

**A GOOD DAY TO DIE****Simon Kernick****2005****ISBN: 0593051467****Bantam (UK)**

One UK release for your summer reading list should be Simon Kernick's latest. Dennis Milne was last seen in *THE BUSINESS OF DYING*. If you read that book, like me, you probably thought we had seen the last of Dennis. However the killing of his ex-partner brings him back to the city he thought he'd left for good. His return doesn't stay a secret for long, and soon he's hunted while doing his own hunting. The driving force behind the book is Kernick's ability to take a character who should be a villain and make him a hero. Delving into morality and the gray areas of what true justice is, this is a very human story that goes well beyond revenge. Add to this Kernick's ability to create and diffuse tension, and keep the suspense escalating right to the end, it's a combination that will quite simply kick your ass.

Kernick has become one those authors I can count on to consistently write great books, getting better with each outing. Simon Kernick is on my short list of all time favorite writers, and just another example of why the writers in the UK should not be missed.

Jon

**ALL SHOOK UP****Mike Harrison****May 2005****ISBN 1-55022-688-6****ECW Press**

Canadian Mike Harrison's *ALL SHOOK UP* is a very well done first novel. P.I. Eddie Dancer's first case is engaging from page one.

Written in the first person with a terrific sense of timing and an economy of words rare to a first time novelist *ALL SHOOK UP* is a great story. The plot unfolds as Eddie is asked by one crook to find the other. It seems Joe Baker has been conned by his partner in a bank robbery and left without his cut of the score. Eddie declines to take the case but when Joe's "partner" Dick Wyman visits Eddie's office a few days later asking Eddie to find out where Joe is because he's taken off with the heist money our protagonist cannot resist the case. Soon it becomes more complicated.

A series of crimes against Calgary prostitutes, a couple of very skuzzy ex-cons, a prison inmate, a great sidekick, and a motorcycle club all contribute to a story that should be ricocheting all over the place but somehow remains linear and fast paced throughout.

*ALL SHOOK UP* and author Mike Harrison are welcome on my headboard anytime.

Ruth

**ANSWERS FROM THE GRAVE****Mark Timlin****2005****ISBN: 1904316417****Do-Not Press****Available in the US from Dufour Editions**

With a career that spans decades and twenty-seven books, Mark Timlin has honed his noir style to an edge that cuts through all formula and pretense. Known best for his Nick Sharman series, Timlin has outdone himself with this chronicle of how one frozen moment in time crosses generations to stab at the heart with revenge.

The wheels of fate are set in inexorable motion when a bank heist master-minded by Daniel Butler in June 1982 sends out four men one morning for a robbery that all agreed had ever chance of going wrong.

Jimmy Hunter and four other men set off for the just opened doors of the Brixton bank. With money in hand, the men headed outside, where everything quickly went wrong.

The four scatter to the wind but only Jimmy seems to be in the clear. One man stands in the way of his freedom. Billy Farrow.

"He saw Farrow put up one hand as if by doing so he could prevent the inevitable, and as he looked down into the deep blue eyes that had got Billy his nickname, almost without meaning to, Jimmy pulled the trigger and the hammer on the gun started the short journey towards the rim of the cartridge. Just a centimeter or two in distance, and a split second in time, but a split second that would stretch for more than twenty years before its echoes and reverberations would finally end."

The day Jimmy is due out of prison, Mark Farrow begins to circle the waters where his father's killer will appear. He is driven by revenge but has room in his heart for two people. 'Uncle' John Jenner, the mob boss and former friend of his father who took him in when no one else would. And Linda Pierce, the daughter of the man that killed his father. Farrow left them behind years before but is now drawn like a moth to flame. And like a moth, destruction awaits him in the light.

*ANSWERS FROM THE GRAVE* is the book every crime writer aspires to write at some point in their career. It is a deeply satisfying read, richly colored by social mores, forbidden love and a sense of place that puts the reader right on Brixton's dirty streets.

This book is well worth the import cover price for any American lover of Brit Noir.

Jennifer

**BEFORE I WAKE**

By Anne Frasier

May, 2005

ISBN:0-451-41184-6

Onyx

Anne Frasier's latest novel, after HUSH, SLEEP TIGHT, and PLAY DEAD (all paperback originals) once again demonstrates her mastery of atmospheric suspense.

In BEFORE I WAKE, erstwhile criminal profiler Arden Davis is begged back into service by Special Agent Nathan Fury for reasons she can't refuse. Albert French has just been executed for a string of brutal slayings, the last of which were Arden's parents, murdered quite literally in front of her while Arden hid on the family farm. After French's execution, Fury is handed a note written by French: "Just thought you'd find it amusing to know that I didn't kill those people in Ohio. Wish I did, but I didn't. I killed everybody else, but not the lovely Ohio couple."

What Arden doesn't know...well, she doesn't know much. Having been haunted by brutal memories most of her life, she volunteered for a government experiment known as "bleaching" to erase her memories. It didn't go as planned. Dreams and reality dance around with each other. Random memories remain. Two things in particular that escape her are the actual murder of her parents (as in who actually did it), and the fact that she and agent Fury were lovers.

What I've always admired about Frasier's writing is the effortless with which she establishes a sense of place. Using "smell as a time machine", as when she returns to the once abandoned Madeline State Lunatic Asylum, now a psychiatric research unit - cum nursing home: "She wouldn't have asked for the stench of a basement. Of damp wood and mildewed cement. The feel of the metal railing under her palm, penetrating her skin. The smell of water." And then at Cottage 25, where the real experiments happened and went so badly: "She finally placed the smell. Like corroded rubber. Like an isolation tank."

Walking down the halls of the old asylum I could hear the floors creek. During the incredible finale, which takes place back on Arden's family farm during a pounding blizzard, you just may want to bundle up. Arden Davis is a thoroughly engaging character who has been dragged through hell many times just because she needed to fill in the blanks.

Gary Shulze of Once Upon A Crime

**BETTER OFF WED**

Laura Durham

2005

ISBN:006738316

Avon Books

Annabelle Archer is a wedding planner in Washington, DC; and if she can get through this next wedding, it will probably be the one that helps establish her reputation. It will help establish her flamboyant catering friend, Richard, too. Everything is perfect, down to the last detail. Everything except the dead mother-of-the-bride, of course. That, she didn't think of.

When the police discover that the victim was poisoned, they are quick to shut down Richard's kitchen. Although there isn't a lot of call for a caterer who lets his customers get poisoned, Richard is reluctant to cancel his services to a faithful customer who happens to run in the same circles as the murdered woman. Annabelle is guilted into helping out, and she overhears some tantalizing remarks about the murder which encourage her to investigate on her own; well, on her own with the help of Richard and Kate, her assistant and the little old lady downstairs. Let the police figure it out? I don't think so.

BETTER OFF WED is a familiar recipe, with the ditzy chick and her crazy crew of helpers who bungle things or make miraculous saves. Let us not forget the handsome police officer that seems interested in more than just the case at hand. It's a quick, light read.

Kathleen Tromp

**THE BLACK ANGEL**

John Connolly

2005

Atria Books

ISBN: 0743487869

This latest in the Charlie Parker series has a grand and epic feel to the beginning. And it sets the stage for a book that is for lack of a better word, amazing. By the time I got done with this book I felt drained from the emotional state it put me in.

Parker's friend Louis needs a favor, his niece is missing, and the chances of her being found under pleasant circumstances are pretty unlikely. As the search begins Parker finds himself being drawn into the path of an evil even he might not be ready for. Stretching from border towns to Europe, Parker is on a collision course with an evil that has been around possibly longer than man himself. The goal? To bring back THE BLACK ANGEL.

Connolly spins this tale so intricately that once you are drawn in you will not get out till you finish the book, and there's a damn good chance you'll do that in one sitting. I am not exaggerating when I say that this could be his best book yet. Connolly's outstanding attention to characters and plot are there, as well as an underlying tension that builds throughout the book. I think I actually might have held my breath for longer than would be considered healthy when it came to the ending. Run, don't walk to get this book, and then don't make any plans once you open it.

Jon

**BLOOD MEMORY****GREG ILES****2004****ISBN 0-7432-3470-7****Scribner***When does murder begin?*

Cat Ferry, an emotionally woman wrapped in the guise of a forensic odontologist asks.

She has been called in to murder scene after murder scene in and around New Orleans. She's witnessed from the icy distance of medical science and an alcoholic haze, the remnants of other's hurt, anger and violence.

But these latest murders, these middle-aged men, found mutilated, bitten – these murders get to her. Already on quaking ground, seduced by the numbness afforded by alcohol and working in a field in which a woman has to stand her ground with the toughest men, Ferry has been driven to panic attacks at the murder scenes of these men.

Her work is all she has left. Her married lover, Detective Sean Regan, lives on the fringes of her life. And her family? That is where the trouble began. And that, Ferry realizes, is where she must return if she is hold to her onto job and her sanity.

She goes back. Back to Natchez, back to the Malmaison estate and the rich, powerful bastard of a man she knows as her grandfather, Dr. William Kirkland. Back to her childhood home and the site that soaked up the blood of her father who was shot by an intruder when Ferry was five. That night is like a new moon trying to peek through thick rain filled clouds. Dreams that Ferry has had since the recent murders intensify and the clouds begin to part. Ferry turns detective, clearing away layers of dusty lies and hidden lives as the moonlight brightens. What she sees when everything comes to light could heal her. Or it could shatter her to pieces.

