

BUZZ BIN

Ben F Small's *THE OLIVE HORSESHOE* is an intriguing book. Estranged family, murder and conspiracies with some truly memorable characters. And while the scope feels big it is not blown out of proportion and is a really enjoyable book. Small does some nice work with dialogue and I really enjoyed his protagonist Denton Wright. A Night Shadows Press release from April.

Michael Stanley the writing team of two friends, Michael Sears and Stanley Trollip, gentleman who live in South Africa. *A CARRION DEATH* is the first in a crime series set in contemporary Botswana, featuring Assistant Superintendent David Bengu and his Police Department. I hope there are many more to come as this was one of the finest first crime novels I have read recently and an outstanding traditional mystery.

A badly decomposed body is found in the Kalahari near a sacred site of the local bush people. The investigation leads Kubu to a chain of crimes that links the rich and powerful of Botswana and sends him traveling through Africa. Stanley's narrative is informative and rich in detail. His plotting is excellent, the characters are well drawn and come alive. The ambiance of modern Africa shines through the book. In the last few years many fine foreign police procedurals have been published in the US. Put *A Carrion Death* at the top. - Richard Katz

Mario Acevedo returns with the third in his wonderful, original cross-over series featuring vampire PI Felix Gomez. This time Felix is sent by the Araneum (the mysterious vampire ruling council) to find out why women are disappearing. Are aliens involved? Felix goes up against corrupt police, government assassins and evil alien businessmen in order to save the day. Acevedo is a breath of fresh air. He is able to combine the mystery genre with horror and sci-fi and make his novels work on all three levels. The books have excellent plots, well drawn characters and Acevedo is able to make the books sexy and funny while he delivers a thrilling story. In the *UNDEAD KAMA SUTRA*, Acevedo expands the plot lines, there are many interesting directions the author can take his undead hero. There is lot of new talent writing cross-over fiction that combines the genres of mystery, sci-fi, fantasy and horror and Mr. Acevedo novels are a great place to start. Richard Katz

Well, all I can say is it's about time. Thuglit presents *HARDCORE HARDBOILED*, and anthology edited by Todd Robinson, editor of the amazing thuglit.com. Kensington books is putting this out there for you lucky readers and it's filled with all sorts of harboiled goodness from authors like Ken Bruen, Sean Cherver, Victor Gischler and Duane Swierczynski. This not for the faint of heart collection also has a wonderful introduction from none other than Otto Penzler. This is so good it's almost dangerous.

Joseph Wambaugh is one of the very best when it come to police procedurals and his latest, *HOLLYWOOD CROWS*, is just another piece of evidence proving that he is one of the masters of LAPD novels. A femme fatale who is in the middle of a divorce and has a target on her back seeks help from one of LA's finest, she is giving him more than he bargained for and the truth is in short supply. With characters that are bigger than life and Hollywood as a backdrop Wambaugh once again has written a truly wonderful book. Joseph Wambaugh's early novels *THE NEW CENTURIONS* and *THE BLUE KNIGHT* have been rereleased from Grand Central Publishing.

Tasha Alexander has really made me love Victorian Age mysteries. Her series with Lady Emily Ashton grows by one more this summer with the release of *A FATAL WALTZ* (William Morrow). A murder mystery set among aristocrats of a romantic age with deceit and secrets and adventure this is a wonderful and enjoyable book. Alexander gets better and better.

Steven Sherrill's latest is *THE LOCKTENDER'S HOUSE*. It is an engrossing story that intertwines a mystery into a journey taken to overcome grief. Janice's boyfriend is killed and she plans to go and meet the body as it's brought back to the states. Circumstances put her in rural Pennsylvania at an abandoned lockhouse on a dry canal. She stays and meets some local people, but as her world seems to calm down she is plagued by blackouts and nightmares which lead her down a dark path. This book may make you want to leave the lights on.

DEADLY ERRORS is a fast paced medical thriller by Allen Wyler, a real life brain surgeon. A new automated computer system to aid in patient care is causing deaths that should be avoidable quite easily. When Dr. Matthews voices concern he is given a party line by his bosses to keep quiet and not jeopardize the multimillion dollar system. Soon he is in danger on multiple fronts as his concerns grow. This is a great beach read, fast, exciting and entertaining.

A classic mystery tale set in the early 1900's, DEATH ON THE HOLY MOUNTAIN is the seventh David Dickson novel featuring Lord Francis Powerscourt. This time out Powerscourt is off to Ireland to investigate art theft, but before long he is investigating murder. A wonderfully complex plot drives this book with a graceful pace that make reading a pure joy.

Raymond Benson scores big with A HARD DAY'S DEATH, a rock and roll thriller that will make you feel like a real insider. Peter Flame is an aging star, once huge now on the downside of his career. After a mediocre performance he is found dead, at first an apparent suicide, but soon ruled a homicide. Spike Berenger and his Rockin' Security are determined to find out what happened, but with a list of suspects that read like liner notes to a prog rock album they have their work cut out for them. Benson has thoroughly nailed this book, it's fast and entertaining as hell and is every bit as perfect as a Carlos Santana guitar solo on a summer afternoon.

DELUSION by Peter Abrahams (William Morrow) is a lovely dark twisted piece of fiction. Let me sum this up as briefly as I can, a murdered boyfriend, girlfriend testifies and bad guy goes to jail. Girl marries detective. New evidence frees bad guy, girl doubts herself and opens a real nasty can of worms. Someone is lying to Nell Jarreau and if she can't find the truth, it may find her and leave her dead. This book is absolutely devilishly wicked and entertaining as Hell.

The final DI Jack Frost novel from the late R.D. Wingfield is bittersweet in the fact that it is a wonderful book, but as we now know, it will be the last. This story twists and turns like a drunk teenager on an icy road, and it moves as fast as well. A missing persons case, a multiple rapist, poisoned food at the supermarket and a human foot all add up to a lot of work for Frost. But that pales in comparison to the political games afoot when a new detective moves in. Truly wonderful reading. From Bantam Press UK this should be on everyone's reading pile.

If you pick up THE FINDER by Colin Harrison (Farrar, Straus and Giroux) be prepared. This book moves fast and may not wait for you to keep up. It's essentially a chase with one Jin Li on the run, bouncing around New York like a pinball. Everybody wants something and no one is honest as she runs into people from every walk of life. The truth comes to the reader eventually in a spectacular frenetic finish. This book will leave you dizzy, in that fun amusement park kind of way.

Dave White's sophomore book, THE EVIL THAT MEN DO (Three Rivers press) is just as good if not better than his first book, WHEN ONE MAN DIES. Jackson Donne may not have a PI badge any more but that doesn't mean he's not going to do any investigating. Drawn into a sixty year old mystery by a sister he hasn't seen in years Donne needs to solve this case to get his life back to himself. White is really a great example of new writers who are embracing the noir legacy and making it their own. I urge everyone to buy this book. Or even tow, they would make great gifts!

A non fiction entry in this issues Buzz Box is THE SUSPICIONS OF MR. WHICHER by Kate Summerscale (Walker). This engrossing book looks at an English murder from 1860 and the inspector on the case. Perhaps the best detective to ever work at Scotland Yard this case ruined the career of DI Whicher. This case is actually credited with starting the fascination with detectives and this book should be required reading for all true mystery fans.

Chuck Logan's SOUTH of SHILOH (HarperCollins) No one can accuse Chuck Logan of not doing his research. A few years ago, and excuse me if I don't have all the facts right -I can be accused of not doing my research-concerned citizens in Stillwater called police when they saw a man parading down the street in full Civil War gear - wool uniform, Sharps rifle and all on a warm and sunny day. To everyone's relief, and to our reading enjoyment, this was not a potential "suicide by cop", but Chuck checking out what it was like to be all geared up as a Civil War "reenactor". South of Shiloh is a fascinating account of a Civil War battle reenactment gone wrong. The goal of these things is for maximum authenticity (reenactor's are even given "fate cards" with the name and details of a real combatant in the battle). Of course, one exception to authenticity is that everyone's supposed to be shooting blanks. But there's a sniper out there, who just misses his target, killing a Minnesota reenactor by mistake. John Rane, maverick "anything for the best shot" news photographer, and former lover of the dead man's wife, agrees to go undercover and investigate. This is no "cozy" read - conspiracy, greed, and bad guys abound in this intelligently crafted thriller - but I did pick up a delicious and easy recipe for Cabbage & Sausage soup. (Gary Shulze)

THE REGULAR REVIEWS:

AN INCOMPLETE REVENGE
Jacqueline Winspear
Henry Holt & Co.
2008

Accepting an assignment to vet a business deal in which the Compton Corp, is to acquire most of an estate and a brick factory in rural Kent, Maisie Dobbs, in this the fifth in the series, encounters a strange series of crimes while conducting the investigation. Over the preceding decade, there appear to have been many minor thefts and burglaries, as well as a fire at about the same time and date each year.

The story takes place during the early 1930's, about a decade after the end of World War I, which always plays a part in the series, since Maisie served as a nurse in France and her fiancé was mortally wounded there. Also, the Depression weighs heavily on her mind, as she worries about her investigations business. Maisie runs into a wall of silence, as the villagers exhibit prejudice against outsiders, Londoners who come there once a year to harvest hops, Gypsies, as well. They also seem to be possessed by the legacy of a wartime bombing by a German Zeppelin. As in the previous entries, the protagonist remains human and charming, as well as capable, while exhibiting self-doubt. But she continues to grow in her efforts as well as a person. The historical setting provides a different milieu for a mystery, while not intruding on the plot. The writing is cogent and the story revealing. Certainly another good read.

