



Deadline

John Sandford

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The thrilling new novel in the #1 *New York Times*—bestselling series.

In Southeast Minnesota, down on the Mississippi, a school board meeting is coming to an end. The board chairman announces that the rest of the meeting will be closed, due to personnel issues. “Issues” is correct. The proposal up for a vote before them is whether to authorize the killing of a local reporter. The vote is four to one in favor.

Meanwhile, not far away, Virgil Flowers is helping out a friend by looking into a dognapping, which seems to be turning into something much bigger and uglier—a team of dognappers supplying medical labs—when he gets a call from Lucas Davenport. A murdered body has been found—and the victim is a local reporter. . .

Deadline Details

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From Reader Review Deadline for online ebook

Michael says

If you like detective stories with quirky characters, flights of humor, and a focus on the travails and suspense of solving a case where you already know who the perpetrators are, this could be a book for you. Virgil Flowers of the Minnesota Bureau of Criminal Apprehension is so wholesome and lovable, I just want to spend time with him. He loves fishing above all activities and makes a fetish of wearing t-shirts with odd band names on them. Unlike most detective heroes these days, he is not an alcoholic or twisted by a dark past. Like Peter Falk his best skill is in drawing suspects out in conversation. His routine fault is forgetting to take his gun with him.

In this story (8th in the series) he comes to a remote rural small town to help an old friend (Johnson Johnson—named after the boat motor company; his brother is Mercury) who now owns a lumber mill. There is a problem of pervasive dognapping. To these country folk it's like having family members abducted. When it turns out that many of these pets are slated for sale to medical laboratories, Virgil has his hands full trying to stop a vigilante massacre of various suspects. The kind of bumper stickers these guys brandish include "Heavily armed ...and easily pissed" and "Point and click—means you are out of ammo." Just as their tracking along waterways and woods starts to home in on where the dogs are being held, Virgil identifies some remote facilities as a meth lab. This higher priority crime gets him sidetracked into helping the DEA commandos with planning a raid.

Life starts getting especially complicated for him when he gets a call from his boss Lucas Davenport asking him to check out a nearby murder of a reporter, who was shot in the back. The story he gets from various town people is that this fellow was a speed addict. Meanwhile, the reader knows he was working on a big case of embezzlement by the entire county school board. This is no spoiler, as the book jacket notes that the school board in private session to discuss "personnel issues" has come to a vote on a motion to kill a local reporter: "There were no votes against."

Thus, you get the picture that the story here is not after the meaning of particular crimes and the sociology of psychopathic killers. It's about how Virgil works by enlisting various colorful characters to help figure things out, dodging all the snares and traps set by equally colorful criminals, and finally bringing them to sweet justice. The chaos that results here, and in others in the series, reminds me a bit of Donald Westlake sometimes. There is a wonderful night chase sequence at one point involving boats and golf carts and a grand finale of violent anti-vivisectionist women against the dognappers. This one really hit the spot. I have to forgive Sandford again for letting the body count get so high before Virgil solves the case

Jerry B says

About ten years ago, our famous author complemented his long-running and highly violent "Prey" series with the introduction of a new set featuring Virgil Flowers, a "country-boy" type of crime solver that rarely even totes a gun. This was a great idea, in our opinion, as the "Prey" protagonist, independently wealthy Lucas Davenport, who ages contemporaneously with each book, is getting a tad long in the tooth, and often acts as little better than a coordinating executive. While the just prior Flowers tale, "Storm Front", was widely panned as inconsistent and barely entertaining, we also learned (from the author himself) that ghost

writers helped with that novel. So the good news is the helpers were either unceremoniously dumped for "Deadline" or they got incredibly better in short order, as this eighth entry in the set reverts to good form.

Flowers starts out by helping with what appears to be a dognapping ring – but the next thing you know is that a couple of murders switch his priorities into solving a school board embezzlement scenario. We readers get to know all the villains in advance, but of course Virgil plods along until he has just about everything figured out and all the culprits identified. He only needs a few more pieces of solid proof to collapse the whole thing. Obviously he succeeds; but our only gripe is that the pace got a little sluggish – slash about 50 pages of his hunt and chase and that would be just right. Oh – and did the story go to the dogs?

Much better.

