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Dear Bookpals,

I can just hear some of you saying “Whoa Brendan, are you kidding me. Another bookletter. I thought this was a once a year event as opposed to what now seems to be an every three or four month occurrence”. Well yes, it is true, more bookletters! But the reason is quite simple – there are just so many great books being written by so many authors that it just seems appropriate to put out another letter. And of course, as we always remind, there IS “delete”.

One of the reasons for so many new books and authors is that certainly within the mystery genre, globalization has really occurred. Whereas it was not that long ago that if one were a “mystery fan” one would be pretty much restricted to U.S. authors and maybe a few from the UK. But now countries all across the world are turning out great mystery writers and they are being regularly translated into other languages, including English, and are being made very broadly available.

At least part of the impetus behind this phenomenon is of course the enormous success of the “The Girl Who” trilogy by Stieg Larsson of Sweden. These three books have in effect become a cottage industry, generating quite literally millions and millions of sales and all three have at one time or another reached the number one best seller position in each of some 30 countries. And furthermore the three “Girl Who” movies produced in Sweden (in Swedish – duh!) have also been an enormous success. And by the way, if you have not seen them, they are readily available on Netflix and are genuinely excellent. The actress who plays Lisbeth Salander is a relatively unknown European actress named Noomi Arpachi and she is literally brilliant and actually lives up to the Lisbeth of my imagination (no small feat!)

And now, predictably, the US movie industry has stumbled onto the fact that these books were successful and is already in production of U.S. big-budget versions of these three films. Interestingly, they have chosen a relatively unknown actress named Rooney Mara to play Lisbeth. (The fact that Rooney is the granddaughter of the late Wellington Mara, owner of the

New York football Giants can only be described as "curious"). And now I can just hear some of you saying, number one, "how does he know all this junk" and number two, "when we can get to the new books." Okay, okay, here we go.

Now "normally" I would start rattling off in rapid order several new authors (i.e. to this letter), and some of their books. But now let me do something a little different. Courtesy of one of our "staff" this time based in Hamburg, Germany (who said we weren't an international organization?) we have a recommendation of an absolutely fabulous American author who has written approximately 14 books and the ones I've read are truly outstanding. The author's name is Don Winslow and the breadth and range of his books is pretty breathtaking. This is a special author! Here then are the three books I've recently read by Winslow:

1. *The Power of The Dog* – this was the book that caused our friend in Germany to e-mail that he had "just read one of the very best books ever". Guess what? He was right. This is a big, sprawling novel, but one that is tightly written and riveting on every page. And now I'm actually going to quote from the flyleaf because it does a brilliant job of summarizing what this book is about. "An electrifying new novel of love and revenge, politics and influence, corruption and honor. Moving at break neck speed tells a riveting, sometimes harrowing story set in the shifting nexus of power among the Latin American drug cartels, the American mob and the US government... Spanning the years from the rise of the Mexican Drug Federation in the 1970's to the Iran – Contra affair in the 1980's to the vicious drug wars of the 1990's, the action ranges from Manhattan's Hells Kitchen and the halls of Washington to the streets of Tijuana and the deserts of the American South West... The players: a DEA agent, a drug lord, a call girl, a hit man, a priest." (whew – but accurate). This book does have some violent stuff in it, that's for sure, but boy is it a spectacular read. And it also as a bonus gives you some interesting perspectives on US government activities in Central America during the three decades in question. It really does have it all. This is a not-to-be-put-down read. Albeit, one of over 500 pages. One of my all-time favorites!
2. *Satori* - how many of you are old enough to remember a great book, *Shibumi*, written by Trevanian way back in 1979. (BTW – if you never read books by Trevanian like the *Eiger Sanction*, the *Loo Sanction* etc. you've got another great, author to go back and catch up on. They may have been written 30 years ago but I suspect they are still every bit as

