

No one does it better

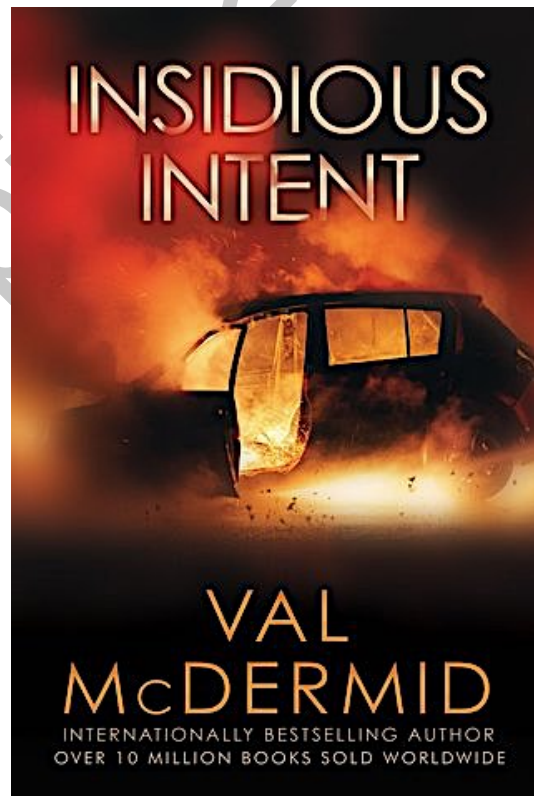
Val McDermid's latest breaks the boundaries

Suspended Sentences

by Jim Napier

Psychologist Dr. Tony Hill and DCI Carol Jordan are back on the job, but not without more than their share of emotional baggage. Carol is burdened by recent events in her past. She's spent the past six months rebuilding her late brother's barn conversion, trying to erase the horrific violence that had taken place there, events that had culminated in the deaths of her brother and his lover. Carol's personal life has deteriorated to the point where, after a night of drinking, she'd been involved in a road traffic accident. Members of her team had derailed the resulting inquiry by claiming that the breathalyser used to establish her alcohol level had been faulty. The resulting acquittal, bad enough in its own right, had led to similar verdicts for several other drink-driver defendants, and one of them had gone free only to kill himself and others in yet another incident. Now an energetic reporter, aided by a disgruntled officer who is nursing his own grudge, is on the trail of the cover-up, and it seems to be only a matter of time before Carol's professional life—as well as

those of several officers involved in the cover-up—are in tatters. Tony can only watch as the woman he loves descends further and further into dark places where even he is powerless to help.



As if all this were not enough, other members of the team are carrying their own burdens. DS Paula McIntyre and her partner, Dr. Elinor Blessing, have taken a fourteen-year-old youth into their home following the murder of his

mother. Already withdrawn, Torin McAndrew is becoming increasingly moody, and Paula worries that he might be on drugs, or something worse. Her instincts are correct: Torin is hiding something. But it's not what Paula suspects, and she and Elinor will need help from others within the CID team to deal with it.

But all of that must be put aside as the CID team grapples with a series of deaths in the region. The bodies of young women are being found in burned-out cars, all apparently unconnected with one another, and Carol is certain that there is a serial killer on the loose. The culprit is cunning, though, and even with his formidable skills

profiler Tony Hill has nothing to work with. And when the team does move toward identifying a suspect, it seems the person, aided by a formidable lawyer, will walk free to kill again.

Does anyone do it better? Reading one of Val McDermid's novels is like taking a Master Class in creative writing, her nuanced characters and layered backstories encompassing profound moral themes. Her latest work is yet another fine novel to add to her already-unmatched canon of original and compelling tales. With the passing of P. D. James and Ruth Rendell Val McDermid reigns unchallenged as simply the finest crime writer of our age.

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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. He can be reached at jnapier@deadlydiversions.com

