

BOOKAHOLIC

For the Mystery Addict

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WHAT I'VE BEEN READING

***SPECTRES IN THE SMOKE*, Tony Broadbent, St. Martin's Press. \$23.95**

Jethro the cat burglar is back after his first outing in Broadbent's first novel, *The Smoke*. It is 1948 and in black market post-World War II England Jethro is once more being bullied and cajoled by MI5 to do those things that they can't be caught dead doing themselves. One of those things is breaking into a Georgian house near Berkeley Square and taking specific items from the safe. Jethro would love to know exactly why he's doing this, but MI5 prefers to keep him in the dark, and the two play a cat-and-mouse game as they attempt to prevent a plot to undermine Britain's new Labour Government. The story is told in Jethro's voice and a glossary of London underworld slang is needed, and provided. This overlooked series is a little gem for those of us who love London in the 1940s.

***DOUBLE NEGATIVE*, David Carkeet, Felony & Mayhem. \$14.95**

Several years ago, New York personality Fran Liebowitz told a television audience that this was her favorite mystery. The Mysterious Bookshop received dozens of calls the next day but the book was, at that time, out of print. Felony & Mayhem, a newly formed company, has now reprinted this, as well as other lost classics. Nominated for an Edgar Award for Best First Novel of 1980, *Double Negative* is set in the Wabash Institute, dedicated to the study of toddlers and their development of verbal skills. Instead of the kindly scholars one might expect as such an institution, Wabash is a nest of cranky academics, one of whom is bludgeoned to death. Jeremy Cook, who is clueless but the school's premier scholar, becomes the prime suspect and sets out to solve the murder. This is for those of you who love word play and witty dialog. I found the writing style rather dated but the mystery is intelligent and quite ingenious, and I will certainly be checking out other reprinted titles as they become available.

***THE LINCOLN LAWYER*, Michael Connelly, Little Brown. \$26.95**

There's nothing more satisfying than a good legal thriller, and this one is a doozy! Mickey Haller is a Lincoln Lawyer, a criminal defense pro who operates out of the backseat of his Lincoln Town Car. His clients are the lowest of the low and Haller is despised by cops, prosecutors and even some of his own clients. Then Louis Ross Roulet is arrested for brutally beating a woman and Mr. Roulet is from a Beverly Hills rich family. This is a case that just might change Mickey Haller's life. What is the difference between defense lawyer and a catfish? One is a scum-sucking bottom feeder, and the other is a fish. This joke is told in one form or another throughout the book and it sums

up Haller's world of defense lawyering. I know I don't have to urge you to read a book by Michael Connelly, but just in case you're thinking of skipping this because it's out of series: Don't!

***AN AGENT IN PLACE*, Robert Littell, Overlook Press. \$24.95**

You're probably tired of me reviewing every new and reprinted title from Robert Littell! I'll stop reviewing them when I stop reading them, and I can't do that. Just a reminder then that this title is now back in print thanks to Overlook Press. Set just as the Cold War is ending, it tells the story of Ben Bassett, a diplomat newly dispatched to Moscow with top secret security clearance. There he meets the Russian poet Aida Zavaskaya and they fall in love. But they are pawns in a dreadful plot whose ultimate goal is to return to an era that cold war warriors in both Moscow and Washington never wanted to end. Great stuff for the espionage reader.

***THE LIVING ROOM OF THE DEAD*, Eric Stone. Forge. \$22.95**

It is 1995 and Ray Sharp is a journalist based in Hong Kong but that's not where he spends his leisure time. That would be a ferry ride away, in Macau where the gaming tables and prostitutes await. Ray is approached by one of his colleagues whose brother has fallen in love with one of the prostitutes and asks Ray to help him get her away from her pimp so that she and his brother can marry. The problem is, in Macau, prostitution is run by the Russian mafia and they don't give up their income easily. Here's where the plot line fails a little. Ray agrees to help, but after the first, second, or even third time he is subjected to the horror and violence which goes along with helping out someone who is, after all, only an acquaintance, you'd think Ray would call it a day. But the plot depends on Ray's inability to say no and, after suspending belief in this slim premise, I was taken for a ride through a slime pit of horrors that had me turning the pages. A very interesting debut. Not for the faint of heart.

ON MY READING LIST

***THE CITY OF FALLING ANGELS*, John Berendt, Penguin Press. \$25.95**

On the evening of January 29, 1996, a fire destroyed the historic Fenice opera house in Venice. The loss of the Fenice - where five of Verdi's operas premiered - is catastrophic for Venetians. Arriving in Venice a few days after the fire, Berendt becomes a kind of detective, inquiring into the nature of life in this museum-city while gradually revealing the truth about the fire. I'm sure Berendt, who is the author of *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil*, has once again given us a brilliant page-turner.

