

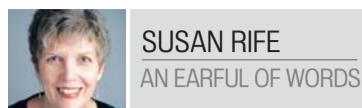
BOOKS



ONLINE

Check out the latest book and author news in Susan Rife's blog at www.artsarasota.com

BEACH READ

"Never Tell" by Alafair Burke (Harpers, \$24.99) is mystery involving an apparent suicide by the daughter of a wealthy and well-connected family.SUSAN RIFE
AN EARFUL OF WORDS

'Unholy' literary mashup

Full disclosure: When "Unholy Night" by Seth Grahame-Smith made it onto the list of the six finalists for the Sarasota County Libraries' annual One Book, One Community project, I was a bit dubious.

The other titles tend to run a bit more to the literary end of the spectrum, with one nonfiction title (you can read all my reviews of them by following online links in this column at ArtsSarasota.com). "Unholy Night" instead is by the author of "Pride and Prejudice and Zombies" and "Abraham Lincoln, Vampire Killer," books that are mashups of unlikely literary genres.

And here's the plot: What if the three wise men who came from the east to pay homage to the newborn Messiah were actually three thieves on the run from Antioch, who basically stumbled into Joseph and Mary's hiding spot in a rude stable in Bethlehem?

The story hinges not on baby Jesus, nor on his parents, but on Balthazar, who has made an almost mythical reputation for himself as the Antioch Ghost, whose skills as a childhood pick-pocket in the marketplace have grown into an impressive resume as a thief. When his luck runs out and after an audience with the loathsome Herod, king of Judea, a



AUDIO BOOK REVIEW

UNHOLY NIGHT.

By Seth Grahame-Smith. Hachett Audio, \$19.98. Unabridged, 9 hours, 50 minutes. Narrated by Peter Berkrot.

diseased creature who is a puppet for the Romans, Balthazar finds himself in a dungeon cell awaiting execution with two other thieves, Melchior and Gaspar. Balthazar's last request is not for a meal, but for three priests — one to console each of the

condemned men — and soon three innocent men are beheaded while the "Wise Men" make their escape from Jerusalem on camelback.

But when the three attempt to hide in the same Bethlehem stable where Mary has just given birth, Balthazar's world is shaken. There's no logical reason for three thieves on the lam to serve as guardians to the young family as they flee Herod's decree that all infant males under the age of 2 are to be slain.

Balthazar is nothing if not practical, but he's got a strong internal code of honor, and the sight of soldiers slaughtering babies in the streets is more than he can take.

What follows is a wild romp across Judea, with narrow escapes, miraculous signs, and a reunion with Balthazar's first love.

Don't delude yourself that this is literary fiction. What Grahame-Smith has accomplished here is a wildly entertaining and highly improbable mashup of biblical history and an adventure movie a la "Indiana Jones and the Raiders of the Lost Ark." It's got "movie treatment" written all over it. The writing ranges from inspired to cliched.

But Grahame-Smith also manages to cast an entertaining and somewhat insightful eye on the untold story of how Joseph and Mary were able to escape Judea when virtually the entire country was hunting for them and their newborn son. The excesses of the Romans and the Judeans who did their bidding are perfect fodder for the story.

Peter Berkrot's narration is as exciting as the action, which is bloody, violent, hilarious and unbelievable. Just like any action-adventure, there's no way the human body could survive the kind of assaults Balthazar and his band of refugees endure.

"Unholy Night" makes for fun listening. Whether it would be a rich mine for book discussions and the kind of programming that surrounds One Book might be another story entirely.

An Earful of Words appears on the first and third Sundays of each month. Call 361-4930 or email susan.rife@heraldtribune.com.

"Every Holmes needs his Watson," said Lutz about Pearl. "Although (Pearl) is way more volatile than Watson was, and too hot-blooded to have been a policewoman, which is her background." — JOHN LUTZ



John Lutz, author of "Pulse," divides his time between Longboat Key and St. Louis, Mo. COURTESY PHOTO

Lutz finds new 'Pulse'

Sarasota inspires novel's murder and monsters

+By EMILY LEINFUSS

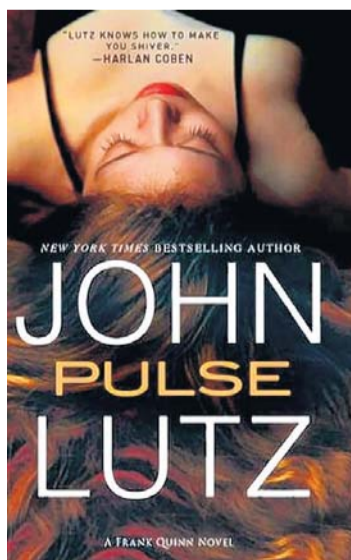
Correspondent

Serial killers make for fascinating reading, which is what New York Times best-selling author John Lutz is counting on as his latest book, "Pulse," is released this month from Kensington Books.

To add local color, Lutz — an award-winning mystery and thriller writer who makes his second home in Sarasota — has set his latest page-turner in Florida.

The book begins in Sarasota, where his murdering protagonist (he calls them monsters) was convicted in 2002. On the way to a maximum-security prison in Belle Glade, a hurricane jogs south and the notorious Daniel Danielle is on the loose. But is he killing again? Or is it a copycat? Frank Quinn, an NYPD homicide detective-turned private investigator, is determined to find out. A cast of satellite characters — including Pearl, his on-again, off-again romantic interest — come along for the narrative ride.

