

Edition: U.S. ▾

FRONT PAGE POLITICS ENTERTAINMENT BUSINESS MEDIA ARTS SCIENCE RELIGION TRAVEL EDUCATION LIVE | ALL SECTIONS

Arts · Books · Book Club Libraries In Crisis



Featuring fresh takes and real-time analysis from HuffPost's signature lineup of contributors

HOT ON THE BLOG

Bill Moyers
John Hillcoat

Dean Baker
Bobby Bowden

HuffPost Social Reading



Michael Giltz
Freelance writer

GET UPDATES FROM MICHAEL GILTZ

Like 102

FOLLOW US

Books: *The Case of the Deadly Butter Chicken* Delicious Fun

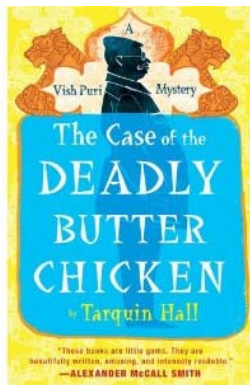
Posted: 07/10/2012 11:23 am

React ▾ Inspiring Funny Typical Important Outrageous Amazing Innovative Beautiful

Follow ▾ India, Video, Books, Mysteries, Mystery, Tarquin Hall, The Case Of The Deadly Butter Chicken, Vish Puri, Vish Puri Mysteries, Books News

SHARE THIS STORY

Submit this story



THE CASE OF THE DEADLY BUTTER CHICKEN *** out of ****

BY TARQUIN HALL

S24; Simon & Schuster

341 pages

Some people read mysteries so they can match wits with the hero. They scribble down clues and characters and get very angry if the crime is solved without offering them the chance to solve it, too (say, a key detail is revealed at the last minute). I gave up on trying to out-Sherlock the detectives/private investigators/little old ladies that populate these tales a long time ago. I dive into mysteries that use the universal stories of revenge and justice to illuminate another culture or another time, whether it's the ancient Rome of Steven Saylor, the Laos-set mysteries of Colin Cotterill or the charting of America's racial history via the LA tales of Walter Mosley.

I've got a new series to add to that list and a new hero: Vish Puri, India's Most Private Investigator. Author Tarquin Hall is a British journalist who lives in Delhi and he has an outsider's ability to spot the incongruities and telling detail that a local might take for granted. I read his latest mystery, *The Case of the Deadly Butter Chicken*, and enjoyed it so much I immediately read the first two books of the series. That's how I usually tackle a series; unless the books are purposely designed to be stand-alone and not build on one another, I like to see the characters develop in chronological order. Since there are only

MOST POPULAR ON HUFFPOST

1 of 2

MAP: Hurricane Isaac's Path Aims For Gulf Coast
Recommend 255

Limbaugh's Wild Isaac Conspiracy
Like 7k

Isaac Balloons Into A Hurricane, New Orleans Threatened
Recommend 677

Republican Attendees Thrown Out After Racist Attack On CNN Worker
Like 7k

RPatz Agrees To Meet KStew But Is Selling Their Home
Like 41

Chipotle Busted For Cheating Customers Out Of Pennies
Like 458

Deaf Boy Asked To Make Controversial Change (VIDEO)
Like 3k

GOP Approves Abortion Ban
Recommend 8k

PHOTO: The Queen Rolls In A Range Rover Wearing A Hoodie
Like 989

DON'T MISS HUFFPOST BLOGGERS

1 of 5

Bill Moyers
WATCH: Both Parties Give Invisible Americans the Silent Treatment

Dean Baker
Poverty: The New Growth Industry in America

three titles to date in this amusing series, I wasn't thrown off by jumping back and forth in time with Mr. Puri. but if you're like me, you'll want to start with *The Case of the Missing Servant*. Or you can just wait for the movie -- surely it's only a matter of time before Hollywood turns this into a film or TV show.

Puri makes most of his money by investigating the backgrounds of people who are going to get married. Arranged marriages seem bizarre to most Westerners, but the books here offer insight into how tradition and the idea of marriage (a partnership perhaps as much as a romance) can color people's expectations until it doesn't seem so odd. Of course, then the young people involved decide it's not for them anyway, so we see modernity creeping in nonetheless.

