

Hellnotes Book Review by Bev Vincent

DEATH'S DOOR

Michael Slade

(Penguin Books Canada, 368 pp, hardcover, \$32.00, ISBN #0-670-91165-8)

Is Vancouver author Michael Slade noticing the sands of time trickling past? His new psychothriller, *Death's Door*, explores mankind's ongoing efforts to decelerate the aging process, borrowing inspiration from *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, in which Dorian offers his soul to an Egyptian god in exchange for remaining young forever.

Slade's Special X division of the RCMP investigates two seemingly unrelated crimes. Ten people died during the daring theft of an Egyptian mummy that has completely intact flesh. The secret of its preservation would be worth billions to the pharmaceutical industry.

Concurrently, a serial killer is scattering the remains of his victims on coastal B.C. islands, bodies mutilated to parody breast augmentation, liposuction and other surgical procedures. The locations seem

staged, possibly to foil geographic profiling. Is there a link to another serial killer operating in L.A., the Mecca of cosmetic surgery?

Officer Nick Craven and his former lover, Coroner Gillian MacBeth, who have both benefited from the skills of a plastic surgeon, assist the investigation. Dr. David Denning restored Craven's hand and ear -- lost in the Mephisto case -- and rejuvenated MacBeth, who has targeted Chief Superintendent Robert DeClerq in her sexual sights.

Pornographer Wolfe Capp, specializing in custom female-in-jeopardy and snuff films, lurks in the shadows. His associates and clients include an ugly plastic surgeon, a former embalmer, and the mysterious Director, while another mysterious figure manipulates allies and adversaries alike behind the scenes.

Death's Door is filled with Slade's hallmark research: expositions about psychosexual disorders, Egyptology, martial arts, genetics, premature aging disease

and gerontophobia. His forte, though, is accurately depicting state-of-the-art investigative techniques. A lawyer specializing in the insanity defense, Jay Clarke -- the writing component of 'Slade' -- consults with real-life RCMP officers, fictionalizing two of them as characters in recent books. Still, Slade's Mounties don't always get their man -- master criminals sometimes get repeat performances.

This is Clarke's second collaboration with his daughter Rebecca. His recent books are more tightly focused, his villains less Gothic (though no less demented) than in earlier novels. The unflinching violence and nervous tension surrounding the fate of his series protagonists drives this fast-paced amalgam of horror and mystery to its climax.

(The U.S. edition of *Death's Door* will appear sometime next year. Jay Clarke will sign at Dark Delicacies in Los Angeles on December 15th.)