

Madness in the air

Robinson's latest explores our troubled times

Suspended Sentences

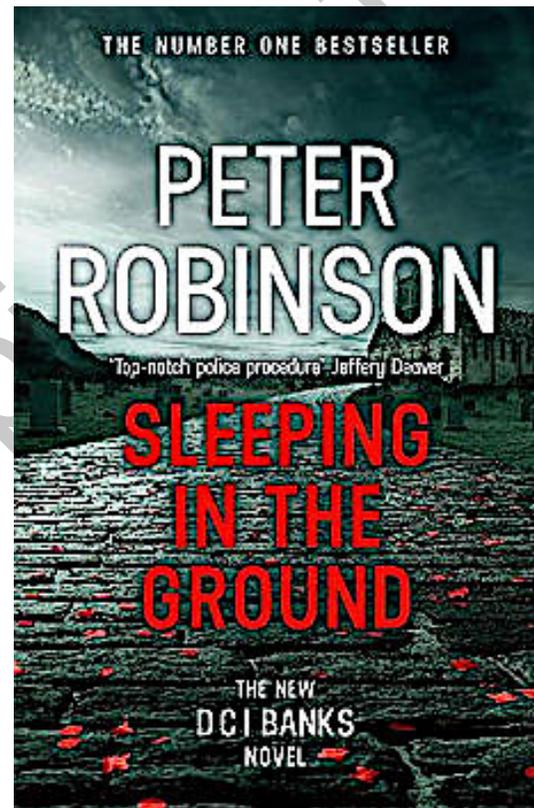
by Jim Napier

In a small village in the Yorkshire Dales a wedding party gathers outside a picturesque country church. The joyful scene at St. Mary's Church is frozen in time as blood suddenly appears on the bride's wedding dress, and she falls to the ground. A moment later the groom falls as he too is hit by gunfire, then the maid of honour drops, a guest is hit, and a bridesmaid's head is torn apart as grotesque trails of blood snake among the others in the wedding group.

Ironically, at this very moment and not that far away Detective Superintendent Alan Banks is attending a funeral service for his first love. His mobile is turned off, so he knows nothing of the unfolding event.

The list of casualties reads like something out of a natural disaster, except that this is no event due to natural circumstances. Someone has willfully planned and executed it, with a malevolence that speaks of monsters. Before long we learn that among the dead are the bride, Laura Tindall, and her close friend, the maid of honour. Also two bridesmaids and the father of the groom. Among the injured, some with life-altering wounds, are the groom, the wedding photographer, several guests, and one

of Bank's own CID team. Not all of them will survive.



The carnage leaves the survivors and the police, with the soul-searching question that will both guide their investigation and haunt their private thoughts: Why? Why did this occur? What could have driven someone to wreck such havoc, such suffering, on people he or she didn't even know?

Before long Bank's team trace a vehicle seen at the church to the home of Martin Edgeworth, a retired dentist; they find him in the basement, dead, and next to his body an AR-15 rifle of the type used in the wedding shootings. An apparent suicide, the man has been dead for more than two days—just barely long enough to have done the deed. Among his possessions are some newspaper clippings about the forthcoming wedding of Laura Tindall and Benjamin Kemp. His prints are on the AR-15 and on a revolver involved in his death, and gunshot residue as well. Both guns were registered to Edgeworth. It seems the police have got their killer.

Or have they?

Sleeping in the Ground is the superbly-conceived 24th novel in the widely-acclaimed Inspector Banks Series. Simply on its own merits it is extremely well written: with a challenging plot and believable characters set against the colourful backdrop of the Yorkshire Dales, and textured by the nuanced backstories of the character's lives. But this latest

addition to the Banks canon goes beyond its literary dimensions to confront a vital social issue that reaches across national borders to confront us all. It is a chilling portrayal of the monsters in our midst who seemingly come out of nowhere to sow terror and tragedy amongst us, and in so doing it raises difficult questions about how society can hope to protect itself from those who seem normal on the outside, but who harbor dark and deadly thoughts within. Robinson catalogues and then considers several of the real-world monsters that have perpetrated such crimes, and comes up with no easy answers. As a story it will keep you on the edge of your seat; as a social issue it might very well keep you awake at night.

Postscript: shortly after writing this review I received an email informing me that the Crimewriters of Canada had awarded *Sleeping in the Ground* the Arthur Ellis Award as the Best Crime Novel of 2018. Further validation, if it were needed, that this is an outstanding novel for our troubled times.

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Jim Napier is a professional crime-fiction reviewer and novelist based in Canada. Since 2005 his book reviews and author interviews have been featured in several Canadian newspapers and on multiple websites. His crime novel *Legacy* was published in April of 2017, and the next in the series, *Ridley's War*, is scheduled for release in the Fall of 2018.