Bet You Missed It: What Do Spies and Dinosaurs Have in Common?

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THE JOY OF TREACHERY
by Bruce Strauch (The Citadel)

Let’s read about the Cambridge Spies. (1) Kim Philby, My Silent War (1968); (2) Yuri Modin, My Five Cambridge Friends (1994) (He was their handler); (3) Miranda Carter, Anthony Blunt: His Lives (2001); (4) Phillip Knightley, The Master Spy (1988) (Six days of interviews with a dying Philby where he opened up and told much. Bedrock on which every study of the five has been built); (5) Eleanor Philby, The Spy I Loved (1968) (This deluded fool left her husband for Philby when he was out of MI6 and a news correspondent in Beirut. He ditched her when he defected to Moscow).


BOOZING WITH FAULKNER
by Bruce Strauch (The Citadel)

Author Ace Atkins lives, writes and drinks in Oxford, Miss. (15 novels. The Lost Ones. Broken Places. The Forsaken. G.P. Putnam’s Sons). He learned much about Faulkner from his niece the late Dean Faulkner Wells.

He says Faulkner had strict rules about his drinking. Vodka indoors; gin outdoors. No beer after sundown. Smoke with a fine wine and he’d turn over your glass. The first day of fall he’d take his first sip of straight bourbon. Between scotch and nothing, he’d take scotch.

Faulkner was mainly civil in his drinking. The binges were a reward for finishing a book and signing off on a galley proof.

In a review of Four Roses Single Barrel, Ace sits at the Rowan Oak Plantation table where the great man sat reviewing the galley pages of Absalom! Absalom! while answering the phone to condolences calls for the death of his brother in a plane crash. Dean was a barnstormer and the inspiration for Pylon. And on the 15th anniversary to the day of Dean’s death in 1935, Faulkner took the call announcing he had won the Nobel Prize.


WELL, IT IS CALLED PERFORMANCE ART
by Bruce Strauch (The Citadel)

In La Jolla, CA, Tim Yould is typing The Long Goodbye on a typewriter brand that Raymond Chandler used and in a locale of the book. Over five years he intends to retype one hundred classic novels. Sponsored by the Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego. Public invited.


DEATH OF DINOSAURS
by Bruce Strauch (The Citadel)

Steve Cohen was threatened by his agent with never getting published again if he didn’t join the 600 authors backing Hachette against Amazon.

He goes on to lambast a backward industry that last innovated with the mass-market paperback in the 1930s. Asks what other industry responds to declining sales by raising the price? Hardcover fiction is now selling for $26.63. The returns system dates to the Great Depression. Price-testing and cover-testing are nonexistent.

Independent bookstores could stock 35,000 titles max. Borders 150,000. Amazon can reach for the sky. Yes, your chance of self-publishing success are slim, but a typical book by a “real” publisher sells less than 1,000 copies.


DOOM & GLOOM IN AUTHOR LAND
by Bruce Strauch (The Citadel)

While on the other side of the pond, we find British authors’ incomes have fallen off a cliff and the number able to scratch a living drastically declined. Median income for the professional author in UK is £11,000, a drop of 29 percent. Put in all writers, it drops to £4,000. Will Self says it’s the result of “an active resistance to difficulty in all its aesthetic manifestations. You’ve always been able to comfortably house the British literary writers who can earn all their living from books in a single room — that room used to be a reception one, now it’s back bedroom.”


BLEAK BRITAIN
by Bruce Strauch (The Citadel)

Let’s read some thoroughly depressing novels about angry young working class Brits. Many of these were movies in the ’60s. (1) Walter Greenwood, Love on the Dole (1933) (grinding poverty of the Great Depression; hunger marches); (2) John Braine, Room at the Top (1957) (Demobbed soldier claws his way up in a vicious world); (3) Alan Sillitoe, The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner (1959) (petty crime leads to stint in Borstal); (4) Stan Barstow, A Kind of Loving (1960) (bitterness, knocked up; girlfriend of higher social rank, miserable marriage); (5) Barry Hines, A Kind of Loving (1968) (bullied and miserable teen finds solace in a kestrel, support from a kindly teacher, but still turns out a nobody).