

Sept Oct 2011 issue 38 reviews

Buzz Bin:

Andrew Taylor is a writer that in our opinion, is not read enough. **THE ANATOMY OF GHOSTS** (Penguin UK), his latest, is a perfect example of the depth of his talent. Set in 1786 John Hodsworth is an author who believes ghosts are a hoax. He is brought in to investigate a supposed sighting at Jerusalem College. Things begin to happen that make him rethink his opinions. He is seeing his dead wife and realizes only by solving the murder of the ghost, one Sylvia Whichcote, will he get his answers. Impossible to put down.

**ASIA HAND** (Black Cat) is the latest from Christopher G Moore, another of the Vincent Calvino PI series set in Thailand. On the Chinese New Year an American is found dead with clues leading to upcountry connections. The death looks to be tied to some news footage that has become very popular on the news networks. Was he killed to hide the footage or to steal it for personal gain? Fast moving and hypnotic, this was a great read.

Mark Haskell Smith has written a number of good books; his latest **BAKED** (Black Cat, a division of Grove Atlantic) is a really original and hip thriller. Miro Basinas has organically engineered an amazing marijuana plant, so amazing that he is shot for it and the plant stolen. Now Miro, pretty mellow by nature, is on the trail of his missing weed and the people behind the theft. Loads of fun, stock up on chips before reading.

Stephen Jay Schwartz is back with his second novel, **BEAT** (Forge), another featuring Hayden Glass of the LAPD. Glass has a bit of a problem controlling his urges and finds himself in San Francisco looking for a woman he saw on the internet. Run-ins with the Russian mob and bad cops eventually land him working with the FBI. Dark and tense, fast paced and relentless, **BEAT** should put Schwartz on everyone's must read list.

**BLIND MAN'S ALLEY** (Doubleday) by Justin Peacock is like an awesome episode of Law and Order. A series of events including a murder, a construction accident and lawsuits are all swirling around a Manhattan real estate tycoon with a reputation for being more than a little bit of an asshole. Lawyer Duncan Riley gets wrapped up in the world of Simon Roth by accident, but it will send his life down a path he never imagined. Tremendous reading and lingering themes.

**BRAINS: A ZOMBIE MEMOIR** (Eos) by Robin Becker had us laughing so hard coffee snorted out of our noses. A nice quick read about zombies who aren't brain dead, but still crave brains. They want to be accepted by society as more than slack jawed monsters and they are on a quest to see it happen. Wild fun.

Scandinavian authors are a new hot subgenre. Karin Fossum had impressed us before it was cool. **BROKEN** (HMH) is her latest and it is a stand-alone. A story of the fictional world crossing over. An author wakes in the middle of the night to find a character of hers standing over her bed, demanding to know his future. Creepy, suspenseful and a damn fun ride.

John Rector's **THE COLD KISS** (Forge) is a book about everyday people who get caught up in something they can't control. A theme Hitchcock did well, Rector also plays in this sandbox with great aptitude. Similar to *A Simple Plan*, a young couple comes across a large sum of money through a strange set of circumstances and it changes everything for them. And puts them in danger. Unlike *A Simple Plan*, these are actually characters that you care about and hope will come through ok. A great first novel.

African adventure and mystery in **THE CROCODILE'S LEAST EMBRACE** (Obsidian) by Suzanne Arruda is a terrific read. Set in the 1920's, Arruda brings the continent to life while schemes are afoot. Jade del Cameron gets a letter from a dead fiancé that leads into a strange series of murders. It looks like the work of an old enemy escaped from prison. Traditional and engrossing, this was a perfect read.

**THE DEAD DETECTIVE** (Akashic) by William Heffernan is a procedural a little off the beaten path. Harry Doyle died when he was ten years old. Resurrected by two police officers, he eventually dedicates his life to catching killers and is working as a homicide detective. As it turns out, the dead talk to him, in whispers. His latest case is a murder of a woman who was a child molester. Doyle is a great character and the book really draws you in quickly. A must read.

**DEADLOCK** (Bantam UK) by Sean Black is another in the series with bodyguard Ryan Lock. This time he's undercover in a maximum security prison trying to protect a man who is turning state evidence. Frank Reaper Hays is a member of the Aryan Brotherhood and he doesn't want the protection. This is a rapid firing fast paced book and it will not let you put it down.

Michael and Patrick McMenamin are a father/son team and **THE DEVALERA DECEPTION** (Enigma) is the first in a series of thrillers with Churchill as the protagonist. It's a wild journey that involves secret services from multiple countries, German and Russian working on a secret project, the IRA and arms deals that need to be stopped. Fast paced and engrossing.

Jeri Westerson's **THE DEMON'S PARCHMENT** has a medieval P.I. that in those times was referred to as a "tracker." This tracker, Crispin Guest, had been a knight with land, a title and a manor home of his own. Found guilty of treason, he now makes a meager living on the streets of London, lucky to make enough to keep in wine in the evening and turnip soup in the morning. With the help of a young orphan, Jack Tucker, whom he has taken under his wing, they do their best to bring justice to the few that can afford it. They live in a time in which Jews, as a people, are barred from living in England. But the king has sought the help of a Jewish physician to cure the queen's barren state. The doctor has had a parchment stolen. A parchment he is loath to admit could foster the creation of a golem. When young boys are found murdered and eviscerated, it seems the worst-case scenario has come true: someone is using the parchment for nefarious purposes. In a city in which he is seen as a pariah, Guest must discern if the monster treading the streets is a man or man-made. Stupendous read!

**THE DEVIL:** You need a set of brass ones to name a book **THE DEVIL** (Minotaur and Transworld). If anyone can fulfill the promise of a book with this title, it's Ken Bruen. Jack Taylor has been sent back to Galway after being refused entry to the US. His misery is interrupted by the case of a murdered student. It soon becomes obvious that the killing was aimed at Jack to get his attention. Was the man he met at the airport more than he let on? Has Jack finally met his match, a true nemesis? Another winner from a great writer.

**DICTATOR** (Bantam UK) is book four from rising star Tom Cain. He has really kicked ass on this book. Samuel Carver is hired to effectively bring about a regime change in an African country. A sticky situation where trust is minimal at best. Great action with the illustrious characters we've come to expect. Another winner by Cain.

Jordan Dane has been putting out consistently excellent books and **THE ECHO OF VIOLENCE** is another. A hostage situation with untrustworthy assistance, an unrelenting plot and an ass kicking lead make for a one-sitting read.

**FIFTY SEVEN TRAVELING** (Gale/Five Star) by Lonnie Cruise is a charming traditional mystery featuring road tripping grandparents Kitty and Jack Bloodworth. They are antique car buffs and while at a show they run in to trouble. A fast fun read with some really entertaining characters.

Another Swedish author hits the scene. Camilla Ceder's first novel **FROZEN MOMENT** (W&N/Orion) is a procedural featuring Inspector Christian Tell investigating a strange murder in a remote area. A second murder ups the ante and the case is complicated when Tell has doubts about a reporter he is interested in romantically. A wonderful blend of traditional mystery and thriller this is a debut that doesn't wait for the reader, it expects you to keep up. Well done.

**THE GOOD THIEF'S GUIDE TO LAS VEGAS** (Minotaur) is crazy fun. Chris Ewan tells a highly entertaining tale of an amateur magician who is a crime writer/thief on a trip to Vegas. Events get out of control, as they often do in Vegas, and Charlie Howard is accused of something he didn't do. We know because he was busy doing something else illegal. When the tough guys want money back he doesn't have it really gets fun.

If you don't like horror, stop reading and jump to the next book. If you do like horror, you'll love **HANDLING THE DEAD** (St. Martin's) by John Ajvide Lindqvist. His first book was a terrifying vampire tale, this one is a

zombie tome. It explores the reality of getting what you want, and whether getting it is what you thought it would be. Scary, genre bending and terrific.

The latest from Ridley Pearson is **IN HARM'S WAY** (Putnam), another in the series featuring Sheriff Walt Fleming. This is a nice bonus book for Pearson fans as we get to see Walt meet up with Lou Boldt from Seattle PD. Walt's new girlfriend may be closer to the case than he'd like as he discovers that the photographer is in the middle of what is happening. Pearson is one of our favorites and this is yet another first rate thrill ride from a true master.

**THE INSANE TRAIN** is just that. Sheldon Russell's novel has a train full of patients from recently fire damaged insane asylum in California traveling by rail to their new residence in Arizona. Hook Runyon is directed to man and then supervise the ride there. Who ever burned the first asylum down has not complete their task. Two more people are murdered and Hook knows he is the only one that can discover the miscreant. With a train load of suspects, only sharp eyes and quick instincts will derail this killer. A nail biter to the last page, this 1940's noir style tome is an excellent read.

Part one of a trilogy; **THE LEFT HAND OF GOD** (Dutton) by Paul Hoffman is not crime fiction, but something fans may enjoy. Cale is raised from childhood by a group known as the Redeemers to become a warrior monk. After years of training and abuse he discovers a world outside the monastery and it changes everything for him. Now Cale must decide where he stands and who he really is. Epic and mesmerizing. We can't wait for Book Two. A nice change of pace.

**LONG WAY HOME** (Free Press) is a nonfiction book by Laura Caldwell. It's the story of a kid from the wrong part of town who gets bullied into confessing to a crime he didn't commit and the struggle to get him out. Fascinating reading from the lawyer turned novelist.

The Billy Boyle books from James R Benn are among a small group that go right to the top of the reading pile. The latest, **RAG AND BONE** (SOHO) is book 5 and it's another terrific read. Boyle is in London looking into the death of a Russian diplomat. It soon becomes clear that there is more than meets the eye. Solving the crime could cause major problems with the tenuous relationship with the Russian that the US is hoping will get them through WWII. Taut pacing and great characters make this series great and this is a wonderful addition to the body of work Benn is creating.

Upon being given the barest hint that David Peace has a new book out, many Crimespree readers will be not so patiently waiting without a recitation of the plot. Peace writes like no other and has admitted feeling every line of angst he writes on the page. In **OCCUPIED CITY**, he tells the tales of a small bank in Toyko, 1948, with an after hours customer rapping on the door. The man claims to be a doctor there to immunize the employees against dysentery. He has poisoned them with cyanide instead and all but one dies agonizing deaths. Told in the voices of the dead, those searching for the killer and an American doctor assigned by the army to investigate the possibility Japanese bio weapon experimentation, each chapter takes the story deeper. The reader lives this book while reading it.

