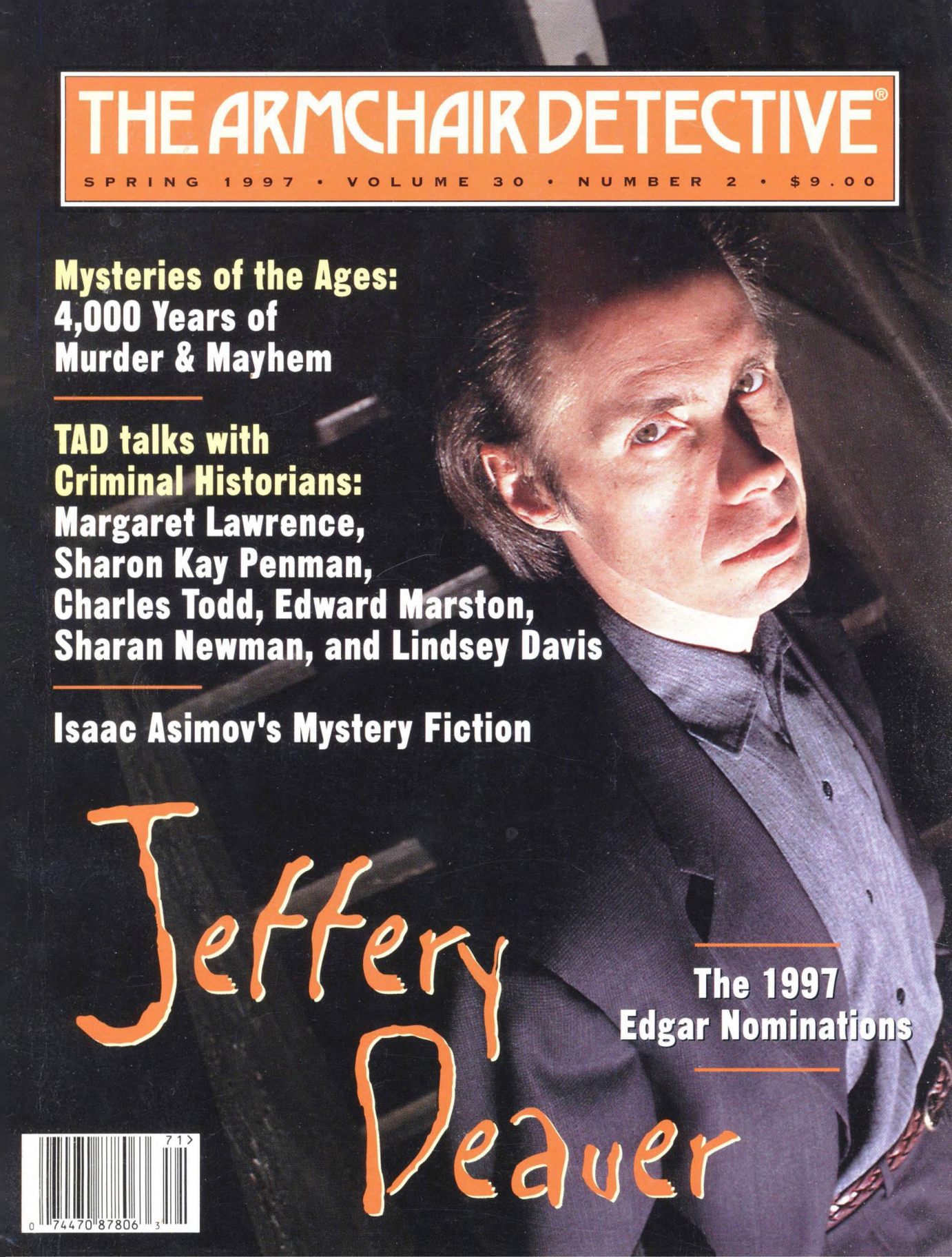
THE ARMCHAIR DETECTIVE®

SPRING 1997 • VOLUME 30 • NUMBER 2 • $9.00



Mysteries of the Ages: 4,000 Years of Murder & Mayhem

TAD talks with Criminal Historians: Margaret Lawrence, Sharon Kay Penman, Charles Todd, Edward Marston, Sharan Newman, and Lindsey Davis

Isaac Asimov's Mystery Fiction

Jeffery Deaver

The 1997 Edgar Nominations

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SPRING 1997 • VOLUME 30 • NUMBER 2

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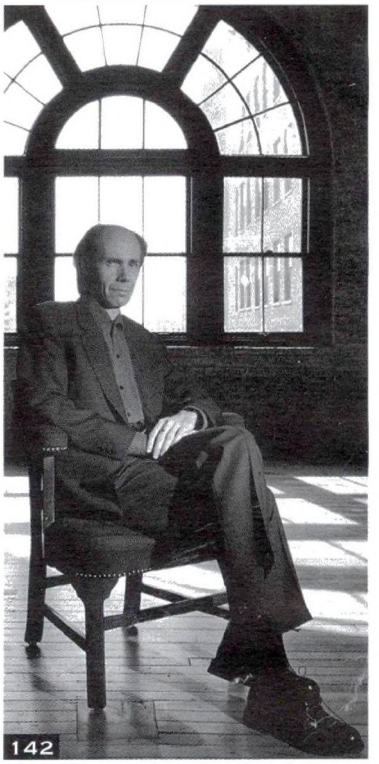

DEPARTMENTS

REVIEWS

Cover photo by Gerard Garcia

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Uneasy Chair

The last few years have seen a remarkable remembrance of crimes past. This issue of *The Armchair Detective* brings together an outstanding sampling of some of the best writers—newcomers and veterans—in this burgeoning field. I'm a particular fan of historical mysteries and I hope that our overview article, "Mysteries of the Ages" will act as an enticement for those of you unfamiliar with this entertaining subgenre.

The Archives

Moving from mysteries of history to histories of mystery, the Archives of Detective Fiction is a website dedicated to the documentation and preservation of work in the mystery field. Sharon Villines, the Project Director, will be discussing the Archives in our next issue. Right now, though, Sharon needs volunteers to help with research and other tasks. If you're interested you can contact her at: The Archives of Detective Fiction, SUNY Empire State College, 225 Varick Street, New York NY 10014; e-mail: <archives@sescva.esc.edu>; website: <www.esc.edu/archives/>.

That's "Nigh-Oh"

Ngaio Marsh was one of the grandest of the Golden Age *grandes dames*. In a career that spanned almost five decades, this New Zealander garnered a worldwide following and a slew of honors—including MWA's Grand Master Award. Marsh's tall, handsome, and aristocratic Inspector Roderick Alleyn has never lost his ability to charm and in the last few years there's been a resurgence of interest in his creator. The Ngaio Marsh House Museum opened recently in Christchurch, New Zealand, and here in the States, St. Martin's Press has started reprinting her novels in paperback. The only element missing was a forum for Marsh's fans. Accordingly, the Ngaio Marsh Society International was founded last year at the Malice Domestic convention. The Society's new president is Nicole St. John and the vice-president is B.J. Rahn. (Special thanks to B.J., who cheerfully answered my questions very early on a Saturday morning!)

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For those interested in joining, the yearly dues are $20. Checks should be made out to the Ngaio Marsh Society International and mailed to: Nicole St. John, 103 Godwin Ave, Midland Park NJ 07432; (201) 891–0595; e-mail: <johnstonstjohn@worldnet.att.net>.

Quoth This Raven, Congratulations!

Mystery Writers of America has a special award, the Raven, given for outstanding achievement in the mystery field outside the realm of creative writing. This year the Raven goes to Marv Lachman, who is, of course, a longtime *TAD* columnist in addition to his many other criminous accomplishments. Our congratulations to him for this well-deserved honor.

Other writers appearing in this issue are also to be congratulated: Margaret Lawrence, Charles Todd, Sharon Kay Penman, and Willetta L. Heising for their Edgar nominations and Sharan Newman, Margaret Lawrence, and Willetta L. Heising for their Agatha nominations. Our best wishes!

The Short Goodbye

It hardly seems like five years since I moved up the masthead from book review editor to editor-in-chief of *The Armchair Detective,* and yet stacked on my desk are half-a-decade's worth of issues.

A quick survey of past issues shows a host of new editorial features. One of my personal favorites is "Murder Is Their Business" which provides a forum for booksellers, publishers, internet specialists—anyone who makes their living in the mystery field. Our book review editor—first Keith Kahla, now Jackie Acampora—offers commentary from the "Mystery Soapbox." George Demko's new "Atlas to Mystery" is a globetrotter's guide to mysteries and Marv Lachman's "Literary Loot" delivers the apt quotation. Charles Silet reviews yesterday's hits in "Past Crimes" while the "Mystery Best Seller List" keeps track of what's hot today. The striking redesign by Annika Larsson and Nell Maguire a few years ago beautifully enhances the fine work of our talented feature writers and interviewers. And our longtime columnists, of course, have given *TAD* the foundation for its preeminence in the mystery field. Suffice it to say that all of these folks deserved the Anthony Award that *TAD* won for Best Mystery Magazine at the most recent Bouchercon.

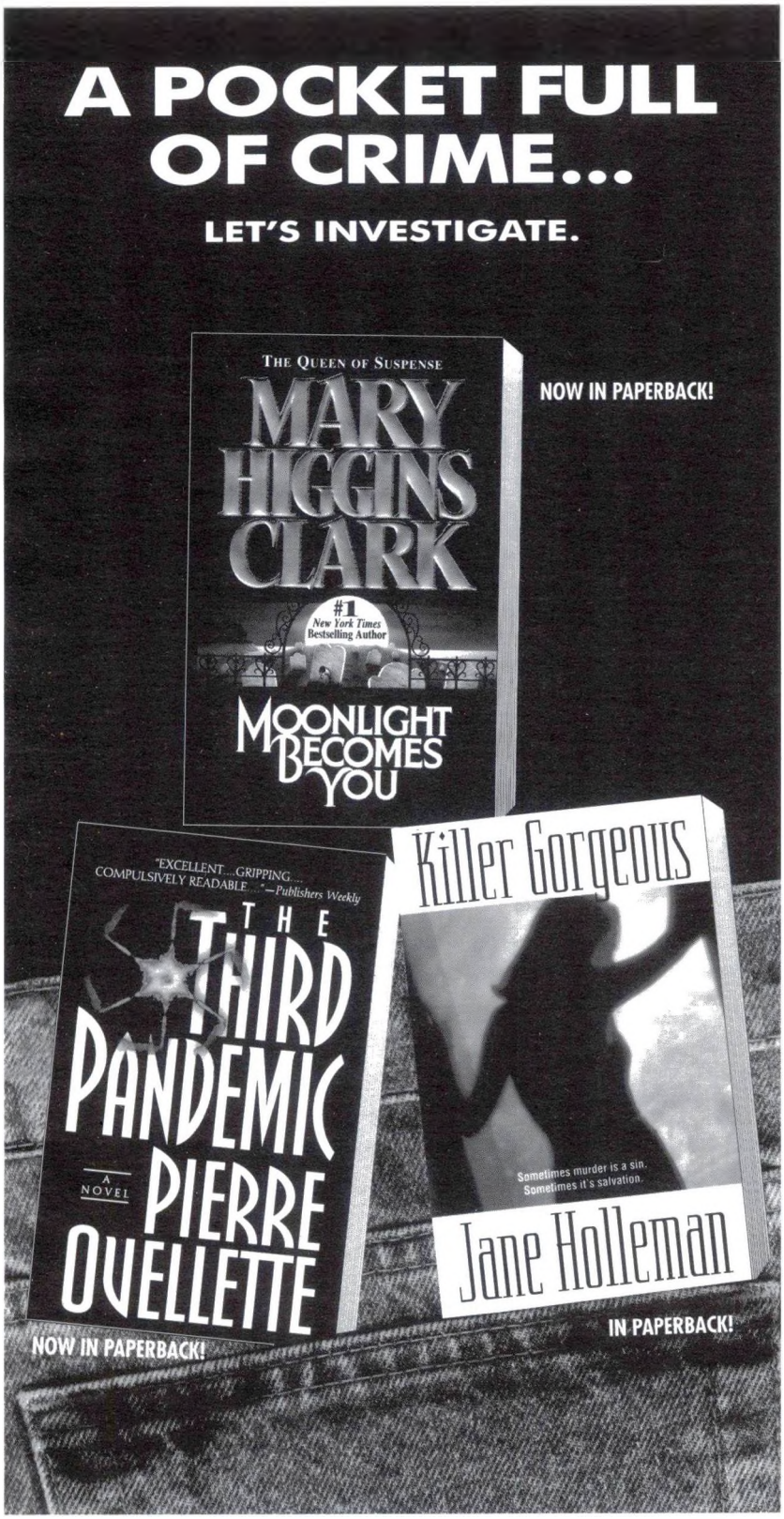
Paging through these back issues reminds me how very lucky I've been in my professional life. For me, *TAD* is full of personal milestones: an elegant evening at the Edgar Awards, a friendship begun over a bookdealer's table at Bouchercon, an interview with a writer whose work I admired long before I ever thought of becoming an editor.

But *TAD* is, of course, much more than a personal scrapbook—it is the chronicle of a community. This is a community bound not by geographical chance but by a sincere affection for mystery fiction and the equally sincere desire to share this pleasure with others. Five years ago, I was offered a warm welcome and generously given all the cooperation, advice and encouragement that are essential to running *The Armchair Detective.* I don't think there's any way to repay everyone who has helped me over the years except perhaps by passing along the kindness I've been shown.

So, while professionally it's time for me to leave *The Armchair Detective,* I'm not leaving town, so to speak. When you see me at the next mystery convention, do come over and say hello. After all, it's the neighborly thing to do.

Best wishes,

Kate Stine
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF



Celebrate May with the paperback release of Mary Higgins Clark's **MOONLIGHT BECOMES YOU**, the #1 *New York Times* bestseller from the Queen of Suspense. Fashion photographer Maggie Holloway is thrilled to be invited to spend a few weeks at the Newport, Rhode Island estate of her beloved former stepmother, Nuala Moore. But when Maggie arrives, she finds Nuala murdered. Soon other Newport matrons begin dying of "natural causes," and Maggie begins to suspect a link. What she doesn't realize is that she is the target, and each clue in this "stay-up-all-night, scare-yourself-half-to-pieces novel" (*USA Today*) is leading her closer to an unimaginable fate.

Pierre Ouellette wowed critics with his first novel, *The Deus Machine*—a book that made "*Jurassic Park* seem like a day at the zoo" (*The Oregonian*). Now he's back with **THE THIRD PANDEMIC**. This dazzling biotech thriller is "very scary...holds the reader in a vise grip" (*Kirkus Reviews*). Brilliant scientist Dr. Elaine Wilkes believes that a new antibiotic-resistant disease will wipe out sixty percent of the global population in one year. While the fatal epidemic races toward American shores and the law of the streets takes over, Dr. Wilkes struggles to deliver the cure, even as a psychopathic genius readies the final, stunning blow.

KILLER GORGEOUS is Jane Holleman's adrenaline-charged, action-packed debut novel. Set in the gritty fringes of the urban Southwest, this is a mystery that sizzles with slick action and dark wit, served up with a straight noir edge. Allison Robbins is a beautiful, savagely abused socialite wife who thinks her only way out is to hire someone to do her in. Montgomery Jones is an Armani-clad hit man, who kills without remorse. And Mike Shiller is a solitary cop with a past. Three lives from three different worlds converge in a scheme with all the fury of a Texas tornado.

See what's in store from Pocket Books. We wrote the book on mystery.

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Letters

Hail, Britannia!

Dear *TAD*,

Here's a list of crime and mystery bookstores in the U.K. that might prove useful to readers of *The Armchair Detective*.

CRIME IN STORE: 14 Bedford Street, Covent Garden, London WC2 9HE. New crime fiction & mysteries mainly UK some US. Hardback and paper. Catalogues issued. Tel:+0171–379–3795. Fax:+0171–379–8988.

FANTASY CENTRE: 157 Holloway Road, London N7 8LX. 1940s–1950s Mystery paperbacks. Open Mon. to Sat. 10–6. Tel: +0171–607–9453.

MING BOOKS UK: 10 Hartcran House, Gibbs Couch, Watford WD1 5EZ. Large stock of US & UK second hand crime fiction & mysteries, both hardback & paper. For both collectors & readers. Some new crime fiction & mysteries. New book orders accepted. Catalogues issued. Open Mon. to Fri. 10–6 and by appointment. Tel: +0181–421–3733. Fax & out-of-hours telephone: +0181–428–5034. US checks accepted.

MURDER ONE: 71–73 Charing Cross Road, London WC2H 0AA. Large stock of new crime fiction & mysteries both US & UK. Plus small stock of second hand mysteries & crime fiction. Stock of Sherlockiana. Both hardback & paper. A shop for readers not collectors. Catalogues issued. Tel: +0171–734–3483. Fax: +0171–734–3429.

NIGEL WILLIAMS RARE BOOKS: 22 Cecil Court, Charing Cross Road, London WC2N 4HE. Crime fiction & mystery first editions for collectors. Specializes only in highlights. Catalogues issued. Open Mon. to Sat. 10–6. Tel: +0171–836–7757. Fax: +0181–379–5918.

OBELIST BOOKS: Virginia Galleries, 33 Virginia Street, Glasgow G1 1TU. Medium-sized stock of second hand crime fiction & mysteries, both hard & paper. Imports new crime fiction from US. Open Mon. to Sat. 10–4. Tel: +01698–817931.

POMES PENYEACH: 63 High Street, Wolstanton, Newcastle under Lyme, Staffs ST5 0ER. Crime fiction first editions. Open Mon. to Sat. 10–5:30. Tel/Fax: +01782–630729.

ROBIN RICHMOND
Watford, U.K.

Literary Loot

Compiled by Marvin Lachman

No sub-genre of the mystery is more American than the private detective story, and the voice of the private eye, invariably in the first person, is one that is very real to us through the stories of Hammett, Chandler, Muller, Paretsky, and hundreds of others. Much of what they and their creations have said about the P.I. tradition, the way they view their jobs, or their struggles for financial survival is worth remembering.

The Private Eye

The private detective story "would be no adventure if it did not happen to a man fit for adventure....If there were enough like him, the world would be a safe place to live in, without becoming too dull to be worth living in."

—Raymond Chandler,
"The Simple Art of Murder"
(*Atlantic Monthly*, Dec. 1944)

"I wanted to be nineteen and the grandson of Philip Marlowe."

—Max Byrd,
California Thriller (1981)

"In my Sears jacket and J.C. Penney tie, I was neither as tough as Sam Spade nor as well dressed as Philip Marlowe, but I was the best Davenport, Iowa could offer."

—Patrick Ireland,
"Blackjack Queen"
(*AHMM*, Jan. 1994)

"If I was a pulp Private Eye...it was nothing to apologize for...because it was an honest thing to be, and a decent one."

—Bill Pronzini,
Blowback (1977)

"You sat and you listened or you stood and you listened. And when the calluses got thick enough so you didn't fidget, then you could be a private detective."

—John Evans,
Halo in Brass (1949)

I'm "a windmill jouster." I "turn over rocks for a living."

—Janet Dawson,
Kindred Crimes (1990)

"What I really am is a cleaner. I go into places and situations that are dirty and I try to clean things up."

—Alan Russell,
No Sign of Murder (1990)

"I hadn't had a client in two weeks and I hadn't paid a bill for a month...My ex-wife once told me that I was a private investigator because I didn't have the character to starve in a garret."

—Peter Corris,
"P.I. Blues,"
The Big Drop (1985)

"I skipped lunch and drove to a downtown theater where an old Robert Mitchum detective film was playing. I took notes."

—Loren D. Estleman,
General Murders (1982)

Told he has the head to be a private eye, Matt Jacob asks, "Is that a compliment or an insult?"

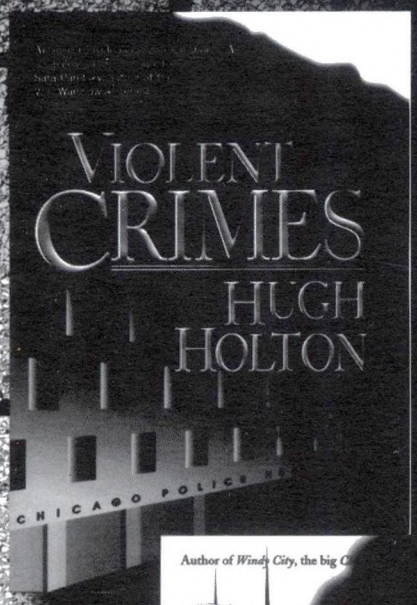
—Zachary Klein,
Still Among the Living (1990)

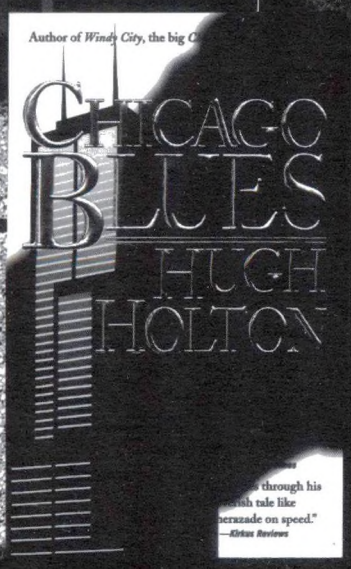
"All in all, it's a great time to be a Private Investigator. Nobody trusts anybody."

—David Housewright,
Penance (1995)

Chicago's Most Wanted

From Chicago Police Lieutenant Hugh Holton, author of the explosive *Chicago Tribune* bestseller *Windy City.*





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—Andrew M. Greeley

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—Sara Paretsky

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CHICAGO BLUES
Hugh Holton

"Holton writes with the stark, gut-wrenching realism of a cop who knows the slime-pit cops work in."
—William J. Caunitz

"Holton races through his feverish tale like Scheherazade on speed."
—*Kirkus Reviews*

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Mystery Best-Seller List

October–December 1996

HARDCOVERS

1. *"M" Is for Malice,* Sue Grafton
2. *The Fallen Man,* Tony Hillerman
3. *Aunt Dimity's Good Deed,* Nancy Atherton
4. *Trouble in the Town Hall,* Jeanne Dams
5. *Rueful Death,* Susan Wittig Albert
6. *Bordersnakes,* James Crumley
7. *Murder, She Meowed,* Rita Mae Brown
8. *The Main Corpse,* Diane Mott Davidson
9. *Accustomed to the Dark,* Walter Satterthwait
10. *The Ghost Walker,* Margaret Coel

PAPERBACKS

1. *The Body in the Transept,* Jeanne Dams
2. *Nutty As a Fruitcake,* Mary Daheim
3. *Distant Blood,* Jeff Abbott
4. *Walking Rain,* Susan Wade
5. *Killer Pancake,* Diane Mott Davidson
6. *Murder in Scorpio,* Martha Lawrence
7. *The Poet,* Michael Connelly
8. *Aunt Dimity's Death,* Nancy Atherton
9. *Two for the Dough,* Janet Evanovich
10. *The Twelve Deaths of Christmas,* Marian Babson

The following mystery bookstores furnished information:

A Compleat Mystery Bookshop, Portsmouth, NH; Aunt Agatha's, Ann Arbor, MI; Deadly Passions, Kalamazoo, MI; Mystery Book Company, Tulsa, OK; Mystery Book Store, Dallas, TX; Mysteries and More, Austin, TX; Mysterious Galaxy, San Diego, CA; The Poisoned Pen, Scottsdale, AZ; The Rue Morgue, Boulder, CO; Seattle Mystery Bookshop, Seattle, WA; The Sleuth of Baker Street, Toronto, ON; Snoop Sisters Mystery, Belleair Bluffs, FL

IMBA is a trade association of independent bookstores or related businesses having a strong interest in mystery. Its purpose is to serve as a forum for ideas, a channel for communication, and an effective force for change.

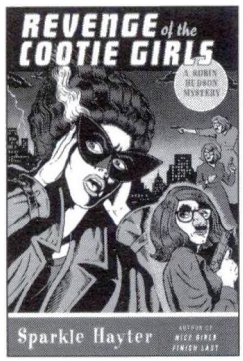
For further information write to:

Pam Jobin, Deadly Passions
157 S Kalamazoo, Kalamazoo MI 49007

Murder and Mayhem from VIKING PENGUIN

"America *needs* more funny women writers. Huzzah for Sparkle!"

—Sarah Shankman, author of *I Still Miss My Man But My Aim is Getting Better*



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A Penguin Paperback

Two new Robin Hudson mysteries from
Sparkle Hayter

REVENGE OF THE COOTIE GIRLS

A Girls' Night Out takes sassy, sexy Robin and her goilfriends on a deadly trip into the past.

"Reaffirms that when tough babes speak up, act out, and make trouble, you can always count on the last laugh...smart, funny.... A great read."—*Regina Barreca*

NICE GIRLS FINISH LAST

Robin investigates a link between her murdered gynecologist and the S & M underworld—and her own social life.

"Deftly aimed satire and neatly plotted murder mystery"—*Philadelphia Inquirer*

Also available from Penguin: *What's a Girl Gotta Do?*

"Stone works the hard-boiled genre conventions with the insouciance of an old pro."

—The New York Times Book Review

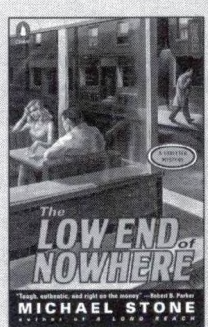
Michael Stone brings you two new Streeter mysteries

A LONG REACH

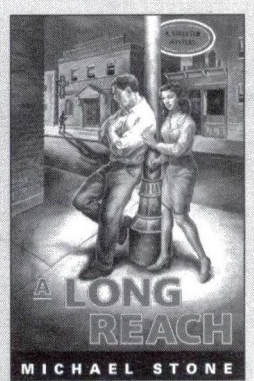
Streeter's back and tangles with a cast of offbeat no-gooders, lowlifes, and dames from the subtle and smoky to the flashy and vicious.

THE LOW END OF NOWHERE

Blonde bombshell Story Moffatt hires Streeter to find some loot—and every unsavory character in Denver seems to be looking for it too.



A Penguin Paperback



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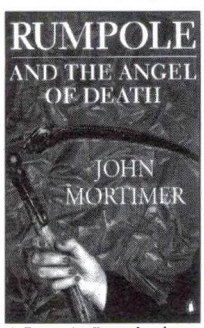

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—The New York Times Book Review

John Mortimer

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Rumpole for the Defense,
Rumpole's Return,
The Trials of Rumpole,
Rumpole and the Golden Thread

IN BOOKSTORES NOW FROM VIKING PENGUIN

THE CRIMINAL DOCKET

19th Annual MWA Symposium: Wednesday, April 30, 1997, New York University, New York. A day-long event featuring panels on criminal investigations, law enforcement issues, other nuts-and-bolts information for crime writers. Registration material will be mailed to members.

MWA Edgar Awards Banquet: Thursday, May 1, 1997, Hilton Hotel, New York, New York. For information contact: MWA, Inc., 17 E 47th St, 6th Fl, New York NY 10017.

Malice Domestic IX: May 2–4, 1997, Hyatt Regency, Bethesda, Maryland. Membership and Agatha Awards Dinner costs $145; membership only is $95. Information: Malice Domestic, PO Box 31137, Bethesda MD 20824–1137; website: <http://www.erols.com/malice>.

Of Dark and Stormy Nights 15: June 7, 1997, at the Holiday Inn Rolling Meadows in suburban Chicago, Illinois. Day-long writers' workshop sponsored by the Midwest Chapter of MWA. Features writers, editors, agents, marketers, reviewers, forensic experts, crime/courts specialists, and others. Designed for mystery writers of all levels of experience. For information: Bill Spurgeon, Director, PO Box 1944, Muncie IN 47308; (317) 288–7402; e-mail: <73177.3544@compuserve.com>.

ClueFest '97: July 11–13, 1997, Dallas, Texas. A 3-day mystery readers book fair. Guests of Honor: Joyce Christmas & Jeremiah Healy; Toastmaster: Parnell Hall. Registration is $75; $85 after June 1. Information: Barry and Terry Philips, The Book Tree, 702 University Village SC, Richardson TX 75081; (972) 437–4337; e-mail: <booktree@aol.com>.

Mid Atlantic Mystery Book Fair & Convention: October 3–5, 1997, Holiday Inn, Independence Mall, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Registration is $50. Information: Deen Kogan, Mid Atlantic Mystery, c/o SHP, 507 S 8th St, Philadephia PA 19147; (215) 923–0211.

Magna Cum Murder: October 24–26, 1997, Ball State University, Muncie, Indiana. Information: Kathryn Kennison, E.B. Ball Center, Ball State University, Muncie IN 47306; (317) 285–8975. Unofficial website: <http://www.parlorcity.com/secop/murder.html#Fond>.

Bouchercon 28: The World Mystery Convention, October 30–November 2, 1997, Monterey, California. Information: Bouchercon 28, PO Box 26114, San Francisco CA 94126–6114; website: <http://users.aol.com./bchrcon97/index.htm>; e-mail: <bchrcon97@aol.com>

The 1997 Edgar Allan Poe Awards Nominees

MWA's Edgars will be presented to the winners at the 52nd Anniversary Gala Banquet, Thursday, May 1 at the New York Hilton Hotel & Towers.

Best Novel
The Chatham School Affair by Thomas H. Cook (Bantam)
With Child by Laurie R. King (St. Martin's)
Hearts and Bones by Margaret Lawrence (Avon)
Pentecost Alley by Anne Perry (Fawcett/Columbine)
Mean Streak by Carolyn Wheat (Berkley)

Best First Novel by an American Author
Bonita Faye by Margaret Mosely (Three Forks Press)
The Queen's Man by Sharon Kay Penman (Henry Holt)
A Test of Wills by Charles Todd (St. Martin's)
A Brother's Blood by Michael White (HarperCollins)
Simple Justice by John Morgan Wilson (Doubleday)

Best Paperback Original
Fade Away by Harlan Coben (Dell)
Silent Words by Joan M. Drury (Spinsters Ink)
The Grass Widow by Teri Holbrook (Bantam)
Walking Rain by Susan Wade (Bantam)
Tribe by R.D. Zimmerman (Dell)

Best Fact Crime
Outrage by Vincent Bugliosi (Norton)
Fall Guys by Jim Fisher (Southern Illinois University Press)
No Matter How Loud I Shout by Edward Humes (Simon & Schuster)
Power to Hurt by Darcy O'Brien (HarperCollins)
Trespasses by Howard Swindle (Viking)

Best Critical/Biographical Work
The Secret Marriage of Sherlock Holmes by Michael Atkinson (University of Michigan Press)
Detecting Women 2: A Reader's Guide and Checklist for Mystery Series Written by Women by Willetta L. Heising (Purple Moon Press)
The Blues Detective: A Study of African-American Detective Fiction by Stephen F. Soitos (University of Massachusetts Press)
Agatha Christie: A to Z by Dawn B. Sova (Facts on File, Inc.)
Elusion Aforethought: The Life and Writing of Anthony Berkeley Cox by Malcolm J. Turnbull (Bowling Green State University Popular Press)

Best Short Story
"My Murder" by David Corn (*Unusual Suspects*, Vintage Crime)
"The Dark Snow" by Brendan DuBois (*Playboy*, Nov.)
"Kiss the Sky" by James Grady (*Unusual Suspects*, Vintage Crime)
"Red Clay" by Michael Malone (*Murder for Love*, Delacorte)
"Hoops" by S.J. Rozan (*Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*, Jan.)

Best Young Adult
Who Killed Mr. Chippendale? by Mel Glenn (Lodestar)
Mr. Was by Peter Hautman (Simon & Schuster)
Flyers by Daniel Hayes (Simon & Schuster)
Hawk Moon by Rob MacGregor (Simon & Schuster)
Twisted Summer by Willo Davis Roberts (Atheneum)

Best Juvenile
The Last Piper by Helen Cavanaugh (Simon & Schuster)
The Case of the Wiggling Wig by E.W. Hildrick (Simon & Schuster)
The Clearing by Dorothy Reynolds Miller (Atheneum)
Gaps in Stone Walls by John Neufeld (Atheneum)
Cousins in the Castle by Barbara Brooks Wallace (Atheneum)

Best Television Episode
"Slave" written by Rene Balcer & Elaine Loeser ("Law & Order," NBC)
"Causa Mortis" written by Rene Balcer ("Law & Order," NBC)
"Every Picture Tells a Story" written by Paul Haggis ("EZ Streets," CBS)
"Deadbeat" written by Ed Zuckerman & I.C. Rapoport ("Law & Order," NBC)
"ID" written by Ed Zuckerman ("Law & Order," NBC)

Best Television Feature/Mini-Series
"Best Boys" written by Paul Abbott ("Cracker," A&E)
"True Romance" written by Paul Abbott ("Cracker," A&E)
"An Autumn Shroud" written by Malcolm Bradbury ("Dalziel & Pascoe," A&E)
"Brotherly Love" written by Jimmy McGovern ("Cracker," A&E)
"Darkness Visible" written by Ashley Pharoah ("Silent Witness," A&E)

Best Movie
Le Ceremonie written by Claude Chabrol
Fargo written by Joel & Ethan Coen (Gramercy)
Trainspotting written by John Hodge
Lone Star written by John Sayles (Castle Rock/Columbia)
Sling Blade written by Billy Bob Thornton (Miramax)

Best Play
no nominees or winner this year

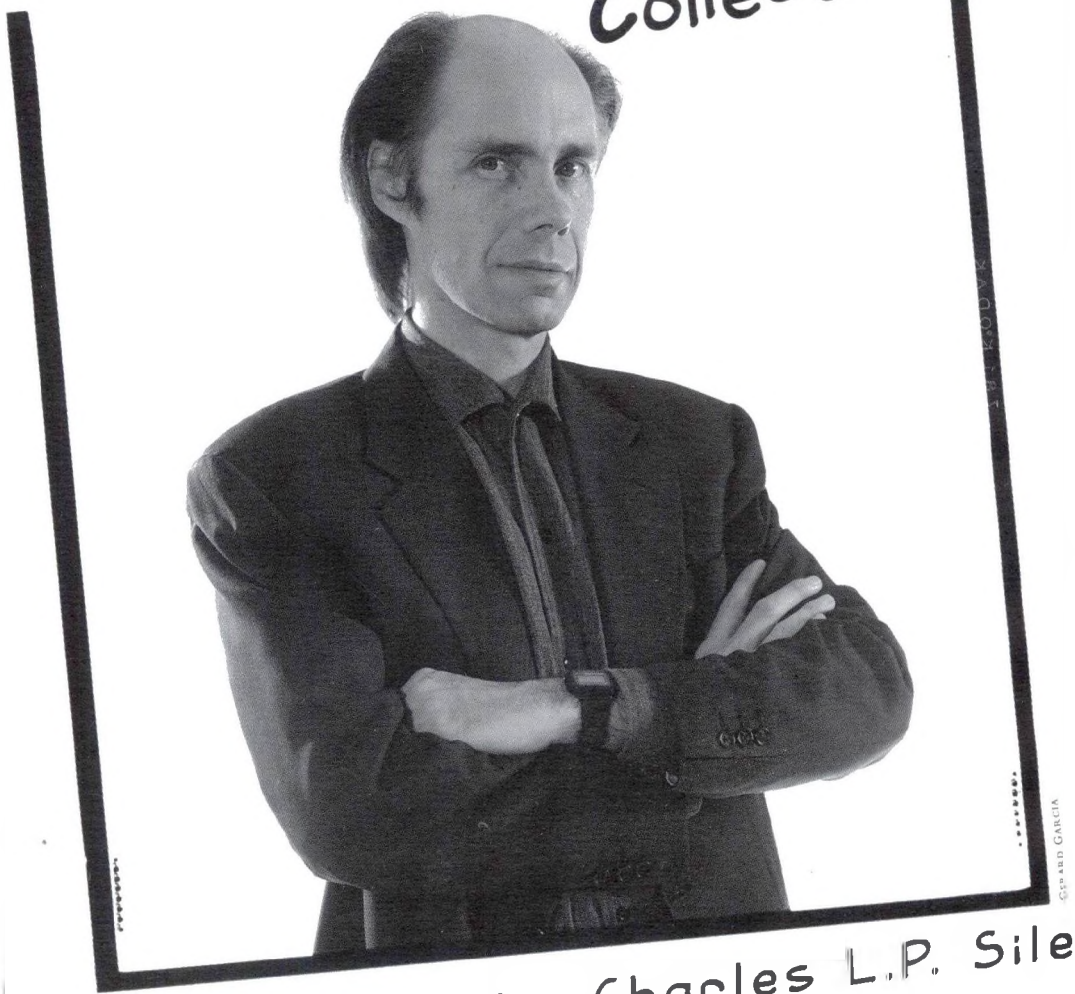
Grand Master
Ruth Rendell

Ellery Queen Award
Francois Guerif

Robert L. Fish Memorial Award
"The Prosecutor of DuPrey" by David Vaughn (*Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*, Jan.)

Raven
Marvin Lachman

The Bone Collector



An Interview with Jeffery Deaver

by Charles L.P. Silet

Charles L.P. Silet teaches film and contemporary literature and widely reviews and interviews in crime and mystery fiction.

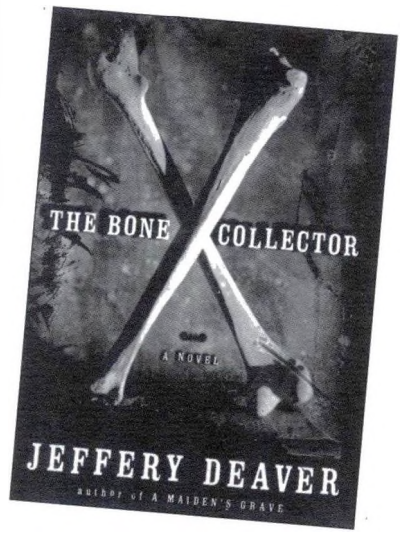
Jeffery Deaver grew up in suburban Chicago, the son of an advertising copywriter and an artist. After studying journalism at the University of Missouri and while serving a stint as a folk singer/song writer, he began editing (mostly art magazines) and moved to New York. He fell in love with the city, its culture and pace, but the rents were high and the living expensive. Law school seemed a way to provide a better income, and after graduating in the top of his class, he went to work for a large Manhattan firm. Unfortunately, as he confesses, he lacked any real talent for the practice of the law. Besides, the urge to write, which had prompted him to study journalism and earn a living as an editor, now resurfaced as a desire to write fiction.

His first attempts were unsatisfactory, but after a period of self re-education, in short order he published three books featuring Rune, a street-wise female amateur investigator. He then began writing larger one-off thrillers that gave him more room to explore the psychology of his characters and to exploit his skills as a researcher.

By the time he published *The Lesson of Her Death* (1993) he had developed a mature style and a firm grasp of the genre, and with each succeeding novel his readership has grown. A film version of his hostage novel about a bus-load of deaf children, *The Maiden's Grave,* which starred Marlee Matlin and James Garner, was broadcast on HBO in late 1996. His latest thriller, *The Bone Collector,* already has been sold to the movies. With a sequel in the works and another thriller in draft, Jeffery Deaver is emerging as one of today's most popular and bankable writers.

TAD: When did you start writing?

DEAVER: Actually I started my first thriller when I was about eleven. My parents had a very liberal censorship rule: Though there were certain movies I couldn't see, I could read anything I could get my hands on. Of course in the Midwest in the late 1950s and early '60s, especially in conservative DuPage County, I couldn't find any of the really good stuff. I wasn't reading Henry Miller at that age. But I had a steady diet of adult thrillers—James Bond, Mickey Spillane, cold war political thrillers, the Travis McGee books, Agatha Christie, Sherlock Holmes, the Doc Savage adventures. I also read a lot of science fiction—Edgar Rice Burroughs, H.G. Wells and Jules Verne.



TAD: Tell us about your first published novel.

DEAVER: My first novel was the proverbial book from hell. A novel called *Voodoo.* It was a supernatural horror story, a paperback original, published by a small company called Paperjacks. I liked the theme of *Voodoo*—ancient religion conflicting with modern science. All sorts of eerie things going on in Manhattan. Fun to research, fun to write.

After that came an art thief caper—*Always a Thief.* Then I switched to Bantam and did my first carefully constructed, plot-driven thriller. It was a three-book series featuring a young woman amateur P.I. named Rune. First was *Manhattan Is My Beat,* which was an Edgar nominee. Then *Death of a Blue Movie Star. Hard News* was the third. Rune was a young, irrepressible heroine, a "Downtown diva," whom some readers loved and some didn't. But the value for me was the plotting. It was there that I developed the plot twists, the multiple points of view, the characters whom we think are certain people but turn out to be entirely different. I learned how to seed clues in, to pace the books, to end scenes on high moments, to write in a very cinematic way, to add a bit of low-key humor while not sacrificing credibility.

TAD: Two of your early books, *Shallow Graves* and *Bloody River Blues,* were written under the pseudonym of William Jefferies. Why was that?

DEAVER: These two books were written at the same time as the Rune books. They are grittier but still feature the twists and turns, the surprises, the careful plotting. I wrote under a pseudonym merely as a legal technicality. Under my contract with Bantam I couldn't publish books with another company under the Deaver name. In my energetic youth back then I was writing two books a year, so I sold the Jefferies books to another company. They, by the way, feature a continuing character, John Pellam, a location scout for a film company and a private eye. *Shane*—George Steven's classic western—was my inspiration for those stories. "A stranger comes to town..."

After those books, I started writing stand-alone thrillers. In the publishing business these are called "big books," though no one really seems to know exactly what a big book is. As the Supreme Court said about pornography: You know it when you see it. They featured multiple points of view, more in-depth character development, more subplots, more stylistic variations than my series books. First came *Mistress of Justice,* my only legal thriller. Then *The Lesson of Her Death, Praying for Sleep, A Maiden's Grave.* In March of this year Viking published my latest, *The Bone Collector.*

TAD: Publishers like series. Was it hard to move on to writing something more adventuresome after you had two series going?

DEAVER: It wasn't hard for me creatively; I had more freedom with the stand-alones. And I'm sure it wasn't hard for the publishers, since sales weren't so hot! I got the most resistance from the readers who fell in love with the characters. At Bouchercon or a signing, peo-

ple'd come up and say, "I *love* Rune. When're we going to see her again?"

As it's turned out I'm bringing back my protagonist and some other characters from *The Bone Collector* in one of the books I'm writing at the moment. After I sold the book to Universal Pictures and submitted it to my publisher, my agent and I were inundated with positive responses about my character and I agreed to try another book featuring him. It's a bit of a gamble but I enjoy writing about this man and if the readers enjoy him too—well, that's what this business is all about.

TAD: Your novel *A Maiden's Grave* was made into an HBO movie in late 1996. What was the experience like, seeing your book filmed?

DEAVER: I've heard horror stories about Hollywood and I've certainly had my successes and failures with the movie business. But on the whole I've had good experiences—mostly because I don't expect anything. I've been optioning books for years now. I learned early that everyone is excited by your book, everyone has great plans for it, it's definitely going to get made and Clint Eastwood or Harrison Ford is definitely going to star in it. And nothing happens—except your option check clears. Usually.

Making *A Maiden's Grave* into a film was a long process. The property went through several film companies—look at the opening credits of a film sometime; who knows *which* company is actually making the film? All those corporate names.

Then I heard HBO wanted to do it, then that Dan Petrie Jr., a very talented director, was attached. Then James Garner signed on as Arthur Potter, my hostage negotiating hero, and Marlee Matlin as my deaf hostage heroine. Next thing I know I get the buy-out check. Which means that they'd exercised the option.

But you have to remember that books and films are different experiences. They may pull the same strings, but they use different mechanisms to pull them. You need to keep telling yourself that what the credit line says has to be taken literally: "Based on the book by..." It's not your book; it's an interpretation of your book.

TAD: I understand you went to Toronto to watch a bit of the shooting.

A Jeffery Deaver Reading List

Voodoo, 1988

Always a Thief, 1989

Manhattan Is My Beat, 1989* (Rune)

Death of a Blue Movie Star, 1990 (Rune)

Hard News, 1991 (Rune)

Shallow Graves, 1992 (John Pellam)

Mistress of Justice, 1992

Bloody River Blues, 1993 (John Pellam)

The Lesson of Her Death, 1993

Praying for Sleep, 1994

Speaking in Tongues, 1995
(Published in U.K. only)

A Maiden's Grave, 1996*

The Bone Collector, 1997

*Nominated for
Edgar Allan Poe Awards

DEAVER: I had a great time. I'd expected to be a bit of an untouchable—"uh-oh, writer on the set, hit the decks"—but everyone, from the director and stars to caterer, was nice as could be. I've written a number of scripts and studied films for years; I know it's essentially a very meticulous, often tedious process. But it's still magic.

Oddly, the best advice I've ever heard for writers—advice I'd tried to keep in mind—was from a filmmaker. Ingmar Bergman said that he had three inviolable rules for making films: "Entertain your audience, never compromise your vision, make every movie as if it were your last."

TAD: What did you think of the finished film?

DEAVER: I enjoyed it. I thought it was very well done. But an interesting thing happened. They used a lot of my dialogue, so I'd be hearing what I wrote and have a certain expectation about where the story was going only to find that it changed direction in a very different way. It didn't bother me, but it was disorienting.

The acting was great—James Garner, Marlee Matlin, Lolita Davidovich.... Oh, and Kim Coates—he made a very scary bad guy.

The only thing I would like to have seen more of was Matlin's character's relationship with the deaf children. Much of my book is about Melanie—the school teacher protagonist—trying to save the children, both despite of and with the help of her deafness. But in an hour-and-three-quarters movie, that had to go. And, if I'd been making the film, I would have cut it too. It was too internal to translate well to the screen.

TAD: In *A Maiden's Grave* you introduce a technique you've used extensively since, especially in your latest book, namely to have a lot of the communications done on the phone.

DEAVER: Part of that in *A Maiden's Grave* was necessity. My negotiator was talking to the chief hostage-taker via what the cops call a throw-phone. In my new book, *The Bone Collector*, my hero's a quadriplegic and has to communicate with his assistant, a policewoman, through the radio.

But apart from the practical necessities of the story the technique lets me exploit my love of dialogue. I enjoy writing dialogue. It gives authors a chance to reveal a great deal about their characters without explaining about them. It lets you work in a little humor and pathos and move the story along very quickly. I love patois and dialect and local expressions.

TAD: You mentioned *Praying for Sleep* was the novel in publishing terms that really broke you out. Why do you think that was?

DEAVER: One of the things I found most appealing about that book was its central character. I have other protagonists as well but he's the character that sets the story in motion and keeps it going. Michael Hrubek is a paranoid schizophrenic who escapes from a mental institution, where he's been incarcerated for murder, to track down the woman who was the chief witness against him at trial. The book follows his harrowing journey to get to her house. I worked very hard to make him believable and to have him shatter everyone's expectations about him and about the crime he was arrested for. And readers have responded very well to him.

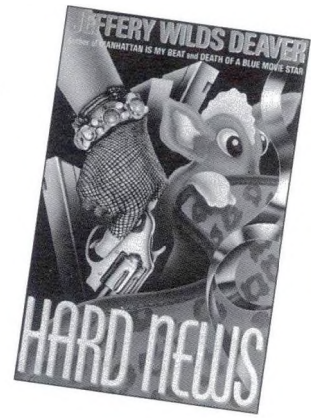
TAD: Let's talk about your latest book, *The Bone Collector*. I see all the hallmarks of your writing in this book: the long-distance communications, the hostage situation, a love affair between two impaired characters, a compressed time frame.

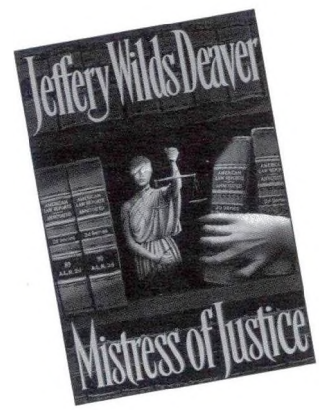
DEAVER: *The Bone Collector* features a quadriplegic hero, Lincoln Rhyme, a former detective who used to head the New York Police Department's forensic division. He literally wrote the textbook on criminalistics—crime scene science. He's depressed, bored with life, and awaiting a Dr. Kevorkian character to help him kill himself, when his old partner comes back into his life, needing his help. A serial kidnapper is planting clues to the whereabouts of his victims and only Rhyme, it seems, will be able to figure out what the clues mean. Rhyme happens to enlist the aid of a patrol officer, Amelia Sachs, who is just about to quit the force. She's very disillusioned with life as a cop because of a recent personal tragedy.

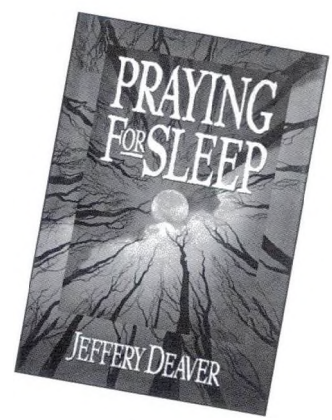
Rhyme has to use his forensic skills and Sachs her innate policewoman abilities together to find the victims as these hourly deadlines approach and the innocent are about to die.

I had great fun with this book—all the forensics and the clues. I even include evidence charts so readers can figure out who the bad guy is and what he's up to.

TAD: You also have lots of interesting information on old New York.







DEAVER: My bad guy is someone who has modeled his activity on a fictional serial killer from the turn of the century. I loved researching that aspect of the book, and many of the clues Rhyme must decipher relate to historical New York. There's so much history in the city, good and bad.

TAD: You must have enjoyed doing the research on forensics, because there is an enormous amount of material on the subject in the book.

DEAVER: I've worked with the NYPD and the FBI; both of those organizations were very helpful. I also do a lot of cruising on the forensics web sites. My desk at home is littered with crime scene manuals. I often go out to lunch or dinner and take work with me—but for *The Bone Collector* I had to think ahead. I don't think fellow diners would appreciate my studying graphic autopsy photos at Denny's.

One thing about criminalistics that impressed me is how sophisticated the mechanisms are for tracking down the bad guys in this country. Certainly at the FBI and large city police departments, but in the small towns, too. Criminalistics can be magic in a way, and I've tried to present a certain sense of that magic through the eyes of my character, Lincoln Rhyme.

TAD: You obviously like to do research but you don't bog down the narrative with it. The reader gets the information but is hardly aware of it because it is so carefully integrated with the story.

DEAVER: Every forensics fact in the book has a payoff. It's not gratuitous. It may be a red herring, meant to lead readers (and my characters) off the scent. But nothing's thrown in just for the sake of inclusion. Oh, I may have to spend just a few sentences describing a particular forensic procedure, but even that isn't usually necessary. Readers are real smart; they'll figure out what's going on.

TAD: At times your books are quite graphically violent.

DEAVER: People have sometimes complained about the violence in my books. I have two thoughts about that: First, come on, folks—these are thrillers. They're about crime and people in extreme situations. There has to be a credible risk to someone, otherwise, where's the thrill?

But second, I'm aware that my essen-

tial job is to give readers an enjoyable, if harrowing, experience and if I start to alienate them, if I make them feel uneasy with what I'm describing, it's not my villain they're going to be angry with. It's me. And I'll have failed in my job. I'll add as much violence, as many scary situations, as possible, stopping only at the point where I think readers are going to get turned off and stop reading. I have no theoretical problem endangering anyone—in *A Maiden's Grave* eight deaf children are held hostage by a trio of killers—but I'll look at the situation carefully and try to figure out if I've stepped over the line.

I should say too that much of the violence in the books is off-camera. I'm a believer in letting the reader's imagination supply the graphic details. It's also very tough to write a fresh and believable passage describing a murder or gunfight.

TAD: There is a resonance in your books of social issues. Is crime fiction particularly suited to deal with such themes?

DEAVER: That's a very good way of putting it, resonance. I don't want to "present" an opinion on social issues. I'm not an authority on most of them anyway. But having my characters affected by such issues (like Rhyme's deciding whether or not to kill himself, Michael Hrubek's release from a mental hospital because of budget cut-backs) I've added another dimension to them—in a very concrete, immediate way. I hope this helps readers understand and empathize with them better than they might otherwise.

And, yes, crime fiction is particularly suited to larger themes—because it involves extremes and passions, and people often feel strongly, passionately, about certain issues; people are willing to take risks to be involved in them.

TAD: What's your next project?

DEAVER: I always work on two books at once. One is a stand-alone book, which happens to be very exciting to me, but I'd rather not talk about now except to say it's a psychological thriller. And as I mentioned, I'm doing a second Lincoln Rhyme book. I've been quite surprised at how people have responded to this man. It's a bit of a challenge, given the obvious limitations of doing a series with a character who can't move. But the next book is just about finished and I'm outlining a third.

I also write several short stories a year for *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*, which I just love writing, and I'm working on a couple of original screenplays too.

TAD: Are you going to bring out a collection of short fiction?

DEAVER: I've thought about doing that though if I do it won't be in the immediate future. I only have a dozen or so published stories. They're such fun to write though. I call them O. Henry meets Poe: macabre, eerie, and with ironic twists.

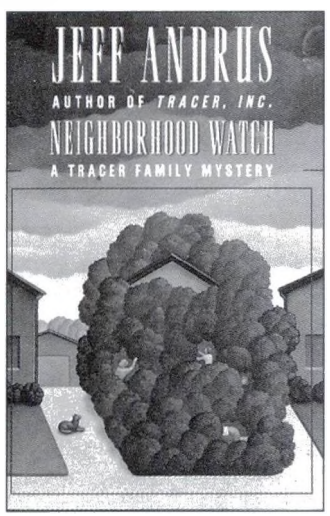
TAD: Have you ever finished an interview, and there was something you've always wanted to be asked but never were?

DEAVER: Yes. The ISBN numbers and ordering information for all my books. ■

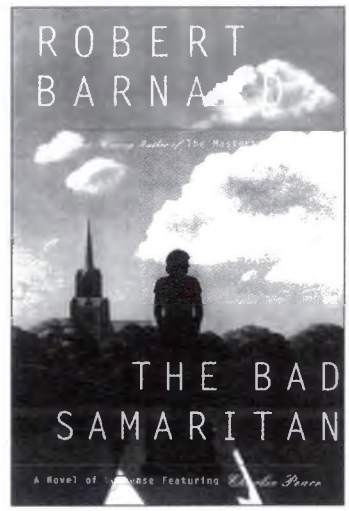
AJH Reviews

By Allen J. Hubin

Neighborhood Watch (Scribner, $21.00) is the second of Jeff Andrus's tales about John Tracer, and it's a welcome break from stereotypical private eye fare. For Tracer is not an ex-cop—he's been downsized out of an industrial human resources job. In addition, he's not an unmarried tom cat—he's very much wedded, with children and other (*lots* of other) family. And he's not a big city type—he lives somewhere near Monterey, California. The plot is imaginative: Tracer's batty neighbor (claims to be a Venusian) lays some long green on Tracer to find his sister (a Venusian princess?), who's gone missing after attending a high school reunion in Oregon. That only begins to suggest the tangled trails down which Tracer will stumble. So, good pluses here. On the other hand, the narrative seems undecided between mystery and domestic farce, with little integration of the two, and I got lost in the story and family relationships a few times. It will be interesting to see where Andrus goes with this.