All the while, a killer walks free, with only the cryptic message *MY WORK IS NEVER DONE* to lead a baffled police force.

Greg Iles blends solid forensics and police procedure with a woman's quest to find the heart of the all consuming darkness within herself. The novel is seamless, powerful and runs breathtakingly deep.

Jennifer Jordan

**BLOODLINES****Jan Burke****2005****ISBN 0-7432-2390-X****Simon & Schuster**

I remember my first day with reporter Irene Kelly and the author who created her, Jan Burke. In *GOODNIGHT IRENE*, Burke introduced readers to a California Newspaperman with ethics, a sense of humor, the nose for a good story and many ghosts. Connor O'Connor was a body on the beach when we first met him. Throughout the series he has been present, as a guide and a mentor whose death could not stop his influence over and the love he gave to our star reporter.

In *BLOODLINES*, the eighth book in the Irene Kelly series we get to spend time with the living O'Connor. In many ways this is his book and not Irene's. In every way this is the book of Jan Burke today as opposed to the Jan Burke who wrote *GOODNIGHT IRENE*. Three time periods set in one town, a myriad of secrets both public and private, a series of murders stretching over time and one newsroom trying to get to meat of the story. Burke reveals the history of Las Piernas even as her paper threatens to close. And O'Connor shows us a day when reporters went after the story despite office politics and readers polls.

From beginning to end this is an engrossing whodunit. It is a look at four reporters' careers, changing times in the ink business and down at the police station.

Burke has allowed both Irene and many of the supporting characters in this series to go to places over the years that have frightened, terrorized and amazed her readers. *BLOODLINES* drew me into a story I always knew was there, just waiting to be told and that wait? The delivery makes it sweet indeed.

Out for a few months now, Crimespree missed the release date but can not fail to mention this exceptional book. Vacations are coming and daytime is finally stretching past six. Stealing from the N.Y. Times I'll say this is the one crime-fiction fans should make sure to catch up on.

Ruth

**BLOODY MARY****J.A. Konrath****July 2005****ISBN:1401300898****Hyperion Books**

Populated with real, flawed, highly original characters and three dimensional relationships that carry the weight of a shared past both complicated and true, *BLOODY MARY* is the spine-tingling sophomore novel in J. A. Konrath's Jacqueline "Jack" Daniels mystery series. There is a serial killer on the loose in Chicago. Lieutenant Daniels--highest ranking woman in the Chicago PD's Violent Crimes Unit--and her partner Herb Benedict are called to the county morgue when an extra set of arms turn up, sans body or paperwork...and none of the resident stiffs are missing theirs.

The first act follows Jack and Herb in their race against time to stop a killer that, it soon becomes apparent, may be someone in their midst. Raising the stakes, we are also allowed inside the villain's twisted, tormented, criminally brilliant mind. Comic relief is provided compliments of

a demonic cat in diapers and Herb's mounting midlife crisis, both serving up moments of humor that throw the darker subject matter into brilliant relief; sharp, witty dialogue and mounting suspense keep the pages turning long into the night. The novel's second act takes a more sinister turn, as Jack deals with the crushing weight of guilt and personal complications, a legal battle where nothing is as it seems, and a threat to her life and the lives of those close to her; leading to a bruising climax that avoids easy resolution and leaves the door open for the next installment. Fast paced storytelling, snappy dialogue, and vividly drawn characters make Bloody Mary a highly engaging and recommended read.

Jill Lynch

### **BROOKLYN NOIR 2, THE CLASSICS**

**Edited by Tim McLoughlin**

**2005**

**ISBN: 1888451769**

**Akashic Book**

On the heels of the wildly popular BROOKLYN NOIR, this second volume is chock full of classics. While the first was made up of all original work, this one is stories that have been printed elsewhere first. However these are stories that may be hard to track down in their original form.

Every story here evokes the true heart of Brooklyn, from Lovecraft's "The Horror of Red Hook" to Westlake's "The Best Friend Murder". These are writers of short stories at the top of their game. Also included are stories from Irwin Shaw, Lawrence Block, Maggie Estep, Carolyn Wheat, Jonathan Letham and more. This is a wonderful collection.

Jon

### **CAST OF SHADOWS**

**Kevin Guilfoile**

**2005**

**ISBN: 1-400-4308-5**

**KNOPF**

Joining Joan Brady (Bleedout) in the must read books of 2005 is Kevin Guilfoile with his debut crime novel, CAST OF SHADOWS.

The premise is deceptively simple, yet complex in its execution. Taking a look into a possible future in which human cloning has become legalized and regulated, a fertility doctor makes a bold and aberrant move in a hunt for a killer. Dr. David Moore is anguished by the brutal rape and murder of his teenage daughter, Ana Kat. The police reach a block in the investigation. They've collected DNA from the scene, but without a suspect to compare it to, the evidence is useless. Not so for a fertility doctor with access to the killer's semen sample, the ability to clone it and an infertile couple in search of a now everyday miracle.

Justin Finn is the result. Moore's has convinced himself that as he watches the boy grow, he will one day see the face of the man that murdered his daughter. It is a long wait.

In the interim, his marriage collapses and he is haunted by the moral morass his action has landed him in. Has he created another killer or is Justin Finn an innocent? And what will happen when the boy and the world finds out what he's done?

Guilfoile has created a perfect mix of science fiction and crime thriller. Surprising given that Guilfoile has a humorist background with McSweeney's, Modern Humorist, Salon.com and his snarky first book, MY PRESIDENTIARY, written with John Warner in 2001. His characterizations have depth and empathy flowing swiftly along with the undertow of medical and personal ethics. At no point is the novel bogged down by medical/scientific jargon. Instead, it is enhanced by it.

A fascinating read with a powerful ending.

Jennifer Jordan

### **Retro Review**

**THE SHARK-INFESTED CUSTARD**

**Charles Willeford**

**December 2005 (reprint)**

**ISBN: 1-4000-3251-2**

**Vintage**

Although Charles Willeford has long been a cult hero for many writers and fans of crime fiction, he still maybe one of the most underrated crime writer of the twentieth century. Over the course of about thirty years, he wrote some of the toughest, funniest, weirdest, most consistently entertaining crime fiction of all-time. His output included post-modern classics such as THE WOMAN CHASER and THE HIGH PRIEST OF CALIFORNIA, great *noir* novels such as PICK-UP, BURNT ORANGE HERESY, and COCKFIGHTER, and his best known works - the Hoke Moseley series of police procedural novels, including MIAMI BLUES, THE WAY WE DIE NOW, SIDESWIPE, and NEW HOPE FOR THE DEAD. Some crime writers were more prolific than Willeford, others achieved more commercial success, but you'd be hard pressed to find a writer who wrote in so many different styles and who constantly delivered.

One of Willeford's best novels is one of his least known--his Florida-based crime novel THE SHARK-INFESTED CUSTARD. The tale of four "average" thirty-something guys, living at an apartment complex was misunderstood at its time. Written in the seventies, the dark, often brutal, subject matter was considered unmarketable and Willeford had to put the book in the drawer. It was first published posthumously in 1993 by a small house with the subtitle A Novel of Crime, Vice, and Sex, and never received the attention it deserved.

*Custard* is, in fact, a daring, visionary crime novel that, if first published today, would seem cutting edge. The book is divided into four sections, each told from a different point of view. Three of the sections are written in first-person, and one in third-person. In the opening section of the book, told from Larry's point of view, a bet to pick up a woman has tragic consequences. Then, for the second section of the story, Willeford switches to the point of view of Hank and chronicles an affair with a woman that goes horribly wrong. Part Three is told in the third-person and focuses on Don's deteriorating relationship with his wife. For the last section of the book, Willeford switches back to Larry's point of view--the four buddies reunite and there is an ending as dark as any in the crime cannon. The book is straight ahead, no holds barred, pulp fiction, and it's not surprising that Quentin Tarrantino has praised CUSTARD, as its structure, style, and subject matter has clearly influenced his films. Vintage Crime/Black Lizard, which have been reprinting the Hoke Moseley novels in snazzy new editions, has wisely purchased the rights to CUSTARD and plans to reprint it later this year (Dec). Hopefully this neglected classic crime novel will stay in print for years to come.

Jason Starr

#### **CITIZEN VINCE**

**Jess Walter**

**2005**

**ISBN: 0-06-039441-2**

**Regan Books**

When Vince sees a face from his past he panics. Ready to cut and run from his job at the donut shop Vince may be willing to give up his new home and his dreams but he will not give up his right to vote.

CITIZEN VINCE is a book set in the week leading up to the 1980 Presidential Election. With a cast of characters appalling and enthralling at the same time Jess Walter has once again shown fiction readers how to make the story complex by keeping it simple. The dialog sings and the plot thickens. Who is Vince and to what lengths will he go to be able to pull the ballot box lever on election day?

In Walter's capable hands the plot remolds itself like children's clay. On the surface CITIZEN VINCE may be the story of America's sorriest criminal but underneath it is a love story to the desperate state of our democracy and why that democracy, flawed as it is deserves to be fought for.

Ruth

#### **THE CLOSERS**

**Michael Connelly**

**2005**

**ISBN: 0316734942**

**Little Brown**

Harry Bosch is back on the L.A.P.D. and the new Chief has found him a home in *Opened Unsolved*. Harry Bosch has always been excellent at taking clues and cues from case files that were a mystery to those who held the evidence before. Re-teamed with former partner Kit, Harry catches a new/old file his first day back on the job.

