

# BOOKAHOLIC

## For the Mystery Addict

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### WHAT I'VE BEEN READING

***BLOW THE HOUSE DOWN*, Robert Baer, Crown. \$25.95**

The nearly 300 pages of this thriller just flew by for me. Baer presents a riveting alternative history of 9/11, which has, among other conspiracy theories, been circulating on the internet for some time now. What gives this story the chilling ring of truth is Baer's credentials: for twenty years he ran agents from inside the CIA's Directorate of Operations, developing intelligence on Hezbollah, Al-Qaeda, and other terrorist organizations. His memoir, *See No Evil*, inspired the movie *Syriana*. While some of the references are a little obscure - "insider" talk maybe, Baer's writing is crisp, salty, and deeply cynical. Toto, we are not in Kansas anymore!

***CITY OF SHADOWS*, Ariana Franklin, Wm. Morrow. \$24.95**

Set in Berlin in the 1920s, this first novel really stays with me. Germany is trying to recover from the devastation of the Great War: the 'haves' live lives of decadence; the 'have nots', lives of desperation; a charismatic Adolph Hitler is making his voice heard; and a killer is on the loose. Because of that setting I was not prepared for the main story. Prince Nikolaevich Potrovskov, a Russian Prince who isn't a prince at all, runs one of Berlin's most successful nightclubs and Esther Solomonova, a Jewish émigré with a scarred face, is his secretary. Prince Nick hears of a woman being held at Dalldorf, the hospital for the deranged, who is saying she is Anastasia, the daughter of the last Russian czar. Prince Nick has a scheme to rescue her and make money from the surviving Russian aristocracy by encouraging her fantasy and passing her off as the lost daughter. Elegantly written, the story, based partly on fact, kept me riveted right up until the shock ending.

***THE KING OF LIES*, John Hart, St. Martin's Minotaur. \$22.95**

This debut introduces Work Pickens, a lawyer from North Carolina. Told at a leisurely pace, the mystery at the heart of the story involves Work's family. The body of Work's father has just been found. Ezra Pickens disappeared nearly a year ago on the night of his wife's death. What happened that night has had a profound effect on Work and on his sister Jean, who wants little to do with her family. The discovery of Ezra's body puts the spotlight on the family as suspects as well as heirs to Ezra's vast fortune and eccentric whims. Slowly, secrets come to the fore. There's no doubt that Ezra deserved to die but whodunit? You'll need patience to find out. I use the words "leisurely" and "slowly" for a reason; this literary thriller, well written though it undoubtedly is, moves sluggishly at times.

***THE WRONG KIND OF BLOOD*, Declan Hughes, Wm. Morrow. \$23.95**

Another first mystery, this one set in Dublin. Private Investigator Ed Loy has returned home from Los Angeles to bury his mother. He is asked by an old friend to find her husband and is soon on a journey that involves his dead father, two corpses, and organized crime. The writing here is reminiscent of that of John Connolly (who recommended this to me). Hughes is not, to my mind anyway, the writer that Connolly is, but the story is about understanding the present by unearthing the secrets of the past. Cerebral, thrilling, and utterly Irish.

***MR. CLARINET*, Nick Stone, Michael Joseph.**

I don't usually like to review books not yet available in the US, but this British import is getting so much attention, and deservedly so, that I want to bring it to your attention. Max Mingus is a private investigator based in Miami. He has just been released from prison and is contacted by a billionaire, Allain Carver, whose son Charlie disappeared three years ago in Haiti. Max is, at first, unwilling to take the case but a \$10 million payday awaits him if he can locate Charlie, dead or alive. Max travels to Haiti where he hears rumors of Mr. Clarinet, a mythical figure who steals children. What is remarkable about this book is not the story, however, but the evocation of Haiti during the 1990s. Stone spent his early years there and some of his relatives worked for "Papa Doc" Duvalier and it is Haiti which is the real horror at the heart of this story. I'm sure this debut novel will be published here but if it isn't, find a way to get your hands on it.

