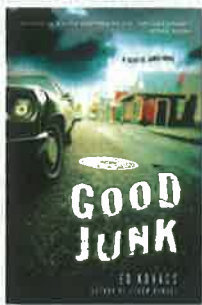


★ Good Junk: A Cliff St. James Novel

Ed Kovacs. Minotaur, \$25.99 (336p) ISBN 978-0-31260-089-1

Set a year after Hurricane Katrina ravaged New Orleans, Kovacs's outstanding second Cliff St. James novel (after 2011's *Storm Damage*) finds St. James, a private investigator who's also a mixed martial arts instructor, distraught over accidentally killing his opponent during a sparring session. The self-doubt St. James now feels proves a handicap when his close friend and not quite lover, NOPD homicide detective Honey Baybee, recruits him to officially assist with what she believes is a murder/suicide case. Two dead men, possibly gay lovers, have turned up in a grubby parking lot, one of them with his brains blown out in the passenger seat of a Mercedes S550. As both victims did sensitive work for the Defense Department at the local NASA assembly facility, St. James and Baybee encounter more than a little federal interference with the case. St. James may fit the familiar wiseass detective mold, but powerful prose that evokes a city still struggling to recover its infrastructure and identity elevates this well beyond most other contemporary PI novels. *Agent: Richard Curtis, Richard Curtis Associates. (Dec.)*



featuring English professor Alison Bergeron (after 2011's *Physical Education*) finds Alison juggling her teaching duties at St. Thomas University in the Bronx with far more dangerous pursuits. Second marriages for both Alison and her new husband, NYPD homicide cop Bobby Crawford, create a spate of complex and delicate family relationships. Alison's 19-year-old twin stepdaughters bring resentment and some wild romantic entanglements, while Bobby is a little too friendly with ex-wife Christine. But when Christine's brother, Chick, is found dead in his sleazy apartment with \$250,000 tucked into his mattress, events spin out of control. Alison, sarcastic and brash, wins no friends in pursuing the source of the money, as well as losing the trust of her best friend and the seriously annoying Bobby. Quirky characters complement a plot that offers a number of entertaining if sometimes illogical surprises. An irresistible hook at the conclusion will draw readers to the next installment. *Agent: Deborah Schneider, Gelfman Schneider. (Dec.)*

Dinosaur Thunder

James F. David. Forge, \$27.99 (384p) ISBN 978-0-7653-2378-1

A Tyrannosaurus Rex, nuclear explosions, and sacrificial Mayan rituals collide in David's entertainingly goofy third thriller set in a world in which prehistory has invaded the present (after 2006's *Thunder of Time*). As Director of the Office of Security Science, Nick Paulson continues to deal with the "time waves" that, 18 years before, swept Earth, "intermixing the Cretaceous and modern periods," leading to jungles overrunning human habitations and dinosaurs running amok among humans. If that's not bad enough, hapless astronauts discover that a T. Rex has somehow reached the moon, while a war brews between embattled human survivors, who have turned to religious mysticism, and an intelligent new species descended from dinosaurs. The ultimate threat lies, however, in the imminent approach of the same asteroid that originally rang down the curtain on the prehistoric era. Readers who don't expect plausible, Crichtonesque explanations for all this may enjoy David's baroquely over-the-top storytelling. *Agent: Carol McCleary, Wilshire Literary Agency (Dec.)*

Cat Bearing Gifts:

A Joe Grey Mystery

Shirley Rousseau Murphy. Morrow, \$19.99 (320p) ISBN 978-0-061-80694-0

Talking cat fans will welcome Murphy's exciting 18th mystery featuring feline Joe Grey (after 2011's *Cat Telling Tales*), in which Joe's tortoiseshell friend, Kit, plays a lead role. After a multicausal accident on a dangerous mountain road near Molena Point, Calif., Vic Amson, a violent no-gooder whose old pickup was wrecked, steals the Lincoln Town Car of Kit's elderly human friends, Pedric and Lucinda Greenlaw. Only later do Vic and his injured partner in crime, Birely, who have begun a successful search for bundles of cash hidden on the property once owned by Birely's sister, realize that their stolen vehicle hides an even greater treasure. Evil and greed lead to murder, and it's up to the cats to see justice served. Anyone unfamiliar with this cozy series will be quickly drawn in by the complete believability of Murphy's crime-solving felines and their helpful human companions. *Agent: Martha Millard, Martha Millard Literary. (Dec.)*

Extra Credit:

A Murder 101 Mystery

Maggie Barbieri. Minotaur, \$24.99 (336p) ISBN 978-1-250-00188-7

Barbieri's diverting seventh mystery

Frank Sinatra in a Blender

Matthew McBride. New Pulp (www.newpulp-press.com), \$14.95 trade paper (220p) ISBN 978-0-9855786-0-2

Ken Bruen provides an introduction to McBride's debut romp, which features Nick Valentine, a St. Louis PI who downs weird combinations of alcohol and pills; loves his Yorkshire terrier, Frank Sinatra; and helps cops and crooks with equal, if spaced out, panache. A well-planned, poorly executed credit union robbery leaves a fortune missing and in the hands of a tweaker (meth user) called Telly. After robbery mastermind Joe Parker charges his vicious henchmen, Sid Godwin and Johnny No Nuts, with retrieving the loot, Valentine throws in with thieves Big Tony Sparrow and Doyle to get there first. At the same time, Valentine has also promised to help ace police detective Ron Beachy solve a related crime. High-octane, casually brutal action keeps the story slipping and sliding through the icy winter streets with touches of macabre humor providing laughter even amid the carnage. Fans of offbeat characters and grisly noir are in for a treat. *Agent: Stacia Decker, DMLA. (Dec.)*