

## The buzz list

here's some books that are getting a lot of buzz and worth checking out with a short and sweet rundown on why you should check them out.

AMERICAN SKIN is now in paperback. Ken Bruen's tour de force is a dark tale set in the US and one of the best books written by this master of the hardboiled genre. It is published by Justin Charles & co.

ANTIQUES MAUL from Kensington is written by Barbara Paul (Barabara Collins and Husband Max Allan Collins) and is the second of the new series. It is traditional mystery at it's best and is a pure pleasure to read. Brandy Borne along with her mother open up a booth at a local antiques mall, she also has her son visiting and Halloween is looming. With all this going on the last thing she needs is distraction, but it shows up in the form of a corpse and a wrongly accused dog. This is a wonderful new series and should not be missed.

BLACK OUT is another mystery set in WWII, this time in London 1944. John Lawton has detective Sergeant Troy working a case involving the burned body of a German found in a bombsite. A masterful story set in a time of chaos this book satisfies on every level. It's out now as a trade paperback from Phoenix, an imprint of Orion Books (UK).

BLONDE FAITH, is the tenth Easy Rawlins book from the living legend that is Walter Mosley. Overflowing with the things that make us human it is hard not to identify with this book, and Mosley's deft writing makes it impossible to put down. Rawlins' friend Mouse is missing, another friend is in trouble and Easy's personal life is in chaos. Quite simply put, this is brilliant.

BLOODLINE is the latest Repairman Jack novel from F. Paul Wilson, and #11 is a perfect example why this series has obtained cult status. A beautiful blend of PI, supernatural, thriller and action this is a wholly original series. Jack is brought in to look into a problem for a woman whose daughter is marrying a very shady character. The original PI on the case has gone missing and as Jack investigates he finds wide ranging conspiracies that actually could be influencing his own life. Repairman Jack is too cool and this is another great book in a great series.

CRIMINAL MINDS: JUMP CUT is the first novelization of the hit show from Max Allan Collins. The team who make up the Behavioral Analysis Team are in Kansas working on a case involving murdered homeless men. Another case though different soon also ties in. Collins has managed to take these characters from the wonderful show and add new depths to them while also taking us much deeper into the case than the television show could. A wonderful way to spend your reading time.

DEATH AND THE DEVIL from William Morrow was original printed in Germany. This is the first American translation of Frank Schatzings utterly absorbing book. Based on true facts the novel looks at the death of architect Gerhard Morart in 1260 in which he plunged to his death from the top of the Cologne Cathedral. A perfect blend of fact and fiction.

DOWN RIVER by John Hart is the second book by wonderful new author. Adam Chase is caught up in the middle of hard feelings and flaring tempers as the past refuses to let go and the present is bringing new problems. The local power company is taking land along the river and as the situation becomes more heated a body is found on the Chase family land. Because of his history Adam is the chief suspect. Hart's second book is a dazzling follow up to his debut last year with THE KING OF LIES. DOWN RIVER is published by St. Martin's Minatour.

EAT THE DARK from Joe Schreiber is not for the faint of heart. This book will grab you by the throat and pull you in and take you where ever it wants to go. The lowdown is this, a madman is taken from prison to a hospital that is closing down, he gets loose and starts a reign of terror in his bid for escape. Wow, great stuff.

THE FIRST WAVE is a marvelous follow up to last year's BILLY BOYLE. James R. Benn is an author who takes great care to get things right and this tale set in 1942 Former Boston cop Boyle is serving his country in Europe and is involved in murder investigations, spy missions and invasions. Fast paced and carefully drawn out this is wonderful reading. A must have from SOHO books.

THE LAST JEW STANDING is book for from Michael Simon featuring Austin Texas Homicide detective Reles. Dan seems to be living large in the beginning of this book only to have his long absent father show up and ruin things. As it turns out Dad worked for the Mob and when he show up with a prostitute at Dan's new home he is less than welcome. Evocative and atmospheric as hell this is a reading experience on a par with the first time reading of Connelly or Richard Barre. Top notch Texas Noir!

LITTLE FACE from SOHO books was a British sensation by Sophie Hannah and is now available here in the states. A story of a mothers worst nightmare unfolds as Alice Fancourt comes home to discover her husband asleep and their new baby replaced with another. Everyone thinks Alice is crazy, but when she disappears and the police investigate they discover something dark hiding beneath the shiny happy life portrayed. Unnerving as hell this is a top notch thriller.

A PALE HORSE, the latest Inspector Rutledge mystery from Charles Todd opens in 1920 with 5 terrified boys in Yorkshire. This tenth installment lives up to the attention grabbing opening as Rutledge is dispatched to investigate why a body came to be found in the room that sent the boys screaming. A myriad of possibilities is open as to why the man is dead, and some of these paths will lead to nothing but trouble.

The Rutledge series is one of the best historical series being done today and I can promise you that the name Charles Todd on the cover means you are in for some amazing reading. This is a December book from William Morrow.

#### REAL MURDERS

Charlaine Harris

1990/2007

Berkley Prime Crime

This is a reprinting of the now classic REAL MURDERS, Harris' first Aurora Teagarden mystery. Aurora "Roe" belongs to a club that studies true crime. But things take an unexpected turn when one of the members turns up dead. Before she wrote about supernatural beings and became a household name Charlaine Harris was writing some of the best damn traditional mysteries out there. And now they are back in print, so treat yourself to a wonderful reading experience!

REBEL ISLAND is the sixth book in Rick Riordan's Tres Navarre series and for my money Riordan is one of the best PI writers we have. Navarre is also one of the most human protagonists you'll ever read. REBEL ISLAND see Tres on his honeymoon having given up the PI biz. Unfortunately the PI biz hasn't left him and before he knows it he's knee deep in a murder investigation. They say things are bigger in Texas, and Riordan's writing makes me think it might be true, his writing is beyond a doubt larger than life.

RED MANDERIAN DRESS is the fifth of Qiu Xiaolong's mysteries and this time out could prove too much for Inspector Chen. Taking a vacation to avoid complications at work Chen finds himself drawn into what looks like a serial killer case. With word from above telling him to solve it fast he has his work cut out for him. A terrific novel with marvelous insights into Chinese way of life.

RESORT TO MURDER is an anthology from the Minnesota crime wave which follows the raging success of their SILENCE OF THE LOONS collection. Short stories from Minnesota authors each writing a story set at a resort. Published by Nodin Press this is a great book and would make a great gift. Once Upon a Crime should have plenty of copies available, probably signed.

SHOTGUN RULE is the new hardcover from the force of nature that is Charlie Huston. A stand alone thriller, this is the tale of four teenagers just trying to stay busy and often finding trouble is the way to beat boredom. Moving like a fireball this is an engrossing read that feels kind of like a shot of cheap tequila, in the fun way.

SKIN AND BLISTER is out from Orion Paperback and Victoria Blake's latest is outstanding. PI Sam Falconer's past is catching up with her when her brother goes missing and stirs up her family's past. The story moves from Iraq to Ireland and back to Oxford in this wonderful moody British series.

SPIDERTRAP is another Brock and Kolla mystery from Barry Maitland, a British procedural high on atmosphere and suspense. This is a stupendous series and this latest addition could be the best yet. A cold case intertwining with the return of a villain thought gone this is a pure pleasure to read as Maitland casts out the line and then draws you in.

STRIKE DOG, book five in the series featuring Grady Service who is a Conservation Officer. Joseph Heywood has a nomadic background that lends itself perfectly to writing these hard boiled books. In this outing published by The Lyons Press Grady is hunting a serial killer in conjunction with the FBI. Fast paced and suspenseful as Hell this is a great book to lose yourself in.

SUCKER PUNCH is a debut novel from Canadian Marc Strange and it's published by a wonderful publisher, DUNDURN. For a debut novel this book has a lot going for it, strong characters a plot that has some real originality to it and a really strong ending. Joe Grundy, ex-boxer and now security at an swanky hotel has his hands full with a rich kid intent on giving away all his money. Naturally the kid ends up dead, but it's the why and how they find out that makes this so much fun. I want more from Marc Strange.

THE TINROOF BLOWDOWN is another in the series by James Lee Burke featuring Dave Robicheaux. This is possibly the most heartbreaking book Burke has written as he puts his grief from Hurricane Katrina in print. This is a can not miss from Orion Books (UK)

THE VENETIAN BETRAYAL by Steve Berry ships in early December from Ballantine book. Berry is truly one of the best adventure thriller writers working today. The stories he tells are vast and sweeping and his five previous books are amazing. In this latest offering the historic tie is that of Alexander the Great and the search for his grave. Berry writes like a man possessed and the velocity of the story is measured in light speeds.

THE VENGEFUL VIRGIN by Gil Brewer sound like one serious noir novel, and that's appropriate, because it is. Originally published in 1958 and now being reprinted for the first time since, this is classic noir with all the plotting and scheming you could want. A woman trapped in a life she didn't want taking care of an invalid, a man enters her life and they scheme to take the money and run. And of course things don't go as planned. Great classic nor, from Hard Case Crime of course.

VOICES is the new books from Thomas Dunne books by Arnaldur Indridasson. Protagonist Inspector Erlendur Sveinsson is back in this tale that opens up a Christmas time in Reykjavik. A Santa is dead and finding the killer is added to the good Inspector's already overbooked schedule. This gold dagger winner brings it all when he writes and this is an amazing book and if you like books with a European flavor you must get this.

THE WOUNDED AND THE SLAIN been reprinted for the first time in more than 50 years and this is noir the way it talked about by scholars. A failing marriage sends the Browns on a vacation to Jamaica and improved relations is the last thing going on. Dark, cynical and un-put-downable this is just another great book from Hard Case Crime. Fans of the genre NEED to read this book.

#### Book Reviews:

##### 52 VOLUMES 1-4

Greg Rucka, Mark Waid, Keith Giffin, Grant Morrison and Geoff Johns  
2007  
DC Comics

This is a four volume set of trade paperbacks collecting last years crossover event. It follows a number of different story lines showing how the DC universe copes with it's main three heroes gone. Ralph Dibny is searching for hope after his wife is killed, Renee Montoya ( of Gotham Central fame) is searching for herself while taking on a quest with a dying man, Black Adam tries to redeem his villainous past and villains are teaming together to release the apocalypse.

This was a very large undertaking involving multiple writers and meeting weekly deadline as it was originally released. Reading it in trades is a totally satisfying experience. Heroes who are truly heroic and a depth of characterization often overlooked in comics. Any fan of superheroes will enjoy this.

Jon Jordan

##### 100 BULLETS: ONCE UPON A CRIME

Brian Azzarello/ Eduardo Risso  
2007  
Vertigo/DC Comics

This on going epic tale is going to be wrapping up in 2008. In this the 11<sup>th</sup> volume of the collected series things are gearing up. Azzarello has been building to a big finish and in ONCE UPON A CRIME we see all the players lining up and choosing sides.. For those un familiar with the series, a quick run down. Long ago the families controlling organized crime in Italy put together a group of people to keep watch, The Minutemen. They police the families with out answering to them. Now, years later the controlling members have done away with the Minutemen. Unfortunately no one bothered to consider that Agent Grave, the man in charge doesn't take orders from them. He is reassembling his group to put things back in order. Through out the series he has been recruiting and reactivating his team.

