



Heat Lightning

John Sandford

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A killer is leaving a puzzling calling card in the mouths of his victims. And in the middle of a steamy Minnesota summer, Virgil Flowers of the Bureau of Criminal Apprehension finds himself embroiled in an investigation with no easy answers?and no easy way out.

Heat Lightning Details

Date : Published (first published 2008)

ISBN :

Author : John Sandford

Format : Kindle Edition 401 pages

Genre : Mystery, Fiction, Thriller, Crime

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From Reader Review Heat Lightning for online ebook

Nette says

How does John Sandford crank out so many books (is this his second or third this year?) and stay so consistently good? Lucas "Prey" Davenport is cool, but I'm loving this new Virgil Flowers series, too. A cop with surfer hair, obscure rock t-shirts, and a sideline writing fishing articles? Awesome. This book had a little to much DRIVING AROUND for my taste -- I find chase scenes in books really dull -- but the plot was intriguing and twisty.

Jeanette "Astute Crabbist" says

Of course, four stars in the brain candy category is not the same as four stars in the great literature category, but I really enjoyed the ride while reading this book.

This is the second in Sandford's new Virgil Flowers series, and I liked it more than the first one, *Dark of the Moon*. Good plot with lots of little kinks and curves, and Sandford's trademark guy humor. Also many familiar characters carried over from the Lucas Davenport series, so I felt I was hangin' with my old friends. I especially loved the way they resolved their dilemma with the Homeland Security guys near the end of the book. ;) Heh, heh.

Eric_W says

I really like the Virgil ("Fucking Flowers") Flowers series. I've read several of the Lucas Davenport books by Sandford and find the Flowers books to have more humor and interest. They are also perfect for listening to while putting up snow fence. I have about 800 feet of snow fence to put up along my lane. For those who don't know what that involves, it means driving fence posts into the ground with a post driver weighing about 20 lbs, unloading rolls of wooden snow fence and then attaching the fence to the posts. It's always done when the weather is shitty (cold and windy and the field often muddy) and for someone my age probably inviting a heart attack. Takes me usually about 4-5 hours so I find a good book to listen to and take my time (I used to get done in about 3 hours.) The Flowers series, read by Eric Conger is perfect. Occasionally, I'll pause and laugh out loud.

The plots are rather routine. In this one a series of murders is being committed. All the dead had been in Vietnam at the same time, although not in the military. The bodies each have a lemon duct-taped in the mouths; several had been slowly tortured. Fine, the investigation is interesting and makes sense, but it's the character of Flowers (who knows his Aeneid) and his relationship to the other cops that I really like. It's obviously not a spoiler to say Virgil gets his man/woman.

The ending is a lot of fun. Sandford certainly has no love for Homeland Security (why does that name always seem to force my arm into an unnatural stiff arm salute?) The subtext issues of this book must have John Stuart Mill rotating in his grave.

The Face of Your Father says

'Heat Lightning' is the second novel in the Virgil Flowers series.

A killer is leaving a mysterious calling card in the mouths of the victims. Virgil Flowers of the Bureau of Criminal Apprehension finds himself thrown into a murder investigation that spans beyond the country's borders.

John Sandford has created the perfect protagonist. Virgil Flowers is a cop who has a passion for writing. He is not above sporting a Death Cab for Cutie tshirt at a crime scene. His calm demeanor is the perfect counter balance to the violent life his job leads. The son of a preacher, Virgil Flowers thinks often of God, especially when he is forced to take a life.

'Heat Lightning' possesses the usual Sandford thrills and ultraviolet scenes of gunfire and gore. The pages fly faster than your fingers can move, the mystery is genuine, the suspense builds, guns are fired and blood is spilled. Sandford doesn't write just crime fiction, it's violent poetry. The absolute master of summer reads.

4/5

Kemper says

"When the going gets tough, try to unload it on that fuckin' Flowers."

This philosophy is put into practice when several men are murdered and the bodies are left prominently displayed on various veteran's memorials with lemons in their mouths. With Minneapolis about to host the Republican National Convention it's a bad time for a bloody murder spree. Since Lucas Davenport is wrapped up with all the convention planning he puts his man Virgil Flowers on the case. Virgil finds connections that indicate the killings are linked to Vietnam veterans, but bodies keep dropping.

I liked but didn't love the first three Virgil spin-offs from the *Prey* series when I originally read them, but this one gets a big boost from a reread of it. There was a lot more action than I remembered, and Virgil's laid back manner is severely tested in interesting ways by the increasing pressure to solve the crimes. I particularly liked how seeing Davenport in his role as Virgil's boss makes him seem like more of a bastard than usual.

The ending brings about some unexpected twists, and there was a lot more of the tense action and sense of momentum that Sandford is so good at delivering. All in all this another remarkably solid thriller that adds a lot to the on-going adventures of Flowers.

Marty Fried says

I'm glad I discovered this series. It's my favorite type of casual reading - a good plot, interesting characters and dialog, and a bit of scattered humor to keep from taking it too seriously.

