

BOOKAHOLIC

For the Mystery Addict

September 2005

Vol. 3, No. 9

WHAT I'VE BEEN READING

***PANIC*, Jeff Abbott, Dutton. \$23.95**

Young Evan Casher appears to have everything: he's a successful documentary filmmaker and his relationship with his new girlfriend, Carrie, couldn't be better. Then he receives a phone call from his mother. She wants him to drop everything and come home. When he arrives, he discovers his mother brutally murdered and barely escapes with his own life. He cannot get hold of his father, who is on a business trip, and when he calls Carrie at work he is told that she resigned that morning. This is Abbott's hardcover debut and it's a heart pounding one. Lots of plot twists that had me guessing.

***FIDDLERS*, Ed McBain, Harcourt. \$25.00**

A blind violinist taking a smoke break is shot twice in the face. So is a woman cooking an omelet in her own kitchen, a college professor returning home, a priest in the rectory garden, and an old woman walking her dog. There's something odd going on: Most serial killers don't use guns or strike five times in two weeks, and the prey usually share something more than being over fifty years of age. Detective Steve Carella and his colleagues in the 87th Precinct investigate. This the last installment in the series (I assume - McBain died in July) and, to the end, McBain retained his wit and ability to spin a great yarn.

***FEVER*, Sean Rowe, Little Brown. \$19.95**

Matt "Loose Cannon" Shannon, an ex-FBI agent turned security chief for the world's largest cruise line, is approached by his stepbrother, Jack Fontana, in Miami. Fontana gives Shannon a hand-held game to play with and the next moment Shannon has sunk a freighter in the shipping lane and his fingerprints are on the device that sent the signal. Shannon is thus blackmailed into helping Fontana hijack a cruise ship and make off with the money on board. Soon, he finds himself up to his neck in the plot and now people are dead. This first novel was an odd read for me. At first, reading the set-up above, I thought this plot too far-fetched. But the story turned into a genuinely terrific hard-boiled thriller.

***THE DOUBLE EAGLE*, James Twining, HarperCollins. \$24.95**

In 1933, FDR recalled the nation's gold coin and bullion during a banking crisis. Among the coins turned in and melted down were the Double Eagles, solid gold \$20 coins. Only five were saved and kept at Fort Knox. That part is true. The time is the present and a priest is found murdered in Paris. Lodged in his throat is a Double Eagle. When the

vault at Fort Knox is opened, the box containing the Double Eagles is empty. CIA agent Jennifer Brown is asked to make an offer to the presumed thief, Tom Kirk, former CIA agent-turned-international jewel thief. Only problem is, he didn't steal them. Or so he says. This is one of the few books in the past few years which has not drawn a comparison with *The DaVinci Code*, and I find that odd. This is the nearest thing I've read to that blockbuster. Not the story, but the heart-pounding, page-turning, cliff-hanging set up of the story.

CONTACT ZERO, David Wolstencroft, Dutton. \$24.95

Ben Locke is a recent graduate of an espionage school in the United Kingdom. During an operation in South America, he is framed for a crime and finds himself cast out by his handlers in London. On the same day, across the globe, seven of his fellow classmates have been found dead. Only three of the original ten survive, and they join forces to try and find help. When spies have nowhere to turn, they try to find Contact Zero, or so the story goes. Some say it is an isolated hideout run by ex-members of the Agency, others think that it is one man, but to most it is a myth, a fantasy. To Ben, Lucy and Nat, it is their only hope. Great page-turning stuff slowed down only by too much of the personal lives of the three protagonists.

ON MY READING LIST

HALF BROKEN THINGS, Morag Joss, Delacorte. \$22.00

Three strangers – an aging house-sitter, a struggling con man and a pregnant young woman – are drawn together at Walden Manor, a secluded and gracious country house. Each sees one final chance to start over. Things will never again be the same. Joss doesn't usually get onto my list, but my colleagues at The Mysterious Bookshop are all reading this and raving. Comparisons to Ruth Rendell and Minette Walters always capture my interest.

