

Jon's Round up

Debut author Philip Hawley Jr has kicked off his writing career with a bang with his novel STIGMA. A medical thriller with emphasis on the word thriller this is a book that will grab you and not let go. Great characters and racing plot really make this a book not to miss.

Brett Battles is another first timer with his book THE CLEANER. The title describes the lead character perfectly, a cleaner who takes care of cleaning up after a spot of violence so that people won't get caught. But a job goes bad and now he may be the one who get cleaned up. Battles has a real gift for action and this is tremendously fun book. And his protagonist, Quinn is some one I immediately liked. This book is a winner.

While TV shows like CSI have started a real craze for forensics and "The other side" of investigating, mystery fans have been reading books about it for years. With her second book, SILENT ASSASSIN, Lori Andrews has cemented her place among those who are doing it right. The science is right on the money, and so is the writing. This outing has ties to Viet Nam and is non stop in its unrelenting building of suspense and tension. Skip the hype of Cornwell and read the real deal. Andrews is amazing.

Adrian McKinty has garnered nothing but praise for his first two books. This third in the trilogy, THE BLOOMSDAY DEAD, should leave no doubt that he is a true star. Fast moving and highly engaging this is a great book. McKinty just gets better and better, a true star of crime fiction.

Los Angeles Noir from Akashic is edited by Denise Hamilton, a true example of great LA writers. She has assembled a great line up with solid great writers. Every story here truly has the LA feel to it and this could be one of the best of the "Noir" series of anthologies. Well Done!

Yet another debut author, Bill Cameron has entered the mystery scene with his first book LOST DOG from Midnight Ink. With deft story telling and compelling characters Cameron spins a wonderful yarn. Enthralling with all too fragile characters Cameron has the skills of a seasoned vet.

THE ART OF LOSING from Keith Dixon is a book that is part caper/part mystery focusing on a trouble magnet named Michael Jacobs. It's not really his fault, he's just really unlucky, and can't stop making bad choices. Dixon makes the words sing with a wonderful ability to move the story forward while amping up the tension in what is a truly character driven book. I really enjoyed this.

I enjoyed Hunt's two previous book under the Five Star line, and with this book from St. Martin's Minatour James Patrick Hunt has really cranked it up and brought his best game. THE BETRAYERS is a wonderful book and a procedural that has such a twist plot you might need to take notes. Completely perfect writing, and I can't wait for more.

Another non fiction book about serial killers landed on my desk. This one is not trying to name them all, but focus on 17 killers. SERIAL KILLERS AND MASS MURDERERS by Nigel Cawthorne is a concise look at some pretty bad men. From Ulysses Press this book has some pretty salient facts and is one of the better true crime books I've seen. If you like reading about the real thing, check this out.

And that's a wrap.....

THE 50/50 KILLER
Steve Mosby
2007
Orion

The premise of this book is one of the most disturbing things I've come across in quite a while. I've read a lot of dark books, a fair amount of horror, seen a lot of gruesome movies. But THE 50/50 KILLER got under my skin and stayed, it stayed a bit longer than I'm comfortable with. This is of course a compliment. Mosby is an extremely talented writer.

The killer: Smart, tech savvy and ruthless. He watches his victims, couples who are married and in love, and when he makes his move he puts them in a position where one of them has to choose who lives and who dies, and one them will definitely die. The police: John Mercer, a older cop who had a bit of a breakdown a few years earlier heads up the team searching for the killer. He's damn good at what he does, but he might not be as good as he was. Mark Nelson is new to the team, young, enthusiastic and hand picked for his skills with people. Mosby writes with an unrelenting pace and with such heart that I tore through this book. I can't wait to see what he does next.

Jon

ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS

Gillian Roberts

2007

Ballantine

Amanda Pepper is an English prep school teacher in Philadelphia. The author claims that this is the final novel, # 14, in the series. Sad news for her fans. Amanda plans a new life. Not only is she a P.I. in training, but her husband C. K. Mackenzie, a criminologist, wants to move to New Orleans to help his relatives who were affected by a devastating hurricane. Before she can leave Philly Prep, a friend asks to her look into the death of her stepmother Phoebe. The dead woman, supposedly a suicide, was a bit of an eccentric, married five times, claimed being a descendent of Napoleon's, and who may have hidden away a treasure.

No end of suspects if Phoebe was murdered--a business partner who blamed Phoebe for losses of their pet and her marriage. an obnoxious son, and then the dates Phoebe arranged on the internet. Literally, never a dull moment. Meanwhile a mystery is going on at Amanda's school, not related to the murder, but related to the New Orleans disaster for which the children are collecting money. Some of it goes missing. Are prep school kids gambling? Cozy and comfortable, with a good dose of humor, and a very enjoyable read.

Gay Toltl Kinman

AN ACCIDENTAL AMERICAN

Alex Carr

2007

Orion (UK)

Random House (US)

Expert forger, Nicole Blake, moved to the French countryside after serving six years in France's Marseille prison. However, her quiet, civilian life is disrupted when US intelligence operative, John Valasmis, asks Blake to help apprehend her former lover and current terrorist, Rahim. Although she is hesitant to betray a former lover and play rat for the US government, she goes to Lisbon, where she and Rahim used to live, thinking that if he is to be apprehended, better her than US intelligence. But she soon realizes that the crime and corruption runs deeper than expected and even the reader is unsure of who can be trusted. Told with flashbacks, multiple points of view and an almost poetic writing style, AN ACCIDENTAL AMERICAN is a fantastic read with a refreshing new voice.

Carr has created an intriguing character as Blake is truly an accidental American. She was born in Lebanon and raised in France, but since her father was American, she possesses the coveted blue passport and American citizenship. Throughout the suspenseful novel, Carr manages to weave in character layers that raise questions about the value of citizenship and what it truly means to call a country home.

(editor's note: Alex Carr has also written under the name Jenny Siler)

Dana Kaye

ALL TOGETHER DEAD

Charlaine Harris

May 2007

Ace

Sookie Stackhouse returns. In the seventh book of the Sookie series, author Harris proves that it is indeed possible to keep a series entertaining indefinitely.

ALTOGETHER DEAD opens with Sookie still mad at an ex-love, cherishing time with a new romance, and uncertain what her relationship is with a third entity. Harris sprinkles her series with vampires, shape-shifters, and weres (there are more creatures out there than the wolf), but barmaid Sookie is always at the center. The ever present personal complications are bits of humanity readers can smile at. It is the story that raises this "Goth Series" to the very top of this relatively new sub genre in Mystery. Far from fantastical, Sookie's world reflects today with a realism that pulls no punches.

As Sookie (a telepath) gets ready to attend a Vampire Convention on behalf of the Queen of the Louisiana Vampires she's still mourning friends unfound since Katrina, both human and non. The state she calls home has fallen on hard times. The summit at Rhodes may be the death of the queen, but it is also Sookie's first plane ride and her first trip to the northern states. Harris sets up her tale with a mixture of excitement, confusion, grief and duty that is remarkable. Once we get to the Conference we get down and dirty.

There is conspiracy. There is murder. There is peril. There is destruction.

Throughout her long career, Harris has always written the stupidity of intolerance and the horror of violence like no one else. That she has managed through three series to do this with humor, truth, and a touch of Southern charm is amazing. When the unthinkable happens in Rhodes, Sookie and Harris bring their reader safely to the end. We are safe but the story is not. Sookie and Charlaine, with these gals in our corner reality is manageable.

Ruth Jordan

THE ALPINE SCANDAL

Mary Daheim

2007

Ballantine Books

Cozy little Alpine, Washington is still relaxing after the hectic Christmas Holiday season when the Alpine Advocate receives an obituary for Elmer Nystrom in the morning mail. Not an unusual event in itself, but the obituary date is after the postmarked date, which isn't the norm. Even if this is an error, such things as death don't normally go unnoticed in a small town, and if Vida Runkle, the Advocate's House and Home editor hasn't heard it, it isn't news! Curiosity piqued, Vida and Advocate owner Emma Lord head to the Nystrom home only to find that Mrs. Nystrom sent Elmer off to his morning chores and work that morning, the same as always. An offer of fresh eggs sends the intrepid duo to the chicken coop, where they find the unfortunate Elmer.

Well-respected and mild mannered, Elmer Nystrom didn't seem like the sort to get his head bashed in, and it certainly has Sheriff Milo Dodge's attention. However, Dodge is sidelined by a health crisis, so Emma and Vida do their best to help the sheriff's department find the culprit. To them, the lack of motive is a gauntlet thrown in their direction and they set a determined course to find out who would want Elmer dead. In their search they discover unsavory bits about their neighbors that surprise even Vida, Goddess of the Grapevine.

In its nineteenth outing, the Alpine series is still hale and hearty. Emma Lord and her friends and associates don't sit on their laurels, stagnating from one year to the next. Their lives are full, with people coming and going, and they change and grow as life throws its curveballs at them. While Emma and Vida do tend to push the "investigative reporter" angle a bit strongly for a small town weekly, they make a fun and entertaining team.

Kathleen Tromp

AMEN CORNER

Rick Shefchik

2007

Poisoned Pen Press

It is Masters Week in Augusta and the plot is all about the tournament and someone who has a grudge against the golf club. Sam Skarda, on leave as a Minneapolis detective after having been shot, has been invited to participate in the Masters as an amateur after having won the U.S. Publinx Championship. As it turns out, he doesn't make the cut, but becomes involved in a busman's holiday.

One murder after another takes place, all seeming to be linked with proponents of admitting women to membership at the all-male Augusta National. Cries for suspension or postponement of the Masters are ignored by tradition-bound officials—the tournament must go on despite the protests and murders. Sam is invited to conduct a private investigation to find the killer to ward off interruptions by the police. Suspects center on the members, but of course, there are employees and others to consider. Meanwhile, the culprit continues his ways.

Theodore Feit

ANATOMY OF FEAR

Jonathan Santlofer

April 2007

William Morrow

In this compelling thriller, Jonathan Santlofer has successfully combined two art forms into a novel of "visual suspense". He's added graphics to an already compelling story, and added a very interesting twist to the genre.

Nate Rodriguez is a police sketch artist who sees and thinks in pictures – a good thing, since he makes his living drawing. As the story opens, Nate is interviewing a crime victim; by 'seeing' the young woman's words, Nate is able to produce an eerie likeness of the bad guy.

But soon, Nate is drawn into a case where the killer, a lunatic racist, shares his artistic skill. The perpetrator leaves drawings at each crime scene. So it becomes artist versus artist, and the question is, which man can outwit the other. And which man will survive.

Santlofer has created an intriguing world here, peopled with well-rounded characters, and telling a fascinating story. It's to be hoped we see more of Nate Rodriguez.

Rae Helmsworth

BAD LUCK AND TROUBLE

Lee Child

May, 2007

Delacorte

High above the California desert a man is thrown 3,000 feet to a horrific death. In Portland, Jack Reacher is enjoying time with a lovely attorney. Then he receives a call for help, a distress signal from his military days.

What follows is another great Jack Reacher book.

Child achieves a perfect balance of the cerebral mystery and action adventure novel in *BAD LUCK AND TROUBLE*. This tale of a band of brothers (and sisters) in arms trying to save themselves and avenge their brethren offers the reader another look into Reacher's past while paying the series forward.

What got Calvin Franz dead? Where are the soldiers who haven't answered the call? Who is the international terrorist making his way to the same destination as Reacher and his former team? Child spends a good part of the book in plot setup with a slow reveal into Reacher's military past. The dénouement is adrenaline reading with a race to the finish one can only find in a Jack Reacher book.

I could not turn the pages fast enough.

Ruth Jordan

CAT O'NINE TALES

Jeffrey Archer

2007

St. Martin's Press

Jeffrey Archer is a popular writer of crime fiction in every mode imaginable: novels, short stories, plays, screenplays, and diaries. Jeffrey Archer is also a notable character in his own right. A successful Conservative politician, made a life peer by John Major in 1982, Archer served five years in the House of Commons and 14 years in the House of Lords. He also spent two years in prison, for perjury during a libel suit. His unofficial biography, *STRANGER THAN FICTION*, was written by journalist Michael Crick in 1995.

