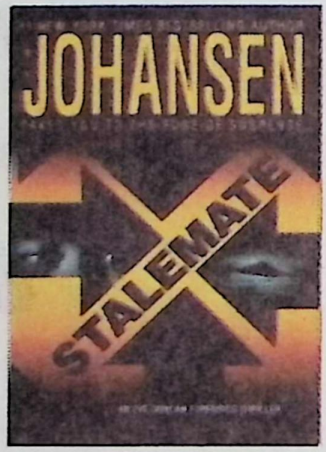
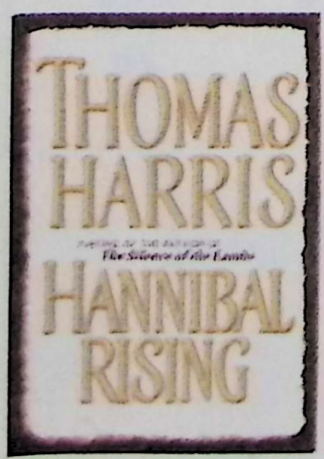
Scary Readings



Stalemate
Iris Johansen
Bantam Books; December 2006
In the latest Eve Duncan forensics thriller from bestseller Johansen (Killer Dreams), the Atlanta-based forensic sculptor with an international reputation finds herself attracted, not always convincingly, to a sleazy manipulator. Duncan, who specialises in reconstructing facial features from skulls, has buried herself in her work since the disappearance and presumed death of her seven-year-old daughter, Bonnie, years earlier. That still-open wound is probed with sadistic skill by Luis Montalvo, a shady Colombian arms dealer, who offers to solve the mystery of what happened to Bonnie if Duncan agrees to attempt a reconstruction from a skull Montalvo believes was his late wife's. Despite the misgivings of her former husband, an FBI agent, Duncan accepts, and soon finds herself dodging bullets in a war between Montalvo and a drug lord rival in the Colombian jungle. Despite a shortage of the sort of meaty science that, say, a Kathy Reichs thriller typically provides, Johansen's faithful audience should be satisfied.



Brother Odd
Dean Koontz
Bantam Books; December 2006
Bestseller Koontz's third Odd Thomas novel (after Forever Odd) offers an irresistibly offbeat mix of supernatural horror and laugh-out-loud humour. A resident of St. Bartholomew's Abbey, a monastery in the Sierra Nevada mountains, Thomas has the ability to see the spirits of the dead, a gift he has used to resolve mysteries and prevent future tragedies. As the story opens, the seer is unsettled by visions of bodachs, sinister ghostlike entities whose appearance precedes some dire tragedy. Thomas frantically searches for some sign that will help him head off disaster, even as St. Bart's is thrown into turmoil by the disappearance of one of its members. Thomas must figure out both the identity of the person or being behind the terror and the most effective way to restore peace to his haven. While newcomers may find the villain's underlying motive a bit over the top, the narrator's engaging voice should continue to give this series cross-genre appeal.



Hannibal Rising
Thomas Harris
Dell Publishing; December 2006
Twenty-five years after Hannibal Lecter, a cross between Professor Moriarty and Jack the Ripper, first invaded the imaginations of countless readers worldwide in Red Dragon, bestseller Harris has crafted an unmemorable prequel that's intended to explain the origins of Lecter's evil. Fans of Harris's previous Lecter novel, Hannibal (1999), already know the major trauma that transformed the young Lecter-the murder of his beloved younger sister, Mischa, during WWII-which the author describes in more grisly detail. Lecter also has an unusual love interest, his uncle's Japanese wife, Lady Murasaki, but the bulk of the narrative focuses on Lecter's quest for revenge on those he holds responsible for Mischa's death. Unfortunately, the prose and plotting lack the suspenseful power of Red Dragon or The Silence of the Lambs, and will leave many feeling that with such a masterful monster as Lecter, less is more.

Compiled by **SANYAT SATTAR**