Theodore Feit

THE ASSIMILATION

Edward Winterhalder and Wil De Clerco

2008

ECW

A Nonfiction book about Rock Machine and the Banditos motorcycle clubs and their presence in Canada, including the role in the biker gang wars that took place, this book was utterly fascinating. I had read some things about the Rock machine and have seen them in some mysteries set in Canada, but this look from the inside by a former member of the banditos was extremely compelling and really explained the nature of these clubs.

As this book will lead the reader to see, these clubs aren't about terrorizing towns like portrayed in the movies, and a lot of these guys are just living life on their own terms, not criminals or a danger to society. THE ASSIMILATION Follows Winterhalder through his life with these clubs and his involvement within them starting with his first time driving right up to his eventually leaving the Banditos and becoming a regular citizen again.

I read this in one sitting and would recommend this to anyone with an interest in motorcycles or even an interest in organizations that may be straddling the law.

Jon

BARRINGTON STREET BLUES

Anne Emery

2008

ECW Press

Anne Emery writes a complex and tight mystery featuring criminal lawyer Monty Collins creating a wonderful blend of legal thriller and noir.

Collins is involved with what looks like a straight murder suicide case, representing the families of the dead men as they sue a mental health facility. As things unfold nothing is as straight forward as it seems and Collins is drawn into a hornet's nest of lies and deceit as he tries to get the truth.

Dark and moody, but also humorous at times this book is wonderfully engrossing and a pleasure to read. The characters resonate and take on a life of their own. Kudos to Anne Emery on a terrific novel.

Jon

BATMAN: FALSE FACES

Brian K Vaughan

2008

DC Comics

Before he started working for TV's Lost and before his amazing PRIDE OF BAGHDAD Vaughan wrote some pretty fun Batman tales. I love his work on Ex-Machina and Y The Last Man is wonderful but seeing him work in the DC sandbox with established characters is a real treat.

The first two tales are Batman, one with an identity crisis involving his long time under cover alias Matches Malone.

It's great background on this long running aspect of what Batman does and it's an interesting character study as well.

The second story is really my favorite, the Mad Hatter is running a series of crimes using other villains done up as characters from Alice In Wonderland. But things are not what they seem and Batman working it out is sheer poetry.

The collection wraps up with a Wonder Woman two parter that has her facing Batman foe Clayface who has come up with a really clever way to mess up the Amazon Princess.

All in all this is a really fun book, great writing and a real love for the characters added to some damn fine artwork by Scott McDaniel and Rick Burchett and Scott Kolins make this another volume that needs to be added to any Batman collection.

Jon

BATMAN: THE MAN WHO LAUGHS

Ed Brubaker

2008

DC Comics

This is a wonderful collection of Batman stories and as the title suggests, Joker is prominent. It's all written by Uber Fan Favorite Ed Brubaker.

The first half is an arc with a new to heroics Batman taking on a new to psycho crime Joker. Joker is killing people and even announcing when they will die, yet it's all the Gotham Police can do to keep up. Batman is frustrated, but in his true relentless fashion manages to eventually capture and put away Joker. The second story is a really classic kind of Batman story. An old murder mystery and Gotham's first hero, Golden Age Green Lantern haunted by it put Batman's skills as a detective to work. Brubaker does great crime stories and I think this is a wonderful example of why Batman is more than just a superhero in the hands of the right author. The story actually feels a bit Ed McBain-ish to me, and that is a real compliment. Brubaker has added to the legend of Batman and added to the myth in a powerful way.

This is a must read book.

Jon

BLACK FLIES

Shannon Burke

May 2008

Soft Skull Press

Count amongst my favorite books to receive for review anything from Soft Skull Publishing. Crime fiction is not their forte but dark, quirky fiction has a home there as is evident with BLACK FLIES, the second book from former Harlem EMT, Shannon Burke.

After dropping out of med school, ostensibly to take time off, Ollie Cross's begins his first year working the streets as an EMT in Harlem in the mid-90's. His co-workers and the streets themselves put him through a hazing process of horror as he sees what people are capable of doing to themselves and each other. To survive, he begins to change. From a man trying save whomever he can to a man there to do a job and get out alive. When faced with the premature birth of a baby that is most likely brain damaged and HIV positive, Cross must see if he is still a doctor is if he is a survivor.

As with Burke's first book, SAFELIGHT, BLACK FLIES is a slim tome of concentrated darkness. The story and the people are stark and all too real in this fantastic book.

Jennifer Jordan

BLACK OUT

Lisa Unger

May 2008

Shaye Arehart Publishing (random house imprint)

I made a mistake in picking up this book. Actually the mistake was not picking it up, but more when I picked it up. Reading Lisa Unger will have an adverse effect on your sleep. BLACK OUT made me want to stay up reading, and it kept me up when I was done.

Annie Powers has at first glance a very normal life, married a daughter who makes her life a joy, a nice house and lovely in laws. But Annie has secrets, one of them being the fact that she wasn't born Annie, but someone else entirely. She was in a situation that was getting worse and worse, dangerous and illegal. Her husband Gray rescued her and helped her put her new life together. But the past doesn't always stay buried and now Annie's has come back.

Lisa Unger has done such a great job with this book, she manages to fill in all the back story and weave it into the ongoing current story seamlessly. Pieces are given out as we follow Annie as she starts to get scared and then angry. The tension builds throughout the narrative and actually almost become un bearable. You'll want to skip ahead to make sure things end ok. Don't do it. Let Unger work her magic and I promise the ending will be a major pay off you will love.

This book is really something special and once again Lisa Unger has kept me up all night.

Jon

THE CHAMELEON'S SHADOW

Minette Walters

2008

Knopf

Minette Walters' newest psychological suspense novel focuses on the effects of war, not on those who inhabit the country of warfare, but rather on those who fight the wars, and the horrendous injuries they sustain that affect every aspect of their lives, both physically and psychologically. The protagonist is British lieutenant Charles Acland, 26 years old, home from Iraq with devastating head injuries, including loss of sight in one eye and total disfigurement of that side of his face, tinnitus, and migraine headaches. Even worse are the resultant personality changes: suspicion of those around him almost to the point of paranoia; outbursts of uncontrolled anger ["red mist" is a recurring phrase]; distrust of nearly everyone, especially women; inability to tolerate being touched – whether all this is the result of post-traumatic guilt over the death of two of the men under him in the same attack or what is termed "the prolonged destruction of a personality," or something else entirely, is unclear. The effects of traumatic brain injury and subsequent antisocial behavior are explored.

When several men in the London area are attacked and beaten to death over a period of several months, and it appears that it is the work of one man, Acland falls under suspicion. It is unclear to the police, and the reader, whether or not he is in fact the attacker. He unwillingly turns for aid to a woman whose lesbian partner runs a bar in which he has started a fight, a doctor called merely "Jackson." A fascinating creation, she is variously described as being "the size of a whale" and "over six feet...*this* wide and looks like Arnold Schwarzenegger," but she earns Acland's grudging respect and becomes his savior, his psychiatrist [though that is not her area of medical specialization] and, ultimately, his friend.

The title derives from (1) Acland being described as, chameleon-like, projecting "different images of himself to different people," and (2) the Jungian definition of a "shadow" as "the dark aspect of personality formed by those fears and unpleasant emotions which, being rejected by the self or persona of which an individual is conscious, exist in the personal unconscious." The view is a disturbing one. I must admit that I couldn't help but feel that the resolution was somehow less compelling than that which had preceded it. Nonetheless, Ms. Walters has again written a gripping and suspenseful novel.

Gloria Feit

CITY OF HUMAN REMAINS

Darren Callahan

2008

Available at DarrenCallahan.com

Renegade writer and publisher Darren Callahan's recent novel, CITY OF HUMAN REMAINS, is his best work yet. It is set in the year 2097 and opens with the day 81 children go missing from City 32. He tells the story through dozens of viewpoints, like a panning camera, shifting vantage point at every chapter break. The most endearing viewpoint character is Hektor, an eleven-year-old orphan who loves Batman comics and is determined to find the missing kids. Callahan also follows two other boys from the orphanage, one of the investigating officers, and parents of the missing children, creating a sense of sprawl. It is his aptitude for storytelling that makes this difficult structure work and enhances the novel's suspense.

The overall story is gripping and entertaining, but it is the social commentary on what our world could easily become that gives the book a deeper meaning. CITY OF HUMAN REMAINS is set in a time where everything is controlled, even the weather, where newspapers are digitally uploaded to newsstands, and where corruption is at an all time high. Rather than expressing his opinions blatantly, he tucks the messages within the prose and leaves much up to interpretation. Combining a gripping plot, a wide range of interesting characters and strong social commentary, Callahan has created a fantastic novel that is easily deemed a must-read.

--Dana Kaye

CITY OF THE SUN

David Levien

2008

Doubleday

CITY OF THE SUN, by David Levien, introduces private investigator Frank Behr, a retired detective struggling with substance abuse, divorce and the loss of a son. He doesn't usually take on hopeless cases, but in the case of Paul and Carol Gabriel whose son went missing over a year ago, his sympathy gets the better of him. The boy went out on his usual paper route but never came back, and after fourteen months, the local authorities have abandoned hope.

