

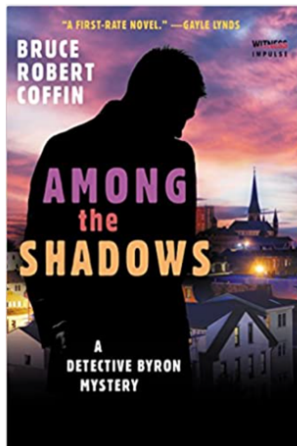
Bruce Robert Coffin



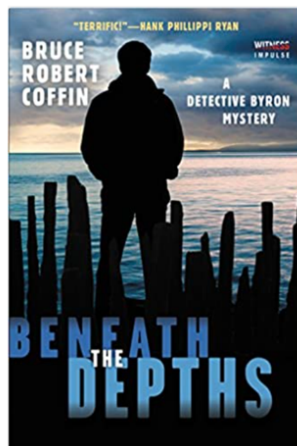
BRUCE ROBERT COFFIN retired from the Portland, Maine, police department in 2012, after more than twenty-seven years in law enforcement. As a detective sergeant, he supervised all homicide and violent crime investigations for Maine's largest city. Following the terrorist attacks of September 11, he worked for four years with the FBI, earning the Director's Award (the highest honor a non-agent can receive) for his work in counterterrorism.

Bruce's fiction has been shortlisted twice for the Al Blanchard Award. His story Foolproof appears in the Level Best Books anthology *Red Dawn*, Best New England Crime Stories, 2016, and in Houghton Mifflin Harcourt's Best American Mystery Stories, 2016. He lives and writes in Maine.

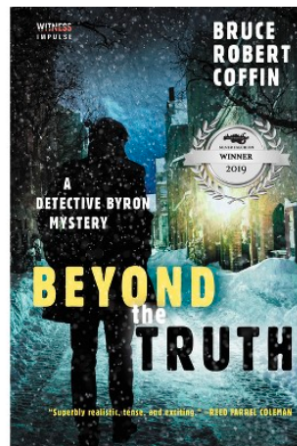
His four published books in the Detective Sergeant John Byron series are:



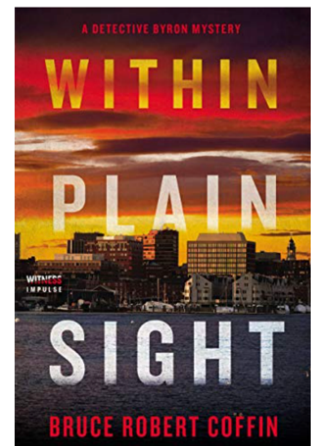
Among the Shadows:
2016



Beneath the Depths:
2017



Beyond the Truth:
2018



Within Plain Sight:
2020

Complete Review of the Works of Bruce Robert Coffin by George Easter, editor and publisher of *Deadly Pleasures* and self-identified major fan of Michael Connelly

from "The Thrill of Discovery: Bruce Robert Coffin," *Deadly Pleasures*, Spring 2020, Issue 88, pp 12-15.

Bruce Robert Coffin

I met Bruce Robert Coffin at last year's Bouchercon and he made quite a first impression on me. He gave me his business card that had color photos of his three novels (to that date) on it in a very attractive presentation. The combination of the two led to my seeking out his first book, *AMONG THE SHADOWS*, when I returned home. I was hooked

after the first few pages. As soon as I read one I picked up the next – and I blitzed the three of them plus his newest novel in just a few days.

Bruce Robert Coffin is a retired detective sergeant with more than twenty-seven years in law enforcement. At the time of his retirement, from the Portland, Maine police department, he supervised all homicide and violent crime investigations for Maine's largest city. Bruce also spent four years working counter-terrorism with the FBI, where he earned the Director's Award, the highest honor a non-agent can receive.

His four novels to date all feature Detective Sergeant John Byron. They are published in very attractive trade paperback original editions by Witness Impulse, an imprint of HarperCollins. If you can't find them at your local bookstore, or your favorite mystery bookstore, they are readily available online in print or as e-books.

We are introduced to the protagonist of this series, Detective Sergeant John Byron and his team of colleagues at the Portland Police Department in *AMONG THE SHADOWS*. Byron is a Harry Bosch look-alike in that he is totally dedicated to the job of finding justice for murder victims. He lets truth lead him wherever it goes, without fear or favor.

