ForeWord Reviews

Send Out the Clowns
Bill Walls
Harry Hoge
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> *She wore purple, a tight-fitting gown reflecting the spotlight with a shimmering glow that changed color with each subtle movement … Lavender nail polish sparkled in the light, and adamantine jewelry, which would appear gaudy in any other environment, accented her dark skin in a way that Cleopatra would envy.*

In this unusual disguise, Houston homicide detective Geraldine "Gerry" Gardner shows her new partner, Frank Rivers, her hidden talents as a stand-up comic when she goes undercover to help him discover who is killing the comics known in the trade as clowns.

The mystery begins appropriately on Halloween, when Rivers is sent to investigate the murder of a Vietnamese male dressed in a clown suit. Though unclear about motivation, Rivers is certain that the murder is the first of a serial killer's work.

Discovering that the victim was a stand-up comic, Frank and Gerry check out two comedy clubs owned by the influential Rueben Rankin. Rivers is convinced that Rankin is the murderer, but proof is scarce. When a second clown is murdered, Gerry thinks the killer is leaving messages for Frank, and decides to go undercover.

While working hard to figure out who the killer is, Frank is also trying to keep alive his long-term relationship with his significant other, Pauley. Her jealousy of Frank's attractive partner, and an opportunity to expand her exclusive fashion boutique business, lead Pauley to move out, and creating one of the weak points of the novel. At the book's onset, the relationship "had all the intimacy, both communal and carnal, enjoyed by most married couples." Yet, by the end, "I think it's best we not try to fix our problems until I get this mess organized. I wouldn't be good company for you. It would be difficult for you and your work."

Pauley moves not to a temporary hotel room, but back to an apartment she has continued to pay rent on! The distance traveled in the relationship from a marriage-equivalent to total dissolution just seems too far, too fast.

Frank’s lieutenant is also acting strange, checking up on his abilities with his partner, Gerry, and getting advance information on both the case and department doings. How is the lieutenant getting her information, why do all clues lead back to Rankin, and who is really sending out the clowns? These are all questions that Frank is seeking the answers to, as he rushes to prevent Gerry from becoming the next clown victim.

The partnership between Frank and Gerry is the strongest element of this first mystery, whose authors met in 1958 and have collaborated on two previous novels. Gerry’s humor and spontaneity play off well against Frank’s careful research and introspection. The partnerships, both between authors and characters, promises more interesting mysteries with unusual twists.