

Getting Away With Murder

Mike Ripley



June 2010

Top Notch

It is always a good omen if one gets a mention in that most intellectual of newspapers, *The Guardian*, even if it is contained in the Quick Crossword, as on the 20th May when the clue to 23 Across was “Excellent: 3,5”.

After several hours of puzzling and a phone call to my old friend Colin Dexter (who has some experience of crosswords), the answer became clear: **Top Notch**, and the reason this was an omen was because that was the very day in which we here at Top Notch Thrillers finalised the legal details (no agents were hurt in the process, though it was close) on the next four titles by the imprint which protects and promotes “Great British thrillers which do not deserve to be forgotten”.

The July tranche of print-on-demand Top Notch Thrillers (full details of which will appear on the website www.ostarapublishing.co.uk) will be: *Black Camelot* by Duncan Kyle, the pen-name of former CWA Chairman John Broxholme; Francis Clifford’s *The Grosvenor Square Goodbye*, which won the CWA Silver Dagger in 1974; *The Young Man from Lima* by John Blackburn, a sadly neglected master of the macabre who combined the detective story with the spy story and added a touch of gothic horror and science fiction for good measure (and once described as ‘the literary link’ between Dennis Wheatley and James Herbert); and *Watcher in the Shadows* by Geoffrey Household, author of the legendary *Rogue Male* and fans of that classic will not be disappointed by *Watcher*, which one distinguished critic has described as “Gunfight at the OK Corral transposed to St Mary Mead.”

It is entirely possible that you may hear more of these splendid titles, which should all grace the private libraries of any serious reader of crime thriller fiction, before they are released on to the market in July.

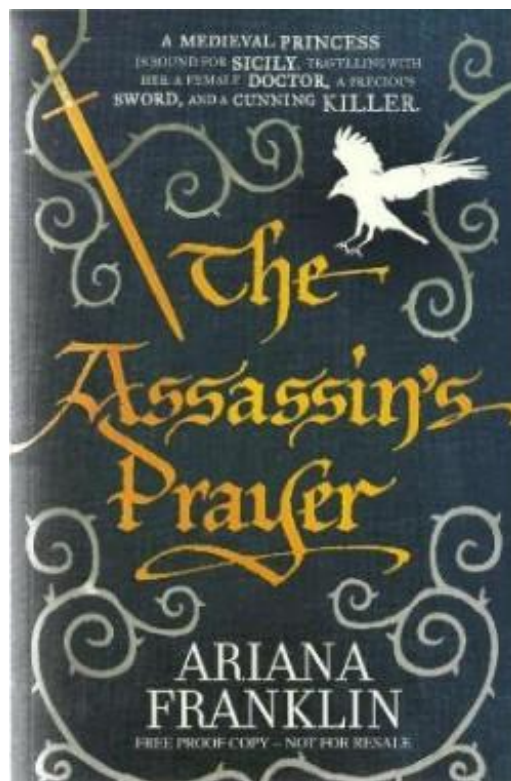
A.K.A.

My good friend the award-winning historical-mystery writer Arian Franklin is determined to make my life as confusing as possible.



Well, actually, it is not so much *her* as the *titles* of her excellent *Mistress of the Art Death* series of 12th Century mysteries, which I suspect she probably finds just as perplexing as I do. For some reason, the enormously popular American editions of her books have different titles to the UK editions, and yet – and this is the really irritating bit – both titles are actually quite good. *The Death Maze*, for instance, became *The Serpent's Tale* while last year's *Relics of the Dead* became *Grave Goods* in the US.

Now comes the fourth Adelia Aguilar mystery (she is the 'Mistress of the Art of Death' – a doctor and prototype pathologist as well as a prototype feminist) which in the UK is called *The Assassin's Prayer* but across the Atlantic, where I believe it is already available, it is known as *A Murderous Procession*.



I feel positively churlish about carping at this (I don't really) as both titles are totally apt: there is a procession – a journey from England to Sicily in 1178 – with several murders along the way, and one of the people on that journey is an assassin, who (the reader knows) prays to a very peculiar god, so both titles actually work.

And whatever it is called, *The Assassin's Prayer/A Murderous Procession* is a fabulous feast of a historical thriller with Franklin once again showing off her knowledge of all things medieval but in straightforward, clear modern English and never over-egging the pudding by putting her research before her characters, who are genuinely and humanely drawn.

The Doctor will See You Now

Unlike Ariana Franklin, I have never won the Ellis Peters Award for Historical Fiction; nor have I ever been awarded, as many crime writers have, an honorary doctorate, not that I am in any way bitter.

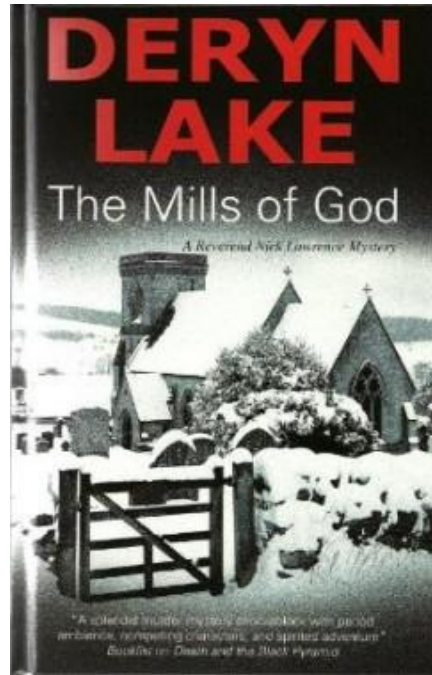


In fact I am delighted to see my old friend Margaret Maron so honoured recently by the University of North Carolina and only bitter over the fact that I could not be there to join in the celebrations, for Mrs Maron, a naturally witty and charming person is deadly serious (and very generous) about her interpretation of the phrase “Southern hospitality”.

A leading light in the *Sisters In Crime* organisation and the *Mystery Writers of America* (both of which I was once a member of, until discovered), Margaret Maron has penned two distinct series of mysteries, the earlier one featuring New York cop Sigrid Harald and the more recent, Carolina-based, series about Judge Deborah Knott, both of which I recommend most highly.

