

47 RULES OF HIGHLY EFFECTIVE BANKROBBERS

Troy Cook

2006

Capital Crime Press

Rule #1: Your gun is your friend!...

Rule #17: Say something memorable...

Rule #7: It's impossible to underestimate how stupid people can be...

These and 44 more rules form the basis of the education 22 year old Tara Evans has received from her dad Wyatt since she was 9 years old. That's when she first started helping him rob banks, rehearsing with Barbie and Ken dolls. Now, Tara is straining at independence, and Wyatt has become, well, nuts. Robberies have escalated from simple in-and-outs, to "leave no witnesses".

When Tara becomes attracted to Max, a local sheriff's rebel son (who has a considerable list of father issues himself), Tara sets up her dad, and runs away with Max, robbing gas stations along the way. Then Wyatt escapes. Now, there are two weird dads chasing after them, each eager to dispense their own brand of justice. Add to that a gaggle of feds, and some angry ex-partners (Rule #10: partners suck), and we're in for a wild and crazy ride.

I've been told by the author that only 46 rules actually made it into the book. Troy vetted the rules with several law enforcement types, who gave the nod to their practicality and authenticity. Maybe the missing rule is the one that actually is foolproof, and the feds asked that it be omitted. But who's counting? A fun book from a talented author. And if you can't find it in your bookstore, check the "self help" section.

Gary Shulze, Once Upon a Crime

ALL MORTAL FEAR

Julia Spencer-Fleming

October 2006

St. Martin's Minotaur

Ever since the opening passages of *IN THE BLEAK MIDWINTER* I have been a fan of the way Spencer-Fleming writes. She has a singular flair for irony which she uses to maximize the effect of her plots. She has used this touch to bring universal themes to the small town North East for five novels now. With each book she becomes surer in her story telling skills and she knows her two main protagonists just a bit better.

For the lifetime of this series there has been a central and all too real conflict. The Reverend Clare Fergusson and Police Chief Russ Van Alstyne fell into a welcome and unexpected friendship in the first book. There were hints of a deep physical attraction between the pair. These are two highly moral people who believe in the sanctity of institutions. The very married Russ and our good Reverend have fought an unwelcome love while trying to preserve their friendship throughout the series. Spencer-Fleming has managed to bring a very contemporary spin to the saga of forbidden love while solving a quartet of excellent mysteries.

The opening passages of *ALL MORTAL FEAR* alarmed me. Can she really cheat this badly? My trust in this author is such that I soldiered on, drawn in by the prose and welcomed by the characters that inhabit the town of Millers Kill. Russ and his wife Sara have separated at her request. When a friend stops at the Van Alstyne house to check on Sara she finds an open front door and a petite corpse. The blonde has been bludgeoned to death and Russ quickly becomes the prime suspect.

A shaken police force requests outside help and Clare starts an investigation of her own. As motive, opportunity and the timeline of *ALL MORTAL FEAR* come to bear Spencer-Fleming uses her craftsmanship to bring the world stage to her small town. A war in Africa is running through the lifeblood of Millers Kill as surely as its running through Baghdad. The contemporary issue of parental versus community responsibility for the raising of our children finds a place in these pages. Friendships are tested and the cruelty of neighbors is not ignored. The current of a love story with three individual players moves from prominent background to forefront status.

ALL MORTAL FEAR has many twists and turns along the way. Spencer-Fleming writes her best action sequence to date. The climax will leave you stunned and the epilogue will give her reader another lesson from within. To be a whole person one must realize all of their strengths and passions, even if it's painful. Or dangerous.

Trust earned is trust I will give again. I now know that Spencer-Fleming will never use shortcuts or deliver pat dialog. I believed it before but after closing this book I can declare it fact.

Ruth

BACK TO BOLOGNA

Michael Dibdin

2006

Vintage Books/Random House

As a fan of Gold Dagger winning Dibdin's work since I had the great fortune of reading, *THE DYING OF THE LIGHT*, the chance to read the latest in the Aurelio Zen series pleased me no end. Quirky is the mildest way of describing Zen as a character and one never knows what form of narration Dibdin will choose in his latest novel featuring the neurotic detective.

In this tenth book in the series, we find Zen investigating the murder of a Bologna entrepreneur, Lorenzo Curti. Curti was found pierced by a Parmesan cheese knife. As the owner of the Bologna football team, Curti is beloved by the locals despite questionable ties to possible tax evasion. The most prominent suspect is one Vincenzo Amadori, a rather unhinged male debutante who is a rabid soccer fan. Amadori's

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roommate Rodolfo stars in a sub-plot that pits his egomaniacal professor of Semiotics, Edgardo Ugo, against the adored host of a food show in a cook-off. Problem is, one of them can't cook.

As he struggles with the case, Zen does his best not to face the facts of his possible hypochondria as his relationship with girlfriend, the ever patient Gemma begins to deteriorate. The investigation, soon deepened by the appearance of more bodies. Add to the mix the shenanigans of Tony Speranza, Bogart obsessed private eye, and all the ingredients for a damn funny, politically atmospheric read.

Jennifer Jordan

THE BANCROFT STRATEGY

Robert Ludlum

2006

St. Martin's Press

Do the ends justify the means? Does any individual have the right to decide what's in another individual's, or group's, best interest? And then act on it, and in taking action, lie? Those fundamental questions are at the core of *The Bancroft Strategy*, Robert Ludlum's latest pulse-pounding, spine-tingling thriller.

Andrea Bancroft is a hedge fund analyst. Todd Belknap is a spy. In the normal course of events it would be very unlikely for these two people to meet. But when one of Todd's colleagues is kidnapped by Lebanese terrorists, and Andrea is asked to sit on the board of a family foundation, events are put in motion that bring the two into contact – and then the fireworks really start.

The action is unrelenting, the plot is nicely twisty, and the resolution is completely satisfying. In short, it's everything we've come to expect from Robert Ludlum.

Rae Helmsworth

BEFORE THEY MAKE YOU RUN

By James Patrick Hunt

October 2006

Thomson Gale

Although it's been done before, Hunt's quick read about corrupts cops framing an innocent person; this tale will hit the spot for a lot of readers. At thirty-four, Paul Kessler is a good guy but he is just meandering through life. And although a good attorney, apparently he was absent from law school the day they learned about not messing with the police chief's wife. Especially a police chief who's volatile, weak-willed and not so bright. So, when Carol Macy, a smart and attractive judge makes a pass at Paul, he is easily led astray. And that path takes him places he doesn't want to know about, much less go. Their short-lived affair ends with Carol's death and someone trying to frame Paul for the deed. The quick-thinking and sometimes desperate acts he commits to save his neck and keep one step ahead of the "bad guys" are the substance of this story.

This story is filled with more than its share of sinister types: crooked cops, a menacing street criminal, a detective who's as immoral as he is cunning. It seems there's no end of persons who'll break the law if it'll get them what they want or to save themselves. Committing murder is fine with them as long as the cause is right.

Jacqueline Rice

THE BLONDE

Duane Swierczynski

2006

St. Martin's Minotaur

Divorce. Unwanted travel, Philly. A beautiful Blonde. Jack Easley is about to die. Unless he stays with THE BLONDE... Enter a game of cat chasing dog that reaches the highest level of national security and corporate greed.

The game's afoot and the author is not pulling our leg here. He has the stuff. Last year's THE WHEELMAN was coveted by reviewers and hailed by fans. A refreshing new look at the dark side of the genre, THE WHEELMAN has had folks waiting for a year to see what this young man would turn in next.

THE BLONDE is, quite simply, unforgettable. Duane Swierczynski has turned in this year's smartest hard-boiled read. There's Kelly (the blonde), who happens to be a scientist working with a special project. She is now infected with deadly nano-chips. There's Jack, our hero. And returning from a brief appearance in last year's book is Kowalski, one of the best heroic anti heroes to emerge in crime fiction.

The plotting and pacing are as good as it gets. Story upon story, one vignette after another, the novel is a wildly irreverent and entirely cynical look at our life and times complete with some wonderfully nostalgic moments. It is a look at the most horrific possibilities the new world order has to offer. THE BLONDE is also about hope and a severed head. There is a craftsmanship to the prose that will have you sharing passages.

And once again you'll wait for next year's book.

In the work of Duane Swierczynski, we've found the stylistic heir to the Richard Stark novels.

Ruth Jordan

BLOODLINES: A HORSE RACING ANTHOLOGY

Edited by Maggie Estep and Jason Starr

2006

Vintage

And we're coming around the final turn of 2006 even stronger than the first leg of the year. This year has been platinum for the short story. There have been at least two excellent collections released each and every month of this year. BLOODLINES has 20 great entrees within its pages. Beginning with Lee Child's .50 SOLUTION and crossing the wire with Meghan O'Rourke's MY LIFE AS A CHILDHOOD RACING JUNKIE there's nothing bound for the glue factory here.

What sets BLOODLINES apart and above the rest of the pack is the execution of its concept. Estep and Starr know the track. They understand the lure of the race. And it's reflected in both their choice of contributors and their own stories. Short stories are presented by an all star cast that includes Joe Lansdale, Scott Phillips and Laura Lippman. With essays by Jane Smiley, Steven Crist and Laura Hillenbrand's THE DERBY, this collection will remind everyone who ever loved the track why they do. It will also make those who've never been wonder how they've missed it.

There's nothing in the world quite like the start of a horse race. The partnership between horse and rider as they leave the gate and the strategy presented in those first seconds is a wonder to behold. The people watching is like nowhere else on earth. It's all here. In these pages.

I'm awarding Estep and Starr the Roses for setting a new pace in an already breathtaking race. 2006 has been the year of the Short Story. BLOODLINES is a call to editors. Rise above concept and explore hi-def.

Ruth Jordan

THE BOOK OF LOST THINGS

John Connolly

2006

Atria

Once Upon a time, life was Grimm, and books came alive.

"Listen to me,...Let me tell you the truth about the world to which you so desperately want to return. It is a place of pain and suffering and grief...There were wars before it, and there will be wars after it, and in between people will still fight one another and hurt one another and maim one another and betray one another, because this is what they have always done." So says the Crooked Man, John Connolly's most frightening creation yet.

World War II is raging upon London. A young boy, David, whose books talk to him, is unhappy with his new lot in life. When a German bomber crashes near his new home, he must investigate the horror of the burning plane and its occupants. He stumbles through a passage and finds himself in another land where his recently dead mother calls to him. He misses her so. David begins a journey fraught with unimaginable horrors and convoluted fairy tales that are hysterical but oh, so believable. He meets good and kind people, and evil, deadly creatures, but he continues on his course in search of his mother, for she has whispered to him that she is not really dead.

David's experience in this monster-filled other-world is brought to life by Connolly's unique imagination as it carries the reader along a wickedly clever path that will keep you turning the pages. The Book of Lost Things is certainly a departure for Mr. Connolly, but a story so entrancing that one ought not to pass it by.

Pat Frowp

Once Upon A Crime, Minneapolis, MN

BORDERLINE

Mark Schorr

2006

St. Martin's Minotaur

The first book in a new series, Schorr introduces psychologist Brian Hanson, a Vietnam veteran and recovering addict. When a former client supposedly commits suicide, Hanson is convinced of foul play, and is determined to deliver justice. But a can of worms is opened as he uncovers the corruption in the city administration, and the city administration uncovers what Hanson is up to. Schorr raises the stakes when Hanson's job, marriage and life are put in jeopardy, to create a quick, suspenseful read.

Using close third person, Schorr captures multiple view points. This allows him to keep secrets from certain characters while allowing the reader to know everything. Although this is difficult to do well, Schorr creates more tension and suspense with this technique and allows readers to get closer to characters other than the protagonist. His characters are developed and relatable with pasts that affect their decision making in the present. Schorr never takes the easy route or "cheats" when it comes to plotting; he raises the stakes at each twist and turn without forcing readers to stretch their imagination. This is the stuff great thrillers are made of: three-dimensional characters, a thrilling plot, beautiful writing and lots of surprises.

Dana Kaye

THE BROKEN SHORE

Peter Temple

2006

Querus Books

THE BROKEN SHORE is a small town regional mystery, the difference is that the region is the outback in Australia. Joe Cashin is a cop in need of healing and change and he heads to a small town to put his life back together. But crime isn't restricted to big cities and when a man is attacked and left for dead Cashin finds himself at odds with the locals when he doesn't want to believe the answer that is all too easy.

Temple is an incredibly gifted writer and should be must reading for all fans of this genre. His characters are brought to life with his mastery of dialogue and his plotting is unbelievable. This is a true gift to readers everywhere.

Jon

CALLING THE DEAD

Marilyn Meredith

2006

Mundania Press

Deputy Tempe Crabtree is the heroine of Meredith's fabulous series set in a small mountain town in the southern Sierras of California. The body of a woman is found in the river by two teenagers who lie to Tempe, and get her into trouble. The dead woman's live-in boyfriend

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professes to know nothing about her death, but, of course, he is number one on the suspect list. At the same time, another man dies, apparently of natural causes.

