



Blackman's Coffin (Sam Blackman, #1)

Mark de Castrique

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What's really hidden beneath Asheville's rich history? Sam Blackman is an angry man. A Chief Warrant Officer in the Criminal Investigation Detachment of the U.S. military, he lost a leg in Iraq. His outspoken criticism of his medical treatment resulted in his transfer to the Veteran's Hospital in Asheville, NC. Then an ex-marine and fellow amputee named Tikima Robertson walks into his hospital room. Tikima hints that she has an opportunity for Sam to use his investigative skills--if he can stop feeling sorry for himself. But before she can return, Tikima is murdered, her body found floating in the river. Tikima's sister, Nakayla, brings Sam a journal she finds in Tikima's apartment. The volume dates to 1919 and contains the entries of a twelve-year-old boy who accompanies his father, a white funeral director, as they help a black man, Elijah Robertson, transport his deceased relative to a small family plot in Georgia. Nearly ninety years ago, Elijah's body was found in the French Broad River, a crime foreshadowing the death of his great-great granddaughter--Tikima. Sam and Nakayla must delve into Asheville's rich history, the legacy of the Vanderbilts at the Biltmore estate and of author Tom Wolfe, to uncover the murderous truth. Blackman's Coffin starts a new series by Mark de Castrique, author of the critically-acclaimed Buryin' Barry Mysteries.

Blackman's Coffin (Sam Blackman, #1) Details

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From Reader Review Blackman's Coffin (Sam Blackman, #1) for online ebook

Lynette Hague says

Thoroughly enjoyed this murder mystery set in Asheville NC. I loved the story story line, Sam, Timika, Natalya, Harry, and the Captain. Having moved to North Carolina 11 years ago, I enjoyed reading about some of the history. I also enjoyed the connection to Gainesville, Georgia as my parents live there.

Ann says

Sam Blackman is in the VA hospital in Asheville, NC. He lost his leg in the current Iraq War and is having rehab when he meets Tikima Robertson, a fellow amputee who invites him to apply for a job at her security firm. Soon after, Sam phones the firm and learns Tikima has been found murdered. Tikima's sister, Nakayla, calls on Sam when her sister's apartment is broken into. The intruders overlooked a diary from 1919 bookmarked with Sam's name and number. The diary brings to life the story of a white funeral director and the Robertson sisters' great-great-grandfather, Elijah Robertson, that ends in Elijah's murder. Sam agrees to help Nakayla to investigate, but he must overcome physical and mental obstacles before he can find the truth. This is an excellent story and a good mystery. The story is well written and the characters are very well written. I hope there are more in this series.

Katharine Ott says

"Blackman's Coffin" - written by Mark De Castrique and published in 2008 by Poisoned Pen Press. "Every cop likes the bonus of solving a cold case and Elijah's eighty-eight-year-old murder was positively frigid." This book and I just got off on the wrong foot somehow and we never really made a connection. It's an earnestly written mystery that strives to incorporate all the usual ingredients of a murder investigation plus a few historical tidbits, but there were too many moving parts and a kind of plodding feel to it that I did not enjoy. Many convenient and sometimes bizarre events and circumstances were slotted together to produce an adequate story but one that did not appeal to me.

Marybeth says

I got this book through one of my free ebook sites and am now hooked on the author's style. I am especially appreciative of the way the characters are built without the usual "his hair was this color with that color eyes." By the end of the first chapter we know a great deal about two of the characters without it feeling forced. All of the characters are likable and engaging, and I appreciate how some of the people we met in the first book continue to show up in the next one. There's a sense of community being constructed rather than simply individual characters. The dialogue is fun and the atmosphere of place makes me want to visit NC to see it for myself.

Now that I'm 3/4 of the way through the third book (and already have the fourth for when this one is

finished), I continue to be impressed by the author's mechanics and style. The pacing is beautiful, never feeling rushed or lagging. There have been a few typos, including the use of "shutter" when it should have been "shudder" in book two (shame shame, editors), but otherwise there is nothing to detract from the well-paced, tension-filled journey to a very satisfying conclusion. I can't wait to read more and plan to work my way through everything I can get my hands on by this author.

Kate Vale says

This story is really two: whether a child wrote a diary about a murder in the early 1900s or if a famous author did; and how the visit of a black woman to a recent fellow military man who's lost a leg in the war has anything to do with her murder days later and the murder of a long-dead relative eighty years earlier.

The two stories wind around each other like the vines of an ivy, each providing clues that link to the other as surely as ivy leaves turn red in the fall. But who has caused those deaths and why? The gradual revealing of the story kept me engaged from first page to last.

