

## Jennifer's Round-up

When a debut book ends up in my hands there is excitement tempered by jaded experience. A debut can run the gamut from fresh and invigorating to tired and choppy. But when good, really good, debuts find their way into the to-be-read pile, my brain does a celebration that would no doubt equate into a spastic jig if externalized.

I damn near did a solo ho-down after reading Pearce (Michael) Hansen's *STREET RAISED*. Based on a story called "Speedy" that appeared in the late and lamented *Plots with Guns* (where some of crime fictions newest and brightest began), the story revolves around a newly ex-con making his way from Pelican Bay Prison to his old home of Oakland, California. After a trip that confirms the weird and violent ways of the world, Speedy finds Oakland changed. His best friend, Fat Bob, is a bouncer at a couple of punk clubs and his troubled brother, Little Willy, is homeless, erudite addict. When two of our trios' former homeboys end up trussed in chains tossed into a river, revenge is the only option. Going up against a family of drug dealers, their success is not guaranteed. Add a psycho killer, a pissed off cop and a gaggle of skinheads make the improbable damn near impossible.

Our heroes are not overdrawn, noir caricatures or quick quipping ne'er-do-wells with hearts of gold. These are the bad guys of other novels and they make this book one of the best books of 2006.

*THE BLADE ITSELF* also sees the release from prison of a hardened man but this story reverses the story. Marcus Sakey twists and internalizes the classic tale of good vs. evil to suit the modern setting of Chicago. Evan McGann and Danny Carter are both the bad guys at the beginning of this book. But the difference between the two is sharply drawn when a pawnshop robbery goes wrong. Carter wants to cut and run but McGann gives in to a violence simmering just under the surface. He pays the price for both when he goes to prison.

By the time McGann serves his seven-year sentence, Carter has turned his life around. He is in management at a construction company, has a steady girl friend and a well earned, secure existence. This does not sit well with McGann. To him the only logical step is to re-new their nefarious partnership. He has a plan that would disrupt everything Carter has built. The Carter resists the plan, the more violently persistent McGann becomes until Carter's life and the life of the woman he loves are in peril.

Sakey has done a brilliant job of developing the characters of two men raised in need who by choice and circumstance take two very divergent paths in life. The tension is played out perfectly to the very last page.

Tim Maleeny's makes a strong entrance into crime fiction with *STEALING THE DRAGON*. There is hardly a drought of Asian-themed mysteries but Maleeny gives readers a fresh and fast take that enthralls.

The story begins with a ship full of ill-treated Chinese refugees run around on Alcatraz with the crew found executed in a professional manner. P.I. Cape Weathers recognizes the signs of an assassin and seeks answers from a sometime partner, Sally, a martial arts master and human enigma. Her history as an orphan from Hong Kong could shed light in the subject but when she turns up missing, Weathers questions if he knows Sally at all. When he starts digging for answers a body ends up in his trunk and his life has a bounty on it. He finds that human life is not a precious commodity but some thing that was on that ship was. And if he doesn't find it, his life if forfeit.

**THE ALEXANDRIA LINK**

Steve Berry

Feb 2007

Ballantine Books

I'm a bit pissed off at Steve Berry. I should know better by now, having read his previous books, but I did it again. I picked up his latest book when I really needed to sleep. And sleeping is something that won't happen when reading Berry.

*THE ALEXANDRIA LINK* is another great adventure, this one involving a bookseller named Cotton Malone, recently retired from the Department of Justice's Magellan Billet, which specializes in extra-sensitive international investigations. Malone is an unknowing heir to the lost library of Alexandria, which puts him and the people he cares about in a very dangerous position.

A great everyman character, following Malone through this adventure is a real treat. Extreme pacing and a tight plot make this a hell of a great ride. Berry is the master of the high concept thriller.

Jon

**THE ARSENIC LABYRINTH**

Martin Edwards

Jan 2007

### Poisoned Pen Press

As with 2005's THE CIPHER GARDEN, Martin Edwards finds suspense and murderous intent in ambitions common to human beings in every walk of life. Edward's series featuring cold case investigator Hannah Scarlett and historian Daniel Kind doesn't include gory, violent crime scenes or frantic, dangerous chases through city streets or suburban walkways.

Instead in this very satisfying read, Edwards dishes up excerpts from old, dusty diaries; a lonely woman operating a small hotel, easy pickings for an amoral con man; an impressively shoddy old mansion operated as a mediocre museum by its elderly, deluded owner; residents of the area involved with their children's upbringing in loving hope similar to parents the world over; and the uneasy atmosphere of an area in the scenic byways nearby which hides a network of old abandoned mining tunnels - the labyrinth referred to in the title.

A telephoned tip to a local newspaper begins a chain of events which leads to a search operation in the tunnels, conducted by the local police cold case unit. They are not surprised to find the body hinted at by the tipster. But no one was expecting a second body, several decades older than the first.

Kind has been conducting research into the history of the area, in preparation for a scholarly book on the life and career of a famous resident of the area. His startling discoveries amid long abandoned documents moldering in a school library provide the link that Scarlett needs to identify both corpses and solve two long ago murders.

Almost in spite of themselves and against their better judgment, Scarlett and Kind continue to feed the embers of a growing attraction to each other. Edwards wisely keeps this part of his story low key, adding to the suspense and encouraging readers to anticipate the next installment.

Woodstock

### ASK THE PARROT

Richard Stark

November 2006

Mysterious Press

Picking up where 2004's NOBODY RUNS FOREVER left off, this begins with Stark's anti-hero Parker being pursued by cops, police dogs, helicopters, and a large posse after a bank robbery gone bad. Climbing up the side of a mountain with no apparent means of escape, he runs into an armed townie named Lindhal who offers the criminal a hiding place. But Lindhal has a price. Unjustly fired by the racing track he used to work at, he wants to take his revenge, and he wants the fugitive Parker's help.

Like the previous twenty-two Parker adventures, the pleasure in the story comes from watching the sociopath Parker do his thing without remorse or regret, and seeing how normal people react to this walking crime wave. Since empathizing with a hero who kills, tortures, steals, and shows zero emotion is impossible, Stark shows us the dreams, hopes, and fears of the supporting cast. Some of them we like. Some of them we don't. And we never know who Parker is going to kill at any given moment.

I read my first Parker book in the early 1980s, and was entranced by the clipped prose, the detailed descriptions of criminal activity, and reading the point of view of someone who is an irredeemable criminal, yet can't be characterized as evil.

Parker, who hasn't really evolved much in the last 40 years, is basically the human equivalent of a shark. He isn't malevolent or sadistic. He's simply single-minded in purpose, and his purpose is to survive. Robbery is how he makes his living, and he'll get the job done by any means necessary.

Like the previous Parker novels, this one involves a caper where the carefully laid plans get screwed up by human error, and not everyone gets out alive. Parker remains as fresh and as compelling as he was forty years ago, and Stark's genius lies in making us root for the bad guy, even as we fear he's going to kill someone we like.

Parker has been portrayed several times in movies (Lee Marvin, Peter Coyote, Robert Duvall, and Mel Gibson have all had a shot at it) and many crime writers, including Max Allan Collins, James Ellroy, Stephen King, and Dan Simmons, have been influenced by Stark, who is really author Donald Westlake. The reason for his longevity and success is obvious: Stark writes great crime novels with an unusual protagonist. ASK THE PARROT is no exception.

J.A. Konrath

### AYE DO OR DIE

Candy Calvert

2007

Midnight Ink

Murder and romance march down the aisle in Candy Calvert's second Darcy Cavanaugh mystery. Darcy and her friend Marie are tabbed as bridesmaids for fellow nurse Patti Ann and her firefighter fiancé Kyle on a last minute wedding cruise. As if the attendants' outfits aren't bad enough, polka-dot fifties chiffon that Marie swears channels Lucy & Ethel, the antics of the practical joke loving groomsmen make the cruise a comedy of errors. Until someone has an allergic reaction to a buffalo wing. Add to this the appearance of Darcy's ex Sam as an invited guest who swears she invited him and her own confusion over a

possible proposal from Luke, G-Man extraordinaire and the waters get choppy. Pranks and mishaps increase, each more sinister than the last until Dale, the least popular and most lecherous of the firemen, is found hunched over the paper shredder in the ship's business office, strangled by his own tie. Darcy, the one he hit on the most, is the one who finds him when she goes to the office to fax a document to her grandmother's nursing home. While she can't save his life, she decides to attack the mystery and save Patti Ann's wedding. Unexpectedly, the case brings Luke on board to investigate as an agent of the cruise line, just in time to see Darcy nursing Sam after a brawl in the Schooner Bar. As one of the suspects, Darcy vows to find the person who has it in for the male members of the wedding party, despite her own war of feelings for the two men in her life. It takes a chance encounter on the Lido deck and a second look at the decorations in the Bridal Party salon to set her on the right course.

Maryann Mercer

#### BAD BLOOD

Linda Fairstein

January 2007

Scribner

Alex Cooper and her sidekicks, detectives Mike Chapman and Mercer Wallace, have been with us now for several excellent novels. In *BAD BLOOD*, they are fine-tuned to the nth degree. Combining a fast-paced mystery with little-known facts about underground New York City, the author has created perhaps her best work to date.

