

THE ABORTIONIST'S DAUGHTER

Elizabeth Hyde
2006
ISBN: 0307263665
Knopf

The Abortionist's Daughter is an atypical mystery suspense novel. It is a chronicle of human tragedy for which many super successful "career" families face all too often. Author Elizabeth Hyde sets the tone by identifying the dysfunctional nature of each family member that lends itself to the inevitable violent act of murder. Dr. Diane Duprey, abortion clinic director, was wife of Frank Duprey, a successful district attorney. Their daughter Megan was a intelligent rebellious 19 year old college student. Frank and Megan both quarreled with Diane Duprey the morning of her death and, to complicate things, Frank Duprey had had an affair with the coroner assigned to the case.

Diane Duprey was dedicated to her strongly held beliefs and responsibilities, and she did not hold back when confronted about the abortion issue. She received murderous threats from individuals and groups unsympathetic to her mission. For that reason, she had plenty of enemies--creating a long list of suspects.

Midway through this novel one could have difficulty deciding who to pity the most, the victim or the survivors. In spite of the hundreds of people attending her funeral, this abortionist's life ended in a flurry of hate and anger. Because of the nature of her profession, the reader follows the logical path of suspects in spite of family feuds and separate lifestyles between husband and wife. The culprit, however, was closer to home than anyone could have imagined. The author spins and weaves circumstances in such a precarious manner one may forgo their personal opinions of a father-daughter relationship to entertain the possibility one of these two family members could be responsible for the tragedy.

Author Hyde did offer at least one redeeming quality readers could glean from these unfortunate events. Whatever distance had been created between father and daughter was slowly replaced by a strong bond which enabled them to move forward as a normal family unit. It speaks to the fact that it sometimes takes traumatic experiences to get people to value what they have in each other and appreciate the importance of making the best of the life they live. Though Diane Duprey centered much of her caring, concern and understanding on the clients she served and the passion for the cause, at the point of her demise she thought of her husband. It was a thought she would never be able to share.

Not withstanding the emotional roller coaster ride through the field of "who-dun-it," this book is a reminder to wake up and smell the "proverbial" roses.

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ALL IN ONE PIECE

Cecelia Tishy
2006
ISBN 0-89296-797-8
Mysterious Press

Reggie Cutter is her grandmother's heir. This means she has a nice town house in Boston's South End, a new tenant, and a paranormal ability with which she isn't altogether comfortable. She also inherits a relationship with one of the local cops - not a romantic relationship, but a dubious partnership in investigating the odder crimes Detective Devaney comes across.

When her tenant Steve Damelin is brutally murdered, Reggie has a vision involving drowning and a log. It would seem that Steve was stabbed, but there was fluid in his lungs. Was he drowned? Does the possibly Chinese character drawn in blood on the doorframe have something to do with Steve, or is Reggie the target?

Detective Maglia is assigned to the case, and he wants Reggie to butt out. Reggie refuses, which makes for some conflict. Her investigation turns up some connections that the police don't want to follow, connections that put Reggie's own life in danger.

ALL IN ONE PIECE is not nearly as woo-woo as it could be; Reggie's discomfort with her ability is handled nicely, and rounds out her character in a satisfying sort of way. The plot is serviceable, and I think a perspicacious reader can solve the puzzle with the clues given. The setting is a nice complement to the story, and blends well with the kinds of people Tishy uses to populate her part of Boston.

P.J. Coldren

ANOTHER LOST ANGEL

Steven B. Mandel
2006
ISBN 1-59414-413-3
Five Star

Following close on the heels of Dave Case's wildly successful "Out of Cabrini" comes another impressive debut from Five Star: "Another Lost Angel" by Steven B. Mandel.

Police Detective Linny Nomar is on the take. Nothing blatant, mind you, just some missing evidence here, some misdirection there...that is until unidentifiable bodies of teenage boys (8 and counting) start turning up in Chicago's waterways, and Linny is asked by the Mob to help frame someone for the murders.

The Mob has even gone so far as to have Linny transferred from Robbery over to the task force investigating the "H2O murders". Joining the team, Linny finds himself uncharacteristically nagged by conscience and doubt - he's never been asked to do something this serious. And it doesn't help when a mutual attraction develops between him and one of the team.

It comes down to two choices: do the Mob's bidding, or follow his conscience and lose everything, including, in all likelihood, his life. Linny opts for the salvation/redemption route by launching his own investigation, and we soon become amazed at how good he is at it.

Although the clichéd "Hollywood" climax, in which the bad guy holds the gun, explains all, and gloats, is a plot device that I usually rage against, in "Another Lost Angel" it actually works, because (one): Mandel makes it necessary and believable, and (two): ...well, you'll just have to read the book. Linny is one of the most sympathetically flawed heroes I have met in quite some time, and I couldn't help but to cheer him along, hoping against hope for a happy ending. The actual ending is far more inspired and realistic than anything I could have imagined; it simply blew me away.

Gary Shulze, Once Upon a Crime

THE BOOK OF THE DEAD

DOUGLAS PRESTON & LINCOLN CHILD

May 30, 2006

WARNER BOOKS

ISBN: 0446576980

Together, Douglas Preston and Lincoln Child have written eleven books. Some brilliant. All with an addictive, thriller quality. What sets them and this series apart are the characters, living on from book to book, each able to carry the story. FBI Agent Aloysius Pendergast is at the center of this clan of characters and he is odd, intelligent and removed take on the world is what holds the books together. These books are not stand-alones. Each book bleeds into the next and any reader who hasn't read the books before will be missing out on history and back-story that can't be made up in a few summative paragraphs.

The last book has Pendergast in a high security prison, his evil brother Diogenes loose upon the world after having set him up and the cast of characters going about business as usual. Except for the loyal, stubborn Vincent D'Agosta. He's put his shield on the line for Pendergast in the past and is still quite willing to put his life on the line for the mysterious agent.

The New York Museum of Natural History, the setting for crime and terror alike in the past, is trying desperately to bring visitors back after inadvertently scaring them away. A mysterious donation from a distant count incites them to re-open an Egyptian tomb sealed on the premises for since the early 20th century. Nora Kelly, content to sort through pottery shards, is called upon to ready the tomb for a grand opening post haste. She reluctantly agrees.

As she studies the files on the tomb, letters and memos alluding to a curse and strange deaths associated with the tomb are found. Under pressure from the board, she presses on, the curse at the back of her mind.

When strange deaths begin to occur as a harried crew works feverishly on the tomb, everyone is on edge but continues on despite their well found worries.

Fragile Constance Greene, left on her own with the absence of Aloysius, receives a late night visitor. This visitor claims to understand her better than anyone ever could. He tells her tales her benefactor would not want her to hear.

Aloysius Pendergast knows that he is the only one that can stop his brother. And a dark abyss of memory must be explored of he is to stop his sociopathic genius of a brother from committing his greatest crime yet.

THE BOOK OF THE DEAD features an ensemble cast who must face their greatest fears when going up against a man dedicated to mayhem. There is a quality of *The Shadow* and a bit of camp mixed well with complex history and well thought out plots. Well worth the day of exhaustion faced by intrepid readers who read this book 'til dawn.

Jennifer Jordan

BREAK NO BONES

Kathy Reichs

July 2006

SCRIBNER

ISBN: 0743233492

Truth time. I read the first six books in Kathy Reichs's series featuring Temperance Brennan from a sheer love of forensics. I enjoyed them until the fourth book where the characters tendency to get hit over the head and knocked unconscious began to get on my nerves. There was too much of Tempe being confronted by suddenly verbose bad guys and too much about her sex life.

When BREAK NO BONES came in, I didn't hold out much hope for a good read.

I was proven wrong.

Tempe is supervising a dig of Native American burial grounds in Charleston, S.C., far from the labs and crime scenes she usually inhabits. But in the midst of pre-Columbian remains when a student stumbles across some that are much more recent. This is a problem for the contractor who can't wait to tear the land up for development and for Tempe who had hoped to return to Montreal. When perennial kid and ex-husband Pete ends up rooming in the same friends house as he investigates a missing persons case with ties to a local church, Tempe is officially having a bad day. When another body is found swinging from a tree, what looks a chance illegal burial and a suicide are ruled possible homicides by a small, barely traceable link: a rare hairline break in the C6 vertebrae. Trouble is in town and it's looking for Tempe.

This book worked. The reader is still asked to suspend disbelief but readers are asked that on some level with every work of fiction. What caught me up was, once again, the forensics. And with Reichs' extensive background on the subject, that's a given. But the snappy dialogue, the dark humor and the history Reichs presents in each book are her strengths as well. If you're looking for superior writing, read James Sallis. If you want to spend a night or two reading an entertaining and interesting book, look no further.

And, happily, the book is concussion free.

Jennifer Jordan

THE BULLET TRICK

Louise Welsh

2006

ISBN 1-84195-794-1

Canongate

Welsh hit the mystery world running with her first novel, *THE CUTTING ROOM*. *THE BULLET TRICK* is a stunning second mystery.

William Wilson is a floundering illusionist with a gambling jones. When a few quid come his way they've already been spent. As *THE BULLET TRICK* opens he's accepted a gig. Strippers, cops, bent nosers and a floundering illusionist open *BULLET* with a bang.

William is sent to Berlin to do his act. Soon he finds he has managed to escape death but there are now people after him. Does he have incriminating evidence? Can he stay alive long enough to find out why people are after him? He'll give it a go with the help of a beautiful young dancer.

Welsh adds a film to the narrative of *Bullets* that keeps the reader intrigued from first page to last. She's a far better illusionist than her protagonist. Creating a slight of hand with mere sentences. That's magic.

Ruth

BURDEN OF MEMORY

Vicki Delany

2006

ISBN 1-59058-266-7

Poisoned Pen Press

Two vanished worlds, and one memory held in secret for far too long enrich the action in Vicky Delaney's thoughtful *BURDEN OF MEMORY*.

Elaine Benson is a free lance writer who accepts a commission to help an elderly woman write and publish her memoirs. Moira Madison grew up in a wealthy family, with a harsh authoritative grandfather presiding. Dozens of servants kept the household running smoothly, and a secluded getaway in the Ontario forest provided summers full of leisure and freedom, as the men stayed behind in Toronto to run family business affairs and their wives and children enjoyed the pampered existence of the upper class.

