

Jennifer's Round-up

I am constantly amazed at the variety of books one can read within the genre of crime fiction. The books in this round-up were all exceptional and a joy to read.

To begin with the book I most recently finished, let me heartily recommend David Corbett's beautifully written BLOOD OF PARADISE. Inspired by his reading of PHILOCTETES, Corbett tells the tale of a man in exile that unwittingly holds the key to solve multiple quandaries. In this moral thriller, our hero in this tale, Jude McManus, lives out the role of the young Neoptolemus. As an executive protection specialist, McManus is world's away (El Salvador) from a life that saw his cop father drummed out of the force with his two compatriots – Bill Malvasio and Phil Strock.

McManus is no fool. He knows the people he works for are, for the most part, corrupt. El Salvador itself has gone through civil unrest and has the highest murder rate of any peacetime country which is exacerbated by the U.S. Government deporting gang members from the U.S. back to El Salvador and letting them go free.

When Malvasio asks a favor that could put the past right, McManus agrees. But Malvasio himself is a puppet to higher powers that need to pull McManus' strings through him. After nearly a lifetime of trying to escape the past, the past has grown even more malignant in this Third World hell and McManus soon discovers that he still has something to lose.

Corbett has outdone himself with BLOOD OF PARADISE.

Simon Wood follows up his wonderful anthology WORKING STIFFS with an edge-of-your-seat thriller, ACCIDENTS WAITING TO HAPPEN.

Josh Michaels is an everyday man with a good job, a loving wife and a delightful daughter. A drive home from a successful day at work changes this. He is forced off the road, seemingly by accident. But as the car slowly sinks into the Sacramento River, the driver of the other car stops to give him a "thumbs down" before speeding away from the scene. The event makes the local paper and draws a skeleton out of Josh's closet.

As other accidents, near misses all of them, occur, Josh deduces that he's the target of a killer. Is it the person from his past bent on seeing him suffer? Or is it someone with possibly more sinister intentions? When others die, seemingly victims of "accidents", Josh knows whoever is responsible is getting closer to finishing the job and that if he doesn't figure out whom and why, his life is forfeit.

ACCIDENTS WAITING TO HAPPEN is a briskly plotted thriller that uses point of view shifts better than any novel I've read in quite a while.

I've read the other books in Jim Kelly's series featuring the intrepid journalist and tortured soul, Phillip Dryden. Taking place in the Fens, a literal of Ely, England, from FIRE BABY to MOON TUNNEL, Kelly has established a strong narrative voice and an equally strong protagonist. Both are taken to a new level in THE COLDEST BLOOD.

The story begins in the summer of 1974 at a holiday camp at Sea's End. A man puts knife to skin, trying not to scream as his blood flows. Unbeknownst to him, three pairs of eyes witness his self torture.

In the present day, a deep freeze hits the Fens. A man dies a strange death ostensibly by his own hand. He is found in his apartment with the windows wide open, his body frozen solid. The police are quick to rule it a death by misadventure. When Dryden sees the scene for himself, he thinks differently. Another death that mirrors the first confirms this in his mind, especially when a tie between the two men comes to light. They spent their childhoods at an orphanage in Ely that is at the center of an investigation concerning child abuse.

But there are ties that go deeper. They sit heavy in Dryden's heart and he shares his knowledge with no one. Instead, he doggedly pursues his own investigation, even after his own life almost comes to an end. Dryden must look to his own past to solve the puzzle of what is happening in the present. And that's the last thing he wants to do.

Kelly has a strong, consistent style of writing that never lets a reader down. THE COLDEST BLOOD may well be his best effort so far with complex story arcs that tie neatly together and a closer look at the veiled inner life of Phillip

Dryden. The ongoing saga of Dryden's devotion to his comatose wife fills out a story already brimming with pathos and compassion.

AFRICAN PSYCHO

Alain Mabanckou
February 28, 2007
Soft Skull Press

"I have decided to kill Germaine on December 29"

It is no accident that Alain Mabanckou's *AFRICAN PSYCHO* echoes the title of Bret East Ellis' *AMERICAN PSYCHO*. But Mabanckou's psycho is no blank slate. His narrative exhibits a mind in chaos with a non-stop internal chatter wrapped around a desire to "make his mark" like his mentor, the self-slain murderer Angoualima. Our anti-hero, Gregoire Nakobomayo, is a petty criminal leading a petty life until his decision to murder his girlfriend, Germaine. Despite a string of failed attempts at great crimes, Gregoire knows that if he plans everything perfectly, this event will make of his life everything that it was meant to be.

"When I think that people like me sweat blood to do their jobs and take risks, and then no one gives us the least bit of play in the media! The victim always gets the lion's hare, and that's unfair! I agree with whoever said you have to "let the dead bury the dead.""

Angoualima death is no deterrent to Gregoire's constant internal dialogue with the man. And Angoualima is not pleased. If he does not succeed this time, Gregoire knows his guru will have nothing more to do with him. As the day he has planned for rapidly approaches, Gregoire begins to lose what little wit he has left.

AFRICAN PSYCHO is an intimate and darkly humorous look inside the psyche of a would-be criminal mastermind. This is a brilliant read with a very fresh take on a violent subject. Alain Mabanckou, born in Congo-Brazzaville, is an award winning author, receiving the "Prix Litteraire de l'Afrique Noire" in 1999 for his first novel, "Bleu-Blanc-Rouge."

Jennifer Jordan

AFTERMATH INC.

Gil Reavill
2007
Gotham Books (an imprint of Penguin)

AFTERMATH INC is a non fiction book about a year spent with a company that cleans up crime scenes. While it might not be for the squeamish, it's utterly absorbing and interesting. A totally unique look at investigations and what happens after.

This is the best way to experience a crime scene with out actually being there. It proves that truth really is stranger than fiction as he describes the scenes and the crimes involved.

While I wouldn't want to do what Reavill did, I sure was fascinated reading about it.

Jon

ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS

Gillian Roberts
2007.
Ballantine Books

I opened Gillian Roberts' new book with conflicting feelings: Happy anticipation at again entering the world of Amanda Pepper, Philadelphia high school English teacher and investigator-in-training, but dismay at the knowledge that this is the last of the 14 books in the series.

Amanda is asked by her friend, Sasha, to look into the death of her stepmother, whose body Sasha had discovered, her death apparently caused by a lethal combination of alcohol and sleeping pills. The fact that the woman was dressed for an evening out or at least one entertaining a guest, her outfit complete with 4" stiletto heels, is enough of a

reason for her to be convinced it could not have been suicide, and she persuades Amanda to help her prove it. The stepmother had been married five times--divorced four times, widowed most recently--and had one son, described as worthless and uninterested, his only virtue being that he lived far away from his mother. But no immediate suspects are apparent. Amanda's husband, a licensed investigator and former homicide cop, now attending grad school, is dealing with the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, which has devastated the lives of his parents and other relatives, and is not sympathetic to the task. But then Amanda and Sasha discover a second body, in the same house. And now the investigation begins in earnest.

The wit, literary allusions and interesting plot make ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS among the best of the novels Ms. Roberts has written. The ending is a satisfying one. Amanda will be missed, but who knows what new sleuth this author has in store for her many fans?

Gloria Feit

ANATOMY OF FEAR: A NOVEL OF VISUAL SUSPENSE

Jonathan Santlofer

April 2007

William Morrow

Santlofer's latest offering is a gripping stand-alone thriller that pulls us into the intriguing world and mind of Nathan Rodriguez, a Jewish/Puerto Rican NYPD police sketch artist. While this novel is not set within the contemporary art world, as were the artist-author's three earlier crime novels featuring art historian Kate McKinnon, there is art... graphic art, and plenty of it. The inclusion of numerous finely executed renderings of witnesses, suspects, crime scenes, and NY city neighborhoods adds yet another dimension to this book's fast-paced storytelling and deftly handled changes in point of view. Interspersed among the text, are more than 100 striking black and white sketches and drawings either by Nate, related to cases he's working on with the Department, or some other works that are actual evidence--drawings made by a suspected serial killer, dubbed "The Sketch Artist," who leaves his own blood-spattered sketches of the crime scenes with the bodies of his unfortunate victims. But why *these* victims? There seems no apparent connection... or motive.

Summoned to work on this case with newly promoted, attractive, female Detective Terri Russo, and eventually with a team from the FBI, Nate begins to "see" more images in his head than usual--some of which he does not completely understand--as more victims are found. When his apartment appears to have been rifled, though with apparently nothing taken, and his building super becomes the killer's next victim--with evidence found linking Rodriguez to the crime scene--Nate's now desperate for help. He becomes the prime suspect. And no one, except one who truly knows and loves him, will believe him. His *buela*. His grandmother.

Our protagonist's relationship with and visits to his paternal grandmother, who still lives in Spanish Harlem and follows the religious practices of Santeria (Sp. "the way of the saints"), offers fascinating insights into a lesser known spiritual and cultural world that exists in the Hispanic neighborhoods of NYC.

Rodriguez is very much a multi-faceted character who seems to literally step off the page. From descriptions of his wild youthful days with his best friend Julio searching for alcohol and drugs in *El Barrio*, to the burden of guilt that he bears about the shooting death of his Narc Squad policeman father, Nate was very real to this reader. The descriptions of the processes involved when he attempts sketches of suspects from interviews and conversations with the victims or witnesses were completely riveting--and that alone makes it worth the price of admission. But there's much more to enjoy. Do experience this suspense packed thriller for yourself.

Annie Chernow

BEHIND YOU!

Linda Regan

February 2007

DuFour Editions, Inc./Creme de la Crime

It's the holiday season. Detective Inspector Paul Banham is still mourning the deaths of his wife and daughter, which makes for some problems with his assistant, Sergeant Alison Grainger. He likes her, she likes him, but between the job

and his memories, he's not sure what they have can go anywhere. While none of that is central to the murder they are investigating, it does complicate an already messy situation.

The police have been called to a theater, where a Christmas pantomime is playing. Lucinda Benson is dead. Did she trip on stage during a scene that takes place in the dark, with ultra-violet fish, or did somebody hit her hard enough to kill her? The police won't know for sure until the lab tests come back, which will take a few days. In the meantime, the scene is being treated as a homicide.