The story starts off with Alex trying a murder case that is beginning to look hopeless, with the defendant likely to get off. However, as in previous novels, the investigation is ongoing even as the trial progresses. The defendant, accused of murdering, or arranging the strangulation of, his wife, a few days into the trial overpowers the officer guarding him and grabs her pistol, shooting her in the head, harming two other court officers and escaping custody. [Not a spoiler – this happens very early on in the novel.]

Meanwhile, Chapman and Wallace uncover facts relating to a prior strangulation many years before following a blast in Water Tunnel #3, in which three workers were killed, one of whom was the defendant's brother. The body of the earlier victim is exhumed, allowing the author to discuss the latest forensic breakthroughs involving DNA evidence. Needless to say complications abound, especially with a blood feud between two families of tunnel workers.

An exciting finish to this narrative takes place in a little-known subway station—the original—but abandoned—City Hall stop of the city's first rapid transit system, still probably the most elegant ever constructed in the Big Apple to which nobody has access anymore. This time there's less courtroom drama, but more legwork to tell the story. But the reader races along never tiring right down to the final page.

Highly recommended.

Theodore Feit

#### THE BEST AMERICAN MYSTERY STORIES

Edited by Scott Turow

2006

Quercus

Short story anthologies are perfect for between novels, and a great chance to check out some writers that may be new to you. There isn't room for me to discuss all the stories, but they're all excellent and deserve to be included in this collection. A couple of the standouts were CJ Box's "Pirates of Yellowstone" and Laura Lippman's "The Crack Cocaine Diet." Scott Wolven, one of the best short story writers out there, makes an unprecedented fifth appearance in this series with his story, "Vigilance."  
Jon

#### THE BLADE ITSELF

Marcus Sakey

Jan. 2007

St. Martin's Minatour

As the story opens, Danny and Evan are sitting in a car, watching a drunken potential witness slumped against a building across from the pawnshop they intend to rob. Evan, an ex-Golden Gloves champ, offers to "knock him down". Sakey writes that this idea, to Danny, "wasn't totally without merit, but lacked elegance."

In *THE BLADE ITSELF*, most everything about Sakey's writing is elegant. In so few words, and right from the start, Sakey captures the essence of the conflict between these characters. Danny sees himself as the cool professional in charge, and Evan as a hothead; a loose cannon to be kept under control. Evan doesn't see it that way at all, and so, of course, the job goes bad. Real bad.

Amidst the mayhem and sirens, Danny escapes and goes straight. Evan doesn't, and goes straight to maximum security for twelve years. Evan's always felt that he saved Danny's life during the robbery, and that Danny owes him not only for that, but

also for keeping silent on Danny's involvement. Danny thinks that Evan screwed up royally, and wishes that he'd just go away and let him be. Life is good now. So he's totally unprepared when Evan shows up five years ahead of schedule with a vengeance and a plan. Danny's a painfully slow learner, and actually thinks that he can once again exert control over a bad situation. Evan, again, has other, less elegant, ideas.

*The Blade Itself* has already garnered a bunch of buzz, and deservedly so. My only criticism would be that the final confrontation between Evan and Danny seems a bit overdrawn. Otherwise spare and intense, with remarkable characters and dialogue, it is a stunning debut, and not to be missed.

Gary Schulze – owner of Once Upon a Crime

#### THE BLOOD SPILT

Asa Larsson

Feb 2007

Delacorte Press

The first two brief chapters of *THE BLOOD SPILT* describes a murder, one as it is being committed, from the p.o.v. of the murderer [the only such chapter so written], the second as her body is later discovered, hanging by a chain from a church organ loft in the Swedish mountain town of Kiruna, the victim having been done awful, pointless violence as well. Thus is the reader introduced to the world of Asa Larsson and her protagonist, Rebecka Martinsson, an attorney who has been on extended sick leave after an incident during which she killed three people in that same town, Kiruna, where she was born and raised. The murder of the woman, Mildred Nillson, a priest, is reminiscent of that of a male priest murdered in the area in the past. It was in the aftermath of that earlier killing that Rebecka's traumatic event took place, his murderer one of those she shot. Her firm's attempts to establish a professional relationship with the Church following the woman priest's death reluctantly brings Rebecka back to Kiruna for the first time since those killings nearly two years prior. The question arises whether Mildred's murder was committed by someone 'who'd been keeping a scrapbook after the first murder and decided to make a sequel of their own,' or was entirely unrelated to the earlier event. Mildred was known as Kiruna's foremost local feminist, with a passionate, indomitable personality, and had made many enemies. Rebecka inevitably ends up involved in the investigation.

This new book by Asa Larsson, in a translation by Marlaine Delaroy, contains wonderful descriptions of the Swedish countryside, particularly its forests, as well as those of inner landscapes and reminiscences of times past, of loved ones lost, whether parent or spouse, and a she-wolf known as "Yellow Legs," whose story is like a running theme throughout the book. The scenes become palpable: "At first the thoughts in your head are like a tangled skein of wool. The branches scrape against your face or catch in your hair. One by one the threads are drawn from the skein. Get caught in the trees. Fly away with the wind. In the end your head is empty. And you are transported. Through the forest. Over steaming bogs, heavy with scent, where your feet sink between the still frozen tussocks and your body feels sticky. Up a hill. Fresh breeze. The dwarf birch creeping, glowing on the ground. You lie down. And then the snow begins to fall." And, later on, "The snow has completely gone. The ground is steaming, quivering with longing for life. Everywhere things are crawling, chirruping, crackling and playing. Leaves burst open on the aching trees. Summer is coming from below like a green, unstoppable wave."

*THE BLOOD SPILT* is not a book of pulse-pounding suspense [until the final pages, at any rate], but exerts a more subtle pull as it moves toward the horrifying resolution. It is a well-wrought, disturbing and beautifully written novel.

Gloria Feit

#### BLOODY HARVESTS

By Richard Kunzmann

2006

Thomas Dunne Books, St. Martin's Minotaur

For the most part, the first several chapters of *Bloody Harvests* depict seemingly unrelated scenes, scenes of violence and terror taking place in and around Johannesburg, South Africa. It is shown as a world where superstition plays a big role in the lives of the Zulu, Zhosa, Yoruba and other tribesmen who live there. But the horrors which are committed are rooted firmly in the 'real' world.

The body of a young black child, a girl of perhaps 5 years of age, has been found, mutilated, with organs removed and her throat slit. Assigned to the investigation are D.I. Harry Mason and his partner, Jacob Tshabalala, both men haunted by their past histories dating back to their respective childhoods with which they are unable to come to terms. The murder is thought to be a Muti ritual, and the deeply superstitious Africans are terrified of omens and witchcraft seemingly at play. One asks, rhetorically, "How long does a curse endure?" [Muti killings, more commonly known as medicine murder, involve the murder of someone in order to excise body parts for incorporation as ingredients into medicine.] These are dangerous times in the city – eleven fatal shootings in the space of just a few days, kidnapping of young children, a huge drug bust made by the police perhaps triggering reactions among the criminal underworld. And Harry, a white man, must try to understand the occultism and belief in witches that play such a large role. As he is told: "Occultism is about the irrational. What you haven't taken into account is that no witch doctor would risk exposing himself like this. They prefer working in the dark, manipulating people from

the shadows.” Of the man the police seek, the author says “He brought them hope just as much as he brought them fear, two strong emotions that can inspire people when he needs them most.” Jacob tells Harry, “My people have witnessed things that you whites don’t understand – or don’t *want* to understand. You still think our culture is primitive, that our beliefs are stupid, but you know...maybe Africa is just different.”

This is a dense and dark novel, filled with intensity, complex characterizations, and rich in sense of place of this fascinating culture and country. It is a very good read, and is recommended.

Gloria Feit

#### BORDERLINE

Mark Schorr

2006

Thomas Dunne Books/

After a great beginning with three well-received Red Diamond mysteries in the mid-1980s, and a total of nine books in eight years, Mark Schorr seemed to have dropped out of the crime fiction and thriller genres in 1991. He is now back with a bang. A serial killer called Wolf is roaming the streets of Portland, Oregon, taking out the city’s bad guys. Brian Hanson, Vietnam vet and recovering addict, meanwhile, has turned his life around. As these two story lines are developed, the reader is caught in Mark Schorr’s welcome return to crime fiction.

Brian is now a successful therapist in a mental health clinic in one of Portland’s more downtrodden areas. But when one of his clients, 28-year old Tammy LaFleur, is found dead with a bullet in her face, his demons come roaring back. Despite a police ruling of suicide, and his own Narcotics Anonymous sponsor’s advice, Brian’s doubts lead him into his own investigation. As he becomes more and more engrossed in the complexities of his investigation, his confrontations with the police and City Hall increasingly endanger his job, his marriage, and even his life.

Part crime fiction and part political thriller, BORDERLINE offers an intriguing peek into the amoral machinations of political and law enforcement hierarchies, as well as an insider’s view of several different forms of borderline personality disorders. But it’s the ever-widening scope and accelerating pace of Brian’s investigation that keeps the reader engrossed.