THE MIERNIK DOSSIER, Charles McCarry, Overlook Press. \$24.95

A small group of international agents embark on a car trip from Switzerland to the Sudan. Related as a collection of dossier notes written by the five characters, the story reveals a complicated web in which each spins his or her own deception: each is a spider, and each is a spy. Introduces American operative Paul Christopher. This is McCarry's first novel, published in 1973. Overlook Press, which is also reprinting the work of Robert Littell, is doing a wonderful job of bringing back into print the best in espionage fiction.

CINNAMON KISS, Walter Mosley, Little Brown. \$24.95

It is 1967 and Easy Rawlins is thinking about robbing an armored car. His daughter, Feather, needs medical treatment that costs far more than Easy can earn or borrow. Then his friend, Saul Lynx, offers a job that might solve Easy's problem. He is to track the disappearance of an eccentric attorney whose assistant "Cinnamon" Cargill has also disappeared. Easy knows there's more to this than he's being told, but he takes the job

and finds himself in unfamiliar territory – from the hippie enclaves to a plot that stretches back to the war in Europe.

SCHOOL DAYS, Robert B. Parker, Putnam. \$24.95

Lily Ellsworth, the grand dame of Dowling, Massachusetts, hires Spenser to investigate her grandson Jared Clark's involvement in a school shooting. Seven people were killed in cold blood but, despite Jared's being named as a co-conspirator by the other shooter, Mrs. Ellsworth is convinced of her grandson's innocence.

TYRANNOSAUR CANYON, Douglas Preston, Forge. \$24.95

I don't have a lot of information about this book: A moon rock missing for thirty years. Five buckets of blood-soaked sand found in a New Mexico canyon. A monk who will redeem the world. The greatest scientific discovery of all time. But that's enough for me. The co-author of *Brimstone* has captured my attention.

13 STEPS DOWN, Ruth Rendell, Crown. \$25.00

Michael "Mix" Cellini is an obsessive man. Among his obsessions are a model he has only seen once and Reggie Christie, the notorious serial killer. Mix's landlady, Gwendolyn Chawcer, and her friends watch as his eccentricities not realizing how dangerous he has become. This sounds like classic Rendell.

SHALIMAR THE CLOWN, Salman Rushdie, Random House. \$25.95

In Los Angeles in 1991 Ambassador Maximilian Ophuls is murdered in broad daylight on the doorstep of his illegitimate daughter. He is knifed by his Kashmiri Muslim driver, a mysterious figure who calls himself Shalimar the Clown. Ophuls is a World War II Resistance hero and was at one time American's counter terrorism chief, so the murder looks at first like a political assassination. But it isn't. It is intensely personal. Can't wait to read this one.

DRIVE, James Sallis, Poisoned Pen. \$19.95

This novel has been expanded from the story which first appeared in Dennis McMillan's anthology *Measures of Poison*. It tells the story of a stunt driver for the movies, Driver, who also acts as a wheelman during robberies. The story takes Driver from the dives and the seedy motels of Los Angeles to the strip malls of the Arizona desert. This neo-noir from the creator of the Lew Griffin series looks wonderful and is getting some rave reviews.

FIRST MYSTERIES

REMAINS SILENT, Michael Baden & Linda Kenney, Knopf. \$24.95

When a body is discovered near the construction site of a mall in upstate New York, Philomena "Manny" Manfreda, attorney, and Dr. Jake Rosen, deputy chief medical examiner of New York, embark on what will become a treacherous journey. A cover-up

leading from a state mental hospital to the highest echelons of American government is revealed.

***THE MAN FROM BEYOND*, Gabriel Brownstein, W.W. Norton. \$23.95**

In April 1922, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle arrives in New York on a spiritualist crusade. He displays photographs of ghosts and spirits and defends the powers of the mysterious Margery, one of the most famous mediums of the day. His friend, Harry Houdini, is skeptical and when Doyle claims Margery's powers are superior to Houdini's, the magician sets out to prove him wrong.

***IMMORAL*, Brian Freeman, St. Martin's Minotaur. \$22.95.**

For the second time in a year, a beautiful teenage girl has disappeared off the streets of Duluth, Minnesota. The two young women couldn't be more different: Kerry was bubbly and sweet and Rachel is a dark, sexually charged wild child. Lieutenant Jonathan Stride is being pressured to find a serial killer and, as he searches, his own life is being changed by the secrets he uncovers. Secrets that stretch across time.

