

The MIT Murders

Stephen L. Bruneau

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Stephen L. Bruneau's *The MIT Murders* is a spectacular mystery that combines cutting-edge biotech, mad science, a conspiracy, and serial murder.

The Massachusetts Institute of Technology, one of America's most well-respected institutions, attracts some of the smartest and most dedicated scholars and scientists from around the world. One of those people is Professor Hans Berger, a brilliant, somewhat aloof brain researcher. Alongside an MIT undergraduate, Susan Pearce, Professor Berger creates a startup biotech company dedicated to finding a cure for Alzheimer's.

The new company gets a big boost from investors about whom not much is known. Suspicions about the investors abound in Susan's mind. At the same time, a string of gruesome murders occurs in Boston. All of the victims are women, all have been mutilated, and most have some kind of connection to MIT. The campus is put on high alert, and a variety of law enforcement agencies are activated. Susan takes on the case, with the help of Cambridge PD Chief Homicide Detective Dimase Augustin.

This is a tight, well-structured thriller whose narrative holds attention. Its language is modern, streamlined, and places a premium on action. There's an excellent mix of real science, as when the book describes typical laboratories and expands on Alzheimer's and related research, and real police work, as with detailed crime scene investigations carried out by Dimase.

Toward its end, the book becomes akin to an action movie, especially once Susan realizes that one of her teammates might not deserve her trust. This realization, and the unmasking of the criminal conspiracy behind the Boston and MIT murders, makes for an exquisite apex involving violence and a maximum security prison in West Virginia.

The characters are archetypal. Susan is a earnest, somewhat naïve student who later taps into an incredible reservoir of personal physical strength, even managing to fight off a stronger, better trained opponent. Dimase is a jaundiced detective whose been on the force for fifteen years, both world weary and unprepared for the magnitude of the MIT murders. Underneath his toughness is a soft and compassionate heart, but his main preoccupation is with solving the murders. Professor Berger is the novel's chameleon: at times reassuring, at other times suspicious.

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BENJAMIN WELTON (April 13, 2020)

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