But when Behr starts digging, he discovers the case isn't as cold as he thought and there's a chance he could still be alive.

Levien's screenwriting background is evident in this fast moving, well plotted thriller. With plentiful section breaks acting like cinematic cuts, he is able to move the story forward at rapid speed while building tension at every scene. However, many of his point of view shifts are jarring and his writing relies heavily on dialogue and action rather than character development and scene description, proving that perhaps Hollywood has had too much of an effect on him. Still, he has created an interesting series character that has the potential for longevity. Levien is a talented plotter who knows how to thrill readers, and with experience, his style is sure to improve.

--Dana Kaye

THE CRAZY SCHOOL

Cornelia Read

2008

Grand Central Publishing

After being introduced to Madeline Dare in Cornelia Read's first novel, A FIELD OF DARKNESS, readers are again treated to an encounter with this original protagonist. Now 26 years old, she has left upstate New York for the Berkshire Mountains in Massachusetts and, when her husband's job offer falls through, begins teaching at the Santangelo Academy, a boarding school for disturbed teenagers. The school motto is "Free to Be," and it has a rather unusual way of doing things: "Everyone at the school had to do Santangelo-approved therapy—not just the kids but the teachers, the administrators, and the parents of every student. We did ours on campus. Santangelo had a traveling crew of shrinks who met with parents around the country. If they missed a session, they weren't allowed contact with their kid by phone or mail for a month. I couldn't believe that was legal, but they were desperate enough to suck it up without complaint."

Touted as a "healing community," it begins to look more like "The Snake Pit," and Madeline suspects that the Academy's director is "just the latest charlatan to wrap himself in their snake-oily mantle of overpriced navel-gazing hooley." When two students die in what appears to be a double suicide, Madeline, who had sincerely cared about these kids, both especially vulnerable, is determined to find out the truth. At this point the novel, which had been proceeding at an unhurried pace, rapidly kicks into high gear

This is another compelling novel by this author, the plot alternately funny and suspenseful, and the world she has created is a bit like passing the scene of an accident but finding oneself unable to look away. [I might add that I loved her use of a line from an old and classic Danny Kaye movie.]

Gloria Feit

CROSSING MIDNIGHT: A MAP OF MIDNIGHT

Mike Carey

2008

Vertigo

This second collection moves quickly and adds an awful lot to the mythology that Carey is creating here. Toshi has become a servant to Lord Aratsu and she is learning her new duties in a way that doesn't allow much room for error. Because of the changes she's gone through she now sees things in the world that most people don't even know exist. Her job is to cut loose parts of dreams from people and collect them, however while this seems like an easy job at first she quickly learns that she is not the only servant out there doing the bidding of a master. She has a confrontation with a servant of the Gleaner which leads to a major battle.

While all this is going on, Toshi's brother Kai is drawn to Tokyo and while searching for his sister he too learns things. He stumbles across evil and supernatural beings he didn't know were there and he is heading down a new path.

Carey is creating a wonder fantasy world here and his use of Japan as a setting is inspired. It has all the elements great story telling should have, and most important, it leaves me wanting more. The artwork is crisp and colorful, and yet seems almost translucent at times. It's a perfect match. Kudos to Jim Fern and Eric Nguyen.

Jon

DAEMONS ARE FOREVER

Simon R Green

June 2008

ROC books

If supernatural beings existed wouldn't you feel better knowing that someone out there is keeping an eye on them for you? Keeping the evil creatures from doing harm? Stopping invasions from other dimension?

Well, that's what the Drood family does and has done for generations. They are kind of like MI-6 of the spook world. In last year's THE MAN WITH THE GOLDEN TORC we meet Eddie Drood, also known as Shaman Bond. Eddie is a

field operative for the family and is very good at what he does. After the events of the last adventure Eddie finds himself in charge of the large family and having to gain their trust while reinventing the way they do things. With morale way down and trust from government leaders waning he needs to do something quick. He decides to take on a group of ghouls known as the Loathly Ones. It was a good decision because as it turns out they are just part of an invasion force that could wipe out all of existence.

Fast paced and full of really entertaining action this book reads fast. It has humor, time travel, and creatures that don't exist. This is one of those series that makes me stop what I'm doing and read the book as soon as I get it. Fair warning, Green's writing is addictive and will leave you not just wanting more, but needing more.

Jon

DELICATE CHAOS

Jeff Buick

2008

Dorchester Publishing

The novel opens with a scene of alternating beauty and brutality – peaceful Kenyan forest, herds of elephants, zebras and wildebeests, and the rangers who are entrusted with their safety, immediately followed by the rifle fire of poachers intent on taking the elephants' tusks, firing with equal abandon on both man and beast and achieving the death of both. The action then switches abruptly to Washington, D.C., depicting the two worlds of the protagonist, 37-year-old Leona Hewitt, founder of Save Them, a non-profit organization based in the U.S. dedicated equally to saving the African wildlife in the 700 square miles allocated for the purpose by the local government, employing 27 well-armed and -trained park rangers in the process, and to improving the life of the local population, building water wells, schools and a clinic.

Her invaluable assistant is Mike Anderson, a 45-year-old ex-cop [handsome, intelligent, divorced—something of which he needs to keep reminding himself—and trying to control his drinking], who handles the distribution in Africa of the huge amounts of money raised by the foundation. The African end of the organization is headed by Kubala Kantu. After the scene described above, after three elephants have perished, one ranger killed and another badly wounded, to Leona's question of "Why does it have to be like this? Why is there always death?" Kubala can only answer: "TIA...This is Africa. This is the way things are." By the end of the tale, each of the three will be in peril, placed there by disparate scenarios, each motivated by greed.

The following day Leona returns home, where she is Director of Corporate Acquisitions and Accounts for DC Trust. A big promotion is offered to her, and her first assignment is to oversee, and ultimately approve, a structural change in a publicly-traded utility company mining and generating electrical power with coal, one of her company's biggest clients. The question of environmental ethics becomes paramount, and complicates Leona's ability to do the job expected of her and, with many millions of dollars at stake, ultimately, her life.

The environmental discussions offered are thorough without being preachy, the corporate, financial, environmental and even political aspects all get equal time from the author. Leona, vulnerable despite her success, is a commanding presence as the protagonist. This is the fifth novel by Jeff Buick and, with equal parts tension-filled suspense, taut plotting, an unredeemingly awful killer, and a shocking [if somewhat implausible] ending, the whole adds up to a most satisfying read.

Gloria Feit

DESERT CUT

Betty Webb

2008

Poisoned Pen Press

Scottsdale PI Lena Jones, in four previous appearances, has tackled some different and interesting and controversial topics, ranging from polygamy, the homeless and a former WWII German POW camp. In this latest novel, she uncovers horrific subject one knows about in Africa and the Middle East, but hardly comes to mind in the United States.

While horseback riding with her boyfriend scouting a film location in the Arizona desert, Lena finds the body of a seven-year-old girl. It turns out there are other young girls either missing or dead from a nearby town. Many of the inhabitants work for a chemical factory there, and are African or Middle Eastern immigrants. Lena can't get the thought of the little girl she found in a shallow grave from her mind, and starts her own investigation. Eventually, she ties together a common thread for all the dead and missing young girls, and a horrific one it is.

As in the previous books in the series, the plot is meticulously researched, with an outstanding bibliography, carefully written and documented, and the writing and story substantial. While constructed as a mystery, the novel truly has an importance beyond the genre.

Theodore Feit

THE DOMINO LADY: SEX AS A WEAPON

Edited by Lori Gentile

April 2008

Moonstone books

The Domino Lady was a pulp hero back in the thirties and was created by Lars Anderson. She was Ellen Patrick, daughter of a murdered politician in LA who donned a sexy white dress and mask to fight crime. Gangsters, corrupt politicians and bad guys of all types are targets for her work. Moonstone Books has gathered nine authors to reintroduce this wonderful character to readers.

Nancy Holder, Chuck Dixon, C. J. Henderson, Martin Powell, Ron Fortier, James Chambers, Bobby Nash, Gail McCabe, Lisa Bandemer and Ver Curtis all contribute wonderful short stories here. They all have that wonderful pulp feel to them and I am really happy that someone is bringing back this style of stories. I really enjoyed Stoker Award winner Nancy Holder's The Strange Case of the Domino Lady and Mr. Holmes and Chuck Dixon's Stealing Joe Crick, but all nine stories are wonderful. Before there were noir movies, there was pulp fiction, and this is a great addition to that tradition.

The book is available from Amazon and your local bookstore should be able to order it for you. I plan to buy extra copies to use as gifts.

Jon

FIDDLE GAME

Richard A. Thompson

2008

Poisoned Pen Press

For a first novel, FIDDLE GAME is quite an accomplishment. The author has led quite a varied career, including a 45-year stint in construction. He is a civil engineer, a certified Minnesota Building Official and a registered professional engineer. But nothing in his biography indicates he has ever written anything prior to this novel.

An Amati violin plays a central role in a con game conducted by a gypsy family and going on since World War II.

Herman Jackson is a bail bondsman in St. Paul who becomes the latest victim of the con. A woman enters his office offering the valuable fiddle as security for a bond for her brother. Unfortunately she is soon the victim of a hit-and-run and dies. The killer escapes with the violin. Herman quickly attracts the interest of the police as the possible perpetrator. The plot then has Herman attempting to solve the murder and retrieve the fiddle.

The story is extremely well-told, moving to a most unexpected conclusion. It is a surprisingly welcome debut, and we hope it is not a one-shot from this author.