good as they were then). In any event, this book *Satori*, written by Winslow is in effect a "pre-quel" to *Shibumi*. It features the same amazingly interesting lead character, Nikolai Hel, but we meet him well before his time that we experience in *Shibumi*. It is the fall of 1951 and the Korean War is raging. Nikolai is at this time, 26 years old and has spent his last three years in solitary confinement at the hands of the Americans. He is fluent in seven languages and has honed an extraordinary "proximity sense" – an extra awareness of the presence of danger. He has all the skills to become one of the world's most proficient assassins and it is to be that that the CIA is now trying to recruit him. Because they have a job for him. Namely, to go to Beijing and assassinate the Soviet Unions' Commissioner to China. This is another great soaring novel of a period of time that certainly to me is uniquely interesting in history. It is the time of Mao in China, a powerful Soviet Union, beginnings of difficulties in Vietnam, a United States in post-World War II "Innocence" (not really), etc. etc. This is not a history book, however. It is a fascinating novel that captures so much of this era really brilliantly. Great characters, great insights into Asia and a central character, Nikolai Hel who is a genius, a mystic and arguably the most formidable assassin in the world at that time. A rather cool combo as we'd say. And one thing should be made clear -- you do not have to have read *Shibumi* to enjoy this book. But if I were you I would put *Shibumi* on my list as well and think about reading them both in whatever order pleases you. Chronologically, it would mean go to *Satori* first.

3. *Dawn Patrol* - yet another from Winslow, having absolutely nothing to do with either of the two foregoing books. Our hero here is Boone Daniels, a California PI/surfer who works "just enough to keep himself in fish-tacos and wetsuits,". To consider this a "surfing novel" would be to greatly underestimate it. But if you do have any interest in and liking for surfing, you'll particularly enjoy this. It's a terrific mystery while at the same time capturing life in Southern California basically in current times superbly. A great fun read. And if you're starting to get the sense that I really like Winslow you would be absolutely correct. I'm looking for all of his books.

Okay, now still on the "new authors/new books" front, what's happening in Scandinavia? Well, you could easily be forgiven for thinking that the mystery book publishing world has completely tilted to that part of the world which for six months of the year is dark, wet, gloomy and pretty damn cold. Because based on the wild success of Stieg Larsson, every publisher in the universe is quickly pumping out books written by authors from Sweden (in particular). But also from Norway, and Iceland and can Finland and Denmark be far behind? Actually, there are some very, very good writers from this part of the world who are now enjoying perhaps overdue success. Clearly Henning Mankell is one of them and he pre-

existed Larsson and is genuinely one of the great writers. And just a quick reference to a prior letter, if you have not read "*The Man from Beijing*," by Henning Mankeli you really are missing a treat. But what's new from some new authors:

4. Roslund & Hellström –*Three Seconds*

More accurately, the authors are Anders Roslund an award-winning journalist and Borge Hellström an ex-criminal with considerable experience (i.e. time served) in Sweden's prisons.

As the fly leaf says "Their unique ability to combine inside knowledge of the brutal reality of criminal life with searing social criticism and complex intelligent plots has put them at the forefront of modern Scandinavian crime writing". Actually quite true. This pair have actually written several books, but this definitely is the one to read. And could well be the start of a continuing series. It also was an extremely well marketed book (quite Patterson-esque) and that's what got me to buy it. Well worth it and really a most, most interesting read and quite different from a lot of the genre. It has to do with deep undercovers in the Polish Mafia in Sweden as they try to control amphetamine distribution throughout the vast Swedish prison system. Undercover cops, "good guys" in prison, corrupt government officials, tons of excitement and a stunning ending really make this one, in my judgment, a must. I really enjoyed this one. It IS Swedish, however, and you should like that territory. And truthfully, one aspect that all of these novels from Scandinavia bump up against is Lisbeth Salander as a central character – or more correctly, the lack thereof. She truly was a one-off and really is what made the Larsson trilogy so successful.

5. Roslund & Hellström – *Box 21*

This book actually came before *Three Seconds* and served to establish these authors as big-time mystery guys in Sweden and this book was acclaimed "Best Crime Novel of The Year" in Sweden. Some of the characters reappear in *Three Seconds* but it is by no means necessary to read this first. This is another terrific read though, in that it deals with the "seedy underbelly of Stockholm" (isn't it amazing how many of these clean "nice" cities all seem to have these "underbellies") but it is reality. This one deals

principally around organized crime, particularly the sex trade in Sweden and the exploitation of young girls from Lithuania. This has it all – hard-working dour Swedish cops, notorious mob enforcers, junkies out of control – – but all really, really well written and a most engaging read. Again, it helps if you kind of have an interest in Sweden, and Stockholm and Scandinavia, but you don't have to.

