

BOOKAHOLIC

For the Mystery Addict

April 2005

Vol. 3, No. 5

WHAT I'VE BEEN READING

***IN THE COMPANY OF LIARS*, David Ellis, Putnam. \$24.95**

Ellis, who won the Edgar for his first novel, *Line of Vision*, does something extremely risky here. He writes his story in chronological reverse, so the reader must trust the writer to make sense of what is, at first, confusing. The book begins as the story ends – with the death of Allison Pagone, a woman on trial for murder. As we move backward, we gradually learn Allison's story which is fleshed out chapter by chapter. We also meet other characters who may or may not be who they appear to be. As I say, risky. But Ellis pulls it off. Put yourself in his hands and he'll reward you with a story which is breathtaking.

***THE DEVIL OF NANKING*, Mo Hayder, Grove Press. \$24.00**

Grey is a troubled Englishwoman obsessed with the 1937 Nanking Massacre. She arrives in Tokyo seeking a survivor of the massacre who, she has heard, holds a rare piece of film footage, lost for decades, showing a specific incident during the holocaust. This man, a visiting professor at Todai University, is wary of Grey and will have nothing to do with her until he learns that Grey, in order to support herself, has taken a job as a hostess in an up market nightclub. A certain gangster is a regular visitor to that club and Professor Shi wants something from him. If Grey can get it, he will hand over the film. This book is gorgeously written and absolutely devastating. It will haunt me forever. Hayder is a writer who takes enormous risks with her work and this is not for the faint of heart.

***SILVERFIN*, Charlie Higson, Miramax Books. \$16.95**

Attention all James Bond fans. The Ian Fleming Estate gave permission to Charlie Higson to pen a series for teenagers about James Bond's formative years. In this, the first installment, James has just started school at Eton in the 1930s. During his vacation, he visits his Aunt in the Highlands of Scotland and discovers that the dark waters around the castle contain a sinister secret. This becomes young Bond's first mission to thwart a deadly foe. No, it is not Ian Fleming writing here, but this is definitely a James Bond we can recognize (although no sex yet). I loved that the format follows the books and the movies. The first chapter was a jaw dropper and had me hooked. This is being marketed to those of us who are over ten years old. The true first is Brit of course, but that comes only in paperback.

ALIBI, Joseph Kanon, Henry Holt. \$26.00

This elegant novel is set in Venice in 1946. Adam Miller, a U.S. Army war crimes investigator in Germany, is visiting his widowed mother who is being wooed by a suave Venetian, Gianni Maglione. Adam falls in love with Claudia, a Jewish woman scarred by her devastating experiences during the war. Through her eyes, Adam sees another Venice, a city haunted by atrocities and compromise during the Occupation. When the past erupts into murder, Adam finds himself at the center of a web of deception, intrigue, and moral dilemma. This novel moves at a stately pace and is one to be savored rather than devoured.

LEGENDS, Robert Littell, The Overlook Press. \$25.95

I was thrilled to learn that Littell had a new book and dropped everything to read it. It does not disappoint. Martin Odum, a private eye, is approached by Stella Kastner, a young Russian woman who engages him to find her brother-in-law. Her sister, an Orthodox Jew, wants a divorce, which under religious law requires the husband's presence. Odum takes on the case, but wait a minute, who is Odum? He was once a CIA field agent with a number of identities – or legends. Is he Dante Phippen, an IRA explosives expert? Or Lincoln Dittman, Civil War expert? Even he doesn't always know. Nor does he know if he can trust the CIA psychiatrist or the Deputy Director of Operations. As Odum tries to solve Stella's case he is battling danger and his own psychological disorientation. This is pure Littell.

ON MY READING LIST

HARD TRUTH, Nevada Barr, Putnam. \$24.95

Anna Pigeon has now married Sheriff Paul Davidson and is district ranger at Rocky Mountain National Park in Colorado. Three young girls have disappeared in the Park during a religious retreat and when two of the children emerge a month later, they claim to remember nothing (think *Picnic At Hanging Rock*). With the reappearance of the children, strange things begin to happen and Anna finds herself up against a paranoid religious sect determined to keep the girls sequestered from law enforcement and psychiatric help. Not only does Barr get better with each outing, she is getting darker, and that makes me really happy.

