



# Simon Said

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## **Simon Said** Sarah R. Shaber

Winner of the Malice Domestic/St. Martin's Press Best First Traditional Mystery Award Forensic historian Simon Shaw likes his murders old and cold, and his first case fits the bill. An archeologist friend has found a skeleton with a bullet hole in its skull under historic Bloodworth House, and Simon investigates with his usual doggedness until he discovers that the corpse is Anne Bloodworth, an heiress who disappeared in 1926. Shaw feels compelled to find out who killed her. But this turns out to be more than an academic exercise when someone who wants to hide past secrets tries to murder him!

"Shaber charms us with her personable prof and her warm, vibrant portrait of small-town Southern life."  
--"New York Times Book Review"

## **Simon Said Details**

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Author : Sarah R. Shaber

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# From Reader Review Simon Said for online ebook

## Richard Derus says

Rating: 3.5\* of five

**The Book Report:** First of the Professor Simon Shaw, forensic historian, series set in 1990s Raleigh, North Carolina. Simon Shaw's not having a good end of spring semester, 1996. His wife has left him, sending him into a deep depression. His colleagues are concerned, one of them to the point of using his depression as a lever to pry Simon out of small Kenan College's last tenured history professorship, in an academic-politics war that could end a career.

But it's the corpse in the college's historical home-cum-museum that's causing most of the trouble for Simon. In fact, it's about to get him killed, despite being seventy years dead. You see, Anne Bloodworth, the rightful heiress of the property, disappeared one April night in 1926, never to be seen or heard from again. Until a body is discovered in a routine excavation of the old house's vanished outdoor kitchen site.

Simon is called to the scene, told the probable timing of the death, and using clues such as a quilt in which the gun-shot corpse was wrapped, the jewelry the corpse still wore, and the lore of the house, gives Raleigh Police detective Otis Gates and Police Department counsel Julia McGloughlan an ID for the vic...so what, the killer's dead by now, can't prosecute a dead person, and let's all go on with life.

Simon can't just go on with life, and besides he's been depressed about his life since his wife left, so he latches on to the case. His investigation takes him into the world of upper-crust Raleigh before Jim Crow was tamed, into dusty library stacks, into microfiche readers and card catalogs, and requires him to survive murder attempts that make no sense in a case this old.

Until they do, in a moment of revelation that had me squirming in acute discomfort, and fanning pages to find out what was going to happen next.

**My Review:** Metaphorically speaking, that is, since one can't fan pages on a Kindle. Bella Rosa Books, a small press with the specific mission of rescuing out-of-print series mysteries for new fans to find, reprinted this 1997 St. Martin's Press Malice Domestic contest winner in 2011, and a Kindle version was made at the same time. Very wisely, the first book in the five-book series was free on Kindle for a few weeks, and even now is free for Prime members to read. It's whetted my appetite for the others, so their decision to forego immediate revenue for future sales is proving to be effective in at least one case.

This is not to say there are no issues with the Kindle edition. In several places, too many to be overlooked and forgiven, words or dates are missing (eg, David Morgan has all the *Rolling Stone* issues printed since . SINCE WHEN?!). Some flaws, such as Simon and Julia's attraction for each other being glued on to the plot, and the underuse of a perfectly delightful red herring suspect, are too minor to register as more than niggles.

In the end, it's the atmospherics of the book, the evocation of a vanished moment—and good riddance to it—that make the book fun. Simon is an entertaining sleuth, his pleasantly hang-dog ways and his sharp mind (if conveniently distractable eye) making him less a Holmes figure than a Maigret one. He's relatable and still plausible. And the book is good fun. Kindlers of the world, spend that \$2.99 with no fear of wasting your money!

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## **Ruth says**

c1997: I got to 70% and I just didn't care any more - so I jumped to the end just in case there had been a twist in the tail. Nada, nothing. The first half was okay but I did want to punch the "hero" and tell him to man up. I am not quite sure why I didn't enjoy this book as it appeared to have got rave reviews when it was first published eg The New York Times Book Review said that "Shaber charms us with her personable professor". It also won the 7th Annual St Martins's Press/Malice Domestic Best First Traditional Mystery. From Mystery People.com "Malice Domestic is an annual fan convention "saluting the traditional mystery". Think Agatha Christie, Mary Higgins Clark, or Elizabeth Peters, and you've got it. Held every year in Bethesda, Maryland, Malice Domestic is a chance for fans and writers to get together, find out what's new, compare experiences, and talk about the books we love." FWFTB: past, murder, prejudice, Southern, academia. FCB: Professor Simon Shaw, Judy Smith, Charles Bloodworth, Sergeant Gates, Adam Bloodworth.