The company is, as is not unusual in the theatre, full of egos, rivalries, and politics. The producer has ties to almost all the major players, who have ties with each other, who are related to each other. Following the money is just as convoluted an endeavor as trying to trace family trees; of course, not everything people say to Banham or Grainger is the truth, or the whole truth.

Looking at the cover of *BEHIND YOU!*, one might expect something very noir, very gritty; it's in shades of red, black, and grey. But it's cozier than the cover would lead one to believe, and still it's a good police procedural. Once Banham and Grainger unravel all the family ties, the killer is fairly obvious. But that unraveling is not easy, and leaves the two police officers lots of time to worry about each other and where they are headed.

P.J. Coldren

BERMUDA SCHWARTZ

Bob Morris

2007

St. Martin's Minotaur

The title of this book conjures up glib, fast-talking protagonists, goofy sidekicks, and feisty dames; in other words, a well worn, if usually amusing, formula most notably made famous by Carl Hiaasen. However, "Bermuda Schwartz" is anything but formulaic. It's the third in an excellent series featuring former football player Zack Chasteen.

Here, Zack has arrived in Bermuda to attend the 70th birthday party of his girlfriend's aunt, and is helping with preparations, when two bad things happen. First, he discovers the body of a murdered scuba guide. Then he discovers that the money he left safely accruing interest in a Bermuda bank is neither accruing interest, nor is it any longer in his account.

The two events are inextricably linked, and before long Zack has been pulled into a life and death struggle to find out who murdered the young guide, and why an ancient reliquary should have anything to do with it. And oh, there's also the matter of the missing money.

Although it's written with a light touch, this novel touches on many serious and thought-provoking issues, and is a most worthy follow-up to the Edgar-nominated "Bahamarama".

Rae Helmsworth

BIG CITY BAD BLOOD

Sean Chercover

2007

William Morrow

Every year there are hundreds of new authors on the scene, and every now and then you read one that you know is going to be big. Like the buzz of reading your first Lehane or Connelly, you know it's something special. From the opening chapter of *BIG CITY BAD BLOOD* you can tell this is one of those books.

Ray Dudgeon is a recovering journalist turned PI working in Chicago. He's been hired to protect a Hollywood locations scout who will be testifying some bad guys. After checking with some less than savory contacts Ray is assured there is no contract from the Mob out on his client, so he takes the bodyguarding gig. He should have said no, because if

something appears to good to be true, it probably is, and when his gravy assignment turns into a nightmare he can either drop it and run, or stand and do the right thing.

Written with a natural cadence and skilled storytelling. Chercover keeps a smooth pace through the book. He also has characters that you can feel a connection to, characters that you feel invested in. Chercover's debut novel comes at you kicking and screaming and demands attention. It's attention well deserved. Chercover writes about Chicago like only a Chicagoan could and you hear the city breathe on every page. Ray Dudgeon is my kind of protagonist and I can't wait to get my hands on the next book.

Jon

BLACK HATS

Patrick Culhane

2007

William Morrow

BLACK HATS is a historical thriller set at the beginning of prohibition in New York. It puts two of Americas favorite icons together, Wyatt Earp and Al Capone in a story that is both engaging and fascinating.

Wyatt is working in LA as a part time PI when someone out of his past shows up on his doorstep to ask a favor. The favor entails Wyatt going to New York to help out the son of Doc Holliday, and Wyatt can't think of a reason to say no. On arrival he hooks up with Bat Masterson, who is now writing a sports column and together they find Johnny Holliday and see what they can do to help keep an up and coming mobster off his back, one Al Capone.

Great fiction that is also historically accurate is a hard thing to pull off. Culhane not only succeeds, he raises the bar. This is a terrific tale and it was an absolute pleasure to read. Fans of Max Allan Collins will love this.

Jon

A CASE OF TWO CITIES; AN INSPECTOR CHEN NOVEL

Qiu Xiaolong

2006

St. Martin's Minotaur

Inspector Chen is caught up in the web of inscrutable Chinese politics. He is appointed to investigate corruption by a high official of the party, and given a blank check for authority. The investigation involves an individual and his family who have fled to the United States, but may also involve many party cadres, bureaucrats and others.

How to proceed against the institutionalized Chinese system? Chen wends his way alone seeking leads from various sources. One of them is raped and murdered before giving him information. As he begins to learn more, he is suddenly appointed chairman of a literary delegation leaving for Los Angeles in a couple of days. Was the appointment an effort to sidetrack the investigation, or really deserved (after all he is a respected poet and translator)?

Before leaving on his new mission, Chen deputizes his assistant to carry on the investigation in Shanghai. In the United States, Chen continues his efforts and gains assistance from U.S. Marshall Catherine Rhon, with whom he previously worked in Shanghai.

Like its predecessors in the series, this novel provides deep insights into contemporary China, while giving the reader a crime story that is compelling.

Recommended.

Theodore Feit

A COLD DAY IN HELL

Richard Hawke
March 2007
Random House

Richard Hawke follows up last year's *SPEAK OF THE DEVIL* with a second novel featuring P.I. Fritz Malone and NYPD Detective Megan Lamb. *A COLD DAY IN HELL* opens on a cold day in New York City. Malone is in court and can't resist stopping in to see how America's latest "Celebrity Trial" is going. Late night talk show host Martin Fox is accused of two murders. The bodies of two of Fox's lovers have been found slain and with a very distinctive signature. When body number three is discovered with Fox behind bars both the prosecution and the defense are forced to rework this multiple homicide.

Hawke plays his plot with tongue firmly in cheek. The world of corporate entertainment and news takes more than a few jabs throughout the novel. *A COLD DAY IN HELL*'s narrative is straight forward and highly readable. Hawke's main characters are very likable and his "guest-stars" are all well developed. This is a suspense novel that really does have moments of suspense. But what makes *A COLD DAY IN HELL* stand out is Hawke's New York. This book is written by a man who loves N.Y.C. and can project his love for it with words.

Ruth

CON ED

Matthew Klein
March 2007
Warner Books

Kip Largo doesn't have much of a life, and doesn't really expect to get one any time soon. He's been recently released from jail, having served eight years after being convicted for mail and securities fraud. A job at a dry-cleaner and a half-baked mail order business are all he has going for him. He's living in a beat up four-plex in Palo Alto, and just trying to survive. And then, in the space of hours, everything changes. A beautiful woman asks him to help her con her way to freedom from a vicious, albeit extremely wealthy, husband. Kip's wastrel of a son shows up, hiding from the Russian bad guys whose money he's scammed – like father, like son? So Kip has to decide: Con the rich guy for money? Con the Russians to save his son's life? Neither? Both? There are no easy paths for him to follow. The underlying question becomes: what will you do to save someone you love – even if you know they're really not worth it? Matthew Klein has written an entertaining debut novel; the plot is terrific and Kip Largo is an engaging, likeable protagonist. This one is well worth reading.
Rae Helmsworth

THE CONJURER

Cordelia Frances Biddle
2007
Thomas Dunne Books / St. Martin's Minotaur

Biddle has an impressive list of books written with Steve Zettler as Nero Blanc; and also two under her name only. This book is dream-like, told from several points of view, and holding no punches on life in Philadelphia in 1842, from the poor to the rich.

Wealthy Lemuel Beale disappears. Martha, his only child, has people searching for him. Beale's assistant sets himself the job of looking after Martha. Smotheringly so. Thomas Kelman, an assistant to the mayor, is also looking into the case, but this is not the only murder he is investigating. The conjuror, Paladino, gives Martha an insight into her father's death. But before she can pursue this with him, he is clapped into jail for the murder of a man, whose wife Paladino was having an affair with. The plot thickens.

The villains, twirling their mustachios, reveal themselves soon enough to the reader, but the sleuths must find out the same information before all is lost.

Gay Tolti Kinman

DAMAGE CONTROL

Robert Dugoni
2007
Warner Books

DAMAGE CONTROL is a legal thriller that moves well outside the court room. In fact, there is not a lot of “legal” about it other than the main character being a lawyer.

Dana Hill is an up and comer at a law firm in Seattle, and with her life already about to face some changes, her twin brother is murdered, leaving her devastated and determined to find out who the killer is. Enter Michael Logan, a detective hunting a possible serial murderer. The trail takes them far from Seattle and even if Dana finds answers, will they be the answers she needs?

Dugoni is a masterful writer and uses a combination punch of great characters and perfect plotting to tell a chilling tale that moves like a leopard after it's prey. It's fast and unrelenting and damn near perfect.

Jon

DEAD HEAD

Allen Wyler
2007
Forge

DEAD HEAD opens rather like an episode of ER (back when it was a good show) and closes like a Bruce Willis *Die Hard* movie. Russell Lawton is a Dr. who is working with methods of using components attached to the brain to help people function, still in the theory stage, or so he thinks.

Lawton is taken at gunpoint, and he quickly learns that the terrorists who have him, and have also taken his daughter, are not going to be happy with anything less than utter cooperation. In this instance utter cooperation means performing a miracle to save a madman.

Part medical thriller, part action adventure, DEAD HEAD is a lightening fast book with relentless pacing. Wyler uses medical jargon throughout the book, but doesn't lecture with it, and doesn't bore with it, it's actually fascinating. I also really like his ability to create tension, it is palpable and all to real while reading. I literally could not put this book down.

Jon

DEADLY INTEREST

Julie Hyzy
2006
Five Star

Alex St. James, a reporter in Chicago, is dashing off to a banquet at which her former lover will receive a award for a story he stole from her. However, she is stopped in her rush by her neighbor who needs help, and tells her she has something interesting for a story for her to work on--something about what's going on at the bank she works in. Alex doesn't give it another thought, until she finds her neighbor dead.

The dead woman's son is a prime candidate for prime suspect. But he has company. The dead woman was looking after a friend's daughter whose boyfriend is now out of prison and looking for her. Throw in a few nefarious bank employees who keep giving Alex wrong information, and wrong documents, and the suspect list becomes a healthy one.

Lots of action.

Gay Tolti Kinman

**DEATH IN A PRARIE HOUSE
FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT & THE TALIESIN MURDERS**

William R. Drennan

March 2007

University of Wisconsin Press

DEATH IN A PRARIE HOUSE is a look at Frank Lloyd Wright and the horrific mass murder that occurred at Taliesin in the summer of 1914. Professor Drennan begins his book with a quick synopsis of the crime and a look at Wright's life from the beginning until the summer day that took the lives of his lover, her two children and four men who worked for him.

