



## Dark Undertakings

*Rebecca Tope*

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Fifty-five-year-old Jim Lapsford makes an unusually healthy-looking corpse. A life-long devotee of vitamin pills and herbal remedies, it seems almost ironic that he has succumbed to a heart attack, but his doctor is convinced that this is the case.

Trainee undertaker Drew Slocombe isn't so sure. As an ex-nurse, Drew is convinced that there is enough conflicting medical evidence to merit a coroner's inquest at least. And then there's Jim's personal life: in addition to a long-suffering wife, two sons, and a grieving terrier, Jim appears to have left behind a series of scorned mistresses.

Everyone else seems happy to accept the doctor's verdict, and Drew knows he shouldn't rock the boat. But can he really turn his back on murder? With plenty of suspects, zero proof, and Jim's cremation just days away, Drew sure has his work cut out for him...

Smart, engrossing, and delightfully refreshing, *Dark Undertakings* is another great mystery from rising star Rebecca Tope.

## Dark Undertakings Details

Date : Published June 23rd 2001 by Minotaur Books (first published 1999)

ISBN : 9780312265700

Author : Rebecca Tope

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## From Reader Review Dark Undertakings for online ebook

### **Ewa says**

Book was OK, characters were OK. However plot was predictable and ending didn't surprise me.

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### **Suzanne says**

I originally picked this up for my mystery club's "Weddings and Funerals" month. Just now getting around to reading it. Only 1 chapter in and I like it.

For the most part I liked this mystery. I liked Drew and the other guys at the funeral home. I especially liked Roxanne and hope she'll be in future books in the series. The mystery was satisfying and I'm sure I'll read more by this author. My only complaint is that the book seemed unnecessarily long - perhaps 20% could've been cut to keep this moving swiftly along.

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### **JenniferB says**

Good suspense (a little too much). Mixture of interesting and annoying. Main character is an undertaker, so a bit too much information about that.

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### **Kirsty Darbyshire says**

i've got really behind with updating around these parts. i remember enjoying this book, which is the first in a series featuring drew slocombe, the new boy at a funeral directors. obviously he's going to end up poking into the deaths he comes across in the business. i wasn't really convinced there was a series in this after this book but i did spend half the book saying "no drew, leave it alone, you'll only get yourself sacked, stop sticking your nose into things!" which is probably a sign of good writing really. i'll certainly try another in the series to see how drew gets on.

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### **Katherine Coleman says**

Not one of her best. Really could get into it.

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### **Shriti Chatterjee says**

I'm kind of berating myself for having picked up this book at all. The enticing cover promised a lot but 500+ pages are proof that it was all for naught.

The book's plot is awful. It is supposed to be a whodunnit but I was so tired of drudging through the chapters that I couldn't care less whether it was accidental death or pre-meditated murder.

Recommended to no one as it was one of my worst reads of this year.

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### **Frances says**

I was somehow surprised to enjoy this. It felt slow, yet in a very gentle and slow way I became very intrigued by the characters. Unusually I didn't worry about the story not moving on quickly, but felt immersed in the simple way the story developed as if I were there. Pleasantly surprised.

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### **Pam Baddeley says**

First in the Drew Slocombe series - I've only read the later volumes previously, when he encounters Thea Osborne and is gradually subsumed into the Cotswold series. In this opening volume, Drew is at the start of his sleuthing career and has been working for a few weeks at an undertaker's where he is the new boy, so is far off from starting his later struggling natural funeral business. Similarly, he and wife Karen are trying to start a family, whereas I've only seen him with his later family situation (which I won't explain to avoid spoilers for anyone who hasn't read those books).

This book has a different style than the Thea Osborne books because we don't just follow Drew around - there are a lot of scenes from other points of view and so we learn things that he is still in ignorance about. Sometimes this can lead to head hopping in a scene or things being developed perhaps more slowly than otherwise.

Drew is unsatisfied about the cause of death of a man his firm is called in to 'remove' and later to arrange the funeral for - the doctor has made a perfunctory examination and chalked it up to a heart attack, in a previously healthy 55 year old man. As Drew investigates, we gradually learn that the dead man had quite a colourful existence with more than one woman 'on the go' at a time, something his wife deliberately shut her eyes to, especially as she had had an unspecified affair herself at some point. Drew tries to obtain evidence against the deadline of an impending cremation, as he feels his suspicions and various circumstantial evidence and hearsay are not enough to convince the police.

