

The Buzz Box

Every so often an author comes along with an idea that feels fresh, something that seems to give the genre that new car smell. Craig Johnson is one of those authors. ANOTHER MAN'S MOCCASINS is the fourth book in the series featuring Walt Longmire, a sheriff in Absaroka County Wyoming. This adventure with Walt begins with a dead Vietnamese woman, a murder that soon opens Walt's past in Nam. It soon turns into a case with two murders forty years apart. Johnson writes with an a quality that thoroughly engages the reader and he mixes the perfect amounts of action and characterization. This is fast becoming one of the best mystery series being written today.

BLOOD ALLEY (Toby Book) by Tom Coffey is the author's third book. Set in 1940's New York the book stars one Patrick Grimes, a WWII vet working for the Examiner, a tabloid paper. He is called out to a murder scene in an unsavory neighborhood and the victim is a daughter of a wealthy family. An arrest is quickly made but Grimes doesn't think they got the right guy. This is a great mystery set in an exciting time and Coffey has really delivered the goods here.

BLUE SMOKE AND MURDER (William Morrow) from Elizabeth Lowell brings another timely news item to her fiction with a look at art fraud. Jill Breck becomes an unwilling player in this strange world when her Aunt dies in a mysterious fire and brings to light some family art. Fast paced and fascinating this is a great summer read.

ANTHONY BOUCHER, A BIOBIBLIOGRAPHY by Jeffery Marks is a wonderful book about a truly great advocate of the mystery genre. Yes, it's the guy the convention is named for. The book covers all aspects of Boucher's life from author to critic and has a full bibliography. This is a wonderful reference book, though I will warn you, it's priced like a text book, 213 pages including index in a trade paperback for \$35.

CITY OF THE SUN (Bantam UK) is a debut from a screenwriter who has done some great movies. David Levien introduces PI Frank Behr in this opening book with a missing persons case involving a 12 year old paperboy. Levien writes a moody book, which is a perfect example of how good PI novels can be. Your only disappointment will be having to wait till next year for book two.

Patricia Smiley is a wonderful, charming and funny lady and it comes through on every page of COOL CACHE (Obsidian) her latest Tucker Sinclair novel. Tucker is working with a woman who owns a high end chocolate shop and true to form for her, a body is soon discovered. What follows is a nicely laid out plot that brings the reader along as the clues are found and the mystery solved. Smiley's style is easy going and draws the reader in effortlessly and then proceeds to entertain and engage for a totally satisfying read.

THE DARK OF DAY is the latest by Barbara Parker and is published by Vanguard Press. C.J. Dunn is a hot lawyer in Miami and she is definitely on the fast track. A missing girl puts the spotlight on a congressman's driver and by cause and affect the congressman himself. While not a fan of the politician C.J. takes the case in hopes of it leading to some bigger things for her career. As things progress secrets start to unravel that could threaten the congressman and C.J. and leaves her with some choices that no one would want to have to make. This is a high tension thriller on overdrive and will be a great summer read.

Meg Gardiner's DIRTY SECRETS CLUB (Dutton) is her first US novel, though not her first novel. Forensic Psychiatrist Jo Beckett is working for the San Fran PD and looking into murder suicides of some pretty unlikely people, stars and high rollers, people with everything to live for. Her investigation turns up something called the dirt secrets club, and this opens up a whole other can of worms. With her life on the line it's a race to solve the mystery behind the club. Gardiner is a brilliant writer and I guarantee after reading this you will seek out her other work. Whoever is number one on the best seller list better get ready to move over.

Ian Rankin returns with EXIT MUSIC (Little Brown), the final outing in his long running series featuring Edinburgh Detective Inspector John Rebus. I, along with many others, am a huge fan of this series, so it is with a little sadness that I read this book and write a review. A Russian dissident poet is murdered in Edinburgh while an elite delegation of Russian businessmen are trying to do business in Scotland. As usual, Rebus will defy the powers that be to solve the crime, while he hopes to put in prison his gangster nemesis Big Ger Cafferty. As always, Rankin's narrative is brilliant and to the point. Like Michael Connelly, Rankin has the ability to make an ordinary scene thrilling, making his novels very believable. He remains one of the most influential novelists of his generation, the Rebus books have changed the way British mysteries are written. The new generation of British crime writers have followed Rankin's lead, their books are dark, gritty and hardboiled. Whatever direction Mr. Rankin goes with his writing I know I will read them, he is one of the leading examples of the crime novel as today's modern literature. I will really miss Detective Inspector John Rebus, simply one of the finest characters in fiction history. - Richard Katz of Mystery One Bookshop

FEVER is the latest nameless detective novel by Bill Pronzini from Forge books. With 35 other books in the series it's safe to say Pronzini has a track record of great writing, which no doubt led to his being named grand Master this year by the MWA. This time out nameless is looking for a missing wife with a gambling habit. The case soon twists into a domestic nightmare and possible murder with our hero right in the middle. The wonderful thing about this series is that you don't have to read them in order, each tale stands on its own. But I will warn you, once you finish you'll want more. This is the level people reach for when they write, and Pronzini gets better and better.

FREEZER BURN (Berkley) is a paperback original by D. H. Dubin, a part of his ongoing CSU Investigation series. Rookie CSU investigator Madison Cross is working a number of cases that at first seem unrelated but slowly a picture forms that may lead to something so elaborate and twisted that her own life may be on the line. A fast paced thriller that gets the forensics right this is a book that will appeal to fans of the science side of mysteries and to people who love a book that really moves.

David Skibbins has his fourth tarot card mystery out in August, THE HANGED MAN (St. Martins). In recent years Skibbins is one of a few authors who really stand out with what they are doing in the mystery genre with a totally fresh series. This latest, number four in the series is his best yet. Cool as ice protagonist Warren Ritter is roped into a murder investigation when a dominatrix friend of Sally's, his girlfriend, is arrested wrongly. The couple end up going undercover with a group of their friends to get a dominatrix out of jail. Skibbins is a master story teller and this is book you will want to read in one sitting. No summer reading list is complete without this.

St. Peter, MN author Barbara Fister is back with IN THE WIND (St. Martins), a book that was worth the wait. In what we hope will be an ongoing and frequent series, she introduces Chicago P.I. Anni Koskinen, a former cop who was basically drummed off the force for testifying against a fellow officer. As in her brilliant 2002 debut (*ON EDGE* /Dell pbo), Fister, from the get-go, demonstrates her command for establishing strong characters. And Anni is a pistol. In one of the opening scenes, she is about to be confronted by two men on the street and proceeds to, well, beat the crap out of them. Turns out that they're feds who have been tailing her. The reasons for the feds' interest launches her into investigating secrets deeply rooted and protected, involving the '70's American Indian Movement, an ice-cold murder of an FBI agent in 1972, and the heightened paranoia of post-9/11 surveillance. Set in Chicago and rural Minnesota, this is a book not to be missed. (Gary Shulze of Once Upon a Crime)

JACK SECRET HISTORIES (Tor) is a young adult novel from fan favorite F. Paul Wilson. Based on the Repairman Jack novels, this new series shows Jack as a youngster, and an ass kicking hero. Jack and his buddies find a corpse and a strange artifact. Jack knows something isn't right and soon discovers a knack for fixing situations that seem wrong. Fast paced and wonderfully crafted this is a great book for both adult fans of Jack, and a wonderful new series for young adults. If you haven't read Wilson before this is the perfect place to start. (look for F. Paul Wilson at Bouchercon this fall)

Criminal Minds has brought on Max Allan Collins to do the tie in novels and the latest is KILLER PROFILE (Obsidian Mystery). The Behavioral Analysis Unit heads to Chicago to assist in what initially looks like three unrelated crime scenes. It appears that someone is duplicating the crime scenes of famous serial killers. Collins does some wonderful things with these characters adding depth that they don't have time for on the TV show. The story here is top notch and a fast thrilling read.

PAYING FOR IT is from a new imprint at Random House UK, Preface. Tony Black makes an amazing debut with this book, a dark and emotional piece of work. Gus Dury is a man on the edge looking down, with basically nothing to lose. Salvation strangely comes in the form of a favor for a friend, look in to the murder of his son. It's a dark path and not a place for the timid. Black has managed in his first book to show a maturity in his writing that some authors chase for years. I'd put him up there with Rankin and Kernick and Billingham with just this first novel. I can't wait for more.

SACRIFICE (from Minotaur) by English debut novelist S.J. Bolton is a creepy and wonderful read. Obstetrician Tora Hamilton moves to Scotland with her husband and the discovery of a body on their property leads her on a journey of secrets and nightmares. Part modern thriller part haunted folklore this is a debut that looks to be marking the beginning of a wonderful career.

SIN is a new anthology from Avendia Publishing featuring writers from "The Chicago Contingent". Among the writers are Crimespree's Dana Kaye, and Crimespree pals Marcus Sakey and Darwyn Jones. The stories inside aren't all crime fiction, but they are all well written and unique. The theme of the collection is obviously Sin. Among the stand outs for me were Sakey's Funny in a Dark Sort Of Way, and Dana Kaye's Running Back. I also really enjoyed the depth of A.C. Frieden's Atonement. A total of 15 stories in this book, and all of them winners. The contents shows the diversity of the group and the city they hail from.

SLEUTH SLAYER (Pocol Press) by Jeffrey Burton and Bruce Burton is a damn entertaining book. I'm a sucker for books with real life people as characters and with their protagonist, writer Guy Davitt, they manage to give an insider's wink to a really great period in time. Someone is killing mystery writers and Davitt discovers that they are being killed with methods from mystery novels. This has actually been done, but not in this period. Davitt needs to solve the crimes that the police don't want to admit are linked by fiction before he becomes the next victim himself. The Burtons have a real gift for storytelling and this book is compelling and engrossing. It's kind of like they used a time travel machine to go back and create an alternate reality. It's also a hell of a lot of fun. If you want to spend a really nice afternoon, kick back with this book. I hope to see more of Davitt and more from the Burtons. Seek this book out, you won't be sorry.

Volk's Shadow(Holt) is the second book by Brent Ghelfi. Every now and then, those of us who love to read come across an exceptional book. A novel that combines all the elements, a fine narrative, great believable characters, thrilling plotting, an outstanding lead and insight into a culture. This happened last year when I read Brent Ghelfi's brilliant first book, Volk's Game, a novel that cuts into the dark heart of modern Russia.

