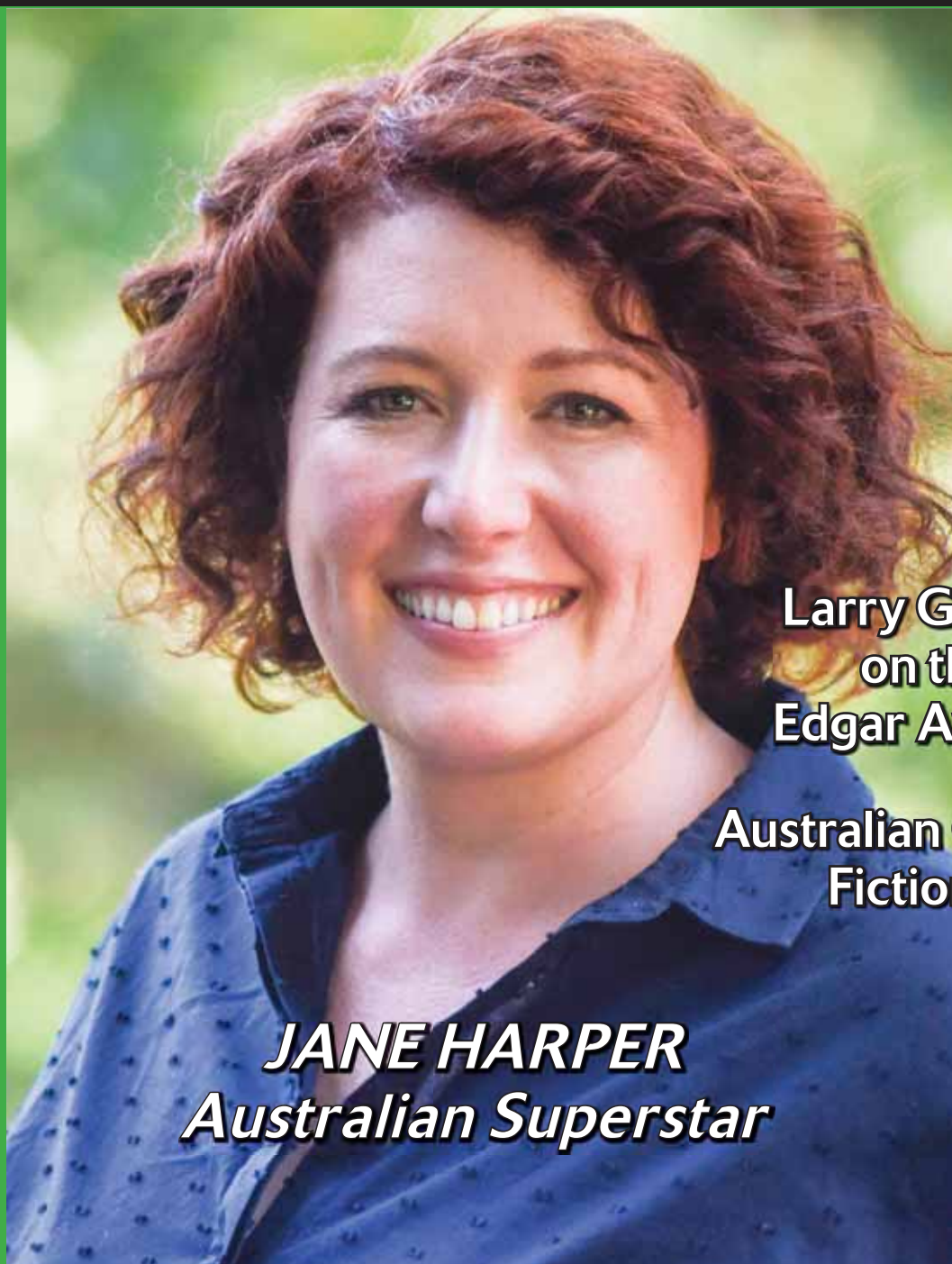


Deadly Pleasures *Mystery Magazine*



**Larry Gandle
on the
Edgar Awards**

**Australian Crime
Fiction**

JANE HARPER
Australian Superstar

JANE HARPER

Australian Superstar

The Peripatetic Jane Harper's **Road to THE DRY.** 39-year-old Jane Harper was born in Manchester, England and moved to Australia with her family when she was eight years old. By the age of fourteen she had obtained Australian citizenship, but soon returned to England as a teenager and later studied English and History at the University of Kent in Canterbury. Upon graduation, Jane began her career in journalism with a reporting gig at the *Darlington & Stockton Times*. She moved on to become a senior news journalist for the *Hull Daily Mail* and worked there for several years before moving back to Australia in 2008. Once again, she worked as a reporter, first for the *Geelong Advertiser* and then for the *Herald Sun* in Melbourne. In 2014 Harper wrote a short story that was published and that became the impetus for writing a novel. On August 14, 2015 she married Peter Strachan and on the same day received news of the six-figure auction held to sell Australian publishing rights to **THE DRY**, her first novel. She remarked, "It was the happiest day of my life." Their marriage has been blessed with a beautiful daughter.

With the publication of **THE DRY**, Jane's life entered a Whirlwind Phase. Her first novel became a worldwide publishing phenomenon, selling well over 1 million copies – which is phenomenal for a first novel -- especially an Australian one. The success of **THE DRY** was followed up by another best-seller **FORCE OF NATURE**, which also featured the protagonist Aaron Falk.

There is no doubt that Jane's success has changed her life in many unexpected ways in the last few years. A former colleague, Victoria MacDonald said, "she didn't have a smartphone for a really long time and I remember thinking

that the time the rest of us were willing away (our time) on Candy Crush were the moments Jane must have been working on her book." That attention to detail has paid off with a ever-growing reputation for in-depth characterization, and fairly and complexly plotted mystery puzzles. Her editor is quoted as saying, "...what I find with Jane is that the clues are there all along and she puts them together in a clever way."

How **THE LOST MAN** came to be.

Jane wanted to set her third novel in the unforgiving Australian outback. "I knew I wanted somewhere hot and far-flung, but with a community of sorts," Harper said of her choice of location. As part of her planning, she flew to Charleville, some 400 miles west of the Queensland capital of Brisbane, and then drove more than 500 miles further to the tiny town of Birdsville, on the edge of the Simpson Desert. The town's claim to fame is hitting the highest-ever temperature in Queensland, of 49.5 degrees Celsius (121.1 degrees Fahrenheit). Now it's the town that served as inspiration for **THE LOST MAN**.

Accompanying Harper on her journey was Neale McShane, the officer in charge of Birdsville Police Station for 10 years, who is now retired. McShane, by himself, once patrolled an area of outback the size of the United Kingdom, with a population of about 250 people.

From her training as a journalist, Harper had determined exactly what she needed from the research trip: "I knew how I wanted the story to play out, but I'd left enough flexibility for the things I didn't have at that stage." She didn't know how two-way radios worked, for instance, or what kitchens looked like at cattle stations. Those were

the known unknowns. But there were still surprises: "If anything," she said, "I'd underestimated how dangerous it can be out there, and how quickly things can go wrong."

Reached on the phone from his home in Charleville, McShane praised Harper's evocation of (very) small-town life. "You can drive 12 hours here without passing another car," McShane said. "She nailed the loneliness of it."

Jane's goal is not to be boxed into a genre, but to write books that people will enjoy reading. But I hope that she focuses most of her time writing crime novels – they are so good. Source: *New York Times* article, "Jane Harper Started as a Business Reporter. Now She Writes Novels," January 31, 2019.

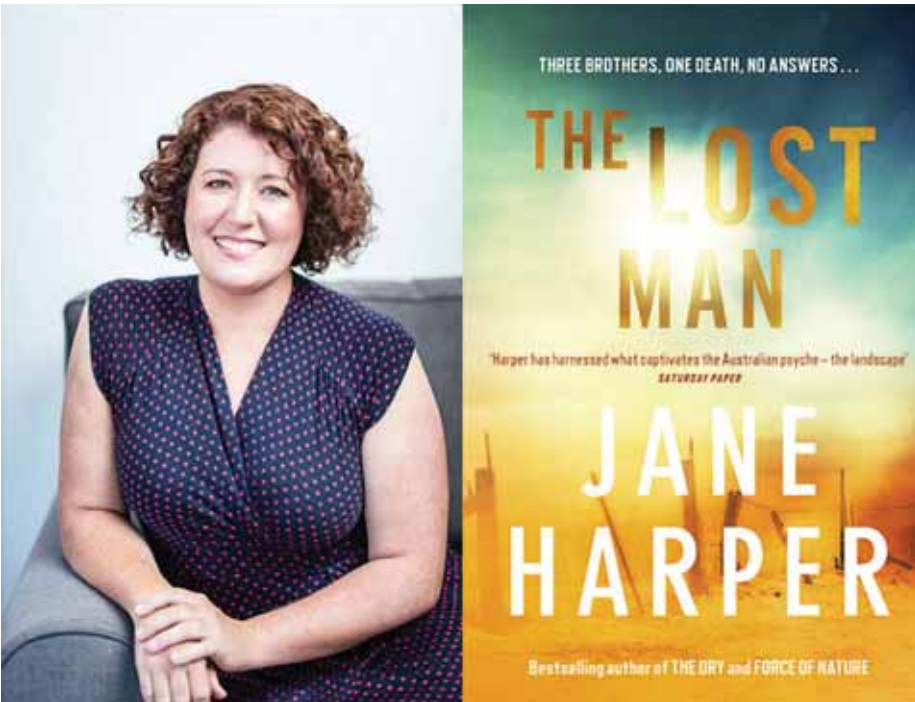
THE LOST MAN by Jane Harper (FlatIron Books, \$27.99). **Rating: A** [Reviewed by Jeff Popple] **THE LOST MAN** is set in Queensland, a ranch's distance off from a town called Balamara, itself "a single street, really," 1,500 kilometers west of Brisbane. (For those of you still using imperial units, 1,500 kilometers is roughly equivalent to one billion miles.) In this remote country, Nathan Bright is isolated further still by an ancient transgression whose nature Harper doesn't immediately disclose. He

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manages his land alone, accepts infrequent visits from his son, and occasionally sees his family. But he's barely alive. "After Kelly died," Harper writes — his dog, cruelly poisoned by an unknown enemy — "he had felt his fingertips starting to slip."

As the novel begins, though, Nathan receives a jolt. His brother Cam dies, and it forces him back to his childhood home, where he sees his mother, a fearfully capable old hired hand named Harry, a couple of backpackers who have stopped for work and, perhaps most crucially, the woman he once loved but who married his brother -- Ilse.

The bizarre circumstances of Cam's death — he dies from the heat, desperately spiraling a gravestone to stay in its meager shade, despite being close to his car — force Nathan into an ad hoc investigation first of his brother, then ultimately of his own unhappiness.

"Human relationships are vast as deserts," Patrick White, perhaps Australia's greatest writer, once wrote. "They demand all daring." Harper's books succeed in part because she conveys how even now, geography can be fate. Heat and empty space in her work defeat modernity, defeat logic, technology and even love, throwing us back upon our irreducible selves. By the time she reveals the (brilliantly awful) back story about

Nathan's banishment from the few human comforts of Balamara — the pub, for example — the reader feels frantic for their restoration.

The final pages of **THE LOST MAN** are somewhat predictable, but Harper is skillful enough, a prickly, smart, effective storyteller, that it doesn't matter. She's often cynical, but always humane. Book by book, she's creating her own vivid and complex account of the outback, and its people who live where people don't live.

Brothers Nathan and Bub Bright meet for the first time in months at the remote fence line separating their cattle ranches in the lonely outback.

Their third brother, Cameron, lies dead at their feet.

In an isolated belt of Australia, their homes a three-hour drive apart, the brothers were one another's nearest neighbors. Cameron was the middle child, the one who ran the family homestead. But something made him head out alone under the unrelenting sun.

Nathan, Bub and Nathan's son return to Cameron's ranch and to those left behind by his passing: his wife, his daughters, and his mother, as well as their long-time employee and two recently hired seasonal workers.

While they grieve Cameron's loss, suspicion starts to take hold, and

Nathan is forced to examine secrets the family would rather leave in the past. Because if someone forced Cameron to his death, the isolation of the outback leaves few suspects.

I consider this Jane Harper's best book to date. Her dry, slow-reveal story is absolutely compelling and I simply didn't want to put it down. It begins with the horrific discovery of Cameron Bright, son, brother, husband, father, being found dead at an old unknown stockman's grave on the family property. Normally he, like everyone in the harsh, remote Queensland outback, has water, food and supplies to last a couple of days in his car. And yet Cam's car -- in perfect working order -- is found too far away for him to (1) walk to it, and (2) access the radio and the life-saving food and water. His death is an inexplicably horrible mystery, and it falls to Cam's brother Nathan to try and figure out what really happened.

Nathan is riding his own demons, and we find out exactly what they are through the book. He lives on an impoverished property next door to the family spread, desperately scrabbling to eke out a living, a virtual outcast. The only person who visits is his teenage son (an excellent character, finely drawn), on leave from school, and the local policeman and health worker. Nathan's not that welcome in town, either, because past events have condemned him in their eyes. Working past all the stigma is not easy, but he has to step up to try and figure out Cam's death.

The Australian outback is like an added character in this story. It is harsh, crucifyingly, relentlessly boiling hot, totally unforgiving, keeping its secrets. Nothing is easy. All kudos to Jane Harper for writing a brilliant story. I'm not going to give anything away, because the secrets of the story are all part of the onion-layer-peel reveal through the book -- and the staggering shocks really do keep coming. Each new fact makes you think you know where the story's going to head -- but it doesn't, it twisted and turned and lurched just where you didn't expect. I loved the way I had no idea about the end. An amazing read.

George Easter's Take: Best Mystery of 2019. Unforgettable. **Rating: A**

Jane Harper's Other Two Novels

THE DRY by Jane Harper (FlatIron Books, \$25.99, January, 2017). **Rating: A** [Reviewed by George Easter] This highly acclaimed Australian debut novel has two mysteries to resolve: 1. What possessed Luke Hadler to murder his wife and son and then commit suicide? And 2. What really happened twenty years ago with the death of Ellie, a teenaged friend who either committed suicide or was murdered.

Aaron Falk returns to his home town of Kiewarra (which is suffering from a terrible drought – hence the title) to pay his respects to his friend Luke Hadler and his surviving parents. His intent is to give his condolences to Luke's parents who were very good to him as a child and be on his way back to Melbourne, where he is a federal fraud investigator. But before you know it he is involved with the very likeable local police detective in trying to find out the reason behind the deaths of the Hadler family members.

Not everyone in town is welcoming because those with long memories still think that Luke or his father had something to do with Ellie's death.

I can't find any fault with this book. Everything works: characterization, set-

ting, plot, pacing, prose – all excellent. I can assure you that it will get a very close look for a Barry Award nomination. You should seek this book out and read it.

FORCE OF NATURE by Jane Harper (Macmillan). **Rating: A-** [Reviewed by Jeff Popple] Jane Harper has followed up her stellar debut novel, **THE DRY**, with another impressive tale that combines good plotting with interesting characters and evocative descriptions of the Australian bushland. Set in rugged ranges to the east of Melbourne it revolves around a corporate wilderness retreat where five female colleagues get lost and only four make it back. Detective Aaron Falk from **THE DRY** returns once again to investigate what happened to Alice, the woman who is missing. Falk's ties to Alice go beyond the case at hand, and her disappearance could be related to the information she was providing him. The story digs deep into the pasts and secrets of the five women, and gradually their roles in the present tragedy are revealed.

It is a good story and Harper uses her alternating timelines of Falk's current investigation and the disastrous unfolding of the trek through the bush to good effect. The tension steadily mounts as the book closes in on the climax, and the bushland becomes a creepy, threatening presence. There are also some good final twists. In the end it is the strength of Harper's characterisations that engage the reader and keeps them keenly reading until the final page.

Overall, **FORCE OF NATURE** is a strong second novel by Harper and sufficiently different from **THE DRY** to indicate that she has a good breadth of story-telling ability.

mystery/crime fiction block and everyone seems to be admiring it. What make and model, you ask? It's the new Australian writers' vehicle – the Aussie, which comes in a variety of models, and is definitely turning heads. Love that new car smell. We first saw it when Jane Harper's **THE DRY** burst onto the scene in 2017. Since then, other eye-catching models have followed, as you will see in the following article. For me (George Easter), the new models that I most want in my garage are the Jane Harper, Dervla McTiernan and Emma Viskic editions, sitting right next to my vintage Aussie models of Barry Maitland, Garry Disher and Michael Robotham. All with plenty of power, the latest bells and whistles and not a lemon in the bunch.

Emma Viskic



Classical Musician Emma Viskic and her road to RESURRECTION BAY. 50-year-old Emma Viskic began writing as a young girl, but got diverted by her musical talent. After formal education, she began a career as a musician (clarinet) and traveled the world playing in orchestras and small chambers (chamber music). She even recalls playing for a wedding party that ended in a brawl. But when two daughters came along and she was spending



New Class of Quality Australian Crime Fiction *By George Easter and Jeff Popple*

There's a shiny new car on the

more time at home, her long-dormant itch to write came to the surface. With a profoundly deaf protagonist in mind (he became Caleb Zelic), she undertook extensive research which included learning Australian sign language (Auslan). Her first novel, **RESURRECTION BAY**, was met with great critical acclaim (see review below) and it was quickly followed by its sequel **AND FIRE CAME DOWN**. The third in the series, **DARKNESS FOR LIGHT**, is due out in June of 2020.

She now lives happily in Melbourne, Australia with her husband, daughters, a scruffy dog Otto and three chickens: Tuffy, Scruffy and Fluffy.

RESURRECTION BAY by Emma Viskic (Pushkin Vertigo, \$18.95).

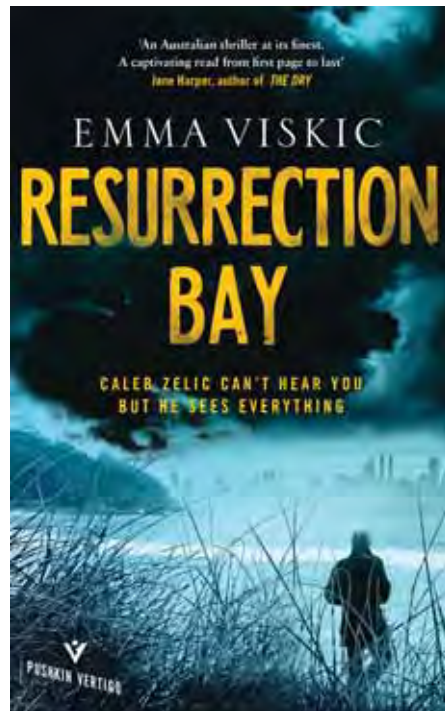
Rating: A [Reviewed by George Easter] Caleb Zelic is a deaf private eye eaking out a living in Melbourne, Australia. He hires a childhood friend, who happens to be a policeman, to do a little snooping on the side. It involves investigating the theft of \$2 million worth of cigarettes. Pretty basic stuff, but certainly not enough to warrant his friend being tortured and killed.

Naturally, Caleb goes in search of the killers, which search takes him back to his home town of Resurrection Bay and to his estranged wife and their very shaky marriage (he deeply loves her but recognizes that he is very difficult to live with.)

Caleb is a very proud man and tries to keep his deafness from those he encounters because he is a pretty good lip reader. But that often results in his missing words, phrases and meaning – and the reader missing those same things because the story is told in the first person.

The way the author weaves in the challenges of the deaf into the plot was one of the most interesting things for me. People are often telling Caleb that they will give him a call and he has to remind them that he can only text with his phone – not listen to their voices. But his deafness also has small silver linings such as his ability to read slight facial gestures, especially when trying to decide if a person is telling the truth.

The story line is compelling and the



writing top notch. This was my second favorite book of 2018 (after **THE RUIN** by Dervla McTiernan). As soon as I finished **RESURRECTION BAY**, I ordered a copy of its sequel, **AND FIRE CAME DOWN** and when it arrived, I consumed it.

It should be noted that this debut thriller won the 2016 Ned Kelly Award for Best First Crime Novel, and was a finalist for the 2018 Gold and Debut Dagger Awards – and has been nominated for a Barry Award.

AND FIRE CAME DOWN by Emma Viskic (Pushkin Vertigo, \$14.95). **Rating: A-** [Reviewed by George Easter] Caleb Zelic used to meet life head-on. Now the deaf P.I. is struggling just to get through the day. His best mate is dead, his estranged wife, Kat, is avoiding him, and nightmares haunt his waking hours.

But when a young woman is killed after pleading for his help in sign language, Caleb is determined to find out who she was. And the trail leads straight to his hometown, Resurrection Bay. The town is on bushfire alert and simmering with racial tensions. As he delves deeper, Caleb uncovers secrets that could threaten his life and any chance of reuniting with Kat. With the help of his sketchy brother and driven by his demons, he pushes on.

The author is especially good at dialogue, plotting and difficult relationships. This follow-up to the marvelous **RESURRECTION BAY**, did not disappoint in any way. Another winner! Can't wait 'til next June when the third in the series comes out – **DARKNESS FOR LIGHT**.

Dervla McTiernan

Irish Lawyer Dervla McTiernan's Road to THE RUIN. After working for twelve years as a lawyer in Ireland, the worldwide financial crisis occurred and she and her family (husband and two children) decided to move to western Australia (Perth), where she works for the Mental Health Commission. An avid fan of mystery fiction from an early age, Dervla decided to try her hand at short fiction and the result was short-listed for the Sisters in Crime Scarlet Stiletto Competition. Spurred by this early recognition, she went on to write her first novel, **THE RUIN**.

THE RUIN by Dervla McTiernan (Penguin \$16.00; Sphere, £13.99). **Rating: A+** [Reviewed by Jeff Pople] This compelling first novel by Australian-based author Dervla McTiernan is my favourite debut of 2018.

Set in the Irish town of Galway, it follows the investigation by Garda detective Cormac Reilly into two crimes



Dervla McTiernan

twenty years apart. In 1993 on his first week in the job, Reilly was called to a horrific scene of death and abuse in a crumbling country house. His investigation at the time was thwarted by his superiors and he was left with a hopeless feeling of letting two young children down. Now in 2013, Reilly has returned to Galway after a successful career in Dublin as a detective. As he tries to navigate the politics of the Galway police station, he finds himself drawn back to that earlier case when a body surfaces in the icy black waters of the River Corrib.

This is a very well written and evocative crime novel that steadily draws you into its dark plot. There are plenty of twists and turns and Reilly is an interesting and credible character. The descriptions of Galway add to the enjoyment and the unfolding of the dual investigations is well done. It is not hard to work out some of the elements of the plot, but the conclusion comes as a good surprise.

This is an impressive debut that will keep you glued to the pages until the end.

George Easter's take on THE RÚIN

I read **THE RÚIN** on Jeff Popple's recommendation inasmuch as I don't remember him ever giving a book an **A+** rating. And boy, am I glad he did. I'm giving it an **A+** also. It is the best mystery I read in 2018. It was one of those books that I just didn't want to put down and I thoroughly enjoyed the entire reading experience. I can't think of a thing to quibble about. Excellence throughout. I especially enjoyed the author's insightful prose.

In the U.S. it was published by Penguin in a trade paperback edition, but don't let that fool you. It is as good if not better than anything being published in hardback.

Like the title of the Alison Krauss song, I've found a "new favorite." The U.S. edition also changed the title from **THE RÚIN**, which, in Irish, means a mystery or a secret to **THE RUIN**, which could refer to the crumbling house in which some early, essential elements of the plot occur. It works either way.

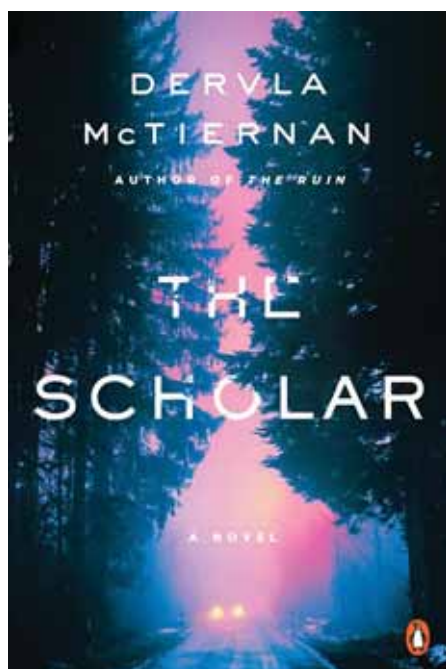
It is a WOW book. Reminiscent of Minette Walters **THE ICE HOUSE** and just as good, if not better. Dervla McTiernan will undoubtedly be compared to another Irish writer, Tana French, and the comparison is valid and well deserved. **Rating: A+**

Dervla McTiernan's Sequel to THE RUIN. THE SCHOLAR by Dervla McTiernan (Harper Collins, \$A32.99). [Review by Jeff Popple] **Rating: A** Set in Galway, Ireland, it was a clever, emotionally-charged and gripping police detective novel that offered plenty of twists and turns and sharp societal insight. It also featured a very engaging lead character in the form of DS Cormac Reilly, who had returned to Galway after a high-flying career in Dublin to be with his partner, Dr. Emma Sweeney, a scientist at the Galway University. Shunned by his colleagues, he is given cold cases to investigate, including one that relates to a recent possible suicide. It is this case and a related earlier one from when Reilly was an young constable, that forms the centrepiece of the book. **THE SCHOLAR** is set shortly after the events of **THE RÚIN** and shows no signs of second book nerves. Late one night outside her laboratory at Galway University, Emma stumbles across the body of a hit-and-run victim. The young woman has severe facial injuries that hamper identification, but she has a security

card which identifies her as Carline Darcy, a gifted student and granddaughter of the founder of the Irish pharmaceutical giant, Darcy Therapeutics. Reilly arrives first on scene and takes charge of the investigation (he's been anxious to get a current case rather than another cold case). The case quickly takes some unexpected twists and Reilly finds himself battling against his own superiors and the might of Darcy Therapeutics, as he tries to find the killer. He also must overcome the mounting evidence that Emma is somehow involved in the death.

This is a first-class detective novel that proves that Dervla McTiernan is no 'one hit wonder.' The story opens well and Dervla's engaging style keeps it ticking over nicely through the first half of the book as the plot is established and the main characters are introduced. There are also a couple of surprising turns to keep it interesting. The pace picks up in the second half and the final chapters are very tense. Dervla is a very clear and lucid writer and she creates characters that the reader comes to care about. She studied and lived in Galway and her descriptions of the town are simple, but evocative, and the plotting contains the sort of surprises and twists that one expects in a good crime novel. Some minor plotting flaws stop it from being as good as **THE RÚIN**, but overall this is a superior crime novel that will have some of Britain's leading crime writers looking nervously over their shoulders.

George Easter's Take on THE SCHOLAR: I agree with everything that Jeff Popple has written about **THE SCHOLAR**. I also noticed that the pacing seemed slow in the beginning although I was never tempted to lay the book down. And indeed it did pick up dramatically in the second half. I think that Dervla McTiernan is a talent that only comes along once in a long period of time. I will read (and I'm sure, enjoy) anything she writes. A fan for life. She has signed up to attend this year's Bouchercon in Dallas and I really am looking forward to meeting her.





Chris Hammer

Other New Australian Writers of Note

Chris Hammer

Journalist Chris Hammer has used his twenty five years as a journalist and as a writer of non-fiction books to create his much-acclaimed first work of fiction, **SCRUBLANDS**.

SCRUBLANDS by Chris Hammer (Allen & Unwin, A\$29.99; in U.S., Atria, \$26.99). [Review by Jeff Popple] **Rating: A-** This powerful thriller is set in a remote country town brought to its knees by serious drought. When troubled journalist Martin Scarsden arrives in the town to report on the anniversary of the shooting of five parishioners by the local priest, he finds that the accepted truth around the incident is wrong and that the motivations behind the massacre are more complex than anyone realised. The more he digs, the more complicated it becomes, and soon more deaths occur.

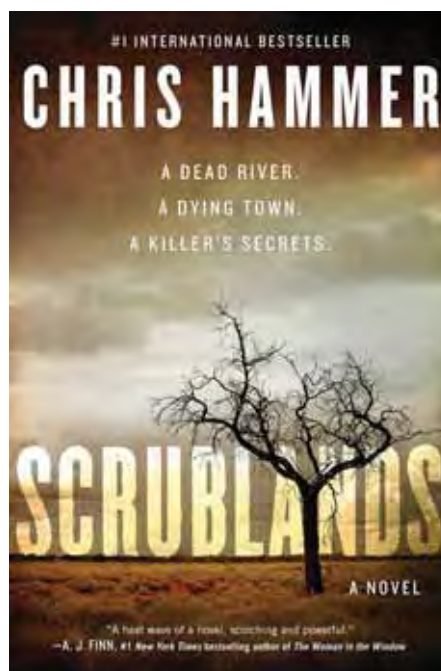
This is a riveting and thought-provoking novel that grabs attention from the opening pages and holds it throughout. Although long, the book largely moves at a good pace and the ending delivers the suspense and surprises associated with the best crime

fiction.

A strength lies in Hammer's fine eye for characterisation and his ability to create convincing, interesting characters that we care about. Scarsden is a classic flawed narrator with a troubled past, but Hammer brings a freshness and complexity to him that is often missing from mystery novels. The other characters are also well developed, especially the owner of the only bookshop and café in Riversend, Mandy Blonde, and the earnest policeman Robbie Haus-Jones.

Hammer, a former journalist, also evokes the sense of drought and decay in the Australian bush and the effect it has on the residents. His descriptions of the town and the countryside are vivid and accurate, and the set piece involving the fighting of bushfire is suspenseful and very real. It will bring back nightmares for those who have been caught in a fire.

SCRUBLANDS will inevitably be compared to Jane Harper's **THE DRY**. While it does not have the tightness of plotting of **THE DRY**, it is in some ways a better book with a broader canvass, a wider range of ideas and an interesting international element. The only complaint is that it is probably



Jock Serong

too long, and that some trimming would have tightened the tension.

Highly recommended.

Jock Serong

Formerly a lawyer, Jock Serong is now a features writer and almost-full-time novelist. He is married with four children and lives on the far southwest coast of Victoria (Port Fairy), Australia.

QUOTA by Jock Serong (Text, A\$22.99). **Rating: B+** [Reviewed by George Easter] As this novel begins, we witness the protagonist, barrister Charlie Jardim, lose his temper with an especially officious judge, calling him "a heartless old prick and a drunk." (my favorite scene of the book) Even if what Charlie says is true, to say so is especially bad form and he finds his career in a downward spiral thereafter. And not just his career. This proves the last straw for his girlfriend as well.

So when Harlan Weir, a charitable colleague and former mentor, asks him to be second chair for a prosecution brief that will take him to the remote coastal town of Dauphin, Charlie reluctantly agrees that he had better get back in the saddle.

The case is a murder. The victim

Matthew Lanegan was involved in the illegal abalone trade and the even more illegal drug trade. Matthew has been found dead of a gun shot wound, with his boat a burnt-out hulk. Suspicion immediately falls on two of his “mates” Skip and Mick. But the evidence is weak. Both Harlan and Charlie think that the witness statement of the victim’s brother Patrick doesn’t ring true. So Charlie is dispatched to Dauphin to see if he can convince the brother to modify his statement (to the truth.). Complicating matters is the fact that the family of one of the accused murderers rules the town financially and has most inhabitants in their pockets.

A trial eventually ensues and the fallibility of legal justice is brought to bear on the situation.

I read this book for two reasons:

1. The author was Australian; and
2. the author will be attending this year’s Bouchercon in Dallas. The novel lags in the middle as Charlie is getting to know the eccentric people and ways of a small Victoria town, but then picks up with the trial. The writing is excellent and Jock Serong has quite a fine, literary style. I can’t say that I cared what happened to any of the characters – I didn’t connect with any of them, but the overall reading experience was a good one. This is a 2015 first novel., which won the 2015 Ned Kelly Award for Best Australian First Crime Novel. The author has written three more stand-alone novels

since then, the latest being **PRESERVATION**.

Christian White

Born and raised on the Mornington Peninsula, Christian had an eclectic range of ‘day jobs’ before he was able to write full-time, including food-cart driver on a golf course and video editor for an adult film company. He now spends his days writing from home in Melbourne, where he lives with his wife, filmmaker Summer DeRoche, and their adopted greyhound, Issy. He has a passion for true crime podcasts, Stephen King and anything to do with Bigfoot. **THE NOWHERE CHILD** is his first book. He’s working on his second.

THE NOWHERE CHILD by Christian White (Minotaur, \$26.99). **Rating:** B+ [Reviewed by George Easter] Two-year-old Sammy Went disappeared from her family home in Mason, Kentucky on April 3, 1990. She was never found, nor have the details of her disappearance ever been discovered.

Fast-forward to present day Melbourne, Australia. A stranger approaches Kimberly Leamy who is a photography teacher. He shows her a picture of the two-year-old Sammy Went and asks if Kim recognizes the girl. She doesn’t. He tells Kim that he believes Kim is Sammy Went.

But Kim has serious doubts that this could be true because she was raised by a very caring woman, a loving social worker, who died of cancer four years

ago. The woman she knew would never have travelled thousands of miles to kidnap a little girl in Missouri.

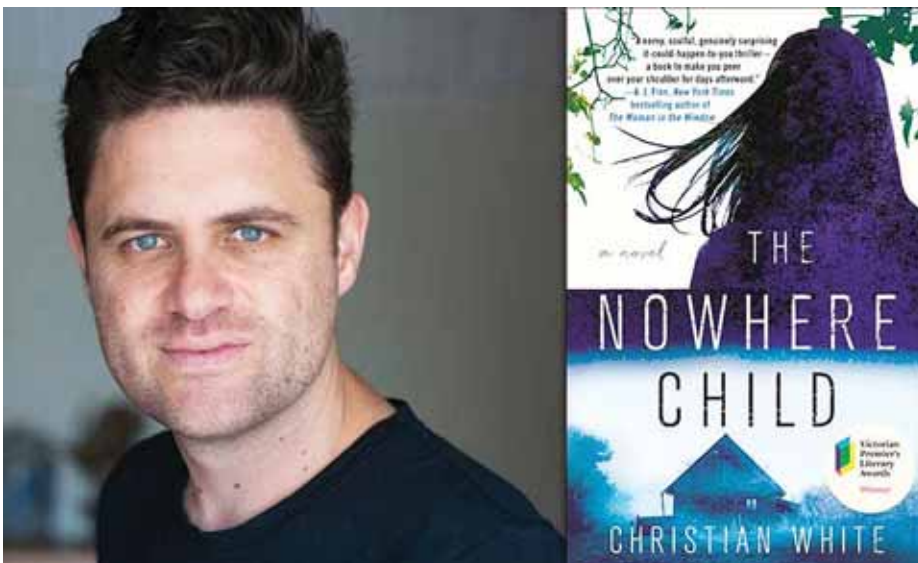
But to settle the question with its surrounding mysteries, Kim travels to Missouri to find out if she is Sammy and if so, what were the circumstances behind her abduction.

The narrative jumps between 1990 and the present with each chapter peeling back another layer of secrets. The story, shrouded in tension and mystery, seemed very realistic to me. The suffering of the Went family was palpable. And the resolution of the mystery was both believable and inventive. So why not a higher grade? Once again, I wasn’t engaged by any of the characters to where I cared about what happened to them. I have to have that connection to really enjoy a good mystery.

Benjamin Stevenson

Benjamin Stevenson is an award-winning stand-up comedian and author. He has sold out shows from the Melbourne International Comedy Festival all the way to the Edinburgh Fringe Festival and has appeared on ABCTV, Channel 10, and The Comedy Channel. Off-stage, Benjamin has worked for publishing houses and literary agencies in Australia and the USA. He currently works with some of Australia’s best-loved authors at Curtis Brown Australia. **GREEN LIGHT** is his first novel.

GREEN LIGHT by Benjamin Stevenson (Penguin, \$32.99). [Reviewed by Jeff Popple] **Rating:** A+ Benjamin Stevenson’s impressive debut is one of the most accomplished crime novels I have read this year. Four years ago, Curtis Wade was convicted of the murder of Eliza Dacey in the small wine making town of Birravale in rural New South Wales. The conviction relied on some circumstantial evidence and a popular TV documentary by Jack Quick has the public convinced that Wade is innocent. The courts agree and following a retrial Wade is acquitted of murder. But Jack kept one vital piece of evidence out of his documentary and when a similar murder occurs he





Benjamin Stevenson

begins to worry that he has allowed a killer to walk free. Determined to get to the truth this time, Jack returns to the unwelcoming town of Birravale to find out what really happened to Eliza.

This well-written and compelling novel grabs attention from the first page. Jack is a flawed, but very engaging character with his own secrets, and the reader is quickly caught up in his quest to find the truth. The town of Birravale and its unfriendly inhabitants are well sketched and the background information about wine making and television production is seamlessly woven into the story and is quite interesting. Importantly the novel is underpinned by a very clever crime story that moves along at a good pace and will keep you guessing all the way to the final surprising twist. Highly recommended.

Jack Heath

As of February 2018, Jack Heath is the fourth best-selling fiction author in Australia. His twenty action-packed novels (mostly for young adults) have been translated into several languages and optioned for film and television.

HUNTER by Jack Heath (Allen & Unwin, \$A29.99); in the U.S., **JUST ONE BITE** (Hanover Square Press, \$26.99, June, 2019). **Rating:** B+ [Reviewed by Jeff Popple]

Increasingly some Australian writers, such as Michael Robotham and Barry Maitland, have chosen to set their stories overseas, particularly in America or Britain. Jack Heath, a popular writer of young adult books here in Australia, had some success overseas last year with his first adult novel, **HANGMAN**. Set in Houston it featured a deeply flawed part-time consultant to the FBI, Timothy Blake, who also had some unfortunate dietary predilections! He has now followed it up with a gripping sequel in the form of **HUNTER**.

Blake's tortured childhood has left him with a raft of psychological issues and anti-social behaviours, and a disturbing taste for human flesh. Despite his flaws, he is a genius at solving puzzles, and crimes, and was the FBI's last resort when they had particularly difficult and horrendous cases. He has now left that behind and works in the body-disposal business for a local Houston crime lord. He is getting by, until he stumbles across a body he was not supposed to find and hides it in his freezer. Forced once again to help the FBI with the search for a serial killer, Blake desperately tries to keep one step ahead of the police and his gangster boss, while trying to catch a killer who is even more dangerous than him. He also has the problem of dealing with the body of one of the killer's victims, which is at home

in his freezer with a bite taken out of it!

This compelling thriller opens at a brisk and grisly pace and keeps the reader engaged as it veers down some dark and disturbing paths. The plotting is clever, and Heath ably steers it through some good twists and turns to a bloody conclusion on the outskirts of Houston. Central to the story is the character of Blake, who is a darker version of TV's **Dexter**, and Heath does a good job in maintaining the reader's interest in his twisted character's fate, without softening his gruesome edges.

Underneath the gore, Heath is a fine writer with a good eye for interesting locations and a deft hand at characterisation. The relationship between Blake and the FBI agent Reese Thistle, is handled delicately and the details of Blake's childhood in foster care adds poignancy to the story. Also adding to the enjoyment are the clever brain teasers at the beginning of each chapter.

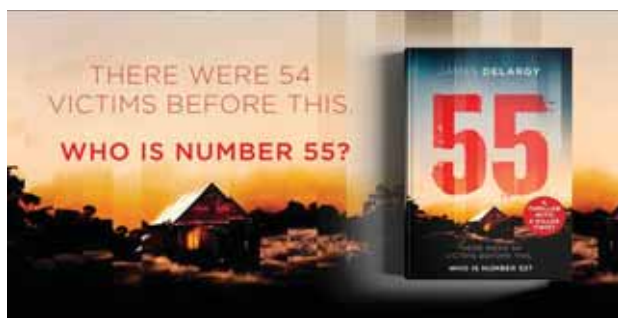
Some aspects of the novel strain credibility, but overall this is a very enjoyable and disturbing thriller by a promising new Australian author (Jack lives in my home town of Canberra). It may not be to everyone's taste, but it is quite enjoyable in an escapist sense.

James DeLargy

James DeLargy was born and raised in Ireland but lived in South Africa, Australia and Scotland, before ending up in semi-rural England where he now lives. He incorporates this diverse knowledge of towns, cities, landscape and culture picked up on his travels into his writing. He would like to complete a round-the-world series of novels (if only for the chance to indulge in more on-the-ground research). James is currently working on another novel set in Western Australia, a follow-up to **55**. Although not an Australian, James DeLargy's current work is set in Australia and hence included in this article.

55 by James DeLargy (Simon & Schuster, \$A29.99). **Rating:** A- [Re-





viewed by Jeff Popple] James Delargy's debut 'outback noir' crime novel revolves around an interesting premise. An injured man, calling himself Heath stumbles into the small, remote Western Australian town of Wilbrook. He is covered in dried blood and bruises and carries no identification. He claims that he was drugged, driven to a cabin in the mountains and tied up in chains by a man called Gabriel. He managed to escape and left his kidnapper lying in the desert after a struggle and a fall down a ravine. He also claims that before he escaped Gabriel told him that he was going to be victim number 55. Police Sergeant Chandler Jenkins, who runs the town's small police station settles the man down and starts the search for the kidnapper. He quickly finds Gabriel, but when he does Gabriel claims that he is the actual victim and that Heath is the serial killer.

The arrival of a senior police officer and his team only complicates things for Chandler, for Inspector Mitchell Andrews used to be a friend of his until they had a falling out years ago. Things quickly spiral out of control, as further events happen, and the police try to work out which one of their suspects is a serial killer and where the victims are buried.

55 is a very clever crime thriller. Delargy does a very good job of maintaining the guessing game as to who the killer is and there is a high level of suspense as the plot twists its way to an unexpected and thudding conclusion. The introduction of a second storyline about Chandler's and Andrews' involvement in the search for a missing young man back in 2002 initially slows the pace, but Delargy ably pulls the two strands together towards the end and skilfully

uses the flashbacks to enhance the characterisations of the two policemen. The ending comes as a bit of a shock and is likely to divide readers as to whether it works or not.

Also adding to the pleasure is Delargy's simple descriptions of the hot, rugged landscape and the

people who inhabit it. He gives a good sense of the Western Australian outback and its people, although he does little for the local tourist industry.

