

BOOKAHOLIC

For the Mystery Addict

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WHAT I'VE BEEN READING

***MIDNIGHT CAB*, James W. Nichol, Canongate. \$23.00**

A three-year-old boy is standing at the side of the road holding on to a wire fence. His mother told him to stay there and hold on and then she disappeared. The only clue to the boy's identity is a photograph in his pocket of two young girls. Sixteen years later, Walker Devereaux travels to Toronto determined to discover the truth about his biological mother. He takes a job as a cab driver and, with the help of the night dispatcher, wheelchair-bound Krista, he begins the complicated task of seeking out his identity and that of his mother. This is also the story of Bobby, troubled and violent, and he and Walker will cross paths but the connection will stay hidden until almost the final page. This kept me turning the pages and I thought I had solved the riddle of Walker's identity more than once.

***SWEET SUNDAY*, John Lawton.**

I've been putting off reading this novel for some time because it was not in the series featuring Frederick Troy of Scotland Yard. That was a mistake. Lawton has set this story in New York in 1969 and has managed to capture the people and the times in an extraordinary way. As the novel opens, the summer is turning out to be the hottest on record, Norman Mailer is running for mayor, and Turner Raines is on his way to Canada. Turner, a sometime private eye, often acts as liaison between American families and their sons who run to Canada to escape the draft. He's chasing a punk called Joey D and nothing seems to go right, but when he returns to New York he discovers that his best friend has been murdered with an ice pick and sets out to find the murderer. Turner comes from a remarkable family who we meet in flashback and this story is made especially wonderful by the feel Lawton gets for coming of age in the late fifties and early sixties. I finished it just in time for it to make my list of favorite reads of the year. Sorry to say that this novel has not yet been published in this country. But I know that won't stop you from finding copies. It is published in the UK in both hardcover and paperback.

***HIDDEN RIVER*, Adrian McKinty, Scribner. \$24.00**

McKinty follows up his extraordinary first novel, *Dead I Well May Be*, with an equally gritty thriller. Alexander Lawson is a former detective for Northern Ireland's police force who was forced to resign in disgrace when he became addicted to heroin. When his former sweetheart, Victoria Patawasti, is murdered in America, he is asked by her family to go to Colorado and investigate. In Denver things begin to go wrong immediately when

the only credible witness to Victoria's murder is accidentally killed. Alex finds himself on the run from the cops and also the Ulster police who believe he has information about a corruption scandal back home. With this second novel, McKinty is surely going to cement his position as one of the best thriller writers at work today.

***HONEYMOON*, James Patterson and Howard Roughan, Little Brown. \$27.95**

Guilty pleasure alert! Every few James Patterson books, I'll pick one up just to check in on him. His co-author here is Howard Roughan who wrote the very good *The Promise of a Lie* earlier this year. We are introduced to Nora Sinclair who, apart from her stunning looks, lovingly described, does not seem to have any redeeming features - immediately reinforcing my theory that James Patterson does not write many of his books with a female audience in mind. The FBI are looking at Nora because it would seem that she has killed off her husband. The reader knows she also has another husband and a fiancée in the wings, both extremely rich, and FBI agent, Craig Reynolds, posing as an insurance agent, is trying to get closer to this Black Widow. It isn't long before Craig is caught in Nora's web endangering both the investigation and his life. There are a couple of subplots, one involving Nora's mother, that give the story another layer, but Patterson needn't have bothered. His audience is going to lap this up. Why wouldn't I put this book down? Maybe because there was no need to. I sped through the nearly four hundred pages of large type and white space at an extraordinary pace. This is going to the bestseller lists.

***THE HEARTBREAK LOUNGE*, Wallace Stroby, St. Martin's Press. \$22.95**

Harry Rane, helping out a friend with some investigative work, is approached by Nikki Ellis. She feels menaced by her ex, Johnny Harrow, who has just been released from prison and who is determined to find her and the baby Nikki put up for adoption seven years before. Johnny is on his way to New Jersey and to the Heartbreak Lounge, where he first met Nikki, to claim his son and start a new life. Ex-state trooper Harry Rane was introduced in *The Barbed-Wire Kiss* which I did not read but which, I was told, was a wonderful dark and well-told story. I believe it. This is an excellent addition to the hard-boiled tradition and Johnny Harrow is one of the deadliest creations to cross the country leaving death and fear in his wake.

