

RANDOM HOUSE  BOOKS



The Art of Murder

Michael White

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About the Book

In all his years on the force, Detective Chief Inspector Pendragon has never seen a corpse like this one. After the initial horror, he recognises the reference to the surrealist painter, Magritte. But that makes the crime even more sickening – accomplished, as it has been, with a calculated ferocity which places it in another league from common or garden homicide.

In the Whitechapel area of London in the 1880s, a person who remains unidentified to this day committed a series of sadistic murders of local prostitutes, which involved elaborate mutilation of the victim's bodies.

Although the contemporary crimes are not directed exclusively at female targets, there is a grotesque similarity in the mindset of the two perpetrators – divided, as they are, by more than a century. But Pendragon is determined that this pathologically brilliant killer will not escape detection

About the Author

A former Thompson Twin, Michael White is now a globally best-selling author of thirty-six books. He has the unique distinction of being the only person in the world who has appeared in three different Top Ten charts: As a novelist, as a non-fiction writer and as a pop star.

He has sold over two million books in forty languages, including *Equinox*, *The Medici Secret*, *The Borgia Ring* and *The Art of Murder*. He has also written the E-Force series under the pseudonym "Sam Fisher".

Michael has recently co-authored a novel with the world's best-selling author James Patterson. Entitled *Private Oz*, it is due for publication globally in 2013.

For more information visit:

www.michaelwhite.com.au or

<http://www.facebook.com/michaelwhitewrites>

ALSO BY MICHAEL WHITE

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Equinox

The Medici Secret

The Borgia Ring

The Art of Murder

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Aftershock (as “Sam Fisher”)

Nano (as “Sam Fisher”)

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Mind and Matter

Mozart

Galileo

John Lennon

Isaac Newton

The Art of
MURDER
MICHAEL WHITE



arrow books

‘The creative process is a cocktail of instinct, skill, culture and a highly creative feverishness. It is not like a drug; it is a particular state when everything happens very quickly, a mixture of consciousness and unconsciousness, of fear and pleasure ...’

Francis Bacon
(1909-92)

Chapter 1

Stepney, Wednesday 21 January, 8 a.m.

She came running down the street screaming at the top of her voice. As she ran, commuters heading for Whitechapel tube station moved out of her way thinking she was a madwoman. But she was not mad, she was simply terrified. She had just seen something that would make the strongest stomach somersault.

Her name was Helena Lutsenko, a Ukrainian immigrant. She had been in England for a little over six weeks and her English was limited to a couple of hundred words. In her petrified state, she could think only in Ukrainian. But even in her native language, there were few words to describe the horror of what she had just witnessed.

It was 8 a.m., halfway through the morning rush hour, and the Mile End Road in East London was awash with grey slush. It had snowed the previous night, and, as always in London, it had settled for about ten minutes before turning to a slurry unknown to pre-Industrial man: part water, part diesel, part city grime. The pavements were no better. The grey snow had been piled up to either side of a narrow footpath cleared for pedestrians, and although council road sweepers had been out since six, throwing around sand and salt, the icy strip of pavement was treacherous.

Helena slipped and just broke her fall by grabbing a lamp-post. The shock forced her to calm down a little. She could do nothing in this state, she told herself. She needed to explain something, something desperate, something barely imaginable. And she needed to explain it to anyone who would listen. Anyone at all. Pushing away from the lamp-post, she took measured paces and deep breaths. Approaching a young man dressed in a business suit and carrying a briefcase, she began to articulate her horror, but the commuter speeded up instinctively. Helena walked up to a middle-aged woman talking into her mobile phone. The woman looked at her as though she were insane and shouldered her away. Just another East European beggar, the commuter thought, and sighed. Then a young couple turned a corner. They were well dressed but relaxed-looking, graphic designers or ad execs perhaps, definitely not bankers or insurance grunts. The woman was wearing a *Comme des Garçons* ankle-length coat; the man had a Louis Vuitton satchel slung over his left shoulder.

‘Help me,’ Helena said as clearly as she could. She stood in front of the couple, one palm held flat against the man’s coat sleeve. He looked down at her hand, then glanced at the young woman beside him. She was ready to move on, but he was a little more patient.

‘Please help,’ Helena said.

