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Mystery

Everybody Wants an Oscar: The Hollywood Murder Mysteries Book Four
Peter S. Fischer
The Grove Point Press
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Characters from Hollywood's past come back to Technicolor life in this fast-paced, well-crafted mystery.

Everybody Wants an Oscar, the fourth book in Peter S. Fischer's The Hollywood Murder Mysteries series, is another hard-boiled detective novel following cinema publicist Joe Bernardi as he unravels mysteries against the backdrop of the post-WWII film industry.

In this book, set in 1950, murder rides alongside Hollywood drama: three women are vying for an Academy Award and a mysterious V.J. Shelley stole Joe's novel and turned it into a screenplay. But, have no doubt, murder is present—or is it suicide? Either way, plagiarist Virginia Jenks is dead, and it's up to Joe to find out what happened.

The novel's cast list is a veritable who's who of Hollywood at the time. While readers will easily follow the novel without full knowledge of the real-life players, quick research into Fischer's characters—like Jane Wyman, Gertrude Lawrence, and Eleanor Parker—will give readers an enjoyable overview of the era. Plus, set alongside production of the film version of Tennessee Williams' *The Glass Menagerie*, the novel whets readers' appetite for classic film and literature.

Fischer keeps the plot moving a good clip, but makes sure readers are keeping up by slowing down pivotal scenes and recapping or emphasizing vital details.

Joe is clearly in the know around Hollywood, but rather than making readers feel like outsiders, he lets them in on the stuff insiders know—for example, "Oswald and I have met for lunch at Musso & Franks (nobody calls it The Musso & Frank Grill) …" These details also adeptly divulge a sense of the time and place; Fischer has clearly done his research.

The prominence of female characters sheds light on the advancements, or lack thereof, that feminism had made at the time. Fischer is by no means overt or political about the

topic—the plot of the novel is his primary concern—but readers will be intrigued to see the odds women were up against to gain respect and validation for themselves and their work.

Joe's first person narration is conversational and matter of fact—a spot-on fit for the genre. The dialogue is clipped, fast-paced, and colloquial—"Yes. That woman. Virginia. She's dead." and "Call an ambulance. Tell 'em to make it quick." Readers can almost see Hollywood actors of the area, black and white on the big screen, saying the lines.

As with the rest of the series, the cover art seems a bit amateur for the caliber of writing—rather than a cohesive design, it's a melding of stock imagery and simple design work.

Fischer was the co-creator of *Murder, She Wrote* and wrote for *Columbo*, and this series of novels seems to be a project that he savors. His experience and enjoyment pay off for readers as he delves with excellence into the craft of writing and the development of characters and setting.

These novels will appeal to mystery lovers, vintage Hollywood aficionados, and anyone who loves a fast-paced, well-crafted read.

Melissa Wuske