

5 BOOK REVIEWS BY SAM BAUMAN

Remember Marilyn Monroe? Actress who died in 1962 allegedly of medication overdose? If not, pick up author Max Allan Collins' crime novel *Bye Bye, Baby* at the Carson library's new books section. Collins' byline was not familiar to me but it turns out he has written dozens of books of all kinds. He's done a couple about Monroe but this one in true pulp fiction is pretty darn good.

It's mostly fiction but Collins does a pretty realistic job with his characters --- Frank Sinatra, Sammy Davis Jr., Peter Lawford and of course Marilyn.

Plot is MM hires PI Nathan Heller to tap her phones while she is battling with 20th Century studio over restarting her career, derailed when she was unable to appear on set for a film. Much of the novel takes place in LA, but there are scenes at the old Cal Neva casino on Lake Tahoe, back when Sinatra owned it. The scenes there recall a bygone era of gamblers and crime bosses. Too bad the place no longer buzzes with such folk.

First half of the book is about MM and her problems, especially with her two better lovers, John F. and Bobby Kennedy during their White House days. Second half is about her apparent suicide and all the work by the cops and 20th Century to make sure it was a self-inflicted death. Problem is it doesn't add up and Heller pursues the mystery despite pressure to drop it all. LA cops are turned, CIA and FBI are involved, Secret Service appears. It's a pretty tangled web Collins spins, but engrossing. Who knew our leaders were such womanizers? Or cops so crooked?

One thing one comes away with from this book is sympathy for Marilyn who apparently played with fire and got fatally burned. She comes across as someone you would have liked to know. Same can't be said for the rest of the cast.

--- Sam Bauman

Four books worth readers' time

Here's some post New Year's reading options, all from the Carson Library new books section. Gabriel-Garcia Marquez has a short novel *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* with an unusual plot line. Seems two brothers are going to murder the man who rejected their sister at the altar. Seems the whole village knows about it but doesn't do anything. It may not be his best novel but it is fascinating to see how the story evolves.

Then John Updike takes a look at the *Hamlet* story in *Gertrude and Claudius*. In this take on the prequel to Shakespeare Updike projects a story of the two as lovers before the king is murdered. Polonius plays a bigger role and King Hamlet is a macho tough king. Doesn't devalue the play *Hamlet*, but it does cover some of the gaps in the play.

Nemesis, the Last Days of the American Republic, by Chalmers Johnson was published in 2006 and in some ways is outdated but it's a wonderful look at some of the things the American government has done over the years. Too bad the GOP candidates never read it. You may be surprised to see how many overseas bases the USA has or had. And the parallels between the Roman, British and American empires

is frightening. He who does not know history is condemned to relive it, some sage has noted. Date by events but still important.

In the heavyweight class is Hans Fallada's *Every Man Dies Alone*, a 528-page story of Berlin during WWII, with Otto and Anna as plotters in a scheme to undermine the Hitler regime by planting critical post cards around the city.

This is a novel of courage, of cruelty and determination to make your stand no matter what. Many become involved in Otto and Anna's adventures and many suffer. This is a Germany at its worst and best, with the SS, the SA and Gestapo all true villains. A special section reproduces many documents of the era.

The book is based on a true story. Not an easy read but telling in what it is like to live under a mad bureaucracy.

--- Sam Bauman