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Dear Bookfriends,

"What in the ...what in the... what in the...?" (With apologies to Jive Bunny and the Master Mixers). And for those of you who don't know what the heck I am talking about there don't worry, just move on.

Actually it was a rather silly way of expressing what I am sure many of you are thinking - namely what in the - another bookletter already. Wasn't the last one just at the end of June? Yes, it was, but once again there are just so many good books to share.

And happily, some of the best books I've read over the last few months are books by our longstanding really favorite writers. And not only have they come out with new books but many of them have surpassed themselves, either returning to greatness or reaching new heights. Favorites like Lee Child (boy, is Reacher back), Robert Parker, (yes he is dead - but he must have some special contraption in the coffin to enable him to still pump out books), Lawrence Sanders, (yes - that Lawrence of ages ago) to say nothing of people like Colin Cotterill, Shamini Flint, Paul Levine, etc etc. All have terrific new books and then there's Don Winslow who has quickly and prolifically become one of my all time favorites.

And then of course there are at least several "new" authors who also are absolutely worth talking about.

So at risk of discombobulating those bookletter readers who have become accustomed to "new authors first, favorites second" we will flip the order here and start with our favorites.

And here they are:

1. Lee Child - *The Affair*

Frankly, after 15 Jack Reacher novels I was beginning to worry that this excellent series was going a bit stale. I mean how many new places could Reacher go and then basically "restore order". Well, good news - in this brand new "Reacher" as the cover says "Go back to the beginning for a story that's never been told". And what that means is that Lee Child goes back when Jack Reacher was still a Major in the United States Army as a Military Policeman, operating within the military, experiencing some amazingly "interesting moments" in the halls of the Pentagon (you can just imagine). If you at all like the Reacher series you will love this one. It answers any number of questions about Reacher's beginnings and does so in that Lee Child irreverent, clever style that makes for such entertaining and easy reading. And by the way if you have never read a "Reacher" (what IS wrong with you) this would be a great one to start with. You MUST! And if you don't like this one frankly I suspect you won't like the rest of them either. This is not unlike what Vince Flynn recently did with Mitch Rapp in his latest book of that series titled "*American Assassin*". It went back to when Mitch was coming out of Syracuse University and first became a black ops operative for the CIA. One further thought on Jack Reacher -- it appears that movie rights have been sold to at least a few of these books. And wonder of wonders, guess who has been chosen to play Jack Reacher. Apparently Tom Cruise. (Huh?) Now, my vision of Reacher has always been of a rather huge lad, about 6'5", 240 pounds of pretty solid muscle, ruggedly handsome, but certainly not pretty, or God forbid, cute! In fact in one of the scenes in "*The Affair*", Reacher on his own "deals with" six burly hillbillies who are threatening him. My mental image of Reacher at that moment ain't Tom Cruise. But as Emily, age 17 might say, "Whatever".

2. Robert P. Parker's *Killing the Blues* - by Michael Brandman

OK let's sort this out. Robert Parker did indeed die two and a half years ago, yet books keep appearing. Although this is really the first one which he himself did not write. It is part of the Jesse Stone series (more on that later) and Michael Brandman has actually written this. Brandman collaborated with Parker for years on movie projects, on the Spenser TV movies and most importantly on the Jesse Stone series of TV movies starring Tom Selleck. So how did Brandman do? In my opinion, superbly. And I cannot believe I am saying that, because I bought this book fully anticipating I would hate it and would put the wooden stake into Parker

forevermore. However, if anything, this book may actually be even a little bit better than the nine "Jesse Stone" novels that have preceded it. You may recall Jesse Stone is the sheriff in small town Paradise, Massachusetts having come from Los Angeles, where he was a homicide cop but ran into "some difficulties". As with all Parker books, this is easy to read, fun to read and actually continues to have some pretty excellent dialogue. Although I must say if there is one place where Parker's deft touch is a bit missing it is in the funny, witty, wise-guy dialogue. But, on the bright side, the endless psycho babble which used to permeate this series as Jesse Stone was wrestling with what to do with his ex-wife, while his girlfriend Sunny Randall was wrestling what to do with her ex-husband and various other boyfriends, all through some psychiatrists office - I'm happy to report that's all gone. Sunny has been dispatched to Europe on some strange mission and does not even appear in this book. It's just a fun read and you don't have to have read any of the earlier ones. This has some wonderful mob characters, an annoying young PR person (that's rather redundant isn't it) and a really bad boy from LA whom Jesse had dealt with in the past, reappears with some rather evil intentions. Absolutely a quick, highly enjoyable read.

