

## The Buzz Bin

**THE ADVOCATE** (Echelon) by Teresa Burrell is a nice blend of a legal thriller and the suspense of a family secrets mystery. Sabre Orin Brown is a Juvenile court attorney working a messy case custody case that has her digging for answers. Well drawn characters and a plot that grips like a vise grips pliers this is a great beach read.

Tom Bradby's latest, **BLOOD MONEY** is a thriller/procedural set on Wall Street in 1929. Deaths that at first appear to be suicides of bankers soon turn up ties to Lucky Luciano. A well researched and perfectly plotted period book set in New York during a truly exciting time this is a real gem with all the elements needed for a perfect crime fiction tale.

**CRIMINAL TENDENCIES** edited by Lynne Patrick is an anthology from Crème de la Crème (Available from DuFour editions in the US) which is donating some of the proceeds to Breast Cancer research. Among the authors involved are Peter Lovesey, Sophie Hannah, Reginald Hill, Val McDermid, Zoe Sharp and Peter James among others. A foreword by Mark Billingham rounds this out and makes it a damn heavy weight collection.

**CROSSING THE CENTERLINE** (Echelon) is the debut novel from Allan E. Ansorge. It's a tightly plotted highly entertaining read that has a great cast of characters, and we do mean characters!. Carl Fletcher is retired from the sheriff's department after a hit and run accident, now running a charter boat. But after an attempt on his life it looks like the hit and run that killed his fiancée and cost him the use of a leg was no accident. With help from an ex-partner and a crazy old lady among others Carl is going to find the answers. Ansorge has got some skills and they are nicely displayed here. We can't wait for the next one.

Here in the US we didn't get enough of a chance to read Iain McDowall as only his first three books were released here. They were damn good and I seek them out from UK sources now. **ENVY THE DEAD** (Piatkus) is McDowall's sixth book and it may be his best yet. DI Jacobson and DS Kerr are working a case that started back in the eighties with the murder of Claire Oldham, a girl who was in the middle of protests and anti war actions. Years later her murderer is found to be innocent with new forensics. Someone doesn't buy it and Martin Grove is shot dead. Jacobson and Kerr must now step in and wade through the past while keeping an eye on the present to find a killer. Dark and extraordinary this book is a real gem, as are McDowall's earlier books. Find this book, read it and savor every word.

**THE EXTRA** (Minotaur Books) by Elizabeth Sims is another in her series featuring amateur sleuth Rita Farmer. Working on a movie as an extra dressed like a cop Rita stumbles across an assault and steps in to help. Things lead her back to a place she turned to for help years ago, a mission run by the assault victim's grandmother, the it's a different place now and something is wrong. Rita steps in to help. Written with a strong voice and wonderful characters THE EXTRA as a book that goes down easy, like a perfect cup of coffee.

Chris Knopf has quietly been getting better and better with each book and **HARD STOP** (permanent Press) is really a masterful piece of work. Book four in the series with Sam Acquillo opens with Sam walking in on a burglar. After subduing and stopping the intruder questions ensue and Sam discovers his old boss needs a favor, which would normally be a big NO for Sam, but an attractive offer is made. A missing persons case with corporate ties has Sam with his hands full. Knopf does great characters and he really makes you feel like you are right there in the Hamptons. Wonderful summer read.

**HELL'S FIRE** (Pegasus Books) was covered last year when it came out in the UK, but it is now out here in the states so there is no excuse not to pick up this great book by Christopher (Chris) Simms. A wonderful dark procedural with religious crimes and secrets that are truly spooky. DI Spicer is a great character and we can't praise Simms work enough. See in the reviews for his latest UK release.

Religious thrillers can be hit or miss, but **THE HOLY BULLET** (Putnam) by Luis Miguel Rocha is definitely right on target. Set in the Vatican after the murder of Pope John Paul the first this book races through action with a

wide cast including rogue priests, a jaded journalist and secret organizations. This is no Da Vinci Code clone, but a truly wonderful book that is completely engrossing.

Henry Perez makes his debut with **KILLING RED** (Pinnacle) in spectacular fashion. A reporter is called to death row to interview a man about to be killed for grisly crimes. When he discovers that the crimes are being repeated he's working against the clock to stop the new horror. Perez writes like a man possessed and this book is a top notch read. We look forward to more from Henry Perez

Has Elmore Leonard ever written a book that wasn't great reading? I don't think so. His latest, **ROAD DOGS** (William Morrow) takes the fun factor up a few notches by bringing together character from three previous books, Jack Foley from **OUT OF SIGHT**, Dawn Navarro from **RIDING THE RAP** and Cundo Rey of **LABRAVA**. Loaded with misadventures in a caper, trust and mistrust and Leonard's usual wonderful plotting and dialogue this is a pure 100 proof drink of a book.

It is impossible to keep up with all the new authors hitting the market each year. Brett Battles landed smack in the middle of the crime fiction scene with his debut **THE CLEANER**. His third book, **SHADOW OF BETRAYAL** (Delecorate) is just out and it is an absolute pleasure to read. Battles has a true gift for writing thrillers and this book should put him on everyone's list. Jonathan Quinn is a freelance operative who is one of the true good guys. In this latest tale Quinn is brought in to stop a terrorist group abducting kids but the waters are quickly muddied and trust is at a minimum. A true race against time thriller from page one this is a perfect summer read.

**SHANGHAIED** (Bleak House) is the fourth book from Eric Stone and proves once and for all he is worthy of all the acclaim he's been getting. Ray Sharp is living in a Hong Kong now controlled by the Chinese and it's a different world than the one he was used to. **SHANGHAIED** moves like a speed boat through crystal clear water and this book will grab you and not let go. Nobody is writing books in Asia as well as Stone, and he is a must buy author.

David Morrell has never written a book that I didn't love and read in almost one sitting. Since moving to Vanguard Press he seems to have revved up the motor into an even higher gear and his last three books were amazing. This summer we have **THE SHIMMER** shipping in July. An interesting combination of aspects of Close Encounters and conspiracy thrillers we see a man searching for his missing wife who may have been drawn to a strange phenomenon in a small Texas town. Crazy man goes crazy and shoots people, old government secrets unfold and the action never stops. Morrell is **THE** master of the thriller, period.

Bantam Press UK has just released the latest by Simon Kernick, **TARGET**. For some reason his first three which were released here didn't do well enough for St. Martin's to keep publishing them but I will tell you it's worth your time to find a place in the UK to order from. Kernick is a mad noir genius. The target in question here is a writer named Rob Fallon who during a night of drinking ends up going home with a girl and see her murdered. He escapes and get the police, but she is gone and everything is clean. Is he going nuts or is someone out to get him next? Kernick is someone you really have to read. **GET THIS BOOK.**

**TETHERED**(Shaye Areheart Books) came out last year in Hard cover, and is now out in trade from Three Rivers Press, perfect to take with you where ever you may be going. Amy MacKinnon writes a deliberately paced book with some dark aspects to it. Clara Marsh likes her job in a funeral home, but a couple chance encounters put her on to a child pornography ring. Assisting local cop Detective Mike Sullivan, Clara helps to uncover the truth. With a wonderful characters and a easy pace this is a dark but wonderful debut.

Jeff Abbott has been getting better and better with each novel and his latest, **TRUST ME**(Dutton) is a masterpiece. Encompassing a different perspective on the war on terror, **TRUST ME** features an analyst who follows terror on the web, Luke Dantry. Luke works quietly at home for his step father tracking groups who may be dangerous. He discovers that he is on to something big when he is taken and left for dead. He is on the run trying to stay ahead of his abductors and find the truth before something horrible happens. Abbott's writing is truly compelling and the depth of the story makes it important not to read too fast, but it's also impossible not to. This is a real winner.

Alexandra Sokoloff once again keeps sleep from coming with this “read in one sitting” book. **THE UNSEEN** (St. Martin’s Press) is set at Duke University and uses the Rhine experiments as it’s spark. Laurel wants to duplicate the experiment but is unaware of just how horribly it ended the first time. Sokoloff has delivered a book that is both suspenseful and creepy as Hell. Read this book, but leave the lights on.

**WHERE THE DEAD LAY** (Bantam/Transworld UK) is the sequel to last year’s debut by David Levien, **CITY OF THE SUN**. Ex cop and reluctant PI Frank Behr is back in a case which is very personal. A friend is murdered and there is no evidence, and just as he gets his teeth into the case he is asked to take a job finding two missing detectives from a private firm. Sinking into the underbelly of Indianapolis Frank finds himself in a dark place populated by gamblers, transients and mobsters. Behr is character that will stick with, his troubled past and quest for peace and justice make him a perfect reluctant hero.

## The Book Reviews

### **ABANDON**

Blake Crouch

July 2009

St Martins Minotaur

Easily my favorite book of this year.

Two stories from two centuries happening in the same town. Abandon, a former bustling mining town in the wilds of Colorado that muleskinner discovers vacant on Christmas, 1893. It’s as if the inhabitants had walked away with only what they had on their backs, their holiday meals on the table.

Today finds an intrepid group made up of a team of paranormal researchers, a journalist fresh from the Big Apple and her estranged father, a history teacher with a more than mild obsession with the ghost town. The team has mixed intentions but all are intrigued by the town’s mysterious past. As the team makes it to the empty town, a fierce blizzard heads their way. Knowing that weather and permits make this a one-time experience, they forge on. As night falls, something worse than a storm visits the town. Something that could soon make each of them disappear as quickly and thoroughly as those that vanished over a century ago.

This is the book that will make Crouch a household name. Weaving the past and present together with such seamless skill that from the prologue to the last page, this book captures the imagination. This book has the arc and flow of a master storyteller. Bravo, Mr Crouch.

Jen Jordan

### **ABOUT FACE**

Donna Leon

2009

Atlantic Monthly Press

Leon, who has lived in Venice for twenty-five years, has the city under a microscope.

