

1st Kill
Michael Kronenwetter
2005
ISBN 0-313-34737-5
St. Martin's Press

Winner of the 2004 St. Martin's Press/PWA Best Novel Contest, 1st Kill tells the story of Hank Berlin, who has just been asked by an old-time flame to investigate the murder of her husband. As with any good mystery, things aren't what they seem.

The victim, Jack Drucker, and Hank were best friends since childhood, until their opposing views on the war in Vietnam tore them apart. They hadn't spoken since. Jack went on to become a respected journalist, and Hank became a P.I. This being a small town in Wisconsin, not all that much seems to happen, crime-wise, so Hank is relatively under-employed, and eagerly takes on the case. The fact that he's still attracted to the newly widowed Elizabeth Drucker certainly aids in his decision.

Thinking that the victim was likely to have been murdered over something he was investigating, Frank begins there. What he discovers are layers upon layers of political and corporate corruption, with plenty of suspects, and loads of dead ends. Then there's the story about war atrocities Jack was working on...

1st Kill is marvelous in the way it evokes small-town sensibilities, and in how it demonstrates that if you look hard enough, you'll be amazed at the dirt you can dig up. Michael Kronenwetter, a prolific non-fiction author, possesses an amazing way with words in this, his debut fiction, deftly putting the "modern" into "modern noire"
Gary Shulze, Once Upon a Crime

Editor's Note: I also read this and while deciding to use Gary's review, I wanted to add that I thoroughly enjoyed this book. Kronenwetter has created a wonderful set of characters and he has a relaxed pacing that drew me right into the story. I can't wait to read his next book. Kronenwetter is the real deal and should not be missed.
Jon

7 DEADLY WONDERS
Matthew Reilly
January 2006
ISBN 0-7432-7053-3
Simon & Schuster

Fans of Matt Reilly should know that his perennial hero Scarecrow is missing in his latest novel. Never fear, 7 DEADLY WONDERS is every thing we've come to expect from this Aussie author. When I try to describe a Reilly novel I always end up saying he reads like a Bruce Willis action flick. There is no down time in a Reilly epic and 7 DEADLY WONDERS has the Reilly stamp.

A fast paced novel where a small band of underdogs must race to save all of humanity, it is the fantastical supposition of history that draws the reader in. Has there been an all powerful weapon in existence from the time of Alexander the

Great. And did he dismantle and hide it at the ends of the earth? If you've read Reilly you know the answer to this question. If you haven't WONDERS is a great place to start. Reilly takes us into the ancient world, dropping archeological trivia and history into the plot wherever possible.

Within the first two chapters we are cheering our team on as they race against two super powers to use the greatest weapon man has ever known for the powers of good and not the powers of nationalism. Led by Captain Jack our crew is driven to collect pieces of the ancient puzzle and the voyeurism is marvelous. From a cabin in Ireland, to Crocodiles in the African desert, a stand off in Paris, a visit to the Hanging Gardens of Babylon and a climax at the Great Pyramid the action never stops.

If you like a novel packed with physical suspense, there is no one else writing today who does it with Reilly's flare.
Ruth

AN OMINOUS DEATH
Annette Mahon
February 2006
ISBN: 1-59414-359-5
Five Star

While visiting recuperating Senior Guild member Candy Breckner at a convalescent home, the Quilting Bee ladies are surprised at her accusations that an "Angel of Death" stalks the facility. An even greater shock greets members Maggie Browne and Louise Lombard a few days later when they discover her still-warm corpse. More specifically, Louise finds her, and Maggie gets an impression that the police are not so sure it was a natural death as they certainly seem interested in Louise!

Nose twitching, Maggie quietly directs the Bees between morning quilting sessions and afternoon snoops in the quest for answers. It becomes a bit easier when Candy's daughter and stepchildren give them all of Candy's craft fabric—and a key to the house. This opens them up to teach residents at the care center how to quilt, and to gather information as a by-product.

This low-impact mystery spends a lot of time in the sewing room, where the Bee women discuss; nay, even gossip at length about the unexpected death of one of their own. And while Maggie is the main character, she leans heavily on her friends to help find answers, and they eagerly support her.

Kathleen Tromp

THE ASSASSIN'S TOUCH
Laura Joh Rowland
2005
ISBN: 0312319002
St. Martin's Minotaur

This novel is set in 17th century Japan. When an important spy dies for no apparent reason in the middle of a horse race, the shogun's second-in-command, Chamberlain Sano Ichiro, is ordered to investigate. The pressure on Sano is intense: he has only recently been promoted to his position, which includes overseeing Japan's military government, and there are many who want him to fail – and are actively trying to make that happen. After having spent much of his life outside

the 'system', Sano chafes against the rigid protocols demanded by Japan's political and social conventions. But his first priority is his family, and in order to keep them safe Sano must play by the rules.

At the same time Sano's wife, Reiko, is asked by her magistrate father (a refreshingly enlightened man of the times) to look into a young woman's confession to the murder of her family. As the daughter of a politician, Reiko is well aware of her required role: deference to men, and staying at home to raise her son. Reiko, however, has a mind and feisty spirit of her own.

As Sano and Reiko struggle with both court intrigue and cultural constraints, the murders continue and their separate investigations converge, leading to a deadly final battle that's guaranteed to leave readers breathless. Rowland does a great job of pulling the reader back in time; she manages to make the story seem both contemporary and historically accurate. The relationships and conflicts among the characters could take place as easily today as in feudal Japan, while the vivid descriptions of daily life lend fascinating color and reality to the story. I had no idea when I picked up this book that it's the 10th in a series – I'm going back to start reading the first nine in order.

Rae Helmsworth

THE BLOOD PRICE

Jon Evans

2005

ISBN: 0060782366

Dark Alley (trade paperback imprint of Harper Collins)

THE BLOOD PRICE is a book that can't be read slowly. Jon Evans writes suspense so well that you just can't put it down. DARK PLACES was a amazing debut, and I think this book is even better.

Using the premise of simple tourists being placed in jeopardy Evans takes us all over the world. A couple in Sarajevo end up trying to help a woman in trouble. This of course leads to all sorts of complications, not the least of which is the unsavory people this puts them in contact with. It's also a startling look at just what people are capable of when they are put in danger.

Evans pacing is like an avalanche, starting with a flurry and burying you if you can't keep up. The climax of this book is amazing and will leave you asking for more. Evans has a such a smooth flow to his writing that reading is effortless and the time flies by. I think he is one of the best new writers to come aong in recent years and he is definitely one to watch.

Jon

BLUE SPRINGS

Peter Rennebohm

October, 2005

ISBN 0-87839-227-0

North Star Press of St. Cloud

A boy and his dog go on a duck-hunting trip with the boy's father. The boy's 11, the dog's a natural duck hound, and the father's a drunk. Taffy the dog performs superbly, otherwise the trip is an embarrassing disaster.

After the trip back - part of which young Charlie Nash has to steer the car for his dad from the back seat - the boy decides to run away from home. So he bundles together his stuff, among which are some copper pennies bequeathed to him by his great uncle. Knowing that he'll need some traveling money, he takes the coins to a local dealer. At the dealer's shop, Charlie gets spooked and decides not to sell the coins after all. Turns out these copper pennies were minted in 1943, the year of the zinc penny, and are priceless.

Charlie's misgivings about the dealer prove to be accurate, and his running away proves to be timely. The dealer's a really bad man who murdered the former owner of the coin shop, and will stop at nothing to get the coins. He's "connected", and hire's another really bad man to find the boy and his treasure.