Ghelfi returns with the second in the series, Volk's Shadow. Volk is a former Colonel in the Russian military and now a freelance operative who operates on the fringes of today's lawless Russia. He answers to the highest forms of power, a General who only answers to Putin and a crime czar who is the most powerful in the country. In Shadow, Volk must return to Chechnya, where he was a master sniper and a hated enemy. If anything, Shadow is even better than Game, Ghelfi narrative is sharper, his insight into Russia is fascinating, his plotting thrilling and complicated. Volk is simply one of the most interesting fictional characters I have ever read. There is even a moving love story as part of the plot. Although these novels are dark and violent they will appeal to all readers. Exceptional new series. Richard Katz of Mystery One Books

Ruth's Hit List

Ah, Spring into Summer means plenty of great reads on the TBR pile. Knee deep in Bouchercon means letting go of the reviewing but me, not read? Hell no. And so I share the following

Ridley Pearson's KILLER VIEW is a great read. The best-selling novelist returns to Sun Valley's Galena Summit. It's winter and a book that begins as a simple search and rescue soon folds in an entire community. The natives of Galena and the wealthy outsiders who've begun to populate the valley with second homes have butted heads before, this time Pearson's plot threatens to change the town's DNA. Pearson's Galena is so real I can now cross Sun Valley off of my "places to go" list. With action passages that sing like the best of the thrillers and plot and character developed by a crime fiction master Killer View is as refreshing as ice water on a hot summer day.

Don Winslow's THE DAWN PATROL and his protagonist Boone Daniels own a different kind of landscape. With apologies to Mr. Winslow (who has something to say about the Beach Boys in this novel), nobody has owned the waves off of California as assuredly as Brian and the Boys in decades. Full time surfer and part time PI Daniels is waiting for the big swell. Hours away when the novel opens, the swell is the ride Boone and his fellow Dawn Patrolters have been waiting for for years. The bills are calling and Boone takes a quick job locating a stripper whose seen too much. The book gains momentum on every page and Winslow's prose and dialog are as astounding as ever. The incoming wave swells in the foreground as the reader get's a look at the underbelly of San Diego's seamier side until everybody gets to hang ten.... Or not. THE DAWN PATROL-Point Break for the intellectual on steroids.

Kent Krueger's RED KNIFE is proof that writing, perhaps outside of your comfort level, will keep a series fresh. Readers of the Cork O'Connor series will swear they know the community of Aurora as well as Krueger by now. And they would be wrong. Krueger sets the plot in this small town in the UP. It's spring and the tourists are coming, the burger shack is in full prep mode for the Tourist Season. And then...Murder hits home when a gang leader and his wife are murdered, their baby left alone howling into the night. The "real world" has arrived in Aurora, neighborly disputes have been outsourced and the murders may blow the town apart. The presentation of characters in RED KNIFE reaches beyond this sleepy little town, down into the soil of a human past that may inevitably become part of the future. Gang Warfare isn't just for LA anymore and Krueger doesn't shy away from his subject matter. You could say he bitch slaps us, and it's all good. Reading that is... A novel for modern times.

I mention this next novel because my reaction to it fascinates me and the author is well known to the Thriller reader. I admit I'm coming in on the end here. TO THE DEATH by Patrick Robinson is the last book in a series and the first I've read. As I began the book I was kind of excited, declared to my reading partner, "It's Tom Clancy before he went insane." But alas, the read has several fatal flaws. And as I read on (only slightly less entertained) I realized that today's thriller reader is more discerning than writers often give them credit for. TO THE DEATH has the potential of great characters but they aren't utilized. And therein lies the rub. Because an entertaining plot is bogged down by the authors desire for us to "like" the characters. In a thriller if the motivation needs to be forced by explanation for goodness sake leave it out. Let your plot do the work and the characters will follow. It worked for Deighton. Is this book for you?

Max Allan Collins is a multi-faceted writer, no question. STRIP FOR MURDER is a book that folds together all of his strengths. The year is 1953 and a famous comic strip writer is found dead in his apartment. The apartment is a floor below a Halloween party being hosted by his arch-enemy. And PI Jack Starr is on the case. Collins takes fictional characters and allows one of the comic strips' most famous feuds come alive on the page. I enjoy Collins work for its reverence toward the gold medal pocket age of PIs but there are few if any who can touch him when it comes to writing fictional accounts of true history. STRIP FOR MURDER is another Collins success.

Michael Koryta's ENVY THE NIGHT is mentioned elsewhere in this magazine but I have to sing it's praises a bit. When a writer ventures into "stand alone" territory with readers still being introduced to a series he's taking a risk. ENVY THE NIGHT is an introduction to a writer whose talent had already been confirmed. Frank Temple, a young man with a long past returns to his former summer refuge to confront a past still very much alive. And the rest is the reading of your dreams. Voiced through multiple points of view and with a plot both epic and personal, ENVY should attract the rare mystery fan who's yet to introduce themselves to this polished and unique writer. And He'll have you eating out of his thesaurus by the end of the book.

Karin Slaughter's FRACTURED makes me want to coin a new sub-genre. Are you ready for "post-modern gothic noir". Utilizing all the tools of contemporary forensics and policing and reaching back to a classic prose style, Ms. Slaughter throws something entirely new onto the page. Slaughter's novels have long held crime fiction up to a mirror and cracked the glass. With FRACTURED and the story of Abigail Campano you'll find amidst the shards a look at today's South like no one else writing.

THE TURNAROUND is a long awaited novel in this house. Two years with no George Pelecanos is far too long. The book is being released at the end of August but Crimespree was lucky enough to get an early copy. For almost two decades Pelecanos has owned D.C. and THE TURNAROUND will only make property values go up. The story of a long ago crime introduces today's D.C. The teens affected by that long ago night still live and breathe their city, histories different and history shared as only tragedy can make them. And as the events of this book unfold Pelecanos tells the story of both War and Peace in a way that is singularly his. From gentrification of old neighborhoods to the unpreparedness of all Americans when it comes to the war in Iraq, the story weaves itself through text until it is a tapestry so personal, succinct and alive you'll know it was written just for you. Pelecanos delivers like never before.

Jen's Round-Up

As readers, we've all had runs of good and bad reads. We can't wait for the bad to end but the good.... The good we know must end but wish fervently it wouldn't. I had such a run of good reads in this last pile of books from the Crimespree arc pile.

I fought Ruth for the latest Luiz Alfredo Garcia-Roza and though I may be wracked with guilt, I am very pleased that I did. In BLACKOUT, Garcia-Roza has Chief Inspector Espinosa tackle, with tremendous passion and patient analysis, the case of a murdered homeless man. The suspects, a group of the socially elite, are not the usual suspects. But through them Espinosa finds the finest thread of connection to the murder of a prominent professional in an investigation so subtle only the most gentle and persistent probing could crack it. Garcia-Roza is a superb writer with a fine understanding of human nature and a very droll, dark humor. BLACKOUT is in my top reads of the year.

Another book I stole from dear Ruth, (I am merciless when it comes to books) features one of my favorite reluctant 'detectives', Dr Siri. CURSE OF THE POGO STICK is another delightful and intelligent read from the wonderfully odd Colin Cotterill. How could I not adore a book about a septuagenarian Loation national coroner in post-Communist country who plays host to an ancient shaman being hunted down by evil spirits? In this episode, Dr. Siri is taken hostage by the women of Hmong village in hopes of soliciting his aid in exorcising the head honcho's possessed daughter. Meanwhile, back in Vientiane, his crack crew is handling the explosive autopsy of an unknown soldier under the close supervision of some bugged out party members. As always, the stranger things get, the more everything makes sense. Cotterill writes with humor and an unusual sense of justice in a world where justice is second to the party line. Brilliant.

Marcus Sakey stands alone again in his third novel, GOOD PEOPLE. Some people will do just about anything to get what they want. Even good people. Tom and Anna Reed have a marriage on the verge of collapse. All their thoughts, efforts and money have gone into infertility treatments with no success. Emotionally worn out and financially strapped, their wish is about to come true. Sort of. A tenant is dead. And he has a sack full of money. And who's going to miss it? Soon people are looking for the missing cash. And the are decidedly not good people. Sakey has written a taut thriller featuring every day people making choices no one should have to make. He builds the tension beautifully in a modern morality tale.

My deep and abiding love of anthologies was sated. Bitter Lemon Press' CRIMINI is a varied and wonderful collection of Italian crime fiction. The first story, Niccolo Ammaniti's "You Are My Treasure Chest," begins subtly as the story of Paolo Bocchi, the highly respected surgeon, unfolds. Late for a boob job, Bocchi steadies his rum hangover with a snort and careens in to the operating theater in less than optimal condition for surgery. And within the hour he makes a mistake that will utterly snap his life. The collection features stories from Carlo Lucarelli, Sandrone Dazieri and Andrea Camilleri among many other fine writers.

The second short story meal was Japanese. MURDER MOST MODERN is a dissection of detective fiction viewed from a country that adores the genre. Editor Sari Kawana's introduction, "Detective Fiction, Diphtheria, and Modernity" is a brilliant treatise about why the Japanese have taken to and made their own a type of fiction that most associate only with the West. Each successive section cross-section illustrates how the detective tales told by Japan authors reflect and refine the Japanese culture.

Finally, in BONEYARD, Michelle Gagnon returns with FBI special agent Kelly Jones in a case that crosses state lines. Along the Appalachian Trail, young men have been going missing for years. When hikers stumble across the remains of one man that lead investigators to a mass grave, bone specialist Jones is called in. The case grows in complexity as it appears there may be more than one killer. And it grows in tension as police from two states try to steer the investigation in two different directions. When another man disappears, Jones must make sense of the chaos before he, too, becomes a part of the bone yard.

ANOTHER THING TO FALL

Laura Lippman
William Morrow
March 2008

Tess Monaghan returns for the 10th time in this Baltimore-based series when she is retained to baby-sit an obstreperous starlet, who is featured in a television show being produced in the city. A series of mishaps—a fire, a suicide and various other pranks and events—are hampering progress on the show, and the producer, fearing for the safety of his leading lady, asks Tess to protect her.

Then a murder takes place late one night near the production office, and Tess warms to her specialty. The task becomes more and more difficult amid the egos and foibles of the actors and writers, lies and hidden motives.

Laura Lippman is a skilled craftsman, using her native city as a backdrop, and her recently learned knowledge of the television industry (her husband was the writer/producer of a wonderful TV series) to good advantage. She has written about people with a deep insight into human emotions and, as usual, told a sparkling tale.

Theodore Feit

BURN ZONE

James O. Borne
February 2008
G. P. Putnam's Sons

This novel is the second in the series featuring Alex Duarte, ATF agent living and working in Florida. Alex, whose family is from Paraguay, is now nearly thirty years old, and seems to have commitment issues. His nickname is Rocket, because of his focus and drive; he believes "once you hit your stride, you never let up." He is called in by his friend, DEA agent Felix Baez, working out of the agency's headquarters in West Palm Beach, to assist in the attempt to shut down a smuggling operation run by a mysterious Panamanian named Ortiz--guns and drugs seem to be involved, thereby bringing it under Duarte's jurisdiction as well. With the informal help of his girlfriend, a crime scene tech [or 'forensic scientist' as he prefers to think of her], Alex joins the hunt for this infamous and slippery criminal.

