

ABOVE GROUND

Don Easton
2007
Dundurn

Jack Taggart first appeared on Don Easton's LOOSE ENDS, now he's back in ABOVE GROUND a crime novel set in Canada and involving the complexities of undercover work. Not really a straight up procedural, though the main characters are in the Canadian Royal Mounted.

The main focus of this novel is Jack Taggart, a cop who works undercover and sometimes has to allow the lines between right and wrong blur just a bit in the name of justice. Some one has killed a man sharing the same name in front of the family and it seems like a hit on Jack gone bad. While that is being looked at, Jack is trying to keep two rival groups of drug dealers from going to war over territory and still bust them. This is not aided by the fact that Jack owes a major favor to the man named Damien running the biker gang who is on the top of the drug chain. Jack is doing the dance of his life to keep his job, protect his friends and still do the job.

The plot in this story unfolds quickly and picks up speed with ever paged turned. Nothing is what it seems and nobody is quite who they say they are. The characters are amazing and Easton writes these people like he knows them personally. Given his background, he might. This was a great book and I would recommend it to any one who likes fast action that's gritty and unflinching.

Jon Jordan

THE ACCIDENT MAN

Tom Cain
July 2007
Transworld

This book made me remember why I read - to be thrilled, to travel to dangerous places from the comfort of my chair but also to understand a little how this world works, sometimes only fiction can provide the difficult answers – bravo Mr Cain you get my standing ovation. This is the thriller of the year.

The novel starts mid-action introducing the mysterious figure Samuel Carver, who we learn is an ex-military man, British special forces if you will, employed on a contractor basis to set-up accidents for enemies of the State, people that can't be dealt with by diplomacy and normal police methods. The novel places Carver in the centre of the action as he sabotages a helicopter owned by a East European People-smuggler and Gangster. Carver has rules, he only arranges accidents for the guilty, so he has pangs of guilt for the helicopter pilot, but his masters / handlers manage to rationalise his turmoil that what he's doing is for the greater good.

No sooner is Carver trying to switch off, then he is asked – no he's told, to return to civilisation as there's another job to do. This time he has to eliminate a middle-eastern powerbroker who's visiting Paris with his girlfriend. Carver does not want to eliminate an innocent woman in the process, but is told that the powerbroker in question is providing funding for an Islamic Terrorist Group, and that an atrocity in England is mere days away, unless Carver can provide an accident in Paris. The girlfriend will be acceptable collateral damage. Before you can hum the John Barry theme, Carver flies back from his retreat in New Zealand and heads to France. Due to the gravity of the situation, Carver rigs up the apartment with explosives if his accident miss-fires, and the accident is to follow the couple in their limousine, and cause a car-crash in an underground tunnel.....sound familiar? Yes, because the mission goes to plan and the car does crash, but unknown to him a Russian hit-squad have also been sent on a high-powered motorbike but their mission is to kill Carver. Leading the mission is Russian brute Grigori Kursk accompanied by the glamorous Alix Petrova. They hadn't reckoned on Carvers resilience because in a battle in the sewers under Paris, Carver dispatches Kursk in a slurry of explosive, or so he thinks and escapes with Petrova. In his escape, Carver kills several British agents as he realizes that he's been set-

up. The target was not a middle-eastern powerbroker and his girlfriend – as the media issues blanket coverage of the deaths of Princess Diana and her lover Dodi Fayed in the same Paris tunnel. Then begins a global hunt for Carver and Petrova by Kursk's overlords as well as the British secret service, but leading the trail is a Frenchman called Papin, an associate and freelancer who discovers their trail across Europe. Carver starts to fall for Petrova, but can he trust this eastern beauty, who in a former life worked for the Russian secret services as a 'honey-trap' agent? Papin asks for a cool half million from the British secret service to reveal the location of Carver and Petrova. Surely Papin has not read 'Hannibal' because like Thomas Harris's Italian detective – Renaldo Pazzi, selling the whereabouts of wanted men can come with a high price.

As entertainment this is slicker than an oil-spill, but it also provokes a great deal of thought as apart from Cain's skill as a writer, comes a knowingness that behind the closed doors that power this world, there are dark secrets, hidden agendas with people fueled with darker desires, of power, sex and control of destinies. This is one of the fastest paced thrillers I've read in an age. The rapidity of the action, the sensual women, the dark villains, the cutting back and fro from action sequence to action sequence had me spinning in my chair, but most of all there buried a few inches from the surface of the narrative, is a feeling for humanity, people trapped by bonds created by economics and human nature. It also harkens back to the conventions of the golden age of thrillers, and I just loved the battle across Europe, Ian Fleming style, women, the high life, but with death a mere trigger-pull away. Want to know if Carver survives? Well you'll have to find out for yourself as the ending is a violent, cathartic and makes the experience uplifting in a surreal way.

The Accident Man, for me is one of the must reads of 2007, [or 2008 if you live in America] and for once all the publishers hype is bang on target. If you miss this book, you will miss one of the most discussed thrillers released this year. If you like James Bond, you'll love Samuel Carver.

Ali Karim

THE ALIBI MAN

Tami Hoag
2007
Bantam Books

Elena Estes is an angry, bitter, guilt-ridden woman. There are good reasons for all those strong emotions. Her past clings to her like that dank smell on damp wool. She is adopted and has renounced her adoptive family. She used to be a cop, until her partner was killed in an incident that she believes is largely her fault. Now, she rides horses on the farm of a dear friend, and tries to leave her past alone. Of course it's not that easy.

One February morning, Elena is out riding, trying to ride out from under the blues. She finds a body. It's the body of a very attractive woman. Elena recognizes her as Irina, a groom at the same place Elena rides for. Irina has an amazing wardrobe for a groom, and parties with some very affluent types. Irina is Russian, and so how could she possibly NOT be connected to the Palm Beach arm of the Russian Mafia? The policeman working the case is Landry; he and Elena were an item until she decided not to let him get any closer. That break-up happened a night or two before she finds the body. As one might imagine, this makes an already unpleasant situation even more so, both for Landry and for Elena. Making Elena's life as miserable as possible requires just a few more things: her adopted father is the attorney for most of the people who might be accused of murdering Irina, her ex-fiancé is the star suspect (she broke up with him when he asked her to alibi him for a rape many years ago, and her father sided with the ex-fiancé), and the one truly attractive man in the case was accused of something similar in London not so long ago.

Elena makes good use of all her skills. She uses what she learned as a cop to ferret out information, which she mostly passes along to Landry. She uses some of the self-defense skills to fend off the

Russian Mafia don who loved Irina and has vowed to kill her killer. She uses some wonderful sarcasm on the various men in her life; her verbal skills are used well but not always wisely.

THE ALIBI MAN is well-plotted. The characters, while certainly not all charming people, are believable and don't act in ways one would not expect them to act. Hoag writes of Palm Beach and environs as though she's lived there quite some time; her knowledge of the polo world is certainly adequate for THE ALIBI MAN. Hoag writes as solid a thriller as anyone could ask for.

P.J. Coldren

AMERICAN OUTRAGE

Tim Green

2007

Warner Books [now Grand Central Publishing]

This thriller is about a TV investigative reporter who, with his adoptive son, becomes the story itself. Along the way, he learns some truths about himself and his methods for getting the stories he is so proud of—no matter the cost—and getting the truth.

When his 13-year-old adopted son asks him to find his biological mother, it sets Jake Carlson on a quest that unearths all kinds of dirt involving organized crime, a nefarious child trafficking ring and a corrupt politician, the scion of a rich, established Hudson Valley family. The journey includes peril to Jake and his son, resulting in a violent ending.

The moral of the fast-paced and graphically written novel is: should past sins be revealed? It is strongly recommended that AMERICAN OUTRAGE be read to learn the answer.

Theodore Feit

ANARCHY AND OLD DOGS

Colin Cotterill

August 2007

Soho Press

Last Year's DISCO FOR THE DEPARTED had many of us scrambling to read the first two installments of the Dr. Siri series. With ANARCHY AND OLD DOGS, Colin Cotterill continues to be one of our most engaging new writers.

Dr. Siri is the national coroner of Laos. As ANARCHY opens we are in the year 1977. Laos is being squeezed by its neighbors and the fight Dr. Siri began all those years ago to get rid of the French Imperialists is in jeopardy. Older, a bit crusty and always ingenious Dr. Siri must find out why a blind dentist was killed after leaving the post office to receive a letter written in invisible ink. Yes, you read the previous sentence correctly.

Cotterill takes this improbable beginning and runs with it. His ability to take a classic cozy hero, shroud him in a cloak of international intrigue and personal journey, add a trousseau of well drawn characters, crude forensics, immanent peril, a bit of the woo, and six or so secondary plot lines and come up with one of the year's best dressed mysteries.

A joy from beginning to end ANARCHY AND OLD DOGS is a must read in 2007.

Ruth

BABY SHARK'S BEAUMONT BLUES

Robert Fate

2007

Capital Crime Press

There almost more shootings and killings (almost all by Baby Shark) than there are pages in this latest chapter of the young woman's adventures in the Ft. Worth/Dallas underground of the 1950's, not to mention a knifing as well. But Baby Shark doesn't hustle a single pool game (as opposed to the first novel in the series). Instead, she and

her PI partner of two years have the recurring chore of finding a missing Texan a few times under less than favorable circumstances.

Along the way, the dynamic duo confronts many dangerous Beaumont criminals, eliminating them faster than they can show up by various means. The real surprise in this swift-paced crime adventure is in the denouement. The continuing saga of Baby Shark next takes place in May, 1957, in the forthcoming PANHANDLE CARAVAN. Theodore Feit

A BEAUTIFUL BLUE DEATH

Charles Finch

July 2007

St. Martin's

Charles Lenox, the hero of Charles Finch's A BEAUTIFUL BLUE DEATH, is a London gentleman of 1865. His brother is a member of Parliament. His neighbor, Lady Jane, is a childhood friend. His butler, Graham, is his loyal confidant. His assistant is Dr. McConnell, himself married into a titled family. This is a tale told from upper crust England. What does a well to do gentleman of the times do with his time? He becomes an amateur detective.

