

Buzz Bin

13 ½ is Nevada Barr stretching her writing muscles a bit and doing a non series book. It's a bit darker than some of her fans may be used to but it is also a really damn fine book. Two stories that start in tragedy interconnect later in life. A murdered family, a girl over coming abuse. When these people connect as adults another tragedy brings them together. Can past history be overcome? I couldn't help but think of John D McDonald set in New Orleans. Rich characters and a wonderful narrative make this a beautiful book.

Debut author Stephen Jay Schwartz comes into the crime fiction world kicking and screaming with BOULEVARD. LAPD detective Hayden Glass is an imperfect person, but a damn good cop. Hey, I know, you've heard it before, but this is a fine addition to the fictional cops that walk the streets of LA. A case that comes off real enough to be taken from the news, Schwartz throws some really nice twists into his plot. Glass is interesting without being a cliché, and Schwartz has really come out of the blocks at full speed with this book. This is a writer to watch.

DARK MIRROR (Minotaur books) by Barry Maitland is another fine entry in his series featuring DCI David Brock and DI Kathy Kolla. What at first appears to be a tragic accidental death turns out to be a murder and as the investigation net spreads Brock and Kolla find themselves deeper and deeper in a dark mystery in a case that may be too hard to solve. Maitland has a wonderful narrative and his writing is complex and enjoyable from page one to the finish. This is a great series and this may be the best yet.

Scottish writer Russel D Mclean may be a familiar name to readers of Crimespree, he's done a number of pieces for our magazine and we've published a short story of his. His debut novel is THE GOOD SON and it is astounding. PI J McNee is hired to look into what the police are calling a suicide. The plot of the mystery is terrific, but what really makes this stand out is McLean's characters, full and rich with the things that make people tick this book is haunting. The future of crime fiction is in good hands.

Richard Castle is the star of the hit ABC television show, Castle, a show about a mystery Novelist. Well, the first book by Richard Castle is out. HEAT WAVE (Hyperion) is the first in a series starring Nikki Heat, a Homicide Detective in New York Heat is partnered with a writer named Jameson Rook by the department and it makes things a bit tedious for her having to work with this guy while trying to do real police work. The case here involves a rich man falling to his death and the investigation is spot on as secrets of the wealthy are uncovered. Well written and fast moving this is a lot of fun.

Charles Kipps has a new series underway and main character, Conor Bard is one of the reason's HELL'S KITCHEN HOMICIDE (Scribner) is such a great read. Kipps has written for television including for a number of the Law and Order franchise shows. It's very quickly apparent that Kipps knows New York and the city is alive on every page. Bard is also a cool cat and a great lead. A Lawyer is found dead, and suspects are plenty, mob associates he worked for, an angry wife or any number of clients who felt underrepresented. Fast paced and completely satisfying.

David Ellis is a great writer and he has an Edgar to prove it. He's just started a series featuring Jason Kolarich and the first book is an ass kicker. THE HIDDEN MAN introduces the smart ass tough lawyer Jason and this first outing sees him attempting to help a friend he hasn't seen in years. This is the start of a great series.

THE HIDDEN OASIS (Atlantic Monthly Press) by Paul Sussman is a large book, a thriller that spans time from ancient Egypt to present day. If you are a fan of the globetrotting centuries spanning thrillers this one will one will be just what you are looking for. If you are looking for more straight up crime fiction of mystery, maybe not.

HOLLYWOOD MOON (Little Brown) by Joseph Wambaugh is yet another in a long line of great novels. His new series set at the Hollywood station of the LAPD is terrific and the characters are classic. This latest has a number of strange cases that seem to circle each other and eventually intersect. Perfect suspenseful writing leading up to a great conclusion.

Michael A. Black is one of those writers who should be huge. His latest, *HOSTILE TAKEOVERS* proves this beyond a doubt. Sergeant Frank Leal and Olivia Hart always worked well together, so the two of them working together should make a case go down easier. But there is a war coming between rival drug lords and they are on the front line caught right in the middle. Black's background ensures that Chicago is done right, and his characters feel like they walked right out of a windy city police station. Black is an author *no one* should miss.

THE HUMAN DISGUISE (Tor) by James O'Neal (James O Born) is a futuristic thriller sci fi adventure that is a pleasure to read. Earth has changed, New York is gone, Germany is becoming a player on the world scale again and life seems almost not worth living. Tom Wilner is a cop outside Miami which is now a prison and he accidentally uncovers something that is old and evil. Two ancient races fighting for Earth and Wilner may be the only hoe human kind have. This is crime fiction of a sort, but it all top notch story telling.

LILJA'S LIBRARY: THE WORLD OF STEPHEN KING (Cemetery Dance) is a collection of articles and interviews by Hans-Ake Lilja. It is basically the ultimate book for fans of Stephen King. If you enjoy King and want more insight into the man and the work this is a must own.

LOCKED IN (Grand Central) is the latest Sharon McCone mystery from Marcia Muller and it is different than any of the previous books. Sharon is attacked early in the story and is experiencing "locked in syndrome", fully able to think, but trapped in her body only able to blink. As her agency and husband look for the perp murder victims start to pile up and the climax is amazing putting her husband in a position to make a choice that could change his life forever. Astounding book.

LONDON BOULEVARD (Minotaur) by Ken Bruen was originally published in the UK in 2001 and is now available here in the US. The story is a noir twist in the classic movie *Sunset Blvd.* and Bruen infuses it with new life. This book is a perfect example of why people love Bruen's work. The book has also been bought and a movie is on the way.

Joe Pitt is back in *MY DEAD BODY* (DelRey), the latest from Charlie Huston. Vampyre Pitt is searching for a pregnant girl whose baby may be key to the future of Vampyres in New York. He's taking the gig to make his ex-girlfriend happy, too bad no one else seems happy about. Huston is a great writer and this series is a blast.

James Swain's *NIGHT MONSTER* (Ballantine) is another Jack Carpenter story, south Florida PI and former cop. A case from Carpenter's past has reopened itself when a abduction looks to be the work of a man Jack was not able to catch as a cop. With a great cast of characters pitching in Jack moves to close the case once and for all. Fast paced and spooky as Hell this is a great read. Swain is a true master.

John Gilstrp's latest *NO MERCY* (Pinnacle) is a hurricane of a thriller featuring rescue specialist PI Jonathan Grave. He's wealthy and has all the toys he needs to get the job done. When a operation he is running turns sour and becomes a shootout his case becomes more complicated and dangerous. Action a plenty in this plot driven book by a wonderful writer.

PARIAH (Serpent's Tail) is a dark crime novel by Dave Zeltserman. The centers on a member of the Boston mob who fall s out of favor and post prison has a bit of a celebrity comeback involving a book. Funny, dark and intense *PARIAH* is a wonderfully twisted book.

Christopher G. Moore's latest *PAYING BACK JACK* (Grove Press) is the latest in the Vincent Calvino series. Calvino is a PI in Bangkok, an American lawyer that has been disbarred and is now living a life much different and much darker. The story this time out has political ties and maybe a little more danger than Vincent signed on for. Rich in atmosphere and with amazing characters Moore is someone who should be on every mystery reader's radar.

Book three in John Sanford's *Virgil Flowers* is *ROUGH COUNTRY* (GP Putnam). Flowers is a protégé of Lucas Davenport, Sanford's mainstay series character. *ROUGH COUNTRY* opens with Virgil's fishing trip interrupted by a call from his pal Davenport and he finds himself investigating a murder at a resort that is for women only called Eagle Nest Lodge. As Virgil digs into the case he discovers other murders and some deep secrets that

complicate the case. Another great read from John Sanford.

A TOUCH OF DEAD (Ace) is a collection of short stories from Charlaine Harris. It's actually all the Sookie stories to date. There are five stories and an introduction for Charlaine. If you love the series, you'll love these short stories.

Sandra Ruttan's LULLABY FOR THE NAMELESS is the third book in her Hart and Tain series. She manages to play with the audience's imagination by returning to the first case that brought these two detectives and Detective Nolan together for the first time. Far too talented to present anything like an "in the beginning" story. Instead we move forward in the timeline. A body has been found in the town where our three main players first came together. New evidence suggests that perhaps our detectives didn't get it entirely right the first time. As they sift through evidence, conspiracy and both law enforcement & tribal politics, danger calls. Can they fight for the victims of The Missing Killer and save themselves? LULLABY FOR THE NAMELESS will keep you up all night. If you have't read Ruttan before why not start at the beginning?

Jonathan King's newest book is called THE STYX and was released by the small press, Middle River Press. Within these pages King reaches back into the USA's history to tell the story of when Florida changed and the terrible price many of its citizens had to pay. Written in third person, THE STYX feels like historical investigative history. It left me not only satisfied with all I had just read but wanting to know more about this history. Which, I suspect is just what King wanted when he wrote this novel. It may be harder to find than the novels of his award winning Max Freeman series, but you don't want to miss this book.

Last year's CHERNBYL MURDERS by Michael Beres was amazing. The follow up is TRAFFYCK and it's even better. As the title should suggest the tale here is about trafficking, in this case of the human kind. Mariya has escaped her past and made a life for herself, but it comes crashing down when her husband is murdered as a result of his own past and as it turns out, present. She meets a private Eye who is working a case that ties in and while he may be the true love of her life, the case that ties them together may kill them both before they can be together. Beres has such great pacing it's hard to stop reading. The story is bleak at times, but compelling and fascinating.

BOOK REVIEWS:

THE 5 GREATEST WARRIORS

Matthew Reilly

2010

Simon & Schuster

Matthew Reilly makes no excuses. He wants people to read his books. Young people, old people, those who read 100 books a year and those who've never read a book before. On the Graham Greene scale of novels vs. entertainments Reilly has created a new and totally over the top milieu. The early works of Tom Clancy are Black & White while Reilly is full blown blue-ray.

