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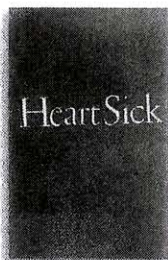
These titles go in for the kill

What is it about serial killers? Our fascination with them never seems to end. USA TODAY's Carol Memmott investigates two new mysteries featuring two memorable, and unusual, villains.



By Peter Iovino, Showtime

Embodying book character: Michael C. Hall stars as Dexter, a police expert — and serial killer.



By Kate Estelby

Cain: Plans for two more Lowell novels.

her victims.

The setting: Rainy Portland, Ore.

The mood: Gritty, grim police procedural

Supporting cast: Pink-haired Susan Ward, who is writing about the After School Strangler case for the *Oregon Herald*.

Payoff for the reader: Highly flawed but intelligent characters, a unique killer and a setting that complements a grizzly story line make this a novel mystery lovers can't afford to miss.

What's next: Cain has a contract for two more Gretchen Lowell novels. *Sweetheart* is due next year.

Heartsick

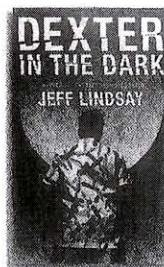
By Chelsea Cain
St. Martin's Minotaur, \$23.95

Why it's notable: This debut novel about a female serial killer arrives with considerable buzz.

The killer: Gretchen Lowell, brilliant, blond and beautiful, is in prison, having confessed to numerous killings. We don't know much about her, although she appears to have some medical training: How else would she have known how to remove a victim's spleen?

The plot: Two years after Detective Archie Sheridan was tortured nearly to death by Lowell, he's back on the job. Addicted to painkillers and to Lowell — he visits her in prison every Sunday — Sheridan seeks her help tracking down a killer who's snatching teenage girls off the streets.

Lowell's signature: She leaves a heart-shaped scar on the chests of



Doubleday

Lindsay: Makes even a killer lovable.

victims.

The setting: Sun-soaked Miami

The mood: Gruesome with comedic elements

Supporting cast: Dexter's potty-mouth adoptive sister, Sgt. Deborah Morgan, Dexter's clueless fiancée, Rita, and her oddly frightening children, Astor and Cody.

Payoff for the reader: The book's adrenaline-pumping gore factor is balanced with large doses of hilarious black humor. Any writer who can make his readers love a serial killer must be doing something right.

What's next: A fourth Dexter book is in the works.

Dexter in the Dark

By Jeff Lindsay
Doubleday, \$23.95, in stores Tuesday

Why it's notable: This is the third in a series about serial killer Dexter Morgan; basis for the Showtime series. The second season of *Dexter*, starring Michael C. Hall, premieres Sept. 30. The DVD of Season 1 has just been released.

The killer: Morgan works as a blood-spatter expert for the Miami police department by day and slices and dices killers by night.

The plot: The usually affable Dexter is feeling dull and listless because his "Dark Passenger" — his name for whatever it is that drives him to kill bad guys — seems to have left his body. Meanwhile, he searches for the perpetrator of some gruesome killings that may be tied to an ancient cult.

Dexter's signature: He saves a drop of blood, on a slide, from each of his