

# BOOKAHOLIC

## For the Mystery Addict

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### WHAT I'VE BEEN READING

#### **CASE HISTORIES, Kate Atkinson, Little Brown. \$23.95**

Three families who have experienced tragedy are prompted by circumstances to reopen their unresolved cases. The man they all happen to choose to investigate for them is private detective Jackson Brodie, a seemingly hapless divorcee who agrees to follow trails long gone cold. Atkinson, who won the Whitbread Book of the Year Award for *Behind the Scenes at the Museum*, has gathered here a cast of characters impossible not to love. The plot is intricately constructed and the writing is nothing less than breathtaking. Definitely one of the reads of the year for me.

#### **THE FINAL SOLUTION, Michael Chabon, Fourth Estate. \$16.95**

Another prize winner who here gives us a novella featuring Sherlock Holmes, although Chabon never actually mentions his name. It is 1944 and England is at war as an ageing man, once a renowned detective, tends his bees. When he meets a young boy with a remarkable parrot, he is soon helping to solve a murder. I have never quite understood the passion for Holmesian pastiches but I'd be a convert if they were all as extraordinary as this. In the hands of Chabon, this small gem is a mix of the, by now well-known, talents of Holmes and the horrors of war.

#### **NIGHT FALL, Nelson DeMille, Warner Books. \$26.95**

DeMille's latest is based on the true story of the crash of TWA flight 800 off the coast of Long Island in July of 1996 and he brings back John Corey, former New York City homicide detective, now working for the federal Anti-Terrorist Task Force. Corey is married to Kay Mayfield, an FBI agent who worked on the TWA flight 800 case. She confides in Corey that she is not totally satisfied with the official result: a mechanical failure that caused the center fuel tank to explode. Corey is soon convinced that there has been a cover up and, with Kay providing background, he re-interviews witnesses and tries to find the couple who, it is believed, filmed the whole crash from the beach where they were trysting away from their spouses. A page turner from start to finish, I wondered how DeMille was going to resolve this mystery and he does it masterfully. As the story progressed I was gradually enveloped by a feeling of dreadful inevitability. Excellently done.

**THE ROTTWEILER, Ruth Rendell, Crown Publishers. \$25.00**

A serial garrotter is on the loose in a small London neighborhood. He has been dubbed The Rottweiler because the first victim had a bite mark on her neck. Although the police have discounted that bite as incidental, the name has stuck and the neighborhood is on edge as new victims are found. After last year's brilliant Inspector Wexford mystery, *The Babes in the Wood*, I was looking forward to this. Alas, the tension is not sustained. We meet the members of this ethnically diverse neighborhood and we know it is one of them. It is also quite obvious who it is not and the story becomes tedious as Rendell takes too much time dangling this particular red herring in front of the reader. In the end, I didn't really care which of the neighbors was the killer. Very disappointing stuff from one of the, usually, best UK writers.

**COLOR BLIND, Jonathan Santlofer, Wm. Morrow. \$24.95**

It is hard to describe the plot of this follow up to *The Death Artist* without giving everything away. Here's the bare bones: Kate McKinnon, former cop now art critic, is once again asked by the NYPD to help track down a serial killer. This one is leaving oddly colored paintings at the crime scenes. There's a whole other element to this plot, but it means more if you have read the previous book. This can certainly be read on its own, but a chunk of information from *The Death Artist* gives an added zip. Santlofer, an artist himself, writes gruesome stuff which is enhanced by his knowledge of the art world.

## ON MY READING LIST

**MCSWEENEY'S ENCHANTED CHAMBER OF ASTONISHING STORIES, Edited and with an Introduction by Michael Chabon, Vintage. \$13.95**

Original stories from Michael Chabon, Roddy Doyle, Stephen King, Jonathan Lethem, Alan Furst, Joyce Carol Oates, Peter Straub, etc., covering a number of genres. If this is anything like the first McSweeney's volume, *Mammoth Treasury of Thrilling Tales*, we're in for some fine reading.

**METRO GIRL, Janet Evanovich, HarperCollins. \$26.95**

Evanovich introduces Alexandra Barnaby who is in Florida looking for her younger brother, Wild Bill. There she meets Sam Hooker whose boat has been stolen and who follows her in the hope that she will lead him to Wild Bill. Hot nights, murder, graft, car chases, land grabs, cussing and tasteless sexual innuendo. It's all here. Evanovich has a huge fan club (of which I am not a member) and this is bound to please them.

