

Book Review: Mine is the Night
By Alex Wagner

The subtitle on the cover of Alex Wagner's novel "Mine is the Night" states "One perfect murder is not enough ..."

That's the key issue I have with this multiple-murder mystery. Someone, or perhaps more than one person, is trying to commit many perfect murders. And in the course of trying to weave these intricate webs into one cohesive narrative, the end result is a much too convoluted story. Overkill times ten.

The setting is Vienna. The Prologue introduces us to Anton Mering, a low-level detective determined to prove himself to his chief inspector (Erich Brisart) by catching a serial killer on his own. We don't learn whether he succeeds or not, as the narrative jumps ahead 17 years and introduces a smorgasbord of current, former and would-be crime solvers.

There's Patricia Elmer, a successful private detective; her husband Robin, a famous crime novelist; Frank Konig, a widely read crime blogger; Father Simon Westerholt, a priest whose penchant for solving crimes has aided the local police on numerous occasions; Lucia Storm, a former investigator turned vigilante; inspector Beatrix Seiler, an inexperienced detective trying to prove herself; and her boss chief inspector Brisart.

Each of these crime solvers, except Beatrix, receives a cryptic yet personalized note from someone calling himself Mine is the Night. Is this person responsible for the headless body found in the crypt below St. Martin's Church where Westerholt practices? Clues and hints are dropped like breadcrumbs indicating, and confusing the reader, that any one of these crime solvers could be the actual killer. Or one might be trying to frame the others. But why?

That, in my opinion, is the major issue here. There are too many characters, and too little backstory provided on each, to draw any reasonable conclusions. At times I felt like I was a

participant in a game of Clue (I'll take Westerholt in the church with the knife). I spent more time scratching and shaking my head when I'd rather have been putting pieces of the puzzle together.

Oh, I almost forgot. Shortly after Father Westerholt is whacked on the head and seems to suffer a concussion, he begins a running conversation with St. Martin – the actual saint who Westerholt sees and talks to throughout the bulk of the story. Is Westerholt losing his mind? Or is this the author's way of demonstrating the Father dealing with his own conscience?

Whatever. I found "Mine is the Night" to be a bit overblown as Wagner goes overboard with the twists and turns. Keeping it simple would have been a better strategy.

Three out of five stars. Not highly recommended unless you like your mysteries mapped out like a game of Twister.