But he is a member of a tight bureaucracy, probably similar to other mid-size police departments in the U.S. He enjoys working with those colleagues that show intelligence, drive and loyalty (African American Detective Diane Joyner, family man Detective Mike Nugent and gay Detective Melissa Stevens) and shuns the ones that are lazy or perhaps a little bent. His immediate superior, Lieutenant Martin LeRoyer, recognizes Byron's talent and dedication but often gets flack from the brass higher up the chain of command for Byron's failure to follow orders and play by the politically-correct book.

Other skilled techs play important roles in the chronicled investigations: evidence technician Gabriel Pelligrosso, computer forensics expert Dustin Tran, and the always necessary medical examiner, Dr. Ellis.

Acting as a foil to each investigation is the obtrusive investigative reporter Davis Billingslea, who often bends the rules of ethical journalism to get a story. And then there is the police chief and the assistant police chief who wield their power to get certain outcomes. It became obvious after reading the four novels that it is a danger for the police chief and the assistant police chief to back any horse but John Byron, even if it looks like he has strayed from the path or is running in the wrong direction. It can cost them their job and does so over the course of the four books.

John Byron's dismal personal life rears its head only once in a while, because, frankly, he doesn't have much of one. He is separated from his long-suffering wife who thinks he favors his job over their marriage (she's right.). His cop father's inexplicable suicide years ago still haunts Byron. And there is the constant temptation of alcohol that he sometimes succumbs to. Over the course of the four novels, he enters into another romantic relationship, but one fraught with difficulty and trust issues.

AMONG THE SHADOWS begins with a routine investigation of a retired policeman (a contemporary of Byron's father) who is found dead in his home. The policeman was terminally ill and the police just have to check all the boxes because everyone thinks it is a

natural death. But upon closer examination it appears that he was smothered by a pillow. Why would someone kill a terminally ill man? Byron seeks an answer to that question and finds more than he bargained for.

The second novel in the series, *BENEATH THE DEPTHS* begins with the discovery of the body of prominent Portland attorney Paul Ramsey at the bottom of Casco Bay, following his loss of a multimillion dollar civil trial. Detective Byron suspects foul play and his investigation has two tracks: looking into the dark side of Paul Ramsey and ferreting out the secrets of the law firm in which Ramsey was a partner. But the secrets of the wealthy and the powerful are not easily uncovered, especially if the guilty have strong ties to the powers-that-be in the Portland police department.

The plot of *BEYOND THE TRUTH* is ripped from recent headlines involving alleged police misconduct and over-use of force. A popular high school athlete is shot and killed while apparently attempting a late-night robbery. Sean Haggerty, the policeman who was chasing him and his accomplice thought he saw the hooded young man pull a gun, but there was no weapon found at the scene. Detective Sergeant Byron knows the cop and considers him sound so he has to figure out what exactly happened to clear the cop's name. What he eventually uncovers is far greater than a somewhat minor robbery. Then an attempt is made on Haggerty's life and Byron goes into overdrive to reach a solution to this case.

When the dismembered body of a young woman is discovered in a Portland lumber yard, Byron soon becomes aware of the fact that the deceased shares similarities with other bodies found in Boston, the victims of a killer known as the Horseman. So the questions are: has the Horseman come to town or is someone copying the modus operandi of the Horseman? In *WITHIN PLAIN SIGHT* Detective Sergeant John Byron deals with these questions and more in a rush against time to find a killer before he/she acts again.

All four of these novels are crammed full of realistic police detection and procedure. Coffin's eminently likable characters and page-turning plots are also top-notch. I've long been a fan of this type of crime novel and now look forward with anticipation to more from Bruce Robert Coffin.

Earlier I mentioned Michael Connelly as a favorite. I usually read each new Michael Connelly in a rush of enjoyment. But then comes the realization that it probably will be another year before the next one comes along.

So I've always been on the lookout for other similar novels to fill the time gap between each new Connelly. ...I realize that it may be a disservice to Bruce Robert Coffin to compare him to Michael Connelly because of Connelly's near iconic status (I consider him to be the world's best living crime writer), but there are some similarities that immediately become evident. So, if you are a Michael Connelly fan, please give Bruce Robert Coffin a try. It's next to impossible to be as good as Connelly, but being nearly as good is high praise in my book. I would give the four books in the series a rating of A to A-. Enjoy.