

Reviews:

Buzz Box

James Grippando is a name that always seems to show up on the best seller lists, and with good reason. His latest, **BORN TO RUN** (Harper) is another book bound for glory. Miami lawyer Jack Swyteck is back in this novel and he's really in for a marathon. After finally coming to terms with his family, in particular his Father he is asked by his Dad for help. After an accident kills the vice President his Dad is asked to step up as the new VP. But things go bad quick and Jack finds himself in the middle of a situation 50 years in the making. Fast and gripping and with energy to spare **BORN TO RUN** is a superb thriller and a damn fun read.

CALLING MR. LONELY HEARTS (Ballantine Books) is an intricate book that reminded me a little of some of Peter Straub's best work. Laura Benedict has really outdone herself here. Three childhood friends are all having various problems with their lives. It looks more and more like something from their past is coming home to roost. When they were kids they conspired to lie and ruin a priest, he was defrocked and his life in ruins. And now it looks like he may be back and take vengeance on his own rather wait for his former boss to get around to it. Gripping and soulful **CALLING MR. LONELY HEARTS** is a disturbing and wonderful read.

DAEMON (Dutton) is a high high tech thriller that takes place a little bit in the future. Daniel Suarez has made technology scary again in the way Michael Crichton and William Gibson did. In this world a Daemon is a program that runs behind the scenes to keep things working. But what happens to a world that relies on computers for everything when a game designer dies and unleashes a daemon that isn't meant to help? This book left me a bit freaked out and my blood pumping.

The third book from Cody McFayden, **THE DARKER SIDE** (Bantam) came out in September and it's a damn good book. FBI Special agent Smoky Barret is brought in from LA to investigate a case in Washington DC. Needless to say there are political implications to the killing and a need to wrap it up quick. But the killer has other ideas and he's pushing Smoky and her team to the limit. McFayden keeps the suspense building page after page and creates such a sense of urgency that it becomes unsettling. Add to that the great complex characters and the amazing ending this is a great book and I can't wait for more.

Author of a number of books in this series, Linda Berry has become quite comfortable with the character of Trudy Roundtree. **DEATH AND THE CROSSED WIRES** (Five Star) has Trudy investigating a number of deaths that all seem to center around a sixteen year old who now believes she is cursed. A nice solid mystery with a southern flair that will appeal to fans of traditional mysteries.

FACE OF BETRAYAL (Thomas Nelson Books) is co-written by Lis Wiehl and April Henry. This is an interesting approach as it has three lead characters, a reporter, one Cassidy Shaw, Federal Prosecutor Allison Pierce and Special Agent Nicole Hedge of the FBI. The three friends are all involved in the case of a missing senate page, a seventeen year old girl who goes missing while walking her dog. Filled with political intrigue and fast paced action this is a hopefully the start of a great new series, because I'd love to read more.

Serena Mackesy's fourth novel, **HOLD MY HAND** (SOHO Constable) is a dark gothic feeling story that combines suspenseful narration with a wonderful mystery. Following dual story arcs that intertwine we see the happenings as Bridget Sweeny and her daughter are moving to a manor house to be caretakers and hopefully make a fresh beginning of their lives. But the house has a history and one that may not be as quiet as they would like. In order to find peace they will have to solve a mystery going back to WWII. Atmospheric and vivid story telling make this a real winner.

Terry Holland is an very obvious fan of the hard boiled works of Spillane and Hammett and McDonald. **AN ICE COLD PARADISE** (Point Blank) is a tip of the hat to these and other authors that wrote in that vein. That doesn't mean that this isn't an original book, it sure is and it's a fast entertaining read. Harry Pines is a former Army Ranger and ex-con who is trying to lead a more quiet life living in Hawaii. His peaceful lifestyle is interrupted by a classic femme fatale type who comes to him for help finding her missing nephew. While investigating Harry runs across some bad ass people who are running hookers, stealing weapons and leaving a wake of torn up lives behind them. This is not only a really fun book, but you can actually read it free at TerryHolland.info

The Mammoth Book of Best Crime Comics (Running Press 2008) Edited by Paul Gravett, The title of this monster sized book states pretty clearly what it intends to be. One look at the writers involved and you can see they are on the right track. Ed McBain, Alan Moore, Max Allan Collins, Will Eisner and more. It's a who's who of crime and comics. After 479 pages of reading I have to admit that this collection could well be some of the best in crime comics. It is a really nice cross section of eras and styles and really does represent the best. If you enjoy crime fiction and comics you will love this book.

Lee Goldberg once again takes Monk to a whole new level in **MR. MONK IS MISERABLE** (Obsidian). Following Natalie on vacation to Paris Monk surprises her by wanting to tour the famous sewers. But when in the catacombs he spots a skull that is too new to be there and he is drawn into another murder investigation. Series regulars Captain Stottlemeyer and Discher are brought in when a connection to San Francisco is discovered. Written with Goldberg's typical amazing characterization and his ability to weave a mystery that would make Ellroy Queen jealous this is another great book by a modern master.

NIGHT KILL (Poisoned Pen Press) by Ann Littlewood is a sharply plotted mystery which sees zookeeper Iris Oakley drawn into investigating the murder of her husband. She and her husband had been having problems, mostly because of his drinking but when it occurs to her that his death was not an accident her life becomes a little more dangerous and too many strange coincidences make it seem like she may know the killer. Littlewood does a nice job with the story and her characters are very easy to empathize with, this is a straight forward mystery with a very satisfying ending.

Another welcome offering from Soho Constable is **THE RUFFIAN ON THE STAIR** by Gary Newman (not to be confused with the new wave rocker of "In Cars" fame). This is an adventure as much as a mystery as we follow the path of a young author who is searching for

his Grandfather's past after finding a notebook in a box of old belongings. He and his girl friend trek across Europe retracing his Grandfather's life. What they find is a series of mysterious deaths and clues about a famous missing painting. Soon people are looking for him and he no longer has a choice about finding the truth. An enjoyable read this book has a few slow spots, but is worth the perseverance as the ending is quite satisfying.

Fans of espionage novels will love Charles Cumming. If you haven't already discovered him you owe it to yourself to pick up **THE SPANISH GAME** (ST. Martins). Alec Milius is a former member of MI5, and while no one is ever really an ex-spy he is trying to live a quiet life in Madrid. Unfortunately he is drawn back into the game when a politician goes missing proving you are never truly out. Fast paced and every bit as good as LeCarre at the top of his game this proves that the espionage genre is alive and well, and in good hands.

TOO CLOSE TO HOME (Orion) by Linwood Barclay grabs by the throat and doesn't let go. Jim Cutter and his family have a nice life, at least until violence invades their neighborhood and the next door neighbors are gunned down in their own home. The horror of this is made worse with the realization that the wrong family was killed, it should have been the Cutters home that was invaded. What follows is a character driven thriller in which old secrets are brought to light and a family is going to be pushed to its limits. Barclay is at the top of his game with this book.

A little late as this was an October book, but **WHISKEY REBELS** (Random House) by David Liss is a book too good to not mention. Set in the early days of the US post Revolutionary war and peppered with historical figures this is a tale of intrigue and the beginnings of a country still trying to find itself. A new method of distilling whiskey is at first a boon for Joan Maycott and her husband, but soon outside forces are putting pressure on them and bringing unwanted attention from the new government. Hitching onto this plot is Ethan Saunders who has been asked to look into a plot against the treasury by both Alexander Hamilton and Thomas Jefferson. Intricate and engrossing reading this is time well spent.