3. Lawrence Sanders - *A Drop of the Hard Stuff*

Block is genuinely one of the great masters of American crime fiction. He has received every award you could possibly mention over a long, long career and has written well in excess of 50 books. Arguably his most famous and best loved series features Matt Scudder, a private eye in New York City who operates principally in what historically was referred to as Hell's Kitchen. (It still is Hell's Kitchen - despite the best efforts of developers and mayoral candidates to rename it "Clinton" - are you kidding?). Regardless, Scudder was a New York City policeman who as a result of troubles with drinking, and an unfortunate incident while on the Job, left and became a private eye. A private eye, sans license, but someone who solves problems for people across the City. Amazingly the first book in this series, *The Sins of the Fathers* was written in 1976. And truthfully reads as well today as it did then. Now, some 16 books later we have yet another author who is doing a "prequel". In other words, this book, *A Drop of the Hard Stuff*, goes back to when it all began. Scudder is just out of NYPD, has just given up drinking and has joined AA. And then a childhood friend of his gets shot, "once in the mouth and once between the eyes". And we're off... if you have not read any of this series this would be a perfectly fine one to start with since, despite being the 17th in the series, it does go back to the beginning. If you have never read any of the Matt Scudder books and you're at all intrigued with New York City and neighborhoods and private eyes this is just a treasure trove for you. Block genuinely is one of the great authors of our time and I believe this is his best series. He is one of the very best at bringing to life a place, New York City, a time, the last twenty years of the twentieth century and the interesting people who make up the fabric of New York. And just think, if you like this one, you've got 16 others to go.

4. Colin Cotterill - *Killed At The Whim of A Hat*

Yes, this is that Cotterill, but no, this is not another in the series now numbering seven books featuring Dr. Siri Paiboun the reluctant National Coroner of Laos in the 1970's. This is the first in what hopefully will become another series by Cotterill, featuring another great central character, this time, Jimm Juree, who as the story starts is the ambitious back up crime reporter for the Chiang Mai *Daily Mail*. But quickly she, and her extremely eccentric family led by a gentle matriarch who "might be drifting mentally", all move to a pretty out of the way part of Thailand, certainly far from the sophisticated urban settings of Bangkok and Chiang Mai. Actually it is to a town called Pak Nam, on the southeastern coast of Thailand. As Jimm Juree points out "our P.O. Box is number two which shows you how much correspondence passes in and out of Pak Nam".

I freely admit to loving books that bring to life really interesting, unusual places, and this one does so superbly. Thailand is one of my favorite countries in the world, but this is a part of Thailand that I've never visited and yet it comes stunningly to life, always with great smiles and great send-ups of the important and famous. Both in Thailand, and interestingly enough in the United States. For those of you who are long standing George W. Bush fans you may not fully appreciate the fact that each chapter of this book begins with a somewhat out of context quote from the most recent President Bush. Actually extremely funny. And just to give you a taste, Jimm Juree explains where the phrase "Killed At The Whim of A Hat" came from. According to her "George W. was in Washington DC and he'd fallen off the edge of the teleprompter again and he was caught somewhere between "on a whim" and "at the drop of a hat" and ended up with terrorists killing one

another "at the whim of a hat". Now, if this tickles your funny bone get ready for tons of this kind of stuff throughout the book. If it sort of sends you into orbit and has you rushing to your nearest Tea Party gathering, this book may amuse you a bit less. I thought it was just outstanding and hope it's the start of a long new series.]

5. Shamini Flint - *A Bali Conspiracy Most Foul*

I know, I know, I can just hear some of you going, what is with this guy. Pak Nam, now Bali, what next. (Actually, Miami - but keep reading). This is the second in a series that will include four books written by Shamini Flint--- a Cambridge Graduate, British Lawyer, a fascinating young woman who has given all of that up to live and travel extensively in Asia and write these unbelievably great mystery novels featuring the "portly and wheezing homicide detective, Inspector Singh of the Singapore Police Force". This time, Singh's Singaporean bosses who never miss a chance to exit him from the country, have dispatched him to Bali, Indonesia to assist the local police force in the investigation of recent terrorist bombings in what once was an idyllic resort. As the flyleaf says, "Unfortunately, Singh has as much experience with terrorism as he does with proper diet and exercise---none". Singh gets paired up with Bronwin Taylor, a "peppy and eternally optimistic Australian Cop" (female) and together and through their eyes we see the good, the bad and the ugly of Bali. A unique and remarkably interesting place by the way. These books, not unlike the two by Tarquin Hall featuring "Vish Puri, India's most private investigator" do a remarkable job of capturing a place and culture and make it come to life in amazingly visual ways. And at the same time does a wonderful job of sending up and even puncturing the various "hot air balloons" that permeate societies in these different countries. (Not that they are not here in the U.S. also). Just great informative, fun reads which by the way revolve around extremely realistic "mysteries"--- in this case terrorism in a country that unbeknownst to most, is the largest Muslim country in the world.

