

THE ARK (Touchstone) by Boyd Morrison is knuckle biter of a thriller. Dilara Kenner's Father went missing while searching for the actual Noah's Ark. A dying man gives here a couple clues and a name, Tyler Locke. She tracks him down and they start the adventure of a life time. Morrison has a great sense of timing and pacing and this book builds up speed while you read. A perfect thriller.

The latest Ethan Gage book in the series by William Dietrich, THE BARBARY PIRATES (Harper) is yet another historical adventure that is entertainment in it's pure form. Set in 1802 Ethan has to rescue his former love and his son, while also being the first to get his hands on an ancient weapon of legend, The Mirror of Archimedes. Dietrich manages to be historically accurate and thoroughly engaging without a dull moment. This is a fast and great read.

THE BIG BANG (HMH) is one of the books we've been most excited about. Max Allan Collins finishing a book started by Mickey Spillane. That should be enough right there to make you want to read it. Add to the fact that it is set in the sixties with Mike Hammer doing what he does best against drug dealers and I promise your only complaint is that you want more. Collins writing is flawless and I defy anyone to pick out whether Spillane or Collins wrote what on this book. A must have!

Quintin Jardine once again returns to Spain with his latest novel BLOOD RED (Headline UK) featuring Primavera Blackstone. A wonderful mystery set in a small town with gossip and rumors and intrigue. A local man is found dead after objecting to a wine festival being held and when Primavera becomes a suspect she must figure out who is really behind it as a matter of self preservation. Jardine has a writing style that flows like a warm summer breeze and it is a joy to read.

BOCA MOURNINGS (Forge) is the second book from Steven M. Forman in his series featuring retired Boston cop Eddie Perlmutter. Humorous and wise cracking in wonderful PI tradition the Florida landscape is the perfect setting for these books. Eddie is dealing with a number of smaller strange cases and also needs to clean up a little something from his first case as a PI involving the Russian mob. A medium boiled mystery that will leave you wanting more.

The writing team that is Jefferson Bass has carved out a very nice niche in the forensic mysteries sub genre and the latest, THE BONE THIEF (William Morrow) also brings in a very topical subject, the market for black market organs. In order to crack down on a group who is grave robbing to provide organs the FBI wants to use the body farm as bait which brings Dr. Brockton into the case. The series does a great job of keeping continuity from book to book, but they do stand alone nicely as well. A great forensics thriller.

CONTROL (Bantam UK) is another nail biter from John Macken. A sadistic killer on the loose and a detective moving in to catch him. The investigation takes a cruel twist when the detectives son is snatched and he is warned to back off or the son dies. Dark and using the state of the art forensics this book moves fast and is a one sitting read.

A great new anthology, THE DARK END OF THE STREET (Bloomsbury) edited by Jonathan Santlofer and SJ Rozan is coming in May. Includes Lee Child, Lawrence Sanders, James Grady, Laura Lippman, Val McDermid and others writing stories about Sex and Crime. A trade paper original it's affordable and awesome.

Rosemary Harris has quickly become a favorite among mystery fans. DEAD HEAD shows why. Solid mysteries with great characters, quirky and fun with great plotting. This time out Paula needs to uncover secrets of her neighbors to find out which one is on the run from the law. This is a perfect set up for the series as it allows for great humor and wonderful dialogue. Harris is a rising star and should be on everyone's bookshelves.

Andrew Pepper has established himself as a writer with great depths and his latest book is a layered historical piece that feels as much like a thriller as it does a mystery. THE DETECTIVE BRANCH (W&N, an imprint of Orion) is a tale set in 1844 just as Scotland Yard forms a detective branch. Pyke, our hero in the tale, is called in to investigate a murder that has ties to his past. As the case unfolds more people die and it looks as though people in power want the case shut down. Rich with the atmosphere of the period it's set in this is a book that will linger after reading.

FROM AWAY (Overlook Press) by David Carkeet is a crime fiction novel that works on a number of levels. Denny Braintree is not really a character you immediately like, but as the book progresses you learn to love the guy. Denny is passing through a small town and as a result of a case of mistaken identity stays on longer than planned, and gets involved in a murder investigation. Carkeet mixes humor with an interesting look at people and society and the behavior of both. The plotting is tight and the book is a real gem. One of his earlier books, DOUBLE NEGATIVE has just been rereleased in trade by Overlook.

Laurie R. King returns with another tale in her Mary Russell and Sherlock Holmes series, THE GOD OF THE HIVE (Bantam). A wonderful adventure with t Mary and Holmes trying to escape traps set for them in London, on the run but

trying to return to the city they live in, plus someone is trying to wipe out the whole of the Holmes bloodline. Fast and furious historical fun.

LAST NIGHT IN MONTREAL (Unbridled Books) by Emily St. John Mandel is one of those books that really doesn't fall easily into a particular category. While it certainly has mystery elements it isn't strictly a mystery. Lilia Albert is a woman who has a habit of packing up and disappearing, and when she does it this latest time her boyfriend is not content to just let her vanish. She is also being pursued by a PI. As it unfolds secrets become clear and we learn more about who Lilia is. As much a character study as anything else, this book is engrossing and hard to put down.

THE LEVELS (Headline) by Sean Cregan is an urban thriller, which is a perfect description of this book. The Levels is a failed housing project abandoned by the city of Newport and has become home to a number of society's misfits. Homeless, drug dealers and people who just don't want to be found are living here, and it's this place that will draw a number of people together. A cop who has been poisoned by a killer, a CIA man thought to be dead and a gang member who just wants to get out. Cregan creates a high level of suspense and tension throughout the book and the payoff is one worth getting to. A great read.

Denise Swanson has year after year delivered with her Scumble Creek series and the latest, MURDER OF A WEDDING BELLE (Obsidian) is yet another winner. A great group of characters surround protagonist Skye Denison, a school psychologist who always seems to end up knee deep in a murder. This latest book has her helping her cousin plan a wedding, and when the wedding planner is found dead Skye needs to find a killer and plan the wedding by herself.

Stephen J. Cannell has an ability to tell story that is uncanny as his track record has shown. His latest novel, THE PALLBEARERS (St. Martins), is just more proof of this. The ninth in his series with LAPD Detective Shane Scully finally opens up the past a bit as someone who was the most important to Scully as a kid is found dead, apparently suicide. Scully doesn't buy it and being the kind of guys who doesn't take direction well he looks into the case. Along the way he forms a bond with the other pallbearers at the funeral as all their lives were touched by this man. Once again Cannell pulls together a great story with wonderful timing and characters you really care about. Top notch.

Linda Castillo's second novel, PRAY FOR SILENCE (Minotaur), is another set in the Amish community of Painter's Mill. A family slaughtered on their farm has Police Chief Kate Burholder working another case that puts her right back in the Amish community. Castillo writes with a nice sense traditional mystery with modern sensibilities. This is a book that should appeal to all.

ORANGE COUNTY NOIR is another of the Akashic anthologies, this one edited by Gary Phillips. As the reader soon finds out, Orange county is all happiness and shopping. Some of the authors included are Robert Ward, Dick Lochte, Robert Roberge and Nathan Walpow. It's another great collection.

Funny is not descriptive enough to describe OUR LADY OF IMMACULATE DECEPTION (Minotaur) by Nancy Martin. The main character is Roxy Abrusso, kind of related to the mob though her immediate family is really trying to be good, she runs a architectural salvage business, which is a really good way to make money. On one of her latest transactions she "accidentally" keeps a statue which turns out to be worth a lot. When the owner dies, complications ensue. And by complications I mean some damn great writing with some damn humorous stuff happening. This book made me forget winter for a few hours.

Andrew Gross is no doubt an awesome writer of thrillers, but his latest, RECKLESS (William Morrow) is his best yet and it is a high impact high speed ride. A series of murders that are disguised as something else start to bring investigators together when they realize they have stumbled onto a worldwide financial conspiracy. This book moves faster than a college kid on free beer night and is relentless from beginning to the amazing climax. As we said on Twitter: The new Andrew Gross book, RECKLESS is a mother f&@%er of a great read.

SICK LIKE THAT (Minotaur) is a sequel to THE LAST GIG by Norm Green. We've been fans of Green since his first book and love this new series. PI Marty Stiles is out of action so Alessandra (AI0 and Sarah are in charge and end up working a case that involves Sarah's ex husband. Great action and a wonderful story with great characters, if this was bowling, Green has just had a 300 game.

Mario Acevedo's books always go to the top of the Crimespree to be read pile as we love his vampire detective Felix Gomez. The latest, WEREWOLF SMACKDOWN (Eos) is a wonderful adventure which has Felix trying to stop a werewolf civil war while at the same time trying to keep his head, literally. Fast, furious and loads of fun Acevedo is a must buy

13 1/2

Nevada Barr
2009
Vanguard Press

In this psychological thriller, the reader is treated to a twisted tale involving two brothers, one of whom killed his parents and two-year-old sister with an axe. One brother, Marshall (nee Dylan), who becomes known as "Butcher Boy," is convicted and sentenced to serve a long term in juvenile detention and then adult prison. His brother, Danny (nee Richard) suffers a serious wound on his leg and survives a hospital stay and is rewarded with sizable donations from a sympathetic populace. Marsh is awarded parole after many years and becomes a successful architect, after Danny takes charge of him and moves the two to New Orleans where he becomes the successful owner of a boutique drug store chain. He continues to remain in charge of Marsh, drugging him in the process. Marsh has never remembered the killings, despite many attempts by prison psychiatrists to resurrect the murders in his mind.