Theodore Feit

FIRST THE DEAD

Tim Downs

2008

Thomas Nelson

Forensic entomologist Nick Polchak, also known as "Bug Man", returns in this heartfelt yet suspenseful mystery. Set in New Orleans, FIRST THE DEAD focuses on the days following Katrina and brings readers directly into the chaos and devastation the city faced after the disaster. As a member of DMORT (Disaster Mortuary Operational Response Team), a group that identifies bodies and notifies their families, Polchak flies to New Orleans to assist with rescue efforts. His orders are to first help the living, but he can't help but notice the bodies floating in the water seem to have been killed long before the hurricane hit. Against all orders from his superiors, Polchak investigates these murders, determined not to let a murderer use the largest natural disaster in recent history to get away with his crime.

The wealth of information contained within the pages, proves that Downs has done his research on forensics, but the authenticity and compassion he brings to New Orleans and the events surrounding Katrina leads readers to believe that he knows his subject first hand. Regarding the setting, he notes, "I made my fictional characters subject to the same limitations everyone shared during that time: a lack of reliable information, erroneous and exaggerated news reports and unfounded rumors about conditions and events in the city." Although much of the plot was based on rumor, it was this exaggeration and urban legend that made the mystery exciting and gripping, all the while staying true to the city and the people that resided within.

--Dana Kaye

FRIEND OF THE DEVIL

Peter Robinson

2008

William Morrow

Two weeks after she has been on loan from the Western Area HQ Eastvale police station to the Spring Hill police station in the Eastern Area, Annie Cabbot is assigned the murder investigation of a woman found in her wheelchair at the edge of a cliff, with her throat slit. At first appearing to be about 40 years old, she is soon found to have been only 28, a quadriplegic who had been a resident in a care home nearby to the murder site. At the same time, Inspector Alan Banks, Annie's one-time lover, is investigating the brutal rape and murder of a 19-year-old girl in Eastvale. The investigations of the two cases are juxtaposed in alternating sections, with the lines at times conjoining. Further inquiries in the "Wheelchair Murder," as it is dubbed by the press, result in the realization that the dead woman was involved in an infamous case six years earlier [and the subject of an earlier book], with which Cabbot and Banks were deeply involved, and the case immediately becomes much more complex. An underlying theme is "the secrets and burdens people carry around with them," and their memories.

All the favorite elements of this wonderful series are present here: The terrific writing, evocative descriptions of the English landscape and cityscape, Banks' indulging in his regular pint or glass of wine [general over-indulgence in alcohol palpable throughout], the marvelous backdrop of music by Bill Evans, Coltrane and Monk, among others.

What is different in this newest series entry is the emphasis on the character and personality of Annie Cabbot. Although Banks is the usual protagonist, and an always fascinating one he is, allowing Annie to take her equal place at center stage here only adds one more dimension to this always excellent series.

Gloria Feit

GAS CITY

Loren Estleman

2007

Forge

Unneeded of haste, Loren Estleman, in this standalone novel, limns a tale of an 'ordinary' Midwestern blue-collar city with its usual equal parts of good guys and bad, corruption and greed, which with one precipitating event begins to boil to a point where it may just combust. Pivotal characters include Police Chief Francis Russell, married for 55 years to his beloved Martha ("Marty"), and devastated by her death as the book opens; Anthony Zeno ("Tony Z"), boss of The Circle, an area of ten square blocks ["the only thing the area required to be considered an independent city was its telephone exchange"] to which all the sex-for-sale, drugs, gambling, etc. of the city are confined; Nicholas Bianco ("Mr. White"), Tony's boss; Moe Shiel, the unofficial and unsworn Chief of Police of the Circle, as well as its unelected Mayor; and Hugh Dungannon, Russell's boyhood friend now a Bishop in the church; and assorted others. The town was built around an oil company which is and always has been its most important component and employer.

Russell's life is now immeasurably saddened. He hasn't seen his daughter in 12 years; his son was killed while serving in the Armed Forces in southeast Asia. He has served as Chief for five terms, during all of which time he has had an "understanding" the local Mafia boss. With his wife's death, the latter is unsure whether Russell will "continue to hold up his end." Indeed, he ponders whether redemption is possible, and considers actually doing the job he was hired to do all those years ago.

In addition to those described above, the book is full of colorful characters: The hotel detective who says of himself: "Being a busted copy was as bad as being a defrocked priest. It took practice to keep your lies straight;" Zeno's wife, Deanne, whose husband describes her as "healthy as a horse. And just as expensive to keep;" a local judge who "had developed the bad habit, after seventy, of slipping in and out of gear when he was running for reelection. In his dotage he thought his seat on the bench had something to do with ballots." In the midst of a mayoral campaign, the town is hit with a serial killer, variously referred to as the Black Bag killer [for his choice of container for body parts] or Beaver Cleaver [for his choice of weapon].

I found I had to pay close attention when reading for fear of missing subtly wonderful passages, which abound. One of my favorites was this description of Russell's reactions upon his wife's passing: "And then the rage and heat were gone, and there was a hole through him and he had to turn so the wind wouldn't whistle through it. He'd been preparing for this moment for weeks – *years*, he corrected, from the time the results of the first tests had come back and he'd stopped arguing with them – and he'd hoped the dread of the waiting would give way to a sense of release. He'd felt it for a moment, with the last exhalation, when she took her leave of her body, a lacy apparition in a cheap religious print. But this was a new level of emptiness. What he'd thought was the bottom collapsed beneath his weight, the thinnest of crusts, and he went plummeting yet again. It was like falling in a dream. They said if you woke up before you hit, you were okay, but if you didn't, well, that was when people died in their sleep. It seemed better than this eternal falling."

Gloria Feit

THE GRAVING DOCK

Gabriel Cohen

2007

St. Martin's Minotaur

THE GRAVING DOCK is set in the New York City of December of 2001, and is the second in the Jack Leightner series. Leightner is a NYC detective and a member of the Brooklyn South Homicide Task Force. The book begins a few months after Jack had barely survived a shooting incident in a basement in Red Hook, a section of Brooklyn near the docks where Jack lives. Divorced for 15 years, and the father of a boy in his early twenties, Jack has been working up the nerve to propose to his girlfriend, Michelle, with whom he is deeply in love.

When a handmade coffin washes up on the shore in the harbor, Jack gets the call, and it is found to contain the body of a young boy with the letters "GI" written on his forehead. At a loss to identify the boy, things only get more complicated when another body turns up, with the same letters emblazoned on it. The ensuing investigation requires dogged police work, but Jack is determined to find the killer. At the same time, he has to find out the reason for the preoccupation – almost to the point of indifference - of the detective from the local precinct with whom he is partnered, while at the same time dealing with the not-as-easy-as-he-thought matter of his engagement. The hunt takes him, and the reader, to Governors Island, a relatively unknown parcel of land a quarter-mile from the Brooklyn shore now in disuse, formerly an old Army and then Coast Guard base until the mid-nineties.

To this reader, most of whose life has been lived in Brooklyn, the author gets the descriptions and the feel of that borough, of New York, and New Yorkers, exactly right – especially nailing the "shell-shocked, dazed" world in which they lived in those traumatic days, mostly by oblique references that capture the atmosphere, not with a heavy hand, but with an expert touch. Some authors are good storytellers, some are good writers – Mr. Cohen is both. If you haven't read any of his books yet, now is the time to do so.

Gloria Feit

HELL'S BAY

James W. Hall
2008
St. Martin's Minotaur

Thorn, the iconoclastic and naturalist protagonist of James W. Hall's novels set in the untamed regions of Florida, has gotten himself into all kinds of dangerous situations in the past. This time, he seems to have outdone himself in a thriller containing a huge surprise for him. Set against a privately owned conglomerate headed by a rugged 86-year-old free-enterprise-and-all-else-be-damned matriarch intent on running her billion-dollar phosphate and-whatever-else conglomerate to milk the last penny of profits, the novel enables the author to use his ever-present ability to describe the wild Everglades to a tee.

The plot involves the fight against environmental hazards, and pits Thorn against those fighting the dangers of the mining operations. Early in the book, we discover that Thorn actually is a member of the family that owns the mining dynasty, setting him up as both a target for the opposition, as well as possibly making us wonder if he will change his values in his own economic interests.

It seems the matriarch drowns—or is she murdered?—shortly after which Thorn's uncle and niece engage Thorn and his ex-girlfriend, Rusty, to take them on a fishing expedition. That is when Thorn learns of his mysterious background. But more important, on the first day of the trip, all hell breaks loose. It is a shocking tale of environmental rape and misguided revenge.

Theodore Feit

THE HIGHWAYMEN

Marc Bernardin and Adam Freeman
2008
Wildstorm/DC

This trade collection of the comics mini series THE HIGHWAYMEN is loads of fun. Once upon a time there was a duo that specialized in delivery services, one excels at driving the other was a weapons expert. Now retired from the business they live a quiet life. At least until a message from a past president asks them to do one last job to help save the country. Filled with great fight scenes, loads of shoot outs and death defying car chases this book is an action movie on paper. I especially enjoyed the chase scene with the bus full of retirees. Monroe and McQueen need to take a girl to Atlanta and in the process quite possibly save the world. What ensues is the ride of a lifetime. Great characters and the fact that it's set just a bit in the future make this a wonderful read. I also love the future that Bernardin and Freeman have created with a privately owned New Orleans and some really interesting politics. I would definitely like more of this.