**MEN AND CARTOONS, Jonathan Lethem, Doubleday. \$21.95**

These short stories include *The Dystopianist*, *Thinking of His Rival*, *Is Interrupted by a Knock on the Door*, Lethem's tale that features suicidal sheep, and *Super Goat Man* a

satire on the failures of the sixties baby boomers and their children. Lethem is never less than fascinating.

***WOLVES EAT DOGS*, Martin Cruz Smith, Simon & Schuster. \$25.96**

Arkady Renko, sleuth, returns with a case set in the new Russia. Pasha Ivanov, billionaire businessman, has jumped to his death and Renko discovers hidden demons and international plots which lead him to Chernobyl, site of the Earth's worse nuclear reactor accident.

***NOBODY RUNS FOREVER*, Richard Stark, Mysterious Press. \$23.95**

When a stool pigeon is killed, master criminal Parker is forced to reconsider his life's work. For a nanosecond. When his expertise is called for in the "heist of a lifetime," money troubles and sheer boredom override the warning signs. Parker is soon up to his neck and he'll need every trick he knows to avoid paying for his questionable line of work.

## FIRST MYSTERIES

***MURDER AT THE B-SCHOOL*, Jeffrey Cruikshank, Mysterious Press. \$24.95**

Assistant Professor Wim Vermeer is summoned to the Dean's office and he can't imagine what he's done. But it is the death of Eric McInnes that the Dean is concerned about. The second son of a fantastically wealthy family, and a student in Harvard's prestigious graduate program, McInnes has been found presumably drowned and Vermeer is asked to look into this death. It isn't long before Vermeer realizes he's been set up as the fall guy for a very nasty coverup. Cruikshank is a well known financial writer. This is his first novel.

***THE DRUPERMAN TAPES*, John Goodger, St. Martin's Press. \$24.95**

Druperman, the head of a confidential cooperative of the most powerful casinos in Las Vegas, receives a videotape threatening violence against the members' casinos unless a ransom is paid. The casino owners dig their heels in but Steve Forrester, the head of security at Las Vegas' top casino, senses that this group of criminals is deadly serious. He will have to risk his own life, and that of his new love, to stop them.

***FALSE PROFITS*, Patricia Smiley, Mysterious Press. \$23.95**

Tucker Sinclair, recently divorced, is living with her mother and her mother's annoying West Highland Terrier. This is a temporary arrangement since Tucker is a senior manager with Aames and Associates. When she's asked to write a simple business plan for Milton Polk and her research shows his plan is not practical, he flies into a rage, disappears, and Tucker is left with an irate boss who accuses her of tricking L.A.'s

money men out of eleven million dollars. Add to this mix a dead body and a sexy detective and you have a story bound to appeal to fans of Janet Evanovich.

## NON MYSTERIES OF NOTE

### **A CLOCK WITHOUT HANDS, Guy Burt, Ballantine. \$24.95**

Alex returns to Italy where he grew up and tries to resolve an incident involving him and his friends Jamie and Anna. As children, they came across a wounded man and nursed him back to health, gradually discovering who he was as they heard about a shoot-out involving terrorists. Guy Burt wrote the very chilling *The Hole* when he was eighteen. This is his third novel.

### **THE COURAGE CONSORT, Michel Faber, Harcourt. \$22.00**

This volume contains three of Faber's novellas: *The Courage Consort* which tells of an *a capella* vocal ensemble sequestered in a Belgian chateau to rehearse a complicated new piece; in *The Hundred and Ninety-Nine Steps* a lonely woman joins an archaeological dig at Whitby Abbey and unearths a mystery involving a long-hidden murder; and in *The Fahrenheit Twins* two children, identical in all but gender, are left at the icy zenith of the world by their anthropologist parents, where they create their own ritual civilization. Michel Faber, the author of *Under the Skin*, a story that will stay with me forever, and *The Crimson Petal and The White*, may just be the most distinctive and empathic writer at work today.

### **RUNAWAY, Alice Munro, Knopf. \$24.00**

Alice Munro is surely one of the greatest short story writers and this collection is about women of all ages and circumstance. The runaway of the title story is a young woman who, though she thinks she wants to, is incapable of leaving her husband. All Munro's stories are about the power and betrayals and surprises of love.

