

BOOK BREAK

Ann Arbor mystery is fun, entertaining

BY VICTORIA DIAZ
SPECIAL WRITER

"Curly Smoke," by Susan Holtzer
(213 pp., \$20.95, St. Martin's Press).

Outside, a storm rages. Through the
fickle hand of fate, a rather motley col-
lection of characters find themselves
thrown together in a sanctuary of sorts.
Eventually, this little group makes a
terrible discovery: a murderer lurks

among them.

Sound familiar? It's the gist of in-
numerable murder mysteries, of course
— and also the gist of "Curly Smoke."

You'll find the characters of "Curly
Smoke" familiar, too. Beautiful heiress.
Appealing child. Wimpy husband. Bos-
sy, earth-mother type. Handsome ex-
jock. Tweedy professor. Aging curmud-
geon. A few students living in semi-

aqualor. Adventurous heroine, complete
with snappy sports car.

Sound trite, hackneyed, contrived,
tired, and tiresome?

Holtzer's mystery novel is fun, enter-
taining, colorful, and completely ab-
sorbing. A true mystery fan could do
worse on a howling winter's night than
a generous cup of hot chocolate and this
bracing fireside read.

Holtzer's "sanctuary" is a small resi-
dential enclave called Mackinac Court,
located in the heart of downtown Ann
Arbor. Just off Division Street, the odd-
ly situated complex is made up of two
Victorian mansions, three "elderly
McKinleys" (built post-World War I),
two cozy cottages, and a storage shed.
Dreadful secrets lurk within the nooks
and niches of Mackinac Court. And,
you can be sure, murder most foul waits
within its shadows.

As the story opens, independent com-
puter consultant (and Art Deco maven)
Anneke Haagen has just moved into
one of the two cottages. Her own trea-
sure-filled home lies beneath a shroud
of ice in this "pale December," recently
destroyed by fire. Anneke is a night-
mare-ravaged wreck herself, having only
narrowly escaped her own destruction in
the flames. She doesn't know it yet,
but her troubles will quickly multiply.

Almost as soon as she moves in, an
elderly woman dies inside one of the
mansions. One morning shortly after-
wards, Anneke discovers a very dead
body a few steps from her front door. A
brilliant architectural student — one of
her neighbors — has been strangled.
With a length of dental floss.

Anneke, in addition to being a com-
puter whiz and an Art Deco-ophile, is
(now wouldn't you know it?) something
of an amateur detective. Soon, she and
boyfriend Karl Genesko (former Pitts-
burgh Steelers linebacker, but now,
conveniently, with the Ann Arbor po-
lice) set out, in the wintry landscape, to
track down the killer.

At the heart of all the trouble in
"Curly Smoke" lies the deadly sin of
greed. Something is going on about a
new development called the Division
Project, in which Mackinac Court
would be leveled to make way for some-
thing more lucrative. This, it turns out,
is a matter of life and death importance
to somebody at ground zero. (This
sounds familiar, too?)

So, if the plot and the characters re-
peatedly evoke feelings of déjà vu, what
keeps these pages turning at a fast-for-
ward rate?

See DIAZ, 13D

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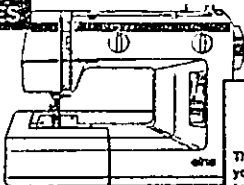
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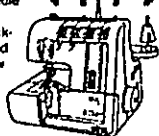


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