

## THE BUZZ BOX

DEATH WAS THE OTHER WOMAN by Linda L Richards is like a lost noir classic that has been unearthed by St. Martin's Minotaur. Set in depression era LA, Kitty Pangborn is a tough as nails working for a PI who may not be on the right side of things. What starts as a simple tail job turns into a murder conspiracy Kitty's mettle is put to the test. Classic hard boiled writing with a great character to drive the story this is a wonderful read.

THE DELLS (Dundurn) by Michael Blair plays out the old saying "you can't go home again" and Joe Shoe, Blair's protagonist feels this to the core. A trip home to Toronto brings hi into a murder investigation involving a man who may have been a rapist years ago. As the investigation moves forward things get a little close to home for Joe as he knows most of the players. A well written mystery by a great new talent.

HOW THE DEAD LIVE is a classic noir novel and Derek Raymond is amazing. The third in "the factory" series, this book features a protagonist with no name, it's far from conventional and is as much a study of the human condition as it is a mystery. I won't go into details about the plot, it's not important, what is important is that you NEED to read Raymond, the UK equivalent of Jim Thompson. Thanks to Serpent's Tail for bringing this book back.

KILLER YEAR: STORIES TO DIE FOR is an anthology from that group of new authors that were everywhere last year. Edited by Lee Child this collection has some great stories in it and each is introduced by the mentors who worked with them in their first year. Some of the stand outs were Killing Justice by Allison Brennan and Tear down by Marc Lecard. Sean Chercover and Dave White also contributed wonderful stories. The whole collection is ... well, killer.

THE LOST LUGGAGE PORTER is the third in the Jim Stringer series by Andrew Martin. Stringer works the rails in the early 1900s and the books are wonderful. This third outing has Jim being promoted and going undercover. Martin has an obvious passion for the rails and it shines through in his writing.

MAD DOGS published by Cemetery Dance and written by Brian Hodge is a real gem of a crime novel. James Sheppard is an actor who has not had many big roles, one of his latest was a reality tv show doing a reenactment to help catch criminal. When driving to Arizona he is pulled over by a deputy who is on a par with Barney Fife and he is mistaken for the criminal he just played on TV, a real criminal who is n the run. Now Sheppard is on the run too. This is a great book and a very clever idea. Seek this out.

MONSER PLANET by David Wellington may not be for everyone but this Zombie novel was loads of fun and a real change of pace. The third in his monster trilogy sees the planet over run by zombies. Funny, gory and full of action this non mystery is a cure form the winter blues. From Thunder's Mouth Press.

NOT QUITE DEAD is one of those books that I relish, because I love reading about real people set in fictional stories. John MacLachlan brings together Charles Dickens and Edgar Allan Poe in a suspenseful mystery set in the mid 1800's that involves among other things, Poe faking his death. Unadulterated fun for fans of good mystery and for anyone interested in Poe or Dickens. Top Notch.

Charles Kelly makes his debut with Point Blank's publication of PAY HERE. Set out west starring reporter Michael Callan this novel is timely and clever. Kelly has real skills and his experience as a reporter shows in his work. This is a wonderful debut.

Alex Carr (also known to some under the name Jenny Siler) is a terrific talent. THE PRINCE OF BAGRAM PRISON proves her skills once again. A classic espionage tale with secrets within secrets and pacing that dares you to keep from finishing in one sitting this is pure adrenaline. Spooks from multiple agencies, mysterious deaths and a boy on the run who may be able to unlock the puzzle behind it all keep Katherine Caldwell on her toes as she tries to stay one step ahead. Coming from Orion in Feb.

THE REVENGE OF CAPTAIN PAINE by Andrew Pepper is now in trade paperback from Weiden & Nicholson. Set in 1835 Pepper brings back his character Pyke from THE LAST DAYS OF NEWGATE in this period mystery set in England around the industrial revolution. A murder, a witness gone missing and a possible suicide are the things that bring Pyke to the case, though by the time it's over he may live to regret it. Elegantly written with a full bodied flavor of the times this book is pure pleasure.

Book Reviews:

THE ABYSSINIAN PROOF

Jenny White

February 2008

W.W. Norton & Company, Inc.

It's not often one picks up a book to find out it is about historical Istanbul. I wasn't quite sure what to expect. What I found was a lovely book with an extremely likable protagonist in Kamil Pasha. This is his second adventure, following the highly acclaimed THE SULTAN'S SEAL.

Someone is stealing antiquities and icons from mosques and churches, and Kamil Pasha is ordered to get to the bottom of it. Working with another likable police inspector, he digs deep into the rumors of smuggling rings and thieves, only to find himself embroiled in the life of a strange religious sect. Unbeknownst to him, one of his good friends is a leader in the sect, and brings him secrets pertaining to one of the stolen articles, which he claims is the Proof of God, which could destroy their world as they know it. When Kamil's friend is murdered, Kamil finds an even greater motivation to find the villains.

White's storytelling is intriguing, and while this book isn't what one typically would call a page-turning thriller, I found myself drawn back again and again to discover what would come next in the story. The characters, especially Kamil Pasha, are engaging, and I wanted to keep reading to find out more about them. The setting is also interesting, and I learned a lot about the Ottoman Empire. Having read this book, I will go back to read the first in the series to become better acquainted with Kamil Pasha and his world. I'm always glad to find something different from other mysteries, and this book offers an atmosphere that cannot be found in many others.

Judy Clemens

ADAM

Ted Dekker

April 2008

Thomas Nelson

A serial killer. An obsessed man hunting him down. Feel as though you've read this before? You have. But believe me, there is a twist. Ted Dekker, graphic novelist and writer of four different series, brings a deeply spiritual approach to this subject. In ADAM, featuring FBI behavioral psychologist Daniel Clark, this approach is instilled by exploring the theme of life after death.

In an article lifted from "Crime Today" magazine, 2008, the reader is introduced to a killer. Alex Price, in nine monthly installments, will have his story told as his crimes unfold. Stolen from his true parents, Price and his sister are raised by a couple that taught them about pain, punishment and a twisted philosophy that kept the children terrified until their escape thirteen years after they were taken.

In these thirteen years, it is clear; Alex Price has not been a good boy. Known as Eve to his pursuers, he has been leaving a trail of bodies in his wake and Daniel Clark PhD. is on the verge of nabbing him. Clark wants to nail Eve on his own. The FBI has other ideas. He is partnered with Lori Ames, a beautiful, smart and savvy pathologist. When they get the call about a white van found by an unmarked cave, Clark knows they are close to Eve. And they are. Too close. In a freak happening, Clark is shot, a few cops are dead and a recovered victim is a victim once again. Oh, and Clark isn't just shot. Clark is dead.

Ames, his partner of a barely an hour, fights heroically to save him. When Clark comes back to himself, his memory of the events that led to his death is gone. He is soon convinced that within those missing minutes is the identity of the killer. Clark knows what he has to do. He has to die again. And again. And one more time for luck.

Clark is wrestling with his own demons as he tries to uncover the truth. A truth that has him re-thinking a prejudice against religion and his own perception of reality. Can Clark find the truth before the truth kills him? With the help of the running article in "Crime Today," we know he does. We know from the beginning.

Because this isn't a crime novel. It is a novel about the human soul, what shapes it and whether good can conquer an evil seated deeply within. Dekker is well-versed in what he writes and his passion is obvious. So is the plot. And so is his cheesy, over-written and troubled hero.

Jennifer Jordan

AMERICAN GANGSTER

Max Allan Collins

2007

Tor

If the title seems familiar, it is probably because this novel is based on the screenplay for the film currently playing throughout the US, which is a fictionalized take on events in the lives of Richard Roberts and Frank Lucas, respectively a detective with the Prosecutor's Office in New Jersey, and the man he chased and ultimately successfully prosecuted. It is stated that the novel takes further liberties with the fact-based story portrayed in the film. Much of what is depicted here is known to be true: Frank Lucas is a man who in the 70's and years to follow, controlled the heroin traffic on the streets of Harlem, once the exclusive province of the Mafia. As a black man, that was an astonishing enough accomplishment. But the way he did it, importing pure heroin directly from the Golden Triangle of the Far East, was completely innovative. Fact or fiction, this is an engrossing tale.

For his part, Richie Roberts is portrayed as an anomaly in the police force in those years: an honest cop who was held in contempt by most of his fellow officers for his refusal to take money or dope when it came his way.

Frank Lucas is depicted as a man who had his own code of honor: "Within his circle, in his private life and for that matter in his business dealings, Frank Lucas considered himself a moral man. Matters of right and wrong, in any larger sense – social or religious – were defined by the world he'd been born into, a white man's world. Dope being sold to black people was a reality that wasn't going anywhere; better another black man be in charge. Killing people who needed killing was strictly business – those yellow people getting killed in Vietnam by boys both black and white made less sense to Frank than removing a business rival or a personal threat by violence. Frank hadn't invented the world where money ruled, but if he was going to live in it, by God, he was going to have at least his share."

The book is written with alternating p.o.v. of the two men, which was not at all a distraction. The world described was a violent one, and a fascinating one as well. The book is well-written and, though the outcome is a foregone conclusion, manages to be suspenseful nonetheless.

