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Readers of historical mysteries, take note: *Dry Bones*, Peter Quinn's third novel in a trilogy featuring private eye Fintan Dunne, is out this autumn.

Like its predecessors, *Dry Bones* follows Dunne across the blasted heath of the 20th century. The novel encompasses the horrors of the Second World War and the sleeker, hidden corruption of the postwar world. Quinn's eye for detail and feel for history bring to life landscapes as disparate as battle-scarred Europe, pre-revolutionary Cuba, and the glittering hustle of 1950s New York City.



Dry Bones is divided into two parts. The first takes place in 1945–46 and tells the story of an OSS mission into Nazi-occupied Czechoslovakia that almost costs Dunne his life. The second is set in 1958 and tracks Dunne through a labyrinth of governmental and sexual secrets related to that mission. It's a hell of an adventure tale, as well as a rueful reflection on the great themes: love in all its varieties, and "the infinite incarnations in which death greets and embraces victor and vanquished alike."

Dry Bones is also about the nature of change. The wild-and-woolly OSS is transformed into the CIA. Dunne, the freelance private eye, sees his profession forsake individual cases for the more dependable and profitable field of industrial surveillance. Batista's Cuba is replaced by Castro's. The only constants are, as Quinn notes in *Hour of the Cat* (2005), "pain and politics. The perennials."

Fintan Dunne is at the heart of Quinn's books. An orphan who was raised in the Catholic Protectory in the Bronx, he served under "Wild Bill" Donovan in the Great War and, after his discharge, joined the police force. Too honest for his own good—or, at least, for a career in harness—Dunne struck out on his own. He scrapes a meager living out of divorce work until the events of *Hour of the Cat* force him to make a choice. A beautiful young woman asks Dunne to help free

Man About Town

PETER QUINN



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by Joseph Goodrich

her brother, a Cuban émigré who's been convicted of murder. Dunne is tempted to tip his hat and walk away. Does he do what's easy...or what's right? Right and wrong matter to Dunne, even though he's no shining example to others. They matter because he's Catholic. Time and again, his moral sense impels this battered knight to take the more difficult path.

Hour of the Cat finds Dunne grappling with Nazis, bent cops, and twisted doctors. It covers two continents and the most tumultuous years of the last century, 1938 through 1945. *The Man Who Never Returned* (2010) has a tighter focus. It's an engrossing fictional account of the disappearance of Judge Joseph Crater in 1930. Two-and-a-half decades later, Dunne is hired by a Hearst-like media mogul to investigate the Judge's

vanishing act. Dunne is presented with a very cold trail, but his initial skepticism fades when he gets the bit between his teeth. "No crime was a riddle beyond solution, a mystery with no answer...The only question was whether it was too late to gather the pieces of the puzzle, as well as how far those with the answers would go to stop the people trying to find them." Dunne pieces it all together, but the truth of Crater's disappearance remains, in every sense of the word, buried.

Quinn's books are thoroughly researched. "I'm a lapsed historian who stopped just short of a PhD," he says. "I love to do research." All three books contain superlative period evocations of New York City, with its automats, elevated trains, and newsreel theaters. Forgotten moments bring the era alive. In *Hour of the Cat*, Dunne runs into Fuzzy

Whalen, an old army buddy. They have a few drinks, then prepare to go their separate ways.

They came out to a bruised and threatening sky. A thunderstorm seemed about to hit. But there wasn't a hint of moisture anywhere. The dryness coated throat and tongue. A few drops fell. Hard as sand. A minute later, the storm arrived. A shower of grit, the blown-away fields of dry, exhausted earth from a thousand miles away, from the busted farms of Oklahoma and Texas, descended on New York in a blinding swirl.

Bizarre as it may seem, this dirt storm actually occurred.

Quinn captures other locales with equal facility. In *Dry Bones*, Dunne remembers watching *Cover Girl* at a USO movie night in London. Gene Kelly and Rita Hayworth are singing Jerome Kern and Ira Gershwin's "Long Ago and Far Away" when:

A lone soldier started to cry. Before long, muffled sobs filled the hall. Old-timers and newly arrived joined in. Technicolor beauty almost too much to bear, Rita could reduce any G.I. to tears.... When the lights came up, tears had dried. Men skulked out, avoiding each other's eyes, like college boys leaving a Times Square peep show.



Quinn says Dunne is "an urban type wonderfully described by [novelist] William Kennedy as a 'cynical humanist.' He despises bullies. Though he's also sympathetic to people in trouble, he's a man of no illusions. Distrustful of all authority, skeptical of most causes, uninterested in heroics, he is reluctant to get involved. Whatever the case, he knows from the outset that there are no perfect endings, no spotless souls, and that some mysteries are better left unsolved. Still, de-



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spite his understanding of the futility of good intentions and the hopeless fallibility of everyone—including himself—Dunne can't help but try to see that some modicum of justice is done."

Quinn concludes: "Fintan Dunne is the man I want to be when I grow up."

Like his hero, Quinn is a product of New York City. Born in 1947, he grew up in the Bronx and remains a passionate defender of that much-maligned borough. He went to Manhattan College and Fordham University, where he studied history. His interest in politics is bred in the bone; his father, Peter A. Quinn, had a long and distinguished career in New York City's Democratic party, serving as a district assemblyman, US congressman, and State Supreme Court Justice. Quinn has dabbled in politics himself as chief speechwriter for New York governors Hugh Carey and Mario Cuomo. He worked his way up the corporate ladder at what is now Time Warner, retiring in 2007 as corporate editorial director. A fourth-generation Irish American, he's a well-known and much-admired figure in New York City's Irish community. His first novel, *Banished Children of Eve*, was published in 1994. *Looking for Jimmy: A Search for Irish America*,

a collection of essays, was published in 2007.

Quinn's love of Raymond Chandler's work dictated the form Fintan Dunne's exploits would take. "Chandler's investigations are into character and soul," Quinn says, "into the American Dream and the nightmare wrapped inside it." But the form itself is a draw. "For me there's something innately attractive about the mystery/detective genre. At the risk of emphasizing the obvious, we're all sunk in trying to solve the mystery of our own lives, who we are, who our parents and ancestors were, what our fate will be, what will become of those who follow us...life as the great whodunit."

Quinn's sense of personal history and ethnic identity provide him with deep roots. No matter how far from the city he—or Fintan Dunne—may stray, he remains at heart a New Yorker. "My father was born over his father's bar on 11th Street," he says. "I rode on the 3rd Avenue El as a kid. The first baseball game I ever went to was in the Polo Grounds. The streets and sights and smells of New York are etched into the deepest crevices of my brain. But the city I write about is mostly gone—demolished, rebuilt, paved over, redeveloped."

This is the way New York City works, though, and Quinn admits it. "When it comes to their city, all New Yorkers—Dunne and me included—are hopeless romantics, always pining for what was."

Thanks to Peter Quinn, the reader can still experience that vanished city in all its dirty glory.

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PETER QUINN

Booklist

THE FINTAN DUNNE TRILOGY

Hour of the Cat, 2005

The Man Who Never
Returned, 2010

Dry Bones, 2013

www.newyorkpaddy.com