

Book Reviews issue #11
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A CHILD'S GAME
John Conner
2006
ISBN: 0752872737
Orion Books

D.C. Karen Sharpe is so hard-boiled the yolk has turned green. John Connor's protagonist returns in A CHILD'S GAME. To kick it off we have murder and arson. A very disciplined bad guy. Enter a kidnap at the same time. An art gallery owner and her daughter. And then there's Sharpe, M.I.A.

Connor plays his story like Wakeman on the keyboards. Traditional meets something entirely new. How far will a mother go to save her child and what evil lies in the heart of men? Connor's evil is so abstract it rings with a new truth and his protagonist is so fresh I feel as though I've known her forever. If you haven't read these books yet by all means start now.

Ruth

ALREADY DEAD
Charlie Huston
2005
Ballantine
ISBN:034547824X

If you love dark, criminal tales with a twist of irony, then you've read CAUGHT STEALING and SIX BAD THINGS. I don't need to tell you that both books are as fast and furious as a tequila hangover after Margarita Nite at the local fly bar. And for you, ALREADY DEAD was a must read. You've forgiven Mr. Huston for leaving you hanging as you wait for the last in the Henry Thompson trilogy. Because ALREADY DEAD has already gotten you and robbed you of your will to do anything read it from cover to cover before you collapse in a heap of reading gluttony.

ALREADY DEAD isn't a vampire book. Sure, the lead, Joe Pitt is a vampire. Don't let that bother you, you "I only read noir and I hate vampires" fans of the previous Huston books. This is no Gothic tale of bloodsucking and tortured souls. It is the tale of a P.I. trying to wrap up a case before the powers that be come down hard.

Picture Manhattan filled, unbeknownst to mere humans, with the undead. And the undead aim to keep it that way. Any wayward killings that could draw attention to the underground undead are not just frowned upon. They're acted upon with swift justice.

Joe Pitt manages to track the rogues as he plays all sides, the Enclave, the Coalition and the Society, toward the middle. Then, the simplest of cases, a search for a human Amanda Horde, who has run away from the life of rich girl to skating on the fringes of vamp life, puts Pitt in immortal danger. He may be a vampire but without blood to feed the virus that made him what he is, he's as dead as the next corpse. Only sunlight could bring a more permanent demise.

Adding to his caseload is a series of deaths that threaten to blow everyone's cover. But these aren't victims of vampires.

These humans who have become corpses take on lives of their own as brain eating zombies.

Sound cheesy? It isn't.

Huston has re-vamped a subject that's been down a thousand ways and made it fresh, contemporary and funny as hell.

Jennifer Jordan

THE ART OF DETECTION
Laurie King

2006
ISBN: 0553804537
Bantam Books

THE ART OF DETECTION has one of my favorite duos together again. While Laurie King has been writing and releasing excellent novels at a steady clip, my favorite San Francisco Police officer has been waiting for an opportunity to share the page with her inventor again.

Here it is. They're together but they've both changed. Kate has been happy with partner Lee and daughter Nora. Ms. King has been writing the highly successful and award winning Mary Russell series and in an engrossing plot their recent lives synchronize to give them both a shining moment in mysterydom.

A Saturday morning call upsets Kate's ideal weekend. A body has been found. Soon identified as Phillip Gilbert, a surprise awaits detectives when they enter his Russian Hill home. The gentleman is a Sherlockian. The works of Conan Doyle have made up the man's life. Now Martinelli must determine how his obsession accounts for his death.

She plays the reader with ease, guiding us between modern day police-procedural and Sherlockian lore. We once again walk Martinelli's streets and share her life as we explore the life of Gilbert and how his irregular lifestyle might account for his death.

Ms. King is to be commended for allowing this story to percolate and take life. Like fine wine, she'll tell no story before it's time. 2006 is time for Kate Martinelli.

Ruth

BEHIND THE CURTAIN
Peter Abrahams

2006
ISBN: 006073704-2
Harper Collins (Young Adult)

When Ingrid's older brother begins to get muscular, moody, and starts to run with a different crowd she gets worried. Something is up here. Ingrid is a middle school detective with a case under her belt already. Like her hero Sherlock Holmes she pays attention to detail. When her brother's DVD player isn't on his shelf anymore and it shows up in her best friend's older brother's room. Or when she finds the bottle of steroids in her old tree house. Then Ingrid is kidnapped on her way to the Mathfest and no one believes her story. She has got to prove to them she is telling the truth. To top it all off her soccer coach was hit in the head with a rouge ball and suffered a concussion, and he was replaced by the oh so slick Julia LeCane who has a few surprises of her own. and whose side is she really on?

Katie Higgins

THE BIG BAMBOO
Tim Dorsey
2005
ISBN: 0060585625
William Morrow

If I had to summarize my thoughts on THE BIG BAMBOO in one sentence that sentence would be " Bwaaaaa ha ha ha ." I laughed all the way through this latest adventure with Serge Storms.

Serge is a bit obsessed with Hollywood in this book and especially focused on Florida movies. Eventually going to Hollywood, Serge leads us there with his extreme behavior every step of the way. There is no way even the outrageous way of life in Tinsel Town is ready for Serge. Kidnappings, failed actors, insane studio heads and carnivorous agents can't compete with Serge and his stoned to the gills buddy Coleman. A bigshot director is making the epic to end all epics and the studio is bleeding money. Eventually a plan is formed involving Serge and his unique talents. Too bad the studio didn't realize that Serge doesn't exactly follow orders.

This book had me so busy laughing and moved so fast I finished it in no time. An absolutely amazing plot that kept me guessing to the very end. Plus it boasts one of my all time favorite scenes when Serge is killing a person who really has it coming and drops the good news bad news line on him. (The good news was that Serge just saved a bunch of money on his car insurance.)

Tim Dorsey is consistently funny and gets better with every book. This is a series you need to have on your shelf.

Jon

BLINDFOLD GAME
Dana Stabenow
January 2006
St. Martins Press
ISBN 0-312-3403-X

Dana Stabenow is an Edgar Award winner, and the author of three different series, including the Kate Shugak mysteries. Ms. Stabenow was born in Anchorage, and writes about Alaska, a place that takes on many different faces. Her new novel includes Alaska, and much more.

Harry Rincon, a CIA analyst, begins hearing rumors of radioactive material and military equipment that is for sale on the black market. He begins putting all of the pieces together, but the story is too far fetched and unbelievable for his bosses at the CIA. Meanwhile Harry's wife, Sara Lange, is the Executive Officer in the Coast Guard and serving on the Sojourner Truth in the Bering Sea. This puts her in the middle of the conflict, and Harry goes to Alaska to sort out the rumors involving Anchorage and the coast of Alaska

The story never lags and the adventures of this couple will leave you unable to put it down. Ms. Stabenow's books generally keep me up all night, and this was no exception. Though I am waiting for the next Shugak in the series, any stand alone like Blindfold Game will keep me happy. This is

billed as a thriller and most certainly lives up to its author's reputation.

Karen Hildebrand

THE BOBBED HAIREBANDIT
By Stephen Duncombe and Andrew Mattson
February, 2006
ISBN 0-8147-1980-5
New York University Press

In 1924, New York City was captivated by a blond with a fur coat and an automatic. THE BOBBED HAIREBANDIT is a look at one of the U.S.'s first notorious celebrities. Professors Duncombe and Mattson have returned to the front pages of Hearst's papers to explore the case of Celia Cooney.

Young and with few options, Celia began robbing grocery stores to provide the American Dream to her unborn child and landed on the front pages of the tabloid press. The water cooler topic of the day and soon as trendy as her hair cut, Celia's celebrity galled police. Our authors not only recall the crimes of this young woman and her husband Ed they delve into society's reaction to the pair and their motivations. Everyone had an opinion of this infamous case.

THE BOBBED HAIREBANDIT is a look at the changing mores of the 1920s and the press who shamelessly courted public opinion to sell more copies. This book is a fascinating look at a young woman who looked at her options and decided to play the P.R. game before the term had been invented.

An historical account that reads like Doctorow, THE BOBBED HAIREBANDIT is non-fiction at its most accessible.

Ruth

BONE THIEF
Thomas O'Callaghan
2006
ISBN: 0786018119
Pinnacle (PBO)

BONE THIEF has a lot of the elements common to serial killer books, disturbed psycho with trauma from childhood, brooding detective in mourning and very visceral murder scenes. On the surface this book seems like a lot of other serial killer books. However O'Callaghan makes the book compelling and enjoyable and is clearly in his element.

John Driscoll is a cop dealing with loss, his wife is left in a coma after an accident that killed their child. His job keeps him going and the small moments he grabs at home with his wife and the glimmer of hope. The killer he's tracking is leaving the victims without their bones in public places and shows no signs of stopping. And the victims have nothing in common. It going to take everything Driscoll has to stop the killing.

This is an unrelenting book, with incredible pacing and wonderful mood and an ending that really pays off. This book will linger long after you finish. I look forward to the next in the series.

