

Kathy Reichs' franchise has taken off, the television show is a big hit and actually very enjoyable. But the books came first and her latest, 206 BONES (Scribner) proves why she is so popular. This twelfth in the series is told in flashbacks with Tempe remembering details of the case while locked in a small room. Elderly women are being killed and someone want Tempe quiet. Fast pacing and some nice surprises make this a great read.

Dan Fesperman is a truly gifted writer and his latest book is an incredibly deft espionage masterpiece. **THE ARMS MAKER OF BERLIN** (Knopf) is set in modern day with flashes back to WWII as Nat Turnbull tries to unravel secrets of his mentor who at 84 is in trouble again. Arrested for possession of some stolen documents Gordon Wolfe ends up dead in jail, and Nat and a number of other agencies try to track down the secrets of the documents and keep the repercussions from blowing up in their faces. Deeply satisfying like a large well prepared meal this is a real treat.

Another stunning book from Declan Hughes, **ALL THE DEAD VOICES** is pure magic. Ed Loy is working two cases that seem to be on a collision course with one another. A man killed years ago may have resulted in the wrong person jailed, at the same time a soccer star is killed and also has connections to one of the suspects in the earlier murder. A man as troubled as the place where he lives, Irish Private Detective Loy is a modern heir to the noir legacy of crime fiction.

We love Tom Cain here at Crimespree so we were thrilled to get a copy of ASSASSIN (Bantam Press UK). In this third book with Sam Carver, our hero has given up the business of killing people, but someone else has left a number of bodies in a way that makes it look like Sam is freelancing. To complete the frame they have one high profile target set up, and Sam needs to save a life, clear his name with MI6 and keep from getting arrested. All in a day's work. This is a wonderful series and we suggest owning everything by Tom Cain

BABYDOLL (Berkley) is the second book from Allyson Roy, a husband wife writing team. The series features Saylor Oz, who is a sex therapist. Models are dying and it obviously the work of a serial killer, but Saylor doesn't really take notice to her friend's brother is accused. She ends up going undercover to find the killer. While not the most original idea for a mystery it is entertaining and fun to read. I plan to pick up the first in the series as well.

Bill Loefelm's first book FRESH KILLS was a great debut and **BLOODROOT** (Putnam) was opened with great anticipation. At the heart of the story are two brothers, Kevin willingly lost in his own misery and Danny, lost to drugs but back, clean and sober with a plan that while illegal interests Kevin. A children's hospital is scheduled to be turned into a museum and Danny plans to stop it, however he may need to. As the story goes on the brothers become entangled and things get more and more murky. Completely absorbing this is a perfect modern noir tale.

Casey Daniels has another in her Pepper Martin series, number five is **DEAD MAN TALKING** (Berkley Crime) in October. Pepper finds herself in a strange contest to save the Monroe Street Cemetery in the form of a reality TV show. Pepper being able to talk to dead folks should make it plenty interesting. In addition to this already stressful experience, a ghost who claims he was wrongly accused of Murder wants help. Just another day in the life for our heroine.

DEAD WRITE (Obsidian) is the third book in this great series from Sheila Lowe featuring forensic handwriting expert Claudia Rose. A New York dating service is losing members, not because they are quitting, but because they are being murdered. The owner hires Claudia to assist in the investigation. The owner of the dating service, Grusha Olinetsky is not laying all his cards on the table, so Claudia is going to need to watch her back as she gets to the bottom of this mystery. This is a wonderfully written traditional style mystery with modern story telling flare.

David Liss has once again written a book which couldn't be put down. **THE DEVIL'S COMPANY** is a historical corporate thriller set in 18th century London. Benjamin Weaver is a bit of a thug for hire, ex boxer without many prospects he takes odd jobs. When he is hired to steal papers from the East India Company he finds himself in a maze of conspiracies and secrets as power players make moves against each other with him in the middle. Rich with the textures of the time this is a historical novel with modern situations, which really proves history repeats itself. A real treasure of a book.

DISMANTLED (Harper) by Jennifer McMahon is a twisted tale. A group of collage kids belong to a group called The Compassionate Dismantlers, typical of kids that age, they think they are immortal and justified in everything they do. The thinking of the groups is that only by taking things apart can you understand them, and this leads to some pretty nasty pranks and mischief, eventually resulting in the death of one of the group. Years later while trying to live a life free of the memories, deaths start and it looks like the past is coming to get them in a big way. This is an eerie and creepy book and McMahon is wonderful at building suspense. Wow, leave the lights on!

DUCHESS OF DEATH (Phoenix Books) is an unauthorized biography of Agatha Christie by Richard Hack and it's a damn in depth book. It covers her disappearance in 1926 and her childhood along with everything else. Research was obviously key here and Hack had access to a lot, personal letters, documents and other records which he used to give a nice full picture of one of the best selling authors of all time. And like any good bio book, pictures!

Charles Todd, the wonderful writing duo of Charles and Caroline, have launched a new series at William Morrow. Bess Crawford makes her debut in **A DUTY TO THE DEAD**, out in late August. Set during WWI Bess follows family tradition by serving her country, in her case as a nurse. While caring for wounded on the Britannic, the ship is sunk. She is sent home injured, but this means she now has to carry out a dying man's wish. Murder, secrets and a family with a troubled past come together in this first story with Bess and it's a classic already. With all the research and depth we've come to expect from the Todds, this is a wonderful book.

THE DYING LIGHT (Orion), the latest from Dagger winner Henry Porter is a thriller set just into the future a few years, a police state that could actually exist. Made extra frightening by the fact that this could actually happen, the story of Kate Lockhart is especially haunting. Kate is wrought over the death of a man she loved, a brilliant member of the intelligence community in Britain, David's death leaves Kate in a state. She looks into his recent past and his disappearance leading up to his death and soon finds herself on the run and at risk, from some of the very people she used to work for. This book takes a hard look at what could happen if we go too far to protect society. Porter is the real deal and this book is another winner.

If you believe the numbers, Linwood Barclay certainly doesn't need our help selling his books. But **FEAR THE WORST** is such a compelling and energetic read that it just has to be mentioned here. A great story of a typical everyman, divorced, in a weird relationship and a job going nowhere fast. When his daughter goes missing he finds out what he is really made of as he looks into her disappearance. Some things are better left unknown but this book is not better left unread, pick this up!

One of the most talked about books of last year was by Stieg Larson, the author who passed away before his books were released. His second is out, **THE GIRL WHO PLAYED WITH FIRE** (Knopf). Crusading journalists, murder, cover-ups and plenty of action make this book a great read, every bit as good as the first. This another of those books everyone will be talking about, and they should.

Laura Wilson is a talented writer and she writes some of the tightest plots in the business. In **THE INNOCENT SPY** (Minotaur) we are taken to the 1940's in London. The death of a film star has detective Stratton trying to prove murder not suicide. MI5 Agent Diana Cathrop is working an operation undercover when she discovers possible corruption with one of her bosses. Before long, the Detective and spy meet and discover links to what they are working on and between gangsters, spies and liars they need to get to the bottom of things fast. Great characters make this book a pleasure to read and Wilson really nails the time period. Love this book.

Tyler Dilts debut novel, **A KING OF INFINITE SPACE** (World Parade Books) is a detective story set in Long Beach, a haunted detective searching for something missing inside himself and trying to catch a murderer. Detective Danny Beckett is a captivating character and Dilts lays out the plot at a wonderful pace. It's a bit like Ed McBain meets Ross McDonald and I hope to see more.

John Buntin's **L.A. NOIR** (Harmony Books) is a nonfiction look at the Los Angeles stories of Mickey Cohen and top cop Bill Parker. There have been loads of books on this subject and fiction is overflowing with tales inspired by them. L.A. NOIR tells the real story and does it in such a way that it is more entertaining than anything an author could make up. Truly fascinating.

Lisa Gardner does not care if you have to get up tomorrow, she doesn't care if you sleep. And if you start **THE NEIGHBOR** (Orion) you won't be getting any sleep till you finish the book. In south Boston a mother goes missing and Detective Warren is racing the clock to find her. Warren has her work cut out for her as the only witness is four years old, and the husband is just to hinky for his own good. With the local media breathing down her neck the pressure is on Warren to close out the case fast. This book is a combination of procedural, suspense and thriller with a dash of gothic thrown in. A one sitting read.

John Gilstrap seemed to disappear for a while from the crime fiction scene, but he's back with **NO MERCY** (Pinnacle), and it's a hell of a return. Jonathan graves is a PI on the run after a hostage scene goes bad. He is looking into a missing person, his ex-wife's new husband is gone and the reasons behind are nothing but trouble. Fast paced and at times violent this is an entertaining book. And while the characters are not entitle new to anyone who reads crime fiction, they are highly entertaining.

RED TO BLACK (ecco) by Alex Dryden is a espionage novel set in Russia that is pure adrenalin. MI6 op Finn is undercover in Moscow and has found a source in the Kremlin, a source which the Russians are looking for. The KGB agent doing the hunting is a woman who has a pedigree of service to the Soviet Union. Secrets are unearthed and new alliances formed in an effort to save all of Europe, complicated by unexpected romantic entanglements and a ticking clock. A top notch thriller and I think a new rising star of a writer.

Coming in October is a hot book we first heard about back in April. **RIZZO'S WAR** (Minotaur) is by debut author Lou Manfredo and it is a hell of a first book. It's being called a thriller, but it's really a procedural, and a fast moving perfectly plotted one at that. Joe Rizzo has been on the force for a while and as a veteran Detective he is put in charge of training a new detective, Mike McQueen. While McQueen soon discovers that while Rizzo doesn't always go by the book, he does know what he's doing. When the two catch a case involving a missing politician's daughter the rookie soon learns how things can really work, or not. Manfredo brings real life experience to his writing and it show on every page with every piece of dialogue. This book is authentic, original and should be a contender for a lot of awards next year.

Jeri Westerson has done a very cool thing, she has made reading about the middle ages fun with her take on Medieval Noir. **THE SERPENT IN THE THORNS** is the second book to feature Crispin Guest, former aristocrat, now just a guy getting by on his wits. It's 1383 and Crispin is asked to help a tavern girl who is accused of murder, and if the case is not solved, it could lead to war as the victim is a French diplomat. Fast, clever and wonderful this is a great way to spend an evening.

SWAN FOR THE MONEY is the latest from Donna Andrews, one of the go to authors for Crimespree editors when we need a pick me up. Smart funny and totally entertaining Andrews never lets us down. In this latest adventure Meg's parents have taken up growing roses and competing with other growers. Her luck holds true as a attempted murder at a show puts her in the middle of another investigation, surrounded by well meaning but crazy family members Meg's life is never boring, lucky for us!

TEARS OF PEARL (Minotaur) by Tasha Alexander is another exotic historical thriller that satisfies on all levels. Honeymooning in Turkey Lady Emily and Colin Hargreaves discover that Constantinople is not immune to murder and intrigue as a harem girl is found murdered. The victim is soon identified as the daughter of a diplomat who has been missing for 20 years. As Emily and Colin try to discover the killer the body count rises. A combination of great locale, wonderful suspense and intrigue make this a winner.

VANILLA RIDE (Knopf) is a new Hap and Leonard novel from Joe Lansdale. Leonard asks for Hap's help when a friend need to rescue his granddaughter from some drug dealers. A quick job escalates when it turns out they have deep ties to the mob and a killer is brought in to stop them. Lansdale is a brilliant writer, but this series is my favorite of all his work. This chapter in the lives of Hap and Leonard is funny, action packed and terrific.

