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What we're reading: Jeff Abbott's twisted amnesia thriller

Compiled by Steve Bennett Updated 11:43 am, Wednesday, August 2, 2017



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Austin writer Jeff Abbott's latest thriller "Blame" has mind-spinning plot twists.

The first thing to know about Austin writer **Jeff Abbott's** "Blame" is that it is an amnesia novel.

An overused, contrived plot device, right? Not in this case, and not in the hands of Abbott, author of the brilliant series of thrillers featuring crime-busting CIA agent **Sam Capra**. "**Blame**," (**Grand Central, \$26**), set in Austin and San Antonio, is not a Capra novel, but it is an incredibly twisted story about a college student suffering from amnesia who is driven to investigate an accident in which her friend David died two years earlier. All the characters have something to hide, including Jane's own widowed mother. The ending is mind-spinning. Read the full [review](#).

Here's a look at other books on our night table this week:

There are great stories by several San Antonians in the new collection of Latino/a sci-fi "**Altermundos**" (**UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center Press, \$24.95**), among them playwright Gregg Barrios and National Book Award finalist **John Phillip Santos**. What's not to like about "Flying Saucers in the Barrio," Barrios' engaging recounting of his experience directing a group of **Crystal City High School** students in a 1976 stage production of "Stranger in a Strange Land"? It was inspired in equal parts by **Robert Heinlein's** novel and the music of **David Bowie**. Read the full [review](#).

The infamous **Donner Party**, much delayed by a tendency to dawdle, made a crucial error when it diverged from the well-established California Trail above the Great Salt Lake for a shortcut through the desert salt flats below the lake. That route was offered by **Lansford Hastings** in an 1845 guidebook for Oregon and California pioneers. It proved to be the party's undoing. It's a well-known story — we've been titillated by the cannibalism for more than a century — but **Michael Wallis** new book, "**The Best Land Under Heaven**" (**Liveright, \$27.95**), is an even-handed, briskly written history of the party, destined to become the standard account of this horrid chapter of American history. Read the full [review](#).

The Prince of Wales has spent a lifetime waiting, which is what one does if Mummy is queen of England and the longest-reigning British monarch on record. But, as biographer **Sally Bedell Smith** notes in her new book, "**Prince Charles: The Passions and Paradoxes of an Improbable Life**" (**Random House, \$32**), another woman has had a huge impact on the prince's life. No, not Diana. As Smith's biography makes clear, Camilla's impact on Charles has been considerable, first as his mistress in an on-again, off-again relationship that spanned decades and the end of both their marriages, and then as the second wife whom the prince married in 2005. So, while this is very much a biography about Charles — billed as the first major biography of the prince in 20 years — the reader will find Camilla woven throughout much of the story. Read the full [review](#).

Entertainment Channel

In 2000, **Matthew Klam**, then one of the **New Yorker's** "Best Fiction Writers Under 40," published a funny collection called "Sam the Cat." The stories won prizes and got everybody excited for Klam's next book. Which never came. Until now. "**Who Is Rich?**" (**Random House, \$27**) is about a writer who once enjoyed "precocious success" and then sank into obscurity. Klam may be working in a well-established tradition, but he's sexier than **Richard Russo** and more fun than **John Updike**, whose Protestant angst was always trying to transubstantiate some man's horniness into a spiritual crisis. Read the full [review](#).

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