The ensuing investigation pits them up not only smugglers, but a white supremacist group intent on "changing America." The man called Ortiz is seen to be a sadistic brute, but sadism is the least of his failings. A helluva combination, as it turns out.

This is a thriller which doubtless will be enjoyed by many. This reader was disappointed, however: Having enjoyed FIELD OF FIRE, I expected more from its successor novel in the series. The identity of the alter egos of the two 'bad buys' was apparent to me early on, which might have been intentional on the part of the author, perhaps to heighten the suspense—if that was the purpose, it didn't work, at least not for me. The book began with a great opening line, addressed to Alex by his ATF partner: "You ever think we should write some of this b***s*** down and put it in a book?" With the author's background, it just may have originated that way, and while I am sure the scenarios laid out are possible, this thriller just didn't hold up for me. I found the characters almost caricatures and the whole not nearly as well written as the prior entry in the series. That said, I would probably read the next chapter in Alex Duarte's life, in the hope that it will come up to the level seen in FIELD OF FIRE.

Gloria Feit

CITY OF THE SUN

David Levien
March 2008
Doubleday

Jamie Gabriel disappears early one morning and after a year little has been discovered by the police. Then a kind-hearted cop slips Jamie's father a worn business card of an ex-cop now PI. Despite various failed efforts by other investigators, the father, Paul Gabriel, approaches Frank Behr, and we are introduced to a new hard-boiled PI, the latest in a long line of hard-hitting, introspective PIs with a somewhat failed background, no matter how able they are. Behr makes it a practice not to accept hopeless cases, and after 14 months, he knows the leads are ice cold and there is little likelihood of either finding Jamie or uncovering what happened to him. But something in his background—he lost his own son—moves him to undertake the assignment. And, thus, we are led down a somewhat tortuous path as Behr doggedly finds facts and leads.

It is a gripping tale, well-told. Behr is a complex antagonist full of the knowledge of his profession, but haunted by his own history and self-doubts. Dogmatic to an extreme, he can soften and relent, especially when Paul insists on getting involved, forcing Frank to break a fundamental rule.

Theodore Feit

CLOSE CALL

John McEvoy
March 2008
Poisoned Pen Press

In the previous three novels in the series, John McEvoy demonstrated his uncanny ability to match the master, Dick Francis, in writing mysteries with a horseracing background. Now, he again has written a memorable tale using the same protagonist, Jack Doyle, and his "fairy godfather" and raconteur, the furrier-to-the-mob, Moe Kellman.

Just returned from New Zealand and at loose ends, Moe suggests that Jack become the publicity and advertising director of a rundown racing park south of Chicago, Monee Park. The track was owned and operated for many years by Moe's friend, Jim Joyce, who recently died, leaving 51 percent ownership to his niece, with the balance to his nephew who lives in Ireland. The racetrack is run down and hardly making any money. The niece, whose husband suffers from ALS (Lou Gehrig's Disease), intends to keep running the track in the memory of her uncle. The nephew would rather have it sold to developers and use the cash to expand his bookmaking business.

From this conflicting interest a whole series of events takes place, with Jack at the center. As in previous entries in the series, this book is tautly written and suspenseful, well-plotted and exciting right up to the conclusion.

Theodore Feit

COCKATIELS AT SEVEN

Donna Andrews
2008
Thomas Dunne Books

This latest Meg Langslow mystery is a real riot. It's funny as hell and a great traditional mystery. This series gets better with each book and this 9th book is no exception.

A woman Meg barely knows stops by to drop off her son for Meg to baby-sit for a few hours. Before long it looks like Mom isn't coming back. Meg takes matters into her own hands after consulting with the police and starts looking for the missing mother. Good thing as it turns out poor Timmy's Mom is in deep trouble. While Meg is no stranger to detective work, this is the first time she's had to do it with a toddler along for the ride.

Top notch plotting and wonderful characters this is another great novel by Andrews. As funny as it is compelling.
Jon

COMPULSION

Jonathan Kellerman
April 2008
Ballantine Books

No matter how predictable an Alex Delaware novel can be, it is always different, interesting and informative. Alex demonstrates his knowledge of psychology; his sidekick Milo his detective skills; the evildoer the psychological characteristics for the two protagonists to use their skills. In other words, predictable but wholly entertaining. In the current novel, we have a murderer who is rather clever, and no two victims are alike. The only clue is the killer's use of black luxury vehicles. But there is no motive for Alex and Milo to discern. Meanwhile Milo is confronted with the resurrection of the 16-year-old disappearance and possible murder of a young boy. Pressure is brought to solve the cold case because a convict in another state seeking a deal promises to disclose where the boy is buried. One cannot sufficiently praise Jonathan Kellerman's talent for suspense. The text flows swiftly, while the reader is moved forward slowly but surely with explanations of the how and why.

Theodore Feit

CRAZY FOOL KILLS FIVE

Gwen Freeman

2008

Capital Crime Press

Set in Los Angeles in the present, Fifi Cutter is a P.I. and her current assignment is with a law firm on a big wrongful death case. To keep the roof over her head, she also acts as the documents clerk for the case, thanks to the good graces of her friend and attorney, VJ, Victoria Jane Smith.

A crazy fool, and that has to be proven, shot the pilot on a plane, which crashed killing all four aboard and one on the ground. If the aircraft company was negligent in hiring the crazy fool, then they are liable. Simple. Not quite. Insurance conglomerates provide murky targets. Were two Japanese businessmen on the plane worth many times more than a retiree in a trailer, where the plane ended up?

Fifi has been in the insurance business and she senses fraud. She looks into that angle but someone doesn't want her to continue her investigation. Is she getting too close to what really happened?

Her new boyfriend is the opposing counsel. Very good for her social life, but not good for her work life. Is he shining her on, hoping she'll spill important information about trial strategy? That's what VJ thinks. Because somebody is getting insider information, and Fifi is the prime suspect.

Fifi's half-brother, Bosco, who is living with her in the 'family home' and sponging off her shamelessly has a new girlfriend pursuing him. This makes Fifi suspicious for she considers him a deadbeat of the first degree. Is there more to Bosco than she knows about? More to the girlfriend? He is getting too involved in the case, telling everyone he's a P. I. working with Fifi. As Fifi points out, he doesn't even have a valid driver's license, let alone a P.I. license. This makes Fifi nervous, and she is even more so when the bad guys start chasing her in earnest.

Gay Tolli Kinman

CRY FOR HELP

Steve Mosby

2008

Orion Books

Mosby's book from last year, *THE 50/50 KILLER*, was a true pleasure to read. When I started reading his latest, *CRY FOR HELP* my expectations were high. I'm quite happy to say that Mr. Mosby did not let me down.

Dave Lewis is a troubled man trying to ignore the past and struggling to keep his present in control. He works as a magician and puts out a magazine that gives him a forum to blast his parents and their beliefs.

Detective Sam Currie is a man living with grief. The grief for a dead son he couldn't protect and marriage he couldn't save. To say that he is focused on his job is a gross understatement. His job at the moment is stopping a killer killing women and torturing their families with emails. Currie discovers a link between his current case and the death of his son and unfortunately for Dave Lewis, he's it.

This is a barn burner of a suspense novel that escalates the pace and edginess with every turn of a page. Steve Mosby is an incredibly gifted writer and you would do yourself a disservice not to be reading him.

Jon Jordan

CURSE OF THE SPELLMANS

Lisa Lutz

Simon & Schuster

March 2008

THE SPELLMAN FILES, the first book in this series, introduced Isabel ["Izzy"] Spellman, thirty-year-old p.i. employed by Spellman Investigations, daughter of a former Inspector in the San Francisco Police Department, as was his father,

grandfather and brother before him, and described as a cross between Dirty Harry and Nancy Drew. Spellman Investigations consists of Mom Olivia, Dad Albert, Izzy and her sister Rae, presently fifteen years of age. David, described by Izzy as her “freakishly attractive, intellectually superior, and all-around charming brother,” is an attorney, having left the firm several years back, and has recently married Izzy’s best friend and former fellow delinquent, Petra. The family members have a loving if decidedly dysfunctional relationship – not in a dark way – and only if you consider conducting surveillance and using coercion and outright blackmail on family members – all as a matter of course – dysfunctional [e.g., routinely secretly recording conversations with family members]. Her younger sister, Rae, had for a while taken up “recreational surveillance,” or spying on strangers, in her spare time. She has more recently taken up safer [or maybe not] habits – spending most of her after-school hours haunting the office of Superintendent Henry Stone, introduced in the earlier book, to the latter’s dismay and occasional displeasure. He is described as now being an “honorary member” of the Spellman family – something not for the faint of heart, to be sure.

This time around Izzy is doing background checks on their new next-door neighbor, apparently – and suspiciously – named John Brown, who claims to be a gardener, but who is frequently seen throwing away copious amounts of shredded paper.

The author has a somewhat non-linear style, just enough to keep the reader a bit off-balance, perfectly in keeping with her characters. A new addition is introduced in this book: Morty Schilling, the “pint-size octogenarian” pro bono lawyer hired by Izzy after her fourth arrest in a short period of time [or is it her second? The correct answer is dependent on whom one asks]. The Spellmans are just as endearing and outrageous the second time around, and the book is a very entertaining read.

Gloria Feit

DAKOTA
Martha Grimes
February 2008
Viking

Previously, Andi Oliver suffered various traumatic experiences and now suffers from amnesia. She remembers nothing of her previous 19 or 20 years, except for the past two years. She does remember shooting a man and running away, walking across three states, with short stopovers for waitress jobs to earn a few dollars, then continuing on her journey. Walking down a dirt road near Kingdom, ND, she sees a mistreated donkey by a fence. She liberates it and treats various sores, afterwards taking it into town. Andi befriends a local widower who offers her a part-time job and room and board. Later, with time on her hands, she takes on another part-time job at a hog “factory farm,” as well as at a nearby slaughterhouse, where she witnesses untold acts of cruelty toward the animals. These observations allow the author to feature her own beliefs in animal rights and vegetarianism.

Another element of the plot is the two men trailing Andi (who knows what her real name is? She adopted her current moniker from the initials “A O” on her backpack) across three states, one of whom seeks information from her past, which she can’t remember. As in the previous novel that introduced Andi, DAKOTA is tender and appealing, as well as informative. One can assume we will be seeing Andi again, a good thing to be sure.

