



Mr. Penumbra's 24-Hour Bookstore: A Novel

By Robin Sloan

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A gleeful and exhilarating tale of global conspiracy, complex code-breaking, high-tech data visualization, young love, rollicking adventure, and the secret to eternal life—mostly set in a hole-in-the-wall San Francisco bookstore

The Great Recession has shuffled Clay Jannon out of his life as a San Francisco Web-design drone—and serendipity, sheer curiosity, and the ability to climb a ladder like a monkey has landed him a new gig working the night shift at Mr. Penumbra's 24-Hour Bookstore. But after just a few days on the job, Clay begins to realize that this store is even more curious than the name suggests. There are only a few customers, but they come in repeatedly and never seem to actually buy anything, instead "checking out" impossibly obscure volumes from strange corners of the store, all according to some elaborate, long-standing arrangement with the gnomic Mr. Penumbra. The store must be a front for something larger, Clay concludes, and soon he's embarked on a complex analysis of the customers' behavior and roped his friends into helping to figure out just what's going on. But once they bring their findings to Mr. Penumbra, it turns out the secrets extend far outside the walls of the bookstore.

With irresistible brio and dazzling intelligence, Robin Sloan has crafted a literary adventure story for the twenty-first century, evoking both the fairy-tale charm of Haruki Murakami and the enthusiastic novel-of-ideas wizardry of Neal Stephenson or a young Umberto Eco, but with a unique and feisty sensibility that's rare to the world of literary fiction. *Mr. Penumbra's 24-Hour Bookstore* is exactly what it sounds like: an establishment you have to enter and will never want to leave, a modern-day cabinet of wonders ready to give a jolt of energy to every curious reader, no matter the time of day.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

Amazon Best Books of the Month, October 2012 (Debut Spotlight): *Mr. Penumbra's 24-Hour Bookstore* is an old school mystery set firmly in tech-loving, modern day San Francisco. Clay Jannon (former web designer) lands a job at a bookstore with very few patrons and even fewer purchases. His curiosity leads him to the discovery of a larger conspiracy at play, one exciting enough to rope in his best friend (CEO at a startup) and love interest (works at Google). As Clay and company unravel the puzzles of Mr. Penumbra's book shop, the story turns into a sort of nerdy heist, with real-life gadgets, secret societies, and a lot of things to say about the past, present, and future of reading. Sloan originally self-published *Mr. Penumbra* as a short story through Kindle Direct Publishing, before expanding it to its current form with a traditional print publisher--a fitting trajectory for a fast, fun story that has so wholly and enthusiastically embraced the tension between the digital and analog books. --*Kevin Nguyen*

Review

“Delightful.” ?*Graham Joyce, The Washington Post*

“An irresistible page-turning novel.” ?*Newsweek*

“One of the most thoughtful and fun reading experiences you're likely to have this year . . . extremely charismatic . . . deeply funny . . . there's so much largehearted magic in this book . . . Sloan is remarkably gifted and has an obviously deep affection for both literature and technology.” ?*Michael Schaub, NPR Books*

“A jaunty, surprisingly old-fashioned fantasy about the places where old and new ways of accessing knowledge meet . . . [*Mr. Penumbra's 24-Hour Bookstore*] cleverly uses the technological age in the service of its fantasy . . . Sloan's ultimate answer to the mystery of what keeps people solving Penumbra's puzzle is worth turning pages to find out.” ?*Tess Taylor, San Francisco Chronicle*

“[A] winning literary adventure . . . Sloan grounds his jigsawlike plot with Big Ideas about the quest for permanence in the digital age.” ?*Thom Geier, Entertainment Weekly*

“Fantastic . . . I loved diving into the world that Sloan created, both the high-tech fantasyland of Google and the ancient analog society. It's packed full of geeky allusions and wonderful characters, and is a celebration of books, whether they're made of dead trees or digits.” ?*Jonathan H. Liu, Wired, GeekDad*

“Robin Sloan cleverly combines the antiquated world of bibliophilia with the pulsating age of digital technology, finding curiosity and joy in both. He makes bits and bytes appear beautiful . . . The rebels' journey to crack the code--grappling with an ancient cult, using secret passwords and hidden doorways--will excite anyone's inner child. But this is no fantasy yarn. Mr. Sloan tethers his story to a weird reality, striking a comical balance between eccentric and normal . . . The pages swell with Mr. Sloan's nerdy affection and youthful enthusiasm for both tangible books and new media. Clay's chatty narration maintains the pace and Mr. Sloan injects dry wit and comedic timing suited to his geeky everyman . . . A clever and whimsical tale with a big heart.” ?*The Economist*

