

100 BULLETS:VOL.8 THE HARDWAY

Brian Azzarello
art by Eduardo Risso
ISBN: 1401204902
DC Comics

In this 8th trade collection of the 100 Bullets series Brian Azzarello takes us to New Orleans. Before we even get to the story we have a forward from Jason Starr in which he gives his ideas on what he thinks noir is. He sums it up by saying that yes, 100 Bullets is pretty damn noir. I agree. You don't have to read the previous books to enjoy this tale of revenge and sorrow, however after reading it you will probably want to.

Wylie Times is in Louisiana, drinking and waiting. You see he's been given an untraceable gun and 100 bullets to go with it, and if he waits long enough he hopes to be able to use them on the man he believes is responsible for his misery. Through the telling of the story we discover Wylie is an ex-con, and that he was in love. But as things in these stories do, things went really wrong.

Azzarello is an remarkable writer. This is such an intricately weaved plot that it just pulled me along and I couldn't read fast enough. Sean Doolittle was quoted as saying that in true noir from page one you know the character is f*#ked, well here you get the feeling that all the characters are. To make this incredible story even better is the moody and distinctive art work by Risso. Together these two brilliant men have created something that is haunting and truly memorable. Find this book, read it, think about it and absorb it, and then read it again.

Jon Jordan

2000 MILES TO OPEN ROAD

Trey R. Barker
2005
ISBN: 1594143234
Five Star First Edition

If books were Rock and Roll, Trey R. Barker would be The Ramones.

Halford Turnbull is not having a good day. The police are after him for murder, gangsters want to kill him, and people are shooting at him. All he wants to do is prove he's innocent, not to his girlfriend, not to the people after him, just to his brother. But to do that he needs to log in some hard traveling miles.

A new voice in the crime fiction world, Trey R. Barker has made himself heard with this book. It's kind of like Quentin Tarrantino on Methamphetamines. It's not really a caper, but has some of those elements. It's really just about a guy trying to get through an ordeal, and hopefully redeem himself a bit in the process. Barker writes with fury and the action in this book propels it at light speed. And yet the anchor here is the characters, human and flawed, but true.

Barker has come to kick some ass and chew some bubblegum, and he's all out of bubblegum.

Jon

ALWAYS TIME TO DIE

Elizabeth Lowell
July 2005
ISBN 0-06-050415-3
William Morrow

When the novel opens, a heavily applied pillow is sucking the life out of "the Senator," the patriarch of a powerful New Mexico family. We soon learn that Andrew Josh Quintrell III was of a breed so vile and disgusting, it was amazing that foul play hadn't befallen him decades earlier. Apparently, when it came to sex, the Senator had neither discretion nor access to birth control. His legacy became one of sorrow and heartache. The Senator's death coincides with the arrival of Carolina (Carly) May, a genealogical researcher. She's been asked, or more accurately, commanded to trace the female line of the Castillo family by the Senator's tough as nails, sister-in-law, Winifred. Is Winifred out for revenge on those she believes put her sister, Sylvia, the Senator's long-suffering wife, in a coma? With more than a few secrets of his own, Dan Duran, one of the Senator's unacknowledged grandchildren, begrudgingly gives Carly a hand in her quest. They develop a rapport that takes the brooding, loner Dan by surprise. Their relationship unfolds slowly and thoughtfully for a few pages, but before long Dan's "woody" is open for business. Carly's investigation soon unearths some disturbing details about the Quintrell family that have been veiled in secrecy for generations. What effect will Carly's probing have on Josh Quintrell IV's run for the White House? The plot thickens when mean-spirited pranks intended to frighten Carly turn into full-fledged murder attempts. What information hidden in the family tree is worth killing for? Carly's inquiry allows the author the chance to provide the readers with a glimpse into New Mexico's past. And like an episode of CSI, we learn something about forensic genealogy. I give the book 3 (out of 4) stars for the history lesson. 2 stars for the convoluted plot (I had to keep looking at the family tree in the front of the book) and 1 star for the romance that wasn't all that romantic.

Jackie Rice

APPALOOSA
Robert B. Parker
2005
ISBN 0-399-15277-6
Penguin

Robert B. Parker has always written about the same thing, whether it's a Spenser novel, Jesse Stone, or even Sunny Randall. His themes are universal; love, pride, and doing the right thing against all odds. His latest novel, *Appaloosa*, is no different. Except it's set in the old west, not modern-day Boston.

Virgil Cole and Everett Hitch are two gunman who go from town to town cleaning up problems. They arrive in Appaloosa, a small town probably in Colorado, to find that an outlaw rancher named Randall Bragg has killed the town marshal and is now terrorizing the town. Cole and Hitch are

hired by the town to stop Bragg. Along the way, Cole meets Allie French and falls in love. The clichés of a western are all there, from a hold up of a train, to a chase in the desert, to a showdown in the middle of a town. What separates this novel from other westerns is Parker. Still a strong stylist, Parker always shows who his characters are, never telling. The descriptions of the time period are used as beats in conversation. We learn about the characters through what is said and unsaid. And much like Spenser and Hawk, when Hitch and Cole talk, most of what's important remains unsaid. Even Allie French observes while the two are talking in front of her, "Sometimes I sit here and watch you two grunt at each other, and have the feeling that there's a whole conversation going on that I don't even hear" (65). It's all typical Parker fare, but it works. Ultimately, I think the response to this novel will come down to whether or not you're a Parker fan. I've enjoyed his works for many years and feel that this is another strong entry into an ever-expanding catalogue.

David White

BLONDE LIGHTNING
Terrill Lee Lankford
August 2005
Ballantine Books
ISBN 0-345-46779-5

Lankford's grip on sleazy Hollywood is a pleasure. Last year's EARTHQUAKE WEATHER introduced crime fiction readers to Clyde McCoy and Mark Hayes. As BLOND LIGHTNING opens the cops are following O.J. in that infamous slow chase and Clyde has finished his manuscript. He asks Mark if he'd like to be a producer. To get a B movie made what will people do? BLOND LIGHTNING tells a story of the self absorbed, high risks and fatal decisions. Sparse prose and great characters are played against the wordy world of promises and caricatures of a Hollywood you feel you know. Can Mark and Clyde get the film *Blonde Lightning* made? What will become of them and the people who they meet while filming and financing their dream? Lankford delivers his story well making BLONDE LIGHTNING one of the best and fastest reads of the summer.

Ruth

THE BLOOD KNOT
John Galligan
2005
ISBN: 1932557121
Bleak House Books

Bleak House Books has an amazing author in John Galligan. His writing is unique in a genre where books can very easily blend together. While they claim to be fly fishing mysteries, they are much more. They are human and emotional and poignant and totally original. His insight into human nature is evident on every page.

Ned "Dog" Oglivie is trying to escape his previous life and his way of doing that is to disappear into the streams of the wilderness and fish. BLOOD KNOT opens with Dog in a

small little county in Wisconsin made up of a very strange family and an Amish community. His fishing is interrupted by a beaver attack and a murder, and it's hard to say which one will bring him more grief. As Dog is drawn into the case he finds himself in very dangerous place. Unfortunately he is not the only one who will suffer if he fails to make sense of what is really going on. "This is not a fishing trip".

Galligan's first book in the "Dog" series, THE NAIL KNOT, was brilliant, this one is better. A tale that twists and turns more than rivers and creeks fly fisherman haunt. An exceptional book that is one of my favorites of the year so far.

Jon

BONE FACTORY
Steven Sidor
September 2005
St. Martin's Minotaur
ISBN 0-312-32951-8

Steven Sidor follows his debut novel SKIN RIVER with an equally strong sophomore offering. BONE FACTORY is as well written as any book you're going to read this fall. When police partners Eliza Ochoa and Ike Horner are called to the scene on a cold Midwestern morning they find a body next to the river. Someone has killed with a viciousness that makes even these two hardened cops think twice. The battered body found by an early morning jogger is only the first of the crimes this pair must look at before coming to the concluding pages of BONE FACTORY.

Sidor writes with a noirish flare seldom accomplished in police procedurals. Brilliantly written passages give way to a seamlessly told story. As our detectives traverse the seedier side of the "sex for hire" market in their community we find ourselves more involved with the characters who make up this world than with the world itself. Familial disapproval and shattered lives sing to you through Sidor's prose. The detectives' relationship takes on a feel of early courtship. Mutual admiration and respect often give way to concern and just under the surface are the secrets of any new relationship. The underbelly of corruption is palpable and with a slight of hand Sidor takes an opportunity to speak about the many different sides of have and have not.

BONE FACTORY assures Sidor recognition as one of mystery's best new scribes.

