

BOOKAHOLIC

For the Mystery Addict

July 2004

Vol. 2, No. 8

WHAT I'VE BEEN READING

***GARDEN OF BEASTS*, Jeffery Deaver, Simon & Schuster. \$24.95**

Paul Schumann, a German-American living in New York City in 1936, is a mobster hitman who has just been caught. The arresting officer offers him a deal: life in prison or a covert operation for the government. Paul chooses the latter and learns that he will pose as a member of the press traveling to Berlin with the Olympic team. Once there he is to kill Reinhardt Ernst – the ruthless architect of Hitler's clandestine rearmament. I know some of you are disappointed that this is not a Lincoln Rhyme mystery, but not me. This is terrific stuff and Deaver uses real as well as fictional characters to portray Nazi Germany.

***R IS FOR RICOCHET*, Sue Grafton, Putnam. \$26.95**

I gave up on this series sometime around J, but every now and again I go back and check that I made the correct decision. Here's the problem I have. When Kinsey Milhone burst on the scene in *A is for Alibi*, she was young, hip, and funny. Twenty plus years later, she is still fairly young, sort of hip, and sometimes funny. Grafton made the decision to keep Kinsey rooted in the 1980s, so Kinsey has no computer, no cell phone and Ronald Reagan is president. I can't quite wrap my head around that. I know it has been done before, notably by Ed McBain in his 87th Precinct series, but keeping characters locked in a time period, unless it is an historical series, poses all sorts of problems. For those of you who could care less about that, here's the latest Kinsey Milhone mystery.

***BLACKBIRD HOUSE*, Alice Hoffman, Doubleday. \$19.95**

These stories of the various occupants of a house on Cape Cod span a period of two hundred years. From the family that built the house to the summer renters, these are extraordinary tales of love and loss. Hoffman is one of my favorite writers, and although I am not a huge fan of short stories, I became completely involved with the lives of these characters.

***COUNTRY OF ORIGIN*, Don Lee, W.W. Norton. \$24.95**

Lisa Countryman, a young American, vanishes in Tokyo in 1980. Tom Hurley, an official at the U.S. Embassy, and Kenzo Ota, a neurotic Japanese cop, are both assigned to find her. Their separate searches take them into the shadowy world of Tokyo's sex trade where clubs cater to every imaginable male fantasy, lust, and perversion. But this is also a story about fitting in, or not. Lisa, Tom and others are *ainoko*, half-breed, and their

stories are bound up with race and identity. This is a wonderful read, gorgeously written, totally absorbing, and the descriptions of Tokyo's demi-monde reminded me of last year's *Bangkok 8*. Kenza Ota is one of my favorite recent characters in crime fiction and I'm hoping for more stories featuring him, but I suspect Lee may not be starting a series here.

***DARKLY DREAMING DEXTER*, Jeff Lindsay, Doubleday. \$22.95**

Now here's a serial killer we can all get behind. He only kills bad people! When I heard the premise of this novel, I wasn't sure the author could pull it off without getting cute. But he does. This is a terrific, laugh-out-loud story told by Dexter Morgan, blood splatter analyst for the Miami police, supportive brother to Deb, a Miami cop, and a serial killer of bad folk. Why a serial killer and not an avenging hero? Well, he started young, with animals, and cannot control his urge to kill. What he can control, thanks to a loving foster-father, is who he kills. But now there seems to be another serial killer operating on Dexter's turf and Dex has a feeling that this new arrival is offering him an invitation to "play." This is perfect summer reading.

ON MY READING LIST

***MURDER SUICIDE*, Keith Ablow, St. Martin's Press. \$21.95**

John Snow is a brilliant multi-millionaire inventor with a rare form of epilepsy that threatens to destroy his mind. Experimental surgery could cure him, but on the night before his surgery, he is murdered. Dr. Frank Clevenger, forensic psychiatrist, uses his ability to get into the mind of a killer as he investigates the prime suspects: Snow's wife, son, and business partner.

***RAIN STORM*, Barry Eisler, Putnam. \$24.95.**

John Rain has fled to Brazil to escape the killing business but his extraordinary gifts continue to create a demand for his services. His old employer, the CIA, persuades him to take on a high-risk assignment: finding a ruthless arms dealer supplying criminal groups throughout Southeast Asia. Rain's special gifts include making death seem to be by "natural causes," his ability to operate unnoticed, and his refusal to kill women, all of which make this series immensely appealing.

