

THE ALPINE RECLUSE

Mary Daheim
2006
ISBN 0 354 46814 7
Ballantine Books

Mary Daheim's Emma Lord series has been one of the most enjoyable "cozy" series for awhile. Her crimes seem real and the repercussions often flow through the streets of Alpine like snow melt in April.

This year's THE ALPINE RECLUSE has all the ingredients of a Lord book. Lying beneath a tragic house fire lies a story of murder. And in quiet Alpine the natives suspect the reappearance of a mountain hermit might have something to do with the untimely death of a young father to be. Emma suspects the truth may lie a little closer to home and the race to the answer may again get our heroine in trouble.

THE ALPINE RECLUSE is more complex and more contemporary than some of the previous titles in this series. It is a mixed success. Although I applaud Daheim for bringing to the page a frightening trend in domestic life and thoroughly enjoyed the "recluse" subplot the narrative lacks the seamlessness of some of her earlier titles. Still, an enjoyable read for fans and one of the better cozies you're likely to read this year.

Ruth

BALTIMORE NOIR

EDITED BY Laura Lippman
2006
ISBN 1 888451 96 3
Akashic Books

As Ms. Lippman points out in her introduction to BALTIMORE NOIR there is perhaps no other city more appropriate in which to set a short story collection of murder. With a rich history in the subject both factual and fictional America's northern most southern city lends itself to the "mystery" short story.

The sum of any anthology is made up of its parts. The individual stories are what makes success or failure. BALTIMORE NOIR is a resounding success. Each story not only embodies a neighborhood and a time period but through the characters and narrative gives the reader a bit more of Charm City than thought upon first read. With nods to famous stories that came before and a television series that has perhaps defined modern day Baltimore in the minds of mystery fans, the authors involved in this book each came up to bat with Ripkin's work ethic and Robinson's singular talent.

With outstanding first time short fiction from David Simon, Joseph Wallace and Rob Hiaasan sandwiched in between the seminal stories of Lippman and Massey you know you have an enjoyable read. As I walk the streets of Baltimore I will forever see Jack Bludis's Pigtown and Dan Fesperman's Fells Point. BALTIMORE NOIR is another great nod to the short from Akashic. And they're not done yet. Next up, Dublin.

Ruth

BATHROOM CRIME PUZZLES (THE LITTLE BOOK OF)

M. Diane Vogt
2006
ISBN: 1592331025
Fair Winds Press

Ms. Vogt, the author of a series featuring Judge Wilhelmina Carson has put together this cool little book. It is jammed packed with 65 two page mysteries for you to solve using the forensic evidence given. All can be solved by paying attention and using basic logic. I averaged about 4 out of 5. The answers are presented in the back explaining the why and hows. This could also be used for games with groups of people in teams or one on one. I'm ready for book 2.

Loads of fun, and a great gift idea too!

Jon

BLOWN AWAY

Shane Gericke
2006
ISBN: 0786018135
Kensington Publishing

Blown Away is the story of a Naperville cop, Emily Thompson, who is caught in the web of a serial killer. Emily, a widow, is trying to make a new life for herself in the aftermath of her husband's tragic death in an auto accident. When her business card is found in the pocket of a murder victim, it appears to be a coincidence. But the 'coincidences' mount up, until Emily and her

colleagues realize that a serial killer is on the loose, with Emily as his primary target, and with Emily's imminent 40th birthday as the intended climax to his rampage. What makes the murders particularly horrific is that the killer uses children's games as clues to taunt the police, and that anyone in Emily's sphere is a potential target. Everyone is fair, or unfair, game. It takes all of Emily's resources, and extraordinary assistance from her colleagues on the police force, to bring the killer to some sort of justice. This intricately plotted novel is reminiscent of PJ Tracy's writing, and will appeal to anyone who likes a fast-paced puzzler of a story.

Rae Helmsworth

BOOKMARKED TO DIE

Jo Dereske
2006
ISBN 0 06 079082 2
Avon Books

Librarian Helma Zukas is turning 42 and in a funk. With the launch of her local author's project she has little time to dwell on it all though. Ms. Moon prescribes a week of group therapy. An offer Helma dare not refuse. And the first body is discovered just as best friend Ruth re-enters the playing field. The cat goes missing and a second body is lying in Bellehaven's morgue. Mysterious complications in her relationship with police chief Wayne Gallant make this a case where our amateur sleuth must use all her resources to sidestep what could prove to be a giant publicity problem for her beloved library. BOOKMARKED TO DIE and author Jo Dereske are sitting pretty on the cozy side of the mystery fence and will be a treat for all who partake in this subgenre.

Ruth

BUZZ RIFF

Sam Hill
2006
ISBN: 075286727X
Orion

Out now in the U.K. BUZZ RIFF is Sam Hill's second installment in the Top Keirnan series is a worthy successor to BUZZ MONKEY.

Top is an ex-mercenary who still dabbles in recovery but makes his living (almost) running fact checks for Corporate America. The bank is calling in the note on his refurbished school house and he needs money, stat. Financial considerations demand he take a case he'd rather not. Top must find a confederate flag stolen from his client, a man he'd rather not be keeping company with.

As Top travels through Hill's colorful South in search of the infamous flag closer to home ex-girlfriend Gillie is planning an apocalyptic revenge for being cut out of Top's life. The colorful characters and full throttle plotting make BUZZ RIFF a must read for anyone who appreciates a great tale that will leave a smile on your face..

Humorous in the way that makes for some of the most entertaining reading in mystery BUZZ RIFF is a book with a style that seems to be overlooked when it comes to awards in our amazing genre. Every word of RIFF matters to the whole of the book and the whole of the book will entertain anyone who reads our genre.

Ruth

CAT IN A QUICKSILVER CAPER

Carole Nelson Douglas
July 2006
ISBN: 0765314002
Forge

I will state for the record that I am not a "Cat Mystery" kind of guy. I am however open minded and love good books. This is my first Douglas read and I have to say I was pleasantly surprised.

Midnight Louie is the furry protagonist and he lives with Temple Barr. Temple is working on opening an exhibit of Russian treasures at a swanky hotel in Vegas. The opening could be ruined however because of a murder that takes place in the aerial act staged above the exhibit. With Temple's job in jeopardy Louie steps in to investigate leading him on a merry chase involving art thieves, gangsters and political troublemakers.

Douglas writes a tight mystery and her joy in what she writes comes through on every page. While this book may not for hardboiled fans, I found it to be funny, smart and very well crafted. It was a real treat and I will read more.

Jon

CITY OF SHADOWS

Ariana Franklin
May 2006
ISBN: 0060817267
William Morrow

Berlin in the 1930s was a city of light, and a city of shadows. The night life glittered, but behind the sparkly façade was a lot of ugliness. Berlin was one of the most beautiful cities in all of Europe and had admirably re-built itself since the end of WWI. Yet inflation was running at over one thousand percent. As it became increasingly difficult to even find, much less afford to buy, basic necessities of life like bread, whispers began to be heard in dark corners of a new way of life; a way of life that would re-unify Germany and make it proud again. This new way of life was being promoted, of course, by the National Socialist German Workers Party – the Nazis. And many hard-working Germans, who simply could not feed their families under the current government, were beginning to listen to the incessant, foul whispers. Against this compelling historical backdrop, Ariana Franklin has crafted an amazing debut novel that tells the story of three people whose lives are intertwined by coincidence, by history, and by murder. Esther Solomonova is a young Russian-Jewish émigrée. A victim of the pogroms in her homeland, Esther finds work as the secretary, gopher, and sometime-lover to another Russian émigré, a shady nightclub owner / entrepreneur who calls himself 'Prince' Nick Potrovskov. Nick has an ear to the ground for any potentially lucrative opportunity; when he hears of an inmate in the local insane asylum who may be Anastasia, the surviving heiress of the Russian Czar's family, he decides that he and Esther should investigate. The inmate, called Anna Anderson, convinces Nick of her authenticity, and Nick spirits her away from the asylum, seeing a golden opportunity for lots and lots of money. He then hands her over to Esther, who becomes Anna's unwilling caretaker. And Anna needs a lot of care – she's being stalked by a murderer who will stop at nothing to silence her. But why? Enter Siegfried Schmidt, a Berlin police inspector, called to the scene when the valiant Esther foils an attempt on Anna's life. Schmidt and Esther form an unlikely alliance, trying to find those who are determined to kill Anna. And the attempts are unrelenting. *City of Shadows* is a carefully crafted, many-layered tale. Part 'Cabaret', part Sam Spade, it's a wonderfully atmospheric, meticulously plotted thriller. The historical detail is rich; all of the characters, even the supporting players, are fully developed – you really care about them. And then there's the ending....good grief, the ending. An historical note: the novel is loosely based on the life of the 'real' Anna Anderson, a woman who spent her life claiming to be Anastasia; in a fascinating afterword (which contains spoilers, so save it) the author leaves us to draw our own conclusions.

Rae Helmsworth

THE COLD MOON

Jeffery Deaver
2006
ISBN:0743260937
Simon and Schuster

Nobody writes fast paced thrillers like Jeffery Deaver, nobody. Under Thriller in the dictionary it should just say "Read Deaver". *THE COLD MOON*, the latest in the Lincoln Rhyme series is yet another in a long line of great books by Deaver. A new killer named The Watchmaker is operating in New York and Rhyme and Sachs are brought in by the powers that be to get to the bottom of things. At the same time Sachs is working her first homicide case as lead detective, an apparent suicide which is not what it seems. The Rhymes and Sachs combination is a winning one and gets better with each book.

The book moves fast and Deaver once again raises the bar with such skill in his plotting and pacing that it is almost impossible not to finish the book in one sitting. A sure bet for every best of 2006 list.

Jon

DARK ASSASSIN

Anne Perry
2006
ISBN 0 345 46929 1
Ballantine Books

Amongst ongoing traditional mysteries not many names are better known than Anne Perry. And not many series are as engaging as her William Monk books. *DARK ASSASSIN* is everything this reviewer enjoys in a traditional mystery and is made immensely entertaining by the skills of its author. For those of you who haven't checked into the series for awhile this would be a great place to jump back in. Monk's circumstances have changed and he's now a Super in the Thames River Police, having worn out his welcome in his last position.