What follows is epic adventure, combining a cross-country runaway by Charlie and his dog, a ruthless villain giving chase, and the kindness of strangers. Above all, it's a heart-warming commentary on love and estrangement. Rennebohm initially considered marketing *Blue Springs* as a YA novel. Except perhaps for a few intense scenes (as with his previous book *French Creek* the author is particularly gifted in portraying evil), the book is appropriate for that age group. It's a well told and suspenseful story, with gorgeous cover art to boot.

Gary Shulze, *Once Upon a Crime*

BOOST

Steve Brewer

2005

ISBN 0972577653

Speck Press

Sam Hill steals classic cars - not your ordinary Toyotas or Fords, but cars like "a hot 1965 Thunderbird with a gold metal-flake paint job". He's been doing this for a while, and is pretty good at it. Unfortunately, this particular T-bird has a corpse in the trunk, which complicates Sam's life in no small manner. BOOST is, when one boils it down to basics, about two guys who get into a pissing contest to see whose dick (insert euphemism of choice here) is bigger. The DEA get involved, the local cops get involved, and the stakes just keep escalating.

BOOST is a quick read, because Brewer keeps the suspense ramped up. The characters are believable, the plot works, and the setting is a pleasure to read about when it's the dead of winter for most of the northern US. There is a certain amount of violence, but it isn't gratuitous (well, maybe a little) and considering the characters in BOOST, the violence is to be expected. People get hurt once a drug lord gets ticked off.

BOOST is a solid novel of suspense, with a spicy cast of characters in the middle of an escalating battle. One wonders at the end of BOOST where Sam and Co. are going, what the next chapter holds for them.

PJ Coldren

BOYOS

Richard Marinick

2005

ISBN: 1932112421 (Trade Paper)

Kate's Mystery Books/Justin Charles & Co.

BOYOS is a perfect example of why I read crimefiction. Now out in tradepaperback, there is no reason not to pick up this book.

BOYOS follows the story of Jack "Wacko" Curran and his brother Kevin, street gangsters working for Irish mob boss Marty Fallon. The Currans are ready to move up and beyond Fallon, and Fallon isn't having it. Penthouse Magazine called Jack "an existential street samurai" and I think that does a nice job of summing him up. The characters are not always easy to like, but they are fascinating and captivating. Marinick is an incredible writer with a background to give him the credibility to write what he does. While similarities to movies like Boondock Saints and State of Grace pop to mind, Marinick has a voice uniquely his own. This is a must read book. I can't wait to see what he does next.

Jon

CAPITOL MURDER

William Bernhardt

January 2006

ISBN: 0-345-45149-X

Ballantine Books

Oklahoma lawyer Ben Kincaid takes the office to Washington to defend the senior senator from his state. Senator Todd Glancy has been a naughty boy and a damning videotape of a female intern and himself has surfaced in D.C. and made its way to the airwaves still referred to as "news" channels. When Veronica Cooper winds up dead in Glancy's secret lair Ben's legal advice is sorely needed by the Senator but not always taken.

Ben and coworkers delve into Veronica's life and discover an underground world of loneliness, drugs and vampires in our nation's capitol. Who made the video and why did Ronnie have to die? Can politics and justice ever work together? Bernhardt takes this fantastical plot and runs with it in a way sure to appeal to the series' fans. In Washington there is no end to the wicked and Mr. Bernhardt introduces his readers to all of them in this tale.

CAPITOL MURDER reads well but there are far too many irons in the fire for the straight forward narrative to be the best form to tell this tale in. People coming to Kincaid for the first time may want index cards to keep it all straight. All in all it was a worthwhile evening of entertainment, if at times confusing.

Ruth

CEMETERY OF THE NAMELESS

Rick Blechta

2005

ISBN:1894917170

Napoleon Publishing/RendezVous Crime

Violin virtuoso Victoria "Tory" Morgan is lured away from her very successful European tour by Austrian aristocrat Baron Rudolph von Heislinger. He offers her a newly discovered concerto, almost certainly Beethoven's last work, in return for certain favors. At the end of an evening of fine dining, very good wines, and some great music, Baron Rudy makes Tory his offer. She declines. She wakes up next to a very dead Baron Rudy, the knife sticking out of his chest bearing her fingerprints. She runs, with the help of one of Baron Rudy's maids.

Rocky Lukesh is back in Canada, recuperating from an injury which is keeping him from playing his own instrument. When the news breaks that his wife is being sought for the murder, Rocky heads for Vienna, where he and Tory's accompanist Roderick Whitchurch try to figure out what happened.

There are several plausible suspects for the murder, all with motives and opportunity. Blechta is a musician; CEMETERY OF THE NAMELESS reads (to a non-musician like myself) with the same kinds of patterns and repeating themes one hears in pieces of music.

CEMETERY OF THE NAMELESS is a good mystery. There are moments when it feels like a thriller, in that the situation always gets worse. Blechta can ratchet up the suspense with the best of them. I recommend this, even to non-musicians. A very good read, with the added bonus of great atmosphere and compelling characters.

PJ Coldren

COVER YOUR ASSETS

Patricia Smiley

Nov 2005

ISBN: 0892960191

Mysterious Press

COVER YOUR ASSETS is another sophomore book in this issues batch of reviews. The second appearance of Tucker Sinclair is even more enjoyable than the first, which was really fun.

In this outing Tucker is trying to solve the murder of a Hollywood agent who seems to be pretty unlikable. Of course when Tucker was dating him in college he was a different man. So while her own life is going through some changes, including starting her own management consulting firm after leaving Aames and Associates and dealing with sharing a space with her flaky mother, she decides to look into the death of ex boyfriend Evan Brice. Life is anything but quiet for Tucker.

Smiley is such an engaging writer, she does characters brilliantly and her plotting is terrific. Smiley may be a new name in the mystery community, but I have the feeling she'll be around for a long time. She's made Hollywood even more entertaining than it already is. Who knew finances could be this fun?

Jon

THE CUTTING CREW

Steve Mosby

2005

ISBN:0752861166

Orion

University Secretary Steve Mosby hit the headlines in 2003 when his debut novel THE THIRD PERSON was launched as part of Orion's International New Blood series. The follow-up is a noir crime-fantasy, which could easily be labeled "Future-Noir". The novel's hero Martin is a former police officer [now single after his marriage failure] tracking his missing friend, Sean who vanished into the shadows of this future city. The city has districts named after animals [e.g. Wasp, Horse, Rabbit et. al]. Then bodies start turning up, and soon the vigilante activities of Martin and Sean and their cabal become revealed as a political conspiracy is unearthed which has been concealed within the shadows of the inter-district boxing tournament. This is crime fiction at the cutting edge and extremities of the genre; grim, brooding but not without black humour and insight – it is very different. If you enjoyed Paul Johnston's Sherlock Award-winning tales of future Edinburgh featuring the maverick investigator Quint Dalrymple, or the world of Michael Marshall's THE STRAW MEN, then Mosby's book is right up your alleyway but beware of some real viciousness ,you have been warned.
Ali Karim.

DEARLY DEVOTED DEXTER

Jeff Lindsay

2006

ISBN:075286677X

ORION Books (UK)

Lindsay's follow up to DARKLY DREAMING DEXTER, DEARLY DEVOTED DEXTER is a highly entertaining book. It's hard to describe a book that has the best elements of a thriller and humor, but I think that saying this is highly readable is an understatement.

Dexter still has his day job as a blood spatter analyst (and no, I don't know if that's a real profession!) but because of the suspicions of Sgt. Doakes Dex has had to reign in his extra curricular activities. And while not killing is making Dex a bit stir crazy things are complicated when he and Doakes have to work together on a case involving a nut job who is torturing people, for weeks at a time.

Lindsay is a terrific writer and this second in the series proves that the first was no fluke. The pacing is right on, and the characters are entertaining and engaging. I love books that are just a bit different and Lindsay along with Tim Dorsey have created what could be a whole new sub genre, the lovable serial killer, and I for one want more.

