



A Straits Settlement

Brian Stoddart

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In the third installment of the Le Fanu Mystery series, the intrepid superintendent is promoted to Inspector-General of Police in 1920s Madras, which proves to be more boring than he had envisaged. Instead of pushing papers across his desk, Le Fanu focuses on the disappearance of a senior Indian Civil Service officer and an apparently unrelated murder. As the two incidents intertwine, the world-weary detective is drawn into the worlds of indentured labour recruitment and antiquities theft.

A Straits Settlement Details

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Author : Brian Stoddart

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From Reader Review A Straits Settlement for online ebook

Karen says

The Le Fanu series from author Brian Stoddart is one of those extremely elegant combinations of mystery fiction and historical lesson that also provides entertainment for readers. There's even a bit of good old fashioned romance from the male point of view. In short, there's something for all readers within these pages.

The third book, A STRAITS SETTLEMENT sees Le Fanu promoted above his desired wishes to acting Inspector-General, buried in paperwork and oddly behaving subordinate officers, increasingly desperate to resolve his ongoing faltering love affair with a local Anglo-Indian woman. It's not surprising that this reluctant bureaucrat seizes the opportunity to get back into some proper investigating work when a senior Civil Service member goes missing, and a seemingly unrelated murder occurs.

The sense of place and time in this series is absolutely pitch perfect - using as always something from the time as an element of the crime - in this case highly suspect indentured labour recruitment, people smuggling and antiquities theft. Always though, the ongoing question of British rule in India and the bubbling pressure for independence forms the backdrop, with elements of the struggle between colonial thinking and posturing and the reality of day to day life for the people cleverly incorporated. Le Fanu is the point of difference in the Colonial powers, and in the day to day society, with the manner in which he runs his household, his love affairs and his interactions with the locals. Even his food choices are not what the Colonial powers would approve of.

The manner in which Stoddart writes these books is pitch perfect. The historical elements, the factual tidbits, are built into the narrative in a way that lets the reader learn a lot and experience what it must have been like in that part of the world at that time. The mystery elements remain to the forefront and the personal bits and pieces are dotted throughout creating a character with depth. Le Fanu is not just a totally believable character he's nicely vulnerable, complicated and extremely easy to connect with. A series that really hasn't put a foot wrong, A STRAITS SETTLEMENT pushes the story of Le Fanu, his life and his future forward, setting up some major changes for the next book. Really looking forward to that.

<https://www.austcrimefiction.org/revi...>

Stephanie Jane (Literary Flits) says

My initial concern about reading A Straits Settlement was jumping into Stoddart's Superintendent Le Fanu series at its third volume. I wondered whether I would already have missed out on too much of the background information, but this turned out not to be a problem. There are nods to the two previous novels, but enough back story is reiterated to make reading A Straits Settlement satisfying and the hints to other stories are enticing. The mystery unfolds in 1920s India and Malaysia so I found myself in the same world as The Roar Of The Tiger by Annie Ayre, albeit a few years earlier. Stoddart shows the rigid class and race barriers and the ridiculously stilted British Raj etiquette to great effect especially in how these attitudes influenced the choices of which men should be offered powerful jobs. When reading this era of historical fiction, I often find myself amazed the the British Empire existed at all, let alone how we ruled so many nations for so long!

Superintendent Le Fanu is very much on the edge of polite society thereby enabling us as readers to look in. His 'scandalous' choices of girlfriends reveals his character, but I liked that he is in no way a lothario.

Unravelling murders might be his forte, but personal relationships certainly are not! Stoddart has created an interesting and diverse cast of supporting characters. I did sometimes get confused by exactly who was who among the lesser roles, but I liked Watson and Habi. A Straits Settlement is an intricate yet cosy mystery. Stoddart keeps a good pace, but this book is one for readers who enjoy studying clues, not for breathless thriller fans. It's certainly worth taking time over and I would recommend stocking up on a few Le Fanu mysteries now that the evenings are beginning to draw in.

See more of my book reviews on my blog, Literary Flits

Natalia Pì says

It took me a long time to read because I was busy, yes, but also because it is the kind of slow read that should be savoured the right way, so I got reading it when I could enjoy the atmosphere, ie. when I was relaxed. Ie., very rarely, but this is not the book's fault.

Atmosphere is possibly one of the main components that made me appreciate it -- it truly felt like stepping into a time machine every time I started reading. As is often the case for good genre fiction, the story is just a way to talk about other issues, which in this case range from the British presence in India to race relations, class, and many others.

I used to be a big genre reader when I was at university because it was one of the best ways to learn about different times in history or locations, while also reading a good story... This book is of the kind that made me like genre fiction in my 20s.

I liked it, but if you are looking for the kind of thriller that will make you hold your breath, that is not it. This is more the kind of book which works as a flying carpet to another dimension, with the added value of a mystery. If, on the other hand, you're the kind of reader who likes to be taken far, far away from where they are, then, this is the book for you, read it on a cold afternoon in winter and it will make you feel a little warmer!

PS If you are worried that it is not the first of the LeFanu mysteries, don't worry about it. It didn't stop me from enjoying it at all!

Kerrie says

I think it helped, this being #3 in this series, that I had already read the first two, so that I was familiar with many of the characters that occur in the earlier books.

What I particularly like about these stories is the authentic feel to the historical setting, which is, rather vaguely, Madras in the 1920s. The Indian Civil Service is losing its grip because of the independence movement and the protests about Imperialism. Le Fanu has risen to the level of Inspector-General of Police mainly because Major Jepson has taken his sick wife back to England. Le Fanu expects to job to be a lot more interesting than it is, but it does bring status with it.

Nevertheless he jumps at the chance to do some real investigation, rather than his usual pen pushing, and the trail eventually leads him to the Straits Settlements of Penang and Singapore, and with that the tantalising offer of a new job.

Stoddart has left himself plenty of room for #4