Gloria Feit

#### AT THE CITY'S EDGE

Marcus Sakey

January 2008

St. Martin's Minotaur

Sakey raised the bar with his debut novel, *THE BLADE ITSELF*, but this brilliant encore has lifted it even higher. *AT THE CITY'S EDGE* has everything you'd expect from this Chicago thriller writer: dark setting, gritty dialogue and haunted characters that you can't help but care for. But this round, he goes above and beyond, adding politics, corruption and a bit of romance to heighten the suspense.

Discharged soldier, Jason Palmer, returns from Iraq to find a similar war raging in his neighborhood on the south side of Chicago. When his brother, Michael, is killed for his attempts to end the gang violence, it is up to Jason to take care of eight-year-old son and bring his brother's killer to justice, by any means necessary. Jason's emotional transformation is just as gripping as the chase scenes and shootouts as the events in the story force the immature boy playing soldier to grow up and become a man. Sakey takes the time to explore his characters' pasts and how their experiences affect their current actions. Chicago, almost a character itself, comes alive on the page as Sakey creates Crenwood, the fictional neighborhood in which most of the story takes place. Sakey chose a fictionalized location because of, "his desire to respect the people who live in these areas", but it also allowed him to create a Chicago all his own, unique to anyone else that writes about the city. Combined with his unforgiving prose and fast-paced suspense, *AT THE CITY'S EDGE* sets Marcus Sakey apart from any thriller writer on the shelves.

Dana Kaye

#### BEATING THE BABUSHKA

Tim Maleeny

November 2007

Midnight Ink

A year has passed. The waiting is over. The newest book in what promises to be a strong series is here.

In his debut, *STEALING THE DRAGON*, Tim Maleeny began telling the tale of Cape Weathers, former reporter and smart-mouthed P.I. Many books may begin with that premise but Maleeny has made everything old new again and added a side kick that truly kicks ass. In his sophomore effort, the spotlight goes from the fearless Sally to the Russian mob and the movie business.

Tom Abrahams, a big time Hollywood producer, falls to his death from the Golden Gate Bridge. Everyone is quick to accept this as a suicide. Everyone except his colleague, Grace Calloway. One beautiful woman, a

case that isn't even a case and a touch of danger and it's clear Weathers will be taking the job. And it isn't long before he's been shot and Russian gangsters are raiding his office. But what the hell do they want? What ever it is, they aren't the only ones who think Weathers knows more than he should. Now, if he can find out what it is that he shouldn't know. With Sally Mei at his back, Weathers is soon on the trail of the truth behind a man's death and the success of many Hollywood movies. But with the mob, a movie studio, a seedy journalist and a police department against you, you need more than a gut feeling and circumstantial evidence to break the case. And to stay alive.

Maleeny has kept the promises made with STEALING THE DRAGON. With an obvious understanding of the traditions in crime fiction, he has created a series that tips the hat as it modernizes the plot line. A plot that sizzles from page one and keeps cooking until the twists at the end. I can't wait to hear more from the very talented Maleeny.

Jennifer Jordan

#### THE BLUE DOOR

David Fulmer

January 2008

Harcourt, Inc.

Shamus award winner David Fulmer delivers another tale of music and murder. Fulmer excels at capturing the feel and textures of earlier decades. The reader is drawn in by the immensely likable characters and richly realistic story lines.

As welterweight boxer Eddie Cero makes his way home through a dark south Philly, he interrupts two punks beating up PI Sal Giambroni. Sal buys Eddie a drink and offers him a part-time gig helping with his private detective work. Despite Eddie's reluctance, a few days on the job reveals that he has a knack for snooping and then he stumbles onto a cold case involving a missing singer.

A music lover with a budding interest in the singer's attractive, talented sister, Eddie finds himself involved in a violent, twisted story of betrayal and intrigue, power and passion.

THE BLUE DOOR brings the reader the vibrant city of Philadelphia and the early days of famous soul singers. This book makes you feel like you are back in time in south Philly. I can't wait to see where Fulmer takes us in his next novel.

Joe Czech

#### BLUE HEAVEN

CJ Box

January, 2008

St. Martin's Minotaur

My Sweet Idaho.

Genre readers, prepare to share.

When Annie and William go fishing they see murder. And the murderers see them. Kootenai Bay, Idaho will never be the same. Annie is twelve and William nine but they have survival instincts that take them to the right place. Jess Rawlins is a man seeing his ranch and his Idaho disappear. When he finds Annie and William in his barn he makes a promise to keep them safe. None of the three realize just how hard a promise this is going to be.

Hey you, yeah you, over there in the corner saying, "A children in jeopardy book, I'm not reading another one of those." I said Jess was on the case, right? C.J. Box is known in our community and I'm pleased to note, outside of the mystery community, for his Joe Pickett series. BLUE HEAVEN is not a Pickett book. It truly is a thriller. By that I mean that we come in just as the first cataclysmic action is occurring but long before the last reveals itself. It is handled with the same love of community and adroitness for character as the Pickett books but is entirely unique.

The result is that very real and pleasurable reading experience of never knowing what's going to happen but always being one step ahead of all the characters within the action. Box reveals the play to the reader and takes us into the heart of the good, the bad and the downright ugly. Through character as much as action we are forced to hold our breath and just hope and pray the good guys come out on top.

And the action comes: over his head sheriff, distraught mother, concerned wives, four evil men, two true heroes, and a town full of people in shades of gray. At the heart is the two children. Can their love for one another and their mom be enough to determine when to trust and when to run? The hooks are all in place by page fifty. BLUE MOON is over 300 pages. Get out that espresso machine. It's going to be a long night, the best kind.

Once or twice a year I recommend a book to all who love our world of mystery. A novel that entertains even those who snub their nose at "mystery". I say put it in their hands, they'll thank you. BLUE HEAVEN is even better than that. The cover blurbs for this book come from Harlan Coben, Robert Crais, George Pelecanos,

Tess Gerritsen and T. Jefferson Parker. All use the word thrill or thriller. Stop and look again at that list of names. Do I have your attention? Good. What is even more remarkable is that for the month of January they are willing to call it "a book of the year". What am I saying? I'm saying that not only can you recommend this book to all your friends who try to be "understanding" about your mystery habit; you can recommend this book to all who read mystery, no matter how myopic their reading has become because of personal preference. That's saying a mouth full.

Ruth Jordan

#### **THE BONE MAN**

Vicki Stiefel

2007

Dorchester Publishing

Tally Whyte, the protagonist in this series, of which this is the fourth entry, is a psychologist who headed MGAP, the Massachusetts Grief Assistance Program she'd founded. She left the program one year ago, after the death of her adored foster mother, Veda, who had been the Chief Medical Examiner for Massachusetts in Boston. Tally's inheritance has allowed her the luxury of traveling the country and the world and to attempt to recover from her own grief, with the help of her three-legged former Canine Corps dog, Penny, a German shepherd.

As the book opens, Tally is enjoying a late September in her New Hampshire home when her former associates entreat her to return to her former position. When a human skull is found inside an ancient clay pot, Tally is intrigued and anxious to see the facial reconstruction done by her friend, forensic anthropologist "Didi" Cravitz, she cannot believe her eyes: She is absolutely certain that it is the face of a friend, an art dealer. But how could a contemporary skull be inside of an artifact ostensibly nearly a thousand years old? When bodies start to pile up, all of them friends of Tally and all tied to the clay pot and the skull [which are soon stolen from the scene of the first of these murders], Tally determines to find who is responsible. The trail leads to New Mexico, where Tally takes advantage of an offer by the local medical examiner's office to create a grief assistance program, going for the interview with her own agenda in mind. The tale turns on Native American carvings and lore, and lovingly describes not only the New England setting which is her home but the southwestern desert to which she travels to uncover the reason behind the killings and the identity of the murderer.

Tally places herself in danger, surviving several attempts on her life, while at the same time trying to figure out her relationship with her boyfriend, Sheriff Hank Cunningham, who she discovers has now apparently become a State homicide investigator [something he has failed to mention]. The story is engrossing, particularly after it travels to the New Mexico desert, where the danger and the suspense mount. But this reader found the plotting to be implausible--assassins popping up at every turn with no obvious--or even obscure--way for them to have known where to find Tally, and inflicting horrendous injuries which seem to be almost shrugged off with little effect. But then, maybe it was meant to be satire and my sense of humor was somehow not functioning during my reading of this book.

Gloria Feit

#### **CALUMET CITY**

Charlie Newton

2007

Simon & Schuster

An attempted mayoral assassination, a multiple-casualty drug bust, and a body long-buried in a tenement wall all find locus in the hidden damage of Chicago beat cop Patti Black's violent childhood. Struggling to keep her history from jeopardizing her sanity and her career, Officer Black races to uncover a complicated plot of high-profile corruption that began in the violation of her past before it can explode her carefully constructed life.

Calumet City is cop noir at its darkest, most grimacing best. With shockingly brilliant clarity, first-time author Charlie Newton drops us into a ghetto world and systematically shatters the lights, strips our defenses, dead-bolts the back door, and siphons our air until we are completely, helplessly trapped in the extravagantly brutalized confines of Patti Black's psyche. The experience is claustrophobic and excruciatingly tense, because it is utterly believable. Newton writes with a stylized prose so effective that it's almost implausible, forming, detonating, and reforming in a frenetic first-person narration that perfectly articulates danger and emotional unraveling. Combining the blackest humor with the bleakest of nightmares, this book is an incredible achievement.