TRIAL BY FIRE, D.W. Buffa, Putnam. \$24.95

Julian Sinclair, a brilliant scholar, is bored with academic life so he joins the famed defense attorney Joseph Antonelli in private practice. When a married district attorney is murdered, Sinclair is accused of killing her in a fit of jealous rage which Antonelli, knowing Sinclair, feels is just not possible. But the murdered woman's husband thinks he can sink both Sinclair and Antonelli in one fell swoop. Antonelli baits the real killer to come out of hiding and the case is decided and the man is sent to prison. But the real mysteries of the murder are only just beginning. Buffa has few peers when writing legal suspense.

THE MURDERER NEXT DOOR, David Buss, Penguin Press. \$24.95

All of us love reading about fictional murderers and their victims, but when it comes to the real thing, we often shy away. It is just too frightening to discover, as in the recent unveiling of the BTK killer in Kansas, that the monster is a seemingly normal person we have known all our lives. In this extraordinary book, the author goes one step further. His research indicates that the human psyche has evolved specialized adaptations whose function is to kill. Buss explains that all of us are at risk of both being murdered and of becoming a murderer and can tell us exactly when these risks are high for us.

WE'RE IN TROUBLE, Christopher Coake, Harcourt. \$23.00

This debut collection of stories was brought to my attention by Otto Penzler who told me that one of Coake's stories, *All Through the House*, appears in his *Best American Mystery Stories 2004*. When he read it, Otto said, it was so shocking to him that it took his breath away. I can't think of a more compelling recommendation.

A SLIGHT TRICK OF THE MIND, Mitch Cullin, Doubleday. \$23.95

It is 1947 and the long-retired Sherlock Holmes lives in a remote Sussex farmhouse with his housekeeper and her young son, Roger. When Roger secretly searches Holmes's private study, he uncovers the case of Mrs. Keller, the long ago object of Holmes's deep – and never acknowledged – infatuation. The author weaves together Holmes's hidden past, his poignant struggle to retain mental acuity at ninety-three, and his unlikely relationship with Roger. A portrait of literature's most beloved detective in the twilight of his life.

COMPANY MAN, Joseph Finder, St. Martin's Press. \$24.95

Nick Conover is the CEO of a major corporation in a company town. He was once the most admired man in Fenwick, Michigan, but now, because he presided over massive layoffs, he is one of the most despised. When his family is threatened by a stalker, events spin quickly out of control and Nick is faced with a dead body and damning circumstances. This lands on my reading list because of how much I enjoyed Finder's last book, *Paranoia*.

A KILLING NIGHT, Jonathon King, Dutton. \$23.95

Max Freeman is becoming restless in his remote shack in the Everglades, so when his one-time girlfriend, Detective Sherry Richards, asks for his help as a private investigator in nailing an ex-cop she suspects of killing several young women in South Florida, Max signs on. The problem is that Sherry's suspect is a former police officer who served with Max in Philadelphia and saved Max's life. Third in this excellent series.

THE GOOD WIFE, Stewart O'Nan, Farrar, Straus & Giroux. \$24.00

Two men break into a house they believe to be empty. It isn't. Soon an old woman is dead and the house is in flames. The men are caught and across the county a pregnant woman is awakened by a call from her husband. He and his friend have gotten themselves into a little trouble. This is the story of Patty Dickerson as she raises her son,

navigates a system that has no place for her, and braves the scorn of her community. O’Nan is an extraordinary writer with much to say.

***THE PORTRAIT*, Iain Pears, Riverhead Books. \$19.95**

This short novel tells the story of an influential art critic who travels from London to the island of Houat, off France’s northwest coast, to sit for a portrait painted by an old friend. The balance of power shifts between the two men as they reminisce and the painter gradually reveals why he has accepted this commission and why he left London so mysteriously. Set in the early years of the twentieth century. I do not believe there is a UK edition of this book.

