



The Killings on Jubilee Terrace

Robert Barnard

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Vernon Watts may have been beloved by the millions of faithful viewers of the long-running soap opera "Jubilee Terrace" but his fellow cast members knew him for what he was -- an egotistical former music-hall performer whose untimely death in a pedestrian accident was not something to be universally regretted. Sadly, though, director Reggie Friedman soon fills the supposed void by asking Hamish Fawley, an equally unpleasant former member of the "Jubilee Terrace" troupe, to rejoin the soap. Hamish was never much liked. Now he's more obnoxious than ever.

The mood on the set is not exactly serene, a situation made worse when the police receive an anonymous letter suggesting that Vernon Watts's "accident" may in fact have been murder. Did one of his fellow actors push Vernon into the oncoming traffic?

Detective Inspector Charlie Peace faces tough challenges as he probes the make-believe world of skilled thespians to find a possible killer. With a cast of suspects who are trained to emote on cue, Charlie will need all of his policeman's instincts if he's to avert further tragedy.

Writing with his usual acerbic wit and penetrating insight into human foibles, acclaimed master of mystery Robert Barnard gives us another winning entry in his magnificent body of work.

The Killings on Jubilee Terrace Details

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From Reader Review *The Killings on Jubilee Terrace* for online ebook

Lukasz Pruski says

"Ordinary people leading ordinary lives, which sometimes [...] get caught up in extraordinary events."

This definition of a TV soap comes from Robert Barnard's *The Killings on Jubilee Terrace* (2009), a mystery novel whose plot is set among the cast, directors, and scriptwriters of a fictional soap opera on British TV, called *Jubilee Terrace*, a not-so-subtle allusion to the long-lived *Coronation Street* series. *The Killings* is not a good book and, in fact, I was more than once about to toss it when struggling through the first 20 or so pages (and I am not a tosser: in my recent memory only two books out of well over a thousand infuriated me enough not to finish reading). The beginning of the novel takes a lot of goodwill to get through: the author introduces all 17 characters in short, intermingled snippets of prose and dialogue. Eventually the plot emerges, but it is quite boring until almost the end, when it momentarily picks up, only to get tangled in preposterous twists at the very end.

DI Charlie Peace from the Leeds CID appears at about one fifth of the novel: he is investigating an anonymous letter regarding the death of one of the actors in the show. The letter implies that the death that had been thought accidental might have been a murder. The plural in the title of the novel suggests further killings and indeed, they are delivered as promised.

The psychology is infantile and cartoonish: not a single character feels like a real person; they all are tired clichés. Mr. Barnard attempts to add a value to the novel by exploring the phenomenon of soap actors confusing their own lives with those of the characters they play but he is unconvincing in trying to portray the merging of their real personae with the TV ones. The effect is ludicrous: while the author lampoons the implausibility of the show's plot he manages to get even more implausible in his own plot. If he planned it this way, I am too obtuse to enjoy his subtle joke.

Close to the end of the novel, one can find two interesting passages: one is just a few sentences long and concerns the Romanian-born wife of one of the main characters. This is the only fragment of the novel that I have found realistic. The other interesting passage refers to a rather rare sexual deviation, but - although captivating - the theme does not match at all the light, chatty tone of the novel. About a page worth of interesting material in a 250-page novel is a rather low yield.

A disclaimer is needed: I am enormously biased against TV programs, in particular against TV shows, and in most particularly against soap operas. Only reality shows are farther from reality than soaps.

One and a quarter stars.

Ellen Schauer says

I guessed the ending almost immediately, but Barnard's tricky exposition had me second-guessing my conclusion several times over the course of the book.

Jill Hutchinson says

Another short book by Barnard starring Charlie Peace as the investigating officer. This time a member of the cast of Jubilee Terrace a television soap similar to Coronation Street, is murdered along with a female bit player. The interesting facet of this book is the description of relationships of the long-term cast members whose real lives are intertwined with the parts they play. There is not much of a mystery nor much page time given to Charlie Peace.....but it is a quick read and is typical Barnard.

Rog Harrison says

A bit disappointing as usually I like Barnard's books. I felt it was a bit rushed and certainly had not been proof read. For example a minor character starts off as a uniformed police constable then a few pages later Barnard refers to him as a sergeant then a few pages later he has become a Detective Constable! Having said that I did not figure out who the murderer was even though with hindsight there were clues had I but registered them.

Joy says

Two awful actors die in quick succession on the TV soap "Jubilee Terrace". The actors, that is, not the characters. Both of them actively tried to make life horrible for their fellow cast members. Also, it looks like an awful actress was meant to die too, in the arson fire. We're not sure, because the actress who did die looked like another awful actress in the making. Someone might have been cleaning house, to make life more pleasant for the cast who were left. Or there might have been specific motives, such as blackmail or terrorization.

I liked this mystery because I like cozies. Inspector Peace and his family make a good background, and so do the day-to-day maneuverings of plotting a soap. Inspector Peace, with a new son, is sympathetically interested in the several fathers in the case.