The young man pushed a hand into his pocket and came up with a handful of small change.

‘No,’ she said, shaking her head. ‘Not money. Come. I show.’

‘What?’ the young woman said suddenly and stared at the man. ‘What does she want, Tom?’

Tom Seymour shrugged. ‘Search me.’

‘Please, come. I show.’

‘Don’t like the sound of this,’ the young woman said, and took her companion’s arm.

There was something about the desperate stranger that moved Tom. He seemed to know instinctively that she was genuine, that she needed someone. She was clearly terrified. He turned to the woman beside him. ‘Trish, I think she needs help.’

‘Yes ... help,’ the Ukrainian woman responded.

‘Tom, you don’t know her from Adam. She could be the front for a gang. Don’t be a twat.’

He sighed. ‘Yeah, you’re right.’ Then he tried gently to move Helena aside. ‘Have to go,’ he said to her.

Helena deflated like a balloon with the air sucked out of it and she burst into tears. Trish was already a pace away, but Tom hadn’t moved.

‘What’s happened?’ he asked.

Helena did not understand.

Tom put his hands out, palms up. ‘What is it?’

‘Man ... dead,’ she said, tears flowing down her cheeks.

Chapter 2

Helena took Tom's arm. Trish remained where she was, shaking her head, unsure what to do. In the end she simply said, 'I'll see you at the office,' and walked away.

Tom turned back just in time to avoid colliding into another commuter. He and Helena dodged to the right. He pulled his arm free. 'Where're we going?'

She looked round at him, but said nothing.

They turned a corner, right, off Mile End Road, down Vallance Road. Fifty yards further on, they swung another right into a narrow lane, Durrell Place. For the first time, Tom began to worry, began to wonder whether he had done the right thing after all. Then he saw a sign up ahead: *Berrick & Price Fine Art Gallery*. He recognised the name from an article in *GQ*.

Helena ran ahead. Tom caught up with her at the door to the gallery. The front windows stretched for about twenty-five feet. They were blacked out, with the name of the gallery printed in silver lettering across the glass in an eccentric font, a cross between Bank Gothic and Marlett, all block letters and narrow serifs. The door stood ajar. From inside came the faint smell of stale alcohol and incense.

'So, what's this all about?' Tom asked, dropping his shoulder bag to the ground at the gallery's entrance.

Helena simply pointed through the open door.

‘Who are you?’ he said.

Helena looked puzzled for a second, then tapped her chest. ‘Me? Cleaner.’ Then she pointed again. ‘Man dead.’

‘Dead? You sure?’

She nodded.

He thought about calling the police, but curiosity had already got the better of him. He had come this far, he thought to himself, why back out now? Some part of him was suddenly excited.

‘Where?’ Tom asked.

Helena just nodded towards the door.

Tom took a deep breath. ‘Okay. You wait here.’

It was dark in the corridor, but an archway to his right led into a small room immediately behind the blacked-out windows. Bright halogen spots hung down in a cluster from the ceiling. Two walls were covered with vast canvases, blocks of pure colour, one a dark green, the other a deep purple. Under each stood a black leather and chrome sofa, original George Nelsons. Ahead was another archway that led into a much larger room, the display space.

Tom walked over to the second archway, hesitated for a moment and then stepped inside. This room was also brightly lit from rows of powerful halogens in the ceiling. In the centre of it stood some sort of installation, a tangle of plastic and steel, indistinct angular shapes bursting through a matrix of metal. Tom turned to his left and saw what he took to be another installation. He stepped towards it and froze. He felt the hairs rise on the nape of his neck. His mouth suddenly felt very dry and fear began to ripple through the pit of his stomach. For several moments Tom Seymour could not fit what he was seeing into his image of the universe. It made no sense, it was a set of contradictions, what he was seeing clashed with the model of ‘normal life’ he had in his head. Then, as

acceptance came, he felt his guts heave. Dashing back to the archway, he vomited as he ran, the spew landing on the expensive parquet flooring and slithering down his exquisite Yohji Yamamoto coat.