The artwork by Eduardo Risso is perfect for this story, it's gritty, and dark, and expresses the mood of the book in spectacular fashion.

This volume has an introduction fro Tom Fontana of Oz and Homicide.

You need to be reading this!  
Jon Jordan

#### A DANGEROUS RETURN

Rique Johnson  
2007

Strebor Books

This is Rique Johnson's third novel about the travails of maverick Detective Jason Jerrard. Each episode includes a serious love interest, new attempts of violence against his person and a final gut wrenching vindication. The intensity of each of these three elements is ratcheted up with each new installment.

In his latest book, Jason has enough new found wealth to retire very early from the police force and reunite with the first love of his life, Monique. He seems very happy with his new status in life and enjoys all the indulgences his new wealth brings. We are also treated to some very detailed and steamy accounts of their passion for each other. Late one evening Jason's mentor is the victim of a car bombing and Jason jumps at the chance to find the killer. He decides to rejoin the force to lead the investigation against Monique's wishes and his troubles build from that moment.

Jason finally decides to marry Monique, while at the same time following leads to the car bombing. The wedding scene is one you will never forget! The ingenious way he tracks down the car bomber is part high tech/part good luck. But after he collars the car bomber, he has even bigger problems as a crew he has previously put behind bars is out for serious revenge on Jason and everyone around him. The body count begins to build!

This series continues to sizzle and I'm sure will everyone will want to follow the adventures of Jason Jerrard.

Joseph Czech

#### A HELL OF A WOMAN

ed. Megan Abbott  
December 2007  
Busted Flush Press

Short stories are not easy to write. For some people they're damn near impossible. The writer must capture the reader in just a few sentences, establish character and plot in a few paragraphs and wrap the whole thing up in a few pages. Yet every story in the anthology A HELL OF A WOMAN succeeds in doing this.

Most readers are used to skipping around a bit with an anthology, reading the names they know and possibly skipping the names they don't. That would be a mistake. The names in this book get to play with form and character out of series and try things they wouldn't outside of a story. And the new kids in the book are the ones that will be names down the line.

Annette Meyer's starts everything off with a "fuck" in "It's Too Late, Baby," then rest of the stories leap of the page and grab for the throat right at its heels. "High Yellow" by the sublime Libby Fischer Hellmann tells the tale of a beautiful woman who is so much more than she seems. "The Kiss of Death" by Rebecca Pawal is a vivid tale of how subtle a murder can be. Lynne Barrett is a fresh voice with a fresh take on the Hollywood tale in "Blue Vandas." Vicki Hendricks hits it hard with "The Big O" in a story as toxic as MIAMI PURITY. "Bumping Uglies" may well be this reviewer's favorite as Donna Moore twists the other woman story around. And "Hungry Enough" simply kicks major ass. Remind me never to piss Cornelia Read off....

There's more. Much more. Charlie Huston, Eddie Muller, Daniel Woodrell, S.J. Rozan – why wouldn't you want to read and be consumed by an anthology that is like a black panther, pacing back and forth in her cage with a snarl. Open the first page, to the first story, and you will be overcome with a dark, lethal, beautiful force.

Jennifer Jordan

#### ANOTHER MAN'S WORLD

Joe Stein  
2007  
Bluechrome (UK)

A warning if you decide to read this follow up to Stein's previous book COLD FIRE, CALM RAGE. You should take your time. You won't want to. You'll want to read faster and faster. Trust me, read it slow, make it last. Like a good glass of wine or an aged scotch.

Garron is trying to make a better life for himself. He has work, and he's coping as best he can with his past. But life ain't always about easy and Garron does what he must to survive. Things get a bit out of control and with out meaning to Garron has crossed into the world of Adam Hillier, a man who gets what he wants when he wants and answers to no one. Coming out alive may be all he can hope for.

Deftly drawn characters and a wonderfully lurid setting set this up as a book that will stay with you long after you finish reading. This is the full package.

Jon Jordan

AYE DO OR DIE  
Candy Calvert  
2007  
Midnight Ink

Darcy Cavanaugh is a nurse on a cruise ship, but she is also there because she is a member of a wedding party. Two boyfriends show up, one current and the other not, plus a former employer who is a podiatrist with a foot fetish. (Think toe cleavage!) Plus, Darcy is receiving poems from an admirer, and she is not appreciative. The males are having a continuing stag party and the 'jokes' get carried a little too far as one victim has to be airlifted to a hospital. Then someone dies.

Which means the murderer has to be someone on the ship. A nice, enclosed world, but it also means the killer knows what Darcy is up to. Not healthy. She gets into trouble faster than she can whip out a thermometer.

Romantic- mystery but more the latter than the former--all the hunks keep their clothes on, more or less.

The author has a great sense of humor, and it almost makes a seasick-prone person, like me, want to take a cruise. A fun romp. Written with humor by a former nurse.

Gay Toltl Kinman

BANG BANG  
Theo Gangi  
2007  
Kensington

Debut author Gangi delivers the goods in this non-stop crime thriller. Gangi jumps into the crime fiction pool with a major splash and leaves a big wake.

Izzy is a Stick Up Man, basically a hood who robs drug lords. He lives by a code and that is why he's still on the streets. But when a job goes bad, Izzy ends up at odds with his partner and the people who trusted him. Now Albanians crime lords are after him, his ex-partner wants him dead and his estranged son is strangely drawn to the life Izzy leads.

The action is non stop and Gangi's characters ring almost too true. Twisting a number of different plot threads Gangi weaves a tale that leaves and after burn in your brain. This was a one sitting read and I can't wait for more.

Jon Jordan

BENEATH THE BLEEDING  
Val McDermid  
2007  
HarperCollins U.K.

BENEATH THE BLEEDING features Ms. McDermid's recurring sleuths, Carol Jordan and Tony Hill. Tony arrives at hospital after a vicious attack. Bradford's favorite footballer lies just up the hall in intensive care. The young man dies horrifically and not by accident. Carol finds herself handling a major incident without Tony by her side.

For the people of Bradford things are about to get a whole lot worse. It looks like their hero may not be the first to die from "unusual" circumstances. A community reeling in grief then suffers an explosion that will change the city forever.

McDermid often allows stories to simmer within her head until they can be written with a completeness few others in crime fiction ever manage. BENEATH THE BLEEDING takes a hard look at post 9-11, post 7-7 terrorism. Carol and her police colleagues work a case (or maybe 2) that is sure to resound with readers. For the possibility of unimaginable horrors is now a probability in every day policing. In a straight up police procedural, with well loved characters, that new reality sings like bad elevator music.

The result is a novel that goes beyond even this highly successful series standard. And there are rewards for the long time reader aplenty, but those I'll allow you to savor on your own.

Ruth Jordan

BONES TO ASHES  
Kathy Reichs  
2007  
Scribner

This is the tenth Temperance Brennan novel. She is a North Carolina-born, Montreal-based forensic anthropologist. In her childhood, she met and became great friends with an Acadian girl two years her senior. Then the friend, Evangeline,

disappeared, along with her mother and sister. For the next few years, Tempe sought traces of her friend with no success. Thirty years later, a skeleton is found, one of a young girl unearthed in Acadia. Immediately, Tempe theorizes it could be Evangeline. Meanwhile, a number of other missing girls flood the crime scene, with Tempe's partner tracking cold cases, two unidentified corpses and three missing persons. All teenage girls.

While working the cases, Tempe continues to obsess over the possibility that the skeleton is that of her friend. She locates Evangeline's sister in Acadia, who tells Tempe her friend was murdered 30 years before. Some clues implicate the sister's husband, an operator of strip joints, among other shady dealings. Ryan and Hippo, another cop, and Tempe pursue the mysteries of the cold cases, and Tempe keeps up her hopes of identifying Evangeline.

As in previous novels, there is an abundance of forensic anthropological science, details of bone dissections and linguistic analyses, all of which prove useful in the process of solving the mysteries. The customary fast-paced writing and tight plotting brings the novel to an unanticipated conclusion.

Theodore Feit

#### CAIRO: A GRAPHIC NOVEL

G. Willow Wilson/Art by M.K. Perker

November 2007

Vertigo/DC Comics

Half way through CAIRO one of our characters has to look at his motivation for a planned action with truth. What he sees horrifies and with this self realization he is deemed worthy of possessing the Companion Sword and moving forward on our quest. These five panels, drawn with skill and written with simplicity are the heart of the book.

CAIRO, the "City of Victory", an area of historical importance and present day integration is the perfect back drop for this tale. Our cast: An Arab drug dealer trying to get by, an Israeli soldier caught behind enemy lines and trying to get home, an angry and dispassionate American teenager, A well meaning but naïve American college student wanting to absorb Arab culture for self indulgent reasons, and a Cairo based reporter. The five are brought together by a Jinn in a Hookah and the criminal who wants possession of the genie's magic and the secret of a spiritual box.

It's a grand adventure. There's desert, pyramids, stoned camels, a belly dancer and a magic carpet ride. We visit the Israeli/Egyptian border and one of the world's most charismatic cities. We meet the contemporary Arab many times. Polite, hospitable and with a sense of honor. We walk through lore of the ancients; the Under Nile, the crypts, Jinn magic and the sword of my opening. A sword who's historical purpose has been to protect the peacekeepers. Why is it given to a seventeen year old boy? You'll have to absorb the novel, readers.

Many say that the graphic novel is coming of age. In truth, if you look at the books many of the best duos have already presented this print subculture has been "of age" for quite some time. The Vertigo imprint promises its reader quality. An action packed, highly visual tale of adventure with a lot of meat on it's bones.

It's the marrow of Wilson and Perker's work that will leave an impression.

The allegory beneath CAIRO speaks volumes. Disparate people working together can indeed change the direction of political winds. East can be made empty again and we can start over with humanity and love in the City of Victory. For peace should be the underlying motive in any culture and is, if we let everything else be stripped away in the spirit of adventure and truth. Not bad for a "comic book".

CAIRO, a must read for adventurers of any age. A smart and visual look at one of history's most storied cities, G. Willow Wilson and M.K. Perker present a tale that creates ancient magic in 2007. With succinct characters and a high voltage plot, CAIRO is a book to both embrace and remember. Graphic Novel with a capital N.

Ruth Jordan

#### THE CHICAGO WAY

Michael Harvey

2007

Alfred A. Knopf

To paraphrase, "Chicago, Chicago, it's Michael Kelly's kind of town." The windy city is the setting for this hard-boiled PI's debut. Kelly was cashiered from the police force two years previous, and is approached by his ex-partner to help solve an eight-year-old rape and assault-and-battery case, one which his friend was ordered to "forget."

The next day, Kelly's friend is found dead of gunshot wounds on Navy Pier. Kelly's fingerprints are found on the casing, but no one takes it seriously, allowing him to pursue the case. He links his friend's murder to the original rape case, and goes about investigating.

Eventually, Kelly discovers various clues relating to a serial rapist and murderer on death row, a current rapist, and four other murders, all possibly relating to the original case. As the story progresses, the suspense mounts. Written with a fluid style, in the tradition of private eye novels, the book leads the reader on without a suspicion of how it is going to end. The novel works on several levels: the mystery itself, forensics (DNA testing), problems with rape cases in general and other aspects.

