

The 2008
Mystery Scene
Holiday Gift
Guide

by
Kevin
Burton
Smith

There was a holiday wind blowing that night. It was one of those bitterly cold Santa Claus winds that come down through the mountain passes and curl your hair and make your nerves jump and your skin itch. On silent nights like that every holiday gathering ends in a fight. Meek little wives feel the edge of the carving knife and study the turkey's neck. Anything can happen. You can get a full glass of eggnog at a cocktail lounge. Or even what you really want under the tree Christmas morning...

FOR COLLECTORS

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TRAVEL

An ideal gift for that very special mystery reader would have been tickets to the 2009 International Mystery Writers Festival in Owensboro, Kentucky, but it was recently announced the hugely popular theater festival has been postponed, although it will be returning in 2010. Fear not, though—for mystery fans with ants in their pants and money in their pocket, there are any number of other trips well worth making.

After all, what mystery fan wouldn't love tickets (and transportation and accommodations) for the **Bouchercon 2009 World Mystery Convention**? This year Bouchercon turns 40 and the celebration, to be held in Indianapolis, Indiana, October 15-18, should be quite the blowout. At the largest annual gathering in the world for mystery lovers you can expect to find 500 or so published writers (we're talking big, big names here), plus more librarians, booksellers, and publishing types than you can shake a pencil at.

In addition to a full schedule of panel discussions by mystery writers and other experts, special events will include cooking demonstrations by culinary mystery writers, a field trip to Indiana University's spectacular Lilly Library, and a Nero Wolfe Dinner. The always enticing book-dealers' room will be joined this year by a special kid-focused dealers' room.

This year the Guest of Honor will be Michael Connelly, the Toastmistress will be S.J. Rozan, and the Lifetime Achievement Award will go to Allen J. Hubin.

Don't be intimidated by the big names, though. The bulk of attendees are, first and foremost, readers and fans. If you've never



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made it to a mystery convention before, now's the time. We'll even save a place at the bar for you.

But if Indianapolis doesn't quite set your heart afire, how about Hawaii?

Left Coast Crime 2009 (leftcoastcrime.org) will be held March 7-12, on the Big Island of Hawaii at the Marriott Waikoloa Beach Resort. The Guests of Honor this year are Barry Eisler and Rhys Bowen, the Toastmaster is Lee Goldberg, and Earl Derr Biggers of Charlie Chan fame will haunt the proceedings as the Ghost of Honor. Brian Skupin and Kate Stine report that *Mystery Scene* is sponsoring a Meet the New Authors Breakfast and Kate is giving a slide show lecture on "The History of Mystery." So shake out your grass skirt, grab your lucky loved one and say, as the conference slogan puts it, "Aloha to Murder!"



Marriott Waikoloa Beach Resort, site of the 2009 Left Coast Crime Conference



Burn Notice's stylish Michael Westen (Jeffrey Donovan). Accessories, including his Chase-Durer watch and the Oliver Peoples sunglasses, are available at seenon.com.



BLING BLING

What would Christmas be without bright shiny objects? Fortunately, the fashionistas at seenon.com aim to capitalize on that. A sort of one-stop-shopping portal for purchasing clothing, shoes, jewelry, and what not "as seen on" various television shows, their *Burn Notice* selection is a virtual bling bling orgasm. After all, not since *Miami Vice* (or perhaps *Peter Gunn*) has a TV crime show displayed such a deliberate fashion sense as the USA Network glitzy drama about

an exiled spy forced to eke out a living as a private eye. Did you like that way cool **Special Forces 1000 UDT Men's Stainless Steel Watch** (Chase-Durer, \$669.00) ex-spy Michael Westen was sporting on the July 10th episode? Or maybe his **Sterling Silver Saint Christopher Pendant Necklace** (Roman, \$79.99)? No? Then how about something for the ladies, perhaps one of the trinkets Fiona, Michael's bloodthirsty sometime-girlfriend, has worn on the show? Maybe that **Geneva Brown Leather Watch** (Jacques Lemans, \$249.00) or a **Silver Tiny Hammered Disc Macramé Bracelet** (Me and Ro, \$795.00)?

CLOTHING

More interested in clothes? The good folks at seenon.com can help there, too. Check out that red-hot **Shirred Silk Slip Dress** (Twelfth Street, \$82.50) that *Burn Notice*'s Fiona wore so memorably. Actress Gabrielle Anwar not included. Sorry guys.

