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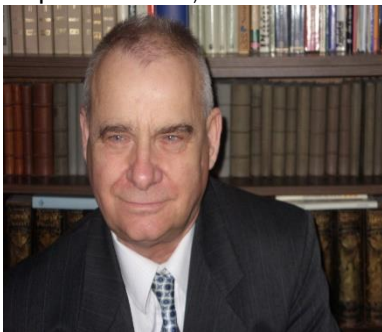
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Jaroslav Bálek: The Prague Economist Who Became a Master of the Classic Whodunit

The Prague-born economist, historian, and writer brings Czech culture and old-fashioned deduction to *Murder in the Garden* — three mysteries introducing private detective Pavel Havránek.

By DORX Chronicle Staff

September 26, 2026 · 8 min read



Jaroslav Bálek, the Prague-born author of *Murder in the Garden*.

Some writers arrive at fiction by a straight road. **Jaroslav Bálek** took a longer one — through economics, history, politics, poetry, and drama — before circling back to a pleasure that had been with him since childhood: the detective story. Born in **Prague on October 8, 1946**, Bálek has built a distinctive place in contemporary Czech-language literature, and with his 2025 collection *Murder in the Garden* he returns to one of the oldest joys of crime fiction: handing the reader enough clues to form a theory, then daring them to solve the case before the detective does.

An economist whose real passion became storytelling

Bálek studied economics at the **University of Economics in Prague** and the **University of Economics in Bratislava**, and his early published work centered on economic policy and national economic issues. But by his own account storytelling was always the deeper interest, and over time fiction became the dominant force in his writing.

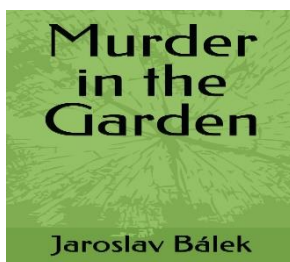
The result is a bibliography of unusual breadth. Alongside historical and political works such as *100 Years of Defeats and Victories*, *Is History Repeating Itself?*, and *Politics in Theory and Practice*, he has written humorous fiction, drama, and several poetry collections. Titles like *Coward, Dana*, and *All My Dancing Seasons* have earned him a large and devoted Goodreads following. Bálek has never confined himself to a single literary identity — he writes about relationships and everyday absurdities as readily as about politics and history.

The childhood influence behind the detective fiction

His love of mysteries began early. As a boy he listened with his family to serialized detective stories on the radio, each week bringing a fresh chance to guess who was responsible and whether the family's predictions would hold. His home library introduced him to **Sherlock Holmes** and **Agatha Christie**, and an elderly neighbor who taught him English happened to be a devoted Christie admirer — so much of their "lessons" were spent reading and translating her detective stories.

The influence stayed with him. When Bálek finally began publishing his own books, he wanted to write a detective story purely for enjoyment — something a reader could settle into of an evening and try to solve alongside the investigator. That idea became *Murder in the Garden*.

Murder in the Garden by Jaroslav Bálek — three mysteries introducing private detective Pavel Havránek.



Three mysteries, one detective

Published in 2025, *Murder in the Garden* is structured as three self-contained stories rather than one extended investigation: "**Murder in the Garden**," "**Murder in the Office**," and "**Murder in the Village**." In the first, a sudden death during a garden party leaves open the question of accident or murder. The second moves into an office, where a department head dies after a farewell

gathering and a second body is discovered nearby. The third travels into the countryside, where the suspicious death of a successful business owner becomes a new case. In all three, the police cannot reach a satisfactory conclusion — and so those involved turn to a private detective.

Pavel Havránek: a detective who thinks before he acts

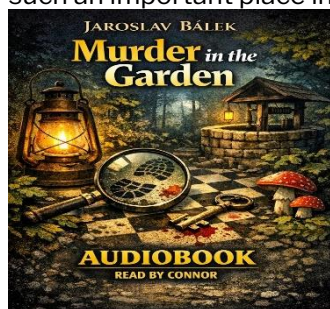
At the center of Bálek's mysteries is **Pavel Havránek**, a former police officer who left the force after disagreements with his superiors and opened his own agency. He is deliberately the opposite of the action-hero detective. His background in mathematics and competitive chess gives him the habit of thinking several moves ahead, and while he is not opposed to modern investigative methods, he holds to a more traditional belief that complicated problems usually have simpler answers than they first appear. His three guiding principles are **simplicity, intuition, and common sense**.

And then there is his preferred office: the Prague pub. Havránek's fondness for Czech beer, Czech food, and unhurried conversation is as much a part of his identity as his reasoning — he often meets clients over a glass, and the pub becomes a stage for the deductions to unfold.

There are no weapons required and no need for constant action. The reader is invited to observe, think, and make connections — an intellectual exercise as much as a story.

Prague is more than a setting

For Bálek the setting is part of the mystery itself. *Murder in the Garden* blends the life of Prague, the Czech countryside, and the atmosphere of the traditional English village whodunit that first shaped his taste. One reader interpretation that especially resonated with him was that the collection works not only as detective fiction but as an affectionate portrait of Prague, Czech culture, and its central detective — which is exactly why food, pubs, and local character occupy such an important place in the stories.



The audiobook edition of *Murder in the Garden*, read by Connor.

A writer still looking ahead

Despite an extensive catalogue, Bálek says he still has projects he wants to finish. Although he is an economist by profession, his published books have not focused on economics — so he has begun work on an economics-related book, with another humorous work also in progress. His challenge now, he says, is less about finding subjects than finding the time. The international reach of his books, published through Amazon and other retailers, has brought a large volume of reader correspondence from around the world that he keeps in the hope of answering when time allows.

Jaroslav Bálek in focus

- **Born:** October 8, 1946, in Prague, Czech Republic
- **Profession:** Economist, historian, and writer
- **Education:** University of Economics in Prague; University of Economics in Bratislava
- **Genres:** Detective fiction, humor, poetry, drama, history, and political writing
- **Known for:** *Murder in the Garden*, *Coward*, *Dana*, *All My Dancing Seasons*, *Politics in Theory and Practice*
- **Featured detective:** Pavel Havránek

Where to find Jaroslav Bálek

Murder in the Garden is available in print, e-book, and audiobook editions, and Bálek's work appears in both Czech and English.

[Find *Murder in the Garden* on Amazon →](#)

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