



Think of a Number

John Verdon

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An extraordinary fiction debut, *Think of a Number* is an exquisitely plotted novel of suspense that grows relentlessly darker and more frightening as its pace accelerates, forcing its deeply troubled characters to moments of startling self-revelation.

Arriving in the mail over a period of weeks are taunting letters that end with a simple declaration, “Think of any number...picture it...now see how well I know your secrets.” Amazingly, those who comply find that the letter writer has predicted their random choice exactly. For Dave Gurney, just retired as the NYPD’s top homicide investigator and forging a new life with his wife, Madeleine, in upstate New York, the letters are oddities that begin as a diverting puzzle but quickly ignite a massive serial murder investigation.

What police are confronted with is a completely baffling killer, one who is fond of rhymes filled with threats and warnings, whose attention to detail is unprecedented, and who has an uncanny knack for disappearing into thin air. Even more disturbing, the scale of his ambition seems to widen as events unfold.

Brought in as an investigative consultant, Dave Gurney soon accomplishes deductive breakthroughs that leave local police in awe. Yet, even as he matches wits with his seemingly clairvoyant opponent, Gurney’s tragedy-marred past rises up to haunt him, his marriage approaches a dangerous precipice, and finally, a dark, cold fear builds that he’s met an adversary who can’t be stopped.

In the end, fighting to keep his bearings amid a whirlwind of menace and destruction, Gurney sees the truth of what he’s become – what we all become when guilty memories fester – and how his wife Madeleine’s clear-eyed advice may be the only answer that makes sense.

A work that defies easy labels -- at once a propulsive masterpiece of suspense and an absorbing immersion in the lives of characters so real we seem to hear their heartbeats – *Think of a Number* is a novel you’ll not soon forget.

Think of a Number Details

Date : Published July 6th 2010 by Crown Publishing Group (NY) (first published 2010)

ISBN : 9780307588920

Author : John Verdon

Format : Hardcover 418 pages

Genre : Mystery, Thriller, Fiction, Crime, Mystery Thriller

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From Reader Review Think of a Number for online ebook

Sam Quixote says

I made it to page 20 of this mediocre "thriller" before throwing in the towel. I realise that it's not giving it much of a chance, how could any writer bring energy or develop a plot in that time? Well some writers have, notably Michael Connelly and Stephen King, which is probably why they're as famous as they are.

John Verdon isn't much of a writer though. Here are some examples of his awful writing that made me put the book down:

"He realised that planting tulip bulbs on a glorious Indian-summer day in a hilltop garden overlooking a rolling panorama of crimson autumn woods and emerald pastures under a cobalt sky was not a particularly onerous assignment." p.9.

Could he cram in any more cliched modifiers into that overlong and breathless sentence? But it was the exposition that did it for me. After 10 pages of the main character feuding with his wife over nothing, he meets an old friend he hasn't seen in a while:

"Davey Gurney! Back at Fordham they used to say you looked like Robert Redford in All the President's Men. Still do - haven't changed a bit! If I didn't know you were forty-seven like me, I'd say you were thirty!". p.20.

Ouch! Anyone else stung by the information dump made by this character? So now we know the main character's age and physical description, all clumsily spilled out by a character in dialogue that doesn't even sound vaguely real.

Factor in the cheesy chapter headings "Trouble in Paradise" and "I know you so well I know what you're thinking" and I was finished with this tripe.

Try something else, the writing in this book is barely above high school standard and about as sophisticated as a happy meal.

Georgia says

Δε?τε επ?σης και στο Chill and read

Το πρ?το βιβλ?ο του Verdon ?χει γρ?φους, μυστ?ριο και ?ναν προβληματικ? ντετ?κτιβ. Σαν να λ?με "η συνταγ? της επιτυχ?ας"!

"Σκ?ψου ?ναν αριθμ?. ?ναν οποιονδ?ποτε. Τ?ρα δεσ π?σο καλ? γνωρ?ζω ?λα σου τα μυστικ?." Αυτ?ς ?ταν οι τελευτα?ες αρ?δες απ? το γρ?μμα που ?λαβε ο Μαρκ και τον ?κανε να ανησυχ?σει. Αυτ? και μια σειρ? απ? στιχ?κια που τον ?καναν να ανατριχι?ζει ?ταν η αιτ?α να ζητ?σει βο?θεια απ? τον παλι? του συμμαθητ? και δι?σημο ντετ?κτιβ, Ντ?ιβ Γκ?ρνε?.