As the Second War approached, Moira left the bosom of her family and volunteered with the Canadian Army Nursing Sisters. Now elderly and confined to a wheelchair, Moira wishes to commit her war time memories to print and has offered Elaine her full cooperation and access to all letters, diaries, and other family memorabilia.

Delany alternates chapters between Moira's experience as an Army nurse, her pampered childhood summers, and the present. As the weeks go by, Elaine uses her free time to explore Moira's estate and little by little finds mysterious abandoned cottages and forest trails. The reader soon suspects that there are many secrets which are not recorded in the documents she is researching. And it becomes obvious that Elaine has a strong psychic connection to these secrets. Equally obvious is the disturbing fact that someone in Moira's extended family will stop at very little to bring Elaine's memoir writing commission to an abrupt halt.

BURDEN OF MEMORY is enjoyable on many levels - rich historical fiction, a gradually unfolding mystery, and psychological suspense.

Woodstock

BURIED

Mark Billingham

2006

ISBN 0316730505 (UK)

Little Brown (UK)

It seems like just yesterday I was reading SLEEPYHEAD and it's hard to believe that Buried is already Billingham's 6th book. What's even harder to believe is that I consistently like each one more and more. Billingham gets better with each book.

BURIED sees DI Thorne on loan to the kidnap squad on a hot case, the son of a ex-cop has been taken and the clock is ticking. But things are not what they seem and the more Thorne finds out, the more questions he has.

I look forward to reading the latest books from Mark Billingham the way I used to look forward to vacations as a kid. I find myself lost in Thorne's world oblivious to what is going on around me. Great suspense and terrific characters make this a truly great escape. Billingham is a true star of the crime fiction genre. If I were you I'd order this one from the UK instead of waiting till next summer for the US release.

Jon

CARVED IN BONE

Jefferson Bass

2006

ISBN 006075981X

William Morrow

Jefferson Bass is actually the writing team of Dr. Bill Bass and John Jefferson. Bass is the founder of "the body farm", a research facility that is used in the study of human remains to help forensics specialists. Jefferson is a journalist. The two men have authored an amazing book.

A thirty year old corpse is found in a Tennessee cave. The investigation into the woman's death reopens a lot of old wopunds for a lot of people and the further the investigation goes, the more intense the secrets become.

With all the books on the market featuring forensics specialists it's refreshing to read one that just flat out nails it. This book is the real deal, fast and furious with twists and surprises. I was blown away by this book. I have to have more from this writing team.

Jon

CLAIR FONTAINE, CRIME FIGHTER

Tracey Enright

2006

ISBN: 0-312-31960-6

Thomas Dunne Books / St. Martin's Minotaur

Take Carrie Bradshaw of "Sex and the City" fame, add a dash of Stephanie Plum, locate the mix in Los Angeles, and you'll have "Clair Fontaine, Crime Fighter".

Clair Fontaine is unapologetically wealthy. She lives in Brentwood. She has a maid (think Rosario from "Will and Grace"). But she wants more than just a life of mani-pedis and shopping on Rodeo Drive. Clair wants to contribute to society. She wants to fight crime.

So Clair finagles a job interview with Henry Bennett, a local PI. At least, she thinks it's a job interview. Bennett thinks he's simply giving a few minutes of his time to an over-funded, under-intelligent airhead, and is quite cranky about the politics of it all. And when he realizes that politics are going to force him to take Clair on as his assistant, his crankiness ratchets up several notches. But there's not much time for Bennett to waste on being grumpy. There's a murderer on the loose, and suddenly Clair is making herself useful as she and Bennett work together to find the bad guy who's cut the throat of a local party girl.

The relationship between Clair and Bennett fuels this debut novel, but there are plenty of satisfying twists and turns in the plot. Readers who enjoy Janet Evanovich's writing are sure to find something to love in this light-hearted romp of a book.

Rae Helmsworth

COLD KILL

David Lawrence

2006

ISBN: 0312347413

St. Martin's Minotaur

The third entry in the DS Stella Mooney series, "Cold Kill" is part procedural, part mystery, part thriller, and wholly engrossing. When he's not writing crime fiction, David Lawrence is a poet, and there's a lyrical quality to his prose that brings nuance and texture to what could otherwise be pretty standard fare.

The story opens as Stella and her compatriots are working a crime scene: a young woman's partially-clad body has been found in a park, clubbed and garroted; it's one of a series of attacks on young women. When a very strange man named Robert Kimber walks in off the street to confess to the crimes, Stella and her colleagues hope that they've caught a very lucky break. But things just don't add up. Kimber doesn't know the details he should know, there are DNA issues – the cops know something's not right. As much as they want Kimber to be the bad guy, their gut instincts tell them that this case is just not that simple. And their gut instincts are right.

Stella is still trying to come to terms with the fact that she recently had to kill someone in self defense, and with a new relationship with a journalist, John Delaney – a relationship that makes very personal the natural conflict between law enforcement and journalism. When

Delaney's work involves him in this case, their relationship is stretched to the breaking point; the question of loyalty becomes a central theme of this story.

David Lawrence has crafted an intricately plotted, yet very human tale. There are no 'stock' characters, the plot hangs together well, and the ending will have you turning the pages as fast as you can. This book is a fine entry in an excellent series; it's to be hoped that we see more of DS Stella Mooney.

Rae Helmsworth

CRIME BEAT

Michael Connelly

May 2006

ISBN 0-316-15377-X Little Brown US

ISBN: 0752873873 Orion (UK)

The maturation of Michael Connelly as a novelist has been wonderful to behold, beginning with *The Black Echo* and ending most recently with *Lincoln Lawyer*. But if you want to track his burgeoning talents from the true beginning, then you have to read his collection of news reporting for The Florida Sun-Sentinel and The Los Angeles Times, in his latest release, *Crime Beat: A Decade of Covering Cops and Killers*. This remarkable journalistic overview of selected articles by one of the premiere crime fiction writers in America today is not to be missed, and not to be quickly read. This book is to be savored. The stories were written when Connelly was covering the crime beat in first his native Florida, and then later in Los Angeles, during the early 1980s and 1990s (and check out the press photo of him on the inner back flap). But make no mistake here: Connelly was not biding his time until he could publish novels. The man was an outstanding reporter. Connelly writes in the forward that moments defined his life, his career choices. It is moments and details that Connelly is a master at capturing and exploiting to significant emotional impact, both here in *Crime Beat* and in his fiction. These are straight forward accounts of murder, with often hard details, that take on a touch of artistic crafting. You will read how these cases take a toll on the lives of the investigating detectives, the sheer number of exhausting hours required, and the sometimes frustrating result of a case gone cold. (In a nice touch, the reader is supplied an informational footnote giving an update on specific cases.) Connelly faithfully gave his reading public the necessary facts and the insinuations between the lines, but he also managed to fit in an empathetic sensibility – the murdered woman who loved her horses so much that her routine cost her life; the detective who chews down on his eyeglasses, leaving an indent reflective of his compassion for the victims. The book is divided into three main sections, The Cops, The Killers and The Cases. In a piece entitled "The Call," Connelly relates his experiences following homicide detectives in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida, on a 24/7 basis. He is given exclusive access and a pager. When the detectives are called to a job, Connelly is likewise alerted. It is Bosch in the making. And the crime beat didn't just provide impetus for his cop creation; he was exposed to criminals of the lowest order. In the second section, Connelly writes about Roland Comtois, a man depicted as "evil until he dies." It is reportage of fact and psychology, a Los Angeles man who, together with his girlfriend Marsha Lynn Erickson, brutally murders one teen and sexually assaults another. Connelly digs deep here, finding experts to comment upon Comtois as a sociopath incapable of being rehabilitated, a man destined for the death penalty. In "Nameless Grave," perhaps one of the more heartbreaking pieces in the collection, Connelly reports on the strange account of a killer caught and convicted, though the identity of his male victim is never discovered. The lead detective states that this had never before happened in his department. The victim is ultimately buried in an unmarked grave in Florida. It is the kind of case that would haunt and stay with Harry Bosch, and this is the kind of intoxicating book that will resonate with Connelly's readers for quite some time. I'm seeing Edgar nomination written all over this book.

Anthony Rainone

CROOKED

Brian Wiprud

2006

ISBN: 0440243122

Dell Mass Market Paperback

This latest book by Brian Wiprud is kind of in the same series, it stars Garth's brother Nicholas Palihnic (no I did not try to pronounce it out loud). Nicholas works for insurance companies retrieving stolen items, and on our first journey with him we find that it's not as easy as it sounds. As it turns out being Nicholas might not be all that easy either. As his search for a painting called Trampoline Nude eventually leads him to a literal gold rush in Manhattan. Twist after twist make this a fast paced adventure that is thrilling, fun and a great read.

Wiprud writes with a flair for dialogue that is unique and thoroughly enjoyable. While comparisons to other authors is inevitable they are also unnecessary, Wiprud has a voice all his own and it's one I look forward to hearing more of. This should be on everyone's to buy list.

Jon

DARKNESS AND LIGHT

John Harvey

July, 2006

ISBN 0-15-101133-8

Harcourt Books

Ex-cop Frank Elder has tried to leave his old life. After all, his wife has divorced him, and his daughter just barely survived a savage attack that Elder fears he may have caused. Now he tries to be content in a desolate cottage in Cornwall. Still, he is unable to ignore a call from his ex-wife asking him to help an old friend find her missing sister. Besides, he hopes he might have a chance to reconnect with his estranged daughter.

Unfortunately, returning home is not easy. His wife is ill at ease with him, and his daughter seems too busy with school to ever talk to him. And the disappearance of the sister, Claire Meechan, is very puzzling. Then, when the "missing woman" turns up murdered, Elder feels even more uneasy. The body reminds him of his first murder case – one he never solved.

This crafty, but fast moving plot is skillfully developed. There are enough clues and red herrings to satisfy any mystery reader. And, naturally, Elder soon discovers Claire is not the person she appeared to be – a plain, widowed, nondescript housewife in her 50's, just like Irene Fowler, Elder's first case. Now her murder is more understandable, but still unsolved.