In A Beautiful Blue Death Charles is called by Lady Jane to investigate the death of a former servant girl of hers, Prudence Smith. Her current employer, George Barnard, MP and currently in charge of the mint, tries to convince Lenox and a young policeman, Jenkins, that the girl committed suicide by ingesting poison. Charles persuades him otherwise. Barnard uses his position to replace the young officer, who is sympathetic to modern investigative technique, with a more amenable investigator, Inspector Exeter. Exeter and Barnard put Lenox on the fringe of the investigation. Suspects are many, clues are present and fairly laid out but the plotting is convoluted enough that the reader having a go at solving this crime will have to read close. Charles doggedly sorts through both clues and suspects and with the help of his friends A Beautiful Blue Death comes to a satisfying end. Throughout the story Charles mentions previous cases and the conclusion suggests 'future' cases. Thus, Mr. Finch has room to play and his easy going English Gentleman is likely to appear again as a welcome addition to the historical side of the genre.

Dave Biemann

BLAZE

Richard Bachman [Introduction by Stephen King]

2007

UK Hodder and Stoughton / US by Scribner

I have been going around with a shit-eating grin on my face but an ache in my heart this week, and all because of finally getting my hands on a copy of Stephen King's 1973 novel BLAZE which he is about to release under his pen-name Richard Bachman. Firstly the reason for the grin is that this book was completed on 15th of February 1973, around the period when he was writing SALEM'S LOT the period that I first discovered King, and found his prose touching my mind and making me appreciate the written word with a fever. BLAZE is really a novella written in the same haunting style as the work from King's collection Different Seasons which featured The Breathing Method, Apt Pupil, The Body, Rita Hayworth and the Shawshank Redemption, in fact Shawshank Penitentiary gets a few mentions in this very moving and engaging story. I consider the four stories in Different Seasons amongst his best and "Blaze"™ easily matches the quality of those works. To find that King released a lost work from that period just literally put a huge smile on my face, or what perhaps King would call a shit-eating grin that lasted all week. The ache in my heart however was because that as King explains in his newly written introduction, this would be the last work from Bachman.

King's introduction to Blaze is very interesting as he talks about the novel in context to rest of his work. He explains how much he enjoyed penning THE COLORADO KID for Hardcover Crime, but felt that Blaze

was more of a melodrama and therefore not suited to that publishing house, so he decided to release it as a Bachman book, after updating it.

The story is a heart-wrenching melodrama featuring the misadventures of Claiborne Blaisdell, Jr, [aka "Blaze" a young boy brought up by an alcoholic and abusive father and his rites of passage. As a boy Blaze is harmed in a dreadful incident that causes brain damage [with a dent on his forehead] and results in Blaze becoming slow-witted. Blaze however is a big lad, a giant if you will but a gentle giant perplexed at the terrible things that haunt our world and the cruelty inflicted upon him.

We see Blaze sent to an orphanage where he is mistreated, but survives by his good nature, and how he befriends a more intelligent but weaker boy John Cheltzman, and together they survive the rigors of the orphanage by helping each other out. In all this terrible cruelty comes moments of magic, like when the Orphans pick blueberries in the summer for the kind and fair-minded Harry Bluenote. In terms of structure and theme it shares a chord or two with Rita Hayworth and the Shawshank Redemption, about how friendship and hope can get you through the cruelty that life can throw at you. One aspect however is that you can see that the tale will end in tragedy because the naïve Blaze befriends a criminal George Rockley, a man who works out the perfect scam, the kidnapping of a baby from a wealthy Maine family to hold for a multimillion dollar ransom. The gentle giant Blaze however has not the intelligence to pull this scam off and his love for the child will be his undoing. Coated in pathos and melodrama this little story pulls at the heartstrings, but also allows the reader to travel to another era; another time and see that the world is full of dangers for those who don't understand the machinations of human beings. For me, this story is a gem and I am so glad King found it and issued it because for the few hours it took to unravel, I sat mesmerized - hands glued to the covers of this little treat. However when I put the book down a great sadness lay heavily on my heart, not only because of the bittersweet ending, but also that perhaps this is the last of King's early work that I will read, as opposed to re-reading.

Ali Karim

THE BLUE ZONE

Andrew Gross

2007

Wm. Morrow

After having co-authored five bestsellers with James Patterson, Andrew Gross has struck out on his own with this solo effort. THE BLUE ZONE is a state described in the Witness Protection Program as one where someone disappears from protective custody and whose whereabouts are unknown. In this novel, there are two such persons and the reasons for their disappearances are at the heart of the plot.

The story revolves around a family forced into the program, except for a daughter who refuses. There comes a time when she relentlessly attempts to learn the secrets of her father's past, and the consequences that result from her efforts. Along the way several U.S. Marshals and FBI agents, as well as persons under their protection, are tortured and murdered. Who is responsible for these acts? What is afoot? Who's next?

This is a gripping tale, with suspense mounting at every step along the way. The author proved his talent and earned his spurs to ride off alone. It is a worthy debut. Now for the follow-up.

Theodore Feit

Broken Bodies

June Hampson

2007

Orion

Everything's not so gear or fab in sixties England. The Kray brothers are terrorizing London. In Gosport (across from Portsmouth), Site of June Hampson's Broken Bodies, her gangster character, Roy Kemp,

has murdered Daisy Lane's husband Kenny and lover Eddie. Daisy flees to Greece, has Eddie's child, plots and plans, leaves her child with friends and returns to England with revenge on her mind. Daisy has an elaborate sting in mind and the early part of the book involves the set up. Daisy is a very attractive woman and though she still loves Eddie, most of the men she meets, including Roy Kemp, fall for her. She finds many of them sexually attractive as well. Daisy's friends are all lower class, fringe elements. Most of them would rather be law abiding but they're trapped by circumstances. Broken Bodies has plenty of tough talk, some gruesome violence and a lot of strong female characters. It follows Trust Nobody which sold well in England and introduced Daisy Lane. Not a cozy, by a long shot but still something of a woman's read, if that cliché holds any water, Broken Bodies could be worth a look see here across the pond.

Dave Biemann

THE BROKEN SHORE

Peter Temple

June 2007

Farrah Straus and Giroux(US)

Joe Cashin is a cop on the mend. After a case literally cracks up on him, he's seconded to the small Australian sea-town where he grew up to as a way to ease him back into active duty and his homicide squad. He spends a lot of time drinking, listening to opera, reading, walking his dogs, and recovering both physically and mentally. The Broken Shore is a slow building police procedural. Not that there isn't a lot going on. For a little town it has kids with drug problems, petty theft, and a burglary gone bad which leads to murder and puts Joe Cashin in the thick of things.

Joe's family and friendships and old school connections play a big role in The Broken Shore. The story picks up the pace as Joe is more and more convinced by those same friends and schoolmates, that the three young boys from the Aboriginal side of town didn't commit the murder. Joe is a tough solid cop. The case becomes much more than just finding the real killer. This is the eighth crime novel Peter Temple has written. There are four novels in the Jack Irish series and three other stand alones. It's our good fortune that FSG has picked up Mr. Temple here in the states.

Dave Biemann

BUFFALO MOUNTAIN

Frederick Ramsay

Aug 2007

Poisoned Pen Press

Former CIA agent Ike Schwartz is now a sheriff in a small mountain town in Virginia's Shanandoah Valley. One cold wintery morning, Ike is called to investigate a dead body found in the local woods.

Although the dead man carries the ID of a local resident with a surname common to the area, Ike is dismayed to recognize him as a former Russian spy, a man whom Ike believed dead for several years. With this intriguing opening, Frederick Ramsay takes his readers back to the small community he first introduced in ARTSCAPE and SECRETS. This latest entry in the series provides a highly entertaining collision between the secretive traditional communities of the nearby mountains and the technology and instant communication of the 21st century.

The 21st century provides an ominous cell phone which stands out like a sore thumb when Ike attempts to use it: and provides little help when he does connect. Then there's the electronic ability to track what several Federal agencies are doing as they investigate the fate of the murdered man, which creates more questions than it answers. And in the background is the perception of Ike and his staff that the modern era and the authorities from on high only complicated matters when involved in earlier cases. The secretive societies based in Washington, DC present just as many obstacles to understanding as do the residents of nearby Buffalo Mountain.

Ike learns more and gains more ground in his investigation by relying on what his staff can learn with standard, well worn cop techniques like witness interviews, search warrants, and analysis of the skimpy evidence they manage to uncover. And it's no surprise when good old fashioned greed provides more keys to the solution than a complicated high tech cell phone.

The pleasant ensemble of characters who inhabit the small mountain town where Ike enforces the law return in **BUFFALO MOUNTAIN**: deputy officers, the dispatcher who keeps everyone on track, Ike's parents, his romantic interest, the faculty of a small college, and a collection of other town residents; all nicely portrayed and not a stereotype in the bunch.

Ramsay can't resist including a send up of the "James Bond" type of thriller novel, providing a few laugh out loud moments, and one character even throws the book in question across the room - a classic gesture of disgust often threatened by voracious readers of this reviewer's acquaintance.

Ramsay is fairly new on the scene, and one of the better writers to emerge in the last few years.

Woodstock

CACTUS HEART

Jon Talton

2007

Poisoned Pen Press

Richard III regarded his two nephews, just little boys, as serious threats to his ambition to gain the throne as King of England. Legend has it that he locked the two youngsters up in the Tower of London and left them there, either to starve to death or to await a visit by a thug hired to kill them. An unsettling similarity greets Jon Talton's protagonist David Mapstone as he investigates the fate of two young boys after a pair of small skeletons are found abandoned in the remains of a vacant warehouse in downtown Phoenix Arizona.

Deputy Sheriff Mapstone is a former cop, as well as a former history professor, and uses his dual skills as cop and historical researcher to solve "cold cases."

The remaining shreds of clothing and a man's wristwatch identify the two as vanished members of a wealthy Phoenix family. Mapstone interviews the boys' two uncles, now prominent men, seeking answers to the circumstances of the boys' disappearance. As with the legend of Richard III and his nephews, the answers will lie with ambition and jealousy. Talton spices the story with questions about marital infidelity, a failure of "honor among thieves;" and the poignant fate of a woman caught up in the action who endures a lonely prison sentence as a result.

