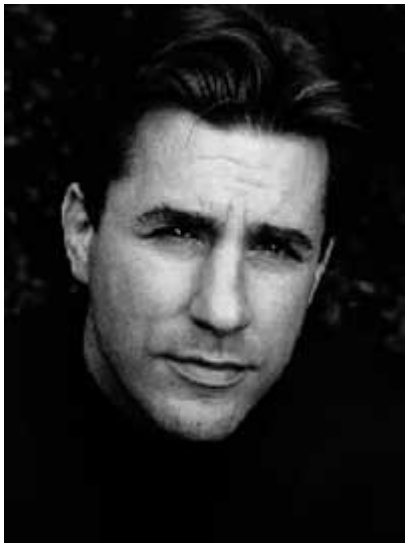
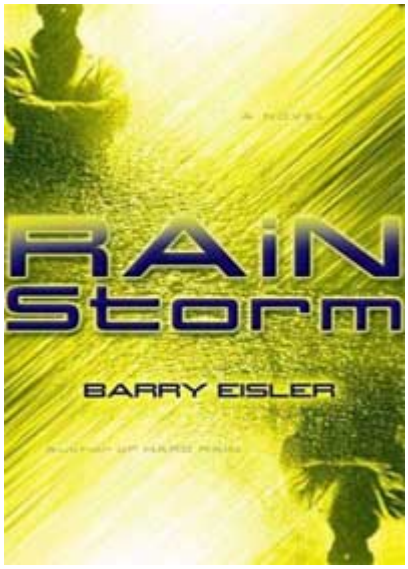
BARRY EISLER’S ARCHAEOLOGY

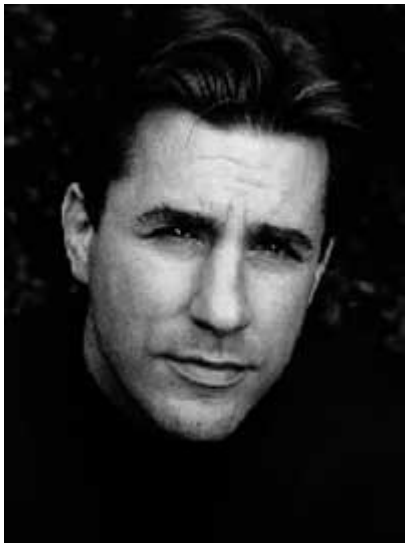


Barry’s latest in the John Rain series of novels – Rain Storm – is out. He was super smooth at the signing tonight at Kepler’s, Menlo Park.



Didn’t you work for the government, Barry? What were you doing?

Yes I did, … and no comment …



[Link – Barry Eisler]

John Rain, Barry's anti-hero, Asian-American assassin who makes his victims look as though they have died of natural causes, is now in his third novel. They take you on a thriller romp through Tokyo night clubs, Brasilian martial arts, and the world of global conspiracy.

I have long been interested in the connections between crime and conspiracy underworlds and an archaeological sense of place and event (have a look at my book Experiencing the Past – soon to go online [Link]). Both are rooted in a sharp attention to detail and an awareness that all may not be what it seems – look beneath the surface. And, of course, at a scene of crime, anything could be relevant. These are edgy worlds. Our archaeological hold on the past is so often so slight, dependant on massive projection from potsherds and beetle wings. Rain's world of intelligence services and invisible assassinations sometimes seems so distant from our everyday experience, but all the details ring true. What, after all, is the link between the everyday, and the big picture, history, power, what is really going on?



I got Barry to come along to my Mellon Workshop at Stanford on visual anthropology and ethnography a couple of years ago to talk about the way he writes. The empirics. Not least because I have heard him tell me of his trips away, to Macau, Osaka, Hong Kong, Shanghai, to research the streets and bars. He has spent a week in Palm Springs learning how to be a night club bouncer and manage adrenalin (well I think it was in Palm Springs!). He is a black belt in judo (and you should see the cauliflower ears on the guys he works out with in Mountain View!). He does serious ethnographic research on John Rain. It is fiction. But what is fiction anyway?

Then there are the descriptions of the fights.

Two meters. The guy to my right was closest. He was turning to his left, toward whatever had made his partner start to bug out. I saw the left side of his face as he came around, slowly, everything moving slowly through my adrenalized vision.

One meter. I stepped in with my left foot, bringing my left arm across my body, partly as defense, partly as counterbalance. I let my right hand drift back, the

flail uncoiling on the way, then whipped my arm around, the palm side of my fist up, my elbow leading the way, my hips pivoting in as though I was doing a one-armed warm up with a baseball bat …

I caught the gun in my left hand and used my right foot to blast his legs from under him in deashi-barai, a side foot sweep that I had performed tens of thousands of times in my quarter century at the Kodokan. I went down with him, keeping my weight over his chest, increasing the impact as he slammed into the floor … I rose up to create an inch of space between our bodies, spun my left leg over and past his head, and dropped back in juji-gatame, a cross-body armlock …

Fingerprints were only part of the problem, of course. When you're stressed, you sweat. Sweat contains DNA. Likewise for microscopic dead skin cells, which, like sweat, can adhere to metal. If you're unlucky to get picked up as a suspect, it's inconvenient to have to explain why your DNA is all over the murder weapon. The dead men's clothes, which I had touched while searching them, were less of a problem. They wouldn't take prints, and I probably hadn't handled them sufficiently to leave a material amount of sweat or skin cells

behind.

I turned into an alley choked with overflowing plastic garbage containers. An aluminum leader ran down the side of one of the alley walls and into an open drain beneath …

This is not about “description” – you don’t need the detail of the body movements.

But it is documentation.

You can track Rain’s every haunt and movement through the novels – Confeitaria Colombo coffee bar, Rio, Jardin de Luseine, Tokyo, Oparium Cafe, Macau …

Cliff McLucas came with me to my archaeological excavation in Sicily back in 98. He was the artistic director of Brith Gof Theatre, an arts company I helped manage. We were exploring the connections between archaeology and contemporary art. We were working on what became the Three Landscapes Project at Stanford. At the end of the stay he gave a lecture to the crew on what he was doing with me. He didn’t see our work anything like the way archaeologists normally do (archaeologists discovering the past). The irony was that his talk made it very clear that he was far more rigorous in his research into what was going on in the excavation of a prehistoric hilltop settlement in the west of Sicily than were our scientific colleagues. But his research was leading to a performance fiction. Our archaeology colleagues were horrified. I left the project the next year.

[Link]

The problem is that our information is limited, Rain said …

Wonderful!