

# BOOKAHOLIC

## For the Mystery Addict

November 2007

Vol. 5, No. 12

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### WHAT I'VE BEEN READING

Until now, I have not been a fan of short story collections, no matter how well reviewed or strongly recommended. The problem I felt was the length! The better the story, the more difficult it was to put the impact aside and move on to the next one. I would confuse them or not give the next story a chance. Since reading **Joe Hill's** excellent anthology *20<sup>th</sup> Century Ghosts* and *Jesus Out to Sea* by **James Lee Burke**, I've decided that I've been depriving myself.

So I have a new strategy and my life has improved dramatically. I'll read several anthologies at a time and dip from one to the other. It works. Here's a list of some excellent titles that contain some of the best writing I've read in a long time:

*Best American Short Stories 2007* – **Stephen King**, Editor (or any year. Series Editor – Heidi Pitlor)

*Best American Mystery Stories 2007* – **Carl Hiaasen**, Editor (or any year. Series Editor – Otto Penzler)

*St. Lucy's Home For Girls Raised by Wolves* – **Karen Russell**

*Collected Stories* – **Carol Shields**

*Runaway* – **Alice Munro**

#### **ZUGZWANG, Ronan Bennett, Bloomsbury. \$24.95**

This literary thriller is set in St. Petersburg in 1914 where an international chess tournament is in progress. Also in progress are a series of mysterious murders. Dr. Otto Spethmann, psychoanalyst, seems to be implicated, although he doesn't see how that can be. He does have new patients: a woman plagued with nightmares and a chess master on the verge of a complete breakdown. They might be involved with the deaths, but he can't talk about that to anyone without violating doctor/patient privilege. I can't resist mysteries involving chess (and it helps to have at least a working knowledge of the game while reading this). Illustrations of plays appear throughout the book. The title, by the way, is a chess term used to describe a position in which a player is reduced to utter helplessness. Every play makes the player's position worse. Bennett is a remarkable writer who doesn't usually write mysteries. He should do it more. The UK edition is the true first.

**AT THE CITY'S EDGE, Marcus Sakey, St. Martin's Minotaur. \$24.95**

Sakey follows up his first novel, *The Blade Itself*, with an equally well-written and absorbing tale, set in his native Chicago. (What is it about Chicago? These days, every other excellent mystery is coming out of the Windy City.) Jason Palmer is back from Iraq with nothing on his mind except booze and women. His older brother, Michael, is killed when the bar that he owns burns down. It doesn't take long before Jason learns that the fire was arson and that Michael was involved in more than pulling beers. Jason gets drawn into a gang war as he tries to avenge his brother's death and protect Michael's young son from the dark side of the city.

**BY BLOOD WRITTEN, Steven Womack, Harper Suspense. \$7.99**

I started to read this as a guilty pleasure, intrigued by the premise: an author is receiving critical acclaim for his novels but not much else; this all changes when he starts a series about a serial killer who seems to be making his way through the alphabet. At the same time, a real-life serial killer is on the loose. Dubbed the Alphabet Killer, his killings are taking place on or close to the reading tour our author is on. Could it be? Well, yes it could. I'm not giving away anything when I tell you the author is the killer, because there are no surprises in this story. What kept me reading was the fascinating look at publishing, mid-list vs. best-selling authors, reading tours, bookstore chains, and independents?

## ON MY READING LIST

**HIDDEN MOON, James Church, St. Martin's Minotaur. \$23.95**

Inspector O returns from a mission abroad to find his new police commander waiting for him. There has been a bank robbery – the first ever in Pyongyang. Various ministries are demanding action and O must start investigating. But this is North Korea, and nothing is ever as it seems. This is the second book featuring O, and if it is half as good as the first, we have a winning series.

**RUNOFF, Mark Coggins, Bleak House Books. \$24.95**

August Riordan is back, and this time he has been hired by Leonora Lee, known as "Dragon Lady," who has failed to carry the predominantly Chinese precincts of San Francisco in her run for mayor. Lee asks Riordan to investigate the possibility that someone has rigged the election by hacking the city's newly installed touch-screen voting machines. Oh, surely not! Any book by Mark Coggins lands on my must-read list.

**END GAMES, Michael Dibdin, Pantheon. \$23.95**

This is the final Aurelio Zen mystery. Michael Dibdin passed away earlier this year at a shockingly young age.

**THE PURE IN HEART, Susan Hill, The Overlook Press. \$24.95**

I haven't read the first in this series yet (*The Various Haunts of Men*), but this series is getting such great word of mouth that the second book joins it on my ever-increasing must-read pile. Detective Chief Inspector Simon Serrailer is on vacation in Venice when he's recalled home. A little boy has been snatched as he stands at the gate of his home waiting for his lift to school. This series is, I hear, character driven and that's enough for me. The true first, collectors, is the UK.