CAT O'NINE TALES is a collection of 12 short stories – nine of which are based on tales he heard in prison – and all of which, though embellished, are based on fact. Although the stories are fairly short, ranging from 12 to 36 pages each, the author manages to thoroughly develop his characters and his plots. He is able to fit in enough back-story to make the characters real and the story lines engrossing. The stories are all enjoyable; and I found three so good that, by themselves, they are worth the price of the book.

In the first of my three favorites, Chris and Sue Haskins spent 40 years building their business and becoming community leaders in Cleethorpes, a seaside town on the east coast of England. Despite early set-backs when Chris became redundant after his employer was acquired by a larger firm, and Sue lost her job when her employer retired, they worked hard and succeeded first in a popular fish-and-chips shop, and then as proprietors of the local post office. But when he was again done wrong by an employer, Chris Haskins became "The Man Who Robbed His Own Post Office."

In a story with a somewhat similar theme, and equally likable characters, Henry Preston is an introverted accountant who, surprising even himself, becomes friends with one of his clients, Angela Forster, the very extroverted sole proprietor of a firm that organizes events for social and business organizations. Henry has resigned himself to being the reliable member of the firm who gets the job done but will never be a partner in the firm. But he is not content to accept the meager return Angela has been able to make in her successful business. So Henry and Angela put in place an ingenious, albeit illegal, retirement plan based on the premise that "Charity Begins at Home."

The final entry in this trio of excellence is must-read for every man who would marry for lust, and for the friends, male and female, of such an unfortunate soul. Bob Radford is a very successful doctor and the heir of his wealthy Aunt Muriel. After many years as a single man-about-town, Bob is smitten by the gorgeous Fiona and, three months later, marries her. Shortly after Aunt Muriel dies, Fiona files for divorce and proves unwilling to accept any out-of-court settlement. It then becomes necessary for Mrs. Justice Butler to settle the case relying upon her "Wisdom of Solomon."

Do get *CAT O'NINE TALES*. Your favorites might not be the same as mine, but you will find favorites amongst these 12 thoroughly enjoyable stories.

David Chernow

COCAINE AND BLUE EYES

Fred Zackel

2006

Point Blank Press

Mike Brennen is a PI who doesn't really care about being a PI, but he's also a fascinating character to read.

COCAINE AND BLUE EYES is a reprinting of the 1978 first appearance of the character who later returned in *CINDERELLA AFTER MIDNIGHT* in 1980.

Brennen is down and almost out, not really caring much about anything. When he gets a letter in the mail with a thousand dollar bill in it he takes what he thinks will be a quick missing person case. A coke dealer wants his girl back. The coke dealer ends up dead, but with nothing to do Brennen keeps looking. For me the story while intriguing and well done, was just an excuse to follow Brennen and get in to his head. I think that Michael Brennen is a perfect example of a truly noir PI.

This is an amazing book that feels like Ross MacDonald on a binge. At times stark and cynical, yet with a character that you want to succeed and find his way. This was a great book and really hope they reprint the second book soon.

Jon

COLD DAY IN HELL

Richard Hawke

2007

Random House

The opening line of Richard Hawke's new novel [following the first in the series, SPEAK OF THE DEVIL, is: "On the last day of her life, she took a yoga class." The 'she' in question is Robin Burrell, whose neighbor, Margo, is the girlfriend of Fritz Malone, the NYC PI. who is Mr. Hawke's protagonist in this series. Robin is the third woman to have died in similar gruesome manner, and Marshall Fox, the man who had been her lover, and who had known the first two victims, was now in jail and on trial for those two murders. The trial has been grist for the mill of the media, since the accused is an internationally known late-night comic. When there is a fourth, similar, killing less than eighteen hours later, the inescapable conclusion is that in all likelihood, someone else is the killer of all these victims—or is it a copycat?

One week before she was killed, Robin had asked Fritz to look at some of the huge amounts of letters and e-mails she'd received since the trial had started, some supportive, some hateful and hate-filled, which he gladly did; now he is feeling some guilt for not having warned her to be more careful, that somehow he could have or should have done something that would have avoided her death, as a result of which he feels compelled to look into the matter. This causes no small friction between Fritz and Margo, his significant other and the daughter of his one-time boss, partner and mentor.

To merely call COLD DAY IN HELL eminently readable is to do it an injustice, but that is the phrase that came to me while engrossed in this well-plotted and intriguing tale. Megan Lamb, the troubled police detective who works with Fritz on the investigation, is an interesting character, and Fritz is a wonderful protagonist, his humor lightening the grisly story of what appears to be a serial killer, or more than one killer committing lurid murders with no discernible connection to each other.

Gloria Feit

THE COLOR OF BLOOD

Declan Hughes

April 2007

William Morrow

Declan Hughes introduced himself to the Crime reading community in last year's THE WRONG KIND OF BLOOD. That book was a great read about an Irish ex-pat returning home 25 years later to an unfamiliar and prosperous country to bury his mother. Ed Loy had left Ireland and come to the U.S. where he worked as a P.I. Divorced and mourning the loss of a child in BLOOD he found keys to his past and a glimmer of a future.

Hughes has found a way to tell the "Irish Story" with an American friendly voice. THE COLOR OF BLOOD is proof that his concept was a good one. Home now and welding his past with NEW Ireland, Loy has decided to stay and work in his profession despite the fact that there is no licensing for private investigators. He has little personal support in his corner and the cases are of the low-brow variety. Finding cheating spouses and run-a-way children is providing an income, just, but self-appreciation is hard to come by.

When Shane Howard, a respected Dublin Dentist comes to Loy for help finding a blackmailer and his missing daughter Hughes takes off with a tale that roots in the past and threatens the future. Within hours of the initial interview both Howard's estranged wife his daughter's ex boyfriend are dead and Shane is in prison.

Here is where Hughes begins his story of an Ireland that has changed faster than its people. Researching the Howard family and its secrets allows Hughes, Loy and their readers to unravel an eerie mystery. Hughes makes it more than that. A cast of damaged souls runs rampant upon these pages. The decidedly Irish Hughes allows us a glimpse of country whose new-found prosperity cannot erase the sins of the often self righteous and blind religious fanaticism that was its past.

Following doctrine on the personal level often holds consequences. For the Howard family the tragedy was one of Grecian prophecy. For those who read THE COLOR OF BLOOD it's an opportunity to look at where we've come and where we're going. Wrapped in satisfying crime fiction and a well told fable.

Ruth Jordan

CON ED

Matthew Klein

2007

Warner

Matthew Klein has done several things well in his novel Con Ed. He's created a sympathetic main character with a good sense of humor. He's created believable bad guys and minor characters. And finally, he's plotted and produced a thoroughly enjoyable novel that has the right mix of tension, sex, violence and humor to keep the reader turning pages. Kip Largo was a con man. Not that he wanted to be. He got caught. He did his time. Now, he's an ex con ex con man. Like most of us he's trying to get by, following the rules. Like some of us, events overtake him. Kip's out is to run a con. Expect twists and turns in

plot. Expect to be fooled as a result. Expect to be highly entertained. The inside flap will tell you the story line. Don't read it. Just let yourself be carried along for the ride. Con's are fun when it isn't you being conned. You'll have fun with Con Ed.

Dave Biemann

THE CRIMEWRITER

Gregg Hurwitz

July 2007

Viking

Gregg Hurwitz has created a lot of buzz in the mystery world with his Tim Rackley series. The series is a compelling, well researched and plot driven set of adventures featuring a Federal Agent who isn't afraid to go "balls to the wall".

THE CRIMEWRITER is more. This book offers a view into a world only its author knew before. Hurwitz has left behind the he-man feel of his series to present a view of the chaos, serendipity, absurdity and beauty that is today's Southern California. When we meet Drew Danner he's leaving prison. He's been given a not "not guilty" verdict by a jury of his peers. The crime he's been accused of is the murder of his ex-girlfriend. It wasn't just any trial. Thanks to Drew's occupation (Crime writer) and his ex's "almost" celebrity status, the media was whipped into a frenzy. All of America saw the surreal story unfold in their newspapers or with Mary Hart.

He wants the truth. You see, our protagonist doesn't remember what brought him to Genevieve's bedroom or why he was apprehended by police standing over the body with the knife in his hand. He had a tumor. He has amnesia. When another body is found the original detectives come to call again.

Hurwitz feeds his story like an engine man feeding coal to a locomotive. The more he writes the faster the story travels. The pace of the story aside, there are passages within this novel which sing like the loneliest of elegies. But with the mourning there is hope. At the very beginning of the book is a soliloquy to today's L.A. that is inspired. Within Danner's daily rituals we find a contemporary man living with doubt, worshipping false icons and still in search of the "Truth".

That Hurwitz's dénouement is straightforward and yet beyond bizarre is a testament to his strength as a writer and his love for L.A. In THE CRIMEWRITER Hurwitz marries over-the-top Hollywood with the most basic of human emotions. The evolution of writer and story is apparent on every page. He has created a California voice as stylistic as Cain's, Chandler's, Crais' or Prather's and set it in the 21st century.

Like Rackley, Hurwitz isn't afraid to go "Balls to the Wall" and the pay-off is remarkable.

Ruth Jordan

THE CRUEL STARS OF THE NIGHT

Kjell Eriksson

2007

St. Martin's

The Cruel Stars of the Night is the second police procedural from Kjell Eriksson. Ann Lindell and the rest of the team from best selling: The Princess of Burundi are back.

Erkisson, in a Ruth Rendell like way, again, gets into the heads of all the players and this serves to build some tension as well as allowing growth in the main protagonists. This time out three men are killed, probably by the same person. There's little to connect them to each other, initially. A retired officer suggests a theory that could link them. Because the queen is visiting shortly his off thought has more credence than normal. The diligent pace builds to an exciting climax. Ann, Ola Haver and the rest of the violent

crimes squad are becoming more familiar. Erkisson makes mention of other crimes suggesting more books in the series.

They'd be welcome. If you're looking for a unique, new, procedural series Kjell Eriksson offers distinct possibilities.

Dave Biemann

THE DEAD FATHERS CLUB

Matt Haig

2007

Viking

When asked what part they would like to attempt, many actors promptly reply, "Hamlet." Living the part, on the other hand, isn't such a thrill. Philip Noble will attest to that. He's eleven, socially awkward, and just beginning that hormonal hurricane known as adolescence. His father dies in an automobile accident. His mother is comforted by Uncle Alan, who wants the family pub as well as Philip's mother.

Philip is not comforted in the least when the ghost of his father shows up at the funeral. The ghost wants Philip to avenge his murder; he says Uncle Alan cut the brake cables on the car. Uncle Alan could easily have done it, as he owns a garage in partnership with Mr. Fairview. Mr. Fairview has a daughter Leah; Uncle Alan thinks Philip and Leah make a nice couple. Leah is amenable; Philip is torn but acquiescent. She is, after all, an older woman.

Matt Haig has written a great knock-off of an already great story. Philip has a lot on his plate for an adult, much less an eleven-year-old. He makes some bad choices, which have consequences. Some are humorous, some are tragic, and some are truly dreadful. Haig makes no bones about the Hamlet connections; it's what he does to the basic story that makes THE DEAD FATHERS CLUB such a good book. One wonders where he'd go with KING LEAR. Or, considering his skills in writing about adolescents and their thought processes and emotions, ROMEO AND JULIET.

P.J. Coldren

DEAD SHOT

Annie Solomon

March 2007

Warner

To be honest, I've never been a big fan of Romantic Suspense, but Annie Solomon's DEAD SHOT hooked me in the very beginning. Photographer Gillian Gray's supermodel mother was murdered years ago, but her killer was never apprehended. Gray's photo exhibition, a series of violent self-portraits recreating similar murders, is not just about shocking critics. It's about bringing her mother's killer out into the open. When bodies start turning up, the crime scenes eerily similar to Gray's photographs, she suspects that her mother's killer is getting the message. Ex-cop Ray Pearce is hired to protect Gray but finds himself getting closer to his client than the job calls for.