The story here is complex and interesting. I had no idea what was going on until it was revealed near the end, where we find that more or less nobody is what they seem to be.

I like that the lines are not so sharp between good and evil. Virgil, the cop, doesn't like using a gun, wears t-shirts from obscure bands, and doesn't draw such sharp lines between right and wrong, legal and illegal, etc, as some cops. He's more interested in justice, not punishing people for mistakes or petty crimes, many of which he knows about personally.

He never really wanted to be a cop. His degree was in environmental science, but there's not much demand for that. He likes to write nature articles for magazines, he sometimes tows a fishing boat behind his government-supplied vehicle, to the consternation of his boss, and he'd mostly rather be fishing (catch and release, mostly). His hair is a bit longer than most cops, and he's basically pretty laid back, although his success rate is second to none in solving crimes.

It's hard to feel any animosity against most of the criminals. Even the murderers may not seem so bad in many ways; sometimes, their intentions are noble, but they make mistakes and hey, they murder people, which is not a good thing.

The stories remind me a bit of the TV series *Justified*, which I liked a lot, except the bad guys in this series are not as dumb as some of the ones in *Justified*, and it's not as humorous.

Tom Swift says

Another solid Virgil Flowers story from Sandford. Always a fun read.

James Thane says

This is the second entry in John Sandford's series featuring Virgil Flowers, an investigator with the Minnesota Bureau of Criminal Apprehension. Virgil is an unconventional detective, who looks more like a surfer than a gifted investigator. He wears his blond hair down to his shoulders, dresses in tee shirts bearing the names of often-obsolete rock bands, and rarely carries a gun.

Virgil loves to fish, writes articles for outdoor magazines, and often tows his boat behind his pickup as he roams about the rural Minnesota countryside, chasing killers. He also loves women and is attracted to lots of them, many of whom return his interest. His principal method of investigating crimes involves walking around and talking to lots of people, and out of these conversations a solution usually occurs, often with deadly consequences.

This case begins when a man walking his dog is killed by a sniper who is assisted by a spotter. The body is then left in front of a veterans' memorial in Stillwater, Minnesota, with a lemon stuck in the victim's mouth. Several other men are killed in the same fashion and left at other veterans' monuments around the state. Virgil discovers that the victims had connections back to the war in Vietnam, and that becomes the thread that he will follow through to the end of the chase. (This book was published in 2008, thirty-five years after the events in Vietnam, and the victims are middle-aged men.)

Truth to tell, the plot is pretty far-fetched, but that doesn't really matter here. Most people read these books in order to spend a few hours in the company of "That F***in' Flowers," and it's always a joy to do so. Virgil's boss, Lucas Davenport, makes several cameo appearances here as to Shrake and Jenkins, two other members

of Davenport's crew, and it's fun to see them all in action together. A very entertaining novel.

Phil Wheeler says

This is an entertaining book but there is one scene in the book that is unintentionally hilariously funny. I am not being critical of the book as a whole but this is too funny not to mention. The author spends a great deal of time during the story trying to convince you that our hero Virgil Flowers is this macho cool guy which is fine because most mystery writers do that. It is just part of the genre. Sanford makes a big deal out of the fact Virgil wears an earring, has long blond hair, is a tough guy and how he picks out what Heavy Rock Metal Band T-Shirt he is going to wear each day. But, there is one scene that comically undermines this persona.

During a hard days work, Virgil suddenly realizes he hasn't eaten all day and he is starving so he pulls into some diner. He takes a quick look at the menu and orders---wait for it----- an apple salad and a piece of carrot cake! Can't all us manly macho guys relate to being hungry and thinking, "what I could use now is a hearty apple salad and a chunk of carrot cake?" The scene continues as he gets interrupted during his hearty meal with a phone call. After the phone call he realizes he has to get going quickly so the author says he "wolfs down the rest of his carrot cake". I don't think it is possible to wolf down a piece of carrot cake not matter how macho you are.

My wife and I were listening to this book on CD while on a long road trip and when I heard this scene I had to turn off the player and pull over to the side of the road I was laughing so hard.

John Stanford does tell an entertaining story though and I will probably read more of his books but it will be a while before I can listen to another Virgil Flowers(maybe there is more to his name than I realized) mystery with a straight face.

Michael says

I enjoyed this a lot, but as a guilty pleasure I can't quite stretch it to 4 stars. Our hero with the Minnesota Bureau of Criminal Apprehension, Virgil Flowers, is wonderfully likeable, genuinely happiest when he can fish or write about fishing, is prone to fall in love a lot, loves dancing, and always wears a t-shirts featuring old rock bands. He harnesses his charm and affability to solve his cases by drawing clues out of conversations. Here is case is a growing set of serial murders of elderly men, apparently professional hits, with the bodies all placed on a veterans memorial. The common link among the first victims appears to point to past military or business experience in Vietnam. Though a poor marksman, his drive for justice makes him carry bravely on when situations get dangerous and violent. Lots of exciting twists and turns with a lot of lively and often humorous dialogue in the quiet times. On the down side, his failures to stop a lot of the killings is a bit frustrating, and the victims don't evoke much empathy in the reader. In compensation, the bad guy turns out to be very interesting indeed.