Ruth

BRANDED WOMAN
Wade Miller
1952/ July 2005
ISBN 0-8439-5359-4
Reprinted by Hard Case Crime

Wade Miller was a pseudonym for writers Robert Wade and William Miller. Their most famous book is BADGE OF EVIL (adapted for the screen as the Orson Welles classic *A Touch of Evil*). Their most famous character has got to be P.I. Max Thursday. Largely forgotten by today's hard-boiled readers, this pair remains at the heart of hard-boiled origins. This summer Hard Case Crime has reprinted one of their stand

alones and opened the eyes of a whole new generation of readers.

BRANDED WOMAN opens in a Mexican Airport. Protagonist Cay Morgan is traveling alone, just her and her 357 Magnum. Her agenda is murder. Cay is an international jewel thief who has a five year old score to settle. And after a long wait she's hot on the trail of the Trader. A man who's only been seen by a handful of people. A man who Cay had the misfortune to cross.

With twists and turns and plenty of Mexican scenery BRANDED WOMAN takes its reader on a joyful and pulpish ride. What is the Trader after? Can Cay find him? Who will turn up dead next? Concise prose and direct dialog had me from page one until the bitter end. It's hard-boiled people, you know the end will be bitter. At \$6.99 this is the steal of the summer.

Ruth

THE BURNING GIRL

Mark Billingham

2005

ISBN:00060745266

William Morrow

The fourth book in the series featuring Inspector Tom Thorne, THE BURNING GIRL should cement Billingham's place at the grown up table at the mystery dinners. He has gotten better with every book and this one is no exception. Detective Inspector Thorne is working two cases at once, a series of gangland related and a cold case that is being worked by an Ex-DI named Carol Chamberlain. Before long it looks like the two cases are related and it's up to Thorne to keep Carol from getting too wrapped up in it. Old wounds are re-opened and new problems arise as they get deeper and deeper into the gray areas of justice. Add to the mix Thorne's Father having some real problems and it might be enough to break Thorne down for good.

This series has some of the best characterization in crime fiction today. Billingham is at the top of his game in BURNING GIRL. An amazing piece of work full of humanity and suspense.

Jon

THE CASE OF THE GREEDY LAWYERS

By Carl Brookins

September 2005

ISBN 1-59414-319-6

FIVE STAR

Savvy, snazzy, vertically challenged (but with interesting compensations), Carl Brookins' P.I. Sean "N.M.I." Sean is one of the most engaging new characters to snoop around since Elvis Cole, or Rushmore McKenzie.

Sean Sean is a throwback: "a P.I., a private dick, a peeper, a shamus". He maintains a downscale office mostly just to have a place to hang out in bad weather, and to meet with mostly downscale clients with problems. So when a beautiful broad (why are they called that?) enters his office, saying that she needs help and that he was recommended to her,

Sean Sean is perplexed. (One): he's not used to having clients of such obvious means; (B): he and the law firm recommending him have a mutually acrimonious history, and (3): she leaves without telling him her problem or giving him her name.

The next time he sees her, he learns her name - from the coroner.

Now Sean Sean may be short, but he's not one to trifle with-- unless you don't mind a naked man (except for red Keds and a mask) crashing your swanky pool party. But seriously, when Sean finds himself without a client, and later threatened to stay off the case, he naturally dives right in, fully clothed for battle.

Replete with stolen identities, blackmailers, shady, shameless, and, of course, greedy lawyers, a wealthy dominatrix, a masseuse who won't mix business and pleasure, video tapes, thugs, wise-cracks, and subtle references to several publishing houses which - and this is just a guess - possibly lacked the foresight to publish this series, this is a book not to be missed. The writing is superb: Carl, for instance, uses shorter sentences than that last one. As with all Five Star productions, this is a beautifully done book, and you can judge this book by its cover.

Gary Shulze of Once Upon A Crime Bookstore

CHICANO DETECTIVE FICTION

Susan Baker Sotelo

2005

ISBN:0786421851

McFarland

This is a non fiction book that examines Chicano detectives in fiction. Included are studies of the work by Hinojosa, Rudolfo Anaya, Lucha Corpi, Michael Nava and a personal favorite, Manuel Ramos.

While this book is obviously set up to be used as a text book, it is a wonderful introduction to a group of writers who are becoming more and more influential. Sotelo's love for the work shows through out the book. It is extremely well researched and informative, and while it could easily become dry reading, it doesn't. It made me want to go back and reread some of these books with different eyes.

Jon

COLD GRANITE

Stuart MacBride

2005

ISBN:031233995X

St. Martin's Minotaur

COLD GRANITE is the debut novel from Stuart MacBride, but it sure doesn't feel like a first book. MacBride writes with the skill of veteran author.

Logan McRae is back on the job after year off spent recovering from stab wounds received on the job as a Detective with the police in Aberdeen Scotland. His first night back a young boy's body is found. It has all the markings of a serial killer, and sure enough, before long another child is missing. The case is soon complicated by leaks of

information to the press. Pressure is brought on to the investigative team to get this solved quickly, even more so when the local parents take the law into their own hands. MacBride will undoubtedly be compared to Ranking and Robinson and McDermid, but make no mistake, he has a clear and unique style all his own. It feels like an overcast day. He plays fair with the reader, and also manages to throw in some interesting twists and turns. A superb narrative and wonderful sense of timing helped make this a book that got read in two sittings, and while it is almost 450 pages, it sure didn't feel like it was that long. COLD GRANITE is an perfect example of what I love about reading mysteries.

Jon

CSI – SECRET IDENTITY (Graphic Novel)
Steven Grant
Art by Gabriel Rodriguez
2005
IDW Press

This particular run in the series will be collected in a trade format very soon. IDW has the exclusive rights to the comics and they are doing a wonderful job. This time out in the Secret Identity story arc they have Steven Grant writing. The story opens with a body being discovered in a hotel that has been demolished.

Before long the team starts uncovering evidence leading to past murder and secrets come to light.

I don't want to say too much because I don't want to give anything away. However I can say that the writing is top notch and the art suits the series perfectly. IDW has done a wonderful job with the CSI franchise and this latest story line is no different. And while the show sometimes makes me a little crazy, the comics are terrific. They are available where comics are sold, the collections are easy to obtain online at Amazon and other places or you can go right to www.idwpublishing.com. These are comics that seem tailor made for mystery readers.

Jon

THE DARWIN CONSPIRACY
John Darnton
Sept 2005
ISBN:1400041376
Knopf

This book seems to have a little of everything in it, adventure, suspense, a true mystery, and great characters. Darnton is a master and this is proof positive.

Charles Darwin waited quite a while to publish his theories on evolution, and this book in part looks into why. It starts in the present with a researcher named Hugh Kellem who is still dealing with his brother's death. As a way to escape he seeks refuge on an island doing research of tropical birds. When this grows old he returns to London and turns his interest towards Darwin. With the discovery of Darwin's daughters Lizzie's journals he may be on to something other researchers have missed.

The book also simultaneously flows a young Charles Darwin on his voyage on The Beagle, it was this trip that brought about his theories and changed his life.

Darnton's book is so engaging that I could not stop reading. With a wonderful flow between past and present he tells a story that is elaborate and yet easy to follow. While a lot of the book is based on speculation, it reads like it could easily be fact. High entertainment factor with a little learning thrown in.

Jon

THE DAVINCI COD
Don Brine
Oct 2005
ISBN: 0060848073
Harper (Trade Paperback)

Ok. I'll admit it right up front, I laughed hard enough reading this book that I had coffee shoot out of my nose. This book is not only a parody of the plot and book itself, but of the writing style used in THE DA VINCI CODE. And it is done brilliantly. Jacques Sauna-Lurker, a professor, at the National Gallery in London is murdered, by having a large cod stuffed down his throat. Dr. Donglan, an anagrammatologist, is brought to the scene by the police to help de-cipher a secret code.

However it soon becomes apparent that he is their chief suspect. He is soon on the run with a French police cryptologist named Sophie Nudivue and as they try to prove Donglan's innocence they uncover a vast world wide conspiracy. Add to this already quirky group of characters a hitman called "The Exterminator" and you have unlimited potential for fun. I also loved the extraordinary amount of detail the characters go into every time they explain something. If it was a movie you would expect them to be talking right to the camera when they do it.

This book is sheer genius and total unadulterated fun. Don Brine is actually Adam Roberts, a Professor of 19th Century in London. He managed to not only write a very funny book, he has written a compelling and entertaining adventure at the same time. This is more than just a great parody, it's a great book.

Jon

DEADGAME
Kirk Russell
Oct 2005
ISBN:0811850781
Chronicle Books

Book three featuring John Marquez, warden of the California Fish & Game Agency is terrific addition to this great series. In the last book the story revolved around bear poaching, this time out it's sturgeon, which are being used to get illegal caviar and pass it off as Russian. As one might guess, this brings in an involvement with Russian mafia types, and they have a lot more going on than fish egg smuggling! To complicate matter Marquez is dealing with monstrous budget cuts and a less than cooperative FBI. Russell also uses Marquez's family to help keep him grounded and this keeps him from becoming just a cut out action hero.

