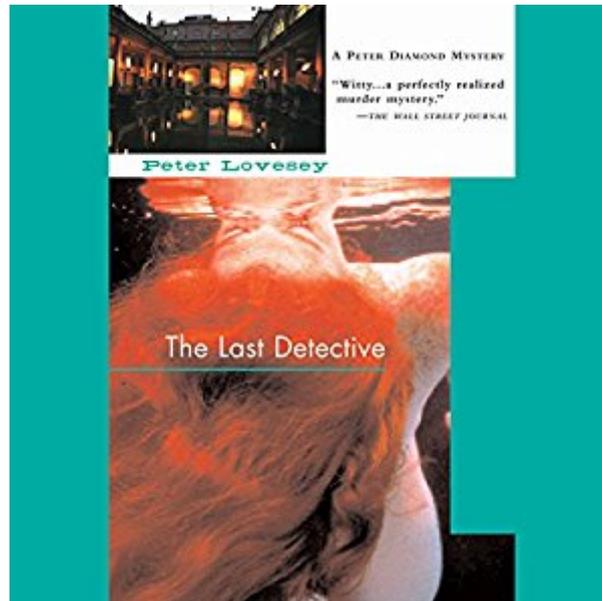


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The Last Detective: An Inspector Peter Diamond Investigation



Synopsis

Detective Superintendent Peter Diamond is the last detective: a genuine gumshoe, committed to door-stopping and deduction rather than fancy computer gadgetry. So when the naked body of a woman is found floating in the weeds in a lake near Bath with no one willing to identify her, no marks, and no murder weapon, his sleuthing abilities are tested to the limit. Struggling with a jigsaw puzzle of truant choirboys, teddy bears, a black Mercedes and Jane Austen memorabilia, Diamond persists even after the powers-that-be have decided there's enough evidence to make a conviction.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Peter Diamond is something of an anachronism on the police force--a stickler for old-fashioned detection in a business that relies almost completely on state-of-the-art computers and genetic engineering to catch crooks. So when he is called in to investigate the death of a woman found floating nude in a river near Bath, he sees it as the perfect opportunity to prove himself as "the last detective." On the way, Diamond repeatedly risks not only life and limb but the most important thing to him--his job. There are plenty of entertaining moments here. The examination of the fierce backstage politics at Scotland Yard is fascinating, and Lovesey, ever the consummate researcher, weaves in an intriguing subplot involving two mysterious letters penned by the late, great Jane Austen. Unfortunately, he may have heaped a bit too much on his plate; there isn't enough emphasis on what should be the real heart of the novel--the mystery itself. That, in addition to excessive length, is a real problem. Even Lovesey's crisp, lighter-than-air prose can't overcome a

plot this bulky and unfocused. The use of alternating points of view tends to bog down rather than advance the narrative, while other story devices--such as a clumsy attempt at courtroom drama--are just plain unnecessary. The mystery never achieves the level of complexity needed to justify the extraordinary length of time that Diamond takes to unravel it--in fact, it's rather shallow. Not to mention the fact that the identity of the murderer becomes a foregone conclusion well before THE LAST DETECTIVE enters its final pages--don't expect to be surprised. And finally, the greatest stumbling block turns out to be the detective himself.

I have always had a love/hate relationship with Peter Lovesey's books for many years. I have a large number of his novels on my shelf, mostly from the Sgt. Cribb series. In looking over them I realized that while they were readable, there were not particularly memorable and were all somewhat unsatisfactory. "The Last Detective" is a bit of a change in pace, in that it really is a notch better than the Lovesey standard. Detective Superintendent Peter Diamond fluctuates between being interesting and being thoroughly unlikable. While not anti-computer, he is quite distrustful of them, and is unhappy with their effect on police work. As a result he has come to style himself as 'the last detective.' His overall personality is overbearing and a bit egotistical which makes him a bit unpopular with both his co-workers and the top brass. As a reader I found that he had his moments, but I liked his second in command, John Wigful, quite a bit better. The plot, which centers on a drowned woman who turns out to be a 'retired' soap star with the personality of a rabid mink and the morals of a sociopathic rabbit. Singularly murderable, if I say so myself. The most prominent of the suspects are much more likeable. In a Lovesey novel this usually means that they will be subjected to a fair amount of hectoring by the investigator, and this is no exception. In this case, the police make a highly dubious arrest. Detective Diamond is so disturbed by the process that he resigns his position and resolves to do some investigation on his own. While the path to the true murderer is a bit complex it does not justify the length of the novel. Pacing is often uneven. Lovesey uses an unusual device in this story, i.e.

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