Night patrol makes him witness to a curious death. Murder or Suicide that is the question. When wife Hester becomes independently involved with the same dead body Perry weaves a tale of corruption and 19th century upper class ego as only she can. We follow the Thames project and watch in horror as it becomes apparent that the men working on this project hardly count as human to the men who are profiting from it. My favorite Monk read in recent history, ASSASSIN reminds you of depth to this author's talent.

Ruth

THE DARK BACKWARD

Julia Buckley

2006

ISBN: 0738708267

Midnight Ink

New mystery publisher Midnight Ink is really stepping up to the plate. Their latest offering is from Julia Buckley, THE DARK BACKWARD. Lily Caldwell is a cop and after she and her partner get shot she dies. Before being brought back she has a vision which leads her to believe the Governor maybe involved in her partners death. Too bad everyone thinks she's crazy.... Buckley has a wonderful voice and writes with the confidence of a seasoned pro. The plot is beautifully crafted with twists and turns that kept me guessing. I enjoyed every minute of reading this book and I'm ready for more.

Jon

DARK LIGHT

Randy Wayne White

2006

ISBN 0-399-15336-5

Putnam

In Randy Wayne White's newest Doc Ford novel Dark Light, the storm clouds are grey, the photo of an enigmatic beauty is in black and white, the bad guy is obvious and the mystery involves a wreck uncovered (by the hurricane) in the murky waters of the gulf coast.

Doc Ford and Tomlinson and the rest of the Sanibel gang are adjusting post hurricane life when Jeth and Javier pull up some artifacts that the storm has uncovered. They give the pieces to Doc for him to clean up and it's from there the plot spins.

Tomlinson introduces Doc to "Chestra" Engle, goddaughter to the woman in the photo. She volunteers to fund the expedition to explore and salvage the new site.

Multiple claims, for multiple reasons are made.

Jeth and Javier want the treasure that may or may not be there. The bad guys want it too more out of greed than need.

Chestra's claim is emotional she professes to want only a token from the past. Doc's interest is piqued both as a scientist and a spy. Could the wreck be an old Nazi sub? Solve the history, solve the mystery Doc figures.

In Dark Light Mr. White will find more accolades added to the praise the Doc Ford series richly deserves.

Dave Biemann

DEAD SIMPLE

Peter James

2006

ISBN: 078671641X

Carroll & Graf

DEAD SIMPLE is a jarring book. It swivels and maneuvers like a slalom skier. James writing is so tight that as a reader you can't help but follow where he is leading.

The book opens with a stag party. The groom to be has pulled pranks in the past and tonight he is in for a reversal. He buddies bury him alive. This would be horrible enough, but when the buddies all die in a drunken crash Michael is left in the ground with no one the wiser. His fiancé Ashley seems plenty broken up, but something isn't quite right with her. And his business partner is a little too smooth. Detective Superintendent Grace is on the outs with his boss and needs to play things carefully, but when asked to help on this case he gets drawn in. Will they find Michael in time? Do his friends know more than they are saying?

Peter James is a very gifted writer and he kept me guessing with his relentless pacing and suspense. I would be reading what I thought was a lead into the climax, only to notice I was only half way through the book. This book is a gem.

Jon

THE DEAD YARD

Adrian McKinty,
Serpent's Tail
June 2006
ISBN: 1852428127

Michael Forsythe is faced with a choice: a tough jail sentence under new European riot laws or heading undercover to infiltrate a rogue IRA splinter group in the US. It doesn't seem much of a choice, but British Intelligence aren't leaving him much of an option and so he accepts their proposition. His

McKinty has an incredibly confident and often lyrical style, and Forsythe is as much a poet as he is a man of action. The prose is often startlingly beautiful but never overly florid, with Forsythe's reflections on the world around him providing stark relief to the violence that seems to define his life. The international elements of the book are perfect, with no one location standing out as ill defined or awkward and the ambiguities of the family-based IRA cell are portrayed as completely human, meaning the final bloody confrontation is as affecting emotionally as it is viscerally. McKinty is quite simply a superb writer and *The Dead Yard* is one hell of a ride.

Russel McLean

DEATH GOES DUTCH

Albert A. Bell, Jr.
March 2006
1-932158-65-0
Ingalls Publishing Group, Inc.

Susan DeGraaf is a Korean-American social worker, specializing in reuniting adopted children with their birth parents. When she makes the connection for Josh Adams, it is not quite typical. Josh's birth mother, Margaret Dykstra, died five years ago. His grandmother, Ella Dykstra, is delighted that her grandson has surfaced.

The rest of the family is less than ecstatic. Uncle Edmund is currently the head honcho at Dykstra Furniture, and more than willing to throw his considerable financial and political weight around. Restraint orders are issued, one of which results in Susan being legally unable to be in her office, thus putting her job at risk. This all has nothing to do with a six million dollar trust fund set up by Margaret for her son, should he ever turn up. Right.

Josh isn't making Susan's life any easier, either. Every time she turns around, something in Josh's past crops up and it's never anything that makes him look good. He can explain everything, and his explanations stand up. And then something else comes up. This happens a lot.

And strange things begin to happen. A missing folder turns up, then disappears. Josh is apparently set-up for a drug charge, then almost killed while in jail. Questions begin to arise about Margaret's death.

DEATH GOES DUTCH takes place in Grand Rapids, Michigan and the surrounding area. What was delightful for me was revisiting this part of the country, where I spent several decades, and wallowing in the accurate depictions of Dutch society, mores, and culture. Bell never hit a wrong note, which is such a pleasure to read.

The characters are also intriguing and well rounded. Bell captures the emotions and reactions of outsiders who live in a very ordered and structured society, and he does it without beating the reader over the head about it.

DEATH GOES DUTCH is a stand-alone. Bell has written several other mysteries. If they are all as well done as this, they will be worth tracking down for the pleasure of reading another good mystery.

P.J. Coldren

THE DEATH OF ACHILLES

Boris Akunin
2006
ISBN: 0812968808
Random House

Erast Petrovich Fandorin, Boris Akunin's elegant super-sleuth returns with his characteristic panache and unerring good sense in *The Death of Achilles* (Random House, New York, 2006). Fandorin is back in Moscow after four years in Tokyo where he has acquired fluent Japanese, the ninja arts and a droll oriental servant. When a politically powerful military hero is found dead, Fandorin is given an imperial command to investigate.

The suspects include a beautiful courtesan, the chief of the German secret police and a mysterious, behind-the-scenes villain whose career of fabulous and subtle murder across the capitols of Europe has made him the most sought-after assassin in the Western world.

Fandorin is that rare sort of hero who combines the deductive method of Sherlock Holmes or Nero Wolfe with the tenacity and perseverance of Travis McGee or Amos Walker. This is a novel of desperate intrigue where the character around the corner may wield a Reichsrevolver or a vial of poison gas and where life or death depends on the merest chance. But Fandorin never loses at games of chance.

This is the fourth in this top-notch series to be published in the U.S.

Greg Parr

DIRTY BLOND

Lisa Scottoline

2006

0-06-074290-9

Harper Collins

Cate Fante barely has time to get her Judge's Robes dry cleaned for the first time before both the robes and her life are in danger. Appointed to a high profile case, Cate's dirty secrets soon become media hi jinx while a killer seems to have set her in their sights.

Scottoline turns in her annual read with a bit of aplomb this year. The mystery in DIRTY BLOND is well thought out and Cate is a likeable heroine. Parts of BLOND read more Krantz than Scottoline but Ms. Scottoline is very slyly addressing the effect of "celebrity" on our judicial system. It all adds up to a pleasant read.

Ruth

THE DRAMATIST

Ken Bruen

2006

ISBN: 031231647X

St. Martin's Minotaur

If you haven't heard of Ken Bruen or haven't read him yet I'd have to ask what rock you've been under. Bruen has taken the US by storm and there is a very good reason. The reason is that Bruen is simply amazing. His books go beyond crime fiction and cut to the core of what it is to be human. All too human with all the baggage included. His protagonist Jack Taylor, in this his fourth in the series, shows all too well.

Jack for the first time in a long time is feeling more like the people around him, mainly straight and sober. This isn't necessarily by choice though. It's because his main connection is sitting in the clink. When his dealer ask Jack to do a favor, Jack does what he usually does, says yes before he's really thinks it through. Naturally this is no simple missing persons case. Taylor finds himself involved in a serial killer case.

Bruen's writing is soul tearing and gut wrenching. It is sparse and fulfilling. It's noir poetry with blues in the background and a whiskey chaser. It's also great reading.

Jon

THE DRUMMER

ANTHONY NEIL SMITH

May 2006

TWO DOLLAR RADIO

Everyone has wanted to be a Rockstar at some point. But this book is about a Rockstar who wants to be anyone else. Coming off the perpetual buzz of '80's hair-band glory in the form of Savage Night, Calvin Christopher walked away from sex and drugs and rock 'n roll topped off with a pile of debt that left the band broke.

Cal finds his way to the deep south after faking a fiery death. New Orleans suits "Merle" and his low key life. But the past comes up and bites him in the ass in the form of the former lead singer, Todd, looking to reunite the band. What looks like a ticket to ride the fame train to Todd looks like facing up to arson and tax evasion to Cal. And when Cal finds Todd dead in his hotel room, it looks like he might be wanted for murder, too.

Anthony Neil Smith is a man with more than enough experience and balls to write noir the way it should be written: hard and fast with a twist of gallows humor to make it go down smooth. As with his first novel, PSYCHOSOMATIC, THE DRUMMER is sharp and expertly written. But THE DRUMMER has an accessibility that will make this the book to read this summer.