Tempe becomes even involved with both families because of her husband, Hutch, a minister, who provides both temporal and secular help to his parishioners. In the process, she learns more about the two victims. It is, after all, a small town. Tempe is not convinced the boyfriend is the murderer when she learns more about the dead woman's past. Nor does she believe the husband died naturally, especially when she learns of the wife's past. Tempe considers now there are two cases, neither of which she is supposed to investigate, as others have been assigned that duty. She clashes with her superiors, who are quite happy to pin the murder on the boyfriend and leave the death by natural causes alone. They don't want Tempe stirring things up like she always does.

Simmering below the surface of Tempe and Hutch's marriage is the conflict between her Native American beliefs and his Christianity. She wants to use a method that might reveal what happened to the woman in the river--"calling the dead." It's dangerous, and Hutch fears for her soul--and her life. He absolutely forbids her to do this.

Of course, Tempe obeys--her own sense of right and wrong. With no one on her side, and only her instincts, she does what she can to free an innocent man, and convict a guilty wife. If she's wrong-- I've read the series and look forward to the next one. Excellent, well-written, well-plotted.

Gay Tolti Kinman

CHASING THE DEAD

Joe Schreiber

2006

Ballantine

Sue Young is a successful single mother. She lives in Boston, and when her rat of a husband abandoned her 18 months ago, he left her the third largest real estate agency in the area. So Sue is well off, and leading a pretty decent life. She's found a great nanny, Marilyn, to take care of her daughter, Veda; she's doing work she enjoys; and on this evening, December 21, as Sue arrives home, she's looking forward to Christmas. Then her phone rings.

"You have a very lovely little girl, Susan", the caller says, and thus begins a horrible, and horrifying, odyssey. Veda and Marilyn have been kidnapped, and the only way for Susan to save them is to be guided through the night by phone instructions from the caller, a man who knows entirely too much about the dark events that ended Sue's childhood years earlier.

According to author Joe Schreiber, the central theme of this blood-curdling thriller is the idea that "the worst and most nightmarish aspects of our lives are never quite behind us -- and may, in fact be lurking around the bend, just waiting for us to feel safe". As Sue races against time (the story takes place over a far too brief twelve hours) to try and save her loved ones' lives, she's drawn into a new and desperate reality -- not only is her past not dead, it's still with her, and may be the instrument of killing what she holds most dear.

CHASING THE DEAD is a mystery, a thriller, and a horror story all wrapped up in one wonderfully, nightmarishly, horrifically delicious package. You won't mind losing some sleep over this great debut novel.

Rae Helmsworth

THE CHEMISTRY OF DEATH

Simon Beckett

2006

Delacorte Press

THE CHEMISTRY OF DEATH marks a welcome return to writing for Simon Beckett who last published a fiction book around six years ago. THE CHEMISTRY OF DEATH is his sixth thriller.

The central character, David Hunter, is a forensic anthropologist who has given up this work after a personal tragedy and has retreated to a small village where he now works as a country doctor. But murder won't leave him behind -- the mutilated body of a young woman is uncovered in the fields, and the police ask him to use his skills to track down the killer. Further disappearances follow, until the killer is unmasked.

So far, so expected. What makes THE CHEMISTRY OF DEATH such a strong book -- it was short listed for the £20,000 Duncan Lawrie Dagger -- is the way in which Beckett can develop tension and create fear, a sense of menace and evil. There are passages in the book that can keep the reader on the edge of his/her seat that are all the more chilling for the deceptively cozy setting of the small, isolated village. The details of forensic anthropology are worked carefully in to the plot, giving the reader a fascinating insight into this field.

This book is highly readable and gripping. It operates within the territory explored so well by Thomas Harris, but Beckett has his own voice. If there is a flaw, it is in the slightly disappointing ending.

Highly recommended.

Barb D'Amato

CITY OF LIES

R.J. Ellory

2006

Orion

John Harper doesn't have much of a life. He doesn't really want much of a life. Born in New York, his father was gone by the time he was two, his mother died when he was seven, and John was grudgingly raised by his widowed aunt. So, the minute he turned nineteen John left New York and made a home of sorts in Miami. He's written one semi-successful book, but his muse has left him -- he's started a number of things and finished none. So now John writes filler for the Miami Herald and waits without much hope for his voice to return.

Until one day when his aunt Evelyn calls to demand, without giving a reason, that he return to New York. And although they're estranged, John feels the sticky pull of family ties and goes back to his old home, where he learns a shattering fact. His father is not dead, as John has been led to believe all these years; he's alive, barely, in the hospital after having been gunned down during an attempted robbery. And that's the last bit of truth John finds as he's pulled into a labyrinthine mass of plots, counterplots and treachery.

His father, Edward "Lenny" Bernstein, may or may not have been a mobster. Maybe the armed robbery was a setup. Maybe there are other mobsters who aren't so happy that John Harper is in town. Maybe Aunt Evelyn knows more than she's willing to tell. And there's a cop, Frank DuChaunak, who has an agenda all his own driving him to try and manipulate John's opinions and behavior.

R.J. Ellory does a masterful job of weaving together several subplots and the points of view of many intriguing characters, from the least important petty gangster to the reluctant protagonist, John Harper. As Harper tries to work his way through a maze of lies and deceptions, we come to really care – not only about Harper, but about the how-, who-, and why-dunnit of this terrific and suspenseful thriller.

Rae Helmsworth

THE CLEANUP

Sean Doolittle

2006

Dell Mass Market Paperback

Sean Doolittle came into the mystery world with the fabulous book *DIRT*. Corruption in cemeteries. And then it came to pass in reality. His second book, *BURN* was a masterful look at opportunistic Hollywood. The first two books had an élan to them. *RAIN DOGS* presented us a Doolittle who was now an adult and the writing was more layered if a little less slapstick.

THE CLEANUP is Sean Doolittle, the writer. Set in Omaha it has the wild chase plotting aspect of Doolittle's first two books and the layered characters of *RAIN DOGS*. In this tale of disillusioned police Matthew Worth and Gwen the checkout girl we have everything any reader of crimefiction could want. There's: good police, bad police, petty criminals, scary criminals, multiple love stories, multiple body disposal, one cherry muscle car and one Midwestern blizzard.

Matthew may read as a bad guy or a good guy but you'll find yourself cheering him on. *THE CLEANUP* is composed of five primary story arcs and Doolittle has done his research on all of them. The result is a book in which the narrative cuts across the page with seemingly effortless efficiency. Whether Doolittle is getting his hero across town in a storm or bagging groceries you'll be there in the book. Outside world be damned.

Doolittle continues to amaze this reviewer with his rate of growth. Each book is better and better and the end result is he allows the reader to Cleanup.

Ruth

CONSIGNED TO DEATH

Jane K. Cleland

2006

St. Martin's Minotaur

Josie Prescott has come to enjoy her new life. After playing a central role in a price-fixing scandal in New York, she's moved to the New Hampshire coast to start her own antiques auction house. Two years into it, she's beginning to develop a good reputation, and beginning to feel as if she's found a home. When a local widower, Nathaniel Grant, asks Josie to help him sell his possessions, she's delighted. His collection of antique furniture and paintings is beautiful and valuable; working with him will be a feather in Josie's cap.

But when she goes to Mr. Grant's house for a meeting, he's not there. And Josie only learns why when the local sheriff arrives at her office to interview her – about Grant's murder. It seems that Josie is a prime suspect. All the evidence, although circumstantial, points to her. Josie knows she's done nothing wrong but convincing the sheriff, Alverez, won't be easy. And, as events progress, Josie begins to wonder – is someone trying to frame her?

This clever debut novel is well constructed, and Josie is an interesting, likeable protagonist. It's to be hoped that we see more stories from Jane Cleland.

Rae Helmsworth

A CORPSE IN THE KORYO

James Church

2006

St. Martin's Minotaur

North Korea is one of the world's most closed, most secretive societies. In his richly evocative and beautifully written debut novel, James Church (the pseudonym of a long-time Western intelligence officer) gives us a rare glimpse into the workings of this mysterious country.

Inspector O is a man of character and honor, who's learned that those qualities aren't worth much to a totalitarian regime that values nothing more than blind obedience. However, over the course of time, O has formed a good working relationship with his superior, Pak. So, when Pak sends him on an early morning assignment comprised of nothing more than photographing a passing car, O takes it philosophically. His orders make no sense, but O has long since given up the idea of expecting any sort of logic from the government. But the battery in the government-supplied camera is dead, product of a corrupt supply master who sells new goods for his own profit and recycles used goods through the police department. So the mission fails; that's bad enough, but when O returns to headquarters and finds two government agents with Pak, it gets worse. The agents, Captain Kim and Deputy Director Kang claim to share the same objective, but it's soon clear to O and Pak that there are conflicting agendas, and that there's something very sinister going on.

And against his will, O is thrust into a case so far outside his experience, and so far outside his authority as an Inspector, that he is entirely alone in his investigation. James Church has created a sympathetic and entirely believable protagonist in Inspector O: a man who's learned how to survive the capricious whims of his government, but one who is loyal to his friends and doggedly determined to find the truth. It's to be hoped that we see many more stories about this intriguing character and the world he inhabits.

Rae

DEATH IN WEST WHEELING

Michael Allen Dymmoch

2006

Acting Sheriff Ajax "Homer" Deters has a major crime wave on his hands. People are missing, bodies are unidentifiable, cars are stolen, and a circus tiger is holed up in the back room at the Post Office. It can only get worse. And it does. Homer just keeps plodding along, hoping that adherence to procedures will somehow make it all right in the end.

Dymmoch is a talented and fearless writer, willing to step away from the predictable niche already established and try something very different. DEATH IN WEST WHEELING reaffirms this talent; one can only hope that readers are as willing to take a chance.

P.J. Coldren

Editor's Note: I really enjoyed this book as well. The more of Dymmoch's work I read the more impressed I am. I can't wait to see what the next book from this talented author has to offer. I am a die hard fan. – Jon

DECEIT

James Siegel

2006

Time Warner Books

In DECEIT, we have a book that will challenge those who thought DERAILED was his best, because the new one is really extraordinary. At its heart DECEIT is tale of redemption, and of understanding loss. We have Tom Valle a small town journalist in small town California, harboring an open secret and stumbling upon a huge conspiracy from the simplest of incidents; a car crash which leaves one man dead, and the other soon appears to be a stooge in a bigger game. Valle far from being a small town journalist, is in fact The Tom Valle big-time and disgraced journalist who fabricated a series of stories to give himself the oxygen of "fame" and "notice"; something deprived of him due to a fractured and tragic childhood. The scenes where Siegel describes the boy Valle sitting at the diner joining the dots in a puzzle book while his delinquent mother drinks herself to oblivion makes you understand how childhood shapes the future person, warts and all.

Valle soon harasses his editor about the car crash, and how it is linked to an old woman in a nursing home, as well as a dam-burst that flooded a town and killed all but one child. The editor is skeptical [due to Valle's own track record on fabrication], but that does not deter Valle as he embarks on a journey to seek the truth, from the fabrication and conspiracy he sees around him.

Tracing a war veteran, he heads straight to the heart of the truth, a journey that is peppered with his recollections of his own tortured youth. I must admit that there are curious coincidences along the way, and the writing style is terse with the protagonist Valle not being one of the most likable people you'd want to share a journey with, but Siegel's prose keeps the pressure on, as Valle's search is perhaps one of redemption and finding out why he is the way he is. DECEIT is full of pathos which contrasts markedly with some visceral violence as Valle is tailed by a mysterious hitman who is referred to as The Plumber. The terse dialogue makes this novel more movie material for Siegel. But as a thriller novel, this is right-up with Buchan's 1915 thriller THE THIRTY-NINE STEPS. You'll read this like Siegel's other work in one sitting, so in a word, Excellent and shows that the world around us is brimful of misdirection and deceit in all shapes and forms.

Ali Karim

THE DEVIL'S PITCHFORK

Mark Terry

2006

Midnight Ink

"When human beings steal the devil's pitchfork, they don't destroy it. They think by stealing it they've stopped the devil". But they haven't, all they've done is allow it to be stolen by terrorists. The devil's pitchfork referred to in the title of this terrific thriller is a deadly virus, *Chimera 13*, that kills its host within 24 hours. It's completely man-made, and there is no vaccine. And it's been stolen, in a very well thought-out and carefully coordinated attack, by a group that calls itself Fallen Angels.

Immunologist Derek Stillwater, PhD, has been brought into the case by Homeland Security to help find and stop the thieves. But it's not easy. They're determined to kill as many people as they can, and they have absolutely no conscience.

Written in a matter of fact style that ratchets up the tension and suspense to an amazing degree, this novel will have you at the edge of your seat as Derek races the clock. This is the first in a series featuring Derek Stillwater, and I'm really looking forward to the next entry.