Frank Elder himself is a complicated character full of warring emotions.. He is angry with his wife, whom he still desires, and he is very hurt by the distance between him and his daughter. Most of all, though retired, he still relishes being a copper and is energized by the challenge of the case. Certainly many of us can empathize with Elder who has been battered by loss and bad luck. .

Supporting characters are equally well drawn, such as the wife and the daughter. Even the potential suspects and witnesses are sometimes inscrutable. In fact, each major character has an interesting back story, which adds to the richness of this book..

This mystery could have been just another serial killer case. However, Harvey thoughtfully considers the sexual secrets that many of his characters (and perhaps readers) have. The common desire for love and a sexual connection is powerful, one that can easily lead to rage, guilt, and murder.

Recommended because of the adroit plot, rich, believable characters, and skillful writing.

Bev DeWeese

THE DEAD HOUR

Denise Mina

2006

I.S.B.N. 0-316-73594-0

Little, Brown

Denise Mina returns with a second book featuring protagonist Paddy Meehan. Set in Thatcher's realm, like last year's FIELD OF BLOOD , THE DEAD HOUR is stunning.

Young Paddy is now a reporter for her paper having been elevated from the copy girl position she held in FIELD. She is low man on the totem. Make no mistake. Relegated to the p.m. beat, not much happens in Paddy's job.. When a late night call takes her to an palatial home, Paddy is momentarily concerned for the attractive woman with blood on her face. Reassurances from the handsome man who opens the door and a silent communication from the woman herself Paddy leaves after being given 50q.

When the woman proves to be a murder victim Paddy is haunted by her failure to help and determined to get to the bottom of this story. Why did a successful and beautiful solicitor send help away? We're off on another Mina thrill ride. With seeming insight into addiction and its consequences for family and sufferer alike Mina crafts a chilling plot. Soon there is another dead body and a woman on the run from certain death.

It is the character of Paddy who elevates the book to something sublime. Our girl has changed since FIELD. She's a young and highly competitive professional. And yet she struggles. She has the responsibility of being sole bread winner for a family of six. The unwritten obligation to be a good Irish-Catholic sister and daughter. Hard, in the best of circumstances. And circumstances are not the best. In fact there's an all around mess here. The newsroom is suffering and if Paddy doesn't bring a big story to new management the Meehans may soon have no support at all. She could well be prosecuted for accepting a bribe. Her best friend is getting married. Her married sister has come home after being beaten and her other sister thinks she may have been called to serve God.

Motivation is strong for Paddy to uncover the reason for murder. It's even stronger for us to cheer her on.

Another brilliant character from the author of THE GARNET HILL TRILOGY.

Ruth

DEAD MAN HAUNT

T.M. Simmons

June 2006

ISBN: 1-59414-443-5

Five Star

Welcome to the crazy world of Alice Carpenter, a ghost hunting writer who has a knack for getting herself into trouble. When she and Twila, her next-door neighbor, go to a haunted hotel to investigate its paranormal activities, they find a dead body, well half of one, at the bottom of the elevator shaft. Teamed up with her cop ex-husband, a crazy Granny, an attractive nude ghost and her two pets, she tries to solve the woman's murder and let the ghosts who roam the hotel rest in peace.

Simmons' over the top situations and hilarious dialogue keep the pages turning. The characters are fun, sassy, and far from ordinary. However, the actual plot felt secondary; there were times when I actually forgot the characters' goals or the driving force of the plot. I thoroughly enjoyed seeing the characters interact, but it was the scenes themselves that were interesting and not necessarily how they were woven together. It reads like a tongue-and-cheek television show: the episodes are funny and entertaining but if you skip one, you don't miss

much. The story lacks suspense, despite the many attempts to weave in red herrings and place cliff hangers at the end of chapters. If you love hard-boiled mysteries and police procedurals, not a good pick. But it's a fun book with fun characters even if the plot was less than perfect.

--Dana Kaye

DEAD SKY (published in the US as "PRIOR BAD ACTS")

Tami Hoag

2006

ISBN: 0752841270

Orion

The prologue of this heartstopping thriller is the discovery of a horrifying triple murder. A mother and her two foster children have been tortured, maimed and killed in their home. It's a crime that sends shockwaves through the lives of everyone involved in the aftermath: the police detective who responds to the first call for help and those who investigate the case; the prosecutor; the defense attorney; the suspect – no one is untouched.

As the story opens, Judge Carey Moore must make a very tough call. She's being asked to determine whether the suspect's criminal record can be admitted into evidence. A former prosecutor, Carey's inclination is to throw the book at the alleged killer, a drifter named Karl Dahl. Personally, she agrees with public opinion: Dahl is guilty as hell and should be convicted with all possible speed. But she has a responsibility to the justice system and Dahl deserves a fair trial. So, Carey does what she believes is the right thing; she throws out Dahl's record, which consists only of a few misdemeanors. And that's when things begin to spiral out of control.

Leaving the courthouse, Carey is attacked. The cops who are sent to investigate, Sam Novac and Nikki Liska, aren't happy about it - the law enforcement community has been disappointed by Carey's record on the bench. Novac in particular has little patience for this particular victim. And then, Dahl escapes from custody and all animosity is forgotten as the detectives and the judge are thrown into a maelstrom of conflicting clues and escalating violence.

Nothing is what it seems in this terrific page-turner. The labyrinthine twists and turns of the plot will keep you guessing, the characters are well drawn and fully fleshed out, and the ending is a crackerjack. This was my first experience of Tami Hoag's writing, and it certainly won't be my last.

Rae Helmsworth

DEADLY HOUSEWIVES

Edited by Christine Matthews

2006

ISBN 0-06-085327-1

Avon Trade

Short Story Anthologies. They are everywhere right now. Not many are executed as well as Matthew's DEADLY HOUSEWIVES. With stories written by le crème de le crème of contemporary female mystery writers, you're assured of 13 separate excellent reads. Matthews has asked these ladies to put forth stories of lust, ennui and self-absorption. She has asked them to tell the story of death and crime. The result is a series of short stories that examine everything female. Purrz Baby is a very different kind of cat mystery told by Vicki Hendricks. Sarah Paretsky's Acid Rain is a unique and frightening tale from the creator of V.I. Warcheski. Everybody is in top form. Perhaps my favorite story in this collection is S.J. Rozan's The Next Nice Day, a gripping story of how to cure suburban boredom with a last line that made the skin on the back of my neck crawl.

Ruth

DEATH WITHOUT COMPANY

Craig Johnson

May 2006

ISBN 0 670 03467 3

Viking

The man who offered us THE COLD DISH is now giving us DEATH WITHOUT COMPANY. When Sheriff Longmire investigates the death of Mari Baroja, he finds connections with the Basque community in the area. Checking the past and the present could help find the killer among them. But things are never as simple as they should be, and looking into her past the sheriff discovers her friendship with Lucian Connally, the previous sheriff who is assisting with the murder case. The cast is also composed of Henry Standing Bear, Longmire's close friend and his Deputy Victoria Moretti. They are joined by the specter of Mari's abusive husband and her daughter, Kay. The coal-bed methane industry there in the Absaroka County also becomes important as Mari's unhappy past is totally revealed. This is a great follow-up to Mr. Johnson's debut book. There are strong characters and a feel for the country and its history. Maybe that is because Mr. Johnson hails from the town of Ucross, pop.25.

Karen Jordan

DEFINITELY DEAD

Charlaine Harris

May 2006

ISBN 0-441-01400-3

Berkley Publishing Group

It's the social event of the supernatural world in New Orleans. The vampire queen Sophie-Anne is marrying the king of Arkansas, Peter Threadgill. Sookie Sackhouse has a command invitation from Sophie-Ann to be there, which upsets her former lover and vampire higher-up, Eric. It apparently also upsets some other people, because bad things start happening around Sookie.

Her new love interest, Quinn, is a weretiger. Sookie is all too aware of her trusting nature and the troubles it has brought her in the past, so she is being particularly wary around Quinn, who is very attractive. But so were Bill and Eric, and neither of those relationships turned out well.

Sookie also has to clean out her cousin's apartment in New Orleans. Hadley was Sophie-Anne's lover, which may or may not have something to do with the dead were/vampire found in the closet. One does NOT want to be around when that wakes up for the first time! Lots of people (using the term loosely) wind up dead in DEFINITELY DEAD. Sookie comes close a time or two, and Quinn is a good ally to have in a fight, which goes a long way towards making Sookie lighten up around him.

The plot is convoluted, the pacing fast, and the story enthralling. Sookie Stackhouse leads an interesting life. DEFINITELY DEAD is an enchanting addition to the Southern Vampire series. It wouldn't be a bad idea to start from the beginning and enjoy the first five (again) before diving into DEFINITELY DEAD.

P.J. Coldren

DOWN AND DIRTY

Gammy L. Singer

2006

ISBN 0-7582-0895-2

Kensington Publishing Corp.

Amos "the Don of Harlem" Brown isn't having a wonderful Christmas. The drug dealers are trying to move into his buildings and his neighborhood. The gay cancer has stricken one of his friends and tenants. His girlfriend Catherine is now his ex-girlfriend. And to top it all off, his mentor Deacon Steadwell is in jail, suspected of killing Dap Jones over some stolen furs. Dap stole them from Steadwell, who stole them from someone else. Life is never easy.

DOWN AND DIRTY explores the beginnings of so many of the elements that took Harlem from its heyday to the true ghetto that it seems to have become today. Singer covers not just the obvious bases, but the secondary issues like politics, police protection (and the lack of it), housing, and other social issues. This does not mean that DOWN AND DIRTY is a polemic, but rather a mystery with overtones and nuances.

The characters may well remind one of those in the works of Damon Runyan; this is also not a bad thing. Amos Brown is very human, definitely flawed, but he's trying to do the right thing in a world where that choice is often difficult to find. Because the setting is so much a part of DOWN AND DIRTY, the language and the tone are earthy. Don't be put off by that. Singer writes of a very real world, with real people, and a plot that isn't so far out of the realm of the possible.

P.J. Coldren

FAMILY BUSINESS

Janet LaPierre

September 2006

ISBN 1-880284-85-5

Perseverance Press

Patience Mackellar is a female P.I. in the small town of Port Silva, California. Sometimes her daughter Verity works with her, when she's not cooking professionally. Together they are raising Sylvie, who's almost a teenager. Both women have active love interests. All of this is relevant.