Ο Ντ?ιβ, μετ? απ? πολλ?ς επιτυχημ?νες συλλ?ψεις κατ? συρρο? δολοφ?νων, ?χει πια βγει στη

σ'νταξη. Είναι πλέον 47 χρονών και προσπαθεί να προσαρμοστεί σε μια πιο ήρεμη ζωή. Δεν είναι απλώς για να μυαλά σαν το δικό του. Ήταν λοιπόν δέχεται την εκκλήση του παλιού του φίλου για βοήθεια, δεν μπορεί παρά να προσπαθήσει να λύσει ένα ακμή μυστήριο. Τα πράγματα περιπλέκουν όταν ο Μάρκ βρσκεται νεκρός και ακμή περισσότερο, όταν τον ακολουθούν στο θάνατο αλλά δόο τομα.

Ο ήρωας του Verdon είναι ένας πολύ επιτυχημένος ντετέκτιβ, που μετά από πολλά χρόνια υπηρεσίας, κατά τα οποία θυσίασε πολύ περισσότερα από τον χρόνο του αποφάσισε να βγει στη σ'νταξη. Δεν είναι και τόσο ξεκθάρο ήτι την απήφαση την πρε με πολύ σιγουριά, καθώς φάνεται ήτι δυσκολεείται πολύ να προσαρμοστεί σε μια απλή ζωή κοντά στη φήση. Κπως ήτσι ο συγγραφέας ξεκινεί να μας δείξει ήτι πρκειται για ένα μυαλό που ήχει φτιαχτεί για να λύνει γρήφους και αινύματα και ζητ να είναι πάντα απασχολημένο. Η έξυπνδα του ήρωα ήχεται σε αντιδιαστολή με το συναισθηματικό του κςμο. ήχει μια επήσης ήξυπνη αλλά και πολύ υπομονετική σζυγο που τον στηρζει ακμα κι όταν η ήδια δεν ήλγει, δεν συμφωνεί με αυτό που κνει. Ξήρει ήμως πως λειτουργεί το μυαλό του και προσπαθεί να καταλάβει τα συναισθήματα του.

Οι γρφοί και το μυστήριο πσω από τους αριθμούς, που δίνουν και τον τίτλο του βιβλίου, είναι μια πολύ ήξυπνη και πρωτυπη ιδέα. Φάνεται ο ήπος προσήγισης του γρφου από τον ήρωα και πως καταλαγγει να τον λσει κολλντας τα κομμτια του παζλ. Ωραά πλοκ, αρκετά ήξυπνη, δνει στοιχεία στον αναγστή να βρει το δολοφνο, αρκετά να κρατεί τα μτια του ανοιχτά. Το μνο που χρειζεται κποιος είναι να κολλσει τα κομμτια που αφήνει ο συγγραφέας εδώ κι εκεί, για να φτσει αργή η γρήγορα στο αποτλεσμα που ήφτασε και ο ήρωας.

Η δρση δεν είναι σταθερή σε ήλη τη διάρκεια του βιβλίου, καθώς ο συγγραφέας προσπαθεί να μας δσει να καταλάβουμε την ψυχοσνθεση του ήρωα, ποιος είναι, ποιοι είναι οι ήβοι του, οι αδυναμίες του, αυτό που θα ήθελε να ξεχσει και αυτό που μπορεί να τον επηρεσουν. Καθς είναι το ήρο βιβλό που μας συστνεται ο ήρωας, είναι λογικό και αναμενμένο να υπρχουν πολλά στοιχεία μέσα που θα σκιαγραφον το χαρακτήρα του. Μνει μνο να δομε πως εξελσσεται αυτό η ισορροπία ανάμεσα στο συγγραφέα και στη δρση στα επμένα βιβλία της σειράς!

