

and the story "Final Episodes of Peanuts You Never Saw" finally captures such events as Charlie Brown kicking the football and Marcie and Patty professing their love for Melissa Etheridge. However, spoofing material that's already satirical is a delicate business, and most of these works are mildly amusing rather than downright hilarious. The parody works best when the artists use the bland daily comic strip format to savage another topic, as in "Bush Family Circus," which takes on both Bill Keane's strip and the presidential dynasty. The book features several full-color sections and looks terrific overall, succeeding as much as a tribute to the great comic strips of the past as a lampoon. (Nov. 2003)

Mystery

MYSTERIOUS PLEASURES:

A Celebration of the Crime Writers' Association 50th Anniversary

EDITED BY MARTIN EDWARDS. *Little, Brown (Trafalgar Sq., dist.)*, \$17.95 paper (370p) ISBN 0-316-72563-3

Did you know that the much-prized Gold Dagger Award given out by the British Crime Writers' Association was known as the "Crossed Red Herring Award" when the group had its first luncheon in 1953? (It went to Winston Graham, of *Poldark* fame.) Editor Edwards notes this without apparent irony in his introduction to a well-chosen collection of stories by CWA award winners put together to mark the golden anniversary of the influential organization—a shrewd mixture of old favorites such as Margery Allingham's "One Morning They'll Hang Him" and John Creasey's "The Chief Witness" (according to Edwards, one third of CWA's early members "happened to be Creasey himself under his many pseudonyms") and eight new tales written for this anthology by such big names as Colin Dexter, Reginald Hill, Val McDermid and Ian Rankin. The stories cover the range of what we've come to expect from British crime fiction at its best, from the traditional cop on the beat story with a twist in its tail (Hill's "The Game of the Dog") to McDermid's tough and dark "The Consolation Blonde," which appropriately enough is about a male writer who loses a major literary award and takes out his frustration on his date. This could be the perfect volume to take along on your next trip to England, especially with all the recent airport delays. (Apr. 1)

Forecast: *Despite its import status, this one should sell well to fans of British mysteries given the all-star cast of contributors. Other tales original to this anthology are by Robert Barnard, Lindsey Davis, H.R.F. Keating and Peter Lovesey.*

CAT FEAR NO EVIL: A Joe Grey Mystery

SHIRLEY ROUSSEAU MURPHY. *Harper-Collins*, \$24.95 (336p) ISBN 0-06-620949-8

★ Once again sleek feline sleuth Joe Grey and his tabby partner, Dulcie, prove to be the best snitches the Molena Point, Calif., police ever had in this superior cat cozy, the ninth entry in Murphy's popular series (after 2003's *Cat Seeing Double*). A sophisticated thief has been targeting the small coastal town, stealing prize jewelry and paintings, despite elaborate security measures. Also missing is a vintage 1927 Packard belonging to Joe's owner, Clyde Damen. The ante is raised when a waiter at an art gallery opening suddenly falls dead and a local realtor gets blown up in a gas explosion. Meanwhile, someone is stalking interior designer Kate Osborne, whose apartment is invaded by ferocious tomcat Azrael, an old adversary of Joe's, and the avaricious Consuela Benton is leading astray troubled teenager Dillon Thurwell, whose mother is having an affair with a suave art collector. As usual, the relationships between the lively human characters and the talking cats in whom they confide their problems provide as much interest as the crime solving. The intricate and absorbing plot keeps the reader in suspense throughout. (Mar. 5)

FYI: *Murphy has won the Cat Writers' Association Muse Medallion five times.*

AN INTIMATE GHOST:

A Jane Lawless Mystery

ELLEN HART. *St. Martin's Minotaur*, \$24.95 (320p) ISBN 0-312-31747-6

An urgent message summons Jane Lawless to an unexpected psychedelic spectacle—the entire wedding party of a school-teacher acquaintance tripping out—in Lambda Award-winner Hart's 11th assured mystery (after 2001's *Merchant of Venus*) to feature the Minnesota restaurateur and sometime sleuth. Someone has slipped a hallucinogenic mickey into Jane's catering staff's delectable comestibles, causing much embarrassment, litigation and one life-threatening injury when the groom leaps into an empty swimming pool. The poignant history of the groom's father, Alden Clifford, provides the ballast for this richly layered narrative, in which the suspense builds as the author slowly reveals the defining moment that overshadows all Alden's subsequent actions. Jane's longtime sidekick and co-investigator, Cordelia Thorn, is as diverting as ever, while the romantic atmosphere of Jane's Lyme House restaurant and the piquant offerings on the upscale menu will delight fans of culinary cozies. Touches of humor offset the heartfelt woe. Incorporating societal ills torn from the headlines, Hart bares the weaknesses in her well-realized characters as well as their strengths. Despite a plot refreshingly short on guns and gore, the tension is palpable in this spunky page-turner. (Mar. 8)

FYI: *Hart is also the author of Death on a Silver Platter (2003) and other titles in her Sophie Greenway mass-market mystery series.*

REDEMPTION STREET:

A Moe Prager Mystery

REED FARREL COLEMAN. *Viking*, \$22.95 (244p) ISBN 0-670-03291-3

Set in 1981, Coleman's fast-paced sequel to *Walking the Perfect Square* (2002) will please fans of both hard-boiled and traditional PI mysteries. A retired cop with an inactive PI license, Prager is happily bored in his new incarnation as a Manhattan wine merchant, husband and new father. Residual ambivalence about his choice to help cover up the disappearance of his wife's beloved brother leads Prager to reconsider his initial refusal to take on another quest for a missing sibling—Arthur Rosen's search for the sister widely believed to have died in a fire at a Catskill resort 15 years earlier. When an arrogant and shadowy real estate magnate attempts to bribe him to refuse the case, Prager leaves his family and job to try to unearth the truth about the fatal blaze, which claimed 16 lives and was officially blamed on a careless bedtime smoker. He finds that the conflagration marked the point at which the small town of Old Rotterdam began its decline and that his questions stir up ill feeling from the locals, who include mysterious neo-Nazis and a group of Jews who call themselves the Yellow Stars. Prager's dogged pursuit leads to a satisfying and logical solution, while demonstrating Coleman's gift for blending a classic whodunit with a gritty, realistic procedural. Prager is a fascinating creation, believably grappling with his status as an unaffiliated and unobservant Jew, with ample room for greater growth. (Mar. 22)

FYI: *Coleman is also the author of Little Easter (1993) and two other mysteries in his Dylan Klein series.*

MURDER BY DESIGN:

A Rick Domino Mystery

JON P. BLOCH. *St. Martin's Minotaur*, \$23.95 (272p) ISBN 0-312-31312-8

Gay gossip columnist Rick Domino made a smashing debut in Bloch's spoof of the Oscars, *Best Murder of the Year* (2002). If this wickedly funny sequel doesn't quite match the same high standard, the author keeps the satire mostly on target as Rick lets the design experts of the do-it-yourself cable TV show *My House, Your House* make over his outdated living room. Rick soon finds not just his house but his life turned upside down. Playing the comic innocent is Terry Zane, an LAPD "junior detective" whom Rick befriended (and helped bring out of the closet) in *Best Murder of the Year*. At Rick's suggestion, Terry allows *MHYH* to make over his bedroom on the same episode. The program's quirky cast includes Aunt Fern (coun-