Gerry Bartlett says

I love Virgil Flowers and this book takes him right into the area of Minnesota where he shines. He's a good old boy, from his cowboy boots to his vintage band t-shirts. When a good friend tells him some dogs are being stolen, why shouldn't he hitch his boat to his truck and check things out? Of course there are much more serious things afoot in this little town-- meth cooking and the cooking of the books by the local school board. Virgil is up to his eyebrows in trouble as fast as you can say "What the f--?" I just couldn't put this book down and of course I was worried about the dogs from page one. Don't fret, they come out all right in a hilarious conclusion that will make you smile when you finally put the book away. This is why I have Sandford on my auto-buy list. Must admit Virgil has leaped over Lucas Davenport as my fave character. Thanks, author, for making my weekend fly by.

Albert Riehle says

Unless I miss my guess, there may be some griping about this installment in the Virgil Flowers saga, from a portion of it's fans, but I loved it for the same reasons some will probably complain.

Those who read the Flowers series (and the Davenport/Prey series) are used to a certain kind of bad guy and a certain kind of case and to put it succinctly, this ain't it. There's no serial killer. There's no mass murderer. There's no international intrigue. And what there is...well, it doesn't sound especially exciting. Flowers actually starts by investigating a dog-napping for his good friend Johnson Johnson. While he's doing that he accidentally hooks into a case of corruption on the local school board.

That's it, folks.

Then again...it's not that simple. This Flowers book is certainly a departure, but in my not-so-humble opinion, it's a good one. This book has a Justified/Fargo feel to it that's always been a thread of this series, but in this book it's really brought out to the forefront. And while the corruption case itself might not be very interesting, the murders that start happening to cover it up, committed by rednecks with guns, make it fun.

My only complaint is a minor one. Typically, I applaud Sandford for his breakneck pacing. This book lacks that. It's a slow roll to the bottom of a gently sloped hill instead of the more typical barrel over the waterfall,

but it's worth pointing out that the pace he chose suited the countrified story well. So, while I kept waiting for the pickup in pace, it's probably for the best that it never came.

If the whole series was like this, it might be an issue, but I, for one, applaud Sandford for mixing it up a bit and not being afraid to give his heroes lesser cases from time to time. I most definitely recommend it--and the whole series.

And for those of you who are fans of the series...you will fall off your chair laughing, at the end, when you hear the name of the dog. That's all, I'm saying though.

Read it.

Skip says

Virgil Flowers is asked by his buddy Johnson Johnson to help local dog owners catch someone stealing their dogs. Virgil quickly becomes embroiled in breaking up a meth manufacturing operation hidden in the hills and a series of murders related to covering up massive fraud and misappropriation by the local school board. Virgil's friendliness, homey style and determination are his strong points, but his process of sharing his developing theories with non-police personnel seems unlawful and dangerous. I liked some of the pick-up bumper stickers at the local bar in Minnesota: "Got Hollowpoints?" and "Point and click means you are out of ammo."

Monnie says

Not long ago, I was challenged to come up with a Top 10 list of all-time favorite book "heroes." Sandford's Virgil Flowers came in at No. 7 (though my ranking for 7 through 4 are pretty much interchangeable depending on how much I enjoyed the most recent book). Nothing in this one changed my mind - that fu**in' Flowers is still a hoot and this, the eighth in the series, is another winner.

What makes me love him so much? I'm not totally sure, except to say that unlike his boss, the richer-than-God Lucas Davenport (the main character in another Sandford series), ol' Virgil still has a hint (okay, more than a hint) of maverick in him. Then too, there are the wisecracks (although not always coming from Virgil), to-wit:

"It's darker in there than a black cat's ass in a coal mine."

"Coyotes don't eat dachshunds."

"It's a fu**in' Chihuahua. It's practically a fu**in' hamster."

And if that isn't enough, what's not to love about a guy whose favorite brewski is Leinenkugel?

As you might suspect, this one has gone to the dogs. There is, it seems, a whole lot of dognapping going on; at the request of a friend, Virgil starts a mostly unofficial investigation of the apparent theft of dogs from local owners in rural southeast Minnesota. Most likely, the theory is, the kidnappers are rounding up the

canines to sell to medical labs for research purposes.