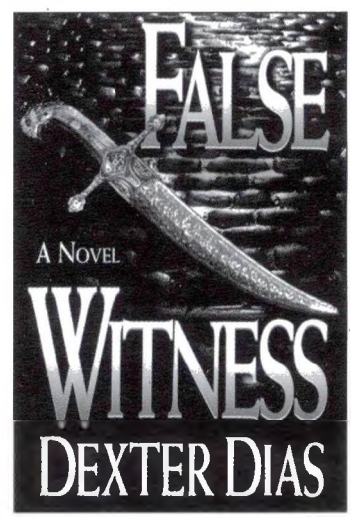


Robert Barnard's target in **The Bad Samaritan** (Scribner, $21.00) is the established Christian church, at least as Barnard perceives it in England. Rosemary Sheffield, wife of the pastor at St. Savior's, has lost her belief in the



God whom she apparently never knew. Her husband takes the news with equanimity, and she goes off on retreat to think on these things. There she meets a Bosnian refugee employed without the necessary work permit. On return home, she finds that word of her loss has spread throughout the gossipy parish, and a political effort is mounted to remove Rosemary from all positions of responsibility. Then the refugee turns up, and Rosemary helps him get further illegal employment, provoking a new batch of gossip in the parish. All of this might have passed, were it not for the murder of one of the parish activists, who seems to have had some (sinister?) connection with the refugee. Enter Barnard's series sleuth, the black detective Charlie Peace. *Samaritan* is amusing and well told, as one would expect from Barnard. For me, however, it is weakened by lack of contrast. All of the parishioners are shown as shallow and/or venal. There is thus no counterpoint with a real Christian, but perhaps Barnard doesn't know what one would look like or disbelieves in the existence of any—poor fellow.

Dexter Dias is a defense barrister in England, so he surely knows the British legal system well, but the picture of it he gives in **False Witness** (Mysterious, $19.95) goes a long way toward boggling my mind. Tom Fawley is Dias's antiheroic protagonist—a defense attorney with no detectable (sexual) morals, who drinks too much, demonstrates appalling bad judgment, and is sometimes just barely competent. His client is the loathsome Richard Kingsley, who has already admitted to sexual depravities with young lasses and is now on trial for the murder of a sixteen-year-old girl down in the shadowy village of Stonebury. Fawley and prosecutor Justine Wright have a curious relationship in court; outside of court they spend a good deal of their time in bed together (not withstanding Fawley's wife and family). And the judges (we experience two of them) have their own agendas as well. It seems likely that Kingsley is guilty of murder, too; he has almost confessed, in fact, and is less than

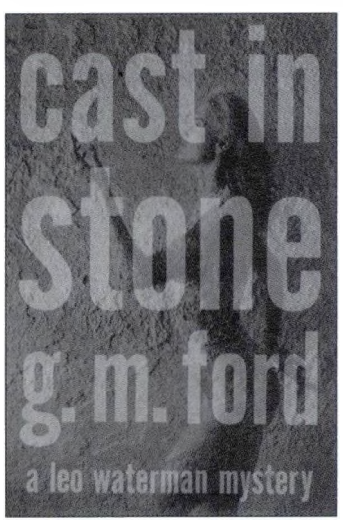


fully forthcoming with his counsel. There are, to be sure, one or two odd features of the case... I don't know that

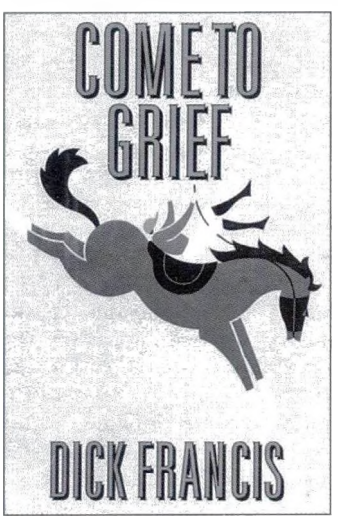
I believed any of *Witness,* but it was surely a fascinating read.

Janet Evanovich's first Stephanie Plum caper, *One for the Money* (1994), won high praise all around. The second, **Two for the Dough** (Scribner, $22.00), my introduction to the series, is a sparkling tale, full of wit and triumphant characterizations, with a fine sense of place (blue-collar Trenton, New Jersey). Plum is an unlicensed investigator who tracks down bail jumpers for her cousin Vincent Plum and his bonding company. Here the target is Kenny Mancuso, who shot a buddy in the knee. Stephanie keeps tripping over vice cop Joe Morelli in her search, and the stakes go up: someone (Kenny?) comes back and finishes the job on the buddy. Why is a vice cop interested in this business? And how is Stephanie going to avoid getting seriously dead? Morelli might pop up again at the right moment, but Stephanie has a secret weapon, her fearsome Grandma Mazur. And, in her spare time, Stephanie is looking for a load of missing budget caskets for Spiro at Stiva's Mortuary—a completely unrelated matter, of course...

Good as was G.M. Ford's debut (*Who in Hell Is Wanda Fuca?*), he avoids the sophomore jinx with a vengeance: **Cast in Stone** (Walker, $21.95), a reprise for Leo Waterman, is even better. Heck Sunstrum, Seattle fisherman, was a very close friend (and employer, on his boat) of Leo's—until, 23 years ago, the beautiful Marge came into Heck's life and rearranged it, leaving Leo and other pieces of his old life out in the cold. Now Heck is in the hospital, comatose after being hit by a truck, and Marge—reluctantly, against her better judgment—asks Leo for help. It seems that Marge and Heck's beloved son, Nick, stricken by cancer, married the seductive Allison Stark, who appeared in his life suddenly, and took her on a honeymoon boat trip, from which no one returned alive. A tragedy, yes, but where did all of Nick's money—nearly a million dollars—go? And did Allison truly die when the boat blew up? And what was Heck doing in the dismal part of town where the truck hit him? Leo's not sure he wants to work for Marge, but for Heck's sake he'll try. It's an absolutely fascinating trail he follows, and the creature that emerges as Allison Stark is a stunning creation. *Cast in Stone* is not to be missed.

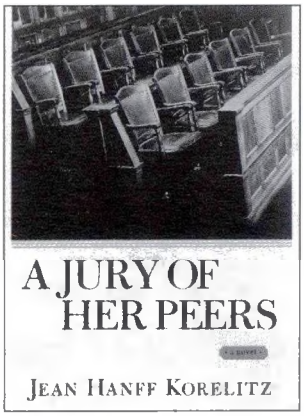


The Edgar awarded to Dick Francis for **Come to Grief** (Putnam, $23.95) produced some grumbling. I haven't read all the other titles shortlisted for that Edgar, but a fascinated perusal of *Grief* gets nothing but raves from me. I can't think of a book in many months that has drawn me so deeply into the story, so that I took it nearly in a single gulp (broken, only with great reluctance, for a meal). Lots of other writers should take note of Francis: shovelsful of sex, endless violence, and pages dripping with filthy language are not necessary for good storytelling; in fact, I submit they are impediments. Sid Halley, jockey turned investigator, here returns for a third adventure. Someone is maiming and killing young horses around England; one of his victims was the proud possession of Rachel Ferns, a young cancer-stricken girl whom Sid has come to love. So his motivation is as intense as his disbelief when bits of evidence begin to point to one of Sid's long-time friends, a person who has risen almost to the status of national hero. How could Sid accuse such a one as he?



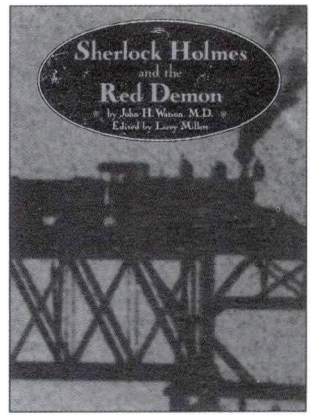
A room locked not once, not twice, but effectively three times, with a murdered body inside, that's the puzzle offered up by Richard Hunt's fifth novel, **Deadlocked** (St. Martin's, $19.95). The corpse of Dr. Arthur King (who will not be much mourned) is found, a sword driven into his chest, in a room in his own home. All entrances to the room are securely bolted and undisturbed, the house is equipped with a high-tech security system which would have recorded any unauthorized movement much less a forced entrance, videotaped any such activity, and sent an alarm to a police station, and the house is surrounded by a recent snowfall which displays no footprints that can't be accounted for. A nice problem for Hunt's series sleuth, Chief Insp. Sidney Walsh, and it gets more baffling as he goes. The resolution, once Walsh makes the right mental leap, is not quite as satisfying as the problem, and Hunt's prose hits occasional rough spots, but all in all this is a good addition to the subgenre of impossible crime.

I was prepared not to like **A Jury of Her Peers** (Crown, $24.00), a first novel by Jean Hanff Korelitz. After all, its protagonist, NYC public defender Sybylla Muldoon, is firmly positioned at the far left, along with the ACLU (to which obeisance is made in the text, and which, I deduce, actually stands for Anti-Civil Liberties Union). But Muldoon turns out to be an engaging sort, and her father, a Supreme Court nominee as firmly positioned at the other end of the spectrum, is not portrayed as evil incarnate. Sybylla is defending Trent, a street person accused of slicing up a little child. A hopeless case, clearly, since Trent inarguably did the deed and public sentiment—with a disfigured and formerly



pretty child ready to take the stand—is ready to roast Trent alive. But Trent's attack was far out of character, as Sybylla knows from previous contact with him, and what was that trace of LSD doing in his system, he who so scrupulously avoided drugs? And why oh why does Sybylla's father so desperately want her to drop the case? I found *Peers* nearly unputdownable.

I spent some of my growing-up years, shortly after WWII, in the Minnesota village of Sandstone, noted for the nearby federal prison and once noted for the quarries which produced the stone used to construct many buildings around the state. But a darker part of its history lies in 1894, when it was consumed in the forest fire named for the town of Hinckley, ten miles away, which was destroyed first. Why do I bring up these details? They would doubtless remain supremely uninteresting to mystery readers, if not to me, without **Sherlock Holmes and the Red Demon** (Viking, $22.95) by Larry Millett, a writer for the St. Paul *Pioneer Press*. The summer of 1894 (coincidentally and irrelevantly the year my father was born, but not in Hinckley or Sandstone) was terribly hot and rainless in northeastern Minnesota. The massive stands of virgin white pine were falling to the loggers' saws, leaving piles of cuttings, wonderful fuel for a fire. As the summer progressed, railway magnate James J. Hill, owner of a railroad line from Hinckley to Duluth, began receiving threatening letters from the "Red Demon," promising vast destruction. Hill sends his emissary to London to persuade the world's greatest consulting detective to identify and capture the Demon and prevent catastrophe. Holmes and Watson come to Hill's St. Paul mansion; Sherlock agrees to tackle the case (already, from the letters themselves, in possession of a critical clue), and he and Watson take up residence (a precarious residence, as it turns out) in Hinckley as a pair of English journalists. They ask careful questions—but not careful enough... This is a wonderful tale, full of impressive atmosphere and descriptive detail, solidly built on historical fact, featuring real events and real people, and seamlessly interwoven into the Sherlockian canon. ■



MIND OVER MATTER

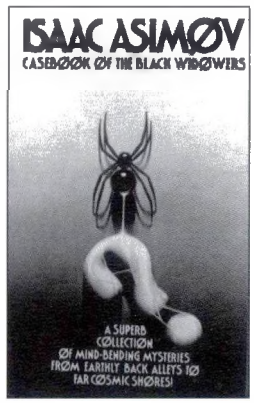
THE MYSTERY FICTION OF ISAAC ASIMOV

BY DORMAN T. SHINDLER

THOSE FAMILIAR WITH THE WRITING OF ISAAC ASIMOV (AND IT'S HARD TO IMAGINE A READER WHO ISN'T) GENERALLY THINK OF HIM AS A WRITER OF SCIENCE FICTION. IN TRUTH, HIS OUTPUT OF MORE THAN 470 BOOKS WAS LARGELY MADE UP OF NONFICTION MATERIAL. FROM SCIENCE AND MATHEMATICS, TO SHAKESPEARE AND THE BIBLE, THE "GOOD DOCTOR" WROTE ABOUT IT ALL. SO IT SHOULD COME AS NO SURPRISE THAT ISAAC ASIMOV WAS A WRITER OF MYSTERIES AS WELL.

Dorman T. Shindler is a contributing writer/reviewer for the *Dallas Morning News*, the *Denver Post*, the *Des Moines Register*, the *St. Petersburg Times*, the *San Antonio Express-News*, *The Bloomsbury Review*, and the *Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel* (for which he reviews mystery novels). Recently, he found time to complete a first novel entitled, *The Valley of the Shadow*.

When compared to the large quantity of nonfiction he produced, or the body of work which comprises his *science* fiction, Asimov's mystery output seems rather small: six novels and just over 100 short stories. For many other writers, that output would constitute a career's worth of writing; for Asimov, it was merely a part of a greater whole. Still, by all accounts, it was the writing of mystery short stories which brought him the most satisfaction. In his final memoir, *I. Asimov*, he remarked, "In the 1970's and 1980's, I wrote something like 120 mystery short stories, far more than the number of science fiction short stories I wrote in that period. I don't think that will change. I enjoy the mysteries more."



The mystery fiction of Isaac Asimov can be divided into four distinct groups: the Black Widowers mysteries; the Union Club mysteries; his miscellaneous mystery stories and novels; and the science fiction mysteries.

The first two groups, the Black Widowers and Union Club mystery stories, were consciously modeled after the fictions of a mystery writer Asimov believed to be the best of all time: Agatha Christie. Asimov loved the *intellectual* nature of Christie's stories; he admired the fact that they rarely involved "onstage" violence of any sort. Speaking to this admiration, and to his concept of the perfect mystery story, Asimov once wrote: "I wanted to be purer than the pure. I was going to try to have no violence at all in my stories." He took pride in this lack of violence, and in the fact that his stories were of the old-fashioned, "locked room" variety. Both the Black Widowers and the Union Club mystery stories involve groups of professional men who are intellectual and somewhat overeducated, and who all gather together to solve a crime or mystery using nothing but their wits. Describing his mystery tales, Asimov observed, "almost every mystery story I write belongs to the 'armchair detective' variety. Our hero listens to a puzzling story of some kind that seems to have no solution and, taking into account only what he is told, comes up with the answer in so cogent a fashion that every other character in the story (and the reader, too) is at once convinced of its legitimacy...My stories are, in short, not exercises in violence, not thrillers, not psychological suspense stories. They are, generally speaking, puzzles, and rather intellectual ones."

It was only after writing seven or eight short mystery stories which revolved around science fiction hooks (or, by extension, science-related hooks), that Asimov came up with the first of his Black Widowers stories. Eleanor Sullivan, Senior Assistant Editor at *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*, asked Asimov for a mystery story. "The Acquisitive Chuckle" was published with the proclamation (added by, Fred Dannay, after *he* read the story): "First of a NEW SERIES by Isaac Asimov." Never one to back away from a challenge, Asimov proceeded to write more mysteries involving Geoffrey Avalon, Emmanuel Rubin, James Drake, Thomas Trumbull, Mario Gonzalo, and Roger Halsted—the members of "The Black Widowers." (Incidentally, Asimov once noted that these characters were all loosely based on his friends Lester Del Rey, Lin Carter, Don Bensen, Gilbert Cant, John D. Clark, and L. Sprague DeCamp, all of whom were members—along with Asimov—of a club called "The Trap Door Spiders.") The Black Widowers stories took place during the monthly meetings of that club. In stories such as "Yankee Doodle Went to Town," "The Obvious Factor," or "The Cross of Lorraine," each member of the club takes a turn inviting a guest to dinner. After being wined and dined, the guest is then grilled by the club members as they labor to solve a mystery which the guest hasn't been able to solve himself. In each of these tales, after ruminating out loud about the "crime" in question, the members of the club find themselves stumped. Enter Henry, their personal waiter, and the man who always solves each crime. He is, as Asimov once admitted, a literary cousin of P.G. Wodehouse's butler, Jeeves. And like Wodehouse's character,

THE MYSTERY FICTION OF ISAAC ASIMOV

NOVELS

(The Baley and Olivaw Series)

The Caves of Steel, 1954

The Naked Sun, 1957

The Robots of Dawn, 1983

Robots and Empire, 1985

The Death Dealers, 1958
(later published as *A Whiff of Death*)

Murder at the ABA, 1976

SHORT STORY COLLECTIONS

Tales of the Black Widowers, 1974

More Tales of the Black Widowers, 1976

The Key Word and Other Mysteries, 1977

Casebook of the Black Widowers, 1980

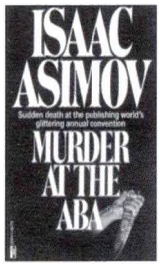
The Union Club Mysteries, 1983

Banquets of the Black Widowers, 1984

The Disappearing Man and Other Stories, 1985

The Best Mysteries of Isaac Asimov, 1986

Puzzles of the Black Widowers, 1990



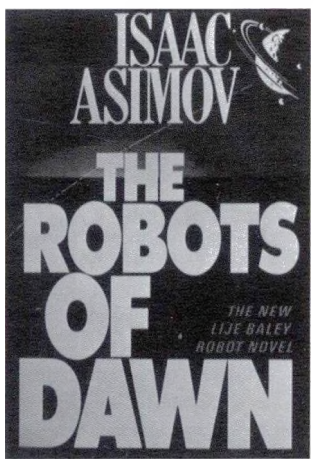
Henry lends each story an atmosphere of wit and sophistication.

Created for friend and editor Eric Protter, Asimov's Union Club mysteries were a variation on the Black Widowers stories. In this case, the club was smaller (four men), and the element of mystery was usually introduced by the most prominent member, Griswold. Again, the stories were of the "armchair detective" variety—intellectual puzzles in which Griswold recounts a tale of mystery, stopping just before it is solved. When the other members, having exhausted all possibilities, protest that there *is* no solution, Griswold proceeds to prove them wrong.

To anyone who found such tales old-fashioned, Asimov once responded: "Old-fashioned? Certainly! But so what? Other people in writing mystery stories have their purposes, which may be to instill a sense of adventure, or a grisly sense of horror, or whatever. It is my purpose in my mysteries (and, in actual fact, everything I write, fiction and nonfiction) to make people think. My stories are *puzzle* stories and I see nothing wrong with that." It could even be said that Asimov's stories were "interactive mysteries" in which the reader was invited to solve the crime before the characters. As Asimov explained, "The detective must know only what the reader knows so that there is nothing to stop a particularly ingenious reader from beating the detective to the solution. And, indeed, my stories openly challenged the reader to do so..."

In Asimov's two non-SF related mystery novels, he actually factored in a murder. But true to his word of avoiding violence, these crimes took place "off stage," before the puzzle was solved. In *The Death Dealers* (1958; later released as *A Whiff of Death*) the murder took place in the chemical laboratory of a university. And in *Murder at the ABA* (1976)—written at the behest of yet another editor, Larry Ashmead—the murder happens at the much-ballyhooed convention of the American Booksellers Association. The protagonist, Darius Just, was modeled after Asimov's friend, Harlan Ellison; and for a time, Asimov considered a series of novels using the Darius Just character; but his editor was only interested in more science fiction.

Fittingly, it is Asimov's science fiction mysteries, involving Detective Elijah Baley and a robot sidekick called R. Daneel Olivaw, which have earned him the most acclaim. In the "personages" of Olivaw and Baley, Isaac Asimov created two of his most interesting and



memorable characters. They are something of a futuristic Holmes and Watson, although it is often hard to tell which is which. With further hindsight, his "robot" mysteries may prove to be some of Asimov's best writing. A small irony when considering that he cobbled up his first science fiction mystery only to prove it could be successfully done. And, once again, the hands of an editor played an important part.

At the behest of Horace Gold (an editor at *Galaxy* magazine), Asimov began *The Caves of Steel* (1954), the first of four books which would incorporate Gold's idea of "a detective and a robot sidekick." Baley and Olivaw first meet after having been assigned to solve a murder on the distant world of Solaria. Like all the people who stayed on Earth, Baley hates robots. But Olivaw must accompany him because Solaria is a planet where humans are basically hermits (shunning even one another's touch), and robots are the only way they interact with each other. A gruff, old-fashioned cop with an innate sense for solving crimes, Baley often needs Olivaw's assistance just to be mobile (having lived inside an enclosed city for most of his life, Baley suffers from agoraphobia, among other things). With the help of Olivaw (who also lends detecting abilities of his own), he is able to complete the investigation and solve the crime.

Asimov constructed each of his "robot" mysteries so that the science fiction elements also provided motive and method for the murder in each novel. Furthermore, the science which is so pivotal to the plot in each book and which advances the mystery elements, also helps to provide a solution to the mystery. And, of course, the creation of two such interesting detective characters, with a unique relationship, made the books that much more readable. By the second book, *The Naked Sun* (1957), Olivaw has won Baley's acceptance and grudging friendship. In *The Robots of Dawn* (1983), they team up again to solve the "murder" of a robot with a "positronic brain." And in *Robots and Empire* (1985), Baley has long since passed away, but his spirit lives on in the immortal R. Daneel Olivaw. Like his "Foundation" novels, Isaac Asimov's science fiction mysteries are filled with the hope and possibility of the unknown future. And like everything he wrote, they revolve around ideas and intellectual puzzles. They are stories which awaken the mind as well as the heart.

Isaac Asimov was one of the great journeyman writers: applying simple mortar and bricks, he left the stucco or the fancy art deco interiors to others more suited. But his mystery stories always tantalized the reader into exercising the intellect more vigorously. Asimov encouraged his audience to put mind over matter and forgo brute force; to use the "tools" of intellect and reason to obtain a solution; to rely solely on one's wits; to, finally, *solve the puzzle*...which is, after all, what mysteries are all about. ■

Isaac Asimov contributed one of his Black Widowers tales (#63) to *The Armchair Detective* (Spring 1990, volume 23, number 2).

Murder  Is Their Business

BY WILLETTA L. HEISING

When I flew to San Francisco on business in June 1992, I was looking for employment and romance, not necessarily in that order. Two interviews stood out—one with an investment research firm looking for freelance reporters; the other with the man of my dreams. As it turned out, neither meeting produced the results I was looking for. Instead, I came home with a bag full of private eye novels that changed my life. This is how it happened.

Saturday, June 27, was a picture perfect Northern California day. Seated on the patio deck of a Berkeley cafe, my friend Trudy and I were catching up on more than 20 years since our newshound-days on the Valparaiso University *Torch*. We had covered the big stories during 10 hours of conversation the day before, so we were winding down by the time I asked the all-important question, "What are you reading these days?"

"For fun?," she wanted to know.

After 25 years of business reading, "reading for fun" sounded (forgive me) like a novel idea. When I asked what she read for fun, her immediate reply was "Mysteries, of course."

"Like what?" I asked.

"Well, Grafton and Paretsky for starters," she said.

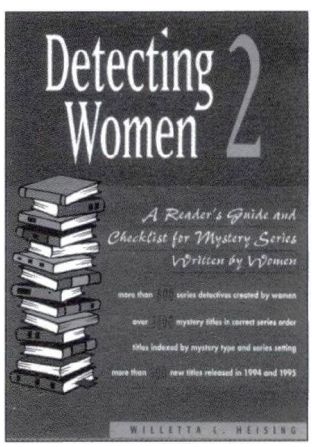
Trudy could tell by the look on my face I'd never heard of Sue Grafton or Sara Paretsky. Determined to correct this situation, she marched me down the street to Black Oak Books where we loaded up on paperbacks from the used book room. Two days later on my return flight to Michigan, I started *"A" Is for Alibi* and followed it with a book-a-day for the next two weeks.

After 13 cases with Kinsey Millhone and V.I. Warshawski, I launched my own investigation. Were there other women private eyes for me to read about? To my delight and amazement, one hour in the mystery section of my local library produced more books than I could carry. It also prompted the obvious need for a list to keep track of what I'd already read and what I planned to read next.

From the beginning, I knew reading a series in order was important to me. While Sue Grafton's titles made it easy, getting the proper order for Marcia Muller, Linda Barnes, Sue Dunlap, and Liza Cody required some effort. Because I hadn't known better, I'd read the first few V.I. books in random order. When I realized the problem, I gathered up the Paretsky novels to check the copyright pages for dates of publication. Armed with my findings, I started reading again—this time at the beginning.

Coincidentally, I had just hired a private tutor whose job it was to fast-forward me into computer literacy. The proud owner of fancy new hardware I didn't know how to use, I was also owner of The Writing Company—my solo re-entry into the world of marketing communications. Downsized before it became fashionable, I lived in fear that summer my clients would discover I wasn't qualified to produce the brochures and newsletters they were hiring me to write.

Knowing I had a lot of catching up to do, I jumped at the tutor's suggestion to make a list of something I needed to track. No doubt he expected a mileage log or a chart with client hours worked, but I proudly produced my first list of mystery series—57 entries showing author, character name, book title, publication date, and setting. Using that first list I also learned how to create



headers and footers. With what can only be described as accidental foresight, I chose my name, copyright notation, fax number, and e-mail address for the footer notation. Wherever my list went, those in possession knew how to get in touch.

It still amazes me how far those early lists traveled. A librarian saw my mother checking her list in the Williamsburg (Virginia) Public Library and asked if she could make a copy. Every time I

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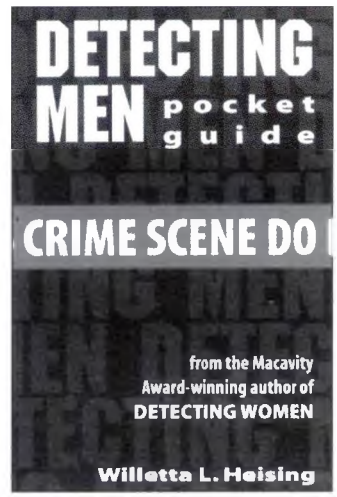
sent an updated list, she shared it with her library reference staff. The list jumped from 57 to 100 titles in a matter of days and to 1000 titles within a year. Librarians started using my list to help patrons find next-in-a-series titles, and friends of friends instructed me to publish the list. For almost 18 months I staunchly resisted. "I have a real job," I'd say. "This is just what I do for fun." But by June of 1994 I'd read 500 series mysteries written by women and wondered how I was going to justify so much time spent reading for fun.

In July that year my friend Margaret (Certified Financial Planner, business owner, author of a book on mutual funds, and voracious mystery reader) took me to lunch and announced we were not leaving the restaurant until I agreed to "do this book." It took her three hours to convince me the book needed to be done, it needed to be done by me and it needed to be done by the end of the year.

The next six months were a blur of 18-hour days—attending conferences, arranging meetings, making phone calls, consulting with vendors and reading everything I could find about how to publish a book. I was on a mission, fueled by energy I didn't know I had. On January 25, 1995, in the middle of a snowstorm, I personally delivered the first two cartons of *Detecting Women* to Aunt Agatha's Mystery Bookshop in Ann Arbor. Thanks to the ballast provided by a car full of books, I made it home from the manufacturer's distribution center in one piece. Little did I know the real work was just beginning.

In retrospect, it's horrifying what I didn't know about how books get into stores and libraries. Yet my inexperience and naïveté about publishing in general, and mystery fiction in particular, allowed me to forge ahead without over-questioning my qualifications and suitability to be doing what I had chosen to do. It wasn't as if I lacked business or marketing experience. I'd spent 18 years in a variety of marketing positions at a major regional bank. And it made sense to me that someone who could take an out-of-favor bank product and turn it into a $100-million showpiece could produce a book.

What I never expected was the wave



of enthusiasm and support that materialized—almost magically. Everywhere I turned I'd run into experts who wanted to help. Fan mail was another bonus. And there were days when a fan letter or phone call was all that kept me from leaping off the roof, screaming "What was I thinking!" Heck, there are still days like that. But all in all, I can't imagine doing anything other than what I'm doing now. With the number of projects resulting from the first *Detecting Women*, I'll be busy for years.

Detecting Men will make its debut in May, followed shortly thereafter by *Detecting News*. Next will come *Detecting Women 3*, *Detecting Classics* and perhaps *Detecting Kids*. We're also planning a zippered *Pocket Guide Portfolio* for mystery travelers and the requisite t-shirts and sweatshirts featuring the Purple Moon Press logo. In between these projects I'll make time for some public speaking so I can share the story that losing a cushy corporate job could be the best thing that ever happens to you. It certainly was for me.

In October 1997, I'll be returning to San Francisco for the first time since 1992. This year's trip will again be business (Bouchercon 28, Oct. 30 to Nov. 2, Monterey) but what a difference five years makes. As I write this in February, I count among my blessings a 1996 Macavity Award, a 1997 Edgar nomination, and a world of new friends, colleagues, and opportunities. Every time I think it can't get any better than this, darned if it doesn't. And who knows? Maybe this time I'll find romance. ■

MYSTERIES OF THE AGES

FOUR MILLENNIA OF MURDER AND MAYHEM IN HISTORICAL MYSTERIES

BY JENNIFER S. PALMER

It is possible to find all subgenres under the overall umbrella of historical detection—hardboiled, cozy, espionage, courtroom dramas, thrillers, gothics, police procedurals, and psychological crime stories. The historical mystery can feature amateur detectives, professional police, official investigators, private eyes, husband and wife teams, and apprentice 'tecs with older mentors.

The use of historical settings goes back quite a long way. Melville Davisson Post must have claim to be one of the first writers of historical detective fiction. In 1918, he began publishing the Uncle Abner stories which take place in Virginia in the 1850s. Abner's ability to observe details and to formulate explanations is worthy of Sherlock himself though his emphasis on the religious dimension to justice is more reminiscent of Father Brown. In 1945, Agatha Christie published *Death Comes As the End*—set in Egypt around 2000 B.C., this is the most ancient setting for a mystery that I have discovered. Another writer whose works certainly predate the enthusiasm of the 1990s was Dennis Wheatley. He wrote a series of 12 spy stories beginning with *The Launching of Roger Brooke* in 1947 in which Roger Brooke progresses through the French Revolution of 1789 and the French Wars (1793–1815). These books are lengthy, however, and the historical background can be rather indigestible!

DEFINING THE HISTORICAL MYSTERY

No detective story reader looking at the first books that he or she read which concern the past could exclude Conan Doyle's books about the exploits of Sherlock Holmes in Victorian London. Doyle, initially at least, was writing about his own times, not as an historian, and so his books might be referred to as period novels. I use the term period novel to describe a book written by a contemporary observer which gives us a picture of a past era. I shall try to exclude from this article all authors who are writing about their own times. The dividing line can be a difficult one—is a

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book written about the period when the author was a child acceptable as a historical detective or not? Kingsley Amis has a detective novel *The Riverside Villas Murder* set in the 1930s with a hero aged 14; Amis was born in 1922 so this book could well reflect his own childhood memories and fantasies and therefore falls into my category of period novel.

HISTORY AS SEASONING

While Agatha Christie's *Death Comes As the End* (1945) and Josephine Tey's *The Daughter of Time* (1951) take different narrative approaches, each incorporates verifiable historical events in their plots. Christie, married for many years to an archaeologist, wrote very convincingly about Egypt in 2000 B.C. *Death Comes As the End* is entirely set in the past and, indeed, is inspired by historical artifacts—it is possible to see the actual letters in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York around which she fashioned her plot. Taking a different tack, Josephine Tey immobilized her contemporary protagonist, Inspector Alan Grant, in a hospital bed. Grant then conducts a classic "armchair investigation" of the celebrated fifteenth century disappearance of Edward IV's two young sons (known as the Princes in the Tower) and the role played by their uncle, Richard III of England. Strictly speaking, however, while both these novels examine crimes that occurred in the past, Christie's novel is a historical mystery while Tey's is a contemporary mystery which uses or relies upon historical events as plot elements.

Still, the combination of a modern mystery with historical events is a clever approach that has been used successfully by a number of authors. Anthony Price in his first book *The Labyrinth Makers* (1971), used the disappearance of the Schliemaan Treasure from Berlin to great effect and combined this with the reappearance of a crashed WWII plane from an English lake during a 1950s drought. Elizabeth Peters has also featured the Schliemaan Treasure in one of her romantic suspense thrillers about Vickie Bliss—*Trojan Gold* (1987). Robert Goddard's *Hand in Glove* (1992) weaves a complex mystery around a poet who died in the Spanish Civil War of 1936–38 and the imminent release of his work from copyright protection in the 1990s. A spy thriller set in the 1980s by Caroline Hougan, *The Romeo Flag* (1989), makes very good use of the deaths of the Romanovs in 1917 Russia and Second World War events in the Far East. Robert Barnard in *Out of the Blackout* (1984) uses a child evacuee protagonist who was abandoned in the country during WWII and tries to remember the past when, years later, he sees a familiar door in London.

TIME TRAVELERS

One problem that a writer in the historical mystery field faces is how to include naturally in the story the necessary detailing of the period background. John Dickson Carr has taken the innovative approach of sending modern characters back into history. The hero of *The Devil in Velvet* (1951) is an expert on the late 17th century and therefore can avoid some of the pitfalls of his situation but not all of them. In a superstitious age it behooves a man to be careful of revealing apparent knowledge of

THE ANCIENT WORLD & DARK AGES

	EGYPT	
Agatha Christie	Death Comes As the End (1945)	c.2000 BC
Lynda Robinson	Murder in the Place of Anubis (1994) ✣	1356 BC
Lee Levin	King Tut's Private Eye (1996)	1356 BC
Anton Gill	City of the Horizon (1991) ✣	1355 BC
	GREECE	
Margaret Doody	Aristotle Detective (1978)	332 BC
	ROMAN EMPIRE	
Steven Saylor	Roman Blood (1991) ✣	80 BC
John Maddox Roberts	SPQR (1990) ✣	70 BC
Marilyn Todd	I, Claudia: A Mystery (1995)	13 BC
David Wishart	Ovid (1995)	19 AD
Lindsey Davis	Silver Pigs (1989) ✣	70 AD
Barbara Hambly	The Quirinal Hill Affair (1983)	116 AD
Rex Burns	Roman Nights (1991) ✣	180 AD
	ENGLAND	
Peter Tremayne	Absolution by Murder (1994) ✣	664 AD
	CHINA	
Robert van Gulik	The Chinese Bell Mystery (1958) ✣	663 AD

✣ INDICATES ADDITIONAL TITLE(S) IN THE SERIES.

the future! The book's hero lived in the same 17th century house in 20th century London so he can recognize much of the house's interior; the real shock comes when he opens the front door and steps out into a very different street—Pall Mall as a rural area in 1675.

Jack Finney's *Time and Again* (1976) also enters the field of time travel. He postulates a means of travel into the past and his hero, Simon Morley, moves between the 1970s in New York and 1882. The descriptions of 1882 Manhattan are riveting. Ann Dukthas's time traveler, Nicolas Segalla, acts as an observer in *A Time for the Death of a King* (1994) which chronicles the suspicious death of Lord Darnley, Mary, Queen of Scots's second husband, in 1567.

RECALLED TO LIFE

A more common type of historical mystery is the one that uses a real historical personage as a detective. Lillian de la Torre uses Dr. Johnson in short stories that range through his life. The stories are very precisely expressed in period style with a real evocation of language, grammar, punctuation, expression, and even spelling. Peter Lovesey sets Albert, Prince of Wales to work detecting crimes in the "Bertie" novels (*Bertie and the Tin Man,* 1987). In Molly Brown's *Invitation to a Funeral* the real female playwright, Aphra Behn, meets, among others, Nell Gwyn, Louise de Kerouille, and Hortense Mancini, Charles II's mistresses. In Stephanie Barron's *Jane and the Unpleasantness at Scargrave Manor* (1996), Jane Austen makes her debut as a detective. In *A Cadenza for Caruso* (1984) Barbara Paul places Enrico Caruso into a murder investigation which occurs while he is preparing for an appearance at the New York Met in 1910.

The appearance of illustrious walk-ons as characters within stories is a common method of providing historical verisimilitude. Ellis Peters has as the background to her Brother Cadfael novels the civil war of mid-12th century England between the supporters of Empress Matilda and King Stephen and, on occasion, both these individuals appear as do some of their more famous adherents.

Leonard Tourney has his detectives acting as trusted aides to Sir Robert Cecil, Queen Elizabeth I's Principal Private Secretary; Gillian Linscott uses George Bernard Shaw in 1909. Theodore Roosevelt as Police Commissioner in New York in 1897 helps officer Dennis Muldoon in William DeAndrea's story, *The Lunatic Fringe* (1985). Roosevelt is a major character but he tends to come and go, appointing other characters to investigate. Set in 1896, Caleb Carr's *The Alienist* introduces a serial murderer in New York. Again Roosevelt is a significant character although again other protagonists carry the action of the story.

There are several authors who have employed the Prince of Wales, Queen Victoria's heir and the future King Edward VII of England, as a character in their tales; Amy Myers puts him into several of the adventures of Chef Auguste Didier and Richard Grayson

THE MIDDLE AGES

MIDDLE AGES FROM 1066 (NORMAN CONQUEST OF ENGLAND) THROUGH THE NORMAN, PLANTAGENET, LANCASTRIAN, AND YORKIST DYNASTIES TO 1485 WITH THE DEFEAT OF RICHARD III, THE LAST YORKIST KING, BY HENRY VII, THE FIRST TUDOR RULER.

Edward Marston	The Wolves of Savernake (1993) ✣	1086
Ellis Peters	A Morbid Taste for Bones (1977) ✣	1137
Ken Follett	The Pillars of the Earth (1989)	1135–1170
Sharan Newman	Death Comes As Epiphany (1993) ✣	France, 1139
Domini Highsmith	Keeper at the Shrine (1994) ✣	1180
Ian Morson	Falconer's Crusade (1994) ✣	1264
P.C. Doherty	Satan in St. Mary's (1986) ✣	1284
Umberto Eco	The Name of the Rose (1983)	Italy, early 1300s
Michael Jecks	The Last Templar (1995) ✣	1316
Susanna Gregory	An Unholy Alliance (1996)	1348
Candace Robb	The Apothecary Rose (1993) ✣	1365
Paul Harding	The Nightingale Gallery (1981) ✣	1376
Paul Harding	An Ancient Evil (1994) ✣	late 1300s
G. & J. Clancy	Death Is a Pilgrim (1993)	1387
Margaret Frazer	The Novice's Tale (1992) ✣	1431
Kate Sedley	Death of a Chapman (1991) ✣	1471
C.L. Grace	A Shrine of Murders (1993) ✣	1471
Josephine Tey	The Daughter of Time (1951)	1483–1485
P.C. Doherty	The Fate of the Princes (1990)	1483–1485
Elizabeth Eyre	Death of a Duchess (1991) ✣	Italy, 1490s

TUDORS 1485–1603

Michael Clynes	The White Rose Murders (1991) ✣	1517
Ann Dukthas	A Time for the Death of a King (1994) ✣	1567
Edward Marston	The Queen's Head (1989) ✣	1588
P.E. Chisholm	A Famine of Horses (1994) ✣	1592
Faye Kellerman	The Quality of Mercy (1989)	1593
Leonard Tourney	The Players' Boy Is Dead (1982) ✣	1601

into some of the Inspector Gautier books in *fin-de-siecle* Paris.

Another popular stylistic device is the writing of a historical detective story as a memoir—Robert Lee Hall's Nicolas Handy was supposedly writing his memoirs in 1795 about his experiences with Benjamin Franklin in 1757; Michael Clynes has the 90-year-old Roger Shallot reminiscing in 1517 about his adventures as rogue in Tudor England. Roger the Chapman (i.e., peddler) in Kate Sedley's books is also an old man reminiscing about his life.

The story in Umberto Eco's *The Name of the Rose* (1983) is told by young novice Benedictine Adso of Melk, the assistant to the formidable Brother William of Baskerville. The use of a "Watson" is particularly well suited to historical detection; much historical information can be presented to the modern reader as the detective explains his reasoning to the perplexed assistant, especially if he or she is a young inexperienced person.

WHAT IF...?

An interesting variant on the historical mystery is one in which an imaginary series of events is postulated on a framework of both fact and fantasy. For example, Bernard Bastable (aka Robert Barnard) in *Dead, Mr. Mozart* has the premise that the composer stayed in England after his visit of 1764 and lived a long life. Mozart finds himself embroiled in the tussle in 1820 as Queen Caroline returned to England to attempt to regain her position as Queen against George IV's strenuous opposition. In *Fatherland* (1992) Robert Harris sets his mystery in 1964 with Hitler (as the victor of the Second World War) celebrating his 75th birthday. *Archangel* (1995) by Mike Connor is set in the 1930s—when a plague is killing everyone except black people—and follows a series of murders in Minneapolis. Peter Dickinson has two stories—*King and Joker* (1976) and *Skeleton-in-Waiting* (1989)—which postulate a Royal Family of the 1970s on the assumption that Prince Eddy, heir to Edward VII, had not died and, therefore, succeeded his father as King of England in 1910 rather than, as actually happened, Prince George becoming George V.

TIMELINES OF DETECTING

Sometimes it seems when one looks at the new mysteries available that new authors have examined the periods of history already covered by other writers and chosen to fill in the gaps. On closer view, however, there are certain periods which provide nuclei around which the writers cluster. I would see the late nineteenth and early twentieth century mainly in England and the U.S. as the major center but the Middle Ages, almost entirely in England, is becoming an important center, too. To find books set outside Europe or the U.S. is unusual. Robert van Gulik was an innovator in the field of historical mystery when he wrote in 1958 about Judge Dee. The Judge was a real-life Chinese magistrate of the Tang dynasty (630–700 AD) and van Gulik writes tales based on the work of such a magistrate in the traditional Chinese style, reminding us that the detective story is not confined to Western Europe. Another author using the Orient is Laura Joh Rowland with her 17th-century detective Sano Ichiro, in *Shinju* (1994). Still, even a cursory glance at the lists of historical mysteries by era that accompany this article will show that mystery writers have their favorite times and places for mayhem.

ANTIQUITY

Even when only a few authors are writing about a period it is interesting that they cluster around a particular charac-

STUARTS 1603–1714

INCLUDING THE ENGLISH CIVIL WAR OF THE 1640s, EXECUTION OF CHARLES I IN 1649, RULE OF CROMWELL AND RESTORATION OF THE MONARCHY IN 1660.

Robert J. Begiebing	The Strange Death of Mistress Coffin (1991)	Colonial New England, 1640s
Maan Meyers	The Dutchman (1992) ✣	New Amsterdam, 1664
John Dickson Carr	The Devil in Velvet (1951)	1675
Molly Brown	Invitation to a Funeral (1995)	1676
Laura Joh Rowland	Shinju (1994) ✣	Japan, 1689

HANOVERIANS

KINGS GEORGE I, II, III, IV & WILLIAM IV.

Deryn Lake	Death in the Dark Walk (1994) ✣	1754
John Dickson Carr	The Demoniacs (1962)	1757
Robert Lee Hall	Benjamin Franklin Takes the Case (1990) ✣	1757
Lillian de la Torre	Dr. Sam: Johnson Detector (1944) ✣	1763–1784
Bruce Alexander	Blind Justice (1994) ✣	1768
Dennis Wheatley	The Launching of Roger Brook (1947) ✣	Europe, 1783
Margaret Lawrence	Hearts and Bones (1996)	U.S., 1786
J.G. Jeffries	The Thieftaker (1972) ✣	1798
Quinn Fawcett	Napoleon Must Die (1993) ✣	Egypt, 1799
Stephanie Barron	Jane and the Unpleasantness at Scargrave Manor (1996) ✣	1802
John Dickson Carr	Captain Cut-Throat (1955)	France, 1802
John Dickson Carr	Fire, Burn! (1957)	1820
Bernard Bastable	Dead, Mr. Mozart (1995) ✣	1820
Kate Ross	Cut to the Quick (1995) ✣	1820s
Richard Falkirk	Blackstone (1972) ✣	1820s
Raymond Paul	The Tragedy at Tiverton (1984) ✣	U.S., 1832

ter or era. There are two writers at the moment who have started series about ancient Egypt and they are both writing books set in the short reign of Tutankhamen (1361–1352 BC) out of the ages of ancient Egyptian history. The first of the two is Anton Gill who writes about Huy the Scribe, a supporter of Akhnaten's heretical ideas, in *City of the Horizon* (1991). After the Pharaoh's death in 1361 BC, Huy was forbidden to practice his profession as scribe and instead became a private investigator. Secondly, Lynda Robinson has *Murder in the Place of Anubis* (1994) with an investigator who is an important royal courtier, Lord Mere. There is rather a nice contrast between these two protagonists. Gill's Huy is reminiscent of a seedy 1930s private eye: he is regularly beaten up; clients give him limited information and enemies of different types lurk 'round corners. Robinson's Lord Mere, on the other hand, is the official Intelligencer of the Pharaoh and, like any modern Police Commissioner, has resources to command and is personally protected from physical harm by guards. In 1996, another mystery set in this era appeared: *King Tut's Private Eye* by Lee Levin.

Two writers on ancient Rome use settings in the first century BC. In Steven Saylor's *Roman Blood* (1991) Cicero summons Gordianus the Finder to investigate a murder in 80 BC. In subsequent adventures Gordianus ages and we follow the growth of his family and fortunes. The SPQR series of John Maddox Roberts is set in the Republic of Crassus and Pompey (around 70 BC) and features Decius Caecilius Metellus the Younger, a highly born civil servant (*SPQR,* 1990). Both these writers have books in which they enjoyably explain the origins of Catiline's Conspiracy which ended with a battle destroying Catiline and his supporters in 63–62 BC. The tremendous cosmopolitanism of the later Empire is vividly evoked by Lindsey Davis in her Marcus Didius Falco novels which are set around 70 AD (*Silver Pigs,* 1989).

MULTITUDES OF MEDIEVAL MYSTERIES

The Middle Ages is a particular focus for mystery writers—one of the earliest writers was Ellis Peters with *A Morbid Taste for Bones* (1977). Ellis Peters produced twenty chronicles of Brother Cadfael in King Stephen's 12th-century England with great success. There are only three authors using medieval countries other than England as the main setting. Sharan Newman uses medieval France in her novels, beginning with *Death Comes As Epiphany* (1993). Umberto Eco's *The Name of the Rose* (1983) is set in early 14th century Italy and, at the end of the era, the Renaissance Italy setting of Elizabeth Eyre's *Death of a Duchess* (1991) is particularly unusual. All the Borgia-like maneuverings of court life are admirably countered by Sigismondo, Eyre's courtier, mercenary, and detective of the 1490s.

What attracts writers and readers to the medieval period? Perhaps it is the very remoteness from our own times, attitudes, and problems. The punishments seem barbarous to us, the conditions of life harsh, and the legal systems very alien. The position of women was very different and although their status was generally low, nevertheless many writers prefer to use female detectives. Perhaps it is the feeling that despite enormous differences of attitude the medieval person faced the same basic challenges to law and order and to the concept of moral right.

Mystery protagonists of this era—both men and women—are often members of religious communities. Does the circumscribed life give a better contrast to the lawlessness around? Does the need for the detective to consider the moral aspect of the vows they have taken before they act give a further dimension to the story? Margaret Frazer sets her

books mostly in a 15th century nunnery with detective Sister Frevisse. This nunnery is tucked away in the countryside and Frazer conveys very successfully the role of the nunnery in local life and the claustrophobic atmosphere within. Sister Frevisse finds it difficult to accept the restrictions of convent life although hers is a genuine piety.

There is one very important advantage to these religious protagonists: their educational achievements enable them to investigate and evaluate the evidence in a period of widespread illiteracy and ignorance. I would suggest that this practical reason is a paramount one for the choice of religious detectives as heroes.

As the number of books on the Middle Ages increase and some are filmed and televised, it becomes possible to rely on the readers having a picture of the period already. This generalized knowledge might lead to confusion—the variations of the different medieval periods from each other can be harder to convey and there is often need for the writer to explain vast chunks of background history to make sense of the events he wishes to describe. He or she must also make clear the social mores of the day—the situation of servants, the hierarchy of the Church, the status and concomitant responsibilities of nobles, and the desperate need to avoid famine and disease. The sharp differences in lifestyle between town and country dwellers are also important, as is the difficulty of communicating between areas. Fears of travelling were fully justified particularly on the borders and during unsettled times. The dirt and mud of medieval towns with their crowded streets and lack of sewers cannot be overemphasized and yet by dwelling too heavily on smells and squalor the author can fail to push the story on or even discourage a reader from continuing! The complications of getting water and heating it remind us of how difficult it was simply to wash frequently. The likelihood that people would be scarred by disease or injuries and the harsh punishments of the day for crimes often resulting from poverty are shown by all authors of the medieval era.

THE TUDORS

The reign of Queen Elizabeth I (1558–1603) is certainly the most popular reign of a Tudor monarch for historical detectives. Edward Marston's Nicholas Bracewell solves murders while organizing a troupe of players starting with *The Queen's Head* (1989). In *A Famine of Horses* (1994) P.F. Chisholm introduces the elegant Sir Robert Carey, who prefers to become deputy warden on the Scottish Borders in 1592 although he had been a favorite of Queen Elizabeth at the Court. Faye Kellerman provides a Jewish heroine in *The Quality of Mercy* (1989), which shows us the dirt, disease, and cruelty of the 16th century. And Leonard Tourney writes about Matthew Stock, a clothier and a County Constable, and his sensible wife, Joan, in *The Players' Boy Is Dead* (1982).

Historical mysteries set during the Tudor and Stuart periods (1485–1714) show slightly greater variety in their settings. Robert J. Begiebing's haunting *The Strange Death of Mistress Coffin* (1991) is set in colonial New England. The action of Maan Meyers's *The Dutchman* (1992) occurs in the Dutch settlement of New Amsterdam as it is about to be rechristened New York.

HANOVERIANS

I suppose that it is not surprising that mysteries set in the 18th and early 19th centuries should congregate around the same period and venue—the latter half of the century in London with the Bow Street Runners, who were the nearest approximation to a police force at that time.

It is fascinating, however, to see how many writers have employed Sir John Fielding—the blind magistrate at Bow Street Court from 1754 to 1779—as a character in their novels. Sir John, with his brother, the writer and playwright Henry Fielding, originated the use of the Bow Street Runners. These early "policemen" were used to investigate the cases that came before the Bow Street Court. Robert Lee Hall's detective hero, Benjamin Franklin, consults Fielding in *Benjamin Franklin Takes the Case* (1990). Deryn Lake, in *Death in the Dark Walk* (1994), features Sir John as a magistrate and has another real historical figure as the detective; he is the apothecary John Rawlings, who was apparently the first manufacturer of soda water.

In *The Demoniacs* (1962) set in 1757 John Dickson Carr also features a Bow Street Runner but shows more of society's doubts about such men. The hero Jeffrey Wynne as one of "Mr. Fielding's People" meets Justice Fielding several times. Fielding was noted for his preternaturally sharp hearing and the accurate deductions he made about his visitors despite his blindness. The "Blind Beak" in Bruce Alexander's books (*Blind Justice*, 1994) uses a 13-year-old country boy as his "investigator," a boy who starts with an appearance before Fielding in 1768. An opportunity is used here to show Fielding's view of the independent "thieftakers" who existed in London then and who hoped for payment for the success of their activities. The picture of 18th century London built up by the boy, Jeremy Proctor, is superb.

Two other writers also use Bow Street Runners as their detectives, one in the late 18th century. J.G. Jeffries writes about Jeremy Sturrock (in the UK the books are published under the author's name of Sturrock) who is a Bow Street Runner loosely based on the real Runner Townsend. Richard Falkirk's *Blackstone* (1972) is a tough character in the 1820s who often goes undercover to investigate—for example, as a navvy building railways.

Kate Ross sets her highly entertaining Julian Kestrel mysteries (*Cut to the Quick*, 1995) in the 1820s and provides her charming Regency dandy detective with an occasional Bow Street Runner. Her books share something of the same spirit as Stephanie Barron's Jane Austen mysteries, which began in 1996 with *Jane and the Unpleasantness at Scargrave Manor*.

Across the Atlantic, Margaret Lawrence's haunting *Hearts and Bones* (1996) assesses the damage done to both sides of the conflict in post-Revolutionary War Maine.

THE VICTORIAN & EDWARDIAN AGES

The Victorian and Edwardian eras (roughly 1830s to the outbreak of the

VICTORIAN AND EDWARDIAN

QUEEN VICTORIA 1837–1901; KING EDWARD VII 1901–1910

GREAT BRITAIN AND EMPIRE

LONDON MAINLY

Bernard Bastable	To Die Like a Gentleman (1993)	1842
W.J. Palmer	The Detective and Mr. Dickens (1990)	1852
Francis Selwyn	Cracksman on Velvet (1974) ✣	early Victorian
Anne Perry	The Face of a Stranger (1990) ✣	1855
John Dickson Carr	The Hungry Goblin (1972)	1869
John Dickson Carr	Scandal at High Chimneys (1959)	Victorian
H.R.F. Keating	A Remarkable Case of Burglary (1975)	Victorian
Evelyn Hervey	The Governess (1984)	1870
Carola Groom	The Good Doctor (1995)	1870
Ann Crowleigh	Dead As Dead Can Be (1993) ✣	1875
Peter Lovesey	Wobble to Death (1970) ✣	1878
Peter Ackroyd	Dan Leno and The Limehouse Golem (1994) (U.S. title: The Trial of Elizabeth Cree)	1880
Anne Perry	The Cater Street Hangman (1979) ✣	1881
Robert Goddard	Painting the Darkness (1989)	1882
Emily Brightwell	The Inspector and Mrs. Jeffries (1993) ✣	Victorian
Robert Player	Oh! Where Are Bloody Mary's Earrings? (1972)	1887
Jean Stubbs	Dear Laura (1973) ✣	1880s
Peter Lovesey	Bertie and the Tinman (1987) ✣	1886
Ray Harrison	French Ordinary Murder (1983) ✣	1891
Julian Symons	The Blackheath Poisonings (1978) ✣	1890s
Barry Perowne	The Return of Raffles (1933) ✣	1890s

KENT

Elizabeth Jenkins	Harriet (1934)	1875
Amy Myers	Murder in Pug's Parlour (1986) ✣ (other settings in later books)	Victorian

OXFORD

Donald Thomas	Belladonna (1983) (U.S. title: Mad Hatter Summer)	1880
Gwendoline Butler	A Coffin for Pandora (1973) (U.S. title: Olivia, 1974)	1880s

SOUTH EAST COAST

Kate Kingsbury	Room with a Clue (1993) ✣	Edwardian
Robin Paige	Death at Bishop's Keep (1994) ✣	1890s

DERBYSHIRE

John B. Hilton	Gamekeeper's Gallows (1976) ✣	1877

EDINBURGH

Iona McGregor	Death Wore a Diadem (1989)	1860
Alanna Knight	Enter Second Murderer (1988) ✣	1870

	EGYPT	
Elizabeth Peters	Crocodile on the Sandbank (1975) ✣	1880
Michael Pearce	The Mamur Zapt and the Return of the Carpet (1988) ✣	1908
	SOUTH AFRICA	
June Drummond	Slowly the Poison (1975)	1911
	FRANCE	
Richard Grayson	The Murders at Impasse Louvain (1979) ✣	c.1890s
Eric Zencey	Panama (1995)	1892
Gillian Linscott	Sisters Beneath the Sheet (1992) ✣ (other settings in later books)	c.1900
	USA	
Melville Davisson Post	Uncle Abner (1918) ✣ U.S.	1850s
Miriam Monfredo	Seneca Falls Inheritance (1992) ✣	1857
Jack Finney	Time and Again (1970) ✣	1882
James Sherburne	Death's Pale Horse (1980) ✣	1880s
Peter J. Heck	Death on the Mississippi (1995) ✣	1890s
Mary Kruger	Death on the Cliff Walk (1994) ✣	1895
William DeAndrea	The Lunatic Fringe (1985)	1896
Caleb Carr	The Alienist (1994)	1896
Teona Tone	Lady on the Line (1985) ✣	1899
Dianne Day	The Strange Files of Fremont Jones (1995) ✣	1905
Barbara Paul	A Cadenza for Caruso (1984) ✣	1910

First World War in 1914) provide the other major historical period for detective writers; while it is nearer to our own times and experiences, it certainly involves a much more strictly hierarchical society than we live in today. For the latter half of the 19th century many period detective stories exist, giving the modern writer both models and a background easily understood by the readers. There are many films and books too, so that audiences are generally familiar with the clothes, houses, transport, and manners.