If your mystery fan's idea of sartorial splendor is more six-pack than Chablis, you could latch on to Michael's pal Sam's **Slam Dunk Camp Shirt**, a spiffy men's 100% silk short sleeve shirt with a tropical print over a linen and frond textured background, available in black, maritime blue and something called "pony" (Tommy Bahama, \$110.00).

Slipping down the fashion slope even further, wildties.com has just the thing for those guys whose idea of

haute couture is remembering to wear pants: **The Scooby Doo Tie** (\$9.95). Even Shaggy will look (almost) presentable when he makes the scene wearing this nifty black silk tie featuring everyone's favorite crime-solving Great Dane. Not convinced? There are a dozen Scooby styles to choose from, ranging in price from \$9.95 to \$19.95, in silk or polyester. If Scooby isn't quite the fashion statement you want to make, there's also **The Three Stooges Detective Tie** (\$14.95), featuring Larry, Moe and Curly each doing their best Sherlock Holmes, and, for those in law enforcement, **The Barney Fife Tie** (\$18.95) says it all. Deputize yourself.

Mystery fans whose tastes lean toward the darker side should get a kick out of

The Scarface Tie (\$9.95), a nifty number that's as over the top as the film, a bold black, white and red depiction of machine gun-toting Tony bellowing "Say hello to my little friend!"

The well-dressed criminologist has an outfit for every occasion. For those grisly events on the social calendar, your loved one will appreciate a Bio Protection Bunny Suit (crime scene.com/store, \$9.00-24.00), available either in a general-use (white) version or a heavy-duty (yellow) version. These hooded coveralls, complete with booties and gloves, are tested for "the permeation of blood



Dressing for every occasion.



under splash and pressure conditions.” In other words, perfect for when Cousin Tom, after a few too many egg-nogs, insists he knows damn well how to carve a turkey with an electric knife.

GAMES

The boom in “casual” games continues, with several based on beloved mystery characters and genres



clamoring for disk space. Generally a series of quick games, each of which can be played in a half hour or so, casual games usually demand that a combination of hidden objects be found and various mini-puzzles (word games, jigsaws, spot-the-difference, math games, etc.) be solved before further clues are revealed. Think of it as a glorified, slightly more complex version of those I Spy games. Most are available for download from places such as bigfishgames.com or game treeonline.com, and have online demos that allow you to try before you buy.

Fans of the mean streets school will probably sneer at the light-hearted but engaging *Private Eye: Greatest Unsolved Mysteries* (Gogii Games, Windows only, \$19.99) but fans of globetrotting grand mysteries should enjoy it. Your “mission” is to infiltrate the mysterious Enigma Society, a secret criminal organization. Accompanied by your high-school assistant, Kimmy, you’re charged with finding such



vital clues as a sleeping dog, a bag of mints, a bonsai tree, and even a bottle of stolen mouthwash in Venice. With 30 unique and exotic locations, there’s plenty of rampant silliness here, and more bad jokes than open mike night at a strip mall comedy club, but the challenges of this multi-level game are varied and surprising, making this one of the tougher casual games around. Don’t let the humor fool you.



James Patterson's *Women's Murder Club* game.

CRIME, CLASSIC TO CONTEMPORARY

Murder Short & Sweet

edited by Paul D. Staudohar

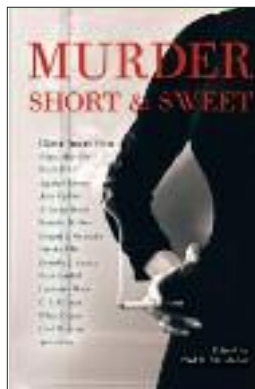
Chicago Review Press, November 2008, \$19.95

This is simply one of the best mystery short story anthologies I've ever read. And why wouldn't it be, with 25 classic tales concocted by some of the greatest mystery writers of all time? Included here are earlier masters such as Poe, Doyle, Christie and Sayers. More current writers include Block, Westlake and Rendell.