Rae Helmsworth

THE DOCTOR ROCKS THE BOAT

Robin Hathaway

July 2006

Thomas Dunne Books/St. Martin's Press

A passing glance out the train window inspires Dr. Fenimore to start rowing again, after giving it up for no good reason years ago. This spur-of-the-moment decision plunges Fenimore into another murder case. Young Chuck Ashburn dies, but not from the heart condition that Fenimore thought he had. Charlie Ashburn Sr. is an old fraternity brother of Fenimore's but that doesn't make him very happy to have Fenimore poking around the death of Chuck.

Fenimore has other problems, of course. His long-time female friend may have another interest, which doesn't sit well with Fenimore but also doesn't seem inclined to make him up the level of commitment to the lovely Jennifer.

THE DOCTOR ROCKS THE BOAT has Fenimore engaging in some behaviors which are atypical for the usually by-the-book man, but the reasons seem clear. Hathaway has a deft touch with her characters and her plots.

P.J. Coldren

DOT.DEAD

Keith Raffel

2006

You know that you're having a bad day when you discover that you're wearing different colored socks just before an important sales meeting. The confirmation of your bad day is delivered via a blow to the head as you arrive home to change. Naturally, tomorrow can only be better for you. After all, you are a top executive in a hot Silicon Valley networking company with a brilliant future ahead of you.

Unfortunately, if you are Ian Michaels, things get much worse. The following day, after being excused early from jury duty, Ian comes home for lunch to find his housekeeper, Gwendolyn Goldberg, dead on his bed. Ian tells police that he's never met Gwendolyn face to face – she comes in to clean once a week with a key that he provided to the cleaning service. Gwendolyn's family and friends are telling a different story. They insist that Ian and Gwendolyn had a deeper relationship.

Now the number one suspect in a murder investigation, Ian takes matters into his own hands. With his new software project derailed and his promotion denied, Ian begins his own investigation into Gwendolyn's murder. He gains an unlikely ally in his search for the truth – the victim's sister, Rowena. As Ian and Rowena delve deeper into their investigation, they discover that someone has left a trail of evidence leading directly to Ian. The relationships that Ian counted on become filled with conflict and secrets. Complicating Ian's investigation, the company's board of directors is conspiring to change its leadership and try to draw Ian into their plan. In the midst of the chaos, Ian uncovers a plan so ingenious it fools almost everyone involved in the investigation.

Keith Raffel's debut novel is a great read. Although the book is fast paced, each of the characters is distinct and well developed. His main plot and subplot flow together well, creating a cohesive and interesting story. Raffel manages to keep his reader guessing until the end, adding a special twist just as things seemed resolved. Don't be deterred by the Silicon Valley setting or computer jargon – Raffel uses technology both well and sparingly. He clearly explains any computer terminology involved without overwhelming the computer challenged among us. Set aside a day to read this book – once you start it, it's hard to put down.

Susan M Kaye

DRAWING DEAD

Rick Gadziola

2006

ECW Press

Gadziola's third book, DRAWING DEAD, is like cotton candy: it's light, airy, and tastes great, but it doesn't fill you up. Gadziola's protagonist, Jake Morgan, is a former cop and current poker dealer in Las Vegas. Morgan's casino boss pressures him to "entertain" one of their attractive high rollers, and Morgan reluctantly agrees. But when his customer lets in the room service waiter, she is met by an assassin and a bullet to the head. After Morgan is cleared of suspicion, he is asked to deal cards at a police officer party, and yet again, finds himself in the wrong place at the wrong time. While using the restroom he overhears a few cops talking about their plan to take out Bulloch, a sexy female officer who's into martial arts and S&M. While trying to protect Bulloch, Morgan gets sucked into the world of corrupt cops, and now it's his life that's being threatened.

While Gadziola writes wonderfully, his plot is very loosely woven, letting many details fall through the cracks. He sets up his characters and what they have at stake, but then the plot moves forward without any further character development. The first fifty pages pull you in, but it is quite a let down when the suspense is not maintained throughout the rest of the book. While I love poker novels and the characters had real promise, I was disappointed that it lost momentum, and, like cotton candy, it didn't fill me up.

Dana Kaye

THE ENEMY WITHIN

Noel Hynd

2006

Forge

The year is 2009 and in two weeks, the President will be assassinated. Secret service agent Laura Chapman, who has been on White House detail, is assigned to prevent the attempt, but her less than perfect track record makes her an unlikely candidate. She's mentally unstable, has a tendency to drink and smoke pot too much, and because of her young age and gender, the other agents expect her to fail. But because the suspect is male and in the service himself, they could only trust a female agent to expose the enemy within. Using multiple viewpoints and numerous settings, Hynd creates a thriller that's impossible to put down.

The writing is fantastic, embracing the voices of the different characters and settings. Hynd clearly knows D.C. and the agencies within it, the information that are made public and the ones that are kept secret. I was surprised at how well he wrote a woman protagonist as it is often difficult to cross genders and maintain a believable voice. While Chapman isn't the most reliable narrator with her less than perfect mental health and her habitual pot smoking, the plot is so riveting and intense that you have no other choice but to follow her and see where she leads you.

Dana Kaye

ERRORS AND OMISSIONS

Paul Goldstein

2006

Doubleday

Michael Seeley is a drunk with a crumbling marriage. He's also a senior partner, specializing in defending artists' rights, in a big Manhattan law firm. As this engrossing legal thriller opens, Seeley's career is in a downward spiral, and may just have hit bottom. He's appeared in a judge's chambers reeking of gin, insulted the judge, and given his client bad advice. Seeley's senior partners are threatening him with dismissal, while giving him one last chance: fly to Los Angeles to confirm that one of their major corporate clients, United Pictures, really does own the rights to a film franchise.

Seeley is at a point where he really doesn't much care what happens to him, so Los Angeles seems as good a place as any to be a failure. But a funny thing happens once he arrives at the studio. Almost in spite of himself, Seeley begins to be intrigued by the case; it's a legal

labyrinth stretching all the way back to Hollywood's Golden Era, and with inevitable offshoots into the shameful days of black listing and betrayal among Hollywood's power elite.

As Seeley tries to find the truth about the ownership of the original film rights, he's pulled into old battles; he also begins to care again about the practice of the law and to rediscover his moral center.

The choices we make at times of great stress or danger, and whether they're altruistic or self-serving, lie at the heart of this deftly plotted novel. It's the first in a planned series, and I'm looking forward to the next entry.

Rae

EVERY FEAR

Rick Mofina

2006

Pinnacle Books

The suspense in this new novel by Rick Mofina begins in Chapter One and doesn't let up till the book's end. The tale is of every parent's worst nightmare: Lee Colson's life is turned upside down when his adored 7-month-old son, Dylan, is stolen from his stroller in front of a local store in their "safe" northwest Seattle neighborhood. Marie is critically injured by the van in which her baby has been spirited away. Was it a random act, or was Dylan targeted?

Jason Wade, a local reporter, and Detective Grace Garner each separately vow to track down the kidnappers. Jason and Grace 'team up' at one point to share information to the benefit of each, and there are hints of a personal relationship to be explored in future novels in the series, to which I am eagerly looking forward.

The book makes the point that every body has a dark side, and everybody has secrets. Those with secrets in their own past extend to the protagonists as well, including not only Grace, with a life-altering incident in her past, but Jason's father, a former Seattle cop whose police career ended with an event only hinted at, to be revealed in some future book. EVERY FEAR is the second in this series by Rick Mofina, who has written five other novels as well.

Fast reading, suspense filled and absolutely gripping, this book grabs hold of the reader and doesn't let go, and is recommended.

Gloria Feit

EXTRAORDINARY PEOPLE

Peter May

2006

Poisoned Pen Press

The key to understanding the action in EXTRAORDINARY PEOPLE is contained on the frontispiece where one can read a quote from Dostoevsky - with the famous justification found in CRIME AND PUNISHMENT - that extraordinary people have an innate right to act as they please, particularly to commit crimes and break laws at will.

While visiting with friends one evening, Enzo MacLeod accepts a wager - that he can apply the latest developments in crime solving techniques and use them to solve a decades old cold case. MacLeod has expertise as a forensic biologist and works as a university teacher in the south of France. After he takes the bet, he travels to Paris and consults with a journalist whose notes provide the only clues still available in the murder of a highly regarded politician several years earlier. Before long MacLeod has begun to uncover an interlocking trail of enigmatic clues, consisting of abandoned and buried sets of relics. Included are oddball items - sea shells, athletic referee whistles, bones - both human and animal, key fobs, and other small seemingly unrelated trinkets.

With a growing number of helpers and assistants who have become intrigued by the search, and following information provided by series after series of internet searches. The chase culminates in a confrontation in a creepy Paris underground maze. Various members of law enforcement authorities become exasperated with MacLeod as his search expands. His employer as well as governmental functionaries from the highest levels of the French justice system implore him to stop and let the police take over. But an engaging stubborn streak as well as the determination to win the bet keeps MacLeod in the hunt.

With the worldwide popularity of another book and related film featuring a chase around Europe following enigmatic clues, it would be easy to dismiss May's book as a copycat endeavor. But that would be a mistake.

May does a good job of developing his characters and the motivations of the investigating team MacLeod assembles are believable. EXTRAORDINARY PEOPLE is a suspenseful engrossing read, and well worth the time to join the chase.

Woodstock

FEAR OF THE DARK

Walter Mosley

2006

Little, Brown

Paris Minton gets top billing in the new arrival from Walter Mosley. FEAR OF THE DARK opens with a knock on the door. When Paris sees it's his worthless cousin he does not allow him past the threshold. Trouble has a way of holding on to Ulysses "Useless" S. Grant and Paris doesn't want it sticking to him.

Family, you can't get away from it. First though Paris needs to get rid of the body in the basement. The old cliché "you know someone's your friend when..." is beautifully played. Fearless Jones enters with a shovel and someone to do the heavy lifting. Situation over; not.

I've found over the years that the best part of sharing an evening with Mosley in any of his work is you never know where you are in the story.

Are you still sniffing at the worm or are you being pulled to the boat. FEAR OF THE DARK is no exception. Paris might be able to say no to Useless but when his aunt comes knocking soon after Paris has to say yes.

There's money to follow, family to honor, friends to stand up for, corruption, bad guys, bad gals, bad asses and it's Mosley.

"Three weeks earlier I'd been having dinner in a diner in downtown L.A. It was an Italian-American place at one of the crossroads between the races. There were all kinds of patrons eating there: whites' blacks, Asians, and even one Mexican family.

I like integrated places...."

L.A. is a land that has been lovingly stroked since the beginnings of Crime Fiction. Think Chandler, Cain, Shannon..... The LA of today is captured dead on by more than one. Walter Mosley presents an L.A. that reflects times past and present that is so true and so his own, readers do themselves a favor upon purchase.

Timeless L.A. Classic Mosley. FEAR OF THE DARK is a stellar addition to his town and this series

Ruth Jordan

A FINAL JUDGEMENT

Michael A. Black

2006

Five Star First Star

Michael Black took a bit of a break from his Ron Shade series and wrote a few non-series books, all of them good. But now with A FINAL JUDGEMENT Ron Shade is back and better than ever. Black writes PI novels the way the frugal gourmet cooks, he makes it seem effortless and the end result is spectacular.

In this installment Shade is working for a lawyer, something he's not fond of doing, but the lawyer is an old friend. He's helping to prep for a case set to go to trial in a very short time, a case that involves going up against a very prominent attorney. The first PI working the case is dead, ruled a suicide, but Shade's not so sure. The case is definitely more than it seems.

Black is a extremely gifted writer and someone that should not be missed.

Jon

FOUR KINDS OF RAIN

Robert Ward

2006

St. Martin's Minotaur

Bob Wells, a liberal and social activist from the old school, is a practicing psychologist in Baltimore without much of a practice, known to his patients, some of whom even pay a fee, as Dr. Bobby. His ex-wife has dumped him for one of their old school buddies who now has a nationally syndicated radio show, he has gambled away his life savings [hastening the breakup of his marriage], and is deep in a state of depression and bitterness. He has now met a young woman with whom he has fallen in love, who tells him that she loves him too but fears repeating the mistakes of her first marriage to a complete loser, and he finds himself contemplating the previously unthinkable: Stealing a legendary and apparently priceless mask supposedly worth millions from one of his patients, a wealthy man who, Bob reasons, will collect the insurance anyway, leaving only the insurance company as a 'victim.'

So ends Part One of this new book by Robert Ward, whose previous book, RED BAKER, garnered excellent reviews. The current novel has a protagonist with whom one can almost sympathize, but only 'almost.' Bob's thoughts go from very positive and upbeat, honest and unselfish, one moment, to the pits of self-pity and –hatred and, for that matter, hatred of [most of] his fellow man, completely self-absorbed and cynical, the next. His changing moods and mind-sets fairly cry out for a shrink of his own. As Bob puts it, he no longer plays by the rules of the civilized world. Oh, and the priceless mask that started it all? It's an ancient Babylonian mask of the god of vengeance and justice.

By turn comic, dark and disturbing, FOUR KINDS OF RAIN is an offbeat and interesting noir tale.