***THE GHOST WRITER*, John Harwood, Harcourt. \$25.00**

Gerard Freeman is obsessed with just two things: his elusive pen pal and the secret manuscript that his mother gave her life to protect. Suspecting that something within the manuscript holds the key to his mother's terrified refusal to return to her childhood home prior to her death, Gerard sets out to uncover the mystery surrounding his family. Is it my imagination or are there a whole slew of books just now involving manuscripts, hidden codes, etc.? No matter, I can't resist – and I'll talk more about Dan Brown in the fall.

***SKINNY DIP*, Carl Hiaasen, Knopf. \$24.95**

Chaz Perrone is a marine scientist who has found a way of doctoring water samples so that a ruthless agribusiness tycoon can continue illegally dumping fertilizer into the endangered Everglades. When Chaz's wife, Joey, discovers what he's doing, Chaz dumps her overboard in the Atlantic. Unfortunately for Chaz, Joey does not die. Instead she's rescued by former cop, Mick Stranahan. It's been a while since Hiaasen gave us one of his excellent pro-environment mysteries set in the state he loves. It's good to have him back.

***THE MADMAN'S TALE*, John Katzenbach, Ballantine. \$24.95**

Francis Petrel was committed to Western State Hospital when he was barely out of his teens. He's middle-aged now and the State Hospital has long been closed. When a reunion is planned on the grounds of the institution, something stirs in Francis's mind: memories about the grisly events that led to the closing – the unsolved murder of a young nurse whose mutilated corpse was discovered one night after lights out. I'm surprised I haven't read this yet. Katzenbach writes extraordinary tales, no two are ever alike, and he always manages to keep me up half the night.

***BY A SPIDER'S THREAD*, Laura Lippman, Wm. Morrow. \$24.95**

Tess Monaghan agrees to help Mark Rubin track down his missing wife and children. Mark, an Orthodox Jew, claims he, his wife Natalie, and their three children are a close and loving family but what Tess discovers is that Natalie walked away from her husband with the help of an ex-con named Zeke. Tess must find out why this woman would turn herself and her children into accomplices of a violent criminal. I really don't read enough of Laura Lippman and I'm beginning to feel that's my loss.

***LITTLE SCARLET*, Walter Mosley, Little Brown. \$24.95**

At the height of the 1965 Watts riots, a white man is pulled from his car by a mob and escapes into a nearby apartment building. Soon afterward, a red-headed woman known as Little Scarlet is found dead in that building – and the man who fled is the suspect. Easy Rawlins's hunt for the killer reveals a new city emerging from the ashes. Mosley, L.A., and Easy Rawlins. That's enough for me.

***A CARNIVORE'S INQUIRY*, Sabina Murray, Grove Press. \$24.00**

Katherine, the narrator of this story, has just left Italy and arrived in New York City, but why she is there is a mystery. Soon she starts an affair with a middle-aged Russian émigré novelist she meets on the subway and moves in with him. Then she's on the move again, journeying from New York to rural Maine and Mexico City trailed, everywhere she goes, by a string of murders. This novel is getting tremendous reviews and great word of mouth.

***D.B.*, Elwood Reid, Doubleday. \$23.95**

In 1971, just as a Seattle-bound 727 from Portland, Oregon, was taking off, a man calling himself D.B. Cooper handed a note to a flight attendant which said he had a bomb. The plane touched down in Washington State and airline officials and FBI agents met his

demands - \$200,000 and several parachutes. The passengers were released and Cooper jumped out of the plane over the Pacific Northwest woods. No trace of him was ever found. Reid imagines Cooper's life, an FBI agent named Frank Marshall and how their paths eventually cross in this work of fiction about what work means and what the dream of escaping really entails. I've only read one of Reid's books, *Midnight Sun*, and I'm looking forward to some tough prose.

FIRST MYSTERIES

***WALKING MONEY*, James O. Born, Putnam. \$23.95**

State cop Bill Tasker is framed when a satchel with a million and a half in skimmed money goes missing and a key witness is murdered. Everybody seems to want this cash and, as the bag passes from hand to hand, the body count rises. Tasker realizes it's up to him. If he doesn't take control of his life, someone is going to do it for him.

***BUDDY COOPER FINDS A WAY*, Neil Connelly, Simon & Schuster. \$24.00**

Buddy Cooper is a part-time professional wrestler known as the Unknown Kentucky Terror. He's the one whose dirty tricks in the ring are never enough to beat the All-American champions, and the fans love to hate him. Then Buddy's new boss decides to stir things up by having Buddy win a match. On the night he's to be crowned champion, a deranged fan produces a gun and opens fire, igniting a deadly chain of events.

***RIFT*, Richard Cox, Ballantine. \$23.95**

Cameron Fisher, bored with his job, his wife, his life, is asked by his boss, who has just fired him, to take part in an experiment. The company is developing technology that will revolutionize personal travel by making human transmission possible, and it is looking for volunteers to test the technology. There are incredible risks, but Cameron, if he survives, would be paid five million dollars. What has he got to lose?

