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Dataman
Tom Mitcheltree
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Dataman has a great premise: Take a computer geek, a guy running his own computerized information-gathering company, and have him work with the cops. The cops, of course, have people who do this sort of thing, too, but they're restricted by the price of staying technologically current and things like, uh, laws. Have the computer geek solve crimes.

In this case, Tom Walkinshaw runs Dataman Investigation and Information Services. As he says, "I am a resource." In addition to running his company, Tom is agreeably eccentric, interested in amateur theater, old cars and his psychologist girlfriend. Hired to investigate the murder of "taggers," gang-related graffiti artists, he soon finds himself the target of the killer, another hacker. Only this hacker likes to use a rifle with an infrared spotting scope.

Mitcheltree mixes this main plot with other work his character does, finding missing people, debugging a software blackmail scheme and time spent with his girlfriend. The biggest flaw of this novel is probably its main character's chattiness. Although charming, I wished he?d spent more time on his mystery or the nuts-and-bolts of computer hacking (glossed over), than on his love life.

Reminiscent of John Camp's novels featuring hacker, sleuth, con man Kidd (Camp is better known by his pseudonym, John Sanford, author of the bestselling Prey series.), Dataman is a lot of fun. It lacks both the hard edge and overreaching eccentricity of Camp's two Kidd novels, but since Camp hasn't written a Kidd novel since 1991, there's definitely a niche to be filled. Dataman is a fun read, light, ironic, with plenty of action and humor.

Mark Terry