Although the love story was intriguing and the sex scenes fogged up my glasses, the action and suspense were what drove the story forward. Gray's somewhat sadistic personality serves as a magnet for danger and conflict, a refreshing change from the stereotypical damsel in distress. In fact, I found Pearce to be the more sentimental and fearful of the two, breaking the mold of the cookie cutter romance novel. Even though the ending could have been more climatic, the journey there was gripping enough to keep me turning pages. Don't let the Romance label steer you away; DEAD SHOT has the making of a hard-boiled thriller.

Dana Kaye

DEADLY ADVICE

Roberta Isleib

2007

Berkley Prime Crime

What a pleasure it was to read this book. Roberta Isleib has mastered the skill of writing about the serious topic of murder with a light, deft, and humorous touch. Rebecca Butterman is a clinical psychologist. She's divorced, more or less resigned to it, and is pretty happy with both her day job and her sideline, writing an online advice column.

Things take a turn for the deadly, though, when Rebecca's neighbor, Madeline, dies of an apparent suicide. Rebecca is so busy chastising herself for missing the signs that something was amiss, it takes Madeline's mother to ask the obvious question: maybe there was nothing wrong. Maybe Madeline was murdered.

And about the time Rebecca discovers Madeline's blog, which focuses more than anything else on her adventures in dating, Rebecca's editor asks for a piece on the modern singles scene.

The opportunity is just too good to ignore, and Rebecca begins to ask some very pointed questions among the denizens of the local dating circuit, questions that bring danger right to her door.

Rebecca Butterman is an entertaining and endearing protagonist, the plot kept me guessing until the very end, and the ending itself was extremely satisfying.

I'm looking forward to Rebecca's next adventure.

Rae Helmsworth

DEATH AT THE OLD HOTEL

Con Lehane

2007

St. Martins

This is a fierce novel in the Irish sense, fierce in the sheer passion of the writing

And in it's raw depiction of hurt, loyalty, betrayal, and courage. It may well prove to be the definitive Irish American saga the values and contradictions of both countries are beautifully and wrenchingly portrayed. As a snapshot of the nineties, the novel is unique captures the whole era in it's flawed skewered direction the depiction of the unions and the power they wield(d) is as Menacing as anything the cosa nostra threw up the women.....ah.....as ferocious, loyal and wondrous as only Irish women can be, the lash and the love

The American mind set walking point on the Irish sensibility has produced what can only be described as a dark emerald, lit by old glory a true masterpiece of slow burn.

Ken Bruen

DEATH COMES FOR THE FAT MAN

Reginald Hill
2007
HarperCollins

The Fat Man—Andy Dalziel—spends this novel in a coma amid various reveries which give his colleague, Peter Pascoe, the limelight. Andy and Peter were victims of an explosion set off by terrorists and Peter, who was behind the Fat Man, was shielded from the force of the blast. Andy was not so lucky.

After recuperating, Pascoe is obsessed with finding out what happened. In part he is stimulated in his efforts by the irrational belief that such endeavors would keep Andy alive. The culprits are a group called The Templars, named after the first of the Crusaders. Their victims are Muslims who escape conviction in the courts.

In his investigation, Pascoe is, to some extent, hampered by the British spy service in which, he is convinced, there is a mole supporting The Templars. The plot is complex, and is only relieved by asides to the humor of the Fat Man as recalled by Pascoe or in the brief episodes depicting his reveries as he lies comatose. Pascoe uses Andy's condition to help him unravel some of the plot, enabling Pascoe to move forward. Then come the surprises and an explosive conclusion.

Theodore Feit

DEATH ROLL

Marilyn Victor and Michael Allan Mallory
May 2007
Five Star

Lavender ("call me Snake") Jones loves animals, and has a job that allows her to spend her life around critters. She's zookeeper at the Minnesota Valley Zoo. She's also happily married to Jeff, an Australian herpetologist. The only fly in her ointment, in everyone's ointment, is the zoo's director, Anthony Wright. Wright is pompous, egotistical, and on a power trip, all qualities that probably contribute to his untimely end in a crocodile pond.

When the local police decide that the crocodile's handler is the best candidate for a murder charge, Snake can't stand by and watch her friend suffer. So she decides to investigate, and soon finds more mysteries than any one woman can handle. Husband Jeff is happy to help – as much to keep Snake out of trouble as for any other reason – and together they work to find the real killer.

This book is by turns amusing and creepy – in a good way. Snake and Jeff are a great team, the plot is nicely twisty, and action is fast-paced.

I hope we see more Snake stories from this talented writing team.

Rae Helmsworth

DOUBLE DEAD

Terry Hoover
2007
Five Star

Steve Harlan has changed jobs, going from being a newspaper reporter to being a private eye. It's the 60's, and he was just a little too color-blind for upper management at the paper. Steve's big break comes when a wealthy local banker, John Lattimore, is arrested for the murder of his mistress Delores Green. What makes most people really upset about the case is Lattimore asking Delores's 13-year-old son Greg to help him cover up the crime and make it look like a natural death.

Lattimore is not your most sympathetic character. Big, blustery, very confident . . . overbearing, selfish, less than discrete . . . there's plenty not to like. Delores seems fairly straightforward at first. As Steve digs into Lattimore's past, into Delores's past, into the various relationships surrounding the victim, he finds that everyone has secrets, everyone is not what they seem to be at first glance.

The defense contends that Lattimore did NOT kill Delores; something that happened to her in the time she was missing prior to her death caused that death and whatever it was, it had nothing to do with Mr. Lattimore. The prosecution claims that Lattimore beat Delores to death because he was tired of her drinking and because he thought she was cheating on him. Bearing in mind that so much of the forensic ability we take for granted today was not available 40 or 50 years ago, it is interesting to see how each side attempts to prove their version of the story.

In the course of the investigations, Steve rubs somebody the wrong way and his family is threatened. It is at this point that Steve realizes the kind of woman he has married; she knew when he changed careers that something like this would happen somewhere along the line and still made the conscious decision to support him in his choice. It's a small moment in the book, but one that stays with the reader.

Hoover has written a good mystery, with lots of possible solutions to work through in order to reach the ending Harlan and the defense work out. For many readers, this step back into the not-too-distant past will be refreshing and nostalgic.

P.J. Coldren

THE ECHELON VENDETTA

David Stone

2007

Putnam

THE ECHELON VENDETTA is a terrific read and it hums along quick, so be ready for fast reading.

The CIA has many different people working for them in a variety of positions. Micah Dalton is a spy, he's not a intelligence gatherer, or an analyst. What Dalton does is come in after something has hit the fan. He's a "cleaner" and it's his job to keep things from getting to the public, basically erasing any trace of a job gone bad.

Dalton's role in his world changes when an old colleague and mentor is killed. Dalton can't help but want to find out the truth behind his friend's death. He uncovers a trail of murder victims with nothing in common except involvement in something known as Echelon.

Stone has all the aspects of a classic thriller here and it is going to raise your heart rate. Great characters and perfect plotting make this a book you won't want to miss.

Jon

THE EVER-RUNNING MAN

Marcia Muller

JULY 2007

Warner Books

Wow. One sitting. I read this book with out stopping. I've always thought Marcia Muller was a great writer, but this book has surpassed everything else I've read by her.

Sharon McCone and her husband are happy in their marriage and in their careers. Sharon running her PI firm and Hy working with the security outfit he's a partner in. The happiness is being put to the test her in THE EVER-RUNNING MAN. Someone is targeting RKI offices across the country, the only clue after the explosions is witnesses occasionally seeing a running figure leaving the scene. RKI decides that Sharon and her firm are the ones to bring in to track down the bomber. And while Sharon hasn't always been a fan of the people her husband works with, she agrees to take on the case. Because of the nature of the investigation she has to dig into the back ground of the partners looking for reasons why they might be targeted, including her husband.

What Sharon discovers could very well mean the end of her marriage, at the very least change the way she sees her husband. But when more people die, and one of the partners is gunned down in his home, Sharon has no choice but to move forward.

Marcia Muller has such a great knack for creating empathy for her characters that she draws you into the story smoothly and seamlessly. She also writes with a fondness for the past books that is seen in her recurring characters, how ever brief the appearances are. Muller is at the top of her game with this book. And if I ever get in trouble, I want Sharon McCone watching out for me.

Jon

A FATAL GRACE

Louise Penny

2007

0-312-35256-5

St. Martin's Minotaur

The author's first book in the series, "Still Life," was a great success, and she is following it up with the same hero, Chief Inspector Armand Gamache of the Surete du Quebec, Canada. A very unusual death occurs. A woman, CC de Poitiers, is electrocuted on an ice field in the small town of Three Pines. Why was she wearing boots with steel spikes on the bottom? How could she possibly be electrocuted in this setting. Did her husband want to do her in? Someone else? How about her daughter, whom she repressed and scolded for the least infraction? Perhaps her photographer lover? But did he really love her? She wasn't beloved by anyone as Gamache discovers, so there might be other suspects he hasn't uncovered. Not only does he have several suspect, he also has several rumors. Which to investigate?

But first, he has to figure out how the murder was accomplished, and in front of many witnesses. It seems an impossible crime.

Well done, and an intriguing story.

Gay Toltl Kinman

FEVER MOON

Carolyn Haines

2007

St Martin's Minotaur

After her success with the "Bones" series of cozies set in present day Mississippi, Haines has turned her eye back to the mid 20th century and westward to the bayou country of Louisiana.

In a small community in New Iberia parish, a body is found mangled and disemboweled, with a seriously ill woman frantically pacing near the dead man. Deputy Sheriff Raymond Thibodeaux tries to calm her in order both to learn what happened at the scene and also to relieve her illness. But rumors begin to spread in the small close knit community that a werewolf is on the loose and has entered the body of the ill woman.

Haines has set her story in the WWII years, when families waited anxiously for news of their loved ones serving overseas and when returning veterans struggled to come to terms with their violent memories. Finding a demon to blame for a lingering sense of unease and uncertainty was easier than to accept responsibility for townspeople in need of help.

Struggling to protect the woman found by the dead body, and to find the murderer who continues to threaten the town, Thibodeaux struggles to find a new way of life after the physical and psychological wounds he suffered while with the US Army in Europe.

Fans of Haines cozy mysteries should enjoy this effort as the popular author expands her writing style.

Woodstock

FOILED AGAIN

J. S. Borthwick

2007

0-312-36655-1

St. Martin's Minotaur

Sarah Dean is Assistant Professor of English at Bowmouth, a small college in Maine. This is the 13th in the series, and is centered on a very avant garde performance of "Romeo and Juliet." What wasn't scripted was the reality of two of the actors being injured and one killed. A foil maybe the murder weapon—or was it an epee?

There are several characters in the story. Thankfully, a handy cast list is in the front of the book. Sarah is in the front line as she is helping out with the costumes changes.

Motives and suspects abound, particularly when the English Department concocts a subversive plan to take over the Drama Department. Can this be a motive?

Lots of fun with the play that mixes sexes and costumes, and the story moves as fast as a Shakespearean play.

The author lives on the coast of Maine so depicts the setting and weather well.

Gay Toltl Kinman

FREE FIRE

C.J. Box

2007

Putnam

Sometimes the best part of dinner is dessert. The anticipation of something that will make you happy, and feels like a reward. That's how I feel about the books by C.J. Box, they are a reward that I look forward too after reading book after book for review. It's a reward I save and that I savor. Box has consistently entertained me year in and year out with each new book.

FREE FIRE, is the seventh book by Box and it's another addition to his series featuring Joe Pickett.

Joe has been fired from his job and is working as a ranch hand for his Father In Law, not really the happiest position for him to be in. However a horrific murder gives him an opening to his old job as the Governor makes him a deal, solve this case and get the old job back. The murderer, a sleaze of a lawyer named McCann has found a loophole that has allowed him to plead guilty and still walk away from his crimes unscathed. Joe has his work cut out for him.

