

Mystery captures the flavor of Providence

"SCRATCHED: An Algy Temple

Mystery," by J. J. Partridge.
Virginia Beach. 304 pages. \$17.95.

By **SAM COALE**

SPECIAL TO THE JOURNAL

Algy Temple, counsel to Carter (an alias for Brown) University, knows his way around the "Byzantine ways of Providence politics, its nudge-nudge baseline of governance," a pool room, and the city itself from Al Forno and The Dunk to Congdon Street and Swan Point. In this third of Partridge's fine series of mysteries, Temple gets to Rome and the poor village of Basilicata to meet the Don of 'Ndrangheta, the local crime family.

This densely detailed and cleverly spun tale has enough plots for three mysteries. Italo Palagi, director emeritus of the Institute of Italian

Studies, winds up dead in the river during WaterFire. The \$6 million he's invested for the university in Ravensford Capital has vanished into Bernie Sugarman's Ponzi scheme.

So are we talkin' murder or suicide? There's Italo's mysterious son in Italy. His mother's involved with the Giambazzis. Francisco Zito executes viciously criminal scams. Jimmy Harrigan wants to score big in the national Shoot-Out Pool Tournament in Providence. Claudia Cioffi, Italo's secretary, has the goods on her boss's own labyrinthine dealings and sexual peccadilloes, which are revealed early on in a letter he gave to Father Pietro Sacchi at Providence College.

I still haven't mentioned Temple's being locked in a trunk. Or the upcoming wedding. Or Hannigan's convoluted ties with Ziro. And then the

idiotic Faculty Senate of Carter University has just voted to rename Columbus Day, Native American Day, on the eve of the Columbus Day weekend. Oh, and the tax deal with Providence, the suspicious new director of the Institute, the Luccas and their support for Vittorio Ruggieri, Italo's untrustworthy son. And the spot-on, riveting descriptions of pool matches and the kind of folks they draw. I don't even like pool and was mesmerized.

But I wondered: how can Partridge, himself of Providence, pull this all together? It's impossible, but he does it, clearly and legitimately in this fine intricate yarn.

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