When 16 year old Becky Verloren disappeared and was then found dead in 1988 the police ran a good case but the perpetrator was never caught. 25 years later D.N.A. may make an arrest possible. Harry sifts through the evidence as only Bosch can. Connelly tells the tale like no one else out there would even try. As interviews take place and leads blossom and die Mr. Connelly explores the consequences of murder. The affect it has on the survivors from the most tenuous to parents forever shattered.

There are beautiful passages in this book. The initial interview between Becky's father and Bosch is heartbreaking. There are playful moments in this book. Can Harry's mysterious neighbor of last summer, Jane Davies be part of another open unsolved? There are hints that we may go back to Harry's first murder case which sits collecting dust in the annals of L.A.P.D. failures. And at the end of the book? Well there's a moment. The kind of moment that series readers forever wait for and rarely comes.

THE CLOSERS finds both Bosch and Connelly on the top of their game.

Ruth

#### **THE COCAINE CHRONICLES**

**Edited by Gary Phillips & Jervey Tervalon**

**April 2005**

**Akashic Books**

**ISBN: 1888451750**

This is one short story collection that assaults your nostrils, burrows deep and spits you out, never to fully recover. In other words, Phillips and Tervalon have assembled a stellar group of people to write about the lure of white powder and its devastating, humorous and lasting effect. The editors contribute fine stories to close out the anthology, but special props go to Ken Bruen's harrowing "White Irish," Laura Lippman's gleefully twisted "The Crack Cocaine Diet," Robert Ward's twisted revenge tale "Chemistry" and newcomer Detrice Jones's quietly horrific, autobiographical "Just Surviving Another Day." The Cocaine Chronicles could be read piecemeal, but the stories are far too addictive to read a single dose at a time.

Sarah Weinman

**CONTROLLED BURN**

Scott Wolven

2005

ISBN: 0-7432-6011-2

Scribner

The most raw, brutal, lyrical and hard stories I've read in an age. That was my first impression after reading Wolven's collection of thirteen short stories, CONTROLLED BURN. His work has appeared in the last four Best American Mysteries collections. Why? Simple, well-crafted, soul wrenchingly beautiful writing.

The collection, divided into 'The Northeast Kingdom' and 'The Fugitive West', portray men walking on a razor fine edge between desperation and apathy, last hopes and resignation. Every story is like distilled chaos.

It opens with Taciturnity and its evocative tale of a woman taking simple revenge on the cop that jailed her son,

*"Mrs. Stone, I was just doing my job."*

*"So were the Romans." She shook her head. "As my father used to say, you're a bird even if you never flew."*

And it ends with Vigilance, the tale of a man given the choice of life sentences of going back to a prison system he knows he won't survive or living as a man that would sell out the closest thing he's ever had to a friend.

*The whole sky seemed covered with heavy-gauge mesh steel, one big prison. If was lucky to be alive, I rarely knew it.*

Intertwined over years, location or happenstance, Wolven's protagonists cross over into oblivion of their own making. It is an oblivion we've all at least set a toe into, scuttling away, scared by what we saw and felt. The men in these stories embraced it, breathing it into every cell.

Jennifer Jordan

**CUT AND RUN**

Ridley Pearson

2005

ISBN: 0-7868-6726-4

Hyperion

Roland Larson and Hope Stevens spent forty-one days together and then were lost to each other for almost six years. Roland Larson, a deputy with the U. S. Marshals Service, was guarding Hope Stevens. Hope had information against The Romero family, which the Justice Department considered extremely valuable and made her very dangerous to the Romero's. After several attempts on her life, the government decided to move forward and place Hope in the Witness Protection Program. On their 41<sup>st</sup> day together Hope asked Larson to cut and run – go with her – live with her. He hesitated and the next day she was gone.

Almost six years later Roland Larson is living in St. Louis and attending a Shakespeare play- somehow always hoping that thru Hope's love of Shakespeare that he might find her once again. Just as he thought he heard her laugh and looked around he saw two agents headed towards him and soon he was off on an assignment that would lead him from one end of the United States to the other on a quest to protect Hope Stevens and her daughter who were on the run and at risk from the Romeros who wanted Hope dead. The entire Witness Protection Program was at risk. Uncle Leo, the man who wrote the code for Laena, the master witness protection list, had been kidnapped. Leo Markowitz' assistant had been murdered. When Larson viewed the body of Leo's assistant he recognized the razor slash across the assistant's throat as a signature cut used in an earlier murder when the Romero family killed one of Hope's guards in an attempt to capture her.

Larson finally catches up with Hope who has already heard the warning she was told to listen for if ever the Witness Protection Program was in danger. Together they follow the bloody trail across the country in the search for Uncle Leo and Penny, Hope's daughter.

Penny has had to move around with her mother and has learned the art of survival. Ridley Pearson introduces you to a very resourceful mother and daughter who have learned to take advantage of any opportunity available to protect them from their enemies.

This book is extremely fast paced and very descriptive. One you won't easily forget.

Patricia Reid

**DEAD AS A DOORNAIL**

Charlaine Harris

2005

ISBN 0441012795

ACE HARDCOVER

It's here! The latest Sookie Stackhouse is here!

Fellow Sookie addicts will rejoice in DEAD AS A DOORNAIL, the fifth in the Southern Vampire series to feature the down to earth, telepathically gifted/cursed wiseass waitress. Our heroine has already had her New Year's resolution to not get beaten up fall to the wayside as she dealt with sociopathic witches and a sexy amnesiac head vampire in DEAD TO THE WORLD. As Sookie puts her world back together with a pluck that would make Yo-Yo Ma jealous, the first stirrings of new trouble happen when she looks in her brother Jason's eyes.

It's near the first full moon after a nasty were panther bite and it looks like her Lothario sibling, Jason, is a shape shifter. Bad follows bad when a sniper takes aim at the were's in Bon Temps, Louisiana and all non-human eyes turn to Jason. If Sookie doesn't track down the killer before the next full moon, Jason is roadkill.

Werewolf and friend that wants more, Alcide Herveaux, needs her help. Too bad he doesn't ask. His father Jackson is looking to become the next leader of the local werewolf pack. His nemesis, Patrick Furnan, is more than willing to lie, cheat and slander to take the position himself. A telepath would come in handy.

Oh, and Sam Merlotte, Sookie boss and a shifter as the moon glows, gets shot; Sookie's house catches fire and when forced to ask the far too appealing Eric for help, she's stuck with a fine-looking vampire/pirate/bartender as a roomie.

How Harris manages to have so many balls in the air and not drop a one boggles the mind. Every book is crammed cover to cover with humor, dire situations, pithy social insights and sexual tension. At the core is a tough character that can stare down the scariest vamp and still guilelessly win the respect and adoration of non-humans when her own kind shuns her. This the best book yet in a winning series.

Jennifer Jordan

#### **DEAD RUN**

**P.J. Tracy**

**April 2005**

**ISBN: 0399152466**

**Putnam**

P. J. Tracy, the mother-daughter writing team behind the Monkeewrench thrillers, is back with another brilliant, heart-stoppingly suspenseful tale.

Four Corners, tucked away in the wilds of northern Wisconsin, is tiny as a postage stamp and so far removed from the hustle and bustle of city life cell phones find no signal and the nearest shopping is a half day's trip away. The story unfolds as the picturesque village's inhabitants go about their usual morning business, thinking nothing of a passing dairy truck, which hits some buckled pavement just outside of town and tips...releasing something far more lethal than unpasteurized whole milk.

Enter the Monkeewrench team: Twin Cities software designers with a talent for finding trouble and fighting crime. Plus size beauty Annie Belinsky and wary, reclusive Grace Macbride of Monkeewrench are on their way to pick up Sharon Mueller, a Wisconsin deputy on loan to the Twin Cities FBI. The women plan to drive down to Green Bay, where Sharon believes a new serial killer has set up shop. Taking the scenic route, the three women become stranded on a little-used road when their SUV breaks down, forcing them to walk to the nearest town...but what they find in Four Corners is nothing--literally. No people, no birds chirping, no dogs barking...no one at Dale's Gas or Hazel's Cafe...when they hear the roar of approaching engines they perk up, until they hear automatic rifle fire and barely escape notice as they witness a terrifying double

murder. What happened to the inhabitants of Four Corners, and why would someone kill to keep the secret? As they run for their lives, Annie, Grace, and Sharon uncover and work to thwart a homegrown terrorist plot that threatens their lives and the lives of untold thousands.

Told with dark wit, flair, and the eccentric humor for which the Monkeewrench gang is known, Dead Run is a race-to-the-finish thrill ride. The women are hardly damsels in distress, rather our heroines are refreshingly plucky and resourceful in the face of the direst peril. The only caveat is it may have you up all night reading--so brew some strong coffee and settle in for one exciting night.

Jill Lynch

#### **DEADLY BLESSINGS**

**Julie Hyzy**

**June 2005**

**ISBN 1-59414-290-4**

**Five Star**

The latest Alex St. James novel finds our star reporter effectively benched. A search for her own past has her out of town when her latest interviewee is found dead. There's a shake up at the station and suddenly Alex finds herself doing a feature on bad haircuts instead of chasing down a story of corruption within Chicago's Archdiocese.

Alex finds a tenuous link and soon is delving into the murky present of the Church's hierarchy. What do an immigrant hairdresser, her missing brother and a beloved priest have to do with our dead girl?