***PREDATOR*, Patricia Cornwell, Putnam. \$26.95**

Dr. Kay Scarpetta is now freelancing with the National Forensic Academy in Florida with her team Pete Marino, Benton Wesley, and Lucy Farinelli. Their new case takes them from Florida to Boston as they hunt a cunning and malevolent killer.

JAR CITY, Arnaldur Indridason, St. Martin's Minotaur. \$21.95

A lonely man is found murdered in his Reykjavik flat and the police have no leads. Inspect Erlendur Sveinsson heads the investigation team and, delving into the dead man's life, he discovers that forty years ago the man was accused, though not convicted, of rape. This introduces American readers to a crime writer from Iceland whose work has created an international sensation. There will be obvious comparisons to Henning Mankell.

SEVEN LIES, James Lasdun, W.W. Norton. \$23.95

Stefan Vogel, a young man growing up in the former East Germany, yearns to go to America. By a series of increasingly dangerous maneuvers he contrives to make his fantasy come true, and finds himself not only in the country of his dreams but also married to the woman he idolizes. His secrets are safely locked away behind the Berlin Wall. But then his world begins to fall apart. Lasdun is the author of the extraordinary *The Horned Man*.

THE AMBLER SEQUENCE, Robert Ludlum, St. Martin's Press. \$25.95

At a psychiatric facility on Parrish Island off the coast of Virginia, former intelligence employees are kept under close scrutiny when their mental state makes them a danger to their own government. One of these employees, former Consular Operations agent Hal Ambler, is kept heavily medicated and closely watched. But there's a difference between Hal and the other patients – Hal isn't crazy. When he pulls off a daring escape he returns to a world he doesn't know, and which doesn't know him. Ambler sounds a bit like Bourne, but that's probably the point.

PRIVATE WARS, Greg Rucka, Bantam. \$24.00

Secret agent Tara Chace is back, this time in strategically crucial Uzbekistan. And once again she is fighting the War on Terror. Tara Chace was introduced in the first Queen and Country novel, *A Gentleman's Game*, which I loved.

FIRST MYSTERIES

AND ONLY TO DECEIVE, Tasha Alexander, Wm. Morrow. \$23.95

Soon after Emily's marriage, her husband Philip dies on safari. Now, two years later, Emily discovers that Philip was a far different man than the one she thought she'd married. Trying to piece together his life, Emily searches in the British Museum, one of her collector husband's favorite places, and uncovers a dark, dangerous secret. This novel of historical suspense is set in Victorian England.

THE SCORPION'S GATE, Richard A. Clarke, Putnam. \$24.95

Forces both in the Middle East and the United States are at work to launch another war. But this time it could be bigger. It could be nuclear and spread to Asia and beyond. Set in the not-too-distant future, Clarke has blended realism with suspense and he should

know whereof he writes. For three decades he worked in the White House, State Department and Pentagon.

***THE DEVIL'S OWN RAG DOLL*, Mitchell Bartoy, St. Martin's Minotaur. \$23.95.**

1940s Detroit: the war effort is in full swing and racial tensions are high. When a vivacious white heiress is found murdered in the black part of town, the city threatens to erupt into mob violence, bringing the factories to a halt and putting Allied forces around the world in jeopardy. Detective Pete Caudill is charged with covering up the crime in the interests of civic peace.

***THE SHROUD OF THE THWACKER*, Chris Elliott, Miramax Books. \$22.95**

Set in New York City in 1882 this spoof hilariously chronicle the adventures of police chief Caleb Spencer and his two cohorts, reporter Liz Smith and mayor Teddy Roosevelt, as they unravel the mystery of the world's first serial killer, Jack the Jolly Thwacker.

***THE COLOR OF LAW*, Mark Gimenez, Doubleday. \$24.95**

Scott Fenney, a poor boy turned college football hero turned elite law firm partner, is assigned to the *pro bono* defense of Shawanda Jones, a heroin-addicted hooker. She is accused of murdering Clark McCally, the son of Texas millionaire senator and presidential hopeful Mack McCall.

***AS DEAD AS IT GETS*, Cady Kalian, Forge. \$23.95**

Maggie Mars used to be an East Coast reporter, but she moves to Hollywood to make a name for herself as a screenwriter. When Maggie's mentor, the Executive Director and Chief Negotiator for the Creative Artists' Union, is found dead in a bathroom, it makes big news – especially when it's revealed that he was wearing a red garter belt and bra.