Then comes a call from boss Davenport; a local newspaper reporter has been found murdered, and this investigation is an official assignment. So, for the most part the other investigation goes to the dogs while Virgil follows clues to track down the killer and finds himself in the middle of a hugely lucrative embezzlement scheme involving, of all things, members of a local school district's board of education.

There aren't a lot of surprises here, nor are there meant to be; for the most part, the bad guys and gals are known pretty much from the git-go. The fun comes in the where, when and how of nailing down the evidence so arrests can be made (with not a few more dead bodies turning up along the way).

I won't say this is the best-ever entry in this series, but it's still a hoot and, IMHO, well worth the relatively short time it takes to read.

Kemper says

Anybody who ever served on a school board and had to listen to people complain about the curriculum or the budget or what the cafeteria served could probably relate to this book in which a small town board votes to start murdering people. That's one way to keep parents from whining about their kid's grade point average....

Minnesota state cop Virgil Flowers has come to a rural community at the request of his old fishing buddy Johnson Johnson to look into someone who has been stealing dogs to sell to research labs. As he tries to track down the missing pooches a local newspaper reporter is murdered, and Virgil finds clues that it's linked to a massive embezzlement scheme by the local school board. Virgil's investigation riles the board and soon more bodies are dropping as they attempt to cover up their scam.

This is a prime example of what Sandford does well. He cooks up an interesting criminal scheme, lets us see what the bad guys are up to, introduces one of his main characters, and then the game begins. While the stakes are deadly serious there's also plenty of humor along the way with cop thugs Shrake and Jenkins making an appearance to back Virgil up and give him a lot of grief in the process.

As a longtime fan of the Lucas Davenport series I continue to appreciate the way that Sandford contrasts Virgil as being the more laid back and the softer of the two who is more concerned with right and wrong. Yet Virgil also has a sly way of flouting the rules that infuriates many which is why he is generally referred to as 'that fuckin' Flowers', and he's more than capable of pulling some sneaky moves to get things rolling his way.

The school board scheme is a great hook to hang a story like this on, and Sandford does a nice job of laying out how a small town criminal conspiracy like that would work as well as the carnage that could happen once things start going sideways. The subplot with the missing dogs is also a good one with Virgil having to try and keep angry owners from going vigilante.

The more books Sandford puts out, the more impressed I am at his ability to deliver entertaining thrillers that keep the elements fans like while still providing enough fresh ideas to prevent them from becoming formulaic and stale.

Also posted at Kemper's Book Blog.

Mike French says

If you enjoy John Sandford, you will love Deadline! My favorite Virgil Flowers story so far.

Andrew Smith says

You don't need to have read any of Sandford's *Prey* series, featuring Minnesota cop Lucas Davenport, to enjoy these offshoot books, but it does help to get a full picture of Virgil Flowers if you have. He can come across as lazy (he'd rather fish than do just about anything else) but on the other hand he's pretty relentless when he gets his teeth into a case. He's also likely to have left his gun in his truck just when he needs it most. But most of all, Virgil is a collaborator – he's inclined to use his gut feel to test whether he trusts someone and if they pass the test then they're likely to become part of the team. In many cases these people are not law enforcement officers – in fact, far from it, often they are just random people he meets whilst he's investigating cases. They trust him and he trusts them. They like him and start to share information and then actively participate in helping to solve the case. All in all, it's a different, subtler approach to that taken by his boss, Davenport.

In this episode, Virgil's downtime is interrupted by a friend who is seeking his help to track down some kidnapped dogs. Virgil works in the outlying areas of the state but this is the sort of Hillbilly problem that really shouldn't be taking up his time. But it's his friend. However, it isn't long before the search for the murderer of a reporter - shot and left in a ditch – is taking up more of Virgil's time. He soon finds out that the reporter was about to break a big story concerning a crooked school board.

Sandford tends to allow you to see both sides of the coin: whilst you watch the cops chasing the crooks you're also on the inside with the crooks as they attempt to wriggle and evade detection and capture. It makes for a fascinating and often amusing double view. As the net starts to close the efforts to avoid arrest become ever more desperate. Its very well done and hugely entertaining.

I'm a huge fan of John Sandford's books. He's managed to differentiate the Davenport and Virgil series sufficiently, so that you can appreciate the synergies but enjoy the individuality of the two men. I'm probably always going to be a Davenport man, but Flowers is beginning to breathe quite heavily down his neck.

