

## Sand of the Arena: A Gladiators of the Empire Novel

JAMES DUFFY. McBooks, \$23.95 (416p)  
ISBN 1-59013-111-8

For this first entry in a new series, debut novelist Duffy recreates in gory detail the world of Roman gladiators, complete with larger-than-life characters and plenty of fast-paced, sanguinary action. When the hero, Quintus Honorius Romanus, loses his parents and is injured during a storm at sea, a resentful and resourceful slave, Lucius, steals his identity. The real Quintus—renamed Taurus—works to rebuild his life as a gladiator, with the help of new friends Lindani, an African hunter, and Amazonia, a rare female gladiator who seems lifted straight from the overheated world of professional wrestling. Meanwhile, Lucius—masquerading as the patrician Quintus—rises to a position of power in Rome. Beginning in Britannia on the frontier of the Empire, Taurus fights his way to notoriety, a match in Rome and the inevitable showdown with his nemesis. From training regimen to weapons and fighting tactics, Duffy renders the technical elements of the “sport” in layman’s terms. He also corrects some common misconceptions about gladiatorial combat—e.g., the losing fighter was more likely to be spared than killed. Despite its made-for-TV-movie plotting and characterizations, this entertaining read may find a receptive audience among fans of historical fiction. *Agents, Loretta Barrett and Nick Mullendore.* (Nov.)

## MYSTERY

### The Devil’s Game: An Unlikely Mystery

DAVID HOLLAND. St. Martin’s Minotaur/Dunne, \$24.95 (288p) ISBN 0-312-34077-X

In Holland’s impressive third Victorian novel of crime and corruption (after 2003’s *The Devil’s Acre*), the tormented Reverend Tuckworth is still haunted by his mercy killing of his fatally ill wife. When the death of Bellminster’s member of Parliament causes a feeding frenzy among the town’s powers-that-be and would-be power players,

Tuckworth’s friend and patron, Lord Granby, further stirs the pot by deciding to stand for election. The resulting turmoil divides the community, and some resort to violence to influence the voters. After an innocent bystander is brutally beaten to death, Tuckworth finds himself unable to resist investigating, despite the local leadership’s opposition. Though the choice to reveal the killer’s identity early on somewhat undercuts Tuckworth’s achievements as a sleuth, Holland does an excellent job at evoking the desperate claustrophobia of the town, which will remind many of the setting of Dickens’s *Hard Times*. *Agent, Bob Solinger at the Dickens Group Literary.* (Dec.)

### High Heels and Homicide

KASEY MICHAELS. Kensington, \$14 paper (288p) ISBN 0-7582-0880-4

The drop-dead gorgeous hero of Maggie Kelly’s popular mystery series, Alex Blakely (aka the Viscount Saint Just), came to life in Michaels’s *Maggie Needs an Alibi*; the two return to face more murder with wit and a certain kind of almost accidental panache in a locked-room caper plopped inside a romantic comedy. Maggie and crew (Alex’s butler, Maggie’s editor, etc.) head to England to watch the filming of her latest murder mystery and get trapped on location in a creepy mansion when a major rainstorm floods the grounds and the power goes out. People start turning up dead, and Alex and Maggie try to figure out whodunit while engaging in ongoing rounds of double entendre as they consider their mutual infatuation. Michaels’s lively characters and skewering of all sorts of types—the over-reaching actor, the studio jerk—provide much of the fun, since the murders and the schemes behind them are nothing special. Light and funny, if overlong, Michaels’s latest should please her many fans. (Dec.)

### Seaside: A Lily Pascale Mystery

SCARLETT THOMAS. Justin, Charles/Kate’s Mystery, \$24.95 (320p)  
ISBN 1-932112-09-X

British author Thomas’s compelling third Lily Pascale mystery (after 2004’s *In Your Face*) finds

the young literature professor at home on a dark and stormy night when a celebrated crime writer, Emma Winter, knocks at the door of her remote Devon cottage and offers her an ungodly sum of money to investigate the recent suicide of an 18-year-old twin. Or was the apparent suicide really murder? And which twin is dead, anyway? The suicide note is signed Laura, but the surviving twin insists that she’s Laura. And why does Emma, who refuses to explain why she’s interested in these twins, care? Before Lily can figure out whodunit (and who was done in), a rock star is murdered and incest is uncovered. Meanwhile, Lily is increasingly tempted to chuck her university job and take up detecting full time. Then there’s the handsome American screenwriter who’s just moved in next door. This novel of mixed-up identities, murder and malice sizzles. *Agent, Simon Trewin at Peters, Fraser & Dunlap (U.K.).* (Nov.)

### Involuntary Witness

GIANRICO CAROFIGLIO, TRANS. FROM THE ITALIAN BY PATRICK CREAGH. Bitter Lemon, \$13.95 paper (274p) ISBN 1-904738-07-9

A bestseller and winner of multiple awards in Italy, Carofiglio’s debut should please fans of American-style courtroom thrillers. A murder case presents Guido Guerrieri, the archetypal burned-out defense lawyer, with a chance at redemption. A Senegalese peddler, Abdou Thiam, is arrested for killing a nine-year-old boy, whose body was found at the bottom of a well near a coastal resort in southern Italy. Even though the police have only circumstantial evidence against Thiam, he’s advised to take a plea bargain that would allow him to get off with only 20 years in prison. Guerrieri becomes convinced that his new client is the victim of racism and is being used as a scapegoat. Defying conventional wisdom and putting his own career on the line as well as Thiam’s fate, Guerrieri takes the case to trial. The result is a powerful indictment of the Italian justice system. (Nov.)