

Jekyll and Hyde

Appearances can be deceiving

Suspended Sentences

by Jim Napier

Writers are noted for being as varied as the novels they produce. There's the chain-smoking, no-nonsense, rolled-up-shirt-sleeves type (the late Norman Mailer comes to mind), the somewhat distracted, slightly disheveled horn-rimmed-glasses type (think Woody Allen), and the reclusive Little Old Lady (Agatha Christie, until her fame made that persona impossible to maintain). There's even the avuncular Alexander McCall Smith type, ministering to the needs of those around him.

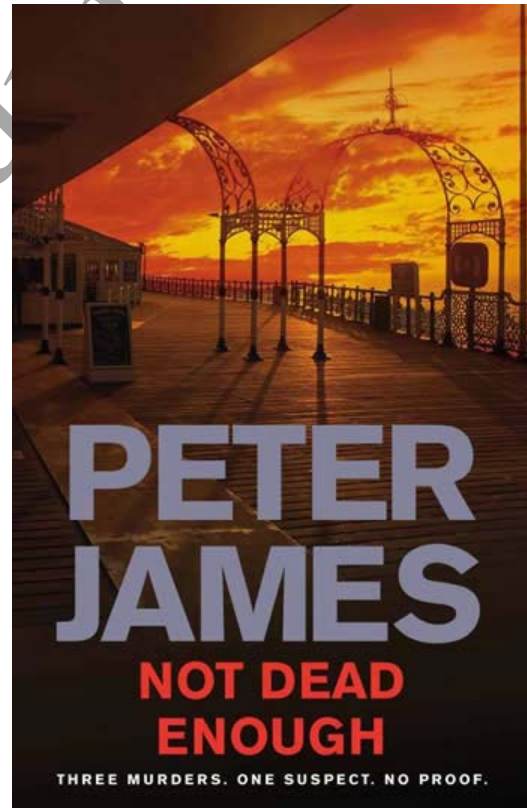
This week's author falls into none of those categories. With his crisp white dress shirt cloaked by an immaculately-tailored pinstripe suit and expensive dress shoes polished to perfection, you might easily take him for an investment banker, a corporate lawyer or perhaps an upper-echelon British civil servant.

You'd be wrong. Although his public-school education is evident in his elegant dress, urbane bearing, and precise speech, Peter James spends his days devising ingenious ways to stalk, torture and kill people. In print, that is; for James is one of Britain's most talented crime writers. His novels demonstrate that appearances can be deceiving.

Peter James

Peter James must be one of the very few people who has managed to live up to the U.S. Army slogan, "Be all that you

can be." Born in England in 1948, James attended Charterhouse, a prestigious independent British school. Following graduation he studied at the Ravensbourne Film School, subsequently producing several notable films, including *The Bridge of San Luis Rey*, starring Robert De Niro, and *The Merchant of Venice*, starring Al Pacino, Jeremy Irons and Joseph Fiennes.



In his spare time somehow James has found time to carve out an equally impressive niche as a novelist. To date

his seven-teen novels have been translated into over two dozen languages, and have garnered multiple international prizes.

James and his partner Helen divide their time between a Georgian manor house in Sussex and a flat in Notting Hill, London, which they share with two hounds, Phoebe and Oscar. When not writing he is a passionate skier and collects classic and modern cars, some of which he races.

Not Dead Enough
(Macmillan, 2007)

Suburban housewife Katie Bishop has stopped at a petrol station on a dual carriageway outside of Brighton on her way home. She little suspects that her journey will be her last. Returning from the booth after paying for her gas, she enters her car and drives off. Only then does she notice a movement in her rear view mirror. Someone is in the car with her. She feels a sharp blade against her throat. A man's voice says 'Just keep driving, Katie.'

The voice is familiar.

The next day Brian Bishop is on the golf course, in the midst of a tournament, when detectives approach and inform him of his wife's death. He is a suspect, of course; in homicide cases close relatives always are. Perversely, Bishop wants to continue his game, explaining that his partners will be disqualified if he fails to finish. The detectives do not miss his obvious *sang-froid*.

The investigation into Katie Bishop's death is assigned to Sussex Detective Superintendent Roy Grace, aided by his sergeant, Glenn Branson. Relations between the two are strained: after quarreling with his wife, Branson has been thrown out of his hose, and is

staying with Grace. It is not a marriage made in heaven: Branson leaves clothes, CDs, and leftover food strewn about the house, and Grace is not best pleased. Fortunately he is occupied with his own lady friend, Cleo Morey, who is the Chief Pathologist for the Sussex Police.

The crime scene is macabre: the cleaning lady had arrived at the family home to find Katie Bishop had been stripped naked and tied to the bedposts, with a World War Two gas mask beside her. She had been strangled.

While Bishop's home is poured over by forensics experts the police arrange for him to stay at a local hotel, with instructions to remain there until their preliminary enquiries are completed. The noose begins to tighten around Brian Bishop's neck. His alibi (being in London before the golf tournament), is questioned when his car number plate appears on a speed camera outside of London that night. A check of police computer files reveals that the businessman has a record some years earlier for rape and assault. Bishop's business has cash-flow problems, and a few months earlier a three million-pound life insurance policy had taken out on his wife, although Bishop denies any knowledge of it.

Soon afterwards Bishop goes missing from the hotel. Police discover that he has a girlfriend, Sophie Harrington, and CCTV cameras reveal that when he left the hotel he walked in the direction of her flat. When Sophie is found murdered, and his semen and DNA are found on her body, the case against Brian Bishop seems complete.

Or is it? Sophie had been stalked by someone else; and that person is now stalking Grace's girlfriend, Cleo Morey.

Once again, appearances can be deceiving.

A layered, compelling thriller

In *Not Dead Enough* James has crafted a subtly-layered, compelling novel that takes the genre of thriller writing to new heights. There is violence, but it is not gratuitously graphic; the puzzle and suspense take centre stage, leading us beyond greed, love and lust to a darker, more sinister motive.

James' finely-crafted, tightly-woven tale carries readers along effortlessly to a gripping and original climax, and leaves us wanting more. A year ago I reviewed the first in Peter James' series of Roy Grace novels, *Dead Simple*, which I described as one of the best crime thrillers I'd read in a long while. *Not Dead Enough* is every bit as good.

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