As you may imagine from the title, Stephen J. Cannell's **THE PROSTITUTE'S BALL** is fast, fun and will leave you with a helluva hangover. A party in the backyard of a Hollywood hills house that has been sitting vacant for years ends in gunfire. As the guests scatter to the winds – or rather their very expensive cars, they leave behind three bodies. Two are high priced call girls. One is a very famous producer. Partnered with the undesirable Sumner "Hitch" Hitchner, who seems more concerned with how to turn the case into a multi-million dollar script than in finding the killer, Detective Shane Scully is surprised to find the case wrapped up quickly. Maybe too quickly. When he digs deeper, the lawyers start to scurry, blocking his way. But there is one thing they can not argue with. The one bullet casing that does not match the myriad of casings from the machine guns casings that cover the grounds. This book is a better treat than you will find going door to door in even the Hollywood Hills on Halloween.

In **A RUSH OF BLOOD** (Headline UK) Quintin Jardine once again lets us tag along as Bob Skinner solves an impossible case. A suicide of a man with everything to live for coincides with a mysterious girl being rescued

by a man who disappears after dropping her off at the hospital. Awesome suspense from a master of the genre.

The third book featuring series character Denton, a misplaced American, **THE SECOND WOMAN** (Orion) by Kenneth Cameron is a Victorian mystery set in London. Strange goings on surrounding a murder at his home has Denton once again investigating murder. Secret groups within the Government, British Intelligence and a woman he loves in trouble has Denton at the top of his game. It may not be enough.

**SHIFT** (Crown) is a rock and rolling thriller from Tim Kring (Heroes) and Dale Peck. A sixties CIA experiment with LSD and mind control leaves Chandler Forrestal with mental powers. Because of his new powers he uncovers a plot to kill Kennedy and he finds himself on the run from, well, almost everybody. This book is all kinds of crazy fun and yet it is almost scary in its message. A must read.

Steve Mosby is a Crimesprees favorite and we just got a copy of **STILL BLEEDING** (Orion, distributed by Trafalgar). Officer Pal Kearney is after a killer who is draining blood from his victims. The investigation takes him to some dark places. When Alex Connor's friend Sarah goes missing he becomes a part of the hunt. Obviously this is a dark book, but it is also fascinating and moves fast. Great read.

Martin Cruz Smith. The name should be all the endorsement you need to pick up **THREE STATIONS** (Simon and Schuster). The fact that it is a book featuring Arkady Renko should cement the deal. Cruz Smith was one of the first to really do Russian crime fiction great. **GORKY PARK** is still an all time favorite. Renko is working two cases, a dead prostitute and a missing baby, both occurred at the three stations train depot. The characters are uber-engaging and the plot really moves. Another winner.

**THIRTEEN HOURS** (Atria) from Deon Meyer is another stunning book from an author who should be on everyone's must read list. A dead American in Cape Town South Africa has the potential to be an international incident, and finding the victim's friend before she too ends up dead just adds to the urgency of getting a quick solve. Homicide detective Griessel has other high profile cases to solve too, so will this just be another day for the newly sober detective or will this be the day to push him over the edge? Meyer is just damn good at what he does and I don't want to hear any excuses, you need to read this.

Wild Onion LTD is back in David Walker's **TOO MANY CLIENTS** (Severn House). Kristen and Dugan are up to their necks in problems when a bent cop is killed and Dugan looks a little too good as a suspect. His lawyer skills aren't going to help as much as his wife's PI skills in the search for the truth that will keep Dugan out of jail. Kristen will need to keep on her toes as she is getting a lot of mis-information. Twisty, turny and with a momentum all its own, **TOO MANY CLIENTS** is a great read with great characters.

Lisa Black's latest novel, **TRAIL OF BLOOD** (William Morrow) sets forensics expert Theresa MacLean against a serial killer recreating the Torso Murders in Cleveland. The forensics are done with precision and are not clinical. They add to the story. And the story itself is gripping. A wonderful piece of suspense. A truly intelligent read.

**THE VANISHING OF KATHARINA LINDEN** (Delecorte) by Helen Grant is a debut novel, though it reads like the work of a seasoned vet. Imagination is key and the characters drive this book. A girl in a small town in Germany is subjected to ridicule from classmates when her grandmother dies. The only person who will hang out with her is another student also being shunned. When a girl disappears during a celebration, Pia and her friend Stefan suspect something supernatural, a theory reinforced after hearing tales from an elderly man in the village. Suspenseful, encouraging, surprising and utterly enthralling this is a Hell of a debut.

Another debut author in September is Toby Ball with his novel **THE VAULTS** (St. Martin's Press). Set in the '30s in an unnamed city, the "vaults" are a giant repository for criminal justice records. Something known as the "Navaho Project" is unearthed independently by three people. As they investigate, they find themselves at odds with a corrupt mayor and shady business men with something to hide. A moody and atmospheric book this was a distinctive book and lingered well after the reading was done.

## **Regular Reviews:**

### **31 BOND STREET**

**Ellen Horan**  
**March 2010**  
**Harper**

In 1856 New York, widow Emma Cunningham meets and falls in love with Doctor Harvey Burdell. She and her daughters move into his home to manage the house and staff until, as Harvey promised, they would be married. But the longer she is in his home, the more Emma learns about the unsavory ways of Dr. Burdell. And on the fateful night of January 31, 1857, Dr Harvey Burdell is viciously murdered, leaving Emma Cunningham as the prime - and only - suspect.

Told in alternating segments of flashback and the present, Horan slowly reveals the lives of Harvey Burdell and Emma Cunningham over the course of their year together.

31 BOND STREET is a fascinating legal mystery of historical fiction and Horan manages to build the plot by adding new questions and conflicts to Emma Cunningham's case as the book progresses. Instead of presenting all the factors at the front end, she divvies them out bit by bit, so the result doesn't so much unfold as the story goes along, but rather it reveals itself in its entirety at the conclusion. This allows her to build the characters and keep the reader guessing.

31 BOND STREET is based on the actual murder of Harvey Burdell and the trial of Emma Cunningham for that murder. Horan reminds us through this tale of the horrors slavery was perpetrating on the nation, even the Northern segment of the country. The tale is also a reminder of the struggles of women during this time period. The rules of society and the limits placed on women left many at the mercy of men.

I am not a scholar in this time period, so some of my questions may be due to a lack of knowledge, but I had questions about a few details in the book.

31 BOND STREET was a fun read and it kept me guessing to the end.

Jen Forbus

### **AMOS WALKER, THE COMPLETE STORY COLLECTION**

**Loren D. Estleman**  
**2010**  
**Tyrus Books**

Tyrus Books already has me as a huge fan. They had me at hello. By releasing all of the Amos Walker stories in one book they have done something I've said needed doing for over ten years. Not a single one of the "big" publishers thought to do this.

Estleman's Amos Walker series is hands down one of the very best PI series ever written. Every single novel is a work of art. Estleman has also managed to produce a nice series of short stories with the character that call Detroit his home. Thirty years of Amos Walker has produced 32 shorts and they are all here, including a new one just for this collection. I remember reading "Greektown" the first time and being blown away by how easily Loren transitions from novels to shorts. I love the entire collection of stories but my favorites are "Cigarette Stop", "Dogs", and "The Anniversary Waltz."

This collection should be a must own by everyone who loves PI stories and anyone who is a fan of crime fiction. Estleman is a master.

Jon Jordan

### **BAD BOY**

**Peter Robinson**  
**2010**  
**William Morrow**

Those who've been with Crimespree from the beginning are more than familiar with my love for this author. The majority of you share my admiration and Mr. Robinson has been a winner of the Crimespree Best Continuing Series Award. It's close to impossible to come to a twenty book series and continue to say

something new. It's highly improbable to write from the same point of view and tell a different kind of story in an entirely new way. Time and again Robinson accomplishes this. The man's got rhythm.

BAD BOY opens with long time protagonist Alan Banks on R&R in the U.S. West far removed from his usual patch. It's quiet time, away from the primary action of the book and highly appreciated.

Holding the fort is partner D.I. Annie Cabbot. When an old friend of Banks comes for his assistance with a domestic problem it quickly spins out of control. Alan's daughter Tracy is caught in the middle. As Annie and the rest of Bank's squad work to diffuse the situation and rescue Tracy, Robinson's long time readers and new fans get a new slant on this series.

All of our long time side characters get a chance to sing within the pages of BAD BOY. Annie is marvelous. The baggage of the past is simply that. Annie has evolved into whom she will become. If she gets the chance.....

BAD BOY is a book of fathers and daughters, friends and lovers. Action packed poetry in motion. There is both peril and life within these pages.

Here's to you Mr. Robinson.

Ruth Jordan

## **BERRIED TO THE HILT**

**Karen MacInerney**

**2010**

**Midnight Ink**

Set on Cranberry Island, Maine, Natalie Barnes has just bought a B & B there, and found her true love, John. Business is not good, but picks up fast when a sunken boat is discovered--maybe a pirate ship. Now she has a reason for cooking and baking (recipes in back) up a storm, as archaeologists and fortune hunters fill her inn. Unfortunately someone is found dead, and several suspects on are on hand--a former druggie whom his mother says has gone straight, but he's missing; a person who has benefited greatly by the demise; and a man who fought with the deceased and owns the cutlass that killed the victim.

Of course, the plot and the chowder thicken, as Natalie learns more about her guests. Lots of good cooking in between sleuthing forays, so read while eating. Recipes in back--the French toast is a winner!

MacInerney won an Agatha nomination for the first in this Gray Whale Inn Mystery series.

Gay Toltl Kinman

## **BETRAYERS**

**Bill Pronzini**

**July 2010**

**Forge**

The three partners in the detective agency founded by the Nameless Detective undertake three separate cases, each exhibiting a common characteristic: betrayal. In alternating chapters, each case is developed until solved, whether the driving force is personal (in the case of Tamara), involves a child (Runyon) or the elderly (Nameless).

Tamara's case begins as something personal, but evolves into something deeper as she learns more about a sometime lover. It appears he and his mother are con artists bilking gullible marks for phony charities.

Runyon's assignment is to find a bail jumper, which leads to finding a different kind of betrayal, pitting brother against brother and husband against wife. Nameless takes on a pro bono case in which an old woman is being harassed, possibly to force her out of her home so her relative can gain access to funds from its sale, and, more importantly, when Nameless returns home to discover his adopted daughter has a secret which leads him to yet another ugly situation.

The Nameless Detective series began in 1966 and now constitutes 34 novels and three short story collections, and is said to be the longest running of its kind. This novel easily could have been three separate short stories, comprising equally entertaining, classic private eye fiction, but is well written and splendid in its present form nonetheless.

Theodore Feit

## **BLACK BEANS & VICE**

**J. B. Stanley**

**2010**

**Midnight Ink**

Most of the book is about James Henry's life in the small town of Quincy's Gap, where he is the Head Librarian for the Shenandoah County Library, and about his relationship with his son, Eliot, 4, and former wife, Jane, his father Jackson and stepmother, and his co-workers, as well as the Supper Club members.

Although two murders occur, the Supper Club doesn't get into high gear until the last quarter of the book when they pool their food and their ideas to solve the crime. The other members of the club include Lucy Hanover, Sheriff's Deputy; Bennett, Gillian, and Lindy Perez.