Jon Jordan

CHARMED TO DEATH

Shirley Damsgaard
March, 2006
ISBN 0-06-079353-8
Avon Books

It's a cozy! Shirley Damsgaard's first book WITCH WAY TO MURDER captured the imagination of a number of friends who enjoy reading on the lighter side of our genre.

After reading CHARMED TO DEATH, I understand why. Ophelia Jensen is a witch. She has the site and her grandmother Abby is teaching her to use it.

When Ophelia's job takes her to her old home she decides to face the ghost of her best friend Brian. Brian's murder is five years old but still fresh in Ophelia's heart and mind. She had a vision that day. But it was too little and too late to save her friend. Policeman Henry Comacho knows Ophelia was hiding something then and suspects she is hiding something now.

Back home in Summerset, Iowa bodies begin to stack up as the town fights a threat to their environment. Enter Comacho. As the duo two steps around one another, the murderer from the past comes back to menace mystery's newest witch.

This Crime Spree reviewer was indeed charmed by CHARMED TO DEATH.

Ruth

CHASING THE WOLF
NATHAN SINGER
February 2006
Bleak House Books
ISBN:1932557148

It's a fickle world we live in. With all of us pushing speed limits on the way home every night, the radio telling us who blew up whom, who lied to whom and who got caught doing it. We arrive home to a mailbox full of bills and spouses we may recognize only from the wedding photos on the mantel because we only see them for the kiss in the morning and the groggy goodnight. This is the world Nathan Singer excels at pushing the casual reader out of as vividly, painfully sketched landscapes spring into life. With his newest book, CHASING THE WOLF, as with his first, A PRAYER FOR DAWN, Singer transports us to places where strength of character and body are tested and minds are expanded. Sometimes with words like jackhammers. Sometimes with words like a flower pulled gently across the cheek. Either way, the reader will be indelibly marked.

Where A PRAYER FOR DAWN was like a disco ball reflecting life in all its wonder, hurt and desperation in spinning flashes, CHASING THE WOLF is a telescope held the wrong way around. And it's pointed at the past.

Eli Cooper was a 27-year-old painter. It was New York, 2001. He was jaded, thinking:

I could clean my brushes on an old T-shirt and The Voice would call it "The boldest statement in art since Piss Christ."

All that connects him to the muse that made him he all that is the blues and a woman named Jess who could dance like no one else. And he's about to lose her. God, he'd do anything to get her back.

As Eli scribbles to himself the story of how he ended up where he is now; the backwoods of Mississippi in 1938, and in exactly one month Robert Johnson, the king of delta blues, will die. Eli is burdened with this knowledge as he charts his own story of a man finding himself in the past.

In this reality, he is just a white drifter grabbing work baling hay. The hollow man, the artist, the bereaved husband grows distant as he learns to rely on the kindness of strangers. He learns how to put the future behind him.

Swaying into this life is Ella Brown, a housekeeper for the woman who owns the boarding house Eli beds down in. Eli is struck by how much she looks, even moves, like Jess. But this is no simple love story. Any story coming out of the backwoods of the Delta is no simple story.

As the tale begins to fold in on itself, with layers of Ella's diary telling of the handsome stranger and of Jerome Kinnae, a time-traveling business man who leaves himself notes at places in time to track his own tale, taking shape is a greater reality.

Reading CHASING THE WOLF was like coming across a box full of letters, journals and postcards in a dusty box in the attic. The tales within it overlap to form a window into the past and the present. That window looks on the ugliness of racial disparity that manages to travel through time on the back of ignorance and the beauty of taking pleasure in being alive whenever you are. In the bottom of the box is a record; dirty, scratched and brittle. But it still plays when you bring the needle down. And the song it sings is this book.

Jennifer Jordan

CODE BLACK

Philip Donlay
May, 2006
ISBN 1-59687-368-X
ibooks

With little preamble, Philip Donlay's CODE BLACK launches the reader into a pilot's (not to mention a passenger's) worst nightmare. I guess, then, that the mid-air collision which opens this thriller is doubly nightmarish for Donovan Nash: he's a passenger on board. He's also a pilot, and knows just how bad things really are.

This is no Doris Day movie. The wreckage and carnage from the collision are devastating; there appears to be no hope for survival. But seeing as how we're barely 30 pages into the book, still airborne yet limping, and that this is Donovan Nash, after all, there can be little doubt that all is not lost.

Meanwhile, on the ground, Dr. Lauren McKenna - now Donovan's fiancée - is having a heck of a time convincing the people in charge that there even is a problem, let alone getting them to agree to help save the doomed flight. But, amid all the bureaucracy, heightened security and paranoia, help does come, and from the most unlikely of sources.

There's plenty of intrigue, suspense, in-fighting, back-biting, hidden agendas and derring-do to keep you reading, and turning, the pages well into the night. Once again, Donlay

takes us on a great ride. When I reviewed CATEGORY FIVE last year, I cautioned against reading that book on the beach. With CODE BLACK... ah, what the hell - take it along on your next flight. And buckle up.

Gary Shulze, co-owner Once Upon A Crime Bookstore

THE CYMRY RING

By Michael Allen Dymmoch

March, 2006

ISBN 1-59414-429-X

Five Star

Back when we were young....

Fresh off of the success of WHITE TIGER, Dymmoch offers her reader another surprise.

Ian Carreg is police in the pursuit of murderess Jemma Henderson when they are both catapulted into the second century.

An entirely refreshing break from the constraints of the mystery novel, THE CYMRY RING sings a siren's song. Calling me to the favorite reads of my childhood, where reality had no place and probability was unimportant. A grown-up's fairy tale, RING tells the story of two people transported to a time of Gods, and smiths, and Romans and warring tribes. RING is everything, fantasy, sci-fi, mystery and romance.

Back when we were young... imagination ruled. Michael Allan Dymmoch is the youngest writer mystery has today, but she's willing to share. The rites of Spring never read so good.
Ruth

D.C. NOIR

George Pelecanos, Ed.

2006

ISBN: 1888451904

Akashic Books

The publishers at Akashic Books have released the latest in their Noir series: D.C. Noir. Readers will not be disappointed. These 16 stories range across DC neighborhoods, with only three set in the well-known and tourist-friendly Georgetown, Chevy Chase and Capitol Hill. But in the hands of these talented writers, the recognizable is only at the surface. Beyond this, there is a depth to the neighborhoods beyond the familiar, and to the characters that are given dimension and life.

George Pelecanos sets the tone for this volume with The Confidential Informant, the story of one man trying to prove himself and gain the approval of his father. There is a consistency to this collection throughout the stories. In true noir fashion, the surprising plot twists convey the unexpected, as ordinary people make decisions with extraordinary consequences. Whether the subject of the story is the off duty cop and bouncer in Jim Patton's Capital of the World, Laura Lippman's suburban single mother in A.R.M and the Mother, a reporter in The Coyote Hunt by Ruben Castaneda, or James Grady's Senate Chief of Staff in The Bottom Line,

the plot line has moved each individual miles from where they started. Interesting also is the motivation behind the character's choices, and the sense that the circumstances with which they are faced are in some way predetermined. Yet it is the manner in which they each will either rise to the occasion or make that one misstep, and the surprising turns that follow, that makes this collection resonate with the reader.

Alexandra Cohen

D. C. Noir

George Pelecanos, Editor

January 2006

ISBN 1-888451-90-4

Akashic Books

Dark is better, whether one is discussing chocolate or suspense fiction. Many readers see it that way, and a treat to begin a new year is always a pleasure.

This collection of sixteen stories based in Washington DC includes entries by well known names - Pelecanos himself, Laura Lippmann, Jim Fusilli and James Grady. But the real pleasure in reading this volume is enjoying the entries from lesser known writers - Robert Wisdom, Jim Patton, and Quinton Peterson among them.

Each of the entries has a short subtitle giving the reader a geographical clue to the events in the story to follow, and the title pages of the book include a handy little map enabling those not familiar with DC to place the action. It's clear from the map alone that the dark side of human experience can be found anywhere one chooses to look.

How pleasant it would be if a review could include an analysis of every single story. Space limits that goal. But different as they are in voice and tone, each one of these stories is engrossing and thoroughly readable.

This is the seventh in a series of short story collections planned by Akashic Books. It's worth the time to find the earlier books, read this one, and keep an eye out for books to come.

Woodstock

THE DEAD DON'T GET OUT MUCH

Mary Jane Maffini

2005

ISBN:1894917308

Napoleon Publishing/RendezVous Press

The dead may not get out much, but the elderly sure do get around in this, the 5th book in the Camilla MacPhee mystery series by Canadian author, Mary Jane Maffini. After marching in Canada's annual Remembrance Day parade, Camilla's friend, Violet Parnell (Mrs. P) starts behaving strangely. She's obviously been traumatized, though it's not clear by what. When Camilla and Alvin (Camilla's quirky assistant) confront Mrs. P, she seems nearly catatonic. After mumbling something about seeing a dead man, she loses consciousness. Mrs. P's stay at a hospital is short-lived; she goes AWOL and it's up to Camilla and Alvin to figure out where she's gone and why.