Box is one of my favorite authors writing today. The depth of his skill shows on every page. Strong characters and impeccable plotting are aided by spot on pacing that constantly cranks up the tension like a high wire ready to snap. Like the thunder telling of a coming storm. this book builds to a lightening strike finish that will leave you breathless and in awe.

Jon Jordan

GANGSTERS WIVES

Lee Martin

2007

No Exit Press

If you're into Fyodor Dostoyevsky then look away now, because this is not 'Crime and Punishment' for the 21st Century; but if you're looking for a tough London Gangland thriller with a cynical eye and full of black humor then this is just what you are looking for. Written with a terse and fast voice, 'Gangsters Wives' tells the tale of four women Sadie, Nicky, Poppy and Kate who are married to key leaders of London's East-End gangland. When a court case for which the Gangsters could go to jail starts in earnest, the wives look at their lives and decide that some things have to change. One is married to an abuser, while one is actually broke due to the excessive lifestyle, while one is an East European bride and another who enjoys extra-marital fun. Enter an undercover Asian policeman who gets involved with the cabal, while trying to track the Gangster's next job and soon finds himself beneath the sheets in some rather explicit sexual antics.

The wives hatch a plan that will free them from the shackles of their husbands, but the plan involves a JCB excavator, a cache of automatic weapons and a double cross of their partners, with the Asian cop sat right in the middle of the heist. So the women tool up, leaving their ladies-who-lunch lifestyle behind and head into the double-cross. Needless to say, their plans do not go by the numbers, while their husbands discover the deception when the bullets fly. This leaves the cop with nowhere to turn as he also has some secrets that are only revealed at the stunning and head-spinning climax. One point I have reveal here is this can not be a debut novel, as the writing is far too clean, and there is not a wasted word. Plus, whoever this Lee Martin is, he or she has played a rather funny if somewhat rude joke on this reviewer, as the Cop who sits between the gangsters and their wives shares my name! Anyway, I must also warn you that the language as well as the sexual content is hardcore in the extreme, but that just adds a level of authenticity to the proceedings. If you like Martina Cole's work, then 'Gangsters Wives' will be right up your darkened alley-way, but again, be warned, not for the faint of heart and in a few words – 'Great Fun'

Ali Karim

GRAY GHOST

William G. Tapply

2007

St. Martin's Minotaur

In his newest novel, William G. Tapply brings back Stonewall Jackson [Stoney] Calhoun, protagonist of *Bitch Creek*, the first in what appears to be a new series for this prolific author. [This was apparently not the author's original intention, but the acclaim received by the first book encouraged him to bring Stoney back.] Stoney woke up seven years ago in a VA hospital where he was taken after being struck by lightning, with absolutely no memory of who he was or anything of his life before that moment. Now 32 years old, he has started a new life for himself as a part-time fishing guide and part-owner of a fly shop and guide service in Portland, Maine, living alone but for his dog, Ralph [full name, Ralph Waldo], in a cabin in the woods.

Out one day on a charter fishing job with Paul Vecchio, a likeable and inoffensive history professor, they stop at one of the many little islands in the Bay and stumble upon a man's body, burned beyond recognition, throat cut and body mutilated. The sheriff, who other than Kate, the complicated woman who is his business partner and more, is just about Stoney's only friend in the world, urges Stoney to let him deputize him and assist him in the investigation, but Stoney turns him down. The sheriff tells him: "You know how to analyze things. You're objective. You notice things, and you remember everything. You're smart as hell, and you're discreet, and most of all, I trust you. I need you." He concedes: "I guess I used to be some kind of cop...before I got hit by lightning and had everything zapped out of my brain. All I can tell you for sure is, I'm not a cop anymore, and I don't want to be. I just want to hang out with my dog, sleep in my cabin in the woods, listen to the birds sing and my brook gurgle, split and stack firewood, and maybe go fishing once in a while." But when Stoney comes home to find Vecchio's dead body sitting in a chair outside his cabin a couple of days later, he reconsiders, feeling somehow responsible.

Stoney Calhoun is a wonderful creation, a man with all sorts of abilities the origin of which he cannot begin to fathom—"he'd also discovered that he knew how to hurt people with his hands, and that it didn't bother him when he had to do it." And then there is the presence of the person Stoney refers to as The Man in the Suit, who turns up from time to time since the VA hospital to try to determine what if anything Calhoun might have remembered from his previous life and always relieved when told that he remembered nothing.

The wonderful descriptions of the Maine landscapes and waters, the well-rendered characters [including Ralph, as much of a presence as any human in the story – although not in a "cute" way – not that that's a bad thing, mind you], and the mystery of both the past and the present, make this a beautifully written, terrific read, and it is highly recommended.

Gloria Feit

Green Lantern: Revenge of the Green Lanterns

Geoff Johns

2007

DC Comics

Revenge of the Green Lanterns is a collection of various stories that all expertly reveal how Hal Jordan interacts with the people around him.

Split into three very different story arcs, Johns tells three stories involving Hal Jordan's relationship with Green Arrow, Batman, and his fellow Green Lanterns. Johns uses brilliant characterization to create dialogue and scenes that have the characters interacting in ways realistic to their personalities. Such insight into the personas of these superheroes makes Johns' stories even more interesting to read.

The first story is penciled beautifully by Carlos Pacheco, who is able to skillfully draw a variety of scenarios, from a two page spread of Green Lanterns in battle to Hal and his brother playing football. The second story is drawn well by Ethan Van Sciver, but is colored too darkly to truly portray the clean lines and detailing of Sciver's work. Ivan Reis penciled the last story

arc, and is my favorite. His clean work is striking and perfectly detailed, and he is one of the few artists who I believe consistently draws attractive people.

The four comics that make up "The Revenge of the Green Lanterns," are the best of the group. With great writing and beautiful art, Johns tells the story of Hal Jordan's newly problematic life; Jordan is penalized for simply doing his job, and the return of a Green Lantern Hal himself had killed prompts a journey into space where Hal discovers a secret plan being carried out by the notorious Manhunters. With clues into DC's secret "52" event, the story fits beautifully into DC's year later idea, with tantalizing tidbits into their upcoming huge event. Again, with the famous Green Lantern, Johns' characterization and mysterious surprise make a story worth reading again and again.

Hannah Katz

HADES

Russell Andrews

2007

Mysterious Press

Russell Andrews has synonymous with great suspense and this latest book proves why. Layers upon layers really make this book an intricate web waiting to be unraveled.

Justin Westwood is brought into this story when he finds a dead wall street mover and shaker. As he explores the reason for the murder he uncovers a conspiracy that brings him into the world of international high finance and people with enough money that they are used to buying and getting whatever they want. As Westwood teams up with a former lover who also happens to be an FBI Agent he finds himself in a place where people have different morals and values, all based on wealth and what you can do with it, often leaving him the only truly honest man in the room.

The way this book builds in suspense is like an ever tightening wire, and like any wire pulled too taut, eventually something is going to rip loose. I literally could not stop reading.

Jon

HARD MAN

Allen Guthrie

June 2007

Harcourt

Pearce is a hard man. He's an ex-con who's seen and heard it all. Until two men show up at his door and announce with their fists that they need his help. They tell him they hear he "went soft" when his mum died. This is the Baxter family when they need a favor.

May Baxter is pregnant. Wallace, her husband, was displeased to hear that the child is not his. But instead of leaving May, he can't leave her alone. Her husband is stalking her. The Baxter men haven't taken kindly to this. They want Pearce to give them a hand. Babysitting May Baxter.

Pearce balks. But when his only love in the world, his pooch, three-legged Dandie Dinmont Hilda, is dog-napped, he knows he has to save her. And help the Baxter's by dint of saving his girl from whatever fate Wallace holds in store, for who else could it be that would threaten a man's best friend? Thank God the Baxter's let him know what an animal hater the man is. Now it's to meet fist with fist, face to face and man to man. And whoever is left standing is the real hard man.

Allan Guthrie has followed up his snappy TWO-WAY SPLIT and the so cruel KISS HER GOODBYE with a novel of violence, humor and deeply cynical pathos. Because we all have, somewhere inside of us, a brutal survivor ready to hold court in a dark alleyway, we can all get behind Pearce, a tough guy seeking vengeance for his wee dog. Guthrie keeps his edge sharp and the reader on edge with HARD MAN.

Jennifer Jordan

HOMELAND SECURITY

Alexa Hunt

2007

Forge

The beloved characters from CORRUPTS ABSOLUTELY are back in another high-concept, espionage thriller. Former assassin Leah Burgland and reporter Elliot Delgado are hired by the US government to track down two nuclear bombs that were stolen from the Russians and brought into the United States. Whether they were taken by the Columbia cartel, a croup of fanatic Muslims or the Fidelista exiles, no scenario looks good for US national security. Set in the near future where electric cars and video phones are the norm, Hunt has created a world that is both intriguing and suspenseful.

Hunt knows how to create a deft sense of sprawl, telling the story from multiple viewpoints and various international settings. It's a good thing she includes the date, time and location and the beginning of each section, otherwise I'd have trouble keeping track. Although there is some character development, the majority of the novel is plot driven; the focus being on the nukes rather than the people chasing them. I would have been more riveted if I had known more about the characters, really cared for them, but the external conflict was enough to keep me hooked.

--Dana Kaye

THE HUNTER

Asa Nonami

2007

Kodansha America

A central question at the heart of this gripping thriller is, who really is the hunter? Is it the detective searching for a killer? Or is it the killer, searching for his next victim? And, is there ever justification for murder?

Asa Nonami, a prize-winning Japanese writer, has crafted an intriguing glimpse into the workings of a Tokyo police department. Similar in many ways to their American counterparts, but with their own cultural imperatives driving them, the detective team of Takako Otomichi and Tamotsu Takizawa are not necessarily happy to be working together. Takako, one of the few female detectives on the force, and Tamotsu, a crusty old veteran, have little to nothing in common. But they both want to do the job.

When a man bursts into flames in a family restaurant late one night, the detectives know they have a challenging case in front of them. And it doesn't get easier. From a sleazy dating club to a local mental hospital, Otomichi and Takizawa follow the clues to a stunning realization – they're chasing a wolf who's been trained to kill on command. And the wolf has escaped and now is following its own agenda.

Lyrical written, this book will haunt you with its conflicted protagonists and sympathetic criminals – including the wolf. A most highly recommended read.

Rae Helmsworth

JACK THE RIPPER: SCOTLAND YARD INVESTIGATES

Stewart P. Evans and Donald Rumbelow

January 2007

Sutton Publishing

Yes. Another Jack the Ripper book.

So many books, so many theories. Some credible, some bunk. What can be said here that hasn't been said? Quite a lot, actually.

JACK THE RIPPER - SCOTLAND YARD INVESTIGATES delves into territory heretofore undelved by dint of studying case material many have not bothered to look for before. Stewart P Evans and Donald Rumbelow, two ex-police featured prominently in the best online resource on the subject, Casebook: Jack the Ripper, have look at scrutinized the case since 1960. Here they have investigated every clue and lead from the stand-point of the investigators of the time, going through their case files and the scant evidence left after years of neglect. In these clues are profiles of the men involved in the case and backgrounds on the victims that shed a different light than the fictionalized and exaggerated results of recent books.

With photographs, political cartoons and files written from the time depicted on these pages, the reader feels more like an actual investigator than an arm chair detective. Knowledge of the history of the period and the turmoil under which the investigation took place are fascinating and in depth. The only thing this book lacks is a definitive suspect; something no one can truly provide. Tantalizing suspect possibilities bandied about by the investigators themselves bring the reader closer to this answer than most of this book's predecessors.

Jennifer Jordan

JUNE BUG

Jess Lourey

2007

Midnight Ink

Mira James is a witty woman in Battle Lake, Minnesota, who searches for a diamond necklace supposedly lost by a woman in Whiskey Lake many years ago. The story had become a local legend. Mira, a scuba diver, looks for a box planted in the lake by a local company as a publicity stunt. She finds a corpse--maybe. Mira is also a part-time reporter and employee at the local library. With these resources, she does a little more digging into the legend. She sneaks into the house Shangri la (what else!) where the woman was staying. She finds one of the rooms almost dismantled. Apparently someone else learned that the necklace was part of a large treasure trove of jewels, and they all didn't sink to the bottom of the lake. She finds a clue there that gets her into more trouble.