Elizabeth A. says

Blackman's Coffin is the first book in a new series from Mark de Castrique, author of the outstanding 'Buryin' Barry' series. Blackman's Coffin introduces us to Sam Blackman, a former Chief Warrant Officer in the Army's Criminal Investigation Detachment who, having lost part of his left leg in Iraq, is currently rehabbing at a V.A. hospital in Asheville, N.C.

Shortly before he is set to be discharged, both from the hospital and the Army, he meets fellow vet and amputee Tikima Robertson during one of her visits to the hospital. Knowing of his investigative background, Tikima offers Sam a job with the security company where she works and promises to visit again in a couple of days. After several weeks pass with no word from Tikima, Sam follows up with her company only to learn that Tikima was murdered, her body having been pulled from the French Broad river with a gunshot to the head.

Sam subsequently receives a call from Tikima's sister informing him that her sister's apartment has been ransacked, and that she thinks she knows what the intruders were looking for... a journal from 1919 which recounts, among other things, the murder of the Robertsons' great-great-grandfather, Elijah, who was also found in the French Broad river. Tikima had hidden the journal under the dust jacket of another book and left a note on it indicating that the journal was intended for Sam's review. Feeling a sense of obligation to the woman who had reached out to him, Sam agrees to help investigate Tikima's murder.

The plot, which deftly interweaves the modern day murder of Tikima with that of her great-great-grandfather Elijah, manages to include a great deal of history about Asheville, the Biltmore Estate and Thomas Wolfe (an Asheville native, and who does factor into the story), all without ever slowing down the pace of the story. As with his Barry Clayton series, which is also set in North Carolina, the characters in Blackman's Coffin are so well written the reader immediately feels as though they've known them forever, and both the behavior and dialog of even the most bit player rings true.

If you've never read Mark de Castrique's work before, Blackman's Coffin is a great place to start.

Pamela says

While perusing the stacks at the library, Blackman's Coffin practically leaped off the shelf into my hands. I thought: "That sure looks like the Biltmore House in Asheville." If you've never been to America's largest private residence - the mansion of mansions - you are missing out! Words can not even begin to describe such opulence.

After I turned the book over and read the back cover, not only did I confirm my assumption, I was intrigued by the synopsis.

Recovering Iraqi War amputee, Chief Warrant Officer Sam Blackman, is convalescing in the Veterans Hospital of Asheville when he gets pulled into a civilian murder case with ties to a one-hundred-year cold case. He's full of spit and vinegar at first, as any recent amputee might be, and is reluctant to get involved. He soon comes around when he realizes the case might not get solved, or at the very least, taken seriously, if he doesn't do a little digging of his own.

While piecing the clues together, Sam and Nakayla (sister of recently murdered Takima) become targets themselves as they poke, pry, and prod into the history of Biltmore, Thomas Wolfe, gem mining, The Cradle of Forestry, Pisgah Forest, gold mines, mortuaries and graveyards. And not everyone is happy about it, either. Not only is Sam making waves in the Asheville PD, and not the good kind, he's also on the outs with his brother, in addition to being red flagged at the VA for going AWOL, and stepping on a few regionally noteworthy toes.

All in all, a compulsively readable mystery. Quite enthralling, really. Based on real life people, places and events (of course, embellished and/or fictionalized with a creative flare and flourish). Entertaining and a bit educational.

The created characters were just as fascinating as their real-life counterparts. Sam himself, being a witty and wise protagonist drew me in with his laughable wit and affable charm. He does spew a few expletives here and there - including G-D-it. That always makes my heart sad. Otherwise though, Castrique writes some really great - and I do mean GREAT - ultra-realistic dialogue. Nothing about any of it felt forced, canned, cliché, stilted, etc. And of course, having lived in WNC for thirteen years, and intimately familiar with all the locales in the book, I was enamored with the setting(s).

If you're a fan of cozy mysteries with historical components - but you'd like a bit more vim and verve without being blindsided by explicit guts and gore, Blackman's Coffin might be what you're looking for.

FOUR ***** Compulsively Readable, Regionally Fascinating, Mystery/History ***** STARS

And for the record, I think this would make an excellent movie.....

Chuck McGrady says

Having read several of the books in this series, I figured I ought to go back and read the first one although I

knew the basic plot from the later books. As with the author's other books, Blackman's Coffin is fun because I know so many of the places and the history, and I didn't figure out the twists until the author revealed them. One little quibble: the protagonist (Blackman) interacts with a Forest Service ranger, and they reference "park land." No U.S. Forest Service employee would call the land managed by them as "park land." Constituents often can't tell the difference between parks and forests, but the agencies that manage those public lands know the difference and wouldn't make that mistake in describing them.