Port Silva is in the throes of upheaval over the foreign policies of the current (G.W.) administration. There is a significant pacifist contingent in town, not surprising considering the proximity of Port Silva to Berkeley. There is also a vocal pro-administration faction. Up until very recently, the confrontations have been limited to shoutings and fist-wavings.

At the end of the most recent march, violence broke out, and two men went over the bluff into the ocean, presumably to their deaths. One of those men was Danny Soto, live-in boyfriend to Grace Beaubien. She hires Patience and Verity to find out Danny's past, which is basically unknown before he showed up two years ago.

Then Sean Flynn is found murdered. Sean is connected to another case the Mackellars have been working – the disappearance of Peter Flynn, uncle to Sean. The Flynn family is not a peaceful one right now. The family farm is being sold off to developers, and not everyone is delighted with that.

LaPierre capably takes all these varied plots and ties them up into a fairly neat little bundle by the end of FAMILY BUSINESS. Oh, there's some stuff left over for the next book in the series, but LaPierre writes a nice, tight, cozy mystery with enough social statements to keep it interesting without being preachy. FAMILY BUSINESS covers a lot of territory in a lot of families.

P.J. Coldren

FALSE IMPRESSION

Jeffrey Archer

2006
ISBN 0-312-35372-3
St. Martin's Press

In his first fiction book in seven years Archer has written a high-octane thrill ride through the art world, and in this book the action never stops. From the harrowing events on 9/11 through the following week, from New York to London to Paris, Archer takes us on a wild journey of painting masters, airplanes, and relationships. Never a dull moment, I enjoyed every bit of the story, and felt I learned a lot, as well. Archer has delivered another winner!

Judy Clemens, author of Three Can Keep a Secret

FINDING AMY

Joseph Loughlin & Kate Flora
2006
ISBN 9 781584 655336
University Press of New England

A true crime story of the murder of a young woman in Maine, this book stand out over the usual true crime, and gives you the feeling of being there. You share the grief of the family, and the police who work tirelessly to solve the murder of Amy St. Laurent, who is missing after a night out in the small town of Portland.

All this is skillfully done by Kate Clark Flora. She takes you step by step through what the law enforcement officers in Maine did to find and convict the ruthless man who committed one of the most shocking murders in their state. Flora's account is aided by the recollections of then Lieutenant Joseph K. Loughlin. His narratives make the case very personal to the reader. You feel you know the officers, the victim's family and the victim herself. You also learn how much work, time and energy goes into a case that some might dismiss as open and closed. Flora and Loughlin collaboration make this an excellent example of the cooperation and hard work of several departments in the State of Maine.

Karen Jordan

THE FURTHER INVESTIGATIONS OF JOANNE KILBOURN (Omnibus)

Gail Bowen
2006
ISBN: 0771014694
McClelland & Stewart

The best crime fiction, or any fiction for that matter, is many-layered. A good crime fiction novel is well plotted, has believable characters, and keeps you guessing until the end. A great one has, in addition, nuance and subtext; there's something flowing underneath the surface of the whodunit or howdunit.

Gail Bowen writes great crime fiction. While the Joanne Kilbourn novels stand up wonderfully as straightforward mysteries, they're elevated by Bowen's use of each story as an opportunity to write about human nature and the impact on many lives of one person's actions.

Three books are gathered in this omnibus: "A Colder Kind of Death"; "A Killing Spring"; and "Verdict in Blood". In "A Colder Kind of Death", a prisoner is shot to death in a Saskatchewan prison; Joanne's personal connection to the man makes her a suspect. In "A Killing Spring", one of Joanne's teaching colleagues is found dead in rather shady circumstances. In "Verdict in Blood", Joanne becomes involved in the case of a judge whose battered body is discovered in a local park.

Joanne Kilbourn is a reluctant amateur sleuth. She's compelled to become involved in solving murder cases because she wants justice to be served. Her struggles to do the right thing, often in the face of overwhelming obstacles, make for terrific reading.

Rae Helmsworth

GRAND & HUMBLE

BRENT HARTZINER
2006
HARPER TEMPTTEST
ISBN: 0060567279
Gr. 7-10

In alternating chapters, Brent Hartinger has woven a story around two high-school kids who are on different sides of the social spectrum. Harlan, 17, is the good-looking, charismatic and brilliant son of a rich senator. On the surface, he seems to lead an ideal life. Underneath is a boy growing to manhood who is ignored by his father and played like a chess piece by his mother. Manny, also 17, is a theater geek living with his single father in a paycheck to paycheck existence. He loves his Dad but senses there is a Pandora's box that his Dad wants to remain closed.

Both boys suffer from nightmares with a common theme: drowning and being hit by a truck. They wrestle with panic attacks by day. Each must face up to their fears to bring the bad dreams to a halt. A brilliant twist near the end makes their world's collide in a moment of epiphany.

GRAND & HUMBLE is a wonderful story told with a sure and able hand. It is both a whodunit with tinges of the paranormal that tells the tale of two boys who have more in common than they could ever imagine and an allegorical tale of growing up.

Jennifer Jordan

HARDSCRABBLE ROAD

Jane Haddam

2006

ISBN: 0312353731

St. Martins Minotaur

This is the latest entry in Haddam's long-running series featuring retired FBI man Gregor Damarkian. The series began back in the ur-time before Netscape as a series of mysteries set around the various American holidays with NOT A CREATURE WAS STIRRING. Haddam eventually ran out of major holidays, but the series has persisted. What has kept Readers buying the series? The Damarkian series features solid, intelligent writing, some very good plots, the charming and unlikely duo of Gregor and his much younger, fantasy-writer Other, Bemis, and the Armenian kitsch of their Philadelphia neighborhood. Plus, Gregor is a good guy, a bit stodgy and stuck in his routines, reserved about his feelings, slow to make judgements about people even when he doesn't understand their behavior. Damarkian is a credible, aging American everyman on top of being a clever detective. Haddam's books have always included lots of social commentary, so it's never been the kind of series that readers who dislike commentary in their mysteries would read. HARDSCRABBLE is almost all political commentary, the mystery part gets short shrift, Bemis is out of town on a book tour, and most of the strengths of the series are just missing.

The plot revolves around a Limbaugh-like character who has his prescription drug habit outed (ripped from the headlines), a missing homeless man who's maybe going to take the fall for supplying him, radio network bosses worried about their cash cow and their careers, the talk-radio man's political opponents and the targets of his daily screeds, his sister who's in a cloistered nunnery on (ta-dah) Hardscrabble Road on the outskirts of Philly where much of the action takes place. Joining this ensemble is everybody's lawyers doing maddening lawyer things, even including a beautiful young nun who used to be (of course) a brilliant young lawyer. Just about everybody in the book gets their chance to describe how angry and disgusted they are about the current state of American public opinion and discussion, what's wrong with everyone else, why things are so bad. Father Tibor chimes in from time to time pontificating on who's right and wrong. And WHY. Gregor is mostly exasperated throughout with everybody's political agendas, with Bemis who's out of town and not calling him, and even with the plot which he finds way too predictable. The only person he has any use for is a non-political mediaevalist Professor who happens to become a target of various machinations. The problem with all this is that this reader anyway also became exasperated with all the elitist nonsense spouted by the characters, with the reduction of political ideas to pompous cant, with the confusion between public policy and personality, and even with the know-it-all righteousness of Father Tibor. I don't mind serious themes and characters in crime fiction, but there needs to be some pleasure for the reader as well. HARDSCRABBLE is like an especially annoying op-ed page in the morning paper.

I hope Bemis is back in the next book. I hope Jane Haddam finds a happier balance between mystery and commentary again. If the author wants to continue political themes, I hope she can get past being hung up on all the superficial rhetoric of people preaching to themselves and their campaign contributors. For mystery readers who have an interest in the substantive questions raised in HARDSCRABBLE ROAD, the extent of the division in American public opinion and the reasons for it, let me recommend Prof. Morris Fiorina's CULTURE WARS?. Fiorina's book is half as long as HARDSCRABBLE and it's chock full of evidence.

Dick Flannery

THE HIGHLY EFFECTIVE DETECTIVE

Richard Yancey

2006

ISBN 0-312-34752-9

St. Martin's Minotaur

I loved this book. At the same time hilarious, fun, and also poignant, Yancey offers us a highly unique detective. Teddy Ruzak is not smart. He's not knowledgeable (about detection, anyway). He's not even a high-quality physical specimen. What he has to offer are his kindness, his brain's extensive database of trivial items, and a plethora of seemingly unrelated anecdotes that somehow come around to making sense. The plot is fresh, the characters interesting, and Yancey's writing a joy to read. I can't wait for the second installment of this series!

Judy Clemens, author of To Thine Own Self Be True

HIT PARADE

Lawrence Block

2006

ISBN: 0060840889

William Morrow

John Keller, one of crime fiction's favorite hitman is back, and he's back with a bang. HIT PARADE opens with Keller on the hunt, he has a contract on a major league ball player and is following him from town to town watching the team play while waiting for his time to strike.. His second job of the book is interrupted by the tragedy of 9-11 and leaves Keller stranded in Florida. It also leaves him in a funk. And a hit man in a funk is not good...

Block has written some amazing books, in particular I love the Scudder series. Keller is quickly becoming my new favorite. Written with Block's usual flair for just enough wit without being an in your face comedy this book is an extremely satisfying and totally enjoyable read. This is further proof why Block is a master. Make a pot of coffee, grab a red bull and get ready for a book that you'll want to stay up and finish.

Jon

THE JANISSARY TREE

Jason Goodwin
2006
ISBN 0-374-17860-7
FSG

Jason Goodwin has a history of Turkey written. It was praised for its beauty in the New York Times. In the Janissary Tree, a work of fiction, a mystery and a well done one at that, Mr. Goodwin paints a more expressive picture of this country that is both Asian and European.

The story is set in 1836. Ten years earlier the Sultan of the Ottoman Empire took back control of his country from his military, the Janissary. They had started many years before as slaves and heathens as Muslims should not wage war on fellow Muslims. Over the years they grew powerful as well as corrupted. With their overthrow, by a Western styled Turkish army, the Sultan can pick up the pace of needed modernization. European powers have their eyes on the empire.

