

Jon's Round up

Atticus Kodiak is back in his sixth book to date. Kodiak has made his living as a bodyguard and his adventures have made for some of my favorite reading experiences. One of the busiest writers in the business, Greg Rucka has brought Kodiak back again in *PATRIOT ACTS* (Bantam Book) and has our hero teaming up with a one time foe now lover in a world wide epic adventure. Do No Miss this book.

WRITTEN IN STONE (Bantam UK) by Simon Beckett is his second book and features Dr. David Hunter, a forensics anthropologist. Hunter is brought into a case that starts out looking like spontaneous combustion on the island of Runa though it's quickly obvious a murder has been committed. Beckett has amazing skills as a writer makes it almost impossible to stop reading. I look forward to his next book.

With all the books I see declaring themselves a thriller it's a very pleasant surprise to pick up a book with no such declaration and find out that it is a truly classic global scale thriller. Alex Scarrow's *LAST LIGHT* is a timely and harrowing read. The world's oil production is stopped. The world panics and plunges into anarchy. Andy Sutherland, an engineer in Iraq is stranded and trying to return to London. He son realizes he may know who and what is behind what is obviously a conspiracy. *LAST LIGHT* is fiction at it's best, amped up on red bull and speed, this book moves at the speed of light to an amazing climax. You need to reach for the *LAST LIGHT*.

Casey Daniels is writing a really fun series and the latest is *THE CHICK AND THE DEAD* (Avon). Pepper Martin has come across the ability to talk to ghosts. In this, her second novel, Pepper is hearing fro a dead novelist who wants things set right, which means that her last novel which was stolen and published by her sister needs to be credited to the dead author. This is another cross genre book that I really enjoyed. Daniels is entertaining and writes a very fun book.

LOOKING GOOD DEAD (Carroll & Graf) from Peter James is the second with Detective Superintendent Grace. I loved last year's *DEAD SIMPLE* so I was really looking forward to reading this. I was not disappointed. This is a cat and mouse game looking for killers who are not the least bit shy, using the internet to air snuff films. A man finds a disc on the train and opens it at home discovering the site, he does what most people would do, he turns to the police. This action may make Bryce and his family the next stars of this horrifying show. Fast paced and edgy this is a exciting book.

A few non fiction books about television have come out recently that may deserve a look. First off is *LIFE ON MARS: THE OFFICIAL COMPANION* (pocket books UK). This is a book that may get people who have not viewed the show to watch, and fans of the show *NEED* to own this. Tons of photos, interviews with stars and creators, and of course an episode guide. Great book for a great show. Another very well done book is *DEADWOOD: STORIES OF THE BLACKHILLS* (Bloomsbury) by David Milch the show's creator. This has everyting you need to know about the show, character studies by the actors, background of the real history and episode by episode info. Worth every penny.

Two more television books that are more for the die hard fan: *THE NUMBERS BEHIND NUMB3RS* (Plume) and *READING CSI* (Palgrave). It's no secret I'm not a fan of CSI, I think it is over glamorized soap opera. However the book does have a few pieces I enjoyed basically addressing what I dislike about it. Numb3rs is a really fun show and the book while dry will appeal to fans..

David Ellis delivers again with *EYE OF THE BEHOLDER*, an ass kicking, take no prisoners book which puts an attorney on the hot seat. Paul Riley prosecuted a serial killer and made his career, but now the murders have started again. Either a copy cat or the real killer, and they seem to be coming for Riley. Top notch!

Ken Bruen. That should be enough to make almost any crime fiction fan pick up this book. *AMMUNITION* (St. Martin's Minotaur) is another Inspector Brant novel and it rocks. crazy man fires into a pub almost killing Brant. It should go without saying that some one is going to regret this! Great read again. Hail Mr. Bruen.

I really enjoy the work of C.J. Caver and *GONE WITHOUT A TRACE* (Orion) may be my favorite book yet. Jay McCauly has found herself a career post military that allows her to use her skills and her brains. She helps reunite families separated in wars and be other means. In the course of a job her past comes back to confront her and MI6 asks for her help stopping a Albanian crime lord. Fast paced, great action and beautiful plotting Carver scores a perfect ten with this book.

Jason Bourne is one of my favorite characters and the books by Robert Ludlum are among my favorites. I was a little nervous when I saw that the estate has brought in a writer to continue the series. Not that Eric Van Lusbader isn't a great writer, he is. But writing another author's characters always brings problems. Well, Van Lusbader nailed it. He seems to channeling Ludlum

in THE BOURNE BETRAYAL (Orion UK, Warner books US). What starts out as a rescue mission soon turns into what may be a global conspiracy. With all the action that Bourne fans expect this is a winner.

Susan Kandel is obviously a big fan of the mystery genre as shown in the series she writes about Cece Caruso. Each book brings in ties to a iconic writer and this time out it's Agatha Christie. CHRISTIETOWN (Harper) is satisfying on many levels Kandel is a not to be missed author.

Vintage Crime has re-released Ross MacDonald's classic THE WAY SOME PEOPLE DIE. If you've never read it, well , Shame on you! Go pick this up now and enjoy a truly great book.

LAST BREATH is the fllow up to last years debut from George D. Shuman 18 SECONDS. A bit of the supernatural thrown in with an absolutely ass kicking thriller. Sheery Moore is a blind psychic helping to hunt down a serial killer. Be warned, it may cause trouble sleeping...

Book six from Lori Avocato, DEAD ON ARRIVAL (Avon Paperback) is out and it's another wonderful addition to the series featuring Pauline Sokol. Sokol is a Insurance fraud investigator and her undercover work tends to land her in trouble, this time out its with a ambulance company that uses helicopters. Smart, fun, humorous and a great mystery to boot.

If cozies are your thing then check out MURDER CAN DEPRESS YOUR DACHSHUND(Signet) by Selma Eichler. It has all the classic trappings, a recipe, dogs and shopping. A light entertaining read for those of you a little bored with the hard boiled grittier side of mystery.

Jen's Round-Up July 2007

Having been a tremendous fan of Mr. Torres and his writing since reading, "Stoop, the Thief" as a submission for Crimespre, my reading of his Precinct Puerto Rico series verified what I already know about his writing. It is solid, empathic and passionate. When the chance to read a stand-alone, THE CONCRETE MAZE, was given to me, I leapt at the chance. I was not disappointed. Dipping into a fearful reality every parent faces, Torres write of Luis Ramos and his search for his daughter, Jasmine. A gripping read from the first page, Torres does not let up the momentum of this book, even on the last page. As readers, we are not allowed respite from being on the edge of our seats when we set this book down. There are no formulas, no tricks, no red herrings and no agenda in THE CONCRETE MAZE. It is pure, human story-telling at its finest. Something I have come to expect from Torres.

In issue four of Crimespre, one of my other favorite stories appeared with, "Stoop." Rick Mofina's "Blood Red Rings." Taught, tight and heart-wrenching, Mofina clearly knows how to engage the reader in a story. In the third installment of his latest series featuring Jason Wade as a crime reporter for the Seattle Times, Mofina writes a tale of that leaves a trail of blood from the past into the present, when a nun beloved by the community is murdered. As Wade tenaciously tracks down every possible lead, he is shocked to discover a key that will blow the case wide open lies in his haunted ex-cop father's past. Mofina writes family tragedy as powerfully as Ross McDonald, with a modern edge.

I wrote a review of John Rickard's WINTER'S END in which I said, "I shall still be eager to read John Rickards' second novel. He shows talent that may bloom." THE DARKNESS INSIDE is Rickard's third novel and indeed, he did bloom. Former FBI Agent Alex Rourke has evolved into civilian P.I., embittered but still obsessed with justice. That he may have made a mistake, or a series of mistakes, that may have led to justice being subverted, shakes him to the core. Cody Williams knows things that could destroy the life Rourke has struggled to build since he left the FBI behind. And Williams knows the fate of a past victim that will force Rourke into requesting his dying wish – to speak to the man that put him in prison. Rickards is a master of tension and pacing. But what makes THE DARKNESS INSIDE a captivating read is his protagonist. In Rourke he has created a brilliant anti-hero lead on a par with John Connolly's Charlie Parker.

THE ALIBI MAN
Tami Hoag
2007
Orion Books

Former detective, Elena Estes, is once again sucked into an investigation. This time, she finds the dead body of her horse groomer, Irina. Not only does the young groom have ties with the Russian mob, but also with a group of wealthy men known as "The Alibi Club". Unfortunately, Estes knows all too well about these Palm Beach playboys; one of them is her ex-fiancé who, thanks to Estes' alibi, got away with rape and murder, and she's determined not to make the same mistake twice.

Hoag creates a memorable cast of characters, all of whom harbor secrets and scars. As Estes struggles to find Irina's killer, she is constantly battling with the traumas of her past: cases gone wrong, clients she's let down, and mistakes in judgment. Her regrets of the past taint her decisions in the present, making her a fascinating, yet flawed protagonist.

Instead of using action and violence, Hoag uses characters to raise the stakes and heighten the suspense. The Russian mob boss, the ex-fiancé, and the current love interest in Estes' life all create tension just by being in the room, without pulling a gun or making a sudden move. While the actual whodunit might have been slightly predictable, the story and suspense kept me reading, and the climax was so gripping and exciting, that I had to read it twice.

--Dana Kaye

ALL-IN

Pete Hautman

2007

Simon and Schuster

Denn Doyle first appeared in NO LIMIT, a teenager with an uncanny ability to play poker. After winning a major game he takes his stake to Vegas and starts to play in the big leagues. Unfortunately his skills have rubbed a few people the wrong way and someone has plotted to drain his bankroll and leave him broke. Denn's only chance is to get into a Million Dollar tournament, but first he needs to rustle up ten grand to enter.

The sheer joy of poker is enough reason to read this book, though it is wonderful on many levels. Watching Denn struggle with becoming an adult and dealing with the problems facing him is captivating. Hautman is magic with his writing and the spell he casts with ALL -IN is a powerful one. This is a great book, and don't let the young adult status keep you away from this great read.

Jon Jordan

AMBER KNIGHT

Katherine John

2007

Accent Press

In "Amber Knight", Katherine John has crafted a tale that skillfully blends the past with the present, and history with fable and fiction. Based on medieval Prussian history, this thriller begins in 1232, with the creation of the Knight during a pitched battle near Elblag.

Fast forward to 1945, and the last days of WWII. The Nazis, at least many of those stationed in Poland, know the end is near, and are trying to escape with their lives while holding on to as many treasures as they can grasp. The Amber Knight is sent to Berlin, from Hitler's Wolfschanze in Rastenburg. Or is it?

And now fast forward to today, when a mysterious group claims to be ready to auction the Knight to the highest bidder. Enter Adam Salen, the American director of a museum trust, who's escaped to Gdansk to lick his wounds from a failed marriage.

Invited to participate in the auction, Adam wants to first verify the relic's authenticity, and that's when the trouble begins.

Someone wants to kill him. Or maybe it's his colleague, Magdalena, whose life is in danger. And maybe it's just the Russian Mafia, looking to settle a score against Magdalena's rascally estranged husband. Strange and terrifying circumstances make even stranger allies, as the action heats up and the bodies pile up.

Adam Salen is a likeable protagonist, the plot is wonderfully twisty, and the pace is unrelenting. I'm very happy to have discovered Katherine John, and looked forward to reading more of her work.

Rae Helmsworth

AMMUNITION

Ken Bruen

2007

St. Martin's Minotaur

In the beginning of this rambling novel, a contract killer shoots maverick inspector Brant in the back while he's drinking in a pub. Everyone is surprised it hasn't happened many times before. The question is who ordered the hit and why, of the many enemies Brant made over the years conducting his unusual type of policing in southeast London.

The novel includes portrayals of the various police and their reactions to the shooting, from wondering why it hadn't taken place before to glee as Brant holds on to life in the hospital, ornery as ever. And it is obvious that another attempt will be made on his life. But, of course, with Brant you had better succeed the first time—or else.

This reviewer's reaction to the novel is ambivalent. The writing is interesting, characterizations poignant. Yet the story is confusing, except for the main theme of the shooting and Brant's reaction to it. But the other players and their stories are less meaningful, and, more important, perplexing, at least to me.

Theodore Feit

BABY CRIMES

Randall Hicks

Sep 2007

Wordslinger

Attorney and tennis pro Toby Dillon returns in this sequel to last year's amazing debut THE BABY GAME. Dillon is a wonderful character and this is a terrific series.

BABY CRIMES has Dillon stepping to help the family of one of his students. Her parents bypassed the legal adoption methods and have decided before telling her she is adopted to make sure that their daughter is legally theirs. The work Dillon does to track down the birth mother and father ruffles a few feathers and Toby finds himself at odds with a local mobster. Quick thinking is the only thing that might keep him around long enough to play tennis again.

Layered plotting and wonderful back story round this book out and help produce a truly wonderful novel. Hicks has a love of what he is writing that shows on every page. His use of settings also creates a wonderful mood through out the book. He has a very Ross MacDonald feel to his writing. I liked this book even better than BABY GAMES and Hicks is on my must read list.
Jon Jordan

THE BIG O

Declan Burke

2007

Hags Head Press

THE BIG O.

It takes some big cajones for a writer to slap a title like that on a piece of crime fiction. With Declan Burke, there is no lack on the cajones department. For those that have partaken in Burke's EIGHT BALL BOGIE, this book is utterly different. Burke has grown a writer and THE BIG O is everything fans of dark, fast, tightly woven crime fiction could want. As related in an interview with The Critical Mick, Burke had been challenged by then girlfriend (now wife) who was disgusted with chick lit. "Hey," she asked him. "Why don't you write about a 30-something gal who can't get married and likes to rob banks?" And that is exactly what Burke did.

What does a girl do when her sociopathic ex getting out of prison? And let's say that ex inadvertently left in her hands tools that she has put to 'good' use: a 44., a Ducati bike and sixty thousand bucks.