Many humorous incidents occur, including a visit from a midget who brings her another clue and wants to share the spoils; and a couple of ne'er-do-wells who bring her nothing, want a share of the pot; and then there's her date with a friend of the Chief of Police. Things get complicated, so Mira buys a stun gun. Very funny. Very enjoyable.

Gay Tottl Kinman

JUSTICE: Volume 2

Krueger/Ross

2007
DC Comics

This is the second of three volumes to this collection. Alex Ross, who co wrote the story and does art chores (painting over sketches by Doug Braithwaite, is an Icon in the comics arena. He is one of the most sought after artists working today. One look at anything he's done will tell you why. Jim Krueger is also a huge talent and a great writer. His love for the graphic format and the characters is all too obvious.

Justice is an old school comics story featuring a huge number of heroes and villains. It opens with the villains banding together to incapacitate the heroes, leaving them free to act on their plots. In this case they want to save the world, doing things the heroes wouldn't. They are curing disease, turning deserts into lush valleys of green and other things to make the world a better place. Meanwhile the heroes are trying to overcome the traps laid for them in volume one. At the end of this installment we see all the good guys banding together at Superman's fortress of solitude to form a strategy to overcome the villains and uncover their real motives.

This is old school story telling by a crew of creators who love the genre. Their love for these characters shows on every page. This is the buzz I got reading comics in my youth. It also happens to have some of the best art I've seen in years. Books like JUSTICE are the reason I read comics.

Jon Jordan

JUSTICE FOR THE DAMNED

Priscilla Royal

June 2007

Poisoned Pen Press

In the thirteenth century, superstition governed much of men's and women's reactions to the world around them. Monasteries, nunneries, and priories were oases of reason and learning, giving them a position of respect when events turned ugly in the small isolated towns of the British countryside.

Prioress Eleanor and Brother Thomas of the Priory of Tyndal have traveled to the Amesbury Priory together. Eleanor is recovering from a serious illness which has threatened her life and is seeking rest, recuperation, and tender care from her aunt, who is a nun there. Thomas has a more sureptitious role - he is there in the role of a spy, trying to identify the source of a threat against a valuable illustrated manuscript.

The small village of Amesbury is in turmoil after a series of unexplained deaths, and in the absence of the sheriff, the community turns to the priory. As has been the case down through the ages, human greed, sexual desire, budding romantic love, and unbridled ambition are at the source of the troubling events. Thomas and Eleanor discover that the high value of the manuscript is closely related to the motives for the murders.

Royal's cast of characters seem fully human and fully understandable, even to a 21st century reader. Her series based in the Priory of Tyndal is the product of impressive research and a treat for those who follow this series.

Woodstock

KEEP IT REAL

Bill Bryan

May 2007

Bleak House Books

KEEP IT REAL, television writer and producers Bill Bryan's debut book, starts big, reads big and ends big.

"The sight of Ms. Gutierrez naked is all bad, but the thing that really jumps right out at me is her humongous bush."

That first sentence perfectly sets the internal narrative of our irascible lead, the puerile and loveable Ted Collins. From a damn good investigative reporter to shill/producer of "The Mogul", a reality TV show that is slowly bleeding his slow dry, Ted's descent into Hollywood hell was brought about by divorce and Ted's temporary break with normal adult behavior in the face of adversity. What gets Ted out of bed every morning, his beautiful and witty little girl Hallie, is denied him except under the supervising eye of the court appointed meany, the afore-mentioned Ms. Gutierrez.

On one of these visits has Ted wading through shrubs looking for a lost ball when he gets an earful from next door. Gangsta rapper Boney his booty-licious girlfriend, Patrice are arguing. Fiercely. When Patrice ends up as a headline as a missing starlet, Ted reverts to his former career and begins to investigate for all he's worth. For the first time, working in reality TV may not be the worst thing ever. Ted gets Boney written into "The Mogul" and suddenly he's like Shaggy after a Scooby snack. Can Ted track down a killer before he a.) Gets fired b.) Gets found out c.) Gets killed?

Bill Bryan's vast experience with film and television, including *Night Court* and *Coach*, has given him the chops to write a snappy book. But some dark and twisted part of his brain has given him the power to write a fantastic debut that reads fast and will actually have you believing that a Hollywood producer can evolve into a human being.

Jennifer Jordan

KNOTS AND CROSSES Special Edition
Ian Rankin
2007
Orion

Orion is re-releasing Ian Rankin's first Rebus book complete with previously unpublished material. A directors cut if you will, complete with extra features.

When I meet people who have not read the Rebus books I usually tell them to start with BLACK BOOK, if you enjoy it, go back and start at the beginning of the series. I don't think KNOTS AND CROSSES is Rankin's best book, few first books are. But it is a good book, and an important book. It's also close to impossible to get a hard cover for less than a king's ransom.

This is a great looking edition, and truly is a collector's edition.

Happy 20th birthday Rebus.

Jon

The Letter Killeth
Ralph McInerny
2006
St. Martin's Minotaur

Ralph McInerny has written over 70 mysteries, including 26 Father Dowling books, plus numerous non-fiction books. He has been a professor at the University of Notre Dame for over 40 years. He was awarded the Lifetime Achievement award by Bouchercon. Ralph McInerny is one of the most distinguished writers on the crime fiction genre.

THE LETTER KILLETH is the 10th in the series of mysteries set at Notre Dame, featuring Professor Roger Knight and his PI brother Philip Knight. When Roger is asked to look into threatening letters that were sent to college administrators and to the new, successful football coach, he and Philip at first believe they are the work of pranksters. Or possibly a ploy by the underground student paper to boost circulation. But then a fire in a professor's office, followed by the burning of his car, moves the investigation beyond the hunt for pranksters. And it turns deadly serious when a professor is found dead.

The first half of the book is spent introducing a large cast of characters, none of whom we really get to know or like. For this reader, in fact, the most interesting character is the one who winds up dead. Numerous theories of the crime are set forth, and multiple arrests are made, before Roger Knight, at the end of the book, finally names the killer.

Ralph McInerny has a well-deserved reputation as an experienced and professional story-teller. And his insider's view of campus politics, and the "town vs. gown" interactions, are truly fascinating. However, as crime fiction, THE LETTER KILLETH is not one of his best efforts.

David Chernow

THE LIAR'S DIARY
Patry Francis
2007
Dutton Adult

High school drama, cliques, flirting and betrayals aren't just for students. Jeanne Cross, the school secretary, believes she's on the path of a perfect life until Ali Mather is hired as the new music teacher. Ali is energetic and confident, immediately becoming a favorite of the students and the intrigue of the staff. People in the small town, however, know of Ali and rumors of her adulterous ways follow her everywhere. Still, Jeanne can't help but to envy Ali's free spirit. After all, Jeanne's husband is little more than a roommate and the relationship with her teenage son is rooted in food - of both the fast and junk varieties. Perfect lives can be perfectly boring.

With a seemingly innocent request for a ride to work, Jeanne and Ali's unusual friendship takes hold and they begin to confide in each other. There are some secrets that neither are willing to share, however. When a murderer strikes the town and evidence is found that someone has been sneaking into Ali's home, Jeanne's son is arrested. Jeanne's loyalty, both to her family and her new friend, is tested to dangerous levels.

Patry Francis creates rich characters in her debut novel, THE LIAR'S DIARY. None are innately evil or good. Each are layered with hopes, flaws and neuroses. They are people we'd expect to see at the grocery store, the annual street festival or, perhaps, at the local high school. While the climax - a 'cheat' of the first-person account - left a bad taste in my mouth, the story was gripping, the pace raced and the characters left me wanting more.

Darwyn Jones

MAGIC CITY
James W. Hall
2007

St. Martin's Minotaur

Thorn—is it his given or family name?—doesn't look for trouble, but it comes to him in droves anyway. It has its genesis in 1964 with the Cassius Clay (before he was Ali) vs. Sonny Liston championship fight. Seated in the third row were a number of well-known people, some of whom later participated in the murder of eight Cubans. A photograph showing the spectators is put on display at a gallery many years later, setting off the subsequent events which lead to much mayhem and murder.

It is this photograph that stirs up the plot, the participants in which want to destroy any copies. The son of the murdered family wants to see a copy to identify the killers. Thorn is thrust into this situation when it is discovered that his girlfriend's father has a copy. All this against a backdrop of Miami, its anti-Castro Cuban population, the CIA and assorted side issues.

The action is fast-paced, the writing quick, the conclusion explosive.

Theodore Feit

MANHUNTER: TRIAL BY FIRE

Marc Andreyko – art by Javier Pina

2007

DC Comics

TRIAL BY FIRE is the second volume of this series from DC, a series that has come close to being cancelled, but keeps getting reprieves due to the Manhunter fans loyalty.

Kate Spencer is a Federal prosecutor in LA. She's the one who gets the big cases against the baddest of the supervillians. Her drive and energy make her a great lawyer, but it's also cost her a marriage and custody of her son. However sometimes the law doesn't always do what it should and due to loopholes and cracks in the justice system sometimes the bad guys walk away. Kate has decided to act on this, and using equipment from an evidence locker she has outfitted herself as a vigilante. With a bit of help from an ex-con trying to stay straight named Dylan, she the technical backup she needs. So when the legal system can't do it, Kate steps in as Manhunter, taking the law into her own hands, not so much upholding the law, as serving true justice.

In this second collection Kate is prosecuting some named The Shadow Thief who has killed the superhero known as Firestorm. This is complicated by a group of villains trying to kill him to keep him quiet. While this is going on there is also a killer stalking and killing everyone who has ever been a hero named Manhunter, and Kate is on the list.

Wonderful artwork from Javier Pina and Jesus Saiz compliment this wonderful story from Marc Andreyko. Kate is not portrayed as a nutjob, but as someone truly frustrated and trying to set things right. It's like the movie Deathwish with more planning and better equipment. It's got humor, it's got action and it's got great characters, and it's a very unique look at superheroing in the 21st century. This is why I read comics.

Jon Jordan

MIAMI PURITY

Vicki Hendricks

May 2007

Busted Flush Press

This book is, to me, the very definition of noir.

Ms. Hendricks steers us head long into the down and dirty life of Sherise Parlay as she attempts to make her life a better place. The best way to accomplish that, murder of the cold-blooded variety, of course. In a circumstance of the darkest irony, Sherise lands herself a job at Miami Purity, local dry cleaners. She is minutes into to living out her resolve to better her life when she is introduced to Payne, the owner's son. On the surface, he seems to be everything she hasn't had before in a man. Underneath, possibly worse. A deeper shade of black.

I inhaled this book like a drowning victim takes in lungs full of air upon hitting the waters' surface. It is very fast, very dark and very good. The darkest parts of human nature are dissected and put on display, for our reading pleasure. And, I can tell you now, the ending will mess with you.

Jennifer Jordan

THE MISSING

Chris Mooney

2007

Atria Books

Darby McCormick was a witness at sixteen. She saw a woman being tortured; as a result of that, she saw one of her friends dead and the other kidnapped, presumed dead. Some kids would have taken that life history and walked as far away from it as possible. Not Darby. She is now a career criminalist, making a living hunting down the kinds of people who made her adolescence a nightmare.

One of those cases has come to her own town. In the process of investigating the kidnapping of Carol Cranmore, Darby finds a wreck of a woman, a woman who claims to have escaped from the man who kidnapped Carol. This woman looks like an

Auschwitz survivor, all skin and bones and scars, and is almost feral in her affect. She fights anyone who tries to help her, except for Darby.

As Darby and her old FBI buddy Evan Manning and her current partner Jackson "Coop" Cooper work the case, they find that the kidnapper is well known to the FBI; they refer to him as The Traveler. He's been all over the country, leaving behind lots of dead people and very few clues. The resolution of the case doesn't make Darby's life any easier, which is too bad, because none of the bad stuff was her fault.