When Camilla and Alvin go to Mrs. P's apartment, they discover it's been ransacked and they both fear that Mrs. P

may be in terrible danger. Other evidence indicates that Mrs. P's hasty departure relates to events that happened during World War II. Some notes near her phone point to Italy as her destination, so Camilla follows her friend to Tuscany. In her wake, Camilla leaves a cranky Alvin to hold down the fort.

In the land of Chianti and cappuccino, Camilla's inquiries elicit a mixture of sympathy, bewilderment, and some questionable leads. In addition, the language barrier proves problematic at times and she's never sure whom to trust. And although black Mercedes appear to be plentiful in Italy, why does she get the feeling that one of them is on her trail? Adding to Camilla's frustration and feelings of incompetence, when she does corners the feisty octogenarian, Mrs. P manages to give her the slip. Why is her usually kindhearted friend acting like a stranger and rebuffing all of Camilla's attempts to help her?

Camilla eventually figures out what old photos, aging partisans and a long ago plane crash have to do with Mrs. P's disappearance. The denouement is a flashy mix of flames and firearms. THE DEAD DON'T GET OUT MUCH is a frothy read best served with a crunchy biscotti and a cup of your favorite espresso drink. Enjoy!

Jacqueline Rice

THE DEAD YARD
Adrian McKinty
MARCH 2006
ISBN: 0743266439
SCRIBNER/SIMON & SCHUSTER

Dawn over the turquoise shore of Africa and here, under the fractured light of a street lamp, brought to earth like some hurricane palm, I woke before the supine ocean amidst a sea of glass and upturned bus stands and the wreck of cars and looted stores.

With this opening line, Michael Forsythe is back in reader's hands after his action-packed introduction in DEAD I WELL MAY BE. He's survived the Troubles in Northern Ireland and a failed career as an enforcer in the Irish Mob in New York that left a pile of people dead. Now, rugby fans gone amuck have landed him in Spanish prison. But there is a way out.

Forsythe must become one of the good guys. An undercover member of M16. A plan is put forth by enticing agent Samantha Cauldwell. Either he agrees to work for her or he is headed to a Mexican prison he managed to escape from before. They would be happy to have him back. And happy to add a little punishment to his sentence. Forsythe, resigned to his fate, takes her up on her offer.

It is his task to infiltrate the Son of Cuchulainn, an IRA sleeper cell, via Kit, the daughter of its leader, Gerry McCaghan. Kit is a revelation to him, tough and innocent at once, with the world seemingly at her feet. As he wins her trust, he feels something alien to him; guilt. But Forsythe is more than willing to push that aside in order to get the job done. And he's figured a way to make a few quid in the process. All he has to do is win the trust of McCaghan second hand man, Touched McGuigan. Touched is a twitchy, paranoid sociopath with an uncommon skill in torture and Forsythe rides on the edge as he courts Kit

and hoodwinks the henchman. McKinty specializes in an in-your-face thriller style packed with action and very little pathos. His writing is sharp and over-the-top. His books are perfect for a Hollywood production and it's no surprise to see that DEAD I MAY WELL BE has been optioned.

Jennifer Jordan

DRIVEN TO MURDER
Judith Skillings
2006
ISBN: 0060583207
AVON BOOKS/HARPERCOLLINS

This is Ms Skillings third book featuring Rebecca Moore, an ex-reporter, who works restoring classic cars. In that capacity, she is hired by Peyton Madison III to work on his Lotus 49C, which has been entered in a race for Formula One cars dating back to the 60's and 70's. During a practice session the windshield on the Lotus is hit by a bullet. Was it a warning? Or was it intended for someone? Ian Browning the driver thinks a rival team is trying to scare him off. Could it have been meant for Mr. Madison, a man with a less than stellar reputation?

Enter Mick Hagan, a man from Moore's past, and has been sent to help and protect Ms. Moore. With only days to go before the race and the pre-race excitement growing, Manning is found in the cockpit of the Lotus, near dead. Rebecca begins her own investigation and finds more than one possible suspect. She also finds a dark secret in the Madison family going back several decades. There is an added mystery of a little girl with a camera and the introduction of family members that Rebecca has never met. With the race ending, and Rebecca's life in jeopardy the killer is revealed.

Karen Hildebrand

ESCAPE CLAUSE
Jim O. Born
2006
ISBN: 0399153349
Putnam

Last year Crime Spree said of SHOCK WAVES, "it establishes Born's place amongst the best series fiction being written today." We weren't the only ones. Everyone is enjoying the escapades of Bill Tasker.

ESCAPE CLAUSE reinforces this writer's strengths. After a very bad day off, Tasker is sent on an "easy" assignment by his department. He's off to Manatee Correctional, or "the Rock". A sleazy little Florida town and a sleazier hotel room become Tasker's home as he tries to find out just what is going on at this prison and what the hell is happening in this quiet berg. Full of humor and backed with thorough detail, Born's rhythm is like that of a Crocodile. He's not just going for a swim, he's going to take a bite out of his reader.

Ruth

THE ETHICAL ASSASSIN

David Liss
2006
ISBN:140006421X
Ballantine Books

THE ETHICAL ASSASSIN opens with Lem Altick, a door to door salesman in Florida trying to earn money for college. Life may not be great, but it's interesting. It gets a lot more interesting when the two people he is selling to are killed and the killer confronts him with the choice of play along or get implicated yourself. Lem finds his life going in a bit of a different direction as he spends more time with this strange man who won't eat meat and has a unique outlook on life.

Liss has written a highly entertaining book. It was a little slow starting, but it quickly starts moving, and it does not stop. The Florida setting is a wonderful backdrop for this bizarre and sometimes humorous story. Full of twists and quick change ups this is a totally satisfying read. While not what some might expect from the Edgar award winning author of CONSPIRACY OF PAPER, I really enjoyed this book. Liss proves he can write all over this genre and I can't wait to see what he does next.

Jon

THE FALLEN

T. Jefferson Parker
William Morrow
March 2006
ISBN: 0-06056238-2

San Diego Homicide detective Robbie Brownlaw has an unusual talent. Due to a six-story fall and the resulting head injury, his senses occasionally get mixed up. When someone Robbie is speaking to gets emotional, he can see their words as a series of colored shapes...and most valuable of all, the shapes tell him what the person is really thinking. Lavender ovals mean sympathy, green trapezoids mean envy, and lies are accompanied by red squares. Brownlaw's wife, Gina, is the only person who knows about her husband's ability; his bosses only know that his case-cancellation rate is a superb eighty-eight percent.

The Fallen opens with Brownlaw and his partner McKenzie Cortez at a crime scene. Garrett Asplundh, an investigator for the city watchdog Ethics Authority Enforcement Unit, has been found dead in his car. While his death initially looks like a suicide, it soon becomes clear that something much more insidious has occurred. Cortez and Brownlaw's investigation leads them through the dark heart of San Diego, where greed, corruption, lust, and fear are just part of the job. A prostitution ring is uncovered that serves some of the city's most powerful and influential men...did Asplundh's investigation into these activities lead to his demise, and if so, at whose hands? As the pool of suspects grows, Robbie finds his marriage is slipping through his fingers like fine grains of sand. The novel reaches its climax in a harrowing symphony of suspicion, compromise, loss, and at last closure, if not peace.

In THE FALLEN, Parker has created yet another gem. Its pages are packed with all the suspense and intrigue a mystery lover could want; but perhaps more importantly, with

vibrant characters that seem truly and uniquely human. A highly recommended read.

Jill Lynch

FIT TO DIE

Karen Hanson Stuyck
2006
ISBN 1-59414-369-2
Five Star

For anyone who has been tempted or threatened to kill their personal trainer, aerobics instructor, Weight Watchers counselor or that guy who yells at you that you *can* lose weight if you would change your eating habits or work hard enough, here is a book for you. In Karen Hanson Stuyck's FIT TO DIE, the victim is Stan Harris, the gym owner and weight-loss guru who has become obsessed with staying thin.

Lauren Prescott is not so impressed with Mr. Harris' theory that you must be thin to be happy. Then her husband leaves her almost penniless and she must seek her first journalism job in several years. Her first assignment is writing about Stan Harris' life and death. As she begins to research him, she discovers that his death may not have been a suicide as originally declared, and there are many persons who have plenty of motive. So Lauren delves into the investigation while dealing with her own marital issues, and finds that they may intersect. Lauren has her hands full!

FIT TO DIE is an enjoyable read and it takes shots at the "you have to be thin to be successful and happy in life" dogma. For anyone who has continued to fight the "weight-gain" struggle, this book will probably be very entertaining. Regardless of your weight status, this book does not have any fat grams or carbohydrates. Enjoy!

sandi

FOOLISH UNDERTAKING

Mark de Castrique
March 2006
ISBN: 1590582276
Poisoned Pen Press

In the fictional mountain town of Gainesboro, North Carolina, funeral director Barry Clayton is in for the shock of his life. The night before the high-profile funeral of Y'Grok Eban, a heroic Montagnard who assisted US troops in the Vietnam War, Barry is knocked out in the embalming room. When he comes to consciousness, he finds that Mr. Eban's body has been stolen, but why? Does it have anything to do with the covert missions that took place on the other side of the globe almost forty years ago? Or the enigmatic message Y'Grok sent to war buddy and Boston cop Kevin Malone just before he died: "Raven has come home." The premise of Foolish Undertaking is irresistible, the historical focus on the Montagnards is fascinating, but most importantly, the execution of this mystery is flawless. Following Dangerous Undertaking (2003) and Grave Undertaking (2004), this is the third entry in Mr. de Castrique's series featuring funeral director Barry Clayton. It's also his

best. Foolish Undertaking succeeds on every level, from its large cast of real and vivid characters to the steadily mounting tension and the handful of completely unexpected plot twists. Take a trip to Gainesboro. You'll love this original and absorbing mystery.