Gloria Feit

THE FOURTH PERSPECTIVE

Robert Greer

2006

Frog, LTD.

Robert Greer's C.J. Floyd's series remains one of my favorite truisms in Crime Fiction. Write where and who you know and the book will enthrall your reader. Greer has taken a Colorado Bounty hunter to places, which are, without exception a pleasure.

THE FOURTH PERSPECTIVE is as layered and complex as its predecessors. When C.J.'s post Bounty hunter business is burned to the ground the story is far from simple. He'd been sold two documents the day before the flames. The young man who sold them was murdered. This will ring with resound throughout the state.

C.J. is under pressure. He's drawn into a murder case when he's promised he's done with this part of his life. The exploration of a past century leads him to explore new sources and the play is escalating. Someone wants sole possession of the history C.J. held in his hands for a brief period of time. A moment of American history was captured in film and someone wants this priceless snap all for their own.

Greer takes his reader on a ride into a past that many readers may not know. Even if you do, Colorado's history is woven so into the plot, it is a great moment in the Floyd series. While other regional series are only now getting into the world schematic Greer has taken us there with his last three novels and is now going back into the past while exploring C.J.'s many relationships with series regulars. It makes THE FOURTH PERSPECTIVE special .

The only lead in the plot is the return of our super villain, Celeste Deepstream. In a sub-plot where she is once again plotting to assassinate our hero there is nothing new and I found myself skimming pages for the first time ever in this series. Gault didn't work for Patricia Cornwall in the end and Deepstream is more of an annoyance in this book than anything else. I hope she stays in Paris.

Ruth Jordan

GRAVE SURPRISE

Charlaine Harris

2006

Berkley Prime Crime

The sophomore installment of Ms. Harris's books featuring lightning survivor Harper Connelly and her step-brother Tolliver is a fast and furious read. For those who missed GRAVE MATTERS, Harper's touch of death through a lightning bolt has left her with "a gift". When she

printed from www.crimespreemag.com

connects with the physical remains of a dead person she "sees" how they died. She and her brother have been making their living letting the living speak to the dead. They are sometimes hired by distraught relatives and sometimes by the police. They struggled at first but their results have been noted and now the duo is quite busy.

GRAVE SURPRISE starts with the duo visiting a small campus in Memphis, Tennessee. Documents on cause of death for a whole cemetery of long deceased corpses have recently been found. A certain Professor would like to discredit Harper, but hey, he's paying. All goes well for our duo until they get to the grave of one Josiah Poundstone. Josiah has company and this body is much more recent. Not only are the remains recent but Harper is all too familiar with the descendant's non-astral history. Harper tried to find Tabitha Morgenstern for her family two years ago and now she has.

Too much coincidence for Harper and Tolliver. Harris starts here and takes her reader on a case full of nasty twists and turns. To clear themselves Harper and Tolliver must re-examine a case they thought they were done with. The secrets of small town Tennessee and two families are slowly revealed.

As in all her work, Harris effortlessly takes her reader from the macabre to the sorrowful with humor and humanity. This writer has a certain something in her prose that no one else writing today can match. Her compassion combines with her wit to make everything she writes a joy. No matter you have to go places that in real life you never would. You've got Harris holding your hand.

Ruth

THE HARD WAY

Carol Lea Benjamin

2006

William Morrow

I have been a fan of the Rachel Alexander series since THIS DOG FOR HIRE. It has always been a well constructed PI series with a gimmick. Rachel is our PI but she is always ably assisted by her pit bull, Dash (for Dashell Hammett). Although a very good writer with a loyal following Ms. Benjamin's talent as an author has grown considerably and many who should be reading her don't. Why? "That's the series with the chick and the dog, right?"

In her last outing, WITHOUT A WORD, Ms. Benjamin used her considerable skills to show her readers a post 9-11 world where even the dogs were suffering from stress. It was an engrossing read. This year's THE HARD WAY is even better.

Rachel is hired to find a man by a fashion maven. He's homeless and therefore underground in a way that requires undercover work on the part of our two protagonists. Ms. Benjamin cuts into her narrative with an eerie dialog reflecting an understanding of the homeless mindset. She creates an imaginary world that is frightening in its reality. Within the narrative she does what she does best, allowing Rachel to put together what really happened to the man who died on the subway platform. Along the way Ms. Benjamin rues the loss of parts of her New York City. Why are the models and fashion houses moving into her meat-packing district? Who would spend 600 dollars on a jacket for their dog?

Where this book sings is in Benjamin's frank look at the homeless population of New York. It is haunting and true. Although Ms. Benjamin writes in a way totally unlike Mark Billingham I was reminded of his tour de force, LIFELESS. Mystery and Crime readers lost their taste for books with plots about the homeless a long while ago. Meanwhile our homeless population grows. It's a great thing that a few brave writers are touching upon this subject again. That they are touching upon it with dignity gives this reader hope.

Ruth

HELLBLAZER: EMPATHY IS THE ENEMY

Denise Mina

Nov 2006

DC COMICS.

This collects the first story arc that Mina wrote for this great series from Vertigo comics. It takes Constantine to Scotland in a confrontation with a misguided magician. Mina nailed the character and this is a great read. We've reviewed the comic already, but this is a reminder to go get the trade collection. You need to read this!

Jon

HORNSWOGGLED

Donis Casy

September 2006

Poisoned Pen Press

Casey's second book featuring Alafair Tucker is just as enjoyable as last year's THE OLD BUZZARD HAD IT COMING. Casey sets her books in the early years of the 20th century in a small Oklahoma plains town. Everyone knows everyone else, and when the body of a local woman is found lodged in the roots of a tree growing on the banks of a stream running through the Tucker farm, theories abound among the townspeople on the precise details of her fate and what led up to her murder.

Several months later, Alafair learns that the personable young husband of the dead woman is a candidate for the hand of one of her daughters. Although the widower has a solid alibi and has been cleared of suspicion in his wife's death, other traits of his personality do not recommend him to Alafair as a prospective son in law. Using her solid position of respectability in the community and a persistent curiosity and stubborn streak, Alafair learns more and more details of the dead woman's unhappy life and startling information about the cruel mistreatment of her body after her death.

In the end, the true murderer is unveiled and life in the small Oklahoma enclave returns to the seasonal cycle of tasks on the farm, community celebrations and an enviable family life of love, mutual respect and hard work.

As with her earlier book, Casey enriches the telling of the story with regional idioms - as in the title - and an afterward featuring mouth watering recipes for Oklahoma staples we would now call "comfort food."

A thoughtful reader will realize that this small town haven will soon be besieged by world wide events beyond the control of Alafair and indeed all others in her small community. At book's end in May of 1914, war in Europe is very close at hand. Casey's heroine is already sensing the approach of vast change. Readers who enjoy this series are sure to be anxious to learn of what lies in store for Alafair and her family.
Woodstock

THE HOUNDS AND THE FURY: A NOVEL

Rita Mae Brown
October 2006
Ballantine Books

Brown, herself, is a Master of the Hunt, so she knows what's she's talking about when we mount up and ride off. A fun book in that I learned a lot about fox hunting in Virginia. Not to worry--it's a game to everyone, including the foxes and the hounds as the latter occasionally 'talk' to each other. After all, if there were no foxes, what would they all do? No fun chasing coyotes or rabbits, as they don't know the rules.

In the first few pages, human blood is found by the animals, however the body doesn't show up to the humans until about two-thirds of the way through the book.

Although this is more about fox hunting, than about a mystery, which is confined to the end of the story, I found it fascinating. No question Brown is a good writer, knows her subject, and knows how to keep the reader interested.
Gay Toltkinman

KIDNAPPED

Jan Burke
Oct. 2006
Simon And Schuster

Talent shows. Last year Jan Burke's Irene Kelly explored BLOODLINES, a layered and history filled novel that told us the story of Irene's mentor and Irene's own tenure as reporter. a piece of brilliance for for the enjoyment of snowed in readers everywhere. How does one follow an epic like that up?

If you're Jan Burke you write KIDNAPPED. A tale of both an immediate and extended family that boggles the mind at the same time it rings true. Ms. Burke opens this chapter in the chronicles of Kelly and Harriman with both reading Irene's latest feature story on missing children. Ms. Burke gives her readers data to work with on the statistics of missing children. Soon though the story focuses on one case. The black sheep son of one of Las Piernas's leading families has been murdered years earlier. One son is in prison for the crime, a daughter has been missing since the day of his death, the widow is remarried to her dead spouse's brother and another son happens to be a protégée to Irene's good friend Ben.

If it's all sounding like a daytime drama you haven't read Burke. For what Ms. Burke does in this book is tell a story of a wealthy family with strong roots in humanism that has been corrupted by power. Reflective of much that is right and wrong in today's world KIDNAPPED goes out to the long time Kelly reader. The dogs are here. Frank is here, and Irene is using all of her investigative reporting skills. The evil of corruption will be addressed but the reader will also spend treasured moments with mystery's favorite Las Piernas's daughter.

This book is a palate cleanser. KIDNAPPED stole me away for a delightful and frightening evening.
Ruth

LOST ANGEL

by Mike Doogan
2006
Putnam

Nik Kane has just been released from prison, where he spent seven years paying for a crime he didn't commit. He is no longer welcome on the police force where he'd built his career as a detective, but the chief of police has some private business. A small religious sect called Rejoice has lost one of its members. They'd like her found. Kane travels to the commune, where he becomes embroiled in crime, religious fervor, and lots of unanswered questions -- both current and from years past. Kane is a likable character, driven by needs both spiritual and physical, and is quite intelligent in his search for the missing girl. His unease at being "outside" feels real, and he is a very sympathetic figure. He alone is enough to make the book enjoyable. Doogan writes well, bringing the Alaskan land and temperature alive with color and texture, and I felt I learned a lot from his careful descriptions.

The plot, while it works, was a bit of a disappointment to me. Not only had I figured out the villain early in the book, but I found the solution to be a tired cliché in crime fiction. Kane also has a relationship in the book which doesn't come as a surprise, nor does the resolution of it. There were a few twists in the story, but the plot was a weak link in what is otherwise a good debut by this author.

Judy Clemens, author of the Stella Crown mystery series

LOVE, DEATH AND THE TOYMAN

Robert S. Napier
Nov, 2006
Five Star

For a debut novel, LOVE, DEATH AND THE TOYMAN is highly rewarding. The story flows effortlessly, with twists that unexpectedly turn, clues that veer off leading the reader to wonder what comes next. The author, of course, is an experienced writer, even though this is his first novel. Hopefully, it won't be his last.

Jack Lorentz is a former investigative reporter who now specializes in collectible toys. Rather than bowing to pressure in killing a story, he resigned with his honor and reputation for honesty intact. He is retained—actually forced—to undertake an investigation by a wealthy

Northwest family after the discovery of bones at their lakeside cabin property. It seems the potential scandal would put a crimp in the political plans of the husband of the woman, Amanda, who pleads with Jack to look into the matter. She was his college sweetheart 15 years earlier. As Jack investigates, he is confronted by the dysfunctional family members, each of whom could be the potential murderer. Actually, he discovers there were two murders to solve. Slowly, he accumulates facts and evidence and the reader is led to a conclusion that is highly unexpected. Along the way, Jack also has to face up to his relationship with Amanda and various other side issues. Professionally plotted, and well-written, the novel reads quickly and interestingly. It appears to be the culmination of many years of the author's experience as a writer and editor, who has published more than 500 fanzines since 1969 and many articles on crime topics.
Theodore Feit

MALICIOUS INTENT

Kathryn Fox
2006
Harper

MALICIOUS INTENT is a gripping debut novel, featuring forensic physician Anya Crichton. Anya's life is not easy; as the only female freelancer in her field, work is often tough to get, and Anya must work in order to pay child support to her ex-husband. As the story opens, a young, obnoxious man comes to her office to demand that she find out exactly how his sister died. He's convinced that the police are not interested in the truth because his family is Arab. Anya is not eager to take the job; the young man's expectations are unrealistic, and she just flat doesn't like him. But it's work, so she agrees to look into the matter. And thus begins a baffling, horrifying, and ultimately shocking series of events. As the story reaches its climax, Anya is forced to question everything she's ever known about herself. Every belief she's held dear is turned on her head. For Anya, there's no satisfying resolution; she's left to wonder, and to doubt. But readers will be very satisfied by this terrific tale, the first in what should be a great series.
Rae

MELODY OF VIOLENCE

Michael A Black
2006
Echelon Press

Black has created a pulp action hero right out of the forties. The characters come to life as if leaping off of a old movie serial screen. This is a perfect homage to the work of Walter B. Gibson, Lester Dent and Henry W. Ralston. Reading this book was pure fun. Black is a extremely versatile writer and with this book he proves again that there is no part of the genre he can't write. The style of the book is right in line with the era from which it is drawn and I love the characters. I'm not going to give anything away, I'll just say you should read and enjoy this book. When you pick this up, make sure you clear you schedule first, because once you start reading you won't want to stop.
Jon

