

We Don't Need No Stinking Badges: The Hollywood Murder Mysteries Book Two

Peter S. Fischer

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A former TV writer continues his old-time Hollywood mystery series, seamlessly interweaving fact and fiction in this drama that goes beyond the genre's clichés.

We Don't Need No Stinking Badges, the second in the Hollywood Murder Mysteries series by former television writer Peter S. Fischer, again transports readers to post-World War II Tinseltown inhabited by cinema publicist Joe Bernardi. After the collapse of his B movie house in the first book, Joe gets a gig with Warner Brothers in Mexico on the set of *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre*. Joe brushes elbows with Humphrey Bogart, incompetent movie staff, inefficient Mexican officials, and south-of-the-border gangsters. When a murder occurs, Joe must decide if it's worth exposing the Americans and Mexicans around him to reveal the culprit.

After establishing his abilities to deftly create period settings in Book One, Fischer takes his talent one delightful step further here as Joe works on the set of a famous movie, interacting with Bogart, director John Huston, and actress Ann Sheridan. The author seamlessly interweaves fact and fiction; he thankfully does not afflict Joe with starry-eyed fan worship. Instead, the protagonist worries if Huston's annoyance with the film's progress will cost him his job, and amiably chats with Bogart as he seeks the scoop on the actor's recent bar brawl. Joe and the actor become friendly acquaintances.

Joe's trademark one-liners return, with more dryness and understatement than before. He routinely makes deadpan complaints about Mexican food and the inability of chefs to make satisfactory Yankee fare. He vows to "take over the kitchen, at the point of a gun if need be."

As before, the secondary fictional players remain as nuanced as Fischer's portrayals of real-life actors and of Joe. In a genre where duplicitous officials and even seedier gangsters have become cliché, Fischer complicates these tropes. The Mexican officials operate in a gray zone, with understandable motives given their country's politics. While the adage claims no honor exists among thieves, the Mexican bureaucrats and the gangsters all behave according to their own honor codes. Indeed, much of the suspense comes from Joe's ever-shifting relationships with both parties. As the story unfolds, Joe and readers constantly question whom they should trust.

Joe has a love interest stateside; newspaper reporter Bunny Leshner. Their playful bickering and *double entendres* over the phone masterfully depict what occurs when one's longtime friend becomes one's lover, and the subtle ways in which the relationship changes while remaining the same.

Strong characterization propels this book. Toward the end, the crosses and double-crosses become confusing, as seemingly inconsequential things, such as a dead woman who was only mentioned in passing in the beginning, now become matters on which the whole plot turns. One wishes the author had done a little more pipe-laying. Textually, the Spanish words throughout the text are not italicized as they should be, and one is even misspelled.

Such minor hiccups should not deter mystery lovers, Hollywood buffs, or anyone who adores a good yarn.

JILL ALLEN (May 2, 2013)

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