

The Buzz Box

14 (Mira) is a twisty creepy and wonderful book from JT Ellison, her second. Nashville thought the terror of the 1980's was over when the Snow White Killer stopped and even sent a letter saying so. But now Taylor Jackson of Homicide is seeing a return of the killings. Possibly a copy cat, maybe the elusive original killer returned, either way Taylor has her work cut out for her as the murders are escalating. With pacing that makes Nascar look dull this book is a real ride on the lightning. Ellison is relentless and grabs the reader from the first page and refuses to let go until the soul tearing climax.

COLLISION is the latest thriller from Jeff Abbott and it is a M*%&#R F*#@#R. Some books have a pace that builds slowly, some build fast, the pacing here is like a rocket facing down with extra engines it moves so fast. A businessman and a former spy are brought together by accident and soon discover that they are in a boatload of trouble and have no one to trust but each other. This is a perfect blend of Hitchcock's "innocent man in jeopardy" combined with Ludlam like spycraft on speed. Abbott will leave you gasping for air.

Brett Battles is back his second novel, THE DECEIVED, a follow up to last year's terrific debut THE CLEANER. Jonathan Quinn has an unusual job, as a cleaner he comes in and makes crimescenes disappear.(Think Harvey Keitel in Pulp Fiction) In this outing Quinn is asked to remove all traces of an ex-CIA agent. This quickly becomes a problem when it turns out that the ex agent is Quinn's friend. Battles writes with a major emphasis on action and has twists that even seasoned readers won't see coming. Another great book in what will hopefully be a long running series.

In FISHERMAN'S BEND, Linda Greenlaw's second book with Jane Bunker is a wonderfully intricate puzzle. Former Chief Detective in Miami turned insurance investigator starts out with a simple vandalism claim but before long finds herself up to her neck in the very things that made her leave Miami. Wonderful characters with fluid plotting make this is a book superb follow up to SLIPKNOT.

Bill Loehfelm's FRESH KILLS is a hard to describe, it has the characteristics of a thriller but also the characterizations of genre crossing novels that look into the soul. John Sanders Junior is a troubled man, not terribly motivated and prone to making mistakes with his personal life. A lot of his flaws can be traced directly to his Father, John Sanders Senior. When his Father is found murdered Junior doesn't feel the normal sense of loss or grief, only regret that is dad is dead without being punished for the hell he wreaked on his life. Still, Junior wants revenge on the killer and this leads to an even darker and more twisted path. FRESH KILLS is one of those books that will stay with you long after you finish reading. I look forward to more from this new author.

There is no disputing the fact that Daniel Silva is one of the masters of thriller novels and his latest book only goes to further that. MOSCOW RULES is another Gabriel Allon adventure with the beginnings that follows the death of a journalist and takes Allon to the heart of power in the new Moscow. To call this a just a thriller is like calling wasabi just spicy, this books moves so fast you may need to read it twice.

SMALL CRIMES is Dave Zeltserman's third novel and init he uses his skills of writing undesirable and unsavory protagonists to create a dark masterpiece. Joe Denton is a bad cop, bad enough to go to jail for it. But somehow he's out early and though no one wants him around he has unfinished business. Mobsters, corruption and just plain rude behavior fill this book with a lead character no one should like, yet it impossible to take your eyes off him. Well Done.

SOUTHERN POISON Thomas Dunne Books) is the second in this new series from T. Lynn Ocean featuring former marine Jersey Barnes. Jersey wants to live a quieter life, she has seen her share of action and is ready for other things. Life has other plans though and former handler Ashton puts her back in action due to a clause in her contract. Adding to stress levels are things like her desire for a relationship with her partner Ox, her Dad maybe going to jail, and oh yeah, assassin want to kill her. This is an entertaining book that doesn't slow down for anything, great characters and a wonderful ending. Total satisfaction.

Debut author Julie Kramer is off to a running start with STALKING SUSAN (Doubleday). After working in the business for years she has turned that experience towards fiction and I for one am damn glad she has. Investigative reporter Riley Spartz uncovers a killer who once a year kills women named Susan. Facing a news director and local politician who both want the story quiet or gone, Riley takes matters in to her own hands to get to the bottom of this once and for all, and that bottom could include her taking extra risks and

realigning the killer's sights onto herself. *STALKING SUSAN* is fast, edgy, and even nerve wracking with it's pacing. And Kramer's writing is almost too believable. Add another author to the must read list.

Don Bruns has given us yet another in his wonderful new series. *STUFF DREAMS ARE MADE OF* is another tale with James Lessor and Skip Moore and this time they have their best money making idea yet. They plan to sell food during a tent rival meeting and rake it in. Unfortunately the good Reverend is not as good as he would have people believe and before long the boys are up to their necks in it again. Bruns has a wonderful knack for humor in his storytelling that adds to the fun without distracting from the mystery. Memorable characters and great plotting round out the trifecta here for a great read.

Book Reviews:

THE AMNESIAC

Sam Taylor

2008

Penguin Books

The use of a novel within a novel often distracts the reader, and in this story it is more complicated by the use of a Victorian mystery within a contemporary dilemma. In this book 29-year-old James Purdew, after breaking his ankle and remaining virtually homebound for six weeks, begins to recall his past—except he cannot remember three years.

He returns to the city where he attended university, where he finds both strange and familiar sights and fleeting glimpses of the past. He is fortunate when he is selected to live in and rehabilitate a house in which he had lived when in school. It is filled with tragic memories.

This is a haunting tale, and it is well-written. However, many readers no doubt will be overwhelmed by the prose and plotting, much less the above mentioned technique. Nevertheless, the book is more than worth the effort of plodding through all the metaphysics and philosophy and parables.

Theodore Feit

ARMAGEDDON CONSPIRACY

John Thompson

2008

Harbor House

Brent Lucas is no stranger to self-sacrifice. Having abandoned his dream of becoming a teacher to pursue a more lucrative career in money management, he risked his job to blow the whistle on his colleague's illegal activities and then, shunned by the financial industry, accepted a covert assignment to help the government investigate a multi-billion dollar firm for insider trading. Unfortunately, this last choice may require the ultimate sacrifice when Lucas realizes he has been set up to take the fall for a billion dollar theft—a theft that will finance an elaborate plot between Christian and Muslim extremists to bring about Armageddon. Suddenly on the run from the police, the FBI, and the terrorist forces who want him dead, Lucas must unravel the conspiracy before the world is irrevocably changed.

John Thompson's *ARMAGEDDON CONSPIRACY* is smartly paced, intricately plotted, and, because of the fully developed characters, unnervingly believable. Thompson does more than exploit the post-9/11 fear of terrorism—he explores localized fanaticism and the tendency of any exclusionary, self-serving tenet to engender violence. An exciting and intellectually stimulating first novel!

Rebecca Tatham

AUGUST MOON

Jess Lourey

Midnight Ink

Another humorous story in the Murder-by-Month mystery series featuring Mira James, part time librarian and part time reporter. She decides to leave Battle Lake in two weeks because the love of her life is no longer around.

A new cult ministry, led by Pastor Meale, his wheel-chair bound wife, and her sister, circulate a petition about the banned book exhibit Mira has in the library. She hires a new library clerk, who does some strange things. Then, in this quiet tourist town, a young woman is found dead, murdered in a brutal way.

Everyone is preparing for the August Moon Festival. Mira's editor gives her the assignment to write a story about the cult's Bible Camp, and about the Festival. She decides to go undercover for the Bible Camp stint.

The cast of characters who surround her are hilarious, and Mira is just as funny. Mayor Ms. Kennie Rogers wears outrageous outfits, thinks the Police Chief Gary Wohnt is hers, romantically, and then is devastated when he finds God at Bible Camp. She wants Mira to help her bring him to his senses. Kennie is marketing

a new product she makes-- coffin tables--you can have one in your living room while you're alive and then still use it when you're not. Then there's the band, Not With My Horse, whose leader is Mira's former husband. He wants to get back together--but just for a few one-night stands.

A man wearing a cape comes to town and tells her he's the curator of the wood tick museum at a local university. Is this guy for real? Mrs. Berns, her assistant at the library, an octogenarian, is more than willing to share the details of her love life, or the one she would like to have. Hilarious.

The endings of her stories are always bang-up, over the top, and in this one several, including Mira, are about to meet their heavenly maker at the hands of the murderer. This isn't on Mira's agenda, but it is one time that God helps her out in a tangible way. Wonderfully funny. Cozy.

Gay Toltl Kinman

BATMAN: FACES

Matt Wagner

2008

DC Comics

A reissue of this wonderful trade collection of a story by Matt Wagner that originally ran in Legends of the Dark Knight 28-30 is timely, of course, because of Mr. Dent's appearance in the new movie. No matter, this is a story that should remain in print because it is so damn good. The art by Wagner is breathtaking and I love the story. Joe Lansdale points out in his introduction that this story sees Batman doing Detective work, not just avenging crime. And he's right, that is a big part of why this story rocks. But it is also the insight into the crazy, sad world that Two Face lives in. Torn between right and wrong, especially here, he's actually trying to do what he considers a good thing. Of course, the point is that only he thinks it's a good thing, and he's willing to lie cheat steal and kill to do it. This story doesn't play as heavily into the whole "Batman, tortured by former friend, turned evil" shtick, which feels a little ham-fisted at times. Wagner created a noir Batman in both look and feel and I for one would welcome him back on this Icon's writing staff anytime.