We are then introduced to Polly, a young girl who grows up as trailer trash in Mississippi. She runs away to New Orleans, becomes a successful professor of English literature then marries for a short time and bears two daughters. The paths of these three meet shortly after Hurricane Katrina, resulting in a macabre conclusion.

Nevada Barr has written a gripping tale, although on a grisly subject which recalls many famous similar crimes. As part of Marsh's psychiatric treatment he is forced to write his reactions to many of these crimes. The author provides an interesting view of the violence and hatred apparently inherent in some people.

Theodore Feit

212

Alafair Burke
March 2010
Harper Collins

When a classmate directs Megan Gunther to a campus gossip website, she discovers someone is leaving threatening messages to her. The police tell Megan and her parents there isn't anything they can do. Megan ends up dead, her roommate seriously injured. Meanwhile, real estate agent/high-priced call girl Katie Battle is found tortured to death after leaving for a "date" with a seemingly harmless man. When Ellie Hatcher and partner, J.J. Rogan, find a connection between the two women, they start trying to put the pieces together. However, the pieces don't seem to fit right. A new piece is thrown into the puzzle when connections to a wealthy New York businessman and a high profile trial judge are unearthed. Are these pieces all from the same puzzle? If so, how do they go together? If not, where do they belong? Ellie Hatcher is back with a vengeance. A vengeance that lands her butt squarely in jail. Smart, independent Ellie proves to the world everyday that she's far more than a pretty face. She can "bring home the bacon and fry it up in a pan." She juggles her job, her older brother Jess, Assistant District Attorney Max Donovan, even her mother back in Wichita. And while she may not be as hip as her brother would like, she still manages to do it all with panache.

Burke's work is the epitome of art imitating life. Her plot lines are "ripped from the headlines;" the characters and dialogue are infused with pop culture; and she brings to life the New York City she so loves. **212** has no shortage of Burke's signature wit, which often comes out in her crisp, commanding dialogue. Ellie's exchanges with both her brother Jess and her partner J.J. could walk off the pages they are so believable.

The complexity of **212**'s plot is carefully balanced. Burke peels back layer after layer, creating numerous unexpected twists throughout the book. But the twists never go over the top, nor do they become too numerous for belief. Instead they keep the reader gripped to the pages.

The plot of **212**, like each of Burke's previous novels, reflects current events. But more than that, it examines some hefty "why" questions that are floating around these current events as well. And whenever Burke addresses a "why" question in her writing, she illustrates that the answer to that question is never a basic one, like so many people want to make it out to be. I waited over a year for Ellie Hatcher to return to action, and **212** was worth every minute of that wait.

Jen Forbus

61 HOURS

Lee Child
May 2010
Delacorte

Reacher; that most singular character, he of no possessions and a personal code that takes him places most of us wouldn't go. Everyone has an idea of who this man is and yet no one but author Lee Child would claim to know the man. Once again, crazy random happenstance brings Reacher to a point on the map where only he can make it right. Or can he?

61 HOURS begins with Reacher hitching a ride, a bus accident and a small town trying to make a stand. It's cold in **61 HOURS**. Steve Hamilton cold. Bolton, South Dakota cold. Every once in a while it warms up just enough to allow another

dozen inches of snow. We have sixty-one hours to get to the bottom of what's going on in this town, is that enough time? Local police are trying to back up the new federal penitentiary and protect a local witness amidst this weather. There's another force from south of the border at work. With a police department equally inclusive of the knowledgeable and the inept it's going to be a bumpy ride. The one bright spot for Jack is a new ally, the woman who now holds his old command as an M.P.

Riveting and full of Velocity, this is 61 HOURS. Sean White taking on the half pipe. Can Reacher stomp his last trick or will he be left in the snow bank?

Ruth Jordan

ANTIQUES BIZARRE

Barbara Allan

2010

Kensington

My reading tastes are all over the board. While I do tend to read more hard-boiled or cross over mysteries, there are a number of great cozy or traditional mystery writers I love. The books by Barbara Allan are among them. Barbara Allan is actually the husband/wife team of Max Allan Collins and Barbara Collins, and just as they are great as a couple, they are also a superb writing duo.

Brandy Borne is once again caught up in the whirlwind her mother Vivian creates and this time it's a charity auction to help flood victims. Vivian has convinced a local woman to donate a Faberge egg for the auction, the last one made.

Almost as soon as the egg is sold, the winner is found dead as was the woman who donated it. Brandy steps in to find out what's going on, but she does this pregnant, as a surrogate for a friend. She also just found out who her biological father is and it's all she can do to keep it together.

Great characters are what drive this series, and the research about the antiques really adds to the story. Its fun reading and the mystery is terrific. I'll keep reading this series as long as Kensington keeps publishing them.

Jon Jordan

AREA 10

Christos N Gage w/ Chris Samnee

April 2010

Vertigo Crime

Christos Gage has proved himself to be writer that can deliver the goods. Whether the writing is for comics or television Gage has a natural story telling ability. In AREA 10 he excels in the genre of crime fiction, showing a great flair for characters and plot. This is a welcome addition to the growing line of Vertigo Crime books.

AREA 10 refers to a part of the brain and is the main focus of the story involving a detective who sustains an injury to this part of his own brain. Adam Kamen is a Detective for the NYPD and he is tracking a killer known as "Henry the Eighth", known as that for his signature of removing the heads of his victims. When Kamen confronts a perp, he gets a screwdriver to the forehead. When he is finally released from the hospital he discovers that his perception has changed. This change in perception is the aim of people who perform trepanation on themselves, leaving a hole in the skull. As Kamen looks further into the art of trepanation he starts to get some insight into his own condition and maybe into the killer as well.

Gage has a perfect pace set up for his tale and it is engrossing. By the time the reveal comes at the end I was so caught up in the story I didn't realize that I should have figured out who the killer was. Gage's real strength is his characters.

Kamen is a man whose whole life has been tilted out of balance and he is troubled. The supporting characters are realistic and well written. I also love the dialogue. Chris Samnee does great work on the art and it has a true classic crime comics feel, almost as if it had been drawn in the sixties. AREA 10 is a unique and fresh approach to a part of the crime fiction genre that has been done to death, while the case is about a serial killer; the story is about the Detective working the case. I'm onboard for anything Christos Gage writes from this point forward.

Jon Jordan

THE BAD KITTY LOUNGE

Michael Wiley

2010

Minotaur

Winning the Shamus for his first book, last year's THE LAST STRIPTease, Wiley is back with another case for his Chicago PI Joe Kozmarski.

Joe takes on what looks to be a simple meat and potatoes case from a man who wants dirt on his cheating wife. However when the husband goes after boyfriend Eric Stone on his own, he ends up going out with a roar uncharacteristic for the lamb that he was. While the police think they have all the pieces, Joe soon discovers that the puzzle isn't complete when the still breathing lover, Stone, hires him to clear the now dead husband. The caseload is complicated by Joe's personal life, which is a bit of a mess. This is about par for PI books, but done here in a fun way.

Wiley writes with a flair for dialogue and an eye for detail. The book is engaging and worthy of another Shamus nomination in my opinion. Wiley is a welcome addition to the ranks of great PI writers.

Jon Jordan

THE BONE CHAMBER

Robin Burcell

2010

Harper

What's a girl to do? Slated to leave on a two-week vacation for a Thanksgiving vacation in San Francisco with her family, FBI forensic artist Sydney ("Sid") Fitzpatrick once again becomes involved in an operation in which she doesn't belong. Asked by her friend Tasha to undertake a portrait to identify a murder victim, instead of leaving, she finds herself in the midst of a black op by a secret government agency after learning of her friend's death in a "hit-and-run" accident. Determined to find her friend's murderer, Syd finds herself flying to Rome, where she becomes involved in the operation. The initial victim was the daughter of the U.S. Ambassador to the Holy See. And subsequent events indicate a centuries-old conspiracy involving the Vatican, Knights Templar and Freemasons, as well as international hit men seeking an ancient map supposedly leading to either a hidden treasure or even the Biblical plagues brought forth upon Egypt by Moses. International bankers and government officials are also part of the conspiracy to dominate the world. Written with a broad brush, Syd's travels take her to the catacombs of Milan in an effort to prevent the bad guys from obtaining the secret map to the Templar treasure. The fact that she is an FBI-trained forensic artist herself enables the author to provide authentic descriptions of the forensic aspects of the tale, and also permits her to chronicle the case with a high degree of realism. As the story progresses, the suspense builds exponentially.

