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## Killers On The Loose

[Eddie Duggan](#)

According to Mendoza, there are currently between thirty-five and fifty serial killers working in North America, while up to four may be operating in the UK. "Once a rare phenomenon, serial killing has become increasingly frequent with dozens of maniacs terrorising different cities simultaneously." However, while for Mendoza the serial killer is "an uncomfortably unfathomable reality of modern life", he doesn't attempt to fathom the serial killer, nor to define for the reader what serial killing actually is. Mark Seltzer, on the other hand, in *Serial Killers: Death and Life in America's Wound Culture* (London: Routledge, 1998) notes that the term was coined by FBI's Robert Ressler in the mid-1970s, and Seltzer offers the FBI's definition of serial killing: "the killing of at least four victims, over a period greater than seventy-two hours." The major shortcoming of Mendoza's survey is that it makes no reference to any other work on the subject. It's not that Mendoza hasn't carried out any research - clearly he has - but he provides no references to substantiate what appears to be a paper-bound version of the case studies on his website. The book abounds with unsourced quotes from various law enforcement officials that might be from newspapers, television news or from interviews, but the sources are never stated (in fact the only reference Mendoza provides in the whole 240 pages is to his own website). So while the cover tells us that "this is the first look at serial killers at large, from one of the world's foremost authorities", this claim appears to be no more than an unsupported assertion on the part of the blurb-writer. *Killers on the Loose* is superficially alluring but ultimately unsatisfying - the paperback equivalent of a salacious American television documentary. According to the ads in the back of the book, this is one of a series of true crime titles published by Virgin, including books on the Dunblane killings and Harold Shipman. One can only hope these are rather more substantial and purposeful than Mendoza's offering: if they are not, then someone at Virgin ought to look more closely at quality control in the publishing division, unless these endeavours are meant simply to provide hot air to help fuel Richard Branson's ballooning expeditions.

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