Rebecca Tatham

CHAT  
Archer Mayor  
2007  
Grand Central Publishing

Joe Gunther of the Vermont Bureau of Investigation, in the midst of the start of one murder investigation, learns that his brother and mother were seriously injured in an automobile accident and are in the hospital. He rushes there and subsequently learns maybe it was no accident. Then a second similar murder occurs with a similar, but slightly different, M.O..

The plot is that simple—but boy, is it complicated. To begin with, in discovering the circumstances of how his brother's car went off the road, Joe theoretically has to remove himself from the investigation, depending on the local sheriff's office and one of his own people to move the inquiry forward. But as it progresses, a lead into the murders opens up. The title, CHAT, refers to the use of a chat room by the murderer to entice the victims to a motel room.

This excellently written novel is up to the series' high standards, and the descriptions of the author's beloved Vermont are penetrating. It is always a joy to read a Joe Gunther mystery, and CHAT has been no exception.

Theodore Feit

CITY OF THE ABSENT  
Robert W. Walker  
November 2007  
Harper

On October 28, 1893, the World's Fair in Chicago came to an end, two days later than its scheduled closing, to allow former President Benjamin Harrison to visit. That Fair was the setting for a prior novel in the series featuring Inspector Alistair Ransom of the Chicago Police Department, SHADOWS IN THE WHITE CITY. Both novels reflect the author's love of the Windy City and its history.

As the Fair was being closed down, the Mayor was assassinated on his front lawn by an office seeker. Never a dull moment in the nation's second city. In addition, there occur a series of "disappearances" of persons who "wouldn't be missed." These didn't rate much attention until a disguised female Pinkerton agent was found murdered and disemboweled. She was a friend of Ransom's, and he leads the charge to solve the grisly murder.

Ransom is a larger-than-life protagonist, allowing the author to make all kinds of observations about the city, its politics, graft and other characteristics. His methods are unorthodox, and in this episode he finds himself accused of one act of which he is not guilty. The book is written in the same tone as the era it depicts and is a page turner.

Theodore Feit

CRAWFISH MOUNTAIN  
Ken Wells  
2007  
Random House

Too often a novel based on an author's pet peeves falls flat. That is not the case in this novel, which combines environmental issues, corporate greed and political shenanigans, with bribery, love affairs and blackmail thrown in. The story is told with the background of the Louisiana Wetlands and the power of the oil interests in the state in the forefront.

At the heart of the story is the degradation of the bayou ecosystem and the effects on the coastal areas, which led to the devastation of Hurricane Katrina. Justin Pitre's grandfather bought acres of pristine marshland, built a "shack" there, fished and trapped, living a happy life. He left it to Justin, asking him not to let any changes take place. When a greedy oil executive tries to cut a pipeline through it, all hell breaks loose.

The characters include a charismatic Governor (not quite a Huey Long), and true-to-life, loveable Cajuns, among others. The tale is well-told, although this reviewer found the wrap-up somewhat contrived. Nevertheless, it is a most enjoyable read, and, given the time, it probably would be well worth the effort to go back and read the previous Catahoula Bayou trilogy, which we missed.

Theodore Feit

THE CRIMES OF DR. WATSON  
John H. Watson MD

Edited By Duane Swierczynski  
2007  
Quirk Books

Well, as it turns out there isn't much that Duane Swierczynski can't do. I'm still waiting for his first cd to come out with perfect blues. Until then we have great modern noir novels, some pretty damn cool comics, books about beer and now Sherlock Holmes.

But this is no ordinary Sherlock Holmes. No, my friends, a straight prose novel isn't challenging enough for the talented MR. Swierczynski. This book is interactive! A bit over sized and full of clues, the reader must open envelopes with notes, go through matchbook covers, torn messages and other assorted items in order to help solve the case. The case in question? Dr. Watson has been charged with sundry crimes and it's up to you and Holmes to prove him innocent!

This kind of thing could get people who don't normally read interested in books. Fans of the genre will flat out *love* this. This is one of the most clever ideas I've seen in a long time, and that's something coming from a guy with an electric recliner with massage units!

Jon Jordan

DEADMAN'S HAND  
Edited by Otto Penzler  
2007  
Harcourt

"Mystery and Poker" go together like "chocolate and peanut butter", "rum and coke" or "movies and popcorn." It's a natural subject for the crime fiction genre and it's no surprise that this collection of short stories about the card game we all know is bursting with wonderful stories.

Penzler, who has a sharp eye for dark fiction exemplified in the Best American Mystery Stories each year, has some of the best in the business represented here. From Michael Connelly and Jeffery Deaver to Laura Lippman and Joyce Carol Oates, the styles are varied and dead on perfect. Walter Mosley contributed a terrific tale and a real stand out for me was the entry from Sam Hill.

This is a great anthology and it bears seeking out. I predict a number of award nominations coming from this book.

Jon Jordan

DEXTER IN THE DARK  
Jeff Lindsay  
2007  
Doubleday

Dexter, the totally original and distinctly macabre character created by Jeff Lindsay, is now known to millions of people beyond his readership since the introduction of the cable tv series of that name. But I daresay one must read the original creation, on the printed page [or, I guess, the computer screen], to fully appreciate him. As the third book in the series opens, Dexter is about to marry his girlfriend, Rita, to whose two young children he has become mentor [in scary ways]. The marriage is yet another step in his quest to appear outwardly normal to the outside world – as he says: "It would never do to have the sheep see that Dexter is the wolf among them." If you are not familiar with Dexter, he works as a blood spatter analyst for the Miami P.D., but in his off-hours carries out his passion in his role as vigilante serial killer. His cop foster father has instilled in him very specific rules: "Harry had taught me to find and dispose of only those who, by his rigorous cop standards, truly needed it." The only one aware of Dexter's dark side, other than Rita's kids, is his foster sister, now a full sergeant in homicide, who finds a personal, that is, professional advantage in it: "I had gained a small reputation for my insight into the way the twisted homicidal sickos thought and operated – natural enough, since, unknown to everyone but Deborah, I was a twisted homicidal sicko myself."

The author again gives unspoken voice to Dexter's Dark Passenger, the internal guide to his dark side, but when he is called to the scene of a particularly gruesome murder, his Dark Passenger goes mysteriously silent. Without the assistance of his inner monster, Dexter doesn't know if he'll be capable of finding and ridding the world of this new and truly awful adversary, someone or something unlike anything he's come up against before, and he finds himself now the hunted, instead of the hunter.

The writing is often comedic [something one wouldn't expect in a book about a serial killer]. Witness this musing from Dexter, when discussing the wedding and honeymoon: "And so there were actually several very good reasons to go through with this – but Paris? I don't know where it came from, this idea that Paris is romantic. Aside from the French, has anyone but Lawrence Welk ever thought an accordion was sexy? And I would have thought that by now it would be clear that they don't like us there, and they all insist on speaking French, of all things," reflecting on "the land of Rouseau, Candide and Jerry Lewis."

The alliteration in the titles of the three books in this series continues in the narrative, usually keeping with the “d’s,” hence Dark Daddy Dexter, Demon Dexter, etc., which one would think might be irksome but was instead fun. I did find disconcerting the author’s use of both third person and first person, with Dexter referring to himself in the same paragraph as both “I” and “Dexter,” but that’s just a minor annoyance. The sardonic tone used throughout takes the edge off what might otherwise be just another serial killer book, but this is anything but. This series has been called ironic, sinfully entertaining, inventive—it is all those things and more.  
Gloria Feit

#### DOWN INTO DARKNESS

David Lawrence

2007

Thomas Dunne Books

As the author of a series starring another protagonist named Stella, I was a bit anxious about reading a book with a different Stella as the main character. I needn’t have worried. Lawrence’s Stella Mooney is such an individual, striking character there’s no mistaking her for any other. Her past haunts her present in almost debilitating ways at times, but she is strong and determined to move on.

When the police receive the news that the naked body of a woman is hanging from a tree, it is just the first in a series of harrowing murders. All of the victims are killed in horrendous ways, and are accompanied by words which are scrawled on their bodies. The police must go about connecting these victims, hoping to find the killer before any more people die.

Lawrence’s writing is wonderful to read. His characters come to life immediately and deeply, and I felt I knew them, even though I am late coming to this series. This is the fourth book about this police department, with all of the previous novels highly praised by reviewers across the board. I was not surprised at the accolades once I began reading, and will go back to read all of the others. I will also look forward to the next.

Judy Clemens

James Reasoner

2007

Point Blank

James Reasoner is the author of over 80 books under various names. DUST DEVILS is his second “redneck noir” (his previous was the cult favorite TEXAS WIND (1980). The story is short and action-packed with plenty of twists and surprises.

Young Toby McCoy appears at an isolated farmhouse in the windswept Texas plains looking for work. Soon he is plowing the fields, feeding the hogs and making eyes at the farm owner Grace Haligan. One day two strangers appear at the ranch looking for Grace and when they find her a wild shootout ensues and Grace kills both men. She then tells Toby that more men will come looking for her and the loot she doesn’t have. Suddenly, Toby is on the run with Grace and facing robbers, murderers, betrayals and death. Toby has his share of dark secrets that will come out. All good noir novels have as their center a femme fatale and Grace fits that bill to a tee.

In the spirit of the genre, Reasoner saves the final chilling revelations for the very end. DUST DEVILS is definitely worth the read.