Perhaps we learn a little TOO much about Mapstone's romantic life. But Talton's obvious affection for the American Southwest and the issues presented by a growing population in a desert area still enriches a nice, enjoyable mystery.

Woodstock

THE CASTRO GENE

Todd Buchholz

2007

Oceanview Press

I revel in fiction. even as two "non-fiction" authors present two "definitive" versions of Kennedy and the grassy knoll, Todd Buchholz writes yet another version of what might have happened on November 22nd. That's the history in this thriller. The story is a well done if rather paint by numbers story of a young man thrown into a quest. Luke Braden was a boxer until he killed a man in the ring. Now he works security. When he is pulled into the world of one of America's wealthiest men he doesn't ask questions, but he should. And when he meets a girl he knows he has to find up what Paul Tremont is up to and why his estranged father is missing. Buccholz has the pacing of the contemporary thriller down on his first go round and an interesting twist. Too bad the publisher gives it away

in the title. I just don't understand why they did this and it decidedly detracts from the effectiveness of the novel. Still, a good beach read,

Ruth

CAT IN A HOT RED HOT RAGE

Carole Nelson Douglas

May 2007

Forge / Tom Doherty

What's not to like about the new *Midnight Louie*, a feline P. I. caper? Set in Las Vegas, alternating chapters give Louie's take on the situation as he teams up, reluctantly, with daughter Midnight Louise, and two more of his favorite feline friends of the female gender. Alternating with Louie's voice, and told in the third person, Miss Temple Barr, P.R. Director for the hotel, tells what is happening at the Red Sisterhood convention. And what would a mystery be without a body? One turns up soon enough.

So does the ex-husband of Electra Lark, Temple's landlady. Soon Temple is pink-hat deep in the mystery.

Wonderful romp with the Red Hatted and the Pink Hatted Ladies, their philosophy and how they have fun.

A lot of time is devoted to the disappearance of Max the Magician who was Temple's previous love. Now she's hooked up with a former priest, and is quite happy with the change, however she is worried about Max.

A good romp!

Gay Toltl Kinman

COVET

Tara Moss

May 2007

Dorchester Publishing

In her third thriller, after *FETISH* and *SPLIT*, Tara Moss has brought back Makedde ["Mak"] Vanderwall, a model and psychology student from Vancouver, B.C., and has brought that protagonist back to Sydney, Australia [where the author makes her home]. When she was on assignment in that city in *FETISH*, she became the target of a man dubbed the Stiletto killer, who was responsible for the death of her best friend, in the course of which she met and fell in love with Andy Flynn, the detective assigned to investigate the serial murders and who was her rescuer. In *COVET*, she has returned to Sydney to testify at the trial for murder of the sadist who had kidnapped and tortured Mak, and is reunited with Andy.

The book opens with a chilling prologue describing a completely unrelated murder, committed in a frighteningly detached manner, introducing the reader to the macabre world of Tara Moss' creation. And the reader soon becomes horrifyingly aware of how this new killer is connected with the main story line and the serial killer at its center. I hesitate to give any more of the plot for fear of giving away any spoilers, but suffice it to say that the book is page-turning and suspenseful, and thoroughly enjoyable. Mak's plans after obtaining her Ph.D. include practicing as a clinical forensic psychologist, and one can look forward to future books depicting her in that profession. Having missed this author's earlier books featuring this complex and sympathetic protagonist, I look forward to following her in novels yet to come. The word 'spiningling' has been used often before, but it perfectly describes *COVET*. Yet the book is much more than that - Tara Moss tells a helluva good story.

Gloria Feit

CROAKED!

Dick Lochte

2007

Five Star

I was pleasantly surprised with this comedic, almost satirical mystery. Set in the sixties during the Vietnam War, CROAKED! takes place at *Ogle*, a men's magazine, that few read for the articles. The eccentric employees, gorgeous centerfolds, and freedom of sexuality make it a great place to work. That is, until one of the vice-presidents is crushed beneath a giant statue of the magazine's frog logo, supposedly by accident. When employees start asking questions, suspecting that the tragedy was actually a murder, people start disappearing, or worse, turning up dead. Harry Trauble, one of the magazine's copywriters, along with his girlfriend, Terry, are determined to expose the truth, but soon learn that the execs are covering up a lot more than murder. Lochte creates memorable, quirky characters that are fun and entertaining: the ex-archbishop who inadvertently becomes religious editor, A.K.A. assistant to the editor/publisher, the tubby assistant promotional manager who is always yelling and reeking of cologne, or the numerous attractive secretaries who seem to always know more about what's going on than the executives they assist. With all the hardboiled, dark mysteries I'm used to, this fun, tongue-and-cheek novel was a nice change of pace.

--Dana Kaye

CROOKED LITTLE VEIN

Warren Ellis
2007
Harper Collins

Warren Ellis specializes in broken people. Those who never quite, and who are never going to, fit in. The "hero" of CROOKED LITTLE VEIN, Mike McGill, is a classic loser, practically a cosmic punchline. He's the kind of guy that gets a big break in the case only to discover that it involves having a sensitive bit of his anatomy inflated with saline injections.

And it just gets worse from there.

The cast of characters that either help or hinder him on his quest to retrieve the quasi-mystical Secret Constitution of the United States are a wild collection of freaks and perverts. But ones for whom Ellis seems to have a genuine affection for. Well, some of them at least. After all, every quest needs villains.

In fact, the defining characteristic of the book, aside from its dark sense of humor, is a surprising optimism and love of humanity, despite, or even because of, all its odd little quirks. At the end of the day, Ellis seems to come down on the side of freaks.

As you can probably guess, this book isn't for the squeamish or prudish. In fact, even if you consider yourself to be fairly shock-proof, there's probably still a couple things you've never heard of, or even considered possible, on McGill's tour through the sexual subcultures of modern America.

Fans of Ellis' work in comic books will see much here that is familiar. And there are times, especially earlier in the book, where he falls into overused speech patterns. But as the narrative unfolds, he seems to become more comfortable with the characters and less reliant on old tricks. And the Nick and Nora Charles by way of William S. Burroughs tone of the book certainly is a unique one.

All in all, CROOKED LITTLE VEIN is a wild, rambling, funny look at the dark alleys of the American sexual landscape. A look at the freaks that holds up a mirror and reminds us that we're all pretty weird when the lights go out.

Neal Bohl

CROSS
by Ken Bruen
2007
Bantam Press (U.K.)

Ah, Jack Taylor. Nothing cleanses the reading palate quite like this man. Ken Bruen is one of our most unique stylists and Jack Taylor is a poor wastrel of a man whom you cannot help but cheer on. With well written prose, chatty internal dialog and a running commentary on

pop culture the newest Taylor is always a pleasure. A grim and nasty pleasure to be sure. The equivalent of pulling off a scab that's only two days old or smelling the milk you know is sour by the due date stamped on the bottle. Underneath Bruen's stylistic prowess there is also always a poet's look at Ireland and all it's fallibility.

CROSSES opens with a boy crucified. Soon his sister is burned to death. These deaths help to bring Jack back to some form of mortality. A lost soul our Jack, so disillusioned he'd be disillusioned by the very idea he cares enough to be disillusioned. And so drunk, a dry drunk to be sure, but dryer than the finest martini and wetter than a bottle of zinfandel. As the latest in this series unfolds he cannot afford the luxury of his demons. A boy he cares for lies in hospital and Jack's daily visits may keep him alive. His friend Ridge needs his help. And the boy on the cross calls for justice.

As Taylor dips his toe into the waters of Galloway's latest hate crime, Bruen provides his reader with an insight to the community both he and Jack love. The Ireland he sees now is not the Ireland he loves. Nor is it the Ireland of the last few Taylor books, the luster of the new prosperity is losing it's shine. The people on the street are a wide blend of ethnicities and cultures, bleeding into and changing the soul of his city. It may be better but it is different. Only in the loathsome crime he's investigating does Jack find any sense of stability. For hate is always pure and the motive is always the same.

The music that sings to him is losing its volume (literally) and the justice he seeks becomes more and more blurred until in the end Jack Taylor allows a part of himself to the surface. It is not a good part. Neither this series or our hero will ever be the same again.

A pivotal outing in one of mystery's finest series, CROSS will make you rethink your definitions of both life and living.
Ruth

CROSSHAIRS
Harry Hunsicker
2007
St. Martins

Book three in the series starring Lee Henry Oswald from Harry Hunsicker is a hands down winner. Hunsicker has staked his claim in the PI genre and he's here to stay from the looks of it. And that's damn fine thing.

CROSSHAIRS opens with Oswald reeling from events in the last book, he's no longer working as a PI and is living in a rundown motel while bartending. His ex-partner Nolan is married to a rich old man and spends most of her time with a pretty good buzz on, and buddy Olsen is moving on after his relationship failed because of what happened in THE NEXT TIME YOU DIE. But investigating seems to be in Lee's blood and he falls into a case trying to help a woman who feels she is in danger. And she truly is, a bad ass loose cannon ex-special forces mercenary for hire is stalking her. Lee reluctantly takes the job of looking into the whos and whys for her. Along the way he ends up burning a few favors and pissing off more than a few people. Hunsicker has a wonderful talent for drawing people into a story and not letting go. He creates an empathy for the characters that compels you to not stop reading. It's truly the interaction between his characters that drive the book, they are all too human. The action is tight and fast and realistic as well. There are also some really nice little twist and turns through out the book.

I can very easily say that Hunsicker is the Ross MacDonald of Dallas, and one of my favorite writers, of any genre. Harry Hunsicker should be on every readers radar.

Jon Jordan

THE DEAD DON'T LIE
Stuart M. Kaminsky
2007
Forge

Stuart Kaminsky's cops are low keyed, witty, diligent, and in The Dead Don't Lie both 'Rabbi' Abe Lieberman and 'Father' Bill Hanrahan prove

again that strongly written characters are the key source in which to build a series storyline. The day to day life of Kaminsky's Chicago detectives has been woven through each of the previous 9 "Lieberman" crime novels. Often as not minor characters reappear reinforcing the connection between this new novel and previous reads. Mr. Kaminsky's writing style makes a reader new to the series feel quickly up to speed as to what's happened previously. The Dead Don't Lie is as good a starting point as Lieberman's Folly (#1 in the series).