Theodore Feit

THE BRIDE COLLECTOR

Ted Dekker

April 2010

Center Street

It doesn't matter how many books by an author line the shelves of a bookstore or a library, to someone somewhere that author is a just discovered, brand new read. Furthermore, this is the one chance to make the reader a devotee. I know I know I'm stating the obvious, but I just had this experience. After writing 31 fiction books, 2 graphic novels, a novella and three nonfiction books, I discovered Ted Dekker. I'm thrilled that I found him and will be catching up.

THE BRIDE COLLECTOR is an edge-of-your-seat, page-turning race to save the next victim. FBI Special Agent Brad Raines has been following a serial killer, the Bride Collector. His victims are found glued to a wall, artfully arranged much like an angel, nude with only panties and a bridal veil covering their beautiful faces, perfect in everyway, except for a hole drilled into the heel of her foot and fully drained of blood. The Collector moves easily through society, he reflects a rather ordinary, exceptionally neat, well-groomed image, blends in well, seemingly intelligent. Hidden is the sly, devious, ruthless perfectionist. He only takes Brides who are the most beautiful women, as is fitting and leaves no clues or DNA to follow. However, the last victim is an exception. Left behind in the drilled hole is a cryptic note for Raines. The note leads him to Center for Well-being and Intelligence, a private psychiatric institution for the mentally ill who are extraordinarily gifted and to four very unique individuals. The FBI never had an investigating team quite like this one. Raines is not without his own dark hollow corners that are exploited by the gifted Collector. Shifting gracefully between the POV of Raines, the Collector and Paradise, a resident of the Center and focus point of the 'team', gives the reader a clear and unobstructed view into the worlds they inhabit and how they must collide.

THE BRIDE COLLECTOR purposefully blurs the lines between mental illness and genius, heaven and hell, angel and demon, retribution and redemption, shaking up the status quo. Making the reader rethink what they hold most dear.

Ted Dekker is a powerful writer, telling an equally powerful story. Do not miss THE BRIDE COLLECTOR.

Penny Halle

- Muskego Public Library -Murder & Mayhem in Muskego

BRIGID OF KILDARE

Heather Terrell

March 2010

Ballantine

Terrell's previous book, THE MAP THIEF, put forth a revolutionary idea based on a probable possibility. This book does the same, but in a different area. Were there gospels suppressed by the Roman Catholic Church when the religion was floundering for control? What if there was a Gospel of Mary? Why do women play such a subservient role in the Church's liturgy?

The book moves among three people--Brigid and Decius of fifth century Ireland and Alexander of present day Ireland. The location is Cill Dara, or Kildare, in both time periods.

In the present day, Sister Mary Kelly, the Keeper of the holy relics for the order of nuns, was asked to arrange for the selling of fifth century artifacts to raise money. Alexandra (Alex) Patterson has been hired to authenticate them. What she finds is even more interesting and it takes her to Rome to verify it, without anyone knowing what information she is seeking.

The story is fascinating, a mystery involving research, a la POSSESSION by A. S. Byatt, and ARCADIA by Tom Stoppard. No bodies. The title belies the exciting story within.

Gay Toltl Kinman

THE BRONX KILL

Peter Milligan w/ James Romberger

March 2010

Vertigo Crime

New York is a great place for crime fiction. Some of the best and most enduring tales are set there. The ones that stand out and stay popular are the ones where it is apparent that the author loves the city. Lawrence Sanders, Reed Coleman, SJ Rozan all treat New York like another character. Peter Milligan brings this same fascination with the city to THE BRONX KILL.

Martin Keane is man who is living in the shadow of the past, both his own and that of his family. Coming from a long line of NYPD officers it was assumed that he would be a cop. However Martin has become a writer. Working on his second book has proved to be more of a challenge than he thought it would be. Martin takes a trip to Ireland to work on his book and upon returning home his wife goes missing. Having a family of cops doesn't seem to help much when he becomes a suspect. To get out from under he starts looking into events on his own. As Martin is looking into what happened he learns more about his own family's past. It is filled with some disturbing secrets, not the least of which is his grandfather's death that no one wants to talk about.

Milligan has done really an amazing thing. He led me where he wanted me to go, he made me change my mind repeatedly about which characters I liked and didn't, and he surprised me with the ending. The family dynamics and history are so realistic it feels like nonfiction. Filled with classic noir sensibilities and the punch to the gut style of James Cain, THE BRONX KILL is an instant classic. I want to see more crime fiction from Peter Milligan.

Jon Jordan

CITY OF DRAGONS

Kelli Stanley

February 2010

St. Martin's Minotaur

Miranda Corbie is a former prostitute turned female private investigator in 1940 San Francisco when a young man falls dead at her feet in the midst of a Rice Bowl Party. The cops are sweeping his murder quietly under the carpet; who cares about a Japanese boy, after all? But Miranda is determined to find out who killed Eddie Takahashi. Meanwhile Helen Winters hires Miranda to find her step-daughter Phyllis, who she believes is responsible for her husband's murder. As Miranda uncovers clues in both cases, Miranda's own life is endangered. Life as a young, single, female PI seeking the may turn out to be shorter than Miranda anticipated.

The setting of CITY OF DRAGONS comes alive; taking on a character role, at page one. Stanley evokes every human sense to transport the reader into a pre-war San Francisco.

In addition to the sense-stimulating imagery, Stanley makes effective use of song references throughout the novel to create a more palpable atmosphere and tone.

Tensions are mounting between Chinese-Americans and Japanese-Americans; corruption is running rampant. And Miranda Corbie is far from the typical private investigator of that era. As a point of contrast, Miranda's office is hidden in the corner of her building next to the famous Pinkertons. Not only does she have to overcome the stigma of being a former prostitute but she also has to battle the gender bias of the time period.

Miranda's past, has made her wise and hardened to the ways of the world, but not immune to the dangers and the violence of the corner she's chosen to make a life in. She's not helpless, but she also isn't superwoman. She's a real woman on a mission. Beauty assists her, but her past hinders her. All of these complexities contribute to the plot conflicts and almost work to illustrate Miranda as the personification of the city. Stanley blends character, plot and setting so that the lines are almost indistinguishable, lost maybe in San Francisco's fog. No matter where the lines have gone, the melding of the novel elements creates a seamless read. Chapters flow one right after the other.

Readers, too, will find themselves enveloped by a fog, the fog Stanley masterminds in the pages of CITY OF DRAGONS, a fog that carries the reader out of the present and squarely into a time gone by. The "City of Dragons" is deceptive and dazzling and dangerous.

Jen Forbus

CITY OF LOST GIRLS

Declan Hughes

April 2010
William Morrow

Ed Loy is a name very familiar to the reader of PI novels. He is the creation of Irishman Declan Hughes. A man who left the home country for America and found occupation as a Private Investigator stateside, Loy returned to Eire upon the death of his mother in the award winning debut novel, *THE WRONG KIND OF BLOOD*. Since then Loy has eked out a living as a Shamus in his homeland and breathed new life into this classic American Genre.

CITY OF LOST GIRLS is that wonderful novel that brings a beloved mystery character to a wider audience. Loy is called upon by an old acquaintance. Film director Jack Donovan is Irish born but he and Loy knew one another in L.A. where Ed worked for the man until he felt Hollywood dirty. Twenty years on, Donovan is back in Ireland filming another movie and receiving alarming messages. He calls in his old mate and Hughes begins his play. *CITY OF LOST GIRLS* is far more Shakespearean tragedy than American PI. When extras from Donovan's movie disappear alarming warning bells call out to Loy. He recalls an older, similar group of crimes. What do the crimes have to do with one another? And what of the notes Jack is receiving? The Criminal's Notebook that Hughes uses as a tool for his reader adds suspense worthy of any thriller. For the long time reader there is a certain, heartbreaking resolution.

In his "other life" Hughes was the artistic director of Rough Magic Theatre Company and he draws upon his theatrical experience to deliver a tale full of theatrics but primal in its message and voyeuristic in its plotting. These days it's hard to escape even a PI novel about a filmmaker without feeling "Hollywood Dirty". But you cannot stop reading...

Ruth Jordan

DEAD MAN'S SHARE

Yasmina Khadra (Translated by Aubrey Botsford)

2009

The Toby Press

Brahim Llob is a police superintendent in Algiers where there seems to be a shortage on crime. In a crime fiction novel, you know that can't last long. When the action happens in *DEAD MAN'S SHARE*, it's explosive.

Llob's lieutenant, partner and friend Lino is dating the wrong woman, the ex-girlfriend of the wealthy and powerful Haj Thobane. Not only is Lino dating her, he's flaunting the fact that he's dating her, and he's digging himself into a financial debt trying to impress her.

When an attempt is made on Haj Thobane's life with Lino's gun, Lino is arrested and left in deteriorating condition in jail. It's up to Llob to uncover the truth and free his friend before there is nothing left. But in the process of uncovering the truth, Llob finds far more than he ever planned about his country and its past.

In *DEAD MAN'S SHARE* Khadra paints a stunning picture of Algiers and the conflicts that face its people. Sacrifices are made, evils are sanctioned and disparity rages. Khadra's stunning use of language, translated by Aubrey Botsford, is the right balance to set the tone, create the atmosphere and develop the characters without being ostentatious. Every word functions to heighten the reader's experience and propel the plot forward. Meanwhile, the events of the plot keep the reader on his/her toes as one twist follows the next at dizzying speeds.