***DEAD RUN*, P.J. Tracy, Putnam. \$23.95**

Monkeewrench founders Grace MacBride and Annie Belinsky, together with Deputy Sharon Mueller, are driving from Minneapolis to Green Bay, Wisconsin, where they believe a serial killer is on the loose. When their car breaks down in the northern woods, they walk to the crossroads town of Four Corners hoping to find a mechanic. What they find is...absolutely nothing. Something terrible has happened here and the complete absence of life and severed phone lines make it impossible to get help. Gosh, I like this series, and this entry is getting much positive ink.

***WATCH YOUR BACK*, Donald E. Westlake, Mysterious Press. \$24.95**

Easy access to a New York City apartment, hordes of valuable, and an absentee owner: it’s the score of a lifetime for John Dortmund, but the hapless criminal must also contend with the Mafia who think his beloved gin joint, the OJ, is perfect for a little fraud via a big fire. Dortmund and his gang split their time fighting the mob and robbing the rich.

***POWER OF THE DOG*, Don Winslow, Knopf. \$25.95**

An ambitious novel from the talented Winslow set in the period from the rise of the Mexican drug Federacion in the 1970s to the Iran-Contra affair in the 1980s to the vicious drug wars of the 90s to the turn of the 21st century. The story is one of love, revenge, politics and influence, corruption and honor and the nexus between Latin American drug cartels, the American mob, and the U.S. government. Can’t wait.

FIRST MYSTERIES

***THE MOURNING SEXTON*, Michael Baron, Doubleday. \$23.95**

Attorney David Hirsh was the managing partner of one of St. Louis’s most prestigious law firms until he was convicted of embezzlement. Now free after seven years, David is trying to build a modest legal practice. He has also discovered his Judaism and has joined a minyan, a group of ten men who pray together each morning. When one of the group asks for his help in a legal matter, David finds that a seemingly straightforward lawsuit conceals a cold-blooded murder.

***THE THIRD TRANSLATION*, Matt Bondurant, Hyperion. \$22.95**

Walter Rothschild, an American Egyptologist living in London, is charged by the British Museum with the task of unlocking the ancient riddle of the Stela of Paser, one of the last remaining real-life hieroglyphic mysteries in existence today. The secrets of the Stela, a centuries-old funerary stone, have evaded scholars for thousands of years due to the stela's cryptic reference to a third translation. Drawn into its mystery, Rothschild becomes the dupe of a seduction, robbery, and conspiracy engineered by a cult devoted to ancient Egyptian mysticism. The author was actually employed at the British Museum and that is where he first saw the relic. I don't have to tell you which book this is being compared to.

***A CONFIDENTIAL SOURCE*, Jan Brogan, Mysterious Press. \$24.95**

Hallie Ahern works as a reporter for *The Providence Morning Chronicle* in Rhode Island. Late one night, she witnesses a murder. The police think it was a robbery gone wrong, but Hallie can't let it go. This could be her opportunity to reenter the world of investigative journalism, a world she lost when she compromised a story for the man she loved. But there's more to this crime than meets the eye and Hallie soon finds not only her job but also her life on the line.

***GODS IN ALABAMA*, Joshlyn Jackson, Warner Books. \$19.95**

When Arlene Fleet left her hometown of Possett, Alabama, to attend college in Chicago, she made three promises to God: she would never again lie, never fornicate, and never go back to her hometown. All God had to do in return was to make sure the body of high school quarterback Jim Beverly was never found. Ten years later, Arlene has kept her promises but God is falling down on His part of the bargain. This one falls under the heading of Chick Lit, I believe, and it is getting lots of attention.

***EIGHT OF SWORDS*, David Skibbins, St. Martin's Minotaur. \$23.95**

Twenty years ago, Warren Ritter was involved in a mysterious crime. Now he's changed his identity, faked his death, and is reading tarot cards in a booth in San Francisco. He's very good at it, so much so that he is beginning to think he has the power to predict the future. Skibbins is the first man to win the St. Martin's Minotaur/Malice Domestic Contest for Best First Traditional Mystery.