BOOK REVIEWS FOR ISSUE 32 SEP/OCT 2009

ABOUT FACE

Donna Leon
April, 2009
Grove/Atlantic

It is no mean feat to sustain a mystery series at this high a level for 17 novels. Of course, that is just what Donna Leon has accomplished and more (this is the 18th Commissario Guido Brunetti mystery). Of course, ABOUT FACE features that charming and erudite Venetian detective in a tale that begins with what appears to be mafia control of the garbage industry and illegal dumping of dangerous substances but soon turns from just a simple criminal inquiry into a more complicated morality tale.

Once again, the reader is treated to the sights and sounds of Venice as well as Brunetti's love of classical literature and the delightful observances of his wife. Written with subtlety and insight into the characters, the novel, as its predecessors, is a pleasure to read.

Theodore Feit

THE AMATEURS

Marcus Sakey
August 2009
Dutton

What was I thinking? I started THE AMATEURS one evening after three straight eleven-hour days. I just wanted to relax.

I should have known better. I'd read *THE BLADE ITSELF*, *AT THE CITY'S EDGE* and *GOOD PEOPLE* and thought I knew what to expect, memorable characters, a well plotted story, crafted writing, in short a very satisfying read. When my alarm went off at 5:45 the next morning I was making a heart-pounding escape with Jenn and less than ten pages left of an extraordinary book. The next day I spent a lot of time trying to pinpoint the exact moment I knew I wouldn't put down the book for something as mundane as sleep.

THE AMATEURS, four quite ordinary people, who forge a friendship to fill their empty, lonely, lives. Alex, a bartender, Ian, a stocker broker, Mitch, a Hotel Doorman and Jenn, a travel agent are the Thursday Night Drinking Club. The high light of every week is Thursday when they gather at Alex's bar to drink, laugh and play the "What if?" game. The game, an extension of their days, dreaming their would of, should of, could-ofs, had they but made a different choice. In fact, they always made the easy choice until one Tuesday evening. After that, every choice, even the easy ones, has a bitter consequence. Life or death hang in the balance, just surviving is no longer an option. No one is laughing any more.

The brilliance of *THE AMATEURS* is the fact that these four people could be anyone, you, me, your neighbor, a person on the street or sitting next to you in a darkened movie theater. Jenn, Mitch, Alex and Ian are the best and the worst in all of us. No one can honestly say "I would never . . ." until pushed to the edge of the cliff. What separates heroes from villains? I don't know. Aren't we all a little of both?

Marcus has delivered another 'tour de force'. Powerful writing, believable characters and a thrilling, fast-paced story. Everyone put *THE AMATEURS* on the top of your to be read stacks, you won't be sorry.

Penny Halle, Murder & Mayhem in Muskego, Muskego Public Library

THE ASYLUM PROPHECIES

Daniel Keyes

October 2009

Dorchester Publisher

Yes, that is Daniel Keyes name you see. Yes, that Daniel Keyes. His first book in almost thirty years and it's a thriller, baby!

Living a life in and out of asylums at the behest of her father, the director of a clinic in Greece which she currently resides, is a haze for Raven Slade. When nurse Faye Sawyer asks her to visit her former acting professor, Tedescu, she balks but is quickly controlled. Sawyer knows very well how to handle Ravens outbursts after nursing the dissociative girl for many years. She knows the two personalities fears, hates and loves to keep both in line. During Ravens visit with the professor, the nurse is mere steps away as Raven, triggered by Tedescu, begins to recite lines she assumes are from a play she studied for. But the lines allude to something called Operation Dragon's Teeth and Tedescu, despite many physical disabilities, begins to beat at the shocked girl as Sawyer swoops in for a rescue.

It isn't long after this that shots ring out on the ward and four armed men in masks seize her. From life on a closed ward when suicide seemed the only way out, Raven is suddenly fighting for her life. Her only bargaining chip is a secret locked deep inside her chaotic mind.

An excellent, many layered thriller that, although not as iconic as *FLOWERS FOR ALGERNON*, is one hell of good read.

Jen Jordan

BENEATH THE BLEEDING

Val McDermid

Sept. 09 (U.S.)

Harper

I reviewed *BENEATH THE BLEEDING* last year when it was released in the U.K. An overnight package from Harper's arrived just last week. I found myself drawn to it, like a moth to a flame. I mean, McDermid? In a world where I can no longer afford the indulgence of rereads the next four hours flew by.

This book is the latest installment of the Tony Hill/Carol Jordan epic. McDermid has written a true thriller here while forwarding two of her most beloved characters.

A soccer player is dying and no one knows why. Our favorite police, Carol and her team try to determine why while being cast aside by police bureaucracy. Criminal Profiler Tony is even more at a loss as he lays in hospital, with nothing but snippets of information and his mind to help Carol along.

Soon the midfielder is dead, Bradfield is mourning and an even more sinister terrorist plot unfolds. Hundreds will be injured and many will die. Will our handicapped team get to the bottom of it all?

The personal interrupts the hunt as both Tony and Carol realize they do not know each other as well as they thought they did and must draw new boundaries because of new circumstances in their relationship.

The heart of *BENEATH THE BLEEDING* is the abhorrence of senseless violence. McDermid manages to give the reader a view of violence so inexplicable this capable duo is unable to at first comprehend it without a grizzliness that will make you want to turn away from the page.

BENEATH THE BLEEDING, what every thriller should strive to be.

Ruth Jordan

BLOOD LINE

Mark Billingham
July 2009
Little, Brown U.K.

"This one's got your name on it," Those words from forensic expert Phil Hendricks to Thomas Thorne cut quickly to the heart of Mark Billingham's award winning fiction series.

Indeed the death of Emily Walker unfolds into pure Billingham. In a series of books not for the faint of heart, BLOOD LINE will curl the toes of the most hardened of crime fiction fans. Because evil, pure evil, is not shocking or intelligent, it just is. That there is a Thorne, a man who can look at what appears to at first be a domestic and see that this is going to be worse than perhaps anything he or his team have ever seen before is where the reader will find comfort.

It turns out that Emily's is not the first death. The pieces of her murder can be tied to another and shortly there will be two more. The bashed in heads, plastic bags and pieces of something that looks like cellophane are not the only things these victims share. There is a past that alerts the police to whom the next victims will be. Can Thorne and his team save them? BLOOD LINE is almost entirely set around the case at hand but in this novel we see more of Thorne as a person than perhaps ever before. Using a personal tragedy at the beginning of the book as an emotional barometer Billingham uses sprinkled scenes and mere sentences to more fully define a character already loved and read by millions world wide. We see when Thomas Thorne shuts down, when he grieves and when he simply just gets on with it. His ability to finally be both selfless and selfish, to be concerned for others and seek help for himself show a grand evolution in the character of Thorne.

If you're worried by the above paragraph that perhaps Billingham has gone soft... well come on. Have you read him at all? Following not one but two serial killers to decidedly unhappy results ought to reassure you and the grizzly climax will delight.

After a book away from the world of Thorne, Billingham has returned to his protagonist to present not only a great story for the reader but a firm knowledge of who his protagonist is and what waters within crime are his milieu.

Ruth Jordan

BLOOD MOON

Garry Disher
May 2009
Soho Press

To say that Adrian Wishart was a control freak would be an understatement. It is, therefore, perhaps understandable that when he reports his wife missing, the police are less concerned than Mr. Wishart might have hoped. After all, his wife has not been missing for very long. His fears, however, ultimately prove to be well founded. But is he in fact the person responsible for his wife's death? They'd only been married for three years. He was known to have been extremely jealous, given to following his wife around and keeping close track of her movements at all times, whether she was at work or having lunch with a girlfriend. But he appears to have an airtight alibi for the relevant time frame.

The police are already involved in another investigation: the severe beating of the chaplain at a prestigious boarding school, who is also the head of a local fundamentalist church. The victim is in a coma, and the fact that the man's brother is an aide to a local politician, one given to loud criticism of the police, makes matters even more 'delicate.'

The expectations of a lunar eclipse seems to heighten the already intense atmosphere, and on the night of the highly anticipated event Pam Murphy, a new member of the detective squad, stands "transfixed. All human activity except the need to congregate and worship was suspended for an hour or so. . . The red moon mellowed them. They swayed to inner choruses and seemed inclined to kiss and hug each other."

Inspector Hal Challis of the Australian Victoria Police has become 'involved' with Sergeant Ellen Destry, a member of his squad, the Crime Investigation Unit. Though their relationship is only of 3 weeks duration, things have already been getting 'sticky,' on both personal and professional levels. All of these disparate themes are played out with subtlety and precision.

This is the fifth in the Inspector Challis series, set in the Melbourne area. On its most basic level, it is a police procedural, done as well as anything in the genre, but it is more than that, with wonderful characters and sense of place. It is thoroughly enjoyable.

Gloria Feit

BLOOD SAFARI

Deon Meyer
2009
Atlantic Monthly Press

Deon Myers is an amazing crime novelist and BLOOD SAFARI, his fifth, is my favorite so far. The series character is hired to help out a woman in desperate trouble. Emma le Roux has seen something on the news that shakes her to her soul;

her brother, missing for twenty years, has been named in a murder investigation involving poaching endangered vultures. After making some inquiries on her own, people try to kill her in her own home. This is when she calls in help in the form of Lemmer.

Steeped in some of the harsh realities taking place in Africa, this book is not only a terrific read, but also a look at social and political issues we, as Americans, try not to notice. The book doesn't preach, but through the telling of the story Meyer informs the reader and draws him further into the tale while doing so. It has all the classic noir type elements, only it's not the mean streets being walked here. The climax is powerful and this is a book not to miss.

Jon Jordan

BLOOD'S A ROVER

James Ellroy

2009

Knopf

James Ellroy, perhaps the finest fiction author working today, returns with BLOOD'S A ROVER, the third in his Underworld USA Trilogy that began with AMERICAN TABLOID and THE COLD SIX THOUSAND. It is almost eight years since COLD SIX THOUSAND and many of us have been waiting breathlessly for BLOOD. The books start at the end of 1958 and cover America through 1972. All three books hit a level of brilliance, this is true crime fiction of the highest order. Nearly all of the characters really lived. In fact when Mr. Ellroy signed in my store for COLD SIX THOUSAND, he told the audience that the books are history and not fiction.

The books focus on the power brokers of America. J. Edgar Hoover, Carlos Marcello, Howard Hughes, the Presidents, the gangsters and FBI agents who made the history of our times. ROVER begins as COLD SIX ends. We follow the players from the streets of America's big cities, to the islands of Haiti and the Dominican Republic. There are also tough, brilliant ladies in ROVER who play a huge part of our times. I will not repeat any plot except for a scene when Wayne Tedrow wheels 25 million in cash (1968) to Richard Nixon at the Republican National Convention.

BLOOD'S A ROVER is every bit as good as the previous books in this series. The books are the essence of hard-boiled fiction, the prose is amazing yet very lean and mean and filled with shocking amounts of information. I urge all people to read these books, but you must start at AMERICAN TABLOID as the books tell a continuous story. I only hope Mr. Ellroy will continue, the book ends right before Watergate, for the remaining years must also be told. In my humble opinion this trilogy of books is the finest fiction novels of the last twenty years. I also hope we do not have to wait eight years for the next one, even though the wait was worth it. Hail to the King.