DEAD MAN'S SHARE is at turns heartbreaking and uplifting. Llob believes so passionately in the justice he pursues, while others mock him and instruct him to leave well enough alone. But in the end, he simply embodies his own definition of sacrifice:

"Sacrifice isn't about dying for someone or for a cause; I'd even say that that is the least reasonable act of all, without a doubt. Sacrifice, true sacrifice is about continuing to love life *despite everything*."

Jen Forbus

DELIVER US FROM EVIL

David Baldacci

April, 2010

Grand Central Publishing

Baldacci is back and *DELIVER US FROM EVIL* is all about the chase. Shaw, the mysterious hero of *THE WHOLE TRUTH* is here to lead the reader into the story. On the lookout for Evil, this Secret Agency and their star player have found Canadian Businessman Evan Waller. Waller has been involved in slave trade for years but now is branching out into international arms dealing. It's time for him to be stopped. Shaw sees opportunity in Provence. *The Whole Truth* has no idea how evil this man really is. But another organization does and they've sent some of their best operatives to Provence as well....

Who was Waller in his former life? What is the enchanting American Reggie Campion up to? Should Shaw be working with her or against her? Baldacci takes his reader from France, to England, to Canada, and through twists and turns sure to engage those who prefer Thrill in their reads. Will good triumph over evil? Will Waller's version of *The Most Dangerous Game* backfire on him or will he find himself triumphant again... It's all in this read.

I have to say I really like the promise of Reggie Campion. This is a character I'll look for more of. Shaw is assuredly an homage to those Secret Agent Men we've read before but he gets the job done with Bond like aplomb and I really enjoy

the few emotional moments Baldacci allows him within this story. The story itself while entirely readable feels a bit clunky when Shaw is engaged with members of the opposite sex, but hey, so too is real life. With Baldacci's prowess as an author I can't help but think this will correct itself handily if he is allowed to write more about these characters. And for now? DELIVER US FROM EVIL is a hell of a ride.

Ruth Jordan

THE DEPUTY

Victor Gischler

2010

Tyrus Books

Presenting Toby Sawyer, the newest character to spring onto the pages of Victor Gischler's works. The town of Coyote Crossing is the kind of town you grow up in dreaming to escape. And Toby, he was that close.

Back home after chasing the dream of away, living in his inherited trailer with wife Doris and infant son T.J., Toby is eking out a living as a part time Deputy. When he gets the call to meet the Chief of Police and Deputy Banks he responds promptly. Toby's assignment, guard the body of the newly deceased town ne'er do well, Luke Jordan. Simple enough, right?

A craving for cigarettes and a pop send Toby to the Texaco out on the Highway and when he gets back to his crime scene, Luke's body is gone, Toby's career seemingly over. He returns home, dejected, wanting only to watch his boy sleep.

Toby decides to return to work (against orders) and Gischler's talent for ricocheting events steps up.

What got Luke killed and who took the body lead Sawyer and the folks reading THE DEPUTY on a path to rival that of an Oklahoman tornado. By morning the nights events will leave a trail of broken cars; collapsed and burned out buildings.

Dead bodies will be strewn all along Main Street.

And Toby will emerge a man with a son and newly found respect from the members of his community.

Gischler is a gifted scribe and THE DEPUTY is an outstanding example of his talent for "the absurd meets noir" style he's known for. Toby Sawyer's 12 hours of hell will become the reader's four hours of heaven.... If your idea of heaven includes a narrative from a Brad Hicks kind of guy. THE DEPUTY, put it on your "Must Read" list.... It will wash away any mundane day .

Ruth

DO THEY KNOW I'M RUNNING

David Corbett

2010

Mortalis Books

Family is a complicated thing: no one knows this better than Roque Montalvo. Not yet nineteen, but already a promising guitarist, Roque lives in a dusty California trailer park with his aunt Lucha, uncle Faustino, and half-brother Godo--an Iraqi war veteran who bears terrible scars, both mental and physical. When Faustino is caught in a raid and deported to his native El Salvador, it is Roque who is called upon to help bring him back; in a scheme that involves bargaining with the drug lords, and kidnapers, and corrupt officials that battle for control of the smuggling routes from Central America through Mexico and into the United States. Further complicating an already impossibly dangerous task, to help ensure their safe passage Roque must also transport an Arab man who may or may not be a terrorist, and a gorgeous, damaged, musically gifted young woman who has been promised to a Mexican drug lord. One thing is certain: no one that survives this journey will make it through unchanged.

Do They Know I'm Running, David Corbett's fourth novel, reveals the author's incredible depth of knowledge and nuanced understanding of the human condition. This is fiction that reads like non-fiction, a searing gut-punch of a thriller that literally had me holding my breath while I read. Every scene and every character is so thoroughly imagined that you feel less like a distant observer and more like a fly on the wall. Hold on to your heart and be prepared to reconsider just how far you would go to protect the things that matter to you most.

Jill Lynch

DOORS OPEN

Ian Rankin

2010

Reagan Arthur Books/Little, Brown

Inspector John Rebus, Ian Rankin's usual protagonist, plays no part in his latest crime novel, but Edinburgh remains a vital part in this very unusual tale, plotted and written with the dexterity of a master of exciting and stimulating fiction. Three friends meet one day and hatch a plan to steal valuable artwork from the National Gallery by substituting clever forgeries.

The idea is planted by a professor of art, and it appeals to Mike Mackenzie, a rich but bored man who has sold his software company for the proverbial pot of gold. The third person is a banker friend of Mike's. The caper becomes

complicated by other factors, including a gangster brought into the plot by Mike.

It would do the reader no service to further describe the story other than to suggest acquisition of the book itself, which would be its own reward.

Theodore Feit

EIGHT FOR ETERNITY

Mary Reed and Eric Mayer

April 2010

Poisoned Pen Press

Set in January 10, 531, in Constantinople, the capitol of the Roman Empire, where John, the Eunuch, is the Lord Chamberlain for Emperor Justinian. The Prologue is about two prisoners who are to be hanged. The rope breaks. Twice. Then the two men vanish.

The Emperor designates John to find out what happened. John finds one of the men, and expects the second has been also murdered. But who murdered them and why? Were they killed in this way to bring disgrace to the Emperor?

There is unrest in the city, possibly stirred up by the rivalry between the Greens and the Blues chariot teams, but everything is murky. Who is causing the unrest? Why is obvious--someone else wants to be Emperor.

John questions Porphyrius, a famous charioteer, and John believes the man may know more than he's telling. What about the Emperor's relatives--does one of them want the throne?

This is the eighth in the series from this husband and wife writing team, experts in the time period.

The story is told from John's POV, and occasionally that of Felix, a palace guard, whose assignment is to protect the young Julianna, a relative of the Emperor. She doesn't want to be guarded and she's very agile at getting out when she wants to.

Gay Toltl Kinman

EXPIRATION DATE

Duane Swierczynski

2010

Minotaur

Duane Swierczynski has never disappointed me when it comes to putting words to paper in all the various forms he does it in. Short stories, comics and of course his wonderful hard edged and off beat novels, almost as if he is the literary bastard son of David Goodis and James Cain.

His latest, EXPIRATION DATE, is another great tale with its fingers in both noir and post modern narrative. Mickey Wade is not having the time of his life, his job is gone and he finds himself back where he started, living in his grandfather's apartment. It's where he grew up, not a wonderful place. He wakes up to discover that he has actually traveled back in time to his childhood days. As he explores his childhood neighborhood with adult eyes he meets a 12 year old who lives downstairs, a kid who will grow up to kill his Dad.

Swierczynski has such fantastic characters that it's very easy to get quickly lost in their world. The story moves fast and dares you to keep pace. Just the right blend of humor and action make this a perfect book.

Jon Jordan

EXPOSE!

Hannah Dennison

Berkley Prime Crime

2009

In the third installment of this series, reporter Vicky Hill receives a mysterious phone call alerting her to an unscheduled burial. As obituary writer for the Gipping Gazette, Vicky hurries to the cemetery in time to pay her last respects to Scarlett Fleming, Gipping-on-Plym socialite and community actress. Odd that extroverted Scarlett would submit to a quiet burial. Even odder is the enthusiastic appearance of Douglas Fleming's childhood sweetheart, Eunice Pratt. How did she know about the burial?

Douglas insists his wife didn't want a fuss, but that's not what Vicky hears from local gossips. Scarlett let them know she planned to go out with an open viewing and a thirteen-piece steel band.

Scarlett apparently died in Spain on her way to a yoga retreat. The mention of Spain sends off warning bells, as Vicky's father, the notorious Fog, is on the lam in Costa Brava.

To complicate things, Vicky's nemeses, Annabel Lake, tries to befriend Vicky. Then her fantasy boyfriend, Lieutenant Robin Berry, asks her to keep an eye on his unstable Aunt Eunice, a task made more difficult when the object of her obsession—Douglas Fleming--cozies up to the daughter of a recently deceased millionaire.