Jordan Dane made her debut with **NO ONE HEARD HER SCREAM** and has been kicking ass since. Her latest is **EVIL WITHOUT A FACE** (Avon Books) and it's the first in a new series called Sweet Justice. Jessica Beckett is a bounty hunter and in this debut of the series she is teamed up with ex-NFL player Payton Archer to find a missing girl, Payton's niece. It looks like an online stalker has gotten to her and time is something they don't have. This is fast paced and has so much energy sparks almost come off the pages while reading. Another great book from Dane.

Regular reviews

THE ALCOHOLIC

Jonathan Ames & Dean Haspiel

Nov. 2007

Vertigo

This graphic novel from the people at Vertigo has rightfully found spots upon many "best of books" lists for 2008. A hard look at one life entirely controlled by the bottle and one night of adolescence. Jonathan A. found charm and popularity in teenage bingeing or so he thought.

THE ALCOHOLIC does what few books are capable of because of the seamless marriage of visuals and words. It tells a story of the freefall of one life. The excuses of anyone substance dependent are present and the warnings all too visual. Selfishness wafts from one page and a simple act of self depreciation invokes the reader's sympathy upon the next.

This character; his history, goals and relationships, spoke to this reader with truthful words and stark pictures to the extent I felt like an unwilling enabler. It is a melody as mournful as anything I've ever read on the subject and something for the hardboiled fan everywhere to envelop themselves within for an evening. If you can leave this tale without being both touched and alarmed you are far more hard-boiled than I'll ever be.

Ruth Jordan

THE BIG DIRT NAP

Rosemary Harris

February 2009

St. Martin's

Paula Holliday is a gardener and owner of Dirty Business, who visits the 'titan arum,' aka 'corpse flower,' for an article she is writing for her local newspaper. The plant sits in an enclosed area in the lobby of the Titans Hotel in Connecticut's wine country. The hotel is a short distance from a new Indian casino.

As she waits for her roommate, Lucy, to arrive, Paula takes notes, and sips tonic water in the bar. Nick Vigoriti strikes up a conversation with her, offering to buy her a drink. She remembers all her past mistakes with alcohol and men, and resists his charm.

Paula leaves the bar and goes to her room. The next she learns of Nick is when the police show her his body in the hotel's dumpster. The title refers to a state of permanent rest, so taking the big dirt nap is being dead.

From there it's a wild and funny ride involving the casino, refinancing, Russian hoods, Ukrainian girls, a dumpster diver, some Harley Hogites and some tough ladies. One of them gives Paula a taser and it sure comes in handy. This cast of fun characters is brought to life by Paula's salty comments.

The climax comes when the corpse flower is about to bloom, which it does once every ten years or so. Only this time it happens in the midst of a Goth party.

A lot of fun to read. The author is a certified Master Gardener.

Gay Tolti Kinman

THE BIG O

Declan Burke

2008

Houghton Mifflin Harcourt

Declan Burke has been on quite a trip with his hugely-acclaimed second novel, *The Big O*.

After starting life on the lists of tiny Irish publisher Hag's Head Press the Sligo-born author's follow-up to *Eight-Ball Bogie* has recently been given an American release.

No mean feat for a book that Burke gave up his hard-earned mortgage deposit to see published, and for which he had such modest hopes as to "recoup the costs".

It's a trip, though, that pales by comparison to *The Big O*'s rollicking plot.

When stick-up artist, Karen, meets Ray -- a crim with a side-line in kidnap -- you can expect fireworks. Figure on worse when Ray is commissioned to snatch Karen's best mate, Madge. Throw in a dodgy plastic surgeon with an immediate need for cash ... and an insurance policy on Madge, and the the mix a heady one.

The Big O is one big-old crazy caper with an eerie hint of Elmore Leonard and a brash, bold, ball-bustin' tempo that puts the genre so close to *The Edge* that Larry Mullen might be nearby busting his sticks!

As a stylist, Burke is as kick-ass Irish as the great Ken Bruen and is already taking the back-roads to the same place in American hearts with this latest Houghton Mifflin Harcourt release.

The really big appeal of *The Big O*, however, is that there is simply nothing like it -- nothing close -- on the bookshelves today.

The Big O is a perfect confluence of craic and cracker-barrel craziness. A white-knuckle ride with pace and taste and a winding, weaving storyline that will have you moving through those pages faster than a hobo with a free meths ticket.

Burke has hit a bullseye with *The Big O*, and, blessed as he is with such a slick and impressive command of language, his achievement has more than earned all its big old praise.

Tony Black, Author of PAYING FOR IT

BROKEN HEARTLAND

J M Hayes

2008

Poisoned Pen Press

Hayes writes an entertaining series featuring two half brothers – one serving as a sheriff in a small Kansas town; the other a type of mystic wanderer who nevertheless keeps a home in Kansas to remain close to his brother. Inevitably, the lawman, with a surname of "English", is dubbed "Englishman" by the townspeople; and his brother, with the surname of "Maddox" is called "Mad Dog."

Borrowing an idea from a popular TV series, Hayes packs all the action into one twenty four hour day. It's Election Day in the small community, and Englishman is facing a challenge from a religious right wing candidate. News comes of a school bus accident, and one of the deputies on Englishman's staff ends up in the hospital. Instead of last minute campaigning, the sheriff must cover the entire county himself.

Drawn by some psychic sense that all is not well with their father, Englishman's two daughters, each named Heather (!), arrive to assist him and their uncle Mad Dog cope with the increasing mayhem.

Much of the action is semi-comic, yet a murderous attack at a local school; an enigmatic death in the school bus crash; and mysterious actions by a private security force at a local farm all point to larger hostile forces at work in the area.

Hayes will be publishing the next book in this series – *SERVER DOWN* in a few months. As another reviewer noted – "even quirky characters can have a sober, thoughtful side." Readers who enjoy a lighter touch, coupled with careful attention to believable characters, will enjoy Hayes' series.

Woodstock

BUFFALO BILL'S DEFUNCT

Sheila Simonson

2008

Perseverance Press

The pairing of a Sheriff's chief investigator and a librarian makes for an odd combination in more ways than one. But when it works, as it does in this engaging novel, there's nothing to complain about. Sheriff's investigator Rob Neill has been haunted by his lack of success in solving his first case, the theft of sacred objects of the Klalo tribe from the western end of the Columbia River Gorge. Meg McLean has just been hired as the head librarian of the small town in which he works and lives. She buys a house next door to Rob and they develop a close working relationship—and then some.

A body is discovered buried in her garage, setting off a chain of events that brings Meg and Bob together (in more ways than one). Her information-retrieval skills prove useful in an investigation that grows as two more murders take place.

The author lives in Vancouver, WA, and the descriptions of the region in the book reflect her appreciation of the area. Written in a smooth style, the story progresses logically toward a suspenseful conclusion.

Theodore Feit

CITY OF FIRE

Robert Ellis

2008

St Martins Paperbacks

Detective Lena Gamble is new to the Los Angeles Robbery Homicide division, and feels intense pressure to prove herself as a rookie detective and as a woman. She and her partner are called to the scene of a brutal murder, and the investigation turns up another killing of another woman, with disturbing similarities between the two crimes and the two crime scenes. In each case, the woman's husband is the immediate suspect, and indeed, one of the men has confessed in a rage of despair and grief.

Yet how could one man, in custody after confessing to murder, kill a second time with such chilling identical detail? Unable to satisfy themselves that either man is responsible, Lena and her partner continue to search for patterns and detail that will connect the two crimes, in classic police procedural style.

Ellis alternates points of view between cops and the killer, creating parallel story lines, and parallel lines of intrigue which eventually intersect. As Lena learns more and discovers troubling facts, she begins to suspect the involvement of a rogue cop. Family loyalties and the continuing stress of loss and grief begin to color the activities of all the characters. A classic brush fire begins just outside the city, complicating the investigation. Along the way Ellis provides entertaining glimpses into some of the neighborhoods of LA - parts of the city rarely seen in glitzy Hollywood productions.