"Every Holmes needs his Watson," said Lutz about Pearl. "Although she is way more volatile than Watson was, and too hot-blooded to have been a policewoman, which is her



background," he explained.

Lutz said he enjoys working within the framework of a serial killer investigation. "It follows a dramatic arc and there really are such bizarre and dangerous people as the villains; my monsters are ready made," he said in a recent interview.

He should know, he has penned more than 40 novels including "SWF Seeks Sam," which was made into the hit movie "Single White Female" starring Bridget Fonda and

Jennifer Jason Leigh. In addition, his novel "The Ex" was made into an HBO movie, for which he co-authored the screenplay.

As for his attraction to Sarasota, Lutz attributed it to his friendship with another well-known area mystery writer, the late Stuart Kaminsky.

"Stuart and I had the same agent for 25 years. When I looked around, with my wife, Sarasota seemed like the best place in Florida. We settled about one mile from Siesta Key," he said. "Florida is a great place to set a novel," he added.

When asked where he gets his ideas and his prolific ability from, Lutz answered that he is always on duty when it comes to writing. "Writing is hard work: it is like doing homework for the rest of your life. You are always chipping away at it."

He should know, Lutz's work includes political suspense, private eye novels, urban suspense, humor, occult, crime caper, police procedural, espionage, historical, futuristic, amateur detective, thriller; virtually every mystery sub-genre.

Look forward to more serial killer fiction from Lutz - he is already at work on the next Frank Quinn book. Tentatively titled "Twist," it will continue along with the multi-layered and intricate plot twists and turns that Lutz is known for.

It will also feature the same cast of intriguing satellite characters, especially his partner, Pearl, that occasional romantic interest.

BEST-SELLERS

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The numeral at the end of each listing indicates the number of weeks a title has been on The New York Times' best-seller list. Plot summaries are included only for titles new to the list.

FICTION

- 1. GONE GIRL**, by Gillian Flynn. (Crown, \$25.) (4)
- 2. WICKED BUSINESS**, by Janet Evanovich. (Bantam, \$28.) (2)
- 3. BLOODLINE**, by James Rollins. (Morrow/HarperCollins, \$27.99.) A deadly rescue mission in the African jungle and a clinic bombing in South Carolina both reveal a dangerous conspiracy. A Sigma Force novel. (1)
- 4. SUMMERLAND**, by Elin Hilderbrand. (Reagan Arthur/Little, Brown, \$26.99.) The aftereffects of a deadly automobile crash in Nantucket. (1)
- 5. THE MISSION TO PARIS**, by Alan Furst. (Random House, \$27.) (3)
- 6. THE AGE OF MIRACLES**, by Karen Thompson Walker. (Random House, \$26.) A girl comes of age as an apocalypse caused by a slowing of the earth's rotation looms. (1)
- 7. CALICO JOE**, by John Grisham. (Doubleday, \$24.95.) (12)
- 8. A DANCE WITH DRAGONS**, by George R.R. Martin. (Bantam, \$35.) (47)
- 9. CANADA**, by Richard Ford. (Ecco/HarperCollins Publishers, \$27.99.) (6)
- 10. THE THIRD GATE**, by Lincoln Child. (Doubleday, \$25.95.) (3)

NON-FICTION

- 1. WILD**, by Cheryl Strayed. (Knopf, \$25.95.) (11)
- 2. THE AMATEUR**, by Edward Klein. (Regnery, \$27.95.) (7)
- 3. UNBROKEN**, by Laura Hillenbrand. (Random House, \$27.) (85)
- 4. AN AMERICAN SON**, by Marco Rubio. (Sentinel, \$26.95.) (2)
- 5. COWARDS**, by Glenn Beck and Kevin Balfe. (Threshold Editions/Mercury Radio Arts, \$28.) (3)
- 6. KILLING LINCOLN**, by Bill O'Reilly and Martin Dugard. (Holt, \$28.) (40)
- 7. YES, CHEF**, by Marcus Samuelsson. (Random House, \$27.) The award-winning chef discusses his career and recalls growing up as an Ethiopian child adopted by a Swedish family. (1)
- 8. BECOMING SISTER WIVES**, by Kody, Meri, Janelle, Christine and Robyn Brown. (Gallery, \$25.) The stars of the TLC reality show describe their polygamous marriage. (1)
- 9. WHAT REALLY HAPPENED**, by Rielle Hunter. (BenBella, \$24.95.) John Edwards' mistress and the mother of his child tells her version of their story. (1)
- 10. IT WORKED FOR ME**, by Colin Powell with Tony Koltz. (Harper/HarperCollins, \$27.99.) (6)

ONLINE: For the full list of best-sellers, visit www.heraldtribune.com

BOOK EVENTS

July 15-21

BENJAMIN BUSCH will discuss and sign copies of "Dust to Dust" at 6 p.m. July 16 at Inkwood Books, 216 S. Armenia Ave., Tampa. (813) 253-2638.

Voting continues through Aug. 31 for the next **ONE BOOK SARASOTA** title. Finalists are "Unholy Night" by Seth Grahame-Smith, "Someone Knows My Name" by Lawrence Hill, "Unbroken: A World War II Story of Survival, Resilience, and Redemption" by Laura Hillenbrand, "Cloud Atlas" by David Mitchell, "The Snow Child" by Eowyn Ivey and "Salvage the Bones" by Jesmyn Ward. Brief descriptions of the books are at www.onebooksarasota.com. Vote at onebooksarasota.com/the-vote-2012 or all county libraries and at Bookstore1Sarasota, 1359 Main St., Sarasota. The winning title will be announced Sept. 14.