



A Conventional Corpse

Joan Hess

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Farberville, Arkansas is playing host to its first ever mystery convention. Sponsored by the Thurber Farber Foundation and held at Farber College, Murder Comes to Campus is playing host to five major mystery writers representing all areas of the field. Dragooned into running the show when the original organizer is hospitalized, local bookseller Claire Malloy finds herself in the midst of a barely controlled disaster. Not only do each of the writers present their own set of idiosyncrasies and difficulties (including one who arrives with her cat Wimple in tow), the feared, distrusted, and disliked mystery editor of Paradigm House, Roxanne Small, puts in a surprise appearance at the conference. Added to Claire's own love-life woes with local police detective Peter Rosen, things have never been worse.

Then when one of the attendees dies in a suspicious car accident, Wimple the cat disappears from Claire's home, and Roxanne Small is nowhere to be found, it becomes evident that the murder mystery is more than a literary genre.

A Conventional Corpse Details

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The Badger says

The Claire Malloy series is a step above a Cozy, mainly because you actually LIKE the characters. Claire is the single mother of Caron, a teenaged daughter who's at the age of speaking in ALL CAPS. Claire is also the proprietor of a bookstore (which she doesn't seem to spend much time in, on account of solving murders and trying to calm Caron down to at least italics). Peter is Claire's detective boyfriend whom she's lucky to have, otherwise she'd spend the majority of her time in a holding cell for interfering with crime scenes.

If you're looking for a mystery series where you actually LIKE the characters (I love Christie, but spent much of my extracurricular time plotting the death of the sanctimonious bitch Ms. Marple), start on the Claire Malloy series. Likewise, if you're wondering whether to have children, pay close attention to Caron. I work with kids and can assure you that all teen girls go through the "I HATE YOU--I NEED A RIDE TO THE MALL" phase. Unless you're saving for boarding school, pay attention.

Dale Safford says

I love the interesting cover, and the plot of murder at a mystery writers convention showed great promise, but I had to force myself to read this book. The characters are cardboard, main character Claire Malloy is just THERE and seems totally unable to pull things together or solve anything, and the dialogue has a very stilted, formal style ("why did you respond so virulently?"-what does that mean?). I went from this slow-moving story to an action-packed, page-turner mystery by Harlan Coben and was thrilled to read it!

In Farberville, Arkansas a mystery writers convention is taking place at the local college with 5 successful authors being featured (and pampered). Bookseller Claire Malloy unexpectedly must coordinate everything. One author's cat disappears, their feared and disliked editor disappears, and a college attendee dies in a suspicious car accident. How can Claire make a success out of all this?

George says

#13 in the small bookstore owner Claire Mallory set in the small college town of Farberville, Arkansas. The town is playing host to its first ever mystery convention which is held at Farber College, Murder Comes to Campus is playing host to five major mystery writers representing all areas of the field. When the original organizer is hospitalized, Claire Malloy finds herself in charge of the two day convention. Soon, everything that can go wrong, does with Claire in the middle of trying to keep the demanding authors happy and the convention to run. Then there is a murder.

The overall tone is light mainly because of the cast of characters topped off by Claire's snarky caustic wit and Caron, her 16 year old daughter, who is the drama queen of all drama queens.

Miriam says

i had hoped for a good snow-day read. i had to talk myself into finishing it.

Brett says

This is my first Joan Hess, Claire Malloy mystery. I found it on a list of humorous mysteries and picked it up because it was available at my local paperback exchange. I was disappointed. The premise was fun, a murder at a convention of murder mystery writers. But the characters and the humor did not seem generally successful. Maybe a bit too much stereotypical characters. I had a little trouble keeping track of the characters. The book was enjoyable at times, but I would not particularly recommend it. I probably won't try another.

Ruth Turner says

Had run out of books to read on vacation so picked this up at the little lending library while taking a walk around the lake. Not my kind of book...silly, absurd (who would ever act like those characters, especially the police?) but stuck it out. But, nice that there are books out there for everyone's taste!

Angela Barbee says

Ive had enough from these annoying characters! And the biggest twist is that a cat goes missing? Naw...

