

Six for the Summer

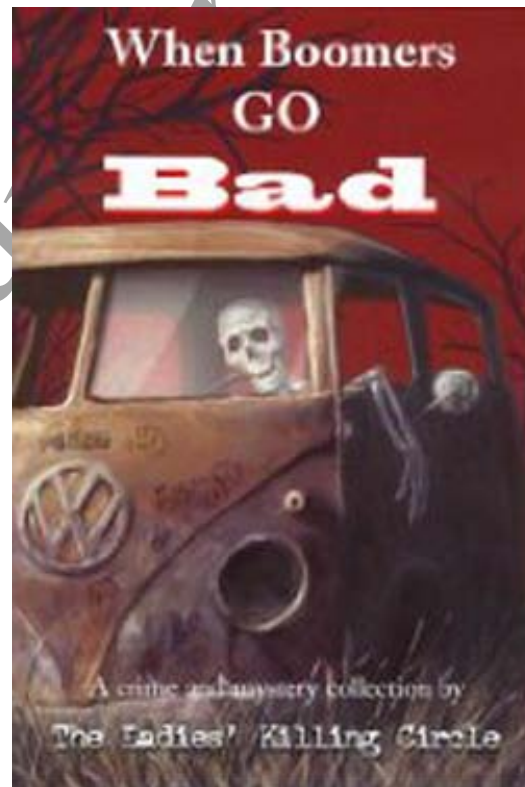
Suspended Sentences

by Jim Napier

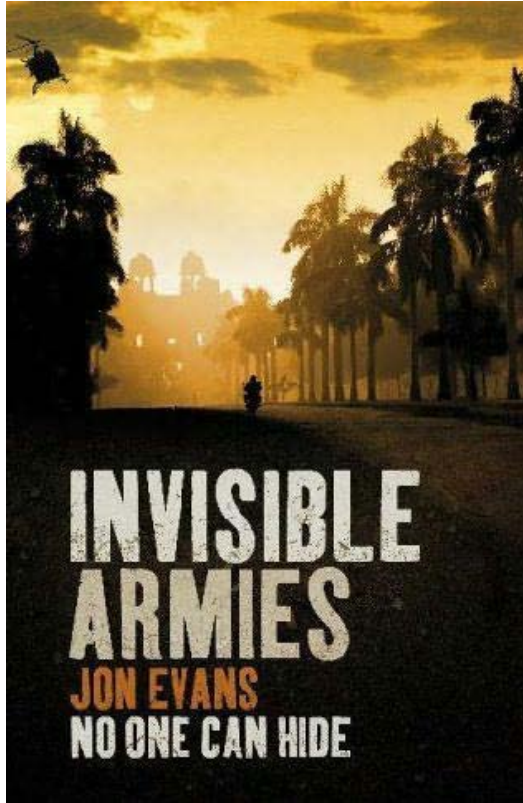
Summer is now officially upon us, though sunshine seems to be in short supply. No matter. Pack up the kids and your other half — and the family dog if you must — and head for the cottage or the beach. You deserve it.

And just in case the power goes off, or to pass the time while you're making sure the little ones don't wander too far out into the surf, here's a treat: half a dozen of some of the most entertaining works in recent Canadian crime fiction. It is a smorgasbord of crime, with something for almost everyone, reminding us of just how much good home-grown mystery writing is out there.

Leading the pack is an anthology of murderously clever short stories by a group of Ottawa-based writers calling themselves — what else? — The Ladies Killing Circle. The unifying theme is the Boomer Generation, and how they've fared all these years later. By turns witty and dark, these tales give a whole new meaning to coping with middle age.



Joan Boswell et al,
When Boomers Go Bad
(RendezVous Press, 2005)

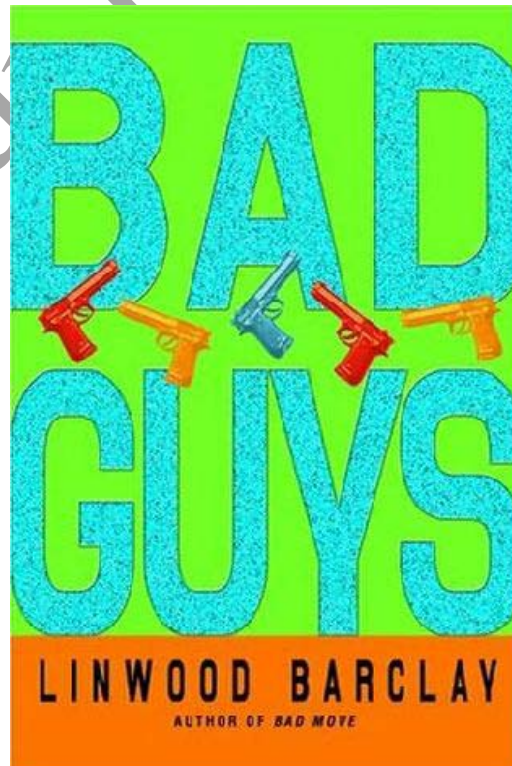


Jon Evans,
Invisible Armies
(Harper Collins, 2006)

An action-based thriller for conspiracy buffs. Montreal writer Jon Evans has served up a fast-paced tale that moves from India to Paris to Las Vegas, as Danielle Leaf finds herself in the middle of a war between a multinational mining company, third-world farmers, and a legion of anti-globalization protestors. In a world in which black is seldom black and white is never white, it seems everyone is prepared to use violence to obtain their goals.