Jon

THE DEVIL'S HALO

Chris Fox

2005

ISBN: 0091794994 (UK)

Hutchinson (imprint of Randomhouse UK)

THE DEVIL'S HALO, Fox's second book, is an ass-kicking techno spy thriller.

Terry Weston works for the CIA primarily doing work that involves economics he does non-lethal hits that benefit the US. However in a changing European landscape things aren't what they once were. People Terry used to think of as friends are no long friendly. France and Russia are heading up a union to bring Europe back to the number one spot in the world power struggle. Added to this mix is a pentagon plan to deploy space weaponry and the European answer to it, the stakes are pushed higher. As Terry and his wife Maria go deeper and deeper trying to stop the play against the US they discover themselves running out of time and allies.

This book was a great way to spend a couple night reading. Fast paced isn't accurate enough to describe the action in this book, it would be like saying a Roll Royce is a nice car. This book rocked, it's engaging, edgy and entertaining as hell, exactly what a great thriller should be.

Jon

DEVILS IN THE MIRROR

Lesley Horton [Orion £18-99]

I thoroughly enjoyed Lesley Horton's previous British police procedurals SNARES OF GUILT and ON DANGEROUS GROUND which brought together DI Handford and DS Khalid Ali who worked the racially diverse West Yorkshire beat. Part of my enjoyment comes from her grasp and use of the English Language, and considering her teaching background this comes as little surprise. What does however come as a surprise is her grasp of the issues that confront the police in West Yorkshire, especially those related to the youth, and this is most evident in the third installment. This time around Handford and Ali are investigating the apparent ritual slaying of Black schoolgirl Shayla Roberts, a troubled girl who accused one of her teachers of sexual assault, but who was also found to be a pathological liar. The problems start to mount as Handford's wife works at the school that Shayla Roberts attended, while Ali is partnered with a racist colleague and then the story weaves through a succession of sub-plots and a large array of characters. Balancing the themes of racial conflict, religious fervour, child criminal gangs and identity, we get a very complex tale that stretches far from the druid altar that Shayla Roberts was found upon. If you like your police procedurals peppered with social realism then Horton's Mirror is a devilish tale well worth investigating
Ali Karim

THE DOOR TO BITTERNESS

Martin Limon

2005

ISBN: 1569474044

SOHO CRIME

Not since J. Robert Janes' St-Cyr and Kohler has a pair of seemingly incompatible investigating officers, Army CID cops George Sueno and Ernie Bascom, made such an effective and convincing team. Set in post-war Korea, this series deviates from the well-worn trial of police procedural by dint of its place, its time and Limon's talent for painting a picture.

Seoul, Korea, September 1974. Political and social landmines abound. Justice shines a different light on different classes, some left altogether in the dark. Working in a system that barely tolerates them, Sueno and Bascom enjoy a night off in a boozy haze. A beautiful blonde with dark, almond eyes sits across from Sueno. A bizarre smile permanently affixed on her face varies from inviting to crazy. Downing his drink, Sueno begins to feel the affects of the alcohol. His vision blurs. Stumbling outside, he finds himself in an alleyway. Punches are thrown. He's knocked out.

Morning. A knot on the head, body covered in cuts and bruises, Sueno awakes to discover a GI CID's worst nightmare. His gun and badge are gone. Not long after, both are used in a casino robbery. A woman is shot. The perps match Sueno and Bascom descriptions.

Facing very possible court marshal, they must find the men responsible. The locals won't talk. The Korean officials withhold information. And at every corner, the smiling blonde woman.

One of the best books of 2005, the series that began with JADE LADY BURNING, THE DOOR TO BITTERNESS is lean, empathic and strongly atmospheric. The reader can practically taste cheap wine, feel the dusty streets under foot and taste sin in the air. This book is well worth the four year wait.

Jennifer Jordan

ECHOES OF THE LOST ORDER

John J. Lamb

2005

ISBN: 1594143218

Five Star Publishing

Steve and Victoria MacKinnon have moved to smalltown Virginia from California, and their world has changed. But not all for the better. Having served as a homicide detective in San Diego, Steve is ready to be the Chief of a sleepy southern town. But of course, seeing how this is a mystery novel, that can't happen. Steve has a murder to solve, with the help of his forensic analyst wife, Victoria. Set in the midst of a civil war re-enactment town, this book offers humor, an intriguing, complex mystery, and strong characters. The MacKinnons are delightfully cynical, and their ability to stand up for themselves in a positive manner is refreshing and fun. Lamb offers interesting details of police work which add color and reality to the story, and it's obvious he has many of his own years in police work to keep things real. A strong debut novel, I hope this book is the first of many more MacKinnon stories.

Judy Clemens, author of THREE CAN KEEP A SECRET

EDGE OF EVIL

J.A. Jance

2005

ISBN 0060828412

Avon Books

J.A. Jance has not only a new book, but an interesting new character. Alison Reynolds is a TV Journalist whose high profile job comes to an abrupt end. When she is let go by the higher-ups, who are looking for a more youthful persona, Alison puts her life in review and finds it is coming up short. This gives her an opportunity to go back to her roots in Sedona, Arizona. She moves into a home near her Mother and takes a part time job waiting tables in her Mother's restaurant. It is easy to become reacquainted with the area, and in doing so she becomes involved with the unexplained death of a childhood friend. On the advice of her son she starts her own Blog giving her a chance to explain her feelings about her former employers. She is surprised by the response she gets not only from her fans, but people interested in the circumstances of her friend's death.

J.A. Jance is known for her best selling series featuring J.P. Davenport and Johanna Brady. Her new Protagonist can surely hold her own against these two.

Karen Hildebrand

FINAL LABYRINTH

Lance Rucker

2005

ISBN:096882742X

Lochenlode Publishers

Brandon Drake is on his way to Crete, tracking down a French con man who took money to invest in archeological sites. On the cruise ship to Crete, he meets Dr. Sarah Sanderson, a naive wealthy pretty young archeologist going to Crete to make her own success, one not bought by her father's money. Sparks fly. Signals are sent, wires are crossed. Is the big Greek man following Brandon or Sarah? Why is he following either of them?

The mysteries deepen once everyone gets to Crete. Dr. Pietro Perezia insists that his apprentices live like nuns, unless he is the man squiring them about town, as he does with Sarah. His wife Danna is a brassy bronzed California girl with an eye for the stud-muffins, and she considers Brandon to be right up her alley. In the meantime, Brandon is having no luck tracking down the Frenchman. There are strange things going on at the digs, the site believed to be the castle of King Minos. There is a detailed retelling of the Minotaur myth, which is relevant to the plot.

FINAL LABYRINTH is a thriller. We know who the bad guys are from the start. What we don't know is what nefarious activities are going on, and what the timeline is. While FINAL LABYRINTH would certainly benefit from some judicious editing, it is an interesting book. Brandon Drake is definitely a

human hero, flaws and all, but the kind of guy good to have around when things get dicey. Or romantic.

PJ Coldren

THE FINISHING SCHOOL

Michele Martinez
January 1, 2006
ISBN: 0060724005
William Morrow

It's 2 a.m. on a cold winter morning, the week before Christmas and you're called to a crime scene on Park Avenue. Two young women, both students at an exclusive Upper East Side School are found dead under bizarre circumstances. You've got to leave your 1-year daughter with your philandering ex-husband while you go to investigate. And your tyrannical boss is breathing down your neck for answers. Such is the life of Melanie Vargas, federal prosecutor.

