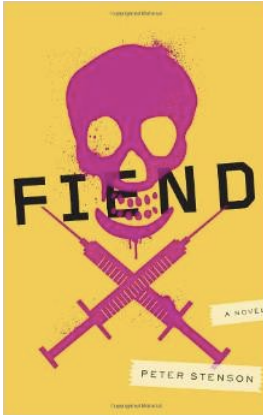


***Fiend* by Peter Stenson**  
**Crown (July 9, 2013)**



Fiend may be his first novel, but Peter Stenson isn't dipping his big toe into the shallow end of the pool here; it's more like he's cannonballing naked into a murky lake of unknown depth, wearing a blindfold just for kicks. The payoff, for those willing to dive in with him, is an exhilarating rush of a first-person read that's rife with graphic violence, riddled with expletives, devoid of quotation marks, and determined to test your sense of squeamishness. Our protagonist, Chase Daniels, is an unlikely choice for a "hero" with an even more unlikely chance of survival--an unabashed addict who has just snapped out of a week-long drug binge to find himself facing a dystopian nightmare. In a world narrowed down to meth-heads and (a refreshingly original take on) zombies, this kid, with his only vaguely remaining moral compass, is our only option for empathy, our only hope for humanity. He's got no special skills, and he's not connected to a crucial government agency. He knows only what he sees or feels, and so do we. It's gritty, it's gripping, and it's a great debut. --[Robin A. Rothman](#)