David Chernow

#### BY THE TIME YOU READ THIS

Giles Blunt

Feb 2007

Henry Holt

Stealing from the title, by the time I read the bold print synopsis on the back of the galley, I already knew too much of the plot; it destroyed the emotional impact of one of the finest opening chapters I’ve read.

Which leads me to rant just a bit: try to avoid reading dust jackets. Too often - and this is also a dilemma with reviewing - publishers’ synopses give away too much. Imagine a blurb on “Murder on the Orient Express: “Everybody did it!” Or a review of “Star Wars”: “unbeknownst to Luke, Darth Vader is Luke’s father!” My apologies if there are any of you who didn’t already know that, but you get my point. The best way to combat such spoilers is to shop at independents. We’re supposed to know this stuff, and warn you against it.

Having said that, how to review this book? I’m tempted to just say “trust me, you’ll love it”, but here goes.

I was a huge fan of *Forty Words for Sorrow*, and Blunt’s John Cardinal series has continued strongly with *The Delicate Storm*, and *Black Fly Season*. *By The Time You Read This* is his best yet. If you haven’t read him before, this is a good place to start. You will want to read them all.

Blunt is an incredibly smooth writer, and John Cardinal, one of Canada’s Algonquin Bay’s finest, is a gem of a character. Add to that a genuinely creepy, unique, and unsuspected villain, inspired police procedures, and an intricate, fast-paced plot, and we have the makings of what is certain to be one of the high points of the year.

Trust me, you’ll love it.

Gary Shulze, Once Upon a Crime

#### THE C.S.I EFFECT

Katherine Ramsland

2006

Berkley Trade

I have a deep-seated and long-standing respect for Katherine Ramsland’s books and her credentials. I’ve read with fascination books on the Body Farm, studied adipoceros tissue, the ever evolving studies and effects entomology, anthropology and DNA, etc. that identify and demystify the science of the decaying human body.

I also have a rather strong and documented dislike of the glorifying and falsely portrayed advances in forensics as seen on television; namely C.S.I. What is seen on the show is far from reality. It's hard for me to conceive of labs that are well funded with an abundance of technicians, equipment and tests that can be run in record time.

I'd hoped Ramsland's way with words would win me over.

Ramsland does discuss the process of getting from finding the body to convicting a perpetrator. In twelve chapters, she covers some basics as well as some of the latest in forensics, including the advances in computer forensics.

But this book doesn't go deep enough for those well read and enthusiastic about the subject. And it is too pedantic and dry for those reading seriously about the subject for the first time. The constant tie in to the television series seemed contrived, even forced. Ramsland's work on the Crime Library online is without compare. This book does not live up to the hype.

Jennifer Jordan

#### THE COMMISSION

Michael Norman

February 9, 2007

Poisoned Pen Press

The murder of the Chairman of the Utah Board of Pardons sets off a wild and woolly story in which kinky sex throws Sam Kincaid, who heads the Special Investigations Branch of the Utah Department of Corrections, off on a series of tangents, before he and his counterpart, a female Lieutenant from the police department on the right track. But not before two suspects, one of whom actually did the initial killing, also are murdered.

The mystery unfolds slowly, as each investigative step uncovers new facts, with twists and turns to keep the reader suspended until the mystery's conclusion. This well-written and –constructed tale is very much worth reading.

Theodore Feit

#### EPITAPH FOR A TRAMP & EPITAPH FOR A DEAD BEAT

David Markson

Jan 2007

Shoemaker and Hoard

This is a re-release of two novels from 1959 and 1961. Markson only wrote two crime novels, and both are wonderful examples of the PI genre.

Harry Fannin is a divorced PI in New York, and in the first book reprinted here he finds the body literally on his doorstep. His ex-wife, stabbed and bleeding out comes to Harry as she's dying. Harry proceeds to retrace his ex-wife's life from the time they parted to find out who killed her. The second of the two, EPITAPH FOR A DEAD BEAT, sees Harry among the beatniks of the early sixties trying to solve a murder. I loved these two books because there were no modern detective tricks; it was all footwork and instinct. While Markson did go on to write some other brilliant books, I think the PI fans missed out when he stopped at two.

With all the classic elements of great PI books, Fannin is a wisecracking hardboiled man who isn't easily shocked. While it is a perfect example of PI writing, it is also a wonderful look into the world of New York back in the early sixties. Entertaining as hell, and with a plot tighter than an executives tie this is a book that should not be missed.

Jon

#### A FALSE MIRROR

Charles Todd

January 2007

William Morrow

In *A False Mirror*, ninth in this series written by a mother and son writing team, Inspector Rutledge continues to be haunted by his experiences in the trenches in France during the First World War. An unusual co-protagonist is the "ghost" of a corporal executed for failure to follow orders in the conflict to whom the inspector supplied the *coup de grace*; he continually speaks to Rutledge with warnings and advice.

Rutledge is summoned from London to a southern English seaside hamlet when a man he has no respect for, a lieutenant who served under him in France, takes as hostage a woman to whom he was formerly engaged in an attempt to stave off arrest for an assault on her husband. He professes innocence and the local police have him targeted as the culprit. He seeks the inspector's aid in finding the real attacker.

The emotional strain on all the characters is overwhelming, especially on Rutledge, suffering from shell shock and his own lost love when he left for France. Not only does he have to overcome his own demons affecting his objectivity, but must also find the person responsible for the attack as well as a careful and methodical murderer of two persons.

I'm sorry to have discovered this series so late in the game because it is so interestingly written and characterized that I suspect its predecessors are equally well drawn. Well, better late than never, there are always eight others to turn to.  
Theodore Feit

FIZZ  
Paul A Toth  
2004  
Bleak House Books

Toth is an exceptional writer, and while FIZZ is not technically crime fiction, it's a book steeped in mystery. Ray Pulaski is trying to figure out who is really is and as part of this journey he re-invents himself as a number of different people. On his trip to self discovery, we find Ray becoming gigolo quite by accident, a rock star and gentleman's gentleman. Often humorous and tragic, this book is captivating.  
Toth writes from the soul with an honesty and truthfulness that is almost uncomfortable. Toth has a truly unique voice you shouldn't miss.  
Jon

THE GREEN TRAP  
Ben Bova  
2006  
Forge

THE GREEN TRAP is a thriller that combines corporate greed, high tech science and industrial espionage in a fast passed adventure that could very easily be all too real.  
When a microbiologist is murdered, his brother Paul Cochrane and professional industrial spy Elana Sandoval want to find out who did it and why. Cochrane's knows his brother was working on something that could provide limitless energy for mere pennies, and the list of suspects grows long fast. Whether to get their hands on the formula or just stop it all together there are a lot of people getting in the way.  
In a world where money and the people who wield it make the rules, this is a story that could cross over to reality. That not only makes it scary, but it also makes it a hell of a fun book to read. This book is a delight.  
Jon

HOLLYWOOD STATION  
Joseph Wambaugh  
2006  
Little, Brown & Co.(US)  
Quercus (UK)

This is classic Wambaugh at his best; it's been a long time since his last one. It appears that he collected all kinds of anecdotes, situations and observances from many police officers in several jurisdictions and wove many of them into this novel. The cop talk and descriptions of every day patrol and response certainly is up there with the best he has written in the past.  
Threaded into the string of tales and descriptions is a sort of plot that comes and goes. It begins when a couple of tweakers [smokers of crystal meth, to the uninitiated] rifle a mail box and get hold of a letter indicating arrival of a diamond shipment to a local jewelry store. They pass the letter along to a couple who then rob the jeweler, improvising an ingenious escape: a hand grenade is placed between the victim's knees with the admonition that pressure be maintained or the pin would fall out and the grenade explodes. Naturally, when the LAPD officers arrive on the scene, the knees give way, setting up for an act of heroism as everyone waits for the explosion.  
The robbers are not finished. They are told of a delivery of cash to an ATM that should be an easy job. It turns out that the man has to shoot one of the guards, murdering him as they get the \$93,000. The getaway car is a clunker and they narrowly escape. The rest of the story is sort of serendipity, along with irony and poetic justice.  
The long wait certainly was worth it because this novel is most readable and enjoyable. The cast of characters is poignant and their lives and personalities are made real. The reader is immersed in the daily comings and goings of the men and women—those on patrol, in the station house and detectives—of Hollywood Station.

Theodore Feit

HOMICIDE 69  
Sam Reaves  
January 2007

Carroll & Graf

Sam Reaves is a Chicago writer with a proven background. Ask any of his fellow Chi-town writers for a list of their top ten writers, and Reaves name is sure to come up. There's been a gap between books and Reaves' name has never quite broken out of regional circles. But that's about to change thanks to the beginning of a new series featuring Mike Dooley, Chicago Homicide cop.

The year is 1969 and the place is Chicago. A body has been found. A woman savagely murdered and the body dumped. Nobody wants Dooley to pursue this case but being a cop is what Dooley does and he must speak for the dead. Dooley runs the leads through a summer and a time most readers are familiar with. I can sum up two dozen books written in this city and against this timeline. None have represented what Reaves manages in HOMICIDE 69.