The novel is a fast, enjoyable read.  
Theodore Feit

CRIME AND SUSPENSE ANTHOLOGY I 2005-2006  
ed. by Tony Burton  
2007  
Wolfmont Publishing,

As stated in the subtitle, Selected tales from Crime and Suspense ezine's first fifteen months, the stories were all previously published in the popular Crime and Suspense ezine created and edited by Tony Burton. This book has a lot of fantastic reading. Some stories are very short, almost like sound bites. Very addictive!  
In "A Little Wildness," Austin Camacho's story, a killer likes a little wildness, but the victim's husband might like more. "A Chilling Clue" by Patricia Harrington is a two-page story, in which a rich woman realizes that her boy toy may have married her for reasons other than love. In "Honor Thy Father" by Kathleen Strasser, the heroine wonders if she should honor her mother more.  
In Tony Burton's "Cheaters Never Win," a cheating husband thinks his wife is less than faithful and hires a private detective to verify his delusion--and in a way, the P.I. does. In "Prey," by Jonette Stabbert, a dog terrorizes the neighborhood and the heroine decides to do some knitting, a seemingly harmless endeavor. John M. Floyd's "Saving Mrs. Hapwell" is a delightful, whimsical story, and I laughed out loud at the ending. "Virgin Timber" by Diane Dahlstrom proves that cutting down trees can be hazardous to a person's health. "Arapaho" by Gary R. Hoffman is a chilling tale about what goes wrong when you train a raptor. "Silver Lining" by Peggy Ehrhart explores the idea--when is a stolen ring, not stolen? "Summer Freeze" by Kate Thornton--A kid goes into an ice cream freezer at the wrong time. (Don't worry, he's okay.) "Waitress" by Agnes Dee--This two-and-half page story is about a man who plays a trick, which is the twist of the story. "Heavy Burdens" by Jim Wilsky is a bizarre tale about two men who love the same woman but have only one parachute between them. "All in the Family" by Jenny Schwartz--Set in England, this tale is about marriage in the upper classes. In "Sweet Red Tomatoes" by Mike Madoc, we learn how volatile a little ol' tomato plant can be.  
Gay Toltl Kinman

DAMNATION FALLS  
Edward Wright  
2007  
Orion (UK)

Multiple award winner Wright is possibly the best unknown writer working today. Why he's not a best seller eludes me, but I can guarantee it's not his writing skill that keeps from the NYT best seller list.  
Randall Wilkes is doing what some say can't be done; he's going home again. His career as a journalist wrecked, he is writing for a boyhood buddy and ex-governor with aspirations of a come back. Sonny McMahan's family is colorful to say the least, so when the elder Mrs. McMahan speaks of seeing her dead husband it's all but ignored. And then she is found dead herself, followed by more people with ties to the McMahan family. Wilkes finds that there are no easy answers as he travels the state and the past to find out the truth.  
Dark, atmospheric and insightful this book is one that should be savored slowly like a perfect late summer afternoon, though there are definitely storm clouds coming....  
Jon Jordan

DEAD STREET  
Mickey Spillane  
2007  
Hard Case Crime

Mickey Spillane left us last year, but he didn't leave us empty-handed. At the time of his death, he had just finished an adventure novel (THE LAST STAND) and had three other novels near completion, including two Mike Hammers (THE GOLIATH BONE and THE KING OF WEEDS) and a cop novel, DEAD STREET. Spillane left these works-in-progress in the capable hands of Max Allan Collins. DEAD STREET is the first of these to see publication, fittingly by the great pulp revival house Hard Case Crime.  
In short, DEAD STREET is aces, and you should go buy it. Now.  
The long version? DEAD STREET tells the story of ageing NYPD detective Jack Stang, facing retirement with no real eye to the future. Twenty years earlier, Stang's fiancée, Bettie, was killed in an attempted mob kidnapping. For the last 20 years, Stang has lived his life, done his job, alone in the world and mourning the love of his life. Now, on the eve of his retirement, a stranger arrives with the news that Bettie is still alive, and living in Florida. The catch? During her kidnapping ordeal, the van

she was in plunged off a bridge, into the Hudson River. Bettie lost both her eyesight and her memory in the crash. Worse, the mobsters know she's alive and are still after her, and they're willing to do anything to access the information locked inside her head.

Spillane writes Stang from the perspective of a man heading into the final act of his life's drama, and the result is surprisingly poignant. Stang's relationship with Bettie is both passionate and tender, and we ache with him as he carefully reacquaints himself with his true love, who has no memory of their earlier relationship.

But have no fear, this is a Mickey Spillane novel, and Stang is plenty tough when the bad guys come calling. The action scenes at the climax of DEAD STREET will set your heart racing.

Kudos must be given to Max Allan Collins, who wrote the last three chapters of DEAD STREET based on Spillane's notes. The prose flows from Spillane to Collins invisibly, and DEAD STREET reads as a first class Mickey Spillane novel, from the first chapter to the last.

Sean Chercover. author of Big City Bad Blood

#### DEADLY BELOVED

Max Allan Collins

2007

Hard Case Crime

Ms. Tree made her debut in comics in 1980, deftly drawn by Terry Beatty for a perfect eye for telling a mystery tale with art. Collins and Beatty continued the series through a number of different publishers, the last being DC comics. After all this time, this is the first prose novel (there have been four short stories) featuring this hard boiled woman who could take on most men in fiction.

When a woman is arrested for killing her husband and a hooker in a hotel room, Ms. Tree is brought in to aid in her defense. While there is no question that Mrs. Addwater did the deed, there is a question of why she did and punishment should be meted out. As Michael Tree digs into what happened, she finds more than she bargained for.

This is a picture perfect hardboiled tale and I for one would love more Ms. Tree novels.

Jon Jordan

#### DEATH OF A MURDERER

Rupert Thomson

2007

Alfred A. Knopf

Billy Tyler is content to float through life as a bobby, patrolling the streets of a small English village. He was not disappointed to fail the sergeant's exam—he really lacks ambition. He's committed some unsavory acts as boy and man, had two torrid love affairs, marrying his second lover, with whom he has had a daughter who suffers from Down's Syndrome.

One day he is assigned to guard a mortuary, in which the body of a reviled child molester-murderer (based on Myra Hindley, the real-life Moors Murderer) lies in a refrigerated slot. It's a long shift, 7 pm to 7 am. There's nothing to do but think, setting the stage for a series of flashbacks to events and acts of Billy's life to date: his marriage, which has lost the original glamour after many years, his "damaged" daughter, relationships with a couple of boyhood friends.

Some of the observations take the place of conversations with the dead woman, who seems to have penetrating insights into Billy. As a result, he gains introspection into his problems and anxieties, raising deep questions: whom do we love, and why; how do we protect our children; and what separates us from so-called monsters.

Tightly written, the novel reveals the depths of Billy's soul, giving rise to fundamental questions, and is well worth reading.

Theodore Feit

#### DEATH OF A WRITER

Michael Collins

2007

Bloomsbury (Trade Paperback)

I missed the hardcover release of this book. Pity. DEATH OF A WRITER is an amazing book. Author Collins has taken the publishing world and an amalgamation of writer personas and created one of my favorite reads of 2007 (original copy write 2006).

Two men with parallel and diverging careers. One had the possibility of becoming the greatest novelist of his generation but now wallows in minor academia? The second writer is our best selling novelist, a brand name if you will. They first met in college and have been rivals of a sort ever since.

When Allen Horowitz comes to speak to Bannockburn College, Professor E. Robert Pendleton is charged with hosting the dinner. He uses the opportunity to try and kill himself. Despite his best efforts, at this too, he fails.

A great work never published? Why? And is the work entirely fiction? Detective Jon Ryder wants to find out. What are the secrets of the good professors dark past?

Leaving his cat and his home in the care of a T.A. the secrets of Pendleton's literary career are about to be found underneath the basement steps. Collins uses his plot to cathartically expose many questions that are asked every day by people who are wordsmiths, both good and bad. Merely creepy at times, DEATH OF A WRITER is at times more chilling than an ice storm in January.

Ruth Jordan

#### DMZ: PUBLIC WORKS

Brian Wood

2007

DC Comics

This third collection of DMZ is possibly the most relevant yet. Using a possible future in which the US is divided and in the midst of a civil war with Manhattan as the middle unclaimed ground Wood tells a story that is frightening in it's realism. The government cozying up with corporations to rebuild parts of New York will do what ever they need to do to keep the money coming. Matty Roth, our reporter hero, goes undercover on a work crew and uncovers secrets that could get a lot of people killed, himself included.

Sad, disturbing, enlightening and all too close to home this should be in every home and read by every American citizen who has questions about their government.

Jon Jordan

#### EXIT MUSIC

Ian Rankin

September, 07

Orion

Reviews are everywhere for this book, the last of the John Rebus series. At least for now. Is it a good book? It is a *great* book. Simpler and less symbolically driven than the last half dozen or so books in the series, EXIT MUSIC is one for fans and Rankin to share together. This is a straight up police procedural full of characters you're invested in, a city we've all grown to perversely love in the last twenty years and the well crafted crime reveal that has made Rankin a household name in much of the world.

In the twenty year history of this remarkable series John Rebus has solved twice as many crimes. In his last ten days as a police officer it is right that he and his creator take us back to the bare bones and intuitive detecting that hooked us all in the beginning. A Cliff-hanger ending is sure to have those of us who are old school flicking our bics. The young will raise their cell phones. We'll all follow Rankin anywhere, in fact can't wait to go there. But should our favorite tartan duo decide to reunite in the future???? Hell, it ain't exit music until we know there will be no more encores. If Zeppelin can reunite .... anything's possible.

Thank you both for sharing your journey. Bon Voyage!

Ruth Jordan

#### FALSE FORTUNE

Twist Phelan

2007

Poisoned Pen Press

When her father is on leave from the law firm where she also works, attorney Hannah Dain steps in to cover a settlement conference which should be routine. However, a group of women approach her in the lobby. Members of the Tohono O'odham nation, they oppose the proposed settlement which is ostensibly on their behalf. Instead, they believe the proposed monetary amount to be far too small to compensate them for the injuries they have suffered as a result of radioactive pollution near their homes. In a flurry of legalese and courtroom procedure, Hannah leaves the conference with a postponement and startled to find herself newly appointed by the court to represent the petitioners.

Hannah sensibly understands that her next best move would be to find evidence to support the claims of her clients. The area where the purported illegal dumping of radioactive waste has occurred is on the reservation in a dry, dusty, hot corner of the desert near Phoenix Arizona. But when Hannah schedules trips to the area with a consulting geologist to collect samples, and later with a video camera to provide context and background, events turn ugly and her personal safety is seriously at risk. She finds the evidence she needs, but also the unpleasant realization that someone wishes she would quit looking and will stop at nothing to prevent her interference.

Hannah's personal life is in a similar state of turmoil. A young woman shows up on Hannah's doorstep with a startling claim to be included in her life. Hannah's relationship with her sister Shelby remains tentative. Hannah still struggles with questions about her relationship with her father and memories of her mother. An overly assertive secretary seeking to micro-manage Hannah's life only adds to the confusion.

Phelan's series featuring Hannah Dain is a very enjoyable combination of suspense and character study. She conveys a strong sense of place in the setting of America's southwestern deserts.