THE 5 GREATEST WARRIORS is the final chapter in the Jack West serial. After saving the world twice before, Jack's own team of warriors must race against other factions to try and save planet Earth yet again. Using archeological clues and artifacts with ambiguous history and hi tech gadgetry West and his team are decidedly the underdogs in a race against the Death Star that will destroy our planet. In Reilly's capable hands the outcome may never be in doubt but the ride there is delightfully bumpy and full of twists and turns.

Imagine, if you will, a Michael Bay movie On paper.... With a plot...

Go green one dreary day this winter. Keep the DVD player off and pick up this thoroughly delightful thriller in the style of an old time Saturday Serial, Super-sized.

Ruth

9 DRAGONS

Michael Connelly

2009

Little Brown – US/Orion – UK

I'm going to tell you a little secret. We sometimes get books that really don't need to be reviewed. I'm not saying they aren't good books. Hell, sometimes they are great book. But basically everyone already seems to be reading them, so our reviewing them may seem redundant. Michael Connelly is one of those authors that almost everybody who enjoys crime fiction has read. And they should, he's an amazing writer who brings a lot of different elements to his work.

OK, October sees his second book for 2009, 9 DRAGONS. Here's a quick rundown for you. Harry Bosch in Hong Kong. Connelly refers to this as the most personal of Harry's stories and Harry and his daughter are at the core of it.

This book my favorite Bosch yet, all the classic Connelly elements are here. Buy it, you'll be happy you did.

Jon

A BAD DAY FOR SORRY

Sophie Littlefield

August 2009

St. Martins Minotaur

When Stella Hardesty couldn't take the physical abuse her husband doled out anymore, she fought back. That left her with an inherited sewing shop and a reputation. She took on her second job to help other woman in abusive situations. Since her moonlighting job isn't official, she's able to work outside the letter of the law if a situation demands it. Stella has to do just that when Chrissy Shaw believes her husband Roy Dean ran off with her son. And in this particular case, playing outside the law results in a little more than Stella bargained for. If Stella can finagle herself and Chrissy out alive, she may encounter some potential waves, however, with the handsome sheriff, Goat Jones.

There's a new spitfire in town; her name is Stella Hardesty. And there's a new crime fiction star in town; HER name is Sophie Littlefield. A BAD DAY FOR SORRY is an amazing debut novel. Littlefield blends creative humor, fast-paced action and stellar characters together, adds just a pinch of romantic spark, and the result is explosive!

As Stella so eloquently enlightens the no-good Roy Dean, "...badass comes in all ages." Stella is in her 50s, spunky, funny and done taking crap from anyone. While she covets that "badass" reputation, she also harbors an amazing capacity for compassion. Littlefield illustrates Stella's extremes through independence, too. As a reader I appreciate a strong, smart, independent female protagonist. But even the strongest of any gender needs a little help every once in awhile. Stella doesn't need a "white knight" but she can definitely benefit from a "helping hand" once and again. Stella is a character who is going to surprise readers for years to come. Littlefield definitely has a knack with humor: finding the funny in everyday situations and everyday people. That's a big part of what makes this book come alive. From the crew at BJ's Bar to her teenage neighbor, Todd, to the crotchety old quilters; they are all dynamic and flawed and real; it's the richness of those characters that winds its way into the plot to meld everything together. Littlefield created a symbiotic relationship between the characters, the setting and the plot; the elements of this novel simply don't exist separately.

A BAD DAY FOR SORRY is a masterpiece, and only the beginning for both new gals in town.

Jen Forbus

BLIND EYE

Stuart MacBride

2009

Minotaur Book (US)/Harper Collin (UK)

BLIND EYE is book five in MacBride's series featuring police Detective Sergeant Logan McRae. The series is set in Aberdeen Scotland and is known for its dry humor and dark themes.

In this latest book McRae is brought onto a investigation looking for a suspect who is not killing, but blinding his victims. The DCI in charge, Finnie, has it in for McRae and is making his life herder than it needs to be. The investigation takes a turn when the victimology changes from Polish immigrants to a local mob figure. Logan finds himself not only bending rules, but breaking a few to get to the truth. Added to the tense feeling of the

case is an investigation into the police for corruption.

MacBride is a writer with an impressive list of great books. BLIND EYE may be a little darker than some people will enjoy, but I found it entertaining and enjoyable.

Jon

THE CHOCOLATE CUPID KILLINGS

Joanna Carl

2009

Obsidian Books

I'll be the first to admit that I am not what anyone would consider a reader of cozies. However, I do love a good book, and I know that Joanna Carl (Eve Sandstrom) has got some mad skills as a writer.

THE CHOCOLATE CUPID KILLINGS is an adventurous story with some wonderful plotting. Lee McKinney Woodyard and her aunt run TenHuis Chocolate, a successful business in a small town. They have also been doing something on the sly, helping abused woman escape from abusers in an underground railway kind of way. It is this second activity that brings them to the attention of a PI named Valentine. Aunt Nettie and Lee are drawn into a murder investigation when Nettie is found holding a bottle that was used to kill the detective. Now being personally invested in the case, Lee needs to find the killer, not only to help prove her Aunt's innocence but to protect the woman they are hiding.

Tight plotting and a totally believable set up make this a wonderful book. Great characters and a superb wrap up make it one worthy of being recommended to anyone who like their murder books a little on the lighter side.

*Jon***CHOCKER**

Frederick Ramsay

June 2009

Poisoned Pen Press

Ike Schwartz, former CIA operative and now sheriff of Pickettsville, the small Virginia hamlet, takes a long-delayed vacation on the Maryland shore of Chesapeake Bay. Only it turns out to be a busman's holiday. A friend and former colleague at the CIA asks him to look into the disappearance of his niece's fiancé who was flying over the bay on July Fourth when his plane disappeared from the radar.

Meanwhile, back in Pickettsville, trouble was brewing among the high school crowd, giving Ike's deputy trepidations: Should he take action or not? Also, some communion silver has gone missing from the church. What to do about this as well? And are the two things related?

While the two separate story lines progress smoothly, the more exciting tale is the one Ike begins to unravel as he looks into the disappearance of the plane. The result is an exciting thriller, well worth the effort to read.

This is the third in a well-constructed, finely written series, and let's hope a fourth is in the works.

Theodore Feit

THE COMPLAINTS

Ian Rankin

Orion, U.K.

2009

When an author you've delighted in for years leaves behind a best-selling, award winning series for new pastures there is a moment of trepidation as you pick up the first installment of the next. It doesn't matter how hard-boiled you are or how much faith you have in the writer as a stylist or story-teller. I'm happy to report I stopped holding my breath on the first page of THE COMPLAINTS.

Rankin's Rebus will go down in Crime-Fiction as one of THE singular characters. when I think back to Knots and Crosses now, I realize just how unpolished the author was and yet the talent was there. Twenty years on, Rankin is legend and the first novel featuring Malcolm Fox is the series debut of the year.

Malcolm Fox is Edinburgh Police. His department is Complaints and Conduct, the Scott version of Internal Affairs. He's arrived there via CID. A recovering alcoholic, Fox knows he is what he does. The fact that he's just been able to close the books on one of the department's bad apples is an affirmation he's doing what he's meant to.

There are no seams showing in THE COMPLAINTS. Rankin jumps right into this new world using his vast descriptive talents and sublime prose to draw the reader in. Within pages Rebus is forgotten and a new

Edinburgh awaits. In the day to day world of policing there is no sitting on ones laurels to be had and as Fox begins his next case readers are exposed to an undercurrent of corruption in the department that Fox is determined to arrest and wave of family heartache over which he has no control.

Welcome to Edinburgh, 2009. Rankin driven and Fox style.

Ruth

DAYLIGHT NOIR

(Raymond Chandler's Imagined City)

Cathrine Corman

2009

Charta Art Books

Well dear readers, this is not a review of a novel, but a photo essay in book form. DAYLIGHT NOIR is loaded with black and white photos that captures the Los Angeles that Chandler saw. While these photos are new they portray a city that has changed enough that it is no longer recognizable to the LA that Chandler wrote about in many places.

There is an introduction by Jonathan Letham.

A wonderful book for inspiration, a companion to any novel of LA or simply a book to stare at, this is really cool.

Jon

DEAD WRITE

Sheila Lowe

2009

Penguin Books

Sheila Lowe's latest Forensic Handwriting Mystery delves into the emotionally volatile world of matchmaking and makes anything you've watched on reality TV seem frivolous by comparison.

After a guest appearance on a local faux-news show brings her media attention, Claudia Rose receives a job offer from Baroness Olinetsky in New York.

The Baroness, who runs a world-class matchmaking service for the rich and powerful, needs a new handwriting expert. Her previous graphologist "made bad mistakes" and there were "consequences."

Since a lot of Claudia's work is for employers looking for good hiring matches Claudia sees how graphology could be helpful in the love-connection business. Still, something in the Baroness' story makes Claudia hesitate.

Learning that the previous expert was her arch-rival doesn't help. But a job is a job, and Claudia, who needs some "space" in her relationship with LAPD detective Joel Jovanic, accepts the offer.

In New York, when Claudia analyzes handwriting samples in the baroness' client files, she finds many markers for violence that her predecessor ignored. Concerned about possible problems, she brings it to her employer's attention.

Reluctantly the Baroness admits that there's been a rash of "accidental" deaths among her clients.

Considering her findings, Claudia views the deaths as highly suspicious. But alerting the police is out of the question according to the Baroness, who claims the publicity would destroy her business.

Although Miss Rose says repeatedly that she is a graphologist and not a detective, her impressive investigative skills kick in as she works to uncover the person responsible for what she believes are four murders. But the killer has a lot to lose if caught and is determined to eliminate Claudia first.

Lowe's list of credible suspects and well-place red herrings keeps us guessing about the villain's identity till the end, and then, with only a few pages remaining, she delivers one more shocking "Kapow!"