Who made the early morning phone call to alert Vicky of the burial? Does Annabel have an ulterior motive? Is Eunice Pratt hallucinating when she insists that "Dougie" keeps calling her to confess his love? And what does the local CCTV controversy have to do with a stolen prop from the The Gipping Bards?

Author Dennison provides another riotous romp with a quirky cast--a perfect read for a rainy afternoon.
Jacqueline M. Vick

THE FALL

David Fulmer
March 2010
Five Stones Press

Richard Zale is happily married, gainfully employed, the father of two. When he finds out that his childhood friend Joey Sesto is dead, he takes off for his hometown of Wyanossing, Pennsylvania to say his farewells. Of course, it isn't that easy.

One day turns into an overnight trip, then into a few days, then into at least a week. Isabel, the wife, is understanding but not happy. It doesn't help that Richie is staying with Angela, Joey's sister and an old flame. Richard wanders around town, asking questions and thinking about how it used to be when he was a kid. Lots of angst, not much detecting. Of course, Richie is slow to catch on that detecting is required. It takes a combination of events to convince Richie that Joey did not accidentally fall off of Council Rock.

Even though Richie is a little slow on the uptake, the locals quickly make it obvious that they aren't happy to see Richie back in town. How much of the hostility is directly connected to Joey's death and how much is just left over from "back in the day"?

Fulmer takes his time with the plot, going back and forth between Richie's remembrances of his youth and the realities of life in Wyanossing today. This gradual depiction gives depth to both characters, although Richard's motivations are not as clearly defined as Joey's. THE FALL is billed as "suspense"; while the pace belies that label, the plot and the denouement do not. Just because Fulmer doesn't pull the reader along at break-neck speed does not mean that he doesn't know what he's doing. He does.

P.J. Coldren

FAR CRY

John Harvey
June 2010
Houghton Mifflin Harcourt

There is nothing more exciting than a good book. When the skewed release dates of the U.K. and the U.S. allow me the gift of a reread, it is a grand event.

FAR CRY, from Cartier Diamond Dagger recipient John Harvey came into the house on a dreary February day. The kind of day where you don't feel like tackling something new but want to drift amongst well written words and story. And so I began my second read of this book. However, Mr. Harvey refused to comply with my plan and soon, rather than drifting with the tide, I was being pulled by undercurrents, treading water & just trying to breathe. You have to love these moments, when you're allowed to revel in the fact that great reads can be read over and over again. The rather cynical "Who has time to reread anything?" is compelling me to have all my fellow Americans not miss this book's American release. Mark it on your calendar now, June 2010.

Harvey brings back two police from his previous novel GONE TO GROUND to tackle a case almost too horrible for anyone to endure and sure to make any parent reach out to their child no matter what the age.

A couple loses their only child to a tragic accident and their marriage is ended. A dozen years later the woman is remarried with a new daughter. This child too, disappears. Is fate so cruel as to do this to a parent twice? That is the question Helen Walker and Will Grayson must ask themselves as they investigate both the old and new crimes. As theories play against one another and time runs short for the second daughter Harvey tells a story of both loss and strength while drawing every note out of each character in this symphony of a book.

In the hands of a lesser author this could indeed be an exploitive novel but Harvey is known for bringing his stories back around to a truth both simple and harsh. In knowing there is a future. In not, there is only the feeling of treading against an undercurrent that will allow you neither forward nor back.

Ruth Jordan

FIRST RULE

Robert Crais
January 2010
Dutton

There are certain authors that bring a groan and audible sighs from my husband, Dennis. Robert Crais is one of them. He knows that once the book is started the usual comings and goings in our home are at a standstill (that includes meals) until I'm finished. But when I close the book, it is his turn, a classic snatch and run.

Joe Pike is back!! Yahoo! Not since the WATCHMAN in 2007 have we been gifted with a Joe Pike story. Thank you, Bob.

In **FIRST RULE**, Joe takes on the Organized Crime machine transplanted here from the former Soviet Union republics. It had been ten years since Joe had talked or worked with Frank Meyers. Frank, Joe and a select few had constituted an elite team working in El Salvador. Frank had retired after that jig to marry Cindy. Started an import business and became a successful businessman, contented husband, proud father and suburbanite. Now the police had tracked Joe down on a bright clear crisp day to tell him Frank and family had been murdered in their home, casting aspersions that Frank hadn't been squeaky clean. After all, the police reasoned, Frank and family were the seventh in a line of home invasions. All with the same MO and each of the first six were ". . . as dirty as yesterday's socks . . .". No matter what the police try to infer, Joe knows Frank and something else is going on. Joe enlists the help of Elvis, guys from the unit and selected persons from the dark side to clear Frank's name and find out what really happened. Joe Pike may live in the shadows, knowing and living with the darker forces of human nature but he is bone-deep loyal, certain of the course he has charted and knows the ends justify the means to protect and keep safe the innocent of this world. The hallmark of Crais' writing is the elegant violence he brings to the page, his writing, his characters and his story. I will say it again, Thank you, Mr. Crais.

Penny Halle

Muskego Public Library-Murder and Mayhem in Muskego

FRAME UP

John F. Dobbyn

March 8, 2010

Oceanview

Boston lawyer Michael Knight witnesses a car blow up with his best friend, John McKedrick, in it. McKedrick was an attorney for a Mafia figure and he might have been trying to break away from the organization. Knight is injured and spends a little time in the hospital.

In the main story, Knight becomes involved, through his boss Lex Devlin, in defending the son of a mob boss on a murder charge, hence the title of the book. The son, supposedly, is not involved in his father's business and is still attending college at 21. But the large question remains--who set him up and why? To get back at his father? Is someone trying to take over his father's organization? Knight works on the defense, not on who the murderer is.

Knight is soon over his head dealing with some of the guys, and becomes more involved, in spite of his boss / mentor's advice and help. He gets involved with vicious Russians, a \$70 million dollars loan, a fake Vermeer, and another body. Fast-moving and exciting story.

Gay Tolt Kinman

THE GENTLEMEN'S HOUR

Don Winslow

2010

Arrow Books (UK)

THE GENTLEMEN'S HOUR is Don Winslow's follow-up to **THE DAWN PATROL**. Named for the block of surfing time in the day directly after "The Dawn Patrol," **THE GENTLEMEN'S HOUR** finds Boone Daniels investigating the murder of his surfing hero, Kelly Kuhio. The only problem with this situation is that Boone is investigating on behalf of the young man who admits to killing Kelly.

The detective who normally prefers to be inactive juggles a second case for one of his friends from the Gentlemen's Hour, Dan Nichols. Nichols hires Boone to follow his wife and find out if she is cheating. Boone hates these kinds of cases, but accepts to help a friend. His choice may end up leading Boone straight to jail.

Don Winslow is notorious for sharp wit in his writing. He can be writing about the darkest, ugliest aspects of human nature and manage to pop something out that just makes you laugh, even though you're on the verge of heart-wrenching tears. And the reason you laugh is because the quip is so blatantly and starkly true. While **THE GENTLEMEN'S HOUR** doesn't quite take you to the heart-wrenching tears - crying is not permitted in the gentlemen's hour, after all - it does explore the complexities and sensitivities of friendship and its bonds.

As in **THE DAWN PATROL**, the action of the plot is symbolized through the ocean. At the onset of **THE GENTLEMEN'S HOUR**, the ocean is flat and still. No surfing takes place, just lolling and philosophizing. The ocean, like life, is all-powerful. You can't control it even when it's still, but you can learn to understand it. Boone understands the ocean; it's the rest of life he still needs to be educated in. He's learning bit by bit and he's trying to do what he knows is right, regardless of how hard that may be. That struggle to do right is what makes Boone a character readers can relate to. His missteps and machismo are what make him a character readers find humor in. The whole package is what makes him the protagonist of an outstanding P.I. novel.

THE GENTLEMEN'S HOUR cut a lot of the fat from **THE DAWN PATROL** for a tighter plot, but it maintains Winslow's depth and humor. The return of Petra and the loss of Sunny throws explosive dynamics into The Dawn Patrol's chemistry. The added layer of The Gentleman's Hour builds dimension in the surfing community of Southern California.

While the ocean may not look like it's doing much in **THE GENTLEMEN'S HOUR**, Winslow is making a huge splash with

the return of "Boone freaking Daniels" and his surfing crew. If you enjoyed THE DAWN PATROL, you will love THE GENTLEMEN'S HOUR.

Jen Forbus

GOING, GONE

Laura Crum

April 2010

Perseverance Press

The equine veterinarian Gail McCarthy series now has its 11th book. This, as are the others, is about horses, and yes, cats and dogs. The mystery starts when a police car pulls up to the site where Gail, her husband and son, are camping on a friend's property in the Sierra foothills. The police officer is a friend of Gail's, whom she hasn't seen for a long time, and his passenger, the man he is arresting for murder, is another old friend.

Since Gail (and we) know the old friend didn't commit the murder, we are anxious to meet the neighbors, aka suspects, and to find out what the motive of murdering a brother and sister could be.