***FIRST KILL*, Michael Kronenwetter, St. Martin's Minotaur. \$24.95**

Hank Berlin is a detective whose cases have been relatively ordinary – what one would expect from a small Wisconsin River town. But the assignment he has now involves the murder of his former best friend, reporter Jack Drucker. Jack's widow, Liz, whom Hank loved and lost, begs him to find her husband's killer.

***DEMON OF THE AIR*, Simon Levack, St. Martin's Minotaur. \$23.95**

In 1517, Emperor Montezuma, ruler of the known world, is plagued by strange dreams. Yaotl, slave to the Chief Minister, is also disturbed. While escorting a sacrificial victim to the Great Pyramid, the victim uttered a strange prophecy and then leapt to his death – before the sacrifice could take place. The Emperor orders Yaotl to investigate – on pain of death if he fails to uncover the truth. True first is the UK edition.

***SACRED COWS*, Karen E. Olson, Little Brown. \$21.95**

New Haven, Connecticut, police reporter Annie Seymour is called to a crime scene where she finds herself looking at the naked body of a Yale student. Bad news for the University, and it begins to get much worse when Annie learns that the girl was a student by day and a high-priced escort by night. Annie stumbles onto a network of corruption that everyone – even her own mother – seems to be involved in.

***OFFICER DOWN*, Theresa Schwegel, St. Martin's Minotaur. \$23.95**

Police officer Samantha Mack is knocked unconscious during an impromptu sting. When she wakes up in the hospital, she learns that her partner was shot and killed at the scene. With her gun. She remembers firing her gun at the perp until it was empty, but there's no evidence that anyone else was even at the scene, alive or dead. Sam is determined to clear her name before whoever killed her partner comes back for her.

NON MYSTERIES OF NOTE

***THE DARWIN CONSPIRACY*, John Darnton, Knopf. \$25.00**

What led Darwin to the theory of evolution and why did he wait 22 years to publish *The Origin of the Species*? These are the questions at the center of this novel, which is told from three different points of view: Darwin's as he travels the world aboard the Beagle; his youngest daughter Lizzie's as she struggles to understand the embattled anger of her father at the height of his fame; and present-day anthropologist Hugh Kellum and Darwin scholar Beth Dulcimer whose obsessions with Darwin (and with each other) drive them beyond the accepted boundaries of scholarly research.

***BROKEBACK MOUNTAIN*, Annie Proulx, Scribner. \$14.95 HC, \$9.95 PB**

This story, from Proulx's book *Close Range*, has been published to coincide with the release of the film directed by Ang Lee and starring Jake Gyllenhaal and Heath Ledger. It tells of two cowboys who enter into a sexual relationship which becomes something much more. For collectors of Proulx, this will be a First Edition Thus.

NEWS FROM THE UK

***DYING FLAMES*, Robert Barnard, Allison & Busby**

Novelist Graham Broadbent coasts through life accepting the easy pace his success allows him. Then a twenty-year-old woman appears at his door and announces that she is his daughter.

***BENEATH THE SNOW*, Caroline Carver, Orion**

Lisa McCall, a young scientist, disappears in a snowstorm in the wilderness near the Alaskan town of Lake's Edge. Her sister, Abby, flies out from England to join the rescue team.

***BEE'S KISS*, Barbara Cleverly, Constable**

It is 1926 and Joe Sandiland is back from India enjoying the pleasures of Jazz Age London. But soon he's involved in the investigation of the death of a bludgeoned woman who is found in her suite at the Ritz.

***SEVENTY-SEVEN CLOCKS*, Christopher Fowler, Bantam Press**

Art vandalism, an exploding suspect, murder by snake, pornography, Gilbert and Sullivan – and not a suspect in sight. Bryant and May, the brilliant but cranky detectives of London's Peculiar Crimes Unit investigate a series of murders that defy human understanding. You haven't started reading this series yet? Don't delay.

***MAN WHO SMILED*, Henning Mankell, Harvill Press**

After killing a man in the line of duty, Inspector Kurt Wallander is spiraling into an alcohol-fueled depression when an old acquaintance asks for his help. Wallander is too

distracted to listen, but when his friend is shot, he realizes he should have paid more attention.

