

Buzz Box:

**THE ASSASSIN** (Orion Books) by Stephen Coonts is a perfect thriller featuring anti hero Tommy Carmellini, a former burglar now working for the CIA. Tommy is tracking down terrorists with ties to the mob and his adventures take across the globe. Fast paced with the punch of a bass drum this is book will send you reeling.

**BLOOD SINS** ( Bantam) by Kay Hooper is another in the series featuring Noah Bishop of the FBI. This book sees our hero trying to solve murders inside a religious cult's secret retreat. Great action and fast pacing make this a real treat for thriller fans. If you dig Tess Gerritsen then you will dig this.

Jeff Sherratt's **THE BRIMSTONE MURDERS** (Echelon Press) classic mystery set in the 1970's Los Angeles. Jimmy O'Brien is a defense lawyer with a business on shaky ground, he takes the pro bono case thinking it will be a simple matter of pleading out and moving on. However when his client takes off and a murder charge lands on his head things start to get a bit hairy. This is a entertaining, clever and fun book. I look forward to more by Sherratt.

**BY THE SWORD** (Forge) is the latest Repairman Jack novel from F. Paul Wilson and it's everything you would expect from the master of edgy suspense. Jack is hired to track down a rare sword with an unusual pedigree. It's been stolen before and the thief's son wants it back. Unfortunately for Jack the people he's up against have a lot of reasons to want Jack stopped. Fast paced and over the top entertaining this a book that goes beyond big fun.

**DEATH ROE** is the sixth book in this series by Joseph Heywood referred to as "The Woods Cop Series". It's a clever mystery with an edgy character and is perfect for fans of CJ Box and Nevada Barr. Grady Service is works for the Department of Natural Resources and the case in this book revolves around tainted caviar. The consequences of what Grady uncovers goes well beyond the woods he's used to working in. Heywood's writing has a way of getting in your head and it makes it impossible to stop reading.

**DEFENDING ANGELS** by Mary Stanton (AKA Claudia Bishop) is the first in a new series featuring Brianna (BREE) Winston Beaufort, a lawyer in Savannah, the most haunted city in the world. As such the series has a supernatural bent and has the cross appeal of being a great mystery with some really charming southern characters. This was a truly memorable read and it's coming in early December as a mass market paperback.

Swedish author Johan Theorin has delivered a truly chilling and suspenseful novel with **ECHOES FROM THE DEAD** (Doubleday). Opening with a child disappearing and jumping ahead twenty years this book is full of twists and zig zags that keep things so tense you may need to take a break. Dark secrets and a perfect small town feel make this an amazing piece of work.

The long awaited sequel to Katherine Neville's debut novel THE EIGHT is finally here. **THE FIRE** picks up twenty years later with Alexandra Solarin, the daughter of Cat and Alexander from THE EIGHT, returning home for her mother's birthday only to find Mom missing and the chess set that caused all the trouble in the first book in play again. **THE FIRE** is a thriller on an epic scale drawing on history and multiple global locations tied together by a constantly building pace. Top notch.

Julie Hyzy's latest series features a chef at the white house and it's not only a wonderful traditional series, but it's a lot of fun too. The most recent is **HAIL TO THE CHEF** and will be out in December from Berkley in mass market. Ollie Paras has a lot on his plate with the holidays coming up. The last thing he needs is dead bodies in the White House. But Ollie is drawn into the investigation and her life becomes more than a little more interesting. This is a fun series.

Nick Stone made a stunning debut last year and he returns with an equally amazing sequel. **THE KING OF SWORDS** (Harper) is the second book with Max Mingus, a wonderful hardboiled detective. This time out Max is up against it when he has to tackle Voodoo priests, bad cops and gangsters. Stone is a fresh voice and one you shouldn't miss.

**MISS FORTUNE**(Moody Publishers) by Sara Mills is a noir PI tale in which our heroine Allie Fortune is on the trail if missing gold while being plagued by soviet agents. Set during WWII this is well plotted and classic PI book that fans of the genre should love.

**SIX GEESE A-SLAYING** is a holiday book in the Meg Langslow series from Donna Andrews. Meg has taken on the organization of the annual Christmas parade and in true Langslow tradition things go wrong, wrong in this case being a dead Santa Claus.

Andrews writes entertaining books and this is one of her best, the added holiday element just adds to the fun. This is a don't miss.

**THE SPY WHO CAME FOR CHRISTMAS** (Vanguard) by David Morrell is a wonderful blend of the best of the thriller genre and some wonderful heartfelt moments that make this a perfect holiday book. Filled with spies and mobsters and strange parallels to an age old tale this is a fast moving book that has characters so real it doesn't always feel like fiction. I for one demand to see more of them. Thank you Mr. Morrell.

Standard Book reviews:

### **100 BULLETS VOLUME 12: DIRTY**

Brian Azzarello

2008

Vertigo

DIRTY collects 100 Bullets issues 84-88. The series will be ending with issue 100, so it's safe to say that things are really starting to amp up to what I'm sure will be a killer conclusion. This is one of the best pieces of crime fiction I've read in years, each volume another chapter in a saga that is complex and absorbing.

Sides are being chosen in the battle between Agent Graves and the Trust and it's getting messy. Bodies are dropping and the players are resorting to their most basic instincts, kill or be killed. Graves is pushing on with his still unknown final agenda and the Trust is trying to do whatever they can to stop him. As with earlier parts of this tale, we see everything through the eyes of the people on the ground, each move having an effect on the outcome with more direct consequences for the players involved. No one appears safe as someone makes a move on Lono, who up till now seems unstoppable. A player thought to be off the board is brought back into play and Graves world seems to be getting smaller.

This series actually moves quickly considering how smoothly the story is told. It's so absorbing that time between events blurs. Azzarello is without a doubt a genius, a mad genius to be sure, but the kind I want writing more crime fiction.

This volume also has an introduction by the artist for the whole series, Eduardo Risso. It's a love song to the work that he and the team have created and it seems to me that maybe he should try his hand at some more writing.

One volume to go, and I can't wait, but I also don't want it to end.

*Jon Jordan*

### **ASKING FOR MURDER**

Roberta Isleib

2008

Berkley Prime Crime

Dr. Rebecca Buttermann finds herself in an uncomfortable place. Her friend and fellow therapist, Annabelle Hart, has been brutally beaten and may not live. Dr. Buttermann has a professional obligation to help Hart's patients, either directly or by finding them someone else while Annabelle recovers. Personally, Rebecca feels that the police are not doing a good enough job of investigating. She is bound by the various laws and codes of conduct not to reveal information about Annabelle's patients, and she is also convinced that the "burglary gone bad" story is incorrect; as a result, she feels she must check out the patients because the police can't and/or won't.

As one might expect, the police don't think highly of her refusal to cooperate in giving out patient information, or her decision to investigate on her own. Her local detective, Meigs, is out of his jurisdiction and not much help, which somewhat irrationally annoys Rebecca.

There are some romantic involvements for all the major characters, some of which go well and some not. Annabelle's sister Victoria is cold and shuts Rebecca out of information and contact with Annabelle. Rebecca doesn't take this well, on either count. Rebecca finds herself dealing with her ex-husband and another therapist who clearly has no use for her; both relationships surprise her.