Three people in the Turkish community have been murdered and it falls to Lieberman to find the connection. Meanwhile, his partner (Hanrahan) attending the birth of his daughter, has only to ride the elevator to his next case. A shooting victim reports that he's been beaten by two people unrelated to the man who shot him. Bill is left to sort through this. The two cases are both intriguing on their own but it's typical of Kaminsky to have his cops juggling several things at once. Justice is served, violence portrayed, respect shown, life lived, things are changed... Kaminsky makes it all seem so easy. Read The Dead Don't Lie to see how it's done.

Dave Biemann

DEAD EX
Harley Jane Kozak
2007
Doubleday

Award winner Kozak is back with her third book featuring Wollie Shelley, and this time out our favorite Hollywood heroine is getting caught up in the world of soap operas. The book opens with Willie going to a party thrown by the star of a soap that she did a mural for. Her friend Joey saves her from the tedium of the party by getting drunk and needing an escort out. But Wollie was there long enough to get a job offer, dating soap stars for a show called Soap Dish, kind of Entertainment Tonight for the soaps. She also picks up a job for another mural. Balancing these new jobs along with getting her brother ready to move proves to be quite a challenge. The challenge is increased when producer David Zetrakis is found dead, shot execution style. Wollie dated him at one point and her pal Joey also dated him. In fact Joey is having problems with her husband and has been spending time with Zetrakis again while he is dealing with his terminal cancer.

It's not anywhere near as confusing as it sounds, in fact with Kozak's writing skill the story flows along and makes perfect sense. It's a classic who dunnit with all the Hollywood trappings. I love all of Kozak's characters, especially the eccentric cast and crew of At The End Of The Day. My first instinct is to point out how funny the book is, because there is a lot of humor in DEAD EX, but what really stood out for me was the wonderful pace Kozak uses to layout and tell the story.

I love this series, and I've heard this may be the last book starring Wollie. Truthfully, I'm ok with that as long as Harley Jane Kozak keeps writing mysteries. She has a real talent for telling stories and wonderful way with words. I'll read anything she writes. I'd suggest for now you read DEAD EX.

Jon Jordan

DEAD MADONNA
Victoria Houston
2007
Bleak House

Doc Osborne's life is looking pretty good. His daughter Mallory is up visiting, and they are getting along pretty well. His relationship with Chief Lew Ferris is progressing nicely. He's learning to fly fish, he's thinking maybe they should move their relationship along just a little bit more, and he's a pretty happy guy.

That won't last. There are two murders in Loon Lake, and Lew Ferris has a lot of territory to cover with not nearly as much staff as she'd like. It's tourist season, so there are the usual tourist-y kinds of

offenses to deal with. Then she gets two murders to solve. One is a young and pretty party animal, with possible designs on a wealthy Chicagoan. It doesn't help anything that Dee Dee Kurlander is pregnant. The other is another local, Nora Loomis. Does her murder have anything to do with a telephone call she reported, a call that might indicate a domestic violence problem in the making? Lew's life gets even more complicated when the bankers descend. There is some widespread bank fraud going on in Loon Lake, and all the bean counters have just connected the dotted lines. How does any of this relate to the murders? Or are Lew and Doc just having a really bad week?

In the meantime, Doc's buddy Ray has come up with another hair-brained business scheme. Let's hang video cameras around the necks of fawns and broadcast the film on the Internet. Doc's daughter Mallory actually thinks this is a good idea, and Doc isn't sure if her longstanding infatuation with Ray is coloring her judgment. Plus he's worried that Ray's infatuation with Gwen the gun dealer may hurt Mallory. A father's life is never easy.

DEAD MADONNA is the eighth in Houston's Loon Lake series. It's as good as anything else in the series, and better in some ways. The plot isn't perhaps the greatest, but Houston writes so well about her people and the place in which they live that the plot isn't quite as important as it could be. On the other hand, Doc just keeps getting better and better, as a character and as a person. He's not nearly as bitter and self-deprecating as he was early on; he's more accepting of those around him while still keeping his keen sense of human nature. Houston has managed to maintain the tension between Doc and Lew while their relationship progresses. She's also managed to show the reader that small towns don't remain stagnant; they grow and change just as the people living in them do. DEAD MADONNA will make followers of this series very happy.

P.J. Coldren

THE DEAD PLACE
Stephen Booth
2007
Bantam Books

The newest book in this deservedly popular series by Stephen Booth, just published in the US, brings back Detective Constable Ben Cooper and his partner, Detective Sergeant Diane Fry. While Fry is investigating creepy phone calls received by the police from an obviously deranged person speaking through a voice changer and referring to deaths which have not yet taken place, in addition to the disappearance of a young woman from a car park, Cooper is trying to identify, with the help of a forensic artist who has done a facial reconstruction, a woman whose body has been found lying in a wooded area apparently more than a year after her death. The anonymous phone caller is obsessed with death, and the subject permeates every corner of this book. Part of one phone call: "I can smell it right now, can't you? ...It's the scent of death." And indeed death in all its aspects becomes palpable – to the police and the reader in turn, the thanatologist who volunteers to assist the police as a consultant only enhancing the effect. Diane muses: "...there must be many ways of shutting out the sight of death passing by, or pretending it didn't exist." But the caller, again, insists: "To most people, death is a dirty secret, a thing of shame, the last taboo. To me, it's completion, the perfect conclusion." On the other hand, Ben "knew that he'd have to face up to his own death some time. Like most people, he'd always thought he could avoid it forever. And perhaps he'd read too many stories in which people didn't die. Instead, they passed away, breathed their last, or were no more. In polite conversation, death was skated over rapidly, like thin ice." Cryptic clues are contained in the phone calls, which exhort the police and tells them that all they have to do is find "the dead place." It becomes a race against time as the police attempt to discover the identity of the caller, and of his next victim.

A psychological thriller of the first order, THE DEAD PLACE is filled with atmospheric detail and a complex plot. Fry and Cooper are

wonderfully drawn characters with whom the reader becomes more involved with each new novel by Mr. Booth.
Gloria Feit

DEADLY ADVICE

Roberta Isleib
2007
Berkley Prime Crime

When Dr. Rebecca Buttermann's neighbor is found dead after allegedly committing suicide, Rebecca is uneasy. She is a psychologist, trained to study people and figure out what's going on in their heads. But she missed it this time. Granted, she didn't know her neighbor all that well, and didn't even necessarily like her, but still... The detective on the case doesn't put much credence in Rebecca's questions, but Rebecca soon finds out more about her neighbor than she ever thought she would know. Delving into the modern singles scene, Rebecca finds a side of the dead woman that she never expected, and really doesn't want to reveal to the woman's mother. Anthony and Agatha-nominated Isleib has created a very sympathetic and believable character in Buttermann, and her writing is smooth and easy to read. This is a new series, following Isleib's *Golf Lover's Mysteries*, and Isleib has created another character and environment that will be attractive to a wide readership.
Judith Clemens

DEADLY APPRAISAL

Jane K. Cleland
2007
St. Martin's Minotaur

Josie Prescott thinks she has put that recent murder investigation behind her. Her business is doing well, she's got a love life, and she might even be making some friends. She's doing well enough on all fronts to be giving back to her community; Josie is hosting a benefit for the Portsmouth Women's Guild. It's a glitzy affair, with lots of money in the room. Josie is just starting to relax and enjoy the evening when Maisy Gaylor drops dead in front of the entire assembly. Detective Rowcliff is in charge of the investigation, and he's not sure that Maisy was the intended target of the poison that killed Maisy. He thinks perhaps someone has it in for Ms. Prescott. The only person Josie can think of who might be carrying a grudge is her former employer, the man she sent to prison. Seems he's out now. And not happy. But why would he steal a valuable tureen, one of the items at the silent auction? Josie turns to her staff for help, but begins to wonder about their loyalty as unpleasant events continue to trail her. Her boyfriend Ty, the local police chief, is out of town and can't help her. He's dealing with family problems of his own. The local reporter, bane of her existence in the previous murder case, is filling the same spot this time around. Josie Prescott has her work cut out for her. She continues to rely on the spirit of her father, who taught her many valuable life lessons. Her attorney still covers her back; one wonders just how she can afford the kinds of services he provides. *DEADLY APPRAISAL* is a very good second novel. Cleland looks to be another good young writer with a long series ahead of her.
P.J. Coldren

DEADLY VINTAGE

Elaine Flinn
SEPT 2007
Perseverance Press

Elaine Flinn is a favorite of the mystery community and reading *DEADLY VINTAGE* is a perfect example of why people love her. A truly perfect traditional mystery with a wonderful cast of characters and a great location.

Molly Doyle, Antiques seller and trouble magnet has been asked to help decorate a large public room at a local winery. The owner and his daughter love her ideas, but the son in law can't stand the changes, he want ultra modern. Being a control freak he tries to sabotage Molly through various means. As this drama unfolds Molly, along with most of the town, finds herself at the vineyard for a large party. The party mood is quickly vanquished when her nemesis ends up dead and she and her boyfriend Police Chief Randall find themselves as suspects by the Sheriff's department. Flinn has an uncanny ability to draw the reader into the story and her characters are so terrific you very quickly feel like you are spending time with old friends. This is a great book and I would recommend it to anyone who love a traditional mystery.
Jon Jordan

DEADMAN'S SWITCH

Barbara Seranella
2007
Thomas Dunne Books

Charlotte Lyon makes for an intriguing protagonist in *DEADMAN'S SWITCH*, the last book written by Barbara Seranella, published posthumously. Charlotte is a crisis manager with a 100% success record who suffers from OCD and has been recently widowed. She specializes in crisis response strategies, p.r., litigation support and investigation, and when there is a train derailment in Riverside County, CA, following which one passenger and the engineer are found dead, the rail line's attorney hires Charlotte on its behalf. The reader knows from the outset that this was no accident, and soon is told that there was an accomplice, an inside connection. Whatever his agenda, it becomes clear that the killer is determined not to let anything, including Charlotte, interfere with his plans. Charlotte meets and works with Todd Hannigan of the NTSB, and a growing attraction becomes apparent as the investigation proceeds. Somewhat controlled by meds, her quirks only serve to make her more endearing, Monk-like. She has a fascinating background, some explained and others only hinted at, including a period of time when she, her sister and their mother were in the Witness Protection Program, providing a tantalizing glimpse into what the future books in this planned series would have further delved into. Wonderfully written, filled with suspense, this is a thoroughly enjoyable book, though at the risk of sounding maudlin, I must confess the underlying poignancy I could not escape while reading the novel, and the sadness which almost overshadowed my pleasure in the book at the almost overwhelming sense of the life and talent lost all too soon. For those who may not know, Barbara Seranella passed away much too young in January of this year, and she is, and will be, missed.
Gloria Feit

DIRTY MARTINI

JA Konrath
2007
Hyperion

Jackie Jackie Jackie...Once a year you come into my life, we spend some real quality time together, a few really happy hours that you make sure are just action packed. And then you're gone. And I'm left waiting and wanting for another year. JA Konrath's Jack Daniels series has hit book four, *DIRTY MARTINI*, and I think this is his strongest work to date. Our heroine, Jacqueline (Jack) Daniels, is in need of a new partner. Herb can't take the danger any more. As it turns out Herb may be onto something because the city has put Jack in charge of a task force to find a maniac poisoning hundreds of people in Chicago. To help her concentration on the case Jack also has to decide if she wants to accept a marriage proposal. The clock is ticking on both the personal life and professional.