**THE QUIET GIRL, Peter Hoeg, Farrar, Straus & Giroux. \$26.00**

In Copenhagen, a tax-dodging psychic clown searches for a missing girl. Sorry, that's all I know about this entry, but here's the important part: it's by the author of *Smilla's Sense of Snow*.

**THE WANDERING GHOST, Martin Limon, Soho Press. \$24.00**

Good news! The Slicky Boys are back. The only female MP assigned to Korea's DMZ is missing. Army cops (known as Slicky Boys) Sueno and Bascom are sent in to find her and discover black marketeering, riots, and corruption. This is a terrific series which has lost some of its momentum because of the length of time between entries. But don't miss it.

**THE BLACK LIZARD BIG BOOK OF PULPS, Otto Penzler Editor, Vintage. \$24.95**

This oversize trade paperback is a must for mystery fans, especially those who love the golden age of pulps – the '20s, '30s, and '40s. The book is broken down into three sections: *The Crimefighters*, *The Villains*, and *The Dames* – more than 1,000 pages of the best writing of the period by the best: Dashiell Hammett, Horace McCoy, Frank Gruber, Raoul Whitfield, Raymond Chandler, Cornell Woolrich, etc. For that special person on your holiday gift list – like you!

## FIRST MYSTERIES

**GARCIA'S HEART, Liam Durcan, St. Martin's Press. \$23.95**

Neurologist Patrick Lazerenko leaves Boston to travel to the Hague to witness the war crimes trial of his mentor, a doctor accused of involvement in Honduras' torture and interrogation program. He hopes to exonerate his friend, but Lazerenko finds that the case will take him beyond issues of guilt and innocence.

**THE GOOD THIEF'S GUIDE TO AMSTERDAM, Chris Ewan, St. Martin's Minotaur. \$23.95**

Charlie Howard is a writer of suspense novels who, on the side, steals for a very discreet clientele on commission. When an American offers to pay Charlie 20,000 Euros if he steals two small monkey figurines, Charlie is suspicious. He doesn't know how this client found him and the job seems too good to be true. And, of course, it is. This first

novel won the Long Barn Books first novel competition in the UK. The UK is the true first edition.

## NON MYSTERIES OF NOTE

***THE FALL OF TROY*, Peter Ackroyd, Doubleday. \$23.00**

Heinrich Obermann, a celebrated German archaeologist, has uncovered the ancient ruins of Troy on a Turkish hillside. He believes that his discovery will prove that the heroes of The Iliad actually existed. Ackroyd is a multi-award winner and attention should be paid. The true first is the UK.

***NO RESERVATIONS: AROUND THE WORLD ON AN EMPTY STOMACH*, Anthony Bourdain, Bloomsbury. \$24.95**

For those of us who like to travel and, despite the title, eat.

***A FREE LIFE*, Ha Jin, Pantheon. \$26.00**

Nan Wu studied political science at Brandeis University in the mid 1980s and he is certain that a bright future awaits him and his wife when they return to China. But after the Tiananmen Square massacre, the Wus feel that they can begin a freer life in the West. They set out on an uncharted journey through contemporary America – from Boston to New York to Atlanta – in search of financial stability, a sense of belonging, the American Dream. The American immigrant saga has been brought up to date here.

***LAST NIGHT AT THE LOBSTER*, Stewart O’Nan, Viking. \$19.95**

O’Nan does write mysteries every now and again, but this is not one of them. A Red Lobster restaurant in Connecticut is closing and manager Manny DeLeon takes stock of his life and his job.

## NEWS FROM THE UK

***COVER THE MIRRORS*, Faye L. Booth, Macmillan.**

Molly Pinner is a successful medium in Victorian England, a “trade” she has inherited from her aunt. But Molly discovers that her aunt has lied about more than just her ability to commune with the dead.

***THE ENCHANTER’S FOREST*, Alys Claire. Hodder & Stoughton.**

Tenth in the Hawkenlye Series, set in England in 1195.

***DEATH AT DAWN*, Carol Peacock, HarperCollins.**

Liberty Lane sets out for France in 1837 in pursuit of her father’s killer.

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## BOOKS OF THE MONTH

**Baldacci, David, *Stone Cold***, Grand Central Publishing. \$26.99. The Camel Club is back in their most dangerous adventure yet.

**Barbieri, Maggie, *Extracurricular Activities***, St. Martin's Minotaur. \$23.95. College English professor Alison Bergeron teams up with NYPD Homicide Detective Bobby Crawford when her ex turns up dead.

**Bush, Nancy, *Ultraviolet***, Kensington. \$19.95. P.I. Jane Kelly takes on her first big solo case – but it may be her last.