Russell has a writing style that is engaging and entertaining. He draws the reader in quickly and keeps the story moving fast. He is one of the best at creating suspense and maintaining a sense of urgency. He is also extremely knowledgeable about his subject matter with his writing of these eco-issues he manages to raise awareness without preaching. I hope to see many more books from this wonderful new author.

Jon

DEADLY ILLUSIONS
Chester D. Campbell
2005
ISBN: 1-930754-65-5
Durban House Publishing

I was waiting for a plane at Nashville International two days after the last Crimespreed Deadline when I read the first line: "For a guy who'd had a major problem with much of Metro Nashville's finest a little more than a year ago..." By the time I got to "We took off into a cloudless sky and headed north..." I was looking out my own window watching a river wind through the Tennessee countryside. It always adds a little zest to feel a part of a book's environment, and from the get-go, this one put me in the location, without letting the location take over.

After 35 years together, Greg and Jill McKenzie work well as a team. Now, they have opened an investigative service and within a short time have two clients; unfortunately, one disappears shortly after hiring them. This raises Jill's maternal hackles, and soon they are deeply involved with the police and several federal agencies.

As a team, Greg and Jill work together smoothly, their conversations keeping the reader abreast of their reasoning while still flowing naturally. They seemed like a nice couple with a lot of common sense, and I'm glad this is a series because I'm looking forward to seeing more of the McKenzies.

Kathleen Tromp

DESERT BLOOD THE JUÁREZ MURDERS
Alicia Gasper de Alba
2005
ISBN 1-55885-446-0
Arte Público Press

Straight up, this is a book no one who's a fan of the sub genres hard-boiled, contemporary amateur detective or neo-historical should miss. And I did. Or at least I missed being able to review it in a timely fashion. So this isn't as much of a review as a heads up. De Alba has managed to bring the horror of the ongoing Juárez murders to the fictional page of mystery in a way that is far from exploitation.

Ivon is a Juárez native now living in Southern California. Returning to her home town with the hope of starting a family of her own is the plan. On the plane she reads an article about the killings in Juárez. Horrified by her lack of knowledge Ivon believes she may have found something that

will tie her dissertation up. The plane lands and soon the happenings in Juárez come far to close to home. Within a day Ivon loses the baby she has sought to adopt and the younger sister to whom she's broken a promise has gone missing.

De Alba jumps forward with her story. In an excellent piece of fiction the author manages to inform readers about the ongoing politics of a situation we all shudder to believe and weep to acknowledge. She writes with a fluidity that is amazing. Her characters breathe with life and goodness, fallibilities and evil. For this is a straight-up south western/over the border yarn. The fact that De Alba has the ability to make readers aware of and care about a real genocide that is occurring in our world while telling a tale that will be remembered by all who read it, that's talent. A talent that mystery readers should not ignore.

Ruth

DEVIL'S CORNER
Lisa Scottoline
2005
ISBN 0060742887
Harper Collins

This is a legal thriller by Edgar winner, and former trial lawyer, Lisa Scottoline gives her old team of Rosata & Associates a rest, while introducing her latest heroine Vicki Alegretti, a newly assigned assistant U.S. Attorney in Philadelphia, has current case take a bad turn, when a former ATF partner, and a would be informant are killed in a street shoot-out. The death of her friend and her own near death makes it hard for her to walk away, and she disobeys orders from above. She investigates on her own time, ignoring instructions to move with a new case. While looking for information, she meets Reheena, a woman as independent as she is, and they take on an unlikely partnership. Two women with "attitude" joining forces to solve two crimes that may be related is a combination that is enjoyable, unless you are a bad guy on the streets. Working through their relationship, and the relationships with her testy superiors, who want her out of this, could be a challenge for someone with less Italian moxie than Vicki. Add her worried parents, a possible new love, and you know she has her hands full. As always, Lisa Scottoline offers us a heroine who is stubborn and funny, and a book full of entertaining characters and excitement.

Karen Hildebrand

DRIVE
James Sallis
September 2005
ISBN 1-59058-181-4
Poisoned Pen Press

This short novel is a tightly constructed work, reminding this reader of an intricate pattern created from interlocking lengths of fabric. It moves back and forth in both time and place, following a few weeks in the life of Driver - a character who provides no other name and yet inhabits the pages as perfectly as a hand slides into a custom fitted expensive glove.

He has a double career - first as a stunt driver for the LA film industry, self trained and among the best in the highly skilled group of specialists. And in the evenings and between film jobs he drives for thieves and con men. But that is all he does - drive. No burglary, no guns, no other participation. But it only takes one moonlighting venture going wrong to pitch everything out of balance, and to send Driver in search of those who double crossed him. And so the story moves to its inevitable conclusion - anticipated and yet a surprise. Sallis has a wonderful way with characters. In spare prose, important people in Driver's past and present life are clearly drawn and believable. Some are presented only as traces from Driver's memory. Although fragmentary, these brief references provide perfect motivation for Driver's actions as he moves toward his moments of revenge. Appropriately, Driver is the tough warp thread which brings all the fragments together. He is a man not always on the right side of the law, or even of a just society, yet in Sallis' hands he becomes a man worthy of respect.

Readers who delight in noir have a treat in store. I highly recommend James Sallis DRIVE.

Woodstock

THE DYING HOUR
Rick Mofina
July 2005
ISBN: 0786016973
Pinnacle Books

A storm pushing through Washington State into British Columbia brings into existence for readers of Rick Molina's THE DYING HOUR a new protagonist in a new series. After five novels, the award-winning Mofina takes heads north and takes readers for a wild, terrifying ride.

A woman, driving hard, makes her way through a down pour only to have her car give out on a lone stretch of highway. She's troubled. A man, a reverend, stops to help her and asks as much. She's glad to have such a kind man give her a ride to the nearest gas station. She thinks maybe her luck had changed. A reporter just starting at any paper, especially one sliding in through a internship contest, needs a major story in order to outshine the competition. The competition being two reporters that are better educated and more experienced. Jason Wade knows there will be a fight for every by line.

The job at the paper is holding Wade together as he struggles to stay afloat amidst the turmoil of caring for an alcoholic father no where near admitting his problem and the absence of a fiancée who leaves a hole only activity will fill. Wade trolls the Mirror's call list hoping to catch a break a he sorely needs. Three calls in and a voice saying "That thing's got nothing to do with us," sounds like music to his ears. He's directed to the Sawridge County Sheriff office. It could be nothing, it probably is nothing, but his instincts and desperation tell him different. Detective Stralla promises to give him what scant details he's got.

He starts banging out a story. His story; an exclusive. When the Seattle Mirror hits the pavement tomorrow, it will be with front page from him. The mutilated body of a woman is found and takes the story nationwide. Wade takes ownership knowing that every exclusive he brings to the paper brings

him that much closer to the life he wants to lead. And that much closer to helping the woman who pleads to him from the front page.

His renegade ways bring Wade closer and closer to trailing the missing woman but earn him reprimands from his would be employer. He's riding the edge, pursuing the story full bore. Milking Detective Stralla as he tries to foster the mans trust Wade and the Detective are sure that if the woman is still alive, she is near death. Wade plays with fire, juggling his job a woman's life and his own where one small misstep will bring it all down.

Loner Jason Wade, used to fighting hard for what he needs, has the scruples and the balls to be the hero a strong series needs. And this is indeed the beginning of strong series. It isn't another serial killer book; it isn't another intrepid reporter does good story. It is a thriller with guts written with a superior hand.

Jennifer

EYE OF THE WOLF
Margaret Coel
September, 2005
ISBN 0-425-20546-0
Berkeley Prime Crime

EYE OF THE WOLF is the latest entry in Coel's popular series set in Fremont County, Wyoming on the Wind River Indian reservation. Two nations, the Arapaho and the Shoshone, live in the area. Long standing mistrust simmers just below the surface, and a series of brutal deaths in hostile winter weather bring out the worst in more than a few people. Father John O'Malley receives an odd message on a friend's answering machine - the voice sounding distorted and cruel, reading a few short lines of inept poetry referring to a massacre which occurred in the late 19th century. Attorney Vicki Holden receives a plea from an Arapaho woman to provide legal defense for her son, accused of assault against a group of young Shoshone men. The Shoshone do not appear at the first legal hearing, and within a few days their bodies are discovered at the site of the long ago massacre. Fans of this series will be familiar with the tensions and issues Vicki and Fr O'Malley face together. Not wishing to give away too much of the plot, I'll just comment that the reader's faith in the basic integrity of these two all too human individuals is not misplaced.