ON MY READING LIST

***THE EMPIRE OF THE WOLVES*, Jean-Christophe Grange, Ecco. \$24.95**

Anna suffers from amnesia and hallucinations and undergoes a series of tests which reveal that she has had drastic cosmetic surgery, but Anna doesn't remember when, where, or why. Meanwhile, in Paris, two policemen investigate the brutal murders of three Turks. Their investigation lead them to "The Gray Wolves" a right-wing Turkish organization involved in illegal trafficking. Grange, who wrote *Blood-Red Rivers* doesn't get a whole lot of attention in this country. A shame since he's very good.

***FORESTS OF THE NIGHT*, James W. Hall, St. Martin's Press. \$24.95**

The life of patrolwoman Charlotte Monroe changes in an instant when she opens the door to a stranger who has a warning for her husband: a note scrawled in Cherokee reads, "You're next." The warning becomes more ominous as Charlotte and her husband, Parker, discover the truth about the man. When their troubled daughter runs away to join this outlaw, Charlotte follows them into the Great Smoky Mountains. Hall, who usually sets his mysteries in southern Florida, has changed venues here and I look forward to reading this which will, I'm sure, be as lyrical as his previous work.

***THE VILLA OF MYSTERIES*, David Hewson, Delacorte. \$22.00**

In Rome's Campo dei Fiori, a woman tells two carabinieri that her sixteen-year-old daughter has just been abducted. Detective Nic Costa knows what the two officers do not: that a forensic pathologist is examining the corpse of a girl whose disappearance and death years ago bear similarities to this new case. This is the second mystery featuring Caravaggio loving Nic Costa and police pathologist Teresa Lupo.

***ALICE IN JEOPARDY*, Ed McBain, Simon & Schuster. \$25.00**

Alice Glendenning is a widow with two children trying to make ends meet while waiting for the insurance money due after her husband's death. Things have been tough for Alice, but they are about to become a nightmare. Her two children are not on the school bus home and Alice gets a phone call from a woman claiming to have her children and asking for a ransom identical to the amount Alice is going to get from the insurance company. McBain takes a break from his 87th Precinct series to bring us this novel of psychological suspense.

***CONVICTION*, Richard North Patterson, Random House. \$25.95**

Brothers Rennell and Payton Price are charged with the murder of a nine-year-old girl and a jury, abetted by an incompetent defense lawyer, quickly find the men guilty and sentence them to death. Fifteen years later, lawyer Teresa Peralta Paget and her family are convinced that not only did Rennell not receive a fair trial but also he may be innocent. Patterson, a former trial lawyer, explores the politics of death row in his new, bound-to-be bestseller.

***SEVEN TYPES OF AMBIGUITY*, Elliot Perlman, Putnam. \$27.95**

This story is told in seven parts by six different narrators whose lives are entangled in unexpected ways. It has been described as a psychological thriller and a literary adventure and the book and its author are getting all kinds of media attention, though not all of it positive. But it sounds intriguing enough to land on my must-read list.

***A COLD TREACHERY*, Charles Todd, Bantam. \$25.00**

In December 1919, constables in England's Lake District discover a scene of unimaginable carnage: the bodies of five family members in a bloodied cottage kitchen. A search is mounted for the youngest boy, missing from the scene, and Ian Rutledge is pulled from a court case to drive north where there is a murderer on the loose. This is being hailed as the best in the series so far.

FIRST MYSTERIES

***RUN THE RISK*, Scott Frost, Putnam. \$19.95**

First, a shopkeeper is shot to death, then a rare, untraceable explosive ignites in a bungalow, hurling the front door across the yard. Finally, a teenage girl goes missing, her car window smashed, her keys still in the ignition. Even before they tell her, homicide Detective Alex Delillo knows that this girl is her daughter. Frost is one of the writers behind *Twin Peaks*, so look for eerie, atmospheric tension here.

***7,000 CLAMS*, Lee Irby, Doubleday. \$23.95**

Frank Hearn, a bootlegger, loses a shipment of top-quality booze to a double-crossing thief and hunts him down, roughs him up, and finds a scrap of paper which is unmistakably an authentic IOU for \$7,000 signed by Babe Ruth. This hard-boiled adventure, set in the Roaring '20s, takes Frank to St. Petersburg, Florida, where the Yankees are about to begin spring training. Along for the ride is Ginger DeMore, a pistol-packing blonde who is being sought by a Chicago mobster named Al Capone.

