

“Capitol Offense” by William Bernhardt.

Ballantine Books, 2009. \$26.00, 320 pages.

One of the earliest known mysteries was “The Three Apples,” of the “One Thousand and One Nights” translated into English in 1706. The continued popularity of this genre is evidenced by the number of mystery books published annually. Doesn’t everyone love a skillful whodunit? Bernhardt, a former trial attorney, has a thorough knowledge of the legal system and the art of writing a skillful mystery. The lead character in this legal thriller is lawyer Ben Kincaid. During his career, Ben has had some strange and unusual cases, but his current one has given him pause. Dennis Thomas, a university professor, wants to engage his services to represent him on a murder charge that has not yet been filed. Dennis wants to kill the police officer who refused to authorize a search for his missing wife Joslyn. She had left the hospital after a normal day at work and was not seen for days. Each day thereafter, Dennis went to the police station and was unable to get the police to do anything. On his own he had searched hospitals and the route she normally took. On the third day he was sent to Detective Christopher Sentz who not only also refuses to look for his wife but he insinuates she is having an affair. Dennis is told by Sentz that authorizing an APB would be against regulations.

Part of the story is told in the first person by Joslyn. While driving home she was blinded by an oncoming car’s lights and she lost control of her Land Rover. The vehicle careened down a ravine, leaving her badly injured. Seven days later, Dennis convinces another officer to track her cell phone. She is found barely alive, but dies shortly after being freed from the vehicle. Kincaid advises Dennis to not take vengeance, but later that day the officer is found shot to death. Kincaid is now representing Dennis on a temporary insanity defense. Dennis claims he absolutely did not kill the officer even though he wanted to, but he has no memory of the last encounter with Detective Sentz. Kincaid hires a private detective, Loving, to investigate this case. Loving must trace the connection to the hospital. The book is fast paced and well written. You will find yourself staying up late reading to see if you solve the puzzling mystery before the denouement.

William Bernhardt is the author of over twenty novels including “Capitol Threat,” “Capitol Conspiracy,” and “Death Row.” He teaches writing courses at conferences. Bernhardt lives in Tulsa, Oklahoma with his family.

Susan Benning is the Head Librarian at May Memorial Library. Visit us online at www.alamancelibraries.org or call 229-3588 for information about programs planned for this month.