Chapter 3

Brick Lane Police Station, Stepney

Detective Chief Inspector Jack Pendragon had just switched on the coffee-maker on a counter at the back of his office when he heard a rap on the door. He could tell by the outline at the other side of the opaque window that it was his sergeant, Jez Turner. He turned back to fill the water container of the coffee machine, calling: 'Come in, Sergeant.' As he pushed a button the machine started its repertoire of sounds with a high-pitched whir followed by the crunch of beans being pulverised. Pendragon turned round to see an expression of excitement on Jez's face. 'Okay, what's the big news, Turner?'

The detective sergeant was twenty-three, tall and slim, with a taste for designer suits he managed to find at dramatically reduced prices and paid for by moonlighting as a DJ at a local club. Today he was wearing a dark blue, double-breasted Emporio Armani, a light blue shirt and a yellow tie held down with a slender gold tie-clip. With his hair greased back over his ears, his high cheekbones and large dark eyes, he looked like a 1920s gangster. 'Sir, just had a bell from the Emergency Call Centre. A murder just down the road in Durrell Place ... an art gallery.

'Berrick and Price?'

'Dunno, guv.'

‘Must be. It’s the only gallery there,’ Pendragon said half to himself. He grabbed his coat and scarf from a hook to the side of the office door and pushed past Turner into the hall.

There was a commotion at the front desk; a young man in a donkey jacket and calf-high Doc Martens was being restrained by the duty sergeant, Jimmy Thatcher. Another sergeant, Terry Vickers, was running towards them from a room down the hall. The young man tried to twist away from Thatcher, but the sergeant, a powerfully built cop who spent four evenings a week pumping weights at the local gym, was having none of it. As the restrained figure turned, Pendragon saw him head on. He had a web tattooed over his face, two blue spiders at each temple. The man was snarling and filling the air with expletives.

Vickers took only a second to reach them and yanked the man’s right arm up hard behind his back, making him yell in fury. Between them, the two policemen dragged the tattooed man down the corridor towards the holding cells.

‘Welcome to Wednesday morning,’ Pendragon said to Jez as they sidestepped the two sergeants and their bundle of joy. The DCI’s long face broke into a cynical smile.

As they went through the main doors to the station they were hit by a blast of freezing wind. ‘Jesus fucking Christ!’ Sergeant Turner exclaimed. Pendragon ignored him and gripped the collar of his coat tight about his face as he sped towards the nearest squad car. From behind them they heard the doors to the station swing open and close again and caught a glimpse of two other officers, Inspector Rob Grant and his sergeant, Rosalind Mackleby, taking the steps down towards the parking bays.

Pendragon jumped into the driver’s seat and turned the key in the ignition. A voice filled the car, reading a news bulletin on Radio Four. ‘Weather conditions around the

country have deteriorated dramatically overnight. Four inches of snow have fallen in some parts of the South East, and some of the worst of the weather has been in London after a blizzard swept over the capital in the early hours. The weather has caused serious disruption. All major airports have been shut down and ...' Pendragon switched it off as Turner clicked in his seatbelt. The DCI reversed out of the spot and turned carefully in the snow. The wheels struggled to gain purchase, then he gently squeezed the accelerator.

Brick Lane had been transformed. Its usual drab greys and browns were smothered in white. 'Positively Dickensian,' Pendragon said to Turner with an edge of sarcasm. Cars with their headlights on and wipers snapping back and forth were moving as though in slow motion, and along the pavement marched figures bundled up in heavy overcoats and hats, hands in pockets, heads bowed to the wind. The falling snow was almost horizontal, carried through the air in powerful gusts.

Pendragon pulled the police car into a gap in the traffic and crawled along. They had the heater on 'Max' and the wipers cutting two semi-circular swathes across the windscreen. The car ahead stopped abruptly, red brake lights blazing in the driving snow. Pendragon put his foot to the floor, but the car just kept going. He turned the wheel and they slid sideways, finally stopping a few inches short of the kerb. The engine stalled. Pendragon pulled on the handbrake and turned the key. Nothing.

'Okay, let's go,' he said resignedly, and snapped the key from the ignition.

'Go where?'

'To the gallery, where else?'

It was only a short walk, but by the time they reached Durrell Place, Pendragon had lost sensation in his fingers

and toes. He and Turner dashed into the entrance to the gallery just as Inspector Grant and Sergeant Mackleby's squad car pulled into the narrow lane behind them, sliding around in the powdery snow.

