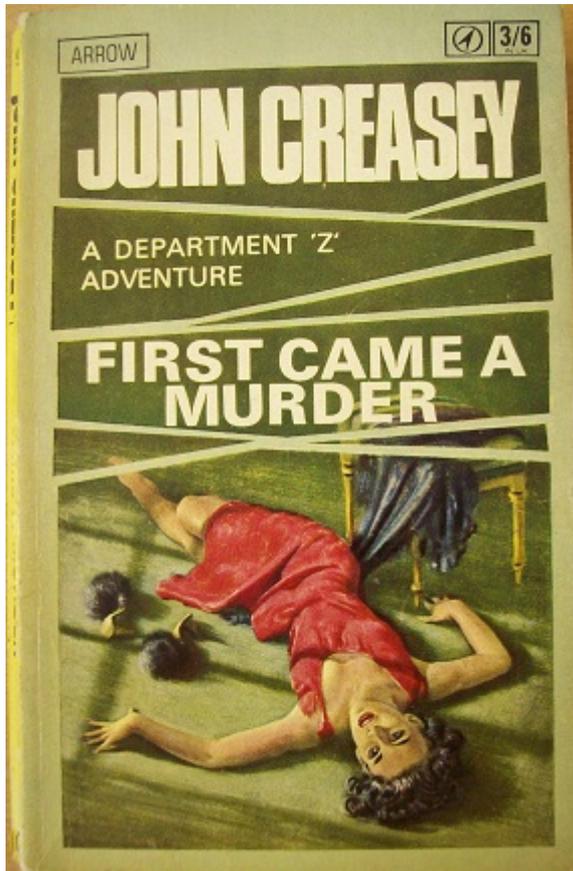


#105 – First Came A Murder, John Creasey BOOK REVIEW

Krauser PUA | 23 November, 2018 | by krauserpua

NOTE: This is my 1,000th post on the blog. Fancy that!



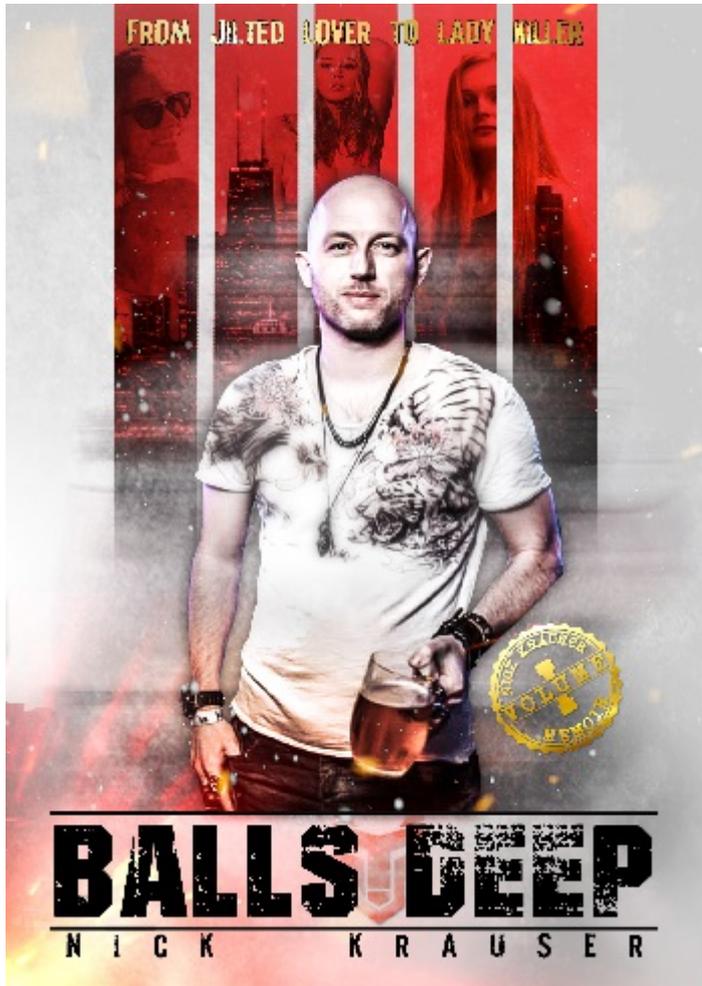
Regular readers know that I've set myself a little reading challenge, to wit, that I will attempt to plow through speed-writer John Creasey's **Department Z** series in order. Easy enough, you may think, until you see how ham-fisted his early writing is. You see, Creasey was determined to be a novelist even when the whole publishing world was against him. He endured 743 rejection slips as a young man until he finally won a newspaper writing competition and was kick-started. His 562 books [1] went on to sell more than 80 million copies. Creasey eventually got good.

I dunno, 743 rejections before finally achieving success.... there's something about that which strikes a chord in me. I wonder if it in some way relates to any task I committed myself to.....

Creasey was asked, in 1967, to revise *First Came A Murder* for its paperback reissue and he writes, "the astounding (to me) changes in my own style almost made me decide to close the book and forget it. Perhaps I should have done just this." That's not the kind of thing a reader wants to see when he's about to begin a book – that even the author thinks it's a bit crap. *First Came A Murder* was Creasey's fifth novel, so he was still learning.

Though it was 32 years between hardback and paperback editions, I do somewhat relate to Creasey's surprise at re-reading his old work. I have spent the last few months revisiting my own first memoir, *Balls Deep*, with a view to reissuing it in hardback. It's been educational to see how badly my original writing aged in the four years since first publication. I was ever so proud of it at the time. Since then I've written four memoirs [2] and two textbooks. I've learned a lot about writing and also finally settled on how I wanted my memoir to be. So, I felt compelled to go back to volume one and do a final definitive edition.

