



Murder aboard the Highland Rose: The Hollywood Murder Mysteries Book 18

Peter S. Fischer

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An atmospheric, thrilling caper through one of the grand ages of Hollywood, Murder Aboard the Highland Rose is full of fun.

Harking back to the golden age of hard-boiled mysteries, Peter S. Fischer's *Murder Aboard the Highland Rose* is an enjoyable romp through 1960s Hollywood.

Author and screenwriter Joe Bernardi is recovering from his loss at the Oscars and trying to find inspiration for a new book when a project falls into his lap. The unsolved 1929 murder of talent agent Archie Farrell aboard a yacht owned by Joseph Kennedy has resurfaced, and there are plenty of people in power who want Joe Bernardi writing the real facts—as long as they don't implicate certain power players.

Against the wishes of his wife Bunny, Joe begins looking into the case. Witnesses include film stars Gladys George and Gloria Swanson, as well as other famous Hollywood icons ... any of whom also might have done Archie in.

The novel is a rollicking ride through old Hollywood. Bernardi uses his charm and wit to get him where he needs to go—and that often lands him in hot water. His voice and personality fit the subject matter and time frame perfectly; he's a joy to read about. Secondary characters, including the many once-glamorous Hollywood stars who are involved in the case, are given plenty of personality and sparkle as well, though most of them tend to come in and out of the story in small bursts. Bernardi's wife and daughter are underdeveloped and function more as props than anything else.

Fast and action-filled, this mystery is also a clean read—short on bad language and graphic violence. This does not diminish its tension. It is intricate but moves at a good pace; red herrings appear and disappear with regularity, and there is a solid thread about culpability that runs throughout. The result is a refreshing and lighthearted book.

In the end, the true killer is not given away too soon—nor do they come from out of the blue. There are a few awkward transitions, but the text captures the feeling of a pulpy 1960s whodunit well, down to its wisecracking characters. Bernardi's profession contributes to scene-setting Hollywood details, and his doubts and struggles as a writer give him depth.

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ANGELA MCQUAY (November 20, 2018)

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