

Review of the book the spiritualist murders by james musgrave

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It is the late 1800s, and Clara Foltz is the first woman to become a lawyer. As a member of the suffragist movement, this accolade gives her very favourable repute amongst her peers. One night, upon leaving a suffrage meeting, she comes across a young lady in an apparent state of bewilderment. Leading the girl back to her house, she consults with her best friend, Ah Toy, to figure out what may be wrong with her. They soon find out that her name is Adeline, and she happens to be a young spiritualist medium.

Adeline's gift is rather unique. Apart from reading the thoughts of other people, she is also able to recall every day of her life with absolute clarity and precision. Having just come out as a discredited witness at a murder trial, Adeline is desperate for someone to heed her warnings about the man behind the murder. As a newly appointed attorney, as well as a budding investigator, Clara is all too willing to delve into the case. What she discovers, however, stems much deeper than just one murder. The *Spiritualist Murders* follows Clara and her friends as they set out to uncover the truth.

This is the second volume in the *Portia of the Pacific Historical Mysteries* series, and the characters from the first instalment are revived in this one. I felt a bit out of whack when I began reading knowing that all of the characters had backstories that I wasn't apprised of. In the beginning, there is a brief description of Clara, her children, and Ah Toy, and how they all came to be living together in a mansion. There was no other introduction to these people. I found this a bit disappointing as it never allowed me to particularly warm to Clara or any of the characters. Clara's entourage

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consisted of about seven friends and family members. With this core group of individuals, I was sad to see very little character development. I considered the fact that they were borne from the first book, but it left me feeling a bit cheated that I never got to see a single character mature. A love develops between two of the characters, but there is no elaboration as to how this love grows; it just happens. That is about the most evolved that any relationship gets.

The number of characters in the book is considerable. Because of this, I was confused throughout a lot of the story. I wouldn't have a problem if all the characters had a part to play, but a lot of them were interchangeable. The suspects of the murder were too similar for me to keep a handle on, and I felt like I should have kept a notepad handy to keep myself informed of who was who. I was also puzzled by the speed at which everyone accepted that Adeline was clairvoyant. The odd happenings in the book should have shocked people. Instead, they all took these unusual events in stride. The narrative included certain ideas only because it was required by the story. This made for many convenient moments in the book that left me wondering why the author didn't want to create any waves. It also, sadly, made the story fall a bit flat. All this being said, the mystery itself was genius. It brought all the parties together in the end for a big reveal, and James Musgrave kept the intrigue compelling until the conclusion. I loved how the various pieces all tied together so nicely. There was no cliff-hanger, there were no unanswered questions, and the book was perfectly complete. The editing was great; I found only a handful of minor mistakes. I would

recommend this book to any fan of historical fiction with a murder mystery thrown into the mix.

With a bit more character development and a more invigorating narrative, I would be able to rate *The Spiritualist Murders* more than 2 out of 4 stars. As it is, the flat characters and the too-perfect narrative make this book mediocre, but with a little enhancement - I think it could be exceptional.