In all, *55* is a very good and unusual crime novel. The pace is a little sluggish in the middle of the book, but it picks up well towards the end. Some suspension of disbelief is also required over how the police handle the case. The ending will divide readers, but it will stick in your mind for some time!

"Old" Vets Still Shine in the Land Down Under

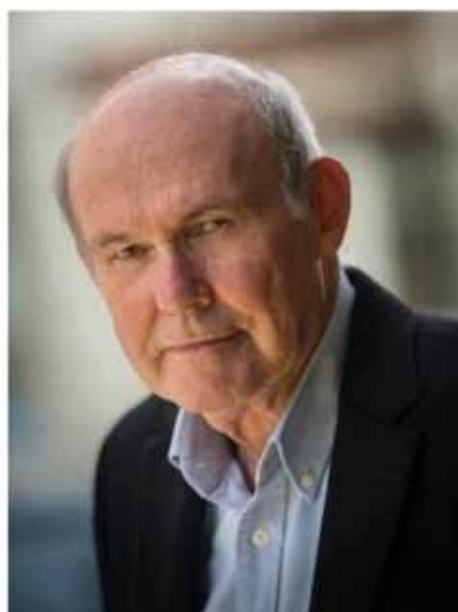
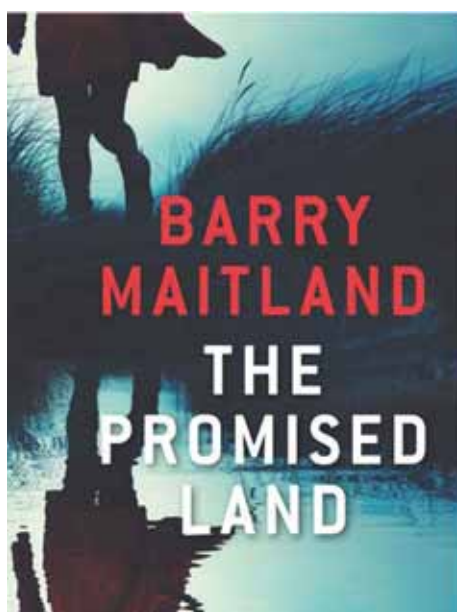
Barry Maitland

THE PROMISED LAND by Barry Maitland (Allen & Unwin, 13th in Brock & Kolla series). **Rating: A** [Review by Jeff Popple] After a nearly six-year absence, Barry Maitland has returned with a new novel about his popular detective

pairing of David Brock and Kathy Kolla.

In the six years since we last saw them, Brock has retired and is aimlessly spending his time at his partner's, Suzanne, place on the Sussex coast, while Kolla has been promoted. She is now a Detective Chief Inspector in charge of her first major case, a series of brutal murders on the Hampstead Heath. The killer has been leaving little in the way of clues, but when a similar murder of a young woman occurs in the house of a failing London publisher on the edge of the Heath, she arrests the owner, John Pettigrew, and charges him with murder. Pettigrew is an unlikely murderer and his lawyer contacts Brock and asks for him to come to London and speak to the publisher. Brock is initially reluctant, but acquiesces and soon finds himself caught up in the case and at loggerheads with his former police colleagues, including Kolla.

This is a very clever and engaging crime novel, which has all the ingredients of a good mystery. The detectives are engaging and flawed, the secondary characters are well fleshed-out and the plot is cleverly constructed and full of interest. There is a stunning mid-book development that will come as a surprise to most readers and Maitland keeps his plot twisting and turning all the way to the final page. Underpinning the book is a nice literary sub-plot about a lost



George Orwell novel that may, or may not, be fake. There are also some wry reflections on writers, particularly crime writers: "I am a crime writer... I know far more about killing people than any real-life murderer."

I think that the plot is one of the best that Maitland has concocted, but a lot of the book's pleasure comes in seeing how Brock and Kolla have aged and changed. Maitland does a good job in conveying Brock's aimlessness and loss of purpose early in the book and Kolla continues to grow as a determined detective with an empty home life and a closet full of lost opportunities.

In all, it is a very enjoyable read.

George Easter's Take: Rating:

A This was anything but what Larry Gandle terms a "boring British police procedural." **THE PROMISED LAND** turns out to be a real page-turner. I was surprised at nearly every turn and there were many turns, with a big one half-way through and another one at the end. Once started, I was compelled to read to the end in the shortest time possible.

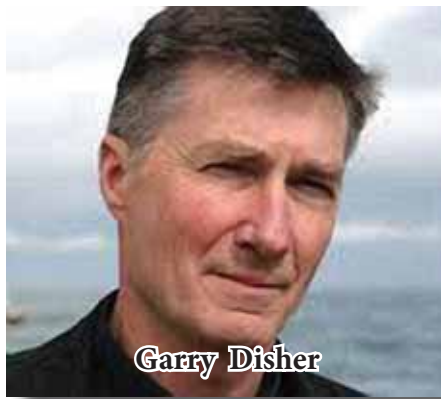
One of my favorite mystery reads of this year. Surprisingly there has been no U.S. publication announced as of yet. You may have to order a copy from Book Depository like I did. The trade paperback was well worth the \$23.00 I paid (Free delivery).

Garry Disher

UNDER THE COLD BRIGHT LIGHTS by Garry Disher (Soho Crime, \$26.95, July, 2019). **Rating: A-** [Reviewed by George Easter] Alan Auhl retired from police work and then was brought back to work cold cases. His young colleagues underestimate his abilities until they work closely with him.

Alan has several cases of interest. One involves a husband whom Alan suspects is cleverly murdering wives and girlfriends. Another is once where the victim's daughters are pushing him to find out who murdered their father. But by far the most pressing one involves a skeleton found under a concrete slab.

The reader also finds out about



Alan's unhappy marriage and his generosity to those staying in his large, ramshackle house – one in particular being a mother/daughter being harassed by their abusive former husband/father.

Garry Disher is a master of understated and clear prose. He is a story teller and gets right down to business telling that story with no frills or elaborate description. My kind of writer. I've been reading his works for years and I've never been disappointed.

Jeff Popple's Take: Rating: A- I did not think that the plotting was as tight as in the Challis novels, but overall it is a very engaging tale of murder and revenge. Well-crafted and leanly written, it maintains a good grip on the reader's attention from beginning to end and I will be interested in seeing where Disher takes the series. Recommended.

KILL SHOT by Garry Disher (Text, \$A29.99, 2018). **Rating: A** [Reviewed by Jeff Popple] Garry Disher's hard-nosed books about the old-style thief known only as Wyatt are one of my favourite series. In the latest book Wyatt is in Sydney just getting by on small one-man jobs. He needs a bigger score to set himself up and when he hears about the corporate crook Jack Tremayne, who has reportedly salted away the proceeds of his dodgy business deals, he decides to head to the seaside city of Newcastle where Tremayne is based. Rumour has it that the businessman is about to skip the country with a million dollars hidden aboard his yacht and Wyatt decides to grab the cash before it heads overseas. Meanwhile Wyatt's actions in Sydney have caught the attention of other crooks and the police and as Wyatt heads north he has some nasty sorts

on his tail.

This is a terrific piece of pared down crime writing. The book moves along at a good pace and Disher effectively sketches convincing characters with just a few words. There are several strands to the story, but Disher juggles them well and the book moves swiftly to some unexpected final showdowns. Deceptively simple, but with some sharp insights and credible characterisations underpinning it, this is one of the most enjoyable crime novels I have read this year.

There is no U.S. publication of this novel as yet.

Michael Robotham

THE OTHER WIFE by Michael Robotham (Sphere, £19.99). **Rating: A** [Reviewed by Jeff Popple] Michael Robotham takes many of the tropes of the modern domestic thriller, which is dominating crime fiction at the moment, and elevates them into something more substantial through his superior writing, clever plotting and credible characters.

His popular creation, London clinical psychologist and occasional police adviser Joe O'Loughlin, is surprised when he rushes to his father's hospital bed after a brutal attack to find a



stranger covered in blood sitting at his father's bedside claiming to be his wife. Is the woman a fantasist, or was his father leading a second life that has put him in deadly danger? As O'Loughlin struggles to come to terms with a series of revelations about his father, who remains in a coma, he also comes to realise that whoever attacked him may still want him dead.

I always enjoy Michael Robotham's books, and I think that this is one of the best of his recent novels. It grabs attention from the opening pages and keeps the reader interested throughout. The characters are very well drawn, and the plot twists are clever and credible. The end result is a gripping and surprising thriller that will keep you entertained and eagerly turning the pages all the way to final twist and the poignant conclusion.

GOOD GIRL, BAD GIRL by Michael Robotham (Scribner, \$26.00, July, 2019). **Rating: A-** [Reviewed by George Easter] When a young girl is found in a secret room in a ramshackle house, the scene of a vicious crime, there are many mysteries that surround her. Who is she? Where are her parents? She doesn't appear in any missing persons files. Here DNA provides no clue as to her identity. The girl, now known as Evie Cormac, will not speak of her past and

exhibits a prickly personality if anyone tries to query her.

Six years later she is residing in a secure children's home and chafing at the bit to get out and start living her life. But there is no way to determine her age or whether she is an adult. A kindly forensic psychologist Cyrus Haven (with his own tragic past history) is coaxed by a colleague to help in Evie's care. In strictest secrecy Cyrus is told that Evie is a "truth teller" – someone who can innately tell if someone is telling the truth – or not.

Meanwhile, there is a local champion figure-skating champion who is found dead on a remote footpath close to her home. Cyrus is called in by the police to help in the investigation and before he knows it Evie is helping out – much against his better judgment. Surprises abound as the investigation progresses.

This remarkable combination of psychological suspense and police procedural is billed as the first in a new series. There are many mysteries about Evie and Cyrus yet to be solved. I'll be first in line to read the sequel.

Thanks to Jeff Popple, **DP's** Australian correspondent, for providing much of the content for this article. He's my go-to-guy for all things Australian. I'm very excited to meet him for the first time at this year's Bouchercon. (I'm sure that he would like to meet any **DP** readers in attendance so please seek him out.) Jeff has a new, entertaining blog called Murder, Mayhem and Long Dogs (<https://murdermayhemandlongdogs.com>), which I visit on a regular basis. Check it out.

I hope that you will try some of the new and some of the classic Aussie models as described herein. Take 'em for a spin. Then come home and fire up the barbie. I'm pretty sure that you will thank Jeff and me for the recommendations. Until then, g'day, mate!



THE BEST TEN AUSTRALIAN CRIME NOVELS OF THE 21ST CENTURY by Jeff Popple

Prior to the early 1980s, Australian crime writing primarily consisted of local authors writing English murder mysteries for the British library market or pulp writers, such as Carter Brown, who wrote tough crime paperbacks set in an imagined America. There were exceptions of course, such as Arthur Upfield; Jon Cleary, who wrote about Sydney detective Scobie Malone in amongst his popular international novels; and Charlotte Jay who won the Edgar for **BEAT NOT THE BONES**.

The arrival in the early 1980s of Peter Corris and his series of books about Sydney private eye Cliff Hardy helped to spark a renaissance of Australian crime writing, and he was joined by a plethora of other authors, such as Marele Day and Garry Disher, keen to set their books in Australian locations. Not all of the books produced were good, but it certainly led to the establishment of a thriving crime fiction industry in Australia. By the end of the 1990s there was a well-established set of good local writers, including the exceptional Peter Temple, and authors, such as Barry Maitland, who called Australia home, but wrote novels set overseas.

Now as we head towards the end of the second decade of the 21st Century, there is a new revival of Australian crime writing with a strong focus on so-called 'outback noir', books set in rural Australia, and a host of good writers exploring international settings.

The following list sets out ten of the



best crime novels written so far this century by Australian authors, or by overseas authors who reside here. The list is in a rough order of preference, although all are very good and well worth reading!

THE BROKEN SHORE

by Peter Temple

South African born Peter Temple is arguably the best crime novelist that Australia has produced. He won multiple awards in Australia and his series of books about disgraced lawyer turned cabinet maker Jack Irish are an evocative depiction of inner Melbourne and terrific stories. He won the CWA Gold Dagger for *The Broken Shore* and it is an outstanding, character driven novel.

THE DRY

by Jane Harper

Harper's debut novel about murder in a small country town devastated by drought is a strong, gripping novel. Its success overseas has also revitalised interest in Australian crime writing and inspired a stream of detective novels set in the harshness of rural Australia. This won the Barry Award for Best First Novel.

THE SUSPECT

by Michael Robotham

This debut novel by Gold Dagger awarding author Michael Robotham, who lives in Sydney but writes terrific international crime novels, is an exciting and surprising thriller about a London psychologist, Joe O' Loughlin, caught up in murder and deception. The start of Robotham's successful series about O'Loughlin and detective Vincent Ruiz, it is still one of the best in the series.

THE RUIN

by Dervla McTiernan

THE RUIN is simply one of the best crime novels of the past few years. Irish-born Dervla now lives in Australia and **THE RUIN** was her sparkling debut novel about Galway detective Cormac Reilly, who finds himself revisiting one of the first crimes he ever investigated and dealing with its consequences twenty years later.

WIN, LOSE OR DRAW

by Peter Corris

Often referred to as 'the Godfather of Australian crime writing', Corris wrote his first Cliff Hardy novel in 1980 and continued writing about the Sydney Private Eye through to 2017. **WIN, LOSE OR DRAW** was the 52nd and final Hardy novel and is an easy flowing tale, with good characters, well described locations, an interesting plot and a nice sense of social justice. A fitting finale for an icon of Australian crime writing.

BITTER WASH ROAD

by Garry Disher

Garry Disher emerged in the early 1990s in the wake of Corris, with a hardboiled series of books about an amoral professional thief known only as Wyatt. He then branched out into a good police series about semi-rural detective Hal Challis. **BITTER WASH ROAD** is a stand-alone police novel set in outback South Australia and is probably the best and most complex of his books. Strong characters, vivid descriptions and a clever plot make it a stand-out.

RAIN DOGS

by Adrian McKinty

Irish writer Adrian McKinty was living in Australia when he wrote his successful series about Northern Ireland Detective Sean Duffy. Set in the 1980s during the height of the Troubles, the Duffy books are tough, evocative crime novels with well-crafted plots and a great sense of place and time. **RAIN DOGS** is my favourite of the series, but all are excellent.

THE PROMISED LAND

by Barry Maitland

Maitland is a British author who now calls Australia home. He has written Australian-based novels, but he is best known for series about London detectives Brock and Kolla. *The Promised Land* is the latest novel in the series and is probably one of his best. The story revolves around a lost George Orwell manuscript and contains some terrific twists.

GREEN LIGHT

by Benjamin Stevenson

Benjamin Stevenson's **GREEN LIGHT** probably got a little lost in the fanfare around the books by Jane Harper and Dervla McTiernan, but this 2018 novel is well paced and has some great final twists. It also takes a hard look at the recent enthusiasm for true crime documentaries.

HADES

by Candice Fox

Fox is now enjoying commercial success by co-writing crime novels with James Patterson. Her early novels about flawed and psychologically damaged Sydney detective Eden Archer, however, are much superior and well worth checking out. **HADES** was her award-winning debut.

A few books that just missed out are Chris Hammer's epic crime novel about a massacre in a small town, **SCRUBLANDS**; Michael Brissenden's political thriller, **THE LIST**; Sarah Bailey's **THE DARK LAKE**; Kel Robertson's **SMOKE AND MIRRORS** and James Delargy's forthcoming serial killer thriller set in a remote Western Australian town, **55**. Also worth considering, are Jon Cleary's books about Sydney detective Scobie Malone. Cleary returned to Australia in the 1970s and resumed his series about Malone in 1987. The last one appeared in 2004, but the best probably date from last century, especially **THE HIGH COMMISSIONER** (1966).



*Reviewed to Death***SAVE ME FROM DANGEROUS MEN****by S. A. Lelchuk****(Flatiron, \$27.99)****George Easter**

When Nikki Griffin was a young girl her parents were killed during a home invasion/burglary. She and her younger brother are cast to the winds and flounder. Through a stroke of good fortune, she lands with a stable couple who nurture her and she manages to get a college degree. But she is damaged and determined to be stronger, faster, more skilled and more focused than any male threat she may encounter. And she also has her own private crusade to champion the well-being of abused women.

With a small inheritance from her parents she buys a building and through serendipitous evolution turns it into a bookstore. But from an upstairs room she also runs a small private investigations business. The CEO of a high tech company hires her (with a substantial fee) to follow an employee suspected of leaking corporate secrets. Her investigation reveals that all is not as it seems at first.

Three things made this an outstanding debut for me. First and foremost is the totally captivating character of Nikki Griffin. In one of the opening scenes she does a Lisbeth Salander number on a sexual predator. But that is only one side of this multifaceted and deeply caring person. There is a lot to like as we find out more and more about her. The second is that the story is a well-told, realistic and suspenseful thriller – with lots of action. And the third is the fluid writing style of the author. No first-time clunkiness – just pure, unobstructed

storytelling.

A definite candidate for Barry Award consideration.

It should be noted that the author seems to be shrouded in some secrecy. I suspect that it is part of a marketing strategy. But the advance reading copy that I read identified the author as “Saul Lelchuk” on the title page so I can’t rate the publisher’s attempt at mystery and secrecy very highly -- if that was the purpose behind just using the author’s initials rather than full name. **Rating: A**

Kristopher Zgorski

As a character, Nikki Griffin is one I certainly support, but the plot of this novel was just so over the top in terms of action and lack of development that I really didn’t end up enjoying this read. It seemed that the author had an agenda – and a worthy one at that – but to me this resulted in nothing more than a Dexter Morgan type role for Nikki. Using the bookstore setting as a backdrop was interesting and the references to other literature was entertaining, especially when the cinematic sequences became too much and I longed to toss the book aside. Not sure I would give this author another try, but if the synopsis was intriguing enough, Nikki Griffin might lure me back in. **Rating: C**

Donus Roberts

By creating the character Nikki Griffin, S. A. Lelchuk will inevitably trigger comparisons to Stieg Larsson’s

Lisbeth Salander and probably invigorate renewed interest in Larsson’s **THE GIRL IN THE DRAGON TATTOO** trilogy. It certainly cannot hurt sales to have a crime novel character compared to Lisbeth Salander.

However, for me at least, Nikki Griffin is unique. She is a one-woman show in the novel. We know that immediately when she rides her red Aprilia motorcycle up to an Oakland, California sports bar, orders a Heineken, and intrudes into a pool game of men.

Nikki has a mind of steel but a heart of gold. Her occupation is book store owner. That captured my mind immediately, as I am a book store owner, but I have no desire to take up advanced martial arts at my age. Searching for books for patrons versus searching for killers is a unique contrast. I felt that there should have been more book store scenes to build Nikki’s character. However, I will say that the S. A. Lelchuk did an excellent job of writing about Nikki’s interior mind in between fight scenes that were riveting and nail-biting.

This novel is a full scale thriller, but it has a relatively conventional crime plot line. I was enthralled with the book from beginning to end, which is high praise from a guy who ordinarily favors character over plot. I look forward to where the author takes Nikki in future novels. I also look forward to finding out more about the author, S. A. Lelchuk **Rating: A**

Maggie Mason

I liked this book. When George asked me to read it, I was hesitant as I’ve been reading mainly cozies. I didn’t have trouble getting into the book, probably due to the bookstore. I liked Nikki, and was amazed at her strength. She took chances, but mostly she acted in a manner she knew was not going to put her in more danger than she could handle. The one time she acted on impulse her reasons were well defined and it worked out well due to her abilities. I’d read another in the series. **Rating: B+**

Ted Hertel**SAVE ME FROM DANGEROUS**



MEN is a solid debut novel, the first in a projected series, from S. A. Lelchuk. Bookseller by day, kick-ass private investigator/vengeance seeker by night, Nikki Griffin is a complex, damaged character. She walks the line between sympathetic friend and psychopath. She is tough, with an intriguing backstory that would make me curious to read more about her. Further, as a bookseller, Nikki spouts a number of literary references that add some pleasure to the novel.

I just wish that Nikki had found herself in a better plot. The book is marred to some extent with the clichés that pop up in private investigator novels. The P. I. who rejects the client's money but still must carry on in order to achieve justice. The witness who has vital information but refuses to disclose it until late at night in a secluded spot and the investigator who fails to protect her prior to that clandestine meeting . . . the reader knows all too well what going to happen to that witness long before the detective does. Then there's the standard "I'm going to put myself into incredible danger in spite of the authorities standing by" mentality.

On the other hand, the action is fast and furious, making it easy to overlook those relatively minor quibbles. The opening scene at the pool table will immediately capture your attention and

you'll want to stick around. Lelchuk knows how to tell an intriguing story, even if there are some gaps and the finale may not be totally believable. Just don't think too much about it and enjoy the ride. **Rating: B+**

Larry Gandle

For a debut novel it is okay. There are things both good and bad. But first of all, who wrote this book? The author, using initials and telling us virtually nothing about himself/herself -- no photo and no real bio makes me suspect this might be an alias. I (*Larry, check out the photo above -- found with a simple google search -- Editor's comment.*)

What the author did well -- Nikki is an interesting protagonist (definitely suspend reality as the concept of her going around beating up men [Neanderthals from central casting] is beyond stereotypical. The chapters are short (like James Patterson) and there are intermittent episodes of suspense and action which will keep the readers engaged.

The author is obviously influenced by Lee Child as in one episode the author describes a Reacher type moment when Nikki confronts an abuser named Luis, "We watched each other. Preparing. Then three things happened..." The whole scene reeks of Lee Child and it

is well done. However, soon after the author describes a confrontation scene with a very long and confusing exposition with the villain holding a gun on the heroine while they have a conversation describing all. My least favorite scene in any mystery.

So the book is a mixed bag -- I probably would not have finished it as the plot was getting increasingly unrealistic, but it was a Reviewed to Death title.

Rating: C+

Michael Dillman

I thought **SAVE ME FROM DANGEROUS MEN** was a very good book. Really enjoyed the presentation of the history of the characters leading up to why they are the way they are and why they are doing what they are doing.

I was somewhat disappointed in the ending of the book -- with the reveal of the motive of the characters she is trying to stop. There was also a little problem with believing some of the fight scenes between Nikki and guys much bigger than her.

The writing and the fast-moving story make up for the shortcomings of the motive. **Rating: B+**

Next Reviewed to Death



In Splendid Company

by George H. Madison

Thought I'd dispel the widespread rumor that I am a troglodyte who rejects all things contemporary. Therefore it is my pleasure to enthusiastically praise four contemporary authors whose work provides me with joy; although I admit that *DP* has paid them scant attention. I speak of Dave Zeltserman, Haughton Murphy, M.L. Longworth and Andrew Culver.

Dave Zeltserman

Dave Zeltserman is usually a denizen of the dark side of town; not a neighborhood I normally frequent. His noir, crime and horror novels have been well received by the critics. However, it is his creation of Julius Katz and Archie that has enthralled me.

Most pretenders to the Nero Wolfe pastiche throne fall well short of the standards that I require; namely wit, decent plotting and great characterization. Wolfe is anything but boring, yet some writers make him so; or worse yet, create a clown-like parody. Dave manages to capture Wolfe's brilliance and eccentricities without being an impersonator. His homage is original, yet comfortably familiar. It's imagination trumping imitation.

I've become addicted to the exploits of his entertaining creation, Julius Katz, Boston's most celebrated and highest paid investigator and Archie, his assistant. Katz is a wealthy and sophisticated forty-two year old P.I. living in a three level Beacon Hill town house. His luxurious lifestyle includes a 5,000 bottle rare wine cellar (instead of an orchid greenhouse), fine food, gambling and the lovely twenty-nine year old Lily Rosten. He is lazy

by nature; quite comfortable in his civilized routines, and is only prompted to accept a new case when in dire financial straits (e.g. – when in pursuit of a rarely seen \$25,000 case of wine) and relentlessly badgered by Archie.

Dave's creation of Archie is most unorthodox, and at first squint may not be appealing, but it works for me. Archie is a 2 ½ inch, 1.2 oz. computer chip that is worn as a tie tack, one that speaks to Julius through a wireless receiver that is worn in his ear like a hearing aid. Archie possesses an advanced neuron network with a seemingly endless knowledge base. Their banter is clever, but when Archie becomes overbearing, Katz disconnects him. He becomes unplugged, unheard and unheeded. It's an act that infuriates the little guy.

Dave's series has totally captivated me. The mysteries are good, the locus is refined and the characters are great. Finding his adventures; however, is a daunting task. Not easily dissuaded, I managed to track down all existent short stories published in *Ellery Queen Mystery Magazine*. Both **THE JULIUS KATZ COLLECTION** (2014), a selection of short stories, and Dave's recently published first full length mystery, **JULIUS KATZ AND ARCHIE** are available in paperback original form. You will be richly rewarded for your efforts to locate them. As a card carrying member of the Wolfe Pack, I'm not easy to please. Julius Katz may be placed harmoniously among your Nero Wolfe collection without rancor or mutiny.

Haughton Murphy

From Boston's tony Beacon Hill, I transition to New York City's venerable

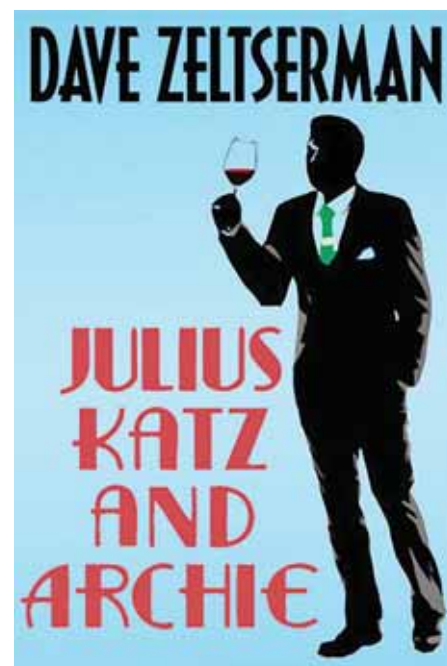
Upper Eastside where two charming and urbane septuagenarians reside in an unpretentious, timeless style. They are New Yorkers both by instinct and inclination; viewing Manhattan as a nation rather than a city borough.

Reuben Frost is a wealthy, retired senior partner in a very prominent Wall Street law firm, and his wife, Cynthia, was once a renowned ballerina. In retirement, they are both active in a NYC ballet foundation. He continues to be involved, emeritus, in his law firm and lunches at the all-male Gotham Club in midtown. She continues her ballet work-out regimen. After a pre-prandial martini, they dine out at NYC's finest restaurants. Occasionally, these amiable folks stumble upon a murder that offends their sensibilities, one that must be solved to preserve their peace of mind.

The creator of this delightful eight book series is Haughton Murphy whose real life identity is James Duffy (born circa 1935). Duffy is a Reuben Frost doppelganger, a graduate of Princeton and Harvard Law School; both cum laude. He is a successful, retired, Wall Street attorney who also served on Mayor Koch's Advisory Commission for Cultural Affairs. His Honor even makes a few less than flattering appearances in the series.

The plots are fair play mysteries. NYC is an actor, lovingly portrayed.

Duffy/Murphy accurately reflects the City I knew decades ago in the 1980s and



'90s. He is a resident in this elite world and the authenticity is evident throughout. One series entry takes place in Venice, Italy where both the Duffys and the Frosts frequently vacationed. They have the simplest taste; they only like the very best, and they usually get it.

In many ways, the Frosts are a geriatric Nick and Nora Charles, albeit with a less dissolute lifestyle. They are stately survivors from the age of Nero Wolfe and Cole Porter. The writing is elegant, witty and engaging. Gentle and genteel, the books are absent violence or mayhem, sex or profanity. A *Booklist* review opined that "Populists best avoid Reuben Frost and his world, but anyone with a taste for caviar will feel at home".

A seven book series was written from 1986 to 1997. What makes Murphy a quasi-contemporary writer is that in 2016, Otto Penzler resurrected the series after a sixteen year hiatus. **MURDER. COM** is the eighth and concluding entry. Alas, Otto's staff believe it to be the finale.

M. L. Longworth

Style travels first class from Murphy's classic NYC to M.L. Longworth's Aix de Provence where an attractive ensemble are our crime solvers. Some are involved by vocation and others by avocation. Longworth's eight book series is also a paean for the enjoyment of superior food and wine, an elite cigar club and the camaraderie of civilized cohorts, whose spellbinding company will have you turning pages well into the middle of the night. The novels are cozy without inducing sleep.

Longworth was born in Canada in 1953 and has lived in France since 1997. In addition to penning her charming series, she is a professor of writing at the NYU campus in Paris. Her joy for life in Aix is evident on every page of her books, and it is contagious. Not myopic, she also manages to skillfully convey the stress between tradition and the ever increasing demands of "progress" without resorting to pedantry or being judgmental.

Each entry features a slow and gentle rhythm. Everyday life in Aix is beautifully rendered by Longworth, who clearly appreciates its existence in her life. The environment she creates is so enchanting that the plot almost becomes superfluous.



The protagonists are Magistrate Antoine Verlaque and his girlfriend, soon to be wife, Marie Bonnett, who is a law professor engaged in writing a biography of Simone de Beauvoir. The Commissioner of Police, who accompanies the Magistrate in French criminal investigations, is Bruno Paulik, who along with his lovely winemaking wife, Helene, comprise a harmonious quartet of friendly sleuths. Their friends and companions only enhance the atmosphere. Even the villains aren't particularly villainous.

The series began impressively in 2011 with the release of **DEATH AT THE CHATEAU BREMONT**. Her most recent – **THE SECRETS OF THE BASTIDE BLANCHE** (April 2018) – was less than enthusiastically reviewed by Norma Dancis in *DP* #84. Although I share her reservations, I hasten to insist that **BLANCHE** is an anomaly. It suffers from an awkward and convoluted plot device and a departure from her distinctive book cover art. I enjoyed it, but the initial seven entries are superb and superior.

Andrew Culver

From the seductive sophistication of Verlaque – Bonnett's Aix de Provence wine and food culture, I turn 180° and fully embrace four of the five Andrew Culver Tiki mysteries, featuring Arisotle McCredie and Anna. The cover art is attractive and Culver's youthful, unabashed enthusiasm for his subject

speaks to the eternally twenty-year-old boy in me.

In the late 1950s, Tiki bars were the rage. As a college undergrad, NYC was my home and Trader Vic's was the mecca. The fad quickly morphed every Chinese restaurant into Chinese-Polynesian. Their Bali Hai ambience captivated America. Drinking was an important component and every libation featured multiple, mysterious ingredients. Sadly, however, they were all usually poured from the same industrial bottle. Cocktails were served in mugs and jugs, pineapples and coconuts; and they were invariably decorated with a plastic umbrella.

Culver's active imagination celebrates the essence of tiki in book form. He is a kitschy product of California; possessing both a B.A. and M.A. and is probably in his late 20's. The mysteries involve government directed mind control conspiracies and advanced paranoia. Nonetheless, each page makes reverential reference to tiki drinks while providing names and ingredients (absent actual recipe measurements). Tiki music, art and quirky characters abound.

Plots are secondary, if not optional. They drift and are abruptly concluded in the final fifteen pages or so. It's difficult to be precise because the pages are not numbered. It's all about the tiki drinking life and likeable refugees from a Jimmy Buffet song-fest.

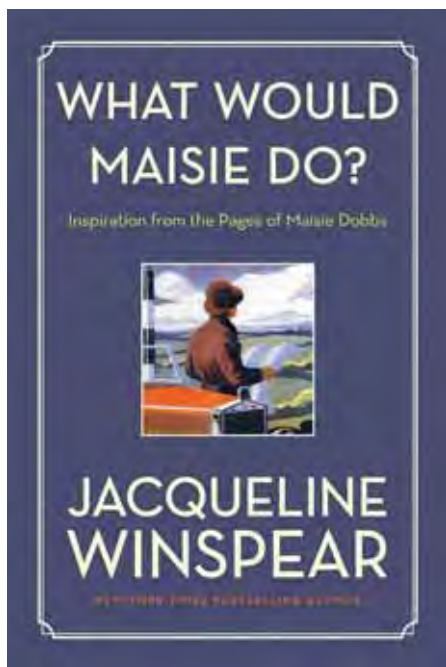
One caveat: avoid book five. All the positive energy vanishes, and the characters become disturbingly vulgar instead of spacey fun. Maybe Culver was a victim of the aforementioned governmental mind control experiments. McCredie is not for every taste and is best read with a pina colada in hand and a Martin Denny CD playing in the background.

There you have it; my reluctant foray into the 21st century world of mystery books. I do not choose to dwell in a world of serial killers and child molesters, and the universe of the chocolate chip cookie bake-off winner bores me. These are clearly a drinking man's choice filled with martinis, select wines, cognac and the improbable tiki concoction. All are to be enjoyed in congenial company. I'll drink to that!

Editor's Message



What Would Maisie Do? Harper has come out with a beautifully illustrated companion book to Jacqueline Winspear's popular Maisie Dobbs series called **WHAT WOULD MAISIE DO?** (Harper Perennial, \$17.99). The author wrote this in response to correspondence from her many fans. It's purpose is to share Maisie's wisdom and inspiration to all of us who may be in need of it. One fan described Maisie as "the big sister I never had – someone there to support and advise me."



Latest Title Trend. We've gone through endless "daughter" and "girl" books, and the beat still goes on. Now get set for an onslaught of "widow" novels. **THE LAST WIDOW** by Karin Slaughter, **WIDOW'S REVENGE** by Lynda La Plante, **THE WIDOW** by Fiona Barton, **BLACK WIDOW** by Christopher Brookmyre, Sidney Sheldon's **THE SILENT WIDOW** by Tilly Bagshawe, **THE WIDOW MAKER** by Clive Cussler & Justin Scott, **THE WIDOWS** by Jess Montgomery, **THE BLACK WIDOW** by Daniel Silva, **THE WID-**

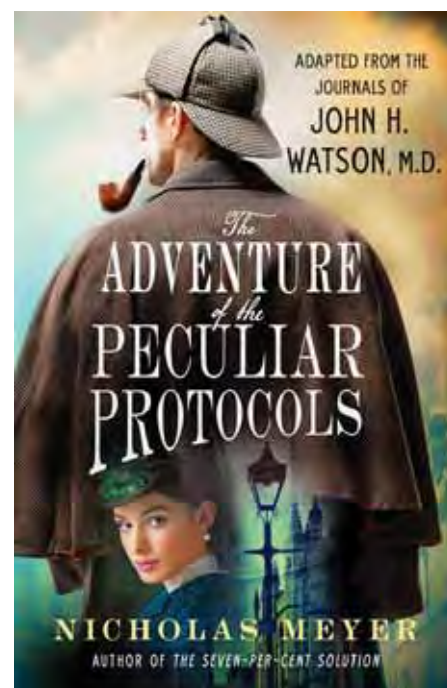
OWS OF MALABAR HILL by Sujata Massey, **AUNT DIMITY AND THE WIDOW'S CURSE** by Nancy Atherton, **WIDOW'S WREATH** by Cynthia Riggs, **THE WIDOW'S HOUSE** by Carol Goodman, **WIDOW-MAKER** by Paul Doiron, **WIDOWS-IN-LAW** by Michele W. Miller, **THE WIDOW'S STRIKE** by Brad Taylor. Whew! Buckle Up!

Most Prolific Mystery Writer Besides James Patterson? I happened to take notice of Stuart Woods' output over the past several years – in particular as regards his Stone Barrington series (which I have never read). He is churning them out at a feverish pace – 4 in 2014, 4 in 2015, 4 in 2016, 4 in 2017, 5 in 2018 and now 3 so far in 2019 = 24 novels in six years! Quite a bit more than the usual one book per year output that most authors manage. Then add 4 more that were produced in collaboration with Parnell Hall during that same time period. I read and loved Stuart Woods first book **CHIEFS**, and read a few more after that, but lost interest because the writing wasn't up to the quality of the first novel (the Patricia Cornwell syndrome). But there must be a number of readers out there that are his fans or Putnam wouldn't keep putting them out there. Right? Any comments?

Where Are They Now? Dana Stabenow took a break from her popular Kate Shugak series a few years ago (I suspect that St. Martin's Minotaur didn't renew her contract in 2013.). Since then she has written four non-mystery novels. And in 2017 a British publisher Head of Zeus began publishing new Kate Shugak novels starting with the 21st in the series **LESS THAN TREASON**. In November, 2019, number 22, **NO FIXED LINE**, will come out from the same publisher. Die-hard fans and/or completist collectors can find both on

amazon.com or bookdepository.com. I find it interesting (puzzling?) that some enterprising U.S. publisher didn't take up the torch. I mean, wouldn't there be more interest in Alaska mysteries (especially done by a veteran, skilled writer) in the States than in the U.K.? Perhaps Dana should try her hand at domestic suspense?

Another writer we haven't heard from in a much longer time is Nicholas Meyer. He burst onto the mystery fiction scene with his highly influential **THE SEVEN-PER-CENT SOLUTION** in 1974. It was the Sherlockian pastiche in which Sherlock confronts his cocaine addiction with the help of Sigmund Freud and was a novel that made a path for the many pastiches that followed. Two more "Memoirs of John H. Watson" followed with **THE WEST END HORROR** in 1976 and then nineteen years later **THE CANARY TRAINER** in 1995. Now twenty four years after the last comes the fourth in the series **THE ADVENTURE OF THE PECULIAR PROTOCOLS** which will be published by Minotaur in October, 2019. I'm about ½ way through it and quite enjoying it. Will review it in a future *DP*. Most of Meyer's career has been spent in Hollywood writing and directing films such as *Time After Time* and *Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan*.





Hamilton

Coleman

Gardiner

Three Barry-Award Winners Sign Mega-Deal. Blackstone Publishing has signed Steve Hamilton, Reed Farrel Coleman and Meg Gardiner to a “career best deal in seven figures.” I’m not sure if the seven figures applies to them individually or collectively, but it still amounts to a financial step up for them all. These three authors were comfortably situated with the industry giant Penguin Random House. So it would have to be quite a sweet enticement for them to go to the relatively unknown Blackstone Publishing, which was founded in 2015 and to date has only published a handful of mysteries – and those by relatively unknown authors. I read one recently (and reviewed it in *DP* 85), **THE TRUTH ITSELF** by James Rayburn a.k.a. Roger Smith. It was an excellent thriller worthy of wider readership. I am also impressed by Blackstone’s quality production of books. The spines are really solid so they don’t get bent at the top and bottom by shipping or mishandling. It also should be noted that Blackstone in the largest independent producer of audio books in the U.S. with over 14,000 titles in their catalog. It is from that financially solid base that Blackstone is entering big-time book publishing with this splash.

Steve Hamilton’s first two novels for Blackstone will be the third Nick Mason and the twelfth Alex McKnight. It is

unknown at this time what will be the nature of Reed Farrel Coleman’s first novel for Blackstone, but Meg Gardiner’s will be the third in her UNSUB series, which is being developed into a tv series by CBS.

The Horowitz-Francis Swap.

Sounds like a Robert Ludlum thriller. Anthony Horowitz was originally scheduled to be the International Guest of Honor at this year’s Bouchercon in Dallas. However, a conflict in his schedule cropped up that could not be resolved in favor of Bouchercon and he had to withdraw from that honor. But the clever folks in Dallas (with the help of Mystery Mike Bursaw) arranged for a worthy replacement – Felix Francis, the

son of Dick Francis, who has continued his father’s work in admirable fashion. I’m quite excited about this choice. It was Dick Francis who lit my mystery fiction fire as a fan. It’s hard to tell how things would have worked out if I had never read a Dick Francis mystery, but it is possible that if I hadn’t, there never would have been a *Deadly Pleasures Mystery Magazine*. Regrettably I didn’t have the chance to meet Dick Francis in person and have long looked forward to an opportunity to encounter Felix. When I shake his hand I will express to him my gratitude for his heritage. Of all the children of famous mystery writers following in their parent’s footsteps, I think Felix does the best job of creating exciting and puzzling fiction. Felix’s next book **GUILTY NOT GUILTY** will come out in early October, just in time for Bouchercon. I look forward to reading it because I find the plot synopsis intriguing: Bill Russell is acting as a volunteer steward at Warwick races when he confronts his worst nightmare -- the violent death of his much-loved wife. But worse is to come when he is accused of killing her and hounded mercilessly by the media. His life begins to unravel completely as he loses his job and is in danger of losing his home as well. Even his best friends turn against him, believing him guilty of the heinous crime in spite of the lack of compelling evidence. Bill sets out to clear his name but finds that proving one’s innocence is not easy -- one has to find the true culprit, and Bill believes he knows who it is. But can he prove it before he becomes another victim of the murderer?

New British Crime Fiction Convention. Capital Crime, a London-set crime fiction convention kicks off this September with a dynamite line-up of authors, including David Baldacci, Robert Harris, John Connolly, Ann Cleeves, Martina Cole, Ian Rankin, Don Winslow, Kate Atkinson, Mark Billingham, Peter James, Kate Moss, Denise Mina, Abir Mukherjee, Stella Rimington, Charles Cumming, Tom Bradby, Kate Rhodes, Sarah Hilary and Adam Hamdy. Quite a stellar group. See details on our convention page herein.



Felix and Dick Francis

www.capitalcrime.org

Out of Sight Out of Mind. Two authors whose deaths have recently reported hadn't published anything for years so I was surprised when I read their obituaries. I guess that if I had even given it a thought I would have assumed that they had died some time ago. Herman Wouk, who lived to be 103-years-old, was not a crime writer per se, but he penned one of the finest courtroom dramas ever written in **THE CAINE MUTINY** (1951), and he certainly deserves mention in these pages. I can still remember my thoughts as I read the book many decades ago: "This guy can really write!" The other is a whipper-snapper by comparison. Anthony Price lived to be 91-years-old. He wrote an erudite, nineteen-volume spy series featuring Dr. David Audley. His last novel was published in 1989. Anthony received a CWA Silver Dagger (**THE LABYRINTH MAKERS**), a CWA Gold Dagger (**OTHER PATHS OF GLORY**), and in 1996 he was awarded the CWA Cartier Diamond Dagger for lifetime achievement.

Some Award Winners. The Agatha Awards were announced at this year's Malice Domestic Convention that



Norma Dancis

celebrates traditional and cozy mystery fiction. This year's winners are: Best Contemporary Novel: **MARDI GRAS MURDER** by Ellen Byron (Crooked Lane Books). Best Historical Novel: **THE WIDOWS OF MALABAR HILL** by Sujata Massey (Soho Crime) Best First Novel – Tie: **A LADY'S GUIDE TO ETIQUETTE AND MURDER** by Dianne Freeman (Kensington), and **CURSES BOILED AGAIN** by Shari Randall (St. Martin's).