Ten days before a major announcement from the Sultanate, four officers of the new army are murdered. Also murdered is a harem girl, the queen mother has come to Yashim, wondering if missing jewelry is part of the reason why. Solving the mysteries of who killed them and why falls to Yashim. Yashim, being a eunuch, is one of the few males who can enter into the harem. Are the girl, the jewels and the officers murders linked? How much of the deaths are politically motivated? How much by espionage?

The story builds through vivid description and fine character development. Yashim has a way around people that make them want to help him. He cultivates both a trucker type as well as the wife of a Russian prince. The queen mother and a Polish Ambassador without a country are both his advisors and friends. The pace really quickens about half way in but you've been swept up into the intrigue, the color, the history and the mystery from the earliest chapters. If you're looking for an historical that's extraordinary, you're looking for the Janissary Tree.

Dave Biemann

KILLER INSTINCT

Joseph Finder
June 2006
ISBN: 0-75287-480-2
Orion Books

Jason Steadman is the typical sales executive, who drives his car while listening to the radio, talking on his cell phone, and checking e-mails on his Blackberry. But when he drives into a ditch, he befriends his tow truck driver, Kurt Semko, who was formally in the Special Forces. Jason gets his new pal a job at his company, working corporate security and Kurt teaches him the secrets of climbing the corporate ladder: business is war.

As Jason's career begins to take off, things take an awful turn for his rival co-workers, and although he knows Semko is behind it, he can't bring himself to stop it. After all, he likes the promotion, the new house, and with a baby on the way, he loves his new salary.

But when Kurt's tactics worsen from pranks to murder, he finally tries to put a stop to it and his former friend becomes a dangerous enemy. It's not just his career that's at risk anymore, it's his life.

A fresh new take on the thriller novel, Finder takes ordinary people and puts them in extraordinary circumstances, showing what they're capable of when their lives are on the line. The characters begin as stock executives, just faces in the suit-and-tie crowd, but as their lives are turned upside down, the hidden aspects of their personality begin to show. The suspense is a little slow moving at first, but keep reading. The payoff is worth it.

--Dana Kaye

LEGENDS: A NOVEL OF DISSIMULATION

Robert Littell
2006
ISBN: 0786277262
Thorndike Press

So you think you know who you are, but are you really sure? Because in Robert Littell's latest thriller you may well realize that even you may not be who you think you are.

With identity theft being the greatest crime to hit our times, Littell weaves an ingenious tale around the conflicting identities of former CIA operative Martin Odlum that will

make you wonder who people really are; which is the theme for this existential spy thriller.

The title LEGENDS references the espionage term for false identities that operatives use when in deep cover. Odlum is a man confused, because while working as a P.I. in Littell's native Brooklyn, he wonders if he actually is a civil war expert-cum-arms dealer Dittman; or perhaps he's really an IRA explosives expert called Pippen or perhaps he's someone else. His CIA therapist considers that he has a hidden trauma causing his multiple personalities, but has to back-off. As the novel progresses we start to sense a real feeling of dread, almost like watching a slow motion car crash. In some ways this could be considered a horror novel with a dash of Philip K Dick. The plot is chilling in the deft hands of Littell, and there are many deaths on the journey which is peppered with people who may not be who they seem to be.

Characters such as the mysterious Stella Kastner who engages Odium to track down a relative to free her sister from her marriage, or the mad dwarf Hamlet who rules the toxic island in the Aral sea, or the gangster Samat or even Odium's ex-boss the mysterious Crystal Quest aka Fred Astaire. Odium during his quest is told that Stalin, Trotsky and Lenin were all invented names, so in a world where no one is who they seem to be; is it any wonder that Odium is slowly turning mad? The book rapidly gathers momentum from the surreal opening in the Russian countryside and then becomes a globe-trotting epic that Franz Kafka would have been proud of escaping, but the real kicker is how Littell knits this devious tale together with a huge dash of irony. If you like your espionage tales with an existential flavour then this will delight. From the pen of one of the best exponents of the thriller genre, - make that any genre, be prepared to learn how the world behind the looking glass really works. I thought THE COMPANY was a hard act to follow, but how will Littell top this diamond of a tale?

Ali Karim

MANHATTAN NOIR

Lawrence Block, Editor

2006

ISBN 1-888451-95-5

Akashic Books

The entertaining series of collected short stories continues with this entry based in Manhattan. So much has been written about New York City over the years, telling its history and enticing tourists, that it's easy to forget that real people live and work there. Along comes Lawrence Block with this group of vignettes which looks at the dark side of human experience but also manages to celebrate human resiliency and will to survive.

As with previous collections in this series, the unexpected pleasure comes in finding new authors to enjoy and new voices to listen for. The entries from Robert Knightly, C. J. Sullivan, and Xu Xi are all worth an extra look for that reason.

Murder, extortion, deception and pain are here in abundance as expected - but in Xu Xi's story *Crying with Audrey Hepburn* we meet a heroine who is not connected with any specific crime, but whose story definitely belongs in a collection of noir fiction.

As in the other NOIR collections by Akashic Books, the title pages feature a handy little map of Manhattan, and icons making it clear to the reader that persons from all parts of Manhattan have stories to tell.

Woodstock

MARK OF THE LION

Suzanne Arruda

2006

ISBN 0-451-21748-9

Penguin Group

Jade del Cameron finds her self in east Africa after World War 1; she's trying to track down the missing brother of a man who died in the war. He'd asked her to marry him, but was shot down before she had given him her answer, so there is some guilt driving her search. The search is problematic, because the family denies the brother exists.

Jade is a feisty woman, self-confident and comfortable in her skin, although well aware of the strictures and mores of the society that exists in east Africa. Her experiences in the War have grounded her, and given her the tools she needs for this search, taken on while also researching articles for a travel magazine. Quotes from The Traveler form the chapter headings, and they are relevant and pertinent.

Jade encounters quite a variety of people in her quest; some of the characterizations are almost caricatures but Arruda manages, with humor and affection, to carry off the sketches without crossing that line. Her descriptions of Africa are evocative and realistic, conveying the realities of life without modern conveniences without making that life seem tedious or cumbersome.

While the mystery is not all that complicated (at least not for anyone who reads widely in the genre), the story-telling is more than adequate. MARK OF THE LION promises to be the first in another line of good, readable, historical mysteries with a strong female lead.

P.J. Coldren

MASK MARKET

Andrew Vachss

August 15, 2006

ISBN 0 375 42444 9

Pantheon Books

When a potential client is shot after a meeting with Burke, his concern is less with the papers he left in Burke's hands than he is with the possibility that he was seen and recognized by the assassins. When he goes through the papers he discovers they concern a girl he had rescued twenty years ago. As he searches for her he hopes that he did not make a mistake in returning her to her family.

He is joined by his old cast of characters, each of whom has his own special contribution. They are faced with the dark side of humanity that has followed him from his childhood and has made him the man he has become. This is true Burke, and true Vachss. It is gripping, and opens a vista of the world most of us never see.

Karen Jordan

THE MERCY SEAT

Martyn Waites

2006

I.S.B.N. 1-933648-00-7

Pegasus Books

I love a good import. The last several years have seen the U.S. lose a little of its edge on noir. Readers of the darker side have instead been reaching towards "new" U.K. writers. Amongst the best? Ken Bruen, Mark Billingham, Denise Mina, Simon Kernick, Mo Hayder, Declan Hughes, Louise Welch and on and on. Martyn Waites has been on my list for quite a while but not published stateside. Finally, he's here. For this I thank Pegasus Books.

The bleakness of Waites' world is introduced to Americans in *THE MERCY SEAT*. At the heart of this book is former investigative reporter Joe Donovan. The man has a hard-boiled past and he has sequestered himself in Northumberland. Suicide is never far from his mind.

His former paper gets a phone call. Someone has a disc that may break open the disappearance of a famous scientist and he'll only discuss details of transfer with Joe.

Waites sucks in his reader like a super powered vacuum. The author is relentless with plot and unafraid to delve into characters many writers would be afraid to face in nightmares. He puts us in the mind of a sociopath one moment and then envelops us within a young boy's fear. No one is unflawed in Waites' fictional world. Joe is drawn into a case with tentacles everywhere. Will he be able to shake off his own demons long enough to once again become the reporter he was?

If you travel towards the darker side of mystery I encourage you to purchase *THE MERCY SEAT*. Work like Waites need to be supported. It is money well spent. There is an evolution occurring in our genre we can only evaluate if we continue to support writers with something new to say on the universal themes that brought us all here in the first place.

Ruth

MILLION DOLLAR BABY

Amy Patricia Meade

April 2006

ISBN: 0738708607

Midnight Ink

Million Dollar Baby is the first title in a new series featuring the mystery writer, Marjorie McClelland. The book was reminiscent of one I read recently about another young woman sleuth, Maisie Dobbs. Both stories take place in the 1930's and each woman has experienced traumatic loss. However, while Maisie is mature and reflective, Marjorie comes across as rather naive and impetuous.

Marjorie's tranquil, if somewhat lonely existence is disrupted when an aristocratic stranger buys an abandoned mansion near her hometown of Ridgebury, CT. It's "love at first sight" for Creighton Ashton III and he quickly hatches a plan to get to know Marjorie better. He gets more than he bargained for when he invites her to tour his new home and the two of them stumble upon a skull on the property. Creighton seizes this unconventional opportunity to join forces with the bewitching Miss McClelland to investigate the situation. A handsome detective, Robert Jameson, who's been summoned to help with the case, becomes Creighton's worthy opponent for Miss McClelland's affections. For her part, Marjorie revels in the attention.

As Marjorie and Creighton delve deeper into the mystery of the unidentified bones, they discover clues pointing to another murder, a stolen ring and a hidden affair. Throughout the book, Marjorie and Creighton carry on like Cary Grant and Katharine Hepburn in a 1940s movie. Their banter is sometimes clever, sometimes not but the author deserves an 'A' for effort.

A somewhat jarring climax ties up all the loose ends (a little too neatly, perhaps) and the denouement may leave readers wondering if there is a depth to Marjorie that will be explored in future installments.