JACQUOT AND THE ANGEL, Martin O'Brien, Headline

In the closing months of the World War II, four Resistance fighters are executed by the Gestapo in Occupied France. More than fifty years later, a German family living in Provence is brutally murdered. Daniel Jacquot of the Cavaillon Regional Crime Squad investigates. The first book in this series, *Jacquot and the Waterman*, is almost impossible to get in first edition at anywhere near a reasonable price.

FLOOD, Ian Rankin, Orion

Rankin's first novel, unavailable for nearly twenty years, has now been republished with a brand new introduction.

REBUS'S SCOTLAND, Ian Rankin, Orion

A beautifully illustrated volume highlighting the Scotland of Ian Rankin who reveals the story of John Rebus and how he came into being. It is also a tour of the Scotland which the tourist never sees.

OXFORD LETTERS, Veronica Stallwood, Headline

When Kate Ivory returns from holiday, she receives some alarming news. Apparently Kate's mother is not well, but her mother insists she's being well looked after by her new friends, the Freemans.

MASTER OF SOULS, Peter Tremayne, Headline

Sister Fidelma and Brother Eadulf are asked to investigate the death of an Abbess leading a pilgrimage and the abduction of the six female religieuse who were with her.

DEVIL'S FEATHER, Minette Walters, Macmillan

When five women are brutally murdered in Sierra Leone, Reuters correspondent, Connie Burns, questions the arrest of three rebel soldiers for the crimes.

COLLECTING

Despite some mixed reviews, *The Historian* by Elizabeth Kostova is a bestseller with legs (as Otto Penzler likes to say), meaning that it looks to have staying power. It has been nominated for a Quills award as Best First Novel and will probably pick up more nominations as the year progresses.

It is generally assumed that the American Edition is the true first, but in fact the US and the UK editions were published simultaneously. UK editions are just beginning to arrive here because Kostova has completed her signing tour of the UK. For those of you who

follow the flag, the US edition may be enough, but as collectors, do consider both editions of this title.

BOOKS WITH A BUZZ

I think I've confessed before that *Entertainment Weekly* is my bible of all things cultural! The book reviewers for that magazine have consistently led me to titles I've overlooked or highlighted books that are right up my alley.

The latest find from those hallowed pages is *A Sudden Country* by **Karen Fisher**. This is a first novel, not a mystery, which tells the story of James MacLaren, a Hudson Bay Company trader whose wife deserts him and whose children die. He sets out to find his wife against the actual events of the 1847 Oregon migration. *Entertainment Weekly* is not alone in its praise. **Larry Watson** calls it "a magnificent debut"; *Publishers Weekly*, "a great novel of the American West."

Just thought you should know.

BOOKS OF THE MONTH

Fiction

Benjamin, Carol Lea, *Without a Word*, Wm. Morrow. \$23.95. Private investigator Rachel Alexander tries to find a woman who disappeared five years earlier.

Blevins, Meredith, *The Red Hot Empress*, Forge. \$24.95. Annie Szabo and her mother-in-law, fortune teller Madame Mina, are up to their necks in murder and mayhem during the Chinese New Year in San Francisco.

Cannell, Stephen J., *Cold Hit*, St. Martin's Press. \$24.95. Detective Shane Scully connects a ten-year-old "cold case" and a series of brutal killings which lead him to a sinister government conspiracy.

Carcattera, Lorenzo, *Chasers*, Ballantine. \$24.95. Three years after the events in the novel *Apaches*, the surviving members of the team reunite to continue their battle against crime.

Cooper, Natasha, *Gagged and Bound*, St. Martin's Minotaur. \$24.95. When a newly ennobled politician believes he has been mis-identified as a terrorist who killed a busload of young children thirty years ago, barrister Trish Maguire agrees to help a biographer fight the libel case.

Coulter, Catherine, *Point Blank*, Putnam. \$25.95. FBI agents Lacey Sherlock and Dillon Savich face the most dangerous case of their careers when they try to rescue popular entertainer Pinky Womack from kidnappers.