Commissario Guido Brunetti, her series hero, and wife, Paolo, visit her wealthy parents, Conte and Contessa Falier, for dinner. On the way there, Brunetti sees a couple--the woman with a face that looks like a botched face-lift. The couple, it turn out, are also Conte's guests. Brunetti learns that the wife, Franca, his seat mate at dinner, is a good friend of the Contessa'. He is much taken with her because she quotes Cicero. Later, the Conte calls him to look into the background of Franca's husband, who wants him to invest in a project. The Conte is leery. Before Brunetti can ask the police department's computer whiz, Signorina Elettra, for help, he is assigned a case involving a murder in another jurisdiction, as the murderer might live in Venice. Guardino, the police officer from the other jurisdiction, reluctantly gives him information, which puzzles Brunetti all the more. A body is found across the laguna on the grounds of a chemical plant, and the murdered person is involved in the case Brunetti is working on. Franca comes on the scene again as she is linked to the murder. She refers Brunetti to a specific story by Ovid, and when he reads it all becomes clear.

The title has more than one meaning, and one of those meanings applies to the ending.

Gay Tolti Kinman

## **AMERICAN RUST**

Philipp Meyer

2009

Spiegel & Grau

AMERICAN RUST is set in a Pennsylvania steel town. The mill, the heart of the town, has been closed down. Two friends are soon caught up in an act of violence that will alter their lives.

AMERICAN RUST makes use of echoes and influences of distinctly American novels creating in the process an ambitious, sometimes plodding novel that feels vaguely familiar.

The characters are well defined but in some ways become mere exercises in character study. The characters could have benefited from less internalizing and more external plot movement. This lack of external plot movement also handicaps one of the books intentions, creating a portrait of a dying/dead town. The close relation of the central circle of characters lends a closed off feeling to the whole affair. A broader cast of characters that cuts through more layers of social (and economic) strata is needed. The core characters regularly come into contact with secondary characters having different experiences than their own (and landing differently after the collapse) but since they aren't explored at all they become missed opportunities. It's this intended portrait of a dying town that suffers the most from these missed opportunities and keeps AMERICAN RUST from being profound and relevant.

Brian Lindenmuth

## **THE ANATOMY OF DECEPTION**

Lawrence Goldstone

2009

Black Swan

Deeply atmospheric and steeped in shadowy intrigue, THE ANATOMY OF DECEPTION will sate readers of historic fiction and suspense alike. We follow the labors of Ephraim Carroll, a resident physician in Philadelphia, 1889. The world and the medical field itself are the verge of great change. Carroll is studying under one of medicine's great forerunners, Dr. William Osler, who pushes the boundaries of patient care and surgical hygiene. He has gathered his students at the Dead House where necropsy is used to glean knowledge from corpses well beyond intervention. When Osler and a fellow student react strongly to the seeing a young and seemingly well-to-do body of a young woman, Carroll's curiosity is peeked. As he digs deeper into the identity of the woman he is confronted by the unseemly and unethical practices of a fellow student and Osler himself. His nightly forays into the sordid streets of turn of the century Philadelphia open his eyes to a new and darker world, and he begins to question what is important: catching a killer or allowing a man heralded as the future of medicine to continue unimpeded.

Goldstone has taken a fictional premise and interlaced stories of actual players in the history of medicine. With the fictional Carroll left to explore the moral high ground when as he observes the how the actions of few may affect the many. He also paints a vivid, grim view of medical standards of the time. Medicine, at that time, was the one great equalizer.

The book's fictional characters could be stronger and the opening pages more engaging, put these are small complaints in the face of how wonderful a book this was in its entirety.

Jen Jordan

## **THE ASSAILANT**

James Patrick Hunt

2009

St. Martin's Minotaur

Hunt creates a great mixture of suspense novel and police procedural with his new novel, THE ASSAILANT. Lt. George Hastings leads the investigation of the strangulation of a young college girl. All police have to go on is that she was working as a high-end escort, until another girl is found strangled across town. Prostitution is

the link and Hastings plunges head first into the hidden lives of call-girls and the married, distinguished clients they're paid to entertain.

The investigation moves slowly, frustrating the killer just as much as the police department. So, he sends a letter to the newspaper, threatening more death unless someone catches him. Hunt expertly illustrates the sociopath's double life: on the outside he's a nice, charming doctor, but within, he's sick and twisted. He's smooth and tactful and expertly evades capture. But occasionally, he'll let his dark side show itself and these flaws make the character more intriguing.

While the plot is pretty straightforward – the killer is identified early on and there are minimal twists and turns – THE ASSAILANT is a piece of solid crime fiction. Hunt's series character is memorable and multi-faceted, he creates a story that readers care about, and he maintains suspense throughout the novel. Not super original, but still dark and entertaining.

Dana Kaye

## **AWAKENING**

S.J. Bolton

2009

St. Martins

Bolton is yet another great fresh new voice from the UK. AWAKENING is her second book (following last year's SACRIFICE). A small town mystery steeped in suspense and with a nicely done gothic feel this is a "can't miss" book.

Clara Benning lives and works in a small village as a vet for wild animals. She likes her job and is good at it, working day-to-day saving badgers and other critters injured in the area. The book opens with a typical day going south quickly as she is called in to rescue an infant from a venomous snake. She soon discovers that there is a rash of snake incidents. There is obviously something behind them besides nature striking back and this is confirmed when she captures a deadly snake native only to Australia. She teams up with a strange neighbor to discover what is going on and the small town feathers are ruffled as they uncover some old secrets. Danger ensues.

Bolton is a strong writer and this story drew me in quickly. The characters are compelling and real. Her use of suspense is worthy of Hitchcock and keeps you on edge right to the end. She also manages to make feel damn uneasy and, well the only word for it is squirmy.

A truly masterful piece of work.

Jon Jordan

## **BRITTEN & BRULIGHTLY**

Hannah Berry

2009

Metropolitan Books

I'm late with this review and plead ignorance. BRITTEN & BRULIGHTLY hit my radar with the stellar reviews it received earlier this year. The accolades are well earned. This graphic novel tells a PI story more relevant than 90% of the PI novels I've read this year. The artwork is outstanding, sucking you into the noiriness of it all on the very first page.

Fernandez Britten is a PI haunted by his profession. How many clients have come to him over the years for answers they do not want to hear? How many lives have been destroyed by the answers he provides?

When a young woman comes to him sure that her deceased fiancé is not a suicide it is with trepidation he accepts the work. The case soon grabs him and as he investigates Fern realizes his past may well provide the clues to what really happened to Berni Kudos.

Who's hiding what in the Maughton family? Will this case be the one that sends Fern over the edge? Berry's art & words blend to create a perfect whodunit. My only complaint is the lettering. While beautiful, the words blurred frequently for these middle-aged eyes. However, the story demanded I work through the pain.

Ruth Jordan

## **BURY ME DEEP**

Megan Abbott  
July 09  
Simon & Schuster

When you speak of the best of Noir everyone has their own favorites. Few names make every list. One that does is Megan Abbott. I've read them all; DIE A LITTLE, THE SONG IS YOU, QUEENPIN. Each novel to date has had a distinct story of its own, with fabulous characters, delectable plotting, a unique story and a steamy yet gossamer setting. Wonderful and craftily drawn worlds that suck you in like a traffic accident filmed by Michelangelo Antonioni. To say expectations were high when I cracked this book open would be an understatement.

Goddamnit, this woman can write.

BURY ME DEEP, the story of Marion, Louise & Ginny. Three young women in the throw of the depression filled with needs. The need for money, the need for love, the desire for something more than a cream of celery casserole being the highlight of their day. The men who use them and let them down slither like snake oil through the pages of this book. But each choice every person makes is a part of not only their character but also this book's soul.

A young Bride is left behind in a desert town by her husband, a heroin addicted doctor. He has secured a job and a rooming house for the woman he loves all most as much as his drugs. Soon befriended by co-worker Louise and her roommate Ginny, Marion is introduced to the gay side of life. Dancing and peroxide, music and hooch. And then comes Gentleman Joe. Joe awakens feelings Marion never knew she could have and a warning from Louise "You'll never know what you can do until you've done it." goes unheeded to an Eddie Cantor background. This story isn't going anywhere good and you know it.

In the afterward we find the novel spun out from the author's fascination of the true story of Winnie Ruth Judd. She spun it out, reveled in it, imagined herself in this dusky and molten time and has made the story her own. A stunning work of fiction, it is Abbott's love for her central character that makes BURY ME DEEP so accessible and so far away at the same time. Imagine Hammett wrote Daisy Buchanan and not Fitzgerald. And you are Gatsby... so close and yet so far away. This is BURY ME DEEP.

Ruth Jordan

### **CHERRY BOMB**

J.A. Konrath  
July 2009  
Hyperion

Konrath has gotten better with each book and after reading FUZZY NAVEL I wasn't sure he could take it up yet another notch. I was wrong. CHERRY BOMB is his most suspenseful book yet and the pacing left this reader worn out.

One of Jackie's inner circle of family and friends is dead, and the killer is taunting her. Jackie has gone after some real kooks and bad asses before, but this goes beyond Jackie's regular "catch the bad guys" scenario. It's become her only focus in life. By the time this is done, the life of Jacqueline Daniels will never be the same. And I'm not just saying that. Konrath really put it all on the page. If you take a toboggan and hot wax the bottom of it, go at a 45-degree angle hill and jump on, you will move pretty fast. Not as fast as this book though. I literally could not turn the pages fast enough.

It may actually be the end of the series, but I have hope eternal. And I hope to cross paths with Jackie again.  
Jon Jordan

### **CHOKER**

Frederick Ramsay  
2009  
Poisoned Pen Press

A cocky young pilot, Nick Reynolds ,bites off more than he can chew, and flies into a fog bank over Chesapeake Bay. He's quite relieved to escape the fog, but worried that he's too far off course when he sees a ship where no ship should be.

Taking a closer look, he decides he'd better call someone – the someone being Charlie Garland, a former CIA agent. Unfortunately, Nick's call is not answered. All he can do is leave a message. And that's the last anyone hears from him.

Enter Ike Schwartz, the protagonist of Frederick Ramsay's entertaining series set on the Eastern seaboard. All Ike is trying to do is enjoy a vacation, but when his buddy Charlie asks him to help look for the disappeared Nick, Ike just can't say no.

But it's not a simple missing persons case. It's the small tip of an iceberg that turns out to be full of international mystery and intrigue, and pulls Ike into the orbit of a Washington spy community that's more interested in their own agenda than in solving the problem.

Ike Schwartz is a good guy, easy to relate to and to root for. The plot of this story was really well done – lots of surprises, but nothing outlandish. I'm looking forward to reading more of Ramsay's fiction.

