

INTENSE archival research is the nearest one can get to employable insanity.

Those who still indulge in the historian's archival obsession, although a depressingly shrinking breed, are easily spotted: the perennial allergic reaction to dust, fish moths and delightfully small minority in the archival profession) is always counterpoised with the rapid-eye movement of a zealot on a mission. It is the hidden gem, the rare treasure, the document-that-will-explain-it-all, that is the crack cocaine of the research addict; the belief that by searching through thousands upon thousands of pages during months of light-deprived digging, everything could be understood by finding the collection that captures the historical essence of the subject under consideration.

Caroline Hamilton, an archival expert based at the University of Cape Town, once inadvertently explained to me why archives hold such power over the researcher. Archives, as she explained, present themselves as the repository of all available knowledge; an illusion, of course, as archives can only ever capture a "slice" of lived experience.

Researchers have the foolish belief that archives offer the possibility of understanding the entire world, of explaining



WRITERS ON READING

Paul Holden on archives and other obsessions

everything. And, because archives are usually perceived the preserve of the specialist, they hold out the tantalising hope of finding that one piece of knowledge that no-one else has yet seen; a crumbling paper Rosetta Stone with which society can be read, and without which the "text" of our society can only be imperfectly translated.

The arrival of the Internet, which has proliferated the knowledge available, and its ability to be searched with surprising thoroughness, have only worsened this affliction. Google is the modern equivalent of the archival index, but with one important difference: an index describes one archive, Google searches the world. For information gluttons and those maniacally possessed with the belief that information appears just as long as you can search for it in the right way, this is a combination that offers to destroy your sanity as effectively as sex, drugs and rock 'n' roll. In this way, it is similar to those other passions that attract

the completist loonies. If you've ever met a music fanatic worshipping at the altar of disco (a disease of which I am an unrecovered sufferer), you'll see the same tell-tale signs and the same blinking confusion at the incomprehension of the rest of the world. How can you not appreciate the extended 12-inch version of Chic's *I Feel Your Love Coming On*? What do you mean you haven't listened to every track of Universal Robot Band's back catalogue to find a song as good as *Shake That Tambourine*?

What do you mean you've never tried to copy all 100 box files of the Institute of Race Relations' archive?

What sort of "human" are you? ● Paul Holden is the co-editor with Lauren Segal of *Great Lives, Pivotal Moments*. His book, *The Arms Deal in Your Pocket*, is released this month by Jonathan Ball.



PODCAST: To hear the interview go to <http://multimedia.thetimes.co.za/audio>

SUNDAY TIMES RECOMMENDS

THE WHITE TIGER by Aravind Adiga, Penguin, R160

ARAVIND Adiga's *The White Tiger*, shortlisted for this year's prestigious Man Booker Prize, is an uneasy read. It's the story of Balram Halwai, the son of a rickshaw puller from rural India, who "makes it" as a city entrepreneur. The twist in the tale is that Adiga subverts the image of emerging India and its growing middle class — gushingly reported on by international news networks — presenting a character who is utterly ruthless and amoral, and whose "entrepreneurial" success is built on envy, murder and theft. Interviewed on Bookbrowse.com, the 34-year-old author commented: "There's a kind of continuous murmur or growl beneath middle-class life in India, and this noise never gets recorded. Balram is what you'd hear if one day the drains and faucets in your house started talking." Adiga's writing style is devoid of artistic flourish, or nuance, much like the character Halwai, and both are difficult to like. But, because it is a disturbing read, it's a story that has to be followed to the end. Don't say you weren't warned. — *Laurice Taitz*



THE FALL OF THE BLACK-EYED NIGHT by Sean Badal, Umuzi, R150

THIS, the third book by Anglo-Indian Sean Badal, is the first set in South Africa, the land of his birth. Badal was raised in England, returning to Johannesburg, where he still lives, to follow a career in journalism. *Fall of the Black-eyed Night* is set in Cape Town and is a surprising and unexpected novel. The moderate Muslim protagonist, Shehzad Shadhili, is the son of an Athlone imam. Shehzad feels more at home in cosmopolitan Cape Town than the insular Muslim area where he grew up. But he is all too well aware of the deep roots Islam has in Cape Town and his own family tradition. When a foreign conglomerate threatens to develop part of Table Mountain and destroy his grandfather's *kramat*, family loyalty spurs him into action. Delicately observed and beautifully rendered, this story is both tender and exquisite, familiar yet foreign: Badal has done South Africa proud with this thought-provoking and atmospheric literary read. — *Aubrey Paton*