This is the third entry in the "Advice Column" series. Isleib is doing a good job of finding ways to keep Rebecca investigating; this book doesn't deal with a murder and yet there are secrets to be uncovered. ASKING FOR MURDER pushes Rebecca again to deal with some of the issues in her past, not just her divorce. Her entanglement with Meigs gets no closer to being settled, although things are not the same at the end of the book. Plot? Well, perhaps not the best of the three, but believable and possible. It's a pleasure to watch Rebecca come to terms with herself, that's for sure.

*P.J. Coldren*

### **BERLIN**

Michael Mirolla

January 2009

Leapfrog Press

In a case of parallel universes that intersect, the Berlin Wall comes down as a mental patient, Giulio Chiavetta, falls back into some semblance of consciousness after two-years in a near catatonic state. He promptly marches to the fence surrounding the hospital and is not seen after.

It is here that reality begins to spiral into a mix of memory and a narrative produced by a mind coming to terms with

consequences that lead to madness.

Antonio G. Serratura is submersed in thoughts of his father's death – a father cold and removed by his experiences in a concentration camp. A trip to Berlin to give a speech at the Wittgenstein World Symposium on the Realism/Anti-Realism Debate in Contemporary Philosophy takes Serratura outside of his known sphere of a teaching existence and into the midst of a bold city that shocks him out of a state of false complacency. As he explores the debauched side of Berlin in the form of transvestite bars he returns to a hostel where nothing is what it seems most of the time.

As Serratura slips into a deeper, darker part of Berlin, his mind begins to slip and falter between images of sado-masochism, philosophical hedonism and murder. Not until the last pages is the reader allowed to judge what is real and what isn't.

Michael Mirolla, author of *The Formal Logic of Emotion*, is a novelist, short story writer, poet, and playwright is a teller of tales that only the tautest prose style could relate with cohesion and beauty. This book will thrill the mind.

*Jennifer Jordan*

## **THE BLACK TOWER**

Louis Bayard

2008

William Morrow

Bayard has proved himself to be a master of historical mysteries and his latest, *THE BLACK TOWER*, is no exception. It is a tale of one of the first modern detectives, the founder of the plainclothes police force in Paris, Eugene Francois Vidocq.

The case in this gripping novel surrounds the idea that the son of Marie Antionette and King Louis XVI was not killed in the black tower and may actually be alive. Facts come to the attention of Vidocq as he is investigating a medical student suspected of murder.

Bayard combines uncanny plotting skills with an accuracy of the period creating a story that will not allow the book to be read slowly. His way with words will be enough to make literary snobs forget that they are reading a genre book. I found this to be so engrossing that I was completely lost in the book, needing time to reacquaint myself with my actual surroundings when I was done. A masterpiece.

*Jon Jordan*

## **BLACKMAN'S COFFIN**

Mark de Castrique

2008

Poisoned Pen Press

The Churchillian phrase, "A mystery wrapped in an enigma," certainly applies to this novel, which promises to be the first in a new series featuring Sam Blackman. Sam was a career soldier in the army, most recently a Chief Warrant Officer in the Criminal Investigation Detachment in Iraq where he lost a leg. Sent to Walter Reed Hospital in the nation's Capitol, he raised his voice against poor treatment of veterans in the press and before a Congressional Committee, gaining a certain notoriety.

Apparently as a result, or in an attempt to hide him from the public eye, Sam was relocated to a Veteran's Hospital in Asheville, NC, boyhood home of the novelist Thomas Wolfe, who plays a role in the story. Shortly before his discharge, Sam is visited by another amputee, Tikima Robertson, who suggests she could use his services. Before either could follow up, she is murdered. Her sister brings Sam a journal written in 1919 by a 12-year-old boy. The tale leads Sam and the sister into looking into not only Tikima's murder, but several others, including that of a couple that took place almost nine decades before.

Written with style and verve, the novel provides broad and interesting glimpses into North Carolina history, excellent descriptions of the Vanderbilt's legacy at the Biltmore estate and some interesting insights into Tom Wolfe's writings.

*Theodore Feit*

## **BLOOD ISLAND**

H. Terrell Griffin

2008

Oceanview Publishing

Matt Royal used to be a lawyer, but now he's mostly a beach bum, doing legal work occasionally for the fun of it. When his ex-wife shows up asking for a favor, he's got no real reason to say no, and he's still in love with her, so he says he'll find her daughter for her. You'd think he'd know better.

The search for Peggy leads to a religious cult, a string of high-end whorehouses, some major drug dealing, and the like. Matt winds up calling in some favors and some old friends to get the job done. There is enough violence to go around, although none of it is actually gratuitous given the circumstances and the genre.

Griffin has written a fast-paced thriller with some interesting characters and a plot that only lightly touches on the

extremely unlikely. His descriptions of Florida and the Keys are almost enough to make me wish I'd read this in February, when I'd truly appreciate them.

*P.J. Coldren*

### **BURN OUT**

Marcia Muller  
2008  
Grand Central

Sharon McCone is one of the most enduring characters in the PI genre. Over the years, the character has grown and evolved with the times. As fans, we've followed as she becomes more successful, fallen in love, gotten married and does what she does best, solve mysteries. In *BURN OUT*, we see Sharon in a state that is perfectly described by the title; she's burned out. She is questioning what she wants to do and what she wants from life.

Leaving San Francisco to spend some down time on her ranch, Sharon is in the high country of California to clear her head. The down time isn't working and she feels worse than when she arrived. Though she is dead set on not doing any work while away, she can't help but get involved in a case with a local Native American. What follows is unlike anything we've seen before with Sharon and it is truly a spectacular thing to behold. Muller has outdone herself here and I was blown away by the sheer depth of this book.

*Jon Jordan*

### **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*

### **CHASING SMOKE**

Bill Cameron  
December 2008  
Bleak House Books

Skin Kadash is on leave from his job as a police detective in Portland, trying to get through one day at a time, surviving chemo and the radiation, hoping the news won't keep being bad. His former partner, Susan Mulvaney, calls him to a crime scene. They've been partners for a long time, at least compared to his other partners. She's working with some new guy, a real jerk.

The scene looks like a suicide: pills, liquor, milk, and a gunshot wound to the head. What makes it suspicious is that it's the fourth suicide in recent weeks and all the deaths have one thing in common. They share the same oncologist, Kadash's oncologist. Then there's Jerilyn, daughter to one of the dead men. She came to the police with a list of five men, swearing that they were all dead men. She was right about three, and this guy makes four.

Lieutenant Owen doesn't like Kadash, doesn't want departmental revenues spent on what is an obvious case, and tells Susan and Skin to leave it alone. Like that's gonna happen. Susan gives him her notes, and asks him to do some background investigation. Kadash goes off on his own, stirring up trouble as he goes.

*CHASING SMOKE* is clearly a police procedural, but there's more to it than that. Certain elements give it a definite cozy feel, while the more depressing aspects of police work make it more noir-ish. Cameron has a feel for inner dialogue that makes Kadash a sympathetic character, even when he's being a snot. The plot is good, the descriptions are good. Portland in August can't seem much steamier. If Cameron's first book (*LOST DOG*) is as good as *CHASING SMOKE*, he's an author to look for.