The incomparable Sherlock Holmes appears in two adventures: In “The Speckled Band” he foils one of the cleverest murder schemes of all time, and in “Abbey Grange,” he uses his uncanny ability in observing minutiae to bring a murderer to justice...or does he? In Christie’s “Philomel Cottage,” we share the slowly deepening fear of a newlywed as she discovers that her husband may be a serial killer. Rendell’s “Fall of a Coin” shows why a woman scorned can be lethally dangerous and why it’s important to pay attention to details.

If you like police procedurals, you’ll enjoy Clark Howard’s “Under Suspicion,” in which a detective travels the mean streets to find the killer of his partner’s daughter, and Lawrence Treat’s “H as in Homicide” where a missing person report turns into a puzzling murder case. If you have an appetite for irony, Roald Dahl’s “Lamb to the Slaughter” is one of the most ironic stories you’ll ever read.

This anthology offers something for every mystery lover’s taste: For courtroom drama enthusiasts, there’s Vincent Starrett’s “The Eleventh Juror;” for those who enjoy a touch of Gallic humor, there’s James Holding’s “The Inquisitive Butcher of Nice;” and for those who revel in seeing villains get their just desserts, there’s Francis Iles’ “Dark Journey” and Brendan Dubois’ “The Dark Snow.” This wonderful anthology should provide many hours of enjoyment for mystery readers of every genre.—*Joseph Scarpato, Jr.*



If the whiz-bang golly gee of *Private Eye* is unnerving, consider the more sedate *Sherlock Holmes: The Lost Cases* (Legacy Interactive, \$19.99). Classy and appropriately old-fashioned in its approach, it’s being touted as the first computer game officially licensed by the Conan Doyle estate, and I’ve got to admit it’s pretty cool. There are plenty of tips of the deerstalker here for those familiar with the canon, and while the animation in the connecting sequences is a little stiff, the well-rendered and detailed settings for the actual games are a feast for the eyes. There are sixteen cases in it, with a bonus game for the triumphant detective who cracks the lot. The mystery in each case is more a framework to hang the games on than an actual mystery, but the clues are always fair, and the challenges and mini-puzzles within each case are engaging and addictive. And the cases do get trickier as you go on.

Those looking for something grittier should check out the decidedly more adult *James Patterson's Women's Murder Club: Death in Scarlet* (I-Play, Windows Vista/XP/Pocket PC 2002/Macintosh, \$29.99), yet another installment in the Patterson commercial juggernaut, and based on his popular novels. There’s a serial killer loose, and it’s up to the Murder Club (that’s you!) to track the killer



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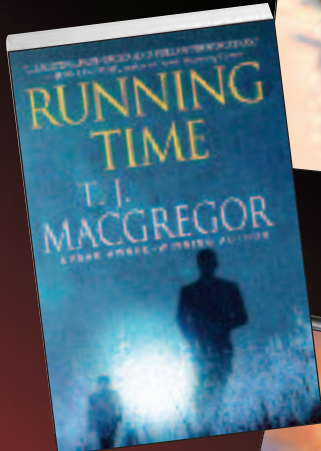
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In *Michael Clayton*, George Clooney plays a corrupt lawyer who, much to his surprise, discovers his principles will only bend so far.



mystery-themed crossword puzzles which boasts “clues from your favorite mystery series,” be it Stephanie Plum or Lucas Davenport. Each puzzle is accompanied by a brief series overview and a handy checklist of titles.

STOCKING STUFFERS

A nifty gag gift or stocking stuffer to consider is a *Private Detective Badge* (Amazon.com, \$4.99). Not sure what you'd use it for (Halloween costume? Sneaking into PI conventions?) but this 2.5” “metal silver costume accessory” is just a neat little doohickey for the PI fan on your list. And it's cheaper than Magnum's Ferrari.

Of course, the gift of reading is obvious to most mystery fans, but it is also a right that must be encouraged and defended, something that the American Library Association does vigorously. This year, as always, the ALA Store has a mess of goodies, including *The “Read” Silver Keychain* (alastore.ala.org, \$10.00), a Tiffany-style silver cable keychain laser engraved with one simple word: “Read.”

Obsessive/compulsives everywhere, your search is over. Behold the *The Monk Bobblehead Pin*. Measuring approximately

Facsimile clues from
The Crime of Dr. Watson.

down. The action kicks off with a crime scene in San Francisco's Chinatown and continues through eighteen unique locations—and nine separate investigations—with numerous detours to the forensic lab and the police station. The ability to retrace your steps and revisit previous scenes to gather more evidence adds to the procedural appeal. And the razor-sharp artwork definitely makes this offering feel more “grown-up.”

