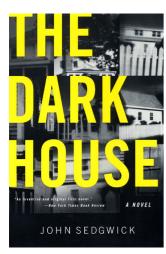# John Sedgwick

The Dark House
ISBN13: 9780060934644

What's *The Dark House* about?
A well-born Bostonian in his late-30s, Edward Rollins, who works in a downtown investment house during the day, and engages in the unusual hobby of following people in his car at night.

Why does he do that?
Well, that's the book's ultimate subject. The surface explanation is that he's simply curious. He doesn't have much of a life, so he gloms on to the lives of others, but not as your run-of-the-mill peeping tom: He prefers to think of himself as a social anthropologist, an observer of the human species. But the deeper explanation has to do with a search for answers to certain profound questions about his family.

But his night work gets him in trouble?
Yes, fairly quickly. As the book opens, Rollins (he prefers to be known only by his last name) is tailing a car out to a Boston suburb late one night. His man pulls into a driveway, climbs out of his car, and enters a house — without ever turning on the lights. To Rollins, this is deeply unsettling. With his man in the dark like that, Rollins might not be the observer this time around, but the observed. But who would watch him, and why?

Rollins does all this alone?
He has what he calls the Garbo rule. He has to be alone. But a young woman from his office, Marj Simmons, suddenly takes an interest in him, and he confides in her about the "dark house." At first, she finds his nightly rambles a charming eccentricity. Things get complicated, though, when she senses that his "pursuits," as he calls them, might in fact be part of a dark pattern to his life.

Did you ever follow anyone in your car?
Not for the book, no. I relied on my memories of going on surveillance with a private eye named Gil Lewis, tailing some errant spouse or other. I found that fascinating, and I wrote my first book, *Night Vision*, about Gil's life and work. So I didn't have to tail anyone for research purposes, but I did follow a few cars after *The Dark House* was done, just for fun.

How was that?
It's surprisingly easy. I followed one guy for about 30 miles out the Mass Turnpike. He had no clue I was there. None of my "subjects" did. I always stayed well back, making myself just another car on the road. I even started developing playful theories of my own, like the idea that cars have a herding instinct, or why else would Lexuses invariably end up in neighborhoods with so many other Lexuses?

How's this book different from *The Education of Mrs. Bemis*?
With *The Dark House*, I was determined to write a book that readers could not put down, and I'm happy to say that seems to have been a consistent reaction of reviewers. I had more ambitious goals for *The Education of Mrs. Bemis*. I wanted to try something more literary, more penetrating and emotionally complex. Also, Edward Rollins had a fair amount of me in him, whereas I relied much more on my emotional imagination to create the two women in *The Education of Mrs. Bemis*. To say more, though, is like having to compare your children.