

BOOKAHOLIC

For the Mystery Addict

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WHAT I'VE BEEN READING

WINTER STUDY, Nevada Barr, Putnam. \$24.95

I'm always taken by surprise by my love of this series featuring flawed park ranger Anna Pigeon. As an aficionado of high body counts, I am usually charmed by bloody murder, and the gorier the better. But Barr's quality writing and her setting—our national parks—has consistently won me over. Anna Pigeon is once again at Isle Royale (she was there in her second book, *Superior Death*), this time in the dead of winter to learn to manage and understand wolves as they are reintroduced into the park. With Anna are a study team and two scientists from Homeland Security who are checking out the study and the park. They're an odd assortment of people, cramped together in small quarters, who battle the elements and, later on, a ruthless killer in their midst. Although the murder here doesn't happen until half-way into the story, the suspense is sustained throughout and the story is chilling, in more ways than one.

THE FORGERY OF VENUS, Michael Gruber, Wm. Morrow. \$24.95

Chaz Wilmot is a gifted artist who has to make his living in the world of commerce—magazine covers and rather interesting renderings of famous personalities which support him, his ex-wife, and their sick son. He takes part in a drug test which has a peculiar result: he hallucinates, imagining himself to be the reincarnation of the artist Velasquez. Dropped from that program, Chaz is then offered a job restoring a ceiling in a Venetian palazzo, a job he does so well that more offers follow. But not all is as it should be. He finds himself recreating works of art in such fine detail that it is impossible to tell them from the original. Is he going crazy? Chaz begins to question his own existence. Mysteries set in the art world are never a great favorite of mine, philistine that I am, but when the author is as good a writer as Michael Gruber, I am captivated.

THE FINDER, Colin Harrison, Farrar, Straus & Giroux. \$25.00

Corporate greed is at the heart of Harrison's latest thriller. As the story opens, Jin Li, a young Chinese woman who runs an office-cleaning service in New York City, takes a ride with two of her employees—illegal Mexican women—to Brooklyn. They never make it. In one of the most graphically violent scenes I have read recently, the two Mexican women are killed and Jin Li is running for her life. This is one of Harrison's most exciting novels (*Afterburn* is the other) as we meet a hedge-fund billionaire, a woman with a check-cashing operation, a speculator in the Chinese stock market, an NYPD detective on his deathbed, and Jin Li's ex-boyfriend, a man with a past he won't

discuss. Harrison does not write books as often as I would like, but when he does, they are certainly worth the wait.

***WILDFIRE SEASON*, Andrew Pyper, Picador. \$14.00**

Several years ago I read this author's first book, *Lost Girls*, and thought it a remarkable debut. I was not the only one: it won Canada's prestigious Arthur Ellis Award. Like many Canadian authors, Pyper doesn't get the respect he deserves this side of the border and so he slipped below my radar. That will never happen again! The story is this: near the small town of Ross River in the Yukon, an arsonist starts a fire in the wild. It will take some time for that fire to take hold, and, meanwhile, we meet the residents of that town: the firefighters led by Miles McEwan, burned and scarred from a forest fire, the hunters who use the town as a base to track grizzlies, their guides, and the native population. We also meet Alex who arrives in town with her daughter Rachel in tow. We follow these characters and we follow the fire. I was going to cut down on the superlatives because I thought I might raise expectations too high. But I can't! I'm not going to say this is the best book I have ever read. But I will say that, as a reader, I live for the moment when a story like this comes into my hands. It is a privilege to read sentences that stop you in your tracks with their beauty even as they tell a universal truth. I don't often quote other reviewers, but because he gets it so right, here is Ken Bruen: "...a novel of true haunting loneliness and isolation...a novel that blazes with all the ingredients of the best literature." This was first published in Canada in 2005, then published in hardcover in the US.

***THE CALLING*, Inger Wolfe, Harcourt. \$24.00**

Detective Inspector Hazel Micallef is a sixty-one-year-old veteran who is looking towards her retirement. But a series of terrifying murders across Canada puts that out of her mind. A serial killer is mutilating terminally ill victims: their bodies drained of blood and their mouths forced into strange shapes. With her bickering staff, Hazel must track this madman across the country. We know who the killer is and we are with him for several of his murders. Knowing his motives and his methods only make him more terrifying. But the truly remarkable part of this story is the other characters we meet. Hazel, she of the bad back and the high fiber diet, her remarkably healthy mother who lives with her, and her colleagues are all a pleasure. This is an extraordinarily well-done mystery. Inger Wolfe is the pseudonym for a "prominent North American literary novelist," we are told by her publisher, but I have no idea who that may be and all my speculations have come to naught.