Blake Crouch

GOOD DAY IN HELL

J.D. Rhoades

2005

ISBN: 9780312334215

St. Martin's Minotaur

The way I see it JD Rhoades should owe me a night of sleep. But since I was up all night reading his first book, it should be no surprise the his second, GOOD DAY IN HELL, would have me awake all night again.

Jack Keller is trying to stop trio of killers who have decided that they want the spotlight, the kind of light that only the media can cast on psychos and maniacs. The killers have come up with their own morality which basically means that anything goes. As they drive on the survival rate of those in there way drops with each mile of road.

Rhoades writes in a grab you by the throat style that has your attention from the first word to the last. Tension you can feel, and an ending that will leave you dazed. This book had me seeing things out of the corner of my eye and kept me wired even after I was done. Simply put, Rhoades is the real deal.

Jon

GOTHAM CENTRAL: HALF A LIFE

Greg Rucka, Michael Lark

2005

ISBN: 1401204384

DC COMICS (Trade Paper)

GOTHAM CENTRAL is set in the city that is home to Batman, but this is not a superhero book, but rather it's about the police in Gotham City. In this collection it's a story about Renee Montoya, from patrol to detective it shows here working cases and dealing with the life of being a police officer. It's complicated when a con takes her to court and tries to sue her. The con hires a PI who ends up outing Detective Montoya and tries to destroy her career.

Lark's artwork is moody and fits the setting perfectly. Greg Rucka won an Eisner award for this run on the series and it was well deserved. It's an incredibly human and compelling look at cop who just wants to do her job but has to struggle with her identity and family and fellow officers in order to do it. An amazing piece of work from a great writer.

Jon

HELLBLAZER: STARING AT THE WALL

Mike Carey

2006

ISBN:1401209297

DC Comics

With art by Marcelo Frusin and Doug Alexander Gregory this latest trade collection of Hellblazer is terrific. John Constantine decides to be a little more proactive in stopping an evil force before it can get a foothold.

The story opens with a story about his niece Gemma that leads into the main story arc. Gemma is on her own away from home and falls in with some old cronies of John's. She eventually is called on to fix an old wrong.

In the main story John is calling together colleagues in the mystical arts to help stop a world destroying force. Deception is par for the course and things are not what they seem. There are some nice cameos from some old friends that make this story that much more fun to read.

Carey does a wonderful job with this character and this is not to be missed.

Jon

HOLMES ON THE RANGE

Steve Hockensmith

2006

ISBN:

St. Martins

Some days it seems as if Steve Hockensmith is everywhere. He has a column in Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine, and his short stories about Larry Erie appear there, too. He also does a series of stories for EQMM featuring a pair of nineteenth century cowhands named Otto (Big Red) and Gustav (Old Red) Amlingmeyer. Big Red even has his own blog (probably only nineteenth century blogging cowboy) on Hockensmith's website (www.stevehockensmith.com). And now there's HOLMES ON THE RANGE, Hockensmith's first novel, which, as it happens, stars Big Red and Old Red as they solve yet another murder.

Old Red has been inspired by his brother's having read aloud "A Study in Scarlet" at the campfire one evening. Old Red might not be Sherlock Holmes, but he believes he can apply the master's methods to solving crimes in Montana in 1892. Turns out, he's right, and part of the fun of reading HOLMES ON THE RANGE is seeing how what works in Victorian London works in the Old West. Different circumstances, to be sure, but the approach is the same.

Big Red narrates the novel and will inevitably be called Old Red's "watson." There's some truth in that, but Big Red's style is a bit more colorful than John Watson's. Big Red is more in the Mark Twain school of story-telling, and the way the story is told is just as important as the story itself. You'll find yourself smiling and laughing at Big Red's way with words all the way through the book. Hockensmith says that he reads everything aloud to be sure it sounds right before he signs off on the final draft. This kind of painstaking craftsmanship pays off.

As for the plot, the Amlingmeyer brothers find a body after a stampede. Well, sort of a body. It's not exactly all in one

piece. They identify the remains as those of the manager of the ranch they're working on, having been hired by a couple shady characters. Big Red wants to bury the body as soon as possible and forget about it, but Old Red suspects that more than cattle had a hand in the manager's demise. Soon there's another death. Suicide? That's what it's supposed to look like, but Old Red suspects otherwise. Then the Brits who own the ranch show up to inspect their property, and things begin to get complicated.

St. Martin's has wisely chosen to market HOLMES ON THE RANGE as a mystery novel. The publicity department, and probably Hockensmith, would just as soon the phrase "western novel" never be uttered. Western novels, you see, aren't selling these days. So call this a "historical mystery" that just happens to be set in the west. Or call it whatever you want, as long as you read it. Hockensmith is going to be around for a long time. You'll want to be in on the beginning of what's sure to be a fine career.

Bill Crider

ISOLATION WARD

Joshua Spanogle

2006

ISBN: 0385338538

DELACORTE PRESS/BANTAM DELL

This is a medical thriller. Nonetheless, I shall refrain from bad medical puns and get to the crux of the matter. Joshua Spanogle is a Stanford medical student who is writing from a large body of knowledge. Lovers of medical thrillers will love the book and readers of thrillers will keen to it as well. It irked me. Not enough to dislike it but enough for me to mention it.

In a germ phobic society, the threat of imminent, horrible death via some unknown virus is this nation's nightmare. And that's exactly what may happen when Dr. Nathaniel McCormick is called in the CDC's Epidemic Intelligence Service to St. Raphael's, a small and decrepit hospital in Baltimore.

Three young women have flu-like symptoms that have morphed into something akin to, but not exactly like, Ebola. High fever, jaundice, swollen lymph nodes and hemorrhaging of skin ulcers that leads to a sloughing off of the dermis. Whatever the cause of this virus is, it's virulent and contagious. McCormick knows it must be contained and investigated thoroughly.

The steps McCormick takes to make this logical conclusion happen is where Spanogle makes mistakes and loses me as a reader.

McCormick is quickly established as a cocky know-it-all with almost zero bedside manners. He rides rough shod over the rules and around his superiors in his quest to crack the case. To get him out of their collective hair, the CDC sends him to San Francisco where he teams up with an ex-lover to track down the genus and genesis of the virus.

All the victims have been residents in group homes for he mentally challenged which steers McCormick to a doctor in

charge of one of the homes. He is painted in a heavy-handed way as one the bad guys of the tale. Further illegal clue fests on the West Coast tie the doctor to a drug company whose experiments intended to heal have instead wrecked havoc. The company's attempts to cover up their many misdeeds and McCormick's own arrogance puts McCormick and his sidekick in mortal danger.

Spanogle is a good writer, of that have no doubt. But he broke a few rules early on with foreshadowing statements of the "I didn't know how wrong I would be," variety. But the most egregious aspect was his "brash" lead. Again, the characterization is overdone. Not only was I not rooting for McCormick, I was actually applauding every time someone punched him. The storyline was enough to make this a good medical thriller. Throwing in such an asinine lead put me off the read.

Jennifer Jordan

JLA: CRISIS OF CONSCIENCE

Geoff Johns, Allen Heinberg

2006

ISBN: 1401209637

DC COMICS (trade paper)

This latest collection of DC's JLA series deals with the aftermath of IDENTITY CRISIS, reviewed here last fall. The villains of the DC universe have discovered that the heroes have been tampering with the minds of some of their brethren and they are none too happy.

The members of the Justice League are feeling the effects as well, as the group starts to splinter and distrust each other. The characterizations are dead on and as tensions rise we get a glimpse of who they really are. This leaves them in a vulnerable position as they are attacked by a group of villains banding together and then an old foe thought long gone. Things take a turn for the worse when they decide to finally tell Batman they tweaked his memory but are attacked first by the person behind the memory restorations. I don't want to spoil the story so I won't say too much more about what happens, but I will say that there is a hell of a cliff hanger that is going to lead into the major event DC is running called Infinite Crisis.

The Justice League was always one of my favorite comics and Johns is writing stories that bring back the magic I felt when I first read comics. The artwork by Chris Batista is top notch in both action scenes and in the quieter moments. Fans of DC will love this book.

Jon

THE LAST CATO

MATILDE ASENSI

MARCH 06

ISBN: 0061117374

RAYO / Imprint of Harper Collins

You'll see THE LAST CATO lumped together with books that "you may enjoy if you liked THE DA VINCI CODE." Ignore that. May I suggest that you may enjoy THE LAST CATO if you enjoy books with hidden depths, literary puzzles and globe trotting adventure.