Drennan's book has much to offer those who are "true crime" fans. He provides an alternative timeline for the slayings and argues its credibility with the documentation of statements and newspaper accounts that remain available from that summer. This book also provides a very good biography of the writer's early life and is exceptional when discussing the evolution of "Prairie Style Architecture".

DEATH IN A PRAIRE HOUSE has one weakness as a crime novel that is its biggest strength as a biography. The author refuses to make any suppositions as to motive and therefore leaves one wondering why Julian Carlton systematically assassinated seven people. If you want a tidy ending this is not the book for you. However if you'd like to learn more about Wright the architect and why Taliesin burned to the ground Drennan offers a summary of the facts in an engaging writing style.

Ruth

DEATH OF A MAID

M. C. Beaton

February 22, 2007

Mysterious Press

The customary elements of this long-standing wonderful series remain in place: Constable Hamish Macbeth's romantic life remains in flux, he is content to solve crimes in the little fishing village of Lochdubh in the Scottish Highlands but give credit to anyone else because he doesn't want a promotion and wants to remain there with his dog and tamed wild cat.

In this case, a cleaning woman famous for gossiping and fairly poor work is discovered by Hamish outside the home of one of her clients with her head bashed in, apparently hit with her own cleaning pail. The list of suspects includes all five of her clients because Hamish suspects that while cleaning, the woman discovered secrets and blackmailed the clients.

It is a simple tale, but Hamish's investigation is anything but. As in past entries he doggedly pursues clues right up to the end. As usual, the book is well-written, the plot well-staked out and Hamish's love life more than complicated. A delight to read.

Theodore Feit

THE DIRT-BROWN DERBY:

Ed Lynskey

2006

Mundania Press LLC

Broke, reluctant, and world-weary PI Frank Johnson is a highly memorable protagonist in this story that is lightening fast out of the starting gate and gallops full tilt to the last page finish line. Through a mutual acquaintance, Frank Johnson's investigative services are recommended to Mrs. Mary Taliaferro, a wealthy aristocrat who owns a sprawling horse estate near Middleburg, Virginia. Mrs. Taliaferro has recently suffered the loss of her teenage daughter Emily in a tragic riding incident when the young woman was thrown and evidently crushed by her highly spirited thoroughbred Hellbent. In the opinion of the police and local medical examiner, this was obviously a cut and dry accidental death, but her mother insists it was no accident at all, but *murder*. Johnson is not at all convinced and resists taking on the case until he is offered a sum he cannot refuse - two hundred thousand dollars!

Johnson's efforts at investigating the case are thwarted at every turn not only by the recalcitrance and suspicious behavior of some of the estate employees and interference by some local riff-raff, but also by the local sheriff who hates his guts and wants to run Johnson out of town. Not long after our PI gets his first hot lead and identifies a prime suspect, the estate's handsome horse trainer who was having a secret affair with not so virginal young Emily, the suspect turns up dead.

Now with two apparent suspicious deaths to solve and with leads taking him from one dead end to another, Frank needs help and recruits Sheila, an ex-cop and his former lady love who helped him get started in the PI biz. Hot on the trail, the pace picks up once again...leading the reader through some stunning plot twists and to a very satisfying resolution.

This is a terrific *noirish* novel by an author whose distinctive clipped prose style and energy I've greatly admired in his short fiction that has appeared in *Crime Scene Scotland*, *Shots Magazine*, and other publications. Mr. Lynskey is a particularly gifted writer and this is one book that definitely should not be missed.

Annie Chernow

DISTURBING THE DEAD

Sandra Parshall

March 2007

Poisoned Pen Press

Deputy Sheriff Tom Bridger and veterinarian Rachel Goddard have each moved to a rural community in the mountains of Virginia to escape - Tom is trying to come to terms with a tragic automobile accident which took the lives of the most immediate members of his family; and Rachel is fleeing the attention of a malicious stalker who has been imprisoned for his crime but is now seeking parole.

When Rachel befriends a young woman from one of the reclusive mountain families in the area and brings her into town to work as a veterinary assistant in her clinic, long simmering hostilities between residents of the town and their mountain neighbors are brought to the surface.

Complicating matters even further, excavations for a new real estate development have unearthed two sets of human bones, and Tom and other officers make the unsettling discovery that the two dead women were members of the same family as the young woman befriended by Rachel.

Tom's investigation pits him against the secrecy, entrenched lies, jealousies, malicious ambitions, ingrained suspicions and feelings of inferiority which have festered for generations in the area. To his dismay, his investigation raises doubts about the integrity of police records maintained by his father who preceded him in the sheriff's department.

Tom's difficulties increase when Rachel becomes the target of several acts of malicious vandalism against her personally and against her brand new clinic. Tom's growing attraction for Rachel compromises his objectivity during his investigation.

Tom and Rachel are an appealing pair of protagonists. Refreshingly, Rachel lets law enforcement do the investigating, in contrast to many female main characters who attempt to take matters into their own hands. **DISTURBING THE DEAD** is an engrossing read, and I'll look forward to the next book in the series.

Woodstock

DON'T BE AFRAID

Rebecca Drake
2006
Kensington Publishing Corp.

Drake's debut novel shows that even in the suburbs, there are plenty of reasons to be afraid. A serial killer is on the loose in Steerforth, Connecticut. He has been nicknamed "The Toolman" for his unique use of a nail gun. He's targeting young female realtors, all of whom happen to be friends or colleagues of Amy Moran. Divorced with an asthmatic five-year old daughter, Moran struggles to make ends meet, leaving her life as an artist to become a realtor in the pleasant New England town. But now she's struggling to stay alive as The Toolman's conquests begin hitting closer and closer to home.

Drake's pacing will make you want to read the book in one sitting. With each turn of the page, the stakes get higher and the tension gets thicker. She creates characters that are easy to care about: the struggling single mom, the cop haunted by his past, even the killer who was brutally neglected as a child. This makes the suspense all the more gripping, turning the pages and hoping that Moran isn't the next to die. The novel isn't suitable for weak stomachs either; the murders scenes are gory and cryptic. They are so well written and vividly described that it brings you into the story, as if you are the one who discovered the dead body. Don't be fooled by Drake's blond hair and smiling face, this soccer mom's writing will terrify you to your very core.

Dana Kaye

DOUBLE DEAD

Terry Hoover
2007
Five Star

This terrific debut novel is set in Charlotte, North Carolina in 1961 and features the likeable Steve Harlan. Here we have a struggling PI who's happily married, has children, and actually likes his life – with the minor exception that he could use a few more cases.

So, when a big one comes along, Harlan is delighted. He's been asked to join the team defending the local Big Banker, who's been accused of murdering his mistress. Harlan's delight, however, is short-lived; the defendant is a well-heeled scumbag who probably should be in jail. Harlan knows that defense clients can't all be innocent, and he's prepared to do his best. Until he discovers evidence that not only puts his life at risk, but endangers his family.

Hoover does a masterful job of drawing the reader into the Kennedy years, and has written a finely crafted, suspenseful mystery that will keep you guessing until the very last page. It's to be hoped that we see many more Steve Harlan mysteries.

Rae Helmsworth

THE DYING CRAPSHOOTER'S BLUES

David Fulmer
2007
Harcourt

I left this book for last in my review pile because I've never really been into this kind of setting: the South, in the 1920s, during prohibition. But wow, was I in for surprise. Fulmer brings us a book dripping with detail, environment, and character. He evokes the scents, the feelings, and the sights of that frightening and frustrating time in Atlanta.

When pimp and gambler Little Jesse Williams is shot in the street by a drunken cop, everyone knows he's going to die. But he takes a week doing it, implying secrets and motives that he won't reveal fully. That same night, there is a robbery at one of the wealthiest homes in the city, in which valuable jewelry is taken. Joe Rose, traveling thief and

ladies man, happens to be in town, and gets thrown into the midst of both crimes, under suspicion by the nastiest, most feared cop in town.

Charming, flawed, and clever, Joe investigates as he can, trying to protect his friends and stay out of the way of the police. Throw in some blues with the blind singer Willie McTell, the horrors of segregation, and a major record label, and you have a novel brimming with fun, thoughtfulness, and action. I started out to read the final book on my stack, only to discover I really did save the best for last. *THE DYING CRAPSHOOTER'S BLUES* is a lovely, tasty treat.

Judy Clemens, author of the Stella Crown mysteries

DYING TO BE FAMOUS

David Hiltbrand
2007
Harper (PBO)

This is the third installment in the series with rock and roll detective Jim McNamara, a PI who specializes in work for the music industry. It's a clever idea and Hiltbrand does a great job of blending a look at the music as an industry and a believable mystery.

In *DYING TO BE FAMOUS* we see Jim taking on a murder investigation for a television producer, a job he planned to turn down until he saw the amount of money being offered. Jim arrives in Hollywood to whisked off to the offices where they produce *Star Maker*, a pretty obvious clone of *American Idol*. One of the finalists has been murdered and they want it solved on the QT to keep the ratings up.

McNamara is a likeable protagonist with the usual witty comments and cynical outlook, the mystery is plausibly presented and solved, but what really makes this a great book is Hiltbrand's use of his characters to make fun of all the ridiculous things that go on in Hollywood. I tend to share his views on a lot of things and it was a joy to read it presented in the context of a fun mystery.

Jon

EFFIGIES

Mary Anna Evans
2007
Poisoned Pen Press

When Faye Longchamp sets off for an archaeological dig in Mississippi, she doesn't know how much she'll learn, or how much trouble she'll find. When the site she and her school colleagues are excavating turns out to be in the middle of controversial land, Faye and her friend Joe find themselves caught between two sides -- the law pertaining to ownership, and the beliefs of an age-old culture.

Evans keeps the plot running with great characters, interesting twists, romantic possibilities, and a store of knowledge about the land, its people, and history. Interspersed in the novel are stories from the Choctaw people, as told by one of the characters. What wonderful legends and stories they have -- full of truth, as well as mysticism.

Besides enjoying a great read (which I could hardly put down), I learned so much in *Effigies* about the Choctaw culture and the people of Mississippi. In the back of the book, Evans includes a Guide for Teachers, Students, and the Incurably Curious which includes answers to questions about archaeology, the Choctaw culture, and even Faye's relationship with Joe. I can see why the book would be used by teachers -- it is a great learning tool set in a fun and interesting book. I loved *EFFIGIES*, and can't wait for the next installment in the series.

