

BOOKAHOLIC

For the Mystery Addict

December 2004

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Welcome to the third year of **Bookaholic**, celebrating two years of completely subjective reporting!

This has been a lean month. I usually receive an embarrassment of riches from publishers – reading copies galore to choose from. But I received precisely none for December leading me to believe that only holiday books were being published. But never fear! We'll be getting our mystery fix. You'll just have to wait for some of these gems: the books I've been reading are all being published in January.

WHAT I'VE BEEN READING

VALLEY OF BONES, Michael Gruber, Wm. Morrow. \$24.95

In Miami, Detective Jimmy Paz is called in when a wealthy oilman falls from his hotel balcony onto the railings below. The only suspect, who was in the man's room at the time, is Emmylou Dideroff, a pious woman who communes with the saints. With his new partner, Tito Morales, and police psychologist Lorna Wise, Jimmy Paz must find out the truth behind the notebooks being filled by Emmylou who is more than happy to be writing out her confession. Like his last book, *Tropic of Night*, Gruber has written an eerie story in which the best and worst of cultural beliefs are combined. Paz's background in Santeria and Emmylou's Christianity are both fascinating and terrifying, and Gruber has once again, in Emmylou and Lorna, created women whose stories are jaw dropping. This is turning out to be a terrific series.

THE COLD DISH, Craig Johnson, Viking. \$23.95

This first novel is set in Wyoming in the shadow of the Bighorn Mountains where there is peace between the whites and Native American communities after a long and bloody history. Sheriff Walt Longmire investigates when the body of Cody Pritchard is found near the Northern Cheyenne Reservation. Two years earlier Cody and three other boys were convicted of brutally raping Melissa Little Bird, a young Cheyenne girl with fetal alcohol syndrome. The boys were guilty but were let off with suspended sentences. The townsfolk think Cody's death was a hunting accident, but Sheriff Longmire isn't so sure. The writing here is quirky – Walt Longmire lives in his head much of time and we're privy to his thoughts and little private jokes – but after the first chapter I found this impossible to put down. Great characters, great story. The first in what I hope is a long series.

***DANGEROUS WOMEN*, Otto Penzler, Ed., Mysterious Press. \$24.95**

Some of you have asked me, jokingly I assume, how much Otto pays me to review his books. NOT ENOUGH! He does, however, edit several terrific series which mystery fans ignore at their own risk. Here, OP has assembled a veritable who's who of mystery writers, all of whom have taken a crack at stories featuring women they consider dangerous. Michael Connelly brings together Harry Bosch and Terry McCaleb (before his heart transplant), Pretty Boy Floyd plays a minor part in Elmore Leonard's story, and Laura Lippman's heroine has an extraordinary collection of...well, read the story. Many of the writers consider a woman most dangerous when she has control of that part of a man's body which he can't seem to control himself, but it is Nelson DeMille who comes closest to my definition of a dangerous woman: she's anonymous, she has a gun, and she uses it. Often. An excellent collection.

***AT RISK*, Stella Rimington, Knopf. \$24.95**

The British Intelligence Joint Counter-Terrorist Group has a problem. It seems that an "invisible" has been deployed. An "invisible" is an ethnic native of the target country who can cross its borders unchecked and unnoticed – a nightmare for security. Liz Carlyle, intelligence officer, realizes that there is an imminent terrorist threat and she can figure out the invisible's port of entry, but from there she is almost completely in the dark. This debut novel starts slowly and builds to a crescendo of almost unbearable tension. The author is well qualified to write this story: during her 30-year career with MI5, she was director of the countersubversion, counterespionage and counterterrorism branches and was appointed director general of MI5 in 1992.

ON MY READING LIST

***ROAD TO PURGATORY*, Max Allan Collins, Wm. Morrow. \$24.95**

It is 1942 and Michael O'Sullivan, the boy who accompanied his gangster father on the road, is now a man. At twenty-two he is a veteran of Bataan and is returning to Chicago to take on the Capone mob. As Michael "Satariano" he will risk his life by becoming a trusted aide to Frank Nitti. A parallel story set in 1922 tells the story of Michael's father, chief enforcer to Irish godfather John Looney. This is a follow up to Collins's bestseller *Road To Perdition* which was made into a film starring Tom Hanks and Paul Newman.

