

THE
THREAD
BONE
PRESS

Doug Groves

DEATH TAKES A CRUISE

An Inspector Alvord Mystery



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. Wriiing 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 of a Circus Clown will be published by Threadbone Crimeshelf in the Autumn of 2017.

Published by The Threadbone Press
Great Heaving, Dorset, England

Set in Helvetica Neue

Printed in The West Country
© Doug Graves Ltd

First printing 2017



DOUG GRAVES

Death Takes A Cruise



CHAPTER ONE

The high soprano voice that now commanded the steward to install its owner's luggage in "*her usual*" cabin, was instantly recognisable as that known to opera lovers at Covent Garden, La Scala and the Metropolitan in New York: that of *La Superba*; the incomparable Maria Careless.

"*And mind you don't damage it*", Captain Ulysses Kythera added, "*the buckles alone are worth more than you are!*" The steward obeyed, leaving Madam and the Captain with a slight bow of the head, signalling just how much he understood the Captain's concern. Madam was famous - infamous even - for her fiery temper. Only recently she had stormed out of *La Traviata* at *La Fenice* in Venice, protesting the producer's assumption that she - *La Superba* - would stoop to singing "*Sempre Libera*" whilst suspended upside down from a swinging chandelier wearing only a tea towel. "*But Maria*", the intendant had protested. "*Miss Netrebko did it and Ms Georgiou before her!*" "Imbecile", she had retorted, "*do you not know who I am; I who have sung to kings and to presidents. Was it not me who sang Way Down upon the Swanee River to 30 council leaders at the opening of the Upcerne Convention on Sustainable Car Parking?*"

A movement on the gangway caught the Captain's attention. "*Madam will I hope excuse me, we have another guest coming aboard.*" Whether excused or not, captain Kythera made his departure leaving *La Superba* to wonder yet again why she had agreed to join Yannis Acropolis and his odd assortment of companions on this short-break have-it-away-weekend

Aegean mini-cruise. To be sure Yannis' yacht was magnificent: reputedly the most luxurious yacht sailing out of any Mediterranean port, but it was no Viking-Threadbone Cruise Liner and Maria knew the difference.

Perhaps it was the impending premier of Addinsell Threadbone's *Three Blind Mice* in which she was to play the leading role that suggested to her increasingly fragile mind that it was time to relax and take stock. She had never played a clock before and nothing had ever run up and down her in a hurry - at least not since her days in the chorus at The West Dorset Opera when opportunities to understudy the established stars came with a price tag. Maria shuddered at the thought. Mauricio Pongelatero. Yes he had been the worst. An impresario with a reputation for getting his clients parts but only after he had completed a thorough personal investigation into *their* parts first!

"*Ah Signor Pongelatero*", Captain Kythera called, "*So nice to welcome you aboard the Παρθενώνας*", he added in his most obsequious tones. Maria froze. Her former agent and nemesis here! Aboard the Παρθενώνας!

"*Vesti la giubba*", Pongelatero quipped in his easy, disarming but wholly irritating manner, "*I imagine all the usual suspects are here eh?*" "*The millionaires, socialites and philistines eager only to meet the supreme animateur who is Mauricio Pongelatero!*" Captain Yannis hid with the peak of his stylish naval cap what appeared to be a smirk forming on his handsomely-tanned Greek face. "*Perhaps so*", he said, though his demeanour said otherwise.

Turning away and hoping she had evaded his attention, Maria tried to make her exit. “*La Superba*”, Pongelatero called, “*no warm greeting for your primo signor .. for the signor, might I say, who made La Superba superba?*” “*Such ingratitude from one who owes so much and gave so little ...*” Once again Maria winced remembering with what reluctance she had parted with what he now reckoned so little. Only her honour, only her pride, only her private box.