Of course, while Conan Doyle is not the only mystery writer from the Victorian era, he is almost certainly the best known. And today Sherlock Holmes pastiches are so numerous as to provide a modern genre of their own! The image of fog-filled streets of Victorian London is deeply entrenched—when I worked as a teacher of English in the Far East, I found that the textbooks invariably described London this way. Other contemporary mystery writers who grope through the fog of Victorian England—and who are still read today—include G.K. Chesterton, Wilkie Collins, and, in some of his novels, Charles Dickens. And, lest we forget, there was Edgar Allan Poe who started it all in America.

The rigid social structure of the era provides a rich source for the crime writer. The hymn *All Things Bright and Beautiful* has a verse which is now usually omitted because it is unacceptable in modern society. The verse runs:

The rich man in his castle
The poor man at his gate
God made them, high or lowly,
And ordered their estate.

H.R.F. Keating's unusual evocation of London crime in 1871—*A Remarkable Case of Burglary* (1975)—provides an excellent picture of a wealthy London household above and below stairs. As is so often the case with stories about the Victorians, a main theme of the book is the indifference of the wealthy to the feelings and livelihoods of their servants. Anne Perry has bridged the gulf between the classes with her detective team of Inspector Thomas Pitt, the son of a disgraced gamekeeper, and his well-born wife Charlotte. These two sleuths can investigate from official and unofficial viewpoints but, more importantly, from different class perspectives. Charlotte's entree into higher levels of society helps her husband tremendously since Victorian mores would not allow him to interview thoroughly or understand the viewpoints of many upperclass ladies. This series begins in 1881 with *The Cater Street Hangman* (1979).

John Buxton Hilton has several Victorian detective stories which occur outside London—in the Derbyshire area. He vividly evokes the claustrophobic atmosphere of distant, inbred villages and is unusual in his preference for rough village characters rather than aristocratic or middle class ones.

The idea of class is differently expressed in the U.S. but the gulf between wealthy and poor is as marked as in Europe with the additional factor of aspiring immigrants who hope to transcend their origins.

A WOMAN'S PLACE

In the Victorian era, the treatment of women was still harsh and the Married Women's Property Act of 1884 offered only some protection of a woman's property and the rights to see her children in an estranged marriage. Divorce

FIRST WORLD WAR (1914–1918) ONWARDS

John Dickson Carr	The Ghosts' High Noon (1969)	U.S., 1911
Charles Todd	A Test of Wills (1996)	1914
Eileen Hawkes and Peter Manso	The Shadow of the Moth (1983)	1917
Peter Lovesey	The False Inspector Dew (1982)	1921
Samuel Peeples	The Man Who Died Twice (1976)	U.S., 1922
Carola Dunn	The Winter Garden Mystery (1994) ✣	1923
William Hjortsberg	Nevermore (1994)	U.S., 1923
Kerry Greenwood	Death by Misadventure (1989) ✣	Australia, 1920s
Peter Dickinson	A Summer in the Twenties (1981)	1926
George Baxt	The Dorothy Parker Murder Case (1984) ✣	U.S., 1920s
K.K. Beck	Death in a Deckchair (1984) ✣	1927
Robert Goddard	Closed Circle (1993)	1931
Sandra Dallas	The Persian Pickle Club (1995)	U.S., 1995
James Anderson	The Affair of the Blood-Stained Tea Cosy (1975) ✣	late 1930s
H.R.F. Keating	The Murder of the Maharajah (1980)	India, 1930
Stuart Kaminsky	Bullet for a Star (1977) ✣	U.S., 1940
Leslie Thomas	Ormerod's Landing (1978)	mainly France, 1941
Thomas Fleming	Loyalties (1994)	U.S./Europe, 1941
Robert Harris	Enigma (1995)	1943
John Lawton	Black Out (1995)	1944

remained extremely difficult to obtain and meant social ruin. Illegitimacy had to be hidden from society for the sake of mother and child. In *Dear Laura* by Jean Stubbs a typical Victorian household has a protected and powerless heroine whose husband dies in circumstances which lead to the suspicion of murder. There are two common Victorian features here; a suspicious death suggesting poison and a dramatic trial. The theme of female subservience above, as well as, below stairs is equally common. Men were less socially and economically constrained than women but the rules of Society had to be obeyed over issues like gambling debts; little quarter was given.

In the Victorian and Edwardian ages, there are more women receiving education and they are taking more adventurous roles. Suffragettes are only the most obvious examples; women are exploring Africa, sailing down the Nile, being artists, entering medicine, and owning property. Still, as in the Middle Ages, restraints on their behavior are extensive and a significant source of narrative tension. Women from the privileged classes in the U.S. are possibly less trammelled than their European sisters but are still likely to be economically dependent on their fathers and later their husbands. The situation of upper and middle class women differs markedly from that of poor women, who were forced to work from an early age, with little education, low pay, and poor living conditions.

The First World War is not a popular period for historical detection. Perhaps the horrors of the trenches on the Western Front in particular make writers prefer alternative periods. Maybe also it is seen as the watershed between two different worlds rather than as a topic in its own right. Those historical detective novels that do exist seem mainly to be set outside the actual fighting zone or look back to the events. A current example of this would be Charles Todd's *A Test of Wills* (1996). The 1930s and the Second World War, while the setting for a number of historical mysteries by newer generations of writers, also provide good backgrounds for those writers who use past historical events to spark a modern plot.

CONCLUSION

Despite the general interest in historical mysteries, I wonder how unified an appeal historical detecting really has. Do people see historical crime books and buy them regardless of the period they depict or do they choose only periods in which they are interested? Or is it the type of detective fiction that is important, not the period? Merely because both authors use the Victorian era as the setting would an admirer of a violent psychological study such as Caleb Carr's *The Alienist* want to read Emily Brightwell's "cozy" *The Inspector and Mrs. Jeffries* (1993)?

Why has there been such a great increase in historical detective stories since 1990? Perhaps the past seems like a Golden Age when life—and even death—was simpler. Or perhaps it is because we can see that the human drama goes on even after the most appalling disasters. Many present-day issues have their origins in the past and there is sometimes something of a detective thrill simply in discovering these distant connections.

Of one thing there is no doubt—in the roughly four millennia of historical detection described in this article there is surely something mysterious for everyone. ■

A SHORT HISTORY of MYSTERY COLLECTING

COLLECTING FIRST EDITIONS OF DETECTIVE AND MYSTERY FICTION HAS BECOME A BOOMING FIELD IN THE LAST 25 YEARS—HERE'S WHY.

BY BARRY T. ZEMAN

Detective and mystery fiction has become the most popular area in book collecting in the last 25 years. Yet prior to 1970, relatively few collectors focused on the crime and mystery genre, many venturing tentatively into the pool through their primary interest in "modern literature." Several different factors have contributed to this phenomenal growth, not the least of which is a remarkably talented new generation of writers who have created something of a second "Golden Age" for crime and mystery fiction in the 1980s and 1990s. Here's how it started...

THE SCHOLARLY FRAMEWORK FOR MYSTERY COLLECTING

The first serious discussion of collecting in the mystery genre was written by John Carter in *Collecting Detective Fiction*, a 63-page pamphlet published in England by Constable in 1934. (It had originally formed a chapter of his full-length book, *New Paths in Book Collecting*, also published in 1934.) Little else appeared about the subject until 1941 in the United States when Howard Haycraft wrote *Murder for Pleasure*, the first comprehensive history and criticism of detective/mystery fiction. It is a landmark book still worth reading today. In it appeared the first iteration of Haycraft's "Cornerstones of Crime," a listing of the best or most influential books in the field.

Frederic Dannay was not only a highly popular writer and an influential editor (he and his cousin Manfred B. Lee, the other half of the Ellery Queen writing duo, edited the *Ellery Queen Mystery Magazine* for decades and published dozens of anthologies from 1941 through the '70s), he was also a great bibliophile. Dannay updated and expanded Haycraft's list a number of times until it reached its final form in 1956 and became known as the Haycraft-Queen Cornerstone list (or H-Q). This list begins with Voltaire's *Zadig* in 1748 and continues through 1952. (See *TAD*, Vol. 25 No. 4, for a complete copy of the Cornerstones.)

Under their Queen pseudonym, Dannay and Lee published a number of important books and essays relating to the history of detective/mystery fiction that began to generate interest in collecting. Among those books were *The Detective Short Story*, a groundbreaking bibliography which appeared in 1942, and a series of entertaining essays about the genre and collecting called *In the Queen's Parlor, and Other Leaves from the Editors' Notebook* published in 1957. Their most influential work was *Queen's Quorum—A History of the Detective/Crime Story*. The first book edition was published in 1951. In 1969 it was reprinted by Biblo and Tannen with supplements by Dannay bringing it up to date. Dannay was the principal author of this landmark scholarly work which provided in-depth historical and bibliographical information regarding the most significant short-story volumes by single authors in the genre. The work of many writers was discussed following a time line from 1845 with Poe's *Tales* up through 1967 when

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Queen gave up adding to the "lustrum." Although wide ranging, this work centers around the best books in each era or decade, and these volumes are now known as "Queen's Quorum." This important volume gave focus and direction to a generation of new collectors and Queen's Quorum, like the H-Q List is used as a "shopping list" by many collectors today.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s a number of detective fiction fanzines sprang up, most notably Allen Hubin's *The Armchair Detective*. Over the past 30 years *TAD* has educated an entire generation of readers about significant mystery writers and their work and, in the process, greatly encouraged mystery collecting. Otto Penzler, who for some years owned and published *TAD*, also contributes an influential column "Collecting Mystery Fiction" which has helped define the field. The first installment of this column, a landmark essay entitled "An Introduction to Collecting Mystery Fiction" has been reprinted and updated in this issue of *TAD*.

In 1979 Allen Hubin made yet another major contribution to the mystery genre. His remarkable *Crime Fiction: A Comprehensive Bibliography 1749–1975* has become an essential tool for collectors. The most recent edition, published in 1994, covers the period of 1749 through 1990. Since then a large number of other reference and critical works—aimed at both fans and scholars—has helped increase the prestige and the ultimate collectibility of the mystery genre. (See the updated list of essential reference works in this issue's "Collecting Mystery Fiction." As an author himself, Otto Penzler has written or co-authored several important scholarly works in the field, including the Edgar-winning *Encyclopedia of Mystery & Detection* and *Detectionary*, among others.)

THE SPECIALTY BOOKSELLERS

It was also during the late 1960s and early 1970s that modern literature collectors discovered Hammett and Chandler. When prices for these two giants began to skyrocket during the mid-'70s, modern-literature collectors began looking for other "cross-over" writers. Here began the growth and popularity of collecting mystery writers such as Ross Macdonald, Rex Stout, Agatha Christie, and Ellery Queen. No longer confined to a few hundred serious connoisseurs, collecting mystery writers became widespread. When these authors' early first editions in dust jacket became pricey and hard to find, collectors in the field began to seek out newer authors whose first editions could be had at more reasonable prices. This spiralling growth continues today.

Until relatively recently, though, there were very few specialist dealers in the mystery field. The best known was Lew David Feldman of the House of Dieff whose long career ended in the mid-1970s. Feldman was the premier source of fine and rare detective/mystery fiction for the few hundred serious collectors existent in the '50s and '60s. In the early '70s a few farsighted mail-order dealers also began to specialize in collectible detective/mystery fiction, most notably Peter Stern in Boston, Enola Stewart of Gravesend Books, and Bill Dunn (now of Dunn and Powell). They were joined by a few shops who dealt mainly in modern literature such as Serendipity, Joseph The Provider in California, J&S Graphics, and a few others, by dealers specializing in collectible detective and mystery fiction, and by many hundreds of general dealers who routinely list scores of genre collectibles in their catalogues.

The real surge in growth for the genre, in both reading and, as a result, collecting, was fueled by the advent of the mystery bookstore geared to the general public. Dilys Winn founded Murder Ink, the first retail mystery bookstore, in New York City in 1972. (After a long absence from the field, she has recently returned to mystery bookselling at Miss Marbles' Parlour in Key West, Florida.) Murder Ink was shortly followed by the Mysterious Bookshop in New York, which was, and still is, the quintessential mystery bookshop many have tried to emulate. Today there are well over a hundred retail bookstores in the U.S. specializing in newly published crime and mystery fiction, with more opening every year. There is little doubt that these specialty bookstores have been instrumental in transforming casual readers into well-educated mystery fans and, in many cases, into mystery collectors.

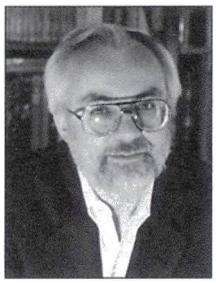
THE FUTURE OF COLLECTING

The question of what to collect always surfaces for a new collector. At a recent Bouchercon I had the privilege of moderating a panel of distinguished dealers and experts where this subject engendered great discussion. The universal advice was to find an area in which you have some real interest. You could focus on a specific author or two, an era (e.g., Victorian, Edwardian, the '50s, etc.), a locale, your profession, a hobby (e.g., trains, autos, wine, coins, stamps, etc.), a subgenre, first novels, the high spots in the genre represented by the H-Q List or Queen's Quorum, or anything else one can conjure up (including mysteries about magic!).

Some areas of collecting are going to be very difficult. Trying to start a collection of fine first editions of certain authors such as Christie, Chandler, Stout, Queen, Woolrich, Hammet, Ian Fleming, or Conan Doyle, will lead to sure disappointment unless you have unlimited funds and free time. The same is true if you want a fine first edition of every book listed on the H-Q List or Queen's Quorum.

However, there are still relatively undercollected and very affordable areas which present many opportunities. These include books made into movies, paperback originals, pulps, Edgar-winning books in various categories (you would be surprised at the relatively low price for many of the early Edgar-winners), and currently under-appreciated writers. Some of the latter include Stanley Ellin, Robert Fish, Michael Gilbert, and Dorothy Salisbury Davis. There are other well-known and frequently-collected authors whose first editions are undervalued. These include Robert Van Gulik, Mickey Spillane (although his early published firsts have recently become pricey), Donald Westlake (many of his early books are still quite a bargain), Marcia Muller, Chester Himes, James M. Cain, and Dorothy B. Hughes.

In short, the possiblities in collecting mystery fiction are endless—as is the fascination. ■



Collecting Mystery Fiction: AN INTRODUCTION

BY
OTTO PENZLER

As a service to our readers, The Armchair Detective *periodically reprints the following introductory column about book collecting. Please note that the list of recommended reference books has been updated for this issue of* TAD.—*ed.*

This first of a series of columns devoted to the collecting of mystery fiction will be an informal introductory potpourri presenting some of the elements of book collecting in general and mystery collecting specifically. It will be occasionally difficult—but always essential—to remember that the concern here is with *collecting,* not *reading,* and when these two distinct fields overlap it is a matter of happenstance and irrelevance.

Collecting, in the sense that will be addressed in this column, will have a rather specific definition. It will not mean picking up old paperbacks and saving them; it will not mean trying to put together a shelf of battered hardcover editions of the complete works of Edgar Wallace. It *will* mean (since all detective fiction and most mystery fiction has been published during the past two centuries) the pursuit of fine first editions. There will be several, or perhaps many, exceptions to this practice, but the overall aim will be to regard mystery fiction as other collectors perceive the works of Ernest Hemingway, or Americana, or poetry, or modern drama, or any of the hundreds and thousands of avenues open to them.

The ideal collection will consist of first editions in condition identical to their appearance on the day they were published. If issued with a dust jacket, the ultimate copy must have a dust jacket. That it must also have its original binding is self-evident. One can accumulate a wonderful library of reprint editions, or even shabby copies of first editions, and derive from it an enormous amount of pleasure. That is to be applauded, of course. The day would be black indeed when books are collected but not read. But, to reiterate for the final time, assembling that type of collection falls outside the working definition of collecting that has been adopted for this column.

Perhaps a few definitions would be appropriate at this time. The word "collecting" has been dealt with, and the short phrase "mystery fiction" will mean works of fiction in which a crime, or the threat of a crime, are central to the theme of the book. Thus the definition extends far beyond the range of detective fiction to include crime stories (such as those featuring the exploits of A.J. Raffles, The Saint, the characters who populate the works of James M. Cain and W.R. Burnett and the zany world of Donald E. Westlake, etc.), espionage fiction (which often involves crimes against nations, rather than individuals), suspense stories (such as those by Cornell Woolrich and Francis Iles), and even out-and-out thrillers (in which adventure and chase play such large roles; after all, how can one consider the mystery genre and ignore such writers as John Buchan and Sax Rohmer?).

It is safe to suggest, and intelligent to accept the suggestion, that some limitations be placed on a collector's pursuits. Very few have the space, time, money, ability, ego, energy, or inclination to attempt to assemble a complete library of mystery fiction first editions. A conservative estimate would place that number at 90,000 volumes, with more being added every week. Only a few collectors have made a serious attempt at completeness, the one coming closest thus far being myself, with more than 40,000 volumes.

The limitations can be as strict or as loose as the collector chooses, depending upon imagination, taste, ambition, and the realities of finance. A collection can be confined to one or two (or *any* number) of authors; a specific type of fiction (such as British "Golden Age," hard-boiled private eye, gothics, locked room, etc.); locale (books set in New York, or London, Southern California, Hoboken, and so on); subject matter (as books with backgrounds in the world of art, magic, opera, gambling, medicine, ballet, sports, or books themselves); a specific period (as Graham Greene's collection of Victorian detective fiction, or books written only between the two World Wars); or any other special interest, such as books involving sinister Orientals, or lawyers, or female detectives. In short, the structure, the parameters, of a collection are solely the province of the collector. It is often true (and is to be desired) that the area of collecting is that portion of the mystery genre which most interests the collector, so that special knowledge and affection can be brought to it.

As with so many other things in this world, it is not necessary to have wealth to be a collector; it just makes it easier. The overwhelming majority of collectors function within a limited budget, but it is nonetheless possible to achieve a respectable, even enviable, shelf or bookcase or library with the slimmest of wallets.

In 1934, the eminent bibliophile John Carter advised impecunious collectors that detective fiction was one of the best "new paths" to follow. Twenty-five

years ago, Eric Quayle, in *The Collector's Book of Detective Fiction* (London: Studio Vista, 1972), proved the correctness of Carter's prediction when he wrote, "In the entire field of literature, I know of no section that has appreciated more quickly in value during the last two decades, than works of detective fiction." And that is merely the beginning. The strides made between 1934 and 1972 were dwarfed by the developments of the next quarter century, and it seems most reasonable to theorize that the next ten years will see a continuing increase in the value of fine first editions in the world of mystery.

While it is a mistake to undertake the assemblage of a collection for profit motives, the expenditure of sometimes substantial sums requires that at least some thought be given to the matter. And it is an irrefutable fact that a *great* collection cannot be formed without occasional (or frequent) major purchases being made.

Any number of circumstances contribute to escalating values, the most obvious being that of supply and demand. In recent years, more and more

people have begun to collect mystery and detective fiction. At the same time, books (being a perishable commodity) have decreased in number as fire, water, children, pets, insects, and other disasters have claimed their victims. As long, then, as the number of collectors is great, the value of good books will inevitably and inexorably rise, as there is no one this side of heaven who can create another first edition copy of *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* or *The Hound of the Baskervilles*. Still, if the world economy, the price of gold, war in the Sudan, the overthrow of a Latin American dictator or other esoteric factors conspire against increased values, the first and greatest pleasure should be derived from the formation and ownership of a collection, not from its sale. Realizing a bonanza, if the collector has bought wisely, should be a bonus, a lagniappe.

Once the decision has been made to collect, the next step is to determine how and where. No matter where books are to be found, the possibility exists that something suitable for the collection will be on the next shelf or just behind the next book. Salvation Army outlets, tag sales, antique shops, auctions, garages, attics, thrift shops—all have books and it is always possible to find something worthwhile. A more fruitful source of supply for books is, not surprisingly, a bookstore, though the prices will be generally higher. The next step up, to a bookstore specializing in mystery fiction, means that it will be still easier to find books for the collection but, again, prices will be higher, and often higher than in a general bookstore. You will spend more money, as a rule, by going to the specialist who has devoted time, money, and expertise to finding books for his customers, but you will save considerable time and effort.

There are other mystery booksellers in the United States, to be sure, but the majority advertise in *The Armchair Detective*. They are either shops, open to the public, or mail-order firms which issue lists or catalogues. An open bookshop provides the collector with the advantage of seeing a book before it is purchased. Nevertheless, there is rarely *caveat emptor* in the book business. Protection is afforded a prospective book buyer who may be ordering through the mail or over the telephone.

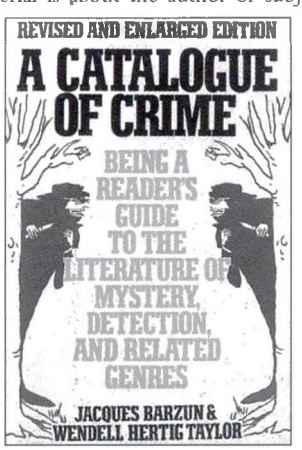
It is customary in the honorable profession of bookselling for a dealer to accept the return of a book for any valid reason. If a book is not as described in a catalogue or on a list, *in the buyer's opinion*, the bookseller should accept its return without complaint. This practice keeps the pressure on reputable booksellers to describe their books honestly and correctly. Of course, the street goes two ways. If a collector frequently

returns a large percentage of his books, he may expect to be dropped from the dealer's mailing list. Why he would continue to order books from a dealer whose books are invariably disappointing is a pertinent question.

Before ordering through the mail, it is advisable to become familiar with standard booksellers' vocabulary. In most cases, the prime factor to consider when making a decision about a book is its condition. If a book is described as **mint,** it should be exactly as new; a **very fine** copy is just a shade below, with no noticeable flaws; **fine** means fresh and crisp, though a bit of dust soiling to the cover or dust jacket may be present; **very good** begins the descent into secondary copies, permitting a little loosening of the binding (not a cracked hinge, of course, but the sense that a book has been read several times), some soiling, slight rubbing, and even fraying to the dust jacket; a **good** copy is an average second-hand book in used condition with its attendant, expectable flaws; **fair** may mean that part of the cloth has worn away, exposing the cardboard covers, there are stains on the cloth and pages, names and/or bookplates, ragged dust jackets, if present at all—not a collector's copy, in short, unless an exceptionally scarce book; **poor** means exactly that—a reading copy only.

Some other frequently used bookseller's terms are:

–ana: A suffix indicating that the material is about the author or subject



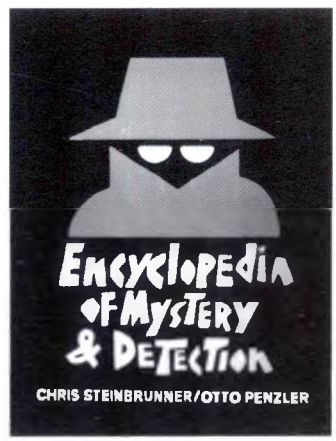
listed (Sherlockiana and Chandlerana, for example, deal with Sherlock Holmes and Raymond Chandler but—in the latter case—is not *by* the author).

as issued: A term indicating that the item is in its original format (as when a book is offered "without dust jacket, as issued" and is therefore not lacking something which ought to be present).

backstrip: The covering of a book's spine.

blind-stamped: An impressed mark on the book's cover or page, without gold or ink (can be lettering or ornamentation).

boards: The cardboard covers of books, usually themselves covered with cloth or paper; generally used nowadays to mean covered with paper, books covered with cloth being described simply as "cloth" (which means cloth pasted on cardboard); abbreviated as "bds."



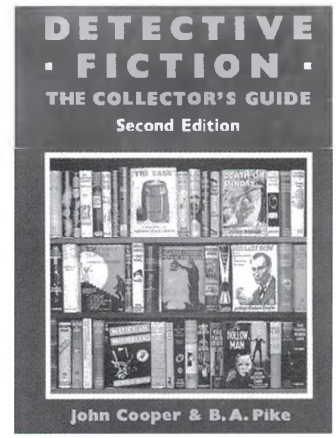
bound: A book with a cover of any type. *Unbound* means that the book has never had a binding. *Disbound* means that the book has been removed from its original binding.

case-bound: Hardcover, rather than paperback.

chipped: Describes dust wrappers or paper covers with small pieces torn away or frayed.

dust jacket (or **dust wrapper):** The generally decorative paper wrapper placed around a book by the publisher to protect it. Abbreviated as "d.j." ("d/j") or "d.w." ("d/w"); often shortened to "jacket" or "wrapper" (but not to "dust").

endpapers: Two sheets of paper in each book, one in front and one in back, which are used to attach the pages



to the binding. Half of each sheet is pasted to the inside of each cover; the other half is then referred to as the "free front (or rear) endpaper." Abbreviated as "e.p." (or "f.e.p.").

ephemera: Items, such as flyers, programs, handbills, advertising, or promotional pamphlets, intended to have only fleeting use and therefore unlikely to have survived. *Ephemera* can be interesting, important, and valuable, and are generally scarce. They are often exactly what they appear to be—junk.

ex-library: A book formerly in a library, with predictable markings such as ink or blind-stamped labels, pockets, and countless other desecrations. The least desirable copy for a collector. Abbreviated as "ex-lib."

foxing: The browning of pages due to a chemical reaction of the paper and air; found mainly in nineteenth-century books and those published on pulp paper (especially during WW II).

frontispiece: An illustration facing the title page.

half title: A page bearing only the book's title, generally immediately preceding the title page.

hinge: The inner joint where the cover and the pages meet; the part of the book that bends when it is opened, and thus is the point of most frequent damage. When the endpaper has taken too much wear, it begins to tear; this is described as (front, usually) "hinge cracking" or "splitting"; a general weakening and small tears is described as "starting."

out of print: A book no longer available from the publisher; abbreviated as "o.p."

point: A distinguishing characteristic (such as a typographical error) which suggests (and occasionally proves) priority within print run of an edition.

privately printed: A book designed for sale or presentation by an individual or group for private, or personal distribution, and not to the general public.

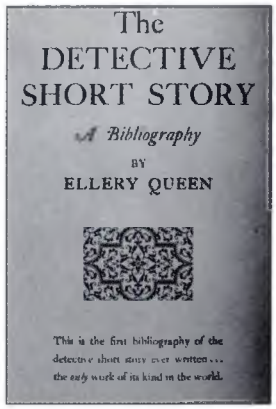
publication date: The date on which the book is officially placed on sale-usually four to eight weeks after the book is actually available. The book is manufactured (printed, bound, etc.) well in advance of publication.

signature: A large sheet of paper, printed and folded to make up the pages of a book. In modern books, a signature is generally eight, sixteen, or thirty-two pages. Signatures are sewn (in well-made books) or glued (in what is inexplicably termed "perfect-bound" books) into the binding. When a signature comes loose, it is often described as "sprung."

wrappers: Paper covers for a book or periodical; not to be confused with dust wrapper. Abbreviated as "wr.," "wrs.," "wrps.," "wrapps."

Finally, a few words about bibliographers' terms, often used inaccurately by booksellers: edition, printing, issue.

The first edition of a book includes all copies printed from the first setting of the type. As long as the type remains unchanged, a book may go through a hundred printings over a ten-year period and still remain in its first edition. A printing includes all the copies produced during a single press run; printing is virtually synonymous with "impression" in this context. When booksellers and collectors refer to first editions, they invariably mean the first printing of the first edition. Variations in the pages or in the bindings, within a single printing, are referred to as "issues" or "states." Thus, if the printer spots an error and corrects it during a print run, or if the binding material is used up before all the sheets have been bound, these different forms of the book are variant issues, or states. While these variants are usually accidental, they have also been planned, as when publishers (especially in the nineteenth century) offered more than one color of binding for their customers. Priority is frequently impossible to determine in these cases.



That should be enough of the technical part of book collecting for the moment. Now, perhaps a word or two about philosophy, and a bit of pedantry here is irresistible.

Buy the best book you can afford. There is no bargain in picking up the cheaper of two copies if the condition is inferior. The bookseller prefers to see an inexpensive and battered copy of a book leave his shop than to part with a fine, crisp copy which may be impossible to replace. If a good bookseller is nearby, it is worthwhile to establish a relationship with him or her. Most people in the world of mystery fiction are friendly and willing to share knowledge, experience, and enthusiasms. A bookseller will begin to save good books for a serious collector, or search for them, and that collection will mature nicely.

The word "relationship" implies reciprocity. Loyalty is much prized. Instead of buying the new Dick Francis or Robert B. Parker from the local chain store, it is regarded as a gracious gesture by booksellers if the collector drives a few miles extra or waits a week to make the purchase from the dealer with whom a relationship is being established.

Everyone loves a bargain, and most everyone, if he is beaver-like, will find one or many. But a collector will win no friends in bookshops by pulling a book off the shelf and saying, "Wow! Ten dollars? I just picked this up in a garage sale for a quarter!" It is unreasonable to expect the dealer to share the moment of excitement. The collector will also do well simply to decline a book, rather than telling a bookseller that it is "too expensive." If it is too expensive *for you,* that is both acceptable and understandable. It is inevitably true for everyone that one book or another will be too great a strain on the budget. But that is quite different from telling someone who earns a living (presumably) by being expert enough to know the value of a book that it is too expensive. The bookseller's competence has been insulted, and the matter is improved not at all if the remark is true. Other matters of bookshop etiquette tend generally to be merely those of normal good taste and manners.

Once books have been acquired, it is recommended that the best care possible be taken of what are valuable pieces of property or likely to become so. A bookcase with glass doors is the best possible storage place for a collection, but other forms of protection exist. The first is common sense. Dampness, in the form of direct contact with water or humidity and moisture in the air will destroy a book. Direct sunlight will fade the spine of a book very quickly. Tremendous heat or cold will do books no good, nor will resting drinks on them, using them as doorstops, leaning them at an angle for a long period of time, or having them make contact with pets, children, or food. A novice should never attempt to repair books; the damage will be compounded. If one insists on writing a name on the endpaper, pasting bookplates into a book, gluing dust jackets down, or eating fried chicken while handling the volumes—forget about collecting. A piece of Mylar (a clear plastic available at library supply houses) wrapped around a book will keep it clean and protect the dust jacket from dirt as well as wear and tear. Some bookshops can also supply these at modest prices. For truly exceptional books. slipcases can be made to protect books. but these are quite expensive and are mainly for the advanced collector.

One of the wisest investments for any collector, new or sophisticated, is a good shelf of reference books. This is an occasionally painful necessity because a limited number of dollars often means having to choose between a reference book and a collectible first edition (which sometimes seems more urgent, or is a "once-in-a-lifetime" opportunity). In fact,

good reference volumes will teach a great deal, help to avoid costly errors in the future and are, in themselves, often worthwhile collector's items.

Some of the basic reference tools which belong on the shelf of any collector of mystery fiction are:

ADEY, ROBERT. *Locked Room Murders.* Minneapolis, MN: Crossover Press, (1992). An annotated bibliography of locked room and other impossible crimes. (second edition)

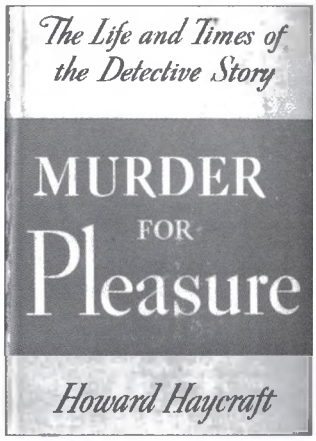
BARZUN, JACQUES, AND WENDELL HERTIG TAYLOR. *A Catalogue of Crime.* New York: Harper & Row, 1971; second edition, corrected, 1974. An idiosyncratic reader's guide to detective fiction.

CARTER, JOHN. *Collecting Detective Fiction.* London: Constable, 1934. A 63-page pamphlet containing the pertinent chapter of his larger volume, *New Paths in Book Collecting.* The first serious approach to collecting volumes that had been previously regarded as unworthy.

COOPER, JOHN, AND B.A. PIKE. *Detective Fiction: The Collector's Guide.* Brookfield, VT: Ashgate, 1994. The second edition of this beautifully produced and valuable reference to mainly British books, with invaluable information on issue points of books that are bibliographically complex.

DEANDREA, WILLIAM L. *Encyclopedia Mysteriosa.* New York: Prentice Hall, 1994. Very much modeled on the *Encyclopedia of Mystery and Detection* but brought up to date by nearly 20 years and written with good humor and idiosyncratic wit.

GREENE, GRAHAM, AND DOROTHY GLOVER. *Victorian Detective Fiction.* London: The Bodley Head, 1966. A catalogue, with bibliographical and historical annotations, of the joint collection (or 471 books) formed by the two friends. It was bibliographically arranged by Eric Osborne, with an introduction by John Carter.



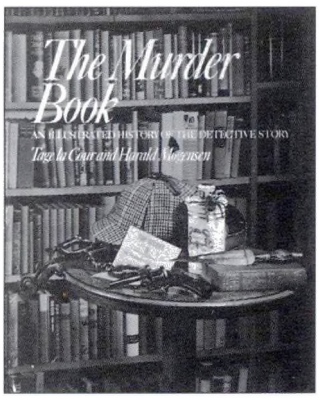
HAYCRAFT, HOWARD. *Murder for Pleasure.* New York: Appleton-Century, 1941. Subtitled, "The Life and Times of the Detective Story," it is the first and best comprehensive history of the genre.

____. *The Art of the Mystery Story.* New York: Simon & Schuster, 1946. A

collection of critical essays, edited by Haycraft. The volume contains Carter's long article, "Collecting Detective Fiction," among many brilliant pieces.

HUBIN, ALLEN J. *The Bibliography of Crime Fiction 1749–1990*. New York: Garland, 1994. The most remarkable reference book in the world of mystery fiction, listing, as its subtitle claims, "all mystery, detective, suspense, police and gothic fiction in book form published in the English language."

LA COUR, TAGE, AND HARALD MOGENSEN. *The Murder Book*. New York: Herder and Herder, 1971. The first heavily-illustrated overview of mystery fiction.



LODER, JOHN. *Australian Crime Fiction: A Bibliography, 1857–1993*. Clayton, Victoria, Australia: Thorpe/National Centre for Australian Studies, 1994. A comprehensive list with appropriate bibliographical information, as well as brief plot descriptions, of this overlooked area of English language mystery fiction.

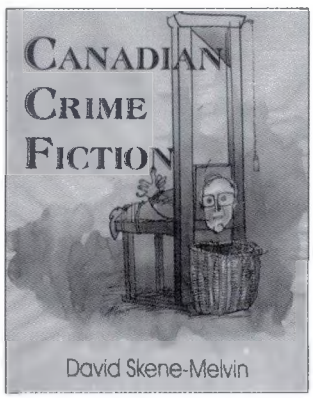
MUNDELL, ELMORE, AND G. JAY RAUSCH. *The Detective Short Story: A Bibliography and Index*. Manhattan, KS: Kansas State University, 1974. A catalogue of short-story collections and anthologies, listing the titles of each individual story contained therein, as well as the name of the detective, and pertinent publishing data.

O'BRIEN, GEOFFREY. *Hardboiled America*. New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1981. An uneven history of mystery fiction in paperback format.

QUAYLE, ERIC. *The Collector's Book of Detective Fiction*. London: Studio Vista, 1972. A beautifully produced, if erratic, history of detective fiction from the collector's point of view, by a noted collector.

QUEEN, ELLERY. *The Detective Short Story*. Boston: Little, Brown, 1942. The first bibliography of the detective short story in book form and, in spite of some errors and numerous omissions, an extraordinary pioneering work of scholarship, and still the best book of its kind yet published.

_____. *Queen's Quorum*. Boston: Little, Brown, 1951; revised edition with 125 books: New York, Biblo & Tannen, 1969. Subtitled "A History of the Detective-Crime Short Story as Revealed by the 106 Most Important Books Published in this Field since 1845." Each title annotated with references to its historical significance, literary quality, and scarcity. Controversial but perceptive and intelligent.



SKENE-MELVIN, DAVID. *Canadian Crime Fiction*. Shelburne, Ontario, Canada: The Battered Silicon Dispatch Box, 1996. A massive volume that provides detailed information on virtually every book related to mystery, crime, suspense, and espionage fiction including juveniles, as it connects with Canada, whether that country is the setting or if the author is Canadian.

St. James Guide to Crime and Mystery Writers. Detroit: St. James, 1996. A giant work, exceeding 1,200 pages, of biographical and critical material on most of the major mystery writers of this century, as well as many others, including comprehensive lists of all their work.

STEINBRUNNER, CHRIS, AND OTTO PENZLER. *Encyclopedia of Mystery and Detection*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1976. An accurate and authoritative guide to mystery fiction in all media, including a section devoted to "Collecting Detective Fiction" by Norman S. Nolan.

WINN, DILYS. *Murder Ink*. New York: Workman, 1977. Contains countless essays on an implausible number of subjects, including "The Haycraft-Queen Definitive Library of Detective-Crime-Mystery Fiction" and "Collecting Detective Fiction" by Otto Penzler.

Not specifically created for collectors of fiction, but important nonetheless, are:

BOUTELL, HENRY S.: *First Editions of Today and How to Tell Them*, which has gone through several editions, all of which are useful in helping to identify the first edition (and first printing) of most books published in England and the United States.

PRONZINI, BILL, AND MARCIA MULLER. *1001 Midnights*. Not very useful for collectors, as it provides no bibliographical information, but an interesting guide for readers.

SADLEIR, MICHAEL: *XIX Century Fiction*, published in 1951 in two volumes. Subtitled, "A Bibliographical Record Based on His Own Collection," these volumes illustrate how great a collection can be. Among the mystery writers covered are Wilkie Collins, Charles Dickens, Arthur Conan Doyle, B.L. Farjeon, Hawley Smart, and Mrs. Henry Wood.

STINE, KATE: *The Armchair Detective Book of Lists, revised second edition*. New York: Otto Penzler Books, 1995. Does not contain bibliographical details but is a hugely useful collection of lists, including the entire Haycraft-Queen cornerstone library, Queen's Quorum, all the Edgar award winners, Gold Dagger award winners, and much else.

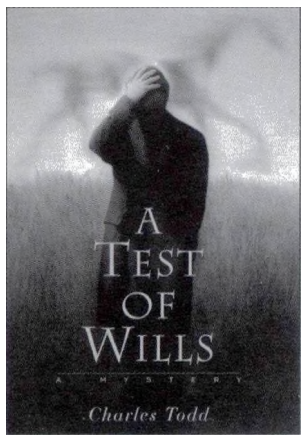
WILSON, ROBERT A.: *Modern Book Collecting*. New York: Knopf, 1980. A basic guide to the subject. ■

ORIGINAL SINS

BY MARVIN LACHMAN

If Sherlock Holmes was the world's "first consulting detective," Ian Rutledge, in Charles Todd's **A Test of Wills** (1996; St. Martin's Press, $22.95), may be the world's first hallucinating detective. His mental problem stems from combat experience in the trenches in World War I. It is 1919 in this historical mystery, and Rutledge has returned to his position as a Scotland Yard Inspector and been sent to Warwickshire on a delicate case, the murder of a man very well placed with English royalty. However, though Ian hides his condition, he still hears the voice of the Scottish soldier whose execution he ordered, while under stress.

Intuition is cited as Rutledge's strong suit as a detective. That may be Todd's way of saying he did not plan to provide his detective with enough clues from which he could solve the case by deduction. The solution is surprising but has too little basis in what went before. Todd seems to realize it near the end when he says of Ian, "And then, out of nowhere he had his answer...." It is a pity that the ending is not better since there is much that is very good in this debut. Todd has created a believable British village and peopled it with an interesting and varied group of characters. The effect of World War I on them, not only on Rutledge, is well done. Todd is especially good in demonstrating the difficulties and responsibilities a conscientious police detective faces. But oh that solution! The only thing that would be more unfair would be my disclosing it now.



David Guterson's **Snow Falling on Cedars** (1994; Vintage trade paperback, $12.00) is a first novel that, in reprint, has been on the paperback bestseller list for more than a year. It has a murder trial and is close enough to being in the detective genre for me to bring this publishing phenomenon to the attention of any *TAD* readers still unfamiliar with it. Ultimately, Guterson does not succeed as a mystery writer, but he provides a great deal to compensate. There are excellent character studies and well limned descriptions of the Pacific Northwest. (The setting is an island off the Washington coast.) We learn a great deal about the fishing and agriculture of the area, as well as the damp climate. However, what is most important in this novel, set in the 1950s, is its poignant picture of Japanese-Americans, victims of one of the most unfortunate actions in our history. In 1942 they were interned, with no evidence to expect they might be disloyal.

This is a book I recommend, though some readers seeking more plot and true detection at the end might be disappointed, especially since Guterson's many long flashbacks and descriptions of scenery balloon this book to 460 pages.

Two decades of optimism, 1946–1965, regarding the possibility of racial harmony in the U.S. have given way to increasing pessimism. Though official segregation has been outlawed, there is still racial separation and animosity, as the O.J. Simpson trial demonstrated. Dennis Lehane's Shamus-winning **A Drink Before the War** (1994, reprinted in 1996 by Avon, $5.99) presents an unremittingly bleak picture of racial relations in Boston, as seen through the eyes of his private eye Patrick Kenzie.

In a deceptively ordinary opening, Kenzie is hired by a politician to recover stolen pictures. These lead not only to murder, but to a war between two black gangs, with Kenzie in the middle. Lehane is especially good regarding Boston racial attitudes, symbolized by the Dorchester and Roxbury sections, where another sort of war, over school busing, was waged in the 1970s.

Though he is far younger (and sometimes acts immaturely), Kenzie reminds this reader of Spenser, especially with his sidekick Bubba available to come to the rescue. Like Spenser, Kenzie does not believe in loyalty to his client, though Lehane almost makes this a virtue, giving him as a client the sleaziest fictional politician to come along in years.

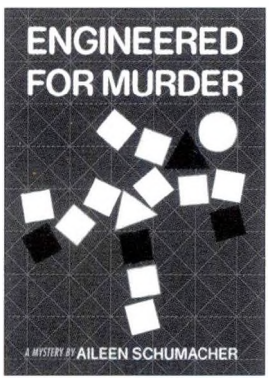
A question for potential readers of *A Drink Before the War* to consider: Do I want a book with that much violence and the kind of incessant obscenity I can hear daily on the streets of any big city? My answer was "yes," and I stayed with this book because Lehane is a good story teller and an acute, courageous observer of the Boston scene. If his Patrick Kenzie has no solution to the problem of race there, neither do people wiser and older than he.

Shari P. Geller also tackles a social problem, sexual abuse of children, in **Fatal Convictions** (1996; HarperCollins Regan Books, $24.00), a book about a serial killer. As the popularity of the series killer novel winds down, writers seem to be going further afield to find a class of victim for their murderers. In this case, it is child molesters. They are all over this book, allowing targets who are dispatched with gratuitous blood and violence by a killer who shoots or stabs them in the eyeball and then taunts them with comic book dialogue.

From her title, one of those trendy legal phrases that means little in the context of this book, Geller is prone to clichés. This is a book that is mostly dialogue, and her characters often speak

in pop psychology, uttering lines such as, "We all make mistakes and the important thing is to learn from them." The setting is Los Angeles, but it could be anywhere because there is so little description, a rarity in a time when virtually every American mystery has a strong regional component.

One expects greater insight into the problem of abuse from Geller since she is both a former counselor of sex offenders and a lawyer. (There is a long trial sequence that is the best part of the book.) However, the solution that seems most appealing to her is to imprison offenders for life, with no hope of release. I suspect that is the only solution for a condition with so high a rate of recidivism, but the story she uses as illustration for 352 pages is never well told or compelling enough.



When was the last the time you read a mystery about quality control? Aileen Schumacher's **Engineered for Murder** (1996, Write Way Publishing, 10555 E Dartmouth Suite 210, Aurora CO 80014, $21.95) is a first from a small new publisher that does something fairly rare in detective fiction these days. It pictures the world of work with considerable accuracy. In this case it is a construction project, a football stadium being built for New Mexico State University in Las Cruces. The viewpoint is that of Tory Travers, an engineer who runs Travers Testing and Engineering, the company under contract to provide quality assurance inspections for the building of the stadium. The locales, Las Cruces and nearby El Paso, Texas, are also off the beaten track.

The mystery plot isn't quite as good as the setting. A man who, in a great coincidence, works for one of the subcontractors Travers is keeping an eye on has information that threatens to bring up a scandal from her past. There is a murder, and Tory is a suspect, but she also receives death threats. In what has now become a cliché, Tory is thrown into a prickly relationship with David Alvarez, the police detective on the case. Too much of the book consists of their banter. Alvarez's reverse snobbery, his hangups regarding Tory's supposedly privileged background, and their hate-love(?) relationship became tiresome. Little better is the byplay between Alvarez and Faulkner, his police partner. Schumacher's effort to make Faulkner distinctive, giving him a stutter, doesn't work, and it seems unnecessary. The ending is better than some, and while the reader isn't exactly overwhelmed with clues, everything is tied up nicely after some suspenseful scenes, and the identification of the killer is a surprise.

I'm not sure what Dale Furutani had in mind for his first book. **Death in Little Tokyo** (1996; St. Martin's Press, $21.95). His hero, Ken Tanaka is a Los Angeles mystery fan who is a member of a club which acts out mysteries. In connection with a mystery he is writing for them, Ken improbably rents a downtown office and advertises himself as a private detective. Predictably, he gets a real client who wants him to pick up those dreaded, mysterious photos. Before long, Ken is a murder suspect and is beaten by Yakuza gangsters. (Most of the characters in the book are Japanese-American, and is largely set in a well-described region of downtown Los Angeles that is too seldom used in mysteries.)

Tanaka is a rather light-hearted narrator and also fairly light-headed. He undertakes some bumbling detective work, though he admits to the readers, "...the sensible thing would be to step back and let the cops do their thing, but by now you know I'm not all that sensible."

At about page fifty, in what has started as a rather lightweight book, things take a serious turn, and the author brings in the same issue that is central to the Guterson novel reviewed above: the shameful forced internment of Japanese-Americans in World War II. Furutani becomes guilty of gross exaggeration. He equates the "relocation" camps, which were bad enough, with the far worse "concentration" camps, in which the Nazis killed millions. To him, America's misguided attempt at self protection by wartime internment is the same as the Japanese empire's sneak attack on Pearl Harbor. He then generalizes regarding American treatment of Asiatics throughout history. For example, he dismisses the American effort in saving South Korea from invasion, with the loss of 50,000 American lives, because some soldiers were bigots and called our allies "gooks." He gives subjective instances of discrimination in American society against Asiatics, but he makes these neither dramatic nor interesting fiction.

Later, he injects another serious note when he has Tanaka's girlfriend attend an A.A. meeting. He devotes three pages to her speech to her fellow alcoholics. Moving, but totally irrelevant to the plot.

I like to see mysteries tackle important issues. However, in a book with such a simple mystery plot, in which coincidence and confession resolve the crime, unsubtle intrusions of reality can be especially jarring. They indicate that Dale Furutani has been saving up grievances until his publisher gave him a captive audience of people willing to stay with his book to see how what started out as a non-political mystery turned out.

There is much that that will attract readers to Bill Blum's **Prejudicial Error** (1995; reprinted by Onyx, 1996, $5.99), but just as much to repel them. One can start with a negative right on the cover, yet another of those interchangeable titles that Turow's children wish upon us. Then, there is the usual picture of Los Angeles as the equivalent of one of the rings of Dante's Hell. Yet, fans of regional writing should like the unflinching picture of so many aspects of the city, including its gangs, its deteriorating areas, its traffic, and its legal system.

John Solomon has a drinking problem which has virtually destroyed his private practice as a lawyer. Earlier he lost his job as a district attorney due to a "sexual indiscretion." And he's the book's sympathetic character! Most of the others are racist cops, in a case of art imitating life, or violent, foul-mouthed "gangstas." Solomon, who can't get

other clients, agrees to defend a gang member accused of murdering a cop. The puzzle is minimal, but the trial scenes are excellent with an authenticity that Blum brings to his writing from his experience as lawyer and administrative law judge. The ending is hard to accept, far too convenient a way of ending matters. You'll see.

Having a first novel published is a major event in a writer's life, so it is sad when he dies before it is published, as did Gary Provost, author of the enjoyable novel **Baffled in Boston** (1996; Berkley Prime Crime, paperback original, $5.50). Actually, Mr. Provost was not a newcomer to print, since he was a prolific and respected author of true crime. Provost's protagonist is the amusingly pessimistic Jeff Scotland, once a true-crime writer. Scotland has reason to feel like Job. He can no longer write true crime, having developed a mental block against it when the subject of one of his books tried to kill him. His wife has left him, and, in what gives the book its plot, a good friend, the advice columnist for a Boston newspaper, has died in a suspicious accident. "Scotty" proves to be an engaging narrator as he tries to find the truth about her death in a story with insights into newspaper publishing, including a Murdoch-type publisher. He even gets involved in a contest to select the columnist's successor. There are some funny lines, although one is repeated at least three times. At the end, when Scotland identifies the killer, he is told, "There's no evidence," and there isn't nearly enough for his deductions. For a change, I didn't let that distract me from a pleasant read. ■

Past Mysteries, Present Masters

by Kathryn Kennison

A roundtable discussion of the historical mystery with Edward Marston, Sharan Newman, Charles Todd, Sharon Kay Penman, and Margaret Lawrence

Is the current surge of interest in historical crime and detective fiction mighty enough to be labeled a trend? "Absolutely," says Jim Huang, editor of *The Drood Review,* and owner of Deadly Passions Bookstore in Kalamazoo, Michigan. "In fact, this is the strongest sub-genre within the mystery field I've seen in the last five years, and it shows no sign of waning. It's stronger than ever, and what I find so fascinating is that the current mania encompasses so many periods and locales—everything from ancient Egypt and Rome, right on up through the modern post-Viet Nam era."

Huang and Thalia Proctor of Crime in Store Books in London agree that mysteries set in medieval England generate the most interest, and both consider the late Ellis Peters the muse of historical mysteries. Proctor's customers incline towards the religious or spiritual overtones found in the characters and settings of Peters's Brother Cadfael series.

Readers of historical mystery are an adventurous bunch it seems when it comes to sampling other authors. If, for instance, a reader loves Ellis Peters, he is apt to try another writer of that same period, and often he may sample other periods and locales. At Crime in Store, novels set in ancient Egypt and Rome are almost as popular as those with a medieval setting.

Huang cautions against thinking of historical mysteries as just history, and Proctor agrees. Whichever century the action takes place in, the crux of the story is still crime and resolution. Plot, character, and dialogue, for instance, are as important to a crime novel set in ancient Rome as to a novel set in Edwardian England or the Eisenhower era in the United States. As do all other mysteries—indeed as do *all* works of fiction (mystery or otherwise)—historical mysteries reflect the ethos of their own particular time and place, but this does not mean they're about history and nothing else.

Writers of historical mystery fiction have diverse theories regarding the popularity of this sub-genre, diverse reasons for writing what they write and diverse approaches and opinions regarding their craft. Five of those writers very kindly shared those opinions with us for this article.

Edward Marston

Edward Marston's Elizabethan theatrical mystery series featuring Nicholas Bracewell, stage manager for Lord Westfield's Players, is a spellbinding blend of history, adventure, and intrigue enhanced by his marvelous characters and his painstaking attention to period detail. The Elizabethan series began with *The Queen's Head,* published in 1988; the most recent in that series is *The Fair Maid of Bohemia,* out in 1997. The seventh book, *The Roaring Boy,* was nominated for an Edgar award in 1996.

Marston's Domesday series offers a county-by-county study of the crimes and misdemeanors surrounding the compilation of the Domesday Book, the massive record commissioned by William the Conqueror to assess taxes and survey land holdings in 1086–87. The first in the series is *The Wolves of Savernake* (1993). The fifth, *The Serpents of Harbeldown,* will be released later this year.

Released in February 1997, Marston's first book in his newest series is an architectural mystery featuring Frank Lloyd Wright and written under the name Keith Miles. This novel is set in Arizona in 1928, during the construction of the Biltmore Hotel. Says Dr. Joanne Edmonds, assistant dean of The Honors College at Ball State University, "*Murder in Perspective* promises to continue expanding the boundaries of the historical mystery as it is being redefined by one of its most inventive practitioners."

Sharan Newman

Sharan Newman, a medievalist since she was twenty, may have been attracted to the period because of misconceptions learned from movies and fairy tales, but she has been educated now, she says, far beyond any reasonable need. And the reality is even more fascinating.

Set in twelfth-century France, Newman's Catherine LeVendeur series began with *Death Comes As Epiphany,* nominated for the Anthony and Agatha awards, and winner of the 1994 Macavity award for best first mystery. It was also a nominee for the Independent Booksellers' annual award. The third title in the series, *The Wandering Arm,* was nominated for an Agatha award in the best novel category. The newest book in the series is *Strong As Death,* and the fifth, as yet untitled, is due in 1998.