Author Julie Hyzy travels through Chicago with her protagonist at a pace swifter than the spring breeze off of Lake Michigan. With Alex's voice she visits the communities, newsrooms and parishes of their hometown to present a mystery both complex and straight-ahead. The result is chilling.

Ruth

#### **DEATH IN DUPLICATE**

**Valerie Wolzien**

**2005**

**ISBN: 0449468082**

**Ballantine Books**

Susan and Jeb are thrilled to share their home with daughter Chrissy's family—husband Stephen, newborn twins, and two huge dogs. As a gift, Stephen's parents have hired a baby nurse, Shannon, who earns Susan's confidence almost immediately. Happy chaos reigns in the Henshaw abode!

Shortly after they move in, a neighbor is found dead and the nanny is implicated. With the help of her best friend Kathleen, Susan puts her best nose forward to assist the police in finding the murderer. Leaning often on her reputation from previous experiences, she often finds

information by talking to people the police wouldn't even think of, and they are often thrilled to talk with the woman they have read about in the newspapers. And there is even more to talk about when a second body is discovered...

Valerie Wolzien's characters seem like nice people, and a day with them doesn't feel wasted. DEATH IN DUPLICATE is a busy tale, but not to hard to keep up with. I'd actually like to see the Shannon character developed; I think she has a lot of potential. Hope we see her again in the future.

Kathleen Tromp

**DREAMS NEVER END**  
edited by Nicholas Royle

2004

ISBN 0-9547913-0-4

Tindal Street Press

Available in the US from Dufour Editions

DREAMS NEVER END is a collection of short stories presented by Nicholas Royle. I say a collection and not an anthology because what Mr. Royle has done here is to take an assortment of short stories from three young authors so that we get more than a taste. We get a sense of style and promise and a feeling for where both the short story and "noir" may head in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Andrew Newsham is the author who opens the collection for us. A set of four stories, all with sparse characterizations and well drawn plots of a simplicity that I found very refreshing. Pulp and Noir, with a wink of the eye to the reader and a sense of self from the writer you seldom find in stories of this length.

Royle introduces us next to the work of Mike Scully. Dark, surreal, classic, a bit like Hammett on acid. Deep with plot and light of touch, his stories too are unique and new.

We end with the work of H.P. Tinker. Post-Gibson. Neo-Lynch. I'd never read anything like these stories and I thank both Tinker and Royle for giving them to me. They were like crocuses peeking out amongst a March snow. Constructed, imagined and executed with classic rules they presented to me an author whose career I will religiously follow from here on in. Because in Spring anything is possible.

Royle says that his intent is to show the shame that the format "short story" has become endangered. With these three authors he has shown us that there's no danger at all.

Ruth

**Eight Of Swords**

David Skibbins

2005

ISBN 0-312-33906-2

St. Martin's

Warren Ritter makes his living reading tarot cards in San Francisco. It's a comfortable life, it allows him to follow his own pursuits on his schedule. He spends his free time riding his motorcycle, going to the shooting range with his cop buddy and haunting bookstores.

But Warren isn't who he seems to be. He's hidden from his past in this new life he's created for himself. But the past is catching up with him.

His older sister finds him, and to make matters worse he is a suspect in a kidnapping and murder. To protect himself he has no choice but to make an effort to clear himself by finding the truth.

Skibbins has managed to create a quirky, humorous and tough character that is hard not to like. He has a strong voice and deft plotting skills. His sense of pacing is right on the money. The story builds and grows in the same way a good rock concert gets louder and faster. Encore!

Jon

**FACE DOWN BELOW THE BANQUETING HOUSE**

Kathy Lynn Emerson

2005

ISBN: 1880284715

Perseverance Press

This is the readers ninth trip into the Elizabethan Age with Kathy Lynn Emerson and her amateur sleuth Susanna Appleton.

In FACE DOWN BELOW THE BANQUETING HALL the inhabitants of Lady Appleton's corner of Kent await a visit from the Queen and suffer the wants of her advance team. And then comes death. With a skilled knowledge of the time period and a wicked sense of humor Emerson quickly engages her reader in a plot that reads like guilty soap opera. A great cast of characters, an engaging plot, a couple of twists and satisfactory wind up are enough to keep her readers coming back for more.

A great respite from the more serious tomes of crime fiction Lady Appleton is a treasure.

Ruth

**THE FOREST OF SOULS**

Carla Banks

2005

ISBN 0-00-719210-x

Harper Collins U.K.

THE FOREST OF THE SOULS is a book not yet available in the U.S. but one certainly worth the cost to any American fan of cerebral thriller, even with our depreciating dollar.

Helen Kovacs is dead. An historian who was researching the Nazi occupation of Minsk at the time of her death, Helen may well have stumbled upon a secret from those times that managed to get her killed.

Two people want to find out the truth behind Helen's untimely death. Fellow historian and friend Faith Lange has a vested interest in avenging Helen's death.

reporter Jake Denbigh just wants a meaty story.

As our two protagonists delve through historical papers and old memories author Banks presents a feeling for the time of occupation born out by fairy tales and history. The research behind this thriller is the best I've read in years and yet Banks light hand with the thriller genre allows the reader to absorb new knowledge without being side tracked from a very contemporary plot.

Perhaps the most cut throat profession of the all is to be found in the world of academia. Certainly academics have the ability to distort documentation and mold the truths they want seen rather than those that are real. Banks book lets us into this world. But her writing will leave you in Minsk where the forest is indeed full of souls whose lives were made too short by the inertia of a population who could not fathom the depths of evil in our world.

Ruth

### **THE GRAVEYARD POSITION**

**Robert Barnard**

**2005**

**ISBN: 0743253469**

**Scribner**

Robert Barnard does characters like no one else and THE GRAVEYARD POSITION allows the man to show off all his strengths. An entirely droll drawing room mystery this is the story of a family. Merlyn Docherty is the long presumed heir to a fortune and when his Aunt Clarissa dies he comes back to England and find his past. Why did his aunt arrange for Merlyn's disappearance and why is someone trying to kill him now? Barnard's fans are sure to enjoy this book and anyone with a sense of satire should give THE GRAVEYARD POSITION a go.

Ruth

### **THE HANNIBAL E-PUZZLE**

**Don Eckhardt**

**2004**

**Tahoe-Hudson Books**

**ISBN: 0975420771**

Strange e-mail puzzles are the clues to stopping an act of terrorism in this high energy thriller. With events that could be easily pulled from the morning paper this is a timely and entertaining book. May "Temper" Link and Rowdy Marshall are working against the clock too stop events that could endanger a power plant and influence the next presidential election.

Eckhardt has obviously done his homework for this book. The locales are dead on perfect, and his characters are wonderfully human and intriguing. And I have to add that I really enjoyed the puzzles. They add a very traditional mystery feel to a modern thriller, and I liked the challenge. A wonderful book, and I look forward to more in the Temper/Rowdy series. This is Eckhardt's second in the series.

Jon

### **HEX AND THE CITY**

**Simon R. Green**

**2005**

**ISBN: 0441012612**

**Ace Fantasy**

The Nightside is a world hidden from the one we walk in, yet tied to it. Linked by supernatural means to 3:00 AM London it is a place where things that shouldn't and can't exist do exist. And in the Nightside is a man named John Taylor, a private investigator with a unique talent for finding things that are lost and hidden. And now in this, the fourth book in the series, he is taking on a case which could very well destroy him. He is looking for the origin of The Nightside, a secret as old as mankind. It also brings him closer and closer to discovering who his Mother really is. Up until now he has no memories of her and has heard nothing but rumors of a being of great power. The more he learns, the less he knows, and the only thing for sure is that if he finds out, things will never be the same.

In case you haven't guessed, this is a cross genre book. But it has all the elements of a classic PI story. A wisecracking and streetwise hero, with loyal friends, and some people to help watch his back when it needs watching. I find this series to be totally enjoyable, and this latest one is no exception. Green is a natural story teller with a wonderful imagination. Think Mickey Spillane writing episodes of Millennium. He makes the Nightside come alive in such a vivid way that you wonder if maybe he hasn't actually been there himself. Take a vacation with Green into The Nightside... just try not to get lost in it....

Jon

**HIGHWAY 61 RESURFACED****Bill Fitzhugh****2005****ISBN: 0060597615****William Morrow**

HIGHWAY 61 RESURFACED features the return of Rick Shannon, the rockin' P.I. Shannon is a classic rock DJ by trade, but recent notoriety has prompted him to get his private investigator's license. When Lollie Woodfolk hires him to find her grandfather, Rick figures it will be another simple case. The man in question turns up dead and his client turns out to be an imposter. In steps the real Lollie Woodfolk, who hires Rick to find out who killed her Grandfather and why.

This novel finds Fitzhugh in classic form as he provides a solid mystery filled the kinds of odd, colorful characters fans have come to expect from the author. I found 61 to be more down to earth than some of Bill's previous work. His portrayal of Rick and Lollie's blossoming romance was fun and kind of sweet, He has an amazing knowledge of music and uses it to mix real history with fiction with great success.

Some fans of the author's more insane work may be disappointed by the more down to earth flavor here, but Bill still provides a supporting cast of bizarre folk and there is still more than enough weirdness to go around. I can see great success for the Rick Shannon series. I highly recommend both 61 RESURFACED and its predecessor, RADIO ACTIVITY.