Rae Helmsworth

## **THE COLDEST MILE**

Tom Piccirilli

2009

Bantam

THE COLDEST MILE is one hell of an entertaining crime novel. It does lose just a little of its impact since we already know the world and these characters but still delivers a solid story that I HAD to finish once I started it. Those who are already familiar with Chase and Jonah will appreciate the pick up from where the action last left off. For those who aren't familiar with these characters, go out now and grab the paperbacks. That's right, paperbacks. So even in these economically stressful times you can and should empty the change jar for these books.

While reading THE COLDEST MILE some thought was scratching in the back of my brain. In a genre built on the backs of long running series and stand alones, it took me a little while to figure it out. But THE COLDEST MILE feels very much like the middle book of a trilogy. This makes sense to me because I don't think these characters, and their dynamics, could support a long running series.

I like Chase and I found myself thinking about him for a while after THE COLD SPOT and again after THE COLDEST MILE. Jonah seems to be cut from a Parker mold and seems to have an amorality that mostly surrounds him. Chase isn't like him despite being raised by him, simply because he cares and feels beholden to those whom he loves. It's this sense of obligation that underscores the dramatic tug o' war as Chase struggles to find firm ground and do the right thing.

Bob Dylan once wrote "Forget the dead you've left behind, they will not follow you" but these words, for Chase, just aren't true.

Brian Lindenmuth

*Retro Review:*

## **A COOL BREEZE ON THE UNDERGROUND**

Don Winslow

1996

St. Martin's Paperback

Neal Carey is a graduate student who simply wants to be left alone to finish up his Masters in literature. But, Neal also happens to be a P.I. A P.I. who works for "The Family." They took him in as a "friend" of the "Family" when his drug addict mother failed to follow through on her duties. Then the "Family" paid for Neal to go to college. So, when the "Family" comes knocking on Neal's door to put his P.I. skills to work finding Allie Chase, the missing daughter of Senator Chase, Neal doesn't have much choice but to comply.

Senator Chase is in contention for the vice presidency and he needs his missing, drug-addict daughter home and clean for a wholesome family appearance before the Democratic Convention. Allie was spotted in London and that's where Neal heads and finds more adventure than he had planned.

A COOL BREEZE ON THE UNDERGROUND is Don Winslow's first book in the Neal Carey series. I listened to this one on audio. It was read by Joe Barrett who did a very nice job with voicing the various characters. He didn't grow overly dramatic and his inflections were well-placed and timed. I enjoyed his reading of this book.

Winslow's characters are superb. He did make use of the damsel in distress, which I'm not especially fond of, but he saved himself from my bigger pet peeve at the conclusion of the novel, but to avoid spoilers, I'll let you find that one out for yourself.

I absolutely loved "Dad." Joe Graham is the man who taught Neal everything he knows about P.I. work. And Neal refers to him as "Dad." Joe has an artificial arm, which amusingly plays a role in how Neal and Joe end up meeting. Throughout the book Winslow flashes back to various events in Neal's P.I. "education." The relationship between Neal and Graham is humorous and vital to understanding both characters.

COOL BREEZE's plot is a mover, filled with plenty of twists, as Neal explains, the life of a P.I. is lies.

A fast, funny, enjoyable beginning to the Neal Carey series. I look forward to reading more.

Jen Forbus of [jensbookthoughts.blogspot.com](http://jensbookthoughts.blogspot.com)

## **CRIMINAL KARMA**

Steven Thomas

2009

Ballantine Books

If I hadn't seen the cover of CRIMINAL KARMA, I would have sworn I was reading an Elmore Leonard novel. Steven Thomas's second book has the sweet-talking yet terribly flawed protagonist, the larger-than-life female character, the crime gone wrong, and the catchy dialogue which pulls the story along. Robert Rivers is a small time criminal, until he sets his sights on a socialite's quarter-million dollar necklace. But when he and his womanizing partner, Reggie, sneak into her hotel room to take it, they're intercepted by a thug claiming to work for Baba-Raba, a spiritual guru who may be running more than just an ashram. Rivers tracks Baba-Raba and attempts to infiltrate his community and reclaim his quarter-mil. From tantric meditation to schmoozing the socialite, Rivers will do whatever it takes to get that necklace back.

Thomas expertly captures southern California, and while he's clearly knowledgeable of the setting, he has a sense of humor about the whole LA scene. He's not afraid to poke fun at the ridiculousness of it all and uses his characters at representations of the types of people who live there. The plot was intriguing, I wanted to know how everything turned out, but it was the characters and the dialogue that carried the story through. With time and practice, Thomas could easily be the next Elmore Leonard.

Dana Kaye

## **THE CUTTING**

James Hayman

2009

St. Martin's Minotaur

In this debut thriller, Hayman introduces Detective Michael McCabe with the Portland, Maine PD. McCabe fled Manhattan after his brother was shot, wanting to raise his daughter far from the violent city. But when a female teenager is murdered, her heart surgically removed from her chest, McCabe realizes the smaller town isn't as safe as it seemed. The entire department is on the hunt for this sadistic killer, but when another girl is abducted, it's a race against time.

If you can get past the opening scene, where the killer brutalizes a poor little bunny, it's a pretty decent thriller. I should also warn animal lovers that a dog is killed as well. Despite the animal cruelty, Hayman is a thoughtful writer who knows how to craft a story: each character has a definitive arc, they all have something at stake, and there are enough twists to keep readers on their toes. There were some unnecessary scenes and some chapters where tension was minimal, but he's a debut author and he can smooth out those wrinkles on book #2.

Dana Kaye

## **THE DEVIL'S DOZEN**

Katherine Ramsland, Ph.D.

2009

Berkley Books

The premise of this non-fiction book is an intriguing one. The author looks at the cases of twelve notorious serial killers, and discusses how the investigation into each situation advanced various aspects of forensic science.

I started reading, expecting that every story would illustrate a specific advance in criminal investigation. However, in my view the author failed to provide enough context in each situation. It wasn't clear to me how, for example, the use of fingerprint technology in the case of Richard Rogers during the early 1990s was different from earlier cases; nor was it clear what were the specific advances around the use of fingerprints in that criminal investigation.

Each story is, in and of itself, an interesting history of how a serial killer was brought to justice. I just didn't learn as much as I would have liked.

Rae Helmsworth

## **DIAL EMMY FOR MURDER**

Eileen Davidson

June 2009

Obsidian / New American Library

A niche mystery featuring Soap Opera star Alexis Peterson (and written by an Emmy-nominated Soap Opera star!). Alexis' life on-camera is becoming the same as off-camera--only the real-life actors are really dead. Det. Frank Jakes, whom she met on a previous case (and in a previous book), asks for her help when she recognizes the names of some of the dead men as being actors. He asks her to find out when and where they auditioned, as she knows the business. He wants to find a pattern, anything that will give him a clue or something to work with.

Jakes' captain is adamant that Alexis have nothing to do with the case, and Jakes' partner feels the same way. Jakes feels he's on to something as the deceased worked or auctioned for the Soaps.

Alexis' ex-husband, the embezzler, is back in town and wants to see their young daughter. That will be the day!

A romance with Jakes is heating up, but her boyfriend Paul is still on the scene. The complications are getting to her. To top it off, someone is stalking her--is it the ex or the murderer?

Definitely a great look into the behind-the-scenes world most of us would never see otherwise.

Gay Tolti Kinman

## **THE DISASSEMBLED MAN**

Nate Flexer

2009

New Pulp Press

In **THE DISASSEMBLED MAN**, Frankie Avicious, a man on a meat assembly line that rends animals into bits, is about to come apart at the seams himself. As a marriage to the daughter of the man that owns the meatpacking plant fails his obsession with Scarlett Acres, a local stripper looking for a way out, grows. And Frankie is about to be nudged into the toilet bowl while teetering on the seat. For a man that thinks life has treated him to just one unjust swirl after another, this will be his chance to be flush instead of being flushed. When Jack Marteau knocks, it is just the opportunity Frankie has been looking for. Selling watches of dubious quality door to door after the sun has sunk is odd, but Frankie's opening the door to an old family friend. After offering the man the cleanest glass in the house, Frankie finds himself telling his sad life's story to a strange man. As he tells it, Frankie stewes on just how unfair life has been. As his words circle around, it seems he suddenly has a clear-cut plan. He's got to get some money so he can get the woman he loves and get out of this town of dead ends and death. And when a pissed off, drunken sociopath has a plan, everyone best get out of his way.

Flexer has written sheer, nasty beautiful prose with this book. The wince factor is high and the characters horridly riveting. The envelope has not just been pushed, but set on fire.

Jen Jordan

## **DON'T LOOK TWICE**

Andrew Gross

2009

William Morrow

The second book featuring Detective Ty Hauck, *DON'T LOOK TWICE* has everything we love in a thriller: suspense, plot twists, deception, and a kick-ass ending.

The story opens innocuously enough, with Hauck buying his teenage daughter a soda at a gas station (an amusingly written scene that reminded Your Faithful Reviewer, once again, how grateful she is to never have had a teen of her own). Hauck is still recovering from his most recent case, which brought a lot of unwanted notoriety, and wants nothing more than to get his life back on an even keel.

No such luck. Before they've even paid for their snacks the gas station is hit by a drive by shooting – unusual, to say the least, in tony Greenwich, Connecticut.

And so begins a terrifying, and thrilling, journey for Hauck, his family, and the citizenry of Greenwich. You just know that with Andrew Gross you'll get a satisfying ride – this books absolutely does not disappoint.

Rae Helmsworth

### **DOPE THIEF**

Dennis Tafoya

2009

Minotaur Books

Ray and his best friend Manny have a great system for robbing drug dealers. They impersonate DEA agents. When a "raid" on some bikers goes wrong they attract the wrong kind of attention from the men who want their money back.

Too often in crime fiction what we see are attempts at being savage that wind up being nihilistic kill-'em-all.

For some, the definition of noir is "ends in death or violence" but it can become too easy for an author to coast when situations end in mortality. If every Gordian knot is cut by death then what's the point?

Tafoya gives us more than that in *DOPE THIEF*. He shows us the bad but instead of ending it there he extends the story far past that. By allowing us to see his character come out of the other side harmed and changed, he becomes something far richer; a standout.