***WHITEOUT*, Ken Follett, Dutton. \$26.95**

Several people are trapped in a remote family house in Scotland during a blizzard on Christmas Eve: Stanley Oxenford who has developed a drug to fight a deadly virus, a container of which is missing; his grown children who are spending the holiday with him and who have their eyes on the money the drug will bring; Toni Gallo, the security director of the medical research firm; and a local television reporter who has sniffed out the story. As the storm worsens, emotional sparks fly and hidden traitors and unexpected heroes will emerge.

BETHLEHEM ROAD MURDER, Batya Gur, HarperCollins. \$24.95

The body of a young woman is discovered in the attic of a house on Bethlehem Street in the Baka neighborhood of Jerusalem. Chief Superintendent Michael Ohayon is called to the scene. Gur, who lives in Jerusalem where she is the literary critic of *Ha'Aretz*, Israel's prestigious newspaper, only gives us a Michael Ohayon mystery once in a blue moon and it is always worth the wait.

SKELETON MAN, Tony Hillerman, HarperCollins. \$25.95

Former Navajo Tribal Police Lieutenant Joe Leaphorn is investigating what appears to be a simple trading post robbery. He will soon need the help of Sergeant Jim Chee and his fiancée, Bernie, who are searching for the remains of a passenger on a plane that went down in the Grand Canyon 50 years ago. That passenger had an attaché case full of diamonds handcuffed to his wrist and one of those diamonds has turned up in Leaphorn's robbery.

THE FIRE BABY, Jim Kelly, St. Martin's Press. \$24.95

Philip Dryden, small-town journalist, was introduced in the wonderful first novel, *The Water Clock*. His wife, Laura, was in a coma then. Now she is slowly emerging from that coma; as she does so, she overhears a confession that could blow open the murder story Dryden is covering. If this is as good as Kelly's debut, it could turn out to be one of my favorite series.

THE COMPLETE WESTERN STORIES OF ELMORE LEONARD, Elmore Leonard, Wm. Morrow. \$25.95

A complete collection of the stories that launched Leonard's career. From the first short story he ever wrote – "The Trail of the Apache" - through fifty years of western tales, this is a must-have collection for every Elmore Leonard fan.

FIRST MYSTERIES

THE BLUE ROSE, Anthony Eglin, St. Martin's Press. \$23.95

Alex and Kate Sheppard have finally found the perfect house nestled in the English countryside. The Parsonage is supposed to be their refuge and paradise, but when they make a beautiful discovery their world is shattered by the publicity. They find themselves involved in strange experiments, coded journals, greed, and murder and the only way out is to unravel the secret of the Blue Rose. I have only read one review of this book and it was a rave.

ASPEN PULP, Patrick Hasburgh, St. Martin's Press. \$23.95

Former TV writer turned private eye Jake Wheeler is hired to find runaway cheerleader Tinker Mellon. Jake, using what he has learned from *The Rockford Files* and other TV detective shows, uncovers a crime ring that lies within the old mine shafts of Aspen Mountain.

NON MYSTERIES OF NOTE

LOOP GROUP, Larry McMurtry, Simon & Schuster. \$25.00

Maggie and Connie, two women approaching their sunset years, are determined to have one more grand adventure. Maggie is being pushed around by her trio of married daughters and Connie, who likes younger men, has taken on a real nut, so when a series of bizarre events occur, the two women become desperate and, armed with a .38 Special, they drive due east encountering along the way a quirky cross-section of humanity. If this sounds like *Thelma and Louise*, it is probably meant to.

NEWS FROM THE UK

Not many mysteries being published in the UK either!

I recently wrote about John Connolly's book, *Nocturnes*. I described it as a collection of short stories. And indeed it is. However, the collection includes a novella which features Connolly's character, Charlie Parker. This is a must for completists. Connolly's next Charlie Parker novel is coming out next year, I hear.

THIS AND THAT

Have you seen the December 5th issue of the Book Review of The New York Times? In it are listed the editors' picks and a variety of books-of-the-year lists, including The 100 Best Books of the Year. Am I dreaming! There is no mystery list and no "traditional" mysteries made the 100 Best list! Here then are the books from the 100 Best that can fit, some only just, into the mystery category:

Harbor – Lorraine Adams
Jonathan Strange & Mr. Norell – Susanna Clarke
The Hamilton Case – Michelle de Kretser
Men and Cartoons – Jonathan Lethem
The Falls – Joyce Carol Oates
Snow – Orhan Pamuk

Slim pickings! There were some excellent choices of non-mysteries on the list and the following are on my shelf and, I hope, on yours:

My Life – Bill Clinton (yes, really!)
Chain of Command – Seymour Hersh
The Line of Beauty – Alan Hollinghurst
War Trash – Ha Jin

An Unfinished Season – Ward Just
Aloft – Chang-rae Lee
Cloud Atlas – David Mitchell
The Plot Against America – Philip Roth
In the Shadow of No Towers – Art Spiegelman
The Master – Colm Toibin
Amateur Marriage – Anne Tyler

COLLECTING

Here are some indispensable sources for the new, or old, collector:

FIRSTS: The Book Collector's Magazine

Published monthly except July and August. Lots of articles for the collector plus listings of dealers, book fairs, and book prices. \$40 per year in the US, \$60 per year in Canada and Mexico, \$95 per year all other countries.