Woodstock

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 is writing 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.

Wills pulls out facts from the community, 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 questions.

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 in all these years.

Her library holds some diaries of citizens covering those years, and Wills decides to delve a little more. Not a good idea!

Well-written, suspenseful, and based on a true incident, about as close to the truth as a writer can get. Like librarians everywhere, she wants to provide the answer.

A good study of how to find information when the investigator only has wisps of rumors to begin asking questions. Cozy category.

Gay Toltl Kinman

DEATH WAS IN THE PICTURE

Linda Richards

Jan 2009

Thomas Dunne Books

I loved Richard's DEATH WAS THE OTHER WOMAN so I was pretty excited when we got a copy of DEATH WAS IN THE PICTURE. Sometimes when a sophomore effort arrives and I start reading I'm really excited about it but I end up disappointed as the read just isn't as good as the anticipation. Not the case here. Richards delivers on every level. DEATH WAS IN THE PICTURE announces this series featuring Kitty Pangborn. She's technically a secretary, but she does most of the work for her PI boss Bex Theroux. This time out Dex and Kitty are working for a group of "concerned citizens" who want them to keep an eye on an actor named Laird Wyndham they feel has bad morals. It seems strange and sure enough, Laird is popped for murder. And just like a classic noir movie, Kitty is soon working for Laird to clear his name, which could be a conflict because Dex has already agreed to help prove his guilt.

Richards must have a time machine because her rendition of the 1930s Hollywood feel flawless. Her instincts are also perfect when it comes to pacing, she keeps the story moving without making it feel rushed. I really like this series and I really like Kitty and I promise you will too.

Jon Jordan

DING DONG DEAD

Deb Baker

December, 2008

Berkley Prime Crime

Deb Baker's Gretchen Birch series is one of the most visible in the current round of "cozies with a nitch" series being presented by all of the major houses in paperback form. DING DONG DEAD was my first look at the doll restorer's series and I now know the reason for that visibility. Deb Baker is an extremely talented cozy writer.

When the Phoenix Dollers receive the donation of an historic house to home a doll museum, they get to work. Gretchen is directing a play to raise money. Her mother is building displays out of the fabulous collection already in the home and the dolls donated by enthusiasts from the local doll collectors, and the entire crew of Dollers is assisting in one form or another. Then the body of an L.A. doller is found in a Scotsdale cemetery, a ghost is discovered in the new building, someone tries to kill Gretchen's mother and the entire cast of DING DONG DEAD threatens to strike.

Who knew dolling could be so dangerous? Deb Baker did. Coming into the middle of a popular series is not always a good idea. It has

to be noted that Baker quickly introduced me to her main players, making me both care what is happening to them now and wanting to go back and revisit past books. I adored aunt Nina, loved Caroline (Mom) and what's not to like about a love interest who's a homicide detective and has smoldering eyes.

Gretchen is a contemporary and adult Nancy Drew with a hobby many readers may want to know more about. If you haven't begun the series already it may be just the thing for those February evenings when nothing but a good read and a cushy throw over your lap will do.

Ruth Jordan

**THE DRESDEN FILES:
WELCOME TO THE JUNGLE**

Jim Butcher

2008

Dabel Bros/ Del Rey

The Dresden Files by Jim Butcher are some of my favorite books. Combining supernatural with a classic noir style Pi sensibility the series is a joy to read. It also seems a natural for a comic book and Butcher says as much in his opening.

Harry Dresden is a professional Wizard and he makes a living out of Chicago, a lot of it from consulting for the Chicago PD. In Welcome to the Jungle he is brought in to investigate a series of attacks at the zoo. As always things aren't what they seem and Harry is soon up to his neck in trouble. He's got 24 hours to solve the case and then the police need to take control. Harry jumps right in and finds most of the people at the zoo uncooperative and it's looking like a gorilla is getting the blame. Harry meets a woman working there names Will (short for Willimena) and she actually seems willing to talk. Before long Harry has it figured out, but know there is an ancient evil loose possessing animals and stopping it are two entirely different things.

Written by Butcher and illustrated by Ardian Syaf this is a great introduction to the character. If it's your first exposure and you enjoy it I recommend all the novels. The collection also has some bonus features. There are all the original covers and a number of pages of concept art for the series. And I know that I'll be reading the comics from here on as well.

Jon Jordan

THE DROWNING POOL

Jacqueline Seewald

February 2009

Five Star

In this romantic suspense, with emphasis on the mystery aspect, librarian Kim Reynolds teams up again with police lieutenant Mike Gardner.

Set in New Jersey in the present, a man is found in a pool in the La Reine Gardens apartment complex where Kim lives.

She has a psychic gift, which helps Mike in his investigation. His partner "Bert" (short for Alberta) St. Clair, is an experienced officer who has transferred in from another city.

They soon find out that Rick Bradshaw, the dead man, was not as beloved as he thought he was. He was a womanizer, about to leave his live-in girlfriend, Cheryl McNeill; possibly had shady dealings, which did not endear him to his business associates; and was not above treating the hired help like slaves.

A guy like this collects a few enemies along the way, but which one was mad enough to kill him. The story is told from more than one POV.

Sonny Blake is the pool boy who should have been around at the time the body went into the water. Louise Scofield may or may not have been too friendly with the victim. (At least, her husband thought she was.) April Nevins was having an affair with him.

Seewald uses an old trick in a new way--all the suspects are gathered together to make the questioning easy as they have all been lying about their whereabouts. Who is going to admit they were at the pool when the man died? The new way is that she uses this device in the middle of the book, not the end as was often done in the 1940s film mysteries. The police come up with a suspect, but it's not over yet, obviously.

This is a very effective method for the reader who gets to see each of the players, interacting with the others. Very clever.

So the police end up with a confession, but the victim didn't die quite the way the suspect says. As they are closing in on the truth, Kim 'sees' what really happened, but doesn't know the motive.

Another murder, and the three--Kim, Mike and Bert--get into a tight situation where it doesn't look like they are going to be able to reveal who the real murderer is.

Gay Tolti Kinman

EASY MEAT

John Harvey

Bloody Brits Press

2008 (reprint)

In the eighth Charlie Resnick novel, the DI is facing a troubling case: That of a young boy, Nicky Snapes, who, during a home robbery, beat an elderly woman nearly to death as she was trying to protect her equally elderly husband. Nicky is put into care while charges against him are being weighed, and when things take a decided turn for the worse, the results are more tragic than Charlie or the reader could have imagined.

Snapes is the youngest of three being raised by his single-parent mother, and his choice of friends includes fourteen-year-old Martin, who "didn't seem to know what risk meant," at his tender age having already escaped from the facility where he had been incarcerated

and promptly getting sent back there after his next criminal offense. Their squalid lives are realistically and rather depressingly portrayed.

There is a romantic interest introduced for Charlie in the person of Hannah Campbell, Nicky's teacher, who has her pocketbook stolen by Nicky shortly before the robbery of the senior citizens, but who remains sympathetic to the boy despite everything. Returning are the cops with whom Charlie works, including Lynn Kellogg, still recovering from her kidnapping over a year ago. Ill-concealed misogyny, racism and general prejudice are evident in the CID [as in the 'outside world']. And then one of their own is brutally murdered.