Redemption and hope are possibilities in Tafoyas world but they don't come easily, free or cheap. They are top shelf items that demand a premium. They can't be stolen, only bought with a pound of flesh and little bit of your soul. As a part of this path Tafoya shows us the strength that comes in the family that we create.

And that's the way it should be. Emotions and a depth of character aren't something to be feared. The way to make Bad feel Worse is to contrast it with Good. Virtue isn't virtue unless tested and change doesn't stick unless earned.

*DOPE THIEF* is a knockout of a book that goes the extra distance to give us a memorable character that we want to do well not just win or survive.

Brian Lindenmuth

### **THE EDGE**

Chris Simms

2009

Orion Books

Part of the Best of British stable of authors at Orion Books, Chris Simms is one of the truly fresh new voices of UK crime fiction. His work gets better with each release.

In *THE EDGE*, Detective Inspector Jon Spicer gets a phone call that was inevitable; his younger brother Dave is dead, killed as a direct result to his lifestyle of drugs and violence. Guilt sends Spicer to the Peak District to find out what happened and hopefully find the killer. His best lead, his brother's girlfriend, is on the run from the people whom Dave owed money to.

*THE EDGE* is aptly named, as the events within it push Spicer right to the edge. Simms writes with a depth that makes this much more than just a procedural or a revenge story. Introspection and dark places of the human soul are revealed, twisted and laid bare in this dark and engaging tale. Seek this novel out.

Jon

## **FILTHY RICH**

Brian Azzarello (art by Victor Santos)

AUG 2009

Vertigo Crime

I've read pretty much everything Azzarello has written, including his short story in *UNCAGE ME*. With everything he does he surprises me. Azzarello always takes you somewhere new. *100 BULLETS* is the ultimate modern crime tale with mobsters and bad guys; *Loveless* was a gritty western tale of despair and controlled rage. His superhero books, while heroic, are far from stereotypical. With *FILTHY RICH*, Azzarello has revealed yet another dimension. The body of work, much like Brian himself, is unique, layered and always interesting.

*FILTHY RICH* takes place in the early sixties and has all the elements of classic noir; a femme fatale, a man who thinks he knows his own limits; circles of evil. There are no clear-cut villains in this book but some are better and more practiced at it than others. Richard "Junk" Junkin is a former football star that left the game with a blown knee and gambling allegations. Junk works at a car dealership in Jersey that has made the owner very rich and the owner's daughter very spoiled. Junk ends up a bodyguard for the spoiled Victoria. He thinks he knows the score, and he's ready to play this game, but in *FILTHY RICH* *everyone* seems to be playing a game and it's pretty clear that Junk is not on equal footing. Junk is trying to swim in a sea of superficial, rich party people but a series of bad decisions and misguided choices might find him in Davey Jones' Locker. When it's all said and done, someone is going to be *FILTHY RICH*.

Every time I thought I knew where this was going the story made a turn and took me someplace unexpected. When it was all said and done, the ending seems so obvious, but it took getting there to see it. Between his plotting and dialogue, I think Azzarello is one of the strongest voices in crime fiction today and *FILTHY RICH* is just further proof of that. The artwork by Victor Santos really brings home the period feel of the book. It's not overly complicated and it's perfect for the black and white format of the book. A blend of perfect dialogue, flawless pacing and an unpredictable plot served with seamless art make this a perfect noir cocktail.

I think that if Jim Thompson or Patricia Highsmith read this, they would be proud to see the mystery tradition carried on by such a strong voice. *FILTHY RICH* comes in fast like a stiletto blade, and while not fatal, it will probably leave a scar. Azzarello's comic fans will be happy as will crime fiction readers.

This is a great beginning to what looks to be a great imprint for Vertigo. *FILTHY RICH* left me with my mouth dry and my palms wet. Books like this are the reason I read Crime Fiction, and in Azzarello's hands it has a rich future.

Jon Jordan

## **FIFTY GRAND**

Adrian McKinty

2009

Henry Holt and Co.

If Havana Lunar gives us the people of Cuba then in many ways *FIFTY GRAND* gives us the government. This isn't to suggest that it's a portrayal with a forgiving or sympathetic eye. But it is a portrayal that gives us a greater understanding of its machinations.

The scope of the book is vast. A lot of mystery/crime fiction novels start with a dead body and the solving of that crime will cut through various social and economic strata. But in *FIFTY GRAND* the protagonist, very much alive, becomes the silver bullet cutting through the strata. Detective Mercado, a police officer in Havana, finds out that her father was killed in a hit and run accident in Colorado. She suspects foul play and arranges to leave the country secretly to investigate. To do so she must travel to Mexico, assume the alias of a Mexican citizen and illegally cross the border into the U.S. taking a job in the town where her father lived.

This path will provide the launch pad for observations on both the Cuban and American governments; the politics of small isolated towns and the lives of the invisibles that are an integral part of the economy whether acknowledged explicitly or not.

*FIFTY GRAND* is an exiting thriller with a conscience, a point of view and an opinion all of which is expressed in beautifully written prose.

Brian Lindenmuth

## **FINAL CRISIS**

Grant Morrison

2009

DC Comics

Over at DC they have been leading up to this story for years, The last few big events were pointing to this and it was worth the wait.

The short version is basic: what if evil wins? The longer version is a bit more complicated and goes into continuity over the last few decades and minutia details of DC Comics. Coming into this you really only need to know one thing. This is a great story told with great art.

There are a group of New Gods that have been decimated, all but completely erased. In FINAL CRISIS, we see that the evil contingent from a home world called Apokolips are back, hiding in human form on Earth. Little by little, they are taking over the planet. By the time people know what's going on it's almost too late. The villains are on board thinking they will benefit, the heroes are doing everything they can to stop it. But it possible that they can't stop it. Wonder Woman has been possessed. Superman is kept busy elsewhere. And Batman... Well, you'll have to read it to believe it when it comes to Batman's fate.

There are parallel Earths that are being watched by a group known as the monitors, and every one of these Earths is in Crisis. The reader gets to see wonderful variations on the heroes we know i.e. multiple Superman's fighting for everything they hold dear. The truly wonderful part of this story is that while epic in scope it focuses on individuals and brings a very human aspect to the tale.

Bringing it all together is writer grant Morrison. Morrison is a bit of a mad genius. When he brings his A game he shines. This is definitely his A game. The art is primarily done by J.G Jones and Doug Mahnke. these are two men who love what they do and it shows on every page.

A lot of books are billed as being Epic. They claim that "Things will never be the same!" Well, it look like this is one book that lives up to the hype.

A "must have" for fans of DC Comics or casual readers of comics alike, this is first and last, one Hell of a great story.

Jon Jordan

## **FIRST FAMILY**

David Baldacci

2009

Grand Central Publishing

This book picks up where the bestselling SIMPLE GENIUS ends. The protagonists, Sean King and Michelle Maxwell, are trying to build a life together, but it's tough. Michelle is tightly wound, and struggling, and Sean doesn't know what to do to help her.

When a child is kidnapped, Michelle and Sean are pulled into the manhunt, and the primary question is, who or what will break first? Their relationship or the case?

The bad guys in this book are truly evil, and willing to stop at nothing, including murdering a child, to achieve their goals. It makes the chase all the more suspenseful.

This story gives you everything you want in a political thriller, and nothing you don't. Baldacci never disappoints.

Rae Helmsworth

## **FOR BETTER, FOR MURDER**

Lisa Bork

September 2009

Midnight Ink

"A Broken Vows Mystery" is the title of this new series. The contemporary setting is a tony village in the Finger Lake region of New York state in December.

A great opening scene, as heroine Jolen Asdale, owner of a classic car business, theatrically whips open the door of a Ferrari to show the car to a prospective buyer--and a body falls out. Talk about killing a deal!

The body is that of a man Jolene briefly dated, and there's other evidence to tie, or rather pin, the murder on her. Not good that her soon-to-be-ex, Ray Parker, is the investigating sheriff on the case. Evidence piles up against her, including several witnesses who saw Jolene and the now-deceased together in her car showroom, supposedly arguing--and supposedly she hit him. She says they were talking about zoning, parking meters and politics.

Bad goes to worse and then worser. Her sister has escaped from a mental institution, and uses Jolene's apartment as a way station with three other 'friends', one of whom is a fellow escapee. The two escapees may be robbing stores.

The other half of the story is about Jolene trying to set things right with her estranged husband, and always doing the wrong thing. They haven't lived together for three years, ever since she filed the divorce papers. But the divorce was never finalized. He was pressuring her to have a child, and she didn't want to, as she thinks insanity runs in the family. Could be.

The Christmas present her sister gives her is a wonderful denouement to the story. Lovely book.

Gay Tolti Kinman

## **THE FRIGHTENED MAN**

Kenneth Cameron

May 2009

Thomas Dunne Books

Turn of the century London. A mad man walks the streets, eviscerating woman and terrorizing a population. And his name is Jack the Ripper. An overworked premise in need of a dynamic protagonist. In former American marshal Denton, we find a troubled and bright but ultimately lumbering hero.

Barely earning a living from a writing career that has become stilted Denton exists in lassitude. A much needed jolt stirs him from his mental indolence when his manservant, the quip ready Sergeant Atkins, lets in a late night visitor, a bedraggled man named Mulcahy, who claims to have witnessed the fiendish Ripper committing his latest crime. He begs Denton to protect him but flees in terror before truly telling his tale. Writing off his claims as the rantings of a delusional man, Denton dismisses the affair. However, the next body found on the streets stirs his conscience and he vows to find Mulcahy, convinced the man himself must be either the monster or closely tied to him.

Obtaining access to the post mortem and the crime scene via a police contact, Denton feels the police are incapable of solving the crime. Janet Striker, a woman who works with the women most targeted by the killer, joins forces with Denton to hunt the man down. Can it be that his sense of moral outrage and the companionship of this energetic altruist have transformed him from a world-weary man down on his luck to a brave seeker of justice?

It isn't likely. Although not eminently dislikeable, Denton cannot carry a story that has been told better with better protagonists. Not far into the book, the reader will be as weary as the lead.

Jen Jordan

## **FUGITIVE**

Phillip Margolin

2009

Harper

This book features the welcome return of Amanda Jaffe, the protagonist of two previous Margolin books, **WILD JUSTICE** and **PROOF POSITIVE**.