A lot of the story is the quite realistic interactions of a 50 year old widow with her grown up sons, one of whom is 'difficult' and as it transpires (view spoiler). The various muddled motives, thoughts, emotions and misunderstandings between people in real life are quite well portrayed though will undoubtedly irritate some readers who just want to get on with the plot and find out 'whodunnit'. But I quite enjoyed the story although it is perhaps a little longer than necessary, and therefore award it a 3 star rating.

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## **Susie says**

A man is found dead at home, in bed. The doctor signs the death certificate as it being a heart attack without doing an autopsy. So an undertaker, who is new to the town, decides that it wasn't a heart attack and takes it upon himself to prove that it was murder and to find out who did it.

This book confused me because NO ONE - not the family, his coworkers, the doctor, etc, no one wanted to find out if it was murder, even though they suspected. And the police weren't brought in to the investigation until the very end.

It just baffles me. Perhaps things are done differently in England, but I would hope that if you notice something suspicious about a death, that a) you'd want to know definitely if it is a murder or natural and b) you'd let the police know of your suspicions! I mean, isn't that their job???

I understood how people who thought they'd unintentionally killed him might want to cover it up (although, hello, accidents happen!), but people who had no care one way or the other considered it meddling.

I just didn't understand the motives of the characters. The end wasn't much of a surprise (there were lots of clues) and I didn't appreciate that the author killed off the dog. I mean really, it didn't even advance the plot!

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## **Bev Taylor says**

the first drew slocombe mystery

drew has just started a new job as an undertaker after problems with his nursing career

jim, at 55 years old, is found dead in bed and the doctor says heart attack

h/e drew is not convinced. but nobody else agrees and he has to investigate on his own

the village is a very tight knit community with many secrets of it's own. not least jim's affairs, a dodgy doctor and drug dealings

a light read as usual with excellent characters

h/e there were a few loose end

why did daphne notice that the inside of jim's mouth was a different kind of pink and not drew

how were they going to include the dog in his coffin as it would be smelling by then

why did drew not ask for the tea bag to be saved

what was jodie's position in the going on's

bev

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### **Samhazy says**

Too slow. Halfway through we still hadn't decided if it was murder. Boring.

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### **Anne Marshall says**

Didn't finish

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### **Sheila says**

Intricate small town mystery investigated by a trainee undertaker. It's very light, nobody swears, and we learn a bit about the undertaker's trade. I quite enjoyed it.

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### **Julie says**

I have met Drew Slocombe in the Cotswold mysteries but this earlier glimpse of his life is interesting. It was intriguing to watch him discover his own passion for detective work as his instincts forced him to be the only one to question a seemingly natural death.

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### **Apé says**

I'm glad I picked this book up for free. I keep seeing packs of her books and wondering. At least I can wonder no more. I've now read a Rebecca Tope book, and I wouldn't touch another with a barge pole. This was just dreadful. It drivelled on and felt like it would never end. The style of the book wasn't engaging at all, felt a bit muddled, and as though a few of the characters and conversations had been lumped in as filler. It starts off by throwing stacks of characters at you and continues like that. It means that there isn't a main character or person you are following through this story, neither is the plot itself strong enough to lead you, so it ends up feeling a little muddled. Plus there's no atmosphere or sense of place; and no character depth as such. It was all just a bit dull and lukewarm.

Then there's the plot and the people. Jim Lapsford dies in his sleep in his early fifties. It's a big shock for everyone because he was so fit and well. But the doctor signs it off as a heart attack, saying there's no need for a post mortem. Ok, not brilliant... but here comes the ridiculous bit. Ex nurse Drew, who has started his new job with the undertakers, thinks this is a bit off. Does he alert the authorities? No. Does he go to the police? No. He goes down on his own to the body before embalming and interferes with it, taking stomach contents and sneaks it off to an old chum at the hospital. But he thinks it's blindingly obvious that the man

had been poisoned!!!! Yes, it's bad that there wasn't a post mortem, but that was a lazy doctor. Not necessarily a sign of murder. But he does his little deerstalker and plays at super sleuth - even in this he is lame and unconvincing. He had the personality of an old dried out dishrag. So irritating. The only good thing I can say on this point, is thank god there wasn't a main character we had to follow the whole time through the book, because if there had been, it probably would have been him.

The solution is not impressive either.... I won't write about it here, but for 500 pages of drivel-mystery, it really wasn't worth it.

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