Jacqueline Rice

MOONBLIND

Laura Crum

September 2006

1-880284-90-1

Perseverance Press

In two months, equine veterinarian Gail and husband, Blue will welcome their firstborn child into their family circle. At this momentous time in her life, what Gail craves is peace, quiet and a worry free existence. What she gets is a horse with a mysterious ailment, a distraught cousin with a lot of secrets and her own fears about the upcoming birth of her son.

Late one night, Gail's cousin Jenny, who lives nearby, calls to tell her Gail that her dog has been poisoned. All of Gail's attempts to reassure Jenny that it might have been an accident are rebuffed; Jenny is convinced that the dog was killed to warn her. And she's tight-lipped when Gail asks why.

Already preoccupied with Jenny's news, Gail is confronted with another disquieting situation while checking on her horses. Something subtle is wrong with Danny, one of her geldings. Later that day, Gail goes to check on Jenny who reluctantly tells Gail about a long-term affair she had with Don, her husband Charley's charismatic best friend. The affair lasted seven years until Don's wife, Annie found out about the clandestine relationship. Annie went off the deep end, threatened Jenny, and then promptly disappeared. That was the incentive Jenny needed to move on. After divorcing Charley, Jenny moved across the country to start her own thoroughbred training program and be near her only family, Gail.

Jenny's usual levelheadedness deserts her as her dubious past behavior and unsavory associates catch up with her. Wavering between wanting to help her troubled cousin and needing to protect her own well-being and that of her unborn child, Gail nevertheless becomes enmeshed in Jenny's predicament. As the situation escalates, Gail must balance her unruly hormones, an ailing horse and the repercussions of Jenny's questionable past. .

Jacqueline Rice

MURDER IN EXILE

Vincent H. O'Neil

2006

ISBN: 0312352077

St. Martin's Minotaur

The title of this award-winning debut novel refers both to a town in Florida's Panhandle, and to the condition in which the protagonist, Frank Cole, finds himself. Frank is the bankrupt former owner of a computer business. A judge has decided that any money Frank earns above a certain threshold, before the bankruptcy is settled, goes to creditors. So Frank has escaped to Exile, Florida, where he's making ends meet as a fact checker for an insurance company. Frank's goal in Exile is to keep himself busy, fed, and under the bankruptcy court's radar. But that's easier said than done.

When Frank is asked to look into the circumstances surrounding the hit-and-run death of a young man, Eddie Gonzalez, things start to go sideways. Eddie bought a hefty life insurance policy only shortly before his death, and the insurance company has asked Frank to make sure Eddie's death was the simple, yet tragic, accident it appeared to be. Frank expects a straightforward case, and yet in asking basic questions, he manages to ruffle feathers and bring threats upon himself. It soon becomes clear that there are powerful people who have absolutely no desire for the truth to come out, and that Eddie's death was no accident.

Vincent O'Neil has crafted Frank Cole's search for answers into a very entertaining mystery. I hope we see more from this promising new author.

Rae Helmsworth

MURDER OF A REAL BAD BOY

Denise Swanson

Aug 2006

ISBN: 0451218280

Signet

I am a huge fan of the Scumble River series and couldn't wait for this book. When we last saw Skye Denison she had been working for the city coordinating the rummage sale from hell, and ended up inheriting a house. In this latest chapter of Skye's life she is in the process of getting the house fixed up. Her fixer upper is a local bad boy with a reputation. Before he can do any damage to Skye's reputation he ends up dead. Skye being the person she is looks into the murder.

Swanson is a born story teller and her choice of using the traditional mystery setting to do it works beautifully. Her pacing is perfect and she writes characters that could be your neighbors. Scumble River is always on my vacation destinations list. Swanson rules the neotraditional mystery.

Jon

THE MYSTERIOUS NORTH

Edited by Dana Stabenow

2002

ISBN 045120742 4

Signet

This is a collection of twelve all new short stories, all taking place in Alaska. That is all but one. S.J. Rozan features a P.I. from Alaska, looking for someone in New York City. Anne Perry has a story of three sisters reuniting in Alaska after the death of their Mother. Too bad they are doing it on Good Friday in 1964. In The Twin, Brad Reynolds explores good versus evil, and Native Culture. Cheechako by Dana Stabenow takes place during the Klondike Gold Rush. There are eight more authors contributing to this anthology. All of them offer a different insight into the wonders that make up Alaska. Most of will never get there, but many of us enjoy reading the accounts of the people who live or visit there. With the exception of S.J.Rozan these authors live or have worked there. All of their stories will expand your knowledge of this interesting state. Some, like "An Unkindness of Ravens", by Donna Andrews, might amuse you. Michael Armstrong's A Little Walk Home could amaze you. I enjoyed all of them enough to read this book twice.

Karen Jordan

NAILS

Peter Bowen
2006
ISBN:0-312-31207-5
St. Martin's Miniature

God Bless Peter Bowen. One of my favorite regional mystery series is this man's Gabriel Du Pré Montana. Toussaint is a town I know as well as my own. I know where to go for a burger, who's been fighting with whom, what to wear to hear Du Pré play his fiddle and who the soft touch in town is. And I know not to mess with the population here or else I'll have to answer to this cigarette smoking and whiskey drinking force of nature.

Times are bad in Toussaint. The economy is nonexistent. Vets are coming home from Iraq missing limbs and hope. And dang nab it the fundamentalists are taking over. Shouting creationism. Declaring evolution a lie. Refusing to see truth where it negates their agenda.

When one young girl is found dead and another is missing Du Pré is challenged to save her. He's a strong man and the Metis are a strong people but society is creeping into their town even as the prairie is calling it back.

Once more, with feeling, I'll recommend this fabulous series for it's highly conceptual crimes and entirely original setting.

Ruth

THE NIGHT GARDENER

George Pelecanos
2006
ISBN: 0316156507 Little Brown (US)
ISBN: 0752875418 ORION (UK)

THE NIGHT GARDENER is pure Pelecanos, didactic and urban dialog disguising a poetic and inevitable plot. No one does contemporary crime fiction with the same deftness as this man and woe to anyone who'd try. Only a handful of writers in our genre have uniqueness so individual I suspect a copy-cat would be painful to read. Pelecanos is one.

NIGHT GARDENER opens with a flashback to a crime scene. Two rookie police patrol the perimeter while a seasoned Homicide takes the reins. A girl lies dead in a city garden. She is victim number three.

Fast-forward twenty years to now. The three are about to cross paths again. Gus Ramone has been police for twenty years. A family man who's doing the best work he can until it's time to get out. "Doc" Holiday is retired police who now spends his days as a professional driving escort and his free time drinking too much and chasing snatch. T.C. Cook is our former lead detective. He's in failing health and hoping for one last chance to solve the case of the Night Gardener.

There is a new death. A thirteen year old boy has been found in a garden. Found by Holiday. He reports the death and does a runner even as remembered details of the old case begin a dangerous trip down memory lane.

The victim was a friend of Gus's boy. Now he's a corpse. Ramone works the case. Taking the lead in family interviews, trying for compassion when the grief is too raw. Being good police doesn't always work with being a good family man but Gus does his best to be both.

Cook is alone now. Only the possibility of one last closed file keeps him going.

The new crime scene details don't add up. Is the Night Gardener back or are the similarities superficial? These three men are all determined by separate motivations to find out.

All three leads are impressively written and there's a strong secondary cast.

Pelecanos tells a tale he's never told in book form before. NIGHT GARDENER is a look at the modern institution of police. The diverse kind of characters who make up our modern law and order. The kind of substance that makes the grade and the flaws that can lead to failure. The demons that walk with our men in blue. Within the richly drawn urbanity for which he has become known, Pelecanos once again reinforces that it is only by finding strength of self that we can make our society stronger.

Ruth

NO GOOD DEEDS

LAURA LIPPMAN
June, 2006
HarperCollins
ISBN 0-06-057072-5

P.I. Tess Monaghan understands the private eye business is tough, personally and financially. She's even had to stoop to giving seminars at a newspaper where she once was a reporter just to get some quick cash. It seems none of the "newbies" know how to investigate a story. Still, she's feeling good. She and her significant other, Crow, are living together now. But, when she comes home and finds Crow has brought home a homeless street kid, Lloyd Joseph, who has already tried to scam Crow, she is not happy. First, the fact that the kid obviously knows Youssef, an assistant U.S. attorney and murder victim, and may have used his ATM card, makes her immediately suspicious. Actually, she is sure Lloyd will try to rip them off. And he does. However, since he doesn't know how to drive a shift, Crow quickly tracks him down. Soon, both Tess and Crow realize Lloyd is mixed up in something really dangerous, something which could attract the attention of the FBI, the DEA and even another assistant U.S. attorney.

In this ninth book in the series, Tess is her usual tough, competent, street smart self. Fortunately, a reporter turned P.I. has lots of contacts and can call in some big favors. After all, even though she loves Crow dearly, Tess thinks he can be really naïve, and she assumes she will have to get him out of this latest mess. But Crow isn't as gullible as Tess thinks he is. Actually, he's quite resourceful when he takes off to protect Lloyd. And Lloyd himself is an appealing kid who's had no breaks. We like him, and Crow also likes and wants to help him. At first, Crow is not sure Lloyd realizes how much trouble he is in and so he's hard to keep safe.

The portrayals of the various government agents who are also after Lloyd are unflattering portraits of law enforcement people who think they have been screwed by the establishment, and now they intend to screw the public and make some money, though you do feel a little sorry for one of them. And an inexperienced reporter also causes Tess some problems. But there is a good ex-cop who is able to help Crow and Lloyd out. Overall, the problems make for a good plot.

As usual, the Baltimore and Atlantic City settings are sketched with authentic detail and color. Not only do the references to specific places, streets and weather add realism, but Lippman also seems to know the culture and sociology of the citizens of these cities and incorporates them skillfully into the story.

Vividly described settings and characters, along with a well-paced plot, make this an excellent addition to the Tess Monaghan series.
Bev DeWeese

NO NEST FOR THE WICKET

Donna Andrews
AUGUST 2006
ST MARTIN'S MINOTAUR
ISBN: 0312329402

She began her writing career with the multi-award winning MURDER WITH PEACOCKS and six books into her series featuring Meg Langslow; Donna Andrews is still in top form.