Resnick is a wonderful protagonist: a lover of good jazz and cats [both immediately endearing him to this reader], the former evidenced by the names given to the latter, jazz legends all: Dizzy, Miles, Pepper and Bud [who he calls 'eternally young and stupid'], and despite Charlie's statements that "he had no immediate family, unless you included the cats and he did not. Cats were cats and people people and Resnick knew the difference, he was clear on that . . . Resnick reached out a hand to stroke the animal's glossy fur, but Dizzy turned away from his touch and, tail raised, presented Resnick with a fine view of his backside as he ran along the rail and then sprang down towards the door, anxious to be fed. A neat encapsulation, Resnick thought, of man's relationship with cats." He sits at his desk one morning with "dancing the last of several things occupying his mind. For no clear reason he could discern, unless it were the coffee in the cup that he was holding the words to an old Bessie Smith blues came filtering to the surface, something about waking up cold in hand," this last presaging the author's most recent novel in the series, appropriately enough entitled "COLD IN HAND."

Beyond such charming moments, the author evokes visceral scenes of violence, as well as the occasional ones of tenderness. He makes clear why he says, near the last page, that "there's nothing people won't do to one another, if the circumstances are right. No dreadful thing." John Harvey is one of the best British writers on the scene today, and this series as good as anyone can find.

Gloria Feit

THE EXPLOITS OF THE SECOND MRS. WATSON

Michael Mallory

2008

Top Publications

Michael Mallory's third Mrs. Watson book is a collection of thirteen short stories about the convincingly imagined second wife of Dr. John H. Watson, companion and chronicler of the famous Sherlock Holmes mysteries.

Rather like a case book, the stories follow the headstrong and capable Amelia Watson, as she ferrets out clues, pieces together puzzles, and exposes scams and culprits. She never tries to outshine her affable husband, and indeed confesses that her "true occupation is awaiting his return," nevertheless, her quick mind and fearless sense of justice sometimes leave him in the dust.

When Scotland Yard requests Dr. Watson's medical expertise, it's often Amelia's intuition that's needed, as in "The Adventure of the Bleak House Fire" where spontaneous combustion is suspected, or in "The Adventure of the Beggar's Head" in which Amelia's clever use of a nursery rhyme averts disaster and nails a serial killer, akin to Jack the Ripper.

Sometimes a client comes looking for Sherlock Holmes and must accept Amelia's assistance or go away disappointed, as in "The Adventure of the Gregorian Deed" in which her research on a little known historical fact uncovers a forgery.

Occasionally, it's Mycroft Holmes, Sherlock's corpulent brother, who seeks out Amelia on behalf of the Crown, as in "The Adventure of the Queen's Letters." Here we discover that the high-minded Mrs. Watson is not averse to destroying evidence, if the situation warrants it.

But there are times when the good wife works side-by-side with her doctor-husband to expose a murderer, as in "The Adventure of the Two Mrs. McGregors," involving a hot-air balloon and a telescope, and "The Adventure of the Diamond Stickpin," which features the renowned Buffalo Bill Cody.

And while Sherlock Holmes makes the occasional appearance in these stories, it is always the clever Mrs. Watson who has the final word. Mallory's introductory "Biography of Amelia Watson," is fascinating and makes his heroine's existence quite believable. His knowledge of Edwardian England, its royalty and history, as well as Conan Doyle's characters, adds color and authenticity to these charming, light-weight mysteries.

Jackie Houchin

THE FRAILITY OF FLESH

Sandra Ruttan

2008

Leisure Fiction

A murdered child's mother asks an RMCP constable about the case just as the convicted killer is about to be released. Another child is murdered, and the parents' first response is to get the lawyer on speed dial. Neither case promises a happy ending for the constables of Coquitlam RMCP in Sandra Ruttan's latest effort, THE FRAILITY OF FLESH.

Constable Craig Nolan is approached by Lisa Harrington, whose daughter Hope was murdered ten years earlier. Nolan is confused as the case was handled by his father. He offers advice onto handling the convicted killer's parole hearing and promises to review the case for her. Before he knows it, he is hounded by a local reporter and pressured by his boss to take an official interest in the case. Why? The killer, Donny Lockridge, has been paroled and is suing. When it begins to look as though Nolan's father and partner may not have closed a clean case, Nolan becomes obsessive.

Which is not good for him and his domestic partner, Contable Ashlyn Hart. Hart and partner Tain respond to the murder of Jeffrey Reimer, a four-year-old boy who was beaten to death. Reimer's brother points the finger at his missing sister. Before Hart and Tain can get anywhere, the Reimer family hides behind their high-powered lawyer, effectively shutting down the investigation. Further complicating things is a Port Moody (British Columbia) cop named Parker who is a poster child for the incompetent local cop. The case consumes Tain, dealing with a child murder in his own background, and Hart, who is hiding her pregnancy from Nolan. As both cases come together, Hart and Nolan begin to drift apart.

Ruttan has crafted an intricate web of secret relations, police politics, and lies upon lies with a romantic component. The romantic side is far from happy and suffers from realistic miscommunication and self-absorption. Nolan, Hart, and Tain are very real characters whose seams are very ragged by the end of the tale. Some of the antagonistic characters, such as Nolan's partner Luke Geller or irascible Sgt. Zidani, show a human side. Geller feels left out when his coworkers (rightly) don't trust him. While Zidani leans hard on Nolan, he ultimately relents with Hart, encouraging her after a lawyer assaults her. Other characters, such as attorney Byron Smythe or Officer Parker, are unredeemably arrogant. The Reimers prove to be the most enigmatic, paranoid in the extreme and hiding more than they need to be.

Ruttan has written a worthy follow-up to the Nolan, Tain, & Hart debut, *WHAT BURNS WITHIN*.

Jim Winter

GREASING THE PINATA

Tim Maleeny

December 2008

Poisoned Pen Press

In this, his third in the Cape Weathers series, Tim Maleeny has out done himself. In a perfect balance between thrill ride, a visit to a deadly aquarium and dark comedy, *GREASING THE PINATA* is whole enchilada.

A senator going MIA stirs his estranged daughter, Rebecca, to search for a father who never cared. When both he and her brother are found in a alligator infested water trap in a gold course in Mexico, the local Policia reassemble the pieces and write the case off as a misadventure. Rebecca hires the only many good enough or maybe crazy enough to take the case. Cape Weathers, hired to find one man, now must find the killer of both men.

After antagonizing a Chief Inspector, getting in the wrong side of a drug carte and the DEA, Weathers digs in even after having his penis imperiled by toothpick fish. Calling his own personal savior, Sally, to his side, he is as ready as he can be to stare down a bevy of bad guys headed by two vicious men. One of whom has a predilection for death by Humboldt squid.

Maleeny is as fresh, engaging and entertaining in this third book in the series as he was in the first. Cape Weathers shares much in common with some of the best written P.I.'s in the genre: droll humor, dogged determination and a soft spot for women in need of a little justice. What makes Weathers and Maleeny different is a perfect mix of humor and action mixed with a touch of the exotic. This is the kind of book that makes the year wait for the next one sheer hell.

Jennifer Jordan

HARD BOILED SENTIMENTALITY

Leonard Cassuto

2008

Columbia University Press

This is a non fiction look at a piece of our culture. Right up front you should know that while very interesting reading it is more of an academic book and does sometimes get a bit dry. Hard Boiled crime fiction has been popular for a long time and Cassuto manages to find a lot of fresh ideas and new things to say about it. He convincingly links it to both classic literature and "domestic fiction". Well researched and addictively interesting this book gives a whole new perspective on some for the books I've loved for years. Anyone interested in the genre and it's history will enjoy this book.

Jon Jordan

HEY THERE

(YOU WITH THE GUN IN YOUR HAND)

Robert J Randisi

2008

Thomas Dunne Books

Another in the ultra fun rat pack series by PWA founder Randisi which is such a love letter to the era it take space in it should come with a soundtrack.

