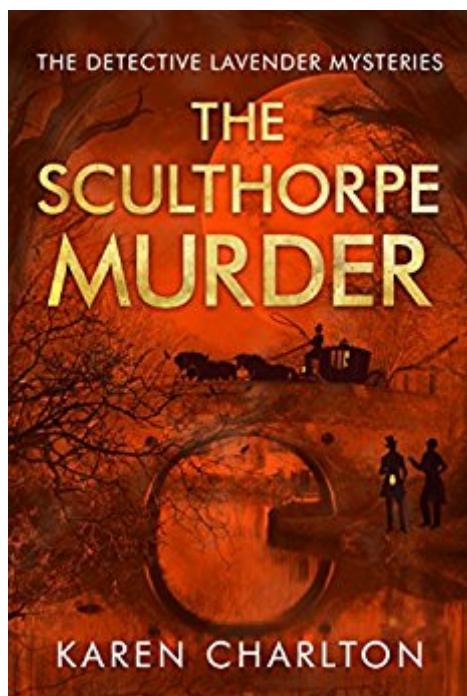


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The Sculthorpe Murder (The Detective Lavender Mysteries Book 3)



Synopsis

Northamptonshire, 1810: As a new canal network snakes across the landscape, a vicious mob stakes its claim to the county. Every local constable is out on the hunt for the ruthless Panther Gang. When an elderly man is robbed and murdered in sleepy Middleton, the beleaguered magistrates send for help from London's Bow Street Police Office. Detective Stephen Lavender and Constable Ned Woods soon discover there's more to William Sculthorpe's demise than meets the eye. Mystery surrounds the old man and his family, and the stench of revenge hangs heavy in the air. Are the Panther Gang really responsible or is something more sinister afoot? As Lavender delves further into long-hidden secrets, Woods has demons of his own to contend with: ghosts from his past that stalk him through the investigation. Uncovering decades of simmering hatred and deceit, Lavender and Woods must use all their wit and cunning to solve this evil crime.

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Customer Reviews

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The Sculthorpe Murder

The year is 1810, and Bow Street Runner Detective Stephen Lavender has been called from his native London to Northamptonshire. It seems that an elderly man, William Sculthorpe, has been robbed and murdered. The most likely suspects are a gang known as the Panthers, whom the local authorities have been unable to put their hands upon. But when Lavender and his friend Horse Constable Ned Woods investigate at the request of a wealthy noblewoman, they find clues that suggest otherwise. Most notably, the testimony of Sculthorpe's son Billy who actually saw the murderers. But he's an unreliable witness who talks about "dark elves", so has been mostly ignored. This is the third Detective Lavender mystery, and I have not read the previous volumes. According to the author's notes, her main character is loosely based on the life and activities of a real Stephen Lavender, who was an officer of the Bow Street magistrates. Likewise, this book's case is based on one Mr. Lavender actually solved, though Ms. Charlton took liberties with even the bare bones account provided by historical records. Billy Sculthorpe has Down syndrome (called "cretinism" in the story because Dr. Down hadn't even been born yet, let alone started studying the condition.) Lavender quickly realizes that despite his moderate mental disability, and a vivid imagination fed by spooky stories his recently deceased Mum had told him, Billy is a talented artist and has a good memory.

Billy's testimony leads the detectives to discover clues about William Sculthorpe's actual past and other possible motivations for his murder. The sleepy village of Middleton and its surroundings turn out to have many dark secrets that get turned up by the murder investigation, multiplying the number of suspects. There are even ties back to London, which allows Lavender's love interest Magdalena and other city-bound characters to make an appearance. Meanwhile, Constable Woods finds his own past catching up with him. As often happens with historical mysteries, Stephen Lavender as the protagonist is perhaps just a little too enlightened for the times he's living in, believing in religious tolerance and treating the women in his life with respect for their intelligence and opinions. Woods is a bit more believable as a person of the early Nineteenth Century, but not so much so as to make him unsympathetic. I found the solution to the mystery satisfying; genre-savvy readers will spot one of the murderers very early on, and clues as to how it was done are abundant. Much of the last part of the book is Detective Lavender negotiating just how many of the crimes he's uncovered must come to light, and which must face justice of a more subtle sort.

Possible trigger issues: There's some discussion of spousal abuse and animal abuse in the backstory, including the fact that it was even more difficult to get out of an abusive marriage in the Eighteenth Century than it is today. There are

some slurs hurled by less sympathetic characters towards Billy because of his condition, a bit of slut-shaming, and anti-Catholic slurs. Recommended to fans of the historical mystery sub-genre. For more mystery reviews, see my blog at[...]

Charlton's historical mystery series featuring Detective Lavender and Constable Woods is set in the early 1800s in England and is a very good addition to the genre. Lavender and Woods are both interesting characters and work together well to solve the mysteries they investigate. In this novel, they are called to a small village to look into the murder of an 86 year old man, who lived alone with his son. Billy, the son, has what we know today as Down's Syndrome, but in the period the book takes place, is viewed much differently. The local constables blame a notorious gang of five thugs, who have been terrorizing the area, but Lavender is not so sure. What they discover about the victim and a number of people who live in the village is disturbing, shocking. Charlton does a great deal of research for her books and provides plenty of accurate details. She based the plot loosely on an actual incident she read about in the papers of the era. Woods faces an interesting and emotional personal discovery that affects the nightmares from which he suffers, and Lavender makes decisions based upon what he feels is the right thing to do, even considering his devotion to the law. Good writing, a carefully developed plot that touches on issues that are pertinent in the present, surprising developments, and fascinating historical detail make this a fine edition to the series and well worth reading.

I highly recommend this series set in the early 1800's in England. The historical setting, character development, and complex plot are all top notch. Wow! The reader gets pulled into the story immediately and the extremely talented author doesn't let go. The dialog is diverse and appealing. Nothing drags. Nothing is so forced or far out that it becomes unbelievable. This is just fantastic, clever and very intriguing. I suppose this can be enjoyed as a stand alone but it is best in sequence. Fortunately, all the books are wonderful. The hard part is waiting for the next Lavender installment. Please hurry.

Another great mystery with Lavender and his partner, Woods. The author has done more than enough research into the social expectations and restrictions of the times the where the novel takes place. Due to the author's creativity, you are amazed at the deductions of Lavender, but will be surprised at "who done it" at the end. Reoccurring characters in the author's books add to the appeal of the series.

Delighted to find new characters to enjoy: Stephen Lavender and Ned Woods - in a thoroughly enjoyable mystery and a good sense of another time, another place. So I'm now onto my second in this series, having started with the third - and all's good so far (Sans Pareil). My favorite mysteries are those where the characters are as equally cared about as the plot, if not more so. Especially in a series. And while there are quite a number of fine mystery/thriller writers where the plot is the key (as in those with "former Special Ops" characters - repetitive after awhile), I enjoy nothing better than settling into another world where there's an element of fireplace-comfort in the midst of a good murder mystery. Am I wrong in thinking UK writers excel in these? Oh, and another: Louise Penny and her Gamache/Three Pines series. While Charlton doesn't reach that level for me, I believe I'll follow the Lavender series as long as she develops them and doesn't get too comfortable with either plot or characters.

I have enjoyed all of Karen Charlton's books and her character development is second to none. Detective Lavender is truly one of my favorites. I appreciate historical novels that transport me to a different time and this one certainly did. The pacing is perfect and the story was captivating. I only wish there was no wait for the next book! I received an ARC in exchange for my honest review.

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