THE MEPHISTO CLUB

Tess Gerritsen
2006
Ballantine Books

Tess Gerritsen has written 10 thrillers, 4 of them are medical thrillers, and then she has also written 6 in a series featuring Detective Jane Rizzoli and medical examiner Maura Isles. The latest in the series is called THE MEPHISTO CLUB. The book opens with a brutal murder which is quickly linked to a club in Boston called The Mephisto Club, a group of people studying evil. The club believes that Satan may truly walk the earth. This is a great read filled with superb pacing and a truly gripping story. The Rizzoli/Isles books are all wonderful, but this one could be my favorite (so far). Gerritsen draws the reader into the story from the first page and keeps the suspense building right to the very end. If you haven't read her yet, now is the time to go and start. She gets better with every one.
Jon

MISSING MEMBER

Jo-Ann Power
2006
Thomas Dunne Books / St. Martin's

Carly Wagner, a member of Congress, found Alistair Dunhill dead in her office when she arrived at work. Since she is high on the suspect list, perhaps even with her own party, she does some damage control, namely trying to find out who would want to frame her, for why else would his mutilated body (another reference to the book's title) be in her office. The list of who wanted to kill Dunhill, also a member of Congress, is long. The book is fascinating because we are in Carly's head for the entire ride, listening to how she thinks and her silent and hilarious remarks about those around her. Her "voice" is wonderful. She is aware of every innuendo of the party members, knowing that they will cut her loose in less than a heartbeat if it looks like she's a liability, and that also goes for the money backers back home in Texas. She needs to find the killer, and soon-- otherwise she is out of a job come next election. Luckily Lt. Sarge Brown, a detective with the Capitol Police, shares some of his findings with her and he's smart enough to know he needs her insider information. And through the friendship of her daughter, 12, with the deceased man's son, she learns more. A mysterious stranger, Mr. Jones, is hired for megabucks by an unknown benefactor to protect her. Carly's worried about what kind of debt she is racking up by accepting his help, but when she is in physical danger and he gets rid of the attacker, she accepts his help.

This book is fascinating as we get a look of how politics work behind the scenes in Washington. Powers, a multi-published author, knows what she's talking about--she worked in public relations in Washington.

Carly is a wonderful character and she has my vote.

Gay Tolti Kinman

THE MISSION SONG

John Le Carre

2006

Little Brown

The world powers are turning their attention to Africa. Fortunately, author John Le Carre is, in some ways, ahead of their game. In *The Mission Song* he's giving those sympathetic to allowing Africa to develop at its own pace and for Africans ample warning that they're playing catch up.

THE MISSION SONG is the story of one Bruno Salvador, son of a missionary gone astray, loyal Englishman and expert interpreter of the various Congolese dialects and minority languages of Swahili.

He's worked small jobs for British intelligence and is recruited by them by a Mr. Anderson, for a bigger job, which trips his conscience. The novel starts off rather lightly but grows as dark as a North Sea winter's sky. The pace is brisk. The action is subtle. The close reader will pick up some foreshadowing. Le Carre has again fashioned a story of spying and politics and the deceit they often resort to in order to advance less than righteous causes. This is spy story realism from the master and *THE MISSION SONG* should be on everyone's must read list.

Dave Biemann

MONKEY MAN

Steve Brewer

October 2006

Intrigue Press

"Nothing interrupts a nice chat like the arrival of a gorilla" – the opening line of *MONKEY MAN* and an indication of the slightly whacky and offbeat [in a good way, mind you] novel to follow. The circumstances of the "chat" in question? A meeting in a café between Bubba Mabry, of Bubba Mabry Investigations, with a potential client seeking to hire him with regard to suspected malfeasance leading to the death of an inordinately large number of animals of the zoo in Albuquerque, New Mexico where he is employed. (The suspected plot kinda gives "endangered species" a whole new meaning.) But the meeting is interrupted when the aforementioned man in the gorilla suit pulls a gun and shoots the whistleblower dead.

Having decided he has no further obligation in the matter, Bubba is forced to change his mind when the dead man's fiancée hires Bubba to investigate, reasoning that if they find out what secret's being covered up, they'll find out who the killer is. Despite his reluctance, Bubba agrees, and that resolve is only bolstered when, shortly thereafter, someone else who had just been speaking to Bubba is killed - Bubba, feeling guilty, becomes determined to find the perp, if only for his own peace of mind, all coercion and threats if he pursues that course notwithstanding.

Bubba, who is self-described as suffering from "genetic gullibility," nonetheless asks enough questions of enough people to flush out the culprit[s]. Along the way he gives the reader a fast and enjoyable read. *MONKEY MAN* is the latest in the Bubba Mabry series, one I'm glad to have been introduced to.

Steve Brewer is also the author of the Drew Gavin series, in addition to the recent standalone *WHIPSAW*, much enjoyed by this reviewer.

Gloria Feit

THE MORTICIAN'S DAUGHTER

Elizabeth Bloom

2006

Mysterious Press

Apparently you can go home again, despite what Thomas Wolfe wrote. At least, that's what Virginia Lavoie discovered when she received a telephone call from her best friend in Western Massachusetts to come back to the small town she grew up in and find out who murdered her son.

Ginny at the time was a suspended New York detective (internal affairs was investigating dirty cops, Ginny included; she wasn't on the take but was taken in by a lover). So Ginny drove up north to find out what happened to the 19-year-old boy and along the way re-ignited a teenage romance. All she remembers when she gets there are her negative memories. But she finds changes she hardly recognizes in the town. But the insular attitudes of the long-time residents are unchanged. There's even a Starbucks-like coffee establishment with the fancy name of *Café des Artistes*.

The first homicide she came to investigate leads to a second, and then a third. Are they related? And Ginny almost becomes a fourth—twice. She uncovers the skeleton of her friend's 19-year-old runaway older sister who supposedly left town 16 years earlier. A promiscuous teenager who apparently slept with at least half the town's males was carrying a three-month old fetus at the time of her death. Was the father the murderer?

And was it related to the recent crimes?

The intricate plot and excellent writing carry the tale forward with suspense. The twists and turns (including Ginny's amorous adventures with her teenage now-grown boyfriend) keep the reader on the edge of the seat. And Ginny has two tasks: solve the mysteries of the murders as well as what she wants to do with the rest of her life; can she work out either or both?

Theodore Feit

MURDER, EH?

Lou Allin

2006

Rendezvous Press

Sudbury, Ontario is a peaceful Northern community with a low crime rate. Except for all the murders that have recently happened. Belle Palmer, a local realtor, is as distressed about these upsetting current events as the rest of her community, but it really has nothing to do with her. Until her appointment to show a local lakefront mansion to prospective buyers, when she finds the corpse of the owner in the bathtub. Once again, distressing, but nothing really to do with Belle. And then the murdered woman's 12-year-old son, Micro, comes to stay with Belle's friends, and Belle and Micro form an attachment. When Micro disappears after an argument, Belle is compelled to try and find him. As she searches for her young friend, Belle is drawn into the schemes of the murderer and has to fight not only for Micro's life, but for her own. This entry in Lou Allin's Belle Palmer series is a cleverly written, carefully plotted puzzle of a story. It was fun to get to know Belle, and I look forward to reading more about her.

Rae

THE MURMUR OF STONES

Thomas H Cook
Oct. 2006 (U.K.)
Quercus

I must thank Quercus for releasing the new book by Cook in the UK, after the tour de force that was the CWA Gold Dagger nominated RED LEAVES. THE MURMUR OF STONES is a tremendously well crafted work; which thematically shares a similar structure to RED LEAVES; the secrets hidden in the families of the dysfunctional and fractured. The narrative unfolds from David Sears' perspective – a divorce lawyer coming to terms with the loss of his father and his young nephew, who both suffered from schizophrenia. The chapters are divided by an exchange between Sears and Detective Petrie, because the deaths of his father and nephew Jason may or may not have been of natural causes.

When the young Jason is found drowned in a deep pond in the garden; being cared for by his brilliant but distracted father, the scientist Mark Regan, David Sears watches his sister Diana slowly unravel. She suspects that her husband Mark had a hand in her son's death, but there is no tangible proof. David has to confront the past and wonder if there is madness in their family gene-pool; something that the David can't bring himself to accept; because his own sanity is at stake.

As Diana's behaviour becomes more and more bizarre, her brother fears for his own daughter Patty's life as Diana starts to form a bizarre bond with her. David's wife Abby watches from the sidelines as does David's business partner Charlie.

It is an uneasy story, and perhaps the ending was telegraphed a little, but even so it still shocks as the reader has started to care for the characters. It does pose one interesting point that I often ponder upon - how insane are the people who hear these voices in their head? Cook calls these whispers 'The Murmur of Stones', so where do these voices come from? Expect this novel to feature heavily in the award nominations next year, such is the strength of the narrative.

Ali Karim

MY LOLITA COMPLEX

Max Allan Collins & Matthew V. Clemens
2006
Twilight Tales Inc

MY LOLITA COMPLEX is a great collection of stories. The team of Collins and Clemens is unbeatable, with stories ranging from supernatural to historical, all with a flavor of noir added for good measure. Gangsters, monsters, spies and soldiers, there is not a type of character out there that this duo can not write. Each story is extraordinary, though I particularly enjoyed the story featuring a Vampire slayer PI set in Chicago in the 20's. Not only do Collins and Clemens embrace the short story format, they prove why it is such a delight.

All the stories contained in this anthology deal with sex, violence or both. But what all these stories also contain is how much fun they must have had writing them. The two stories featuring John Sand and his wife were a wonderful homage to what Bond might have become. The Hellboy story is also truly wonderful, and shows just how versatile Collins and Clemens are. This is a collection that should be on everyone's bookshelf, and most likely in a worn and well read state.

You might open the book to read one story, but you'll find yourself hooked and finished and wanting more. I know I do.

Jon Jordan

THE NAMING OF THE DEAD

Ian Rankin
2006 (U.K.)
Orion

As THE NAMING OF THE DEAD begins John Rebus is seated in the front pew at church. Michael Rebus has died. "It was quick," The doctors have told the family. In the previous fifteen novels featuring this reserved person and passionate police, never has he been as uncomfortable as in the opening passage of this book. Memories of a brother, lost now. Disconnected from the family beside him and unwanted by his department. Funeral leave gladly given. There is no room for Rebus's independence in a police squad getting ready to be viewed by the world. The date is Friday July 1st, 2005. The G-8 is about to descend upon Edinburgh and protestors are arriving in that city even as Rebus sits in a church in Kirkcaldy listening to the closing track of QUADROPHENIA.

*"I'm getting put down
Getting pushed round,
I'm being beaten every day.
My life's fading,
But things are changing,
I'm not gonna sit and weep again."*

The Who's seminal rock opera was Michael's favorite and author Ian Rankin presents THE NAMING OF THE DEAD as an homage to the brother we've never really known. This novel has the same kind of controlled schizophrenia squared as Townsend wrote Quadrophenia with. What results is a novel so metered in its execution and voiced of its time it is destined to become a piece of classic literature.

The 2005 G-8 was unusual. Most often the G-8 is a two minute piece on the evening news. 2005 saw it become something more and yet less than it normally is because of a shout out from two rock stars. Geldof and Bono wanted people to descend upon Scotland. They wanted the masses to bring themselves and their concerns to Edinburgh. They wanted the power structure to have to listen to the voice of the people. The people who wanted poverty, hunger and war all gone. Our duo promised music and hoped for results. In the absolute of selfless cause, too often what results is a variety of side shows that dilute the purity of beliefs. The 2005 G-8 was more than it normally was because it was covered by the press and the news was followed by the people. It was less than it should have been because not a lot, in the end, was accomplished and soon it disappeared from peoples' memories. Rankin takes us to those days in Edinburgh. We walk the streets with police, politicians and protesters. Rankin allows us to re-experience the joy of the March of White and the sorrow of "the naming of the dead". Too many lives were lost in Iraq by July of 2005 and now it would take a full week to say them all. There was a group of people in Edinburgh that week who believed that change could be commanded. We need to hold onto those heroes and emulate them however possible. In this part of the novel Rebus's well earned cynicism is firmly countered by Rankin's storytelling. It is Townsend and Entwistle, working together, in prose.

A phone call rescues Rebus from the unfamiliar filial responsibilities of death. Siobhan Clarke is part of the police setting up for the G-8. While securing the perimeter of Gleneagles she's stopped at Clottie's Well. In this place where folks offer up clothing of the dead she's spotted a piece of a shirt. That shirt belongs to the corpse of one Cyril Colliar, rapist, employee of "Big Ger" Cafferty, murder victim. It's Rebus's life line back to active duty. They're told to move forward but tread quietly. Two other corpses are discovered and now the fear is there's a serial killer stalking those recently released from prison and deemed unworthy by a judge of one. This is the primary crime in THE NAMING OF THE DEAD. Throughout the narrative there will be others. A politician falls from the balustrade of Edinburgh Castle. Central characters give up on law and order without even realizing they've done so, while others work to reveal the grand scale crime the G-8 is giving them access to. Ramifications both personal and abstract ripple throughout. Rankin once again takes a hand up from Townsend with the vocals of Daltry backing him up. Rebus is police without political acumen and what drives him in his work is a sense of purity in law and order. He'll belt it out reaching for result. But will the result be what he really wants, or just a slightly less volatile state of mind?