Prefer your interactive games a little more old school? Then give mystery writer Duane Swierczynski's *Batman: Murder at Wayne Manor* (Quirk Publishing, \$24.95) a shot. Illustrated by cartoonist and fellow writer David (Stray Bullets, Silverfish) Lapham, this attractive, well-produced

hardcover is an old-fashioned mystery-in-a-book, complete with sealed “evidence” envelopes, (a party invitation, a map of the manor, a newspaper, an autopsy report, etc.) and an engaging story. In this year of *The Dark Knight*, what could be cooler? Workmen at Wayne Manor stumble across a 30-year old corpse and all evidence points to Thomas Wayne, Bruce's late father. But that can't be, can it? Fortunately, Bruce is on pretty good terms with Gotham City's greatest detective. Those looking for the cynicism and angst of this summer's smasheroo film may be thrown off, but true Batphiles will lap it up. To the Batcave!

The situation is bleaker for another familiar character. In *The Crime of Dr. Watson* (Quirk Publishing, \$24.95) by

John H. Watson, M.D. and edited by Duane Swierczynski, Sherlock Holmes has vanished just as Watson has been thrown in prison for murder. The sorry tale is recounted via letter by the good doctor and it's up to the reader to use the enclosed facsimile clues to set matters right. It's a beautifully crafted—and nicely priced—gift for any mystery lover.

For those who can't wait for Parnell Hall's next Puzzle Lady novel, here's an alternative: Linda K. Murdock's *Mystery Lover's Puzzle Book* (Bellwether Books, \$10.95), a collection of



Dead Fred Pen Holder.



two inches, you can wear it on your lapel and watch his head bounce around all the livelong day. Oh, the joy.

Tired of losing your pens? Or just feel like sticking it to someone? **The Dead Fred Pen Holder** (thinkgeek.com, \$9.99) takes care of both problems. This silicone rubber bright red figure of a man not only adds a splash of color to your cubicle, but also can be stabbed repeatedly. Cackling evilly while doing so is optional, but recommended.

And for those who want to stick it to the man, whomever the man might be, make a statement by hauling your books around in **The "I Read Banned Books" Tote Bag** (alastore.ala.org, \$12.00). Made



The *To Kill a Mockingbird* Birdhouse.

of 100% cotton, and measuring 13" x 14," it's perfect for lugging a banned book like, oh, say, Dashiell Hammett's *The Thin Man* or Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*.

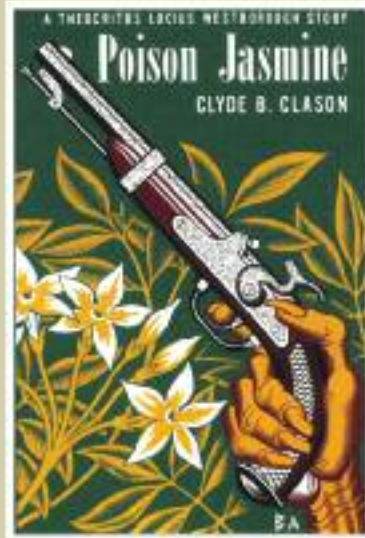
Speaking of which, here's a little something for your fine-feathered friends: **The To Kill a Mockingbird "Literary Lodgings" Birdhouse** (figpickels.com, \$114.95), a one-of-a-kind *objet d'art* handcrafted from an actual vintage copy of Lee's classic, signed by folk artist Dave Vissat himself.

DVDs

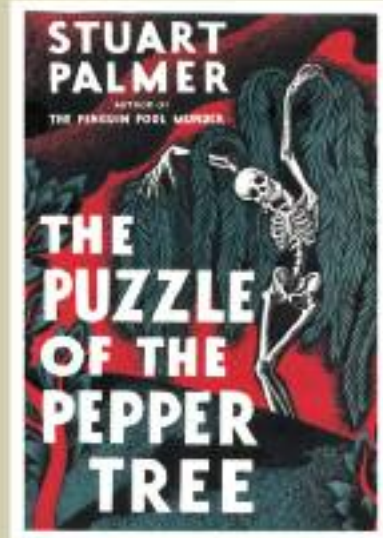


The flood of old TV shows on DVD has finally slowed to a trickle, now that most of the obvious ones have been released. Still, moldy oldies such as **Mannix: Season One** (Paramount, \$49.99) and **Cannon: Season One, Vol. One** (Paramount, \$49.99) are perfectly solid, if joyfully dated, looks at what private eye dramas used to be like, before Rockford winked and Magnum let his chest hair blow in the breeze.

