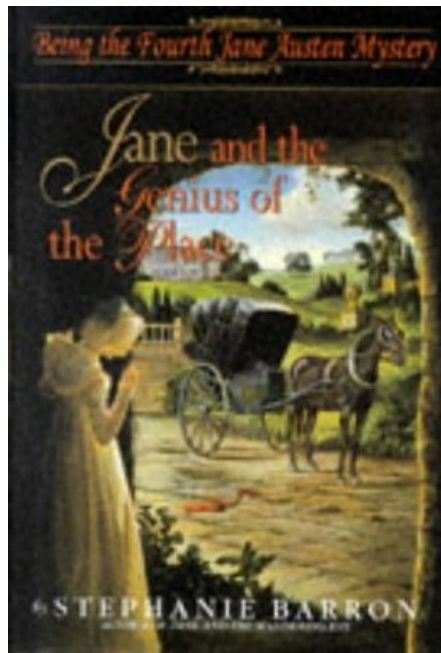




Jane and the Genius of the Place

Stephanie Barron

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For everyone who loves Jane Austen...The fourth engaging mystery in the series that recasts the well-loved author as a sleuth!

In the waning days of summer, Jane Austen is off to the Canterbury Races, where the rich and fashionable gamble away their fortunes. It is an atmosphere ripe for scandal--but even Jane is unprepared for the shocking drama that unfolds. A flamboyant French beauty, known for her brazen behavior, is found gruesomely strangled in a shabby chaise. While many urge the arrest of a known scoundrel with eyes for the victim, Jane looks further afield and finds a number of acquaintances behaving oddly.

As rumors spread like wildfire that Napoleon's fleet is bound for Kent, Jane suspects that the murder was an act of war rather than a crime of passion. Suddenly the peaceful fields of Kent are a very dangerous place...and Jane's thirst for justice may exact the steepest price of all--her life.

Jane and the Genius of the Place Details

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From Reader Review Jane and the Genius of the Place for online ebook

Tara says

One of the things I love about these mysteries is all the history that I learn in them. This one deals with French intrigue along the Kentish coast, while Napoleon threatens to invade. It is so interesting and well written. I love the characters and the conversation.

Maia B. says

It's not Austen's writing, though the fake is pretty convincing, but it's fine. The mystery is quite good, and though I do have a hard time fitting Austen into amateur sleuthing, I can believe it enough that it's not a struggle. It's a very summery book, and evokes the heat and dust and 19th century very well. I'd recommend it if you're not an Austen purist, but you like Jane Austen.

Nadia says

Finished it at last. It proved to be very tiresome read till the very end. To much niceties in text so meaning drowns in them and can't hold attention of the reader. I wonder if first two read stories had the same issue? I honestly can't remember. I also can't say i remember what they were about. What a pity. Jane just goes with the flow. She does not investigate. And it's what saddens me most. I would like to see more action. And here they just were handled the solution by the responsible party. Not very heroic if you ask me.

Pam says

Enjoyable

Patricia says

Great series, with Jane solving mysteries. Can't get enough of these books.

Meri-Lyn says

This is another fun read in the series. I was able to accurately predict how the murder actually happened fairly early in the story and who the murderer was before it was revealed. Several of the story details were a surprise so the book was not overly predictable which made it a good read. I look forward to the next in the series when I get to reading it.

Carey Bligard says

I enjoyed a lot of things about this book, but the mystery was only so-so. I knew as soon as the victim was found how the murderer managed it and spent the entire book wondering why Jane did not see it too. There was also a big hint part way through and she still didn't get it. I don't think this showed much cleverness by our dear Jane.