Joe Czech

#### THE FAULT TREE

Louise Ure

2007

St. Martin's

Louise Ure won the Shamus Award for her unusual FORCING AMARYLLIS. She’s written another unusual book of award-winning quality.

Set in the present in Tucson, Cadence Moran is an auto mechanic—and a good one. Her other attribute is that she is blind. On her way home from work, she’s the victim of a hit-and-run by a duo who have just committed a murder. They try to track her down to kill her also, as they don’t know she couldn’t see them. The story is told via short chapters and through the POV of main characters including the killers. But the reader doesn’t know who they are until the police uncover their identities.

Dupree and Nellis are the detectives trying to find the murderers. The first victim was an old woman, Wanda Prentice, rumored to have a lot of money in her house. Soon the two go on a Bonnie-and-Clyde-type spree. The title refers to the tree of Cadence's childhood where her alcoholic mother made her stand until she apologized for whatever wrong her mother considered she had committed. It also refers to a NASA quote at the beginning of the book. Cadence considers what she should take the blame for at the end of the story, for things do go wrong.  
Gay Toltl Kinman

#### THE FEVER KILL

Tom Piccirilli  
December 2007  
Creeping Hemlock Press

Crease has reached a critical juncture in his life, and before he can figure out how to move forward he needs to return to his home town and try to solve an old crime that destroyed his father's life. Mary Burke was just a young girl who'd been having a tea party with her dolls the day she was kidnapped from her yard. The kidnappers demanded a ransom of \$15,000. Crease's father, the local sheriff, handled the exchange, and things went bad. The money disappeared and Mary was shot and killed, the kidnappers never apprehended. Crease's father descended into alcoholism until his death, and Crease was forced out of town. Now a cop himself, he's spent so much time working undercover he's as guilty as the men he's trying to bring to justice. With a marriage on the rocks and a son who won't speak to him, Crease has gotten his drug-dealing boss's mistress pregnant, and his boss is out for revenge. This is a classic story of a man who must confront his demons before he can move forward in his life, but Piccirilli goes beyond that, to show the ultimate futility of trying to settle old scores while you compound problems from the past with new mistakes. Through Crease, I could understand the sound logic behind many flawed choices people make, a logic Crease can't argue with, as much as he tries. No trite or contrived twists, the story is so natural you feel you should have seen what was coming, but didn't. The writing is superb, the suspense is intense, and Piccirilli caps it off with one of the best endings ever.  
Sandra Ruttan

#### FRIEND OF THE DEVIL

Peter Robinson  
2007  
Hodder & Stoughton

Inspector Banks, it's been far too long. There are certain writers out here in Crime Fiction that are addictive. The quality and regularity of their titles have readers putting little marks on the calendar. It hadn't been that long since I shared a new adventure with the good Inspector but I still did a happy dance when FRIEND OF THE DEVIL arrived. What a great book I got for my extra patience. Annie Cabbott is on loan and there's a dead body on her patch. A wheelchair bound woman has been brutally slain. In Eastvale, Banks and the team are called in when a young girl is found dead. Could this be the beginning work of a serial killer? Robinson does what he does best in FRIEND, keeping all tracks of a very complex plot humming to a tune only he can create. There's sure to be a shudder from any avid reader with the book's big reveal followed quickly by a satisfied sigh... Nobody plays cat and mouse in quite the same way as Robinson, nor are many others as true to the timeline of their series and its lead players. As always there are nods to the past and an end to certain futures. At the same time FRIEND OF THE DEVIL is an individual novel as surely a any stand-alone I've read this year. With Banks and Cabbott leading the reader on from the get go all this death, destruction and debauchery, FRIEND should lead any reader to an inevitable conclusion ... bliss .. hard-boiled and soft.  
Ruth

#### THE GOOD LIAR

Laura Caldwell  
January 2008  
Mira

Laura Caldwell may have started in chick lit, but she has proven herself as a thriller writer, and The Good Liar is, by far, her best suspense novel yet. She opens with Kate Livingston, recently divorced accountant who can't seem to get over her ex. Her best friend, Liza Kingsley, sets Kate up with former co-worker,

Michael Waller, thinking that it will be a rebound fling. But when Kate and Michael end up falling for each other and getting married, Liza fears she has brought her friend too close to the world of secrets and lies in which she and Michael Waller live. It isn't long before Kate suspects her husband of being more than just a restaurateur and upon further investigation, realizes no one, not even her husband or her best friend, are who they say they are.

Caldwell's detailed, intricately woven plot leaves no loose ends and her extensive research gives a sense of authority to the book. Starting off with what seems to be a standard romantic suspense, she slowly builds the story into something bigger, a tale of government conspiracy and international intrigue. Her experience writing chick-lit combined with her knowledge of US government and talent for suspenseful prose, set Caldwell apart as a unique author who knows how to grip readers cover to cover, no matter which genre she's writing in.

Dana Kaye

#### THE GOOD THIEF'S GUIDE TO AMSTERDAM

Chris Ewan

2007

St. Martin's

Chris Ewan's main character is a twist on the usual crime fiction protagonist. Charlie Howard writes novels about a thief named Faulks. Although Charlie makes a living at writing he supplements it by thieving.

Charlie sends his newest book back to England for a review by his agent, Victoria. Victoria spots a major flaw which gives Charlie grounds to stay on in Amsterdam to think through a rewrite. Meanwhile, he's contacted by an American who wants him to steal something. How does this American know Charlie is a thief? Charlie pulls off the job despite his suspicions but things go seriously awry from then on. It's up to Charlie to figure out what's behind what he took, who to trust, and how to fix his storyline.

THE GOOD THIEF'S GUIDE TO AMSTERDAM has an old school caper feel to it. Charlie has a sense of humor, he's handsome enough to get the girl, and Ewan's writing style allows Charlie to stay one step ahead of the reader while still revealing enough information for you to, at least, think you've solved things ahead of him. There's some convincing and non gratuitous violence, some non graphic sex, delivered through clever dialog and plotting. It makes for a thoroughly enjoyable read. Pick up (and pay for)

THE GOOD THIEF'S GUIDE TO AMSTERDAM. You'll get your money's worth.

Dave

#### HELLO CHARLIE: LETTERS FROM A SERIAL KILLER

Charlie Hess with Davin Seay

Feb 2008

Atria Books

HELLO CHARLIE a true crime, not fiction. But this is not the usual non-fiction rehashing of gory details and speculation. Charlie Hess, along with two other retired law enforcement officers, formed a team to investigate cold cases. In doing so, Hess got an entirely unique perspective into the workings of one serial killer in particular, Robert Charles Brown, who had previously been convicted of just a single killing.

Through conversations both in person and in letters, Hess befriends Brown and gets to know him. He also gains insights into the killer most people wouldn't covet.

Fictional books by Robert Harris and others are good reading, but what is real is ultimately more disturbing. This one of the most compelling true crimes books I've read since Helter Skelter.

Jon Jordan

#### HIGH SEASON

Jon Loomis

2007

St. Martin's Minotaur

Frank Coffin was a decorated homicide detective in Baltimore, until corpse-induced panic attacks forced him to leave the department and eventually return to his Cape Cod hometown for a less stressful position with the Provincetown police. Fourteen years later, when a notoriously homophobic, secretly cross-dressing televangelist is found strangled to death on a local gay men's beach, raspberry-colored taffeta scarf at criminally unfashionable odds with his size-twelve, sensibly-heeled pumps, Frank's plans for an uneventful slide into retirement face an unwelcome challenge. The new police chief, town manager, and destination marketing consultant are united in their concern that the murder (and subsequent investigation by the state

police) will damage the town's business dynamic—so Frank is ordered to run a parallel investigation, ostensibly to solve the crime quickly, quietly, and with minimal public fanfare. Unfortunately, Frank soon discovers that he and his partner, the tough and quick-witted officer Lola Winters, are pursuing a killer with a multi-victim agenda. Aided by the local community of gossipy and hilariously vivid eccentrics, including various members of Frank's extended family, Frank and Lola follow a trail that navigates an increasingly complex miasma of greed, dirty politics, violence, and seriously questionable fashion.

High Season is the fiction debut from poet Jon Loomis, and it's a surprisingly rewarding read. Although peopled by over-the-top characters and propelled by a rather fantastic plot, the story achieves success beyond simple campy enjoyment. It's a fun romp that also resonates at a more visceral, satisfying level because of its intelligent prose and its interestingly textured protagonists and subplots. Loomis writes with real humanity, subtle depth, and a wickedly good-spirited humor that manages to be satirical without condescension. This book could easily become a series—and I would gladly visit both Frank Coffin and Provincetown again.

Rebecca Tatham

#### HITMAN

Parnell Hall

2007

Pegasus Books

Fast action and quick New York wit abound in this entertaining, fast reading mystery. Stanley Hastings is a self-employed, non-gun carrying private eye hired by a hitman, who wants Hastings to prevent him from carrying out his current assignment. All he has to do is tail the hitman; make sure no one is taking a particular interest in him. This employment is far from his usual gig, which involves working for Richard Rosenberg, a sarcastic ambulance chasing lawyer, who employs Hastings to take pictures, interview clients and gather needed support material for current cases. Juggling both the hitman hire and Richard's ongoing nagging needs,

Hastings becomes more and more unwittingly involved with the mob and the police force, after his hitman is iced and his name is directly related to the hit. Hastings proceeds to investigate the alias given by the hitman, an innocent schoolteacher who becomes the target of an unsuccessful mob hit, saved by Hastings. The shooter is killed on the spot, so, it would seem, case closed. An unjustified mob hit on an innocent citizen, or so it seems. Hastings, in true PI fashion and with not so much encouragement from his intelligent wife, Alice, continues on the case, wondering what connection the alias has with the mob, which appears to be none.