***DIALOGUES*, Stephen Spignesi, Bantam. \$23.00**

In a mental hospital in Connecticut sits Tory Troy, a young woman facing six particularly grotesque charges of felony murder. The reader gets to know her through the dialogues conducted with the doctor whom the court has appointed to assess her competence to stand trial and it is this unorthodox structure which makes this first novel unique. Each dialogue reveals something new or it confounds our assumptions. Each time we believe we understand what has happened, difficult questions and insights arise.

NON MYSTERIES OF NOTE

***DOWN THE RABBIT HOLE*, Peter Abrahams, Laura Geringer Books. \$15.99**

Ingrid's shoes are not where they should be and getting them back means getting involved in a murder investigation rivaling those solved by her idol, Sherlock Holmes. Ingrid is also involved with soccer, school, and the Echo Falls production of *Alice in Wonderland*. The talented Abrahams builds suspense as a smart young girl finds that her small town isn't nearly as safe as it seems. This is for Grades 5 and up. That's us, right?

***THE WITCH'S BOY*, Michael Gruber, Harper Tempest. \$16.99**

The author of *Tropic of Night* and *Valley of the Bones* has written his first fantasy novel about a boy named Lump, who is raised by a witch, a talking cat, a bear, and a demon. Gruber's novels for adults are full of folklore and spirituality, so this story for children should be fascinating.

***WILD DOGS*, Helen Humphreys, W.W. Norton. \$22.95**

Alice's boyfriend abandons her dog, which joins a feral pack. Alice and five others gather at the forest's edge, trying to call their dogs back. My heart is already broken, writing that, but knowing this author's work (which ranks among my favorites) I'm sure this tale has something stunning to say about love and our desire to domesticate what is wild. If you have not read Humphreys' *Leaving Earth*, *Afterimage*, and *The Lost Garden*, do it. Do it now.

NEWS FROM THE UK

***THE BLACK ANGEL*, John Connolly, Hodder & Stoughton**

A Charlie Parker mystery. Hooray.

***CAST ADRIFT*, Peter Guttridge, Allison & Busby.**

Nick Madrid and his friend Bridget are faced with their biggest danger when they are shipwrecked. The only other person on the island is the sole surviving member of the gone horribly, horribly wrong Survivor-like TV game show, *Cast Adrift*.

***DEAD LETTERS*, Gerald Hammond, Allison & Busby**

Featuring Detective Sergeant Honoria Potterton-Phipps, former party girl, heiress to a large fortune, and dog lover.

***ASH & BONE*, John Harvey, Wm. Heinemann**

Detective Sergeant Maddy Birch is made very uneasy by the take down of a violent criminal which left a young constable dead. Detective Inspector Elder is once again persuaded out of retirement to take on a cold case with a devastating present day impact.

THE BEST BRITISH MYSTERIES 2005, Maxim Jakubowski, Ed., Allison & Busby

Includes previously unpublished cases by Britain's favorite sleuths: Colin Dexter's Inspector Morse, Ian Rankin's Inspector Rebus, John Mortimer's Rumpole, and Reginald Hill's Dalziel and Pascoe. Also stories by Val McDermid, John Harvey, Christopher Fowler, Robert Barnard, Mark Billingham, Laura Wilson, and Liza Cody.

PUCCINI'S GHOSTS, Morag Joss, Hodder & Stoughton

No information on this title yet.

MINOTAUR, Barbara Vine, Viking

Kerstin Kvist is a trained nurse who takes a job with the Cosway family at their elegant home in the Essex countryside. The family is odd, mad even, and Vine's new book depicts the sex, lies, and secrets within an apparently respectable family.

THIS AND THAT

There was a very interesting article in the Arts section of *The New York Times*, Monday March 21st about the life of **Dan Brown** post *The DaVinci Code*. On the downside, he has lost a lot of privacy and is unable to take commercial flights without being mobbed for autographs. On the upside the writer of the article, Edward Wyatt, estimates that Brown has earned close to \$50 million over the past two years for sales of his four books in the U.S. alone. This figure is not confirmed by his publisher.