With helmet on head and .44 in hand, Karen robs from the rich and keeps the money. It keeps her and her beloved Anna safe and away from psycho ex-con, Rossi. Ray, a new man her life, kind of understands, even if he is on a bit edge. He met her while staring down the barrel of the 44. during her last escapade. Ray is trying to walk away from his own criminal life. Maybe getting involved with a woman armed with a high caliber weapon isn't the way to accomplish this.

Cupid has a dark sense of humor.

Karen is ultimately the epicenter from which the other characters in this express trip to hell emanate. Karen is friends with Madge who is the ex of Karen's lascivious boss, Frank who has hired someone to kidnap Madge for insurance money. That kidnapper? The reluctant Ray.

What could be an overly complicated and confusing book is well structured and well paced. By using clearly marked narrative separation, Burke skillfully let's the reader know what is going on with the entire cast, event by event. He does this seamlessly and with mordant humor. As each scene unfolds, tension mounts and hilarity ensues. And guess as the reader might, there is no way to predict how the finale will unfold. Two thumbs up, Mr. Burke. Listen to what your wife tells you and all will be well.

Jennifer Jordan

BLOOD AND CIRCUSES

Kerry Greenwood

2007

Poisoned Pen Press

This novel is the 11th (although the sixth written, in chronological terms) of this charming series to be published in the United States by PPP. The indomitable Phryne Fisher is asked to investigate strange happenings at Farrell's Circus. Accidents, a murder and other events have stalked the enterprise, with attendance down and money lost. Meanwhile, one of the troupe is murdered in a rooming house bringing the police into play.

Phryne goes into deep cover, joining the circus as bareback horse rider to solve the mystery in her customary unflappable manner. While she undertook this caper because she was bored, the adventure keeps the reader wholly interested.

Theodore Feit

BONE RATTLER

Eliot Pattison

2007

Carroll & Graf

The comparisons to James Fenimore Cooper will be inevitable with Eliot Pattison's new release, Bone Rattler. Designed as a series there's plenty of action in this densely packed first novel to make one wonder how Mr. Pattison will top himself. With Scotland up in arms against England, Duncan McCallum, has been exiled to America for innocently harboring his Scots rabble rousing uncle. While on the prison ship, bound there, some of the men Duncan's befriended are murdered. They have left him vague and cryptic warnings of some sinister reason as to why these particular prisoners are headed for the vast wilds of the interior of America. Half the prisoners are killers, the other half are more than familiar with death and diseased bodies. McCallum, for example, is just short of being a medical doctor. These men, some actual grave robbers, know the human body enough to distinguish its many ways of dying. Ahead lies the Ramsey Estate/Co. to which Duncan has been indentured. There's a mysterious beauty, Ramsey's daughter, naturally, a mysterious British military officer, a mysterious English Vicar and shifting rivalries between the Indians, the Scots, the British and the French. It's a lot to take on. Pattison's Duncan McCallum seems up to the task. For the reader there's a lot to look forward to. Bone Rattler is certainly different from the Inspector

Shan books in many ways but if you enjoyed Skull Mantra and Bone Mountain and Water Touching Stone you'll likely find some philosophical similarities beyond Mr. Pattison's writing style and will also enjoy Bone Rattler and the novels to follow.

Dave Biemann

BURIED

Mark Billingham

Aug 2007

Harper Collins

With each new addition to his DI Tom Thorne canon, Mark Billingham's brilliance as a writer of first-rate crime novels becomes ever more apparent. In BURIED, the sixth in series, Thorne finds himself on loan to the Kidnap Unit. This is not necessarily something that sits well at first with the DI, who best applies his skills to cases that actually have bodies as the starting point. This case involves the strange disappearance and possible kidnapping of Luke Mullen, the well-behaved and usually reliable sixteen year old son of ex-DCI Tony Mullen. The teenager was last seen getting into a car with an unidentified older woman and, to complicate matters further, there's been no ransom demand. This raises the question... was this voluntary or is something sinister behind his disappearance? The investigation and growing concern for the young man's safety takes on increased urgency once the videotape showing the boy arrives. Luke's alive... but for how much longer? The time before a body is found may be running out.

When Luke's father is questioned by Thorne and his new partner DI Louise Porter about criminals and villains the former DCI helped put away or ones who may have threatened him in the past, the list Tony Mullen compiles has several curious omissions, including the prime suspect in an unsolved murder case. Thorne and Porter wonder if the extreme stress of the situation has caused the father to simply forget the man's name, or is he perhaps hiding something? When the kidnapper shockingly demonstrates that he is not afraid to kill, Tom Thorne finds himself and his colleagues without the luxury of time as they desperately dig to unearth secrets buried deep in the past.

Billingham's formidable plotting skills, powerful writing, and fully fleshed-out characters make BURIED not only one of the strongest entries in this impressive procedural series, but also a definite Do-Not-Miss. Run, don't walk to your favorite bookseller.

Annie Chernow

THE CHAINSAW BALLET

Thomas J. Keevers

2007

Five Star

The cover grabbed my attention, it stood out of the review pile and drew me to it. I opened the book with the intention of a quick glance to see what it was about. Three and half hours later I was finishing the book. I guess you could say this book not only grabbed my attention, it held it, manipulated it and controlled it.

Mike Duncavan is a classic PI, former homicide dick turned private. He's been hired to look into the death of business partners by an insurance company who would rather not payout two million dollars if they don't have to. Mike's investigation turns up Serbian mob ties, illegal slave trade and crooked cops. Will he uncover the truth before he becomes another performer in THE CHAINSAW BALLET?

Keevers writes a damn fine gritty PI story. He knows the stomping grounds and it comes through in the writing. This was a terrific book.

Jon

CHICAGO BLUES

edited by Libby Fischer Hellmann

October 2007

Bleak House Books

The Windy City winds through the hearts of all who've lived there. CHICAGO BLUES captures a tempo that doesn't adhere to the four/sixteen of my long ago music lessons. It unfolds with a life all of its own, like the music once played at Theresa's. The twenty one authors who make up this anthology all bring their own beat, play their own song and the result is Chicago with all of the warts, corruption, murder and mayhem one expects from Chi-Town.

Hellmann has assembled an impressive group of stories, an amazing list of authors. From acknowledged "greats" Paretsky and Kaminsky come a pair of stories about misplaced justice and back room poker. Kevin Guilfoile makes me yearn for a piece of vinyl I know never was. Kris Nelscott tells a story of growing up too fast. D.C. Brod tells the story of one Cub's fan, even more conflicted than most. Max Allan Collins brings us a Heller tale and J.A. Konrath serves up the Jack.

You'll drive the Ryan, shop the million dollar mile, try like hell to escape the detour on Wacker. You'll visit cops on the take and mobsters on the make. You'll see the back rooms of bars and the shady promise of "The Crossroads".

This anthology plays the blues, Chicago style. Every rift unexpected and yet playing into the whole. And for the anchor we have the indomitable Barb D'Amato. 18 pages of brilliance, a low so low you need to revel in the grime. True blues brings out a feeling. Pain can be beautiful. Pain can be addictive. Pain sings better than any other emotion when given the right voice.

CHICAGO BLUES is Southside. Something found nowhere else that you'll come back to again and again.

Ruth Jordan

THE CHRYSALIS

Heather Terrell

2007

Ballantine Books

Terrell has clearly done her research for this solid debut novel about Holocaust survivors attempting to reclaim their artwork which was stolen by the Nazi's during World War II. *The Chrysalis* is told through three timelines; the most predominant one being New York, present day. Attorney Mara Coyne is in spitting distance of making partner and her new client, one that could easily make or break her promotion, is an auction house accused of selling a painting which had been stolen from Hilda Baum's father, a Holocaust victim. While there is plenty of legal precedent for her client to win the case, Coyne soon discovers that the documentation doesn't reveal the whole story and she might be advocating the wrong side.

The other timelines, 1940's Amsterdam and 17th century Netherlands, provide texture for the main plot, giving both history and personification to the painting in question. Coyne's storyline is intriguing enough to stand on its own, but the background given in these sections makes the painting feel more important and raises the stakes for readers.

Because the book is heavy on information and light on action, it's a slower read that could frustrate some thriller fans.

Personally, I enjoyed the slower pace and learning about the history and legal issues surrounding this seldom discussed topic. This is Terrell's first novel and I am confident that she can only get better.

--Dana Kaye

CIRCLE OF ASSASSINS

Steven Rigolosi

2007

Ransom Note Press

From a Manhattan Upper West Side community newspaper ad section: "Every day we are brutalized by those who hurt us, take advantage of us, steal what is ours, mistreat our loved ones, destroy our property, terrorize us psychologically, criticize and condemn us, or trample our self-respect. Enough is enough. It's time to turn the tables. Write to A % Box 270. (For entertainment purposes only.)"

Clever plot! Think "Strangers on a Train." In that story there were two strangers who met. In this book there are five strangers who never meet. From the responses, A selects four other circle members--B, C, D and E. We read the letters, just as A does. Each of the letter writers has a distinct voice, giving us a good picture of their personality, and, from their descriptions, of the people who are making their lives miserable. In separate chapters, the intended victims are given equal time with their statements, so we come to know them, too. A assigns B, C, D and E the name and information about the victim they are to

kill, with specific instructions about not leaving any evidence behind. Each proceeds to carry out the assignment. How people who have never murdered before try to do it is fascinating.

A detective becomes involved in one of the deaths, and starts investigating. But how can he ever find the murderer when there is no relationship with the victim? Do the circle of assassins get away with murder? Is the circle doing the world a favor, or just each other? Great double twist ending.

Gay Tolti Kinman

CITY OF FIRE

Robert Ellis

June 2007

St. Martin's Minotaur

Five years earlier, Lena Gamble discovered her musician brother's dead body in his car in a Los Angeles street while she was on patrol. Now a detective with the elite Robbery Homicide Division, she is part of a hunt for a serial killer. Somehow, along the way her brother's murder crops up as his friend and co-lyricist is found murdered, the scene reflecting the MO of the serial killer. But something doesn't ring true.

In a nutshell, the hunt is on for the serial killer and the chase is on to unravel the mystery surrounding the murder of the two musicians. Lena pursues both with a determined effort. And she proceeds until the plot takes an unexpected turn to reveal the truth. An excellent read.

Theodore Feit

THE CLIFF HOUSE STRANGLER

Shirley Tallman

2007

St. Martin's Minotaur

The third entry in the Sarah Woolson mysteries, "The Cliff House Strangler" is an entertaining, old-fashioned whodunit. The setting is 19th-century San Francisco, and Sara Woolson, an attorney, has set up her own practice – pretty daring for one of the rare female lawyers of the era.

Invited to attend a séance at the Cliff House, overlooking the Pacific, Sarah and her friend Robert Campbell arrive on a dark and stormy night to discover quite a cast of characters assembled: a politician, a cop, an upstanding citizen – and their wives. The soothsayer, mysterious Madame Karpova, is just about to get things started when trouble arrives in the form of dastardly Damian Moss. He's a reporter for the local gossip rag, and maliciously delighted to have barged in on so many notable pillars of San Francisco society – especially since he has dirt on every single one of them, and is more than anxious to share it. So, when the lights go out, it's no surprise when they come back on that Damian has been murdered.

In the best tradition of the locked room mystery, Sarah must find out what happened. Not so much because she cares that he's dead, but because somehow Damian Moss's murder has been the catalyst for a dizzying series of events that have drawn in not just Sarah, but her family and her colleagues. There's murder and blackmail, deceit and corruption. And Sarah has to fight to find the truth.

Shirley Tallman intrigues and delights with this fast-paced story, and the world she's created for Sarah Woolson is one I'll want to visit again.

Rae Helmsworth

CODE BLACK

Philip Donlay

Oct 07

Ibooks (distributed by Simon and Schuster)

With little preamble, Philip Donlay's *Code Black* launches the reader into a pilot's (not to mention a passenger's) worst nightmare. I guess, then, that the mid-air collision which opens this thriller is doubly nightmarish for Donovan Nash: he's a passenger on board. He's also a pilot, and knows just how bad things really are.

This is no Doris Day movie. The wreckage and carnage from the collision are devastating; there appears to be no hope for survival. But seeing as how we're barely 30 pages into the book, still airborne yet limping, and that this is Donovan Nash, after all, there can be little doubt that all is not lost.

Meanwhile, on the ground, Dr. Lauren McKenna - now Donovan's fiancée - is having a heck of a time convincing the people in charge that there even is a problem, let alone getting them to agree to help save the doomed flight. But, amid all the bureaucracy, heightened security and paranoia, help does come, and from the most unlikely of sources.

There's plenty of intrigue, suspense, in-fighting, back-biting, hidden agendas and derring-do to keep you reading, and turning, the pages well into the night. Once again, Donlay takes us on a great ride. When I reviewed *Category Five* last year, I

cautioned against reading that book on the beach. With *Code Black*... ah, what the hell - take it along on your next flight. And buckle up.

Gary Shulze of *Once Upon a Crime*

THE COLLABORATOR OF BETHLEHEM

Matt Beynon Rees

2007

Soho Crime

In this first in a planned series, we are introduced to Omar Yussef. Omar is a good man. An honorable family man and doting grandfather. He is a pragmatic and patient Palestinian Arab man, who prides himself on being an "independent thinker." And though he can show himself at times to be someone with a rather short fuse and a wicked tongue, that on occasion draws potentially dangerous attention to himself, Omar's also a very human and humane being whose sense of justice and righteousness transcends place and time.