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## **Aisling says**

I actually had to check that it was this book that won the Malice Domestic award because I could not believe it. The characters are flat and unlikeable (except Gates and Bessie Cofield). The main mystery was mildly intriguing but easily solved, the secondary mystery (who is threatening Simon) is even more painfully obvious. I was annoyed beyond reason that the main character drank a coke I swear on every single page. I just did not enjoy anything about this book except the concept of researching and solving an old murder.

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## **Carol says**

I'm not a big reader of the cozy mystery sub-genre but from the start I fell in love with Simon and his friends. Throw in the mystery and a well told story and they combine to make a light and fun tale. Those that are not big fans of the darker, gorier mysteries will find that this is a pleasant surprise. The characters are not especially "deep" but they hold their own in bringing the story alive and keeping the mystery intriguing. This is the first of the Simon Shaw Mysteries but i will be looking for more when I want something that is light and fun to read. 5 stars.

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## **Cheryl Landmark says**

Actual Rating: 3.5 Stars

Not an amazing mystery but certainly enjoyable and interesting for the most part. I liked the idea of Professor Shaw trying to solve a seventy-year old murder, which is not the usual premise for these types of mysteries. The author did a fairly good job of combining the cold case with history, college life and modern day attempted murder. I did find some of the info dumps a little lengthy and tedious, however.

Simon himself was a likeable guy--intelligent, modest, considerate and a great historian but not a super sleuth or a terribly exciting man, which made him relatable. I did think, however, that he moved a little too quickly to try and develop a sexual relationship with Julia, the police consultant lawyer. Somehow, it seemed a little out of character for him. I would have pegged him as the type to build such a relationship slowly.

The contemporary hijinks were somewhat predictable, in my opinion. (view spoiler)

The ending and the motive were okay, but a little rushed and questionable.

All in all, I was intrigued enough by this book to want to continue on with the second one in the series.

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## **Shovelmonkey1 says**

Now, normally I avoid these kinds of books. Snobbish? Maybe. Too many preconceptions? Definitely. Why? Because this is my job laid out in fictional format. But somehow (Richard Derus's fault) I've found myself reading two bits of archaeo-fiction in the last two days.

I don't watch Time Team (even though I've been on it - secret shame). I don't watch National Geographic or the History Channel (also for fear of a fleeting glance of my own mug) and the reason that I'm not at home avidly watching Zahi Hawass gesticulate in front of the pyramids, or Tony Robinson look confused in front of a trench with Mick Aston in it, is that sometimes it is nice just to have a day off and live in the present for a change. We all need time out... hairdressers probably don't come in from the salon and watch "Cutting it", doctors don't sit down and tune into ER, although I do know some teachers who watch Teachers but there is an exception to every rule.

Having your career fictionalised and sensationalised in any format immediately sets all the sceptical alarm bells ringing and you find yourself being overly critical from the very first page. It is hard not to be. So with some trepidation I picked up Simon Said. And then heaved a sigh of relief when it became immediately clear that it's not really about archaeology at all, but about a young, below average height, just about average looking, moderately Jewish history Professor, Simon Shaw. Yes there is some archaeology in it but that is more incidental - a missing society heiress who vanished 70 years ago is unexpectedly uncovered in a shallow grave in the middle of an archaeological excavation. The police aren't too interested in taking on this sub zero cold case and so Prof Shaw takes it on.

From this point onwards, aside from some mildly inaccurate attempts to define the differences between what exactly archaeologists and anthropologists do, there is only a limited amount of archaeology and the bulk of proceedings move out of the field and into the libraries of various schools and colleges in and around Raleigh, North Carolina. The plot was enough to keep me interested (but I'd already identified the murder weapon and likely murderer early on) so I kept going mainly to see if my historic research skills would be a match for those of Professor Simon Shaw. They were. I like to think that I beat him to the punch because he made so many pit stops for cans and bottles of Coke. As the book went on I found myself wondering if the guy actually produced carbonated piss, such was his intake of the gassy brown beverage.

I was also vastly amused by the sub-plot of nefarious, competitive and scheming history professors, all battling it out to get tenure at the college. This is a fairly realistic representation of the inter departmental lunacy which is bred within the quiet halls of many an academic department. Do not be fooled people, academics are not mild mannered, tweed wearing drones. They are rabidly cannibalistic when it comes to

promotional matters and would likely rip out your heart and eat it, if you were what stood between them and a full professorship.