And one caveat – readers who are claustrophobic are advised to approach the later chapters with caution!

#### FEAR OF LANDING

David Waltner-Toews

2007

Poisoned Pen Press

With an enigmatic title and a startling first sentence: "There is something warm and comforting about doing an autopsy on a cow," Waltner-Toews gets off to a good start in his debut novel. Abner Dueck is a veterinarian, assigned to a world wide agricultural project sponsored by a Canadian agency. North American dairy cows have been sent to a remote area of Indonesia, and in addition to the expected occasional anthrax outbreaks, other more subtle diseases have caused the death of several of the imported cows. Abner's team has been assigned to find out why. However "team" is probably a misnomer, since most of the other foreigners working on the project devote their days to soaking up atmosphere, investing in traditional religious relics, and enjoying an active night life.

The action is set in the early 1960's, at a time of political upheaval in Indonesia. Shifting political loyalties and ongoing power struggles have resulted in assassinations as well as mysterious disappearances. The first half of the book is filled with a sense of ominous foreboding as Abner struggles to make sense of a life in a strange country, unable to understand everything happening around him. The title reflects his ambivalence – should he remain abroad to experience the life of an exotic land or should he return to the familiar and routine awaiting him in Canada?

The reader is not presented with a murder until nearly half the book has elapsed. This long delay sacrifices some of the originality and punch of the opening chapters.

However, Waltner-Toews presents an armchair traveler's delight in atmospheric visits to sections of Indonesia not usually on a casual tourist's itinerary. And encountering the shifting loyalties and enigmatic actions of persons caught in threatening political intrigue always provides pleasure for the reader.

Woodstock

#### FIDDLE GAME

Richard A. Thompson

January 2008

Poisoned Pen Press

It's one of the oldest cons in the book - the fiddle game. In this case, it involves a real fiddle, a priceless antique violin left as collateral on a bail bond. The lovely lady who leaves it winds up dead very quickly, which kind of screws up the con as it's traditionally set up. So Herman Jackson, bail bondsman, tries to figure out what's going on, since he's the one left holding the worthless violin.

Amy Cox, the victim of a hit-and-run, claimed to be the sister of Jimmy Cox, in jail for Grand Theft Auto, Malicious Property Damage, and some other minor stuff. After she's hit by a car, but actually strangled to death, it turns out that there is a Jimmy Cox, but he's never heard of her and has no sister. The police, for some reason, think Herman Jackson had something to do with Ms. Cox's untimely death.

And everyone wants the violin. The good cop. The crooked cop. Some gypsies claiming ancient rights to the violin. And then there's the person who wants Jackson dead, for reasons not known to Jackson.

Herman Jackson used to live in Detroit, and would like to maintain a very low profile because of some unnamed (almost certainly criminal) activity that caused him to leave Detroit. The whole mess with the violin, and the killings that are persisting, make this low profile life very difficult to maintain. Jackson has to solve the crime just to keep his life on a somewhat even keel. FIDDLE GAME is a good first novel. Jackson is a character with lots of room to grow, plenty of back-story to learn about, and a job almost guaranteed to bring him more trouble. The plot in FIDDLE GAME is pretty good (which means I hadn't a clue what was coming next). St. Paul is a great city in which to set a story: we all know where it is, but most of us don't know as much about it as we think we know about Minneapolis. All in all, FIDDLE GAME is a very competent first novel.

P.J. Coldren

#### FIFTY-SEVEN HEAVEN

Lonnie Cruse

2007

## Five Star

If you've ever owned or coveted a classic car, you will understand some of the feelings Jack and Kitty Bloodworth experience when a corpse is found in the trunk of their 1957 Chevrolet Bel Air. To make matters worse, they know the woman. Cousin Will Ann caused lots of problems in the family while she was alive, and certainly hasn't stopped now that she's dead. It doesn't help matters at all that Will Ann caused a scene the night before at a local restaurant, accusing Kitty's daughter Sunny of being a sneak and a tramp. What brought that on?

Kitty knows that Sunny is keeping something from her, but what on earth could it be that would have set Will Ann off to that degree?

As Kitty investigates, several troubling items come to her attention. Will Ann had hired a private detective. What was that all about? Who got into the Bloodworth's barn, where Sadie (the car) was kept under lock and key? Who was driving Maggie's van when it ran Kitty off the road and nearly killed her?

Cruse writes a charming cozy novel about people who are real, who take weeks to recuperate from serious injury, whose kids keep secrets from them, whose marriages are not perfect but still loving and caring. She writes with a great understanding of human nature about the foibles and frailties of families, about the good and bad sides of living in a small town where everyone knows everyone. While the plot is nothing earth-shattering, the motive came as a surprise, and the characters are a delight. If you like Susan Rogers Cooper's E.J. Pugh, you will almost certainly like Kitty Bloodworth.

Cozy readers can hardly go wrong with this novel.

P.J. Coldren

## FIRE PRAYER

Deborah Turrell Atkinson.

2007

Poisoned Pen Press

Storm Kayama narrowly escaped death in the second installment of this series, so in this third what can one expect? She and her law partner (and paramour?), Ian Hamlin, journey to Moloka'i, a small island in Hawaii, on a double mission: he to investigate the possibility that a local tour company is responsible for the missing son of a rich client, she at the behest of a high school friend to make sure his ex-wife is taking good care of his adolescent diabetic son.

Amid the excellent flavor of local customs, mores and language customary in this series, the plot thickens. To begin with, soon after Storm visits Jenny, the ex-wife, she is found dead by her 12-year-old son of a head wound – the boy having possibly seen the murderer as well. Then there is a question of the death of the client's elder son ten years before in a fire. Subsequently, suspicions arise about a possible link between these events.

The story races through the scenes of the island: the rain forests, beaches and ocean, as the dangers to the boy both from his disease as well as being pursued by his mother's killer. And Storm, of course, is placed in danger as well.

The novel paces the reader with all the beauty of the islands, the legends and folklore of its peoples. As in the past two novels in the series, the writing is fluid and the plot well-constructed. It's a good thing aloha means goodbye as well as hello: it will hopefully greet the fourth in the Hawaii series.

Theodore Feit

## FORENSICS AND FICTION

D.P. Lyle

2007

Thomas Dunne Books

This is a non-fiction book meant to be an aid for writers that answers questions about forensics and all things CSI. It is my feeling that as an author you wouldn't need another reference source. Lyle lays out information in an engaging manner without making the reader feel like they are being lectured. As a non-writer, I found this infinitely interesting and it makes me question where some of the folks in Hollywood get their information! If you read crime fiction with any reality at all you need to read this book.

Jon Jordan

## FROM MAY TO DECEMBER

Pat MacEnulty

2007

Serpent's Tail

Although FROM MAY TO DECEMBER may be a tad literary for our readers, MacEnulty's gifted writing style and fascinating characters had me hooked from the very beginning. She tells the story of four women: Jen, a wild ex-porn star trying to finish

her dissertation but getting distracted by men and booze, her sister Lolly who teaches a poetry class in the Florida State Correctional facility but is soon diagnosed with cancer and reaches out to Jen for help, and inmates Nicole and Sonya, both of whom participate in Lolly's class and are desperate to be free from the violence they face every day. Each carry their own baggage and have their own hurdles to overcome, but by interweaving their story lines and seeing how the characters affect one another, MacEnulty creates a powerful book that can speak to everyone, from every background.

All the characters are interesting in their own way, but Nicole's point of view is by far the most intriguing. Told through her prison memoir, it is the only first person view-point, allowing readers to see prison through the character's eyes. The conflicts are mostly internalized, so don't expect prison breaks or death threats. The suspense lies within the characters, not in the external plot, so while it may be a disappointing read for crime fiction fans, I found FROM MAY TO DECEMBER powerful and captivating.

Dana Kaye

#### GRAVE IMPORTS

Eric Stone

Bleak House Books

September 2007

Stolen Cambodian art—statues, parts of temples, icons—illegally sent through Thailand, Vietnam and China to Hong Kong where it is sold, at the time, legally, brings Ray Sharp to his second adventure. The exotic Far East background provides the reader with real glimpses into the people and locales.

Sharp leaves his journalistic career as a result of an unfortunate incident, which leaves him in a depressed state. A good friend, a former CIA spook, now trying to build a corporate investigation firm, hires Ray. He is assigned a routine look into a Chinese art supplies company in which an American client is considering investing. Instead of mundane art supplies, he finds secret stashes of antiquities. The trail leads to an ex-South Vietnamese General now living in Thailand and to the Khmer Rouge, the ancient temples, and the killing fields of Cambodia.

The author's knowledge of the Far East seems to be quite genuine, and the descriptions of the streets and people of Hong Kong, Bangkok and other locations compelling. The story is believable and the characters real. Insights into the cultures of the area, as well as the horrible plunder of artifacts, are lessons well-told.

Theodore Feit

#### HARD ROW

Margaret Maron

2007

Warner Books

HARD ROW marks the welcome return of Judge Deborah Knott. Now in her late 30's and newly married to Major Dwight Bryant, Chief Deputy of the Colleton County, North Carolina Sheriff's Dept, Deborah is adjusting to life with a newly acquired husband, his eight-year-old son, as well as their terrier, Bandit. Dwight is called out one night to a scene where a man's severed leg has been found lying in a ditch, and additional severed body parts are discovered not long thereafter, apparently from more than one victim. The ensuing investigation unearths not-so-well-hidden racial prejudices and resentment over the local immigrant population, both legal and undocumented, who are the cleaning women, waitresses, busboys and, of course, migrant field workers on whom our society so greatly depends. (Of course, there are parts of the country where the feelings are on the other side of the equation, but that is a discussion for another time and another place.) Another theme raised in the book is the challenges faced by young and not-so-young married couples raising stepchildren under sometimes difficult circumstances, something Deborah is handling with as much aplomb as she can muster.

As always, this author has peopled her novel with her usual endearing cast of characters, both family and friends who have known each other forever, and it is a pleasure to once again enjoy their company. The author has kindly provided a family tree outlining her eleven brothers and half-brothers and their various mates and offspring, always a helpful thing. Parenthetically, the title of the book refers to the 'hard row to hoe,' which is the plight of many, if not most, farmers in today's society, and each chapter of the book is prefaced by quotations from "Profitable Farming in the Southern States, 1890," in interesting fashion.

The book proceeds at an unhurried pace, which is just fine.

Gloria Feit

#### HEARTSICK

Chelsea Cain

2007

St. Martin's

Chelsea Cain's HEARTSICK is a most unique serial killer novel. There are two killers operating. Like Hannibal Lector, the most

manipulating one is behind bars. She, yes, *she*, was put there by the main protagonist, Archie Sheridan. Gretchen Lowell kidnapped and tortured Archie, who is, after two years, still recovering. He's asked to head up the task force to catch the latest killer; dubbed The After School Strangler. The mayor 'assigns' a reporter to the task force.

Susan Ward is a feature writer looking to become a reporter. The interplay between these three characters makes for highly recommended reading. Ms. Cain's plotting is tight, the police actions are totally believable. The ending is satisfying. Go out and get Heartsick. Everything after it will be derivative.

Dave Biemann

#### HELL FOR THE HOLIDAYS

Chris Grabenstein

2007

Carroll and Graf

Grabenstein weighs in with book two of his series featuring FBI agent Christopher Miller in another book filled with holiday madness. This time out, Miller is on the trail of terrorists planning an explosion at JFK airport.

