



# The Spook Lights Affair

*Marcia Muller , Bill Pronzini*

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In 1895 San Francisco young debutantes don't commit suicide at festive parties, particularly not under the eye of Sabina Carpenter. But Virginia St. Ives evidently did, leaping from a foggy parapet in a shimmer of ghostly light. The seemingly impossible disappearance of her body creates an even more serious problem for the firm of Carpenter and Quincannon, Professional Detective Services.

Sabina hadn't wanted to take the assignment, but her partner John Quincannon insisted it would serve as entrée to the city's ultra rich and powerful. That means money, and Quincannon loves the almighty dollar. Which is why he is hunting the bandit who robbed the Wells, Fargo office of \$35,000.

Working their separate cases (while Sabina holds John off with one light hand), the detectives give readers a tour of The City the way it was. From the infamous Barbary Coast to the expensive Tenderloin gaming houses and brothels frequented by wealthy men, Quincannon follows a danger-laden trail to unmask the murderous perpetrators of the Wells, Fargo robbery. Meanwhile, Sabina works her wiles on friends and relatives of the vanished debutante until the pieces of her puzzle start falling into place. But it's an oddly disguised gent appearing out of nowhere who provides the final clue to both cases—the shrewd "crackbrain" who believes himself to be Sherlock Holmes.

Fans of Marcia's Muller's bestselling Sharon McCone novels and Bill Pronzini's Nameless Detective series will applaud *The Spook Lights Affair* and future exploits from the annals of Carpenter and Quincannon, Professional Detective Services.

## The Spook Lights Affair Details

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# From Reader Review The Spook Lights Affair for online ebook

## Amy says

Oh, this just isn't going to work for me. I'm sure the story is good. Sadly, the audio narration left a lot to be desired. Meredith Mitchell in particular was reading as if she were reading a phone book. A *little* voice and expression would have been welcome. If I come back to this one, it will be in print format.

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## Cheryl says

Plot-centric historical mystery, with very little character development. The mysteries weren't that interesting, and I was able to figure most of it out early in the story. Lots of info dumps ("telling") about the mysteries, instead of simply showing it to the reader. I won't be reading more of this series.

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## Molly says

Yikes. This has been a very slow read for me. I struggled through most of this book, with only a couple of riveting scenes. My stubbornness got the best of me which is why I kept reading, but as many others noted the character development was very weak and there was much telling and lack of showing. I'm at the end where everything is being revealed and still losing interest. I feel there's too many characters involved and I can't keep track as they keep jumping from one to another to another when explaining what happened. A very frustrating read, indeed.

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## Susan says

Enjoyable story taking place in historic San Francisco. I liked how both cases ended up combining to make the bigger picture.

The detectives have good chemistry together and both work well together. However, this one leaves the reader on a bit of a cliffhanger regarding one of the detective's personal life. Can't wait to see where this goes.

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## Scott says

*The Spook Lights Affair* is a light mystery revolving around the apparent suicide of a wealthy debutante one foggy night during a party in San Francisco, 1895. Detective Sabina Carpenter was hired to look after the girl and the tragedy is seen as a failure on her part. But Sabina senses that not all is as it seemed, and she pursues her own investigation in order to salvage her agency's reputation.

Meanwhile, her partner, John Quincannon, is working on a bank robbery case: \$35,000 stolen and not a single suspect. Who could resist trying for the 10% reward?

I don't read a lot of historicals so this was something of a novelty for me. The setting feels authentic (and the authors assure us that it is, in their afterword), and the mist-shrouded streets have a lot of atmosphere. The novel's weakness lies in its dearth of characterization. The characters serve the plot and little more. I couldn't even tell you much about Carpenter and Quincannon themselves, for whom this is their second outing. John has a big crush on Sabina, but she prefers to keep their relationship professional. He likes poetry. That's...about it. Any such information we do get is simply stated, rather than worked into the story naturally. The duo are likable enough, but they don't feel quite as real as the physical world they inhabit.

All in all, a pretty bare-bones mystery that I found less than satisfying.

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### **Frank says**

[library audiobook]

By depicting the apparent thoughts of 19th century San Francisco, the narrative became tiresome and I turned off and deleted. Also, the depiction of the female lead as a former Pinkerton op was a turn off.

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### **David Rough says**

This novel had some moments of good writing and an engaging plot, but there were also some moments when the energy seemed to lose some power. I found the final explanation of the mysteries rather strange. I have not read the first of the Carpenter and Quincannon mysteries, so this might have caused some gaps in my knowledge of the characters (especially the Homes character). I might go back and pick up Volume 1 in the future, but there many books ahead of it in queue.

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### **Naomi says**

I have to admit that the whole reason that I grabbed this book from my library was that I saw that Bill Pronzini was listed as a co-author. I love his writing so I was dying to see the influence of it in this book. It had very little of the tension that I love his books for.

This book had more of a "cozy-lite" feel to it which simply bored me. Although parts of the story grabbed me, the majority did not.

While I wouldn't continue on with this series, I did feel that it was written well enough to pass it onto my cozy lovin' friends.