Omar Yussef is at present employed as a teacher in the United Nations School for Girls located in a Palestinian refugee camp outside the city of Bethlehem. He is a dedicated teacher concerned not only about his current young charges and what the future holds for them, but he's also a mentor and trusted friend to many of his former favorite students. When one of those former students, a Christian Bethlehem antiques dealer, George Saba, is arrested by the local police and charged with collaborating with the Israelis, Omar assesses the reality of the situation and concludes that no one is really going to try very hard to prove the innocence of Saba from these so-called crimes, and Omar himself undertakes a search for the truth. Then, when another student of his, Dima, a young woman now married to a suspected Martyr's Brigade terrorist is found murdered, Omar uncovers possible evidence linking the accusations against Saba with the brutal killing and rape of Dima Abdel Rahman. For the most part, the characters in *COLLABORATOR* are presented as complex, three-dimensional people who could easily step off the page, particularly the members of Yussef's immediate family and his police chief friend, Khamis Zeydan. And while the actual sleuthing on Omar's part is definitely that of an amateur, he successfully employs all his personal skills as an astute observer and student of human nature. The setting is claustrophobic... with the action in places we only may know from headlines. Featured are towns that oftentimes are under siege either from without – the story opens with retaliatory shelling of George Saba's Bethlehem house by the Israelis—or, more often, from within—as local gunmen terrorize the populace by wielding Kalashnikovs in running battles to retain power in the streets.

First time mystery author, Matt Beynon Rees, who has covered the Israelis and Palestinians for both *Time* and *Newsweek* magazines, and for *The Scotsman*, is himself an astute observer and reporter of human behavior. He is now a full-time author whose second entry in this series is now completed. In *COLLABORATOR*, the voices we hear have an authenticity which must come from the time Rees has spent in the homes of both Palestinians and Israelis. In interviews he has said that he chose to write his stories as mystery fiction because he finds it a more effective medium for exploring cultures and society, and for exploring the nuanced way in which both gunmen and corrupt politicians actually operate. For a novel dealing with such volatile politics and issues, it is remarkably well-balanced.

What came as somewhat of a surprise to this reviewer was that this exceptional novel may, in the end, leave other readers too with not only a satisfying conclusion to the mystery story, but also with a somewhat hopeful feeling. After all, knowing that Omar Yussef is actually a fictionalization of a real person—an admired acquaintance of the author—one can only hope that there are other independent thinkers like Omar inhabiting that part of the world... individuals who are willing to take risks to try to end the lawlessness and corruption that preys on their society. This is my favorite book, so far, in 2007.

Annie Chernow

THE CRITIC

Peter May

Nov 2007

Poisoned Pen Press

In a small vineyard in the southwest of France, there is a seasonal spring which is used to irrigate the fields of grapes. A legend tells the story of two lovers from rival families, who met at the spring in defiance of their elders, and who eventually took their own lives when they could not plan a future together. In more modern times, this small corner has become a favorite spot for lovers to meet and plan together for happily ever after. A romantic evening is abruptly interrupted when two young people find a bloated body hanging from a crude cross, wearing the robes of a local ceremonial trade organization. The autopsy reveals the nauseating news that before its discovery, the body had been soaked in wine!

Readers met Enzo McLeod in May's prior book *EXTRAORDINARY PEOPLE*. McLeod is a forensics expert and is working on using the most up to date investigative techniques to solve a group of unsolved murders publicized in a recent book written by a well known journalist. In this entry, May dishes up the entertaining combination he used in the prior novel – a group of eager assistants to McLeod, a puzzle to be solved, and a simmering antagonism in his relationship with law enforcement and officialdom.

The dead body hanging in the tree was a prominent wine critic, whose remarks in an opinion column could make or break the financial health of a winery. McLeod, with the assistance of the dead man's daughter, locates his computer and confronts a mysterious type of coding system for upcoming reviews of the wines of the region in France where he died. Since an unfavorable review could mean significant financial loss, there is potential for ample motive for murder hiding in the codes. Was anyone else able to decipher it? When other dead bodies are found, all saturated in the same sickening manner as the body of the critic, McLeod finally gains the grudging cooperation of local law enforcement.

Long established but not forgotten grudges will eventually unmask the murderer. McLeod is a delightful protagonist – stubborn, insightful, occasionally foolhardy, totally at odds in his relationships with the women in his life, and a very pleasant addition to current suspense fiction.

Woodstock

CROSSING MIDNIGHT: CUT HERE

Mike Carey

2007

Vertigo/DC Comics

Another new series from Vertigo being collected in it's first volume, CROSSING MIDNIGHT showcases just why Mike Carey is so good at what he does.

A blend of magic and folklore are the basis for this tale of twins in Nagasaki Japan. Born on either side of midnight they are from birth destined to be dancing between our world and a world governed by supernatural forces.

Toshi discovers early in her young life that she cannot be cut or pierced by any sharp object. As she grows into her teens Aratsu, the lord of knives comes for her, leaving her little choice but to go and become his disciple and student. As Toshi reluctantly agrees so as to save her family, her brother Kai is working from the other end trying to discover just why this is happening and how it can be stopped.

This book is billed as a fairy tale for horror fans and I think that sums it up pretty perfectly. It is a fascinating tale and it is obvious that Carey has done his homework on the lore of Japan. This is captivating and enchanting and thoroughly fresh and enjoyable. I would urge everyone to give this a go.

Jon Jordan

CUT TO THE BONE

Shane Gericke

2007

Pinnacle Books

Shane Gericke has brought us the second in his series about Detectives Emily Thompson and Martin Benedetti -- and I'm so glad he did! When the two detectives are enjoying a mud bath at a local spa, homicide rears its ugly head. Fighting the fear and injuries left over from her last big case (BLOWN AWAY, 2006), Emily is brought into the case. But it turns out the killer -- the Executioner -- is not done. More deaths follow the first, until the police and the locals fear what he might have in store for the rest of them. Emily is a very likable character, as is her lover, Benedetti, and their friends on the police force. The cops are intelligent and competent, and it's nice to read a book where they are not the bad guys! Gericke's writing is smooth and easy to read, and his characters well drawn.

The book also becomes a discussion about capital punishment and what it means for our country and our society, but in a way that is not at all preachy or one-sided. I am a person who is definitely on one side of the issue, but the story was able to get me thinking about the opposite view, as well. CUT TO THE BONE is a darker read than I usually enjoy, but I couldn't put the book down and enjoyed every scene. I look forward to Gericke's next addition to the series!

Judy Clemens

CUTTHROAT

Steve Brewer

2007

Bleak House

Solomon Gage is the man I want watching my back. Steve Brewer writes great characters and I love the lead in CUTTHROAT. Gage works for the uber-rich Dominick Sheffield as a troubleshooter. Meaning he tries to keep his boss and his boss's reputation clean. Not so easy to do when the kids don't mind breaking laws to get what they want, and don't mind going global to do it. Of course Sheffield is convinced his kids are angels which makes Gage's life that much harder when mercenaries show up from Africa.

I would not only say you should buckle up before getting in this indie car of a book, I'd suggest wearing a five point harness, this book moves fast and is relentless. Great action and wonderful climax.

Brewer delivers on every level.

Jon

DEAD CONNECTION

Alafair Burke

2007

Henry Holt & Co. (US)

Orion (UK)

The murder of two women, exactly one year apart, both of whom were connected to a popular online dating site, is enough to get the attention of Flann McIlroy, a homicide detective with a reputation as an eccentric, publicity-seeking cop. McIlroy in turn brings in rookie Detective Ellie Hatcher on special assignment to the NYPD homicide task force. Ellie's job? To enter the high-tech world of stolen identities and on-line dating, where no one is who he or she claims to be. Anonymity, safety and privacy are what are promised, but these turn out to be the killer's protection, not that of the women who are his victims. The stakes are raised when another woman – like the others, a thirty-something Manhattan resident – is killed.

This is an intricately plotted and well-written novel, and the story line certainly a timely one. The author, who has written three books in the Samantha Kincaid series involving a Manhattan ADA, has created another gutsy female protagonist in Ellie, whose life has been shaped by the death of her Wichita, Kansas cop father when she was 14 years old, dead--the police department says--by his own hand in the aftermath of his failure to track down a serial killer sought for the murder of at least eight young women, such finding of suicide making her mother ineligible to receive any death benefits – life insurance or pension. Ellie is determined to vindicate her father and prove that he was another victim of the same serial killer he tried to capture, now finally in prison. One would assume this will be the subject of the next book in this anticipated series, which I will happily look forward to reading. (And I loved that Dave Robicheaux, the estimable fictional creation of the author's father, James Lee Burke, makes the briefest of cameo appearances, as does Laura Lippman by way of mention of one of her most recent books.)

Gloria Feit

DEAD COPY

Kit Frazier

2007

Midnight Ink

This book had me laughing from the first sentence. It's rare to find a book that entertains completely through the entire read, but this is one of them. Frazier's protagonist, Cauley MacKinnon is a reporter stuck writing obituaries, and she's dying to get out out of it. (sorry) But the job comes in handy when her FBI agent sort-of boyfriend, Tom Logan, comes calling with a request for a report of a faked death. Cauley is creeped out by the whole thing, but will do it for the sake of her sort-of boyfriend and the ultimate good of humanity. When the fake dead guy ends up not so fake, the whole thing explodes into an all-out mess involving recording studios, power-hungry police (and good ones, too!), love at first sight, and lots more to keep the story running. I enjoyed this book from beginning to end, and found Cauley to be a smart, interesting, and likable character. Not at all a dumb blonde, even though she's pretty and young, and she's got me cheering for her relationship with Logan. A fun, quick read for the summer -- or anytime!

Judy Clemens

DEAD MONEY

Rudy Stegemoeller

2007

Midnight Ink

As pointed out in these pages before, "poker and the mystery writer have a long history together." (Thanks, Ruth.) With his debut novel, DEAD MONEY, Rudy Stegemoeller has extended that long and proud history one more step.

Mark Newcomb is a public defender, married to a New York City police officer. He is also a talented amateur poker player. Despite his amateur status, Mark is not dead money playing with the pros at the \$10,000 buy-in Texas Hold'em tournament at the Humpback Casino in Massachussetts. Although his wife is irked that the tournament makes him miss her cousin's bachelor party, Mark couldn't be happier as he advances through the early stages of the tournament – and then he comes across the dead body of one of the best of the players.

In quick progression, there arise a number of other obstacles to concentrated play. Mark explains it to his wife: "Let's summarize the situation. I'm one of sixty surviving players competing for a million-dollar prize in a tournament. I have a police captain playing cat and mouse with me in a real live murder case. I have friends who are active suspects who need my help. I

have a twelve-year-old truant on my hands. I have a sociopathic killer threatening to bury me alive. And your greatest worry is that I'm going to miss your cousin's party?"

Mark decides to continue in the tournament, and to provide help to the police captain. We cheer his progress in the two seemingly opposing endeavors, while twists and turns abound in both, until the author brings us to a surprising yet satisfying conclusion.

Although I know absolutely nothing about tournament poker, I found the who-won-it just as exciting as the who-done-it. You do not have to be a professional player, or even a talented amateur, to enjoy this fine read.

David Chernow

DEATH MESSAGE

Mark Billingham

2007

Little Brown (UK)

It's no surprise that Mark Billingham is becoming more and more popular with each book. His writing keeps getting better and better. His creation of DI Thorne is a gift to all mystery readers and fans of the crime fiction genre. Grumbly, dedicated and all too human Thorne is the perfect character.

DEATH MESSAGE opens with Thorne getting a photo via his cellphone, an unmistakable image of a dead man. As the techies take away his phone and try to determine what they can it soon becomes apparent to Thorne that this is just the beginning of a bigger problem. A villain of the mad dog variety was put away by Thorne years ago and while inside he's been plotting revenge. Thorne has to stop him before the full plan comes to fruition and leaves him out of the game permanently.

Once again Mark Billingham has engulfed me with a book and loose track of everything else going on around me. A building suspense that pulls like a water ski rope this book moves fast and faster. And again Billingham brings it all to a smashing climax. Billingham is the first word out of my mouth when people ask who they should read, read this and you'll know why.

Jon Jordan

DEATH OF A MURDERER

Rupert Thomson

2007

Alfred A. Knopf

This is Englishman Rupert Thomson's eighth novel. Each novel has been a psychological thriller using characters thrust into very unusual circumstances. As a result, they contemplate their thoughts about violence, both within themselves and among society at large.

A female serial sex murderer, whose crimes were very extraordinarily gruesome and the details were widely publicized during her court case, has finally died of natural causes after decades in prison. The public is still fascinated by her and the police must guard her body from the prying public until her cremation.

Billy Tyler, an underachieving, unambitious career policeman, has been assigned the task of guarding her body overnight in the morgue to ensure that nothing happens. As he sits in the lonely quiet with the body of the notorious killer so close by, he reviews the well known details of her crimes in his head. He thinks about scenarios that are consistent with the known facts and comes up with ideas as to why she might have committed such heinous crimes. Perhaps she wasn't as ghoulish as everyone thinks and was driven to these acts by factors beyond her control.

This leads Billy to review his own life. He is reminded of a number of incidents with criminals during his police career that could be viewed as "over the top" violence. And then he begins reviewing his failing relationship with his wife and begins to question the life he has led.

Thomson is a writer with a very dark vision that loves to analyze the human psyche and expose each person's moral complexity when he/she is placed in highly unusual circumstances.

If you love a complex, multi-layered novel, with a beautiful writing style, I strongly urge you to read this novel.

Joseph Czech

THE DEVIL YOU KNOW

Mike Carey

2007

Warner Books

The debut novel for writer Mike Carey whose previous work includes writing Hellblazer and Lucifer for Vertigo comics is an accomplished and entertaining read. Set in a London that's just a little different than the one we know. In Carey's London the dead aren't so quick to leave this plane and as a result people like Felix Castor are needed to help them along.

Castor is a professional exorcist, and as you might imagine it's not a typical day job. In *THE DEVIL YOU KNOW* Castor is hired to remove a spirit from an archive that has been getting more and more aggressive. It's the first job he's taken in a while as he is starting to have doubts about the consequences of what he does. As he starts the work of finding out who the spirit is and why they are there he uncovers some ugly things. He also draws the unwanted attention of some criminal types who want him to stop. Typically Castor's job is unpredictable and sometimes dangerous, but with the mix of the very real living people involved this could be a case that finally stops him.