The three books develop nicely with each central mystery a little more complicated and dangerous than the one before. *The Case of the Missing Servant* revolves around an arranged marriage and the disappearance of a servant no one seems terribly concerned about. *The Case of the Man Who Died Laughing* revolves around con artists who use religion to trick people into handing over buckets of money. And *The Case of the Deadly Butter Chicken* includes the poisoning of the father of a top cricketer, organized crime and a journey into Pakistan where many of Puri's family were massacred during the partition of 1947.

But the driving force of all the stories are the charmingly believable characters. Puri has a fondness for eating his wife tries desperately to counteract. Time and again she attempts to impose a diet and time and again he takes a break from sleuthing to sneak a delicious snack here and there, always careful to avoid dripping any tell-tale stains on his clothing and meticulously wiping off his fingers. (The back of the book even includes some recipes, in this case even one for deadly butter chicken, sans poison.) His team of misfit assistants come into focus with each book, their varied backgrounds letting us see what life is like in India for people of various castes and economic backgrounds. And always nearby with unstoppable focus is Mummy-ji, a woman with as much smarts as her son and as much a desire to solve puzzles that come her way, though Puri will haplessly insist that investigating is not a suitable occupation for mummies.

Small details make the series come alive, like Puri's battle in traffic. He has a driver who suffers over Puri's insistence on NOT sounding the horn at every possible moment and a bizarre insistence on obeying certain traffic laws that not a single other driver on the road would pay heed to. Various clubs and Puri's status in them are telling. With some officials he is curt, with others he adopts a faux obsequiousness and with still others a genuine obsequiousness that comes naturally to Puri with his respect for certain traditions.

Gently amusing and with a real feel for Delhi, this is a charming series. Each new novel has raised the stakes subtly and Hall has grown more confident with each outing. It's quite possible that what has begun as a fun series will become a genuinely great one.

BOOKS I'VE READ SO FAR IN 2012

1. *The Underneath* by Kathi Appelt ***
2. *Jack Holmes and His Friend* by Edmund White ***
3. *The Last Unicorn* by Peter S. Beagle **
4. *Fun Home* by Alison Bechdel ***
5. *Death Walks In Eastrepp* by Francis Beeding ***
6. *Lumious Airplanes* by Paul La Farge ***/
7. *The Professionals* by Owen Laukkanen ** 1/2
8. *Unterzakhn* by Leela Corman **
9. *The Child Who* by Simon Lelic ***
10. *Hinterland* by Caroline Brothers ***
11. *The Yard* by Alex Grecian *** 1/2
12. *The Alienist* by Caleb Carr ***
13. *On The Wings Of Heroes* by Richard Peck *** 1/2
14. *A Princess Of Mars* by Edgar Rice Burroughs *
15. *The Gods Of Mars* by Edgar Rice Burroughs **
16. *The Warlord Of Mars* by Edgar Rice Burroughs ** 1/2

MOST DISCUSSED RIGHT NOW

1 of 2



[Ray Bradbury's FBI File](#)



[Why Does the World Exist?](#)

HOT ON FACEBOOK

1 of 3



[How to Talk to Little Girls](#)



[Michiko Kakutani's 11 Meanest Book Reviews](#)

HOT ON TWITTER

1 of 2



[ricky_martin](#)

Make Room for (the New) Daddy
<http://t.co/Q6eIDokm> via
[@huffingtonpost](#)

[Retweet](#)



[feliciaday](#)

Think on it: Cambridge scientists say all mammals, birds, many others including octopi, have human-like consciousness.
<http://t.co/aF6W2ZQh>

[Retweet](#)

HUFFPOST'S BIG NEWS PAGES



[Snooki](#)



[Television](#)



[Gas & Oil](#)



[Standardized Testing](#)



[Latino Prosperity](#)



[Kansas](#)



[It Ain't Over](#)



[Mitch McConnell](#)



[Pretty Little Liars](#)

[MORE BIG NEWS PAGES »](#)