Some of the members of the Supper Club are trying to lose weight, so they sign up with a hypnotist, Harmony. Lindy's old boyfriend has reappeared; James' four-year old son wants to be a vegetarian after watching a show on TV; an old girlfriend Murphy Alastair has just bought the local newspaper and moved back to town; and vegetarian protestors are on the march.

Lots of things are going on, and lots of people are introduced, most of whom we have met in previous books. Small town life with familiar characters are the strength of this book and series. In this story two people die of apparent heart attacks, but we know differently, and so does the Supper Club..

A wonderful group of people, and it makes you want to move to Quincy's Gap. Beware--a lot of food is eaten and discussed in the story. Each chapter is named after a food, and the sugar grams are listed. Several recipes in back.

Gay Toltl Kinman

**BURY YOUR DEAD**

**Louise Penny**

**October 2010**

**Minotaur Books**

There had been a major hostage incident, and Gamache is in Quebec City from his role. He is dealing with both physical and mental trauma. For those readers who complain that Gamache is too perfect, his part in this incident can be used to argue either side of that case.

Of course Gamache can't be in a book and not be investigating a murder. A man has been found dead in the basement of the Literary and Historical Society, that houses literature and history of the English in Quebec.

The man is a notorious fanatic, ever searching for the burial place of Samuel de Champlain. While Gamache gets involved in finding the murderer, he also becomes very interested in the mystery of where Champlain is buried.

Inspector Jean Guy Beauvoir has been sent to Three Pines, much against his will. He, too, has wounds from the hostage incident. His job, assigned to him by Gamache, is to go back to reinvestigate the murder case against Olivier for killing the Hermit, Jakob. Beauvoir is to look at the case from the angle that Olivier did NOT commit the murder. Beauvoir is, as readers of previous books will know, not at all comfortable in Three Pines or with the inhabitants thereof.

The pace of Beauvoir's investigation is sure and steady, much like Beauvoir. Gamache's investigations into the murder and into the Champlain mystery are also fairly slow, unhurried. The tension, the suspense, comes from the hostage situation story. This is told in a series of flashbacks, the voice in Gamache's head that won't leave him alone. Penny starts this off slowly but by the end of the book the suspense is almost unbearable.

BURY YOUR DEAD is a complex, multi-layered novel. Characters continue to grow and change, as circumstances would direct. Penny has a wonderful sense for setting, for atmosphere, and this talent is displayed to great effect in her descriptions of Quebec City. The history of Champlain is complicated; Penny feeds us details slowly and deliciously without anything resembling a data dump. She also conveys to the reader, in each book and over the span of the series, that evil can, and does, live anywhere. The most idyllic seeming spot contains a blemish; the purest emotion can be the darkest.

PJ Coldren

**CEMETERY ROAD**

**Gar Anthony Haywood**

**2010**

**Severn House Publishers**

The now famous Thomas Wolfe phrase “you can’t go home again” sits at the heart of CEMETERY ROAD. It’s a thoughtful meditation on friends, family, guilt, memory, loyalty and truth. Given the power of the exploration of these themes maybe I should have capitalized each of them.

In the folly of their youthful impetuosity Handy and his friends commit a crime that has horrible consequences. It results in loss of life and the breaking up of their fellowship. Handy leaves town and becomes a repairman, fixing electronics and appliances, having a natural ability to diagnose and repair machines. But Handy himself is broken in many ways and his skills as a repairman fail to serve him well with his own self. This sense that something is amiss and the need to fix it lies at the heart of his investigation into the suspicious death of one of his friends. The pull of redemption for the acts committed years ago is so great that it provides the drive for the investigation. This is a man who wants to be saved or is willing to die trying. Which if you think about it is a really interesting kind of desperation.

Handy is a brilliantly conceived character with a broken heart that aches with humanity. The crime from their past is genuinely horrific and the reader feels the burden that Handy carries with him when the fullness of it is revealed.

CEMETERY ROAD is a contender for one of the best books I’ve read this year.

Jen Forbus

## **CUBA: MY REVOLUTION**

**Inverna Lockpez & Dean Haspel**

**2010**

**Vertigo**

This novelization of Inverna Lockpez’s early life in Cuba is spectacular. Beginning with the fall of Batista’s government on New Year’s Eve 1958, this trio of talent walks the reader through a very personal tale. “Sonya” is a young girl from a privileged background whose desire for a new government for and of the people finds her enthusiastically joining the Castro movement. The promise of equality soon evolves into a world of sacrifice for country.

Lockpez’s honest look back towards an ideological soul who lived two lives in an effort to help heal and grow her country will astound you. With the art provided by Haspel you will grow alongside this young woman in a world gone both mad and cynically wrong.

Haspel’s (The Alcoholic) ability to strip narrative with art in so bare it hides nothing from the reader once again makes for a read sure to appeal to any Vertigo fan. A look at the history of Cuba in the late fifties and well into the sixties of the last century adds volumes to this graphic novel.

This is a not to missed tale of history and recall.

Ruth Jordan

## **COLOURFUL DEATH**

**Carola Dunn**

**2010**

**Minotaur**

Prolific author Dunn has another series "A Cornish Mystery" of which this is the second book. Think Miss Marple in Cornwall.

Set in the 1960s in fictional Port Mabyon, Eleanor Trewynn is enjoying retirement with Westie dog Teazel, who plays a part in the story, but not a sleuthing one. Eleanor has picked up Nicholas Gresham, an artist, from the train station after his successful foray to London where he placed two paintings with a reputable art dealer. When they enter Gresham's shop in Port Mabyon, he finds his paintings there slashed and immediately suspects Geoffrey Monmouth, a fellow artist. He thinks the man damaged them in a fit of jealousy when he heard about Nick's good fortune in London. Eleanor drives him to Monmouth's place. They find him dead. Monmouth's girlfriend, Stella Maris, says she saw Nick stab Monmouth, even though Eleanor says he didn't, but the police believe Stella.

They spend considerable time in the local police station while all the statements of all the witnesses are taken, but the day ends with Nick spending the night there. Since Eleanor knows he didn't do it, she works the local populace for tidbits of information and gossip. Her niece is DS Megan Pencarrow, part of the investigation team, and some of the story is told from her POV, but mostly from Eleanor's.

Gay Toltl Kinman

**A CUP OF JO**

**Sandra Balzo**

**2010**

**Severn House**

A Maggy Thorsen Mystery. She and her partner Sarah Kingston have moved their coffee house to the new terminal on the Brookhills-Milwaukee commuter train line. It's opening day and Maggy has arranged a spectacular eye-catcher.

As the cameras roll, from the inflated saucer and cup on top of their shop, out tumbles a body--JoLynne. Her husband arranged for the display, so he's the first to be hauled off to the pokey, followed up by Maggy's boyfriend, Sheriff Jake Pavlik, also rumored to be having an affair with Jo.

There is more going on in the story as Maggy picks up clues and tries to exonerate Jake on one hand, and get him out of her life on the other.

A few more complications arise, such as comments by Jo's sister, Rebecca, who implicates another bigwig in the County government in Jo's extra-marital affairs. Then there's the drug dealing, and a mime who isn't Norwegian, and a woman who cleans her house with a toothbrush-shiv. Maggy tries to solve the murder by discussing the case with her sheepdog Frank--with her boyfriend in jail, what's a girl to do?.

A fun book--the sixth in the series.

Gay Toltl Kinman

**CUT AND RUN**

**Matt Hilton**

**2010**

**Hodder & Stoughton**

Joe Hunter is back and things are about to get a little messier. As CUT AND RUN opens author Matt Hilton is quick to grab the reader's attention. A girl has been killed. Cruelly. Two police officers come to question Joe in Tampa and then.. bam.. they're gone. Vaporized.

Crime comes in a variety of styles and Hilton is one of my favorite new voices. Joe Hunter is an amazing lead. Isolated, tough and resilient Hunter isn't afraid to break the rules to get to the truth.

Who killed these police and why? Every good lead has a great nemesis. Enter Luke Rickard. What follows is an international cat and mouse game where the stakes are high and the thrills roll off Hilton's pen.

Fans of Reacher, Scarecrow and Joe Pike can rejoice. There's a new kid in town & he'll captivate you; one read at a time.

Ruth Jordan

**CUT, PASTE, KILL**

**Marshall Karp**

**June, 2010**

**Minotaur Books**

A woman, the wife of the British consul in Los Angeles, is found stabbed to death in the ladies room of a posh hotel. A scrapbook recalling her transgression, killing a young boy leaving a school bus while DWI, lays nearby. Lomax and Biggs, the comic LAPD homicide detectives, catch the call. Then they learn that the FBI has been investigating two other murders with identical MO's for the previous two weeks. Each victim was guilty of some offense but had escaped punishment for one reason or another. And we have the makings of another serial murder mystery.

Additional murders take place, and the wisecracking detectives, teamed up with the FBI, are hard-pressed to solve the case. Meanwhile, Lomax and his girlfriend are pre-occupied with caring for a precocious seven-year-old girl when her mother has to go to China to tend to her dying parent, and Biggs volunteers to write a screenplay based on a concept of Lomax' dad (two ex-cops driving an 18-wheeler and solving crimes on the road, entitled "Semi-Justice").

Not only is the humor twisted, but so is the plot, which keeps the reader twisting with every unanticipated turn in the story. The one-liners come often enough to take the hard edge off a grisly subject and a detailed police procedural. A welcome addition to the series, in which this is the fourth entry.

Theodore Feit

### **THE DAMAGE DONE**

**Hilary Davidson**

**2010**

**Forge**

One of the best debuts I've read in years, **THE DAMAGE DONE** is so good it makes me wonder why Davidson waited so long to write a novel.

Lily Moore is a travel writer (like Davidson herself) who has taken time off and is essentially hiding out in Spain. What she is getting away from is her sister who has hit new heights in being a pain in the ass. Her getaway is cut short when she gets news that her sister Claudia is dead, an apparent suicide.

Upon returning home Lily discovers that the body was not that of her sister, but an imposter who has been posing as Claudia. Is Claudia dead or alive? And who killed the imposter and why? Lily needs to find out and along the way she discovers some disturbing things about her ex-fiancé. Looking into this has brought her to someone else's attention as well.

Davidson does an outstanding job of building suspense and creating tension. Her characters are believable and at no point did I find myself not believing every word. I can't wait to read the next book.

Jon Jordan

### **A DARKER SHADE OF BLUE**

**John Harvey**

**June, 2010**

**CA: Arrow Books, UK: Wm. Heinemann**

[This book is only available in/through the UK and Canada at this time]

Of the 18 short stories in this collection, four feature Charlie Resnick, seven north London detective Jack Kiley, and one in which they both appear. Each, of course, is a well-known protagonist featured in prior John Harvey novels. And their characters come through even more strongly in a short story.