Dooley is not a man coming of age in the late sixties. His experience with everything from the Manson slayings, to the Chicago riots is far different than those we usually read. A good Catholic family man and an honest cop in a corrupt system, Dooley came of age in WWII. He lost something there; faced horrors that cannot be shared by anyone other than those who've gone through the same. And now this father of three is full of sorrow. His oldest son is in 'Nam. Letters have tapered off but between the lines of the less frequent missives Mike sees that he can now share his loss of self with his son, Kevin. It isn't something he wants but better a son with these horrific memories than a wooden casket being returned home.

At the "office" Dooley and his partner identify the body of the slain woman and the location where she died through dogged police work. When it turns out she is the ex of an assassinated Mob guy, pieces begin to fall into place. The mobsters and some of Chicago's finest both try to warn Dooley away. As he gets closer to answers, who the bad guys and good guys are becomes murkier and murkier.

Richly drawn collages of the summer of '69 suck the reader in. The complexity of what Dooley the person is going through parallel to the complexity of a sordid Chicago crime make this a superb book on every level.

Ruth Jordan

#### HONOUR AMONG MEN

Barbara Fradkin

2006

Rendezvous Crime

Inspector Michael Green misses the streets now that he is riding a desk. When one of Ottawa's homeless stumbles over a woman's corpse, Green's curiosity is piqued and he worms his way into the investigation. This isn't just a poor working girl plucked off of the street, she is a lost soul crushed under broken dreams, her body tossed into a forgotten cranny of the city. The investigation has barely begun when an officer is brutally attacked, confirming Green's hunch that this anonymous woman was no chance victim, but was an intended target.

Peacekeeping. The book is haunted with excerpts from the diary of a long-dead soldier, pushed beyond his limits in Bosnia. Unable to resume a life in pastoral Nova Scotia, his long silenced voice holds the key to the present. His memories give the reader a perspective that Inspector Green would envy, and are the stuff of nightmares. Lost dreams, lost loves, lost lives. Told in third person, the author gives a good ride inside of Green's mind, his observances of others, and his deductive reasoning. The minds of other actors are opened to the reader, if only briefly, but we spend most of our time with the good inspector.

I liked Green in part because he seems like such a nice guy. Trying to juggle all his axes and apples at once. Loves his kids and wife, still likes his job, has a soft spot for homeless folk. Wants to be everything to everyone, but isn't sappy about it. He hasn't developed that depressive aura that so many detective characters get (a good example would be James Lee Burke's Dave Robicheaux). He wants to change the world, and he isn't afraid to try. And the reader is right there with him, knowing he can.

Kathleen Tromp

#### HOW TO MARRY A GHOST

Hope McIntyre

January 2007

Mysterious Press

London ghostwriter Lee Bartholomew really prefers a quiet, preferably uneventful, life in her house in Notting Hill. By nature she's a bit of a recluse who wages an uphill battle each day fending off a rather strange assortment of irrational neuroses and fears. So when her mother decides to "marry" her American millionaire gentleman friend in a barefoot commitment ceremony on a Long Island beach, Lee books her flight to New York to serve as her mother's maid of honor. Reluctant at first, Lee now sees this trip as the perfect opportunity to create some much needed space between herself and her ever-faithful live-in boyfriend Tommy. Also it's the big break she's been waiting for in her professional life – the chance to be the one chosen to write the autobiography of the legendary, reclusive rock super-star, Shotgun Marriott.

But the best-laid plan gets off to a rocky start when Lee learns that her younger and overtimes formidable ghosting competitor, Bettina Pleshette, has beaten her to the plum writing assignment. While at the oceanfront ceremony, Lee puzzles over the strange woman who appears out of nowhere intently watching the crowd from the sidelines... then, a disturbance takes place further down the sandy stretch. It seems the body of a young man has washed ashore wearing --a wedding dress-- and this man is soon identified as the estranged son of (you guessed it) Shotgun Marriott. Not long after when Bettina Pleshette is found dead, shot through with an arrow, on the grounds of the rock star's sprawling estate, our reluctant heroine finds herself not only taking the place of the dead ghostwriter, but also playing sleuth before a murderer strikes again.

This second in series was a most entertaining story with engaging dialogue, a fascinating cast of offbeat characters, pretty solid plotting, and light-handed humor. While I've not read McIntyre's first book, *HOW TO SEDUCE A GHOST*, if it's half as engaging as the second, it too is definitely worth seeking out. *HOW TO MARRY A GHOST* is a very enjoyable novel with a unique protagonist who I definitely look forward to spending time with once again.

Annie Chernow

#### IN THE EVIL DAY

Peter Temple

2006

Quercus

Another kicking thriller from Peter Temple, one of the best exports from Australia. This is his eighth book and it's another winner.

Journalist Caroline Wishart has stumbled on to a story bigger than her usual celebrity disgraced pieces. John Anslem is a man trying to leave his past behind by working in a semi-legal surveillance firm. Con Niemand is a mercenary also trying to escape his past. But he is a man with a secret people would die and kill for. It's this secret that draws all three together in a place where the players are played and there is no black and white, just a lot of gray.

This thriller is like watching a movie on fast-forward; it strains to be read faster than you can keep up. Superb characters and incredible plotting make this book another sure hit for Temple.

Jon

#### IN THIS RAIN

By S. J. Rozan

December 2006

Delacorte Press

In an odd coincidence, having recently finished reading's S. J. Rozan's *IN THIS RAIN*, I read an article in that morning's edition of the New York Times dealing with the new designs just made public for Ground Zero, referring in its opening sentence to "the mediocrity we have come to expect from a planning process driven by political opportunism, backdoor deal-making and commercial greed." These are precisely the issues with which Ms. Rozan deals in her wonderful new book.

A scandal in New York City involving the ever-burgeoning construction industry following a death at a building site results in a plea-bargain by a bribe-giver and -taker, and a prison sentence for Joe Cole, a cop with the City Department of Investigation who, though innocent, still feels guilt for being too fixated on getting to the 'top guy' in the scheme to see the potential danger in shoddy practices that ultimately resulted in death. Now, having served two and a half years in prison and out on parole, and having lost, perhaps forever, his reputation, his wife and his daughter, he is contacted by his former partner, who is investigating [and wants to enlist Joe's help in] a whole new, but startlingly similar situation involving possible corruption in the construction of a huge new development in Harlem, with some heavy hitters, wealthy and with influence in high places, involving more than one death, both 'accidental' and homicidal. The ensuing probe reaches the highest levels of local government, and threatens careers and, increasingly, lives.

S. J. Rozan is an author who reels you in slowly. Unlike others who try to grab you with an opening sentence, or paragraph, or chapter, Ms. Rozan steadily pulls the reader into her story, and the lives of the compelling characters depicted. The groundwork, and background, and events from which the rest of the story flows, consume about the first 100 pages of the book, by which point the reader is thoroughly 'hooked,' and by which point, in her inimitable style, the author has immersed the reader into big-city politics [as well as racial politics], construction moguls, and the greed and ambition that drive them.

The reader is presented with an intricate puzzle, not unlike that created in *ABSENT FRIENDS*, this author's previous stunning standalone novel. And when you think you know where the plot is going, Ms. Rozan throws an unexpected curve that takes the book, and the reader, off in another direction when, in her words, the cat becomes the mouse. The depiction of New York, often in the rain [as implied by the title] in this book, is always a particularly special ingredient of this author's work. The book has everything – terrific writing, pulse pounding, hold-your-breath moments, suspense – S. J. Rozan has another winner.

Gloria Feit

#### KILLER INSIGHT

Victoria Laurie

2006

Signet Books

Abby Cooper, professional psychic, thinks Valentine's Day is going to be perfect this year. Her FBI Agent boyfriend Dutch is coming over, and she has all his presents wrapped, things she has lovingly chosen. When she opens her new GPS cell phone from Dutch, she thinks it's a joke. He gave her a cell phone? Then she notices with her sixth sense that she no longer appears over his shoulder, as she did before. She can always see someone's significant other in that spot. She tells him to go, and dissolves into serious heartbreak.

An invitation to her childhood friend Ellie's wedding is waiting, and she decides to attend earlier than planned to get away from her sadness. Elli's brother Duffy is cuter than she remembers, and he helps to cheer her up. He is a Sheriff now, and it turns out that Ellie needs him in that capacity too.

A bridesmaid is missing, and Abby can tell from looking at her pictures that she is dead, though no one but Duffy wants to believe her. When another bridesmaid disappears, then another, Abby has to rely on all her senses to stop the killer before she too is killed. This book begins by Abby telling readers that she was shot and experienced death for at least a moment. Readers will be turning pages to find out what happened and if she is able to survive.

Abby's beloved sister Cat comes in to town for the wedding, along with their parents, who have never understood Abby and don't seem to want to. The supporting characters in this series are as complicated and three dimensional as anyone's reality. This is the fourth in the Psychic Eye series with Abby. Author Victoria Laurie is a psychic herself, and that element of the series is clever and interesting rather than gimmicky. Psychic ability is shown in a realistic way, as impressions and another sense instead of a magic trick. It is just one aspect of Abby, a clever, funny character who sometimes follows her heart instead of any of her senses.