Dr. Ottavia Salinas is an academic and a nun of certain faith. She is head of the Restoration and Paleography Laboratory of the Vatican's Classified archives, researching and restoring ancient texts and tomes from all over the world. There is strict protocol involved and those who don't follow it are gone. Her life is a set of routines that she follows without question. Until the body of an Ethiopian man is found covered with scarifications imbued with meanings only Salinas can decipher.

Teamed with Captain Glauser-Roist of the Swiss Guard, Salinas uncovers a hidden pattern in the man's marks. They point to a plot that has potential to upset the very fabric of the Roman Catholic Church. And to pieces of the True Cross that have, one by one, been stolen from church reliquaries across the world. The keys to it all lie within the pages of Dante's Divine Comedy, it's depictions of the levels of Purgatory and the Seven Deadly Sins.

Charged with solving the riddle and returning the stolen relics, Salinas, Glauser-Roist and an Egyptian archeologist named Farag Boswell go from location to location as clues from Dante's masterpiece are revealed. They are not the first to follow these clues. Before them, for hundreds of years, went followers of an order whose soul purpose is to protect the True Cross and to unify it after many years of plunder. The trio begins to realize that with each puzzle they solve, they are one step closer to finding the hidden location of this order and their leader, The Last Cato.

THE LAST CATO is Matilde Asensi's first book to be translated into English. It is a classic tale of adventure that, with a skillful hand, leads the reader through lessons of history, literature and faith. As the reader follows Ottavia Salinas on her outer journey, they are treated to her inner journey as she grows beyond a definition of self and an idea of faith. Asensi has written THE LAST CATO with intelligence, wit and a love of history the reader can't help but share.

Jennifer

LAST TO LEAVE
Clare Curzon
December 2005
ISBN 0-312-31876-6
St. Martin's Press

Clare Curzon is well known to fans of the English police procedural. Superintendent Mike Yeadings has lead readers to the conclusion of seventeen mysteries over the past twenty-two years. LAST TO LEAVE is the author's eighteenth title. And the lady still has the stuff. The Dellar family gathers and a fire breaks out. What at first appears to be an accidental blaze turns out to be arson. Yeadings and his team soon have murder to unravel. Is the family being targeted from outside or within? Perhaps both? With dogged

investigation and with some happy accidents Curzon leads her reader through a tale that both entertains and works the whodunit cells .

Curzon is a writer who deserves a much wider readership here in the U.S. She is a master of the traditional. And on a chilly winter day there is nothing better than catching up with this series. It is always a pleasure.

Ruth

THE DEEP BLUE ALIBI
Paul Levine
2006
ISBN:0440242746
Bantam Books

What do you get when you combine a classy, ultra-principled woman with a street smart, fly by the seat of his pants kind of guy? In this case, the volatile lawyer duo, Victoria Lord and Steve Solomon mixing it up in Paul Levine's second Solomon vs. Lord novel.

Victoria is surprised to hear from Hal Griffin, her father's business partner, who vanished shortly after her father committed suicide. Before Victoria can learn what kind of legal help "Grif" needs, a yacht with an unconscious Grif, a second man with a metal spear in his chest and \$100,000 careens onto the beach where Victoria and Steve are frolicking. When the "speared" man, Mr. Stubbs dies, all fingers point to Grif as the murderer: the dead man, an environmental rep, had the power to veto Grif's latest business venture, a hotel and casino to be built on coral reefs. Did Stubbs agree to a bribe from Grif and then get greedy? Or does someone have reason to sabotage the project?

The pool of other suspects is small, most arresting is Grif's beefy and beguiling son, Junior, who was Victoria's childhood playmate and with whom she still shares a mutual attraction.

Levine, a former attorney has his lawyer proceedings down pat, but it's clear that finding out who killed Stubbs and why is secondary to watching Victoria and Steve squabble as they get in each other's way. Part roundabout plotlines, part junior-high shenanigans, the book lets extraneous issues take precedence as the two attorneys meander toward cracking the case. Junior parades his pecs once too often making Steve behave like a jealous baboon; Steve's boorish ways lead Victoria to break up their personal and professional partnerships; their split coupled with the arrival of Victoria's self-absorbed, shoe-collecting mother propels the neurotic Victoria into a "poor me" spiral; Steve, partnerless and girlfriendless, blithely overrules his dad's objection and goes to extremes to have him reinstated to the bar. Steve's laid-back manner has appeal and you gotta love a guy who provides his emotionally disturbed nephew with much needed security and a home. Thank God, because it's 12-year old Bobby who saves the day with his common sense attitude and mind-boggling savant skills.

Will the murderer's identity come to light and justice be served? Will Steve and Victoria stay together to spar another day? Not surprisingly, it does, it is and they do. Case closed.

Penguin UK

Jacqueline Rice

MAITLAND UNDER SIEGE

James Patrick Hunt

April 2006

ISBN: 1594144400

Five Star First Edition

On the heels of his debut book MAITLAND, MAITLAND UNDER SIEGE is a follow through punch that put me down for the count. Bounty hunter Evan Maitland is a character that shows loads of promise and it's James Patrick Hunt that delivers. His writing style is reminiscent of some of the master and at the same time fresh and his own. He has a wonderful voice.

In what starts as a simple tracking job Maitland doubles his fee as soon as he discovers his quarry has killed two men already while on the run. Following the trail to Kansas City Maitland finds himself in a game with rules he didn't right and extra players being added. Before it's over Maitland my be side by side with fugitive Thomas Hicks fighting for his life.

Hunt has an knack for writing action with characters that are vivid and vital. This book pulls you along and leaves you little choice but to follow. MAITLAND UNDER SIEGE is serious like a heart attack. Don't make any plans when you open this book, you won't do anything till it's done.

Jon Jordan

MOVING IS MURDER

Sara Rosett

April, 2006

ISBN 0-7582-1336-0

Kensington Books

Ellie Avery is moving...again. As the wife of a military man, she has more experience in this than she'd like. This time, along with the stress of her newborn baby and the unpacking of seemingly endless boxes, another military spouse ends up dead, and Ellie is smack in the middle of it, having found the victim shortly after death. Rosett draws a likable picture of her protagonist and her family, and in this day of so many books having troubled relationships at the center, it's refreshing to read about a husband and wife who actually love and trust each other. The life of a military family is shown in an interesting and educational fashion, and the frustrations and joys of having a newborn were so well-written they took me right back to that point in my own life. Rosett's prose flows nicely, too, and I came away enjoying this book so much I'm eager for the next in the series.

Judy Clemens

author of THREE CAN KEEP A SECRET

MR CLARINET

Nick Stone

2006

ISBN:

One of the real thrills of book reviewing is stumbling across a masterwork, and this debut by the enigmatic Nick Stone is just such a book. Like the exotic work of John Burdett and his inside view of Bangkok; Nick Stone focus's his mystery in the dark and mysterious world of Haiti. Mr Clarinet however will do little for Haiti's tourism board, but will certainly do a great deal for Mr Stone's career as a thriller novelist. This is one of the best debuts I have read over the last decade, and I read a lot. Reminiscent of William Hjortsberg's 'Falling Angel' [filmed by Alan Parker as 'Angel Heart'] as well as John Connolly's 'The Black Angel' it weaves a Chandler-esque detective story from the ashes of the dead and dying, but still has a voice that is as fresh as it is dangerous. I find it hard to shake off the story from the darker recesses of my mind, and it has haunted my dreams and made me wake in the early hours with my skin filmed with sweat, icy sweat – and I mean it, because this book is very, very scary.

It really does grab you right from the opening even if it uses a most conventional plot device that borders on cliché – *The ex-cop turned P.I. asked to trace a missing child*. In most cases this would result in a yawn from this jaded reviewer, but the skill of Stone's writing is such that the convention / cliché is turned into a real strength because the writing is such a joy; but beware as I felt real fear as I turned the pages with trepidation when the story hit top gear.

And so Max Mingus, P.I. who specialises in the tracing of missing children starts his journey from his release from Rikers Island Penitentiary. Jailed for the murder of three sadistic murderers and mourning the loss of his wife, he decides to take the case to try and fill the void inside his heart. Working for the rich and powerful Carver family he first checks out one of his predecessors, a sleazy P.I. named Clyde Beeson. The scene where Mingus meets Beeson will take a long time to erase from my memory, such is the surreal and shocking fate that befell the unfortunate investigator. But understand quite clearly that the shocks that lie ahead for Max Mingus are far, far worse.

The trail leads Mingus to Haiti and the vivid prose makes for compelling reading, but like manoeuvring past a car crash, one's compulsion is balanced by an equal dose of revulsion. The other strength of this book is the way that the huge array of characters are detailed, from the Carver clan, and their secrets, right up to the characters who lurk in the shadows. It is also an angry book, a book that shows how close we as human beings are to our savage past, because there is brutality in full view in a landscape peppered with the stench of death and evil. The shadows are filled with supernatural, of ghosts, of voodoo and of pain brought on by the exploitation of our fellow human beings. There is a scene where some UN Troops accused of rape find that retribution can be a terrible thing and for the reader, it makes one question how justice can be achieved when there is no law.