Trouble ensues and Hastings ends up being very centrally related to the overall plot. After much chance-taking and play, he comes out clean, unlike several other characters in the book. Parnell offers a very quick and clever mystery with HITMAN, an excellent read for any rainy weekend.

Judy Maupin

#### HOOKED UP

Joyce & Jim Lavene

January 2008

Midnight Ink

What a great idea. A stockcar racing mystery! It's like combining NASCAR with Columbo (and everyone knows how loyal NASCAR fans are). The Lavenes have written over 40 books and this is their second racing thriller.

The main characters are husband Glad Wycznewski (a retired Chicago cop) and his wife Ruby (20 years younger and ready to attack life). They take their RV from raceway to raceway, following the NASCAR circuit. But they seem to run into trouble at each stop.

On the road to the monster mile at Dover International Speedway, NASCAR fan Glad is expecting to see speed on the raceway, have a cold beer in his hand and make love in the RV with his beautiful wife Ruby. So when Glad finds a strange man in his bed wearing his favorite p.j.s, he's pretty upset. Ruby tells him the sleeping man is just a weary hitchhiker. Later that night, the hitchhiker falls to his death and no one is sure if it's murder or suicide. Things only get stranger when rumors fly that \$10 million is missing. As the body count rises and the mystery becomes more complex, Glad and Ruby are racing after the crooks at breakneck speed that isn't over until the checkered flag drops.

Fans of racing and mystery will enjoy this speedy turn around the track as Joyce and Jim Lavene provide a superb racing thriller.

Joe Czech

INCOGNEGRO  
Mat Johnson  
2007  
Vertigo Comics

There's a title coming from Vertigo this February that is well worth the price of admission. Mat Johnson and Warren Pleece have created a visual story as Noir as the blackest night. The art is simple and stark in Pleece's interpretation of Johnson's story. It allows the reader to see not only the individual panels playing out but also many unfortunate truths.

INCOGNEGRO, a story set decades past when the hanging of Negroes was a form of entertainment in the deep south. One man travels from the safety of his Harlem home time and again, exposing the continuing racism for Negroid and mainstream press alike. He is able to do so because the color of his skin blends, the kink of his hair succumbs to straightening, and he can control his anger to reveal the truth through the words of the articles he writes for the New Holland Herald. When we meet him, Zane Pinchback is torn. He realizes the value of his calling but also yearns for the recognition someone with his readership deserves. It is an infamy that can only come to light if his true colors are revealed and anonymity lost. While discussing the need to move on with his sweetheart and best friend Carl, Zane receives a letter that will send him back to the South and his very origins.

For those of you unaware of Mat Johnson the novelist, this may seem like pretty deep stuff for a comic book. If you know his work you're writing down the title (INCOGNEGRO). After a promising debut novel (DROP), Mr. Johnson has delivered two of my must read books. Both HUNTING IN HARLEM & THE GREAT NEGRO PLOT are books that of themselves are remarkable and when compared side by side show a novelist who refuses to be held in a mold. Are you a comic book aficionado? Johnson cut his teeth on Papa Midnight ( a Hellblazer spin-off ) after being a long time fan of the art form. Like myself, his favorite imprint quickly became Vertigo and with INCOGNEGRO he proves he really gets it, cherishes it, breathes it. I can only imagine the heady stuff it must be to contribute to it.

Every character in this story is more than they seem at first. Each individual has a story to tell. In the forward of INCOGNEGRO he speaks of the birth of his twins, " Two people with the exact same ethnic lineage destined to be viewed differently only because of genetic randomness." Although Zane and those close to him are at the heart of this tale Johnson expands upon this theme deftly while telling a story that would seem to be a straightforward mystery.

With Jena Six in the news every day and prejudice again on the rise in the U.S. (if it ever really did get any better), INCOGNEGRO is a story to be read for its entertainment level alone, but unless I'm mistaken the Vertigo readership will embrace this title for what it is, A well told story of the many inconsistencies in American perception and how unimportant they actually deserve to be. Vertigo is a line never afraid to take risks to tell a new story. With Mat Johnson as part of their arsenal they have many more stories to tell and whole new audiences to reach. Viva la Comic Book.

Ruth Jordan

IN THE SHADOW OF THE GLACIER  
Vicki Delany  
2007  
Poisoned Pen Press

During the Vietnam War there were men of draft age who fled to Canada to avoid serving in the army. In this novel, Trafalgar, British Columbia, is characterized as a center of such settlement, and apparently will be the site of a new series featuring Constable Moonlight ("Molly") Smith.

One such draft evader who prospered north of the border upon his death bequeathed his land to the town for a garden to be dedicated to honor draft dodgers, thus setting the stage for conflicts between the "peaceniks" and their opposites, especially businesses fearing antagonizing U.S. tourists upon whom they were dependent. One opposed to the garden was the developer of a proposed luxury resort who is found by Molly dead, presumably murdered, in an alley.

Molly is but a lowly beat cop, but she is assigned to assist Detective Sergeant John Winters in his investigation of the death. Further trouble is fomented by a TV personality and outside agitators. Winters and Smith continue seeking clues. While he resents her presence, he teaches and she learns. The DS has his own fears haunting him, which caused him to leave the Vancouver police department for the small town, and these are increased by the frustration of not solving the case quickly.

The author has a way of coming up with unusual themes, and this novel certainly lives up to this ability. In addition, the descriptions of the small town, its citizens and environment are handled exceptionally well. It is a good, solid mystery.

Theodore Feit

### **KENNEDY'S BRAIN**

Henning Mankell

2007

The New Press

Henning Mankell has written 37 novels, with perhaps the nine Kurt Wallender mysteries best known in the United States. The present novel, while a mystery of sorts, really is a polemic based on the author's frustration with the poverty and disease rampant on the African continent. Indeed, it is a written indictment of the greed which is an inherent part of the African AIDS crisis.

Swedish archaeologist Louise Cantor returns home from her job of supervising a Greek dig to find her only son lying in his bed, dead. An autopsy shows the 28-year-old full of sleeping pills, and his death is ruled a suicide. Louise refuses to accept the ruling, believing his death was a murder, and embarks on retracing his various trails to discover the "truth." It takes her to Barcelona, where the son had a secret apartment, to Australia to find her ex-husband, and then to Maputo, Mozambique. Along the way she finds out her son was HIV positive.

Bit by bit, Louise learns how little she knew about her son. In Mozambique she learns an awful truth about an AIDS hospice, and possibly its link to the son's death. Also, there appear to be links between the AIDS epidemic and Western pharmaceutical interests, giving the author more reason to raise criticism. This book is not a joy to read, despite how well-written it is, but then it is not meant to be. While it is a story full of mysteries, it is not the kind of tale a Wallender novel would be. It is more of a psychological inquiry with social overtones.

Theodore Feit

### **THE KILLER'S WIFE**

Bill Floyd

2008

St. Martin's Minotaur

Intellectually, most of us understand that—as asserted by psychological profilers and proven by history—a serial killer might be anyone: our neighbor, our bus driver, the clerk at the quick mart, hiding beneath a veneer of normalcy. But don't most of us also believe that were we to encounter such a murderer, our internal radar would somehow hone in on his base deviance and alert us of danger? What would it say about us if we failed to recognize evil, or were incapable of acting against it?

In *The Killer's Wife*, author Bill Floyd attacks our assumptions of consciousness, conscience, and culpability. Nina was married to Randy Mosley, a charmer with at least 12 deaths on his hands, for four years before she turned him in to the police. Claiming no knowledge of Randy's crimes, she is cleared of any involvement in his decade-long spree. After his trial and conviction, Nina changes her name and relocates from California to a quiet eastern town with her young son. She relies on anonymity to escape the burden of her past and is largely successful for six years—until Charles Prichett, the father of one of Randy's victims, tracks her down and exposes her true identity to the media. Prichett has never believed in Nina's ignorance, or her innocence. He is determined to publicly establish Nina's role in Randy's crimes and to investigate her link to recent area murders that seem to mimic Randy's methodology.

Nina must now fight to protect the new life she has built. Under the scrutiny of an angry community, she is forced to relive her memories of Randy and, when her son's life is jeopardized, to find a clue in those nightmare years that will help prevent further tragedy.

With this debut novel, Bill Floyd offers an original take on the standard serial-killer story. The book is suspenseful and well-paced by an interesting perspective and a wide, inclusive trajectory that compels us to look beyond the traditional definition of "victim". Although some of the plot-critical relationships lack the depth to be completely credible and the psychological insights developed through flashbacks aren't terribly challenging, the book is ultimately satisfying and I would recommend it.

Rebecca Tatham

### **KOLCHAK: THE NIGHT STALKER CASEBOOK**

Edited by Joe Gentile, Garrett Anderson and Lori Gentile

2006

Moonstone Books

Carl Kolchak was the featured character in one of my favorite shows (*Night Stalker*) growing up. He's an investigative reporter with a penchant for attracting weird and bizarre stories. It seems natural for some one to write stories about him and I'm shocked there hasn't been something like this before. But, thanks to the wisdom of Joe Gentile at Moonstone Books, we now have this wonderful collection of short stories. The

writers are known in a few different genres, most noticeably comics and mystery, which only makes sense given the subject of the stories.

