

# The attractions of evil

Bernard Carpinter's monthly roundup of crime and thrillers.

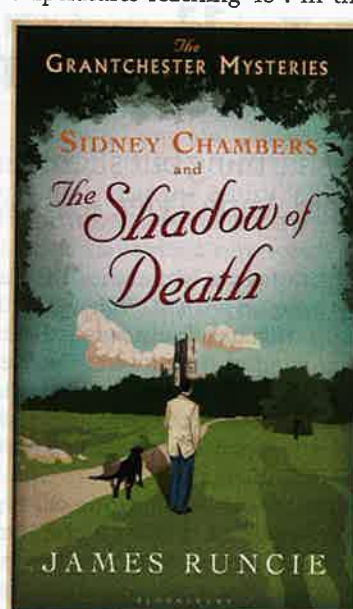
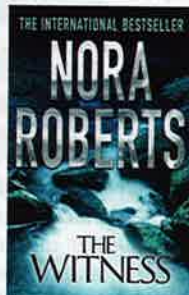
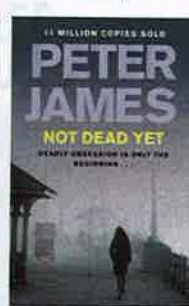
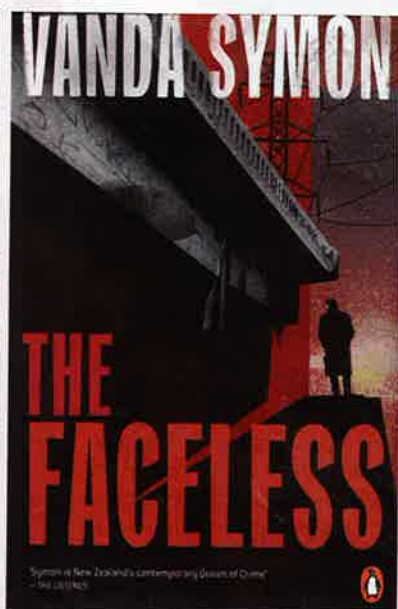
Dunedin writer Vanda Symon has gone off in a new direction with her latest, **THE FACELESS** (Penguin, \$29.99). After four novels featuring – and narrated by – perky young detective Sam Shephard, Symon switches to mild-mannered Auckland accountant Bradley, in thrall to his tyrannical boss, manipulative wife and disobedient daughters. Bradley sort-of-accidentally kidnaps Billy, a young Fijian woman, and imprisons her. He gets in touch with his evil side and finds he likes it; indeed, Symon's

their behaviour and forgiving their sins; but as an amateur sleuth he found that the requirements were the exact opposite." Very nicely written; a bit like Agatha Christie without all the red herrings.

Nora Roberts also writes as JD Robb and her Robb book *Celebrity in Death* was reviewed in last month's column, not very favourably. Judging by the Roberts novel **THE WITNESS** (Piatkus, \$36.99), the difference between the two personas seems to be that Roberts is more believable and

were crazy to start with, and an enraged scriptwriter is desperate for revenge. Gaia's life is threatened from different directions and James's Detective Superintendent Roy Grace has to ward off the threats while his fiancée is preparing to give birth to their first child. Fortunately, the British side of the book takes precedence, but the writing is marred by an overwhelming number of exclamation marks.

Sweden is sweating through a heatwave, with temperatures reaching 45°. In the



appreciation of the attractions of evil is reminiscent of Paul Cleave's. Billy's disappearance stirs her homeless friend Max out of his great funk and he forces himself to rejoin the world. More serious and ambitious than the Shephard books, and better written, this is a real step forward for Symon.

James Runcie's **SIDNEY CHAMBERS AND THE SHADOW OF DEATH** (Bloomsbury, \$35) is the first in a new series featuring Canon Sidney Chambers, an Anglican clergyman living in a village near Cambridge. The series starts in the early 1950s with Sidney aged 32 and still single. His work – and thoughts of romance – are constantly interrupted by parishioners and friends in London presenting him with crimes to solve, which he does reluctantly: "As a priest he was expected to be charitable and think the best of people, tolerating

less over the top. Elizabeth is 16 when an uncharacteristic act of defiance of her controlling mother results in her witnessing two murders by the Russian Mafia in Chicago. She runs, and keeps running. Twelve years later, she is trying to live a solitary life in a small town in Arkansas – until the local police chief takes a shine to her. Elizabeth is highly intelligent and some of her dialogue is delightful; she talks like an over-educated robot trying to make sense of the chaotic and illogical. Not bad at all.

Peter James's **NOT DEAD YET** (Macmillan, \$34.99) is a strange mixture of solid British police procedural and trashy Hollywood novel. The Hollywood stuff comes in the form of megastar singer-actress Gaia Lafayette, who is coming from America to make a film in Brighton; she plays the mistress of King George IV. Her British fans go crazy, apart from the ones who

provincial city of Linköping, people can sometimes smell the nearby forest fires. Mons Kallentoft's **SUMMERTIME DEATH** (Hodder, \$36.99) is set in the opposite season to his previous book, *Midwinter Sacrifice*, but features the same set of detectives and again focuses on single mother Malin Fors. A teenage girl has been attacked and left naked in a park, and another has gone missing. Clues are few but Malin and her team must find the energy to keep pushing on in the enervating heat. Malin also needs to sort out her feelings for her parents, her ex-husband, her teenage daughter and journalist Daniel. The strengths of this complex and excellent novel include realistic dialogue, thorough characterisation and concern for such social issues as immigration and homosexuality. ■

*Bernard Carpinter is a journalist and reviewer.*