

08/16/2010 Fiction

★ **In Search of Mercy**

*Michael Ayooob, Minotaur, \$24.99 (304p) ISBN 978-0-312-64492-5*

Winner of the Private Eye Writers of America Best First Private Eye Competition, Ayooob's outstanding debut introduces a flawed hero who transcends all the flawed hero clichés. Dexter Bolzjak found fame as a high school "phenom" in hockey-mad Pittsburgh until he had a meltdown during a game at the Pennsylvania state championship in 1993. Eight years after being abducted and brutally assaulted by deranged sports fans, the 25-year-old Bolzjak sorts warehouse produce and takes care of "Job 1"--maintaining his sanity. Then he meets an old drunk, Lou Kashon, who offers him big bucks to find a reclusive former movie star, Mercy Carnahan, who hasn't been seen since 1958. Whether describing the chaos of a hockey game, creating a backstory for Mercy, or detailing the film editing process, Ayooob shows a sure hand. Filled with vivid, violent images and characters who leap off the page into the reader's imagination, this impressive novel builds to a startlingly ambiguous ending. (Oct.)