Jon

KIA

Thomas Holland
2008
Simon & Schuster

During the Vietnam War, five high-ranking South Vietnam officers, an American Master Sergeant in charge of a large supply depot and a mysterious American formed a brotherhood to steal all sorts of supplies and send them to the north in exchange for free passage of contraband drugs across the Laotian border. The supply NCO finally “chickened out” on an extraordinary request and “disappeared.” First listed as Missing in Action, his case was later reviewed and changed to “presumed Killed in Action.”

Many years later the Asians have relocated to the United States and started successful businesses. Meanwhile a body is recovered and Dr. Kel McKelvey, forensic anthropologist in charge of the Army’s Central Identification Laboratory, gets the task of determining whether the remains are those of the supply NCO. At the same time a series of murders takes place on or near various Army bases, bringing in Chief Warrant Officer Tom “Shuck” Deveroux as the CID investigator.

The two men combine to run down clues and facts to bring about a conclusion both as to murders as well as the identity of the remains, which appear to be linked. It is an exciting, well-constructed chase, leading to a most unexpected denouement. Switching from the 1970s to more than a decade later, back and forth, keeps the reader enthralled. An excellent read.

Theodore Feit

L. A. OUTLAWS
T. Jefferson Parker
2008
Dutton

LA Sheriff’s Deputy Charlie Hood has just made detective, a temporary assignment after he was first on the scene of a horrendous crime scene: ten men shot dead inside an auto body shop, apparently members of opposing street gangs, although one ‘civilian’ is dead at the scene as well, a diamond merchant there to hand over nearly half a million dollars worth of diamonds to repay a large gambling debt. Charlie is included in the squad organized to investigate the murders. He is 28 years old, former NCIS, and filters everything through his experiences in Anbar province.

Another prominent player in this tale is Lupercio, a Salvadoran killer known as “the lone wolf” who, by the way, walks around with a machete strapped to his leg. The two men’s lives cross when they both become focused, to the near exclusion of all else, on Suzanne Jones, 32, a beautiful LA history teacher who, in her other life, is self-styled Allison Murrieta—she is a direct descendant of a real-life infamous outlaw, Joaquin Murrieta, who was shot and beheaded in 1853. Among other things, over an eighteen-month period and wearing a mask and a wig, she has committed 34 armed robberies of various retail businesses, mostly fast-food chain stores, and stolen a couple of dozen high-end cars for sale on the illegal foreign market, literally leaving behind a calling card each time. Since she donates large amounts of money to various charities, she is known variously as Robin Hood, Bonnie Parker, or, as one cop says, “a delusionary babe with a death wish.”

Thanks to the ubiquity of security, video and cell phone cameras, Allison’s exploits have been shown on tv and in the newspapers. Charlie Hood meets Allison just after she has left the scene of the murders, where she came upon the gory scene after hoping to make off with the diamonds – which she does – having known of the planned meeting. He shortly suspects her dual identity. Lupercio, on the other hand, has been ordered to find her and gain possession of the diamonds. When he sees her, he wonders “why anyone with such beauty would choose to be a criminal.” A valid question indeed. But she does know a helluva lot about expensive cars, stealing them often, since she gets “bored after five days of just about any car.”

Allison is an original and obviously over-the-top creation. She has three sons, a baby and a ten- and nineteen-year-old, all by different men, and is presently living with the father of the youngest. She has become a local folk hero. Charlie thinks “Allison Murrieta was just brazen enough to think she could lift diamonds from gangsters and live to tell about it, as if the underworld was just another fast-food joint and all she needed to conquer it was an attitude and a gun.” Charlie becomes obsessed with her, and the results are not good. But they make for an exciting and suspenseful read. This book is a bit of a change for Mr. Parker, being less grounded in reality than his previous novels, but no less well-written.

Gloria Feit

MADMAN ON A DRUM
David Housewright
May 2008
St. Martin’s Minotaur

I need to preface this review to talk about something that’s really criminal. David Housewright’s “Rushmore McKenzie” private eye series is by far one of the best ongoing mystery series out there, but it’s going out of print. Leisure had picked up the first 3 in the series, but has no plans for further reprints. The same fate has befallen

another favorite of ours: KJ Erickson. One notable exception, Reed Farrel Coleman, just recently escaped oblivion thanks to Busted Flush Press.

I know you can all name some favorites of your own. It's a frustrating situation for the dealer, the author, and especially for the fans who happen upon a series in mid-stream and can't go back to its origins. I feel like telling you all to throw open your windows and holler "I'm mad as hell and won't etc. etc." but the end results would only be a bunch of sour throats and barking dogs.

But now to Housewright's new novel, *Madman On A Drum*, #5 in the "McKenzie" series. This guy keeps getting better, and he started out of the chute by winning the Edgar® award for 1st novel, along with a Shamus nomination, for "Penance". Need I mention that it's out of print? *Madman On A Drum* is his best yet. Rushmore is still a bit of a babe hound, but he's reined it in some, mostly because he's caught up in a dire situation that demands all of his attention.

His best friend's daughter, who is also Rushmore's god-daughter and an heir to his sizeable estate, has been kidnapped. The girl's mother is warned by the kidnapper "no police". The mother immediately calls the police – no hesitation here – her husband's a cop. There's a million dollar ransom, which somehow the kidnappers know is readily and willingly available from McKenzie. Listening to a tape tapped by the Feds, even though electronically altered, Rush can't shake the "I know this guy" feeling, and starts digging through his fairly long list of guys out there with a grudge this large.

Eventually, Rushmore figures out who did it, the ransom is paid, and the girl is returned safely. The kidnappers suffer a bad fate, and I notice that I'm only about 2/3 done with the book. My first thought is "Oh Boy, there's more!" And is there ever.

Buy this book. Read this book. Buy lots of copies for your friends. Throw open your windows and holler "Buy David Housewright! ...and while you're at it, check out KJ Erickson too!" It's a stretch, but if enough of you do it, just maybe the right people will hear you.

Gary Shulze, Once Upon a Crime

THE MARATHON MURDERS

Chester D. Campbell

2008

Night Shadows Press

Greg McKenzie, retired Lieutenant Colonel where he was an agent with the OSI [Office of Special Investigations], is contacted by a former colleague from the Air Force and asked to investigate a matter for his girlfriend, one Kelli Kane. Greg and his wife, Jill, live in Nashville, TN, where they opened a p.i. agency about seventh months ago. Kelli herself has a background that includes working undercover for some Federal Agency, whether CIA or otherwise is unclear. It seems that her great-great-grandfather had been accused of embezzlement when a large sum of money went missing from the company for which he worked as assistant treasurer, Marathon Motor Works, ultimately resulting in its declaring bankruptcy. Her grandfather, now 84 and in a nursing home, has been contacted by the job foreman for a company renovating the building which had housed that company ninety years ago, telling him that some papers had been found, hidden in a wall, attached to which was a handwritten note indicating that the papers were to be turned over to the District Attorney's office. The job foreman, a man named Bradley, was to have brought the papers to Kelli's grandfather, but never kept his appointment. Greg and his wife are asked to find Bradley and the papers which they believe will exonerate her relative and clear the family name.

It is not long before Bradley's body is found, and his house is discovered to have been ransacked, as is Kelli's grandfather's house. And of course the papers that might solve the mystery of the missing money are nowhere to be found. Complicating matters is the fact that as the investigation progresses it appears that the old man had a propensity for alienating a wide range of people, as had Bradley himself, and his being targeted may have had nothing to do with the Marathon investigation, but simply a matter of vandalism. But then another body is discovered. Marathon Motor Works was a real company, and in fact it produced the only car completely built in the South.

Nashville and its environs are lovingly described by the author, who has given us a very good mystery, well-written and suspenseful, and one I enjoyed a great deal.

Gloria Feit

MELTDOWN

Martin Baker

2008

Macmillan

This novel, published in England and Canada but not yet in the United States [and available in paperback as well as hardcover in both countries], is an attempt to depict the wild world of money, trading and speculation, not to mention manipulation, greed and conspiracy. Unfortunately, while the premise is valid, the execution leaves much to be

desired. It is loosely fashioned on a number of financial dealings of the recent past, but artificially fashioned to fit into an implausible plot.

The story begins with the recruitment by a media tycoon of Samuel Spendlove, a legal scholar at Oxford, to go undercover at the Paris branch of an international investment bank, to learn how a top trader managed to win away a French publisher from under the nose of the Englishman who coveted it. Samuel becomes the trader's assistant and in a matter of weeks becomes sufficiently knowledgeable and proficient to match wits with his boss, known only as Khan. Then two colleagues are found murdered and Samuel is accused of killing them.

The title of the book, MELTDOWN refers to the chaos created by driving down the price of a currency or other asset, creating panic on a scale far more dire than the Great Depression, destroying whole countries. While the plot has a great degree of potential, it really is far-fetched and artificial. The writing is somewhat stilted and sex is inserted needlessly at various points. The descriptions of the trading floor at the Paris branch of the American bank are fairly realistic and amusing.

Theodore Feit

THE MIRROR'S EDGE

Steven Sidor

April 2008

St Martin's Minotaur

Steven Sidor, author of SKIN RIVER and BONE FACTORY, releases his third book this April, THE MIRROR'S EDGE. When two-year-old twins, Shane and Liam Boyle, are taken from their home, even video of the event left behind does little to help police find the kidnappers. And no one knows if there will be a ransom note or body recovery.

