



Storm Front

John Sandford

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In Israel, a man clutching a backpack searches desperately for a boat. In Minnesota, Virgil Flowers gets a message from Lucas Davenport: You're about to get a visitor. It's an Israeli cop, and she's chasing a man who's smuggled out an extraordinary relic — an ancient inscribed stone revealing startling details about the man known as King Solomon.

Wait a minute, laughs Virgil. Is this one of those mystical movie-plot deals? The secret artifact, the blockbuster revelation, the teams of murderous bad guys? Should I be boning up on my Bible verses? He looks at the investigator. She's not laughing.

As it turns out, there are very bad men chasing the relic, and they don't care who's in the way or what they have to do to get it. "They're crazies," she says.

"What kind of crazies?"

Palestinian crazies, Syrian crazies, Egyptian crazies, maybe a couple of Israeli crazies. Turks. Some Americans, too, I suppose. Maybe the Pope."

Perhaps Virgil should start praying.

Storm Front Details

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Author : John Sandford

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From Reader Review Storm Front for online ebook

Eric_W says

Audiobook: A Lutheran minister steals a stela from a dig in Israel and returns back to his home in Mankato. He has an incurable illness and then disappears. Virgil is asked by his boss, Lucas Davenport, to liaise with an Israeli antiquities investigator who has come over to get the stela back. Its importance soon becomes clear as the inscription on the stela seems to imply that King Solomon may have been an Egyptian pharaoh. So, of course, everyone wants to get his hands on the stela for political and monetary reasons. A couple of Turks, a Mossad agent, a gun-toting (don't they all?) Texan, an Indiana Jones wanna-be and a fake IAA investigator are all after this thing and to top it off "Fucking" Flowers has to deal with "Ma" Nobel a local institution who's selling fake antique lumber and keep everyone from killing each other.

Classic Virgil Flowers and this may be the best of the series. Some of the dialogue is LOL funny. I really like him as a character, and Eric Conger reads magnificently.

I ran across this interesting tidbit in Biblical Archaeology News that pertains:

<http://www.biblicalarchaeology.org/da...>

Sue says

Well this was certainly an action packed entry in the Virgil Flowers series, almost too packed at times to the point of caricature of this type of suspense novel.

A dying archaeologist smuggles an artifact into the United States to sell it to the highest bidder. Then these bidders arrive from all corners representing a strange variety of bidders. Flowers is caught up on the middle of this horde in odd ways which grow to dangerous and, at times humorous, ways.

The story is fun and well written but seemed somehow less probable than other of Sandford's stories. I have to admit I was also a little concerned to see Sandford's acknowledgment at the beginning of the novel in which he thanks Michele Cook for "help from my partner". I do hope that Sandford isn't joining some other authors who have become industries unto themselves.

Addendum, 11/13/13: after hearing from my GR friend James, I am reassured re: my concern expressed above regarding Sandford's partner for this book. Apparently he has used partners throughout the Virgil Flowers series who have begun the books for him and he has then finished them off in his usual style. I'm glad to know and sorry that I didn't pick up on this fact earlier. Thanks to James. I also hope that this didn't color my review in any way, and I don't really think it did. My thoughts were more connected to plot than concerns for future books.

Jason Grimes says

Extremely disappointing. The worst out of the 7 Virgil Flowers books. The author says the book was written

with the help of Michele Cook, however, I believe Michele actually wrote it. While it's a constant action book, very fast paced, what is missing is the lazy humor from Virgil. Plus the plot really isn't that interesting, nor are most of the characters that keep trickling in. I love this series (esp Rough Country) but this book lacks and doesn't fit. 1 star if not less.

Sarah Darwin says

In a way, I'm grateful to John Sandford for this truly forgettable book. For me it has just marked a watershed: the moment when I refuse ever again to read anything churned out by the dismal new world of the corporate book factory.