So this ticks all the boxes for a one day weekender or a beach read if you're looking for a bit of distraction. If you know anything about the Civil War or like North Carolina or "the South" in general then this element of the story will probably be the sparkler in your holiday read Pina Colada.

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## **Cleo Bannister says**

This is a traditional mystery story set in 1996, where Simon Shaw is a Professor in forensic history at a college in Raleigh, North Carolina. His life is on a downward spiral having recently split up with his wife. He is suffering with depression which he is at pains to keep under wraps but his lack of interest in academic life has been noted by his colleagues and questions are being asked in some quarters about his abilities. Then a body is found on an archaeological dig at Bloodworth House by his friend David Morgan and it looks like he has a chance to use his skills to help him out. It doesn't take long to realise that whilst the body is old, it isn't all that old and Simon becomes obsessed with finding out more.

With the date of the body still under consideration the Police are called to the site but are unwilling to carry out too much in way of an investigation considering the perpetrator is most likely dead. It is at this point we meet Julia, a lawyer with the police whose job it is to consider the legal aspects of how to file the crime. After all it doesn't take much by way of an examination to realise that it is a crime, the skeleton has a bullet hole through their skull and they had been hidden below the floor of the kitchen at Bloodworth House.

Simon soon becomes convinced that the bones belong to Anne Bloodworth who went missing in 1926 and was never seen again although there were rumours she'd run away because of a falling out with her father. Simon soon moves from a point of interest to obsession banishing the worst of his depression in research and Julia.

This was a competent mystery story that held my attention for the duration. The plotting was solid and the historical aspect very well presented although perhaps the contrast between life in the 1920s and 1990s would have been more distinct had Simon not been a bit fussy and pernickety for a man who is reportedly only in his 30s, but maybe that's what being a Professor at such a young age does to you? The book did however underline that the life of heiress Anne Bloodworth, was maybe not all it was cracked up to be. The book came into its own when it became clear that someone wanted to halt any investigation into her life and Julia became far more involved with the case and her character was a really good addition to the book as her role is one not usually seen in this type of crime fiction novel.

The academic setting also made a pleasant change, we had academic in-fighting and jostling for position as a backdrop, I especially enjoyed the meetings which while differing in subject matter could mirror the petty concerns of work colleagues the world over, these adding shade to the storytelling.

While the dénouement wasn't especially inventive, it was fitting which to me is far more important anyway. I did guess some, but not all the mysteries, I was better on the who than the why. Given that the first book in the series is possibly the weakest in that a wide range of characters have to be given backstories I thought that Simon Said was a proficient and interesting opener.

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## **Brenda says**

Professor Simon Shaw was a historian who loved his work, while David Morgan was an archeologist who was working at the old Bloodworth House. When David discovered a skeleton under the old kitchen which turned out to have been there for seventy years, then Simon identified her as Anne Bloodworth, daughter of the owner, the mystery of her disappearance in 1926 set Simon's investigative heart on fire.

Simon's determination to discover as much, if not all, about the young woman's disappearance consumed him – but suddenly strange things began happening to Simon. It seemed that the secrets of that long ago past had someone wanting to keep them hidden – at all costs.

*Simon Said* is my first by author Sarah R. Shaber, and the first in the Professor Simon Said series – which is great as I thoroughly enjoyed the story. There were some laugh out loud moments; Simon is an excellent character, a really likeable guy! A gentle, entertaining historical cosy mystery which I recommend.

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## **Sue says**

Every once in a while, it's fun to read something simple and fun. In this case I chose a fairly straightforward mystery set in Raleigh, North Carolina with its crime the 70 year old murder of the teen age daughter of the local magnate. As the story opens, a body is found during an archaeological dig at outbuildings of the Bloodworth estate, now part of Kenan College. Professor Simon Shaw (of the title) is asked to look at the body and give an opinion re possible identity. From there the plot takes off.

It is one part history, one part mystery and one part college/faculty intrigue. All enjoyable without being thought-provoking or lasting. Fun and nice to read between heavier tomes. The characters are also fun though not especially deep.

Rating 3

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## **Kribu says**

To be honest, the rating for this book *may* have been one star higher if I hadn't read it on Kindle - because the Kindle formatting, especially the way paragraphs and scenes constantly ran together without any breaks, was so irritatingly bad that it constantly pulled me out of the story.

But even without that, it wouldn't have made my favourite mysteries list. For the first quarter or so, I wasn't sure whether I would manage to finish the book at all - the pacing was all wrong, disjointed and rushed and full of completely irrelevant descriptions and mini-infodumps whenever a new character was introduced. I found the writing did improve a little towards the ending (well, either that or I got more used to it), but not a lot.