Pendragon stamped his feet and chunks of frozen slush fell on to the wooden floorboards. He opened his collar and looked up to see a pale young man, tall and wiry, clutching a leather bag over his left shoulder. He was sitting on a metal chair. Pendragon could see that his face was smeared with sweat in spite of the freezing cold. He was wearing a suit and an open-necked shirt. On the floor at his feet was a rolled-up overcoat. Beside the young man stood a woman: short, dark-haired. Probably in her mid-twenties, Pendragon thought, but she looked at least a decade older. East European features. She was dressed in cheap jeans and a drab brown coat that was far too flimsy for this weather. The man stood up.

'Detective Chief Inspector Pendragon.' The DCI nodded towards Jez. 'Sergeant Turner.'

The young man offered his hand. 'Tom Seymour.'

Pendragon turned to the woman. She was nervous, looking at the floor, raising her eyes but keeping her head down. 'Helena Lutsenko,' she said.

'So you made the call?' Pendragon asked, turning back to Tom Seymour.

He nodded. 'I was on my way to the tube station and this lady ... Helena ... stopped me and asked for help.' He wiped sweat from his forehead and blew air through his mouth. 'She ... ah ... led me here.'

'I'm cleaner,' Helena interrupted. 'I find dead man.'

'Okay,' Pendragon said, and glanced towards Turner to make sure he was taking notes. The sergeant had a pad and pencil in his hands and was writing quickly. 'Where's the body?'

Tom Seymour flicked a look towards the archway.
'Through there, in the main gallery.'

Pendragon turned to see Roz Mackleby and Rob Grant appear in the doorway. 'Ah,' he said. 'Sergeant Mackleby. I think these people need a cup of tea,' and nodded towards a door at the end of the corridor through which they could just see a rudimentary kitchen. 'Inspector Grant, come with us.'

The three policemen walked through into the reception area, ignoring the mammoth canvases and the expensive furnishings. Pendragon led the way under the second arch and into the main gallery. Surveying the far wall, he turned to his left and walked slowly across the wooden floor. A man was seated in a chair, hands in his lap. A pole had been placed behind his spine, keeping his dead body upright. He was wearing a black suit, white shirt and a red tie. On his head was a black bowler hat. Just under the rim could be seen a thin cord wrapped around the top of the head and tied to the pole. It kept his dead weight from falling forward. A hole seven inches in diameter had been cut into the man's face. The hole was the depth of the head. Where his eyes, nose and mouth had once been was now a cylinder of air. It looked as if a massive cannonball had passed through the corpse's face. Placed at the base of the void was a polished green apple.

Chapter 4

Pendragon turned away and saw that Turner was as pale as death and Grant was doing his best to keep his stomach from embarrassing him. 'All right,' he said, his own face expressionless, only his dark blue eyes showing emotion. 'I want the building sealed off. And I do not ... Sergeant? Are you with us?'

Jez Turner was transfixed by the sight in front of him, his face a blend of confusion and creeping revulsion.

'Sergeant!' Pendragon waved a hand in front of Jez's face.

'Sorry. Sorry, guv. It's just ...'

'Put a call through to the station, inform Superintendent Hughes. Get outside! I want the whole lane cordoned off. No one in, especially the press. I want the media kept out of this for as long as possible, understand?'

Turner nodded and headed for the exit. Pendragon glanced at Inspector Grant and ran a hand over his forehead and through his short salt-and-pepper hair. 'We need Forensics here on the double. Put a call through to Dr Newman. And get Sergeant Mackleby to escort Seymour and Lutsenko to the station. We need statements ASAP.'

Inspector Grant stared fixedly at Pendragon and then left without a word. The DCI watched him cross the room and was about to turn back to the macabre sight when he saw Dr Neil Jones, the police pathologist, turn the corner under the arch and walk straight towards him across the

wooden floor. Jones was short, pot-bellied and bearded. He was dressed in green plastic overalls to protect his suit and carried a grey plastic case in one latex-gloved hand. When Pendragon had first met him six months earlier, soon after the DCI had moved to his current job at Brick Lane, he'd thought Jones bore a striking resemblance to Gimli the dwarf from *The Lord of the Rings*, though he had never mentioned it.