## ON MY READING LIST

***END OF STORY*, Peter Abrahams, Wm. Morrow. \$24.95**

Ivy Seidel hopes her bartending gig is a temporary one. Her dream is to become a writer, so when she is offered an opportunity to teach writing to inmates at a maximum-security prison, she jumps at the chance. There, she discovers that Vance Harrow, convicted of a terrible crime, also possesses a remarkable talent. Ivy is soon under the spell of his writing and begins to investigate Harrow's past. But somebody doesn't want that past disturbed. Abrahams is one of the masters of chilling suspense.

***THE TEMPLAR LEGACY*, Steve Berry, Ballantine. \$24.95**

With their knowledge and staggering wealth, the historic Knights Templar controlled kings and popes. But when their last master died in 1314, their reign ended. Or did it? For Cotton Malone, a former covert U.S. Justice Department agent and his ex-supervisor Stephanie Nelle, an earth-shattering discovery lies in wait at the end of a heart-racing chase through a labyrinth of intrigue, danger, treachery, and lust for power that spans centuries. I can't resist this latest from the author of *The Third Secret*.

***HIGH LONESOME: Stories 1966-2006*, Joyce Carol Oates. \$34.95**

One of our most prolific writers, Oates has the extraordinary ability to churn them out without any apparent loss of quality, so it's no surprise that this collection of her short

stories comes in at nearly 700 pages. As well as collecting *the best* of her short fiction (she left some out!), Oates has included nine new stories. I can never resist joking about Oates' production, but I'm a great admirer and wouldn't miss this for the world.

**BRANDENBURG GATE, Henry Porter, Atlantic Monthly. \$24.00**

It is September 1989 and the Communist government in East Germany is on the brink of collapse. Even the Stasi can't stop the rebellion that ends in the fall of the Berlin Wall. This novel, which won the Ian Fleming Steel Dagger Award in the UK, is set against those last few frenzied weeks. A former Stasi agent, Rudi Rosenharte, is caught between the Stasi who are holding his family and the British and Americans, forcing him to choose between his beloved brother and returning to East Germany as a double agent.

**DIRTY BLONDE, Lisa Scottoline, HarperCollins. \$25.95**

At age 39, Cate Fante has just become a federal judge and is slightly intimidated. Her job, after all, is described in the Constitution of the United States. Inwardly, she worries that she only looks the part, but Cate keeps all her doubts a secret. And that's not the only secret she keeps, because Cate leads a dark, double life, and when that secret comes to light in the case before her, her life is spilled all over the tabloids. This seems bound for the best seller lists.

**TRAITOR'S KISS, Gerald Seymour, Overlook Press. \$24.95**

An English trawler strays into Russian waters and when it returns, the captain has a package to deliver to British Intelligence. For the next four years, a high-ranked Russian naval officer passes valuable information to MI6. Suddenly the information stops. His contacts in London know nothing about him but the time has come to get him out. Only one veteran agent realizes there is more at stake than a man's life. Espionage and Cold War politics.

## FIRST MYSTERIES

**CONSIGNED TO DEATH, Jane K. Cleland, St. Martin's Minotaur. \$23.95**

Josie Prescott leaves her high-paying New York auction house job to live on the New Hampshire coast, and gets involved in murder. The eligible but emotionally distant local police chief thinks Josie may be his suspect and suddenly she has a lot to lose. A mixture of antiques, lore, and suspense in this debut.

**MURDER IN EXILE, Vincent H. O'Neil, St. Martin's Minotaur. \$22.95**

Frank Cole, fact checker for an insurance company, is called to investigate the hit-and-run death of a young man and becomes convinced that this "accident" was murder and that the victim was mistaken for the actual target – whom Frank somewhat resembles. Winner of the 2005 Malice Domestic/St. Martin's Press Best First Traditional Mystery Contest.

## NON MYSTERIES OF NOTE

***BLACK SWAN GREEN*, David Mitchell, Random House. \$22.95**

This narrative tracks a single year in the life of thirteen-year-old Jason Taylor, who lives in a sleepy village in Worcestershire, England, in 1982. But these thirteen chapters create an exquisitely observed world that is anything but sleepy. Mitchell, whose *Cloud Atlas* is surely a work of genius, inverts the telescopic vision of that novel to put this one year, this one village, this one boy, under his dazzling microscope.