The Thriller Award winners are: Best Novel: **JAR OF HEARTS** by Jennifer Hillier -- a favorite of Kristopher Zgorski (see cover article of last issue). Best First Novel: **THE CHALK MAN** by C.J. Tudor (also a Barry Award nominee). Best PBO: **THE LOST MAN** by Jane Harper -- apparently the Australian edition came out last year as a pbo. This will likely be a Barry Best Novel nominee next year because it was published in the U.S. in hardback in 2019.

Norma Dancis – We Hardly Knew You. It is very sad for me to tell you that our valued **DP** contributor/reviewer Norma Dancis recently passed away. I never met her in person, but enjoyed and appreciated our e-mail correspondence over the years, her reviews, her articles and her devotion to the mystery scene. When she sent in her review column for this issue, I had no idea how close the end was for her.

Here is her obituary: Norma Ruth Danovitz Dancis, age 71, died May 30 2019 in Gaithersburg, MD after a long fight with lymphoma. Norma grew up in Squirrel Hill, Pennsylvania. She graduated from Indiana University with a Masters in Linguistics in 1972. Working for many years as a legal secretary in Philadelphia, she moved to Maryland in 1998 to be closer to her daughter, Jessica Dancis. She is survived by her daughter, son-in-law, Steve Lahn, grandchildren, Talia and Jeremy Lahn, and sister, Susan Danovitz. Incredibly smart and amazingly kind, Norma was the ethical, educational and emotional anchor for those lucky enough to have her in their lives.

Anthony Award Nominations 2019

Best Novel

GIVE ME YOUR HAND

by Megan Abbott

NOVEMBER ROAD

by Lou Berney

JAR OF HEARTS

by Jennifer Hillier

SUNBURN by Laura Lippman

BLACKOUT by Alex Segura

Best First Novel

**MY SISTER,
THE SERIAL KILLER**

by Oyinkan Braithwaite

BROKEN PLACES by Tracy Clark

DODGING AND BURNING

by John Copenhaver

WHAT DOESN'T KILL YOU

by Aimee Hix

BEARSKIN

by James A. McLaughlin

Best Paperback Original Novel

HOLLYWOOD ENDING

by Kellye Garrett

IF I DIE TONIGHT

by Alison Gaylin

HIROSHIMA BOY

by Naomi Hirahara

UNDER A DARK SKY

by Lori Rader-Day

A STONE'S THROW

by James W. Ziskin



Assistant Editor's Message



Twenty years ago there was a craze called Hypermodern Mystery Collecting. This topic has been covered multiple times in *Deadly Pleasures*. This refers to new books that have a limited number of first editions published that were well received by readers. Collectors would drive up the price of these so-called rare books. Book dealers loved it but they would warn the collectors to not get drawn too deeply into this craze as they knew how foolish it was.

Some of these books were considered cornerstones of the hypermodern mystery collections. They were books that would typically cost a few hundred dollars. I am referring to books like **TRACK OF A CAT** by Nevada Barr, **THE BEEKEEPER'S APPRENTICE** by Laurie R. King or even **POSTMORTEM** by Patricia Cornwall. Books like **A TEST OF WILLS** by Charles Todd, in first edition, were considered rare and expensive to obtain.

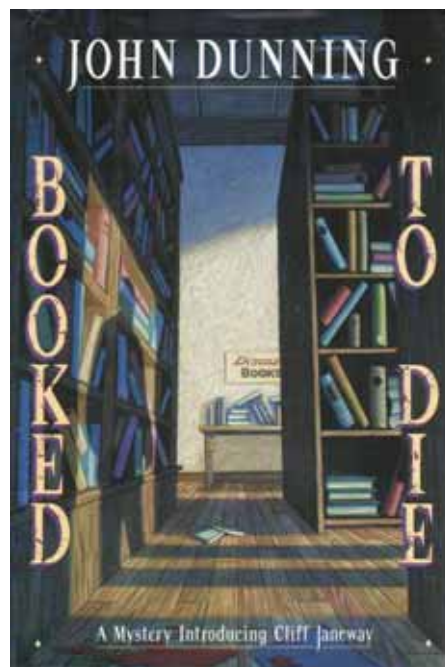
Well, the ultimate hypermodern mystery was **BOOKED TO DIE** by John Dunning. This book, in pristine condition, could command prices of \$800 to \$1000 at that time. It was considered the book that started it all. I felt fortunate to grab a copy with a dinged corner for \$500.00. I bought it from a dealer in Colorado that guaranteed their books and were willing to buy one back for the same price they sold it for. When I heard John Dunning say how crazy the whole hypermodern craze was -- including the price his book commanded, I decided to sell it back. Well, it was a great move because Mysterious Bookstore was recently selling a fine copy of the book for a mere \$175.00. This perfectly captures the ultimate foolishness of the craze. Even at this price, the book is probably overpriced. As always, collect what you like -- if you must collect -- and never expect to make a profit from the books. It is a rare modern book that is truly

collectible especially with the internet making books widely available all over the world. Books are generally easy to find and the multitude of copies allows buyers to shop the various dealers. Of course this does not apply to all-time classics such as Dashiell Hammett's **THE MALTESE FALCON** which will always command high prices.

Recently, in the *New York Times Book Review* on June 2, there was a column entitled 'Thriller Roundup.' It contained mini-reviews of current thrillers written by women authors. The author, Vanessa Friedman, mentions that women are on the fringes of the thriller world and are recently breaking into it in the Me Too era. This prompted Sara Paretsky to write a letter to the *Book Review*, self righteously complaining that women have been writing thrillers for the past forty years. As examples she uses Marcia Muller, Sue Grafton, Linda Barnes and, of course, herself. Into the mix she threw Nevada Barr and Ann Cleeves. Sara Paretsky perfectly revealed her total ignorance as to what a thriller is. None of the authors she cited

are thriller writers unless you want to use the word 'thriller' to describe any book in the crime fiction genre. She took offense when, not only was none remotely given AND the author, Vanessa Friedman, featured female writers in her article. Let's be clear. The above authors Sara Paretsky mentioned write P.I. novels or police procedurals (Nevada Barr has some thriller elements in her novels, but they are essentially novels of detection) -- not thrillers. Sara Paretsky writes long, dull, dreary P.I. novels that are overblown with trivial minutia relating to her protagonist VI Warshawsky. I use her books as a perfect example of why I hate P.I. novels -- we are told every single detail of the character's life. We learn the car she drives, the route she takes to work, the coffee she drinks, her brand toothpaste etc. I will never read another of her books. The fact that she thinks she writes thrillers shows how clueless she truly is. In *Deadly Pleasures* issue 31 page 2, George and I defined what a thriller is (action, danger, deadline, fast pace, or in other words, thrilling). It was, at this time, that we created the Barry Thriller Award because we felt the thriller was not getting enough respect in the crime fiction community. It was also shortly before the International Thriller Writers organization was started. Unfortunately, ITW has never truly defined what a thriller is and will admit to the organization anyone who pays the dues. To me, it is truly ironic that it is Sara Paretsky that complained -- one of the least thrilling writers I can think of.

On a much more positive note, this year I will be attending Thrillerfest. I haven't been to one in quite a number of years. The reason I am attending is that I want to see our own Mystery Mike Bursaw get the Thriller Fan Award -- long deserved. Mike is so very active in the mystery/thriller fiction community. He runs a bookselling website, has hosted and helped run two successful Bouchercons including Indianapolis and New Orleans, ran the bookroom in multiple Bouchercons and Thrillerfests, and, for us here at *Deadly Pleasures*, he has actively participated in the Barry Award nominating committees. He has



phenomenal energy and enthusiasm -- which can be infectious. He also has a remarkable head for business, leadership, organization, and, of course, books. That is how he gets things done and done right. We are quite proud of him and his accomplishments. Congratulations, Mike!

Well the Edgar Award winners were announced a couple of months ago, as usual, at the end of April. And as is the case most years, my least favorite winds up on top. I just want to revisit, not only the list, but the Edgars as a whole. I also want to look at the winners compared to my own picks.

George and I looked at the previous Edgar winners in a previous edition of *Deadly Pleasures* (comparing them to Barry Award winners). We noted that the bestowing of the Edgar Award on a writer does not automatically provide a boost to his or her career by shooting it into the stratosphere. The Edgars really appeal almost exclusively to readers of the mystery genre. Authors have told me that they do get a bump in sales after a win but it really does not truly affect their career. Perhaps the award provides a bargaining tool in renewing publishing contracts. Good for the author but this also will not define success in the long run.

I invite you to look at the past winners of the Best Novel and Best First Novel by an American Author category. What you will notice is that a reasonable percentage of the past winners are virtually unknown today. Perhaps twenty percent are truly successful writers while the other eighty percent are struggling midlist authors at best. I will not name any of them but you will see what I mean. So, a win does not at all translate to future success.

Over the years there have been significant misses in that books that have drilled right into the American reader's psyche becoming fixtures on the bestseller lists have been overlooked for books that were far less noticed by the reading public. One major example is when *GONE GIRL*, a trendsetting novel that changed mystery fiction for years (and is still a big influence) lost to Dennis Lehane's *LIVE BY NIGHT*



in 2013. Now, I did really like Dennis's book (**Rated A-**) but it is not his best work. He is a fixture in the genre and one of our finest writers but *GONE GIRL* is so much more of an influential and important work that not awarding it the Edgar led to a lot of head scratching. George and I alluded to other examples in our article. As I have said before, the Edgar committees might be a bit too insular.

Now, looking at this year's winners. I only will comment on the Best Novel and Best First Novel by an American Author, as these are the only categories I have read. The winner of the Best Novel award is Walter Mosley for *DOWN BY THE RIVER UNTO THE SEA*. First of all, Walter Mosley is one of the most revered names in crime fiction. That he has never won an Edgar is extremely surprising.

I remember, over twenty years ago, I phoned Otto Penzler, at The Mysterious Bookshop in NYC, for the first time asking him who are the best authors to read and collect. At that time, he recommended two authors -- Michael Connelly, who had written three or four books at the time and Walter Mosley who had about the same number. I bought all of both author's books. These were the Easy Rawlins books. They were brilliantly written but full of extremely unsavory characters. I realized the bril-

liance of the writing but I never enjoyed spending time with these characters. They were, in that sense, hard books for me to read. Any one of these books could have and should have won an Edgar but they did not. So, here we are decades later and Walter Mosley has written a standard -- and in my mind -- pedestrian PI novel which I found highly forgettable (I already did). However, it is Walter Mosley so I cannot complain too much.

Let me remind you that mystery fiction is often called an 'entertainment'. And, honestly, that is what these books are. They are meant to be entertainments. That would imply books that are exciting, unputdownable and just truly fun to read. From that standpoint, Mike Lawson got robbed. He wrote one of the most entertaining and compelling books of the year. On the Edgar shortlist, nobody came close. But on that list there was only one Master of the genre -- one legendary writer and that is Walter Mosley regardless of the book that he wrote. (I will merely point out the fact that for the second year in a row a black author has won in the Best Novel category. There aren't that many black authors in the genre, so that is quite remarkable.)

Now, Best First Novel by an American Author. Let's go back to my comments on *GONE GIRL*. This year the reading public has enthusiastically endorsed Delia Owens and her astounding first novel, *WHERE THE CRAWDADS SING*. This book has been on the bestseller lists for months. Often it was at the number one slot. It has definitely resonated with many readers including myself. The book is not shlock fiction. It is a beautifully rendered novel with copious descriptions of the locale filled with realistic, but desperate, characters. It is an all encompassing read. The committee simply missed all that. The book that won (*BEARSKIN* by James A. McLaughlin) is a dull, dreary and forgettable wilderness mystery. In my opinion, the committee blew it -- as so many of their predecessors have. Let's see which author has the more successful writing career. I will put my money down on Delia Owens.

Letters



The following emails were in response to my announcement that **DP** is going digital with Issue 89 and after many had an opportunity to see the color pdf file of **DP** 85. Thanks so much for your responses. As with the last issue, you may receive a color pdf of this issue by sending an email to me with "PDF 86" in the subject line.

C Gian-Cursio

Color is outstanding and the pdf format allows me to cut and past titles of interest to my buy/borrow list. Having enjoyed **Deadly Pleasures** and your efforts for many years, I'm looking forward to many more years of the publication in the twenty-first century.

V. Feldman

As a long time subscriber your message that the print version of **Deadly Pleasures** will no longer be available saddened me. I love my computer. I don't love reading books or magazines on it.

I mark up the magazine with comments and star reviews of books I want to look for. I suppose that if there is no reprieve for the print version I'll take the pdf to a copy shop. But I really hope you will reconsider. I'm not a luddite. I just prefer print over screen for my reading.

J. Macica

Although I have always enjoyed the print copy, I can certainly understand your reasons to go digital. A pdf is a good way to go because I can read on my 8" Kindle Fire, my 9" Samsung Galaxy Tab A or my computer. Works well too because I am running out of space to store my print copies of **DP**. I especially appreciate that the digital copy will be searchable as I keep going back to old copies of **DP** to research when I am in the mood to read something specific. I wouldn't recommend changing a thing about your format, it's great

J. Elkin

In this regard, we are part of the same age cohort (and, as someone who retired nearly seven years ago, I thoroughly am impressed you still are working). I admit to preferring hard copies of magazines over electronic versions but several publications to which I subscribe already have accomplished this transition, instanced by the *New York Review of Science Fiction* and *PC Magazine*. I have noted in multiple communications how much I enjoy your publication – indeed, I find it invaluable in identifying authors unfamiliar to me – and, in this context, hope you continue to distribute **Deadly Pleasures** for many years to come.

(After seeing the color pdf version) I feel you have done an outstanding job converting Issue #85 into a .pdf document, especially regarding the use of color images. I own a "largish" computer monitor (with a 34" 5k/HDR screen) and readily could view each page at a 150% zoom setting.

J. Barry

The change to digital is fine for me -- saves more trees. When should I pay the \$10.00? When my subscription expires? Now? I do not want to live without **Deadly Pleasures** -- I postponed even opening the current issue until now -- on my vacation in Hawaii! [I have added the pdf subscription to the last page. If you wish to continue getting DP after the conversion you may subscribe to it at any time, but check your expiration date on your address label and if it is after 88, you will have some digital copies coming to you when the conversion takes place.]

S. Curry

Your plan for going digital starting with Issue 89 seems to be a sound one, including the pricing. Go for it! (After seeing the color pdf version) Wow, it looks great!

B. Henshaw

I will miss the printed copy, but having the magazine in PDF form will allow for easily reading it on multiple devices.

S. Kirk

Good luck with the transition to digital. It makes sense. I imagine that reading on an iPad will be more fun then reading on a desktop or laptop. [It definitely is.]

I was thrilled to see **BOOKED TO DIE** featured in your Most Influential list. Also **POSTMORTEM** and **ONE FOR THE MONEY**. Made my day. [Susanne was the editor at Scribner's for these influential works.]

M. Elliott

Well the presentation is great. Sharp, clear, love the color pictures. I'm not really a fan of reading lots of stuff online (I'm a book person), but I do have a good, black and white laser printer which I will probably be using when the pdf only option takes effect. Thanks for finding a way to keep the magazine going. I would really miss it.

R Rood

Deadly Pleasures is one of my greatest pleasures. And while I love hard copy magazines, I understand your decision completely. In fact, I'm grateful to your continued commitment to this most excellent publication.

Gail Coulson

I know things get more difficult as we get older. Maybe you should consider training someone younger to help you and maybe takeover when that time comes—But I hope that is a long way off. Thank you again for your great magazine! [I had to chuckle about your comment. I've been looking for that person for 25 years. Very few super mystery fans have the desire or the time to take on the responsibility for a publication such as **Deadly Pleasures**. If you run across someone who wants to do it, please send me their name. One must want to do it for the love of the genre, because there is no profit incentive considering the number of hours it takes to produce an issue.]

S. Epstein

I applaud your decision. I've been producing a bi-monthly newsletter for my temple for nearly 20 years. Quite a while ago we switched to a color digital (pdf) format. We print a small number of b&w copies for a handful of people who are not computer savvy, but most people like the pdf version. They are easy to store on your computer for future reference, and all the other "pros" you mention as well. Good luck getting people to switch. (I still have to deal with the "jigsaw puzzle" layout problems, but sometimes adjusting font size helps.) *[I learned that a long time ago – thank heavens.]*

(After seeing the color pdf version) Very nice. The colors really add a great dimension. I think most of your readers will be pleased (there will always be a few diehards who like to hold the magazine). I always love getting a new edition of *DP*. I sit with a pen and pad to write down books I want to check out. You and I have very similar tastes.

K. Zgorski

Wow, that color version looks great.

R. Dustow

It opened easily and it is all there in living color. I understand the reasons why you are doing this. I lament the end of the traditional magazine but this is almost as good. And much better than advertising in it.

D. Reiling

I opened it, and saved it to iBooks on my iPad. Easy to navigate that way. Initial impression is it looks great! I really like the color photos. I'll go through it in more detail later. I'm proud to say I have all the paper *Deadly Pleasures* issues from #1. *[Wow!]* I think I subscribed a year or two in, then bought the back issues. I've enjoyed reading it over the years.

V. G. Larson

I do not like to read on the computer and would pay more for the print but I will try it. I love the mag.

A. Morrison

Thank you for keeping your great magazine going. I will forward to seeing *Deadly Pleasures* in which ever type of mail box it comes in.

C. Gillay

First I have to say love your journal – have enjoyed it for years. I will miss the print copy but understand why you are doing this. I certainly do not want to print out a .pdf document. However, have you thought about making it available thru kindle? Am not sure how the process goes to get it on kindle, but I know that I can get Time, Reader's Digest, etc on the kindle. I have both a kindle fire as well as an ipad with the kindle app. *[There are apps for Ipad such as iBooks that you can open the DP pdf in. I'm not familiar with the Kindle, so perhaps a subscriber who has opened the DP pdf on a Kindle can give us some guidance?]*

And you do have to have paid subscription to subscribe and access these magazines? *[Yes, it will be \$10 per year for 4 issues]* Might be easier for you to handle your subscriptions thru amazon kindle. *[Amazon generally takes such high fees that it is not worth going through them.]* I am 75 so get where you are coming from – hope you have many years left and hope you have a staff that can take over at some point. Again, have truly enjoyed *Deadly Pleasures* (but too many books and not enough time to read them all.)

J. French

I'm up for the pdf only issues when they come out.

L. Vernon

I too prefer a printed copy. However, the ability to search the issue would be wonderful. I find myself going back to previous issues to look for certain book reviews. I have started to list all the A reviews by my go-to reviewers on my tablet, so I can find the right issue.

On the cost of printing, I have another option to be considered. If one has a recent HP printer, HP Instant Ink is a wonderful service. You pay a monthly

fee and they sent you ink as needed. 50 pages per month (color or BW) with a carryover unused max of 100 is 2.99 per month. 100 pages with carryover of 200 is 4.99 per month. You can switch between plans or cancel anytime.

P. Key

I, for one, look forward to the PDF version. It is easier to keep back copies to hand. I have actually tried scanning in some of my print issues to PDF but it was too tedious. *[I have pdfs of the last 20 or so issues. Just ask me for ones you want and I will email them to you.]*

Mike Lawson

Thanks for forwarding Larry's column regarding Edgar nominees. It was nice to get his curmudgeon endorsement, or at least I think it's good to be at the top of "an historically awful" list of nominees. Tell Larry hi for me.

Marv Lachman

Issue #85 was a great one, with the usual well-reasoned reviews plus articles on some older names, like Kelland, Bruno Fischer, and Maigret. Your "Best" lists in the issue must have taken a lot of time, but they are very useful.

Your announcement about the change in DP's format is understandable, and anything that can keep DP going with less expenditure of time and money by you is good. You can count on me to subscribe. I especially like the "searchable" idea because there have been many times when I wanted to check for an author's name to read a review and found that it isn't as easy as it should be in the future.

Interesting to read in Larry Gandle's column about MWA removing the Grandmaster status from Linda Fairstein. I assume that honor was due to her writing. It seems to be an act of political correctness to take it away from her due to what she allegedly did in her life, or at least in her other occupation. MWA, which calls itself a "professional" organization, has too often been amateurish, in the worst sense of that word.

DP Calendar

THEAKSTONS OLD PECULIER CRIME WRITING FESTIVAL

July 18-21, 2019

Harrogate, U.K.

Guests of Honor: To Be Announced

Website: <https://harrogateinternationalfestivals.com/crime/>



CAPITAL CRIME 2019

September 26-28, 2019

Grand Connaught Rooms, London

Authors Attending: David Baldacci, Kate Atkinson, John Connolly, Ann Cleeves, Martha Cole, Robert Harris, Peter James, Linda LaPlante, Abir Mukherjee, Kate Mosse, Denise Mina, Ian Rankin, Stella Rimington, Don Winslow and many more

Website: www.capitalcrime.org



BOUCHERCON 2019

50th Anniversary Convention

Denim, Diamonds & Death

October, 31- November 3, 2019

Dallas, Texas

American Guest of Honor:

Hank Phillippi Ryan

Distinguished Contribution to



Genre:

James Patterson

International Guest of Honor:

Anthony Horowitz

Lifetime Achievement:

Peter Lovesey

Local Guest of Honor:

Deborah Crombie

Toastmaster: Harry Hunsicker

Fan Guest of Honor:

McKenna Jordan

Website: <http://bouchercon2019.com/>



com/

LEFT COAST CRIME 2020

Murder's A Beach

March 12-15, 2020

San Diego, California

Guests of Honor: Rachel Howzell

Hall, T. Jefferson Parker

Toastmaster: Matt Coyle

Fan Guest of Honor: Mysterious

Galaxy Books

Ghost of Honor: Raymond Chandler

Website: www.leftcoastcrime.org/2020/

MALICE DOMESTIC 32

May 1 – May 3, 2020

Bethesda, Maryland

Guest of Honor:

Julia Spencer-Fleming

Lifetime Achievement: Ellen Hart

Toastmaster: Jeff Cohen

Fan Guest of Honor: Dina Wilner

Malice Remembers: Ruth Cavin

Website: malicedomesti.org

BOUCHERCON 2020

Where Murder is a Capitol Crime

October 15-18, 2020

Sacramento, California

Guests of Honor

Scott Turow

Walter Mosley

Anne Perry

Cara Black

Fan GOH: Janet Rudolph

Toastmaster: Catriona McPherson



Website: bouchercon2020.org

BOUCHERCON 2021

August 26-29, 2021

New Orleans, Louisiana

Guests of Honor

Steve Berry

Craig Johnson

Charles & Caroline Todd

Sandra Brown

Jo Nesbo

Toastmistress:

Alafair Burke

Fan Guest of Honor:

Ali Karim

Kid's Guest of Honor:

Jonathan Maberry

More details to follow

It will be in the same hotel and put on by the same committee of fans who put on the last convention in New Orleans so expect a similar good time.

It's About Crime

by Marv Lachman



The Short Stop

Though Simon Brett is better known for his novels, when he writes a short story it often appears on my "Best" list. It's early in 2019 as I write this, but the best short story I've read so far is Brett's "Entries and Exits" in the January-February 2019 issue of *EQMM*. It is told in the form of diary entries by characters, most of whom are despicable, albeit members of the British upper class. The story is loaded with surprises, none of which I anticipated.

There is enough crime in the work of many mainstream writers to warrant their being in Hubin's bibliography. Not so John Steinbeck, but that absence has now been remedied by Al Hubin with the addition of **OF MICE AND MEN**. Another possible addition which I brought to Hubin's attention is Steinbeck's collection **THE LONG VALLEY** (1938), which includes a short story "The Murder." It is set in Steinbeck country, the central valley of California, in Monterey County. The regional descriptions of an agricultural community are far more memorable than the plot. Jim Moore and his wife Jelka have conflicts and an unhappy marriage. The title of the story removes some of the suspense, though there still will be a surprise for most readers.

Notes on Novels Recently Read

The death of Jane Langton late in 2018 made me think it was time to read another of her books. **DARK NANTUCKET NOON** (1975) is a regional

novel about the island of Nantucket, and issues of development and tourism there. It also beautifully integrates the phenomenon of an eclipse of the sun on the island. Another bonus is the use of quotations as chapter introductions, mostly from Melville's **MOBY DICK**. The book has art work in the form of line drawings by Langton, who had degrees in the fine arts. I can't say that the drawings advance the plot, though I found them charming. However, chapter 16 could have used photos because neither the drawings, nor the written description, are quite good enough to describe the setting.

The book marked the return, after ten years, of Langton's series characters Homer Kelly and his wife Mary. Kelly is a combination of lawyer, policeman, "down-home Yankee," and literary scholar. Mary is a historian of feminism. Things are wrapped up neatly (perhaps too neatly) in a very exciting ending.

Almost twenty years after Cornell Woolrich died in 1968 he was still popular enough that Mysterious Press arranged to have Lawrence Block complete one of his unfinished novels. The result: **INTO THE NIGHT**, published in 1987. Woolrich was the greatest writer of suspense ever, but this time there is less suspense than one would expect. Too many scenes are told through flashback, rather than in the present tense, and sometimes there is too little action in the book. Motivation is questionable, beginning with the opening in which Madeline Chalmers considers suicide "Because her life was empty . . . there was no reason *not* to kill herself." Like most of Woolrich, the book is eminently readable, but there is an ending that dis-

appoints. There is some awkward writing, for example, a woman who twice "thinks parenthetically." Why review a book about which I have so many reservations? Even when not at his very best, Woolrich is still worth reading, and an unknown Woolrich novel is always important enough to be considered.

A bonus is an "Afterword" by Francis M. Nevins that succinctly tells of Woolrich's life and the circumstances leading to this unfinished work being printed in 1987. Nobody but Nevins knows as much about Woolrich, and no one can tell about him so well. Anyone who has heard of Woolrich but not read him should read this final chapter.

Peter Lovesey must have done a great deal of research for **MAD HATTER'S HOLIDAY** (1973) because he provides a wonderfully detailed view of the English resort of Brighton in 1882. Before his series characters, Sgt. Cribb and Constable Thackeray, appear, relatively late in the book, we are in the hands of a most unusual protagonist, Albert Moscrop, who is on vacation in Brighton. His hobby, discreet voyeurism, involves observing people, often through binoculars, when they are unaware they are being scrutinized. His hobby involves him with an attractive woman he has been watching and, ultimately, murder.

A map or diagram of Brighton and its Aquarium would have been helpful. When a human hand is found in the crocodile pit at that aquarium, Cribb delegates Thackeray to retrieve it. The Cribb-Thackeray team is a good one, especially with their often edgy relationship. Few authors write better British police novels than Lovesey.

Doom with a View

There was a year, 1947, in which two outstanding movies used a subjective approach to filming. Most of each movie was seen through the eyes and point of view of the leading character. That approach has been belittled by many film critics, and, as far as I know, never repeated. As I see these films again, I still find it works for me.

The Lady in the Lake is MGM's ad-

adaptation of Raymond Chandler's novel, with Robert Montgomery, one of the best actors to play Phillip Marlowe, also directing. The screen play is by Steve Fisher, one of the best writers to come out of the "pulp." The scene in which Dick Simmons punches Marlowe, well, at least the camera, is quite effective. Even more so is sexy Audrey Totter kissing Marlowe, though I suspect many men in the audience thought that *the* were receiving the kiss.



Dark Passage is based on the novel by David Goodis, who has become so well thought of that a noir convention named after him was held in Philadelphia. Only the first half of that movie is told from the viewpoint of the Humphrey Bogart character, a man convicted of a murder he may not have committed. Lauren Bacall co-stars with Bogey (no surprise), but the movie also has an unusually good supporting cast. Tom D'Andrea is a philosophical cab driver. Agnes Moorehead whines as effectively as she did in *Sorry, Wrong Number*. Houseley Stevenson plays the creepy plastic surgeon whose operation permits us to see Bogart as we expect him to look. Little known Clifton Young plays a blackmailer who says, "I was a small-time crook until this very minute. And now I'm a big-time crook." Franz Waxman's musical score adds to the mood and suspense.

The 2019 Barry Award Nominations

It's Barry Award Voting Time! Please take a minute or two to vote **right now** for your choices in each category. It is not necessary to have read all candidates. You may email your votes to george@deadlypleasures.com or mail them to 1718 Ridge Point Dr., Bountiful, UT 84010. Voting is open to all readers of *Deadly Pleasures Mystery Magazine*. **Deadline: Friday, September, 2019**

Best Novel

NOVEMBER ROAD, Lou Berney (Morrow)
DARK SACRED NIGHT, Michael Connelly (Little, Brown)
THE SHADOW WE HIDE, Allen Eskens (Mulholland)
DEPTH OF WINTER, Craig Johnson (Viking)
LEAVE NO TRACE, Mindy Mejia (Atria)
A NECESSARY EVIL, Abir Mukherjee (Pegasus)

Best First Novel

MY SISTER, THE SERIAL KILLER, Oyinkan Braithwaite (Doubleday)
NEED TO KNOW, Karen Cleveland (Ballantine)
DODGING AND BURNING, John Copenhaver (Pegasus)
SWEET LITTLE LIES, Caz Frear (Harper)
BEARSKIN, James A. McLaughlin (Ecco)
THE CHALK MAN, C. J. Tudor (Crown)

Best Paperback Original

A SHARP SOLITUDE, Christine Carbo (Atria)
DEAD PRETTY, David Mark (Blue Rider Press)
THE RUIN, Dervla McTiernan (Penguin)
THE HOLLOW OF FEAR, Sherry Thomas (Berkley)
RESURRECTION BAY, Emma Viskic (Pushkin Vertigo)

Best Thriller

THE TERMINAL LIST, Jack Carr (Atria)
SAFE HOUSES, Dan Fesperman (Knopf)
LONDON RULES, Mick Herron (Soho)
FOREVER AND A DAY, Anthony Horowitz (Harper)
LIGHT IT UP, Nick Petrie (Putnam)
THE KING TIDES, James Swain (Thomas & Mercer)

Thanks to the Barry Award Nominating Committee Members for all the reading they do so as to be prepared to suggest worthy nominees: Oline Cogdill, Larry Gandle, Maggie Mason, Mike Bursaw, Donus Roberts, Kristopher Zgorski, Donny Longmuir, Mike Dillman, Kris Schorer, Steele Curry, Ali Karim and Jeff Popple.

The DP List

2019



Titles listed garnered starred reviews in the four library journals (*Publisher's Weekly*, *Kirkus*, *Booklist* and *Library Journal*) and a glowing review in *Deadly Pleasures* as indicated. These books are the best of the best for 2019.

Best Novels

****WOLF PACK** by C. J. Box (Putnam, \$27.00). The good news is that Joe Pickett has his job back, after his last adventure in *The Disappeared*. The bad news is that he's come to learn that a drone is killing wildlife--and the drone belongs to a mysterious and wealthy man whose son is dating Joe's own daughter, Lucy. Meanwhile, bodies are piling up in and around Joe's district in shocking numbers. He begins to fear that a pack of four vicious killers working on behalf of the Sinaloa cartel known as the Wolf Pack has arrived. **PW & DP**

****FRIEND IS A GIFT YOU GIVE YOURSELF** by William Boyle (Pegasus, \$25.95). Goodfellas meets Thelma and Louise when an unlikely trio of women in New York find themselves banding together to escape the clutches of violent figures from their pasts. **BL**

****NEW IBERIA BLUES** by James Lee Burke (Simon & Schuster, \$27.99). Detective Dave Robicheaux's world isn't filled with too many happy stories, but Desmond Cormier's rags-to-riches tale is certainly one of them. Robicheaux first met Cormier on the streets of New Orleans, when the young, undersized boy had foolish dreams of becoming a Hollywood director. Twenty-five years later, when Robicheaux knocks on Cormier's door, it isn't to congratulate him on his Golden Globe and Academy Award nominations. Robicheaux has discovered the body of a young woman

who's been crucified, wearing only a small chain on her ankle. She disappeared near Cormier's Cyrcemort Point estate, and Robicheaux, along with young deputy, Sean McClain, are looking for answers. **Kirkus, PW & BL**

****AS LONG AS WE BOTH SHALL LIVE** by JoAnn Chaney (Flatiron, \$27.99). "My wife! I think she's dead!" Matt frantically tells park rangers that he and his wife, Marie, were hiking when she fell off a cliff into the raging river below. They start a search, but they aren't hopeful: no one could have survived that fall. It was a tragic accident. But Matt's first wife also died in suspicious circumstances. And when the police pull a body out of the river, they have a lot more questions for Matt. Detectives Loren and Spengler want to know if Matt is a grieving, twice-unlucky husband or a cold-blooded murderer. **Kirkus & BL**

****A DANGEROUS MAN** by Robert Crais (Putnam, \$28.00). Joe Pike didn't expect to rescue a woman that day. He went to the bank same as anyone goes to the bank, and returned to his Jeep. So when Isabel Roland, the lonely young teller who helped him, steps out of the bank on her way to lunch, Joe is on hand when two men abduct her. Joe chases them down, and the two men are arrested. But instead of putting the drama to bed, the arrests are only the beginning of the trouble for Joe and Izzy. After posting bail, the two abductors are murdered and Izzy disappears. Pike calls on his friend, Elvis Cole, to help learn the truth. **Kirkus, BL, PW & DP**

****THIS STORM** by James Ellroy, (Knopf, \$29.95). It is January, 1942. Torrential rainstorms hit L.A. A body is unearthed in Griffith Park. The cops

rate it a routine dead-man job. They're grievously wrong. It's a summons to misalliance and all the spoils of a brand-new war. Elmer Jackson is a corrupt Vice cop. He's a flesh peddler and a bag-man for the L.A. Chief of Police. Hideo Ashida is a crime-lab whiz, caught up in the maelstrom of the Japanese internment. Dudley Smith is an LAPD hardnose working Army Intelligence. He's gone rogue and gone all-the-way Fascist. Joan Conville was born rogue. She's a defrocked Navy lieutenant and a war profiteer to her core. **Kirkus & PW**

****THE PARAGON HOTEL** by Lyndsay Faye (Putnam, \$26.00). The year is 1921, and "Nobody" Alice James is on a cross-country train, carrying a bullet wound and fleeing for her life following an illicit drug and liquor deal gone horribly wrong. Desperate to get as far away as possible from New York City and those who want her dead, she has her sights set on Oregon: a distant frontier that seems the end of the line. She befriends Max, a black Pullman porter who reminds her achingly of Harlem, who leads Alice to the Paragon Hotel upon arrival in Portland. Her unlikely sanctuary turns out to be the only all-black hotel in the city, and its lodgers seem unduly terrified of a white woman on the premises. **Kirkus & BL**

****AUNTIE POLDI AND THE VINEYARDS OF ETNA** by Mario Giordano (Houghton Mifflin, \$26.00). Auntie Poldi retired to Sicily from Germany and is finally ready for some peace and quiet—interrupted by romantic encounters with handsome Chief Inspector Montana, of course—when the water supply to her neighborhood is cut off and a dear friend's dog is poisoned, telltale signs that a certain familial organization is flexing its muscles. Poldi knows there will be no resolution without her help. She soon finds a body in a vineyard, tangles with the Mafia, and yet again makes herself unpopular in the pursuit of justice. But once wine and murder mix, how could she possibly stay away? **PW & Kirkus**

****AFTER SHE'S GONE** by Camilla Grebe (Ballantine, \$27.00). Out of the frozen depths of a forest in Ormberg, Sweden, a woman stumbles onto

the road. Her arms are covered with scratches, her feet are bare, and she has no memory of who she is. Local police identify her as psychological profiler Hanne Lagerlind-Schön, who, with her partner, had been helping investigate the cold case of a young woman's murder. Hanne begins to recover but cannot recall anything about where her partner is, or what their investigation had uncovered before her disappearance. Police have only one lead: a young woman in a sequined dress who was spotted nearby the night Hanne was found. **BL & PW**

****THE STRANGER DIARIES**

by Elly Griffiths (Houghton Mifflin, \$25.00). Clare Cassidy is no stranger to murder. A high school English teacher specializing in the Gothic writer R. M. Holland, she teaches a course on it every year. But when one of Clare's colleagues and closest friends is found dead, with a line from R. M. Holland's most famous story, "The Stranger," left by her body, Clare is horrified to see her life collide with the storylines of her favorite literature. **BL & LJ**

****THE LOST MAN** by Jane Harper (Flatiron, \$27.99). Brothers Nathan and Bub Bright meet for the first time in months at the remote fence line separating their cattle ranches in the lonely outback. Their third brother, Cameron, lies dead at their feet. In an isolated belt of Australia, their homes a three-hour drive apart, the brothers were one another's nearest neighbors. Cameron was the middle child, the one who ran the family homestead. But something made him head out alone under the unrelenting sun. Nathan, Bub and Nathan's son return to Cameron's ranch and to those left behind by his passing: his wife, his daughters, and his mother, as well as their long-time employee and two recently hired seasonal workers. While they grieve Cameron's loss, suspicion starts to take hold, and Nathan is forced to examine secrets the family would rather leave in the past. Because if someone forced Cameron to his death, the isolation of the outback leaves few suspects. **Kirkus & DP**

****THE RIVER** by Peter Heller (Knopf, \$25.95). Wynn and Jack have been best friends since freshman orien-

tation, bonded by their shared love of mountains, books, and fishing. Wynn is a gentle giant, a Vermont kid never happier than when his feet are in the water. Jack is more rugged, raised on a ranch in Colorado where sleeping under the stars and cooking on a fire came as naturally to him as breathing. When they decide to canoe the Maskwa River in northern Canada, they anticipate long days of leisurely paddling and picking blueberries, and nights of stargazing and reading paperback Westerns. What they get is a wildfire and a woman who has disappeared. **Kirkus & LJ**

****AN ANONYMOUS GIRL** by

Greer Hendricks & Sarah Pekkanen (St. Martin's, \$27.99). Looking to earn some easy cash, Jessica Farris agrees to be a test subject in a psychological study about ethics and morality. But as the study moves from the exam room to the real world, the line between what is real and what is one of Dr. Shields's experiments blurs. Dr. Shields seems to know what Jess is thinking... and what she's hiding. Jessica's behavior will not only be monitored, but manipulated. Caught in a web of attraction, deceit and jealousy, Jess quickly learns that some obsessions can be deadly. **BL, LJ & PW**

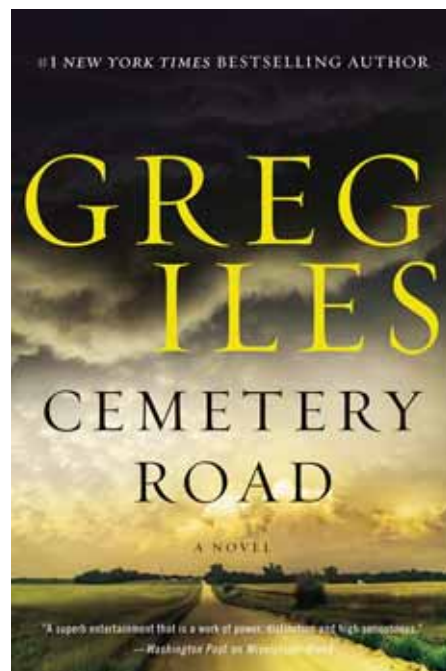
****CEMETERY ROAD** by Greg Iles (Morrow, \$28.99). When Marshall McEwan left his Mississippi hometown at eighteen, he vowed never to return. The

trauma that drove him away spurred him to become one of the most successful journalists in Washington, DC. But as the ascendancy of a chaotic administration lifts him from print fame to television stardom, Marshall discovers that his father is terminally ill, and he must return home to face the unfinished business of his past. On arrival, he finds Bienville, Mississippi very much changed. His family's 150-year-old newspaper is failing; and Jet Turner, the love of his youth, has married into the family of Max Matheson, one of a dozen powerful patriarchs who rule the town through the exclusive Bienville Poker Club. To Marshall's surprise, the Poker Club has taken a town on the brink of extinction and offered it salvation, in the form of a billion-dollar Chinese paper mill. But on the verge of the deal being consummated, two murders rock Bienville to its core, threatening far more than the city's economic future.

