

BOOKAHOLIC

For the Mystery Addict

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Welcome to the sixth year of *Bookaholic*.

This is my favorite time of year, when “best of” lists are compiled. I’ve already looked at the year’s 100 Best Books according to *The New York Times*. More interesting to me are the lists that regular readers compile. Here’s mine:

William Boyd – *Restless*
James Lee Burke – *Tin Roof Blowdown*
Chelsea Cain – *Heartsick*
Joe Hill – *20th Century Ghosts*
Matthew Klein – *Con Ed*
Cormac McCarthy – *The Road*
Ian McEwan – *On Chesil Beach*
Brian McGilloway – *Borderlands*
Michael Marshall – *The Intruders*
Derek Nikitas – *Pyres*
Caro Ramsay – *Absolution*
David L. Robbins – *Scorched Earth*

WHAT I’VE BEEN READING

***THE GHOST*, Robert Harris, Simon & Schuster. \$26.00**

Former British Prime Minister Adam Lang (a very thinly disguised Tony Blair) is under deadline to complete his memoirs—he’s been paid a remarkable sum to do so. However, his former aide and ghostwriter is killed in a ferry accident near Martha’s Vineyard and a replacement must be found. Enter a professional ghost writer—the unnamed narrator of this fast-moving thriller. As he begins his task, his subject is accused of war crimes by The Hague for authorizing the abduction of British citizens, suspected terrorists, from Pakistan and handing them over to the CIA by whom, apparently, they were tortured. (Hard to believe, isn’t it?) As the writer probes deeper, secrets surface and he begins to suspect that his predecessor’s death may not have been an accident. Only one absurdity in this otherwise terrific read: after only a very short acquaintance the former First Lady and the ghostwriter end up in bed. No first lady, former or otherwise, would compromise her husband’s or her own reputation by having sex with a relative stranger. Honestly guys, no matter how much you want women to be this way, we are so not! This is not a major plot element, so gloss right over it and have yourself a wonderful holiday read.

***I AM LEGEND*, Richard Matheson, Orb Edition. \$14.95**

This novella, long out of print, has been reissued along with some of Matheson's other stories to take advantage, no doubt, of the recently released movie. It seems that I am among the very few who did not read this classic story before it went out of print, but it has a great reputation that has followed it down the years. Well deserved too. This story has not aged, and it is so disturbing, so frightening, so intriguing that there is no way I am going to sit in a darkened room and watch it on a big screen. Even if you're less squeamish than I am, read the book first. It's bound to be different and, I suspect, the scenes are better imagined than cinematically portrayed.

***THEY DID IT WITH LOVE*, Kate Morgenroth, Plume. \$14.00**

I read this author's first novel, *Kill Me First*, and was impressed. This paperback original, however, did not initially call my name. Then a colleague suggested that I stop dipping my hands so gleefully into the blood of many and try to appreciate a story, well told, without my usual requisite high body count. I'm glad he did. This is a must for all of us. It involves a reading club in Connecticut that discusses only mysteries. You'll recognize the authors, the titles, the bookstores, and even the personnel of those bookstores. But that fun stuff aside, the serious subject of this novel is the murder of one of the members of said book club. Morgenroth has fashioned a whodunit worthy of Agatha Christie, as she pushes and pulls us from one suspect to another. Nicely constructed with a satisfying twist at the end.

***THE LOVER*, Laura Wilson**

This is another of those reading copies that has been languishing on my slush pile for several years. It is set in my favorite place at my favorite time, for fiction anyway—London during the Blitz—and is based, apparently, on a real serial killer who was known as the "Blackout Ripper." It has an odd construction that may not appeal to all: several characters, including the killer, narrate the chapters. But I found this compelling and was quite unable to put the story aside despite knowing who the killer was. What I found most chilling was knowing what the killer thinks alongside what the women with him think he's thinking. I suspect that there are women who weave such fantasies around men who turn out to be just plain rotten, if not serial killers, and I wonder if all those fairy tales about princes that females are told in childhood are to blame.

ON MY READING LIST

***A HELL OF A WOMAN*, Megan Abbott, Ed., Busted Flush. \$26.00**

This anthology of female noir features original stories by or about women by Ken Bruen, Sara Gran, Rebecca Pawell, Naomi Hirahara, Daniel Woodrell, etc. Can't resist. This anthology is also available in paperback (\$18.00).

***T IS FOR TRESPASS*, Sue Grafton, Putnam. \$26.95**

Is it me, or is this series beginning to seem just a little odd, set as it is in the 1980s? I know it was always Grafton's intention not to move forward in time so that she would not have to age Kinsey Millhone, but pay telephones and an absence of the internet are beginning to seem behind the times even to this old fart! But it is Sue Grafton and it is Kinsey Millhone and, I understand, the voice changes in this story from Millhone to that of Solana Rojas, sociopath. So of course it's on my list.

***TOUCHSTONE*, Laurie R. King, Bantam. \$24.00**

This stand alone novel, set in Great Britain between the two world wars, introduces Bennett Grey who fought in the Great War. As the nation braces for the Great Strike, the British government needs a man able to pick out a terrorist among a tangle of allies. I love novels about England incorporating actual events and I'm sure, this being King, that the research is impeccable.

***WATCHMAN*, Ian Rankin, Little Brown. \$24.99**

Unavailable for many years, this reissue of Rankin's espionage novel is most welcome. Miles Flint is a spy who is making some serious mistakes. But there's also something wrong with the agency he works for. Miles begins his own investigation, and when he's sent on a routine mission to Belfast, his darkest suspicions are confirmed and his life is endangered.