The state of Wyoming is almost a third continuing character - Coel weaves impressive knowledge of its rich history and modern day atmosphere into her story.

Woodstock

FAITHLESS
Karin Slaughter
September 2005
ISBN 0-385-33945-3
Delacorte Press

Karin Slaughter's FAITHLESS is another memorable read from one of today's top novelists. The fifth novel featuring protagonists Sara Linton, Jeffrey Tolliver and Lena Adams

FAITHLESS once again proves that Slaughter writes perhaps the genre's best opening scenes. A girl walking in the woods with a man she trusts only to be buried alive.

Later, Jeffrey and Sara discover a body while taking a Sunday morning walk. Was the pregnant teenager left there to die or was this a punishment gone terribly wrong? There's another teen missing. Will the Grant County Police find her or is it too late? At the heart of the case is a ministry that has ties both new and old to the Linton family. Slaughter takes the reader through the narrative of this case with a deftness only the truly talented can manage. A complicated mystery involving faith, religion, sexism, greed and family returns to our protagonists time after time without detracting from the tale Slaughter weaves.

There are scenes that will make series regulars cheer, a couple to make you cry and there are scenes that will make you shake your head. Healing is a hard process. The crimes that Slaughter has exposed her core and peripheral characters to continue to formulate the way they react with one another and to different situations. In a believable manner. When it comes to Slaughter, I'm keeping my faith. Ruth

FIRST DROP

Zoe Sharp
September 2005
ISBN 0-312-34169-5
St. Martins Minotaur

FIRST DROP marks a new beginning for Zoe Sharp and her engaging character Charlie Fox. It's the first American release for one of the U.K.'s rising stars and it's the first time Sharp's protagonist finds herself in the middle of trouble here in the States.

FIRST DROP opens on a roller coaster, literally. Charged with protecting the teenage son of a software developer, bodyguard Charlie finds herself entertaining the obnoxious teen at a Florida amusement park. When a man with wrap-around sunglasses starts shooting at the duo, Charlie's army background and self defense techniques kick into overdrive. Cut off from the rest of the protection detail and unable to trust the law Charlie and teen Trey Pelzner set off on a race across the state with a destination of Spring Break in Daytona.

Sharp has created something special with her not "tough as nails" but more "ball busting" protagonist. Charlie Fox is an exceptional addition to the loner lead in crime fiction. Changing the setting she works in to the U.S. is a stroke of brilliance. Charlie remains a true English Lass but Florida? Spring break? How can American's say no to this introduction.

The fact that Sharp has added a plot that is fast paced, well written, full of twists and turns, breathtaking settings and well drawn characters should put her on the map to stay. This is one roller coaster I didn't want to get off of.

Ruth

FORCING AMARYLLIS

Louise Ure
June, 2005

ISBN: 0892960094
Mysterious Press

Along with the intriguing title, Louise Ure's debut novel, Forcing Amaryllis, has an interesting premise, with this combination of an amateur sleuth mystery and a legal thriller. Calla Gentry, a trial consultant in Tucson, Arizona, is no lawyer. Instead, she works with attorneys to help study and predict the actions and minds of potential jurors. Now, having to work on her first criminal case in six years, she is put face-to-face with the man who could have raped her own sister, Amaryllis. Calla lays her job on the line and dives into her own investigation, attempting to uncover the past's secrets.

Ure's writing is smooth, and the sense of setting is divine, evoking the heat and beauty of the southwestern US. The cast of supporting characters is interesting and fun, from the friend whose restaurant serves daily menus with all the foods beginning with the same letter, to the cranky, unsympathetic boss. Calla herself is likable, although her sometimes rash and naive actions made her seem not as intelligent as I had been led to believe early on in the book. Ure has written a promising first novel, and I hope she finds many fans for her garden of characters.

Judy Clemens

HEAT SYNC

Wes DeMott
2005
ISBN:0843955457
Leisure Fiction

Wow.

This was a great read. Fast? Oh yeah, it's fast. Action? Oh yeah, there's action.

HT Thompson is training to be a Navy Seal. Unfortunately Thompson has some problems with some of the water aspects of the training and he might not finish. Enter the head of an elite covert group who feels that Thompson is just the guy he's looking for. HT signs up and he's off to a secret training facility. As he discovers, not every one is cut out to be a member of the "Jaspers". But he is excelling in the program. Once he graduates he discovers the true nature of the unit and he starts having second thoughts. But this isn't a unit you just walk away from...

DeMott writes a taut thriller that grabs you around the throat and won't let go till you are seeing stars. The training portions of the book ring with accuracy and that has got to be DeMott's background with the FBI and SWAT coming through. DeMott is brilliant with plotting and pacing. This is a dynamite book. It's like slamming down four or five espressos, it will leave you that jazzed when you finish.

Jon

HEIR TODAY . . .

J. J. Lamb and Bette Golden Lamb

August, 2005
ISBN: 1-59414-356-0
Five Star

This was action from the get-go. Paige Alper receives an offer from an heir-tracer who has found an unclaimed inheritance: \$250,000 split between Paige and her sister, and the tracer will keep a measly 50% for his trouble! While her sister is ready to sign it off, Paige is not so easily swayed: she and her husband Max are investigative reporters, and can't resist at least trying to find the money on their own. A logical idea, and one that should only irritate the heir-tracers (and perhaps Paige's sister), but before long, they discover that they have awakened a very irritable sleeping dragon.

Clues are meted out in journals left by Paige's Uncle Jock, leaver of legacies and sea captain extraordinaire. They reveal a touching side of Jock that Paige never knew, as well as a dastardly side of life that they never thought about. The Alpers have to do a bit of traveling to find them all, but that's where all the fun begins. This husband and wife team are the fast and curious, and they don't let much stand in their way.

Kathleen Tromp

IDENTITY CRISIS (Trade Collection)
Brad Meltzer
art by Michael Bear and Rags Morales
Oct. 2005
ISBN: 1401206883
DC Comics

This is a trade collection of one of the hottest titles of last year. Novelist Brad Melzer has written an incredible murder mystery featuring some of the best known names in DC Comics, and in particular The Justice League of America. The story opens with Elongated Man on a stakeout. Common enough in comics, but while he is waiting for the bad guys to show up he gets a distress call from his wife. He rushes home only to discover he is too late, someone has killed her. Within minutes a call goes out and some of the best minds are on the scene looking for clues to the killers identity. Before long another family member of another superhero is almost killed. It soon becomes obvious that no one is safe and that these heroes are facing their greatest fear, they might not be able to protect their loved ones. While the mystery of who the killer is plays a major role, it almost takes second seat to the discovery of a secret from the past. If these secrets become public it could destroy the Justice League and the lives of everyone involved. I've enjoyed Meltzer's novels but I have to say, writing comics might be his true calling. I got a buzz reading the collection that I haven't felt since I first discovered comics back all those years ago. Meltzer has taken characters that are widely known, hell, they are icons, and he has added such depth to the characters that they seem totally fresh and yet totally familiar at the same time. No small feat. He had me from page one and kept me riveted through every twist and turn right up to the ending, which was a bit of a shock,

even for some one who has read comics for over thirty years. An outstanding book.

Jon

IN A TEAPOT
Terence Faherty
2005
ISBN: 1932325042
Crum Creek Press/ The Mystery Company

This is a novella from award winning author Terence Faherty featuring his series character Scott Elliot. Elliot is an operative for Hollywood Security in the 1940s. Shakespeare's The Tempest is poised to be made into a film featuring some of the best British actors in Hollywood. When one of the actors is discovered to be dating a Burlesque queen, Hollywood Security is asked to look into it. Scott Elliot, only days away from his wedding, is hoping to wrap it up in time to make it to the alter. But before the investigation really gets a head of steam, a body shows up. Bring on some involvement from the local mafia types, and some hard to deal with actors and Scott may end up late to his own wedding...

Faherty writes this era like he was there. Slipping into this book was like sliding into my favorite recliner and just as comfortable. The story is engaging from the first paragraph, and Faherty's writing is smooth as 16 year old scotch. A wonderful mystery from a true master of the PI genre.

Jon

IRISH GILT
Ralph McInerny
October 2005
ISBN 0-312-33688-8
St. Martin's Minotaur

IRISH GILT opens in April. Private Detective Phil Knight is contemplating the lack of sporting entertainment while his brother Notre Dame Professor Roger Knight is teaching a spring course that has his students excited. What class could be more appropriate than one that discusses the works and theories of Father John Zahm?

Roger is not the only person on campus who's restoring interest in Zahm. Two alumni are visiting South Bend. One is trying to gain support for a new Zahm Center. The other is busy in the archives looking for proof of riches. Did Zahm find a city paved in gold? And then the body is found on a park bench.

