ForeWord Reviews

TRUE CRIME

Cracking Cases: The Science of Solving Crimes
Henry C. Lee
Thomas W. O'Neil
Prometheus Books
978-1-57392-985-1
(April 2002)

When attorney Robert Shapiro asked Henry Lee to help his team clear O.J. Simpson of murder charges during what even then was already being called “the trial of the century,” the veteran forensic scientist was utterly unfamiliar with the football star. Not long afterward, Lee’s testimony targeted serious errors that had been made during the official investigation—and helped the defense to clinch its case. His name leaped into the headlines, and today the prolific Taiwan-bred author is a popular figure on the lecture circuit, where he discusses murder cases with the same chatty aplomb he brings to this book.

Having consulted with hundreds of law-enforcement agencies, Connecticut-based Lee covers in this collection an array of homicides that share a common theme: husbands killing wives. Cutting a sobering swath from Hawaii to Miami, these include the O.J. case and another high-profile incident, widely known by its revelatory nickname, “the woodchipper murder.” For each case, Lee offers a general chronology, describing his own involvement in a readable fashion that merges travelogue with autopsy report. Sparing no gory details in these narratives, he also includes in each chapter a set of scientific data, such as charts and lab reports. Number-shy readers will be compelled to skip these, and can still find much to enjoy even if they do, but for those who put their minds to it the scientific bits add a framework seldom found in true-crime books.

Lee is every inch a professional, whether discussing the condition of linguine in seafood sauce as it appears when removed from a murder victim’s digestive tract or patiently explaining that “mist is the term used to describe the high-velocity type of bloodstain.” While horror is his stock in trade, he shares it with readers in a warmly personal way that keeps the shivers down while revealing the evil that men do.

Anneli Rufus