

Homicide for the Holidays

Suspended Sentences

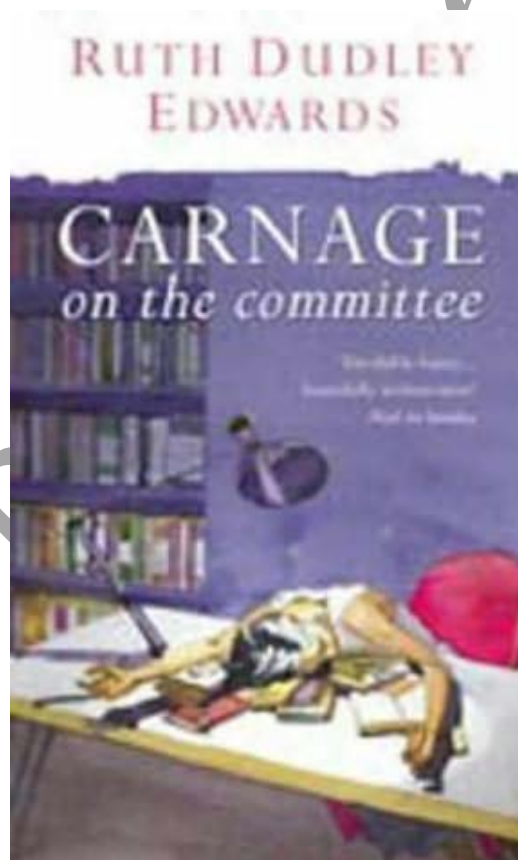
by Jim Napier

As Christmas looms, we are all faced with what to get dear Aunt Gladys, who likes to knit formless sweaters in improbable colour combinations, and George at the office, who turned up last year with a Christmas offering of matching jars of pickled tongue and marmite. Of course, you could get even and surprise them with a CD of the Greatest Hits of the Grateful Dead, or a gift certificate for a visit to the Museum of Household Insects, but this is the season for forgiving and being generous, right? So in the hope that somehow the Christmas spirit will prevail, here are my suggestions for a baker's half-dozen books calculated to bring a smile — or perhaps a gasp — to the faces of those you hold near and dear (and George, too).

Ruth Dudley Edwards,
Carnage on the Committee
(HarperCollins)

A dark sense of humour and a total irreverence shows in the writing of Irish novelist and journalist Ruth Dudley Edwards. Baroness 'Jack' Troutbeck is called to investigate the death of the Chairman of a committee about to award a prestigious literary prize. As others on the committee meet untimely ends, she must delve into the intrigues of modern literature, a task she finds slightly more daunting than confronting a murderer. Barbed and

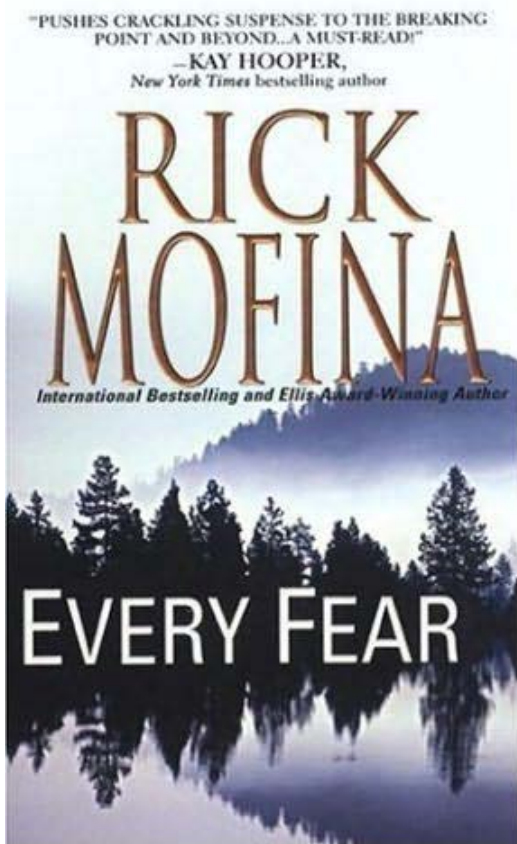
witty, and unfailingly on target, this is social satire at its best.