Richard Katz of Mystery One Bookstore

THE BOURNE DECEPTION

Eric Van Lustbader for Robert Ludlum

2009

Grand Central Publishing

The Bourne thrillers have become a brand – like Kleenex or McDonalds, you always know what you're going to get. This is not a bad thing. If what you're looking for is a few hours of utter escapism, riding along with a character you already know and like, then you could do a lot worse than The Bourne Deception.

As usual, someone wants to kill Jason Bourne, this time in Bali. The twist here is that the assassination attempt may be linked to the crash of an American passenger flight, which has been shot down by an Iranian missile – whether by accident or by design being the question under investigation by a team of experts.

And, as usual, finding the answers to both mysteries becomes a race against time, with Bourne trying to simultaneously save himself and the world.

Eric Van Lustbader does a fine job carrying on the tradition of the Bourne series. This is definitely a recommended read.

Rae Helmsworth

BREATHING WATER

Timothy Hallinan

August 2009

William Morrow

In the third installment of Timothy Hallinan's Bangkok Thriller series, BREATHING WATER finds Poke Rafferty trapped in a peculiar predicament. During a poker game, he won the right to author Khun Pan's biography. People have clamored for this biography because Pan has done what virtually no one else has in Thailand: risen from the ranks of dirt poor to grotesquely wealthy. Despite demand, this biography has not been written, and Poke quickly discerns the probable reason. Poke has been threatened: if he writes the biography, one side has threatened to kill his family; if he doesn't write the biography, another side has threatened to kill his family. And both sides will be watching him to see that he's doing exactly what they dictate. He's literally stuck in a catch-22. Poke needs to hold off both sides until he can figure out just

exactly what it is he WILL do.

BREATHING WATER is the quintessential story of the haves versus the have-nots. The most obvious level of this theme is found in the rich versus the poor. But Hallinan takes the theme to multiple levels with Poke's family, his friend Arthit's family, and the illegal baby trade, illustrating to the reader that money is not the only factor creating divisions between the haves and have nots.

Hallinan never fails to ignite his plots with plenty of twists and turns; BREATHING WATER is no exception. One of his strongest plot building devices is unquestionably character development. He builds strong, rich characters whose depth and interactions with each other work to intensify the plot.

Hallinan makes use of every word, every sentence, every paragraph. BREATHING WATER is definitely a tight, fluff-less plot that rewards its readers with an adventurous ride through the darkness of Bangkok.

Jen Forbus

THE CAVALIER OF THE APOCALYPSE

Susanne Alleyne

2009

Minotaur

Paris in the winter of 1786. A body with Freemason symbols on it is found in a cemetery. In this prequel to the first two in the series featuring hero Aristide Ravel, he is a poor pamphlet writer who becomes a suspect in the crime.

Friend Inspector Brasseur asks Ravel, a Mason himself, for information about the Masons and hires him as a sub-inspector. This gives Aristide a little authority to ask questions. But suspicion still hangs over him.

Are the Masons involved in a plot to get rid of Louis XVI and to put the Duc d'Orleans in his place? Or is the murder connected with a diamond necklace given to the queen under dubious circumstances? Medical schools in the area are fond of fresh corpses to dissect, so it's possible the man was killed for this reason and the Mason symbols are only a false clue.

As Aristide and Brasseur investigate, they find that four Masons are missing. The families of each seem to try to be hiding their disappearances, each with a different excuse. One of the missing men is the dead man, but which one?

A wonderful window into life, both of the rich and the poor, in Paris at this time.

Gay Toltl Kinman

CABAL OF THE WESTFORD KNIGHT

David S. Brody

2009

Martin and Lawrence Press

This intriguing novel takes as its premise the idea that the legend of the Westford Knight is true. If, like me, you've never heard of the Westford Knight, the short version of the story is that some historians believe that during the 14th century, Europeans explored New England – a good 200 years before their earliest acknowledged settlement in the New World. It's a controversial theory, not accepted by mainstream archeologists and historians, but it makes a great basis for a suspense story.

And the story is excellent. The protagonist, a lawyer named Cameron Thorne, is simply trying to help some clients when he's sucked into the controversy and conspiracy of the Westford Knight. The bottom line is that there are very powerful forces who are not interested in having the truth come to light, and who are willing to do anything to keep the past a secret. Thorne and his sidekick, a researcher called Amanda, are well-rounded and likable characters, and the plot is full of interesting historical information, while at the same time moving quickly toward a heck of a climax.

Sound a bit like THE DA VINCI CODE? Well, yes. But that doesn't make this book any less of an entertaining, engaging read. I highly recommend it, and am looking forward to reading more of Brody's work.

Rae Helmsworth

THE CALLING

Inger Ash Wolfe

May 19, 2009

Mariner Books

Whether this novel is a thriller, mystery or police procedural, or a combination of all three, it is original and suspenseful. It takes place in a small town north of Toronto, and features 61-year-old Hazel Micallief, the acting head of a small police outpost in Port Dundas. The crusty Detective Inspector has a bad back and, racked with pain, is dependent on pain killers.

Aside from minor infractions, little in the way of real crime takes place in the small town. Then one day a murder is discovered, the terminally ill victim horribly mutilated. Hazel discovers other similar victims stretching across Canada from Vancouver eastward. Despite her understaffed department, she undertakes to investigate what appears to be a case of a serial killer who may be masking mercy killings.

The story is gripping, with a tight plot, packed with shivering descriptions and taut writing. The author's name is a nom de plume of a writer who is described as a North American literary novelist. One wonders why the author chose to hide under an alias for this well-told tale; whatever the reason, it should be read for its well-constructed flow.
Theodore Feit

CIVIL TWILIGHT

Sue Dunlap
2009
Counterpoint Press.

Not many scribes today have the ability to turn a plot with the sheer élan of Sue Dunlap. An author of note from her very first mystery, she has made fans laugh, cry, cheer for the good guys and want to kick some bad guy ass.

If you've not yet experienced her newest heroine know that Darcy Lott will steal your heart. A Stuntwoman living a truly San Francisco existence with a complicated family life and the ability to always be on the scene of the latest murder? What's not to love here.

In CIVIL TWILIGHT, Darcy's brother introduces her to Karen Johnson. Enthralled and skeptical of her brother's new client Darcy desires to learn more about her.... And then Karen disappears. A Murder occurs. A Lott is the primary suspect. Can Darcy save the day and what secrets did Karen have and how deep is the history that results in this latest crime? Dunlap will keep you reading and you'll clamor for more.

Ruth Jordan

THE COUNTERFEIT GUEST

Rose Melikan
2009
Touchstone /Simon & Schuster

The back cover blurb states that the book is in the grand tradition of Charlotte Bronte--and this is true. Melikan has the language spot on. The author has captured the spirit of the times, Georgian England, along with manners, dress, and customs, without intruding on the story. The blurb gives the game away about something that happens one third of the way through the book.

Set in 1797 England, Mary Finch inherits a fortune. While her estate is being renovated, she stays with her girlhood friend, Susannah Armitage, who has just married Col. Crosby-Nash in their elegant Champion Hall.

Susannah's cousin is Capt. Robert Holland for whom Mary has always felt an attraction. Now she has money and can do something about it, but he seems a little standoffish.

Mary becomes involved, by her own choice, in spying on her host (hence, the counterfeit guest), who may be a traitor. She is also involved in the investigation of a man who is murdered, plus a possible sabotage plot. The latter brings Robert on the scene to Mary's delight.

Crosby-Nash is not a person Robert or Mary would have recommended for Susannah, and they wonder why she married him, or he, her. But Susannah seems to be happy, so perhaps Mary's foray into spying is all for naught.

The story is written from several P.O.V.s, but mostly from Mary's and Robert's, even sometimes in alternating paragraphs ala romance writing traditions.

Gay Toltl Kinman

CRUSH

Alan Jacobson
2009
Vanguard Press

Book two in this series with FBI profiler Karen Vail is even better than the first. Jacobson is definitely in his element with the thriller genre.

Karen Vail is ordered to take some time off and she and her boyfriend, detective Hernandez, go on vacation to Napa valley. But as we know, our favorite characters don't get to take vacations! Soon after they arrive at their getaway a body is found. While the local police are not too keen on help, a second body makes them see reason. Before long, Karen is working with a task force looking for a killer. While they find secrets and motives a plenty, Karen feels something is still wrong, and when Karen gets this feeling people better pay attention.

Jacobson's research into the FBI and Napa Valley really paid off because this book is tight. It moves like kids down stairs on X-mas morning and the anticipation it builds is almost too nerve racking.

I'm a fan of this series and can't wait for more.

Jon Jordan

THE DARK HORSE

Craig Johnson
June 2009
Viking

When a woman is housed in his jail, Sheriff Walt Longmire is not convinced she is guilty of the murder of her husband. Even though the murder took place in an adjoining jurisdiction and she confessed, with the murder weapon in her lap, something doesn't smell right to Walt, who undertakes to conduct an investigation undercover. Walt goes to the small town in which the incident took place in the guise of a representative of an insurance company because in addition to the murder, a barn with six horses and the house in which the murder victim was found lying in his bed burned down. He encounters a diverse set of unusual characters, as well as a series of dangerous adventures. Along the way he comes to the conclusion that nearly everyone in town wanted the victim dead. The plot, as usual for this author, unfolds against the rugged Wyoming landscape, and is written in the sparse style of the previous four novels in the series. After 24 years as Sheriff, Walt is running for another two-year term, but is too busy to campaign. The story flashes back and forth between Walt's efforts to get the accused to help him learn what happened, and his actual investigation. The casual humor of Walt's under-deputy, together with the sharp repartee, provides a light touch to the otherwise grim tale. As the story progresses, the reader is kept guessing right down to the final chapter.

Theodore Feit

DARK PLACES

Gillian Flynn
May 2009
Shaye Areheart Books

31 year old Libby Day is a depressed, at times suicidal, young woman. And she has every right to be: When she was seven years old, her mother and two sisters were murdered, in what was later called "The Satan Sacrifice of Kinnakee, Kansas" and "The Prairie Massacre." Libby survived by crawling out a window of the family farmhouse where they lived, and where the others died. The only other surviving family member was Libby's then 15-year-old brother, Ben - the person who Libby later testified was the killer. Michelle, 10, was strangled. Debby, 9, died of axe wounds. And the mother, Patty, died from two shotgun wounds [her head nearly blown off], axe wounds [her body axed nearly in two], and deep cuts from a hunting knife. The story opens 24 years later. Libby has managed all the intervening years by dint of the money from a trust fund set up by sympathetic members of the public following the trial and the attendant publicity. But that money has nearly run out, leading Libby to consider an offer from a group calling itself The Kill Club. The macabre secret society, obsessed with notorious crimes, will pay Libby to interview Ben and others about That Night. The Kill Club, it should be noted, believes Ben is innocent. Ultimately, Libby begins to question the accuracy of her memories. Libby is a thoroughly dysfunctional, nihilistic personality, routinely pessimistic, who "assumed everything bad in the world could happen, because everything bad in the world already did." She still thinks of herself as "the one who lived," and as Baby Day and Orphan Day, as the tabloids had variously referred to her at the time, and says "I was raised feral, and I mostly stayed that way." This makes the reader understand that the darkest place of all can be one's mind. The p.o.v. changes from Libby, in the present [the only 1st person voice], to Ben and Patty, from the days before "that last summer before the end," and more specifically to The Day. This was not an easy book to read. Libby is as much of an anti-hero as one will meet in a novel, and being in her mind is a harrowing foray. But the book is difficult to put down, and whatever the reader may expect at the end, the author will surprise you..