Jennifer Jordan

DUECES WILD

Clyde W. Ford

2006

ISBN: 0738708097

Midnight Ink

Another great sophomore effort, DUECE'S WILD is the follow up to last year's THE LONG MILE. John Shannon, an ex-cop working for the City of New York's office of municipal security. The case starts out as a simple one, do a few interviews and assess the threat of a rapper who has converted to the Muslim religion. The case changes when the rapper is killed. Shannon's son asks his dad to find out what happened. And while his boss no longer has an interest, when an attempt is made on Shannon's life it becomes a bit more personal.

Ford has a great ability to weave a mystery around a subject that is very timely. This is hardboiled and literate at the same time proving once again that this genre may really be the best window to the world around us.

Pick up DUECE'S WILD and give Ford a chance to amaze you.

Jon

DYING IN STYLE

Elaine Viets

October 2005

ISBN 0-451-21679-2

Signet/New American Library/Penguin Group

Josie Marcus, mystery shopper and single mom, does a very accurate and negative report on Danessa Celedine's three high-end purse stores in St. Louis. Danessa comes down to Suttin Services to raise hell with Harry, Josie's boss. Josie's report will likely kill the buyout of Danessa's stores by a major conglomerate. There is a loud and unpleasant scene. Harry threatens Josie with unpaid leave; she threatens him with a fictitious Federal Female Employment Code, Section 131-B. So, in spite of Josie's mostly negative interior monologues, Josie does have some gumption.

Josie is not prepared when the police show up at her doorstep. Danessa has been strangled. The snakeskin belt used to choke her to death has Josie's fingerprints all over it. Josie decides she has to clear her own name, because the police don't care why she flunked the polygraph.

Josie does have a trusted sidekick, Alyce, who is lucky enough to live just down the road from Danessa and her (also murdered) lover Serge Orloff. The cast of characters in Alyce's world is a treat.

Viets writes with compassion and understanding about women whose lives are not all sugar and spice, no matter what the finances. Her characters are believable. Her sense of humor is great, as evinced by some of her descriptions of Josie's various mystery shopping trips, and her descriptions of the women in the Wood Winds sub-division.

If you enjoy Viet's other work (the Dead End Job series), DYING IN STYLE is good quality for the money. A good deal for the discerning reader who likes savvy heroines, some twist in the plot, and a soupcon of romance just to make life interesting.

P.J. Coldren

EYE OF VENGEANCE

Jonathon King

2006

US - ISBN:0525949534 -Dutton

UK - ISBN:075286953 -Orion

Jonathan King has made quite a name for himself in the mystery world. Just as we begin to clamor for our annual Max Freeman fix Mr. King is throwing us a curve. Luckily it's low and inside. In his first "stand-alone", EYE OF VENGEANCE Mr. King introduces us to investigative reporter Nick Mullins.

Nick is still struggling with the aftermath of personal tragedy as EYE opens. It looks as though someone is borrowing from Nick's feature archives to find a series of worthy corpses.

The duality of Nick's personal and professional lives intersect nicely under Mr. King's guidance and the serial killer plot is way above average. With insider's insides towards media pre and post 9/11 the book becomes a true thriller. You keep turning the pages until it's all gone.

Ruth

A FIELD OF DARKNESS

Cornelia Read

2006

ISBN 0 89296 023 X

Mysterious Press

Madeline "Bunny" Dare is a features writer for a weekly newspaper in Syracuse N. Y. Sunday dinner with the in-laws is about to change her life and introduce readers to a new name in Mystery.

"Bunny" and her husband Dean sit down to eat and Cal Dare unfolds the story. One score ago two bodies were found in a field. Young vibrant women, deader than dead and adorned with rose wreaths. To this day the identities of those girls is unknown and their murderer is at large. And then he drops the bomb on Bunny. Dog Tags..... with a name all too familiar to this young married.

"What do you want to do?", asks Dean. And we are introduced into Bunny's waspish world and Read's fertile imagination. Madeline is perfectly happy being a features reporter but the name on those dog tags leaves her cold. The smart thing, the easy thing, giving them to the cops.... is not an option because of long ago loyalty. As we investigate the crime with Madeline we meet her past. Read uses a broad canvas and draws a world I want to come back to again and again.

Seasoned narrative, well honed plotting and an already unique style make A FIELD OF DARKNESS much more than a debut novel. Read's twists and direction surprise and delight the mystery reader in me enough I can even forgive Bunny's less than flattering view of my home town.

Cornelia Read. Remember this name.

Ruth

THE FLAMING LUAU OF DEATH

Jerrilyn Farmer

2006

ISBN: 0060587296

William Morrow

My thoughts on THE FLAMING LUAU OF DEATH by Jerrilyn Farmer are only *slightly* swayed by the fact that I read it during one of the biggest snowstorms we've had all winter here in Chicago! I suspect it would've been a great escape no matter when I read it. The book takes place in Hawaii, as we join party-planner Madeline Bean on a bachelorette weekend for her friend Holly Nichols. Madeline has planned for pampering and relaxation...but she hasn't planned for the surprise intruder who greets them upon arrival. When the celebration weekend is marred by a murder and some suspicious characters surrounding the group, "Mad" Bean jumps into her usual role of crime-solver, trying to find the killer while experiencing some of Hawaii's most breathtaking scenery and amazing cuisine. Farmer is obviously a 'foodie', and I loved the detail she put into describing each morsel her characters devoured. She writes her female characters exceptionally well, and though the loose ends of the plot tie up rather neatly (I realize this is a "light" mystery), getting to know the girls in the group is effortless. This book made me feel as though I was on a lovely vacation. If you're looking for a winter-blues escape, or just in the mood for some light mystery fare and fabulous atmosphere, definitely check out THE FLAMING LUAU OF DEATH.

Christin Kurelich

GONE

Lisa Gardner

2006

ISBN: 0752873067

Orion Books (UK)

The plot of Gone by Lisa Gardner is quite easy to summarize. Find Rainie. On a storm driven night Rainie Conner's car is found, still running, along a quiet stretch of country road. Why would a woman, even one as troubled as Rainie, leave the car before reaching her destination? The police, familiar with Rainie's past and present, suspect suicide. Her estranged husband Pierce Quincy is notified and appears at the scene. As quickly as the suicide explanation arises so too does Kidnapping. Which proves to be the case.

Fans of Lisa Gardner have met Pierce, Rainie and Pierce's daughter Kimberly in Ms.Gardner's earlier works -The Third Victim, The Next Accident, and Killing Hour. Pierce is an Ex FBI profiler, Rainie a Police officer and Kimberly is an up and coming FBI agent. Those new to these characters will find them very well developed, displaying both faults and fine points throughout. Their characterizations help drive a well plotted thriller. The story flows as smoothly as water downhill. In Gone, Lisa Gardner builds on her reputation for delivering a terrific read.

Dave Biemann

GRIZZLY LIES

Eileen Coughlan

2005

ISBN 1-894549-41-4

Sumach Press

Hellie MacConnell has fled a disastrous romance in Toronto for a free-lance journalism career in Banff. She is house-sitting for her uncle, Doc Rivard, when his body is found under a gazebo. Local loony environmentalist Arthur Elliott insists that Doc was murdered, although the autopsy indicates heart failure, and Doc did have a weak heart.

Hellie's first big job is writing a feature article about Texas big-game hunter Ansel Rock. Rock has been spending huge amounts of money every year in a lottery for the chance to shoot an Alberta bighorn sheep. Rock has history with Elliott, and with Doc; he believes that the death of his wife and daughter can be laid at Elliott's doorstep. He and Hellie are immediately at odds over the pros and cons of hunting vs. preservation. Rock insists that Elliott is not the saint most people consider him, Hellie included.

Hellie is drawn into the investigation into Doc's death, into Ansel's life, and the lives of several of the long-term locals in Banff. In the process, she discovers that almost everyone has secrets, and that she'd rather not know most of them.

Coughlan has written a thought-provoking mystery that deals with environmental concerns, affairs of the heart, and the lengths to which people will go to when the stakes are high. This is not to say that GRIZZLY LIES is a dull read; it is a good mystery with interesting characters and situations, and a gorgeous setting. The only drawback is the difficulty in obtaining this book; do make the effort to find it.

P.J. Coldren

HARDBOILED BROOKLYN

Reed Farrel Coleman editor

2006

ISBN: 1932557142

Bleak House Books

Anthologies are all the rage right now and there are an awful lot of them coming out. Sometimes they get lost in the shuffle. Well I'm going to tell you, if you only get one anthology this year, this could be your best bet. Excellent stories from the cream of the crop in crime fiction, set in a great city. You just can't go wrong. Hell, the cover is amazing.

In particular a couple of the standouts for me were Charlie Stella's *Waiting for Gallo*, Ralph Pezzullo's *Step up* and SJ Rozan's *Sunset*. Coleman got some great stuff for this collection.

And remember, this is not New York, it's Brooklyn!

Jon

THE HARD WAY

Lee Child

2006

ISBN:03853336691 Delacourte (US)

ISBN: 059305184X Bantam Press (UK)

Lee Child's Reacher has become one of crime fiction's most recognizable franchises. The May release of *THE HARD WAY* can only add to the luster. Reacher is back and Reacher is on the move. A cup of espresso draws our hero in. A kidnapping demands he stay until a possible solution lures him to the U.K.

In *HARD WAY*, Child introduces his reader to several larger than life characters. Reacher must tap dance in the world of mercenaries. He receives help from two well drawn female characters; a sister sitting sentinel and a former FBI agent haunted by the case that didn't work out. All leads to the most explosive Reacher climax yet.

THE HARD WAY moves beyond thriller with an almost traditional mystery wrapped amongst snapshots of a New York City both Reacher and Child obviously love throughout the first half of the book. The second part of the tale is set in England and ... well I'm not going to spoil it for anyone.

This book, like all the Reacher books before is better than the last and has me waiting for the next. What Child will do next, I don't know. I'm awfully happy he's sharing with the mystery world. Viva la Reacher.