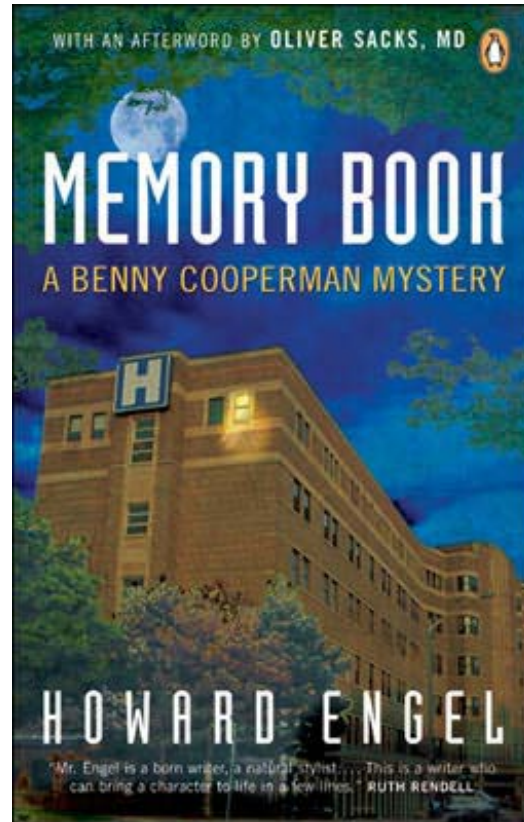
Linwood Barclay.
Bad Guys
(Bantam Books, 2005)

Zack Walker is back. The well-intentioned but bumbling husband and father from *Bad Move* has moved his family back to inner-city Toronto, where he wrestles with, it seems, all the complexities of modern urban life. After stumbling onto a hit-and-run, Zack comes up against a local crime boss with a penchant for collecting dolls, known as Barbie Bullock. As if that weren't enough, he feels obliged to get involved in his daughter's troubled love life, and, for good measure, Zack discovers that a computer recluse seems to have an unhealthy interest in his son. A salutary lesson in how *not* to cope, with many enjoyable laughs along the way.



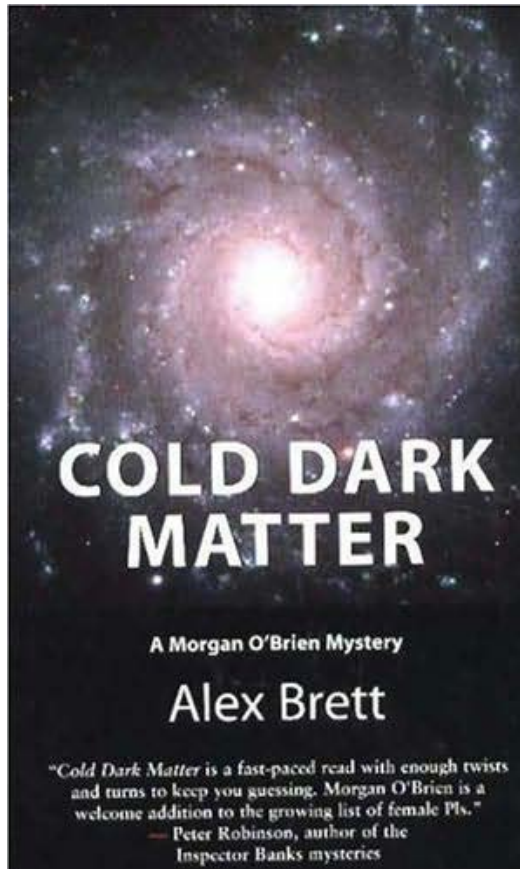
**Lou Allin,
Murder, Eh?
(RendezVous Press, 2006)**

While Belle Palmer, a realtor based in Sudbury, is showing a house, she discovers a body in the bathtub. Definitely bad for business. The city's third break-and-enter death in recent months, events point strongly toward a serial killer. Belle takes the victim's twelve-year-old child into her home, only to have him disappear after they argue. Now it is a race between Belle, the murderers, and the ravages of a Northern Ontario winter, with a child's life hanging in the balance.



**Howard Engel,
Memory Book
(Penguin, 2005)**

Benny Cooperman is the apotheosis of the two-fisted, hard-drinking private investigator: his favorite food is a chopped egg salad sandwich washed down with a glass of milk, and he regularly gets beaten up by the thugs he is investigating. This time Benny finds himself in a Toronto hospital, recovering from a serious blow to the head which affects his mind. Benny can still write, but he cannot read, and his memory has suffered as well. Intent on understanding the events that led to his injuries, Benny enlists his girlfriend's Anna's help in discovering why he was found unconscious next to a dead woman. This original story is all the more poignant because Engel himself suffered a stroke, with exactly those symptoms.



Alex Brett,
Cold Dark Matter
(The Dundurn Group, 2005)

On a lonely mountaintop in Hawaii, a Canadian astronomer commits suicide. Sent to the observatory where he worked to locate his missing data, Morgan O'Brien discovers that someone else is after his notebooks, and is prepared to do whatever is necessary to get them. Morgan's quest will lead her to Ottawa, and to events rooted in the Cold War. A probing and informed look at scientific research and the ambitions and politics that drive such research. Shortlisted by the Crime Writers of Canada for the Best Crime Novel of 2005.

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