Carey writes with a panache that really suits the character of Felix Castor. Castor is no super heroic figure, but he's smart and resourceful and therefore believable. The plotting is top notch as Carey draws you into his world and opens the doors a little at a time to let you see what's really going on. This is the perfect blend of supernatural suspense and mystery and I can't wait to read more.

Jon Jordan

DMZ Volume 2: BODY OF A JOURNALIST

Brian Wood

2007

Vertigo/DC Comics

DMZ is another genius creation from Vertigo, the DC Comics adult imprint. The premise behind the series is that the US of A is in a civil war and Manhattan is De-Militarized Zone, a DMZ. Matt Roth is an aspiring journalist who wants to piss off his old man and goes into the DMZ as a photographer for a more famous reporter. An ambush occurs and Matt is on his own and clueless how to survive. Before long he encounters people in the DMZ who are living a new existence, former med students acting as doctors, former warriors acting as protectors of the zoo, people have found a way to survive. With Manhattan split into different factions run by different outfits Matt soon learns that what he has been hearing on the news isn't the whole story and sets out to tell the truth.

In *BODY OF A JOURNALIST* Matt is captured by the New America forces and learns that the reporter he was shot down with is alive and that they want to trade him to the government for certain concessions. As these things tend to go it turns out everyone is lying and has their own agenda, with Matt Roth in the middle. By the end of this story arc Matt has some hard decisions to make and they will definitely have an effect on his life.

This brilliant series uses fiction to say things that can be said of our own government and media. How much is hidden or distorted for the greater good? DMZ also gives voice to our human ability to rise above, to survive and persevere and it shows us that while we breathe, there is hope. What at first looks like a bleak futuristic tale is hiding (and not very obviously) whole other levels. This is a great read and I suggest it to everyone who has ever watched the news or wondered about the governments actions or just plain likes a good story. It's like *Escape From New York* for people who think.

Jon Jordan

THE DROP EDGE OF YONDER

Donis Casey

October 2007

Poisoned Pen Press

Once again Donis Casey takes us to a small Oklahoma town in the early days of the 20th century. Readers of the first two books in these series will recall that Alafair Tucker and her husband Shaw are the loving parents of ten children, living on a farm, and hold positions as respected members of their small community.

One August evening, their daughter Mary is enjoying an evening horseback ride when she and her small group of friends are assaulted by a sniper with a rifle. One young man is shot dead, and Mary and one of the other young women are injured. Both of the injured women incur a type of amnesia as a result of their wounds, and are unable to provide any helpful information as the sheriff begins to investigate. As she struggles to recover from her head wound, Mary is nagged by the persistent idea that her memories of a recent Fourth of July celebration hold important clues and a conversation with the young people who gathered to visit, flirt, and tease each other while they enjoyed post parade treats of ice cream and lemonade is a key to providing the identity of her attacker.

Against the backdrop of a sweltering prairie summer, the small community deals with continued sniper attacks and the frustration of repeated failures to find the killer. Readers of this series will be pleased to see that Alafair is her usual persistent self, and in a violent confrontation near the close of the book she subdues the killer with help with one of her hired men.

Casey's books are a very enjoyable, and indeed, believable combination of historical background and amateur protagonist. As in prior offerings, she layers her narrative with colorful turns of phrase, and provides an after word with mouth watering recipes. And although Alafair's psychic abilities to "tune in" to her subtle knowledge of personalities and events are a part of the story, there is no "woo-woo" factor here. Instead, Alafair is presented as an insightful, intelligent woman, a strong and loving mother to her children, and a character to look forward to reading about in the future!

Woodstock

EXPOSURE

Kurt Wenzel

2007

Little Brown & Company

The future is here in Los Angeles, as technocrats and anti-techs are pitted against each other, overwhelming the senses with overexposure of advertising and publicity images. The main characters are involved in the movie business—a screenwriter, a motion picture idol, a top agent and others.

Billboards surround the city casting larger than life pictures from every conceivable surface. A Mr. Black and a book called, appropriately enough, the Black Book take up the task of tearing down the technology. Groups of young people take up the challenge, destroying the moving billboards, as they are called. No one knows the true identity of the author, but everyone wants to know, especially the aforementioned agent and a young TV anchor.

Then a female movie star dies of a mysterious disease, followed by the death of the motion picture idol. His best friend, the screen writer, runs amok on drugs and alcohol trying to unravel the secrets. It is a far out book, confusing, as it probably should be because of the plot, encompassing the forces involved: the industry, celebrities, and the complexities involved.
Theodore Feit

EYE OF THE BEHOLDER

David Ellis

2007

G.P. Putnam's Sons

Paul Riley, former Federal prosecutor now the chief assistant county prosecutor, is in charge of a serial murder case in which the perpetrator literally falls into the hands of the police. It is open and shut: The bodies of six mutilated females are found and the murder weapons and forensic evidence are in his basement. Weirdly, each victim was killed in accordance with the lyrics of a song. The murderer was convicted, despite pleading insanity, and eventually executed. But just before he is gassed the convict mouths the words: "I was not alone."

Sixteen years later more murders occur in accordance with the lyrics of the second stanza of the same song. The two cases seem related. By now, Riley has long been in private practice having basked in the glory of the Mansbury Massacre. His main client is the billionaire father of one of the original victims. He enjoys litigation and has built a large law firm. Strange notes start arriving at his office and he is drawn into the investigation both by the police and by the current murderer. Why? What's the connection?

In a suspenseful development in which Riley eventually has to make judgments—based both on knowledge and intuition—he slowly pieces together the mysteries of past and present murders, questioning everything.. He is convinced the original prosecution was justified—but what is missing? Was there an accomplice? In an unusual finish, Riley has to face the ultimate test in this tightly plotted and well-written novel.
Theodore Feit

FABLES Vol. 9: SONS OF THE EMPIRE

Bill Willingham

2007

Vertigo/DC Comics

I need to say up front that I am prejudiced. I love this series and have read and reread all the first 8 volumes. It's my considered opinion that Bill Willingham is a genius on the level with Tolkien and Seuss and Asimov. There have been other stories that re-imagine the classic fables and fairy tales, but this to me is a work of art. For those who don't know that background it sums up like this: All the fables live in another world, each happy in their different kingdoms. A powerful force comes and starts to take over and a war begins. As a last resort the fables band together and flee to our world founding a small town within New York called Fabletown. There's more to it, but that's enough to get you going.

In this latest installment titled SONS OF THE EMPIRE we see some Father/Son relationships explored. Bigby Wolf (The Big Bad) and his father the North Wind and Pinocchio and his father Geppetto. It explores family and commitment. We also get a look at a typical day in the life of Rapunsel. While there is no earth shattering changes in the series here it is a wonderful filling out of characters and adds to the whole new mythology that Willingham has created.

The artwork is amazing and fits the stories beautifully. Various artists contributed here and they are all spot on.

This is honestly one of my very favorite series right now, and this is not a bad place to jump in and see if you too will become enraptured by this. All the volumes are available so there is no fear of not being able to get the earlier ones. If you love stories, if you love reading, you should really love this.

Jon Jordan

FINAL PAYMENT

Steven F. Havill

2007

Thomas Dunne Books/St. Martin's Press

Posadas County Undersheriff Estelle Reyes-Guzman knows that her weekend is going to be very busy. The first Posadas County Hundred Mile Bicycle Race kicks off, with literally hundreds of bikers pedaling like crazy across some very rugged terrain. Just as high on her priority list is the first piano recital of her seven-year-old son, who has quite a talent.

It doesn't help matters when it is brought to her attention that someone has been flying Jerry Turner's big Cessna without him knowing about it. The odd part is that the plane has been returned, with the gasoline replaced. What joy rider would do that? Whoever it is knows how to fly, because they've flown it in and out at night, which is a little bit tricky.

There are international implications, and the tension builds as Estelle figures out who took the plane and the possible ramifications caused by family connections. Of course there is a murder, and that only makes Estelle's life almost infinitely more complicated.

Steven Havill has done something unusual: he started this series with one protagonist (then sheriff Bill Gastner) and has managed to keep it going while making the transition to another protagonist (Estelle). FINAL PAYMENT is a very good police procedural, with overtones of a really good thriller. I think Havill is a seriously underrated mystery writer, and FINAL PAYMENT proves it once again, at least in my mind.

P.J. Coldren

THE FOLLOWER

Jason Starr

Aug 2007

St. Martin's Minotaur

Peter Wells has his whole life mapped out. He's come to New York to marry his sweetheart, Katie Porter. We meet him as he starts his new job at an Upper Eastside gym. We get to see the terrific apartment he's bought for him and Katie to start their new lives together. Now all he needs to do is make Katie Porter fall in love with him.

Too bad she has a boyfriend she's ambivalent about. Too bad she doesn't even know Wells has come to town. But Peter's an optimistic kind of guy. He's not about to let the fact Katie hasn't seen him since she was thirteen stop him. He's seen all the Hollywood romances and just knows it will all work out in the end. And boyfriend Andy proves too stubborn to get himself dumped...

Well, Peter's not above a little murder to set things right. After all, he's the great love of Katie's life. She simply doesn't know it yet.

Welcome to Jason Starr's latest effort, THE FOLLOWER, which starts out as *Sex and the City* featuring twenty-something fledgling yuppies and one deluded loser in Peter Wells. Starr paints the New York dating scene in the first third of the book as a rat race encouraging young adults to be self-centered opportunists when it comes to sex. Katie herself wonders if she'd been date raped by Andy or simply didn't say no. That should be your first hint this is a Starr novel.

But if you don't get that, fear not. Wells takes out Andy by appealing to his libido, saying his wife likes to sleep with other guys and tell him about it, then promptly strangling him. It goes downhill from there.

Jason Starr takes the standard chick lit tale and proceeds to bludgeon it to death. By the end of the book, Peter Wells is revealed as a full-fledged monster, and Katie... What happens to Katie is pure Starr. The premise does lack some of the edginess of Starr's previous work, but only in the first third of the book. By the end of the second act, we're back in familiar territory with Wells becoming the type of guy who would scare most of Starr's protags.

Jim Winter

THE FOURTH ORDER

Stephen Frey

2007

Ballantine Books

In *The Fourth Order*, Stephen Frey rises above and beyond the corporate thriller, writing a story of terrorism and the government agencies formed to counteract it. Michael Rose is the chief financial officer of a top energy company in Washington D.C. Not a position that typically deals with terrorists and government agents. But when he plans to execute a

hostile takeover of a company, unaware that the business is a front for US intelligence, he puts everything he loves at risk without even knowing it.

The Fourth Order of Immunity is a small group of agents, licensed by the federal government to kill and torture without prosecution. Their job is to interrupt terrorist attacks by any means necessary, and, because of the hostile takeover, Rose becomes a primary target.

The large cast of characters and wide-ranging settings can be confusing at times, but have faith; it all comes together at the end. Frey uses a surprising amount of character development, particularly for this genre. Rose's wife is killed on her way home from having an affair, and Frey takes the time to explore his emotions and show Rose acting in a very real and humane way. He delivers with all the action and thrills that his readers expect, but he takes his characters to a new level, making them more layered and authentic than ever before.

--Dana Kaye

THE GENESIS CODE

Christopher Forrest

2007

Forge

Looking for something that moves? Christopher Forrest's *The Genesis Code* certainly does. This little thriller has an interesting premise and points out some "Coincidence? I think not! type scientific, mathematic and historical oddities. The story turns on whether or not ancients were able to encode DNA. Forrest's character Joshua Ambergris has solved the problem. A secret society is bent on keeping the information in the DNA code for its own, read profit making, purposes. Ambergris sends his former protégé, Christian Madison and Ambergris's current assistant Grace Nguyen enough seemingly innocuous, though encrypted information to, with time, make them aware that the Genesis Code does exist and is solvable but the bad guys are right on top of them, trying to prevent them from knowing even that the Genesis Code exists. Forrest, a lawyer, has done his genetic homework in this his first novel and it goes a long way in creating a plausibility factor that keeps one reading. Given this researching strength and a way with characters that is a level above most, you should look into *The Genesis Code* and then for Christopher Forrest to improve with each new book. *The Genesis Code* makes for a nice summer, beach read.

Terrific debut

Dave Biemann

THE GOOD GUY

Dean Koontz

2007

Bantam

While sitting in the comfort zone of his friend's bar in his usual inconspicuous spot after work one day [he is a bricklayer], Tim Carrier finds himself mistaken for someone else by the nervous man who sits next to him: mistaken for a man who has agreed to kill someone for hire, a woman whose photo and address the man leaves with him along with an envelope containing what he says is a "\$10,000 down payment." Before Tim has a chance to disabuse him of his incorrect conclusion as to his identity, the man says "Ten Thousand now. The rest when she's gone" and leaves the bar. The strangeness of this encounter is outdone only by the appearance a few minutes later of the man who would appear to be the actual hired killer for whom Tim was mistaken, the latter thinking that Tim is the one who is bringing him the money. Realizing that he must do something quickly, Tim tells him he's had a change of heart and will pay him \$10,000 *not* to kill the woman. This only gets weirder when, after following the hired killer out of the tavern, he discovers that the guy is a cop.

Tim, never an introspective man, indeed a man who 'had retreated to a life of repetitive work, innocent pleasures, and as little reflection as he could manage,' realizes that he must put himself in the middle of these people's lives if he is to prevent the death of a presumably innocent woman. The extent to which he will endanger himself and the inner resources he is able to call upon surprise even him. And he finds himself playing an unexpected role, as suggested by the book's title.

