

It was no ordinary suicide. Jack Dillon is sure of that. But how can he find out more, as an ex-cop who doesn't even have a fixed address? One thing he knows: it's all about a necklace.

In this multi-layered whodunit, Robert D. Rice harks back to the 1940s, and as he did so deftly in his first, award-winning novel *Burn Marks*, he's nestling his characters up to the headline grabbing people and events of that era. Dillon was previously involved in the Leopold and Loeb murder, and had a short marriage that nearly ended in murder (hers, of him), to one of the peripheral suspects, a nasty girl named Deja' with the body of a goddess and the mind of a snake. Recuperating from that trauma and others, he leaves his Chicago haunts to visit New York City and the World's Fair. There he runs into lawyer Roy Cohn and as they chat about some of the bad old days, Dillon instinctively runs the wrong way when a bomb is set off, making him a suspect in placing it. From there, based on what Dillon learns about a woman who may have thrown herself off a building, or may have been forced off by a "Chinese looking lady," he takes a slow boat to Indochina and becomes embroiled in what will someday become an international conflict.

Dillon makes a superb anti-hero, depicted by Rice with grit and humor. The poor slob is trying to improve himself in order to seek a new career, carrying around a notebook and writing down new words for his vocabulary classwork. But he can already throw words around like a quarterback when he needs to, with a snappy comeback for anyone from a nosy lawyer, to a sexy Asian schemer, to a friendly though careworn waitress who will still be there waiting when he gets home. The book opens with a scenario offering a plethora of clues for Dillon to sort through: a little girl playing on the beach in Southeast Asia is given a valuable jade necklace in a cigar box, which is immediately stolen by a mysterious Frenchman who appears out of nowhere, snatches the box, and is lifted in a basket up into the sky. Nothing of him but his tattooed arm, which will serve as shark bait, will be seen again until Dillon tracks him down. In the same mission, the soul-weary ex-cop will meet up once more with Deja' - who's always in all the wrong places.

Rice, one imagines, has a brain like a computer with a million stored connections that have enabled him to fashion this complex, page-turning crime/history combo. And like a computer, it seems the screen must sometimes slow to a standstill while the little colorful ball spins out a new twist. His historical references are fascinating; in the bombing incident he throws in background on "Nazi Lindbergh," the American hero/turncoat who may have been implicated in that as yet unsolved crime. And he inserts a myriad of detail about the lead-up to the Vietnam War. Rice says he likes to "revive and sculpt historical events"; in *Ordinary Suicide* he has painstakingly set action in stone to be viewed from myriad angles.