Eddie Gianelli is pals with the rat pack because of his job at the Sands. Sinatra considers him enough of a pal to ask a favor. Someone is blackmailing Sammy Davis Jr and Frank wants Eddie to make the drop. But what should be a quick, if not a little risky, favor soon turns sour as the drop only produces a dead body. Things start to get pretty hinky fast and Edie and his pal Jerry need to find out what the hell is going on. The presence of Secret Service doesn't bode well as it means there may also be a JFK involvement.

Randisi is a top notch writer and I've loved everything I've read by him, but it seems to me that this series is probably closer to his heart than anything else he's written and it shows. He loves this period and I have to admit that by the end of each book I really feel like I was born too late. This is a treat to read that everyone deserves.

The series is also in pre pre production for the screen

Jon Jordan

HOLLYWOOD BUZZ

Margit Liesche

March 2009

Poisoned Pen Press

Pucci Lewis is delighted to be a WASP, getting to ferry fighter planes across the country and fly almost as much as she wants to. Her boss, Jackie Cochran has a great deal of faith in Pucci, and not just in her flying abilities. Pucci's already had one undercover

assignment (LIPSTICK AND LIES) and now Cochran is sending her to Hollywood, where she will once again have more than one assignment.

Her legit mission is to work with a director on a movie short about the WASPS, and try to keep him from portraying the women in a bad light. Cochran has fought for everything these women have, and doesn't want them to come off as bimbos or less than responsible and professional. This won't be an easy task; the director has a penchant for shots that feature posteriors over professionalism.

Her other assignment is to find out who sabotaged Frankie Beall's plane. Frankie is a WASP, and a good one, until her plane crashed and she wound up in a coma. Was it an accident that her plane was shot? Or was there something wrong with it before the shooting? HOLLYWOOD BUZZ features some famous names: Bela Lugosi, Judy Garland, and Clark Gable. Most of the names are just that, mentioned in passing. Bela Lugosi has a slightly larger role. Liesche walks that fine line between history and fiction very well, making the whole thing seem oh so reasonable.

HOLLYWOOD BUZZ continues the series begun with LIPSTICK AND LIES; it's a very good second novel with much to recommend it. Fans of fiction featuring strong women characters, set during WWII, especially fans that don't like battle scenes, will enjoy HOLLYWOOD BUZZ.

P.J. Coldren

HONESTLY DEAREST, YOU'RE DEAD

Jack Fredrickson

Jan 2009

Minotaur

Vlodek Elstrom, Dek, to almost everyone, and his pal Leo Brumsky, are at work on his castle tower repairing a window, when he gets a call from a lawyer. It seems he's made executor to a will. What's unusual is that Dek doesn't know the person he's executing the estate for. But, it's quick money, something Dek doesn't have a lot of, so he sets off for Michigan to do a job he thinks will take a couple of days at most.

That of course is where he's wrong. Louise Thomas's cabin has the look of a burglary gone bad. Louise must have died going through a window trying to escape. Dek, does his job and takes the one thing of interest, a typewriter, back home with him to Rivertown, Illinois. When Dek finds a hidden key and who Louise Thomas really was the story really takes off.

HONESTLY DEAREST, YOU'RE DEAD is Jack Fredrickson's second Dek Elstrom novel. Like A SAFE PLACE FOR DYING it's a fine read. Dek Elstrom is a guy you'd want in your corner. This isn't a tough guy P.I novel but it has it's tension throughout. It isn't a cozy either and those readers who don't want a lot of violence in their novels should be readily pleased that the bodies pile up off screen as it were. Honestly Dearest, you won't regret picking up HONESTLY DEAREST, YOU'RE DEAD.

Dave Biemann

IN THE SHADOW OF THE MASTER

Edited by Michael Connelly

Jan 2009

William Morrow

Presented by MWA this anthology celebrates the birth 200 years ago of a guy named Edgar. Edgar Allan Poe to be exact who if not THE father of detective stories, definitely one of them. Inside are 16 of his stories, each accompanied by an essay by a modern master. Among the contributors are Jeffery Deaver, Sue Grafton, Stephen King and Tess Gerritsen. It also has the classic illustrations by Harry Clarke to go with the tales of mystery and imagination. It was fun enough to reread some of these stories for the first time in years, the experience was made even more satisfying by reading what some of my favorite authors had to say.

This is a nice book to have around and one that will be picked up and reread often.

Jon Jordan

THE INNER CIRCLE

Mari Jungstedt

2008

St. Martin's Minotaur

Spending time with a bunch of fellow students digging up a site where there is a Viking fort buried should be loads of fun, and it sure starts that way. However it doesn't take too much reading of THE INNER CIRCLE to discover how fast that fun can turn sour.

Inspector Anders Knutas is brought to the site to investigate the murder of one of the students, Martina Flochten. Martina's body was found hanging from a tree with all the blood gone, a ritual style scene to be sure. Before long other murders turn this case in to an urgent fast paced and fast moving mystery.

Jungstedt's use of Scandinavia mythology really add to the atmosphere of this book and her pacing is brilliant. This is a book that will take over every portion of your brain and leave you tired.

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 background. Tempe's assignment is Bear Creek in Tulare County near the Central Valley of California, where she lives. Her

supervisor 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.

While she is with Abby, two men follow them. Tempe accosts the first one, but is not able to confront the second. When she returns to Bear Creek, she has to contend with the contempt of the two detectives because she didn't bring back any information they can use. Her boss sends her off again, this time to Santa Barbara. Husband Hutch, accompanies her. She is still being followed, perhaps even stalked, and she doesn't know why, but danger is present. Is the person a link to the murderer, or the murderer?

A theme running through the series is that Tempe's job, which puts her in danger, and heritage, which is not always aligned with Christianity, have always been a sore point with her husband, who is a minister. How far will religious tolerance stretch in their marriage? Tempe wants to recover those early loving days, but can she?

Tempe realizes that she is being threatened because she is stirring things up, so she continues to do so. A smashing story, and ending. Cozy category.

One of the highlights of the series is that we learn more about Native American heritage--along with Tempe.

Gay Tolti Kinman

THE LAST GIG

Norman Green

Jan 2009

St. Martin's Minotaur

Norman Green has been away from the scene for a little bit and I'm thrilled to see a new book from him. And what a way to come back! THE LAST GIG is an exhilarating novel and a true pleasure to read.

Alessandra (Al) Martillo had a rough beginning, her mother killed herself leaving her in the care of an indifferent Aunt. She ran away and eventually came to live with an uncle who turned her around. She is grown up now and working for a classic sleaze ball PI in New York City and she finds that she thrives on it. What seems like an interesting break from repossessing cars comes along when a mobster wants her to go undercover into his Irish mob family to find out who is betraying him. Al embraces the opportunity. Run ins with local toughs only make Al more determined as she gets into the case.

This is such a refreshing book, a woman who seems perfectly at home in the dangerous situations and it isn't explained away by circumstances. Al is a totally competent PI with street smarts to spare and I hope to see much more of her. Norman Green has New York City in his veins and he bleeds it onto the pages of this book. This early in the year and I may already have a favorite book.

Jon

THE LINDBERGH CHILD

Rick Geary

2008

NBM/Comics Lit

Rick Geary has been working on this series of true crime graphic novels for a while and they are really well researched and offer up some of the truly great crimes of the last century. This latest is obviously about the Lindbergh kidnapping. Since reading Max Allan Collins novel STOLEN AWAY I have been more than a little intrigued by this case and have formed my own opinions. In THE LINDBERGH CHILD Geary offers up all the facts of the event as they took place. He did his research and it shows. He also points out some of the strange inconsistencies with the story but he does it in such a way that he isn't drawing conclusions. My own feelings are that the baby's remains they found were not the kidnapped child and that the wrong man was punished. There are a lot of strange things in this case and while tragic it is truly fascinating as well. It also changed federal laws.