Fortunately the publishers have provided us with a list of the cast and the characters they play. This helps a lot, because the narrative reflects the identity confusion when actors play the same character for years running, by sometimes calling the person by his/her real name and sometimes by the character name. The author did this to remind us that we can't be sure what some of the people are really capable of.

Kay Robart says

The novel has many characters, and they are so one-dimensional that I found it difficult to keep them straight, especially as most of them are called by two names, their character's name and their own. I found The Killings on Jubilee Terrace only mildly interesting, even though it has a difficult solution.

See my complete review [here](#):

Candy Wood says

Seems as though I must have read other Robert Barnard mysteries featuring DI Charlie Peace, but I don't remember them and would expect to if this one is typical. Jubilee Terrace is a TV soap, reminiscent of *EastEnders* or *Coronation Street* but set in Leeds. The police don't get involved until quite a way in, and keeping the large cast and their onscreen personae straight was a bit tricky for bedtime reading. But I'd still recommend it to anyone who likes British police procedurals, or who is interested in what goes on behind the scenes of a TV soap. Simon Brett used to do this sort of thing from the actors' perspective--Barnard's approach is more traditional, switching from the actors' viewpoints to a firm emphasis on law and order. At the same time, it's up to date with a diverse police presence, mobile phones, and suggestions of an international sex trade, not to mention a gay character who is not played by the cast's gay actor.

Sarah B says

I really enjoyed it, he did delightful characters as always. In fact, we spent so much time with the cast I would have liked to spend a little bit more time with the main character and his family. It was just a short read, though; so it wasn't like there was a lot of room to spend with all the characters.

Krob says

This was just a hoot. The story was about murder on a soap opera. The characters kept confusing their real life with their soap opera life. It was pretty funny, and although it is billed as a novel of suspense, I wouldn't exactly call it suspenseful. It was entertaining however and I enjoyed it.

Marfita says

Egos run wild in a soap opera filmed in Leeds. Inspector Charlie Peace goes to the production company prompted by an anonymous letter to investigate the seemingly ordinary accidental, if tragic, death of a cast member. Then everything goes pear-shaped.

I thought the unpleasant characters just a bit two-dimensional. They can't be normal (as opposed to psychopaths). Bet, wife of one of the actors and occasional character on the soap opera herself, is so unabashedly horrid I can't believe her. At least when talking to the police she could have tried to exculpate herself other than it being just the way she was. Total slut, unbendingly unvirtuous wife, and uncaring mum. Her character is echoed by two younger women as well. It's just that they weren't married or had any children yet.

Maybe I'm just too naive.

The ending, though, brought a tiny tear to my eye.

Polly says

I love Robert Barnard, but either he's losing it, or I am. Several places in the book there are conversations or events that seem to have been randomly stuck in, or else conversations or events where it's not clear who is taking part in them. As I say, that could be me zoning out, but I don't think so (it's not happening with anything else I'm reading). I'll definitely have to re-read this in a month or so and see what I think then, but for now I can only give it a lukewarm rating. The characters and setting (an English soap opera) are exactly right for the sort of light malice that Barnard does so well, but the plot takes much too long to get started, and the solution seems to come out of nowhere. Definitely not one I will be rushing out to buy, even second-hand.

Having re-read this about a year later, I think I must have been distracted the first time, because I didn't notice the problems I mentioned above. That said, it's by no means Barnard's most brilliant book, not even his most brilliant recent book.

Susan says

Hamish Fawley is the least-liked actor ever to appear on the long-running soap opera "Jubilee Terrace"--at least among the other actors. When he's brought back on a short-term contract, he does his best to insult and upset all of the cast members. But when he and another person are brutally murdered, Leeds Detective Inspector Charlie Peace is hard-put to sort out the actors, who tend to confuse themselves and the others with the roles they play on the show.

Teresa says

We have two sets of characters here, the real ones and the characters they play on the soap opera. As one can imagine this causes confusion and slow going in the beginning. They are also some of the most unlikable people in mystery fiction. However the suspense is good and the ending satisfying.

Nikki says

Although I've read many of Robert Barnard's excellent mysteries, this is the first of his Charlie Peace series I've sampled. I hadn't even realized Peace was Black! In this book, an anonymous letter sends him to make inquiries about whether the death of a TV soap opera star was really an accident. A lot of the book is spent setting up the various characters in the TV show (it's one of those British evening soaps like EastEnders or The Archers) and their relations with each other and their families; this part is just as much fun to read as the actual "mystery" segments, which really begin when another of the soap's characters is killed and the suspects are legion. I saw the ending coming from a fair ways away, but in this case, getting there was more than half the fun. Strongly recommended.

Amy says

Laugh-out-loud funny, as I rightfully expect Barnard to be. (I also expect it of Pratchett, who didn't come through much on the book I read immediately after this one, *Unseen Academicals*.) Another similarity with Pratchett is the way he takes on a particular area of endeavor, and this one, soap operas, is a winner. The mystery is, as often the case with Barnard, close enough to a Christielike whodunnit (80%?) to be disappointing in its failure to come the last 20% of the way. You gotta put the red herring closer to the middle if you want the final twist to feel twisty. Still, fun and very well-written, as usual.