ON MY READING LIST

***DELUSION*, Peter Abrahams, Wm. Morrow. \$24.95**

Twenty years ago, Nell Jarreau witnessed the murder of her boyfriend and helped put a man on death row. She is now married to the detective who solved the case. But new evidence has exonerated the killer and he's out of jail. Could she have been wrong? And if not, what now? Nobody writes this kind of suspense like Abrahams.

ANGELS FALL, Baron R. Birtcher, Iota Publishing. \$23.95

This is the third mystery featuring Mike Travis, former Los Angeles detective, who now runs a scuba charter business in Hawaii. When a teenage girl disappears, Mike finds himself pulled into an underground culture driven by designer narcotics and violent sex. Birtcher writes terrific tropical noir which exposes a dark side of a paradise that is seldom seen by tourists. I'm bringing this to your attention because we have a new publishing company in California devoted to publishing the books we love (hooray), and because Baron Birtcher is a terrific writer and an all-round good guy.

HOLD TIGHT, Harlan Coben, Dutton. \$26.95

Sixteen-year-old Adam Baye has been unusually distant lately, and because there have been a number of suicides at his school, his parents are worried. They install a sophisticated spy program on Adam's computer and are shocked by what they read in a message from an unknown correspondent. Meanwhile, the mother of Spencer Hill, who committed suicide, is browsing through an online memorial for her son put together by his classmates. There's a photo taken on the night of her son's death—and she thinks Adam Baye is standing just outside camera range. And then Adam goes missing.

THE THIRD ANGEL, Alice Hoffman, Shaye Areheart. \$25.00

Hoffman charts the lives of three women in love with the wrong men. If you're a Hoffman fan, as I am, this is reason enough to put the book on your must-read pile. Because you know that the writing will be magical and the author will do so much more than tell you the story, she will explore the very nature of love. This is also, of course, a Non Mystery of Note.

TRAUMA, Patrick McGrath, Knopf. \$24.95

Charlie Weir, a psychiatrist in New York City, once counseled traumatized veterans returning home from Vietnam. Agnes, the sister of one brutalized soldier, became his wife but the marriage fell apart after her brother's suicide. Now that Charlie's mother has died, Agnes has returned to offer him the solace he couldn't provide for her. Meanwhile his brother introduces him to a volatile woman who jeopardizes Charlie's faith in himself. Charlie's hold on sanity loosens. McGrath can write a psychological thriller about as well as anybody.

FIRST MYSTERIES**DEATH WILL GET YOU SOBER, Elizabeth Zelvin, St. Martin's Minotaur. \$23.95**

When Bruce Kohler wakes up in a detox unit on the Bowery, he knows its time to change his life. But how can he stay sober without dying of boredom? Well, he could investigate a murder. The author is a psychotherapist who has directed alcohol treatment programs, so we're in for a realistic depiction of addiction.

NON MYSTERIES OF NOTE

***UNACCUSTOMED EARTH*, Jhumpa Lahiri, Knopf. \$25.00**

Stories that take the us from Cambridge and Seattle to India and Thailand as they explore family life. Lahiri won the Pulitzer Prize for her debut collection of stories, *Interpreter of Maladies*.

***THE SUSPICIONS OF MR. WHICHER*, Walker & Co. \$24.95**

This true story tells of the murder, in 1860, of three-year-old Saville Kent who was found at the bottom of an outdoor privy with his throat slit. The crime horrified England, and although the detective was a relatively new invention—there were only eight in all of England—Scotland Yard sent its best man to investigate, Inspector Jonathan Whicher. Whicher's conclusion—that someone within the family was responsible for the murder—was unable to be proved, and Whicher returned to London a broken man. But his legacy lives on in fiction: the tough, quirky, and sharp shamus we all know and love.

NEWS FROM THE UK

***MURDER'S IMMORTAL MASK*, Paul Doherty. *Headline*.**

It is 314 AD and Claudia must find a vicious killer who is stalking the streets of Imperial Rome.

***THE DYING BREED*, Declan Hughes. *John Murray*.**

PI Ed Loy investigates the world of trading, dealing, gambling and breeding in Ireland's horse racing community.

***GALLOWS LANE*, Brian McGilloway. *Macmillan*.**

Inspector Benedict Devlin returns to investigate a series of gruesome murders around the Irish borderlands.

***BRUNO, CHIEF OF POLICE*, Martin Walker. *Quercus*.**

Introducing Captain Bruno Courreges, Chief of Police of the small town of St. Denis in the Perigord region of France. When the head of an immigrant North African family is found murdered, Courreges' investigation stretches back to World War II.