*P.J. Coldren*

### **DEAD RINGER**

Michael A. Black and Julie Hyzy

Five Star  
November 2008

Authors and friends Black and Hyzy each write a few series. This is their first collaboration, and hopefully not their last. Black's Ron Shade series features a private eye in Chicago who believes he is a charming ladies' man. Hyzy's Alex St. James series features a researcher newly promoted to reporter on a Chicago new television program. These two come together in a smart, fast paced adventure.

One of Shade's clients, an insurance company, is nervous because the man whose death caused a multi-million payout, has been spotted in Vegas. Bob Bayless was thought to have burned up downstate Illinois on a deadly curve of road. If he is alive, who was the corpse? And where is Bob now?

Alex is assigned an unglamorous homeless story, and her always illogical boss wants her to get out and live on the streets for this assignment, even when that proves very dangerous. He also wants her to find out why Ron Shade sold him a fabulous car for a very low price.

Ron thinks he's seen the last of that car with its terrible memories, but he is perfectly willing to meet Alex over dinner. He is sure she is seeking him out romantically. The two discover that there may be a connection among their cases, involving corrupt funeral home directors, exploitation of the homeless and of course the several million dollars.

Personally Alex is on a quest to find out who her biological parents were. She has no time or inclination for romance, but as she and Ron have to help each other more and more with their cases they discover respect and friendship, even if their two headstrong styles cause humorous friction.

While some collaborative mysteries jar as readers go from one protagonist to the other, this one blends as seamlessly as the two intricate plots come together. There is lots of action in this page turner and fans of either or both series will love this one.

*Amy Alessio*

#### **DEAD SILVER**

Neil McMahon  
2008  
HarperCollins

Hugh Davoren and his sidekick, Madbird, return, after having made their debut in LONE CREEK. Set against the Big Sky and vistas of Montana, the men are drawn into an investigation of a past double homicide when Renee Callister returns to Helena after an absence of many years to bury her father. The homicides were of the father's sexy young wife and a lover in a cabin miles away from Helena, and the husband was suspected but never arrested for the murders.

Renee believes her father was innocent and asks Hugh to help discover the truth. The list of suspects begins to mount up as the two begin looking into the past with the help of the Sheriff. Along the way, Hugh and Renee become involved, which of course raises questions as to his judgment. And the dangers increase as his efforts regarding the past go on, and he has to keep dodging bullets.

The writing is tense and the descriptions of the wide open country are graphic. The plot progresses, with the reader unaware of red herrings along the way, leading up to an unanticipated conclusion.

*Theodore Feit*

#### **DEATH BOOKS A RETURN**

Marion Moore Hill  
2008  
Pemberley Press

Pemberley, a small, but well-respected press, has a new offering for us. Hill's 'Scrappy Librarian' mystery series features Juanita Wills, a public librarian of Wyndham, OK. Wills was introduced in Bookmarked for Murder.

Wills is working on the history of the area and wants to find out more about the murder of a black high-school student in 1959. The more she delves the more she finds out about race relations then, and about the murdered student who had a big win against an all-white high school. There is a double entendre in the book in that race-the color of skin, and race--and the running feat, are both motivating factors in the story.

Wills pulls out facts with great effort. No one wants to talk about that part of their past. The murderers are still out there, this is a small town, everyone knows everyone, and everyone knows what anyone says about anything. A man is killed, and Wills isn't sure if it was because of her.

Her boyfriend, a police officer, is not encouraging, no surprise there. She finally wrangles the official report out of him, but it is meager and doesn't show that any follow-up has been done through the years. Wills believes that no further investigation was done on this hot potato case..

In the library are some diaries of citizens covering those years, and Wills decides to delve a little more. Not a good idea! Well-written, suspenseful, and about as close to the truth as a writer can get, based on a true incident. Like librarians everywhere, she wants to find the answer.

A good study of how to find information when the investigator only has wisps of rumors to begin with.

*Gay Toltl Kinman*

### **FACE OF A KILLER**

Robin Burcell

2008

Harper (mass market)

Robin Burcell's latest novel is a edge of your seat thriller centered on FBI agent Sydney Fitzpatrick. It's a relentless tale that does not let up for a minute.

Sydney's Father was killed years ago and though she's moved on for final closure she is going to see the man convicted of the crime before his execution. She finds that he is not the monster she expected. Soon other inconsistencies start to appear which make her question everything she thought to be true about her Father and the murder. The trail it leads her down could ruin her career or worse, but she's in too deep to stop.

Burcell has written a tale full of suspense and real life details that make this an incredible read. Fast paced and edgy this is a wonderful way to spend an evening.

*Jon Jordan*

### **FLESH HOUSE**

Stuart MacBride

2008

St. Martin's Minotaur

FLESH HOUSE is the fourth book by McBride, who has quickly become a must read author for me. Aberdeen has had its problems, but now Detective Sergeant McRae is up to his neck in it. Body parts are showing up and it looks like an old case that was long ago closed is wide open again. The man originally convicted has been set free on a technicality and now he's missing. Things go from bad to worse and the investigation is a top priority, which brings the return of the detectives who originally worked the case. The problem is it's hard to tell if the returned cops are there to help or hide something from the original case.

Written with McBride's signature flair for dark suspense and unrelenting fast paced plotting, this is his best work yet. If you haven't read McBride yet, you need to get this book.

*Jon Jordan*

### **THE FOURTH WATCHER**

Timothy Hallinan

2008

William Morrow

Bangkok once again stars as the setting for an adventure by Poke Rafferty, who makes his second appearance in what one hopes is a continuing series. He is determined to avoid trouble this time and settle down, marry his girlfriend Rose and enjoy his newly adopted daughter Miaow. Unfortunately, the best laid plans . . .

Poke has an idea for another book—something involving someone being followed and trying to avoid those tailing him. The book would be similar to those he writes for his "Looking for Trouble" series. This leads to an amusing episode which has little to do with what ensues. Now that Poke is ready to enjoy family life, who turns up but his father, who abandoned Poke and his mother 20 years before. Frank Rafferty is a rogue and is being chased by a Chinese gangster whom he has defrauded of a lot of gems and cash. All this leads to an exciting story, filled with violence, descriptions of the Thai sex trade, counterfeiting, and of course, the exotic splendor of the city. Once again, as in the initial entry in the hoped-for series, intrigue and danger prevail mightily.

*Theodore Feit*

### **THE FRAILTY OF FLESH**

Sandra Ruttan

Leisure Books

November 2008

Lisa Harrington has received notice that Donny Lockridge, the convicted murderer of her sixteen-year-old daughter, Hope, is up for parole, and she asks Canadian Constable Craig Nolan for help in thwarting his release. Lockridge, convicted as a teenager, had served ten years of a twenty-year sentence, and the brutal way in which Hope had been killed is enough to convince nearly anyone that he does not deserve to walk the streets again. The conflict for Nolan is in the fact that his own father had worked the original investigation, and was instrumental in obtaining the conviction.