Marfita says

The Monster Buonoparte is on the verge of invasion of England's green and pleasant land, but the locals in Kent, while their bags might be packed, are still up for horse-racing, balls, and a little light murder. Jane's brother Neddie is the local Justice and as he knows how Jane loves a good mystery he calls on her for help. I liked this a bit better than the previous installment although I could see the solution pretty easily. At least part of it. It's a wonder the characters couldn't - but then it wouldn't be much of a story, would it? Barron fills the narrative with wonderful imagery of landscaping and historical detail. Of course we all know Bonaparte never did invade (so, no spoiler there), but we are still concerned with the characters and whether they will have to abandon their property and burn their crops ... unnecessarily.

Becky says

Love the series, but the mystery and characters unique to this installment really fell flat for me. The saving grace of three stars is because I enjoy the author's style, the Regency setting, all that set dressing, you know? If this plot has been transposed to modern diction, I never would have finished it. I don't think the relationship between this Jane and Edward captured the impression that I have of it from reading letters/historical info, etc. The mystery was just really tedious, but also busy and hectic. I didn't like it.

Miriam says

The fourth Jane Austen Mystery was a bit of a let-down after the third one. That is not to say that it wasn't still a good read, but it was much less tightly plotted and had a much less satisfying resolution. I wish this author did not constantly let the murderers escape after a full explanation and fail to punish them directly. A posting in India is not the equivalent of an arrest and a public trial.

The depictions of Godmersham and Jane's brother and his family there were charming, but that alone is not enough to support the plot. That Mrs. Grey had been murdered before the race and replaced by someone in her dress wearing a veil was incredibly obvious, and the fact that Jane did not realize rather hurts her characterisation as an extremely intelligent amateur sleigh. I sincerely hope that the quality of the series will return to the level of the third instalment in the next book.

Kimberly Paulson says

Definitely well researched and tightly written, but the mystery is pretty cool.

Jenna says

Jane Austen's father has recently died and Jane is spending time in Kent with her brother Edward and his wife Lizzy. They spend an afternoon at the races, where Jane's other brother, Henry, has a horse in competition. What none of the party expect to encounter is the strangled body of Franciose Gray tumble out of a carriage that is not her own. So begins the fourth Jane Austen Mystery, *Jane and the Genius of the Place* by Stephanie Barron.

I think this installment is, thus far, my favorite of all the books. Perhaps because of the introduction of Lizzy and Neddie into the tales, but I'm not sure. I have really enjoyed the characters of Henry and Eliza in past books, so it was refreshing to see Jane interact and sleuth with more members of her family. Once again, I found myself trying to sniff out the culprit, but never getting it right!

There were plenty of well-written suspects, and I love Barron's descriptions of people, places and things. Everything felt so authentic as it was written; it was very easy to find myself slipping into the 19th century Kentish countryside to walk the gardens with Jane. And that, right there, is probably why it is my favorite so far. I'm greatly looking forward to the next book in the series!

Ruth says

In the summer of 1805, Jane Austen finds herself enjoying the comforts of a visit to Godmersham Park, her wealthy brother Edward's estate in Kent. Following the passing of her beloved father some eight months prior, Jane, along with her mother and sister Cassandra, found themselves set adrift in the world, dependent on the generosity of more well-heeled family members to provide them with shelter and sustenance. Jane determines to enjoy all the benefits that come with her brother's place in society, and is thrilled with a family outing to the Canterbury Races, where her brother Harry hopes to see a horse of his own meet with success. But a thrill of a different kind awaits Jane's keenly observant eye, when the universally disliked Francoise Grey, a flamboyant Frenchwoman, creates a scene and then is later discovered in a shocking state of dishabille, brutally strangled. With Edward serving as the local Justice of the Peace, Jane is privvy to all attempts to bring Mrs. Grey's murderer to justice - but events fail to lend themselves to a straightforward resolution. Was Mrs. Grey the victim of a simple lover's quarrel, or was she playing for deeper stakes - with an eye to Bonaparte invading England's shores? With the nation at stake, Jane's investigations threaten to uncover secrets that the powerful would pay dearly to keep hidden...