Dreyer, Eileen, *Sinners and Saints*, St. Martin's Press. \$24.95. Forensic nurse Chastity O'Connor tries to find her missing sister.

Dunn, Carola, *Fall of a Philanderer*, St. Martin's Minotaur. \$23.95. A Daisy Dalrymple mystery set in 1920s England.

Grimes, Martha, *Belle Ruin*, Viking. \$25.95. When young Emma Graham discovers the crumbling shell of a fabulous hotel hidden in the woods near her small home town of Spirit Lake, she never imagines that the mysteries it holds will help solve a forty-year-old crime.

Herbert, James, *Nobody True*, Tor. \$25.95. James True returns from an out-of-body experience to find that he's been murdered and mutilated. The killer has left nothing for him to go back to.

Hurwitz, Gregg, *Trouble Shooter*, Wm. Morrow. \$24.95. Deputy U.S. Marshal Tim Rackley is on the trail of Den Laurey, the leader of one of the country's most violent biker gangs. Laurey should be behind bars but made a daring escape that left several U.S. marshals dead.

Kling, Christine, *Bitter End*, Ballantine. \$24.95. Seychelle Sullivan sees the hated ex-husband of her one-time best friend murdered. She must break the news to Molly but maybe she knows already – Molly is arrested and charged with the murder.

Lindsay, Paul, *Buried*, Simon & Schuster. \$24.00. Nick Vanko, FBI agent, is working with his colleagues to put away a Brooklyn mob crew. They do not know that Mike Parisi, the local mobster, is facing a power struggle of his own which will soon involve members of Vanko's crew.

Perdue, Lewis, *Perfect Killer*, Forge. \$25.95. Neurosurgeon Bradford Stone is confronted by a baffling mystery: why would a black civil rights lawyer want to save a convicted white racist murderer on death row?

Rehder, Ben, *Guilt Trip*, St. Martin's Minotaur. \$24.95. The blackmail of a deviant Texas state senator and a pet psychic with big plans take the attention of game warden John Marlin in Blanco County, Texas.

Robbins, Harold & Podrug, Junius, *Blood Royal*, Forge. \$25.95. Five months after a fairy tale wedding, pregnant with the heir to the throne, Her Royal Highness, the Princess of Wales throws herself down a flight of stairs. She's going to need a good lawyer!

Sharp, Zoe, *First Drop*, St. Martin's Minotaur. \$23.95. Charlie Fox is a bodyguard and her new assignment is to baby-sit the teenage son of a rich computer programmer in Fort Lauderdale. But the boy's family disappears and someone is stalking Charlie and her charge. Sharp's first novel to be published in the US.

Sidor, Steven, *The Bone Factory*, St. Martin's Minotaur. \$23.95. Second mystery from the author of *Skin River* featuring homicide cops Eliza Ochoa and Ike Horner.

Simon, Michael, *Body Scissors*, Viking. \$23.95. The sequel to *Dirty Sally* featuring Dan Reles, a New York-born Texas detective on the trail of a drug kingpin.

Slaughter, Karin, *Faithless*, Delacorte. \$25.00. Medical examiner/pediatrician Sara Linton and her ex-husband, police chief Jeffery Tolliver, stumble across the body of a teenage girl buried in the woods in Grant County, Georgia.

Smith, Alexander McCall, *Friends, Lovers, Chocolate*. Pantheon. \$19.95. This is the second installment in the Sunday Philosophy Club series featuring Isabel Dalhousie the editor of the *Journal of Applied Ethics*.

Stevenson, Talitha, *Exposure*, Harcourt. \$24.00. In the course of one evening, prominent lawyer Alistair Langford destroys everything. The scandal threatens his marriage and exposes a secret he has hidden his entire adult life.

Tanenbaum, Robert K., *Fury*, Atria Books. \$25.95. Butch Karp and Marlene Ciampi take on a politically charged case involving the rape of a female jogger.

Tapply, William G., *Nervous Water*, St. Martin's Minotaur. \$23.95. This latest in the series explores the previously hidden past of the main character, Boston attorney Brady Coyne.

Non-Fiction

Rehak, Melanie, *Girl Sleuth*, Harcourt. \$25.00. The author traces the role of Nancy Drew, and those of her authors, in forging the modern American woman.

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