Miller deals with an apathetic reaction to his information and continues the hunt on his own while trying to help his daughter cope with the aftermath of the previous Christmas (SLAY RIDE). The pacing of this book is so perfect, the suspense builds with every turning page.

Ultimately timely and action heavy, HELL FOR THE HOLIDAYS makes the holidays dangerous and entertaining as hell. Part Die Hard and part Criminal Minds, this book will take your mind off the leftovers and erase any thoughts of napping.

Grabenstein is a truly gifted writer and one I would not miss.

Jon Jordan

#### HIDDEN MOON

James Church

November 2007

St. Martin's

James Church's North Korean Inspector O, returns in HIDDEN MOON. In a nation where passing the buck, covering your ass, fighting with rival offices, shifting the blame and worrying over who's watching you is raised to the nth power; Inspector O is unique in police circles as he's known to get things done. A bank has been robbed. This is a rare occurrence in North Korea. Few people have money and don't trust the banks, regardless. Foreigners use the bank. They're very vague when questioned. Lots of Euros appear and disappear. People end up dying. O is told to back off. He's told to pursue the case. He's assigned a partner from a different branch agency. O sands his varieties of wood, banter with his boss and tries to make sense of everything going on as intrigue piles on intrigue. This is a police procedural but if you're looking for familiar ground you won't find it here unless you're willing to read into it. Fans of exotic locale, unique perspective, and a different writing style will thoroughly enjoy Hidden Moon and Inspector O.

Dave Biemann

#### THE INDIAN BRIDE

Karin Fossum /Translated by Charlotte Barslund

2007

Harcourt

A haunting novel, filled with all kinds of ambiguities, set in a small Norwegian village, this novel is the fourth in the Inspector Sejer Mystery series. It begins with a penetrating study of Gunder Jomann, a 50-year-old bachelor, a salesman of agricultural equipment, who decides to travel on a two-week vacation to Mumbai (formerly Bombay), India, where he meets and weds an Indian woman. He returns to Norway, and she follows two weeks later.

The day she arrives, his sister is injured in an auto accident and he is called to the hospital, unable to meet her plane. Instead he asks a cab driver to pick her up, but she can't be located. Later, a woman is found bludgeoned to death not far from Gunder's home. The body turns out to be that of the Indian bride.

As Inspector Sejer, taciturn and methodical, and his colleagues conduct their investigation, with few clues to go on, the reader is treated to a deep look into the small community of about 2,000, where everyone knows each other and their secrets. More important, we look into the minds of each of the main characters for penetrating insights. This novel is equal to the best of the chilling, dour Scandinavian (and Scottish) mystery writers. (One somewhat curious side note: like the incomparable Spenser, Sejer has a woman psychiatrist for a girlfriend.)

Theodore Feit

#### INNOCENT AS SIN

Elizabeth Lowell  
2007  
William Morrow

In the latest of her 60-plus novels, Elizabeth Lowell tells a tale inspired by facts (relatively) 'ripped from the headlines' – brutal wars far from home shores, money laundering, the smuggling of blood diamonds, the inter- and trans-national illegal arms trade, among other things. Kayla Shaw, a private banker in Arizona, is unwittingly forced to become involved in money laundering on a huge scale when her client's husband blackmails her into complicity. The philosophy from which the title derives comes from a statement by Kayla: "Even sin was innocent once. The rest is timing and opportunity."

Rand McCree is a painter who becomes a reluctant participant in events that ended in the murder of his identical twin brother. That loss has motivated him, five years later, to find and track down the killer, an evil man who is Kayla's nemesis as well, and their shared hatred for the man and all he represents propels the plot. Circumstances have them both in the employ of St. Kilda Consulting, a "necessary organization in today's world of transnational crime, failed and failing states, feral cities, and the just plain savage places in between. All the places where duly appointed and lawful governments are just short of useless and corrupt governments thrive." Another player is John Neto, described as "a black man speaking Scots Gaelic—who was also a former British intelligence officer—was presently chief of intelligence of a small African country that was besieged by transnational criminals from Russia, Brazil, Europe, and the UAE. And this man was being interviewed for American TV in a room in British Columbia, Canada, about a murderous Siberian gunrunner presently living the high life of a socialite in Phoenix, Arizona."

I had some problems with this book, not the least of which was that I found the protagonists rather two-dimensional. I also felt the adjective "feral" was annoyingly over-used. As well, the reader is aware of Rand's anguish at his brother's death almost from page one, and I didn't feel it was necessary to be reminded of it on what seemed like every page, e.g., "his twin's loss was still an open wound on his soul." But almost in spite of myself I was pulled into the intricate tale, the timeliness of which makes it one many readers should find enjoyable.

Gloria Feit

THE INTRUDERS  
Michael Marshall  
2007  
William Morrow

Eerie doesn't begin to describe this novel, which brings us an unearthly glimpse into a dark and evil supernatural occurrence. Jack Whalen, a former LAPD cop, now lives in a remote Oregon mountainside with his wife, Amy. He has published one book, and is attempting to write another. Amy is a high-powered, successful advertising executive.

Into this idyllic setting comes a boyhood friend asking for Jack's help to solve the murder of a woman and her son. The quest leads him into the unknown. Amy disappears, and the friend suggests he can provide information about her, leading Whalen deeper into a mysterious world. The more Jack investigates, the more unexplainable the situation becomes.

For fans of this type of story, it is a well-told thriller. In some parts it plods along drearily, and in others is exciting and thrilling. In any event, it does stretch the mind and has several unexpected curves along the way.

Theodore Feit

IT RHYMES WITH LUST  
Drake Waller  
2007  
DARK HORSE COMICS

This book was originally written and drawn way before I was born. Dark Horse has put it out in a trade edition and they should be thanked for this. This graphic novel is pure noir. It's got the bad girls, the desperate men and plenty of bad decisions made by both.

Our story opens up with a funeral, a wealthy man has passed and his young widow now controls his money and in turn the small town they live in. Enter an old flame, brought in to run the local newspaper. Hal Webber used to love Rust Mason, but now she's out of his league. He soon falls for Rust's step daughter and the plot thickens.

This is such an amazing read that after finishing it runs through my head like a movie. If you love noir you will love this book.

Jon Jordan

JUDGMENT FIRE  
Marilyn Meredith

2007

Mundania Press

Meredith's books never disappoint. Tempe Crabtree, her series character, is the resident Deputy Sheriff in a small mountain town in California.

We follow Tempe on patrol and one of her calls is a neighbor of a battered wife. The wife is in denial but the husband pushes Tempe too far and she arrests him.

Someone dies and the suspects are husband, son and a neighbor who had an on-going argument with the family. Tempe, Native American, has what the Irish would call "the gift." She senses danger, and visits a shaman for guidance. Old memories of bad times in high school start to haunt her, but that's no surprise because she is dealing with people from her past.

Disturbing memories become more so because her husband, a minister, doesn't want her exploring too deep into the Indian side of her heritage, although he's coming around, the shaman tells her.

Tempe is receiving threatening calls, but how can that be with the person she thinks is the caller is in jail?

Excellent police procedural, very realistic, I enjoyed the rapport between her and husband Hutch. Tempe is always excellent company.

Gay Toltl Kinman

## JUSTICE DENIED

J. A. Jance

2007

William Morrow

The J.P. Beaumont series just rolls on and on, and keeps getting better. Beau and his partner Melissa ("Mel") are working for the State Attorney General's Special Homicide Investigation Team (the acronym is an inside joke) when the AG assigns each to a separate, secret "off the books" assignment without explanation. Beau is asked to look into the murder of a recently released convict exonerated by DNA evidence after several years. Mel is asked to analyze the whereabouts of recently released persons convicted of sexual offenses. Neither is to discuss his/her case with anyone. In addition, Beau is checking on missing person cases never solved as well.

Somehow, however, their cases begin to intertwine and they begin to work as partners professionally as well as in their private lives. Their investigation takes them into what might be a conspiracy involving cops or persons in high places. Meanwhile, Beau has to confront all kinds of personal problems.

This novel is the 18<sup>th</sup> in the series published in the last 20 years. It is of the customary high caliber, and let's hope they keep coming.

Theodore Feit

## KNEE HIGH BY THE FOURTH OF JULY

Jess Lourey

2007

Midnight Ink

Another laugh-out loud Murder-a-Month Mystery by Lourey. Each is different and just as funny.

Mira James is a part-time librarian and reporter in small town Battle Lake, Minnesota. The town's pride, joy and symbol, a twenty-three foot high statue of Chief Wenonga, is missing from the town center. Mira discovers the theft, as well as part of a real scalp on the base.

Mira can get into trouble faster than she can write her column for the Battle Lake Recall, and even get into trouble for that. Ms. Kennie Rogers, the town mayor has a standoff with a group that is against having the statue in the first place because it is a stereotype. Did they take it?

Removing the statue means some serious big hauling equipment, so Mira looks into who in the area has that. A resident dressed as an Indian in the Fourth of July parade is kidnapped. Her library assistant, Mrs. Bern, may look like a little old lady, but is far from that image, as Mira learns.

Mira sums up her life. "I needed to evade the police, find a man missing part of his head, track down a twenty-three foot statue, cover the fireworks display for the Battle Lake Recall and avoid a cheating ex-boyfriend."

Mira lives in a double-wide on the lake, which she longs to share with Johnny Leeson, the local garden expert. She's not alone in that fantasy. In between trying to snag Johnny, and looking for the fiberglass chief, she finds a body, with part of its scalp missing. She calls in the discovery anonymously, otherwise Chief of Police Gary Wohnt might lock her up and ask questions much, much later.