At first it appears that Whitney Seward and Brianna Meyer's deaths are the result of accidental heroin overdoses, but when things just don't add up, foul play is suspected. In addition, Carmen Reyes, a fellow student who lives in the basement of the building with her dad, the building super, has disappeared. Unbeknownst to anyone, Carmen is being held captive by a nameless assailant. As Melanie struggles to get a handle on the case, an unexpected problem turns up in the form of Dan O'Reilly, a cop who's also been assigned to the case. Although Dan makes Melanie weak in the knees, they recently ended their budding romance. Melanie blamed bad timing, Dan blamed Melanie and they parted unpleasantly.

Before long Melanie has lots of leads but no clear motive. Is Carmen's father telling the truth about what time Mr. Seward, a senatorial candidate, showed up that night? Did Whitney's alcoholic mother see or hear anything that can help the investigation? What are the school officials trying to hide with their evasive answers to Melanie's questions? Where is Carmen and how does her disappearance factor into the case? How intimate was Whitney's relationship with a notorious drug dealer? And last but not least, does Melanie have the strength of will to keep her mind on her work and not on Dan's strapping body and manly ways?

The ride is fast and furious as Melanie uses brainpower, know-how and some daredevil tactics to get to the bottom of the shady goings on and solve the case.

Jacqueline Rice

FREEZE ME TENDER
Michael A Black
Jan 2006
ISBN: :1594144710

Five Star First Edition

Michael Black keeps me guessing. His first two books, part of a PI series in Chicago were excellent. He followed those up with a caper book about a bank robbery in Chicago. In FREEZE ME TENDER he has shifted gears seamlessly to a story featuring a reporter and a dead rock star. Black has a natural style to his writing that makes reading time fly by. He's a born story teller, and becoming one of the most versatile writers I know.

Harry Bauer has seen better times. His wife is divorcing him and marrying his boss, his writing career has stagnated and he's trying to stay sober. What better time to go to Vegas? Which is where he ends up while working on a story about a dead rock star who bears a strange similarity to one Elvis Presley. It's the anniversary of Colton Purcell's death and a big celebration is planned in the city of a thousand lights. At the same time Purcell's widow and daughter are fighting over her upcoming nuptials to a pop star on the rise. The upcoming wedding is of particular interest to a mobster who has his hook's into the popstar's manager. Because of this there is a hitman with a bad disposition trying to make things fall in the right way so the manager and thus the mobster end up with loads of dough. Sound confusing? Not the way Black tells it in this great tale.

For me one of Michael Black's real strengths is his characters. He's not writing characterizations, he's writing about people, the way they really are. He writes with his soul and his heart and it shows in every piece of dialogue and in every description in the book. His books leave me wishing they were longer, and this one is no exception. I want more Harry Bauer stories.

Part caper, part whodunit, part thriller, I think this is Black's best work to date. If books were cars, this would be a Jaguar, smooth, sleek and perfection. FREEZE ME TENDER should be on everybody's must read list. This will easily be on my list of favorite books of the year.

Jon Jordan

FREEZEOUT
Rick Gadziola
2005
ISBN: 1550226894
ECW Press

FREEZEOUT is the second appearance of Jake Morgan, ex-cop gambler. His adventures in this book center around missing funds belonging to the mob that have been unaccounted for going on fifty years. He has also been asked by his new boss to show his niece the town. The fact that she is too young for him doesn't stop her from making advances that Jake just doesn't need. Will Jake keep Angelica entertained without making his boss mad? Will he track down the missing money linked to the disappearance of Carmine Bonello? Will he avoid getting killed? Jake has his hands full.

Gadziola, a professional poker player himself, writes an incredibly authentic and entertaining book. Morgan is a great character and very easy to like. The story moves along nicely

with a wonderful sense of timing. In the big deck of books I read every year, this one is an ace.

Jon

THE GIRL WITH THE LONG GREEN HEART

Lawrence Block
November 2005
ISBN: 0-8439-5585-6
Hard Case Crime

THE GIRL WITH THE LONG GREEN HEART is a hardboiled classic originally written in 1965. Block writes a great classic tale of grifters on the make. Johnny Hayden and Doug Rance are good at what they do, and what they do is cheat people for a living. With the help of a femme fatale they set their sights on one last score, real estate genius Wallace Gunderman. But as things often do in these tales, something goes wrong.

Block writes characters better than almost anyone in the writing business, and this book proves it. Hayden and Rance should be people we just can't like simply because of what they do, but by the end of the book you are rooting for them to succeed. This is a true noir book. Don't miss it.

Jon

GREATEST HITS
Edited by Robert J Randisi
2005
ISBN: 0786715812
Carroll & Graf

There seems to be more anthologies coming out than ever before. It's hard to keep up with them some times. Well, you owe it to yourself to find this one and buy it. The running theme in GREATEST HITS is hitmen. Some of the authors involved are Lawrence Block, Max Allan Collins, Lee Child, Christine Matthews, Jeffery Deaver and Barbara Seranella. I especially enjoyed Ed Gorman's A TRIP HOME and John Harvey's SNOW SNOW SNOW. The whole collection is terrific and this is definitely a must have book. Randisi is the true master of putting together an anthology.

Jon

THE GUTTER AND THE GRAVE

Ed McBain
December 2005
ISBN: 0-8439-5587-2
Hard Case Crime

McBain is a legend in the mystery world, having written over fifty books just in ones series. This is a book he wrote under another name back in 1958. Before his death he re-edited the book and changed it back to his original vision for this version.

Matt Cordell is a PI and in New York. He is asked to take a case by an old friend, and since losing his wife he doesn't have much on his plate, he takes the case. Originally taken as a favor the case takes on a life of it's own as Cordell wades

through lies and women. Murder, dames and true noir fill this book. It's fast paced and truly wonderful. McBain is the undisputed master.

Jon

I Right the Wrongs
Dylan Schaffer
2005
ISBN: 1582345066
Bloomsbury

Like many of us, all Gordon Seegerman wants to do is survive his workday so he can escape the confines of his office and pursue his real interests. Gordy's days are spent in the Santa Rita (a very thinly disguised Oakland), California public defender's office. His real life centers around his Barry Manilow "homage" band, the Mandys - hence the title of this book. Unfortunately, murder keeps getting in Seegerman's way.

"I Right the Wrongs" is the follow up to "Misdemeanor Man", Dylan Schaffer's excellent first novel featuring Gordy Seegerman, the underachieving lawyer. (Schaffer knows whereof he writes; he's practiced criminal appellate law in California for over 15 years.)

In "I Right the Wrongs", Gordy is forced to set aside his band's preparation for a gig in Las Vegas, perhaps for Manilow himself!, to deal with a high profile case of drug possession. Marcus Manners, a local high school athletic hero, is arrested for dogsnapping a rival team's mascot. The fact that there's a little mysterious pot in the car shouldn't cause too much trouble in this basic 'misdo' case. But Gordon draws an insane judge. The alumni of Manners' rival school, many of whom are involved in the local legal system, are not interested in letting things slide. And then, the wife of the mascot's owner is killed and Marcus is arrested for the murder. Thus, Gordy is thrust into the spotlight - much against his will.

Because Dylan Schaffer writes with a light touch, it would be easy to dismiss this book as simply a slapstick fluff piece. But it's not. There is, of course, a lot of humor in "I Right the Wrongs". Much of it, though, is gallows humor. Gordon Seegerman has lost all his illusions and most of his dreams have faded and died; he's using his wry wit and his music to give his life some color and meaning. And Schaffer deals with a number of very dark issues: racism, corruption, and the difficulty of dealing with aging family. This book is part deftly plotted murder mystery, part legal thriller, and very highly recommended.