Amy Alessio

## THE LAST SECRET OF THE TEMPLE

Paul Sussman

2006

Bantam Books

If you were to go through a checklist of what would make for a thrilling read, almost all boxes could be checked for this book. Fantastic story, great balancing of history and fiction, and well developed character- they're all there. But something is a little off and with a book of this size that can be a problem.

Jan Weis, hotel owner and connoisseur of Egyptian archeology, is found dead near an excavation at Malgata on the west bank of the Nile and Inspector Yusuf Khalifa of the Luxor police (first seen in Sussman's first novel, *The Lost Army of Cambyses*), is called in for what appears to be a routine case. As Khalifa mines for clues in the man's mysterious life, correlations to a case Khalifa was a junior on thirteen years ago begin to appear. Under the marked reservation of his superiors, Khalifa re-opens the case of the murder of an Israeli woman that ended in the conviction of, in Khalifa's opinion, the wrong man. He and Israeli police officer Arieh Ben-Roi find that the murder is deeply woven into the fabric of an ancient mystery of a religious artifact smuggled to a castle in France, Castelombres.

As they pull the puzzle pieces scattered across the globe together, journalist Layla al-Madani, receives an anonymous letter that asks her to contact "Al-Mulassam" ("The Veiled One"), a Palestinian extremist leader she has recently interviewed. As a reward, she will be granted information about a document, written in an old Roman alphabet that at first appears to be just gibberish. It is, instead, a complex code; a code that could lead to the discovery of something long hidden. Something very dangerous.

The problem lies in the pacing. A thriller, by its very nature, should be thrilling. This story, written with obvious passion and knowledge, is an undertaking to read. If the readers can dedicate themselves and read through to at least the middle, the plot will carry them forward.

Jennifer Jordan

## MASTER OF SOULS

Peter Tremayne

2006

St. Martin's Minotaur

Peter Beresford Ellis has written over 30 scholarly works on the ancient Celts ranging from *Wales - A National Again: The Nationalist Struggle for Freedom* (1968) through *Macbeth: High King of Scotland 1040-57* (1980) to *Eyewitness to Irish History* (2002). Under his fiction pseudonym, Peter Tremayne, he wrote 26 fantasies prior to 1994, most based on Celtic myth and legend, and 18 Sister Fidelma mysteries since 1994. He brings the same mixture of wit and scholarship to his mysteries as to his non-fiction works.

MASTER OF SOULS is the sixteenth novel featuring 7<sup>th</sup> century sleuth Sister Fidelma, the sister of the king of Muman (Munster) in southwestern Ireland, a *dálaigh* (advocate) of the Brehon law courts, and a religieuse in the Celtic Church. The

date is January 668 A.D. The location is the abbey at Ard Fhearta (Ardfert) and Corco Duibhne (the Dingle peninsula). The mystery is murder most foul – or is there more?

Sister Fidelma has been asked to investigate the murder of the abbess and disappearance of 6 young sisters of the abbey. Her brother the king has encouraged her to travel to Ard Fhearta as a gesture of reconciliation with the recently rebellious populace. Sister Fidelma and her husband Brother Eadulf reach the abbey just as another death, that of an elderly scholar, is discovered. As Fidelma's investigation takes her and Eadulf across the peninsula, they begin to suspect that these murders are connected to each other and to the rumors of a trade ship that is lured to destruction on the rocks and the murderous, murky figure called "the Master of Souls."

Peter Tremayne paints a captivating picture of the times while being scrupulously fair to the mystery reader. Sister Fidelma is fond of saying: "Never try to make a deduction until you have sufficient knowledge." So we see all of the clues as Fidelma uncovers them. And we are drawn in as Fedelma gathers the strands of the various mysteries into their surprising resolution. David Chernow

#### MCMANSIONS

Justin Scott

January 2007

Poisoned Pen Press

Ben Abbott is a realtor in a small Connecticut town. He has a sideline as a private investigator, working mostly for attorneys in non-threatening situations. He has been observing with dismay the proliferation of large, poorly designed houses dubbed "McMansions" which are being built in the area, changing the landscape for the worse and inflating the tax base, bringing harsh economic pressure to many local property owners.

When unscrupulous real estate developer Billy Tiller is found dead under the blades of a bulldozer, the young man sitting atop the huge machine is arrested immediately. He protests his innocence, claiming he was trying to move the huge machine off the injured man. Discovering that he is an environmental activist, local cops find his protests unbelievable and take him to jail. Abbott gets involved when the defense attorney hires him to find a case for reasonable doubt. After Abbott meets the young man's father, his unease begins to grow as he realizes that no one is willing to consider that the accused kid's protests of innocence might be true. As he asks questions and searches for persons who might have had a murderous grudge against the dead man, Abbott finds that the most meaningful information does not come from Tiller's checkered business operations. Matters of the heart hold more significance.

Scott has an appealing protagonist in Ben Abbott, and he portrays the inevitable tensions and connections of a small town very well. McMANSIONS is a very enjoyable read.

Woodstock

#### A MINOR CASE OF MURDER

Jeff Markowitz

November 2006

Five Star/Thomson Gale

A MINOR CASE OF MURDER is Jeff Markowitz's second book, both humorous cozies featuring pulp journalist and amateur investigator Cassie O'Malley. His first book, WHO IS KILLING DOAH'S DEER?, was published in June 2004.

After 15 lonely years of widowhood, Cassie O'Malley has a boy friend. And when Andy MacTavish turns out to be smart and rich and sweet and the owner of the White Sand Skeeters minor league baseball team – well life couldn't get much better.

And then the team mascot, Skeeter, dies on the field. But Donna, who usually wears the Skeeter costume, has been asked out by Andy's brother Billy, and so her friend Heather wore the costume on the fatal afternoon. Was she murdered? If so, was Donna the intended victim, or is someone out to destroy the team? Andy asks Cassie to look into the case.

As Cassie balances the Skeeter case, her new-found love life, her newspaper job and her friend Cheyenne's mayoral campaign, we are introduced to a large cast of fascinating characters. Jeff Markowitz does a terrific job of fleshing out even the minor characters. We learn to know and like all of them, even the one who turns out to be the one who done it.

David Chernow

#### MUDERER'S ROW

Robin Odell and Wilfred Gregg

2006

Sutton

MUDERER'S ROW is a true crime book presented in an A to Z of famous murderers. It tells of each killer, his or her crimes and the outcome of each case. From the famous to the infamous to some who are truly obscure, MUDERER'S ROW is a reminder of just how real the villains can be. The authors, Odell and Gregg did their homework and it shows. This is a must have for any fan of true crime.

Jon

### THE NECROPOLIS RAILWAY

Andrew Martin

January 2007

HARCOURT PRESS

It is 1903, and young Jim Stringer has just arrived in London, eager to start work on the new railways.

But when his colleagues greet him with a frosty demeanour, and more than a few men wind up dead, Jim begins to realise that there is something darker going on than he could ever have imagined.

Andrew Martin's historical crime novel is a pleasure to read. The prose reads in a contemporary fashion; the style and rhythm akin to early nineteenth century writing but with a pacing suitable for the twenty-first.

There is also a supreme sense of atmosphere and character. Wasting no time for pre-amble, Martin throws us into the London of the early twentieth century; a city drenched in fog and alive with the sound of the new steam engines and the bawdy rumble from working men's pubs crammed into this heaving, industrial metropolis. Seen through the eyes of a young man such as Stringer, the reader is opened to the wonder and magic of the times.

There's a cheeky sense of humour at work here as well, particularly in Jim's naïve wooing of his new landlady. Her practicality and worldliness play well against Jim's relative innocence and wide-eyed enthusiasm, leading to some of the lighter moments in this novel. But the humour here is organic, never

forced. Martin wisely avoids post-modern winking to the audience and it is to his credit that the book maintains its own credibility throughout.

Not simply for rail enthusiasts or historical fiction aficionados, *The Necropolis Railway* is a well-written, deeply researched crime novel; a window into a fascinating, and now lost, world, and a fine debut for an intriguing protagonist.

Russel McLean

### NEVER FEAR

Scott Frost

2007

Headline Books (Division of Hodder) (UK)

Penguin Group (US)

NEVER FEAR is the second novel from screenwriter Scott Frost, whose work has included the X-Files and Twin Peaks. His screenwriting has served him well in his forays into the novel format with wonderful back-story and no red herrings.

NEVER FEAR brings back Alex Delillo (first seen in 2004's RUN THE RISK), a Pasadena detective who discovers she has a half brother only after the he is found dead. It may be too late for her to know him but she is on the trail of his killer. The case gets deep when she discovers ties to an earlier string of murders that may involve her estranged father.

Calling this a thriller is kind of like calling Metallica heavy metal it goes a couple notches past thrilling. Frost does an incredible job of keeping the plot flying forward, amping it up more and more. He nails the Los Angeles setting and his plotting is intricate and tight.

Jon

### OBSESSIONS CAN BE MURDER

Connie Shelton

November 2006

Intrigue Press/Big Earth Publishing

Connie Shelton has written ten Charlie Parker mysteries over the past eleven years. During that time, Charlie Parker has evolved from a tough smart-aleky amateur sleuth into a regular gal – a whole lot like Connie Shelton.