Theodore Feit

THE DARK TIDE
Andrew Gross
March 18, 2008
William Morrow

A couple of million here, a couple of million there. Before you know it, it adds up to a lot of loot. In this novel, in fact, Charles Friedman, who runs a hedge fund, managed to lose a billion dollars trading. And the consequences lead to his trying to cover up the losses from some very dangerous people who stop at nothing, including murder. Then one day, when he rides into Grand Central Station to his office, a bomb goes off on his train and fire spreads all over. When he doesn’t show up at work, he is presumed dead. But is he? Meanwhile, a hit-and-run death near his home in Greenwich, CT, intrigues a police detective. And threats against Friedman’s wife brings him into contact with the cop. From there events progress in a fairly straightforward manner, leading to a pretty obvious conclusion. That observation isn’t particularly negative, in any sense. The book is well-paced and logical. All one has to do is follow the hidden secrets from beginning to end. The only question unanswered and unexplained is how a billion dollars can be lost before steps are taken to prevent massive losses, or just how Friedman’s cover-up really works. Otherwise, a good read.

Theodore Feit

DEATH OF A GENTLE LADY

M. C. Beaton

February 2008

Grand Central Publishing

When an author creates a character that's so appealing, with all the human emotions and foibles and the ability to bumble into solutions to murders and crimes, it is mandatory that the series continue on and on. Such a protagonist is Hamish Macbeth, the constable in the sleepy village of Lochdubh, Scotland. This novel is the 23rd, and it is still as fresh and entertaining as the first.

In GENTLE LADY, Hamish encounters a recent resident to "his" town who is much adored by the people for her sedate manner and promises of donations, for example, for a new church roof. Hamish, in performing his perceived duties, pays her a welcome visit and apparently antagonizes her for some reason he can't fathom. As a result, she undertakes a strong effort to get his one-man police station closed.

In an effort to stay in his beloved village, Hamish blunders his way into a foolish situation. Then two murders take place, giving him the opportunity once again to prove himself. A delight to read.

Theodore Feit

DEVIL'S PEAK

Deon Meyer

March 2008

Little, Brown & Co.

Three very flawed but sympathetic characters populate this novel. There is Thobela Mpayipheli, a Black South African who was trained as an assassin by the East German secret police. Then there is Benny Griessel, alcoholic detective. And lastly, Christine van Rooyen, a prostitute with a three-year-old daughter. Somehow, their lives intertwine in a gripping story which keeps the reader off-balance all the way.

Initially, Thobela is introduced as a farmer who recently lost his wife, leaving him with a young boy who he loves very much. The boy is shot dead during an armed robbery, setting off a chain of events which leads Thobela to act as an avenging vigilante against abusers of children. Benny, once (and possibly even in his present continual alcoholic haze) a superior detective, is kicked out of his home by his long-suffering wife with the admonishment that he might be permitted to return if he stays sober for six months. Meanwhile, he is placed in charge of two important cases, including the serial killer of abused children. Christine's story alternates with the other two as she sits confessing to a priest. Her tale plays a pivotal role in the lives of the other two.

This is the author's fourth novel, each superior reading. His complex stories and descriptions of South Africa are exceptional, his characters unusual and graphic, his works top-notch. Like his previous efforts, DEVIL'S PEAK is highly recommended.

Theodore Feit

DIRTY DEEDS

Suzanne Price

July 2008

Obsidian / Penguin Books

The subtitle is: A Grime Solvers Mystery. No that's not a typo, it's a play on words. The heroine, Sky Taylor, is a house and building cleaner in present day Pigeon Cove, Massachusetts.

After a Christmas party, Sky is going to clean up, but one of the guests refuses to leave. Well--he doesn't refuse, he just doesn't move, just stays asleep in a hammock. But we know better, and soon so does Sky when she and her friend, Chloe, try to extricate him from his cocoon.

Since it's a mystery, we also know that he didn't have a heart attack all on his own, induced yes, and by a rare poison, maybe.

In the meantime, Sky's hippie mother descends on her, and Sky's reported boyfriend, Mike, presses her to take in a roommate who is willing to tell all about one of the town's upstanding citizens. Upstanding, except when he's prone and that's what she is going to tell all about, as she is a woman scorned.

On page 140, Sky unloads all of her problems on Betty-Mom. "A few months ago my friend Jessie Barton leaves the Cove, no explanation offered. Then I stumble on Kyle Fipps body after a Christmas gala. Then my boyfriend, Mike brings a gorgeous Amazon stripper home from Boston, and before I know it she's rooming with me, coming and going at all

hours when she isn't walking around my place stark naked...and I find out she's having an affair with..." Sky continues to catalog her woes and rightly so. And to get out of the morass she has to find out who killed Kyle.

Land deals, betrayals, real estate, swapped wives, and other nefarious deeds provide more than enough dirt for Sky to clean up, and she does.

Author Jerome Preisler has written many books, fiction and non-fiction, and now has teamed up with his wife, Suzanne under the name of Suzanne Price to create this wonderful mystery series.

Breezy, fast-moving, solid plot. Excellent read.

Gay Toltl Kinman

DON'T TELL A SOUL

David Rosenfelt

July 2008

St. Martin's Minotaur

Several months ago, protagonist Tim Wallace, lost his wife. They went out on his boat and just a few moments after Wallace dove into the water, the boat exploded into flames. He's spent the subsequent months mourning her loss, trying to figure out why something so awful could happen to her, and trying to prove his innocence to one detective who is certain Wallace is the one responsible for the explosion. But on New Year's eve, when his friends drag him to a bar to have some and take a break from mourning, a drunken stranger whispers three words in his ear that turns his world upside down.

"I murdered someone."

He goes on to tell Wallace that he killed a girl three months ago and gives him the location before warning him, "Don't tell a soul." At first, Wallace brushes it off as just the ramblings of a drunk, but soon feels a civic duty to tell the authorities. But when this stranger is a link to his wife's death, Wallace is implicated in two murders and a possible terrorist threat, he must evade the police and find out who is responsible for the set up.

Rosenfelt is a gifted suspense writer and knows how to maintain tension throughout the story. Despite some loose plot ties and jarring point of view shifts, DON'T TELL A SOUL kept me engaged and dying to know what happens next.

Dana Kaye

EXILE TRUST

Vincent H. O'Neil

July 2008

A Thomas Dunne Book for St. Martin's Minotaur

Frank Cole is still festering, albeit fairly contentedly, in Exile, Florida. He's working just enough to have money to live on while not making enough to get his creditors on his butt. Not a great life, but not all bad.

Frank helped the local police with a case recently, so when the local bank needs some low-key investigating done, Chief Dannon recommends Frank for the job. Apparently the record keeping for the safety deposit boxes hasn't been stellar, and the auditors are coming. Can Frank track down ten or twelve people that the bank can't seem to locate? Sounds easy enough.

The first one or two are pretty simple. Then the job gets complicated. Somebody poses as the husband of a box-holder on vacation and gets into the vault. Frank then finds out that the real box-holder just died. And her husband has been dead for years. Was Dorothy Freehoffer's fall down the basement steps really an accident? She wasn't a popular person, but murder does seem a little extreme.

When Frank tries to find out who the faux husband was, he stumbles into a morass of old crimes and old ties to the real estate boom of a decade or so ago.

O'Neil has taken a fairly routine situation and parlayed it into an engrossing mystery. The characters ring true and the plot is certainly not unrealistic or unbelievable. Frank Cole has grown a bit since his first appearance, and that has been fun to watch. This entry in the series lives up to the promise shown in O'Neil's first book, MURDER IN EXILE.

P.J. Coldren

EXILE TRUST

Vincent H. O'Neil

July 2008

Thomas Dunne / St. Martin's Minotaur

The title refers to the small town of Exile, Florida, and it has its problems. One of its economical mainstays is the bank, and it's in trouble. But not what you're thinking. It's the safe deposit boxes. Records haven't been kept up, someone has complained and there is going to be a bank examination. The Chief of Police asks Frank Cole to help find the owners of

the boxes. Frank doesn't see this as a major problem. He has a week, and following up on what leads the bank has, surely they can locate most of the boxes' owners. It is, after all, a small town. Frank guesses some of the owners are now deceased.

Meanwhile, the husband of one of the owners, Dorothea Freehoffer, comes in to check on their box. Wearing hat and sunglasses, he sure looks like the owner's husband. The only problem is that the husband is dead, and has been for a while.

Then Dorothea is discovered dead. A fall down her stairs. Mmmm.

Frank wants to find out who the imposter is, what was in the box and why was it important for him to get it. Was Dorothea's death really an accident? When he starts talking to her best friend, who lives behind her on the next street, he finds out many interesting things. Was Dorothea a blackmailer, since she received money from someone on a regular basis? If she was, what secret did she harbor? And whose secret was it? Blackmailers are always a target for murder. The more Frank digs, the more he finds out, and the more ill-will he generates with someone who doesn't want him to continue any of his sleuthing jobs, including the safety deposit one.

Gay Tolti Kinman

FOOL ON THE HILL

Morgan Hunt

2008

Alyson Books

Tess Camillo made her first appearance in "Sticky Fingers," as an amateur sleuth, and the book was a finalist in the 2007 Reader Views Literary Award, and was nominated for the Golden Crown Literary Society Award.

The title comes from a song of Cody Crowne, whose concert Tess attended the night before. Tess thinks about this and about her breast cancer operation and survival, as she goes walking in a San Diego park the next morning. She wants to resume her love life, but is very insecure because of what has happened to her body. How will intimate situations work--for she definitely needs love and affection. She feels ready to tackle this, and that is in her thoughts.

Alas, these thoughts fly out as she comes upon Cody--crucified.

Tess finds herself compelled to find Cody's murderer for three reasons. She was at his last concert, her roommate has asked her to find the murderer, and she discovered Cody's body.

Obviously the manner of death, and some other clues point to a relationship between the killer and the victim. Revenge or something else? Finding the key will help Tess find the murderer. She interviews Cody's friends, acquaintances and other nefarious individuals. No question the music industry is a dog eat dog world, each climbing over the others in a betrayal walk to get to the top. But only one of these killed Cody. Who hated him the most? Who had the most to gain? Or who was the loser?

At the moment she figures out who the murderer is, she finds herself a very close candidate for the same death, and in the same excruciating manner as Cody died.

Well-written, plausible plot, and love scenes. If you are not interested in the open bedroom door of two women, then this book is not for you.

Gay Tolti Kinman

FROM DEAD TO WORSE

Charlaine Harris

May, 2008

ACE

Sookie is back home in Bon Temps but the times are far from good. Just back from witnessing the death of many in the southern Vampire Community and is worried about her current love, Quinn, whom she hasn't seen since getting home. Between the bombing and the aftermath of Katrina the supernatural communities of Louisiana are all in unsettling and vulnerable states. The predators are knocking on the door and Sookie is up to her pretty little neck in every battle in town. A Stackhouse outing always promises its reader personal as well as community development. Here a throw-away line from a prior novel makes its way to the forefront in FROM DEAD TO WORSE. A Delicious subplot introducing us to new relatives may be the highlight of this book. Or perhaps it's the disappointment we feel when many we've come to know let our fav telepath down. In a world of human uncertainty a telepath may not be able to see the future but Sookie always attacks it head on.