For her fourth Jane Austen mystery, Barron continues her tradition of deftly incorporating a clever mystery story into actual known events that occurred in Jane's life. While Jane didn't broach political matters in her writing, it's clear from her letters that she was a well-informed woman, and with two brothers serving in the Navy it is no stretch to imagine that she was highly concerned with the course of England's war with Bonaparte. As Barron states in her Editor's Note introducing *Genius of the Place*, Kent was "ground zero" for Napoleon's invasion plans - and with the indomitable Jane there in the middle of it all, the possibilities for encountering some good old-fashioned espionage are endless. Barron couples her exploration of the political threat to England at the time with a focus on the pastimes of a Regency gentleman that would have been of interest to a man occupying Edward's social position. From horse racing to the desire to "improve the landscape" with a re-routed stream or a well-placed ruin, Barron deftly incorporates rich period detail that brings Jane's world to vibrant life.

Along with her brother Edward, we are introduced to a new coterie of Jane's family and acquaintance. While I desperately missed old favorites like the enigmatic Lord Harold Trowbridge and Henry's vivacious wife Eliza, I loved the introduction of Edward's wife Elizabeth - Lizzy - who serves as Jane's primary companion, and I can't imagine a classier, more intelligent foil and sounding board for Jane and her investigations. Barron also introduces us to Anne Sharp, the Austens' governess, with whom Jane would form a life-long friendship and later present her with a presentation copy of her novel *Emma*. I loved how Barron imagines Anne's storyline to parallel that of Jane Fairfax's relationship with Frank Churchill in *Emma*. She has a gift for subtly echoing characters or themes found within Jane's published works that make this series an Austen fan's dream come true. The storyline would, I think, benefit from tighter plotting and an earlier, and more in-depth, focus on the espionage element so integral to the storyline. But nevertheless, *Genius of the Place* is another thoroughly enjoyable entry in the series, replete with Barron's delightful interpretation of Jane's style, wit, and insight.

Laurel says

A fascinating Jane Austen inspired Regency mystery involving horseracing, French spies and the "improvement of the estate"

In the summer of 1805, we find Jane Austen visiting her wealthy brother Edward and his large family at their palatial country estate Godmersham Park in Kent, enjoying the comforts of living above "vulgar economy," and the privileges of ease and splendor. Her father Rev. Austen had passed away the following January, displacing herself, her sister Cassandra and their mother from their rented residence in Bath. This was the beginning of their wilderness years, when the Austen women would shuffle about from relative to relative, homeless genteel vagabonds, dependent on the generosity of their families for a roof over their heads. While Jane visits in Kent, her sister Cassandra resides nearby Goodnestone with Mrs. Bridges, the mother of Edward's wife Elizabeth, and Mrs. Austen is in Hampshire.

Jane wastes no times in enjoying their opulent society with an outing to the Canterbury Races to picnic on the green and watch her brother Henry's latest folly with the Sporting Set, his magnificent race horse Commodore, who is set to take his paces against the local favorites. Among the festivities, it is hard not to notice a beautiful young woman in a scarlet riding costume sitting in a phaeton near their own carriage. As she lashes out injuring a young man with her driving whip, Jane is shocked by her wild behavior. Her sister-in-law Elizabeth Austen explains that she is the notorious Françoise Lamartine Grey, the spirited young wife of a wealthy local banker who owns the grand neighboring estate The Larches. Besides being a Frenchwoman in England during the height of the "Great Terror," when many feared Bonaparte's invasion of the English coast, she is disliked by everyone in the neighborhood because of scandalous behavior. While Henry's horse loses the race, Mrs. Grey loses her life.