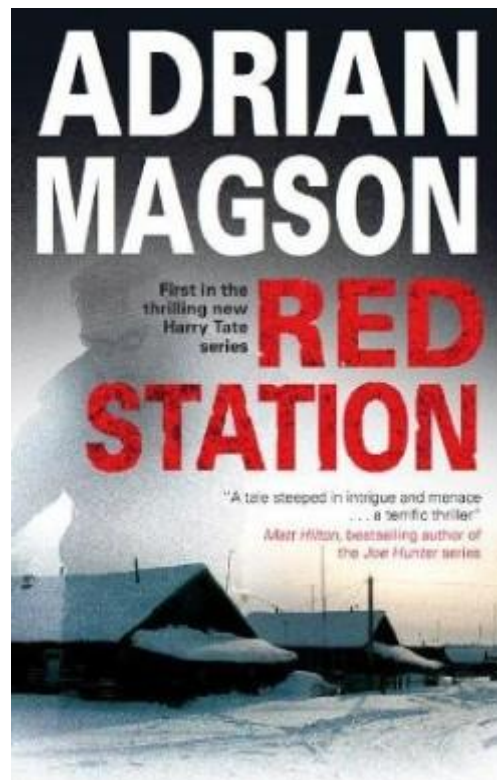
Shaking off the dust of Grub Street

I have always admired publisher Severn House for resisting the fashionable temptations of London's Grub Street and relocating to the leafy Surrey countryside. But there is nothing of the that county's pastoral charm when it comes to their red-blooded list of forthcoming titles, which include new series from established British crime writers as well as some exotic imports.



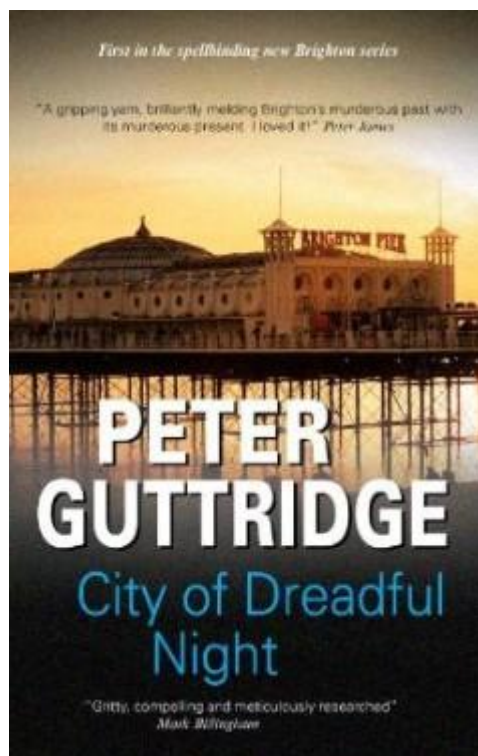
Best known for her Georgian mysteries set in the 18th Century featuring John Rawlings, Deryn Lake has flash-forwarded into the present day and created, in *The Mills of God*, a new detective in the shape of the Rev. Nick Lawrence, a trendy young vicar in a sleepy Sussex village.

Similarly, Adrian Magson is probably best known for his Riley and Palmer series (she an intrepid reporter, he an ex-MP), but he also launches a new series this summer with *Red Station*, a thriller featuring MI5 officer Harry Tate plunged into the labyrinthine politics of eastern Europe.



Severn House can count it a coup that they have landed the long-awaited, much talked-of 'Brighton Trilogy' by that cosmopolitan man of letters Mr Peter Guttridge, who pens the film column (whilst practising vinyasa yoga) for this august organ.

City of Dreadful Night, the first volume in the trilogy will be published in August, and marks a turning to the dark side for the author, as Peter Guttridge whose previous fiction has been in the field of comedy. In fact for many years his books carried the label *The King of Comic Crime* and I had to read no further than that before I began to smile.



On the more 'exotic' import scene, Severn House have already received many plaudits for their championing of American author Gar Anthony Haywood (*Cemetery Road* in 2009) and now welcome to their lists another ace practitioner of the hardboiled private eye novel, Robert Randisi.

Randisi's new thriller, *I'm A Fool To Kill You*, appears in September and follows his successful formula of mixing a fictional crime with a cast of real characters. And what a cast! This time the centre of attention is Hollywood legend Ava Gardner and as the setting is the famous Sands casino in Las Vegas, do not be surprised to find Frank Sinatra, Dean Martin and the rest of the Rat Pack, as well as numerous Mafia bosses, involved in the investigation.

Before then – next month in fact – Severn House publishes *The Masuda Affair* by I. J. Parker, which is the seventh novel in a series but, I believe, the first to have crossed the Atlantic. Ingrid Parker's detective hero, Sugawara Akitada, does I feel fully qualify for the epithet 'exotic' as he is a government official in 11th-century Japan.

This series is new to me but sounds to be a must for the many dedicated fans who remember the 'Judge Dee' mysteries of Robert Van Gulik.

New Girl in Bologna

The latest recruit to the new MaxCrime imprint is the shy and retiring Italian *noirista* Barbara Baraldi with her debut novel set in Bologna, *The Girl With The Crystal Eyes*.



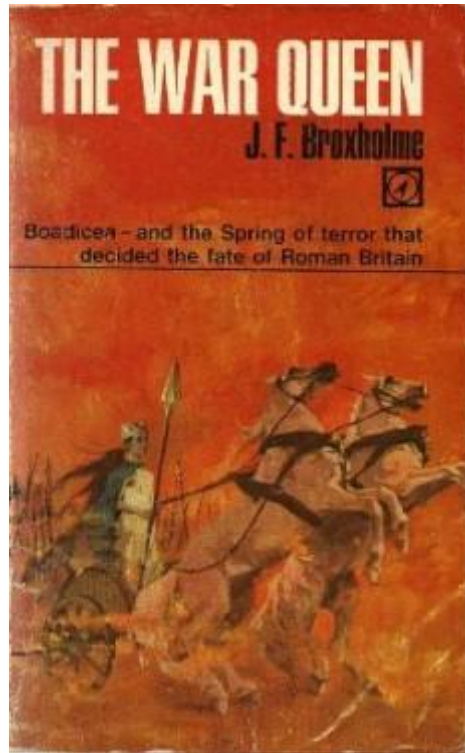
The book, which is out now, is not only edited by MaxCrime supremo Maxim Jakubowski, but also *blurbed* by him with the quote: *'An unholy and thrilling cross between the bloody imagination of Dario Argento and the seductive perversity of the female mind...'*

However much of “an unforgettable gothic journey” the book turns out to be, I am confident that it has been supremely well translated by Judith Forshaw, who is the wife of that urbane polyglot, Professor Barry Forshaw.