Lesley Looper says

I enjoyed the fact that this was about a mystery writers' convention in the college town of Farberville, as well as the development of the relationship between bookseller Claire Malloy, the protagonist, and Detective Peter Rosen. The ending caught me a little off guard, but it was a good read!

Jenn says

A mystery convention with 5 major mystery writers was coming to Farberville, Arkansas. They all stayed at an inn and the editor was found murdered in a cistern. Everyone had their own spin on who dunnit. I just wanted to find out the ending.

Jasmine Giacomo says

Claire Malloy, owner of the Book Depot bookstore, finds herself suddenly in charge of a weekend murder mystery convention when the organizer is hospitalized. Five mystery authors, strong personalities intact, swoop into town, clashing with each other, their B&B owner, and a surprise guest who crashes the convention: their agent. A local girl crashes her car on the way home from the first night of the convention, but it's more than just a simple accident. And then the theories get really creepy, as the authors begin to speculate on death and murder as only they can.

While I generally enjoyed this book for the mystery convention concept, I wonder whether Ms. Hess wrote it on a dare, or possibly as a cry for help, or even as a satire on the ins and outs of her own genre. I'm probably kidding about the cry for help, but this one line from page 227 makes me wonder: "Authors are powerless in the overall scheme of the publishing industry." She's right, you know. It's one of the reasons successfully published authors are going indie in this new era.

The characters in this book were well done: the authors, naturally, overpowered everyone else except Claire, who, while she confessed to feeling lost and/or ignorant occasionally, held her own in the "sit down and STFU" line delivery category. The insulting in this book was delicious. And I enjoyed the little inside issues the authors had to deal with, such as being ignored by their editor, or having books trapped in a backlist, inaccessible to readers. Motives for murder abounded.

The only character who felt flat was Peter Rosen. There tried to be a whole subplot between him and Claire, but with the vivid author characters dominating the book, it came across as reduced to a series of similar "I'm not talking to you" conversations and forced insertions of baby/babymaking references.

The plot itself, as I said, was fun. But it felt pretty unrealistic, even more than the usual serial cozy plot. A handful of bestselling mystery authors popping into a tiny town? Hmm. The subplot with Peter wasn't terribly gripping, but the one involving Arnie was surprisingly endearing, and had a tie-in with the Peter-Claire subplot.

The end was disappointing, however, and in a way I've found disturbingly often in the cozies I've been reading recently. (view spoiler) And that's where they left it. That's too cozy for me, really. Consequences, people!

One thing that came across as a little jarring was the tendency for the authors' thought processes to leave so much assumed between the lines, in contrast to the rest of the plot. Whenever they'd talk amongst themselves, you'd have to fill in a few blanks around their dialogue in order to keep up. Which was cool and made sense; their job is to think on that level. But the rest of the book was more simply written, and as a result, the "regular" characters seemed a bit slow.

And do not let me forget to mention the gaping plot hole that pretty much destroyed the credibility of the first killer's motive! (view spoiler) I actually re-read parts of the book, trying to figure out if I'd missed something, or if I'd misunderstood the motive/timeline. Nope.

The writing was so tight that it seemed to tear in a few places, leaving a gap just a bit wider than I enjoy crossing to continue the story. I also counted several typos of the sort that are also words (a for at, Rose for Rosen, etc), and a couple of completely omitted words, which for me really detract from the enjoyment of a book.

Overall, a fun read with the mystery convention in town, but the authors' vivid and weighty presence seemed to unbalance the plot and the writing both.

Gina Estrada says

so much with the plot... mystery writers could be a possible suspect, you'll just never know because the way they think.

Jan says

Holding a murder mysstery writers convention in faberville, Arkansas, Claire Malloy is left running the mess rather than just selling books to the attendees. On the side, she has to solve the murder of conference attendee as well as the nasty agent to four of the authors. Better than the earlier ones.

Alice Benson says

I used to read this series

Vicki Gooding says

I really liked this book. Showed some of the backbiting, self inclined temperaments of some writers. The main character was not overly syrupy nor bitter rude, but is logical and humorous. Refuses to listen to excuses and walks in a type of integrity that makes her perfect for the book. As this is only the first I've read out of many, I'm looking forward to reading the others.

Jewett says

I enjoy her books and think this ids one of the best Claire Malloy mysteries. Decent plot of lots of laughs along the way.