The old friends, Lonny Peterson and Bret Boncantini, are featured in previous mysteries. As Crum mentions in her acknowledgements, they haven't been around for a while, and now they're back.

The murdered brother had a house in the Monterey Bay area near where Gail lives, and when she returns home she rides over to check it out. She's on a new horse, so doesn't know how it's going to react to the terrain--and the adventure.

Crum has trained horses for over thirty years, so everything she writes about this subject is authentic.

Gay Tolt Kinman

HELL GATE

Linda Fairstein

2010

Dutton

Hell Gate is ADA Alex Cooper's 12th appearance and has her working extra hard as she has two redball cases on her desk. A human trafficking case that is prompted by the discovery of a group of bodies washing up on a beach, and a congressman leaves the scene of an accident to avoid the scandal of an extra-marital affair. The girl goes missing and it looks bad for the young politico. The cases end up tying together and Alex is walking through a minefield of politics as she tries to make the mayor happy and wrap things up.

The book is topical without being preachy, and wonderfully plotted. While folks who read a lot of mysteries will reach the end knowing the killer, it doesn't matter. It's the ride that matters and with Fairstein driving you're in damn good hands.

Jon Jordan

HELLO KITTY MUST DIE

Angela S. Choi

Tyrus Books

April 2010

"Hello Kitty" – term referring to educated, well-mannered Asian-American women.....

Fiona Yu- educated, well-mannered Asian-American woman determined to kill her inner "Hello Kitty".

HELLO KITTY MUST DIE; the best debut novel I've read this year. There is a joy about this manically sublime and entirely over the top book that's hard to describe. The only way I can explain it is to say I now believe I belong to a secret club.

This is the book to present the argument, "Good mysteries can be warped and funny".

As the novel opens Fiona is working on downgrading her "Hello Kitty" status. This requires that she lose her virginity.

What follows is perhaps the most commanding first chapter I've read in the last decade. Not since Vicki Hendricks found love with a dolphin has anything been as singularly female, shocking and accessible.

Cheated out of the rite of passage to "lose her virginity", our heroine decides to reclaim the momentous moment with plastic surgery. She meets up with her childhood friend, Sean Killroy and an entirely different world opens up for her... this world is dark. Ken Bruen dark. How far does one go to decide who they will become in the U.S.A.? What price do you pay to become the real you? And if the answer to whom the real you is rather shocking do you embrace your individuality or once more conform to society's ideal of whom you should be.....

BONUS to the above questions, how high can you make the body count?

In Choi's first novel, I relived the experience of Tart Noir, remembered Richard Stark, found myself wanting to be in the room when Choi met Bill Fitzhugh and Val McDermid. And here's the most important thing about HELLO KITTY MUST DIE. I found myself promising never to miss a book or a moment with this author, because the pages flow one into the other with a 1990s' deconstruction and the Romanticism of the Golden Age. No one else could have written this book and no one else should

try to copy it. That's some major talent for a new writer.

One of the most refreshing aspects of HKMD is the fact that it is a female world but Choi invites any reader who's

experienced Swierczynski or Huston to the party. So read the book. I'll give you the password to our club. It's Angela Choi. Remember the name.

Ruth Jordan

HOOK LINE AND SINKER (An Anthology)

Edit. T. Jefferson Parker

April 2010

Countryman Press

As themes for anthologies go this one actually makes perfect sense as these are all authors who actually love fishing. Couple that love for a passion for writing mysteries and you can't go wrong. The proceeds from the book are going to two charities, both fishing related, one for women cancer survivors and the other for returning veterans.

Included are stories from: Ridley Pearson, Michael Connelly, John Lescroart, Dana Stabenow, Don Winslow, CJ Box, Brian Wiprud, Victoria Houston and more, a total of 16. Among my favorite were "Granite Hat" by Wiprud, "Tight Lines" by James Hall and "Sandy Brook" by Don Winslow. A tight collection and trust me, you don't have to be a fishing fan to enjoy this collection.

Jon Jordan

A HOUSE TO DIE FOR

Vicki Doudera

April 2010

Midnight Ink

The book begins with a superb prologue. Dapper and professional Bostonian surgeon Dr. Emerson Phipps is dying to own a specific house in Hurricane Harbor on a small island in Maine. He does both.

Darby Farr, a San Diego realtor, is called home to Maine when her Aunt Jane becomes ill. Jane's assistant, Tina Ames, is most anxious that a touchy real estate transaction take place. The house, Fairview, becomes a prominent character in the story. It is what the plot is about. The sale is to be to a group who want to hold weddings there. So far, okay.

However, a few snags are thrown in, such as zoning restrictions, a dead body, a crazy soldier, a mysterious Italian lover, a seemingly uncaring police chief--and the FBI.

Darby tries to go ahead to make the deal work, while balancing a few conflicts in her life, the main one being she doesn't want to be on the island where she grew up and which holds many bad memories for her. One of them is of her best friend, Lucy Trimble, who suddenly disappeared for a year, supposedly going to a private school. But there's more to the story, and now Lucy has been arrested for murder. She also happens to be co-owner of the house with her brother, Mark, and doesn't want to sell to a certain person.

Wonderful story, atmospheric, good plot.

Gay Tolt Kinman

HUMAN TARGET – CHANCE MEETINGS

Peter Milligan

Vertigo Comics

2010

Peter Milligan is one of those rare writers who finds himself perfectly at home no matter what sub genre he is writing in.

This collection is his take on a DC character that has been around since the 60's and has been turned into a pretty good television show on Fox (Human Target starring Mark Valley).

CHANCE MEETINGS, a catchy name given that the human target is named Christopher Chance, is no longer the sophisticated playboy type hanging out in a swanky pad waiting to be a hero. At this point in his life he is troubled and damaged. Too many years being other people have started to take their toll. Both the stories in this collection play on that theme. This is story telling firmly set in LA, with a bit of a Robert Crais novel feel to it. There is a man who has worked with Chance caught up in his own role of being someone else going through what Chance has. There is a femme fatale hit man (woman?) out to get Chance and her back-story almost could use its own book. Gangsters, bad guys and a truly modern noir feel make this an amazing read that any crime fiction fan will adore. And it's also just damn good story telling with a focus on characters.

The art is a joy and really captures the nature of the tales being told. Edvin Biukovic and Javier Pulido are both on the top of their game here.

This collection is another wonderful book in what I'm calling the year of Peter Milligan. So read this book, watch the show, and ask for more!

Jon Jordan

IN THE ABSENCE OF ILES

Bill James

January, 2010
The Countryman Press

Favorite authors venturing into new territory is a tricky subject.. IN THE ABSENCE OF ILES fits Bill James like a second skin. AC Esther Davidson wants to bring down the largest gang in her sector of the U.K. She attends a conference hoping for advice from her colleague Desmond Iles but needs to trust her own instincts when he fails to arrive. What ensues is classic James with a female lead. How far does one go to get a result and where does the line of morality ambiguously lie?

There's a new voice at the helm of this novel but the dialogue and plot are those of one of Crime Fiction's true masters. If you're a long time follower, IN THE ABSENCE OF FRIENDS will verify what we've always known; James has a true respect for the femme. If you've been avoiding the Harpur and Iles series because of the sheer volume of backlist here's a great excuse to jump on board and discover one of the 20th and 21st Centuries true treasures.

Ruth Jordan

INVISIBLE BOY

Cornelia Read

March 2010

Grand Central Publishing

Have you met Madeline Dare? She's not in Syracuse anymore.

Madeline is plodding away at a New York City paper, reconnecting (somewhat reluctantly) with her family and the friends of her seemingly privileged youth in the city that never sleeps, the story of 6,000,000 people. She agrees to help clean the weeds out of an old family cemetery that's become a vacant lot. And then they find the skeleton.

Who is this small boy, tossed into Madeline's past like a bag of garbage? Can New York slow down enough to even care? What follows is pure Read. Grounded, bon vivant, sad and woven like the small pox blankets Dare's ancestors gave Native Americans to acquire "this land of you and me".

Cornelia Read, in her first two books created a character at odds with herself as only "a child of the seventies" could be. It is within the pages of INVISIBLE BOY she allows that character to leap off of the page and into your heart. This is no mean feat in mystery. Every encounter we've had with a politically incorrect relative, or an elitist member of the middle class in the first two novels allows Read to lay out Madeline within INVISIBLE BOY.

This broken boy with the short life does not disappear into the news cycle. He is championed by Dare, her family, friends and the police. He is not forgotten as a headline of the week. And while we uncover his story, Madeline discovers more of herself.

INVISIBLE BOY moves our story's heroine ahead to whom she will become and why, while not forgetting the crime that forwards that story. This is a gift increasingly rare in Crime-Fiction, one that only a purist with a pure heart could present. By the end of this book your heart will break, an all too familiar tale of evil within the home becoming clearer and clearer from early on. But you will also feel an empathy leaning towards pain for Madeline. Righteous and ridiculous, all inquiring and willing to shut the blinds as soon as daylight breaks into the room. Read implants tucks here and nips there until you are left with a hope and sorrow entirely about the book and absolutely about the story she has created for one heroine on the list of mystery heroines for all time..