Mooney writes a great thriller, if THE MISSING is any indication. The ending, in particular, was enough to make me really uncomfortable with the depths of evil a writer can imagine. For surely, if a writer can imagine it, there is someone out there who can do it. THE MISSING should not be finished late at night, when it's very dark outside, and the thunder and lightning are really going to town. Of course, it won't change much to finish it in a very public place, with lots of people around . . . because who knows that those people do in private?? I'll bet Chris Mooney can come up with some more scary ideas.

P.J. Coldren

MURDER...SUICIDE...WHATEVER

Gwen Freeman

2007

Capital Crime Press

If you're ready for an interesting, witty, laugh-out-loud novel, you've got to pick up Murder...Suicide...Whatever. It will keep you reading, and keep you chuckling. Fifi Cutter, a smart, independent insurance investigator who finds herself living paycheck-to-paycheck, can't say no when her half-brother Bosco, handsome and wily, comes knocking at her door with the prospect of a paying job. It seems "Uncle Ted" (of no actual relationship to them) has gotten himself, well, possibly murdered. But maybe not. Bosco, giving an interested party the impression that he and Fifi are private investigators, has taken on the job of figuring out Uncle Ted's death. And off they go, finding false clues, pretending to be grief counselors, scrambling for their fee, and basically screwing up everything they try. Throw in sleazy insurance agents, a porn company, smart-ass kids, sleeping on a half-inflated pool raft, and more red herrings than you can count, and you have a hilarious, non-stop story. I enjoyed every minute of the book, and will look forward to the next in the Fifi Cutter series!

Judy Clemens

MURDER IN THE ILE SAINT-LOUIS

Cara Black

2007

Soho

Cara Black's new Parisian novel, MURDER ON THE ILE SAINT-LOUIS, takes place in February 1995. Set in the main protagonist and computer security specialist Aimee Leduc's own neighborhood of same name, an "island in the heart of Paris," this seventh novel in the series presents perhaps the greatest challenges yet to our très chic French-American heroine. While in the midst of running systems maintenance on an important new client's computer network, Leduc is alerted to the courtyard of her apartment building, where she finds an abandoned baby. Although awkward with the child at first, Leduc becomes smitten, and gives the female orphan the name Stella (star). Monitoring software, fighting bad guys and burping Stella is a tall order, but Leduc is up to the task (with motherhood manuals tossed in for guidance). In fact, Stella manages to steal virtually all her scenes in the novel, mainly because all the characters react to her in the same way – with adoration. Even Leduc's business partner Rene Friant finds himself buying the baby stuffed animals. The care of Stella leads to a nicely woven sub-theme of Leduc's relationship to her own long-gone mother, a former radical who disappeared when Leduc was a child. No one knows what happened to la mere Leduc, but this reader wouldn't be surprised to find her reappear in her daughter's life in a subsequent novel. In fact, it would be welcome.

MURDER ON THE ILE SAINT-LOUIS is an adventure novel of sorts, too. When it appears that Leduc's current client, a publicity firm for an oil conglomerate, is somehow involved in the death of a young environmental activist, and the disappearance of Stella's real mother, Aimee dives in feet first, both figuratively and literally (clad in Manolos, bien sur). Leduc's investigations take her into the drainage sluices of the Seine, a dark and dank sewage complex that offers refuge to the homeless; the caves under her apartment building that serve as storage units for the tenants; and subterranean caverns that exist deep under the city's environs and offer recreational pursuits for amateurs. Like all Black's books in the series, Ile Saint-Louis is steeped in rich historical detail that is intoxicating. One of the main characters is heir to the (theoretical) Polish throne, and there is much interweaving of Polish, Nazi and Resistance factual and cultural lore. Historical narrative aside, the novel reads like a female Indiana Jones exploit at times, with fast-paced and breath-taking action sequences. Despite the humorous aspects to the series, Black can write hardboiled scenes as good as anyone in the business. When Leduc has to deal with private intelligence operatives hired by the oil company, and those encounters turns deadly, Leduc will do whatever it takes to protect herself, and the innocent. Hint: she's a deadly aim with her Beretta. Intentional or not, setting this story in the heart of Paris parallels the heartfelt emotions pulsing throughout the book. In some ways, Ile Saint-Louis is more touching than the others in the series, because of the themes of motherhood, parental love and progeny longing. The raw emotions that bubble up in Leduc when she recalls her ma mere, a child's natural desire to know what happened to her parent so many years ago, is affecting. Murder in the Ile Saint-Louis has all the sights, sounds and smells of Paris that are the trademarks of

the series, along with the new settings particularities, such as the fascinating details of the Seine. There is love – okay, sex – too, a bad boy that Leduc finds irresistible, and who she allows to take her in his arms and bed. Yet, the book comes back to Stella. Like Marlon Brando's plaintive scream, her name is heard reverberating throughout the novel. Perhaps the author is sending her heroine on a more personal journey in books to come. Leduc is maturing, and that's just as sexy, just as thrilling.
Anthony Rainone

THE NAMING OF THE DEAD

Ian Rankin

April 2007

Little Brown & Company

The G8 Summit Meeting in Scotland during July, 2005, provides the background for this latest—and perhaps penultimate—Rebus novel (Ian Rankin has been quoted as having started on the last but promising not to kill off the dour detective). The setting allows the author to sound off on a variety of political topics: third world debt, arms sales to these needy nations, poverty at home, big business vs. funds and programs for the impoverished. Additionally, Rankin's knowledge of contemporary music—the combos, albums and songs of the past couple of decades—threads its way throughout. And in the middle of the G8 conference are the London underground and bus bombings and the Live8 concert.

Days before the world leaders are to arrive, on Friday, July 1st, while at Gleneagles, site of the meeting, being briefed on the overwhelmingly tight security, Siobhan (Shiv) Clark, Rebus' Sergeant, wanders off to the woods where local residents hang mementos of their dear departed on tree branches. There she finds a patch cut from a jacket worn by the victim of an unsolved murder (a bouncer at one of gangster Ger Rafferty's clubs, thus bring Rebus' arch enemy into play). SOCO and forensics soon find two additional mementos of unsolved murders. Are they related? Clarke is given until the following Tuesday to work the situation as head of the inquiry, with Rebus assisting providing a role reversal of sorts and setting the stage for his usual insubordination.

Meanwhile, back in Edinburgh, a popular MP falls to his death from a rampart on the castle. Is it an accident, suicide, murder? Rebus draws the case. Complicating the time line, Shiv's parents are attending the protests, and her mother gets hit in the face and taken to the hospital. Believing this may have been an act of police brutality, she wastes a lot of her limited time looking for the culprit.

Needless to say, all these factors contribute to a tightly woven tale in the usual Rankin style which somehow drifts to a somewhat unsatisfactory and unfulfilling conclusion. However, Rebus, being Rebus, provides us with hope that he'll never give up. And, frankly, we hope that Rankin won't either.

Theodore Feit

NERVE DAMAGE

Peter Abrahams

2007

William Morrow

Roy Valois, a 47-year-old Vermont sculptor and part-time amateur hockey player, has just completed his masterpiece, something he has entitled "Delia," the name of the wife he adored who had died nearly fifteen years ago in a helicopter crash while working in Venezuela. She had been a few months pregnant at the time, making the tragedy even worse. Roy had never gotten over his loss, although he begins to feel that with the completion of this piece, he may begin to move forward with his life, perhaps with Jen, the woman he has been seeing and for whom he cares. Just when he contemplates marrying Jen, he gets a terrifying medical diagnosis, which leads him to speculation and curiosity about the obituary which he is told probably exists in a newspaper's computers, as is commonly done, especially likely in the case of an artist who has achieved some degree of fame. When he manages to hack into the paper's obits, he finds something puzzling: Delia, who had a Ph.D. in economics from Georgetown and had worked at the Hobbes Institute, a think tank specializing in third-world economic problems, is described in the obit as having been employed by the United Nations. He tries to clear up what he sees as a simple mistake, but gets all the more confused when that doesn't appear to be the case at all: her former colleagues deny ever knowing her, the building that housed the think tank ostensibly is and has for decades been the office of another organization entirely and Roy cannot find any records that the Hobbes Institute had ever actually existed. He begins to doubt that he ever really knew anything about the woman he'd been married to and loved for years, what work she actually did, and the facts surrounding her death. He determines that in the time he has left, he must find the answers to these questions. Given the awful way in which the book opens for its protagonist, one cannot see any way in which it can end well for him. It's not like anything he finds out can make things better, change his prognosis. Nonetheless, the author maintains and steadily builds the suspense, in a well-written and engrossing tale.

Peter Abrahams, the author of numerous earlier novels, has given us a psychological thriller entirely gripping, creating layer upon layer of intrigue and unlikely events that perhaps are not that unlikely after all, and still manages a final twist.

Gloria Feit

OBSESSION

Jonathan Kellerman

2007
Ballantine Books

What's a guy supposed to do? Protect a patient's psychological well-being or tell the truth? Tanya Bigelow was first brought to Alex Delaware by her well-respected foster mother when the child was seven. He treated her successfully at that time, and then again a few years later, when her symptoms reappeared. Now nineteen, she approaches the doctor with a problem. The foster mother, Patty Bigelow, on her death bed gave Tanya an enigmatic message. She said she was guilty of a crime years before, and urged Tanya to seek Delaware's help on the theory he would enlist Milo Sturgis' assistance. The characters are all somehow related. Milo, a homicide detective and close Delaware friend, also is the partner of Patty's supervisor, Rick Silverman, in the ER where she was a nurse. No one can conceive that the selfless and hard-working nurse could be guilty of anything.

Alex and Milo backtrack Patty's past life discovering all kinds of clues. Eventually, the L.A. homicide squad enters the picture. Together they uncover various secrets of the past and present leading to the dangers facing Tanya which her dying foster mother was attempting to warn her about.

Needless to say, this is another superb, suspenseful Alex Delaware novel.

Theodore Feit

THE ONLY PURE THING

Patrick Hyde

2007

Beckham Publications

Stuart Clay is a Washington D.C. defense attorney whose skills are put to the test with client Cleveland Barnes. Cleveland was found pushing a shopping cart of empty cans outside one of Georgetown's more popular nightclubs. Not a crime unto itself, but when a decapitated head is plugged onto a parking meter in the same area, suddenly the police are very interested. In fact, considering the fact that Cleveland's wearing the dead guy's bloody loafers, Clay has a big fight ahead of him.

Patrick Hyde's experience as a D.C. criminal lawyer steeps the debut novel with authenticity. The confines of the court system provide obstacles and tests for the protagonist, but he knows how to play the game, playing some legal tricks of his own. Of course, the conflict isn't sequestered to the halls of justice - Clay also explores the dark corners of D.C. Unfortunately, the stakes are lacking. The mini-arcs of the novel provide some suspense, but the overall story left me uncaring whether Cleveland Barnes would be found guilty or innocent. Still, with a spot-on setting and a fast-paced plot, I look forward to future novels by Hyde.

Darwyn Jones

THE PACT

Roberta Kray

2007

Carroll & Graf

THE PACT is a book that is very different, with plot changes and character development so unexpected that the reader needs a road map to follow the curves and developments. It begins simply: Eve Weston's brother is in jail for a six-month sentence, but on a visit she sees he has been beaten. In return for her promise to do whatever he asks, she makes a deal with another prisoner to protect her brother.

Meanwhile, Eve is recovering from the suicide of her father and the loss of her job because of her close relationship (purely platonic) with her married lawyer superior, misconstrued as an affair. Then the fun begins. Her apartment is broken into and ransacked, she is followed, her ex-husband's residence is broken into and ransacked, two men are found murdered and other odd occurrences take place. What's going on? Who's responsible? What is at the heart of these misadventures?

As the plot moves forward it becomes obvious that someone believes Eve has something they want, but she doesn't know what it is. All the characters, seemingly unrelated, become intermingled and the mystery unwinds in spectacular fashion.

It is well worth reading to find out the reasons.

Roberta Kray is the widow of the late, legendary London gangster Reg Kray. Her first book was a biography of her husband. This is her second novel.