BOOKS OF THE MONTH

Baldacci, David, *The Whole Truth*, Grand Central Publishing. \$26.99. The Ares Corporation is the world's largest defense contractor and is headed by Nicolas Creel. Dick Pender is Creel's "Perception Manager" who manipulates international conflicts. But Creel tells him he wants something grander than that.

- Cannell, Dorothy, *Goodbye, Ms. Chips***, St. Martin's Minotaur. \$23.95. An Ellie Haskell mystery. By the author of *Withering Heights*.
- Chan, Cassandra, *Trick of the Mind***, St. Martin's Minotaur. \$24.95. Detective Sergeant Jack Gibbons has been shot, and his best friend, Philip Bethancourt, must retrace his investigation to catch the culprit.
- Clark, Carol Higgins, *Zapped***, Scribner. \$24.00. Regan and Jack Reilly uncover some disturbing facts when they renovate their lower-Manhattan apartment.
- Cleland, Jane K., *Antiques to Die For***, St. Martin's Minotaur. \$23.95. Josie Prescott, New Hampshire antiques appraiser, is once again involved in a murder when a friend is killed just hours after confiding a secret to Josie.
- Dickinson, David, *Death on the Holy Mountain***, Soho Press. \$24.95. Lord Francis Powerscourt solves a noblewoman's kidnapping by Irish nationalists.
- Dymmoch, Michael Allen, *MIA***, St. Martin's Press. \$24.95. A man's death brings danger to the wife and son he leaves behind.
- Faletti, Giorgio, *I Kill***, IPG. \$24.95. A killer announces his murders with songs that point to his victims who are found with their faces removed.
- French, Nicci, *Losing You***, St. Martin's Minotaur. \$23.95. A race-against-time thriller about a mother's worst nightmare: her child is missing and no one believes her.
- Gorman, Ed, *Sleeping Dogs***, St. Martin's Minotaur. \$23.95. After several years as a paid consultant to senators and congressmen, Dev Conrad knows that both parties are full of...sinners. When Senator Warren Nichols runs for re-election, Dev is called in to help when a man trying to blackmail the senator dies under mysterious circumstances.
- Graham, Heather, *The Death Dealer***, Mira. \$24.95. Members of an Edgar Allan Poe literary society are being murdered in ways mirroring classic Poe tales of terror.
- Gregorio, Michael, *Days of Atonement***, St. Martin's Minotaur. \$24.95. Hanno Stiffeniis, the detective who uses the powers of deduction learned from his teacher, Immanuel Kant, is asked to help with an investigation. Set in French-occupied Prussia.
- Haddam, Jane, *Cheating at Solitaire***, St. Martin's Minotaur. \$24.95. A Gregor Demarkian mystery.
- Hall, Parnell, *The Sudoku Puzzle Murders***, St. Martin's Minotaur. \$23.95. Cora Felton, the Puzzle Lady, is asked to write a sudoku book. Dead private eyes start to turn up.
- Hart, Carolyn, *Death Walked In***, Wm. Morrow. \$23.95. The latest Death on Demand mystery finds Annie and Max Darling's home under attack by an intruder who claims there is a fortune in gold coins hidden there.
- Hathaway, Robin, *Sleight of Hand***, St. Martin's Minotaur. \$23.95. A Dr. Jo Banks mystery.
- Herron, Mick, *Reconstruction***, Soho Press. \$24.95. MI6 agent Ben Whistler becomes the center of a nursery school hostage crisis.
- Hess, Joan, *Mummy Dearest***, St. Martin's Minotaur. \$24.95. Claire Malloy finally marries Lt. Peter Rosen. They choose Luxor, Egypt, for their honeymoon where strange doings involve Claire, her teenage daughter, Caron, and Caron's best friend. Yes, it's a family honeymoon!
- Hughes, Declan, *The Price of Blood***, Wm. Morrow. \$24.95. Dublin PI Ed Loy returns for his second outing.

Jackson, Lisa, *Lost Souls*, Kensington. \$22.00. A young woman's hunt for a serial killer draws her deep into a twisted psycho's terrifying web.

Johansen, Iris, *Quicksand*, St. Martin's Press. \$26.95. Forensic sculptor Eve Duncan, still obsessed with finding the killer of her daughter, enlists the skills of the mysterious Dr. Megan Blain to help bring the elusive killer to justice. This is a follow-up to *Stalemate*.

Kane, Andrea, *Twisted*, Wm. Morrow. \$23.95. Kane explores the twisted depths of the serial killer's mind.