When Meg goes tumbling down during an extreme croquet game, her lost ball is more than she finds. She is face to face with a beautiful blonde who has exquisite taste. Unfortunately for both of them, she's dead.

The society ladies of Caerphilly Historical Society, a local developer and assorted other players and standers-by are implicated. With all mallets and the sledge hammers being used by a local family to demolish then rebuild Meg and her where fiancé, Michael's, house hauled in as potential evidence, there nothing left to all present to do but have a cookout. Everyone except Meg who goes into sleuth mode. Well, and her Dad, who goes into sleuth mode.

A stash of documents and photos found from the old homes former owners may have hidden clues as to the who and the why of the murder. Enough so that someone tries to break into the shed they reside in despite being protected by a viscous dog and Meg's expert blacksmithing. Oh, and whoever the killer is, he/she has a nasty case of poison ivy.

Donna Andrews is always guaranteed fun. She is one of very few writers capable of having a dozen suspects and not losing the thread of the mystery. And it's a definite that you'll pick up some odd information on the way. This is a vacation book; a book worth lugging around airports and hotels for the payoff in laughter and improbable plot points wonderfully resolved in the last few rollicking pages.

Jennifer Jordan

PEGASUS DESCENDING

James Lee Burke
June 2006
ISBN 0 75287 478 0
Orion Books

Twenty years ago, Dave Robicheaux was a police officer in Miami, when Dallas Klein, his old drinking buddy and gambling addict is forced to engineer an armed robbery. When Klein is gunned down in front of Robicheaux, he is not sober enough to help. Now still haunted years, later he finds events in his life that link him to those old days. He meets Dallas' daughter, and hears that the suicide of a young woman may be connected to the man to whom Dallas owed money. In New Iberia there are involvements with young men connected to powerful criminals, and the death of a drug dealer.

James Lee Burke is an award winning author with book set in Montana and Texas, as well as his long standing Robicheaux series.

Karen Jordan

PIECE OF MY HEART

Peter Robinson
2006
ISBN 0-06-054435-X
William Morrow

Peter Robinson and D.I. Allan Banks have returned this summer with *PIECE OF MY HEART*. And as brilliant as the last three books have been, I'm happy to report that there are no personal tragedies or losses in *HEART*. In fact, D.I. Banks is settling into his restored and improved cottage, playing with his new electronics and even has a chance to do some positive Family Bonding.

All of which allows Robinson and Banks to remind us what brought Banks to the forefront of our genre to begin with. Good policing. In *PIECE OF MY HEART* D.I. Banks is investigating the death of a free lance rock and roll reporter. A blow to one man's head leads to the story of a local Rock and Roll band the Mad Hatters and their history. 30 years ago there was another murder just as Led Zepplin hit the stage at Brimleigh.

Robinson has us follow the two investigations. We piggy back on his imagination to the Summer of Love. We are introduced to Detective Chadwick, a serious and stern man who's a bit out of his element when it comes to "new" rockers Zeppelin, Jethro Tull and the local boys, The Mad Hatters. Still, he works the case solid until.....

Banks, on the other hand is in his element. Visiting Mojo's head quarters, sharing the Hatter's first Album with son Brian and looking back on the music and times of our youth.

Robinson pulls out and fictionalizes a lot of rock and roll lore in this book. It is used to move the plot and entwine the two cases. And in the end this is a Rock Tragedy. I fully expect to see it on V.H.1 during sweeps.

This experiment with mirror images in time is another stellar success from a writer who can do nothing less. I'm holding up my lighter dude, when's the encore?

Ruth

PROMISE ME

Harlan Coben
2006
UK: ISBN:075287439X - Orion
US: ISBN 0525949496 - Dutton

In Harlan Coben's *Promise Me*, crime solving sports agent Myron Bolitar is back after a six year absence. In that time, Bolitar hasn't gotten into any sort of trouble. He's expanded his agency to attract more than just sports figures. He's started a relationship with a 9/11 widow. And at a party to celebrate their relationship, Myron finds himself back in trouble's eye.

At the party, he overhears two teenage girls talking about drinking and driving. Myron pulls them aside and makes them promise to call him if they're ever in trouble. He'd pick them up no questions asked. Three weeks later, the call comes. Myron does what he promises and after he drops the girl off, she disappears. Myron is the last person to see her.

The formula is familiar to fans of Coben's work. But what carries the novel along is Myron. Finding out what's happened to him in the six years, seeing his friends and how they've aged, and watching Myron deal with his hero complex is what makes the novel work. No one wants Myron to help in the case, but he's compelled, and no matter who tries to talk him out of it our hero keeps going. It's very addictive reading.

The suspense is palpable, the action visceral, and the mystery genuinely surprising. Coben has found his stride again, and having Myron Bolitar back for the ride definitely helps.

David White

PUBLIC ENEMY

Will Staeger
2006
ISBN 0060765879
Morrow

Will Staeger burst upon the fiction scene last year with his brilliant first book, *Pain Killer*. It featured, the mysterious W.Cooper, beach bum and American spy. It was simply my favorite read of last year. Funny, tough, great plotting, detailed characters and rapid fire tension made *Pain Killer* the coolest book of last year.

So I have to say I was actually nervous reading *Public Enemy*, Staeger new entry. Laramie, the brilliant and beautiful CIA analyst and sometimes Cooper girlfriend is put in charge of capturing long time sleeper agents who are armed with bio-terror weapons. She, of course, will bring Cooper into the mix.

I did not need to worry. Staeger has fashioned a great second book. From the back rooms of Washington, to the jungles of Central America, Cooper and Laramie track

down a truly terrifying enemy. Once again the black comedy is excellent, the characters are real, the spy tradecraft riveting, the plot brilliant. Cooper joins the ranks with Jack

Reacher and John Rain as one of the coolest and baddest characters in thriller fiction. The last few years have seen certain inspired authors combine the traditional mystery

with a thriller. Lee Child, Barry Eisler, Greg Hurwitz and Adrian McKinty are such talents. We can already add Will Staeger.

Richard

PUTTING LIPSTICK ON A PIG

Michael Bowen
2006
ISBN 1-59058-287-X
Poisoned Pen Press

A startling array of plot elements not usually found in suspense fiction enrich Bowen's highly entertaining novel. Trademark and intellectual property lawyers. A publisher of soft porn calendars who admires Winston Churchill. A newly appointed Federal Court of Appeals judge. Snowmobiles. Ice fishing. And so on.

Rep Pennyworth has moved from a lucrative position with a law firm in Indiana to a small rented office in Milwaukee. His goal is to support his wife who has an opportunity to accept a tenured position as a college professor in the Wisconsin university system. Searching for opportunities to build a law practice in his new home, he accepts just about any client who comes his way. When a young court reporter spots her doctored image on a soft porn calendar and retains Rep to file a claim for compensation, Rep finds himself drawn into a widening circle of questions, ambiguities, and danger.

With the support of his wife, and the assistance of a group of eccentric Vietnam Vets, Rep gradually uncovers a series of cover ups and deception. Bowen skillfully keeps the reader guessing on the motive behind all the events, and as the action progresses, it remains unclear whether a murder has been committed.

Bowen's style includes a deft use of wry humor without sacrificing suspense. Rep Pennyworth along with his collections of supporting sidekicks are characters to admire and to look forward to meeting again.
Woodstock

SHAMUS IN THE GREEN ROOM

Susan Kandel
2006
ISBN: 0060581093
William Morrow

Kandel's third book, SHAMUS IN THE GREEN ROOM, is actually more fun than the first two, and I loved the first two. Cece Caruso makes her living studying famous mystery writers and this time out she has written a biography of Dashiell Hammett. The book is being made into a movie and Cece is on the set as an advisor. However When a woman is killed and the leading man is the main suspect Cece has her own mystery to solve.

A wonderful blend of fact and fiction this is a series that all mystery lovers should be reading, written by someone who obviously loves the genre as much as we do.

Jon

SHIFTING SKIN

Chris Simms
2006
ISBN: 0 75287 365 2
Orion

When you speak of young mystery writers with talent one name that continually gets mentioned is Chris Simms. After reading SHIFTING SKIN in one sitting it is easy to see why.

Jon Spicer is painting a nursery while solving the tabloids' current crime de jour. "The Butcher of Bellvue" is leaving a wake of skinned corpses and nothing enralls tabloid readers like a good serial killer story. For Spicer it's his job to solve the crime and he cannot remove himself to the abstract fascination of Manchester's readers. Even the paint choice for the baby's room brings him back to the horror of the crime scene.

When yet another body is found, the police realize, to their horror, that the perp must be a professional physician and their talents will be tested trying to apprehend the man. Enter a co-worker of Joe's partner. She heard someone being strangled in the room next to hers at a dive hotel the night before the body was discovered. She comes forward but the probability of her tale seems fantastical. When pooh-poohed she begins to investigate on her own.

As Fiona and Spicer walk intersecting paths the element of danger escalates. For Fiona, it comes from home and herself. It is Joe's path that is even more precarious. He must sift through the evidence and walk with incomprehensible evil in an attempt to solve a crime that shouldn't happen. He struggles with department politics and the killer's motivations trying very hard not to lose himself in the abyss.

SHIFTING SKIN is another in a new wave of serial killer books that seem to be re-establishing that sub-genre. The character and motivation in SKIN is reflective of the state of our society. The complexity of the plot is an "in your face" commentary on the populist perspective of current day expectations and mores. Modern tragedy is everywhere and Simms sees it with an unforgiving eye. This writer is not a "talent to watch": he is a talent to embrace.

Ruth

SIMPLIFY

Tod Goldberg

2006
 ISBN: 0976717719
 University of Illinois Press

"Simplify" is a collection of twelve beautifully crafted short stories about people who inhabit a different world than (most) of the rest of us.

Each story is told from the first person point of view of someone whose perspective is a bit skewed, a bit distorted. And whose life is not necessarily all that it could, or should, be. After all, what do you do if Jesus decides that he's your new best friend? Or the portrait of Elvis on your wall starts bleeding? Or you witness a brutal murder?

No story in this collection is like any other story, but all are told at breakneck pace and all are intelligent, brutally funny, melancholy, and in some cases, tragic. Every character is interesting, full of personality and quirks. These people inhabit that no man's land where those who don't easily fit into society's pigeonholes dwell. It's a dark and often frightening place, full of violence and greed and surprising moments of hope and salvation. You'll be glad you visited it.