Judy Clemens

EYE OF THE ARCHANGEL

Forrest Devoe Jr.
March 2007

Harper Collins

It's 1963, Jack Mallory and Laura Morse, agents for The Consultancy, first met in *Into the Volcano*, are back at work in *EYE OF THE ARCHANGEL*. An evil genius, known as The Dane, has managed to get a WWII German rocket scientist out of his captivity in Russia. The scientist has finally completed a weapons system known as Archangel.

The Dane is asking the outrageous sum of half a billion dollars (remember this is 1963) for the prototype and the plans. Laura and Jack are assigned to steal, or failing that, destroy Archangel and the plans and get the scientist out so that nothing reaches the open market.

If you remember the sixties this novel, set in the exotic Monte Carlo during the Grand Prix races, will seem quaint and familiar. If you don't *Eye of the Archangel* will give you a good feel for both the style and plotting of a sixties espionage novel. What Devoe has given us is a tight little throwback to *The Avengers*, *Matt Helm*, *The Girl from Uncle*, and things groovy and swingin'.

Dave Biemann

FALLING

Christopher Pike
February 2007
Forge

Devastated after being dumped by his girlfriend, Matt Connor plots the ultimate revenge, which begins by faking his own death. Using plane crashes and getaway boats, everyone thinks he is deceased, leaving Connor free of suspicion when he kidnaps his ex-girlfriend's child, Jimmy Techer. But when the child is in his hands, his eyes are all too familiar and Connor realizes that this child is his, raising the stakes and changing the situation altogether.

Kelly Feinman is an FBI agent who seldom plays by the rules. She went rogue on her last assignment to catch a violent serial killer, nearly resulting in her painful death. Despite recovering from her severe injuries, she is still too wrapped up in her work and her fed-up husband leaves her, taking their daughter with him. Feeling lonely and abandoned, she throws herself deeper into her work, determined to find Jimmy Techer and his kidnapper. But when the path leads to Matt Connor, still alive and well, she falls into her old pattern of ignoring regulations and getting too close to her prey.

While the plot is a bit uneven, the story is gripping enough to keep the pages turning. Even after finishing the novel, it is still unclear who the antagonist is in the story, as criminal and FBI agent become friends, stretching the realms of believability. Both Connor and Feinman are likeable and flawed, blurring the lines of conventional heroes and villains.
--Dana Kaye

FIELD OF FIRE

James O. Born
2007

Florida ATF agent Alex "Rocket" Duarte is a dedicated law officer, with bad memories of his time as an Army combat engineer in Bosnia. Duarte gets to confront those memories, and make amends for past fatal mistakes, when he is called upon to investigate a bombing at a labor migrant camp in Palm Beach County. *FIELD OF FIRE* marks the beginning of a new vibrant series character for James O. Born, and offers another up-tempo ride from the Southern author. While Duarte has a harder edge than that of Bill Tasker, the author's other well-known FDLE fictional creation, Born's trademark humor, thorough approach in detailing police procedure, and controlled pacing is crisply apparent.

Duarte is confident in his law enforcement abilities, and he's at his best when he confronts bad guys using his wit and fists (he dislikes guns). Aside from being weak at interviewing suspects, Duarte lacks social skills, particularly at recognizing his appeal to women. When his investigation of Alberto Salez, a low-level gun runner takes on larger implications involving a series of bombings stretching from Virginia to Seattle, Duarte is paired with Department of Justice lawyer, Caren Bruen Larson (take note of the significant middle name) to bring the bomber to justice. Larson is attracted to the single and stoic Duarte, but she commits a mistake by withholding some critical information on the case from the forward driving lawman.

FIELD OF FIRE is a rapid page turner, and no small amount of that is due to the richly portrayed – and often off-beat – characters. Salez is a killer with a twisted sense of logic that allows him to take life easily. He has no problem either driving around with several dead bodies in his car – and they're not in the trunk. Though Duarte is hot on his trail, Salez has another problem of equal magnitude: bomber Mike Garretti has been ordered to kill Salez, in order to keep him from giving Duarte valuable information. Garretti might be a hired killer, but he is determined not to take innocent lives, if possible. ATF agent Chuck Stoddard is a trustworthy and reliable partner to Duarte – just don't ask him to put in overtime. And then there's Duarte himself, a self-contained man with a high regard for duty, but one who doesn't mind snapping a few fingers on a tough guy, or busting in a door without a warrant, to get the job done.

The novel is skillfully supported by a framework of high-concept thriller plot progressions, mainly involving renegade government officials and big business interests, spread out over a playing field that spans several states. The denouement is a pyrotechnic tour de force of explosives and testosterone-charged bravura. Smaller scope human interests that can give the plot line depth don't get washed out, however. For example, family proves to be important to Duarte, as much as advancing his career. Duarte lives with his lawyer brother Frank --who he'd rather not see most days -- in an apartment over his parents' garage. Duarte particularly benefits from his mother's cooking and his father's sage guidance. The Americanized Duarte (he doesn't speak Spanish) grunts and shrugs his way through the day, but it doesn't diminish that underneath, he possesses an astute intellect, great sensitivity and ambition. It will be interesting drama to watch Duarte confront his past, and further develop his robust potential, in this excellent new series.
Anthony Rainone

FIND ME

Carol O'Connell
Dec 2006
Putnam

A fine novel like a fine wine will not be ready until its time. It took the author some time to write it and this review is tardy. You see, some books I save as special treats. For the past decade The O'Connell Mallory books have been my Franco Mints, my Godiva raspberry dark.....and so as we were winding down this issue of the magazine I reached for FIND ME on our headboard and came out of my Mallory induced stupor two days later.

Mallory is the techno savvy, impeccably groomed, brilliant, intuitive and amoral heroine who first appeared in MALLORY'S ORACLE. All police and mostly sociopath, Mallory is the anti femme-femme. And although Mallory may not have a conscious she does have a code.

As FIND ME begins Mallory's long time partner Riker is in her apartment standing over a dead body. Mallory is in Chicago, at the historic beginning of Route 66, standing over a dead body. O'Connell is at her computer, standing over and protecting a cast of characters amongst the best loved in Mystery.

FIND ME is a remarkable read. As Riker tries to determine whether his partner is a murderer or not and Mallory tries to connect with a piece of her past O'Connell unfolds an epic story of death, corruption, a preeminent evil, and a mythical road. There are moments in this book that will break your heart and there are moments that will heal. Desperate families and the world's saddest roadtrip will lead you to a conclusion that is pure O'Connell.

Ruth

FORESTS OF THE NIGHT

David Stuart Davies
January 2007
St. Martin's Minotaur

FORESTS OF THE NIGHT is a refreshing twist on an old classic, almost an homage to Davies' beloved Sherlock Holmes. Set in England during the Second World War, this debut novel introduces Johnny Hawke, a private detective who got out of the army after losing his eye in a rifle accident. Tired of the usual investigations of cheating spouses, Hawke finally lands an intriguing case involving the disappearance of a young woman. During his investigation he uncovers her double life, and later her dead body. Working as a high class prostitute, each of her clients is a possible suspect, including well-known actor, Gordon Moore. Hawke also becomes involved with a runaway boy who may have

witnessed an act of violence. Scarred and scared, he takes the boy under his wing, showing the softer side to the gruff private eye.

This mystery is a classic whodunit and Davies builds the tension using multiple view points, letting the story unfold slowly and tactfully. With each point of view, a new voice comes through, illustrating Davies' span of capabilities. The writing style and character voice made me nostalgic for the old Sherlock Holmes novels, but with a little more blood and guts than a typical cozy. This short but sweet novel is a great start to the new series and has made me an avid Davies reader.

--Dana Kaye

HELL TO PAY

Simon R. Green

2006

Ace Fantasy

It's no secret that I am a huge fan of this series from Green, and in this latest tale from the Nightside the adventure is a real treat. John Taylor has recently just saved the entire Nightside and everyone in it from oblivion. And while the aftermath is still felt, and it's done wonders for his reputation, he still needs to earn a living. Enter an Immortal known as The Griffin.

Taylor is hired to do some straight up PI work and track down the Griffin's missing granddaughter. She stands as the only heir to a considerable fortune amassed over centuries. But there are various factions in the Nightside who want to see this family's bloodline end, and so John has to find her before they do.

Highly entertaining and with an ass kicker of a plot this may be my favorite of the series yet. I particularly enjoyed the terrorist nuns who drop from the ceiling with machine guns. But the really fun part was that of all the books, this one has the most actual detective work. It was kind of a cross between Clive Barker and Ross MacDonal. Green is a demented and disturbed genius, and I mean that in the nicest way! If I ever need help. I want to call on John Taylor.

Jon

IN FIRM PURSUIT

Pamela Samuels-Young

January, 2007

Kimani Press

Vernetta Henderson, an African-American attorney, acquires what seems to be an easy win case just weeks before landing a partnership at her prominent law firm. Eager to please her corporate client, she passes up a chance to settle out of court, sure that she can win the case with her eyes shut. But when her prime witness dies in a suspicious car crash and evidence suggests a cover up, Henderson is torn between her morals and ethics and her desire to win the case.

Samuels-Young creates memorable characters: a cop with a foot fetish, a public defender who married a white woman for the money, Henderson's over-the-top best friend, Special, who plays men like a good game of chess. She tells the story using multiple view points, allowing readers to sympathize with each character and learn things that Henderson is unaware of.

Although the book cover claims this is a legal thriller, it seems to be more in the category of romantic suspense. The first half of the book primarily deals with Henderson's husband cheating on her with a young intern and Special dating her opposing council. Further internal conflicts arise with the issue of being a black female lawyer in a firm of white men, interracial dating, and black identity. These hot-button issues were handled tastefully and truthfully throughout the novel. Although the legal thrill ride didn't really start until page 200, the sub-plots and internal conflicts kept me intrigued.