***THE DEVIL'S RIGHT HAND*, J.D. Rhoades, St. Martin's Press. \$21.95**

Jack Keller, a Gulf War vet, makes a living by tracking bail jumpers for an agency in North Carolina. His assignment begins routinely enough when he starts to trace a loser for jumping bail on a simple breaking-and-entering charge, but events are soon spiralling out of control. Keller tangles with a couple of locals hellbent on avenging their father's murder, a cop with a vicious mean streak, and the cop's beautiful partner. This looks to be a dark and stormy debut.

***BENEATH A PANAMANIAN MOON*, David Terrenoire, St. Martin's Press. \$23.95**

John Harper may be the most reluctant player in the history of spycraft. He's retired but he's a musician so when a Panamanian resort hotel needs a piano man with special skills, Harper finds himself involved with American mercenaries and Colombians with an eye on the history books. A conspiracy is set to explode on New Year's Eve and Harper is scheduled to play one final farewell performance before the real fireworks begin.

NON MYSTERIES OF NOTE

***FASCINATION*, William Boyd, Knopf. \$24.00**

Boyd is one of the UK's finest writers and this is a collection of short stories exploring the ways a life can be dominated by a need for love and the torments that arise when love is misplaced: a film director's journal becomes an unintentional record of his obsessive love for his leading lady; a performance artist, longing for stability and order, reveals the details of her chaotic life; a prostitute finds an unexpected friend in a young man who

plays piano in a brothel; and a man's life is revealed in film format – rewinding and fast forwarding.

***BAD DIRT*, Annie Proulx, Scribner. \$25.00**

This is Proulx's second collection of short stories (after *Close Range*) set in Wyoming. Proulx, who wrote *The Shipping News* and the far superior, in my opinion, *Postcards*, is a stunning writer whose stories always display her vast knowledge of the West, of history, of ranching and farming. And if that doesn't turn you on, her compelling characters will.

***LIBERATION ROAD*, David L. Robbins, Bantam. \$25.00**

Robbins, who wrote the very well received *War of the Rats* and *Scorched Earth*, retells the story of the Red Ball Express in this historical novel. In the seven months following D-Day, the Allied forces had no supplies for the American lines as they swept west, pushing the Germans out of France. The Red Ball Express, which was formed to feed the Allied effort, was overwhelmingly manned by African-American troops and this is the never-before-told story of personal courage and racial tension as Germany was being defeated.

NEWS FROM THE UK

***DEATH OF A CHANCELLOR*, David Dickinson, Constable**

***THE GAME*, Mandasue Heller, Hodder & Stoughton**

A stand-alone thriller.

***THE LONELY DEAD*, Michael Marshall, HarperCollins**

I was told recently that this is a very scary stand-alone by the author of *The Straw Men* and *Upright Man*. Well, in a way it is. His previous two books, which featured Ward Hopkins, were really two segments of the same story. But Ward Hopkins is back in this novel and I can't wait.

***THE EXCURSION TRAIN*, Edward Marston, Allison & Busby**

***DEADLY WEB*, Barbara Nadel, Headline**

A naked teenage girl is found dead near the beautiful Byzantine Yoros Castle in Turkey. Inspectors Cetin Ikme and Mehmet Suleyman investigate.

***STRANGE AFFAIR*, Peter Robinson, Macmillan**

An Alan Banks mystery.

THIS AND THAT

Here are my favorite reads of the year:

Kate Atkinson – *Case Histories*
John Case – *The Murder Artist*
Michael Chabon – *The Final Solution*
Frank Devlin – *Love in All the Wrong Places*
Nelson DeMille – *Night Fall*
John Lawton – *Sweet Sunday* *
Stephen Leather – *The Chinaman* *
Don Lee – *Country of Origin*
Robert Littell - *The Defection of A.J. Lewinter* *
Michael Marshall – *The Straw Men* *
Lisa Reardon – *The Mercy Killers*

* Published prior to 2004.

COLLECTING

This is less an article about collecting than an introduction to one of my favorite mystery writers, **Andrew Taylor**, who seems to continually be experimenting with the genre. His books are fairly easy to acquire and all, with the exception of his first few books, are quite affordable.

Andrew Taylor is surely one of the most underrated writers at work today. He is of course a bigger hit in his native England than he is here. His books have been published in the US but they seem to go quickly out of print.

He won the prestigious John Creasey Memorial Award for his first book, *Caroline Miniscule*, which introduced William Dougal, an unscrupulous man, who, later in the series, becomes a private detective not averse to murder.

He also wrote a trilogy featuring intelligence agent Eric Blaines and a series under the pseudonym **Andrew Saville**.

