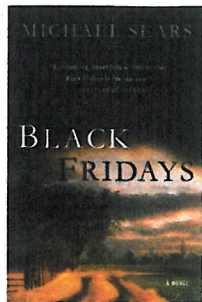


## ★ Black Fridays

Michael Sears. Putnam, \$25.95 (352p) ISBN 978-0-399-15866-7



At the start of Sears's impressive first novel, one of the best of a recent crop of financial thrillers, Jason Stafford admits: "I was the first alumnus from my MBA class to make Managing Director. I was also the first... to go to prison." A simple accounting error turned into a major felony—in effect, he mortgaged his trading portfolio's future to the tune of \$500 million, and lost his career, most of his wealth, and his family. Out of prison and back in Manhattan, Stafford takes a short-term consulting gig with a medium-sized boutique firm, Weld Securities, looking into the trading records of a young executive who died under mysterious circumstances. In an emotionally engaging subplot, Stafford attempts to reclaim his five-year-old autistic son from his ex-wife. Sears is terrific at generating momentum and suspense while juggling a convoluted plot and an enormous cast of characters. A former trader himself, he's also good at making the opaque intricacies of the financial markets transparent, even interesting. Wall Street doesn't necessarily need or deserve much sympathy, but this is no screed, and the book is the better for it. *Agent: Judith Weber, Sobol Weber Associates. (Sept.)*