As Mr. Harvey writes in an introduction, the short story form gives an author greater latitude to experiment with an idea or character to learn whether or not use can be made later in the novel format. The extremely well-written, well-constructed short stories are a prime example of that observation.

Not lost in the shuffle is Harvey's fascination with the world of jazz, nor his descriptions of London and outlying areas, especially the more depressing aspects of English life and the world of crime.

Theodore Feit

### **THE DEAD LIE DOWN**

**Sophie Hannah**

**2010**

**Penguin**

The newest book by Sophie Hannah concerns itself with obsession and revenge, and consists in large part of enigma piled upon enigma. Reading the first twenty or thirty pages, one thing seems abundantly clear: Ruth Bussey is one very strange woman. In the opening pages, she and her boss/lover, Aiden, have each decided to share one stunning secret from his/her past with the other, after which no questions will be asked. Ruth's is almost impossible for her to speak about, literally. Their relationship is an odd one, to say the least: although love has been declared, and neither is a virgin, they remain chaste. The one essential, it seems, is that much of what each knows about the other is a lie.

But Ruth's is not the only odd, and chaste, relationship, Sergeant Charlotte "Charlie" Zailer, ex-CID currently working with the Culver Valley Police, and her fiancé DC Simon Waterhouse, both making a return appearance here, being the other. But dysfunctional connections, familial and otherwise, abound in this novel. Charlie's

back-story is not gone into in any detail, except that is clear that yet another past relationship nearly ruined her life, and severely damaged her career. Simon's career is here regularly threatened as well.

These characters come together when Ruth seeks out Charlie, to whom she is a stranger, to tell her that Aiden has told her that he has killed a woman, a woman Ruth knows to be quite alive. Beyond that, the salient story lines take a lot of patience on the part of the reader, or it did this one at the least. It takes a couple of hundred pages before any part of the intricate and convoluted plot makes any sense, and another hundred or so before any clarity takes place. There are several twists and turns, and shocking revelations, along the way.

Gloria Feit

## **DEAD LINE**

**Stella Rimington**

**2010**

**Alfred A. Knopf**

In the newest entry in one of the better contemporary spy series, highlighting the activities of Liz Carlyle and her co-workers at Britain's MI5, "Dead Line" focuses on the Mideast situation. A conference is scheduled in Scotland for talks between the heads of Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, Iran and Israel. And naturally, intelligence information indicates there will be an attempt at a violent disruption of the conference, blame to be placed on Syria.

And once again it is Liz to the rescue, chasing after all sorts of clues, false and true, relying more on her own instinct than on real intelligence-gathering. That is not to say that a real look at the intelligence apparatus is not provided by the author, who was the first woman to serve as Director General of MI5. MI5, MI6, and the CIA are all involved, along with various security forces, including the Secret Service, and local police guarding the Scottish resort where the meeting is to be held.

Written with a sure knowledge of the subject, the plot is a lot different from the standard spy story, all to the good. The characterizations are vivid, and the prose flows.

Theodore Feit

## **A DEADLY ROW**

**Casey Mayes**

**September 2010**

**Berkley Prime Crime**

Savannah Stone is enjoying her retirement. Her husband Zach has retired, a bullet to the chest disabling him enough that he can no longer be the police chief in Charlotte, NC. Savannah is a former math teacher, and spends her time now creating the math and logic puzzles in your local paper. These two careers, his and hers, overlap when Zach is asked to come back to Charlotte because his friend an former boss has been threatened, and people connected to this friend/boss have been murdered.

The killer plants subtle clues, clues that mean something to Savannah and don't make sense to the rest of the people working the case. Savannah is disturbed when the killer makes it quite obvious that he knows more about her family than either she or Zach realize.

A DEADLY ROW is well plotted. The red herrings are carefully placed, and draw the reader down some convincing blind alleys. Savannah is a mature woman, in both obvious senses of the word; this can be refreshing in that she brings her life experience to bear on the case. Fans of traditional mystery, or police procedurals with a cozy bent, will be looking for more from Savannah, and from Casey Mayes.

P.J. Coldren

## **DEATH WATCH**

**Jim Kelly**

**2010**

**Minotaur Books**

As far as British mysteries are concerned, this novel is as far out as they go. An 18-year-old case is combined with contemporary mysteries to befuddle the best of detectives, giving DI Peter Shaw and DS George Valentine plenty to chew on, as well as keeping the reader intrigued.

That eighteen-year-old case involved a pregnant 15-year-old girl who disappeared and whose body was never found. However, her twin brother "feels" her death. Two suspects still live on the street where she had lived with her family. Now the charred remains of the brother are found in a hospital incinerator where he was employed to feed waste. The ensuing investigation uncovers other discrepancies at the hospital and it is up to the two detectives to solve the crimes before any more deaths occur.

It is a complex puzzle that faces the police team, one that requires a combination of insight and forensic science. At the same time, Shaw and Valentine are haunted by the botched murder investigation of the young girl, following which Peter's father was virtually drummed off the force. Written with power and a profundity that keeps the reader guessing.

Theodore Feit

## **DEVoured**

**Denise Meredith**

**Nov 2010**

**Minotaur**

This has been a good year for debut authors and Meredith is now on my list of writers to keep an eye on. If this debut is any indication, we are in for a long run of entertaining and thoughtful books.

DEVoured is set in London of 1856 and our main characters are Adolphus Hatton and his assistant Albert Roumonde. They run the morgue and are also some of the first in the new field of forensics. When one of societies upper echelon is murdered they become a vital part of tracking the murderer. Lady Bessingham is caught up in a craze of people collecting specimens and artifacts from faraway lands, in her case, Africa. Secrets, strange customs and a whole new world making its first strides towards no longer being confined to one place, Hatton and Roumonde are walking in uncharted territory in more ways than one.

Dark, creepy and fascinating DEVoured is a book that lingers long after the reading is done.

Jon Jordan

## **DEXTER IS DELICIOUS**

**Jeff Lindsay**

**2010**

**Doubleday**

I've been a fan of this series long before it was on TV. The character is fascinating and unique. I do watch Dexter on DVD every time a new season comes out and I love them, but the books for me are the real meat and potatoes. The plots aren't following where the TV show is going and the ride in print is much more intense.

In DEXTER IS DELICIOUS our anti-hero is going through some changes and his urges have become less pressing. When a case of a missing girl hits his radar Dexter finds himself going up against a group of people committing evil acts together. They may also be eating people together. Is Dexter next on the menu? Will our favorite blood splatter analyst be able to shut down this weirdo picnic? I think we can be sure Dexter will come out the other side before we begin, but who cares? This is definitely a case where the ride is more important than the destination.

Lindsay is what brings this to life; his wit and Bizarre sense of humor really make this work. Strong plotting and the ability to make the reader think on new levels make this a special series, and DEXTER IS DELICIOUS my favorite in the series to date.

Jon Jordan

## **DRIVEN TO INK**

**Karen E. Olson**

**2010**

**Obsidian**

Brett Kavanaugh is a tattoo artist, owner of The Painted Lady, in the Venetian Hotel in Las Vegas. This story involves the Dean Martin look-and-sound alike who make a wedding chapel so appealing. Brett can't stay out of trouble, no matter how hard she tries, and she does! All she did was loan her car to Sylvia Coleman, mother of a fellow tattoo artist (and competitor), Jeff, for her wedding with Bernie Applebaum at the drive-in chapel

where all the Dean Martin-look-alikes sing. But there's more to Sylvia's story, which she hasn't told Brett or her son Jeff.

How does Brett get into trouble by being a nice person? When she opens the trunk of her car after the wedding, there is a dead body in it. Then bride and groom are missing. Her twin brother, who's a member of the LVPD, is on her case.

Things get even worse. Some shots, some car run-ins-- and all she was doing was trying to be nice, while minding her own business.

A fun read--as was "The Missing Ink." Brett is a comedic character, a bright and caring person, not expecting to be blind-sided by life. But she is! It's just one catastrophe after another for Brett, even though the reader is laughing, Sorry, Brett!

If you've been to Las Vegas, you know everything in this book could happen.

Gay Tolti Kinman

## **THE EMERALD CAT KILLER**

**Richard A. Lupoff**

**2010**

**Minotaur**

Book ten in the Lindsey/Plum series is also the last. It's both sad and happy. It's cool that such a fun series goes out on a high note, but it also kinda sucks because books this good make you want more.

Bart Lindsey has retired from International Surety, happy in retirement from insurance investigation. He is drawn back in for one last case by his former boss, and it's not a love for his boss that makes him come back to the job, but the case. A book has fostered a lawsuit. THE EMERALD CAT KILLER is being published by a Bay area publisher and another publisher claims it is a lost manuscript of an author murdered in an unsolved case. Lindsey is once again crossing paths with Marvia Plum who is now a Berkeley police lieutenant. It's a no brainer that if they find the original, if it exists, that the person who has it either is the killer or knows who is. It all leads to a merry chase in the city by the bay.

This book was a lot of fun for me on a lot of levels. I loved all the book stuff, I loved the classic hardboiled feel to it, and I love the caper feel it had. Lupoff writes characters that you want to either hang out with or punch, but they all feel real. Great story, great plot, awesome ending to a really classic series.

Jon Jordan

## **ENTANGLEMENT**

**Zygmunt Miłoszewski**

**2010**

**Bitter Lemon Press**

This is not your average crime fiction book. The title implies more that the entanglements the characters have with each other. It implies how readers will become involved with this book. The lead, Warsaw prosecutor Teodor Szacki, is strong, flawed and driven. The plot resembles what its like to go off the beaten path in a dense forest. You don't know where you are and have to use cunning to find your way out. And that can be a glorious thing

It is said that ignorance is bliss. In the case of a man found skewered through the eye after rushing off from an intense therapy group, ignorance is safety. The moment Teodar Szacki takes more than a lingering interest in this murder; forces to be reckoned with are watching everything he does. Psychoanalyst Cezary Rudzki is tries a controversial technique with his therapy group in a special retreat at a monastery. The Family Constellation approach features different people representing relatives of a particular participant. Henryk Telak is found the morning after a rough session skewered. Talek quickly uncovers his heartbreaking history. A daughter committed suicide and the remaining son is terminally ill. To Szacki this suggests that a fellow patient took the role-playing too far and committed the murder in therapy created rage. Threats against his life and an almost constant tail have Szacki wondering what lies beneath the tragedy.

This is not a simple story. The book unfolds in beautiful layers, drawing the reader into the story and into the mind of the lead, the excellently written Szacki. Mere words in a review can't relate how well written this book is. Miłoszewski has the skill to leave a few threads dangling into the unknown to whet the appetite for the next installment.

When the reader forgets that they are reading, the book is well done. This book is exceptional.