In particular, I really enjoyed Robert Randisi's "Call Me Sam," and Mike Baron did a great job with his "Fish Story." Included in this book are Gary Phillips, Tom Defalco, John Ostrander, James Reasoner, Christopher Golden and ten other great writers.

This is really a fun collection and I would recommend it to anyone who likes a bit of supernatural in their reading. Full details of the book and others from moonstone at [moonstonebooks.com](http://moonstonebooks.com)

Jon Jordan

#### THE LAST NIGHTINGALE

Anthony Flacco

2007

Ballantine Books/Mortalis

Just over 100 years ago—1906—the Great Earthquake nearly destroyed San Francisco. Amidst the destruction and carnage, the Nightingale family was murdered, although the police observation at the scene attributed the deaths to the earthquake. Hidden in the house undetected was Shane, an adopted son, who heard the perpetrator talking to his victims as he slew them. When the carnage was over, Shane—the last Nightingale of the title—left the house and took refuge at the Mission Dolores, where he was given a job care-taking the cemetery, and a shed in which to live.

A larger-than-life police sergeant, Randall Blackburn, makes Shane's acquaintance when the boy writes him a note suggesting a motive for the murder of a prominent citizen for which Blackburn was assigned the investigation. Impressed with Shane's intuitive abilities, the policeman befriends the boy and tries to get him to assist in capturing a serial killer. Other relationships among the main characters develop, to a rousing conclusion.

The descriptions of the havoc caused by the earthquake are graphic, and the characterizations excellent. Written at a fast pace, the novel grips the reader from cover to cover. The book is among the first issued under the new Mortalis imprint.

Theodore Feit

#### THE LONG EMBRACE

Judith Freeman

2007

Pantheon

This is a non-fiction book about Raymond Chandler, and while I am not qualified to say whether it's a literary study, a biography or a bit of each, I can say that anyone who is fascinated by Raymond Chandler needs to read this book.

Chandler was together his wife, Cissy, for more than thirty years. She was older than he and most of their relationship has been unknown. Chandler destroyed all their correspondence after her death. Freeman obviously did exhaustive research for this book and it is truly fascinating. Casual fans and die hard fans alike will find this book to be an unforgettable true life mystery and a wonderful insight into one of our true writing pioneers.

Jon Jordan

#### MIDNIGHT RAMBLER

James Swain

2007

Ballantine Books

Confronted by the prospect that Simon Skell, a.k.a. the Midnight Rambler, a serial killer he put in prison, might be released with the surfacing of "new" evidence, ex-cop Jack Carpenter embarks on a quest to prove his original apprehension of the man was justified. Now an abduction specialist, with no resources and a broken marriage, he travels all over Florida, from his Ft. Lauderdale home to Tampa and Disneyland, seeking clues to the mysterious disappearance of several women whose suspected deaths he attributes to Skell.

The new evidence is the body of one of the victims that turns up in the back yard of her sister's home, and the forensic evidence suggests the wrong man was jailed. The police arrest and charge someone else for the crime, setting the stage for an appeal to release Skell, who was convicted of the murder on Carpenter's charge and the testimony of a witness who now recants her story.

The next days are one wild ride, as Carpenter relentlessly seeks clues, uncovering the mystery bit by bit, while attempting to put his life back together again. It is a suspenseful tale, adroitly told, keeping the reader on edge all the way.

Gloria Feit

#### MONEY SHOT

Christa Faust  
February 2008  
Hard Case Crime

Christa Faust's MONEY SHOT is the story of Gina Moretti, a.k.a. Angel Dare. Angel is a former porn star now running her own agency connecting girls with gigs. When a good friend calls in a favor, asking her to make one last film, she's reluctant, but she learns she'd be co-starring with a pretty hot young man she's aware of by reputation. Lust replaces logic. Angel – who we've gleaned is self-assured, smart and shrewd – finds herself walking into a trap.

Angel is attacked, her friend murdered, and the only thing that keeps her in the land of the living is luck. Unsure of the reason for the assault and exactly who her assailants were and what they wanted, Angel isn't sure who she can trust. On the run from people who want to kill her, Angel is in a race against time, while the lives of the people she cares about most hang in the balance.

Although MONEY SHOT touches on the porn industry anyone thinking the book would be overloaded with sex, innuendo and cheap jokes is mistaken. Faust has done a tremendous job balancing the story. She gives enough of a glimpse into the industry to understand the characters and players who are relevant, but doesn't overstep the boundaries with gratuitous sex. Although MONEY SHOT is hardboiled/noir at it's core, it could also fall under the thriller label. I was hooked from the first line. MONEY SHOT is an action-packed story with twists and turns and Angel Dare is a compelling, kick-ass protagonist Faust does an incredible job of humanizing. Faust has a new fan. I think my only complaint is that I don't know if Faust will be doing another book for Hard Case Crime – I certainly hope so.

Sandra Ruttan

#### THE MOST NOTORIOUS CRIMES IN AMERICAN HISTORY

Various  
2007  
Life Books

As a kid, I always loved Time/Life books. My parents had tons of them and I've now have my own sets. Life Magazine itself was always known for wonderful pictures and compelling stories, so it seems a natural for them to put out a book like this.

This a big coffee table size book and it's chock full of photos. It covers everything from Lincoln's assassination to Sid and Nancy, then goes on to cover politics and pointless mayhem. I especially like the coverage of the Lindbergh kidnapping, Watergate, Leopold and Loeb and Starkweather cases. It is up to date as well, covering some events only a year or two old.

If you enjoy reading about true crime then this is a book you must own. And I think it would make a great gift.

Jon

#### MURDER BY SERPENTS

Barbara Graham  
November 2007  
Five Star

Quilt aficionados will love this book, complete with a mystery quilt pattern. Set in the present in the Smokey Mountains of Tennessee where Theo Abernathy has her quilt shop. "Gossip Central" her husband Tony calls it. He's the Sheriff for Park County. The town is small so everyone knows everything about everyone. Well--maybe not everything as Tony finds out.

While Theo contributes to helping him solve the mystery, Tony is the real protagonist in this story. A man is found dead in his vehicle, both have been baking in the heat. He is handcuffed to the steering wheel as several of his pets slither around, all deadly snakes.

The man was a new preacher in town using the snakes in his ministry. Tony eventually learns the man's name, and finds a distant relative he had stayed with when he first arrived.

Tony determines the man was up to no good, minister or not, but what was his real mission? Something connected with that is the reason he was killed? Or did his murder have to do with something before he arrived in town?. Tony keeps investigating and soon comes up with some surprising information, and a surprise as to how the man died.

Another body is discovered, which complicates matters. Are the two deaths related? The second was also not a nice man, being an abusive husband. However, the coroner is going to label the death as 'accidental.' "It could have been," he tells Tony. Tony is okay with that because, yes, it could have been, and it means one less murder for him to investigate. Along the way Tony discovers a meth lab, a lost baby and more secrets.

Gay Toltl Kinman

#### NAMELESS NIGHTS

G.M. Ford

February 2008

William Morrow

Paul Hardy is a man with a hidden past. The victim of a horrific accident, for seven years Paul has been "not quite right". Disfigured and unable to communicate or remember his past Paul has been residing in a group home as a ward of the state. In a blast of literary serendipity a second accident is about to change that.

A second accident gives Paul a new face and images from his past. Snapshots of memories he feels compelled to follow.

This premise is the basis for G.M. Ford's NAMELESS NIGHTS, a stand alone thriller that is a read in one sitting kind of a book. The words that speak from the pages are beautifully crafted. The adventure is tightly wound and far reaching at the same time. Story upon story woven together NIGHT doesn't just ask to be read it demands to be read.

I still remember when I found out there would be no more Waterman books. A certain sadness came over me, and then I met Corso. When it comes to Ford's work I'm going to always trust the words that feed me. This novel takes it's reader across the country and across time, exploring every kind of corruption. From a little boy lost to a young woman found again and of course the mandatory "crime at the highest level of government", The story of Paul Harvey and the people he meets discovering his past is a must read. Enjoy the journey.

Ruth Jordan

#### NOBLE LIES

Charles Benoit

2007

Poisoned Pen Press

After various adventures in a number of other parts of the world, including having served as a Marine during Desert Storm, Mark Rohr finds himself working as a bouncer in a Thai bar when he is fired for overzealously performing his duties. But the bar's owner and bartender, a long-time friend, steers him onto a job assisting a woman who is looking for her brother a year after the tsunami.

The client offers him \$500 a week and a \$5,000 bonus if he finds the brother, who Mark believes was either lost to the giant wave or doesn't want to be found. The quest is complicated by a top gangster who also has a vested interest in finding the brother. And the race is on along the pirate-infested waters of Thailand and Malaysia. It is an exciting chase, filled with graphic descriptions of the devastation brought on by the tsunami, as well as the poverty and corruption in the country.

This novel is the third featuring globe-trotting Rohr, ranging from Singapore and the Raffles Hotel to Casablanca and Cairo, then to India and elsewhere. In each, he introduces a number of surprises, and NOBLE LIES is no exception. This reader could not even begin to anticipate how he would bring the novel to such a conclusion.