Theodore Feit

THE PINK PANTHER'S JUST DESSERTS

Marc Cerasini and Alice Alfonsi

2007

Harper Entertainment (PBO)

What a hoot! My memories from the old movies still alive in my head, I had no trouble picturing and enjoying the characters in this new Pink Panther adventure. Inspector Jacques Clouseau is just as hilarious and annoying as ever (as an officer of the leau), Chief Inspector Dreyfus just as frustrated and long-suffering, and Ponton steady and attractive. And while the plot is

fantastical, it's still (perhaps) within the realm of possibility. I laughed out loud more often while reading this book than I have in a while!

French master chefs are turning up dead, right before the World Food Expo in Las Vegas, and France is in panic mode. If France should lose -- well, there goes the meaning of life. Throw in a bumbling Mafia man, an obsessive-compulsive food inspector, and the crazy atmosphere of a cooking reality show, and you've got more than you need as a recipe for chaos. Cerasini and Alfonsi deliver a fresh and funny story, complete with crazy characters and all we expect from our favorite bumbling -- yet somehow effective -- detective. Hurrah!

Judy Clemens

A POISONED SEASON

Tasha Alexander

2007

William Morrow

A POISONED SEASON is a wonderful follow-up to Alexander's debut novel, AND ONLY TO DECIEVE. This series set in Victorian England featuring Lady Emily Ashton is off to a wonderful start.

In this second adventure with Lady Ashton we find her in the midst of the social season, which means parties and events that she would rather skip to follow her own scholarly pursuits. However social status has obligations and she finds herself attending a few of these functions. This leads to her meeting someone claiming to be descending from the defunct throne of Louis XVI. It is also at these affairs that she learns of a burglar who is stealing items that belonged to Marie Antoinette. Before long the burglar visits her home and the room of a guest. Shortly after one of the victims of burglary is killed and Emily finds herself with a new distraction, solving the murder.

Immediately engrossing and thoroughly entertaining this is a great book to take you away from the world around you. Alexander writes with a fullness and richness to the writing that leaves the reader extremely satisfied.

Jon

QUEENPIN

Megan Abbott

June, 2007

Simon and Schuster

Megan Abbott's previous two novels DIE A LITTLE & THE SONG IS YOU have introduced readers to an individual voice so taut and precise the reviews have almost universally claimed her as a new voice for old-school noir. Having finished QUEENPIN I must argue that Ms. Abbott's work is New-Time Noir. The tale is a classic. The setting is Vegas of the past; but QUEENPIN spins out with contemporary relevance and a style that belongs to this author alone.

A young, Catholic schooled Vegas girl sits in the back room of a low rent Vegas Gambling joint learning to cook the books and avoid passes. A feminine Vegas Institution sees something in the girl that reminds her of herself. Gloria Denton has found herself a protégé.

Abbott writes the seductiveness of the Vegas Underworld like the Grimms wrote fairy tales. No one's getting out whole. Our young heroine is schooled in the art of graft while wearing silver fox. The more she learns of the world the louder the siren song sings to her. The feminine solidarity evolves and morphs into something never quite written before. In the end, both the "Queenpin" and Abbott's reader get the payoff they should have seen coming if only the story hadn't been so deliciously distracting.

Ruth Jordan

A REAL BASKET CASE

Beth Groundwater

2007

Five Star

It is always with some trepidation that I pick up a book -- especially a first novel -- by someone I know personally. What if I don't like it? What will I say? Well, I needn't have worried in this case. Beth Groundwater's debut novel, A REAL BASKET CASE, doesn't disappoint.

When Claire Hanover finds herself practically naked under the bloody body of a man who is not her husband, things get a little complicated. Well, they were complicated before that, but this really changes things. Her husband is charged with the murder, and unwilling to believe her husband could do such a thing, Claire knows something has to be done to find the real killer. So she dives into many worlds in which she is not familiar: police work, drug dealing, lawyers, and the idea of divorce. Can she prove her husband's innocence without getting herself killed? No one else in her circle -- friends, the police, her husband, clients of her gift basket business -- thinks she can. But whether through naivete, intelligence, or simple devotion to her husband and marriage, Claire is determined to get to the bottom of the crime.

Groundwater's characters, especially Claire, are sympathetic and interesting, and I found myself really caring about Claire, her marriage, and that justice be done. A Real Basket Case and its author are a welcome addition to the mystery genre.
Judy Clemens

REQUIEM FOR AN ASSASSIN

Barry Eisler

June 2007

G.P. Putnam's Sons

Barry Eisler's John Rain has evolved from the efficient killing machine we first met in Rain Fall. As Requiem opens we find him "retired", in love, and a bit out of practice when it comes to the survival skills all Rain readers have come to depend upon. But a kidnapping forces Rain's hand. Loyalty before self preservation. Forced to kill again & not knowing the agenda of his assignment, Rain must embrace his inner killing machine. As Rain rushes from continent to continent completing assigned tasks to save a friend, Eisler writes the story of the struggle within. Together the pair must solve the mystery of where and why a hostage has been taken and piece together the individual tasks until they can sort out the motivation for clues to the enemy's next move.

A strong writer from the very beginning, Eisler has evolved as both a stylist and plotter. REQUIEM FOR AN ASSASSIN is a breathtaking spook tale. Eisler writes a thriller that pulsates with the right now while nodding at masters Deighton and LeCarre. Not afraid to "double down" at every opportunity, Eisler delivers a Thriller that thrills.

Ruth Jordan

SAFE AND SOUND

JD Rhoades

2007

St Martins Minatour

Rhoades has really hit his stride with his third book. I really loved the first two books by this new author but this third outing kicked my ass.

Keller is ex military working as a bounty hunter, his girl friend runs a PI firm and he catches this case kind of by default. His military contacts hopefully will prove useful in tracking down a soldier who has kidnapped his own daughter. However since the soldier is in Delta Force there is little cooperation to be had. SO while Keller is still trying to get his own life on track after his own military experiences he is driven to find the missing girl, regardless of the consequences.

Rhoades writes incredibly human characters with a real flair for the way people really act. He also has pacing that moves the story like a finely tuned nascar racing machine, hugging the twists and turns and racing to a finish that left me out of breath.

Rhoades is a true rising star. You NEED to be reading his books.

Jon

SANCTUARY HILL

Kathryn R. Wall

May 2007

St. Martin's Minotaur

Put this on your tbr list.

Bay Tanner, in the seventh in this atmospheric series, lives and works in South Carolina in "the sultry Low Country," an area of Hilton Hill in Beaufort County. Bay and partner Eric own a P. I. Agency with a silent and irascible partner, Ben, a former police officer. They are hired by Billy Dumars to find his wife, Tracy, who has disappeared-- after she withdrew \$100,000 from their bank account.

Throw in Tracy's best friend who has a gambling problem and her no-good boyfriend; not to mention the wealthy husband, who is acting rather strangely--and you have a few good suspects. In another case, for which they are not being paid, Bay found the body of a baby with a 'root' bag around its neck. The baby was murdered. The root leads her to those who still practice this form of augury. Lots of other things going on in her life that cause distraction--her ailing father, the Judge; and their housekeeper who raised her; and a former brother-in-law, a police officer.

Heavy on local color which adds to the irresistible draw of the story.

Gay Toltl Kinman

SHELL GAME

Sarah R. Shaber

2007

Thomas Dunne Books

Professor Simon Shaw has enjoyed a professional relationship with the police helping them solve cold cases with his history expertise. But this time it's contemporary – and much more personal. When Simon's

best friend is murdered, Simon not only has to grieve, but has to also serve as the executor for his friend's estate. Ordered by Detective Otis Gates to "stay out of the case" because of his close ties to the victim, Simon still finds himself involved because of his position of taking care of his friends' papers and personal belongings. Convinced the murder had to do with the controversy surrounding a 14,000-year-old skeleton, Simon tries to convince Detective Gates, to no avail. But the trail of this ancient corpse has led to much anger, argument, and, of course, the murky world of politics. But will it lead to another murder? Simon is determined it won't. An interesting book with well-drawn characters and a glimpse into the lives of academics and North Carolina, *Shell Game* is a welcome addition to the Professor Simon Shaw series.

Judy Clemens

SISTER PELAGIA AND THE WHITE BULLDOG

Boris Akunin

2007

Random House

It would seem that anyone who would kill a dog without compunction might just as easily kill a person. When Bishop Mitrofanii's elderly aunt's pet bulldog is poisoned, she beckons him to her side, as he is known throughout as one who can unravel knavery. Although secretly pleased with this reputation, the bishop's conscience does tend to point out that vanity is an idle vanity, as well as the fact that it is an undeserved reputation. To appease his aunt, he sends Sister Pelagia, a rather unusual nun and later, her "sister" Polina

Andreevna Lisitsyna to observe the guests and residents of the estate. It is quickly realized that although the dogs are the direct target, the true intent is to kill the bishop's dear, rich aunty; for it is not murder if the victim dies of a broken heart.

Until Sister P. enters the story, it does tend to dawdle a bit as the author gives us back-story in much the way that Tolstoy would have. The omniscient narrator extols his little hamlet and describes many of the players in picturesque dissemblage, giving the reader a view--not always positive--of the characters which may be more than the general citizenry of the town is aware. The backdrop of prosperity in pastoral late 19th century Russian is much like the English manor mysteries with its host of suspects. The comparison of

Sister Pelagia to Miss Marple is more than fair, and her theological sparring matches with her superior, the good bishop Mitrofanii are spirited, to say the least.

This is not a book for the faint-of-reading. This is a book for someone wanting a robust story with a vigorous constitution. A book to challenge the reader! Akunin (Grigory Chkhartishvili) has given us a text rich with flavor and a character worthy to sit with the greats of mystery. So, read with pleasure. Tolstoy would have loved this book; but he would have complained that it was too short.

Kathleen Tromp

THE SLEEPING DOLL

Jeffery Deaver

June 2007

Simon & Schuster

THE SLEEPING DOLL gives special agent Kathryn Dance who was introduced to readers in THE COLD MOON a chance to lead. What a story it is.

As THE SLEEPING DOLL opens, interrogator and body language reader Dance is called in to interview a killer. Daniel Pell is a lifer who may be responsible for yet another murder. Evidence has been found that Pell may have murdered a local man and he is brought to Kathryn for interview. As the pair access each other and a cat and mouse game of control plays out it is impossible not to get involved. When Pell escapes from his temporary cell leaving a mortally wounded policeman in his wake, the reader wants his capture as much as Dance and her team.

This is Deaver's great skill. He involves his reader from page one, always. SLEEPING DOLL is an effective and visceral man hunt but it is also a psychological thriller that reveals the psychosis of crime from every angle. To catch Pell Kathryn brings in his former co-conspirators, the sole survivor of the crime for which he has been convicted and a true crime writer who sees this man as the most frightening criminal he's encountered.

Pell is frightening. A cold, calculating and immoral individual, his tactics and methodology both ensnare and repel. Remember this is a book from one of crime fiction's greatest magicians. So watch out readers, for even as you know you've reached the abyss of human behavior Deaver will present an evil you never saw coming. And that, well it's perfect summer reading.

Ruth Jordan

SOUL PATCH

Reed Farrel Coleman

April, 2007

Bleak House Books

This novel is the fourth in the series whose protagonist is Moe Prager, a former New York City cop, prematurely retired due to injury, who misses the life. In this installment, he becomes involved with the past—friends and co-workers in the Coney Island precinct where he broke in. Now partners with his older brother in a chain of wine stores, he still keeps his hopes alive as a sometime private investigator.

At the opening of the latest wine shop, his long-time friend, the chief of detectives, hands Moe a tape, setting off a chain of events resulting in a series of murders and unwanted revelations. It all began many years before, under the boardwalk in the shadow of the now-defunct parachute jump.

Like its predecessors, this book is good and entertaining reading, the character development solid, the writing terse and graphic.