In Port Moody, in the Vancouver area, Constables Hart and Tain are handling the investigation of the violent death of a four-year-old boy, the only witness being the eleven-year-old brother of the victim, who identifies the killer as his older sister, who has disappeared. When the parents are told what has transpired, their first reaction is to refuse to talk with the

RCMP officers, and to consult with their attorney, one who is well-known to the police, and not in a good way, and who is also the attorney threatening a lawsuit for the alleged wrongful conviction of Donny Lockridge two decades ago. The two cases, each dealing with the violent death of a young child, have unsettling parallels. The author details the procedural investigation with deliberation while building up suspense at the same time as the cases proceed, and the reader gradually realizes that the present case may present a crime to which there is no good solution. The complexity of the relationships among the players as well as the cases, past and present, are riveting. Whatever one might guess as to where the author is taking you, nothing can prepare the reader for the shocking resolution. One reservation: I must admit to some confusion about the final chapters of the book, which had almost an anticlimactic feel to them. Nonetheless, it is a great read, and I am looking forward to the next entry in the series. The three protagonists are each skillfully drawn and certain to have Ms. Ruttan's readers anxious to know them better, as am I.

*Gloria Feit*

### **I AM NOT A COP!**

Richard Belzer (Co authored by Michael A Black)  
October 2008  
Simon & Schuster

For those who don't know Richard Belzer he plays Munch on "Law and Order: SVU".

Belzer is the main character of this novel, not Munch. The first one or two chapters I found were very awkward. Corny. I continued on hoping it would get better. To my delight it did.

Belzer is supposed to meet up with a friend at Garden City Arena to watch a mutual friend in a boxing match. But the friend never shows up. His car is found, along with his trench coat covered with blood. The cops are searching the river for a corpse, but nothing turns up. The police file it under missing persons and move on to the next case.

But a couple of days later, Belzer receives an envelope in the mail – included is a ticket stub for the seat his friend should have had at the boxing match and a small piece of paper with a code on it.

It looks like it's up to Belzer to find his friend. If you are looking for a nice fun read this is it. Belzer manages to keep it nice and light.

*Don Longmuir - Scene of the Crime Books*  
[www.murdermysteriesandmore.com](http://www.murdermysteriesandmore.com)

### **ILLEGAL ACTION**

Stella Rimington  
2008  
Knopf

The KGB lives on, no matter how the initials change. In this second compelling espionage thriller by the author, former head of Britain's MI-5, we find Liz Carlyle in a bit of a muddle as she is assigned to an undercover role as an "art student" in the household of a Russian billionaire in London. It appears "intelligence" has picked up information of a Russian plot to assassinate a Russian oligarch in the British Isles, which could produce a severe international incident.

Liz has been transferred to counter-espionage. While it was the hub of activity during the Cold War, major MI-5 emphasis is now on counter-terrorism despite the fact that there are probably more Russian spies in London than during the height of East-West hostilities. Now, however, they seem to spy on numerous Russian oligarchs intent on enjoying themselves and spending their money ostentatiously. In this fine-tuned thriller, the clues are numerous, but misdirection's more plentiful. Tersely written, the plot moves forward to a dangerous but satisfying end. Liz is an appealing character, which is more than one can say for some of her co-workers.

*Theodore Feit*

### **IN THE DARK**

Mark Billingham  
2008  
Harper

On a rainy night in London some young gang bangers, out on an initiation, fire some shots at a car. The car swerves killing an innocent person. This seemingly random event upsets the lives of three people. Helen, a young pregnant woman. Theo, the trigger man. And Frank, an organized crime boss willing to seek revenge.

IN THE DARK alternates between Helen, Theo and Frank and each of these characters comes alive for the reader. Mr. Billingham's title, IN THE DARK, suggests that none of his characters know the full story. The twists and turns have the reader thinking along. Mr. Billingham cleverly leaves us satisfied with the ending but perhaps still in the dark; wondering along with his characters if we know everything

Stand-alones make a great introduction to readers unfamiliar with an author. IN THE DARK is a perfect pick up. His Tom Thorne series is also tough, gritty and hard boiled. Mark Billingham has written a sure handed stand-alone that will take you into the underbelly of London.

*David Biemann*

### **JAMES BOND: THE UNION TRILOGY**

Raymond Benson  
2008  
Pegasus

This trade collection puts together three of Bond novels by Benson and includes a new short story as well. Benson was a natural to take of the franchise and was brought in by Fleming's family to do just that. The Union is an organization of criminals and this trilogy sees Bond taking them on in typical 007 fashion.

HIGH TIME TO KILL is a globetrotting adventure that come to a climax in the Himalayas. After their defeat, the Union vows to get revenge and takes their shot in DOUBLESHOT, putting Bond on the offensive and in more than the typical amount of danger. NEVER DREAM OF DYING brings the whole thing to a head as Bond finally takes the move on the leader of the Union.

Benson knows this character and his writing is flawless in its storytelling. He holds the thrill of the first books with an eye to the future of the character. This is classic Bond and what thrillers are meant to be.

*Jon Jordan*

### **KINDRED SPIRITS**

Marilyn Meredith  
2008  
Mundania Press

Deputy Tempe Crabtree delves more into her Native American heritage as she investigates the murder of a woman who shared the same heritage. The setting is Bear Creek in Tulare County, near the Central Valley of California. Because of her heritage, her boss sends her to Crescent City to deliver the news to the dead woman's cousin, Abby, and to find out more background. The two detectives investigating the case have no more leads, yet are derisive as to Tempe's competence before and after her trip.

While she is there, two men follow Abby and her. Tempe accosts the first one, but is not able to confront the second. Are either or both involved in the murder? Why are they following her? When she returns to Bear Creek, she has to contend with the contempt of the two detectives because she didn't bring back anything they can use.

Her boss sends her off again, this time to Santa Barbara, and husband Hutch accompanies her. She is still being followed, and danger is present. Tempe realizes that she is being threatened because she is stirring things up, so she continues to do so.

A theme running through the series is that Tempe's job and heritage are a sore point with her husband, who is Anglo and a minister. How far will religious tolerance stretch in their marriage? Tempe wants to recover those early loving days, but can she?

One of the highlights of the series is that we learn about her Native American heritage along with Tempe. A smashing story, and ending.

*Gay Tottl Kinman*

### **KING OF THE HOLLY HOP**

Les Roberts  
2008  
Gray and Company Publishers

Book fourteen in the Milan Jacovich series has been a while in coming and I, for one, am glad it's here. Jacovich is a favorite PI and Roberts is a real master of the genre.

KING OF THE HOLLY HOP opens with our pal Milan going to his 40<sup>th</sup> high school reunion. While attending with his fellow Cleveland alumni, one of the attendees is murdered and a fellow classmate is the main suspect. Milan takes on the case and soon finds himself learning things about his classmates he wishes would have stayed secret. With a case that takes Jacovich through organized crime, the medical community and various levels of society, the case turns out to be as tough as any he's worked.

Full of his usual flair for using the city as a character, Roberts has delivered a masterpiece of Private Eye fiction. This should be on everyone's radar.

*Jon Jordan*

### **A MATTER OF JUSTICE**

Charles Todd  
2009  
William Morrow

Hitting the shelves at the end of December the latest Inspector Rutledge novel from Charles Todd is another triumph from this writing duo.