Gloria Feit

A DEADLY HABIT

Andrea Sisco
2009
Five Star

The habit in the title refers to Sister Germaine, who is the sister of heroine Penelope "Pen" Santucci. Pen, 27, finds her husband Paul dead in their house. It is no matter that she broke in (they are getting divorced) to get some of her things that he wouldn't give her. She calls the body in anonymously but remains the number one suspect and her voice is recognized. Pen doesn't look forward to wearing prison orange or being housed by the state of Minnesota, so she goes to her friend, Father Daniel Kopecky. He puts her in touch with a lawyer who owes the good father a favor. Pen does some investigation on her own because she knows, as a probation officer, how slowly justice moves, if at all, and particularly if the police think they have a suspect--and they do. The more she investigates, the more she finds out about her husband, a lawyer. He was up to something--but what? Whatever it was, Pen is sure, got him killed.

Pen is wise-cracking and funny. If she doesn't take life seriously, she does take her freedom seriously.
Gay Toltl Kinman

DOUBLE EXPOSURE

Michael Lister
September 2009
Tyros Books

Remington James is a successful but unhappy advertising executive when his father dies. He returns to his hometown to run his father's store and care for his dying mother. While home, he decides to return to wildlife photography, the hobby he left years ago. He sets trap cameras in the woods of the Apalachicola River Basin in hopes of catching the elusive Florida panther. But, as he is out taking pictures and checking his traps, he discovers he has caught not the panther on his camera, but a murder. Now the murderers are hunting Remington through the pitch black of the Florida woods. Readers wanting to experience DOUBLE EXPOSURE surfacely, are in for a heart-pounding thriller. Lister's written a tight plot that doesn't allow one to slow down for even a second. And he's created a powerful effect through minimalism. His protagonist is a photographer taking pictures in the woods, and the prose mimics that process so you can hear the camera shutter as you read:

"Evening. Glow.

Dark figures.

Shot.

Explosion.

Bloom of blood.

Body dropping to the cold ground."

And Lister's setting development carries you smack into the middle of Remington's Eden, which is horrifically transformed into his Hell all in the course of one night. Remington reminds himself to "Use your senses. All of them." And Lister helps the readers do just that. Whether they are seeing the beauty, hearing life or feeling fear, readers will definitely be in the woods with Remington James on the most terrifying night of his life. But they'll have to listen carefully to hear nature's sounds over the thumping of their own hearts.

If you delve deeper, you will find a complex interweaving of theme, plot, character and setting resulting in a magical reading experience.

And of course, nature is a prominent theme as well as a symbol in DOUBLE EXPOSURE. The dark of night is essential to build up the suspense, but it plays a role also in the idea that man is destroying nature. So Remington's manic race is not just a race for his life, but a race for nature. Can they both make it out alive?

Brilliant.

Beautiful.

Must-read!

DOUBLE EXPOSURE by Michael Lister.

Jen Forbus

DOUBLEBACK

Libby Fischer Hellmann
October 2009
Bleak House Books

Ellie Foreman's friend calls one day with a plea for help. Her neighbor's daughter, Molly, has been kidnapped. This isn't the type of thing Ellie has any experience with or knowledge of, but she has a friend who might just be able to help - PI Georgia Davis. Despite the kidnappers' insistence that no police be involved, Davis says that is the only option for Molly's mother, Christine. When Davis turns the ordeal over to the cops and Molly is amazingly returned unscathed, Davis believes the issue is behind her - close the books on that case. Until a few days later when Christine dies in a suspicious car accident and her ex-husband hires Davis to investigate what really happened to his ex-wife for fear Molly may still be in danger.

Foreman and Davis team up to investigate Christine's "accident" and find themselves investigating something much larger as they follow the trail from Wisconsin to Arizona and into the ugly depths of a government-contracted security company, illegal immigration, and drug smuggling.

Simply put, DOUBLEBACK is a book that moves. No one told Libby Fischer Hellman that the shortest distance between two points is a straight line because Davis' trip to Arizona is brimming with twists and turns. Yet, I'm certain most readers will arrive in record time. As with EASY INNOCENCE, Hellmann's plot is multi-layered and peppered with heavy social issues, which ultimately draw the reader deeper into the plot line.

While Georgia Davis may have needed to, Libby Fischer Hellman doesn't need to "doubleback." She's indisputably crossed the line into the realm of great crime fiction writers. There's no going back now.

EMBARKING ON MURDER

Sue Owens Wright

2009

Five Star

A Beanie and Cruiser Mystery, featuring Elsie MacBean aka Beanie, a reporter for the Tahoe Tattler and also a P.I., and her basset hound, Cruiser. The title--emphasis on bark--refers to the paddle wheeler trip, which opens the story.

A Fourth of July dinner cruise on beautiful Lake Tahoe in California--what could be nicer? Nicer would be a trip without someone going overboard and possibly lost forever. Not only that, Tessie, a mythical Loch Ness-type monster, may be involved! Elsie and Cruiser help their friend, Sheriff Skip Cassidy to find Ivy Digg, the woman who went overboard.

Ivy was the much younger wife of Frank. His family feels her disappearance is no great loss.

The other strand of the story is Tessie. Elsie meets Professor Crispin Blayne, a dashing Englishman, who is studying the lake for Tessie and may have proof that she exists. An old-timer, who lives near the lake, is missing and Elsie takes in his dog.

She's in the rescue dog business (as is the author), which is how she acquired Cruiser (or vice versa).

Dog lovers will love!!

Gay Toltl Kinman

THE EXTRA

Elizabeth Sims

2009

Minotaur

Set in present day Los Angeles, heroine Rita Farmer is an extra in a movie shoot. Costumed in a police uniform for and with time to kill time between scenes, she takes a short walk. And soon she's a part of a real crime scene. Two muggers are attacking a boy. The attackers see the uniform, think she's a real police officer with a real gun, and take off.

They also see the face of the 'officer.' This puts her in danger, although she doesn't realize it at the time.

The boy, Kip, has a grandmother, Amaryllis B. Cubitt, who founded a skid row-type mission. Rita is very familiar with it, since acting jobs are few and far between, and she has her young son to support. The mission has been promised quite a bit of money and is now operating very differently from what she remembers. Differently in a bad way, as Rita suspects something is going on that isn't quite right. And she why Amaryllis is acting so strangely?

Her curiosity is piqued, so she and her PI boyfriend, George Rowe, go undercover as homeless people. A little over the top but applause is due for the ending scene.

This book is sequel to **THE ACTRESS** featuring the same heroine.

Gay Toltl Kinman

FABLES: VOLUME 12, THE DARK AGES

Bill Willingham

2009

Vertigo

This series has been a whirlwind of action and intrigue, filled with constantly building anticipation. In Volume 11 we saw an end to the conflict, but things are not exactly peaches and cream for our heroes. THE DARK AGES relates the aftermath of the war and the coming of another challenge, a dark evil no longer in hiding.

Things are going wrong in a big way. Fabletown suffers a catastrophe and everyone needs to relocate. Even though the war is over there is still death and sadness. It's hard to write about this without giving anything away. I was curious about what would happen once Willingham got the series to the great final war and there was a victor, but it becomes clear that he still has tricks up his sleeve. After the journey he's taken these characters on, it's hard to imagine what could be in store, but this volume really does a fine job of ending the first chapter and leading into the next. This really is one of the best comics being done today.

Jon Jordan

FAMOUS PLAYERS

Rick Geary

2009

Comic Lit/NBM

I've been a fan of these books since I first stumbled across THE MYSTERY OF MARY ROGERS a few years ago at Once Upon A Crime bookstore in Minneapolis. I recognized the artwork right away as Rick Geary and that alone was enough to make me pick it up, and then I saw that he was doing graphic novels based on true crime stories and I was hooked.

NBM/ComicsLit has a whole series of these books, and I've loved them all.

The latest is FAMOUS PLAYERS and is a true Hollywood mystery surrounding the still unsolved case of William Desmond Taylor's murder. Taylor was a director back in the golden age of cinema and was making a real name for himself at the time the studios were just becoming powerful and forming companies we still know today. He was found dead on his living room floor by a man servant and from the beginning it looks like the case was destined to be unsolved. Suspects are plentiful, but sloppy police work and a lack of authority over the studios and the minions of Hollywood doomed the case from the start.

Geary in FAMOUS PLAYERS, like his other works in this line does his homework. He takes facts from numerous sources and gels them into a single narrative to give us as complete a picture as he can. I appreciate that he doesn't seem to pick any favorites as to who may have actually done the deed.

The artwork, also by Geary has a comfortable feel to it and no one looks really sinister, which aids in the who really done it appeal of the book. It's all line art and he brings a depth to the work that is easy to get lost in.

These books are all wonderful and they are books that I have re-read a number of times. I also think that they would really appeal to fans of Max Allan Collins series with Nate Heller.

If you enjoy true crime, mysteries, or just great comics, check these out, and start with Famous Players.

Jon Jordan

FAR CRY

John Harvey

2009

Random House UK

FAR CRY opens with a mother mourning one daughter while another awaits pick up at school. We quickly cut to Policeman Will Grayson as he sets off upon his morning run. His morning of domestic bliss is quickly shattered by a subordinate. It seems Mitchell Roberts has been released. Arrested just three years before for the rape of a young girl Roberts is what Will Grayson Police officer and father doesn't like about the system of law and order he's sworn to protect.

With the experience of a master Harvey jumps from the story of our mother to the story of our police with seamless acuity.

What results is a crime novel not about the abhorrence of child abuse nor a story of the deep tragedy of one woman's life; rather FAR CRY is a picture of today, the measures we all take to keep our children safe and how easy it is to fail them even as we fail ourselves.

Ruth and Simon are unable to move beyond their loss. Ruth is unable to not fear for her new daughter with second husband Andrew. Andrew is unable to understand. Until....

Grayson knows in his soul that Roberts is bad, and wants to avenge the other girls, those he suspects knew him before the conviction. Soon we'll have two sets of parents facing nightmares unimagined.

With a wealth of well developed secondary characters, and a plot that sings like the music of Eric Delphy, FAR CRY is sadness and joy, building to an unforgettable crescendo. This novel from John Harvey uses all of his strengths and indeed makes me wonder if the man has any weaknesses at all.

Ruth Jordan

THE FATE OF KATHERINE CARR

Thomas H. Cook

2009

Houghton Mifflin Harcourt

This intricately plotted novel tells a story of loss, redemption and hope overlaid by a suspenseful mystery.

George Gates is a writer who had found a profitable niche for himself as a travel writer specializing in describing places where people disappeared (think Judge Crater). When his own son was kidnapped and murdered George retreats into writing fluff pieces for the local paper.

Arlo McBride is a retired detective with a bit of a monomania. He's obsessed by the case of Katherine Carr, a novelist who disappeared some years ago, leaving not much behind other than an unfinished story about the stalking of a novelist named Katherine Carr.