--Dana Kaye

KINDNESS GOES UNPUNISHED

Craig Johnson

March 15, 2007

Viking

Walt Longmire, sheriff of Absaroka County and his friend Henry Standing Bear are heading east. Walt wants to spend some quality time with his daughter, Cady, a Philadelphia lawyer. He finds her in the hospital fighting for her life, the victim of attack that has left her comatose. Her ex-boy friend seems a likely suspect until he turns up murdered. The Moretti family, mostly members of the Philly police, offers it's help and they are soon joined by Victoria, Walt's deputy sheriff. They find drug dealing and a potential political scandal brewing, but it's nothing this troop can't handle. This is Craig Johnson's third book with Longmire and his friends, and it's a fantastic read. Johnson is great new talent and should not be missed.

Karen Jordan

KISS HER GOODBYE

Robert Gregory Browne

February 2007

St. Martin's Press

Socialist Amerikan Reconstruction Army cult leader Alex Gunderson has been tormenting ATF Agent Jack Donovan for a long time. The bank job today is just another in a long string of crimes Donovan would like to pin on Gunderson. Too bad that things are going to go bad all over this time.

Gunderson's pregnant wife Sara (yup, he named his Army after her) is critically injured in a car crash after the bank job. Gunderson's son is killed. As paybacks, Gunderson kidnaps Donovan's daughter Jessie. In the ensuing manhunt, Gunderson is killed. With him goes the secret to where Jessie is hidden with her 36 hours of air in the tanks.

KISS HER GOODBYE is a well-written thriller, with all that one has come to expect from the genre. Browne does bring a new wrinkle to things: when Donovan goes off a bridge and almost dies, he meets Gunderson in the after-life and they somehow form a bond that Gunderson controls. This device enables Brown to do some very interesting things in terms of plot, motivation, and tension-building.

Not all readers may enjoy this aspect of the novel. The quality of the writing, the depths of the characters, and the well-paced action will keep most readers coming back for more.

P.J. Coldren

LADYKILLER

Lawrence Light and Meredith Anthony

2007

Oceanview

LADYKILLER is a book about a serial killer, and while some may be tired of them, I'm sure not. Light and Anthony have put together a fast moving thriller that keeps the suspense building right to the end.

Detective Dillon needs to solve this case or he's out, and when he teams up with a social worker named Megan there are things happening besides solving the case. However the Ladykiller is enjoying the challenge and proving just how scary New York can be.

This is a fun read, and very fast moving. And while it does have the usual aspects of a serial killer story, they are done well. Light and Anthony make a great team and I look forward to seeing more from this team.

Jon

THE MALLORCA CONNECTION

Peter Kerr

2006

Accent Press (distributed by Dufour Editions)

THE MALLORCA CONNECTION is a police procedural set in Scotland featuring Bob Burns, a copper who is not much interested in moving ahead in his career, but more interested in getting to the truth.

When an old woman is murdered the brass want to go with the convenient answer and lock up the first suspect they have. But Burns feels something in his gut that says this is wrong. He goes against orders and pursues a line of inquiry that will set him at odds with his boss, and possibly ruin his career.

Kerr writes with a solid traditional narrative and puts together an elaborate yarn that is both enjoyable and entertaining. The characters are developed well and watching his protagonist Burns work the case is a pure joy.

Jon

MCMANSIONS

Justin Scott

January 2007

Poisoned Pen Press

Ben Abbott is a realtor in a small Connecticut town. He has a sideline as a private investigator, working mostly for attorneys in non threatening situations. He has been observing with dismay the proliferation of large, poorly designed houses dubbed "*McMansions*" which are being built in the area, changing the landscape for the worse and inflating the tax base, bringing harsh economic pressure to many local property owners.

When unscrupulous real estate developer Billy Tiller is found dead under the blades of a bulldozer, the young man sitting atop the huge machine is arrested immediately. He protests his innocence, claiming he was trying to move the huge machine off the injured man. Discovering that he is an environmental activist, local cops find his protests unbelievable and take him to jail.

Abbott gets involved when the defense attorney hires him to find a case for reasonable doubt. After Abbott meets the young man's father, his unease begins to grow as he realizes that no one is willing to consider that the accused kid's protests of innocence might be true. As he asks questions and searches for persons who might have had a murderous grudge against the dead man, Abbott finds that the most meaningful information does not come from Tiller's checkered business operations. Matters of the heart hold more significance.

Scott has an appealing protagonist in Ben Abbott, and he portrays the inevitable tensions and connections of a small town very well. *McMANSIONS* is a very enjoyable read.
Woodstock

THE MISSING

by Chris Mooney

2007

Atria Books(US)

Penguin (UK)

First novel in a brand new series! Three teenage girls witness a brutal murder and the killer corners them days later. One is found dead, the other disappears, and the third girl - Darby McCormick, the cop's daughter - escapes. Cue present day: Darby is a crime scene investigator for the Boston Police Department. When Darby and her partner look into a girl's abduction, they find a bloody and emotionally friable Jane Doe hiding near the scene. She's incoherent, babbling about dark prison cells holding more women, more pain, starvation, madness. Do you imagine you know where this book is leading? You don't. Predict all you want, you will never guess where Mooney is taking you. Just be glad you signed on for the ride. By the time FBI agents arrive, it's clear there is a serial killer at loose, and he's been working uninterrupted for decades. They call him The Traveler and he doesn't like escapees, or witnesses...or Darby. Edgar finalist Mooney (REMEMBERING SARAH) has an uncanny talent for keeping the tension

high and the pace furiously fast without losing any of his characters' humanity. You may read this novel in one unstoppable rush, but *THE MISSING* is peopled with personalities, wholly alive on the page, who will stay in your thoughts for weeks to come.

MG Brisco

MORE TWISTED

Jeffery Deaver
2007
Simon and Schuster

This second collection of short stories from Jeffery Deaver is a masterpiece. Deaver has already proved himself to be one of the absolute masters of writing thriller novels. When he brings his magic to the short story form it is a truly wonderful thing to see. This book contains 16 short stories and every one of them is a gem. The stand out's for me were *Tunnel Girl* and *Born Bad*. If you can't wait for the release of *THE SLEEPING DOLL* in June, this will definitely see you through.

Jon

MURDER...SUICIDE...WHATEVER...

Gwen Freeman
March 2007
Capital Crime Press

Fifi Cutter, half black, half white, makes her debut in this novel, along with her Caucasian half-brother, Bosco, and the publisher hints they will reappear in the future. They are a couple of characters. She is an insurance adjuster who lives in an inherited house with no furniture. He is a ne'er-do-well drifter and sponger.

When Bosco turns up on Fifi's doorstep after a hiatus of five years, he presents her with a potential murder investigation, one for which neither is qualified. It seems "Uncle" Ted Hefferman was found in his office, supposedly dead of a heart attack, but one of his co-workers is convinced he was murdered so the firm could collect \$5 million in key man insurance, sorely needed to pay off a judgment. They are offered compensation to find the murderer (although the money is as hard to get as a solution).

It would appear that many of the deceased's co-workers, including his two partners, had motives to slay him. Among the ruses Fifi and Bosco use in their "investigation" in an attempt to garner clues is to pose as grief counselors to employees of the insurance brokerage firm. Just one of the many quirky characteristics of the two.

For a first effort, the novel is fast-moving and interesting. The plot is different, although the traditional "closed door" mystery is at its base. The dangers to the protagonist are several, including the bombing of her vehicle, and the police suspecting her of various crimes. And, of course, the conclusion is unexpected.
Theodore Feit

MURDER OF A BOTOXED BLONDE

Denise Swanson
2007
Signet Original Paperback

Well, once again something rears its head in Scumble River to upset the status quo, this time it's a health spa being set up in an old mansion believed to be haunted. School psychologist and special consultant to the police department Skye Denison is asked to look into a vandalism problem before the grand opening. Some one is trying to sabotage the spa and the owners want Skye's help. She agrees to a free weekend and ends up in the middle of a murder. A famous former super model is dead, found in a mud bath, and Skye is first on the scene. Add that it's thanksgiving weekend and the fact that her mother is interfering with her love life, it's going to get worse before it gets better.

Swanson's Scumble River series is quite simply the best traditional mystery series being written today. Tight plotting and plenty of surprises keep this series on my must read list.

Jon

MYSTERY MUSES: 100 CLASSICS THAT INSPIRE TODAY'S MYSTERY WRITERS

Edited by Jim Huang and Austin Lugar
 2006
 Crum Creek Press
 Non-fiction.

Huang, in this round-up book, ask two questions of one hundred mystery writers: Did a mystery set you on your path to being a writer? Is there a classic mystery that remains important to you today?"

Arranged by date of publication of the 'classic,' the book starts with "THE CASK OF AMONTILLADO" by Edgar Allan Poe, pubbed in 1843, and ends with "GONE, BABY, GONE" by Dennis Lehane, pubbed in 1998.

Barbara D'Amato, in the midst of a devastating pregnancy, read "MURDER ON THE ORIENT EXPRESS" by Agatha Christie, which helped her for a few hours, to forget her misery. Now, that's great writing! It also put her on the path of reading more mysteries, and writing them.

Several mention about being snobbish about mysteries—real literature, please--but were more than pleasantly surprised after reading the first one. Mmmm, maybe there is some real literature here!

Each answer is fascinating, giving insight into the creative process--bits of candy for the brain.

What I found interesting was that there were few duplicates in books that affected each of the writers.

Another great read from Jim Huang and Crum Creek Press.

Gay Tolti Kinman

NIGHT FALLS ON DAMASCUS

Frederick Highland
 2006
 Thomas Dunne Books

The more things change.....

Even in 1933, cultural conflict was ancient news in Damascus. And a man like Nikolai Faroun, newly named Chief of the Damascus Prefecture needs to worry just as much about politics as he needs to worry about the crime rate.

Faroun has recently returned to Damascus, reclaimed the family villa of his youth, and is hoping for a long stay in his home town. But it's not going to be that simple, or that easy. When the notorious Vera Tamiri is murdered, it's at first glance a simple crime of passion. However, as Faroun begins investigating, he realizes that there are just too many people with reason to want her dead. And the clues are simply not adding up. Perhaps she was killed by a lover – she had many. Perhaps she was killed by a political enemy – she had many of those as well. And there were those who hated her simply because she was a woman who refused to be subservient to any man.

This realization sends Faroun down a dark path filled with conspirators, and those who would rather see a murder unavenged than have their own secrets revealed.

Frederick Highland's third book is an intriguing look at a Damascus that's not all that different from the Damascus of today – and the mystery his protagonist is asked to solve is intriguing as well. It's to be hoped we see more of Nikolai Faroun.

