



Dead Man's Bones

Susan Wittig Albert

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Susan Wittig Albert's exciting mysteries have been praised as "unique" (Seattle Post-Intelligencer) and "fascinating" (Booklist). Now, a dead man's bones are uncovered—and Texas ex-lawyer and herbalist China Bayles must dig into a pair of murders separated by time but connected by motive... When China's teenage son finds some skeletal remains during a local cave dig—remains that show a not-so-accidental death—it's a disturbing development. But China doesn't let it distract her from the opening of the new community theater donated by the elderly Obermann sisters. Unfortunately, the haughty, bullying Jane Obermann—and her frail, frightened younger sister—made the donation with a condition: that the first production be a play written by Jane about their aristocratic family history.

The premiere party ends with a bang when a ne'er-do-well local handyman is shot dead by Jane while breaking into the Obermann estate. It seems like a clear-cut case of self-defense. But China senses something else going on behind the scenes. Now, the key to catching a killer might be the mysterious bones in the cave—a clue from the past that could help China solve a mystery in the present...

Dead Man's Bones Details

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From Reader Review Dead Man's Bones for online ebook

Lissa Notreallywolf says

I love this series of books but once again I find myself wishing they had more diligent editors. There is the strong nostalgic sense of Nancy Drew about them because of the lavish food descriptions. I will quote one here as an example about the showstopping sentence I tripped over.

"I split two croissants and spread them with chicken salad and lettuce, ladled two cups full of cold tomato basil soup, and poured two glasses of rosemary lemonade. " Sure, it is a casual list sentence but it could have been improved in so many different ways. My mind stalled at spreading lettuce, although this isn't impossible, spreading lettuce on sandwiches. Just not a usage I would have chosen, and not compounding a confusing process with questionable grammar.

But that triviality aside, which seems petty in this wonderful cast of characters-say, aren't those sisters familiar from a prior book? Or was that another mismatched pair of sisters in Utopia vs. Pecan Springs. If I am correct, Utopia came before Pecan Springs, and China may have moved on because Utopia is a real town and it may not have appreciated the crime stream necessitated by a fictional detective in virtual residence. Because I have read the books as they have come to hand, organizing them as much as I can, this transition from Utopia to Pecan Springs isn't entirely clear to me.

This book has interesting tidbits about bone health and the use of various herbs, including horsetail as a treatment for breakage and osteoporosis. Crysanthemums are another unexpected healer.(p.130) Of course none of these things are a good idea to try on oneself, unless of course you are using tinctures under supervision. I just enjoy the medicinal herbs and the history of growing medicines. I have used some of these type of herbs (horsetail) as bath adjuncts-what one absorbs through the skin seems to be a tolerable level of exposure unless you are bathing with deathcaps or hemlock. The commonsense recipe for phytoestrogen bone healthy soup actually sounded pretty good.

Sadly, one of my favorite characters suffered from alcoholism and a botched transcript/CV-Alana. I gather China was saddened by it as well, but wary because she has her own history with alcoholics. She translates alcoholism as suicide on a slow track, which in some senses is true, but in others it can be a means of self medication to prevent a more abrupt departure. A thorny issue this novelist struggles with, and China is a typical ACA on many levels.

The plot of this book is best left to the reader- an old corpse reveals the seamy side of the blue bloods in town, and China networks the solution mostly but exposure to a very wide caste of people.

Mac Daly says

How are old bones found in a cave, and a recent deadly break-in tied to one of the town's oldest and wealthiest families? That's the mystery China Bayles finds herself in the middle of while trying to sort out the love lives of her best friends and make some extra money during the economy's downturn.

Jasmine Giacomo says

China Bayles is at home in Pecan Springs, working with Ruby in their herbal shops. A new playhouse has been erected, and is putting on its first performance, starring Ruby in a play written by the rich donor of the playhouse itself. Meanwhile, China's stepson, Brian, discovers a set of bones in a remote cave near town.