Jeffrey Keeten says

”Do you believe in Fate? I do, because I thought I’d never see you again--and then one day, there you were. It all came back: how you sound, how you move--most of all, how you think. If someone told you to think of a number, I know what number you’d think of. You don’t believe me? I’ll prove it to you. Think of any number up to a thousand--the first number that comes to mind. Picture it. Now see how well I know your secrets. Open the little envelope.”

How would someone know a random number picked out of a 1000 possibilities? It is the first baffling aspect of this case. It is disconcerting to think that someone you don’t know would know you well enough to correctly guess the number you would pick.

Is it a guess?

Retired Detective Dave Gurney is approached by one of those friends that it takes him a while to remember how he knows this person. An acquaintance might be a better term to use, but when people need your help

they tend to overstate the closeness of your relationship. Mark Mellery has a problem that he doesn't feel comfortable involving the "bumbling" police about, given his mild celebrity and his clinic business for helping discretion conscious, miserable, wealthy people. We can't have the rich people experiencing any level of inconvenience. Owning beach houses and red Porsches doesn't seem to make people any happier than those people who own single wide trailers and Chevy pickups with rusted fenders.

He calls Gurney.

An interesting aspect of this book is the decided distrust of law enforcement that crops up at several points in the novel. Even Gurney experiences a harassment situation with an officer that set my teeth on edge because it reminded me of a recent encounter of my own with law enforcement overreach. Gurney pulls out his retired police officer card and is able to diffuse the situation quickly, but he could tell the officer was disappointed he would not be able to push him around. Bad apples spoil a barrel, which is unfortunate because there are terrific police officers who truly are working to serve and protect.

Serve and protect, not harass and bully.

What begins as a puzzle soon becomes deadly. What do these obtuse poems being sent to Mellery really mean? The poet is playing a game. According to Gurney's wife Madeleine, he has a secondary agenda beyond what is beginning to look like a revenge obsession. **"He wants to prove that you're a pack of idiots"**

The plot is fascinating and had me pondering all the probabilities while I was away from the book, doing those other things that always keep us from our reading. What really makes the book go beyond just a thriller is the relationship between Dave and Madeleine. They experienced a terrible tragedy together, and now they are trying to adapt to his retirement. It is evident that Madeleine is more ready for him to be retired than he is. *"His mind worked exceptionally well in a certain way, and the greatest satisfactions in his life had come from applying that intellectual gift. He had a supremely logical brain and a finely tuned antenna for discrepancy. These qualities made him an outstanding detective."*

Madeleine is not happy that he has taken on this case. Her rebukes are mild, yet effective. Gurney loves working on cases. He is proud of all the murderers he has put behind bars over the years and is considered a legend by many in his profession. I love the fact that he appreciates Madeleine's intelligence, and as he works through aspects of this investigation, he frequently asks for her advice.

Sometimes, when people have been married a long time and have collected some heavy baggage along the way, they need to look for and remember those things they liked about that person before life started inflicting wounds. **"He studied her face. He was at a loss for words to capture what he saw. It was as if all the radiance of the snow-covered landscape were reflected in her expression and the radiance of her expression was reflected in the landscape."**

She wants him away from all that death and mayhem, but he never feels more alive than when he is hunting for a killer. *"He generally viewed a homicide as a puzzle to be solved, a murderer as an opponent to be outmaneuvered. He studied the facts, figured the angles, tripped the snares, and delivered his quarry into the maw of the justice system."* He is very good at seeing the evidence instead of the horror.

The plot is fascinating. John Verdon deftly leads us from puzzlement to amazement as the missing pieces are found to form a picture of true insanity. The grand finale provides one revelation after another as we discover the darkness behind the poetry. There are many moments of self-discovery for several of the characters as

the truth has them questioning what they know about themselves. Gurney is especially self-reflective as he tries to fathom who he is supposed to be now. This wrestling with inner fears adds a layer of depth to the plot that makes this thriller more literature than thriller. Highly recommended!

If you wish to see more of my most recent book and movie reviews, visit <http://www.jeffreykeeten.com>
I also have a Facebook blogger page at: <https://www.facebook.com/JeffreyKeeten>

James Thane says

Dave Gurney has recently retired from his job as one of the NYPD's most talented homicide investigators. He's moved to a rural area in upstate New York and is attempting to rebuild his relationship with his wife, Madeleine, who has always been forced to take a back seat to his job. But then Dave receives a plea for help from Mark Mellery, an old college classmate, who has received a threatening communication--a poem, actually--from someone who claims to know his most intimate secrets.