## NEWS FROM THE UK

### **WHITER THAN THE LILY, Alys Clare**

No info

### **THE YEAR OF THE WOMAN, Jonathan Gash, Allison & Busby**

A Lovejoy narrative, I hope.

### **THE VESUVIUS CLUB, Mark Gatiss, Simon & Schuster**

Set in London in the 1890s and introducing Lucifer Box, a portrait painter, who lives at No. 9 Downing Street. Box is a witty bon vivant who also happens to be a secret agent.

**THE CHAPEL OF BONES, Michael Jecks**

No info

**A DETECTIVE AT DEATH'S DOOR, H.R.F. Keating, Macmillan**

No info

**DARK FIRE, C.J. Sansom, Macmillan**

Lawyer Shardlake's second outing. In 1540, Shardlake believes himself to be out of favor with Thomas Cromwell and takes the case of Elizabeth Wentworth, accused of murdering her cousin.

**THIS AND THAT**

Awards were handed out at Bouchercon which was held in Toronto this year:

**ANTHONY AWARD**

**Best Novel:** *Every Secret Thing* - Laura Lippman

**Best First Mystery:** *Monkeewrench* – P.J. Tracy

**BARRY AWARD**

**Best Novel:** *Every Secret Thing* – Laura Lippman

**Best First Mystery:** *Monkeewrench* – P.J. Tracy

**MACAVITY AWARD**

**Best Novel:** *The House Sitter* – Peter Lovesey

**Best First Mystery:** *Maisie Dobbs* – Jacqueline Winspear

**SHAMUS AWARD**

**Best Novel:** *The Guards* – Ken Bruen

**COLLECTING****Alan Furst**

For those of us who love espionage and cannot get enough of Graham Greene, Eric Ambler, or John Le Carre, a “new” author burst on the scene in the late 1990s, roughly twenty years after he started writing.

Alan Furst is a native New Yorker who spent many years living in France. His period is 1933 to 1944 and his canvas is Eastern and Western Europe during those years. His prose is elegant and his stories superb – espionage at its best. He tends to dismiss his earlier work, which is just as well, since most of us would have to mortgage our children

to own it. If you're planning to collect Furst, start with *Night Soldiers* and return to his first three books at a later date.

The good news is that Furst's later work is still quite reasonable and, since he now lives on Long Island, often is signed:

- 1976 *Your Day in the Barrel* – Atheneum, New York
- 1980 *The Paris Drop* – Doubleday, New York
- 1983 *The Caribbean Account* – Delacorte Press, New York
- 1988 *Night Soldiers* – Houghton Mifflin, Boston
- 1991 *Dark Star* – Houghton Mifflin, Boston
- 1995 *The Polish Officer* – Random House, New York
- 1996 *The World at Night* – Random House, New York
- 1999 *Red Gold* – Random House, New York
- 2000 *Kingdom of Shadows* – Victor Gallancz, London (the UK is the true first)
- 2002 *Blood of Victory* – Random House, New York
- 2004 *Dark Voyage* – Random House, New York

(Random House has recently published paperback editions of most of Furst's later novels. Read those.)

## BOOKS OF THE MONTH

**Babson, Marian, *Please Do Feed the Cat***, St. Martin's Press. \$24.95. The trouble begins when author Machu's girlfriend, Cassie, moves in with him and immediately puts his cat on a diet. These cat cozies are spoofs I think.

**Beaton, M.C., *The Deadly Dance***, St. Martin's Press. \$22.95. Agatha Raisin finally opens her own detective agency. Sam Spade she ain't!

**Brockmann, Suzanne, *Hot Target***, Ballantine. \$22.95. Troubleshooters Inc. must act as bodyguard to movie producer who is receiving death threats.

**Charles, Paul, *I Love the Sound of Breaking Glass***, St. Martin's Press. \$22.95. Inspector Christy Kennedy investigates the disappearance of a record company director.

**Churchill, Jill, *A Midsummer Night's Scream***, Wm. Morrow. \$23.95. Jane Jeffry's best friend Shelley buys a run down theatre. When a cast member is found dead, Jane and Shelley investigate – between snacks.

**Clark, Mary Higgins & Clark, Carol Higgins, *O Christmas Tree, My Christmas Tree***, Simon & Schuster. \$20.00. Mother and daughter reteam as Alvirah Meehan and Regan Reilly solve a Christmas mystery.