Jon

BLACKLIGHT BLUE

Peter May

Nov 2008

Poisoned Pen Press

May continues his enjoyable series featuring forensic investigator Enzo McLeod. In the first book in the series, EXTRAORDINARY PEOPLE, McLeod accepts a bet that he can solve all seven of the cold cases featured in a book published by a journalist friend.

The first two cases he took on were unraveled in fine style, but the resulting publicity has drawn publicity for Enzo and his work from every corner of France. And it seems that someone who is responsible for one of the remaining unsolved murders does not want to be found. The third entry in the series opens with Enzo receiving truly frightening news about his own health, while more or less at the same time one of his daughters survives an attempt on her life, and the boyfriend of Enzo's second daughter faces ruin after his business is destroyed by arson.

Correctly perceiving that someone is out to get him, Enzo scoops up his entire family, along with one of his research assistants, and flees to the home of an enigmatic friend, using that hideaway as a base camp for his investigation. Little by little, he tracks the person or persons who are threatening him, and is startled to discover that he is discovering answers to one of the remaining crimes described in the cold case files which led to his bet.

Attacks on him and his family continue, and the reader realizes that not all assistance offered them can be trusted. As in the earlier two books, Enzo travels throughout France, visiting atmospheric villages and harrowing mountain slopes. Some questions remain unanswered at the close of the action, leaving the reader ready and waiting for more!

Woodstock

BURIED LIES

Peter Rennebohm

North Star Press of St. Cloud,

Anyone involved in book collecting is well aware of the importance of dust jackets, which is why I was drawn to BURIED LIES. The plot centers on an incredibly rare and privately printed book that contains clues to a treasure of some sort. The dust jacket – and it seems that only 2 copies are extant – is key to solving the puzzle. But never in my imagination did I expect to come across a line like this:

"In the house!" someone yelled. "If you want to live, give us the dust jacket. You got two minutes! Then we torch the place!"

Now I know that book collecting can turn into a “contact” sport (ever been to a library sale?) but this seems a bit extreme. The speaker, or in this case, the yeller is apparently oblivious to the fact that “torching the place” would reduce the number of surviving copies to “one”, but he’s kind of drunk, and not thinking straight. But the book remains intact, and the body count continues to rise.

Speaking of dust jackets, BURIED LIES sports some outstanding artwork by Mark Evans, who also did the jackets for Peter’s two previous books from North Star Press: BLUE SPRINGS and FRENCH CREEK. They are all beautiful editions and fun reads, worthy of any collection.

Gary Shulze – once Upon a Crime

BURN NOTICE: THE FIX

Tod Goldberg

2008

Obsidian

BURN NOTICE: THE FIX is the first novelization of this great TV show from USA network. Tod Goldberg pens it and this could be some of his best work to date.

Michael Weston is a man who is used to working in the secret circles of espionage. But after he was burned, he found himself back home in Miami and being watched. Unable to leave, he is trying to find out who burned him and why. To keep busy, and make some money, he becomes a bit of a Travis McGee operator and helps people in trouble who can’t go to the cops. He’s helped by a former IRA agent who he used to be in love with (and may still b), and a retired FBI agent who can kick ass when the need arises as long as it doesn’t cut into happy hour.

In this novel by Goldberg, Michael is helping a wealthy socialite who got swindled by a suave character claiming to be a spy. Michael is also on edge because a beautiful Russian agent is in town. This book stands on its own as a great thriller and you don’t need to watch the series to enjoy it. If you do watch the series, and you should, you will enjoy it even more. I really hope to see many more of these from Mr. Goldberg.

Jon

CARELESS IN RED

Elizabeth George

2008

Harper

Following the shocking murder of his wife, Thomas Lynley resigned from Scotland Yard and returned to his native Cornwall, where he began a walking tour from one end to the other--not bathing or shaving and living in only the clothes he wore. In this state, he attempted to insulate himself from the tragedy and escape. But along the way, he finds a body at the foot of a cliff, and as a result he is forced to awaken to his police background and relationships with people.

Thus begins this detailed story of various family histories, past and present mistakes between and among the family members and the possible reason for the death of the person Tommy finds, which is soon judged to be a murder. The investigation soon uses Tommy in a semi-official capacity, and later his old Met partner, Barbara Havers, is sent to Cornwall by her superiors in an effort either to protect him or entice him to return to the fold.

In this rather long novel, the author’s eye for detail is exhibited to a “fare thee well.” The reader is engulfed in all kinds of minutiae, about geography, history, personal backgrounds and other aspects of the story. But however buried the reader may be, one is not overwhelmed, nor hardly bored. The novel is so well written, the 650 pages turn quickly, as the reader is drawn forward to find out the next revelation.

Theodore Feit

THE CASE OF THE DECEIVING DON

Carl Brookins

2008

Five Star

Vertically challenged P.I. Sean, uh, Sean is back on the case, red Keds and all, following his entertaining debut in TCOT GREEDY LAWYERS Brookins, an author, lecturer, critic, and long-time champion of the P.I. genre, delivers such a classic, yet modern day detective story that I’m moved to coin, if I haven’t been beaten to it, a new “sub-genre” label: “retro-noir”.

Sean, uh, Sean (this is kind of a running gag throughout the book; people get stuck when addressing Sean, not knowing whether to use his first or last name, (uh, duh) is returning home from a surveillance only to find the street where he lives littered with police, the remnants of a wheel chair and a body. It appears that one of the residents of the nursing home across the street was out for a ride when his booby-trapped wheel chair exploded. Curious, Sean Sean investigates.

Turns out that the body once belonged to a minor-league mafia Don from Mechanicsburg, PA who moved to the "Sheltering Winds" retirement home several years ago. More curious still, Don Molinaro had a constant companion in Martin Levy, a young body builder, personal trainer, and valet who lived at the home with him, rarely leaving his side, except, of course, for when the retired Don took his rigged wheelchair out for a ride. So was this a mob hit? Who is this Martin Levy character, anyway? Why does the "Sheltering Winds" director seem shady and unforthcoming? Who are the two goons who came to his office, trying to buy him off the case? And, most important, why is someone taking shots at him through his window? The answers to these and other puzzlers are all neatly tied up in this highly readable and smoothly written adventure.

Gary Shulze

THE CATCH

Archer Mayor

2008

St. Martin's

When Ed McBain died, the mantle of responsibility for police procedural writing fell on the shoulders of Archer Mayor.

His newest novel, THE CATCH, shows why the choice was wise, easy and obvious. Joe Gunther appears for the 19th time in a story that begins with a cop killing. The presumed killer has ties to drug smuggling. A multi-state task force is created with Joe and his Vermont Bureau of Investigation, unobtrusively leading. Multiple points of view, multiple sub plots and multiple characters, are kept in line with easy style from Mayor. Like McBain, Mayor lets procedure set the story. Pacing and tension are built into most police stories with the idea that the first 24 hours are crucial to any investigation. Mayor handles those hours and the hours after with realistic aplomb. Fans of Archer Mayor will pick up where they left off. Joe's team is all there. Those new to Mr. Mayor and Joe Gunther needn't worry as the story stands alone well enough without having to go back to earlier novels. Anyone looking for consistently good police procedural writing who hasn't found Archer Mayor can stop looking with THE CATCH.

Dave Biemann

CATNAPPED

Gabriella Herkert

Penguin / Obsidian

Sara Townley is an investigator for a Seattle law firm. The senior partner, her boss, treats her like scum. He sends her off on an assignment to find a missing millionaire--a cat named Flash.

Trying to find the cat leads her to a dead body, a concussion, and two other suspicious deaths. She turns up a possible scam involving the dead people.

In her private life, Connor, her husband of four months, with whom she only spent a few days, appears explaining his mysterious disappearance as being on an assignment for the Navy SEALs. He wants into her life completely and she can't do that, not yet. She's a bit reluctant to even let him help her in her investigation, which, out of necessity, involves a few nefarious deeds, but he is so good at it that she wonders what he did for the SEALs.

Her neighbor and best friend, Russ, is a gay man and a delightful character.

Luckily, she has a good relationship with the investigating police officer, although she expects him to haul her off soon--either to jail or the asylum, for she keeps telling about her suspicions, and they are just that--she has no evidence.

For example, in an interview with the wife of one of the dead men, the woman appears ditzy, disheveled. When Sara returns a few minutes later with her partner, the woman is lucid and dressed neatly, leaving the partner to wonder about Sara's perception. Sara is a little puzzled also at this abrupt change.

Her poking around gets her into trouble, and almost into a coffin.

A fun book.