Boudica Rising

Even when I was writing my cult-classic *Boudica and the Lost Roman* (which was famously disqualified from the Ellis Peters Awards for ‘not having enough crime’), I knew I was not the only crime-writer who had been inspired by the uprising of that tribal queen against the Romans in the year AD60 or thereabouts. There is no doubt that this Iron Age Delia Smith character and her native troops to seriously scared Nero’s Roman empire as they destroyed the growing townships of Colchester and (what is now) St Albans, along with an undistinguished lawless, Dodge City of a trading post now called London.

Manda Scott, of course, turned the story into a four-book trilogy; Brian Cooper (creator of the Tench and Lubbock detective series) tried a revisionist history under the pen name Richard Hunt; M. J.Trow (author of the hysterical ‘Lestrade’ series) stuck with a more conventional archaeological approach; and that brilliant *auteur* of the spy story, Anthony Price, penned the best short story ever in *The Boudicca Killing* for *Winter’s Crimes #11* in 1979.



But I was unaware until recently that *The War Queen*, telling the story of ‘Boadicea and the Spring of terror that decided the fate of Roman Britain’ had been written in 1967 by John Franklin Broxholme, who was to become slightly better known in 1970 when he emerged as best-selling thriller writer Duncan Kyle.

Later to become Chairman of the Crime Writers Association, Kyle (who also wrote as James Meldrum) authored *A Cage of Ice*, *A Raft of Swords* and *Green River High*, among others, which put him firmly in the Alistair Maclean bracket. He is pictured below on a visit to Sweden deep in discussion with Swedish editor and thriller guru Iwan Hedman-Morelius.



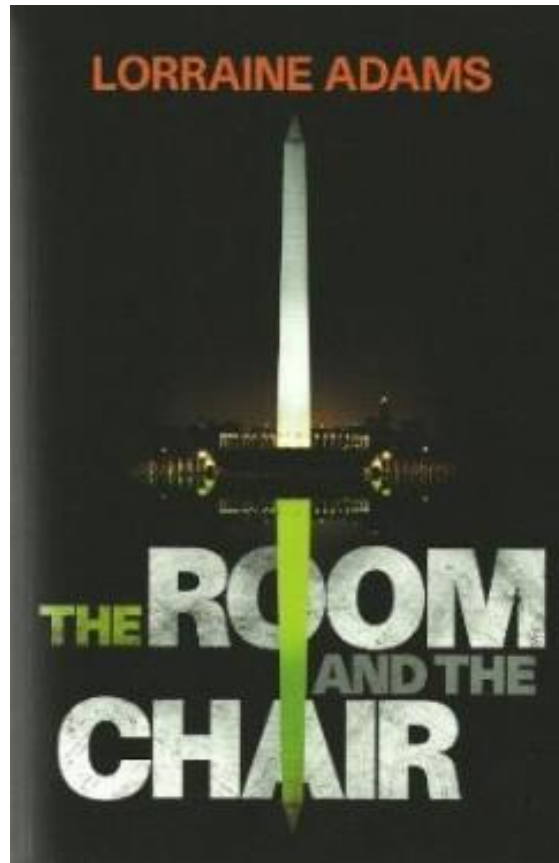
The War Queen is interesting in several ways, for it shows all the Kyle trademarks for research and a plot always on the move, as well as John Broxholme’s affection for his adopted East Anglia. It is also the only book he ever wrote under his real name and – it is said – a book he wrote for a bet in *one week* in an attempt to compete with John Creasey’s claim to be able to write a thriller in seven days.

Legend has it that Creasey, founder of the Crime Writers Association, once offered to promote the genre by placing himself in a shop window of Selfridge’s Oxford Street store for a week and writing a crime novel from scratch and in full view of the public. Fortunately, his fellow crime writers restrained him from giving the game away and showing the reading public how easy this writing business really is.

Duncan Kyle is, of course, the author of that great thriller *Black Camelot*, which is about to be re-issued print-on-demand by that magnificent imprint Top Notch Thrillers; though I may have mentioned this already.

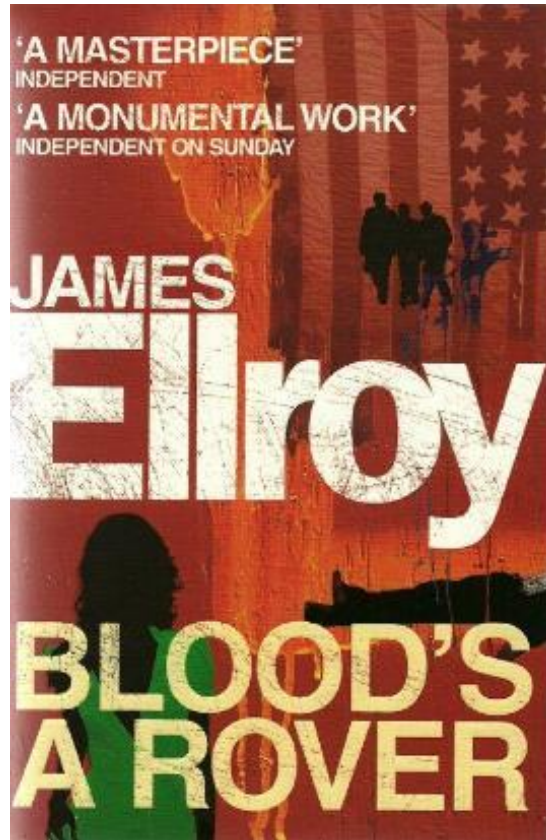
New Kids on the Block

The winds of recession may be cutting publishers to the quick – or at least that’s what they always tell me when I send in a manuscript – but new imprints seem to be springing up everywhere and two new names (at least new to me) on the Grub Street crime block have appeared in the last few weeks.



I may be wrong, but although Portobello books have been around for five years now, *The Room and the Chair* by *Washington Post* journalist Lorraine Adams seems to be their first title to be marketed as a thriller. It does seem, however, to be clearly a “literary thriller” which means I will probably not understand it.

Windmill Books, part of the Random House Group, has certainly published in the crime/thriller field before now, but their new big-hitter is the magnificent James Ellroy with the paperback edition of his monumental *Blood’s A Rover*.

