



Twelve Red Herrings

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This new offering by the author of several of the more popular novels of the last decade is a rather uneven, yet interesting, collection of short stories to trick the unwary reader. Each of the first eleven attempts a surprising and twisting conclusion designed to bring the hand to the forehead in an exclamatory fashion. An attempt, it must be said, which is of such a nature that quite often the author succeeds in the effort. By far the majority of these stories are identified as being based, at least loosely, on actual historical incidents. “Never Stop on the Motorway,” for example, is an impressively gripping recounting of an episode widely reported around the world last year.

The last of the short stories, “One Man’s Meat,” affords the reader the opportunity to select any of four different endings to the tale. Each of the conclusions is quite plausible, although the average reader may find one far more convincing than the others—a circumstance which the author no doubt anticipated with a certain degree of relish.

Jeffrey Archer is not an author of the first rank, and it is highly unlikely he will ever receive a literary prize of any distinction. Nevertheless, he is an exceptionally talented individual with a gift for creating entertaining stories that skirt the edges of any substantial reality. His novels allow the reader the luxury of suspending disbelief without feeling betrayed or cheated in either a literary or an economic sense. His short stories are of a similar piece, although the prudent may wish to delay acquisition of this particular work until a paperback edition appears.

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