Lowe's expertise as a handwriting expert gives her books authenticity. From tics, t-bars and twisted loops, to dot grinding and word crowding, readers get a fascinating insider look at the tools and techniques used in graphology. It might even prompt them to look for homicidal tendencies in their own handwriting.

Note: Loyal readers to the series will see one of Claudia's dark fantasies realized in this book. Hooray!

Jackie Houchin

DRAWN IN BLOOD

Andrea Kane
2009
William Morrow

Andrea Kane's *DRAWN IN BLOOD* kicks into high gear from almost the first page. Her latest combines fast pacing with a rich family story line reminiscent of John D McDonald. Sloane Burbank is used to action, but not when it's close to home. Sloane's parents have a break in and it seems the thieves were looking for something specific. Her Mother was attacked and a message left for her father. If she's going to help her Father will have to let her in on some old secrets. As she gets deeper into what happened she discovers ties to a Chinese triad and stolen art. The book moves along nicely but at times it seems a little too heavy on the romantic and not enough on the suspense. This is why I sometimes squinch up when I hear the term romantic suspense. But overall it's a good read. Maybe not buy in hardcover good, but worth checking out.

Jon

EVIDENCE OF MURDER

Lisa Black
2009
William Morrow

Lisa Black is my favorite kind of author. She knows her material, in this case forensics from her own background as a forensic specialist. Lisa Black can talk the talk because she walks the walk. Her series features Theresa MacLean who is, no surprise, a Forensics Investigator. The books are set in Cleveland which I think is always a wonderful setting for crime fiction. MacLean is dealing with some personal issues which are the after effects of her last adventure (seen in *TAKEOVER*). A demanding case could be the ticket to help her concentrate on work and hopefully move forward after her loss. A body has been found in the woods with no immediate cause of death and no clues. The victim is a young woman recently married and a young mother. Theresa doesn't buy into the suicide scenario won't let go of this case until she's figured out exactly what happened. An ex boyfriend and father to the child shows up and also believes foul play was cause. And it looks like they were both right as it looks like the little girl could be a target as well.

Black really knows how to keep a reader captivated and she manages to show real forensics without being academic or boring. This is an exciting book and I can't wait to see what Lisa Black writes next.

Jon

EVIL AT HEART

Chelsea Caine
2009
Minotaur Books

In the follow-up to *SWEETHEART*, Chelsea Cain continues the saga of Portland Detective Archie Sheridan and serial killer Gretchen Lowell. The novel opens with Archie hospitalized in an institution and almost fearing a life outside the safe walls. But when it appears that Gretchen has reneged on their deal - he wouldn't try to kill himself if she wouldn't kill anyone else - Archie leaves the safety of the institution to resume his pursuit of "The Beauty Killer."

Cain paints a graphic portrait of not only a sick serial killer but also a sick society in the third Archie Sheridan thriller. While she may employ hyperbole with society's reactions, there is an underlying truth: we, as a society, tend to grab on to the bloody, sick headlines and make them profitable. This is the exaggerated embodiment of "if it bleeds it leads."

The dark tone of the novel is lightened by the presence of "journalist" Susan Ward. Her purple hair and purse full of mace add a humorous element to an otherwise terrifying plot. The other element that Susan Ward adds is reason. She wants to write a book about the pop culture reaction to Gretchen Lowell; she seems to be the only person cognizant of the insanity of the general population's crazed obsession over a psychopathic murderer. At least she's the only person until Archie is released from the institution.

Archie is a sympathetic character. He's endured more than most humans could survive and yet his main

concern is still to help others as if he is serving his penance.

EVIL AT HEART is a fast-moving thriller with a plot that makes readers feel as though they are walking through a fun house of mirrors. What's the truth and what's not? EVIL AT HEART is also a graphic plot with detailed images of gruesome events. Cain must have had some interesting research for this novel.

I listened to this book on audio, which was read by Carolyn McCormick. I cannot say enough to illustrate how wonderful her reading is. She does an exemplary job of creating distinct voices for characters. And her interpretation of the book was convincing. She didn't over-dramatize, but she increased tempo and emotion at appropriate points in the plot. It is an excellent reading that complements Cain's writing.

EVIL FOR EVIL

James R. Benn

2009

SOHO Books

Book four in the Billy Boyle WWII series is a real winner. This series has been consistently well written and entertaining.

EVIL FOR EVIL opens with Billy being sent to Northern Ireland to recover some stolen guns and hopefully keep them from falling into the wrong hands. The Germans hope that hostilities in Northern Ireland will distract the British and so Billy's mission is important on a number of levels. With the help of an undercover operative he investigates but finds many suspects on all sides. The seriousness of his mission escalates as the body count rises.

Benn writes about this era in history like someone who lived it, his research must be intense because the writing is detailed and full. He also does a wonderful job with the mystery neither giving anything away yet playing fair with the reader. Suspenseful to the end. Another great book from Benn.

Jon Jordan

FABLES: DELUXE EDITION VOLUME 1

Bill Willingham

2009

Vertigo/DC Comics

If for some strange reason you haven't been reading Fables this is your perfect jumping in opportunity. If you have been reading it, this is the edition you've been waiting for.

This is without a doubt one of my very favorite series ever. It is such an obvious premise, and yet I don't recall seeing anyone doing this in comics before. Take well known (and a few not so well known) characters from fables and fairy tales to tell modern stories. I think what really makes this work is that Bill Willingham really makes it seem like this is the natural progression of the characters and he does it in a way that seems effortless, like he's just telling a story he already knows by heart.

Volume One of the Deluxe editions contains the first two story arcs, Legends in Exile and Animal Farm from issues 1-10. Legends in Exile introduces our cast through a mystery, the case of who murdered Rose Red, Snow White's flakey sister. Animal Farm introduces us to the farm upstate where fables who can't blend in live. A wonderful tale with dragons and giants and talking critters.

After re-reading the beginning of the series I am once again blown away by the elegance of writing and the perfect artwork by Mark Buckingham and Steve Leialoha. This is just so damn good.

There are a few extras: character art and covers from the series. Also a fantastic introduction from Bill Willingham. This is a book everyone, comic readers and non comic readers should have on their shelves. It is truly story telling at its best and this edition is made to last for years.

Jon Jordan

FINCH

Jeff VanderMeer

November 2009

Underland Press

So you don't read fantasy. You heart mystery and crime fiction but haven't touched a fantasy book since that one summer when you devoured LORD OF THE RINGS. Well let me tell you that things have changed since then. The SF/F genre has a long history of crossing genre borders and right here, right now, in 2009, people are starting to notice. Earlier in the year China Mieville wrote a cool police procedural fantasy and Richard Kadrey wrote a hardboiled fantasy called SANDMAN SLIM that would make even the most wild-eyed of the basement noir crazies stand up and take notice.

Jeff VanderMeer closes out the year with a secondary world fantasy, filtered through noir sensibilities, that is hands down the best of the bunch. From the fantasy perspective Jeff VanderMeer has introduced a new language into the lexicon with a clipped, telegraphic, hardboiled, James Ellroy-esque writing style that he bends to his will. The stripped down prose is like a machine gun strafing the genre.

In the city of Ambergris, a race of mysterious underground mushroom inhabitants known as the grey caps have taken over. They have disbanded the government and rule under martial law using addictive drugs, internment camps and acts terror and torture. The resistance is scattered and the grey caps are building something out in the open for all to see but no one knows what it is. Against this backdrop John Finch must work a case, a double homicide, for his grey cap masters that will cut to the heart of and change everything.

From the crime side of things he has created a new noir language that retains the atmospherics of the past and weds them with the throbbing claustrophobia of the city. One of the things that comes through in FINCH is VanderMeer's appreciation for mystery/crime fiction and all that the genre entails. At times Finch takes on the characteristics of a detective story, a police story, a spy story, a thriller, a political thriller.

For me, as someone who genuinely enjoys a lot of different types and genres of fiction, FINCH is one of the best books that I've read in

years but it is also the book I've been waiting to read for years without knowing it. Beyond that though, when all is said and done,

FINCH will be among the best books of the year.

Brian Lindenmuth

FIRE AND ICE

J. A. Jance

2009

William Morrow

In previous novels, J.A. Jance introduced separately two appealing protagonists, J.P. Beaumont and Joanna Brady. In FIRE AND ICE, both play inter-related roles while pursuing apparently different cases, his in the Pacific Northwest, hers in Arizona. Who said the twain will never meet?

Discovery of a murder in Washington State leads Beaumont to investigate the grisly deaths of six young women, while in Bisby, AZ, Brady and her deputies are looking into the death of a caretaker in an ATV facility. Meanwhile, one of her detectives has a sister missing. Is one of the victims up north that sister? Are crimes in two different jurisdictions related?

Tightly plotted and full of suspense, Jance has written a powerful tale, gripping in detail. The insights into her characters are deep and psychologically intriguing.

Theodore Feit

FRAG BOX

Richard A Thompson

2009

Poisoned Pen Press

Charlie Victor lived on the edge of organized society for too many years. He figured out a way to escape the bitter winters of St Paul Minnesota by pulling off a crime just serious enough to land him in jail with three meals a day and a warm place to sleep until spring came around again. An important part of this strategy was his relationship with Herman Jackson, a bail bondsman who helped him leave jail when the weather was warmer.