Gay Toltl Kinman

CHECKMATE

:FALL

OF

THE

WALL

Greg

Rucka

2008

DC

Comics

It's been coming since CHECKMATE #1 and Amanda Waller is finally going down, but not without a fight. Waller has been scheming and maneuvering since she was first introduced to comics back in the eighties and for a while it looked like she might have found a home and been doing good just for the sake of doing good. Well, old dogs and new tricks and all that. After running secret missions and following her own

agenda, the other members of Checkmate finally need her gone, and they will do what ever they need to do to accomplish that. Rucka is at the top of his game in this espionage title and this is another great chapter in the new Checkmate.
Jon

CHERNOBYL MURDERS

Michael Beres

2008

Medallion

Beres has picked what at first seems an unlikely setting for a murder mystery. Nonetheless CHERNOBYL MURDERS is the perfect book for this author to write. Using knowledge of nuclear energy that earned him a place on the Atomic Energy Commission, Beres has crafted an unrelenting thriller that feels so believable it's frightening.

A year before the meltdown, detective Lazlo Horvath hears disturbing things from his brother, who works at the plant. Things aren't as safe as they should be and Horvath looks into it. This raises a flag for a number of people, who watch his progress. When the plant actually explodes and kills his brother, Horvath knows and that he is now in danger, as well.

This is a frightening book and an engulfing read. Fast paced and detailed beyond regular research, this book lingered long after I finished. This is a top notch read.

Jon

CLEAN CUT

Lynda La Plante

Touchstone

Detective Anna Travis is spending another Friday night alone, contemplating her frustrating relationship with colleague DCI James Langton. Her ruminations are cut short when she learns that her lover has been brutally wounded while investigating the attempted decapitation of a prostitute. Suddenly, Travis finds her concerns (and her cases) back-burnered by Langton's near-fatal injuries and his obsessive need to find his attacker. As Langton eventually regains sufficient health to rejoin the force, it becomes clear that his pursuit of a gang of illegal immigrants, his personal vendetta, and one of Travis's own cases are linked—with consequences that spin chaotically and violently out of control.

CLEAN CUT, Lynda La Plante's third novel featuring Travis and Langton, is a complex and absorbing police procedural; it is also an overwhelmingly angry critique of dysfunctional relationships, sexism, sex offenders, illegal immigration, and a frighteningly large number of crises facing the various British criminal justice systems. The constant current of rage fuses the intersecting storylines, but also slows the pace of the narrative. Fortunately, the action is as relentless as the domineering perspective and the book is a worthwhile, if exhausting, read.

Rebecca Tatham

THE CLINCH KNOT

John Galligan

September 2008

Bleak House Books

What do skinheads, Tang, fly fishing and murder have in common? The Dog, a.k.a. Ned Oglivie, former security guard, current dystopian gadabout. He's camped near the rivers of Livingston, Montana with local gal about town Jesse and non-local pronghorn expert D'ontario Sneed.

A face to face with skinheads leads to a pointless call to the local law and the discovery that the Dog's gun is missing. After a long look see, Dog finds them. Jesse is dead, shot. And Sneed is unconscious in her car after a seemingly near successful suicide attempt.

With the police looking for an easy solution, the coma bound Sneed is accused and the Dog has a puzzle to unravel. This means disingenuous conversations with locals, a run-in with a dopey deputy and a lawyer obsessed with out running aforementioned pronghorn. There is no shortage of suspects, lies and booze guzzlers looking to score. The Dog aims to find Jesse's real killer no matter how many people he has to piss off in the process.

John Galligan is brilliant. It is that simple. His writing and characters are rich, complex and intriguing; to the point that I warn you not to pick this book up unless you have time to read it cover to cover. Yes, it's that damn good.

Jen Jordan

THE DEAL

Adam Gittlin

2008

Oceanview Publishing

Drawing upon his extensive knowledge as a real estate executive, the author has written a penetrating novel not only of the wheeling and dealing behind the New York City commercial property market, but of people and how they think, act and grasp greedily and hungrily for money and power. It is the story of Jonah Gray and how he goes about amassing money by making real estate deals, while partying and consuming massive amounts of alcohol (Sapphire and tonic) and white powder.

But all that is merely background to a devious plot, murder and mayhem. And decorating the scene are various Faberge eggs, each more beautiful than the next and valuable beyond calculation. The descriptions of the New York night scene, fancy restaurants and the like are as interesting as the plot itself.

Written in the first person, the story provides a thrill a minute, right up to its conclusion. The novel took five years to complete, and it is well worth the effort. The plot unfolds at a fast and furious pace, keeping the reader entranced from start to finish.

Theodore Feit

DELUSION

Peter Abrahams

April 2008

Wm. Morrow

Friendship can lead to all kinds of results, as this suspense novel proves. Moreover, the consequences can not only be unanticipated, but lead to more complications than the human mind can conceive. But this author does a pretty good job of conjuring up as many as he can think of.

About 20 years before the story takes place, Nell Jarreau was strolling along the bayou with her boyfriend when they were attacked by a masked man demanding money. The boyfriend was then knifed and murdered. Nell kicked the attacker and the mask fell for a moment, giving her a glimpse of the man's face. Based on her ID, a man was convicted and sentenced to life imprisonment. A year later, she married one of the detectives, who, as the story is told, is now the Chief of Police, both apparently living happily until a telephone call changes everything.

As a result of hurricane damage, a tape is found exonerating the apparently falsely incarcerated convict. Nell feels guilty about having sent an innocent man to prison, but her memory of the attack is at best hazy, and she goes about attempting to investigate the matter. She meets with the released man, tries hypnosis and attempts to find the truth. Before the reader can reach the end of this well-paced novel, there is a dearth of clues pointing one to a logical conclusion. Yet the ending is consistent with the single earlier clue, and the characterizations are finely tuned. A well-written tale.

Theodore Feit

EVERYBODY KNOWS THIS IS NOWHERE

John McFetridge

2008

Harcourt

John McFetridge knocked crime fiction fans on their respective asses with DIRTY SWEET. Now he's back with EVERYBODY KNOWS THIS IS NOWHERE and he's back with the force of a semi truck sans brakes rolling down a mountain road. Part caper and part procedural, this is a spot on example of the modern noir.

The story follows two characters. First, Sharon McDonald, grower of marijuana and possessor of a number of problems including dodging police and being under house arrest. Yet the biggest problem is a man named Ray who makes things a bit too interesting and too dangerous. Second, meet Detective Gord Bergeron, a cop trying to do his best to handle a huge caseload with a new partner he can't get a handle on. Missing kids, corruption in the department, terrorist cells and suicides all start to tie together as, inevitably, Bergeron and McDonald meet.

Toronto has a darker side that tourists don't see. With drugs and prostitution twisted together with gangsters and layers on layers of lies to hide illegal activities, it's all a cop can do to keep up.

Tight plotting and characters that are uncomfortably believable are savored well after reading. Fast paced noir in the grand tradition; this is a book people will be talking about for a long time.

Harcourt has also just released DIRTY SWEET in trade paperback.

Jon Jordan

EXECUTIVE PRIVILEGE

Phillip Margolin

2008

HarperCollins Publishers

Presidents of the United States have been accused of many transgressions, but being a serial killer—so far—has not been one of the accusations (unless you include undeclared wars). However, that's the gist of

the plot of Mr. Margolin's fascinating 10th novel. To give any further detail would give away too much of the plot. Suffice it to say that the portrayal of the characters is real, and the story moves forward at a rapid pace.

The descriptions of the FBI procedures and insights into the appointment and actions of a Special Prosecutor investigating a high ranking executive are superb, indicative of the author's legal background.

Theodore Feit

jFIDELITY

Thomas Perry

2008

Harcourt

Thomas Perry's newest novel is riveting from the first page – or, more accurately, the second page, for that's when Phil Kramer is murdered in an ambush. Kramer, a 45-year-old LA P.I., leaves behind a wife, Emily. In short order, she discovers that in the last year of his life, her husband has left her virtually penniless, with only several hundred dollars left in personal and business bank accounts. Emily is clueless, as are, literally, the police.

This narrative line is juxtaposed with one which introduces Jerry Hobart, the man who was paid to kill Kramer. But nothing that happens after that point can be anticipated by the reader. These story lines do not stay separate for long, as all too soon Jerry is brought within Emily's orbit, in ominous fashion.

The author, with the attention to detail that is the hallmark of his novels, has again delivered one that is original and wholly absorbing, as Emily tries to uncover the truth behind her husband's killing. She, and the reader, are wholly unprepared for the answers. In addition to giving us a suspenseful book [so much so that the conclusion is nearly anticlimactic], the author presents, in various guises, the question as to the degree of responsibility that fidelity imposes and, conversely, how much is that responsibility diminished when the fidelity is no longer there. A real page-turner.

Gloria Feit

FIFTY-TO-ONE

Charles Ardai

November 2008

Hard Case Crime

In celebration of Hard Case Crime's 50th novel publication, Ardai changes history. What if the publishing house had been founded 50 years ago by a swindler always out to make a quick buck? In FIFTY-TO-ONE, protagonist Charley Borden teams up with Tricia Heverstadt, a small town gal working as a showgirl with dreams of writing for The New Yorker, to write I Robbed the Mob! While it's a fictitious account, Borden knows he can make more money if he markets it as fact, and pretty soon both cops and criminals want to get their hands on the "anonymous" author.