PW, BL & DP

****THE CURRENT** by Tim Johnston (Algonquin Books, \$27.95). In the dead of winter, outside a small Minnesota town, state troopers pull two young women and their car from the icy Black Root River. One is found downriver, drowned, while the other is found at the scene—half frozen but alive. What happened was no accident, and news of the crime awakens the community's memories of another young woman who lost her life in the same river ten years earlier, and whose killer may still live among them. Determined to find answers, the surviving young woman soon realizes that she's connected to the earlier unsolved case by more than just a river, and the deeper she plunges into her own investigation, the closer she comes to dangerous truths. **Kirkus & PW**

****STALKER** by Lars Kepler (Knopf, \$27.95, Feb.). The Swedish National Crime Unit receives a video of a young woman in her home, clearly unaware that she's being watched. Soon after the tape is received, the woman's body is found horrifically mutilated. With the arrival of the next, similar video, the police understand that the killer is toying with them, warning of a new victim,

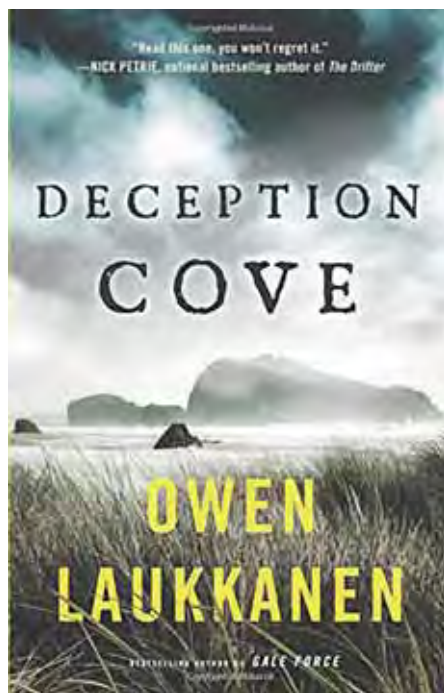


knowing there's nothing they can do. Detective Margot Silverman is put in charge of the investigation, and soon asks Detective Joona Linna for help. Linna, in turn, recruits Erik Maria Bark, the hypnotist and expert in trauma, with whom Linna's worked before. Bark is leery of forcing people to give up their secrets. But this time, Bark is the one hiding things. Years before, he had put a man away for an eerily similar crime, and now he's beginning to think that an innocent man may be behind bars--and a serial killer still on the loose **BL & PW**

****METROPOLIS** by Philip Kerr (Putnam, \$28.00). Summer, 1928. Berlin, a city where nothing is verboten. **METROPOLIS**, completed just before Philip Kerr's untimely death, is the capstone of a fourteen-book journey through the life of Kerr's signature character, Bernhard Genther, a sardonic and wisecracking homicide detective caught up in an increasingly Nazified Berlin police department. In many ways, it is Bernie's origin story and, as Kerr's last novel, it is also, alas, his end. **Kirkus & DP**

****MIRACLE CREEK** by Angie Kim (Sarah Crichton, \$27.00). In rural Virginia, Young and Pak Yoo run an experimental medical treatment device known as the Miracle Submarine—a pressurized oxygen chamber that patients enter for therapeutic “dives” with the hopes of curing issues like autism or infertility. But when the Miracle Submarine mysteriously explodes, killing two people, a dramatic murder trial upends the Yoos’ small community. Courtroom thriller. **Kirkus, LJ & DP**

****DECEPTION COVE** by Owen Laukkanen (Mulholland, \$28.00). Former US Marine Jess Winslow reenters civilian life a new widow, with little more to her name than a falling-down house, a medical discharge for PTSD, and a loyal dog named Lucy. The only thing she actually cares about is that dog. After fifteen years -- nearly half his life -- in state prison, Mason Burke owns one set of clothes, a wallet, and a photo of Lucy, the service dog he trained while behind bars. Seeking a fresh start, he sets out for Deception Cove, Washing-



ton, where the dog now lives. As soon as Mason knocks on Jess's door, he finds himself in the middle of a standoff between the widow and the deputy county sheriff. When Jess's late husband piloted his final “fishing” expedition, he stole and stashed a valuable package from his drug dealer associates. Now the package is gone, and the sheriff’s department has seized Jess's dearest possession—her dog. Unless Jess turns over the missing goods, Lucy will be destroyed. **PW, Kirkus & DP**

****LIKE LIONS** by Brian Panowich (St. Martin's, \$26.99). Clayton Burroughs is a small-town Georgia sheriff, a new father, and, improbably, the heir apparent of Bull Mountain's most notorious criminal family. As he tries to juggle fatherhood, his job and his recovery from being shot in the confrontation that killed his two criminally-inclined brothers last year, he's doing all he can just to survive. When a rival organization makes a first foray into Burroughs territory, leaving a trail of bodies and a whiff of fear in its wake, Clayton is pulled back into the life he so desperately wants to leave behind. Revenge is a powerful force, and the vacuum left by his brothers' deaths has left them all vulnerable. **PW**

****GOOD GIRL, BAD GIRL** by Michael Robotham (Scribner, \$27.00).

Evie, aka Angel Face, is a ward of the state, living in an institution. No one knows her real name, or her real age (and if Evie knows, she's not telling), because she was discovered as a small child living in a home with no one but the decaying corpse of her former protector (or abuser). She was placed in a series of foster homes before landing at the secure children's facility where Cyrus first encounters her. Cyrus, a forensic psychologist with a traumatic backstory of his own, has been asked to help determine if she is ready to live independently. The two forge an uneasy but unshakable alliance.

Meanwhile, Cyrus is also unofficially consulting on a murder case. And Evie, who has an uncanny ability to know when someone is lying, is uniquely poised to help Cyrus with this case. **BL, Kirkus, PW & DP**

****GONE TOO LONG** by Lori Roy (Dutton, \$28.00). On the day a black truck rattles past her house and a Klan flyer lands in her front yard, ten-year-old Beth disappears from her Simmonsville, Georgia, home. Armed with skills honed while caring for an alcoholic mother, she must battle to survive the days and months ahead. Seven years later, Imogene Coulter is burying her father—a Klan leader she has spent her life distancing herself from—and trying to escape the memories his funeral evokes. But Imogene is forced to confront secrets long held by Simmonsville and her own family when, while clearing out her father's apparent hideout on the day of his funeral, she finds a child. Young and alive, in an abandoned basement, and behind a door that only locks from the outside. **LJ, Kirkus & BL**

****THE ROAD TO GRANTCHES-TER** by James Runcie (Bloomsbury, \$28.00; \$17.00). It is 1938, and eighteen-year-old Sidney Chambers is dancing the quickstep with Amanda Kendall at her brother Robert's birthday party at the Caledonian Club. No one can believe, on this golden evening, that there could ever be another war. Returning to London seven years later, Sidney has gained a Military Cross and lost his best friend on the battlefields of Italy. The carefree youth that he and his

friends were promised has been blown apart, just like the rest of the world--and Sidney, carrying a terrible, secret guilt, must decide what to do with the rest of his life. But he has heard a call: constant, though quiet, and growing ever more persistent. To the incredulity of his family and the derision of his friends--the irrepressible actor Freddie and the beautiful, vivacious Amanda--Sidney must now negotiate his path to God: the course of which, much like true love, never runs smooth. **PW**

****THE BORDER** by Don Winslow (Morrow, \$28.99). In a story that moves from deserts of Mexico to Wall Street, from the slums of Guatemala to the marbled corridors of Washington, D.C., Winslow follows a new generation of narcos, the cops who fight them, street traffickers, addicts, politicians, money-launderers, real-estate moguls, and mere children fleeing the violence for the chance of a life in a new country. **BL & DP**

Best First Novels

****CONFESSION OF AN INNOCENT MAN** by David R. Dow (Dutton, \$27.00). Rafael Zhettag is the owner and head chef of a promising Houston restaurant. A bachelor, content with having few personal or material attachments that ground him. Then, lightning strikes. When he finds Tieresse--billionaire, philanthropist, sophisticate, bombshell--sitting at one of his tables, he also finds his soul mate and his life starts again. And just as fast, when she is brutally murdered in their home, when he is convicted of the crime, when he is sentenced to die, it is all ripped away. **PW**

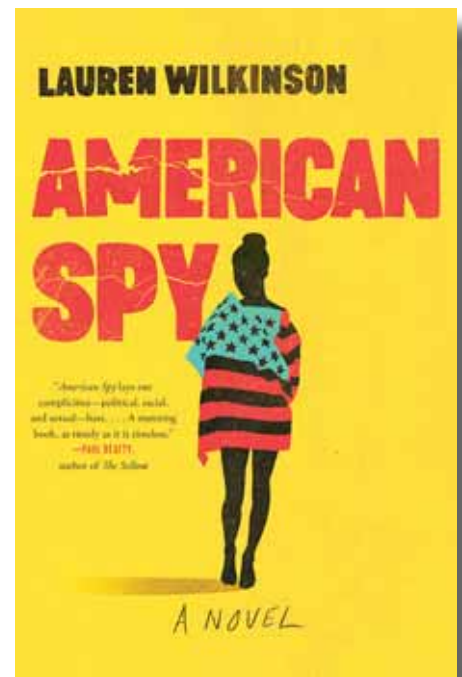
****SCRUBLANDS** by Chris Hammer (Touchstone, \$26.99). In Riversend, an isolated rural community afflicted by an endless drought, a young priest does the unthinkable, killing five parishioners before being taken down himself. A year later, accompanied by his own demons from war-time reporting, journalist Martin Scarsden arrives in Riversend. His assignment is simple: describe how the townspeople are coping as the

anniversary of their tragedy approaches. But as Martin meets the locals and hears their version of events, he begins to realize that the accepted wisdom--that the priest was a pedophile whose imminent exposure was the catalyst for the shooting, a theory established through an award-winning investigation by Martin's own newspaper--may be wrong. **LJ, PW & DP**

****THE PLOTTERS** by Un-Su Kim (Doubleday, \$25.95). Reseng is an assassin. Raised by a cantankerous killer named Old Raccoon in the crime headquarters "The Library," Reseng never questioned anything: where to go, who to kill, or why his home was filled with books that no one ever read. But one day, Reseng steps out of line on a job, toppling a set of carefully calibrated plans. And when he uncovers an extraordinary scheme set into motion by an eccentric trio of young women--a convenience store clerk, her wheelchair-bound sister, and a cross-eyed librarian--Reseng will have to decide if he will remain a pawn or finally take control of the plot. **BL & PW**

****SAVE ME FROM DANGEROUS MEN** by S. A. Lelchuk (Flatiron, \$27.99). Nikki Griffin isn't your typical private investigator. In her office above her bookstore's shelves and stacks, where she luxuriates in books and the comfort they provide, she also tracks certain men. Dangerous men. Men who have hurt the women they claim to love. And Nikki likes to teach those men a lesson, to teach them what it feels like to be hurt and helpless, so she can be sure that their victims are safe from them forever. When a regular PI job tailing Karen, a tech company's disgruntled employee who might be selling secrets, turns ugly and Karen's life is threatened, Nikki has to break cover and intervene. **Kirkus, PW & DP**

****AMERICAN SPY** by Lauren Wilkinson (Random House, \$27.00). It's 1986, the heart of the Cold War, and Marie Mitchell is an intelligence officer with the FBI. She's brilliant, but she's also a young black woman working in an old boys' club. Her career has stalled out, she's overlooked for every high-profile squad, and her days are filled with



monotonous paperwork. So when she's given the opportunity to join a shadowy task force aimed at undermining Thomas Sankara, the charismatic revolutionary president of Burkina Faso whose Communist ideology has made him a target for American intervention, she says yes. Yes, even though she secretly admires the work Sankara is doing for his country. Yes, even though she is still grieving the mysterious death of her sister, whose example led Marie to this career path in the first place. Yes, even though a furious part of her suspects she's being offered the job because of her appearance and not her talent. **Kirkus, PW, BL, LJ & DP**

Best Thriller

****MISSION CRITICAL** by Mark Greaney (Berkley, \$27.00). Court Gentry shares a flight on a CIA transport plane with a hooded man who is being transported to England where a joint CIA/MI6 team will interrogate him about a mole in Langley. When they land in an isolated airbase in the U.K., they are attacked by a hostile force who kidnaps the prisoner. Only Gentry escapes. His handlers send him after the attackers, but what can one operative do against a trained team of assassins? A lot, when that operative is the Gray

Man. **BL & DP**

****OUT OF THE DARK** by Gregg Hurwitz (Minotaur, \$27.99). Taken from a group home at age twelve, Evan Smoak was raised and trained as part of the Orphan Program, an off-the-books operation designed to create deniable intelligence assets, i.e. assassins. Evan was Orphan X. He broke with the Program, using everything he learned to disappear and reinvent himself as the No-where Man, a man who helps the truly desperate when no one else can. But now Evan's past is catching up to him. Someone at the very highest level of government has been trying to eliminate every trace of the Orphan Program by killing all the remaining Orphans and their trainers. **LJ & PW**

****HOUSE ARREST** by Mike Lawson (Atlantic Monthly, \$26.00). As the fixer for Congressman John Mahoney in Washington, D.C., Joe DeMarco has had to bend and break the law more than a few times. But when Representative Lyle Canton, House Majority Whip, is found shot dead in his office in the U.S. Capitol and DeMarco is arrested for the murder, DeMarco knows he's been framed. Locked up in the Alexandria Jail awaiting trial, he calls on his enigmatic friend Emma, an ex-DIA agent, to search for the true killer. **PW & DP**

****THE PARIS DIVERSION** by Chris Pavone (Crown, \$27.00). American expat Kate Moore drops her kids at the international school, makes her shopping rounds, and meets her husband Dexter at their regular café. And on the nearby rue de Rivoli, Mahmoud Khalid climbs out of an electrician's van, and elbows his way into the crowded courtyard of the world's largest museum, in the epicenter of Western civilization. He sets down his metal briefcase, and removes his windbreaker. That's when people start to scream. **BL & LJ**

****THE NIGHT AGENT** by Matthew Quirk (Morrow, \$26.99). No one was more surprised than FBI Agent Peter Sutherland when he's tapped to work in the White House Situation Room. When Peter was a boy, his father, a section chief in FBI counterintelligence, was suspected of selling secrets to the Russians—a catastrophic breach that

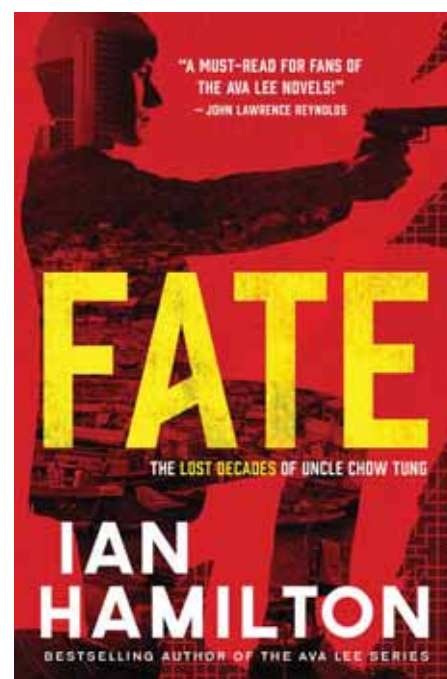
had cost him his career, his reputation, and eventually his life. Peter knows intimately how one broken rule can cost lives. Nowhere is he more vigilant than in this room, the sanctum of America's secrets. Staffing the night action desk, his job is monitoring an emergency line for a call that has not—and might never—come. Until tonight. At 1:05 a.m. the phone rings. A terrified young woman named Rose tells Peter that her aunt and uncle have just been murdered and that the killer is still in the house with her. Before their deaths, they gave her this phone number with urgent instructions. **LJ & DP**

****BACKLASH** by Brad Thor (Atria, \$27.99). Two days ago, Scott Harvath was crossed—badly. Now, in a foreign land and surrounded by his enemy, Harvath must battle his way out. With no support, no cavalry coming, and no one even aware of where he is, it will take everything he has ever learned to survive. But survival isn't enough. Harvath wants revenge. **DP**

Best Paperback Originals

****BEYOND ALL REASONABLE DOUBT** by Malin Persson Giolito (Other Press, \$16.99). Thirteen years ago, a fifteen-year-old girl was murdered. Doctor Stig Ahlin was sentenced to life in prison. But no one has forgotten the brutal crime. Ahlin is known as one of the most ruthless criminals. When Sophia Weber discovers critical flaws in the murder investigation, she decides to help Ahlin. But Sophia's doing her utmost to get her client exonerated arouses many people's disgust. And the more she learns, the more difficult her job becomes. **PW & Kirkus**

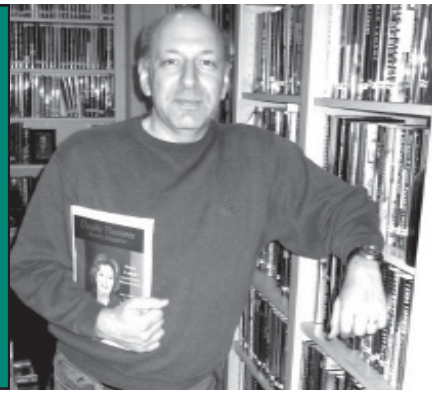
****FATE: THE LOST DECADES OF UNCLE CHOW TUNG** by Ian Hamilton (Spiderline, \$15.95). Hong Kong, 1969. The Dragon Head of the Fanling Triad has died and there is a struggle to replace him among senior members of the gang. Normally, the Deputy Mountain Master is next in line, but this one is weak and ineffectual and has only survived because of the protection of the Dragon Head. Up to this point, the



Fanling Triad has operated in relative isolation from neighbouring gangs, but the Dragon Head's death has drawn attention to the area ? and to its wealth. Other gangs start to make threatening moves and it's obvious to the senior members of the Fanling Triad that they need a leader who can fend off the threats, unite the membership, and maintain their prosperity. There are several candidates. The least conspicuous is the White Paper Fan, their young administrator. His name is Chow Tung, but many of those who work with him already refer to him as "Uncle." **DP**

****THE HORSEMAN'S SONG** by Ben Pastor (Bitter Lemon, \$14.95). Spain, summer 1937. The civil war between Spanish nationalists and republicans rages. On the bloody sierras of Aragon, among Generalissimo Franco's volunteers is Martin Bora, the twenty-something German officer and detective. Presently a lieutenant in the Spanish Foreign Legion, Bora lives the tragedy around him as an intoxicating epic, between idealism and youthful recklessness. The first doubts, however, rise in Bora's mind when he happens on the body of Federico Garcia Lorca, a brilliant poet, progressive and homosexual. Who murdered him? Why? The official version does not convince Bora, who begins a perilous investigation. **PW**

Larry Gandle's Take on the EDGAR AWARD NOMINEES



After having read the Best Novel and Best First Novel By An American Author categories, I can now say it has been a truly bad list- historically awful. I did see the list of books submitted and there is no real excuse for this. In looking at the Barry nominees, they missed so many of the best books of the year. To be fair, however, the Barry list missed what is most likely the best book of the year, **WHERE THE CRAWDADS SING**. I wish I read it earlier.

I did not read the Best Paperback Originals as they all appear to be the female psychological suspense novels that are falling over each other to be the next **GONE GIRL**. (See assistant editor column)

BEST NOVEL

This is a truly awful list with only one standout. George loves Mike Lawson's work and I can see why.

THE LIAR'S GIRL by Catherine Ryan Howard (Blackstone, \$24.99).

Rating: C

Will Hurley has confessed to killing five women in a canal near a Dublin college where he went to school. He sits in a psychiatric hospital in the city for the last ten years. Now another woman is found in the canal. There is, apparently, a copycat killer out there. The police want to bring in Will's ex- girlfriend at the time, Alison Smith, as Will says there is something else he wants to confess but will only do so to Alison. She definitely does not want to be dragged back into the case but agrees to meet him. The truth eventually emerges and places Alison in mortal danger.

This is a very pedestrian psychological suspense novel. It is reasonably en-

gaging but really nothing truly unique or unforgettable except for the writing. It is terrible. How many times can the characters "roll their eyes", sigh, have "a warm feeling flow across their chest" or have hairs stand on their end. The book is full of awful trite phrases. Now, I rarely- if ever- comment on the writing as the books I choose to read are already well edited and, to be honest, crime fiction is not usually great literature. In this instance, the author should sue her editor for malpractice. For example, probably fifteen to twenty times various characters "rolled their eyes". I can't recall ever doing it, personally. Needless to say, it is very distracting. To add insult to injury, the 'twist' at the end is very predictable and disappointing. This book is on the Edgar Award shortlist for Best Novel. It is another awful selection of the Edgar committee.

A GAMBLER'S JURY by Victor Methos (Thomas and Mercer, \$24.95)

Rating: B+

Dani Rollins is a defense lawyer working in the Salt Lake City area. There is nothing high powered about her as her life is pretty much self destructive. She takes the case of Teddy Thorne, a mentally challenged 17-year-old black teen who is accused of selling a large amount of cocaine. Dani realizes that there is no way Teddy has the mental capacity to perform this task on his own. She has no doubt the case will be dismissed and that he is likely being set up. Surely the court system is not blind and foolish enough to take his case seriously! She is wrong and soon winds up with an unwinnable case and the guardianship of Teddy besides all the other personal disasters in her life.

The most remarkable thing about this book is that it is an incredibly well written legal thriller with a female protagonist written by a male author. If I did not see a photo of the author, I would be absolutely convinced a woman wrote this book. Women authors tend to focus on relationships and the mundane existence of the main protagonist. Descriptions of clothing and designer shoes add to the female mystique. The snappy dialogue and, at times, downright funny scenarios could have been written by Janet Evanovich. The meticulous investigation could have been written by Sue Grafton. I will say that it does take some time to get into this book but the fifty-page rule should suffice for most readers to realize it is a book worth reading. I will point out there is a political agenda within the pages and conservative republicans may not be thrilled. The characters are well developed and the plot moves swiftly. This is an entertaining book by an author I was not familiar with. Now that he is nominated for an Edgar Award for Best Novel of the Year, many more readers will know who he is. Recommended.

DOWN THE RIVER UNTO THE SEA by Walter Moseley (Mulholland, \$27.00). **Rating: C+**

Joe King Oliver is a former NYPD detective who was set up for a crime he did not commit. He is now a PI working the city. He receives a letter from a woman who claims she agreed to frame him for a crime he did not commit. He looks into the individuals who had it out for him. Another case he looks into is a man who is accused of killing two bad cops involved in drugs and prostitution. Joe places himself in harm's way as he

investigate the cases leading, of course, to death and danger.

I do not like PI novels- not at all. They are way too formulaic for me as defined by Chandler. This one is no exception. The writing is great. The characters well defined and Walter Mosely is a master at evoking the setting and writing true to life dialogue. What I did not like was the same old feel for this book- I feel like I read something like this a hundred times before. It lacks any sense of uniqueness. For that reason, I feel this is a poor choice for an Edgar nomination. I do not recommend.

ONLY TO SLEEP by Lawrence Osborne (Hogarth, \$26.00). **Rating: B-**

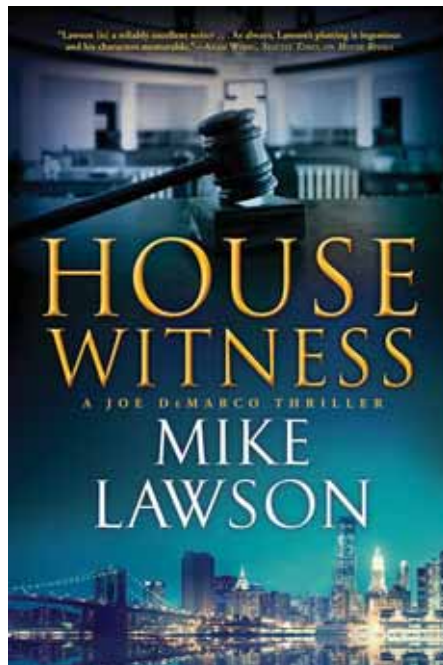
Philip Marlowe is back (for some reason- undoubtedly financial gain for the estate). The time is the 1980s. Marlowe is retired and an 'old' 70 years old. He carries a cane with a knife inside. He is pulled out of retirement by an insurance company who is convinced that a man who supposedly drowned and was quickly cremated represents a fraudulent claim. They want Marlowe to ascertain whether the man and his wife, who is the beneficiary, are actually honest. Marlowe takes the case and he soon finds himself in small Mexican villages on the heels of a man who is likely the supposed deceased. Along the way he meets many unsavory characters and places his life into mortal danger.

Do we really need another Marlowe book? Again, I do not like PI novels. Raymond Chandler is credited with creating the modern PI novel. He did a great job with that. What is the point of bringing his character back? The author attempts to evoke Chandler and, in my opinion, falls short. What I like about this book is the story concerns one plot point- the search for the missing man. Therefore, the plot is easy to follow and there is a sense of suspense created without watering it down with an excess of characters and increased complexity with other plot lines. Personally, I didn't care for any of the characters and therefore never truly bought into the plot. Yet, the book is entertaining enough. I just don't think it is a worthy member of the Edgar shortlist for Best Novel. Not recommended.

HOUSE WITNESS by Mike Lawson (Atlantic Monthly, \$26.00). **Rating: A**

Joe Demarco works as fixer for the Minority Leader of the House, John Mahoney. Mahoney has a secret – he has a son through an illicit affair and now the son is dead- killed in a bar in Manhattan with five witnesses ready to testify. The killer, Toby Rosenthal, is the son of a wealthy attorney. Now, it appears that the witnesses are being interfered with and Mahoney sends Demarco up there to assist the prosecutor with the case. As he looks into the matter, he does see evidence of witness tampering and investigates. In the meantime, Ella Fields, the trial consultant for the defense, is very much involved with eliminating the witnesses by any means possible- including murder. A cat and mouse game ensues.

The plot is original and with the two main protagonists, Joe Demarco and Ella Fields, through an alternate chapter point of view, the reader is privy to what is happening at all times while the characters run around in the dark. The pacing is tight and the suspense always at a fever pitch. It is virtually impossible to put down the book. The plot is clever and complex. The characters are well sketched and the locale is well described. This is the first book in the series I have read and it is quite excellent on its own. The book is on the Edgar Award shortlist for Best Novel by



the Mystery Writers of America. Based on the list, it is easily the one to beat. Highly recommended.

A TREACHEROUS CURSE by Veronica Speedwell (Putnam, \$26.00).

Rating: D+

In London, 1888, amateur detective, Veronica Speedwell, looks into a disappearance of a man from an Egyptian archeological dig with a priceless artifact. Her friend, Stoker, was part of the expedition. There also appears to be a curse from the ancient Egyptian princess causing Anubis, the God, to be stalking the London streets. Danger abounds, of course.

Perhaps I should just say that this book is not to my taste and leave it at that. But I won't, as usual. I want to define why I hated this book. It is dull and uninteresting. There are no real scenes of suspense or conflict until the last third of this overwritten and lengthy book. Characters are stock figures and I never fully appreciated any humor. I really did not care about any of the characters or their problems. I also did not get a great sense of the time and the locale. It is astounding to me that out of the truly hundreds of books submitted for the Edgar award Best Novel, this one stood out. This is a very strange Edgar committee. Definitely not recommended -- avoid!

My pick: HOUSE ARREST by Mike Lawson. Nothing else comes close!

Winner: DOWN THE RIVER UNTO THE SEA by Walter Mosely. He deserves an Edgar, but not for this.

BEST FIRST NOVEL BY AN AMERICAN AUTHOR

A KNIFE IN THE FOG by Bradley Harper (Seventh Street Books, \$15.95).

Rating: A-

In September, 1888, London, the famous serial killer, Jack the Ripper is beginning his killing spree. The ex-Prime Minister Gladstone asks twenty-nine-year-old Arthur Conan Doyle to come and investigate and provide assistance to the police in that he just wrote **A STUDY IN SCARLET** and Gladstone feels Doyle is clever like his

detective. Doyle insists his old professor of surgery, Joseph Bell, join him as he was the inspiration for Sherlock Holmes. Upon arrival, they are assigned a guide through the area, Miss Margaret Harkness who is an author that resides in the East End of London. As the brutal murders commence, the three of them team up to stop the killings.

One of the most difficult tasks an author must face when writing a crime fiction novel that would include actual historic personages asked to help solve a crime, is to immediately and logically explain why they were placed into a position to do so. If it doesn't make sense, the reader will never buy into the story. The author does a reasonable job of explaining this. It is obvious that a lot of research went into this totally absorbing historical mystery. It is easy to fact check using the internet and everything related to the killings were true. Of course, the author did eventually use some literary license to create a neatly packaged ending. For a debut, the writing was remarkably deft. The depictions of the locale were realistic as were the characters. The pacing is swift but the book is slightly too long. There are numerous pointless scenes which serve no real purpose in advancing the plot. Also, there is the irksome scene of the villain in a superior position divulging all. Overall, this is an excellent historical mystery and a deserved member of the Edgar Shortlist for Best First Novel by an American Author.

THE CAPTIVES by Debra Jo Immergut (Ecco, \$26.99). **Rating: C-**

Miranda Greene, daughter of an ex-congressman, is serving time for murder. Frank Lundquist is the prison psychologist and lived in the same town as Miranda when they were in high school. He had a crush on her back then but she hardly noticed him. Now, she is his patient. Miranda is seeing him because she wants to collect enough pills in order to commit suicide. Frank, not knowing that he is being played, becomes more and more drawn into Miranda leading to an outrageous proposal placing them both into unexpected danger.

I will admit I hated this book. It is dull and dreary in the beginning with two remarkably unlikeable characters. I will admit the writing is fine with

the characters well drawn. The prison setting seems very real as the author has taught writing there. To get to the more interesting set up in the end, the reader must traverse a long and boring character study on both Miranda and Frank. I quickly lost interest as I didn't like either one. In my mind, the book is forgettable and a bewildering choice for an inclusion on the Edgar shortlist for Best First Novel by an American Author.

THE LAST EQUATION OF ISAAC SEVERY by Nova Jacobs (Atria, \$25.00). **Rating: DNF**

Sorry, I could not get into this book which I was extremely bored with after 50 excruciating pages. There are way too many other books to read. Dull! Avoid!

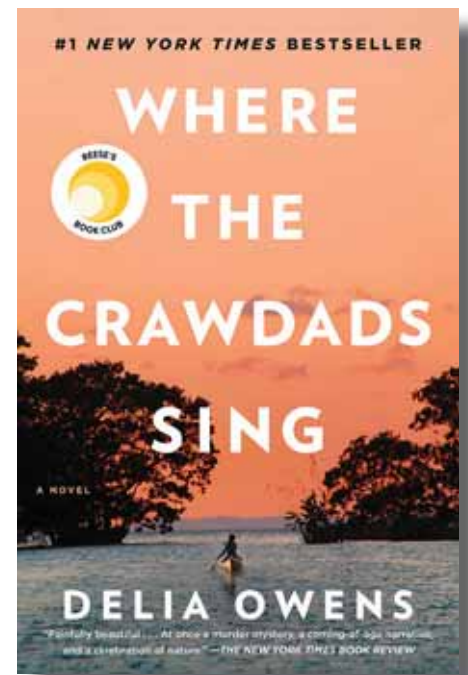
BEARSKIN by James A. McLaughlin (Ecco, \$26.99). **Rating: C+**

Rice Moore is a caretaker in the rural Virginia Mountains. He tracks wildlife and lives a solitary life. He has fled from his life with the Mexican drug cartels and is hiding out from them. When a bear carcass is found, Rice takes it personally and goes after the poachers. This, of course, brings him into danger—not just from the poachers but from the cartel that is catching up to him.

As a debut author, McLaughlin has done a remarkable job at depicting the locale. The descriptive passages are beautifully written but so detailed that the plot moves at a snail's pace. Personally, I did not like any of the characters and did not care to know what happened to them. Often bored, I fought the impulse to put the book down but persevered to the reasonable climax and ending. Very good writer but unless he concentrates on telling a story in a tighter and more compelling fashion, I do not predict a long career for him in the crime fiction genre. Perhaps literary fiction better suits him. However, I am judging this as a crime fiction book on the shortlist for the Edgar Award Best First Novel by an American Author. As such, I do not recommend it.

WHERE THE CRAWDADS SING by Delia Owens (Putnam \$27.00). **Rating: A**

Kya Clark lives in a swamp on the rural coast of North Carolina. At the beginning of the story, she is, essentially, an abandoned six-year-old as her family,



one by one, left their abusive father and husband until it was just Kya and her father and eventually just Kya. She learns to survive on her own while getting to know the flora and fauna of the swamp on an intimate level. Two men enter her life and both let her down. It is the second one who is found dead having fallen off a fire tower. It is thought he might have been murdered. The locals are looking at Kya for the deed.

The most remarkable thing about this book is the writing itself. It is lyrical and captures the very essence of the locale. It is rare to read such beautiful descriptions of nature. The story, itself, is well told. It is a coming of age novel which turns into an exceptionally good trial novel. Characters are realistically portrayed and their dialogue appears to be spot on. The possible murder and the juxtapositioning of time keeps the suspense at a heightened level. This book is on the shortlist for the Edgar Award Best First Novel by an American Author. It well deserves its place—highly recommended. One of the best books of the year!

My pick: WHERE THE CRAWDADS SING by Delia Owens. There is no other book remotely in its class of either category.

Winner: BEARSKIN by James A. McLaughlin. George liked it, but I did not. Perhaps George should review the Edgar nominees in future. [no, no, no]

The Donus Report

Donus Roberts



RED SNOW by Will Dean, Point Blank Publishing, 391 pages, 2019, 14.99 pounds. **Rating: A** Will Dean is a Londoner who has resettled in Sweden, where he has set both of his crime novels, **RED SNOW** being the second. His chilling first novel is entitled **DARK PINES**. Dean's books qualify as Nordic Noir in structure, but there is a British heritage behind his words, particularly found in some cutting-edge humor.

The setting for both novels is the fictional town of Gavrik, Sweden. Two events happen early in the novel, a suicide followed by a ritualistic murder. Black Grimberg liquorice coins cover the murdered man's eyes (Grimberg is a large, local producer of liquorice). The hashtag #Ferryman trends as local people start to stock up on ammunition.

The author's protagonist for both novels is Tuva Moodyson, a deaf reporter at a local newspaper. She joins my personal list of compelling protagonists; she is able to turn her personal handicap into an asset in her investigations. The author employs a time-line technique that keeps the plot moving, which is that Tuva has only a few days before she has to leave for a new job with another newspaper in a different region of Sweden.

The big complication in the plot occurs when a blizzard moves into the region and literally shuts the town off from any other contacts. Coincidentally, as I write about this crime novel, an April blizzard has cut our small city, Watertown, South Dakota, from the rest of the world, TV and the internet excepted. All roads are blocked by snowdrifts, schools are closed, and most businesses are closed. Imagine a psychopathic murderer on the loose in this environment.

RED SNOW is the second novel in what promises to be a marvelous series. The author's skill at storytelling would hold my interest even if the murder plot were not nail-biting.

Every once in a while I check out my memory of a golden oldie. For this column I turn to **BANKING ON DEATH** by Emma Lathen, published originally in 1961, 233 pages, now a print on demand book, \$11.99. **Rating: A-** Emma Lathen is the pseudonym of Mary J. Latis and Martha Hennissart, two Boston businesswomen.

BANKING ON DEATH is the first novel in what became a 24- book series. Lathen's protagonist is John Putnam Thatcher who is senior vice-president of the Sloan Guaranty Trust Company. We understand that the Sloan, as it is called, is one of America's largest banks in an age when banks were still only account and lending institutions rather than sprawling financial trusts.

When I re-read this novel, I was very surprised to find how well it read, considering how much banking has changed, which, of course, is because people's penchant for murder has not changed. Perhaps I have matured to read for more than plot, because John Putnam Thatcher is a very complex and interesting character. Many of the novels in the series center on economic crimes, which usually cause readers to yawn, but the personality of John Putnam Thatcher still keeps the plots moving. In the case of this novel there is an economic crime followed by a murder.

Hilda Henderson, the wife of Arthur Schneider, who has been deceased for years, has suffered a debilitating stroke, so their children are now circling the wagons for their inheritance. The problem is that one of the heirs to the

trust was missing. When John Putnam Thatcher located him, he had been a corpse for two weeks--and not from natural causes.

In her day, Emma Lathen had high praise rendered. The *Times* of London raved: "She is a sort of Jane Austen of the detective novel, crisp, detached, mocking, economical." Anthony Boucher commented on their "extraordinary ability to clarify the most intricate financial shenanigans so that even I can understand them" A significant number of awards followed the John Putnam Thatcher novels. In 1967 the authors won the Gold Dagger Award for **MURDER AGAINST THE GRAIN**. In 1983 The Ellery Queen Award; in 1997 the Agatha Award and the Malice Domestic Award for Lifetime Achievement.

Emma Lathen has not survived as well as some Golden Age authors, but she should not be forgotten. I am happy that I picked her as my golden oldie.

In my opinion, Michael Connelly has created the iconic detective within all crime fiction, that being Harry Bosch. After 27 years, Connelly just keeps writing novels that raise the bar for crime fiction. Along the way he adds memorable characters, now Renee Ballard, who makes her first appearance with Harry Bosch in **DARK SACRED NIGHT**, Little, Brown, 433 pages, 2018, \$29.00.

Rating: A The standard line in crime fiction is if you have a loner detective, add a character who is the opposite of loner. However, both Renee Ballard and Harry Bosch are loner detectives, and Connelly makes it work.

Detective Ballard is working the night beat, known as "the Late Show," when she meets Bosch; he is illegally rifling through old files, trying to find information on a cold case that has attracted his attention. She gently removes Bosch, after which she scans the files he was searching. She sees what Bosch saw, and they join forces.

The unsolved murder was that of fifteen-year-old Daisy Clayton, a runaway, who was savagely murdered -- her body left like garbage in a dumpster. Finding the guilty party who perpetrated such a crime is a guiding quest for both Renee and Harry, and they work quietly alone/

together. Until...

If you are among the readers who have never encountered Harry Bosch, the good news is that you have dozens of good novels ahead of you. My advice: if you want to read the Harry Bosch series, go back to the first one, **THE BLACK ECHO**, followed by the next four, and read them in order; after that read anywhere in the series.

MY SISTER THE SERIAL KILLER by Oyinkan Braithwaite, 226 pages, 2018, \$22.95. **Rating A-** Frequently I stretch the boundaries of the crime novel in this column, which is also true with this novel. The title of this novel, **MY SISTER, THE SERIAL KILLER**, is both accurate and misleading. It is not a gruesome knife-slasher story; rather the novel is a playful investigation into sibling rivalry, a culture of abuse, and pervasive sexism found in Nigeria's Patriarchal society.

One sister, Korede, is a nurse at a hospital in Lagos. She also narrates the novel. She is homely, responsible and lonely. Any passion for men is never reciprocated. Her younger sister, both beautiful and reckless, is Ayoola, who kills her boyfriends. At the opening of the novel, Ayoola, has just murdered her third man with a knife.

Ayoola summons Korede to clean up

the crime scene and dispose of the body. After every murder, Korede cleans up the body and the blood; thus she is both an accomplice and an enabler.

Korede has a crush on a doctor named Tade, but he deflects all of her feelings. Then Tade meets Ayoola and falls under her spell. Will Tade become the fourth victim?

There is considerable humor on the book. "Ayoola has a 'figure eight--like a Coca-Cola bottle'" and Korede has "a figure one--like a stick." Ayoola gets flowers and various offers from wealthy men while Korede is told, "You're going to make someone an awesome wife."

The novel moves very rapidly, and I wanted more. However, a sequel to this novel is not likely.

DEATH OF AN EYE by Dana Stabenow, Head Zeus, 254 pages, 2018, \$29.00. **Rating: B** In the early 1990s, Dana Stabenow was riding the crest of her new series of crime novels set in Alaska and featuring the gutsy private eye, Kate Shugak. At the time Ms. Stabenow was high on my list of crime authors; she won an Edgar in 1993 for Best Paperback Original, **A COLD DAY FOR MURDER**.

Over the past few years, Stabenow temporarily quit writing the Shugak series. Now comes a new Alexandria, Egypt series set in 47 B.C. The central character is Tetisheri (known as Sheri). She is a childhood friend of Cleopatra, who is currently heavily pregnant with the child of Julius Caesar. Cleopatra has formidable enemies in Egypt who are waiting for the right moment to topple her reign. Cleopatra says, "I am surrounded by spies set in place by the Romans, by the nobles, by my brother, all of whom are watching and waiting for me to make that one slip." That opportunity seems to be at hand because a shipment of gold coins, meant to shore up the shaky Egyptian economy, was stolen; also Cleopatra's secret agent, known as the Eye, has been murdered.

Tetisheri sets out to find the coins under very dangerous circumstances. I am often asked about the realism of women undertaking such dangerous challenges. It was very real. Cleopatra

was a strong woman leader in the same era. Joan of Arc also comes to mind.

I was a big fan of Dana Stabenow from the get-go on the Kate Shugate novels. However, I found the beginning of **DEATH OF AN EYE** disorganized. The good news is that the novel improved as it moved toward the ending, except for the feeling I had during the reading that Stabenow was trying to write an analogous story to the circumstances in the world today.

GIVE ME YOUR HAND by Megan Abbott, Little, Brown, 352 pages, 2018, \$27.00. **Rating: A-** Megan Abbott is a master of the psychological thriller. With each passing novel, she constricts her settings more and more, and likewise her characters constrict within their relationships.

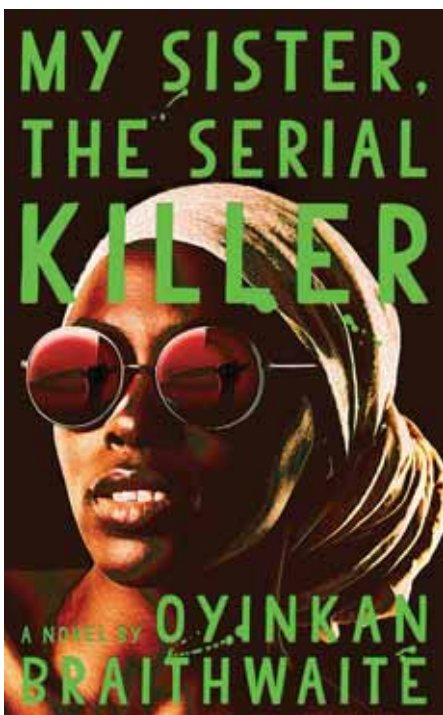
Sometime soon Megan Abbott may write a modern version of Edgar Allan Poe's "The Pit and the Pendulum." In each of her past three novels she has written, comparatively speaking, a version of it: an elite clique of high school cheerleaders in **DARE ME**; aspiring gymnasts in **YOU WILL KNOW ME**; and two friends who come from the opposite end of the tracks in **GIVE ME YOUR HAND**.

The novel follows these two characters through various stages of their lives: Diane Fleming from the upper middle class and Kit Owens from lower working class. Their friendship will break, but their lives will inevitably circle back to each other, and each time the tension will wind tighter.

I must say that I admire Megan Abbott's novels more than I like them. Yet somehow, with so many books and so little time I still end up with one of her novels in my hand about once a year.

MURDER ON THE LEFT BANK by Cara Black, Soho Crime, 276 pages, 2018, \$27.95. **Rating: A** It was 1998 when the first Aimee Luduc Investigation was published, **MURDER IN THE MARAIS**. Now there are eighteen Aimee Leduc Investigations. Equally amazing they have all been published by Soho Press.

About 1998 I recall I was in the Once Upon A Crime Bookstore in Minneapolis



lis when a small quarto hardcover with a picture of a rundown Paris apartment house on the cover caught my attention. I was ready to choose a book because of its cover, and I have always been grateful for my spur of the moment action.

MURDER ON THE LEFT BANK, Black's newest, is one of the strongest novels in the series. Monsieur Solomon, 82, very weak and wearing an oxygen mask, visits his attorney, Eric Besson. Solomon demands that his attorney take his journal, which includes pages of financial records, to the leading Prosecuting Attorney in Paris immediately. Allegedly the records show that dirty cops have been laundering stolen funds for years and Solomon wants it stopped.

Besson is overdue in court so he assigns his nephew Marcus the job of delivering the papers. Marcus is 18, and he and his girlfriend have planned a sexual tryst at a hotel that afternoon. Teen hormones being what they are, Marcus tells his girlfriend, Katrine, to go to the hotel and wait for him. True to his word, Marcus arrives at the hotel after a few minutes. Before lust can have its moment, men arrive and rough Marcus up, asking over and over where the papers are. Getting no answer, the men murder Marcus, leaving a hysterical Katrine in the room with the dead body.