6. Jo Nesbø --Nemesis.

I can just hear many of you now saying "Well, he finally found Nesbø". And specifically, Harold was first, Harry was second, Bonnie A was third, Dr. Bob was fourth and there are probably more of you as well who have relentlessly said, "read Nesbø , you blockhead". Well I finally have and I really do like him. This is just one of at least four books that he has written. All feature police detective Harry Hole of the Oslo Norway police force. Yes, we've moved from Sweden to Norway. And truthfully Nesbø has become a global publishing phenomenon. Not quite to Larsson or Mankell status but certainly getting there. And he really is very, very good. Hole is one of the more interesting characters you'll come across – but does suffer from the Scandinavian "virtues" of being reasonably gloomy, reasonably alcoholic, a bit of a philanderer but a very, very, good detective. And in this one he actually gets caught up in a series of bank robberies/murders as a potential suspect. The action takes place across Oslo, but also into Brazil and it's pretty nonstop. I still miss "Lisbeth" but absolutely you should read at least one of Jo Nesbø's books. His newest one, just out, which I have not read is titled *The Snowman* and is getting massive marketing support here in the United States. I would definitely try one of his.

7. K. O. Dahl – The Fourth Man

Yep – back to Norway again. And the Swedes referred to Dahl as "a Norwegian Mankell" (It must be a hoot up in Scandinavia trying to keep all these books and authors straight, coming up with new ways to describe them). But anyway this was described accurately as "an absorbing study of sexual enthrallment, dogged police work, and a harrowing twist or two ". Could not have said it better. Actually I can, because as the fly leaf says this "book is a sexy, fast paced psychological thriller that puts a modern twist on the

classic-noire story of the femme fatale". All that's true, and we again have a terrific character in Detective Inspector Frank Frølich of the Oslo police. Romantic entanglements get him ensnared with a big-time mob and then he is on the defensive to prove he is not one of the bad guys. Some really good writing and again a police procedural this time but that takes place in a very interesting and different environment.

8. Tina Fey--*Bossypants*

Huh? "I thought this was about mysteries". Well, hey, I'm allowed to manifest my feminine side once in a while and I do think Tina Fey is one of the coolest people of today. And by the way, this was a terrific book. Unfortunately it's kind of positioned as "for women", and even by some as a "guide to being a successful woman". Ridiculous. It's just terrific. Very funny, very informative, very insightful book about life in the United States today. And particularly in the world of television. It IS a bit of a "how to be successful" handbook but it is so much more than that. It's gossipy. It's funny. It's all about "Saturday Night Live", Sarah Palin, you name it. It's got it. And it's a really quick read and one that in my view is absolutely worth picking up. Even if you are a male with "some" dinosaur tendencies.

9. Tarquin Hall – *The Case of the Missing Servant*

- *The Case of the Man Who Died Laughing*

I can hear some of you wondering "where the hell does he find these books". Well, actually this one was a recommendation of Jonathan and is absolutely spectacular. Tarquin Hall is a British author who has lived in South Asia for quite a bit. However he writes this book which takes place in current day India and in particular, in Delhi, totally as if he was a native. These are amazingly funny, yet insightful, easy to read books about India today. They both feature Vish Puri, "India's most private investigator". He is described as "portly, persistent and unmistakably Punjabi" and he "cuts a determined swathe through modern India's swindlers, cheats and murderers". I particularly love the names of his team of undercover operatives – "Tubelight, Flush, and Facecream" -- all dedicated supporters of Vish. These are actually wonderful mysteries that have the added benefit of introducing or perhaps reintroducing the reader to modern day India -- the India of massive slums, call centers, multi-multimillionaires etc., etc. If you want to take a little vacation from where you live today and visit India and have a great time doing so, this is a great cheap way to do it. One last point—"The Missing Servant" was chosen as one of the New York Times notable crime books of the year. (To those to

whom that matters, buy the book. And to those who abhor the Times, ignore it. And buy the book anyway).