That said, the plot itself intrigued me enough that I kept reading, simply because I wanted to know "who did it" (for both the historical murder and the contemporary goings-on). I didn't warm to Simon, but he did have

his good points (such as his affection for his cat), and some of the supporting cast, while somewhat one- or two-dimensional, showed promise. Not enough for me to read more in this series, but enough for me to give it a "it was OK" rating and not regret the time spent on it.

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### **Judy says**

The body of a woman with a bullet hole in her skull is found in an archeological dig on a historic site in Raleigh, North Carolina. Buried for at least fifty years, there's no one who could possibly identify the body.

No one except history professor Simon Shaw.

Simon Shaw is not your usual sleuth. He's not a private eye, he's a tenured history professor at a small North Carolina college. And he's not what you called hard boiled either. He's got a sensitive stomach, he's prone to headaches and he's depressed about his divorce. But he's a damn good historian, so who better to figure out who killed the young woman back in the 1920s?

I especially admired how Sarah Shaber was able to make the inclusion of the amateur sleuth into a murder investigation plausible for me, deftly avoiding what I call the Jessica Fletcher Effect. In this case, the murder has taken place 70 years ago, the perpetrator is long dead, so it's a low priority for the police force.

The pace is good, and Shaber keeps you guessing as to how Simon is going to find the murderer when all the witnesses are either dead or very old. She moves back and forth between the Jazz Age and the 21st century with ease.

A great summer read.

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### **Phrynne says**

I really enjoyed this short but very entertaining mystery and was very happy to discover it is the first of a series so I have more goodness to go:)

The character of Simon Shaw is interesting. He is a small man and unassuming in manner - no alpha male here! He is however exceedingly smart and oddly rather charming and he still manages to get the girl!

The book is set in 1997 but the murder occurred in 1926 and Simon is involved as he is a historian familiar with the history of the house where the murder occurred. He finds himself much more interested in solving this case than doing his normal job of teaching. It is definitely a cosy mystery, but an intelligent and well written one.

I am looking forward to carrying on with the whole series.

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### **Jeannie and Louis Rigod says**

I found myself thinking what a surprising tale this novel turned out to be. A talented young professor of History is thrust into a murder mystery spanning seven decades. Can this murder be solved? Also, who is trying to kill the Professor that everyone loves...



Of course, no one is loved universally, and Professor Simon Shaw does have his enemies, such as a jealous Professor, and a student denied Graduate School due to his grade received in Simon's class.

This novel takes us through life in North Carolina in 1926 and 1997. So much has changed for the better, yet, so much remains the same.

The gentle romance and friendships formed and continued make this tale a true cozy.

I was so impressed, it was an older edition so, no chapters etc. This was recorded when Kindle was new. Be patient and overlook the editing issues. The story is worth your tolerance.

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## **Joan says**

This was 'ok'. A competent murder mystery with a rather bland Professor as the 'detective'. The real problem was that the whole thing read a bit like a list of bullet points. There was virtually no depth or emotion to the characters and the constant 'naming' of Simon became intensely irritating after a short time: e.g.

*Simon went up to dress. He paused in front of the mirror to check for bags under his eyes, and he decided that they were not too pronounced, despite lack of sleep and the morning's events. Simon was a small man, which had never bothered him before except for the irritation he suffered when looking for clothes. But being a university professor allowed him to wear anything he wanted, and since his under-graduate days, he had lived in jeans, polo shirts or turtlenecks, sneakers, and any jacket he could find to fit. Occasionally, he wore a knit tie.*

*Simon had played baseball in high school and college: he biked to work, and he had visited the local batting cage regularly until recently. He was still in reasonably good shape with a well-developed chest and arms and slim legs and waist.*

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See what I mean? I know what Simon 'looks' like but it's all superficial and boring. I have no sense that the writer was ever in love with this character. And so I couldn't be, either.

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## **Lyn says**

*Simon Said* is the first in Sarah R Shaber's ENTERTAINING Simon Shaw Mystery series. I read *Snipe Hunt* Book 2 first and then went backwards. I LOVE SIMON SHAW. He's a great amateur sleuth with a twist; he's a forensic historian. This means he investigates long ago murders. This first investigation begins with a fellow faculty archeologist, digging up an unexpected corpse behind the Bloodworth mansion in Raleigh NC. Simon, an unassuming history professor, becomes fascinated in the woman's disappearance and death in 1926. If you're a history lover and a cozy mystery lover, THE SIMON SHAW MYSTERIES are just what you want to read!

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