Ardai mixes humor in with blood and sex, creating a novel that's entertaining on multiple levels. All of his characters are surprising, interesting and highly flawed, which tends to get them into sticky situations. Some of the plot points are over the top, almost comical, but it is in keeping with the tone of the book, allowing readers to broaden their scope of believability. As the publisher of Hard Case Crime, he clearly knows the characteristics of high-quality pulp fiction and how to publish it, but FIFTY-TO-ONE demonstrates that can also create his own.

Dana Kaye

THE FIRST QUARRY

Max Allan Collins

September 2008

Hard Case Crime

Just when you thought Max Allan Collins retired his series character, a ruthless killer-for-hire, he brings Quarry back in this prequel. THE FIRST QUARRY tells the story of his first assignment: take out a college professor and burn his manuscript. It seems simple, until Quarry realizes the book is a mafia tell-all and the man that hired his services is the head of a notorious crime family. Back then, he wasn't as experienced, wasn't as careful, and it is entertaining to see him err.

The prose and dialogue are all you'd expect from Hard Case Crime: gritty, fresh and unapologetic. The plot is straightforward and nothing out of the ordinary, but sometimes the simplicity of the story is what makes it great. Though reading the previous Quarry books would help appreciate the story and the character, it is not imperative and the story works great as a standalone novel.

Dana Kaye

FLIGHT OF THE HORNBILL

Eric Stone
October 2008
Bleak House Books

Ray Sharp has another assignment for DDI, Due Diligence International. They want him to check reports of a massive gold find in Jakarta; one of their clients is interested but wants to know if things are even reasonably on the up-and-up before spending more money. This is something he can handle, something he's good at.

Sylvia has another job for him, a job he's not so enthused about. Her fiancé is missing. Nobody has seen Alexander Lee Truscott in a while, and if Ray can find him for Sylvia, she won't contest the divorce. The payoff is good - divorce in the Far East can be complicated if both parties don't cooperate. The job itself? Well, Ray will look into things because of the payoff.

Somewhere in the course of both investigations, it becomes obvious that Alex is involved in the Lucky Break mining company scam. Somebody has been pushed out of a helicopter into the jungle; is it Alex? The body can't be found.

Ray Sharp is a flawed man with a predilection for the wrong woman (or women, as the case may be). He knows that he should sometimes just let things go, but he can't. He reflects on these facets of his personality, accepts them, and keeps wading into the fray. Sharp, as an American, sees with a clear eye the differences in culture, and doesn't always know how to deal with the disparities. Eric Stone, as the jacket blurbs will tell you, was a journalist in Asia for a long time. He knows the territory. This book, like the first two in the series, is loosely based on a real scandal. Both of those elements, combined with Stone's formidable writing skills, make for a compelling novel.

P.J. Coldren

FORSAKEN SOUL

Priscilla Royal
August 2008
Poisoned Pen Press

In 13th century England, a priory offered religious sanctuary, medical attention and pharmaceutical treatments, education for those who joined the community, and assistance to local law enforcement. Readers of Royal's previous books featuring the Prioress Eleanor will welcome a return to Tyndal for a new chapter in the lives of the priory residents.

The term " anchoress " is probably not familiar to many modern readers. This role was open to both men and women, and indicated a type of hermit, who fled the world, took up residence under the protection of a religious community, and lived in isolation, usually with a small window or door to allow consultation with those who came to seek counsel and advice.

Eleanor has recently allowed a woman to live in a small cell as an anchoress, and is distressed when the woman's presence seems to have invited tragedy to the small community. A local resident is poisoned, and superstitious rumors spread, attributing the death to the work of the devil. At odd hours of the day and night, suspicious persons come and go from the anchoress' window while the woman herself shuns the loving care Eleanor offers her.

Religious preconceptions abound in Royal's tale – over and over again characters, both good and evil, jump to conclusions about each others' actions, delaying understanding and allowing more deaths to occur. Eventually Brother Thomas, one of the residents of the priory, begins to sort out the chain of events.

Woodstock

THE
Tony
Bleak

FOURTH
House

VICTIM
Spinosa
Books

Delivering home heating oil can be a perilous business. The hours are long and hard, the work is smelly and dirty, the customers are frequently disgruntled, and the profit margin is very slim. Death is rarely a worry. When fellow delivery drivers are bumped off, including a man who had saved his life when they were both cops, Joe Serpe is on the case.

Serpe's first inclination is to look at all the other oil companies; his was not the only one to lose a driver. Some are more receptive to his inquiries than others. The ones who are very uncooperative merit another look.

How is a murder that took place several years ago when a young African-American photographer was thrown or jumped off a roof connected to a very vocal preacher in the neighborhood, and the deaths of all these drivers? Or is this all just coincidence and bad timing? THE FOURTH VICTIM is a gritty, dark, and very readable novel. This is not a mystery that glorifies the victims, or the people around them. Spinosa captures the attitudes and reactions of working-class stiff with precision and care; his descriptions make the setting very real. If one were to reduce the plot to one

sentence, it wouldn't be a big surprise; Spinosa's skills make the journey far more interesting than one might expect.
P.J. Coldren

FREEZING POINT

Karen Dionne

2008

The Berkley Publishing Group

It's rare to find a book that truly lives up to any "from the first page..." hype, but Karen Dionne's new scientific thriller FREEZING POINT opens with a physical tension that, trumping cliché, never lets up. Hoping to purchase the rights to a patented process for harvesting freshwater from the polar icecaps, Ben Maki finds himself off the coast of Newfoundland with the iceberg-cowboy captain who pioneered the concept. Unfortunately, the berg they've just roped begins to roll—taking their trawler with it. Despite the brevity of the scene, its terror and urgency establish an uber-adrenaline pace that, when the story picks up three years later, only accelerates.

Dionne deftly infuses her plot lines with provocative science and sympathetic characters, moving between corporate Los Angeles, an Antarctic research station, and a giant iceberg loosed in the Weddell Sea to explore the chasms between philanthropy, profitability, and environmental responsibility within the context of a very contemporary global issue: the growing drinking water shortage. Never pedantic, often fascinating, and always compulsively readable, Dionne's narrative voice is a uniquely compelling entertainment.
Rebecca Tatham

GOOD PEOPLE

Marcus Sakey

August 2008

Dutton

Tom and Anna Reed are average people, good people. They work good jobs, rent out the bottom floor of their Chicago two-flat, but years of struggling to get pregnant and going through costly procedures has left them thousands in debt with no end in sight. When their tenant's apartment catches fire and the Reeds burst in to put it out, they discover their tenant dead and 400-grand stashed in his kitchen. The money is the answer to their prayers. They could be debt free and still afford another round of in vitro. But the money didn't belong to their recluse tenant; it belonged to a ruthless criminal who'd do anything to get it back. Now Tom and Anna will learn how far they're willing to go to keep the money and their dreams alive.

Written with eloquence and plotted with mastery, Sakey's Dutton debut tops his previous work. He plays with morals and ethics, not only with his protagonists but with his villains. Blurring the lines between good and evil enriches the plot and is in keeping with the setting: Chicago, where the cops aren't all good and the criminals aren't all bad.

It's the characters that pull you in, but plot is what raises your heart rate and keeps the pages turning. He sets up an almost impossible situation for his protagonists and never takes the easy way out. Suspenseful from beginning to end, Sakey is raising the bar for crime fiction.

Dana Kaye

THE JOKER : THE GREATEST STORIES EVER TOLD

Various

2008

DC

Comics

With the wild success of the Dark Knight movie, this is a very timely collection including writers Bill Finger, Dave Wood, Steve Englehart, Len Wein, Jeph Loeb and Paul Dini.

The Joker is arguably the most well known comics villain and is mordantly sinister. We see just how depraved and mad this man is in these stories. While a wonderful character and one any writer would love to do, not all Joker stories fully manage to capture the madness. This collection does.

It was a joy to sit down and read or re-read these classic tales. Although the art and writing styles from story to story, the defining characteristics of the Joker translate from decade to decade. Bob Joy did a great job picking from the huge amount of stories he had to choose from.

Jon

LIE DOWN WITH THE DEVIL

Linda Barnes

St. Martin's Press

Aug 2008

Carlotta Carlyle is having a terrible time. Fiancé Sam is on the lam, evading murder charges. Little Sister Paolina is now in a mental health facility trying to overcome the terror of seeing her father killed before her

eyes and will not see our Boston Detective. And Mooney, Carlotta's former boss, police-insider and friend is forced to shut down all communications with Carlotta to avoid possible charges of his own regarding the whole Sam on the lam sub-plot.

Enter Roz, she of the brilliant tee-shirts and kind heart. A case comes knocking on Carlotta's door. A small white lie and Carlyle is once again in the driver's seat, doing what she does best. Detecting. This time it all goes terribly wrong and the new client is not only dead, she isn't even who she claimed to be.

This brief wrap up would seem to indicate a crime novel that attempts to throw in everything but the kitchen sink and results in a confusing read. Not so. You see for over two decades Linda Barnes has been writing one of mystery's top notch series. She is a maestro at playing all points of plot simultaneously. What can Sam's exile possibly have to do with a dead client, a special election and Indian Gaming laws?