Rae Helmsworth

THE LIVING ROOM OF THE DEAD

Eric Stone
2005
ISBN:0765312972
Forge

THE LIVING ROOM OF THE DEAD is a well-written, suspenseful, enthralling, and very uncomfortable book to read. It takes us into the world of the adult sex trade in Macau and Hong Kong. Journalist Ray Sharp is asked to do a favor for an relative of a co-worker: is there a way to get a Russian contract prostitute out of her contract so that she can marry the wealthy British lawyer who has fallen in love with her? This simple favor pulls Sharp into a milieu with which he has a passing acquaintance, partly because of his ongoing affair with a former prostitute.

Sharp is not prepared for the levels of degradation and violence which permeate this sub-culture. He travels in and around Macau, Hong Kong, and then to Vladivostok, tracking down the Russian Mafiosos who control the trade in Macau.

THE LIVING ROOM OF THE DEAD will remind readers of Andrew Vachss, both in content and in quality of writing. The characters, for the most part, are not bad people (with some notable exceptions) but the situations in which they find themselves, either by choice or by happenstance, are not liable to bring out the best in a person. Sharp is a reluctant white knight, but keeps soldiering on where most would not. Not a cheerful book, but a compelling book. Gritty and violent, difficult to put down even in the ugly parts, THE LIVING ROOM OF THE DEAD is a fine first novel inspired by a true story.

PJ Coldren

A LONG SHADOW
Charles Todd
January, 2006
ISBN: 0-06-078671
Morrow

When the first Inspector Rutledge novel, A TEST OF WILLS came out I was immediately drawn into Todd's beginning of the post modern world at a time when you still needed to crank automobiles. Rutledge is a damaged hero, an officer in the first world war, he came home scarred but still a very efficient policeman. What made the first novel truly compelling for me was the Todd variation on Watson. Rutledge you see, has a voice in his head. Hammish, the heroic soldier under his watch whom the Inspector shot rather than see suffer. Even as I read the book I wondered at how such a conceptual series could possibly maintain itself. Seven books into the series I'm beginning to suspect my concerns were a bit premature. A LONG SHADOW opens on New Year's Eve. Rutledge is willingly coerced to a party featuring food, conversation, and a psychic. And with relief he flees. A LONG SHADOW holds within its pages two tales. The first is the shooting by bow & arrow of a rural constable. The second is the stalking of our protagonist Ian. Rutledge must solve the first and survive the second.

As in all well executed plots the two stories both diverge and intersect. The "mystery" is another straight-forward and traditional whodunit. The Todd signature is the ease and simplicity with which they entertain their reader and book after book manage to say something about the consequences of war. 1919 or 2006, the most immediate consequences of war are highly personal but never the same for any two people.

The story of Constable Hensley will entertain the Todds' many readers. The ramifications of warfare will make you think. Another terrific addition to an always great series. I'm waiting for number eight.

Ruth

OVER AND UNDER
Mat Coward
November 2005
ISBN 1594142742
Five Star Press

DI Don Packham and DS Frank Mitchell find themselves dealing with one of the oldest crime clichés in the book when they stumble across the body in the library. But this body, it seems, may be the victim of political machinations as the two detectives find themselves involved in the politically divided local community who have found themselves radically split over the proposed closure of the library.

The Don and Frank mysteries seem like almost traditional mysteries. Light and frothy, they deal with typically English eccentricities and fascinations. The previous adventure, *Open and Under*, dealt with death at a cricket match. *Open and Closed* deals not only with death in the library but local politics and class veneer. What marks this book, and indeed Coward's other Don and Frank mysteries, out from the rest of the genteel English copper pack is Coward's excellent sense of humour and his endearingly sympathetic characters who often surprise us by breaking free from what appears to be obvious stereotype.

Open and Closed is an entertaining, light and very funny take on the traditional English mystery. Coward's breezy style guides the reader willingly through the twists and turns of this clever, witty novel.

Jacqueline Rice

BENEATH A PANAMANIAN MOON
David Terrenoire
2005
ISBN: 0312321317
St. Martin's Minotaur

David Terrenoire has written a terrific debut thriller. His protagonist is John Harper, a former spy turned Washington D.C. piano player who makes 900 dollars a night entertaining Washington's political society. He likes his work, and he especially likes being retired from the spy game.

But John's former mentor, a handler named Smith, has other ideas. After persuading Harper to do him a favor, Smith makes it impossible for John to refuse just one more assignment: going under cover in Panama to keep an eye on a 'situation'. A band of mercenaries is operating out of a hotel there, and Smith wants someone inside to keep an eye on things and pass along any interesting information. So Harper finds himself exactly where he doesn't want to be – in

Panama, in the middle of a very nasty scene. There are mysterious, deadly things happening, and some really sinister people at the center of it all. Harper knows that something very bad is imminent, and it's on him to stop it, if only he can.

Terrenoire writes about espionage and its government-related shenanigans with authority; a reader gets the very strong impression that he's walked a mile in Harper's shoes. The story is action-packed with a great twisty plot, and John Harper is an engaging protagonist who has no illusions about himself; he's rather bitter, and has a wonderful sense of cynical humor. As the story unfolds and races toward its edge-of-your-seat climax, you'll find yourself hoping against hope that he'll survive -survival is by no means a forgone conclusion – because John Harper is a character we'd very much like to see again.

Rae Helmsworth

PARADISE LOST
Taffy Cannon
2005
ISBN:1880284804
Perseverance Press

Twenty-one year old Holly Constantine's idea of fun is reading historical works while lounging in her favorite pair of sweatpants and relishing a bowl of peach ice cream. She's only come to Paradise Plaza, a ritzy health spa in Santa Barbara, in order to satisfy her domineering mother. During an early morning hike into the mountains, Holly and another guest of the spa are pepper-sprayed, tied up and whisked away by strange assailants.

Before long, an obscure organization called Parks for the People posts a ransom demand on the Paradise Plaza website. The kidnappers' instructions, while peculiar, are clearly spelled out: three public parks must be developed in three separate California towns. Recovering quickly from the initial shock of her daughter's abduction, Holly's mother, Connie, shifts into high gear. An extremely competent and high-powered entertainment lawyer, Connie will stop at nothing to ensure that her daughter is returned unharmed. To that end, Connie takes charge of raising the \$8 million stipulated by the kidnappers to fund the park "projects." At the same time, the FBI, local cops and the prying media all struggle to hold on to their turf as the race to find the perpetrators and their victims heats up.

As the narrative shifts from various third person points of view, we learn that underneath Connie's tough exterior, there may beat a genuine heart. We also learn that at least one of Holly's captors is genuinely concerned about her welfare, and that of her "roommate." Vanessa Wyatt, a less than talented television actress, is as uninhibited as Holly is shy and not above using her sexuality to suck up (no pun intended) to a very willing abductor. The fact that Vanessa is blindfolded and tied up does little to cramp her style.

When the bad guys disagree about tactics and strategies, their scheme quickly unravels. As the situation becomes

increasingly dangerous, the usually timid Holly is forced take considerable risks in order to save herself.

Taffy Cannon describes this book as her lucky thirteenth novel, and I agree; it's a real winner. The book's characters are multi-dimensional; no one's perfect and the criminals' motives and personality traits aren't what the reader might expect. Cannon skillfully describes the complexities of relationships especially that of the introverted Holly and her go-getter mother as well as the unspoken alliance that forms between Holly and one of her captors. The final test of a good book is the author's ability to tie up loose ends believably, which Cannon does with ease. The bittersweet tone of the epilogue also rings true. All in all, a smart, funny and intriguing book.