FIRST MYSTERIES

***PRECIOUS BLOOD*, Jonathan Hayes, HarperCollins. \$24.95**

Dr. Edward Jenner, who resigned from his post as forensic pathologist after the trauma of 9/11, is called in as a consultant when the body of a young woman is found. Jenner believes that this is the work of a budding serial killer. Hayes works in the ME's office in New York, so I expect the autopsy scenes to be gruesomely authentic.

***WITHOUT WARNING*, Eugenia Lovett West, St. Martin's Minotaur. \$24.95**

When Emma Streat's successful husband dies in a hit-and-run accident, she sets out to find his killer. She finds herself in the international high-tech world where a new laser invention may become a global threat.

NEWS FROM THE UK

THE TEMPLAR: TEMPLAR SERIES 1*, Paul Doherty. **Headline.*

First in a new series about the founding of the Templar Order. Popular author. Popular subject.

***THE JUDAS*, Steve Jackson, HarperCollins.**

In Rome, the severed hand of a retired MI6 Head of Station is found. The hand is holding a bag containing thirty silver pieces. In London, MI6 Agent Paul Aston is asked to investigate the murder in Rome. When one of MI6's directors dies suddenly, Aston realizes there's a lot more going on than meets the eye. A first novel from Jackson.

BOOKS OF THE MONTH

Ashford, Lindsay Jayne, *Strange Blood*, St. Martin's Minotaur. \$23.95. Women are dying with pentagrams carved on their faces. Forensic psychologist Megan Rhys is called in to help.

Brand, Max, *Masquerade: Ten Crime Stories*, Crippen & Landru. \$40 hardcover. \$19.00 paperback. The master of western pulp and creator of Dr. Kildare also turned his talents to mystery. This is the first collection of Brand's crime and mystery fiction.

Cohen, Nancy J., *Killer Knots*, Kensington. \$22.00. Hairstylist Maria Shore lands roots-deep in another Bad Hair Day mystery.

Curzon, Clare, *The Edge*, St. Martin's Minotaur. \$23.95. Superintendent Mike Yeadings investigates when the body of a naked woman is found in a stable.

Druett, Joan, *Deadly Shoals*, St. Martin's Minotaur. \$24.95. Fourth seafaring mystery featuring Wiki Coffin – linguist, navigator, and cultural liaison on the *U.S. Exploring Expedition*.

Dubois, Brendan, *Twilight*, St. Martin's Minotaur. \$23.95. World War III is over and U.N. peacekeepers are in the US trying to establish an uneasy peace.

George, Kathleen, *Afterimage*, St. Martin's Minotaur. \$24.95. Pittsburgh detective Colleen Greer must find the killer of two lonely women.

Graves, Sarah, *The Book of Old Houses*, Bantam. \$22.00. A Home Repair is Homicide mystery.

Harper, Tom, *Siege of Heaven*, St. Martin's Minotaur. \$24.95. Third in the First Crusade Trilogy.

Hart, Ellen, *Mortal Groove*, St. Martin's Minotaur. \$25.95. Jane Lawless's father learns that the truth will out when his race for governor turns ugly.

Jones, Merry, *The Deadly Neighbors*, St. Martin's Minotaur. \$24.95. Art therapist Zoë Hayes investigates when a woman's body is discovered in Zoë's father's kitchen.

Lakeman, Thomas, *Chillwater Cover*, St. Martin's Minotaur. \$24.95. Second in the series featuring FBI agent Peggy Weaver.

Martin, P.D., *The Murderer's Club*, Mira. \$24.95. A group of serial killers create their own online reality show where contestants are voted off and murdered.

Nesbo, Jo, *The Redbreast*, HarperCollins. \$24.95. This Norwegian thriller follows a recovering alcoholic inspector as he tracks a vicious neo-Nazi.

Pattison, Eliot, *Prayer of the Dragon*, Soho Crime. \$24.00. Former Beijing investigator Shan must save a comatose man from execution for two murders in this fifth Tibetan mystery by Edgar-winner Pattison.

Poyer, David, *Korea Strait*, St. Martin's Press. \$24.95. A sea adventure set as World War III is about to begin.

Randisi, Robert J., *Luck Be A Lady, Don't Die*, St. Martin's Minotaur. \$23.95. The Rat Pack returns to Vegas for the premier of Ocean's 11 and Eddie G. is once again called upon for assistance.

Roberts, John Maddox, *SPQR XI: Under Vesuvius*, St. Martin's Minotaur. \$23.95. A priest's daughter is murdered and Praetor Decius must find her killer and keep the mob off the young boy who is the prime suspect.

Satterthwait, Walter, *The Mankiller of Poojegai and Other Mysteries*, Crippen & Landru. \$40.00 hardcover. \$19.00 paperback. Satterthwait's stories set everywhere from 19th century Italy to modern Africa are gathered in this collection.

Schwegel, Theresa, *Person of Interest*, St. Martin's Minotaur. \$24.95. A cop's wife in a failing marriage tries to protect her daughter from a bad boyfriend and finds herself in the middle of her husband's most dangerous case.

Xiaolong, Qiu, *Red Mandarin Dress*, St. Martin's Minotaur. \$24.95. Chief Inspector Chen Cao of the Shanghai Police Department is on vacation but returns when Shanghai is stalked by its first sexual serial killer – the victims are all dressed in red mandarin dresses.

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