But it is his two other series which are, for me, most impressive.

The first is the Lydmouth series, which appears to be a series of “village” mysteries but which are anything but cozy. Set in and around a fictional town on the Anglo-Welsh border in the years following World War II, Lydmouth is a typical English town – relatively self-contained, conservative, and wary of a changing world. The protagonists

are Jill Francis, a journalist from London, and Detective Inspector Richard Thornhill who comes from the Fens of East Anglia. The crimes these two investigate are not isolated incidents, rather they create a complex web of intrigue. Meanwhile, Francis and the married Thornhill fight a growing attraction which, this being the early 1950s, gives the reader a feeling for the stifling morality of that period.

But perhaps Taylor's most ambitious and successful work is the *Roth Trilogy*. This is a unified work presented in three books. The story moves backwards in time from the 1990s to the 1950s and each book reveals a layer of story that shows the origins of the evil that confronts the two main families in the trilogy.

William Dougal Series: *Caroline Miniscule* (1982), *Waiting for the End of the World* (1984); *Our Fathers' Lies* (1985); *An Old School Tie* (1986), *Freelance Death* (1987); *Blood Relation* (1990); *The Sleeping Policeman* (1992); *Odd Man Out* (1993)

Lydmouth Series: *An Air That Kills* (1994); *The Mortal Sickness* (1995); *The Lover of the Grave* (1997); *The Suffocating Night* (1998); *Where Roses Fade* (2000); *Death's Own Door* (2001); *Call The Dying* (2004).

Roth Trilogy: *The Four Last Things* (1997); *The Judgement of Strangers* (1998); *The Office of the Dead* (2000).

(Much of the information about Andrew Taylor and his books came from Andrew Taylor's website and from *The Mammoth Encyclopedia of Crime Fiction*, compiled by Mike Ashley and published by Carroll and Graf.)

BOOKS WITH A BUZZ

This is for those of you who thought you had all the possible computations of *Jonathan Strange & Mr. Norell* by **Susanna Clarke**:

You probably already have the US First Edition, the true first edition, which is available with either a black dustjacket or a white dustjacket. The book was published in the UK several weeks after the US edition was published, and for those of you who "follow the flag" (Susanna Clarke is a Brit), this edition is for you. It was published in a limited as well as a trade edition and copies in the UK are signed not only by Clarke but also by Portia Rosenberg who is the illustrator.

Now there is an edition in the US with a red dustjacket. This is not a first edition but the dustjacket is unique. Only 25,000 dustjackets were printed and the publisher limited the number each store could order.

So go to it Susanna Clarke fans.

BOOKS OF THE MONTH

Bonanno, Bill, & Pistone, Joe, *The Good Guys*, Warner Books. \$24.95. A novel about the Mafia by former mob chief Bonanno and FBI agent Pistone a.k.a. Donnie Brasco

Alexander, Bruce, *Rules of Engagement*, Putnam. \$24.95. The final Sir John Fielding mystery. Alexander died last year and this was completed by his wife and **John Shannon**.

Bernhardt, William, *Dark Eye*, Ballantine. \$25.95. Psychologist Susan Pulaski is consulted by the Las Vegas police when a young woman dies after being buried alive.

Braun, Lilian Jackson, *The Cat Who Went Bananas*, Putnam. \$23.95. James Qwilleran and his felines, Koko and Yum Yum, solve another mystery.

Brown, Rita Mae, *Cat's Eyewitness*, Bantam. \$25.00. Mary Minor "Harry" Harristeen and her trio of sleuthing pets are back for the 13th time.

Brown, Sandra, *Demon Rumm*, Bantam. \$20.00. Rylan North, actor, is living in Kirsten Rumm's house while he plays her daredevil late husband. Romance, suspense, the works.

Burke, Jan, *Bloodlines*, Simon & Schuster. \$24.00. Featuring reporter Irene Kelly.

Craig, Philip R. and Tapply, William G., *Second Sight*, Scribner. \$24.00. A Brady Coyne and J.W. Jackson mystery set on Martha's Vineyard.

Delinsky, Barbara, *Twilight Whispers*, Warner Books. \$18.95. A tragedy haunts three American families.

Eccles, Marjorie, *Killing a Unicorn*, St. Martin's Press. \$22.95. Inspector Dave Couch and his Sergeant Kat Colville investigate a murder and a disappearance in the same family.

Ephron, G.H., *Guilt*, St. Martin's Press. \$23.95. Forensic investigator Peter Zak helps police investigators track down a bomber.