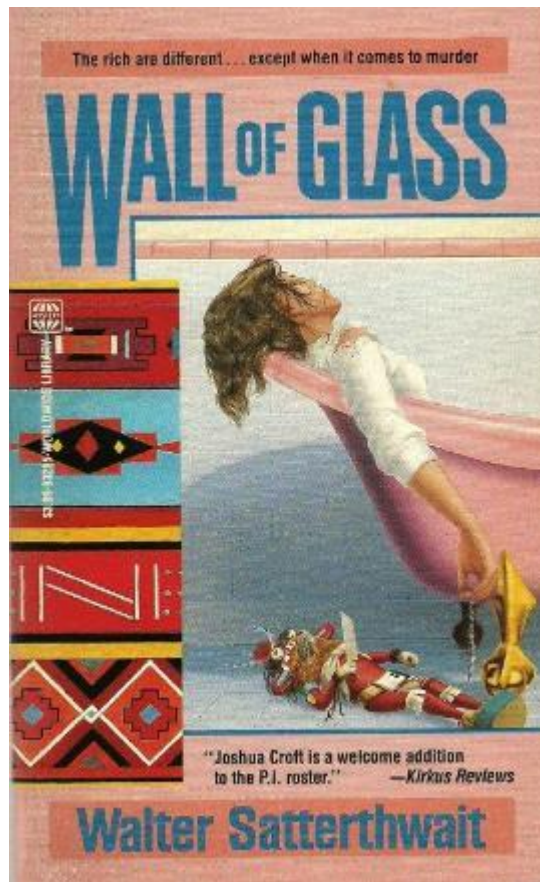


Windmill will also be issuing the other two parts of Ellroy's visceral 'Underworld USA' trilogy: the outstanding *American Tabloid* from 1995 (was it really that long ago?) and *The Cold Six Thousand* from 2001.

Down New Mexico Way

I am positively green with envy when I read of the plans for next year's Left Coast Crime Convention (www.leftcoastcrime.org) due to take place in Santa Fe in New Mexico, which has, as all my discerning readers will know, adopted the chilli as its official state vegetable.

I believe the main convention hotel is already fully booked, even though the event is not until March 2011, and 'overspill' hotels are being pressed into service. I am not surprised that this is proving a popular venue, for it is not only an area of historic and archaeological importance, an important artistic centre and a cultural crossroad, but it also provided the setting for the brilliant 'Navajo' series of mysteries by the late, great Tony Hillerman as well as a personal favourite of mine, though less well-known in the UK, the 'Joshua Croft' private eye novels by my old friend and fellow *boulevardier* Walter Satterthwait.



I seem to remember that Martin Cruz Smith, who has a new Arkady Renko mystery out later this year, set one of his early thrillers in New Mexico and fittingly, he will be at Left Coast Crime next year to receive a Lifetime Achievement award. (And surely he must be in contention for a Cartier Diamond Dagger, mustn't he?)

Totally Justified

I have recently discovered that there are now *more than four* television channels in Britain, many of them broadcasting in colour. Will the advance of technology never slow?

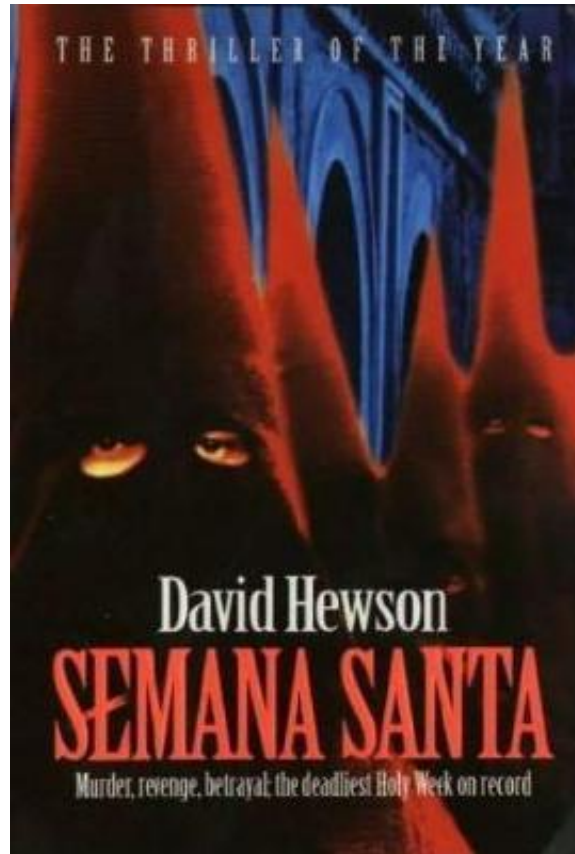
Whilst trawling the airwaves the other night trying to find the 24-hour *Heartbeat* channel, I discovered a station called, I believe, Five USA which only shows programmes from the colonies.



One of these caught my eye – and jolly it good was too – called *Justified* and concerns a tough modern-day US Marshall returning to work in east Kentucky, and believe me, it pays to be tough if you're a Marshall riding into this particular part of Kentucky. I have become a regular viewer of this gripping and very well-produced series and I recommend it highly but please don't just take my word for it, rather trust in the name of Elmore Leonard who is credited as both writer and executive producer on the show.

Spanish Eyes

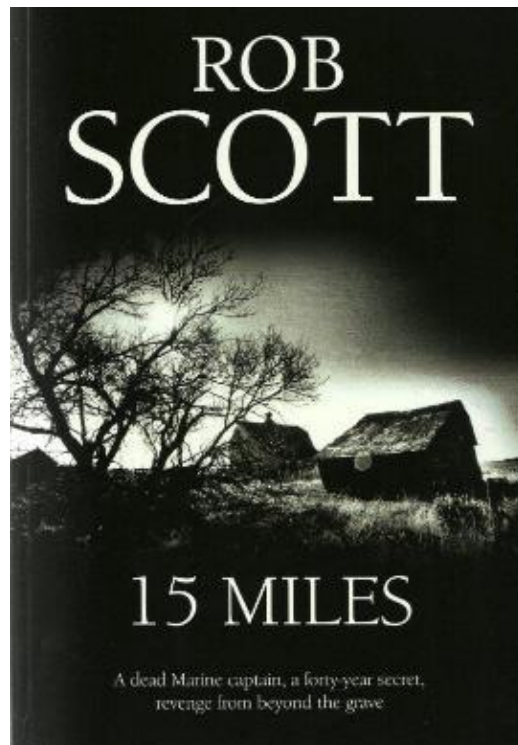
I will be delighted to see one of David Hewson's early thrillers *Semana Santa* from 1996 back in print, republished by Macmillan in November, although the title has been changed to *Death in Seville*. I think that is a pity as the original title, *Semana Santa*, was truly memorable as was the original rather spooky cover.