Rick Mofina,
Every Fear
(Pinnacle Books/Kensington)

Second in a series, following *The Dying Hour*, reviewed in these pages last February. After nipping into a Seattle corner store for a moment, Maria Colson sees her baby son Dylan being taken from his stroller and put into a waiting van. Rushing outside, she jumps on to the van, but is thrown off as it drives

away, putting her in the hospital in a coma. Reporter Jason Wade discovers that a young woman connected to the Colsons has been the victim of a grisly murder. As the FBI and local police search for Dylan's abductor, Wade and his ex-alcoholic father (a PI and ex-cop) race to make the connections before time runs out for the young child. A gripping page-turner, with an all-too-believable plot and an engaging protagonist.

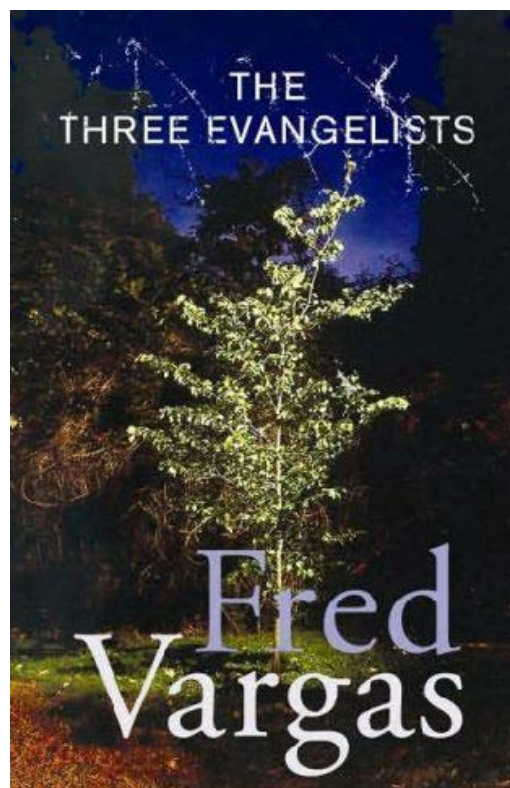
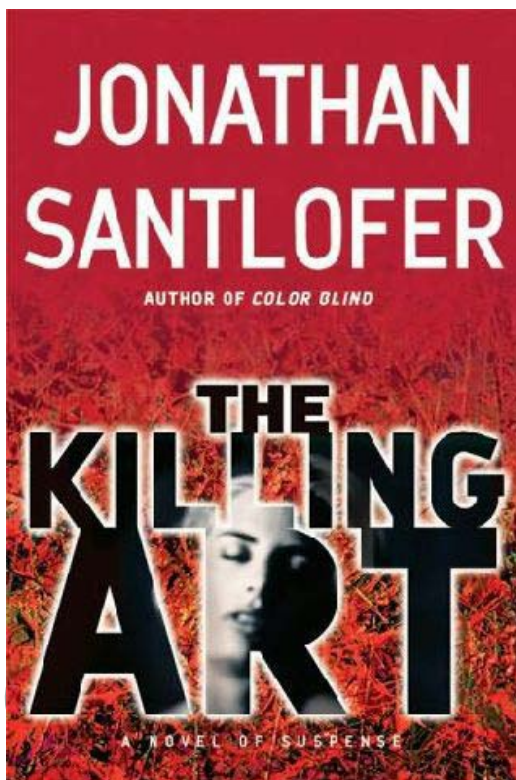


R. J. Harlick,
Red Ice for a Shroud
(RendezVous Press)

As winter approaches, Meg Harris and a crew of friends are working to create a series of trails for a ski marathon when a young woman in the group goes missing. Meg discovers her body in the cabin of a young Algonquin man, also a member of the crew. Convinced of his innocence, Meg sets out to clear her friend. At the same time, the kids on the local reserve are turning up with drugs. Are the two events related? Set in northwestern Quebec, this is the Ottawa writer's second novel in the Meg Harris series.