FROM DEAD TO WORSE is another lively outing from Crimespree's favorite southern belle.

FUZZY NAVEL

J.A. Konrath

2008

Hyperion

Konrath's Jack Daniels series is a favorite of mine and I think it's some of the best entertainment on the shelf. Each book makes me laugh, and keeps me up late reading.

Book five in the series, FUZZY NAVEL, opens as we find our heroine, Jacqueline Daniels in a pretty good place. Her job is going well, her boyfriend is feeling better after what happened to him in DIRTY MARTINI, and a whack job that Jack helped lock up has decided to do the world a favor and add himself to his list of victims.

Of course, in Jack's world, not everything can be sunshine and roses for long. The rain on this parade is vigilantes who go too far and kill a cop. Rain turns to hail when it looks like suicide victim Alex Kork may not be dead after all. Jack's life soon becomes a warzone and things can't end well, for anyone.

Konrath has toned down the humor in this nail biter and amped up the action. This book moves so fast it was like having the words fired into my head by a machine gun. There is also an ending that will make your jaw drop.

Thanks J.A.!

Jon Jordan

THE GENTLE AXE

R.N. Morris

March 2008

Penguin Books

They don't write Russian novels like the old masers any more. But this effort comes close. The year is 1866 in St. Petersburg and we find investigating magistrate Porfiry Petrovich still weary from the case, the year before, of the deranged student Raskolnikov made known to us in CRIME AND PUNISHMENT.

While an historical mystery, the story progresses more like a modern-day police procedural. It begins one wintry day with the body of a large peasant hanging from a tree in a park. Nearby, a suitcase lies with a dwarf in it, his head cut open by an axe which is found on the hanging man's belt. Is it a simple case of murder and suicide? From this beginning the story progresses to more murders, bringing Porfiry across a wide swath of the people and sites of the then Russian capital.

It would not be fair to compare this novel to one by Dostoyevsky, suffice it to say it is a real suspense-filled mystery, intricately plotted and completely enjoyable.

Theodore Feit

GO-GO GIRLS OF THE APOCALYPSE

Victor Gischler

2008

Touchstone Books

Well, I think that people are going to have a hell of a time deciding how to categorize this book. While it does take place in a post apocalypse world and could be called Science Fiction it also has loads of crime fiction elements. Let's forget that stuff though because it really does not matter. What matters is that Victor Gischler has given us a book that is entertaining beyond words.

Mortimer Tate has been hiding in a cave in Tennessee and now ten years after the event that screwed the world he has come out to an entirely different planet. The only real civilization left is a string of clubs called Armageddon's Sassy-a-go-go. Tate undertakes a journey with three companions, Buffalo Bill and Sheila and Tyler, two ass kicking ladies. The plan is to get to Atlanta and save the world.

Gischler is wonderful when writing crime fiction. Here he is even better. No boundaries to hold him in a world he created with its own rules. His rapid fire dialogue is perfect and the story moves faster than a frat boy in a free beer line. This is a must own book.

HELL HOLE

Chris Grabenstein

2008

Minotaur

The fourth John Ceepak novel is with a new publisher and though the cover looks a bit different it is every bit as wonderful as the previous books.

Grabenstein has put together a wonderful story that has Ceepak and partner Danny Boyle running all over Sea Haven trying to figure out if a suicide at a nearby rest stop really was a suicide. Before long they are dealing with marines on leave, arsonists, drug dealers and aging hippies. The case ends up involving some shady government dealings and it could mean big trouble for our boys.

Grabenstein once again kept me up late with a thrilling novel full of twists and turns. The pacing in these books is perfect and Grabenstein really knows how to grab the reader's attention and run with it. If this book was music I would have the volume all the way up.

Jon

HELL'S FIRE

Chris Simms

2008

Orion Books

Chris Simms is an amazing author who, by some twisted sense of fate, is still relatively unknown in the US. His latest book, HELL'S FIRE, is novel that should be read by anyone who loves taut, fast paced mysteries.

Jon Spicer is a Detective Inspector with the Manchester Major Incidents Squad. He and his fellow officers are called in to investigate a church burning. A dead body and symbols that can only be satanic make the case a priority. The case escalates with more killings and Spicer needs to solve this crime before the whole city is in flames. Spicer is a veteran copper but everyone has their limits and this case could push Spicer to his.

Simms has filled every page of this book with a sense of urgency that creates a vacuum seal on the reader and won't let go. Absorbing and utterly enjoyable this is another great book from one of the new masters. Seek this book out.

Jon Jordan

HOLD TIGHT

Harlan Coben

April 2008

Dutton

Unexpected twists and turns complete with a surprising ending characterize the novels of this popular author, and this book is no exception. As with his previous efforts, Coben uses his New Jersey background for a setting, although for some strange reason the Bronx plays a vital role.

Mike and Tia Baye are a suburban couple with two children. He's a surgeon, she's an attorney. Their 16-year-old son has become withdrawn and sullen, especially after the suicide of his best friend, and they are unable to penetrate his withdrawal. So they go against their better judgment and begin spying on him. They place spyware on his computer to learn what he is surfing, and read his e-mails. Thus begins a trip down a dangerous path. The son runs away and his parents learn he plans to go to a drug and drinking party.

If that isn't enough excitement, there are a few other sub-plots with enough intrigue and danger to keep the reader on edge. Written with the author's accustomed tautness, the intricacies of the plot keep moving steadily forward to a rousing finish.

Theodore Feit

I SHALL NOT WANT

Julia Spencer-Fleming

2008

St. Martin's Press/Thomas Dunne Books

Clare Fergusson is a woman torn. She still loves Russ Van Alstyne. She has enlisted in the National Guard, and is spending much of her free time working on getting in all the flight time she needs. She is still the resident priest at the local Episcopal church, and the Bishop's watchdog is still keeping an eye on her. She is grieving about all the things that have torn her life apart, and not handling that grief as well as she'd like to think she is.

Russ Van Alstyne is torn as well. He still loves Clare. He loves his wife. He misses his best friend, and the relationship they used to have. The job is still there for him, but it isn't the solace it used to be. Now is not the time Russ wants to be dealing with a serial killer, or with the concomitant publicity. He's just not up for it.

Into this miasma of emotions comes murder, illegal aliens, and a new character for the readers to enjoy. Hadley Knox is the newest cop on the force. She's leery of emotional entanglements, coming off a very bad relationship. She's unsure of herself, still taking courses at the Police Academy and very aware of her lack of knowledge. It doesn't help that Kevin Flynn, the youngest cop around, is very conscious of her as a woman and he isn't quite sure how to handle her. She's a single mom with two kids, living with her father, and scraping to get by. When he has a heart attack, her life becomes almost unmanageable.

Spencer-Fleming just keeps getting better as a writer. Nothing that she puts Clare and Russ through is outside the realm of possibility, and their reactions to their situation and to each other ring true to the characters we've come to know. The plotting is good, although the ending will probably not be a big surprise to most readers. Spencer-Fleming makes the

setting so vital to the story, although it doesn't overpower the action. *I SHALL NOT WANT* can be read as a stand-alone but to truly appreciate all the nuances, one should read the series in order. It will not be time wasted.

P.J. Coldren

IN THE WIND

Barbara Fister

2008

St. Martin's Minotaur

I don't require profundity from the crime fiction I read. While I always appreciate the kind of tight plotting, vivid characterizations, and motional storylines that compel my participation with the author's imagination, I don't demand that the zippered pockets of my psyche be opened by some revelation during the experience. Sometimes a vicarious adrenaline rush, the pure fun of clever folly, or a well-chartered prow through darkness is all I need. When I do find a book with elements that prod the reading into deeper relevance, I take note. If it can do so without obvious pedantic manipulation and without sacrificing any of the genre's standard virtues, I usually count it among the best. Barbara Fister's *In the Wind* ranks in this category.

The story explores the way fear, when it enters the social fabric, can become a vehicle of suppression and oppression. Until recently a respected member of the Chicago PD, Anni Koskinen is now a private investigator with a single case under her belt. At the request of a neighborhood priest, she offers to help a church member—and becomes inadvertently instrumental in the woman's subsequent escape. After an interrogation from local and federal authorities, Anni learns that the woman she met as "Rosa" is actually a fugitive accused of the 1972 murder of an FBI agent. That agent's son, also a member of the Bureau and one of Anni's oldest friends, is concerned with the integrity of the official response. He asks Anni to work with Rosa's defense team in uncovering the truth behind his father's death.

What follows is a fast-paced, multi-layered investigation that smartly parallels our contemporary, post-9/11 culture of paranoia with the counterintelligence-fueled instability of the Vietnam War era. Anni is drawn into a conflict that involves members of a white supremacy group, a radical faction of the American Indian Movement, the FBI, and the Chicago PD. By forcing engaging, sympathetic characters into situations that threaten their personal or ideological securities, Fister explores the interplay between the perception of radicalism and the conception of civil liberties. This is an intriguing book that rewards on every level!

Rebecca Tatham

KILLER HEAT

Linda Fairstein

March 2008

Doubleday

This latest legal *cum* detective fiction brings back the dynamic trio—DA Alex Cooper and her two detective buddies Mercer and Chapman. This time, they are faced with a series of rape-murders with almost no clues. As side stories, Alex prosecutes a serial rapist decades after the events, is faced with gang-related revenge efforts, and, on the lighter side, pursues her romantic involvement with the Frenchman, Luc, who she met in the previous novel in the series.

As in previous entries, Ms. Fairstein's trademark descriptions of various New York City landmarks providing authentic knowledge of the sites and history lend an unparalleled flavor to the story. In the present case, such information relating to Governor's Island and Breezy Point provide background to the plot.

The novel is so well-paced that the reader will have a hard time putting it down before reaching the stirring climax. About all that's unresolved in this, the author's tenth crime novel, is what is going to happen next—if anything—with her relationship with Luc. Nevertheless, it's a great read and shouldn't be missed.

Theodore Feit

THE LEMUR

Benjamin Black

July 2008

Picador

Black manages to pack memorable characters, suspense, and a well thought out plot into this slim novella, and he does it without compromising detail or texture. Journalist, John Glass, is hired to write the authorized biography of his father-in-law, former CIA agent turned wealthy entrepreneur. But his researcher, whom Glass refers to as "the Lemur", finds uncovers secrets in the family's past and blackmails Glass to keep the information quiet. Before Glass has a chance to panic, "the Lemur" is found murdered in his apartment with all his computer equipment stolen. With clear motive and

opportunity, Glass is number one on the list of police suspects. Now he struggles to prove his innocence and keep the family's skeletons tucked safely in the closet.

The tone is dark and gritty, making *THE LEMUR* a modern day pulp novel. Glass's aversion to technology, his addiction to Irish whisky and cigarettes, even his way of speaking are all reminiscent of 1950's noir fiction. The artful writing style and masterful plot make this novella a short, but superb read.