When Victor is found savagely beaten to death in broad daylight, Jackson is startled to learn that he has been named the sole heir, and that Charlie left a stash of thirty thousand dollars as his estate. The hitch, and of course there would be a hitch, is that no one knows where the money is, and Charlie has left enigmatic clues to its whereabouts which are not easily deciphered. Complicating matters even further is the presence of two sets of bad guys pursuing Jackson. Probably one group has decided Jackson is asking too many pointed questions about their involvement in his death, but who are the other guys? With the help of an attractive newspaper reporter Jackson begins to unravel the tangle of perplexing questions. As he remembers some of the details Victor shared over the years about his service in Viet Nam, he moves closer and closer to finding the money and also closer and closer to a potentially deadly confrontation with those who are on his trail. In the classic tradition of Alfred Hitchcock's "McGuffin" (an item which exists in the plot to drive the action and which is in the final analysis only peripherally important) FRAG BOX pulls the reader along to the small towns of Minnesota's Iron Range in mid winter; back to abandoned rail yards in St Paul; and into the ominous twists and turns of supply tunnels no longer used for their original purposes. FRAG BOX is an enjoyable read from a new author on the scene. Thompson has previously published one other book featuring Herman Jackson – THE FIDDLE GAME – and has plans for more to come.

Woodstock

FRIDAY NIGHT BITES

Chloe Neill

2009

New American Library

Vampires are all the rage lately and while the trend shows no signs of stopping, it may be time for it to slow down a bit. Between television and novels we are being bombarded with new series featuring vamps. This series, by Chloe Neill will most likely be one that makes it past the hype and will be one of the few left standing when America moves on to its next obsession.

FRIDAY NIGHT BITES is book two in the Chicagoland Vampire series and the main character is a grad student turned vampire named Merit. After book one the bloodsucking undead have become unlikely celebrities in Chicago. While not embraced by everyone, they seem to co-exist just fine. But this may not last long as a group of less civilized vamps decides to start feeding in large numbers. Merit is asked to be a liaison of sorts between living and undead and help keep the nastier parts of the vampire lifestyle out of the news. Someone old and dangerous is behind the power play and if the feeding parties don't stop there could be a war coming. And Merit is stuck right in the middle.

Neill does a nice job keeping the book fun and moving along. It has everything a book like this needs: a strong lead, an interesting cast of characters and a plot that works. Great entertainment with staying power.

Jon

GALLOWES LANE

Brian McGilloway

September 2009

St. Martins Minotaur

Inspector Benedict "Ben" Devlin has a babysitting assignment in GALLOWES LANE. James Kerr has been released from jail and Devlin's superintendent, Costello, wants Kerr to stay in Northern Ireland. Devlin's job is to convince him to do so. However, Kerr has a mission. He needs to see "a man" to get something "off his chest." Then he'll be gone, he assures Devlin. But shortly thereafter people start dying unnaturally. Kerr is the prime suspect until he is crucified on Gallows Lane. Devlin is determined to stop the carnage, especially when his family is in danger.

GALLOWES LANE is a complex police procedural that has equal parts psychological action and physical action. Devlin battles internally with what is right and what is wrong as his wife challenges his loyalty to their family. She believes he selfishly puts their family in harms way for the glory of his job. While Devlin struggles with this internally, externally he's faced with knowledge of a corrupt colleague vying for promotion as well as his own unlawful act performed in an effort to secure justice.

McGilloway's style is magnetic. His sharp, crisp dialogue flows naturally and often accompanied by dry humor. The development of the characters is superb. Devlin is in many ways the classic crime fiction detective and in

other ways uniquely McGilloway's creation.

GALLOWS LANE doesn't move like a thriller novel, instead the reader moves along more like the convicts who once walked the road: slowly, analyzing each step of their lives and how those steps brought them to this point. As readers experience Devlin's psychological struggles, they will likely find it difficult not to question what their own decisions would be and then realize they would struggle no less than Devlin. Beware of **GALLOWS LANE**, McGilloway may very well get inside your head and start moving around those "truths" you've held locked inside.

GALLOWS LANE is the second book in the Inspector Devlin series. I look forward to more from McGilloway and his troubled inspector.

Jen Forbus

THE GATEKEEPER

Michelle Gagnon

November 2009

Mira

This book is a case of cross purposes coming together to create the kind of tension readers crave with a set of protagonists that readers become passionate about.

Special Agent Kelly Jones has come face to face with some nasty characters. But whoever took teenager Madison Grant will has deep roots in some powerful, radical hate groups. Her fiancé Jake Riley goes in one direction to save Madison as Kelly is seemingly taken in another when a senator is murder and dismembered. But the cases converge when the presence of the man behind it all is revealed – the Gatekeeper.

The utterly nightmarish plan in full movement is too unite fringe groups driven by hate. Hate of immigrants, the government, non-whites.

Gagnon consistently writes utterly readable books. Driven by strong, personable leads, her characters do something not all fictional people do – evolve. They have attitude without typical quip filled dialogue. Gagnon's work is detailed yet fast paced; vivid yet not overdrawn. Gagnon is here to stay.

Jen Jordan

THE GHOSTS OF BELFAST

Stuart Neville

2009

SoHo

Crime fiction is filled to the brim with characters who are haunted by their demons and the ghosts of their past. Crime fiction is also filled with the coping strategies in which these characters try to deal with them. At the top of that admittedly not too long list is self-medication. In other words drinking to forget. One of the prime things that Stuart Neville does in **THE GHOSTS OF BELFAST** is approach this device from a different direction, which enhances all of its features. Simply put, he literalizes the metaphor. The ghosts of Fegan's past aren't his conscience clanking away at Jacob Marley's chain, with such a dismal and appalling noise, demanding to be heard, never to be forgotten, nor are they figments of his imagination; they are instead very much real. They haunt, they scream, they demand their pound of flesh as vengeance. By being willing to take a peek into the fantastic, Stuart Neville has created a powerful, haunting, and moving engine that drives this story.

One image that floated, unbidden, to my mind while reading **THE GHOSTS OF BELFAST** was of a movie I haven't seen in years, the western "Shane." Fegan, and others like him in the novel, remind me in some ways of Shane the character. They are figures that were necessary to traverse and then eventually tame a wild land, and though they were necessary in that land's formation and progression, they were not civilized enough to live, exist, or thrive in the finished product afterwards and so must be left behind.

THE GHOSTS OF BELFAST is many things: It's a ghost story, a love story, a crime story, a political story, and a story of redemption. One of the main questions asked by the book is, "Is there a point on the path of a man's life where the hard scabbled crawl to redemption is no longer possible?" Fegan has a Troubles-size hole in his heart, mind, body, soul and spirit. Can the hole be filled or is the damage too great? Is his quest for redemption a futile one and a failure from the start? The answer, as in life, isn't an easy one or a neat one, but it is a provoking one.

One of the benchmarks that I use for books that I read is my desire to re-read the story. More so than any

other novel I read this year, I want to read *The GHOSTS OF BELFAST* again; in fact, I wanted to start reading it again the moment that I finished it. That's the highest praise that I can give to any story.

Brian Lindenmuth

GROUND ZERO

F. Paul Wilson

2009

TOR

GROUND ZERO is the latest Repairman Jack novel and in it Wilson looks at 9/11 from a different angle. He ties it in with his secret world histories and has crafted a tale so spellbinding it is impossible to not keep reading.

A childhood friend of Jack's is trying to uncover the real truth of what happened on 9/11 and who it was that is trying to blame someone else for the horrific events. As Weezy digs into the truth she becomes a target and of course being a friend of Jack she can count on his help. It looks more and more like the attacks were part of a plot that has been in place for a very long time by a group both evil and patient. Jack is drawn deeper and deeper into a shadow war nobody even knows is happening.

Saying that a Repairman Jack novel is great reading is like saying breathing is a good thing, of course it. Wilson has such a vivid imagination and a wonderful ability to put it on the page. Full of great action, wonderful covert worlds and conspiracies and great character *GROUND ZERO* is just another in a great line of novels from this truly gifted author.

Jon

HARDBALL

Sara Paretsky

2009

Putnam

HARDBALL is the latest VI Warshawski novel (#13), and as typical of Paretsky it is charged with elements that make you think about society and the world we live in.

VI has been hired to do a missing persons search for a man named Lamont Gadsden who has been gone for over 40 years. She soon has her workload doubled when a cousin she's only just met, Petra, goes missing. Her digging around for Gadsden is turning up ties to Chicago's racial past and possible corruption. The game turns dangerous when a witness turns up dead right before she can question him.

Paretsky has such an amazing voice and the nature of the Warshawski novels really let her sing. Politically charged and unafraid of looking at things we as a society may not be proud of this book is more than just a great mystery. VI Warshawski is an enduring character and I think this may be my most favorite of the books to date.

Jon

HEAVEN'S KEEP

William Kent Krueger

Atria

2009

William Kent Krueger continues to be one of the big Mystery names we all feel deserves a bigger audience. Since he first hit the written page with the novel *IRON LAKE*, he has satisfied with his series and stunned with his Stand-Alone novels. Setting his stories always in smaller communities where the ramification of crime hits close to home and quickly becomes intimate. He's long managed to pen mysteries with the traditional feel of a loner despite the fact that his main protagonist, Cork O'Conner has a pretty amazing support system.

Last year's *RED KNIFE* was a stunning tale of a criminal under culture and the ramification of violence wrapped in an enthralling mystery. *HEAVEN'S KEEP* is the story of deep loss and the death and rebirth of hope. As personal as everything that's come before has seemed this is the book that will have long time readers running out for more Kleenex and new readers wondering why they've never read this talented author's work before. To say more will take you away from the rhythm of Krueger's words. In that rhythm you'll

find something you may never have felt before.

Ruth

THE IMPROBABLE ADVENTURES OF SHERLOCK HOLMES

Edited by John Joseph Adams

2009

Night Shade Books

The last time I looked there were hundreds of books with the name Sherlock Holmes on them. Scores of authors have written tales of this famous character and I imagine scores more will as well. So, why should you pick up this collection of short stories about the world's most famous detective? Because this collection of 28 stories has some of the best writers in the world doing what they do best, telling wonderful tales.

A cross between mystery, sci-fi, and horror, this book is highly entertaining. No matter the setting one thing remains constant, the unflappable detective and his faithful side kick Watson.