The Rutledge series has amazing characterization and there is a depth to the writing that puts it on a literary level. The attention to details and getting the places and times right create an immense landscape for the books. A MATTER OF JUSTICE takes Rutledge to Somerset to investigate the murder of a business man. The victim was despised in his home town, but in London he had nothing but respect. The suspect list comes to include almost everyone who knows him in Cambury. And though Rutledge begins to unravel the puzzle and find the truth, proving it will be another thing altogether. Set in post World War I England this is a historical mystery that should be used as a guide on how to do it right. Intriguing and complex this is a superbly rich novel and a real treat for mystery fans.

*Jon Jordan*

### **THE MEMORIST**

M.J. Rose

2008

Mira Books

The second in her The Reincarnationist series, THE MEMORIST is a powerfully fast paced thriller that is relentless with ever building tension.

Meer Logan is seeking answers to memories she has been having of a previous time, one not her own. She discovers connections to an ages old composer and a journalist who has lost everything and has nothing left to lose. Meer's search for herself becomes a race against time to stop an event that could have dire consequences. The race takes her through Europe and it's museums and other places housing the past, all in hopes of finding something to help unlock her past and help save the future. If her luck holds out, she'll do this before another group with intentions not as good as her own do. Rose grabbed me in the first chapter and tightened her grip on my imagination with every turn of a page leaving me worn out by the time I reached the amazing climax. This is a truly incredible book.

*Jon Jordan*

### **MILK, SULPHATE AND ALBY STARVATION**

Martin Millar

February 2009

Soft Skull

The Milk Marketing Board is fuming. Beyond teeth gnashing – they're "hire an assassin" mad and Alby Starvation is the reason why. Just couldn't keep his mouth shut about a miraculous cure to numerous ailments that banning milk from his diet brought about. Now the world thinks he's some kind of savior and he's got a killer on his tail.

It is a tail that is not easy to find. Years of doling out amphetamine's in Brixton has made Alby more than a little paranoid, enough for him to squat in a new house that he won't leave without a very, very good reason. Like trying to sell his beloved comic book collection despite a fervent desire not to unless he really altogether must.

Oh, and there is a strange Chinese man looking for him.

Oh, and another man digging a hole in the street in search of a mysterious artifact.

Will Alby thwart the attentions of the Chinese man and a (did we mention dead sexy) female assassin? Will he have to sell his comics? Will his skin ever clear up? Believe it or not, you'll want to know.

From THE GOOD FAIRIES OF NEW YORK to LONELY WEREWOLF GIRL, Millar is in familiar territory when he writes of the odd and the disenfranchised. Add guns to the mix and you have a ripping good book.

*Jennifer Jordan*

### **MURDER IN MINIATURE**

Margaret Grace

2008

Berkley Prime Crime

Geraldine "Gerry" Porter is a miniaturist, building three-sided houses and furniture the size of her thumb, and this makes for a great opening scene. At a craft faire, her friend, Linda, disappears. In the middle of the night, Linda calls and asks Gerry to pick her up at a lonely spot in a not-so-good neighborhood in their Northern California town. Gerry has to take granddaughter, Maddy, 10, along. When they pick her up, Linda tells a little but doesn't explain the whole situation.

Later, Maddy tells about her exciting middle-of-the-night adventures to her uncle Skip, who happens to be a police officer. This gets Gerry into trouble with him, because a body is found the next day at that location. Was Linda involved?

Gerry is sure that Linda didn't kill the person, but she may know who did. A jewelry store is robbed, two more people are killed, and Gerry is putting the pieces together. The plot takes several twists and turns before veering to a climax that involves Gerry stopping the murderer with craft glue. Yes!

Some information about the world of miniatures--would love more!--including hints at the end for the miniaturists.

Grace is the pseudonym for Camille Minichino, a multi-published author. This is the first book in a new series--no doubt

miniatures can be murder. I'm looking forward to the next one.  
*Gay Tolt Kinman*

### **NORTHLANDERS VOLUME 1 : SVEN THE RETURNED**

Brian Wood  
2008  
Vertigo

I'm not going to pretend to make this fit in with crime fiction. It won't. NORTHLANDERS is a tale of adventure and action set in 980 A.D., a Viking tale, a thriller with a people whose time is past.

Sven left Orkney early in life for adventure. He became a skilled warrior living in a palace in the Mediterranean. He is drawn back when his Father's death leaves his Uncle the head of the clan, stealing Sven's birthright. Rather than a quick regaining of what is his, Sven finds himself waging war against an army singlehandedly as he discovers that the past is never completely gone. The tale is truly epic and the stuff of legends.

Brain Wood (DMZ) has crafted a lush backdrop for storytelling and while Conan is fun reading, this feels deeper and more connected to history. He has taken a period in humankind's history and given a face to it. This is great reading.

*Jon Jordan*

### **ONE OF THE WICKED**

Harry Shannon  
2008  
Five Star

Mick Callahan's life isn't perfect. A psychologist, Mick is also a talk show host whose time slot is being eyed greedily by an obnoxious competitor. He can't work things out with the woman in his life. And now, a former Navy Seals buddy is calling in a favor.

Mick's pal, a guy called Bud Stone, is a decent fellow. But he has pissed off the wrong people, namely a crew of bad guys who are way too closely connected to the Vegas mob and who want Bud to pay them a bunch of money. Bud doesn't want Mick to get involved in the main action, he just wants Mick to keep an eye on his ex-mistress. Fine.

But then things start to get complicated. Bud decides that the best way to get the money to the mobsters is to rip off a drug dealer. His scheme, of course, goes off the rails and now he has not one, but two gangs of baddies after him. And now Mick is well and truly sucked in.

From this action-packed setup, ONE OF THE WICKED races from one adventure to the next without giving the reader a moment to catch their breath. It's a fast-paced, intricately plotted thriller with enough twists and turns to keep you guessing until the very last page.

This is the third book in the Mick Callahan series, and I hope we see many more stories about this great character.

*Rae Helmsworth*

### **THE OTHER SIDE OF SILENCE**

Bill Pronzini  
2008  
Walker

Pronzini was awarded the Mystery Writers of America Grand Master for a reason. THE OTHER SIDE OF SILENCE shows off all of his considerable talents. What opens as a story of a man trying to clear his head after his wife leaves becomes a journey that will leave him forever changed.

Rick Fallon has headed out into the desert in a jeep, a place he goes to reconnect and clear his head of cobwebs. While in the desert he comes across a woman nearly dead close to her abandoned car. After saving her, he is determined to find out why she was there and what brought her to this point. In saving her he is also trying to save himself, which when done badly comes off very clichéd. But in the hands of Bill Pronzini, it is a true masterpiece.

*Jon Jordan*

### **PHOENIX**

John Connor  
2008  
Bloody Brits

Tantalizingly, this novel opens with a brief scene which takes place in Shepherd's Bush, London, in March of 1988, to which no further reference is made until much later in the book, after the reader has been left to ruminate and try to place it in the context of the balance of the book, which takes place in West Yorkshire, eight years later. DC Karen Sharpe is called to the scene of a murder, where she is asked to identify the victim: Her partner, Phil Leech, 37 years old, who has been shot to death, the same man who she was to accompany the previous night but was too drunk to do it. Now it would appear that the person they were to meet, a long-time informant, or someone connected to or following that person, had

murdered him, and would have perhaps murdered her as well.