Jonathan Janz says

I've only read two John Sandford novels, but I'm ready to apply an adjective I've formerly reserved for only

two writers, both of whom rank among my favorite writers of all time: Joe R. Lansdale and Elmore Leonard. The adjective?

Sly.

I'm not just talking about Sandford's wonderful leading man Virgil Flowers (affectionately--sometimes--referred to as "that f&%#in' Flowers"), but also Sandford himself. The paragraphs and pages fly by, but when you slow down and study what you're reading, you find interesting twists of phrase, beautifully idiosyncratic riffs on standard technique. Sandford scaffolds his stories to please every reader, which is a rare and wonderful gift.

In short, there's something for everyone in a John Sandford Virgil Flowers novel. I've read two of them, out of order, and loved them both. I can't wait to read more.

DJ says

This is the second book by John Sandford to feature Virgil (f***ing) Flowers, a state investigator that works for super cop Lucas Davenport. Davenport is the cop featured in Sandford's very real, character driven, Prey series. Lucas does show up in these books, but he is a minor character.

Heat Lightning was a little too predictable and uneventful than the first Virgil Flowers book Dark of the Moon but still very entertaining. I guess what I have always liked about Sandford's Prey series, and in the first Virgil Flowers book is the challenge of trying to figure out who the criminal was before Lucas Davenport. In Heat Lightning, Sandford reveals the criminal about half way through, and the latter part of the book is all about the apprehension.

With that being said though, Sandford still keeps it interesting with his portrayal of some really great characters against the backdrop of the beautiful upper Midwest. If you liked any of the Prey series, you'll like Heat Lightning.

Michelle says

Utterly forgettable. And I mean that. Sincerely. Apparently I read this book in 2009 and didn't remember a damn thing about it so I mistakenly re-read it over the recent Christmas holiday. Here is the sum total of what I got from both reads:

1. The Vietnam War...something-something about American greed
2. Guys were murdered many years post-war
3. Virgil Flowers drove all around Minnesota looking for the killers
4. Minnesota is quite damn large so Flowers drove around in almost every damn chapter
5. Lastly, Minnesota has a lot of bugs in the summer

Don't make my mistake and read it twice. In fact, don't even read it once.

Daniel says

Here is yet another example of a foot-flavored experience, meaning: after years of scoffing at every Sandford book that I saw on the shelf ("good grief, how many ways can you use the word 'Prey' in a title?"), I got curious. Oh wait, peeps at Mulholland Books think he's entertaining? Maybe he's actually pretty good...

The kicker was coming across a nice copy of the second Virgil Flowers book on one of those tables that you see on the sidewalks of New York. Even better, this was the day before a long flight. So, alright, here's a buck and here's to trying Sandford--hypocrisy be durned!

Well kids, let me tell you what my foot tastes like this time:

--Chewy: a killer is on the loose and we don't know who he or she or they be!! And wow but their methods are weird.

--Earthy: Call in Virgil Flowers! The man who wears faded t-shirts from 90s bands (pretty sure there was a Pixies reference in there, hell yeah) and jeans and who barrels into an investigation with fearless curiosity.

--Familiar: yep, we've got some genre staples here, and yes, some of them are easy to call. Still, the plot chugs along and the ride is fun.

--Spicy: there is not a lot of action here, and some of it is mundane in nature; I still got caught up in every scene the way I was intended to. The car chase, in particular, is really good, while the way Flowers handles the subsequent arrest on the reservation border is an awesome display of his meaner, badder side.

The final flavor of my foot: the 'ass' that goes into 'assumption.' Let that learn me a lesson.

Book Concierge says

Digital audiobook narrated by Eric Conger.

From the book jacket Minnesota Bureau of Criminal Apprehension investigator Virgil Flowers is only in his late thirties, but he's been around the block a few times, and he doesn't think much can surprise him anymore. He's wrong. It's a hot, humid summer night in Minnesota, and Flowers is in bed with one of his ex-wives when the phone rings. It's Lucas Davenport. There's a body in Stillwater, two shots to the head, found near a veterans' memorial. And the victim has a lemon in his mouth.

My Reactions:

This is the second book in the Virgil Flowers series, which is a spin-off of Sandford's extremely popular Lucas Davenport series. I haven't read the first book in the series, but I don't think I was missing much by jumping in on book number two.

In his trademark style, Sandford gives us plenty of twists and turns in the plot, a few red herrings, and some subtle clues that are easy to miss. Flowers is an extremely likeable character – and the ladies certainly like him (witness his bedding one of his ex-wives), but he's no pushover. He's also smart, decisive, deliberate, and resourceful. I love the dialogue; Sandford definitely has a gift for writing believable back-and-forth exchanges. The action is fast and furious, and while I figured out the culprit some time before Flowers did, the ending is still satisfying for the thriller/mystery genre.

Eric Conger does a fine job narrating the audiobook. He keeps the pace up and the action moving forward.