While Charlie and her husband Drake are taking a well-deserved vacation in Watson's Lake, New Mexico, Charlie is asked to look into the disappearance of David Simmons. It's been four years since Simmons disappeared on the same day that his big expensive house blew up, killing the housekeeper. A gas leak was the official explanation for the explosion; Simmons did it according to the local rumor mill. Neither the police nor the insurance company has been able to find him, nor have they been able to determine if the fatal fire was an accident or arson. So his daughter Amanda retains Charlie to re-open the cold case. Charlie's investigation into the life of David Simmons reveals a secretive man with several false identities, a brilliant businessman obsessed with money. But David Simmons was also obsessed with his second wife, a young gold-digger who now hungers only for the insurance money and her seedy lover. As Charlie continues digging, uncovering lots of money and lots of motives, she meticulously works her way through the numerous entwined plot lines to a surprising conclusion.

David Chernow

## PICTURES

Robert Daley  
2006  
Harcourt

Daley's seventeenth book, PICTURES is an exciting thriller with a fresh feel.

A security firm is hired to find out who took some photos of a certain European royal with a woman not his wife. The firm puts ex-NYPD Captain Vincent Conte on the job. He decides finding the "other" woman of the photograph is the key to putting an end to the blackmail. The case leads him all over Europe.

A cop by training, he is driven by a need for the truth, not a desire to make clients happy. Ultimately, Conte must decide what he cherishes more: his job or the truth.

Daley writes with a deft hand and a style that is uniquely his own. There is a reason why he's such a great selling author, and the proof is on the pages. Fast pacing and tight plotting make this a real pleasure to read. Conte is an intriguing character and I would love to see him again.

Jon

## THE PILO FAMILY CIRCUS

Will Elliott  
Jan 2007  
ABC Books

"You have two days to pass your audition.

You better pass it, feller. You're joining the circus. Ain't that the best news you ever got? The fuck it ain't. You're just lucky the new apprentice ain't working out. I will kill that sonofabitch, you see if I don't.

Gonko, on behalf of Doopy, Goshy, Winston and Rusfshod

P.S. Steal from me again and I will cut your balls off."

If this little collection of words has put you off, do not pick up THE PILO FAMILY CIRCUS. Of course, far from putting me off, it made me grab for this tome eagerly. And I'm not the only one. Australian Will Elliott has won the ABC Fiction Award for this clown-sopped tale and it was well and horribly earned.

This dark, comedic supernatural thriller begins like a smack upside the head with our protagonist, Jamie, heading back from a dull night of concierge work at an elite Brisbane club to his mundane and filthy shared house to have a boring nights sleep before waking up to do it all again. But a dull night was not to be had. He almost runs over a clown who subsequently refuses to move out of the path of Jamie's car. Is the clown stupid? Drunk? Insane? Real? Jamie doesn't know.

The next night brings a gaggle of clowns into Jamie's life. He observes their mayhem from a shrub and can't believe his senses. When he pockets a bag tossed aside by one of the clowns before they leave, he unwittingly seals his fate. The clowns return for it, trashing his place terrifying Jamie and his flat mate with their vicious and gleeful hijinks. And they give him the audition decree.

After two days spent in horrible anticipation, Jamie begins what he hopes is his audition. Passing out from sheer exhaustion, he awakes to find himself trapped on many levels. He is in a tent in a circus. That is all that is clear for the rest is like some kind of nightmare. He is among a troop of clowns whose sadistic leader, Gonko, rules like a madcap Moe Howard on crack. When Jamie puts on his face paint, he himself is transformed into JJ, a clown long on mean humor and devoid of restraint. Jamie is horrified by the acts his alter ego commits and struggles to contain him. But finds the face paint difficult to resist. This is made more difficult by the other denizens of the Pilo Family Circus. Here, savagery has become an art form rewarded by the theft of your soul. Jamie struggles to survive as he looks for a way to escape the circus. But when the face paint goes on, JJ tries to find a way to get rid of Jamie for good.

Forget the days when clowns were fun, happy symbols of carefree childhoods. Their modern iconic image as evil wrapped in red-noses and striped satin (if you're thinking Wayne Gacy, you are dead to rights), is the world written by Will Elliott. The cavalier tone Elliott uses to describe flagrant violence and degradation is what makes this novel powerful and wonderfully nasty.

Jennifer Jordan

## PROBABLE CAUSE

Theresa Schwegel  
January 2007  
St. Martin's Minotaur

Ray Weiss wanted to be a cop to make his father proud. But now, finally in uniform, he finds himself embroiled in an illegal scheme that threatens to send an innocent man to prison. Not wanting to be disloyal to his fellow officers, but also not wanting to be responsible for false arrests, Weiss is trapped between doing the right thing and doing "right" by his friends. PROBABLE CAUSE follows Schwegel's Edgar-winning first novel, OFFICER DOWN (even making a passing reference to "all the trouble in the twenty-third"), and is written in the same vein: Gritty, dark, police work; confusing loyalties; and life as a street cop. As in Officer Down, this novel is written in present tense, and in Schwegel's hands this works effectively, making the story feel immediate and urgent, especially with the time constraints within the story. Except for a couple of clichés Schwegel uses during the last chapters, Probable Cause is an interesting and fresh book, with good characterization, vivid settings, and some good twists. A good follow-up to her first, very successful book.

Judy Clemens

#### NEXT

Michael Crichton

2006

HarperCollins UK

Firstly let me warn you NEXT is no JURASSIC PARK nor is it an ANDROMEDA STRAIN but most importantly it isn't a STATE OF FEAR either thankfully. NEXT is however an interesting tale about the perils and the benefits of genetic manipulation. The novel is structured like a Robert Altman movie, featuring several intersecting characters trying to understand the impact of manipulating human and animal genes, with the strands all impacting each other toward a rather bleak conclusion. Replete with cutting edge science, it also has doses of pathos with characters competing in harnessing genetic technology for advancing the human genome to the next level. We see multilingual primates such as the speaking chimp Dave, who is only 400 genes short of being a man. A talking parrot called Gerard with an I.Q. of a human, and also Californian scientists rushing to patent fragments of human genomes to cure diseases, and advance human evolution. The characters weave in and out of the story showing that caution must be exercised in embracing this technology. One of the scientists thinks he may have discovered a genetic cure for drug-addiction, only to discover that his genetic spray has a dark-side.

Crichton is also at his most funny; almost playful because when it comes genetic manipulation we're all like children opening up Pandora's box. With 3 Million copies printed and dispatched to bookstores worldwide, this like Crichton's previous work, is an important addition to the Techno-Thriller genre. In two words, I'd sum NEXT up as Great Fun

Ali Karim

#### THE RAGTIME KID

Larry Karp

January 2007

Poisoned Pen Press

1899. The story is about the blatant oppression of the "colored" people, and if that offends you--because the epithets are throughout the book--then don't read this story, as it is unrelenting. The main story line is about the music industry, and specifically about Scott Joplin's music as discovered by 15-year-old Brun Campbell, a real life person who wrote a book about his relationship with Joplin.

The murder is a small part of the story, although pivotal. Campbell runs away from home and rides the rails to get from Arkansas to Sedalia, Missouri, specifically to take lessons from Joplin.

On his way from the train station, Campbell trips over a dead woman, and picks up two pieces of evidence. One belongs to Joplin, he later finds out, and the other to a nogoodnik, possibly the killer.

A good man is arrested, and Campbell feels badly about this but he cannot not reveal anything about the evidence he picked up without putting himself and Joplin in jeopardy. This is no question that Joplin will be lynched on the spot; it's that kind of atmosphere.

The murder does not take up a lot of time in the brain of Campbell, who is a "piano fool" and only wants to be involved in the music business. He loves Joplin's music so much that he steals some of it, and in turn, it is stolen from him, which puts him in another dangerous position. Campbell decides the way out

of this mess is to find the real killer. Karp researched this story and all the characters are real historical figures, except for the villains, but they certainly could have existed.

Gay Toltl Kinman

#### THE SECOND MOUSE

Archer Mayor

2006

Mysterious Press

Joe Gunther, veteran Vermont Bureau of Investigations detective, wanders in one day, being in the neighborhood, to the site of an apparent death by natural causes. The scene already is in the hands of a local cop, but the situation appears to be a little unusual, leading Joe to look into it further. From this innocuous beginning develops a complex and suspenseful tale.

Although there are no clues or signs of violence, Joe is intrigued, more by instinct than anything else.

Although suicide is a reasonable assumption, Joe and his team discover various facts that make them wonder about a few suspects. Following a trail of false leads and half-truths, they begin to unravel the circumstances of the death, only to uncover a series of other crimes. Serendipity often plays a part in solving mysteries. And this novel is no exception.

The characters and topography always play a part in this author's writing, and these attributes are no exception in this novel.

From the highways to the Green Mountains, the reader is brought into the atmosphere of New England. The writing and plotting are superb, and one should only sit back and enjoy the book.

Theodore Feit

#### THE SHADOW WALKER

Michael Walters

2006

Quercus

Walters's debut novel is a real page-turner, fast paced and masterfully written.

Inspector Nergui is a member of the Mongolian Serious Crime Squad. He has his hands full when a British geologist is found dead in a posh hotel. Working together with British CID officer McLeish, Nergui is on the trail of a serial killer. At least they are until McLeish goes missing.