Firsts Magazine, 4493 N. Camino Gacela, Tucson, Arizona 85718-6807

e-mail: firstsmag@aol.com

Book Collecting for Fun & Profit, Bill McBride, McBride/Publisher

A fascinating pamphlet for the beginner. How to get started, parts of a book and how they're described, where to get books, how to sell, etc. A great resource.

McBride/Publisher, 585 Prospect Avenue, West Hartford, CT 06105

e-mail: jumpingfrog@worldnet.att.net

www.jumpingfrog.com

The Deadly Directory, Edited by Kate Derie.

This is a guide for mystery, crime and suspense readers and writers. Listed are booksellers, associations, events, publishers, etc.

Deadly Serious Press, 6702 N. Casas Adobes Drive, Tucson, Arizona 85704-6124

e-mail: info@deadlyserious.com

www.deadlyserious.com

BOOKS WITH A BUZZ

When I was at The Mysterious Bookshop recently, everybody who walked in or called on the telephone included with their order a copy of **The Final Solution** by **Michael Chabon**. Two reasons for this: it is a Sherlockian pastiche and it is written by a Pulitzer Prize winner. I don't know how many first editions were published, or how many were signed, but putting this in your collection would appear to be a no brainer...

BOOKS OF THE MONTH

Bannister, Jo, *The Depth of Solitude*, St. Martin's Press. \$23.95. Brodie Farrell's new case involves looking for her best friend Daniel, who seems to have disappeared after their latest disagreement.

Bland, Eleanor Taylor, *A Cold and Silent Dying*, St. Martin's Press. \$23.95. Chicago homicide detective Marti MacAlister and her partner Matthew Jessenovik investigate the death of a homeless woman.

Clement, Peter, *The Inquisitor*, Ballantine. \$24.95. When an increasing number of cancer patients in the hospital begin to complain that they've had out-of-body or near-death experiences, Earl Garnet grows suspicious.

Cooper, Natasha, *Keep Me Alive*, St. Martin's Press. \$24.95. Barrister Trish Maguire takes on one of the biggest supermarket chains in England on behalf of a group of small food producers.

Doherty, P.C., *The Hangman's Hymn*, St. Martin's Press. \$22.95. The series based on characters from Chaucer's Canterbury Tales continues with *The Carpenter's Tale*.

Hillerman, Tony, *The Leaphorn and Chee Novels*, HarperCollins. \$19.95.

Skinwalkers, *A Thief of Time*, and *Coyote Waits* are now available in one volume.

Keating, H.R.F., *A Dreaming Detective*, St. Martin's Press. \$23.95. Harriet Martens is asked to take another look at an unsolved crime: over thirty years ago the Boy Preacher was brutally murdered at The Imperial Hotel which is about to be demolished.

Koontz, Dean, *Life Expectancy*, Bantam. \$27.00. No information, just a tease, about the latest from this best-selling author.

Longworth, Gary, *The Unquiet Dead*, St. Martin's Press. \$24.95. Female detective Jessie Driver returns to take on a mummy and an exorcist in this second in the series.

McCall Smith, Alexander, *The Girl Who Married a Lion*, Pantheon. \$20.00. A collection of African tales from Zimbabwe and Botswana remembered and retold.

Mortimer, John, *Rumpole and the Penge Bungalow Murders*, Viking. \$24.95.

Rumpole's very first case is told here. A man is accused of murdering his father and his father's friend with a pistol taken from a dead German pilot.

Scottoline, Lisa, *The First Two Novels*, HarperCollins. \$19.95. *Everywhere that Mary Went* and *Final Appeal* are available for the first time in hardcover.

Thurlo, Aimee and David, *Thief In Retreat*, St. Martin's Press. \$23.95. Sister Agatha uncovers the truth about a closed monastery – complete with a wandering ghost, thefts dating back twenty years, and local legends.

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