To prove the point, the poet instructs Mellery to pick a number up to 1000 and then open another, smaller, envelope that was sent along with the threatening lines. Mellery picks the number 658 and is stunned to open the second envelope and discover that his adversary has correctly predicted the choice. Mellery asks Gurney for advice, but when Gurney suggests that Mellery should bring in the police, Mellery refuses for fear that it would cause complications in his professional life.

Despite his wife's misgivings, Gurney agrees to help his friend and thus goes to work with one if not both hands tied behind his back. To say any more would be to give too much away, but what follows is an excellent suspense novel that rises far above the average thriller, in which Dave Gurney matches wits with an extremely interesting and intelligent villain who has a very deep agenda.

A crucial subplot involves the relationship between Dave and Madeleine and the end result is a gripping story with very well-drawn and sympathetic characters. *Think of a Number* is an excellent debut novel that should appeal to anyone who enjoys a compelling, well-written story. I can hardly wait to read John Verdon's second book.

Andrei B?dic? says

Cel mai lung roman poli?ist pe care l-am citit pân? acum.

"Nu se putea l?sa dus de nas cu de-astea. Din câte ?tia el, când un om î?i d? dou? motive pentru hot?rârea luat?, e foarte probabil s? mai existe un al treilea motiv - cel real- pe care s? nu ?i-l fi spus."

"Îi revenir? în minte pove?tile pe care i le citise tat?l lui pe când avea cinci-?ase ani ?i care pentru el erau mai vii decât orice i se întâmpla în via?a adev?rat? - pove?ti despre aventurieri, cabane în s?lb?ticie, c?r?ri prin p?dure, indieni buni ?i vreascuri trosnind - imagini atât de concrete, atât de pline de detalii."

N?ρα says

Καλ? προσπ?θεια του John Verdon να γρ?ψει κ?τι διαφορετικ?. Συμπαθητικ? αλλ? δεν ε?ναι απ? τα βιβλ?α που με ξετρ?λαναν. Καλ? ιστορ?α, μυστ?ριο, αγων?α με ?ξυπνους γρ?φους που κρατ?νε τον αναγν?στη σε εγρ?γορση, αλλ? λ?γο κουραστικ? σε ορισμ?να σημει?α. ?ταν λ?γο περισσ?τερο μακρ?συρτο απ? ?τι θα ?πρεπε. Δεν ?ταν τ?σο καλ? ?σο το περ?μενα. Το τ?λος ε?ναι αναμεν?μενο.

Magdalen says

I was actually looking forward to reading this, and man am I disappointed.

The things I didn't like were firstly and most importantly the writing! If there wasn't a picture of the author I would have guessed that this book was written by a 15 year old. If you can ignore all the cliches *rolls eyes* and the repetitions and you don't give two cents about it you shall be fine. I wasn't.

Other than that, I was let down by the killer. See John Verdon literally offered the killer's identity in a plate if you were paying close attention. And I hate it when I am able to figure out who the killer is and by no means am I trying to sound cocky. I love to be surprised but it didn't happen this time.

Last but not least, the action. The first half of the book took the longer to read because it was flat. The second part I finished it in a day but when the story started to unfold I got bored again. If a book doesn't make your blood run cold and keep you at the edge of the seat how on earth can you enjoy it to the fullest?

The characters were interesting though.

To sum up, if you are looking for a fine book to pass your time pick it up. If you demand more than that then this book is not for you.