Jacqueline Rice

PERFECT DARK: INITIAL VECTOR
Greg Rucka
October, 2005
ISBN: 0765315718
Tor

Thank you Greg Rucka. Let me paint a picture for you people. You've had one of those unsatisfying work days.... the kind that makes you want to "stick it to the man". Your energy is non-existent. You have the energy left to a.) open a beer or b.) click the remote. Reading? Yeah right. Enter PERFECT DARK:INITIAL VECTOR, Red Bull to the nth power. Greg Rucka has written a book based on a video game with great success. Meet Joanna Dark, a bounty hunter for the 21st century mystery reader. Morelli who? This dame is Ranger on steroids. Rucka is for female what Crais is for kids. Nobody does it better.

I'm addicted. Rucka's story of a world ruled by and a population manipulated by giant corporations is everything an evening of entertainment should be. Datadyne is bad. Their secrets so horrible they will do anything to protect them. And their competition, they want to expose DataDyne's flaws while stealing their technology. The one institution standing between the world's people and the competing corporations is the Carrington Institute. Carrington's most lethal weapon is Joanna Dark. Joanna will play by Carrington's rules when they're convenient and go her own way when necessary. A recent pandemic in Canada will lead to much worse if unstoppable. Back room agreements, corporate espionage, unending treasuries, and multinational armies are no match for Joanna.

This is a femme the boys will lust after and the gals will cheer for and visa-versa. Kick-ass has a new pseudonym, it's perfect. Darko.

Ruth

PRAYERS FOR THE ASSASSIN
Robert Ferrigno
February 2006
ISBN: 0-7432-7289-7
Scribner

Welcome to America in the year 2040.

There's no need to worry about the war on terror anymore, because, well, we lost. Things aren't all bad in the Islamic States of America, though. We still have the Super Bowl, though it's played in Khomeini Stadium, and there are midday prayers instead of a halftime show.

In *Prayers for the Assassin*, Robert Ferrigno gives us a nightmare, a there-but-for-the-grace-of-Homeland-Security-go-us scenario, that would give even Tom Clancy the willies: back in 2015, Israel hit NYC, D.C. and Mecca with simultaneous suitcase nuke blasts, and 25 years later, the fallout has left much of the U.S. under Islamic rule, save for a rebel Bible Belt nation. But was Israel to blame after all? That's up to former Muslim fedayeen Rakkin Epps and his historian girlfriend, Sarah Dougan, to discover. If they live long enough to sort it out.

With *Prayers*, Ferrigno is working on a wider canvas than ever before, and the view is just breathtaking. On one page you'll learn how to kill someone with a pair of chopsticks; on another, you'll receive an insight into radical Islam that you don't see on CNN. Ferrigno's vision of a near-future America is disturbing because it seems so possible, an entirely plausible sequence of disastrous events born out of today's headlines. Everyone who knows Ferrigno's work says he's long overdue to break out huge; if this book doesn't do it, I say we start talkin' jihad. Check out the website at www.prayersfortheassassin.com

Duane Swierczynski

PURSUIT
Luiz Alfredo Garcia-Roza
February 2006
ISBN: 0-8050-7439-0
Henry Holt

Garcia-Roza is a name often murmured among mystery fans with something akin to awe. The translation of his prose into English remains lyrical, adding a metre rarely found in any novel. With the introduction of policeman Inspector Ezpinosa, the stalwart upholder of law and order whose dream is to run a bookstore Garcia-Roza came up with the perfect formula to entrance the American mystery reader. Only there is nothing formulaic about these books. The latest, *PURSUIT* adds to the mystique of this character and the writer who has presented him to the reading public.

On vacation and bored Ezpinosa agrees to meet with psychiatrist Dr. Nesse. The gentleman's daughter has been kidnapped by one of his patients and he'd like the good Inspector's help... off the record. A second phone call finds the daughter safe at home, but this story is only at its start. An eerie and malignant narrative unfolds as Ezpinosa watches the devastating destruction of a family due to madness that cannot be contained.

PURSUIT is one of those books it's hard to run away from. Lyrical it well may be but the book may well leave you wanting a scrub brush and lye soap to wash away the truth the author

has put to the page. *PURSUIT* is my first delightfully disturbing read of 2006 and I'm sure will remain on my radar throughout the year. It is brilliant, haunting and unforgettable.
Ruth

RAINING CATS & DOGS
Laurien Berenson
September 2005
ISBN:0758208138
Kensington Books

Melanie and Sam have finally gotten married, which is a wonderful thing, except that five Standard Poodles, a pre-teen boy child and two adults makes for some crowded conditions in a small house. In order to get out just a little, and do something dog-related which is at the same time NOT connected to controlling Aunt Peg, Melanie takes Faith, one of her poodles, to Obedience Class. The class ropes her into going with them to a local retirement community, and on Melanie's first visit, Mary Livingston is murdered. Mary is the great aunt of Paul Lennox, one of the class members. He nudges Melanie about investigating the murder; Aunt Peg seconds the motion. The chase is on, in a casual sort of way.

Laurien Berenson has a very readable style; the story moves right along, the characters are interesting people, and her plots continue to surprise me. There is a nice sub-plot involving a new next-door neighbor who wanders around in peignoirs and has seven cats. The glow that clings to newly-weds is ably demonstrated without becoming cloying. Readers of Ms. Berenson will find this up to her usual standards; new readers ought to be tempted to read the backlist.

PJ Coldren

SEASIDE
Scarlett Thomas
2005
ISBN: 193211209X
Kate's Mystery Books/Justin, Charles & Co.

What a treat it was to read this book. Lily Pascale, a literature lecturer/wanna-be PI, takes over the pages as a refreshing, interesting character, and I believed in her from page one. The English setting is both lovely and eerie, Pascale's relationships warm but complex, and her personality real and very likable. The mystery itself, a knot of twins, deceit, and intrigue, pulled me in, and I read straight through with unflagging interest. A mystery with twins, you say? Sure, it's been done before. But not quite like this. Pick up Thomas's novel of beautiful prose, and you'll find much to keep you reading. Haunting and somewhat dark, this story will linger in your thoughts and make you want to pick up more of Thomas's work. Justin, Charles & Co. is to be commended for bringing Thomas to us across the Atlantic.

Judy Clemens, author of the Stella Crown mystery series

SHADOW MAN
James D. Doss

October 2005
ISBN 031234052
St Martin's/Minotaur

It's hard to put down a really good book. A book with characters you enjoy and would like to meet at their favorite café and enjoy their talk over coffee. That's why I like to read straight through a series of books. I was totally wrapped up in James D. Doss's series featuring Charlie Moon, an investigator for the Ute Tribe in Southern Colorado. Add his elderly aunt who is a Ute Shaman and his good friend Scott Parris, a sheriff in a nearby town, and you have a book worth spending time reading.

SHADOW MAN came out just as I finished the last book in the series and it certainly lived up to the reputation of his previous books. Charlie has moved up into a ranches/owner position. Aunt Daisy is living with Charlie, temporarily, and getting into her own kind of trouble. Scott has a new murder case. The problem with this case is a man who claims to be the intended victim, and who swears he has had near death experiences before. In each instance his "doppelganger" made an appearance. Scott turns Mr. Blinkoe over to Charlie, who takes him on as a client. When the killer strikes again, he gets the job done right and Charlie's new client is dead. Now Charlie and Scott are joined by Lisa McTeague, the latest FBI agent in the area, who is looking into Mr. Blinkoe for other reasons. Things get twisted and interesting before everything moves to a successful conclusion.

Reading any of the Doss books is a good thing, but you really can't go wrong with Shadow MAN.

Karen Hildebrand

SIRIUS ABOUT MURDER
Sue Owens Wright
January 2006
ISBN 0-59414-364-1
Five Star

Even people who don't read mysteries are aware of the several series featuring cats. Cats who travel, cats who assist their detective owners, cats who crack jokes, and so on.