McInerny jumps off from here to tell a classic whodunit. Suspects abound and so do apparent motives. Roger and Phil team up to get to the bottom of the case and save an innocent man from prison. A great cross section of characters, a superior time line oriented mystery and a hearty dose of Notre Dame history make this book a delightful way to spend an evening. IRISH GILT is a great addition to the McInerny collection.

Ruth

IRON GIRL
Ellen Hart
2005
ISBN: 0312317492
St. Martin's Minotaur

With this 13th installment in the Lawless series Jane, after years spent mourning the death of her partner Christine Kane, tackles questions surrounding her lover's death when she finds a gun in those long stored-away boxes.

Before her illness Christine worked as a real estate agent and was in the process of selling a house for a prominent Minneapolis family.

Just prior to her death, three members of that family were brutally murdered. Jane always assumed Christine knew nothing about this family's secrets, but the gun is proof that she feared for her life. Thus begins Jane's search for clues to understand what really happened to Christine, her pursuit leads her into deep peril.

Jane Lawless is a brave and charming woman; nicely complimented by her college friend Cordelia Thorn, artistic director of a St. Paul theatre, who is both funny and opinionated. Ms. Hart has just the right touch for characterization and sense of place. A thoroughly enjoyable read.

Ellen Hart has won several awards for her writing, among those the Lambda.

Patricia Frovarp
Once Upon A Crime

IT'S RAINING MEN
NAOMI RAND
Aug 1, 2005
Harper Collins
ISBN: 0060723718

Shake, rattle and roll. Emma Price awoke to the sound of a wailing siren too near. Adjusting her vision, she realized she was staring at a blue pants, and moving up, past the waist and upper body, she found a man's face. He boasted a handlebar mustache and an arresting shock of black hair. "Hey," he said, catching her eye. "Don't worry, sweetheart, you're doing just fine."

When a book starts out with the lead flat on her back you know it won't be a yawner.

Emma Price is a tough ass. She's got to be. As the lead investigator for New York Capital Crimes, any less would mean her job. As she comes to after an attack by two men she gives a full and angry description of to the investigating police, she's dizzy and infuriated. At the waterfront warehouse in the stead of her unpopular but effective boss, Dawn Prescott, Price knows tracking down Prescott has to take priority.

But it is too late. Prescott dead is found a short time later and the cops on the scene are eager to go with the clues presented and rule her death a suicide. Prescott's disaffected father agrees and harshly tells Price to back off.

Price realizes she's the only one that knew Prescott and the only one who cares enough to set the record straight. That and you don't come that close to killing her without paying a heavy price. All around her, from a territorial cop to a New York producer with an anger management problem to a lawyer who is not one to let his conscious be his guide, Price has her pick of suspects. Even her own ex-husband, Will Price, an editor with an agenda, is in the mix.

As Price unravels the clues, she gets too close for someone's comfort. Boyfriend Detective Laurence Solomon warns her off the case. But she won't let her of it. You don't cross Emma Price and walk away from it.

Jennifer

JUST MURDERED
Elaine Viets
2005
ISBN: 0-451-21492-7
Signet Paperback Original

Thanks to a few rather impetuous deeds in a prior lifetime, Helen Hawthorne tries to keep under the proverbial radar by taking piddly little jobs, preferably on a cash basis. Just Murdered has Helen assisting in Millicent's, an up-scale bridal boutique, where the women assume that big bucks are an excuse for just about any behavior.

When the Most Awful Obnoxious Mother-of-the-Bride Ever walks in with her drab daughter, it's battle stations. A raging feud with her ex-husband (underwriter of said wedding) means that Cost Is No Object, and she means it. Soon, the dresses are piling up, as well as the bills. But Kiki isn't going to let Desiree be the star of her own wedding; at least, not without a fight. When Kiki is a no-show at the wedding, speculation abounds . . . until her body is found, with Helen's fingerprints everywhere.

This appears to be a fun little series with a lot of potential- after all, there are dead-end jobs aplenty, so happily, I expect Helen will be kept busy for some time.

Kathleen Tromp

THE KILLING ART
JONATHAN SANTLOFER
Nov 2005
ISBN: 9780060541071
William Morrow

From the DEATH ARTIST period to the COLOR BLIND period, Jonathan Santlofer has a new showing featuring Kate McKinnon, a woman who went from Queen's to Manhattan and from cop to society lady to cop again. When the pigment is blood red and the subject is dead, McKinnon is the only one who can see the artist inside the murderer.

Kate McKinnon left the force after her husband, Richard, was murdered. With it, she left behind a way of life. From an apartment in Central Park West she is now ensconced in a Chelsea loft with her protégé Nola and the girl's baby boy. No more designer clothes, no more rubbing shoulder with New York's elite and no more love.

What she still has is art. It is a passion that has run through her life and now keeps her head above water as she struggles day to day. Her current project is a book of abstract impressionists of the 1930's and 1940's. Her latest subject is Phillip Zander, who was part of an inner circle of artists called the New York School of Painters. From Willem de Kooning to Franz Kline, Kate is eager to find out about the lives behind the painters.

Someone with a similar, but more vicious agenda, begins slashing paintings by artists from the School including one Kate donated to the Modernist Museum. At a friend's home, the slasher strikes again and Nicolas Starnett is killed. Once again, Kate finds herself in the middle of a murder investigation. And now *she* is now in the killers list.

Jennifer

THE LINCOLN LAWYER
Michael Connelly
October 2005
ISBN 0-316-73493-4
Little Brown

Michael Connelly's new standalone is being touted as a legal thriller, but only the last fifth or so of the novel is set squarely in the courtroom. THE LINCOLN LAWYER is more accurately described as a psychological thriller and an escalating game of gotcha between the titular attorney and his increasingly menacing client.

Los Angeles attorney Mickey Haller works out of his car — doing business in the backseat of his Lincoln between runs to the sundry courthouses spread out across the City of Angels. Haller (who is also Det. Harry Bosch's half-brother — a connection established in Connelly's second novel, THE BLACK ICE) lands a dream client in the person of wealthy real estate mogul Louis Roulet. The realtor is accused of beating and attempting to murder a low-level actress turned hooker.

Connelly paints Haller as a pragmatist: "It didn't matter in terms of the strategy of the case whether the defendant 'did it' or not. What mattered was the evidence against him — the proof — and if and how it could be neutralized. My job was to bury the proof, to color the proof a shade of gray. Gray was the color of reasonable doubt."

But Haller's dubious philosophy is put to the test when he is forced to confront the probable guilt or innocence of his new client. This is something he is forced to do when he begins to detect ties between his current case and an earlier one — a case that may have resulted in the incarceration of an innocent man.

Soon, the "Lincoln Lawyer" finds himself the target of a murder investigation.

This novel is a considerable change of pace from the usual Connelly fare, but the former reporter brings a convincing wealth of detail to his so-called "legal thriller."

The dialogue pops and Mickey's spiky exchanges with the private investigators, cops and clients passing through his life sizzle.

The tension also steadily mounts as Haller's ex-wife and his young daughter are made pawns in client Roulet's dangerous game of psychological chess with his distressed attorney. Connelly has hinted his next novel, a return to Harry Bosch, spins out of the conclusion of THE LINCOLN LAWYER.

Craig McDonald

LOCKED ROOMS
Laurie R. King
2005
ISBN: 055380197X
Bantam

What a delight to lose oneself in Laurie R. King's world of the early 1900s. And what better companions to travel with than Mary Russell and Sherlock Holmes? King's characters live and breathe, and become friends with the reader. No longer the drug-addicted, painfully intense detective we all know, King's Holmes is believable and attractive, while Russell is an interesting and worthy partner. The California of King's novel is alive with the vividness only an expert storyteller can convey, with details about the earthquake and fire of 1906 I certainly hadn't known. The mystery, a personal one to Russell, is intriguing, and the closure very satisfying. The reader comes away with an appreciation for San Francisco in an earlier time, and a feeling that one has been involved in a deeply emotional venture. I look forward to the next Russell/Holmes novel!

Judy Clemons

LONG TIME GONE
J.A. Jance
August 2005
ISBN 0688138241
William Morrow

In Jance's seventeenth putting, J.P. Beaumont is back in action. After working for the Seattle Police Department and retiring, to act as a private investigator, Beaumont takes advantage of a one time offer to go to work for the Washington State Attorney's Special Homicide Investigation Team. This is much to the dismay of old foes at the police department. Add the fact that his former partner is up to his neck in chaos doesn't help. Beaumont's position won't allow him to help his old friend, who is being sued for child custody of his three children. There are people from the police who are eyeing him in the investigation of his ex wife. When a childhood friend turns to Beaumont for help, he knows he is in a position to assist her. Sister Mary Katherine is having recurring dreams of a murder. Could she, as a five year old, have witnessed a crime? This becomes the first "Cold Case" for Beaumont and his newly assigned Partner Melissa Soames, and there are people in Seattle who don't want this crime reopened, much less solved. While the plot thickens, Beaumont is also being faced with major changes in his personal life. Ms. Jance brings J.P. Beaumont back in an exciting book, and she has a new hit.