The Senior Investigating Officer on the case, DCS John Munro, is sympathetic to Karen's understandable feelings of guilt, which are only magnified when the 22-year-old informant is also found murdered, a short distance from the spot where Leech was killed. But Karen appears unemotional, and insists she needs no time off and is ready and able to assist in the investigation [dubbed "Operation Phoenix"]. Munro tells the officers: "There has never been an undetected murder of a serving officer in the entire history of the West Yorkshire Police Force. This one will be no different. You will see to it." Karen Sharpe, thirty-five years old, six feet tall, is an intriguing protagonist, wonderfully drawn. One has heard of the detective who is "flawed" [not to be too cliché about it], filled with guilt, complex, and with little respect for authority – Karen is all of the above. The author says: "There would be something hard at the center of Karen Sharpe, something she kept only for herself . . . Most of the time she felt like an iceberg. Not just frozen. But moving around in the midst of more trivial objects." And she is indeed something of an enigma, thought of by her co-workers as a maverick. The story is compellingly written, the characters three-dimensional. The novel is one of the latest from this publisher, whose mission is to bring to the US the works of authors well-known in the UK, and for good reason.

*Gloria Feit*

### **POINT NO POINT**

Mary Logue

2008

Bleak House Books

POINT NO POINT is the 7<sup>th</sup> in Mary Logue's Deputy Sherriff Claire Watkins series set in northern Wisconsin. It's possibly her strongest book to date.

Claire is called out to Point No Point, on Lake Pepin, because a body has been found, naked with no identifying marks save a tattoo. Just as she starts to work on this case she is called out on another, a dead woman shot in bed. The woman is dead, but was it murder or suicide?

As the investigations, Claire's personal life starts to encroach on the cases and things are complicated by her daughter's shenanigans. As things progress, the cases start to point to a connection and as secrets are revealed things become more tangled. Nothing is what it seems and by the time she's wrapped this up she'll be in for a few more surprises.

The twisting plotting pulls the reader forward like a speedboat pulling a water skier and the climax is real surprise. This novel is amazing.

*Jon Jordan*

### **POISON PEN**

Sheila Lowe

2007

Penguin

Claudia Rose is, as her creator, a forensic graphologist who can tell a lot about a person from their handwriting. Her work assignments range from employment applications to ransom notes. Handwriting tells a lot!

Her current case is from a friend--the block-printed, possible suicide note of an old acquaintance, Lindsay. Was this printed by Lindsay or by someone else? Writing is one thing, printing is another. In either case, she needs a sample. The problem is, there are no samples of Lindsay's printing.

A person is murdered in Lindsay's condo and Claudia finds the body, while someone else is there. The murderer?

Claudia discovers that Lindsay had a couple of lucrative side businesses, which made her day job possible. She begins to unravel the mystery of Lindsay's life, but there are those who don't want her to uncover anything--because their names might be involved, and these rich-and-famous can't afford to have that happen.

Claudia doesn't let up in goading some of them to reveal more. One does, intending that Claudia will never be able to tell anyone, because she will be as dead as Lindsay.

Loved the graphology information, and would like to have more.

*Gay Tottl Kinman*

### **QUEEN OF THE FLOWERS**

Kerry Greenwood

July 2008

Poisoned Pen Press

There isn't much more one can say about the eccentric and charming Phryne Fisher, the thoroughly modern woman ensconced in Australia after the First World War: She has appeared in numerous entries in this series and her deductive powers as a detective continue to be acute.

Two missing young girls are at the heart of the story line. One is Phryne's adopted daughter, Ruth, who is seeking the father she never knew, the other, a 13-year-old, one of the flower girls serving Phryne, who is to be the Queen of the Flowers in the Flower Parade.

There have been many novels in this series before and after this one. PPP continues to publish them in no particular order—much to this reader's delight. Keep them coming!

*Theodore Feit*

## **RESOLUTION**

Robert B. Parker

2008

G.P. Putnam's Sons

Dialogue and prose in a Parker novel is always sparse and written with economy. The conversations between characters—be they Spenser and Hawk in Boston or Cole and Hitch in the Wild West—is separated only by the broad "a's," jive talk or western drawl. But they are always a delight to read.

After APPALOOSA, the preceding book in this series, Cole and Hitch find themselves in a small town called Resolution. Initially, Hitch is hired by a man named Wolfson, who owns the bank, hotel and leading saloon, to act as sort of a bouncer. Later, Cole drifts in. Being Cole and Hitch, they act independently, and Wolfson hires two other gunmen to counter-balance their independence. Wolfson aims to acquire all the assets of the town, including the outlying homesteads. This leads the four hired gunslingers to moral decisions in conflict with their employer's desires.

The novel proves once again that Parker can write in all kinds of genres with his accustomed excellence of writing and economy of style, whether a detective story or a western (among other genres his more than 50 novels have encompassed).

*Theodore Feit*

## **A RULE AGAINST MURDER**

Louise Penny

Jan 09

St. Martin Minotaur

Louise Penny, whose middle names must be Agatha and Christie, has, with A RULE AGAINST MURDER, worked through the seasons. It's summer, Chief Inspector Gamache and his wife, Reine-Marie have returned to the well respected and secluded Manor Bellechasse to celebrate their wedding anniversary. They've come back to their friend Clementine Dubois and the old time luxury she affords them. The manor, built in the heyday of logging offers the Gamaches these comforts and their privacy. Their peace is interrupted by a hotter than usual summer, black flies and the Finney Family. The Finney's arrive with an unusual monument to their late father. Among the extended family are Armand Gamache's friends from Three Pines, Peter and Clara Morrow.

The heat and the Finneys begin to wear on everyone to the point of murder. Gamache's hand is forced. Naturally, Peter and Laura are there as sounding boards as Gamache is a reflective cop. He listens but is equally determined to close a case once on it. A RULE AGAINST MURDER is a happy addition to STILL LIFE (fall) FATAL GRACE (winter) and THE CRUELEST MONTH (spring). Ms. Penny's easy, comfortable style and her beloved characters have generated a long list of fans of the traditional mystery. Joining them is as easy as reading A RULE AGAINST MURDER.

*Dave Biemann*

## **SANCTUARY**

KEN BRUEN

2008

Transworld

SANCTUARY is the seventh, and possibly final, installment in the Galway-based Jack Taylor series by Ken Bruen... If this is the end, and God forbid that's true, then Jack's going out on a high. The booze-soaked sleuth has been battered and bruised in just about Biblical proportions from book one (The Guards) and this latest outing offers no, er, sanctuary for him.

Jack is up to his neck in bad shit from just about page one, when he receives an anonymous list of 'victims' including two guards, one judge, and a nun, signed only by the mysterious, Benedictus. Followers of the groundbreaking series will know Jack's a man who's never been overly keen on the 'finding business'; in fact, if he's interesting in finding anything, it's an escape from his own misery. He seems close to doing just that at the outset of SANCTUARY -- he even has his tickets for New York in hand -- but then the case dramatically draws him in.

And what a bitch it turns out to be.

To the list of victims is added...a child.