Dana Kaye

LIFELINES

C. J. Lyons
March 2008
Berkley

C.J. Lyons is an engaging new voice in the mystery scene, and a most welcome one. With her debut novel, she presents Dr. Lydia Fiore, who as the book begins is entering her first day of work as attending physician in the Emergency Department at Angels of Mercy Medical Center, as well as the new medical director and training advisor of the EMS. Lydia, now 30 years old, is a product of LA's foster care system, newly arrived in town and trying to adjust to life in Pittsburgh, a far cry from the surfer world she knew. She appears to be earning the grudging respect of her new colleagues when a trauma patient comes in, a twenty-eight year old male pedestrian struck down by a car, suddenly in much worse condition than originally thought, having lost consciousness and gone into profound respiratory distress in the ambulance en route to the hospital.

Although Lydia takes every conceivable step she can think of to save him, the patient dies. Lydia, tormenting herself with what she may have missed that might have saved the young man's life, finds she doesn't have that luxury as her problems have more far-reaching consequences: the dead man is the son of the hospital's chief surgery, who publicly accuses her of killing his son. She is immediately placed on suspension, threatening her entire professional career and civil and possibly criminal charges promised. The mystery arises when it appears that the dead man, a gay rights activist, may have been murdered.

Lydia is but one of the hospital workers featured in the book. There is also Gina, third-year emergency medical resident; Amanda, 4th-year med student; Nora, the charge nurse who butts heads with Lydia on her first day but is slowly coming to admire her medical skills; Seth, fourth-resident surgical resident and Nora's boyfriend, who apparently has some secrets; and the assorted male docs, interns and paramedics who orbit their lives. Interspersed with exciting and realistic medical crises both in and outside of the hospital [the author is a pediatric ER physician] are scenes giving the reader gradual knowledge of the women's private lives. At the risk of getting corny [which the book is not], the novel is all about the literal as well as figurative lifelines we all reach for. This is a first-rate novel, with strong plotting, well-drawn characters, and just enough romance to not get in the way of the mystery, and is recommended.

Theodore Feit

THE MAP THIEF

Heather Terrell
July 2008
Ballantine Books

I am not fascinated by maps but I was by this book. Alternating chapters between the early 1400s China, the late 1400s Portugal, and the present day beginning in New York City.

The hero of the former is Zhi, a eunuch mapmaker. The second is Antonio, mapmaker for explorer de Gama. The third is heroine attorney, turned art investigator, Mara Coyne. She is also a negotiator and lobbyist for legislation to prevent the export of antiquities from their native countries, and a private investigator of art thefts.

Richard Tobias hires her to find a map that was stolen from a Chinese excavation he is financing. Ben Coleman is the archeologist who found a body and the map. The map is the early 1400s, the body the late 1400s, which presents another mystery.

The premise, quite plausible, is that the Chinese did much more exploration than historians know about. The reason is that a new Emperor came in and his first edict was to destroy all the maps of these trips. He wanted to turn the focus of the country inward, not outward.

The voyages of all three of the narrators take the reader all over the world as we learn the true story of the stolen map. Each is a map thief in a way. Zhi 'steals' the ideas from many maps, at the bequest of Admiral Zheng He, before they are destroyed at the new Emperor's order. Zheng does not want his explorations to be forgotten, for they are spectacular. Antonio 'steals' ideas to make the map for de Gama as the latter explores supposedly uncharted territory, for very few knew that a Chinese map existed, let alone what it showed. Mara does her own 'stealing.' Her belief is that the map should be returned to the rightful owners, the Chinese, but there are complications.

Clever plot, well told tale.

Gay Tolti Klinman

THE MAN IN THE BLIZZARD

Bart Schneider

2008

Three Rivers Press

This book is not a typical PI novel nor is it a typical mystery. While it has elements of both, it may not appeal to readers looking for a straightforward investigation book. That said, I really enjoyed THE MAN IN THE BLIZZARD.

Set in the twin cities in Minnesota, we are tagging along with Augie Boyer PI. Augie is an intriguing man. Divorced, not in the best of health due to a love of smoking and eating, and a bit obsessed with his ex-wife. His daughter has a career as a singer who likes to share her family problems with her audience. And he has a cop friend who has awoken a love of poetry.

Augie is working for a woman that wants him to track down a missing violin and keep tabs on her husband. Hubby is up to something fishy involving his keeping time with really bad folks. Add an anti-abortion rally and neo Nazis, and we have a PI over his head.

The case is interesting, but it really isn't the focus of the book. Augie is. By the time I finished this I couldn't help but love the guy.

This may not have enough mystery for all fans of the genre, but I would urge people looking for something a little different to pick it up.

Jon Jordan

MIGHTY OLD BONES

Mary Saums

2008

Minotaur

Best friends Jane Thistle and Phoebe Twigg are back in MIGHTY OLD BONES, the latest from Mary Saums. Saums writes absolutely delightful mysteries and this one is a winner.

A storm knocks over a tree and unearths a skeleton on Jane's property and it soon becomes evident that this is not some ancient burial site. This puts a severe cramp in the promise they made to each other not to get involved in another murder, as well as the project of helping set up an event at the library. While the mystery drives the story what really makes it work is the friendship between Jane and Phoebe, and it's written in such a way that at times the reader feels like a third part of an unspoken trio.

Saums has a solid plot with the mystery and a wonderful take on some truly enjoyable characters. This book is a bit lighter than some Crimespree readers may enjoy, but I found it to be a witty and fun traditional mystery.

Jon Jordan

MR. MONK GOES TO GERMANY

Lee Goldberg

2008

Obsidion

I enjoy the show "Monk." It isn't too heavy and has real mysteries being solved. It's just funny enough without over doing it. And while I love "heavier" shows like "the Shield" and "The Wire", "Monk" is a nice way for me to unwind. Reading novelizations of television shows is an interesting experience. Not all are done well, but the ones that are really add depth to the characters and the enjoyment of the show. Among the authors who do "tie in novels", Lee Goldberg is among the best. Every nuance of the show is in the book, and because there are no constraints of having to film it the medium allows for an expansion of the stories.

In MR. MONK GOES TO GERMANY, Monk's doctor is going away for a conference and a much needed break. Monk, of course, can't take it and before two days go by he's on a plane to Germany to keep his scheduled appointments with his doctor. And because this is Monk he soon becomes involved in a murder case. However, this murder may lead to the man who killed his wife.

Goldberg has such an incredible way with words, the story flows so smoothly it's effortless to read, it's almost as if it was being read to me. And the plot has some wonderful twists and turns and is a perfect classic mystery. Whether you watch the show or not, you should really be reading these books.

Jon Jordan

MURDER IN THE RUE DE PARADIS

Cara Black

March 2008

Soho Crime

The real question is which is more interesting: the intricate unfolding of this Aimee Leduc mystery or the detailed and authentic descriptions of Paris. Each aspect, in its way, combines for an impelling story. Just as Aimee reconnects with her on-again-off-again boyfriend in a meaningful way, he is murdered. In attempting to discover the identity of the perpetrator, Aimee becomes involved in a wider conspiracy involving the Moslem population of Paris, including Kurds and Turks, Iranians and a religious Jihad. The plot is fashioned in such a way as to keep the reader completely in suspense, while taking one through the streets and quays in a backdrop so detailed that one can smell the Seine.

Theodore Feit

NEUROPATH
Scott Baker
2008
Orion Books

Scott Baker has done something not a lot of authors have done. He made me cringe while reading his novel NEUROPATH, and it wasn't "a this a terrible book" cringe, it was a "this is really disturbing" cringe. For me that means he really did something special.

Tom is a fairly normal guy, divorced and not really living a very exciting life. Not exciting until a friend he hasn't seen in years comes back into his life courtesy of a video shown to him by the FBI. Tom teaches psychology and his old buddy Neil went into research. Unfortunately Neil became a bit obsessed with his research and started experimenting on innocent people. As his research involved surgery on the human brain, his experiments have the FBI wanting him brought down and they ask Tom to help track down his former friend.

I found this book fascinating totally lost myself to it. I can't wait to see what Baker writes next.

Jon Jordan

THE NIGHT FOLLOWING

Morag Joss
March 2008
Delacorte Press

On the day she discovered her husband's infidelity, the woman was driving home from the supermarket in the rain. She hit a woman traveling on bike, instantly killing her. Thus begins a complex tale. The novel alternates between letters written by the husband of the victim to his dead wife, chapters of the victim's novel, and the reactions of the motorist. It is a complex concept, and wearing on the reader. The husband, Arthur Mitchell, shows an inability to cope without his wife, Ruth, and slowly deteriorates. The motorist kicks her husband out, and then devotes herself to secretly assisting Arthur, by spending nights at his home cleaning up, cooking and doing other chores by way of atonement. Eventually, Arthur comes to believe that his dead wife somehow has returned to care for him, not realizing the very person responsible for her death is right there. It is a complicated and even perverse novel. And, I venture to say, probably will appeal to a restricted and limited audience, no matter how well-written it is.

Theodore Feit

OCCUPATIONAL HAZARD
Jonathan Segura
July 2008
Simon & Schuster

I once had an author who used to come into my bookstore store and say "I want the reader to hate my main character." I honestly don't see the logic behind this. You read a book because you want to see what's happening to Elvis Cole or because you love Dave Robicheaux. You sympathize with the main character. You love them or are just generally interested in them.

I started reading Jonathan Segura's first novel "Occupational Hazard" and almost immediately hated the main character, Bernard Cockburn. He reminds me of a young version of Archie Bunker. If there is a politically incorrect statement to be made, this character is making it.

Cockburn is a reporter on a weekly newspaper who is given the assignment to cover a housing development. Not content on doing a flowery story on the good news neighborhood, he quickly hones in on the vigilante neighborhood watch.

Bernard finds a couple of loose threads and starts tugging. Soon things start to unravel...maybe a little too easily.

I was debating on putting this book down, tired of the relationship between Bernard and his on-and-off (mostly off)-again girlfriend. Not to mention the drugs and alcohol that control Bernard's life.

But just when I thought the author had lulled me to sleep, the book did a mini- explosion in my hand and left me standing looking around asking "What just happened?"

On the back of the book, Simon and Schuster compare Jonathan Segura as a kind of Elmore Leonard meets Bret Easton Ellis. I'm not sure they read this book. I would have compared him more to a Jason Starr meets Lawrence Sanders style. In the end I enjoyed the novel. Even grew to have sympathy for the main character. Go figure. Personally, I'll be watching out for the 2nd Jonathan Segura novel.

Don Longmuir

Scene of the Crime Books,

www.murdermysteriesandmore.com

THE OSAGE ROSE

Tom Holm

2008

University of Arizona Press

A wonderful debut novel from this professor of American Indian Studies, THE OSAGE ROSE earns Tom Holm on my must read list.