Her first book, *The Dagda's Harp,* won a Philadelphia Reading Round Table award and was on Bowker's recommended reading list for 1977. Next came the lovely and lyrical Guinevere trilogy, a significant work on the Arthurian legend from Guinevere's point of view: *Guinevere,* originally published in 1981, was re-released in November, 1996; *The Chessboard Queen*

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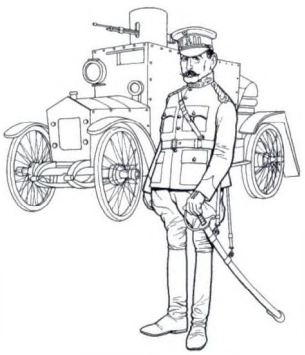
(1983) will be re-released in October 1997; and *Guinevere Evermore* (1995) is scheduled to be re-released in 1998.



Charles Todd

A Test of Wills, Charles Todd's extraordinary debut novel, has excited comment on both sides of the Atlantic since its release last summer and is a 1997 Edgar nominee for Best First Novel. According to Jim Huang, it has quickly become a hot item on collectors' lists.

Award-winning author Peter Lovesey said, "War-wounded Britain in 1919 is beautifully conveyed in an intricately plotted mystery. With this remarkable debut, Charles Todd breaks new ground in the historical crime novel." Inspector Ian Rutledge, the shell-shocked survivor of *A Test of Wills* returns this Fall in *Wings of Fire*, and Todd is currently hard at work on number three, as yet untitled.

When Todd went to sign up for the draft at 18, the Viet Nam War had been over only a few years, and yet he had a great-uncle still alive who'd fought in France in World War I. He is descended from a long line of soldiers who fought in the Revolutionary War, the War Between the States (on both sides), and the Great War (also on both sides). He knew old women who talked nostalgically about the lover or brother who'd "got the gas" in the trenches, come home whole, then died from rotted lungs. "I'd always been told that European generals hadn't learned anything since the American Civil War and allowed the slaughter of thousands in Flanders because they were too stubborn to change. It always seemed to me that the men who survived the trenches, who came home afterward, and struggled to live through peace defined true courage best," he says. "That's where Rutledge sprang from. He saw gallantry die and the horror live. The business he's in—murder investigations—is a daily reminder, and yet it's what he's best suited for: dealing with death. Ironic, but there it is."

Sharon Kay Penman

It has been said of Sharon Kay Penman and her previous historical novels that: "Penman is a superb storyteller." (*The Miami Herald*) "Once you enter Penman's world, you're hooked." (*Seattle Post-Intelligencer*) "Penman writes about the medieval world and its people with vigor, compassion and clarity." (*The San Francisco Chronicle*) "Her writing is faultless, deftly interweaving the threads of the various story lines into a glowing, living tapestry. This is storytelling at its finest." (*The Philadelphia Inquirer*)

All of these accolades could be just as easily applied to her latest novel and first mystery, *The Queen's Man*, featuring Justin de Quincy, the well-educated but illegitimate son of a bishop. Set in 1193 when King Richard is being held prisoner in Austria while his ruthless brother, John, schemes for the throne, Justin finds himself by a strange twist of fate in the employ of the king's mother, the legendary Eleanor of Acquitaine. *The Queen's Man* has been nominated for a Best First Mystery Novel Edgar.

Speaking of legend—the story behind Penman's first novel has almost become a legend itself. For years, while a student and then a lawyer, Penman slowly but steadily worked on her novel during whatever brief moments could be snatched from her busy schedule. However, after all these years of effort her only copy was stolen from her car. Thankfully for her future fans, she began again, and her novel about Richard III, *The Sunne in Splendour*, has become a favorite of readers around the world. She has written five acclaimed historical novels and is at work on another, as yet untitled, that will ultimately make up a trilogy, the first of which was *When Christ and His Saints Slept*.

Margaret Lawrence

Margaret Lawrence says that writing is the greatest pleasure of her life, and that's easy to believe after reading *Hearts and Bones*. What is surprising is that a novel that brings early America so forcefully to life was written by someone who is really a medievalist. A friend who was teaching a women's history course gave Lawrence some books about that period and the rest is, as they say, history. Says Lawrence, "It seemed naturally congenial to me, the atmosphere of the woman's kingdom, the intricate, highly-skilled work. I grew up with a grandmother who lived to be ninety-nine, you see, and she and my mother taught my sister and me those skills. It wasn't that anybody ever said, 'you're a woman, this is all you're good for.' Entirely the opposite. It was more like a treasure they had to give us, something it was our natural right to know and their responsibility to

teach." It must have been this upbringing that brought to life Hannah Trevor, the nurse-midwife protagonist of *Hearts and Bones*.

"This remarkable book," says Jim Huang, "brilliantly illuminates the ambiguity of the period." Others obviously agree; *Hearts and Bones* is a Best Novel Edgar nominee. The hardcover edition of *Hearts and Bones* appeared in the autumn of 1996 and the paperback will be out in 1997, shortly before the publication of the second novel in the trilogy, *Blood Red Roses*.

The Armchair Detective asked these writers to share their thoughts on the nature of the historical crime novel.

TAD: How do you account for the growing interest in historical crime and detective fiction?

MARSTON: History is eternally fascinating. If you want to get to know someone better, you learn about their past. If you want to understand a nation, you study its history. Crime novels set in the past enable authors to focus on specific periods and point up modern parallels. Historical mysteries also make the past more accessible with their judicious mix of scholarship and entertainment.

NEWMAN: There are several possible reasons. One is that the historical mystery combines two complementary genres. In a mystery there's a problem that (almost) always is satisfactorily solved by the end of the book. History, by its very definition, is completed. However dreadful it is, it's past. (Thanks to Kate Ross for this enlightenment.) So comfort is provided the reader on two counts.

This doesn't explain why historical mysteries are popular *now*. But many people have suggested that there is a certain *fin de siecle* need to look back and assess where we've been before we face what's coming next. With this also being the end of a millennium, this feeling may be compounded.

TODD: I think one of the basic reasons is that historical crime fiction offers such infinite variety. More people seem to be discovering mysteries as a genre, and they may be starting with familiar territory—the historical—when they may not have a taste yet for police procedurals or hardboiled. The historical mystery can take the cozy to the vicarage tea-party—or it can carry as hard an edge as the author wants to give it, which means all kinds of possibilities for fans and writers.

Everyone says local settings, for instance Jeremiah Healy's Boston, have strong appeal because readers can go there and enjoy following Cuddy around the place. But maybe we've overlooked the possibility that many people have brushed against some historical period—on TV, in a movie or another book—and would like to know more about it. And here's a mystery set in that very time or place, just the thing to take you the next step. Then, book in hand, it's possible to stalk a Victorian Holmes through London as enthusiastically as tracking Morse around modern Oxford. It might even call for a little detective work, adding to the fun. The past isn't dead. Readers can still find "Upper Streetham's" shadows in Warwickshire, and feel what I did when I was there.

PENMAN: I think Edith Pargeter, in her Ellis Peters identity, deserves much of the credit for the current popularity of the historical mystery novel. She expanded the boundaries of the traditional mystery, and her shrewd, humane monk, Brother Cadfael, blazed a trail that others were quick to follow. Clearly people still have a healthy curiosity about other cultures, other eras, and what more painless way can there be to learn history than by tracking a killer through the slums of Victorian London or the alleyways of ancient Rome or the court of Eleanor of Acquitaine?

LAWRENCE: The answers are endless, and the question is huge. During the 1980s, a lot of inveterate readers, trapped between the talking heads of deconstructionist fiction and the bubble-card crapola of the marketing mania, went back to the classics that had been their first literary friends. Another group went to the mystery because of its traditional plotting, and the two groups met, I think, on the common ground of *Jane Eyre* or *Our Mutual Friend* or *Hamlet*. The classics are full of thwacking good mysteries, reaching all the way back to *Oedipus Rex*. Not detective stories, mind, and not thrillers. I'm speaking of novels of thought and character in which the central plot device, the thing that provides profluence—that tricky little article that keeps you turning pages—is the discovery and resolution of a sudden and violent death or great damage.

Oh, no doubt some of us go to the past nostalgically, deluding ourselves that things were simpler then. Some of us, I'm sure, go to the past in order to chuckle over how much better off we are with a computer and a microwave and a fax machine than our foremothers, with their sealing wax and spinning wheels and looms, and the mystery category is just the sop we throw to our modern need to put a label on every product of the mind.

But for some, it goes much deeper. We need to be allowed to matter, you

see, at least in our imaginations. Mystery encourages us to consider the ultimate questions of life and death, but historical fiction allows those questions to be asked in a vivid parable that, by its very distance from the present, frees us to poeticize our terror of mortality, of cosmic insignificance, in an ancient, even ceremonious, way. I think, at the root of it, that's what serious readers ask of mystery, whether they know it or not. A restoration of innocence, of the strength and power of the truth to survive against the odds. We feel something shabby is being fobbed off on us these days. I suspect Jane Austen felt the same.

TAD: Why did you choose the period you chose for your novel?

MARSTON: Authors choose periods with which they have an affinity. Having worked in the theatre for so many years, I have become obsessed with Elizabethan drama. It was a wonderful creative expression of England in a Golden Age. The Nicholas Bracewell series enables me simultaneously to explore three of my favourite preoccupations—crime, history, and theatre.

The early Norman period has also intrigued me because it was a time of enormous political and cultural change, peopled by larger-than-life characters with extraordinary drive and ambition. The Domesday Book itself is a remarkable record of England in 1086 and all kinds of crimes and misdemeanours lay behind the abbreviated Latin of its text. Digging them out for my own Domesday books is a labour of love. Researching the sites of my tales on a county-by-county basis is a great help.

As for *Murder in Perspective*, Frank Lloyd Wright symbolises American architecture for me and the story of his long life is an inspiration to anyone in the creative field.

NEWMAN: Why choose the 12th century? It's the one I know best. My specialty area is from about 500 A.D. to 1215 A.D., but most of my academic work is in the first half of the twelfth century. I feel comfortably at home there.

TODD: I'm still not sure whether 1919 chose me or I chose 1919. Everyone says, write about something you know. And I knew something about England. That part was easy. But when I thought about some of the things I wanted to do in a novel, I could see that today's England might not be right for them for a number of reasons—the way the police do their work, the way people view ideas and situations now versus in the past, the way I've talked with men and women who've fought in most of the wars in this century, and I was interested in how war can define a generation. But if I wanted to develop that theme, I didn't want the controversy of say, Viet Nam, to overshadow either Rutledge's work or his own suffering. I didn't want to get into the issue of Gulf War Syndrome in dealing with his haunting. I had relatives who'd fought in the Great War and lived on into the Viet Nam era. I remembered them as old men with faded photographs of a boyish, smiling face in a stiff-collared uniform. I think this must have left such a strong impression that when the time came to find my own time and place, 1919 seemed "right." Fortunately, Rutledge appears to be as happy with it as I am. You have to take that into account, too, as I'm learning.

PENMAN: There was never a choice involved; it never occurred to me to do otherwise. For nearly twenty years I've been living in medieval England and Wales, with occasional side trips back to the twentieth century. *The Queen's Man* is the sixth one of my books to be set in this turbulent age. It was a time that was vital and vibrant and bloody. Death and disease and childbirth and executions were not sanitized or sequestered. Bandits lurked in the dark shadows along the road, and perhaps so did demons. Nature was not tamed and Hell was real, but even the worst sinner could repent and gain forgiveness. In the classic study, *The Waning of the Middle Ages*, J. Huizinga wrote: "So violent and motley was life that it bore the mixed smell of blood and roses." Now what writer could ask for more than that?

LAWRENCE: As a matter of fact, it rather chose me. An historian friend of mine gave me a fascinating diary from the post-Revolutionary period. I saw a lot of parallels with the present that fascinated me, and I dug out more journals and a lot of other research materials about the atrocities that occurred in the War, the treatment of Loyalists, the legal position of women, etc. I was utterly stunned and stricken by the enormities we Americans are never told in history books, the bitter truth of our beginnings and the seeds of what we have become and continue to be. I found I had no choice but to write about it. All those mute ghosts, you know, with no one to speak for them. I felt it was owed them.

Then, also, I felt a real kinship with the women of those times, having myself grown up with a grandmother who taught me to make soap and to cook on a wood-burning stove, a great-aunt who could cure almost anything with one herb or other—as well as make you an exact copy of any hat, dress, or coat from a picture in a magazine, and all by hand. From my mother, I learned as a child to quilt and sew and garden, and I was taught to believe in the work of the hands, that it steadies the soul. My father and mother never drew lines between "men's work" and "women's work." There was simply work and you did it according to your skills and talents—preferably singing while you were at it, which is how I got interested in folk music. So Hanna Trevor's skills are mine, in some respects. The personal kingdom of learned talents that keeps us self-sufficient and free, the frontiers woman's kingdom, that could be carried anyplace. We are surrendering it wholesale, these days, to a lot of bleeping machines and to the delusion of our own superiority to hand-labor. I sorrow for that. I suppose I wanted to set it down before it was gone.

TAD: How much literary license is allowed? Do you ever play "fast and loose" with actual historical figures and attitudes?

MARSTON: I always work from primary sources and try not to distort known historical facts. But I am very

frugal in my use of real historical persons because they hamper my freedom. Though I write about Elizabethan drama, Queen Elizabeth herself has made only one non-speaking appearance in a nine-book series. I prefer to explore the past through fictional characters who are grounded in fact. When I do use real figures—Archbishop Lanfranc in my Domesday series, Richard Topcliffe, the notorious Elizabethan interrogator, in *The Roaring Boy*, or Frank Lloyd Wright in my architectural mystery—they are only supporting characters. It's impossible to shed modern sensibilities entirely but I make every effort to give my characters the speech and attitudes of their respective eras.

NEWMAN: How much literary license is allowed? *None.* It's one of the rules of the historical that one has to work within the beliefs of the period as well as the actions and personalities of historical characters. I've been told that my women are too "modern," for instance. I know they aren't; they reflect the attitudes and actions of women of their time. I'm not going to make them more downtrodden and subservient to conform with people's inaccurate beliefs about the Middle Ages. Nor will I have my Jewish characters speaking Yiddish, a language that didn't develop until the fourteenth century.

TODD: The writer is creative, he's going to make things up, it's part of the job. If you stick with only the facts all the way, you'll have a treatise, not a novel. That said, however, I feel strongly about getting it right, and I try very hard. One review mentioned the tone of the book, and I think it was saying that I'd captured the spirit of the time and place. Which is what I set out to do. If I can't document something, I take the next best route—was it possible? Would it have happened, even if nobody was there to take notes? Is it in keeping with what did happen? Is it real and realistic, not just a plot twist for its own sake?

I had a sixth-grade teacher whose philosophy of education was, if you don't leave my class with some grounding in history and geography, I've failed. I thought she was a tyrant at the time. Now I realize she was offering us a tremendous gift. She'll come back and haunt me if Rutledge puts a foot wrong!

Reinterpreting actual people (unless you've found some new information) can be risky. It makes the reader wonder what else you might have taken liberties with. It opens doubt. And credibility in an historical mystery keeps the reader with you—their imagination must fly on the wings you've provided.

What bothers me as a reader as well as a writer is putting modern feelings about sensitive issues into the mouths of people in a time when it wasn't natural to think about a problem in that light. It may make a character seem more "with it" for the modern reader, but is it a betrayal of your period? I absolutely agree that there have been "enlightened" people in any given age. Maybe the problem is not so much whether you do it but how you go about it. If it comes out of the people and time frame naturally, that's one thing. If it's put in just because this

issue is politically correct now, it's going to be jarring. In Rutledge's time, the King and Queen were respected and even deeply revered. When a troublemaker like Mavers questioned the monarchy, it was seen as just another proof of his probable guilt in the Harris murder—if you'd stoop to one, you'd stoop to the other. The same is true of the death penalty. Whatever Rutledge's deep personal feelings are on that issue (and he hasn't told me yet), they hanged the guilty people he caught, and he knew that, and he had to accept the responsibility for going through with his arrests. Therefore so do I, as the author.

PENMAN: How much literary license is allowed? If I had my way, very little! When writing of actual historical figures, I consider it a grave literary sin to stray far from the known facts. I think that is cheating the readers, a betrayal of trust. Obviously any writer has to fill in the blanks to a certain extent, and even with a strong factual foundation, a novel is still a work of the imagination. But if the characters who walk through my pages also once walked the earth, I do not have the liberty or the right to create them "from scratch" as it were. If I turned the worldly, willful, and astute Eleanor of Acquitaine into a shy, shrinking violet, I'd deserve to be haunted to the end of my days by Eleanor's vengeful ghost...and legions of indignant readers.

LAWRENCE: "Literary license" is a term that tickles me. I get a mind-picture of Oscar Wilde wearing a little silvery dog-tag. "This, my precious Gendolyn? Why, it's my literary license." (If the IRS hasn't thought of requiring one, no doubt they soon will.)

But seriously, a writer can, I think, take certain liberties with fact for the sake of fiction. You can move, say, something that happened in Maine out to Pennsylvania, or make an Englishman into an Eskimo, or move events from one year into another so as to concentrate the action of your story into a single time and place. When you write for movies and TV, as I have done, you have a very tight time frame—two hours, or about a hundred and twenty pages—that demands a kind of historical shorthand, and you find yourself using one historical fact or incident or even object to represent a whole host of others. You cannot allow yourself to be entrapped by a needless adherence to superficial detail.

But that is not the same thing as misrepresenting historical fact. I am a trained researcher and I do a lot of digging, both before and after the first draft is done, and I never stop checking on myself. The only freedoms I take are the occasional drawing of conclusions based on probability when no actual primary research sources are extant. When you are dealing with poor, unlettered women, for instance, or with the treatment of the deaf in the eighteenth century, the evidence is very scant and you have to draw your pictures from what little you know, projecting possibilities that are reasonable and concurrent with such facts as you do have.

"Fast and loose," no. That's fakery and irresponsibility, and I wouldn't be comfortable with it.

TAD: Are there advantages to setting you novel in a past era that a modern setting wouldn't allow? Disadvantages?

MARSTON: The big advantage is freedom. Modern police procedurals have so many decisions already made for the author. He or she has to work within an existing framework and it is difficult to individualise a novel. The amateur sleuth is a particularly difficult trick to pull off because, in real life, very few homicides are solved by the Father Dowlings and Jessica Fletchers of this world.

The further back you go in time, the more rudimentary any system of justice. Keeping the peace was an immense problem in Norman times, hence the brutality of their punishments. In the Elizabethan period, there was a large criminal underworld. Many crimes went undetected or unpunished because of the lack of a proper police force. In such an age, do-it-yourself sleuthing was often a necessity. Survival was the name of the game.

Disadvantages? Having to do an enormous amount of research, then having

to disguise that fact from the reader by feeding them relevant information in an entertaining way.

NEWMAN: Are there advantages? Yes. I don't need to worry about ballistics and DNA, etc.; things I know nothing about. Disadvantages? I have to be careful not to use modern idioms. No one can be railroaded or blackmailed, for example. Even time was measured differently then. Seconds hadn't been invented yet. Momentum was the shortest unit of time and only meant "not very long."

TODD: A resounding yes to both.

I wanted to work with someone who was thrown on his own resources—whatever skills and knowledge and intuition he could dredge up after war had rather dramatically changed both his life and his prospects. It was useful for Rutledge to have some general knowledge of forensics, but I didn't want men in white coats second-guessing every move and decision from some lab down in, say, Hampstead. He's the man on the spot in every sense. *A Test of Wills* is a puzzle about the human spirit under great stress, not about police methods. In 1919, the slower pace of an investigation allows a character to develop more fully. Which in turn has a bearing on your plot. When you can't count on a Mel Gibson level of action to carry the reader page after page, you have to find intensity in other ways. It's an odd feeling, putting yourself so deeply into another time, long before you were born, but that was the only way I could think of how to do it. In some ways I've learned a lot about myself in the process of learning about Rutledge and his world. We were both thrown on our own resources.

The disadvantages are legion—you're cut off from the knowledge that's been developed ever since your date. You have to be careful of such small things—what's been invented, how to start a car, whether shoes laced or buckled. I can create a serial killer, but I can't use this familiar term, because it hadn't been coined then. Go back another few hundred years, and the most ordinary things we take for granted would have seemed like outright sorcery. Time and distance can be a major problem, too. Rutledge can't fly to New York to interview a witness, he can't even be sure whether he'll find a telephone in some places. The story has to take such limitations into account. You learn to adapt to that. And you have to make a provincial village—where different values mattered, people saw religion and death and social order in terms that seem old-fashioned now—fresh and interesting to readers who're already focusing on a new century. But Rutledge always seemed to find a way, and I owe him.

PENMAN: Actually, the disadvantages are more readily apparent than the advantages. Medieval detectives had a harder row to hoe than their modern counterparts. Just think about it for a moment: no fingerprints, no ballistics or forensics, no DNA! Coming up with plausible medieval clues is definitely a challenge. But plotting a murder is only half the puzzle. While I was laying out a trail for Justin de Quincy to follow, I was also attempting to give my readers a glimpse of the world in which he lived: the shuffle of lepers in their hooded cloaks, the stink of Newgate Gaol, the raucous laughter spilling out of a London alehouse, the whisper of silk, and the glint of a dagger's blade. To me, the raw reality of twelfth-century England is the heart of a medieval mystery.

LAWRENCE: The advantage, for me, to working with historical fiction is that people—i.e., publishers—seem willing to accept a richness of language and detail, a lyricism, in a story about the past that is very difficult to market in a more contemporary novel. Or so I'm told. Technically, even a marvelous book like *The English Patient* is historical, set in World War II. But it's very much a modern novel. Would Michael Ondaatje have gotten away with that luminous prose in a book set in 1997? I wonder. Personally, I think there's a deep need for it and an audience for it, but publishers seem to be afraid of it. That's a shame, because I don't think contemporary fiction will really grow much until we're allowed to return to a richness of language and incident and character, to give our modern lives the stature with which we are now free to endow the past.

Disadvantages to setting a novel in the past? Well, I love history and I seem to be able to get excited about almost any period and country. But I can get just as excited about the present, about characters of the here and now. Any time you put an adjective in front of the word fiction, you have a built-in disadvantage, because you have dug yourself a trough and you must face the possibility that someday you'll have to claw your way out of it. Historical fiction is a category and a category is a box and a box is a potential prison. I want to write books, not boxes.

TAD: "The more things change, the more they stay the same." Does this apply to the crimes, criminals, and sleuths in your period novel as opposed to modern fiction?

MARSTON: "There is no thing new under the sun."—Ecclesiastes. Crime is as old as mankind. Its forms may become more sophisticated (computer crime, etc.) but it will always remain the same in essence. What changes is the emphasis given to certain types of crime. In some medieval warrior societies, for instance, homicide was not punishable by death because it might mean losing another able-bodied soldier. A murder-fine was imposed and the perpetrator would have to pay it back in instalments. If he died before doing so, his kinfolk inherited the debt.

By the time of Elizabeth, murder was a capital offence with frequent hangings and beheadings. The punishment for treason was to be hanged, drawn, and

quartered, a horrifying ordeal played out in front of jeering spectators. Knowing the consequences of being caught, criminals in the periods about which I write will go to any lengths to avoid arrest. It is vital for my sleuths to be men of action because their detection will invariably end in some kind of violence.

NEWMAN: *Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose.* I don't think this is entirely accurate. People are molded by their surroundings. The past is another country (I don't remember who said that). Even though the human race hasn't changed fundamentally in the past few thousand years, the motives for crime and for uncovering it can be subtly or wildly different from those of today. People were killed for revenge or gain, just as in modern mysteries. But in writing about the Middle Ages one needs to add other shades of motive: religious beliefs, a sense of right order in society, family duty. These are all components in the modern mystery, but the spin on them in medieval society is one way to show the difference between our cultures.

TODD: I don't know that the basics of human nature have ever changed. We know a lot more today. We have more to covet, more things others can steal, more ways to kill than the cave man had and more ways of detecting murder. But that's the window dressing. Rutledge's suspects respond to grief and loss just as we do, they can hate as intensely as we do, and they can kill just as quickly. I have to ask myself what would have driven this character to murder in 1919, and can I convey that motivation to my reader? And I'd have to ask the same questions if I was writing a mystery set in modern Atlanta. Rutledge is probably more attuned to listening than a modern cop simply because murders were fewer in 1919 and case overload now is a factor. But the mystery reader expects the writer to remain faithful to the genre, however innovative he's allowed to be in style and period and character.

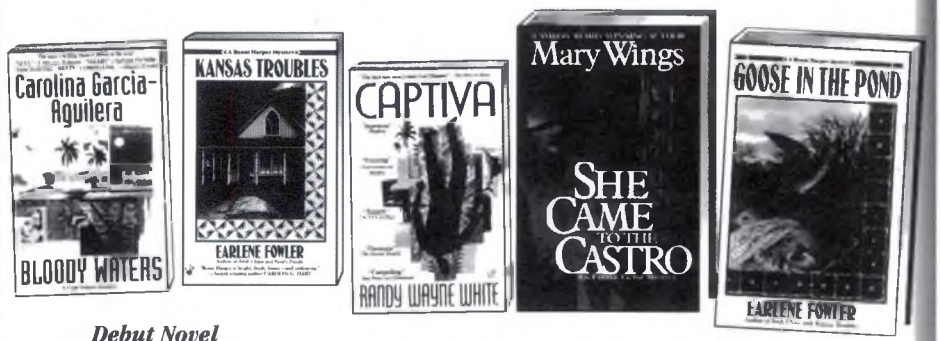
I think what the mystery fan looks for in any novel, modern or historical, is a good story. And a fair chance to beat the protagonist at his or her own game. He wants a character strong enough and intelligent enough to make the contest exciting. He wants to respect the protagonist's skills, share in his or her ability to interpret the clues, and feel at the end that he's had a good run for his money. There's satisfaction in a good ending, because it means the reader's time and energies haven't been wasted—even if he failed to guess who did it. The author didn't cheat. Even when you know from the start who did it and the game is how the detective got his man, you're still pitting your wits against his. The fascination with Holmes was his ability to find significance in an ordinary fact that everyone else had overlooked. Miss Marple's great skill was in reading people. For Poirot it was processing information. Every detective, modern or historical, has his favorite method. As long as the reader knows what the rules are, he can compete. In many genres, the reader is passive, he sits there and follows the story through to the end. In the mystery, he can be as active as he wants to be. Simply entertained—or a silent partner. These are the common threads that bind reader and author—and I don't know that the period you write about makes much difference, except in the variety it offers. If the reader trusts you and your character and the reality of your setting, he'll be excited by what happens and give you the chance to enlighten and surprise him. Pace and suspense keep him turning the pages. Character keeps him involved. I don't think that will ever change. It isn't when a murder happens that really matters. It's the fact that murder has been done and somebody has to see to it that the scales are balanced again. The reader included.

PENMAN: I believe that human nature has changed little over the centuries. While people's attitudes are clearly shaped by the times in which they live, the emotions remain constant. When done well, historical fiction should function as a form of time travel, opening a window to the past. But there should also be a jolt of recognition, the realization that these medieval men and women were not so different from us, after all.

LAWRENCE: Part of my research for *Hearts and Bones* and *Blood Red Roses* has been the unearthing of court records and newspaper accounts of criminal cases of the 1780s, and yes, I do think things change *and* stay the same. Very Buddhist, though not, of course, true in terms of methods. Prisons and punishments were different then; you got your nose slit for picking pockets and you got whipped if they caught you sleeping around—if you were a woman, at least. And there were debtors' prisons—but then we have those, too, I suppose. They're called the Welfare Net. But the intrinsic nature of what drives people to acts of violence, the sense of entrapment, of hopelessness, the diminishing of the individual until he can only prove the fact of his own existence by striking down his neighbor—certainly we share that terrible motive with our forebears. Greed is eternal, lust is little different in one century than in the next. Raptors change their feathers, but not their feeding habits. There are the takers and the taken. That is eternal. ■

Start off the New Year with a BANG!

New Mysteries from Berkley Prime Crime



Debut Novel

BLOODY WATERS

Carolina Garcia-Aguilera

"Fascinating... witty... compelling." —*Miami Herald*

"Adventurous, refreshing... Young private investigator Lupe Solano... struggles to find the birth mother of an illegally adopted baby who needs a transplant. But before her search yields any answers, a murder occurs. Fans of Edna Buchanan should enjoy this."
—*Library Journal*

February

KANSAS TROUBLES

Earlene Fowler

"Benni Harper is bright, fresh, funny—and endearing."
—Award-winning author, Carolyn G. Hart

When Tyler Brown, an aspiring country singer with a mysterious past, is murdered, San Selena Chief of Police Gabe Ortiz finds himself out of his jurisdiction. But Benni Harper is free to step in and do some sleuthing of her own.

March

CAPTIVA

Randy Wayne White

"Compelling."
—*San Francisco Chronicle*

"Enticing."
—*Entertainment Weekly*

From "the rightful heir to John D. MacDonald" (*Tampa Tribune Times*): a wicked new thriller that sends government agent-turned-marine biologist Doc Ford into dangerous new waters, as a Florida fishing dispute escalates into a deadly war that reaches across the ocean…

May

SHE CAME TO THE CASTRO

Mary Wings

Lambda Award-winning author of
She Came By the Book

San Francisco P. I. Emma Victor returns to find a blackmailer and retrieve a damaging videotape. But before she can track him down, the blackmailer is murdered, putting more careers—and lives—on the line.

April Hardcover

GOOSE IN THE POND

Earlene Fowler

"Brilliantly crafted romantic suspense." —*The Mystery Zone*

In *Goose in the Pond*, Benni Harper, the ex-cowgirl and quilter of San Selena, faces her most perplexing case yet: who killed the library storyteller found facedown in the lake?

May Hardcover

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BERKLEY PRIME CRIME

Murderous Affairs

BY

JANET A. RUDOLPH

I REALLY ENJOY A GOOD MYSTERY BOOKSTORE AND JUDGING BY WHAT I HEAR FROM THE READERS OF THIS COLUMN, SO DO YOU. A SPECIALTY MYSTERY BOOKSTORE IS A GREAT PLACE TO FIND BOOKS, MEET OTHER MYSTERY READERS, LISTEN TO TOURING MYSTERY WRITERS, OR GET TOGETHER IN A MYSTERY READING GROUP. MANY MYSTERY BOOKSTORES HAVE CATALOGUES, DO SEARCHES, HOST SPECIAL EVENTS AND TRIPS, AND MORE. I LOVE VISITING MYSTERY BOOKSTORES. I GUESS I HAVEN'T GOTTEN OVER the joy of touching books, scanning the shelves, finding books I wasn't looking for (but which intrigue me) and speaking with knowledgeable booksellers. I hope you feel the same way about these stores.

It's been awhile since I've put together a list—and the list has grown quite a bit since that time. I know I'll forget a few, so if I do, drop me a line or send e-mail, and I'll include your favorite mystery bookstore in an update. Although I would love to annotate all the stores below, space is a constraint. I hope you'll visit some of these stores and let me know what you enjoyed most about them. And, for those of you who travel on business, remember a mystery bookstore is the perfect place to take a break from your busy work schedule and meet with like minds and make new friends. Although I won't be including them at this time, there are many other general bookstores which have large excellent mystery sections. I'll try to mention them in a future column.

ARIZONA

Clues Unlimited, 123 S Eastbourne, Tucson AZ 85716; Charlene Taylor, Christine Burke, Patricia Davis, co-owners; (520) 326–8533; <clues@AZStar.net.com>; <http://www.tdigital.com/clues>.

The Haunted Bookshop, 7211 N Northern Ave, Tucson AZ 85704–4424; Jean Wilson.

The Poisoned Pen, 7100D E Main St, Scottsdale AZ 85251; Barbara Peters; (602) 947–2974; fax: (602) 945–1023; <sales@poisonedpen.com>; <http://www.poisonedpen.com>.

CALIFORNIA

Book'em Mysteries, 360 Acacia St, Sierra Madre CA 91024–1508.

Book'em Mysteries, 1118 Mission St, South Pasadena CA 91030–3212; Barry Martin; (800) 4BOOKEM; (818) 799–9600; fax: (818) 799–9605; <mystbks@aol.com>; <http://www.gbm.net/bookem/>.

Coffee, Tea And Mystery, 13232 Springdale, Westminster CA 92683; Joan Wunsch, owner; (714) 898–CLUE.

Grounds For Murder, 3858 Fifth Ave, San Diego CA 92103; Phyllis Brown; (619) 299–9500.

It's A Mystery To Me, 20125 Paseo Luis, Yorba Linda CA 92686–5717; Susan Scheide.

"M" Is For Mystery, 74 E Third Ave, San Mateo CA 94401; Ed and Jean Kaufman and Deborah Harter; (415) 401–8077; fax: (415) 401–8079.

Mainly Mysteries, 424 E Main St, Ventura CA 93001–2627; Patty Grossman.

Mysteries To Die For, 2940 E Thousand Oaks Blvd, Thousand Oaks CA 91362; Audrey Moore; (916) 362–3278.

Mysterious Galaxy, 3904 Convoy St #107, San Diego CA 92111; Terry Gilman, Jeff Mariott, Maryelizabeth Hart; (800) 811–4747; fax: (619) 268–4775; <mystgalaxy@ax.com>; <http://www.mystgalaxy.com>.

The Mysterious Book Shop, 8763 Beverly Blvd, Los Angeles CA 90048–1803; Sheldon MacArthur; (800) 821–9017; fax: (310) 659–2962.

Mystery Annex, 1407 Ocean Front Walk, Venice CA 90291; (310) 399–2360.

Mystery Ink, 332 Forest Ave Ste 9, Laguna Beach CA 92651–2124; Debbie Mitsch.

San Francisco Mystery Bookstore, 4175 24th St, San Francisco CA 94114; Bruce Taylor; (415) 282–7444; <http://www.mysterynet.com/sfmb>.

Secret Staircase Bookshop, 2223 Broadway, Redwood City CA 94063; Diane Blakely; (415) 366–1222; <secstbks@secretstaircasebooks.com>; <http://www.secretstaircasebooks.com/>.

Snoopers, The Mystery Bookstore, 5990 14th Ave #D, Sacramento CA 95820; (916) 456–5990; <snoopers@softcom.net>; <http://virtualmarkets.net/vme/snoopers>.

Colorado

Book Sleuth, 2513 W. Colorado, Colorado Springs CO 80904; Helen Randal; (719) 632–2727.

Murder By The Book, 1574 S Pearl St, Denver CO 80210–2635; Shirley Beaird, owner; (303) 871–9401.

Rue Morgue, 946 Pearl St, Boulder CO 80302–5109. Tom & Enid Schantz; (800) 356–5586; <Tomenid@aol.com>.

Connecticut

Alibi Books, 718 Broad St Apt D1, Meriden CT 06450–4372; S.I. Davis, proprietor.

Mystery File, 62 Chestnut Rd, Newington CT 06111–1601; Steve Lewis, proprietor.

District of Columbia

MysteryBooks, 1715 Connecticut Ave NW, Washington DC 20009–1108; Martha Pennigar, owner; (800) 955–2279; (202) 483–1600; fax: (202) 387–8252; <boris1@killerbooks.com>; <http://www.killerbooks.com>.

Florida

Miss Marbles Parlour, 502 Olivia St, Key West FL 33040; Dilys Winn; (305) 296–6939; fax: (305) 296–8681.

Murder On Miami Beach, 16850 Collins Ave, Miami Beach FL 33160; Joanne Sinchuk; (305) 956–7770.

Snoop Sisters Mystery Bookshop, 566 Indian Rocks Rd N, Belleair Bluffs FL 33770; Susan Rose; (800) 858–7846; <CJJW55A@prodigy.com>; <http://pages.prodigy.com/FL/cjjw55a/snoop.html>

Georgia

Science Fiction & Mystery Bookshop, 2000F Cheshire Bridge Rd NE, Atlanta GA 30324–4273; Mark Stevens; (404) 634–3226.

The Subject Is Mystery, 1183 Garden Pl, Norcross GA 30093–4047; Laurie Carlton.

Illinois

Centuries & Sleuths Bookstore, 743 Garfield St, Oak Park IL 60304; August Aleksy; (708) 848–7243.

Mystery Loves Company, 3338 N Southport, Chicago IL 60657; Bob Wackerman; (312) 935–1000.

The Mystery Nook, Illinois Antique Center, 308 S W Commercial, Peoria IL 61602; (309) 685–3840.

Scotland Yard Books Ltd., 556 Green Bay Rd, Winnetka IL 60093–2221; (847) 446–2214; fax: (847) 446–2210; <ruhroh@ziplink.net>.

Something Wicked, 816 Church St, Evanston IL 60201; (847) 328–1300; <smwicked@concentric.net>.

Uncle Buck's Mysteries, 390 Oak Hill Dr, Belleville IL 62223; (618) 397–3568.

Indiana

Fountain Of Mystery Books, 1119 Prospect St, Indianapolis IN 46203–1936; Winona Eads; (317) 635–CLUE.

Mysteries and Make Believe, 309 S Walnut St, Muncie IN 47305; Susan Danner; (317) 288-1122; <Dannersbookend@Juno.com>.

Kansas

At Murder's Gate, 1902 Fairview Ave, Wichita KS 67203–2527; Margaret Simmons; (316) 264–8150.

Mystery Hound, 13416 Santa Fe Dr, Lenexa KS 66215–3664; Ann Huseman; (913) 541–8008.

The Raven Bookstore, 8 E 7th St, Lawrence KS 66044–2702; Pat Kehde; (913) 749–3300.

Maryland

Mystery Bookshop Bethesda, 7700 Old Georgetown Rd, Bethesda MD 20814–6100; Jean McMillen; (800) 572–8533; fax: (301) 907–4950.

Mystery Loves Company, 1730 Fleet St, Baltimore MD 21231–2919; Kathy Harig; (800) 538–0042; fax: (410) 276–6708; <kharig@epfl2.epflbalto.org>.

Mystery Tales, 24 Annapolis St, Annapolis MD 21401–1308; Barbara Pierce; (410) 280–0660.

Massachusetts

Kate's Mystery Books, 2211 Massachusetts Ave, Cambridge MA 02140–1211; Kate Mattes, owner; (617) 491–2660; <katemysbks@aol.com>.

Mystery House On Cape Cod, 545 Main St, Harwich Port MA 02646–1839; Jane Mendoza; (508) 430–2907.

Space-Crime Continuum, 92 King St, Northampton MA 01060; Chris Aylott, owner; (413) 584–0994; <spacrime@crocker.com>; <http://www.io.com/~aylott>.

Spenser's Mystery Bookshop, 223 Newbury St, Boston MA 02116–2568; Andrew Thurnauer; (617) 262–0880.

Michigan

Aunt Agatha's Mystery Bookstore, 213 S Fourth Ave, Ann Arbor MI 48104; James Agnew; (313) 769–1114.

Deadly Passions Bookshop, 157 S Kalamazoo Mall, Kalamazoo MI 49007–4823; Jim Huang; (800) 643–6737.

Murder, Mystery & Mayhem, 35167 Grand River Ave, Farmington MI 48335; Yvonne and Robert Peaslee, owners; (810) 471–7210; <Yvonne8@aol.com>.

Minnesota

Once Upon A Crime, 604 W 26th St, Minneapolis MN 55405–3303; Steve Stilwell; (612) 870–3785.

Uncle Edgar's Mystery Bookstore, 2864 Chicago Ave, Minneapolis MN 55407–1320; Jeff Hatfield; (612) 824–9984; fax: (612) 827–6394.

Missouri

Big Sleep Books, 239 N Euclid Ave, St Louis MO 63108–1527; Chris King; (314) 361–6100; <jgambit@smartnet.net>.

Miss DeMeanors: Crimes Crafts & Collectibles, 200 Broadway, PO Box 78, Jamesport MO 64648; P.J. Herrin; (816) 684–6633; <jgambit@smartnet.net>.

New Hampshire

A Compleat Mystery Bookshop, 7 Commercial Alley, Portsmouth NH 03801; Susan and David Ekholm, proprietors; (603) 430–7553; fax: (603) 430–9387; <mysteribks@aol.com>.

Mystery Lovers Ink, 8 Stiles Rd, Salem NH 03079–2847; Joanne Romano; (603) 898–8060.

New York

Black Orchid Bookshop, 303 E 81st St, New York NY 10028; Joe Guglielmelli or Bonnie Claeson; (212) 734–5980; <BOrchid@aol.com>.

The Haunted Bookshop, 100 Elmwood Ave, Buffalo NY 14201; Robert Hatch.

Haven't Got A Clue, 454 Broadway, Saratoga Springs NY 12866; Betsy Blaustein; (518) 583–7176.

Murder Ink, 2486 Broadway, New York NY 10025–7428; Jay Pearsall; (800) 488–8123.

Murder Ink II, 1467 Second Ave, New York NY 10021; Jay Pearsall; (212) 517–3222.

The Mysterious Bookshop, 129 W 56th St, New York NY 10019–3881; Otto Penzler, owner; (800) 352–2840.

Mystery Bookstore Of Long Island, 173A Woodfield Rd, W Hempstead NY 11552–2526; Adrienne Williams; (516) 565–4710.

Partners & Crime, 44 Greenwich Ave, New York NY 10011; John Douglas, Maggie Griffin, Kizmin Reeves, Jon Teta, Maggie Topkis, co-owners; (212) 243–0440; fax: (212) 243–4624; <partners@crimepays.com>; <http://www.crimepays.com/>.

Science Fiction, Mysteries & More, 140 Chambers St, New York NY 10007–1007, Alan Zimmerman, owner; (212) 385–8798.

North Carolina

Murder For Fun, 2115 W Marilyn Cir, Cary NC 27513–5302; Pat O'Keefe.

Ohio

Foul Play, 6072 Busch Blvd, Columbus OH 43229–2562; Antoinette Cross; (614) 848–KLUE.

Murder By The Book, 1574 Girard St, Akron OH 44301–2141; Peg Sanford.

Murder Is Served, 5273 Bittersweet Dr, Dayton OH 45429; John Bierman; (513) 438–0211.

Oklahoma

Mystery Book Company, 3747F South Harvard, Tulsa OK 74135; Julie Buckley; (918) 744–4082; fax: (918) 744–1783; <jbuckley@iamerica.net>.

Pennsylvania

Mystery Books, 916 W Lancaster Ave, Bryn Mawr PA 19010; Norma Frank and Bob Nissenbaum; (610) 526–9993; <mystrybk@op.net>; <http://www.mysterybooksonline.com>.

Mystery Lovers Bookshop, 514 Allegheny River Blvd, Oakmont PA 15139–1648; Richard Goldman and Mary Alice Gorman; (888) 800–6078; <71652.2654@CompuServe.com>; <http://ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/mysteryloversbookshop>.

Whodunit?, 1931 Chestnut St, Philadelphia PA 19103–3530; Art Bourgeau; (215) 567–1478.

Rhode Island

Murder By The Book, 1281 N Main St, Providence RI 02904–1827; Kevin Barbero; (401) 331–9140.

Tennessee

Mostly Mysteries, 4108 Hillsboro Pike, Nashville TN 37215.

Texas

Adventures In Crime And Space, 609A W 6th St, Austin TX 78701; (512) 473–2665; fax: (512) 473–2693; <acs@eden.com>; <http://www.eden.com/~acs >.

Murder By The Book, 2342 Bissonnet St, Houston TX 77005–1512; Martha Farrington; (713) 524–8597; fax: (713) 522–7945; <mrdrbybk@neosoft.com>; <http://www.neosoft.com/~mrdrbybk>.

Mysteries & More, 11139 North IH 35 #176, Austin TX 78753–3242; Jan & Elmer Grape; (512) 837–6768; fax: (512) 339–1695; <Mystrymore@aol.com>

Mystery Book Store, 6906 Snider Plaza, Dallas TX 75205–1333; Geraldine Galentree, manager; (888) 265–7057; <Mystery@onramp.net>; <http://www.clickanddagger.com>.

Washington

Killing Time Mystery Books, 2821 NE 55th Street, Seattle WA 98105; <http://members.aol.com/ktbooks>.

MisterE, 1501 Pike Place Market #432, Seattle WA 98101; (206) 622–5182.

Mysteries Unlimited, 18820 Aurora Ave N, Seattle WA 98133–3914; Gail Mackey; (206) 546–8853.

Mystery Ink, 2521 W Longfellow Ave, Spokane WA 99205–1548.

Seattle Mystery Bookshop, 117 Cherry St, Seattle WA 98104; (206) 587–5737.

Wisconsin

Booked For Murder, 2701 University Ave, Madison WI 53705–3700; Mary Helen Becker; (800) 200–5996; <stoddard@itis.com>; <http://www.infohiway.com/way/booked>.

Mystery One Bookshop, 2109 North Prospect Ave, Milwaukee WI 53202–1110; Richard Katz; (414) 347–4077; fax: (414) 347–9878; <mystery1@execpc.com>; <http://execpc.com/~mystery1/mystery1.html>.

Canada

Dead Write Books, 4374 W 10th Ave, Vancouver BC V6R 2H7, CANADA; (604) 228–8223; <whidwarf@iceonline.com>; <http://www.iceonline.net/home/whidwarf/webpage.html>.

Murder & Mayhem, 12 Lock St, Port Dalhousie, St. Catharines ON L2N 5B5, CANADA; Myra Masterson, proprietor; (905) 646–8281.

Mystery Merchant Bookstore, 1952 W 4th Ave, Vancouver BC V6J 1M5, CANADA; Christa Pritchard; (604) 739–4311.

Prime Crime Mystery Bookstore, 891 Bank St, Ottawa ON K1S 3W4, CANADA; Linda Wiken, (613) 238–CLUE; <mystery@magi.com>.

Sleuth Of Baker Street, 1600 Bayview Ave, Toronto ON M4G 3B7, CANADA; J.D. Singh; (800) 361–2701; <sleuth@inforamp.net>.

Whodunit? Mystery Bookstore, 165 Lilac St, Winnipeg MB R3M 2S1, CANADA; Henrietta Wilde and Gaylene Chesnut, proprietors; (204) 284–9100.

England

Crime In Store, 14 Bedford St, Covent Garden, London, WC2E 9HE, U.K.; Ralph Spurrier; +0171–379–3795.

Ming Books, 10 Hartcran House, Gibbs Couch, Watford, WD1 5EZ, U.K.; +0181–421–3733.

Murder One, 71–73 Charing Cross Rd, London, WC2H 0AA, U.K.; Maxim Jakubowski; +0171–734–3483.

Germany

Die Wendeltreppe, Brückenstrasse 34, Frankfurt, D-60594, GERMANY; Jutta Wilkesmann; +069–611341.

Ireland

Mainly Murder Bookstore, 2A Paul St, Cork, IRELAND; Patricia Barry; +021–272413.

Murder Ink, 9 Chatham St, Dublin 2, IRELAND; Michael Gallagher; +01–677–7570.

Australia

Gaslight Books, Bonner Ct, Neptune St, Woden, ACT 2606, AUSTRALIA; Gayle Lovett; +62–825995.

Wow! That was so long, there's no more room to tell you about all the upcoming conventions, magazines, and happenings. Drop me a line if I've missed your favorite mystery bookstore. And, you can always let me know about anything else happening in the mystery world. Stop by my website to learn more about what's going on: <http://www.murderonthemenu.com>

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WHEN IN ROME...

LINDSEY DAVIS AND HER MYSTERIES OF THE ANCIENT WORLD

BY JEFFREY MARKS

Vividly imagined ancient Roman settings, cynical humor, romance, and a jaunty, somewhat tattered hero—all of these elements are turning Lindsey Davis's Marcus Didius Falco mysteries into international favorites.

Falco, private informer, is a member of the plebeian classes, a former legionnaire who has served a term in the frontier province of Britain, but has now returned home to Rome. He is the de facto head of a large, worrisome, and impoverished extended family. At once a hardheaded cynic and an incurable romantic, this staunch republican is practical enough to work for the Emperor Vespasian when need be. (The books take place around 70 A.D., when Vespasian and his sons, Titus and Domitian, controlled Rome.)

Perhaps one of the most enjoyable aspects of the novels is the ongoing romance between Falco and Helena Justina, the high-spirited daughter of a senator. Through their unconventional relationship Davis is able to explore the full range of Roman society from the hardscrabble neighborhood where Falco was raised to the inner sanctums of the ruling classes.

Davis talked about her work from her home in Greenwich, England. She notes that her latest lodgings are a step up from the flat she had when she started the series—a flat which served as the model for Falco's more than humble sixth-floor walkup on the Aventine.

TAD: When did you start writing?

DAVIS: A very early age. I was interested in writing except I didn't know it was something you could do as your proper job. I had trouble choosing between English and history, but I was better at English and I wanted to go to

Jeffrey Marks is a freelance writer from Cincinnati, Ohio. He recently began a mystery series featuring a Beatles-loving detective.

Oxford University. So that settled it. I expected that when I left university that I would have a real job and probably stay with that. In fact, I did have a "proper" job and go to an office for thirteen years.

My original intention was to write women's romantic fiction. I wanted to write about the Civil War, which is not your civil war, but our own: the one in the 17th century with the Roundheads and Cavaliers. I wrote several series set in that time period for women's magazines in this country. When I started to write novels for publication, I found the era wasn't wanted by publishers—in fact, they didn't want straight historical fiction. I came to the Romans by accident, trying to come across something unusual to attract their interest.

TAD: Why the Early Empire? What led you to this particular era?

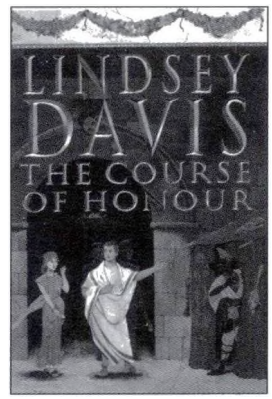
DAVIS: I thought that people would be familiar with the *I, Claudius* books, and the very good BBC series on the telly here. I think you've seen it in the States as well. So that background helped.

The First Century has a great deal of Latin literature. So there's plenty of research material and quite a bit of archaeology material available. My books take place slightly after the Claudian period in the time of Emperor Vespasian. He attracted me because of my job. I'd been a civil servant and I was interested in the man who put the bureaucracy right after the chaos.

Because I'm a European, I'm also interested in the business of the Empire and how that was run. Europe as a concept was very much on the minds of the people who lived in Europe in those days. In my German book (*The Iron Hand of Mars*), a chieftain tried to repel the Romans and create a huge Celtic empire. When I was writing it, the Berlin Wall came down and that set up a lot of resonance for me.

I'm also interested in the Roman concept of marriage, which was very basic in some ways. If two people consented to actually physically live together, they were married. That was all the Empire required. You didn't need a contract or a ceremony. When one party decided it was over and left—that was divorce. Which seems to me very sensible.

The other thing I think was very sensible was their political structure. The way a man had set stages. He didn't decide to be a politician. You were expected to give service to your country at certain times in your life. You



had to be in the civil side of things, and you had to be in the army. But in between, you went away to work on your estate and be a private man. Look at what politicians do now. Sometimes I think one of the problems is that they grow up, they go to school, they go to university, and they become politicians. They've never held down a job and been in the real world. Maybe if we had something more like the Romans did, it would be a good thing.

TAD: You chose to write mysteries. Why?

DAVIS: Mysteries were an accident. I wrote a serious straight novel about the Romans (*Course of Honour* which was published in January 1997, in the U.K.), but at the time nobody wanted that story. They all thought it wouldn't sell. Having researched the period, the city of Rome in the time of the Caesars reminded me of the big, dangerous metropolitan cities that we associate with the gumshoe stories which were another interest of mine. I tried putting them together in the hopes that it would work. To my surprise, it did.

TAD: How do you research a Falco novel?

DAVIS: In every way I can. I enjoy it

A LINDSEY DAVIS READING LIST

THE MARCUS DIDIUS FALCO MYSTERIES

The Silver Pigs, 1989

Shadows in Bronze, 1990

Venus in Copper, 1991

The Iron Hand of Mars, 1992

Poseidon's Gold, 1994

Last Act in Palmyra, 1996

Time to Depart, 1997

A Dying Light in Corduba, January 1998

OTHER

The Course of Honour, November 1998

(*American publication dates*)

and that's very important. Research isn't a job you could do well if you felt it was a chore, because you've got to do as much as you can. I read anything I see that has the word "Roman" in the title. I go to archaeological sites and museums as much as possible. I love doing that. And then I get ideas from my research. I don't write the other way around. I don't say "I'd like to write about so-and-so; I wonder what there is." I gather ideas from what I've done and build on them.

TAD: Do you travel much to Rome? The provinces?

DAVIS: I go to Rome itself every year, whether or not I'm writing a book about Rome. It's a wonderful city. If I'm writing a book about the provinces, I try to go there as well, which is very nice. Another good choice on my part, I'd say.

I go to archaeological sites quite a bit. When I was young, I participated in a dig in England—and that's perhaps why I didn't go on. When you do archaeological digging in Britain, you get rained on a lot. I soon gave up.

TAD: Would you like to visit ancient

Rome if you had the opportunity?

DAVIS: No, probably not. It wouldn't be comfortable for a woman and I would find that very restrictive. I'm very much a twentieth-century girl. In some ways it would be interesting to see whether it was as civilized as it sounds the civilized bits were. I always think that if I were to go back in time, I wouldn't go back in the comfortable classes. My fate would be to be an ordinary person. I suspect in that society it was a pretty hard life.

TAD: How true to history are Vespasian and his sons in your books? Have their characters been modified to fit the plots?

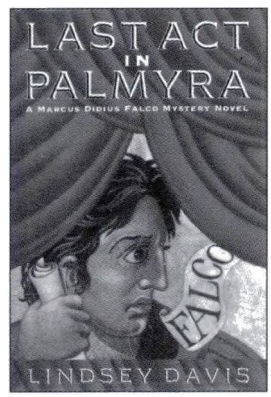
DAVIS: They're as true as I can make them. I don't think there's any point in using real characters or events unless you do your best to make it as right as you can. Of course, we really can't know exactly what they were like, but tidbits and some sources exist. I started off with *The Life of Vespasian* and *The Life of Titus* and anywhere they're mentioned in any of the other Latin authors. Titus was supposed to be a very sociable man and people seemed to like him. That helps.

TAD: Do you plan on using other historical figures as secondary characters?

DAVIS: It's difficult because you're obliged to make them as real as possible. Often enough we don't know much about them. My latest book, the one still in manuscript, is about the aqueducts. I happened to read that Tinus, the famous Roman writer on the aqueducts, was consul in the year that I'm writing about. So it struck me as a wonderful idea to have him get involved in a mystery with Falco and that could arouse his first interest in the subject. He didn't actually write about them until some time later. We don't know much about him except that he was very practical and sensible.

TAD: Where do you see Falco and Helen's relationship going?

DAVIS: People sometimes say to me, "when are they going to get married?" I think that they're as married as they're likely to get. They will stay together. They have one child, so perhaps they will have others. And they are partners. And as much as possible, they are partners in solving the mystery as well. Although it's difficult to show that in Rome because of the constraints of Roman society.



TAD: Your non-mystery historical novel, *Course of Honour,* deals with Vespasian and his mistress?