It's not every day that a prisoner becomes a hero. But Charlie Marsh has done just that – he's saved the life of the Oregon State Penitentiary's warden during a riot. His good deed doesn't do him much good, though, because he's soon on the run to escape charges of murdering a congressman.

Out of the frying pan into the fire: Charlie finds himself in Africa, at the mercy of a particularly vile dictator, Jean Claude Baptiste. Charlie figures jail is better than torture, so he heads home to face the murder charge. Bummer. The evil dictator has sent his equally evil head of secret police to track Charlie down and take him out.

Enter Amanda, a criminal lawyer in Oregon, who finds in Charlie one of her most surprising, challenging, and dangerous cases. Margolin has written believable characters you can care about, and a meticulous plot that keeps the reader guessing until the very end. This is a highly recommended read.

Rae Helmsworth

### **GHOST A LA MODE**

Sue Ann Jaffarian

Sept. 2009

Midnight Ink

This is the first in the author's new series, "Ghost of Granny Apples Mystery." Set in the present, a séance kicks the story off and sends Emma Whitecastle to Julian, CA, near San Diego. There she learns her great-great-great-grandmother--the Granny Apples of the title and story-- is reputed to have killed her husband. "I didn't do it," Granny keeps telling Emma in wisps of images.

Several other ghosts appear, all wanting to set the record straight about their past life. Specters aid Emma as she solves rights the wrongs of Emma's ancestors from stolen land and other skullduggery.

Phillip Bowers, a lawyer who finds Emma obnoxious, nosy and scheming, is on her case. He thinks she's a shill for a man who wants to buy his property. After several talks with Granny Apples, the possibility that the land belongs to Emma's family is a real one. It's also the location where grams was hanged for the crime, albeit without a trial.

Lots of local scenes--there really is a Julian, CA known for its apples. The story is not scary, but great fun. Safe to turn the light out and be assured of having pleasant dreams--particularly of apple pie a la mode!

Gay Toltl Kinman

### **THE GUILTY CLIENT**

Roberta Rogow

2009

Deadly Ink

Set in New York City in 1870, Miss Peggy Pettigrew is a law clerk for her uncle in Pettigrew & Roth. The story is told from the P.O.V.s of her, attorney Joshua Roth, and District Attorney Michael Riley. The men point out they can go places Miss Peggy cannot, and this case involves those unseemly places.

Suzanne Kendall is murdered in an upper-class boarding house. Bertram Delacorte is arrested for the murder two weeks later. Roth is able to get him off after producing a witness who danced with him at a ball while the murder was being committed. This does not please the police, and someone else.

Another murder is committed. The trio focuses on a man who eventually confesses. However they begin to have doubts about his guilt, and why he confessed. Pressing on they find out more about Suzanne Kendall, which brings them to a different conclusion as to why she was killed.

The story, too, is about Miss Peggy trying to become a lawyer in this era. No law school accepts women, and the bar doesn't either. Women don't have the vote, and slavery still exists.

The time period and location are firmly part of the story, with some real historical characters. A great beginning for this new series!

Gay Toltl Kinman

### **HITMAN**

Parnell Hall

2009

Pegasus Books

Welcome once again to the wacky world of Stanley Hastings. A private investigator that works for a negligence attorney, he reaps loads from slip-and-fall cases through TV advertising. Stanley does nothing more exciting than sign up clients to a retainer agreement and take pictures of broken steps and potholes.

That is until a hit man hires Stanley to prevent him from killing the person he has been hired to kill. The problem is the "client" gives a false name and fails to identify the victim. Stanley undertakes the task, but the

hit man is shot dead and the person Stanley thought was the target also is shot and killed. From that point the plot gets more and more complicated and confusing.

However, the story, writing and dialog are very funny, in keeping with the tenor of the earlier entries in the series. Stanley's wry comments are augmented by those of his wife and favorite police officers, as well as his attorney-employer.

Theodore Feit

### **HOUSE OF MYSTERY: LOVE STORIES FOR DEAD PEOPLE**

Matthew Struges

2009

Vertigo

This second collection of the gothic suspense/horror/fantasy comic from DC is another out of this world blend of short tales within an ongoing story about the inhabitants of the HOUSE OF MYSTERY. The latest tenant is Fig Keele, the daughter of a writer who has seen the house all her life through dreams. She's stuck there in a place where guests come and go, sharing tales as currency.

A wonderful anthology with a nod to the original horror comic of the 70's that doesn't fail to entertain. Different writers contribute short stories while Sturge keeps a common thread running throughout. The variety of art is astonishing and I really loved seeing Bernie Wrightson here.

Escapism reading at its best.

Jon

### **THE HUNTED**

Brian Haig

August, 2009

Grand Central Publishing

This incredible (in a good way) book is based on a true story, which makes reading it all the more fun.

In 1987, Alex Konevitch is expelled from Moscow University for being "too entrepreneurial" – he'd been running a construction company from his dorm room. He manages to make some pretty good lemonade out of this particular lemon, and before long has become one of the wealthiest men in the new Russia.

Happy story, right? Not so fast – Alex makes one huge, life-destroying mistake. He hires an ex-KGB director to head his corporate security – and the guy is true evil. Before you can say 'vodka', Alex has been betrayed, kidnapped and brutalized. Not only that, he's the prime suspect in a crime he didn't commit.

Alex and his wife are forced to flee for their lives. They arrive in the US hoping for asylum, both political and personal. But it doesn't work out that way. The US would also like to throw him in jail. Alex has to clear his name to remove the bounty on his head and to protect his family. And to find a place to call home. This is a great thriller – a real page-turner combining both relatable characters and excellent plotting.

Rae Helmsworth

### **ILLEGAL**

Paul Levine

2009

Bantam

Paul Levine is the author of twelve novels, including several in the "**Solomon v. Lord**" series. Readers of the latter books maybe surprised at the decidedly non-comedic tone of this newest book. The title refers to not only prosecutable acts, but people about whom that term is used as a proper noun. I refer of course to people coming into the United States from other countries, predominantly, here, from Mexico.

Jimmy "Royal" Payne, or, as his business card declares, J. Atticus Payne, Esquire, finds himself at loose ends: "Lacking any decent cases, bowling alone on a weekday morning provided a break from bill-collectors and anger management classes." Jimmy doesn't have a great reputation in most places [as his nickname implies], typically known for cutting corners and representing undesirables. But he has represented men seeking legal residency after surviving horrendous trips into the US. Some resulted in the deaths of many inside a

tractor/trailer, resulting in a contempt of court citation and the aforementioned anger management classes, as well as hero status among many in the Mexican community.

Marisol Perez is a Mexican woman quite self-sufficient yet highly vulnerable because of her 12-year-old son, Agustino ["Tino"]. The Perez' lives intersect with Jimmy's when their trip into the US, courtesy of a high-priced and low class "coyote," turns into disaster. They become separated, and Tino manages to find Jimmy to implore him to help find his mother. Jimmy, whose own son of about the same age has very tragically died, cannot refuse - - and his ex-wife, Sharon, won't let him. The search becomes a harrowing adventure, filled with graphic scenes of violence, sexual slavery, and danger.

Gloria Feit

## **JUMP**

Tim Maleeny

2009

Poisoned Pen Press

Ed Lowry was mean, greedy, unprincipled, and cruel. When he fell to his death from a 20<sup>th</sup> story balcony, no one felt much grief. However, since Ed owned the building from which he plummeted, and since almost all the tenants had good reason to hate him, the police have a ready made group of suspects to question.

In an entertaining twist on the classic "locked room" scenario, Tim Maleeny's latest is a pleasant addition to the group of books perfect for a relaxing weekend or to stick in your carryon bag as you pack for a plane trip.

Retired cop Sam McGowan is one of the people cops wish to question, and they recruit him for a type of unpaid undercover assignment – since Sam's apartment is on the 20<sup>th</sup> floor and his neighbors are all under suspicion of plotting Lowry's murder.

This motley collection of fellow tenants/suspects provide most of the fun; a pair of stunningly beautiful women who fund their higher educations by broadcasting their most intimate moments on webcams located in their bedrooms; a motherly woman who spends her time baking cookies which might or might not contain poisonous ingredients; a pair of brothers who have added drug peddling to their lunchtime catering service; a self important film producer whose videography can be found in the adult section of the rental store; and other assorted characters.

The investigating cops are under pressure from municipal authorities to wrap up the investigation and call the death a suicide, but too many details don't support that conclusion. Using his skills as a cop and conveniently "forgetting" to mention he is now retired, Sam begins to sort out what happened. The conclusion might not be a pattern for the best type of ethical decision making, but it's hard not to like the way things turn out.

Woodstock

## **THE LANGUAGE OF BEES**

Laurie R. King

August, 2009

Bantam Books

All you really need to know is that the inestimable Laurie R. King has written another book. Just buy it, read it, and enjoy the heck out of another superlative story.

Oh, all right, I'll tell you a little bit about it.

Mary Russell and her husband, Sherlock Holmes, are delighted to be back in Sussex after months traveling.

The joy of homecoming doesn't last long. Holmes' beloved bees are mysteriously dying, and Damian Adler needs help. Adler's wife and child have disappeared, and he needs Holmes' assistance to find them.

Mary focuses her attention on the mystery of the apiary, while Holmes looks for the missing persons. It soon becomes evident to Mary that her husband is suffering – he won't be able to solve the mystery without her help. And solving it will force them both to face a bitter past, one that has the potential to irrevocably damage the future.

As always, Laurie King has given us lyrical prose, a meticulous plot, and deft storytelling.

Like I said, buy it.

Rae Helmsworth

## **THE LIBRARY OF SHADOWS**

Mikkel Birkegaard  
2009  
Black Swan

Summer & Paperbacks, a time honored tradition. I believe this to be the reason I first gravitated towards this book, but I'm so glad I did. The blurb that caught my attention? "*THE LIBRARY OF SHADOWS is an engrossing literary thriller of intrigue, conspiracy and the extraordinary power of reading.*" And now I recommend it to all who love reading.

This book was a surprise, a wonderful surprise. Perhaps a show of ignorance on my part, I'd never heard of the author and so when I began this tale of readers and those they read to and for and the people with the special gift to facilitate words I was in a little bit of heaven. A book shop in Copenhagen is the scene of a violent death and soon after, attempted arson.