And finally, Alice Barrows is twelve years old, wheelchair bound and dying of progeria – the "aging disease".

How these three characters are involved with each other and with the mystery of Katherine Carr's disappearance makes for an involving story. A well-written and emotionally engaging read.

Rae Helmsworth

FEAR THE WORST

Linwood Barclay
2009
Bantam Dell

Barclay's *FEAR THE WORST* showcases what he does best: turning an ordinary man's world upside down when a loved one goes missing. That ordinary man is Tim Blake, a divorced car salesman. The loved one is his daughter Sydney who, one day, vanishes into thin air. The hotel she was supposedly working at has no record of her employment. Her closest friends have no idea where she could have gone. Blake refuses to give up hope that he will find his daughter and his investigation leads him to uncover the dark secrets of Sydney's life: including fraud, human trafficking, and murder. Barclay sets the story in a safe New England town; his characters are seemingly innocent and live sheltered lives. All of this heightens the tension as their world becomes filled with crime and corruption. He shows what can happen to an average guy when placed in dramatic situations and forces readers to wonder, "What would I do to get my loved one back?" The external plot is riveting, but more so is the character's journey. Every time the stakes are raised, Blake is pushed to the next level, and by the end he's committing acts that he would never do before. The suspense isn't only from finding out what happened to Sydney; it's about seeing what Blake will do to get her back.

Dana Kaye

FINAL FINESSE

Karna Small Bodman
2009
Forge, Tom Doherty Associates

Karna Bodman knows whereof she writes. A veteran reporter and member of the White House Press Secretary's team for a number of years, Bodman has been behind the scenes during many of America's most interesting stories. This fast-paced adventure begins with the explosion of a natural gas pipeline in the middle of the US. Samantha Reid, a deputy director for Homeland Security, isn't inclined to take the explosion at face value, and presses for government investigation. Several more explosions later, Samantha is sent to investigate and to work with Tripp Adams, an executive with the pipeline's owner, to find out what's going on. Which is all well and good until Adams disappears. Now Samantha must race against time and political interests that are working against her, to solve two mysteries, both with the potential for deadly consequences. This is a really good thriller, and one that keeps the reader guessing from start to finish. I'm happy to recommend it, and look forward to reading more of Bodman's work.

Rae Helmsworth

FUGUE STATE

Brian Evenson
2009
Coffee House Press

FUGUE STATE is the latest short story collection from an author that crime fiction fans will hopefully get to know more of over the next couple of years.

No one writes about characters in dissociative states better than Brian Evenson. Others try to and get half way but ultimately fail to put you in that character's shoes feeling all of the resulting conflictive emotions that the state brings such as confusion, dread, fear.

All of the characters in *FUGUE STATE* are in some form of a dissociative state.

From a woman trapped in a mime's invisible box to a woman who feels that a childhood moment of play that unexpectedly combined fear and wonder altered her forever to a man whose brain synapses misfire and he loses the capacity to speak. That all of these characters states find their origins or are grounded in every day normal activities makes the characters all the more identifiable and their slide all the more terrifying.

Brian Evenson continues to add to one of the strongest short story bodies of work out there.

Brian Lindenmuth

FUGITIVE

Phillip Margolin
June 2009
Harper

Amanda Jaffe and her father are leading criminal defense attorneys in Oregon, having won high profile cases outlined in previous novels in the series. Each is separately presented with another challenging defendant in the current novel. The wife of a U.S. Congressman is charged with conspiring to have her husband murdered, but Frank Jaffe obtains evidence to convince the DA to drop the charges "with prejudice." Meanwhile, her co-defendant, accused of committing the murder, flees the country for an African nation ruled by a sadistic dictator whose idol is Idi Amin. After 12 years, he returns to face the charges (and to escape the wrath of his erstwhile benefactor). Amanda's challenge is not only to exonerate her client, but to protect him from being killed by two separate, but equally dangerous, persons who wish him dead.

The combination of the author's intimate legal knowledge and his ability to maintain a suspenseful pace in a firmly written story keeps the reader intrigued from start to finish.

Theodore Feit

GOTHAM CENTRAL BOOK TWO JOKERS AND MADMEN

Ed Brubaker/ Greg Rucka

2009

DC Comics

This is the second hard cover collection of the wonderful stories of the Gotham Police Department. Written by Brubaker and Rucka, it feels like they are channeling Ed McBain, the true master of police procedurals.

This collection covers two separate stories. The first involves the Joker going on yet another rampage, this time during Xmas. The second is Detective Harvey Bullock trying to redeem some grace after he has screwed up big time.

What really makes this work is the fact that while set in Gotham, it's not about Batman, or even his Rogues gallery.

Gotham is overflowing with crime and corruption and having a vigilante in town just makes the job harder. This is about the cops working cases and putting up with all the crap that goes along with it. Brubaker and Rucka put a very human face on these characters. It's compelling, suspenseful and wonderful. The gritty art adds to the mood of the book perfectly: dark and a bit bleak, but not completely hopeless.

Jon Jordan

GRAVE SECRET

Charlaine Harris

October 2009

Berkley Prime Crime

GRAVE SECRET brings ardent readers of Charlaine Harris four books into the troubled and strange life of Harper Connelly, a woman burdened with the ability to hear the dead speak. Not the words of closure for those left behind those that have died. These are words of accusation, ugly truths and cries for justice. With her step-brother Tolliver, she travels the country, earning just enough to keep going by telling these truths. But many wish what is said had remained as buried as the bodies.

What was to be a brief stay in Texas visiting two sisters living with a family not even remotely keen on Harper and her "career" becomes a crisis when the father to them all is soon to be released from prison. Tolliver and Harper despise the man but he is soon around every corner trying to tell them how much he's changed.

Complicating things further is a case for a very wealthy Texas family that just won't seem to end. The truth that Harper told them about their dead father is not what they wanted to hear. And what Harper says about his housekeeper in the grave next to his is even more intolerable. Someone can't afford to have these truths revealed. Harper and Tolliver are soon caught up in the fallout and the avalanche of events set in motion could destroy them and what they hold most dear. Harris has always written characters that one can't help but care for going through some of the worst things that human can do to human. These characters survive, scarred but strong, still caring for the world around them. A world that still has plenty of chaos in store. With dark humor and emotional honesty, Harris continues to write a series that supersedes itself with each book.

Jen Jordan

HEART OF THE ASSASIN

Robert Ferrigno

August 2009

The third and sadly last in the trilogy that portrays the downfall of the world as we know it and the beginning of a world that could well be our future, Ferrigno plays all sides against the middle.

When no one is all right or wrong, and the soldiers are just cogs in the machine. It is the men and women issuing the orders that decide the fates of nations. In the two nations that were once America, one extreme Islam the other Bible Belt, a greater enemy than each other draws them together. The Atzlan Empire, in need of land and resources, has an air force that can easily defeat their enemies. The two must join or be annihilated. Rakkim Epps, an assassin who has lost his blood lust after starting a family, is the man to unite the two. But there is someone pulling the strings behind this movement.

The Old One, a man who has waited centuries for his time to come, dreams of a world that is his alone. And if Epps cannot find his way past the Old Ones defenses, the world and Epps family are forfeit. Brilliant, action packed book to be read at a whirlwind pace. The meticulous detail, the well-painted characters and the gripping realness of it all marks HEART OF THE ASSASIN as a compulsive read.
Jen Jordan

HER DEADLY MISCHIEF

Beverley Graves Myers
September 2009
Poisoned Pen Press

Tito Amato is back at the Teatro San Marco, singing lead roles and living a reasonably normal life for a castrato in 16th century Venice. He's married, kind of, and has a stepson. His wife is estranged from her family, Jews living in the ghetto, because she has left her religion and married outside her faith, in that order. Still, Tito is basically a happy man. It is opening night, and Tito is in the middle of a glorious aria when he notices that there is one box not paying attention to his voice. As he aims his talents at that box on the fourth tier, the curtains open. It is not for him that they open; a woman tumbles over the rail and falls to her death. The woman, Zuletta Giardino, is a courtesan under the protection of Alessio Pino, the oldest son of Cesare Pino, a Murano glassmaker. Alessio is engaged to Maria Albergati, the daughter of a nobleman. Maria is at the opera that night, but not with Alessio.

The new police chief in Venice, Messer Grande, is also at the opera. He takes quick command, and recognizes Tito's value as the only witness to the murder. He also recognizes Tito's other non-singing abilities, and makes Tito part of the investigation. Liya, Tito's wife, actually knows Zuletta, at least in her former incarnation as the daughter of family friends in the ghetto. This comes in handy, as it helps Tito investigate and it provides an avenue for Liya to reconnect with her family.

Myers has done a great job in this latest Tito adventure. Tito has grown as a person over the five books, and is more complex, more aware of what's going on around him, more mature. As he has grown, so has the complexity of the novels. It's a pleasure to watch a series grow and evolve as this series has done. Brava!

P.J. Coldren

THE HUNTER, Richard Stark's Parker

Adopted by Darwyn Cooke
2009
IDW Press

One of the greatest hard-boiled authors of all time was Richard Stark. His character Parker is a legend among hard-boiled crime fiction fans and has inspired many writers. Stark was really Donald Westlake. When Westlake sold rights to some of the books to Hollywood, but he never let them call the character Parker.

Darwyn Cooke is a comic creator. He writes, draws, paints and what he does he does well. Judging from his previous work, THE NEW FRONTIER (a reimagining of DC's Silver Age characters), and the Spirit to name two, it is obvious that Cooke has an affinity for the fifties. He also loves crime fiction. Cooke contacted Westlake and got permission to do a graphic adaptation of the Stark books, and permission to use the name Parker. And we now have the first of four (hopefully more?) of these books, THE HUNTER.

The book opens with Parker coming into New York beat down and in a foul mood. We soon discover that he was betrayed on a heist and wants his damn money back. As he tracks down the parties responsible, he leaves a wake of destruction. He eventually discovers that the mob now has his money, but for Parker this is just another obstacle to overcome.

Cooke has taken a legendary book and given it to a new generation. The artwork is sparse; drawings with only one color added. He portrays the mood perfectly and I immediately fell into the story. His respect for the original work is evident on every page and I think that this is truly a work of art. If you are a fan of Parker I think you will love this adaptation. If you've not read the Stark books, this is a great introduction. It's also a great introduction to Darwyn Cooke, one of the truly great people working in comics. To me this is what the mixing of comics and crime fiction is all about.

Jon Jordan

I CAN SEE YOU

Karen Rose
2009
Grand Central Publishing

I CAN SEE YOU is the second book to feature Eve Wilson. She was introduced to us in **DON'T TELL**, Rose's debut novel.

The victim of a terrifying and vicious assault, Eve was badly scarred and has retreated from reality, where her only contact with the world is via the internet. A number of surgeries later and her appearance is been restored. Eve is now a graduate

student with the goal of using her own experiences to help others.

There's one big problem, though. The test subjects for Eve's graduate research are committing suicide.

The problem is compounded when it's discovered it's not suicide, it's murder. Unfortunately, almost no one believes the deaths are connected. Enter Detective Noah Webster, a man with his own painful past, who is determined to find justice for the victims.

Eve and Noah must work together to find the killer, and to overcome their dark histories, before they, too, become victims.

Romantic, engaging, and suspenseful, this is a terrific novel, and one well worth reading.