Keith Moon's drums cannot be overrated, nor can the heart stopping moments in THE NAMING OF THE DEAD. From the moment the bombs go off in London on the morning of July 7th to the end of this book the reader is presented with one percussion moment after another. Climax and crescendo move hand and hand. The "real world" and Rankin's world collide to resolve the plot and open a world of possibility with vibrations that will be felt long after you put the book down.

It's a well documented fact that Novelist Ian Rankin wrote that first book realizing that the most famous and therefore significant contemporary Scots novel was THE PRIME OF MISS JEAN BRODIE. He wanted to shout out to the world that there were still writers in his country. His desire was to update Scotland's ante in the world of literature. It is this desire that changed him from scholar to writer.

NAMING OF THE DEAD is most certainly a crime novel. It is proof that there does not to be anything formulaic in a long time series. If I was meeting these characters for the first time I'd leave well satisfied and wondering what next. But what this book is more than anything else is a perfect encapsulation of a week in Scottish and United Kingdom history. I refuse to use that "transcending" phrase here. It belittles what THE NAMING OF THE DEAD is. It tells a story of 2005 that people need to remember. This is a time split into multiple personalities. We can be good and evil at once in today's society. Those of us "of a certain age" remember parents grieving at the loss of life; both larger than life personages and foot soldiers in Asia. We remember protestors on the news, speaking above all else for the sanctity of humankind.

Forty years later Rankin has used his wordsmanship to reflect a similar moment in time. A moment where hope, and violence, desire and corruption met once again. Beautifully written, this is a story of my generation. What remains to be seen is if it will find an immediate place in the annals of masterful fiction or if, like the album that hums throughout, it is something that will become more appreciated year after year until there is nothing else that compares. Even for a Stones fan.

Ruth

NO DOMINION
Charlie Huston
December, 2006
Del Rey

Last year's ALREADY DEAD introduced Joe Pitt, Vampyre P.I., to a market now filling with cross-genre crime fiction. Much of what is out there is... cheesy. Mixing a genre form with a definite modus operandi into one that can be so much more elastic can nullify both forms unless written well. Huston's taught text reads like the best of both worlds and he pulls no punches with his characters.

NO DOMINION finds Joe Pitt with a fist in his face and a mystery on his hands. A spazzed out newbie vamp that has a strength that exceeds that of even the standard Vampyre cuts in on an evening out. By stepping in, Pitt sets foot in a long-reaching problem that has roots close to home. The pressure put on him with his rogue status and history of a lack of cooperation sets him on a train through the middle of the city into the heart of an area of New York hazardous for even the Undead.

That's when Pitt stumbles into the headquarters of one of the upper echelon of the complex Vampyre socio-political system. And a grand experiment that puts all of his kind in immortal danger.

The Joe Pitt series a perfect blend of hard-boiled P.I., faced-paced action, very dry and dark humor with a pulsing, unreal world inhabited by beings as ruled by chaos as the humans the live side by side with. A fun, fast and concrete read.

Jennifer Jordan

NO LIGHTS, NO SIRENS
Robert Cea

2006
Harper Torch P.B.

I remember reading Wired, Robert Woodward's biography of John Belushi. It was like a bad train wreck that you have to keep watching, and when it's over you want to tear your eyes out. Robert Cea's NO LIGHTS, NO SIRENS/ The Corruption and Redemption of An Inner City Cop, gave me the same questionable thrill. Cea writes the true story of his life as an inner city cop, starting as an idealistic rookie and spiraling out of control in the badlands of Brooklyn New York.

Determined to make a difference, and get the bad guys off the street, Cea finds himself breaking more and more laws to stay one step ahead of the prey. As Cea becomes successful in his chosen profession, he finds his personal life slipping away, and when he loses his soul, he almost loses his life.

The scenes from the street are gritty and not for the faint of heart. The violence, the drugs and the language are described vividly by this cop turned film producer, and if you can get through the carnage, you will have experienced a life, a landscape and a society that you never could have imagined before. NO LIGHTS, NO SIRENS is soon to be a major motion picture. Read the book first so you'll know what you're getting into.

Don Bruns

THE ONE FROM THE OTHER

Philip Kerr
2006
A Marion Wood Book

Philip Kerr is an enigma. The man's writing is always something special. Whether he's traveling in the world of the future, science fiction or classic mystery he delivers the goods time after time. His most famous and most hailed work to date is THE BERLIN TRILOGY. The closest Kerr has come to series fiction is in the three P.I. novels featuring Bernie Gunther, a man in Nazi Germany who makes the largest part of his income looking for Jews. Bernie has also been known to help the Jews escape and move their money for a fee. Kerr told the story of wartime Germany in the way of no other and attained cult status as a result.

Fifteen years later Kerr returns to his most famous protagonist. The wait? Worth every moment. For Bernie's time frame is now 1949. Post Nazi Germany. People are feeling the ramifications of what occurred during the war years. Profiteers are still trying to squeeze money from a people who have been decimated. Bernie is still getting himself involved in politics in an apolitical way.

Kerr takes the reader to the newly realigned Middle East. In THE ONE FROM THE OTHER, we find ourselves in a world where Palestine, Israel, Turkey and Saudi play more by the rule "the enemy of my enemy is my friend" than any other credo.

It is my theory that Kerr looked at what is going on today and decided that he would a.) Familiarize his reader with some of the history of this region our governments hope we don't know and b.) Present an allegory to what's happening in the region today. Who better to turn to than his most famous protagonist?

The results are positive and negative. Reading Kerr's Gunther again is a joy. Reading Kerr's Gunther again reminds me of just how susceptible we all are towards mystery trends. The eloquent and reflective prose that worked for this reviewer so well in the early nineties now seems slow at times and whereas I was able to discern the meat of the plot effortlessly in 1991, in 2006 I found myself wondering which plot is primary until half way through THE ONE FROM THE OTHER. Have we gotten that much faster? I think I need to reevaluate my reading.

Kerr's exploration of the beginning of contemporary Middle Eastern politics held me riveted, but the personal evolution left me cold at times. The Nuremberg Trial and stolen Jew wealth plots seemed not quite as brilliant as before but from Kerr, I expect perfection.

Ruth

OUT COLD: A BRADY COYNE NOVEL

William G. Tapply
2006
St. Martin's Press

Brady Coyne, the Boston attorney who has appeared in over 20 novels by William G. Tapply, lets his dog out into the backyard of his Back Bay townhouse one wintry January morning and discovers the body of a young girl. When the girl dies, Brady is unable to ascertain whether or not she was still alive when he found her, and is deeply troubled by the possibility that he might have done more and perhaps saved her life. He is even more disturbed when a piece of paper with his address on it is found in her pocket. When he shows the dead girl's photo around in hopes of tracking down her identity, one of those to whom he shows it is herself soon found dead, and Brady suspects there is a connection. As he says: "It all came down to the girl. Who was she? Why did she have directions to my house? Why did she pick my backyard to die in? Why did she have to die in the first place?" The answers to these questions can only be discovered by Brady doing some investigating, both the virtual and the actual kind, and finding the answers puts him in mortal danger.

It was with eager anticipation that I opened this latest Coyne novel, and I was happily rewarded. This series has long been a favorite of mine, with its wonderful prose, leavened with just the right amount of humor, his terrific characters and evocations of Boston: "It was one of those crisply cloudless winter days—bitter cold and dust dry, with a sky so blue it was almost purple. When I walked to the office, the sunlight glittered and ricocheted off the fluffy new snow as if each flake was a tiny gemstone. I smiled at the people I passed on the sidewalk on Boylston Street, and some of them actually smiled back at me. It was that kind of day."

This author never disappoints, and OUT COLD is another winner for William G. Tapply. Recommended.

Gloria Feit

PAGE ONE: HIT AND RUN:

Nancy Barr
2006
Arbutus Press

Barr was a journalist for the Daily Press in Escanaba, Michigan, where the story is set. She writes about what she knows

printed from www.crimespreemag.com

as heroine Robin Hamilton is also a journalist. Robin comes back home after the death of her police officer fiancé to work again for this local newspaper. In her second floor apartment of an old Victorian, Robin sees her startled landlady reacting to a hit-and-run in the park across the street.

The victim is Frank Thompson, owner of an accounting firm. For mystery readers, bells go off. Accountant. Aha! The owner of the truck, a young man with a low IQ, is arrested. His mother, Hannah, babysat Robin when the later's mother died. She asks Robin to look into the matter as her son told her someone borrowed his truck. The son is reticent to tell Robin anything. She realizes he is also afraid. Why? Robin reports on the events as they happen, which the police still believe was a simple h & r.

Another body is discovered, and now nothing is simple. Robin interviews the other two accounting partners, Frank's wife, and Frank's best friend. Some become suspects but what is the motive? Details of small town life, such as the Fourth of July

Parade with her father, walking to work, knowing most everyone, make this a comfortable mystery. That doesn't mean Robin is not in danger, for she is, and her Jeep is almost run off the road. The moral--tell the police everything you know as soon as you learn it.

Nice debut.

Gay Toltl Kinman

PARTING SHOT

Jonathan Stone

2006

Thomas Dunne Books

Sam Stevens is a television journalist in Webster County, a small community that's home to a big story: there's a serial killer on the loose, and the local cops can't solve the case. While Sam's career is on the upswing, his personal life has sunk to the depths of awfulness. His wife, Denise, has turned their marriage into a nightmare battleground, with no regard for the damage being done to their young son, Tommy; she's drinking, having affairs, and neglecting Tommy to the point of being abusive.

Meanwhile, Sheriff Billy Wyatt knows who the killer is: a loser named Rafe Fine. But Wyatt can't prove it, and his inability to make the case is turning him into a laughing stock. Enter the FBI, with an agenda all their own.

Jonathan Stone is a talented writer with a special gift for description. He could have used his talent to write a standard thriller, and that would have been just fine. But he didn't; Stone took the typical components of a 'who-can-catch-the-serial-killer' story, turned them upside down, and wrote an excellent, out of the ordinary, thriller. The central question is, what will a father do to save his son? The answer will intrigue and engross you through every page of this terrific book, and the ending is a real crackerjack.

Rae

THE PRESSURE OF DARKNESS

Harry Shannon

October, 2006

Five Star

This taut thriller opens thirteen years ago, in Mogadishu, with a Black Ops insertion gone horribly wrong. Although some of the soldiers escape with their lives, they are unalterably changed by what they witness.

Fast forward to the present, and Jack Burke is a former operative living in L.A. on the fringes of society. In order to pay his wife's astronomical medical bills, he's doing a lot of things he'd really rather not do, such as chasing deadbeats for the mob. And Burke does some PI work when it's tossed his way by his buddy, Police Detective Scotty Bowden, another former Black Ops soldier.

When Scotty asks Burke to tie up the loose ends on a suicide, it appears to be relatively straightforward chance for a decent fee. A horror writer has committed suicide by self-mutilation, and his daughter is kicking up a fuss – she says it was murder. The cops don't believe her, and neither does Burke. Until he takes a closer look at the case, and things just don't add up.

As he delves deeper, Burke is forced to question everything: his past, his present, and just how far he's willing to go to stay alive. Harry Shannon has written a dark, thrilling tale of murder and intrigue that will have you turning pages as fast as you can.

Rae

THE PRINCESS OF DENMARK

Edward Marston

2006

Martin's Minotaur

Marston in all of his aliases, and several series, has written over seventy books, won many awards, and has captured the hearts of all who have met him. There are fifteen books in the Elizabethan Theater (or theatre) mysteries featuring Nicholas Bracewell, manager of the Company, and the story's sleuth.

Lord Westfield sponsors (a.k.a. finances) the Company. Unbeknown to him, the Company's future looks dim. The inn, which was their performance venue, burned down, and a young man died in the fire. The dead man's father blames the troupe, and makes sure they will never perform at the restored inn. In essence, "You will never eat lunch in this town again!"

Ah, but not all is lost. Their patron is about to be married again, so the troupe sails across the perilous North Sea to Denmark, encounters a storm, subdues pirates, and arrive in-- Elsinore.

Another man is murdered, which makes for a rough time for the troupe. Fortune looks up, for their plays are well received by the Danish audiences, and they are to perform a new play "The Princess of Denmark" for the new bride, who is being very coy.

A member of the troupe is attacked for the second time by some English rowdies. Nick intends to find out why.

And the marriage-to-be is not the simple event it appears to be. Court intrigue between England and Denmark? Why?

POV change among the major characters, and villains. Wonderful historical background, lovely writing.

