

Book Reviews

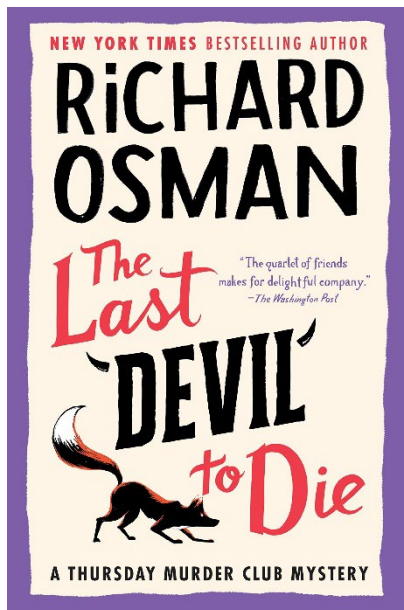
- ***The Last Devil To Die : The Thursday Murder Club 4* / Richard Osman**
Fiction 2023
- ***Sleepless in Stringybark Bay* / Susan Duncan** Fiction 2023

Book Review

***The Last Devil To Die : The Thursday Murder Club 4* / Richard Osman**

Fiction 2023

<https://www.betterreading.com.au/>



The fourth book in the record-breaking *Thursday Murder Club* series from British national treasure author, producer and television presenter.

Our favourite octogenarians are back to solve yet another mystery with The Thursday Murder Club, and this time they're set to face their most deadly opponents yet!

In this fourth instalment, The Thursday Murder Club receives shocking news that an old friend in the antiques business has been killed, and a dangerous package he was protecting has gone missing. With \$100,000 worth of drugs seemingly vanished, the gang is back on the case, and chaos is unleashed.

As the gang springs into action, they encounter art forgers, online fraudsters and drug dealers, as well as heartache close to home. With the body count rising and trouble firmly on their tail, has their luck finally run out? Who will be the last devil to die?

Osman masterfully executes excellent characterisations, witticisms, superb turns of phrase, pacy plot, and deeply satisfying structure that crackles with humour. There are also plenty of resonant themes which focus on the heart of humanity.

In *The Last Devil to Die*, Osman offers an utterly generous and completely compassionate look at the companionship and connection we all long for – regardless of our age.

Osman has the rare capacity to seamlessly switch from his characters' reflections from ageing, dementia and death to internet scams, air fryers and daffodils. It's quite a phenomenal ability and underlies his dexterity as a writer and the delight of this read.

The characters in this are deeply loveable, delightfully flawed and unflinchingly relatable – as is their connection and friendship. It's definitely a gang you'd want to hang out with. If being in your 80s means friendships with Joyce, Elizabeth, Ron and the others – chasing after missing parcels and escaping drug lords – then I'm all for it. There's a tender balance of silly and soulful, placing a lot of our attitudes on ageing and death into perspective.

The genius Spike Milligan once said 'Life is too serious to be taken seriously'. Osman, with his wonderful insights, charm and grace, imbues this series with that spirit, and particularly this edition of it. Go and buy several copies of *The Last Devil to Die*: one for you, one for your bestie and one for any elder in your life who needs a pick-me-up.

Book Review

***Sleepless in Stringybark Bay* / Susan Duncan Fiction 2023**

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A page-turning, mysterious, funny and delightful story by the bestselling author of *Salvation Creek*, *The Briny Café* and *Gone Fishing*.

When five couples pool their resources to live in a house located where a turquoise lagoon meets the sea, the quirky little offshore community of Cook's Basin is shocked. How will ten people – one in a wheelchair and one with a hauntingly familiar face – survive where the only way in or out is by boat?

When a member of the household is found floating face down in the bay, the police insist the death was accidental but the bizarre circumstances have locals scratching their heads.

Former journalist turned café owner Kate Jackson is curious to discover why a group of retirees in their late seventies would choose such an isolated location. Then a throw-away line in an old magazine story leads to shocking revelations.

Wrapped in the colourful culture of a boat-access-only community, *Sleepless in Stringybark Bay* celebrates having a go at any age, revels in the magic of the bush and explores the fragility of relationships, old and young.

Sleepless in Stringybark Bay is a charming novel. From its very first pages, it provides the perfect escapism to welcoming place where we feel like we know everyone and everybody knows our name.

Admittedly, I'm new to bestselling author Susan Duncan's work. Whether this is your first introduction to her writing, or you're a die-hard fan, you'll feel the inclusivity in her storytelling. You quickly feel like you're spending time with old friends with the likes of Ettie, Kate and the adorable Sam. The setting feels like an Australian *Doc Martin*, but the storyline is more *Midsomer Murders*.

The arrival of two limousines leaves our lovable locals mystified as a handful of silvertails take up residence in a remote house. Amongst the group are cheese makers and an ageing actress – with more than a dash of Norma Desmond. And there's also a bright-eyed Daisy, who may be in a wheelchair, but she's still more than happy for fireman Sam to lift her up the stairs. In many ways, Sam is the story's hero.

Complications ensue, and one of the newcomers ends up dead. The novel is great fun in its solving of the mystery whilst continuing the lives of our mainstay characters. Add in a cyclone, births and another death, and you're in for a lot of intrigue as well as heart-warming fun. This is a real treat.