***HIDDEN*, Paul Jaskunas, Free Press. \$23.00**

The news that her ex-husband is being let out of prison comes as a shock to Maggie Wilson. The reason he's there is because Maggie accused him of assaulting her six years earlier. But now, it seems, there's a reason to believe he's innocent. This is Maggie's search for the truth, not only about who did assault her, but also about her marriage to Nate Duke.

***THE STERLING INHERITANCE*, Mike Silverling, St. Martin's Press. \$23.95.**

Jason Wilder is a musician whose gigs are few and far between so he moonlights as a private investigator for his mother's detective agency. From a routine search for the man who pulled a knife on him to exploding offices, a mysterious woman who keeps turning up, and a grisly murder, Jason's life is pretty complicated. Plus he has to answer to his very tough boss.

BLOOD ON THE LEAVES, Jeff Stetson, Warner Books. \$24.00

In the 1960s, it was common in Mississippi for white men caught in the act of killing blacks to be acquitted by all-white juries. But 40 years later, someone is seeking justice; those same white men are turning up dead – in the identical manner in which they killed their victims. This is the debut novel of playwright Stetson.

NON-MYSTERIES OF NOTE**THE COMA, Alex Garland, Riverhead Press. \$19.95.**

A man is attacked on the London Underground and awakens to find himself in hospital, apparently having emerged from a coma. Or has he? This tale is illustrated with forty woodblock prints by Garland's father, Nicholas, a political cartoonist for the *Daily Telegraph*.

TRUTH & BEAUTY, Ann Patchett, HarperCollins. \$23.95

This is the non-fiction account of Patchett's decades-long friendship with the recently deceased author, Lucy Grealy. Despite its July publication date, I believe this book is already out and receiving rave, rave, reviews. Patchett is an extraordinary writer and her book about loving a person she cannot save is a must for me.

NEWS FROM THE UK**THE BURNING GIRL, Mark Billingham, Little Brown**

The attacker of Jessica Clarke was quickly tracked down and he's been in jail for nearly twenty years. So who is harassing Carol Chamberlain, the arresting officer in the case, and insisting that he is the one who attacked Jessica? Now retired, Carol turns to DI Tom Thorne for help.

THE DARK EYE, Ingrid Black, Headline

A gunman is on the loose targeting randomly, or so it seems. When former FBI agent Saxon is drawn into the investigation, she believes that the fourth victim – a photographer with a fascination for murders – holds the key to the killer's identity. Set in Dublin.

BLACK TIDE, Caroline Carver, Orion

When journalist India Kane agrees to accompany a Greenpeace ship called *Sundancer* in its pursuit of a whaling fleet, she has no idea what awaits her. It involves a journey to Jambarko Bay, where the population appears to be dying out.

SOMETHING ROTTEN, Jasper Fforde, Hodder & Stoughton

Detective Thursday Next leaves Jurisdiction and heads back to Swindon accompanied by her child, Friday, and that dithering Prince Hamlet who seems eager to learn about conflict resolution. But Thursday must contend with Yorrick Kane, escaped fictionaut

and Daneophobe, who is now Chancellor of England. Those of you not yet caught up in the wackiness of this series should go to the back of the class and begin reading *The Eyre Affair*.

***THE TORMENT OF OTHERS*, Val McDermid, HarperCollins**

Clinical psychologist Dr. Tony Hill and Detective Chief Inspector Carol Jordan face the toughest challenge of their careers when they are confronted by an “impossible” series of murders.

***CHAUCER AND THE HOUSE OF FAME*, Philippa Morgan, Constable**

It is 1370 and the Hundred Years War is only half over. Geoffrey Chaucer, court envoy, ambitious poet, and protégé of John of Gaunt, is sent on a secret mission to France. First in a series.

***THE TINDER BOX*, Minette Walters, Macmillan**

Well, what is this? Something from Walters in July? Apparently this is a novella of 128 pages. I have no other information.

COLLECTING

I notice that Harcourt has quietly been republishing the West African series of mysteries by **Robert Wilson**. Wilson first achieved recognition in this country with *A Small Death In Lisbon* which introduced us to Javier Falcon. But before beginning that series, set in Portugal, he wrote a series of four books set in West Africa featuring British ex-pat Bruce Medway, a “trouble-shooter” and debt collector. Wilson lived in West Africa before moving to Portugal, and this series is a must for lovers of good mysteries.