***FORTUNATE SON*, Walter Mosley, Little Brown. \$23.95**

Eric and Tommy are as close as brothers although their backgrounds couldn't be further apart. Eric looks like a Nordic god and appears to have an endless supply of good fortune while Tommy is a lame black boy with health problems. Eric has everything but trusts nothing and Tommy has nothing but feels lucky every day of his life. Mosley explores the true meaning of fortune.

***SEEING*, Jose Saramago, Harcourt. \$25.00**

On election day in the capital, it is raining. So hard that no one bothers come out to vote. At three o'clock the rain stops. At four the voters rush to the polling stations, but when the ballots are counted more than 70 percent are blank. What's going on, the politicians want to know. A state of emergency is declared and the president proposes that a wall be built around the city. A police superintendent is put on the case to see if there is a conspiracy against the state. Attention must be paid to this satire on the sometimes dubious efficacy of the democratic system by Nobel Prize winner Saramago.

## NEWS FROM THE UK

***YEAR OF THE COBRA*, Paul Doherty, Headline**

Tutankhamun is unwell, but there is no heir apparent. Egypt's enemies, the Hittites, are advancing through Canaan and Ay, father of Nefertiti, still plots like the spider he is.

***THE MANUSCRIPT*, Michael Stephen Fuchs, Macmillan**

This debut, set in the US, involves hackers, drug dealers, well-armed mercenaries, and a gang of angry young Taoists. The search is on for the meaning of life discovered by an infamous 19<sup>th</sup> century explorer and said to be concealed in the inaccessible spaces of a hidden website.

***PIG ISLAND*, Mo Hayder, Bantam Press**

Investigative journalist Joe Oakes arrives on a remote Scottish island divided into two halves. On one side lives the obscure religious community where Oakesy has been invited to stay. On the other, fenced off by high voltage electric wire, is David Dove, the community's founder who lives in isolation. Oakesy is there on the trail of a strange creature, caught briefly on film, a figure so deformed, it can hardly be human.

***THROUGH A GLASS DARKLY*, Donna Leon, Heinemann**

A body is found lying in front of the furnaces in a glass factory in Murano, Italy. The victim has left clues in a copy of Dante, and Commissario Brunetti must enter an inferno to discover who is burning the land and fouling the waters of Venice's lagoons.

***CHRONICLER OF THE WINDS*, Henning Mankell, Harvill Press**

Jose Antonio Maria Vaz hears gunfire from the deserted theater next door to his bakery. He discovers the wounded body of Nelio, the street urchin known for living on his wits. The dying Nelio tells his story, a story set on the African Continent.

***TAKING COMFORT*, Roger Morris, Macmillan**

When Rob Saunders witnesses a young Japanese student commit suicide, he impulsively takes the folder she dropped as she threw herself under a train. Soon he finds himself taking souvenirs from a series of tragic events, and the lines begin to blur between witnessing, seeking out, and initiating tragedy.

***VISIBILITY*, Boris Starling, HarperCollins**

As the Great Fog of 1952 descends on London, MI5 outcast Herbert Smith stumbles upon a secret that will change the world – if he can stay alive long enough to tell it.

***STAIN ON THE SILENCE*, Andrew Taylor, Michael Joseph**

The last person James wants to meet again is Lily. But now she's dying of cancer, and she tells him that 24 years ago she gave birth to a daughter and James is the father. Lily has one more secret to reveal. Their daughter is wanted for murder.

***BLACK SUN*, James Twining, HarperCollins**

Tom Kirk is back. In London, an Auschwitz survivor is murdered in his hospital bed and the killer makes off with his severed left arm. In Maryland, a gang breaks into the NSA Museum and steals a WWII Enigma machine, and in Prague, an anti-Semitic attack on a synagogue culminates in the theft of a seemingly worthless painting.

## COLLECTING

At the end of February, I attended a talk at The Mysterious Bookshop in New York given by Otto Penzler entitled "Collecting Mystery Fiction." He told me before he spoke that he would tailor his remarks to the collecting experience of the audience, and since that audience was comprised of beginning collectors, what he said was basic. Basic but important. I took notes and thought you might be curious. Here then are

**OTTO PENZLER'S RULES FOR COLLECTING.**

A collector is someone who has focus, a vision. A collector is not someone who accumulates a library of their favorite books.