Jeremy Lynch

**HOSTAGE TO MURDER****Val McDermid****2005****ISBN 1-932859-02-0****Bywater Books**

Val McDermid has returned to her Lindsay Gordon series without missing a beat.

HOSTAGE TO MURDER finds Lindsay back in Glasgow and at loose ends. A chance collision soon has protagonist investigating a case for the Gordon annals.

When a young lad is kidnapped from his school Lindsay finds herself on a quest to save him. As Lindsay travels the sea with a delightful entourage the reader wades through currents full of international terrorism and diplomacy.

Add the heart wrenching story of a child in jeopardy, a myriad of personal developments for our all too human femme, beautiful descriptions of the many locales Lindsay has to cover and a dose of murder and what you end up with is McDermid magic. This is not only a must read for McDermid fans but also a brilliant and highly accessible introduction to her many skills for any reader.

Ruth

**THE HOT KID****Elmore Leonard****2005****ISBN 0-06-072422-6****William Morrow**

Elmore Leonard is one of the most consistently entertaining writers we have in the U.S. today. Known to all for his quirky characters, and sad sacks trying to outdo even sadder sacks plots, Mr. Leonard has never been one to allow himself to fall in a rut. Proof of point, THE HOT KID. Leonard has taken his unique abilities into the 1930's. Set in the depression, THE HOT KID focuses on two Oklahoma players. Carl Webster is a U.S. Marshall and Jack Belmont is the n'er do well who imagines himself becoming Public Enemy Number One. As the one chases the other and visa-versa we're told the story of two sons, two fathers, a reporter and plenty of dames. In a tale that takes the reader through the dusty back roads of the Midwest and into the nightlife of Kansas City, Leonard continues to weave a cast into his story with a familiar tone and yet a different cadence. The rhythm of THE HOT KID is of the thirties. The step back in time made Leonard's remarkable style fresh and new to me. This book will delight those who've enjoyed the evolution of Leonard from the beginning and is a must read for fans of early pulp.

Ruth

**HOW TO BE BAD****David Bowker****June 2005****ISBN: 0312328265****St. Martin's Griffin**

Mark Madden seems to be a very average guy. Average in a way that most people are average, in the way that strangers might even consider us dull. Mark, in his early 20's, owns a bookstore, goes to the pub with his friend and basically leads a quiet life. Quiet until an old flame from back when he was seventeen reappears in his life. Caro (short for Caroline) is a bit crazy. A bit crazy like the Pope is a bit religious. As they go out for dinner Mark discovers that she does indeed find him to be boring, and finds great fun in teasing him about his habit of making lists. She slides a piece of paper to him with a list of her own, three names written on it of people she would like to see dead. She takes it one step further and mentions that she would be his if he could be the one to make it happen. It is at this point that Mark starts to live a life that is anything but dull. People start to die, and weird things start to happen, most of them because of his being with Caro.

Following Mark through this great adventure we learn that change is good, that no one is really what they seem, and nobody is really normal. Add that to the truth that happiness comes from within yourself, and there is actually a lesson here. It's told in a very strange and entertaining way, but it's a lesson.

David Bowker writes wonderful characters, colorful, eccentric, and very real. He also writes some outrageous characters as well. It's the combination of the two that make his books such a pleasure to read. That and the humor Bowker uses in his writing, I actually laughed out loud a few times while reading. Bowker is blistering hot and will only get better. One of my favorite authors and a permanent addition to my must buy list.

Jon

#### **THE ICON**

**Neil Olson**

**2005**

**ISBN 0-06-074838-9**

**Harper Collins**

Neil Olson is president and senior partner in a literary agency. As such he knows what he wants in a book.

He gets it and gives it to the reader in his first novel *The Icon*. This isn't a bandwagon book. It's a well done, realistic and thoroughly believable alternative to that big best seller about religion.

1944 Greece: The Germans are in retreat, in part because of Greek resistance fighters. As the Germans withdraw they carry out reprisals. In the little village of Epiros, a church is burned. In the church is an icon. A very early example of the art form. It is treasured by the people of the village not only for its beauty but as an article of faith and for its miraculous power. Presumed destroyed the world moves on. But, there are some who know the icon still exists and when the icon eventually shows up in contemporary New York City they want it back. Each for their own reasons. It's from his characters need for this special icon that Neil Olson drives his story.

*The Icon* is a briskly moving tale with enough action, good dialog, double cross and intrigue to guarantee an enjoyable read.

Dave Biemann

#### **IN LIKE FLYNN**

**Rhys Bowen**

**2005**

**ISBN: 978-0-312-32815-3**

**St. Martin's**

*IN LIKE FLYNN*, the fourth in the award festooned Molly Murphy series by Rhys Bowen, was thrust upon me amongst a huge stack of review books. It took me out of my comfort zone of dark noir, serial killer series and maverick, alcoholic male leads. Thank God.

New York Senator Barney Flynn lives in a house still in mourning over the kidnapping and subsequent death of his son. His wife, Theresa, has engaged the services of a spiritualist sister (think Fox sisters) in a desperate desire to contact her lost son.

Captain Daniel Sullivan, one time beau and current protector of Molly, puts her on the case ostensibly to investigate the sisters but also to take her out typhoid ridden New York in the summer of 1902. Off Molly goes to the beautiful house in Peekskill, New York, above the Hudson River.

Molly, posing as a cousin of the Irish immigrant senator, is quickly drawn into the intrigues and tensions of the house. Beyond the shady dealings of the Sorenson sisters, Molly has still unsolved details of the kidnapping and a randy ghost to contend with. As one would expect, long lost secrets aired after years of quiet inattention are fraught with danger and Molly is soon targeted.

Bowen may have put a few too many pokers in the fire with the many plot twists but, as in the novel itself, Molly's winning ways will keep readers noses in the book 'til it's fateful and dramatic end.

Molly Murphy breaks the mold of 'feisty' and intrepid historical heroines by dint of her compassion, strength, intellect and her disgust with the role women were made to live with in the early 1900's. I liked her within pages of reading her and loved her by the end of the book.

Jennifer Jordan

#### **THE INNOCENT**

**Harlan Coben**

**2005**

**ISBN: 0525948740**

**Penguin Group**

Coben's Best Since TELL NO ONE.

Harlan Coben's new book, *THE INNOCENT*, features his usual dazzling array of well-drawn characters searching to understand why their lives have suddenly blown up in their faces, but with one difference—the main character is not so innocent, despite the title. Matt Hunter is an ex-con, a guy who made one mistake that turned his life from charmed to charred. He knows it will follow him the rest of his life, despite having served his time in the penitentiary. But what Matt doesn't understand is how hard it is for other people to let go of their feelings about his one mistake. And how they'll use it to their advantage.

In *Matt Hunter*, Coben has created a truly sympathetic, flawed hero. Matt's tragic mistake was going with a friend to a wild college party where a spilled drink leads to a major confrontation with some tough party-goers. When Matt's once-invincible friend gets beat up, Matt gets scared. As another person in the crowd goes for him, Matt grips the young man's neck, and with an unlucky fall, breaks it and kills him. Matt ends up doing four years in a hardcore prison, an event that changes him. Despite starting out as a typical suburban teen with a loving family and a bright future, he ends up with a criminal record, a broken family, and a tough road to get back the life he used to have and wants again.

Just as it looks like life will turn around for him—he is buying a new house back in his old neighborhood and his wife Olivia is pregnant with their first child—a mysterious photo shows up on his camera phone, followed by a brief video clip. The two could lead Matt to believe his wife is cheating on him, which he doesn't want to believe. He is loathe to investigate what he's seen. But when circumstances force his hand to do so, he sets in motion a series of events that will uncover a lot of secrets, some deadly.

The novel capitalizes on what Coben does best, setting up scene after scene of intense, seemingly unrelated story lines featuring unconnected characters that you know will come together somewhere in the future. How these characters share a past, what caused the secrets to come to light, and how all the loose ends get tied up make for a suspenseful read. As with other Coben books, once you start *THE INNOCENT*, you won't be able to put it down. Matt Hunter is a character you will be rooting for. This is Coben's best work since the startlingly fresh *TELL NO ONE* hit the bestseller list in 2001.

Tony Perona, Author of *ANGELS WHISPER*

#### **LIFELESS**

**Mark Billingham**

**2005**

**ISBN: 0316727520**

**Little Brown (UK)**

Detective Inspector Tom Thorne is dealing with the aftermath of events that took place in *BURNING GIRL*, though he's not dealing with them well. He is given a desk assignment, basically so he can get his head together. While he's gone a case develops that points to a killer who is stalking homeless people. Anxious to get back in the game Thorne convinces his superiors to let him go under cover living on the streets, or "living rough". However things may get problematic when Thorne seems to adapt to this a little too easily. While still working the case he also does some serious looking at his own life. And while the killer is caught by the end of the book, what's going to happen with Thorne next is anyone's guess. This could very well be the end of a chapter in Thorne's life.

As always Billingham has done an amazing job with his characterizations. I wonder if he didn't actually live rough for a while to research this book, because his take on this part of society that people seem to overlook is insightful and feels, sadly, all too real. I felt emotionally invested and this kept me reading long after I should have been thinking about sleep. And with the pacing of the story building suspense right to the end sleep really wasn't an option.

I think this is Mark's best book to date, a truly great book. It would be worth ordering from the UK so you don't have wait to read it.