Here are the four books in the series:

Instruments of Darkness

The Big Killing

Blood is Dirt

A Darkening Stain

These are available in paperback. The true firsts were published by HarperCollins in the UK and can be quite pricey.

The series set in Portugal was also originally published in the UK by HarperCollins and is quite affordable, except for *A Small Death in Lisbon*.

A Small Death in Lisbon

The Company of Strangers

The Blind Man of Seville

BOOKS OF THE MONTH

Beyer, Marcel, *Spies*, Harcourt. \$24.00. Two young sleuths try to solve the mysterious past of their own family as they look at family photographs.

Box, C.J., *Trophy Hunt*, Putnam. \$24.95. Game warden Joe Pickett investigates the ruthless attacks on moose and cattle. He does not believe, as others do, that it is the work of grizzly bears. He's afraid that this is a human killer practicing before moving on to a more challenging prey.

Chesney, Marion, *Hasty Death*, St. Martin's Press. \$22.95. Lady Rose Summers enlists the help of Captain Harry Cathcart and Superintendent Kerridge of Scotland Yard when one of her acquaintances is killed. Chesney is also M.C. Beaton.

Clark, Mary Jane, *Hide Yourself Away*, St. Martin's Press. \$19.95. Grace Callahan arrives in Newport determined to launch a future in television journalism, but as her fellow hopefuls start to disappear, Grace finds herself involved in a fourteen-year-old mystery.

Cockey, Tim, *Backstabber*, Hyperion. \$21.95. After four mysteries, undertaker Hitchcock Sewell is featured in a book without the word "Hearse" in the title. Don't let that stop you from picking up the latest installment as Hitch once again gets hilariously involved in murder.

Connors, Rose, *Maximum Security*, Scribner. \$24.00. At the urgent request of her law partner, Harry Madigan, Mary Nickerson takes on the defense of Louisa Rawlins, a woman suspected of murdering her wealthy husband. Harry is also Marty's lover – but he used to be Louisa's.

Crum, Laura, *Forged*, St. Martin's Press. \$22.95. When veterinarian Gale McCarthy returns home she discovers that the horseshoer she is expecting has in fact arrived. He's in her barn with a bullet in his gut.

D'Ancona, Matthew, *Going East*, Doubleday. \$25.00. In this literary thriller, a young London socialite migrates to the East End after a violent crime shatters her world.

Dubois, Brendan, *Buried Dreams*, St. Martin's Press. \$23.95. Lewis Cole is told by his friend, Jon Ericson, that their small New Hampshire town was once a Viking settlement. When Lewis visits Jon's house to look at the evidence, he discovers Jon's dead body.

Erickson, KJ, *Alone At Night*, St. Martin's Press. \$24.95. Mars Bahr and his partner are assigned to the Minneapolis Police Department's oldest unsolved cases, and a missing girl from sixteen years ago is the first on their list.

Forbes, Leslie, *Waking Raphael*, Bantam. \$25.00. In Urbino, Italy, the restoration of Raphael's La Muta will drive a living mute to a shocking act of violence and spark an investigation into a nearly forgotten war crime.

Ford, G.M., *Red Tide*, Wm. Morrow. \$23.95. Frank Corso, renegade Seattle journalist and true-crime writer, must prevent a horrifying act of mass destruction from annihilating his city.

Geary, Nancy, *Regrets Only*, Warner Books. \$24.00. Lucy O'Malley, newly assigned to the homicide unit of the Philadelphia Police Department, becomes involved in the investigation of the death of the mother of the heir to a vast fortune.

George, Elizabeth, *A Moment on the Edge*, HarperCollins. \$24.95. A collection of 26 crime stories by Susan Glaspell, Dorothy L. Sayers, Christianna Brand, Shirley Jackson, Ngaio Marsh, Joyce Carol Oates, Minette Walters, etc. etc. In short, by some of the best woman writers of all time.

Goodman, Carol, *The Drowning Tree*, Ballantine. \$24.95. Juno McKay attends a lecture at her college reunion given by her best friend, Christine Webb. When Christine's corpse is discovered, Juno must confront chilling emotional truths about her own life.

Hayter, Sparkle, *Bandit Queen Boogie*, Three Rivers Press. \$13.00. Two twenty-something women backpacking through Europe try to pull off the perfect crime spree. A paperback original.

Hoag, Tami, *Kill The Messenger*, Bantam. \$27.00. Bike messenger Jace Damon narrowly escapes with his life while delivering for a lawyer. When he returns to the office that lawyer is dead – and Jace is the prime suspect.

Jackson, Jon A., *No Man's Dog*, Atlantic Monthly Press. \$24.00. Detective "Fang" Mulheisen deals with drug smugglers, international terrorists, rogue government agents, and the return of Joe Service.