I've been resistant to it for a while - James Patterson was long ago scratched off my 'watch out for books by' list - but I've made exceptions for some favourite authors, John Sandford among them. I believe most if not all of the Virgil Flowers books had an inscription suggesting some degree of collaboration, but *Storm Front* seems to have crossed a line. I guess the giveaway is in that inscription where he refers to his collaborator as "now a novelist". So who is the novelist here? Sandford or Michele Cook? If this is predominantly the work of John Sandford himself then he's really lost his way. There were countless moments in *Storm Front* that made me cringe, not least for the horribly inappropriate collision of facetious humour with some pretty serious background issues. Someone with a flair for black comedy might have made something great out of this material (try the late Michael Dibdin's *End Games* to see how it's done) but Sandford, or Cook, or wherever the heck wrote this thing, doesn't even get close. It's dreadful. I think I'm being kind giving it one star.

You have to wonder why authors like Sandford risk trashing their own reputations in this way. I've heard it suggested that he's trying to give a few people a leg up in the publishing world, but in that case he really should be looking at something like sponsoring a couple of editors to read works by unknown, unpublished authors and commit to publishing several a year under a 'Sandford' imprint. Now that would actually be a noble thing to do. These 'collaborations', or whatever they are, seem somewhat less than noble. Some people might say they were a bit dishonest. Surely a paying public have a right to know exactly what it is they're buying (as in: who wrote it, and how did any co-author get the gig). These days, you really can't judge a book by its cover.

So that's it for me. No more buying books by long-favoured authors until I've checked that it's all their own work. If it isn't, I won't even borrow it from the library. I'm taking a small, personal stand. It won't exactly have the publishers quaking in their Italian loafers and Jimmy Choos, but it'll make me feel better.

Dre Mosley says

Add me to the list of John Sandford fans who are severely let down by this one. This, as far as I'm concerned is Sandford's first misfire.

Well, wait. . . .did he even write this one? That's questionable. I'd like to think that he didn't. I'd hate to think that Sandford has joined the James Patterson Club(you know, putting one's name on books he really didn't write?), but perhaps he has. This book certainly didn't read like a Sandford novel. As I was reading it,

something felt. . .off, as if maybe an impostor had written it.

Like most fans, I anticipate new releases from my favorite authors, so when *Stormfront* came out, I promptly fired up my Kindle and bought it. When I found out that the story was going to involve some ancient religious artifact, I was like, "oh oh." These kinds of stories never seem to grab me, but I was thinking that since it is Sandford, and since Flowers is the main character, somehow he would make this compelling, so I began reading.

Got to page 50. Not gripped yet.

Got to page 100. Nope, still not into it.

Halfway through the book("Okay, is thing gonna ever pick up?").

You get the point.

What you have is a story about a dying archaeologist who found an artifact while at a dig site in Israel. He fled the site and returned to the States with the artifact. Turns out this artifact could very well rewrite history for the Israelis in a bad way, so they want it. . .and so do other people in the book for various reasons, people ranging from a rogue Mossad agent, to some hot southern belle who wants to jump Virgil's bones. Flowers gets pulled into the situation regarding finding and recovering the artifact and giving it back to Israel. The thief is looking to sell to the highest bidder. A lot of meandering and bungled attempts to get it back from this elusive, dying thief occur. If it's any comfort, no one in this book dies(wait, doesn't Virgil usually deal with murders?)

Now,does this sound like something Sandford would even come up with? Anyway, the book reads like a bad dark comedy, and Virgil comes across as an unwilling participant in the whole thing. It's all very eye-rolling, and none of the characters in the book, good or bad are likable. This is not the Sandford I know. This read like some underling attempting to write like Sandford. Like parody, even.

The book was only around 380 pages, but felt like 500+ because is was SO flat, dull, and uninspired. Had this not had Sandford's name on it, I would have not even bothered to finish it.

I really hope the next *Prey* book is better than this.

Tim says

Loved this story and this is the first "Virgil Flowers" novel I have thoroughly enjoyed. I found this well written and interesting start to finish. 10 of 10 stars

Jon Kurtz says

"That F#!@ing Flowers" is back again. I smile every time I read that monicker. The storyline for book #7 has Agent Virgil Flowers of the Minnesota Bureau of Criminal Apprehension attempting to recover an ancient Middle Eastern relic that finds its way to Minnesota. I guess that's not too hard to swallow, considering Minnesota actually does have a Museum of Mining. Okay, maybe that's a stretch. The relic is a stele (stella), AKA - a stone, which is believed to contain writing that may genealogically link the conflicting

nations/groups in the Middle East. Sandford keeps most of the story light, supporting his protagonist's laid back lifestyle. Fishing and sexual encounters often supercede investigative work or, at least, aid in the thinking process. The order of importance changes with the day. This attitude pervades the book and makes it, like most Virgil Flowers novels, a carefree and enjoyable read. I always hesitate to provide too much or any particulars about the story, but suffice it to say, Virgil shines, bumbles, wins, loses, but always seems to get his man, woman, or stone.

