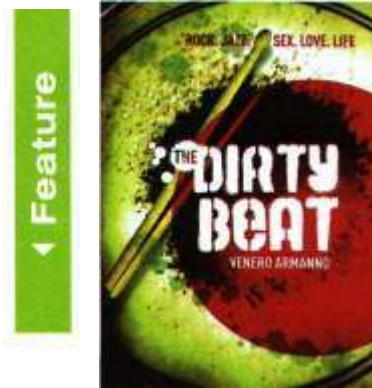


Reviews: August to November



The Dirty Beat (Venero Armanno, UQP, \$32.95 tpb, ISBN 9780702236143, October) * * *

Following up his most recent novel, *Candle Life*, in *The Dirty Beat* Venero Armanno presents Max, a rock and jazz drummer whom we first meet as he comes to on a mortuary slab, being prepped for burial. Before drifting off into the great beyond, Max floats into a reverie of his life's loves, close friends and family—prompted by the appearance of ghosts and the still-living in the pews at his church service. Against the backdrop of this perhaps familiar plotline and some of the predictability of ensuing subplots, the novel has clearly been wrought with love and the overall energy of the novel's emotional build-up comes through convincingly. Some of the characters clearly seem to be composites or directly attributable

to persons once living and this strengthens the novel's power considerably, which is not often the case when writing from life. The affection Armanno has for Max is clearly discernible, as is that of most of the female characters, who share a benevolent, almost motherly regard for him, even if this unanimity can be unconvincing at times. Another of the novel's unusual strengths is the ease with which Armanno sways and hovers between timelines in his protagonist's life. It is woven together seamlessly and without effort, to create an entertaining and at times insightful read.

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