

THE
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PRESS

Doug Groves

DEATH ON
FOUR WHEELS

An Inspector Allardene Mystery

THREADBONE
CRIME
SHELF



Doug Graves is the pen name of Thurston Trebor. He was born in the West Country and worked for 20 years as an Accountant for The Threadbone Corporation. His early novel Death Comes Racing was based on an incident he witnessed as a 36 year old at the Knowelton Race Course. Writing was, he says, his therapy. Published in 2012, Death Comes Racing propelled him to regional recognition and won him the first of his 4 West Country Crime Writers' Association's Golden Candlestick Awards. He is a two-times nominee for the Hengistbury Times-Threadbooker Prize for Crime Fiction.

Doug is the author of more than seven books. He lives in the West Country and is married to Threadbone Press Crime Series Editor Minty Trebor. His latest novel Death Takes A Cruise will be published by Threadbone Crimeshelf in the Spring of 2017.

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DOUG GRAVES

Death on Four Wheels



CHAPTER ONE

The throaty rasp of the high powered V8 pierced the early morning air as, with infinite skill and consummate ease, Dave Clark-Five caressed his Trabant into Millers, through the Stella Curve and down the gently falling path of Magners. Man and machine. Not, in Dave's case, man versus machine, for here was a man at one with himself and his car; a man at one with the world and currently 243 points clear in the Formula One World Championship. With 14 wins and no score draws this season and a machine so reliable you could bet your Monaco apartment on it, Dave and Team Squirrel were riding high. His nearest rival, Messerschmitt ace Enzo Testeronno was having no such luck: three stalls, one failure properly to use mirrors, a dodgy reverse parking manouevre and an incident with the handbrake had kept him in the paddock for the last eight races. The Stewards were considering his future and so were his team. The mighty German car giant for whom winning was everything were growing increasingly impatient and there was no shortage of young talent at the *Pentridge School for Would-be Racing Drivers* ready to take his seat.

Dave quickly checked the 35 instruments 12 screens and 26 buttons on his state-of-the-art Trabant Racing steering wheel as he eased the paddles which would take him up to 7th gear and propel him through the deceptively steep rise of the Curva Budswisser. "Easy now" said the voice in his intercom. It was Chief Mechanic Jack Wrench, "*the torsion bar in the rear suspension spandrel is reporting unusual vibrations*" ... "*better bring her in*". So much for the apartment

in Monaco.

Quietly cursing, Dave eased the canary yellow Trabant down through the gears and, for the first time, noticed he was in a foreign country. The Grand Prix circus certainly took its toll. 128 races in 18 weeks was a lot of miles, a lot of tension and a lot of races.

No longer on the edge of concentration, Dave allowed his mind to wander. What had he been thinking of last night? Leaving rival Enzo Testeroni's girlfriend's flat with a super-hybrid power chain and single wishbone suspension unit tucked under his arm had been a mistake. Perhaps the biggest mistake of his career. It was reckless, thoughtless and heavy and seriously spoilt the line of his Topshop romper jacket. Idiot! He had risked his career, his reputation and his back: a back only recently recovered from multiple fractures following a head-on-incident in the Ferndown *Threadbone Extra* carpark.

And why Enzo's glamorous girlfriend for Christ's sake? "*Of all the parc fermes in all the towns, in all the world, you walk into mine*" he had quipped. Seventeen year old Augusta had missed the point entirely, barely knowing what a *parc fermee* was. Dave felt like a fool. Still he couldn't deny it had been worth it. She made an excellent *creme-de-menthe surprise* and the sex was good. Very good. Unbelievable good. But why risk exposing the super-hybrid drive-train and single wishbone suspension Trabant technology when he well knew that Messerschmitt would kill to acquire it? Surely he could have left it home for the local council to pick up in the

morning?

Arriving at his garage he switched off the power and the highly trained pit crew sprung into action. Within twenty minutes he was out of the car, his Hans Device hanging unwanted around his 26 inch G-force strengthened neck.

“Two twenty-three point zero zero four”, Bob Speed told him. *“Not bad for first practice”*.

