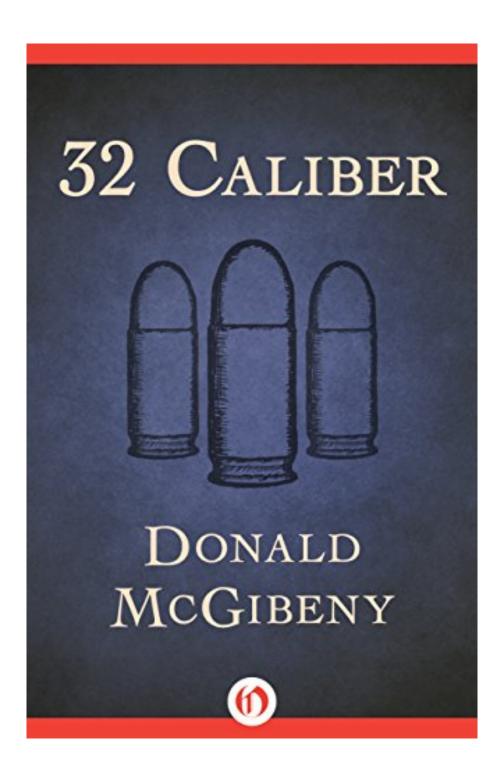


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A gripping thriller of love, betrayal, and murder, in which the declining marriage of one couple pulls everyone around them into the dark

Warren Thompson—Bupps to his closest friends—wants nothing more than for his law partner and best friend, Jim Felderson, to win his sister's hand in marriage. Helen can be capricious, at times even outright cold, but the wedding moves ahead anyway. All appears to be fine, until one day, Helen announces that she's leaving Jim for another man. Frank Woods, whose easy demeanor, wealth, and charm inspire unease on the part of every married man in town, has his sights set on Helen. And it's only a matter of time before he gets exactly what he wants. Not one to go down without a fight, Jim vows to dig up dirt on Frank, but as his suspicions as to the source of Frank's income grow, a heated domestic dispute becomes something much more deadly. Caught in the middle of a mounting disaster, Bupps will soon find himself not only the arbiter of a nasty divorce but the lead investigator of a harrowing death as well!

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Most helpful customer reviews

4 of 4 people found the following review helpful. Half cozy, half thriller - excellent period detection

32 Caliber is a 1920 detective thriller that sits somewhere between a "cozy" and Gold Medal-style pulp action.

Our hero, Warren, is a lawyer and man of means. He's a society-type with the sort of Big Name that the newspapers love to hate. He claims to have a busy practice, but seems to spend a lot of the book at the country club, playing golf and wooing a childhood friend. However, the license that comes with wealth and stature serves Warren well throughout 32 Caliber - as his sleuthing is predicated on his ability to stick his nose in where it doesn't belong.

Whereas Warren is essentially a good egg, his sister Helen is rotten. Easily the most beautiful woman in town, she's had her pick of admirers. With a friendly push from Warren, the one she wound up with is Jim - Warren's best friend, law partner and all-around Good Guy.

And that's Jim's problem: Helen needs to be "treated rough" - Warren even tells him so. But to the lovestruck Jim, the very idea of mistreating Helen was "like telling a Mohammedan to spit in the face of the prophet".

Without Jim doing his manly duty of bullying her, Helen goes wandering - and eventually falls for the local bad boy, Frank Woods. Frank's a dodgy agent of the French Government, although no one is really sure what he does - like everyone else in the book, he spends the majority of his time a-wooin' and a-golfin'. This is all background and comes out in the early pages of 32 Caliber. The story really picks up with the awkward three-sided confrontation between husband, wife and lover (with Warren there to chaperone). Jim's not letting Helen go, Helen doesn't like being yelled at, Frank's a poisonous little lump and wants his own way. Everyone threatens to kill one another and then goes sulking back to their respective bedrooms.

BUT (dun-dun-DUN!), someone does more than sulk. Jim snoops into Frank's past and finds that the "French agent" is up to his ears in dodgy dealing. He gathers up Helen and goes out to confront Monsieur Woods (he's not actually French - but, whatever). But the meeting is never to happen: there's a car accident, Jim dies and Helen is put into a coma!