Gay Toltl Kinman

THE PRISONER OF GUANTANAMO

Dan Fesperman

2006

Hodder and Stoughton

Add a great journalist, a surreal location, a topical subject and a great plot and bingo you have one of the best literary thrillers released this year. Dan Fesperman a former journalist with Baltimore Sun has produced in his fourth novel - THE PRISONER OF GUANTANAMO, a thriller that shows that the awards he received from The CWA with his debut LIE IN THE DARK and THE SMALL BOAT OF GREAT SORROWS were no flash in the pans.

I think the best way to sum up his latest political thriller is to call it "The Cold War Meets The War on Terror" and what an excellent and thought provoking read this is. It is no surprise that Fesperman has been to this little enclave of America on the shores of Cuba several times; because this novel is researched at the highest level, but the research does not get in the way of great story-telling.

The story is told from the eyes of Revere Falk a 33 year old FBI agent with a past that saw him first step onto the shores of Guantanamo. 12 years previously when he was a US Marine. At that time he was involved in some shading goings-on, and harbours secrets that will reverberate to today.

Falk is sent to the Island this time as an Arabic speaking FBI agent to interrogate a Yemeni prisoner Adnan al-Hamdi [a young Afghan caught in the post-9/11 war] who could hold sensitive information for the US. Falk however soon finds himself enmeshed in the apparent murder [or was it suicide?] of an American sergeant [Earl Ludwig] who ends up washed up on the beach that bisects the US and Cuban ends of the Island. The tension in this book is like a steel cord being tightened, and you can hear it creak and strain as the story inches towards its climax. Add a colourful array of characters including Pam, a female interrogator and Revere's love interest and you have a story that could be as real as anything written in today's newspapers. As Revere delves the murky waters he finds circumstances that could link the Cubans to Al-Qaeda; so could the Cold Warriors and the Jihad-ists be awkward bedfellows? Revere realizes that his own past could destroy his future and that everyone is guilty of something. Driven less by action than by dialogue and location, this thriller is one that makes you think and educates. Top notch work from one of our great writers.

Ali Karim

RED HOOK

Reggie Nadelson

2006

Walker and Company

Red Hook is on the waterfront of New York City. Red Hook is turning trendy. As a result, Red Hook is the site of lots of activity and Detective, Artie Cohen has a lot of friends interested in Red Hook's past, present and future. Author, Reggie Nadelson, loves New York City. She writes about it with such intensity you feel you're there. Her character Artie Cohen knows the city too. He knows a lot of people. Many of them are at his wedding reception. Just hours before the wedding an old friend calls asking for help. Artie spends some time with Sid McKay but Sid is so evasive that Artie merely gives him some phone numbers of fellow officers and friends and rushes off to his wedding. A few days later Artie is scheduled for a vacation with new wife, Maxine and her two daughters. Sid's murder compels him to leave them in the lurch.

This isn't a standard police procedural, though Artie is a cop. This is a bluesy, sad jazz composition. Artie has to look at his good friends in a different light. Sid kept files. Artie's friends want them. It's about real estate, suitcase bombs, the nature of friendship, a Russian sailor jumping ship in the 50's. It's about Artie tracking down a murderer. It's different. It's good.

Dave Biemann

RED SKY LAMENT

Edward Wright

2006

Orion Books (UK)

Wright's third novel, RED SKY LAMENT, is nestled in Hollywood of the 1940's, in the heart of the Senate hearings on communist activity's. The main character, John Ray Horn is an on the outs B-actor whose career took a slide with his prison sentence. Being an outsider himself he agrees to help out a friend of a friend when the committee turns it's sights on a troublesome screen writer.

Ripe with emotion and feeling this novel is a brilliant look at a difficult time. It is also a hell of a book, compelling and suspenseful Wright has captured the era perfectly. DO not miss this book.

It is also soon to be released here in the US.

Jon Jordan

SAKS & VIOLINS: A BED-AND-BREAKFAST MYSTERY

Mary Daheim

2006

William Morrow

Daheim's heroine, Judith McMonigle Flynn, runs a B & B, and the series includes the usual suspects--a bible-thumping cleaning lady; a down-right rude mother; her cousin (and partner in crime), Renie, who treats stuffed animals as children.

In the past, Judith's life has a body count like Jessica Fletcher, and the police dispatcher is quite blase about Judith's calls. However, in this story, not all are dead bodies.

Rudi, their neighbor, who rents Judith's husband's ex-wife's house (got that?), is driving the neighbor's crazy by playing music at all hours. His father and stepmother, Andrea and Dolph are staying at Judith's B & B. Then a \$350,000 violin bow goes missing; and Renie's maxed-out credit cards are stolen.

Dolph is a famous music mentor. Invited to a small party are Suzanne (Andrea's daughter); Taryn (Rudi's girlfriend); Elsa

(Rudi's ex-wife); and Olive (Rudi's Assistant). The party is to be in Judith's front parlor, which they rent. Does this not make for a fun time? Oh, yes! And soon a body is found.

Motive, please. What does anyone gain? Someone getting revenge? There are lots of motives for the latter.

More tangled relationships are revealed.

Judith and "coz" Renie get bits and pieces of information from the surviving guests and neighbors, and from downright snooping. Hey, they are sleuths!

Another "son" Greg shows up and proves to be closer to the mental patient Olive is protecting. Then, a strange "maid" arrives to "help" Andrea in her grief. Judith realizes she may have a world class musician in her home, but she also has a world-class dysfunctional extended family there also. It almost drives her into giving up sleuthing. Almost. Lots of laughs.

Gay Tolt Kinman

SECOND BURIAL FOR A BLACK PRINCE

Andrew Nugent

2006

Thomas Dunne Books

In this beautifully written book, Andrew Nugent takes us on a trip to Ireland, where we find a young African man dying on a doorstep, his foot cut off of his body. Why would anyone do this to him? And why, if it is an act of brutality, was anesthetic used?

Police officers Molly Power and Jim Quilligan work with the bizarre aspects of the crime, at the same time trying to figure out the inner workings of the Nigerian neighborhood. What is the story behind the orphan boy who lives within the town but calls no place home? What role did the victim's restaurant play in the fabric of the community, and what about the white female artist who used the victim as a model?

Nugent's knowledge of the African community in Ireland is written into this book in an interesting and engrossing way, and by the end of the book I felt I learned something completely new. His police officers and the victim's family are portrayed as real and likable people, with humor and sorrow. I am so glad to have discovered

Nugent -- to me a new author -- and will certainly be looking up more of his work.

Judy Clemens, author of *To Thine Own Self Be True*

THE SECOND HORSEMAN

Kyle Mills

2006

St. Martin's Press

When Brandon Vale, thief extraordinaire, is broken out of prison, he has no idea who has done it. Or why. He soon finds out, as he runs unequipped and terrified through a dark woods, dogs and guards chasing him, and is thrust into a world of nuclear missiles, hundreds of millions of dollars, and -- things which can't be avoided with those two ingredients -- betrayal and death. Mills takes us on a wild ride of planning a major heist, implementing it, and seeing everything fall apart. Vale is a wonderful and likable character, and I found myself cheering for him, no matter that he is a professional thief! Catherine Juarez is a worthy partner for Vale, and proves herself as she battles her emotions, her fears, and her doubt. The book centers on the Middle East, continuing the tragic enmity of the Jews and the Arabs, but puts a whole new slant on possible solutions for the constant violence and terrorism. Politics and governments come into play in a web of greed and misplaced trust as the whole world watches what could be Armageddon. Mills is a veteran, and proves it with this fun, fast, and disturbing tale. May we never see criminals like these in reality.

Judy Clemens, author of *To Thine Own Self Be True*

THE SECOND MOUSE

Archer Mayor

Oct. 2006

Mysterious Press

I'm a Vermonter through and through. It may be three decades since I left but Archer Mayor always brings me back home again with his series featuring V.B.I. man, Joe Gunther. *THE SECOND MOUSE* opens with Joe riding along on a corpse. It's not his jurisdiction but something tells Joe there's more to the death of Michelle Fischer than meets the eye. Soon "suspicious circumstances" are attached to the woman's death. And Joe and his squad try to make connections.

What they find are "subplots". What Mayor's readers find is a story layered with Vermont life. Vermont is the one state in this country where every economical and educational demographic actually live side by side. Everybody has secrets. So if one low class sadistic bastard gets a hold of military weapons, a middle class sadistic bastard preys upon his dead son's woman and an upper class sadist preys upon a forensic scientist with a small skeleton in her closet where will the plot go?

In a Joe Gunther book you never really know where it will go you're just glad Mayor is letting you in on all the action.

Ruth

SECRETS

Lynne Barrett-Lee

2006

Dufour Editions, Inc:

Megan agrees to flat-sit in Cardiff for the weekend as a favor to her younger sister Ffion. When a stranger calls and leaves a mysterious phone message on the machine, Megan becomes curious and asks about the caller named Jack. When told of the call, Ffion behaves as if she's seen an apparition. Is Jack a ghost from her past? When Ffion does not return to the flat on the scheduled day and disappears, Megan begins to fear for her younger sister and wonders what possible secrets or lies might be behind these worrisome events.

This short romantic-suspense volume is not actually a novel, nor is it a true mystery, but it is a fairly engaging short story written at a basic reading level. SECRETS is one of the near two dozen fiction and non-fiction titles released in the UK 2006 Quick Reads initiative. Written by well-known UK authors and personalities including Minette Walters, Maeve Binchey, Ruth Rendell, and Richard Branson, these short, entertaining volumes are aimed at infrequent and emerging readers. I believe these books could be a useful resource for reading tutors and others working with adult learners.

Annie Chernow

THE SKIRT MAN

Shelly Reuben

2006

Harcourt Books

Morgan Mason is the local eccentric in Killdeer, New York. He's an old farmer who drives his tractor into town, which wouldn't be all that odd except that Morgan Mason wears a skirt. Nothing fancy, a serviceable skirt that Carhart (tm) might make if they were of a mind to make skirts. The Skirt Man, as he is known locally, minds his own business but has still managed to make some enemies.

Was the Skirt Man dead before his chair burned with him in it? Or did he die in the fire? Arson investigator Billy Nightingale and State Trooper Sebastian Bly do the official investigating, while Annie Bly uses her job as reporter/editor of the local paper to do some behind-the-scenes investigating.

THE SKIRT MAN is evidence that Shelly Reuben is an excellent writer with a great feel for characters and plot. She reveals people's dark secrets without destroying their basic humanity.

P.J. Coldren

SLAY RIDE

Chris Grabenstein

2006

Carroll & Graf

SLAY RIDE is a bit different than Grabenstein's series with the amusement park ride names. It's darker and a bit more of a thriller. It's also wonderful

Businessman Scott Wilkinson is a pretty average guy with a job that involves trips away from home. Just before Christmas he is leaving on one of these trips, and the trip starts with a ride to the airport. The driver is late, and then during the ride scares Scott nearly to death with his horrible driving. A phone call to the car service and Scott figures everything is dealt with.

Wrong. Someone is out to get Wilkinson and will stop at nothing.

This book will have you clutching the arms of your chair while you read and leave you exhausted from the tension. Truly great reading from Anthony Winner Grabenstein.

Jon

SMOKED

Patrick Quinlan

2006

St. Martin's Press

Reminiscent of Duane Swierczynski's superlative WHEEL MAN, this debut thriller is an action packed racecar of a book. It follows Smoke Duggan, an arsonist, and his girlfriend Lola Bell, a tough cookie and martial arts expert, on a frantic chase from adventure to adventure as they try to elude an assortment of hit men who are aiming to kill them.

It all starts with Smoke's possession of \$2.5 million in cash that really isn't his. It belongs to his employers, who are not very nice people. Smoke's bosses would like their money back, and they feel compelled to use Smoke and Lola to set an example for others who might be inclined toward this sort of larceny. So they send their best hit man, Denny Cruz, and a couple of sidekicks to the seaside town in Maine where Smoke and Lola are living, with the intention of some disciplinary murder and mayhem

But, of course, it's just not that simple. First there are the screw-ups, then there are the car chases, and then there are the killings. The action is relentless, the plot is slick, and the pace will keep you at the edge of your seat through the climax of this great read.

Rae

A STOLEN SEASON

Steve Hamilton

September 2006

St. Martin's Minotaur

Steve Hamilton's newest book in the Alex McKnight series opens on July 4th – not that one could tell that it's summer – temperatures in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan have been hovering at wintry levels, with heavy fog and few if any rays of sunshine. Not that this is the first time that this has happened – after all, in 1995 they got six feet of snow in one day, and the snow in that part of the country doesn't even melt until May. But this year, summer is a season stolen from the Yuppies [as they call themselves]. Someone says 'every twenty years or so, it's like summer just forgets to come.' As one of his friends puts it, 'something in the air is just plain broken.' For Alex McKnight, much more is stolen from him than just his summer.