Rae Helmsworth

INSPECTOR SINGH INVESTIGATES: A MOST PECULIAR MALAYSIAN MURDER

Shamini Flint

2009

Piatkus

Introducing Inspector Singh, a grossly overweight Singapore detective who goes his own way much to the chagrin of his superiors. But his results are far too impressive to allow them to get rid of him. In this debut novel they send him to Kuala Lumpur to monitor a murder investigation involving a former Singapore model, married to a prominent businessman. She is accused of his murder and must make sure she at least gets a fair hearing.

Convinced she is innocent, Singh undertakes his own investigation to prove her innocence and find the real murderer.

His problem, of course, is that he is unofficially there and the Malaysian police are determined not to help, happy with a "solved" crime. But that doesn't stop him as he plods on.

This novel is the first installment in a projected series: Singh will be sent to Bali in a September UK release and finally work at home in Singapore in a book to be released next February. Singh is an interesting character, a veteran detective who follows his instincts to solve the crime at hand. For a neophyte crime novelist, the author (who has written children's books) has written a very readable, enjoyable work. [It should be noted that this book is only available at present in or through the UK, not yet available in the US.]

Theodore Feit

THE LANGUAGE OF BEES

Laurie R. King

2009

Bantam Books

Set in 1924, Mary Russell and Sherlock Holmes have just returned from San Francisco to Holmes' retirement farm in Sussex where he settled several years ago to keep bees.

The title refers to a colony of bees that has left its hive. Most unusual. Definitely a mystery, but other questions intervene before Holmes can whip out his magnifying glass. Mary investigates while he is away. She, as we, learn a lot about bees, but she doesn't solve the 'mystery.'

Years ago, Holmes had a dalliance with Irene Adler that produced a son, Damien Adler. Holmes only learned about and met his son when Damien was an adult--and under arrest for murder. Of course, Holmes helped him

A young man comes to them asking for their help in finding his wife and young daughter. As Holmes is at loose ends without a mystery to solve, he jumps at the chance to find them.

His wife may have joined a mysterious religion, The Children of Lights. The bible of their religion, "Testimony," is quoted at the beginning of each chapter.

Are they responsible for the people and sheep being sacrificed in various Stonehenge-type monuments around the country?

The religion is only one lead to follow in their quest to find the wife and child. Mary is able to practice her B & E skills, and brother Mycroft Holmes pulls strings to help them accomplish their front-line sleuthing.

The villain may be a Moriarity-type, for at the end of 433 pages he is still alive, and the last words of the book are "...to be continued."

Yes!

As with all of King's books--this is the ninth in the series--it's a page-turner.

Gay Toltl Kinman

LIARS ANONYMOUS

Louise Ure

St. Martin's

April 2009

It was the prosecutor at her murder trial who dubbed Jessica ["Jessie"] Gammadge the "Queen of Liars Anonymous."

She is the first to admit that she is certainly an accomplished liar, and her skills have only improved in the nearly three years since the trial. [The good news: The jury acquitted her; the bad news: she was guilty of the crime.] Despite the jury's finding, Jessie had no choice but to move from Tucson - very few people, including her family [excepting only her father and his then-partner on the police force], believe in her innocence, and with those two exceptions all think of her as the Girl Who Got Away with Murder. In fact, she thinks of herself that way as well.

Jessie, now 32 years old, and calling herself Jessie Dancing [her middle name], is working in Phoenix as a Roadside Assistance Operator when a call comes in from a nearby area from a client needing help after a car crash, during the course of which she hears other voices followed by what appears to be sounds of a beating before the line goes dead. Jessie of course reports the incident to her supervisors and the police, but feels herself drawn to the place where the call came from to see for herself what can be learned from the scene. [The car is found, but there is no sign of the man who made the phone call.] When the latter's wife asks to see her and to hear the tape she agrees to return to Phoenix to see her, and grows suspicious of the woman's truthfulness as well as her too-friendly neighbor, an attorney who Jessie soon discovers is also her lover. [Jessie is, of course, an expert in detecting liars: "There are supposed to be twenty-seven ways to tell if someone is lying . . . But a good liar knows a hundred different ways to convince you that he's telling the truth."] As the investigation goes forward, Jessie finds herself more and more enmeshed, soon putting her a few feet away when a car bomb explodes, killing a young girl who is somehow involved in the car crash incident, and she becomes the focus of a vengeful cop who has always thought of Jessie as 'the one that got away.'

I learned more than I'd ever known about the emergency systems used by auto manufacturers, e.g., they can furnish diagnostics about the car's performance, include a GPS of course, have a strong satellite phone with advisors available at the other end, can tell how fast a car is going when it is hit and whether the brakes were engaged, and can even tell if there was somebody else in the car, where he/they were sitting, and whether they had their seat belts on.

The writing is excellent, equally as good as Ms. Ure's prior novel, *THE FAULT TREE*, which I loved. The sense of place created by the author is wonderful as well, and the reader can feel the heat of the desert, and visualize where "the saguaros stood as dark and still as an army of surprised soldiers in surrender." A terrific read.

Gloria Feit

LIGHT BRIGADE

Peter Tomasi

2009

DC Comics

Originally published in 2004 in four issues, **LIGHT BRIGADE** is a tale of World War II by Peter J. Tomasi and drawn by Peter Snejbjerg.

It opens during the battle in Belgium in the winter of 1944. Having seen "Band of Brothers," I quickly understood how miserable the characters must have been. The main character is Chris Stavros and he wants to go home more than anyone. His wife was just killed in a car accident and his son is alone. Stavros has pretty much decided there is no hope and there is no God. He is apathetic and distracted.

From the opening page we know there is an odd undercurrent and the soldiers are made aware when they are attacked by Nazi soldiers that can't die. There is a battle being fought that goes beyond the scope of man; a battle between angels and fallen angels. Both sides are looking for the sword of God, and the fallen want to use it to storm heaven. The American soldiers discover that one of their own is actually the centurion who killed Jesus who walks the Earth till he can redeem himself. Looks like it might be his time.

Eventually all forces converge on a monastery where the most holy of relics are kept for a fight to the finish. And it's a great fight.

Tomasi did a wonderful job of making this interesting and filling in details with out being preachy or boring. I also love the art by Snejbjerg, I loved him on Starman and he's even better here. This works not only as a weird war tale, but on a supernatural level as well. Fans of either will enjoy this. I see this as a book I'll re-read just as I re-watch "Band of Brothers" once a year.

Jon Jordan

MIDNIGHT IN MADRID

Noel Hynd

2009

Zondervan

The second book in Hynd's Russian Trilogy, *MIDNIGHT IN MADRID* opens as Alexandra LaDuca is recovering in Barcelona from her previous case, detailed in the trilogy's first book, *CONSPIRACY IN KIEV*.

A phone call from the US sends Alex to Madrid, and right into a helluva mess.

Alex is an FBI agent on loan to the US Treasury, and she's tasked with recovering a piece of stolen art, The Pieta of Malta, which some believe is the basis of Michelangelo's 15th century masterpiece.

One person has already been killed in the effort to recover the Pieta, and Alex knows that she's in for a tough ride. Just how rough becomes evident as mysterious assassins try to kill her, and Alex must decide who can be trusted, and who might be behind the attempts on her life.

This is a book with a lot of historical detail, which fortunately never derails the fast moving plot. Hynd has more than four million books in print, and it's easy to see why – he's written a great thriller, with likeable characters and a believable plot. Rae Helmsworth

MIND SCRAMBLER

Chris Grabenstein

June 2009

St. Martin's Minotaur

MIND SCRAMBLER, book five of the John Ceepak series, finds Danny and Ceepak in Atlantic City deposing a witness as a favor to the prosecutor in Ohio. While they are there, an old friend of Danny's shows up. She's working as a nanny for Atlantic City's famous illusionist, Richard Rock. Danny's friend calls him and tells him she needs to speak with him privately, but before Danny can connect with her, she's murdered. Danny and Ceepak are out-of-towners, but they aren't going to stand by and be wallflowers. They are still law enforcement agents in the state of New Jersey, so they'll pitch in and help bring the murderer to justice.

Atlantic City is a new setting for the Ceepak/Boyle duo. Grabenstein makes use of this new setting working in a number of pop culture references to Monopoly. Combine the references with Danny's sarcasm in the narration, and you have the recipe for Grabenstein's signature humor, which contributes to the inertia that drives these books up, down and around on the thrill rides. I was dizzy from all the spinning and smoke and mirrors Grabenstein created that challenged my brain in this plot.

The symbiotic relationship between Danny and Ceepak is what makes the series work so well. In every book they have progressively learned from each other, but in none as blatantly and effectively as in MIND SCRAMBLER. It is a genius use of characterization to view Ceepak through Danny's eyes; Ceepak is, after all, his hero. So when Ceepak stumbles, the effect of seeing that misstep through Danny makes it exponentially more powerful.

When a crime fiction novel makes me laugh, tugs at my heart strings, moves me to cheer for the hero(s) and challenges me to think, I know I've found a top-notch work of art! MIND SCRAMBLER is all those things and so much more.

THE MISSING INK

Karen Olson

July 2009

Obsidian

Brett Kavanaugh is a tattoo artist in Las Vegas who owns and operates The Painted Lady. A young woman inquires about a custom devotion tattoo, one containing her fiancé's name. When that same young woman turns out to be the missing fiancé of Chip Manning, the son of an extremely wealthy casino owner, Brett becomes the last person to have seen her and the person who knows that the name she wanted on the tattoo wasn't Chips. Now the cops want to talk to Brett, the reporters want to talk to Brett, and the prime suspect in the woman's disappearance - not to mention Brett's business competitor, Jeff Coleman, wants to talk to Brett.

The stakes are raised when a second woman turns up dead. No matter which direction Brett turns, she finds herself smack in the middle of the mayhem.

From her distinctive cast of characters to the constant plot twists, I found myself repeating; "just one more chapter" until there were no more left. The plot of THE MISSING INK is quick and full of twists that have you experiencing elements of Las Vegas from a high-class resort and casino to an all-Elvis karaoke bar to the neighborhoods that require bars on the doors and windows. And Olson ignites all your senses in this novel as well. She splatters the pages with Vegas' bright neon colors and fashion's palette, but she also walks you through Vegas' "dry" heat, the busy rows of slot machines, and the myriad smells of all that food.

THE MISSING INK is a winning trip to Vegas.

NOBODY MOVE

Denis Johnson

2009

Farrar, Straus and Giroux

Johnny Lutz is a singer in a barbershop choir that isn't very good and he has a gambling problem. When enforcer Ernest Gambol tries to collect on a debt and gets shot instead that puts Lutz on the run. Lutz crosses paths with Anita Desilvera who has knowledge of a crooked judge and attorney sitting on 2.3 million.

NOBODY MOVE was serialized in Playboy last year in four parts, this is the hardback release of that run.

I won't entertain notions of whether or not Johnson is paying homage to, slumming in or subverting the genre. I don't care

that Denis Johnson followed up his massive, award winning tome-du-jour with a crime novel because even if he doesn't self-identify as one Johnson has always been a crime writer. Read the novel *ALREADY DEAD* and the collection of linked stories *JESUS' SON*, two books with two different styles, for just two examples. Marginal characters, violence, drugs, loss and hurt have always filled the work of Denis Johnson.

