent victim of what came to be known as the Shoe Man, a perpetrator drawn to women who wear sexy, expensive footwear. But over a decade has passed and the crimes have gone unsolved, five victims identified and a sixth, Rachel Ryan, who had never been found.



Fast forward to the Christmas season today. Detective Superintendent Roy Grace has had a tough year: his case load had included locating a young man who had been deliberately buried alive, busting a snuff-movie ring, a case of identity theft involving homicide, and a killer who'd faked his disappearance. But now Grace has much to look forward to: his lover is due to give birth to their child in six month's time. They plan to marry just as soon as he can jump through the bureaucratic hoops needed to have his wife Sandy, who vanished nearly ten years earlier, declared legally dead. Her disap-

The Sherbrooke *Record*, Friday, July 23, 2010

pearance so many years ago prompts Grace to think about the Shoe Man, a open file that has dogged him for so many years. Could his wife have been among the victims? And what of the Shoe Man? Is he still alive, and if so, where is he now? Morbid thoughts, perhaps, for the majority of people, but perfectly plausible for the man selected to head up a new Cold Case Team.

The question takes on a new urgency when a new series of assaults seems to bear the hallmark of the Shoe Man. On New Year's Eve an expensively-shod Nicola Taylor leaves a hotel party to return to her room when she sees a woman in the corridor attempting without success to use her key-card to open her door. When Nicola tries to help her, she is overpowered and a chloroform cloth is pressed to her face, and she is bundled into the room. She survives, but can tell the police little except that her attacker was a man dressed in drag.

Barely a week later another woman is assaulted, this time in her own home. In addition to the trauma she's had to endure, she discovers that her very body is considered a crime scene from which the forensic experts must extract every bit of evidence. It is a grim irony for everyone concerned.

When Grace pulls the Shoe Man file from 1997, he makes a disturbing discovery: some of the pages are missing. He strives to understand the significance of the missing pages. Access to the file is heavily controlled. Could one of their own be involved?

When a third woman disappears Grace assembles a major task force to run the man to ground. But sheer manpower is not enough. Grace

must determine whether the recent attacks mark the return of the Shoe Man or a copycat; and if it is the Shoe Man, a nagging question remains: what's he been doing during the past twelve years?

Among the suspects is a taxi-driver called Yac – a carryover from his youth, when he was diagnosed as a Young Autistic Child. Yac, it seems, is fascinated by women's footwear, in particular the expensive sort. A loner, he has a passion for collecting things, and his job allows him to cross paths with women from all walks of life.

Grace wrestles with all this whilst dealing with a new boss, who is very much an unknown, as well as a throwback officer whose sexist attitudes threaten the efficiency of the team, and a detective sergeant whose own domestic life is rapidly falling apart. And Grace revisits his final moments with Sandy, who had begrudged him for always putting his work first. He struggles to cope with the realization that even that degree of dedication has not helped him locate his long-missing wife, or close the Shoe Man file. In desperation he sets out to taunt his nemesis, publicly questioning his manhood. It is a tactic not without its risks, for the rapist knows all about Grace's personal life.

***An engrossing thriller,
sensitively told***

Told through flashbacks from the late 1990s alternating with events taking place today, *Dead Like You* is a finely layered tale, impeccably researched and filled with technical detail. It is also that rare thing, an engrossing thriller sensitively and evocatively told. And it is a mark of the author's engagement with this issue that James actively supports the

The Sherbrooke *Record*, Friday, July 23, 2010

efforts of the British-based Lifecentre, which helps the survivors of sexual assault to rebuild their lives, and invites his readers to join him in that cause.

Jim Napier can be reached at

jim.napier@deadlydiversions.com

© Jim Napier 2010