This is definitely a mystery, but it also has exactly what every book calling itself a thriller should have, fast pacing and a sense of urgency to keep reading. It actually feels like something is going to be missed if you don't read faster.

Everyone should have a DIRTY MARTINI on their nightstand.

Jon Jordan

DR. JOE BELL MODEL FOR SHERLOCK HOLMES

Ely M. Liebow

2007

Popular Press

This biography of Dr. Joseph Bell is a daunting look at the highly successful medical career of a Dr. who helped to define modern medicine. A personal look into the man's life, career and religious beliefs. There is some mention of Doyle and the unwanted fame brought to Bell through the second hand fame he accrued as A if not THE inspiration for Sherlock's detecting skills.

But while DR. JOE BELL is informative and written with an obvious passion for his subject it is unfortunately not well written. Hard to get through as a narrative this is a book for only the pure Sherlockian or someone interested in the dawn of Modern Medicine.

Ruth

A FALL FROM GRACE

Robert Barnard

2007

Scribners

Award winning author Robert Barnard's newest novel: A Fall From Grace has Detective Inspector Dexter, always called Charlie, Peace and his wife, Felicity, moving to the village of Slepton Edge.

Unfortunately, along come Felicity's father; leaving his comfortable home rather quickly. Felicity and Charlie insist, as neither have much patience for the overbearing man, that he buy a cottage rather than move in with them. The Peace's settle in but another new family has been harassed by a group of teens and pre-teens. Charlie arranges with the local police to 'lecture' the students of the schools acting 'stream.'

Meanwhile the real reason for Charlie's father in law's sudden move becomes known. Is his sudden death related? It's not for Charlie to say as for obvious reasons its not his case. But it does come down to Charlie and Felicity to push the possible homicide aspect.

This is a traditional British village mystery drawn by a master's hand. Mr. Barnard gives you a smooth and easy read. He drops his clues fairly and pulls the subplots together into a satisfying conclusion. If you'll forgive the pun, A Fall From Grace is worth a plunge.

Dave Biemann

FINAL UNDERTAKING

Mark de Castrique

April 2007

Poisoned Pen Press

It is Friday night, and in the streets of Gainesboro, NC, the weekly barn dance is underway. Suddenly, a man raises a pistol and aims it at a stranger. He fires, hitting a young woman. The sheriff shoots him, while in turn getting shot in the chest, effectively putting him in the hospital and out of commission. Enter Barry Clayton, former Charlotte cop now an undertaker in town. The sheriff appoints Barry as deputy in charge of the case, while overseeing the investigation from his hospital bed.

A web of intrigue unfolds, as the original premise for the incident becomes clearer. As Barry attempts to balance his duties to the funeral parlor business and as a deputy, various witnesses die under mysterious circumstances. Doubts arise as to who Barry can trust in his efforts to find the truth.

This novel is the fourth in the series, each a well-plotted, entertaining mystery featuring Buryin' Barry Clayton. All I can say is: keep 'em comin'.

Theodore Feit

GLASS HOUSES

Jane Haddam

2007

St. Martin's Minotaur

Gregor Demarkian has been called in on the Plate Glass Killer case; Henry Tyder of the socially prominent Tyders has confessed, but he's an alcoholic and homeless by choice. It's possible that he is not the killer. It's possible that he is mentally unable to have planned these murders, but it's almost as possible that he's smarter than the average bear. These serial killings are unusual in several respects. The women are mostly middle-aged, not pretty, and not sexually assaulted.

Gregor has at least one other problem to handle. His long-time lover Bennis up and left many months ago. He hasn't known where she is, when or if she'll return, anything. Well, she's back. No real explanations, and Gregor is uncertain how to handle this sudden reappearance. Then there is the woman he's been having dinners with while Bennis has been gone. What is he supposed to do about that?

Haddam has written another great entry in the long-running Demarkian series. She's a talented enough writer that one doesn't have to have read the entire series to enjoy GLASS HOUSES. On the other hand, knowing Gregor and Bennis's history would certainly add some layers to a reader's perspective on this book. One would have to be seriously committed to reading the entire backlist of twenty other Demarkian novels; it's certainly worth it in terms of reading an enjoyable and entertaining series but also certainly not required.

P.J. Coldren

THE HOLLOW CORE

Leslie Horton

2006

Orion Books

When a woman is gunned down in cold blood in front of her family, it seems evident at first that she was the intended victim. But once DI Handford begins to investigate, it becomes less clear-cut. Could it have something to do with her husband and his business? Her daughter? Her daughter's boyfriend? A tangled web of deception and crime begins to unravel, and Handford finds many avenues to check

out. Besides the investigation, there are several other interesting subplots in this book. I loved getting to know Handford's colleagues, with their own family issues and relationships. One of his colleagues is dealing with a sick wife, another is a young policeman trying to work out from under his father's shadow of control. Horton's writing is interesting and descriptive, and I found her style enjoyable to read. It's always fun to read a novel about towns and cities across the Atlantic, and this one was especially educational, while Horton gives a loving and enveloping sense of the atmosphere. This is the first book I've read in the DI Handford series (there are four) and I will be looking for the others. I highly recommend this book!

Judy Clemens

ICE MOON

Jan Costin Wagner

2007

Harcourt

Set in Finland during the long days of summer, Ice Moon is unlike typical mysteries. Although the story is centered around a serial killer who suffocates people in their sleep without leaving a trace, the

driving force seems to be the characters, primarily detective Kimmo Joentaa who is haunted by the recent death of his wife. His loss and his sadness overtake the main plotline, causing him to become a victim as well as a hero.

But Joentaa isn't the only character coping with loss and regret. His department chief, Ketola, has a drug addicted son. The unfaithful widower of the first victim is overcome with regret for his wandering eyes. Wagner seems to give every character he creates, a skeleton, a ghost, haunting them throughout the novel. At first, the character development gave the plot great depth, but as the story moved forward without many redeeming moments for the characters, it got darker and more disheartening. Wagner is a talented writer and storyteller, but his troubled characters and bleak themes make ICE MOON a real downer.

--Dana Kaye

INVISIBLE ARMIES

Jon Evans

July 2007

St. Martin's Minotaur

A lot of books these days are being called thrillers. Some are, some aren't and some fall in between. INVISIBLE ARMIES is beyond any doubt a thriller, it's everything a thriller should be.

Danielle Leaf is woman who really does not have much direction in her life. A wealthy family has left her with too many options and as a result no real goals. She finds herself in India studying yoga. As a favor for an old boy friend she agrees to deliver a passport and some money to some one she's never met. This is the point where we meet her. Before long she is discovering just how dangerous India can be away from the major cities, she is captured by military types and thrown in a cell. As the gravity of the situation hits her she is joined by another prisoner, a man named Laurent who is in handcuffs and has been beaten. One thing leads to another and they effect an escape and the most exciting thing Danielle has ever done is just starting. She hooks up with her ex boyfriend and some of his comrades in India and decides to go after the people behind her capture, members of a very large corporation.

From Paris to London and Los Angeles and India, INVISIBLE ARMIES is truly an international adventure. Evans writes about these places as only someone who has been there can. Hopefully he was there under better circumstances than his characters. The people who populate this book are magnetic in the way they grab your attention. While they may not all be likable, they are all mesmerizing. This is greatly aided by Evan's understanding of the subcultures of hackers and protest groups. Political but not preachy, adventurous but not clichéd, this is a perfect summer read.

Take a deep breath when you start reading, you might forget to breathe again till you finish.

Jon Jordan

THE JUDAS STRAIN

James Rollins

July 2007

William Morrow

James Rollins is a veterinarian in Sacramento, California. In addition, according to his book cover bio, he is "an amateur spelunker and a certified scuba enthusiast [who will] often be found underground or underwater." But we should be glad he doesn't spend all of his time underground or underwater, or we wouldn't have such excellent thrillers as THE JUDAS STRAIN. Given the amount of in-depth research that went into this book and his eight previous books, it is hard to understand how he has any spare time to spend either underground or underwater.

THE JUDAS STRAIN combines an historical mystery, the structure of bacteria, and the life cycle of liver flukes into a can't-put-it-down thriller. While mesmerized by the non-stop action of the heroes and villains, we are also learning quite a bit about subjects we may have

never before considered. (And, thankfully, the author provides a postscript wherein he separates fact from fiction.)

Fact: When Marco Polo left China in 1292, he had 14 ships and 600 men. When he finally reached port two years later, he had only two ships and 18 men. He never revealed the fate of the other ships and men. It is still a mystery.

Fact: There are deadly forms of bacteria such as Bacillus anthracis (anthrax) and there are benign, even helpful, bacteria such as those living in the garden. And the only difference between these are two rings of genetic code called plasmids.

Fact: The adult Lancet liver flukes live in the livers of cows and other grazing animals. Their eggs are passed out in feces, and are eaten by snails. The snails enclose the maturing flukes in cysts which are excreted, and are eaten by ants. The parasite attacks the ant's nerve system and actually takes control of the ant's actions. The ant is forced to climb to the top of a blade of grass where, eventually, it is eaten by a grazing animal. The 3-animal cycle begins anew.