Maria Thomarey says

2,5 δεν μπορω να καταλ?βω γιατι αυτος ο συγγραφ?ς αρ?σει στον κοσμο . Ειναι σα να διαβ?ζει Φρανζεν με αστυνομικ? πλοκ?. Και ναι δε μου αρεσε . Βαρ?θηκα . Πολλες επαναλ?ψεις (λ?μψη αλερτ) , και για ?ποιον εχει διαβασει Ελρου πχ η ?ντριγκα σε λει πολλα. Το βασικ? μου προβλημα ηταν οτι βρ?κα το δολοφ?νο με το που ?σκασε μ?τη . Και ξεν?ρωσα τη ζωη μου

Artemis Slipknot says

Πολ? ωρα?ο, ?ξυπνο και ενδιαφ?ρον βιβλ?ο. Σε κρατ?ει σε εγρ?γορση απο την αρχ? μ?χρι το τ?λος. Το δι?βασα μ?σα σε δ?ο μ?ρες γιατ? ?θελα να καταλ?βω τι ?χει γ?νει. Τον δολοφ?νο δεν τον υποψι?στηκα καθ?λου!!

Γι?ργος Δ?μτσιος says

4 αστερ?κια σε γενικ?ς γραμμ?ς, αλλ? πα?ρνει και ?να μπ?νους 5ο επειδ? τελικ? κατ?φερε το σημαντικ?τερο, να με αναγκ?σει να το διαβ?σω σε δ?ο μ?ρες!

Μου ήρεσε πολύ η ιδέα με το 658, καθώς και η επήλυσή του. Η πανήξυπνη πλοκή του θαρρώ ότι είναι έτσι κι αλλιώς το δυνατό του σημείο.

Ενδιαφών και ο βασικός ήρωας, ενίοτε υπλοίτοι ενίοτε παραήταν 'κ'τι το εντελής διακριτή' ήρες ήρες, με αποτήλεσμα να μην ενθουσιαστή τρομερή μαζί τους.

Στο σήνολό του λοιπήν, ήταν ήνα βιβλήο που ήλο ήλεγα ότι είναι του 7/10, αλλή ήλο και συνήχιζα και συνήχιζα να διαβήζω, με αποτήλεσμα τελική να το βήλω 9/10.

Chrissa Vasileiou says

Πήντα αφιερώνω ήγη παραπήνω προσοχή σε ήνα βιβλήο ήταν αυτή αποτελέσ το ντεμποήτο του συγγραφήα. Στην περήπτωση του Verdon, αυτή ήταν το "Σκήψου ήναν αριθμή".

Ο συγγραφήας ήχει σκεφέτε μια αρκετή ενδιαφήρουσα πλοκή, μια ιστορήα που κρατήει σε γενικήσ γραμμήσ το ενδιαφήρον του αναγνήστη. Βήβαια ορισμήνα σημεία της είναι κήπως ήτονα, αδήναμα, κι απλή διαβήζεισ για να προχωρήσεισ τις αρήδες χωρήσ να πολυενδιαφήρεσαι για το τι παήζεται στη συγκεκριμήνη σκήνη. Ειδική σε κ'τι εσωτερικήσ σκήψεις του Ντήιβ που καταλήγουν σε μακροσκελέσ παραγρήφους. Παρήλο που περήμενα την αποκήλυση του δολοφήνου, βήβαια, δεν μπορή να πω πώς ήμεινα και ήγήρυπνη απή την αναμμήνη. Συγκεκριμήνα, το βιβλήο το διήβασα σε ηλεκτρονική μορφή και δεν αγωνιήσα κιήλασ να πήρω το τήμπλετ στα χήρια μου. Σε ήλλες περιπήσεισ, με ήλλα βιβλήα, τα κουβαλήω μαζί μου εήτε ήντυπα εήτε ηλεκτρονική παντό - τήσο πολή με κήρει να μήθω τι θα γήνει παρακήτω. :P

Αυτή που με κήρδισε στο βιβλήο είναι ο χαρακτήρας του κεντρική ήρωα, του Ντήιβ Γκήρνε. Είναι ήνας ήνθρωπος που απήχει μακρήν απή το μοντήλο του υπερήρωα ντετήκτιβ. ήχει τα ελατήματή του, τα μειονεκτήματή του, τους φήβους και τις ανησυχήες, τα πήθη του. ήχει καταφήρει πολλήσ νήκες ήσο ήταν εν υπηρεσήα αλλή ήχι χωρήσ να πληρήσει τήμημα, και παρή τη φήμη του τα μυαλή του δεν ήχουν πήρει καθήλου αήρα. Ακήμα και στα σημεία εκείνα που μου φήνηκε πώς η πλοκή ήκανε μια μικρή κοιλή, ακήμα κι αν τα συγκεκριμήνα σημεία αφοροήσαν σκήψεις δικήσ του, ο ήδιος ο ήρωας δεν με κήρασε καθήλου. ήσα ήσα, τον κατασυμπήθησα κι αυτή μήτρησε και στα αστερήκια μου.