Now we come to the part of the letter where we quickly recount books by our "favorite" authors (i.e., those whom have already appeared somewhere in the pages of these letters). And since this is now the 13th anniversary of the book letter (no gifts please) the number of "favorites" is well over 100. And they are 100 of the more prolific rascals in all of publishing. So just keeping up with them is no mean feat. Therefore, in the interest of not letting this letter explode as once happened to a mere 17 pages, I will be reasonably brief in describing the newest books from our favorite guys. A reasonable approach since by now you should be pretty familiar with at least some of these.

1. Robert Parker –Sixkill

Wait a minute – didn't Parker die two years ago and didn't you already tell us he was long dead. Yes and yes. However, I must have lied as the books keep coming. Actually this is the 39th novel in the Spenser series and in my judgment is one of the absolute best. I loved it. It introduces a new character, namely Zebulon Sixkill, who is a rather large, former football playing, Native American who is acting as a bodyguard for a rather unattractive character named Jumbo. Long time Spenser fans should think of Zebulon as "Hawk with training wheels" and sadly, this will be his only book. He was a great new character who would have really added to the Spenser series. The dialogue as always is brilliant and truthfully is what carries these books. If you at all like Robert Parker and Spenser, you must get this one. One of the best. Now a little gossip/news. Rumor has it that the Parker Estate is seeking to continue this Spenser franchise by contracting with other writers and the first one in line to write is Ace Atkins. Now Ace is a really good writer. And do I like his books, but... I've don't think anybody could do wiseguy dialogue like Parker. We'll see.

2. John Sandford – Wicked Prey.

This is the first "Lucas Davenport" book I've read in a while. I've kind of drifted off to the Virgil Flowers series, also by Sandford. Now I'm back into what is the 18th of the "Prey" series. It's like I never left. And that is the great virtue of Sandford --he is consistent. The characters stay true to what they purport to be and it's always a timely, topical

highly enjoyable read. This particular book centers around the Republican Presidential convention coming to St. Paul, Minnesota. And with that as the centerpiece, as one might expect, appropriate pithy, rude and funny commentary on same abounds. The story centers around a crew of professional stickup men who are looking to "knock off" political fixers who carry large amounts of cash to be dispensed to assorted "deserving" conventioners. And all of this is combined with a rather nasty pimp whom Davenport put in a wheelchair several years ago. You get the idea. "Prey" fans should grab this one. It's a real winner in this series.

3. Tim Dorsey – *Electric Barracuda*.

If you haven't yet read anything by Dorsey and you've been reading these letters, I may have to give up on you. No, I will keep trying. Again as always, Serge Storms, as the fly leaf says, "that lovable thermonuclear vigilante and one – stop – Florida – trivia- shop has been leaving corpses strewn across the Sunshine State for more than a decade". The premise of this, the 13th in the series has Serge reactivating his Internet website and concocting a theme vacation based on "you too can experience Florida through the eyes of a fugitive". As always, total mayhem and madness. But remarkably accurate info about Florida all served up in an outrageously funny way. And just to add a little extra juice to the story Serge's grandfather's old Miami Beach gang suddenly had their life savings wiped out. Do you think the perpetrator of this particular misdeed will feel the wrath of Serge? Hmm? As a famous American might say, "you betcha".

4. Stewart M. Kaminsky – *Blood and Rubles*.

Once again if you've been reading these letters you do know that Kaminsky is absolutely one of my all-time favorites and three of his four series are also among my all time goodies. And quite possibly the very best is this series featuring Inspector Porfiriy Rostnikov, the one legged, weightlifting, amateur plumber, antiestablishment Moscow cop. This particular book is one of the earlier ones. And I did just manage to find it down in the Strand (lucky me). And like all of them, it's absolutely great. If you want to read books that take place in Russia and that are fundamentally "police procedurals" you absolutely, positively cannot do better than this series by Kaminsky. And once you get

into it you will try to read all of them as I have now done with the exception of just one book which I believe was published only in paperback and which I may resign myself to reading in that rather unappealing format.