Warren is distraught, but the crash is only the beginning of his troubles. First, dodgy Bolsheviks start popping up on the fringes of things and may have caused the wreck. Second, the coroner turns up that - wreck-or-no-wreck, Jim was shot in the back of the head. Third, and most damning of all, the comatose Helen seems to be the one with the gun and the motive!

Well, Helen's a pretty terrible person, but she is Warren's sister, and he'll be gee-darned to hey if he's going to let her go to prison for this (if she ever wakes up). Putting his society connections to the test, he sets forth to see if he can find the real killer. Unfortunately, even when Helen wakes up, she's of no use at all - she's caught a convenient case of amnesia.

The bulk of 32 Caliber involves Warren's amateurish pokings about town. He's not a particularly gifted investigator (something he freely admits after he botches multiple interviews), but he's spirited and genuinely quite appealing in his inappropriately gung-ho nature. As well as the upper class twittery, there's a gentle pace that's reminiscent of the cozies as well - Helen might have to deal with this... eventually... so there's no real need to rush the investigation, is there? Warren is often more upset about his on-again/off-again relationship than he is with the impending trial of his sister for the death of his best friend.

The entertaining Bolsheviks are the reddest of red herrings. They pop in and out of things like the Communist Beagle Boys, yelling inanities about global revolution and then hurrying home for lunch. Warren's quite desperate to pin everything on them, but they're as innocent as they are harmless - the real baddie is clearly Frank Woods.

And here's where things pick up. After spending most of the book a-golfin' and a-wooin', all the evidence falls into place with an almighty ker-thunk. The murderer, the motive and the (extremely silly) modus operandi all reveal themselves within the space of a few pages. Foreshadowing the best Gold Medal tradition, Warren heads to confront the bad guy himself in a disproportionately explosive finale. If previously the most action game on that pesky 7th hole sand trap, the last half dozen pages are a holocaust of fiery death.

Despite the unexpected crescendo and the unhelpful romantic advice, 32 Caliber is a merry little read. Warren is charming in his ineptitude and he's surrounded by a cast of goofy little one-off characters, from the slimy Frank Woods to the ferret-like local inspector to the bombastic Bolsheviks. Neither women nor non-white characters fare too well, but the standard literary apology applies: I'm afraid this is par for the course for the era and genre. Evidencing traits of detection's and future, 32 Caliber makes for an interesting click in the slideshow.

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful.

A 1920s Pulp Fiction Mystery

By Lanise Brown

32 Caliber by Donald McGibeny is a 1920s mystery pulp fiction novel. The story has a great cast of characters, and I enjoyed being dropped into the life of Bupps as he narrates through the martial challenges of his sister, Helen, and his best friend, Jim.

Helen and Jim are going through a bitter divorce, and the cause of their spat is another man by the name of Frank Woods. Their love triangle turns for the worst when Jim mysteriously dies in a car accident. However, Bupps believes his best friend's death was no accident.

Later, the coroner reports that Jim was killed by two gunshots. And whoever fired those shots knew Jim would be driving that night. Bupps is caught in the middle of the drama as he tries to find his friend's killer while hoping his sister isn't responsible. Each chapter of the book layers the characters with more problems and further entangles them in a web that, once sorted, reveals the murderer shot Jim with a .32 caliber pistol.

In the end, I can't really say this book surprised me. The resolution is a bit predictable and the last chapter is a little hokey. Still, I recommend this quick paced 128 page novel for anyone that's looking for an entertaining and suspenseful read you can finish in one night.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful.

One fast moving, suspense filled, fun mystery!

By Bill Baker

Written almost a century ago, this mystery remains one hell of an exciting short suspense filled treat. The narrator's sister is leaving her husband, the narrator's friend and law partner and that starts it all.

But it seems as if her new romantic interest is in serious money trouble – borrowing money that doesn't belong to him and perhaps only interested in his new woman for her cash. Yet he calls the husband to meet him at the country club and it seems they will have it out.

But on the way to the meeting, the husband is shot in the back of the neck – the car is wrecked and he is killed – who was riding in the back seat? His wife, ready to leave him, and now she is on death's door.

That's when the narrator begins playing detective though his suspect seems to have a perfect alibi – people claim he was at the country club all night.

So is his sister guilty? This short mystery is a real rush – sure it's old time – but that's part of the fun! It's kind of like an old antique and a very fast moving one at that!

See all 4 customer reviews...

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