Karen Hildebrand

THE MANIPULATED

Nathan Walpov

2005

ISBN: 0972441220

Uglytown

I came to the Joe Portugal series after Uglytown picked them up. After reading ONE LAST HIT I was hooked. Walpov writes one of the most entertaining series being done today. His writing style feels smooth and casual and instantly absorbs the reader.

In this outing Joe is just trying to chill out, of course this means a little pot smoking, and the next thing Joe knows is that he is naked next door with a very young neighbor girl. Not telling his wife shouldn't be a problem because he doesn't remember a thing. This is soon secondary as Joe becomes involved in a shooting incident in which an actor is killed, though strangely no one really cares. As Joe becomes more and more involved in what ever it is that's going on he starts to think there may be conspiracy involving everyone he knows. Is Joe just paranoid? Something is definitely going on, and hopefully Joe can get to the bottom of it before he becomes a statistic.

Walpov's writing is like a cold beer on a really hot day, cool, refreshing and just what you need to feel good.

He seems to be getting better with every book, and that's saying something because his last one was so good. but this book seems cranked up to another level.

Jon

MERCY FALLS

William Kent Krueger

August 2005

ISBN 0743445880

Atria Books

In any series, but in particular ones that take place in small towns, authors keep a fine line between what is too much and what is too little. Events can't be over the top but having the hometown hero keep the local kids from cow tipping isn't going to make for a great book. The most difficult element is often how to keep a protagonist fresh in a rural setting without that big city action keeping them gritty and raw. Enter big city action without pretense taken on by a hometown hero who is more than up to the challenge. Kent Krueger is a master of the subtle and visceral writing that makes his one of the best small town series in the genre. Once again a sheriff of Aurora, Minnesota in name and not only in thought, Cork O'Connor thinks nothing of answering a domestic violence call on the nearby Ojibwe Reservation. Deputy Marsha Dross drives down Maanadamon, Bad Trail, keeping Cork's ear full of talk about the skunk she hit on the way. When they get to the Tibodeau cabin where the call was made from, everything is quiet. Not even the sound of the dogs barking up a storm when strangers come near is there to greet them.

Dross sees blood on the ground, a lot of it, when a shot breaks the silence. Suddenly Dross is down and Cork finds

himself hidden behind the vehicle as he calls for back-up. More shots rain down. Only later, when help reaches the remote area and the Deputy is taken away by ambulance does Cork begin to wonder about who wants him dead. On a dark, rainy night only days later, a man is found in a Lexus, dead and mutilated. Cork knows him. It is Eddie Jacoby, a Chicago mover and shaker with ties to the local Indian casino. This more than multiplies the troubles on Cork's mind. The wealthy Jacoby's even wealthier family wants answer and they'll pay to get them.

They insist on bringing in Dina Willner, an intelligent, willful and attractive private investigator to 'help' Cork on the case. With Willner at his heels, Cork uncovers ties between one of Jacoby's sons and Jo, Cork's somewhat reconciled wife. With a sniper aiming to take his life and an old flame hoping to steal his wife, Cork has to think fast and move faster before he sinks below the raging waters of Mercy Falls. Kent Krueger is an eloquent and earthy wordsmith with one of the best series leads in the genre. With each installment, Cork and Krueger evolve, both taking chances when others would rest on their laurels. The ending of this, the fifth in the series, will leave the reader white knuckled as they clench in the book in their hands.

Jennifer

THE MIND BOX

AJ Diehl

2005

ISBN: 0738708208

Midnight Ink Books

Lane Daily is a LAPD detective working in Hollywood, and the murder she is solving in this book is pure Hollywood. A Producer of horror films is found killed in a manner that could be right out of his own films. Not short of suspects to choose from Daily has her work cut out for her trying to get to the bottom of the whole mess. When a drug angle is discovered the case gets even more tricky. The thread tying things together is a strange email found on the victim's computer from Mike's Gifts. When Daily starts getting the same emails, the case become more urgent and personal.

Diehl has crafted a wonder detective thriller and her character, Lane Daily is terrific. This is one of those books that you just plow right throw and lose track of the time while you read. It's a debut novel but it sure doesn't read like one. Diehl writes with skills that rival veterans. I hope to seem much more from this great new author.

Jon

NIGHTCRAWLERS: A NAMELESS DETECTIVE NOVEL

BILL PRONZINI

2005

ISBN: 0765309319

Forge

Bill Pronzini's created the Nameless Detective twenty-nine novels ago and the reader finds him a man on the fringes of retirement, running a private agency with two talented and troubled operatives to keep him busy. NIGHTCRAWLERS

illustrates that Pronzini is still at the top of his game and writes novels others only aspire to write. Nameless sits beside Russell Dancer as the old man uses his last breath to ask a favor. Dancer, a long time alcoholic and repugnant former pulp-magazine writer, has a package that must find its way into the hands of Cybil Wade. She is by, no coincidence, Nameless' mother-in-law. To say Nameless is loathe to do this task is an understatement. But his partners face equal and more dangerous tasks. With an, "Okay. Let's do I," the short circuited and sadistic Bix and Tommy have been taking a bat to various gay men in city's Castro district. Their latest victim, Kenneth Hitchcock, is the partner of investigator Jake Runyon's estranged son, Joshua. Joshua has asked begrudgingly for Jake's help as an investigator, *not* a father, but there is no way Jake would refuse him. During his own time, he tracks the marauding duo down. Tamara Corbin, the third in the trio, wants to keep herself from a bed that is too empty with husband Horace in Philadelphia during a cold winter. She takes on the stake out of a deadbeat dad hoping it will make the nights pass. The first night, it becomes something much more ominous. A neighbor of the absent dad carries a long, ill-wrapped package from the trunk of his car. And the package squirms. She hopes and prays it isn't what she thinks. When she uncovers the rap sheet of the man that owns the house, she fears it is. With both of the men of the firm tied up, she takes on reconnaissance of the house. The worst that could happen does. Three story arcs, three complex characters and Pronzini makes NIGHTCRAWLERS seem effortless. The book can't be read fast enough.

Jennifer

NO MAN'S LAND
GM Ford
July 2005
ISBN: 0060554827
William Morrow

Big exciting openings in a book are important, and NO MAN'S LAND definitely has that covered. A prison riot and guards being killed. Frank Corso is the man they want and they'll keep killing till he's there. This leads to an interesting scene with Frank and the Coast Guard which eventually ends up with him on a helicopter making his way to the prison. What follows is a grand escape by a couple of prisoners who don't care if they die, they just don't want to die in prison. At this point the story really takes off and left me feeling a little bit like I was strapped into a stockcar and blindfolded. I wasn't sure where we were going, I just knew it was going to be a fast and memorable ride. This is a book that makes promises and keeps them. In NO MAN'S LAND Ford has added another great book to this series and I love the character. Frank Corso, a true crime writer who can really kick some ass when he needs to is a joy to read. Ford also manages to add some very interesting insight about reality television and news programs. As you might guess he's not exactly a fan. I enjoy the attitude of the books as much as I enjoy the stories they tell.

Bump this to the top of your must read pile.

Jon

OFFICER DOWN
Theresa Schwegel
September 2005
ISBN 0-312-34314-0
St. Martin's Minotaur

Theresa Schwegel handles her debut novel with aplomb. Protagonist Samantha Mack is new on the job and already jaded police. Taking an extra shift leads Samantha into the middle of a quagmire. Her partner is dead on arrival and Sam's been knocked out. Ballistics show that Fred was killed with Sam's gun. Nobody wants this case to go any farther except for Sam who knows she didn't shoot him. Who can she trust? How did her gun get involved? Schwegel leads us through a case stuck in department politics and police corruption. Sam's own fallibilities are often brought to the forefront making her a believable character. She handles her story line with the sure hand of someone who's been writing for a long time. While many of the secondary characters fail to ring as true as our lead and the plot will seem standard to frequent readers of our favorite genre, Schwegel has the talent to make this a long and exceptional series. She is as the saying goes, One to watch.