Ruth

HEART OF THE WORLD

Linda Barnes

2006

ISBN 0 312 33287 4

St. Martin's Minotaur

With *HEART OF THE WORLD* Linda Barnes gets to the heart of her series. Readers of mystery fiction who do not know Carlotta Carlyle must introduce themselves now. This, my friends is what I like to call the "payoff book". Little sister Paolina has gone missing. And in a heart stopping, brilliantly executed mystery Barnes treats her reader to the culmination of several plots that have traveled with Carlotta and with us from book to book.

Issues of trust, questions of loyalties. All will come together as Carlotta makes her way to Columbia and a whole lot of trouble to find and save a girl we've known for over a decade.

What makes Barnes superlative in her writing skills is that none of this book goes over the top and the answers that we come to leave us wondering only what the next set of questions will be. For Barnes talent is at its peak and Carlotta has a whole lot of living left to do, not to mention the next case to solve. Hailed as one of the best private eye series ever HEART OF THE WORLD goes beyond the ranks of contemporary crime fiction straight to the best ever lists.

Ruth

HELLBLAZER Issues 216 - 222

Denise Mina

2006

DC Comics

The Empathy is the Enemy story line in Hellblazer is Mina's first foray into the world of comics writing and she has proven more than up to the task. She has taken a character that is one of the most popular in DC Comics and really left her mark. John Constantine is not his usual self, feeling strangely empathic towards his fellow man he tries to help out one Chris Cole. Cole tried to do a bit of magic and it backfired on him so he goes to the man he's heard can help, Constantine. As Constantine discovers this is more than it seems and as the pair journey together towards Scotland John may find out too late that this is an elaborate trap set for him.

Mina is right at home in Constantine's dark world and really nails the character perfectly. Moody, dark and creepy, suspenseful and gripping, this is some of the best I've read in Hellblazer. Mina was born to write this character.

Jon

A HOLE IN JUAN

Gillian Roberts

2006

ISBN 0-345-48019-8

Ballantine Books

A new book by Gillian Roberts is always a treat. Amanda Pepper is as likable as ever in her urban school setting, and her students play a prominent part in this new mystery. Roberts knows how to use words well, and had me laughing at the same time I ached for her students and the pain they felt. Using modern problems, home stressors, and school tensions, Roberts weaves a compelling mystery that had me rooting for Amanda and wanting to see things turn out well. CK is again a part of the book, and his relationship with Amanda is always enjoyable to read about. If you haven't tried this series, I suggest you start with the first, Philly Stakes, and read right on through. I guarantee you'll have a lot of fun.

Judy Clemens, author of TO THINE OWN SELF BE TRUE

IMPULSE

Frederick Ramsay

June 2006

ISBN 1-59058-283-7

Poisoned Pen Press

In his third published novel and first standalone, Frederick Ramsay proves himself to be an author worth watching. His style is solidly in the style dubbed "medium boiled" by fans of suspense fiction - with a bare minimum of graphic blood and gore. Instead the reader enjoys an emphasis on the characters, their histories and motivations.

IMPULSE introduces us to Frank Smith, who has a reasonably successful career as an author of mysteries. He is also a suspect in the mysterious disappearance of his wife almost four years ago, a target of determined fund raisers who work for his alma mater, a fond grandfather, an uneasy participant in his relationship with his adult daughter and discovering to his bemusement that he is once more an active player in the dating game.

Ramsay's characters include a single minded Arizona cop, a widow who converses out loud with a type of alter ego as a way of staving off loneliness, a confused young mother seeking the best for her children and jeopardizing her marriage in the bargain, an inept fund raiser hiding a long buried secret, an ambitious wife dissatisfied with her husband's passivity, and a chronic ne'er do well who finds himself on the path to straightening out his life, almost in spite of himself.

Ramsay skillfully keeps his story moving forward. There are flashbacks to a tragic afternoon some 25 years in the past as well as parenthetical references to various events in the present. Not a word is wasted or unnecessary, and the final disclosure of the truth is a scene solidly in the tradition of classic detective fiction.

Woodstock

A KILLER COLLECTION

J.B. Stanley
2006
ISBN: 0425207455
Berkley

In the tradition of Elaine Flinn's excellent Doyle series, this debut mystery is set in the world of antiques and collectibles. Southern almost-belle Molly Appleby is a writer for 'Collector's Weekly' magazine, and has a new assignment to cover the kiln opening of a rising celebrity in local pottery-making. Simple, yes? No. When local bad boy collector George-Bradley Staunton dies suddenly in the midst of the party, Molly isn't sure that 'accidental death' is really what happened. With the support of her endearingly quirky mother and several inquisitive friends, Molly determines to find the truth. And is almost immediately justified in her efforts when a rival collector disappears, along with several pieces from George-Bradley's collection. The tension level increases page by page in this story, which promises entertainment for any reader who loves good old-fashioned mysteries.
Rae Helmsworth

THE KING OF LIES

John Hart
May 2006
ISBN 0312-34161-x
St. Martin's

The King of Lies, by John Hart is a mystery that reads like general fiction. It's a fast paced, true mystery that compares favorably to Pat Conroy in style yet, still retains a solid mystery thriller ground. To achieve that kind of cross over in a new work will boost sales and I can see a possible movie coming from a read like this.

Jackson Workman Pickens, Work, to his friends, is a Southern lawyer disappointed and tiring of the career choice. His Father, Ezra, was the Southern lawyer but also cold hearted, greedy, proud and vain. Ezra has been missing 18 months and is presumed dead. When his body is found and the investigation begins this story takes flight. There are the usual suspects, enough tension to keep the pages turning, and though it doesn't seem to have a lot of sex scenes or violence both are worked skillfully into the story. The only fault I found with The King of Lies comes from my close reading. It's a bit predictable. That being said, don't read too close just read and enjoy.
Dave Biemann

THE LAST ASSASSIN

Barry Eisler
June 2006
ISBN: 0-399-15359-4
Penguin Books

Japanese assassin, John Rain goes to New York when he discovers Midori, his lover from RAIN FALL, is there raising their newborn child. Rain got this information from his enemies and knows that going there will put him and his family at risk, but he needs to see his son. To redeem himself, he promises Midori that he will get out of the life, but to do that, he needs to make a few more kills. Tatsu, his friend and foe from the Japanese FBI, is dying in the hospital but wants to see the enemies eliminated before he goes. To fulfill his friend's dying wish and save Midori and his son, he must take out his adversaries and end the war forever.

Eisler know how to write people; how they react in situations, how they speak to each other and most importantly, what they feel. The point of view shifts demonstrate this talent. Not only do we get Rain's first person point of view, but Eisler shifts to third in certain chapters to get perspectives other than Rain's. It is difficult to do this well, but Eisler nails it, creating even more tension by showing what the women in Rain's life really think and revealing details to the reader that Rain doesn't know. The shifts also add to Eisler's ability to sustain scenes. He gives the important details and never rushes the action, showing every kick, punch and gasp for breath. While amateur writers like to get in and get out, he's not afraid to take his time and let the tension build. Eisler has always been a talented writer, but THE LAST ASSASSIN proves that he can only get better.
Dana Kaye

THE LAST SPYMASTER

Gayle Lynds
June 2006
ISBN 0-312--30159-6
St. Martin's

A onetime super-spy, Jay Tice, and now a traitor to the United States has escaped from prison. Elaine Cunningham, a tracker tracer expert for the CIA, currently in the doghouse, is specially designated to find him. She has two days to do so. The FBI has agreed to let the CIA clean its own dirty laundry in order to keep the scandal down. Cunningham's back up unit (code named Whippet) is 'wiped.' She finds Tice leaving the house the Whippet team was using as a base. How could he have gotten on to her so quickly?

There's something more than a simple escape pushing Tice's actions.

Ms. Lynd's story starts on the boil and gets hotter. The multiple plot lines all come together nicely. This is a high tech, high tension read that shows that the co-president of the International Thriller Writers for an expert in pulse racing pace.

Dave Biemann

THE LAST VOICE YOU HEAR

Richard B. Schwartz

2006

ISBN:0738708305

Midnight Ink

Schwartz challenges the reader's morals in THE LAST VOICE YOU HEAR. When a California congressman is found in the London Underground sodomized with a double edged sword, Lieutenant Frank White is assigned to the case. There were no witnesses despite the rush hour crowd and the so-called victim had more enemies than Hitler, leaving the Lieutenant with nothing. That is until a similar case turns up in California when an associate of the late congressman is murdered in the same brutal manner. Since Private investigator Jack Grant has the ability to access information the LAPD can't, he agrees to help out White. When Grant figures out the true reasoning behind these crimes, he begins questioning his own motivations for solving the case.

Far from the typical thriller, this novel pushes the conventions of protagonists and villains. You don't really know who you're rooting for until the very end. The victims are only victims because they were murdered; in their daily lives they played the role of villains. By arresting their murderer, is justice truly being served?

The writing style only adds to the thriller. Schwartz writes short chapters with numerous breaks and leaves a cliff hanger at the end of every passage. Adding point of view shifts and red herrings, he builds the tension and keeps the pages turning. After reading this, I'm never missing another Schwartz mystery.

Dana Kaye

LEARNING TO KILL

Ed McBain

2006

ISBN: 0151012229

Harcourt

LEARNING TO KILL is an amazing collection and also a wonderful look at the beginning of a career in writing. These 25 stories were all written before 1956 before he started using the name McBain and set the ground work for what would become more than 4 decades worth of writing. McBain wrote an introduction and afterward for the collection, plus an into for each story. Separated by categories, such as Private Eyes and Innocents this book is amazing. In particular I really loved See Him Die.

This is a Must Have collection by one of the greatest writers in the genre.

Jon

MAD MOUSE

Chris Grabenstein

2006

ISBN: 0786717602

Carrol & Graf

Danny Boyle, the part time cop from TILT-A-WHIRL is back in MAD MOUSE, Grabenstein's second book. Set in the resort town of Sea Haven Labor Day weekend is approaching and signaling the end of summer and tourist season. Someone has targeted Danny and his beach bum pals and it will be up to Danny and his fellow officer, John Ceepak to stop the crazy man before it's too late.