The owner of the bookshop has been killed and his son, a successful lawyer inherits the business and a legacy that may very well be the death of him. For centuries there have been people with an exceptional gift for reading and also their counterpart. The second group allows the readers to reach all who might not be reachable. They take the experience of the reader, absorb it, amplify it and in tandem the most powerful story telling of all time has been told.

The thriller comes in when a rich business man takes a run for the bookshop and Jon Campelli's law career. Bodies are falling, children are in jeopardy and a tenuous bond is formed between the two sides of an ancient tradition.

There is a sect of books that within its own parameters and story effuses the pure joy of interpreting words written by someone else upon the page. More often than not that joy is what gets your protagonist through the time and or trauma in his life. In THE LIBRARY OF SHADOWS reading is the why of the action. What gets our hero in this mess in the first place. That Jon must accept his gift and his responsibility as a reader at the same time even while being seduced by words is what makes the LIBRARY OF SHADOWS a perfect read.

Ruth Jordan

## **LITTLE BLUE WHALES**

Kenneth R. Lewis  
2009  
Krill Press

The author is a Chief of Police in Oregon, as is the protagonist of this splendid debut novel. While it is the story of a messianic serial killer, it is really about how a repressed memory of a childhood incident can affect a grown person's life. Kevin Kearnes was a policeman in Dodger City, with a wife and two sons he loved, until things went downhill and his marriage ended in divorce. He won the job of Police Chief in Cutter City, Oregon, in which the mayor and his cronies were so corrupt that they fired and hired police chiefs almost annually. Kevin, of course, not only has to stand up and battle the corruption, but undertake an investigation into the disappearance and murder of four young boys while battling his own demons from the past and coming to grips with a possible new love.

The book is an impressive start for a first-time novelist. It flows smoothly, is tightly plotted and believable. Obviously the author's experience as a police chief lends authenticity to the crime novel, but more impressive is the skill with which he portrays human emotions.

No mention is made as to whether or not Mr. Lewis is hard at work at a follow-up effort. Let's hope he is.  
Theodore Feit

## **THE LITTLE SLEEP**

Paul Tremblay  
2009  
Holt

Mark Genevich is a South Boston P.I. who suffers from narcolepsy with the chief side effect being hallucinations. As he tries to solve the case involving some photos of a local reality TV star, what is real and what isn't become central question.

Better stories about characters with medical conditions include: perfect memory (Gene Wolfe's THE BOOK OF THE NEW SUN and Jorge Luis Borges' FUNES THE MEMORIOUS); short term memory loss (Gene Wolfe's

SOLIDER OF THE MIST, the movie Memento); schizophrenia (John Wray's LOWBOY); multiple personality disorder (Matt Ruff's SET THIS HOUSE IN ORDER); Tourette's syndrome (Jonathan Lethem's MOTHERLESS BROOKLYN). In this company, Paul Tremblay's THE LITTLE SLEEP just doesn't hold up.

THE LITTLE SLEEP fails to successfully (even adequately) place the reader in the shoes of Mark. We are told all of these things about his personality as a result of his condition but we never experience any of them. Just to look at one example: we are told more than once that Mark has a slow speech delivery due to his injury. Yet the book is filled with snappy, snarky dialogue that flies at the reader at a pretty healthy pace. It was hard to believe in the speech impediment the way that the dialogue was presented. There didn't even seem to be any frustration from other characters even in tense or tight situations. Mark isn't likeable but don't call him one thing and present him as another.

THE LITTLE SLEEP is a damned interesting (and at times frustrating) book that ultimately isn't quite as clever as it thinks it is.

Brian Lindenmuth

## **LONESOME POINT**

Ian Vasquez

2009

Minotaur Books

This sophomore noir novel from the talented Mr. Vasquez shows his great debut, IN THE HEAT wasn't a fluke. Leo Varela is a mental health worker and sometime poet, who'd really just as soon get high as do anything else. But his girlfriend is pregnant, and Leo knows it's time to start acting like a grown-up. Before Leo can actually do anything about his grand plan, just about the last guy he ever wants to see again bursts into his life. Freddy is an old 'friend' from Leo's childhood in Belize and knows enough about Leo's past that he's confident Leo will help him release a Cuban patient from the hospital where Leo works.

Leo understands that this request is not as simple as it might appear and immediately consults his brother Patrick, who is Leo's opposite in every way. He's ambitious, successful, and dishonest – and he doesn't intend to let a little thing like family ties bring him down. It's clear to Patrick that Freddy has a goal that will bode ill for the Varela family, so that something needs to be done.

Leo soon finds himself the pawn in a dark, deadly game. Will he survive? Will Patrick? And in true noir fashion, does it really matter?

I'm looking forward to more from this talented writer.

Rae Helmsworth

## **LOWBOY**

John Wray

2009

Farrar, Straus and Giroux

Will Heller, a sixteen-year old paranoid schizophrenic, believes the world is being destroyed by climate change. After he goes off his meds, he becomes convinced he can do something about it. In order to do so he has to find one willing girl. And he already has someone in mind; the girl he tried to kill; the crime that led to his being committed. Chasing after him are his mother and a missing persons detective.

LOWBOY is an incredibly engaging novel with great characters and a secret that is dangled in front of the reader like a carrot creating an incredible narrative pull and a desire to turn pages. What's interesting about this carrot is how it acts as negative space for the reader. We attach predictions and expectations to the reveal that become increasingly outlandish or improbable as our anxiety grows. 'Oh my god, what can the secret be.'

When it's revealed, it turns out to be something much more sublime, real, human and effective.

LOWBOY is an incredible book that falls just short of greatness but winds up being just right.

Brian Lindenmuth

## **MALICE**

Lisa Jackson

2009

Kensington Books

Lisa Jackson has presented us with another thrilling suspense story. This one begins as New Orleans Detective Rick Bentz is recovering from an accident and lobbying his boss to allow him back on active duty. He's going stir crazy. His boss is rightly skeptical; she'd be even more cautious if she knew what, or rather who, Rick had been seeing since his injury – the ghost of his ex-wife. Or is she really a ghost? Several years before, Bentz's ex-wife, Jennifer, was killed in a car crash. How, then, to explain the fact that Rick has been seeing her since he woke up in the hospital, and not just seeing her, but smelling her signature gardenia perfume. He knows Jennifer is dead; he identified her body. So, is he losing his mind? Then things get stranger. A copy of Jennifer's death certificate arrives in the mail, marked with a red question mark. This tangible evidence of weirdness sends Rick to Los Angeles, where he was once a member of the police force, and where he lived with Jennifer before her death. He wants to know what's going on. His former friends and colleagues don't exactly kill the fatted calf upon his return – he didn't leave LAPD on very good terms. His quest takes a dark turn when people he contacts begin to be killed, with most of the evidence pointing at him as the murderer. It begins to look as if someone has it in for Rick. Someone who knows intimate details of his life, and his marriage – someone like Jennifer. Intricate plotting and spine tingling tension are Lisa Jackson trademarks, and she certainly uses them to good effect here.

Rae Helmsworth

### **THE MANUAL OF DETECTION**

Jedediah Berry

2009

Penguin Press

THE MANUAL OF DETECTION, coming on the heels of THE SHADOW YEAR and THE YIDDISH POLICEMEN'S UNION (among others,) is smack dab in the middle of a trend of fantastical mystery/crime fiction written by authors who are known more for their SF/F work.

Our hero, Charles Unwin (always with his trusty umbrella,) is reminiscent of a classic detective insisting on using logic and reason to solve all cases. Detective Travis Sivart is reminiscent of a hard-boiled detective. His tools for solving a case are going around talking to people, utilizing contacts in the underworld and sometimes force. Even the case names that Unwin gives to Sivart's reports sound like classic mystery titles (The Man Who Stole November Twelfth, The Episode of the Facing Mirrors, The Threadbare Ghost, The Oldest Murdered Man & The Three Deaths of Colonel Baker). If a conclusion is drawn by Berry as to which of these detectives (and their methods) and by extension, the types of fiction they represent, is preferable then I would surmise that Unwin comes out on top.

IN THE MANUAL OF DETECTION, Jedediah Berry has created an intricately carved world where dream logic prevails and anything is possible. There is a hint of magical realism at play, especially in the nonplussed way that characters behave when faced with the fantastic. A great book that can be appreciated by all regardless of your readalitical persuasion.

Brian Lindenmuth

### **THE MERRY MISOGYNIST**

Colin Cotterill

2009

Soho Press

It is 1978 and in the People's Democratic Republic of Laos and the fledgling socialist regime is glumly realizing life as the ruling faction is not all wine and roses. More bullets and imported rice. Amidst the chaos, a mysterious "city" man with a truck has been roaming the countryside under the guise of infrastructure work. He is on the lookout for each villages prettiest virgin, whom he marries. Far from their homes, the woman are later found strangled and bound to trees. A corpse that ends up on Dr Siri's autopsy table catches his attention. Besides the asphyxiation that killer her, the victim had clear, pale skin yet, worn and blistered hands and feet. Following the smallest of clues that takes Siri into the Laotian jungle side, he sees first hand that the tree bound beauties have become an legend in the small villages. Siri realizes the victim he saw was far from the

first. As the obdurate septuagenarian happens upon the trail of this killer of women, he himself becomes a target for the murderers attentions.

This latest installment from Colin Cotterill enchants me as much as the first. The dry-witted banter between Siri and his wife is alone worth the price of admission. Cotterill has an ease to his writing that makes his work utterly readable as he nourishes the brain with mordantly funny crime fiction.

Jen Jordan

### **NEPTUNE AVENUE**

Gabriel Cohen

2009

Minotaur Books

Brooklyn may have lost the Dodgers, but it has gained Jack Lightner, homicide detective, in the series based on various sections of that borough. Initially, he appeared in RED HOOK then in THE GRAVING DOCK. Now, in the third in the series, he solves crimes in two areas: Coney Island/Brighton Beach and Crown Heights. While recovering from a bullet wound, Jack befriends a Russian émigré sharing his hospital room. The roommate owns a fish import-export business in the Fulton Fish Market and is married to a very attractive woman. When they are released, the two men rehabilitate together, walking, sharing steam baths, and getting closer. Subsequently his friend is shot dead, and Jack takes it personally. He becomes entangled romantically with the widow, who points him toward another Russian (Brighton Beach is home to a large segment of that population), and Jack attempts to prove him guilty of the crime.