Dogs as sidekicks are under represented in suspense fiction, but Wright aims to fill the void with her series featuring Elsie MacBean and her basset hound Cruiser. SIRIUS ABOUT MURDER is a light easy read, set in Lake Tahoe Wyoming.

As the townspeople debate the wisdom of dedicating a plot of undeveloped land for a dog park where canines can romp off leash and where their owners can visit and swap stories, an important local figure is found murdered and the future of the park land project placed in jeopardy. As events unfold, more citizens are injured, dogs are found badly wounded and a collection of local eccentrics are suspected in turn.

Eventually all becomes clear and the evil doer arrested. Wright includes a lot of information about various dog breeds, important principles of dog ownership, and a heartfelt portrayal of the bond between persons and their pets.

Recommended for readers of cozies.

Woodstock

SMOKED
Patrick Quinlan
March 2006
ISBN 07553 2825
Hodder Headline

Smoked is a cool as ice debut from Patrick Quinlan that calls on the spirit of caper cool to tell the story of Smoke Dugan, an ex-crook trying to live the quiet life and maybe even settle down with his girl. Of course, as anyone who's ever read a book by Elmore Leonard will tell you, these kind of plans never go well. It's not long before Smoke's past is catching up with him and threatening to destroy the peaceful life he's created for himself.

Quinlan gives us an impressive cast of crooks, from scammers and wheel-men to hard-ass man-mountain thugs, who are as handy with a cool quip as they are with a fist or a gun. With Smoke's sexy-as-hell, karate-kicking girlfriend making sure the ladies are more than mere window dressing to this smart, exciting thriller and Smoke himself providing the laid-back cool, this is a smooth and assured debut. It may not be the most original plot under the sun but Smoked is a compulsively readable, confidently cool tale of criminal shenanigans that should satisfy those in need of a fix between novels by the likes of Elmore Leonard or Charlie Stella.

Ali Karim

SOLOMON VS LORD
Paul Levine
October 2005
0440242738
Bantam Books

Victoria Lord is an up-tight young prosecutor, just fired from her job as an ADA, engaged to a pillar of the community. She finds herself the temporary partner of Steve Solomon, defending Katrina Barksdale in a sensational murder trial. The case has everything: money, kinky sex, drugs . . . well, no rock-and-roll, but everything else.

Victoria and Steve are not well-suited as partners; his tendency to wing it offends her orderly and structured sensibilities and her moral rectitude flies in the face of "Solomon's First Law: When the law doesn't work . . . work the law."

Then there is the little problem of the sexual attraction they feel for each other. Steve has a nephew with a strange disability, which precludes any serious emotional attachment right now, while Steve is fighting for custody of Bobby. Victoria is engaged to Bruce Bigby, avocado king, rising real estate entrepreneur, vegan, and businesslike in bed.

SOLOMON VS LORD is an engaging yet schizoid book. Victoria is awfully unsure of herself early in the book, but

improves by leaps and bounds. Solomon is a romantic in shark's clothing. The trial preparations and legal shenanigans are handled well; the romance between the two is almost boilerplate Harlequin. Not bad, but nothing new to readers of romance fiction. There are chunks of dialogue which are humorous enough that they almost demand to be read out loud to someone. This is a very good first novel; one hopes for many more to come.

PJ Coldren

SORROW'S ANTHEM

Michael Koryta
February, 2006
ISBN 0-312-34470
Thomas Dunne Books

When TONIGHT I SAID GOOD-BYE came out I went in cold. I knew that Mr. Koryda had written perhaps the strongest P.I. debut novel in twenty years. I did not know how young he was. With SORROW'S ANTHEM his age is a moot point. As solid as Koryta's debut was, his sophomore outing exceeds any expectations I had and is an even more powerful book than the first.

He has studied this genre, that or he's been given an unusual gift. The resulting series featuring Lincoln Perry and Joe Pritchard. is already atop my must read pile. The young hothead and the seasoned vet. Former police and current Private investigators, this pair works with Cleveland police in a way that stands out in the P.I. genre.

When Lincoln's boyhood friend Ed Gradduk finds trouble Lincoln runs to his old neighborhood in an attempt to help. A few cryptic comments and Ed is dead, just another stain on urban asphalt. From here Koryta unfolds a story with more sides than a Rubik cube.

The book is decidedly Lincoln's. His friend, his past, his quest for a truth that he can accept. The investigation belongs to both of our detectives, Lincoln running point with Joe coming in for the sold two pointers.

The story is a tale of misspent chances, corrupt police, and one neighborhood's dirty secret. As the pair gets closer to the truth buildings burn and people die. Will the truth avenge a neighborhood or destroy it.

The decision is yours.

Ruth

SUCH A KILLING CRIME

Robert Lopresti
2005
ISBN: 0972370633
Kearney Street Books

While SUCH A KILLING CRIME is in fact a mystery, I saw it a more of a look at a time in history when things were a bit calmer, right before the Vietnam era. It is steeped heavily in the Folk Music Culture of the early sixties and in New York. It's a real great look at Greenwich Village in 1963.

Joe Talley works at the Riding Beggar, a coffee house that features live music, folk music to be exact. The story revolves around a missing demo tape, and it might be the reason one

performer was mugged and another was killed. Joe Talley decides to look into what is going on.

Lopresti writes with a love for his subject and characters. This was an enjoyable book and a real nice change of pace for me. I would recommend this to people who like traditional mysteries or books that do a great job with a period from the past.

Jon

THE SUMMER SNOW

Rebecca Pawel
February 2006
ISBN: 1-56947-408-7
Soho crime

Carlos Tejada y Leon. The name rolls off the tongue. So does this follow-up to DEATH OF A NATIONALIST. Tejada is called home to Granada by the Guardia but it his father pulling the strings. An elderly Aunt has died after a decade of thinking someone was out to get her. A missing will and cyanide in the dinner wine lead one to believe that she was right. As Tejada mediates between his own household and the rest of the family he follows the trail of Aunt Rosalia's final days. The scenery is beautiful, family relationships complex and Tejada's skills as a member of Spain's Guardia will all be needed in a tale that begins at the very beginning.... The Spanish Civil War. Here's hoping Pawel continues to find more for Carlos to say.

Ruth

SUPPER WITH THE CRIPPENS

David James Smith
2005
ISBN:0752867423
Orion

Anyone one who reads or follows classic true crime stories is familiar with Dr. Hawley Crippen who murdered his wife and fled England, finally being arrested on a ship arriving in Canada. Well SUPPER WITH THE CRIPPENS bring to light new evidence which may change some thoughts on the motives and exactly who was guilty of what.

Smith has obviously done a great deal of research and his findings are believable. And while no one will ever know for sure, this could be the final answer. Either way it's a captivating book and an wondrous look at one of the most scandalous murders of it's day.

Jon

SWEETIE'S DIAMONDS

Raymond Benson
Feb 2005
Five Star
ISBN: 1594144559

After writing the James Bond books from 1996 to 2003, Raymond Benson tackled non-Bond fiction with EVIL HOURS, FACE BLIND, TOM CLANCY'S SPLINTER CELL and TOM

CLANCY'S SPLINTER CELL OPERATION BARRACUDA.
Yes, thrillers are his specialty. Fans of the James Bond books will recognize the style. As do I.

In SWEETIE'S DIAMONDS, Diane Boston, winner of a Teacher of the Year award and mother of 13-year-old David who suffers from Marfan syndrome, is living a mundane day to day life and that's just the way she wants it. When a videotape surfaces that seemingly depicts Boston as Lucy Luv, a hard core porn star from the late '70s that mundane life comes to an abrupt end.

Suddenly her job is on the line, her ex-husband has filed for custody of her son and a man she visits once a month to sell a diamond from her secret stash is brutally murdered. That's right. Diamonds. From her secret stash. You see, Boston has a past she'd rather not talk about. A past that is slowly catching up with her in the form of a thug named Emo Tuff.