These fascinating but seemingly unrelated facts are masterfully interwoven into a truly thrilling tale of bad guys and good guys racing to control a potentially life-destroying biological threat. To learn how, read THE JUDAS STRAIN.

David Chernow.

JUSTICE LEAGUE OF AMERICA:

Brad Meltzer/Ed Benes

June 2007

DC Comics

Superman, Wonder Woman and Batman, the big three, the trinity of heroes at DC Comics. Putting them together in a comic together was a wholly natural progression. Expanding this to include other superheroes was also totally natural. Team Books have been around since the conception of The Justice Society of America over 60 years ago and they have been a staple of the comics genre since. Sometimes this made for great stories, others it was a real mess. The biggest failure comes from not knowing all the players and what to do with them.

Brad Meltzer does not have this problem. He knows these characters and his affection for them comes through on every page. Meltzer also uses his knowledge of the history of these characters to his advantage. Heroes who would normally be considered second stringers are brought to the foreground and it is believable.

The first story arc is about the new team being assembled and Red Tornado's ongoing quest for true humanity. Tornado actually is able to leave behind his android body and become human. This seems like it's going to be great for him, for a while. Before we are taken to a wonderful climax to the story we are treated to some great fights with some classic Justice League villains. The art from Ed Benes is also great. He also obviously has a love for these characters. He manages to give the Justice League a new look without changing their classic look. And he does some of the best action scenes I've seen. This is a great new start to a truly classic title and Meltzer should be allowed to write this title for as long as he wants. If this is the future of DC Comics, I'm all in.

Jon Jordan

A KILLING IN COMICS

Max Allan Collins/Terry Beatty

2007

Berkley

I discovered the work of Max Allan Collins due to his work in comics, so it feels very right to me that he is writing a series of books that take place in the comics world. A KILLING IN COMICS, the first in the series is loosely based on the creators of Superman. No real people are used which frees Collins up a bit to change things around for the story.

KILLING IN COMICS also has a unique feature, comic frames illustrated by Terry Beatty, a long collaborator of Collins on such

projects as Ms. Tree. Beatty Frames open each chapter and are assembled at the end of the book to help the reader piece together the puzzle.

Wonder Guy is published by Donny Harrison, and he is making a lot of money on this superhero, though the creators are not. When Donny ends up dead at a party dressed as WonderGuy, His widow Maggie Starr and his step son Jack Starr are on the case trying to find out who killed the publishing giant.

Melding Collins amazing talent for writing historical crime novels based on fact and his terrific story telling abilities this is a superb mystery. Comics readers will love all the references to the golden age of comics. Hard boiled and entertaining as hell fans of Collins work will eat this up. Suspenseful and fast paced this is a perfect summer read.

Jon Jordan

THE LISBON CROSSING

Tom Gabbay

2007

Morrow

The Lisbon Crossing is a prequel to Tom Gabbay's first Jack Teller novel, The Berlin Conspiracy. Here Jack Teller is a twenty-five year old movie stunt man who slept with the wife of a Hollywood bigshot. His friend, actress Lili Sterne, asks him to come with her to Portugal to search for her close friend, Eva Lange. Eva has fled Germany and the Nazis. Lili feels compelled to bring Eva to the US.

Upon reaching Portugal Jack discovers that he and Lili are not the only ones looking for Eva. The detective, Ed Grimes, who Lili sent prior to her and Jack's trip is dead which means the police are involved. A reporter is snooping around, the Nazis too have an interest in Eva. Jack plays everyone off each other as well as he can. Finding Eva is half the adventure. Whip smart dialog, a brisk pace, plenty of action, multiple plot lines all make The Lisbon Crossing a well above average read. Eva's expository chapter slows things down a bit and could have been rewritten and two little nit picking details caught me up but this is one of the better books available. Sit down with Jack Teller and the Lisbon Crossing. You won't be disappointed.

Dave Biemann

MIAMI PURITY

Vicki Hendricks

2007

Busted Flush

Are you a fan of Noir? That bandied term has been so diluted by overuse I almost hate to use it when discussing MIAMI PURITY. If ever there was a one of a kind author within our genre her name is Vicki Hendricks and this, this is the book. First published in 1995, MIAMI PURITY has been re-released by Busted Flush. With Miami Purity, NOIR was redefined. If you consider yourself a connoisseur you must read this book. Hailed by both critics and readers, MIAMI PURITY is a one of a kind read that is, in my opinion, one of the top five noir experiences and the only one purely female. Female so stark that many run from the harshness of the ending. None of that sissy male noir ending shit in here. The protagonist doesn't get to move towards a path of realization or death, there is only deconstruction of the soul. But what a ride on the way there.

Sherri Parlay is our lead. A murderer, a stripper, an addict and pure sexual energy. Sherri wants a better life and applies for and gets a job at a dry cleaners. She meets Brenda the owner and Payne, her son. And we're off. Unlike the auteur of male noir, Hendricks quickly dissolves any illusions of future and instead with a dark humor and boiling sexuality mirrors the classic noir novel while reinventing it at the same time. To say more would prevent you your own experience with PURITY and it is a must. At 158 high voltage pages this read is one of the reads.

Busted Flush is a small press presenting us with some of the harshest and best noir, both new and re-releases of books that deserve to be

eternally in print. The addition of PURITY to their catalog gives them an immediate credibility. With a forward by the wonderful Ken Bruen and an afterward by the magnificent Megan Abbott there is an affirmation that Hendricks and PURITY are here to stay. But it is the work of Hendricks that has you holding your breath for four of the best reading hours you're likely to ever have.

Ruth

MURDER AMONG THE OWLS:

Bill Crider

2007

St. Martin's Minotaur

If you find yourself in the mood for a lighter, fun read – preferably one well-plotted, peppered with dry wit and quirky deadpan humor, and featuring a laid-back but ever diligent down-home lawman, supported by a cast of small town eccentrics—then, we may have found the book for you. MURDER AMONG THE OWLS is the fourteenth in Bill Crider's always entertaining Sheriff Dan Rhodes mystery series set in the tight-knit community of bucolic Clearview, Blacklin County, Texas. Surprised by the early morning appearance of an older neighbor's indoor cat on their doorstep, Sheriff Dan's wife, Ivy, insists he check up on the active septuagenarian, Helen Harris. When the sheriff arrives and finds that Helen, a long time member of the Old Women's Literary Society (OWLS), appears to have taken a fatal tumble off a step stool in her kitchen, his policing instincts invariably kick in. At first glance it certainly looks like an accidental fall, but could it be something else – perhaps even cold-blooded murder?

Is there a murderer lurking among the ranks of the very proper OWLS or the matrons of the local Red Hat Society? And what could explain Helen's secretive behavior on the last field trip with the metal-detecting Rusty Nuggets club? Another possibility is that the woman's demise might have something to do with her recently revised – and now missing – will.

As the list of suspects grows to include the victim's 'heir apparent'--the widow Harris' womanizing and violence-prone cousin, Leo Thorpe, a local resident of the Tranquility Mobile Home Park -- and her grieving lover, the somewhat mysterious Colonel Alton Brant, Sheriff Dan Rhodes, one-by-one narrows the field until he identifies the (surprising!) guilty individual. Do treat yourself to this enjoyable read.

Annie Chernow

MURDER GRINS AND BEARS IT

Deb Baker

2007

Midnight Ink

This woman has a voice I love--back there in the mountains of the Upper Peninsula in Michigan, but it sure sounds like down south, say the Appalachians. No matter, the voice will stay with you like an audio story.

Gertie, 66, wants to get her P. I. license, but at the moment she can't even get her driver's license renewed. She bought an old police car complete with lights and sirens, puts Trouble Busters on the side--the name of her 'agency'--and now she's in the P. I. biz. She has a man-hungry friend, Cora Mae, who is right there with her, no matter what. Cora Mae prefers bare, but they get bear instead when they go into the woods to find Gertie's nineteen-year-old grandson who is being hunted for the murder of the game warden during bear hunting season.

Not only does Gertie have to outwit everyone to find him, she has to outwit her son, Blaze, the local law. He certainly doesn't like it that she's trying to get into the P. I. biz, and he's more interested in what she's up to--which hampers her a tad--than he is in helping to protect his nephew. This is a laugh-out-loud book.

Gay Toitl Kinman

MURDERING AMERICANS

Ruth Dudley Edwards
2007
Poisoned Pen Press

Irreverent, irresponsible, impossible—these are some of the adjectives used to describe Baroness “Jack” Troutbeck, member of the House of Lords and Mistress of St. Martha’s College in Cambridge. When she is invited (mistakenly) to become one of four Distinguished Visiting Professors at an Indiana college, the intellectually-rigorous right-winger is thrust in the midst of knee-jerk liberal academia, setting off a parody of affirmative action and political correctness. Along the way there are at least four murders, and not only do Jack and her sidekick, Amiss, have to solve them, but they must attempt to undo the harm to academic standards as well. The novel is amusing until near the end, when lengthy expositions—sort of long-winded summaries to bring things up to date—cloud the light-hearted criticisms and observations and reading becomes bogged down. Since this reviewer has not read any of the previous ten entries in the series, no comparison can be made, although it should be noted that the author has been short-listed by the Crime Writers Association for the John Creasey Award for the best first novel and twice for the Last Laugh Award for the funniest crime novel of the year.

Theodore Feit

THE NIGHT FERRY

Michael Robotham
2007
Doubleday

NIGHT FERRY is the third book in this series from Robotham and in this outing the spotlight shifts to Detective Ali Barba. It has all the elements of a perfect procedural and a great suspense novel. Ali is reunited with an estranged high school friend Cate and receives a message from her just before witnessing her murder. Cate mentions saving her baby. But things are not at all as they seem. Ali follows where the clues take her looking into why her friend was killed which opens up some old wounds. Because she is on leave recovering from an injury she decides to pursue the leads to Amsterdam and back and damn the consequences. With international gangsters and terrorists and government agencies all in close pursuit Ali has her hands full while she rushes to save the only people who can tell her what really happened to her friend Cate. Robotham has multiple layers running through this book that all join together in a smashing climax. The suspense created makes it impossible to stop reading. By the time the book ends I felt myself letting out a sigh of relief. This is top notch writing and I would recommend THE NIGHT FERRY and Robotham other books, LOST and SUSPECT to anyone who loves to get lost in a great book.