A year after the abduction, Jase Deering tracks down the boys' former nanny. She leads a life of paranoia and fright, convinced the people responsible for the boy's disappearance and an odd tattoo left on her thigh will eventually make her disappear as well. The tattoo itself provides only more questions. It is the palindrome mirrorrorrim. Deering is seemingly lead down a path that leads him to Graham Morick.

Morick, son of an infamous occult figure, is an enigmatic and charismatic man that seems willing to help. As years pass, Deering becomes more deeply enmeshed in the fate of the boys. And Morick in his. And both begin to shape his fate. A tight thriller that will keep you up late.

Jennifer Jordan

MURDER AT THE HOTEL CINEMA

Daniel Edward Craig

June 2008

Midnight Ink

Book two in this new series from Midnight Ink is even more fun than the first, last year's MURDER AT THE UNIVERSE. Craig's leading man Trevor Lambert is a wonderful protagonist and makes for a great amateur sleuth. Hotels being such interesting places the series has endless possibilities. When I need to escape I like to stay at one of Daniel Craig's hotels.

MURDER AT THE HOTEL CINEMA sees Trevor moving to LA and taking a job as manager at a new hotel that is being set up to become a hotspot for celebs and stars. When a special guest at the opening party takes a dive to the pool and ends up a floater Trevor needs to take charge to keep the hotel running, keep the guests happy and solve the murder because the detective in charge is too busy trying to become a movie star to do the job himself.

The pacing in this book is wonderful and the investigation by Trevor seems to be a natural extension of his job so the book has a real nice flow. Plus the insider knowledge of the hotel business is really interesting and makes for an extremely fascinating read. The mystery itself is laid out beautifully and the ending is terrific. I can't wait for the next one. Daniel Craig is a five star read and as far as I'm concerned it should be on everyone's list. Do yourself a favor and check into The Hotel Cinema and let Craig take care of all your mystery needs.

Jon

NAMELESS NIGHT

G. M. Ford

2008

Wm. Morrow

G. M. Ford's first standalone novel, after his two wonderful series featuring Frank Corso and Leo Waterman, opens with a startling scenario: The man known as Paul Hardy had been found near death in a railroad car, patched up as well as possible, his injuries so severe that he is described in the first pages as follows: "...he smiled, or maybe grimaced. With all that scar tissue on his face, it was hard to tell. Looked like somebody had crushed the front of his skull with a crowbar or something, pushed everything back so far it was both a wonder he was alive and a mercy he wasn't tuned to the same channel as the rest of humanity." He had been put in a group home for the adult disabled,

almost completely unresponsive. Even his name is unknown – “Paul Hardy” was picked for him at random. Now, seven years later and probably in his mid-thirties, he is the victim of a horrific car accident. The resulting surgeries [paid for by the anguished driver who had caused the incident] have completely altered his appearance and much more, to the extent that, as one of his doctors says, “this is a brand-new person, somebody who never existed before... six months from now, not even his own mother would recognize this guy.” His already crushed face and skull have been radically changed well beyond plastic surgery. The person who had been called Paul Hardy is now a thinking, aware and questioning man with the tiniest fragment of a memory of his life before the past seven years, and determined to find out what that life was, and who he is. He embarks on a search for the answers to those questions, with unimagined and unimaginable consequences. That pursuit gives rise to a novel that is as well-written and suspenseful as anything that this author has previously written, and that is saying quite a lot. The scenario that plays out after the scene described above seemed to me at first to be like something straight out of George Orwell, only to find that prescient soul’s name invoked soon after. But of course Orwell’s day didn’t have current technology available nor a post-911 era to justify its ubiquitous use. And in no time at all, as the author’s storytelling skills quiet assert themselves, this riveting tale, all about “memory” and “reality,” has the reader completely in its grip.

Gloria Feit

NOTHING TO LOSE

Lee Child

2008

Bantam (UK)

Delecorte (US)

As I crack the spine of a new Lee Child novel, I am always looking for flaws in Child’s novels, because considering he only writes one series which do follow a formula; the Reacher novels could easily become stale, and from a writer who is no longer hungry and living in a garret could also become lazy. But yet again I found no such problems in NOTHING TO LOSE, because as soon as I started reading, I was sucked into the world of Jack Reacher. This time, the story is more claustrophobic and a stripped down neo-western. Reacher is drifting through Colorado when he stumbles upon two small towns named Despair and Hope, who both live up to their names. Reacher finds himself run out of Despair by the local cops for vagrancy. Typically Reacher decides to return as he smells that something is not quite right in that town. Befriending the shapely Vaughan the cop from Hope, he starts an investigation. NOTHING TO LOSE returns Reacher to what he’s best at – which is [a] investigating a crime and [b] bare-knuckle boxing. The crime Reacher investigates is the discovery of a dead body on the roadside that separates both towns, but when the body vanishes, Reacher realizes there are larger and darker forces at work. The bare-knuckle action comes from Reacher taking out the Despair Sheriff and deputies in a bar-room brawl that is as vivid as it is violent. In between punches Reacher discovers that Despair is a “Company Town” a town dominated by one powerful employer, a giant metal recycling plant from which trucks roll in and out at all hours, and there’s the case of mysterious plane that flies over Despair at night.

Then there’s the covert army base, a war in Iraq casting a shadow over the proceedings and then there’s religion taken to the extremes. The man at the epicenter of the mystery – Thurman is kept offstage until the middle-section, just when Reacher and Vaughan get intimate in a very touching moment which is as compassionate as it is sensual. But action fans need fear not, as plenty of bad guys get their jaws broken. The most interesting aspect of NOTHING TO LOSE is Reacher’s musings on why such madness lurks at the heart of the road that separates these two Colorado towns. It’s Reacher’s curiosity that makes NOTHING TO LOSE a quintessential Jack Reacher investigation, exciting, thought provoking with short chapters, insightful with clipped dialogue that propels the tale to its violent and troubling conclusion. It does follow Child’s debut KILLING FLOOR in terms of plotting, but the peep into Reacher’s understanding of the Iraq war, and his distaste of fanatical religion make for compelling reading. This is what I love about the Jack Reacher novels, the thought-provoking information that peppers the narrative and makes one question what appears as our reality making these novels a perfect dozen

Ali

NOTORIOUS

Michele Martinez

2008

Wm. Morrow

Melanie Vargas makes her fourth appearance in this novel, this time as the chief assistant in her role as an U.S. Assistant Attorney in New York City. As its predecessors, *Notorious* is highly readable, well-plotted and swift reading. And it starts off with a bang—literally. Melanie is heading up the prosecution team in a murder trial, with a much-loved rap star as the defendant. While standing in front of the court house in Foley Square after speaking with defense counsel, she witnesses his murder when he enters his car and it explodes.

No novel in the series is without all sorts of complications, and this one is no exception. To begin with, who is responsible for defense counsel's murder? The defendant? His new counsel, who was sort of the former attorney's partner? Then there is the question of intimidation (or even possible elimination) of witnesses. And, of course, no plot is complete without danger posed to the protagonist. Or without a potential love interest.

As in previous entries in the series, the basic cast of characters remains familiar, even Melanie's "former" love, an FBI agent she has "spurned." This leads to some "schmaltzy" reactions on Melanie's part which in a way reflect badly on her character and really have nothing to do with the plot; one assumes they are put there to humanize her.

Nevertheless, the book is on a par with its predecessors.

Theodore Feit

NOW YOU SEE HIM

Eli Gottlieb

2008

William Morrow

A twisted saga of two families in the small upstate New York town of Monarch revolves around Rob Castor, who became sort of a cult figure when he wrote a book of stories about what supposedly was his home town. Nick Framingham grew up with Rob—they lived across the street from each other—and they were the best of friends. While Rob left Monarch for New York City, Nick remained living in town, marrying his college sweetheart and fathering two boys. When Rob's meteoric rise to fame begins to sputter, he becomes despondent as he tries to cope with writer's block. Further driving him to the edge is his breakup with and new-found success of his writer-girlfriend. He murders her and returns to Monarch, sought by authorities as a fugitive.

Nick reels from the tragedy of his boyhood friend, whom he idolized. Searching the past for clues as to how their idyllic life could deteriorate in such fashion, Nick begins to re-evaluate his own life, his marriage, memories of Rob and the relationship of the two families. In a contorted psychological analysis, Nick discovers a family secret that pushes him over the brink. The novel is a deep exploration of what moves people to act as they do. Astonishing revelations unfold to an unanticipated conclusion. Written with deep insights, full of pathos.

Theodore Feit

OBSESSIONS

Marshall Cook

2008

Bleak House

Another great book from Mr. Cook, this time out the setting is Northern Wisconsin as Mona has enrolled in a writing seminar. The "Big Name" author teaching her course disappears and turns up dead. And while Mona does what she can not to get involved, she can't help it. The fact that her husband found the body doesn't make it easier. Eventually everything comes to a wonderful ending and again, I'm left wanting the next book as soon as possible.

Cook has such wonderful characters in his books, I can't help but wonder if he doesn't take notes every time he meets someone. The dialogue is real enough that it could have been recorded and transcribed for the book. Cook also did a marvelous job of bringing in the mystery in this book, I was reading along enjoying the setting and what was going on with Mona and getting completely lost in this world Cook created. All of a sudden we have a murder and I was actually surprised. Wonderful book by a great new talent.