But this is what I really want to tell you: There is no scheduled release date for the paperback edition of *The DaVinci Code*. **Dan Brown's** publisher does not expect to see a manuscript for his next book until next year. That's 2006, folks.

COLLECTING

No definitive answer to my question about the missing number 4 in the reprint line of *All She Was Worth* by **Miyuke Miyabe**. However, several of you have contacted me to tell me that the number 4 is missing in your "first edition" too. I believe that lends credence to my colleague's assertion that the missing number is an error on the publisher's part. Stay tuned.

BOOKS WITH A BUZZ

I am hearing rave reviews about **Kent Harrington's** latest book, *Red Jungle*. This is published by Dennis McMillan and has a relatively small print run. No, I haven't read it yet, Dennis. *Mea culpa!*

The National Critics' Book Award went to *Gilead* by **Marilynne Robinson**. First Editions will be scarce at this point. Robinson's previous book, *Housekeeping*, has been reissued in trade paperback.

Apart from the review in *The Sunday New York Times*, which was lukewarm, *Saturday* by **Ian McEwan** is getting an extraordinary amount of positive attention. It wouldn't hurt to make some room on your bookshelf for this title. The U.K. is the true first. **McEwan** will be touring to read and sign.

FUTURE RELEASES

JUNE: *Peregrine* – **William Bayer** (reprinted at last)

JUNE: *Black Angel* – **John Connolly** (new Charlie Parker mystery)

JUNE: *Red Leaves* – **Thomas H. Cook**

JUNE: *Killing Rain* – **Barry Eisler**

JUNE: *Fire Sale* – **Sara Paretsky** (V.I. Warshawski)

JUNE: *Captain Alatraste* – **Arturo Perez-Reverte**

JUNE: *Cross Bones* – **Kathy Reichs**

JULY: *Groucho Marx, King of the Jungle* – **Ron Goulart**

JULY: *The Big Over Easy* – **Jasper Fforde**

BOOKS OF THE MONTH

Abrahams, Peter, *Oblivion*, Wm. Morrow. \$24.95. Brilliant private investigator loses his memory in an accident and has to reconstruct his life and last case using only a very few clues.

Allen, Conrad, *Murder on The Salsette*, St. Martin's Minotaur. \$23.95. Shipboard mystery featuring George Porter Dillman and Genevieve Masefield.

Born, James O., *Shock Wave*, Putnam. \$24.95. FDLE agent Bill Tasker reluctantly teams up with the FBI again on a case involving a stolen Stinger missile.

Bowen, Peter, *Stewball*, St. Martin's Minotaur. \$22.95. Gabriel Du Pre searches for his aunt's current spouse, who seems to have run off.

Brady, Joan, *Bleedout*, Touchstone. \$24.95. Told by two complex characters, one a murdered man and the other, his protégé, charged with the murder.