In 80 pages he gives the whole story in such an interesting way that I think most readers will feel like doing some research on their own. I would suggest using his bibliography as a place to start.

Geary also does all the art and for those of you not familiar with his style, it has a gentle and graceful feeling to it. There is no mistaking his artwork for someone else's. Geary has such a unique and beautiful style I've never seen anything close to it.

I also recommend all the other titles in this series of books by Geary. Some of the other titles are: Treasury of Victorian Murder: Murder of Abraham Lincoln, Treasury of Victorian Murder, Volume 8: Case of Madeleine Smith, Jack The Ripper (A Treasury of Victorian Murder Series): A Journal of Whitechapel Murders 1888 -1889, Treasury of Victorian Murder: Saga of the Bloody Benders, Fatal Bullet the Assassination of President Garfield. The whole series is great and worth tracking down whether you are a comics fan, a true crime fan or just a fan of great story telling..

Jon Jordan

LOCKE & KEY:

WELCOME TO LOVECRAFT

Joe Hill

2008

IDW Comics

After an amazing debut as an author Joe Hill has another success story on his hands with his first graphic novel. Locke and Key collects issue 1-6 of what is hopefully only the beginning of a great new comics series.

The Locke family has experienced tragedy, major tragedy. In the aftermath they move to a family home in the town of Lovecraft. The home they move to is called Key House and it has more than a few secrets. Mom and the three kids try to get on with their lives only to discover that the cause of the tragedy is back and coming to them.

More than just horror or crime this is also a story of a family and growth and hope. Hill has real skills with character and his ability to set the pace is perfect. Gabriel Rodriguez is also a terrific addition to the tale, his artwork portrays emotion and action in such a clean crisp

manner it's hard not to get lost in it.

I loved this book and can't wait to see more. I also quite enjoyed the introduction by Robert Crais.

Jon

MEAN TOWN BLUES

Sam Reaves

2008

Pegasus Books

I'm a pretty easy going guy, even tempered and open minded, but this book really pisses me off.

It's not the writing. In fact the part of what pisses me off is that book is so good. What makes me mad is that someone with the unbelievable skills that Reaves possesses is still virtually unknown. I think it's a crime that he's not being read by everyone.

MEAN TOWN BLUES is set in Chicago and follows new resident, Iraq veteran Tommy McLain. Tommy meets a girl, Lisa DiPietro who seems like someone he could fall for. As fate would have it Lisa has a problem with a stalker who is more than a little relentless.

Tommy being who he is steps up and offers to scare the guy off. Things aren't what they seem and Tommy ends up in way over his head with the mob and the FBI. Chicago isn't turning out to be the place of his dreams like he imagined, but if he can't stay alive it won't really matter.

This book is soulful and action packed. McLain is a great protagonist and I really hope to see more of him.

If you only buy one book mentioned in this magazine, make it this one.

Jon

MURDER AT DEVIATION JUNCTION

Andrew Martin

2009

Houghton Mifflin Harcourt

MURDER AT DEVIATION JUNCTION is the fourth book in the series featuring railway detective Jim Stringer set in the early 1900s.

This is atmospheric series steeped in railway lore of the dawn of the industrial age of the big machines that changed civilization.

In this latest outing Stringer is anticipating a promotion which is much needed because the money will go a long to helping his sick son.

To expedite the promotion Jim agrees to investigate an assault case not too far from home, but things soon go askew. Winter 1909 brings a snowstorm that causes problems for train travel and the train Jim is on ends up running into a snowdrift uncovering a body.

Before long the assault case is forgotten and Jim is stalking a killer who soon starts to stalk back.

Martin weaves a tale that quickly and easily takes the reader to another time and place. This is perfect for escaping everything else and just losing yourself in. Martin's Jim Stringer series is must reading for me and is the ideal combination of mystery and historical writing.

Jon

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 her Uncle Skip about their exciting middle-of-the-night adventure. Skip 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 minaturists.

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. Cozy.

Gay Toltl Kinman

MURDER ON THE EIFFEL TOWER

Claude Izner

2008

St. Martin's Minotaur

What happens when two sisters, second-hand book sellers on the banks of the Seine and experts on 19th Century Paris, decide to write a murder mystery? The protagonists are a couple of Parisian booksellers and the setting is the 1889 World Exposition for which the Eiffel Tower was created. Thus, the first of the fictional Victor Legris mystery series.

A series of unconnected victims die of what is said to be a bee sting. All but the first were at the Tower at the same time, and had their names recorded and printed in a four-page special promotional edition of *Le Figaro*. Bookseller Legris was present at the time of the first death, and met or knew the next three victims, raising suspicions in his mind. He becomes convinced that these are murders.

Obviously, the setting and tone of the novel are quite unusual, but given the time period it is set in, the reader may be slightly put off by the relatively stilted writing. Nevertheless, the book is a good old-fashioned story about a serial killer, without any violence. And, while this reader was able to discern who the murderer was long before Victor and his partner figure it out, it did not deter me from finishing the novel.

Theodore Feit

THE MYSTIC ARTS OF ERASING ALL SIGNS OF DEATH

Charlie Huston

January 09

Ballantine Books

Shattered. We've all felt that way from time to time. One of Charlie Huston's greatest strengths as a writer is his ability to take an individual either emotionally crippled or quickly heading down that path, wrap them up in classic noir and for the bow give his reader a new look at a plot we at first believe to be familiar. Then, readers' defenses down, he delivers his kill shot. Such is the case with THE MYSTIC ARTS OF ERASING ALL SIGNS OF DEATH and its protagonist Web Goodhue.

We meet Web hiding from life in his friend's Chev's apartment. We know he's doing his best not to recover from some great tragedy. We know that he has been a popular teacher and he hates buses. For the rest of the story we must read along. Web is cashless and when the parent of one of his former students offers him day labor Chev lets him know his freeloading days are over.

The job? Cleaning crime scenes. Web falls in love with the job quickly. Oh sure, he has to puke a few times, and learn the best products for cleaning brain tissue, but wiping other people's messes helps him to put his own to the back of his mind. To say his new career quickly becomes complicated would be a gross understatement.

This story is pure Huston. Backroom deals and rival cleaning companies not above dirty tactics, personal histories injected into a pulsating plot, the tattoo artist and the slightly shady cop, a ganja growing mom and screenwriting dad, and the heiress...

Web erases all signs of death while Huston paints a vivid landscape with signature style.

Ruth Jordan

NO LOVELIER DEATH

Graham Hurley

2009

Orion Books

Wow. That was the first word out of my mouth when I put this book down after reading it in one sitting. NO LOVELIER DEATH moves like flame on gasoline. From the startling opening to incredible climax this book is never dull and left me in awe.

The book opens with a party. A judge and his wife are on vacation and his daughter throws a bash that gets way out of control. A riot ensues and she and her boyfriend end up dead. It's obvious because of who the dead girl's father is that police are making this a redball case. But the neighbor feels responsible as well as he was asked to keep an eye on things. Bazza McKenzie is not your typical next door type as he is also one of the major players on the London drug scene.

The police put DI Farady in charge of the case, McKenzie puts Ex-Di Paul Winter on the case. Even though they are both looking for the same thing they definitely going about it differently and for completely different reasons. You can tell early on this is going to end messy.

Hurley is one of my new favorites and I can't get enough. This is a perfect example of why his work is so good, it resonates in every part of my brain and I just can't stop reading. Look for this book.

