

Reviews

Fiction

★ Cockroach

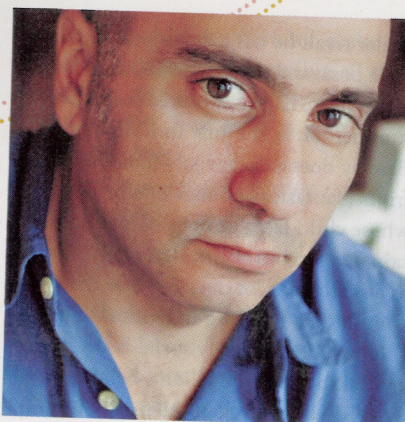
Rawi Hage. Norton, \$23.95 (320p) ISBN 978-0-393-07537-3

With a surprising degree of humor, Hage's second novel (after IMPAC Dublin-winner *DeNiro's Game*) explores the peculiar politics of Montreal's immigrant communities through the bleak obsessions of a misanthropic thief. After trying and failing to kill himself, an unnamed narrator who believes himself to be part cockroach is compelled to attend counseling sessions with an earnest and alluring therapist. As he unspools his personal history—from his apprenticeship with the thief Abou-Roro to the tragic miscalculation that led him to flee his home country—the narrator, reluctant to tell his story (we never learn where the narrator is from, and inconsistencies in his tale cast doubt upon his honesty), scuttles through the stories of others, recounting secrets both confidentially shared and invasively discovered. Unable to support himself on burglary alone, the narrator takes a job as a busboy, but runs into complications after discovering his lover's connection to the restaurant's most prominent customer. The novel's gritty back-alley world gives rise to a host of glorious rogues, each swindling the others at every opportunity, and yet each is capable of great empathy under just the right circumstances. (Oct.)

Dexter by Design

Jeff Lindsay. Doubleday, \$25 (368p) ISBN 978-0-385-51836-9

Lindsay doesn't always maintain the balance between farce and something more serious in his fourth thriller to feature Dexter Morgan (after *Dexter in the Dark*). As fans of the hit Showtime TV series know, Dexter is a blood-splatter analyst for the Miami PD as well as a serial killer who targets killers who've evaded justice. When two eviscerated corpses turn up on a beach, Dexter investigates, as does his sister, Deborah, a sergeant



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Rawi Hage's Cockroach follows a Montreal thief convinced he's part insect (reviewed at left).

with his department, who suffers serious injury after she's stabbed by a suspect, Alex Doncevic. Convinced Deborah's assailant is the person also responsible for the bodies on the beach, Dexter eliminates Doncevic, only to find that he's taken an innocent life. To Dexter's further dismay, someone begins posting videos of Doncevic's murder on YouTube. While the darkly witty Lindsay deserves credit for continuing to make imaginative use of his original concept, a contrived resolution disappoints. (Sept.)

Drawn in Blood

Andrea Kane. Morrow, \$24.99 (336p) ISBN 978-0-06-123680-8

Bestseller Kane's disappointing sequel to *Twisted* (2008) pays more attention to the romantic growing pains between FBI agent Sloane Burbank and her hunky former FBI colleague, Derek Parker, than the crime at hand. Dragon Head, boss of a Chinese triad, is targeting Sloane's father, Matthew, and his circle of friends in a years-old revenge plot that hinges on a stolen painting. Derek and his task force are already on the Dragon Head's scent for stateside crimes when Sloane's parents' Manhattan apartment is burglarized. Matthew privately hires Sloane to protect him while keeping the past hidden from the Feds and Derek. Despite a few incidents early on, the heart-racing action is relegated to Sloane and Derek's bedroom—and when the two aren't amorously engaged, they're arguing about who's hiding what from whom. They're not hiding anything from the reader, though: Kane tells us too much up front, and little is left for the big reveal. (Sept.)

Gingerbread Mansion

Lizzie Brown. Severn, \$28.95 (384p) ISBN 978-0-7278-6775-9

Clichéd situations more typical of a stock romance novel mar Brown's historical set in post-WWII England. Charles Garland, of the newly formed National Trust, which is created to take over the operations of country houses whose owners can no longer afford their maintenance, travels from London to the Jago family's Devon home, Lizzah, to persuade the Jagos to put the property in the trust's hands. Kit, the son who was to inherit Lizzah, was killed in action at war's end, and his father, Myles, is in denial about the state of the family's finances. Romances, an unexpected pregnancy and domestic violence complicate Charles's efforts. Brown (*Cat's Cradle*) fails to make the reader feel the very real emotional impact of the social changes of the period on her characters' lives. Uninspired dialogue doesn't help ("The whole country's at a tipping point. So many of the old ways gone. So many unknowns waiting in the offing..."). (Sept.)

The White Queen

Philippa Gregory. Touchstone, \$26.99 (448p) ISBN 978-1-4165-6368-6

The queen of British historical fiction (*The Other Boleyn Girl*) kicks off a new series with the story of Elizabeth Woodville Grey, whose shifting alliances helped the War of the Roses take root. The marriage of 22-year-old Yorkist King Edward IV to 27-year-old widow Elizabeth brings a sea change in loyalties: Elizabeth's Lancastrian family becomes Edward's strongest supporters, while Edward's closest adviser, the ambitious earl of Warwick, joins with Edward's brother George to steal the English crown. History buffs from Shakespeare on have speculated about this fateful period, especially the end of Edward and Elizabeth's two sons, and Gregory invents plausible but provocative scenarios to explore those mysteries; she is especially poignant depicting Elizabeth in her later years, when her allegiance shifts toward Richard III (who may have killed her sons). Gregory earned her international reputation evoking sex, violence, love and betrayal among the Tudors; here she adds intimate relationships, political maneuvering