This is Madeline's story... so far...

Ruth Jordan

MADAME XANADU VOL. 2 – EXODUS NOIR

Matt Wagner

VERTIGO

2010

Madame Xanadu has been around the DC universe for quite a while and she always seems to play small roles in the stories of others. She is enigmatic and mysterious and that's the way I like her. Matt Wagner has come in and started telling some of her stories going way back to the time of Merlin and giving us an origin. Kudos to Wagner for being able to do this and still keep her mysterious.

This second collection has our magical heroine in the 1940's New York, a time of noir. The setting is familiar to Wagner as he spent quite a few years there with the golden age Sandman. It's no surprise actually that we get a guest shot from Wesley Dodds and his partner Diane Belmont (two of my all time favorite characters). The tale opens with a business man dying in strange circumstances and the family coming to Xanadu for help in finding out what really happened. This means in addition to her regular activities involving divining futures and other things magical, she is also doing some PI work. She finds the next potential victims and tries to warn them. Being arrogant white business men of the times they of course ignore her. Eventually she tracks down the source of the crimes and deals with its supernatural element and puts an end to the ages old curse.

Wagner uses flashbacks to the time of the Spanish Inquisition to help tell the story and to ground Xanadu's involvement in the case. It's a wonderful blend of magic and noir and truly inspired story telling. It touches on the problems with religions and faith and distrust and fear. And it really whets the appetite for more.

Matt Wagner is in top form, and to make the package perfect Michael William Kaluta is doing the art. It's his kind of time period and he really does an amazing job at making it look authentic. If you haven't read Madame Xanadu yet, for God's Sake, pick it up RIGHT NOW.

Jon Jordan

MANIA

Craig Larsen

2009

Pinnacle Books

Nick Wilder is a photographer for the Seattle Telegraph newspaper. He's covered a series of grisly murders that appear to be connected, possibly a serial killer the press is calling the Street Butcher. Then one night the Street Butcher hits close to home, attacking and killing Nick's brother Sam. The more Nick investigates, the closer he moves to the answers behind his brother's murder, the more Nick questions his own state of mind, what is real and who, exactly, he can trust.

MANIA is Craig Larsen's debut thriller. It is a fast-paced, dark psychological plot filled with twists and turns. The novel doesn't follow a straight chronological order; instead it bounces around between before Sam's death, after Sam's death, and Nick's childhood. The lack of a straight timeline helps to build the suspense of the novel, but there is nothing that distinguishes where exactly on the timeline each section is. Some points take the reader a paragraph or two to orient where he/she is in the story. Some date headings probably would have been helpful for that element.

Larsen does a nice job of developing Nick's isolation and growing panic. This helps to build dimension in Nick's character. All the characters surrounding Nick seem to throw up red flags at various points in the novel; this also builds the suspense as the reader is left wondering who exactly Nick can trust, just as Nick ponders this same question.

MANIA is a solid debut and I expect we'll be seeing more thrillers from Larsen in the years to come.

Jen Forbus

MONEY TO BURN

James Grippando

2010

Harper

Michael Cantella is rich and fabulous and it's all about to be taken away. A rising star on Wall Street with a beautiful wife and a bank account to die for, Michael's 35th birthday is challenging.

In a single day he's stripped of his personal wealth, accused of defrauding the company he works for and his wife asks for a divorce. And then the past grabs him. Is his first wife alive? Is she friend or foe? Who, on Wall Street is trying to ruin his reputation and why?

Grippando will answer all of these questions for you with the aplomb of an experienced thriller writer. Every sentence in this novel counts as does every moment of the action. Money creates unlikely enemies and allies and in MONEY TO BURN, James Grippando is going to show you why.

Ruth Jordan

NO MORE HEROES

Ray Banks

2009

Houghton Mifflin Harcourt

NO MORE HEROES is probably the first book that I have ever read where the main character has almost nothing happen in his favor. If Cal Innes isn't getting the living daylight's beat out of him, he's battling his addiction with prescription pain pills. Cal Innes goes from being a messenger to a PI in this latest installment, and finds himself trying to solve a case of arson that has him walking through death's corridor many times before the answers are found.

This is the first book I've read by Ray Banks, and I'd have to say, I'd pick up another any day of the week. It took a little bit to get into, but once I was going, I had a hard time putting it down. From hangovers to riots – this book has Cal encountering about every possible situation you could think of. The twists and the turns in this book don't stop until you've run out of writing to read. The ending leaves you hungry and wondering what's next for Cal? If you find yourself reading lots of books where the main character just can't seem to get anything to work out in his favor, this is the book for you! I would recommend this book to anyone for just this reason.

Nathan Banks

NOWHERE TO RUN

C.J. Box

April 2010

G.P. Putnam's Sons

In the isolated mountains of Wyoming, Game Warden Joe Pickett makes a last journey through his temporary position before returning home. What starts as the hunt for a local poacher quickly deteriorates into a fight for Joe's credibility and life. Encountering a fisherman without a license has never been deadly before....

The above is a brief synopsis of the April release from C.J. Box, 2009's winner of the Edgar Allen Poe Award for best novel. Do you know Joe? Joe Pickett is a man who is born to be a game warden doing far better with the open spaces that surround him in his job than the bureaucracy he's part of because of it. Every book in this series has been good. *NOWHERE TO RUN* is astonishing.

A very good crime novel has manipulated me. Made me look at a point of view far removed from my own. Made me empathetic towards that p.o.v.

C. J. Box has done what only a few writers before him have done successfully. If you strip the Pickett series down to its bare bones you can liken it to just about any contemporary "buddy Cop" series. There's your main protagonist (Joe) and his sidekick and foil (Nate). There are the recurring characters (wife, daughters, mother-in-law from hell) and the rabbi (the Governor). A case is solved. Next, please.

In good hands though, a familiar setting and great plotting can make you look at ideas and issues you perhaps weren't thinking about looking at when you sat in the easy chair with your coffee and snacks. This is what C.J. Box does with *NOWHERE TO RUN*. You'll leave this outing of Pickett contemplating which rules of society you follow, how much of a yes-man you are. Where do the lines of public obligation and personal code bend and where do they snap?

C. J. Box? He's got great hands.

Ruth Jordan

ONCE A SPY

Keith Thomson

2010

Doubleday

There are a lot of books that feature espionage and many have retired spooks as the protagonist. At first glance, while interesting, *ONCE A SPY* didn't seem like a novel that would really stand out among all the other books. But I'm a sucker for good spy stories and it did look to be at least entertaining.

Entertaining is a gross understatement for this novel.

Drummond Clark is an old man with the failing memory of Alzheimer's. His son Charlie is not unaccustomed to having to pick his Dad up and take him home if he wanders, or gets confused. Charlie isn't exactly setting the world on fire with his skills as a gambler so taking a break to go get Dad is not really interrupting anything. Upon arriving back at Drummond's house, it blows up. Thinking the explosion is a hint to pay up Charlie is concerned, but he soon learns that there is a lot more to his Father than meets the eye. The first hint is when Drummond snags a car and hot wires it so they can get the Hell out of dodge.

The story continues with the father and son on the run, Charlie learning a lot about his Dad and himself. The CIA is trying to keep a handle on Drummond, and old enemies are after information he may not even know he has anymore.

The pacing of this book is right on the money and its nicely layered tale that is more than just a thriller or a chase.

Thomson has a great knack for characters and its hard not to feel invested in them from early on. This is a debut book that should end up on some best of lists.

Jon

PREDATORS

Frederick J. Ramsay

2009

Poisoned Pen Press

At the request of the State Department, Leo Painter, CEO of Earth Global, and a party of company executives travel to Botswana. Their mission is to find ways to access the rich extractable resources of the country. Accompanying them are his stepson and the stepson's wife. Each of the journeyers has his or her own agenda, including corporate control, ambition, greed, and murder. Along the way the Russian mob becomes involved. A female game ranger, struggling to gain respect from her superiors and her countrymen, must try to untangle all of the disparate threads and solve the killing before all the suspects head back to the United States.

If one knows Botswana only from the writings of Alexander McCall Smith, the reader will get a different impression of the country through the writing of Frederick Ramsey. I seldom make comparisons between authors, but here I do not hesitate since in this novel Ramsey himself refers on at least two occasions to McCall Smith's novels about Precious Ramotswa's No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency. McCall Smith's books speak of a gentler country with tiny crimes to be solved with a humanistic approach by a private detective. Ramsey, on the other hand, looks at larger offenses handled by official sources, here both the police and the game ranger.

Ramsey takes the reader into the minds of the animals that roam the savannah, in particular a dying lion that has lost his

place as the alpha male in his pride. He uses this effectively as a metaphor for Painter and his associates. Like the lion pursued by both the eager young usurper and the wild hyenas, so too is Painter pursued by corporate hyenas. The author brings the stories of the lion and of the corporate target into convergence when the lion is mistaken for a time as the suspect in the killing.