A post World War I private eye in Tulsa, JD Daugherty is looking forward to some easy money from some easy cases. A missing persons case which seems straight forward soon makes JD realize that he'll really be earning his money. Rose Chischester has run off with her boyfriend, Tommy Ruffle, who just happens to be an American Indian heir to oil owned by his tribe. JD and his sometime partner, Cherokee Indian Hoolie Smith, are soon in for more trouble than they bargained for when Tommy ends up dead and a cache of secrets that could ruin lives are uncovered.

Fast paced with a wonderful flavor of the period and real old west feel this is a stunning debut.

Jon Jordan

PREPARED FOR RAGE

Dana Stabenow

February 2008

St. Martin's Minotaur

When an author has a passion for a subject, it shows mightily. Such an author is Dana Stabenow, who expends great efforts in first-hand research aboard Coast Guard vessels in an effort to portray the men and mission of that service with authenticity. This approach was demonstrated in the previous effort, BLINDFOLD GAME, and again in this the author's 15th novel and second standalone, which also adds NASA and a space shuttle launch to the mix, as well as a terrorist plot on a level equal to 9/11.

The Coast Guard's mission during launches is to keep a wide area off the coast of Florida clear of surface ships to avoid collisions with falling debris. In this case, the cutter *Munro*, captained by Cal Schuler, son of a U.S. Senator, is assigned the duty of directing the operation because it is named for a relative of Kenai Munro. Kenai is one of the shuttle's crew, and also has the role of providing a love interest for Cal.

The "bad guy" goes by many names, the latest of which is Isa, apparently a play on the name of Jesus. He is acting independently of bin Laden and al Qaeda in an effort to establish his rep, and recruits his own cell independently of the terrorist organization. He is determined to strike at the space shuttle, a most visible symbol of the United States on a par with, if not even more important than, the twin towers.

Written with the power and excellence of the previous novels, the book is mind-boggling and eerie, full of action which includes a high-speed ocean chase. It is a clever concept and smartly executed.

Theodore Feit

THE PRICE OF BLOOD

Declan Hughes

March 2008

William Morrow

The latest in the Ed Loy series has the Irish PI looking for a jockey who disappeared years before after holding back a favorite horse so it would lose. It brings him into the midst of deep dark secrets of a prominent horse-breeding and -racing family. Although there isn't enough information to even begin an investigation, such a lack doesn't seem to deter Loy.

Discovery of the first of several bodies opens the inquiry into the many mysteries of the Tyrell family. All this takes place beginning on Christmas Eve and leads up to the four-day Leopardstown Racecourse Christmas Festival. The story is set among the current and past Irish economic and social conditions, with observations on the people and the Catholic Church playing an important role. The plot involves, as usual, the sins of the fathers cast upon the children.

The drama is high, the writing solid. This third in the series is as gripping as its predecessors.

Theodore Feit

QUIVER

Peter Leonard

2008

Thomas Dunne Books

The author recalls having written a screenplay and showing it to his father, Elmore Leonard. "Wanting to be a screenwriter is like wanting to be a co-pilot," was the response. "You want to write, write a book." Well he wrote the first chapter, submitted it to his father and waited. "Boy, you're on the way." And the rest of the chapters complete the tale. When he read the entire manuscript, Leonard *pere* commented: "You've got a sound. It took me ten years to get my sound. You've written a terrific novel." And so he has.

The plot is a relatively simple one: Kate McCall becomes a widow when her husband is killed by their son in a hunting accident. Over the next seven months, the boy becomes withdrawn and runs away. Then he is kidnapped with \$2 million demanded in ransom. The real value in the book is the characterizations. It would not be fair to compare the personages to those of Elmore Leonard. But why not? They're right up there with the master.

Leonard *filis* deftly moves the plot along, with double-crosses and unexpected twists, leading up to a deadly standoff. The novel is a pleasant surprise and we hope Peter is hard at work on his next one.

Theodore Feit

RITUAL

Mo Hayder

2008

Bantam UK

Mo Hayder's latest is available only in the UK so far, but I would get it now, order it from a bookstore in England or Canada. It rocks.

Here's part of the cover jacket: *Just after lunch on a Tuesday in April, under nine feet of water, police diver Flea Marley closes her gloved fingers around a human hand. The fact that there's no body attached is disturbing enough. More disturbing is the discovery, a day later, of the matching hand. Both have been recently amputated, and indications lead police to speculate that the hands were removed while the victim was alive.*

The plotting is superb and perfectly timing builds the suspense as the book progresses. And the payoff at the end is spot on.

Mo Hayder is one of my very favorite writers working today. Every book I've read has left me unable to read other books for at least a week. Her books linger and poke around in your head long after you are done reading. Trust me, get this book.

Jon Jordan

SCARLET ROSE

Julia Madeleine

2008

Black Heart Books

SCARLET ROSE, Julia Madeleine's debut book, is at times disturbing and unforgiving, and throughout un-put-downable. Fiona Dalton's father is murdered. In fact, more than murdered, he was tortured and murdered. Fiona is assisting police with their investigation. Her past is not pleasant. Her mother, Scarlet Rose, is a former burlesque perfumer who ruined her daughter's life. Alcoholic and miserable, all she wants is to get her hands on her dead ex-husband's estate. As Fiona discovers more and more nasty things about her family she tries to hold it together so she help find the person responsible for her Father's death.

SCARLET ROSE shows a flair for the craft of mystery and an elegance in storytelling. I look forward to more.

Jon Jordan

THE SECRET

Mike Richardson/Jason Shawn Alexander

2007

Dark Horse

This is a graphic novel that demonstrates how art can enrich a story.

Richardson's story is one of a young man in love and the horrible experience he has when the girl of his dreams disappears. The nightmare begins with a game in which the teenagers call random numbers and tell people that they know their secrets, followed by a dare to meet. When someone with a real secret shows up the game takes a bad turn. Tommy Morris is the last to see Pam and after she goes missing he's a prime suspect.

It picks up later after Pam's mother has given up and Tommy has forgone college to stay in town, hoping for a clue. Almost by accident he finds one. But police won't talk to him and Pam's friends don't want to believe him, Tommy is forced to take matters into his own hands.

Dark and eerie, this is more than just a simple tale of a missing person. It tells of loss and despair. Richardson nails the story and the art from Alexander only drives the point and emotion home. This is spellbinding storytelling and I loved every page.

Jon Jordan

SERENITY: THOSE LEFT BEHIND

Joss Whedon, Brett Matthews

2007

Dark Horse

This is a graphic novel prequel to the movie *Serenity*, based on the show *Firefly*. The creator, Joss Whedon, helped plot the story for it and he wrote a really cool article explaining the universe that these characters are living in.

The crew of the ship *Serenity* are living in a grey area between lawlessness and frontierism, taking work when they can and doing "jobs" when they needed. There was a great war and Malcolm Reynolds was on the losing side, though not necessarily the wrong side.

This tale opens with Malcolm and his crew pulling a job and having it co-opted by bad guys. They still get the blame and end up on the run. As it turns out, there was a deeper plot involving agents working for the alliance and someone with an old grudge setting up the crew. The agents want a passenger on the *Serenity*, a girl named River, who escaped their custody while they experimented on her. The trail leads all the parties involved to the scene of a great battleground from the war which is still strewn with bodies and ships. Not everyone will be leaving.

Whedon has a wonderful way of weaving a story and within this universe he created he has no boundaries. Fans of *Firefly* will love this, but it's totally accessible for people who haven't seen the show. It's kind of sci-fi, kind of Wild West and kind of a caper, set in a future that isn't very bright and shiny. The artwork by Will Conrad is so good it tells the story almost with out words; the art and words combining to create powerful storytelling and a great yarn.

Jon

SHADES OF BLUE

Bill Moody

February 2008

Poisoned Pen Press

Bill Moody's fourth Evan Horne book is a welcome return of this series. Evan, a jazz pianist who has been living and working in London and Amsterdam, has returned to the US and settled down in San Francisco. When he receives a call from an attorney in LA telling him that his mentor of many years ago, a pianist named Calvin Hughes, has died and named Evan as his sole beneficiary, the world as he knows it is turned upside down.

Evan travels to LA and, among Hughes' things, discovers evidence that, incredibly, Hughes might be his father. [As far as he knew, Cal had never been married and, further, Evan's mother and father are alive and well and living in Boston.] Also unearthed are some sheets of music, in Hughes' writing, that Evan recognizes as famed old jazz pieces ostensibly written by the late and great Miles Davis, that were included in two legendary old jazz albums. Is it possible that Hughes was the actual composer? Either one of these mysteries would be daunting enough to solve; Evan must attempt to get to the bottom of both. He turns for assistance to his girlfriend, an FBI agent, though he vaguely fears she has some knowledge she is not sharing with him.

The sense of place is strong of both NYC and California, and I especially enjoyed the description of the small town on the Russian River in northern California where Evan lives. The author, himself a skilled jazz musician with an impressive background, brings to life the vibrancy of this music and its practitioners, and a knowledge of the history of the music and the musicians isn't at all necessary to thoroughly enjoy his writing, although it certainly makes it that much more wonderful. As good as the story is, what makes it so special is the entrée it provides into the world of jazz music. The articulation of what a jazz musician, or indeed probably any musician, has in his head as he listens to, or creates, great music is absolutely elegant. I was delighted to see that Poisoned Pen Press has published this new Evan Horne book, and hope it portends more of the same in the future.

Gloria Feit

THE SILVER SWAN

Benjamin Black

2008

Henry Holt & Co.

In a sequel to his first crime novel, the 2008 Edgar-nominated *CHRISTINE FALLS*, Benjamin Black (nom de plume of John Banville) creates a complicated tale, filled with unnecessary characters and obfuscations clouding the mystery. It brings back Quirke, the Dublin pathologist with an "incurable curiosity."

A college acquaintance implores Quirke to forgo an autopsy on his wife who jumped off a pier and drowned in Dublin bay. In eyeing the body, Quirke discovers a puncture in her arm, and blood-work shows presence of alcohol and morphine. But Quirke allows the coroner to give a finding of accidental death. The plot involves the back story of the dead woman, alternating with events including those of Quirke's family, especially his daughter. The narratives are intended to lead the reader forward to decide whether her death really was suicide or murder, as well as laying the groundwork for future developments.

The novel is atypical of the usual mystery or crime book, and is more like an Irish drama (written without the brogue, fortunately). Perhaps that is the shortcoming of the novel, no matter how well-written it is. Nevertheless, it should be read and despite my problems with it.

Theodore Feit

SIREN OF THE WATERS

Michael Genelin

July 2008

Soho Press, Inc.