Grabenstein took me by surprise last summer with his debut novel and the follow-up is every bit as good as his first. It quite simply kicks ass. With a terrific narrative Grabenstein tells a story with perfect timing and wonderful characters. The action builds though out the book and it's impossible not to get caught up in the excitement the book generates. Let me just add that

if I'm in trouble, I want John Ceepak watching my back. Grabenstein is a terrific writer and you can't afford to miss this great new series from a great talent.

Jon

THE MAJOLICA MURDERS

Deborah Morgan

2006

ISBN: 0425209261

Berkley Prime Crime (PBO)

THE MAJOLICA MURDERS is book five in this wonderful series set in Seattle by Deborah Morgan featuring Jeff Talbot and his agoraphobic wife Sheila. Talbot is an ex-FBI agent whose expertise was antiques. After retiring he became a "Picker", someone who tracks down and finds antiques and sells them to dealers, kind of like a book hunter.

The book opens with a scene on the Talbot's front porch during trick or treat. The scene closes with Jeff getting shot.

Flashback, glimpse of the future, bad dream? We don't know. We delve into the story proper with Jeff doing business with a fellow picker named Lanny in his den. The house is being prepped for Jeff's fortieth birthday. Jeff and Laney head out so as to leave Sheila to her work. Jeff and Lanny continue their discussion during the ride downtown. Before dropping Lanny off Jeff gives him a check to pick up some Majolica for him. (Majolica is antique earthenware in a variety of shapes and forms). Jeff gets home in time for his party.

The party is interrupted by a phone call. Lanny has been arrested for murdering an antique dealer. Jeff is drawn into another murder case.

Morgan writes a traditional mystery with modern sensibilities. The characters are terrific and real and the relationships feel very genuine. She has incredible pacing and the book flows beautifully. I also love all the aspects of the antique picking and hunting. Morgan is writing a very solid series which should not be missed. THE MAJOLICA MURDERS is a rare find not to be missed.

Jon

MAY DAY

Jess Lourey

2006

ISBN 0-7387-0838-0

Midnight Ink

What a romp this is! A start of a new series, May Day is fun and a very fast read. Mira James, the protagonist, is a funny, likable assistant librarian who gets into way more trouble than she bargained for. Lourey's prose is enjoyable, and I found myself laughing out loud at some of her quips. I also sympathized with Mira, and found the plot interesting and relative to issues of the modern day. Lourey has promised us a "Murder by the Month" series, with the next, "June Bug," coming out next year. I look forward to seeing what Mira comes up with next!

Judy Clemens, author of the Stella Crown mystery series

MONK: THE OFFICIAL EPISODE GUIDE

Terry J. Erdmann and Paula M. Block

2006

ISBN:9780312354619

Griffin

The television show Monk is extremely popular and it was just a matter of time before one of these came out. I love Episode guide for shows I enjoy and this one is terrific. The book is current through the fourth season, and each episode represented features original airdate, who wrote the episode, the guest cast, director and a very complete rundown of the episode itself. It also has "The Quotable Monk", weirdest clue, Idiosyncrasy of the week and the case breaking clue and lots of photos. In addition to all this great fan information is an afterward by Tony Shalub, and an introduction by series writer Andy Breckman. This is a wonderful book and is one that will be picked up again and again. Fans of the show should rush out and get this.

Jon

MOURNERS

Bill Pronzini

2006

ISBN: 0765309327

Forge

James Troxell is not a happy man. Always quiet and reserved, he's lately become more withdrawn and even secretive, to the point where his wife is driven to hire a private investigator. Enter the Nameless Detective. In short order he's discovered that Troxell is spending his time attending funerals, services for young women who have died violently, going so far as to send flowers. He's even paid for a marker for one young woman. Nameless and his team find that Troxell's new obsession with death started only a couple of months before. Did he see something that sent him over the edge? Did he do something?

Aside from the case, each of the main characters have worries in their personal life. For Nameless, it's his wife Kerry. Lately she's been distant, as though she's hiding something, or maybe still angry at him for hiding something from her (in last year's NIGHTCRAWLERS). Nameless' partner Tamara Corbin is facing the loss of her longtime boyfriend, a cross-country relationship that couldn't survive the three thousand miles separating them. Like falling from a cliff, the end wasn't totally unexpected, but there's no way to prepare yourself for the pain.

Then there's the newest detective, Jake Runyon. He buried his wife after her death from cancer, then buried himself in work to avoid it. While tracking Troxell around San Francisco he's met someone new – someone whose resemblance to his beloved Colleen shocks him from his rut. She's in mourning, too, grieving for a murdered sister. Drawn to her, he pledges to find the killer, but can he ever see this woman without seeing his wife?

Pronzini's addition of Runyon in 2003's SPOOK gave the series a much-needed shot in the arm. The dry, matter-of-fact narration of his sections balances Nameless' sentimentality and Tamara's streetwise sass, and his troubles generally feel less contrived than some of the twists in the ongoing soap opera that's occupied the recent books in the series. The mystery in MOURNERS is very well done, with enough twists to keep you guessing without ever leaving the realm of possibility, and Pronzini's handling of the characters here plays to his strengths. Fans of the series will welcome this book as a solid entry, and new readers should find plenty to enjoy as well.

Graham Powell

MURDER IN MONTMARTRE

Cara Black

March 2006

ISBN: 1569474109

Soho Crime

When I finished the latest Aimee Leduc novel by Cara Black, I was reminded of French Impressionist painter Claude Monet. Monet was fascinated by light and color and he did several series showing the changing aspects of light on objects (haystacks being his most famous study) at different times of the day. The same can be said for Black's Paris setting in her Leduc detective novels. Granted the neighborhood is going to be different each time out, but Black could take a loaf of bread and a hunk of cheese and make it seem new and unique. She is a master at the game of detail and sensory exploration.

Aimee Leduc, the computer savvy private investigator, finds herself compelled to help childhood friend Laure Rousseau, after Laure is accused of killing her police partner Jacques Gagnard, when the two go to meet an informant. Laure ends up in a coma and unable to defend herself, leaving Aimee to sort things out. Life has thrown the protagonist a curve as well: her boyfriend Guy has left Aimee, because their relationship is battered and strained by the demands of his doctor duties, and Aimee's PI business. Sublimating her shattered personal life, Aimee is hell-bent on solving Gagnard's death, which seems tied into intra-Corsican vendettas and terrorist attacks on the city of Paris. Providing a level of pathos and raising the stakes higher for Aimee, it appears that Gagnard's death is somehow related to Aimee's father's murder years before in a terrorist explosion. What starts as a mission to aid a close friend takes on crusade status to clear up the mystery surrounding her father's demise.

Besides being known for her narrative rendering of visual Paris, Black has a penchant for innumerable plot twists and red herrings, and this latest book in the series is particularly twisty. The exploration of Corsican culture and underground criminal activities, as well as seeing Aimee negotiate Parisian music clubs (Aimee is not only tres chic, but tres hip), together with her dwarf business partner Rene Friant providing a humorous backdrop impersonating Toulouse Lautrec, and an insider look at (then current) French government spying techniques, makes this one of the most enjoyable novels in the series. The reader pulls for Aimee to find happiness – perhaps in the arms of a talented musician -- and for Paris to somehow expand its boundaries. There are 20 arrondissements in the French city and that leaves only fourteen novels to go. I'm missing Aimee already.

Anthony Rainone

MURDER MOST HOLY

Michael J. Manno

2006

ISBN: 1594143870

Five star First Edition

Detective Sergeant Jerome (Stan) Stankowski is having a rough week; his fiancée has jilted him. So when the phone rings early Sunday morning, on what was to have been the first day of his honeymoon, Stan's first inclination is to leave it unanswered. But he does answer it, and is drawn into a murder case that will both baffle and challenge him. A young nun in this small Midwest community has been inexplicably murdered with a pipe bomb. The first challenge Stan has to face in the investigation is the fact that he's partnered with a crabby former State Prosecutor, Parker Noble. Noble is an egotistical fussy budget, whose primary interests are his next meal, his ageing dog, and making Stan's life miserable (at least that's the way Stan sees it). The next challenge is that there's absolutely no discernible reason for the young woman to have been killed. Her father, Chuck Winborn, on the other hand, is a different story. The publisher of the local newspaper, he's used his 'bully pulpit' as a battering ram to control events in the community, and has a long list of enemies. Unfortunately, he can't aid the investigation, because upon learning of his daughter's death Winborn suffers a fatal seizure. So Stan and Parker are left to work the case with no assistance, and a motley crew of suspects: the local police chief, the mayor, and a prominent building contractor are only the most obvious candidates. The longer Stan and Parker work the case, the more suspects they find. This entertaining debut novel is reminiscent of Dylan Schaffer's writing. Stan Stankowski is a likeable protagonist, and his relationship with the ever-cranky Parker Noble makes this a better-than-average first novel. I'll be watching for more books by this author.

Rae Helmsworth

THE NEXT TIME YOU DIE

Harry Hunsicker

2006

ISBN: 0312348509

St. Martins Minotaur

My favorite line in Tombstone is from Wyatt Earp, played by Kirk Russell, "You tell them I'm coming, and Hell's coming with me". This line went through my head while reading this book. It opens with Hank taking on a job to find a missing file and he's not the only one looking for it. He's also doing a bit of a babysitting job for a friend of a friend, guarding a young woman who might have some trouble coming her way. The further along the book goes, the more complicated things become. Just when you think Hunsicker can't do anything else to Hank to make matters worse, the sky opens up and drops another s*#tstorm on him. I couldn't turn the pages fast enough, and the by the time I was done I felt like I was out of breath. Henry Lee Oswald is the guy I want on my side, hands down. It ends with a truly satisfying ending, with people getting what they deserve.

