



## The Shirt on His Back

*Barbara Hambly*

Download now

Read Online ➔

# The Shirt on His Back

*Barbara Hambly*

## **The Shirt on His Back** Barbara Hambly

The new 'Benjamin January' novel from the best-selling author - Abishag Shaw is seeking vengeance for his brother's murder – and Benjamin January is seeking money after his bank crashes. Far beyond the frontier, in the depths of the Rocky Mountains, both are to be found at the great Rendezvous of the Mountain Men: a month-long orgy of cheap booze, shooting-matches, tall tales and cut-throat trading. But at the rendezvous, the discovery of a corpse opens the door to hints of a greater plot, of madness and wholesale murder . . .

## **The Shirt on His Back Details**

Date : Published June 1st 2011 by Severn House Publishers

ISBN : 9780727880109

Author : Barbara Hambly

Format : Hardcover 256 pages

Genre : Mystery, Historical, Historical Fiction, Fiction, Historical Mystery

 [Download The Shirt on His Back ...pdf](#)

 [Read Online The Shirt on His Back ...pdf](#)

**Download and Read Free Online The Shirt on His Back Barbara Hambly**

---

## **From Reader Review The Shirt on His Back for online ebook**

### **Mz. Diana Gagliardi says**

January is taken from his hometown of New Orleans and travels to the wilds of Oregon to assist his friend Lt Shaw and to earn some money to support his growing family (!) Here we find a tale of vengeance, trappers, Indians, and callous violence. Again, I love the series, the characters, and her fine attention to details of mores (even the LoC agrees- "social manners and customs" is one of the set categories).

This is one of my go-to series for amazing historical mysteries and they never cease to excite my brain. This one is no exception and my mind is now buzzing with prospects and ideas...

---

### **Erin (PT) says**

I always have so little to say about Hambly's books...largely because they're always such an abiding and deep pleasure to read. It's easy for me to get lost in the worlds she creates and dwell inside them for their duration like a princess in a spell.

With her last book I talked about the pleasure of "seeing" old faces; characters that populate the background through most of the series. With *Shirt on His Back*, we are outside of New Orleans, outside of those comfort zones and among an entirely new cast of characters...and yet they aren't any less detailed or vivid than those friends we've visited before.

If I have any complaint, it's that, after the promise of something delving deeper into the character of Abishag Shaw, I feel we only know him very slightly better than before. The book's blurb seems to offer a greater glimpse than what we got...and yet, it's a nitpick, such a minor complaint compared to what's been offered in return. I always recommend the Benjamin January series to anyone I think might be in the least interested and I'm so glad that Severn House has allowed Hambly to keep writing and sharing his adventures.

---

### **Debra Harreld says**

Hambly's depiction of the 19th Century fur trade, as seen through the eyes of an educated free black, is fascinating, although not always easy to follow.

---

### **Valerie says**

An interesting setting, but ultimately not as interesting as the interplay among the races in New Orleans.

---

### **Marlene says**

Originally published at Reading Reality

There's a banking crisis. Too many people lose everything they have invested when the banks fail, and their investments are suddenly worthless. Major banks close. Jobs are hard to come by. People who were doing mostly okay start to think they might lose their homes to foreclosure.

Sounds familiar, doesn't it?

But in *The Shirt On His Back*, the tenth of Barbara Hambly's Benjamin January historical mysteries, the banking crisis is the Panic of 1837, under the new Presidency of Martin Van Buren.

Ben January, a free man of color in New Orleans, is a Paris-trained surgeon who is not permitted to practice in the pre-Civil War U.S. In the South, he has to keep his papers with him at all times to prevent being falsely picked up as a runaway slave.

He makes his living as a piano player, and he is excellent at that profession. He also gives lessons to the mixed-race daughters of liaisons between the local planters and their mixed-race mistresses. Women just like his sisters.

His wife Rose runs a school for girls. But families cut back on lessons and school when times get tough. Then the bank closes, and their savings are lost.

Sometimes, Ben solves murders, by assisting the New Orleans Police in the person of Lieutenant Abishag Shaw. Shaw has come to trust Ben's judgment, a far and delicate reach across race and class in that time and place that they have both come to value.

So when Shaw comes to Ben with a job offer, Ben takes it, no questions asked. He needs the money. And he trusts Shaw.

Ben should have asked some questions first, because Shaw sets out on the road to vengeance, to a place where no one will stay his hand, where no one will punish him for shooting the man who killed his brother.

