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CRIME WATCH

From Wall Street to Tokyo and along the California coast, the gang's all here

By Dick Adler who reviews mysteries and thrillers for the Tribune. A collection of his reviews and essays, "Dreams of Justice," was recently published by Poisoned Pen Press

March 5, 2006

The Fallen

By T. Jefferson Parker

Morrow, \$24.95

When all is said and written, T. Jefferson Parker could well be the best crime writer working out of Southern California. From his first book, "Laguna Heat," in 1985, through last year's stunningly beautiful "California Girl," all 13 of his novels have had at their center a unique vision of the part of the state surrounding San Diego that still has visible traces of history that have been malled over further north.

"The Fallen" has a central gimmick worthy of Oliver Sachs: Homicide Detective Robbie Brownlaw gets thrown out of a sixth-floor window, lands hard (although a canvas awning saves his life), and wakes up in the hospital with a neurological condition called synesthesia, which mixes up the senses and causes weird things like seeing people's words as colored shapes.

The 29-year-old Brownlaw not only learns to live with it but to use it in his work: The shapes change color when people lie to him. And criminals do that a lot, as Brownlaw investigates the shooting death of Garrett Asplundh, an investigator for the San Diego Ethics Authority enforcement unit, which looks into crimes involving police officers and political officials. It looks like Asplundh had uncovered widespread corruption, but that might not be why he was killed.

Despite his unusual problems, Brownlaw is a totally credible investigator. Parker's greatest gift is to keep everything in balance, so the suspense and pain aren't overwhelmed by the central gimmick.

Advertisement



Merger

By Sanjay Sanghoee

Forge, \$24.95

Not nearly enough attention or respect were paid to this timely, gripping and original business thriller when it came out last year. With Enron back in the headlines, I can't think of a better way to keep your financial fluids stirred and shaken than to spend a few exciting hours in the company of charming, talented, unscrupulous Chief Executive Officer Vikram Suri, head of the exploding media conglomerate TriNet Communications. If he reminds you of an Indian version of Rupert Murdoch, I'm sure it's no accident: First-time novelist Sanjay Sanghoee is a New York investment banker with major media clients and contacts.

The merger of the title involves TriNet's gobbling up of a giant satellite operation, a move vital to Suri's grandiose ambitions. To make sure it goes through, he will commit any criminal act he thinks necessary, from bribery to torture and murder. Only one man--an investment banker, as it turns out--has the guts to risk his job and his life to try to keep the merger from happening.

Crossfire

By Miyuki Miyabe, translated by Deborah Stuhr Iwabuchi and Anna Husson Isozaki

Kodansha, \$24.95

Will Miyuki Miyabe turn out to be the next Ruth Rendell? She has already written 36 mysteries, although "Crossfire" is just the third one to