Jon Jordan

THE OVERLOOK

Michael Connelly
2007
Little, Brown and Company

In this latest installment in the life of Harry Bosch he is no longer handling cold cases. He is now assigned to the LAPD’s Homicide Special Squad, and gets his first murder case. The victim is found in the hills above Los Angeles with two bullet holes in the back of his head, an apparent gangland execution. However, all is not as it seems. The victim had access to highly dangerous radioactive material, and the FBI steps in on the premise that it is terrorist-related. As a result, Harry is shunted aside from his own homicide case. Complicating matters is the presence of his onetime lover, FBI agent Rachel Walling. But Harry Bosch, being Harry Bosch, goes his own way to solve the case while breaking in a new partner.

Originally written as a 16-part weekly series for The New York Times Magazine, this hardcover version was fleshed out with new material and a character that wasn’t present in the original version. Even if you read it in installments, it would be rewarding to read this newly-published version.

Theodore Feit

PEPPERFISH KEYS

Darryl Wimberley
July 2007
St. Martin's

The Florida Department of Law Enforcement is an organization similar to a state police force. They’re quite often called into aid local police as they can bring to an investigation hundreds of officers and modern technology that smaller, local police forces cannot. Barrett Raines, AKA “Bear” is Darryl Wimberley’s FDLE’s protagonist in Peppercorn Keys. This is the third novel featuring his African American detective. I’d look forward to more.

Multiple plot lines are skillfully woven together around the framework of the homicide of Florida Senator Baxter Stanton’s maverick daughter, Beth Ann. Bear is called in to investigate her murder despite the fact that news reporter Sharon Fowler has played up the FDLE’s and by extension, Bear’s, failed investigation of Stanton’s political corruption. The story has plenty of violence, some voyeuristic sex, interesting characters and moves at a respectable pace. Wimberley knows his police procedure and sticks pretty close to it. Don’t look for the high humor of some of the other, Southern Florida writers here. Peppercorn Keys is well worth a read.

Dave Biemann

PLAY DEAD

David Rosenfelt
2007
Warner Books

Attorney Andy Carpenter, the protagonist of Rosenfelt’s enjoyable series, is independently wealthy, has a reliable and supportive group of friends, a faithful dog, a not for profit organization he has founded and cares about, a dependable (read lethal) sidekick and a woman he loves who is worthy of his love and returns it. As a wealthy man, with a laid back attitude toward work and its time consuming responsibilities, Andy has the luxury of accepting clients which appeal to his altruistic impulses.

When the local animal shelter Andy sponsors calls to tell him of a beautiful golden retriever which has been turned in because of vicious behavior, a potential death sentence for the dog, Andy instead pays the adoption fee and takes the dog home with him. A few days later, a young woman reacts with joy when she sees the dog in Andy’s company.

Andy soon learns that the young woman’s brother is the dog’s rightful owner, that the brother in prison convicted of first degree murder, and that the two siblings thought the dog had died at the same time as the murder was committed.

What follows is a petition to obtain a new trial, free the brother from prison and reunite dog and owner. The eventual solution is an entertaining mix of the witness protection program; smuggling both into and out of the United States; US military involvement in Afghanistan; and of course, the fate of the dog and his owner. Rosenfelt has a light semi humorous tone to his books, which never overwhelms the serious subject matter. His collection of supporting characters for Andy which includes more than one eccentric returns with satisfying results for the reader.

Woodstock

THE PRICE OF SILENCE

Camilla Trinchieri
June 2007
Soho Press

This beautifully written novel begins with Emma Perotti, an ESL professor on trial for killing An-Ling Huang, a young Chinese artist, who she took under her wing. Trinchieri tells the gripping story through e-mails, trial documentation, and testimonies of the accused and her family. The title says it all as secrets are revealed with every turn of the page and even the reader is misled by the characters' lies. We know from the beginning that Emma and her husband had a daughter that died as a toddler, but we don't find out until chapters later the details surrounding her death. We know that Huang is damaged, haunted by her past, but we continue to find out why until the very last page. The suspense lies not in the "whodunit", not in the supposed murder, but in who these people are and how they got to the dark place they're in now.

Trinchieri demonstrates her skills as a novelist, using deft multiple viewpoints and timelines to build her characters and their stories. Perotti discusses her relationship with Huang, recounts times spent and conversations had, but the shift to her son and husband's point of view indicates that she's not the most reliable narrator, often skewing her true motives and past events. The characters keep secrets, hiding the truth from the reader, leaving us wondering who, if anyone, we can trust. An intriguing and compelling story, *PRICE OF SILENCE*, is one of the best novels I have read this year.

--Dana Kaye

THE SECRET HANGMAN

Peter Lovesey

June 2007

Soho Crime

THE SECRET HANGMAN marks the welcome return of Detective Superintendent Peter Diamond in the ninth book in Peter Lovesey's fine series. It's been three years since Diamond's beloved wife, Steph, was found murdered in a local public park. And since suffering that devastating loss and attempting to move beyond his numbing grief, life is still a bit hazy and an emotional challenge on the best of days for the head of Bath's murder squad. Then a hand-delivered letter arrives on his desk one morning signed "Your secret admirer." Puzzled, and thinking it either a hoax by an insensitive co-worker or (possibly) a legitimate invitation from a lonely woman just wanting to meet him for a drink at a local pub, he pockets the paper with every intention of depositing it in the office shredder. Yes, well, maybe later. DS Diamond begins working a missing persons case involving a waitress, the mother of two small girls. When the unfortunate woman is found dead in a playground, hanging by the neck from a swing set cross-bar, it appears an apparent suicide. But then the post-mortem reveals otherwise. And when the prime suspect, her ex-husband, turns up hanged in a cave, closely followed by yet another couple murdered and brazenly left hanging on public landmarks, Diamond's worst suspicions are confirmed. A bizarre serial killer is on the loose in Bath.

Meanwhile, other officers in the precinct are trying to develop leads in an epidemic of "ram" raids taking place around town. Shop fronts are being smashed using stolen vehicles with valuable goods looted in the dead of night. The pressure for a quick resolution is building from local merchants and politicians, forcing the squad to work even longer shifts and to set up stake-outs. In his few scarce off hours, DS Diamond is spending time with Paloma, an attractive widow with whom he had a chance encounter in the parking lot of his neighborhood grocery. For both it is the first romantic relationship in many years and, despite initial hesitations and fumbings, they are drawn to each other like magnets. When Paloma's son Jerry's car is stolen, Diamond suspects a possible connection to the "ram" thefts. With masterful maneuverings, including his trademark twists and dash of red herrings, Lovesey weaves an intricate tapestry with what appear to be seemingly unrelated threads. The author then ties it all off in great style with a highly satisfying and perfectly executed denouement. What wonderful news for us all that Peter Diamond is

back--and that the DS and his creator both appear to be at the top of their game.

Annie Chernow

SILVERFISH

David Lapham

2007

DC Comics

SILVERFISH is a crime graphic novel, an original from DC comics. David Lapham's previous work shows he's no stranger to the crime genre (*Stray Bullets* and *Murder Me Dead*).

The story opens with what seems to be an awkward teenager dealing with a new stepmother while still getting over the death of her birth mother. Mia is 16 and not happy about her Father getting re married. When the parents go away for a weekend she decides to snoop into her step mother's past, discovering an old address book she calls a few numbers looking for who this woman might really be.

Suzanne as she's called now, as it turns out does have a bit of a past she's trying to hide and Mia has just stirred the hornet's nest. The past comes storming back and it's headed right for Mia.

This book joins to forms I love, graphic story telling with realistic crime drama. Lapham starts out with a hum and that builds to a scream and keeps you wanting to turn the pages faster and faster. *SILVERFISH* should be labeled a stimulant. One of the best crime novels I've read in years, let alone one of the best graphic novels. This is a book that will satisfy many fans of both the comic and mystery genres.

Jon Jordan

SOMETHING IN THE SEA

Yves Bonaveno

2007

Bloomsbury UK Paperback

This little book debut novel took about three hours to read and that was reading slowly as its tight and claustrophobic plot had me riveted to my chair. This novel has London lawyer Terence deciding to escape his recently heavy workload and stress defending wealthy pedophiles ensnared by Operation Ore [for viewing child-sex on the internet] by taking his wife Cathy and child Lucy on a sailing adventure on the Adriatic. It is written in first-person, but I soon felt that the narrator Terence to be an unreliable one, as he seemed to be harboring his own secrets, almost as well as he managed to battle a storm that strikes their vessel.

When they make land, they have a seriously injured child, and a yacht that appears damaged beyond repair. Cue the mysterious stranger Kurt an injured German seafarer who Cathy [a doctor] treats for his injuries. As the light fades, he tells them his sinister story, one that begins more than twenty years back, and also involves an injured child, lost-love and a global search for that love, but in the shadows there is the specter of death. It appears Kurt has two dead bodies on his own injured vessel. I started to guess the ending, but this short book took in another final twist, as if buffeted by another narrative gale. The climax is sad, but in a strange way uplifting, and I came away from the book feeling energized having been more than merely entertained. I also felt pleased with myself in discovering a minor masterpiece that I overlooked when it was released in hardcover last year. Don't make the same mistake, as it is a menacing little maritime tale

Ali Karim

STRANGERS

Carla Banks

2007

HarperCollins UK

This is the second psychological thriller from Danuta Reah with her non-de-plume Carla Banks, the first was *THE FOREST OF SOULS*.

This is a dark and dangerous tale set against the backdrop of Saudi Arabia and a terrifying and claustrophobic look at characters displaced against an alien landscape.

I lived and worked as an ex-pat in this desert kingdom in the 1980's and this work is certainly well researched as it reminded me of the heat, the oppressive regime and the link this land has to the oil that powers its economy, and the religion that lies at the heart of its soul. The story has Roisin and Dr Joe Massey meeting by chance and falling for each other in a head-spinning romance, and then instead of heading to Canada, they end up going to Riyadh where Joe can practise medicine and Roisin teach.