***HOW TO SEDUCE A GHOST*, Hope McIntyre, Mysterious Press. \$24.95**

As Lee Bartholomew embarks on a new job to ghostwrite the autobiography of soap star Selma Walker, she finds herself at the center of an arson investigation. Someone is setting fire to houses in her Notting Hill neighborhood and she must discover who it is and also learn the truth about Selma.

***THE WHEELMAN*, Duane Swierczynski, St. Martin's Minotaur. \$23.95**

Lennon is a mute getaway driver who falls in with the wrong heist team on the wrong day at the wrong bank. Betrayed, he is left for dead and is on a one-man mission to find out who is responsible and get his loot. But the robbery has sent a ripple-effect through the streets of Philadelphia and he'll have to deal with a dirty cop, the Russian and Italian mobs, the Mayor's hired gun and a keyboard player in a college rock band. Great reviews from the likes of Ken Bruen and Jason Starr.

NON MYSTERIES OF NOTE

***OPUS DEI*, John Allen, Jr., Doubleday. \$24.95**

Readers of *The DaVinci Code* are already familiar with some of the controversy surrounding Opus Dei. This is the first serious journalistic investigation of the highly secretive organization and its significant influence in the Vatican and on the politics of the Catholic Church.

***THE GREAT STINK*, Clare Clark, Harcourt. \$25.00**

It is 1855 and engineer William May has returned home from the battlefields of the Crimea. His civilian job is to transform London's sewer system but when the peace of the tunnels is shattered by murder, William loses his tenuous hold on sanity. Implicated in the crime, even he is not sure of his innocence. Although this could qualify as a mystery, it is, I believe, more of a historical novel – one that is getting great reviews from the UK where first-time novelist Clark lives.

NEWS FROM THE UK

***THE DETECTION CLUB*, Simon Brett, Ed., Orion**

The precise date of the beginning of the Detection Club is shrouded in mystery although we do know that regular meetings of crime writers seem to have taken place in 1930 and that the Club was formalized with rules and a constitution in March 1932. The Club's reason for existing is to have three convivial dinners a year for fifty members who represent the cream of British writing talent. This anthology celebrates the Club with stories by Lindsey Davis, Robert Barnard, Colin Dexter, Robert Goddard, John Harvey, Reginald Hill, P.D. James, H.R.F. Keating, Peter Lovesey, Michael Redpath, Margaret Yorke, and Simon Brett. A must for crime lovers!

***SAFER THAN HOUSES*, Frances Fyfield, Little Brown**

Sarah Fortune inherited her flat from one of her many lovers. Now a son has appeared claiming the flat is his and Sarah is receiving abusive and threatening letters from him. Sarah meets Henry, a timid, lonely man whose upstairs neighbor is using every trick in the landlord's book to get him to leave. It seems that if they swap accommodations for a while, they may be able to deal with each other's problems. Bad idea!

***LIGHTHOUSE*, P.D. James, Faber & Faber**

When a visitor to Combe is murdered, Adam Dalgliesh and his team is called in to solve the case discreetly. Hardly have they begun to unravel the complicated motives of the suspects than there is a second brutal killing and the whole investigation is jeopardized when Dalgliesh is faced with a danger more insidious and as potentially fatal as murder.

END IN TEARS, Ruth Rendell, Hutchinson

A lump of concrete dropped deliberately from a stone bridge over a quiet road kills the wrong person. The driver behind is spared. But only for a little while. Chief Inspector Wexford with his old friend and partner Mike Burden plus two new recruits to the Kingsmarkham team investigate.

GRAVE MAN, David Roberts, Constable

Lord Edward Corinth and Verity Browne are attending the memorial service in Westminster Abbey for Lord Benyon, killed when the Hindenburg airship burst into flames as it docked in New Jersey. As the congregation disperses, there is a cry. The father of Maud Pitt-Messenger is slumped in his seat, stabbed to death with an ancient Syrian dagger.

COLLECTING

More and more new titles by authors once published in hardcover are, it seems, being published as trade paperback originals. Those recently published include:

Otto Penzler, Editor - *Best American Crime Writing 2005*

Charlie Houston – *Six Bad Things*

Maureen Jennings – *Night's Child*

Jeffrey Ford – *Girl in the Glass*

As I collector, I have begun to think about my collection and how to proceed. Obviously I will always read books written by my favorite authors, but will I want signed first editions of paperback originals? The answer for me is a resounding yes. In which case I must alert those bookstores who host signings that I will be looking for signed paperbacks.

This is a heads up for you. I'm sure there are those of you who only collect hardcovers. But if you're like me, you should be communicating with your favorite bookshop.