However, overall, I found the story very slow moving. It takes a long time to get where it is going and when it finally does arrive there, not all that much happens. The characters are mere caricatures. There were some plot threads that were left either unanswered or poorly resolved. There are touches of humor along the way, especially in the acrimonious relationship between the greedy son-in-law and his lecherous, scheming wife. Further, Ramsey does give the reader a bit of flavor of Botswana, its land and its people. Overall, though, I cannot recommend it.

Ted Hertel

PRINT THE LEGEND

Craig McDonald

February 2010

St. Martin's Minotaur

PRINT THE LEGEND is the third novel in Craig McDonald's Hector Lassiter series. This collection of adventures for the pulp fiction writer begins after Ernest Hemingway's death. Hector has returned to Idaho to speak at a convention of Hemingway scholars. Mary Hemingway is soliciting Hector's help in publishing some of Hem's work that didn't see print before his suicide. Mary has also agreed to let Richard Paulson, one of the Hemingway scholars, assist in writing her biography. What Mary doesn't know is that Richard suspects Mary of murdering Papa, and he's there to coax an admission of guilt from her.

Meanwhile, the FBI that hounded Hemingway in life is still hovering around everything associated with him: his widow, his home, even his friends - including Lassiter.

As with both Hector Lassiter books before this, PRINT THE LEGEND is brimming with conspiracies, adventures, and crime. McDonald has taken the historic figures and events, weaving them brilliantly into Lassiter's fictional world. PRINT THE LEGEND focuses mainly on Hemingway and the legacy left after his suicide. The blending of fact and fiction is seamless, so much so the reader will find him/herself drawn to the history books (or Google), driven to know more.

As he did in TOROS & TORSOS, McDonald makes use of the third person limited point of view. He alternates the limited point of view between the major roles in the novel, which works to heighten the effect of the conspiracy theories. And again, we see the distinctive time line of McDonald's series. The time line stretches over several decades and intertwines, occurring concurrently, with events that occurred in both previous novels, as opposed to each novel occurring consecutively. The books are like interlocking pieces. They are all interdependent on one another, but the order you obtain the data in is irrelevant, rather it is only essential that you have all the pieces.

This series is unlike any other in the annals of American writing. At its core it is a crime novel. And from there it pushes and pulls and challenges the idea that a crime novel has to fit in a nice little compartment, limit its language, minimize its character development. PRINT THE LEGEND explodes out in every direction, leaving the reader breathless and stunned. Lassiter says, in reference to Hemingway, "When the legend becomes fact, print the legend." But more accurately it's McDonald who "prints the legend" of the man who "lives what he writes and writes what he lives." Regardless of whether you've read any of McDonald's work before this, make sure you add PRINT THE LEGEND to your must-read list immediately.

Jen Forbus

SAINTLY REMAINS

Tony Perona

March 2010

Five Star

Five years ago, West Jasper High School was the scene of a Columbine-style massacre. Nick Bertetto and his family are in West Jasper, visiting his in-laws. He is out with his wife and daughter when he gets a frantic call from his mother-in-law. The problem? Someone has skinned the family cat, Mr. Jangles, and left him for dead. Who did this awful thing? Is it connected to some other missing animals, and the mutilated dog of a neighbor? Is it connected to the shootings at the high school? Five years ago, the possibility of a Satanic cult was investigated, but that lead didn't go anywhere.

One of the victims of the shooting was Keri Schoening; she had been shot because she stated that she believed in Jesus. Her corpse has been taken from her grave. Surely there is a connection to what's going on in Strassheim's neighborhood, but what is that connection?

Nick, a free-lance reporter, has been assigned to the Schoening story. He keeps running a step or two behind a local reporter who has lots of connections he doesn't. Nick's only connection is the owner of the mutilated dog, a sixteen-year-old boy who was at West Jasper during the shooting and who wants to be a reporter.

SAINTLY REMAINS is the third in the series; Perona continues to improve as a writer. The plot holds together well. The characters are believable; in particular, the relationship between Nick and his wife has grown in natural ways, with all those twists and turns that come in a "normal" marriage (whatever that is). Nick is a man of faith, although at times he isn't quite sure what that means to him. SAINTLY REMAINS forces him, once again, to confront some of his doubts. West

Jasper is not a real place because the author didn't want to put the kinds of evil that occur in SAINTLY REMAINS in a place that actually exists. Still, West Jasper is as real a small-town, middle-America community as one is likely to find. Some readers may be put off by the religious aspects of Perona's writing; they are missing some good writing if they let that keep them from reading his work.

P.J. Coldren

THE SPELLMANS STRIKE AGAIN

Lisa Lutz

2010

Simon and Schuster

Lutz's series featuring a nutty family is a nice soft boiled break and it is guaranteed to make you laugh. It's uses the family as comic relief which when done well is wonderful.

In THE SPELLMANS STRIKE AGAIN daughter Izzy is taking over the PI business and she has her hands full. She wants to get a handle on her competition, a pain in the ass ex cop named Harkey. She is also working a case of a missing millionaire. While trying to actually work she is dealing with a mother who won't let up on getting her to date, strange things in the office and on top of it all her younger sister decides to start crusading to get a man out of prison.

This is a funny, fast paced book and Lutz works her characters just right. If you've had enough of serial killers or brooding detectives for a while this might be just what you need.

Jon Jordan

TAKEOVER

Lisa Black

2010

Harper

After spending two days doing nothing but reading Lisa Black's book TAKEOVER it became one of my favorites.

Theresa MacLean is a forensic scientist caught in the middle of a murder investigation. Mark Ludlow, a middle aged, white male from the suburbs found murdered in his front yard, wallet, keys, and jewelry still present at the scene. What was the killer after? Is it connected to a recent bank robbery?

On other side of town, the federal reserve bank is held up by two men with guns, who have taken every one inside hostage including Theresa's fiancée Paul who is a homicide detective. Theresa takes up with the cops and negotiator at the library across the street and tries her best to remain calm while Paul's fate rests in the hands of two armed robbers.

Who was Mark Ludlow? Will Paul make it out alive?

Those questions swirl in your head as you tear through this book; it's one you won't want to put down!!!

Christy Hintz

THE TEABERRY STRANGLER

Laura Childs

Penguin Group

2010

In this 11th installment of the Tea Shop Mysteries, author Childs increases the stakes for Theodosia (Theo) Browning, owner of the Indigo Tea Shop and talented amateur sleuth. This time, Theo witnesses a murder that's too close to home when a neighbor is strangled in the alley behind the shop.

Daria Shand was the owner of the Antiquarian Map Shop, and the remains of shredded documents are scattered across her floor. Did Daria interrupt a burglar, or were local treasure hunters after one of the display maps that Daria refused to sell?

Daria's mother and sister beg Theo to find out who would murder their respective daughter and sibling, but the more clues and suspects that come to light, the more it appears that Theo might have been the intended victim. First, someone tries to run Theo's jeep off a bridge, and then she's followed through a local cemetery. It appears she's being stalked.

With the help of deceptively stodgy-looking Detective Burt Tidwell, Theo takes the investigation to its startling conclusion. As always, readers are treated to the genteel and historic atmosphere of Charleston, SC. Theo's employees, dapper Drayton and energetic Haley, provide humor and insights, and fans of ex-boyfriend Jory will enjoy the complications that arise after he dumps his fiancée, Beth Ann. THE TEABERRY STRANGLER is the perfect book to curl up with on a rainy night.

PJ Coldren

THE WIDOW'S REVENGE

James D. Doss

2009

Minotaur Books

A widow friend of rancher and occasional Ute tribal investigator Charlie Moon believes that she is under siege from witches. Her grandson is missing, so he cannot help her. Instead she calls Charlie to help with the coven (if indeed that's what it is) squatting on the adjoining oil company land. By the time he arrives, however, she is dead. Moon finds no signs of witches. What he does find, though, is a gang hell-bent gang of criminals who appear to stop at nothing to get what they want. If he's going to help the late widow get her revenge, he will have to set a dangerous trap that could cost him his life, as well.

This fourteenth novel in the Charlie Moon series is an odd combination of humor and descriptions of extreme violence. I found it rather bizarre attempting to mix laughs with cannibalism, roasting people to death (with barbeque sauce!), and violence against the elderly. Yet somehow James Doss manages to pull it off without completely grossing out the reader, since the killings happen off the page and are merely summarized for our tender sensibilities.

Having gotten that out of the way, the rest of the book was enjoyable. Filled with the usual cast of characters, each of whom is well-delineated, the book moves along quickly to its tense and bloody conclusion. The reader is given a glimpse into the Ute culture with the vision guidance of Moon's shaman aunt, Daisy. Further there are numerous romantic entanglements for Moon. For example there is Sarah, the seventeen-year-old girl at his ranch, who has a major crush on Charlie. But Moon, completely ignorant of this infatuation, has his sights set on at least several other women in town.

This story is really a Western disguised as a mystery novel with the good guys in the white hats and the villains in black, culminating in a wild shootout at the Columbine ranch. The Wild West setting creates an authentic atmosphere.

This is one of the more unusual books I've read recently. At times almost whimsical, at other times harrowing, the book is fun to read if one can get past some of the descriptions of the murders. Most readers should be able to do just that with little problem.

Ted Hertel