Fairstein, Linda, *Entombed*, Scribner. \$26.00. Alexandra Cooper, Manhattan sex crimes prosecutor, investigates a standing human skeleton in a wall of a house being demolished – a house where Edgar Allan Poe once lived.

Fielding, Joy, *Puppet*, Atria. \$24.95. The life of a young defense attorney is thrown into turmoil when she receives a phone call informing her that her mother has been charged with murder.

Fowler, Connie May, *The Problem with Murmur Lee*, Doubleday. \$21.95. Murmur Lee Harp is astonished to find that she has drowned in the Iris Haven River. Her circle of friends set out to discover what really happened to her while Murmur Lee experiences her own journey and discovers the truth about who she truly is (or was).

Fulmer, David, *Jass*, Harcourt. \$23.00. In the red-light district of Storyville, four players of the new music they call "jass" have turned up dead. Creole detective Valentin St. Cyr investigates.

Gardner, Lisa, *Alone*, Bantam. \$24.00. A sniper with the Massachusetts State Police shoots down an armed man. But the dead man was the son of a prominent judge.

Granger, Ann, *That Way Murder Lies*, St. Martin's Press. \$23.95. Meredith Mitchell and her fiancée Detective Superintendent Alan Markby investigate a poison pen campaign in a cozy English village.

Graves, Sarah, *Tool & Die*, Bantam. \$22.00. The eighth entry in the Home Repair is Homicide series.

Grisham, John, *The Broker*, Doubleday. \$27.95. When Washington powerbroker Joel Backman is pardoned fourteen years into his twenty year sentence, his problems are just beginning.

Hardwick, Gary, *The Executioner's Game*, Wm. Morrow. \$24.95. Luther Green, company assassin, is asked to eliminate the man who trained him.

Joens, Michael, *Blood Reins*, St. Martin's Press. \$23.95. The worlds of horses and homicide collide in this tale of bogus identities, big-money endorsements, and bad breeding.

Kane, Andrea, *I'll Be Watching You*, Wm. Morrow. \$21.95. Radio personality Taylor Halstead is threatened by an e-mail note and has no idea whom she can trust.

Kent, Bill, *Street Fighter*, St. Martin's Press. \$23.95. Aged obituary writer Shep Ladderback and young reporter Andrea Cosicki are once more on the trail of wickedness in the back streets of Philadelphia.

Kozak, Harley Jane, *Dating Is Murder*, Doubleday. \$19.95. Wollie Shelley has more than her ticking biological clock to contend with. Her best friend Annika has vanished and Wollie is convinced that she's in grave danger.

Lescroart, John, *The Motive*, Dutton. \$25.95. Dismas Hardy and Abe Glitsky are embroiled in a murder that begins in the upper echelons of San Francisco society, where money and political influence collide.

Lupica, Mike, *Too Far*, Putnam. \$24.95. The Long Island town of South Shore tries to ignore a deadly hazing that threatens the future of their high-school basketball team.

McGown, Jill, *Unlucky For Some*, Ballantine. \$22.95. Detective Chief Inspectors Lloyd and Hill investigate a series of apparently motiveless murders.

McMahon, Neil, *Revolution No. 9*, HarperCollins. \$23.95. Dr. Carroll Monks is abducted by a paramilitary sociopath so that he can look after the man's ailing son.

Murphy, Shirley Rousseau, *Cat Cross Their Graves*, HarperCollins. \$24.95. When '40s film star Patty Rose is murdered, only a tortoiseshell cat named Kit hears the shots.

Roberts, John Maddox, *SPQR IX: The Princess and The Pirates*, St. Martin's Press. \$22.95. Playboy detective Decius Caecilius Metellus returns to seek glory by ridding the Mediterranean of pirates.

Roberts, Nora, *Survivor in Death*, Putnam. \$23.95. The latest "In Death" series set in New York City in 2059 and featuring Lieutenant Eve Dallas and Roarke.

Sansom, C.J., *Dark Fire*, Viking. \$24.95. Matthew Shardlake, lawyer, is asked to help a friend's young niece who is charged with murder. Set in 1540.

Smith, Peter Moore, *Los Angeles*, Little Brown. \$24.95. Angel, son of one of Hollywood's top producers, investigates the disappearance of a woman with whom he is obsessed.

Wilson, Robert, *The Vanished Hands*, Harcourt. \$25.00. A Javier Falcon mystery. Published in the UK as *The Silence of the Damned*.

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