Theodore Feit

#### NOW & THEN

Robert B. Parker

October 23, 2007

G.P. Putnam's Sons

Who would have thought Spenser would allow his past romantic frustration over the temporary separation from his long-time paramour, Susan, to influence his decisions on a case? But faced with a client's adulterous situation, the hard-boiled Boston PI finds himself in exactly that position. Retained by an FBI agent to learn whether his wife is having an affair, Spencer discovers the truth.

When both the client and the wife are found murdered, Spenser can't let go, remembering when Susan left him many years before to be with another man and the pain it caused him. So he pursues the case to find the killer—even at the expense of endangering Susan. To protect her, we are entertained by his bringing in the troops—Hawk (of course), Vinnie and Cholo.

This novel is Parker (and Spenser) at their accustomed best. No more has to be said. The wisecracks flow, the plot flies and the dialogue is witty and poignant.  
Theodore Feit

#### THE ONE MINUTE ASSASSIN

Troy Cook  
2007  
Capital Crime Press

Talk about dirty tricks in politics--this takes the cake: By bumping off potentially leading candidates, one can get elected. That's the case in this novel. "Tricky Dick" Steel, a lobbyist for a large pharmaceutical company apparently controlled by the Russian Mafia, is one of about 100 gubernatorial candidates in California and his campaign strategy is to literally eliminate leading opponents with the help of two bumbling assassins. John Black, a rather apolitical private investigator who comes from a Bush- or Kennedy-like family (his mother is a U.S. Senator and his sister the Mayor of Los Angeles and the leading candidate to go to Sacramento in the upcoming election) and his partner are thrust into the fray when an attempt is made on the sister's life.

The Cook's previous and initial effort was the award-winning 47 RULES OF HIGHLY EFFECTIVE BANK ROBBERS. It would seem he enjoys rather longish titles. In any event, the present novel is quite different and very readable, developing slowly but surely to a blasting finish.  
Theodore Feit

#### ONE-WAY TICKET

William G. Tapply  
2007  
St. Martin's Minotaur

Brady Coyne is back in this new entry in the series by the prolific William G. Tapply. It is wonderful to again meet Mr. Coyne, his lady love Evie, and his no less beloved dog, Henry David Thoreau, his friend Gordie Cahill, the P.I. with the wonderfully awful puns, et al. The Boston attorney is called by Robert, son of Brady's old classmate from Yale Law and present-day client, Dalton Lancaster, when Dalt is on the receiving end of a brutal beating in a parking garage. He can think of no reason for the attack, but when Brady realizes that Robert himself was similarly beaten one week earlier, and that the boy had inherited his father's predilection for gambling and had gotten badly into debt with the local crime boss, the connection seems obvious. Dalt's mother, Robert's grandmother, is a respected Boston jurist whose wealth and/or position is apparently a target. Things only get uglier, and Brady finds himself squarely in the middle of the ensuing events.

At the same time, Brady is dealing with Evie's preoccupation of late – her father, who is divorced from her mother, living now in California and with whom she has had a guilt-inducing relationship, is ill, the exact nature and severity of which illness is uncertain. Also uncertain is what effect this will have on their own relationship, one which Brady treasures dearly. There's a lot here about sons, and daughters, living up to the expectations of their fathers – or not.

Mr. Tapply is a masterful story-teller, and can wax sentimental one moment while the next it's all gritty realism with intimations of violence. The book is immensely enjoyable, with suspense sustained throughout, the depictions of Boston and environs wonderfully recreated, and is highly recommended.

And now readers can also look forward to reading THIRD STRIKE, due out on December 1<sup>st</sup> and co-authored by Mr. Tapply and Philip R. Craig and bringing back Brady Coyne, who in this instance is teamed up with Mr. Craig's creation, J. W. Jackson – I for one can't wait!  
Gloria Feit

#### PAYBACK

Russell James  
2007  
Point Blank Press

Russell James hooked me from the very beginning with his dark, edgy prose and sharp dialogue, a signature of quality British noir. Protagonist, Floyd Carter, returns to London to attend his brother, Albie's, funeral, but his gut tells him that the car crash that took Albie's life was no accident. Plunging into a world of drugs and violence, Floyd deals with the baggage his brother left behind, including a powerful gang leader who comes to collect Albie's debt.

James' dynamic characters are a cross between those of Irvine Welsh and Elmore Leonard: smart-ass, yet charming bad guys that you can't help but root for. Floyd teams up with drug dealers and has a tendency to get into fist fights, but he takes care of his friends and family, constructing a more sympathetic character. It is a very masculine novel and the gritty writing style and criminal underworld setting may be an initial turn off for some women readers, but the strong female characters create a more appealing story. In fact, it is the women who often save the men from themselves: Suzie, the childhood friend who provides a haven for Floyd and his other brother or Eva, caretaker for a junkie trying to get clean. A talented voice in British fiction, James has created yet another compelling read.

Dana Kaye

#### A PERFECT GRAVE

Rick Mofina

September 2007

Pinnacle Books

A PERFECT GRAVE is the third in the new series by Rick Mofina, whose previous books have been very well received and reviewed by many, including this reviewer. It brings back Jason Wade, rookie reporter working the night cop desk at The Seattle Mirror, doing the only thing he has ever wanted to do: be a crime reporter at a major metropolitan daily. His career took a major hit when, two months before this book opens, he was, through no fault of his own, involved in a major screw-up at the paper, and his every move is second-guessed and criticized by his editor. Reading this book makes one wonder why Jason, or indeed anyone, would subject himself or herself to a deadline-driven job such as this, but one would assume the rewards make it worthwhile, and Jason certainly is up to the task.

Other players include Jason's father, a private investigator, ex-Seattle cop, and recovering alcoholic, whose past demons play a large part in the story, and Grace Garner, who thinks of herself as 'a pathetically lonely self-doubting cop,' with whom Jason was previously romantically involved.

This time around Jason is covering the story of a much loved Seattle nun who is brutally murdered. She had worked for years as a counselor in prisons and women's shelters as well as locally with the poor and homeless, and it is unfathomable that someone would have wanted to kill her – she is dubbed after her death as 'an angel of mercy who eased pain,' and as the "Saint of Seattle," but as Jason looks into her life before she became a nun, there is no information to be found, other than suggestions that she had a dark past and was looking for absolution in her present life. There are ominous hints of a malignant presence, and a recurring image of a knife in a man's hand.

Among the nun's last words are "We can never erase the sins of our past," and this theme permeates the book as Jason and the police race against time to prevent another murder. The suspense, as is usual with this author's books, is relentless till the gripping conclusion. This is another strong entry in the series.

Gloria Feit

#### REASONABLE DOUBTS

2007

Gianrico Carofiglio

Bitter Lemon Press

When Guido Guerrieri finds himself as defense counsel for a childhood enemy, he is ready to exact his revenge for a humiliating beating suffered long ago. His client, however, seems unaware of their shared history, and Guerrieri begins to feel a bond with him, much to his discomfort. Also to his discomfort is the way he begins to feel about his client's wife. What he feels for her could, no doubt, be explained by his recent break-up, when his lover left him to move to America.

REASONABLE DOUBTS is a journal, of sorts, of a man fighting the darker side of himself. He wants to be honest with his actions and thoughts, but often, to his dismay, responds in ways he finds reprehensible. Carofiglio writes sympathetically about the plight of his protagonist, questioning what is right and wrong, and seeing that often there is a huge expanse of gray in-between the black and white of choices. The southern Italy setting is itself a character, and the people surrounding the protagonist, including a likable police detective, other lawyers, and Guerrieri's secretary, and well-drawn and intriguing. Carofiglio's writing, translated by Howard Curtis, is a joy to read. It's not surprising he has won multiple awards, including the Bancarella prize, first received by Ernest Hemingway. REASONABLE DOUBTS is his third novel, and I will be looking for the other two.

Judy Clemens

#### RUNOFF

Mark Coggins  
November 2007  
Bleak House Books

August Riordan is a private investigator who moonlights as a jazz bass player. He's hired by the Dragon Lady of Chinatown to find out who might have fixed a recent election, an election using new touch-screen voting machines. It seems her candidate didn't even carry the precincts in Chinatown, which is a little suspicious.

He's also trying to collect on a reward offered to anyone who catches the person(s) responsible for the rash of stolen ATM machines.

August Riordan has the requisite secretary/former fiancé, drag queen sidekick, and a list of enemies that just grows longer and longer. His inner monologues are humorous, much of the time, and on target all of the time.

Riordan isn't afraid of a fight, and seems to be very skilled in the art. In RUNOFF he kills at least one man, with good reason, and is not happy about it. He's quite attracted to the Dragon Lady's very lovely daughter, which complicates his life even more, particularly when she is attacked.

Riordan's investigations seem to turn up another snake under every rock he over turns. The list of suspects is varied and seemingly unrelated. Of course they are related, although the ATM bandit's last run is quite unexpected. RUNOFF is very entertaining, thought provoking, and a right good read. Riordan is a complex character in an interesting world.