Collect what you like, not what you think you should.

Narrow your scope: books by a particular author; books set in a particular town or state; books which focus on a particular subject.

Modern Literature and Mystery Fiction are most likely to increase in value. If you intend to collect exclusively for investment...buy Treasury bonds instead.

Buy reference books to learn more about your collection, and to put it into context.

Learn how to identify first editions. When we talk about "first editions" we really mean "first printings."

Be careful when buying online. Do not buy blind on sites such as E-Bay. Befriend a bookseller or dealer.

Signatures are important. Inscriptions by contemporary authors are a negative.

Association copies (inscribed to a friend or relative of the author, or a famous person) are valuable.

There are no guarantees that your books will keep their value. Good taste helps.

### CONDITION, CONDITION, CONDITION

Buy the best book you can afford. You only regret the books you don't buy.

Invest in Brodarts and cover your dust jackets.

Keep books away from direct sunlight and damp.

### Michael Connelly: An Example of Collecting

Connelly's first book, *Black Echo*, had a print run of 12,000.

Connelly's last book, *The Lincoln Lawyer*, had a print run of 495,000.

Supply and demand dictate that *Black Echo* increases in price as more collectors discover Connelly.

Do not put off buying those first two or three books. They will only get more expensive.

Do not, as some collectors do, refuse to buy Connelly's third book because you have not yet bought his first and second book. Buy great books when you can.

Otto Penzler (for those of you on Mars or at least out in cyberspace) is the owner of The Mysterious Bookshop in Manhattan. He is an editor, an author, the founder of The Mysterious Press and the magazine *Armchair Detective*, and arguably THE expert on mystery fiction.

## BOOKS OF THE MONTH

**Andrews, Mary Kay, *Savannah Breeze***, HarperCollins. \$24.95. After a disastrous relationship with a con man, BeBe Loudermilk opens Breeze Inn, a motel on Tybee Island.

**Benton Caroline, *The Path of the Dead***, Carroll & Graf. \$25.00. Gus Tavender suspects a connection between the death of a college friend's aunt and a charred body found in a burnt-out house. Set in Devon.

**Chesney, Marion, *Our Lady of Pain***, St. Martin's Minotaur. \$22.95. First in a new series of Edwardian whodunits by the author better known as M.C. Beaton.

- Clark, Carol Higgins, *Hitched***, Scribner. \$24.00. The week before Regan Reilly gets married, she's involved in mystery and mayhem on the streets of New York.
- Clark, Mary Higgins, *Two Little Girls in Blue***, Simon & Schuster. \$25.95. When the parents return home, they find the babysitter unconscious, their three-year-old twins gone, and a ransom note asking for eight million dollars. Great suspense from the queen.
- Crider, Bill, *A Mammoth Murder***, St. Martin's Minotaur. \$23.95. Sheriff Dan Rhodes investigates a Bigfoot sighting that leads him to a dead body.
- Davies, Freda, *Let Heaven Fall***, Carroll & Graf. \$25.00. Sue Bennett suspects her attorney husband was killed – and that she's next.
- Dorsey, Tim, *The Big Bamboo***, Wm. Morrow. \$24.95. Serge Storms, maniac and serial killer, heads for Hollywood in this latest outing. Murder, mayhem, kidnapping, and laughter follow.
- Eglin, Anthony, *The Lost Gardens***, St. Martin's Minotaur. \$23.95. Second mystery featuring eccentric Lawrence Kingston, retired professor of botany, amateur sleuth, and bon viveur.
- Emerson, Earl, *Firetrap***, Ballantine. \$24.95. When an African-American social club burns down, community leaders push for an independent investigation by local reporter and firefighter Trey Brown.
- Estleman, Loren, *Nicotine Kiss***, Forge. \$23.95. Amos Walker's routine job of tracing a deadbeat dad turns violent.
- Fiffer, Sharon, *Hollywood Stuff***, St. Martin's Minotaur. \$23.95. P.I. Jane Wheel is in Hollywood where she meets up with a screenwriting friend whose old writing partner has just been murdered.
- Green, Tim, *Kingdom Come***, Warner Books. \$24.95. Murder and vengeance set in a multi-billion dollar construction company.
- Haddam, Jane, *Hardscrabble Road***, St. Martin's Minotaur. \$24.95. Gregor Demarkian, retired FBI agent, is hired by a local legal project to look into the circumstances surrounding the death of their former client.
- Haines, Carolyn, *Penumbra***, St. Martin's Minotaur. \$23.95. Young woman with a white mother and black father solves a kidnapping in 1950s Mississippi.
- Hamilton, Denise, *Prisoner of Memory***, Scribner. \$24.00. In the fifth installment of this series, reporter Eve Diamond follows the story of a Russian émigré found murdered and finds herself in Cold War territory.
- Hart, Carolyn, *Dead Days of Summer***, Wm. Morrow. \$23.95. Max Darling is framed for murder. 17th in the Death on Demand series.
- Hautman, Pete, *The Prop***, Simon & Schuster. \$14.00. A professional poker player ups the ante in a deadly game of winner-take-all. This is a paperback original from Hautman.
- Jones, Stephen Graham, *Demon Theory***, MacAdam Cage. \$24.00. Hale and six of his med school classmates return to the house where his sister disappeared six years ago.
- Larsson, Asa, *Sun Storm***, Delacorte Press. \$22.00. When a young Swedish lawyer is summoned back to her hometown by the discovery of a body, she is pulled into a web of suspicion and religious fanaticism. This is the winner of Sweden's "Best First Crime Novel."