Meanwhile two women are found hanged in the Crown Heights section, inhabited primarily by Hasidic Jews. Beaver fibers are located on each scene where the women were strangled rather than on the victims. Jack follows each case while carrying on his affair with the widow, jeopardizing his career.

Each of the three novels in the series portrays Brooklyn, its sights, sounds and history, with an authentic flavor. And the author's ability to write a clear police procedural places him on a par with the best of the genre. In this latest chapter, we learn more about Lightner, the person, and it makes him more human than superman. All to the good.

Theodore Feit

### **PANIC ATTACK**

Jason Starr

2009

Minotaur Books

I'd like to thank Jason Starr for making it hard for me to sleep a ofcouple nights. PANIC ATTACK puts a nightmare into personal terms and makes it easy to see that no one is truly safe.

The family Bloom, Dr. Adam Bloom, his wife Dana and daughter Marissa live what on the surface appears to be a very typical and normal life. The peacefulness of their days is shattered when a pair of intruders breaks into the home. Adam confronts them, actually killing one, but the partner escapes. No longer feeling safe, the family is changed and nothing seems the same. As Adam and Dana struggle with their relationship, daughter Marissa has a new one. This new man in her life seems off. Adam doesn't trust him and before long strange things start happening.

Starr manages to pull off different levels of suspense. The novel really is impossible to put down. It feels like a strange blend of John D. McDonald and James Ellroy filtered through Stephen King. I was blown away and it was a few days before I could read anything else. This book stuck with me a bit more than I was comfortable with. Don't read this if you are alone in the house, but do read it, and soon.

Jon

Retro Review

### **PEPPER PIKE**

Les Roberts

PEPPER PIKE was originally published by St. Martin's Press in 1988 and was reissued by Gray & Company in 2005. ISBN: 1-59851-001-0.

Milan Jacovich is a rather eccentric private investigator in Cleveland, Ohio. He receives a strange call one night from Richard Amber, a big wig in the advertising business. Amber wants to hire Milan as a bodyguard for twelve hours. The pay is good; Milan has nothing better to do; so off he goes to meet Amber at his house in ritzy Pepper Pike. If the call wasn't strange enough, when Milan arrives, Amber is nowhere to be found. The next morning, Milan receives yet another call from Amber's wife, Judith. She's also calling to hire Milan. Judith Amber wants Milan to find Richard Amber; he's missing. Amber's disappearance may turn out to be more than your basic "missing person" case for Milan.

PEPPER PIKE is the first book in the popular Milan Jacovich series, originally published in 1988. P.I. Les Roberts is not only true to the flavor and feel of this part of Cleveland, Ohio, but his love of the region radiates from the pages. I shivered actually feeling the wet and cold when Milan was trekking through some residential back yards:

Roberts also does a stellar job illustrating class distinction and the sharp contrast that can exist in the Cleveland region. One needn't drive far to see the struggling working class and then the obscenely wealthy: from a bar where everyone is hanging their hopes on the night's lottery numbers to homes costing in the range of the mid six figures (remember it's the 80s). Even organized crime has a face in the urban sprawl.

The realism doesn't stop at the setting. Roberts is also a master crafter when it comes to his characters. Milan exhibits many of the traits of the traditional P.I. He's witty, a loner and has a knack for finding trouble even when he isn't looking for it. But he also has some traits unique to the P.I. character. As a female reader, the one I most admire is his respect for women, which is probably a reflection of his creator because the female characters in the novel are also worthy of respect. PEPPER PIKE is not full of beautiful women with empty heads, nor damsels in distress who are saved through sex. Roberts' emphasizes Milan's intelligence, thoughtfulness and vulnerability, not brute strength. Milan is also principled, encouraging the reader to develop a strong faith in Milan, cheering him on when the odds are against him.

PEPPER PIKE was an enjoyable read. The biggest benefit of discovering a series late? Not having to wait for the next book to be published! Les Roberts published the fourteenth Milan Jacovich novel last year, so I'll have plenty of Milan to keep me reading for awhile.

Jen Forbus of [jensbookthoughts.blogspot.com](http://jensbookthoughts.blogspot.com)

## **PLEASING THE DEAD**

Deborah Turrell Atkinson

2009

Poisoned Pen Press

The fourth book in the well-received Storm Kayana series begins as Storm, an attorney, arrives in Kahului. She is helping a friend, Lara Farrell, set up a dive shop. Things get off to a bad start when someone bombs a nearby restaurant.

They go from not-so-good to downright awful when one of Lara's employees kills himself and one of his daughters. At this point, Storm starts asking questions, and finds herself facing off with the Yakuza, the Japanese version of the Mafia.

The Yakuza are deadly, and don't want Storm get in their way, Storm finds herself fighting for her very life, and wondering whether, even if she survives, it will all be worth the struggle and sacrifice.

Atkinson's descriptions of Hawaiian life are vivid, and give the reader real insight into the depths beyond the surface of paradise. Storm Kayana is a strong, likable protagonist, and I look forward to reading more about her.

Rae Helmsworth

## **POTTER'S FIELD**

Mark Waid/Paul Azaceta

2009

Boom! Studios

Here's what the publisher has to say:

*Legendary comic writer Mark Waid teams up with the critically-acclaimed artist of **BOOM!**'s own hit, **TALENT!**, Paul Azaceta. Outside New York City is Potter's Field, where the unnamed dead are buried. Now, a mysterious man has taken it upon himself to name the unnamed in this cemetery! Using a network of underground*

*operatives who don't know each other, he fights to save the unsaved and solve the mysteries of the unjustly slain!*

I love this book. Mark Waid surely loves the same crime fiction I do. Either that or we share a birth sign. I've heard you should write what you want to read, and I know that is true of Waid's other works, well it certainly seems true here as well.

A man referred to only as John Doe has taken it upon himself to discover who is buried in the unmarked graves in New York's Potter's Field. He then avenges their deaths. Part of doing this includes our mystery man having a network of people he calls upon for help, a device used by The Shadow and other great heroes. Because Waid's skills, our man isn't necessarily a hero, but a man driven by his own past to atone for something. He's complex and yet easy to understand; a true conundrum of a character. His ability to solve mysteries is classic PI style detective work and his solutions resemble that of some of my favorite complex characters.

The artwork is wonderfully moody and gritty. It conveys the bleakness of the city and the desolation of the characters in spectacular fashion. Paul Azaceta is going to be a name people recognize more and more. I hope to see a lot more of this series; There is another run out now so look for another trade.

Jon Jordan

### **SANDMAN SLIM**

Richard Kadrey

2009

EOS Books

There have been many genre crossing books in the last few years. Some have wonderful success and others fall flat. SANDMAN SLIM is a book that I see as a real success.

James Stark is a magician who practices natural magic. His life is laid out before him until a demon drags him to Hell. The next eleven years are spent fighting his way back. Now he's on the hunt for the ones responsible for ruining his life.

Kadrey has a nice combination of humor, action and lore without over doing any one thing. A perfect blend of favorite elements of crime fiction and supernatural. It actually feels a bit like a Parker novel (by Richard Stark), so I imagine the name Stark is no mistake. Great fun.

Jon

### **SCALPED: THE GRAVEL IN YOUR GUTS**

Jason Aaron

2009

Vertigo

Crime fiction in comics has come a long way since the days of the procedurals of the fifties. One of the best of this new generation embracing crime fiction in the graphic form is Jason Aaron. While Jason writes a number of different titles my favorite work of his is hands down SCALPED.

This latest collection (Volume 4 collecting issues 19-24) THE GRAVEL IN YOUR GUTS sees the main character, Dash Bad Horse, felling deeper into the world of the reservation's underbelly. The man he is supposed to be after for the FBI, Chief Red Crow has warned him away from his only daughter. But Dash can't keep away from Carol, and her bad habits start to have a too much influence on him.

Following the murder of Dash's mother Gina, Red Crow is in a different place than he was, conflicted by a spiritual side too long ignored and plagued by his silent partners. He needs to make some decisions. The consequences are violent and lasting; some of them surprising while other feel inevitable.

Aaron just will not let up. There is no such thing as an off issue where we get a breather from the story. He just keeps pushing and pushing until, as a reader, you have no choice but to give yourself over completely. In a series where no character is without flaws or secrets, Scalped is one of the best crime fiction comics being done today. And while I am fascinated and absorbed by the book to the point of obsession when I finish reading, I have an urge to scrub with boiling water. Only you can't scrub your brain can you?

GRAVEL IN YOUR GUTS is another perfect chapter in this ongoing tale.

Jon Jordan

## **SHADOWS OF DEATH**

David Sundstrand

2009

Minotaur Books

When two poachers are killed in California's Mojave Desert, BLM agent Frank Flynn is sent to investigate. It soon becomes clear that this is not a simple murder investigation, and that there's a very personal connection for Frank.

The poachers have been killing wild burros and the victims have been killed in the same way. The investigation leads to an extreme animal activist named Seth Parker – a guy who Flynn trained when they served together in the Army.

Complicating matters is the opening of a new high-end hunting club, which plans to offer rich guys the opportunity to kill imported exotic prey. Flynn knows that his old Army buddy, Parker, won't be able to resist attacking the club. And he's right.

The story develops into a battle of wits and of strength between Flynn and Parker – and there's no telling whether either of them will survive.

Sundstrand writes beautifully and evocatively about the desert, and layered over that is an intriguing, thought provoking tale. This second book in the series is well worth reading, and I'm looking forward to more.

Rae Helmsworth

## **SNAKEHEAD**

Peter May

2009

Poisoned Pen Press

In this frightening scenario, the world is confronted with an act of bio-terror that could surpass the Spanish Flu epidemic of 1918 or the Black Plague during the Middle Ages. It brings back Dr. Margaret Campbell and Beijing detective Li Yan in the fourth of Peter May's China Thrillers in which they have been teamed as lovers as well as to solve mysteries.

This time, they're in the United States: Margaret as the medical examiner in Houston and Li Yan as a liaison officer in the Chinese embassy in Washington. They are reunited as part of a task force put together when illegal Chinese immigrants are inoculated with an unknown virus. The immigrants were found suffocated in a truck near the Mexican border.