P.J. Coldren

SHADOWS AND LIES  
Marjorie Eccles  
August 2007  
Thomas Dunne Books

At the turn of the century Hannah Jackson traveled to South Africa to take care of a friend, and it changed the course not only of her life, but of many others. In this book, which moves between the times of the late 1800s and the early 1900s, we learn the stories of two families, which come together in an unfortunate manner -- through the murder of an unidentified woman. It takes a couple of intelligent, thoughtful policemen, as well as some determined civilians, to find out what happened and bring the truth to light. Eccles' characters are so likable it's hard to leave one to go to another, but within the first paragraph of each section I was just as wrapped up in the new person as I was in the old. The personalities are varied: the rich, pampered elite; angry, active suffragettes; an orphan just trying to get by. All are well-developed and interesting, and all have important roles to play. The extreme atmospheres of England and South Africa come to life, and I learned a lot about the English colonization in South Africa. Eccles does a beautiful job of making the differing places come alive.

Eccles' list of novels numbers eighteen, and somehow this is the first I've read. I feel like I've been given a wonderful Christmas gift, and can't wait to track down the rest of her work.

Judy Clemens

STATE OF THE ONION  
Julie Hyzy  
2008  
A Berkley Prime Crime Book/Published with arrangement with Tekno Books

Get ready for a deliciously suspenseful new series about White House Chef Olivia Paras in STATE OF THE ONION. The book opens with an intruder trying to break into the grounds of the White House only to be stopped by Ollie's frying pan, a gift for the soon to be retiring White House Executive Chef. The pages will turn quickly as Ollie learns about a plot to shoot the President or two Middle Eastern Royals who are visiting for a very important and delicate agreement. The intruder seemed to want to actually warn the President, and Ollie tries to find him to discover the truth about what is happening and who she can actually trust. Ollie's life has further complications. Her Secret Service Agent boyfriend does not want her to be involved. An internationally renowned assassin The Chameleon sees her and begins stalking her to take care of what he sees as a loose end. When her Boss, Executive Chef Henry, retires, the position will go to Ollie or a television cook with whom she has a long standing rivalry. And then there is a big state dinner to prepare with lots of people to oversee it. The Middle Eastern contingent has their own staff who need to be sure the food is cooked halaal and according to the tastes of their Royal families. A new White House staff member is hired to oversee Etiquette matters and he seems to have decided that Ollie is incompetent. Even at her apartment Ollie cannot get away from the plot at the White House as mysterious visitors try to break in.

While the tension and action fill these pages, Hyzy also does an excellent job of weaving in character and details. The White House scenes are fascinating, and enough recipes are provided at the end to satisfy readers who grew hungry from the mouth watering meal descriptions throughout. There is also plenty of humor in Ollie, who refers to "Herculinary tasks" and other areas of her packed life. This title fits no category, though it is part cooking mystery, part police procedural, and both part cozy and hard boiled (pun intended) fiction. In short, there is something for everyone to enjoy in this one.

STATE is Hyzy's first Berkley book, though she has other titles including a series about a Chicago reporter with Five Star. She also won the Dagger Award in 2007 for her short story in the THESE GUNS FOR HIRE collection, edited by J. A. Konrath. STATE is an excellent debut of a new series.

Amy Alessio

#### THEY DID IT WITH LOVE

Kate Morgenroth

2007

Plume/Penguin Group

Kate Morgenroth has given the "locked room" mystery a slightly new angle. The murder doesn't take place in a locked room, but the murderer must come from a very limited group of people. In the rarified atmosphere of Greenwich, one of the members of a book group is found hanging in her front yard, ostensibly a suicide. Julia is a member of Priscilla's book group; Priscilla's group is limited to women with no children and reads only mysteries. There are five women in the group, at least for the moment. The complicated relationships existing within the book group are what one might expect - some things don't change, no matter how many years ago junior high was. Each of the five women is married; the relationships with the respective husbands are complex as well.

The police are convinced that Julia's husband is the killer, and not just because it is so often the husband.

Some of the women think the police are correct, but they decide to investigate on their own.

Morgenroth does an excellent job in THEY DID IT WITH LOVE. The ending was a complete surprise to me but not inconsistent with the rest of the book. The setting isn't all that important, but her characters truly make this book.

P.J. Coldren

#### TWILIGHT

Brendan Dubois

December, '07

Thomas Dunne

Brendan Dubois is a very good writer within the mystery genre. The solid and very likeable Lewis Cole series is read by many. I have long been a fan of Cole but for me where this author shines brightest is in his stand-alones. Dubois's imagination brings intriguing enough plots to his P.I. series but give him the opportunity to play with either past or future timelines and his voice becomes one of the brightest in a crowded field.

TWILIGHT met with my high expectations. The book is set in the near future and the United States has fallen to a nuclear attack. Our protagonist is a young Canadian, Samuel Simpson. He's working for the Toronto Star as a feature writer when New York falls victim. Samuel gives up his day job to work for the U.N. Peacekeepers as an evidence recorder. The evidence south of the border is not pretty. With a small group of fellow peacekeepers the ex-reporter looks for evidence of war crimes in upstate New York. What they find there is treacherous, traitorous and unbelievable.

Dubois uses the plot of TWILIGHT to present a possible future to his readers that is horrifying to believe.... but not difficult to imagine. If you haven't read this author, I recommend this novel and if you have, move TWILIGHT to the top of the TBR pile.

Ruth

#### THE UNNATURAL INQUIRER

Simon R. Green

Jan 2008

Ace

Simon Green's series featuring John Taylor PI in the Nightside has been bumped from PBO to hardcover with this latest novel. And it's a terrific hardcover debut. Taylor is hired by the editor of The Unnatural Inquirer to track down a man who claims to have proof of the afterlife. The man and the proof are both missing, and John isn't the only person after him.

I love this series. Great detective work set in a mystical realm that is loads of fun. The dialogue is sharp and witty and the characters are unique and entertaining as hell. Take a walk in the Nightside with John Taylor, it will be a real adventure, just don't forget your flashlight and rosary.  
Jon

#### VOICES

Arnaldur Indridason [translated by Bernard Scudder]

October 2007

Thomas Dunne Books

A few days before Christmas, a murder takes place in the basement of an upscale hotel in Reykjavik. The body of the doorman, who had just been made redundant after 20 years, is found in the small room he was allowed to occupy, stabbed to death with his pants pulled down around his ankles and wearing a condom. The victim had been a famous boy soprano who had made two records and was about to embark on a tour of Scandinavia at the age of 12 when his voice changed, ending his career. Subsequently, he became estranged from his family.

Inspector Erlendur Sveinsson conducts the investigation. Few clues, if any, are apparent. The inspector, facing a bleak Christmas of his own, decides to take a room at the hotel while continuing the probe. There is no shortage of suspects, only clues. Meanwhile, he battles his own ghosts—his survival at the age of 10 from a fierce snowstorm in which his 8-year-old brother disappeared; his abandonment of his wife and two children 20 years previously; his difficult daughter who has just reunited with him (she is a recovering dope addict whose habit resulted in a stillborn daughter).

This excellent translation of the author's third novel is on a par with his earlier books. The language and plot flow smoothly, moving the reader forward effortlessly. Winner of the Gold Dagger Award, the author's previous books were SILENCE OF THE GRAVE and JAR CITY. I look forward to the fourth book in the series with great anticipation.

Theodore Feit

#### THE WHISKEY KILLING

H. R. Williams

2008

Thomson Gale

From page one to the end, *The Whiskey Killing*, a mystery/thriller set in the Deep South, keeps the reader guessing about not only who killed Edwin Mayhew, but why. H. R. Williams writes in a richly descriptive manner, bringing to life both the personality and geography of the vicinity and a myriad of colorful characters. Williams engages us with the murder of Edwin Mayhew right from the start, then introduces the main characters of the book- an experienced, intuitive Captain Billy Walker and his able partner Cordelia Hull. Local inhabitants come into play, as unlikely suspects and useless, dead end informants, and range from bar owner Uh Oh Earl to the town crooks/drunks Luther Hollings, Sleep Edwards and Eddie Partee. Soon, Walker and Hull are trying to relate every minute clue and interview to track down the murderer, who mysteriously had poured whiskey on Mayhew after shooting him four times at close range. As the slow but progressive chase continues, Walker and Hull uncover a profile of Mayhew that includes him being the owner of the local liquor store, a wholesale liquor vendor, a mean, deadly loan shark, gambler and a womanizer of young women. Many people would have liked to see him dead, for many different reasons, leading to numerous suspects. In the final pages, Walker and Hull piece together all the loose ends, including information from one of the town drunks, which leads them to another murder and the murderer. *The Whiskey Killing* transports the reader into the backwoods mentality and ambiance of the Deep South. Be prepared to never forget the characters nor the haunting, chilling murder of Edwin Mayhew.

Judy Maupin

#### YOU'VE BEEN WARNED

James Patterson and Howard Roughan

September 2007

Little, Brown and Company

This novel is surreal. It is the story of Kristin Burns, a young girl with a guilty conscience who is having an adulterous affair with her employer. She works as a nanny to two lovely children and is in love with their father [a widower who has remarried]. So much for reality.

Kristin suffers from a recurring dream, in which she witnesses four body bags being removed from a Madison Avenue hotel and takes photographs (she's an aspiring photographer). Other events take place and she can't distinguish between her dream and reality.

The authors have created a suspenseful thriller that defies the imagination. The psychological implications of Kristin's experiences are probably unbelievable—but, of course, that's what is intended. Frankly, this reader didn't particularly like wading through it.

Theodore Feit