Jon

OF ALL SAD WORDS

Bill Crider

2008

St. Martin's Minotaur

The easy going Sheriff, Dan Rhodes, of Blacklin County, TX, has to fight not only crime and murder in the sparsely populated county, but also the humor of his deputies and the harping of the commissioners. Somehow, he manages to deal with all of it with grace and good humor.

The commissioners challenge his idea for a Citizen's Sheriff's Academy, but in the end the students help him. When a mobile home explodes, it exposes what appears to be murder and a crime wave. Then there's the problem of developing a web page for the Sheriff's office, citizens who are lonely and call for help from non-existent animals, and flying saucers.

All told in an entertaining manner, the daily activities of the Sheriff move forward, even in the face of physical danger. And in addition, the hero of a mystery by two neophyte authors who also attended the academy is patterned on him.

A quick and jolly read.

Theodore Feit

OLD SCHOOL BONES

Randall Peffer

2008

Bleak House Books

Michael DeCastro, intrepid hero of the fantastic PROVINCETOWN FOLLIES, BANGKOK BLUES, is reluctantly back to sleuthing. He may not be happy about it but this reader certainly is. Once again, DeCastro is drawn into a case by the pleas of a beautiful woman and once again, the complexity of the case is well beyond his scope but not his tenacity.

A snow covered New England prep school has a skeleton it would like to keep in the closet. Almost literally. When Liberty Baker happens upon the story of secret societies with a violent rivalry, she knows she's stirring up trouble for the school and herself. The forewarning note she receives confirms this. But none of this is reason enough for her to take her own life. Her friends and an advisor are sure of this. When the school and the police ignore them, Awasha Patterson turns to the only person she can think of to help – DeCastro. He is quickly swallowed up by old and new injustices that lurk below the surface of this 'simple case.' And once again, nothing will stop him from uncovering the truth when the powers that be seem set on leaving the past buried.

Peffer submerges into plot and character from page one. His writing is vivid yet economical, carrying the reader along a fast flowing plot that doesn't let up until the last the end. In DeCastro, he has created a hero along the lines of John Baker's very human and very passionate Stone Lewis. This is a hero with fire in his gut and the potential to carry a strong series.

Jennifer Jordan

A PERSON OF INTEREST

Susan Choi

2008

Viking

This novel presents me with a dilemma. I found it slow reading and perplexing, yet all the reviews I have read were laudatory. I found the plot and characters confusing, yet reviewers praised the novel in the highest terms. In fact, I didn't find the story or the characters interesting, and in many ways illogical. How could that be?

The premise is a relatively simple one. Professor Lee comes to the United States from Asia in his late 20's, goes to graduate school, earns a doctorate in mathematics, becomes a professor, gains tenure. So far so good. Where he goes wrong is having an affair with the wife of a fellow graduate student, who later marries and divorces him after they have a daughter. He goes on living alone with little or no interaction with the community or fellow workers. A bomb kills a star professor in the next office, and Lee later becomes a person of interest to FBI investigators, with resultant publicity and its effect on his reputation on and off campus.

The novel apparently is a psychological study of Lee. But as it plods on, all kinds of extraneous information is foisted on the reader. While it had redeeming qualities and fairly good writing, I found it boring and poorly conceived. Others didn't. *C'est la vie.*

Theodore Feit

THE RESURRECTIONIST

Jack O'Connell

2008

Algonquin Book

THE RESURRECTIONIST is a hard book to describe, its part mystery, part fantasy and part pulp. One thing it can definitely be called is entertaining.

The main story is about a pharmacist named Sweeny who has a son in a coma. Sweeny takes a job at a special clinic that claims to be able to help his son. Weird things are going on here and Sweeney is soon caught up in it. A biker gang has a strange connection to the hospital and some of the staff, plus the whole town is downright creepy.

Running parallel to this is a story from a series of comics that Sweeny reads to his comatose son. Circus freaks on the run looking for a place to belong. The two stories have very obvious relationships to each other and as the book progresses it's eerie the way they coincide.

Completely engrossing this book will absorb your mind while you read it and after you are done. O'Connell delivers the goods from word one right to the end.

Jon

ROBBIE'S WIFE

Russell Hill

2008

Hard Case Crime

Jack Stone, a sixty-year old screen-writer quits L.A. after his second failed marriage, matched by a career on the slide. He packs his laptop and his life savings into a duffel bag, heading to Dorset; a sleepy agricultural backwater in England's South West to write the killer screenplay that will get him back on track. His precarious financial situation is the ticking clock that is marbled across the narrative. Finding himself a lodger in the Barlow household's spare-room, he struggles to get a handle for his screenplay; until he meets Maggie Barlow, the eponymous Robbie [Barlow's] Wife. Robbie is a rugged sheep farmer, but with a university education who befriends Stone, taking him in after his car is vandalized. Robbie is in his early forties and handsome contrasting with the aging Stone who at sixty considers himself on the losing side of his career as well as his life.

Stone befriends Robbie and Maggie's son Terry; in ways that make Maggie realize that perhaps he is more fatherly than her husband Robbie. Soon Stone feels himself falling in love with Maggie, who is over twenty-years his junior, and as he does, he finds his lust expressing itself in his writing. As his fevered mind feels the attraction of this comely farmer's wife, his screenplay starts to take shape; a dark shape.

The location and atmosphere is rich in detail and texture with the insight of the outsider making it fresh and deeply evocative. The only fault is that perhaps a British copy-editor should have been consulted as there are quite a few gaffes and lapses that jar a British reader.

Due to the novels trajectory, the first three-quarters build up the tension until it becomes unbearable, both from a sexual as well as a character perspective. Once all this build-up is released, and the crime committed, the tale then goes into a downward race as Jack Stone finds the price he must pay for his actions both morally, as well as criminally are going to cost him dearly. Men being manipulated by their base urges have been fruitful fodder for crime-writers for years, but this one puts a spin on it. In *ROBBIE'S WIFE*, the shapely married femme fatale is attracted not to the handsome stranger, because she is actually married to the handsome man; but is attracted to an elderly man, the stranger down on his luck. It will provide much more thinking time after you put the book down, than the two and half hours it takes to read this tremendous tale

Ali Karim

SALAMANDER COTTON

Richard Kunzmann

2007

Thomas Dunne Books

In present day Johannesburg, South Africa, the quiet of a wealthy gated community is shattered by the screams of a man being thrust into his open fireplace while strapped to a chair. As Inspector Jacob Tshabalala begins his investigation, he learns that the dead man, a former asbestos mining executive, had many enemies and a lengthy history of alienating almost everyone he knew or worked with.

A long estranged wife soon appears, demanding that investigators widen their inquiries to learn the fate of her daughter who disappeared some forty years in the past. And like a spreading malodorous stain, the police find historical evidence of worker exploitation and manipulation of corporate records. One discovery leads to another and then to another – each new insight adding to the grim truths about the dead man.

The reader is aware of other important events; sadistic police corruption in the vicinity of the closed mines; chronic illnesses endured by former mine workers; a continuing series of truck hijackings; and murders of police sent to investigate the thefts; manipulation of the medical histories of those exposed to asbestos; and the long festering resentments on the part of those exploited in the mines.

All story lines converge at the farm which was once the country home of the man whose gruesome death opens the narrative.

Kunzmann presents an appealing friendship between Tshabalala and his former partner, Harry Mason, who works on a free lance basis to learn the fate of the dead man's missing daughter. Two experienced cops, one black and one white, trust in and rely on one another. The author portrays their friendship almost in an offhand manner, and their supportive friendship stands in pleasant contrast to the deception, greed, and cruelty underlying the crimes they investigate.

Armchair travelers have much to learn about the dusty landscape of rural South Africa, and the realities which are outside the tourist areas.

Woodstock

SAVAGE NIGHT

Allan Guthrie

2008

Harcourt

Tommy Savage is being blackmailed. To make matters worse, the man called Smith – who wears a ski mask – quickly proves he's capable of anything. Fearing for his sons' safety, Savage is forced to turn over fifty grand.

His mistake is trying to follow the money to get to Smith so that he can get even.

In this deliciously twisted tale from Scottish author Allan Guthrie we move back and forth through intersecting timelines to get a full picture of the events leading to the blackmail, and what happens afterwards. This is a layered, complex story. From the opening lines we've been drawn right into the center of the action. Why is a headless dead man in a tub in Fraser Savage's living room? And who is he? Many books start off grounding the reader with either a character or hooking them with action. In short order, Guthrie effortlessly does both. With an economy of words he skillfully develops character, setting and hooks the reader through the events unfolding on the page.

Guthrie expertly fools you into thinking you know what will happen and leaves you to wonder why it will happen, and how. The result is a stimulating read that demands your full attention, and it's easy to give it because the book is packed with action, and plenty of twists and turns to keep you guessing to the end.

The characters in *Savage Night* are ones you at times love and at other times loathe. Not for the faint of heart, *Savage Night* is an unflinching look at pain, violence, the kind of destruction one human being can cause in another's life. The story doesn't let up for a second and is a must read for anyone who loves dark, hardboiled crime fiction.

Sandra Ruttan

SCALPED: CASINO BOOGIE

Jason Aaron/RM Guera

2008

Vertigo

This second volume collecting issues 6 through 11 of *Scalped* continues the story of FBI Special Agent Dashiell Bad Horse who has gone back to the reservation he grew up on, He's undercover working for Lincoln Red Crow who is the tribal leader and also runs the brand new casino. Bad Horse has a past with most of the people living at Prairie Rose Indian Reservation and his home coming has been met with mixed feelings.