Jon

NUCLEAR JELLYFISH

Tim Dorsey

2009

William Morrow

Well, Mr. Dorsey has done it again. This is yet another fantastic book that is fast paced hilarious fun.

Serge is on a mission (of course he is!). This time he plans to get a job writing travel tips and to this end he starts a blog. So he and his faithful sidekick Coleman are traveling the state visiting obscure tourist spots, places like a bar made famous by Lynyrd Skynyrd, a hotel made famous because of a movie reference, things like that. He's being perused by his nemesis all the while.

But things in Serge's world are never what they seem. The girl he meets and starts a relationship with is not who she says, and the real reason he's on the road is not made clear till the end. We are taken to coin collecting shows, and follow a trail of diamond thieves.

This is classic Dorsey, strange and fascinating, and totally entertaining. The book just moves so fast that before I knew it I was done, left waiting, again, for another book. I have to say that after finishing I have a strong urge to go to Florida and rent a car.

Jon

OSCAR WILDE AND A GAME CALLED MURDER

Gyles Brandreth

2008

Touchstone

Apparently casting Oscar Wilde as a protagonist served well in the introductory volume of what seems to be a burgeoning series. And the technique serves well in this second in the mystery series. Set in 1892, Wilde is surrounded by friends such as Arthur Conan Doyle and Bram Stoker (author of Dracula), and the flavor of London of the era is delicious.

Wilde chairs what he calls the Socrates Club, where his friends and their guests enjoy dinner and a game. This time, Wilde invents one called "murder," in which each participant is asked to write down the name of someone they would most desire to kill if there was no danger of being caught. When each slip of paper is read, the names vary from the supercilious (a parrot, Sherlock Holmes, Eros and Father Time) to the much more serious: Wilde and his wife, Constance, among others. The very next day, the first victim falls, followed on three succeeding days by more victims on a daily basis. Are Wilde and his wife next? Read on and find out.

Step by step, we learn more about Oscar Wilde, his erudition and analytical ability. It becomes his task to solve the mystery of the four deaths and who has perpetrated the acts. Written in the style of a 19th Century novel, some readers may be put off in the reading. But rest assured, it is well worth the effort. For the most part, it's a lot of fun and some of the observations quite charming.

Theodore Feit

THE PRIVATE PATIENT

P. D. James

2008

Faber

P. D. James hasn't disappointed me yet, nor does she with this taut story. The beginning reminded me of her "A Certain Justice," but the similarity ended rapidly. Rhoda Gradwyn wishes to have a childhood disfiguring scar, caused by her drunken father, removed by a famous surgeon. He asks her, "Why now, after thirty-four years?" She answers "Because I no longer have need of it." Not only is he intrigued, but so is the reader.

She goes to his private clinic in the countryside in Dorset, England, property sold to the Doctor by the family of a woman who works for him.

James' series character, Scotland Yard Commander Adam Dalgliesh and his team of Detective Inspector Kate Miskin and Sergeant Francis Benton-Smith, investigate a death that occurs at the manor house. It is a closed world with only a few present. Surely it must be an inside job. As the team digs deeper, each of the residents and operating team members, have their own secrets.

The story is told from multiple points of view.

The murder victim was an investigative journalist who caused much hurt while doing the job, and some of the people present were affected by the resulting articles. Motives abound. Opportunity is present. As well as means. With, seemingly no leads to follow, and lies at every turn, the team zeros in on the murderer. But not before another is committed. This changes everything. Cozy category.

A delight to read.

Gay Tolti Kinman

SHADES OF BLUE

Bill Moody

2008

Poisoned Pen Press

Evan Horne is a musician, a jazz piano player. He lives life best when playing, and he's been offered a gig--two cuts on a recording with a very famous musician. Maybe it's going to happen, maybe it isn't. Life is good, he has moved to Northern California to be near his FBI girlfriend, Andie, and he has some gigs in the area, enough to keep him going.

An old friend of his, Calvin, dies, and he must return to Los Angeles, as the friend left him his house and its contents. Located in the Hollywood Hills, it's a valuable piece of property. He rents it out to a young woman, Dana, who was taking care of Calvin's dog. While going through his papers, Evan finds sheet music that Calvin wrote. They are famous songs, attributed to someone else who is getting the royalties. Evan contacts ASCAP and meets lawyer, Cameron Brody, who plans to look into the matter.

The legal crimes in the story are fraud, assault and battery, but in Calvin's papers, Evan finds evidence of the same crimes--only to the heart.

Lots of music playing, and Evan details what he thinks and feels about the music, how it's played, how it sounds. This feature is one of the things I like about Moody's books. The series can be read in any order. Moody is a jazz drummer, and a great writer. Cozy category.

Gay Tolti Kinman

SILENT WITNESS

Michael Norman

2008

Poisoned Pen Press

Sam Kincaid is a Special Investigator for the Utah Department of Corrections. Most of his assignments are relatively routine, but on occasion, events turn out of control and things get very interesting.

The aftermath of an armored car robbery has left two people dead and a suspect in custody who is a former member of the FLDS splinter Mormon group so recently in the press. The small sect whose members are now under suspicion includes several young men, who had been turned out of the FLDS with little or no marketable skills and have turned to crime to support themselves.

As the court system prepares for a preliminary hearing to review summaries of early evidence against the suspected robber, two witnesses to the original crime disappear. One man is found dead almost immediately; but there is almost no information on the whereabouts of the second witness, a young woman enrolled in a local college.

In addition to several special procedures to safeguard the accused robber and to prevent him from engineering an escape, Kincaid receives the assignment to locate the missing woman.

Sam soon suspects that the death of the first witness is not all it seems. And at the same time, Sam is dealing with personal troubles --

his ex-wife has notified him that she will be challenging him for custody of their daughter; and a trusted colleague of Sam's has begun to violate important departmental standards.

While Sam copes with this trio of demands on his attention, the reader learns more about the missing woman and her motivations for going into hiding. A final car chase through the Utah desert brings swift unjudicated justice to some of the characters, but provides an unexpected window of opportunity for others.

Combining the best features of police procedurals and courtroom maneuvering, Michael Norman's series is well worth the read.
Woodstock

SKIN AND BONES

Tom Bale

Jan 2009

Preface Publishing (UK)

SKIN AND BONES opens with a startling scene and never slows down and never gives pause.

A young man wakes up a small village with violence, shooting everyone he sees and eventually taking his own life. There is one survivor, Julia Trent. No one seems interested in her account of what happened, but after she recovers from the incident and is released from the hospital she teams up with the son of one of the victims. Craig Walker is a reporter and he and Julia are determined to find the truth, including the second man on the scene which everyone else is ignoring.

A dark tale that is layered with conspiracies and intrigue this is a mystery and a thriller that is satisfying on every level.

Rich characters and a plot that grabs hold and won't let go. The frustration of the characters is palpable and it's hard not to feel invested in the investigation they are pursuing. This book gave me chills.

While this is the first book by Tom Bale, it's not the author's first book. He has also written under his real name David Harrison, including SINS OF THE FATHER from Crème De Le Crime in 2006.

Jon

THE SPANISH GAME

Charles Cumming

Dec 2008

St. Martin's

When Alec Milius was a spy it cost him. He ran, trying to purge his guilt and avoid being killed by the CIA. He ended up in Spain and for six years he's looked over his shoulder, kept a bag packed, several phones and separate lines available, kept to himself, kept out of trouble; the kind of things a spy does. Alec works for a banker providing due diligence.