The plot is far from conventional as Mingus traverses Haiti trying to find out who Mr. Clarinet is, and why children disappear from the island. Not knowing who is good or who is bad gives the narrative a slippery texture. Another facet that

makes this an interesting read is the landscape, which is peppered with contradiction, and proves that in life - no one is truly innocent. Mingus soon finds that his past seems linked to the missing boy named Charlie, and that the \$10m bounty is a price that reflects the immense danger of the case. Only someone with nothing to lose would risk their life for the bounty, but as Mingus delves deeper into the darkness he soon realises that losing one's life may not be the ultimate price in a land where the dead and dying still walk the streets.

This is a big book [over 500 pages], but each word seems to have been considered deeply, heavily evaluated, and then polished. The chapters all appear like short stories or vignettes that weave themselves around this strong central character – Max Mingus. This is crime fiction at its zenith, challenging, compelling and with an insight that delves deep under the skin.

I have only two problems with this book [1] I needed a long cold shower when I finished it as I felt so damned grungy and [2] the wait for more from the pen of the talented Mr. Stone may become unbearable. Reading Mr. Clarinet reminded me of the day I turned the last page of Harris' seminal work - 'Red Dragon'. Need I say anymore?

Ali Karim

MURDER IN MONTMARTE

by Cara Black

March 2006

ISBN 1-56947-410-9

SOHO

Cara Black's Aimée Leduc is a charmer. Her Paris so real you can smell the soot and the baguettes. In the time we've known Aimée she's become our friend. We've seen her mourn her father, lose her sight and find love.

MURDER IN MONTMARTE finds our Paris P.I. suddenly single and looking into the death of her friend's police partner. Did Laure shoot Jacques Gagnard? The department and Gagnard's ex-wife say yes. Aimée's heart says no.

As she survails the neighborhood for witnesses and possible motive she is drawn into a modern day underworld. Corisicans and police rub shoulders with prostitutes and the art world that have made this area of Paris a part of imaginations everywhere.

The quirkiness of Hiaasen, the sense of place of Rankin, the heroics of Paretsky; MURDER IN MONTMARTE has it all. The result is a canvas of murder that is Black's alone.

Ruth

A NECESSARY EVIL

Alex Kava

2006

ISBN 0-7783-2274-2

Mira Books

A Necessary Evil is the fifth book by Alex Kava featuring Maggie O'Dell, a profiler for the FBI. While working on a

series of murders that involves people finding the heads of women in the Washington D.C. area, Maggie is called to Omaha to assist in an ongoing case there. Priests are being killed across the country and they all seem to have something in common. She has worked in the area before, and is familiar with the police force and previous crimes committed there. She is also familiar with Nick Morrelli, who had worked in Omaha, but is currently visiting from Boston, where he works as a deputy prosecutor.

When Maggie discovers a role playing game on the Internet, that involves young boys who have been the victims of abuse, she is reminded of a previous case that introduced her to Father Keller. Four years before, two men were imprisoned for the murder of young boys, but Maggie has always been convinced that it was Father Keller who was responsible for their deaths. When she is contacted by him, she learns that he wants to return to Omaha, and help her find the priest killer. Father Keller is sure he is on the list of priests to be killed, and in exchange for protection, he will offer what he knows. Maggie realizes that this bargain is a necessary evil, but she has no choice.

Maggie has no problem handling two different cases. While working in Omaha she is aware of what is going on with her case in Washington, and keeps in touch with the people working the case and her friend Gwen Patterson, who is sure one of her patients is connected to the victims. Ms. Kava makes an easy transition between Omaha and Washington, and keeps you involved and interested in both cases. It is another exciting and well written book by Ms. Kava, and one you will be anxious to finish.

Karen Hildebrand

OUT OF CABRINI

Dave L. Case

APRIL 2006

1594143781

FIVE STAR PUBLISHING

In crime fiction, the tried and true is in some ways the backbone of the industry. There are thrillers laced with fast action and larger than life leads. There are hard-boiled P.I.'s with drinking problems and dry wit. There are police procedurals with jaded cops that bring the bad guys to justice. When I picked up OUT OF CABRINI, I wasn't expecting anything new. I thought it would be another story about another cop on a quest to put another brutal killer back in the slammer. For the first time in a long time, I was more than pleasantly surprised. I found myself excited about a book and an author establishes a strong, individual voice from page one.

Cabrini, the setting of the story, is a level of hell above-ground inhabited by people heading to the one below at a rapid pace. This is an area of Chicago abandoned to gangs, addicts and the poor while the rest of Chicago grew up and opulent. This is an area of Chicago that scared the shit out of me when I lived there.

Case writes of Cabrini in his foreword with a straight-forward ease that is jarring when he relates the small number of officers assigned to such an 'active' area. Case tells the tale of one of those teams. And Case knows of what he writes. For the past nineteen years, Case has worked on the Chicago

police force. OUT OF CABRINI begins and wraps around Lonnie Huggins. Huggins is out on parole after a short stretch in prison. He's a hard man by anyone's standards and is made a harder man by his time behind bars. Literally by the extensive weight-lifting that made the time go by and internally by what he sees and hears. A perfect place to make a sociopath go even more over the edge than he was on the street. Huggins has earned some compensation for not flipping on anyone on the outside. He's due some payback. That payback comes in the form of four keys and whatever enforcers Huggins wants to expand Mickey Cobra drug territory into Minnesota. Huggins stashes the goods in his car and is ready to fulfill a need that has pressed on him since he went to prison. He visits his girlfriends Latricia. Latricia had grown used to a life without bruises, broken teeth and bloody noses. Huggins is the father of two of her children but he acts like it's nothing to him. Overhearing a phone call, she knows just how to get him back. She makes her own phone call and sets the cops on Huggins tail. The police impound the car with all that it carries: Huggins future and his pact with the Mickey Cobras. Through a bit of under-handed selling, the car ends up in the hands of a secretary as a gift from a boss wanting to thank her for all she 'does' for him. Huggins wants, NEEDS, that car back. He sets two of his enforcers on it. He wants them to get it back at all costs. Detective Stacey Macbeth wants the car. After Latricia called him, he managed to get Huggins behind bars again. But the stash he expected to find wasn't there. And the car was out of the police lot before he could thorough search. As Macbeth and the Mickey Cobras each race to get to the car first, both following clues that leading them from one person to the next, bodies start piling up. Fast. Stacey Macbeth won me over. Not by charm, or smarting off to his superiors or his drive for some vague idea of justice. But as a tenacious man that wants to get the job done. As a man of the streets who understands who he's going after. As a man whose brain and body can't rest until he's solved the puzzle. And this book has one of the funniest and freshest opening chapters I've read since Sean Doolittle's DIRT.

Jennifer

Jordan

PATHS NOT TAKEN

Simon R. Green

2005

ISBN:0441013198

Ace Books

PATHS NOT TAKEN, book 5 of the Nightside series, continues the adventures of PI John Taylor. The Nightside is a place that answers neither to Heaven nor to Hell, and as such it is a place where strange happenings are just a part of everyday life. This is why Taylor is not really shaken when a man comes to him with a unique problem. Eeamonn Mitchell doesn't belong in the Nightside and to make matters worse he is being stalked. Doing the stalking is a group of men all named Eeamonn Mitchell, coming from different points in time to change their futures. The time travel angle alerts Taylor that someone is mucking about where they shouldn't be and it

is directed at him and his own plans. Wrapping up this case is just the beginning of the journey.

As this series progresses we find out more about Taylor and his past and his possible future. Green weaves the threads from book to book that enrich the series as a whole and make each book better than the one before. This is especially evident in this book, Because of something John found out he must go back in time thousands of to the very beginnings of the Nightside and hopefully learn what he can do to prevent what could well be the end of the Nightside and world. Coming along for the ride is Shotgun Suzie, one of John's trusted friends and Tommy Oblivion, the existential detective.

With every book in this series Green fleshes out his world more and more. In PATHS NOT TAKEN we learn a lot about the past and get some insights as to why things are the way they are. A perfect blend of mystery and supernatural fantasy, the Nightside has it all, superb plotting, witty humor and great dialogue. Full of original and unique characters the Nightside is a place I love to visit. John Taylor is a combination of Magnum PI, Van Helsing and Gandalf only hipper and cooler. Get comfortable before you start reading, because chances are you'll want to read it in one sitting. I can not recommend this series enough.

Jon

PRELUDE TO INFINITE CRISIS

MULTIPLE AUTHORS

2005

ISBN:1401207324

DC COMICS

For everyone following all of the myriad trails that have led up Infinite Crisis, I've got just what you need. PRELUDE TO INFINITE CRISIS tells all the tales that need to be told. And it puts them all between two covers.

The stories in this comic were doled out between more than twelve separate comics, three of which sold out. The Flash 219 the Wonder Woman 214 and Superman Secret Files 2004 are all here.