**Macpherson, Rett, *Dead Man Running***, St. Martin's Minotaur. \$23.95. Digging into the past of two mayoral candidates, Torie O'Shea discovers a deadly secret about her hometown's past.

**O'Brien, Patrick, *Richard Temple***, W.W. Norton. \$24.95. A prisoner of the German army in France, British citizen Temple examines his life as an artist and spy.

**Peters, Elizabeth, *Tomb of the Golden Bird***, Wm. Morrow. \$25.95. As the 1922 season begins, the Emerson clan are convinced that the tomb of the little-known King Tutankhamon lies in the Valley of the Kings.

**Pickard, Nancy, *The Virgin of Small Plains***, Ballantine. \$23.95. A long-ago murder resurfaces in a small Kansas town, with devastating and deadly consequences.

**Robards, Karen, *Vanished***, Putnam. \$24.95. Ten years after her daughter disappeared, Sarah Mason receives a phone call. From her daughter, and she still sounds six years old.

**Sallis, James, *Cripple Creek***, Walker. \$23.00. Second mystery featuring ex-cop and ex-con Turner who investigates the facts surrounding an escaped prisoner.

**Skibbins, David, *High Priestess***, St. Martin's Minotaur. \$23.95. Second mystery featuring Warren who is hiding from his previous life, posing as a tarot card reader.

**Smith, Alexander McCall, *Blue Shoes and Happiness***, Pantheon. \$21.95. The latest installment in the best-selling No. 1 Ladies Detective Agency series.

**Taylor, Thomas A., *Mortal Shield***, iBooks. \$22.95. The Missouri State Highway Patrol protect the governor from a home-grown terrorist group.

**Thurlo, Aimee and David, *Mourning Dove***, Forge. \$24.95. Ella Clah investigates a series of car-jackings which, she suspects, might be a cover up for murder.

**Tursten, Helene, *The Torso***, Soho Press. \$24.00. Detective Inspector Irene Huss tracks a necro-sadist. From Sweden.

**Waites, Martyn, *The Mercy Seat***, Pegasus. \$25.00. British journalist Joe Donovan takes on a missing person case in Northumberland.

**Walsh, Jill Paton, *Debts of Dishonor***, St. Martin's Minotaur. \$23.95. Nurse Imogen Quy of St. Agatha's College, Cambridge, investigates the sudden deaths of a billionaire and his son-in-law.

**Wolf, Leonard, *Traitor***, iBooks. \$22.95. This novel explores the impact of the Dreyfus Affair on 1893 France.

**Woods, Stuart, *Dark Harbor***, Putnam. \$25.95. Stone Barrington investigates the secrets of a CIA officer's suicide.

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