If THE NEXT TIME YOU DIE is any indication of what's to come from Hunsicker, he should be able to look forward to a long career in writing. His characters take on a life of their own and his action is amazing. Perfect pacing kept me reading at a damn fast clip. The story is full of twists and turns like an old road out in the country, and the surprises are like deer jumping out in front of your car, fast and totally unexpected. This second book in the series guarantees that I will be buying every book with Harry Hunsicker's name on it. Already on my best of 2006 list. Toss on some Stevie Ray Vaughn and sit back and enjoy one of the best new writers in recent years.

Jon Jordan

NICOTINE KISS

Loren D. Estleman

2006

ISBN: 0765312239

Forge

What can I say? Estleman is quite simply one of the best writers alive today. The Amos Walker series should be read by anyone considering writing PI novels. This is the real deal.

In NICOTINE KISS Walker is walking wounded, recovering from a gunshot wound. He was saved by an old friend. A month later his cigarette smuggling friend Jeff is missing and Jeff's sister calls Walker in a fright, hoping Walker can find her brother before some bad happens. As the investigation continues Walker discovers that the feds are also looking for his old friend in connection with counterfeiting and terrorist ties. As the case progresses the stakes get raised as Walker find himself accused of murder.

With the perfect pacing and wonderful sense of place fans have come to expect from Estleman this might be one of my favorites to date. Walker truly is the quintessential PI and the book is timely and nostalgic at the same time. A perfect reading experience.

Jon

NIGHT OF THE JAGUAR

Michael Gruber

2006

ISBN: 0 06 057768 1

William Morrow

A Priest is shot in Colombia. A Shaman journeys to America to save his people. By canoe. Lead by the spirit of the Jaguar he arrives safely. At the same time Jimmy Paz begins to dream. The Jaguar will kill his daughter Amelia.

Michael Gruber's Paz series is enjoyed by many who like a little dose of supernatural with mystery and for the first half of Jaguar it's easy to see why. Evil men are killed by "Jaguar" and Paz is called upon by old friends at the police department to help out. The set-up is drawn with lots of promise. Shaman Moie is an interesting character as are the environmentalists who shelter him. Jimmy's growing fear of his dreams works well. But without spoiling the book, wife Lorna Wise sits in the middle of this perfect soufflé like the egg shell you gag upon.

If Gruber's Paz is going to keep on solving crimes that involve the "weird shit" his wife is going to have to start accepting the evidence in front of her. And Gruber needs to pay more attention to this character to raise the credibility of his fantastical tales.
Ruth

THE NYMPHOS OF ROCKY FLATS

Mario Acevedo

2006

ISBN: 0060833262

Rayo

Normally I am not a big fan of the cross-over novel.

In recent years mysteries have been separated in genre from sci-fi, fantasy and horror. In the early days of the pulps this was not the case. Lately there has been a return to novels mixing genres, case in point is the emergence of the vampire in crime fiction. The Nymphos of Rocky Flats by Mario Acevedo is a fine example. Felix Gomez, soldier in today's Iraqi war is bitten by an ancient. He becomes a PI and is hired to find out why women at a top secret military base have become nymphomaniacs. To my surprise I found this book to be pure fun. The plot is first rate and Acevedo is excellent at describing the plentiful action. There are nice twists and turns and the mystical identities of some of the characters bodes well for future books. The key here as in any genre fiction, is to create a believable scenario. Acevedo manage to create an excellent vampire underground, they exist in our society, but live in fear of being hunted and discovered. Like Charlie Huston's new, literary, very hardboiled vampire novel, Already Dead, The Nymphos of Rocky Flats is outstanding entertainment.

Richard Katz, owner of Mystery One Books

OH DANNY BOY

Rhys Bowen

2006

ISBN: 0312328176

St. Martin's Minotaur

There's a reason Rhys Bowen get nominated for so many awards. She just damn good. OH DANNY BOY is the fifth book in the series featuring Molly Murphy, a PI in the early days of the 1900's.

Molly's relationship with Police Captain Daniel Sullivan is difficult enough on it's own, but when she is asked to help clear him of a bribery charge the stakes are raised a bit. It brings Molly into the case Sullivan was working on involving a serial killer. Not only does she need to find out who framed Sullivan she needs to keep herself out of trouble while doing it.

Molly Murphy is an incredible protagonist and I look forward reading her adventures more with every book. Bowen does her homework and the research pays off. It's almost like reading history not fiction. The suspense is built perfectly coming to a wonderful finish. Books like this are the reason I love mysteries.

Jon

OUT OF ORDER

Charles Benoit

2006

ISBN 1-59058-252-7

Poisoned Pen Press

Jason Talley, if a reader could step into the pages of a book and converse with a protagonist, would tell you that he is a fairly nondescript sort of guy. In his thirties, with a steady but unexciting job processing mortgage applications, Jason continues from one day to another, putting one foot in front of the other, on occasion regretting his bland existence but lacking the drive to change much of anything.

The one bright spot for him is his friendship with two of his neighbors - a lively immigrant couple from India who regularly invite him to share pizza evenings and delight him with glimpses into their happy marriage.

When the couple is found dead, an apparent murder-suicide, Jason is stunned and grief stricken. The tragedy jerks him out of his complacency and sends him to India on a whim - determined to return an item belonging to his dead friend to the friend's family.

Thus India forms the backdrop for much of the action - with dusty train trips, crowded streets, exotic foods, and a lovely young Canadian woman who attaches herself to Jason's itinerary. The trip is anything but standard tourist fare, since Jason's emails attempting to reach his friend's family result instead in a succession of hostile stalkers who place Jason and his companion in fear for their lives.

OUT OF ORDER is a very enjoyable read and a treat for armchair travelers as well as suspense fiction fans.
Woodstock

PERFECTION

Walter Satterthwait

2006

ISBN:0312352441

Thomas Dunne Books

Satterthwait books are always a treat. PERFECTION comes pretty close to its title. The man is wry. After entertaining us with his 2 P.I. series Mr. Satterthwait is taking a tongue in cheek look at serial killer books.

Detectives Sophia Tegaskis and Jim Fallon are a breath of fresh air. Written with a nod to traditional cliché, the duo takes on a vibrancy in the hands of Satterthwait's imagination. Sophia is a young up and comer, from a line of police with natural instincts for the job and personal phobias that make her leap from the page. Jim Fallon is the seasoned and ravaged detective, complete with baggage from his days as N.Y.C. police and a drinking problem that will cause problems and in PERFECTION may cost him his life.

Satterthwait's plot is elemental "serial killer" with a twist. Someone is killing obese women in the coastal Florida town where Fallon and Tegaskis make their living. Carving the fat off the bodies until they reach their perfect body weight. The crimes are escalating at a faster pace than your average serial killer and our police duo brings in a psychologist to help profile the victims and the killer. Their boss brings in the F.B.I. after only two killings just to stir the media frenzy and bolster his own media image. And Sophia must race a hurricane to stop the killer from striking again.

Satterthwait uses his words first to entertain but there's much more in the pages of this book. Commentary about the U.S. obsession with appearance lace pages that also take more than one poke at the serial killer plot that is still in vogue despite being done to death. That Satterthwait manages to do this and write one of the best serial killer books I've read in recent history is a testament to his talent. That I'd love to see him write another book with the same protagonist is to be expected. Watch out though folks he may break some rules. Because in the end appearance isn't always what it seems to be.
Ruth

Philip Marlowe's Guide to Life

Edited by Martin Asher

2006

ISBN 0715635425

Duckworth Publishers

Raymond Chandler gave his quintessential detective Philip Marlowe classic one-liners, which were his hallmarks. In *The Big Sleep* he says

"The first time we met I told you I was a detective. Get it through your lovely head. I work at it, lady I don't play at it"

His thoughts on private dicks are just one of the timeless wisecracks that can be found in this elegant and exquisite compendium. This is a little gem of a book that can be finished in one sitting; however, I would recommend that you don't but that you dip into it when the mood takes you or when you are looking for that silky response. This alluring compilation of nearly two hundred of Marlowe's most shrewd and totally cool comments, put-downs, and witticisms are a must for any Marlowe fan and will keep enthusiasts happy and going for a very long time. I am not sure, why it has taken so long for such a book to be produced but the editor should take the credit for a masterpiece that will in due course become a much sought after addition to any well-meaning Marlowe fan's collection.

Taking a leaf out of Max Décharné's dictionary of hipster slang *Straight from the Fridge, Dad* - this book is certainly *aces up!*
Ayo Onatade

PRETTY GIRL GONE

David Housewright

2006

ISBN 0-312-34829-0

St. Martins Press

David Housewright's *Pretty Girl Gone* opens with P.I. Mac (Rushmore) McKenzie being not too subtly summoned to a meeting with the inner power circle of Minneapolis politics. Seems they want to know just what it is that Minnesota's First Lady has asked Mac to do for her. What the power elite doesn't know is that the First Lady is one of Mac's several ex-girlfriends, and Mac holds an email sent to her anonymously. The message is simple: the Governor is to abandon his Senate bid, or he will be exposed as a murderer.

Now Mac doesn't respond well even to *subtle* coercion, let alone to a "tough guy" throwback who's been tailing him, and takes off on his own, ignoring warnings and threats, to Victoria, Minnesota - home of the "Victoria Seven" - to see what's up. Once there, it seems as if the entire town has come out to thwart his investigation. The "Victoria Seven" are local legends. A true Cinderella team, they won the 1973 State basketball title against incredible odds. One of the challenges they faced was the fact that one of their cheerleaders - the girlfriend of Victoria's "star" player - was found murdered on the eve of the championship game. Her murder was never solved. Nearly all the original team, and its coach, still live in Victoria, with the exception of the team's "star" player, who now lives in the Governor's mansion.

Pretty Girl Gone is an incredible addition to "Cold Case" mysteries, joining the likes of recent books by Michael Connelly, KJ Erickson, Mary Logue, and Reed Farrell Coleman. Housewright artfully portrays the hopelessness of a group of men whose defining moment happened when they were only teenagers; men who've now grown tired, mean, and pathetic.