How has it changed? Well, sonny Jim, I'm so glad you asked.



The original *Balls Deep* was 135k words and didn't waste any time in pre-ambles. My entire pre-game life was dismissed within a couple of pages and I moved straight to the 'learning game' phase. I figured that's what the reader wanted, and it let me dive straight into the skirt-chasing. Now that I settled on doing a six-volume memoir, the focus has shifted from interesting anecdotes to an attempt to genuinely parse who I am, how I've lived, and what I learned – for good or ill – from my ten years in the Game. So, I wrote an extra thirteen pre-game chapters of interesting stories from childhood and early-adulthood that bring out character traits and motivations that place the Game years into context. I've also considerably fleshed out some of the existing lay reports to make them more detailed and interesting.

What else? I spent more time on developing other characters who reappear throughout the series, rewrote many summaries to be actual scenes with dialogue and action, reinterpreted events with superior hindsight, and restructured the story to fit a chronological path [3]. The new version currently stands at 207k words, the longest I've yet written. It's basically a completely new book.

So, bringing it back to Creasey, I can appreciate how it feels to revisit an early work and cringe a little at the quality.

One thing I can state with confidence is *First Came A Murder* continues the rapid improvement in Creasey's style. As before, it's a completely new cast of characters with the sole exception of Department Z boss Gordon Craigie. This time around strapping young lad Hugh Devenish is tasked to solve a murder at the upmarket Carilon Club, when floundering gambler and get-rich-quick investor Anthony Barr Carruthers has been murdered with a hypodermic syringe in the neck in order to shut him up over a failed scheme to buy ~~crypto-currency~~ South American tin mine stocks. The killer is the club secretary, a Mr Ricketts, and that's not a spoiler because he's revealed in the opening chapter. Devenish investigates and finds himself set against a shadowy money-laundering organisation run by City financier Marcus

Riordon.

What follows is fast-paced thriller action that doesn't make a lick of sense. Creasey was still just 26 years old when he wrote it and it shows. The story is less believable than a JMULV lay report. Seeing as I don't recommend the book, I think I will spoil the plot after-all [\[4\]](#).

Riordon has set up a "long firm" scam to buy up all the gold and precious jewels of Europe in one frenetic day of secret trading in the City. It's all to be loaded up on a battered old cargo ship that was secretly refitted to have super fast engines. Riordon will then murder most of his co-conspirators and sail off to a safe haven with five million pounds of loot [\[5\]](#). That's the master plan.

In order to get enough ready cash to place the orders, Riordon has allied himself with a handful of shifty financiers and a few dozen ex-con heavies. For a few months they set up a web of shell companies to do fraudulent penny-stock schemes not unlike the IPO scams of the movie *Boiler Room* (or modern crypto currencies and tokens). One of these is the aforementioned Marritaba Tin mining stock and that's the loose thread that causes the whole plan to eventually unravel, by alerting Hugh Devenish.

Riordon then finds himself busy fighting fires. Devenish survives two murder attempts on the first day, being almost run down outside the Carilon Club and then shot at outside his home. Later they try to kill him outside a pub, then lure him to a country manor to burn him alive, and then gas him on a yacht. It's quite remarkable how many murder attempts he survives without ever thinking to take more precautions before rushing around like a headless chicken.

You see, this is what betrays the age of Creasey when writing. Devenish is an *absolute fool* who trusts his resolution of every perilous situation to his fast reactions and solid right cross. It's the antithesis of Matt Helm's careful planning and astute reading of his antagonists' likely stratagems. Devenish blunders around constantly. Also, he meets a woman, doesn't kiss her, and within two days he's ready to risk life and limb to rescue her. It's astonishing how gallant the heroes of the early Department Z novels are. Only a silly young man could possibly put a virtual stranger at the centre of all his plans after just a few flutters of her eyelashes.

I dare say Creasey has failed in his attempts to scare me off the series. I shall move onwards with episode four pretty soon. Tally ho!

I haven't yet written 562 books, but the ones I have published are considerably more realistic than Creasey's in showing how an earnest young man can bag himself a hot women. [Go here for an overview of my products and links to buying them.](#)



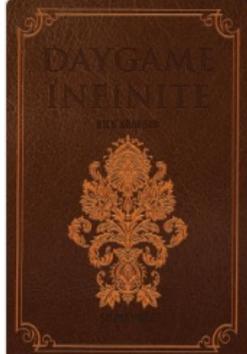
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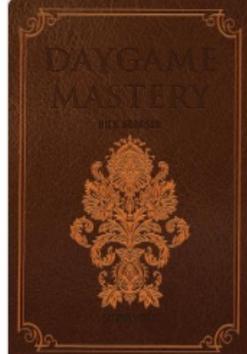
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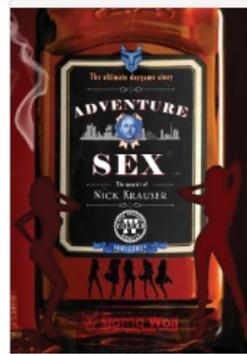
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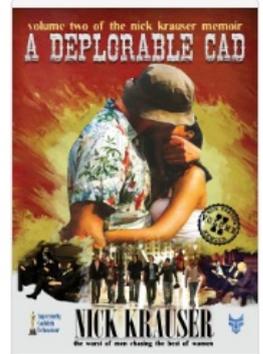
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[1] Yes, really. That's how prolific he was.

[2] One of them scheduled for publication after this *Balls Deep* rewrite.

[3] The original told each girl's story in a self-contained chapter, which many readers found disruptive to the overall flow.

[4] I know I hinted earlier I didn't want to, but like Creasey, I too can just make it up as I go along.

[5] In 1935, I imagine that's rather a lot.

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