I quite enjoyed Neil Gaiman's story, "A Study In Emerald" and "The Adventure of The Lost World" by Dominic Green. The whole collection is fun and you should recognize a few names at least, Stephen King, Anne Perry, Peter Tremayne, Laurie King and Barbara Hambly among others. Pick this up!

Jon

(BABY SHARK'S) JUGGLERS AT THE BORDER

Robert Fate

September 2009

Capital Crimes Press

Kristin Van Dijk and Otis Millett are called to the scene when Dixie Logan, Otis's estranged wife is found murdered. But when more than just Dixie's dead body is discovered, Otis and Kristin team up with Lt. Carl Lynch to track down her killer.

Lt. Lynch plays by the rules. Kristin and Otis make the rules up as they go. Mix in a passel of slick bank robbers and you're left with a lot of "which way did he go?" and plenty of dead bodies as everyone races to find Dixie's killer and her legacy.

JUGGLERS AT THE BORDER is the fourth in the Baby Shark series. Readers will have little problem starting at this point in the series if they have not read the beginning.

Kristin Van Dijk is a detective in 1950s Texas. She's no Wonder Woman, but she's got spunk and she carries a gun she isn't afraid to use. While it wouldn't be a regular occurrence to see a woman as a detective in Texas in 1958, Fate doesn't paint the picture as being unbelievable. Kristin is simply one of those types that doesn't fit society's expectations. You know the kind of person that ultimately ends up blowing society's expectations to bits?

The plot of JUGGLERS AT THE BORDER is fast, non-stop action: bank heists, car chases, and disappearing acts. Readers may actually find themselves leaning with their books as Kristin and Otis take screeching turns at break-neck speed. The pace is so fast that a reader may overlook the beauty of the characters Fate has created in this novel as well as the dynamics of how they all interact. The pairing of the older, seasoned Otis with the young spitfire Kristin creates a solid foundation. A foundation that isn't based on sexual tension but rather an almost mentoring relationship, which quite frankly is a breath of fresh air. This pairing is an absolute winner. When Fate throws in Lynch as the foil, everything melds together, seamless.

This detective duo is now a definite addition to my must read list.

Jen Forbus (Jen's Book Thoughts)

JUST WATCH ME

Peter Grimsdale

2009

Orion Books

Only two books into his career as a novelist and this filmmaker and ex TV executive has me hooked. I think PERFECT NIGHT was a stunning debut and his following it up with JUST WATCH ME proves he's got the

chops.

The book opens with fairly common event, a family going on vacation. But at the airport Dan Carter discovers his passport missing and tells his wife and kids to go ahead, he'll catch up. Ominous words, as the plane crashes a few hours later leaving Carter devastated. As grief tends to do, it makes Carter's mind race through all sorts of scenarios. But before long some of the strange ideas don't seem that unusual. Was Dan kept off the plane on purpose? Was someone targeting him or his family? His instincts kick in and his past spent as a sniper and in the secret services pushes him forward to find out what happened. And as he starts to discover the truth, he realizes he may not want to know.

Reading JUST WATCH ME was such a joy. I felt like I had an IV hooked up that was releasing more and more adrenalin as I got further along in the book. Great pacing and a real knack for keeping the reader pushing forward faster and faster this is a terrific read.

Jon

KILLER SUMMER

Ridley Pearson

June 2009

G.P. Putnam Sons

Sun Valley, Idaho is home to an annual wine auction. This year's wine auction includes three bottles purported to have been a gift from Thomas Jefferson to John Adams. These historic treasures bring in wine connoisseurs from around the world as well as thieves. Sheriff Walt Fleming has to make sure the auction goes off without a hitch, which may be tougher than he thought when a murder occurs before the auction even begins. When Walt receives a report that his nephew may be abducting a minor he's not sure which way to turn.

KILLER SUMMER, the third book in Ridley Pearson's Sun Valley series, added killer fun to my reading list. The book starts out with a death scene that is one of the most powerful I have read in quite some time. In crime fiction we sometimes forget that death is a horrific event. Every life - and therefore every death - matters. This scene makes the reader slow down and not only remember that fact, but experience that fact.

Walt doesn't always say the right thing; he doesn't always make the right decisions. But he's authentic and empathetic. A great combination when you want your reader to connect with your character. And how can you help but love a sheriff in charge of a high class wine auction who chuckles to himself as he listens to the wine connoisseurs because "to him, wine came in a box, and eventually went down the toilet." He's the common man dealing with life's not so common events. KILLER SUMMER has an outstanding supporting cast of characters as well. Fiona, Walt's part time crime scene photographer is smart and witty and yet still makes mistakes.

The relationships between the characters is the icing on the cake, or maybe for this book they're the fizz in the champagne. The relationships work to fuel the action of the plot. A book can have excellent pieces parts - characters, settings, plot - but if those pieces aren't working well together, the book falls apart. Pearson knows how to make his pieces function together; regardless of how dysfunctional the individuals are, the whole hums like a well-oiled machine. I can't wait to see what trouble this cast can wiggle its way into next.

Jen Forbus

THE KILLER : VOLUME 1

2009

Archaia Studios Press

This gorgeous hardcover from Archaia is an English translation of the French called *Le Tueur*, a huge seller in Europe. And after even just a quick glance through it you can see why.

THE KILLER is the tale of a hit man who after years of being one of the best has started to succumb to the weight of what he's done and he messes up a job. This brings undue attention to him for the first time and when he needs to be on the top of his game to escape he struggles just to keep ahead of the police officer after him. A wonderful crime tale as only the French can do it, dark, emotional and sad. We see a noir tradition followed as the hit man dreams of a better life, but is haunted by his own choices and may never realize his dreams to spite himself.

Written by a man known as Matz, and drawn by Luc Jacamon this is a perfect example of why Crime Fiction works so well in the graphic form. Matz assisted in the translation, so it spot on to what he originally wrote. I'd like to thank Archaia for publishing this book here in the US. It's been out for a while, but having just

discovered it I had to share.

Jon Jordan

LEVEL 26: DARK ORIGINS

Anthony Zuiker & Duane Swierczynski

2009

Dutton

When I first started reading Level: 26 I decided that I was going to play it straight and read the appropriate book section and dutifully watch each video when the book instructed me to. Obviously there are different approaches that readers can and will take and this is the one that I chose feeling that it was intended by the creators. What I soon found was that jumping back and forth, from one medium to the other then back, was VERY disjointed. The two mediums didn't mesh well in this presentation.

So I decided to toss this plan out the window. The story at that point had enough of a hook in me that I wanted to keep reading the book and I just figured that I would catch up on the videos later. What a world of difference that made! Now it just felt like I was reading a cool Duane Swierczynski horror-thriller. The story progressed more organically and without the distractions of jumping to the videos the book opened up in a much greater way.

Sqweegel is a genuinely horrific creation partly because he doesn't have any restraints. He does horrible things to people in the book and gets inside of your comfort zone in a way that few other characters do. Where other writers hold their characters back and rely on inferring what they did Zuiker and Swierczynski put those unspeakable acts front and center, giving the reader a front row seat to writhe in.

Overall I'll say that I liked it but I do have some reservations and even some complaints, it's good but not great. Fans of Duane Swierczynski shouldn't hesitate to pick this up but might be better served in forgetting about the videos or if you have/want to watch them do so afterwards. Readers new to his work would be greatly served by checking out his other books. I am intrigued by some parts of the segue way into the next storyline and I think that I'll read the next volume in the series.

Brian Lindenmuth

THE LINEUP

Ed. Otto Penzler

2009

Little Brown

This is a must have for mystery fans. A series of character biographies written by their creators.

Originally done for patrons of The Mysterious Bookshop in New York, they are now collected in a nice hardcover for everyone to get their hands on.

Some of the creators included here Ken Bruen, Lee Child, Michael Connelly, Robert Crais, Stephen Hunter, Laura Lippman, Carol O'Connell and many more. A total of 21 in all. It's a great insight into the characters we love by the people who created them.

Jon

THE LOCK ARTIST

Steve Hamilton

Minotaur

Jan2010

Steve Hamilton has become synonymous with Michigan Crime Fiction despite the fact that he lives on the east coast. The author of the award winning Alex McKnight series returns this winter with a book sure to entertain his established readership and one that cannot help but go national.

THE LOCK ARTIST is the story of a young man who's damaged goods. Michael has an unimaginable past and lives in a hellish present when we first meet him. Michael does not speak. He hasn't since the age of eight. He watches, listens and observes.

Hamilton allows Michael a grand catharsis in these pages. We meet a young man who knows he's made some bad choices but is also aware there is a inevitability to his path. At the age of 13 Michael discovers he

has a talent. He can pick any house lock, feel out any combination. When he enters high school he also discovers a love for drawing. We all make choices. Michael's lead him into the world of crime and a lack of choice.

Controlled by five beepers that tell him where the next heist will be, he becomes a box man, that elusive criminal who still opens a safe with old-fashioned finesse and not 21st century brutality. He remains sane by writing his memoir in the form of a graphic novel until the ultimate job presents itself. Michael sees a way to get out from under but can he get out at all?

Hamilton records Michaels story with stripped down prose. THE LOCK ARTIST is a first person narrative that refuses to show you all sides of this complex character, feeding you just enough information that the chapters become like a drug. You need more. For the simple price of a few hours and the willingness to turn a page you to can enjoy this "hot shot" of a read. The highs will be high and the lows will be so low. You'll leave THE LOCK ARTIST not sure what kind of a trip you've been on, only knowing you need more.

Leaving McKnight behind to enjoy a peaceful winter of hockey, Hamilton has written a stand-alone in the tradition of Higgins and Stark. Come on reader, you know you want to..... Just a taste.