Aimee Luduc was hired by Besson to find who murdered Marcus and locate where he hid the journal. Aimee is hesitant to take the case because her father was a cop and his death was connected to the same unit of cops she would be secretly investigating. She also knew the job would be dangerous, and for the most part her previous cases had not been dangerous.

However, Aimee needs the money. She is a single mother with a small child, Chloe, who will steal any reader's heart. Aimee's investigation was indeed more violent and life-threatening than any of her previous cases, so be prepared for turning pages into the night. Although I usually recommend reading the first novel in a series first, after that read this series in any order.

Central Booking

Kristopher Zgorski



THE AU PAIR by Emma Rous (Berkley, \$16.00). **Rating:** A- A *fronte praecipitium a tergo lupi* (A precipice in front, wolves behind).

This ominous warning graces a plaque on a cannon at the top of the cliff overlooking Summerborne House, the estate of The Mayes Family in Emma Rous' exceptional debut novel, **THE AU PAIR**.

This family home is where Laura Silveira comes to work in the Fall of 1991 to help Ruth Mayes with the work of taking care of young Edwin. By the end of the following summer much will have happened – affecting both Laura and the entire Mayes family.

In August 2017, Seraphine Mayes is looking through the belongings of her recently – and quite unexpectedly – passed father, Dominic, when she stumbles upon a photograph of her mother holding a baby on Seraphine's birthday – the same day that Ruth threw herself from the cliffs surrounding Summerbourne. There is just one small problem – Ruth is only holding one baby, when in fact, twins were born on that day. Reaching out to her twin bother, Danny, and their older sibling Edwin, Seraphine is shook to the core when no one can tell her why there is only one baby in the photograph. Because Seraphine begins to doubt everything she knows about her family, she quickly sets her mind to finding Laura, Edwin's Au Pair, who also happened to disappear from Summerbourne on that same August day back in 1992.

This is the barest outline of a novel that only becomes more complex as Seraphine's inquires expose more long-buried secrets. To say much more than this would become too spoiler-laden and risk ruining the reader's enjoy-

ment of discovery.

Suffice to say, Emma Rous has written a hell of a book; one that is compulsively readable, unexpectedly complex, and 100% satisfying. Chapters alternate between Seraphine's present-day investigation and Laura's accounting of her time working as the Mayes' Au Pair. All of the characters – even those that might seem like minor players – are fully fleshed-out individuals who one might expect to meet within a quaint British village or on some palatial estate, assuming one were granted access to those upper echelons of society.

THE AU PAIR could easily have become a convoluted mess, but in the skilled hands of Emma Rous readers are guided with confidence and clarity through a labyrinthine maze of secrets and lies. This is a book to settle into for the long haul. Readers will quickly find themselves lost in this fictional world where trust changes direction like the wind and where identity and lineage are anything but a sure thing.

No doubt, reading this review, you have already come up with a theory on what happened and let me tell you, Emma Rous will cover those ideas very quickly within the book and then pull the rug out from under you once again. This is pure escapist fun. Remember those days watching television soap operas with your Grandmother? That is the experience of reading **THE AU PAIR** by Emma Rous.

AN ANONYMOUS GIRL by Greer Hendricks and Sarah Pekkanen (St. Martin's Press, \$27.99). **Rating:** B

Greer Hendricks and Sarah Pekkanen proved themselves to be a powerhouse duo with their debut bestseller, *The Wife Between Us*. However, it is their new psychological suspense novel,

AN ANONYMOUS GIRL, which will cement their standing as must-read authors for a legion of crime fiction fans.

Like *The Wife Between Us*, **AN ANONYMOUS GIRL** is a story about the relationship dynamics between two very different women. First there is Jessica Farris, the younger city dweller who struggles in almost all areas of her life – her finances, her family relationships, and her romance prospects. At the other end of the spectrum is Dr. Lydia Shields, a successful psychiatrist conducting some innovative research on the workings of the human mind.

It is this research that brings these two women into the same orbit. Jess needs money to help her parents support her developmentally-disabled sister back home, so when she discovers an opportunity to get paid for answering a few questions as part of Dr. Shields' morality study, she would do just about anything to be a participant.

For her part, Dr. Shields finds herself immediately intrigued by Jess's survey answers and feels the need to dig deeper into this woman's psyche. Just why she feels this connection with Jess is not immediately clear, which is what sets readers on a path that will take many unexpected detours before the tense climax of this gripping novel.

Hendricks and Pekkanen have structured their novel in such a way as to both maintain the needed suspense and to draw the reader deeper in to the core story. Throughout the book, chapters alternate between two points of view. Jessica's chapters are first person and proceed in standard chronological order, from just before she meets Dr. Shields through to her final encounter with this complex woman. Every other chapter is written from Dr. Shields perspective. The interesting thing here is that these chapters are written in second person, which serves to make the reader feel almost directly involved in the action and thus culpable at every turn. Second person narration is less common, but here allows these authors to manipulate the reader in ways that more common points of view would not have been able to accomplish.

In crafting both of these women, the

authors have created a formidable duo. It would have been easy to make one of these women gullible, while the other was just an out-right bitch, but that is not the path taken. Each possesses both strengths and weaknesses that make them uniquely situated to fall into this situation, casting spells over each other. Readers, whose tendency it can often be to choose sides, will find this a harder prospect here – at least in the early sections of the book. The more that is revealed about both women, the more reader's allegiances will shift, sometimes in unexpected ways.

AN ANONYMOUS GIRL is a fast-paced read that will please any fan of domestic suspense. Like most books in this sub-genre, there is some reliance on tropes, but these two authors infuse enough originality into their storyline to make it stand out among a crowded arena. Whatever process they have found to write these novels together is working very well indeed and readers, like myself, will be anxiously awaiting their next exploration into the minds of modern women.

THE SILENT PATIENT by Alex Michaelides (Celadon Book, \$26.99) **Rating: B+** Society has long joked that often it is the therapist who is the one most in need of therapy. This is most definitely a stereotype, but like all such

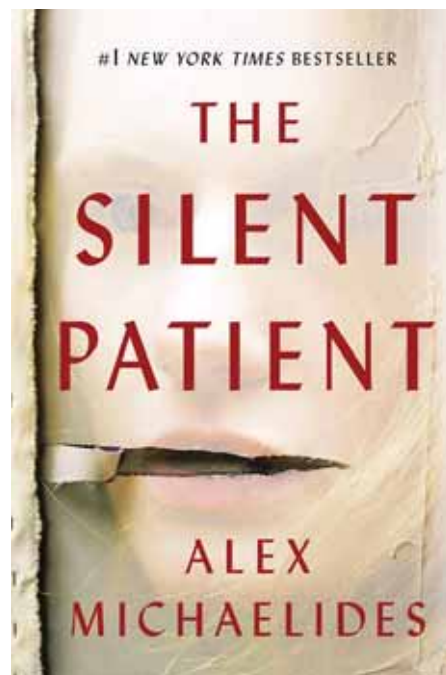
generalizations, there is a grain of truth in there. One need look no further than Theo Faber, the protagonist of Alex Michaelides' debut novel, **THE SILENT PATIENT**, to find an example of how the strange doctor/patient dynamic can derail a professional endeavor with just the slightest of provocation.

THE SILENT PATIENT is one of those books that is difficult to classify, largely because it does not want to be pigeonholed into any artificial constraints imposed by our many sub-genres. **THE SILENT PATIENT** is a thriller that reads like a police procedural by way of the psychological suspense highway. Yet, because of consistent tone, precise writing, and compelling characters, Alex Michaelides navigates the challenges of genre-hopping and succeeds in writing an enthralling novel that keeps the reader glued to the pages straight through to the end.

Theo Faber is a psychotherapist who finds himself obsessed with a patient by the name of Alicia Berenson. Alicia has been in The Grove, an exclusive psychiatric hospital, for six years after being accused of shooting her fashion photographer husband, Gabriel, in the face five times. Since the night of that incident, Alicia has not spoken a single word. Newly assigned to her case, Theo is convinced that he can get her to speak – and hopefully in the process figure out what happened at the couple's home that evening.

Alex Michaelides tells his tale from Theo's point-of-view. There are occasional chapters that represent the diary of Alicia Berenson. These diary entries give readers access to information that Theo does not have, drawing the reader into the story further – often to the point where it is easy to understand Theo's obsessive search for answers, because they will feel it as well.

Before Gabriel's death, Alicia was on the brink of a successful, but unremarkable, career as an artist; however it is the painting she completed the night of her husband's murder that rocketed her to infamy. Since Alicia is not speaking, Theo seeks answers in her artwork and must interview individuals who knew this elusive woman back before the mur-



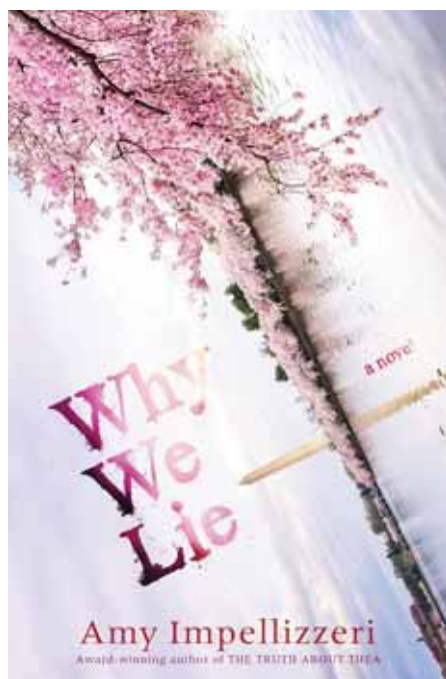
der. Sometimes without authorization, Theo talks with the gallery owner who displays Alicia paintings, her neighborhood best friend, her estranged aunt and nephew, her husband's brother, and several other more spoiler-y characters. Like a detective would, Theo attempts to bring clarity to this mosaic of impressions, information, and insinuation.

Meanwhile, Theo is not without problems of his own. He constant flouting of The Grove's rules puts his job at risk, his rivalry with colleagues does not go unnoticed, and his loyal wife may actually be having an affair. Through all of this, his bond with Alicia continues to grow stronger – fueled by the fact that the two of them both had difficult childhoods that haunt them into adult life. The only question is, can that connection convince Alicia to talk before Theo drives himself over the edge of obsession?

With **THE SILENT PATIENT**, Alex Michaelides, has written a book about silence that will have readers talking for a very long time. A very nice reveal near the end of the novel sends shockwaves that begs for discussion with other readers. Read this book and join the conversation.

WHY WE LIE by Amy Impellizzeri (Wyatt-MacKenzie Publishing, \$14.95) **Rating: A** Take a brilliant plot concept, populate it with complex and relatable characters, then wrap it all in an intimate writing style that is equal parts 'heart' and 'head' and the result is **WHY WE LIE** – one of the first truly-great suspense novels of 2019. This is a book that dares to look at the truth behind the art of lying and exposes its value to humanity, society, and individual sanity.

Amy Impellizzeri's **WHY WE LIE** provides a glimpse into Washington DC political culture from the inside out. Jude and Aby Birch seem like the perfect DC citizens. Jude is a political powerhouse congressman who has only just begun to wield the influence his station brings. His wife Aby is well respected at the nonprofit where she is employed. Within this mix is also the campaign manager, Laila Rogers, who seems to know more about this couple than her role mandates.



When Jude is shot during what seems to be gang-related violence, his injuries change the course of all their lives. Jude's doctor tells Aby that because of the brain damage from the bullet's trajectory, Jude will never again be able to tell a lie. This may seem innocuous enough, but honestly, what is the role of a politician who cannot manipulate the truth to suit his own agenda? Not to mention those little white lies that make everyday existence bearable? And more importantly, what if secrets within a marriage are so explosive that no one wants them exposed?

In our era of "fake news," *Why We Lie* is timelier than ever. Impellizzeri chooses to end many of the chapters with excerpts from a "truth only" newspaper called *The Washington Truth*, which adds more layers of complexity to the narrative. Another element keeping this book relevant is a plot-line that documents how the campaign financing becomes entangled with some social media apps and the fallout from such actions.

WHY WE LIE is a book where maintaining the element of surprise is vital to its success. Amy Impellizzeri cleverly crafts her narrative to keep the secrets intact throughout. She manipulates the reader in ways that only become apparent once the truth is revealed – and that is an extraordinary

thing. Telling the story of the Birch's courtship from first accidental meeting to marriage, then into their political run through to the tragic shooting and beyond seems like a ton to squeeze into a novel that runs well under 300 pages, but Amy Impellizzeri has a blueprint and follows that plan effortlessly without a wasted moment along the way.

A suspense novel built around an insider's view of political campaigns and marriage might at first seem like an unlikely pairing of topics, but readers know that character motivations have to ring authentic regardless of what aspects of that person's life is being examined. Impellizzeri has found a way to weave a thread through both the professional and personal lives of her characters and readers will be mesmerized. **WHY WE LIE** is an excellent read that tackles many of the most controversial hot-button elements of our modern existence.

BLOOD ORANGE by Harriet Tyce (Grand Central Publishing, \$27.00)

Rating: B- Harriet Tyce's **BLOOD ORANGE** could easily serve as "Exhibit A" disputing any claim that domestic suspense is less gritty, less dark, and less risky than its noir sibling. Crack the spine on this novel to enter a bleak landscape filled with deeply-rooted violence, poor decision-making, and levels of sexual danger that would make anyone consider celibacy.

BLOOD ORANGE is the story of Alison Bailey: a UK-based lawyer married to Carl, mother to Matilda, and mistress of Patrick Saunders. It is clear from the beginning of the novel that Alison wants to break things off with Patrick, to be a better mother to her daughter, and mend the fissures within her marriage – but the difference between desire and doing can sometimes be a wide chasm.

Unlike some novels featuring lawyers, Harriet Tyce refuses to sugarcoat the stresses of working on multiple litigations at once. Even after Alison is given her first murder case, the novel documents many of the other lesser court appearances this busy lawyer must juggle around the demands of this new high-profile assignment. As luck would have it – bad luck, that is – Ali-

son's mentor, assigned to help her prep for this murder trial is none other than Patrick Saunders, making any hope that she can resist his charms impossible.

Alison's struggles with alcohol certainly contribute to her questionable choices. It can be frustrating for the reader to watch as she continues to compromise the good things in her life; and yet, the reality is that people can always find ways to justify their decisions – even when those viewing from the outside know better. In the case of **BLOOD ORANGE**, fans of domestic suspense will have no troubles tracking what is happening to Alison. Except that, rather than diminishing the suspense, Harriet Tyce manages to use this to ratchet up the tension readers feel as each risk marches Alison closer toward total destruction.

Harriet Tyce artfully navigates the blame game. Readers are only privy to Alison's point-of-view, but within that are indications that no one in this book is making good decisions. The question is whose decisions are simply ill advised and whose are actionably criminal?

Make no mistake about it, **BLOOD ORANGE** is a feminist crime novel: The murder trial involves domestic violence, there is workplace sexual misconduct, controlling behavior complicates almost every relationship within the book, and patterns of abuse reign. Toxic masculinity is a huge societal issue and there is no shortage of crime novels intent on examining this ill from every possible angle. That said, Harriet Tyce's debut is a brutally realistic and unflinching example of how destructive this mentality is and how difficult it can be to avoid becoming another casualty laid at its feet. Well-written, this dark book is at times harrowing to read because of how mundane it all feels. At the same time, that is precisely why **BLOOD ORANGE** ranks as such an important read.

Oh, and let's not forget – eating oranges will never be the same again!

BEFORE SHE KNEW HIM by Peter Swanson (William Morrow, \$26.99) **Rating: B** No one is going to claim that Peter Swanson repeatedly writes the same book. With his fifth novel, **BEFORE SHE KNEW HIM**, he once again

takes some familiar tropes and alters them just enough to make them feel fresh. The connective tissue linking all of his novels is this deep understanding of the complex dynamic between men and women.

BEFORE SHE KNEW HIM begins with Henrietta (Hen) and Lloyd moving to a new home on the outskirts of Boston. Despite wanting an isolated life, they accept an invitation to dinner at their neighbor's house. Mira and Matthew seem like nice people, but when Hen is given a tour of their home, she notices a trophy on the bookshelf that looks remarkably like one that went missing after the notorious killing of a young man years earlier. Hen becomes convinced that Matthew is a serial killer and that their house is decorated with souvenirs from those murders.

Trouble is, Henrietta is bi-polar and has a long history of becoming obsessed with ideas like this – to the point that sometimes she can't function in everyday life. With medication and a focus on her artwork, Hen thought she had her OCD under control, but this interaction with Matthew reignites the unhealthy fire.

Meanwhile, alternating chapters let readers into Matthew's world. It seems that Hen might not be too far off track with her suspicions and since Matthew noticed Hen's reaction to that trophy, he has begun stalking her, trying to discover if she has discovered his darkest secrets.

Throughout the novel, the line between hunter and hunted is in constant flux with readers knowing more than both characters at critical moments. But Peter Swanson is a skilled storyteller and there are still more things that he cleverly obfuscates from the reader allowing for some startling revelations late in the novel.

BEFORE SHE KNEW HIM is a fast and cinematic read that will certainly keep readers invested through to the end. With two unreliable narrators, Peter Swanson hooks readers with their journey but also keeps the action relatable without sacrificing the suspense. There is no telling what Peter Swanson will deliver in his next novel, but you

can bet it will probably be a fascinating read highlighted by destructive gender dynamics.

Some people are destined to be storytellers. You can tell when you read their debut novel that no matter where life took them, eventually those words were going to make their way to the page for the betterment of us all. Angie Kim and the glorious *Miracle Creek* are a fine example of this phenomenon.

MIRACLE CREEK by Angie Kim (Sarah Crichton Books, \$27.00) **Rating: A+** **MIRACLE CREEK** is a literary novel that will appeal to readers of crime fiction. Because of the various avenues of exploration contained within, marketing is placing this book in the general fiction category, but the thrilling courtroom scenes that form the backbone of the narrative will more than satisfy readers of legal thrillers and traditional mysteries alike. Simply put, **MIRACLE CREEK** is so expansive that it literally features something for every type of reader.

A bare bones plot summary would look something like this: an explosion at a facility where patients are being treated for a myriad of medical conditions through the use of hyperbaric oxygen therapy (HBOT) could have been a tragic accident or a case of intentional sabotage, but regardless of which, the lives of everyone involved will be irrevocably altered.



Angie Kim

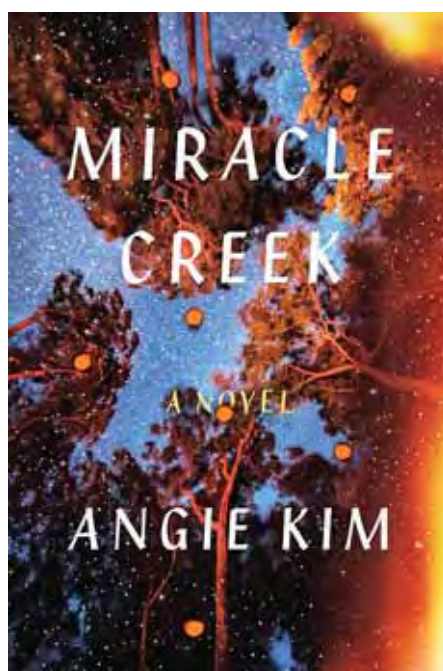
There are seven point-of-view characters in **MIRACLE CREEK**. Each person tells the story of that fateful day from his or her own vantage point. Just as in real life, no two people experience the same events in the same way. Readers are left to connect the various pieces into one cohesive timeline – much the way a image eventually emerges from the careful placement of an artist's mosaic tiles.

These are not characters in a book – well, technically, they are – but Angie Kim breathes so much life into each of them that readers will feel as if these people live next door. As each of them recounts their story, their history, it is impossible not to forge some connection. At various times, readers will experience empathy, sympathy, anger, and frustration; feeling everything from a symbiotic relationship to outright denial – perhaps too adamantly – of understanding.

Angie Kim structures her novel in such a way as to delay the major courtroom revelations, but never makes that feel like the true importance of the novel. Readers will become so invested in these characters and their unique lives that following them on their path becomes the central driving force of the narrative – which is part of the reason the emotional toll the book takes is so impactful.

When the “miracle submarine” explodes in the prologue, killing several and injuring others, it sets into motion a poignant journey that cuts to the core of our humanity. This is a story about immigrants (the HBOT facility is owned by a Korean immigrant family), about the stresses of long-term care-giving, about parenting, about marriage, about dreams, and about life. **MIRACLE CREEK** is a story about “us” in the most universal sense of that word.

As the courtroom drama unfolds, readers should not expect earth-shattering twists, but rather a quiet exploration of how simple choices can have catastrophic consequences and how decisions made in the moment always come with lasting ramifications. Ultimately, it is the labyrinths of the heart one truly longs to follow, explore, and hopefully



understand. **MIRACLE CREEK** is a novel that is deeply felt, forever lodging itself within the soul and wringing every last ounce of emotion from the reader.

As far as debut novels go, **MIRACLE CREEK** is one to cherish. Consider it the birth of a talented writer readers will be following for years. Angie Kim is the real deal and she is about to amass a loyal fan following.

THE WOMAN IN THE DARK by Vanessa Savage (Grand Central Publishing. \$27.00). **Rating: C+** Sarah and Patrick Walker have purchased a Victorian house located in a beachside community in Wales. They have extended themselves financially to obtain this dream for their family. Despite the fact that to most of the population, this building will always be the Murder House – the site of a gruesome multiple homicide – to Patrick it will always be the childhood home he grew up in and the location where he dreamed of raising his own children. This brief summary does not even come close to describing the terror reading Vanessa Savage's **THE WOMAN IN THE DARK** will send down the reader's spine. This is a book of pure psychological suspense by way of a haunted house story.

Sarah Walker is emotionally-drained after the death of her mother, so when her husband suggests taking their two children and moving to his ancestral

home, she certainly understands the appeal. But she has to admit that it is hard to get beyond the house's more recent infamy. Despite her reservations, the Walkers relocate and it is only then that strange things begin to occur.

Their oldest son, Joe, withdraws; while their daughter, Mia, rebels by acting out. No one is sleeping. Strange items are left on the front porch, repeatedly. And for some reason, the stories that Patrick has always told about the house are not adding up. As Sarah meets more of the neighbors and townsfolk, it becomes clear that someone is lying. And all of this is before Sarah hears that the Murder House killer has been released from jail.

Vanessa Savage imbues this Victorian home with such creepiness that readers will find themselves unable to stop stressing for this family and their safety. Even once it becomes clear that the house is not the only thing threatening the Walkers, the lure of this home's mythology will crawl under the skin and take root. Few writers can elicit this amount of dread while maintaining a high-level of menacing feeling throughout an entire novel. **THE WOMAN IN THE DARK** is cleverly constructed so that readers are so focused on the dangers at hand, they miss the more obvious risks at play in the plot.

Despite falling into the trend of including “woman” or “girl” in a book's title, **THE WOMAN IN THE DARK** is indeed the perfect title for this novel. The sanctity of one's home is something everyone understands and to watch that be violated in the ways this book describes is chilling and even difficult to read at times. Readers who are easily disturbed by unsettling feelings should avoid this one, but for all others this tightly-wound, psychologically-astute, horror-filled plot is certain to satisfy. By telling readers on the first page that two more bodies have been discovered in the Murder House (before flashing back to the beginning of the Walker's story), this author captures readers' attention and reinforces the fact that no one in this story is safe.

Whatever Vanessa Savage does next, crime fiction readers are going to flock to it.

From The Waterfront by Ted Hertel



MERCY RIVER by Glen Erik Hamilton (William Morrow, \$26.99, March 2019). **Rating: A-** Van Shaw gets a frantic voice mail from his Ranger friend Leo Pak, telling him “they’re coming,” and interrupted by a police officer. This leads Shaw to the town of Mercy River, Oregon, where he discovers Pak was there to attend a three-day Ranger celebration of a growing support organization. But Pak has instead been arrested on suspicion of murder and armed robbery. The victim was the owner of a local gun shop where Pak worked part-time. As Shaw, no stranger to crime himself, digs into the case he discovers that the owner was also into dealing stolen opiates. Further, a group of white supremacists are threatening to take over the town for its own purposes. Clearing Pak’s name will stir up many enemies who have much to hide and will result in Shaw having to question his own sense of justice versus the letter of the law.

This is another solid entry in Anthony and Macavity Award winning Glen Erik Hamilton’s terrific Van Shaw series. If you haven’t read the previous three novels, Hamilton includes all you need to know about Shaw without extensive elaboration. He has an excellent feel for characterization, both descriptive and motivational. The town of Mercy River is an appropriate setting for a story of small town fears of being overrun by drugs and criminals. The story reminded me of a Western, in which a stranger arrives in town, only to find more trouble than he bargained for.

Told with a high degree of action and suspense, the book moves quickly through its straightforward plotting to its violent climax. But it is in the exploration of friendship and justice that the

book excels. It’s often a question of ends and means: can illegal activity be used to create a just result? The answer here, as it has been in the earlier novels, is a resounding “yes” for Shaw. Throw in a touch of humor and a twist or two and Hamilton has created another enjoyable adventure.

MURDER IN BEL-AIR by Cara Black (Soho Crime, \$27.95, June 2019). **Rating: B** It’s 1999 in *La Ville-Lumière*. Private detective and security consultant Aimée Leduc is at a tech conference when she receives a call that her mother, Sydney, has disappeared (again!), leaving Aimée’s “almost toddler” daughter Chloé at a playgroup. After picking her up, Aimée learns that a woman has been knifed in the neighboring convent garden. Her mother? No, instead it was an acquaintance of Sydney, a woman that she often met in a local café. Aimée undertakes her own investigation into the murder in the hopes that it will lead

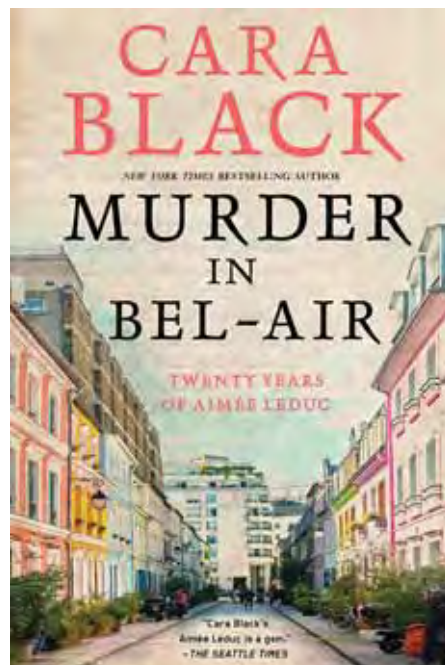
her to her mother. She soon discovers that it leads her to far more complicated and dangerous secrets than she could have ever imagined, putting not only her own life at risk, but also those of people she cares about. Cara Black and Aimée Leduc have been investigating crime in the City of Light for twenty years. Aimée is half-American (on her missing mother’s side) and half-French (on her late policeman father’s side). She motors around Paris on her Vespa scooter from her apartment on the Île Saint-Louis. Only six years have passed in Aimée’s life since Black’s first foray into her character’s life but they’ve been very busy years for her.

This time Aimée’s fashion-charged adventure (little black Chanel dress, Louboutin ankle boots, Vuitton bag) takes her on the streets and trains of Paris in order to investigate what could be a power struggle and impending coup d’état in Africa’s Côte d’Ivoire. She needs the able, although generally reluctant, assistance of her office partner René Friant, her wheelchair bound (or is her?) godfather Morbier, and others to help her avoid death at the hands of terrorists.

As always, the characters are smartly drawn, the plotting is complex but believable, and the Parisian setting is both charming and, at times, deadly. This is a fine continuation of an ongoing family drama, mixed together with international intrigue. While I wouldn’t recommend getting caught up in what Aimée Leduc get herself into, I definitely recommend coming along for the ride with Cara Black’s expert guidance through the lovely city of Paris. This is a fine series and a wonderful twentieth anniversary present to top it off. *Merci beaucoup*, Aimée Leduc and Cara Black!

TEAR IT DOWN by Nick Petrie (G. P. Putnam’s Sons, \$26.00, January 2019).

Rating: A Restless Iraq war veteran Peter Ash is asked by his significant other June Cassidy to travel from their home in Washington State to Memphis to help her friend Wanda Wyatt who has been receiving threats. June knows that Peter needs something to occupy his mind but neither of them can begin



to suspect what will be involved. Peter arrives in Tennessee just after a dump truck has been driven into Wanda's home. As Peter begins to rebuild the property, his truck is stolen by a frightened young man involved in a jewelry store robbery gone terribly wrong. In trying to recover his truck and equipment, Peter winds up on the wrong end of a gang vendetta. Now he not only has to protect Wanda but also wants to find and protect the scared truckjacker against even more violent criminals.

Once again Nick Petrie takes the reader on a literal wild ride, this time through the streets of the decaying Memphis, in this fourth novel about Peter Ash. Ash came out of his service in Iraq with claustrophobia which manifests itself in the form of "white static" whenever he finds himself indoors. He's getting better at controlling it and in one scene it even seems to help him in a dangerous situation. But eventually Ash must call on his friend Louis to help resolve the problems he has encountered. Louis, like everyone in this series, is skillfully drawn and is quite simply an outstanding character.

This is another suspenseful, fast-moving outing from Petrie. His protagonist is not infallible, making him just that much more realistic, even if sometimes the action is a bit over the top. Nonetheless, the story grabs the reader right from the jewel robbery beginning and really does not let up until the very end with the confrontations with the two sets of villains. Along the way the reader is treated to some of the Memphis blues, banter (and sometimes serious anger) between the likeable Peter and June, truly crazy evil killers, and all the violence one has come to expect from this entertaining series. This book roars and I can hardly wait for the next one.

WHERE THE CROWDADS SING by Delia Owens (Putnam, \$26.00, August 2018). **Rating: A** 1952. The marshes of North Carolina. Young Kya Clark's mother has left her family of five children and a drunk of a husband, never to be seen again. As the years pass, all the other family members leave as well, with only Kya left to fend

for herself by digging up mussels and selling them so she can buy food and supplies. She meets a shrimper's son, who takes her under his wing, teaching her to read and write. But he also abandons her when he goes to college, failing to keep his promise to return. Kya takes up with Chase Andrews, but is he only using her or does he genuinely care for her? The reader learns from the prologue that Andrews has died under suspicious circumstances in 1969. The story bounces between the two time-frames until they come together when Kya is arrested for Chase's murder.

This is a terrific debut novel, nominated for the Edgar Award for Best First Novel. Delia Owens has created a strong protagonist in Kya Clark, a girl transforming herself from an naive "Marsh Girl," as the locals call her, to a strong adult, albeit one besieged by loneliness. Owens writes beautifully of the North Carolina marshes and of the people who populate them and the surrounding town. Her ability to get into the head of Kya, writing from the young girl's perspective, is remarkable. She brings out Kya's hopes and fears realistically, making the reader root for her every step of the way.

But more than that, Owens can tell a story that draws readers in immediately, making them feel the anxiety of a girl left to her own devices in order to

survive against tremendous odds. All of this culminates in a well-handled trial undertaken by a courageous attorney willing to face down a town filled with haters and the ignorant. The real story here is that of Kya's life, more so than the mystery of Andrews' murder. Her story is a compelling one, one that has certainly earned Owens the Edgar nomination. I can't wait to see what she does for a follow-up novel.

THE LINE by Martin Limón (Soho Crime, \$26.95, October 2018). **Rating: A** 1970s Korea. Eighth Army CID agents George Sueño and Ernie Bascom are called out in the dark of night to go to travel to the Demilitarized Zone dividing North and South Korea. A Korean augmented to the U.S. Army has been brutally murdered. Complicating things, the soldier's left combat boot was on the South Korean side of the demarcation line, but the rest of him was on the North Korean side. Following orders, Sueño and Bascom pull the body to the "free side of Freedom's Frontier" over the highly vocal objections of the soldiers of the North. This sets off a diplomatic nightmare for which the two get the blame. After all, the Army way is to order you to do something, then hate you for doing it. Sueño and Bascom are ordered off the investigation into the death, but when they believe that the wrong man has been arrested, they naturally go ahead with it anyway.

The thirteenth novel in this outstanding series is one of Martin Limón's best. The story is compelling but even more interesting than the plot is the look at the politics of the Army and the two Koreas with all the infighting within the different factions of the investigating agencies. Limón, who served in Korea for ten years, brings an authenticity to the stories of soldiers caught in the machinery of the post-War era. He not only knows military life but also understands the problems facing the citizens of occupied Korea. The author brings this all to life with his descriptive passages of the country, its culture, and life in the mud and blood of the crowded cities. It is all told with an irreverent humor, yet the tension never lets up. If this isn't enough, throw



in some gangsters, black marketeering, and the disappearance of the wife of an American officer to complicate the daily life of the two investigators.

Set in one of the most dangerous places on earth, with suspects in the U.S. Army, South Korean and North Korean militaries, and civilians, together with the bureaucracy of the three different armed forces, Sueño and Bascom face one of their most complex and difficult cases. And that makes it one of their most enjoyable for the reader. Highly recommended, as is the entire series.

GIRL MOST LIKELY by Max Allan Collins (Thomas & Mercer, \$15.95, April 2019). **Rating: B** Krista Larson is the police chief in small town Galena, Illinois. As her ten-year high school reunion approaches, her friends arrive, guests of one of their own classmates at the lakefront lodge he runs. One of them, Astrid Lund, named in high school as “The Girl Most Likely to Succeed,” has become a rising star in television news. Lund has her secrets. But everyone else, including Larson, has them, and those will come tumbling out as the actual reunion nears. Larson realizes that there may be a killer among those classmates, one who has killed before. Her father, Keith, a retired homicide detective, joins her in her investigation. As the story moves from Galena to Florida and then to Chicago, the tension mounts as friends become suspects and the killer strikes again.

Mystery Writers of America Grand Master Max Allan Collins has stepped away from his award-winning Nate Heller series (as well as other fine series) to write this tense standalone novel. Set in the Midwest, an area Collins is very familiar with, the story moves along rapidly from its murderous beginning. He is a master at slowly peeling back the many layers of the story, keeping the reader in suspense until the violent, bloody end.

Collins has created an excellent daughter-father team in Krista Larson and her father, Keith. Both are initially reluctant to communicate with each other, having a bit of a hard go after the death of Krista’s mother only six months

earlier. This story is as much a search for strengthening their relationship as it is a hunt for a killer. It succeeds on both levels. If you enjoy dark, edgy novels, you will like Collins latest.

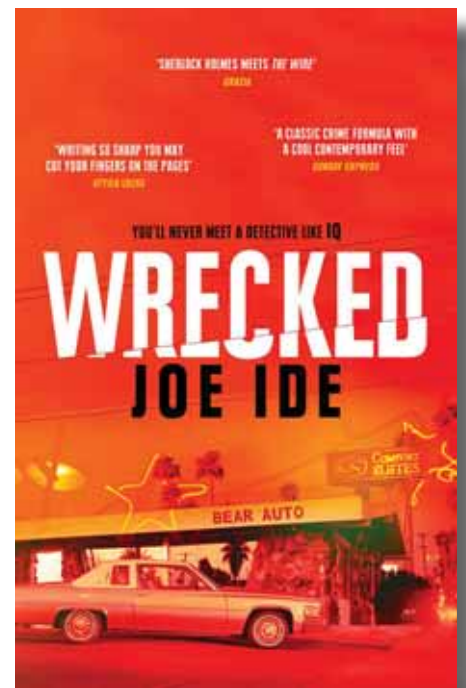
THE COUNT OF 9 by Erle Stanley Gardner writing as A. A. Fair (Hard Case Crime, \$9.95, October 2018).

Rating: B+ Big Bertha Cool, “a hundred sixty-five pounds of potato in a sack,” is hired by artifact collector Dean Crockett to guard a party he is giving to prevent would-be gate crashers from getting in. Bertha handles the job all by herself and, when things go wrong, she calls in her partner, Donald Lam, to come to her rescue. Cool is competent, as she admits herself, but Lam is top drawer. Crockett tells Lam that a jade Buddha and a pygmy blowgun have been stolen from right under the eyes of Bertha Cool. Shortly after Lam recovers the items, Crockett is found dead in a locked room, the victim of darts from a blowgun.

Erle Stanley Gardner, in spite of his insulting descriptions of Bertha Cool, could write one mean and entertaining detective novel. Originally published in 1958, this tightly written novel comes in 223 pages. It is the eighteenth novel in the Cool and Lam series. While there is not a lot of characterization, the dialogue crackles and the plot is very entertaining. Who doesn’t like a locked room mystery? Or stolen Buddhas? Or death by blowgun? Or Lam taking the usual beating? Just settle back, relax and enjoy the fun. This is what mysteries were made of a half-century and more ago, as opposed to bloated 450 page “thrillers” that lack any thrill whatsoever.

Always a bonus and not to be overlooked is a wonderful new Robert McGinnis cover. Of course it is impossible to overlook a McGinnis cover, so never mind.

WRECKED by Joe Ide (Mulholland Books, \$27.00, October 2018). **Rating: A** Twenty-five-year old Isaiah Quintabe, IQ to those who know him in the hood, is approached by Grace, an attractive young woman who has previously caught his eye. She wants his help tracking down her mother, who has been missing for about ten years.



In true private eye fashion, she can’t pay him cash but instead offers him a painting she has made. Unfortunately, Grace’s mother is on the run. She is now in the process of blackmailing a paramilitary group, threatening to release incriminating photos of horrendous prisoner torture at Abu Ghraib prison if they don’t pay her a million dollars. If that isn’t bad enough, Seb, the gangster responsible for IQ’s brother’s death, is seeking additional vengeance. And someone else is willing to reveal IQ’s part in the robbery and nonfatal shooting of the brutal drug dealer Junior months earlier.

This book, the third in Joe Ide’s engrossing IQ series, move like a rocket, swinging madly from one tough situation to another, chapter after chapter, as lives are put in danger with every move. But Ide manages to keep all the characters straight for the reader, intermingled with incredible action sequences and violence. Isaiah has the Sherlock-Holmes-like ability to deduce things from simply observing a person’s appearance or hearing them speak a few words. His powers of observation are also excellent, though I thought that he made lesser use of those abilities here than in the previous books in the series. There is also a bit of romance between Grace and Isaiah, which adds a human

touch to the story.

A particular standout character is Junior, who talks “like he’d swallowed a dictionary sideways.” A few examples of his unintentionally hilarious dialogue: “I do believe I retrospect our assignation. You was walkin’ away and I retained an image of your morphology.” Or “You thought you could recapitulate my premises and not forfeit the residue? You must have misplaced your corpuscles if you thought that was substantiated.”

There is plenty of other humor here, as well, but do not mistake this for a comedy. This novel is also deadly serious and not for the squeamish. It contains several very graphic scenes of torture, rape and murder at Abu Ghraib. Still, the action and perils never really stop until the violent climax of the story. Ide received numerous awards for his first novel, *IQ*, including the Anthony, Macavity, and Shamus. He was also nominated for the Barry and the Edgar Awards. Those who can read past the Abu Ghraib scenes will find a frighteningly original voice, filled with strange but often enduring characters and a story ripped more-or-less from today’s headliness.

**NO LAW AGAINST ANGELS/
DOLL FOR THE BIG HOUSE/
CHORINE MAKES A KILLING** by
Carter Brown (Stark House, \$19.95,
March 2019). **Rating: B**

Alan Geoffrey Yates (1923-1985) wrote under about as many different names as the average person has fingers. His best-known pseudonym was Carter Brown. Carter Brown’s most popular character was Al Wheeler. Yates was extremely prolific, as a “glance” at the *eight-page* bibliography at the end of this three novel collection will tell you. As an example, there are nearly 300 Carter Brown titles alone – and those take up less than 75% of that listing.

The books reprinted here, volumes 7 – 9 of the Al Wheeler series, were originally published in Australia. The first two were revised for U.S. publication as *The Body* and *The Bombshell*. According to the publicity release from the publisher, the third has never before been in print in the United States. If you enjoy



these, Stark House is wisely reprinting them in order. Four of the first six books in the first two collections apparently have never been printed in the U.S., again according to the publisher.

Al Wheeler was a lieutenant in a fictional California county near Los Angeles. In *Angels* Wheeler investigates the murder of two call girls with similar tattoos. *Dolls* finds him searching for a missing girl, which leads him to a kidnapping ring. But a change comes in *Chorine* when Wheeler turns in his badge to become a private investigator for a law firm. A chorus girl is murdered and Wheeler’s new employer wants him to investigate what appears to be an open-and-shut case in order to determine who really did kill the young woman..

These are all tightly written tales. In their original 1950s’ U.S. paperback format they generally ran around 150 pages with sexy covers and stories. Of course what passed for “sexy” in the ‘50s and ‘60s is not necessarily what we might think today. (One example from *Chorine*: “The next moment I was bent backwards over the table, held firmly in Lucrece’s arms while she kissed me violently. And when I say violently, I’m not kidding!”) But there was plenty of action and the plots are straightforward fast reading, laced with humor (also

from *Chorine*: “[I]n the legal profession, we shudder at the use of any words that can be construed as having a definite meaning.”)

So, if you never read Brown’s novels, or even if you have, this is a solid collection of stories from a prolific author. Thanks go to Stark House for reviving Alan Geoffrey Yates/Carter Brown and making him accessible to today’s mystery readers.

ROBERT B. PARKER’S BLOOD FEUD by Mike Lupica (G. P. Putnam’s Sons, \$27.00, November 2018). **Rating: B+** Private investigator Sunny Randall does not know when to quit. She’s still on friendly terms with her ex-husband Richie Burke, son of mob boss Desmond Burke, when Richie is shot in the back and nearly killed. He was also given a message: “Sins of the father.” So Sunny plunges right into the thick of a possible gang war in order to find the shooter. Things escalate when Desmond’s brother Peter, who ran the mob’s bookmaking, is shot in the back of the head. In spite of warnings from Richie, his father, other gangs, and the cops, Sunny continues her investigation until she, too, becomes a target. What dark secrets are so important that they must be kept hidden? After a number of years of other stories based on Robert B. Parker’s well-known characters, someone finally remembered Sunny Randall was still sitting on the shelf. Parker’s estate hired Mike Lupica to handle the project and he does a very nice job of it. He’s no Parker, which is a good thing. Parker’s novels had become weaker in his later years and Lupica has managed to capture his style, but has added some flair and depth to the stories. There were only six Randall novels written by Parker, so it is nice to see her back. Along with Sunny come other familiar characters borrowed from the Spenser and Jesse Stone series, most prominently Susan Silverman and Frank Belson. But others are alluded to, as well, some by name, others only by inference.