DAVIS: Yes. It's not a mystery. I wrote it in the third person from the girl's point of view, which is obviously very different. I think people will still recognize the style as being written by me though. Antonia Caenis, the girl, was a slave originally and became a freed slave. She worked for the mother of the Emperor Claudius, who was a very important Roman lady who'd been widowed young. Afterwards, she never remarried, which made her one of the most independent women from that age, fascinating in itself.

Vespasian knew Antonia Caenis in his youth. But he was ambitious. Since it was illegal for him as a Senator to marry a freed slave, he decided that he would not see her. He had three children with his Roman wife and from what we can tell, they were married at least eleven years, probably much longer. He didn't see Antonia Caenis in that time. His wife died; they were getting on in age. At that point, he went back to Antonia Caenis, which he was allowed to do since he had done things properly first. They lived as man and wife. After a period, he became Emperor, another social bar put on him. He couldn't have a wife who had been a slave and everyone assumed that he was going to leave her again, but he didn't. So the twists and turns in the plot are absolutely marvelous for a would-be romantic writer. A three tissue-box book.

TAD: The Roman class system seems to be a major theme in your work. Why is that?

DAVIS: It's a powerful motive. In some ways, the class system was extremely rigid, and there were rules, especially for the upper classes. As I mentioned, Senators were not allowed to marry freed slaves. They were also not allowed to marry actors or actresses—people in the theater. Society held three broad grades: a Senatorial class, middle classes, and the lower classes. In theory, they were strictly divided, but it was possible to improve yourself. That's one of the reasons I find the period very good to write about—because lots of people were trying to better themselves. Some tried to do it legitimately and some not. That's good material for me.

The most interesting example of a

person who did well was a slave called Narcissus who worked for the Emperor Claudius. He started at the very lowest possible level and he became the chief minister under Claudius. He also became the richest man that anyone in the Roman Empire had ever heard of. So he's a prime example of what someone could do, given ambition.

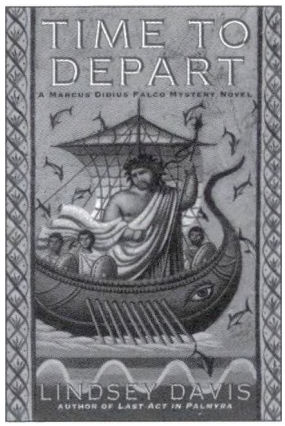
TAD: With all your research and interests, what do you read?

DAVIS: Not surprisingly, I read a lot about the Romans. Being a historical novelist and a mystery writer makes it your job. Everyone expects that you're reading similar detective books. In fact, when I want to relax, I go away and read something like a book on gardens. Something totally different.

I do read novels. I like them to have a sense of humor, but so few of them do. So if I have to name my absolute favorite, in terms of who I'd look for in a bookstore, it would be Terry Pratchett. I don't know if you have him in the States. I think the reason I like him is that he does use his imagination in such a wide way. He draws on all aspects of our culture and yet he tells a good story in each book as well telling good jokes.

TAD: It seems that your books have a very good sense of humor as well. Does that stem from you?

DAVIS: Yes, I can't write any other way. I see the world in that way. I think that part of it is the city I come from—Birmingham. The people there have a naturally dry, slightly despondent, slightly gloomy, outlook on the world. They are very funny although they're not famous for it in the way the Glaswegians or the Cockneys are known for their sense of humor. Definitely, that is definitely part of my character and it comes through in my writing.



TAD: You mentioned your fascination with history. What other time periods would you like to write about?

DAVIS: The 17th century as I've said. I like the politics and the social side of it. Other periods attract me as well, but I wouldn't want to write about periods that other people were writing about. One of the attractions of the Romans was that in this country when I started, I was the only person doing it. I wasn't following in anyone else's footsteps or copying anyone else.

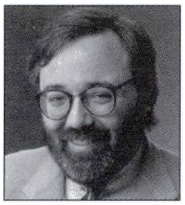
I'd especially like to write a book set in the present day. Partly to show that I can do it. I've written nine Falco novels so far. By July, I'll have ten Roman books out in the UK. I've become so firmly associated with the Romans that people think that's all I can write. So I would like to tackle something different. Maybe a non-mystery and up-to-date. The difficulty is that once you have a really cracking idea, you can't do anything that's not as good, and getting another cracking idea is hard.

TAD: You have two publication schedules due to the lag between the U.S. and the Britain. Can you tell us about the latest Falco book in the States?

DAVIS: *A Dying Light in Corduba* is set in Spain. I've just finished yet another one called *Three Hands in the Fountain* which will be the new one in the UK. It's about a serial killer. Kind of grisly when you think about it. That's due out in England in June.

TAD: Do you plan to keep doing the Falco series?

DAVIS: Well, I certainly have to do one more. I'm sure my publisher will want me to do more after that. Can I go on doing that? It's great fun at the moment. I don't know how long it can last. Maybe after twenty I'll think again. I wouldn't like to stop altogether. Even if I did something different, I'd like to do Falcos as well. ■



THE CRIME SCREEN

BY RIC MEYERS

It may be summer wherever you are, but it's winter where I am and time for my newly annual list of the top and bottom ten worst crime movies of 1996. That's not mystery or detective movies, mind you, because this isn't the "Mystery Screen" or "Tec Screen" column. It's "Crime Screen" and that's perfectly fitting considering the variety of my lists.

By now everyone knows what a good year it was for films in general, with different movies taking all the major awards. At holiday time, you couldn't throw a popcorn kernel without hitting a memorable viewing experience; including *Big Night, Shine, The English Patient, The People vs. Larry Flynt,* and even *Evita* (if you like a two-hour music video consisting of huge crowds waving white kerchiefs).

The crime flicks were no exception, so with further ado, rip these pages out, take it to your local video shop and rent:

The Armchair Detective
Top Ten Films of the Year

Bound

Film noir lovers should have a great time with this twisty, curvy (in more ways than one) exercise in crime slime, with Gina Gershon and Jennifer Tilly having a high old time trying to steal two million dollars out from under the nose of a mob money launderer. It's double, triple, and even maybe quadruple crosses with a sinewy script and fascinating filming technique by yet another pair of brother scripter/directors. Whoever would have thought that there would be an entire category of film that could be called "hard-boiled new-wave crime-mellers created by two brothers"? But with the Coens (see no. 3 below), the Dahls (à la *Red Rock West* and *The Last Seduction*), and now the guys who made this, we have a legitimate sub-genre.

Courage Under Fire

In the mass of great new films premiering near the end of the year, this—clearly the summer's best effort—got all but completely lost. This "*Rashomon* meets *A Soldier's Story*" was Hollywood filmmaking, but Hollywood filmmaking at its finest. Denzel Washington proves again he's the real deal as a guilt-racked military officer investigating a Gulf War incident that left a female 'copter pilot dead. The conflicting stories of the survivors lead him to a personal catharsis, as well as giving Meg Ryan and Lou Diamond Phillips an opportunity for some classy performances.

Fargo

The Coen brothers bounce back from their *Hudsucker Proxy* fiasco with a sweet but violent tale of midwestern crime and punishment, featuring all-time great characters and performances by William H. Macy (as a despicable, hapless loser who brings a whale of anguish unto himself and everyone around him in his lust for money and overwhelming desire to be liked) and Frances McDormand (as a cheery but dogged, pregnant sheriff of a tiny town which suddenly has a kidnapping and multiple murder on its hands). Never predictable, often shocking, but almost always pleasing in its weird way, *Fargo* is the best of the year, hands down, ya know?

Hamlet

People never seem to remember that Willy, Bill-boy, Will-bill, "Shakey," Shakespeare was the Mickey Spillane of his time, what with all the killing and stuff his tragedies were rife with. And this *Hamlet,* splendidly mounted with an unedited text by Kenneth, Kenny, Kenboy, ex-Mr. Emma Thompson, "Branflakes" Branagh, is the stuff of both cul-

ture with a capital "K," and pop culture. Bring a pillow for your aching fanny, choose one of the guest-star scenes (featuring Jack Lemmon, Billy Crystal, Gerard Depardieu, or Robin Williams—but don't miss Charlton Heston) to pass that $3.00 cup of Sprite, but sit back, relax, and let this tale of royal murder and revenge wash over you.

Lone Star

Some people hate it, some people think it's better than everything else I've mentioned put together, but writer/director John Sayles's middle-class, southwestern dabble in Jim Thompson territory makes for engrossing viewing if you can spare the time.

Mission: Impossible

Jim Phelps on Cruise control, but still a fun and funky little adaptation with enough brain candy to keep your eyes and mind occupied. A great cast, two show-stopping sequences, rich direction by Brian DePalma, and a plot which separated the Saturday matinee action movie lovers from the whining, power-mad, envious hypocrites who bawled that "the plot is too complicated!" after repeatedly demanding that very thing from almost every movie they reviewed prior. Sure, the ending defies every known law of physics, human biology, and explosives, but hey, the commercials warned you to "expect the impossible."

Ransom

Ron Howard does not know life. He only knows television and movie sets. He grew up on "The Andy Griffith Show" and then "Happy Days," so I suppose he can be forgiven for making movies that portray actor motivations as opposed to regular everyday human ones. That's what's marred most of his movies that weren't based on true stories (like *Apollo 13*). He always puts in too much plot and contrived movie motivation (*Backdraft, The Paper, Far and Away*). *Ransom* was his attempt at making an "adult" film, and a fine attempt it was, but like the insulated young man he is, it occasionally came off like a child swearing louder and louder to see if any of the older people around him would notice. Even though the whole movie would have been over if the kidnapper had actually acted like any real kidnapper and threatened the child in his father's hearing, the plot had a satisfying twist or two, the cast was full of talent, and the overall effect could not be faulted. It should come off even better on video.

Scream

Writer/director Wes Craven has pulled off an amazing feat here: a movie that is a real slasher film, a satire on slasher films, and a legitimate whodunit all at the same time. It's also an homage to Hitchcock, a teen date movie, a minor condemnation of tabloid journalism, and a few other things as well. Starting with a *Psycho*-like prologue in which a young woman is taunted, titillated, then terrorized by a phone caller who knows too much about horror movies, it moves on to a cat-and-mouse battle between a female teenager whose mother was murdered and a cagey masked killer who's out to punish the world. The finale is practically French farce with knives and guns as alleged murderers and possible victims go in and out of plot lines and doors, but the result is an impressive, ironic, satisfying, but very violent exercise in self-aggrandizement.

Trainspotting

This ode to the joys of heroin was still an energetic, invigorating film for anyone smart enough not to go looking for an excuse to shoot up. Even without the needles, there were enough cops, detectives, and subplots about crime and punishment to get this Scottish import an honored place on this hallowed list.

William Shakespeare's Romeo & Juliet

It's been a good year for this Marlowe wannabee (and I don't mean Philip). Some folks were horrified by this film's modern setting and rocking soundtrack, but I found the dichotomy refreshing, although not in the least believable. Even so, I enjoyed the energy of the filmmakers and the clever ways they adapted the couplet-laden text to reflect modern mores (my favorite being the way they renamed the character's guns to reflect Willy's original dialogue concerning swords). And I have to say that while the rest of the cast (Leonardo DiCaprio, John Leguizamo, Paul Sorvino, and others) did their best, Clare Danes as Juliet nailed every line like the landing of a Chinese gymnast.

Now that we're done with all the relative quality, you can also go out and rent (or make a note to avoid) the following:

The Armchair Detective

Bottom Ten of the Year

In their own awful way, they are at least as entertaining as some of the previous titles.

A Thin Line Between Love and Hate

I take the above disclaimer back on this one. This all black cast knock-off of *Fatal Attraction* is just plain really bad. Its star, co-writer, and director, Martin Lawrence, has recently been arrested for threatening passing motorists, and the co-star of his television show has sued him for sexual harassment. Sadly, she could use this movie as exhibit A.

Diabolique

To take a classic French suspense film and remake it into this silly, campy piece of offal is somewhat offensive to cinephiles. It could also be offensive to almost any woman, given the torment it heaps on the Isabelle Adjani character, the living lampoon they make of the Sharon Stone character, and the breast cancer jokes the Kathy Bates character makes. Go figure.

Eye for an Eye

A fourteen-year-old girl is raped and murdered, the killer gets off on a tech-

nicality, and the girl's grieving mother has to decide whether or not to take revenge. She does. Hooray. The end. Whether you believe in capital punishment or not, this simplistic, knee-jerk effort could have, and should have, been thirty minutes long.

The Glimmer Man

You know, in a way, it's kind of fun to watch Steven Seagal's career self-destruct. After the plain awfulness of *On Deadly Ground*, the audience rejected *Under Siege 2*. But having finally gotten back into the audience's good graces by letting himself be killed after ten minutes in *Executive Decision*, the former aikido teacher felt secure enough to completely disembowel the next step in his twelve-step program to revitalize his career. With massive re-editing, he turned what was supposed to be a buddy-cop comedy that would prove he could share the screen and could laugh at his own image into a sub-par "Steven Seagal" movie just like all his rapidly waning others. I'm sure his co-star, Keenen Ivory Wayans (or was that his brother Damon Wayans?), could only shake his head in wonder and sadness.

Kansas City

Robert Altman ruins a wonderful movie about jazz musicians in the '30s with an awful plot about a nutty woman who kidnaps a politician's wife to supposedly save her hood boyfriend. And when that nutty woman is played by the increasingly mannered and grating Jennifer Jason Leigh, you've got the makings of a four-cringer.

Last Man Standing

Walter Hill has directed one good movie. Interestingly it was the one that had any semblance of a sense of humor, *48 Hours*. To be fair, he has also produced *Alien* and *Aliens*. But he has also directed a string of increasingly humorless and flat out unbelievable studies in meaningless machismo. This reworking of Sergio Leone's spaghetti western *A Fistful of Dollars*, which was a reworking of Akira Kurasawa's samurai movie *Yojimbo* is the latest, and, one might say, worst of them (though I still think *Extreme Prejudice* holds the record by a squint). The rampant stupidity displayed by the characters in this one defy any sort of involvement even by the most bloodthirsty of audience members. It's a joke and a bad one at that.

Mulholland Falls

Speaking of *Extreme Prejudice*, it starred Nick Nolte, and you have to feel bad for the guy, because he also starred in this supposed homage to the "Hat Squad," a real-life band of 1950s detectives who, like movie serial heroes, always kept their Stetsons on. Well, this baby is a mess, pure and simple. One stilted scene follows another, deadening the audience with each passing word. It's so bad it's not even worth analyzing. Screening it would be like torturing a lab animal. Just let it go.

My Fellow Americans

Interesting how it's open season on the President. This movie, Clint Eastwood's *Absolute Power*, and Wesley Snipes's *Murder at 1600* all involve an investigation into White House shenanigans. In this age of Bill Clinton, I can't imagine why this sort of thing would become a trend. In any case, this so-called comedy, lightly based on the '60s sort-of comedy/chase thrillers like *A Man Could Get Killed* and *Arabesque* is a tired, predictable, joyless affair, made worthwhile only by watching great old pros like Jack Lemmon and James Garner having their way with the painfully contrived dialogue. And even that wears thin quickly, until you can only feel sorry for the gentlemen.

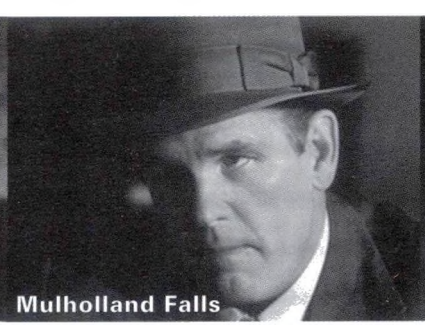
The Rich Man's Wife

Halle Berry is one of the screen's great beauties, but she seems to be coming down with Sheena Easton Syndrome. That's when a charming, delightful, unaffected young woman starts to become so self-aware that she degenerates into an annoyingly artificial individual. Comparing singer Easton's first appearances on Johnny Carson's "Tonight Show" with her last ones is painful. Comparing Berry's early screen appearances with this creaky, clichéd suspense effort is equally disturbing.

Striptease

What is wrong with movie executives? Why would they even release this or *Showgirls* to the theaters? If any movie screamed for "direct-to-video" release, it's this one...and that's no matter how good a job Andrew Bergman did adapting it from Carl Hiaasen's book (and the answer there is "not good enough"). Because, no matter what the source, and no matter how talented the filmmakers, this movie was about Demi Moore's naked breasts. And who's going to bring their wives, husbands, boyfriends, girlfriends, mothers, fathers, and children to see them? Who's going to even bring themselves to a public place to see them, as well as the surrounding movie about fellow strippers? Remember what happened to Pee Wee Herman? No, this baby is, was, and always will be meant for viewing in the privacy of one's own home. Best to discover there how mediocre it is. ■


Eye for an Eye


Mulholland Falls


Striptease

Report from 221B Baker Street

BY

SHERRY ROSE-BOND

AND SCOTT BOND

The Good Old Baker Street Journal

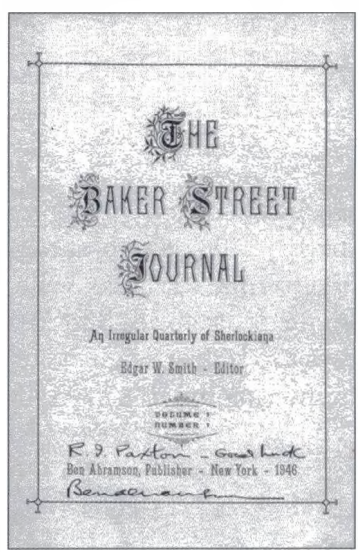
WHEN THE DEBUT ISSUE OF THE *BAKER STREET JOURNAL* WAS HANDED OUT AT THE JANUARY 1946 MEETING OF THE BAKER STREET IRREGULARS, IT WAS WIDELY BELIEVED THAT EVERYTHING THAT COULD POSSIBLY BE WRITTEN ABOUT MR. SHERLOCK HOLMES HAD ALREADY BEEN WRITTEN. THAT THIS same publication recently celebrated its landmark fiftieth anniversary certainly says something about Sherlockians' continued enthusiasm for the Sherlock Holmes canon, but just exactly what?

When the first issue made its appearance in those long ago days of 1946, the organization which created it, the Baker Street Irregulars, was in a period of transition. BSI founder, Christopher Morley, was depressed about his declining career and in increasingly poor health. More and more the group was being directed by Edgar W. Smith, an energetic Vice President of the Ford Motor Company and the man most responsible for shaping the BSI as we know it today. Morley and Smith, along with Chicago newspaperman, Vincent Starrett, had become interested in the idea of creating a regular publication devoted to Sherlockiana. This was spurred on, it would seem, by the success of *Profile by Gaslight,* a hardcover volume of Sherlockian essays edited by Smith and published in 1944. That the *Journal* became a reality and was given the auspicious launching it ultimately got was basically made possible by the sudden appearance on the New York scene of legendary Chicago book seller, Ben Abramson.

Abramson's Argus Book Shop had been a popular hangout for Chicago's literary and artistic professionals, among them Starrett and, when in town, Christopher Morley. Abramson (b. Lithuania, 1898) had entered the book business at an early age and had flourished in Chicago's rich cultural milieu, of which he himself became a vital part. Upon reaching middle age and a comfortable level of commercial success, Ben decided to supplement his book selling business with an ill-fated venture into the world of publishing. This took the form of an elaborately produced literary magazine, entitled *Reading and Collecting,* which he in part wrote, supplemented by contributions from various friends. Though the magazine was judged an artistic success, it proved a resounding commercial failure. It sent Abramson into deepening financial difficulties and, along with assorted other troubles, resulted in his leaving Chicago for the city of New York. Writing in the *Chicago Tribune,* Vincent Starrett lamented, "...it is not the flavor of old fiction or old times that we shall miss when Mr. Abramson takes his shop to New York, as he proposes to do. It will be Mr. Abramson, the personality, the human dynamo, the wearer of colored shirts, the seducer of pocketbooks, the garrulous, many-faceted Mr. Argus himself."

Starrett wrote to Edgar Smith about Abramson's imminent arrival and, once the new shop was established at 3 West 46th Street, Ben began meeting with Smith and Morley, both of whom had offices nearby. This soon led to plans for the first-ever journal devoted exclusively to the world of Mr. Sherlock Holmes. Smith and the Irregulars would supply the content, Abramson would bankroll the enterprise and act as publisher.

The assorted editors, along with Abramson and publication designer, Paul McPharlin, pulled out all stops to make the *Baker Street Journal* worthy of their lofty aspirations. The first issue contained one hundred eight pages of Sherlockian fun and scholarship, handsomely captured between yellow covers and presented with ornate Victorian typography and distinctive graphics by McPharlin. Many of the early essays



BSJ COVERS PROVIDED COURTESY OF SCOTT AND SHERRY BOND

were holdovers from *Profile by Gaslight,* and another Smith opus, *A Baker Street Four Wheeler.* These were rounded out by Smith's editorial, Morley's "Clinical Notes by a Resident Patient," a "terrace" section in memory of departed

Irregulars ("Stand with me here upon the terrace, for it may be the last quiet talk that we shall ever have."), and a section of reports from the early Scion Societies, plus other features. In the third issue, full-page photographic plates began to appear, adding to an already impressive presentation. It was really the writing, however, that was the glory of those early issues. Former *BSJ* editor, Philip Shreffler, recently noted that these early issues serve to remind us that "there was once an intellectual Camelot in Sherlockiana, an age during which devotion to ideas about Sherlock Holmes and the careful crafting of language to express those ideas were equally important" (*BSJ*, Vol. 46, no. 4). Christopher Morley, a founder of the *Saturday Review of Literature*, Smith, and Starrett were all accomplished craftsmen in the witty, urbane literary style of the thirties and forties, and their Sherlockian work is rediscovered with delight by each new generation. They set a high standard for all who aspired to see their efforts under the BSJ imprint. Not everyone succeeded matching them in stylishness and erudition, but there were many notable successes, and virtually everyone put his best literary foot forward.

The *Journal* was deemed a triumph by the Irregular membership, and each new issue was eagerly awaited. But soon dark clouds appeared on the Baker Street horizon from a very unexpected quarter. The estate of the late Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, in the person of his two surviving sons, Denis and Adrian, were only too well aware of the existence of the Baker Street Irregulars, the group which had relegated their father to the ignominious role of Dr. Watson's literary agent. They had also learned of the existence of the *Journal*, the contents of which they had not sanctioned and over which they had no control. A small war, lasting several years, broke out between the estate and the Baker Street Irregulars, with the estate demanding the cessation of publication and, preferably, the end of the group as well. Edgar Smith, ever the diplomat, was able to fend off the increasingly heated attacks of Denis and Adrian, but more serious problems were lurking just around the corner.

Because *Profile by Gaslight* had sold 17,000 copies, Ben Abramson decided that a press run of several thousand *BSJ*s per issue would not be out of place. To the consternation of all involved, the demand proved far less than anticipated. The post war reading public, obsessed with everything new and modern, viewed Victoriana as hopelessly dated and passé, and greeted the publication with icy indifference. The *Journal* went quickly and heavily into the red, taking its generous patron and publisher along with it. With the first issue of 1949, the *BSJ, Old Series,* ceased publication. Ben Abramson found himself unable to reimburse his faithful subscribers, losing some $15,000 in the enterprise, a very considerable sum for the time.

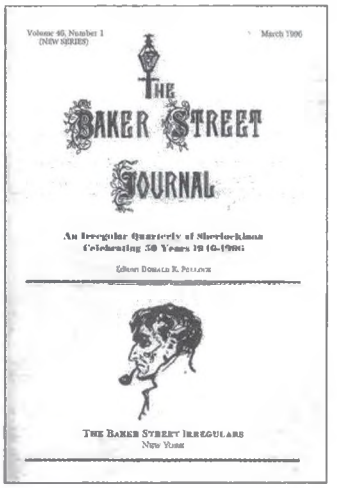
Ultimately, the scrappy Baker Street Irregulars picked themselves up, dusted themselves off, and bravely brought forth the *New Series BSJ* in 1951 with Edgar Smith and the Ford Motor Company secretarial pool handling most of the production chores. The indefatigable Dr. Julian Wolff took over the editorial reins from Smith in 1960, and the *New Series* has continued under various editors and publishers with only an occasional hiatus down to the present day. The bulk of each issue continues to be the trifling monographs sent in by Sherlockians the world over, along with poetry, letters, reviews, and news of doings in the Sherlockian world at large. The *Journal* now has a number of contributing cartoonists, of whom Scott is proud to have been the first featured on a regular basis. It also seems to have found an ideal editor in the person of Don Pollock, BSI, an extraordinarily dedicated Sherlockian, and co-founder and editor of the late, though highly regarded *Baker Street Miscellanea*.

And so, after fifty years of *BSJ* scrutiny, has everything that could possibly be written about Mr. Sherlock Holmes been written? In recent years, such commentators as Jon L. Lellenberg, author of the current BSI archival series, and Sherlockian travel maven David Hammer have all but proclaimed the death of the Grand Game, the principal tenets of which are that Sherlock Holmes is a real person, still living, and that Sherlockian scholarship is real scholarly inquiry into real events as recorded by Dr. Watson. Yes, it seems

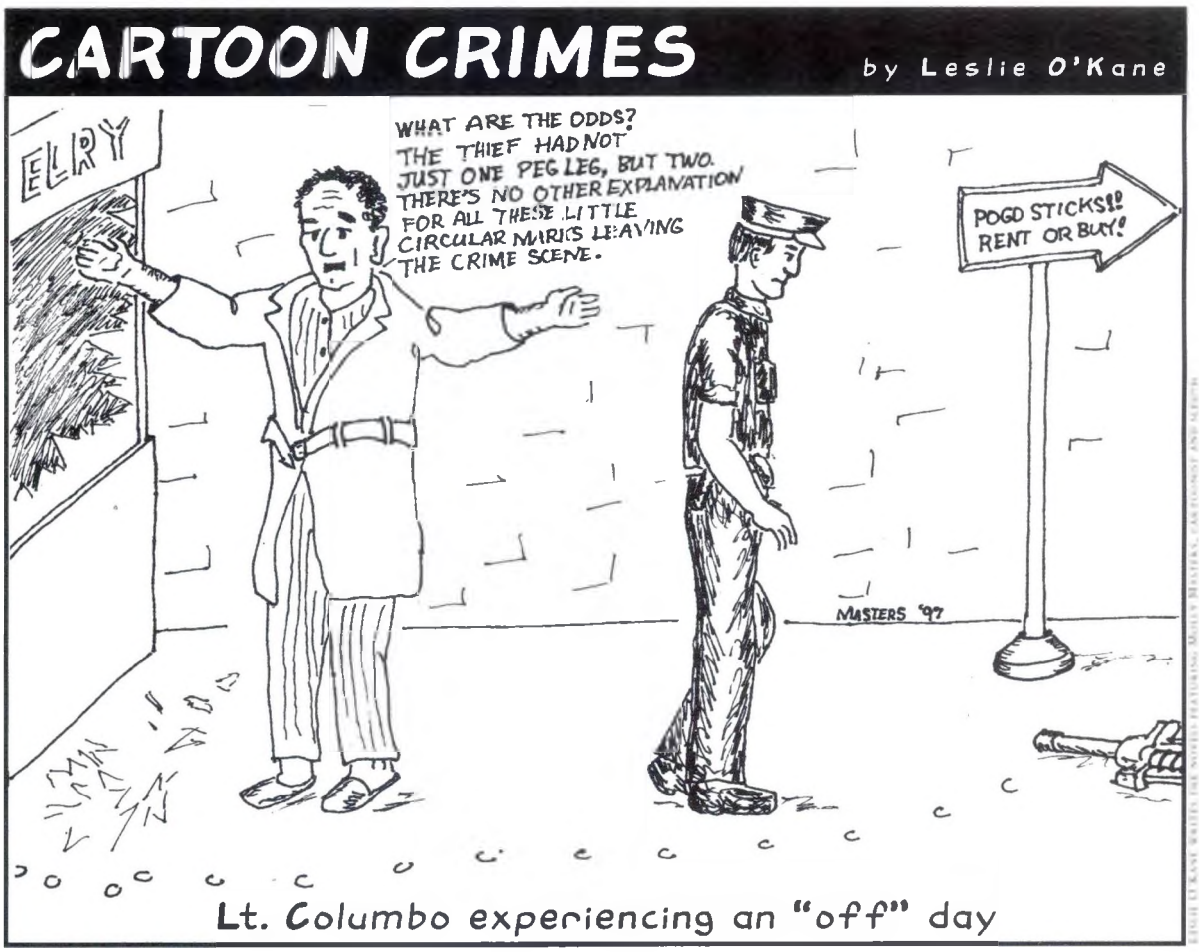
hard for even the most faithful to maintain that Mr. Holmes, now 143 years old, is still among us. And it seems that after literally thousands of Sherlockian scholarly essays, books, encyclopedias, and journals, we can look forward to few, if any, significant new revelations from the pages of the canon. Those who contributed to the *BSJ Old Series* and other early publications had an opportunity which will never be repeated—to write the cornerstone works on the literature of Mr. Sherlock Holmes. We Sherlockians of the nineteen-nineties struggle to bring something new and fresh to the table, but most of us realize that even our best efforts are mere footnotes to the work of those who have gone before.

For the *Baker Street Journal,* however, pure Sherlockian scholarship has never really been the point. The *Journal* has always been and continues to be the warming Baker Street fireside around which we of the Sherlockian world continue to gather. In it we find recorded our many comings and goings, arrivals and departures, BSI dinners and investitures, Scion Society activities, humor, opinions, and, of course, all the news about Mr. Sherlock Holmes that's fit to print. In its pages we get to know one another and derive from it that sense of family that unites Sherlockians from all walks of life. It is all very comfortable and low tech, a form which Dr. Watson would recognize and approve.

Back when the announcement of the first issue was made, Edgar Smith wrote, "*The Baker Street Journal* is for those who would conjure up that nostalgic gas-lit London of the turn of the century which saw the realization of a snug and peaceful world that would 'never be any worse and could never



be any better'—a world we would all give our hearts to capture and know again." The *Journal* has served its readers in this pursuit very well indeed. We look forward to its second fifty years. ■



MacKINLAY KANTOR AND THE POLICE NOVEL

BY JOHN APOSTOLOU

A NEWSPAPER REPORTER, SCREENWRITER, POET, WAR CORRESPONDENT, AND PULITZER PRIZE-WINNING HISTORICAL NOVELIST, MACKINLAY KANTOR ALSO PIONEERED A NEW TYPE OF MYSTERY FICTION—THE POLICE NOVEL.

Although no mystery writer has ever won a Pulitzer Prize, some recipients of this prestigious award have written mysteries. Among the Pulitzer winners who have contributed to our genre are William Faulkner, John P. Marquand, Norman Mailer, and the author whose work is discussed in this essay—MacKinlay Kantor.

A popular and prolific author, MacKinlay Kantor produced some fifty books of fiction and nonfiction as well as hundreds of short stories and magazine articles. He was a newspaper reporter, a screenwriter, a poet, a war correspondent, and, above all, a writer of historical fiction about the American past. His crowning achievement was *Andersonville*, a Civil War novel about an infamous Confederate prison camp, for which he won the Pulitzer Prize for fiction in 1956.

PULP STUFF

Little remembered today is the fact that MacKinlay Kantor wrote a considerable amount of crime fiction, most of it appearing in pulp magazines during the years 1928 to 1934. While struggling to establish himself as a writer, he turned out dozens of stories for the crime pulps. His first pulp stories, "Delivery Not Received" and "A Bad Night for Benny," were purchased by Edwin Baird, editor of *Real Detective Tales and Mystery Stories*. Paid at the rate of one cent a word, Kantor received a check for only $36.

Real Detective Tales, a lesser-known pulp, was published in Chicago. Robert Sampson tells us that the stories in this magazine "emphasized amateur investigators of remarkable mental abilities and adventures among the gangsters of the Prohibition era. The action was brisk, the scene contemporary."[1] Frequent contributors included Vincent Starrett, Seabury Quinn, and Eric Howard.

Several of the stories Kantor wrote for Baird were horror tales, with such titles as "The Thing in the Tunnel" and "Three Men Hanging." On one occasion, Baird asked him if he could do a novelette based on an existing piece of cover art. Kantor accepted the assignment and wrote "The Chicago Racket," as by Joe Feeney, in two days. His best stories from this period are "The Second Challenge," which featured a railroad detective, and "The Light at Three O'Clock," a locked-room mystery. Both stories have often been reprinted.

Kantor churned out pulp fiction to support himself and his family, while devoting his major effort to producing mainstream novels: *Diversey*, *El Goes South*, *The Jaybird*, and an unpublished novel, *Half Jew*. His attitude toward writing for the pulps is revealed in the following quote:

> I wrote it ["The Light at Three O'Clock"] in a solitary few hours of a single day, when I had fled to my workroom after reading the morning mail. Bills, nothing but bills; necessity, nothing but necessity. I had to get another check within a few days. My typewriter was the only machine for manufacturing it.[2]

Eventually Baird raised Kantor's rate to two cents a word, but one day in Baird's office, the editor announced he was lowering the rate back to a cent a word. Kantor stalked out, never to write for *Real Detective Tales* again. He continued, however, to write for the pulps, mainly for *Detective Fiction Weekly*.

His fortunes as a writer were improving. He moved from the Midwest to New Jersey in 1932 and was now represented by a first-rate New York agent, Sydney Sanders. The editor of *Detective Fiction Weekly*, Howard Bloomfield, liked Kantor's work and purchased sixteen of his short stories and a serialized novel in less than two years. The following excerpts from a profile, probably written by Bloomfield, gives us a picture of Kantor at age 29:

> Mr. Kantor is an extraordinary young man, and probably the one writer we know who really looks like a writer. Tall, loose-jointed, horn-rimmed glasses, long brown hair, he emerges periodically from New Jersey with a brief case under his arm and a pipe in his mouth. ...One of his passions is playing a guitar; another is reading histories of the Civil War; and a third is playing the fife.[3]

The one novel Kantor wrote for Bloomfield was printed in five parts and titled *The Little Men of Death* (June 10–July 8, 1933). Kantor relates a bizarre tale of poison darts and voodoo vengeance, with the action taking place in the wilds of New Jersey. It begins with explorer Edwin Garris being erroneously reported dead. The false report providing him virtual anonymity, Garris conducts a battle against "the little men of death," sinister beings from the

After having written dozens of articles for *TAD*, mystery fanzines, and reference books, **John Apostolou** has decided to try his hand at fiction. He's working on an historical mystery set in England during the 1930s.

Signal Thirty-Two, published in 1950, features jacket art by the author's wife, Irene Layne Kantor. The title refers to a phrase used on police radio that simply means "Assist Patrolman" or "Investigate" but implies danger and extreme emergency.

Peruvian jungle. The novel, though essentially a potboiler, is a smooth, well-written example of thriller fiction.

During his long writing career, Kantor displayed little interest in series characters, but he did write three police stories featuring the Glennan brothers for *Detective Fiction Weekly*. The titles are "Sparrow Cop" (Mar. 18, 1933), "The Trail of the Brown Sedan" (Jan. 6, 1934), and "The Hunting of Hemingway" (Apr. 21, 1934). These stories, reprinted years later in *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*, represent the best work Kantor ever did for the pulps. Although he did not think highly of his pulp work, Kaptor wrote that the second Glennan brothers story "has a kind of sharpness and pungency not always found in pulp magazine material."[4] The same comment could be made about the other two stories.

Drawing upon his experience as a news reporter, Kantor was able to create exciting police yarns, realistic in tone. The Glennan brothers, Nick and Dave, are members of a big city police department. Nick, who often displays courage and deductive skill, is the main character, while his older brother, Dave, plays a lesser role as a hardworking detective sergeant. The three stories, taken together, could be considered a novella chronicling Nick's rise from the rank of a rookie cop, walking his beat in a city park, to that of a highly regarded police detective.

Kantor wrote a few other police stories, but most of his tales for the pulps are of the surprise-ending type popularized by O. Henry. Plots are often farfetched and make liberal use of coincidence, with the settings usually in rural areas or small towns. The Glennan brothers trilogy, however, is a real achievement, clearly a forerunner to today's police procedural novels. Authorities on the police procedural have unfairly neglected the contributions of Kantor, Frederick Nebel, Victor Maxwell (probably a house name), and other pulpsters in the early development of that subgenre.

Kantor's pulp stuff, although not on a par with the work of Hammett and Chandler, is certainly superior, especially in characterization, to most pulp era fiction. But Kantor had no illusions about the quality of his pulp stories. In 1940, looking back on his early career, he made this candid, though overly modest, assessment:

> I used to write a great deal of stuff for the pulp detective-and-crime story magazines, in the years when I had to make a living that way, and I don't think that my rather complicated talents were harmed in the least. The severe routine of such endeavor stimulated my sense of plot and construction, which needed such stimulation very badly indeed. I was well aware that the stuff I wrote had little value, except in most cases it made entertaining narrative.[5]

POLICE WORK

In 1934, MacKinlay Kantor experienced his first major success with the publication of *Long Remember*, an historical novel concerning the Battle of Gettysburg. Now enjoying a degree of popularity, he ceased writing for the pulps and began submitting short fiction to the slick magazines. Only a few of his slick stories fall in the crime category; two worth mentioning are "Rogues' Gallery" (*Collier's*, Aug. 24, 1935) and "Gun Crazy" (*Saturday Evening Post*, Feb. 3, 1940). "Rogues' Gallery," a tale about the murder of a sculptor who leaves an elaborate dying clue, became Kantor's most frequently reprinted short story. "Gun Crazy" served as the basis for a low budget movie with the same title, now considered a film noir classic. The movie was directed by Joseph H. Lewis and released in 1950. The screen credits indicate that the script was written by Kantor and Millard Kaufman; however, it was revealed in 1992 that Kaufman had acted as a front for blacklisted writer Dalton Trumbo.

When World War II ended, Kantor showed his concern with the problems faced by returning veterans in the novel *Glory for Me*, written in verse. The book was adapted to the screen as *The Best Years of Our Lives*, winner of seven Academy Awards.

In the years following the war, Kantor was one of several writers who brought realism to the portrayal of police work. Lawrence Treat, Hillary Waugh, and John Creasey began writing police procedural novels, the first being Treat's *V As in Victim*, published in 1945. Sidney Kingsley's drama *Detective Story* opened on Broadway in 1949, and in the same year, Jack Webb's "Dragnet" reached the public in its initial form as a radio series.

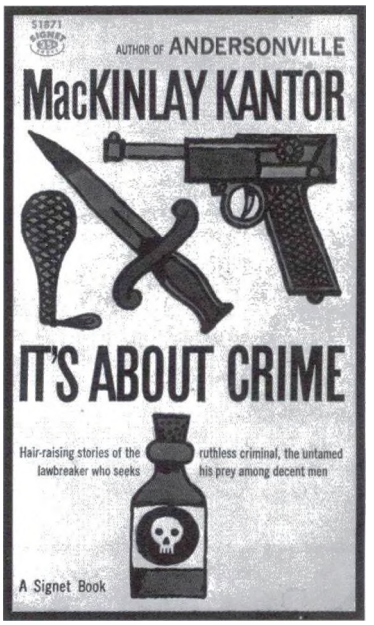
In 1948, Kantor began a fifteen-month period of intensive research into the world of cops. He had received permis-

sion from Thomas Mulligan, the Acting Police Commissioner of New York City, to accompany police officers during all their activities, a privilege never afforded to any civilian, other than a working journalist. Kantor chose to concentrate on the 23rd Precinct, which included posh apartments on upper Park Avenue as well as the slums of East Harlem, a high-crime area then absorbing a massive wave of immigration from Puerto Rico. Taking full advantage of his access to police facilities, he soon made friends with senior officers and patrolmen, and frequently rode in prowl cars during regular duty tours.

The end result of his research was a major novel, *Signal Thirty-Two*, published in 1950 with jacket art by the author's wife, Irene Layne Kantor. The title refers to a phrase used on police radio that simply means "Assist Patrolman" or "Investigate" but implies danger and extreme emergency.

In *Signal Thirty-Two*, Joe Shetland and Dan Mallow are partners who patrol the streets of the 23rd Precinct in a police car. Shetland is an experienced cop; Mallow is a rookie. As in the Glennan brothers stories, the younger man learns what it is to be a cop and proves himself in the course of a number of incidents—some dangerous, some routine. Other important characters are Blondie Dunbar, a rookie cop with whom Mallow served in Europe during the war, and Dunbar's sister, Ellie, who becomes Mallow's wife.

Kantor weaves three threads through the book: the day-to-day police work of Shetland and Mallow, the sometimes strained relationship between Mallow and Ellie, and Dunbar's use of illegal methods to earn a promotion to detective. Mallow's love affair with Ellie and their marital problems seem tame by today's standards, and Dunbar's transgressions never develop into a truly dramatic situation. The novel is most effective when it presents us with realistic accounts of policemen on patrol and their encounters with criminals. These may have been events Kantor had actually observed. Memorable passages depict an exciting chase across tenement rooftops in pursuit of rape suspects, a



frantic attempt to save the life of an emaciated infant, and a dramatic gunfight between Shetland and a thief on a crowded bus. In each of these rather long passages, Kantor makes use of

A MacKINLAY KANTOR READING LIST

NOVEL

Signal Thirty-Two, 1950

SHORT STORIES

Author's Choice, 1944 (40 stories, 5 criminous)
It's About Crime, 1960 (11 crime stories)
Story Teller, 1967 (23 stories, 2 criminous)

BIOGRAPHY

My Father's Voice: MacKinlay Kantor Long Remembered, 1988, by Tim Kantor

heightened language in a powerful stream-of-consciousness style.

Since the novel features uniformed policemen and contains no mystery to be solved, *Signal Thirty-Two* does not qualify, by the definition formulated by Hillary Waugh and George Dove, as a police procedural. To use an analogy from television, the novel is closer to "Adam 12" than to "Dragnet." What Kantor gives us is a police novel, perhaps the first novel to take a probing look into the police subculture. *Signal Thirty-Two* is a forerunner to Joseph Wambaugh's *The New Centurions* and Dorothy Uhmak's *Law and Order,* but without the rough language and sexual frankness one finds in modern fiction.

Kantor was greatly impressed by the dedication and valor of the men in the NYPD, especially the World War II veterans who formed a majority of the police force at that time. He thought being a cop was more than a job to these veterans. In a nonfiction piece for *True* magazine, he wrote that they were motivated by "a peculiar curiosity—a desire to observe and share the heartbeat of human existence."[6]

Some errors about Kantor's work have crept into mystery reference books. *Diversey,* his first novel, is erroneously called a crime novel about Chicago gangsters. The gangster characters play a small part in the book, which is clearly not a crime novel. Kantor's novel *Midnight Lace* has also been incorrectly labeled a crime novel because it has the same title as a 1960 thriller movie, which starred Doris Day. But there is absolutely no connection between Kantor's book and the film *Midnight Lace.* The film is based on a play by Janet Green.

A FULL AND ACTIVE LIFE

After winning the Pulitzer Prize in 1956, MacKinlay Kantor became a minor celebrity. He sold *Andersonville* to Hollywood for a substantial sum, received several honorary degrees, and continued to write historical novels, the most notable being *Spirit Lake,* the story of an Indian raid on settlers in Iowa. Collections of his magazine articles and short fiction were published, including a 1960 paperback collection of his crime stories, *It's About Crime.*

Among Kantor's favorite subjects were the Civil War and the U.S. Air Force. In a letter to a friend, Ernest Hemingway wrote that Kantor "would be a pretty fair country writer if he would just resign this commission in the Confederate Air Force."[7] Although this remark seems rather condescending, Kantor would often quote it with pride and amusement.

Kantor was a colorful character who led a full and active life. He loved America and was devoted to his family. He had a fondness for dogs and a fascination with guns. He enjoyed singing and playing the guitar. A bit of a performer, Kantor took part in reenactments of Civil War battles and played a small role in the movie *Wind Across the Everglades.* More information about his life, the good times and the bad, can be found in *My Father's Voice: MacKinlay Kantor Long Remembered,* a 1988 biography/memoir by his son, Tim Kantor.

No attempt will be made here to evaluate MacKinlay Kantor's place in the broader field of American literature. My purpose is a limited one: to bring Kantor's crime fiction, especially the Glennan brothers trilogy and *Signal Thirty-Two* to the attention of mystery fans. Although Kantor is certainly remembered by Civil War buffs, most readers today are unaware of his work in our genre. Besides producing entertaining crime fiction, Kantor gave us a book, *Signal Thirty-Two,* that deserves to be recognized as an important contribution to the development of the police novel. ■

NOTES

1. Robert Sampson, "Detective Tales (Rural Publications)," entry in *Mystery, Detective, and Espionage Magazines,* edited by Michael L. Cook (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1983), p. 158.

2. MacKinlay Kantor, "Bills, Nothing but Bills," *Story Teller* (NY: Doubleday, 1967), p. 44.

3. "Flashes from Readers," *Detective Fiction Weekly,* 10 June 1933, p. 140.

4. Kantor, "Jersey City Cops," *Author's Choice* (NY: Coward-McCann, 1944), p. 121.

5. Kantor, quoted in Kantor entry in *Contemporary American Authors,* by Fred B. Millett (NY: Harcourt, Brace, 1940), p. 414.

6. Kantor, "Two Cops of the Twenty-Third," *True,* December 1950, p. 104.

7. Ernest Hemingway, quoted in a letter from John D. MacDonald to this author, 31 December 1984.

Novel Verdicts

By Jon L. Breen

Explanation of symbols:

A: All or more than three-quarters of the book devoted to courtroom action.

1/2: One-half or more devoted to courtroom action.

1/4: One-quarter or more devoted to courtroom action.

B: Relatively brief courtroom action; less than a quarter of the book.

C: A collection of short stories or novelettes.

William Bernhardt

Deadly Justice

New York: Ballantine, 1993. **(B)**

In a comic curtain-raiser, Tulsa's Ben Kincaid, representing an environmental group seeking to block a proposed gas processing plant, cross examines and definitively discredits the defense expert witness. When Ben leaves private practice to join the legal staff of the Apollo Consortium, whose ranks are soon reduced by murder, he defends a product liability case brought by parents who charge a faulty suspension system caused their son's death in a flatbed truck accident. The plaintiff's lawyer, a TV-advertising personal injury specialist, is the object of Ben's (and presumably his creator's) disgust at those who give the legal profession a bad name. Deposition-taking, a discovery hearing, and a hearing on Ben's summary-judgment motion bring the courtroom total to about 25 pages. The author's humor and puzzle-plotting ability remain strong.

William Bernhardt

Perfect Justice

New York: Ballantine, 1994. **(B)**

Vacationing in rural Arkansas, Ben Kincaid is asked to represent 21-year-old Donald Vick, a member of the racist paramilitary Anglo-Saxon patrol, accused of the crossbow murder of Vietnamese refugee Thuy Quang "Tommy" Vuong. With the opposing Hatewatch group also setting up shop, the town of Silver Springs is rent by racial tension. In 56 pages of trial action, Ben encounters very loose small-town procedure, including pre-trial matters handled in chambers without a court reporter, as well as a client who insists on pleading guilty though Ben doubts he committed the crime. Even in the loosely run small-town court, it's surprising Ben gets away with what he does in the most unusual courtroom climax. Bernhardt plays some admirable reverses on standard situations, both in his use of one of the time-honored least-suspected-person solutions and in the turned around bigotry that finds Silver Springs rushing to judge a white man accused of killing a minority group member.

William Bernhardt

Double Jeopardy

New York: Ballantine, 1995. **(B)**

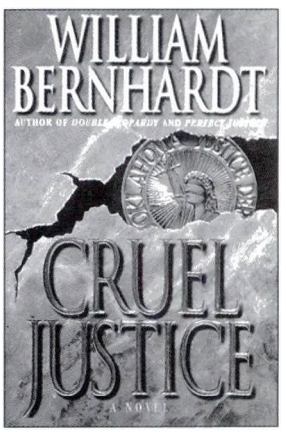
In a non-series novel, Bernhardt moves his locale to Dallas and introduces a lawyer hero who is, superficially at least, as different from Ben Kincaid as could be imagined. Tarvis Byrne, a former cop a year out of law school, practices go-for-the-jugular law with his conscience on the backburner. In his unusual closing argument in a federal prosecution for murder of a federal informant, he defends his scumbag child molester client on a jurisdictional technicality. Appointed to defend mobster Alberto Moroconi on a federal rape charge, Byrne is beaten up by thugs before *voir dire* and learns his predecessor was brutally murdered. Though about 24 pages are spent in court, this is essentially an action-pursuit novel involving the Outfit and the FBI among the players, and trial action is slighter than usual for the author.

William Bernhardt

Cruel Justice

New York: Ballantine, 1996. **(B)**

The fifth Ben Kincaid novel, finding him back in private practice in Tulsa, opens like a sitcom: his sister abruptly abandons her baby in his office when he is late for court and arguing with a creditor about his faulty air conditioner, and he accepts a tricky and troublesome murder case, mistaking it for a slam-dunk personal injury action. The eighty pages of trial include Bernhardt's trademark curtain-raiser, the cross examination of the complainant in a



prostitution case that exploits the comic possibilities of a sex-related court proceeding, and (more lengthily) the defense of retarded Leeman Hayes, prosecuted on the ten-year-old charge of using a nine-iron to murder Maria Escondita Alvarez in the caddyshack of the golf course where he worked. Included is a good ten-page sequence on jury selection, mostly dealing with the candidates' views on capital punishment. The courtroom climax is pure Perry Mason (TV variety) and is followed by a corny woman-with-child-in-jeopardy rescue. The author seems to be seeing how much trendy subject matter he can cram into one book: child abuse, child pornography, baby

farming, repressed memory, developmental disability, juvenile gangs, drug dealing. Media-reflective and stereotypical as it all sounds, Bernhardt is a good enough entertainer to pull it off.

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Philip Friedman

Grand Jury

New York: Fine, 1996. **(B)**

Martin and Meiling Eng, an elderly couple prominent and respected in New York's Chinatown, are brought before the Grand Jury on an unlikely accusation of possession and conspiracy to sell heroin. The first 150 or so pages of this massive large-canvas thriller include probably the most thorough and fascinating account of the grand jury process in fictional annals. Though the jury-room action takes place in a New York State jurisdiction, the workings of its Federal equivalent are explored as well. Following the indictment, two dissatisfied grand jurors, Susan Linwood and David Clark, carry out their own dangerous investigation, which takes them to Hong Kong and mainland China. The world of asset forfeiture and its potentially corrupting influence on law enforcement procedures is another intriguing subject of an enthralling and well-researched novel that almost justifies its near-600-page length.

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Lee Gruenfeld

The Halls of Justice

New York: Dutton, 1996. **(1/4)**

Two Santa Monica, California, trials get extensive and entertaining coverage in this novel. First, underworld-connected Vincent Rosamund is accused of the rape and kidnapping of defense lawyer Diane Pierman and her twin sister Lisa. Sal Milano, a well-liked and ambitious ADA who is on the edge of a romantic involvement with Diane, prosecutes, opposed by aging defense ace Gus Terhovian, who, via a Randolph Mason-ish twisting of the law aided by a seemingly crazy judge, gets his client off. Later the twins are charged with the well-witnessed shooting murder of Rosamund—everyone is certain one of them did it, but how can the prosecution establish which one? The novel has its points, including some well-described interrogation scenes and one of the more detailed fictional explorations of how rape prosecutions are prepared and what indignities are inflicted on rape victims. But the whole second half of the book unfolds unbelievably, from Sal's muddled motivations to a case that seems to get as far as it does only to provide another trial to all sorts of noble speechifying in the final pages. Non-lawyer Gruenfeld, who admits he has taken artistic liberties, may have taken too many. Anyone who watched the Simpson trial knows way too much adversarial combat over objections takes place in the jury's presence. I also wondered if both key witnesses (the two victims) would be allowed in court other than during their testimony. And an absurd statement that a lawyer on cross examination must have the judge declare the witness hostile before leading questions can be asked is a big enough blooper to render the other law suspect.

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Rochelle Majer Krich

Speak No Evil

New York: Mysterious, 1996. **(1/4)**

Los Angeles defense attorney Debra Laslow takes on the defense of Dr. Ken Avedon, charged with the date rape of his receptionist Penny Bailor. Though Debra believes her client innocent, the fact that the complainant is a fellow Orthodox Jew creates conflict for her. The trial action is excellent, with some interesting specifics on jury questioning and an especially sharp cross examination of the complainant. A few other cases are visited briefly, including Debra's defense of a drug possession charge, in which she gets her client off because of a warrantless search. The central plot involves a serial killer of defense lawyers who cuts out their tongues. It's a highly readable novel with some well-managed surprises. However, the author conveys some misinformation about California's three-strikes law: it is not true that a defendant previously convicted of shoplifting and check forgery could get a life sentence for stealing a slice of pizza, as claimed on page 49. The first two felony convictions must be either violent or serious, the latter roughly meaning potentially violent due to the use of a weapon during the crime's commission. ■

What About Murder?

By Jon L. Breen

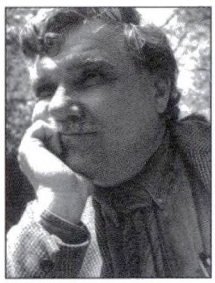
Walter Albert and Margaret C. Albert, editors
Murder Ad Lib: A Tribute to Ellen Nehr, March 10, 1931–December 30, 1995
Pittsburgh, PA: Matrix, 1996. 56p. Illus., bibl.

Distributed to attendees at Bouchercon 27 in St. Paul, where Ellen Nehr was posthumously honored as Fan Guest of Honor, this pamphlet may be a first in the mystery field: a separately published memorial to an influential fan. (*John Nieminski: Somewhere a Roscoe* [see *WAM 2* #158], though it included tributes, was mostly comprised of a selection of Nieminski's own writings.) Among those offering memories of the subject are family members (husband Al and daughter Nell), mystery writers (Barbara Mertz, Charlotte MacLeod, Marcia Muller, Carolyn Hart, Margaret Maron, Barbara D'Amato, Bill Crider, Richard A. Moore), editors (Ruth Cavin, Sara Ann Freed, Lawrence Ashmead), and fellow fans, critics, and scholars (Allen J. Hubin, J. Randolph Cox, William F. Deeck, Steve Lewis, Steve Stilwell, Marvin Lachman, Jo Ann Vicarel, Frank Denton, and the late Barry Gardner, among many others). Robert E. Briney contributes a nine-page bibliography of Nehr's published work, and a six-page sampler of her writing captures its distinctive, witty, often acerbic flavor. Although I thought (and still think) Joe Gores's *Interface* was a terrific book, that didn't hamper my enjoyment of Nehr's devastating pan, headed "Every turkey needs a friend," with suitable illustration. Drawings and photos are scattered throughout. In a helpful two-page article, Art Scott explains DAPA-EM, the venerable fanzine publishing group (in the fan world, a run of 23 years is an amazing accomplishment) of which he is Official Editor and to which Nehr contributed an even hundred issues of her *Apron String Affair*. The Alberts have done a remarkable job of arranging the materials for maximum impact, closing with a tribute by Dan Stumpf and a quote from the last issue of *Apron String* that are immensely moving. After perusing this pamphlet, even readers not fortunate enough to have known Ellen Nehr will feel they have lost a friend.