A spinster schoolteacher and a bachelor professor turn sleuth in these GOLDEN AGE CLASSICS



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by Clyde B. Clason
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For those looking for something in a more traditional vein, the 1941 Oscar-winning *Rebecca* (MGM, \$19.98) finally makes it to DVD. Directed by Alfred Hitchcock, and starring Joan Fontaine as a shy young woman who succumbs to the charm of dashing widower Laurence Olivier, it does Daphne du Maurier's classic novel proud.

And speaking of classic, *Notorious* (MGM, \$19.98) isn't too shabby either. Also directed by Hitchcock, and starring Cary Grant, Ingrid Bergman and Claude Rains, this romantic thriller is another stone-cold must-see. Spies, Nazis, lust, jealousy, deceit, betrayal—and a climax that brings it all home.

Michael Clayton (Warner, \$28.98) is decidedly more modern—but no less satisfying. It's a morally complex tale of corruption, loyalty and redemption, featuring George Clooney as a



The late Heath Ledger gave a powerhouse performance as The Joker in this summer's hugely popular *The Dark Knight*.

burned-out lawyer and legal fixer who discovers, much to his surprise, a trace element of conscience. Don't you just hate when that happens?

But the big crime film this year, the 800-pound gorilla in the multiplex, is without a doubt *The Dark Knight* (Warner, \$28.98). Directed by Christopher Nolan and starring Christian Bale and the late Heath Ledger, it's hard and gritty, fierce and passionate, and completely over the top in oh-so-many ways, but the heart and brains and sheer audacity of this challenging film has raised the bar not just for movies based on comic book heroes (will we ever again settle for just watching some guy jump around in tights?) but all movies. It's a no-holds-barred meditation on right and wrong, order and anarchy, justice and revenge and violence and forgiveness that pokes fingers into a nation's conscience without apology—or mercy; bringing us something we haven't seen in a popcorn film for a long, long time: ideas.

convenient chain-of-custody label printed right on the front, suitable for storing everything from shortbread and ginger snaps to slices of turkey and ham, and the tamper-evident seal will soon let you know if someone's been making midnight raids on the fridge. (Available in a variety of sizes, in paper or plastic, starting from 60 cents apiece at [crimescene.com](http://crimescene.com/store)

/store.) Crimescene.com also offers something a little bit more nefarious: *Body Bags* (\$25.00). These sturdy black polyethylene bags are just like the ones the cops use, extremely durable and guaranteed to stand up to “normal transport conditions”

—whatever that means. Measuring 96” long by 36” wide, they close with heavy-duty zippers to become air-tight and leakproof, and—Hey kids!—each one comes with a free toe tag. Which makes them perfect—if a bit macabre—for storing everything from a small Christmas tree to the earthly remains of Uncle Ned who, after years and years of living dangerously, took “just one more bite” of Christmas dinner—and promptly exploded. ✦

AND DON'T FORGET...

After the big day, once the gifts have been gifted, the guests have been fed, the fruitcake has been passed on to another branch of the family, and the house looks like something worth calling in FEMA for (or possibly CSI, depending on how the festivities went) it's time to pack up the leftovers. May we suggest these snazzy *Evidence Bags*? These bags are leak-proof and puncture-resistant, and come with a



Kevin “Bad Elf” Burton Smith is the founder and editor of the award-winning Thrilling Detective Web Site.
<www.thrillingdetective.com>



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This beautiful catalogue accompanies the exhibition “Bond Bound: Ian Fleming and the Art of Cover Design,” which is currently touring New York and Los Angeles.

Bond Bound charts the role of artists in creating and defining the Bond look and features book covers, film posters, letters and previously unseen archive material. The contents are up to date with artwork from Charlie Higson's Young Bond series, *The Moneypenny Diaries* by Samantha Weinberg, and the recently released *Devil May Care* by Sebastian Faulks writing as Ian Fleming.