“What about Nico?” Dave asked. *“Fifty-nine seconds dead”*, came the unwelcome reply. Dammit! Nico was quicker. Nico was always quicker, but then Nico was sleeping with the boss’s daughter Fraulein Yunkers. Dave suspected Nico was getting better equipment, newer parts, lighter components. Christ, his car even looked different: there was no spare wheel on the bonnet and no tow bar on the back for a start.

Still, come race day, when it was down to grit, determination and first into the first corner, Dave was still king. Starting 150 yards ahead of the rest saw to that. Sure it was controversial and the Stewards occasionally threatened to look into it, but Head of Scrutiny Charlie White-Lightning-Brightning was a good guy and, as importantly, Dave’s brother-in-law.

“See if you can find the problem” Dave barked in the general direction of the solid bank of three technicians hiding behind flickering computer screens. It was 6pm in England and *Eggheads* was about to start. Soon the silken voice of Jeremy Vine would pierce the sound of screaming hybrid turbo V8s with patent fuel injection tranckle nuts.

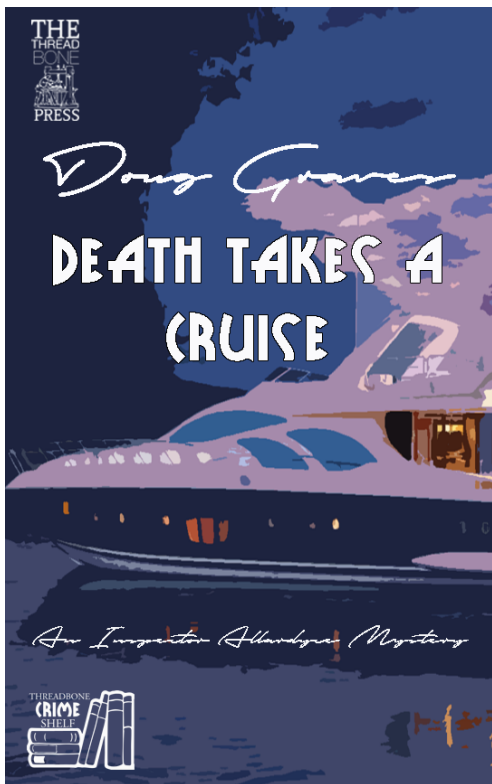
Dave showered and changed into his Marks and Spencer Italian Collection leisurewear, admiring the cut of his slim-fit cardigan; so impractical in the heat of Dubai, but so flattering on a man whose 43 year old body could not defy gravity for ever. “*See you later guys*” Dave called out, in the certain knowledge everyone else would be working all night and Nico would be practicing, practicing, practicing; trying to go even faster.

Searching for the keys to his V12 Vauxhall Cresta, Dave absent mindedly turned over the card he had been passed in the Casino earlier that morning. “*Come to the house at 8*” it said in a barely decipherable 17 year old hand.

“*Interesting*”, Dave mused. “*Looks like the fish has swallowed the bait*”, he added to himself, theatrically.” “*And I had no idea she swallowed*”.

Intrigued by the thought and absorbed in his task, Dave did not notice the shadowy figure reaching into the toolbox stored in the dark recesses of the garage. Didn't register the black glove which even now was probing the 12 to 34 cm titanium strengthened Aldi Home-tech spanners. Spanners of a weight and thickness perfect for crushing a man's skull.

NOW READ ON ...

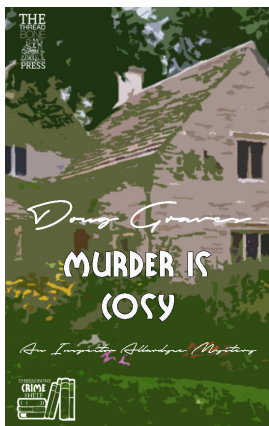


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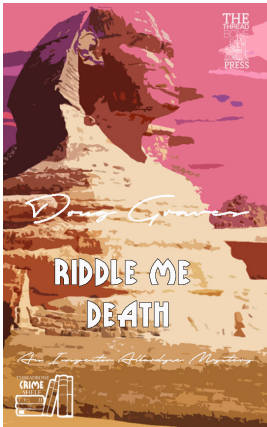
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