Things however are not as they seem as the prologue gives us a taste of what will follow as Joe is concealing a secret, one that can cost lives. Roisin takes up her position in tutoring English to Saudi women, but finds the politics of relationships in this authoritarian culture a surprise. Written in an easy-going style, it is a very fast read though we do get anxious for Roisin as she sees less and less of Joe, due to his work patterns and the secrets he is harbouring. The second part of STRANGERS, is a sweaty ride, as the couple hope to leave for Australia, only to find that Joe's secret may trap them in this land, where consequences for past doings can provide terrifying results. A great addition to the Carla Banks stable.

Ali Karim

THUNDER BAY

William Kent Krueger

July 2007

Atria

William Kent Krueger introduced us to Cork O'Connor a decade ago. The world of Crime Fiction readers and critics immediately embraced both Krueger and his protagonist. What wasn't like. Cork was from the first an everyman hero just a bit different from all the others being penned. A good man; in love with his wife, proud and concerned for his children, awed by and respectful towards his environment and always struck by the evil in man. In the early books Krueger introduced two tributaries of his hero's soul that have kept Cork complex throughout the entire canon of O'Connor books. The first is the character's humanity. Cork's fallibility always manages to ring true and he almost always learns from life mistakes. The second equally fascinating aspect to the character of Cork O'Connor is his continual struggle with an understanding of his own cultural heritage. Part Ojibwe and part Catholic, Cork has trouble with the rituals of both cultures. Melding this culture with his own life and the terrible crimes he sees has been hard at times.

Cork's humanness has been done so subtly and so well that at times you almost forget how well Mr. Krueger writes his environment. His Minnesota sings on the same scale as Block's New York, Paretsky's Chicago, Pelecanos's Washington or Connelly's L.A.. The O'Connor series is a how to lesson for authors who want to write a complex "Small Town" mystery. For readers the series is quite simply a joy. Krueger continues to find ways to forward the story of Aurora and its inhabitants.

THUNDER BAY opens as Cork preps his hamburger stand for the day's customers. We find out that since last we saw him Cork has acquired a P.I. license. George LeDuc waits outside with news of a friend. Henry Meloux is in hospital, dying and asking for Cork. The medicine man and spiritual advisor has a favor to ask. Can Cork find a son he fathered six decades ago?

As Cork begins his quest for Henry's son a piece of Ojibwe history unfolds. The story of Henry's youth and the history of a land stripped for profit decades ago is woven into a mystery that has murder in two timelines and tragedy to spare. When Cork's hunt for Henry's son takes him north of the border to Thunder Bay he has help from friend Wally Schanno and a retired mounted police. We meet adventurers and robber barons. As history is revealed futures will be born and lost. As in every O'Connor book, the investigation is both straight-forward and fascinating.

This series has won many well deserved awards. Krueger's style and talent continue to grow from book to book. Krueger stretches his own boundaries every time he writes a new chapter in this series and widens ours. Aurora and the world of Cork O'Connor have given us not only a series of sublime crimes but an understanding of a culture and a group of people we'd never have met.

Ruth Jordan

WHAT'S SO FUNNY

Donald E. Westlake

2007

Grand Central Publishing [formerly Warner Books]

WHAT'S SO FUNNY brings the welcome return of John Dortmunder in this, the 13th entry in the series. For those who have not previously had the pleasure, he is described by one man who is recommending his services to another thusly: "John here is just about the best you can get. He's a thief when he wakes up in the morning, and he's a thief when he goes to sleep at night. An honest thought has never crossed his brain. If he were any more crooked, you could open wine bottles with him. In his early days he did some time, but he's learned how to avoid that now. I guarantee him to be the least trustworthy, most criminal scalawag you'll ever meet." With that testimonial, John is hired – sort of. In the carrot-and-stick manner, he is kind of being blackmailed by a former cop [the one giving the referral above] into working for the man to whom his "praise" is given, the assignment being to "retrieve" a gold and jewel-studded chess set once intended as a birthday gift for the last Romanov czar – long story. Reluctantly, John and his cronies embark on their mission, which is fraught with peril.

The author's "caper" novels have long been enjoyed and appreciated, and this offering is equally worthy. Dortmunder's "faithful companion," May, is on hand to, among other things, "pull John out of the clutches of despair and goose him into forward motion once more. After all, it isn't whether you win or lose, it's just you have to be in the goddamn game." It is a book where one of its characters works for a law firm named Feinberg, Kleinberg, Rhineberg, Steinberg, Weinberg and Klatsch, there is a cop named Mologna, pronounced Maloney [think about it for a second], and where Dortmunder finds out the difference between being an independent contractor and an employee [besides the health benefits, retirement or softball team]. The answer to the titular question is, reliably, Donald E. Westlake and John Dortmunder. Gloria Feit

WHO IS SHAYLA HACKER?

Evan Kilgore

2007

Bleak House Books

Evan Kilgore's debut novel is an amazing piece of work. From the first few lines it feels like something a little different, something special. The thrust of the story is obsession. A group of strangers all become obsessed about the same thing at different times and in different places. The only constant is a picture of a girl and the need to find her. A police detective just retired, a man about to be married, a woman who runs a construction outfit, a high school girl, an a computer expert. They are all looking for the same answer, WHO IS SHAYLA HACKER?

By twenty or so pages in to the book I was asking the same thing. By fifty pages I was reading faster and asking it louder. By the time I got to the end of the book I couldn't read fast enough. I too had become obsessed with Shalya.

Kilgore has a wonderful ability to draw in the reader, it's almost scary I looked up and noticed that I was halfway done with it. The characters are people that you are instantly interested in and care about, and the way they keep circling each other is pure genius, like a avant-garde ballet choreographed by a genius madman. The descriptions in the book took me to the place the characters went and

are still in my head. This book is going to stay with me for some time to come.

I can safely say that Evan Kilgore is a fantastic writer and I am a fan for life.

Jon Jordan

WITCH HUNT

Shirley Damsgaard

2007

Avon

Shirley Damsgaard gets better with each book she writes, and the fourth in her series, WITCH HUNT may be my favorite yet. The series has a wonderful flow from book to book creating a very entertaining world for Damsgaard to play in.

Ophelia and Abby are helping Tink, a 13 year old that Ophelia has taken in, to learn how to control her powers. Ironically it seems like Ophelia is having a little trouble with her own. Good friend Darci needs help when her cousin is accused of murder and Ophelia picked up nothing before it happened. The murder victim is a biker who is part of a gang hanging around town and looking for trouble. Darci's cousin Becca needs to get cleared before the bikers come after her. A wonderful setting and a terrific cast of characters make this a real pleasure to read. Damsgaard also paces the story perfectly and it moves quick. The addition of the day to day hassles of having a teenager around really add another dimension to this already great series. A traditional mystery with just a bit of the supernatural this book has it all.

Jon Jordan

WOMAN OF ILL FAME

Erika Mailman

2007

Heyday Books

When I first began reading this book, I wasn't sure why I was reviewing it for Crimespree. There was a murder committed, but it was such a small part of the story I didn't really consider the story a mystery. Most of the first half of the book is about Nora Simms, a prostitute who comes to San Francisco from Boston, looking for a better life. For her, a better life means getting more money for her trade and ending up in a parlor house, where the clientele would be of higher quality. I learned a lot about the sex trade in the mid-1800s, from the cribs where the girls would stay (for most of them were girls -- the protagonist herself is only 17!) to the higher class of call girls who stayed in special rooming houses. The second half of the book delves into crime more, with more murders being committed, and begins to feel more like a mystery. Nora is an engaging character, and while I wouldn't exactly call this book crime fiction, I wouldn't say it absolutely wasn't. Perhaps it needs its own genre: erotic crime fiction. A lot of this book talks about the various men Simms has sex with, and describes San Francisco as it was in the days of gold digging. The details of the sex weren't overdone, but I would warn anyone who doesn't like sex in books to perhaps give this one a pass. If a little romping (or a lot of it) doesn't bother you, I think you will find this book is interesting and well-written. I would definitely read another one of Mailman's books -- I just wouldn't expect it to be anything I might usually find with crime fiction. Which, actually, is a good thing. It's nice to find something unexpected every once in a while!

Judy Clemens

THE WOODS

Harlan Coben

2007

Orion

The very first mental picture given to the reader in the prologue of *The Woods* is of 18-year-old Paul "Cope" Copeland, watching his father in

the titular woods, savagely striking a shovel blade into the ground while tears course down his face. Digging. The background is this: Two young couples sneaked into the woods at a summer camp where Paul worked as a counselor. They were never seen alive again, the bodies of one of the girls and one of the boys having been later found with their throats slashed and the remaining two, one being Paul's teenage sister, never having been found. At one point Paul had become a suspect in the investigation. Ultimately the supposed killer, another counselor at the camp, was tried and convicted and is serving his sentence, though he has maintained his innocence.

Twenty years later, Cope is now the county prosecutor in Essex County, New Jersey, with political ambitions beyond that position. When a police investigation into a murder committed in New York City turns up evidence linking the victim to Cope, the police come to question him, and the media spotlight that has never really left him for two decades once more finds him. Cope's present life is a fractured one: His father has recently died, his mother having disappeared many years previously when apparently she could no longer handle the uncertainty surrounding her daughter's fate, his wife died five years ago from cancer and he has been raising their six-year-old daughter alone. And now once again that tragic event from so many years ago is about to ensnare him.

A parallel story line deals with the high visibility trial Cope is in the midst of, the most important of his career, with a Duke University-like rape case involving some of the wealthiest and most influential families in the city, who will go to any lengths to protect their sons, including threatening the prosecutor with unearthing any skeletons in his or his family's closets. And everything revolves around and comes back to the woods.

As one character muses, "We all find our ways to cope, to adapt and survive," and *The Woods* demonstrates exactly how true that is. This was a book I couldn't put down. It was not an action tale such as that woven so well by a Lee Child or Barry Eisler, as wonderful as those authors are, but a story so gripping that this reader raced along literally turning pages as quickly as I could because I had to find out what happens next. The ending is a shocker -- although all the clues had been there, most of it only dawned on me one page before the author divulged it. But even then he had still another twist to deliver. Mr. Coben has written a novel as good as anything he's done before, and that's saying quite a lot.

Gloria Feit