NOBODY MOVE is a damn good, awesomely bleak crime novel that deserves to be read. I like seeing Johnson's prose in stripped down mode, it really works for him, and his style comes through on nearly every page. The linear, more traditional plot structure keep Johnson focused and everything tight.

From the dark humor ("My idea of a health trip is switching to menthols and getting a tan."); to the various shades of fatalism ("I'm not insulted. I just think its bullshit for you to act like you had a choice."); predeterminism ("There's no way to go but the way we're going. I know how it ends, but there's no other way."); and defeatism ("Not dying when somebody shoots you is about as happy as it gets.") the plight of these characters and their slide to oblivion had me riveted from the beginning.

Could *NOBODY MOVE* be in contention as one of the best crime novels of the year? Maybe.

Brian Lindenmuth

PETER & MAX

Bill Willingham

2009

Vertigo Books

PETER & MAX is, as the cover proclaims, a *FABLES* novel. Do you know *Fables*, the Eisner award winning set of graphic novels from Vertigo? No? Doesn't matter except to say you may want to set aside some reading time for them after you finish this book.

Willingham has created a universe where "Fables", those characters we all love from our childhood storybooks exist, having come to our world seeking refuge from their own lands. They have gathered together here on planet earth absolving one another from all past transgressions as they battle against a common enemy.

In the comic version our heroes and heroines include such luminaries as The Big Bad Wolf, Snow White, Sleeping Beauty, Prince Charming and on and on. The wonderful mind that created this series has, in writing this book, revealed that his is a pure genius.

Peter & Max you see, is the story of Peter the Wolf, Peter who ate a pickled pepper. It is the story of the Pied Piper of Hamelin, and that of little Bo Peep and with Willingham at the helm it is a story that now belongs on a shelf all of its own. This story opens with Bigby Wolf informing Peter Piper that his brother has been sighted. Peter must now set off on what will probably be his final quest. He must confront his brother and try to end his evil.

The story flashes back and forth between the quest of today and the story of *Peter & Max*. Peter and his brother Max played the pipes with their dad for living, a meager but happy existence belonged to the Pipers. And then, in one day their existence was forever changed. First father gave the only family treasure (Frost the Flute) to Peter and then the Empire stole their lands. The Piper family with the family of their good friends, the Peeps was forced to run into the woods.....

Using the meter and legend of fairy tales Willingham will hook you quickly, reveal to you the underbelly of storybooks more decidedly than anything ever written by the Grimms. For Peter and Max must end with one brother killing the other, but how did we get to this part of the story?

Willingham uses the fairy tales of our youth and the nightmares of our imagination to deliver an entirely unique Noir Novel.
Ruth Jordan

PRIVATE MIDNIGHT

Kris Sankussem

2009

Overlook Press

PRIVATE MIDNIGHT is Kris Sankussem follow up to the cult classic science fiction novel, *ZANESVILLE*. When Det. Ritter crosses paths with a mysterious woman, his life will be altered forever as revelations about her true nature and her powers are revealed.

Part PI, part noir, part supernatural, part erotic thriller, *PRIVATE MIDNIGHT* is about as disjointed and weird a novel as your likely to find anywhere else. After reading it I decided that it was a detective story for the Will Christopher Baer crowd except weirder.

Is it original? Yes, highly. Is it successful? Maybe less so. It's disjointedness can be so jarring and abrupt as it switches from a PI tale to a more erotic one then finally to a supernatural one that it's likely to throw most readers. There's going to be a certain dedication required for those who chose this book.

I don't mean to make it sound like I'm damning the book with faint praise though. It is indeed an interesting book. There IS a hook in place (even if it is more of the WTF variety) that pulls the reader forward in wanting to know what is going to happen next. But I have to be honest in hesitating to recommend it to a broad audience due to its more experimental nature.

Brian Lindenmuth

A QUIET BELIEF IN ANGELS

R.J. Ellroy
Sept 2009
Overlook Press

About the title.... As we meet Joseph Vaughn he's bleeding out somewhere in New York City. A story unfolds. It begins with the death of Vaughn's father and pulls at your heartstrings until you close the book. Joseph is a small town boy in Georgia at the beginning of ANGELS and in some ways remains so throughout Ellroy's narrative of a life that might have been nothing except for the words he begins to write down after his father's death. Evil lives in Joseph's childhood home. A serial killer is murdering young girls and as the body count escalates so does the violence inflicted on the victims. Joseph knows from the outset that he doesn't believe in much but he does believe in Angels. The souls of the innocent. The crimes are not solved and suspicions are aroused. The tiny town so wants some form of vengeance that when Joseph is a young man his name is tendered as suspect. He lives a life defined by these crimes and his only outlet is in his writing. He writes of his feelings about the murders. He writes of his father's death and his mother's decline into madness. He writes of falling in "forbidden love" and he tries to escape the history he shares with the residents of Augusta Falls. Distance does not remove him from the crimes, for they begin to occur again, following him like the evil that must alienate us all from the angels of our youth.

Ellroy crafts a remarkable story in three simultaneous acts. He tells the tale of two men bleeding to death in New York, the story of the life and times of Joseph Vaughn, and a harsher story of when the words work and when they don't.

Sometimes it's hard to believe in Angels.

R.J. Ellroy demands you believe in Angels. It's the only way you can embrace the quiet harshness of this thoughtfully crafted book.

Ruth Jordan

Sandhogs

Thomas Kelly
October, 2008
Soft Skull Press

What the heck is a sandhog? Well, I'll tell you – they're urban miners and construction workers who work on underground projects, most famously in New York.

This terrific book is set in New York in the booming 1980s. Everyone is making money; everyone is successful, which means that the city is ripe for good old-fashioned mob crime. Especially the Irish mob, which owns the construction rackets. But with success comes challenge, and both the Mafia and the feds are beginning to take deadly interest in the Irish.

The Adare brothers couldn't be more different. Paddy is a failed boxer turned mob enforcer whose large life is turning sour. Billy is a college graduate who's home for the summer to earn some money as a sandhog, before he enters law school and leaves the old neighborhood behind forever.

The conflict between the brothers and their lifestyles serves as the basis for a gripping story of betrayal and greed, with a helluva climax. This story is beautifully written and excellently plotted. I'm delighted to have had the opportunity to read it.

A note: this book was previously published in 1997 with the title PAYBACK.

Rae Helmsworth

SHADOW SEASON

Tom Piccirilli
November 2009
Bantam Dell

Ex-cop Finn has an unusual ability: he can smell blood; even the tiniest amount. The onset of this talent can be traced back five years, to a tragic morning that left his wife Dani dead, and Finn permanently blind and longing for revenge. While learning to live with his disability, Finn takes a teaching job at a rural boarding school for girls. Compared to his days in uniform, the greatest dangers at St. Valarian's Academy are mild--sexual advances by bored teenage students, and a rough patch of vintage flooring--until bodies begin to pile up during the worst blizzard of the winter. Miles from the nearest town, phone lines dead, travel impossible, and a couple of ruthless criminals hot on his trail, for reasons at which he can only begin to guess; Finn is in for the fight of his life.

SHADOW SEASON is a brilliantly paced thriller, and the first book in a long time that I've stayed up all night reading.

There are really two main mysteries: one present and one past, and both unfold bit by bit, and dovetail in unexpected ways. The character of Finn is shaded in gradually, through flashbacks that are triggered by the scent of blood. I actually found myself in the unusual position of *looking forward* to violence because I wanted to learn more about Finn's past.

In the world Piccirilli has created, darkness takes many forms, both real and metaphorical. Make sure you have a bright

reading lamp on your bedside table...you'll need it.

Jill Lynch

SHANGHAIED

Eric Stone

2009

Bleak House Books

The 4th Ray Sharp Novel tosses Ray into a tumultuous Hong Kong in 1997, post take over by the Chinese. He's on a job for a group of Monks investigating a bank that turns out to be as crooked as a Chicago politician in the '20s.

Stone nails the setting which really adds to the narration. Hong Kong becomes another character in the novel. Stone also has great characters and while bringing back some favorites from past novels he also introduces some new ones. I really liked the over the top bad guys. Loads of fun to read.

Stone has a great ability to combine fast pacing with humor keeping the reader on their toes. This was a read that is going on the re-read pile.

Jon Jordan

SHE SHOOTS TO CONQUER

Dorothy Cannell

2009

Minotaur

Ellie Haskell (heroine of the series) and husband Ben, a chef, with friend Mrs. Malloy, arrive at the Yorkshire moors estate of Lord Belfrey in Mucklesfield Manor. Yes!

And the fun continues. Lord B. is in financial straits and has decided to be the prize of a Reality TV show. Why not? He needs the money and the TV company will pay. He also needs a lady of the manor, so the winning contestant will be his wife. Who knows, he might meet someone interesting on the "Here Comes the Bride" show.

The candidates do line up! Mrs. Malloy joins the contest, but someone is trying to eliminate the competition. Not all arrows come from Cupid's bow, as the 'shoots' in the title refers to an archery contest. The contest is to be fatal for some--and someone is starting the contest early. No fair!

Lord B. has a lovely gothic estate that lends itself to mystery. Murder and intrigue. Another story line involves his deceased older brother's wife who disappeared along with the family jewels. Was she murdered? Ellie wants to find out.

Ellie gets involved with a stray black Lab dog, and it inadvertently helps her solve that mystery.

Set in the present, beautifully written, and a fun read.

Gay Toltl Kinman

THE SILENT HOUR

Michael Koryta

August 2009

Minotaur Books

Lincoln Perry has ignored Harrison Parker's letters for several months, but when the ex-con shows up at his office door, he doesn't have much choice but to talk to the man. So, he'll listen and politely decline.

Harrison Parker served 15 years in prison for murder. After the prison sentence was fulfilled, he entered a unique program for paroled murderers, a program run by Alexandra and Joshua Cantrell. Parker wants Perry to locate Alexandra, who disappeared with her husband twelve years ago; he's convinced Lincoln is the right man to tell the story and "give us answers to our questions."

The case seems simple enough and despite his determination not to take the case, Perry agrees. Then little by little, he discovers all the details that Parker conveniently left out of his explanation. The details that walk Perry right into the middle of a murder investigation with possible ties to the Cleveland mob.

The criminal investigation is really more of a by-product of the main focus of THE SILENT HOUR. Lincoln *does* have to be a storyteller and find something that is hidden from the world. However, that true search, and thus the conflict, is internal.

What Lincoln needs to find most in this novel is his way; the answers to his own questions. Even more than a crime novel, THE SILENT HOUR is a passionate study in character.

The depth of every character in this novel envelops you more completely in to the story. While it is told through the eyes of Lincoln Perry, the reader connects with Harrison Parker, with Ken Merriman, John Dunbar, Mark Ruzity. And the emotional investment in Lincoln Perry draws out anguish, frustration, irritation, but still always compassion.

This is a Koryta novel that is going to wreak havoc on the spectrum of the reader's emotions, more so than any of the novels before it. And when Lincoln's story has finally been told, the reader will forever be changed.

Jen Forbus

STILL MIDNIGHT

Denise Mina

July 09

Orion Books

A van pulls up to a middle class neighborhood in Glasgow. Inside the van is a motley crew of would be bad guys who aren't quite tough enough to be a believable grass in most of the more hardboiled series coming out of the UK. "Where's Bob" they ask over and over again. With no Bob present they take the family's patriarch hostage for ransom and steal away into the night.