She meets Brando who owns the company that made the statue. To fill the empty statue base he offers them a large, but

malformed, fiberglass woodchuck--or is it a chipmunk, he's not sure.  
A surprise ending that makes perfect sense.  
Gay Toltl Kinman

#### THE LAST ENEMY

Grace Brophy  
2006  
Soho Press

The story features Commissario Alessandro Cenni, and is set in Assisi, Italy, during Holy Week. As in all Soho published books, the setting is strong, like cake soaked in rum. Rita, a Brooklynite, daughter of two Italians, return to her mother's ancestral home of Count Casati, her uncle. Don't get too attached to Rita, not that it's likely, for she is the reason for this murder mystery. On Good Friday, the city turns out as it always has for procession. A body is found and Cenni investigates, finding secrets that have been buried in the town since the second world war. The Count does not wish his delicate wife to be bothered with such mundane questions by the police. "She knows nothing," he tells Cenni. And if that's not enough, the Count calls on favors from Cenni's bosses. A refugee, a former member of the Count's household, and the woman who found the body, is an all too convenient scapegoat, for she has secrets to hide also. The traditions and flavor of the city prominently figure into the plot. This is not a book to rush through.  
Gay Toltl Kinman

#### LAST BREATH

George D. Shuman  
2007  
Simon & Schuster

Making her second appearance, blind psychic Sherry Moore faces a double peril. To begin with, she still is suffering from pain and psychological trauma resulting from her previous episode. She's popping pills and abusing her body and nearly dies from an overdose. But more important is the task at hand: Helping to find a serial killer who suffocates, strangles or hangs his victims. His murders stretch across the country, but the latest victims are found in western Pennsylvania. Sherry, of course, has the unique ability to hold the hand of a dead person and "see" the last 18 seconds of memory. The novel blends two genres: police procedural and the supernatural. It is a well-written, exciting thriller. The concept certainly is original, the characters believable and paced to a rousing conclusion.  
Theodore Feit

#### THE LAST STRIPTEASE

Michael Wiley  
2007  
St. Martin's Minotaur

Winning the PWA/SMP best 1<sup>st</sup> private eye novel contest has got to be heady stuff! As the last in a long line of Michaels to receive this nod to writing excellence, Mr. Wiley has a lot to live up to. And he does. THE LAST STRIPTEASE gives a reader everything they could want from a P.I. novel. Open it to the first page and you slide in. The one word that came to mind: *smooth*. Chicago PI Joe Kozmarski should be dropping off a summons to a man who seems to have forgotten his child support payments. As he sits in his car, waiting for the man to finish up with a delivery, his role for that evenings life play radically changes. His summons target is shot; he calls 911 and charges into the store to see if there is anything he can do. In the end, he can watch a man die. Joe is relieved when a former colleague, Bill Gubman, shows up for the call but he is shot by the suspect who remains free to slay at will. There's more. Apparently Joe's life wasn't complicated enough. A retired judge and former family friend, Peter Rifkin, has an employee suspected in the murder of his girlfriend, Le Thi Hanh. Despite every cell in his being screaming "no!" Joe agrees to look into the case. Soon, the murdered girls' brothers are following Joe like rabid puppies where ever he goes. They want the man Joe has been hired to help get off for murdering their sister and they want Joe to tell them where he is *now*. Back at the ranch, Joe's mom lets him know that his pissed off, shuttled from house to house nephew is now going to be

staying with him. You know, for a good male influence. Said nephew can't wait to get in on the investigations and isn't at all pleased with the complexities of Joe's love life.

Wiley keeps what could be a sprawling and confusing plot tight and internal. He's created an amiable protagonist who, while not a fuck-up, has issues. Joe Kozmarski is a real guy dealing with real situations in a real way. Of course, all of these situations happen at once.... See, I used that word smooth up there for a reason. It fits. This book is seamless, well thought out, entertaining and intelligent crime fiction.

Jennifer Jordan

#### LUCK BE A LADY, DON'T DIE

Robert Randisi

2007

Thomas Dunne Books

In the second book featuring Las Vegas Pit boss Eddie G. and the Rat Pack the focus is on Frank. In town for the premiere of the original Ocean 11, the rat pack is playing the strip. When Frank's gal goes missing he asks Eddie to step in and find her. What Eddie finds is a body in the bath tub and a whole lot of trouble.

Like last year's EVERYBODY KILLS SOMEBODY, SOMETIMES, Randisi provides his reader with a lot of entertainment. If you're a friend of Vegas in the golden ages, if you hear the call of the one and only Rat Pack featuring Dean, Frank, Sammy, Peter & Joey, this year's romp will amuse as much as last's. I'm starting the chant for next year right now . Sammy, Sammy, Sammy,

Ruth Jordan

#### MAIDEN ROCK

Mary Logue

November 2007

Bleak House Books

It's Halloween in Wisconsin, and the teenagers are having a party. It's a very small town, so pretty much everybody knows everybody else. As always, what the teenagers know doesn't necessarily make it into the collective knowledge of their parents. This is just as true for the children of the police as it is for anybody else.

Claire Watkins wakes up to find her daughter not home, and the body of a teenage girl dead at the bottom of Maiden Rock. Her almost overwhelming fear that it is her daughter makes it difficult to do her job, but she does. She finds herself with the most difficult job any police officer has to do: telling parents that their child is dead. Knowing that child, and her family, makes that job even more difficult. Investigating that death is almost a relief; action can be an avoidance mechanism.

The entire community is surprised to find that Krista Jorgenson had methamphetamine in her bloodstream. All the kids know who the "stoners" are, and Krista wasn't one of them. Now the question becomes, "Who gave Krista the meth?" It also shifts the investigation from that of a possible suicide to one of almost certain manslaughter, perhaps murder.

In the meantime, Claire's daughter Meg is battling the guilt that only a teenager can muster. Meg and Curt have just realized that they are more than friends. They share this with Krista, Meg's best friend. She doesn't take it well. Meg is devastated when Krista is found dead, and blames herself. She doesn't feel she can share this with anyone, and contemplates drastic measures.

Jared is a "stoner", and may or may not have some complicity in Krista's death. His family is confronting the ramifications of his meth addiction.

Logue has written a compelling mystery, focusing on the scourge that methamphetamines are bringing to the American heartland. She takes what so many know of in the abstract and brings the reality into a focus most of us can identify with. She does this without being didactic or preachy, which may have been a temptation difficult to resist. Logue seems to have a good grasp on the angst and motivations of people in their late teens; none of her characters seem forced or paper-thin. Claire Watkins juggles the slippery balls of a career in law enforcement and a family without seeming like a superwoman or an incompetent. This is the sixth in the Claire Watkins series; Logue is a writer to look for.

P.J. Coldren

#### THE MAN WITH THE GOLDEN TORC

Simon R. Green

2007

Roc

I'm already a huge fan of Green's series set in the Nightside. With this new series it looks like I'll be able to get my fix more often.

Eddie Drood is the black sheep in a family that has for generations protected an unsuspecting world from the unseen dangers

of the supernatural. Unbeknownst to most of us, Monsters, Demons and magic are everywhere just under the surface of our vision. When someone convinces the Drood family that Eddie himself is a danger he finds himself on the run from his own. Darkly funny, fast and furious, and highly entertaining this is the start of a great new series. Fans of Green's Nightside books, Jim Butcher and Kat Richardson will love this book.

Jon Jordan

#### MISS KATIE REGRETS

Jack Barry

2007

Brandon Books

Ken Bruen's blood runs through Jack Barry's veins in this gritty Northern Ireland story. Detective Thomas Barrett and his partner Det. Murray, whom he calls Squirrel, investigate parts of Dublin that are not on any tourist itinerary.

While investigating the execution-style murder of politician Larry McMenamin, they are also testifying at the Arland trial, and setting up a sting in a rent-boy operation. Politics and scandals are a thread connecting the past and present.

In his personal life, his wife, Anna, has called it quits, his mother is in a nursing home, his father committed suicide years ago, and he gets to see his ten-year-old daughter. Aoife, once a week.

His father, an investigative journalist, got his teeth into a big story in the 1970s. He was warned off. Thomas never forgave him for that, particularly after he committed suicide. Now he learns what the story was, and that it's part of a case he's working on. He also learns what the threat was.

Alannah Harris, the woman who triggered the Arland affair, may be the key in the current murder investigation. Miss Katie, of the title, a transvestite, provides a service for those of similar inclinations. Her telephone number has shown up on some information Barrett received from an Amsterdam police officer whom he visited.

A very fast ride, and often the scenery gets blurred as it whizzes past the window. Just hang on and read, and all will become clear.

Gay Tolti Kinman

#### MURDER AT ST. POLYCARP ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Marianna Heusler

2007

Hilliard and Harris

So what can go wrong in an elementary school? Perhaps the question should be--what can go right? Particularly at St. Polycarp's. Heusler, a multi-published author, has put tongue in cheek to write this Catholic grade school story. St. Polycarp's has more than its share of odd personalities, such as a shoplifter. Principal Father Felix deals with problems as if he would like to be anywhere else, but there.

No one expected a murder in this grade school, but it happened. One of the teachers dies. And someone's medicine is missing.

Teachers make good sleuths. Miss Hopgood and Mrs. Johnson set out to solve the crime. Someone has to, and they know the cast of characters best.

But could the motive be as mundane as the missing cookie money, a little over \$400, not to mention the missing cookies.

Neither of the women makes light of this, they are just trying to find a motive.

Amelia, her home life tied up with very active two-year twin boys, tries to have an adult conversation with Miss Hopgood over the phone. The only time they can do any sleuthing is on the job. However, the danger is that the murderer will notice.

Who let the rats loose during the Educational Evaluation? Does Mrs. Danvers really shoplift? Did she 'liff' the medication?

Delightful story, fun to read.

Gay Tolti Kinman

#### MURDER IN CHINATOWN

Victoria Thompson

2007

Berkely

Although MURDER IN CHINATOWN is the ninth book in the "Gaslight Mystery" series, it was my first introduction to midwife protagonist, Sarah Brandt, and I was pleasantly surprised. Never a big fan of Cozies, the setting of New York at the turn of the century drew me in from the very beginning, so much that I didn't mind the lack of blood, sex and foul language.

Thompson has clearly mastered the art of historical mysteries, using the atmosphere to heighten the suspense. When the daughter of a Chinese father and Irish mother is found murdered, the puzzle is a lot more complicated than a simple whodunit. Thompson explores the issues of interracial marriage, immigration and race relations that were pertinent to that time period,

sprinkling bits of information throughout the story and informing readers so they can attempt to solve the puzzle along with the characters. She has an aptitude for description, beautifully capturing the tenements, opium dens and gambling houses which lined the neighborhood streets. And although it lacked the gut-wrenching suspense that I'm used to, there was something refreshing about her ability to slow down a scene and really portray the characters and the world in which they live. I'm not a total Cozy convert yet, but Thompson's novel was an enjoyable change of pace.

Dana Kaye

#### MY LADY JUDGE

Cora Harrison

2007

St. Martin's

The year is 1509. A dozen or so years earlier, King Turlough Don O'Brien appointed a woman as one of his provincial judges or Brehon's. Since then Mara has served him well acting not only in trial but also running the law school. Mara's current students range in age from 12 to 19. She tends to them as carefully as she tends to her flower garden. Western Ireland is still clan dominated. Clan, Irish law prevails. Penalty in Irish law is always in the nature of retribution rather than punishment. Because of this, the guilty, almost always come forward. What the guilty individual cannot pay his family or clan will often contribute. Mara's assistant is murdered on the eve of a festive celebration. No one admits to it. It's up to Mara to determine the guilty party. Her investigation makes up the main part of the novel.

Cora Harrison writes with an easy grace. The relationships between her characters reminds one, very much, of Ellis Peters and her Brother Cadfael. My Lady Judge has a nice little twist ending that in hindsight I should have caught but since I didn't, good on Ms. Harrison. That's a sign of good things to come. Fans of the traditional mystery, Irish history, off stage violence, subtle romance and a well paced and plotted read should thoroughly enjoy MY LADY JUDGE.

Dave Biemann

#### NEVER SAFE: STORIES OF MYSTERY AND SUSPENSE

ed. K. M. Kavanagh & Margaret Searles

2006

Seven Sisters Press

Twenty-one great stories of characters in jeopardy--and almost all have a super twist ending.

Tim Wohlforth, a prolific short story writer, puts his series hero in trouble again in the "Killer Fog" of Jack London square.

Editor Kavanagh's story, "Trial & Terror," is about Rashid's voyage into terrorism. In Kathleen Delaney's, "The Trip," the heroine sees what she thinks is a murderer escaping, but she's not going to let him. Sunny Frazier's "Ditched" finds the hero looking for the Ditchbank Killer and comes upon him unexpectedly.