James Thane says

Elijah Jones is a minister and college professor working on an archeological dig in Israel. He's also dying of cancer and about to leave behind him a wife with Alzheimer's who may wind up living for years with minimal care. Then one day, Jones's team uncovers an ancient stele--a stone with inscriptions carved into it. A preliminary examination suggests that the information on the stele, if accurate, could require a significant reinterpretation of the Bible and could also radically undermine some long-held religious beliefs.

While the rest of the team sleeps, Jones smuggles the stone out of the camp and makes his way back to Mankato, Minnesota. The theft causes an uproar and the Israeli government sends an attractive female antiquities expert to help American authorities recover the stone.

The American authorities in question would be that F****ing Virgil Flowers of the Minnesota BCI. Virgil is hip deep in an investigation involving fraudulent antique lumber and his prime suspect is a very sexy woman named "Ma" Nobles. When Virgil's boss, Lucas Davenport, pulls him off the case and tells him to pick up the Israeli expert and recover the artifact, he's not at all pleased, but figures it should be a fairly easy and simple assignment.

Wrong again, Virgil.

The case immediately takes a lot of unexpected twists and turns, and tracking down either the Reverend Jones or the stele is hardly a piece of cake. Things are complicated because, as word of the discovery spreads, an awful lot of other people both foreign and domestic are anxious to get their hands on the stele. Virgil just wants to recover the damned thing and return it to its rightful owners before anyone gets killed so that he can get back to Ma Nobles and the Case of the Fraudulent Lumber. But that may be easier said than done.

As always, it's great fun to spend time in the company of Virgil Flowers, and this is a pretty entertaining book. To my mind, though, it's not up to the standards set by the earlier Virgil books. The plot is way way out in Dan Brown land and is so implausible that a reader, or at least this one, simply can't suspend disbelief enough to really get into the book. I never for a moment bought into the plot, but I did laugh a lot as Virgil investigated the case as only he can. I'll look forward to the next book in the series, hoping that it returns to form.

judy says

Something didn't feel Virgil to me but Sandford admits he had help--and for a very good reason. He is not pulling a James Patterson (yuck--one is enough) but what he is doing is helping his former newspaper co-

workers set a little more aside for retirement (lousy pay even if they still have jobs). He makes no secret of this. He's done lengthy interviews explaining that he deliberately involves them in the Virgil stories and splits the profits. Up until this one they have helped with the plot but he does the writing. Given the acknowledgement at the front of this book, he worked with a reporter who is trying to become a novelist. It is possible that this one was not all his writing. He does two books a year--one Davenport (his alone) and one Virgil with some input from friends. It's not just charity--he finds grinding out two books a year difficult. Somehow I don't see this as the same as the Patterson book factory. In fact I admire him for helping his journalist friends and letting them help him. Shades of the newsroom. This may not be the best Virgil but it still beats lots of other stuff out there.

C.A. Newsome says

I'm having a hard time as a reader these days. Part of it has to do with becoming an author, giving me less time to read for pleasure and making me choosier as well as more critical of the books I read. Part of it has to do with reading the same series authors since the 90s.

For many of them, their story-lines have become preposterous, or they've gotten lazy and they're phoning it in. I can tell because I still reread the stories that made me fall in love with them. James Patterson has become the McDonalds of popular fiction, farming out a dozen novels every year to a variety of short-order writers.

I was thrilled when the library phoned to say *Storm Front* was in. Thank God. John Sandford is still a reliable great read. I was in the middle of listening to *Rough Country* on audio, but happy to set it aside for the new installment in the Virgil (that F-ing) Flowers series.