The prolific author of numerous bestsellers, Dean Koontz has produced another rattling good yarn, full of suspense, humor, and memorable characterizations, and makes this unlikely scenario seem perfectly plausible. I should add that the writing took a bit of getting used to, e.g., "Direct, intense, her green gaze seemed to fillet his serried thoughts and to fold them aside like layers of dissected tissue, yet somehow it was an inviting rather than a cold stare" and "As iridescent as a snake's skin, thin ravel of silvery clouds peeled off the face of a molting moon." But the author won me over. The creation of the hired killer, a thoroughly unpleasant man albeit strangely fastidious, one who locks the doors of his car because "this was not an honest age," is a bit over the top as drawn by Mr. Koontz, as is his protagonist as well for that matter. But that's part of the fun, and the author's many fans will be pleased, among which company, I think, I now count myself.

Gloria Feit

GOTHAM CENTRAL: DEAD ROBIN

Greg Rucka/Ed Brubaker
2007
DC Comics

Volume five of the Gotham Central collections has the police of the Major Crimes Unit in Gotham City hunting a killer, a killer who is dressing his victims like Robin the Boy Wonder. With word from on high that Batman is to be stopped at all costs the case is an instant redball. Added to the mix is an onslaught of media attention and a few reporters who may not be playing by the rules.

Rucka is right at home right this police procedural and it seems clear to me that he was a fan of Homicide Life on The Streets. A compelling mystery with solid police work this is satisfying on many levels. More so due to Greg Rucka's uncanny way with characters, he knows these people and writes them that way. He is able to put us inside their heads and see the whole picture, and the fact that he does it with out rambling on is a testament to his skill. With every page you can feel the frustrations and the heartbreaks, the joy and the melancholy.

The art from Kano and Stefano Gaudiano fills this out with a grittiness ant is oh so very fitting. It's kind of like having a movie on paper in your hands. Shadows and light, and the angles that cameras wish they could get.

When I tell people about graphic novels and why they should read them, books like this are the examples I use. Gotham Central should be required reading for all mystery fans, and comics fans alike.

Jon Jordan

GRAVE IMPORTS

Eric Stone
2007
Bleak House

In GRAVE IMPORTS it's impossible not to get caught up in the wave, make that tidal wave that carries through the book. It builds and gains energy and momentum till crashing on the shores of the conclusion.

South east Asia is the arena this game is played in and the game is smuggling and it is not a game for amateurs. Ray Sharp starts what looks to be a typical case investigation but soon learns just how high the stakes are for a ring of criminals working at getting rich plundering antiques.

International intrigue at it's best. Stone is master at creating intense suspense and his pacing is pure precision. GRAVE IMPORTS should be on every reader's watch list. If you don't have time for a vacation just pick up GRAVE IMPORTS and let Stone export you to a whole new world. This is written with a grace and understanding that can only come from one who has been there. Outstanding.

Jon

HEAD GAMES

Craig McDonald
September, 2007
Bleak House Books.

The newest recipe for great fiction? One pulp novelist, one poet, two Hollywood legends, a secret society and a plot scored by Ennio Morricone This is Head Games.

The good the bad and the ugly are all present in Craig McDonald's mystery. Our pulp novelist is Hector Lassiter a man who ran the bulls with Papa but now spends his day morning the death of his daughter one shot at a time.... When Bud Fiske comes to interview the reclusive and talented pulp novelist, he get's more than he bargained for and soon finds himself in a Mexican Grotto with a duffle bag full of history. It seems that someone has found the head of Pancho Villa and everyone wants it. Our young poet crashes through a window and begins the adventure of his life.

Who wants the skull? It seems a shady fraternity (yup, that one) in New haven has their eyes on this head. What better scalp to perform their rituals with than that of the only man to attack the U.S. of A. on it's own soil in the last one hundred years. Of course this means every other east coast fraternity is trying to get there first.

McDonald weaves true history with fiction in an action driven plot like no one since Max Allan Collins. And the action is driven, from Texas to L.A. Our author has promised "Orson" a sit down. It seems that the scenes between Welles and Marlene Dietrich aren't playing as well as they should and given Dietrich's and Hector's shared history he may be able to add some juice to the dialogue.

As we watch events unfold through the eyes of the world weary and the naïve poet, the pursuit of Pancho Villa's head becomes more outrageous in each instance. We find common ground with each of our protagonists but it is the "unit of the two" that makes this story sing a song more powerful than the Santa Anna winds. Hero worship and ennui meet to a point where the reader simply has to see this tale through.

Head Games is a magic carpet ride in a Chevy Bel Air.... The end result is a trip no mystery fan should miss.

Ruth Jordan

THE HISTORY BOOK

Humphrey Hawksley
August 2007
Warner Books

THE HISTORY BOOK bears no resemblance to a run-of-the-mill thriller. Noted BBC journalist and foreign correspondent, Humphrey Hawksley, has created not only an action-packed adventure that will leave you breathless on the edge of your seat, but also a thoughtful and thought-provoking cautionary tale set in a dystopian society of the near future. This is a truly frightening society where global security concerns threaten to ride rough-shod over personal freedoms in a post 9-11 world. Recently released from jail, the sometime burglar, computer hacker, and undercover agent, Kathleen "Kat" Polinski, aided by Cage, her control from Homeland Security's Federal Containment Agency, has a narrow escape from unknown assailants after breaking into the Kazakhstan Embassy in Washington, D.C. There she makes the grisly discovery of the five dead bodies of embassy employees. Several hours later, at home in Georgetown, Kat receives a curiously cryptic, out-of-character message from her idolized older sister asking for her 'help,' but giving no details. Suzy, who calls herself Charlotte since her move abroad after the tragic deaths of both their parents, now works in London for Project Peace – an arm of the Coalition for Peace and Security, a proposed worldwide agreement to secure global energy supplies. Concerned for her sister, Kat rings Suzy's flat. A man answers – one with a distinctly familiar voice, a man she's never trusted: Nate Sayer, a former assistant to her late father. Sayer informs a stunned Kat that her sister has died in an "accident" --shot with a high-powered rifle while attending a concert.

The action moves on to London, now the most security-intense city in this brave new world. And as the chain of events and connections start to unfold, the pace continues to accelerate--reaching break-neck speed. With Kat focused on finding her sister's killers and bringing them to justice, at whatever cost or risk, she relies on every skill and high-tech gadget at her disposal. The closer our feisty heroine comes to solving Suzy's murder, the more disturbing are the truths she uncovers--not only the personal ones about her own family's well-hidden secrets of the past, but also the threats that exist to the world, and particularly to individual freedom when governments act above the law.

This novel plays fair throughout with the reader and all is revealed in good time, except for one important thing. And that is the question that remains unanswered by the author and is left for the reader to ponder. How much personal freedom is each of us willing to sacrifice in order to live in a 'secure' world? Only we, individually, can answer that question. ...Highly recommended.
Annie Chernow

HOOKED

Matt Richtel
2007
12 Books

This novel is written with an intensity and plotting that is unexpected in a debut. It is the story of Nathaniel Idle, a graduate of medical school, with an MD degree, who decides to forgo residency to become a medical journalist. It begins with a bang—literally. Matt is sitting reading in an internet café when he is handed a note warning him to leave immediately because there is danger.

Matt only catches a glimpse of the blonde who handed him the note, but he thinks she looks like a girlfriend who drowned some years before. He runs out of the café and narrowly escapes death when there is an explosion. From that point there are flashes of the past love affair with his girlfriend, a venture capitalist in the technology sector, and strange goings-on, including more explosions, fires and deaths.

The mixture of medical and technological factors heightens the mystery. The writing is fluid, the story intriguing. A very good read.

Theodore Feit

IN SECRET SERVICE

Mitch Silver
2007
Touchstone

This is a late review, but for those of you wanting to hold on to the last days of summer, grab this book find a beach and enjoy. Mitch Silver's plot churning debut was that most wonderful of summer experiences, a fun, furious and fast afternoon in the sun.

When a bank in Ireland writes American Amy Greenberg to come get the contents of her grandfather's safety deposit box she doesn't know what to expect. When she discovers the box wasn't opened by her grandfather at all but by Ian Fleming, well... yea.

A wild and absurd marriage of true history and fiction propels IN SECRET SERVICE forward as Amy tries to return safely home with her bequest while reading a historical essay that people are willing to kill for. Great fun all the way to the end.
Ruth Jordan

IN THE SHADOW OF THE GLACIER

Vicki Delany

2007

Poisoned Pen Press

Moonlight Smith is the daughter of an American couple who were perfectly at home in the counter-culture of the US in the late 60's and early 70's. Seeking a self constructed exemption from the US military draft during the Vietnam war years, they moved to British Columbia and are now permanent residents of Trafalgar, a small tourist oriented town.

Now that Moonlight is an adult, and a rookie cop in her hometown as well, her given name is as much of a burden as her heavy uniform, boots and gear belt. Hoping for a more mature, responsible image, she goes by her nickname of Molly, even though that nickname also seems juvenile for a cop.

John Winters is also new to the force in Trafalgar, seeking a change from the heavy pressure of service in Vancouver and the many problems faced by big city cops. He is also having trouble adjusting to living and working in Trafalgar.

When these two are assigned to investigate a murder in the small downtown area, things don't go smoothly for either one of them. Complicating the investigation is long simmering tension between real estate development and wilderness preservation, between those who wish to honor the immigrants who came fleeing the US draft and those who wish to leave in the past the issues they raised. The dead man was the chief energy behind the development of a large resort planned for the area, and his death brings world wide attention to the small town. TV news crews arrive, intent on raising ratings, not necessarily on reporting fairly. Various protest groups arrive, aggravating existing tensions.

Molly and John persevere through it all, and begin to build a mutually satisfactory working relationship. The eventual solution to the murder will be found in ordinary human greed. Delany has provided the nucleus of an entertaining new series, if she chooses to return to Trafalgar for future books featuring Sgt Winters and Constable Smith.

Woodstock

INNOCENCE

David Hosp

2007

Warner Books

Legal thrillers usually take place in a courtroom, but in this novel, written by a practicing attorney who applies all the skills of both lawyer and novelist, the story goes beyond to police corruption, street gangs, physical violence and detective work. Scott Finn quit life at a Brahmin Boston law firm to reap the highs (and lows) of a solo criminal practice where his talent shone.

Then one day an associate at his old firm asks him to assist in freeing a man from the jail in which he has been incarcerated 15 years for the attempted rape and shooting of a female police officer.

When Finn argues the motion, the judge expresses doubt that the conviction could (or should) be reversed, but grants two weeks to obtain a DNA analysis. Finn and his investigator associate are not sure of the prisoner's guilt or innocence and after a week they want out. But Finn neglects to withdraw from the case. Then the original attorney is brutally murdered, leaving Finn no choice but to continue despite the danger to himself and the seeming impossibility of learning what really happened a decade and a half before.

With only five days remaining, Finn and the investigator proceed to learn about the circumstances of the original conviction, with their lives at risk, to establish the man's innocence in a final, dramatic courtroom denouement which provides an outstanding example of his legal skills as well as unanticipated conclusion. It is a compelling story, especially well-written, about innocence and guilt.

Theodore Feit

A KILLER'S KISS

William Lashner

2007

William Morrow

This is William Lashner's seventh Victor Carl novel. The series began with the story of a fresh new idealistic lawyer and we have followed Victor's various travails and triumphs to his current status of near insolvency with almost no clients. In this current episode, Julia, the one true love of his life (the one that jilted him years ago at the altar for an older rich doctor) has suddenly reached out and reignited their passion.

But then, there is a middle of the night knock on his door and two cops ask Victor where he has been all evening. It seems someone has killed the doctor earlier that evening and all the evidence points to Julia (or Julia and Victor?). Victor sends them packing and goes into the bedroom to tell Julia her husband is dead.

And now the story is on. He knows he didn't kill anybody and he loves Julia too much to believe she could be involved. So he decides to save Julia and solve the case. There's lots of action as he tries to stay ahead of the police by chasing down possible suspects and motives. All along everything points to Julia, but he cannot believe she would screw him again. The action really heats up and reaches a fever pitch.

All of us have a blind spot for our first love and this story will resonate with anyone that remembers the "good old days" and the "way things should have been" if only the two of you had connected as the stars indicated you should!

William Lashner will be taking a break from Victor Carl for awhile, so make sure you get your fix with this latest (maybe last?) story.

Joseph Czech

KUPERMAN'S FIRE

John L. Clayton

2007

The Permanent Press

On the surface, Michael Kuperman is living the American Dream. Successful business, beautiful wife, wonderful children: he has it all.

But scratch the surface, and things aren't so great. Michael and Deborah, his wife, are losing touch with each other, and they may be losing their marriage. Michael's relationship with his other family members is strained, and tenuous. And the merger his firm has initiated with another company, Chemicorp; well, there are some nasty shenanigans going on, and Michael has to decide what, if anything he's going to do about it.

There are no easy answers to any of the questions raised in this poignantly written novel. We see the same situations through many sets of eyes; and what is hard truth to one person is nothing but empty chimera to another. And which viewpoint is right? We have to decide for ourselves.

Michael has to decide what he's willing to live with, and what, if anything he's willing to die for. The journeys he takes to answer those questions make for a richly satisfying read.

Rae Helmsworth

THE LAST BREATH

Denise Mina

August, 2007

Bantam Press

Paddy Meehan is back. FIELD OF BLOOD & THE DEAD HOUR are two of the most critically acclaimed crime novels of the last two years. If you haven't read them yet, do. They will introduce you to Mina's newest protagonist and set the stage for THE LAST BREATH. First appearing at the height of despair in Thatcher's U.K., Paddy Meehan was immediately an important character in the annals of dark fiction. A young girl trying to be "Catholic" good while wanting a career and soon burdened with being the only means of support for her family. The death of a baby and her connection to the family honed her skills as an investigative reporter at an early age. In THE DEAD HOUR, Mina's second installment of this already "must read" series the sense of Scottish History within the series became Important to all who read of Scotland in the night. The further development of Mina's entirely unique character, the historical look at the U.K. newsroom and an understanding of Glasgow's power infrastructure in the eighties all made for an entirely "new" take on the "amateur sleuth" book.