In this second volume the collection of stories each tells a different vantage point of the opening night of the casino, each seen by following a different character. It seems that everyone in this book is playing a game on someone else, the FBI agent running Bad Horse has his own agenda that goes back years involving his partner being killed. There is also another undercover agent that Bad Horse doesn't know about. Layers upon layers of lies going on all around him, and Dashiell has motives of his own for being there and trying to stop the illegal activities.

The story telling here is gritty and honest, it's a new type of noir and the best word to describe it is brilliant. The characters have a unique voice and while Aaron tells his story you can pick up on subtle social commentary underlying the action. R.M. Guera's pencil work is so perfectly matched with this book that there may be a psychic link between him and Aaron. The visuals are visceral and detailed and yet not over stated. The action scenes leap off the page and you can feel the heat when the characters sweat.

This is a perfect example of why comics work so well for crime fiction tales. I hope this series never ends.

Jon

SILESIAN STATION

David Downing

2008

SOHO Books

The follow up to last year's *ZOO STATION*, this pre WWII novel is engrossing and wonderful. Set in Germany *SILESIAN STATION* has us following English reporter John Russell in country going through some serious changes as it prepares for war.

Russell is just back from vacation in America with his son and before he even gets off the boat he is requested by the Gestapo who have arrested his actress girl friend. Deals are made and Russell ends up being a double agent and supplying information to any number of different people, all the while trying to keep up with his job working for a San Francisco newspaper. His ultimate is to keep his loved ones safe. He's also tracking the disappearance of a Jewish girl who disappeared from a train to Berlin.

Twists and turns aplenty make this espionage novel a superb read full of tension and suspense. It's sad, melancholy and hopeful all at the same time. An amazing piece of fiction which I hope is part of a much longer series of books.

Jon

SLIP OF THE KNIFE

Denise Mina

2008

Little, Brown

Denise Mina's newest book opens with the shocking murder of Terry Hewitt, former boyfriend of her protagonist, Paddy Meehan. They had known each other since they were both in their teens, eleven years ago, but it had been six months since they had seen each other. Paddy is now 27, and has graduated from her lowly position at the Daily News to her present celebrity status with a regular column of her own, in addition to being a published author. Terry, in turn, had just signed a book deal of his own, and Paddy is told by the police that his killing "had all the hallmarks of an IRA hit...his body found stripped naked in a ditch, single shot to the head." He had been a journalist as well, later "went to war zones, conflict zones, did hard reporting on a world stage...the last of a dying breed...had witnessed corruption and brutality, women raped and murdered, children mutilated, whole villages put to the torch...a fifteen-year-old Angolan boy, shot between the eyes right in front of him." But in the moments before he is killed, after thinking that he "had been arrested in Chile, seen a woman necklaced in Soweto, stood on the edge of a riot in Port-au-Prince," he has no idea why he is about to be murdered on a road on the outskirts of Glasgow, Scotland. In many respects Paddy has changed little over the years since she first appeared in Ms. Mina's books, of which this is the third: She still hates her appearance, believing she is too fat; still feels she has to prove herself to the misogynistic men around her; though she attends Mass, she still rebels against her family's Catholicism—her sister is a nun, "wasn't even prepared to take communion and had had a child out of wedlock," a son, Pete, now nearly six years old, who she adores. When she is told by the police that Terry had listed her as his next of kin, with her new address that she didn't even realize he had known, she has no choice. When the effects of that investigation threaten not only Paddy but her son as well, the stakes are raised all the way around.

A parallel story line deals with the release after nine years in prison of young Callum Ogilvy, who with another boy had been found guilty of the brutal murder of a toddler, following Paddy's investigation – she had been engaged to Callum's cousin, Sean – described in an earlier book.

Ms. Mina's descriptions conjure up her characters precisely, e.g., someone's wife is "blond, tall, and so thin she could have opened letters with her chin;" in a photo she sees "a woman of eighty, arms crossed, grinning, the folds in her skin deep enough to lose change in;" and, of her editor: "Nature, time and his temperament had conspired to perfect McVie's glower. His face and posture fitted around misery as neatly as cellophane over a cup." The author maintains an undercurrent of menace. Paddy is a gutsy, slightly vulgar and very human protagonist, the characters and the setting very well drawn, the writing and the story taut with a hold-your-breath quality.

Gloria Feit

STALKED

Brian Freeman

2008

St. Martin's Minotaur

Right off the bat, in a prologue, we're introduced to a vicious villain. We are left wondering whether this clue usurps the mystery. Of course, Mr. Freeman is too shrewd an author to do that. So, the reader is left wondering what it's all about, right up to the end. And that lets the reader wander while wondering about a whole series of murders.

The novel takes place in Duluth, where there's plenty of snow and icy storms, frozen lakes and generally uncomfortable climatic conditions. The thriller begins with detective Maggie Bei waking up from a dream to discover her husband shot, lying dead in his downstairs office. Obviously, she becomes a suspect. Her partner (and superior), Lt. Jonathan Stride, doesn't buy it but, of course, he is recused from the case and another detective, who is convinced of her guilt, heads the investigation. Meanwhile, Stride, and his live-in P.I. girlfriend, Serena Dial, become involved in parallel mysteries, as well as a ten-year-old murder that remains unsolved.

Not only are there a series of murders occupying Stride and Serena, but there is a blackmailer and rapist at large as well. Also uncovered is a sex club, which may or may not bear on the various cases. Enough tension to keep the reader interested? You bet, right up to a terror-filled (and completely unexpected) climax.

Theodore Feit

STANDING STILL

Kelly Simmons

2008

Atria Books

The first thing that should be said about this book is that it is the most impressive debut novel I have read in a long time. Kelly Simmons' writing is riveting, the prose and the story captivating. In the opening pages, Claire Cooper, alone in the house while her husband is away on one of his constant business trips, hears sounds she cannot identify coming from the one of the upstairs bedrooms where her three children, four, five and seven years old, lie sleeping. When she enters one of the bedrooms, she is horrified to see an intruder with her daughter in his arms. Her instinct is what nearly any mother's would be: she tells him "Take me. Take me instead." And he does exactly that. The reader feels her anguish during the ensuing days, as her nightmare plays out. She spends the following week tied to a bed in a motel, her abductor her only companion. She refers to him throughout as simply "Him."

Claire is now a reporter for a local station, having worked all over the globe before her marriage to Sam, who co-owns a successful p.r./marketing business. Her history is, as she describes it, one of leaving without saying goodbye, whether it is a string of lovers or therapists. She suffers from an acute panic disorder, frequently all but disabling, and her Xanax bottle is never far away. Reflecting on her past before her marriage, she says: "I believed I was in control. I didn't see that I was wasting my youth and grace, doling it out as if it would regenerate. I didn't know at twenty what I knew at forty: that powers of seduction slow to a trickle. Until one day you go into the city in a perfect-fitting pair of jeans, get your hair highlighted, and when you walk back to your car no one's head turns. No, I didn't know I was perishable. But once I figured it out, the world conspired to move up my expiration date. It swatted at me daily with small swords—floods and heights and confined spaces and shadows and creaking floors. Things no one else saw. The pathetic world according to Claire."

Interspersed between scenes before and after the kidnapping are reflections of past days, going back to Claire's childhood, as captured in photos she remembers. But Sam and Claire, it appears, both have secrets. The book is all about, to quote the author again, "the things you don't see coming." Kelly Simmons has a completely fresh voice, and has written a novel of breathtaking originality.

Gloria Feit

TKO
Tom Schreck
2008
Midnight Ink

Book two in the Duffy Dombrowski series is actually better than the first book, and I loved the first book. This second installment is the follow up punch of a great one-two debut.

Howard "Hacker" Reinhart has been in prison for a series of murders and on his released Duffy is his case worker. Hacker goes of the grid and at the same time a series of new murders start. In case trying to figure out what's going on with his new charge isn't enough Dombrowski has to deal with a new girlfriend who very easily may be insane. Schreck has a clear and distinct voice and his writing has a smooth flow that just pulls the reader right into the story. It's like sitting down with old pals for a couple of beers, relaxed and entertaining. The mystery here is well done with a very clever wrap up. Schreck is someone to keep an eye on as he will only get better and better.

Jon

THE WATER'S EDGE
Daniel Judson
June 2008
St. Martin's Minotaur

I'm not sure the word dark is heavy enough to describe this book, or even quite right, but it the word that comes to mind first. THE WATER'S EDGE is operating on a number of different levels and it's this layered effect that makes it so engrossing.

A double murder that is carried out in a rather grisly manner sparks the events that take place in this novel. The main characters, Jake Bechet, and Tommy Miller each have their own reasons for being involved. Miller. A former PI is asked by a not so honest police chief to look into the deaths. The hook is one of Miller's old business cards found on one of the bodies. Bechet has a past he's trying to forget and keep from coming back and this necessitates his involvement.

While the murders are the focus, the story going on behind that is the real draw. Both Miller and Bechet have things they need to resolve to truly move forward with their lives and this may be the way to do it, it it doesn't destroy them first.

Judson has rally pulled out the stops here and gives 110% on every page. Intense and foreboding with a constantly growing sense of urgency this book is utterly enthralling. My own experience was made all the better by reading it on a dark rainy night. Let me say Thank You to Daniel Judson for this book.

Jon