Rae Helmsworth

SNAPSHOT

Garry Disher
 2006
 ISBN 1-56947-426-5
 Soho Press

While offering a disturbing look at the...shall we say "alternative"?... lifestyles of a group of people, this book gives us so many interesting, fully realized characters. A police procedural in the very best sense of the word, I enjoyed getting to know this police department, with all of its very human members. The plot was complex and thought-provoking, with several good twists. I haven't had a chance to read Disher before, but I will be reading more of his works!

Judy Clemens, author of the Stella Crown mysteries

SOMETHING IN COMMON

J.R. Lindermuth
 2006
 ISBN 1-59374-499-4
 Whiskey Creek Press

Lindermuth does a wonderful job of bringing his fictional small Pennsylvania town to life by getting us into the minds of a multitude of characters. Each chapter teaches us about someone new, and they all became very real to me. I enjoyed Lindermuth's writing and the story itself was interesting and without a dull moment. There were a couple of clues that hit me as too obvious, giving away the murderer's identity too early in the process for my liking, but I still enjoyed the book and recommend it.

Judy Clemens, author of Three Can Keep a Secret

SPY GODDESS: TO HAWAII, WITH LOVE

Michael P. Spradlin
 2006
 ISBN 0-06-059410-1
 HarperCollins

This young adult book is a fun romp with teenage spy, Rachel Buchanan, fast and funny and definitely not just for the young. A sequel to Edgar-nominated Spy Goddess, Book One: Live & Let Shop, this book takes us on a wild ride with a smart, sharp-tongued heroine and her even smarter friends as they try to thwart Simon Blankenship, a truly wonderful foe who is out to steal an ancient artifact. There were a few references to modern life that are now outdated, but other than that, the book was a bit of brain candy for a rainy day. I think I'll have to go back and read that first one...

Judy Clemens, author of To Thine Own Self Be True

STONE BUTTERFLY

James D. Doss
 August, 2006
 ISBN 13 978 0 312 34054 4
 St. Martin's Minotaur

Charlie Moon has enough going on in his life without his Aunt Daisy calling him about her dreams. Her latest concerns a young girl with blood dripping from her hands. She doesn't immediately recognize her and Charlie dismisses this dream as another one of Daisy's notions. Then he hears about the killing of an elderly man in Nevada. A young girl is found standing over his body holding out her bloody hands. She is soon identified as Sarah Frank, the daughter of Charlie's friend. He and FBI Special Agent McTeague go to Nevada but find that Sarah is missing. Moon is soon on her trail, along with the local police, and several other concerned individuals. Sarah is a former foster child of Aunt Daisy, and it is hoped she might head back to Colorado to find help there. And then things really get confused.

I am always on the lookout for a new Charlie Moon mystery. I love the wealth of characters and mad adventures of Aunt Daisy. There is a hint of mysticism about her that conflicts with Charlie's straight ahead approach to life. It all combines to give a book that is hard to put down.

Karen Jordan

TANGLED ROOTS

Angela Henry
June 2006
ISBN: 1-58314-608-3
Sepia/Hardcover Press

Angela Henry's *The Company You Keep* was one of my favorite books of last year, so I was excited when Mr. Postman brought me a new Kendra Clayton novel. It was not a disappointment.

Willow, Ohio is a small college town and Kendra works hard as a GED instructor and hostess at her uncle's restaurant. Her life is full—a close family, new boyfriend, fulfilling work, and her best friend's imminent wedding. So when a beautician she barely knows is killed, why should it be her problem? But somehow it becomes her problem when she finds the suspect tucked away in her apartment. To top it off, her beloved teaching position is in jeopardy when a martinet is put in temporary charge and her best friend expects her to wear a clown dress in the wedding. We won't even begin on the preacher with the excellent bedroom manner...

Smart, witty, and fast-paced, this second Kendra Clayton novel is as likeable as the first. When some detail from the first book is needed, it is plaited into the storyline in an offhand manner that often flies right under the reader's radar.

Same time, next year, Angela? I'll be waiting.

Kathleen Tromp

TO THINE OWN SELF BE TRUE

Judy Clemens
2006
ISBN 1-59058-298-5
Poisoned Pen Press

I'm very fond of Judy Clemens protagonist, Stella Crown. I don't like it when Stella has a bad day. What could be worse than having to leave your fav tattoo parlor with a tat half finished? How about finding out that while you were snoozing in the inking chair the owner was being tossed in a dumpster in back. And now she's dead. Her husband is missing and Stella? Stella has an excuse to get involved with another mystery. From the halls of Congress to the biking community in Stella's home county, everyone has a clue to offer. Can Stella get the missing husband home and how about that last minute Christmas shopping?

What Clemens does so well is create believable mysteries in an incredibly small community. Her since of place takes the Crown series beyond the cliché of "cozy" and into a world all her own.

Ruth

THE TORCH OF TANGIER

Aileen G. Baron
May 2006
ISBN 1-59058-221-7
Poisoned Pen Press

In a new century, and with the momentous events of the Second World War now more than 50 years in the past, there are only a few persons still living who experienced those days first hand. Books like Tom Brokaw's popular THE GREATEST GENERATION have related the experiences of real people caught up in the conflict and have also sparked the interest of the newer generations who are interested in knowing what it was like to live in those days.

Baron's entertaining book relates the experiences of fictional archeological researcher Lily Sampson, who follows a colleague to Morocco in the early 1940's to work on an interesting dig near the city of Tangier. When military camps encroach on their work sites, the research group turns to the governmental offices located in the area, and find themselves working on coded messages which will support the invasion of Northern Africa by the Allies planned for late 1942.

Not surprisingly, there are shifting alliances at work, both political and romantic. Lily waits anxiously for word of the man she loves, stationed with the military in the area. Servants behave in ambiguous fashion, colleagues may or may not have turned against each other, murdered bodies are discovered, important codes and documents go missing. Finally deciding she can rely only on herself to stay safe and alive, Lily perseveres to keep the important messages flowing to the invasion force.

Woodstock

TWIN CITIES NOIR

Julie Schaper, Steven Horwitz Editors
June 2006
ISBN: 1-888451-97-1
Akashic Books

Traffic in Minneapolis/St.Paul can be hell...it takes me 50 minutes to get to work, and that's on a good day. I take a bus/light rail combination, and the best travel companion I've recently had is *Twin Cities Noir*, Akashic Books' latest edition to their fabulously dark and seedy *Noir* series. The stories are perfectly sized to a commute, a lunch break, or a spare half hour; they are also an ideal antidote to an overdose of Minnesota Nice.

In all, fifteen talented writers contributed twisted tales with Twin Cities settings, each specific to a neighborhood. (Okay, so Steve Thayer cheats a *little* by setting his elegant tale in a storm-tossed Duluth, or "Up North" as the city folk say.) William Kent Krueger's *Burns* is a wicked delight with a twist, and Chris Everheart's *Chili Dog* is a real killer--literally--but worth every bite.

This volume of the popular *Noir* series has a nice rhythm: the voices are varied, and the stories are consistently strong. Editors Julie Schaper and Steven Horwitz deserve kudos for putting together an anthology that showcases some of the best writing the Twin Cities has to offer--and we really do have an embarrassment of riches.

...And so this week I have a new form of entertainment on the trip into downtown: I check out the assorted businesspeople, bleary-eyed students, flocks of teenagers, and ne'er-do-wells that share my ride, and I wonder what hearts of darkness may be lurking beneath their innocent facades--what subtle menace lies beneath closed eyelids--what diabolical plots are being planned over a cup of Starbucks and the Star Tribune.

After all, they don't call it *Murderopolis* for nothing...

Jill Lynch

WILD THING

Mike Harrison

2006

ISBN:1-55022-716-X

E.C.W. Press

My favorite first novel of last year was a book by Canadian Mike Harrison. *ALL SHOOK UP* introduced the reading public to Calgary P.I. Eddie Dancer. With great back story and an interesting case to solve I was charmed by Dancer and more than ready for a second date.

How does a new writer follow up a case of prison corruption and bikers gone bad?

Harrison gets his protagonist out of Dodge (Calgary in this case). Dancer receives a plea for help and a one-way ticket to England in *WILD THING*. A benefactor has been accused of being a serial killer and asks Eddie for help. An infamous prison, a lost manuscript, pap paparazzi and reincarnation are all elements of Eddie's second case.

Having left his secondary characters back in Canada Harrison creates a new and exciting cast. As Eddie helps Dr. Maurice and his wife try to negate the circumstantial evidence implicating him the stakes continue to be raised. Soon it's personal. *WILD THING* is doing 120 on the Fat Boy with no helmet. Proof positive that this writer has the chops to go the distance. And I'll take the bitch seat.

Ruth

WOLVES OF MEMORY

Bill James

2006

ISBN:0-393-06188-4

I'd follow Bill James to the depths of hell. Oh wait, I already have. The Harpur and Iles series is for me like a nice long bath at the end of the day. Nothing can salvage a bad day like reading of a world where morality is often left behind but always trying to come to the forefront from the most unlikely of sources.

After over twenty books in this series you'd think it would be hard for the author to find something new to write but James has proven he'll never run out of original ideas once again with *WOLVES OF MEMORY*.

As *WOLVES* opens Harpur and Iles are relocating a "grass". Iles is in his element playing benefactor as he tries to forward his own reputation. Harpur is wary that reassigning a family of four new identities may prove impossible when they are relocated so close to home.

As the Ballions become the Templetons, Harpur's concern for their safety grows. Iles has always been a character on the edge and more than once he has crossed the line. *WOLVES OF MEMORY* is the book in which he embraces his insanity with the nonchalance of Caligula.

James tells this tale almost exclusively with dialog. The conversation running throughout the book between Iles and Harpur is rather like watching a horrific accident. Even as you realize the catastrophic ramifications the action holds you riveted. A less experienced writer would be content with this as a whole of the book but James has never written anything without layers.

Although the eventuality of a final face off between Harpur and Iles makes up much of the body of *Wolves*, the story of the Ballions is what drives the plot forward. What would you do to save your family? In *WOLVES OF MEMORY* you'll find one answer.

Ruth