Jennifer Jordan

## **FORBIDDEN FRUIT**

**Kerry Greenwood**

**2010**

**Poisoned Pen Press**

It is the Christmas season in Melbourne, Australia and a stifling heat wave bakes the city as Corinna Chapman operates her bakery, Earthly Delights. Corinna detests the season, along with the shopping, the crowds and the festival. Mixed in with making bread and rolls and other tasty goods in a Corinna Chapman novel, of which this is the fifth, there is always a mystery to be unraveled.

It is left to Corinna and her sabra [Israeli born] lover, Daniel, to find two missing teenagers, one of whom is a 16-year-old pregnant girl, assisted by all sorts of characters including a strange bunch of "freegans," vegetarians who proclaim to be free souls. Thus we have the setting of a modern-day manger story, along with a stray donkey and assorted other animals.

Throw in carolers who sing of cooler temperatures and violent actions, and a sinister religious cult, together with a wild chase scene, and you have the makings of another fine story from the author who also has given us the charming Phryne Fisher series.

Theodore Feit

## **FROM AWAY**

**David Carkeet**

**2010**

**Overlook**

David Carkeet's FROM AWAY is one of the more interesting crime novels I've read this year. I call it a crime novel (and it is one) because solving the mystery, to the extent there is one, isn't the thing but some of the crimes that we are talking about here are on a much smaller scale including a car accident, a case of mistaken/assumed identity and a foiled murder plot of sorts. The cast of quirky characters is almost a North East US version of the residents of Cicely, Alaska and the Vermont small town where everyone knows everyone else's business is as much a character as the characters are. This is a novel written as much for laughs as any other reason and is largely successful because of the main character.

It's been said in other reviews of FROM AWAY so I won't spend too much time on the observation, but Denny Braintree is a literary descendent of Ignatius C. Reilly from A CONFEDERACY OF DUNCES. Denny is many things, arrogant and a fool among them. He takes on a sour disposition simply because it annoys people. The character is hypnotic and a joy to read.

Denny is a writer for a train hobbyist publication and carries a certain eye for specificity, detail and background that, in the eyes of others – including other hobbyists and his editor – when covering the layouts of others. The creation of his own train displays borders on the obsessive. Before a character can be placed in a scene, for example, the entire back story and history must be known. Other hobbyists, who are unable to answer probing questions about what to them is probably the most innocuous part of their layout, are inferior to the superior intellect and design building skills that Denny believes he possesses.

Give FROM AWAY a try, you'll enjoy the characters, the story and the locale and keep an eye out for an added layer to the story.

## **FUNDRAISING FOR THE DEAD**

**Sheila Connolly**

**2010**

**Berkley Prime Crime**

At the Antiquarian Society in Philadelphia, Nell Pratt is in charge of FUNDRAISING. A donor and board member, Marty Terwilliger, confides to her that she can't find some papers that she had given the library. Nell feels her eyes cross as she is in the midst of a big fundraiser, and now is not the time to be traipsing around in the stacks in her high heels. It's not a frivolous promise to Marty, but she tells her she will meet her in the morning and they will look into the matter.

She makes a quick trip to Alfred Findley who is in charge of the collections. He tells her what she doesn't want to hear--lots of things are missing and he's putting together a list.

Nell shows up on time the next morning for her meeting with Marty, and finds Alfred dead. At first it looks like an accident, but events don't jibe.

Alfred did do the list and put it on her desk. As she peruses it, she realizes she's looking at millions of dollars in losses.

More dilemmas surface. If they go public, their donations will dry up. Who will give them their precious historical papers with letters signed by Benjamin Franklin, or even any money if they are lax enough to lose valuable papers they already have.

Director (and Nell's lover) Charles Elliot Worthington wants to keep everything under wraps until they know the lay of the land. Someone with inside knowledge is taking the items and only the good things.

How to find out who before anything else disappears, and before anyone else is murdered? A real dilemma, but feisty Marty has a few suggestions, one of which is that Nell go undercover (not with Charles!)

Gay Toltl Kinman

## **THE GLASS RAINBOW**

**James Lee Burke**

**2010**

**Simon & Schuster / Orion**

From the first page of his shattering new novel, James Lee Burke's gorgeous prose enfolds the reader, who cannot help but be enthralled, to the extent that one finds oneself wishing that the book could just go on forever. Or at least that was my own feeling, so completely was I under the author's spell. And when the stunning conclusion does come, that sentiment was only reinforced.

It is nothing new to say that James Lee Burke's writing includes perfectly drawn portraits of even minor characters, as well as lush descriptions of the Louisiana of his and his protagonist's birth. In this case, he also brings to life the history of the area, in its plantation society, pre-Emancipation days, primarily through two of its characters. One is Kermit Abelard, the scion of the wealthy Abelard family, with its historical New Orleans prominence, who has been romancing Dave's adopted daughter, Alafair, as the novel opens. Dave objects to the liaison, mostly because of the large difference in age, as well as his suspicions about the family and its morality, or lack thereof; another aspect is the relationship between Kermit and Robert Weingart, an oft-convicted felon whose part in Kermit's life is of questionable motive and definition. Robert has become a celebrated author as well, and that in turn plays a part in the two men's influence on Alafair, herself an aspiring novelist.

The other old-Louisiana player is Layton Blanchet, a millionaire who hires Clete Purcell, Dave's life-long friend from their days with the New Orleans P.D., now working as a P.I., to find out who his wife, as he suspects, is sleeping with. Clete plays a major part in this book, where we find him going through suicidal and homicidal rages, as indeed Dave does as well.

The tale begins when Dave, a New Iberia sheriff's detective working on his own time after the rape and murder of seven women, all very young, black and poor, visits a penal work gang outside Natchez, Mississippi to interview a man whose young sister is among the victims, and who claims he knows the identity of the killer. When that man is himself murdered, and the body of another young girl is discovered, Dave and Clete decide that since the deaths of young black girls is likely to go uninvestigated if they don't do the investigating themselves, they chart a course which endangers their lives and those of Alafair and Dave's wife, Molly, among others. More killings follow, and motives are obscure at best. And we are told that no matter the jeopardy in which Dave and Clete are placed, as Clete is fond of saying, "the Bobbsey twins from Homicide are forever." Their friendship goes back more than three decades; both men still are haunted by flashbacks from Vietnam; they have both gone from New Orleans patrolmen to detectives, and their loyalty to each other is boundless. Neither is the reader immune to their goodness and charm, and we must profoundly hope that the Bobbsey twins from Homicide do indeed go on forever.

Gloria Feit

## **ICE COLD**

**Tess Gerritsen**

**2010**

## **Ballantine**

In the eighth book of the Rizzoli & Isles series, Maura Isles heads west to Wyoming for a medical conference. Leaving Daniel, her not-so-secret lover, behind in Boston on bad terms, Maura decides to be adventurous when she meets up with her old college pal, Doug. She joins Doug, his two friends and his daughter on a ski trip. However, extreme weather conditions strand them in an isolated area and the group goes looking for help. They find a small community where it appears that everyone just picked up and left: windows are open, pets frozen out in the snow, food left on dinner plates at kitchen tables. The travelers only thought they were having a bad day until they found their way to Kingdom Come. Maura Isles' adventure has only just begun.

Gerritsen has a gift when it comes to developing suspense. ICE COLD is a layered plot, but the reader can't see the layers until the very end when Gerritsen has carefully unfolded them all. It's very much like driving on a constantly curving road. You know a curve is coming up, but you have no ability to see what's on the other side until you're right in the midst of it. Another component that makes this novel so rich is depth of conflict.

Gerritsen doesn't overlook any opportunity for conflict, but on top of that the conflicts start conflicting with themselves. Doug's conflict with himself runs smack into his conflict with nature AND with others. All of the conflicts have to interact for the end result to be possible. That complexity works to heighten the suspense. Gerritsen does an outstanding job of bringing out the supporting cast and making them as essential to the plot as Jane and Maura. The reader connects with them as much if not more so than Jane and Maura because they aren't flat images in the story. They have depth and dimension; they are vital to the plot and aren't interchangeable.

ICE COLD goes beyond the title; it functions as a theme throughout and has meaning on many different levels of the book. Gerritsen weaves it into the plot as well as characterization and even into the relationships among characters. The one place ICE COLD didn't manage to reach, however, was to me the reader. This book was HOT, and I could not put it down. It comes with my highest recommendation.

Jen Forbus

## **INNOCENT MONSTER**

**Reed Farrel Coleman**

**October, 2010**

**Tyrus Books**

When an author writes a book that lays waste to all that has come before in a series it is with baited breath that a fan waits for the next book; so was EMPTY EVER AFTER. It will come as no surprise to those who have read Mr. Coleman before that Moe Prager comes to the pages of INNOCENT MONSTER ready to start again. Much has happened in the last seven years. Moe finds himself once again alone and without a P.I. business. His daughter, Sarah comes to him for help. A child is missing. Can Moe find her?

so begins this next chapter in Prager's life and our reading. Sashi Bluntstone is a child protégé. Is she missing? Dead? Everything that has come before will lead Moe through a hypocritical art world and towards a new beginning.

For readers who are fans of the word there is no better book out there this fall. Sparse with his usage and long with his meaning, Coleman has a peerless style in the Crime Fiction Genre.

Ruth Jordan

## **JUNKYARD DOGS**

**Craig Johnson**

**2010**

**Viking**

Walt Longmire is back in Absaroka County with his band of not-so-merry deputies. Santiago is still suffering post-traumatic stress disorder and now his newborn son is adding some colic to the stress. And Vic, well Vic is never very merry but she wants to move out of her trailer and buy a house. Meanwhile, Walt is trying to keep the peace between the wealthy Durant citizen Ozzie Dobbs and his neighbor, Geo Stewart, the junkyard owner. If their feuding doesn't drive Walt mad, then the startling affair, the frozen thumb, the not-so-bright Duane Stewart, or those Junkyard Dogs just might. All Walt wants for Valentine's Day is peace in Absaroka. JUNKYARD DOGS is Johnson's sixth book in the Walt Longmire series, and Johnson's showing no signs of growing stale. While his main staple of characters stays true to themselves, they also grow from their

experiences and interactions with each other. JUNKYARD DOGS reflects the toll the first five books have taken on the characters as Walt pays a visit to an ophthalmologist to correct an eye injury from a previous plot and Santiago tells Walt he's handing in his badge and returning to corrections.

There's a comfort in knowing that regardless of what she goes through, we're still going to get plenty of piss and vinegar from Vic. Readers always know something is coming from Vic, but just what that something is is the great surprise.

Johnson's cast of characters is unmatched and keeps me coming back to Absaroka book after book. And their adventures are just as strong. The unique blend of hilarious ridiculousness with the insightful glimpses into human nature make the plots simultaneously entertaining and enriching.

I may be starting to sound like a broken record, but Craig Johnson never fails to make me laugh till my sides hurt, make me cry while my heart hurts and at the last page leave me aching until Walt and company return. JUNKYARD DOGS is another solid contribution to this outstanding crime fiction series.