Theodore Feit

STAYING HOME IS A KILLER

Sara Rosett

April, 2007

Kensington Books

In her second Mom Zone mystery, Rosett reunites us with Ellie Avery, dedicated mom and military wife. When one of Ellie's friends allegedly commits suicide, Ellie doesn't believe it and sets out to prove her friend was murdered. Trying to stay out of things doesn't always work, and Ellie's sort-of friend Special Agent Thistlewait of the Office of Special Investigations keeps her in the loop. Yes, Ellie has a young daughter to care for, but she also is committed to her friends and neighborhood. She must find out what happened to her friend. Did her friend's annoying husband finally snap? Or was it someone at the base? And was she pregnant when she was killed? Also in the book is a subplot involving something a lot of us don't think about -- what is it really like for a woman in the military? Should she have to put up with pin-up girls on the walls of her break room? Ellie thinks not.

Rosett's first book, "Moving is Murder," provided tips for moving at the ends of the chapters. In this new book, we get tips for organizing your home -- something all of us can use! Rosett's characters are sympathetic, and Ellie herself is extremely likable. If you enjoyed the first book of the series, you're sure to like this one, too. And if you haven't read either, it's time to start!

Judy Clemens

STORM RUNNERS

T. Jefferson Parker

2007

William Morrow

Talk about your attention-getting opening lines. This newest book by Edgar-award winning author T. Jefferson Parker opens with this one: "Stromsoe was in high school when he met the boy who would someday murder his wife and son." That man is Mike Tavarez, for four years Matt Stromsoe's best friend, at some point thereafter the lover of his wife-to-be, and ultimately the person who caused her death and that of their eight-year-old son from a bomb that was meant for him. The explosion also left him with horrific injuries: the loss of one eye, a finger, ruptured eardrums and several broken bones, among other things. Tavarez is arrested and ultimately sentenced to life in prison for ordering the bomb. At that point in his life, Matt had been for many years a narcotics deputy with the sheriff's office, living in Newport Beach, California, Mike Tavarez [nicknamed "El Jefe"] the boss of one of the worst of the California gangs, one which had a thousand members with gangsters in every state in the US and twelve foreign countries.

Following his family's death, almost understandably Matt falls victim to a deep depression and alcoholism until, 2 years later, he is hired by a former colleague who runs a private security firm, and he begins to move on with his life. Assigned to protect a beautiful young meteorologist/TV weather forecaster who is being stalked, things come full circle when a still vengeful Mike Tavarez once again enters his life.

The author has woven a crafty and imaginative plot in an ingenious tale that brings Matt into the sights of powerful people, with Tavarez once again plotting his destruction. He offers a fascinating glimpse into a world with which most readers are unfamiliar, one similar to but with more poetry than the one limned years ago in the classic film "Chinatown," and does so convincingly. Suspenseful as are all Mr. Parker's books, with a pulse-pounding ending, *Storm Runners* is another winner for this author.

Gloria Feit

THE SUCCESSOR

Stephen Frey

2007

Ballantine Books

Stephen Frey is a managing director of a private equity firm. THE SUCCESSOR is his 13th thriller, the fourth starring Christian Gillette, the chairman of one of the most renowned and powerful private equity firms in New York.

When Christian Gillette gets a call from Jesse Wood, the President of the United States, he becomes part of a clandestine plan to support a coup in Cuba. And he also becomes the unwitting central character in numerous other plans – intricate plots by politicians, rogue CIA and military officers, other financial company leaders, and even members of his own firm. One thing these characters have in common is their hatred of Christian Gillette and President Wood, and their intention to use the Cuban coup as a means of taking down both.

The action becomes increasingly fast-paced, and the plots increasingly convoluted, right up to the beginning of the coup itself, with Christian Gillette's life and President Wood's presidency seriously endangered. Then, in an epilogue dated nine months later, the author tries to tie up the many loose ends. The resolution of the most dangerous threat against Christian Gillette and President Wood is given in the one line, on page 280 of the 283-page book: "But, in the end, it hadn't worked." This line is also an accurate summary of the book.

David Chernow

SWITCHBACK

Matthew Klein

2006

Orion

Matthew Klein has done something very unusual: he's written two first novels. One, the excellent "Con Ed", was published in the US. The other, "Switchback" was originally published in the UK.

"Switchback" begins with a \$24 million dollar loss. Timothy Van Bender, a Silicon Valley hedge fund manager, bet the wrong way on yen, and has just seen \$24 million of a \$100 million fund vanish into thin air. And, as if things couldn't get worse, his wife calls him just as she's committing suicide.

But that's only the beginning. When an unfamiliar woman enters the scene, claiming to be Timothy's dead wife, and with proof, Timothy doesn't know what to think? Is it a miracle, or has he been thrown deeper in to hell?

As he tries to find answers, and to stay alive while he's doing it, Klein takes us on a wild ride. The plotting is intricate, the writing sardonically excellent, and Timothy Van Bender is a great protagonist.

I'm looking forward to whatever Matthew Klein writes next.

Rae Helmsworth

TAILED

Brian Wiprud

2007

Dell Paperback

Garth Cason is back in this latest book from the amazing Brian Wiprud. While a great mystery tale, it's also a very humorous read, which is a hard combination to get right.

TAILED see Garth working for an insurance company appraising taxidermy collections. While his taxidermy rental business is still operational it is now being run by the lovable Russian immigrant Otto. Garth is in Chicago to look at a collection at an ex football player's home, and while he does get to see lots of stuffed animals, what he finds is a body. The dead client puts Garth in the middle of an investigation being run by the FBI and with his bosses prompting Garth is on hand to assist. It seems someone is targeting the owners of some mighty expensive taxidermy collections and killing them with pieces of the collection. Of course nothing is easy for Garth, and he soon finds himself caught up in a whirlwind of a case that puts him on the run, has him meeting his mother at a nudist colony and watching Mexican wrestling. But Garth also reestablishes a firm relationship with his brother and with their bizarre upbringing.

Fast paced and completely absorbing this was a book I read in one sitting. Wiprud entertains, thrills, and satisfies like very few writers can. I think Brian Wiprud is a great new talent and TAILED is his best yet.

Jon Jordan

THIRST

Pete Larson

2007

Bleak House Books

Stu Carlson, minister with a thirst for scotch and a cheating wife, gives up his duties and takes up bartending. He tends bar at the Longhorn Bar in Travis City, Texas. His life is routine until he serves Andrew Washburn a drink of scotch laced with poison. The police arrest Daniel Lackland, a talented young artist and a customer at the Longhorn. Andrew was Daniel's former teacher and is now married to Daniel's ex-wife.

Although Stu is aware that Daniel hated Andrew, he is convinced Daniel is innocent. Though the two are not close friends, Stu decides to take it upon himself to prove Daniel's innocence. The police don't seem too interested in checking into other suspects.

Stu identifies with Daniel because they both had been the victim of a cheating wife. Daniel asks Stu to pray with him. This takes Stu by surprise. When Daniel tells his mother that Stu is his minister, he is even more surprised. Once Stu starts his

investigation nothing can stop him. The police warn him to stay away from Andrew's family members and associates. Stu receives even stronger threats from others that lead him to believe his life is in danger. He keeps on following his leads and uncovers a deeper mystery than he could have ever imagined.

I liked Stu and hope to read more Stu Carlson books.

Patricia Reid

THE UNQUIET

John Connolly

May 2007

Atria

The fifth. When an author gets to this point in a series, the reader knows the lead and can have fair expectations about what will happen in the 'next episode.' But John Connolly has presented the usual series when gave us Charlie Parker. He's not following the rules. THE BLACK ANGEL pays testament to that. After that, what could possibly happen to our intrepid anti-hero?

Rebecca Clay needs help. Years after her well regarded child psychologist father goes missing, someone has come to look for him. This someone is Merrick, freshly released from prison and trying to track his missing daughter and his starting point is the man who treated her, Rebecca Clay's father, Daniel. She has had the court declare him dead but without a body, Merrick, who kills as naturally as most men drive a car, thinks she is the only link. Parker is hired to keep Merrick from Clay's door. But this simple job is complicated by small facts surrounding the rabbit hole Dr. Daniel Clay disappearance into. Can a man charged with healing children be the one that is hurting them? When it is revealed that someone is pouring money into Merrick's search, someone Parker has crossed paths with before, the rabbit hole seemingly leads into an evil wonderland whose twisted inhabitants will do anything to make sure their secrets are kept underground. And things are not so still above ground, either. The Hollow Men are on Parker's heels.

As with all of Connolly's books, THE UNQUIET is meticulous and darkly vivid. While the beautiful prose style remains, the story itself moves more quickly and the story's hero, Charlie Parker, is more accessible to readers than ever before. Dare I say, this is the most human of Connolly's books so far and is well worth the wait for those waiting for the Parker's return.

Jennifer Jordan

THE VAMPIRE OF VENICE BEACH

Jennifer Colt

2007

Broadway Books

Identical twins Kerry and Terry McAfee – alike in looks, if not personality – are off on another adventure in this third book of the McAfee series, this time in the midst of the Goth world of LA. Vampires, coffins, fangs – it's all new and gross, not to mention scary, to level-headed Kerry, the so-called boss of the twins' PI

business. But an old high school classmate called for help, and Terry, the "evil" twin, said yes. The twins find themselves embroiled in a different world where vials of blood, cosmetic dentistry, and the Undead all have a part. Add to this a few murders – or are they a transition to the vampire world? – and the appearance of three actors-turned-security guards Kerry calls the Three Bruces, and you've got a fun, witty, and unique book. If you have a hankering for something with humor and quick dialogue, you'll find it

here. Even if you think "lighter" fare is not your style, I recommend that you try The Vampire of Venice Beach. You'll have a great time.

Judy Clemens

THE TITAN'S CURSE

Rick Riordan

May 2007

Miramax Books/Hyperion

Gods. Demi-gods. Monsters. Adventure. Summer camp. Treachery. It's all you could ask for and more wrapped up in the third installment of the Percy Jackson & The Olympians series.

If you haven't read THE LIGHTENING THIEF and its sequel, THE SEA OF MONSTERS, stop. You lucky dog, you get to read three in a row – and that's the way it should be done. Chronologically. Or Kronos will be quite upset. And you don't want that. If you have read the earlier books, you have been looking forward to Rick Riordan's third installment in the series for a few months. It is well worth the wait.

Percy Jackson doesn't know it but he will soon be in more peril than he has ever been in before and that is quite a statement. His good satyr friend Grover has made a discovery. There are two half-bloods who have yet to be appraised of their status as

the children of Greek Gods. When he, Grover, Annabeth and Thalia botch their attempt, they find out that there is even more at stake. The Goddess Artemis has gone missing. Annabeth has disappeared. And an ancient monster is coming home to roost.

This may seem par for the course when you're a son of Poseidon, but *this* is a dire situation. When facing a nemesis that can bring the world to an end, even those sporting magical swords can find more trouble than they can handle. Because, half children of the Gods or not, someone isn't going to make it back from this adventure.

Riordan mixes humor and action so well, the reader will lose himself completely within the first few pages of each book. He has studied his mythic lore and sprinkled tidbits throughout the book for those past readers that may have hoped to stump him. But Apollo keeps up with the modern trends (what a clothes horse!) as all the nuances of the greatest epics are upheld. The great story that threads its way through the series beckons and will have every reader waiting eagerly for the next book.
Jennifer Jordan

A WELCOME GRAVE

Michael Koryta

2007

Thomas Dunne Books

Michael Koryta is a young author who had a very solid first book and followed it up with an even stronger second novel. A WELCOME GRAVE is the third book featuring Lincoln Perry and Joe Pritchard and proof that after only three novels it is possible to become a "must read" in crime fiction.

When the wealthy Alex Jefferson is murdered Lincoln moves right to the top of the suspect list. Jefferson stole and married Lincoln's girl. When the widow asks Lincoln to find Alex's estranged son and the young man kills himself in front of Perry the waters become very muddied for our body building P.I. Add the complication of Pritchard being largely off canvas due to a shoulder injury and A WELCOME GRAVE becomes one of the best P.I. against the world books I've read in a long, long time. Koryta's dialog remains vivid and his characters sharp as a diamond drill bit. Who knew Ohio could be this interesting?
Ruth