6. Paul Levine - *Lassiter*

To ensure that I've got your attention here just know that Dave Barry, Lee Child, James W. Hall and Harlan Coban among many others all tout this book as "truly outstanding". Let me echo the thought. And while there are about ten earlier books featuring Jake Lassiter, former mediocre Miami Dolphin middle line backer and now large "out there" defense lawyer in Miami, this can be read absolutely as a one-off. If you like legal based thrillers with lots of action, lots of "Florida" stuff, lots of irreverent commentary on the passing parade of Miami, this is for you. Really well written, yet easy to read, this particular novel features such interesting characters as Krista Larkin, "the runaway teen turned porn actress", "a former porn king turned philanthropist" (only in Miami) and lastly a slick Cuban born prosecutor who'd love to be Governor, among others. I really do love this series and this latest one is truly one of the best and again, can be read "first".

Don Winslow - Many Many Books

OK, I will confess I have totally drunk the Don Winslow "Kool Aid". This author, who has written about 15 books, has somehow stayed below the radar screen of everyone reading this booklet. And virtually all of us are to one degree or another aficionados of mysteries. And it took a friend in Hamburg, Germany to alert us to his existence, let alone the fact that he has written all these great books. (Do I hear an emergency opportunity for a new publicist?) In the last booklet, we talked about three titles - "*The Power of the Dog*" (in my opinion one of the very best books I have read in the last ten years) and also "*Satori*" and "*The Dawn Patrol*". Now since that last letter which was in June, I have read an additional seven books by Winslow. (Did someone say "compulsive"). And boy, does he not disappoint. I won't go through all of them with you here, but there are certainly a few that are in my judgment absolute must reads. Here they are:

7. *The Winter of Frankie Machine* -- And rather than trying to improve a great summary let me quote liberally from the jacket cover - "Frank Machianno is a late-middle-aged ex-surf bum who runs a bait shack on the San Diego waterfront, when he's not juggling any of his other three part time jobs, or trying to get a quick set in on his longboard. He's a stand-up business man, a devoted father to his daughter and a beloved fixture in the community.... Frank's also a hit man, specifically a retired hit man. Back in the day...he was known as Frankie Machine. He severed his mob ties and wants them to stay that way. But....someone from the past wants him

dead". This is one of the best reads in a long, long time. It brings together San Diego and all of the very rude comments Winslow has to make regarding Orange County and its various idiosyncracies. It's a Mob book. It's a clever book, it's just outstanding. If you read nothing else by Winslow, read this one and the *Power of the Dog*. And just to show I'm not alone in this regard, let me point out that the rather esoteric collection of Lee Child, Ken Bruen, James Ellroy and Ian Rankin all think Winslow is the tops. Last point - this book is nothing like the *Power of the Dog* - amazing diversity.

8. *California Fire and Life* - the hero here is Jake Wade, a claims adjustor for California Fire and Life Mutual Insurance Companies. And is one of the best arson investigators around. Once again, the setting is Southern California, and we have multi million dollar homes going up in flames, beautiful young wives dying with bottles of vodka at their feet, to say nothing of the Russian mob, Vietnamese gangs, real estate scams, counterfeiting and corporate corruption. Just another excellent Winslow novel, fun to read and easy on the brain. And again, different from the other books.
9. *Savages* - is described as a "provocative, sexy and sharply funny thrill ride through the dark side of the war on drugs and beyond". You almost could call this "The Power of the Dog" "lite". It takes place in Laguna Beach, and it's about a hugely successful marijuana operation run by "part-time environmentalist and philanthropist Ben and his ex-mercenary buddy Chon". Due to their rather extreme success, the Mexican Baja cartel takes notice and wants in. Mayhem predictably ensues, with loads of twists and turns and not without some major opportunities to chuckle out loud.

There are more Winslow's to describe, but enough is enough for one letter. Lest there be any confusion, I think Winslow is absolutely outstanding, and one of the best recommendations ever. And as I've said throughout, his books really are different, one from another. To dismiss him as a "Southern California surfer guy" is really, really a big mistake. Yeah, he does plow that territory but several of these books, in my opinion, are true masterpieces.

Now in the interest of keeping this letter from getting totally out of control ("what - you think it already is?") here then are a few books from authors new to the pages of these letters. While I have read many "new" books over the past few months I will only talk about the ones which were in my view quite excellent or somehow unique. And by the way, every book mentioned above by favorite authors was genuinely excellent.