1837 Rendezvous by Alfred Jacob Miller

But it is the journey of a lifetime. A trip into the Rocky Mountains, to see a way of life that was already dying. They are heading to a fur trappers' rendezvous to trap a killer. Unless he traps them first.

Escape Rating B: The two things that stand out in this story are the portrait of the fur trappers' rendezvous and that we finally get some hints about Shaw's background.

By 1837, the world of the fur trappers was coming to an end, and some of them, at least, knew it. Beavers were being hunted to extinction. The Natives' way of life was being undermined by "civilization", disease and alcohol. Most of all, the pristine, uninhabited wilderness was getting crowded with colonists. Americans were moving towards the "Oregon country".

There's a patina of nostalgia throughout the story. Men who can see their world coming to an end, and Ben January's yearning for the wife he left behind in New Orleans.

The story we follow is Shaw's need to find the man who murdered his younger brother Johnny. The problem

is that Shaw doesn't know what the murderer, Frank Boden, even looks like. So we have a search, an investigation, and finally, some resolution, although not exactly the one that Shaw was hoping for.

The murder investigation takes a backseat to the adventure story. Although the wilderness adventure is fascinating (and reminded me fondly of the early chapters of James Michener's *Centennial*), Benjamin January's story loses something when one of its most important characters is missing.

I missed New Orleans.

---

### **Text Addict says**

This gets five stars because not only is it a fine mystery/adventure (complete with murders, gunfights, revenge, near-scalpings, boxing matches, drinking to excess, fleeing into a raging river, and being hunted by Indians), but Hambly deftly weaves in the dark grays and blacks of the historical context as well as the problem of revenge and justice and the importance of family. As with any excellent writing, then, the work as a whole is much more than a mystery/adventure story - not that there's anything wrong with those, but I'd give the average one a mere four stars.

It is also, of course, the latest installment in the adventures of Benjamin January, doctor, veteran, musician, polyglot, and free black resident (but never really, because of his race, *citizen*) of New Orleans. Various Indians (good, bad, and indifferent) also get important roles and speaking parts - as do Kit Carson, Jim Bridger, and others. It's set at the rendezvous of the "Mountain Men" in the 1830s - those were the fur trappers and traders who were the leading edge of the American invasion of the west.

You might, however, enjoy this book more if you go back and read the rest of the series. I think Hambly lightly sprinkles in enough background on January to make it comprehensible to newcomers, but seriously - why read just one book when you can read a whole series, hmm? It starts with *A Free Man of Color ...* and Hambly is currently working on the next one, in which January travels to Washington, D.C.

---

### **Anne says**

Funny that my friend and companion in voracious mystery reading Alison just read this too!

I agree that the New Orleans setting is more compelling to me as a reader, although this segment of US history is interesting. This story was bursting with characters but I felt like I needed a spreadsheet to keep track of them all...I kept getting jumbled.

Still think this is an amazing series which introduced me to the concept of a "free man of color" in the fascinating person of Benjamin January.

I will keep reading as long as Ms Hambly is writing them!

---

## Rebecca Huston says

Another fine entry in the Benjamin January series. After the loss of the family money in a bank crash that is sweeping the nation, Benjamin joins with Abishag Shaw and Hannibal to journey to the wild West to track down the killer of Shaw's youngest brother at a mountain man rendezvous. Unusual setting and characters along with a very curious murder all add to this being a great entry in the series. Very much recommended for fans of historical mysteries and of Barbara Hambly.

For the longer review, please go here:

<http://www.epinions.com/review/Barbar...>

---

## Jamie Collins says

3.5 stars. I love Hambly, and I love this series. This book seemed a little more rushed than most, but it was still a good read.

When the Bank of Louisiana fails in 1836, Benjamin January loses his savings and is desperate for work. He accepts a job traveling out west with Lieutenant Shaw, who is planning avenge his brother's murder. Accompanied by a depressed but sober Hannibal, they arrive at the annual Rocky Mountain Rendezvous for fur trappers and traders, where they try to find the murderer of Shaw's little brother, and try to keep from being either accidentally shot by drunken mountaineers or scalped by angry Indians.

I missed New Orleans, but it was something of a relief for January to be in a place where he wasn't constantly oppressed. The uncivilized Westerners seem mostly indifferent to his race.

I was glad to see a book featuring Shaw, even though there was not as much exploration of his character as I was expecting and this left me a bit unsatisfied. As I said, the book seemed rushed - I would especially have enjoyed another chapter or two after January arrives back in New Orleans, to see how their adventures have changed the relationship between the two men.

