

Tale for Our Times

James serves up another winner

Suspended Sentences

by Jim Napier

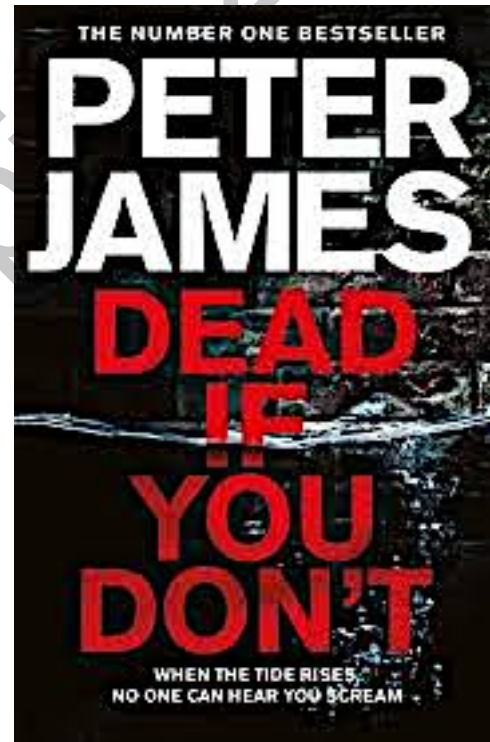
With one eye firmly on current events, best-selling crime writer Peter James has just released his fourteenth novel in the Roy Grace series, and it's compelling, topical, and very much up to the mark.

Saturday promises to be a fun day out for Grace and his son, Bruno, as they attend a soccer match in Brighton. For both of them it should be a bonding experience: Grace had only recently learned that he had a son years earlier by his long-missing wife Sandy, who'd recently died in Germany. Bruno is now ten years old, and they are trying to forge a relationship, not made simpler by the fact that, believing that Sandy was dead, Grace had remarried and has a new wife and an infant son of his own.

But it will be anything but a routine day out for Grace and Bruno.

The match has not even begun when the security commander for the stadium gets a dreaded message on his private cell phone.

There will be a bomb planted in the spectator stands at the match; cancel the match and pay a ransom of £250,000 or it will be detonated.



Grace alerts the police officer in charge at the stadium, who in turn informs his superiors. They heighten on-the-ground security at the entrances, and use their many CCTV cameras to scan the stadium, looking for anyone suspicious, anything out of the

ordinary. And as luck will have it, it's Roy Grace, sitting with his son only a few rows away, who thinks he's spotted their man.

Among the thirty-thousand other spectators, local soccer fan Kipp Brown is blissfully unaware of the terrorist threat. He has other things on his mind: his son Aleksander has disappeared at the stadium, and it soon appears that he's been kidnapped. When he's contacted about a ransom, Brown panics: he's in no position to pay a ransom, even a modest one. A high-flying financial counselor, Brown is addicted to gambling. Even his wife Stacey doesn't know that he's on the very brink of bankruptcy. Regardless of what the kidnapers may think, he simply doesn't have the money to pay to get his son back.

When Grace handles the immediate threat poised by the bomb, it looks as though his biggest problems are behind him. However, Kipp Brown's son

remains missing. As they look into things the suspicion forms that someone among a local group of Eastern European immigrants may be involved in the kidnapping, making it necessary for Grace and his team to investigate the shadowy world of ethnic subgroups and their old ways, ways that do not always welcome the light of day.

And that's only the beginning.

Dead if you Don't is an impeccably-researched and grippingly-plotted tale, with James's trademark attention to detail. As usual it is a layered plot, with two apparently-unrelated crimes intertwined, and backstories involving key figures on both sides of the law combining to weave a challenging and engrossing thriller. With thirty novels, a short story collection, a novella and a non-fiction work under his belt, Peter James remains at the very top of his game.

Previously posted on *Reviewing the Evidence*, July 2018.

§Since 2005 Jim Napier's reviews and interviews have appeared in several Canadian newspapers and on various crime fiction and literary websites, including his own award-winning site, *Deadly Diversions*. His own crime novel, *Legacy*, was published in the Spring of 2017.