Rae Helmsworth

THE NIGHT LAWYER

Michelle Spring
 2006
 Ballantine Books

Ellie Porter has been to hell and back. The death of her father, combined with her lover's betrayal, sent her into a tailspin from which she almost didn't recover. That she's come back at all is due to her own grit...and karate. Discovered completely by random good fortune, the discipline and effort of karate have given Ellie the self-confidence she needs to tackle a brand new job as the 'night lawyer' at a London tabloid.

It should be pretty straightforward. Ellie needs to approve any stories that might contain legally controversial content before they're published. Ellie is excited; this is something she can do, and do well, and the bonus is that at night there aren't too many people around – even though Ellie is feeling better about herself than she has in three years, she's still not comfortable in a crowded room.

So, things start out well – until her former lover decides to pay her a visit. Until she starts hearing more of her low-life neighbors' activities than she wants to. Until someone starts stalking her. And then Ellie finds that she needs every iota of her newfound courage just to survive, and that many things she believed to be true are utterly false.

This suspenseful page-turner is at once action-packed and thoughtful, asking difficult questions about what we do to survive, and providing no easy answers. It's a highly recommended read.

Rae Helmsworth

ON THE WRONG TRACK

Steve Hockensmith

2007

Minotaur

Last year Hockensmith made a big splash with his debut novel *HOLMES ON THE RANGE*. This can sometimes be a tough act to follow, however that is not the case here. *ON THE WRONG TRACK* is a wonderful book.

Big Red and Old Red are moving towards their dream and working as real detectives, well, for the railroad, but it's a step in the right direction. A series of holdups have put them on the train to San Francisco undercover. And they are in luck, because on their first real detective job they get a murder, a robbery, hostages, and a whole bunch of people who might be guilty. If they survive the trip, they might even figure out what's going on!

Hockensmith has created two extremely entertaining characters and this is a great series. Wonderful writing, true mysteries to solve and pure fun.

Jon

ONE GOOD TURN

Kate Atkinson

2006

Little, Brown and Company

When a minor fender-bender occurs outside a theater in Edinburgh, Scotland, a crowd watches as one driver brutally attacks the other with a baseball bat. Only one man – a reclusive mystery writer – intervenes by hurling his laptop at the attacker, thus saving the other driver's life.

From that point, the author takes her readers into the lives and back stories of a group of characters that at first seem unrelated to each other or to the incident in chapter one. Ex-detective, Jackson Brodie, seems to run into trouble every time he turns around, and no one will believe his story. Richard Mott, a dreadful stand-up comedian, gets more than the expected laugh. Police Inspector Louise Monroe tries to catch a murderer while wondering if her delinquent son is somehow involved. There's a disappearing Russian woman, a cheating real estate tycoon and his disillusioned wife, and of course...the mystery writer, whose act of mercy starts a series of events far more complicated than any he could imagine in his crime novels.

As the threads of these characters' lives begin to connect, the reader is drawn into an ever increasing maelstrom of violence and suspense until the final chapter when it all comes together in one shocking revelation.

Ms Atkinson is expert at creating believable, three-dimensional characters, as well as weaving a tangled and intriguing plot. And she knows how to build the level of suspense so slowly, it seems like torture.

Jackie Houchin

THE OXFORD MURDERS

Guillermo Martinez translated by Sonia Soto
2006
Penguin

The author, who has a Ph.D. in mathematical science, has penned a mystery based on symbols in a mathematical theorem. The hero is an Argentine graduate student studying at Oxford University in England. He relates the facts almost in a non-fiction form.

He and a famous mathematician, Seldom, find a body. Seldom says he received a mysterious note and came to the house where the murdered person was. A close relative of the victim would be the prime suspect, except for the note predicting the death at a time when she was seen elsewhere.

Then another person dies, and a second symbol appears predicting that death. What does it all mean, and where will it end--after all the symbols are used? The two mathematicians cannot predict anything even though they know the next symbol in the sequence. Are they dealing with a serial killer? Professor Seldom had written a book with a chapter on serial killers and the relationship to numbers. Where it ends is a surprise, with more deaths, but is the motive behind those deaths the same? Very interesting story, and lots of Oxford area scenes.
Gay Tolti Kinman

THE PALE HORSEMAN

Bernard Cornwell
2006.
Harper

Bernard Cornwell is one of the most brilliant and prolific authors working today. He is the author of several series and close to 40 novels. He is best known for the Richard Sharpe series, a British soldier fighting France during the Napoleonic wars. 15 of these novels have been made into movies starring Sean Bean.

A second series features 9th century England. The Saxons have controlled the lands for about 500 years when England is attacked by the Danes who gain control of three of the four kingdoms. King Alfred the Great is able to lead divided lands and win back much of what has been lost.

THE PALE HORSEMAN is story telling of the highest order. Cornwell's ability to combine real history(most of the lead characters really lived) with outstanding entertainment and adventure separates him from nearly all other writers. Uhtred, the lead character and great warrior of THE PALE HORSEMAN is like Richard Sharpe, simply one of the finest fictional creations I have ever read. Cornwell makes the reader feel that they are truly visiting the time period he writes about. The adventure novel as modern literature.
Richard

PERFECT DARK: SECOND FRONT

Greg Rucka
2007
Tor

Joanna Dark, secret agent, is back and kicking ass. It's been three month since the action of "Initial Vector" took place. Rucka once again brings his reader into the near future and a world run by a handful of huge corporations. DataDyne is the largest, by far. No one comes close until a series of inexplicable events positions Core-Mantis into a solid second place. It seems Joanna is responsible. Or is she? Can Joanna and the Carrington Institute stop the latest manipulation of the world's economy?

As a wounded Dark travels the world from Mexico to China trying to get to the bottom of a series of well planned attacks it soon becomes apparent that not only the economy but also billions of jobs and trillions of lives are counting on a select few.

PERFECT DARK: SECOND FRONT has it all. Terrific action sequences, multiple conspiracies, gadgets galore, unlikely alliances and a superb Rucka plot. If it is the imagination & skill of an author that makes a book rise above the rest SECOND FRONT and Joanna should make Rucka a household name. This book, like Joanna herself is "Perfect Dark".

Ruth

THE PICASSO FLOP

Vince Van Patten & Robert Randisi

Feb 2007

Mysterious Press

Poker and the mystery writer have a long history together. They go back before the advent of not only Cable T.V. but television altogether. Many of mystery's best scribes have written "poker" plots, more have played the game. With the introduction of the WORLD POKER TOUR the game has found a new and ever growing fan base but the mystery reader? We always knew. Poker is the bomb.

THE PICASSO FLOP is the beginning of what promises to be a highly entertaining celebrity series. Together, the Travel Channel's Vince Van Patten and mystery scribe Robert Randisi are introducing their reader to Jimmy Spain, ex professional poker player and ex-con. Jimmy's returning to the professional scene with a lot more patience, a stretch of time under his belt and a protégé. Kat Landrigan is part goth, part debutante and all poker. She has the raw talent but has Jimmy taught her the skills she needs to finish in the money at her first professional gig?

Distraction may undo our pair. When a dead player is found with three cards in his pocket WTF presenter Mike Sexton asks Jimmy for his help. When a second dead body appears on the second day of the tournament the stakes are raised.

With a background of professional poker both then and now, several entertaining table scenes, a smattering of Vegas commentary and even special celebrity cameos PICASSO FLOP will have anyone who enjoys poker going all in. Van Patten and Randisi have delivered an Ace High straight.

Ruth

THE PRAIRIE GRASS MURDERS

Patricia Stoltey

February 2007

Five Star/Thomson Gale

Willie Grisseljon, a Vietnam veteran with an odd talent, finds a body near a drainage ditch while he's hiking the back roads of Illinois in search of his roots. He reports the find, and is immediately thrown into a county hospital psychiatric ward. He uses his one call to summon his sister, Florida Judge Sylvia Thorn, who comes to his rescue and seemingly sets things right. However, before they board a jet back to Florida, Willie insists they revisit the site where he found the body. Discovering it greatly altered, they return to town to notify the sheriff...who just happens to be an old high school sweetheart of the Judge.

Sheriff Parker asks them to stick around to help with the investigation and they reluctantly agree. But when Judge Thorn witnesses a second murder and Willie uncovers important evidence in the case, things turn deadly for the siblings. Will Judge Thorn's ingenuity and determination, coupled with her brother's strange gift, be enough to solve the mystery and catch the killer? Or will she lose everything she's worked for, and maybe even her life?

Stoltey's use of the third person point-of-view for Willie and first person for Judge Thorn is a challenging feat for a first novel, but it works well, especially when the author demonstrates Willie's unusual gift. The book begins slowly, but picks up after a few chapters. It also seems to stretch out beyond the natural resolution to the mystery, adding plot points that could have made a sequel. The central, meaty part of the book, however, is engaging and suspenseful.

Jackie Houchin

QUANTICO

Greg Bear
March, 2007
Vanguard Press

Greg Bear has written a novel set in the future, describing fictional events that could all too easily be happening right now.

Fifteen years or so into the 21st century, things haven't changed much, in fact, they're worse. Global terrorism has spiraled almost out of control, and US politics have become so mired in venality that the FBI may be losing its charter and going out of business.

What's not worse is the science. It's getting better all the time, and now someone has developed a plague that can be directed at specific ethnic groups. And the someone has a mad-on for both Jews and Muslims.

Four FBI agents are dispatched to combat the unknown foe. They each bring a specialized set of skills to the challenge, but they are each imperfect and vulnerable. And their enemy is much, much smarter and more cunning than they can imagine in their worst nightmares.

Bear is most well known for his award winning science fiction novels. Here he has crafted a spine-tingling thriller that will have you asking yourself "could this really happen?" And hoping that it can't.
Rae Helmsworth

ROBBIE'S WIFE

Russell Hill
2007
Hard Case Crime

Russell Hill writes with distinctive poetry. ROBBIE'S WIFE is a simple story of lust and murder. It is, from the first page a tale of desperation that refuses to be quiet. Screenwriter Jack Stone has given up his Hollywood roots in an all or nothing bet to end the writer's block that has plagued him for longer than he cares to admit.

In the quiet of the English countryside Jack finds a muse who awakens his imagination in both literate and physical ways. But ROBBIE'S WIFE might just be deadly.....