Jen Forbus

## **KILLER COUNTRY**

**Mike Nicol**

**2010**

**Old Street Thrillers**

An author of some renown in his native South Africa, Mike Nicol's KILLER COUNTRY, the sequel to PAYBACK, is hard hitting. The writing is terse, clean and strong. The story is brutal. Nicol humanizes his hard man, Mace Bishop, in a way that gets the reader very involved very fast. But no one would envy him this storyline.

Bishop and his partner, Pylon Buso, run a security agency after have run guns for the many revolts that go on in the Dark Continent. That past, which is dodgy at best, is very much creeping up from behind in the form of the sultry and twisted Sheemina February. Lawyer February is paired with a mover and shaker par excellence in Obed Choco. Choco aims to buy up and sell off anything he can get his hands on with occasional loss of human life more than acceptable collateral damage. On Choco's behest, February hires two hit men to do their mutual bidding in a deadly road trip in which the two very mismatched men take down their prey without a flinch. But the smooth and fastidious German assassin, Spitz, made a mistake. He leaves his iPod, filled with the soundtrack that has played in his ears as he's killed, on the stoop of a house with two victims inside. Buso is the one to find it, marveling at Spitz's fantastic taste in music. His soundtrack becomes that of Buso and Bishop as they hunt him down.

But February is playing for stakes that go well beyond the monetary. She redefines the term "grudge match" and Bishop falls prey more than once to her vicious machinations. The price he will ultimately pay is beyond anything he can imagine.

Nicol's sparse writing style suits this stripped down, bare-knuckle story perfectly. Or should I say stories. There are many motives at play and only two men facing multiple bad guys. The men involved would kill and be done with it. But Sheemina February, an epic villainess, likes to play with her prey before she kills. And she is far from done playing with Mace Bishop. She won't be done until he has felt the level of pain and desperation she has felt. And by the end of this novel, he may have reached that point. Careful when reading this book. It has claws and it will scratch. And it is fine. Mighty fine.

Jennifer Jordan

## **THE LAST RUN**

**A QUEEN & COUNTRY NOVEL**

**Greg Rucka**

**October, 2010**

**Bantam**

Tara Chace. Spy. Weapon. Mother. She's come a long way since Rucka first wrote the character and now she's ready to be taken out of the action.

As THE LAST RUN opens Tara is requesting a transfer from the front lines to operations. But first..... there's an extraction. An intelligence source from the days of the Cold War wants to come in from the cold. Chace is in charge.

Things go spectacularly wrong. A wounded Chace tromps across Iran trying to get to safety before her luck and her life run out... Will it be a happy ending or just the end. Rucka has breathed life into this character and this narrative for close to a decade . With THE LAST RUN he gives fans a little piece of non stop adventure that we'll remember for a long, long time.  
Ruth Jordan

**LIVE TO TELL**  
**Lisa Gardner**  
**2010**  
**Bantam Books**

Whatever the cause, whether child abuse, a traumatic experience or some other reason, the event can manifest itself in the personality and behavior of a child, or in his or her later life. And various examples are exhibited in this novel, ostensibly a police procedural, but more closely resembling a psychiatric case study. It features hard-boiled, sex-starved D.D. Warren, of the Boston PD, and her team. The first case to arise is the brutal murder of four members of a family and the apparent suicide of the father. At first blush it appears to be a murder-suicide, but as the investigation progresses it seems there is more to the event. Another similar case follows and a common factor appears to be a pediatric psychiatric unit at a Boston hospital, where disturbed children are treated. Other characters include Danielle Burton, a conscientious nurse in the unit who 25 years earlier survived a childhood trauma, being the only survivor in a family massacre. The present-day murders take place within days of the anniversary of that event. Then there is Victoria Oliver, a devoted mother of a troubled son who will do anything to protect him. All the characters interconnect and the past obviously influences the present. Written with zeal and an apparent understanding and sympathy for the underlying theme, the author has not only created an interesting crime story, but also a penetrating look into a vital subject.  
Theodore Feit

**NOBODY'S ANGEL**  
**Jack Clark**  
**2010**  
**Hard Case Crime**

Eddie Miles is a cabdriver working the night shift in the city of Chicago. He doesn't have much of a reaction to the spate of recent killings of local streetwalkers or cabbies, until it becomes personal: He notices a prostitute on a street corner, little more than a child, who he later finds has become the latest victim of the man who has been preying on the working girls. That was bad enough. But when a good friend is the fifth cabbie to be murdered, that does more than just get his attention. In an interesting touch adding authenticity to the tale, each chapter is preceded by one of the Rules promulgated by the Public Vehicle Operations Division of the Chicago Department of Consumer Services. Not that authenticity is lacking in any respect. Indeed, the reader will come away from the book feeling as though he or she could navigate the streets of the town easily, so thorough is the geography provided by the author. And of course he comes by his knowledge legitimately, as the book was written while Mr. Clark was working as a Chicago cabbie. He describes the scene at the after-hours eatery where the cabbies congregate after their shifts, when the streets are populated by "the cops and the cabdrivers, and the drunks heading home," and they share their stories, which become embellished with repetition. The city is laid out for the reader warts and all, with no attempt to hide the more unsavory areas. Indeed, the reader is reminded not infrequently of the areas to which many, if not most, cabdrivers will not even venture for fear of being robbed, or worse. But the protagonist's, and the author's, pride in the Windy City is evident as well. This is noir fiction at its best, with spare, realistic writing, a sympathetic protagonist, and a fast-moving plot.  
Gloria Feit

**ON THE LINE**  
**SJ Rozan**  
**Sept 2010**

## **Minotaur Books**

In ON THE LINE--SJ Rozan's first Bill Smith novel in almost ten years, Bill's life is turned upside down when a nemesis from his past kidnaps Bill's occasional partner, Lydia Chin. Bill must find a series of clues and figure out what they mean if he wants Lydia to survive. Of course, Bill is told not to call the police.

The first clue sends Bill to an abandoned building, where he finds the body of the Chinese-American woman. The good news is that it is not Lydia. The bad news is that the police have been called and now Bill is on the run from said law enforcement. But as bad as things are for Bill, at least he is not alone. He enlists the aid of Lydia's hacker cousin Linus and Linus's employee Trella. With their help, he works to avoid the police while he struggles to not just follow the clues, but to figure out exactly who he is facing and what this person really wants. If the plot sounds familiar, it is likely because we have all come across it numerous times before in both film and literature; but SJ manages to deliver a novel that, even with the clichés of the plot, crackles with energy and emotion. We are fairly certain Lydia is not going to be killed off, but Bill is so overwrought with emotion that one can't help but be concerned. The writing is tight and smart and keeps things moving at a brisk pace without even letting us come up for air.

Every step of the way, Bill seems ready to explode. He is at his darkest here. If most Bill Smith novels are a black cup of coffee, this puppy is shot of espresso, reduced to the strongest essence and more than capable of pushing you over the edge. Bill is barely able to control himself, bubbling with rage--most of which is directed at himself.

The inclusion of Linus is brilliant because he offers up some comic relief. After things have been turned up to ten, Linus allows SJ to bring us back down to catch our breath. It makes those tens all the more thrilling. I hope that Linus and Trella pop up in the future, because they are fantastic characters.

SJ Rozan has never delivered a poor novel, but she is topping herself each time out and, with ON THE LINE, has now established herself as on the masters of the P.I. novel. I can't imagine any fan of the genre considering this anything other than a home run.

Jeremy Lynch

## **AN ORDINARY DECENT CRIMINAL**

**Michael Van Rooy**

**2010**

**St. Martin's Minotaur**

Montgomery Haaviko, a.k.a. Sam Parker, is a recovering drug addict and a former thief. He's moved into a home in Winnipeg with his wife, his infant son, their dog and their mouse. Monty/Sam has vowed to his wife that he will lead a straight life, get a regular job, settle down. However, when Monty catches a band of thieves in the act of robbing his home and the confrontation ends with Monty killing them, he finds this vow a little harder to keep than he thought. The thieves are connected to a small time crime boss and the man who arrests Monty is a dirty cop. Both want to either kill Monty or run him out of town. But Monty is determined to stay in Winnipeg and live the life he planned. Now he just has to figure out how he's going to manage it.

AN ORDINARY DECENT CRIMINAL had an interesting effect on me. When I first started it, I wasn't so sure this was going to be for me. By page ten I was hooked for the long haul. I wanted to know exactly where Van Rooy was going with his plot. By the middle of the book I realized I was thinking about it when I wasn't reading and anxiously waiting to return to it. As I turned the last page I was devastated. I did not want the end to come and found myself hoping there would be more Monty Haaviko from Van Rooy in the future.

AN ORDINARY DECENT CRIMINAL is fresh and different. Monty is a fascinating character and his wife, Claire, compliments him perfectly. Their relationship enhances the plot and provides humor. I think some humor ended up lost on me, but Van Rooy still has plenty up his sleeve for me to appreciate.

I attribute a lot of the "interesting effect" this book had on me to the details. They may seem insignificant, but combined they play a great role in this caper: observations of his son Fred; actions of his dog Renfield; references to crime movies, books and writers; and interaction with his friend Frank. I learned a lot about thieving, booby traps, and weapons.

AN ORDINARY DECENT CRIMINAL is simply a fun read. I look forward to more from Michael Van Rooy.

Jen Forbus

## **THE PARAMOUR'S DAUGHTER**

**Wendy Hornsby**

**2010**

**Perseverance Press**

A Maggie MacGowen Mystery. The book follows "In the Guise of Mercy" timewise, but they don't have to be read in order.

Maggie is accosted, at night, at a Malibu supermarket by a woman who claims to be her mother. Since Maggie knows this can't be true, she chalks the woman up as mentally unstable and has a security guard help her.

Later, when she drives through the nearby intersection, she sees the woman. The next day she hears on the news that there was a hit-and-run death of a woman. What are the chances? Maggie reports what she knows to the Sheriff's Department.

Her mother overhears the conversation and tells Maggie who the woman was. This leads Maggie to the Normandy area in France, where she meets the woman's extended family (possibly from hell) because Maggie is sure the woman was murdered.

"Curiouser and curiouser," she says, when asked, by a friend, how things are there. There's an attempt on Maggie's life also, and it isn't hard for her to figure out the motivation, since money and property are involved.

What she doesn't know is--who.

Intriguing plot, and well written by Edgar-winning Hornsby.

Gay Toltl Kinman

**PIKE**

**Benjamin Whitmer**

**2010**

**Switchblade**

Over at his blog Benjamin Whitmer said that crime fiction is "supposed to be scary". He also says that noir isn't "supposed to be the police procedurals and wisecracking detective serials that dominate the crime shelves" and that they should be something different: "This is nightmare, hunker-down-in-your-soul, how-deep-can-you-dig, release-the-fucking-bats territory."