THE LAST BREATH affirms my personal opinion that this series is mystery's shiniest bairn. Mina is an unusual writer because she shocks with the truth, tosses in surprise and always stays true to her characters and their history. She follows all the "rules" of classic mystery while simultaneously throwing them out. There was a cliffhanger at the end of our last Paddy Meehan book. I entirely expected to open this year's serial and be a year in the future. Nope, that would be too easy. Easy is not in Mina's vocabulary.

Set in 1990, THE LAST BREATH moves forward six years in history. We catch up with Paddy's life (no spoilers here) and hear a knock on the door. Paddy's mentor has been killed. Was it the IRA? The mystery woven is far above par. The development of Meehan is breath taking. As she play's politics in her job, protects those she both loves and feels a sense of duty towards, Paddy works on finding the killer. It's personal.

At the dénouement of BREATH Meehan makes a dangerous choice and hopes for the best. This is something Mina does every time she sits down to the P.C. One of the true greats writing today, it is invention that sets her apart from the rest of the pack. Even in history she finds something new.

Ruth Jordan

THE LYING TONGUE

Andrew Wilson

2007

Atria Books

The mysterious beauty of the winding murky canals, the shadowy backstreets, and the decaying palazzos of Venice provide the perfect setting for Andrew Wilson's exceptional first novel, THE LYING TONGUE. This haunting, eerie, and provocative tale of psychological suspense is told through the voice of narrator Adam Woods, a recent London university art history graduate from England. The young man harbors vague notions about becoming a novelist and travels to Venice to take a job as a tutor. However, upon his arrival, he's informed by the family that they regrettably no longer have need to fill this position, and suggest Woods might apply to the one-time internationally bestselling author, now eccentric recluse, Gordon Crace, who is in need of a live-in companion.

From their first meeting to the final chilling revelations, the claustrophobic intensity grows... as our somewhat unreliable narrator tells us of the dank, dark, decaying palazzo with its neglected and overgrown gardens and the disheveled Crace, whose handshake feels like "the lifeless body of a tiny bird." Crace, who avoids and fears the out of doors, demands as a condition of employment Adam's near constant presence: "I cannot abide being left alone." Having no other feasible options, Adam works to make himself indispensable. As he comes to know more of his employer's curious, secretive past, particularly the scandalous history that brought him to seek refuge in Venice decades before, Adam decides that he will *secretly* write the famous author's biography.

Throughout this thrilling novel, the darkness grows and tension heightens with every twist and turn in the plot. Chilling revelations about the nature and inclinations of both the amoral narrator and his formidable, and equally amoral, employer will have readers burning midnight oil and turning pages late into the night. This surreal game of cat and mouse (or is it cat and rat?) offers a riveting read where nothing and no one should be taken for granted... and where *nothing* is as it seems... It should be noted that Andrew Wilson is also the author of a highly acclaimed biography of Patricia Highsmith, *Beautiful Shadow*. THE LYING TONGUE, his debut novel, is certainly a fitting homage to her brilliant body of work. One cannot help but think that Miss Highsmith would most certainly approve.

Annie Chernow

MERCILESS

Richard Montanari

2007

Ballantine

The Skin Gods, The Rosary Girls, Kiss of Evil, The Violet Hour, Deviant Way and now Merciless, Richard Montanari has quite a streak going. Merciless is another thriller, police procedural with psycho killers and dedicated cops. It's a quick, cool summer read that keeps you hanging on and in; this time with his Philadelphia Detectives Kevin Byrne and his partner Jessica Balzano. There's a nice feel for the routine procedure of police work that goes into catching the bad guys. But Mr. Montanari's writing style still sets a brisk pace. This is a novel with some unique killings, multiple perspectives and an interesting twist to its conclusion. Merciless is a good place to start if you haven't read Richard Montanari.

Dave Biemann

MURDER AT THE UNIVERSE

Daniel Edward Craig

Sept 2007

Midnight Ink

Craig has kicked off his series with a bang, a big bang of a book called MURDER AT THE UNIVERSE.

The universe in question is a 5 star hotel in New York and the lead character is Trevor Lampert, the director of rooms. Following the employee Christmas party everyone is a bit worse for the wear the next day. The arrival of a convention means everyone will have to suck it up and put on their professional smile and tough it out. When the woman in charge of the convention arrives and the owner is a no show it's up to Trevor to keep her happy as she settles in. Before long the reason for his boss's no show is apparent as his body is found in the parking structure. As the case unfolds the staff all seem to be

jockeying for position to take over the running of the hotel. Solving a murder while keeping a hotel running isn't easy and hopefully Trevor is up to the task.

Craig has created such an amazing setting I almost believed that a hotel like this existed. I especially liked the details involved with running a hotel. The mystery itself is wonderfully clever and well executed.

I'm making reservations for the next book now.

Jon Jordan

MVP

James Boice

2007

Scribner

This debut novel is unusual, insightful and professionally written far beyond the expectations of a first effort. It is the story of the life and development of Gilbert Marcus, superstar basketball player, whose father started training him at the age of three by disciplining him, making him stand outside in the snow without shoes with his hands against the wall for hours.

As he grows up with strict and unusual diets, enemas, hours of running, shooting baskets and training, Marcus' skills develop. Star high school player, he turns pro upon graduation. All his life he is honed only to become the greatest player. He knows nothing else. Highly paid, he turns to sexual excesses, ultimately resulting in a rape and manslaughter trial.

The author has accomplished a novel of intense psychological depth. Gilbert is not a lovable character, but certainly an interesting one. It will be interesting to see if the author can follow up with another novel of equal caliber.

Theodore Feit

A NAIL THROUGH THE HEART

Timothy Hallinan

2007

William Morrow

Poke Rafferty is a writer living in Bangkok with a former bar girl and a young girl he wishes to adopt. But he becomes involved with the seamier side of Thai life when he is asked by an Australian woman to find her missing uncle. That leads him to another dangerous woman, a member of the former Cambodian Khmer Rouge who pays him to find the person who stole something from her.

The two assignments lead to all kinds of violence and mayhem. The author describes the sex trade and street life of the Thai capital with vividness. It is an exciting story, well-written and fast-paced.

Theodore Feit

THE NEXT KILLING

Rebecca Drake

September 2007

Pinnacle Fiction

Sugar and spice and everything nice...definitely not what the girls at St. Ursula's Preparatory Academy are made of. Newly hired Laura Kavanaugh is quick to learn just how dangerous Catholic school girls can be after she finds the body of a murdered student in the woods just outside campus. Everyone thinks it's an accident, until another girl is found dead. Again, the death doesn't appear to be murder, it looks more like a suicide, but Laura knows better, suspecting a group of students is responsible for these brutal killings. But as she gets closer to exposing the truth, she runs the risk of revealing her own past secrets, ones that she's tried desperately to hide.

Drake knows how to up the creep factor, utilizing the dark, wooded setting to her advantage. She gives you just enough information to get an idea of what's coming next, but withholds enough so you're still surprised when the dark figure emerges from the shadows. Her villains aren't just psycho; they have reasons for their actions and, at times, it is easy to understand them and see where they're coming from, making the story all the more disturbing. The Next Killing is a solid serial-killer thriller that could easily be devoured in one sitting.

--Dana Kaye

ON THE ROPES

Tom Shreck

2007

Midnight Ink

Duffy Dombrowski is not your typical protagonist. He's a social worker who also moonlights as a semi pro boxer. In his debut appearance in *ON THE ROPES* he proves to be a unique and wonderful addition to the population of crime fiction heroes. Duffy loves part of his job, the part that actually lets him help people, it seems that the paperwork and politics are his hang up. He tends to go further than his boss would like him to and that is what gets him involved in the search for a missing girl. A schizophrenic addict who is part of his case load gets arrested. To calm her down Duffy promises to look after her dog and look for her daughter. It turns into much more than a missing persons case and Duffy could be in real trouble. Lucky for him his favorite watering hole is also the hangout for a few people who may be able to help him out.

While there is plenty of humor in this book, it's not the first thing that jumps out, what really is Shrecks's strong suit is his characters. The folks who populate this book are people you probably know. The crowd he spends time with while drinking Schlitz and unwinding are people I swear I've met. And I've had bosses like his. The layers of the story propel it forward to a wonderful climax. Between his boxing and social work Duffy has a full plate, and with the search for the missing girl it makes for some very fun sub plots through the story. A great teller of tales I think Shreck will be a name people will know for quite some time to come.

In the boxing match of life I want Duffy Dombrowski as my ring man. This is one hell of a debut novel and Shreck can count me as a fan from this point forward. *ON THE ROPES* is easily one of the best five books I've read this year.

Jon Jordan

ORINOCO

James A. Ciullo

2007

Five Star

Jim Ciullo was once a Peace Corps volunteer in Venezuela. He has written in *ORINOCO* the tale of Joe LaCarta, a former Peace Corps volunteer in Venezuela who has retained his idealism into his mid-fifties. Joe LaCarta hopes to bring his idealistic views into the U.S. Senate, but soon learns that not everyone shares those views. And some shady opponents will use any means to stop his independent candidacy.

On the same day that Joe LaCarta announces his run as an Independent for Vermont's open Senate seat, one of his old Peace Corps buddies is murdered in Mexico. At the funeral, Pete Donovan, the third member of their Peace Corps group, tells Joe that the killing was intended as a warning to Joe to get out of the Senate race.

Despite the threat of violence, and a direct warning from someone who knows too much about his past, Joe decides to fight back. He tries to buy some time by announcing the "suspension" of his campaign. With the help of friends such as Pete Donovan, campaign aide and former FBI agent TJ Jackson, investigative reporter Vicki Rivier, and even Vermont Senator Elizabeth Parker, Joe plunges into the thrilling attempt to learn who his opponents are and how they know so much about his Peace Corps days, and to free his campaign from their threats.

We travel with Joe on his quest as he visits friends and enemies in Montreal; Washington DC; San Jose, Costa Rica; and Acapulco and Cozumel, Mexico. And, as Joe tries to find the source of today's threats, we travel with him down memory lane to 1972 and the activities of three young Peace Corps volunteers in Venezuela along the Orinoco River.

Jim Ciullo has written a fast-paced, readable thriller with interesting characters and exciting twists. *ORINOCO* is recommended as an entertaining and pleasurable diversion.

David Chernow

THE OTHERSIDE

Jason Aaron

2007

Vertigo/DC Comics

Viet Nam was a war that stirred up feelings for everyone in the US and to this day still brings a multitude of opinions and attitudes when it is mentioned. It's not an easy thing to address. Aaron does a masterful job of humanizing the experience and making it a little easier to think about by getting past the politics and focusing on the people who were there.

Billy Everette is a US soldier, a marine called up to go someplace he's never heard of. Vo Binh Dai is a Vietnamese soldier following a tradition of fighting for his country and his family honor. As the book follows the journey of these two completely different men from the start of their paths to the aftermath of the journey they took it is impossible not to see the futility in the fight for both sides.

Artist Cameron Stewart actually went to Nam to research before he started the artwork and an diary with photos is included at the end of the book. His expressiveness is the better for it. As hard hitting as this would be as text alone, Stewart's artwork really brings it home.

This book is sad, heroic and feels brutally honest in both words and pictures. This is a book that will be read over and over again in this household.

Jon Jordan

THE PAWN

Steven James
Sept. 07
Revell

Special Agent Patrick Bowers has been a law enforcement officer for twenty-one years. He's using his job to 'work' his way out of depression over the cancer death of his wife. He's got a whip smart seventeen year old step daughter who he loves but doesn't know how to reach out to. In an effort to get to know his step daughter he's transferred to Colorado to ride a desk and maybe she'll get closer to his parents and then him. Before he gets too settled he's called by his old friend Special Agent Ralph Hawkins.

There's a serial killer loose in North Carolina. Bowers is highly educated. He uses geography, the study of mans interaction with the earth, to build patterns off of the crime scene's forensic evidence. He's looking for a physical profile rather than a psychological one. He runs into friendly trouble from Hawkins partner, Lien-hua Jiang. A psychological profiler.

The bad guy calls himself The Illusionist. He's very clever. So much so Bowers struggles to get ahead of him. When he does it turns out this one case becomes far more complex and far more dangerous. To build suspense, Steven James jump cuts his chapters. We get the story from several perspectives and it's a very interesting story indeed. This is the first of a planned series the second of which is The Rook. If it is as tightly drawn and paced as The Pawn already is John Sandford might have to start looking over his shoulder.

Dave Biemann

PRECIOUS BLOOD

Jonathan Hayes
2007
Harper

Trained as a pathologist and in forensic medicine, medical examiner Jonathan Hayes creates a character, Dr. Edward Jenner, who is still recovering from 9/11. Jenner, once a rising star in the medical examiners office in NYC has been doing private autopsies for wealthy families when a friend of a friend calls on him to be present at the autopsy of his daughter. Everyone is certain, not only from the gruesome way she died but his threats to the girls roommate, Ana, that a serial killer is on the loose. A traumatized Ana ends up staying with Jenner. As further homicides occur Jenner reconnects with his friends on the police force and they begin to put together the clues that will track down the killer. This is a dark book, the crimes are bloody and there are more than a few. The characters are well drawn, they've got their foibles and their strengths. The pacing and writing are good and the plot line believable. Since the late 1980's There have been plentiful novels centering on fictional forensic pathologists to choose from. The addition of Jonathan Hayes' , Edward Jenner, strengthens the field rather than dilutes it.

Dave Biemann

A QUIET BELIEF IN ANGELS

R.J. Ellroy
August 2007
Orion (U.K.)

About the title.... As we meet Joseph Vaughn he's bleeding out somewhere in New York City. A story unfolds. It begins with the death of Vaughn's father and pulls at your heartstrings until you close the book. Joseph is a small town boy in Georgia at the beginning of ANGELS and in some ways remains so throughout Ellroy's narrative of a life that might have been nothing except for the words he begins to write down after his father's death. Evil lives in Joseph's childhood home. A serial killer is murdering young girls and as the body count escalates so does the violence inflicted on the victims. Joseph knows from the outset that he doesn't believe in much but he does believe in Angels. The souls of the innocent.

