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Web-Exclusive Reviews: Fiction

-- *Publishers Weekly*, 9/18/2006

EVERYTHING'S COMING UP ROSIE

Kasey Michaels. HQN, \$6.99 (384p) ISBN 9780373771271

The week-long pre-wedding house party for Doug Llewellyn's cousin Lili-beth is slated to be the social gathering of the decade—or a seven-day ordeal of shrill matchmaking and grim self-reflection, as it would seem to Doug—in this latest contemporary romance from Michaels (*Stuck in Shangri-La*). Handsome, intelligent, witty—and “matrimonially un-catchable,”—Doug is a successful 40-year-old Philadelphia architect dreading the tireless matchmaking efforts of Lili-beth's mother. Ditto for sassy, independent web-site designer Rosie Kilgannon. With no graceful way out, Rosie and Doug figure “us victims have to stick together,” and proceed to undo Bettie's best-laid plans. Meanwhile, disaster rules at the pre-nuptial festivities: the groom is showing a dark side, Bettie is methodically bedding each of the band members, the wedding planner drinks more than she pours, and Lili-beth isn't sure she wants to get married after all. Lots of flirting, slap-stick antics and eccentric characters, including light-fingered 85-year-old Aunt Susanna and Lili-beth's secretive childhood friend Delbert, make this a cheerful, lighthearted read. (*Sept.*)

THIS IS CHICK LIT

Edited by Lauren Baratz-Logsted. BenBella, \$14.95 paper (274p) ISBN 9781933771014

Defending the much-maligned genre, recently dealt a slap with the Elizabeth Merrick-edited collection *This is Not Chick Lit*, author and former *PW* reviewer Baratz-Logsted has produced a comeback anthology that asks, “Are women really criticizing each other about what they're reading?” Though they may be, the ensuing conversation is producing grist for hungry authors. This round up of 18 chick lit tales offers plenty of enthusiasm and creativity, but suffers in the inevitable comparison to *This is Not*. The authors here, including Jennifer Coburn, Gena Showalter, Karin Gillespie, Johanna Edwards and Rachel Pine, have produced undeniably lively, inventive stories that pair expected elements (jerk ex-boyfriends, jealous girlfriends, insecure spinsters, unruly toddlers and demanding mothers) alongside spies, ghosts, futuristic dating databases, third eyes and house-size pumpkins. Authors also get to cheer on their genre in notes that follow each story; “I loved Chick-Lit before Chick Lit was even a genre,” gushes Cara Lockwood at the conclusion of “The Commitment Phobe,” a story about a relationship in which “either he will marry her, or she will kill him.” Unfortunately, the stories are by and large marred with ho-hum dialogue, clichéd characters and unpolished endings, ultimately working to reinforce claims that chick lit trades smarts and craftsmanship for easy laughs and themes that pander to female audiences. Enjoyable and eager, this will please fans who took umbrage at the Merrick gang's salvo, but probably won't win any converts. (*Sept.*)

THE TUNNEL RATS

Stephen Leather. Hodder (Trafalgar Square, dist.), \$9.99 (512p) ISBN 9780340689547

In Leather's latest American release, British Transport Police Sergeant Nick Wright gets territorial when the mutilated body of an American news photographer turns up in an abandoned railroad tunnel. He's resentful toward the Metropolitan police for getting involved, and likes it even less when the FBI joins the manhunt, but he hangs tenaciously to the case, despite being saddled with an alcoholic partner and a hatful of personal problems. When another body with identical mutilations is discovered in Bangkok, he begs permission to investigate that murder as well. By the time he discovers the connection between them, Wright is in over his head and too far in to back out. His only choice is to move deeper into danger, courting the vengeance of a spook from his past. Leather has a gift for making pages fly by as bodies pile up, tension builds and clues drop parsimoniously; effective, economical characterizations give the plot just enough depth to captivate readers without hampering the rapid-fire narrative. (*Sept.*)

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