Jon

#### **MAD COW NIGHTMARE**

**Nancy Means Wright**

**April 2005**

**ISBN: 0312331339**

**St. Martin's Minotaur**

Ruth Willmarth owns a farm in Vermont and it is there that this book takes place. The story opens with group of people coming to stay on the farm. Ruth's boyfriend Colm asked his cousin to help out in his place and when he agreed he neglected to mention an entourage of loud company. One of the party staying on the farm, Nola, has just had surgery in Canada, and it look as though she could have the human equivalent of Mad Cow Disease. So when Nola goes missing people are obviously a bit concerned. To complicate matters her boyfriend is found strangled. Tensions mount and circumstances escalate bringing the whole thing to a rousing climax.

This is a wonderful small town mystery with an incredible sense of place. Nancy Means Wright weaves a beautiful tale and tells it in a charming manner. While this book is a cozy, don't confuse that with dull, it's not!

Jon

#### **MISSION ROAD**

**Rick Riordan**

**June 2005**

**ISBN: 0533801856**

**Bantam**

I've enjoyed reading about Tres Navarre since *THE BIG RED TEQUILA*, and this 6<sup>th</sup> book in the series is my favorite one so far. The opening of the book is like watching the start of a drag race, the tires squeal and smoke goes everywhere, only this lasts longer. Tres has known Ralph Arguello since high school, and while their lives have gone in different directions, they have been there for each other, whether that meant holding a gun or just listening. Ralph's wife Ana is a cop, a career choice about the exact opposite of his own. When Ana opens a cold case file she finds new evidence that should solve the years old murder. However before Ana gets a chance to act on the new evidence she gets shot. Her fellow officers figure it has to be Ralph who did. And unfortunately for Ralph his alibi involves committing a different crime at the same time. On the run and on the hunt for the real killer, where does he go? Right to Tres. And minutes later the police show up looking for him. Tres being a PI who has a tenuous relationship with the police at best does what any good PI would do, he jumps out the window with Ralph and runs. And it's at this point that things start to really move....

Riordan's writing brings on anticipation similar to the sound of fajitas coming toward the table, you know it's coming and it's going to be great. And as usual, Riordan does not disappoint. Tres Navarre is one of the best PI series being written today. The streets of San Antonio make the

perfect back drop and Riordan's knowledge of the city is better than a travel guide. So clear your schedule, toss some Los Lobos on the cd player and sit back and enjoy one of the best books of 2005.

Jon

**MY LIFE IN THECIA**

**Harry Mathews**

**2005**

**ISBN 1-56478-392-8**

**Dalkey Archive**

There is no mystery here unless it's whether to read this very enjoyable little novel believing it fiction or fact.

Writer, Harry Mathews spent some time in the 1970's in Paris. There, all around him are convinced, because of his circumstances, that he is with the CIA. Since it's hard to disprove a negative, Mr. Mathews decides to have some fun with his situation and sets about becoming just such an agent.

To do so, Mr. Mathews, cultivates some new, unusual friends, pokes around trying to glean information, creates a front company, then generates a map, literally out of whole cloth. All the while unaware of the consequences. Part James Bond, Mr. Mathews when he's not enamored of them, has women, more often than not swooning

over him, part Ashenden, where nothing secretive or suspicious seems to be happening to him or because of him. Is Mr. Mathews in playing "his" game, playing "the" game? It's this nothing secretive, all of this can be explained, spin of the novel that could indeed represent what a real agent might go through. And so as Mr. Mathews works his game, lines begin to blur, and in the difficult times of Left Wing European politics, Watergate, Laos, German terrorist groups, coups in Chile, Harry is....? Harry is....?

Harry is well worth reading for you to figure out.

David Biemann

**NIGHT GAME**

**Kirk Russell**

**2004**

**ISBN: 081184112X**

**Chronicle Books**

John Marquez is part of the Dept. of Fish and Game for California. A former DEA Agent looking for something a little less dangerous. Maybe he should have taken up knitting, because his life sure didn't get less dangerous when he switched jobs. In NIGHT GAMES, the second of the series, Marquez is tracking down poachers who are killing and harvesting bears. They sell various parts to people willing to pay big bucks for the medicinal qualities of the bear parts. He and his team are undercover trying to snare the people involved and the trail becomes more and more twisted. Add a murdered college student and the local law enforcement overlapping the murder case with the undercover work and the web is more tangled than before. And just to add a little extra someone might be trying to get at the agents through their families.

This is a great thriller and a wonderful mystery, filled with colorful characters and terrific action. Russell, with his second book is already a master story teller and has an uncanny ability to create suspense and tension with his writing. Kind of like hiking down a mountain side wearing rollerskates. I found the book to be outstanding with only one complaint; I really would have liked to have read one scene with a bear mauling one of the bad guys.... But that's just me.

Jon

**OBSESSED**

**Ted Dekker**

**2005**

**ISBN: 0849943736**

**Westbow (Thomas Nelson Books)**

Dekker is the author of ten other books, and I'm embarrassed to say I hadn't heard of him till I got this book. Well after reading OBSESSED not only will I remember his name, I'll be looking for it.

OBSESSED is a tale told in two times, 1973 and flashbacks to WWII. The driving force behind the story is Stephen Friedman, a real estate developer in LA. He is a war orphan who know nothing of his parents. Events occur which put him on the path to possibly finding out who his mother is. This same path ends up crossing another path, the one being forged by the son of a WWII nazi in hiding. True to the title, Friedman becomes obsessed with the things he is discovering.

Well crafted and entertaining as all get out this is a superb book. The portrayal of a man doing whatever he has to do is magnetic. Watching Friedman let his life go to hell as his follows his heart made me want to reach out to him. And yet the book explores obsession in such a way that you realize that it may not always be a bad thing. Dekker also does a grand job of creating tension and suspense through out, letting it build to a smashing climax.

I was very impressed by this book.

Jon

**ONE SHOT**

Lee Child

June 2005

ISBN 0-385-33668-3

Delacorte Press

Every time I close a Jack Reacher novel I find myself wondering where writer Child is going to take his loner protagonist next. I never come close to the truth which is why this series remains such a pleasure.

ONE SHOT opens with a bang. More accurately six. A Sniper sits on the top floor of a parking garage and swiftly, meticulously slays five pedestrians on their way home from work. Then he flees.

The local P.D. wastes no time and soon they have a suspect. Almost as quickly they have an iron clad case.

Reacher is in Florida working on his tan and his sex life when he sees the news on CNN. And we're off.

As Reacher heads towards the scene of the crime our perp asks for him. The perp's reasons for wanting Reacher to come and Reacher's reasons for heading there are vastly different.

Child soon has his reader caught up in a story of individuals, police and lawyers brought together by this crime. The characters sing. This is assuredly a Reacher novel complete with car chases and danger around every corner, shaky alliances and really bad guys.

At its heart ONE SHOT is a story about evidence. For the indisputable evidence of this case can only be challenged by human investigation. With Reacher as investigator be assured the evidence may be painted as black and white but the reality is a palate of grays. Child elevates this emerging thriller theme with his pen.

ONE SHOT is aptly titled for it is indeed a one shot read.

Ruth

**THE POET'S FUNERAL**

John M. Daniel

May 2005

Poisoned Pen Press

ISBN: 159058144X

Sometimes reading suspense fiction can just be plain fun. To be sure, much of the genre presents dark murderous characters, gruesome crime scenes, and protagonists with psychological damage and unhappy memories. But it doesn't have to be that way - and THE POET'S FUNERAL is a good example of why not.

Guy Mallon runs a small publishing house based in Santa Barbara, California. When he still ran a small bookshop, Heidi Yamada approached him and persuaded him to help her bring her poems into print. Guy soon realized that her "poems" were little more than trite groups of words with little to recommend them. But Heidi was another matter altogether - young, beautiful, and sexually adventurous.

Due almost entirely to enticing photographs of the "poet" appearing on dust jackets, the first printing of Heidi's first book sells out in short order. Heidi begins a march up the ladder of people who are well known for being well known, and leaves Guy behind in her wake.

Several years later, at an American Booksellers Association convention held in Las Vegas, Heidi is found dead, and the stage has been set for this amusing romp of a story.

Chapters begin with excerpts from eulogies delivered at Heidi's funeral, followed by flashbacks to Heidi's career as a "poet" and then present Guy's efforts to find her killer. Once Las Vegas police are satisfied that no more tourists are in danger they move on to other things, leaving Guy with his questions unanswered.

Guy eventually finds Heidi's killer, but readers will need to leave time for some giggles along the way. Daniel pokes fun at almost every segment of publishing, bookselling, and book collecting I can think of.

Woodstock

**SAVAGE GARDEN**

Denise Hamilton

May, 2005

ISBN 0-7432-6192-5

Scribner

Denise Hamilton has captured the imagination of readers everywhere. She does this by bringing to the page one of our favorite fictional characters and making what is often clichéd distinctly her own.

Protagonist Eve Diamond is a Southern Californian reporter who works the Crime Beat of L.A.'s mean streets.

SAVAGE GARDEN begins just outside the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion. An evening of theatre turns drastically wrong even before the first curtain goes up on a new production. The leading lady is missing and Eve's boyfriend may be involved.

Catarina Velosi is a passionate actress. What's happened to her? How far can Eve go with this story?

Author Hamilton uses her own reporting background to weave a tale identifiably California. Personality and persona are often interchangeable with one another, and a sense of reality may not be the best way to get to the facts behind this case.