The crimes are not solved and suspicions are aroused. The tiny town so wants some form of vengeance that when Joseph is a young man his name is tendered as suspect. He lives a life defined by these crimes and his only outlet is in his writing. He writes of his feelings about the murders. He writes of his father's death and his mother's decline into madness. He writes of falling in "forbidden love" and he tries to escape the history he shares with the residents of Augusta Falls. Distance does not remove him from the crimes, for they begin to occur again, following him like the evil that must alienate us all from the angels of our youth.

Ellroy crafts a remarkable story in three simultaneous acts. He tells the tale of two men bleeding to death in New York, the story of the life and times of Joseph Vaughn, and a harsher story of when the words work and when they don't. Sometimes it's hard to believe in Angels.

R.J. Ellroy demands you believe in Angels. It's the only way you can embrace the quiet harshness of this thoughtfully crafted book.

Ruth Jordan.

RAVEN BLACK

Ann Cleeves

2007

Thomas Dunne Books

Inspector Jimmy Perez makes his debut in this thriller. He is a quiet, hardworking, introspective detective who transferred to a remote hamlet in the Shetland Islands, off the coast of mainland Scotland, because he felt overwhelmed and washed out in his former post, and looked forward to a restful assignment. Instead, he finds himself in the midst of a high profile murder. A beautiful 16-year-old girl is found strangled on the moor. And all fingers point to a half-witted man, Magnus Tait, who is believed to have been responsible for the disappearance and presumed murder of a young girl eight years earlier, although no proof was found and no charges filed. A high-powered team is brought in from the mainland to conduct the investigation.

Perez and the lead detective pursue working the case with an open mind, amassing background on the latest victim, but eventually arrest the unfortunate Tait. Neither detective is satisfied, but they are at a loss as to how to proceed. Both persist, however, and Perez finally unlocks the secrets leading to a solution of both murders and possibly to a third that could be prevented if he acts in time.

All during the case, Perez is haunted by his need to make a decision whether to continue as a policeman, or return to his boyhood home and take his place in the family structure, eventually to inherit his father's job. He wavers back and forth, coming to no conclusion. The descriptions of life on the Shetlands and its bleak geography are graphic, even overwhelming, the writing and observations pithy. Human emotions are recorded with intensity.

Theodore Feit

SCALPED : INDIAN COUNTRY

Jason Aaron/ R.M. Guera

2007

Vertigo/DC Comics

SCALPED is a new series from DC and INDIAN COUNTRY is the first collection. Narrowing down exactly what the series is isn't easy, though it has an overwhelming noir influence. Drugs, sex, gambling, corruption and cultures that still clash, this has it all.

Dashiell Bad Horse has come home to the Prairie Rose Reservation after a long time away. He soon discovers that while there may be some cosmetic changes, underneath it's still the same place. A new casino coming in brought about by Lincoln Red Crow is the center of a lot of controversy. A people already struggling with alcoholism and poverty and oppression are now going to be dealing with organized crime and the problems that come with it.

Dash Bad Horse, the son of an activist, is an angry man and his arrival back to the "the rez" is hard to miss. He is immediately involved in a number of fights and comes to the notice of Red Crow, who hires him as a deputy, a job he seems to enjoy with great enthusiasm as he beats down drug dealers and any body else who gets in his way. As the story unfolds we find out why Bad Horse is back, though there are other reasons we don't know about yet. What come across is that he feels let down by his people and family and he is there to set some things right, if only for himself.

Aaron's writing is gritty and hard boiled, capturing the frustration that Bad Horse must be feeling. From the opening pages this book grabs you by the throat and continues to squeeze till the last. R. M. Guera's artwork is a perfect match, dark and rough and elegant at the same time. SCALPED has attitude, SCALPED has guts and SCALPED is no holds barred. In short, SCALPED is F*#king Great.

Jon Jordan

THE SCENT OF BLOOD

Raymond Miller

2007

Toby Crime

When I first began reading this book, I couldn't believe it was this author's first novel. The writing is so smooth, the characters so believable, I thought it must be the work of a veteran author. Turns out I could be right. Raymond Miller is the nom de plume of "a writer who lives in New York." The bio doesn't say if he (or she!) has published other books, but I'm going to assume so, just for my own peace of mind! Nathaniel Singer, Miller's protagonist, is a detective with a conscience. He is hired to look into what was categorized by the cops as a simple hit and run. The widow doesn't think so. Singer takes the job and his investigation carries him into the worlds of crazy religious folks, crooked cops, and women who are stronger than one might think. Singer's relationship with his assistant, Kate, is fun and interesting (and platonic!), and I

enjoyed hearing the detective's outlook on life, his family, and his work. When another book comes out by this author -- whoever it really may be -- I will be the first in line to read it. Highly recommended.

Judy Clemens
SCREAMING ROOM
Thomas O'Callaghan
2007
Pinnacle Books

This police procedural features NYPD Lt. John Driscoll, who has just buried his wife who had lain comatose for six years following an accident caused by a drunken driver. He not only is mourning, but deeply depressed. His top two assistants also carry their own baggage--one a recovering alcoholic, the other having suffered sexual abuse at the hands of her cop father as an adolescent girl.

Counterpoint to the two is a set of brother--sister identical twins [identical in every way except for their gender], an event so rare it occurs only once every 17 years. The pair was prostituted from an early age by their father, who also disfigured them. The twins embark on a series of murders, each with a similar MO. The victim is bashed in the head and left posed in a prominent tourist location in New York City. Driscoll is assigned to solve the serial killings and the novel proceeds to follow the investigation--seeking commonalities for the victims, identification of the perpetrators and other elements.

The story is quite unusual and is gripping and exciting. The author is at work on another Driscoll mystery scheduled for next year.

Theodore Feit

SECOND SHOT
Zoë Sharp
2007
Thomas Dunne Books

I should know better. I've done it before and I should have learned my lesson. When I need to get up early I should not read Zoë Sharp when I go to bed. SECOND SHOT had me get out of bed, make coffee and stay up till I was done.

Charlie Fox is back in the States, this time she's body guarding a woman who just won the lotto and wants to find her missing Father. People are hassling her because of the money, everybody is a celebrity these days, and Charlie is brought in to keep Simone and her daughter safe. Simone decides to leave home in England and go to Boston to look for her Father, however the PI she had working the case has died in what may or may not be an accident. Things get hairy really quick and Charlie better be on the top of her game if she wants to see England again.

Quite simply, Zoë Sharp kicks ass. The action scenes are ultra real, her descriptions are magic and her pacing perfect.

SECOND SHOT is a direct hit, center and clean through. I urge you not to miss this book, just make sure you don't have to be anywhere for a few hours.

Jon

SEVERED
Simon Kernick
2007
Bantam Press (UK)

Kernick is one of the new names in crime fiction that stands out. He is building a solid body of work that is amazing. Hard edged and a bit dark, but endlessly readable this is an author everyone should be aware of.

SEVERED opens with Sean Tyler waking up next to a dead body. Very quickly Tyler discovers that he is being set up, but can't do anything but follow along or get nailed for a murder he didn't commit. This cat and mouse game gains momentum as Tyler tries to find out who's setting him up and what the Hell actually happened to him.

Like a sledge hammer to the gut this book gets your attention quick. And in an almost sadistic (in a good way) fashion Kernick leaves you no choice but to keep reading, faster and faster drawing you into his web. Great setup, great plot, great execution, and all around terrific book.

This is only available in the UK for now, but I suggest to you find a UK bookstore and get it, you won't be sorry.

Jon

SGT. ROCK : THE PROPHECY
Joe Kubert
2007
DC Comics

Nobody, and I mean nobody does war comics like Joe Kubert. His work on Sgt Rock through the years is iconic. He captures the sadness of war, the thrill of the action and the humanity and absurdity of it all with his pencils and pen.

THE PROPHECY is based on a true story set in 1943. Easy Company is given a mission that sets them firmly in what could very easily be Hell. Just ahead of the Nazis and in front of advancing Russian troops they are charged with the task of rescuing a religious Icon that is believed to be able to turn the tide of the war.

Kuberts writing is unsurpassed on this stage and when coupled with his artwork it is truly breathtaking. His ability to say thing with only the expression on someone's face or body language is uncanny. This is a masterpiece.

Jon Jordan

SILENCE

Thomas Perry

2007

Harcourt

Thomas Perry, the author of the wonderful Jane Whitefield series, the protagonist of which helps people in trouble 'disappear' and make new lives when their old ones were in peril, has now given us an outstanding new standalone built around a somewhat similar premise.

The book's attention-grabbing opening chapter describes a brutal and nearly-fatal beating delivered to Wendy Harper, young and successful Southern California restaurateur, as she arrives home in the early morning hours after work. Having survived the event, a terrified Wendy turns to ex-cop and now-p.i. Jack Till and pleads with him "that the only hope she had of staying alive was to try to live elsewhere," and prevails upon Till to help her. Six years later, nothing having been heard of or from Wendy in the intervening time, her former lover/business partner is charged with her murder, as evidence has suddenly surfaced pointing to him as her killer. Till believes that the person who wanted her dead six years prior is trying to lure her back to finish the job, and Till feels he must now track her down himself before that can happen.

Till is an intriguing protagonist, and his backstory makes him a very human one as well. Just as fascinating creations as Till are Paul and Sylvie Turner, forty-something tango dancers who moonlight as hired killers. Or maybe it's the other way around. [There was something very unsettling about a high-powered attorney regularly arranging murder-for-hire, but then I guess murder is an unpleasant business at best, any way you look at it.] Paul and Sylvie are a particularly pathological pair, and unlike your run-of-the-mill hired killers are not just cold-blooded murderers, but ones who entertain homicidal thoughts when merely really annoyed at someone, and their homicidal urges are frequently fatal.

The novel moves swiftly and surely to its conclusion, with the suspense constant almost from page one, like a rubber band slowly being pulled more and more taut.

Gloria Feit

SLIDE

Ken Bruen/Jason Starr

2007

Hard Case Crime

On the heels of the wonderful first collaboration BUST Bruen and Starr repeat their performance in the sequel, SLIDE. Max and Angela are back, though not together and it's time for them to move on to the next big thing. For Max it takes being almost rock bottom and then reinventing himself as a drug dealer. Granted, not a very smart drug dealer, but a drug dealer none the less. Angela has hitched her horse to some one she meets in a bar in Ireland with hopes of hitting it big and going to the states. She does end up in the states, but her new beau has a few flaws. One of those flaws is that he happens to be a psychopath who really enjoys killing people.

Max and Angela's luck holds true, and while they have fun for a while it's a cinch that it can't last. The real fun is watching it all implode.

Bruen and Starr have delivered another great book that crime fictions fans can rally around, pure fun on every page.

Jon Jordan

THE SNAKE STONE

Jason Goodwin

2007

Farrar Straus and Giroux

Edgar Award winner Jason Goodwin brings back Yashim Togonalu in The Snake Stone. The year is 1839. The Sultan of Turkey lies dying. Yashim's investigatory and consulting services not needed; he is comfortably well off and awaiting but not expecting the call of the new Sultan when he comes to power. Yashim's friend, Palewski, the Ambassador from a conquered and consequently nonexistent Poland, brings along to dinner a French archeologist, Max Lefevre. Archeologist as Palewski and

Yashim see it reads, fortune hunter and the ancient fortunes of Eastern Byzantium and Western Constantinople lie hidden in Istanbul.

Lefevre leaves, only to return to Yashim's house the following night much more worried and apparently in some danger; from whom he doesn't say, directly. He begs Yashim to get him on a non Greek owned ship back to France. Yashim, as a courtesy, does this and by the next evening he is standing at the dock waving goodbye. Yet, within hours, Lefevre is found mutilated just outside the French embassy. Yashim is the last person to have talked to Lefevre. It has been the custom of the city to allow the embassies of the foreigners to deal with their various citizens in Turkey. Yashim fears the French report will sully his reputation. He's forced to conduct an investigation into Lefevre's death in order to clear himself.

Jason Goodwin has worked his lyrical magic again. Old Istanbul comes alive under his pen. The Snake Stone reads just as strong and is as enjoyably unique as his Edgar winning, The Janissary Tree. The only discontent a reader might have with this series is that the new Sultan won't call on Yashim soon enough.

Dave Biemann

SOMETHING IN THE SEA

Yves Bonavero

2007

Bloomsbury UK Paperback

This debut novel took about three hours to read and that was reading slowly as its tight and claustrophobic plot had me nailed 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 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. 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 and 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

SONGS OF INNOCENCE

Richard Aleas

2007

Hard Case Crime

John Blake is a young man haunted by the death of a woman he'd loved and the near-death of another, and the certain knowledge that he had failed to protect them both, and has been consumed by guilt in the ensuing three years. In the aftermath he left the p.i. job he'd had at the time, and is now an administrative assistant in the creative writing program at Columbia University in NYC. When Dorrie Burke, a stunning young woman taking the writing course with whom he'd been very close [in every sense of the word], is found dead, an apparent suicide, John becomes convinced that her death was staged and that she was in fact murdered, and makes a promise to the dead woman that he will find out who killed her and why.

Dorrie [nee Dorothy] had led a double life, involved in the city's thriving sex trade, and the possibility is certainly strong that someone she'd met in that life had killed her. Initially he believes that his adversary is the most formidable and feared man in the NYC criminal underworld, with good reason – he is a brutal, ruthless killer. Blake's quest at that point seemed rather foolhardy to me, as he is one physically unimposing civilian seeking out a merciless gangster. But on some level he understands this: "A psychologist might even tell me I'd been wishing for this outcome. You go to a zoo and walk into the lion's cage, you can't complain when he bites you." He finds the man he seeks and manages to survive the event, much the worse for wear but alive. And then things get even uglier, more and in more ways than one could have imagined.