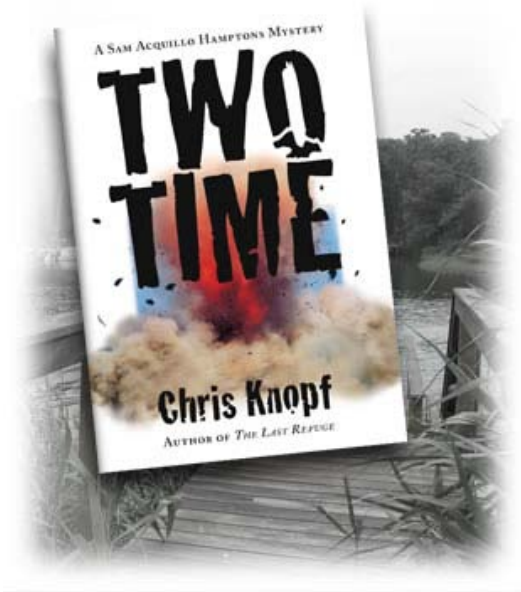
Jonathan Santlofer,
The Killing Art
(William Morrow)

Ex-cop, Manhattan socialite and TV art historian Kate McKinnon is attempting to rebuild her life following the death of her husband. Researching New York art in the 1940s and '50s, she discovers that someone is slashing the very paintings she is writing about. The NYPD call on her professional skills to determine just why this is happening – and whether artists themselves might be at risk. An engrossing thriller, with Santlofer's own drawings providing some of the clues.



Fred Vargas,
The Three Evangelists
(Random House)

Here's one for puzzle fans: what to make of a Greek opera singer who wakes up one morning to discover that a tree has appeared overnight in the garden of her Paris house? When she is subsequently found dead in her car, burnt literally to ashes, an ex-cop and three of the victim's neighbors band together to solve this intriguing, unnerving mystery. A literate, polished tale with original characters and an offbeat plot.

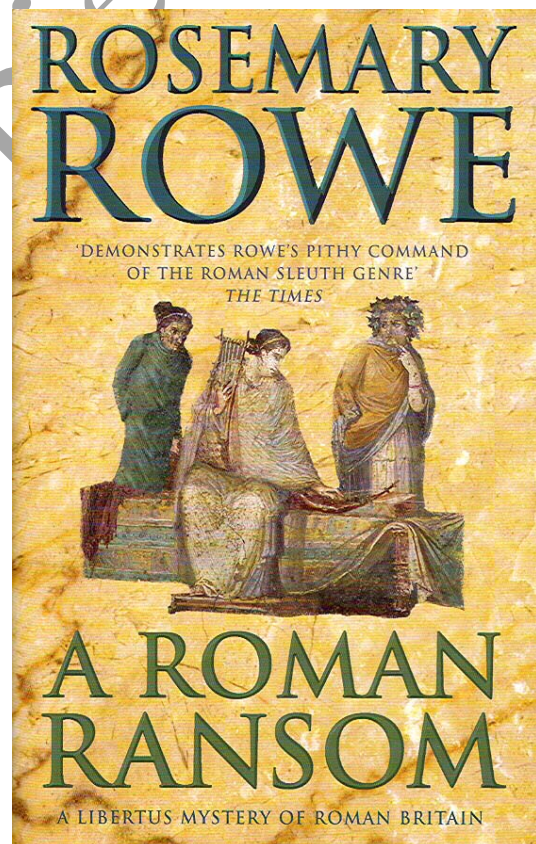


Chris Knopf,
Two Time
(Random House Canada)

In August I reviewed Chris Knopf's debut novel, *The Last Refuge*. He's back with a vengeance in the second installment in this series, featuring ex-boxer and corporate dropout Sam Acquillo. Sam and a friend are having a drink at a local watering hole when they are nearly killed by a car bomb nearby. A prominent financial consultant is the victim, and Sam discovers there's a long list of people who aren't unhappy about his demise. When a local cop dies taking a bullet for Sam, it gets personal. Snappy dialogue and dark humour are trademarks of this rapidly-emerging writer.

Rosemary Rowe,
A Roman Ransom
(Headline Books)

Set in Roman Britain, protagonist Libertus must rise from his sick bed to find the wife and child of his patron, Marcus Aurelius Septimus, who have disappeared without a trace. When a ransom note arrives demanding the release of a political prisoner, Libertus is only too aware that giving into the kidnapper's demand is no guarantee of the victim's safe return; tracking down the kidnapper is his only option. An informed, well-written mystery-with-history that shows us just how little has changed from ancient times to today.



Whilst we're in the spirit of giving, why not give your business to your local independent bookstore – you

know, the one with knowledgeable, friendly staff who are also your neighbours? And if I don't see you before then, have a murderously Merry Christmas and a criminally good New Year!

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