- Chesney, Marion, *Sick of Shadows***, St. Martin's Minotaur. \$22.95. First in a new series of Edwardian Murder Mysteries by author also known as **M.C. Beaton**.
- Clark, Mary Higgins, *No Place Like Home***, Simon & Schuster. \$25.95. A young woman is ensnared into returning to a place she wanted to leave behind forever – her childhood home. From the Queen of Suspense.
- Corcoran, Tom, *Air Dance Iguana***, St. Martin's Minotaur. \$24.95. Two men, twenty miles apart, are killed in the same strange way. Part-time forensic photographer Alex Rutledge finds that he may be the only person interested in pursuing justice.
- Crew, Cheryl Howard, *In the Face of Jinn***, St. Martin's Press. \$24.95. Two sisters are on an import buying trip when one of them disappears. The other must challenge the ineffectual U.S. and Indian bureaucracies and travel with strangers to find her sister.
- Daniel, David, *The Marble Kite***, St. Martin's Minotaur. \$23.95. P.I. Alex Rasmussen investigates murder in the carnival world.
- Eslick, Tom, *Mountain Peril***, Viking. \$24.95. When a boy is reported missing on Mount Washington, Will Buchanan – high school science teacher and part-time search-and-rescue volunteer – springs into action.
- Estleman, Loren D., *Little Black Dress***, Forge. \$23.95. Fifth novel featuring ex-hit man anti-hero Peter Macklin.
- Fitzhugh, Bill, *Highway 61 Resurfaced***, Wm. Morrow. \$23.95. Second in the series featuring radio DJ, turned PI, Rick Shannon.
- Gooden, Philip, *An Honorable Murder***, Carroll & Graf. \$25.00. Shakespearean murder mystery featuring actor Nick Revill.
- Haddam, Jane, *The Headmaster's Wife***, St. Martin's Minotaur. \$24.95. Gregor Demarkian investigates when a student at an elite prep school is found hanging in his room after rumors of an illicit affair with the headmaster's wife.
- Hall, Oakley, *Ambrose Bierce and the Ace of Shoots***, Viking. \$24.95. Fifth in the series following outspoken newspaperman Bierce and his associate Tom Redmond.
- Hall, Patricia, *Dead Reckoning***, St. Martin's Minotaur. \$23.95. DCI Thackeray and reporter Laura Ackroyd confront economic and racial struggles in their Yorkshire town.
- Hart, Carolyn, *Death of the Party***, Wm. Morrow. \$23.95. 16th installment of the Death on Demand series.
- Hess, Joan, *The Goodbye Body***, St. Martin's Minotaur. \$24.95. A Claire Malloy mystery set in Farberville, Arkansas.
- Jakober, Marie, *Sons of Liberty***, Forge. \$24.95. A spy thriller set during the Civil War.
- Jefferson, Roland S., *Damaged Goods***, Atria Books. \$23.00. Newly released from prison, Alonzo Crane must pull off the job of his career for a corrupt prison warden.
- McKinzie, Clinton, *Badwater***, Bantam. \$23.00. Special Agent Antonio Burns becomes involved when a ten-year-old local boy dies in a drowning incident in Badwater, Wyoming.
- Mathews, Francine, *Blown***, Bantam. \$24.00. CIA operative, believed dead, surfaces within a terrorist organization.
- Pearson, Ridley, *Cut and Run***, Hyperion. \$23.95. The Romero crime family steal the master witness protection list from the Justice Department, and US federal marshal Roland Larson must get it back.

Penman, Sharon Kay, *Prince of Darkness*, Putnam. \$24.95. Fourth novel in the acclaimed medieval mystery series featuring Justin de Quincy, loyal servant to Eleanor of Aquitaine.

Peters, Elizabeth, *The Serpent on the Crown*, Wm. Morrow. \$25.95. An Amelia Peabody mystery set in Egypt in 1921.

Powell, J. Mark, & Meagher, L.D., *The Curse of Cain*, Forge. \$24.95. An assassin is targeting President Lincoln during the closing months of the Civil War, and his name is not John Wilkes Booth.

Robards, Karen, *Superstition*, Putnam. \$24.95. Sparks fly between a police chef and a reporter who are thrown together when a brutal killer comes out of hiding after fifteen years.

Smith, Alexander McCall, *In the Company of Cheerful Ladies*, Pantheon. \$19.95. Precious Ramotswe of the No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency is back!

Strohmeier, Sarah, *Bubbles Betrothed*, Dutton. \$19.95. Fifth in the series featuring zany super sleuth Bubbles Yablonsky.

Wilson, Derek, *The Nature of Rare Things*, Carroll & Graf. \$25.00. In the first of a new series, Nathaniel Gye, paranormal investigator, is commissioned by a dead man to find his killer.

Woods, Stuart, *Two-Dollar Bill*, Putnam. \$25.95. Stone Barrington is caught between a clever con man, who's just become his client, and a beautiful prosecutor.

Wray, John, *Canaan's Tongue*, Knopf. \$25.00. Set on the eve of the Civil War, about a gang of men hunted by both the Union and the Confederacy for dealing in stolen slaves. From the author of *The Right Hand of Sleep*.

Wright, Nancy Means, *Mad Cow Nightmare*, St. Martin's Minotaur. \$23.95. Ruth Wilmarth investigates when one of her cows shows symptoms of the mad cow virus.

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