Virginia Creepy

Talking of spooky settings, few places have had a higher body count in crime fiction in recent years than the American state of Virginia. (I am told that Virginia is actually a 'commonwealth' but I refuse to apply that title to anywhere which does not play cricket.)

In Rob Smith's new (debut?) thriller *15 Miles*, which I am delighted to see is published under the legendary Gollancz imprint, life there seems as hazardous as ever if you are a State Trooper or a homicide detective.



Detective ‘Sailor’ Doyle, a vice cop in more ways than one (he has a mistress, an alcohol problem and enjoys abusing pharmaceutical products), but is now assigned to his first homicide case; and it’s a lulu. A rural farmstead, 15 miles south of Richmond (though that’s not the only ‘15 miles’ in the book), is the scene of a suspected double homicide although that could be the very least of what has happened there. In addition to one mutilated human body found packed in cat litter and another in a makeshift tomb (although someone had a go at sawing it half) there are any number of dead cats, dogs, cows and assorted livestock littering the place. What is more frightening, though, are the feral cats still alive and most dangerous of all is a life form that cannot be seen.

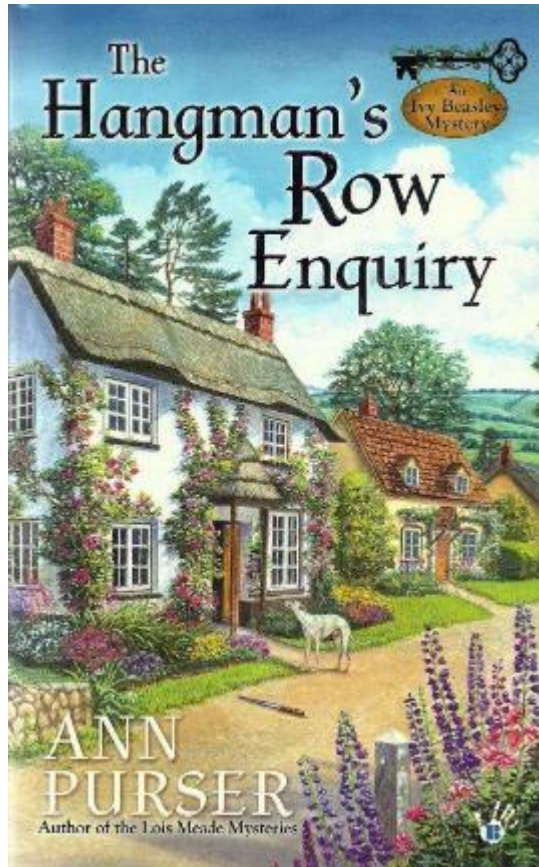
This is not a book for animal lovers, or animal-haters for that matter (a grim family of religious snake-handlers own the neighbouring farm), as our pill-popping detective – who also starts getting psychic messages – bumbles his way around the convoluted crime scene.

15 Miles is an ingenious mix of American Gothic horror story and forensic investigation, with plot undertones of terrorism and weapons of mass destruction or at least the fear of them, which rattles along at a great pace. Even if the central character seems unsympathetic and almost permanently off-his-head, Rob Smith proves himself a master of the macabre.

His style reminds me of that great British thriller writer John Blackburn, who blended the detective story with the spy thriller and the horror story in a rare but exciting combination. Blackburn’s 1965 thriller *A Ring Of Roses* had a similar plot line to *15 Miles*, if that’s not giving too much away, which it might be. For those with a short or failing memory, the work of the late John Blackburn can now be enjoyed again thanks to the reissuing of his 1968 classic *The Young Man from Lima* by that marvellous imprint Top Notch Thrillers, which I really must make an effort to mention now and then.

Safe in Suffolk

If your tastes lean towards cosier crime stories of the ‘Mayhem Parva’ school of English village murder mystery, then you are probably already aware of the Lois Meade series (*Murder on Monday*, *Terror on Tuesday*, etc.) by Ann Purser.



Now she celebrates a new series with *The Hangman's Row Enquiry* (Berkeley Prime Crime) with a starring role for one of her established characters, the “stroppy as ever” Ivy Beasley, now in ‘assisted living’ but always on hand to investigate when a fellow villager is found fatally stabbed with a bread knife.

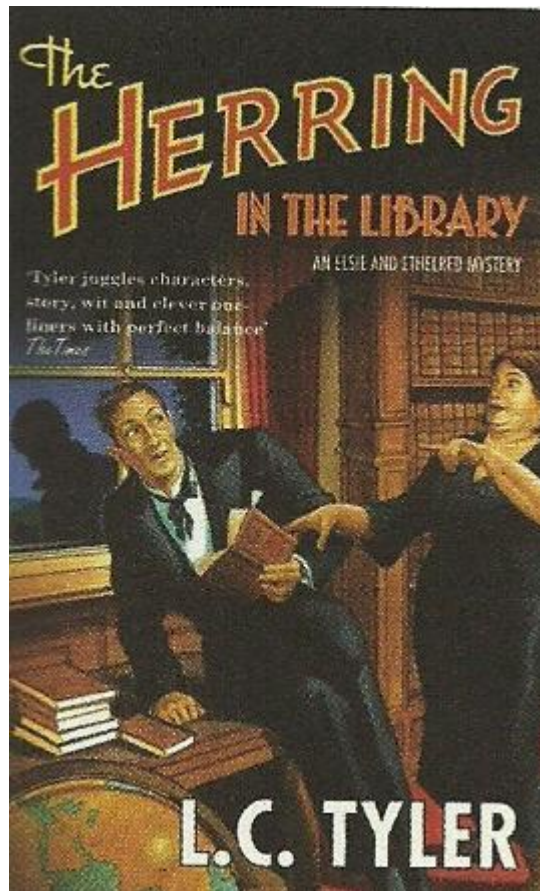
Dare one say – as one of the characters does – that “you’ve been reading too much Agatha Christie”? Well you wouldn’t say it to the fearsome Ivy Beasley, at least not to her face.