Jones nodded to Pendragon and moved the Chief Inspector gently to one side so he could take a good look at the disfigured corpse.

'My goodness,' he said, as though regarding the football scores in the Sunday paper. 'How very unusual.' He ran a latex-covered finger around the inside of the huge hole where most of the man's face had once been. 'Well, he's definitely dead, Pendragon,' Jones remarked without looking up.

Pendragon ignored him. He was used to the pathologist's unconventional sense of humour and knew the best reaction was no reaction at all, just let the man get on with his job.

'I suggest you leave us two alone to get acquainted,' Jones added, nodding towards the corpse. Pendragon got the message and walked away towards the reception area. As he emerged from the gallery, he saw Inspector Grant trying to restrain a tall black man in an ankle-length oyster-coloured cashmere overcoat who was attempting to enter the reception area from the hall. 'Look, officer, it's *my* gallery, for Christ's sake!' the newcomer was saying. His voice was refined, educated. He towered over Grant by at least six inches.

'Inspector,' Pendragon said. Grant turned and, seeing his boss's expression, let the man pass. The DCI took a step

towards the tall black man. 'I'm Detective Chief Inspector Pendragon. You're the gallery owner?'

The man stood rigid before Pendragon, searching his face intently. 'Jackson Price,' he said. 'I'm co-owner with Kingsley Berrick. What the hell's going on here?'

'Would you like to take a seat, sir?'

'No. Why?'

'I'm afraid there's some rather bad ...'

'What's happened?' Price moved forward and, before Pendragon could stop him, passed under the arch and into the gallery.

'Sir. If you would ...' Price was now three steps into the room and staring at the horrific sight close to the far wall. Then he simply sank to his knees, buried his head in his hands and started to rock to and fro.

Chapter 5

Five minutes later, Jackson Price was installed on one of the leather sofas in reception, nursing a mug of steaming peppermint tea. He hadn't said a word since entering the main room and was now staring fixedly into space. Pendragon was seated at the other end of the long sofa. He studied Price in profile. He was a handsome man: entirely bald, head smoothed to a shine; taut ebony skin; facial bones prominent but elegantly proportioned; eyelashes long. He had the air of an actor or an impresario. The two of them were alone in the reception area but nothing could be done about the occasional sounds coming from the gallery as Jones worked on the corpse.

'I realise this is extremely difficult,' Pendragon began. 'But ... do you know the dead man?'

Price turned to him, his face fixed in a blank expression, as though still processing what Pendragon had asked. 'It's Kingsley Berrick,' he said at length, his voice a monotone. 'My business partner. He has a distinctive scar on his chin, just here.' He pointed to a region just below his lower lip, then looked away towards the huge canvases on the far wall.

Pendragon nodded. 'When did you last see him alive?'

Price turned back and seemed to unwind a little. He took a deep breath and then a sip of the hot tea. 'Last night, at the private view.'

'Can you talk me through it?'

‘It was a Luke Martin retrospective – these big canvases?’ And he nodded across the room to a wall-sized expanse of turquoise. ‘Some of the crasser journalists call him the “English Mark Rothko”. Absurd, of course.’ He sniffed and took another sip of peppermint tea. ‘Anyway, it was a great success. The hacks claimed they loved it. We even had a couple of young royals here – admittedly from the wrong branch of the tree,’ he added with a wave of his hand. ‘A sprinkling of rock stars, old and young, and Casper Hammond popped in, en route to his hotel, straight off the plane from Hollywood ... apparently. Best of all, everything was sold by nine o’clock.’

‘And Mr Berrick?’

Jackson Price looked back at his tea, suddenly quiet. For a few moments it had seemed as though he had slipped into an alternate reality, one in which nothing terrible had happened. Now he was back confronting the grim truth. ‘Oh, Kingsley was in a fabulous mood,’ Price said quietly. ‘He was terribly nervous earlier in the evening. But he always was a worrier. If I told him once, I told him a thousand times that worrying would be the death ...’

‘Mr Price, did Kingsley Berrick have any enemies?’

‘Enemies?’ Price shook his head. ‘The very idea is simply preposterous, Chief Inspector. Everyone loved Kingsley.’