I usually avoid reading the inside flap on authors I like because I want to be surprised every step of the way. This time I was riding in the car with a friend when I picked it up, so I took a peek. Turns out, Virgil is in pursuit of an artifact with calamitous religious implications smuggled out of Israel. A DaVinci Code knockoff? Not your typical Flowers fare, but what the hey, it's John Sandford.

So I cracked the spine and turned the pages and found: "I wrote this novel with help from my partner, Michele Cook . . ." and she's a journalist and screenwriter who never wrote a novel before.

Uh-oh.

I tried, I really did. I made it to page 60, but then I had to stop. It's not a bad book, exactly. The writing is competent. If this were a college student, I'd give it an A. Not because I wanted to, because they did what they were supposed to. But it lacks the heart that makes a great book live.

I'm sure many people will be perfectly happy with the book. It's just that it's not John Sandford, whose ball-scratching masculinity sweats from the pores of every word. Sandford put the "F-ing" in Flowers. This Virgil is a paper doll in comparison.

I'm sure the rest of the book is competent as well. It's just that I feel like someone gave me tickets to see Elvis and I got Taylor Hicks in a white jumpsuit instead.

Perhaps it's not fair of me to judge a book I won't finish, but my time is valuable and so is yours. If you

aren't picky, and you aren't a rabid Sandford fan, you will probably enjoy this book. But I don't think Sandford did Cook any favors by putting his name on the cover and setting expectations so high.

Jacqueline says

I am a rabid fan of John Sandford, having read all his books, most of them multiple times. Unfortunately, I will not be rereading this latest Virgil Flowers novel, which was a huge disappointment.

Virgil, a cop who works for the Minnesota Bureau of Criminal Apprehension (and thus, Lucas Davenport), looks like a cowboy in rock and roll band tee shirts, and has an unusual and effective way of going after the bad guys. In this book, however, it is more like a *Keystone-Cops-gone-bad* investigation, with Virgil making an unbelievable whopper of a mistake.

I found I really couldn't care much about any of the characters, including the usually appealing Virgil. I also found missing Sandford's "voice" which often manages to connect his series' books with a few telling references, and without the necessity of retelling old stories. This book felt like someone else wrote it.

Kemper says

Minnesota state investigator Virgil Flowers is working diligently on a case involving Florence 'Ma' Nobles and her sons selling counterfeit antique lumber. Of course part of the reason that Virgil is working so hard is that Ma is very attractive and flirting shamelessly with him. So when a call comes in from his boss Lucas Davenport with another assignment Virgil is more than a little miffed.

Davenport tells him that it's no big deal. A Lutheran minister named Elijah Jones who is dying of cancer stole an ancient inscribed stone called a stele from an archaeological dig in Israel and smuggled it home to Minnesota. The Israelis want it back and have dispatched an antiquities expert to make sure that happens. Virgil just has to play tour guide, pick up the terminally ill minister, and locate the stele. Davenport assures Flowers that he'll back on his counterfeit lumber case in to time at all.

Virgil really should know by now that Davenport lies...

Jones plans to auction the stele off to the highest bidder to get the money needed to care for his wife suffering from Alzheimer's after he dies, and it turns out the old man is pretty wily. The stele's inscription has historic implications that could be very damaging to Israel so Hezbollah has sent a representative to try and obtain it for propaganda purposes. A couple of tough Turks with fearsome reputations also show up. Two spotlight hungry media whores who pretend to be scholars also want in on the action, and the Israelis have a couple of dirty tricks at the ready. Even Ma Nobles gets mixed up in hunt for the stele, much to Virgil's consternation.

Soon there's more allegiances declared and alliances broken than on a season of *Game of Thrones*, and an increasingly frustrated Virgil can't seem to make any of these double crossing idiots understand that somebody's gonna get killed if this foolishness doesn't stop.

Sandford has a lot of interests other than writing and one of the them is archaeology. Per his bio on his web

page he has funded and participated in a large dig in Israel since the late '90s so it's a little surprising that this is the first one of his books to feature an archaeological angle to it. Despite the international flavor with various groups and countries interested in the stele this still has the same grounded style that you usually get in a Sandford novel. There are some great bits late in the book with Virgil interacting with the shadowy figures of some unnamed American security agency, but Flowers remains the kind of guy far more interested in reading a fishing magazine than worrying about international intrigue and national security.