Mac McKenzie is an entertaining and engaging character, and in this, the 3rd novel in the series (following *A Hard Ticket Home*, and *Tin City*), appears all too human. We take the good with the bad in our friends, be they real or fictional, and I've come to see Mac as a friend. *Pretty Girl Gone* is a complex, thoroughly enjoyable addition to what is becoming one of our favorite mystery series.

Gary Shulze, *Once Upon a Crime*

PROOF POSITIVE

Phillip Margolin

2006

0 06 073505 8

Harper Collins

Phillip Margolin is one of the most recognizable names in legal thrillers and over the years has written many of that sub-genre's best books. Never locked into "series" writing he none the less brings back a familiar face for this summer's PROOF POSITIVE. Readers will remember Amanda Jaffe from WILD JUSTICE. Neither she nor the other two lawyers are the stars of PROOF. Inspired by recent headlines Margolin instead focuses on the fragility of forensic proof and the "experts" who abuse the science. Or in this case one particular expert.

As lawyers Dan Weaver and Amanda Jaffe defend a homeless man and Amanda's father Sam handles the case of a serious gangster they realize that something doesn't gel. Margolin weaves several different plots throughout this tale until he arrives at the inevitable courtroom confrontation. One of his more realistic and gripping tales? No. Entertaining? Of Course.

Ruth

PROVINCETOWN FOLLIES, BANGKOK BLUES

RANDALL PEFFER

MAY 2006

ISBN 1932557199

BLEAKHOUSE BOOKS

Randall Peffer has a nomadic writing history. Pick up a number of Lonely Planet guide books and you'll see his name. You'll also see his name on WATERMEN, and LOGS OF THE DEAD PIRATES SOCIETY. Crime fiction is technically new territory for Peffer although KILLING NEPTUNE'S DAUGHTER explored the themes of murder mysteries with a supernatural bent. And like that book, PROVINCETOWN FOLLIES, BANGKOK BLUES is a fresh, original and wonderfully character driven novel. The story begins and ends with Tuki Aparecio. Born in Vietnam, her history is vast, violent and varied. By luck and by street hardened wit, she has survived when others have perished. Now she sits in a jail cell in Provincetown, Massachusetts, accused of murdering her lover and setting fire to his club.

Michael Decastro is trying his hand as solo defense for murder for the time. Tuki tells him she is innocent. He wants to believe her. But where does he begin when Tuki, a beautiful drag queen and diva of the Painted Lady, tells her story in broken pieces that don't fit? Like unraveling the parables of Buddha, there is wisdom and truth behind all that Tuki says. But the unspoken stories are the ones that could set her free. And those are the stories she refuses to tell.

PROVINCETOWN FOLLIES, BANGKOK BLUES easily makes it into my top five reads of the year. Peffer joins the ranks of the newest writers on the crime fiction scene; writers that pay homage to the old traditions as they break the formulas set down by them. The characters are explored with pathos instead of cold psychology and plots twist like prayer flags in a fierce wind. And if my prayers are answered, this book will be only the beginning of the story of Michael Decastro.

Jennifer Jordan

RIDERS DOWN

John McEvoy
March 2006
ISBN 1-58058-258-6
Poisoned Pen Press

John McEvoy, a former correspondent for a newspaper published for the horse racing community, has turned his hand to writing mysteries with satisfying results.

At various tracks in various parts of the US, jockeys are being killed by a single rifle bullet to the brain. It's obvious that an extremely skilled sniper is at work, but to what end? The men who die are respected members of their sport's tightly knit world, with high incomes and spotless reputations. Before long there are more ominous events. Other respected jockeys perform in important races in characteristically inept style - with long shot favorites crossing the finish line instead of the favored horses. Huge payouts are made at betting windows and a mysterious trio of winners raise eyebrows by asking for payouts in cash.

Matt O'Connor, a journalist for a racing newspaper, is among those who are suspicious about the events. Encouraged by a lawyer friend of his who has personal reasons for wanting to know what is going on, Matt begins to ask questions and follow leads.

Meanwhile the killer continues to plot, and not surprisingly, money is at the root of his motivation. Blessed with a brilliant intellect, Claude Bledsoe has never worked a day in his life, choosing instead to live on an inheritance from a doting grandmother.

In this nicely plotted story, McEvoy weaves these disparate elements together in fine style. Along the way there is a lot to learn about the sport of horse racing.

Woodstock

RUSTY NAIL

J.A. Konrath
July 2006
ISBN: 140130088X
Hyperion

Joe Konrath's Jack Daniels series is becoming a must read for an awful lot of people. There is good reason for this. Quite simply, Konrath writes a highly entertaining series.

RUSTY NAIL sees the return of a villain from WHISKEY SOUR who is supposed to be dead, or does it.... Either way, Jacqueline has her hands full as she tries to catch a psycho loose in Chicago. Jack is receiving video of the crimes and the victims are people from a previous case. Hindered by her partner's illness keeping him out of action and the increasing threat the killer poses this could be the hardest case Jack Daniels has worked.

Konrath has a wonderful gift for combining humor and action. His characters are a joy to read, both funny and likable they are the heart of Konrath's writing. With the pacing in this book it is a true thriller and will keep you guessing.

Punching like a boiler maker with and adrenaline shot for a chaser, this book will keep you reading and begging for more.
Jon

SATURDAY'S CHILD

RAY BANKS
May 2006
ISBN: 1904598781(UK)
Polygon

Cal Innes is out of prison and going straight. At least that's what he'd like to think, but nothing's ever that easy and before he realises what's happening, he's being dragged under by the very folks who helped send him away in the first place. And from there, things can only get worse.

What's most striking about this book is the use of dual narrative, splitting the action between Innes and his nemesis, the disturbingly twisted Mo Tiernan. Banks instantly marks these characters through his use not only tense but dialect and the result is spectacular, with each narrative revealing something else about these characters and this world that Banks has chosen to explore. It's a dark novel, set in an all-too real urban England, and as such it feels far more real than the typically middle class murders that have come to dominate the UK market of late. Banks is a startlingly fresh voice and within two books (he is also the author of *The Big Blind*, one of my favourite novels of 2005) he has left many other established writers far behind.

Russel McLean

THE SEA OF MONSTERS

Rick Riordan
2006
ISBN 0786856866
Miramax.

Rick Riordan is well known and respected in crime writing circles. He is the author of a fine series featuring San Antonio PI Tres Navarre. These books are tough, gritty, and well written with great Texas ambiance. He is, however, becoming much better known for a new young adult series called Percy Jackson and the Olympians. Percy is the son of one of the Greek Gods. He and his friends are sent on quests to help save, the Gods, the planet and of course there human race. There are now two in the series, with many more to come. The novels are simply marvelous, filled with outstanding adventure and thrilling plots. All of the characters of mythology are present in the tales. Riordan, a former middle school teacher, paces the books with tremendous action scenes. Like J.K. Rowling, the heart of the books are about family, friendship and loyalty. Children and teenagers will go crazy for these books and adults can read and love them also. This series has already won, a Child Magazine Book of the Year, a School Library Journal Best Book of 2005 and A NY Times Notable Book of 2005. It deserves all the accolades and collectors take note, they are already becoming hard to find.
Richard

SEQUENCE

Lori Andrews
July 2006
ISBN 0-312-35270-0
St. Martin's

Lori Andrews, a lawyer and science commentator, tries her hand at fiction with Sequence. It's a worthy effort that seeks to promote the Armed Forces Institute of Pathology and the museum it houses (In the news with base closings). Ms. Andrews character, Alex Blake is still young and attractive, she played sports and gravitated to science eventually working as a geneticist. Alex is certain her work at the AFIP is important and she feels sidetracked when she goes from working on a flu vaccine to basic CSI type grunt work in search of a serial killer. The Unit has come under new management and the new boss, who was hoping to get to head the FBI has angled to take this case, and others relating to the military, away from the FBI. Will this hastily assembled team including "Alex" catch the killer? The story line itself is not too technical, nor too violent. It's some Washington politics and a little of Alex trying to find herself and true romance in order to settle down in to a job she's grown to like. In short, this is a bit of everything from a first timer who knows her stuff and will grow better from book to book.
Dave Biemann

THE SERIAL KILLERS CLUB

Jeff Povey
June 2006
ISBN: 0446578428
Warner Books

This debut novel from Jeff Povey had me grinning and laughing the whole time I read it. Povey, who is also a writer for British television has done a stellar job with THE SERIAL KILLERS CLUB, It opens with a smallish everyman being attacked and accidentally killing his attacker. His curiosity drives him to open the dead man's wallet and he discovers that he was about to become the sixth victim of a serial killer. Before to long he is posing as the killer under the assumed name of Douglas Fairbanks and finds himself in a club of killers. For the first time he can remember he is happy, hanging out with people he finds entertaining and interesting. and part of a group. Too bad for Doug the FBI is on to him. And to keep out of jail he may have to ruin the one thing in his life he enjoys. Add the looming shadow of The Kentucky Killer, the serial killer with a record list of victims coming ever closer and the club may not last. This book is remarkably funny and extremely fast paced. I love the characters, even though many are in fact serial killers. A pure pleasure to read, witty, sarcastic and timing that runs like a Swiss watch. Povey is on my most wanted list.
Jon

SHADOW LAWS

Jim Michael Hansen
2007

ISBN 9780976924340
Dark Sky Publishing, Inc.

Most sophomore efforts are okay at best, however, Jim Hansen's SHADOW LAWS is exceptional. Homicide detective Bryson Coventry is back in SHADOW LAWS on the hunt for another sadistic killer during the dog days of summer in Denver. At the same time Taylor Sutton, a free spirited attorney, is also chasing a killer on behalf of a fellow friend and attorney. Over a three week period, the clock ticks as both are pushed to their limits to find the answers in this dangerous game.