Brutally strangled by her hair ribbon and striped of her red riding costume, she is found in the carriage of her former lover Denys Collingworth, a man of "slim means, illiberal temper and general disfavor of the whole neighborhood." As the local Justice of the Peace, Edward Austen steps forward and takes command of the investigation, aided by the observant eyes of his sister Jane, his wife Elizabeth and their governess Anne Sharpe, they are able to recount the events of the day involving Mrs. Grey's movements. But something is awry. How could she lie dead in the carriage and then later be seen on horseback recklessly jumping the racecourse rail, chasing after the galloping horses, collecting the winners up, and then promptly departing in her phaeton? All eyes are on Collingworth who feigns absence corroborated by a witness. He points the finger at family friend Captain Woodford and Elizabeth Austen's brother Rev. Edward Bridges who are both deeply in debt to Mrs. Grey. Later we learn that her husband does not mourn Françoise's death, nor does he attend her funeral. As the suspects add up, Edward and Jane are uncertain that what appears to be a lovers

quarrel gone terribly wrong, in fact involves international espionage and Bonaparte far reaching ambitions.

Jane and the Genius of the Place, is the fourth Being a Jane Austen Mystery, by Stephanie Barron, the very popular series involving British novelist Jane Austen as an amateur sleuth paralleling actual events from her own life. It is told in a first person narrative from Jane's perspective edited from her personal journals discovered by the author in an outbuilding on an ancient Maryland estate. They blend the factual and the fictional, incorporating known events and facts from Austen's letters, history, culture and politics with a clever mystery story. This is my fourth of the series and I found it fascinating. The storyline introduces many of the social pursuits that a Regency gentleman would aspire to: horse racing, "improvement of the estate," cultivation of the manor house and family. In addition to the return of Jane's favorite brother Henry Austen, we are introduced to her elder brother Edward, his wife Elizabeth, daughter Fanny and the brood of their other eight children. Governess to the two daughters is Anne Sharpe, who Jane will develop a lifelong friendship with. Barron did superb job with Elizabeth "Lizzy" Austen as companion and sounding board to Jane and the investigation. Elegant, intelligent and composed, Lizzy is the kind of mother, sister-in-law or friend that we all should have in our lives, but rarely do. It is understandable how her death in 1808 was such a shock to Jane and her family.

I loved the introduction of the Austen's governess Anne Sharpe, who we know little about other than a few surviving letters, and that Jane valued her friendship enough to give her a presentation copy of *Emma* when it was published in 1815. In this story she has a flirtation of such with landscape designer Julian Southey, which I wish had been played out more. The aesthetic movement of the "improvement of the estate" is woven into the plot in detail, and as a landscape designer myself for many years, I appreciated the beautiful descriptions of the transformation of English countryside into the picturesque visions made popular by designers Humphrey Repton and Capability Brown.

Even though Jane Austen is criticized for not broaching politics in her novels, she did talk about them in her letters and followed the Napoleonic Wars through her two brothers in the Royal Naval. Politics, international espionage and French spies factor heavily into this novel in a clever way. In addition, with the introduction of new characters I did not miss the lack of Cassandra Austen, who seems to be a killjoy in the series, nor Mrs. Austen who is a bit of a downer for "our" Jane. Even though the mystery drove the plot, I found myself guessing whodunit early on. It really didn't matter in the least. The writing is so entrancing, the descriptions so mesmerizing and the characters so enjoyable, that nothing was wanting – well, except the shortage of Lord Harold Trowbridge, Rogue, Flirt and personal Infatuation. I patiently await his return.

Laurel Ann, Austenprose

Kimberly says

Another excellent book from Stephanie Barron. I just love the MC, especially since I'm a huge fan of Jane Austen's works. The idea of Jane as an amateur sleuth is awesome. :) The author does an excellent job with making statements similar to Jane. :) This is technically the second time I've read this particular one, but the last time was so long ago, I didn't remember it. I did catch the twist before Jane and her brother did, and that may have been my subconscious remembering the story for me. ;) But, I still really enjoy reading this series and recommend it to anyone who likes Jane Austen's writing and mysteries.

Anna Mcfarland says

(Book Review)

Who could have murdered the woman in the riding habit? Jane is on the case. This time her brother Edward and his wife Elizabeth are involved and I must say, they are rivaling Henry and Eliza as my favorite relatives, Cassandra is sadly bringing up the rear with her mother.