There's an almost playful attitude in this one, and while the story is treated seriously it wouldn't have taken much to turn this into an outright farce, kind of like one of Donald Westlake's Dortmunder novels. Sandford's always had a sense of humor, but this is the first one of his books where he almost seems to make light of the stakes involved. There also isn't much of the usual momentum and tension you get in a Lucas Davenport or Virgil Flowers novel. This isn't a bad thing since it seems like a bit of departure from the others, and with this many books in play I like that Sandford doesn't feel obligated to stick to the formula that has worked so well for him in the past.

It isn't my favorite Sandford novel but it's a fun one.

Kathy Davie says

Seventh in the Virgil Flowers ~~detective mystery~~ thriller series and revolving around a roving detective in Minnesota.

My Take

It was an unexpected start with Elijah on a kibbutz with a totally and completely unexpected ending. It took me awhile at the end to process it all. Very clever, Sandford, you sneaky bugger.

It's convoluted with potentially catastrophic fallout if the truth comes out about this stolen artifact. Sandford certainly does raise some questions in my mind that make me want to re-read certain sections of the Bible! The hypothesis Sandford puts forth about the copy errors that could have created this issue are extremely believable. And could create some big problems for Jesus.

That's just the artifact. What makes things really interesting is Elijah Jones and his actions. It's such a contrast with one's image of a minister. Shoot-outs. Smuggling. Theft. Jones is not bad with a gun.

To offset the violence, there's a spoof of specialty television shows whose hosts promote wild tales and crazier conspiracy theories and the lengths to which they'll go to promote themselves. The international factor with the Turks is too funny as well while the tension between Sewickey and Bauer...well, prepare to LYAO. Nor did I expect to appreciate the Hezbollah representative, but, ahem, I can see where the corrupting influence of America is having its way with him. It's those Bloody Marys and the *Playboys*...

And it gets even better with the extremely odd "courtship" between Virgil and Ma, *much more laughter*.

"Sometimes a man's gotta do what a man's gotta do."

and

Ma is so grateful that Virgil isn't "the bashful sort".

I did feel bad for Sewickey's plight and his need for *results*. Then there's Magda Jones and her sad plight. It's too bad we can put dogs and cats down when they're suffering, but we can't do the same for ourselves.

Lucas Davenport is Virgil's boss, but his interaction is generally one-liners as he gives Virgil an assignment and checks in with him.

"Tough, on-the-ball law enforcement, Virgil was proud to say, had forced Minnesota criminals to go back to stealing."

Hmmm, Sandford tosses in an interesting bit on the difference between Turkish road layouts and Minnesota roads. It makes sense, and it sure feels like Sandford had to make a road trip. To. Um, make sure, lol. I reckon those Turks should have taken a short class on poisonous plants *more laughter*.

The Story

In the interests of international cooperation, Virgil teams up with Mossad to catch an artifacts thief.

Only, Virgil finds himself in deep with an artifact that could change religious history.

The Characters

Agent Virgil Flowers lives in Mankato and covers the southern end of Minnesota. He has a preference for fishing and writing articles for outdoor magazines...although he is branching out these days. He grew up a minister's son, and that does have a bearing on his outlook. **Johnson Johnson** is his best friend, and a fishing buddy. **Shirley** is Johnson's current girlfriend. **Robbie** is one of Virgil's neighbors.

The Bureau of Criminal Apprehension (BCA) is...

...the state police for whom Virgie works under **Lucas Davenport**. **Simon "Simple" Hamm** and **Bea Sawyer** are crime scene techs. **Sandy** is Lucas' part-time researcher, an absolute gem who has slept with Virgil. *Haven't all the ladies?* **Joe Morgenthaler** will coach the landlord. **Pat Golden** is an assistant attorney general.

Mankato PD

Officers Jimmy, Paula, Shane Cobley, and Georgina all play a part. **Detective Don Scott** works the park shooting. **Detectives Hall and Jack Golden** are working with Ellen.