The result is a fast paced detective novel that combines the ongoing evolution of one of my favorite fictional characters and a timely, complex plot revolving around current Boston headlines. While several detective series possess strong characters and many writers have the ability to create interesting plots, Linda Barnes is amongst mystery's most talented at doing both without distracting from either half of her whole. In *LIE DOWN WITH THE DEVIL* Barnes makes winter on the Cape as fresh and alive as springtime.

Ruth

THE MAN IN THE BLIZZARD

Bart Schneider

2008

Three Rivers Press

Augie Boyer is a private eye. He's also a poetry aficionado, amateur cellist, and a heavy-duty stoner. A dooper. A pothead. A founding member of the Dope for Breakfast Club.

In Bart Schneider's one, and possibly only nod to the "conventional" P.I. genre, a beautiful blond walks into Augie's office, wanting Augie to find a stolen violin. This is something right up Augie's erudite and eclectic alley, but he soon finds himself involved in a complex case involving neo-Nazi violin collectors, anti-abortionists, a shrink practicing mind control, and, of course, a murder plot.

Nothing that a little more pot won't help him to sort out.

Augie does have his issues; his therapist wife left him for another therapist, he's grossly overweight, his girlfriend loves him to death but he's too insecure to believe it, and his testosterone level is way too low and falling.

Set just prior to the Republican National convention in the Twin Cities, and impeccably researched, this novel is packed with loads of fascinating information about rare violins, poetry, the Nazi's looting and cataloging of priceless treasures during WWII., and, of course, pot. Given all this information, and the complexity of the plot and its characters, "The Man in the Blizzard" is a surprisingly slim volume at just a hair over 300 pages. But, of course, being a poetry buff, Mr. Schneider writes with a masterful economy of words. His is a fresh and welcome approach to the genre.

After solving the case and saving lives, Augie tells his friends: "*I have a poem for you both, which pretty much describes my life as a pothead and a detective. After I recite it, I'm going to need to be alone to contemplate it.*"

'The Man in the Blizzard' by Thomas McGrath.

Even his tracks are gone!

And, of course, his shadow...

But he keeps walking around,

Searching

Certain that someone

(Himself perhaps)

Was here before-

Or will be."

Give this book a try, and after you're done, fire up a doobie (just kidding), get yourself alone, and contemplate it.

Gary Shulze

THE MERCY OAK

Kathryn R. Wall

St. Martin's Minotaur

Bay Tanner, P.I., of Simpson & Tanner, Inquiry Agents, lives in the low country of South Carolina. Erik Whiteside is her young associate. She receives a call from Bobby Santiago, the son of her housekeeper, Dolores. He asks her for information about a hit- -and-run that has just occurred. She deduces that the

person was identified incorrectly, but no one wants to change it. Then Bobby disappears, and so does his mother. The family isn't talking, and Bay is warned off by them and others to stop looking.

Since this is a series, many of the characters are familiar. The Judge, her father, wheelchair-bound, is from an old Southern family, still living in the old manse, Presqu'isle, and still a person to be reckoned with. His long-time housekeeper and best friend, Lavinia Smalls, has been with the family since long before Bay was born, and keeps the house and her father alive.

Bay notices Lavinia is troubled, and finally gets the story out of her. Lavinia and an older man were in a bank when it was robbed. Lavinia's acquaintance recognized one of the men. She wants Bay to find out who the person was.

Red Tanner, the brother of her murdered husband, and recently divorced, has moved into his brother's shoes--and bed. Bay, now a shade past forty, is having many thoughts about this and about him wanting them to be a family with the two children from his marriage. We'll see.

The young woman, who is supposedly dead in the hit-and-run, was an immigrant advocate. Too vocal for some folk's taste. Was that why someone wanted to get rid of her?

Bay receives threatening phone calls. She realizes the caller thinks she knows more than she does. Of course, she is not going to back off. In fact, the calls are having the opposite effect. But the caller has more devious methods in mind to stop her.

The title refers to specially designated trees used in the Underground Railway where food and clothing were hidden for the escaping slaves. It becomes a clue for Bay to follow, for times don't change that much, as she finds out.

A very enjoyable read. In the cozy tradition.

Gay Toltl Kinman

PALACE COUNCIL

Stephen L. Carter

2008

Alfred A. Knopf

The novel spans twenty years from the Supreme Court's decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954 to President Richard Nixon's resignation in 1974. The story is rich in history--Cold War, Apollo Program, Robert Oppenheimer hearings, and the Vietnam War are more than references. Adam Clayton Powell, the Kennedys, and Martin Luther King are all a part of the strong background.

The book opens with a Prologue told from a lawyer's POV talking about the "Council" and ends with the sentence, "His murder was still thirty months away."

Part I begins "New York/London/Boston: 1954-1959," where we meet Eddie Wesley, a new writer, and learn his back story, as he goes to the wedding of his one true love. At the end of Chapter 1 he has found a body of lawyer Philmont Castle, a titan of Wall Street, and a major Republican fundraiser. The body wears a cross that is upside down, the Cross of St. Peter, and has some lettering on it. Eddie takes it and tries to find out its significance and why the lawyer was wearing it, to find out who murdered him.

Wesley moves in Harlem's high society when the artistic salons flourished. He is in love with Aurelia, but she marries someone with money and a profession, Kevin Garland.

Carter sums up the plot in an interview at the back of the book: "People of power get into lots of trouble when they are determined to do what they consider the right thing, and not interested in anyone else's opinion."

Several characters in his two previous novels, *THE EMPEROR OF OCEAN PARK* and *NEW ENGLAND WHITE*, such as the Garland family, are also in this story.

Stephen L. Carter, professor of law at Yale University, enjoys a rich literary reputation for his fiction and non-fiction books. Now he has tried his hand at a mystery.

Gay Toltl Kinman

THE PAPER MOON

Andrea Camilleri

2008

Penguin Books

Inspector Salvo Montalbano is back in the ninth of this mystery series. It is a straightforward and charming novel, with the Sicilian detective embroiled in a murder case involving two beautiful women who continually lie to him. One is the sister of the victim, who was shot in the head and found with his penis protruding from his open pants. The other was his mistress, who claims she had broken off the relationship.

Meanwhile, some high-ranking government officials are found dead of overdoses, and rumors of poisoned cocaine are rife. Are the cases related? After all, the murder victim was a pharmaceutical salesman. Or was he involved with kickbacks to physicians? In between, the Inspector has time to reflect on old age and philosophy, as well as to indulge his culinary appetite.

The quaint story [a compliment, I assure you] is moved along with even more unusual observations and dialogue. It is fast reading and full of fun.
Theodore Feit

PAPER SCISSORS DEATH

Joanna Campbell Slan

2008

Midnight Ink

PAPER SCISSORS DEATH is not a typical cozy. While the premise fits the format, the seriousness of the characters goes well beyond that. Joanna Campbell Slan has a strong voice and her characters have great depth.

Kiki Lowenstein is a scrap booker and, while Slan does this with authenticity, she also has a knack for realism that makes this border on medium boiled. This takes the amateur sleuth a few steps further than what is traditional. With plotting as tight as the seal of a decompression chamber and a flow to the narrative that is as smooth as silk, this is a wonderful read. A September release from Midnight Ink. More please.

Jon

POINTE AND SHOOT

Natalie M. Roberts

May 2008

Berkley Prime Crime

Dancing is all that Jenny Partridge has ever wanted to do, knowing since childhood that she was “born to dance.” When a knee injury destroyed her dream of going into film and stage, she opened a small dance studio in her hometown of Ogden, Utah [the land of the Mormons]. Her dance groups are called Minis, Petites, Smalls, Seniors, and the Company [all pretty much self-explanatory]. A very quiet life-style, one would think, until one day Jenny gets what appear to be warnings to ‘get out of town,’ to the extent that a Gorilla-Gram is sent with a nasty poem telling her that, shortly after which the Gorilla himself [itself?] is found dead in Jenny’s car.

Jenny has envisioned winning an upcoming competition which has a large grand prize, so that she can expand her studio and even open up a small dance store. She is used to having to deal with ‘psycho dance moms,’ but the not-so-subtle warnings have her fearing for her life. Her sort-of boyfriend, Tate Wilson, a local cop, sees to it that she gets protection, but the incidents continue, with a silver Hummer seen in the vicinity each time. In fact, that particular vehicle becomes ubiquitous, making the identification of the perpetrator that much more difficult.

Jenny is a delightful protagonist, although I must admit that it took me a little while to come around to that opinion – what I finally determined to be adorable malapropisms were a bit off-putting at first – mentioning that she slept “like a tree,” speaking of her “neck of the forest,” something not being “in the postcards,” talking about committing Hare Krishna – well, you get the idea. But Jenny won me over, and the book, the third in the series, was a fun and light read, just perfect for summer afternoons at the beach. I really enjoyed it.