Commander Jana Matinova has worked very hard to obtain, and keep, her position in the Czechoslovak police force. She survived being married to an actor who became a dissident, being a woman in a traditionally male field, and losing her daughter's love and respect. Her job is very important to her.

There is an accident involving a van which leaves seven people dead, six of them prostitutes. This is not a good thing in terms of national or international publicity. Jana is assigned to the case, which ends up having major international ramifications.

She is sent to France to speak at a conference on the international trade in people, for which Czechoslovakia seems to be a conduit. At this conference, a man is killed. This killing is obviously connected to several other murders across the continent. A Russian, Levitin, is assigned to work with her. There are threads tying all these cases to the daughter Jana has alienated.

SIREN OF THE WATERS is a well-written police procedural. The reader is given wonderful insight into Jana's head, into her motivations, her thought processes. At times the writing seems a little heavy, but this works within the context of a novel taking place in a country once under Communist rule, within the context of Jana's experiences under that regime. The plotting is good, the characters well developed. Michael Genelin is an author worth watching.

P.J. Coldren

SPUN TALES

Felicia Donovan

July 2008

Midnight Ink

The Black Widow (Detective) Agency is owned by Katie Mahoney with Alexandria Axelrod, a computer expert (she owns a pet tarantula named Divinity); Jane Landers, an accountant; and Margo Norton, the office manager. When Katie needs more help Margo's brother, Marcus, and his lifemate, Andean, join the crew. The latter two exchange hilarious ripostes. The Agency uses high tech when they have to, and that literally saves the life of a man they have under surveillance in the opening scenes.

The main part of the story deals with protecting best-selling author Linda Jordan as she finishes the sequel to "The Franklin Cure." The book grossed forty million dollars, and there is every expectation that the sequel will do as well or better. A bounty of two million has been placed on getting and destroying the sequel by a pharmaceutical conglomerate, as the first book had a negative effect on their cash flow.

Linda wears the flash drive around her neck, and it's the original, there are no copies. It's obvious, Linda needs a lot of protection.

Two million has brought out several nefarious folk. With only one copy in existence, the bad guys figure that should be easy to destroy--except for the Black Widow Agency. These women know how to handle a gun and other weapons, and

can take care of themselves in dicey situations. Of course, there are a few close adventures in which the bad guys are sometimes beaten, and sometimes not. Katie's mother and her friends at the retirement home, unwittingly, become involved in a kidnapping.

The author is involved in forensic recovery of computer files for police departments so knows what she is writing about. Katie's next adventure is in "Fragile Webs" and the introductory pages were included at the end of the book. I'm ensnared!
Gay Tolti Kinman

ST. BART BREAKDOWN

Don Bruns

March 2008

Oceanview Publishing

This is the fourth entry in Don Bruns' series whose protagonist is Mick Sever, 'rock and roll journalist' who writes 'entertainment' articles for the Chicago Tribune. Now working as a freelance writer, he still gets calls from the Tribune from time to time, and has now been offered an assignment to interview music legend Danny Murtz, long-time successful producer of hit records going back many years, and a man with a nasty streak. A sub-text to the assignment is the investigation of rumored incidents in Murtz' past – women last seen in his company who had gone missing, these events being the subject of some anonymous letters received by the publication. The women in question had never been seen or heard from after 'dates' with Danny Murtz, described as a 'one-man wrecking crew' who 'used his celebrity status to wreak havoc on everyone he touched.'

At the outset the reader is privy to the latest of Murtz' attacks, following which Harvey Schwartz, his attorney/manager/handler /cleaner-upper, tells Danny he will take care of the situation, and urges him to take a brief vacation at his villa in St. Barts [which he owns in addition to his mansion in Hollywood and townhouse in Chicago]. Danny is a man who occasionally doubts his own sanity, apparently with good reason, given his perpetually addled brain from the constant drugs, pills and booze in which he overindulges.

Mick Sever and Danny Murtz' lives, eerily, have many parallels – both Chicago natives, having come up in their professions at about the same time and both having attained different degrees of success and celebrity that each man covets while at times finding it an annoyance, both drinking too much [although in Danny everything took on exaggerated proportions] and both with failed relationships [although, again, Danny's have a much darker cause]. The music business is described as a "fantasy world, where money was everything and trust and honesty meant nothing." Danny must himself travel to St. Bart, where he finds his life in danger as he goes about his assignment in a place where fun, sun and rum are the *raison d'être*, and murder and violence are not possible in this tourist-oriented world. Fast-paced, well-written, suspenseful, with considerable *schadenfreude*, this was a very good read.

Gloria Feit

A STRANGER'S GAME

Joan Johnston

March 2008

Pocket Books

This novel starts off and concludes with a bang (each of a different sort). FBI agent Breed Grayhawk meets a woman in a bar one night and engages in what he believes is a fantastic one-night stand. Oh were it so. In exchange for the sex, she extracts a promise from him, but doesn't tell him what it is. She is a convicted murderer of her parents, sentenced to Juvie until 21, and she has been spending the past year since her discharge attempting to find the real murderer and clear her name.

The woman is on the lam, having failed to attend her first meeting with her parole officer. She assumes a new identity and has "disappeared." Breed can't get her out of his mind, and has no way of contacting her. When finally meeting with her, she tells him her story and seeks his help. Thus begins a race against time, especially when she is accused of being a terrorist and chased by the FBI.

There are various subplots and personalities which complicate the basic story, all smooth and well-done. And, like Texas, larger than life. Filled with a serial murderer, suspense and hot romance, the novel progresses rapidly to its finale.

Theodore Feit

SUFFER THE LITTLE CHILDREN

Donna Leon

2008

Penguin/Grove Press Book

In this 16th of the Commissario Guido Brunetti Mystery series, the reader is led through a convoluted plot in which there are more questions than answers. In the middle of the night, Brunetti is summoned from a deep sleep to the hospital bed

of a doctor who has been assaulted when his home was invaded and he was struck by a rifle butt leaving him seriously hurt and unable to speak. The doctor's 18-month-old son was removed from the home.

In a separate plot line, Brunetti and his staff are investigating the possibility of fraud on the part of pharmacists and doctors bilking the state of insurance money (see, it's not limited only to Medicare and Medicaid fraud in the United States). The question arises whether or not the two separate crimes are related.

In the casual style of a Brunetti investigation, the facts begin to unfold. And the story is told with the author's accustomed vivid portrayals of Venice, characterization, mystery and social views. Once again, Donna Leon has given us a novel to treasure. [It should also perhaps be noted that Ms. Leon's newest book, *THE GIRL OF HIS DREAMS*, has just been released in hardcover.]

Theodore Feit

UP IN HONEY'S ROOM

Elmore Leonard

April 2008

Harper

Elmore Leonard has written at least 40 novels. Published last year in hardcover and being released this month in mass market paperback, *HONEY* is among the best—if not *the* best, just because it departs from the customary. It is different from his past work in the sense that it is set in the last days of WW II and the characters include a supposed Nazi spy ring and two escaped German POWs. What is familiar is that it takes place in Detroit and U.S. Marshal Carl Webster returns, seeking to recapture the escaped prisoners.

A review can't capture the delightful story of *HONEY* and do it justice. Just read the novel and enjoy the inventiveness, humor and writing of Elmore Leonard.

Theodore Feit

VICIOUS CIRCLE

Mike Carey

July 2008

Grand Central Publishing

There are a few things you need to know going into this novel. This is the second Felix Castor novel, the first was *THE DEVIL YOU KNOW*. Felix is an exorcist living and working in London. A vicious circle is a summoning circle used to raise demons. Now you have the basic facts.

Here's the low down on the second book, *VICIOUS CIRCLE*. Castor is hired by a couple to find and return their daughter, however this is no simple missing persons case as the daughter is dead and they miss having her ghost around the house. In addition to his case Felix is helping out a friend, Juliet, who has her own wonderful back story and is in a similar line of work. As Castor works his attempts to find the missing girl some things start to happen that don't add up. He is soon at odds with another exorcist, a disavowed offshoot of the Catholic church using werewolves to hunt for them, and a group of Satanists who are none too happy with our boy Felix.

It becomes apparent that something is wrong in London and everyone seems to be hiding something, leaving Felix very few people he can trust.

Felix Castor is a classic detective type character who happens to be in a supernatural noir world. Carey does a wonderful job with the characters he uses to inhabit this world and it aided by the wonderful dialogue. Fast moving and full of terrific action this is a great read and perfect for relaxing with. The Felix Castor novels are part of a great new trend in cross over fiction and I can't wait to get my hands on more. Carey is a rising star.

Jon Jordan

WHAT BURNS WITHIN

Sandra Ruttan

Leisure Books

May 20008

The author is a native of Vancouver, CA and a co-founder of *Spinetangler Magazine*, an online e-zine devoted to mystery literature. Her background serves her well in this initial entry in an expected series of police procedurals featuring Vancouver police officers.

This minutely and tightly constructed novel has the RCMP striving to solve a series of arsons, child abductions and rapes which, on the surface at least, appear to be unrelated. Three officers previously had been assigned to one difficult case together and have a history. Now each is working his own separate crime until the body of a young abducted girl shows up at an arson site. Now, everything becomes intertwined.

The novel is a classic police procedural, with detailed descriptions of each step along the way. The interactions of the protagonists and human emotions are finely told. The dialogue and writing are excellently presented and the story gripping. Further efforts in the series are greatly anticipated.

Theodore Feit

WISHBONES

Carolyn Haines

2008

St. Martin's Minotaur

Sarah Booth Delaney, series heroine, an actress as well as a P.I. in Mississippi, heads for Hollywood and Costa Rica to star in "Body Heat." Her favorite hound dog, Sweetie Pie, definitely a character in the story, goes with her.

The crew stays in a huge old house in Costa Rica owned by the director, Federico. The house was built by his father-in-law, who found his new son-in-law unworthy of his beautiful daughter.

Soon, Tinkie, Sarah Booth's constant companion and partner in the P. I. firm, along with her four-pound 'dustmop' Champagne, join them.

Strange goings-on in the old house that may be haunted. A cast member is injured in an 'accident' when a railing gives way, and Sarah Booth is almost drowned when the tide comes in.

No question Federico is part of a dysfunctional extended family. Is his son, father-in-law or someone else wrecking revenge? Or is it Federico's supposedly deranged daughter trying to sabotage the film? Is the house really haunted by his long ago deceased wife, who died under mysterious circumstances? Are there secret passageways in the house?

One of the interesting characters in this series is Jitty, a former servant for the Delaney family, now a ghost. Jitty has also 'flown' out to join Sarah Booth. She sometimes helps Sarah Booth by giving her hints, for she costumes herself as different characters, who have appeared in famous movies.

Sarah Booth and Tinkie get to the bottom of it all, but not without a few bruises of their own. Don't ask if any of this could really happen, just go along for the fun read.

Gay Tolti Kinman