Derek Crawford is a local private detective. **Max** and **Jane** were the nurses on duty; **Mark** was the resident. **Bud Anderson** is a witness.

Sheriff departments

Frank Martin and **Fred Jackson** help with the manhunt.

The FBI is...

...very interested in two aspects of this case. **Special Agent Louis Mallard** is based in Washington D.C. and has become friends with Lucas (*Easy Prey* , 11; *Chosen Prey* , 12; *Mortal Prey* , 13; and, *Hidden Prey* , 15). **Agents Rose Lincoln, Tom Hartley, and Wesley Moehl** know all about Virgil's past actions with Homeland Security and the DEA, *laughing*

The Israel Antiquities Authority (IAA) is...

...the organization for whom **Yael Aronov** claims she works. The second Yael claims it too. **Colonel Ohad Shachar** is with the Israeli embassy.

Florence “Ma” Nobles, a.k.a., Frankie, is a brilliant hick of a woman and has her fingers, toes, and the whole family in on various criminal rackets. **Rolf, Mateo, Tall Bear, Moses**, and the very young (and very knowing) **Sam** are her five intra-ethnic fatherless boys. **Helen and Hank McClane** were her parents. **Rick Nobles** was her first husband.

The Reverend Professor Elijah Jones is an ordained Lutheran minister from Minnesota who knows Virgil's dad and teaches in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at Gustavus Adolphus College. His wife, **Magda**, has Alzheimer's and is in a home. **Dan** and **Ellen Case** (she's a highway engineer with the state Department of Transportation) are their children. **Sugarman** is an outdoorsy friend. Faculty members include **Maicy**, an assistant professor and **Patricia Carlson**.

Faraj “Raj” Awad is a Middle-Eastern flying student in Minnesota. The Party of God, a.k.a., Hezbollah, has sent a courier, **Adabi al-Lubnani**. **Soroush “the Hatchet” Kazemi** is a *mujahid*, a real killer. **Max Kaar** is a local Islamic limousine driver. He rents his place from **Larry Swanson**.

Timur “the Turk” Kaya, a Turkish terrorist with a delight in cutting off testicles, represents **Burak Sahin**, a collector of important artifacts. **Professor John Sewickey** specializes in Ancient Mysteries at the Center for Transubstantial Studies at the University of Texas in Austin. **Tag Bauer** is a “field archeologist” and host of *The Bauer Crusade* on PBS. He's really playing to the hype with *The Wanderer* (his plane) and *The Drifter* (his yacht). **Tal Zahavi** hates whiners. **Bart Kohl**, a sleeper agent, got involved with a Mossad Interest Group so he could meet girls.

A dig near Beth Shean in Israel...

...is headed up by **Professor Rafi Frankel** at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem in the Institute of Archeology. Elijah, **Steve Phelps** from Alabama, and **Annabelle Johnson**, a Gustavus Adolphus student, are some of the volunteer diggers. **Roger Johnson** is her son. The **Jensens** are Annabelle's next-door neighbors with a key.

Gerta and Ricardo are a German couple sailing the Mediterranean, scavenging for jobs. **Yigael Yadin** is the most famous archeologist and **Moeshe Gefen** the most famous paleographer in Israel and both are/were good friends of Elijah's. **Yuli Gefen** is Moeshe's daughter with an autistic son, **Moshe**.

Dave Moss is accusing, and **Barry Spurgeon** is a really angry customer. **Wendy** is playing at the Coop (*Rough Country*, 3). **Vivek Bhola** is an assistant manager at the Downtown Inn while **Arjun Sharma** is the assistant manager at the Holiday Inn. **Jayden Ethan** is a reporter who will interview Sewickey. **Kennedy** is an earnest rental car clerk. **Ruffe Ignace** is a reporter with the *Star-Tribune*. **Burton Familie** is an auctioneer with information. **Father James McConville** at St. Agnes Church in St. Paul is another friend of Virgil's dad.

A **stele** is a pillar erected by a conqueror that brags about what he's done. A **tel** is a mound covering an ancient city. **Siamun** was a pharaoh back around 986 BCE.