In a world with such a golden glow truth become oblique and flames may be fleeting. Hamilton's tale has the sweet scent of jasmine mingling with a coastal mudslide.

Ruth

**THE SHIFTING TIDE****Ann Perry****2005****ISBN: 0-345-44010-2****Ballantine**

Bless Ann Perry for once again allowing us to follow Hester and Monk through another mystery; in an outstanding series this is an especially engrossing installment. Badly in need of money, Monk reluctantly accepts a commission to find a cache of ivory stolen from a ship waiting to unload at the London docks. As he struggles to maneuver in an unfamiliar environment we follow along, feeling his frustrations and rejoicing at his small victories. Although the ship owner is interested only in the immediate return of the ivory, Monk is determined to solve what he considers the more important mystery, the death of a crew member during the robbery. Meanwhile, Hester is struggling to keep her clinic going. Her insistence in caring for women-of-the-streets meets with public disapproval, but an assortment of loyal characters continues to share the burden. When Monk solves the original problem only half-way through the book, we know that we are being set up for something far bigger and, indeed, Perry does not fail to up the ante. In fact, I didn't put the book down from that point.

What makes all of this unfamiliar territory, the Victorian setting and the rather extreme premise work is the expertise of Perry, the writer. She walks us through the London docks patiently, until we get our bearings, introduces us to some admirable characters as well as some dastardly ones and lets us watch as Monk works. But for me her best contribution is her smooth footwork in avoiding the pitfalls of writing a series: she continues to let her characters grow and change. People move in and out of their lives while Hester and Monk's own relationship becomes satisfyingly deeper. And this book works as a stand alone while alluding just enough to the previous one that if you missed it you'll be tempted to go backwards.

Ann Perry writes of unconventional people in dark times. But she finds for us enough people of intelligence and honor and caring in some of the most harrowing situations that I always finish the story feeling hopeful somehow. I consider that genius.

Mary Coen

**SHROUDED IN THOUGHT****N.S. Wikarski****2005****ISBN: 0-9720335-1-3****Northgate Press**

This is the second book in a series set in Chicago at the end of the 19th Century. It's charm comes from it's breezy, somewhat stylized manner and it's command of Chicago lore in that colorful era. Freddie Simpson and Evangeline LeClair are both children of privilege who spend time outside of the usual social enclave-he is a junior reporter for the Chicago Gazette, she volunteers as an English teacher to immigrants, and they both work together to solve what crimes come their way. When a young factory worker falls to her death in a river Freddie covers it for his paper. The family that owns the factory is an acquaintance of Evangeline's, and when Freddie sees a man from the scene of the drowning at a social gathering the story takes off. With Evangeline pulling most of the strings and Freddie, sometimes reluctantly, doing the leg work, they bounce along to a most satisfactory conclusion.

The mystery is relatively uncomplicated and the characters are rather two-dimensional, but this worked since the pace remained up-tempo. What did not work for me was the relationship between the two main characters: Evangeline seemed far more mature and sophisticated than Freddie, who wasn't given anything but shallow to portray. So the glimmers of incipient romance between them struck a false chord. If you can forgive this, the book can provide a few pleasant hours.

Mary Coen

**SILVERFIN****Charlie Higson****April 2005****ISBN: 0-7868-3661-x****Hyperion**

Bond, James Bond at 14 years old! You don't have to be a seasoned Bond fan to enjoy this book. The setting Eaton boarding school in the 1930s. James is having some difficulties fitting in to his new school. What with the Hellbore cup on the line and his archrival a sure win. But when a mysterious newcomer becomes a threat to the almost fixed win no one is sure the outcome. But James has it easy compared to Alfie Kelly, a boy just about his age. You see as Kelly was fishing in fenced off territory he caught a big slimy eel. Just as he is releasing it into the water he is knocked off balance by more eels. The water suddenly comes alive eels everywhere, they attack and just when the worst is near he is rescued. His savior however has bulging eyes, a wide gaping mouth from ear to ear, wet hairless gray skin, a flat nose with wide nostrils and a hideous face. Sounds worse than the eels right? Right! This monster is part of a scientist's inhumane project of creating man-animal hybrids. It is up to James to save Kelly before its too late.

SILVERFIN is the first in this new series.

Katie Higgins

**The Smoke Room**  
**Earl Emerson**  
**May 2005**  
**ISBN: 0345462904**  
**Ballantine Books**

Jason Gun is a rookie firefighter with a rocky childhood. He finds his place in Engine Company 29, when a beautiful woman walks into his life. His hormones result in his missing a fire call and he finds himself at the mercy of two fellow firefighters that are aware of his slip-up. When these two firemen acquire a fortune in bearer bonds, Jason becomes an unwilling accomplice to their crimes. When actions of these men grow even darker, Jason's conscience cannot allow him to keep silent. He finds himself fighting to do the right thing while keeping the job he loves.

The Smoke Room begins with a pig falling from 11000 feet into a woman's house. You have to like any author that can come up with that. The Smoke Room features humor that I have not seen previously from the author. Emerson delivers a solid suspenseful page-turner. If you are looking for a summer thriller, you can't go wrong with this one.

Jeremy

**STEWBALL**  
**Peter Bowen**  
**2005**  
**ISBN: 031227730x**  
**St. Martin's Minotaur**

Peter Bowen's Gabriel Du Pré is always a guaranteed read and SCREWBALL is no exception. In the latest adventure featuring Mystery's favorite cattle cop our protagonist is called to solve the murder of his Aunt's latest husband. Soon Du Pré is working in tandem with his young granddaughter and a horse named Screwball, the FBI and a cast of characters familiar to all who've visited this series before. It seems there's crooked horse racing going on out west and the objective may be to launder money for terrorist activity. Full of crotchety charm this may not be Bowen's best mystery to date but he still comes out a length ahead of the rest of the pack.

Ruth Jordan

**STILL RIVER**  
**Harry Hunsicker**  
**May 2005**  
**Thomas Dunne Books**  
**ISBN:0312337876**

I have seen the future of PI novels, and Harry Hunsicker is going to be a driving force in what is to come. If his debut novel, STILL RIVER is any indication, Hunsicker will be a name that will be seen on many best seller lists. It has everything a great PI novel should have. This is a debut that will be talked about for a long time.

The PI's name is Lee Henry Oswald, not a real popular name around Dallas. He's a veteran of the first Gulf war, a no-nonsense investigator. In this first tale he takes on a missing persons case which soon escalates into much more. He is soon entangled in real estate games, drug dealers and some very violent and very private people. To make matters a bit more interesting, his partner is dying of cancer and he is asked to keep an eye on said partner's niece, Nolan, a cop from El Paso looking to get into the PI business herself. He reluctantly begins to see that Nolan doesn't really need a babysitter and may actually be an asset. Oswald also has a few friends who are able to lend a hand when he needs it, and by the climax of the book, he sure does need it. The heat of the city isn't the only thing making things hot for Oswald.

Hunsicker had my attention from the first page, and kept it straight through to the end. I love hot food, and if this novel was food, it would be covered in habanero peppers and Tabasco. A great plot driving a superb story to a brilliant conclusion with characters who will soon be used as comparison for other people's work. Hunsicker is the real deal. One question, how do we get him to write faster?

Jon

**STUFFED**  
**Brian M. Wiprud**  
**May 2005**  
**ISBN: 0-440-24188-X**  
**Dell**

After reading this book you will know more about taxidermy, endangered species, and bear gallbladders than you ever cared to. The first part of this odd caper has all of the elements of a traditional detective story. You've got Garth Carson, the smart-mouthed detective, his best gal Angie, Detective Walker, the antagonistic police contact, and Otto, there's always got to be an Otto.

Garth is in Vermont hunting stuffed treasure to feed his taxidermy rental business when he spies a white crow and deems it the perfect birthday gift for Angie. On Garth's way out, the crow's former owner confronts him in the middle of the street and demands it back. Garth sics the sheriff on the boy and makes his way back to Manhattan. That night, Garth and Angie are attacked in their home and robbed of all of their valuable taxidermy, including the crow.

After tracking the stolen goods to Maine, Garth runs into the young man again during their second confrontation the kid is run down by a truck. Before long, a mysterious Asian man, two rough circus carnies, and a pack of angry pygmies are taking turns harassing Garth, who needs to find out what is going on so the local police will let him go home.

For the majority of this book, Wiprud plays the story straight and it resembles a hardboiled detective tale more than a violent episode of "I Love Lucy." The closer Garth gets to the secret of the crow's popularity though, the stranger things get. By the end, Garth is dressed like a clown and trying to link a mutant penguin boy to the North Korean army. The ultimate revelation behind all of the strange happenings, while unique, was a bit too much for me to accept. However, the writing is strong with the story zipping along to the conclusion and Garth and Angie are charming sleuths.

Bryon Quartermous

### **SUICIDE SQUEEZE**

**Victor Gischler**

**2005**

**ISBN 0-385-33725-6**

**Delacorte Press**

To say that Gishler is unique amongst his peers seems an understatement. Who else could sit down and say I'm going to write a book about collecting? Well, lots of people. But the collectible in question? No one but Mr. Gischler could come up with a DiMaggio baseball card that is signed not only by Silent Joe but also by his wife Marilyn Monroe and the director Billy Wilder. And when is the card signed? Why on the day the subway grate scene is filmed in Seven Year Itch.

This card is the one possession that Teddy Folger values above all others. It is also becoming the holy grail to a sect of memorabilia collectors of an unsavory sort.