If you enjoy Benson's James Bond books, you may well enjoy SWEETIE'S DIAMONDS. With what sounds like a fantastic plot and strong characters including the brave but frail young David, Benson could well have risen above the style he's written for years. Instead, the book reads just like the Bond movies, sans the banter. Although fast paced, the book tries too hard to kick ass and take names with a defense expert protagonist it's hard to warm up to and a comic book bad guy. I was left shaken but not stirred.

Jennifer Jordan

TABULA RASA
Shelly Reuben
August 2004
ISBN: 015101079X
Harcort

TABULA RASA is not really a mystery, although there are elements of mystery in it. It's not really a thriller, or a police procedural, or a romantic suspense, either. But it's a great read.

Billy Nightingale and his brother-in-law Sebastian Bly investigate a suspicious fire in which two children die. They determine that it was an arson fire, and the woman who set it goes to prison. Sebastian and his wife Annie raise the one child who survived the fire.

The mystery and the police procedural elements occur in the beginning, when Bly and Nightingale figure out that the fire is arson, who set it, and why. The romantic suspense element, which is very low key, involves Billy Nightingale and a relatively minor character who appears fairly late in the book; this woman becomes a pivotal character in the life of Meredith Bly, the rescued child. The thriller portion begins when the arsonist is released from prison.

Shelly Reuben writes what she knows, so the reader always learns a lot when reading anything Reuben writes. TABULA RASA is no exception. This is a quick, enlightening, engaging book with much to recommend it even if it is difficult to

categorize. Fans of Reuben's work won't be disappointed; new readers will want to track down her other works.

PJ Coldren

THE TEMPLAR LEGACY
Steve Berry
Feb 2006
ISBN: 0345476158
BALLENTINE BOOKS

We've all heard tell of the great wealth of the Knights Templar, hidden during their dissolution. Legends abound as to the final resting place of their untold wealth and the possibilities of knowledge kept by Church decree. THE TEMPLAR LEGACY addresses this mystery in all its complexities and possibilities. It is an action packed historical, and as at odds as that may seem, the tome holds it true.

This once upon a time begins with the violent death by Spanish Inquisition's vast knowledge of torture committed upon the body of the twenty-second master of Poor Fellow-Soldiers of Christ and the Temple Solomon. Events that will occur hundreds of years from said Master Jacques de Molay's demise are set in place.

As a one time operative for the U.S. Justice Department, Cotton Malone has taken refuge in the life of as a seller of antiquated books. He is far from his ex-wife and son and his brief life of violence and intrigue as a government spy.

Walking through the streets of Copenhagen to meet with his former supervisor, Stephanie Nelle, Malone's attention is taken by a man who appears to be stalking her. Suddenly, the man snatches her purse and runs off. Malone runs after him. He catches up with him after spiraling upward through the Round Tower. Before the man jumps from its platform roof, he screams one word – beauseant – then falls to his death.

This is the first piece in a puzzle that began hundreds of years ago; one that has two men willing to do anything to solve it. Its completion could change history and put a ruthless man in power.

Begrudgingly, Malone is pulled in, forgotten instincts coming to the fore as he and Nelle sort fact from fiction in a race to find the forgotten Templar treasure.

In THE TEMPLAR LEGACY, his fourth book, Berry has truly matched fascinating historical mystery with well-written, fast paced adventure. This is not a dry or ridiculous book riding on the coattails of Dan Brown's success. Berry is a well researched and skilled story teller who's work speaks for itself.

Jennifer Jordan

TROUBLE IS WHAT I DO
Rob Kantner
2005
ISBN: 0809511568
Wildside Press

In a world that is far too rubbed, scrubbed, moussed, buffed and polished, Ben Perkins is the real deal: a blue collar guy with a tough, take-no-prisoners attitude and the moxie to back it up. Rob Kantner has written nine novels, and something like twenty short stories, featuring the Detroit based PI. "Trouble is What I Do" is a Kantner-edited collection of the best of the short stories. Although it's an anthology it reads like a novel, because the stories trace Ben's life. We see his maturation, and the appearance and disappearance of several supporting characters, who, by the way, are fully developed with their own quirky personalities and intriguing back stories. The stories themselves are so well plotted and so fully characterized that you forget you're reading a short story; each one is full of sly humor and snarky twists and turns.

Perkins is not a particularly nice guy but he is principled, and he won't compromise his principles for anyone or anything. He lives by a very simple code, taught to him by his autoworker father: "finish the job" - and the implied, "or die trying". A former union enforcer, Ben's day job is running the maintenance crew at a swanky Detroit condo complex. In his spare time, he solves problems for a motley crew of clients, many of whom aren't very nice themselves.

If you've read the Perkins novels, this anthology will be like old home week; you'll have a ball reacquainting yourself with Rob Kantner's wonderful writing. If you're new to Ben Perkins' world, it will be a terrific introduction; once you've read it, you'll be hunting down the books. And the good news is, Kantner is writing again, working on a new Perkins novel.

Rae Helmsworth

TRUE CRIME

Jake Arnott

2003

ISBN: 1569474079 (trade edition)

SOHO Books

The underworld in Britain has always fascinated me and this book feeds that fascination. TRUE CRIME is captivating and relentless, written in a somewhat stark manner. I definitely want to read Arnott's first two books right now. This book should be read by anyone who likes their book hardboiled.

Tony Meehan is ghost writing a memoir of a notable crime figure, one Eddie Doyle. Doyle finally out of prison after serving time for a robbery in which the money was never found. One of the gangsters murdered during the robbery has a daughter also looking for the money. The story from here is basically a search for the ill gotten goods and the people behind the robbery.

Arnott has a unique voice perfected suited to this type of tale. The book is true Brit noir and a terrific read.

Jon

THE VENDETTA

Alston Purvis w/ Alex Tresniowski

2005

ISBN: 1586483013

Public Affairs books

THE VENDETTA is a non fiction book about the career of Alvin Purvis, the G-Man who took down people like Dillinger, Pretty Boy Floyd and Baby Face Nelson. But VENDETTA is more than a look at a heroic man, it is also about how Hoover went after Purvis, for years after Purvis had left the FBI. It examines the just how disturbed Hoover may have been.

With information drawn from Purvis's own records and documents this book by his son Alston is an amazing look at a time when there was a mystique to the bad guys, and the men who chased them. It also gives a unique look at J. Edgar Hoover, who as time goes by seems more and more like a paranoid vindictive man.

Fans of true crime and history will enjoy this book, as will most fans of the mystery genre.

Jon

Paperback releases

Kathy Hogan Trocheck, MIDNIGHT CLEAR, Avon, ISBN 0091098000

Lawrence Block, THE BURGLAR WHO TRADD TED WILLIAMS, Harper Torch, ISBN 0060731443

Deborah Crombie, MOURN NOT YOUR DEAD, Avon, ISBN 0060789573

Jonathan Santloffer, COLOR BLIND, Harper Torch, ISBN 0060541059

Max Allan Collins, ROAD TO PURGATORY, Harper Torch, ISBN 0060540311.

Michele Martinez, MOST WANTED, Harper Torch, ISBN: 0060723998

Faye Kellerman, FALSE PROPHET, Avon, ISBN 006075088X

Virginia Swift, BYE BYE LOVE, Avon, ISBN 0060543329

Claire Matturo, WILDCAT WINE, Harper Torch, ISBN 0060567082

Jerrilyn Farmer, THE FLAMING LUAU OF DEATH, Avon, ISBN 0060587318

Jane Isenberg, HOT WIRED, Avon, ISBN 0060577533