Gloria Feit

THE

QUESTION:

Volume

1&2

Dennis

O’Neil

2008

DC

Comics

THE QUESTION was brought into the DC comics universe in the 80’s. Vic Sage is a reporter in corrupt Hub City who adopts the identity of The Question in order to combat crime. Wearing a trench coat and a faceless mask he is not a typical hero, but more of a noir pulp character. Greg Rucka recently brought Vic back, at least long enough to pass on the mantel of The Question to one Renee Montoya. The stories combine Dennis O’Neil’s social commentary with a Zen like feel. With all the novels in recent years that have characters trying to make a difference in a morally indifferent world, this one is ahead of it’s time. Deny Cowan’s art may not be as flashy as some done today, but it is a perfect fit. The dialog and action are incredible. Fans of the PI genre and modern noir will love these books.

Jon

RANDOM VICTIM

Michael A. Black

April 2008

Leisure Fiction/Dorchester Publishing

There are police procedurals, and then there are *police procedurals*. In this novel, the procedure is more like an obstacle course. On one hand, there is Sgt. Frank Leal of the Chicago Sheriff's Department, raring to solve a cold murder case. On the other, there is his superior, a lieutenant resolutely placing roadblocks in his way.

The plot is straightforward: a murdered female judge is found in a trunk sunk in a lake. After months, no progress is made in solving the crime and the Sheriff is up for reelection. His opponent is running leading the polls saying he'd solve it. So a task force is formed, with Leal, a woman, a black man and an Irishman the components. The woman and the black man have no experience—except to provide “racial balance” in the publicity photos.

Despite all the foot-dragging and misdirection by the lieutenant heading up the effort, progress is made from time to time. It is a well-plotted and –paced story, leading the reader on step-by-step to a conclusion that probably should be anticipated, but is not seen until it is presented at the conclusion. Leal is a real character, while many of the others are stereotypes (for a good reason). The plot is interesting and the book well worth reading.

Theodore Feit

SCARED TO LIVE

Stephen Booth

2008

Bantam Books

SCARED TO LIVE marks the return of DS Diane Fry and DC Ben Cooper, the protagonists of this wonderful series by Stephen Booth. At the outset Diane is called to the scene of a fire which Diane by some instinct deems suspicious, though there is no immediate evidence to support that conclusion. A woman and two of her children have died in the blaze; the husband was not at home at the time and the daughter was at the home of her grandparents, so those family members were spared. Shortly thereafter Ben investigates the death of a middle-aged woman, apparently a recluse, shot to death by a high-powered rifle in the home where she had lived for the past ten months, with no sign of entry into the house. There are no clues as to who might have done it, much less what possible motive there could have been. The woman had been so alone and without human contact that her body had lain undiscovered for more than a day. These two incidents could not appear to be more different, one of three members of a family in a well-off rural community and the other of a middle-class ‘spinster’ on an Edendale housing estate. But as the investigations proceed, it seems there might indeed have been connections.

There is a wonderful sense of place throughout the novel, with lovely descriptive prose enabling the reader to easily visualize the Edendale area of Ben's birth, the villages of the Peak District and the old mills once so prevalent there: “The back wall of the mill overlooked the river. Its five stories were full of windows—long ranks of them separated into pairs by stone mullions. They were spaced with Victorian precision, but so small and dark that nothing was visible behind the glass. Those windows stared out across the rushing water like blank eyes. There were scores of them, a hundred pairs of eyes—a high, brick wall full of dead faces.” There are also fascinating tidbits of local history and folklore.

The proverbial ‘fly in the ointment’ is a common enough phrase, but it took this author to conjure the picture of “a tiny fly twitching its wings in the ointment.” I thoroughly enjoyed this book as much for its excellent plotting as for the author's continuing development of the protagonists, individually as well as playing off each other, the latter made that much more interesting for the fact that Diane is Ben's boss. The point is often made here that “emotions always interfere with rational behaviour,” exemplified in more than one of the characters.

Gloria Feit

SCOTS ON THE ROCKS

Mary Daheim

June 24, 2008

Avon

This is the 23rd entry in Mary Daheim's “Bed-and-Breakfast” series, and the first I'd read. Instead of the customary Pacific Northwest, Judith Flynn and her cousin, Serena [known to one and all as Renie] Jones are in Scotland, where their husbands, retired cop and psychologist, respectively, are indulging in their love of fishing. Joe Flynn has arranged with a policeman friend who is to join them fishing the Scottish waters for the women to stay in a remote village near Aberdeen, where they soon find themselves “at loose ends...What else can we do with no car and our husbands off fishing? We're bored. We Yanks enjoy excitement.” Excitement is soon found in the form of an explosion on the beach near the castle and a man's body found nearby. If that isn't enough, the castle is said to be haunted, and indeed a strange voice is heard from time to time, its source undiscovered. The dead man is the grandson of the caretakers to the castle and the estranged husband of a local oil heiress. There is a large cast of local residents [to the extent

that I had difficulty keeping track of the various characters]. Judith has a habit, as readers of the series know, of finding dead bodies, to the extent that she says “sometimes I feel like the harbinger of death.” For her part, Renie has a habit of occasional violent urges, though relatively harmless ones. They both are given to using expressions such as “gaga” and “neener-neener” and Renie at one point refers to her husband as a “nut doc,” which struck me as particularly off key.

I must admit that cozies are not my favorite things, although that said, the book makes for a light summer read. I found it a bit corny, e.g., one character has the following phone conversation: “The Eagle has flown. The Jackal is trapped. The Leopard? Very well.” From the Too Stupid to Live department, at one point the women accompany a stranger who had used subterfuge to get them to meet him and was a possible suspect, to his cottage, and then discuss at length the murder and their investigation, not to mention the fact that they fell for his ruse in the first place. But the book and Renie have a charm to them, not unlike Mrs. Marple in her time.

Gloria Feit

STILL SHOT

Jerry Kennealy

2008

Thomas Dunne Books/St. Martin's Minotaur

Can a movie and theater critic succeed in solving mysteries? Well, if it is Carroll Quint, the glib movie-dialog-quoting employee of the San Francisco Examiner, he can. After all, with the training of Bogie and the rest of filmdom's private eyes, he has all the background he needs to follow his nose, after his mother, a former starlet, calls him to find the murderer of an old friend. What makes it difficult is that the death was ruled a suicide.

In a complicated though ingenious plot, the intrepid Carroll not only plows ahead, but has to tackle the situation while attempting to save his job (and those of his co-workers) when one of his suspects is near to purchasing the paper. And there are numerous other suspects to deal with. The story is peppered with Hollywood tales, some of which are outlandish but amusing enough to lighten the mood. The author provides an entertaining parody of the silver screen industry and exaggerates the elements of the noir genre at the same time.

The plot moves ahead at a measured pace, with well-developed characters who contribute to the over-all thrust regarding the California culture during the heyday of Clifton Webb, William Powell, Myrna Loy, and even their Thin Man dog, Asta, among many others.

Theodore Feit

THE STOLEN

Jason Pinter

2008

MIRA Books

Henry Parker has been on the thriller landscape for three books and things are looking very good for this series. The voice of Parker is maturing, which directly owes to the talents and growing abilities of author Jason Pinter. Parker is young, but he knows what's important in life – maintaining relationships with those we love and respect. He's a kick-ass journalist with an investigator's instincts, which usually leads to Parker's numerous dire predicaments.

In THE STOLEN, Parker is asked to cover an exclusive story involving the sudden appearance of an eleven year-old child kidnapped five years earlier in an upstate suburb of New York. Daniel Linwood doesn't remember any circumstances during those absent years – not who took him, not where he lived, nothing. It's an intriguing plot premise and Pinter delivers the goods on fleshing this out, while employing thematic lynchpins of thriller badness: politics, big business and medicine. At first, the Linwood family is cooperative with Parker, but then they turn particularly unfriendly, when Parker's investigation unearths irregularities that hit close to home. The author puts the story in full-throttle early on and it never wanes; there are softer moments to be sure, for example when Parker reminisces about ex-girlfriend Amanda Davies, but the tempo is always pulsing under the skin of the narrative like a tick that just won't go away. Parker is tenacious, and when he discovers another child – Michelle Oliveira – who suffered the same mysterious circumstances a few years prior in a similarly well-off suburban community in Connecticut, he's a pit bull that won't let go. It isn't long before the bad guys send a particularly nasty ex-con with a smoking habit to make Parker go away.

Parker is a nice guy. Let me explain that further: Parker is a really nice guy. He has flashes of anger, but those moments aren't self-destructive. Parker gets angry for the little guy and the wronged individual. His integrity is just shy of that well-known guy who wears a cape and flies through the air. This is what makes him so damn appealing to readers: his earnestly good intentions. With so many character flaws abounding

in crime fiction protagonists, it's refreshing to find a guy who passes up a drink with a cute babe (and the certainty of much more) because he misses the woman he truly loves.

Make no mistake however, Parker is willing to get dirty and put his life in danger. He is no bore and faces down more than his fair share of gun barrels. Bodies have a way of piling up around Parker, and there are a few more added to the heap in THE STOLEN. In each of the two previous novels, Parker has had to stare down bad guys with a predilection for torture, and the same occurs in THE STOLEN. Each time, the scenario is gruesome and palpable. In this instance, Parker is used as a human ashtray and still the man does not break. I said Parker was nice, did I mention he has backbone too?