Alex' relationship with the love of his life, Natalie, a Canadian cop, is reaching a critical point. She is now back in Toronto, working a dangerous undercover job attempting to net a big-time gun dealer, and he fears for her safety. On this particular July 4th, Alex visits his friend Tyler who lives in a house at the edge of the water, to watch the fireworks which may or may not [due to the fog] be set off to celebrate the holiday. To their shock, they witness a boat come roaring by only to crash into the pilings of an old railroad bridge, virtually destroying it. Tyler, Alex and his old friend and ex-P.I. partner, Leon, rescue the three occupants of the boat, whose explanation for what they were doing on

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the Lake and how the accident happened doesn't compute. Other incidents involving these men turn out to be hazardous to the health of all concerned.

In one of these, more critically dangerous to Alex than the others, his reaction as described by the author didn't strike me as what one would expect from an ex-cop from Detroit [although that may just be because the last book I read was Lee Child's newest Jack Reacher book, with a much-larger-than-life protagonist]. But Alex is more 'human' [for lack of a better word], seems more vulnerable and when things go even more terribly wrong, he becomes vengeful and rages against those who he feels are responsible. And the body count starts to go higher. The writing is very good and at times lyrical; the sense of place, as always with this author, very strong. The books moves at a measured pace till suddenly and shockingly it revs up into a higher gear and races to its conclusion. I think you'll find yourself holding your breath, as I did.

Gloria Feit

STONEWALL JACKSON'S ELBOW

John Billheimer
September, 2006
Five Star

What an entertaining book this is. Owen Allison is an almost-fifty-year-old failure and risk analyst who has returned to little Contrary, West Virginia to care for his mother, Ruth, and his ward, Jeb Stuart. Owen's life isn't perfect; he's having a tough time finding work in his field, his mother's mental and physical health are deteriorating, and he has an ex-wife in California who may or may not want him back. Meanwhile in Contrary, the president of the local bank, J. Burton Caldwell, has died, and in the aftermath it's discovered that 750 million dollars in bank deposits are missing. The FDIC has decided to auction off Caldwell's vast collection of fakes and frauds including, among other things, the bone from Stonewall Jackson's elbow and two bullet-riddled cars that were each supposed to have belonged to Bonnie and Clyde.

When Owen takes Jeb Stuart to the auction, all he's thinking about is a fun outing, and maybe bidding on some baseball cards. But some surprising things happen. First, a mysterious woman pays forty thousand dollars for a fake Klee. Then, Owen meets the auction curator, Victoria Gallagher, and they're mutually attracted.

But very soon, bad things start to happen to people who successfully bid at the auction, including Owen. And then Victoria vanishes. Owen joins in the search for the criminals, in the hope of finding out what happened to Victoria. This cleverly plotted mystery has lots of twists and turn, wonderfully fleshed out characters, and an ending that's both satisfying and melancholy.

Rae

STREET LEGAL

Bill Kent
2006
St. Martin's Minotaur

Kent's latest book opens the morning after The Press's newspaper columnist Andrea Cosicki finds her car pumped full of sand with two hands pressed against the window. The hands belonged to a lawyer known as the Sandman, known for his knack of delaying legal proceedings and getting pre-trial settlements, always in his clients favor. When Michael McSloan, the Press's lawyer assigned to the Sandman's case, is found dead at the bottom of a high rise, we learn that sleazy lawyers have lots of enemies, making it difficult to pick out a suspect. The premise pulled me in right away, but it was shortly after page fifty, that the suspense and mystery started to fade.

Cosicki ends up taking care of McSloan's disabled son, Rawle, and the relationship between the two of them was extremely well done. Cosicki is such a pistol at work, that it added to her character to see her maternal side. While this would have been an excellent sub-plot, it became the force driving the story forward, and that is not what most mystery readers bargain for. The opening scene made a promise of hard boiled, gritty crime fiction, but as the book continued, there was less suspense, danger, and up until the very end, minimal action. The opening was gripping and the climax was suspenseful, but not enough to make up for the slow-moving middle.

Dana Kaye

STRIPPED

Brian Freeman
October, 2006
St. Martin's Minotaur

Jonathan Stride, a cop from small town Minnesota, is still a fish out of water in Las Vegas, where the only loyalties are to money and power. Teaming up with Amanda, the outcast transsexual on the force (A-man-duh!), and his girlfriend Serena, he is assigned to find the link between the intentional hit and run of a young boy, and the brutal killing of a well known celebrity. The trail leads to the past murder of a famous showgirl which was supposedly solved, but the recent events indicate a cover up. Freeman beautifully captures the Vegas, from its seedy underworld of prostitution and organized crime, to the fantastic shows and gorgeous desert. He uses the setting to his advantage, because in Sin City, nothing is what it seems.

The character development is constructed like a well-woven quilt: everyone's skeletons coming together and adding another layer of conflict. His characters are human, not always making the right decision, often going with their heart rather than their head. Their mistakes make them relatable and the consequences of those mistakes heighten the tension. He relies on psychological suspense, rather than over doing the blood and guts, playing on emotions and haunted pasts. A wonderful read by a gifted story teller, STRIPPED is not to be missed.

Dana Kaye

THE TESTAMENT

Eric Van Lustbander
2006
Forge Books

Eric Van Lustbender has written 19 books proving himself to be a true master of the thriller. In his THE TESTAMENT he proves again why he is just that damn good. A first glance at the cover copy might lead you to believe this is another DAVINCI CODE book, it is not. This is what the DAVINCI CODE wishes it had been. Tight plotting and perfect pacing drive this novel with wonderful action and suspense.

Here's a brief rundown, as I don't want to give anything away. Braverman Shaw's Father dies leaving behind a secret, his Father was part of an order that was thought to have disappeared long ago. The Order of St. Francis of Assisi having been hiding documents which many don't want to be found. Braverman is now his Father's successor as keeper of the documents. The search is on, and Braverman is not the only one searching.

This is a riveting book and utterly engrossing. Clear your calendar for a day or two and kick off your shoes, you are in for a great experience.

Jon

THRILLER

Edited by James Patterson

2006

MIRA

The ITW wants you. It wants you to get to know its members. The International Thriller Writers, Inc. is a newly formed writers organization dedicated to the thriller genre. "Thrillers", according to James Patterson, the editor of this new anthology of short stories, "are...known for their pace, and the force with which they hurtle the reader along." And hurtle is what these stories do. In an effort to increase the visibility of the many writers of thrillers, along with the organization itself, the first project undertaken by the ITW was to put together this anthology of suspenseful shorts, presumably to introduce the authors to readers who have otherwise been ignorant of their existence. They have succeeded admirably, at least with this reader.

While some of the authors have previously graced my book shelves (Lee Child, Gayle Lynds, Chris Mooney, David Morrell, and Joe Konrath, among others) there are writers here who I have never read, or even heard of before partaking of this anthology, including Brad Thor, M. Diane Vogt, F. Paul Wilson, Robert Liparulo, and many more, all of whom should be well known to readers of this magazine, if life was fair. All of the stories, without exception, are notable.

There's James Rollins' "Kowalski's in Love", about an ex-Navy SEAL with dumb (in more ways than one) luck who finds himself on an island moments before it's about to be obliterated from the face of the Earth, or Steve Berry's "The Devil's Due", about one man's encounter with the most wanted man in the world, or Douglas Preston's and Lincoln Child's story of two museum robbers, and the fate that befalls those who steal ancient artifacts (this one has a nice twist) or Grant Blackwood's

ingenious Cold War counter-intelligence scam, or Raelynn Hillhouse's alternative story based on the take-over of the US Embassy in Pakistan at the time of the 1979 hostage seizure in Iran, or...or...well, there are just too many excellent stories to relate here. By their nature, however, all of them are standouts, perhaps made better by the limitations of the short story format. Each and every one of them has to thrill within the space of 10 to 25 pages. Each one succeeds in doing

so.

If you are a regular thriller reader, or someone like me with limited exposure to the genre, this is a great book, either as an introduction to some wonderful story-tellers and writers, or to confirm what you already know - that thrillers do, in fact, thrill.

John Purcell

THE TROUBLE WITH WITCHES

Shirley Damsgaard

Sept. 2006

AVON BOOKS

There is no trouble with witches. The fantastical world Ms. Damsgaard has created in her first two books remains strong and reassuring in this third installment of small town mysticism. Ophelia Jensen and her grandmother Abby are back and this time there's a young girl's life on the line.

Rick Delaney has enlisted our two witches to help find the daughter of good friends and a road trip is required. Ophelia, Abby and the animals head for a remote cabin hoping to infiltrate a cult that may be responsible for the disappearance of Brandi.

Soon they find stories that don't add up and a second child who may just have the same gift as Ophelia and Abby. There's murder, mayhem and witchcraft and all are written with a nonchalance that makes Damsgaard's books the perfect stress reliever for this holiday season. A paperback original you can bring it with you anywhere as you get the December chores finished.

Ruth

UNSAFE HARBOR

Jessica Speart

September, 2006

Avon/HarperCollins

US Fish and Wildlife Special Agent Rachel Porter finds herself stationed at Port Elizabeth, New Jersey; this is quite a change from her previous posting in Hawaii. An assignment gone bad and a love interest going well precipitate this major change. Porter finds herself pushing paper for a lack-luster boss when she longs to track down criminals and right wrongs. In UNSAFE HARBOR she also wants to find out who killed Magda, the Polish woman who ran a pierogi and kielbasa stand in Port Elizabeth. Magda was sporting a lovely but highly illegal shahtoosh shawl that she took off the corpse of a high society murder victim. Porter confiscates the shawl, Magda is murdered, and then life gets complicated.

UNSAFE HARBOR as a title is multi-purpose. There is the very real possibility that terrorists are bringing uranium into the US through the port. There certainly is other smuggling going on - ivory, shahtoosh shawls and scarves, blood diamonds, human cargo. Porter finds her own life threatened on more than one occasion. She does win this battle, but in the process she seems to have lost the war. UNSAFE HARBOR will not reassure the reader about the safety of our harbors, although the mystery is more comforting in that it does get solved.

P.J. Coldren

WELCOME TO YESTERDAY

Ian Spiegelman
2006
Miramax Books

I finished reading WELCOME TO YESTERDAY a few days ago and the characters are still talking to me. They are in my head, suggesting things and making me think about the book they were in. This doesn't happen all that often. I enjoy a lot of books, but it's not often they stick with me like this. Leon Koch is a the kind of guy you would want to hang out with, though maybe not all the time given his penchant for trouble. Koch is a gossip columnist in New York, and when some one he helped roast in the paper is killed he ends up as in the story instead of just reporting about it. Hoping to get to the bottom of things Koch finds himself dodging his editor and the police while following the trail though some of the most celebrated people in the city. The pacing keeps speeding up as Spiegelman brings the book to a fantastic ending.

Spiegelman's dialogue is written like a perfect piece of music and like good music, it merits repeating, or in this case rereading. I loved the vibe of this book and the whole groove of it. I will read everything else that Spiegelman writes.

Jon

WHISKEY STRAIGHT UP

Nina Wright
September 2006
Midnight Ink

How to describe this wonderful, wild, wacky book? Perhaps by giving the "recipe." Start with one realtor, Whiskey Mattimoe, 33, recently widowed by her second husband; a helicopter pilot who wants his flotation device back; a mayor, another realtor who is not as nice as Whiskey (but no matter he won't be around for long); Abra, an Afghan hound from hell; a live first husband who wants to do it all over again; a step daughter from the same place as the hound who believes the house she is living in with her three-month old twins is hers, even though Whiskey owns it; a single father (of the twins); Chester, 8, whom Whiskey is babysitting on a long-term basis and who goes missing with the help of his possible grandmother who may be a fake; and an ex-con who shot Whiskey's second husband the first time. Stir in the setting--Magnet Springs, a Michigan resort town, during the annual Ice Fishing Jamboree.

The search is for Chester, and the searchers keep getting clues, which keep the trail hot. Finally, a ransom note--but not for Chester. Hilarious!!

Gay Toltl Kinman

THE WRONG MAN

John Katzenbach
September, 2006
Ballantine

THE WRONG MAN tells a story about how far parents will go to protect their child. Set in Boston, it opens with Professor Scott Freeman inadvertently reading a letter addressed to his daughter. The phrases "No one could ever love you like I do"; "we were meant for each other and nothing will prevent that"; and "we will be together forever" fill Scott with foreboding. He is so disquieted that he phones his daughter, Ashley, to ask if she's all right; but he receives no comfort from their conversation. The pauses say more than the words do, and the pauses say 'trouble'.

Scott's relationship with his ex-wife Sally, and her partner, Hope, has been strained over the years. But Scott is worried enough that he contacts Sally to share his concern. At first, Sally brushes his worries aside. But very soon they learn that, unfortunately, Scott was right. Ashley is being stalked by a man, Michael O'Connell, who believes that he deserves to have and own her, and who is determined to let nothing get in the way of what he views as his destiny.

As this crackerjack of a psychological thriller unfolds, Scott, Sally and Hope are pushed beyond endurance to a place where the unreasonable and illogical become eminently practical and justifiable. John Katzenbach, the author of ten previous books, has written another great story, one that will engross you from beginning to end.

Rae Helmsworth