Kristi says

I listened to this as an audiobook on some of my longer runs. It was a good story and the ending wasn't predictable. The narrator drove me crazy doing all the different voices and I feel like he had weird pauses, but the book itself was enjoyable.

Chris says

This was one of the first purchases I made when I started using Bookbub, which has introduced me to all sorts of authors that I've never heard of before. I definitely liked Sam Blackman and his investigative prowess. He has lost much of a leg serving in Iraq, and we meet him while he is ending his rehabilitation in Asheville, North Carolina. I've been to Asheville several times and have extremely fond memories - of traversing onto and off the Blue Ridge Parkway, of visiting the Biltmore Estate, and of poking around. I got to do more poking around while reading this book - the setting of Asheville takes a front seat, as does the writing of Thomas Wolfe and great history of the early 20th century including geology and gem-mining. Excellent mystery. I'm hoping the setting stays in Asheville, I look forward to more books in the series.

Christi says

I read a later book in this series that alluded to some of the details from the first book, but that didn't spoil this book. I like how the stories intertwine Asheville history with a plot firmly set in the present day.

My one critique comes with the narrator of the audiobooks. His Southern accent for Sam Blackman sounds very fake at the beginning of the book, then it fades in and out into what I assume is the narrator's natural speech pattern. In the third book, the narrator sticks with just his regular voice and I hope that's the case in the 2nd one as well.

LJ says

BLACKMAN'S COFFIN (Unl. Inv.-Sam Blackman-North Carolina/Georgia-1907/Cont) – Ex
De Castrique, Mark – 1st Sam Blackman book
Poisoned Pen Press, 2008, US Hardcover – ISBN: 9781590585177

First Sentence: I felt a hand on my shoulder , shaking me awake.

Sam Blackman was a Chief Warrant Officer in the Criminal Investigation Detachment. He is now in a VA Hospital in Asheville, NC after having lost part of his leg in Iraq. Tikima Robertson, an ex-Marine who lost part of her arm in Iraq, visits his room. She comes with sass and an offer for Sam to put his past experience to use.

After Tikima is murdered, her sister Nakayla asks for his help and presents him with a journal written in 1919 on which Tikima has placed a note saying "for Sam."

I have become such a big fan of De Castrique's writing. He knows how to construct a good mystery with dimensional characters, a great sense of place and a touch of humor. He manages to include ideas and observations that are important and make me think.

The story is informative without, in any way, being boring or slow. This book is particularly timely in that the protagonist is an Iraq veteran and amputee. Some of his supporting characters are residents of a senior-care facility. References to other characters include the Vanderbilts and Thomas Wolfe.

The structure of the story is fascinating; a supposed journal from 1907--a device that could have slowed the story to a crawl but, instead, gave it extra dimension--and the present day. The story's plot was interesting and the manner in which the two time periods were linked and tied together at the end was so well done. I couldn't identify the bad guys and enjoyed the twists that took the story to a suspenseful climax and a touching end.

I was very sorry to see his Barry Clayton series end but am much better now that we have Sam Blackman. Thank you, Mr. De Castrique, for another great book!

Tulay says

Good mystery.

Started out little slow but ending was good. Interesting characters and plot. Nakalya's sister is murdered after visiting Sam at the hospital. She made a great impression on Sam. After learning the history of this black family and finding the dairy, they have to solve this mystery. Biltmore estate, emeralds and gold around the estate. I will read more from this author

Margie Peterson says

I picked this book up at the Good. Somebody never opened the first page, because if they had, they would not have been able to put it down. The edition I have is a paperback with a blue cover. The research is meticulous and it is about an America I know nothing about. It is a marvelous mystery and I hope the author has some more in the pipeline, because I want to know what Sam and Nakayla investigate next.

Susan says

Sam Blackman left a leg behind in Iraq, and is recuperating at the VA hospital in Asheville when he's visited by another vet who lost an arm, and who promises him help in finding a job. When she never returns, he finds that she's been murdered, and is enlisted by her sister Nakayla, who's found his name on a book in her dead sister's apartment. The book purports to be a first person account of how a young boy, his undertaker father, and an African American man to whom their family is indebted take a body to Georgia for burial. Nakayla finds out that the African American man was murdered shortly thereafter, and was her great grandfather. There's a lot of action, a hidden treasure, and love at the end of the road, which actually is just the beginning of this interesting series.