Jay P. Pederson, editor
St. James Guide to Crime and Mystery Writing
Fourth edition of the source previously titled *Twentieth-Century Crime and Mystery Writers*
Preface by Kathleen Gregory Klein
Detroit, MI: St. James, 1996. xxiv, 1264p.
With all the good new writers entering the mystery field each year, every new revision of this standard reference (for descriptions of earlier editions, see *WAM* #29 and *WAM 2* #556) is indispensable to libraries, scholars, and serious readers. With some deceased or inactive authors necessarily dropped each time, keeping the older volumes is also advisable. The total number of entries per Klein's preface is around 650, somewhat down from the third edition. Among the many new writers added are Edna Buchanan, Michael Connelly, Patricia Cornwell, Barbara D'Amato, Lindsey Davis, John Grisham, Jean Hager, Parnell Hall, Andrew Klavan, Sharyn McCrumb, Margaret Maron, Steve Martini, Walter Mosley, Peter Robinson, Kate Ross, Walter Satterthwait, Steven Saylor, Mary Willis Walker, and Minette Walters. The main changes from previous editions are that international authors and pre-twentieth century authors are now integrated into the main listing and that individual uncollected short stories are no longer noted.

On the whole, the new editor has done an admirable job. On the down side, however, pseudonymous works are not always recognized: as in the previous edition, Donald E. Westlake's novels as Samuel Holt and Thomas Gifford's as Thomas Maxwell are not listed in their entries, and in the entry on Francis Selwyn, his true identity as Donald Thomas and the historical mysteries he has written under that name are not noted. Among significant writers still not included are Thomas H. Cook, P.C. Doherty, Michael Nava, Richard A. Lupoff, Maxine O'Callaghan, Jennifer Rowe, Sandra Scoppettone, James Yaffe, and R.D. Zimmerman.

Malcolm J. Turnbull
Elusion Aforethought: The Life and Writing of Anthony Berkeley Cox
Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1996. 156p. Bibl., index.
It's especially good to see a full-length biographical-critical treatment of one of the giants of crime and detective fiction who has been somewhat under-appreciated in recent years. Humorist Cox wrote adventuresome classical detective fiction as Berkeley and was a pioneer of the modern crime novel, as well as a prominent critic for several decades, as Francis Iles. Turnbull, an Australian historian, devotes chapters to his subject's life, to his humor, to Roger Sheringham, to the other series sleuths, to the Iles novels, and to his true crime, reviewing, and political views. Appendices include an annotated checklist of his books, seventeen pages of notes, a primary and secondary bibliography, and a thorough index. In all respects, this is an excellent job of research and writing. I could spot only one error: on page 106, the British Patricia Wentworth is mis-identified as an American writer. ■



Dial N for Nonsense

BY

LOUIS PHILLIPS

Raymond Chandler's Favorites

Raymond Chandler, in a letter to Alex Barris (April 16, 1949), answered a questionnaire on what he considered to be the *best* in certain categories of mystery writing:

Best character and suspense writer for consistent but not large, Elisabeth Holding. Best plodding detail man, Freeman Wills Crofts. Best Latin and Greek quoter, Dorothy Sayers. Writer with best natural charms, Philip Macdonald. Best scary writer: none, they don't scare me. But Dorothy Hughes does it to most. Most intriguing character I can think of offhand, the M.C. in Margaret Millar's *Wall of Eyes* (M.C. meaning Master of Ceremonies). Best idea man: Cornell Woolrich (William Irish), but you must read him fast and not analyze him too much...

See *Raymond Chandler Speaking*, edited by Dorothy Gardiner and Katherine Sorley Walker (Houghton Mifflin Co., 1962).

I wonder how present-day *TAD* readers would respond to the above categories?

On One Common Mode of Theft

"A common mode of theft practised by the common people engaged in the pearl fishery, is by swallowing the pearls. Whenever anyone is suspected of having swallowed these precious pills of Cleopatra, the police apothecaries are instantly sent for; a brisk cathartic is immediately despatched after the truant pearl, with the strictest orders to apprehend it, in whatever corner of the viscera it may be found lurking."

—SYDNEY SMITH
The Edinburgh Review (1803)

Selling *Harper*

Does anyone recall how the Paul Newman movie, *Harper*, was advertised in newspapers? Eric Lax in his recent biography—*Paul Newman* (Turner Publishers, 1996)—reminds us:

The ads for the picture (*Harper*) mimicked a reading primer:

THIS IS HARPER'S GUN.
SEE HOW BLACK AND SHINY IT IS.
IT IS HARPER'S VERY BEST FRIEND.
SEE HOW MUCH HARPER NEEDS
HIS FRIEND.
SEE ***HARPER.***

"Bad Eggs"

An acquaintance of mine—Hugh Rawson, currently the editor of reference

books for New American Library—has written numerous excellent reference works on word origins and other aspects of the English language. The following observation on the term "Bad Egg" (as in the sentence, "So-and-so is a really bad egg") comes from one of my favorite books—*Devious Derivations: Popular Misconceptions—and More than 1,000 True Origins of Common Words and Phrases* (Crown Publishers, 1994).

Bad egg. This epipthet for a dishonest otherwise unappetizing person sometimes is said to come from Thomas Egg, a nineteenth century American criminal, which seems most unlikely, considering that Mr. Egg is not otherwise remembered in the annals of crime. *Bad egg* has been dated only to 1885, but the expression flows naturally from long-established usage, e.g. 'What you egg! Young fry of treachery!' (William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, 1608). *Bad egg*'s opposite, *good egg*, did not come into vogue until the early twentieth century. *(1903 Oxford English Dictionary)*

***TAD* Joke Book**

Q: What is the new Mafia theme park everybody's taking about?
A: You go to the park, and if you pay your money, nobody gets hurt.

On the Word *Blackguard*

Blackguard—The word is a curious example of deterioration in meaning, as it originally signified nothing scurrilous or villainous in its application, but was used to denote the humble servants who rode among the pots and pans and other utensils to guard the impedimenta when a wealthy household was on a journey or a royal progress was being made from place to place.

—BASIL HARGRAVE
Origins and Meanings of Popular Phrases and Names (1925)

Streets and Criminals

A street in York, England—Whip-Ma-Whop-Ma—received its name because criminals were once whipped there.

The Al Capone Book of Quotations

When I sell liquor, it's called bootlegging; when my patrons serve it on silver trays on Lake Shore Drive, it's called hospitality.

—AL CAPONE

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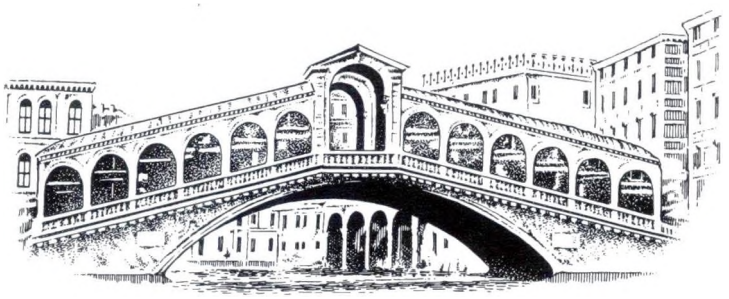
LIFE AND DEATH



IN VENICE

DONNA LEON'S NOVELS OFFER A LOVINGLY DETAILED INTRODUCTION TO THIS DILAPIDATED, FRUSTRATING, ENCHANTING CITY

BY JOHN T.D. KEYES

On a small table in the bustling lunch-hour *rosticcęria* near Campo San Bartolomeo and the Rialto Bridge, Donna Leon spreads out a map of Venice, takes a moment to get her bearings and then starts identifying real locations, albeit for fictitious characters. Here, she says, lives Guido Brunetti, the police detective (official title: *commissario*) who has commanded centre stage in her five novels thus far. Over here is where Brunetti works: at the Questura, where he has the odious duty of reporting to the arrogant, social-climbing Captain Patta. Down here, right on the Grand Canal, is the *palazzo* where Brunetti's aristocratic in-laws reside. And over here, she motions, is where Leon herself lives, in an apartment where, if she looks away from her computer, she can see in the middle distance the Campanile that towers over Piazza San Marco. Until now in our conversation, over a light lunch, Leon has demonstrated little interest in talking about herself, her working habits, her books even—but let the subject become her beloved adopted city of Venice, and her face, which can be solemn if not stern in repose, seems to take on a veritable glow. For Leon, who has lived here for 16 years, Venice is—despite all its tourists and dilapidation and day-to-day frustrations—still a mysterious and enchanted city. It's a sentiment with which Brunetti, walking home late at night from the scene of the crime in his debut appearance, *Death at La Fenice,* would have no quarrel:

> These were the hours when, for Brunetti, the city became most beautiful, just as they were the

John T.D. Keyes is a freelance magazine journalist based in British Columbia. With writer-photographer Anne Garber, he is co-author of the bestselling urban access guidebook *Exploring Ethnic Vancouver* and the recently published *Cheap Eats Vancouver.* Like Donna Leon, he has read "about 17 million mystery novels" and is currently trying his hand at the genre himself.

same hours when he, Venetian to the bone, could sense some of her past glory. The darkness of the night hid the moss that crept up the steps of the *palazzi* lining the Grand Canal, obscured the cracks in the walls of churches, and covered the patches of plaster missing from the facades of public buildings. Like many women of a certain age, the city needed the help of deceptive light to recapture her vanished beauty. A boat that, during the day, was making a delivery of soap powder or cabbages, at night became a numinous form, floating toward some mysterious destination. The fogs that were common on these winter days could transform people and objects, even turn long-haired teenagers, hanging around a street corner and sharing a cigarette, into mysterious phantoms from the past.

"I first came here in 1966, and I was just knocked down by it, as I think everyone is the first time," says Leon, warming up now. "Nothing can prepare you for it—no books, no photos, no movies." Born and raised in New Jersey, she spent the next 15 years indulging wanderlust, teaching and doing post-graduate work in Iran and China, until in the early 1980s she returned to Venice. She took up teaching at the nearby American military base, dove deep into Venetian society ("which is very closed") through some well-connected friends, and thanks to them had the idea for her first Brunetti novel virtually handed to her. A lifelong opera buff, she remembers sitting in conductor Ferro Gabriele's dressing room between acts of *Macbeth* at La Fenice [pronounced la-fe-NEE-chay] in 1989. "We were all badmouthing a particular German conductor, who was hated by everyone, a real monster," Leon recalls. "Either Gabriele or his wife said, 'You know, someone ought to do the opera world a favor and just kill him.' I said, 'Gee, that would make a great murder mystery.' The next day I started, and I had it done in six months."

Leon knew nothing of police procedure—other than having read "about 17 million mystery novels in my life"—and even less about being a parent: "Children bore me. I don't find their sweet things remotely interesting." Nevertheless, out of whole imaginative cloth she created Brunetti, a detective juggling his search for the truth (which is not always the same as justice), the ever-shifting agendas of his boss, and the demands of family life. There's a wife, Paola, an English teacher who gets to say what Leon herself would say in some situations, and two typically self-obsessed teenage children, to whom Brunetti returns after every shift, step by step by step, up five flights of stairs, Venice not being exactly an elevator-friendly town.

DONNA LEON

This also being Italy, Brunetti must be wary of his superior officer Vice-Questore Giuseppe Patta—superior in title only—who "had been sent to Venice three years before in an attempt to introduce new blood into the criminal justice system. In this case, the blood had been Sicilian and had proved to be incompatible." Patta, says Leon, happens to be "a supercilious idiot. He's a conventional character in mysteries, but an idiot in charge is probably more likely here in Italy than anywhere else. If you support promoting incompetents just because they belong to the right political party, you end up with a Patta." Meanwhile, Leon's brush with Venetian high society gave her enough to invent Count Falier and his wife, Paola's parents, a genteel couple who disguise their opinion, if they even hold it, that their daughter married below her station. Over five novels, Brunetti has kept his fingers crossed that he'll never have to arrest his father-in-law and his boss for the same scam.

Lapping at the doors of all of this, buoying stories up and taking characters away, is the water—the beauty part of Leon's work, which she insists is no feat: "Anybody who lives here knows the tidal patterns, just the same way you could drive home, half paying attention." In *Death in a Strange Country*, Brunetti asks a canal pilot to speculate about a case. If a man has to be killed in one place but made to seem drowned in another, where might the killers have slipped him into the water for the body to be found where he was? "The pilot put back his head and closed his eyes," Leon writes, "and Brunetti could almost see the tide chart of the laguna that he studied. Bonsuan remained like that for a few minutes. Once he shook his head in a brief negative that Brunetti would never learn about. Finally he opened his eyes and said, 'There are two places...'"

Death at La Fenice, published in 1992, went on to win the Suntory Prize in Japan, and Leon, who still teaches English to military personnel under the auspices of the University of Maryland, figured she could easily crank out a book a year. "The reason I find composition so easy for me, why I'm so fast, is that I have spent my life writing letters. Several a day. It is as easy for me to write grammatical, interesting, well-structured prose as it is for me to talk. As well, I think books are meant to be written, not embroidered. There shouldn't be this preciousness about every phrase, every verb, all those awful adverbs and adjectives. I grew up on Dick and Jane: He said, she said."

For her second book, *Death in a Strange Country* (1993), she called on her familiarity with the military to involve Brunetti in reconsidering what at first seemed like the simple drowning of an American soldier. *Dressed for Death* (1994) revolves around the discovery of a murdered transvestite—who turns out to be the director of an Italian bank. In *Death*

and Judgment (1995), prominent businessmen are dropping like flies, but in this novel, Leon includes a subplot about the smuggling of Eastern European prostitutes into the country. Her latest book, *Acqua Alta* (1996), is notable on two counts. The title was suggested to her by her friend Martha Grimes, who once visited during one of the city's periodic floods (*acqua alta* means "high water") and thought that the way it paralyzes Venetian life until the water subsides was rife with potential. The city's character is front-and-center, perhaps more so than in any of Leon's previous books:

> Leaving the hospital, Brunetti noticed that the sky had darkened, and a sharp wind had risen, sweeping across the city from the south. The air was heavy and damp, presaging rain, and that meant that they might be awakened in the night by the shrill blast of the sirens. He hated *acqua alta* with the passion that all Venetians felt for it, felt an anticipatory rage at the gaping tourists who would cluster together on the raised wooden boards, giggling, pointing, snapping pictures and blocking decent people who just wanted to get to work or do their shopping so they could get inside where it was dry and be rid of the bother, the mess, the constant irritation that the unstoppable waters brought to the city. Already calculating, he realized that the water would affect him only on the way to and from work, when he had to pass through the Campo San Bartolomeo at the foot of the Rialto Bridge. Luckily, the area around the Questura was high enough to be free of all but the worst flooding.

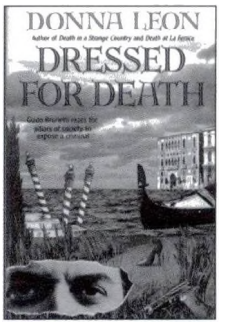
Acqua Alta also sees the return of two characters from *Death at La Fenice*—the imperious operatic diva Flavia Petrelli and her companion Brett Lynch, an American archaeologist. Lynch's life is in jeopardy over the issue of archeological forgery, and Brunetti is drawn back into their lives in the hope of preventing an escalation of violence. Surpassing perhaps even her love of Venice, Leon's abiding passion is for opera, and in Flavia she invests almost as much thought as she does in Brunetti himself. Indeed, next to her alter ego, Brunetti's wife Paola, Leon could be describing her own resilient self, through Brunetti's take on the woman:

> Brunetti could well imagine that she would not like the competition of pushy people. No, that was unfair, for she didn't push herself forward. He had to admit that he had been wrong the last time he'd met her. There was no vanity here, but there was the calm acceptance of her own worth and of her own talent, and he knew enough about her past to realize how hard-won that must have been.

Leon regularly reviews operas for European magazines, whose editors, she says, read *Death at La Fenice* and saw "how spot-on about the opera world it is. I've spent so much time going to the opera that the book is correct. It has the feel of correctness. Musicians have told me this." Even as *Acqua Alta* hit the bookstores, Leon had completed her sixth and seventh manuscripts, but she is already anticipating the point—"maybe book nine"—where her story can be rooted in the opera world again. (Book three—*Dressed for Death*—was dedicated to the late soprano Arleen Auger, "the greatest voice I have ever heard.") "Frankly," Leon concludes, "I'd like nothing better than spending my life just going to Handel or Mozart operas."

After lunch and coffee today, Leon goes for a stroll on the way home. Wise to Venice's cobblestones and late fall chill, she's wearing all-weather runners, topped by black jeans and a luxuriant emerald-green cashmere jacket. As she walks, she points out an elegantly dressed woman who's sporting a remarkable helmet of auburn hair: "See her? I've been watching her for 10 years now, but I've never spoken to her." You know, though, that she has been filed away as local color, grist for the writing mill. Until Leon bought a summer home in Belluno, up in the foothills of the Italian Alps, "all of my free time has been spent in Venice. I couldn't think of living anywhere else. Venetians really are distinct, or they certainly think they are. I think they even look alike, particularly the women—the body shape, the size of the head, the way they walk. They also speak their own dialect, with its own vocabulary and grammar. I understand it, but I can't speak it. It's very musical."

Finally, Leon must take her leave. An opera review awaits her attention. There's a firm handshake and then she turns and disappears—into the crowd of people willing to reside in one of the most frustrating, beautiful cities in the world. ■



A DONNA LEON READING LIST

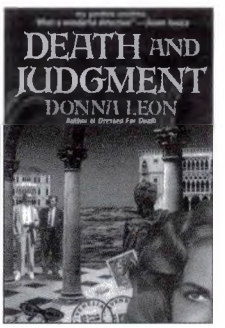
Death at La Fenice (1992)

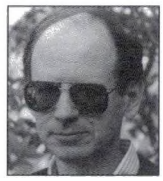
Death in a Strange Country (1993)

Dressed for Death (1994)

Death and Judgment (1995)

Acqua Alta (1996)





Sounds of Suspense

By Dick Lochte and Tom Nolan

Peter Blauner
The Intruder
read by Michael Gross
(Simon & Schuster Audio, 3 hrs., abridged)
Though Blauner won an Edgar for his first novel, *Slow Motion Riot,* his tales have very little mystery or detection. They are, instead, urban nightmares in which the mundane lives of big city dwellers are shaken up by brushes with crime and violence. Here, Manhattan lawyer Jacob Schiff finds himself stymied when John Gates, a homeless man whom his psychologist wife has been treating at a clinic, begins to stalk her.

The police are no help. And Gates is growing increasingly more sinister. An apparently friendly neighbor offers to assist the lawyer in "warning" Gates off. But the confrontation turns violent. A homeless man, not Gates, is killed. And the hapless Schiff winds up on trial for murder, with Gates his only hope of beating the rap.

Blauner's stories, sort of gritty and street-wise versions of Alfred Hitchcock's Everyman-in-over-his-head scenarios, are compelling and suspenseful and, even more chilling, very believable. Reader Gross (who will forever be identified as the dad on TV's "Family Ties") is especially effective in slipping into the character of Gates, a grieving, tormented creature who is somehow both monster and man.

. . . . . .

Michael Crichton
Airframe
read by Blair Brown
(Random House Audiobooks, 4 hrs., abridged)
A midair incident which kills three and injures fifty-six on an airliner bound from Hong Kong to Denver causes seismic jitters at Norton Aircraft, the legendary California firm that manufactured the plane involved. Bad publicity would jeopardize a crucial sales deal with China. Casey Singleton, a Norton executive, must hold off the press as she and a team of engineers hasten to find out what went wrong. Singleton's job is complicated by union thugs who threaten her life, a TV newsmagazine producer eager for an exposé and a company executive who seems to be setting her up for a fall. *Airframe* deftly imparts a good deal of authentic-seeming information regarding the dangerous effects of FAA underfunding, the mechanics of airplane manufacture, the politics of press relations and the behavior of complex machinery.

In Crichton's stories, the high-tech gadgets are always interesting and believable, the people sometimes less so. This plot's resolution depends upon a villain implausibly spilling the big scheme to Singleton in time for her to foil it. But Blair Brown's deft performance compensates for a certain amount of story implausibility.

. . . . . .

Tess Gerritsen
Harvest
read by Jayne Brook
(Simon & Schuster, 3 hrs., abridged)
The concept of illegal organ harvesting still belongs to Robin Cook and his *Coma,* but in her debut novel Gerritsen opens up a few new veins of suspense and offers a nice big bleeding heart for her finale. Her protagonist, Abby DiMatteo, a surgical resident at Boston's Bayside, is about to be inducted into the hospital's elite surgical squad when she whisks a car crash victim's healthy heart away from its intended recipient and into a dying teenager. It may have been a moral judgment call, but it is definitely not a good career move. The rebuffed patient is the wife of a man who is incredibly rich, powerful, and vindictive. And Abby becomes a pariah.

In an effort to get her life back on track, she starts an investigation of the way organs are gathered and assigned at Boston hospitals. Instead of helping her situation, her sleuthing gets a bunch of people killed and puts her own life in jeopardy. Gerritsen, who is a better stylist than Cook by the way, mixes the perils of Abby with the travails of a little boy aboard a Russian trawler. Both tales merge, of course, but in a way that is quite compelling. Jayne Brook (Dr. Grad of "Chicago Hope") renders the chilly tale quite satisfactorily.

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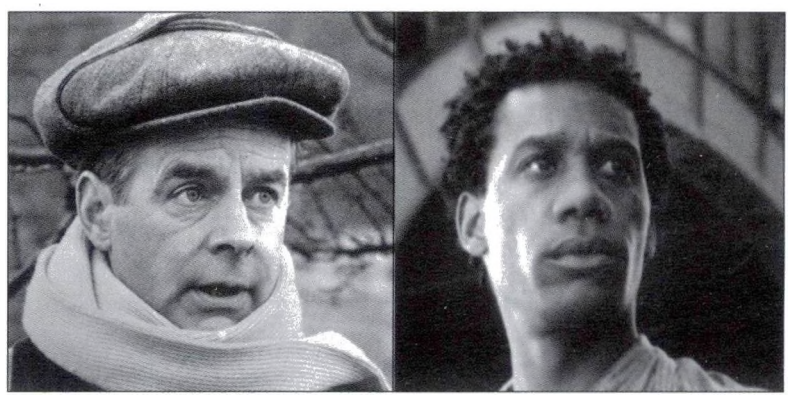
Sue Grafton
"M" Is for Malice
read by Judy Kaye
(Random House Audiobooks, 4 hrs., abridged)
Readers who expressed displeasure with



Ian Carmichael (l) returns as Dorothy L. Sayers's detectives, Lord Peter Wimsey and Montague Egg. Joe Morton portrays H. Tariq Tuttle in Scott Turow's *The Laws of Our Fathers.*

Grafton's *"L" Is for Lawless,* which was something of a departure for the series, should eagerly welcome this return-to-form Alphabet Mystery. In it, Kinsey Millhone is hired to locate a missing heir and restore him to the bosom of his dysfunctional family, at least until the estate of his recently deceased father is settled. Possibly because she is trying to come to grips with her own newly attached family ties (her lawyer cousin is the one hiring her), the detective allows herself to become emotionally involved with the would-be heir. When he is murdered, she angrily vows to make the killer pay.

This vengeance-is-mine approach to crimesolving may be better suited to Mike Hammer, but, as her fans know, Kinsey could probably give Hammer a lesson or two in feistiness. Her quest for the guilty party while also having to deal with the rebirth of a less-that-happy romance makes for a fine, emotional roller coaster ride for both Kinsey and the reader. As befits Grafton's bestseller status, Random has decided to increase the length of this abridgment. Wisely, the publisher continues to use Tony Award-winning actress Judy Kaye as the voice of Kinsey. After thirteen successful audio adaptations, why not?

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Phillip Margolin

Heartstone

read by Margaret Whitton

(Bantam Doubleday Dell Audio, 3 hrs., abridged)

This may be the suspense novel equivalent of the shaggy dog story, but Margolin still manages to make the trip entertaining. The story begins with the murder of a popular high school lad and the disappearance of his cheerleader girlfriend. Eventually, it leads us to a courtroom setting, several years later, with one of the town's bad boys on trial for the crime. In the interim, the accused has become a promising college student, in love with a bright, beautiful, and very wealthy young woman. She hires the small-town lawyer who is the book's protagonist.

The question is not merely whether the boy is guilty but whether the town is conspiring to prove him guilty. And, if so, what can the young, not terribly experienced lawyer do to gain his freedom. Vivid characters and striking shifts of plot make this a bit more than the average courtroom suspense yarn. And a stunning ending, which manages to both annoy and satisfy, raises it to an even higher level.

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Dorothy L. Sayers

Hangman's Holiday

read by Ian Carmichael

(Chivers Audio Books, six hours forty minutes, unabridged, 1–800–621–0182)

Those who savor the memory of Ian Carmichael's portrayal of Lord Peter Wimsey in English TV adaptations of several Sayers novels should be especially interested in the actor's reading of these dozen unabridged short stories, four of which feature that titled detective. The perplexing "Image in the Mirror" haunting a poor Cockney and seemingly implicating him in murder is run efficiently to ground by Wimsey, with a solution that breaks one of the cardinal rules of the Detection Club of which Sayers was a prominent member. "The Incredible Elopement of Lord Peter Wimsey" is a mission of mercy which takes the aristocratic sleuth to a remote and superstitious corner of the Pyrenees, where he uses hocus-pocus and "the remnants of a classical education" to rescue a woman in thrall to a fabulously rich (of course) and fiendishly cruel (naturally) American. Country house parties are the scenes of the crimes in both "The Queen's Square" and "The Necklace of Pearls," with convenient guest Wimsey solving first a murder and then a jewel theft in witty stories that are somewhat reminiscent of Ellery Queen puzzles. Montague Egg, traveling wine purveyor and quoter of rhyming platitudes from "the salesman's handbook," is the sleuth in the next six tales; and, for what it's worth, Ian Carmichael here lays claim to being the definitive Egg. Montague's exploits take him from rural manors to British Railways trains to Oxford to the humble Pig and Pewter. The real pleasure is in hearing Carmichael (a virtual one-man repertory company) bring all the various characters to vivid life. Two non-series tales of dark-comedy suspense, "The Man Who Knew How" and "A Fountain Plays," nicely round off this intermittently interesting 1933 collection.

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Scott Turow

The Laws of Our Fathers

read by Blair Brown, Joe Grifasi, and Joe Morton

(Simon & Schuster Audio, 6 hrs., abridged)

There's a lot going on in Turow's fine fourth novel. Woven into his most satisfying plot since *Presumed Innocent* are story strands involving Holocaust survivors, drug dealers, two generations of American radicals, a quarter-century of U.S. race relations, and some violent protests against the Vietnam War. The focal point of all this history is the 1995 murder-conspiracy trial of Nile Eddgar, a probation officer whose father, a '60s activist, is now a Midwestern state senator. The presiding judge is former prosecutor Sonia "Sonny" Klonsky (veteran of a previous Turow novel). Sonny's ex-boyfriend Seth, a syndicated newspaper columnist in town for the trial, was once Nile's babysitter. H. Tariq "Hobie" Tuttle, Nile's African-American lawyer from Washington, was best friend to the couple in their college days. Told through alternating voices, flashing back and forth from past to present, Turow's absorbing book is both a highly contemporary story and a novel of the 1960s. Seth, who has guilty knowledge of an old campus bombing and a faked kidnapping, remembers how the unchecked euphoria of the '60s veered out of control: "It was like a party where the good times—the music, the dancing, the girls, the excitement—had unaccountably led to disaster." The disaster was predicted, Seth recalls, by his parents, whose "furious issue was what would happen to all of us...if the laws of our fathers were forgotten." This four-cassette abridgment contains the vital gist of a novel that deserves to be read in its entirety. Like the book, the audio moves between different chacters' viewpoints, hence the trio of readers. The gripping courtroom scenes are given to Blair Brown, who nicely brings out all the drama, humor, and backroom intrigue in those sequences (though it's a bit odd to hear the otherwise-urbane Brown spout some of the witnesses' ghetto profanities). ■

Left Coast Crime 7

It should have been dark and stormy—and here in Seattle, it usually *is* dark and stormy—or at least damp.

BY KRISTA LOERCHER

However, it was a mostly sunny and pleasant weekend for the four hundred and fifty mystery fans, authors, and booksellers at the seventh Left Coast Crime mystery convention, held February 14–17, 1997. This year's guests of honor were Faye and Jonathan Kellerman, with Lia Matera serving as toastmistress.

Left Coast Crime was instituted seven years ago so that there would always be a yearly get-together on the west coast (defined as in the Pacific or Mountain time zones) regardless of Bouchercon's location. This convention offers an intimate, casual atmosphere and easy access to a wide range of mystery authors. The slower pace and relative scarcity of agents and editors allow the writers more time to visit with their fans.

The first Left Coast Crime, held in San Francisco in 1991, hosted 130 people, with an equal ratio of fans to authors. At last year's convention in Boulder, Colorado, attendance reached the 500 person limit for the first time in the convention's history. Marcia Muller and Bill Pronzini were the first guest of honor, establishing a tradition of joint-guests that has been broken only twice. Other past guests of honor include: Bill Emerson and J.A. Jance (1992); Sue Dunlap and Julie Smith (1993); Charlotte and Aaron Elkins (1994); Tony Hillerman (1995) and Kinky Friedman (1996).

This year's programming started with a reception on Thursday night at the Seattle Public Library. Panel discussions and author signings began on Friday and continued through Sunday afternoon. Other offerings included a Sunday brunch, a charity auction, a hospitality suite, and a book dealers room. Some of the panels gave insight on the publishing business: "Everything Writers Wished Readers Knew About the Business," "How a Book Happens," and "Why Is the Movie Different from the Book?" Other panels focused on themes in mysteries, such as "Mysteries That Teach," "The Outsider As Detective," and "Too Much Sex?"

The highlight of the weekend was the brunch honoring the Kellermans. The booking of the Kellermans was a coup for Andi Shechter, the chair of Left Coast Crime 7. Married 25 years, the Kellermans do not attend many conferences because of their devotion to their four children and two annual book deadlines. Lia Matera, LCC's toastmistress, introduced the pair.

Faye was the first Kellerman to speak. She poked fun at her unlikely path to publication noting that not many people chose to go to dentistry school in preparation for a writing career. An overactive imagination led her to attempt a first novel, she said, and encouragement from her husband helped her to overcome mild dyslexia and write *The Ritual Bath*. Jonathan spoke next. Writing has always been important to him, even while he had his child psychology practice. Although he acquired an agent when he was 21, he didn't publish his first novel until 14 years later, leading Kellerman to define himself for a long time as "a failed writer with a really good day job." Eventually his persistence paid off with the 1985 publication of *When the Bough Breaks*, his first novel featuring child psychologist Alex Delaware.

Predictably, the hot topic of the weekend was the Edgar nomination list. *Bonita Faye* by Margaret Moseley and *A Test of Wills* by Charles Todd were the most popular picks for the best first mystery category. A first edition of *Bonita Faye* sold for over $100 at the auction, emceed by Parnell Hall and Bruce Taylor. (Taylor, owner of The San Francisco Mystery Bookstore is also co-chair of the 1997 Bouchercon in Monterey, California.) The auction raised over $1,700 which will be donated to the Northwest Literacy Foundation and the New Beginnings Battered Women's Shelter.

Next year, Left Coast Crime 8 will be held in San Diego at the Bahia Hotel and Resort from February 27 through March 1. Elizabeth George is the guest of honor and Alan Russell is toastmaster. For more information, write: Left Coast Crime, PO Box 90051, San Diego CA 92190; (619) 268–4747; e-mail: <Camera@mysurf.com>. ■

Left Coast Crime 7
February 14–17, 1997, Seattle, Washington

Guests of Honor:
Faye & Jonathan Kellerman
Toastmaster/Bruschetta: *Lia Matera*

Committee Members

Andi Shechter: Chair, Program Organizer, Program Book

Thom Walls: Vice Chair and Dealers Room Organizer

Beryl Kolafa: Treasurer

Helen Keiser: Registrar, Booklist

Judy Lyen: Hotel Liaison

Mary Peretz: Hospitality

Louise Saylor: Autographing Organizer, Booklist

Stu Shiffman: Artist with Portfolio, Webmeister, Pocket Program

Heidi Wolf: Green Room, Assistant to the Chair

Krista Loercher has been a mystery fan since she read her first Nancy Drew at the age of seven. She was the first customer and the first employee of Haven't Got A Clue, a mystery bookstore located in upstate New York. She is currently living in Seattle and working as a sales rep for St. Martin's Press.

ARMCHAIR REVIEWS

MYSTERY SOAPBOX

by Jackie Acampora

"...And Boredom For (almost) All"

So now we have a verdict and a resolution, of sorts. (And if I have to tell you which trial I'm referring to, you must have spent the past year in the Gamma Quadrant.) After the book contract, media interview, and banquet circuit speech offers have disappeared, the jury members can go back to being just plain folks, though there will always be a bit of glamour attached to their service.

It doesn't happen that way for most people. For the majority, justice is not only blind, it's boring; for, while many are called to jury duty, few are chosen for a jury. If you don't believe me, count the people you personally know who have served in The Box.

I did my mandatory time last fall. One Monday morning found me in the central jury room, intently listening for my name to be called for a panel. I have an irrational fear that I won't recognize my own name if it *is* called. (Do you know how many ways there are to mispronounce Acampora?) If there's no response to my name, will they make me stay an extra day or two? Will I have to read one of those romance novels left there by previous jurors? Worse, will I be forced to watch one of the daytime talk shows, which is the Queens Central Jury Room idea of court TV? So I come prepared with books, needlepoint, pen and paper. Luckily, I recognized that "Jaklyn Amacora" was me and joined the group of fifty to follow the court officer across the street to Queens Criminal Court, where he told us to meet him in the third floor hallway and left us waiting to go through security. The wheels of justice grind slowly and so do the security lines. It took the better part of thirty minutes before we were together again.

The hall had no chairs, two benches, lots of walls and windowsills. Groups formed and the bonding process began. There was a lot of joking about what sort of case it could be, how long it would take and, mostly, how to get out of actually serving on a real jury. I could have told them not to worry.

Jury duty is something I've done every two years—with the exception of a ten-year period when my children were small—since I was twenty-one. During those years, I served as a juror for three trials, the outcomes of which were decided without jury members entering into debate or rendering a verdict. The time spent in the hallowed halls of justice was spent mostly *in* the halls, waiting. Waiting for judges, waiting for lawyers, waiting for heaven knows what. Yep, I could have told them. But some things people must find out for themselves. Besides, it helped pass the time.

The court officer appeared, telling us to take a two-hour lunch. Then it was back on the security line and off to another hall where we waited for the court officer to escort us to "our" hallway and the wide windowsills. Another wait. When we were finally brought into the courtroom, the judge told us a "legal situation" had arisen, thanked us for our time and sent us back to the central jury room to be dismissed for the day.

Tuesday. My name was again called for a panel. In theory, the panelists cards are all jumbled up so you don't get called with the same bunch. In practice, the panel cards from the day before hadn't been mixed in with the others and the same fifty people gathered together in another hallway. Conversations returned to family and home and jobs...and when we'd get out of that hall.

When we returned from another long lunch, we entered the courtroom, where we listened to statements about the case and heard questions put to prospective jurors. Out of sixteen questioned, two were chosen for the panel, while the rest of us were sent home with instructions to return to that hallway the next morning.

Wednesday. After another long wait in the hall with no coffee truck in sight, imagine our disappointment when we were once again dismissed. Seems that during that long morning wait *sans* coffee, some of the witnesses were with us. No one wanted the jurors tainted by anything we might have overheard. We *didn't* overhear anything, maybe because we were busy complaining about the wait, but back we went to the central jury room for another day. Only we lucked out. This time when our names were called it was to hear a cheery, "See you in two years."

In spite of the grumbles, most people were disappointed that their participation in the system hadn't amounted to more than standing in a hall and sitting in a courtroom for a few hours. I know the jury system doesn't pretend to be perfect, it surprises me when it works as well as it does. I don't mind serving, even when much of it appears to be wasted time and taxpayer money, though I don't understand why some of us are called again and again while others are never summoned and would *love* to be.

Glamour? Ha! Fame? Get serious. Jury reform? Not on anyone's agenda here in New York. Until it is, I'll probably serve every two years, packing my tote with books, needlepoint, and plenty of paper. And keeping in mind that the best windowsills are across from the water fountains.

FEATURED TITLE

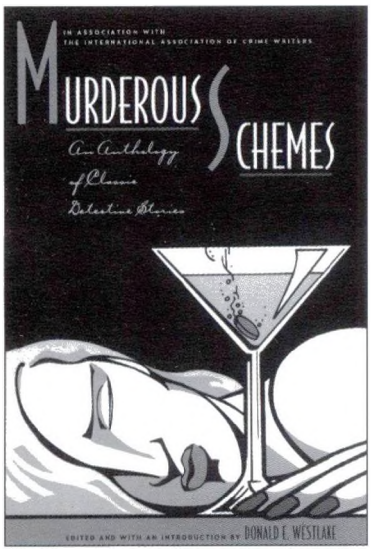
Murderous Schemes: An Anthology of Classic Detective Stories

edited by Donald E. Westlake and J. Madison Davis. New York: Oxford, 1996. $25.00

In a bold effort to define the elusive boundaries of the mystery story, Donald E. Westlake scores an impressive victory on this highly-charged playing field. Assisted by Professor J. Madison Davis, an

Edgar nominee for his first novel, *The Murder of Frau Schutz* (1988), Westlake uses this sizeable short story anthology to illustrate the limitless variations of the mystery genre. Concurrently, the selections sharply identify the common elements that invariably are found among even the most diverse works of mystery fiction.

A number of eminently qualified and



respected authors have attempted similar projects in the past, but until now, all have somehow fallen short of their laudable goals. Why does Westlake's book succeed when others have missed the mark, if only slightly? At least two reasons are readily apparent in the opening pages.

Perhaps most significant is the thorough and powerful introduction. In addition to the six-page introductory premise, the curious brilliance of Westlake's anthology largely stems from a very personal pet peeve. The motivating gripe is his irritation with the ubiquitous literate professionals who routinely choose mysteries for relaxation or entertainment, but imply with this back-handed compliment that mysteries are a frivolity, inherently excluded from great, or important, literature.

To counter this widespread attitude, Westlake uses *Murderous Schemes* to trace through history the many different forms of the mystery story, and demonstrates how its breadth is far deeper and more profound than is realized even by many of the most affectionate readers. Westlake breaks down the mystery story (or as he impudently labels it, "the detective story") into eight major subdivisions, ranging from such well-known themes as the locked-room puzzler to the caper, and finally, the homicidal maniac. The scope of the book is enhanced by a knowledgeable introduction to each of the eight major classifications, and the annotations preceding each of the 32 individual stories.

With so many of the world's best authors represented, it's hard to imagine anybody withstanding the urge to skip about the book to sample the work of a favorite writer, and thus on familiar turf, to overlook the Westlake-Davis thesis. For me, the book passed its first test with a Stanley Ellin story which exemplified the "Come Into My Parlor" subsection. The case was settled with a rare Dashiell Hammett reprint in the category of "Only One Among You" and ultimately clinched with the book's concluding story, a Fredric Brown gem representing the insane killer from the category Westlake dubs "Over the Edge."

—Michael Davis

General

Abuse of Power
by Nancy Taylor Rosenberg.
New York: Dutton, 1997. $23.95

Rachel Simons's spouse died after a long illness that destroyed the family's finances. The thirty-four-year-old widow finds herself the sole support of two small children and buried under a mountain of debt. To survive, Rachel works two jobs. She serves as a security guard and as a police officer on the Oak Grove, California police force. Although she has accepted both jobs because of her financial problems, she expects to bring honor to the badge she wears. For three years, she succeeds in her endeavor in spite of a sexist and corrupt department.

Grant Cummings is the worst offender with his misuse of the badge. Rachel tries to ignore him even when he drugged her at a beach party and encouraged several police officers to sexually fondle her. In her mind, he finally crosses the line when he uses a juvenile as a shield during a riot.

The code of silence that governs the department prevents one cop from blowing the whistle on another. However, when word leaks out that Rachel may place Grant on report, her compatriots close ranks around him and refuse to help her when her life is threatened. Realizing that she has been deserted, Rachel decides to inform on Grant while pressing criminal charges also. As Rachel courageously battles for honor and principles, she finds herself threatened on all sides with the loss of her job, freedom, and possibly her life. Rachel must decide whether honor is worth all that she and family may lose if she continues with her quest for justice.

Abuse of Power is a riveting thriller that exposes the corruption that can occur in a system that is supposed to protect people. Chilling in its moral and social implications, this brilliant novel never flinches from the consequences of a system gone awry. This is Rosenberg at her best, a best-selling author who deserves to be *numero uno* on the charts again.

—Harriet Klausner

After Caroline
by Kay Hooper.
New York: Bantam, 1997. $21.95

Hot on the heels of two near-death experiences in a car accident, Joanna Flynn finds herself obsessed by an eerie recurrent dream involving a sobbing child. Soon after, on the streets of Atlanta, where she is a librarian, two total strangers separately greet Joanna as "Caroline," plunging Joanna into a frenzied bibliographic search for Caroline's identity. Eventually Joanna arrives in Cliffside, Oregon, where Caroline McKenna had died in a smashup the day of Joanna's accident. Joanna immediately learns she is the dead woman's physical double and soon encounters Caroline's brooding husband, Caroline's sorrowing little daughter Regan, their splendid house above the booming Oregon surf, dark hints about Caroline's foibles, and a sexy unattached sheriff—what more could readers who lost their hearts at Manderley ever want?

What do women ever want, indeed? Besides adding two more suspicious deaths, Hooper juices up the classic search for a dead woman's personality with thor-

oughly modern, even *Cosmopolitan*, details of no less than three erotic *pas de deux*. She leaves no bodice unbusted, no borrowed pyjamas undiscarded, although in the age of AIDS, inquiries about a partner's previous amatory history and precautionary methods might better be before, rather than after, the panting fact. Aside from the unlikelihood of a half-dozen swoon-provoking, magnetic males prowling one small Oregon town, Hooper's enthusiastic gallop through her plot's involved dips and twists is engaging and her dialogue no more unconvincing than the soaps, even if her fictional fantasies of sexual fulfillment leave too little to that most provocative of all sexual muscles, the imagination.

—*Mitzi Brunsdale*

The Burning Ghats
by Paul Mann.
New York: Ballantine, 1996. $23.00

Indians revere the burning ghats of Varanasi as the most sacred location to cremate their dead and scatter the ashes over the river Ganges. But even as those who have come to celebrate the passing of a loved one play in the water, deadly currents of phosphorous pour down the river to kill and maim thousands in a terrifying ecological disaster.

Industrial disasters such as the one at Varanasi are unfortunately the norm in modern India, due to corrupt inspection agencies and political exigencies. But when Rupe Seshan is appointed minister of the environment, she makes prosecuting the parties responsible for the disaster at Varanasi the centerpiece of her term.

To head the investigation, Seshan appoints Bombay lawyer George Sansi. Sansi seems the ideal choice. As a police detective who gave up his position for moral reasons to practice law, both his skills and his idealism will serve him well. In addition, the strong friendship they had in high school assures his personal loyalty.

Sansi's investigation leads him into a confrontation with Madhuri Amlani, whose psychological acumen has made him one of the most powerful and unscrupulous industrialists in India. Against the combination of Amlani's manipulative acumen and the vast resources available to such a man, Sansi has only his belief in justice and his wits.

The Burning Ghats, Paul Mann's third George Sansi novel, showcases the talents of a highly skilled writer who deserves every accolade he has received and more. His prose is sensual, passionate, and propulsive without any clutter, with a plot-line that is finely constructed and compelling. But most of all, Mann provides richly detailed, layered, and above all, realistic renditions of every character in the novel, each of whom grows as the novel spins toward its climax.

For those unfamiliar with the first two novels in the series, *Season of the Monsoon* and *The Ganja Coast*, *The Burning Ghats* provides a compelling reason to seek them out.

—*William Eggers*

Criminal Justice
by Barbara Parker.
New York: Dutton, 1997. $23.95

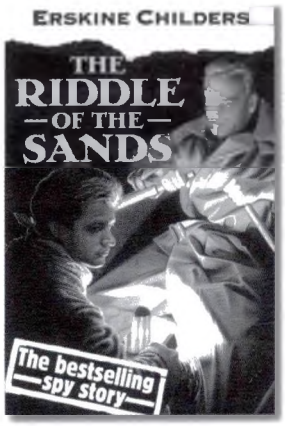
Miami prosecutor Barbara Parker has put her Gail Connor series on hold to introduce a new male protagonist. Dan Galindo refused to put a lying witness

PAST CRIMES

by Charles L.P. Silet

The Riddle of the Sands: A Record of the Secret Service
BY ERSKINE CHILDERS
Introduction by David Trotter

New York: Oxford University Press, 1995. $11.00
(First published in 1903)



Erskine Childers's *The Riddle of the Sands* is often cited as the first modern spy novel. Whether or not that is true is perhaps debatable. However, since 1903 it has remained in print and has been a perennial favorite of readers. The current reissue by Oxford University Press in their Popular Fiction series, with its excellent introduction by David Trotter, provides a welcome addition to the novel's many editions.

Frequently spy novels are a result of their authors' actual experience in the "great game." W. Somerset Maugham's Ashenden stories and John le Carré's spy novels provide well-known examples. Such biographical origins give their espionage fiction a "feel" which is difficult to duplicate otherwise. In this regard Erskine Childers's *The Riddle of the Sands* was the first of its kind.

Childers led a remarkable life. Born in 1870 he was orphaned by the age of twelve and spent his summers in Ireland, on his aunt's estate in County Wicklow. After receiving an honors degree from Cambridge he went to work as a civil servant in the House of Commons. Despite his limp and poor eyesight he volunteered for service in the Boer War, and in 1914, at the age of 44 and with a wife and two children, he again volunteered for active military duty, this time with aerial reconnaissance for the Royal Navy. He was often mentioned in dispatches and eventually won the Distinguished Service Cross. How, then, did this apparently conventional patriot come to earn the opprobrium of his country, prompting Winston Churchill to call him "a murderous renegade"?

It came about through his commitment to Irish home rule, a commitment that was strengthened by his marriage to Mary Alden Osgood, an idealistic Bostonian, whose political ideas he gradually adopted. As a result, he abandoned his faith in the conservative party and the Church of England and finally quit his job in Parliament. In *A Framework for Home Rule* (1911) he outlined his views on Irish separatism. During the summer of 1914 he smuggled into Ireland 900 Mauser rifles and thousands of rounds of ammunition for the IRA, weaponry later used in the Easter Uprising in 1916. After the First World War, Childers joined Michael Collins as a propagandist for the guerrilla war against the Royal Irish Constabulary. Collins's death left Childers caught in the middle of the Irish civil war, and he was eventually executed as a dangerous revolutionary by the Irish Free State.

The Riddle of the Sands was published in 1903 as a cautionary tale about British naval unpreparedness in the North Sea. Childers believed that the German Imperial navy could launch an invasion of England from the East Friesland estuary by using the largely uncharted sands as an embarkation point. As David Trotter points out in his introduction, such fears of invasion were popular in the fiction of the time, so Childers was working in a well-established literary tradition.

Childers once described his book as a sailing book with a purpose, and *The Riddle of the Sands* does have an exhaustive amount of information about the shifting sands along the Friesland coast and provides detailed navigational charts and extensive sailing instructions. Interestingly enough, an invasion of England (unbeknownst to Childers) was actually being considered by the German high command at the time.

The main cast of characters in the book is actually quite limited. The two protagonists are the somewhat effete government functionary, Carruthers, and his friend from university, Davies, the sailor whose suspicions about the naval plot are spelled out in the narrative. The villain is the evil von Brüning, an Englishman posing as a German, who proves to be the spy the two young sailors must capture in order to foil the invasion plans. Finally, there is von Brüning's daughter, Clara—a character suggested as an afterthought by Childers's publisher—who provides an unconvincing love interest for Davies.

Given the directions the spy novel has taken over the past ninety years, *The Riddle of the Sands* now probably will remind readers more of a Buchanesque adventure novel than an espionage thriller of derring-do. The plot is somewhat murky and largely devoid of any kind of violence; the love story is decidedly unnecessary. Even von Brüning is probably too gentlemanly for modern tastes. Still, as a precursor to le Carré and company, the novel remains of real interest because it helped to establish the conventions of the genre and stimulated a future interest in spy fiction. ■

on the stand and lost his job in the U.S. Attorney's office. In the process, he and his wife separate, he loses access to the gorgeous home they had, and he sees little of their small son. Lying low in the shabby corner law office he shares with a friend, Dan's most cherished dream now is simply to take his little boy deep sea fishing for a couple of weeks.

No such luck—he is approached by brother-in-law Rick Robbins, a music producer, to defend rocker Martha Cruz, accused of assaulting a police officer. Martha is staying at the home of elegant Latin American Miguel Salazar, where she seems to enjoy the best of everything, including her own rehearsal room and recording equipment. Dan is raw from breaking off his short-lived relationship with Kelly Dorff, a guitarist in Martha's band. The band has been infiltrated in a DEA effort to nail kingpin Salazar. Former prosecutor Dan Galindo's appearance at the drug lord's home causes speculation among DEA agents.

When Dan returns home one evening to find Kelly Dorff lying dead among his spearguns and the detritus of his salt water aquarium, he knows that his arrest looms inevitable. He must join forces with federal agent Elaine McHale, an old friend who appears to be his only hope. Nobody is what they appear in this vortex of murder, betrayal, and ruthless ambition. Parker's work crackles—you can smell the tangy ocean salt and hear the salsa beat on every page.

—*Susan Zappia*

Deal on Ice

by Les Standiford. New York: HarperCollins, 1997. $23.00

Sick of the sameness and the savagery of those South Florida tales of cocaine, Columbians and corruption? Well then, Les Standiford's latest John Deal book is just the cure. Deal, a South Florida building contractor, is drawn into a murder investigation by the killing of his childhood friend, Arch Dolan, the owner of Miami's best, independent bookstore, and current employer of Deal's estranged wife, Janice.

Hours before his death, Dolan told Deal of his impending demise as a book seller. A large conglomerate, Mega-Media, based in Omaha, and financed by the ultraconservative, multimillionaire Reverend James Ray Willis, plans to construct its largest superstore across the street from Dolan's store. Dolan also confided he had a final card to play before he folded his hand, but was murdered before he could reveal it to his friend.

Deal is both angered by Dolan's murder and puzzled by the apparent construction stoppage across the street. Sensing the two are related, he starts asking questions of people involved in the Mega-Media project, all of whom end up on someone's hit list. So do Deal and Janice.

Standiford conveys a sharp sense of place in his descriptions of Miami and Omaha. With his characters, however, he runs into the classic problem of series authors—how much material is needed from past books to make the characters understandable and credible? Consequently, while *Deal on Ice* can stand alone, it is clearly more meaningful to readers familiar with Standiford's earlier *Deal to Die For*.

—*Nancy-Stephanie Stone*

ATLAS to MYSTERY

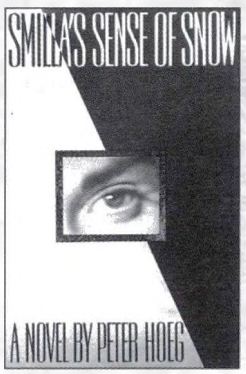
BY GEORGE J. DEMKO

This column is focused on a special set of places—very cold places! The use of arctic or frigid locales for mysteries was relatively rare in the past. It is clear, however, that cold settings have become much more popular recently.

Mysteries set in frigid climes obviously underline the significance of "place." The setting, the region, the local geography in many cases is as important as the plot. These works often focus on environmental themes: deforestation, the spread of development, and resource—especially oil—exploitation. A common third theme is the fate of indigenous populations as development and immigration intrude on native life styles and traditions.

Let me first turn to the Russian Arctic. Unfortunately most Russian-authored stories set in northern USSR/Russia have not been translated. Among western writers, one of the best is Anthony Alcott, who produced an excellent Siberian mystery—*May Day in Magadan* (Bantam, 1983). Martin Cruz Smith's *Polar Star* (Random, 1989) is set on a fishing/factory ship in the Bering Sea. *Kolymsky Heights* (St. Martin's, 1994) by Lionel Davidson is set in rugged Siberia and features a Russian scientist who seeks help from a Canadian Gitskan Indian. Craig Thomas in *A Wild Justice* (HarperCollins, 1995), exposes greed and corruption in the northern Siberian oil and gas fields. The prolific Stuart Kaminsky has created a series featuring a Moscow-based policeman who, in *A Cold Red Sunrise* (Ivy, 1988), solves a vile crime in a Siberian village.

Scandinavian writers have set many mysteries in the Arctic but few have been translated into English. Among the recent mysteries set in Arctic Scandinavia, three merit special attention. *The Zero Trap* (Coward, McCann & Geohegan, 1980) by Paula Gosling centers on a planeload of passengers abducted and imprisoned in a luxurious house in Lapland. More recent novels include Peter Hoeg's immensely popular *Smilla's Sense of Snow* (Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1994) set in Denmark and Greenland, and Kerstin Ekman's *Blackwater* (Doubleday, 1993) which is set in Arctic Sweden on the Norwegian border. The latter is filled with environmental concerns and social tensions between the Sami (Lapps) and Swedes.



Interestingly, two of the most famous of the Canadian Mountie stories were written by non-Canadians. *King of the Royal Mounties* and *Sgt. Preston of the Yukon* were created by Americans—Zane Grey and Fran Striker, respectively. An excellent Canadian mystery set in the north is J.R.L. Anderson's *Death in a High Latitude* (Scribner, 1984) involving an 18th century map and the search for the Northwest Passage. Scott Young's mysteries feature an Inuk Mountie who solves crimes in the Northwest Territories (*Murder in a Cold Climate,* Viking, Toronto, 1988). Christian MacLeon, a British thriller writer exploits the Canadian Arctic with novels such as *Ice Station Zebra* (Doubleday, 1963) and *Athabasca* (Doubleday, 1980). One of the best references on Canadian cold-country crime is David Skene-Melvin's *Crime in a Cold Climate* (Simon & Pierre, Toronto, 1994).

In recent years, Alaska has become a popular venue for mystery writers. Among the most popular currently is Dana Stabenow's Aleut detective, Kate Shugak, who solves crimes all over Alaska. Her themes are very frequently concerned with environmental threats and the loss of native cultures. The physical geography of her novels is exquisite. One of her best is *Dead in the Water* (Berkley, 1993).