Ware says

Behind the gentle façade of small town life, there is an underbelly of corruption which can leave bodies strewn across the back roads of the towns near Lake Wobegon. Virgil Flowers, who according to a local sheriff looks either like a cowboy who has lost his horse or a burned out hippie, once again stumbles across a murderous community complete with its own version of the Harper Valley PTA.

When the bad guys decide which evil deeds to pursue only after properly observing the precepts of Roberts Rules of Order, you know you are in Flowers country. In the rural Minnesota crime logs, there's meth; there's dognapping; and there's public corruption. Flowers, an adrenaline junkie with the Minnesota Bureau of

Criminal Apprehension is not "as stupid as he looks" according to one of the more intelligent crooks. Indeed he is not and he skillfully peels back the lawyers of several different conspiracies involving the county's leading citizens and its leading low-lifes.

This may be the best book in John Sandford's Virgil Flowers series. Sandford has a vivid imagination and can tell stories about Minnesota life as well as Garrison Keilor. You do not want to miss your "Deadline."

Miss M says

Don't think Sandford's ever made me snuffle up before...

"Virgil walked around to the driver's side, tagged by the yellow dog. Virgil looked at the dog, and the dog looked at Virgil. The dog had golden eyes, and it looked past Virgil into the empty passenger side of the truck. Virgil said, "All right," and waved his hand, and the dog hopped up onto the driver's seat, then crossed to the passenger seat and sat down. Virgil said to the dog, "With my lifestyle, I can't have a dog." The dog nodded, and looked out through the windshield, ready to roll...

...And to the dog, "Really. I can't. I'll give you a lift back to Trippton." The dog nodded again and smiled a dog smile. Virgil said, "Really."

Eric_W says

Warning: This review contains adult language although I've heard it from ten-year-olds. Well maybe not in Latin.

Audiobook. Eric Conger and Sandford are perfectly matched, especially when Conger is reading the Virgil Flowers series. He has just the right articulation and sardonic quality to his narration that truly adds to the enjoyment of a fun series. I really enjoy them.

Virgil, a Minnesota Bureau of Criminal Apprehension agent, is asked by a friend, Johnson Johnson, -- Johnson's father was enamored of outboard motor manufacturers and his brother was named Mercury Johnson -- to investigate who has been stealing dogs in the area. During the course of that investigation he discovers a meth lab, and a local man is murdered. The main investigation focuses on the members of a local school board (no spoiler here, the reader is fully apprised of the conspiracy from the start) that has been ripping off the district and splitting the proceeds among themselves, the superintendent and the security guy.) I found it stretching credibility a bit to accept such a successful conspiracy among so many people and that what is portrayed as a very small community has such a huge district budget, but the story does work and in any case the details are irrelevant.

I do have a small gripe with regard to how most writers regard town size. I live two miles east of a small town. The population is 1,800 people. (One PT cop.) I used to live near a smaller town with a population of 176. Those are small towns. The school district (where I now live) covers a very large area encompassing several other small towns and has a budget of about \$6 million. The closest large town,

about 17 miles away, has a population of about 28,000 and the school district's budget is about \$40 million, similar to the one in this story. The interaction of the characters in this story is much closer to a town of 1,800 than one of 28,000. But a small town with the characteristics Sandford describes would never, imho, have a budget approaching \$40 million permitting embezzlement on the scale he describes. But I suppose writers who live in cities assume a small town is something around 100,000. That's a big city. Then again, you can read about the Queen of embezzlers, Rita Crundwell, who stole \$57 million over several decades from Dixon, Illinois, population 16,000. (In classic understatement one of the city commissioners said of her financial stewardship as comptroller, "she looks after every tax dollar as if it were her own."
(https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rita_Cr...)

This has to be the best Virgil Flowers story yet. Some very funny scenes and conversation, often in the midst of serious situations. I loved the boat chase across the Mississippi near the end using two very slow fishing boats followed by a golf cart chase ending in a sand trap. And the Attorney General's representative who, when discussing extradition from the Cheeseheads said he would need to look up the Latin legal phrase for "Fuck Off." (My high school Latin is very rusty, but, I believe it's *Futete*. Don't even ask what "Te futueo et caballum tuum" means. The Internet is amazing.)