Keating, H.R.F., *Rules, Regs and Rotten Eggs*, St. Martin's Minotaur. \$23.95. A crafty puzzle featuring Hard Detective Harriet Martens.

Kellerman, Jesse, *Delusion*, Putnam. \$24.95. Ethan Muller, an art dealer, mounts a show of newly discovered work by a man named Victor Cracke who lived in a New York slum and who disappeared. The show is wildly successful until the police come calling. Are the drawings art or evidence? Is Victor Cracke a genius, or murderer? Or both?

Kennealy, Jerry, *Still Shot*, St. Martin's Minotaur. \$23.95. Featuring entertainment critic and film noir author Carroll Quint. Second in the series.

Lewis, Pam, *The Perfect Family*, Simon & Schuster. \$25.00. The Carteret family is torn apart when their twenty-four-year-old daughter drowns at their lake house in Vermont. William, unable to accept the circumstances of his sister's mysterious death, sets out to uncover the truth about the night she slipped into the lake opening up a Pandora's box of family secrets.

Logan, Chuck, *South of Shiloh*, HarperCollins. \$24.95. The Civil War is the setting for this meticulous and fast-paced stand alone historical.

Lovesey, Peter, *The Headhunters*, Soho Press. \$24.00. A CID Inspector Henrietta Mallin mystery.

Martin, Lee, *River of Heaven*, Shaye Areheart Books. \$24.00. The story of two brothers, a lifetime of estrangement, and the secret that lies buried between them. From the Pulitzer Prize finalist.

Morton, Kate, *The House at Riverton*, Atria Books. \$24.95. Grace Bradley worked at Riverton House as a servant before World War I and her life was always bound up with the Hartford family. In the summer of 1924, at a society party held at the House, a young poet shot himself. The only witnesses were Hannah and Emmeline Hartford and only they – and Grace – know the truth.

Mosse, Kate, *Sepulchre*, Putnam. \$25.95. Secrets, murder, and the occult in nineteenth- and twenty-first-century France. By the author of *Labyrinth*.

Pastor, Ben, *The Fire Waker*, St. Martin's Minotaur. \$23.95. Aelius Spartianus, Diocletian's official historian, receives a letter telling him of a strange miracle-worker named Agnus who recently resurrected a man from death. Aelius is determined to uncover the truth about this miracle.

Raichev, R.T., *Assassins at Ospreys*, Soho Press. \$24.95. A traditional whodunit featuring mystery writer Antonia Darcy and husband Major Hugh Payne.

Robards, Karen, *Guilty*, Putnam. \$24.95. Kat White has built a new life for herself after a terrible mistake she made as a teenager. She's a prosecutor in the Philadelphia DA's office, but her dark past rears its head when she walks into court and discovers that she is to prosecute one of her friends from that one terrible night.

Scott, Manda, *The Crystal Skull*, Delacorte. \$25.00. An ancient codex predicts that the world will end on December 21, 2012, and legend tells of thirteen life-size crystal skulls crafted by the same Mayan people who foretold the End of Days. The skulls are believed to contain secrets – and a safeguard – that will be revealed only when all thirteen are brought together. This is fact. Manda Scott has fashioned fiction about a twenty-first century academic and an Elizabethan physician who hatch a desperate bid across the centuries to crack the enigma of the skulls.

Shannon, John, *The Devils of Bakersfield*, Pegasus. \$25.00. An intolerant small California town becomes convinced a pair of teens are Satanists in the latest Jack Liffey thriller.

Sidor, Steven, *The Mirror's Edge*, St. Martin's Minotaur. \$24.95. Disturbing new details about an abduction, years after the event, affect the family, the babysitter involved, and the reporter who covered the event.

Smith, Alexander McCall, *The Miracle at Speedy Motors*, Pantheon. \$21.95. The latest in the phenomenally successful No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency series.

Stansberry, Domenic, *The Ancient Rain*, St. Martin's Minotaur. \$24.95. Dante Mancuso retraces a past investigation to clear a fellow PI.

Stark, Richard, *Dirty Money*, Grand Central Publishing. \$23.99. In *Nobody Runs Forever*, Parker and his cohorts stole money from a bank, but in the getaway needed to leave the loot behind in a church. Now they intend to reclaim their goods by any means necessary.

Stewart, Chris, *The God of War*, St. Martin's Press. \$24.95. Western cities are in danger when extremists steal the world's most powerful supersonic fighter.

Woods, Stuart, *Santa Fe Dead*, Putnam. \$25.95. Ed Eagle, the attorney featured in *Santa Fe Rules* and *Short Straw* returns. And so does his ex-wife Barbara, the ultimate Black Widow.

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