Alas, while the premise of the plot promised awesomeness, the delivery fell flat. Much of the story was given

over to daily life details, such as Ruby's mysterious new boyfriend, who seems to have some sort of history with both the police chief and with China's husband McQuaid, but naturally one won't say and the other can't remember. There's also the introduction of Cass as a potential replacement for Janet, the aging help in the shops. A lot of business talk goes on: China and Ruby are expanding their horizons, offering catering now, to make up for slow business in the shops. Cass steps up and says she'd like to work with them. They talk about it. They think about it. They talk some more. Sure, it's somewhat relevant to the protagonist's life, but in that much detail? It just watered down the mystery.

As far as that mystery went, what I saw seemed too transparent to be the actual truth, so I kept looking for other explanations. Alas, there were none: the killer was who I thought, and the bones belonged to who I thought. It seems, from reading just two of Ms. Albert's books, that the villains don't come anywhere near the level of complexity as the protagonist, making the books less interesting to read and the resolution almost boring. Ruby's new lover's past was never explained, so it feels he's a setup for the next book, yet he appeared in this book throughout, diluting this case as well.

Pat says

Always good, like the family and friends, and of course, China.

Crystal Karre says

good story and the herb info is very interesting..

john m. ruh says

Just found a new(to me) great author

I. am always on the lookout for good mysteries. I chanced upon Dead Man's Bones and really enjoyed it. After googling Albert, I intend to go back and "run" the China Bayles series

Adam says

Post Listen Review: Man what a bad book this was. This is the only mystery I can think of where I was hoping the amateur detective would get shot before the mystery was solved so I didn't have to hear the ending. This book had the most bland and boring main character ever. She is happily married and seems to run an herb shop in her spare time but occasionally solves mysteries. The mystery itself wasn't very mysterious and I didn't really care who did it anyway. There never seemed to be a sense of fear or danger on the part of the main character. Rather than running away from bad guys or getting deep into the knitty gritty of forensic science or something the main character, China, says things like, "Growing lavender in the heat of a Texas summer can be dicey." She also continually says she is no Martha Stewart and then talks about making pasta with home grown pesto herbs. The writing grated on me at times too. Like when the author says the following-- She said "no," in a contradictory way. Just in case you didn't know that answering no is contradictory to begin with. I see that this is number 13 in a series and I am desperately

hoping that the library does not have books 1-12.

Pre-Listen Guess: I am all for a good mystery and this seems like what this should be. I hope I will like it.

Angela says

I so enjoy china bayles

Fredell Boston says

I really enjoyed this installment of the China Bayles mystery series. I was somewhat different from the others in that her son discovered the first dead body/mystery and things built from there. Of course, all the usual suspects turned up and the Bayles crew had to sift through them without disturbing the delicate balance of local, county and Texas officials involved. Was fast read and I recommend it to any mystery fan.

Ann Lynch says

I'm trying to read ALL the China Bayles books - having some issues at my two local libraries. I might have to beg borrow and steal some - I think there are only about 4 I haven't read yet.

Estella says

I really love this cozy mystery series. One of the reasons it is a standout for me amongst all the cozies I have read is that the protagonist, China Bayles, is described as "short and stocky, with a preference for jeans, tees and anything wash-and-wear." How refreshing! I get a little tired of the tall, willowy heroines who never gain weight and are beautiful even without makeup! Additionally, Susan Albert is a skilled author who really knows how to hold the reader's interest right to the end of the story! My kind of book, and my kind of author!

Fairlee Corkran says

China and Ruby are at it again. Who is the dead man in the cave? Will Ruby new boyfriend be the one or another heart breaker? What s going on with the rich recluse sisters in Town? love this series

Helenk says

Another good mystery by a good author. I will be requesting the next in the series soon.

Katie Rekowski says

Chyna Bales #13, Read by Julia Gibson. 2005. Chyna Bales, previously a lawyer, owns an herbal shop in Texas Hill Country. Her step-son discovers a skeleton in a cave. It appears the skull was crushed by a fallen rock, but was it? Meantime, the Obermann sisters have donated a building to be used as a community theatre. However, there are stipulations. The first play must be hers, a written account of her wonderful father, Dr. Obermann. Jane, the disagreeable sister, likes nothing that is happening to the building renovation and nothing about the direction the play has taken. As all this occurs, there are a couple of murders. Is there any relationship?

Gina Pat says

Audio book easy listening