Benjamin Whitmer makes these tenants Bible truth in his debut novel Pike. With this novel Whitmer announces his presence with a kick to the teeth and he is the real deal.

One of the things that strikes me about Pike is the clarity of the writing. It says what it needs to say in the clearest and most direct way possible. The prose is so clear that it enhances the power of the story. Clearly this is a novel that has been carefully gone over numerous times to make sure there are no snags.

Pike strives for a level of realism in violent actions and weaponry that feels more blunt and powerful when compared to more stylized offerings. There is something almost elemental in the character Pike as if he sprung whole from somewhere other, somewhere more powerful. Pike is possessed of a deliberateness in his actions that adds to this notion of him being more a force than a man – or at least a force of a man. Pike as the titular character is the one we get to know the most. We see from his past that he is not a good guy, at all. But there is this barest hint of something approaching decency at this stage in his life. He's not good, he'll never be good, but there are a couple of facets of him that aren't totally bad.

Pike may just might be the best noir novel that we've seen in years, a true black novel if there ever was one. I won't name names but much of the purported noir class of crime fiction just can't hold a candle to what is on display here, Pike is hardcore and the real deal all others are pale imitators. In a just world Pike will salt the Earth, forcing others to re-examine what can be done with the form.

Jennifer Jordan

**THE QUEEN OF PATPONG**

**Timothy Hallinan**

**August 2010**

**William Morrow**

THE QUEEN OF PATPONG is the fourth book in the Poke Rafferty thriller series, but this is really Rose's story. Rose is Poke's Thai wife and a former prostitute. When a man from Rose's past returns to frighten Rose like nothing has before, she reveals her life story to her family. The revelation convinces Poke that Rose's stranger is back for blood and Poke has to figure out how to defeat him before he destroys Poke's entire family, his entire world.

THE QUEEN OF PATPONG is undoubtedly Hallinan's most amazing effort yet. Rooted in the story of a true Thai child, Rose's story is heart-wrenchingly detailed while Hallinan emphasizes the human element of Bangkok's female prostitutes. Much like the earrings Nana bestows on the young Kwan, to the unknowing, the life can appear rich and glamorous but in reality it slowly and unknowingly harmfully alters those that possess it. Hallinan's rich metaphors dig deep in THE QUEEN OF PATPONG. He parallels the Raffertys' ordeal with Shakespeare's The Tempest, for which Miaow is preparing to play the role of Ariel in her school play. As is often the case in a Poke Rafferty novel, Miaow enlightens her adoptive parents - and readers - with the insights of the unadulterated views of youth. Her spunk and growing pains offer the novel humor and warmth. And her relationships with her parents develop an overall richness to the entire series. Readers can't help but love this feisty little girl.

Once again the sights, sounds, even the smells of Bangkok come alive through Hallinan's words. Dialogue is impeccable. Characters are compelling. And the action is non-stop. Hallinan is a word engineer of the highest degree. He knows the exact combinations and relationships to construct the strongest, the most effective, the most stunning stories. Never experiencing his work is akin to never knowing the great works of nature - the Grand Canyon - or the amazing works of man - the Sistine Chapel. Sure you can live a life without experiencing them, but you're all the richer for it when you do.

Jen Forbus

### **A QUESTION OF BELIEF**

**Donna Leon**

**2010**

**Atlantic Monthly Press**

Leon has another winner in her series featuring Commissario Guido Brunetti with its rich setting of Venice, everyday family life, and the mystery. In this story, his assistant Inspector Lorenzo Vianello's aunt is being bilked out of thousands of Euros; a woman in the City's Hospital is doing strange things with test results; a man is murdered in his own courtyard; and the politicians and high city officials are up to the usual hijinks.

Brunetti always solves the crime, but isn't always able to bring the criminals to justice. As always with Leon, we get a good look at the politics of the city and how things work and don't work, and it's not always a pretty picture, even though it's Venice. But everyone lives with the system that is not the model of efficiency--unless money is involved.

Gay Tolti Kinman

### **THE RED TREE**

**Caitlin R Liernan**

**2010**

**Penguin**

Sarah Crowe is a successful writer with an ominously looming deadline. Her publisher's advance long since spent, she has yet to start her novel. Perhaps the well has run dry.

This book-wrapped-around-a-book begins with an editor's tribute to the late Sarah Crowe and an objective account of a visit to the country farmhouse in Rhode Island where Crowe wrote her last book and ended her life. The ancient oak tree, well over one hundred feet tall, greatly impressed the editor. When she tells the reader that nothing would have induced her to go down into the basement alone, we know that we are in a horror story.

Sarah rents the first floor of a country farmhouse to isolate herself and make a last-ditch attempt to get her novel, if not written, at least started. On a restless exploratory trip to the basement, she discovers the writings of a previous tenant, a suicide who died while researching historic events related to the red tree. Sarah finds these writings unsettling, her precarious mental equilibrium tipping slowly into helpless confusion.

A painter from Los Angeles rents the upstairs, reminding Sarah of her lover Amanda who also committed suicide. Three suicides presented to the reader so soon, and yet Sarah's account of her last days under the spell of the red tree are calm and stubbornly rational. Even knowing that her life will soon end, the reader keeps hoping that she will somehow reach solid ground.

Readers of THE RED TREE may abandon all hope of finding peace and solace in the country.

JoAnna Senger

**REVOLVER**  
**Matt Kindt**  
**2010**  
**Vertigo Comics**

What would you do if the world ended and the next day everything was back to normal? And then back again? If every day you awoke to a different world and you were literally a person of two lives. In one you're a loser. Your job sucks and your boss is a horrible witch. Your girlfriend is a materialistic optimist desperately trying to push you to succeed, when you just don't care. But in the other world, you thrive. You have a purpose. You are one of the last voices to be discovering the truth of the destruction. In a world of death, you start living. What happens when you start to prefer the latter life? What happens when the end of the world is the best thing that could have ever happened to you? This is the situation in Matt Kindt's uber-intriguing **REVOLVER**.

Kindt has been producing brilliant and fascinating independent work for years. Aside from an assorted story for Marvel or Dark Horse, this is his first big mainstream release. Hopefully, it will garner the big time attention it deserves. The story itself is interesting enough. A loser named Sam is living life in two worlds. One where he is a low man on a big totem pole, ignoring his girlfriend and hating his boss. Every night when he goes to sleep he awakes to a dystopian world where he has to fight to survive. As his life in the simple world continues to go nowhere he thrives in the other. He, along with coworkers and friends (in the loosest terms) work to find the truth about what happened to the world. The changes between the two realities converge in his life as he uses experiences in one to get ahead in the other. There are mysteries here to be solved but that is most impressive is the interest you have in Sam and how he interacts in both worlds. His confidence grows in both worlds because he perceives the apocalyptic world as "the other one." It isn't the real one and what he does there couldn't possibly have lasting repercussions. There are no consequences for him, how will he live?

The excellent narration of the story drives the book through the two timelines. Kindt's art is simple but perfect for this "Lost"-like style of story. From the first page you're compelled to read on. You want the answers the end provides but you love the ride to get there. This is evidence of smart storytelling and should set the stage for a long career in independent and mainstream comics for Matt Kindt.

Jo Schmidt

**SAVAGES**  
**Don Winslow**  
**2010**  
**Simon & Schuster**

In the interest of full disclosure, I need to start by saying I am a Don Winslow junkie. It started out innocently enough, **THE DEATH AND LIFE OF BOBBY Z** and **CALIFORNIA FIRE AND LIFE** were quite good and put him on my radar. He slowly reeled me in with **POWER OF THE DOG** and **FRANKIE MACHINE** and totally rocked my world with **THE DAWN PATROL**. At that point, I was completely hooked and begging for more.

**SAVAGES**, Mr. Winslow's latest, centers on very different twenty-something's that have become best friends. Ben is a kind-hearted pacifist with a very green thumb; Chon spent several years in the military serving in both Iraq and Afghanistan and has, as he calls it, Post Traumatic Lack of Stress Disorder. Rounding out the trio is O, a bored upper-middle class Orange County gal that loves both Chon and Ben and is content to spend her time hanging out with them.

Chon and Ben run a very successful marijuana company and produce what is considered to be the best of the best. But the quality of the product has captured the attention of the Baja Cartel and an offer has been made: Sell exclusively to us at a reasonable price, or die horribly.

Ben decides this is an excellent time to retire and offers his remaining product to them. Sounds reasonable enough, but alas, that is not what was requested and the Cartel kidnaps O and makes a counter-offer: work exclusively for us, for two years, and we will release O. Now as this is a crime novel, I think we know that this is not going to happen. Ben and Chon put on the facade of working with them, but also slowly start working to destroy the cartel.

But it is not the story that makes **SAVAGES** one of the best damn novels of the last several years. No, it is the killer writing. The prose is, quite simply, some of the best I have ever read. It is tighter than tight and seems to come from that magical place that fuels the likes of James Ellroy and Ken Bruen. It has been distilled until only

the most important words are there. No fat or filler, just meat. I honestly can't tell you just how many different narratives there are, certainly at least five. But each of them is picture perfect and all of them manage to co-exist without making a mess.

SAVAGES reads like something from the latest young red-hot literary sensation: a fresh, new voice on the scene. That Winslow manages to completely change his language confirms that he is, to borrow a phrase from Deep Purple, a cunning linguist, a master of many tongues. Few authors can completely change their writing voice and make it work. But that is exactly what Don has done here. He has presented a great story and told it in such a way that authors and readers alike can't help but ask, "How the hell did he do that?"

Buy it, read it, love it. I can't see any other reasonable option.

Jeremy Lynch

## **SCOOP TO KILL**

**Wendy Lyn Watson**

**2010**

**Obsidian**

Set in Texas in the small town of Dalliance, heroine Tally (Tallulah) Jones owns the Remember the A-La-Mode ice cream parlor. The book opens as her niece, Alice Marie Anders, a college student, find the body of Brian Campbell at Dickerson University.

There is a lot of academic information, as the victim was a grad student about to receive his M.A., except that one of the three thesis advisors, Dr. Emily Clowper, wouldn't pass him. He filed a suit for sexual harassment against her. Two others, including Dr. Jonas Landry, passed him.

As Tally learns more about Campbell, and it's hard not to because everyone is talking about him and not positively, she wonders if the other two who passed him did it legitimately, for they both have a past.

Tally's former boyfriend in high school, Finn Harper, is an admirer of Emily's, and she respects his judgment. Working in the ice cream store is Kyle Mason, a computer hacker, who is doing some community service for past sins--sort of. Kyle thinks the sun and moon set on Alice, however, Alice only has eyes for Reggie, a Teaching Assistant (T.A.), whom Tally thinks is in the category of men that her ex-husband is in. Despicable, no-good....etc.