In Victoria Heckman's "Josie's Cabin," the building ends up holding something, hopefully, for a long time. Simon Wood's hero Peter Crestfallen discovers his client believes that fantasy makes everything real in "Crestfallen's Kink." Co-editor Margaret Searles' "Game Over" follows the heroine to a gambling casino, where she overhears something that may be of life or death importance.

In my "Body and Blood," set in the church I attend, the story is based on something I experienced, but not to the extent my character does. Frank Zafiro's police officer hero loses something important when he doesn't see the danger in "Running Into Darkness."

Kris Neri's heroine in "Capital Justice" has had enough of brutality and decides living is the best revenge. Gary R. Hoffman tells about what a million dollars will do to people in "Between a Rock and a Hard Place." Tony Burton explains what happens when an angel is chased onto thin ice in "Cheaters Never Win."

In "11-46 At The Pier," Bill Monson's two women police volunteers, out on patrol, give a rapist the ride of his life. Gary Phillips' noir hero English Johnny in "House of Tears" goes for a treasure in the house of a music producer who lives in a castle in the Alhambra area. Jane Denison's "The Scoop" relates the story of a reporter who gets the inside track on the mayor--and is rewarded with the beat he wants.

Marilyn Meredith's "The Resurrection" tells of Pastor Mike's new girlfriend and how she solves the problem of the objectionable maintenance man. In James M. Murphy's "Mean Street," a cop killer may get away. In Chelle Martin's "Secret Passions," the heroine tries to save a woman's life by helping to trap her prospective killer, but something goes terribly wrong.

Charla Maine's "Life is a Cabernet" is set in the wine country where fertilizing the vineyards is as important as life. 'Sister' Sue McGinty's "Dark Benediction" proves that a wastewater treatment plant can be an issue for murder, from a former nun's viewpoint.

Gay Toltl Kinman

## THE NEW DESTROYER: CHOKE HOLD

Warren Murphy and James Mullaney

2007

Tor.

One of my favorite series growing up has been revamped. Warren Murphy is back at the helm with partner James Mullaney. Remo Williams has always been a great character and in the hands of the master he and Chiun make for some memorable reading moments. This is the second in the new Destroyer series.

A global conspiracy is afoot and it involves a new drug being hawked by a tobacco tycoon. Remo and Chiun investigate when bodies start to show up and before long there are assassins and world crime bosses involved. The whole thing becomes globally threatening. As the danger increases, so does Remo's action and the book accelerates like a Nascar on the finishing stretch.

This was pure fun, action adventure fiction the way it's meant to be. Murphy truly is the master.

Jon Jordan

## THE ONE MINUTE ASSASSIN

Troy Cook

2007

Capital Crimes Press

John Black loves his mother and sister despite the fact they're both politicians. John hates politics. He and his mentor Harley are 'persuaders,' convincing deadbeat dads, stalkers and child molesters to stay on the right side of the law. While checking the security set up for his sister's campaign for the California Governorship, John meets and is hired by, reporter, Sierra Rodriguez. He quickly deals with her ex husband because with a week remaining in the race, several of the frontrunners have been 'meeting with accidents. When John's niece, Hillary, surprises a man crawling out from under her mother's car, John and Harley are convinced he's been hired by someone higher up to affect the outcome of the race. John and Harley are determined to get not only the underlings but the top men. It's this chase and the interplay of the characters that drives the plot.

THE ONE MINUTE ASSASSIN is Troy Cook's second novel; fast paced, funny and full of action. If it reads like a movie it's just Mr. Cook playing to his strengths as both screenwriter and director. He provides an enjoyable result. Pop yourself some popcorn and sit down with THE ONE MINUTE ASSASSIN.

Dave Biemann

## PATRIOT ACTS

Greg Rucka

2007

BANTAM

Greg Rucka's seminal hero, Atticus Kodiak has been *the* action hero in thrillers for over a decade. Kodiak took the mantle from such characters as Smiley and Bourne at the pen of one of fiction's finest storytellers with stunning detachment. He moved the traditional intelligent thriller nonchalantly from the government clutches to the private sector while preserving all the traditional thriller hero's internal conflict, natural abilities and stealthy resolve.

With PATRIOT ACTS, Rucka returns to a world where the clandestine meets up in a web of private business and big government. The novel begins in Upstate New York, a deadly situation that soon goes terribly wrong for Kodiak and his team. An insider gives them up and Kodiak and the formidable "Drama" wait and train patiently to exact their revenge. The op, when begun, is "must read book". Set throughout the world and in many different U.S. locations, PATRIOT ACTS is a Global thriller. Rucka is so grounded in presentation of place, that you will travel with Kodiak from Washington state to Washington D.C. wishing you'd packed a suitcase.

What Rucka continues to do with Kodiak is present top notch plots with a flawed character you cannot dislike. The very fact that Kodiak questions his own motivations and wonders where the line between right and wrong is drawn makes this character highly sympathetic. The fact that Rucka builds all of his characters without taking many breaks in the action of the story and even fewer in the dialog makes PATRIOT ACTS one of the year's most visual books.

Living in a world of paid assassins and financial privilege, being in love, and demanding vengeance for the doomed are classic thriller points that Rucka and Kodiak stoke with new flames. Intelligent, frightening and written in many shades of gray, PATRIOT ACTS will have you wondering where the moral line and public good meet. Rucka will leave you waiting for the next chapter in his epic and smart tale.

Ruth Jordan

## POWER PLAY

Joseph Finder  
August 21, 2007  
St. Martin's Press

Jake Landry is too good to be true in this exciting but somewhat contrived thriller. In keeping with the author's specialty, it encompasses the corporate world, sort of an Enron in disguise. Jake is a relatively low-level employee at an aircraft manufacturer when he is asked to accompany a group of high-level executives to a corporate retreat as a substitute for his boss, who is in India. A new woman CEO has instituted an internal review of any 'hanky-panky,' setting the stage for all kinds of corporate intrigue among the men. And she is accompanied by Jake's former girlfriend as her assistant. The group flies to a deluxe lodge hundreds of miles north of Vancouver and completely isolated from civilization—no phones or other means of contact. At the opening dinner, the lodge is invaded by several men who take the group hostage with the intent of extorting hundreds of millions of dollars. The men (and two women) are bound with rope and made to sit in a room, guarded by armed men.

Jake is the only one who attempts to save the situation, acting as Superman, Spiderman and all them other good guys rolled into one. The story is well-constructed and –written if you can get by the super-human efforts of Jake. Even the surprise ending is a bit hackneyed, but believable.

Theodore Feit

## THE REDBREAST

Jo Nesbo  
Dec 2007  
Harper Collins

As soon as it's released, grab THE REDBREAST. THE DEVIL'S STAR, released first, is actually the second in the series of this police procedural set in Norway featuring Harry Hole, a hard drinking, loner cop.

In THE REDBREAST he is promoted and transferred after an incident that occurred during the visit of the US president. Part of Harry's new job is rubberstamping paperwork and sending it up the chain of command. He also covers the Neo-Nazis who are planning to disrupt a Muslim holiday celebration held on the day Norway celebrates its independence. He's side tracked when he sees that someone has purchased a high powered hunting rifle. The odds of it being used for hunting are extremely slim. Harry is looking for a possible assassin.

The early part of the story flashes back to WWII where a thousand plus Norwegians fought against Russia for Germany. The survivors consider themselves real heroes, men who turned the tide against the Reds. Harry makes some connections between the two Nazi groups. When the killings start Harry falls back on his old branch friends to help him catch the killer. Once past the WWII the story unfolds well. Nesbo's THE REDBREAST won The Glass Key award and was voted Best Norwegian Crime Novel of All Time. Heady praise, well earned.

Dave Biemann

## RUBY TUESDAY

Mike Harrison  
2007  
ECW PRESS MYSTERY

Mike Harrison's Eddie Dancer has quickly become one of my "go to" P.I. reads. Dancer is a shamus with muscle, cracking wise while getting the job done. In book three of the series Dancer is safe and sound in his Calgary office when Valerie Miller enters with an odd request. Can Eddie stop her husband from fighting a thug without letting him know?

Like any good detecting novel the story isn't nearly as simple as its plot. What made Paul Miller rise to the challenge? With the fight's purse already growing just how can Dancer get him out of it? Bigger question can he get a middle aged, middle management and out of shape Canadian prepared to fight a younger and extremely fit man?

As Eddie looks at those involved with the initial altercation, their families and their lives he begins to see the list of victims in his case is a long one. Harrison uses RUBY TUESDAY to visit the classic P.I. novel. Delving into amateur boxing, domestic abuse and policing politics, this book has the chops. And Dancer's beloved choppers. Cracking wise and world weary, Eddie is a P.I. for the traditional P.I. reader, complete with the dame and the Shaman.

Ruth Jordan

## THE SALT MAIDEN

Colleen Thompson

December 2007  
Dorchester Publishing

Set in the present in the summertime in Devil's Claw, West Texas, where heat and flash floods are common, and where salt caves mummify whatever is caught in them and dies.  
Lots of steam generated by Sheriff Jay Eversole and veterinarian Dr. Dana Vanover. Dana comes to the town to search for her sister, Angie.  
The Romance genre's technique of alternating POV between paragraphs, even though not pervasive in this story, may be off-putting to some mystery readers.  
We learn about 'The Hunter' and that he stalks Dana. He hopes she will lead him to Angie who has done him wrong and he would like to right that by putting a bullet into her black heart, or worse if he finds her, as she has hidden a big cache of money. His money.  
Jay and Dana are driven into a cave by sniper fire. They find a body mummified by the salt, and believe it to be Angie. Also missing is a couple who have pulled off a big fraud caper. And Jay is still looking for the murderer of his uncle who was the Sheriff before him. The FBI rides in and takes over the investigation involving the body, and the search for the couple. The Devil's Claw of the title is a plant that clings to anything that touches it.  
In a very surprising ending, we learn who The Hunter is.  
Fast moving, page-turning romantic- suspense story with action. pursuit, stalking, murder and torture in this cruel terrain.  
Gay Toltl Kinman

SECRET ASSET  
Stella Rimington  
2007  
Alfred A. Knopf

The bane of any intelligence service is a mole—sleeper or activated, and as the retired head of MI5 the author is more than qualified to write this well-constructed story. It is the second in what appears to be a series featuring Liz Carlyle, an MI5 intelligence officer. She is asked to vet several personnel, one of whom is presumed to be the mole.  
The mole was placed by the IRA years before, but never activated. Meanwhile, another case involving a radical Muslim plot arises, and along the way Liz suspects the two begin to merge. As she progresses in her efforts, the likelihood grows that the mole has switched from IRA terrorism—after all the Good Friday agreement makes such terrorist activities moot—to directing the other plot.  
All of Liz and her co-workers' efforts are directed not only at uncovering who the mole is, but what the plot is and when and where it will take place. All the analyses and hunches lead to a thrilling conclusion. The suspense is sustained throughout the novel, reflecting the author's solid background as a spymaster. Recommended.  
Theodore Feit

SENTENCES: THE LIFE OF M.F. GRIMM  
Percy Carey  
2007  
Vertigo/DC Comics

Percy Carey (a.k.a. MF Grimm, a.k.a. Jet Jaguar) begins the story of his life in the middle of its most intense moment: the day a bullet left him paralyzed from the waist down. It's a scene of incredible violence and chaos that leaves our narrator lying on the snow, bleeding out. And from there we naturally cut to... Sesame Street, where young Percy has an acting gig.  
The jump from bloody murder to such innocent surroundings creates a nice bit of cognitive dissonance that sets the tone for the rest of the book. Throughout the rest of Carey's childhood, we see him constantly pulled between "good kid" and "bad kid". It seems like he could fall either way at any time, and he often does.  
It's here I should mention the art by Ronald Wimberly. The stark black/white/grey color scheme perfectly highlights Wimberly's fluid drawings. His people are full of life, whether sitting having a conversation or in the middle of a fist fight.  
At the same time we see him growing up, Carey provides snapshots of the growth of hip-hop. One of the finest bits of writing comes when he describes the genre's early days, evoking a sense of time and place where something new and wild was being born.  
But he also acknowledges the serpent in the garden, the seed of violence which would become entwined with hip-hop culture. And there are occasional flashes of sadness over that. The fact that something that had started out devoted to unity, celebration and joyous human expression had become so dark.  
And other times, he revels in it. He's not always a nice person, or even a sympathetic character. But there's also the part that wants to see a better world. It's the hope that ends up resonating most strongly, tempered by the knowledge that anyone can do the wrong thing.

