

Book Review: Bitter Fruit
By Tempest Black

Thanks to NetGalley and Little, Brown and Company for this advance reader's copy, in exchange for an honest review. "Bitter Fruit" is scheduled for release on March 23, 2027.

Perhaps the best aspect of Tempest Black's debut novel "Bitter Fruit" is that it's structured as a very effective slow burn. The gradual but steady build of tension and intrigue is much more appealing than a novel that bursts from the gate only to falter after the first few chapters.

When a male body is found on Easter Sunday morning, decapitated and castrated, Detective Inspector Lewan Kane and his team are called on to investigate and solve the gruesome murder. But they quickly learn this is no ordinary killing. And the greatest challenge is there doesn't appear to be a single shred of evidence left behind.

Kane is soon visited by Ella Lonan, a young woman overcoming depression and haunted by strange disturbing visions. At first Kane does not know what to make of these dark visions of a young woman drowning and severed heads on an altar. He initially categorizes them as the rantings of an ill woman. But they soon become the key to unraveling a murder mystery that grows more and more complex as the story unfolds.

The writing is excellent. The narrative built on relatively short chapters that frequently end with a tantalizing tease, making the book hard to put down. In addition to working through the myriad layers of the investigation, the narrative integrates deep character development that makes it easy to care about, and relate to, Kane and Lonan. They may be the protagonists, but they're also flawed and deeply human.

Don't be turned off by the book's initial slow pace. It ramps up soon enough and builds continuously through to the dramatic climax. Stay with it and you won't be sorry.

Five full stars for Tempest Black's debut novel "Bitter Fruit." I'm still not certain exactly how the title relates to the story, but that's a minor point. And it does appear that Black intends to develop a series featuring Det. Kane. Stay tuned.