I like that Barron added unique jobs to this novel, such as the Gentleman Improver and spies. However, I felt that the way the murder was carried out suspended reality, as Jane might say.

(Series review) After reading four of Barron's mysteries, I've been so pleased with how clean and clever the series has been. The dialogue is of the period and it is fun to see Jane cast in the role of detective. Every time, I get a little better at guessing whodunnit.

Christine says

As much as I was not taken by the set up of the third book, I was immediately in love with the set up of this one. Why? It begins at the Canterbury Races and involves regular references to the fear of an invasion by Napoleon, things near and dear to my heart. The introduction of Jane's brother Edward and his wife Elizabeth was quite delightful, and I admit there were more passages here that caused me to outright laugh (in the best way) than in past books. The mystery itself is more complex than it seems at first, and though there is one particular point I thought it took far too long for the characters to figure out, ultimately it was quite satisfying.

Taylor Hansen says

3.5 Stars

QNPoohBear says

Jane is on the move again. This time she is at the Canterbury Races in Kent with her brother Edward and his family. Also at the races is the scandalous Mrs. Grey, a Frenchwoman who has captured the interest of many of the men in Kent but not many of the ladies. Scandalous Mrs. Grey is rumored to have had numerous affairs while her husband was occupied with business in London. Mrs. Grey gives rise to the rumors when she is seen hitting a gentleman with her riding crop. Later she is seen entering a neighbor's carriage and then following the horses as they race. Finally, she is discovered dead in the neighbor's carriage, strangled to death with her own hair ribbon and wearing only her shift. As Justice of the Peace, Neddie Austen is charged with finding the murderer and bringing them to justice. He immediately suspects the neighbor in whose carriage Mrs. Grey was found, but isn't positive. Neddie needs Jane's help to solve the mystery of the murdered woman. Among the other suspects are Mr. Grey who is said to have had little affection for his wife, Neddie's impecunious brother-in-law Edward, Edward's military friend, a timid governess, a dashing French count and a genius of a landscape architect.

This mystery can probably be figured out in part by those who have read any number of novels, include Miss Austen's own. Some situations and conversations appear in her novels, a joke which I really wish the author would abandon. It makes the mystery way too obvious. I figured out the what but not the why or who. The why was a bit confusing and seemed to be summarized far too quickly and wrap up too neatly. As usual there's a bit too much history tossed in and some pointless conversations between characters that seem to go nowhere though actually lead to clues.

I'm not a big fan of the footnotes and usually the reader can figure out the context just by reading the story. An author's note would better explain the history behind the story but as Barron is writing as an editor of Austen's journals, I see why she chooses to add footnotes.

I like Jane the character a lot. She's intelligent and witty and she refuses to be pressured into being someone she's not.

The mysteries are a lot of fun and I look forward to reading the rest.

Marci says

In the fourth mystery involving Jane Austen, Stephanie Barron has written a novel of manners interspersed with episodes of murder mystery and detection efforts. The book has a lot to say about how to behave in polite society, with Françoise Grey, the murder victim, exhibiting outrageous behavior at the Canterbury Race meeting, to the entertainment of the party of Austen ladies. They discuss her behavior inside and out through the rest of the novel, with plenty of commentary on propriety and the lack thereof, and what it might mean about her life, and the implications for the younger Austens.
(view spoiler)

I was disappointed through much of the novel that we were not to see and enjoy the company of Lord Harold Trowbridge. But he appears at the very end, climbing the hill to the little temple where Jane has been writing. Jane had gone to Goodnestone Farm at the close of the climactic scene where all was revealed, and she is back at Godmersham after a week. Jane writes that she has refused the expected proposal from Edward Bridges, as did Cassandra before her, and thus we assume that like Cassandra, Jane had to leave Goodnestone as soon as that proposal was refused. Anyway, Lord Harold comes. He and Jane exchange two speeches and walk off arm in arm.

Not totally satisfying, but it will have to do.