**Crider, Bill, *A Bond with Death***, St. Martin's Press. \$22.95. Professor Sally Good is the subject of rumors that she is a descendant of the a Salem "witch." When another professor, a rival of Sally's, is killed, people suspect her.

- Davidson, Diane Mott, *Double Shot***. Wm. Morrow. \$24.95. The prison sentence of Goldy Schultz's husband has been commuted and now Goldy finds herself the victim of threats, rumors, and violence. Goldy is a caterer so recipes are, of course, included.
- Fiffer, Sharon, *Buried Stuff***, St. Martin's Press. \$23.95. Jane Wheel unearths a corpse in the fourth installment of this "antiques picker" mystery series.
- Grabien, Deborah, *The Famous Flower of Serving Men***, St. Martin's Press. \$22.95. Folk-singer Ringan Laine and his girlfriend, theatre producer Penny Wintercraft-Hawkes, come across a ghost while restoring an old theatre.
- Gregory, Philippa, *The Virgin's Lover***, Touchstone. \$24.95. Political intrigue set during the first years of Elizabeth I's reign.
- Johnson, Dolores, *Taking the Wrap***, St. Martin's Press. \$23.95. Denver's intrepid dry-cleaner/sleuth Mandy Dyer encounters a baffling case of mistaken identity – or is it?
- Kane, Stephanie, *Seeds of Doubt***, Scribner. \$24.00. Dyslexic criminal defense lawyer Jackie Flowers defends a woman accused of abducting a young child.
- Kellerman, Jonathan, *Twisted***, Ballantine. \$26.95. Isaac Gomez must convince homicide detective Petra Connor that there is a serial killer loose in LA. Petra finds it hard to believe that a killer could go undetected for years, but that's precisely this killer's homicidal pattern: nobody notices him.
- Krentz, Jayne Ann, *Falling Awake***, Putnam. \$24.95. Isabel Wright works at the Belvedere Center for Sleep Research analyzing the dreams of others. One of her subjects, known only as Client Number Two, works for a highly classified government agency, and he's been ordered to make contact with Isabel.
- Kurland, Michael, *Sherlock Holmes: The Hidden Years***, St. Martin's Press. \$24.95. An anthology of original stories which speculates on what happened to Sherlock Holmes between 1891 when he disappeared over Reichenbach Falls and 1894 when he resurfaced in London.
- Matturro, Claire, *Skinny-Dipping***, Wm. Morrow. \$23.95. Lilly Rose Cleary is a partner in a law firm in Sarasota. After representing a client in a whiplash case, she is ambushed at her office door. But why?
- Patterson, James, *London Bridges***, Little Brown. \$27.95. Alex Cross battles global terrorism.
- Perry, Anne, *A Christmas Visitor***, Ballantine. \$16.95. Henry Rathbone, featured in Perry's William Monk series, takes on the role of an amateur investigator when a murder occurs at a snowbound estate in the Lake District.
- Roberts, Gillian, *Till the End of Tom***, Ballantine. \$22.95. Philadelphia English teacher Amanda Pepper discovers Tomas Severin dying at the foot of the school's marble staircase. She is hired by his family to investigate their relative's death.
- Sinha, Indra, *The Death of Mr. Love***, Wm. Morrow. \$24.95. A novel of vengeance based on a real life murder in 1950s Bombay.
- Swift, Virginia, *Bye, Bye, Love***, HarperCollins. \$24.95. When singer Thomas "Stone" Jackson asks college professor and sometime sleuth Sally Alder for a little help, she can't say no.

**Thornton, Betsy, *Dead for the Winter***, St. Martin's Press. \$23.95. Chloe Newcombe, Cochise County victim advocate, is assigned to the widow of a murder victim to whom she was once attracted. There is no shortage of suspects.

**Truman, Margaret, *Murder at Union Station***, Ballantine. \$24.95. When Louis Russo, former mob hit man, arrives at Union Station, two men are there to meet him. One is his biographer, the other kills him.

**Winegardner, Mark, *The Godfather Returns***, Random House. \$26.95. Winegardner continues the Corleone Family saga. This novel describes the events between the end of Mario Puzo's *Godfather* and the beginning of Francis Ford Coppola's movie sequels. For those of you who cannot get enough.

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](mailto:sallyowen@verizon.net).

Or via mail:

Sally Owen

1825 Foster Avenue, Apt. 2J

Brooklyn, NY 11230

Phone: 718-434-1705

Visit [www.owenbookseller.com](http://www.owenbookseller.com)