Bruen is a master of the slow burn, adding fuel to the mounting fire of Jack's rage, until finally, the reader has scorched fingertips and the threat of spontaneous human combustion seems a real possibility.

Unputdownable is an overused catch-all these days but SANCTUARY demands the description. The relentless incident, the mounting doom and the unshakable knowledge that here is a tale told by a master storyteller -- at the peak of his form -- makes for one b'Jesus of a read.

The beauty of the prose can only be described as that of a genius. Bruen applies a finesse to his slickly-crafted sentences that's unmatched. It's a Salinger-esque trip told with the kind of insight you'd expect from an author with his own unique, cultural X-ray vision. And, in SANCTUARY, the new Ireland, in all its complexities, is never far from his field of view.

Those of you who have stayed the course throughout the bestselling Jack Taylor series are duly rewarded with the return of a host of recognisable characters -- savoury and otherwise -- that Jack has drawn around him. Jeff and Cathi. Ridge. The odious Father Malachy. And none are mere cameos. They all earn their right to be there, contributing the kind body-blows you'd expect from Bruen. But be warned, the revelation about Serna May is a particularly lethal hurly smack to the nut.

If SANCTUARY spells the end for Jack, he has earned his rest. But for those who don't want to believe it's so, Bruen leaves a tantalising prospect in the final few lines...which I won't reveal here. All I will say is, let's pray Jack's back...and soon.

*Tony Black (author of PAYING FOR IT)*

### **SCALPED VOLUME 3: DEAD MOTHERS**

Jason Aaron

2008

Vertigo

The third collection in this amazing crime fiction graphic series SCALPED is called DEAD MOTHERS. It's pretty straight forward in that the story arc here revolves around two murders, both victims being mothers. But nothing is as it seems of course.

Dashiell Bad Horse is an undercover FBI agent who has come back to the reservation he was born on. His job is to take down tribal leader Red Crow, who has just opened a new casino. Red Crow has a history with Bad Horse's mother and this cause confusion after her murder. Bad Horse is trying to avoid thinking about his mother by throwing himself into an investigation of another dead mother, this one a junkie with a load of kids. Dashiell is concerned for the kids and takes the oldest under his wing trying to help him. Eventually a confrontation is inevitable between Red Crow and Bad horse, but the outcome is surprising.

This series works on a lot of levels. Bad Horse is a troubled man, I wouldn't even call him a hero. His past haunts him and he wants to move on. But to do so he needs to clear up the present and for him that means time on the reservation and constantly being faced with the reasons he left in the first place. I'm not an expert and won't pretend to be, but it seems to me that this series is also really doing a fine job of showing the problems that the Native Americans have faced and are still facing. It's also crime fiction at its best, with a deep old soul and a darker side that tries to hide.

Jason Aaron is a writer to watch and he's only going to get better.

*Jon Jordan*

### **THE SPY WHO CAME FOR CHRISTMAS**

David Morrell

November 2008

Vanguard Press

Sante Fe is lovely at Christmas, especially the Canyon Road area. It's closed to vehicular traffic on Christmas Eve so that pedestrians can truly enjoy the lovely decorations. Kagan is finding it difficult to enjoy the festive atmosphere; he's running from his former compatriots, stealing from them a package they desperately want. He's wounded, and the baby he is carrying won't last long in the December cold if left alone.

The baby is the child of a humanitarian, a strong symbol for those combating terrorism. The other side, the forces interested in keeping terrorism alive, wants this baby to be raised in secret until it's old enough to become a tool for them. Kagan and his crew, members of the Russian mafia, have stolen the child. Their leader is furious that Kagan has changed his mind, decided that the child should not be taken from his parents. Those who hired the Russians are even less happy about the situation; heads and other body parts will certainly roll if the child escapes.

Kagan finds refuge in the house of a battered woman and her child; they are preparing to flee when Canyon Road is again open to cars. Kagan convinces Meredith Brody and Cole to stay, although this means they will be involved in the confrontation with his pursuers. To keep calm in the household, Kagan tells Cole a unique interpretation of the story of the Three Kings and their search for the Savior.

As one might expect from a novel geared to come out during the holiday season, the outcome is positive. This doesn't mean THE SPY WHO CAME FOR CHRISTMAS lacks suspense or tension. Morrell knows how to keep the pages turning. Readers learn Kagan's history through a series of flashbacks, which are the least compelling portions of the book. Morrell has written a spy story set during a season of the year not usually associated with the genre, and he makes it work.

*P.J. Coldren*

## **STRANGER ROOM**

Frederick Ramsay  
2008  
Poisoned Pen Press

The “locked room” mystery has been a staple of suspense fiction almost from the beginning. When a person known to be on the premises cannot be located, someone comes to break down a locked door, and, what do you know, there’s a dead body in there! Further investigation reveals that, on the face of it, there is no way for anyone to have gained entry, committed the crime, and left the doors and windows locked from the inside.

Fred Ramsay has a very intriguing twist on the technique – two locked room murders, each in the same room, and separated in time by nearly 150 years.

In the late months of the Civil war, tensions were high in the mountains of Virginia and suspicions were cast on every stranger. Rumors abound that secrets are being passed to the Union by turncoats in the area. A passenger scheduled to travel on a stagecoach which has stopped for the night is found shot to death in his locked hotel room.

Fast forward to the present day, where elderly Jonathan Lydell is struggling to hold on to the historical family mansion and maintain it as an enjoyable stop for tourists. The story of the traveler found dead in the “stranger room” reserved for paying guests is part of the lore of the old house. Not surprisingly, Lydell is dismayed to discover a dead body in the same room which was the scene of the long ago crime, with the doors seemingly locked from the inside as in the long ago murder.

The many prejudices and preconceptions held by the elderly homeowner figure large in the attempt to solve the present day crime. Ike Schwartz, the local sheriff is Jewish. Karl Hedrick, the FBI agent on temporary assignment in the area, is black. Some of Lydell’s employees, also black, are astute observers and provide excellent information, all of it discounted by Lydell, just as he impatiently dismisses Schwartz and Hedrick as they pursue their investigation.

Painstaking research into local history as well as into the recent correspondence and activities of the dead man will provide the key to understanding. And Schwartz and Hedrick are somewhat surprised to find themselves unraveling the solution to the other murder committed so long ago.

Ramsay updates those who have been following this series with developments in the personal lives of his main characters – but these details never overwhelm the main thrust of the mystery at the center it all.

Ramsay has been described by his publisher as “the best author you’ve never heard of.” His books are definitely worth checking out – both this continuing series and the stand along IMPULSE.

*Woodstock*

## **SUCKER PUNCH**

Ray Banks  
February 2009  
Harcourt

I don’t think you should read this book. I don’t think you can handle it. If you’re thinking now, “Damn it, I can handle anything any double-glazing salesman from Newcastle up Tyne can write,” then don’t come to me when your all beat up because the nasty book got you in the gut.

Cal Innes, dystopian poster child, kind of P.I. and trouble magnet is concierge of a gym drawn into the sorted world of amateur boxer Liam Wooley. Liam needs someone to hold his proverbial hand during a boxing tournament in the extra mean city of Los Angeles.