Despite his fears, he's grown bored. His friend comes to visit and tells him no one is after him anymore. He's told by his boss to run up to Basque country to talk to a politician with separatist connections about a business deal. They meet, enjoy each other's company and agree to meet again. When the man disappears Alec starts to wonder why and finds himself back in the business.

Charles Cummings The Spanish Game is a fast paced, thinking man's spy novel. His character Alec Milius is smart but not too smart. What he's looking for is an end to his dead end affair, his dead end job and his fears that he's done nothing but damage in his young but getting old fast, life. He finds he wants back in the MI-5 or 6 or SIS.

Cumming has the reader right where he wants him following every cross and double cross trying to keep up with Alec. The Spanish Game can and should be shelved with the best of Le Carre, Deighton and McCarry.

Dave Biemann

SPEAK OF THE DEVIL

Shari Shattuck

2008

Signet

In this sequel to EYE OF THE BEHOLDER, psychic Greer Sands is again forced to use her clairvoyant abilities to help find a killer and to protect the people and the environment she loves.

Set against a backdrop of the scorching Santa Ana winds that plague Southern California in the fall, Shattuck weaves a complex story of corporate greed, community unrest, arson and murder.

The people living around Greer have mixed feelings about the dense housing project being built in their community. Developers believe it will bring jobs and commerce; residents see only the ugly scar on their hillside, increased traffic, and pollution. Activists want to do more than just talk about it.

As tempers flare and fires ignite, Greer struggles to keep calm. But disturbing visions about her friends and the neighborhood begin to haunt her, and she sees symbols she can't interpret: a pair of raven wings, a spider's web. She senses a nebulous evil, but can't pinpoint its human source.

Meanwhile, her son Joshua is growing into his own "gift." He can see malevolent and benevolent spirits of the dead, haunting or helping individuals, but he doesn't know what to do about it.

As the brush fires increase and the death toll rises, suspicions focus first on Joshua's new friend, a recently released young felon and gang member, and then on a Native American artist and activist whose landscape paintings seem to align with the arsonist's target.

Following their separate visions, mother and son rush into the conflagration.

Shattuck thrusts her readers into the world of the paranormal almost from the first page, kindling an uneasiness and dread that's not resolved until the final pages. Her descriptions of Greer's visions and premonitions are wonderfully imagined and realistic, and Joshua's violent battle with the spirit world on behalf of his new friend – although reminiscent of Harry Potter's power – is also very believable.

The book's new and returning characters and their sticky relationships are richly drawn and convincing. So well does the author lay

down clues and red herrings, that readers may be surprised at who are the good guys, and who, the villains. SPEAK OF THE DEVIL is a concisely written, romantic-suspense-mystery, with taut, exciting chapters that keep readers racing to the finish.

Jackie Houchin

THE SPIRIT: FEMME FATALES

Will Eisner

2008

DC Comics

Just in time for people to study a bit before the movie, THE SPIRIT FEMME FATALES introduces readers to the women in the Spirit's life.

Will Eisner was undeniably a genius, this character is so perfect. Noir with a sense of fun, great artwork that isn't over done. But what really made the character work so well was the dames in his life. So reprinted here are stories from 1940-1949. Eisner really took the idea of the femme fatale to a new level. Deviously and dangerously wily women who were too clever for normal cops. Eisner's writing inspired a generation and then another after that and reading this will show you why.

Classic comics greatness collected at a reasonable price, what more could any fan want?

Jon

THAI DIE

Monica Ferris

2008

Berkley Prime Crime

For a change, it isn't Betsy Devonshire who is closely involved in a murder. One of her customers, Doris Valentine, has just returned from Thailand and does a small favor for an American she met there. No good deed goes unpunished, and this small favor is no exception.

While in Thailand, Doris met David Corvis. He has a small import/export business and asked her to drop off a small Buddha at an antique store in St. Paul, saving him a whole lot of low-grade hassle. Doris, being a nice enough woman, doesn't see any problem with this. Once she does this, things go rapidly downhill. Her apartment is broken into, some of her souvenirs stolen. The owner of the antique store is killed and his store ransacked. The Buddha disappears. Some crazy woman comes after Doris and the "Thai silk". Betsy does get involved; Doris is a friend and a customer. Betsy believes that something shady is going on, although she is not quite sure what. With the help of the Monday Bunch, she starts asking lots of questions, turning over rocks, investigating. For a change, Mike isn't all that upset; usually the policeman is less than enthused about Betsy messing in his territory.

THAI DIE is a delightful cozy mystery. Doris gets to tell all her friends about Thailand, which is interesting for the reader without dragging down the story. As always, there is just enough information about a new kind of needlework, with a pattern to try. The readers get to know a little bit more about some of The Monday Bunch, giving us all some backstory for future mysteries. Monica Ferris has delivered another enjoyable mystery.

P.J. Coldren

THREE WEEKS TO SAY GOODBYE

C.J. Box

January 09

Minotaur Books

Jack and Melissa had the perfect love story and now they've begun the family they both want. Angelina came to them through adoption and now she's about to be lost to them forever. A technicality they refuse to accept and cannot stop.

But , we soon realize they must. There's something not right about the birth father's sudden confusion about whether he should give up his parental rights. Whatever the motivation of the boy or his father (a man with political power) it is not coming from a good place.

I've been a fan of C.J. Box's for a long time now. I've become comfortable reading this master of the mystery genre. I truly believe that as "highly praised" as he is, he is decidedly underrated. Because, dear reader, you cannot get comfortable with a Box book.

Harrowing is a word too often used in mystery reviews but the three weeks C.J. Box is about to share with you take you beyond "harrowing" or "sinister". They take you to a darkness that you hope only exists in the author's imagination. Tightly woven plotlines intermingle with hope, despair and a philosophy so vile your sure to take at least one extra shower while reading.

Box is going to remarkable places with his stand-alones, making us examine parts of the human condition we hoped to avoid. Within our genre this is a strong selling point, and for any reader this is guaranteed to be one of the most compelling novels of the new year. It is time to put this author permanently on your reading list

Ruth Jordan

WARNING SIGNS

C J Lyon

January 2009

Jove

Think E.R. in print.

If you like medical jargon, hospitals and medical mysteries, you will have a test tube full in this fast-paced book.

Told from the POV of four women working at Angels of Mercy Medical Center E.R. in Pittsburgh in the summer. Amanda Mason has one year to go before she can put M.D. after her name. Her roommate Gina Freeman, is an emergency medicine resident. Dr. Lydia Fiore is a brand new doctor, and Nora Halloran is a nurse. The heart of the mystery is that three came into the hospital with the same symptoms. Two of them are dead, and the third arrives and this is a sample of the medical speak:

"Nineteen-year-old collapsed during a cross-country run this morning, transported in from Millvale," Lydia told Amanda. "On arrival, she was unresponsive, noted to have hypernatremic dehydration with an elevated sodium of one fifty-one. Vitals were normal, but patient grew increasingly nonresponsive with myoclonic movements of her extremities and eventually exhibited a descending paralysis. I was just getting ready to intubate her..."

She is just hanging on and proceeding down the path, as the other two had, toward her death. Amanda is in denial, but she has developed the same symptoms. There were all treated by Dr. Lucas Stone.

Many medical emergencies are going on at the same time--a baby has been asphyxiated, a woman has been beaten, and another has a heart defect--each procedure detailed.

In between, the protagonists try to find answers to the women's deaths by going back over the medical records, and discussing possibilities of what is causing the symptoms.

Each of the protagonists has her own demons, and is trying to cope with purging, controlling family, and the pressure of working in E.R, lack of sleep and proper nourishment.

The ending is smashing, with each of the four, separately, in dangerous situations. Lots of sexy scenes.

The author is a pediatric E.R. doctor.

Gay Toltl Kinman