Although Ann Purser's work is probably better known in the USA than the UK, I can confidently predict that there will be a lengthy queue for her to sign copies of her books at the Bodies in the Bookshop event at Heffers in Cambridge next month. There always is.

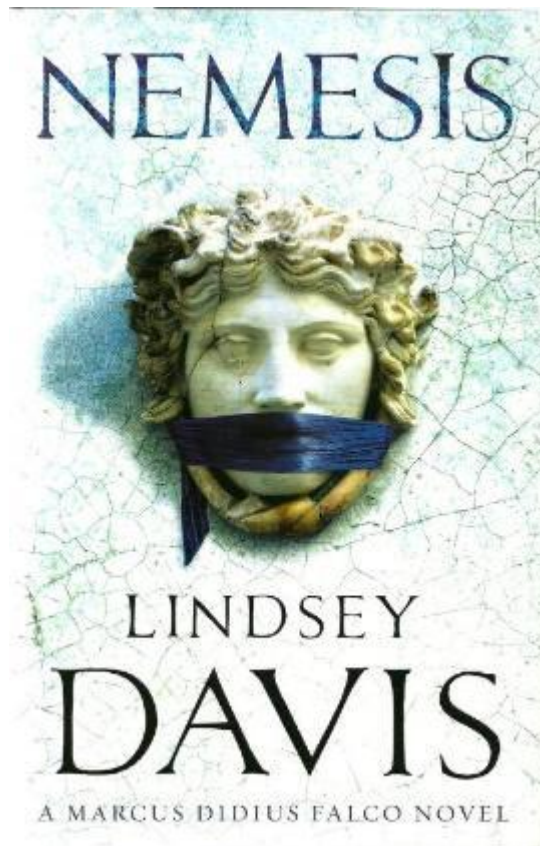
And thinking about it, how about a series of rural English murder mysteries based on counties: *Safe in Suffolk*, *Murder in Middlesex*, *Bombings in Bedfordshire*, *Hatred in Hampshire*, *Death in Dorset*, etc., etc.? The idea is available on receipt of the usual fee.

And speaking of the annual reunion of the alumni of St Heffer's (the only university college solely dedicated to the teaching of crime fiction) on 15th July, I look forward to sharing a place at High Table with the charming L.C. (Len) Tyler, so that he can tell me all about his new novel *The Herring in the Library* which is due out this summer.



When in Rome

It is, unbelievably, 21 years and 20 novels since Roman private eye Marcus Didius Falco saw a girl wearing far too many clothes tripping lightly across the Forum.



Lindsey Davis' marvellous creation is back – and back on home turf – in *Nemesis* (Century), investigating disappearances and murder in and around the Pontine Marshes south of Rome in the high summer of 77 AD.

If, however, you have no idea of whom I speak (shame on you!), then fear not for to accompany Falco's 21st outing, Century have produced an absolutely stunning compendium to all this first-century Roman stuff and to the lad himself. *Falco: The Official Companion* is a guide to Lindsey Davis' enormously popular books and the researching and writing of them. Aside from invaluable historical insights, some great photographs and some brilliant maps, the *Companion* also gives some useful tips to budding authors and particularly on the tendency of publishers to plead with authors to supply "a specially youthful photograph", as below...



Lindsey may well be tempted to share her experiences with her loyal fans in September, when she appears at the Reading Festival of Crime Writing (16th-19th September), the fabulous programme for which has now been finalised (www.readingfestivalofcrimewriting.org.uk).

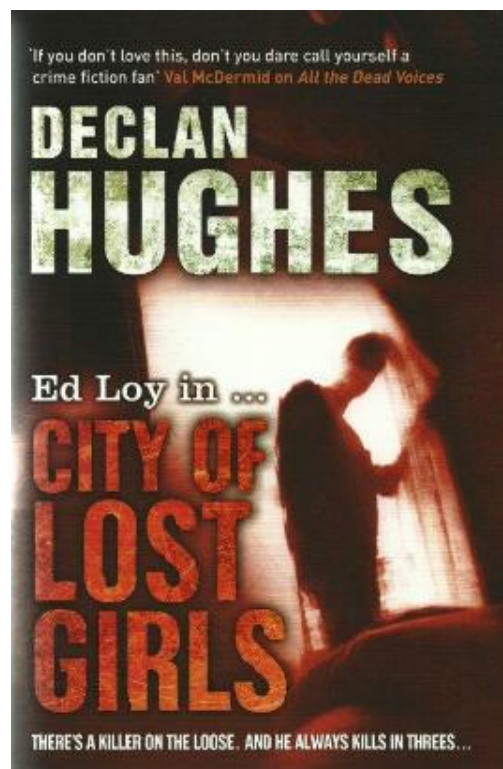
Among other notable names from the world of crime fiction scheduled to attend the Reading jamboree are: Paul Doherty, Nicci French, Natasha Cooper, Sophie Hannah and Christopher Brookmyre. I will even be there myself, for I have been persuaded to assist my old and distinguished friend Mr Peter Guttridge, who is chairing a panel on 'comedy crime' starring M.C. Beaton, Malcolm Pryce and Christopher Fowler. Goodness knows what I will be able to contribute to such a high-powered conclave of mirth, but I am delighted to be making up the numbers.

I must not fail to mention that one of the stellar guests at Reading will be Val McDermid, who recently made the trip to the soft, southern South to collect the Cartier Diamond Dagger for her contribution to crime writing from that epitome of suave, Monsieur Arnaud 'Supersleuth' Bamberger, the CEO of Cartier.



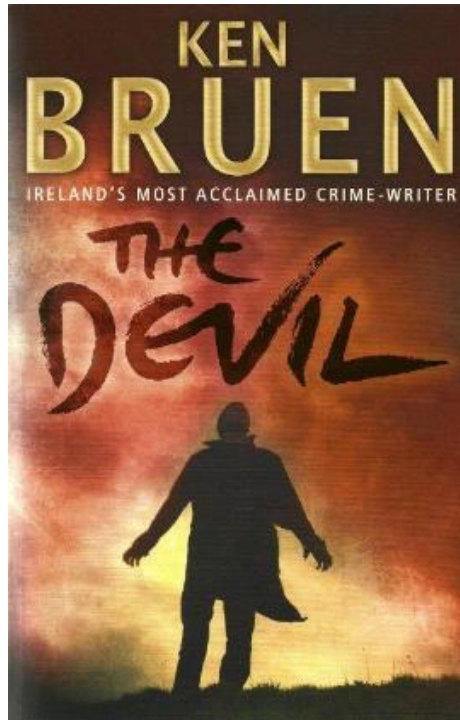
When Irish (Private) Eyes Are Smiling

The merry month of May was particularly merry over in Ireland when two of the Emerald Isle's leading crime writers unleashed new novels.