Liam has made a bad choice. The boxing world is accomplished in ruthlessness and taking a dive for a quick pile of cash. When a once great fighter with a short fuse and a smart ass “security guard” with a codeine haze who takes everything personally land in a hot city full of lies, it’s going to take more than honorable intentions and bull dog grip winning to keep both men alive and out of jail.

Quick, sharp and emotionally raw, reading Banks is like a dinner of blowfish with a sociopathic chef serving up a slice of death on a plate. One bad cut and it could all go wrong, but when served with skill, it’s all adrenaline rush.

*Jennifer Jordan*

## **TOO CLOSE TO HOME**

Linwood Barclay  
September 2008  
Bantam

When the family next door is executed, the Cutter family is terrified that the murderer walked down their shared driveway on his/her way to killing their neighbors. Soon they start asking questions: “How much do we know about our neighbors? What are they into? What have they done in the past? What if the killer went to the wrong house?”

I read TOO CLOSE TO HOME and thought that I had the plot figured out by a quarter of the way through the book. I honestly thought “OMG this book is so transparent”.

What I didn't realize is that Linwood had played me. I took my time reading the first half of the book. Soon I realized Linwood had sucker punched me. I read the second half of the book not being able to sleep. You still see glimpses of Linwood's humor seep into the book. After this novel, publishing agents will soon start telling aspiring writers: "I want you to write more like Linwood Barclay." The book moves fast. The dialogue is tight. I was a fan of the old Linwood and I'm a huge fan of the new Linwood. Don't miss TOO CLOSE TO HOME.

*Don Longmuir - Scene of the Crime Books*

### **VEIL OF LIES**

Jeri Western  
2008  
St. Martins

VEIL OF LIES is labeled a Medieval Noir and I have to say that it is truth in advertising at work. Western's protagonist, Crispun Guest, is the 1300's equivalent of Mike Hammer and that is not praise I use lightly. Guest is a disgraced man left on his own in a time when alliances are everything. He is left to find a way to live any way he can. Due to both physical and intellectual skills he is asked by a local merchant to do some snooping on a wife who may be practicing the ages old game of infidelity. When Guest returns to report his findings the merchant is dead, in a locked room.

Westerson combines an encyclopedic knowledge of the middle ages with an obvious love for the hard boiled genre. He adds a classic mystery telling ability to create what is one of my favorite reads of the year.

I look forward to more from this wonderful new talent.

*Jon Jordan*

### **WE ALL FALL DOWN**

Simon Wood  
Leisure Books  
2008

Hayden Duke is delighted to be starting his new job at Marin Design Engineering, and even happier to be there at the behest of the man who was his best buddy in college, who he hadn't seen in three years. Now 28 years old, he is a successful design engineering contractor, but the chance to work under his friend on a very high level government project seems the best of all possible worlds. But his first day of work doesn't start out promisingly: The body of a Marin Design worker has just been discovered, an apparent suicide. According to a witness, his last words were "I have done a terrible thing, and I can't be forgiven. I must pay for it. This is the only way."

Within one week, Hayden's former best friend, Shane, is also dead, also a suicide, his last words: "I'm sorry, Hayden, but you don't understand what they've done. What I've done. It's terrible. I'm going to hurt you and so many others, but I have to do it." Hayden has no idea what Shane is talking about, but fears, one must feel with reason, that his own life may be in danger. When he returns home, he finds that the house has been ransacked, and among things his computer has been stolen. The only possible clue Hayden has is that on the night he killed himself, Shane had sent him an e-mail attachment, password protected, exhorting him not to read it but to store it and keep it safe.

The reader is thrust headlong into this suspenseful tale, much as Hayden is thrust into a situation fraught with peril as he and Shane's sister, Rebecca, try to discover what has led to these two deaths, and others that soon follow. The action becomes fast and furious and one just has to hang on for the ride. A terrific read.

*Gloria Feit*

### **WHERE SERPENTS LIE**

C.S. Harris  
2008  
Obsidian

Wow. That's my first thought on finishing this book. WHERE SERPENTS LIE is a layered tale set in 1812 that is utterly engrossing.

Eight prostitutes in Coventry Garden London are brutally murdered and one person remains to tell the tale. The daughter of Lord Jarvis, Hero Jarvis. Power structures being what they are, the story is covered up and Hero's involvement hidden. But she wants justice and goes to Sebastian St. Cyr for help. Sebastian is not really in the frame of mind to take the case, but the chance to annoy his enemy Lord Jarvis is too much to pass up.

Harris (AKA Candice Proctor), has really stepped up her game with this book and it is such a good read I hoped it wouldn't end. All I can do now is hope she writes faster.

*Jon Jordan*

## **WOLF MAN**

Wensely Clarkson  
John Blake Books  
2008

"Bounces well when thrown at wall," could be one of the only nice things to say about WOLF MAN, a true crime novel by Wensely Clarkson. This construction of melodramatic word drive was instigated by a series of murders committed by Francisco Arce Montes that took place over decades in a number of countries. Montes victimized young women, most of them traveling alone, and all unlucky enough to catch the eye of this roving, sexually frustrated sociopath.

Clarkson loosely follows a timeline that shows the evolution of the rapist cum killer in a clumsy fashion, often repeating words and phrases with annoying frequency. The whole tome is written in a poorly edited, sensationalistic style that will keep all but the most tenacious fans of true crime from reading cover to cover.

*Jennifer Jordan*

## **WRITTEN IN BLOOD**

Sheila Lowe  
2008  
Obsidian/Penguin

Forensic handwriting expert Claudia Rose is back in her second mystery, WRITTEN IN BLOOD, and she sharper, tougher and more tenacious than ever. In this installment, Claudia is hired to authenticate the signature on a contested will.

Her client is Paige Sorensen, the widow of a wealthy older man who died following a series of debilitating strokes.

His children, a pair of psycho-twins, believe their young and beautiful stepmother forged his signature on the will so she could inherit the estate, which includes the prestigious Sorenson Academy.

Paige is headmistress of the school for "emotionally challenged" celebrity children, and wants it to continue. The twins have other plans for the property.

Claudia meticulously follows the prescribed steps to verify the signature on the will, giving readers a fascinating insider's glimpse of what's involved in the process. But in the tense courtroom scene that follows, her findings are challenged by the prosecution's so called "expert."

Impressed by Claudia's expertise, Paige invites her to the Academy to speak to the girls about her profession. In class, she meets and is curiously drawn to a deeply troubled student named Annabelle. With Paige's approval, Claudia attempts to help the girl through graphotherapy – specific hand movement exercises combined with therapeutic music – but before any success can be measured, tragedy strikes.

Claudia is soon locked in a violent maelstrom of greed, jealousy, revenge and murder. Her detective boyfriend is miles away working on his own case and Claudia must use her professional training as well as her wits to stay alive and to stand between the innocents and the monsters that pursue them.

Lowe's firsthand knowledge and experience as a graphologist are evident in her writing. She weaves in the several aspects of her profession – signature authentication, personality analysis/behavior profiling, and graphotherapy - so skillfully that readers are entertained and yet come away with a new respect for the science.

WRITTEN IN BLOOD is a fascinating and complex murder mystery that keeps readers involved and guessing till the exciting climax, and then adds a teaser epilogue to assure them that there'll be more books in the series.

*Jackie Houchin*