Connor Samson has been hired to repossess Teddy's boat. Nobody could know the trouble he's found. As Gischler tells the story of this hunt he introduces his readers to a slew of characters: a Japanese psychopath, an insurance fraud investigator, a struggling artist, a serial adulteress, even a mob muscleman with a heart of gold and an attractive bartender named Misty. The characters are woven and presented and often tossed away with no more thought than a soiled tissue.

The result is a very well done and often humorous look at GREED. Florida style. Bigger and better than everywhere else. Everyone has a price, something they're willing to give everything else up for. Is it freedom we're after or things? Amongst the many dead bodies and the laugh out loud absurdity of our hapless hero's quest to get himself out of a pickle of deli proportion Gischler delivers a message of contemporary times that may leave a bitter aftertaste.

Gischler continues to get better with each book. I find myself wondering where he'll go next.

Ruth

### **TEARS OF THE DRAGON**

**Holly Baxter**

**June 2005**

**ISBN 1-59058-146-6**

**Poisoned Pen Press**

Large American cities during the depression years of the 1930's were hard places to live. Jobs were scarce, and the burgeoning criminal industry thriving on prohibition led to wide spread corruption and cynicism. Honest families felt themselves besieged on all sides. Cops and journalists who were also trying to live honest lives were similarly isolated.

Holly Baxter introduces us to the Brownes - a widowed mother and four daughters who cling to a fragile economic stability in 1930's Chicago. In the hope of earning a little extra cash, Elodie Browne agrees to help a friend serve food and drink at a fancy party. But the glamorous atmosphere is shattered when a badly beaten man stumbles in, warning of danger to follow. When the intruder is shot dead as the guests and servers watch in horror, Elodie's world spins into a whole new realm.

Elodie works as a writer for a new radio show, and her natural intelligence and curiosity lead her to ask leading questions in the wrong places. Before long, she is learning about Chinese secret societies and the tension between Chicago based Chinese activity and the Italian Mafia. The next violent act hits very close to home, and she realizes that her friends and family are also in danger.

Paula Gosling, who has won awards from the British Crime Writers Association for previous novels, returns to her native US under a new pen name. TEARS OF THE DRAGON is a very engrossing visit to the now distant world of the depression years in America. And Elodie, along with her journalist cousin Hugh and an attractive, honest, red haired cop are characters I look forward to meeting again.

Woodstock

### **THICKER THAN BLOOD**

**Penny Rudolph**

**June 2005**

**ISBN:1590581482**

**Poisoned Pen Press**

The history of Los Angeles is the history of how humans diverted the scarcest of desert resources - water - to allow a large metropolis to thrive and expand. The history of Los Angeles, indeed of all of Southern California, is also the history of conflict between urban planners, farmers and ranchers, and environmentalists.

Rachel Chavez has no intention of getting involved in this particular tug of war. Devoted to maintaining her own sobriety, she lives in a small apartment carved out of a large parking garage left to her by her grandfather. The garage also provides her livelihood, but eventually places

her smack in the middle of a great deal of trouble. A large environmental testing firm specializing in water purity rents parking spaces from her on a monthly basis. When Rachel observes body damage to one of the cars owned by the testing firm, and when she learns that an employee of that firm has died in a hit and run accident, her suspicions are aroused. Other sinister events follow in short order and when her safety and the safety of her family and friends is threatened, Rachel perseveres to uncover the truth. As she follows the chain of events, she finds herself involved in the classic three way struggle over the best way to manage water resources.

Rachel is a gutsy young woman, determined to act on her own. Whether her reluctance to consult with police (based on unhappy experiences during the years she abused alcohol) is a believable thread in the story is for the reader to decide.

Rudolph develops her characters well, and the final unmasking of the villain at the heart of the matter caught me by surprise.

Woodstock

#### **TO DARKNESS AND TO DEATH**

**Julia Spencer-Fleming**

**June 2005**

**ISBN-0-312-33485-0**

**Thomas Dunne Books**

Twenty-four hours. November 14<sup>th</sup> is a day that will live in infamy for the residents of Miller's Kill and fans of Julia Spencer Fleming's Clare Fergusson/ Russ Van Alystyne's mystery series.

It's a full day and it starts early. Much of Miller's Kill wakes up before sunrise. Today is the first day of deer hunting season and there's a promise of venison in the freezer. As Linda Van Alystyne presents Russ with a birthday present never to be forgotten in one corner of town Clare is roused from bed to help with a search and rescue in the other. A heiress is missing and the clock is ticking.

As Clare and Russ tramp through different woods the entire town awakens. Deer hunting isn't the only thing going on. A new resort is set to open this evening and several local businesses are preparing to close when documents turning over private land are signed at the party. Add to this the impending visit of St. Alban's bishop the following morning and our fictional world is indeed a busy one.

In Spencer-Fleming's hand it is also sinister. There will be more than one victim today.

Fleming uses the time theme very well in TO DARKNESS AND TO DEATH. It is however her ability to put to paper the phobias and concerns of the small town that make this book eloquent and her humanity that engages us with the characters within.

This outing of the series is sure to please fans both new and old.

Ruth

#### **VINEYARD PREY**

**Philip R. Craig**

**June 2005**

**ISBN:0743246772**

**Scribner**

I'd forgotten how much I enjoy Philip Craig's Martha Vineyard series. J.W. Jackson is a mystery protagonist who continues to reveal his personality through plot and reaction rather than self-reflection.

J.W.'s acquired a family since the beginning of this series but old loyalties continue to threaten his safety.

In VINEYARD'S PREY it's hunting season on the island and some people aren't just hoping for venison stew.

Joe Bagey's life is on the line and J.W. is going to help. Three black -ops agents are dead. Joe and one other remain alive and J.W. will make hard choices with a big heart to save Joe.

With humor and skill Craig weaves a tale that has the feel of New England folklore, a good story orated in front of a hearth or around a campfire. Scary? Funny? Truth? Fiction? The best of those fireside tales left you wondering so does the work of Philip Craig.

Ruth

#### **WHAT GOES AROUND COMES AROUND**

**Con Lehane**

**2005**

**ISBN:0312322984**

**St. Martin's Minotaur**

The second in Con Lehane's great new series featuring Brian McNulty. et in New York with a bartender as a main character the book already has an advantage, but the real advantage is Con Lehane's great story telling. Set towards the end of the 1980's, McNulty is experiencing a bit of old home week. An old freind hooks him up with another old friend who needs a bartender to help out at the hotel he is running. A body turns up and McNulty's friend Greg turns up missing as well. Before long it seems clear that things are tied to a place in Atlantic City to which all the friends have ties. As he tries to discover what happened to Greg things get a bit crazy and McNulty can't be sure who is playing who. Con Lehane is a pure pleasure to read, the book has an incredible flow to it that gives it a real smooth pace, like a good scotch going down after a long day at work.

A great follow up to BEWARE THE SOLITARY DRINKER. Con Lehane has a wonderful voice and has already earned a place at the bar filled with great mystery writers.

Jon

**WITH NO ONE AS WITNESS**

Elizabeth George

2005

ISBN: 0060545607

Harper Collins

I've threatened to write an article called "In Defense of Elizabeth George" since Crime Spree began. There is absolutely no need. WITH NO ONE AS WITNESS speaks for itself.

The characters that have endeared Ms. George to her readers are all here and in fine form. The simple police procedural that advances the lives of said characters is as on the money as in either PLAYING FOR THE ASHES or FOR THE SAKE OF ELENA.

I was struck immediately by the subject matter. For Elizabeth George has written a serial killer novel. The plot is wonderfully thought out and engrossing. It is also a rather fascinating criticism of the serial killer novel. And while I may not agree with all of the author's arguments I greatly respect her ability to present them as plot. George has been paying attention and has obviously read a great many of her contemporaries.

WITH NO ONE AS WITNESS is her reply to a plot trend that she makes work by using violence in a way few writers would dare.

There is violence aplenty within the pages of this book. The deaths our protagonists are investigating are horrific and yet antiseptic to the average reader. But within these chapters is a violence that will feel very personal to long time readers and even to those who've only stopped in periodically. So put on a pot of coffee and get ready to stay up until the wee hours. Have tissue ready. You may need it.

I've defended the lady faithfully throughout the years while realizing that her books are not for everyone. This book? This is the Elizabeth George that everyone should read. I'll go a step further and say WITH NO ONE AS WITNESS is a book that is award worthy.

Ruth

**WITH RED HANDS**

Stephen Woodworth

2005

ISBN: 0553586459

Dell (PBO)

This is such a great series. The follow-up to last year's terrific cross genre debut THROUGH VIOLET EYES picks up a few years later with Natalie Lindstrom freelancing and trying to build a life with out the NAACC involved. Natalie is what is known as a Violet, meaning she can communicate with the dead. There are enough people (marked by nature with violet eyes) who can do this that a group was put together to train them and over see them. Well Natalie may be gone from the group, but that doesn't mean they are done with her, or her daughter.

Natalie is asked by a friend in the DA's office to take a look into a case she is working on. Before she knows it she is caught in the cross hairs of a killer and she and her daughter are at risk. As more people start to die it's up to her to stop the killer before h finds her.

Woodworth has created a terrific character in Natalie and the world he has created for her is unique. This is an edgy thriller that demands to be read quickly. Woodworth is on my ever growing must buy list and I look forward to his next book.

Jon