

## Death Circles the Square

**Bernard Harland**

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In Hollywood getting to the top can be murder. Star-studded foul play abounds in Bernard Harland's mystery/suspense novel *Death Circles the Square* in which homicide and desire complicate the London premiere of a romance movie.

The novel focuses on a group of several actors. The fatal premiere is hosted by vain Tony Caverly and his gold-digging wife Constance. When the film's star dies under suspicious circumstances reserved professorial Bill the husband of the sexy and confident female lead Dina uses his sleuthing skills. As Bill explores a web of jealousy and death his own marriage threatens to become as dysfunctional as the ones he studies.

Harland's background helps realistically sketch the fast-paced cutthroat world of superstardom. An avid film buff since childhood Harland capitalizes on his fascination with the silver screen to evoke its glamour with a devotee's enthusiasm. While the reader partakes of Harland's excitement for film the grueling realities of the acting craft are also evoked well. Because of his stints as both an actor and a set designer Harland literally has a behind-the-scenes perspective on the subjects he covers in *Death Circles the Square*. His true-to-life depiction of an actor's world provides some grounding for the breathless descriptions of celebrity culture.

Besides being an actor Harland has also worked as an architect while coordinating Long Island University's Interior Design program. Such experience translates into a flair for description as in a passage where Tony Caverly inspects wife Constance's bathroom for signs of infidelity: "Constance's bathroom...was all Italian Cr&232;me and Norwegian Rose marble with gold fittings and scented with her favorite perfumed oils and soaps from Floris. The utilitarian bathrooms of [Tony's] youth...had white fittings and tile floors. For...his own bathroom he'd chosen iridescent dark emerald pearl granite for the floor and vanity top." Through Harland's judicious use of detail the reader can see that Constance is showy and feminine while Tony is a restrained personality. Harland hits such grace notes throughout the book.

Not only is the book vividly written but it is also perfectly paced. The action off strongly *in medias res* and Harland's asides give readers enough information so that they do not get lost. Short chapters keep the momentum going; frequent flashbacks though initially puzzling elucidate characters' pasts and motives. Harland directs his varied cast masterfully fleshing out each member with carefully chosen words and deeds. The characters may be stock types but Harland excels in all other areas making this an addictive novel for mystery lovers crime fans or those who enjoy the vicarious thrills of celebrity.

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