UNACCUSTOMED EARTH by Jhumpa Lahiri, Bloomsbury, R249.95

JHUMPA Lahiri's second collection of short stories opens with a quote by Nathaniel Hawthorne: "Human nature will not flourish, any more than a potato, if it be planted and replanted... in the same worn-out soil. My children have other birthplaces, and, so far as their fortunes may be within my control, shall strike their roots into unaccustomed earth." Lahiri's writing in this and her debut Pulitzer Prize-winning collection, *Interpreter of Maladies*, grapples with the condition of being re-planted in unaccustomed earth. She writes of the space inhabited by the second generation of Bengali families living in the United States. The idea of "home" is a persistent theme — as the young protagonists grapple with trying to belong. Many of the stories are told through the eyes of young adults, attempting to negotiate their way through their own lives and having to make difficult choices about what needs to be sacrificed in order for them to move on. Lahiri's writing is less even than in her previous collection, less lyrical and more concentrated on the detail of everyday lives. But the themes will resonate with anyone whose life has ever been disrupted by a sense of not belonging and a longing to feel "at home". — *Laurice Taitz*



SUNDAY TIMES TOP 10

FICTION

- 1 *The Shack* by William P Young, Windblown, R120
- 2 *Devil Bones* by Kathy Reichs, William Heinemann, R180
- 3 *Where Are You Now?* by Mary Higgins Clark, Simon & Schuster, R190
- 4 *The Broken Window* by Jeffrey Deaver, Hodder & Stoughton, R200
- 5 *Harvesting the Heart* by Jodi Picoult, Hodder & Stoughton, R130
- 6 *Rogue* by Danielle Steel, Bantam, R195
- 7 *A Thousand Splendid Suns* by Khaled Hosseini, Bloomsbury, R139.95
- 8 *Nooit is 'n Lang, Lang Tyd* by Anchien Troskie, Kwela, R170
- 9 *Married Lovers* by Jackie Collins, Simon & Schuster, R200
- 10 *The Other Queen* by Philippa Gregory, HarperCollins, R209.95

NON-FICTION

- 1 *Eat, Pray, Love* by Elizabeth Gilbert, Bloomsbury, R144.95
- 2 *A New Earth* by Eckhart Tolle, Penguin, R190
- 3 *Guinness World Records 2009* by Guinness World Records, R250
- 4 *Hidden Epidemic* by Mariett Chippindall, Oshun, R139.95
- 5 *The Last Lecture* by Randy Pausch, Hodder & Stoughton, R150
- 6 *Stille Epidemie* by Mariett Chippindall, Oshun, R139.95
- 7 *The Secret* by Rhonda Byrne, Simon & Schuster, R209.95
- 8 *The Monk Who Sold His Ferrari* by Robin S Sharma, Element, R159.95
- 9 *What's for Supper?* Ina Paarman by Ina Paarman Cookbook, R29.95
- 10 *Don't Panic* by Alan Knott-Craig, Penguin, R50

Data compiled by Publications Network (Pty) Ltd. SA Pnet, the exclusive representative of Nielsen BookScan in South Africa, from sales at more than 350 retail outlets. © 2008

PLAYING THE ENEMY

NELSON MANDELA AND THE GAME THAT MADE A NATION

John Carlin



As the day of the 1995 Rugby World Cup Final dawned, and the Springboks faced the All Blacks, more was at stake than a sporting trophy. When Nelson Mandela appeared wearing a Springbok jersey and led the all-white, Afrikaner-dominated team in singing South Africa's new national anthem, he conquered white South Africa.

The green jersey of South Africa's Springbok rugby team, which whites loved and blacks saw as a detested symbol of racial oppression, became the instrument around which Mandela chose to heal ancient wounds, unite the country and prevent a war.

AVAILABLE AT ALL GOOD BOOKSTORES

For your chance to win a copy of this book simply email your first name and surname to competition@za-penguin.com with the words SUNDAY TIMES/CARLIN in the subject line.

Join our FREE weekly e-newsletter, register at www.penguinbooks.co.za