City of Lost Girls (from the Jolly Magnificent John Murray) sees Declan Hughes' well-established Dublin-based private eye Ed Loy flying to the US to assist the LAPD with their enquiries into the 'Three-in-One Killer'.

Meanwhile, in Ken Bruen's latest, *The Devil* (Transworld), Galway PI Jack Taylor *tries* to fly to the US but comes up against Homeland Security who refuse to allow him on the plane! Naturally Jack's first port of call is the airport bar for some serious two-fisted drinking and it is a chance meeting with a stranger there that has murderous implications for Jack and those around him.



Given that Ken, whose novels are not so much novels as noir blank verse poems, is "Ireland's most acclaimed crime writer" (it says here) and proud of his Irish-ness, surely the book would be better titled *The Divil*.

Family Affairs

Writing partnerships in crime fiction are far from unknown, in fact some such as Ellery Queen and Nicci French are world famous, but mother-and-daughter writing teams are still, I think, fairly rare.

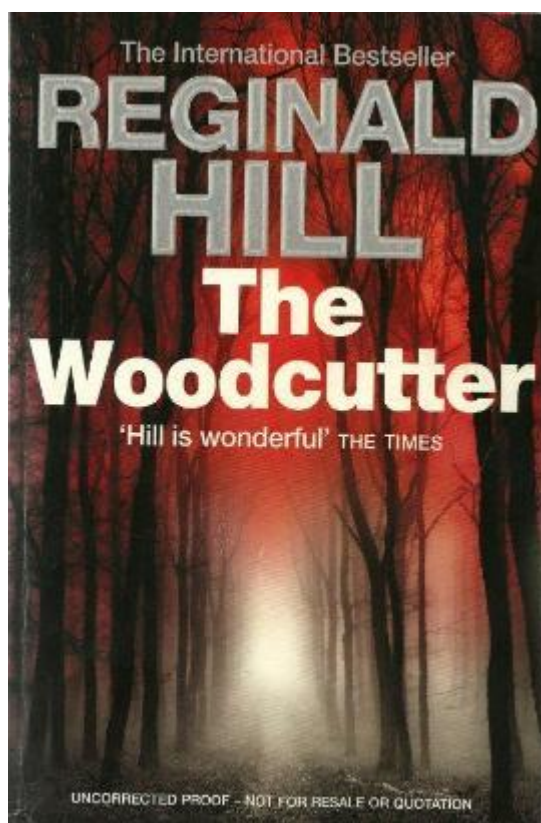


There is no doubt that the duo behind the name P.J. Tracy – P.J. Lambrecht and daughter Traci – have hit a winning formula, ever since their debut thriller *Want To Play?* was championed by that other famous couple: Richard and Judy.

Their latest, *Play to Kill*, is now out from those perky Penguin people; though for some reason the book's title in America is *Shoot to Thrill*.

Up Hill, Over Fell

I have just treated myself by reading an advance proof of the new Reginald Hill novel a month before it is made available to the common reader by publishers HarperCollins – and what a treat it was.



The Woodcutter is not, I have to say, part of the legendary Dalziel & Pascoe series, nor even an addition to the Joe Sixsmith canon, being what in publisher's parlance is probably referred to as a 'stand-alone thriller'. And if anyone thinks this is a new departure for one of English crime writing's national treasures, then I would refer them to excellent thrillers such as *The Spy's Wife* and *Who Guards A Prince* which Reg was writing thirty years ago, not to mention one of his very first attempts at fiction, *Fell of Dark*, published in 1971, which made, as *The Woodcutter* does, full use of a wild Cumbrian setting.

Yet to call the new novel merely a 'psychological thriller' (as someone will) is doing it a bit of a disservice, for I think it is more of a generous slice of Greek tragedy filtered through the brothers Grim. There's a cruelly-disfigured, one-eyed hero who has fallen from success and grace, betrayed and framed at every turn, who eventually seeks his revenge on those who (mostly women) have stitched him up. The odds are so stacked against our Cyclops that it comes as a bit of shock to find he can be a cold-blooded killer – the axe being his weapon of choice – when he needs to be. And that is by no means the only shock in a plot which traps the reader as successfully as any labyrinth designed by Daedalus for King Minos.

Unlike the majority of reviewers, Reg Hill shows off his erudition and love of language, without ever being preachy. One character complains of “Ciceronic skills” and another apologises for being “unnecessarily periphrostatic” (though I’m bugged if I know why they used two words when six would have done) and I am indebted to him for teaching me the Cumbrian(?) word “lonning” which I had not come across before. There are also some good jokes about the Scots and a lovely piece of observational comedy: a roadside greasy-spoon transport cafe called *The Even Fatter Duck*.

Even the epigraphs chosen to head the various sections of the book are a class act and for readers whose German and French may be a little rusty, he kindly supplies translations. He also includes quotes from Dickens and Wordsworth and, I am delighted to say, that much admired academic and exquisite translator of Scandinavian folk tales, Charles Underhill.

I have long maintained that Professor Underhill’s outstanding literary skill coupled with his liberalism and sheer humanity (as well as his command of Nordic and Finno-Ugrian languages) would make him an ideal translator for the current flood of Scandinavian crime novels. Dare I go so far as to say that even Reginald Hill has been influenced by his work in the past?