Unable to speak, Maria was rescued by the friendly voice of Ernesto Recitativo, the kindly but ageing tenor who was to play a cross-dressing Farmer’s Wife in the forthcoming production. “*Maria, amore mia*”, he said, taking her arm and simultanbeously admiring the bejewelled Cartier watch which almost anyone might die for. “*Let us drink champagne and remember the old days in that tedious and mind-numbing way old opera stars do in all the best Sky Arts Documentaries!*” Maria readily agreed though she rarely drank alcohol before 8am and almost never whilst in rehearsal. “*Amore mio, si, prego*”, she replied, “*let us get completamente ubriaco*”. She laughed frivolously in her best stage manner, though the insouciant effect for which she strove was marred by the noisy arrival of a helicopter which even now was churning the azure blue sea into splenetic horsetails of the whitest white. So white that they were whiter than white. Whiter than all the whites that had ever been or could ever be; so white were they with their astonishingly white whiteness.

Yannis Acropolis stepped from the helecopter, stooping with practiced ease to avoid the scimitar like blades that even now continued their gyrations only inches above his distinctively

well- groomed cranium.

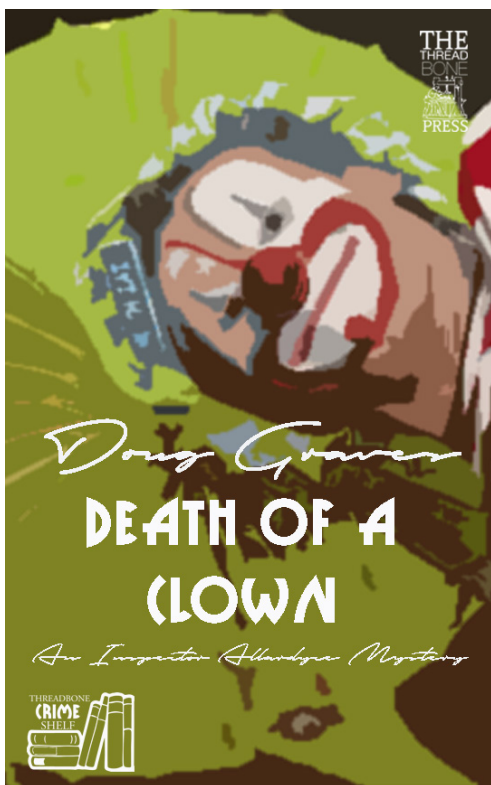
“Οι φίλοι μου” he intoned in his dark Greek baritone, “*my friends. Such joy, such sweetness: καλώς επιβιβάστήκατε*”. “*Welcome aboard innit*”, he translated in order not to alienate non-Greek speaking readers.

“Today we shall relax and tonight we shall feast” Yannis continued. *“And perhaps La Superba will favour us with a song and then tomorrow - ah tomorrow. Tomorrow my friends we shall do something incredible innit: we shall go ashore to buy small Toblerones and Special Edition Mint Aeros and then many things will happen. Who knows? Innit!”*

Later no-one could be quite sure why, amidst the almost manic jollity which erupted once Yannis had completed his small declamation, Maria reached into her purse and seemed to seek reassurance that something was there. Something small, metallic and deadly.

“My own Divina”, the multi-millionnaire Greek lothario intoned, turning towards Maria *“my diva assoluta. The finest voice ever to grace the operatic stage: my voice and a voice to die for innit!”*

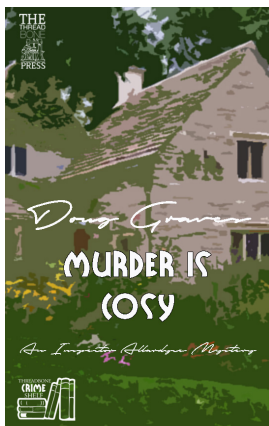
NOW READ ON ...



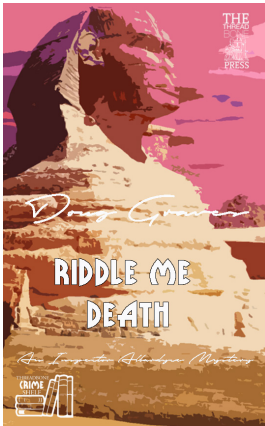
Coming Autumn 2017

From all good Booksellers
or via
The Threadbone Press | Digital Platform

Also by Doug Graves



The Inspector Alladine Mysteries



From all good Booksellers
or via
The Threadbone Press | Digital Platform



An Inspector Allardbyre Mystery

Threadbone Crimeshelf™



The Threadbone Press, Great Heaving, Dorset

UK £15.99