Elizabeth Quinn features Lauren Maxwell, a female State of Alaska Wildlife Investigator concerned with environmental crimes and the loss of native traditions in *A Wolf in Death's Clothing* (Simon & Schuster, 1995). In *Alaska Gray* (St. Martin's, 1994), Susan Froetschel has her female protagonist, Jane McBride, solve a crime related to the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act of 1971.

Sue Henry sets a series in Alaska with State Trooper Alex Jensen as the hero, although his friend, Jessie Arnold, a sled-dog champion racer, usually steals the show. Her immensely popular *Murder on the Iditarod Trail* (Avon, 1993) was made into a television movie. *Her Termination Dust* (Morrow, 1995) is set on the Top of the World Highway.

John Straley has won awards for his *The Curious Eat Themselves* (Bantam, 1995), set in southern Alaska, as was *The Woman Who Married a Bear* (Signet, 1994). Benjamin Shaine in *Alaska Dragon* (Firewood Press, 1994) deals with environmental politics and the mining industry in Alaska. In *Icy Clutches* (Mysterious Press, 1990) Aaron Elkins creates a frigid thriller and Dean Koontz has rewritten his 1976 *Prison of Ice,* retitled it *Icebound* (Ballantine, 1995), and created a thrilling Cold War novel of murder, and Soviet-American cooperation on the polar ice cap.

Samuel Taylor Coleridge once wrote, "set adventures in remote lands for the unknown thrills...an author can get away with less fact and more imagination for there will be fewer among his or her readership who can check for accuracy." Any reading of the novels suggested above, however, will provide verification that these authors get away with nothing—they know their place! ■

George J. Demko, a professor of geography at Dartmouth College, is especially interested in the mystery genre in an international context. He is an active scholar of the *locus operandi* of mysteries.

Death in the Palazzo

by Edward Sklepowich.

New York: Scribner, 1997. $21.00

There is bad blood in the da Capo-Zendrini family going back, well, as it turns out, going back to Emperor Constantine and the Byzantine Empire. The Contessa da Capo-Zendrini, present resident of Ca' da Capo-Zendrini—the Venetian palazzo—has invited the members of the estranged family to a dinner party, to join with the Zeno family in celebration of the unveiling of the Contessa's portrait, painted by Gemma Bellini Rhys of the Zeno family. The last time the families were together was forty years before, when Gemma's mother, Renata, died mysteriously in the Carravagio room, a closed off part of the villa believed to be cursed.

What follows is a classic Victorian gothic locked-room mystery. Once the cast of characters is assembled in the Ca' da Capo, one of the worst storms ever to visit Venice hits, knocking out the telephones and keeping everyone inside away from the flooding streets. Assisting the Contessa is American expatriate Urbino Macintyre, biographer and amateur sleuth. The story unfolds in a number of voices: a letter written by the Contessa's long-dead husband, Alvice; Urbino relating his version of events; the tale of the Byzantine rift between the families told by the septuagenarian flirt, Bambina. And as thunder roars and lightning flashes, the party's unexpected and *thirteenth* guest, Molly Wybrow, is found dead in the cursed Caravaggio room.

Urbino investigates, examining the scene, consulting with one of the other guests, Dr. Luigi Vasco, an aging physician present at the original death forty years ago. The death appears to be an accident. The victim, Molly Wybrow, claimed to have a psychic talent, to be able to see people's pasts. Or perhaps she was simply good at research, since papers Urbino finds in her luggage suggest she was writing a biography about the Ca' da Capo.

One by one Urbino visits the guests. Finally, as the storm rages outside the villa, Urbino stages a little psycho-drama that will bring the killer—yesterday's and today's—to light.

Murder in the Palazzo is good fun. Mr. Sklepowich's prose is light and strong, and half the fun of reading this book is letting those beautiful Italian names drip off your tongue like honey (or marinara sauce!). The entire novel has a feel of something written thirty or forty years ago, and contains all the accoutrements of a gothic novel: a mansion of many rooms, guests confined to the mansion by a raging storm, and slowly, one by one, the bodies piling up.

—*Mark Terry*

Distant Blood

by Jeff Abbott.

New York: Random House, 1996. $5.99

Jordan Poteet is asked to attend a family reunion by his natural father Bob Don Goertz. It is an invitation from hell. After agreeing to attend, he receives a blood stained greeting card with the message "Stay Away Bastard. You're Not Wanted. Don't Make Me Prove It." Two others follow before the reunion begins on Sangre (Blood) Island, owned by Uncle Muff, the family patriarch, who won it in a poker game.

The Goertzes are the consummate dysfunctional family. Uncle Mutt, reported to be worth ten million dollars, had three fingers shot off when he was found in bed with two women. Aunt Lolly believes the spirit of her late husband inhabits the body of her Chihuahua. Cousin Deborah has a voice "warm and sweet like caramel (which) could reduce men to abject slavery." Cousin Aubrey is the despised, resident family historian-therapist.

The reunion gets under way with a dinner party at which Bob Don's sister Sass excoriates the family, Uncle Muff announces that he is dying of cancer of the brain, and Aunt Lolly—the only person drinking red wine—becomes ill and dies of an apparent heart attack. Then the fun begins.

The Goertz family has many secrets. And ghosts. Conversations among members of the family are as vicious as intimate, shared knowledge can make them. Investigating Aunt Lolly's death, Poteet encounters murders, both past and present. Around him rage familial and meteorological storms as he struggles with the issue of his identity. Who should he consider his father? Bob Don or Lloyd Poteet, the man who raised

him and loved him?

The book is a delight. The plot and the richness and complexity of Poteet's reactions to the events around him propel the action and reflect a very high level of invention. Abbott writes very well. His first novel, *Do Unto Others* won both the Macavity and Agatha Awards. He hasn't lost his touch.

—J. Clifford Kaspar

The Echo

by Minette Walters.

New York: Putnam, 1997. $23.95

In the course of researching a story on the homeless for *The Street*, a left-of-center political magazine, Michael Deacon is sent to interview Mrs. Amanda Powell, who six months earlier had discovered the body of a tramp known only as Billy Blake in her garage. The provocative incongruity of a homeless man dead of starvation within the confines of one of London's more exclusive housing developments is more than *The Street's* editor can resist, though Deacon views the proposed interview as gratuitous and contrived.

Deacon's misgivings give way to near-obsession, however, as he finds himself drawn to the character of Billy Blake and compelled to reconstruct the man's life. Deacon is unwilling to accept, as Amanda Powell dryly phrases it, "that any man's life is so worthless that the manner of his death is the only interesting thing about him." As he comes to discover, Billy Blake was a religious ascetic not unlike the poet whose name he adopted, and his life was at least as interesting as his death. As more facts of the dead tramp's life are revealed and aspects of his own history resonate sympathetically, Deacon's quest becomes more personal and philosophical than reportorial.

Aided by Terry Dalton, a homeless 14-year-old who knew Billy better than anyone else, sexually confused photo technician Barry Grover, and acidly avuncular retired lawyer Lawrence Greenhill, each of whom brings his own perspective and prejudices to the project, Deacon's reconstruction of Billy's last years grows to be more than the mere accumulation of biographical data. Involving the unknown fates of two long-missing men—one a diplomat, the other a banker—amid accusations of murder and theft, the story of Billy Blake becomes an examination of the nature, costs, and responsibilities of love, be it sexual, parental, or fraternal. Ultimately, it is a lyrical allegory of the impermanence of love and the enduring power of duty.

Lavish in nuance, nearly seamless in its simultaneous narratives of a life redefined and one awaiting redefinition, *The Echo* is a major novel by an important novelist. That it happens also to qualify as crime fiction is icing on the cake to any fan of the genre. Whatever else you read this season, don't miss *The Echo!*

—Paul A. Bergin

Fade Away

by Harlan Coben.

New York: Dell, 1996. $5.50

"Now reporting for Bob Cameron," the loudspeaker began. "Number 34. Myron Bolitar!" Myron Bolitar in an NBA game? The first-round draft pick eleven years ago who scored eighteen points in a preseason game and got a shattered knee in a collision with Burt Wesson of the Washington Bullets? No NBA career, no endorsements. Just a ticket to law school before becoming a sports agent, and basketball turned into a few pickup games on weekends. Yes, that Myron Bolitar.

This strange turn of events all began when Clip Arnstein, the major owner of the New Jersey Dragons, asked Myron to join the team—undercover—to look for Dragons star Greg Downing, who went missing a few days before. Downing was Myron's basketball rival all through school, the guy who wooed and won the hand of the fair Emily that both had desired. The job quickly sours when Myron and partner Windsor Horne Lockwood III find blood in the basement of Greg's home. Finding out why Greg disappeared and whether he's still alive, as well as digging up long-buried secrets, takes a lot longer.

Win is on board to give financial advice to Myron's athlete-clients, as well as provide "special services" (legal or not) that Myron may require—a holdover from the days when the pair did some undercover work for the FBI. And Esperanza, formerly known as "Little Pocohantas" in her pro wrestling days, keeps the office working smoothly.

So, listen. Grab a Yoo-Hoo (or *your* favorite beverage), pull up a chair and read *Fade Away*. Don't worry: you don't need to be a sports junkie to enjoy the book, any more than you need to be a jockey to read Dick Francis. But you need to know that bursts of spontaneous laughter are likely since Anthony-award-winning Harlan Coben's Myron Bolitar has the same off-beat sense of humor as Robert Crais's Elvis Cole and Robert B. Parker's Spenser. The book cover says *Fade Away*, but I have a strong feeling that both Myron Bolitar and Harlan Coben are going to be on the mystery scene for a long, long time.

—Ronald C. Miller

Hardrock Stiff

by Thomas Zigal.

New York: Delacorte, 1996. $20.95

Don't be put off by the title, which sounds like that of 1940s B-grade... Thomas Zigal's Aspen-based novel—his second following *Into Thin Air*—has a lot going for it. For one thing, it has numerous first-rate action scenes. It has a refreshing setting—the Colorado mountains, with forays from Aspen to

Colorado Springs, Durango, and Las Vegas. It has a solid base of interesting characters, revolving around sheriff Kurt Muller. And it has a larger than life conflict—the struggle between the conservationist greenies and the individual rights/developers coalition that seeks to develop and exploit without restraint. Zigal makes it clear that there are no easy answers here and that the little guys are likely to get hurt as the stakes rise.

Crusty miner Ned Carr has sent for his friend Kurt Muller, suggesting that he is in big trouble. Before Muller reaches him, Carr is killed in a mine explosion, which Muller believes is murder. Kurt takes Carr's grandson Hunter (the same age as his son Lennon) under his wing and vows to learn the truth. As he pursues the trail to attorney Arnold Metcalf and the Free West Legal Coalition, disasters keep happening. Carr's young mine associate Tyler Rutledge is critically wounded by gunfire, the companion-bodyguard of Kurt's old flame Kat Pfeil is killed and the house where Kurt, Kat, and the boys Hunter and Lennon are socializing is firebombed. Who is the target? Kurt? Kat, an environmentalist foe of Free West? Or Hunter, the inheritor of Ned Carr' s mine holdings?

Zigal provides no solution to the environmentalist-property rights debate. Though he may side with the preservationists, he shows the harm of excesses from either side. The story is engrossing, but almost too big for the frame in which he places it. And his nasty developers seem over-powerful, like forces from a Robert Ludlum opus. Still, Zigal's story delivers solidly in many ways. Now if he can just come up with a better title next time.

—*Douglas G. Simpson*

Hunter's Moon

by Chuck Logan.

New York: Harper, 1996. $5.99

Harry Griffin is wakened in the middle of the night by a drunken phone call from his friend Bud Maston. Maston, having dived off the wagon after ten years of sobriety, says he wants Harry to come up to the Minnesota North Woods and teach his step-son how to shoot. All this is news to Harry. Last time they had talked, Bud had been running for the state senate and mysteriously dropped out. Now he was married, with a step-son—and drunk. Because he feels he owes his own sobriety to Bud, Harry reluctantly agrees to join him in Stanley, Minnesota.

What he finds is Bud married to a woman ("sexual predator" is stamped all over her) with two teenagers, Becky and Chris. Almost immediately there is a carnal undertow between Harry and Bud's wife, Jesse. In addition, Harry, a former Marine sniper and mercenary during Vietnam, sees instantly that Chris is a troubled, hostile kid with a possible drug problem—the last person you want to hand a gun. But Bud insists he needs to make a connection with the kid, so the next morning the three males head into the woods.

At one point Harry is drawn back to the lodge to meet Jesse and returns in time to find Chris firing his rifle at Bud. Harry instinctively fires and kills Chris.

Although the local law calls it a justifiable shooting, Harry isn't quite so sure. Off comes his Minnesota Harry persona, the quiet, controlled graphic artist, and on comes the Detroit Harry persona, the volatile, violent, out-on-the-edge drinking man, determined to get to the bottom of the killing. And what he finds is a possible conspiracy that could destroy him.

Hunter's Moon is an amazing first novel that reads like a bullet train with all the impact of a hydrogen bomb. The writing is visceral, vibrant, filled with haunting to-the-heart imagery. Logan's prose style cuts right to the soul of his characters and creates edgy, jagged moods to punctuate the settings. There are dozens of plot twists, most of which leave the reader slapping his forehead with an "Of course!" sense of surprise. A first-rate read, highly recommended.

—*Mark Terry*

Man with a Squirrel

by Nicholas Kilmer.

New York: Henry Holt, 1996. $22.50

In this second Fred Taylor mystery, set in the Boston-Cambridge-Arlington area, and centering on the art world, Kilmer proves again he is a pretty fair wordsmith. "Mr. Martin presents himself more like the underneath of a yard-sale sofa" illustrates his knack for presentation of character.

In this tale Mr. Martin's pre-dawn presence across the street from where Fred and Molly Riley, his mistress, and her two children live in Arlington, begins a story of intrigue featuring some very tough characters, the attempt to literally put back into one piece what could be a very valuable Copley painting from Colonial times, and a sub-plot dealing with a "spirit world" scam.

Kilmer is best at blending the three plots into a satisfying whole, and his depiction of the sporadic home life with Molly and her children is quite on target.

Molly's position as a librarian in the Cambridge system, and Fred's partner, Clayton Reed, art expert, assist him when he needs it most. And the secretive Roberto Smith's talents at putting the painting back together adds necessary expertise without which Fred would be hard put to succeed in his efforts.

The sub-plot features Molly's involvement with a de-programmer of those who have been under the influence of satanic cults. But the de-programmer herself is, ironically, as much a danger to her patients. Thus Molly and Fred are often at odds as to whose case takes priority, and the impact on their lives, and on the lives of Molly's children is not to be taken lightly, with the thread of a

modern relationship between mother and lover neatly packaged with its real-life "ups and downs."

Kilmer is particularly adept with some minor characters: Oona, the elderly Hungarian antiques dealer in Boston, and Marek, her nephew. It is from Oona that Fred gets the first third of the possible Copley painting, and after her death it is Marek who seems to be omnipresent when there is skulduggery. Marek is a strange bird, and we are kept wondering about his character until near the end.

This is an enjoyable caper, and Kilmer seems to have his sights set correctly on the development of this as a series. We can look forward to future adventures of Fred Taylor.

—*Cal Branche*

Notches

by Peter Bowen.

New York: St. Martin's, 1997. $20.95

Another in the growing output of Western mysteries featuring ethnic heroes is Peter Bowen's Gabriel Du Pré series. *Notches* is the fourth in the little noticed series (at least by this reader), though Bowen's work as a writer of westerns (remember *Yellowstone Kelly* from the 1960s?) has achieved some recognition. Du Pré, a cattle inspector/detective, whose turf is the vast reaches of northeast Montana, is a Métis, a centuries-old blend of early white settlers and native Indians, a people who aren't truly regarded as white or Indian.

Du Pré lives with Madelaine, a wonderful and earthy fellow Métis who has been waiting eight years for official notification of her husband's death. Aware of increasing instances of young women being killed and found months later off a highway, Madelaine urges Du Pré to use his skills to find the killer—if for no other reason than to safeguard her own daughters. Du Pré works with local police, FBI agents, and a renegade trucker named Rollie Challis (who had lost a sister to the killer) to track down his man. As bodies are found with increasing frequency, it becomes apparent that two very clever serial killers are inspiring each other to killings both more frequent and more ghastly. One killer is working east/west along the Hi-Line (Route 2), the other north/south.

Du Pré and Madelaine feel a sense of urgency when, first, her 15-year-old daughter runs off (later returned by Challis from Spokane) and, second, when a girl neighbor becomes one of the victims. Concerned that officials playing by the rules can't and won't act quickly enough, Du Pré takes matters into his own hands, assisted by Challis.

Bowen brings the Red River-Wolf Mountains countryside to life, and his cast of characters is both interesting and believable. Gabriel Du Pré is a welcome addition to the western mystery scene. If the other episodes are as engrossing as *Notches,* they deserve a wider reading public.

—*Douglas G. Simpson*

The Phoenix of Prague

by Douglas Skeggs.

New York: St. Martin's, 1997. $22.95

Sometimes you read a book which makes you want to get on the next plane to see first-hand what you've been reading about, to retrace some of the streets, to visit some of the buildings, and to drink in the atmosphere to see if the author got it right.

Douglas Skeggs has done just that.

Native-born Jan Capek, a British spy given a chance to redeem himself after serving nearly two years in a Czech prison, is sent back to Prague to find out about art masterpieces which have begun showing up at auctions.

Formerly in the possession of the late Czech dictator, Ceausescu, the bulk of the paintings could fetch many millions of dollars and might be used to finance a new political regime, something British Intelligence wants to know about.

Capek's adventures in Prague bring him face-to-face with political intrigue as he begins his search. From the labyrinth of tunnels beneath the city—these tunnels are previous foundations on which the city is built—to castle retreats in the dark countryside, Capek is faced with the daunting task of ingratiating himself with the current "people's choice," Jaraslav Kupka, and the icy-calm Major Vlasek of the Czech State Police, an enemy of Kupka.

Capek is desperate to prove he is still a good agent but playing both ends against the middle places him in dangerous situations where one misstep will find him in prison again, or worse, dead.

Blending the provocative scenery of Prague, memorable characterization, and skillful pacing with a realistic and chilling portrayal of the politics of the moment, Skeggs uses art as the binding force to keep us enjoying every moment in this novel.

—*Cal Branche*

Remote Intrusion

by Howard Olgin, M.D.

New York: Dell, 1996. $5.99

Dr. Holiday Powers is young, beautiful, and the new head of Advanced Surgical Technologies at L.A.'s Pacific University Hospital. Her job is to implement two new techniques: virtual reality training systems and remote presence surgery.

Remote presence surgery is the use of robots to perform "virtual reality surgery" from a long distance. Much of the research is funded by the Mitsuyama Corporation in Japan. Immediately trapped in hospital infighting and politics, Dr. Powers isn't quite prepared for the request—or demand—put to her by Han Takamoto, the head of the Mitsuyama Corporation: push up the

research on remote presence and perform gallbladder surgery in two weeks on Han Takamoto.

Reluctantly, she agrees to perform laser surgery in Japan from California by way of fiber optic lines. Despite the accelerated research schedule, Dr. Powers feels the procedure is safe. But things in her life are not going well. She has been receiving threatening phone calls; someone has been following her; the night before the surgery she and Gregory Hampton, the head of the computer simulations department, are assaulted. The morning of the surgery, Hampton fails to show up for the surgery. With few options, she proceeds with the surgery in front of a room full of the press, to vivid and disastrous effect.

The failed experiment makes international news and Powers is removed from her surgical duties. Slowly, she begins to investigate. While she investigates, someone is stalking her, a psychotic rapist who will stop at nothing to have her. The case takes on many odd twists, seeming to point to old friends and lovers, to a labyrinth of personal troubles from her own past.

Remote Intrusion is a gripping read, chock full of medical detail, complicated plot twists and subplots. Unfortunately, the novel sort of falls apart at the end, which is disappointing, given how tight and intriguing most of it is.

If you enjoy medical nuance and an interesting premise carried out well, get this book; but be prepared for a peculiarly weak ending to an otherwise strong story.

—*Mark Terry*

Show Control
by Keith Snyder.
Aurora, CO: Write Way, 1996. $20.95

Turn on your computer, slip a disk in the CD-ROM and call this picture up on the monitor. You and a friend are hanging out on your front porch when a car slows up, a rifle pokes out of the window and a bullet flies in your direction. Think there's enough memory on your hard drive to figure out why?

If you get the idea that *Show Control* has something to do with computers, you're right, but it's more than one of those "cyber" novels. The hero, Jason Keltner, uses a computer to compose electronic music, but you don't have to understand how he does it (and I don't) to enjoy this book. Author Keith Snyder has created a nice-guy hero, a creepy villain, an engaging supporting cast, and a house with character.

When his musician friend, Monica Gleason, is killed onstage by one of her own lasers, Jason decides to do some investigating, in the course of which, we find e-mail and hard drives and electronic gizmos galore. But when it comes down to tactics for fighting the bad guys, Jason turns to an old-fashioned, no mouse to click, paper and ink *book* for guidance. The book, *The Art of War,* sends Jason and his two best friends, Martin and Robert, tooling around Los Angeles and attracting the attention of both big-time mob types and federal agents.

The dialogue is fast and fun, though Mr. Snyder has a tendency to cuteness in the give-and-take of conversation between friends. There's plenty of action, several surprises, and a nice tie-it-up ending. I liked *Show Control,* liked the characters, and hope they'll be showing up in more books by Keith Snyder.

—*Jackie Acampora*

A Soul to Take
by C.N. Bean.
New York: Onyx, 1996. $5.50

Remember the acclaimed PBS series "Prime Suspect"? The female detective spends much of her time fighting jealous underlings and bureaucracy. So it is with Rita Trible here.

She's a divorced mother, trying to balance a demanding career with the upbringing of her young son Greg. The job and her concern for her son merge as a serial murderer begins to prey on young boys, each of whom bears an unsettling resemblance to Greg.

One of the most likely suspects is a priest who has a record of child molestation, but he's protected by the hierarchy of the Catholic church. Rita is told in no uncertain terms that she'll face the wrath of that formidable institution if she pursues her investigation.

This is a novel with some grisly elements. The slain boys have been clumsily embalmed by their killer. Rita is terrorized.

It is a story of contrasts—a life that is a mixture of visits to her senile mother and of the worst aspects of vicious depravity. The author navigates quite well this tightrope between the two.

—*Donald H. Buck*

The Sound of the Trumpet
by Bill Moody.
New York: Walker, 1997. $21.95

Evan Horne, the sometime detective in this novel, is a jazz pianist suffering from overuse syndrome of his right hand and unable to play. He is also about to lose his apartment in Venice, California, to a condo builder. Fortunately, he is consoled by the stunningly beautiful Natalie Beamer, a law student and ex-cop.

A friend offers him a trip to Las Vegas, with all expenses paid and a generous fee, to confirm that two newly discovered tapes were made by Clifford Brown, a brilliant—almost legendary—trumpet player, who died in a car crash in the 1950s at the age of twenty five. If authentic, the tapes could be worth thousands of dollars to a recording company. Horne is taken blindfolded to authenticate the tapes in the presence of

two collectors. He tells them it's either Brown or his double. There is a fight, one of the men is killed, and Horne is knocked unconscious.

Horne notifies the Vegas police, and removes a trumpet with the initials C. B. inscribed in it from the crime scene. After inventing an ingenious and almost fool-proof method of keeping the trumpet safe and out of the hands of the police, Horne works to discover whether the tapes are genuine, whether the trumpet belonged to Brown and who committed the murder. Interwoven with his search for the truth is a well-imagined narrative of Brown's last automobile journey. It is a sad fact that "going where the gigs are" is difficult, and sometimes fatal.

The issue of the authenticity of the tapes is the core the book. In the course of resolving it, Horne wends his way through the world of West Coast jazz. Moody tells us a great deal about jazz and its practitioners, from the amusing—Shelly Manne once owned a club in Los Angeles he named Shelly's Manne Hole—to the intriguing—many young jazz musicians serve an apprenticeship by assiduously copying and imitating a master who plays the same instrument.

The resolution of the problem of the tapes is skillfull; however the solution to the murder is not much of a surprise. Caveat aside, I plan to track down the first two books in this series, *Solo Hand* and *Death of a Tenor Man*.

—*J. Clifford Kaspar*

A Timely Death

by Janet Neel.

New York: St. Martin's, 1996. $21.95

Neel's fifth Francesca Wilson mystery follows 1993's well-received *Death Among the Dons*. In this outing, Francesca is subbing for her ill mother late one night at a women's shelter where she meets Annabelle Brewster, a young doctor battered by her surgeon-boyfriend, Antony Price. When Matt Sutherland, the flame-haired attorney for the shelter, appears to take Annabelle's case, he takes to calling Francesca "Wonder Woman."

Francesca's husband, Detective John McLeish, grapples in his own way with fallout from the dysfunctional Price family's violence. William Price, the owner of a time-share business plagued by complaints of fraud, has been found strangled and his safe has been cleaned out. McLeish and his men become fond of William's son Antony as prime suspect, largely due to his history of battering girlfriends and inconsistencies in his story. Their runner-up is Antony's younger brother, Francis, a drug addict.

John is sexually tempted when the gorgeous Catherine Crane reenters his life and work, taking a position in Fraud. But he is actually in good company: Francesca finds herself more than drawn to Matt Sutherland and they wind up in bed. John, caught up in his harried life and in his feelings for Catherine, mistakes Francesca's tenderness toward Matt for sisterly affection. The widow and associates of the murdered William Price scrabble to salvage the wreck of his business as son Antony gambles and begs Annabelle to return to him.

The mystery here is not particularly suspenseful or convoluted, but Neel's sympathetic examination of marriage and sexual attraction carries things along nicely and Francesca and John McLeish are characters one wouldn't mind meeting again.

—*Susan Zappia*

Woman in the Dark

by T.J. Phillips.

New York: Berkley, 1997. $21.95

Joe Wilder is a successful writer of novels and plays who enjoys a mystery challenge—so much so that he plans to make a second career of it. Raised on St. Thomas in the Virgin Islands, Wilder had an earlier adventure there, chronicled in the first book in the series, *Dance of the Mongoose*. When he is contacted by fellow St. Thomas native Jenny Hughes (also involved in *Mongoose*), Wilder takes an immediate interest in her worries over former college roommate Emma Vale, a wealthy appliance heiress convinced that someone is trying to kill her.

The homicide attempt sparks a special interest because sixteen years earlier, Emma's mother was killed with her lover in the family's guest house on their Long Island estate. Also dead, an apparent suicide, was her lover, whom she had been planning to break up with on that fateful, stormy night. Emma Vale bears a striking resemblance to her mother's graceful blond beauty, and Jenny and Joe cannot but wonder if there is some connection.

After talking to Emma, Joe agrees to help, first by hiring Chap Lannigan, a laconic strongman, to keep a close watch on Emma, and others as the need arises. Emma had been run off the road by a black sedan and, on another occasion, had taken aspirin, to which she is allergic. When Wilder learns that the next heir will be the offspring of the pregnant Emma Vale, the pieces begin to fall into place.

Phillips tells a good story. Wilder is an entertaining, appealing narrator, and Hughes and Lannigan take hold as players readied for future episodes.

—*Douglas G. Simpson*

Cozy

1-900-D-E-A-D

by Tony Fennelly.

New York: St. Martin's, 1997. $21.95

This is Ms. Fennelly's second novel starring New Orleans gossip columnist,

Margo Fortier, and her fifth in which Police Lieutenant Frank Washington is featured. Margo is in a marriage of convenience with Julian Fortier, a modern-day aristocrat who happens to be gay. Margo, now 48, has had a colorful past in show business, including some time as a stripper.

Frieda Harris bills herself as the Mystic Delphine and, in addition to her public performances, operates a psychic call-in service. She also attends the same astrology course that Margo does. When Frieda is found stabbed to death in her office, Margo, aspiring to become a full-fledged news reporter, uses her acquaintance with Frieda to persuade her editor to let her handle the murder for the paper. With her boss's blessing Margo looks for the killer in the psychic world. It is this special knowledge that gives her an in with Lieutenant Washington.

Margo narrates this story. She considers that she has healthy views on sex that complement her sex drive. Relatively chaste this outing, Margo is still slightly outrageous, supremely confident, and blessed with a bawdy sense of humor. This time she runs into a dozen or so off-beat characters and often reveals the tricks of magicians and so-called mind readers. All of which makes for a chuckle-filled read, although when she claims that "coloratura means 'what time is it?' in French," she is really reaching. Readers are reminded that this particular story takes place in late 1993 and, as is the author's custom, makes frequent reference to then-current events. Nevertheless, it is always fun to spend a couple of hours with Margo.

—Don Sandstrom

The Alpine Gamble

by Mary Daheim.

New York: Ballantine, 1996. $6.99

If there's one thing worse for the small Washington State logging community of Alpine than the depression that is slowly killing the town, it's those damn fast-talkin' California investor types who want to come in and build their spas and resorts and bring all their California crime and immorality with them.

Of course, there are residents who feel any enterprise that brings jobs and money to town is worth the sacrifice. When one of those is the venerable Leonard Hollenberg, county commissioner and owner of the muddy hot springs that the Californians want to develop, and another is relative newcomer, architect Scott Melville, who's on board to design the evil kingdom, the stage is set for fireworks. Right in the middle is Emma Lord, the feisty editor of the *Alpine Courier,* the town's weekly newspaper.

The two Los Angeles businessmen arrive and tensions erupt into arguments, fisticuffs and foodfights at cocktail parties. When Stan Levin, one of the entrepreneurs, is found shot to death at the site of the hot springs, Emma is firmly ensconced in her seventh murder case.

Mary Daheim is expert at handling the small town attitudes and prejudices of Alpine, and she juggles the many colorful characters with such aplomb that one gets to know them easily, even for a first time visitor to her town. From Dr. Fleke to Harry Bardeen, manager of the local ski lodge, the myriad population of Alpine become effortlessly familiar, and yet she avoids making them stereotypes.

The Alpine Gamble is light fare to be sure, but far from empty. Daheim's prose often sparkles, her plotting is sound, and her characters eccentric, charismatic, yet real. She is perhaps a bit too fond of the literary device of foreshadowing. The murder victim is obvious quite early, yet she seems to wallow at times in hints of the nefarious crime to come. As a result, it takes about a hundred pages before the murder occurs.

This flaw aside, *The Alpine Gamble* is almost always entertaining, and at times even scintillating. If you haven't visited Alpine yet, it would be a good gamble to give this one a try.

—Laurence Coven

Curl Up and Die

by Christine T. Jorgensen.

New York: Walker, 1997. $21.95

Stella the Stargazer's spooked out: one of her column readers, Ami, is troubled, someone called "Big Dick" keeps sending threatening letters, and Fluffy, her chameleon, is in a funky mood. To top it off, her best friend is head-over-heels for her hairdresser, DeAngelo. When was he born? Is that really his name? She asks, but her friend is too smitten to care, so Stella investigates—with a hair appointment. An appointment that leads to murder when she finds the love of her best friend's life dead.

Stella's boss wants to take her "Stargazer" column away, because one of her co-workers (love interest) told him Stella was receiving threatening letters. The police want her to stay out of the case. She buzzes around Cherry Creek and Washington Park with her chameleon in her pocket and gets herself into a heap of trouble, all because her friend has been accused of punching DeAngelo's ticket. Stella finds out DeAngelo was the salon's Romeo and all the cards are stacked against her friend. It all comes to a unique conclusion and Fluffy, her chameleon turns the right color and mood. Stella even has time for a little romance for herself.

The events are enough to curl your hair. Jorgensen's great sense of humor and twisting, turning plot make for an enjoyable read. This is Stella the Stargazer's third book and I look for-

ward to the next Stargazing mystery.

—Catherine M. Nelson

Elected for Death

by Valerie Wolzien.

New York: Fawcett, 1996. $5.95

This mystery novel is the tenth in the Susan Henshaw series. Forty-seven-year-old Susan is a wife, a mother, and someone good at solving murder mysteries. She has a handsome friend, who is the chief of police in the small Northeastern suburb where Susan lives. He often relies on her help. This time, however, it appears he may be involved with a suspect.

Susan's husband is running for a seat on the town's council, supported by one of three mayoral candidates. Susan is present when one of them gets murdered. The clues suggest several possible murderers and Susan finds herself systematically eliminating them in her usual common sense manner.

Everyone wants to tell Susan how her husband should vote if he is elected. The big issue is whether or not they should allow changes in old historical houses. People stop her on the street to express their opinion on this hot issue. She usually escapes them only to return home and find dozens of messages on her answering machine.

The characters in the book are well described and keep you interested until the end. Susan's good friend Kathleen, a busy mother of young children, supports her in her investigations. A reporter, new in town, also becomes her friend. The family dog, Clue, adds a pleasant, light touch with his antics.

Wolzien's novel contains smooth, believable dialogue. The heroine is an ordinary person whom we come to know and like as she goes about doing laundry, and picking up the dry cleaning and groceries. She worries about her husband and hopes her son will fill out his college applications.

Valerie Wolzien has put together a story that will keep the reader guessing until the end, and all the time enjoying a good read.

—Joyce Kopecky

Malarkey

by Sheila Simonson.

New York: St. Martin's, 1997. $22.95

Lark Dodge has travelled to Ireland from her home in the Pacific Northwest, leaving behind her cop-turned-teacher husband Jay in order to help her father research Irish Quakers. He has had a small stroke and is not supposed to drive.

They are renting a cottage from Alex and Barbara Stein, who produce multimedia software CDs. After they arrive, Lark leaves her father napping and sets out to look around. In a shed at the back of the cottage she discovers the body of a dead man, neatly laid out on his back with his arms folded, a spot of paint on his forehead.

Lark phones the police and the Steins, and is drawn into the murder investigation. Her husband flies over, to her dismay, since she assumes that he does not trust her to handle the affair. She is also tormented by her miscarriage of a much-wanted baby some time before. And is she becoming too fond of the local policeman? As the situation grows tense, both the Steins and their employees come under suspicion. The dead man is Slade Wheeler, their general manager, who organizes war games in the extensive forest behind their home. Then a young woman claiming to be carrying Wheeler's baby turns up.

Two situations lack sufficient explanation: a second murder and an act of destruction. But one does learn a great deal of Irish history and customs. The style is clear, the characters thoroughly believable. By the end, one is ready to hop on a plane for Ireland. This fifth in the Lark Dodge series is on the whole an excellent novel.

—Janet Overmyer

Mommy and the Money

by Nancy Goldstone.

New York: HarperCollins, 1997. $22.50

Sometimes it's just plain fun to sit down with a light and breezy book that doesn't pretend to be more than simple entertainment. This is the sequel to *Mommy and the Murder,* which introduced Elizabeth Halperin and her young daughter, Emily. Elizabeth is now a mystery writer (having turned the events from the first story into a successful book) trying to come up with an idea for her second book. She and her daughter live in the small village of Lenox (in the Berkshires of Western Massachusetts), where Emily has recently started at the prestigious—and very pretentious—Hawthorne Day School.

Having just recovered from a relationship that ended unexpectedly, and struggling to plot her next mystery, Elizabeth finds herself involved in a rather unsatisfying relationship with a real estate developer, who plans to build a shopping mall. Just as she is preparing to break up with him, he asks her to meet him at the construction site to discuss something important. When she arrives, however, she finds him dead, launching her into a wild adventure that, while perhaps stretching credibility, will delight readers seeking some charming escapism.

Elizabeth quickly learns that her deceased boyfriend was hiding quite a past, a past that apparently has caught up with him. A comic cast of suspects soon appears, and as Elizabeth tries to stay one step ahead of the police (who aren't entirely convinced that she wasn't involved in the murder), she attempts to figure out who is friend and who is foe. Some surprising romantic complications develop as well.

Unexpected plot twists and lively characters keep this well-crafted story racing along to a satisfying conclusion that neatly ties up loose ends. Goldstone plays entirely fair with readers in her solution

to the murder, something not always done. I liked the character of Elizabeth, who faces situations with humor and determination, and I look forward to reading about her future adventures.

—Liz Currie

Murder, She Meowed

by Rita Mae Brown and Sneaky Pie Brown.
New York: Bantam, 1996. $22.95

Think of the Browns's Crozet, Virginia, mysteries as the next step in diversity: multispeciesism. Where Koko and Yum Yum, in Lilian Jackson Braun's The Cat Who... series, help their owner solve puzzling deaths by knocking household objects to the floor or leaving books open to appropriate pages, the animal army which supports postmistress Mary Minor "Harry" Haristeen's amateur investigations has mastered strategy and tactics, not to mention conversation. (Sadly, while cats, dogs, mice, horses, even herons have no trouble understanding one another, even the smartest humans turn a deaf ear to their critters' insightful observations.)

At issue in *Murder, She Meowed* are the murders of several jockeys at the annual Montpelier Steeplechase. Cocaine is a serious problem in steeplechasing; gambling, horse-doping, and fraudulent horse trading also provide possible motives when jockeys start turning up dead with playing-card Queens of various suits near their bodies. It's a case tailor-made for Harry and her curious critters, who sniff out clues across the countryside to corner a calculating killer.

As with Dick Francis's award-winning mysteries, those unfamiliar with the horse world may have a bit of trouble getting into this mystery, but most will soon succumb to the charm of the fully-developed, non-human characters who make these tales cozies-with-a-twist.

—Mary A. Carroll

Stricken and So Die

by Simon Brett.
New York: Scribner, 1997. $21.00

That redoubtable actor, Charles Paris, is delighted to be playing the role of Sir Toby Belch in Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*—a job that assures him of a pay check for four months, a coup for an actor of his meager talents.

But his joy soon turns to dismay when the director, planning a traditional play, falls ill and is replaced by a Romanian with a much different agenda—putting his own stamp on Shakespeare. Paris shudders when the man suggests the play open in a double bed populated with all the characters and that a nude scene be included. Bad enough that he finds homosexual overtones in the classic play.

As the director wins over the cast one by one, Paris finds himself an outsider for wanting to play his role as Shakespeare intended. Then another cast member is stricken by a stomach ailment strangely akin to that which disabled the original director. Paris immediately suspects poisoning and his interest in the cast soars.

There is the successful television actor, performing to get back to his theater roots; the one-time television star, starting over after falling from public favor; the veteran actress with an interest in homeopathic medicine.

On the rainy night before the play is to open with its performance at a country festival, murder follows the suspected poisonings. And murder makes the opening night a rousing success.

Paris has reason to believe that he, as the non-believer in his director's pillaging of Shakespeare, may have been the intended victim so his efforts to find a killer logically escalate. The police naturally are not delighted to have the aid of a mere actor, but as the curtain rises for the second night's performance, they are in place to capture a most amazing killer.

Brett is at his comedic best when detailing the travails of his detective/actor—a man who has achieved a modicum of success but will never be a star. His insight into theater rivalries and intrigue are unparalleled.

—Sue Emmons

A Tangled Knot of Murder

by C.F. Roe.
New York: Signet, 1996. $5.50

When Robertson Kelso, Perth, Scotland's most-hated husband and businessman, comes to the office of Dr. Jean Montrose with sharp abdominal pains, she immediately suspects appendicitis. She hurries him off to the hospital for possible surgery. The surgery seems to go well, but, oddly, the next morning Kelso is found dead in his private room. At the postmortem, Dr. Malcolm Anderson discovers that the cause of death is curious. Very curious. And not natural.

The list of suspects is long. Who would, and more importantly, could have killed him? Dr. Hugh Kirkwall, who operated on Kelso, and has a drinking problem? Dr. Ramashandra Shah, the Indian-trained doctor, who is angling for Kirkwall's job? Albert Caie, whose life had been financially and physically ruined by Kelso? Rosemary Gallacher, the evening supervisor? Irene, Kelso's wife, who, along with her son, has been badly beaten by her husband? Or someone else entirely?

Dr. Montrose helps police inspector Douglas Niven, but they cannot agree on which suspect committed the crime. While both are investigating, another murder takes place.

Roe, a retired M.D., makes good use of his background to explain to the reader the medical terminology and procedures. One quibble is that the final convincing clue comes too much as a "sudden flash of understanding," as Dr. Montrose expresses it, a hunch the reader could not have suspected. But the tale

clips along at a brisk pace and is written in a clean, clear style. I would like to read the others in this series.

—Janet Overmyer

HISTORICAL

Fire and Fog

by Dianne Day.

New York: Doubleday, 1996. $28.95

For those of us who live in the San Francisco Bay Area, 1906 is remarkable for one event—the Great Quake. The earthquake and the devastating fire that followed, are key elements in *Fire and Fog*.

Fremont Jones, a young, independent woman who owns a typing business, is jolted awake by the quake and finds that her life has literally been turned upside down. After she tries to piece together the wreckage of her room, she moves on to her place of business to find that the building is uninhabitable. She sets to work, packing up her typewriter and files and, in the packing, discovers a room filled with boxes containing strange oriental artifacts hidden by books. In the meantime, fires in the distance have become a raging inferno and threaten to overwhelm the area.

In the days that follow, Fremont occupies herself in helping at the makeshift hospital and in trying to find the whereabouts and condition of her friends. She picks up some new friends, among them, a couple of admirers and a woman with whom she moves in. She learns that the couple who had been her landlords, and whom she saw shortly before the fire, are reported as being killed in the quake. Dead animals begin turning up on her doorstep and she can't shake the feeling that she is being watched. A murder and a missing body bring her into a fight for her life.

Although it is a little romanticized and perhaps glosses over some of the harsher aspects of the disaster, *Fire and Fog* is an enjoyable book. This is the second Fremont Jones mystery and some of the characters are hold-overs from the first book. Fremont's relationship with Michael Archer continues to grow but we will have to wait for the next book to find out where that is going. In the 1930 novel, *The Maltese Falcon*, there is another San Francisco detective named Miles Archer. Hmmm. Any relation?

—Rick Mattos

NON-FICTION

Bending the Willow

by David Stuart Davies. Penyffordd, Chester, U.K.: Calabash, 1996. $19.99

This is a study of the Granada Sherlock Holmes television series and Jeremy Brett's contribution to it, before and behind the camera. After the obligatory consideration of previous Holmeses and Watsons, the text moves into a season-by-season, episode-by-episode history of writing, production, and reception of the show from its inception to its decline, which coincided with the decline of its star. Brett's illness, he suggests, was merely one, possibly minor, factor in the end of this Holmes; more important were the dwindling number of canonical stories worth adapting and an inclination on the part of British television to cut the budget of shows which have achieved success. (Directors late in the series were ordered to cut back on dialogue and concentrate on pretty pictures.)

The book moves from there to Brett's relationship with Laura Pritchard, who went from fan to a sort of personal assistant, trying to see that he received proper treatment for manic depression. Rather than end with Brett's death, the final chapter reaches back to tell a few anecdotes that didn't fit anywhere else in the book.

Throughout, the book's focus is Jeremy Brett's contribution to the series. The phrase "bending the willow" is his, representing the amount he was willing to bend the canonical accounts. Brett's relationship with Holmes paralleled that of Conan Doyle: though he claimed at times to hate his fictional counterpart, his fascination nonetheless led to the somewhat self-indulgent *The Secret of Sherlock Holmes*, an extracanonical two-man show dealing with a psychological exploration of Holmes and a few shocking revelations about Moriarty.

The author finds an element of danger in Brett's personality which made him a great performer, possibly the most nearly fully-rounded Holmes on film. The book, however, lacks the thick, gooey gushing found in many fan-produced books and is, withal, a sober, thoughtful account of the Holmes series. (He does tend to overuse the word risible.)

"Of course," he claims, "in the end, we are only talking about a character from a story book and a talented performer who played him."

Anything wrong with that?

—Dan Crawford

A Companion to Poe Studies

edited by Eric W. Carlson.

Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1996. $99.50

Intended primarily as a guide to the huge amount of critical/scholarly material which has been written on the work of Edgar Allan Poe and featuring essays by over two dozen contributors, *A Companion to Poe Studies* is clearly not for everyone. Even readers who have a particular interest in the man who is most often (but not unanimously) credited as having invented the detective story may not view the book as indispensable, especially when one takes into account the relatively little space devoted specifically to Poe's tales of crime and detection.

This is not to say that the *Companion* is without value. Far from it. As an attempt to offer an intelligent overview of the major facets of Poe's work and personality and the literature that has been produced on same, it is an impressive accomplishment, and a persuasive argument could be made that it deserves inclusion in any serious library of crime fiction scholarship. Whether it deserves—or is likely—to be included in the more modest home libraries of devoted crime fiction fans is more problematic. It has a great many insights to offer, but is more general than fans of Poe's crime fiction would probably prefer, and its price is daunting.

It is an unfortunate economic reality that academic texts are expensive, and this volume is no exception. This fact will probably limit the zeal of private purchasers, which is regrettable in light of the authority and academic legitimacy crime fiction has assumed in the last few years, but the popularity and literary reputation of its subject seems likely to ensure that *A Companion to Poe Studies* will become widely available through academic and public libraries. It's not the same as plucking it off one's own shelf to clarify a point on the spur of the moment, but at least the scholarship it offers is available. That's the important thing, after all.

—Paul A. Bergin

A Comprehensive Price List of Crime, Mystery, Thriller and Detective Fiction, 1996 Edition

edited by Marshall W. Snow.
South Grafton, MA: Mostly Murder, Mystery and Mayhem. $75.00

The title of this work is almost as long as the massive two-volume book with over 600 pages of current dealer catalog prices for collectible books in the genre. Mr. Snow, a Boston area mail-order used book dealer, has compiled this comprehensive buying reference set, giving a range of prices for crime, mystery, and detective fiction first editions. Containing over 40,000 entries (25% new since his original 1995 edition), the set is comb-bound with heavy paper covers. Not a study publication, it is nevertheless a useful aid for anyone collecting in the field.

All the entries were gleaned from catalogues issued by over 150 different specialist dealers and from advertisements in *A.B. Bookmans Weekly* (the professional bookdealers weekly trade publication that lists books wanted and for sale by dealers worldwide). Each entry presents the following information:

Author Name, [and pseudonym(s)];

Series Character(s), and the books they appear in;

Book Title(s), by year of publication;

Where published and by whom;

Edition Status: First American or English, limited, proof, advanced copy, signed or inscribed, etc.;

Price range for each edition status listed.

Four pages of explanatory notes guide the reader in interpreting the format, listings, and prices, and are essential in deciphering individual listings correctly.

The editor has done extensive research and has provided a book that, used properly, will save collectors a great deal of time and money. The new or experienced collector will find this compendium quite reliable and can use it with confidence because the dealers whose specialist catalogues were used as sources are the most knowledgeable in the field. Here in one place is information that is virtually impossible to find elsewhere in such a convenient format.

In any undertaking of this magnitude, there are undoubtedly some flaws. The most obvious and important for the collector is the range of prices shown for each book without stipulation of the condition of the book. Since condition is one of the major factors in determining a book's value (the presence and condition of the dust jacket if the book was issued with one, and supply and demand being the most important others). Hopefully, the editor can provide a remedy in future editions without greatly increasing the book's length.

Overall, this work is a helpful and welcome reference for the legion of mystery and detective fiction collectors trying to determine a fair price for the next treasure. It is also a great source for finding the better specialist dealers as the editor kindly lists the name and address of each dealer who produced catalogues used as original sources.

—Barry T. Zeman

Elusion Aforethought: The Life and Writing of Anthony Berkeley Cox
by Malcolm J. Turnbull. Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1996. $34.95

Universally admired as the first British novelist to thoroughly explore the untapped psychological drama of the inverted detective story, the reputation of Anthony Berkeley Cox has long been secure. From time to time, the occasional detractor grumbles that the classic stories (his pseudonymous novels as Anthony Berkeley and Francis Iles, 1929–1932) are somehow dated, and therefore diminished, but few take these objections seriously. After all, when a writer is enshrined in the hallowed roll of the Haycraft-Queen Cornerstones, credited with authorship of three innovative novels, the honor is unassailable. Turnbull's book should be a delightful introduction for those who are otherwise unfamiliar with Cox and his writings, and an enticing reacquaintance for others. Apparently the only published book devoted solely to Anthony Berkeley Cox, this is an accomplished first study of the remarkable Englishman.

Turnbull makes economical use of his slim volume to recap the considerable praise (both in quantity and quality) for Cox's best books, as well as the complaints (and there were many) about the failure of his lesser novels. The research is presented thematically, centering around the subject's trio of personas, that is, as A.B. Cox, Anthony Berkeley, and Francis Iles. The cohesive time line within each of the three major divisions permits Turnbull to address any number of curious and significant items, including Cox's mysterious and abrupt cessation of fiction writing, his reclusion, and of course, his founding and membership in the Detection Club.

—*Michael Davis*

My Dark Places
by James Ellroy.
New York: Knopf, 1996. $25.00

It was Sunday, June 22, 1958, sometime during the wee hours of the morning. Two lives were violently and inexorably changed. The first was Mrs. Jean Ellroy, 43, a nurse, whose garroted, partially nude body was found just after 10 A.M. by some boys on their way to play baseball at the Arroyo High School diamond in Monte, a bedroom suburb of Los Angeles. The second was her ten-year-old son James, who wrote this book.

Homicide cops canvassed the neighborhood. Evidence technicians searched for clues at the scene. Witnesses were interrogated. Leads were investigated. Tests of the physical evidence were performed. But no one ever located the Blonde or the Swarthy Man who were seen with Mrs. Ellroy on Saturday evening. File #Z–483–362, Mrs. Jean Ellroy, was unsolved and likely to remain so. The case was abandoned. No one cared, except that ten-year-old boy, who grew into a troubled young man and wavered from one side of the law to the other, and back again.

In January 1979, James Ellroy vowed to turn his life around, to become a professional writer. He still remembered his mother in life...and in death. He wrote dark, brooding crime novels. They always had something of his mother in them. *Clandestine* was nominated for the Edgar Allan Poe award for best paperback original in 1983. *The Black Dahlia* (1987), the first novel of his L.A. Quartet, is a brilliant fictional account of the death of Elizabeth Short, a young woman whose violent death has marked similarities to the death of his mother; that real-life case remains unsolved to this day. And *Time* magazine named *American Tabloid* one of the best books of 1995.

In *My Dark Places,* his most personal book yet, James Ellroy confronts his mother's death, his obsession with crime in general and with murdered women in particular, his personal walk on the wild side, and his renewed investigation of the murder of his mother. *My Dark Places* is spellbinding and unforgettable, eclipsing Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood* and Meyer Levin's *Compulsion,* while setting a new and higher standard for true-crime reporting. Ellroy's purpose in writing this no-holds-barred account of his mother's murder, and in baring his mind and his soul is best stated by Ellroy himself in his chosen inscription for the book: She Lives!

—*Ronald C. Miller*

Perry Mason: The Authorship and Reproduction of a Popular Hero
by J. Dennis Bounds. Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1996. $55.00

Any critic of popular culture looking for a rich field to mine can certainly find one in the various incarnations of Perry Mason. According to J. Dennis Bounds, Erle Stanley Gardner, Mason's creator, left an estate containing 82 original Mason novels, 271 television episodes, 3,221 radio episodes, more than 20 made-for-television movies, six motion pictures, and various related items such as comic books and games.

Bounds himself is a specialist in television and film, and these areas shine through in his book. While he pays tribute to the novels that created the character of Perry Mason, this is done in a self-conscious manner, with a good deal of rather plodding, industrious discussion of literary theory. However, when Bounds moves into the radio, television, and film versions of Mason, the book comes alive. He is particularly good on the incestuousness of the popular media, as in his discussion of how the success of the film version of

Dashiell Hammett's *The Thin Man* affected the Perry Mason movies that followed. The result was that in *The Case of the Curious Bride*, Mason is introduced "recovering from a drinking binge, rolled up in a carpet on his office floor," showing that just like Nick Charles, Mason can down them with the best. (It's hard to imagine the debonair Nick wrapped up in a carpet, though—not his style.) And in *The Case of the Velvet Claws*, Mason is married off to Della Street in a misguided attempt to make the pair into a bright new version of Nick and Nora. Not, as it turned out, an idea destined to have a future, as anyone can verify who saw subsequent Mason films and television programs, where the two are resolutely back in their roles of employer/secretary and no mention is made of this strange marital interlude.

By far the most dominant interpretation of Mason was that of Raymond Burr, and it is Bounds's persuasively argued contention that once Burr appeared on the scene, he became the definitive Perry Mason, replacing even Gardner's original depiction of the character. Thus, Burr the interpreter becomes the model against which Gardner fans test the original Mason, again showing how one popular genre affects another.

With a price tag of $55.00 this is hardly a book for the casual mystery fan; instead, it is a work that those interested in the popular media as a whole, and particularly in the ways in which various aspects of the media affect one another, will want to add to their research collections.

—Joan Kotker

POLICE PROCEDURAL

Cracker: The Mad Woman in the Attic
by Jim Mortimore.
New York: St. Martin's, 1996. $21.95

Perhaps brilliant forensic psychologist Edward Fitzgerald spends so much of his time probing the dark recesses of others' minds so he won't have to spend any time examining his own. After all, he'd much rather gamble his mortgage away over a drink or two. Or more.

With his marriage falling apart and his luck at an all-time low, the news that a former student of Fitz's has been murdered on a train affects him deeply. Seeing this as an opportunity for redemption, Fitz decides to force himself on the Manchester Police Department as an expert investigator.

The police have in custody a man discovered by the train tracks unconscious, battered, and covered in blood. But the suspect can't seem to remember anything. Armed with his wit and the knowledge that amnesia is extraordinarily rare, Fitz brings the full weight of his psychological weaponry to bear, trying to extract a confession. But Fitz's discoveries don't match the police's theory, and he begins to doubt the suspect's guilt.

With the need for a speedy conviction, the Chief Inspector has no interest in Fitz's doubts or those of lovely Detective Sergeant Jane Penhaligon. In the face of this opposition, Fitz and Penhaligon work together to discover the truth, no matter where it lies. Digging ever deeper into the suspect's mind, the professional and sexual tension between these two grows as they are forced to examine their own dark desires. This tension drives Fitz and Penhaligon along their own quests for justice and redemption.

Cracker: The Mad Woman in the Attic is a novelization of a screenplay written by Jim McGovern for the Edgar Award-winning TV series "Cracker." Third in the series, Jim Mortimore's adaptation drives to its conclusion as forcefully as Fitz's search for the truth. In particular, Mortimore's use of multiple perspectives to propel the story shows a remarkable polish for a first-time author.

—William Eggers

Death Is Now My Neighbor
by Colin Dexter.
New York: Crown, 1997. $24.00

What an inbred place Oxford must be! And how do its unfortunate students learn anything, with their dons forever embroiled in one or another of Inspector Morse's investigations?