10. Garry Disher - *Wyatt*

Disher is one of Australia's best known novelists, having written over 40 books. His most popular books feature Melbourne Police Detective Inspector Hal Challis and is an extremely well written, engaging police procedural series. (As I write this I have a vague recollection that somewhere, in some distant booklet I may actually have written about one of his books - Oh well). But the book of the moment is *Wyatt*. And this is an absolutely great read. And is not from the "good guys" side but from the point of view of "cool enigmatic jewel thief, Wyatt Wareen". Disher is an excellent writer, as evidenced by the fact that he won the Ned Kelly Award in Australia, which is quite a big deal there. This story offers lots of mayhem, clever plotting focused around bearer bonds worth millions, excellent observations on the passing parade of life, vivid different characters and lots of "inside stuff" on Melbourne and Australia. (And if you're not Australian, just buy a Fosters, put your feet up and you'll quickly become one as you read this book).

11. Juris Jurjevics - *Red Flags*

This is a book about war. And specifically the Vietnam War. It absolutely brings to life in remarkably vivid terms what it must have been like in Vietnam in that period of time. The story is told through the memory of a now long retired military policeman who was dispatched to a tiny American outpost in the remote wilderness of the Central Highlands to take down a Viet Cong opium operation hidden in the jungle. This is in effect a "mystery novel" clothed in a remarkably realistic "war novel". It is, in my judgment, "literature", but at the same time is extremely readable. One last thought - if names like President Diem, Premier Ky and even Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara conjure up fond memories for you, you may not like this book.

12. Eoin Colfer - *Plugged*

First of all, his name is pronounced "Owen" and secondly he is the same guy who wrote the Artemis Fowl series (all eight books) which is one of the biggest selling young adult series in publishing history. This is his adult debut and really received tremendous advance press. I read it for any number of reasons, not the least of which is it was one of the most heralded and talked about mystery debuts ever. The story basically follows the bizarre exploits of Daniel McEvoy, an Irish bouncer at a seedy New Jersey casino. McEvoy has a host of problems, least of which are his recent hair implants as he tackles the sudden death of his girlfriend, the disappearance of his unscrupulous doctor, and the growing threat of a menacing mob from his homeland. One reviewer stated "the Coen Brothers meet Carl Hiaasen in a brilliant madcap mystery novel of fantastically realized characters engaged in a non-stop fever pitched crime thriller" Well, now - what do you really think? If you're a mystery fan you kinda have to read this one. I genuinely liked it. I'm not sure I thought it was great. But then again maybe I did think it was. Are we confused - yes.

13. Leighton Gage - *Dying Gasp*

This book adds yet another country to our growing list of places around the world where mystery novels flourish, and the country this time is Brazil. This series features Chief Inspector Mario Silva of the Federal Brazilian Police. This is the third in a series of now four books all featuring different parts of Brazil as our Federal Inspector is called out to solve crimes in different corners of this huge country. Silva is like many other characters featured in popular mystery novels. A bit of a maverick, actually a genuine pain in the ass to his bosses, but who is kept around because he is just too good to get rid of. He does solve crimes but he solves them in ways that are not necessarily in keeping with the wishes of the legal system of Brazil. This particular book is about the kidnapping of the grand daughter of a prominent and wealthy politician from Recife. And the trail leads from the beach at Recife to Manaus referred to on the flyleaf as a "jungle hell-hole on the Amazon". (the Tourist Board of Manaus, actually quite an active bunch these days trying to encourage jungle/eco tourism may not share this view). The story line here can get a bit violent, and even gruesome, but it is a great read and if you are at all interested in Brazil, it is an excellent way to "visit". I will be reading the others in this series. It's a winner.

14. Kinky Friedman - *Ten Little New Yorkers*

Actually I'm kind of astonished that I have never written about Kinky Friedman before. If anyone would seemingly have my name on his books it would be "the Kinkster". Even the dour *New York Times* refers to him as "the world's bawdiest and most politically incorrect country music singer turned mystery writer" and this is the 17th novel which feature Kinky's alter ego (namely himself) as well as a cast of "New York" characters who live in Greenwich Village. This may well turn out to be the last of this series and it is a bit of a homage to Agatha Christie (duh - look at the title) but is a fast paced enjoyable, highly irreverent read. I've read several of Friedman's books and they are all of a type and they are all genuinely fun to read. However, if you like one you'll probably like a lot of them, if you don't like one - don't read the rest, because you won't like them.

Sorry this has run on a little long but there are some genuinely great books referenced here. All of them are incredibly enjoyable to read. And hopefully these write ups have identified aspects of them which may appeal to your unique interests and tastes. As always, a return e-mail with a comment or two, or just an assertion you are still alive would be appreciated but is by no means required.

Enjoy,

Regards

Brendan