If THE SHADOW WALKER is a preview of what Walters is capable of, I look forward to his next book. The character, Inspector Nergui, is refreshingly unique and complex. Walters manages to plot a story that will keep the reader guessing till the end with a beautiful climax. I can't wait to see what he does next.

Jon

#### THE SHADOWKILLER

Matthew Scott Hansen

January 2007

Simon & Schuster

Let's get this out of the way: this is a novel, a thriller, about Bigfoot. Sasquatch. That great cryptozoographical phenomena/legend of the Pacific Northwest. This may dissuade many from reading this book and leave the rest a very tough audience. First time novelist and three-time biography co-author Matthew Scott Hansen approaches the subject as writers can and do approach their "fictional" subjects. He did research and suppositioned the rest based on this research. The book opinions that those that believe in Bigfoot will welcome this book's portrayal of the creature. Those that don't are, frankly, in for a good chuckle.

The essence of this book brings us man (*the two legs*) vs. nature. It is a story of revenge and of the hunter being hunted. The antagonist (if one is pro-humanity), the crazed and avenging Bigfoot, is pushed to his limits by the fiery death of his "family" at the hands of clumsy humans. Driven by rage, he begins to systematically hunt down wayward humans and develops a taste for their flesh. The humans, despite living in an area that is rampant with sightings and history, are slow on the uptake when it comes to the party responsible for the mutilated and half-consumed bodies stumbled across by wary hikers and the like. And this possible missing link does not have just mere brute strength, a bi-pedal body designed for climbing and foraging and a cunning mind on its side. It can sense the "mind voices" of these *Keepers of the Fire*. He feels their fear as he chases them down and he revels in it. Will the innocent and yet not guiltless humans that grow to understand their foe turn the tables before Bigfoot's revenge is sated?

This was a gutsy premise for any writer to undertake. Marketing to the crime fiction/mystery community is also gutsy. All the elements of a good thriller are in place, including fast pace and putting the "bad guy" squarely into the minds of the reader.

Using italics to let the reader know the antagonists' narrative was taking place was clumsy and unnecessary. But the dialogue is good and the story a fun one, especially if one has a taste for dark humor and gore.

Jennifer Jordan

#### SINNERS AND SAINTS

Eileen Dreyer

December, 2006

St. Martin's Paperbacks

In what can only be described as prescience, Eileen Dreyer's SINNERS AND SAINTS takes place in a New Orleans that is bracing for a hurricane, what would be the earliest ever to hit that City. The book was published days before New Orleans was

struck by Hurricane Katrina, a devastating event from which it is still trying to recover, and it was obviously written much earlier than that. Reading it now is an eerie experience.

Chastity Byrnes is a 26-year-old former trauma nurse in St. Louis, now “one of two new forensic nurse liaisons at St. Michael’s, her job being not only to save patients, but preserve any viable forensic evidence that might prove a possible criminal or civil case. She made sure abuse victims didn’t fall through the cracks, rape victims got better treatment from the hospital than they did from their attackers, and unknown patients were identified. She helped police and hospital personnel work more efficiently together.” And she needs to call upon all of those skills when she receives a call one day from a brother-in-law she didn’t even know she had, the husband of a sister she had had no contact with for ten years, ever since the day that sister and their mother left their home without a word. She is told her sister has gone missing, and five days later finds herself in New Orleans, having agreed to try to help in the search for her sister, Faith. [The third sister was called “Hope.”] Chastity is the survivor of an unspeakably horrendous abusive childhood [her accusations against her father having resulted in his incarceration], the effects of which have barely diminished over the years. She finds she has to “protect herself from old sins and older secrets.” Each time she thinks she knows all of the secrets, she finds more are yet to be unearthed.

The writing is wonderfully evocative, most strikingly in its descriptions of New Orleans. On Jackson Square: “Chastity stopped at the edge of the square, enchanted. She wasn’t really a mystical person. She’d given up her faith with her virginity, long before she could comprehend either. If she could, though, she thought, she might look for it again here in the dark, where the trees dripped shadows and the church bells tolled into the night. Where usually raucous voices quieted to a murmur, and the only real lights were the candles that flickered on the psychics’ tables. If there was magic, she thought, it was here.” The ominous presence of the impending storm is a living, breathing thing - one cannot help but feel the winds and the lashing waters that surround Chastity throughout the novel, embodying her worst nightmare from the scarred days of her nightmare-filled world from her earliest memories. The suspense builds as Chastity continues her search. People to whom she speaks are killed, and her own life is in danger. Chastity and her friends, Kareena, a New Orleans nurse who helps her, and Kareena’s cousin, James, a survivor himself although of entirely different circumstances, a cabdriver who Chastity hires as a chauffeur, among other things, are terrific creations. Recommended.

Gloria Feit

#### THE SORCERER’S CIRCLE

By Michael Siverling

December, 2006

Thomas Dunne Books, St. Martin’s Minotaur

As this novel begins, Jason Wilder is healing from a knife wound suffered in the course of THE STERLING INHERITANCE, the charming initial entry into this series. And, of course, he is banged up some more, with hurting ribs and the like, as this tale unfolds. As he is about to leave the office one day, a mysterious visitor introduces himself, saying the police have referred him to the investigation agency headed by Jason’s mother, “Queen Victoria.” He tells Jason he is going to be murdered. Jason believes the man to be off the wall and dismisses him.

The next morning two events occur. First, news of the man’s murder, which, in fact, did take place. And Jason is called into his mother’s “throne room,” to find the mayor there seeking assistance in clearing his daughter, who had been involved with the murdered man, apparently a self-styled psychic and “devil worshiper.” The murder took place during a ritual at which the mayor’s daughter and others were participants.

The more Jason’s investigation progresses, the more it seems as though the girl is the guilty party. It is up to Jason to discover whether or not this is truly the case.

While this second book in the series lacks some of the cuteness of the interchange between mother and son present in the earlier novel, the book still is a first class suspense novel, well-written and -plotted to keep the reader from suspecting the outcome until it is revealed. It will be interesting to see if the next one—if one is in the works—will recover some of the mirth and entertaining dialogue encountered in the debut effort. Nonetheless, if it only lives up to the standard of this one, it should be rewarding enough.

Theodore Feit

#### SPOOKS: BEHIND THE SCENES

2006

Orion Books

This book is companion to the BBC TV series Spooks (MI-5 here in the states). Spooks tells the story of a special service branch in England that watches over domestic affairs. Rather a well run FBI on speed. The show rocks with taut plotting and top-notch action and great characters. This is truly good television.

The book is a wonderful oversized edition and has everything you need to know about the first four seasons of the show. Episode by episode guides, behind the scenes features and character studies. It’s like the ultimate special features in print format. It also has a lot of full color photos and still from the show.

If you haven't seen all the episodes, there are a few spoilers. But having the book handy while I watched the show on DVD is terrific. You can look up facts and round out the experience perfectly.

Get the book, get the DVD's and spend some quality time with some wonderful entertainment.

Jon

#### STONE BUTTERFLY

James D. Doss

2006

St. Martin's Minotaur

Daisy Perika, a Ute shaman, is used to disturbing dreams but is convinced her latest one is a matter of life or death. When she confides her vision to her nephew, Charlie Moon, part-time tribal investigator, he thinks she's just had another nightmare. Even if it is an omen, Daisy can't give him the identities of the people in her dream. He has no way to do anything, until a phone call puts him in the middle of a murder investigation. Sarah Frank, a Ute-Papago orphan with connections to Charlie and his aunt has been discovered standing over old Ben Silver with a bloody baseball bat in her hands. Before anyone can arrest her she and her cat have disappeared, destination unknown. Charlie sets off for Tonapah Flats, Utah, the scene of the crime, with FBI agent Lila McTeague to get the details. In the meantime, Sarah and her cat have succeeded in hitching rides into Colorado: her destination, the reservation home of Daisy Perika. Sarah knows Daisy will help her and secretly hopes Charlie will too since they are both part of her childhood memories. Complicating matters is the dead man's half-brother, Raymond Oates, who wants something that Ben had, swears Sarah stole it, and will do whatever he has to in order to get it back. It falls to Daisy to protect the girl in the only way she knows how while Charlie investigates all the angles. A massive thunderstorm sets the stage for the unraveling of this mystery, with one more surprise before the murderer is finally apprehended.

This is the eleventh Charlie Moon mystery, but a first time reader will have no trouble getting to know the characters and their foibles. Doss has done a wonderful job of bringing the Ute culture and people to life. His blend of superstition and legend is intriguing and gives the plot added twists, and the character of FBI agent McTeague serves as a reminder that there is more than one way to get the job done.

Maryann Mercer

#### SUSPICIOUS CIRCUMSTANCES

Sandra Ruttan

Jan 2007

Tico Publishing

Debut novels are a funny thing; sometimes they are over hyped, sometimes they fall between the cracks. And sometimes they are an indication of things to come. In this case, if this book is typical of what Ruttan can do, we have a lot to look forward to. Lara Kelly is a reporter working on a story about a suicide. But it's turns out it's not that simple and Kelly needs to dig deeper. Her investigation is enough to get the police to take another look. Enter detective Farraday. Another body shows up and before long Farraday can't help but believe Kelly is onto something when she herself is attacked. At this point the book really starts to rock.