17. *Undeclared: America's Heroic Fight For Bataan and Corregidor* by Bill Sloan ** 1/2
18. *Stoner* by John Williams ****
19. *The Sisters Brothers* by Patrick DeWitt *** 1/2
20. *The 500* by Matthew Quirk **
21. *The Age Of Innocence* by Edith Wharton ****
22. *The Alienist* by Caleb Carr ***\
23. *Crispin: The Cross of Lead* by Avi **
24. *Rogue Male* by Geoffrey Household ***
25. *The Perks Of Being A Wallflower* by Stephen Chbosky **
26. *Traitor's Gate* by Avi ** 1/2
27. *Cogan's Trade* by George V. Higgins ***
28. *2312* by Kim Stanley Robinson *** 1/2
29. *The Twelve Rooms Of The Nile* by Enid Shomer ** 1/2
30. *Bring Up The Bodies* by Hilary Mantel *** 1/2
31. *In One Person* by John Irving **
32. *A Million Heavens* by John Brandon ***
33. *The Case Of The Deadly Butter Chicken* by Tarquin Hall ***
34. *Seward: Lincoln's Indispensable Man* by Walter Stahr *** 1/2
35. *The Kings of Cool* by Don Winslow ***
36. *The Case of The Missing Servant* by Tarquin Hall ***
37. *Savages* by Don Winslow ***
38. *The Case Of The Man Who Died Laughing* by Tarquin Hall ***
39. *The Trillion Dollar Meltdown* by Charles R. Morris ***
40. *Mrs. Robinson's Disgrace* by Kate Summerscale **
41. *The Age of Miracles* by Karen Thompson Walker **
42. *The Panic of 1907* by Robert F. Bruner and Sean Carr ***
43. *The House That Ruth Built* by Robert Weintraub *** 1/2
44. *I Am Spartacus: Making A Film, Breaking The Blacklist* by Kirk Douglas *** 1/2
45. *Showdown At Shepherd's Bush* by David Davis ***
46. *Alif The Unseen* by G. Willow Wilson ** 1/2

Thanks for reading. Michael Giltz is the co-host of [Showbiz Sandbox](#), a weekly pop culture podcast that reveals the industry take on entertainment news of the day and features top journalists and opinion makers as guests. It's [available](#) for free on iTunes. Visit Michael Giltz at his [website](#) and his [daily blog](#). Download his podcast of celebrity interviews and his radio show, also called Popsurfing and also [available](#) for free on iTunes. Link to him on Netflix and [gain](#) access to thousands of ratings and reviews.

Note: Michael Giltz is provided with free galleys and/or final copies of books to consider for review.

Follow Michael Giltz on Twitter: www.twitter.com/michaelgiltz

FOLLOW BOOKS

Like 20k GET ALERTS

[More in Books...](#)

- Ray Bradbury FBI
File: Sci-Fi Legend
Suspected...
- Reading Great
Writers' Worst
Books
- Worst Book
Reviews: Michiko
Kakutani's 11
Meanest...
- Reclaim Your Heart

Comments 2 Pending Comments 0 [View FAQ](#)

HuffPost Social News

To reply to a Comment: Click "Reply" at the bottom of the comment; after being approved your comment will appear directly underneath the comment you replied to. [Preview Comment](#) [Post Comment](#)

Share your Comment:

Post to Facebook.	Post to Blogger.	Post to Twitter.
Post to WordPress.	Post to TypePad.	Post to Tumblr.

View All

Recency | Popularity

robynsc
0 Fans

11:34 AM on 07/11/2012

omg! i LOVE this series and i'm not much of a reader of stories set in countries other than the US (i know, i know). but i love vish puri (chubby) and his cohorts and family. i've been waiting for this one to come out! very excited.

[Permalink](#) | [Share it](#)

HUFFPOST BLOGGER
Michael Giltz
freelance writer
127 Fans

11:18 AM on 07/14/2012

Thanks for commenting. If you were a fan of the first two, I'm certain you'll enjoy this one just as much.

[Permalink](#) | [Share it](#)

[Advertise](#) | [Make HuffPost your Home Page](#) | [RSS](#) | [Careers](#) | [FAQ](#)

[User Agreement](#) | [Privacy](#) | [Comment Policy](#) | [About Us](#) | [About Our Ads](#) | [Contact Us](#)

Copyright © 2012 TheHuffingtonPost.com, Inc. | "The Huffington Post" is a registered trademark of TheHuffingtonPost.com, Inc. All rights reserved.

Part of **AOL Lifestyle**