You'll see Teen Titan Troia battling a killer android, Superman go up against the Suicide Squad and the Flash teamed up with a blind Wonder Woman against an empowered Barbara Minerva as Cheetah. Zoom, the Reverse-Flash has made her a better, stronger, faster villain tends to Wonder Woman with some tough love. She gives him a swift rebuttal in the shape of a fist. We close the tale with the very insane Jean Loring, newly fused with the evil Eclipso.

What does all this mean? All the bad guys and gals worth their salt have come together to take the universe from the righteous. And if the good guys and gals don't get it together, the universe is burnt toast.

Jennifer Jordan

PRIVATE WARS

Greg Rucka

2005
ISBN: 0553802771
BANTAM BOOKS

Tara Chace may be one of the best, gender busting female leads to come along. She's not feisty; she's pissed off. She's not snooping; she's deep undercover. She doesn't solve a case in some melodramatic grand dénouement; she dispenses hard justice for Queen and country. Tough, passionate and professional, she is a better than a female James Bond. Because Chace has pathos.

Tara Chace was born in Greg Rucka's Eisner Award-winning Queen & Country graphic novel series. Rucka is an old hand at writing tough, female leads. They don't get much tougher than Wonder Woman and The Huntress. Rucka more than made his bones with the thrill a minute Atticus Kodiak series. Chace made it into crime fiction in A GENTLEMAN'S GAME, which established her as a ferocious and intelligent lead who is every inch a woman.

PRIVATE WARS opens with the fallout of Chace's last unsanctioned assignment. Her colleague lover, Tom Wallace, is dead. Wounded in body and spirit, Chace carries within her something that will change her outlook on life; a child. She wants nothing more than to walk away from the past and from Her Majesty's secret service and the people she feels betrayed her. She begins a new life with her baby, Tamsin.

But after a year of being a mommy, Chace is restless. Something her former employers set about exploiting. There is a potentially explosive situation in the politically unstable Uzbekistan. The country's president is dying and the two potential successors, son Ruslam and daughter Severa, offer two completely different political outcomes. With the son educated in the West, there could be peace. With the daughter, chaos. But Ruslam and his son are endangered by Severa's ambitions. Someone has to reach them and get them out of the country before assassins strike.

Only Chace has the expertise to do the job. And she has to do it alone. If she's found, Severa and her men would gladly make the last hours of her life a living hell.

It is patently obvious that Greg Rucka did his homework before writing PRIVATE WARS. The scenarios her writes about are just shy of what is really happening in the world. Rucka has also succeeded in writing a spy thriller with a strong, intelligent and utterly human female lead. Chace is not superhuman. She is a very real, very compelling and very well drawn lead.

Jennifer Jordan

THE PROP
Pete Hautman
April 2006
ISBN: 9780743284653
Simon and Schuster

THE PROP revolves around a recurring theme in Hautman's books, namely poker. The title of the book is taken from a term used to describe some one who works in a casino and essentially props up a game when it is short on players. "Peeky" Kane is a prop in a Indian casino outside Tucson, a

widowed ex-cop who is happy spending her days playing cards and living life on her terms. But her terms take a back seat as she discovers a group of people trying to cheat the casino. To complicate things further her daughter is having some real problems and sucks Peeky right into them. As things get progressively stranger and ore out of control she develops a friendship with the leader of the tribe who owns the casino. But does he have other motives? Peeky is rapidly running out of people she can trust.

Hautman writes terrific characters that stay with the reader long after the book is done, and this outing is no exception. Peeky is immediately interesting and gets more so as the book progresses. The other characters with all their quirks and peculiarities make for an ensemble group that is almost hypnotizing. The action builds at a steady pace throughout the book coming to a terrific climax and a realistic ending. Hautman writes with the confidence of some one holding aces and kings which makes this book a winning hand. Wholly satisfying in every respect.

Jon

RAIN DOGS
Sean Doolittle
2006
ISBN 0-440-24281-9
Dell

The author of DIRT and BURN returns with his third crime fiction novel RAIN DOGS.

Tom Coleman is a former investigative reporter. When his grandfather wills him his canoeing business in the Sandhills of Nebraska, Tom returns to an area of majestic beauty he's known only in passing. The beauty is still there but times have certainly changed. No sooner is Tom starting to settle in than there's a calamitous fire. Three teenagers and a blown propane tank.

Doolittle uses his immense skills to tell a tale of a changing middle America. Where drugs are a problem and often local police would prefer to look the other way, or in some cases do for a share of the bounty. His protagonist Tom is a most certainly a RAINDOG. Battered by emotions that will not die, falling gratefully into the arms of chronic alcoholism Tom still has a nose for a story and you know he's going to stick to it until it's done.

A former girlfriend, her son, his aide de camp and a pack of law enforcement from the local level to the Feds are all characters that help Tom get to where he's going in this story. There are the action scenes that Doolittle's readers have come to expect. RAINDOG is a more mature outing than either DIRT or BURN. Doolittle writes with a stripped down efficiency few in the Crime Fiction arena can match. This is the book that will stick with you like nylons after a coffee spill.
Ruth

THE SECRET SUPPER
Javier Sierra, translated by Alberto Manguel
2006
ISBN 0743276299
Simon and Schuster UK

In the wake of the Da Vinci Code, you could be forgiven for sidestepping a novel that boasted a conspiracy around Da Vinci's most famous religious painting. After all, the whole world has been

gripped by Dan Brown fever and everyone knows that when a literary fever starts the first thing to appear is knock offs. But do yourself a favour and check out this translation of 2004's Spanish best seller.

The Secret Supper is a historical conspiracy thriller set around the painting of Da Vinci's masterpiece. Told from the point of view of an Inquisitor sent to investigate Da Vinci, it slowly reveals a vast religious conspiracy as an ancient sect of Christianity attempts to assert itself against the machine of the Roman Catholic Church. Da Vinci himself is a suspected member of this sect and it seems the clues to his heresy lie in his interpretation of his infamous and as yet incomplete painting of the Last Supper.

Sierra occasionally overdoes the detail here, and sometimes the characters seem very intent on giving each other speeches to explain historical customs, but this is a necessary evil and Sierra quickly compensates for these moments with clever twists and devious little spins on his characters. The actual conspiracy is complex and believable, although as the book goes on your head begins to spin with all the philosophy, theology and codes needed to explain the secrets of Da Vinci's masterpiece. This is a smart historical thriller with a sly sense of humour, and for this reviewer's money it far outdoes the Da Vinci Code in terms of brains, quality of writing and characters who feel concrete, real and complex.

Russell McLean

SHARPER THAN A SERPANT'S TOOTH

SIMON R. GREEN

February 28 2006

Ace for Penquin

0441013872

Things are different on the Nightside. A hidden part of London, in the Nightside the your worst nightmares are your neighbors and it's always 3 a.m.

John Taylor, a mostly human P.I., was born and raised on its dark and dangerous streets. He's seen it all and either shared a drink with it or shot it. That little part of him that's not human? He gets it from his Mom's side of the family. And it's given him the ability to find lost things. But as he looks with this other sight, enemies that have been hard on his trail since the day he was born can find him. If you want to know about his enemies, you'll have to find out about his mother. Which is exactly what Taylor wants to do.

With friends like Shotgun Suzie, Razor Eddie and Deadboy at his side, Taylor begins to track down his mother just before his mother begins to track him down. She's got a plan. It involves the destruction of the Nightside and almost every inhabitant in it. When you're a god, destruction and creation are the same thing. For some reason, the denizens of the Nightside aren't happy with this plan. And John Taylor's

genetic tie to the being set to destroy them pisses them off. Cross a group of angry beings with varying degrees of nasty powers off the Christmas card list.

Now Taylor has to stop his mom from destroying the Nightside and the citizens of the Nightside from destroying him. All in a night's work for a man that plays craps with Death on a regular basis. But John Taylor is in the toughest fight of his life and he has everything to lose.

Simon Green has a merciless writing style. With the most stream-lined prose, he creates a hard-edged world of Lovecraftian creatures with attitudes and rapier wits that could easily do stand up in the Comedy Café; if they didn't smell like cesspools or leave body parts where an audience used to be. Underneath a read that is fun, entertaining as hell and dry as the Mojave is a strict morality tale that Green takes very seriously. He is one of the reigning masters of Monster Noir.

Jennifer Jordan

Sorrow without End

Priscilla Royal

January 2006

ISBN 0-59058-214-4

Poisoned Pen Press

After countless armed conflicts in countless locations, and after advances in medical knowledge, twenty-first century readers are familiar with the distress of post traumatic stress disorder. All too often newspapers bring us stories of the aftermath of undiagnosed suffering including mental illness and violent crime. And far too many of us have a friend or loved one who cannot come to terms with violent and bitter memories.

The modern reader does not need to stretch the imagination when reading SORROW WITHOUT END, set in late 13th century England, for Royal presents a familiar scenario. Men returning home from the Crusades carry more with them than just battered weapons and wartime souvenirs. Their complexions are still deeply tanned, making them stand out in the cold, rainy late British fall. Horrific memories haunt their dreams and bring frightening delusions. Some returning soldiers were not able to endure the encounter with a far away culture without pain. And others found something or someone to love and cherish in that distant land, and felt the grief of loss when the love could not endure.