Virgil's new girlfriend, Frankie, does some farming and Virgil (Sandford under his real name, John Camp, wrote a book about farm life in southwestern Minnesota), when given the choice between following a hay wagon and throwing bales around or having his testicles dropped in a bear trap, has to take a while to "think about it." I know exactly why the delay, having had to throw about a thousand bales a day into a barn daily for several summers. It's dreadful.

If you haven't tried the Virgil Flowers series, I highly recommend them. Start with the first although they stand alone quite well. Much better than the Davenport series, which are also enjoyable.

Ed says

Unlike other authors of long running crime fiction series, John Sandford just keeps getting better and "Deadline" is the perfect example. Virgil Flowers is at his very best here investigating "dogknappers" and the apparent murder of a small Minnesota town's investigative reporter. Turns out the murder victim was investigating embezzlement by the upstanding citizens of the local school board. Of course Virgil would rather be fishing but backed up by his old friend Johnson Johnson, finds the time to pursue both investigations while becoming a target himself.

"Deadline" is exceptionally entertaining crime fiction that also made me laugh hard. Think witty characters drawn like a rural Minnesota version of Carl Hiaassen's Floridians. Country boys demonstrating a keen sense of humor while pursuing bad guys in slow moving boats and golf carts is priceless and these days, I need all the humor I can get! Very highly recommended.....Ed

Jon Kurtz says

That F#!@ing Flowers is once more bumbling and shining his way into the hearts and minds of his fellow fictitious characters and readers.

Deadline, which is book #8 in this series, starts with Virgil arguably screwing off. While other members of his agency are investigating a mass murder, Field of Prey - Lucas Davenport #24, Virgil enjoys a little fishing under the guise of dismantling an organized canine theft ring. The investigation goes to the dogs, yet is maintained throughout as a separate story line as rural owners consider the crime closer to kidnapping than a simple poaching of their pooches.

The major story line begins to take shape when a local journalist is shot and killed outside his residence. Brought in by the local police, Virgil stumbles upon a conspiracy that results in more bodies than cord wood outside a hunting lodge. As the investigation heats up, Virgil is wounded, yet still finds the strength and desire to COPulate (pun intended) with his newest girlfriend, who could possibly turn into wife #3, or is it #4.

As you might imagine, this novel, like most Virgil Flowers novels, is a carefree and enjoyable read. I always hesitate to provide too much or any particulars about the story, but suffice it to say, Virgil gets his men, women, children, and dogs.

On a more detailed scale, this book earns a 3.8.

James Thane says

This is another hugely entertaining entry in John Sandford's series featuring Virgil Flowers of the Minnesota Bureau of Criminal Apprehension. Virgil most often deals with crimes committed in the state's rural areas and usually arrives towing his boat behind his truck, just in case time allows for a little fishing.

The book opens when Vigil is awakened in the middle of the night by a frantic call from his friend, Johnson Johnson. (Johnson's father named his sons after outboard motors, and Evinrude was already taken.) Someone is kidnapping valuable dogs in Johnson's hometown of Trippton in Buchanan County, and the townspeople are in an uproar. So Johnson convinces Virgil to come take a look into the matter.

Just as Virgil arrives, the Buchanan County Consolidated School Board finishes its public business for the evening and goes into executive session to discuss a personnel matter. Once the school security officer ensures that the building is clear, the Board commences its discussion which centers on the question of whether or not they should kill a reporter who's been poking his nose into matters that the Board would rather not be made public. After a minimal amount of discussion, the members vote unanimously to instruct the school security officer to shoot the reporter while he's out for his nightly run. Meeting adjourned.

When the reporter's body is discovered, Virgil suddenly has a second investigation to conduct. The rest of the book details Virgil's efforts to solve the crimes and time is of the essence as more animals are dognapped and more bodies pile up. The plot moves swiftly and, as always, Sandford has created a great cast of characters. At times the book is laugh-out-loud funny and, as a person who has attended *way* more than his fair share of school board meetings, I loved watching Virgil pit his skills against the members of the Buchanan County School Board.

The action builds to a great climax and this book is sure to appeal to the fans of "That F***n' Flowers and to anyone who enjoys a crime story that is very well told. I can hardly wait for the next one.