All of the Parker novels have story line tributaries feeding off the major plot progression. In the case of THE STOLEN, there is the anxious matter of Parker's fractured relationship with lawyer girlfriend Davies, the ever conniving journalistic adversary Paulina Cole and the life-threatening circumstances of Jack O'Donnell's alcoholic addiction.

Parker jettisoned Amanda in the last novel to protect her, but he wants her back as badly as Pam Anderson wanted Tommy Lee. With Amanda absent at the beginning of the novel, Parker experiences an unpleasant part of the city that never sleeps: the potential for work to overtake all other aspects of your life. Parker is devoted to the exiled Amanda, so the option of all-consuming work is his choice: he even keeps a spare change of clothes under his desk. The two ultimately join forces in the Linwood and Oliveira investigations and the flirting gets hot and heavy.

Cole writes for the rival The Dispatch of course, but she'd feel equally at home on Dirt. She's ruthless, enjoys her sex and delights in making Parker miserable. O'Donnell is an icon to the news business and a mentor to Parker, but his health takes a major hit due to his alcoholism. The man drinks the way Amy Winehouse smokes crack. The only way you can get one over on O'Donnell is when he's down, and Cole takes full advantage of that in THE STOLEN. We may be seeing Parker usurping more of the New York Gazette newsroom on his own in the future.

Like any self-respecting thriller, there is a deadly game being played in upstate New York that impacts the lives of the innocent, though they are wholly unaware of it. Villains give way to political and financial lust in these pages, and cut-throat killers are brought in to do the dirty work. Parker is there to stand up for the Linwoods in the world with guile, guts and a good sense of humor. Pinter also does a nice job of alternating the locales between Manhattan and the greenery of Westchester. In each succeeding novel, Pinter finds a unique thread to pick at and to exploit into major dimensions. Strap yourself in because there's no stopping this train, but who'd be dumb enough to want off anyway?

Anthony Rainone

SWEEPING

Carolyn

Poisoned

UP

D.

Pen

GLASS

Wall

Press

Olivia Saul and her grandson William run Harker's grocery store; it's a hard living and scant but it's all they have. The living isn't any easier for having Olivia's mother Ida in the shack out back; she's crazier than the day is long. Olivia has loved Wing Harris since they were children. His wife has been dying for a long time now; he and Olivia haven't spoken much in a long time.

Living on Olivia's strip of the mountain are silver-faced wolves, brought there years ago by Olivia's grandfather. William is trying to raise some orphaned wolf pups, with mixed results. The Hunt Club is killing the wolves and cutting off the ears. Olivia confronts Alton Phelps about his Hunt Club killing her wolves. The meeting is unsatisfactory for both parties.

There are mysteries in Olivia's past, most of which she hasn't been curious about until now. As she probes, she is stonewalled and obstructed at every turn. This does not make her give up, which is no surprise, given her life and disposition. One doesn't survive in the 30's by giving up. Olivia is a strong woman, blind-sided by her past, who picks herself up and keeps on with her life.

Olivia's daughter comes back to claim William. Wing Harris's wife dies, and he comes to claim Olivia. Secrets are unearthed, literally and figuratively, and those secrets come at a cost, a very high cost. She relies on her friends, some of whom are unlikely, given the time and the place in which Olivia lives. They risk a great deal for her, and she does the same for them when the time comes.

Carolyn Wall's first mystery is a gem. Olivia is a tough woman, doing the best she can with the little she has, in a situation that would depress most people today. Her descriptions of Olivia's world make that world very real, giving readers a context for the choices Olivia makes. This is a very well-written, well-plotted, engrossing first novel with much to recommend it.

P.J. Coldren

TOROS & TORSOS

Craig McDonald

September 2008

Bleak House Books

It's the tail end of August in Key West, and there's a hurricane coming in. Crime writer Hector Lassiter is approached in a bar by a young woman, and winds up taking her home with him. He and Rachel Harper spend several lusty days together. The hurricane keeps coming in.

Then Rachel's friend Beverly goes missing and Hector suspects things are not as they seem. Of course he is correct; Beverly is murdered and then so is Rachel. The bodies are posed to look like surrealist paintings. We follow Hector to Spain, to Paris, to Hollywood, to Puget Sound. He meets Rachel's sister Alva in Spain and begins a relationship with her. Neighbor Ernest Hemingway is in Spain, with Martha Gellhorn, writing about the Spanish Civil War where Hector is denounced for multiple murders. Again, the bodies are posed to resemble surrealist paintings. He flees to Paris. Alva is killed before she can join him.

In Hollywood, Hector is working with Orson Welles. There are more murders. Hector, living the life he writes about, continues his pursuit of the killer.

The twists and turns in TOROS & TORSOS boggle the mind, when viewed from a distance. When one is in the middle of the book, it all flows seamlessly. Hector's place, just off the center of several social circles, never seems unusual or unlikely. The well-known figures that he interacts with seem just as real as Hector does; McDonald has done his homework. Those familiar with the art of Salvador Dali and other surrealists will have a more graphic idea of the nature of the murders, although anyone interested can certainly use the Internet to see what the murderer has done. That alone is an education.

TOROS & TORSOS is a novel of deceptions, large and small, and obsessions. It is difficult to think of any major character in the book who is not betrayed somewhere along the line. Set against the background of the Spanish Civil War, the HUAC activities, and the artistic circle that included Hemingway, Dos Passos, Orson Welles, and the like, TOROS & TORSOS is a ripping good read.

P.J.Coldren

TRIGGER CITY

Sean Chercover

2008

William Morrow

When an author has a great debut book the second book can be a little daunting. Sometimes the second falls short of being as good as the first, commonly they are as good as the first, and rarely there better. BIG CITY BAD BLOOD was one of my favorite books of 2007. When I got my hands on the follow up book I wondered how Chercover could follow up such a powerful debut. I should have known better.

TRIGGER CITY reads like it was written by a seasoned pro without the cliché's or easy ways out that occur in a long running series. It opens with a nice prolog which sets the tone for the tale without giving a book report on the previous book.

Ray Dudgeon is hired by a distraught father to look into the murder of his daughter. The police know who did it, and the man is already dead leaving no doubt in their minds that he killed her. But the father wants some closure and offers Ray enough money that Ray can't say no. Ray follows the trail leading to a security firm that hires out mercenaries for governments and big corporations. With the help of an FBI agent and his best friend, Ray dives head first into a situation that could easily get him and everyone he holds dear killed.

TRIGGER CITY has a beautiful and solid mystery for Ray to solve and the flow of the story is flawless. And while there is plenty of action, it's a story that is driven by the characters. Chercover's Ray Dudgeon is one of the most human detectives I've read since Crais and Connelly. He's not a superman, just a resourceful, intelligent and street smart guy trying to do good in his own way. Dudgeon is a character you quickly find yourself cheering for and in the blink of an eye you are invested in the story. There is a depth and humanity to Dudgeon that makes me want read more and read faster. To make this package an even sweeter deal, Chercover writes about Chicago with the heart of someone who couldn't love the city more if he had been a founding father.

Pop the safety and pull this TRIGGER(CITY) off the shelf. When people ask who my favorite new writers are I have a short list, and Chercover is on the top.

Jon Jordan

A VICKY HILL EXCLUSIVE!

Hannah Dennison

Berkley Prime Crime

Vicky Hill is a wonderful character. She's a cub reporter in an English town hoping to get an exclusive to pave her way to fame. Walter Mitty dreams. Annabel Lake, also a cub, is climbing the ladder much faster, with help from her considerable charms and money. Annabel seems to be in the right place at the right time, has informants, and the editor gives her choice assignments. This will never do! Soon Vicky won't have a job at all.

Vicky is desperate for an exclusive story, and soon is off on the scent of a witch's coven, the elusive writer of a best-selling romance, and pursuing the innocuous second autopsy report of a local lord.

In short, she imagines all kinds of nefarious deeds, and tells the wildest stories to string her editor and others along, trying to buy time, and the front page space.

Her parents are in Spain, but in her thoughts constantly. Particularly pa who is in the cat burglar profession and has imparted some words of wisdom to her, which she resorts to in the many scrapes she gets into.

Topaz, a friend, gives her an alibi, after a B & E, by saying they are lovers and that Vicky was with her the entire night. This is not the way Vicky plans to lose her virginity. Although she has some offers, life intervenes each time and she must go on. Very funny scenes and dialog.

After being duped and dumped on wild goose chases, she stumbles on the real exclusive--or is it?

This is a fun book. Vicky is off the charts on some of her imaginings, which makes the book all the more fun. Cozy.

Gay Toltl Kinman

WALKING THE PERFECT SQUARE

Reed Farrel Coleman

Busted Flush Press

June 2008

The original, i.e., first, Moe Prager mystery, which has been out of print, now appears in this reissue by Busted Flush Press. Since his initial appearance, Moe has appeared in four subsequent novels, and welcome have all of them been for this charming, plain yet complicated man. In SQUARE, we find Moe recuperating from a knee injury which caused him to retire him from the NYPD after 10 years on the Job.

