

Crime Marcel Berlins

Unwelcome guest

IAIN LEVISON'S CENTRAL anti-hero in the gripping **Dog Eats Dog** is a clever but usually unsuccessful bank robber who leaves from his latest escapade with a lot of money and a nasty bullet wound from the gun of a copper. Desperately seeking shelter, Phil Dixon reaches a small university town where he chances to see a man having sex with an underage girl. He turns out to be Elias White, a lazy, greedy, ambitious history professor in his thirties, she a 15-year old neighbour.

Dixon confronts him with a proposal he cannot refuse. The professor will allow the robber to stay in his house until he recovers from his injury; in return, Dixon will keep quiet about the criminal act he saw White committing.

Adding to the tense two-some, the FBI is on Dixon's trail, having traced some of the stolen banknotes to the town. Agent Denise Lupo is sent to investigate. The lives of the three principal characters interact in the best traditions of American noir — fast

action, taut dialogue, moral ambivalence, bleak emotions and cynical humour.

Two small asides. Curiously, *Dog Eats Dog* was first published in France in 2006, in translation, and only now reaches us in its original English. And it's the first novel I've read where the principal clue is someone saying the word "up" rather than "down".

The claim that Henry II's wife, Eleanor of Aquitaine, arranged the murder of his

'Fast action and taut dialogue'

favourite mistress, the "fair Rosamund", has never been accompanied by convincing evidence, but Ariana Franklin has transformed the story into **The Death Maze**, a highly entertaining whodunnit. Her lively heroine Adelia Aguilar, a Sicilian-trained doctor, was so successful at solving the mystery in Franklin's first novel, *Mistress*

of the Art of Death, that the king has forbidden her to leave Britain to return home with her illegitimate baby daughter (by a Catholic bishop). She reluctantly accepts his royal summons to inquire into Rosamund's sudden death, apparently by mushroom poisoning, and to exculpate Eleanor. But if not her, who?

Franklin is an adept storyteller who disseminates her research into the period with clarity and lightness of touch.

In **The Man with the Lead Stomach**, Jean-Francois Parot passes the "second novel" test as easily as Ariana Franklin did hers. A professional historian and diplomat, Parot's period is France in the 1760s, during the reign of King Louis XV and the fashionable influence of his mistress Madame de Pompadour. Parot's hero, Nicolas Le Floch, the young commissioner of the Parisian police, investigates murder within French aristocratic circles. It's a clever plot and Le Floch is sympathetic, but it's the superb Parisian detail and atmosphere that truly beguiles.

L. CLARKE/CORBIS



Dog Eats Dog
Bitter Lemon, £8.99; 288pp
☐ £8.54 (free p&p)
The Death Maze
Bantam, £12.99; 368pp
☐ £11.69 (free p&p)
The Man with the Lead Stomach
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A bank robber witnesses an unsavoury act in *Dog Eat Dog*, and quickly takes advantage

Competition



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3. What title do Radiohead and Ian Rankin have in common?

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