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## **Jennifer Harper says**

I did this one as an audio book, just as I did the Bug House Affair, the first book in the Carpenter/Quincannon series. I liked this one much better than the first book as the annoying Sherlock Holmes had only a very minor role. These stories are simplistic and fun little mysteries, great for enjoying while soaking in the tub or while driving to work (remember, I did this audiobook so it was safe). There's nothing terribly complex about the writing, but I do find the description of 19th century San Francisco interesting. If you're looking for something light and entertaining to read, then this series might just do the trick.

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## **Hapzydeco says**

Set in San Francisco in 1895, the Carpenter and Quincannon, Professional Detective Services finds itself involved in two separate cases that in the end become one and the same. While the storyline may prove simple and predictable, the descriptive passages of California living at the turn of the century makes this an enjoyable read.

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## **? Kimberly says**

Carpenter & Quincannon Detective Agency is still in its youth so when a high profile client asks Sabina to babysit their spirited young daughter she grudgingly accepts. The young woman in question is Virginia St. Ives. On a foggy night, while attending a ball, and under the watchful eye of Sabrina, she commits suicide and the body vanishes. This turn of events creates scandal and serious problems for the C & Q Detective Agency. Sabina is determined to figure out what happen and clear her good name. Meanwhile, Quincannon has set his sights on solving the recent robbery of the Wells Fargo train and earning the agency a hefty reward of 3, 500 dollars. The two are working feverishly on their own cases when a third case involving ghostly apparitions falls into their lap. They gain clues from the man claiming to be Sherlock Holmes. (Who reportedly died in England at the hands of Dr. Moriarty) Clues and suspects had me flipping the pages, and the mystery that unfolded held me captive.

Quincannon and Sabrina are strong, opinionated and brilliant at their work. She previously worked as a Pinkerton operative until her husband was killed in the line of duty. He is ex-Secret service and quite infatuated with Sabrina. She chooses to ignore his advances all of which I find delightful. The two are in a lot of ways total opposites. He is stingy and doesn't believe in tipping, and she leaves food on her stoop for a homeless woman. They make an incredible team; yin and yang. There is a light romance developing between them, and while little advancement is made you can see hints of it unfolding. This subtle thread intrigues me without distracting from the mysteries and in my opinion is quite cleverly done. The man who refers to himself as Sherlock Holmes appears again. He is quite a mystery, and I am curious to learn more. Villains, suspects and clients, were colorful and added to the suspense.

Spook Lights Affair offered an excellent addition to the Carpenter & Quincannon Mystery series, solidifying it as a one I will continue. The authors furthered our connection to these characters and again offered up mysterious cases. The adventure kept me entertained as I traveled the streets of San Francisco. We mingling with the upper and lower classes, and it offered us an opportunity to see each of them at work. The tale has enough details regarding 1895 San Francisco to bring the scenery to life, yet allows the cases to be at the

forefront making time and place irrelevant. There were clever twists surrounding all three cases and the weaving of them was brilliantly done. While admittedly this Holmes and Christie enthusiast pieced things together, the search for clues and the plot was highly entertaining. I am looking forward to my next adventure with this dynamic duo.

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### **Karen says**

Another great mystery in the Carpenter and Quincannon series.

The writing is smooth and the plot compelling.

I love PI stories and San Francisco historicals which this combines.

In addition, there is nothing in here that Mom will object to reading.

Win, win.

I bought a copy of this thinking the library did not have it. It did, but I am glad to have a copy to pass on to all my mystery reading friends.

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### **Ladiibbug says**

#2 Quincannon/Carpenter mystery

This is a good story, not too complicated plotwise, but enjoyable. I doubt I'll read more of this series, due to my long TBR.

I picked this up at the library because I liked the cover and title.

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### **William says**

Following in the footsteps of *The Bug House Affair*; Sabina Carpenter and John Quincannon tie together two apparently unrelated mysteries in the greater San Francisco environs of the turn of the last century. Although the cases are fictional, much of the story involves real people and places, so that it reads like an alternate history with a criminal element.

The "bug-house Holmes" makes another appearance, adding to the fun. Personally, I'm looking forward to the next one from Muller and Pronzini.

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## **Kay says**

The second foray into Carpenter and Quincannon was a satisfying mystery neatly tied in a bow at the end, but it just didn't grab me. Perhaps the fact that the audio version is read by both a male and female narrator who alternate depending on the POV.

That alternating voice works well on paper, but when listening, having the male character's dialogue being read by a female voice is a bit off-putting to my ears. Perhaps if they read their own character and only alternated the descriptive passages? I found this distracting enough that it regularly pulled me out of the plot.

Speaking of the plot, two cases were at the center of this tale--one was solved, but the other was left partially open (no more info here because it would enter spoiler territory). And the ending seemed rushed to me. John and Sabina simply went over their respective parts and the reader was told the parts of the detective work that filled in the gaps at the end of the case.

The last chapter, from Sabina's point of view, was placed there--I assume--to make the reader want to read the next book. I personally found it unnecessary and it actually somewhat convinces me I don't want to continue reading these. Why must a career woman, even a widow like Sabina Carpenter, be written into a romantic storyline?

At any rate, although the series advances and the main characters are engaging, if I continue reading about John and Sabina, it will be via paper or e-book. No more audio versions for me with this set of stories.

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