Kellogg, Marne Davis, *Priceless*, St. Martin's Press. \$24.95. Kick Keswick was a master jewel thief before she married Commander Thomas Curtis of Scotland Yard and retired to Provence. But now someone is stealing jewels and using Kick's signature techniques.

Kernick, Simon, *The Murder Exchange*, St. Martin's Press. \$24.95. When ex-mercenary Max Iversson agrees to provide security for a nightclub owner, it turns out to be not so much a set-up as a blood-bath!

Krieg, Joyce, *Slip Cue*, St. Martin's Press. \$23.95. Shauna J. Bogart, the Sacramento talk show host returns to investigate the jail break that frees the celebrity Jasmine, who was arrested for the murder of rocker Johnny Venture.

Lange, Kelly, *Graveyard Shift*, Mysterious Press. \$25.00. News reporter Maxi Poole is on the trail of a missing boy and finds herself in the midst of a city-wide murder spree.

La Plante, Linda, *Royal Heist*, Random House. \$24.95. Edward de Jersey is in danger of losing his stable of racehorses, so plans the most audacious robbery in history. From the author of the Prime Suspect series.

Letts, Billie, *Shoot the Moon*, Warner Books. \$24.00. The tale of a small Oklahoma town and the mystery that has haunted its residents for years.

Logan, Chuck, *After the Rain*, HarperCollins. \$24.95. Phil Broker, his estranged wife, and Delta Force powerhouse, Nina, are involved with terrorism and borderland security.

Long, Jeff, *The Reckoning*, Atria Books, \$25.00. Armed with a Nikon camera and iron determination, photojournalist Molly Drake arrives in Cambodia to cover the U.S. Army-led search to recover the remains of an American military plane and its pilot, still missing thirty years after the Vietnam war.

Lovell, Glenville, *Love and Death in Brooklyn*, Putnam, \$23.95. Ex-cop Blades Overstreet investigates the death of a brilliant young African-American politician, gunned down as his career is about to take off.

McInerny, Ralph, *Requiem for a Realtor*, St. Martin's Press. \$23.95. Father Dowling is once again tangled in a web of deceit when he is told about a troubled marriage connected to one of his parishioners.

Meyer, Deon, *Heart of the Hunter*, Little Brown. \$23.95. Thobela Mpayipheli is a former government agent living quietly in a South African township – until the daughter of an old friend asks for his help.

Maitland, Barry, *The Verge Practice*, Arcade. \$25.00. Kathy Kolla and David Brock investigate the disappearance of a celebrated architect.

Muller, Marcia, *The Dangerous Hour*, Mysterious Press. \$25.00. Sharon McCone investigates a personal betrayal by one of her operatives that has put her business and reputation on the line.

O’Shaughnessy, Perri, *Unlucky in Law*, Delacorte. \$25.00. Nina Reilly is asked to handle a case in which a young man stands accused of grave robbing...and of killing the fresh corpse in it.

Robards, Karen, *Bait*, Putnam. \$24.95. Maddie Fitzgerald is on a business trip in New Orleans when a man breaks into her room and tries to kill her. She has been targeted by a hired killer who has mistaken her for his real target.

Sanders, Lawrence, *McNally’s Bluff*, Putnam. \$24.95. The late Sanders’ latest novel was actually penned by Vincent Lardo. Thought you’d like to know that.

Strohmeier, Sarah, *Bubbles A Broad*, Dutton. \$23.95. Bubbles Yablonsky - hairdresser, reporter, amateur sleuth - investigates who really murdered Carol Weaver’s steel-executive husband with cyanide-tipped fingernails.

Taylor, Sarah Stewart, *Mansions of the Dead*, St. Martin’s Press. \$23.95. Art history Professor Sweeney St. George investigates the murder of one of her students.

Wignall, Kevin, *For the Dogs*, Simon & Schuster. \$23.00. A professional hit man murders all the members of the Hatto family except the daughter, Ella, who is on vacation. She returns home torn by grief and bent on vengeance.

Zubro, Mark Richard, *File Under Dead*, St. Martin’s Press. \$23.95. Chicago high school teacher Tom Mason is working as a volunteer at the local gay youth services center. He finds himself at the center of a murder investigation when he discovers the severed head of the director in a filing cabinet.

Sally Owen is a book dealer and was the manager of The Mysterious Bookshop in New York City from 1996 to 2002. You can reach her via e-mail: sallyowen@verizon.net.

Or via mail:

Sally Owen

1825 Foster Avenue, Apt. 2J

Brooklyn, NY 11230

Phone: 718-434-1705

Visit www.owenbookseller.com