Mildly spoilerish:  
(view spoiler)

---

## Yune says

Wait, said I as I peered at the small text on the cover. Benjamin January, surgeon and piano player and murder investigator, free black man of New Orleans -- in the Rocky Mountains?

Yep. And I very much enjoyed it, even though it meant that Rose had to stay behind. (It's a bit of a pet peeve with me when characters get married and then for all practical purposes act as though they're still single -- see Miles Vorkosigan -- but in this case I think Hambly was careful to keep Rose a light presence in Ben's thoughts throughout.) Because out in the West, men don't really care about the color of your skin, unless you're a native, and even in that case they'll deal with you too. Conditions are too rough to care overmuch about societal stratification. Don't get me wrong, I love how Hambly weaves in the frustrations of Ben's race

and how it hampers him, an otherwise intelligent and capable man, but it was refreshing to see him unfettered for once.

I am sadly far from informed about native tribes of that time and area, so can't comment on how deftly Hambly depicted those, but there weren't any red flags for me. People in general tended to be marvelously consistent -- either truly intelligent, or if they weren't, driven by sensical motivations -- but this is something any Hambly fan already knows. And a great deal of the story deals with the men in the rendezvous, who drink and gamble while trading beaver pelts.

I wonder how approachable this one would be to people who haven't read the rest of the series; but then I think that there is very little good reason not to read the first one, *A Free Man of Color*, and enjoy all the rest between.

---

### **Saralee says**

I usually love the Benjamin January stories, but this one was a stand-out. As always, Barbara Hambly's research has led her to build an awesomely convincing world. I loved the early West setting, the fur trappers and the others out in the middle of the pristine forest, rough-and-tumble lives they lead, with violence and vengeance like a scarlet thread running throughout. There are melancholy predictions that this breathtaking wilderness won't last forever.

It was especially cool to discover all these amazing, real-life adventurers who traveled the same route that Lewis and Clark had explored just a decade or so before. In this book, if a character seems extreme, larger-than-life, and like he couldn't possibly be real, then chances are good he was an actual historical figure

Ben January is always excellent, and Hannibal Sefton is at his side as usual. But I loved getting this glimpse into Abishag Shaw's past -- he's a great character and I'm glad he got more of the spotlight in this outing.

Lately my favorite stories in this series have been the ones where Ben winds up traveling -- to DC, or to Mexico City, or, as in this one, to the Rockies. This is a great entry into the series.

---

### **Susan says**

In 1837 banks were crashing and nobody in New Orleans is hiring musicians. Benjamin January takes a job with his law enforcement friend Abishag Shaw to investigate/avenge the murder of Shaw's brother. They travel west to the trappers' and traders' summer rendezvous where they know they will find the people know something about it. Great characters in a fully developed setting. I didn't think I would like this series as well if it left New Orleans but I was wrong. Good for mystery readers and also for those who like Westerns.

---

### **Alison says**

I like Hambly's books for their exploration of social mores in a very different USA, but her plotting is mediocre, and this one, probably earns just bad. Could see most of the twists coming a mile off. And some of it was just silly.

Having said that, as an exploration of native american and settler relations, it's fascinating. Hambly builds a detailed and nuanced view of a camp where warring factions make alliances and friendships while navigating different power dynamics, prejudices and cultural differences. Chuck a good dose of gender power dynamics in there as well for good measure. Her settlers and Indians are neither cartoon villains, noble savages, or heroes. She shows a world where Native Americans negotiate with considerable power with trappers, while understanding how transitory that power is in the face of white governments. Where women trade the skills and attributes they have for power and safety - in both white and native american societies, with varying degrees of success. And where they do all this while just living lives of work, and fun, love and pettiness. The book is at its best when it is in the camp, and its worst on a ridiculous scavenger hunt-by-random-confessions for a dead mans clothes.

---

### **Nilchance says**

This book was hitting all my narrative kinks (revenge quests! Shaw backstory! Rose is pregnant! Ben refers to Shaw as his brother!) and then it ends with a freaking Columbo speech from Ben laying out the details of the case, and I am delighted. I love these books.

---

### **Unwisely says**

I do like this series, but this wasn't my favorite book. It was a whole leaving the South thing, which was fine (and historically interesting - I guess I hadn't realized quite how quickly American settlers denuded the country). But overall there were too many people (and too many factions) for me to keep track of who was who. Or, for the most part, care, honestly.

Still three stars for being totally readable despite its faults (no Rose? Seriously??).

---