

## Physics proves to be fatal in Grodin mystery

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Murder in academia is the subject of "Physics Can Be Fatal" ([Cozy Cat Press](#), \$14.95), the first book in a new series of mysteries by [Elissa D. Grodin](#) of Wilton.

Mixing the everyone-is-a-suspect style of [Agatha Christie](#) with the sophisticated campus mysteries of Amanda Cross, Grodin takes the reader to fictional [Cushing College](#), where the arrival of a "superstar" professor stirs up conflict.

[Alan Sidebottom](#) is an egomaniacal sexist who almost immediately alienates everyone he doesn't already know, including one of the faculty's youngest physics professors, [Edwina Goodman](#).

Edwina is assigned to be Sidebottom's host and guide, but he is so gross that she quickly leaves him to his own devices at a local inn.

When the man is found dead -- and murder is suspected -- a guilt-ridden Edwina decides to play amateur sleuth. The young woman finds that her sleepy little campus is a hot bed of sexual intrigue and professional jealousy where any one of her colleagues might have killed the obnoxious visiting professor.

"She's my alter ego," Grodin said of Edwina in a recent interview. "I like her. If I had a daughter, I'd want her to be like Edwina."

Grodin is a fan of the mystery genre who decided to give it a try.

"I know that a lot of people are writing mysteries, but as a reader I find myself putting a lot of them down before I finish. I decided to take a stab at it," she said.

Grodin thought about writing a book for several years before sitting down to create "Physics Can Be Fatal." Watching her husband, the actor Charles Grodin, become a successful author no doubt gave her a nudge, but "I didn't find a fiction-writing voice until now, in my 50s.

Grodin thinks that those who don't read mysteries, but put them down reflexively, don't know what they're talking about.

"In Agatha Christie, you will find studies of human nature as good as any. I think disrespect for mysteries is so passe. ... Who really wants to read Dostoyefsky?," she said, laughing.

In "Physics Can Be Fatal," Grodin is drawing on her own experiences.

"When I was at Dartmouth, I had a part-time job in the English department library. While doing that I met my first husband, a professor of English literature in London. It was a very intense world," Grodin said. "Oxford and Cambridge, where everyone knows each other. For whatever reasons, that whole world appealed to me."

Underneath the surface of their serious scholarship, however, the professors and their wives and students were fascinating as characters who could have stepped out of a Christie story.

"These very well-educated people do a lot of sniping at each other, and there is a lot of office politics and gossip, which can be kind of yummy," Grodin said.

Now that she has found her voice, Grodin is happily in the middle of writing the second Edwina Goodman book -- "Death by Hitchcock" -- which she hopes to complete by the end of the summer. The focus will shift to the film studies department at Cushing College as a festival gets underway.

"I'm having a lot of fun with it," Grodin said.

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