“Man, is this book fun--especially for any book nerd who isn't in denial about living in the modern age. If

you love physical books (the smell! The feel!) but wouldn't give up your iPhone for any reason, if you like puzzles and geeky allusions and bookish cults and quests, then this book is for you. It also glows in the dark." ?*Emily Temple, Flavorpill*

"What makes *Mr. Penumbra's 24-Hour Bookstore* so impressive is Sloan's great gift for storytelling and his cast of brilliant, eccentric characters. Think of this novel as part Haruki Murakami, part Dan Brown and part Joseph Cornell: a surreal adventure, an existential detective story and a cabinet of wonders at which to marvel." ?*Carmela Ciuraru, Newsday*

"Beguiling . . . The plot is as tight as nesting boxes, or whatever their digital equivalent . . . Sly and infectious." ?*Karen R. Long, The Cleveland Plain Dealer*

"Sloan isn't just exploring new ideas, but laying the groundwork for a new genre of literature. While the influence of Neal Stephenson and William Gibson is present, *Mr. Penumbra's 24-Hour Bookstore* is something all its own: a technocratic adventure where every riddle and puzzle is solved with very real gadgets, a humanizing reflection on technology that evokes the tone of a fairy tale, a brisk and brainy story imbued with such confidence that it will leave you with nothing but excitement about the things to come." ?*Kevin Nguyen, Grantland*

"In a time when actual books are filling up tag-sale dollar boxes, along with VHS tapes and old beepers, *Mr. Penumbra's 24-Hour Bookstore* reminds us that there is an intimate, adventurous joy in the palpable papery things called novels, and in the warm little secret societies we used to call 'bookstores.' Robin Sloan's novel is delightfully funny, provocative, deft, and even thrilling. And for reasons more than just nostalgia, I could not stop turning these actual pages." ?*John Hodgman*

"The love child of Erin Morgenstern's *The Night Circus* and Neal Stephenson's *Reamde*, *Mr. Penumbra's 24-Hour Bookstore* is a hugely enjoyable story of friendship, living, and the lure of the mysterious. It's a good-hearted, optimistic book about the meeting of modern technology and medieval mystery, a tonal road map to a positive relationship between the old world and the new. It's a book that gets it. Plus, you know: cryptographic cults, vertical bookshops, hot geeks, theft, and the pursuit of immortality. I loved it. And yes, I too would freeze my head." ?*Nick Harkaway*

"Robin Sloan is a skilled architect, and *Mr. Penumbra's 24-Hour Bookstore* is an ingeniously designed space, full of mysteries and codes. A clever, entertaining story that also manages to be a thought-provoking meditation on progress, information and technology. Full of intelligence and humor." ?*Charles Yu*

"*Mr. Penumbra's 24-Hour Bookstore* is a real tour de force, a beautiful fable that is given legs by the author's bravado use of the real (Google is in there, for instance, the actual campus) to sell us on a shadow world of the unreal and the speculative. Robin Sloan comes across as so bighearted, so in love with the world--the ancient world, the contemporary world--so in love with love, in love with friendship, in love with the idea that our technical abilities can serve as conduits for beauty, that the reader is swept along by his enthusiasm. It's a lot of fun--but it's also a powerful reading experience with a wonderful undeniability." ?*George Saunders, in Blip Magazine*

About the Author

ROBIN SLOAN is a self-proclaimed media inventor and writer living in San Francisco. He grew up near Detroit and went to school at Michigan State, where he studied economics and co-founded a literary magazine. Since then, he's worked at Poynter, Current TV and Twitter, figuring out the future of media. Visit his website at robinsloan.com.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Luis Martin:

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Shawn Holmes:

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Marvin Davidson:

Spent a free time and energy to be fun activity to do! A lot of people spent their free time with their family, or their particular friends. Usually they undertaking activity like watching television, planning to beach, or picnic from the park. They actually doing same every week. Do you feel it? Will you something different to fill your own personal free time/ holiday? Could possibly be reading a book could be option to fill your cost-free time/ holiday. The first thing you will ask may be what kinds of reserve that you should read. If you want to test look for book, may be the guide untitled Mr. Penumbra's 24-Hour Bookstore: A Novel can be very good book to read. May be it is usually best activity to you.

Ruth Lowry:

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