Ruth

POWER OF THE DOG
Don Winslow
Knopf
2005
ISBN: 0375405380

In *Power of the Dog*, Don Winslow takes on the war on drugs. At the center is Art Keller, a part Hispanic DEA agent. Art, having seen the damaging effects of drugs in his own family, is driven to take down the forces behind the narcotics industry. Earlier in his career, Keller befriends Don Miguel Angel Barrera, one of the top police officers in Mexico. Keller is stunned when Barrera ends up a drug kingpin and focuses much of his career on taking him down. The question seems to be how much of his own morality will Keller have to sacrifice to achieve his goal? Once again, Don Winslow has spun an unforgettable story. In a little over 550 pages, Don has given us a compelling and realistic look at the history behind America's often futile war on drugs. While extremely bleak and violent, the story captivated me. The characters are believable, the plot complex and the action breathtaking. By the time I finished it; I was exhausted and more than a little depressed. With *Power of the Dog*, Winslow once again shows why he is considered one of the finest voices in crime fiction today. Jeremy Lynch

RESURRECTING LANGSTON BLUE by Robert Greer
October 2005
ISBN 1-58394-136-3
Frog Ltd.

Last year's HEAT SHOCK introduced readers to a compelling new protagonist, Dr. Carmen Nguyen. This fall Greer brings back long time protagonist C.J. Floyd. Mystery readers favorite Denver Bondsman is hired by Dr. Nguyen to find her father, a man she's assumed was dead. Even as the pair strike their deal Langston Blue is on his way to his daughter and the first corpse is being discovered. Was Langston a deserter in Vietnam or was something more sinister going on? What is his connection to Peter Margolin? To reunite father and daughter C.J. must answer these questions. Greer's characters are adroit. This story of a long ago cover-up and its potent potential today is highly readable. Greer's timing of the reveal is commendable. I'm excited by the merging of these two sets of characters. A new beginning for Greer readers.

Ruth

SAME TIME, SAME MURDER
Robert J Randisi, Christine Matthews
2005
ISBN:031231728X
Thomas Dunne

This is a truly fun book. Murder at a mystery convention. Cameo appearances by some real authors, and you can tell the authors have been to a few cons in their day. The main characters, Gil and Claire Hunt recall how they met in this story, and of course, it involved a murder. The convention is in Omaha and the guest of honor is killed.

A traditional who dunnit in a really fun setting this book should be a must read for anyone who's ever been to a convention. It is really fun to see mystery fans using their skills to solve a murder!

Jon

SECRETS
Frederick Ramsay
August 2005
ISBN 1590581881
Poisoned Pen Press

SECRETS is a very worthwhile entry in a genre dubbed "medium boiled" by avid readers of suspense fiction. Set in a small town in rural Virginia and featuring a thoroughly believable cast of characters, SECRETS begins with a murder in a church.

The church secretary finds organist Waldo Templeton dead near the organ, shot twice with a small caliber weapon. Ramsay's title sums up the action perfectly - since the reader will find that layer upon layer of secrets have been concealed in the small community.

A malicious gossip works out her own life of frustration by hurting others. A sensitive group of church files is missing. Married couples deceive each other. An Episcopal priest new to the community has arrived fleeing the disastrous fall-out from a previous assignment. Ike Schwartz, the local sheriff, is startled when the FBI appears, protecting secrets of its own and striving to take over the investigation. Hiding in

plain sight, the killer finds motivation in the protection of yet another set of secrets.

All the myriad tensions contained in the small community overflow and at least one more resident is found shot to death with the same weapon.

Ramsay makes impressive use of the tension and apprehension implicit in the interlocking webs of unknown facts and motivations. As the action unfolds, will the reader discover that revenge and hostility rule the day? Or will good sense and compassion gain the upper hand?

Woodstock

SHADOWS AT THE SPRING SHOW
Lea Wait
August 2005
ISBN: 0-7432-4951-8
Scribner

Maggie Summer is busy enough teaching college courses and as an antique print dealer, but she wonders if something is missing in her life. This leads her to become involved with an adoption agency where she uses her contacts and experiences to organize an antiques show at the college as a benefit to the agency. Oddly enough, someone has decided that adoption is a bad idea and is sending threatening letters. In the aftermath of 9-11, the New Jersey community is determined not to let terrorism (for that is how it feels) win, but opinions are mixed as to whether the show should go on, especially as things escalate.

Shadows At The Spring Show was interesting in that it was a fairly low-impact mystery-much of the action happens off-stage, so to speak; reported instead of witnessed by the reader. And while light on mystery, it was long on the organization of an antiques show-think I could manage one myself, now. It also has Maggie voice or hear questions that plague prospective parents, because they don't always have easy answers. These and other factors lend color and texture to the story, and make it worthwhile reading.
Kathleen Tromp

A SHOT TO DIE FOR
Libby Fischer Hellman
2005
ISBN 1-59058-185-7
Poisoned Pen Press

Nestled in the woods of southeast Wisconsin, the small town of Lake Geneva was a luxurious hideaway for the wealthy families who built the city of Chicago. Gracious homes lined the lakeside, mail and supplies were delivered by boat, tall trees provided shade and privacy for summer getaway weekends and sumptuous entertaining.

As is the case everywhere, all this luxury needed manpower to sustain it, so the town of Lake Geneva was populated by solid middle class families who provided the supporting economy and the manpower for servants, gardeners, cooks, caterers and mechanics.

Ellie Forman is an outsider to both sides of the economic spectrum of Lake Geneva, working there to produce a

corporate video which is intended as a marketing tool for a newly remodeled resort. Ellie lives in the suburbs of Chicago's North Shore, and on her way home one evening she is an eyewitness to a terrifying drive by shooting in which a young woman is gunned down.

Ellie discovers that the dead woman was a resident of Lake Geneva, and as she continues work on the video production job she learns more and more about both sides of the strictly divided Lake Geneva society.

Hellman has a cast of believable characters - and a plot which provides opportunity to consider what makes a happy family. Not surprisingly, money won't do it - but affection, open communication, and a willingness to admit mistakes just might.

Woodstock

STRANGE BUT TRUE

John Searles

August 2005

ISBN: 0-688-17571-6

Harper Perennial

Ronnie Chase's life ended tragically on the night of his senior prom. Five years later, the trauma of his untimely death continues to reverberate through the lives of those closest to him. His mother, Charlene has chosen anger as her way of dealing with life post Ronnie. Charlene has alienated everyone in her life; she and Ronnie's father divorced soon after the tragedy, she quit her library job and has virtually ignored her other son, Philip. Philip had been living a life of quiet despair in New York until he returns home to heal after an unexplained accident leaves him unable to get around on his own. Living under Charlene's cloud of negativity does little to improve the quality of Philip's mood or his life. One cold, winter night, Melissa, Ronnie's high school girlfriend, shows up on Charlene's doorstep unexpectedly. She tells Charlene and Philip that she is pregnant...with Ronnie's child. Charlene has nothing but vile words for Melissa—questioning Melissa's motives and accusing her of being insensitive to Charlene's pain. Philip makes an effort to be kind to Melissa all the while knowing that what she says is impossible. Or is it?

We soon learn of Melissa's lonely struggle to deal with Ronnie's death. She keeps his pictures and mementos nearby and talks to him daily. Her reluctance to have plastic surgery to repair the damage done to her face by the accident provides her with an ever-present reminder of that night. When we learn that aside from her prom night tryst with Ronnie, Melissa hasn't had any other lovers, we can understand her utter belief that he is her baby's father. The book slowly turns ominous as more characters are introduced and danger lurks. As the novel switches narrators and ricochets from the present back to prom night, Searles' novel takes us on a heartrending journey as these damaged beings seek answers in a world that no longer makes sense but forever holds the promise of redemption.

Jackie Rice

THICKER THAN BLOOD

Penny Rudolph

2005

ISBN: 1-59058-148-2

Poisoned Pen Press

Rachel Chavez runs a parking garage in Los Angeles. She hasn't been at it long, but she's getting the hang of it. It also helps keep her from falling back on past addictions. When a CEO of one of her largest customers is killed, Rachel thinks she may have critical information. However, her previous experiences with the police has left her too gun-shy to share, and before long, the evidence has disappeared. The question is-what sort of crime might one want to hide by murdering a bigwig in the water industry?

She must have some special allure as she seemed to collect friends easily. Good, sensible friends, too. But Rachel must still have a vestige of that self-destructive tendency that addicts are often equipped with-she tends to be the sort to meet strangers at the wharf at midnight. She also has a serious knack of being in the right place at the right time; the story is built on almost too many coincidences.

The mystery itself is solidly crafted and logical. While Rachel may keep the reader at an emotional arm's length, she gives up all the clues as she finds them, and it seems that she opens up a bit more with each discovery, so that by the end of *Thicker Than Blood*, it seems that Rachel has learned something about herself, as well as saved the day.

Kathleen Tromp

TILT A WHIRL

Chris Grabenstein

2005

ISBN: 0786715847

Carrol and Graf

I really enjoyed this book. The story is told from the perspective of a part time cop who is basically responsible for driving around the real cop and the true hero of the story. It was a fresh approach, different enough that I was hooked pretty much on the first page.