Ruth

THE LONG SHOT

Katie Kitamura

2009

Simon & Schuster

Don't let THE LONG SHOT by Katie Kitamura fool you, it's a noir. And it's a damned good one at that. There is a lack of self-consciousness that is refreshing. Since it doesn't set out to be a noir it comes off all the greater as one. There isn't any self-awareness of what it is and therefore it comes off as far more naturalistic and effective once the noir elements make them selves clear. It's like the early pulp crime writers who later were grouped together as noir. They weren't trying to be noir at the time, they just were. Well, THE LONG SHOT just is.

THE LONG SHOT uses short, sharp, direct sentences that hit you like a flurry of unending jabs that effectively strikes a perfect balance between external action and internalism. The plot moves forward without ever getting bogged down in excessive pondering and naval gazing; Cal and Riley are men of action and determination. The humanity comes through in their exchanges; in their dialogue that crackles with knowledge and awareness and all of it is happening between the lines. With so much of it being left out you would think that the story would be cut to the bone but it is all there, the hurt, the fear, the humanity and, perhaps most importantly, the secret knowledge that comes a little too late that they probably knew all along but just couldn't admit it.

That secret knowledge is part of what makes these characters so fascinating. There is a disconnect between who/what they think they are and who/what they really are. When those two opposing forces collide it can be quite shocking if not downright devastating. The Long Shot possesses a genuine conflict point, rather than a contrived one, which alters the characters at a DNA level.

The story offers a focused minimalism at its best. There isn't much of a back-story; there isn't a wide-angle lens. There is only a tight focus on the here and now. I think by any measurable standard The Long Shot is a fantastic book but I would particularly implore fans of noir and crime fiction to make sure that they check it out. Part Rocky, part The Wrestler. Refreshingly modern without even a hint of pulpy aftertaste. Very tragic and very much worth your time. Seriously, I'm not kidding, go read this book.

Brian Lindenmuth

THE LORD OF DEATH

Eliot Pattison

2009

Soho Press

The majesty and rigors of the Himalayas, as well as the massive oppression of its peoples by the Chinese, are constants in this series, in which Shan, a former Beijing detective, wanders undocumented. In this installment, we find him transporting a dead Sherpa down from the peaks back to his home village. He comes upon a bus of Buddhist monks being transported to prison, which has become blocked by an avalanche, and Shan helps them escape. Then he discovers a car nearby in which two women have been shot dead.

Covered with blood, Shan is arrested for the murders. He talks his way out of his prison cell after several days

of torture by convincing his interrogator of his innocence and suggesting that he will find the murderer in exchange for his release so that he can rescue his son from an experimental medical facility where he is being held. The quest provides the author with the setting for recounting the earlier days of the Red Guards' conquest and terror of Tibet.

In this, the sixth mystery in the series, we are again treated to an exciting tale, replete with descriptions of the harsh terrain and more on the people and religion of Tibet, and of the country under the thumb of the Chinese. A fascinating read.

Theodore Feit

LUNA PARK

Kevin Baker (Danijel Zezelj artist)

2009

Vertigo

I finished reading LUNA PARK and kind of sat in my chair for a bit, staring and letting what I just read sink in. This is a story with many layers will most likely be looming in my subconscious for quite a while. On the surface it feels like a straight up crime story with historical over tones, but it becomes something a lot more than that as it goes on.

Alik Strelnikov lives near Coney Island and does low level collections for a minor Russian gangster type. He moved to the US after his dreams of being a hero back home met with a harsh reality. He lives day to day chased by dreams of his own past failures and what may be failures in another life altogether. To forget the past he drinks and does drugs and tries to spend time with his girl, Marina. Marina has her own tragic story and the two become intertwined with in one another's misery. As the story moves on it takes on a surreal quality that tells the story of two star-crossed lovers who seemed forever destined to betray and be betrayed, living one shattered life after another.

While I was drawn into the story immediately I was pretty sure I knew where it was going. I couldn't have been more wrong. The final two or three pages really surprised me and I actually said "Wow" out loud. Baker obviously loves to tell Russian stories and from what I know of Russian history he nailed it, the bleakness and despair and foolish hopefulness. The artwork is truly beautiful and fits the story perfectly, made even better by the coloring of Dave Stewart. This is a haunting tale and it left a scar on my soul. I would suggest that everyone read this.

Jon Jordan

MAKEOVERS CAN BE MURDER

Kathryn Lilley

2009

Obsidian

The third in the series of A Fat City Mystery featuring Kate Gallagher, size 16, newscaster in Durham, North Carolina. So what's the problem? A thinner, younger newscaster is after her job. Kate is dreading her new assignment--because it's about her. She has to wear a bikini, to show the before and after, and then follow up with articles about the weight loss scams in Fat City, or the Diet Capital of the World, as Durham is called. In the process of her investigative reporting she will, presumably, lose weight along the way, so there will be an 'after' pix. However, the stress of the other pressures in her life are sending her on a sugar binge.

First, her police officer boyfriend is giving her the cold shoulder, but she doesn't know why. Then, her best friend is killed. Kate suspects the woman's errant husband, who has been pilfering her accounts since she announced she wants to get a divorce. The police don't share the same suspicions, particularly after they've picked up a carjacker, who looks good for the murder.

The story becomes a wild ride. Kate learns the son of a friend is into pot and other nefarious deeds, but she doesn't want to report him to the police. Then she dates one of her diet doctor interviewees. Kate is praying he's a good guy, in spite of some interesting internet research she's turned up.

Kate has a wry sense of humor, particularly about her size, and it's fun and laughs to spend time with her.

Gay Toltl Kinman

MURDER ON A MIDSUMMER NIGHT

Kerry Greenwood

2009

Poisoned Pen Press

In the previous 15 novels in this delightful series, the Hon. Phryne Fisher cavorted through a series of capers in the year 1928. Now in the 16th entry, we progress to the dire year 1929, and the 'thoroughly modern miss' is faced with two absorbing new adventures in her inimitable fashion.

First, she is asked by the mother of an antique dealer to find the real reason for his death, ruled a misadventure by drowning. It would appear that several dilettantes believed that he knew where Blackbeard's treasures are buried and, through séances, are still attempting to ascertain their location by making contact with him.

Then, Phryne is approached by an attorney to discover whether or not a deceased woman gave birth to an illegitimate baby, and whether the child is still alive, since the attorney cannot distribute the estate until all possible heirs are known. The investigation, of course, is not looked upon favorably by the known relatives. Like previous Phryne Fisher novels, this one is charming, as is the protagonist, who goes her merry way. The writing is fluid and the characters the usual assortment of oddities. The author's approach may be whimsical, but there's a lot of meat in the tales.

Theodore Feit

OUT COLD

Tom Schreck

December 2009

Echelon Press

Duffy Dombrowski is back for Round Three in OUT COLD. This time Duffy's taken a hard hit while sparring that knocked him unconscious. Instead of listening to his trusted trainer, Smitty, he sneaks off to another gym and takes a second lights-out blow. Maybe these blows are why Karl, Duffy's schizophrenic client, doesn't sound so crazy to Duffy when he starts running on about a government conspiracy to keep Americans afraid. Despite everyone's advice to the contrary, Duffy teams up with a "guy who...wore a Redskins helmet and meditated in the nude." They are off to fight domestic terrorism with Al the basset hound tagging along for the ride.

If you can read this book without laughing until your sides hurt, I'm convinced you were born without a funny bone. Schreck is an absolute genius: he reels the reader in with irresistible humor and endearing characters then slips in a plot comprised of multiple social issues the reader can't help but latch on to. If mixed together incorrectly, this combination has the potential to be a lethal concoction, but Schreck's recipe stirs in just the right amount of each ingredient for a delicious read.

Each of Schreck's novels challenges society's belief about an "outcast" group; in OUT COLD, Schreck is challenging the reader to closely examine his/her beliefs about people deemed "crazy." In addition, he's calling attention to the government's tactics to gain support through fear. Schreck doesn't lay out clear cut answers; rather he reminds the reader that these issues aren't simply "black" or "white" like many people would prefer.

The Fearsome Foursome is back, funny as ever, and a reminder not to sweat the small stuff. Duffy rings so true, you're waiting for him to walk out of your local gym. And the real star, Al the basset hound, is crafted from Schreck's experiences with the breed. Al's mannerisms and personality are all basset, true to the bone.

The Duffy Dombrowski series is a rare combination of entertainment and challenge. So go ahead; jump in the ring with Duffy because OUT COLD is another knock out for Tom Schreck.

Jen Forbus

THE PARIS VENDETTA

Steve Berry

DEC 2009

Ballantine

I have been a fan of Steve Berry since THE AMBER ROOM, and with each book I am more and more

impressed with his skills as a writer. I finally got to meet him this past February and I have to say that he is also a Hell of a nice guy. He told me a little about his next book and I've been looking forward to THE PARIS VENDETTA all year.

In another racing thriller we have Cotton Malone once again in the middle of a conspiracy with global ramifications and historic origins. The book opens in Copenhagen with a break in at Cotton's bookstore. A man on the run has come to Cotton for help, a friend of a friend, Sam Collins explains to Cotton what he is up to and why he's running. The store is attacked and now Cotton is on the run as well. As it turns out friend and ally Henrik Thorvalson has been keeping tabs on Brit named Ashby who is part of a group called the Paris Club. Ashby also ordered the hit on Thorvalson's son and now Ashby is being stalked by Thorvalson. As they get deeper into the conspiracies going back to Napoleon it becomes clear that while the Paris Club needs to be stopped, Cotton may also have to stop his old friend.

As per usual, Berry has really done his homework and this book is not only exciting but interesting in its historic context. Berry does such a wonderful job with his characters it seems strange that they are not real people. A top-notch thriller that was worth the wait that has Berry at the peak of his skills as a writer doing what he does best, telling an incredible story.