Det. Cal McCormack, has an on-off relationship with Tally. He can't work the case because Bryan was his nephew, son of his sister, Marla. A lot of small town relationships and complications and Tally can ferret them out faster than the P.D.

Gay Toltl Kinman

## **A SICKNESS IN THE FAMILY**

**Denise Mina**

**October 2010**

**Vertigo Crime**

With a wealth of dark tales told in novel and graphic novel form under her belt, Denise Mina is more than able to modernize and twist the "Fall of the House of Usher." This is no mere retelling. Mina herself says, "This story came out of King Lear and rollicking house prices in Britain." As with Lear, this family is about to be torn apart. But Mina is not as gentle as Shakespeare.

The Ushers could be most any family as they gather together for the holidays. But as they sit at the table they are passing around more than the mashed potatoes. Ted and Bidy look on as their children rip into each other like Christmas presents. Sam catches the worst of it. As an adopted child, the only adopted child, he is like a third sock.

As the hours tick by in the night, the family fissure becomes physical in nature. Loathing that had lain beneath the surface for years come bubbling up. They do not come to blows. Member by member the family succumbs to horrible events, beginning with grams. She falls through a hole in the floor landing thirty feet below. From an already bad state in which she is unable to communicate with anyone, she is now bed-ridden. The family feels a small sense of guilt, except Ted who is all for putting her into a resting home as soon as possible. The only one to step forward and take of her is Sam.

But the “accidents” keep occurring. Is there a black cloud over their house? Has the local legend of witchcraft come to roost in the Usher home? Or has one member of the cantankerous family been pushed beyond the limit, now bent on its destruction?

This chilling tale is aptly titled. Like a disease that lay dormant then begins to run rampant, what seems like a survivable ailment quickly becomes morbid. But the source of the ailment remains hidden until the last page. As with her novels, Mina delves deeply into the darkest parts of the human psyche. Somehow, in this more distilled format, the tale is even more horrifying. This is an outstanding read.

Jennifer Jordan

## **SKELETON HILL**

**Peter Lovesey**

**2010**

**Soho Press**

Two murders confront Detective Superintendent Peter Diamond in this, the tenth in the mystery series featuring the irascible Bath policeman. Each of the murders apparently took place during re-creations of the battle between the Roundheads and the Cavaliers three-and-one-half centuries ago. The first, which occurred more than a decade before the latest one, was of a female about 20 years old, whose headless skeleton is uncovered by a history lecturer, who is himself later killed.

The two murders seem unrelated, except Diamond's intuition tells him the spectacles on Lansdown Hill in Bath makes them related. Hindered by a lack of clues, the lack of cooperation by his superior, and other obstacles, Diamond has to claw forward, grasping at straws to reach a plausible conclusion.

Written with an eye to Diamond's sense of humor and logical thinking, the novel is plotted carefully to bring the reader forward as Diamond uncovers additional facts and clues. The author includes a significant amount of history and a wonderful appreciation of the Bath countryside.

Theodore Feit

## **SPEAK NO EVIL**

**Martyn Waites**

**2010**

**Pegasus Books**

Three subplots run through this Joe Donovan novel, the fourth in the series. The main theme involves a book Joe is to ghostwrite based on interviews with a woman, Ann Marie, who murdered a young boy when she was eleven years old. As the interviews continue, further information concerning additional murders of children over the years after her release from prison raise the possibility that she continues to kill. Meanwhile Joe and his team are attempting to recover his lost son, David.

Intertwined with information about Ann Marie's past and present are current-day occurrences, which tend to complicate and frighten her, so she withholds memories from Joe, especially regarding her son, Jack. While she is attempting to come to terms with her evil deeds, it becomes more and more difficult for her, and finally she has to depend on him for help.

The characters are formidable, the prose penetrating, the pace incessant.

Theodore Feit

## **STETTIN STATION**

**David Downing**

**2010**

**Soho Press**

The chronicle of journalist John Russell begins in Nazi Berlin a week before Pearl Harbor in this, the third novel in the series [with a fourth, POTSDAM STATION, to come]. The descriptions of Gestapo tactics and the beginnings of the "final solution" are eerily chilling.

Russell is ostensibly a correspondent for a San Francisco newspaper, allowing the author to describe the machinations of the Nazi censors and propaganda machine with vivid detail, while his protagonist acts as a go-between between German and American intelligence agents, carrying messages back and forth. He even

obtains proof that the Gestapo is removing Jews from Berlin and planning to gas them, even though he can hardly publish the story.

As conditions worsen, Russell has to find a way to get out of Germany, hoping to bring his long-time girlfriend with him. It is a tale of terror with a thrill-a-page pace. Descriptions of wartime Berlin and the police state remind us of a period many may have forgotten, but of which we, and they, should perhaps be reminded.  
Theodore Feit

## **THINK OF A NUMBER**

**John Verdon**

**July 2010**

**Crown**

Homicide investigator Dave Gurney has retired from the NYPD when an old classmate contacts him about some disturbing letters he's been receiving. Mark Mellery owns and operates a spiritual retreat when he starts receiving the taunting letters that insinuate the sender knows him intimately. Mellery winds up brutally murdered and all the clues lead the investigators in circles, so they bring Gurney into the fold to help solve this bizarre puzzle. The puzzle grows even more bizarre when a series of other murders follow the same pattern as Mellery's but in completely different geographic locations and with no apparent connections between the victims. Who is committing the murders and why?

THINK OF A NUMBER is a thought-provoking thriller written with attention to detail. And while it's written in the third person and the readers know more than Gurney, they don't know the answers. So they're working on the puzzle in the same way he is. What I discovered by the end was that I wasn't as fascinated by who the killer actually turned out to be as I was by the process of unfolding all the clues.

The added dimension of Gurney's dysfunctional relationships to his wife and son add to the depth of his character. Like the puzzle of the murders, it makes the reader stop and think about their own interactions with others. Who Gurney is and his own reflection on himself becomes just as pivotal to the plot as the murder investigation.

Half the fun of the novel was watching the pieces unfold and fit into place both in the investigation of the murder and Gurney's investigation of his own soul. He's a man who has spent his life surrounded by death and while he tries to avoid the one that impacts him the most, he realizes, "No matter how hard one tries to ignore it, death finds a way to be noticed. It seeps into your feelings like water through a basement wall."

THINK OF A NUMBER is one of the most cerebral books I've read in some time. It challenged me as a reader in many ways and I felt enriched by simply having experienced it.

Jen Forbus

## **THIS BODY OF DEATH**

**Elizabeth George**

**2010**

**Harper**

In the 16th Inspector Lynley novel, we find him at home after having completed his wanderings around Cornwall trying to find peace following the murder of his wife. Still undecided as to what to do in the future, he is approached by the temporary department head, Isabelle Ardery, to return to Scotland Yard to help her make the transition to the post for which she supposedly is "auditioning." She is quite aware that the team of Lynley's co-workers resent her and Tommy can smooth the way for her to gain their support and even possibly their respect. All too soon the body of a young woman is found, murdered, in a cemetery, and they all undertake to solve the case. There are plenty of suspects both in London and in Hampshire, where the woman originally came from. Ardery is like a bull in a China shop, and blunders regularly, Lynley a calming influence even if his status is undetermined. And to add to the reader's confusion is the regular recounting every couple of chapters of the ten-year-old murder of a two-year old tot by three boys aged 10 and 11. Not until near the end is the reason revealed.

The novel is quite long, some 640 tightly written pages, and for some could present a tedious exercise. However, the prose is smooth and the descriptions of the people and places skillful. The plot is well constructed and it is very much worth it to have Tommy back.

Theodore Feit

## **A THOUSAND CUTS**

**Simon Lelic**

**2010**

**Viking**

A THOUSAND CUTS is a thoughtful condemnation of the institutions and people that condone bullying and an examination of the aftermath of a school shooting that comes as a result of bullying wrapped in a crime novel. In a show of restraint the more blatant of the crimes in this book, the actual shooting event, is never shown. The book opens with the Inspector walking through the halls of the school and the auditorium where it took place surveying the damage and imagining the crime take place.

The rest of the book will follow two paths.

The first path is told in the third person and follows the Inspector's investigation. Her chief obstacle, and the first institution that blocks her way, are the suits. Her boss and his bosses make it expressly clear that she is to wrap this thing up quickly and put a nice neat bow on it since the shooter offed himself. Like any crime fiction detective worth her salt though she just can't let it go or bend to the will of her superiors. So she pushes on. I don't want to leave anyone with the impression that the Inspector is in any way a cliché by that joke though. She becomes an increasingly sympathetic character as she herself is subjected to institutional and vulgar harassment (the grownup word for bullying) that ranges from subtle verbal digs to a frightening assault in the parking lot.

The second path is a series of first person monologues of the various people the Inspector interviews. What we are reading are the actual field interviews. The voices of all of these characters are told in the first person and are as varied as the characters themselves. Through these characters – students, faculty, administrative personnel, parents – we begin to assemble the pieces to get a fuller and more complex picture of what happened at the school on that day. The complexity of this will further put the Inspector at odds with the investigation they WANT her to conduct.

By the end what we see is how various forces, by accident and design, collude to foster an environment where such a tragedy is possible. A THOUSAND CUTS is as strong a debut as you are likely to find this year and is a powerful novel that offers no easy answers.

Jennifer Jordan

## **VERMILION DRIFT**

**William Kent Krueger**

**September, 2010**

**Atria**

When last I closed a Cork O'Conner book, I thought we were done. Little did I know. Kent Krueger had more to say about Aurora, Minnesota and one of its most complex individuals.

Alone now, with the children away and only the dog to look after, Cork is entering a new place in life. his burger business is basically running itself . How often is a P.I. really needed in a community the size of this haven?

Enter the Vermilion Rift and its owners. This mine holds secrets of a missing woman and Cork's past.

Present day environmental woes and a mass murder from Cork's youth spark the plot in this novel. It is the melding of Aurora's many different cultures that give this novel its soul. VERMILION RIFT is a stroke of genius.

Ruth Jordan

## **WORTH DYING FOR**

**Lee Child**

**October, 2010**

**Delacorte**

Any calendar year with two books featuring Child's Jack Reacher is a bonus year. The fact that we left 61 HOURS in the midst of a cliff hanger only makes it better.

WORTH DYING FOR brings Jack to the hinterlands of Nebraska. A Woman's been beaten but that's just the beginning of this story.

In this small community nobody goes up against the Duncans. They control the local industry and during these tough times are the only game in town. When Reacher makes a stand the fists begin to fly. With the help of a local woman and the highly honed b.s. meter we've all come to love Child paints us a story of cruelty. The Duncans aren't simply local bullies. They are an evil that needs to be reckoned with. In an area of the country so flat that there's nowhere to hide, Reacher is up against it once again. And in the brush??? There's a sniper waiting.

Two Lee Child books in one year? Life is good.

Ruth Jordan