Προχωρήω ντουγροή στο επήμενο. Επήσης σε ηλεκτρονική μορφή, και απή ήτι εδήα επήσης μεγήλο. Ελπήζω να μην είναι περισσήτερο κουραστική. Θα δέξει! :)

Giannis says

Η ιστορήα ήταν πολή καλή δομημήνη και δεν σταματοήσε να με εκπλήσσει καθήσ προσπαθοήσα να βρω τους ήγους και τα στοιχέα των φήνων. ήκανε ελήχιστες "κοιλήσ" ενή απή την μήση και μετή "απογείθηκε"! Το ήτι εήχα υποψιαστή τον κακή με ήήνισε ήήγο, αλλή γενική το ευχαριστήθηκα πολή. Πήμε στο επήμενο...

Dee Dee Walker says

I just finished this book and I have to say that I was quite disapointed. I began this book with raving reviews.

It wasn't until I was about half way through that I started to rethink how great this book was. I have to confess that I was totally caught up with the mystery of how the killer seems to read minds. Put quite simply, the killer asks the victim, via a letter, to think of a number and the killer professes to know what that number will be. The number is in a sealed envelope. The number is correct! Interesting, right???? Throughout the book there are more little riddles. The psychopath seems to be brilliant and stumps the police and even the impressive retired detective Gurney. Here is another flaw. Impressive detective Gurney didn't seem all of that impressive to me. In fact, I thought he was quite obtuse. He didn't seem to have any answers until the end. (Even then he didn't have all of the answers.) Despite this little flaw, I did enjoy the first half of the book. All of the mysteries were fascinating and kept me highly engaged. I pressed on because I could not wait to find how all of the mysteries and questions that were building on one another were going to culminate into this profound finally. Then it happened. The big let down. The explanation of the mysterious disappearing footprints in the snow. I found myself thinking "Am I really supposed to buy this? The author couldn't think of anything better than this?" From this point I was constantly disappointed. The explanations of the mysteries seemed very implausible and basic. There was no shocking surprise. No twists or turns. I would have loved for this author to have been able to come up with something that didn't think of. Something a little more unique. Overall, my biggest complaint is that I was not able to buy into the explanations the author gave. Oh yeah, did I mention that detective Gurney is not a likable character? He is flat and emotionally unavailable to his family or the reader. I really didn't care what happened to him. The only character in the book that showed any promise was Gurney's wife and she is not present enough. She also seems to be much smarter than Gurney. Maybe she should be the brilliant detective....

Arah-Lynda says

There is a new voice in psychological thrillers and his name is John Verdon. *Think of a Number* is an unbelievably excellent debut novel. This one will grab you from the get go! The suspense builds, the plot thickens, your heart races, your palms sweat, the pace accelerates and you tighten your grip to navigate the twists and turns coming at break neck speed. Good thing the pages fairly turn themselves as you will need both of your hands to hold on. This book is unputdownable! The writing is cleanly eloquent, very intelligent and no doubt, highly quotable with a full cast of beautifully crafted, well imagined and colourfully scripted characters that are both unique and memorable. Nothing disappoints, even the ending is eerily apt.

"How many bright angels
can dance on a pin?
How many hopes drown in
a bottle of gin?"

Get ready you are going to love this one!

Tammy says

Given a range of 1-1000, which number would you choose if prompted, "Think of a number...?" How would you react if a total stranger could correctly guess that number on the first try? Amazed and scared? That's the

premise behind this psychological thriller and it was very entertaining. If you like a book with a little intellectual "oomph," you will enjoy this one. Although I guessed the villain before the end of the story, I was stumped on how he pulled off the trick. Everything is explained and it makes sense. Detective Dave Gurney is brilliant but has his own demons in hiding, and they make an appearance in this case. I will investigate other books by this author! I listened to the audiobook, and the narrator was rather bland, but I won't hold that against the author. :)