A quick run down of the plot is this: Millionaire is killed in front of his daughter, daughter gets kidnapped, cops try to find kidnappers in time to prevent tragedy. It seems straight forward enough, but it twists around like a snake in the sun. The further into the book I got, the more the waters were muddied, and it kept me guessing right to the end. As John Ceepak works the clues and tries to get to the bottom of what's happening, Danny Boyle is just trying to keep up, while driving Ceepak around the resort town of Se Haven, and hopes to be done by sundown so he can go out drinking with his buddies. But as the case progresses Boyle finds himself getting caught up in it and actually enjoying the work. He may end up being a real cop after all.

Grabenstein has a very easy and relaxed style that makes the book a real joy to read, and while not laugh out loud funny, it definitely has some really humorous scenes. If forced to I would not be able to pick just one thing that made this book so enjoyable to me, but it just felt right, not too over

the top, not understated, just the right combination of everything. I will definitely be looking for the next in this series.

Jon

TOUCH

Gayleen Froese
2005
ISBN: 1896300936
Newest Press

When I picked up this book I was expecting another quirky pseudo supernatural thrill. It definitely is not that. While it has some supernatural elements to it, they just add seasoning to the wonderful meal that this book is. The heroine, Anna Gareau is blessed/cursed with the ability to touch objects and pick up visions of peoples lives. While in Victoria, British Columbia she accidentally touches something linked to a murder while she is retrieving her lost purse. In the course of getting her purse she passed herself off as a special assistant brought in to help the police. She ends up getting hired to help investigate the murder by an author, Paul, and his assistant Colette. Anna could very well be in over her head as she and Colette discover that something or someone is stalking people at the paper where the first victim worked.

I enjoyed this book a great deal. The dialogue was very real and believable, and the story itself was very fresh. Froese sets a wonderful pace, not unlike a person driving a boat pulling a water skier, keeping the speed just right. Froese has a unique voice and I hope to read more of her work soon.

Jon

THE TYPHOON LOVER

Sujata Massey
October 2008
ISBN 0-06-076512-7
Harper Collins

Rei Shimura is one of mystery's most under-rated main characters. THE TYPHOON LOVER opens on Rei's thirtieth birthday. With the Rock band Glaswegian Hangover camping out in her living room and her cousin Chika in the extra room it's a miracle that Rei makes it to her job interview the next morning.

Soon Rei is back in her beloved Japan. On a clandestine mission. As Rei travels this country again Massey's writing takes off. Rei must authenticate a rare piece of pottery. The trip is harsh. A typhoon rages as Rei returns to parts of her life she thought were over while living in a today that could prove perilous.

THE TYPHOON LOVER is a pleasure. Massey's skills as a writer give us palpable settings and deliver an intricate story. To be in Japan with this duo again is a joy. Massey delivers an evolving heroine who makes many choices the Rei of THE SALARYMAN'S WIFE might not have. As a result Rei holds the reader captive from the first page of THE TYPHOON LOVER to the last.

Ruth

VANISH

Tess Gerritsen
August 2005
ISBN 0-345-47697-2
Ballantine Books

Boston medical examiner Maura Isles has had a long day at the morgue: due to a multi-vehicle accident the previous night, business has been unusually brisk. When she thinks she hears someone move in a room full of dearly departed clients, she nearly chalks it up to exhaustion...but, turning to leave, she hears the sound again. Electrified, heart thundering in her chest, she opens body bags until she comes to a gorgeous Jane Doe, a drowning victim brought in earlier that day. Isles leans close, expert hands feeling for the unlikely possibility of a weak pulse, a chill exhalation; she is aghast when *the corpse's eyes fly open*. A macabre and blue-lipped Snow White, the revived Jane Doe fights the ER staff like a wildcat possessed. She manages to wrest a security guard's gun from his hand, shoot him dead, and take several hostages...including Boston PD Detective Jane Rizzoli, nine months pregnant and ready to pop.

Trapped by a desperate captor with nothing to lose, her contractions coming ever closer together; firecracker Rizzoli is locked in a battle of wits and a race against time. Trapped on the outside, Rizzoli's husband, FBI Agent Gabriel Dean, is frantically trying to unravel the identity of the apparently deranged woman who, though she had a tag on her toe a short time before, is threatening his wife and unborn child.

As the situation builds to a climax, the most pressing unknown of all becomes: *Who is Mila: where is she, and what is her secret?*

Tess Gerritsen has woven a rich, multi-layered tapestry of a medical drama-turned-mystery novel, where nothing is black and white: even life and death shades of gray. *Vanish* is packed with suspense and betrayal, scandal and conspiracy, and situations that test the limits of human endurance; throwing the darker themes into relief, the author tempers her tale with friendship and humor, the importance of family, honorable crusades for justice, and the power of love over fear. Who are the good guys, and will they prevail? In *Vanish*, Gerritsen keeps her characters--as well as the reader-- guessing until the end.

Jill Lynch

VENGEANCE

Brian Pinkerton
2005
ISBN: 0843955325
Leisure

ABDUCTED was Brian Pinkerton's first mass-published novel (KILLING THE BOSS was self-produced), but it read like a seasoned pro's effort. A child abduction, the psychology of a stricken mother's guilt and obsession, a disintegrating marriage, and finally unexpected violence -- it was an explosive combo for a thriller in which every word counted. Now Pinkerton delves into a darker area of the legal

thriller, an area in which legality is left far behind for a good cause. Or is it?

Rob Carus is on top of the world. He's a popular high school teacher, it's spring in Chicago, he's about to propose to the woman of his dreams, he does and she accepts -- life is good! But a fatal hit and run later that same day ruins his life and kills his beloved Beth. Rob knows it was an intentional hit and run, but the accused is a powerful, high-profile Chicago attorney, and neither Rob's criminal nor civil case is strong enough to beat an army of lawyers and local media spin. Battered but not beaten, a bitter Rob bides his time and tries to put his shattered life back together. And then, one day, he is approached by The Circle, a shadowy cabal of justice-seekers. How badly does he want justice done? Very badly, it turns out, and Rob joins The Circle. And his life will never be the same, for The Circle demands total loyalty and obedience.

Though the first 100 pages wind the tension a bit ponderously and matter-of-factly, VENGEANCE picks up steam soon after Rob is cheated out of the justice (and a touch of revenge) he seeks. From then on, the novel becomes a lean-mean treatise on justice in America, who gets it, who deserves it, and who should grant it. Loosely adapting the famed Hitchcock scenario from "Strangers on a Train," and layering in some healthy criticism of the legal system as it stands, Pinkerton rebounds from the slow wind-up by backing Rob into quite a corner. Because Rob is a character with whom we can all sympathize, a true Everyman, we give him latitude we wouldn't necessarily agree is just -- and we become his willing accomplices. Pinkerton plays all the right notes while bringing together the various motifs, and the climax is both a gut-punch and a knee to the groin. A likely candidate for filming, Brian Pinkerton's VENGEANCE is a thriller with bite that will turn its own pages.

William Gagliani – Author of WOLFTRAP

WHISKEY ON THE ROCKS

Nina Wright
September, 2005
ISBN: 0-7387-0749-X
Midnight Ink

Whiskey Mattimoe was recently widowed and is still mostly on autopilot. In particular, she is muddling through the work days at her upscale real estate in the resort town of Magnet Springs, MI. When a visitor to town dies in an unusual fashion, his wife descends to raise a ruckus, and soon, her brother is claiming her body. Or at least, that's how it seems at first, but first impressions...well, you know.

This is the premier of the Whiskey Mattimoe series and it was loaded with amusing characters, which, of course, are one of the main reasons that readers come back to a series. The motive was a bit perplexing and there must have been quite an organizational whiz involved in the evildoing, since it certainly must have taken planning!

Whiskey On The Rocks was light, amusing fare and a quick pleasant read, and it shows a lot of promise as a cozy series.

Kathleen Tromp

WILL EISNER'S JOHN LAW: DEAD MAN WALKING

Will Eisner, Gary Chaloner
2004
ISBN: 1932382275
IDW Publishing

This was pure fun. A hard boiled noir comic in the classic tradition. Of course when it's a character from Will Eisner could it be anything less? This collection has six stories in it, three new ones and three reprints of the original Eisner work. It was approved by Eisner before his death.

Set in the forties, John Law is working cases that feel like they are right out of the pulp magazines and radio mysteries of that era. He is a detective in the city of Crossroads, and he is pitting his wits against kidnapers, gangsters and lowlifes. He is a true archetype heroic good guy.

Dames with guns, bigger than life bad guys and mysteries to be solved. Coupled with wonderful artwork this is a must have for any collector or reader of the detective genre.

Jon