The Cover and Title

The cover has a top half of a solid deep teal background with the author's name in an embossed gold and white — the title is in the bottom half in an embossed orange. The bottom itself is a painterly image of a lone house in the distance with a meandering dirt road leading to it. There's a storm with bright lightning touching down and raindrops being pushed up the windshield through which we're looking.

The title is the disastrous potential that artifact has of stirring up a *Storm Front* throughout the world.

Marla Madison says

I've been a Sandford fan from day one. His Prey series has been my favorite; I eagerly awaited each new release. Unfortunately, some of his later works have not been favorites, and with *Storm Front*, Sandford's latest, the author has hit an all time low. If I hadn't been a long-time fan, I'd never have finished the book. Since *The DaVinci Code* became a blockbuster success, everyone's writing books about an ancient relic that if made public, would change the world of religion, as we know it. For me, most of them are nothing but 400 page chase scenes. Not my personal taste, but they have become extremely popular.

Who could imagine Sandford fitting this type of storyline into a Virgil Flowers novel! *Storm Front* stars Virgil Flowers, a character who, like Lucas Davenport before Sandford married him off, is a super-sleuth, and super-successful womanizer. The story opens when Flowers is assigned a case involving an ancient inscribed stone, whose message, if shared with the world, would create chaos in the middle east. The man who stole the stone from a dig in Israel is from Minnesota and is known to have returned to the US with it. Flowers is assigned the case, begins looking for the man, finds the thief missing (of course!) and within a matter of days, he encounters at least four factions (all armed and dangerous) that are also in pursuit of the stone, which is estimated to be worth millions of dollars.

Now, despite the theme of the book, the story does captivate the reader. Flowers is an interesting character, and I did enjoy his investigation and interplay with the people seeking the stone. About halfway through, however, something happened, that if I weren't a devoted Sandford fan, I would have quit reading the book. When Flowers finally gets the stone in his possession, did he find a vault to put it in? A bank? A police station? A Brinks truck? People have been shot at, nearly killed, assassins are part of the chase, (not to mention, once more, the thing is worth millions), and Flowers takes it home with him and stores it in his dishwasher. The reader is expected to believe this character, solver of all crimes, would be that stupid. It's no surprise to the reader that the stone is stolen during the night.

After that I had a hard time forcing myself to finish reading the book, but I finally made it through, extremely disappointed with the story.

Jim says

This is the seventh novel in the Virgil Flowers series. We first met him in John Sandford's *Prey* novels. Virgil works for the Minnesota Bureau of Criminal Apprehension, usually patrolling the rural regions of the state. He often is towing a boat during an investigation ... just in case an opportunity to get in some fishing presents itself. He usually works alone although he sometimes makes a call to Lucas Davenport to send some reinforcements. Davenport, his co-workers in the BCA, criminals, pretty much everyone refers to him as "that F#!%in' Flowers".

This story actually begins in Israel where on an archaeological dig a Minnesota college professor and minister, Elijah Jones, steals an apparent rare and potentially historically significant find. A stele that could rewrite Biblical history. Meanwhile Virgil is investigating Florence 'Ma' Nobles and her sons for selling counterfeit antique lumber. It doesn't hurt that 'Ma' is 30ish, blonde, and attractive. He is interviewing her when Davenport calls. An Israeli antiquities investigator is arriving and he is to meet her and help find the stele so that it can be returned. Virgil is not too happy. Did I mention that 'Ma' is 30ish, blonde, an attractive?

Virgil meets Yael Aronov, the Israeli investigator, and discusses the case with her. As it turns out, there are

very bad men chasing the relic, and they don't care who's in the way or what they have to do to get it. "Is it worth killing for? Who knows? Maybe. To some crazies. Israeli crazies? American crazies? She shrugged. Palestinian crazies, Syrian crazies, Egyptian crazies, maybe a couple of Israeli crazies. Turks. Some Americans, too, I suppose. Maybe the Pope. The Pope? Okay, maybe not the Pope. "

This was not the best book in the series but it was still a fun read. There is some great dialog and you really can't but help liking Virgil. I was debating what rating to give this book. It was not one of the authors better works. It was not a bad story. I think in the end I may have been biased a little because I like John Sandford and the Virgil Flowers character. If you have not read any of the books in this series you may want to start with one of the earlier books.