Jon

PASSPORT TO PERIL

Robert B. Parker

2009

Hard Case Crime

Long before Smiley and other Cold War characters took the stage, Robert B. Parker wrote a spy story set in Russian-occupied Budapest just after World War II. No, not the Parker who created Spenser, but an adventurous wartime foreign correspondent of the same name. It was published in 1951 and has now been reprinted by Hard Case Crime.

It tells the story of John Stodder, a newspaperman whose brother was lost in an air raid over Budapest toward the end of the war, and he wants to find out what happened to him. However, the Russians wouldn't allow him a visa, and he enters the country with a supposedly forged passport of a Swiss watch-and-clock exporter and even purchases the man's seat on the Orient Express when he doesn't show up.

From this point, the complications grow and the confusion mounts with competing interests attempting to gain access to information they think the protagonist brought with him from Vienna, the starting point for the trip. Russians, Americans, even defeated Nazis vie in an exciting chase to the end. Written with verve, the book certainly set a standard for those of the genre to follow.

Theodore Feit

PEEPSHOW

Leigh Redhead

2009

The Outfit

Simone Kirsch has a dream. In this dream she is no longer wrapped around a pole or tottering on tables as men gawk – she wears a police uniform and goes after the bad guys. The dream crumples when the force won't let her in because of the life she hopes to escape. Refining "the force" into "the detective agency," she is top of her class in enquiry agent course at college and has lined up some work.

But life has different plans for her. Frank Parisi, the owner of Melbourne's The Red Room has floated ashore in a bag and in pieces. There are plenty of suspects to choose from. But Simone's best friend Chloe looks damned likely. When she's snatched from Simone's apartment, The ransom? The bad guys, including Frank's brother Sal, want Simone to find out who killed him. She has two weeks or Chloe becomes another statistic in the crime page.

Simone goes undercover at the Red Room and quickly finds out that the "good guys" aren't that much better than the bad. As the clock ticks, she must dance, drink and drink some more to find the answers all while nursing a crush and a serious hangover. A girl has to be quick in her platforms to survive long enough to find the truth. And the truth will set Chloe free.

Leigh Redhead gives the reader a wild ride. PEEPSHOW is fresh, raunchy and a damned fine detective story. We demand a prodigious output from the author.

Jen Jordan

A PLAGUE OF SECRETS

John Lescroart

2009

Dutton

This latest in the courtroom thrillers featuring Dismas Hardy and Lt. Abe Glitsky of the San Francisco homicide squad takes the reader right down to the last page in a murder trial virtually without evidence but plenty of motive and hidden secrets. Background includes blackmail, marijuana, politics, murder, and good old-fashioned legwork and intuition, much less courtroom drama.

The manager of a popular Starbucks-like coffee emporium in San Francisco is found shot, killed by a single bullet, and the owner, a prominent woman, niece of the mayor and sister of a supervisor, is accused of the deed. Hardy has his work cut out for him to defend her with the police and prosecution stacking the cards against the defendant with little or no evidence. She is charged with a second murder as well. Both victims were known to her while they were in college and she was present at the scenes of their deaths around the time of the events. Hardy's friend Glitsky is distracted throughout by an accident to his son and the investigation had proceeded without his supervision.

The tension mounts as the trial progresses, and the complicated plot provides an intriguing mystery for this, the author's 20th novel. Fluidly written, sometimes Hardy's leaps of knowledge defy one's imagination, but, after all, that's what makes the genre appealing.

Theodore Feit

RAIN GODS

James Lee Burke

Nov 2009

Orion (UK)

An enigmatic new protagonist is introduced in this novel of nearly epic proportions. Sheriff Hackberry Holland, cousin of Billy Bob Holland, who has been featured in many of the author's previous novels, confronts his past and present evils in his small Texas border town, accompanied by his deputy, Pam Tibbs, who provides backup and makes for a great sidekick. The brutal murder of nine Thai women obsesses Hackberry until a final confrontation with psychopaths, hired killers and assorted lowlifes comes to a head. Going up against a killer who believes he is on the side of God will test Holland in ways he can't expect.

Holland is a tragic character, haunted by the death of a wife with whom he was very much in love, as well as his time as a POW in a North Korean-Red Chinese prison camp during the Korean "Police Action." His methods are somewhat unconventional, as are his thought processes.

Deeply drawn characters inhabit these pages, with the prose sometimes rambling on so the reader wonders why it is slow going. However, the story draws the reader on and on in an effort to discover what's going to happen next in a clever who done it. In the end, it comes down to a battle of wills.

Theodore Feit

ROYAL FLUSH

Rhys Bowen

2009

Berkley Prime Crime

Georgiana ("Georgie") Rannoch is a distant relative of the British monarchy, a great-great-granddaughter of Queen Victoria, but penniless and without any means of support. She lives in London, far away from the Scottish castle in which she grew up. Nevertheless, she is of royal blood and is invited to spend time with King George and the family at Castle Balmoral during the Scottish grouse-hunting season.

But before the scheduled time to visit, she's still in London, attempting to find a way to earn a living, and her solution proves to be an embarrassment. She is persuaded by Scotland Yard to travel to Scotland early and keep her eyes and ears open because there have been a few "accidents" concerning the royal family, especially the Prince of Wales, who is there involved with Mrs. Simpson, the future duchess. Further mishaps take place, including an accident in which Georgie is almost killed when a rope breaks while she is climbing a

mountain. For whom was it intended? Prince George or Georgie?

The novel is kind of mishmash, but full of light fun, especially concerning Georgie's love life, or lack thereof. The mystery of the "accidents" slowly evolves, but not as Georgie envisions. A lot of the historical background on the royal lineage and the gossip about the Prince of Wales and Mrs. Simpson is interesting and cute, and the story has merit. Well-written and the plot moves forward at a fast pace.

Theodore Feit

SEVEN DEADLY SAMOVARS

Morgan St. James and Phyllice Bradner

October 2009

L&L Dreamspell

Goldie Silver, owner of the Silver Spoon Antiques Shoppe in Juneau, Alaska, is anxiously and with frustration awaiting the arrival of seven samovars that she ordered from Russia. They come in, and almost immediately go out when her customers see them. But hot on the trail of the samovars come two Russian heavyweights who want them all--for free. They manage to find out where the elaborate tea pots all went, and trouble and death start.

Goldie persuades her twin sister, Godiva, to fly up from Los Angeles. They find out information that the two mobsters took the ferry to Seattle. The sisters are supposed to meet mom, Flossie, and Uncle Sterling there, so they fly down, and hope to catch up with the bad guys.

They miss them, but find evidence that they've been in town because someone else was beaten up and her samovar is missing. Worse, yet, mom and Uncle Sterling love to sleuth and want to tag along when the sisters decide to go to Los Angeles on the Russians' trail, and where another samovar is--with Godiva's boyfriend.

The sisters can't give their relatives the slip so all proceed to Godiva's home. Meanwhile they deduce, as the readers have, that either the samovars are valuable in themselves, perhaps heirlooms of the royal Romanov family, or there's something hidden in one or all of them. But what?

A fun ride with these two wise-cracking sisters, and a good mystery. Billed as 'A Silver Sisters Crime Caper.' In real life, St. James and Bradner are sisters, and Bradner lived in Alaska for many years.

Gay Toltl Kinman

SLAMMER

Allan Guthrie

2009

Houghton Mifflin Harcourt

New prison guard Nicolas Glass has already made enemies among the prisoners in the Scottish facility in which he employed. Equally difficult for him is the sadistic abuse he has received from other prison officers. Things get even worse when a gang of convicts threatens his family if he does not cooperate with them in smuggling drugs into the prison. He reluctantly goes along with their demands after his wife is confronted by criminals outside the walls of "The Hilton." In trying to take control of the situation Glass finally shatters, creating tragedy all around him.

This is a tough, violent story, filled with blood, mayhem and death. From its opening pages the story takes one frightening turn after another, as Glass gets in deeper and deeper trouble, trouble from which he cannot extricate himself. An alarmingly realistic view of prison life and its daily terrors, SLAMMER is not for the faint-hearted. The characters leap off the page as Glass' fear for his wife, his daughter, and himself mount. This is a fast-reading, heart-in-the-mouth thriller about a horrendous crime, the repercussions of which will haunt Glass for the rest of his life.

Author Allan Guthrie has previously been nominated for the British Crime Writers' Association's Debut Dagger, the Edgar, the Anthony, and the Gumshoe Awards. This terse, hard-hitting novel can only add to his stature.

Ted Hertel

SOUL MURDER

Andrew Nugent

2009

Minotaur Books

This is book three for Nugent, a former trial lawyer turned Benedictine Monk. His past includes time as a

headmaster of an abbey school that lends itself well to the setting of his new book.

SOUL MURDER opens with some boys sneaking back into the school after a night out and they find the body of the housemaster, quite dead from a slit throat. Irish Police Superintendent Denis Lennon and Sergeant Molly Power investigate but before long their suspect list grows as a boy goes missing and another body is found. Before they know it they have more motives than they would like and it quickly becomes apparent that this is not an open and shut case.

SOUL MURDER is a traditional mystery with a little bit of an edge. The case is interesting and I liked the characters a lot. And while I think the ending is a little weak, the ride to the finish line was a lot of fun.

Jon

TRUE BLUE

David Baldacci

2009

Grand Central

David Baldacci has been showing up on Best Seller lists for a long time. 12 books out of 17 so far have been #1. There's a reason. He's a hell of a writer. TRUE BLUE is another in a long line of great books.

Set in Washington DC, one of the most notorious crime ridden cities in the US TRUE BLUE focuses on two sisters, one is the police chief, Beth Perry and the other, her sister Mason Perry, a pissed off ex cop who was framed for a crime she didn't do.

Baldacci spent a lot of time with DC cops and the research shows. Mason (Mace) is out of prison and trying to clear her name, Beth is dealing with a murder of a prominent lawyer. The cases start to intersect and being Washington DC there are of course secrets no one wants revealed.