Hill's prose is so well honed and exceptionally lyrical that a story that could have been mundane is sublime. ROBBIE'S WIFE is a fine addition to the Hard Case Crime insignia. Everything pulp was married to a promise of what it can be. This imprint continues to impress.

Ruth

SCAVENGER

David Morrell
March 30.2007
Perseus Books Group/Vanguard Press

CREEPERS was an award winning book and David Morrell has followed it up with a sequel which brings back his protagonist Frank Balenger. When Frank and his girl friend attend a lecture on time capsules, he blacks out and comes to only to discover Amanda missing. This becomes part of a game devised by a member of the Time Capsule Society. Solving the mystery puts Frank and Amanda in constant danger, searching for a secret that is locked in the past and buried in a series of time capsules.

Nobody can say too many good things about David Morrell's books, and *SCAVENGER* is entertaining on several levels. It is more than a mystery and more than a thriller. It is one of those books that keeps you up to see the sunrise, and happy to do it.

Karen Jordan

THE SECOND OBJECTIVE

Mark Frost
May 2007
Hyperion

Adventure fiction, thrillers, have lately been something of the 'rage'. Mark Frost's contribution *The Second Objective* manages to combine a police procedural manhunt with a thriller set against a WWII background. Bernie Oster and Erich Von Leinsdorf have been selected by the German High Command to, disguised as American G.I's, capture a key bridge and disrupt allied communication prior to the launch of, what the American's have come to call *The Battle of the Bulge*. But they also have a second objective. It's that second objective which drives the story. Earl Grannit is a CID officer for the US Army. While returning to his unit he and his partner come upon the bodies of several unidentified G.I's. Grannit's NYC detective eye catches a lot of clues to suggest this is more than just a combat skirmish. Grannit is among the first to deduce the German intent. In fact, the offensive is launched as he's investigating. Grannit and his partner get a survivor back to an army hospital. Events beyond Oster and Leinsdorfs control put them in the same hospital.

They're discovered and the chase is on. Grannit comes close but the German tanks are pressing him and he's forced to give up the chase. The novel jumps back and forth using Bernie Oster as a bridge between Grannit, relentless in pursuit and Von Leinsdorf, equally determined to carry out his mission. Mr. Frost moves his story along at a brisk pace. The second objective Oster and Leinsdorf are trying to achieve is a documented fact. The faults of the story are minimal and subjective (To me, some of the dialog and the police procedure ring a little too modern.). Nevertheless, readers of historical mysteries, thriller readers and fans of procedurals are all in for an informative and enjoyable read.

Dave Biemann

SECRET SINS

Kate Charles
March 2007
Poisoned Pen Press

Lots of secrets, for sure, and while not all of them are sinful, all the secrets cause problems and complicate lives. Several characters introduced in *EVIL INTENT* return for this enjoyable combination of crime novel and general fiction set in contemporary London.

A young woman is serving her first Anglican parish as one of its priests. Callie Anson is finding unexpected satisfactions in her job, and encountering unexpected frustrations as well. The granddaughter of a new parishioner is enduring difficult months adapting to a new stepmother, and both Callie and the girl's grandmother are concerned for her.

Meanwhile, DI Neville Stuart investigates the death of a jogger, who appears to be the victim of a random opportunistic killer. But as the police question his wife, troubling questions emerge to complicate the case.

All the principal characters experience upheavals in their personal lives, which become an integral part of Charles' novel. She also portrays several supporting characters who contribute to the two central stories and also cope with issues of their own. The pesky journalist from *EVIL INTENT* who caused so much irritation among the police is also back for more, but plays a much smaller role in this book.

Charles' ongoing series offers enjoyable low key suspense, with most issues and conflicts based on tensions between individuals, and not on overt violence.

Woodstock

SHADOW OF THE RAVEN

David Sundstrand
February, 2007
Thomas Dunne Books
St. Martin's Minotaur

Bureau of Land Management officer, Frank Flynn is hiking in the Mojave Desert on his day off when he discovers a corpse. When he finds the decapitated remains of two big horn sheep nearby, he suspects the man's death is connected to illegal poaching. His job with the BLM is to protect the land from the people who visit and abuse it, but his part-Indian nature is to protect the animals that inhabit it. Against orders from his superior, Frank sets out to investigate the deaths.

Roy Miller, the vicious, sadistic leader of a murdering motorcycle gang called the Sidewinders, learns that the corpse in the desert was his brother and begins a vendetta against all those he believes are responsible.

Linda Reyes, a reporter in search of a story, asks Frank to take her to the little-known watering spot for endangered big horn sheep. He's reluctant, but she's pretty and persuasive. Their mutual attraction grows as they hike in and quietly observe the wary animals. But when they witness a shocking event and Linda is seen snapping photos of the perpetrators, Frank knows her life is in danger.

As the forces of good and evil race towards each other, the innocent and not-so-innocent are caught in between, forcing Frank to make a decision that will change his life.

David Sundstrand's characters are three dimensional and true to life; his knowledge of the desert is impressive, and his skill at building suspense is over the top. Shadow of the Raven is entertaining, exciting, and sometimes downright terrifying.

Jackie Houchin

SHADOWS IN THE WHITE CITY

Robert W. Walker
2007
Harper

This is the second book in Walker's historical series featuring Alistair Ransom. It picks up right where the first book left off. We quickly discover that the man put in jail for the murders in the CITY FOR RANSOM is going to go free. Unfortunately Ransom won't be able to do much about from a hospital bed. Ransom, not to be deterred by something like "Doctor's Orders", leaves the hospital and puts together his own solution to the problem.

His life, now seemingly a bit more under control, is looking good. Just in time to take on a case of what could be the worst monster Chicago has ever seen. A killer is targeting children and when a wealthy family loses their daughter Ransom is asked to take charge. He is also asked to do something he is uncomfortable with in the process.

Walker is a brilliant writer weaving a plot that is both faced paced and utterly absorbing. His research on the time period shows in every detail of the book. This is a wonderful read.

Jon

THE STAR

David Skibbins
2007
Thomas Dunne Books

I've enjoyed both of the previous books by Skibbins, and this is a series that I am now looking forward to every time a new one is released. Skibbins was good with his first book, but the following books get better and better. His series

character, Warren Ritter, is rather unique, and that is a hard thing to accomplish with so many mysteries being published.

In THE STAR Ritter is hoping to get his life back to the quiet happy existence he used to enjoy, but it's not in the cards as his daughter comes to him for help. A small matter of custody battle soon turns to murder. To complicate things Ritter also learns some things about his Father that will also demand his attention. With the help of some friends Warren is on the case in his own unique style, and as things start to spiral out of his control hopefully he can hold everything together and not get killed in the process.

Skibbins writes with a sure hand and weaves a very entertaining story. With each progressive book we learn a bit more about Warren Ritter and his past, and this is part of the draw. He is developing a real sense of family for the first time and it is a real motivating factor for him. I see this series getting better and better and look forward to many more.

Jon

THE SWEET SCENT OF MURDER

Susan P. Baker

2006

Five Star

Set in Texas, Mavis Davis, P. I. is a smart-mouth woman. She is hired by a young man to find his 16-year-old sister whom he thinks was kidnapped, even though his parents haven't reported her missing.

Mavis goes to his home, finds a party and Mom Hilary with a drink in her hand and no tears in her eyes. Then Daddy falls dead at her feet, literally. What is going on?

Mavis' helpmates are Candy, who is in high school and a friend of the boy's; and Margaret Applebaum, her assistant. The dead man is Hilary's second husband, whom she married when the children's father went to prison on molestation charges.

Now Mavis has three cases--the kidnapping, the murder, and the child abuse, and she determines they are all related. She tries to find out who is telling the truth, and who isn't. But it's hard as everyone has their own agenda. Author Baker was a probation officer, an attorney and a judge, so she knows what she's writing about. Great fun!

Gay Toltl Kinman

TRANQUILITY DENIED

A. C. Frieden

January, 2007

Avendia Publishing

Frieden's extensive life-experience and writing talent come together in TRANQUILITY DENIED to create a story told with authority and passion. His character, Jonathan Brooks, is a lawyer in New Orleans working a case involving a North Sea collision. When Brooks exposes a Navy captain lying under oath and finds out that evidence is being suppressed, he realizes that this case is about more than two ships colliding, and could possibly be related to his deceased brother. From the hot streets of nineties New Orleans to snowy Moscow, Brooks is determined to get answers, and soon realizes he's not only risking his life, but the lives of his loved ones.

Having studied law in both Moscow and New Orleans, and as a trained pilot and marksman, Frieden is the ideal person to tell this story. He describes his settings with the devotion of a native and the grittiness of a seasoned mystery writer, making the cities come alive on the page. His characters are relatable yet flawed, giving them a human quality that draws you in from the very beginning. Brooks is the classic fish out of water and as Frieden raises the stakes at every turn, this ordinary lawyer becomes a larger than life character that you can't help but root for. An intriguing tale of power, corruption and hidden truths, this thriller is anything but tranquil.

--Dana Kaye

TRAP DOOR

Sarah Graves
January, 2007
Bantam Dell

Jacobia ["Jake"] Tiptree, her two dogs, her cat, and her best friend, Ellie, are back, as is Jake's ex-husband's ghost.

Uncharacteristically for this series [if memory serves], the "bad guy" in Sarah Graves' newest Home Repair is Homicide mystery, is a paid assassin, Walter Henderson. But the murder he is planning on page 1 of TRAP DOOR is personal, not professional. Despite his planned retirement from a "long, successful career of killing people for money," and but for one loose end he still has to tie up, he's now decided that the only way to get rid of the punk who has charmed his beloved teenage daughter is by the means he knows best. But it seems that the boy has saved him the trouble, for Walter finds his body hanging below the trap door of the loft in Walter's barn. Is it really the suicide it appears to be? Although I was skeptical that a couple of tiny threads of fabric stuck on a hangnail of the victim's hand would really warrant such a suspicion; but maybe that's just me.

But back to that loose end, who turns out to be a wiseguy, Jemmy Wechsler, Jake's friend from her former life as money manager to the mob. Jemmy knows Walter plans to kill him, and calls in a favor by asking Jake to let him hide out in her cottage in Eastport, Maine, where Walter also lives. The spotlight turned on Walter by the body found in his barn, though, is certainly a complicating factor, from anyone's point of view.