Lupica manages to create suspense that lasts right through to the violent conclusion, yet still adds in bantering humor and character development seamlessly. Love, sex, money, guns, and

jealousy – each makes for a separate reason for murder. But combine them and you have one powerful motive for a major crime spree. Lupica puts all of this together satisfactorily for a nice addition to the Parker Chronicles. I hope for more from him.

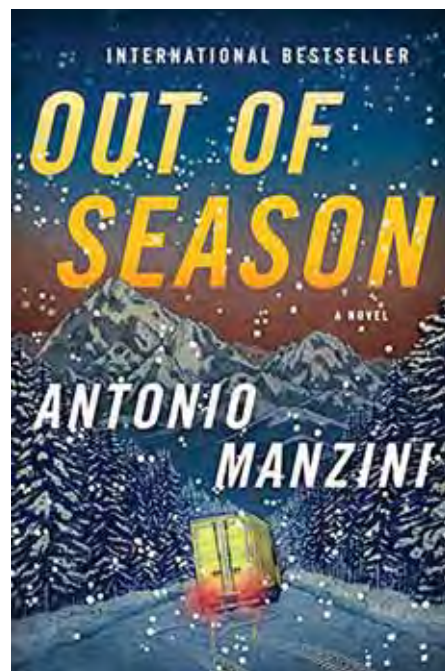
BLACK MOUNTAIN by Laird Barron (G.P. Putnam's Sons, \$26.00, May 2019). **Rating: C** Isaiah Coleridge, a former enforcer for the mob in Alaska, has now settled in upstate New York as a private investigator. But his history means he's never far from crime and criminals. When the horribly mutilated body of one such criminal (no head, no hands) turns up in a reservoir, the mob hires Coleridge to discover the killer. The gangsters are totally opposed to crime and killing, unless they are the ones doing it. Coleridge discovers more complexities reaching back farther and deeper than he ever imagined as he battles his way to a particularly brutal finish against an equally violent villain. This is Laird Barron's second novel in the Isaiah Coleridge series and I was disappointed in it. Somewhere in here there is a decent book screaming to get out. What bogs the story down are the frequent asides (the first one appearing already on page ten) and the lengthy backstories (there's one that opens the book on page one) that appear throughout the novel. Further the book is overwritten, with many efforts at poetic paragraphs. One example: "I assayed a circuitous path back to the rented car. Climbed in and turned the key. The ignition didn't fire. I almost tried again before an alarm bell rang in the primordial depths of my subconscious. That damned lizard stirred again." Who talks/thinks like that? Additionally, Coleridge is simply too perfect a character, always winning at every fight he gets into no matter how outnumbered or outgunned he might be. This eliminates any suspense from the story.

On the positive side this is a dark, complex tale with truly evil people behind it that holds the readers' attention when they aren't being distracted by the novel flaws. There are also plenty of pop culture references sprinkled throughout. So plunge right in, just skipping the

parts you don't need to read.

OUT OF SEASON by Antonio Manzini (Harper, \$15.95, October 2018). **Rating: B+** Chiaro Berguet has been kidnapped following a night of partying. Her parents, owners of a construction firm, owed a substantial amount of money to an unsavory organization. But her kidnappers have died in a van crash without telling anyone where the girl was being held. Aosta, Italy, Deputy Police Chief Rocco Schiavone and his crew undertake the search. But it isn't long before murder and an escaped convict with vengeance on his mind complicate their efforts.

The third novel in Antonio Manzini's Rocco Schiavone series is both entertaining and fast moving. He effortlessly tells an engrossing modern day police procedural. Filled with cops, some amazingly incompetent but all dedicated to obtaining justice for victims, the book has a thread of sardonic black humor running through it. The story is told from a variety of points of view, including the frightening situation in which Chiaro is placed, adding urgency to locating her before it is too late. Originally published in Ital in 2015, this is its first appearance in the United States. The reader would do well to seek out the previous two novels, **Black Run** and **Adam's Rib**, but it is not necessary to have read them in order to appreciate



this book. The translation by Antony Shugaar is smooth with only a few bumps along the way.

My one objection to the book is the thread of the escaped convict which is left open to be pursued in a later novel in the series. It sucks up space without adding anything to the story, other than a touch of suspense. If you don't mind this one open-ended aspect, you'll enjoy this story.

FRANTIC by Noël Calef (Black Gat Books/Stark House, \$9.99, February 2019). **Rating: B+** Julien Courtois has serious financial problems. When he can't get an extension on his loan repayment, he believes he has no choice other than to kill the loan shark from whom he borrowed the money. That man works a floor above him. While his secretary believes he is working in his office, he steps out his window and climbs a rope up to the higher floor. He shoots the lender, making it look like suicide. Courtois descends the rope and tells the secretary she can leave. When he gets to his car he remembers he's left the rope and grappling hook still hanging from the upper floor. He returns to the building, gets in the elevator and then the janitor turns off the power, leaving Courtois stranded in the elevator between floors. He's trapped in the elevator for the weekend, a man he murdered now the only other person in the building. Then things get worse. This is an elaborate tale, brought in at just over 150 pages, of a meticulously planned murder where everything that can go wrong, does. Originally published in 1956 as *Ascenseur pour l'échafaud* and in the U.S. in 1961 by Gold Medal, this suspenseful novel contains one twist after another. The story holds up well, even 63 years after its original publication. Although light on characterization, the plot moves with lightning speed to its gripping courtroom conclusion. Told from multiple points of view, it is a novel of hope, fear, and desperation. It is fine French noir and highly recommended.

If the plot seems familiar, it might be because it was made into a 1958 film by Louis Malle entitled *Elevator to the Gallows*.

Just in Crime

Norma Dancis



WHERE THE CROWDADS SING by Della Owens (Putnam, 2018, \$26.00). **Rating: A+ as a novel, A- as a mystery** Kya Clark is known as the Marsh Girl in Barkley Cove, North Carolina. By the time she was seven, her mother and older siblings slipped away, one by one, leaving her with her abusive, alcoholic father in their shack on the marsh. She spends only one traumatic day in school and grows up with minimal help.

Only by her own industry and the help of a black couple and Tate, a young town boy, allow her to learn to cook, provide her with clothes, and teach her to read. She immerses herself in study of the marsh and its creatures.

As a young adult, she is charged with the murder of a young man who had been her lover.

WHERE THE CROWDADS SING is highly praised, best-selling literary fiction. It is also a mystery featuring first-class courtroom drama. Kya's life and interests are rendered in beautiful, lyrical prose. Owens shows how Kya's understanding of marsh life and her experiences of being excluded shape her view of the world. She brings the marsh alive even to those who have never been there. The murder and trial drama were also beautifully rendered. Owens has created a world apart, fascinating as both a novel and mystery. Highly recommended.

SPIRIT PLAY by Barbara Ismail (Felony and Mayhem, 2018, \$14.95). **Rating: B** Osman, police chief in rural Malaysia, is faced with investigating the death of Jamillah, a market trader. She died right after a healing ceremony from strangling or asphyx-

iation. But Osman is not Keletanese and isn't familiar with the local dialect. He asks fellow market trader Mak Chik Maryam to investigate. Maryam would have done that even without his request. She jumps into collecting truth from gossip and rumor. Villagers suspect supernatural forces, but Maryam's focus is more practical. More violence follows as Maryam investigates.

SPIRIT PLAY works better as a novel than a mystery. Ismail's portrayal of Malaysian village life and thought is fascinating. She brings them to vivid life. However, this concentration overwhelms Maryam's investigation. Much of the truth comes from suspects explaining what they did. Only at the end does Maryam reveal what she is thinking and solve the mystery. Ismail doesn't completely differentiate all the characters, and I often had trouble remembering who was who. When she does focus, however, the characters are memorable.

This book is recommended for those interested in other cultures more than for those interested in detection.

LARK! THE HERALD ANGELS SING by Donna Andrews (Minotaur, 2018, \$13.99). **Rating: A** While overseeing the Episcopal church's nativity pageant, Meg Langslow discovers a live baby in the manger. A note from the mother names the baby "Lark" and suggests that Meg's brother is the father and that it is time for him to support her. Rob proclaims his innocence, but his fiancé-to-be doesn't believe him. The woman who claims the baby turns out to be an imposter.

Neighboring Clay County officials

are the villains, and Meg fights back. Matters spiral out of control, as usual.

This is the fourth Christmas title in the long-running series. The book starts slowly but builds to an extended laugh-out-loud rescue operation that might be the most hilarious Andrews has ever written. The underlying mystery plot is just a peg on which to hang the wit and silliness. A delight for those who enjoy humorous mysteries. If you prefer book tilted more to mystery than fun, try one of her other books.

BODY AND SOUL by John Harvey (Pegasus, 2018, \$25.99). **Rating: B+** Katherine, the daughter of retired policeman Frank Elder, suddenly shows up on his doorstep. She had been very fragile emotionally since having been kidnapped and raped. Posing for controversial artist Anthony Winter seems to offer her some peace, but the pictures he paints of her turn out to be degrading. Elder reacts negatively. Then Winter is murdered and suddenly both Elder and Katherine are suspects.

Elder is simultaneously dealing with the escape of a dangerous criminal he had arrested, a man who had threatened his life.

Harvey has announced that this would be his last book. His novels, including the first Frank Elder books, have won numerous awards. **BODY AND SOUL** doesn't reach the level of Harvey's finest novels. Some of the characterization is very good, yet I found Elder himself not well portrayed. The plotting is far less convincing than in other Harvey mysteries. However, second-best Harvey is still well worth reading. Actions arise from character, and a sense of inevitability underlies what happens. If you are a Harvey fan, you won't want to miss this book. If you have somehow missed reading him, try one of the Charlie Resnick series first.

THE SECOND GOODBYE by Patricia Smiley (Midnight Ink, 2018, \$15.99). **Rating: B+** LAPD detective Davie Richards reviews the open case of the death of a gang member and the

undetermined death of Sara Montaine during a lull in fresh homicides. Montaine's death had been listed as "undetermined" because of an almost complete lack of evidence. Richards begins both investigations from scratch. The strangest feature of Montaine's death is that she had already been declared dead under a different name. The more Richards pursues Montaine's death, the more questions—and violence—arise.

Davie is a believably flawed but determined and skillful detective. The plotting is not memorable, but intriguing enough to keep the reader engaged. A subplot involving a hired assassin feels clumsy until the final clash. Smiley just misses complete satisfaction in this tale, but she is obviously talented.

I enjoyed the book as I read it but discovered that I couldn't remember the plot well enough to review the book after a few days' lapse. I had to reread a few chapters in order to do so. Worth reading and worth checking the next book to see if she hits closer to the bullseye.

AN UNFINISHED MURDER by Ann Granger (Headline 2018 \$28.12 (Amazon hardback), (\$3.99 Barnes & Noble Nook). **Rating: B** An eight-year-old girl and her brother had found a woman's corpse twenty years earlier. The girl stole the woman's distinctive bracelet from the corpse and kept it. They never told anyone about the body. Now, twenty years later, the brother finds the bracelet among his sister's belongings. He tells his employer, retired detective Alan Markby about it. Markby recognizes it as evidence in a missing persons case that he had not been able to solve.

The case is reopened, being investigated by current Superintendent Carter and Inspector Campbell. Markby is retained as a consultant. They re-interview all the old suspects, which sparks modern violence. Granger unites two of her series: Markby and Mitchell, who make their first appearance in their long series since 2005, and current police Carter and Campbell.

Granger doesn't give any of them

enough time for new readers to become acquainted. Granger also doesn't generate much excitement. I was never persuaded that the characters' action were believable, and detection is limited to reviewing old testimony and re-questioning previous suspects. The narrative has a static, almost claustrophobic feel. Technology, even as minor as the existence of cell phones, seems absent. Nothing appears to advance, yet suddenly people crack and react violently. In the final chapter, a character reappears who was last mentioned almost in passing in Chapter 4. That seemed to sum up my feeling of bewilderment. Despite all my complaints, however, I found the book entertaining.

SCHOOLED IN DEATH by Kate Flora (ABN Leadership Group, 2018, \$16.99). **Rating: A-** Private school consultant Thea Kozak is called in to advise the Simmons School when Heidi, a sophomore, gives birth. She swears she had never even had sex, nor had she known she was pregnant. Thea's job is to advise the Headmaster on minimizing harm to the school, but her detective instincts are aroused. They are needed, because Heidi disappears.

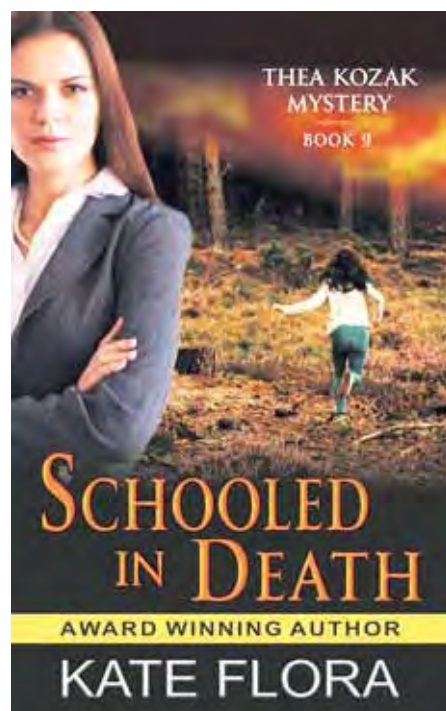
Heidi's divorced parents are both toxic. The mother has arrived with her

new husband, whom Heidi fears. The parents are more interested in scoring points against one another than discovering what happened or how to protect Heidi. Heidi's classmates are determined to protect her by keeping her secrets. Despite her pregnancy and worrying about her own father, who has just had a heart attack, Thea jumps into the investigation.

This intense story moves at breakneck pace. I couldn't read fast enough. Suspense arises from empathy for the characters and fear for what might befall them rather than from any chase or physical danger. Such tension requires particularly strong writing. Each individual is distinct and memorable. The plotting is also solid, twisting yet also easy to follow. Thea and the police's failure to consider some fairly obvious possibilities does undercut the believability a bit. The book may feature an amateur investigator, but it is certainly not a cozy.

AN ELDERLY LADY IS UP TO NO GOOD by Helene Tursten (Soho Press, 2018, \$12.99). **Rating: B+** Maud is elderly, living rent-free in a spacious apartment in Gothenberg, Sweden and traveling all over the world. However, she faces obstacles to her happiness, including a mentally challenged sister, unsatisfactory neighbors, a greedy antiques dealer. Relying on the invisibility of age, using her walker as a weapon and seeming dementia as a defense, Maud systematically eliminates all these annoyances.

These five humorous short stories add up to a delightful, if extremely short, experience. The book barely reaches novella length. It is comprised of 184 large index-card-sized pages of widely-spaced text. This would literally stuff a Christmas stocking. Enjoyable as Maud's mayhem may be, they barely add up to a book. I enjoyed this unexpected light entry in the Irene Huss series (her team investigates one of the deaths), but I received my review copy free. With one more story, I would have considered buying this book. Borrow it from the library and enjoy.



Deadly Pleasures

George Easter



MISSION CRITICAL by Mark Greaney (Berkley, \$27.00).

Rating: A- Court Gentry's flight on a CIA plane touches down in England at a remote airfield to drop off a hooded prisoner. Gentry is just catching a free flight and has no idea what is going on. Suddenly the plane is attacked by a large force which manages to spirit away the prisoner. Gentry commandeers a light aircraft and goes in pursuit.

What ensues is pure "Gray Man" action and detection. Yes, detection – for Gentry has to figure out what plots are afoot and how to foil them and that takes some sharpened deductive skills.

There is a chance encounter with another budding CIA agent, who happens to be THE woman in his life – Zoya Sakharova. Theirs is a catch-as-catch-can romance – there will never be a cottage with a white picket fence in their future. But that just makes the relationship that more interesting.

I've been a big fan of this series since I picked up the paperback original of **THE GRAY MAN** some years ago. Some of the action scenes might be far-fetched to some readers, but to me they are realistic because they **could** happen and are physically possible.

For those of you who like danger, action, deadlines, bravery and good writing, try a Mark Greaney novel if you haven't already. You'll thank me.

ENDGAME by Bill Pronzini (Forge, \$24.99). **Rating: A-** This was a 2017 title that I had purposely been putting off reading because I feared that the title of this Nameless Detective novel was a spoiler and that my 40-book+ fan love affair with this series was coming to an end. And I was right, but it ended in a very satisfactory manner, wrapping

up issues in not only Nameless' life but those of his two long-time associates, Jake Runyon and partner Tamara Corbin.

Two cases come into the office and Nameless takes the first one: James Cahill's agoraphobic wife Alice has disappeared and the husband is under police suspicion. Alice was recently accused of plagiarism. Could that be the motive? Jake Runyon catches the other case: a widow wants to know the circumstances behind her husband's supposed accidental death in a locked cabin. He was supposed to be at a conference in L.A. Both cases are creatively solved.

Quite the run from 1971 to 2017. Not many series can boast that longevity. Thanks Bill for the ride. It's been one of the most enjoyable experiences in my mystery reading over the past several decades.

A SPY IN EXILE by Jonathan de Shalit (Atria/Emily Bester, \$27.00).

Rating: C Ya'ara Stein was fired by the Israeli Mossad for being overly aggressive and failing to follow orders. Just the type of operative the Israeli Prime Minister is looking for to head up a secret and deniable hit squad. She accepts and begins to form her team and train them (much too many pages spent on this boring endeavor). Then two opportunities suddenly arise to take out enemies of the Jewish people and Ya'ara uses them as on-the-job training, with mixed results.

Now laying low because of a large, international blowback, Ya'ara takes on a side task for one of her former Israeli colleagues (which I found a complete waste of time to read about).

Then the novel languidly limps to a prosaic ending. What this novel lacked is any consistent narrative drive. In

other words, it's plot meandered and the book was easy to put down. Action scenes were few and far between. I read to the end to see if it would improve, but it never did. I'd give this one a pass.

It's of interest that the blurb from a starred review in *Library Journal* states, "A superb international thriller. Readers of Joseph Kanon will love the descriptive setting. Fans of John le Carre' and Daniel Silva will appreciate the swift pace and shocking twists and turns." I now wonder if this reviewer and I read the same book. Different strokes for different folks, I guess.

THE SILENT PATIENT by Alex Michaelides (Celadon, \$26.99). **Rating: A-** Talented painter Alicia Berenson has been in a mental institution for the last several years since she mysteriously murdered her fashion photographer husband. They were by all accounts a happy, loving couple. There is no explanation because she has not spoken a word since her arrest.

Theo Faber thinks he can help and he is hired by the mental facility where Alicia is housed. Thus begins a series of encounters between Theo and Alicia, with him trying to bring her out of her shell.

Much of the story is told in flashback scenes – both in Alicia's life and also Theo's life.

Slowly, things start making more sense, but the ending is still a real shocker.

This novel fits firmly within the recent trend of domestic suspense novels that can be traced to the popularity of Gillian Flynn's **GONE GIRL**. If you are a fan of such writing, I am sure that you will like **THE SILENT PATIENT**. It is very well done.

After I completed my reading, I looked into the author's background. He grew up a fan of Agatha Christie and I can see more than a little of Dame Agatha in his plotting, but I can't say anything more without spoiling the plot for those of you who haven't read **THE SILENT PATIENT** yet.

THE MYKENOS MOB by Jeffrey Siger (Poisoned Pen Press, \$26.99). **Rating: A-**

"The Colonel" is an ex-police officer who controls most of organized crime on Mykenos. If you want protection or to get something done on the island, you have to meet with The Colonel. That is, until he is gunned down in the parking lot of a restaurant.

It's summer and Athens' Chief Inspector Andreas Kaldis decides to take his wife and children on holiday to the island of Mykenos, where his in-laws have a beautiful villa. Oh, and by the way, he is also taking his sidekick Yianni to do a little investigating of the murder and its connections to Mykenos.

A clash of mob bosses seems to be brewing with the prize to the winner being a new high-end hotel resort on Mykenos.

While investigating, Yianni makes the acquaintance of Toni, a talented pianist who moonlights as a private detective specializing in reacquiring stolen valuables for the island's tourists. Toni also forms a friendship with Lila, Andreas' wife, who loves her two children but is chaffing at the bit to find some meaningful task to fill her spare time when not mothering. She finds it in helping save some young women from making stupid and dangerous choices in life.

There is a lot of danger lurking behind the beauty of Mykenos and our protagonists find it often as the storyline progresses. The heroes of the story (and there are many) lead happy, fulfilling lives and that makes the action scenes that much more tense – they have so much to lose.

Once more, Jeff Siger has penned an excellent mystery that has so much going for it. If you haven't read any of his ten Greek mysteries, dive in anywhere. His love of the islands is contagious. Greece is very high on my bucket list of places to visit. And, of course, I'll continue to read each novel as it comes out. Jeff Siger has become a must read for me.

CARELESS LOVE by Peter Robinson (Morrow, \$26.99). **Rating: B-** DS Banks and his team are investigating the death of two people – who died under mysterious and puzzling circumstances. One corpse belongs to a young college

student who apparently was doing well in school and seemed to have a bright future. She did not own a car, yet her body was found in an abandoned one on a remote country road. How did she get there? Appearances say suicide, but too many questions remain unanswered to make that quick judgment.

The other body is that of a wealthy man in his sixties. It is found in a gully on the wild moorland. He is carrying no identification. It appears that he died from injuries sustained in a fall, but how did he get to this remote area? And was he pushed to his death?

Banks and colleague Annie Cabot conduct slow, meticulous investigations to find the truth. And that's the rub – the pacing was glacier, with many asides about Banks' and Cabot's personal lives – and their musical tastes. Peter Robinson needs to get back to his glory days with plots like his masterpiece **IN A DRY SEASON**. This was o.k., but he has done so much better.

KILLING WITH CONFETTI by Peter Lovesey (Soho, \$27.95). **Rating: A** Two seemingly unconnected events are brought together in this marvelous mystery. The first is a well-orchestrated prison riot/almost successful mass escape that is foiled at the last moment. The other is easily the most controversial wedding of the season. The daughter of crime boss Joe Irving (just

released from prison after a long stay) is being wed to the son of Deputy Chief Constable George Brace, one of the highest-ranking cops in all of Avon & Somerset. Joe's o.k. with it (anything for his precious daughter), but DCC Brace is as embarrassed as one could be.

Worried about security for the wedding, Brace enlists a very reluctant Peter Diamond (and his team) to be in charge of keeping the wedding party safe. Joe Irving may be the arch enemy of every cop in southwest England, but they can't let him be killed at his daughter's wedding. That task proves to be more difficult than Peter Diamond could ever have imagined.

Peter Lovesey brought us his first mystery in 1970 and since then has enjoyed a sterling career with many, many highlights along the way. It is a marvel to me that 49 years later, at age 83, he is still turning out crime fiction of the highest quality.

In recognition of his many accomplishments, Peter is being honored this year at the Dallas Bouchercon. I'm going to have the privilege of interviewing him. See you there!

NEON PREY by John Sandford (Putnam, \$29.00). **Rating: B-** Clayton Deese is a low-life (understatement), muscle-for-hire and he works for a loan-shark boss whom the Feds would dearly love to take down. When Clayton is caught dead to rights beating up a loan welcher, he skips bail and U.S. Marshal Lucas Davenport and his team go in search of him. Deese isn't home at his rural Louisiana cabin but an investigation into the mounds of dirt found behind his place of abode uncover a mass-murder graveyard. Now Deese is as much a target as his former boss – if not more.

Davenport's investigation takes him and his team in search of Deese whom they suspect has joined a home invasion team in California – and then in Las Vegas. Deese proves to be very illusive.

The narrative flow is very smooth, but there are at least two scenes that I found profoundly distasteful and if they weren't close to the end of the book I wouldn't have finished it. This is probably my last Lucas Davenport read.



There are many better books out there. **NEON PREY** is only for the die-hard John Sandford fans.

DECEPTION COVE by Owen Laukkanen (Mulholland, \$28.00). **Rating: A-** This is a story of two damaged souls who reluctantly unite to save what they both value most – a loyal pit bull named Lucy. Former US Marine Jess Winslow, a recent war widow, comes home from Afghanistan to her falling-down house with a medical discharge for PTSD, and an emotional support dog named Lucy. The only thing she actually cares about is that dog, a black-and-white pit bull mix who helps her cope with the devastating memories of her time in Afghanistan.

After fifteen years -- nearly half his life -- in state prison, Mason Burke owns one set of clothes, a wallet, and a photo of Lucy, the service dog he trained while behind bars. Seeking a fresh start, he sets out for Deception Cove, Washington, where the dog now lives to make sure she's o.k. What he encounters is a standoff between Jess and a corrupt deputy county sheriff, who has taken Lucy into custody on trumped up charges.

It seems that Jess' late husband stole something of great value and the police (who are in bed with the regional drug kingpin) want it back. If Jess doesn't turn it over, they'll have Lucy put to sleep.

Thus begins a very exciting and emotionally charged thriller that had me racing to the end. I've enjoyed several of Laukkanen's Stevens and Windermere procedurals, but I consider **DECEPTION COVE** his best work to date. I'm going to push it for a Barry Award nomination. One of my favorites of the year. Thanks to Oline Cogdill for the recommendation.

NIGHT WATCH by David C. Taylor (Severn House, \$28.99). **Rating: B+** The first novel in this series featuring NYC Detective Michael Cassidy is entitled **NIGHT LIFE** and it was nominated for an Edgar Award. That fact has stuck in the back of my mind for some time so when I had an opportunity to read this, the third in the series, I thought it was high time I got on board.

Set in 1950s New York City, **NIGHT**

WATCH involves Cassidy in a number of baffling cases. At the same time he is receiving threatening messages indicating that some unknown person is going to kill him, but not before Cassidy has suffered. One case is that of a immigrant hansom cab driver who is murdered in Central Park. The other is of a man who commits suicide by throwing himself through a hotel window. Or was he pushed?

Detective Cassidy is true to type: a tough bulldog, determined to find out the truth regardless of danger or pressure from on high to close the case. We've seen his ilk before so this is nothing new, but David C. Taylor does a fine job in making us care about him and what he is trying to accomplish. I'm glad that I finally read one of this series and I will likely pick up the next. The 1950's New York City background is wonderfully described, bringing back childhood memories of my visits to Manhattan to see my Aunt Elma Wadsworth. All that was missing was a visit to the Automat.

MISSING DAUGHTER by Rick Mofina (Mira, \$9.99). **Rating: A-** With a keen reporter's eye, Rick Mofina tells this very believable story of the Lane

family who wake one morning to find their twelve-year-old daughter's window open, their beloved Maddie missing from her bed.

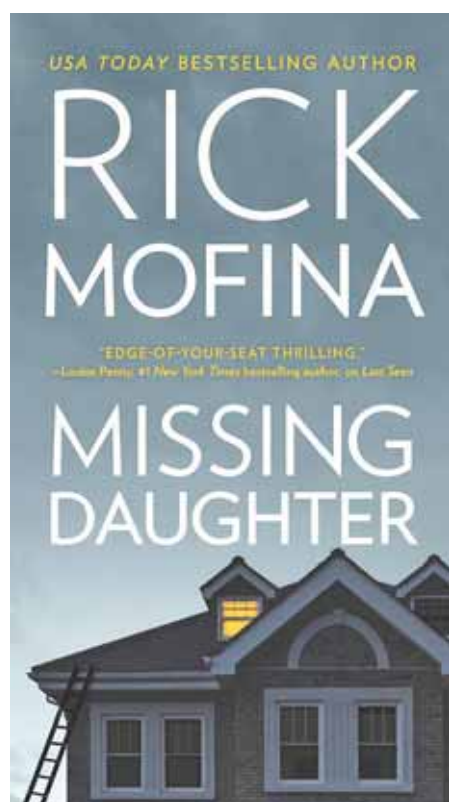
An intense search and investigation ensues and Mofina gives it to us in great realistic detail with all its suspicions, surprise discoveries and alternative theories. To not spoil plot surprises, let's say that a long period of time passes before the truth comes out. In the meantime, everyone involved suffers.

I think that Rick Mofina sometimes gets a pass by some mystery readers because he isn't published in hardcover (an artificial sign that one's publisher thinks that the writer's work has more merit than one published in paperback only. Not true, by the way.). This story of a young girl's disappearance is as well written, suspenseful and ultimately satisfying as anything I've read in hardcover. This would be a good book to read for those of you yet unacquainted with Rick's work.

ROGUE STRIKE by David Ricciardi (Berkley, \$27.00). **Rating A-** Sequel to the well-received **WARNING LIGHT**, in which CIA agent Jack Keller morphed from desk-bound analyst to a brave and clever field agent. Now Jake and his partner, Curt Roach, are in Yemen on an important mission. They've been tipped off to a secret meeting of top al Qaeda leaders. The plan is to interrupt the meeting with a pair of Hellfire missiles from an orbiting drone. The correct coordinates are programmed and the missiles are sent on their way. But the missiles don't arrive at the intended target, but are sent by some interfering means to attack innocent pilgrims in Mecca. Very big OOPS. An international incident of monumental proportions.

Jake and Curt are soon cast in the roles of fall guys and are sought after by the Americans and the Arab world. They go in search of whomever was really responsible and along the way they get wind of a major terrorist attack that they must also foil.

David Ricciardi is as good as Ben Coes in taking today's headlines and creating realistically scary plots with major implications unless foiled. I worry that our highly talented thriller writers



are coming up with too many good ideas for the terrorists of the world. This and other thrillers should have a mandatory required warning on the cover: IF YOU ARE A TERRORIST, DO NOT READ THIS BOOK!

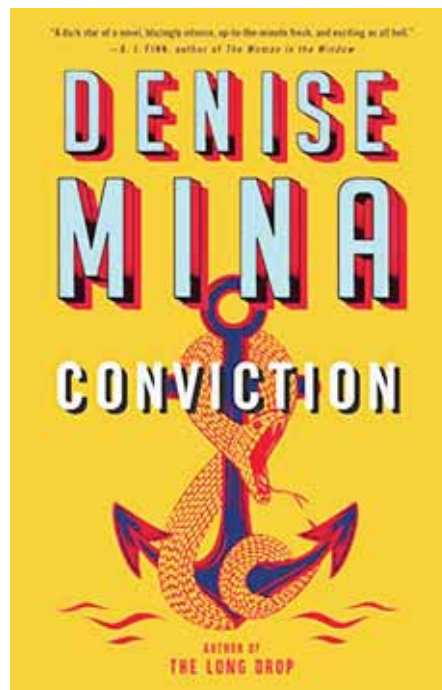
DEAD END by Sally Spencer (Severn House, \$28.99). **Rating: A-** The series protagonist DCI Monika Paniatowski is still in a coma due to injuries suffered in a prior book. The reader becomes aware that there is someone lurking in the background who 1) doesn't want her to wake up; and 2) has planted a listening device to eavesdrop on her colleagues who come to discuss current cases with her in the hopes of stimulating her into consciousness.

Her team is faced with a real puzzler: a body with no face and no fingertips has been recently unearthed. With very little to work with, Monika's team nevertheless perseveres until they get a break.

The denouement is quite exciting, but you'll have to read this excellent novel to find out how it all ends up. I'm a big fan of this series which deserves a much wider audience with its clever plotting and fascinating characters.

CONVICTION by Denise Mina (Mulholland, \$27.00). **Rating: B+** [An aside: one of my 6-year-old grandson's favorite books is the classic **ALEXANDER AND THE TERRIBLE, HORRIBLE, NO GOOD, VERY BAD DAY** by Judith Viorst. Treven Easter likes to read this to me. His teacher says he is the top reader in his Kindergarten class – and the number 2 in bad behavior. We're working with him to get to number one in both categories.] Well, the protagonist in **CONVICTION** is Anna McDonald and she is having a terrible, horrible, no good, very bad day. What starts as a normal day ends with her wealthy husband leaving her for her best friend, taking her two beloved daughters with him, and pushing a wad of "relocation" cash into her hands. She is seriously considering suicide and is saved by the ringing of her doorbell. It's her best friend's husband, Fin, a failed rock star, who is also reeling from the news.

Anna turns to one of her favorite pasttimes – listening to true crime



podcasts – to distract her from her new reality. The one she is listening to at present is about someone she once knew – Leon Parker – who died along with his two children when their yacht blew up. Their cook was convicted of setting the explosive device. Some of the assertions of the podcast don't ring true to Anna and she goes on a voyage of detection and discovery to find out what really happened to the ill-fated **Dana**. Fin gets caught up in her quest and creates a companion podcast that chronicles their explorations. But an unintended consequence of this is that Anna's true identity as Sophie Bukaran is revealed. Who is Sophie Bukaran you might ask? You'll have to read the book to find out.

As I read the first 75 pages of this book I found plot and character motivations a bit confusing, but trusting in Denise Mina's abilities to deliver "the goods," I persevered until it started making more sense and I was really able to "get into the story." **CONVICTION** is not your everyday mystery story. It contains great ingenuity, which one has come to expect from Denise Mina.

THE CUTTING ROOM by Ashley Dyer (Morrow, \$26.99). **Rating: B+** The second in the Carver/Lake British police procedural series with an emphasis on

forensic detail. Detective Greg Carver is still recuperating from head injuries (general weakness and visions of strange auras) and isn't supposed to working full-time, but that goes out the window when he and Lake arrive at an unusual and gruesome crime scene: sections of human brain are encased in plexiglass and displayed as if they are parts of an art exhibit. They are the work of a murderer that the media dub the Ferryman, who has become a social media phenomenon garnering thousands of followers. (I don't know which I found more disturbing – the displays of body parts or the ghoulish followers of the Ferryman.)

Other similar "artistic" displays ensue and the police have very little to work on, even after they identify the body parts as those belonging to a number of recently men who disappeared.

Ruth Lake is thrown for a loop when at one of the crime scenes she sees a bystander who happens to be her longestranged brother Adam. Is he somehow tied into these killings? She tries to keep him and her relationship secret from the investigative team, but when he eventually falls under suspicion, she has to come forward.

I am a big fan of Margaret Murphy who has written nine crime novels in her own name (I especially recommend **DARKNESS FALLS** (2002)), three with Dave Barclay under the pen name A. D. Garrett (excellent series) and now two with Helen Pepper under the name of Ashley Dyer. I especially liked the first in the series – the cleverly plotted **SPLINTER IN THE BLOOD**. However, I admit to having trouble with this well-written novel because of gruesome nature of the crimes and the amoral conduct of the killer's followers. If that doesn't upset you, you'll love this book. Some may find similarities with Daniel Cole's Ragdoll series.

ALMOST MIDNIGHT by Paul Doiron (Minotaur, \$27.99). **Rating: B** While on vacation, Maine Warden Investigator Mike Bowditch receives a strange request from close, lifelong friend Billy Cronk, who is currently in a state prison due to Mike's testimony (like George Washington, Mike couldn't

tell a lie).. Billy wants him to investigate a new female prison guard with a mysterious past, and Mike feels honor-bound to help his friend. But when the guard becomes the victim in a brutal attack at the prison, Bowditch realizes there may be more going on than a personality conflict.

Then Mike receives a second call for help, this time from a distant mountain valley where Shadow, a wolf-hybrid he once cared for, has been found shot by an crossbow bolt and is barely clinging to life. He searches for the identity of the bowman and the she-wolf that is reported to be Wolf's companion, but his investigation is blocked at every turn by the increasingly hostile community.

His quest leads to encounters with an Amish community, a wealthy/belligerent Gorman Peaslee (who thinks that the U.S. Constitution gives him rights to do just about anything he wants), and a corrupt prison administration that is bent on silencing Billy Cronk.

The story jumps around a bit but is not hard to follow. Bowditch can be a difficult personality at times (just ask his girlfriend), but his loyalty and determination to do the right thing shine through.

This series is often compared to that of C.J. Box's Joe Puckett series. It is good, but not yet up to C. J. Box's level yet. Perhaps if Warden Bowditch would get married and have some daughters?

THIRTEEN by Steve Cavanagh (Flatiron, \$26.99, August, 2019). **Rating: A** Former conman now criminal defense attorney Eddie Flynn has been asked to be second chair at a very high profile murder trial in New York City. The defendant is Bobby Solomon, a famous movie star accused of killing Ariella Bloom, his silver screen wife. Eddie's job is to attack the police witnesses so if he goes too far the main counsel can claim he went rogue.

Lurking in the background (but revealed to the reader) is a man whose intent is to subvert the course of justice by getting himself appointed to the jury. Not an easy task unless you kill one of the prospective jurors and take his identity.

The evidence against Bobby is very



strong and it is evident that Bobby is not being entirely truthful with his client.

Then a bombshell results in the first chair resigning on the eve of the trial and Eddie taking over as sole defense counsel. But Eddie is very wily as he fights for the life of his client whom he has come to believe is innocent of the crime he is charged with.

This plot summary is really skeletal because I don't want to reveal any of the surprises that await you.

The author won last year's Gold Dagger from the CWA for **THE LIAR**, which also features Eddie Flynn. This is easily the most entertaining mystery I've read this year (46 so far) and the most cleverly/intricately plotted as well.

THE RUSSIAN by Ben Coes (St. Martin's, \$27.99). **Rating: A-** Say "arrivederci" to the Italian Mafia and "privyet" to the Russian mob, who now controls almost all organized crime in the United States. They have become so powerful that they have assassinated two of their most outspoken critics in American politics – a venerable Senator and a governor who was making a run for POTUS.

President Dellenbaugh is beyond furious and wants the man at the top of the Russian mobs responsible for this act of war to be eliminated. First he has to find out who that person is for there are many factions of the so-called

Russian Mob.

To accomplish this assassination, the President is willing to invoke a secret codicil signed by the Founders of the Constitution. It would allow the President, with approval from sixteen key members of Congress, to form a clandestine assassination team to find and eliminate the unreachable men running this deadly criminal operation. Once the appropriate approval is obtained, CIA chief Hector Calibrisi is put in charge of forming a two-man team of Tier 1 operators. He chooses former Navy SEALs Billy Cosgrove and Rob Tacoma. But before they can act, Russians murder Cosgrove, which means there is a leak in the highest echelons of government – and that Rob Tacoma (whom we are familiar with from previous Ben Coes novels) is on his own.

The two men at the top of this particular Russian mob organization have been very successful in keeping their identities secret, so it is not easy for Tacoma to target them. But he has a dangerous plan to work himself up the chain of command.

Ben Coes has penned another breathtaking thriller with a scenario that appears frightening, yet all too possible. All of Coes' prior novels feature Dewey Andreas, who appears to have retired. So I was surprised when he made a cameo appearance near the end of **THE RUSSIAN**. Despite Dewey showing up on a few pages, it does seem that he has handed the torch of the series over to Rob Tacoma, a much younger man with a similar skill set. So the series continues, but with a fresh face – and that's a good thing.

THE LAST WIDOW by Karin Slaughter (Morrow, \$27.99, August, 2019). **Rating: B+** Karin Slaughter's two most popular characters medical examiner Sara Linton and policeman Will Trent are madly in love with each other, but still trying to figure out how to harmonize their very different personalities and lifestyles.

This chapter in their lives starts with a mysterious kidnapping of a doctor from the Centers For Disease Control in Atlanta, Georgia. She has vanished and the police have no leads on her where-

abouts and her kidnappers.

A month later, Sara and Will are enjoying a lazy summer afternoon at Aunt mansion when their idyll is abruptly interrupted by a bomb blast at nearby Emory University. Both rush towards the scene to offer help when they encounter a strange auto accident that immediately raise their suspicions. Before Will can control the scene, Sara is abducted and taken away to parts unknown.

The background of survivalist-hate groups adds a lot of spice to this story and makes me uncomfortable to think how many there are in the U.S. As one would expect, Sara and Will prevail in the end, but not everyone is so fortunate. Expect a high body count along the way in this one. The criminal mastermind's plot of domestic terrorism is ingenious, but I worry that our clever mystery/thriller writers are giving the "bad guys" too many good ideas. Fans of Sara and Will have a treat in store.

A DANGEROUS MAN by Robert Crais (Putnam, \$28.00, August, 2019). **Rating: A-** Joe Pike just went to the bank to deposit a few checks and didn't anticipate that a few minutes later he would foil an attempted kidnapping of a young woman named Isabel Roland. The two kidnappers are arrested and Pike goes on his way after calming the young woman down. Several days later the two men get out on bail and are both found dead within hours. Pike assumes that this was more than just a kidnapping of a random woman – that she was a specific target. Then Isabel disappears.

Pike enlists help from Elvis Cole and they uncover a family history that involves whistleblowing, a huge amount of cash, the Witness Protection Program and some very dangerous men.

This is just the kind of story I love to read – especially since it is told by one of my favorite writers, Bob Crais. His prose flowed in such a smooth manner that I wrapped this 329-page book up in the space of one day. Totally engaged. Perfect for a plane flight or a visit to the beach or pool.

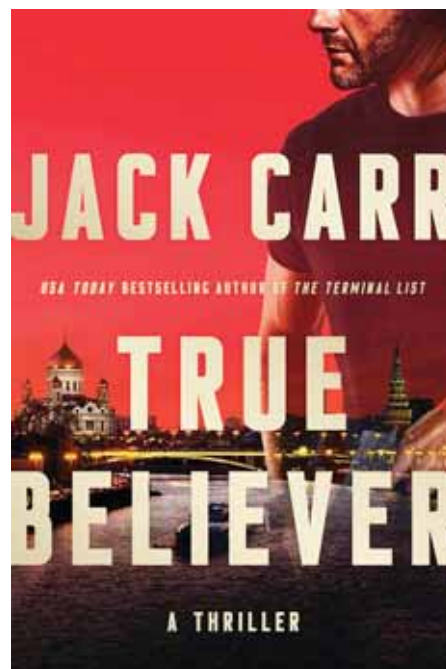
TRUE BELIEVER by Jack Carr (Atria, \$28.00). **Rating: A-** If you've read the first book in this series – **THE TERMINAL LIST** – you'll know that

James Reese exacted a particularly public revenge for the deaths of his family and friends on several high-ranking officials of the U.S. government. He is persona non grata in the U.S. – or anywhere in the world for that matter. If he is to stay alive, he needs to hide out in some place very remote and he thinks he knows just the place in the wilds of Mozambique. To get there he commandeers a yacht and spends weeks navigating oceans to arrive at this destination.