Ruttan has made one big mistake in my eyes: she waited too long to bring her writing to us. She is talented in the way that a natural musician is talented, making all the notes seem effortless. Characters that feel very real, and a wonderful sense of timing, Ruttan brings it all and leaves it on the page. Lucky us. And unlucky me, because now I have to wait for the next one...

Jon

#### THROUGH A GLASS, DARKLY

Donna Leon

2006

Atlantic Monthly Press

The fifteenth book featuring Commissario Guido Brunetti is set on Murano, the home of Venice's famous glass factories. A night watchman for two adjoining factories dies--an accident or murder? Brunetti opts for the latter. The victim was an environmentalist. Was he looking for proof that the factories were not obeying pollution laws? Did he find anything? The factories produce sludge--a toxic waste for which they must pay someone to haul off. Was someone trying to save a little money?

The investigation moves slowly as Brunetti's familiar colleagues help--and hinder--him. His wife, Paola, and two teenage children, assistant Vianello, and the department's computer expert, Signorina Elettra. And--where would we be without Brunetti's bete noir and boss Vice Questore Patta who is lusting after a promotion. He wishes Brunetti would not find any more bodies. This reflects badly on the crime rate in Venice!

But, as we have learned in previous books, and here-- favoritism and corruption are a way of life in author Leon's world.

Gay Toltl Kinman

## TRIPLE CROSS

Kit Ehrman  
January, 2007  
Poisoned Pen Press

What would you say to an all-expense-paid two-week vacation to Louisville leading up to the Kentucky Derby? Steve Cline, a 23-year-old barn manager, who in three previous novels managed to get into all kinds of trouble and solve various mysteries, of course said yes when his father asked him to substitute for an ill employee. And thus begins another tale in which Steve suffers numerous assaults. How he survives these beatings is beyond comprehension—but he usually comes up on top. Steve is contemplating leaving the horse world and has enrolled in an investigations course. His last assignment to be completed is a sort of background check on someone—anyone. He intends to complete the assignment while tending to two horses—so much for the vacation—one of which is entered into the Derby. The subject he picks is a young Churchill Downs marketing employee he meets in the barn. It's a simple records search—but it sets off all kinds of ramifications. The story progresses with the customary flavor of previous novels, excellent descriptions of caring for horses and the racing world—especially the flavor of Derby fever. Steve is invited to a posh party, exposing him to the rich world where greed and revenge rear their ugly heads.

Meanwhile, the woman he is investigating seems to have disappeared. Steve is attacked several times by two thugs who believe he has a tape. Once, they attempt to run him over. Because he is looking into the missing person, he becomes a subject of interest to the Louisville Police Department.

It becomes a race to solve the woman's disappearance. All in all, this is another great read, right down to the finish line—will the horse win the Derby?

Theodore Feit

## VISIBILITY

Boris Starling  
2006  
Harper Collins(UK)

I've been a Starling fan since MESSIAH, and as he continues his writing career he gets better and better. With VISIBILITY he has again outdone himself.

1952, London, a man is killed and former MI-5 turned Scotland Yard detective Herbert Smith finds that you can't always leave your past behind. The man found dead was a biochemist and there are people who want what he was working on, the CIA, KGB and MI-5 are all interested in what happened to him. Smith gets deeper and deeper into the mystery and finds that nothing is what it seems, and nothing is easy.

Another brilliant book from Starling, with wordsmanship that is amazing. He has wound the strings tightly around this story then pulled it loose, letting the action spin out of control. This is a reader's nirvana.

Jon

## WHAT CAME BEFORE HE SHOT HER

Elizabeth George  
2006  
HarperCollins

At the end of Elizabeth George's earlier book, WITH NO ONE AS WITNESS, Helen Lynley, wife of Scotland Yard Acting Superintendent Thomas Lynley, is shot dead on her doorstep. The new novel, which diverges from the author's accustomed series and its characters, has an entirely different focus. It concentrates, instead, on what led up to the murder. It's more a standalone, despite being based on an event that took place in a prior series book.

It is a sad tale of a very troubled 'half-breed' family in an impoverished section of London. Three children are dumped on the doorstep of their aunt by their grandmother who has been tending them before leaving for Jamaica. There is 12-year-old Joel, 15-year-old Vanessa and eight-year-old Toby. Their mother is in a mental institution. Their father was murdered years before. The youngest floats between fantasy and reality, while the oldest withdraws into drugs and sex. Joel attempts to keep everyone together, protecting them from neighborhood roughs. Their aunt, while well meaning, has no experience with children, and is busy with a full-time job and trying to establish her own business.

In an effort to protect his siblings, Joel makes a pact with the devil, a neighborhood gangster and dope peddler, who has other plans for the family—like revenge for the sister who has spurned him. The outcome is tragedy for all. My only criticism would be the title. It seems while Joel was told to shoot the victim, he couldn't, and a confederate committed the crime. But this hardly detracts from this excellent novel, a study in poverty, helplessness and violence. The complexity of the plot, character depictions and issues of class, race and life without hope are so well written that the reader is overwhelmed. The novel is as fine as any work this author has written.

Theodore Feit

#### WHEN DARKNESS FALLS

James Grippando

January 2007

HarperCollins

With thirteen books published since his first in 1994, including four written this year, James Grippando is extraordinarily prolific. Even more amazing than the sheer number of books is the fact that these are not trivial, easy to write – easy to read plot-boilers. These books are complex thrillers with enough twists to keep the reader going page after page and book after book. And – they are based on enough personal hands-on research to have kept Mr. Grippando busy for several lifetimes.

WHEN DARKNESS FALLS is the sixth novel featuring Miami criminal defense lawyer Jack Swyteck, and the second with Jack's best friend and assistant Theo Knight. Jack is called on to represent Falcon, a homeless man obsessed with the mayor's daughter, Alicia Mendoza. Seemingly simple, although high profile due to its political connection, the case begins to twist into the unusual when Falcon is able to provide \$10,000 bail and is released from jail. The story line twists again when a woman's body is found in the trunk of the abandoned car that Falcon calls home; and again when Falcon car-jacks Jack's car, crashes it into a cheap motel, and holds Theo and a motel guest as hostages.

As Jack races to save Theo, he begins to uncover pieces of a much bigger horror – the true story of Argentina's *los Desaparecidos*, the Disappeared. Author James Grippando says, "I hate novels that preach, and I would never write one that does." WHEN DARKNESS FALLS certainly does not preach. But, while racing through the exciting plot, the reader cannot help but wonder "*Donde están los Desaparecidos?*" "Where are the Disappeared?"

As a well-plotted thriller, and as an examination of one man's insanity and one nation's terrible response to terrorism, WHEN DARKNESS FALLS is highly recommended.

David Chernow

#### A WICKED SNOW

Gregg Olsen

March 2007

Pinnacle Books

This is true crime writer Olsen's first fiction novel and it's a hell of a debut.

Hannah Griffin is a CSI investigator, married with a daughter and seemingly content. Nevertheless, while working a case involving child abuse, old memories are brought to the surface. When part of her past she thought buried comes back to haunt her, it get even more complicated. Her childhood home was the scene of one of the worst nightmares imaginable. Multiple bodies are buried, and her family was destroyed. She needs to confront her past and put it to rest once and for all, if she can survive the experience.

Olsen creates a mood with his writing that is down right spooky. His ability to place the reader into scenes with the characters is almost overwhelming. Strong plotting drives the story in an almost hypnotic way. I literally could not stop reading. Nerve-racking suspense and a wonderful climax make this debut a winner.

If A WICKED SNOW is indicative of Olsen's talent I expect we'll be seeing his name for years to come.

Jon

#### THE WINTER OF FRANKIE MACHINE

Don Winslow

2006

Knopf

Thanks to an old friend and mentor's enthusiastic recommendation, I moved this book to the top of my pile. Frank Machianno is at an age when most of us would at least think about being retired. Instead, he runs four businesses, not counting being an on-call handyman for his ex-wife. He does keep some time to himself for surfing with an F.B.I. buddy, but otherwise he's working his tail off to see his daughter through college.

Other than his surfing and his daughter, Frankie's passion is his San Diego waterfront bait shop, where's he's been a much-loved fixture, and the unofficial enforcer of the peace on the pier. He retired from his "day job" long ago as a different type of enforcer. Frankie "The Machine" was a much feared and legendary hit man for the Mob.

Turns out that it's pretty tough to fully retire from the Mob. Frankie quite literally knows where all the bodies are buried, and someone out there wants to make deathly sure that Frankie stays silent. They're out to get him, and he hasn't a clue who, or why, they are. On top of that, his ex-wife's garbage disposal is on the fritz.

THE WINTER OF FRANKIE MACHINE begs comparison to the best parts of Thomas Perry's THE BUTCHER'S BOY, and Larry Block's SUCH MEN ARE DANGEROUS. Intense action and suspense, matched with an unlikely and dangerously competent hero. But Winslow goes beyond all that to give you a character you'd truly like to hang out with. So I'm passing a recommendation forward: read this book.

Gary Shulze, Once Upon a Crime