Pendragon decided to change tack. ‘Did you see him leave last night?’

‘Yes. As a matter of fact, I did. It was late ... must have been oh, let me see ... one o’clock? There were only a few of us still here. He left with Norman.’

‘Norman?’

‘Norman Hedridge, Kingsley’s partner. Well, ex-partner. They’re still friends, but no longer an item.’

‘I see. And did Mr Berrick say where they were going?’

‘Home.’

‘And who remained behind with you?’

Price looked down at his cup again and took another sip before answering, ‘Chester and Selina. Yes, that’s it. Just the three of us.’

‘Then?’

‘Well, we stayed and chatted for a bit. Selina left before Chester. I set the alarm and went home.’

‘Can anyone verify your movements after you left?’

Price looked startled for a moment. ‘My mother was still up. I live with her.’

‘She stayed up that late?’

‘She’s a worrier too.’

Pendragon paused for a beat. ‘So how did the cleaner get in?’

‘The cleaner?’

‘The East European woman.’ Pendragon paused for a second to recall her name. ‘Helena Lutsenko.’

‘Oh, right.’ Price took a sip of tea. ‘A couple of students live over the gallery. We pay them to let the cleaner in and out twice a week. I don’t normally surface till at least ten.’ He smiled for the first time, a big white slash across his face. ‘Surely you don’t think the cleaner ... ?’

Pendragon ignored this. ‘I’m grateful. It must be a terrible shock for you. We will need to have a much more in-depth talk later ... you understand?’

Price stared at him with his blank expression again. It looked as if he were about to say something, but then thought better of it. Opting to nod instead, he turned back to his tea.

Chapter 6

Pendragon walked into the corridor and headed for the gallery's kitchen. Mackleby and Grant were there with Tom Seymour and Helena Lutsenko. 'We'll need you both to come to the station to give a detailed report,' Pendragon said to the witnesses. Helena looked alarmed, but Tom Seymour simply nodded.

'I've called into work to tell them I'll not be in this morning,' he said.

'Good. Inspector Grant and Sergeant Mackleby here will escort you to the station ...'

'But, sir, I do nothing!' Helena Lutsenko exclaimed, her eyes wide and dark with worry.

Pendragon found a brief smile from somewhere. 'Don't worry,' he said gently. 'We're not accusing you of anything.'

'But ...' she looked panic-stricken '... my job ... have to finish ...'

Before Pendragon could say anything more, Roz Mackleby stepped in and placed her hand gently on Helena's elbow.

'Really ... we won't bite,' Sergeant Mackleby insisted.

Pendragon spun round as Sergeant Turner appeared in the doorway.

'Lane's closed off, guv,' he said. 'And Forensics just called to say they're a few minutes away.'

‘Good. Sergeant, I need you to get a complete list of who was here last night from Mr Price, and take a detailed statement from him. I want a full background on the event plus names ... who showed, who didn’t. Find out if anything unusual happened – everything you can get him to cough up. I’ll meet you back at the station.’

‘You’re walking?’

‘Need to clear my head.’

Before leaving, Pendragon turned back into the reception area, walked past Jackson Price and nodded to a uniformed officer posted at the archway to the main room. A police photographer was setting up a tripod and a digital camera a few feet from the murder victim. Jones was kneeling down in front of the dead man, peering into the gruesome void in his head and studying the apple.

‘First impressions?’ Pendragon asked.

There was an electronic whir from behind as the photographer ran off a couple of test shots.

Jones stood up. ‘Well, it’s a Granny Smith, Inspector.’

‘Dr Jones ...’

‘Okay, okay.’ Jones had his hands up. ‘What can I say? Male, early to mid-fifties, average height, bit on the plump side. It’s impossible even to guess at the cause of death before I get the body to the lab. I’d say he’s been dead eight to ten hours, no more. The body’s stiff from rigor mortis. No need for the truss. But obviously the body was put here when it was still relatively pliable.’

‘All right. Forensics are on their way. I’ll have the body released to you ASAP.’

*

Pendragon stepped out on to Durrell Place as Dr Colette Newman, Head of the Metropolitan Police Forensics Unit, emerged from a white van parked behind Mackleby and