Hansen specializes in making character's come alive. Coventry is not just a homicide detective but rather a person with heart and soul, a real person. Throughout the novel we see more of his humanity and his need to solve this case. Hansen's seamless ability to place the reader in the novel, to feel the sticky, humid summer days of Denver demonstrates his mature writing skills. Throughout the story the reader feels the tension of the city as Nathan Wickersham plays Denver at his will. SHADOW LAWS was hard to put down once I started it and I ripped through the pages so quickly that I had numerous paper cuts at the end of the reading. There are so many twist, turns, nail biting going on that you better make sure that you have a few hours to set aside to read this book. Once started, I guarantee that you will not be able to put it down. Hansen continues the tradition started with NIGHT LAWS and is destined to be crowned the new king of the thriller.

Aldo Calcagno

SEVEN SOLDIERS OF VICTORY

Grant Morrison
2006
ISBN:1401209254 (vol.1)
ISBN:1401209750 (vol.2)
DC Comics

Grant Morrison has one of the most creative minds comics today, coupled with an uncanny ability to write you have a winning combination that is a guarantee for the reader.

In SEVEN SOLDIERS OF VICTORY Morrison has taken seven underused characters and revitalized them. Originally set in separate mini series for each character the story is one that involves them all and is presented in the trade collections in chronological order of events (30 issues in all, 4 volumes). The down and dirty short take is that Earth has been under attack for centuries, and various groups of seven have been there to step up to the plate and try their best to thwart the invasion. This time out the seven are unaware of the others and each is drawn into the story in a different way.

The players here are not necessarily "Superheroes" but all have powers which will be used to do their part. The line up is: Zatanna (a magic wielder), The Shining Knight (a misplaced knight of the round table), Klarion the witch boy, The Gaurdian (an ex-cop in armor), Mr. Miracle (an escape artist), the Frankenstein monster, and Bulleteer (an experiment gone wrong). This series is amazing. While the individual story lines flesh out the characters as only Morrison can, it also intertwines the stories into a grand quest to save mankind and our planet. Glorious fun, pure escapism and something to be enjoyed and savoured. A truly grand tale.

Jon

SHOTGUN OPERA

Victor Gischler
2006
ISBN: 0440241715
Dell Paperback Original

SHOTGUN OPERA is a book full of violence. It moves fast and with purpose and is unrelenting. It's a story that started years ago and is finally ending now. It's a story about family and obligations. But more than anything else it is a hell of a book. Mike Foley and his brother Danny do odd jobs for the mob, usually jobs that involve someone getting dead. While on one of these jobs something happens that puts Mike off his game and he leaves, ending up in Oklahoma raising grapes and trying to make wine. His brother went on to have a son. Before dying Danny told his son Andrew that if he was ever in trouble he should call his Uncle Mike. Well, Andrew is definitely in trouble. Hounds of Hell on your tail kind of trouble. Andrew makes the call and before he knows it he is no longer in New York, but finds himself in the middle of nowhere in Oklahoma with a man he's never met, the last of his family. Mike is determined to do what he has to do to pay back debt to his brother by saving Andrew. The flip side of the coin is a woman called in to hunt Andrew, Nikki Enders. She works for a man she know only as "the voice". Nikki has reached a crossroads in her life and is thinking of getting out. So when she farms out what might be her last job she thinks she may actually be ok. But violent people know other violent people and more often than not these relationships end violently. This could be a story of redemption, a story of rebirth, or a story of revenge. But really, it's a story of violence and the consequences of violence. Gischler doesn't write the typical heroes, or even the typical anti-heroes. His characters

however are very real feeling when you get past the surreal set up for them. They are people in situations they don't want to be in and they are trying to get out. They want to do the right thing, but end up following instinct instead. They are all too human, and as a result you can't help but want to cheer them on to make it, to get out from under.

Action packed with a full open throttle pace this book moves fast and dares you to keep up. Gischler's trademark quirks are here, but this book isn't about one liners or gags, it's about people. SHOTGUN OPERA is an amazing book and takes Gischler's writing to another level. Definitely one of the best books I've read this year.

Jon

STILL LIFE

Louise Penny

2006

St. Martin's

ISBN 0-312-35255-7

Anyone looking to read an old school mystery, one brought up to date culturally, can rejoice in Louise Penny's Still Life. She brings to life a little Canadian village of artists and gourmet cooks then kills off one of its beloved inhabitants in a hunting accident. The village is too small to have a full time police officer. As part of the routine, enter Inspector Armand Gamache. But, when the hunter doesn't come forward the suspicion of murder arises. Gamache is an observer, a listener. He encourages a young protégée (read foil) to do the same. For the reader, the forensic side of the investigation takes a back seat to Gamache's strengths. From the Three Pine's side there's a plucky heroine who runs a parallel investigation. Clara is Jane's (the dead woman) best friend. There are plenty of suspects, though no one wanted Jane dead. Between Gamache and Clara they manage to bring the killer to justice without killing anyone else. That's quite a feat in current fiction. Fans of the old 'cozy', here's a must read.

Dave Biemann

TOMB OF THE GOLDEN BIRD

Elizabeth Peters

2006

ISBN 0-06-059180-3

William Morrow

Fans of the continuing series featuring Amelia Peabody will be pleased with the latest installment - Peabody and her husband Radcliffe Emerson are active participants in the events surrounding the 1922 discovery of King Tut's tomb and its stunning collection of priceless artifacts.

Most readers will already know that archaeologist Howard Carter and his patron Lord Carnevon were the actual discoverers. But Peters skillfully places the Emersons and their considerable entourage of family members, household servants, cousins, staff members and friends close to the action, and throws in some political intrigue to spice up the mix. Amelia's brother-in-law arrives with a coded message he obtained in suspicious circumstances. Various members of the Emerson's entourage are followed, attacked, kidnapped and released unharmed. A sudden explosion with tragic results near the excavation site startles and unnerves everyone. The petty jealousies and professional envy of the various teams of archaeologists keep everyone on edge and tempers close to flashpoint.

Eventually all the action is sorted out. Fans of Peters' continuing series will not be disappointed.

Woodstock

A TOUCH OF DEATH

Charles Williams

Reprint 2006/1953

ISBN 0 8439 5588 0

Hard Case Crime

The Hard Case Crime imprint continues to further my education in the history of contemporary noir. This month's case study, Charles Williams. One of the most prolific of the pulp novelists his first book, HILL GIRL was released in 1951. Best known for his thrillers set at sea (DEAD CALM, AND THE DEEP BLUE SEA), his work sails through time with only a slight and a decidedly lustrous patina.

A TOUCH OF DEATH is very much land locked. Lee Scarborough is an ex jock trying to pay the bills as a sales man when he walks into a story of adultery, corruption and a possible cash prize of 120 grand. Every man meets his femme fatale and the ride the writer takes you on is fast and furious. This book is one history lesson I had no trouble at all getting behind. The

timelessness of a good mystery is something the folks of HCC not only understand but are bringing to today's reader with their golden nuggets from the past.

Ruth

WHIPSAW

Steve Brewer

2006

ISBN:

Intrigue Press

Whipsaw: to lose money in a volatile market by buying before rapid drops and selling before rapid rises. It's the title of the book and the fear driving the actions of the characters. Years ago, Matt Donahue retired from the DelaTek Corporation when his wife left him for his boss. But he's brought back in when the video game that's going to save the company from going under is stolen and held for ransom, and one of the conditions is that Matt makes the drop. If he doesn't deliver the three million dollars, the video game will be released on the internet for free. DelaTek can't afford that and, since Matt is a shareholder, neither can he. Forced to work with the man that stole his wife, answer to the jerk who replaced him, and prove to everybody that he's not a conspirator, Matt is relentless in finding the hacker and retrieving the valuable game.

WHIPSAW is one of those books that you get to the end and feel like you had just started reading. Brewer's terse writing style keeps the story moving, never giving you an opportunity to skip over passages. The action moves, but the suspense is light, creating a pleasant and entertaining story that doesn't send you into cardiac arrest.

Dana Kaye

WRATH OF THE SPECTRE

Michael Fleisher with Jim Aparo

2005

ISBN: 1401204740

DC Comics

Crime fiction meets the occult in this wonderful blending of genres. This is a trade collection of comics stories originally published in the 70's and was at the time considered very controversial. This run took a character that started in the 40's as a dark mystical being and somehow transformed into a more mainstream almost humorous character. When he was revamped in the 70's the plan was to bring back the original feel. They succeeded.

Jim Corrigan was a cop, killed by mobsters and ready to go to his reward. Instead he was coupled with the spirit of vengeance, by passing man's laws to mete out a quicker and more permanent justice. What this translates to in the comics is killers being turned to glass and shattered, being killed by giant scissors and other "interesting" ends. At the time I was risky to try and blend a supernatural being with superhero, coupled with the no nonsense vengeance it was groundbreaking. The stories are wonderful and still hold up, in fact given today's world they actually could have been written last week. A truly wonderful crimefiction series with supernatural sensibilities. I loved it then, I love it more now. Fleisher wrote great stories and with the compliment of the art of Jim Aparo this is a collection worth having. Weighing in at almost 200 pages, it's worth every penny.

Jon

ZERO TO THE BONE

Robert Eversz

2006

ISBN: 0743250176

Simon and Schuster

Book five in the Nina Zero series and from what I understand, the last. I believe that Eversz is planning to spin one of the characters into a new series but this is the last with Nina in the forefront. Nina is having an exhibit of photos in a gallery, photos that have nothing to do with the paying gig of paparazzi. One of her models fails to show up for the event which worries Nina. The next day she receives a video on disc of what looks to be the murder of the same model. As Nina looks into the genuineness of the video she discovers that there may be a real sick puppy in LA raping and killing women he meets on line. Her coverage of this for The Scandal Times is putting her in danger.

During the course of this Nina is getting know her niece and re-establishing a relationship with her estranged father. She is also ready to live a life with out probation, a real citizen again. If she's lucky she'll live that long.

Eversz has created one of the coolest and gutsy heroines in Nina Zero and I love these books. This could quite possibly be the best to date. If you haven't read this series yet you should, and this is the best yet.

Jon