5. Stephen Hunter – *Dead Zero*

I am very happy to say that our man Stephen is right back on track. (He is relieved I am sure, to hear this). As always, this book features veteran sniper Bob Lee Swagger who keeps trying to stay retired, but keeps getting called back on one mission or another. This is a very contemporary story about a U.S. Marine sniper team on a mission on the Afghan Pakistan border which is ambushed by professionals using the latest high-tech shooting gear. The team's only survivor, Gunnery Sgt. Ray Cruz is hell bent to exact revenge, but then he mysteriously disappears. This book has bad guys in Afghanistan mixing with bad guys in Washington DC midst the normal duplicitous behavior always so abundant in that city. And then who comes to the rescue of course but Bob Lee Swagger. Written in a beautiful style as all Hunter's books are, this is a must-read for Bob Lee fans. And actually, even if you're not yet familiar with Hunter/Swagger this would be a great one to start with. And if you've enjoyed the Vince Flynn/Mitch Rapp series the odds are enormous you will love this one too.

6. Harlan Coben – *Live Wire*

One of our favorite characters, Myron Bolitar, former professional basketball player (briefly) and current private eye/sports agent, residing in Manhattan and New Jersey is back. Published this year, this very contemporary Bolitar pivots (note b.ball terminology) around an anonymous Facebook post questioning the paternity of an unborn child of a long time tennis pro /friend of Bolitar's. It also moves into his continuing search for his long-lost brother. Probably not the first Coben to read if you've never read this guy as there is plenty of back information that probably would be helpful to know. Read an earlier book in the series first. He is one of our favorites and this is right up there with the rest of his series.

7. Michael Connelly - *The Fifth Witness*

This guy is absolutely, massively prolific. I tell you I don't think there's ever been a Bookletter without at least one of his books featured. And this newest one is absolutely one of his best. And again features "the Lincoln Lawyer" Mickey Haller (aka Mathew McConnaghy) and is simply outstanding. As always with Connelly, the plot is very much on top of today in LA and in the US. And what better place to have Haller bouncing around than in the world of foreclosures. Mickey Haller is one of the "best defense attorneys in LA" despite operating out of the back seat of his Lincoln. Because his traditional practice is drying up a bit, he has now expanded his arena of operation to include home foreclosures. And suddenly one of his foreclosed clients is accused of murder. And guess whom she murdered – the banker who was trying to take away her home. Somewhat predictably, bankers are not treated as the fine upstanding faultless citizens we know them to be (ahem) and the book is off to the races with lots of great courtroom stuff, lots of wry LA observations, and lots of pithy thoughts on the economy. Just a great Connelly read. He is arguably the very best today.

8. Ira Berkowitz –*Sinners Ball*

Yes, that Ira Berkowitz. (To those of you who worked at Ogilvy advertising years ago – he was one of us). This book is a terrific contemporary crime story of today's New York City. Lots of great dialogue, lots of great observations on the passing parade of New York and an excellent lead character, ex NYPD policeman and now freelance "fixer upper", named "Steeg". If you are at all a New Yorker I think you'll really love this. Lots of Hells Kitchen Mob stuff along with several requisite shady politicians behaving naughtily (in NYC? Quelle surprise.)

9. John Brady – *The Carra King*

- *Wonderland*
- *Islandbridge*

I'm not going to tell you about each of these separately. But I have to say, Brady has become one of my absolute favorite writers. Admittedly as I have said before, you really

have to "get it" a bit about Ireland to truly appreciate his stuff. He constantly takes these quick verbal shots at the various individual counties of Ireland, at the Irish language, at Irish history, at Irish politics and politicians, even at the Garda Siochana, that are just absolutely priceless (I never use that word) but they are. BUT-- you probably need to know a little bit about Ireland to truly get the full freight of all of them. But regardless, if you love incredibly well written, "mysteries" you really should pick up a Brady and give it a try. His lead character is a homicide inspector in Dublin named Matt Minogue and he is one of the best characters in all of crime fiction. I really do think these are unbelievably good. Would probably start with an earlier one in this series.

Actually, there are many more books to go, but I know this letter is approaching behemoth length so therefore I must cease and desist.

As always, hope you enjoyed the letter and even more importantly hope you have come upon a new author or certainly some new books to read. There are just so many really, really excellent ones out there. And as always any comments are welcome and as I've questioned before, if a Bookletter lands in the forest and no one responds....

Regards

Brendan