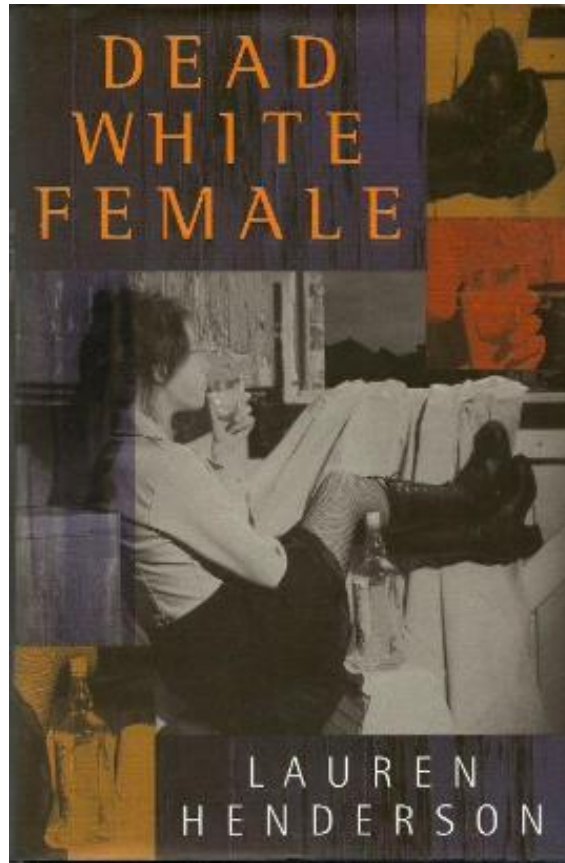
Bad, but familiar, Girls

Whilst eagerly devouring every word in the new Simon & Schuster catalogue, as one does, I came across a new novel scheduled for August in the Pocket Books imprint, *Bad Girls* by ‘Rebecca Chance’.

Little seems to be known of Rebecca Chance, or at least little is divulged apart from the fact she lives in London and this is ‘her second novel’. The publishers do, however, supply a photograph of her.



Now I know my eyesight is failing and perhaps my memory too, but this author picture does ring a bell. Could ‘Rebecca Chance’ possibly be the irritatingly talented Lauren Henderson who burst on to the crime fiction scene 15 years ago with the brilliant *Dead White Female*? I think we should be told.



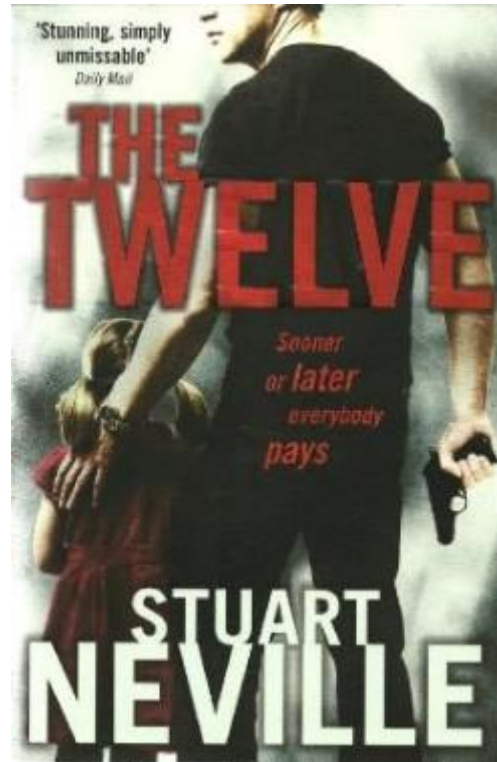
I do hope Lauren did not have to change her literary career and her writing name following her appearance some years ago in the cabaret panel game *I'm Sorry I Haven't A Cluedo* which I used to host (in front of selected audiences, wedding receptions and bar mitzvahs). Lauren gamely stepped in as one of the mystery guests in the ever-popular "Guess the Crime Writer" round where the blindfolded contestants had to identify a crime-writer by touch alone.

I'm sure she's got over that by now.

You Heard it First...

Regular readers will not mind me reminding them of something they heard here first. It is something I do as a matter of duty; it gives me no pleasure and I do it reluctantly – though quite often, it seems.

For 2009, this column's *First Shot Award* for a debut novel went unanimously to Stuart Neville's *The Twelve*, which I believe is known in the US as *The Ghosts of Belfast*.



This excellent, hard-as-nails revenge thriller is now available in an attractive paperback from Vintage, but oddly, this new edition makes no mention of the prestigious *First Shot*, preferring instead to point out that the book won the crime/thriller category of the recent *Los Angeles Times* Book Awards.

I am assuming (without wishing to jinx its chances) that even though first published almost a year ago, *The Twelve* will be a very strong contender for the 2010 Crime Writers' Association's *John Creasey (New Blood)* Award, if not a Gold or a Steel Dagger, or perhaps all of them. And even as I write, those charming publishers Harvill Secker present me with a proof copy of *Collusion*, Stuart Neville's "blistering" sequel to *The Twelve*, which will be released to mere mortals in September.

And another thing. The recently announced shortlist for the CWA Short Story Dagger contains no less than six stories (out of seven nominees) taken from the anthology *Thriller 2* – an absolutely remarkable hit-rate from a single collection – which UK readers first encountered in this very column in August 2009.

And speaking of awards, I hear that Colin Bateman won the Last Laugh Award at *Crimefest* in Bristol for his *Day of the Jack Russell* which, you will recall, won the *Comic Shots Award* for 2009.

Indiana Jones and the Last Crystal Ark of Doom

As an archaeologist, I made several quite interesting discoveries out in the field: many a coin, funeral urns, an entire Roman road and of course, with my crime-writing instincts, plenty of bodies – all of which I named after fictional detectives. (Below is "Inspector Morse").



I cannot claim to have discovered anything as important as Noah's Ark, conveniently berthed in a glacier on top of a mountain in Armenia (or Cappadocia depending on how up to date your atlas is), yet this is the very plot nub of a new thriller from Sphere (and the clue is in the title): *The Noah's Ark Quest* by Boyd Morrison. It is a book which comes to reviewers in one of the most elaborate promotional packages I have ever seen, complete with its own 'newspaper'.

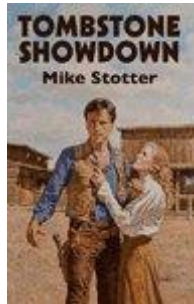


And if that was not enough, the dedicated marketing team at Sphere began to send follow-up emails giving references to the *actual* discovery of Noah's Ark by a team of "Evangelical Chinese Explorers" (I am not making this up) as reported by the *Sun*, the *Daily Mail* and on *Fox News*.

With such impeccable academic references, the story must surely be true and Boyd Morrison's novel a perfectly timed piece of fiction.

Aptly Named

I am often asked why I always refer to the editor of this steadily expanding organ as Mike 'Tombstone' Stotter, but for the life of me I have forgotten the reason.



Pip! Pip!
The Ripster