Fast paced with truly remarkable characters, this book is a marvelous read.

Jon

UNCLE SAM: THE DELUXE EDITION

2009

Alex Ross

Vertigo/DC Comics

This is a reissue in hardcover of a book I find to be one that is worth rereading at least once a year. My trade paperback copy is WORN OUT.

Uncle Sam is truly one of America's true icons. He represents us at our best and worst. In this book, Steve Darnell and Alex Ross have really created something special with our good Ol' Uncle. It opens with Sam kinda crazy and disjointed, disconnected with the country. As he explores who he is we journey with him from the beginnings and retrace his history, and with that, the history of the US of A, blemishes and all. What we get is a look at America through different eyes and it shows us a country that has persevered but that has also stumbled a few times. It ends with what makes the USA so cool, HOPE.

It's hard not to see the social commentary here but it is presented in a way that is entertaining and captivating. Plus Alex Ross really kicked ass on the art.

The book also has some nice added features including bonus artwork and a nice piece on the origins of Uncle Sam.

Jon Jordan

VAMPIRE A GO-GO

Victor Gischler

2009

Touchstone

VAMPIRE A GO-GO is Victor Gischler's latest attempt to conquer all genres. Last year's GO-GO GIRLS OF THE APOCALYPSE was his unique spin on the post-apocalyptic science fiction genre and this year's Vampire a Go-Go is Gischler's Tasmanian Devil-ing all over the horror genre.

One of the first things that popped into my head while reading VAMPIRE A GO-GO was that Victor Gischler was channeling his inner Emerson LaSalle (his invented pulp fiction writer). If memory serves there were a number of old Emerson LaSalle titles mentioned on Gischler's old blog that show that some of the ideas in

Vampire have been steeping for awhile. Particularly Battle Jesuits of Pope Town but even others like .38 Caliber Goth Girl.

VAMPIRE is a kitchen sink novel. The kind of novel that doesn't settle for normalcy and piles the ideas and story elements high. Why settle for a girlfriend when you can also have her be a werewolf? Every character is something else until we have a battle royal of old horror tropes running amok and wreaking havoc.

VAMPIRE A GO-GO feels a little more in control and less chaotic than last year's Go-Go Girls of the Apocalypse. But while it may be less campy it is no less fun.

The bottom line is that Victor Gischler brings a breath of fresh air to whatever genre and medium he chooses to write in and it comes as no surprise that he has been successful in crime, science fiction, horror and comics. Go out today and buy a Victor Gischler book, your day will be brightened and you'll have a new favorite author.

Brian Lindenmuth

THE VENONA CABLE

Brent Ghelfi

2009

Henry Holt

The third Volk novel is very different from its predecessors. It is more cerebral and introspective. While the accustomed violence is present, it plays only a peripheral role in the plot. Volk is arrested when an American film director and long-time Communist sympathizer is found murdered in Volk's warehouse. He is freed to find out the real murderer. A secret cable from 1943 is found on the victim, one of many deciphered by the NSA. It describes the decision by FDR and Churchill in 1943 regarding a Second Front, and was sent by an agent known as "19," giving Stalin an edge in negotiations with the Western Allies.

Among the mysteries is a picture found on the murder victim of himself and Volk's father, who supposedly defected to the United States. The question, of course, is whether Volk's father really defected or was a double agent. Volk never knew his father, and part of his quest is to discover the truth about his father as well as his efforts to uncover the reason for the death of the filmmaker.

The plot takes Volk to the United States where he follows the trail from Los Angeles to Albuquerque to Los Alamos. Along the way there are more murders and attempts on Volk's life. Written with the author's usual intensity, the novel takes a deep look at the past and the present, depicting the craft of spying, looking at the subterfuges of the CIA, GRU and other government agencies, asking who is a double agent and how each side tried to steal from the other to achieve superiority during the Cold War (and beyond?).

Theodore Feit

THE VIOLET HOUR

Daniel Judson

2009

Minotaur Books

Judson is a true wizard of words and his writing is the kind that leaves images and thoughts lingering in the readers head long after the reading is done. His imagery is second to none and he has such a knack for creating tension its hard to be relaxed and read his work.

THE VIOLET HOUR is yet another of these fine books. Caleb Rakowski is a bit of an everyman, not flashy, blue collar and hard working. He's also loyal to his friends. Caleb works for his buddy Eric at a body shop and lives upstairs. His circle of friends includes a pregnant woman hiding from an abusive football playing husband, and a assistant in the body shop who is being trailed by killers. Caleb finds himself trying to help these people out while avoiding bringing trouble on himself. The crescendo to this opera of trouble and violence comes on the magic nights of Halloween, The Day of The Dead and Mischief night.

Judson really does this noir-ish man in trouble type of story better than almost anyone. These are the kind of stories that Hitchcock would be filming if he were alive today. Dark, but not depressing and totally satisfying. If you have not read Judson before, I urge you to do so now. Right now.

Jon Jordan

WEST COAST BLUES

Jacques Tardi/ Jean-Patrick Manchette

2009

Fantagraphics Books

This is an adaptation of a book by Jean-Patrick Manchette, the wonderfully noir tale of George Gerfaut, on the run and trying to stay alive. It's a tale of war criminal and hit men and men who live on the fringe of society. George Gerfaut witnesses a murder and while he does the bare minimum to help keeping his involvement to dropping someone off at the hospital he is soon in more danger than he knows. George is being pursued by a team of hit men, they follow him on vacation and once he discovers he is targeted he leads them on a merry chase. He spends time in the mountains finding a kind of peace that is eventually interrupted by the violence that follows him. A businessman by trade who is underwhelmed by his own life George soon finds himself embracing the new lifestyle.

The art is in black and white and the book is the better for it. Color would not have had the shock value that some of the scenes carry and it makes for a grittier feel to what is a gritty tale. This is a perfect example of why crime fiction works so well in the graphic form. This book left me wanting a shower and a hug and with a few night of strange dreams. In other words, it's superb.

Jon

WHAT REMAINS OF HEAVEN

C.S. Harris

2009

Obsidian

The Sebastian St. Cyr series is fast becoming one of my favorites. The latest, WHAT REMAINS OF HEAVEN, has C.S. Harris firmly on my must buy pile.

It's 1812 and once again St. Cyr is called upon to help solve a brutal crime, this time it's two murders. One of the murders has just happened; the other took place decades before. The bodies were found in an ages old crypt and the archbishop wants to know how they got there and who put them there. A onetime paramour was the last person to see the dead bishop alive and she and her Father both seem at least a bit guilty of something, if not the murder, than what? Other suspects include powerful political figures and even Ben Franklin's son William.

After the older corpse is identified the case opens up new mysteries that will have Sebastian looking to his own family tree.

What at first glance looks like a traditional historical mystery is really more of a historical thriller. Harris has a wonderful way with words and the story just flow so nice that I had read over 100 pages in what seemed like only minutes. Sebastian St. Cyr is a great character and I love this series.

Jon

WHILE THE DEVIL WAITS

Jackson Meeks

2009

New Pulp Press

WHILE THE DEVIL WAITS is a hard book to recommend. It's sloppy and a bit of a chore to read, but mercifully short. Maybe the confusion of the narrative is intentional and exists as a primary source document that proves how disconnected the narrator is from reality—but that doesn't make the book any easier to recommend.

WHILE THE DEVIL WAITS loses its effectiveness. It's not that I don't want to be in this narrator's head because he's a psycho killer, it's that I don't want to be in this killer's head because he's a droning bore.

One of the main problems is that it is a book with an identity crisis and completely disconnected from what it's presented as. There is a struggling conceit at work here (voiced in the summary and right after the first moment of violence) that the unnamed narrator is somehow an everyman. Except no matter how hard Meeks tries, he so clearly isn't. When constructing an everyman there has to be a certain level of relatability in order to make the "I" more universal. Just because he has a job and cares for his mother doesn't make him relatable; hell, it doesn't even humanize him. The narrative voice is consistent; it's just often boring. Well, to be fair, it's really just a relentless running monologue that feels monotonous.

At best he is Lennie from OF MICE AND MEN. At worst he's a fucking idiot. Either way he isn't pondering about the inertia of his life. He just isn't possessed with that much self-reflection no matter how much time he spends in his head. Speaking of everyone's favorite rabbit-lover, one really has to wonder if the unnamed

narrator of *WHILE THE DEVIL WAITS* is really just in some way mentally handicapped and filled with a childlike simplicity that masquerades as “innocence” but really isn’t. Or if he is just a schizophrenic. But again, he doesn’t possess the ability to grapple with abstract concepts like inertia and malaise. *WHILE THE DEVIL WAITS* is the weakest of the initial New Pulp Press offerings and probably should have been left in the drawer.

Brian Lindenmuth

YEAR OF THE DOG

Henry Chang
November 2009
Soho Press

The New York City Chinatown that tourists never see, whether from a bus or in one of the myriad restaurants, is the real subject of this second novel in the Jack Wu series. In his debut, *CHINATOWN BEAT*, Wu was a police officer in the 05 precinct in Chinatown where he returned to tend to his dying father. In this follow-up, part of a trilogy, he is now a second-grade detective assigned to the 09 precinct, a little further north, after making a major contribution toward solving crime in Chinatown.

The novels are less of a police procedural or mystery, although crime, gangs and murder all play their part (after all this is New York City and Chinatown), than studies and vignettes of the people, culture and the neighborhood. And well-told and penetratingly they are depicted. Many of the tales are remembrances of similar instances in the author’s early years of growing up in the area.

The noir stories are fascinating, and while there are examples of Wu plying his detective trade, insights into the gang mentality, brothels, gambling dens and secret societies predominate, as well as the interplay of the various waves of immigrants, from original Cantonese to more recent Fukienese, and their relationship with mainland China and Hong Kong tongs.

Theodore Feit