Carey ends the book on a cautionary note, but the most powerful moment comes when he uses his fictional counterpart to do something he can't in real life. It's at that point where it changes from "this is what I've been through" to "this is what I've been through, AND I'M STILL HERE!"

Neal Bohl

#### THE SHOTGUN RULE

Charlie Huston

2007

Ballantine Books

THE SHOTGUN RULE deals with four teenage boys in 1983 Northern California. There is Andy, super-bright, who frequently imagines murderous scenarios involving friends, enemies and strangers alike; his 2-years-older brother, George, protective yet sometimes resentful of Andy; Paul, always the first to start a fight; and Hector, who keeps an 18" length of bike chain in his pocket at all times. The boys have been spending their summer break time getting into the kinds of trouble not uncommon to working class teens in the suburbs. Their not-so-innocent activities involve robbing neighbors' houses of jewelry, cash, pills – whatever else they find that's small enough to be carried out in their pockets, but their efforts unleash a whole lot of trouble and bring long-buried past events in the town boiling back to the surface. The boys' family backgrounds are revealed in rather depressing fashion, and the author weaves these tidbits alternately with humor, grimness and short bursts of violence into a story that is at once jarring and fascinating, and then it's not funny at all but like passing the scene of an accident--you can't tear your eyes away.

A theme running through the book is the chaos theory – "whether there is a difference between what is random and what is chaotic." Andy, discussing the Shotgun Rule of the title: "The only rule standing between us and the savages. It keeps the forces of chaos at bay. Scorn not the rule." But they do break the rule, and do indeed dare chaos.

The writing is at times non-linear, causing momentary confusion for this reader. Overall this author has his own unique style, and this compelling novel is hard to put down and difficult to forget.

Gloria Feit

#### SNITCH JACKET

Christopher Goffard

2007

The Rookery Press

This is Christopher Goffard's first novel after a long career as a newspaper reporter, most recently at the Los Angeles Times. His novel reads like a misfit's memoir and brings life to the darker side of the west coast counter-culture. It is essentially a literary novel, with a crime story framework that is much more about each character's moral descent than the actual crime being committed.

It's the story of Benny Bun, an over-educated misfit, ex-speed addict and makes his pocket money informing (snitching!) to the police of his friends upcoming illegal activities. You will like him! Benny inhabits an underworld of desperados and drunks and spends much of his free time at the "Greasy Tuesday", a squalid, southern California neighborhood dive teeming with local legends. One night, Gus "Mad Dog" Miller comes into the bar. He is a tattoo-laden Vietnam vet who sports a necklace of severed ears. Benny finds himself attached to this larger than life personality and the two become inseparable. Six months later, Benny is arrested on suspicion of a double murder. Of course he is adamant that he is innocent and tries to explain the story of what really happened to his public defender. As you follow his story you become convinced he was just the wrong guy in the wrong place right up until his court case and conflicting testimony makes you start thinking. And that's the best kind of story, one that makes you guess what will happen next. This is a fine debut from an author I'm sure will continue to deliver.

Joseph Czech

#### SOME LIKE IT HOT-BUTTERED

Jeffrey Cohen

2007

Berkley Prime Crime

The opening lines of Jeffrey Cohen's new novel are: "The guy in row S, seat 18 was dead, all right. There was no mistaking it. For one thing, he hadn't laughed once during the Blind Man scene in *Young Frankenstein*, which was indication enough that all brain function had ceased. For another, there was the whole staring-straight-ahead-and-not-breathing scenario, and the lack of a pulse, which was good enough to convince me." (If that doesn't put at least a smile on your face, your humor gene needs a tune-up.) Right away you know you're in for a treat, that is, if you like a good mystery written with great humor as well as warmth and wit. This book is the first in a promised new series by Mr. Cohen, previously the author of, among other things, the Aaron Tucker mystery novels.

The above-quoted lines are spoken by Elliot Freed, who has recently bought an ancient, long-abandoned and rapidly deteriorating New Jersey movie theatre which shows only comedy films, both old (read "classic") and new, and the dead man was found sitting in the audience after the film had ended. It is later found that the man's popcorn had been poisoned. Elliot is a man receiving alimony from his ex-wife (a doctor now remarried to another doctor), with whom he maintains a very amicable friendship. He takes personally the fact that a murderer apparently chose his theatre in which to commit the murder, and feels it incumbent in him to get involved, especially when the investigation leads to uncovering a scheme involving pirated DVDs. Elliot doesn't want to believe one of his two teenage employees could be connected to either event, but suspicions certainly do point in that direction. Then, when the father of one of the youngsters, who is under increasing suspicion, begs him for help, he feels he has no choice. His growing attraction to the beautiful detective working the case only complicates things. But solving the mystery and finding those responsible for the crimes is only part of the fun in this wonderfully entertaining book – Mr. Cohen's writing and wry sense of humor is a delight. (How could you not love a writer who quotes Mark Van Doren and Woody Allen on the same page, as well as providing an interesting if heretofore unsuspected use for Milk Duds?) Welcome, Elliot Freed – I can't wait to read the next one!

Gloria Feit

SPOOK COUNTRY  
William Gibson  
2007  
G. P. Putnam's Sons

A somewhat confusing beginning sets the stage for the introduction of the characters in three seemingly unrelated subplots that converge to make sense at the end. Technology and science fiction play a large role in its development. There is Tito, a young Cuban-Chinese, now living in New York, part of a family of illegal facilitators who were whisked out of Cuba by a CIA operative, now an retired old man who plays a significant role in bringing the story to a conclusion. Hollis Henry, a former singer with a rock band, is now a freelance writer for a supposed start-up magazine funded by a rich Belgian. Milgrim, an intellectual junkie forced to work as a translator for Brown, who may or not be a government agent. Artists in a new medium that can only be seen in virtual reality, made possible by Bobby Chombo. A techie who also tracks the movement of a cargo container linked to the CIA seeking weapons of mass destruction and to pirates operating in the South China Sea. These characters are woven into an intricate plot involving monies stolen from Iraq and war profiteering and money laundering. Once the reader goes beyond the initial stages of the novel, it all begins to make sense, resulting in a highly moral and satisfying conclusion. The latter parts of the book are substantially easier to read than the beginning stages, making the whole worthwhile.

Theodore Feit

THE TAKEDOWN  
Patrick Quinlan  
2007  
St. Martin's Minotaur

This intricately-plotted thriller is filled with greed, gruesome murders and weird characters bent on outwitting each other. The heart of the story is an embezzled million dollars on which the characters all are focused. It seems Dot Racine skimmed the money from the company she worked for and salted it away in safety deposit boxes in Nassau with the help of a computer geek, Andrew.

A lovely, beautiful blonde, Dot liked the good life and sex. One of her lovers, Nestor Garcia, a psychopath and freelance cocaine trafficker, on the run from the cartels, seeks to obtain the keys to the boxes in the Bahamas. To offset Nestor, Dot takes on Dick Miller as another lover. Dick is an ex-con, handsome and strong. Then a few days before Christmas, Dick wakes up with a hangover after having drinks with Dot in a bar. Is he hung-over from drinking or was he drugged? It doesn't matter, because when he goes to his car, he finds Dot dead in his trunk. Did he murder her? Doesn't matter, he has to get rid of the body or face going back to jail, this time a lot more serious than the two years he served.

Other characters include Lydia, who worked with Dot and is a co-signer to the deposit boxes with possession of the keys, and Cool Breeze, another psycho, though beautiful, lover of Andrew, and Henry, another nut [to use the technical term]. All the characters intertwine, with Cool Breeze scheming to eliminate them, Nestor concentrating on obtaining the money and not stopping at killing anyone standing in his way, and Dick hell bent on saving Lydia.

If the reader can abide the gore, murders, twists and turns to reach the conclusion, the story reads fast and furious. On the other hand, it may be too much for some.

Theodore Feit

**WAKING WITH ENEMIES**

Eric Jerome Dickey

2007

Dutton

This novel picks up where its predecessor left off. While it can be read as a standalone, the author recommends reading *SLEEPING WITH STRANGERS* first. That is if you can get by all the sex and violence. It takes about 100 pages of pure, unadulterated sex, if not downright pornography, before reaching the story, as such.

The plot involves Gideon, a contract killer, being stalked in London by another contract killer. The hit on Gideon follows his high profile murder of a famous rap star. Meanwhile, Gideon is holed up in his hotel room having non-stop sex with two beautiful women who sat next to him on the plane across the Atlantic.

Subplots involve the woman who brought Gideon up, a prostitute who turned him into a killer. His love-hate relationship leads him to want to destroy her. Also, there is Arizona, once love of his life, who wants Gideon to murder her sister in Amsterdam. And then there is the stalker, an interesting character who must be confronted.

Gideon has to take care of these loose ends and others as well. Once the story starts flowing, the novel is not a bad read.

And, if you enjoy almost unlimited sex, it is probably is a good read. Each to his own.

Theodore Feit

**THE WHEEL OF DARKNESS**

Douglas Preston and Lincoln Child

2007

Warner Books

At the beginning of the seventh Pendergast novel, the Special FBI agent and his ward, Constance Greene, are in a remote Tibetan monastery, he to contemplate, she to receive instruction. While there, Pendergast is told of the theft of an ancient box containing an unknown but threatening menace which could destroy mankind. The Lama asks him to retrieve the mysterious object.

The task takes them to Venice and on to Paris, as they follow the path of the box containing the Agozyen. They discover the original thief murdered and trace the whereabouts of the box to the maiden voyage of the world's largest and most modern luxury ocean liner. The pair go to Southampton and board the *Brittania* in an attempt to find the possessor of the Agozyen. Pendergast narrows it down to five suspects and has only days to find the right one. Descriptions of the boat are authentic and colorful, and the story progresses to a supernatural thrust beyond the imagination. It is terrifying, as the descriptions of the perils befalling the ship and its passengers and crew are described. It is an exciting journey into the mind as well as the unknown.

Theodore Feit