In a race against time, Margaret and Li Yan, along with other members of the task force, endeavor to identify the virus and how it could be activated to potentially infect millions with unbelievable consequences. At the same time, the two have to deal with their own relationship and come to terms with the impediments. Over all, it is a provocative story, keeping the reader on the edge of his/her seat.

Theodore Feit

## **THE SPY WHO HAUNTED ME**

Simon R Green

2009

Roc Books

It's no small secret that I am a huge fan of Simon R Green. I find his work to be the peak of great entertainment and I usually drop whatever I have going when I get his books. His latest in the Eddie Drood series, THE SPY WHO HAUNTED ME is one of those books that make me happy I learned to read.

All those things in the dark that scare you? The monsters and creatures, the evil hiding in wait for you? There is no reason to fear because the Drood family has been on watch for over 2000 years. Eddie Drood is the latest leader of the family and the clandestine group of spies and operatives operates like a well-oiled machine. Eddie also goes by an alias, Simon Bond, and in this outing he is asked to pay a visit to a dying old man, one Alexander King. King has been running as a freelance operative for years, sometimes for good and sometimes not. Over the years he has accumulated a lot of secrets and he has devised a way to pass this knowledge on after his death. A contest with five other participants has Eddie running across the globe to decipher clues and solve a mystery that will let him win the prize. Too bad his opponents aren't as honorable.

Once again, Green delivers a fantastical tale set in a world that could exist right under our noses. Fast, fun and furious, *THE SPY WHO HAUNTED ME* is what the espionage world would look like through supernatural binoculars and it had me smiling the all the while I read.

Jon Jordan

### **SWAN FOR THE MONEY**

Donna Andrews

August 2009

St Martins Minotaur

“Dreadful news!” Dad said.

And, indeed, it was. For what could be a worse fate for a rose enthusiast than to see a prize plant, babied from the appearance of the first stem and chock full of genetic gold, eaten by a marauding deer? Someone enticed the deer to consume the beloved hybrid with a generous sprinkling of deer urine. With the county rose show mere days away, Meg Langslow’s mom and dad may have lost their best chance at winning the trophy for their black rose, Matilda.

After volunteering to help when the Caerphilly Garden Club sponsors its first annual rose show, Meg is soon frazzled by the hyper competitive disposition of her parent’s fellow competitors. The grounds of the show, provided by the well-to-do and persnickety Mrs Winkleson, is due to be swarming with gardeners. Instead it plays host to a most unwelcome event – an attempt on Mrs Winkleson’s life. Due to the morose matron’s sharp tongue, there is no shortage of suspects. Included with the ardent growers are the members of an animal welfare group who question the woman’s disposal of farms animals that do not meet her stringent black and white color scheme. As the hours tick by, the danger increases for Winkleson and the rose connoisseurs when a grower is found with a pinking sheers snipping short her life.

Can Meg find the killer and keep the rose show on track? And who will win the prize for the coveted black rose?

Donna Andrews has bred another winner with *SWAN FOR THE MONEY*. Those familiar with Meg will once again find snappy dialogue, singular plots and a fast moving plot that features nary a blighted leaf.

Jen Jordan

### **THRILLER 2**

Edited by Clive Cussler

2009

Mira

No this is not a book on the making of the Michael Jackson video. This is the second collection of stories from International Thriller Writers. The first collection was a huge success, and it’s no surprise given the talent involved.

This collection offers more of the same including such authors as Sean Chercover, Blake Crouch, Jeffery Deaver, Robert Ferrigno, Harry Hunsicker, Jon Land, Tim Maleeny, Ridley Pearson, Marcus Sakey, Simon Wood and more. I’m not going to give a blow by blow of each story. The truth is they are all good. Go out and pick up a copy and find out for yourself just how good these people are when they drop the page count way down.

Jon Jordan

### **UNCAGE ME**

Edited by Jen Jordan

2009

Bleak House Press

This is a collection of short fiction about the monsters around us. Make no mistake, they are all around us. Monsters. It’s just that they act and even look like ordinary people. Like you and me. Mostly. But inside they aren’t the same as we. Are you?

Twenty-two stories, dark, bleak, unsettling, yet many are affirming in odd ways. You find yourself unaccountably rooting for whoever the central character is, even while you know that the end result may be-is likely to be-mayhem, murder along with painful destruction. Definitely not for the faint of heart.

Twenty-two stories in five sections: The section headings are a useful indicator: Love Me, Lie to Me (Or Yourself), Get Back at Me, Fetishize Me, Destroy Me. Like any anthology, there are stories by some popular writers in the mystery community and by relative unknowns. Like most anthologies, the power and the quality of the stories is uneven. But all are moving, probing and persist in poking at raw basic emotions and attitudes; at emotions that are among the fundamentals of human existence. Attitudes are here in considerable variety, in all the colors of the visible spectrum. We all know that individuals vary widely in their world views. Authors are not immune from such variety. Whether the stories in this anthology are successful in changing some readers remains to be seen, of course, but there is definitely power here. and these stories have the potential to illuminate variances in our perceptions of the world around us as well. This is the mark of good literature, to not shy away from the bitter, from the blackness that often besets us. One can, I suppose, go to lengths to avoid that which challenges us, that which makes us exceedingly uncomfortable. One should, in my view, at least occasionally step outside our individual comfort zones. Put a toe in the icy water.

Some of these stories are deeply disturbing, "Fire Girl," by Victor Gishler, "Ten Gallons of Infected Saliva," by Scott Phillips. Others, not so, but the attraction of the collection is that each story is likely to affect the reader in wildly different ways. Whatever that may result, UNCAGE ME is a thoughtful collection worthy of careful attention. The collection is for the most part well-written and well-edited. I'm not prepared to offer an opinion as to whether the stories are well-chosen. Readers will decide. But you need to be ready to park your middle class attitudes about life and human relationships at the curb if you are going to truly appreciate these stories. When you park, be careful you don't step in the blood running in the gutter.

On the other hand, you're free to shut the door on stories like these. In my view readers who avoid this anthology will miss some powerfully visceral literary experiences. This is a challenging collection. An anthology with attitude.

However, choice is what we're all about, right? Just watch out for the ghoul hanging off your right shoulder there.

Carl Brookins

## **VANISHED**

Joseph Finder

Aug 2009

St. Martin's Press

Joseph Finder is a name familiar to most readers, as well he should be. In VANISHED, we are introduced to Nick Heller. Remember the name. Heller is Finder's new series character and I predict he will very shortly be mentioned in the same breath as Reacher and Bosch.

Our introduction to Nick comes as he is working a case in LA for a global security company. He's tracking down a missing shipment for a transport company, and even though he solves the case he wants to know more. My kind of protagonist. He returns to home base in Washington DC when he gets a distress call from his nephew. Nick and his brother Roger don't get along very well anymore, but he loves his nephew Gabe. Gabe's parents were attacked, brother Roger is missing and sister in law Lauren was left in a coma. Heller looks into the disappearance and very quickly realizes something is really off. Unexplained extra phones, wiped clean laptop, and a lot of misdirection. Someone with a long reach is behind this and Heller will do anything to keep his family safe.

I finished the first chapter and actually said "Damn" out loud. Pack a lunch and bring some caffeine, because once you start this journey into Heller's world you ain't leaving till the book is done. The skills Finder brings to this book are like watching an all star team step onto a field to take on a little league team.

As an added bonus there is an 8-page promotional comic written by Brian Azzarello that ties into the story. I never thought I would say this, but, if you only read one book this summer, make it VANISHED.

Jon Jordan

## **THE VENONA CABLE**

Brent Ghelfi

August '09  
Henry Holt

I remember the buzz when author Brent Gheffi introduced the Crime Fiction community to Alexei Volkov. When I read *VOLK'S GAME & VOLK'S SHADOW* I fully understood why and how such a disparate group of readers and critics had become such passionate fans so quickly. Alexei (Volk) is a terrific character. A Russian operative in Democratic Russia with a criminal background, Volk allows author Gheffi to present plots that reflect contemporary Russia, both its infrastructure and its policy from both sides of the fence.

*THE VENONA CABLE* should seal this relative newcomer's reputation as one of the best thriller novelists out there. The book opens with Volk off to take care of unfinished business. Someone He arrives back in Russia set up for a murder charge. The victim? An American operative who perhaps works for Volk's bosses as well. When he's released he finds a clue, a WWII era cable known as the Venona Cable. From here the adventure truly begins. Who's playing whom? What does the cable have to do with Volk's bosses, a decades old spy network operating in California and the long ago defection of Volk's father to the West?

Gheffi explains it all and doesn't forget to throw in breath taking action sequences. Escaping the law and assassins in the US with no money and no I.D.? In Volk's hands this seems to be all in a day's work. *THE VENONA CABLE* works on every level and invents a few new ones along the way. Gheffi is a **MUST** addition to your summer reading pile.

Ruth

### **VERY MERCENARY**

Rayo Casablanca  
2009  
Kensington

*VERY MERCENARY* is a dark, violent and humorous novel. The litmus test for desire to read it will be the simple summary itself.

A group of escaped mentally ill terrorists dressed as furries, kidnap an heiress. A group of guerilla ninja artists rescue her.

*VERY MERCENARY* is an over the top, action packed, slightly bizarre, riot, whack-job of a novel with a lightening quick pace and a lot of absurd humor.

Brian Lindenmuth

### **WOMAN WITH BIRTHMARK**

Hakan Nesser  
2009  
Pantheon

An installment of the Inspector Van Veeteren series, *WOMAN WITH BIRTHMARK* is a wonderful international mystery from yet another great Swedish writer. More and more these books set in the northern European countries are becoming fast favorites. Nesser is an incredibly talented writer and the translation (by Laurie Thompson) feels spot on.

Maris Adler is by her mother's side at her death. Her confession will change her life and inspire a quest to fulfill her Mother's last wishes. It sets her on a path of revenge.

Van Veeteren is brought in when a man is found murdered, a man who really has no good reason to be murdered. Short of clues and motivation, the only thing the detectives have to work with are strange phone calls playing music from the sixties. When a second victim is found the police start to piece together clues linking victims, which unfortunately only gives them a large list of potential victims.

The pacing of this novel really keeps the suspense building as we go from killer to detectives and are left wondering just how far the killer will be able to go to fulfill her task. I like that it's not even a matter of who is doing but whether she can be stopped. Moody and atmospheric, this is a very clever and excellent book.

Jon