He builds a new, yet lonely life there and feels gratified that he has been able to use some of his combat and organizational skills to fight big game poachers in the region.

Back in the West, a series of terrorist attacks are believed to have been coordinated by a shadowy former Iraqi commando who has successfully hidden his identity from nearly everyone. But James Reese once saw him and the CIA want Reese back in the fold to hunt down this terrorist. They are offering immunity for him and the friends who helped him. They track him to Mozambique and make the offer and he accepts. The game is on.

Carr's second novel is a worthy successor to **THE TERMINAL LIST** – cleverly plotted and chock full of exciting action and interesting details. The future is very bright for this exceptional thriller writer.



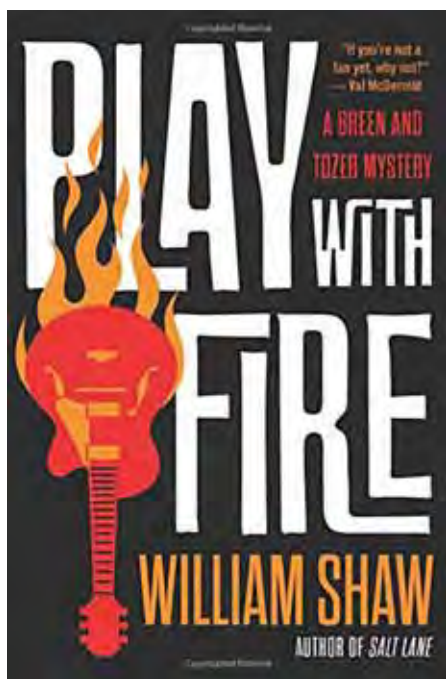
CITY OF WINDOWS by Robert Pobi (Minotaur, \$26.99, August, 2019). **Rating: B-** Dr. Lucas Page is happily married with a gaggle of adopted kids that he and his pediatrician wife are raising. He has successful writing and teaching careers and has absolutely no desire to go back to his former job with the FBI that cost him a couple of limbs and an eye – and very nearly his life. But he also has an amazing ability to reduce his surrounding to a series of vectors, angles, numbers and distances to pinpoint where a shot originated. And that skill is needed now.

During the worst blizzard in memory, an FBI agent in a moving SUV in New York City is killed by a nearly impossible sniper shot. Unable to pinpoint where the shot came from, as the storm rapidly wipes out evidence, the agent-in-charge Brett Kehoe turns to the one man who might be able to help them, former FBI agent Lucas Page. But Lucas wants nothing to do with the case – until Kehoe tells him the victim is his former partner. Then he quickly identifies the assassin's roost some 800 yards away on top of a building.

The next day, there is another victim of the shooter and Lucas must become fully engaged – even though there is great pressure for him to stay home and help his wife with the assimilation of a new (damaged) child into their family. The only connection between victims is that they are both law enforcement officers and are both killed with seemingly impossible sniper shots.

Lucas Page's abilities and personality is not unlike that of Jeffrey Deaver's Lincoln Rhyme. And the novel has a narrative drive not dissimilar to that of Deaver's. My problem was that I was rapidly flipping through the pages, totally engaged with the story, right up until the end, when I thought it fell apart. I really liked the character of Lucas Page and if the author writes another book with him in it, I will certainly read it with great hope that I will enjoy the whole story.

PLAY WITH FIRE by William Shaw (Mulholland, \$28.00; in the U.K., **SYMPATHY WITH THE DEVIL**, Riverrun, £12.99). **Rating: A-** As we



encounter our protagonists DS Cathal “Paddy” Breen and his former partner, now girlfriend (and ex-police), she is pregnant and very bored with just lying around waiting for the baby to be born (smoking too many cigarettes – but the ill effects of cigarettes on a fetus was apparently not widely known in 1969 London). So when Breen catches an intriguing murder investigation, Tozer is curious and quizzes him about the case every evening when he returns home. Her intuition proves valuable to Breen.

The Breen/Tozer relationship has calmed down from that depicted in earlier books of the series. Breen is kind and honest, but old fashioned, and somewhat of a loner – not very good at expressing feelings or getting in the swing of the Sixties. Tozer is head-strong, emotional and keen on showing she is as capable as any man in anything she takes on. But pregnancy and Breen’s constant devotion has taken the edge off of her a bit.

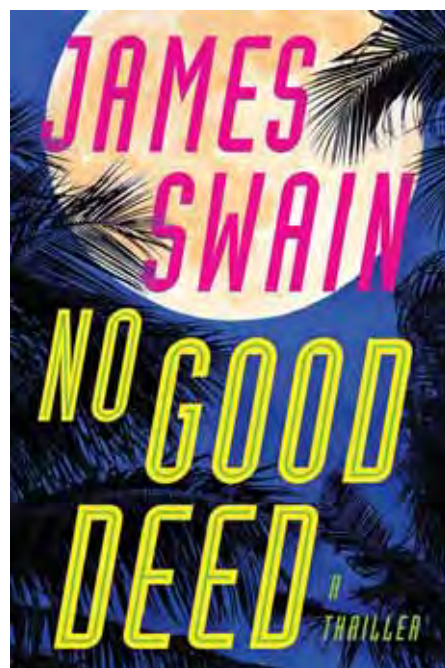
The murder victim is a petite young woman who made a handsome living pretending to be a teen prostitute for men who would buy into that fantasy. She was known as Julie Teenager and was available to wealthy repeat customers. Her body was found on top of a inoperative elevator in her apartment building.

As he proceeds with the investigation he encounters roadblocks from officialdom and wonders if someone higher up is impeding him from finding out the truth. Could one of Julie Teenager’s clients be publicly embarrassed if his name came out?

William Shaw does a marvelous job with depicting the Swinging Sixties and what it was like to live in London during these tumultuous times. A favorite British series that I highly, highly recommend that you follow (from the beginning)

For some unknown reason, each of the four titles in this superb DS Breen and WPC Tozer series have undergone name changes when crossing the pond. In the early days of the series, it was billed as a trilogy, but I’m glad that the author has continued with the Breen/Tozer characters. They were too good to consign to the Cemetery of Lost Characters. Keep ‘em coming.

NO GOOD DEED by James Swain (Thomas & Mercer, \$15.95 paperback original). **Rating: A-** If you haven’t read the first in this series, **THE KING TIDES**, let me introduce you to the two main characters in Jim Swain’s entertaining new series. Jon Lancaster is an ex-Navy Seal, former policeman, now an unlicensed private investigator who specializes in finding kidnapping victims. You’re probably thinking Hollywood



Please vote now for your Barry Award choices. Please send to george@deadlypleasures.com See nominations on page 27. It will just take a minute or so and will mean a lot to me and the authors involved. Thanks.



hunk, but Jon is quite ordinary looking and has a beer belly (from a medical condition) that causes him to be underestimated by nearly everyone.

Beth Daniels is a feisty FBI agent who was nearly abducted as a young woman and considers her job of kidnap rescue as more of a mission than just a “job.” She plays things by the book while Jon is loosey-goosey when it comes to the rules. Professionally they are oil and water, but they are both smart, dedicated and persistent and those shared qualities help form common bonds between them.

A number of women (mostly middle-aged) are being kidnapped in Florida. When a young female is added to the list of kidnapped victims, Jon Lancaster becomes interested and travels to the crime scene to lend his expertise to the cops. There he encounters Beth Daniels and the meeting is awkward because she hasn’t returned his calls for over a month and he has concluded that she doesn’t want to continue dating, even though he thought that things were going well.

They once again form an uncomfortable alliance and their joint investigation takes them down several interesting story lines and gives the reader insights into motorcycle gangs, technological privacy issues and human trafficking. Once again, Jim Swain has presented a fast-paced, intricately plotted, informative and ultimately pleasing investigative tale.

Lookin' For A Few Good Books

Larry Gandle



JUDGMENT by Joseph Finder (Dutton, \$28.00). **Rating: B** Juliana Brody is a judge in the Superior Court of Massachusetts. At a conference in Chicago, she has a one night stand with a man she met in a bar. Upon returning to the courtroom, she is faced with the circumstance that she was set up and is blackmailed into ruling against a woman who is accusing her former employers of sexual harassment. In an effort to get out of her predicament, Juliana must delve into who her blackmailers are and fight back against them. That would be the only way to get control of her life. Of course this places her life and the lives of her family at risk.

This is a fun thriller from Joe Finder that plays well into the 'me too' movement. Stories in which women are not helpless victims abound now in crime fiction. The smart sassy judge will be looked upon favorably by readers and she is a very realistic creation. The plot is a bit of a stretch but it is always entertaining with lots of chases and suspense. Recommended for the plane or the beach.

CEMETERY ROAD by Greg Iles (Morrow, \$28.99). **Rating: A** Marshall McEwan is a successful reporter working in Washington, D.C. He is in print and he is on TV. He has even won a Pulitzer prize for war reporting. Now he must return to Bienville, the small Mississippi town he is from as his father is terminally ill and he must tend to the business of running the family newspaper. When a man, who was his surrogate father is found murdered in the river, Marshall begins to look into the death. This leads him into a confrontation with the Poker Club, a group of powerful local businessmen who will apparently stop at nothing to get their way -- in-

cluding murder. To add to the complexity, Marshall begins to carry on an affair with Jet Matheson, the wife of his best friend from childhood. It is obvious that no good can come from this.

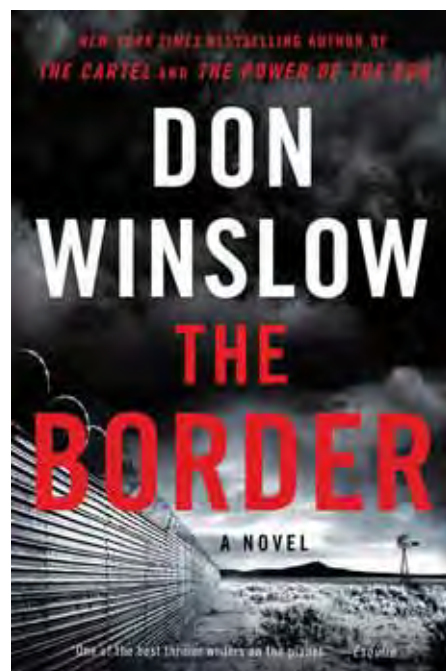
CEMETERY ROAD is another epic novel written in the same style as the **NATCHEZ BURNING** trilogy. Greg Iles creates a profoundly realistic setting from which to set his unique cast of characters. The author is brilliant at juxtaposing various storylines into each other from the present and the past. The traditions and secrets of a small Southern town come vividly to life. The plot is compelling, and the pages do move rapidly to the inevitable but satisfying conclusion.

One point of criticism is the excessive expository dialogue near the end. So much of it seems unnecessary and given the long length of the book, there was plenty of room to divulge some of this material earlier. It is still another

great read by this incredibly prolific author. NOTE -- there is considerable discussion about the politics in the book. Personally, I found it annoying but there is so much more to this book that the politics really play such a miniscule role in the actual story. Highly recommended -- one of the best of the year.

THE BORDER by Don Winslow (Morrow, \$28.99). **Rating: A** This is the third volume in the **POWER OF THE DOG** trilogy about the Mexican drug cartel. At the center remains Art Keller, initially a DEA agent and now the head of the DEA. The first two books were more of a personal account of Keller and his war. This book is more of a grand scope of the various pieces of the drug war and it's world. It tells the tale of Keller as head of the DEA. It tells of the various drug cartels all vying for power after the defeat of Keller's arch enemy, Adan Barrera. These are still some pretty lethal characters but not quite as bloodthirsty as the group known as the Zetas in the previous books. We follow a Guatemalan boy, Nico, as he makes his way illegally into the U.S. and the consequences of that. There is a story of an undercover cop attempting to get to the suppliers by working with the local distributors. There is a story of a heroin addict told from her addiction to near death. Another storyline is about the political players in Washington who rely on the money of the cartels for personal investments -- including the son-in-law of President Dennison who is an obvious fictional rendition of President Trump. The novel is epic in scope with so many pieces -- all of which bring the current drug war into perspective.

The novel is timely and will teach



the average reader a lot about the War on Drugs. Of note -- there is an obvious liberal bias in the writing reflecting the author's viewpoint. Yet, the scope of the story makes this a very worthwhile read. Characters are realistic and many are quite chilling. Once again, Mexico comes off as a barren landscape reminiscent of hell populated with demons and their cowering victims. I have no plans to go south of the border -- possibly ever! In a sense, that is a problem with these books. They depict our neighboring country to the south as a truly horrible place. When the book finally concluded, I realized I do not really want to visit these characters again but the read is an exceptional one. This is easily one of the best books of the year.

MIRACLE CREEK by Angie Kim (Sarah Crichton Books, \$27.00). **Rating: B** Miracle Creek is a small town outside of Washington, D.C. and Baltimore. The Yoo family, Korean immigrants, have invested in a hyperbaric oxygen chamber that they call Miracle Submarine. They cater to children with autism or other psychological development issues. The problem is that one day the chamber explodes killing two people -- Kitt -- the mother of an autistic child and Henry, the autistic son of Elizabeth who has now been charged with their murder. It appears that Elizabeth was trying to rid herself of her autistic son and set up the explosion while she reclined on the nearby riverbank drinking wine. The murder trial begins to create enough doubt that Elizabeth actually committed any crime. Eyes begin to look at Pak Yoo, who possibly created the explosion to obtain insurance money. As the trial progresses, the truth becomes increasingly murky.

It is easy to admire this remarkable debut novel -- I just didn't like it. First of all, the writing is skilled with characters that breathe realism. Since this is a character-driven mystery, that is to the author's credit. The locale is painstakingly depicted. The mystery is reasonably compelling and with the trial the author creates a sense of suspense. The solution and conclusion are both tragic and realistic but also satisfying. So, all great things especially from a



debut author. My problem is that I did not particularly like any of the characters. The plot dragged multiple times to the extent that I considered putting the book down multiple times and not picking it up again. As a result, it took me forever to read this book. I know it is a superior literary mystery -- just not to my taste.

AMERICAN SPY by Lauren Wilkinson (Random House, \$27.00). **Rating: A** In 1986, Marie Mitchell of the FBI is stuck in a job that doesn't interest her with little chance of promotion given that she is black female. She is offered an undercover job trying to undermine the dictatorship of Thomas Sankara, President of Burkina Faso, a small African country. Ideologically, Sankara is a Communist and, as such, the U.S. government wants to bring him down. Marie is asked to get to know Sankara and to put him into a compromising position so he could be blackmailed. Marie sees a lot of good that Sankara is doing for his country and is not at all anxious to help take him down. Conflict ensues eventually culminating with an assassination attempt on Marie six years later.

This is a literary spy novel. The reason is the emphasis on characterization. The novel is based on fact and, therefore, there is a strong element of realism encompassing politics, race and sexuality.

This is a very talented debut author

who wrote a really intelligent thriller as the plot is compelling enough to keep me reading and finishing it in one day. Highly recommended.

THE CORNWALLS ARE GONE by James Patterson and Brendan DuBois (Little Brown, \$28.00). **Rating: B** Army intelligence officer Amy Cornwall comes home from work one day to find her husband and young daughter kidnapped. She is instructed to perform a mission -- capture an individual being held in Texas and deliver him to Florida or she will never see her family again. So begins this tense thriller as we are immediately thrown into the mission. The plot does not let up until the confrontation at the end.

In typical James Patterson fashion, the plot is relentlessly compelling. Chapters are short and often end on a cliffhanger making the book impossible to put down and the book is of a length that can be read in one to two sittings. Characters are, overall, stock figures and the emphasis is on plot progression and pacing vs a deep character study so this can be overlooked. The bottom line is this is a very entertaining book and perfect for a lazy summer afternoon.

CARI MORA by Thomas Harris (Grand Central, \$29.00). **Rating: D** There is a treasure chest under a house in Miami Beach. It is difficult to get to and it has been hunted by a particularly violent psychopath named Hans-Peter Schneider. He now has the house and seeks the treasure underneath it. He also wants the caretaker of the house, a beautiful young illegal immigrant named Cari Mora. Hans-Peter thinks he will be able to kidnap Cari but is unaware of her past as a rebel guerilla and the skill set it has provided her with. This, of course, takes them on a violent clash of wills with only one being able to survive.

Honestly, if any other author wrote this book, it would be roundly ignored. It's the Emperor's New Clothes syndrome where readers and reviewers might be so enamored by the author's previous work that they become blinded by the fact that, after waiting eight years, the book they so enthusiastically grab and read is truly awful. I also looked

forward, eagerly, to get my hands on the book. What a total disappointment. It is a slight book but reads like a much longer one as it drags on endlessly and aimlessly. There are no sympathetic characters in the entire book. Killings are done routinely with little to no emotion. The ending is no surprise and lacks any real tension. This author has written maybe two to three really good books but this one lands with a dull thud. Thomas Harris should not have a free pass to the bestseller lists again. Let him earn it. There are so many books out there recently published that are so much better than this one. Please avoid it and don't waste your time reading it.

RUN AWAY by Harlan Coben (Grand Central, \$29.00). **Rating: B+** Simon Greene works in finance in Manhattan. His wife, Ingrid, is a pediatrician. Paige, their oldest child, is lost to them -- she is addicted to drugs and has disappeared. Simon manages to find her and notices how strung out she is. When her boyfriend intercedes, as Simon attempts to take his daughter home, it leads to an altercation that becomes a viral sensation on the internet. Simon continues his search of his daughter which brings him into the violent underbelly of the drug world. However, there is something strange going on -- why did Paige go from a promising college student to this downward spiral of addiction and self-destruction? The answer is very complicated, as we eventually discover.

I have known Harlan since the days of the "bleeding ball" paperbacks about Myron Bolitar over twenty years ago. Those books were great but he was heading towards a career as a midlist author in the crime fiction world. At a Bouchercon auction in Milwaukee, I won the bid to have him use my name in an upcoming novel. Harlan asked me if it would be okay if I was named as a character in an upcoming standalone which was not part of the Myron Bolitar series. I told him it would be fine. The book was **TELL NO ONE**, the first of his suburban noir novels. Initially, the books took place in suburban northern New Jersey where both of us are from. I could easily identify with the characters

and knew the locale very well. He then got a contract worth many millions to write three additional books similar to that one. His career then skyrocketed. I continued to read his books for a number of years but two things became apparent -- there is a similarity among the books (a main protagonist- family person -- caught up in circumstances beyond their control and they need to bring their lives back to normal entailing life-threatening danger) and he really did not need my support or my reviews as he became a major bestselling author. So I stopped reading him.

I heard good things about this one, so, after many years I decided to pick up his latest. To be honest, the book is very entertaining. I finished it in two long sittings but was engaged throughout. For a thriller, the characters are remarkably well rounded. The plot moves quickly but became increasingly complex as it neared the satisfying conclusion. There are numerous times when reality has to be suspended but we are not talking about high art here. For pop fiction, it is acceptable to stretch reality. Harlan is still in fine form. This is an excellent book for the plane or the beach. Recommended.

IF SHE WAKES by Michael Koryta (Little, Brown, \$28.00). **Rating: A-** Tara Beckley is a student at a small

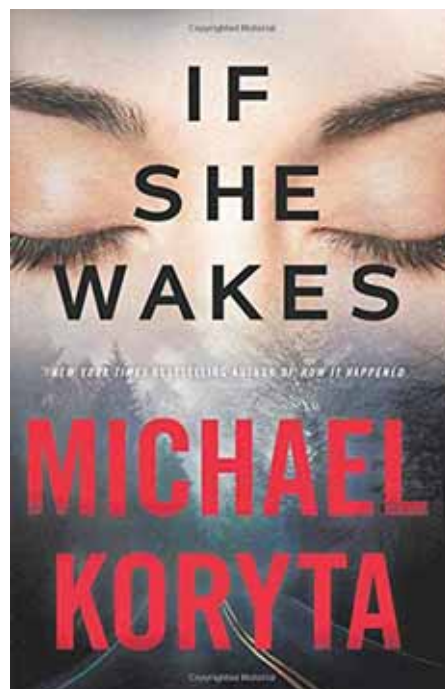
rural college in Maine. She is given the task of driving a visiting professor to a lecture when they are hit by a car killing the professor and rendering Tara into a comatose state in a local hospital. Tara awakens in her unresponsive body knowing she is in some kind of danger but not knowing why. Abby Kaplan is an insurance investigator who is hired by the college to look into the accident. As she investigates, she notices the pieces do not add up. She soon discovers that she is being pursued by a very young but lethal assassin named Dax Blackwell. Why? What is he looking for?

Michael Koryta seems to be heading away from the more lyrical suspense novels to all-out white-knuckle thrillers. This book starts out at a rocket pace and never lets up. Characters are well developed and all quite interesting. Reality must often be suspended as the death count continues to climb. Once the climactic scene is reached, the reader will not be able to stop until the satisfying conclusion. This is definitely one of the most entertaining thrillers of the year. Highly recommended.

George Easter's *Take*. I was very impressed by this novel. Its concept seemed very fresh and new. But despite the freshness, the "locked in syndrome" that Tara experiences reminded me of a famous Alfred Hitchcock tv episode called "Breakdown." Actor Joseph Cotton is in a serious accident and when help arrives they think he is dead, but actually he is suffering from this self-same "locked in syndrome." He is saved from the mortuary at the last moment by the tears he is shedding. I saw that episode in 1955 when I was 10, but it left such an impression on me that it has stayed with me for all these years.

Well, back to **IF SHE WAKES**. Koryta did an especially good job at creating the villain in this story -- the very young, yet brilliant psychopath Dax. And the story is a real page-turner. I totally agree with Larry's assessment. This could be a Barry Award nominee.

THREE BULLETS by R.J. Ellory (Orion, £19.99). **Rating: B** In this alternative history novel, on November 22, 1963, JFK went to Dallas and returned to Washington, D.C. unscathed. Mitch

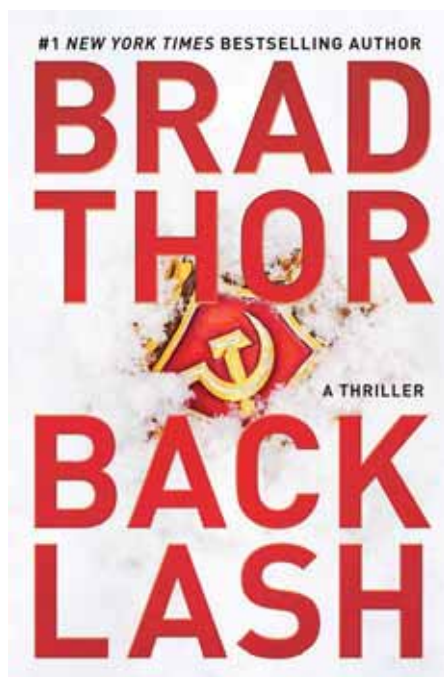


Newman, a photojournalist working in Washington, D.C. is called and told that his fiancé from years ago, Jean, has taken her own life by overdosing on medication. Jean's mother tells Mitch there is no way her daughter would have killed herself. Mitch discovers that Jean, a reporter, was working on a story in Dallas. He goes down there to follow in her path and see if there is truly a cause for her alleged suicide. His investigation takes him into the path of Jack Ruby and a possible assassination plot against the President. Of course, it places him into danger as he wildly attempts to stop the killing of the President.

Roger Ellory has written an interesting book. It paints a dark portrait of the President as a ruthless, self-absorbed womanizer, an awful husband, a dangerously ineffectual leader relying strictly on personal magnetism to win over voters. The plot is quite compelling and moves along at a swift pace. The pieces of the puzzle in Dallas slowly start to come together and as we move to the inevitable climax, the book is difficult to put down. So, the book is extremely well written.

Granted, it is not as beautifully written as the brilliant **A QUIET BELIEF IN ANGELS**, that nails down perfectly the rural South. This book is more plot-driven. My problem with the book stems from the conclusion which I found totally unrealistic and disappointing but will say no more. Getting to this climax is definitely a journey worth taking and, as such, do recommend this latest book by R.J. Ellory. (Disclosure -- Roger is a friend of mine but if I did not like the book I would not have reviewed it)

BACKLASH by Brad Thor (Atria, \$27.99). **Rating: B+** Scot Horvath, a SEAL, a government agent and an assassin, is kidnapped from a house in Governor's Island, New Hampshire by Russian agents after they murder his wife and close friends. He is put on a plane and flown to Russia. The plane crashes into the frigid wilderness before reaching their destination. Horvath manages to kill his captors and must strike out on his own towards the Finnish border before Russian agents attempt



to recapture him. It becomes a race to the death as Horvath outmaneuvers the Russians and as the US Team is sent to the rescue.

BACKLASH is a fast paced and fun thriller. Horvath is a cartoon character -- a comic book hero -- unrealistic but a hero it is fun to root for. There is a lot of gratuitous violence with so many deaths that it is hard to keep up with the numbers.

I have not read a Brad Thor thriller since his first two books. This one shows the author has maintained a level of excellence after such a promising start to his writing career. Lets be clear -- these are not great works of literature but are simply entertainments. With that in mind, the author fully succeeds in taking his readers out of their world of reality and into a truly wild chase. My only negative comment is that it goes on a bit too long. Highly recommended for summer vacation reading.

George's Take. I haven't read a Brad Thor novel in years, but I kept hearing good things about this one. And I'm a sucker for a good survival-against-all-odds thriller. Yes, there is some suspension of belief required, but I thoroughly enjoyed this book. This is a great summer or airplane read. The hours will fly by (no pun intended). If you are into revenge fiction, Thor does a pretty good job there as well. **BACKLASH** will definitely get serious consideration for a

Shamus Award Nomination 2019

Best Private Eye Novel

WRONG LIGHT by Matt Coyle
WHAT YOU WANT TO SEE

by Kristen Lepionka

THE WIDOWS OF MALABAR

HILL by Sujata Massey

BABY'S FIRST FELONY

by John Straley

CUT YOU DOWN by Sam Wiebe

Best First Private Eye Novel

THE BEST BAD THINGS

by Katrina Carrasco

BROKEN PLACES by Tracy Clark

LAST LOOKS

by Howard Michael Gould

WHAT DOESN'T KILL YOU

by Aimee Hix

ONLY TO SLEEP

by Lawrence Osborne

Best Private Eye Paperback Original

SHE TALKS TO ANGELS

by James D. F. Hannah

NO QUARTER by John Jantunen

SHARK BAIT by Paul Kemprecos

SECOND STORY MAN

by Charles Salzberg

THE QUESTIONABLE BEHAVIOR OF DAHLIA MOSS by Max

Wirestone



Maggie's Cozy Mystery Cafe'

Mary Mason



MURDER IN BEL-AIR by Cara Black (Soho, \$27.95). Nineteenth in the Aimee Leduc series. **Rating:**

A Aimee Leduc returns in another adventure that is sure to instill a sense of wanderlust in an armchair adventurer. Paris plays a part in all of the series installments, and this book is no exception.

Aimee is the keynote speaker at a conference that might be just the venue to put Leduc Investigations at the forefront of technical security firms in Paris. Sadly, she has to leave this opportunity on the table when an emergency calls her away. Her formerly estranged mother, Sydney, has not picked up Chloe from a playgroup as arranged, and isn't answering her phone. This isn't the worst of it, as when Aimee leaves with Chloe, she sees a body being taken away from a nearby convent. The body is a homeless woman, and Sydney was the last person known to have spoken to her.

This leads Aimee to get involved in a political intrigue, and also another search for her mother. Aimee is still suffering effects of an injury from a previous investigation, and should really be taking it easy, but she also feels the need to find her mother. She does locate the dead woman's belongings, with a substantial amount of money. Why then, was the woman living as she did?

The result is an international intrigue, based in the Ivory Coast. A lot of agencies know only by letters are involved, not a good thing for anyone to be involved with. Aimee, with the help of Renee and Saj from her firm, do the impossible and figure out what is happening, at great risk to themselves. Great risk is nothing new to Aimee, but with a child depending on her, she may have to be more careful in the future. Sydney is located, the very bad guys are brought to

justice, and Aimee will return for a new adventure.

It is hard to read a Cara Black novel, and not want to book a flight to Paris. France has never been one of my favorite destinations, but Black makes me want to give it another chance. If I could go on a tour led by Cara, I would do so. She perfectly captures the unique quality of Paris and makes me feel I've had a short visit there. I'm glad the books are not set in the present, as it is a way to know that Notre Dame is still intact.

CARI MORA by Thomas Harris (Grand Central, \$29.00). Stand Alone. **Rating: B+** Thomas Harris takes us to Miami Florida for this stand alone adventure.

Cari Mora is a woman with a very sad background. In her native Colombia, she was recruited at a young age to be a child soldier. She was adept at learning the tricks of the trade, but was not indoctrinated fully into the sordid life. When she saw her leader murder chil-

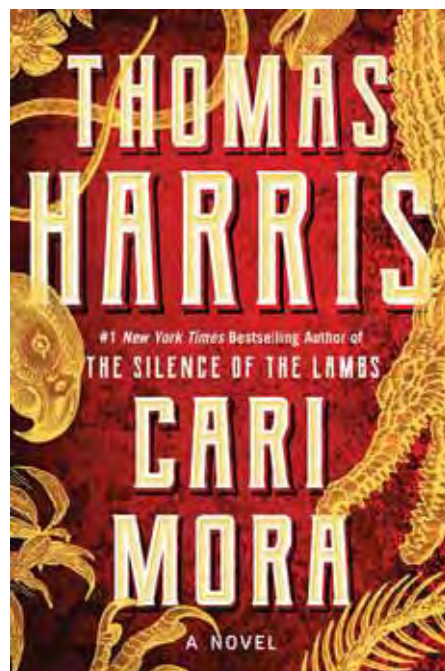
dren in cold blood, she killed him and escaped, ultimately reaching the U.S.

Cari knows she has to be careful as there could be a price on her head, and she keeps a low profile. She works several jobs, one of which is a caretaker at the mansion of a now deceased drug baron. It's rumored there is a fortune in gold hidden on the grounds, and the current tenants are clearly searching for the treasure. The leader is a truly evil man, whose tendency toward violence run to the horrific.

There is more than one group of treasure hunters, some of whom Cari knows and is friendly with. When one of her friends is murdered and mutilated, Cari goes underground, hoping to stay alive to help her family living in Miami. She's not totally successful in hiding, and is convinced to help retrieve the treasure before the monster and his crew can do so.

This was a fast read, the action moving along, with some interesting information on types of mangoes and a scene with a Medical Examiner giving a class a lesson on what to look for in an autopsy. There was also a lot of violence, and disturbing scenes. I had to put the book down at times and read a less graphic one. I couldn't read it at night before bed, but I did enjoy it overall. I liked Cari, a strong and caring woman who deserves a better life.

THE BODY IN THE WAKE by Katherine Hall Page (Morrow, \$25.99). 25th in the Faith Fairchild mystery series. **Rating: B+** Faith Fairchild and her family are in Maine, preparing to have a nice relaxing time at their summer cottage on Sanpere Island. Faith's son didn't come as he had conflicts with a college project. Daughter Amy is working for the chef of a local upscale resort and loving it. Husband Tom is



working on a book, and has found a place to write away from distractions. Faith is pretty much on her own, but luckily there are friends near and a wedding in the works.

Pix Miller's daughter Samantha is getting married on the island and most of the plans are made and everything should be smooth sailing, until Samantha's future mother in law breezes in. She's intent on changing the venue, theme, and pretty much everything to a big, expensive, name dropping event. Luckily there is another visitor suited to be a mother in law wrangler, who makes her understand what a great venue they found.

What is not so easy to fix is the opioid crisis that has found its way onto the peaceful island. Faith actually steps on a body in a pond, which reveals to what extent the crisis has expanded. There is a sub plot with a local woman showing the true effects of this dangerous addiction, and how hard it is to get free.

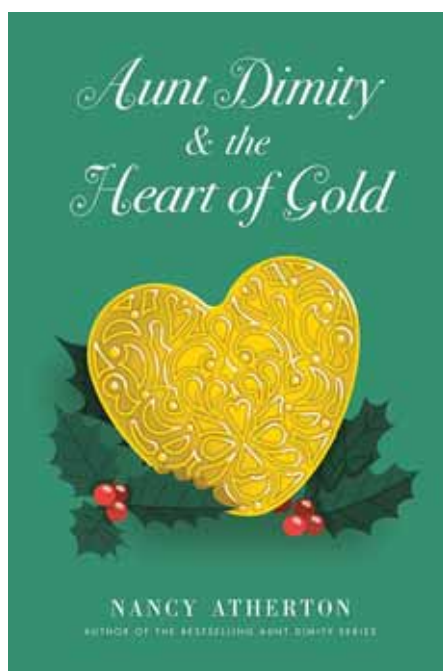
It is clear there is a gang of sorts working the island, and Faith, with great risk to her safety, is involved in solving the mystery of the loathsome drug dealers. Luckily she's up to the task, and the wedding goes on very smoothly.

I have to say that I did guess who the perps were, but it didn't lessen my enjoyment of the book. I always like to visit with the Fairchilds, and even go on vacation with them. The recipes at the end of the book are icing on the delicious cake.

AUNT DIMITY AND THE HEART OF GOLD by Nancy Atherton (Viking, \$26.00). 24th in the Aunt Dimity series.

Rating: B+ It's Christmas in the charming English village of Finch, but sadly most of the villagers are ill, so ill that many are unable to even decorate their homes for the holidays. Lori Shepard and her family have avoided the "plague" and are happy to be able to celebrate with the usual holiday party Emma Harris and husband Derek throw at their stately home.

The party is going well, with a menu that had me drooling. One of the villagers, Bree, is not herself. A young woman, Bree recently moved to the village and inherited a cottage. She reveals that the love of her life recently dumped her over



the phone, which brings out the best in the villagers who do their best to console her.

When the weather changes and an Ice Storm cometh, it's clear no one will be returning to their home. Outside, looking at the changed landscape, they see a car coming up the drive, then skidding into a ditch. The driver, a woman of a certain age, is rescued, and brought into the house. Matilda Trout, known as Tilly, wants a cab to go to a hotel she planned to stay at for the holidays. She is convinced to accept Emma & Derek's hospitality.

Emma had something she wanted to show her friends, and Tilly joins them in viewing an unusual room. None of the "finchers" can figure out what the room was used for, but Tilly explained it was a chapel, and showed them the features of the room that prove it. When Lori gets home, she confides to Aunt Dimity, a friendly spirit she communicates with via a notebook, about the evening. Dimity asks whether a priest hole was found. It wasn't, but when Lori returns to the manor she asks Tilly about it. Tilly explained she was flustered, and immediately sets off to find the way into the priest hole. It is decorated with objects that appear to be from the Hindu religion and include a solid gold heart with the initials C and M.

Now, the healthy villagers have a mystery to solve. Who were C and M, and why was the secret altar decorated in

that fashion. A clue was found in a recipe for an Indian treat and a team researches local papers and finds the answer to a decades old riddle.

This is a series that fits perfectly if you are tired of the current political scene, or just need a break from intrusive technology. A mystery without a murder is something that can easily be shared with younger readers as a way to lure them into the genre. I'd love to find a village like Finch and would move there if I could.

BROKEN BONE CHINA by Laura Childs (Berkley, \$26.00). Twentieth book in the Tea Shop Series. **Rating: B+** It's always a pleasure to visit Charleston, South Carolina and visit the Indigo Tea Shop. Theodosia Browning and her staff run an amazing establishment, and are involved in the community. In this "visit" the action at a hot air balloon event is ruined by a drone attack. Sadly, one of the balloons crashes and all passengers are killed.

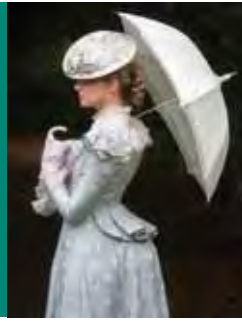
Theodosia are witnesses to this disaster, and Theo finds herself once again helping the police by using her observation skills and natural intuitive reasoning. There are many suspects who may have wanted one of the victims dead. Don Kingsley was the CEO of SyncSoft, a local software company. That alone could be a reason for murder, but Don also owned a very rare and valuable piece of Revolutionary War memorabilia that could be the cause of the attack.

When the article disappears, the suspect list expands. The fiancée of a good friend of Theo's is a suspect, along with Kingsley's estranged wife. Toss in some shady antique dealers, and the puzzle deepens. As usual, Theo is intrepid in her sleuthing, and at personal risk she helps bring the evil doer to justice.

I have enjoyed each installment in this series and this one is no exception. Charleston SC can be considered a character in the series, as we're given an insiders view of the charming city. I like the recipes, and the guide to Charleston and the area. I am thankful to Ms. Childs for introducing me to Poogan's Porch restaurant. I had an amazing dinner there the last time I was in Charleston and hope to return soon.

History Mystery

Potpourri



Sally Sugarman Reviews

THE PARAGON HOTEL by Lyndsay Faye (Putnam, \$26.00). **Rating A+** Each of Lyndsay Faye's books are worth reading. Each is well written, unique, absorbing and thought provoking. She recreates the historical context fully and populates it with intriguing characters dealing with the social issues of their times. There are mysteries and surprises that move the action along smoothly.

It is hard to believe that it is an accident that the narrator of this story is named Alice James. She is not the sister of the famed James brothers, William and Henry, not Frank and Jesse. This is the daughter of a prostitute, growing up in Harlem and in the early 1920s using her talents for anonymity to work for an Italian crime boss. Clearly, this is not the safest occupation and the reader first meets her with a second bullet wound on a train going west.

Thanks to a helpful black Pullman porter, Alice or Nobody as she often calls herself is lodged at The Paragon Hotel in Portland, Oregon. At this point in time, Oregon was a white utopia with many restrictions on blacks, reinforced by an active KKK. A place like the Paragon Hotel was where the few blacks in the community were safe and black transients such as Pullman porters could stay while waiting to ship out again. The fact that many of the black men had served in World War I was not appreciated by the white community.

In this unlikely situation, Alice makes friends with a black singer, Blossom Fontaine. Blossom is a good friend of the white sheriff's wife who comes to the hotel to do Weekly Betterment classes for the black children. When one of these children disappears, the black

community rallies to find him, which complicates matters considerably as the whites don't want blacks to cross their boundaries. The story goes back and forth between the Now of Alice's current life at the hotel and the Then of her life in Harlem and the events that led to her being shot and leaving as quickly as she could. Both of these worlds are vivid and easy to follow while showing the violence and conflicts of the time.

Both enlightening and entertaining this is a book worth each minute of reading.

A GENTLEMAN'S MURDER by Christopher Huang (Inkshares, Inc, \$15.99). **Rating: A+** This is an elegant mystery on many levels. The historical time, the setting and the writing all contribute to this sense of elegance.

It is 1924, Most of the action takes place at The Britannia Club whose members have always been gentlemen who have fought in English wars over time. Lieutenant Eric Peterkin, one of whose

ancestors founded the club, survived the war to end all wars.

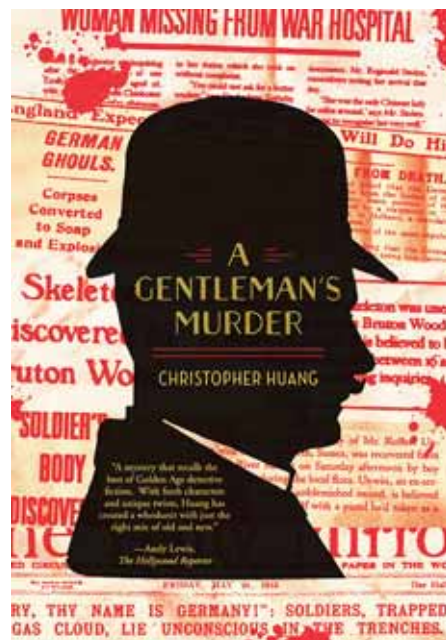
Defying Ronald Knox's edict that no Chinese should appear in a worthy mystery, Eric's mother was Chinese. These two elements of the aftereffectS of wars and the experience of being other enrich the story as well as provide much of its plot. Eric's civilian job is to read manuscripts, many of which are mysteries.

When Benson, who was a conscientious objector during the war, is admitted to the club, some of the members think that it is inappropriate for him to have been accepted even if he had been wounded in Flanders as a stretcher bearer. Benson knows a number of the members, having recuperated with them at the same hospital. When one of these men makes a bet, Eric is asked to be the referee. When Benson turns up dead the next day, Eric feels it is his responsibility to discover the killer, particularly when the officer in charge of the investigation seems implicated in some way.

One mystery leads to another and one murder leads to another. Through it all, the reader experiences the English class system, meets some strong women, including Eric's sister, and appreciates the complexity of the various characters that Eric encounters. This is a time, a place and a detective that one anticipates knowing better. This is Golden Age detection expanded by the social dimension that the author provides. If **A GENTLEMAN'S MURDER** were a manuscript that turned up in his pile, one believes Eric would recommend it.

MONEY IN THE MORGUE by Ngaio Marsh and Stella Duffy (Felony and Mayhem, \$14.95). **Rating: A** When Ngaio Marsh died in 1982, she left the first chapters of this book behind. Her work has not been completed until now. Stella Duffy, who shares characteristics with Marsh in that she is from New Zealand and is involved in theatre and mystery fiction, continues the book smoothly. Where one ends and the other begins is impossible to tell.

The story is set in New Zealand during World War II and there are a number of plots operating at the same time. Inspector Roderick Alleyn is at the hospital for convalescent soldiers for one



reason, but gets involved in a murder investigation for another. Since a storm is raging and the hospital is cut off from communication with the outside world, Alleyn and those stranded in the hospital have to solve the problems on their own. It is an odd assortment of characters, from a blustering accountant whose payroll money has been stolen to a tough nurse, a smart young woman, a fumbling doctor, three boisterous, recovering soldiers and more, all of whom are distinctive and who contribute or detract from Alleyn's work.

Most of the action takes place in the dark of night which adds to the suspense and confusion.

This is an entertaining and engrossing read all the way through. Alleyn is the fixed point that keeps the reader oriented to the events. One might quibble about a letter which affects several people when they read it, but which is kept from the reader. Wasn't one of the rules of golden age mysteries that all the evidence was presented to the reader? This is a minor point, however. The book is well worth reading. There is something comforting knowing that some of our favorite sleuths live on even when their original creators do not. Hopefully, Duffy will return to Inspector Alleyn in another adventure.