At loose ends, Moe is enticed to take on an investigation of a missing college student. His efforts bring him into contact with all kinds of savory and unsavory characters—but more importantly, his deepening understanding of personal relationships and family. Moe is a very different kind of “shamus.” To begin with, he is Jewish, a Brooklynite and native New Yorker, full of self-doubts and inquisitive. And, yes, smart-alecky.

Moe, as a protagonist, much less a person, develops more fully as the series moves on, but the seeds of the fundamental characteristics of the novels are sown in this debut: The graphic descriptions of New York City in the 1970's, the caring and thoughtful Moe, the basic human attributes of the characters, the sharp writing and plotting, as well as the agony and tragedies people endure.

Theodore Feit

WASTED YEARS

John Harvey

2008

Bloody Brits

Detective Inspector Charlie Resnick is an introspective man, and in this entry in the series he is retrospective as well, being drawn back to events that transpired variously in 1969, 1981, 1992 [at which point he had been a ‘career copper’ for twenty years]—back to the years when he first met his wife when they were both in their mid-twenties, to the time six years later when she asked him for a divorce; from robberies that happened in the past to a string of brutal robberies happening in the present; to crimes whose perpetrators are once again at large and a matter of his concern.. As the book opens four robberies have taken place, the amount of violence escalating with each.

Charlie Resnick is a wonderful protagonist--A man who loves jazz [references to Ella Fitzgerald and Duke Ellington and the like abound], he owns four cats named Dizzy, Miles, Bud and Pepper [how could you not love it?], and the title of the book is itself taken from the lyrics of a jazz tune that haunts him. He has not yet gotten over the breakup of his marriage. He speaks of replacing some furniture with other second-hand pieces, “something older, broken in, the shape of other lives already impressed into the upholstery.” The book is at its heart a police procedural, but also a character study of Charlie and those who work with him, now and in the past, and whose paths cross his.

This is the fifth Inspector Resnick novel, and Bloody Brits is owed a debt of gratitude by those outside of the UK who have loved his novels but been unable without difficulty to find them – they have or are about to publish the sixth through ninth in the series. [The newest, and the first one in ten years, has recently been published as well.] And a wonderful thing that truly is.

Gloria Feit

WHAT WAS LOST

Catherine O' Flynn
2008
Henry Holt

If Catherine O' Flynn suffers a sophomore slump it's will be because it's going to be very, very hard to top her first novel, WHAT WAS LOST. This isn't a mystery novel in the traditional sense. It's realistic fiction with a missing child at the core. The story begins in the 1980's with Katherine Meaney, who spends her free time at Green Oaks; a newly opened shopping mall. Katherine, perhaps the least troubled soul in a book full of troubled souls, stakes out the mall working as a junior detective. One day she disappears. Her older friend Adrian, is questioned; and hounded by the press, he too disappears.

Twenty years go by. The case remains open. One day Kurt, a bored mall security guard sees a young girl on the closed circuit cameras. Several days later Lisa, a frustrated record store assistant manager, finds herself lost in the underground tunnels of the mall. She meets Kurt, making his rounds. In the tunnel's she finds a stuffed monkey; is it a clue to Katherine's disappearance? Their interest in Katherine brings them together as friends. Their friendship takes them out of life's routine. It's Catherine O Flynn's descriptive writing, her clever use of life's foibles and her realistic portrayal of our day to day dealings with those foibles that makes the reader keep turning the pages.

WHAT WAS LOST makes for a wonderful read.

Dave Biemann

WHITE CORRIDOR
Christopher Fowler
2007
Bantam Books

If you would instinctively recoil from a book whose primary protagonists are described as "octogenarian policemen", get over your badself. Christopher Fowler's White Corridor will generously reward you for overcoming any preconceived ideas about the ability of past-their-prime detectives to provoke, challenge, engage, and entertain.

Arthur Bryant and John May, eccentric seniors in London's Peculiar Crimes Unit, champion unorthodox methods of investigation to solve the crimes that stymie (or are ignored by) the rest of the Metropolitan Police Force. Their unique approach, while effective, is a liability that keeps their department under constant scrutiny and in perpetual danger of bureaucratic shut-down. The acting head of the PCU has declared a compulsory week-long holiday, ostensibly to upgrade the departmental computer system; seizing the opportunity, Bryant convinces May to join him on a trip to the International Spiritualists' Convention in southern England. En route through the remote countryside, the duo's journey is cut short by a sudden blizzard that has closed the highway. As the weather conditions worsen, Bryant and May join a line of stranded motorists forced to wait out the storm until help can arrive. Disagreeable circumstances, admittedly. But real danger arrives with the discovery of a fresh corpse--and the realization that a killer is searching the snowed-in vehicles for its next victim.

Meanwhile, Detective Sergeant Janice Longbright has been left in charge of the unit and its imperiled reputation. Preparing the department for an upcoming royal tour, she finds herself tasked with the unwelcome job of investigating the suspicious and frustratingly mysterious death of the team's chief pathologist. Fortunately, Bryant and May, accessible by cell phone, are eager to assist while simultaneously managing their own increasingly dire predicament. The drama that ensues is comedic, chilling, deliciously convoluted, and wholly unexpected.

WHITE CORRIDOR is the 5th book in the Bryant and May series, and stands well on its own. Fowler writes with an uncommon humanity and a ferociously intelligent humor, providing both slapstick and linguistic laughter that makes the story as thoughtful as it is entertaining. This is a completely satisfying and enjoyable crime novel.

Rebecca Tatham

WHITEWASH
Alex Kava
2008
Mira Books

Alex Kava has written a thriller that could not be more timely – its themes are oil and greed.

Sabrina Galloway is a 35-year-old former academic, having left her home in Chicago one year ago to work as a scientist for EchoEnergy, a Tallahassee, Florida company apparently in the forefront of the race to convert refuse and other waste material into oil, a process known as Thermal Conversion [a very real science per the author's note]. The corporation seems on the verge of landing a \$140 million government contract to supply the entire U.S. military, the first time such a contract would be awarded to other than a Middle Eastern oil company.

The book, surely written before the present-day preoccupation with gas prices and the per-barrel cost of oil ascending to ever greater and previously unthinkable heights, takes place during a post-George W. Bush administration, and got this reader in its grip early on [almost surprisingly, as I did not finish the one earlier book by Ms. Kava I had ever picked up]. But all the elements are here: a suspenseful story line, fast-paced writing, and engaging characters: Sabrina; her octogenarian next-door neighbor, Miss Sadie, whose gorgeous fluffy white cat, Lizzie Borden, plays her own small role; her father, seemingly victim of dementia; and her enigmatic brother, Eric, who she has neither seen nor heard from in two years, since the tragic accidental death of their mother; and then there are the Washington D.C. players, including Jason Brill, pragmatic chief of staff to U. S. Senator John Quincy Allen, a man with special ambitions of his own, and whose support of the EchoEnergy contract he hopes will further those ambitions.

Gloria Feit

THE WHOLE TRUTH

David Baldacci

April 2008

Grand Central Publishing

In every story there is a premise. The plot can be real or a figment of one's imagination. If it is unreal or illogical, it can interfere with the reader's enjoyment. Such is, perhaps, the case with this novel.

This plot is a fairly simple one. Nicolas Creel, the head of a large defense contractor somewhat on the skids, undertakes to recreate the Cold War to encourage another arms race. Along the way, to accomplish this aim, the collateral damage is widespread, with many people left dead, Russia and China at each other's throats. Only Shaw, a larger-than-life protagonist, and Katie James, a two-time Pulitzer Prize journalist turned unemployed alcoholic (along with a little help) can uncover the plot and prevent Armageddon. Meanwhile, trillions of dollars of arms contracts flow to the instigator of the plot, as well as other defense companies.

The problem is the premise is highly improbable. For a defense contractor to sell weapons and other materiel overseas, permission and a license has to be granted by the United States Government. Without such an OK, no sale. So the truth is the premise for this novel is pure fiction. But, after all, that's what novels are for. So, if the reader can by-pass this little impediment, a highly charged and entertaining read is available.

Theodore Feit

YEAR OF THE DOG

Henry Chang

2008

Soho Press, Inc.

This is noir fiction in its purest form: terse, unflinching, and palpable prose infused with a full-sensory realism that makes atmosphere its most intimate character. Henry Chang snakes his story through the streets and hierarchies of Chinatown, following Detective Jack Yu as he confronts old childhood loyalties, cultural prejudice, and personal nightmares while investigating several crimes whose victimology points to an elaborate strategy of gang warfare.

Along the way, Chang vividly articulates the feel of New York's Chinatown to provide an unusual and explicit perspective of a culture that's underrepresented in modern crime fiction. While the individual psychologies of Chang's players are interesting, the characters themselves play second fiddle to their roles and the strongest impressions are of mood and movement rather than personality. It's a dynamic of tension, and it works here. This is the second Jack Yu novel; hopefully more will follow.

Rebecca Tatham