The trademark home repair tips that preface every chapter but the first, as in the preceding books in the series, are always interesting and practical. There are poignant thoughts of mothers of teenage sons over whom they have little if any control. The final scene is the always satisfying gather-all-the-suspects-in-one-room-and-identify-the-killer, though somewhat implausible in this instance.

Eastport, Maine, where the author as well as her protagonist make their home, is on an island a few miles off the coast of Maine [although hopefully the author's home is sans ghost, ex-husband or otherwise], and is beautifully depicted, and the book is as charming as its protagonist.

Gloria Feit

THE TRIGGER EPISODE

Tom Straw
2007
Carroll & Graf Publishers

This is the first novel from television veteran Straw and it's an ass kicker.

Hardwick is a paparazzi photographer, by default. After an incident in his past leaves him disgraced with regular news outlets he turned to celebrities to earn a living. And it's a rough living. Mob guys after him for money, an ex-girlfriend who wants nothing to do with him and the always challenging job of out maneuvering his fellow paparazzi. His life takes a turn for the weird when some television executives offer to pay him to track down the missing star of a TV show called Thanks for Sharing, which is about to film it's 100th episode, the magic number to sell into syndication. The thinking is that he's tracked her down before and he would have the best shot at doing it again.

The starlet in question, one Bonnie Quinn is a nightmare, and so it's no shock when after filming she turns up dead. But it sure looks like it wasn't an OD like the police think. Hardwick's big payday may end up killing him.

Straw has a sharp wit and it shows in this clever and engaging story. His characters have a great depth and I'd love to see more. Fast pacing and some unexpected twists really move this book along to a great climax. I loved every minute reading this book.

Jon

UNSEEN

Mari Jungstedt

2007
Doubleday

When a woman and her dog are found murdered on a lonely beach in Sweden, the police aren't sure where to start looking for the killer -- close to home, or in the bigger city of Stockholm? Inspector Anders Knutas, a very likable and intelligent detective, does his best to find out, but not before more violence and murder. Johan Berg, a reporter in Stockholm, also gets called to the scene, and works hard to report fairly and accurately, without making an enemy of Knutas in the process. As a result, Berg gets pulled into the investigation in ways he never would've imagined, mainly because of his attraction to one of the victim's friends. Jungstedt's writing is easy to read, and her characters well-drawn and interesting. The setting of Sweden is drawn well, and it was fun to read about a country that's rarely used in mystery fiction! I found the villain to be a bit transparent, but perhaps that's okay since the book is touted as a 'thriller.' This is Jungstedt's debut novel, and a great start! I look forward to reading more of Jungstedt's work and hope lots of American readers take to this unusual and beautiful European setting.

Judy Clemens

VINNIE'S HEAD

Marc Lecard
2007
St Martin

Mark Lecard is twisted – in a good way. He's written a fireball of a debut novel that may be best described as Carl Hiaasen meets Ken Bruen.

Johnnie LoDuco is a loser. And he's not very bright. He knows this, and he's good with it. But he keeps getting into trouble. Most recently, he's been left holding the bag – literally – on a small time convenience store robbery. Trying to escape the long arm of the law, he does what any petty fugitive with a not-too-much-higher-than-room-temperature IQ would do. He goes fishing. His catch? The head, and only the head, of his friend, Vinnie.

Thus begins a caper tale that is guaranteed to leave the reader guessing, and chuckling, from the first page to the last. And this book has one of the more satisfying endings to come along in quite some time.

Here's hoping that Marc Lecard writes something new, and soon.
Rae Helmsworth

THE WATCHMAN

Robert Crais
2007
Simon and Schuster

THE WATCHMAN, Crais' 14th book sees Crais returning to his series characters who made their first appearance in MONKEY'S RAINCOAT. However in this book Joe Pike is the lead, and Elvis Cole is the sidekick. Fans have been clamoring for a Pike book, and they won't be disappointed.

A few years ago Joe Pike asked for a favor in order to help Elvis on a case. The conditions were that at some point Pike would be asked to return the favor. The time to do so has come, and Pike is called in to keep a rich spoiled party girl safe. Larkin Barkley saw something she shouldn't have and the feds have her ready to testify, but they completely drop the ball on protecting her. Through a round about series of events Joe is called in. Joe Pike proceeds to do whatever he has to do to ensure that no harm comes to her, and part of the risk is that Pike isn't sure where the threat is coming from. He calls on Elvis Cole to help out with some aspects of this mission, but he is no doubt handling this on his own. His job isn't made any easier by the fact that Larkin wants to make pone calls, go out drinking and basically doesn't grasp the danger she's in. But before long she does and game is on to keep her alive.

Crais is one of my favorite writers, and trying to name a favorite of his books would be like choosing which parent I love more, however I can safely say that this is one of my favorites. It gave me the same buzz I got when I first discovered

his books. The action is non-stop with pacing like a grand prix race. Crais proves once again why he is a master of this type of book. This should be on the top of everyone's must read list.

Jon

WATER LIKE A STONE

Deborah Crombie

2007

Wm. Morrow

Scotland Yard Inspector Duncan Kincaid and Metropolitan Police Inspector Gemma James and their respective sons (they're still not married in this long-running series) are on a Christmas holiday at his family's home in Cheshire, but it turns out to be a busman's holiday. Soon after their arrival, Kincaid's sister, while renovating a barn for a client, discovers a mummified baby behind a mortared wall. Soon after, a retired social worker is found with a bashed-in head on a towpath near her boat by a canal. Previously, a teenaged boy was drowned in the canal. Are they separate incidents or related?

While the local police have the case, Kincaid and James become involved, especially since his family is involved. The investigations proceed without any real clues. But, of course, Gemma sees some parallels, and the mysteries of the intertwining lives of the victims and the Kincaid relatives are unraveled. It is an intriguing story, which keeps the reader on edge, especially the hair-raising finish.

Theodore Feit

WELL BRED AND DEAD

Catherine O'Connell

January 2007

Harper Paperbacks

The first page of WELL BRED AND DEAD, Catherine O'Connell's second published novel, had this reader intrigued, describing as it does our protagonist, Pauline Cook, gagged and bound on her bed in the luxurious penthouse apartment on the Gold Coast of Chicago, her captors having left her to die. Pauline, described as a "devastatingly elegant and wealthy widow," [although known to very few to be in much more straitened circumstances just lately], can trace her current predicament to her close friendship with Ethan Campbell, a social columnist and author of biographies of famous socialites, and the fact of his shocking death, an apparent suicide. Pauline was the one who discovered the body and has now had to pay for his funeral when no close relatives can be found. Pauline soon finds that there was much she didn't know about Ethan, her best friend for over five years, including perhaps his real identity when multiple birth certificates are found among his things. As Pauline says, it is incredible "how little we know those we think we know best." The mystery only intensifies as her investigation gleans some further tidbits of information, which only leads to further efforts to get to the truth.

The writing is for the most part light-hearted, witty and fast-paced, the view afforded by the author into the world of the social elite is a wry and interesting one, though it is almost by definition a superficial vista. Some of the attitudes are mildly offensive, but these are reflective of the times and strata. And then, of course, we get to the harrowing scene described in the prologue, and its aftermath, and Pauline has to find a way not to become one who is, um, well bred and dead. A quick and enjoyable read.

Gloria Feit

WHY CASEY HAD TO DIE

L. C. Hayden

2007

Five Star

This is a fun book. Mystery conference attendees, particularly Malice Domestic, will recognize names like Marie and Tom O'Day, who are characters in the story. And the story is set at a mystery conference in Arizona. The conference features a crime, which is presented in play-like form, and the attendees are challenged to figure out who the murderer is. A consultant is on board--Harry Bronson (Hayden's

series character) a retired Dallas detective. Bronson and his wife arrive in their camper. He is a bit, make that a lot, surprised when he finds out what the crime is. What is going on?

The Casey of the title, the victim, was a college student murdered at a frat party. Her boyfriend was convicted of the crime, but Bronson never believed he did it. Someone else dies, someone is kidnapped, and someone sends Bronson off on a wild turkey chase using a GPS which gives significance to the compass in a hand featured on the magenta cover of the book. Bronson must find a series of geocaches, each of which gives a clue to the next one. This is meant to be a fun game, but not under these circumstances.

Hayden is an excellent writer who keeps the suspense up.

Gay Tolti Kinman

THE WILDFIRE SEASON

Andrew Pyper
December, 2006
Thomas Dunne Books

If Karin Fossum were from the Yukon rather than Norway, she might write a story something like this one. Andrew Pyper has combined psychological suspense with an edge-of-the-seat thriller to create this masterful tale of loss and redemption.

Miles McEwan is hiding in plain sight in the back of beyond, in a rough and ready little town in Canada's Yukon. He's the fire chief, and he's damned to remember his painful past, awake and asleep. It's wildfire season in the Yukon, but a fire has been started at the hand of a human, and there's a murderer on the loose. And to make things even more complicated, his former lover has arrived with their five-year old daughter, some out-of-towners have decided that now is a good time for a grizzly hunt, and the fire is about to burn out of control. As events race to a cataclysmic finish, Miles finds himself having to come out of hiding to try to save his daughter, and has to discover, for good or ill, the truth about his own character.

THE WILDFIRE SEASON is wonderfully paced and plotted, and the characters are beautifully drawn. It's a stunningly good read, and most highly recommended.

Rae Helmsworth

YOU SHOULD HAVE DIED ON MONDAY

Frankie Y. Bailey
April 2007
Silver Dagger Mysteries

The title of this book comes from an old blues song and appropriately so. Lizzie Stuart has been looking at her past to some degree since the first Lizzie Stuart/John Quinn book DEATH'S FAVORITE CHILD. YOU SHOULD HAVE DIED ON MONDAY will bring Lizzie to the end of one journey and the beginning of another.

As the book opens Professor Stuart is given a lead into her mother's past. Lizzie has never known her mother nor the reason she deserted her as an infant. As she wades through gangsters memories and the music world Ms. Bailey opens a richly drawn world for her reader. The history is outstanding, her characters resound with realism and her plot keeps you turning the page until the very last.

Like great blues, YOU SHOULD HAVE DIED ON MONDAY builds to a crescendo of bittersweet sorrow that somehow manages to offer hope.

Ruth