It's police woman Alex Morrow's turn in the rotation but she is quickly shucked aside. This is a high profile case and her compatriot, Grant Bannerman has curried favor with DCI MacKechnie. Something he may soon regret.

From the very beginning Denise Mina has been a stellar voice in the Mystery world, each title creating a song of its own. In STILL MIDNIGHT the aria we hear has sadness, desperation, betrayal and hope. Never afraid to bring anything to the page, Mina tells the story of an immigrant family searching for the Glasgow dream, the crooks who see an easy piece of action to be had and the police who must try and solve this case before Aamir is killed.

Alex discovers an early inconsistency in the family's retelling of the home invasion and soon she and Bannerman have reached an understanding. Will they put the pieces together in time. With Denise Mina at the helm you won't know until the end. And that is what makes her a must read, always.

Ruth Jordan

THREE FROM PETER MAY

THE FOURTH SACRIFICE

Thomas Dunne Books February 2007

SNAKEHEAD

Poisoned Pen Press February 2009

CHINESE WHISPERS

Poisoned Pen Press October 2009

Peter May has published two highly regarded series, and fortunately for US readers, the first of these - his China Thriller sagas - are now more easily available on this side of the Atlantic.

THE FOURTH SACRIFICE is the second in the series. In the first, American forensic pathologist Margaret Campbell was in China to participate in a conference of pathologists, and remained to assist Chinese investigators solve a murder. Her working partnership with Chinese cop Li Yuan became a love affair; a problem for the lovers, but a welcome development for readers – more books on the way!

In THE FOURTH SACRIFICE, Campbell and Li struggle with the emotions of a "forbidden love" while they unravel the entwined motives of revenge and greed, as well as the theft of valuable artifacts, trying to find those responsible for a series of gruesome beheadings.

SNAKEHEAD opens with a grisly discovery in the Texas landscape near Houston. A refrigerated trailer truck is found abandoned at a small truck stop, with 98 dead bodies inside. All the dead are Chinese, all assumed to be illegal immigrants, and forensic investigators are called in from all over the US to help with the autopsies, Margaret Campbell among them.

When the Chinese embassy in Washington sends its investigator to assist, Campbell and Li Yuan are reunited – after parting in China, both believing that their love for each other could never resolve into a long term relationship.

The autopsies find strange entrance wounds on all the bodies, and a diary found in the personal possessions of the dead reveals that all had been injected with what was purported to be protection against a relatively benign virus found in the US. Instead, forensics finds that the injection was of a far more lethal nature, carrying the potential to unleash a deadly contagion in the US population.

With parallel investigations – to discover the organizers of the smuggling of illegal immigrants; and to find the source and motive for the lethal infection – SNAKEHEAD is an absorbing read, enjoyable on two fronts; the criminal investigations and the on again, off again romance between the two main characters.

CHINESE WHISPERS finds the lovers back in Beijing, and Li confronted by a baffling string of gruesome killings in which the murderer seems to be following a description of the Jack the Ripper killings, almost to the word. When the police begin to receive notes from the killer with taunting personal challenges to Li Yuan, a wider circle of superiors begins to press for an early solution to the crimes.

Several expatriate Americans living in Beijing are involved in the investigation as well, and eventually Margaret is called to assist with an autopsy. Li must begin to consider the unsettling possibility that someone inside the police department is involved, and that he, his loved ones, and his career are in serious jeopardy.

In each book in the series, May includes intriguing details of potential threats to wide populations, as well as current developments in criminal investigative techniques. It's clear that he has done a lot of painstaking research, and called

upon an impressive list of contacts in the scientific community as well as in China. The "China Thrillers" combine romance and suspense in very enjoyable style.
Woodstock

TOWER

Ken Bruen & Reed Farrel Coleman
2009
Busted Flush Press

When two of today's most popular Crime Novelists decide to pen a novel you need to take notice. The fact that they have two entirely diverse writing styles while possessing the utmost respect for one another's talent adds an immediate curiosity for the reader.

TOWER is a New York City story, through and through. Two friends grow up knowing that they can count on one another more than family, or indeed their life choices. Their Brooklyn neighborhood sends them into the arms of the local gangsters where these two junior players are about to shake things up.

Both will be betrayed. Both will kill. One will become police, perhaps the biggest betrayal of all.

Many who review this novel will no doubt deconstruct it to death, looking for the flaws in the symmetry, the difference in meter. This story could have only been as it is written and the reading is an experience not to be missed.

TOWER begins as classic noir, add a touch of Richard Price and a dash of Higgins. Todd and Nick are two young men whose choices are made first by their neighborhood, later by their mistakes and finally by their choices. All the while the North Tower looms in the background, until it isn't there. The gripping violence of all that comes before suddenly stripped away like the final stanza in a Bowers poem.

With TOWER, Reed Farrel Coleman and Ken Bruen slap you in the face. Noir, as well done as it can be is still not nearly as horrific as the evil that exists in this world. The proof is as it is written. TOWER will singe and the pain is good
Ruth Jordan

VAMPIRE A GO-GO

Victor Gischler
2009
Touchstone

If you've read Victor Gischler before you know that he has a wonderful sense of humor, enviable plotting skills and an easy going style that makes the reader feel welcome in whatever setting he has laid out.

In VAMPIRE A GO-GO, Gischler has switched gears once again and is jabbing at the horror genre.

Allan Cabbot is a most miserable grad student doing so poorly that the only thing that can save his academic career is accompanying a strange professor named Evergreen on a bizarre jaunt to Europe on a research expedition to a castle in Prague. While the professor hasn't made his intentions quite clear, Allan soon realizes he's in way over his head as he deals with vampires, witches and ghosts. The tale is narrated by the ghost of a famous alchemist who speaks to Allan.

This book is non-stop fun and would be a perfect movie for Bruce Campbell. I laughed till coffee came out of my nose, seriously. This book is so entertaining it will make your life better just by reading it. (OK, maybe not, but you will forget about any problems you have for a while.)

Jon Jordan

VANILLA RIDE

Joe Lansdale
2009
Knopf

The Hap & Leonard books are the buddy films of the crime fiction genre with everything good, bad and ugly that the form entails.

When Hap & Leonard bust a friend's daughter out of a bad situation, they find their paths crossed with the Dixie Mafia.

The surface of the un-PC banter of these characters will no doubt provoke a few upturned noses but below the surface the dynamics are much more complicated than that. Fans of the series will already know this but Hap is a white, heterosexual former 60's activist and Leonard is black, homosexual, and a Vietnam vet. Their deep bond with one another adds layers of depth to these characters and becomes its own commentary.

It's also refreshing seeing an un-typified portrayal of a gay man. It's easy to go the bitchy, swishy route for gay male characters and play them for laughs and Leonard is anything but.

While they may not be for everyone they are a lot of fun and Lansdale, as always, rips a hell of an entertaining yarn. This is the first Hap & Leonard in 8 years and coupled with Vintage's re-release of the first 6 titles this is a great time to get acquainted with the boys.

Brian Lindenmuth

VANISHED

Kat Richardson

2009

Roc

Kat Richardson may very well sleep restfully each night, but once I started VANISHED, sleep was not in the cards for me. Her series Harper Blaine PI, a greywalker, has gotten better and better with each book and I simply cannot stop reading till it's done.

Harper's life has been a bit stranger since she died and came back. She is working cases that involve supernatural things she never knew existed before, but the one case she never looked into was her own. How did her near death experience change her and not others who went through similar experiences? She revisits her old haunts and looks into the suicide of her father, which she discovers is not what it seemed. Suspicious deaths and supernatural goings on were involved. She has to interrupt her investigation to help out a friend against some vampires and discovers that the past isn't done with her yet.

Richardson has such a natural knack for story telling it's almost like being told a tale around a campfire, it flows naturally and is completely captivating. I think Harper is one hell of a protagonist and I can't get enough.

Jon Jordan

THE WATER'S EDGE

Karin Fossum (translation: Charlotte Barslund)

August 2009

Houghton Mifflin Harcourt

The Rises take the same walk every Sunday, but this Sunday they encounter a strange man limping away from the woods. When Kristine Ris smiles at him, he reacts with a look of terror. The strange man climbs into his car and drives away. When Kristine and Reinhardt start back through the woods, they discover the half-naked body of a small boy. Kristine is disturbed enough by this gruesome discovery, but when Reinhardt begins taking pictures of the boy with his cell phone while they wait for the police, she's completely mortified. Who is this man she's married to?

Inspectors Konrad Sejer and Jacob Skarre are called in to investigate the death of the boy, but the stakes are raised when another boy goes missing in the midst of the investigation. The key to case has to be the man with the limp, if only they could locate him.

In Karin Fossum's sixth book of the Konrad Sejer series, she immediately hooks the reader with the boy's discovery. The tone of the novel is set; there is never anything light or funny about child molestation and murder. The whodunit does not appear to be much of a mystery until Fossum throws in subtle events that make the reader wonder if there is a twist in store.

The greatest strength of this novel comes in the form of its characters. Each character is essential to the book either through his/her role in the plot or through his/her relationship to another character. Fossum created them in such a way as to evoke some kind of emotion from the reader, whether it's revulsion, pity, empathy or compassion. Indifference is not an option.

You will not find car chases, gun fights or fancy martial arts conflicts in this book. This is a chilling story because it is every parent's worst nightmare. Even if you aren't a parent, you can identify similarities in your own communities, make connections to your own lives. That is what makes this story haunt your thoughts long after you've reached the end.

WIFE OF THE GODS

Kwei Quartey

July 2009

Random House

Gladys Mensah, a young medical student, is found dead in the forest of the small town of Ketanu in Ghana, and a special request is made for someone from Accra to investigate. Darko Dawson is a detective inspector with the Criminal Investigations Department of the Ghana Police Service in Accra. His proficiency in speaking Ewe gets him assigned to the case. Dawson also has a bit of a history with Ketanu. His aunt and uncle live in Ketanu, but he hasn't seen them for over 20 years, since his mother disappeared while on a trip to visit them.

Dawson arrives in Ketanu and finds the head of police focused on a suspect Dawson believes is innocent. He also finds a custom where families offer their virgin teenage daughters to fetish priests as trokosi (Wives of the Gods), as well as a slew of possible suspects for this murder. Kwei Quartey's debut novel brings forth some controversial practices in the small towns of Ghana.

The character of Darko Dawson is the epitome of the tragic hero. And his temper is his tragic flaw. While he doesn't do everything right, the reader identifies and empathizes with him. Few of us would be tolerant enough to elude the mistakes

he makes because he makes them out of a sheer passion to do the right thing.

And of course the most exotic element of Quartey's novel is the setting. Ghana is obviously a land with a rich history that is growing and changing little by little. Quartey illustrates those growing pains through his rich characters but also through the distinctive contrast of their environments. Accra and Ketanu are a short physical distance apart but almost worlds apart in advancement.

WIFE OF THE GODS is truly a trip to another world for most Westerners. Readers will open the cover and escape to a strange new land to make friends with fiction's new detective, Darko Dawson.

(a note from the editor: You will notice there are reviews in this issue which do not have an attributed reviewer. We apologize to the reader and most certainly to the reviewer and would like to rectify that post-haste. Unfortunately the individual forgot to sign their efforts and in this cut and paste world we cannot track down the original document. So please, please let us know who wrote these wonderful words for us)