This is the second in the John Blake series. The book's title, fittingly enough, is derived from the title of a poem of pure empathy by William Blake [a line from whose poems prefaces each section of the novel]. John Blake is a man consumed by empathy, to his peril. The flavor and feel of New York City is perfectly rendered, the grim mood of the city and its effects on its more vulnerable residents palpable. I'm uncertain how exactly 'noir' should be defined, but whether SONGS OF INNOCENCE fits that definition exactly or not, it is an absorbing page-turner, with an ending that is nothing less than stunning.

Gloria Feit

STALIN'S GHOST

Martin Cruz Smith

2007

Simon and Schuster

Arkady Renko, senior Moscow investigator, who first made an appearance in GORKY PARK, is confronted by a multitude of sub-plots in this novel. First, there is a flash of Stalin's supposed ghost seen in a Moscow subway station that served as his war room during World War II. Then, Renko observes two detectives, reputed war heroes while they served in Chechnya, who he suspects of murders. Moreover, Renko discovers evidence belying their Chechnya heroism. Renko's girlfriend leaves him for one of the detectives, who is campaigning for a Senate seat from a town a couple of hundred miles from Moscow. And finally, there is the problem of his sometime ward, a young chess prodigy, who comes and goes like the enigma he is. Complicated? After all, this is a Russian novel. It is full of present-day corruption, mafia-run casinos—and snow. And, of course, the past, especially Arkady's father, the WWII general, one of Stalin's favorites. It all comes to an overwhelming conclusion at Tver, the site of a last-ditch stand by the Russians against the invading Nazis.

Theodore Feit

STRAITS OF FORTUNE

Anthony Gagliano

2007

William Morrow

This debut novel is an unusual story about Jack Vaughn, an ex-New York City Cop who quit after shooting and killing another officer, and has been running from the memory ever since. He lands in Miami and becomes a personal trainer, to the rich and famous, among others. One of his clients telephones him to come to his home where he is offered an unusual task.

At first, Vaughn turns down the job, to sink a boat with a dead man on it. The victim, the client tells him, was shot by his daughter, Jack's former lover. The client offers \$100,000. Against his better judgment, Jack later agrees. When he gets to the yacht, Jack finds a second body and starts thinking his former girlfriend didn't do the shooting, but perhaps the client's aide did.

After sinking the boat, Jack finds himself trapped by a speedboat, with someone firing shots at him as he paddles his kayak away. It turns out the aide is doing the shooting, and the question is why the client now apparently wants Jack dead. The rest of the tale is a series of adventures with Jack trying to stay alive and find out the truth. It is well-told and a fine read.

Theodore Feit

A THOUSAND BONES

P. J. Parrish

2007

Pocket Star Books

From the tantalizing prologue [not everyone's favorite thing, but in this instance a brief few pages serving as a segue way to events that transpired in Michigan in late 1975], I was hooked. In this new novel, for the first time P.J. Parrish's protagonist is Joette ["Joe"] Frye, first introduced to readers in A KILLING RAIN, the sixth in the Louis Kincaid novels. Joe is the only woman detective in Miami-Dade's homicide division. But the events described took place when she was a rookie cop in the fictional town of Echo Bay on the Leelanau Peninsula of Michigan, thirteen years prior. The discovery of three small bones in a heavily wooded area leads to the uncovering, literally and figuratively, of the fate of young girls gone missing years before. Joe, perhaps, sees something of her younger self in the picture that begins to form in her head of a willful high school girl determined to get away from the small town of her birth, "...thinking about some nameless girl who wanted to break free of the monotony of suburbs, small minds, and straight sidewalks that led to nowhere."

Her mother, herself a former cop in days when female police officers were expected to wear skirts and do nothing more involved than writing parking tickets, when Joe discusses the mystery of a missing girl with her, urges her to do more than just identify her: "I'm not talking about just IDing her. I'm talking about finding out who she really was." Joe does not need much encouraging, and fights for a significant role in the investigation.

The writing is solid, the book fast-paced and the setting very well-drawn. The book is by turn suspenseful, taut and ultimately harrowing, portraying events devastating to Joe. Louis Kincaid makes only brief appearances in the Prologue and Epilogue, but Joe Frye makes a fully realized and vivid protagonist in her own right. I have only read one or two earlier books by P. J. Parrish, but will certainly seek to correct that in short order – I thoroughly enjoyed A THOUSAND BONES.

Gloria Feit

THREE SISTERS

James D. Doss

November, 2007

Thomas Dunne Books

“Three Sisters” by James D. Doss is a story grounded in the practical world, but with ties to things beyond our reckoning. Charlie Moon, an investigator for the Ute tribe in Granite Springs, Colorado, has his feet firmly planted in both the day-to-day world of any police officer, and in the world of the shaman. His feisty aunt Daisy, a shaman, has aided him in his investigations time and again and Charlie knows better than to discount her insight.

This story, the twelfth in the Charlie Moon series, opens with a television psychic, Cassandra, “witnessing” a murder – as it happens. Almost simultaneously, Cassandra’s sister is mauled to death in her home, which is in the jurisdiction of Charlie’s friend and colleague, Scott Parris. When Cassandra and her surviving sister, Beatrice, arrive in Granite Creek demanding answers, there’s not much to tell them other than, it was an unfortunate, tragic accident. But was it? And if it was murder, who arranged it? And how? For the mauling was done by nothing human.

Charlie’s ingenuity and skill as an investigator will be tested to the limit as he and Scott, with Daisy’s often-cranky help, try to track the killer. And the resolution is a crackerjack.

Doss’s writing flows beautifully, and his characters become real to us as they try to find a solution to the problem at hand. I’m happy to have discovered this writer’s work, and equally happy that there are eleven prior books in the series for me to enjoy. Rae Helmsworth

The Tin Roof Blowdown

James Lee Burke

2007

Simon and Schuster

The power and majesty of hurricane Katrina are reflected in this latest saga of Dave Robicheaux and his sidekick Clete Purcell. It is a song to New Orleans, a city the author knows only too well. In wake of the storm, Dave and half the New Iberia Sheriff’s department are deployed in the ravaged city. Thus begins Dave’s involvement in the quest to discover a missing priest as well as the investigation of a couple of murders and a break-in of a gangster’s home in which thousands of dollars in counterfeit bills, diamonds and a pistol were stolen.

Meanwhile thugs appear in New Iberia seeking the perpetrators of the theft and the loot. One of them, at least, is a psycho who threatens Dave’s daughter Alafair. The novel is tautly written, with vivid scenes of the devastated city and the plight of its citizens. It is as powerful as the force 5 storm itself.

Theodore Feit

TRIAL & ERROR

Paul Levine

2007

Bantam

TRIAL AND ERROR marks the return of Steve Solomon and Victoria Lord, domestic partners as well as law partners at this point in their lives. Steve’s much-loved 12-year-old nephew Bobby is communing with his friends, two dolphins who reside at a local water park one balmy night in South Florida when ecoterrorists apparently decide to free the creatures. Steve is called to the scene and arrives in time to nab one of the men, while a second is shot by the park’s owner. In the aftermath, Victoria gets pressed into service to prosecute the case against the man Steve brought down, while unknown to her Steve at the same time is hired to represent the defendant, charged with felony murder since his illegal act resulted in a man’s death. The details of that death don’t quite add up in Steve’s eyes – the man had a shotgun trained on him and the police were on their way when he allegedly went for his gun. The owner of the marine park then shot him, twice, at pointblank range. The ensuing trial wreaks havoc on Steve and Victoria’s lives.

As always with this series, the courtroom scenes are a delight to read, and to visualize. The trial features a judge who has court papers delivered to him not by a clerk but by a model railroad car. And the classic Steve-the-Shark Solomon antics are, of course, ever present. Bobby, a boy who ‘seesawed between semi-autistic behavior and savant-like abilities of memory and language feats,’ plays a pivotal role. The author’s reliable humor is also present, making this fast-paced and well-plotted book another excellent entry in this series.

Gloria Feit

VEGAS NERVE

Susan Rogers Cooper

2007

Thomas Dunne Books

The eighth book in Susan Rogers Cooper's Sheriff Milt Kovak series, the excellent "Vegas Nerve" is a well-constructed police procedural, an intriguing whodunit, and an entertaining portrait of small-town life.

The story opens as Sheriff Kovak is happily planning his first vacation in several years, attending a conference in Las Vegas with his psychiatrist wife, Jean. As an elected official in Prophesy County, Oklahoma, Milt doesn't feel comfortable leaving town very often – what if his stand-in does a better job than him, and steals the next election? – but the temptation of Las Vegas is too much to resist. So off they go.

But the vacation doesn't last long. It just so happens that Milt's cousin Maida is also in Las Vegas, to visit her daughter. And, it just so happens that the daughter, Denise, is extremely pregnant and married to an abusive, n'er do well, scion of the local Mr. Big. And, it just so happens that, getting wind of the abuse, Maida's husband visits Denise with the intention of having "a little talk" with the skunk of a husband.

And then, everything comes completely unglued. The skunk of a husband is found dead, with Denise's father standing over him, gun in hand.

The local police, under pressure from Mr. Big, aren't inclined to do much more than throw Denise's father, Burl, into jail and throw away the key. But they can't, because Burl has disappeared.

So it's up to Milt, with the dubious assistance of Burl's sons, each of whom comes with his own baggage, to find Burl, find out who really killed the not-so-much-missed husband, and keep some sort of peace amongst a very raucous family. And in the meantime, things aren't exactly quiet back in Oklahoma. Rogers' writing is reminiscent of the Don Harstad's excellent Carl Houseman series. The characters are well drawn, the plot finely crafted, and the finale is extremely satisfying.

This is a highly recommended read.

Rae Helmsworth

VINEYARD STALKER

Philip R. Craig

2007

Scribner

It is unfortunate that the author of this well-done series—this novel is the 18th—died during May of 2007, leaving at least two completed, as-yet-unpublished books and having been in the middle of another one. *Vineyard Stalker* is an intriguing tale, full of clues and red herrings to mislead the reader until its unexpected conclusion.

J.W. Jackson, former Boston cop now a Vineyard resident seeking the simpler life, is living a bachelor life while his wife and kids are visiting "America." [i.e., the mainland] He's bored and accepts what seems to be a simple task: stake out someone's home that is being systematically vandalized and identify the culprits, which he accomplishes the first night on the job. But then the plot thickens, when a murder takes place on the victim's land. Were the vandals responsible? If not, then who? There are several possibilities, and Jackson gets involved and begins his own investigation in this well-written and -plotted whodunit.

Theodore Feit

VOLK'S GAME

Brent Ghelfi

2007

Henry Holt and Company

The corruption, gangsterism and violence that permeate today's Russia run through this debut novel. It introduces Alexei Volkovoy, a colonel who served and lost a foot in Chechnya and is a multi-talented assassin and instrument of assorted tasks for a midget general under whom he serves. Also, for a living, he trades in pornography, narcotics and other forms of lawlessness, including the black market.

Two different gangsters ask Volk what he knows about art, setting the stage for this complex tale. A lost DaVinci lies in the catacombs of the Hermitage, and Volk is to remove it. However, there are complications, with several competing for its possession. The dangers and betrayals abound. The painting disappears and Volk has to find it.

If the reader can sustain interest despite the violence, the novel moves forward with all kinds of surprises. It is well-written for a first effort.

Theodore Feit

WHACK-A-MOLE

Chris Grabenstein

2007

Carroll & Graf

The good news is that rookie cop Danny Boyle and his mentor, role model and partner on the Sea Haven [N.J.] Police Dept., John Ceepak, the 6 foot 2 inch "Eagle-Scout-slash-Jarhead" Iraq War vet, are back in their third adventure in this charming series by Chris Grabenstein [the titles of all of which refer to boardwalk games or rides]. There is no bad news.

Ceepak, if you haven't read the earlier entries in the series [and you should!], lives by a very strict, very rigid moral code: He will not lie, cheat, or steal, nor tolerate those who do.

An innocent enough discovery, a 1983 high school ring found in the sand of the Jersey shore beach, leads the duo in a wildly unexpected direction. Their attempt to return the ring to its owner soon becomes an investigation into the disappearance of two young women well over 20 years ago. When body parts start surfacing, there are indications that a serial killer long quiet has stirred back to life in Sea Haven.

In their personal lives, Danny is at loose ends – his girlfriend, Katie, has left for grad school in California. Ceepak, on the other hand, has become romantically involved with Rita, who was introduced in the prior book.

The book presents a satisfying mystery leavened with the delightful characterizations of these protagonists. As usual, Danny makes the perfect foil for Ceepak, or maybe it's the other way around, with Ceepak being Danny's straight man. Either way, they are a perfect team, and the earnestness of the one played against the wisecracking irreverence of the other make for a delightful summer read, for obvious reasons perfect in all ways for the beach.

Gloria Feit

A WIDOW'S CURSE

Phillip DePoy

2007

St. Martin's Minotaur

When I picked up this book I didn't know what to expect, and was in for a very pleasant surprise: it was one of the best books I've read all summer! Full of fun, witty characters, an interesting plot, and an interesting setting, this book kept me reading and kept me wanting to know what these people were going to do next. When Fever Devlin, an academically-minded loner in the Georgia Appalachians, is drawn into the mystery of a rare medallion, he finds more than just a coin -- he finds family secrets, dangerous strangers, and the idea that curses and magic might actually be true. Fever himself is a complex character -- extremely philosophical and intelligent, while also a bit obsessive and bizarre. He has a very funny friend named Andrews, a former colleague from Atlanta, who comes up to help him with the investigation of the medallion and the mystery around it, and I found myself laughing out loud at him more than once. The people of Georgia are shown to be caring of each other, but also to have their secrets they hold close, even under duress. This is the fourth in DePoy's series about Fever, but is the first one I've read. I will definitely be going back to read the rest. Thanks to DePoy for writing something that's just a little bit different -- a

definite plus in my book.

Judy Clemens