The irascible Inspector is assigned the fatal shooting of an attractive young woman in her North Oxford kitchen. Though the victim appeared to have few enemies, Morse and his long-suffering subordinate Lewis snoop out a few suspects: a rather smarmy journalist with a doubtful past who lives next door; a hard-charging female Tory politico down the block (whose income derives from a most peculiar source); and a senior don from Oxford's Lonsdale College, who was the dead woman's occasional lover and is now one of two finalists for the position of Master of Lonsdale.

Pursuing leads in this puzzling case, Morse and Lewis question fundamental assumptions, even speculating that the victim may have been killed by mistake. When further mayhem ensues, they realize the North Oxford shooting was a more convoluted crime than it at first appeared.

Fundamental assumptions are under challenge, too, in Morse's personal life. Having ignored "healthy lifestyle" twaddle all his life, the Inspector is shocked to find himself confined in the hospital for a week in the midst of his investigation. With a chronic condition which should (but doesn't) diminish his fondness for ale, Morse is even more dependent on the loyal Lewis as they struggle to identify a single-minded killer before more lives are lost.

—Mary A. Carroll

Embers of Death

by Stella Shepherd.

New York: St. Martin's, 1997. $20.95

This is a classic police procedural novel. The police, and Detective Inspector Richard Montgomery in particular, are seen on almost every page. Murder combined with arson are the crimes under investigation here. Nottingham is the place and pharmacist Robert McPherson is the murder victim.

Robert McPherson was a struggling young professional whose funds were scarce. He maintained high standards and was well liked, but something which happened long ago interfered with his success. Early in the novel his charred body is discovered in the burned wreckage of his pharmacy. The rest of the novel describes the attempt to identify his murderer, clearly an arsonist.

Inspector Montgomery is a quiet and reflective cop whose meticulous and thoughtful approach seems sure to bring success. The plot takes us to visit each possible suspect several times and reveals how innocent persons lie to the police to protect themselves or their friends. Finally, after sifting out the lies and exaggerations, the Inspector and his partner begin to make progress in a surprising direction. The book doggedly follows police routine to a well-staged conclusion.

This is a carefully developed novel which provides a glimpse of life in a small British village. Inspector Montgomery and Sergeant William Bird perform in a fashion that will please their fans, and the other characters prove to be interesting and clearly drawn. A short and well-written novel.

—John F. Harvey

The Fallen Man

by Tony Hillerman.

New York: HarperCollins, 1996. $24.00

Hillerman has been one of the most prolific American mystery authors of the last couple of decades. His novels starring Navajo Tribal cop Jim Chee and Detective Joe Leaphorn are sold in over a dozen languages. In this twelfth installment, Joe Leaphorn rallies from retirement to investigate the death, eleven years earlier, of a mountain climber whose skeleton has been recovered from Ship Rock. Leaphorn suspects the remains could be those of ranch heir Harold Breedlove, the alleged victim of a missing persons case he remembers well. Courted by the Breedlove Corporation and family to investigate and find out who was with Breedlove that day, Leaphorn accepts twenty thousand dollars.

Meanwhile, the newly-promoted Jim Chee struggles with the daily politics of supervising other police officers. His personal life is more complicated as he finds himself questioning his engagement to half-Navajo lawyer Janet Pete and tries to remain objective when dealing with attractive Officer Bernadette Manuelito.

Things heat up considerably for both men when an old Navajo gentleman who had acted as mountain guide for Breedlove and his beautiful young bride eleven years before is shot by a sniper. Breedlove, who stood to inherit the ranch on his thirtieth birthday, is characterized as a selfish, spoiled rich kid who climbed mountains sacred to the Navajo people with a devil-may-care attitude toward life. Was he done in by his savvy young wife, by greedy mining interests, or simply by Ship Rock itself?

This is vintage Hillerman, atmospheric and filled with cedar waxwings "chirping bird comments" and "the gray-and-white patterns of soft snow on sage and salt bush and chamisa." He does here what he does best: paint pastel portraits of the Navajo people and reservation.

—Susan Zappia

High-Heel Blue

by Diane K. Shah. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997. $23.00

Los Angeles policewoman Brenden Harlow and her partner Todd Robbie, members of the elite Metro squad, are assigned to decoy duty. Someone has been knifing women at outdoor ATM machines. Brenden will be the lure, Todd and others her backup. As is often the case with police work, though, the killer doesn't bite; he, or she, only nibbles.

Harlow studies the files of the victims, and develops a few leads, none of which impress her immediate superior, Sgt. Raymond Higgins. Higgins has no use for Harlow ever since she showed him up in a tense arrest situation.

Equally troubling are her home problems. Her marriage to popular television actor Jack Hayes is showing fatigue—a fact pounded home when it's left to close friends to tell Brenden something she doesn't suspect: her husband has a drug abuse problem. And Harlow has substance abuse problems of her own. She is spending more and more of her off-duty time at the First Base Saloon.

The serial killer, meanwhile, eludes police snares and increases his tally to eight. The victims display no signs of fear or of having fought against the killer, which leads Harlow to wonder if the murderer might be a woman. She comes up with a likely candidate: the owner of a construction company who witnessed one of the killings. Other task force officers like Harlow's theory, and stake out this suspect.

Then the phone calls begin. Harlow would have ignored the first one. But not the second. The killer has her unlisted number, and begins taunting her.

The mystery is well crafted. The writer, bless her, sticks strictly with her heroine's point of view in the whirlwind race to a climax. We have little doubt she will solve the killings; but how will she deal with her shattering home situa-

tion and own reliance on booze?

—Bernard A. Drew

Killer

by Christopher Newman.

New York: Dell, 1997. $5.99

Expect slam-bang action when Newman's NYPD Lt. Joe Dante—whom a Florida colleague describes as "the most highly decorated street cop, from the biggest police force in the free world"—is on the case. Be it noted, however, that readers with weak stomachs may want to take a pass this time, since the Cali drug cartel honcho at the center of *Killer* is a psychotic, sadistic rapist-murderer despised even by his cocaine-pushing *compadres*.

No one in *Killer* heeds the Biblical injunction to leave vengeance to the Lord. When the media erroneously credit Dante with killing New York City druglord Freddy Mendoza, the Colombian's enforcer brother Teo begins plotting his escape from Sing Sing to kill the New York detective. Mendoza knifes himself seriously enough to force prison officials to ship him off to a hospital. En route he and the prison nurse are hijacked by slimeball *extraordinaire* Julio Mesa, nephew of cartel head Lucho Esparza, and cocaine and gambling addict Lyndon "Sonny" Reed, a massive Georgia good old boy whose promising pro football career ended when alumni boosters ratted on his point-shaving to prevent sanctions against the university.

On their way to dinner cartel shooters "driveby" Dante and a former flame, actress/designer Janet Lake. Dante's skull is seriously creased, but Lake is cut down by the automatic weapon fire.

Vengeance, of course, begets vengeance. Dante leaves his hospital bed to track the killers. The fugitives leave a gory trail of death and destruction, but elude capture with timely warnings from within the NYPD-DEA-FBI task force. In a final confrontation on a levee in Florida's Everglades, Dante goes head-to-head with Mesa, with Dante's current love, NYPD Capt. Rosa Losada, as the prize.

The good-guy/bad-guy structure of Newman's Dante stories is nothing new, but the author deserves credit for giving most of his characters, good and bad, multiple dimensions. The one exception here is the satanic Julio Mesa, a creature so vile even a card-carrying liberal would be inclined to call for the death penalty.

—Mary A. Carroll

Murder of a Dead Man

by Katherine John.

New York: St. Martin's, 1997. $22.95

A young man dies unexpectedly of a heart attack. Rest assured, he died of natural causes; there's no foul play here—not yet. Not until someone sneaks into the morgue and flays the skin from the corpse's face.

Why?

And why two years later does someone—apparently—viciously mutilate and murder the very same man? How can it be that, after a video of the murder victim is shown on television, at least nine people phone in to swear that he is definitely the young man who died and was buried two years ago?

What's going on?

These are only a handful of the questions the Serious Crimes Squad in this small English city must answer in order to solve this most baffling case. Much of the book's focus is on Sergeant Trevor Joseph. For him, this case could not have come at a worse time. Joseph's relationship with his live-in girlfriend is already faltering because she feels he loves his job more than he loves her. Now, with the police under pressure from the press to bring the murderer to justice, he must neglect her entirely. And to complicate matters an old love of his returns, in connection with the crime.

This is the most intriguing mystery novel to come my way in quite a while. The plot is brilliant: inexplicable events and circumstances that defy rationality are all perfectly resolved in the end. I'd almost welcome amnesia, so that I could have the pleasure of reading the book again, and again enjoy being baffled, bamboozled, and buffaloed.

Read a hundred books this year and, if you're lucky, you may come across one that's half as good as *Murder of a Dead Man*.

—Edward Lodi

Privileged to Kill

by Steven F. Havill.

New York: St. Martin's, 1997. $20.95

Crusty Undersheriff Bill Gastner of Posadas County, New Mexico, picked up a stranded bicyclist named Wesley Crocker on the highway into town and paid for the man's lunch on a whim of kindness. Crocker returns the favor by placing his one phone call to Gastner when arrested for murder. Found dead under the sleepy town's high school bleachers is Maria Ibarra, apparently a Mexican national unable to speak English, and residing in the shell of a truck with her "uncle." Gastner's gut feeling is that Crocker is innocent, although it's not his way to have asked the stranger many questions.

Gastner and colleague Detective Estelle Reyes-Guzman get immediately down to the business of determining who knew Ibarra and what the enigmatic Crocker might have seen. When it is determined that the teen actually choked on a slice of pepperoni pizza, the crafty pair remain resolute in the knowledge that someone coldly placed the child under the bleachers. A fatal truck wreck outside of town appears

unrelated until a myriad of loosely-connected threads unravel to reveal some unlikely alliances among the town's high school students.

In this fifth installment of an excellent series, the insomniac and overweight Gastner remains addicted to drinking gallons of coffee and subsisting on the green chili dishes served at the Don Juan de Onate restaurant. A widower suffering from empty nest syndrome, he's forced to sit up and take notice of his own poor health when a minor stroke almost incapacitates him and brings Estelle's physician-husband to his aid. As the Guzmans conspire to get Gastner checked into the hospital, the case finds its solution. Although it's a tad frustrating that the reader is never really privy to what motivated the bizarre actions or lifestyles of several key characters, this series's charm lies in its local New Mexico flavor and cranky but caring protagonist.

—*Susan Zappia*

PRIVATE EYE

Accustomed to the Dark

by Walter Satterthwait.

New York: St. Martin's, 1996. $21.95

They were sitting on the patio having breakfast, planning their day. Rita Mondragon's head jerked, suddenly and violently. Joshua Croft saw the small, perfectly circular hole at the right side of her head before he heard the crack of a rifle in the distance.

Ernie Martinez *must* be the triggerman. He and his buddy Lucero, together with four others, escaped from the penitentiary the night before. The local cops got the escape notification, but the message never got passed through the chain of command to Rita and Croft. Sorry. But that doesn't help Rita. Even though the delicate brain surgery was a success, Rita still lingers in a coma, hovering between life and death.

And when you're a private investigator and your partner—but they're becoming much more than partners—gets shot again by the same man who shot her before, everybody expects you to do something about it. Croft calls in all of the favors he can: from the local cops and the staties, from New Mexico's version of a Mafia don, from an octogenarian computer expert, from a vicious drug dealer and an ex-con, from a hermit of uncertain past and future, who is willing to walk on either side of the thin line that separates law and justice. The clues lead Croft from his Santa Fe home throughout the Southwest and finally to a violent confrontation in the Florida Everglades.

Accustomed to the Dark is the latest and best of Walter Satterthwait's novels featuring Santa Fe P.I.s Joshua Croft and Rita Mondragon. Santa Fe's streets may be dusty, but they can be just as mean and hard as big-city asphalt. And Croft and Rita are just as tough and wily as their metropolitan brethren. You're in for a special treat when you add Walter Satterthwait to your must-read list.

—*Ronald C. Miller*

All That Glitters

by Jerry Kennealy.

New York: St. Martin's, 1997. $21.95

This is San Francisco P.I. Nick Polo's tenth case in ten years and proof that quality cannot only be maintained, it can increase. Mr. Kennealy, like his fictional creation, is a San Francisco P.I.; an excellent combination and his book an excellent concoction.

Polo is hired by his friend, Alexander Rostov, a dealer in antiques and other valuables, to check out a woman who claims to have a golden *Paitza* for sale. The item is a golden identification tablet supposedly once the property of the son of Ghengis Khan. Along the way Polo runs into another P.I. named Thomas Dashuk who heads up his own agency, The Thinner Man. It is evident that Dashuk is seeking the same woman. When Dashuk is brutally killed, Polo learns that he was also running an extortion scam with the collusion of a massage parlor worker. Complications for Polo ensue.

This novel has several strengths, especially the smooth, natural narrative style Polo has and his ability to weave his hometown and its environs into his story. Polo is not the typical wise-cracking, booze-swigging type of P.I. He does have a subtle sense of humor and shows clearly that profanity is not a requisite ingredient for a hardboiled story. At one point Polo comments with some sadness that security guards seem to be the #1 growth industry in the U.S. today. Another strength is its strong and believable story line. I found this to be a most pleasurable read as did Thomas Dunne whose imprimatur is affixed to the book's flyleaf and spine.

—*Don Sandstrom*

Bloody Shame

by Carolina Garcia-Aguilera.

New York: Putnam, 1997. $22.95

After many years of hard toil making her investigative agency a success, Cuban-American Lupe Solano is taking a rare vacation. She plans to visit a former boyfriend, who has retired to the Keys. Her only worry involves her best friend, Margarita, who missed their scheduled meeting. Only one day into her vacation, Lupe returns to Miami when she discovers that a pregnant Margarita was killed in a car accident. Lupe believes that her friend's death is tied to the case her sometimes lover, attorney Tommy McDonald, wants her to help him investigate.

Jeweler Alonso Arango swears that he shot and killed Gustavo Gaston after the man attacked him with a knife. The police don't buy into the self defense alibi because there is no sign of the knife and no witnesses to back up Alonso's

story. He is being charged with second degree murder. Both Lupe and Tommy agree that their client is not revealing all he knows. Lupe's job is to discover what the man is hiding, and how he and his family are tied to Margarita. As the investigation unfolds, the Cuban-American private detective finds herself sucked into a maelstrom of lies and deceit, all of it revolving around various members of the Arango family and their associates. Lupe places her very life on the line in order to learn the real story amidst all the fabrications so she can lay to rest the ghost of her friend.

Carolina Garcia-Aguilera's first novel, *Bloody Waters* was heralded as a success. However, with this second book the author goes one step further by giving her mystery a literary framework. This makes for a much more exciting and entertaining whodunit which provides a first-hand, insider look into the Cuban-American South Florida culture. It's a sensuous and colorful novel, due partly to the exotic nature of the Cuban community, but mostly because of the intrinsic character of the heroine. She is a feisty, take-no-prisoners, '90s woman, who is vulnerable but independent. Ethnic mysteries are in short supply, especially accurate and entertaining ones. Don't miss out on the chance to experience a rare work.

—Harriet Klausner

The Cold Heart of Capricorn

by Martha C. Lawrence.

New York: St. Martin's, 1997. $21.95

Elizabeth Chase is not your ordinary run-of-the-mill private dick. For one thing she works alongside the local police rather than in defiance of them. For another, she doesn't carry a load of chips on her shoulder. For a third, she's the daughter of a prominent neurosurgeon and an equally prominent philanthropist/investment broker. And did I mention that she's beautiful? But these differences are mere frosting on the cake of this unique entry into the field. Elizabeth Chase is a psychic.

Back for her second adventure, Dr. Elizabeth Chase is called by the San Diego Police Department to assist them in tracking down a serial rapist whose crimes are becoming increasingly brutal. The offender has baffled police by committing his assaults without leaving a shred of physical evidence. The careful rapist protects his identity by wearing a mask and covering his hands and other exposed extremities in latex. Chase relives these rapes by interviewing the victims, piecing together their impressions with her sixth sense.

The Cold Heart of Capricorn is an enjoyable read, and Dr. Elizabeth Chase a likeable hero. Being informed about bits of police procedure, neurochemistry, false memory syndrome, and of course, psychic phenomena, without being beaten over the head with it, is refreshing. Martha Lawrence, who guardedly admits to being herself psychic, keeps a good sense of humor about her. She is as likely to poke fun at herself and other psychics as she is to take jabs at skeptics. In one incident, one of her cop friends asks if she'd be offended by a psychic joke. She answers, "Heck no," while carefully avoiding a crack in the sidewalk.

Above all, *The Cold Heart of Capricorn* is a fun read for skeptics and sensitives alike, as we wonder what awaits us in the remaining signs of the zodiac. Websurfers take notice: Ms. Lawrence has a very user friendly site at <www.mlawrence.com> which includes her bio, an interview, and sample chapters from her books.

—Steven E. Steinbock

Darkness, Take My Hand

by Dennis Lehane.

New York: Morrow, 1996. $24.00

It all began innocently enough with a photograph received in the mail. It progressed when Dr. Diandra Warren, a prominent psychiatrist, took the photo of her son to private investigators Patrick Kenzie and Angie Gennaro, asking them to protect her son Jason, who is missing from school where he apparently majored in women and bars. Local hoodlums may be involved, but they are not intimidated by the fact that Stan Timson, Dr. Warren's ex-husband and Jason's father, is the powerful Suffolk County district attorney. And then it escalated into a case that may involve a serial killer who may have been active in the blue-collar Dorchester area for many years and is again back to his killing ways, this time with a vengeance.

Dennis Lehane's Kenzie and Gennaro won me over with their camaraderie and their humor in *A Drink Before the War,* a wonderful book that won the Shamus award from the Private Eye Writers of America for best first novel. *Darkness, Take My Hand,* a much darker and more violent book mirroring the tenor of the times, follows the intrepid pair on a decidedly sinister case in their old stomping grounds. Many of the characters, including Patrick and Angie, have long-buried secrets that come back to haunt them, providing additional facets to complex characters and plots. *Darkness, Take My Hand* will grab your attention with the pulse-pounding action and keep you reading for the depth and beauty of the prose.

—Ronald C. Miller

Deadly Partners

by Christine Green.

New York: Walker, 1997. $21.95

Kate Kinsella, owner and sole employee of the Medical and Nursing Investigation Agency, is very worried about how she will meet the next rent payment. Following two brief phone calls, she quickly accepts a case to find the whereabouts of Nigel Carter, a hotelier on the Isle of Wight. The person who hires Kate identifies herself as

Nigel's dying aunt. Her client needs to know, before she takes her last breath, whether her only blood relative is alive or dead.

As part of her fee and to expedite the investigation, Kate is booked into Nigel's hotel. While traveling to the island by ferry, she meets fellow passenger Caroline whose son Adam is suffering from a breathing attack. When Kate helps the lad, a grateful Caroline invites her over for dinner. Kate accepts the invitation. After settling in, Kate meets Nigel's partner Stewart, guests who knew the missing hotelier, and townsfolk to whom Nigel owed money. All seem indifferent to the man's disappearance, a feeling that causes Kate's curiosity to rise.

The deeper Kate digs, the more trouble follows. Desperate for some progress, Kate and Caroline, who insists on tagging along, break into Nigel's cabin. When Kate leaves to get some sleep, Caroline continues to search Nigel's business records. The next morning Kate finds Caroline dead in Nigel's cabin. Although the police believe Kate to be the perpetrator of the crime, they have to release her. Now not only does Kate have to find Nigel, she also must identify Caroline's killer.

A prime reason the Kate Kinsella series is such a success is that the female protagonist knows that she is a bumbling sleuth who makes many stupid mistakes. It is her determination to persevere despite her shortcomings that keeps the audience rooting for her to succeed and avidly awaiting the next tale in this ongoing saga. *Deadly Partners* is one of Christine Green's best works in this veddy British series. It is fun to watch the eccentric, endearing Kate and the unusual secondary characters, who add richness and color, as they interact during an investigation.

—*Harriet Klausner*

Death of a Sunday Writer

by Eric Wright.

Woodstock, VT: Foul Play, 1996. $21.00

After more than twenty years in a miserable marriage to a control freak, Lucy Trimble Brenner walks out, leaving Kingston, Ontario, for Longborough. A small legacy permits her to buy a small house and convert it to a modestly successful bed-and-breakfast, and part-time work at the town library gives her income when the hostelry business is slow. After two years in this new life, Lucy receives a surprising phone call at the library: David Trimble, a cousin she hasn't seen since her wedding, has died in Toronto, and she's his sole heir. There's not much to the estate, but taking care of the details seems like a minor adventure, so Lucy heads off to Toronto.

Mystery fan Lucy is astonished to learn her cousin was a private investigator, though not a very good one (nor a very good man), according to his lawyer and his landlord, who warn her David Trimble was a gambler whose only friends were slightly sleazy racetrack habitués. But Lucy's curiosity is piqued, especially when Cousin David's office is burglarized just before she arrives to inspect it. She soon accepts a couple of paying cases, and starts asking questions about her cousin's death (whose official cause was a massive heart attack).

It may be a sign that the personal computer revolution has finally arrived that even a low-rent P.I. firm like Trimble's has a computer, and even an overly-sheltered housewife like Lucy knows, thanks to her library work, how to use it. Trimble, it turns out, used his computer mainly for two tasks: keeping track of the bets he accepted as a runner for a local bookmaker, and drafting the racetrack-oriented memoir (or is it a novel?) he was struggling to write. David's computer files give Lucy a number of leads—including some which take her in precisely the wrong direction.

But solving puzzles is only part of the charm of an Eric Wright mystery; equally important is watching his sane, smart, relatively self-aware protagonists—Charlie Salter and, now, Lucy Trimble—negotiate the careful adjustments which define their relationships with the people around them. A winning series debut.

—*Mary A. Carroll*

The Goddess Affair

by Lillian O'Donnell.

New York: Putnam, 1997. $21.95

Goddess Designs, the renowned clothing firm owned by the three "Goddess" sisters (Minerva, Juno, and Diana), is under siege. The company is fighting a lawsuit concerning missing funds and is desperately trying to avoid bankruptcy. Minerva, the richest of the siblings, is terminally ill even though her illness is presently in remission. She decides to take a cruise accompanied by Juno and Diana's fiancé, Paul. As the president of the financially strapped company, Diana stays behind to work on the corporation's problems.

One of the passengers on the ship is New York private detective Gwen Ramadge. She has been hired by the ship's owner to discover who is responsible for stealing jewels from the passengers on the last three excursions. All circumstantial evidence points to an inside job and the company wants it stopped before the rumors ruin their business. While on board, Gwen and Minerva's paths cross and an instant friendship forms even though the P.I. senses that Minerva is hiding many secrets.

On the first night of the cruise, a valuable brooch is stolen. On the third day out, the jewel heists become insignificant because Minerva's dead body is found floating in the pool. While the ship's officers believe it was a suicide, Gwen decides to investigate because she

thinks foul play occurred. Gwen's informal role turns official when Diana and her father board the ship, and hire her to find out how Minerva died. When Gwen gets a little too close to discovering long buried family secrets, she is in danger of becoming the next victim.

The Goddess Affair is a deliciously complex and well-crafted whodunit that does not resort to graphic violence in order to stimulate reader imagination. Instead, the novel relies on a slew of detestable characters and several red herrings to keep readers revising their guesses as to the identity of the killer. Lillian O'Donnell is at the top of her game in her latest and best Gwen Ramadge work. She creates a colorful, carnival-like atmosphere as a sharp counterpoint to the dire happenings that are taking place. This is an effective ploy that is executed with the precision of a music conductor.

—*Harriet Klausner*

Half the Truth

by David J. Walker.

New York: St. Martin's, 1996. $22.95

A rat in a violin case is a strange, but effective way to send a message. Sharon Cooper, the former child-prodigy violinist who now taught English literature, got the point. Then she got Malachy P. Foley on the case. "I'm afraid," she said, "they might actually kill me." She explained that her brother Jason, a practicing social misfit who hung his dreams and his future on an NBA contract, may be in trouble with the law. Two guys, real polite, had been looking for Jason, and they had a head start.

The Cooper case takes Foley all around Chicago and to Wisconsin. He meets the likes of Nick and Fat Wilbur, a pair of lowlifes in the employ of one Breaker Hanafan, charitably described as "an underworld figure"; visits the offices of a top lawyer with political aspirations; and goes for a late-night chat with a resident of elegant Astor Street.

David J. Walker is the new guy on the block in Chicago mystery fiction, but he's a fast learner. *Fixed in His Folly* was nominated for an Edgar for best first mystery. The sequel, *Half the Truth,* features the persistent and resourceful Mal Foley in an even better case. Wonderful characters abound in this deftly-plotted tale.

—*Ronald C. Miller*

Lake Effect

by William Jaspersohn.

New York: Bantam, 1996. $4.99

There are plenty of reasons we keep returning to "formula fiction" despite the repeated appearance of certain clichés. Mysteries are widely read *because* they are formulaic, and because they embody a formula that has proven itself over the test of time. Adherence to a formula makes a book dependable, rather than predictable. A satisfying mystery is one that embraces common clichés and manages to turn them on their ears. *Lake Effect,* the second Peter Boone novel by William Jaspersohn, is such a book.

Here is a book that contains a shopping list of private eye clichés in its opening chapters: a morose, recently widowed, former athlete P.I. is hired by a rich, alcoholic husband to track down his missing spouse. He no sooner sets out on his way when he is roughed up by the local constabulary. But that is where the cliché ends. Jaspersohn provides us with an intelligent, literary, highly readable, and frequently surprising mystery.

Chelly Cole, wealthy New England heiress, has been occupying her middle-years researching a book about fourth-rate Beat poet, Armen Karillian. When Chelly disappears, her husband, Arthur, calls on former Red Sox pitcher Peter Boone to track her down.

Nearly thirty years ago, literature professor Armen Karillian was the guru of a small enclave of self-indulgent poets who called themselves "the Poetry Gang." Then, after a young man died at their cabin of a heroin overdose, Karillian disappeared.

Boone begins to wonder if the missing woman had some connection with the poet and his entourage other than academic interest.

As fictional P.I.s go, Peter Boone is an eminently likeable character who relies as much on nice manners and disarming good looks as on his witty retorts. While the mystery clearly descends from Ross Macdonald's Lew Archer style, there are also elements of Robert B. Parker's Spenser in Boone. With *Lake Effect,* Jaspersohn delivers a multilayered mystery told by an engaging and congenial storyteller.

—*Steven E. Steinbock*

Lightning

by John Lutz.

New York: Henry Holt, 1996. $22.50

Florida private eye Fred Carver finally has his life together in this tenth of the series. He has reconciled his own physical disability, brought on by a young hoodlum's bullet into his knee, which ended his career as a policeman. He's dealing with the death of his young son. And he has a solid relationship with an attractive, intelligent woman—who's just announced she is pregnant. Beth, of African-American descent, had gone so far as to make an appointment at an abortion clinic when Fred persuades her to keep the child.

On their way to another appointment, Beth decides to drop by the clinic to cancel her date. She has barely opened the door when a bomb goes off. One of the doctors is killed, a patient too. Her jarring crash to the pavement also injures Beth and takes the life of her unborn child.

Carver is determined to find out who was behind the explosion. The local police, particularly Carver's Del Moray nemesis Lt. William McGregor, have a suspect in hand: a staunch anti-abortionist who has experimented with blasting caps at his home and who was closer than legally allowed to the clinic at the time of the explosion.

Carver has a nagging feeling that there's more to the bombing than first appears. He decides to make his own investigation. Rivals tug at both arms. FBI agent Wicker on one hand asks for his help and any information he uncovers, McGregor demands it on the other.

Carver turns up a few suspects, among them the Rev. Martin Freel, to whose Operation Alive the chief bombing suspect belongs. There are questions, though, about the possible profit motives of the fiancé of the woman killed in the bombing. And who is the blond-haired thug, known as the Wasp, ominously hanging around Beth's hospital room?

Lightning is charged with tension, electrified with compelling characters

(with the exception of over-the-top McGregor) and flashes with several key plot twists.

—Bernard A. Drew

A Long Reach

by Michael Stone.

New York: Viking, 1997. $20.95

The title refers to the villain's (the old-fashioned word fits him nicely) propensity for killing from a distance: à la the car bomb, the booby-trapped aerosol, the old shotgun-rigged-in-the-doorway trick.

Kevin Swallow was convicted of a double murder but, as with so many criminals these days, his conviction was overturned on a technicality. Released from prison, he sets out to avenge himself against any and all who were even remotely connected with his arrest and conviction.

Carol Irwin was Swallow's defense attorney. Apparently, he holds her responsible for having been sentenced to prison—even though, ironically, it was her perceived "incompetent representation" that ultimately led to his being set free. A tarantula in Irwin's mailbox and a threatening poem send her for help to her former boyfriend, Streeter—a bounty hunter and sometime private eye. Against his better judgement, Streeter agrees to help Irwin. Predictably, he too is soon a target.

The action in this second entry in the Streeter series is non-stop; the plot contains some nice twists. Michael Stone's prose is tough, colorful, tinged with mean humor. The ending is particularly bizarre—one of the most original you're likely to encounter this decade. Read it at your own risk; you will be biting your nails, and splitting a gut laughing, all at the same time.

—Edward Lodi

She Came to the Castro

by Mary Wings.

New York: Berkley, 1997. $21.95

Emma Victor, in her fourth series appearance, has a chance to make her rent for a year and then some if she can identify two unknown blackmailers and retrieve a videotape showing a San Francisco mayoral candidate in very compromising circumstance. The candidate, Margo Villaneuva, is the only one running for office who's shown any sympathy whatsoever toward the city's gay community. Villaneuva's no help whatsoever, though, when one of the blackmailers turns up dead. Lawyer Willie Rossini, who threw the case Emma's way, is missing. And to go to the police, who favor one of the other candidates, would expose the whole sordid affair to the public.

The private investigator has more on her plate. She's agreed to help Kimilar Jones track down her long-missing husband, to obtain a quitclaim to his share of her increasingly prosperous goat farm. Jones's brother, Jason Jeeters Jones, interestingly, is an ex-con turned gay filmmaker whose picture *Pale Refugee* is a showpiece at the San Francisco Lesbian and Gay Film Festival. The two cases eventually tie together. Emma relies on a friend at a security agency, and a hacker-employee who dances on the edge of legality in squeezing information out of state and federal computer networks, to come up with vital leads.

Victor is a comfortable heroine, and the book ends with a dandy little plot zinger.

—Bernard A. Drew

Sunset and Santiago

by Gloria White.

New York: Dell, 1997. $5.50

It was 2 A.M. on the morning of April 24, exactly twenty years to the day and hour, when the speeding car carrying the Ventana cat burglars—'Cisco and Olivia—skidded briefly, jumped the median, and plowed into the unyielding utility pole. Sitting in the thick San Francisco fog, ignoring the cold, Veronica "Ronnie" Ventana tried to visualize the accident that had killed her parents and turned their BMW roadster into scrap metal. Then she heard a noise behind her. A car. Two men, speaking a mixture of English and Spanish, struggling with something. They're dumping a body. Another death at the corner of Sunset and Santiago.

Someone calls the police. Ronnie really didn't see anything through the fog. The cops don't believe her. Ronnie is curious, bugs the cops. No I.D. on the body. A dead John Doe. So Ronnie Ventana, former parole officer turned private eye, gets a bad case of curiosity and calls on Blackie Coogan, her best friend, mentor, and fellow-P.I., to help identify the victim and find out who killed him. No one is more surprised than Ronnie when the case takes some startling turns and brings the murder investigation to her front doorstep.

Sunset and Santiago captivated me with its fast pace and deviously clever plot. Ronnie Ventana certainly inherited much more than her Mexican-American heritage from her parents. She is a complex character, street-smart and determined, with a double dose of elan and a definite hardboiled edge. This is the first Gloria White book I've read; it won't be the last. I'm looking forward to reading Ronnie Ventana's earlier adventures: *Murder on the Run, Money to Burn,* and *Charged with Guilt.*

—Ronald C. Miller

SHERLOCKIAN

Holmes for the Holidays

edited by Martin H. Greenberg, Jon L. Lellenberg, and Carol-Lynn Waugh.

New York: Berkley, 1996. $21.95

You *can* judge a book by its cover!

The dust jacket illustration shows two warmly dressed men looking into a brightly lit shop window in the foreground of a snowy London street scene, with a bobby looking on and a hansom cab in the background. You know at once that "The game is afoot!" and that you're about to spend a few hours in the company of Mr. Sherlock Holmes, the world's first consulting detective, and Dr. John H. Watson, his amanuensis and biographer.

The fire is all aglow at 221B Baker Street, and you're about to enjoy some of the best wintry tales since Sir Arthur Conan Doyle penned his Christmas classic "The Adventure of the Blue Carbuncle." You're probably already familiar with the earlier Sherlockian writings of Loren D. Estleman, J.N. Williamson, and John Stoessel, as well as Carole Nelson Douglas's stories of Irene Adler. Now you're about to experience the world of Baker Street from the viewpoint of modern masters of mystery from both sides of the Atlantic: Anne Perry, Barbara Paul, Gillian Linscott, Gwen Moffat, Jon L. Breen, William L. DeAndrea, Bill Crider, Reginald Hill, Edward D. Hoch, and Carolyn Wheat. Along the way, you'll meet interesting clients with intriguing problems for by the incomparable Sherlock Holmes.

You needn't worry if there's no snow outside your window. Sherlock Holmes is a man for all seasons, and *Holmes for the Holidays* is a book for all seasons.

—Ronald C. Miller

THRILLER/ SUSPENSE

Bag Men

by John Flood.

New York: Norton, 1997. $24.00

The 1960s are a decade that has been largely ignored or treated in a paltry and offhand manner by writers of crime fiction, even those specializing in period work. One explanation may be that from our current vantage point the things we thought, said and did during those frenzied years seem impossibly naive, even embarrassing. Another may be that serious participants in that era's social maelstrom have difficulty remembering details clearly.

Whatever the reason, John Flood (a pseudonym; the author is a Massachusetts-based federal prosecutor) has undertaken to correct the situation with *Bag Men,* wherein the '60s are so vividly and, for the most part, faithfully recreated that it is impossible to imagine this story occurring at any other time.

It is 1965. The Beatles have arrived and the beatnik-to-hippie metamorphosis has begun, although Timothy Leary has yet to assume the mantle of pop culture magus, and the Summer of Love is still two years away. At Boston's Logan Airport, the one runway not shut down by a relentless blizzard has been closed by the discovery of a body. That he was a priest carrying 4,000 hosts, now missing, consecrated by the Pope for distribution at the first English Mass to be celebrated in the United States both deepens the mystery and renders providential the appearance on the scene of Boston Assistant District Attorney Ray Dunn.

The Irish-Catholic son of a corrupt Boston cop—one of the bag men of the title—ADA Dunn, although he does not collect payoff money from the city's criminals, is truly his father's son. Ray Dunn is a fixer, a bag man of another type. His currency is power. Through him, the Boston power elite, prominent among them the leaders of the Archdiocese of Boston, distribute favors and enforce their will. It is their will that a blanket of silence be tossed over the murder of Father George Sedgewick. It rankles, goes against both his training and his emerging desire to act in his own interest, rather than that of others, but what're you gonna do? This is the '60s. This is Boston.

Manny Manning is a former cohort of Dunn's father, and the man who ratted his former colleague to IAD. Now he is a narc chasing the source of unusually strong heroin that is killing junkies all over Boston. He's another bag man. The bag he carries contains guilt. The bags he seeks, euphoric death.

As Ray and Manny follow their individual but converging trails, the latter with the help of Ray's kid brother Biff, a rookie undercover narc, the fog does not lift. It coalesces. Some things can be learned and understood, others cannot. Still others were never meant to be examined at all.

A compelling, serpentine tale of political corruption, religious upheaval and murder, *Bag Men* marks the debut of a major crime fiction talent. It is the kind of book a veteran crime fiction writer could be hugely proud of. That it is a first novel makes it even more remarkable. Not without flaws—the final chapter is hurried, inadequate, and altogether out of synch with the rest of the book—perhaps the best thing about *Bag Men* is the promise of things to come. He leaves a clear hint—unfortunately it is in that wretched final chapter—of where the reader goes from here. This reviewer can hardly wait.

Congratulations, Mr. Flood, whoever you are!

—Paul A. Bergin

Blind Spot

by Adam Barrow.

New York: Dutton, 1997. $22.95

Suburban Chicago academic Marshall Quinn and his wife Lori take their 3-year-old son Jeffrey on a trip to a park and planetarium. Jeffrey disappears, snatched by factory workers who run a money-making scheme on the side: kidnapping children to sell to desperate parents who cannot otherwise adopt a child.

Marshall and Lori contact the police, who are at a loss, then somewhat callous. Marshall determines to play gumshoe. One day as the couple heads through town in their Volvo to distribute fliers about Jeffrey, Marshall spots a woman in an old battered car, gesturing at the flier. Knowing there's a connection, he gets a partial license plate number. Marshall goes it alone but slips in over his head, while his wife Lori retreats into sorrow. It's impossible to hate Buck and Norma, the blue collar couple whose daughter has died and who adopt "Davie" for $20,000. Ironically, the boy names his teddy bear Jeffrey. Meanwhile, Davie's adopted father begins smelling a rat.

Barrow vividly captures the two different worlds: safe suburbia and the earthy blue collar side of town. Suspense is heightened because both couples are likable. Their pain is real. Both are decent and hardworking in their respective worlds and both need to know the truth. But only tragedy can result when

the truth is revealed.

—*S.M. Tyson*

A Brother's Blood

by Michael C. White.

New York: HarperCollins, 1996. $22.50

It is a little known fact that German POWs were incarcerated in Maine during the latter half of World War II. One of the camps had been located outside the town of Sheshuncook, where Irene Libby Pelletier, the narrator and protagonist, runs a small general store and diner. As the book begins, she is driving to the VA hospital in Augusta to bring her alcoholic, wastrel brother Leon back to her home. Along the way she mentions that Wolfgang Kallick, a German natural, is in town asking questions about his brother Dieter, who was a prisoner at the camp and apparently died attempting to escape. Leon becomes furious with her.

After a brief recuperation, Leon gets a phone call and drives into town to look into a job possibility. The police find him frozen to death. Libby doesn't believe her brother died accidentally.

The book moves effortlessly between present day events and Libby's recollections of the camp where the prisoners were used to harvest timber. Her father was a foreman of a logging crew, her brother Leon, a cook's assistant. She remembers Dieter, the murdered man, who served as the camp translator. She remembers an incident in which a POW was found dead after an accident felling a tree. At her peril, Libby finds and contacts other local men who worked at the camp during the war. As she struggles to relate the present to the past, she begins receiving phone calls and neighborly advice warning her to let the matter drop, which, of course, she cannot.

A Brother's Blood is deftly plotted and well written. White's prose is compelling, and replete with stark images as Libby investigates the deaths of the two men through the bleak and frightening isolation of a winter in Maine. In the end, this excellent novel leaves the reader with the unwelcome and troubling realization that Dieter Kallick's death could have happened exactly the way it did in the book.

—*J. Clifford Kaspar*

In the Cut

by Susanna Moore.

New York: Onyx, 1996. $6.99

Frannie is a thirty-four-year-old teacher who lives in Greenwich Village. She goes to the Red Turtle Bar with Cornelius, one of her students. While searching for a restroom downstairs, Frannie stumbles upon a man and a woman caught in an intimate moment. She later learns from NYPD Detective Malloy that the woman was found murdered sometime after leaving the bar, an apparent victim of a serial killer who always removes some body parts of his victims as souvenirs.

It may be a coincidence, but Frannie soon finds a rubber hand left for her under her mailbox. Then she is attacked on the street at night by a masked man whose gloves smell of formaldehyde. She barely manages to escape from his clutches. As Detective Malloy continues to investigate the murder case, Frannie and he become lovers. Malloy is worried that the killer may be one of her friends or acquaintances and that she will be the next victim. After her friend Pauline is murdered in the same trademark way as the previous victims, Frannie even begins to suspect Malloy.

In the Cut is a tale of obsession and depravity and the mood is somber throughout a fast-paced story.

—*Peter Kenney*

Sacrifice

by Mitchell Smith.

New York: Dutton, 1997. $23.95

Tyler Pierce is an extremely likeable anti-hero with an odd mixture of flaws and strengths. He is a knight errant with no confidence in the law enforcement establishment and a strong preference for doing things his own way.

Tyler has recently been released from prison in Kansas after serving seven years for bank robbery. He came by his profession naturally as a relative of both Babyface Nelson and the Youngers.

Before settling down to life as a small town roofer, Tyler pulls off one last job which nets him almost $1,000,000. He seems destined for a quiet, secure existence until he receives word that his daughter Lisa has been murdered in Florida by a serial killer. Tyler immediately leaves for Florida to avenge her death.

In the Miami newspapers he reads about the five murders committed by Lisa's killer. All of the victims have jobs requiring a uniform. There are no signs showing that the victims put up a struggle.

Tyler hires Naomi Cohen, an aging prostitute familiar with Florida's underworld, to act as his guide around the state. A retired gangster leads them to a crooked lawyer and other key figures in the state's drug trade. Through these contacts Tyler gets autopsy photos and police files on the murders. Somewhere in this stack of information is a clue to the reason for these crimes. When he learns the motive for these murders, Tyler will be able to find the killer. The only obstacles in his path are a long line of very nasty fellows and one large pet alligator.

Harris is a skilled writer who introduces the reader to the killer early, but still manages to maintain the suspense to the end. *Sacrifice* is the author's fourth novel.

—*Peter Kenney*

Savage Cut

by Jo Dereske.

New York: Dell, 1996. $5.50

When her ex-husband dies in an auto

accident that leaves her fourteen-year-old daughter Jesse brain-injured, Ruby Crane returns with Jesse to her cabin on Blue Lake near the town of Sable, Michigan.

Sable is in Waters County in the heart of timber country. Before she has unpacked, Crane receives a phone call from Mina Turmouski, the wife of a local mill owner, begging her to come over immediately. Mina has been her closest friend since fourth grade, so she goes. Before Mina can explain why she called, her husband dies cutting lumber, under circumstances which are triply mysterious. The sheriff, Carl "Carly" Joyce, Junior, is clearly in over his head. Then the Turmouski's dog is shot, and Mina calls Ruby at 1:30 in the morning urgently asking to see her.

Before matters are resolved, there is another murder, the shooting of another dog, and a fire that razes the Turmouski property. Someone marks the trees on Crane's land for cutting without her permission and people find they don't own land they thought they did.

Aside from some minor flaws—there is more about harvesting timber than I care to know, and the last chapter is a bit too comforting—*Savage Cut* is excellent. The writing is a delight. Dereske vividly describes people, places, and events in a precise, suggestive prose.

At the center is Ruby Crane, who persists in trying to solve the murders at growing personal risk. Bright, tough, sensitive, maternal, and sexy, Crane is one of the most interesting female characters I have come across.

The publisher promises a second book in the series; I eagerly look forward to it.

—*J. Clifford Kaspar*

Thief of Souls

by Darian North.

New York: Dutton, 1997. $22.95

Seeing or hearing the name Waco sends a chill up the spine. So does this novel. Dan Behr of Brooklyn is not yet 30, an architect with a beautiful wife and young daughter. One night he goes to pick up his wife Alex from a weekend retreat. But she won't come out of the house where the retreat has been held. Not even when he summons the police and has a policewoman talk with her. Suddenly Dan's life plummets into nightmare. When he tries to enter the house, a gun is held to his head and he's arrested for trespassing. After a stint in the hospital, he learns Alex and the people in the mysterious house have disappeared. The couple's car and joint bank account are gone. But police can do nothing without evidence of coercion or crime. Dan's wife has joined a cult.

Desperate, fired from work, with no one to care for his daughter Hana, Dan researches cults. He finds Professor Joost, who keeps a low profile because the cults he speaks out against have targeted him. Through Joost, Dan meets Laura Ferren, an exit counselor, and Everett May, a deprogrammer. May agrees to snatch Alex back from the cult, which is known as the Ark, and headed by a man called Noah. Things backfire disastrously and Alex returns to the cult. Dan finally gives up his wife for lost. Then his daughter Hana is kidnapped and Alex's mother found dead. Dan, who has begun a romance with Laura, decides to join the cult to get his child back.

Thief of Souls is a chilling, well-researched view of the perils and seductions of cults, and the loneliness of ordinary souls who need to belong to something that gives their lives greater meaning. It is a fine, haunting piece of work.

—*S.M. Tyson*

Time Release

by Martin J. Smith.

New York: Jove, 1997. $5.99

An anonymously mailed tape recording alerts Pittsburgh detective Grady Downing to the fact that the poisoning death of a young housewife in a nearby town is related to the still-open case of Primenyl tampering which claimed several lives and nearly ended Downing's career ten years earlier. For personal as well as professional reasons, Downing has been obsessed with the case for the intervening decade. He is certain of the killer's identity, but lacks evidence. Desperate to prevent further deaths as well as to quiet his personal demons, he approaches psychologist and memory expert Jim Christensen with a drastic and ethically compromised scheme. The killer was a wife and child beater as well as a poisoner. Might not Sonny Corbett, his now adult son, be a repository of repressed memories which could be mined and used as evidence?

Sonny, is plagued not only by repressed memories but also by a construct of fabricated history which he has erected as a coping mechanism. As Christensen separates memory from imagination, delicately balancing his loyalty to Downing and his duty to Sonny, the picture that emerges is significantly different from what was expected, though it is no less harrowing. Of no help to Downing in his quest to jail a killer or to Christensen in helping Sonny Corbett, the emerging truth serves only to place all three men and several other characters squarely in the path of an implacable force of evil and madness which cannot be deflected or defeated, only destroyed.

Throughout the book Mr. Smith writes with the skill of an experienced novelist. He can load a scene with menace or pathos with equal ease. His sense of pace is admirable and he imbues his characters—particularly Downing and Christensen—with strengths and weaknesses in believable proportion.

Although several of the most climactic scenes are shamelessly overwritten, this is a solid debut novel by a writer who has all the tools necessary for success.

—*Paul A. Bergin*

Anthology/ Collection

The Habit of Widowhood

by Robert Barnard.

New York: Scribner, 1996. $21.00

Good short stories require tight, crisp, highly focused writing, and veteran British author Robert Barnard delivers a strong collection of seventeen stories, most of which are very satisfying to readers of crime stories. Barnard, eight-time Edgar nominee and winner of numerous awards, is at his best in the several stories delivered with a sardonic and ironic twist.

The title story is the history of the narrator's grandmother, who married many times in many new locales, but with the same result—the husbands kept dying. When a private detective finally suggested that she move on or else, she migrated to Australia and a long and prosperous life. Kind of a twentieth century version of Moll Flanders without all the details.

Not surprisingly, nearly half the stories focus on the killing of one's spouse. In "Cupid's Dart," 18-year-old Jessica Derbyshire, after an extremely sheltered existence, is married off to a man in his fifties. After he ravages her with "cupid's dart," she kills him out of terror and shock—and retains the reader's sympathy. "The Gentleman in the Lake" tells of Marcia Catchpole's well-executed plot to marry the senile Sir James Harrington—and kill him in a squabble. "If Looks Could Kill" features sexy Maggie Lou Hayton, who marries runtish Sam Lupinski for his successful business, which she takes over while arranging for his death. In both these stories, the ladies in question find that having an accomplice can bring on unwanted consequences.

A few of the stories are highly unique. "Dog Television" describes a killing from a dog's point of view. In "Happy Christmas," Crespin Fawkes, tired of his lonely and jaded gay existence, hand picks a young man and sets him up as his killer, thus letting him die happily. Most unique is "Reader, I Strangled Him," whose main character is Charlotte Brontë's Jane Eyre, in a sequel which suggests that Rochester was not such a great find after all. Other stories with Barnard's characteristic twists include these suggestive titles, "My Son, My Son," "Perfect Honeymoon," and "More Final Than Divorce."

These are among the best, but most of the seventeen stories will leave you satisfied with Barnard's skillful plotting.

—Douglas G. Simpson

The Last Pin

by Howard Wandrei. Minneapolis, MN: Fedogan & Bremer, 1996. $29.00

How's this for a plot? A boy grows up in St. Paul, the second of three (or maybe four) children, the son of a prominent lawyer-turned-editor for a major law book publisher. Both the boy and his older brother were prodigies of sorts, interested in writing and the arts. At the time, St. Paul provided sanctuary for any gangster willing to pay a bribe or two and keep his nose clean during is stay in the city. Perhaps influenced by the mores of the times, the boy, Howard, and a group of friends—the newspapers called them The Thrill Bandits—stole cars and got involved in muggings and burglaries. Their break-in at the home of a Minnesota State Supreme Court Justice landed all of them, including Howard, the leader, in prison. But this isn't the plot for a story; it's a glimpse at the early years of Howard Wandrei, who later turned his life around (somewhat) and used his experiences to write some of the best hardboiled stories published in the pulp detective magazines in the 1930s.

The eleven stories in this collection present a thinly-disguised version of 1930s St. Paul and its corruption. We meet all sorts of gangsters, as well as men and women in various walks of life and economic strata who sometimes walk the straight and narrow, and sometimes stray a bit over the line.

A wealthy debutante teams up with gangsters to rob a bank and make an ingenious escape in "Smot Guy." "The Man With the Molten Face" is a tough-guy tale of a man able to rearrange his facial features, and the "League of Bald Men" chronicles a spicy story of a group of bald bank robbers holding a damsel in distress.

Wandrei, like other writers of the era, wrote fast-paced tales with a hard-boiled edge, to compete with the true-crime narratives of Dillinger and Karpis, the Barkers, Bonnie and Clyde, Pretty Boy Floyd, and their ilk. Wandrei's walk on the wild side gave life to stories that still entertain sixty years after they were written.

—Ronald C. Miller

Supernatural Sleuths

edited by Charles G. Waugh and Martin H. Greenberg.
New York: Roc, 1996. $5.99

The judicious skill used by the editors in selecting the 14 short stories in this provocative anthology is abundantly evident from start to finish. Waugh and Greenberg cast a large net by including a wide variety of supernatural detection angles. For example, we have normal detectives investigating fantastic crimes, which may be tainted with phoney supernatural effects to confuse the sleuth. Or quite the opposite, the detective is of supernatural origin working a strange but otherwise earthbound case, or an ordinary human investigator who happens to possess supernatural abilities. Laudable is the choice of stories from many different periods of history, and an eclectic array of exotic (and eerily mundane) locales.

Although it's a shortcoming probably only to students of minutia (like myself), only a few of the stories are accompanied by notes specifying the details of first publication. To be sure, there are hints, but comprehensive annotation should be the goal of every anthology.

Included are reprints of stories by reliable professionals such as William F. Nolan, Ron Goulart, Jack Ritchie, and Manly Wade Wellman. There also are tantalizing selections from relative newcomers, often associated with science fiction writing, like the versatile Lee Killough.

You'll surely want to read every story in the book, but if nothing else, you must check out David Dean's "The Falling Boy." As a regular contributor to *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine,* Dean is known for a modest body of enigmatic stories, which seem to grow ever darker and more complex, and are always fascinating.

—Michael Davis

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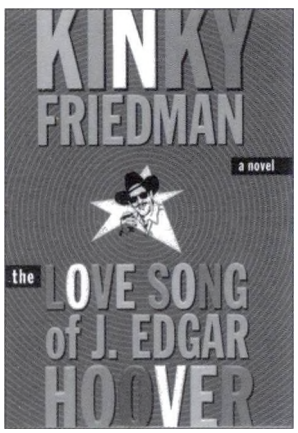

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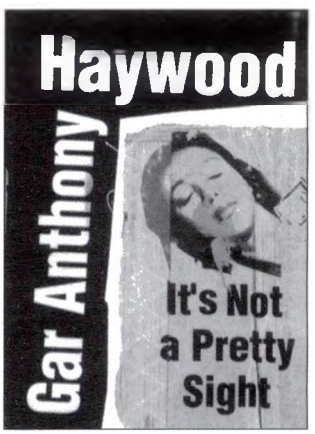

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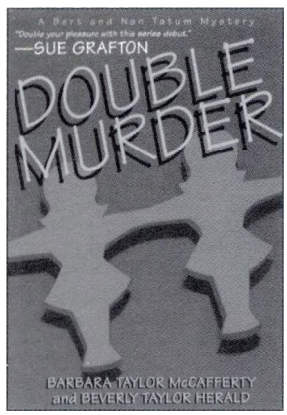

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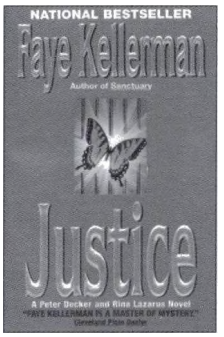

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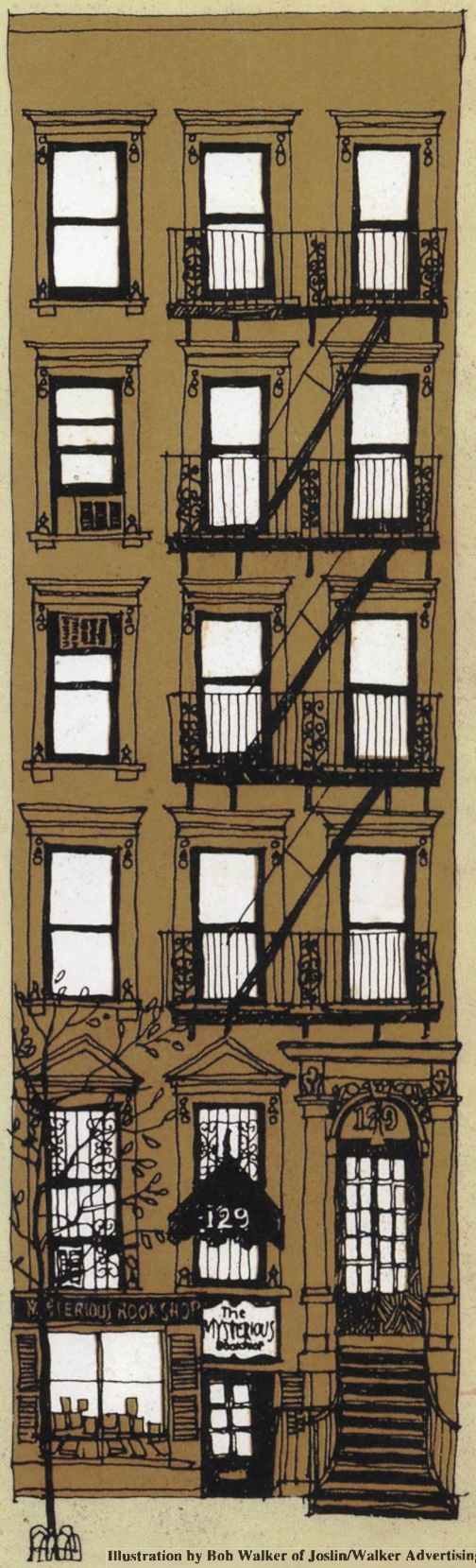

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