The priory of Tyndal includes a hospital with skillful nuns and monks offering the healing arts as well as a safe place to rest. But when the mutilated body of an unknown man found nearby is delivered by a local police officer in the hopes that the healers can help identify the cause of death, the refuge offered by the priory is thrown into turmoil.

The prioress and her staff become part of the mystery themselves. Petty jealousies, unrequited love, personal secrets, thwarted ambition and other familiar human failings exist within sanctuary walls as well as without. Readers who

enjoy an engrossing historical mystery are advised to pick up SORROW WITHOUT END.

Woodstock

SPEAK OF THE DEVIL

Richard Hawke

2006

ISBN 1 4000 6425 2

Random House

When a shooter goes crazy on the streets of New York, Fritz Malone PI has no choice but to take the guy down. But it's the only first step into a wild conspiracy of wild killers and corrupt politics for our hero as he investigates the seedier side of the city so good they named it twice.

Richard Hawke's novel is breathlessly paced, exciting and eminently readable. In fact he doesn't place a foot wrong here, crafting a novel that deserves to sell well and that should have many of its readers losing sleep just to see what happens next. It does everything that a thriller should. If there is a problem, however, it's just that the novel isn't as fresh as the publisher or novelist clearly want it to be. Much of the territory staked out feels like places where Matt Scudder has trod before and, indeed, sometimes Malone feels a little too much like a young Scudder just without the drink.

That said, *Speak of the Devil* is a great read and one gets the feeling that as this series progresses (and it will progress) Hawke's going to take us for a turbulent and gripping ride deeper into the world of Fritz Malone and that prospect is one definitely worth looking forward to.

Russell

SPURRED AMBITION

Twist Phelan

January 2006

ISBN 0-59058-174-1

Poisoned Pen Press

In a previous entry in this series, Arizona attorney Hannah Dain learned that her birth father is a stranger to her - the man she had regarded as her father had raised her as if she were his biological child, but in fact Hannah was conceived in an adulterous affair. With her mother dead, and no one willing to answer her questions, Hannah is thrown into turmoil.

Seeking a breather from her normal routine, she accepts a temporary position with the Tohono O'odham nation. Not every thing goes smoothly however, the tribe member responsible for the project is kidnapped, more than one set of financial projections are found and only serve to contradict each other, and large amounts of money seem to be missing.

Phelan's narrative style provides the reader with a kind of window into Hannah's unconscious - with short asides printed in italics providing glimpses into her fleeting thoughts as events unfold. Relationships with co-workers, family

members and a supportive affectionate boy friend have all been rendered tentative by the unheaven in Hannah's life.

With a somewhat skeptical cop investigating the ominous events, Hannah must also worry about her standing as a law abiding citizen. Eventually all events sort themselves out, but not before other lives are lost. The final paragraph provide the beginning clues to the puzzle of Hannah's parentage. Readers who enjoy this book will certainly be looking forward to the sequel.

Woodstock

THE STORIES OF ALAN MOORE, DC UNIVERSE

Alan Moore

2006

ISBN: 1401209270

DC COMICS

There is little doubt that Alan Moore is one of the best writers working in comics today. Sterling examples of this are the original graphic novel FROM HELL and V FOR VENDETTA. Before Hollywood came knocking on his door, Moore wrote superheroes. DC has collected these stories into one collection which is a must have for fans of the graphic form.

The obvious stand out is *The Killing Joke*, originally a stand alone book this is the first time it's in a collection. This is the story that put Barbara Batgirl Gordon in a wheel chair. Moore's uncanny knack for showing the depths of the flaws in humanity is highly evident here. It is a truly haunting look at a villain everyone knows.

There are 16 stories in all and they are all graphic story telling at it's best. My personal favorite is a Superman Tale, *The Man Who Has Everything* in which Moore uses an interesting way to show what Superman's life might have been like had he not become Superman.

Good for all ages this is a book worthy of any bookshelf.

Jon

THE TENOR WORE TAPSHOES: A LITURGICAL MYSTERY

Mark Schweizer

2006

ISBN:

St. James Music Press

Saints preserve us!

If Jan Karon, Stephen King, and Raymond Chandler ever got together to write a mystery, it might come out something like Mark Schweizer's stuff.

In this third in a series that I hope goes on forever, it appears that Hayden Konig, full time Chief of Police of St. Germaine, North Carolina, has found a preserved saint when he discovers a 70-year-old corpse in perfect condition in the altar of the Episcopal church.

While Konig, who also serves as the choirmaster of the church, tries to unravel the double mystery—how did the stiff wind up in the altar, and why didn't he decompose?—he's also writing a mystery novel of his own, a very, very bad

mystery novel, which he taps out on a typewriter alleged to have been owned by Raymond Chandler.

The ghost of Chandler himself drops in often to cheer on the would-be author, whose only encouragement so far has been an honorable mention in the annual Bulwer Lytton Fiction Contest, a dubious distinction at best.

König's prose is as hilariously bad as Schweizer's is good, and the combination is ever so satisfying. Cozie meets slapstick in this marvelous series, which includes *The Alto Wore Tweed* and *The Baritone Wore Chiffon*. What's next, "The Bass Wore Brass Buttons"? Whatever it is, I'm looking forward to it.

Marshall J. Cook

THE TORSO

Helene Tursten

2006

ISBN:1569474257

SOHO Books

Soho's second translation of Tursten's work from Swedish is an example of how to do it right.

D.I. Irene Huss is happily married with responsible teenagers. The normalcy of her home life does not make it into her workday. *THE TORSO*. Washed ashore, eviscerated, asking for justice. Huss and her co-workers have no leads save an unusual tattoo. This lead will take them to Copenhagen and the world of the sex trade. Copenhagen is where lost souls become suitable victims for "the doctor".

This torso isn't the first. As Huss tries to understand what makes a person dismember another human being she finds unusual allies and experiences the harsh realities of a lifestyle she'll only ever know in theory. But theory can come all too close to home, no matter how safe home is.

Tursten has said that the femme lead who swills liquor, swears a storm and bonks like her male predecessors in our favorite part of fiction does not appeal to her. But the lyricism of her prose with the rawness of the story commands attention from the most hard-boiled reader.

Tursten is a writer to watch.

Ruth

THE TWO MINUTE RULE

Robert Crais

2006

ISBN:0743281616

Simon and Schuster

Robert Crais is a name known to all in the reading community. His Elvis Cole series is one of the most popular and well executed series in detective fiction. For the past several years he has been swapping out between the series and "stand-alone" novels. This year's *THE TWO MINUTE RULE* is a stand-alone. It is pure Crais.

Max Holman is a con as the narrative opens. A man who wants to give rehabilitation a chance, his world is rocked when on the very day of his release his son is found murdered. The son rejected Max's lifestyle so whole heartedly he became police. Now he lies dead with three other officers. There is a cloud of corruption hovering over the corpses. For Max the story doesn't add up. For Crais readers it's double sixes.

Linear and sparse in plot and dialog *THE TWO MINUTE RULE* is a concise tale with a great cast of characters. Why are these men dead and why were they working on a closed bank robbery during their off hours?

TWO MINUTE RULE melds Crais the best-seller with the Robert Crais that brought him to the attention of the crime fiction community. Page-turning. "Follow the money stupid," is one of my favorite lines. In Crais's hands it's one of my favorite reads of the new year.

Ruth

AN UNACCEPTABLE DEATH

Barbara Seranella

2006

ISBN: 0312347987

St. Martin's Minotaur

AN UNACCEPTABLE DEATH contains just that. Do you know Munch Mancini's story? For the past decade this woman has made a life for herself while fighting addiction and the aftermath of a formerly questionable life-style. Barbara Seranella has kept Munch in focus all these years by allowing both her strengths and weaknesses to play into how Munch solves a crime. Munch is truly a character from the heart.

When her heart is broken in the opening chapters of *DEATH*, Munch responds in kind. Rashly, bravely and from the heart. To save the reputation of one she's loved how far will this Brentwood mechanic go? To the mat.

Munch risks it all for a truth she knows is just beyond reach. Seranella takes us through the modern L.A. drug culture, rivaling drug enforcement agencies and an overwhelming grief. The result is a one sit read.

A fine addition to a superlative series.

Ruth

THE WRONG KIND OF BLOOD

Declan Hughes

March 2006

ISBN: 0060825464

William Morrow

THE WRONG KIND OF BLOOD, the first book from playwright Declan Hughes, introduces Edward Loy, an Irish PI. It's gritty and moody and wonderful.

Edward Loy has been living in Los Angeles for twenty some years and comes back to Ireland for his mother's funeral. His return is a mixed blessing with both the familiar feelings of a

native and at the same time the disorientation of an outsider. In the course of things Loy is asked to find the missing husband of an old friend and this leads into a tangle of the past and present that quickly becomes an obsession.

Hughes is a natural story teller who uses a winning combination of original fresh characters and uncanny suspense to create an absolutely brilliant novel. Edward Loy will soon be mentioned along other great characters in crime fiction as he is a truly great protagonist to front a series. Hughes writes from the gut and every word feels personal, I dare you to read this and not want more.

Jon