BOOKS OF THE MONTH

Atkins, Charles, *The Cadaver's Ball*, St. Martin's Minotaur. \$24.95. Psychiatrist Peter Grainer is trying to get his life back on track after the accident that killed his wife and unborn child. Helping is Peter's old friend Dr. Ed Tyson. What Peter doesn't know is that Ed has revenge in mind.

Baldacci, David, *The Camel Club*, Warner Books. \$26.95. It is where the most influential wine and dine, but when Harry Stone, homeless man and conspiracy theorist, witnesses a murder, the secrets begin to unravel.

Brandon, Jay, *Running with the Dead*, Forge. \$24.95. Chris Sinclair must bring justice to an old friend and make peace with the dead in this courtroom melodrama.

Doss, James D., *Shadow Moon*, St. Martin's Minotaur. \$23.95. Ute tribal investigator Charlie Moon and his shaman aunt team up to find a dead man's lookalike.

Druett, Joan, *Shark Island*, St. Martin's Minotaur. \$23.95. Historical mystery set aboard the U.S. Exploring Expedition. By the author of *A Watery Grave*.

Flynn, Vince, *Consent To Kill*, Atria Books. \$25.95. CIA operative Mitch Rapp finds himself in the line of fire when the influential father of a terrorist demands retribution.

Francome, John, *Dead Wight*, St. Martin's Minotaur. \$24.95. After a fall, champion rider Phil Nicholas returns to racing but his mind still hasn't healed. When one of his colleagues is attacked, Phil can't sit on the sidelines any longer.

Gray, John Maclachlan, *A White Stone Day*, St. Martin's Minotaur. \$24.95.

Corruption and murder set in Victorian London by the author of *The Fiend in Human*.

Grabien, Deborah, *Matty Groves*, St. Martin's Minotaur. \$23.95. Ringan Laine and his lover Penny Wintercraft-Hawkes find themselves, once again, in the company of ghosts.

Hall, Parnell, *Stalking the Puzzle Lady*, Bantam. \$24.00. Cora Felton's number-one fan is stalking her. When the first dead body turns up, the Puzzle Lady must create her cleverest clues in order to stalk her stalker.

Hill, Reginald, *The Stranger House*, HarperCollins. \$24.95. Two strangers arrive in the tiny village of Illthwaite in Cumbria, England, on the same day. They do not know each other but they will both invade the quiet and the peace of the village.

Klensch, Elsa, *Shooting Script*, Forge. \$23.95. Sonya Iverson is preparing a puff piece on a new luxury spa when the owner is found shot to death.

Krich, Rochelle, *Now You See Me...*, Ballantine. \$24.95. True-crime writer Molly Blume is asked by a father to help find his daughter.

Massey, Sujata, *The Typhoon Lover*, HarperCollins. \$23.95. Sleuth Rei Shimura travels from Washington D.C. to Tokyo and back again on a mysterious quest.

McInerny, Ralph, *Irish Gilt*, St. Martin's Minotaur. \$23.95. Brothers Roger and Philip Knight investigate the death of a researcher who comes to Notre Dame in search of information that will lead to a gold mine in South Africa.

Morris, Bob, *Jamaica Me Dead*, St. Martin's Minotaur. \$22.95. Featuring Zack Chasteen, former Miami Dolphin, who is once again investigating murder.

Pratchett, Terry, *Thud!*, HarperCollins. \$24.95. Commander Sam Vimes of the City Watch has got an unsolved murder to crack. And that's just the beginning of his day.

Roberts, Nora, *Blue Smoke*, Putnam. \$25.95. Reena Hale becomes a firefighter to try and come to terms with her fascination and fear of fire. She's also dealing with a man who is taunting her with a string of horrifying crimes.

Stewart, Chris, *The Fourth War*, St. Martin's Press. \$24.95. CIA paramilitary agent Peter Zembeic must develop a desperate plan to save the world from the threat of nuclear terror.

Thurlo, David and Aimee, *Pale Death*, Forge. \$23.95. Lee Nez, State Police officer and vampire helps out FBI agent Diane Lopez when a string of gruesome murders in the Shiprock area.

Truman, Margaret, *Murder at the Washington Tribune*, Ballantine. \$24.95. Journalist intrigue and media manipulation in the latest Capital Crimes novel.

Weiner, Jennifer, *Goodnight Nobody*, Atria Books. \$26.00. Kate Klein, newly arrived in upper-crust suburban Connecticut, finds herself embroiled in a local murder.

Woods, Stuart, *Iron Orchid*, Putnam. \$25.95. Holly Barker, small-town cop turned CIA agent, tracks a master of disguise – and consummate killer.

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.

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