**Cohen, Gabriel, *The Graving Dock***, St. Martin's Minotaur. \$23.95. A coffin drifts ashore in Red Hook, Brooklyn. Inside is the body of a boy with the letters GI written on his forehead. Detective Jack Lightner is assigned to help a local detective with the case.

**Doss, James, D., *Three Sisters***, St. Martin's Minotaur. \$24.95. Featuring Charlie Moon, part-time rancher and part-time tribal investigator in Granite Creek, Colorado.

**Forbes, Elena, *Die With Me***, MacAdam Cage. \$24.00. Somewhere in London a lonely young woman reaches out to the wrong man and Detective Inspector Mark Tartaglia must find her before a killer does. First novel in a new series. UK edition is the true first.

**Freeman, Judith, *The Long Embrace***, Pantheon. \$25.95. An exploration of the life of Raymond Chandler and his wife Cissy – the woman who helped transform the shy and troubled accountant into a literary giant.

**Grabien, Deborah, *New Slain Knight***, St. Martin's Minotaur. \$24.95. Ringan Laine and Penny Wintercraft-Hawkes are planning a quiet vacation. But that changes when Ringan's niece, a fourteen-year-old violin prodigy named Rebecca, needs supervision while her parents deal with a medical emergency.

**Gray, John MacLachlan Gray, *Not Quite Dead***, St. Martin's Minotaur. \$24.95. A literary thriller in which Charles Dickens and Edgar Allan Poe meet in mid-nineteenth-century America.

**Jordan, Jen, Ed., *Expletive Deleted***, Big Earth Publishing. \$24.95. A collection of short stories by Ken Bruen, Charlie Huston, Jason Starr, etc. all celebrating that most perfect of all cusswords: f---!

**Koontz, Dean, *The Darkest Evening of the Year***, Bantam. \$27.00. A woman who's dedicated her life to animal rescue harbors a secret that will soon make her the hunted creature in need of saving.

**Kunzmann, Richard, *Salamander Cotton***, St. Martin's Minotaur. \$24.95. A wealthy ex-mining boss has been found beaten and burned to death in his home. His wife insists the killer will be found in the Northern Cape, where the victim owned a farm with a dark secret. Set in South Africa.

**Lellenberg, Jon, with Daniel Stashower & Chris Foley, *Arthur Conan Doyle: A Life in Letters***, Penguin Press. \$37.95. An annotated collection of Conan Doyle's previously unpublished correspondence, offering a complete portrait of the man. V.v. important for all Sherlockians!

**Logue, Mary, *Maiden Rock***, Big Earth Publishing. \$24.95. A Claire Watkins mystery.

**Mortimer, John, *Rumpole Misbehaves***, Viking. \$24.95. Horace Rumpole is called in to defend a child who dared to play soccer on a posh street.

**Patterson, James, *Double Cross***, Little Brown. \$27.99. Alex Cross rejoins the police force to face the most diabolical villain he's ever encountered – a serial killer with a hunger for mega-celebrity.

**Patterson, Richard North, *The Race***, St. Martin's Minotaur. \$26.00. A moderate Republican candidate faces treacherous competition in this look at dirty politics – American style.

**Penzler, Otto, *Dead Man's Hand***, Harcourt. \$25.00. An anthology of poker mysteries with contributions from Michael Connelly, Walter Mosley, Joyce Carol Oates, Jeffery Deaver, etc.

**Robb, J.D., *Creation In Death***, Putnam. \$25.95. Featuring NYPSP Lieutenant Eve Dallas who keeps the streets of a near-future New York safe.

**Rowland, Laura Joh, *The Snow Empress***, St. Martin's Minotaur. \$24.95. Set in Japan in 1699 and featuring Sano Ichiro, the samurai detective who has risen to power and influence in the shogun's court.

**Schechter, Harold, *The Devil's Gentleman***, Random House. \$25.95. True account of Roland Mineux, a wealthy member of late 19<sup>th</sup> century New York who had fame and fortune and killed to keep it that way.

**Spinosa, Tony, *Gun Bunnies***, Big Earth Publishing. \$24.95. Joe Serpe returns in this follow up to *Hose Monkey*. Spinosa is a pseudonym of Reed Farrel Coleman.

**Tremayne, Peter, *A Prayer for the Damned***, St. Martin's Minotaur. \$24.95. In February of 68 A.D., Fidelma of Cashel and her companion Eadulf are about to get married. But murder interferes.

**Truman, Margaret, *Murder on K Street***, Random House. \$24.95. An aspiring presidential contender and his recently murdered wife are featured in the latest entry in the Capital Crimes series.

**Waites, Martyn, *Bone Machine***, Pegasus. \$24.95. Joe Donovan takes the case of a woman abuser accused of ritualistic mutilation and murder.

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