SMOKE AND ASHES by Abir Mukherjee (Pegasus, \$25.95). **Rating: A** This is the third, and the first I have read, in the series about detective Captain Sam Wyndham and his sergeant, Surrender-Not Banerjee. The setting is Calcutta in 1921. Tensions are high within the police force. Besides what appears to be a ritual murder of a nurse as well as a series of non-violent protests by followers of Gandhi, the Prince of Wales is scheduled to visit. Not only must the prince be protected, but so must the image of the British Empire.

Wyndham and Banerjee are assigned the murder which resembles one Wyndham stumbled on the night before when he was in an opium daze. Besides being stabbed in the same way, both victims had their eyes removed. The team's investigation is complicated when an intelligence unit of the army takes over the case. The third victim, however,

provides the link between the other two murders.

The aftermath of World War I has not only left its mark on Wyndham resulting in his addiction, but it has other consequences as well.

Mukherjee does an excellent job in recreating the time and place while maintaining suspense. One understands why the British Raj will eventually fail. Crime novels do more than entertain. They recreate a society's values. This is particularly true of historical crime novels which place the reader into another time and setting so that it comes alive. Wyndham's flaw is not only something with which he has to struggle, but it reflects the struggles within the historical moment.

Sam and all the other characters are vivid and believable, each adding to the story and its believability. The leader of the Indian protest is a particularly fine example of this. It is always a delight to discover a new author who captures your attention completely, making you want to revisit these people, places and historical period.

OSCAR WILDE AND THE RETURN OF JACK THE RIPPER by Gyles Brandreth (Pegasus Books, \$25.95). **Rating: A** This is the seventh book in the excellent series featuring Oscar Wilde as a detective. It takes place

before the sixth book, **OSCAR WILDE AND THE MURDERS AT READING GAOL**. Readers new to the series should read this book before **READING GAOL** which is not only at the end of Wilde's life, but which is moving in a way different than the pleasures of all the books in the series.

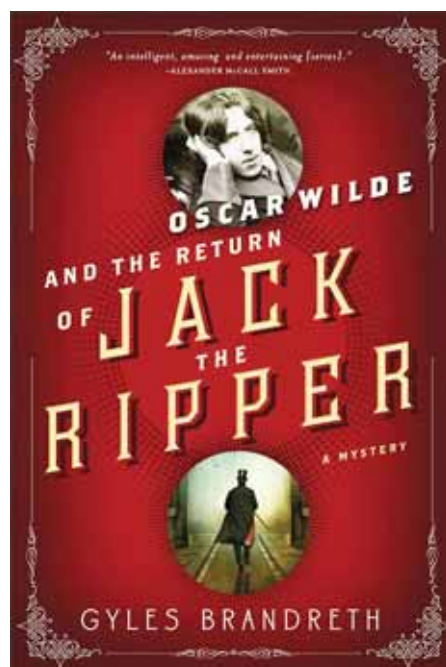
The narrators in the books vary. This one is told by Arthur Conan Doyle who has joined Wilde in investigating the crimes before, but has not been the narrator. He makes a fine Watson to Wilde's Holmes.

It is six years since Jack the Ripper terrorized London with his crimes. Now there are some murders that indicate he might be returning. Chief Constable Macnaghten asks Wilde and Doyle to investigate since they know so many people at different levels of society. As might be expected Wilde has a great line with which to open the book. Doyle is on his own since his wife is in Switzerland with the children. The two men revisit the scenes of the original crimes as well as those of the new murders. Wilde is in charge of the investigation which Doyle dutifully records. They, of course, encounter many of the famous of the time as well as more commonplace folk.

The characters are well developed, particularly Constance, Wilde's wife. This is the foggy London of the time with contrasts of great luxury and desperate poverty. Besides investigating the backstreets of Whitechapel, the sleuths visit the circus, the theatre and asylums for the insane. There is even a grand dinner where Wilde will reveal the identity of Jack the Ripper. There is an interesting commentary on how the press uses Jack the Ripper's name to sensationalize the crimes.

This is a worthy addition to a fine mystery series. The author captures the complexity of Wilde and the world in which he lived so completely that the reader cannot put the book down until the tale is completed.

A SNAPSHOT OF MURDER by Frances Brody (Crooked Lane, \$26.99). **Rating: A** This is the tenth Kate Shackleton mystery. Those who are familiar with the series will feel at home with some old friends. Newcomers will want



to catch up on Kate's past adventures.

There is a wonderful blend of the familiar and the new as Kate prepares a magic lantern show for her photography group. The meeting gets interesting when a new member shows up. He may be new to the group, but not to Kate's friend, Carine and her husband, Tobias. Tobias had been his buddy during the War. He was the one who had told Carine that her first love had died in battle. When Edward shows up scarred but alive, it surprises both of them.

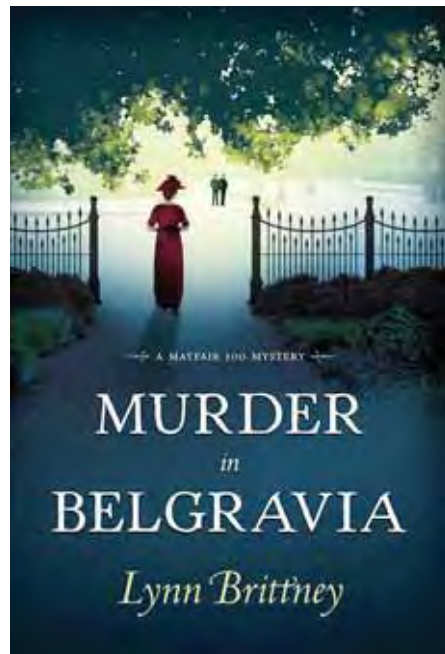
Complicating matters the photography group plans a weekend excursion to Haworth for the opening on the Bronte museum. This is an opportunity to take great photographs of an historical literary spot as well as a special occasion. It is also a chance for murder.

There are many complications since one member of their group has been to the place where they are staying before and is a person who is not welcome because of past behavior.

The story alternates between Kate's first person narrative and third person as the reader sees what is happening back home. Kate's housekeeper Mrs. Sugden is looking after Carine and Tobias' photography business while everyone is away. Complications unfold there as well as on the trip. More than one mystery has to be solved.

Meanwhile, Kate is also dealing with her parents who are visiting close by. All of the characters, new and old, are well developed so that the reader enjoys spending time with them as the plot unfolds. The story is well paced and the solution believable. Although Kate may not do as much detecting as in some of the other mysteries, the truth comes out to everyone's satisfaction.

MURDER IN BELGRAVIA by Lynn Brittney (Crooked Lane, \$26.99). **Rating: A+** The time is 1915, the place London. Chief Inspector Beech has a novel idea for solving crime. He forms a team, consisting of himself, a woman doctor, a titled woman who has studied law, a young policeman, like himself discharged from the army because of a wartime injury and an older policeman. This is revolutionary because despite the campaign for woman suffrage, women



are not considered as possible members of the police force. Beech receives approval for his team as long as it is kept quiet until the right time to reveal it. This summary does not do justice to one of the most engaging first installments of a new mystery series ever.

This is the author's first foray into adult fiction after thirty years of writing adult and children's non-fiction and young adult fiction. Hopefully, she is currently writing the second book in this series which should become widely popular based on this first book. There is only one problem and that is that the book will keep you up late if you start reading it in the evening. The concept of a team is fresh in itself, but the members of this team are all individuals you are happy to spend time with as they pair up in various combinations while investigating. The young policeman Rigsby and older Tollman work well as a team, but each also does well when working with another member of the group.

The issues of the time around the changing role of women, the injustices due to class divisions, changes in medicine and many other aspects of a London being bombed by relatives of the royalty add richness to the narrative. Even the minor characters spring to life.

The plot involves the murder of a nobleman, damaged by the war like many

men at this time. Several improbable suspects confess to the crime, complicating rather than simplifying the solution. There is a great deal of humanity in the way the murder is resolved.

This mystery is not only a pleasure to read, but this reader eagerly anticipates the next in the series.

BERTIE: THE COMPLETE PRINCE OF WALES MYSTERIES

by Peter Lovesey (Soho Press, \$31.95).

Rating: A+ This hefty volume includes the three Prince of Wales mysteries. The books are narrated by the Prince himself. He writes in 1886 for an audience at least one hundred years in the future. As he indicates given his high position as Prince Albert Edward, heir to her majesty, Queen Victoria, it would not be appropriate for him to be revealing these adventures while he and those he chronicles were still alive.

Peter Lovesey is a skilled author and he creates a believable prince so that the reader accepts the man's authenticity completely. The stories related are different types of crimes and reflect the prince's world and his interests. The first has to do with the death of an outstanding jockey whom the prince knew well from his sojourns at the race track. The second involves a hunting party on which he is engaged in which the number of hunters diminish daily by an alarming degree. The third takes the reader and the prince to Paris where one enjoys the company of Sarah Bernhardt, whom he invites to be his assistant. There is also some informative time with Toulouse Lautrec who is helpful even though the prince does not really enjoy Lautrec's art.

As a man to the manor born, Bertie is not always as perceptive as he believes himself. In fact, quite often it is Alix, his wife, the Princess of Wales, who provides him with essential insights unintentionally. Part of the humor in the mysteries arises from Bertie's deductions which are not quite of the caliber of those of Sherlock Holmes. Bertie takes these setbacks with good grace, if some bewilderment. His noted charm with the ladies is often misinterpreted both by himself and the ladies. It appears that among the many virtues

a rich and powerful man such as Bertie possesses, self-awareness is not one of them.

These stories are a delightful combination of an engaging mystery for the prince to disentangle and the humor in watching a likeable amateur sleuth who is not quite as astute as he thinks he is. Each aspect of the historical world is conveyed through the atmospheric setting and the variety of characters. This is one of those journeys into an historical mystery that pleases on every level. The mysteries are solid and well plotted, but it is the sleuth who is always engaging.

Ted Hertel Reviews

SOLEMN GRAVES by James R. Benn (Soho Crime, \$26.95, September 2018) **Rating: A-** Normandy, France. July 1944. A month after D-Day Captain William "Billy" Boyle and his assistant Staff Sergeant "Big Mike" Miecznikowski are assigned to investigate the murder of Major David Jerome. He was killed at an apple orchard farmhouse serving as battalion headquarters near the front lines. The investigation is hampered by the secrecy surrounding the highly confidential nature of "The Ghost Army" which is in the area. Its task is to deceive the enemy by using

radio traffic, sound effects, and dummy vehicles to create the illusion of a much larger force. But Boyle's duty, as usual, is to find the killer of just one man because, even during wartime with its hundreds of thousands of deaths, justice still must be done for that one person.

This thirteenth investigation of Billy Boyle centers around the post-D-Day turmoil in France. James R. Benn's research is detailed and fascinating. He manages to bring his characters to life, placing them in settings accurate to history. Along the way, he also brings in real people, in this case Ghost Army Private Bill Blass, later the well-known fashion designer, in a cameo role. It's little known gems like this that bring an added sense of reality to the story.

Tangled up with Nazi collaborators and the French Resistance, some of whom began to resist only *after* the D-Day invasion, Boyle is growing tired of the war and people dying and suffering because of it. With one wild goose chase leading to another, Boyle passes through the totally destroyed town of Saint-Lô. As one MP says to him, "We sure liberated the hell out of this place, didn't we?" Boyle, along with Big Mike and their friend Piotr Kazimierz ("Kaz") hope for a real life after the war. But until that time comes, Boyle knows he must soldier on in the face of almost overwhelming odds. This investigation brings him one step closer to making that hope a reality. Until that happens, we can continue to appreciate these complex but very personal stories of men and women caught up in war's horrors.

DIARY OF A DEAD MAN by David Downing (Soho Crime, \$27.95, April 2019) **Rating: A-** Josef Hofmann has settled into a boarding house in Ham, Germany, in April 1938. He begins writing a diary of his experiences there, hiding it in a safe spot inside the window frame of his room. But he is not who he seems. Hofmann, a German, is actually a spy and a saboteur sent by Moscow on what is likely a suicide mission. War clouds are on the horizon and Hofmann's job is to find former members of the suppressed German Communist Party and discover if they

are still loyal to the cause, willing to be a fifth column inside the Reich. Taking a job on the railroad puts the spy in contact with them. It is a dangerous game he's playing, as one misstep could result in his being turned over to the Nazis. But his mission becomes complicated as he grows closer to the family from whom he is renting his room.

David Downing, author of the excellent John Russell Berlin Station novels, manages to recreate the fear that permeated Nazi Germany in the pre-war years. Every day brings the potential for Hofmann's exposure, keeping the suspense level very high throughout the novel. But this is a very character-driven drama of a man who abandoned his family, believing that life outside the party was meaningless. Then he finds himself getting in deeper with the distractions of a life unlike any he has ever known. Hofmann slowly begins to form an emotional attachment to the young widow and her son who run the boarding house. Nothing tears the heart like a glimpse of happiness, he discovers. Can he successfully complete his mission without endangering those he is beginning to care about?

Downing handles all of this without creating any easy answers for his characters. Set against events like the Munich sellout and Kristallnacht, there is danger on the streets of Germany, even in little Hamm. He explores the politics of that era, with allusions to today's international politics that parallel what was happening eighty years ago. It is indeed a frightening picture, a reminder of how past horrors and pettiness are strikingly similar to today's xenophobia. Further, the characters come to life, particularly the son Walter, who has his own clear ideas of right and wrong and learns the consequences to standing up for his beliefs in a hate-filled country.

Nor does the United States come off well in many of Downing's novels. America, Hofmann muses, "was such a strange mixture. A country built on slavery and the murder of its natives that thinks itself the finest place on earth." This is a timely, thought provoking novel, historically accurate in all respects. It is one that should not be missed.



BERTIE: The Complete Prince of Wales Mysteries by Peter Lovesey (Soho Crime, \$31.95, March 2019). **Rating: A-**

Before Mystery Writers of America's Grand Master Peter Lovesey created Detective Superintendent Peter Diamond, he wrote three witty and charming historical novels which imagined Albert Edward, the Prince of Wales, as a crime solver in the Victorian era. Here, collected in one volume for the first time, are the three "Bertie" novels. At just over ten dollars for each full-length novel, this is a solid bargain.

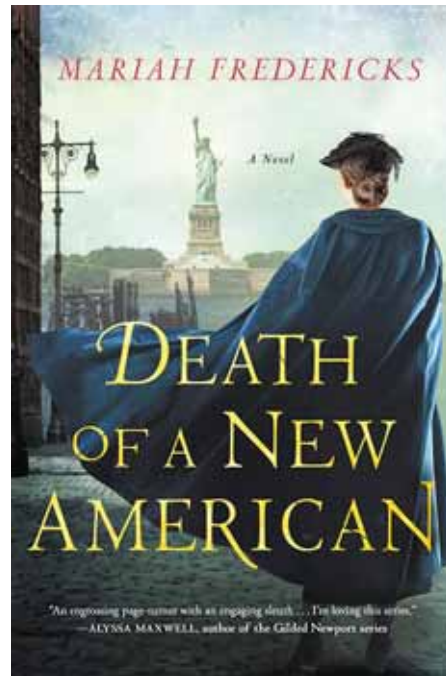
Bertie and the Tin Man finds a famous jockey dead from apparent suicide, his last words "Are they coming?" Bertie, however, suspects murder, and sets out for the first time to use whatever detecting skills he might have (and they aren't many) to bring the culprit to justice. **Bertie and the Seven Bodies** tests the Prince's abilities once again, as members of a royal hunting party begin to die one by one. Finally, in **Bertie and the Crime of Passion**, our hero travels from England to Paris, where the famous Moulin Rouge is the scene of a mysterious death. Can anyone other than Bertie discover the killer?

Lovesey includes a helpful introduction to the volume, setting out how and why he wrote the series. He explains that the books were filled with real characters with whom Bertie crossed paths in his life. For example, the jockey in **Tin Man** was Fred Archer who died uttering those same words. **Seven Bodies** was intended as homage to Agatha Christie. The Heir Apparent often went to Paris, the setting of **Crime of Passion**. All details are as authentic as possible, with the exception of Bertie's detecting career, of course.

Among the many joys of these novels is the contrast between how Albert Edward is expected by his royal family to act and how instead his love of sleuthing, horse racing, music and dance halls, and beautiful women sway him from his duties to Queen and Country. Along the way the reader is treated to all the facets of the late 1800s, from manners to clothing to style, as well as his dressing downs from Queen Victoria herself. Lovesey also delves deep into Bertie's

mind, exposing his candid thoughts about the royals and his part among them. At the same time, the detection is both entertaining and enlightening about the entire era. If you enjoy Lovesey (and who doesn't?) and haven't read these tales from the late 1980s to the early 1990s, you won't want to miss this 600-plus page collection.

Norma Dancis Reviews



DEATH OF A NEW AMERICAN by Mariah Fredericks (Minotaur, 2019, \$26.99). **Rating: A** 1912. Jane Prescott is lady's maid to Louise Benchley, who is preparing for a wedding into the high society Tyler family. Jane befriends Sofia, the nanny for the children of Louise's fiancé's brother Charles. He is famous for prosecuting the Black Hand, an Italian criminal gang that seems to be menacing New York.

On one hot night Jane hears a scream from the nursery. Sofia is dead, and the window, which should have been closed, is open. The Tylers are sure this is a Black Hand kidnapping. A journalist who is convinced that the Black Hand is a serious menace has asked Jane's help. Jane, however, can't reconcile what she has seen with the mafia story. She is driven to help find the killer, keep the anti-Italian story from being written,

and help insure that Louise's wedding does in fact take place.

This is Fredericks' second novel in the Jane Prescott series. As soon as I finished reading it, I ordered the first book. While Jane is an amateur detective, this book is not cozy. She is a believable detective and the historical setting is meaningful and integral to the plot. Fredericks turns over a lot of unsavory historical rocks.

FOUR FUNERALS AND MAYBE A WEDDING by Rhys Bowen (2018 Berkley \$26.00). **Rating: B** 1935. Lady Georgianna Rannoch has finally received permission to drop her royal status so that she can marry Darcy O'Mara. Noble or not, Lady Georgianna is poor. While in despair that they cannot find any place they can afford to rent, Georgianna's godfather offers her the use of his estate, Eynsleigh. She will inherit it, anyway, and he is traveling in South America.

When she arrives at Eynsleigh, she discovers that all the servants she knew have been replaced by a few surly incompetents and everything is in disarray. Without any authority to fire the servants, Georgianna tries to whip them, and the estate, back into shape. Suspicious circumstances and danger begin to multiply. As matters become more fraught, Georgianna tries to gather enough evidence to stop it so that she will live long enough to marry.

While in the previous Royal Spyness mysteries Lady Georgianna has cleverly solved other mysteries, here she seems somewhat dense. She misses obvious clues. Even in a cozy mystery, the reader wants to be surprised rather than silently yelling at the protagonist to notice what is in front of her. Nonetheless, Bowen allows us to spend time with her familiar, well-drawn and popular characters.

The book shines as a historical novel and a comedy of manners. Her portrayal of a time when noble estates were disappearing is in itself delightful. The tug of war between her attempts to impose proper behavior and the staff's refusal to comply is enough reason to read the book. If you prefer to watch an accomplished amateur sleuth at work, however, try one of the earlier books first.

What's New in the U.K.



ENDGAME by Daniel Cole (Trapeze, £18.99, September, 2019). When retired police officer Finlay Shaw is found dead in a locked room, everyone thinks it's suicide. But disgraced detective William 'Wolf' Fawkes isn't so sure. Together with his former partner Detective Emily Baxter and private detective Edmunds, Wolf's team begin to dig into Shaw's early days on the beat. Was Shaw as innocent as he seemed? Or is there more to his past than he'd ever let on?

ONE WAY OUT by A. A. Dhand (Bantam Press, £16.99, June, 2019). When the alert sounds, DCI Harry Virdee has just enough time to get his son and his mother to safety before the bomb blows. But this is merely a stunt. A new and aggressive nationalist group, the Patriots, have hidden a second device under one of the city's mosques. In exchange for the safe release of those at Friday prayers, the Patriots want custody of the leaders of radical Islamist group Almukhtareen – the chosen ones. The government does not negotiate with terrorists. Even when thousands of lives are at risk. But Harry's wife is in one of those mosques. Left with no choice, Harry must find the Al-

mukhtareen, to offer the Patriots his own deal.

SHORT RANGE by Stephen Leather (Hodder & Stoughton, £16.99, July, 2019). Dan 'Spider' Shepherd's career path – soldier, policeman, MI5 officer – has always put a strain on his family. So he is far from happy to learn that MI5 is using teenagers as informants. Parents are being kept in the dark and Shepherd fears that the children are being exploited. As an undercover specialist, Shepherd is tasked with protecting a 15-year-old schoolboy who is being used to gather evidence against violent drug dealers and a right-wing terrorist group. But when the boy's life is threatened, Shepherd has no choice but to step in and take the heat.

ALL THAT'S DEAD by Stuart MacBride (HarperCollins, £16.99, May, 2019). Inspector Logan McRae is looking forward to a nice simple case – something to ease him back into work after a year off on the sick. But the powers-that-be have other ideas. The high-profile anti-independence campaigner, Professor Wilson, has gone missing, leaving nothing but bloodstains behind. There's a war brewing between the factions for and against Scottish Nationalism. Infighting in the police ranks. And it's all playing out in the merciless glare of the media. Logan's superiors want results, and they want them now.

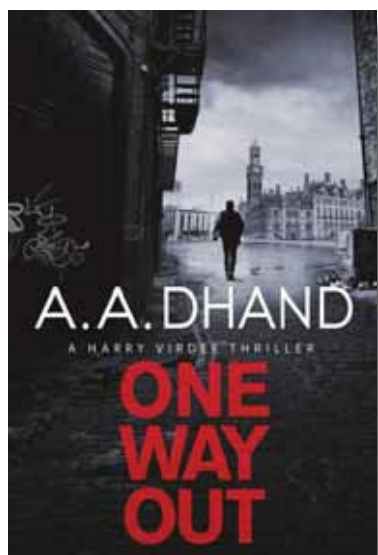
DEATH IN THE EAST by Abir Mukherjee (Harvill Secker, £12.99, June, 2019 – possibly later – I've seen two different dates). 1922, India. Leaving Calcutta, Captain Sam Wyndham heads for the hills of Assam, to the ashram of a sainted monk where he hopes to conquer his opium addiction. But when he arrives, he sees a ghost from his past – a man thought to be long dead, a man Wyndham hoped he would never see again. 1905, London. As a young constable, Sam Wyndham is on his usual East

London beat when he comes across an old flame, Bessie Drummond, attacked in the streets. The next day, when Bessie is found brutally beaten in her own room, locked from the inside, Wyndham promises to get to the bottom of this. But the case will cost the young constable more than he ever imagined. In Assam, Wyndham knows he must call his friend and colleague Sergeant Banerjee for help. He is certain this figure from his past isn't here by coincidence, but for revenge.

DEADLAND by William Shaw (Riverrun, £16.99, May, 2019). The two boys never fitted in. Seventeen, the worst age, nothing to do but smoke weed; at least they have each other. The day they speed off on a moped with a stolen mobile,



they're ready to celebrate their luck at last. Until their victim comes looking for what's his – and ready to kill for it. On the other side of Kent's wealth divide, DS Alexandra Cupidi faces the strangest murder investigation of her career. A severed limb, hidden inside a modern sculpture in Margate's Turner Contemporary. No one takes it seriously – not even the artwork's owners, celebrity dealers who act like they're above the law. But as Cupidi's case becomes ever more sinister, as she wrangles with police politics and personal dilemmas, she can't help worrying about those runaway boys. Seventeen, the same age as her own headstrong daughter. Alone, on the marshes, they're pawns in someone else's game. Two worlds are about to collide.



Reviews from the U.K.



Jeff Poppo Reviews

THE DEVIL ASPECT by Craig Russell (Constable, £16.99; in U.S., Doubleday, \$27.95). **Rating: A-** This engrossing historical chiller is set in a vividly realised Czechoslovakia in 1935.

On the streets of Prague, a terrifying killer known as 'Leather Apron' is butchering women in a sickening manner reminiscent of London's Jack the Ripper. As the police, led by the no-nonsense Capitan Lucás Smolák, struggle to find the killer, young psychiatrist Viktor Kosárek makes his way to a small rural village where the revolutionary Orlu Asylum is housed in an ancient medieval castle. The Asylum is home to six of Europe's worst murderers, known as the 'Devil's Six,' and it is Kosárek's intent to study their psychology. Each of the patients have their own dark story to tell and Kosárek hopes that his revolutionary techniques will unlock their murderous secrets. Gradually Kosárek's psychological investigations begin to collide with the police's hunt for 'Leather Apron.'

This is a well-constructed and thoroughly engaging novel. The structure of having the police investigation run parallel to Kosárek's interrogation of the six killers works well and adds some action to the storyline. The setting of Czechoslovakia in 1935 also adds a good sense of impending historical doom as the gathering war clouds mirror the growing tensions in the asylum and on the streets of Prague. The descriptions of Prague are well done, and Russell excels in creating the gloomy atmosphere of the city in late autumn.

Russell gradually ramps up the tension, albeit probably a little too slowly for some, and the story moves to a dark

and bloody climax in the dank reaches of the castle. There are some good, unexpected twists and Russell satisfactorily resolves the loose ends from earlier in the book. On the negative side, the book is a little too long and some skilful trimming would have enhanced the tension. For me there was too much debating and talking about psychology and the interviews with the 'Devil's Six' become too repetitive. A good, but not great thriller.

SECRET SERVICE by Tom Bradby (Bantam, £12.99; in U.S., Atlantic Monthly, \$26.00). **Rating: A** It has been a long time between books for TV journalist and author Tom Bradby. His last book was the bulky historical thriller **BLOOD MONEY**, released in 2009, but now he is back with a very timely and convincing spy novel.

Kate Henderson appears to be the typical British civil servant with a quiet job, a pleasant husband, two teenagers and an Alzheimer's-stricken mother. In reality, however, she is a senior MI6 officer who is running a very sensitive

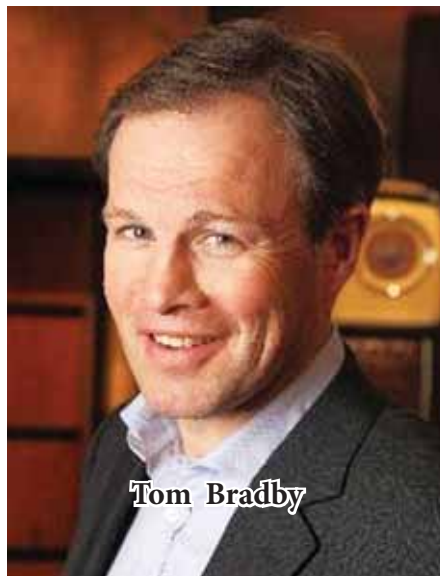
operation. In response to information from a secret source, Kate inserts a young woman and a listening device onto a Russian oligarch's super-yacht in Istanbul. The bug reveals the startling intelligence that the British Prime Minister has prostate cancer and that one of the leading candidates to replace him may be a Russian agent of influence.

Kate and her superiors are sceptical about the intelligence, but when the PM suddenly announces his resignation for medical reasons, they find that they must sift through the possible replacements to find out which one is the Russian agent. It is a complex and very sensitive task, made infinitely more difficult by a web of complicated personal relationships and the likelihood that there is another mole, codename Viper, in one of the intelligence agencies. There is also the real possibility that they are being played by the Russians. As tension around the operation increases, Kate finds that her job, her marriage and maybe even her life may be at risk.

I really enjoyed this clever espionage novel, which once again proves that the British do the intelligent, credible spy story better than anyone else. There are a couple of slow patches, but overall it moves at a good pace and when the action occurs it is quick, believable and tense. Bradby intermingles Kate's personal and professional lives with aplomb, although close reading is required to keep the myriad of personal relationships clear in your head.

The book moves ably through some twisty turns and Bradby does a good job of keeping us guessing as to who the mole is and which one of the candidates is really the Russian agent of influence. The story is very up to date about Russian attempts to influence elections and there is a good contemporary feel to the story, although he does not explicitly address Brexit. The descriptions of London, Turkey and Greece are spot-on and quite evocative and add a further layer of credibility to the story. There is also a good cast of convincing secondary characters.

I thoroughly enjoyed **SECRET SERVICE** and think it is the best contemporary spy novel I have read so far this



Tom Bradby

year.

THE MAUSOLEUM by David Mark (Severn House, £20.99). **Rating: A-** **THE MAUSOLEUM** is a slightly unusual crime novel and quite a change for David Mark, who is best known for his DS McAvoy series of police procedurals.

The book opens in 2010 with two old ladies watching an even older man nearing death in a hospital bed. They harshly wake him so that he can answer their questions. The book then moves back to 1967 when the two ladies first meet over a grave in a small village near the Scottish border. Cordelia Hemlock is trying to pull her life back together after a failed academic career, a marriage of convenience and the death of her young son. She is an outsider in the 'lost in time' village of Upper Denton and is initially dismissive of the quiet, submissive, uneducated Felicity Goose. Their first meeting is interrupted by a sudden violent storm and a lightning strike which reveals a recently deceased body in a mausoleum hundreds of years old. When the storm passes, they find that the body has disappeared and that the one person they told about the body has died in a suspicious car accident. Together they decide to investigate and find a web of secrets stretching back to the Second World War.

The story alternates between Cordelia's experiences at the time and transcripts of Felicity's recollections of what happened in 1967, along with the occasional account of events back in World War II. The telling takes a little while to get used to and the opening sections of the book move at a leisurely pace. Once underway, however, the pace picks up and the final sections grip your attention as the book moves to its unexpected conclusion.

Mark skilfully gives each of the women their own distinctive voice, and uses the different perspectives of the same events to deepen the mystery and the suspense. The depiction of small village life in the 1960s is convincing and Mark fleshes out the local villagers so that they are more than familiar caricatures. There is also considerable poignancy and subtlety in his descrip-

tions of the personal lives of Felicity and Cordelia and the gradual blossoming of their friendship. The plot is well structured, and the book moves in some very unexpected directions before reaching its conclusion.

In all, I thoroughly enjoyed **THE MAUSOLEUM** and it is well worth persevering through the slow opening section.

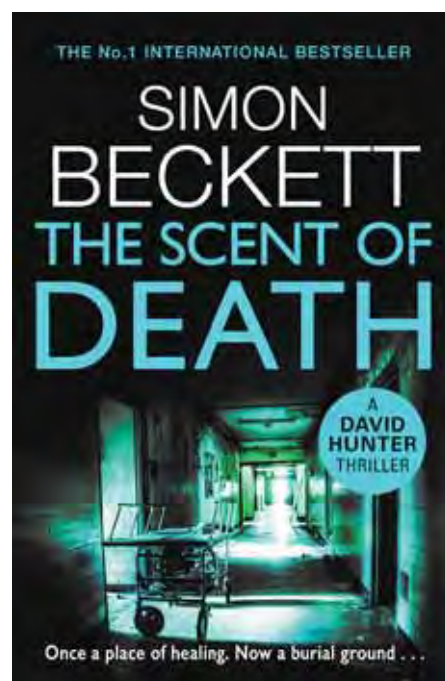
George Easter Reviews

THE SCENT OF DEATH by Simon Beckett (Bantam Press, £18.99). **Rating: A-** The sixth Dr. David Hunter forensic procedural. The story line surrounds the demolition of a London hospital, St. Jude's. Just before the building is to be razed, a mummified body is discovered in an attic area. Dr. David Hunter is called to consult with the police on the matter and things get dicey when the attending pathologist takes a wrong step (startled by a bat) and crashes through the ceiling. While extracting the wounded pathologist it is discovered that the room he has landed in is really a walled-in secret chamber containing two dessicated bodies strapped to gurneys. So now there's three unidentified bodies.

Hunter is assigned the first body which turns out to be that of a young, pregnant woman. Identification proves very difficult and finding out who killed her even more so. But Hunter and the police eventually get there.

I like the character of David Hunter but he isn't warm and fuzzy. Still suffering the effects of losing his wife and daughter some years ago, he is emotionally closed down and has trouble with his girlfriend because of this. I wanted to slap him and say, "Wake up, buddy. You have a good thing going here!" He seems to find purpose in life by doing his work well.

Over the course of thirteen years Simon Beckett has penned what I consider the best forensic mystery series. I gave up on Patricia Cornwell decades ago and haven't read a Kathy Reichs for at least ten years. We don't hear much from Aaron Elkins lately – I did like



his Gideon Oliver series but he's only written two in the last decade.

If you like forensic detail, you are in for a treat. And it doesn't disappoint that Simon Beckett can write a cracking good story as well.

SCORCHED EARTH by David Mark (Mulholland/Hodder, £17.99). **Rating: B+** The story begins in a squalid migrant camp in Calais, where Manu, a young refugee from Mozambique, finds a bloody way to ensure passage to England, where he will seek revenge on the person he blames for all his woes.

In England a young girl and her riding companion are abducted while on a gentle horse ride in the Lincolnshire countryside. The youngster is Primrose Musgrave, daughter of Joel, a biosciences expert and 'new-agro consultant' for a company that offers advice on future farming technologies to developing countries.

Meanwhile, in Hull, Aector McAvoy is making a visit to a care home, to see an old friend. Former police officer Perry Royle might be in his 80s but he's still on the ball and what he reveals leads McAvoy to call at a run-down house opposite. There's no one at home, except that is, for a dead man, impaled on a wall. Could it be the work of the Headhunters, the ruthless gang of criminals who have had previous with encounters

with McAvoy and his boss Trish Pha-raoh?

The discovery leaves Perry in hospital and McAvoy heading over the river to rural Lincolnshire when a search of the deserted property leads to the discovery of a puzzling till receipt. It's the first piece in a mighty convoluted puzzle which will have you rapidly turning pages to see how it turns out.

Though not one of the stronger books in this admirable series, **SCORCHED EARTH** still is populated with some of my favorite characters in British crime fiction. Any visit with them is worth the while.

Ali Karim Reviews

RUN AWAY by Harlan Coben (Century, £20.00). **Rating: A** Simon and his wife Ingrid Greene may be suffering middle-class child-raising guilt. Their three children, Sam, Anya and Paige, have all the opportunities afforded by well-educated and wealthy parents.

Paige falls through the cracks of their safety net, dropping into the hidden (and scary) world masked from middle-class view; namely a life controlled by Aaron Corval, a drug dealer and criminal. It appears Paige's life derailed after leaving home for Lanford College.

The action commences on page one, when Simon finds his daughter Paige begging in New York's Central Park. What starts as a plea for his daughter's return turns ugly, when Simon confronts Corval. A fracas ensues and is caught on camera-phone. When released online, 'the court of public opinion' starts to comment on the footage, and Simon becomes a figure of notoriety. The Greene's family life becomes affected, including a call from their daughter Anya's private school Abernathy Academy which are trying to distance themselves from the infamy of Anya's father Simon. However, things turn sinister when Paige's boyfriend, the drug dealer and criminal Aaron Corval is found dead, in the scruffy Bronx apartment they shared. Police scrutiny and suspicion falls upon

Simon, as well as his daughter, the missing Paige Greene.

Coben's ability to work with a large cast of characters is on display to great effect in **RUN AWAY**. We have quite an array of major players, as well as secondary characters, and some obscured by shadow; but they are all delineated vividly for the reader.

As ever, in the hands of Harlan Coben, the hidden aspects of families are what powers the engine to this narrative. Like in Coben's breakout work, **TELL NO ONE**, the affable and entertaining writing style belays a darker side that indicates that some families are troubling, and hold dangerous secrets.

RUN AWAY is Harlan Coben at the height of his narrative mastery, for this novel is slippery and slick in how the pages turn so fast. There is entertainment within, but more importantly, there is insight, as it provokes thought about what is hidden in our lives and that of those, we call family. Though there are smatterings of humour (deftly applied), that helps bring the light into a dark and disturbing story.

Terrific as an insightful novel, but as thriller it is a narcotic -- one that makes you think deeply, very deeply -- unmissable.

METROPOLIS by Philip Kerr (Quercus, £20.00; in U.S., Putnam,

\$28.00). **Rating: A** Berlin 1928, the Nazi regime is gathering momentum and power in a desperate nation, one humbled by that Great War.

Gunther is living in a rooming house that he shares with an overbearing landlady and assorted misfits including an Englishman named Rankin. Gunther's detective skills have been noticed by his superiors in the Berlin Police; and so, in consequence, he finds himself promoted from the Vice Squad, to the Murder Squad.

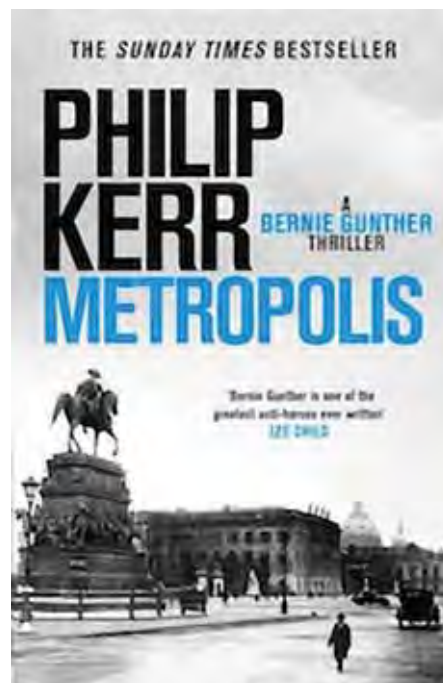
As ever, the narrative is peppered with observations and dialogue that could have been torn from the pages of Raymond Chandler, for Bernie Gunther shares the world-weary cynicism of Philip Marlowe. There is much wit within these pages, but that is matched by the oppressive darkness of the story.

Gunther is assigned to track down a serial killer who is hunting the scalps of prostitutes, many whom are desperate women trying to earn a little money just to survive.

The press daubs the serial killer as 'Winnetou', a reference to the native American hero of the western novels of German author Karl May. As the scalps of prostitutes start to litter the dark alleys of Berlin, the attention of a local gangster Erich Angerstein is piqued, and who soon unofficially joins Gunther in the hunt for 'Winnetou.'

Gunther's bosses at the Kriminalpolizei soon tell Gunther to drop the case as a second serial killer appears on the scene, one whose victims are more politically incendiary than dead prostitutes, namely beggars, former WW 1 veterans with missing limbs who are being shot at close range by a person who calls himself "Dr Gnadenschuss", a self-styled vigilante cleaning up Berlin's streets of these human reminders of Germany's humbling in the Great War.

Gunther believes there is a connection between these two serial killers, though his superiors are sceptical as both serial killers deploy divergent modus operandi. 'Winnetou' uses a knife to stab and then scalp his victims (all women, apart from a Transvestite male dressed as a woman), while "Dr



Gnadenschuss” uses a handgun fired at point blank range into the faces of disabled WW 1 veterans (all male).

Gunther is unconvinced but has to follow orders, and goes undercover, disguised as a disabled veteran akin to a ‘tethered goat,’ bait to draw out this “*Dr Gnadenschuss*.” It’s dangerous work, but Gunther soon finds an intimate friendship in the shape of an actress named Brigitte as compensation. Gunther (and the reader) receive an amusing lesson on the historical (and dangerous significance) of whistling.

Reading a Bernie Gunther novel gives the reader subtle insights into the fabric of our experience of reality, both philosophically as well as historically, but all the while entertaining as these novels inform and provoke thought as the pages turn.

Real-life characters such as Lotte Lenya, Kurt Weill, and others pepper the proceedings, as well as the mention of Fritz Lang, which all add flavour to this narrative. In fact, those familiar with the background to ‘*The Threepenny Opera*’ with MacHeath (aka ‘*Mack the Knife*’) as well as the films ‘*M*’ and ‘*Metropolis*’ as well as the art of that era, of that Berlin, will find much to admire in this extraordinary novel.

Though at its core, the great attraction of these adventures of Bernie Gunther is his cynical world-view, his survival instinct and his snappy observations with darkly-amusing dialogue.

The climax has an air of melancholia, for though satisfying, the reader is forced to understand that this is the last outing for Bernie Gunther for it was written under troubling circumstances (terminal illness) by a writer at the height of his powers.

It is published posthumously, with an enlightening introduction from fellow award-winning crime-writer Ian Rankin. When you get to the end, it makes you re-read Rankin’s introduction and to reach out for **MARCH VIOLETS**, the first of this exceptional series of novels from Philip Kerr -- because **METROPOLIS** is the Alpha and the Omega of the fictional detective, Bernie Gunther.

Though Philip Kerr wrote over thirty novels in his career, spanning many sub-genres, it will be the fourteen novels that featured Bernie Gunther that he will be remembered for, his legacy as a novelist. Miss this novel (and its thirteen precursors) at your own peril, for the work of Philip Kerr and Bernie Gunther’s philosophical investigations sit at the top table of the crime fiction genre.

Norma Dancis Reviews

HEADLONG by Cynthia Harrod-Eagles (Severn House, 2019, \$28.99).

Rating: A Edward Wiseman, one of London’s best-known literary agents, is found dead after an apparent fall from his study. Callie Hunt, the Borough Commander’s goddaughter, is Wiseman’s latest client and obsession. Hence the Borough Commander is pressuring DCI Bill Slider to find the death accidental to keep his goddaughter’s personal life private.

But Slider sees small, but important reasons to suspect the death was murder. Wiseman was a serial romancer, whose many lovers didn’t seem to expect exclusivity. That pressure to close the high-visibility case quickly without involving Hunt forces Slider and his team to try to find someone who didn’t love Wiseman.

Even after more than twenty books in the series, Harrod-Eagles manages to surprise the reader. Her writing still sparkles with wit and clever repartee. At the same time, she offers sympathetic and memorable characters. Even as they grow and deal with new life experiences, Slider and all the members of his team are both old friends to long-time fans and easily accessible to new readers. A satisfying and enjoyable addition to a favorite series.

COLD CASE by Quintin Jardine (2018 Headline £19.99). **Rating: A-** Sir Jimmy Proud, former Chief Constable Bob Skinner’s predecessor and mentor, asks Skinner to look into a thirty-year-old closed case. Not only had Proud been involved in the case, known as The Body In The Quarry, but Skinner’s



other mentor, Alf Stein, had headed the investigation. Although a man had been convicted, blogger and investigative journalist Austin Brass is planning to accuse Proud of being the real killer. Proud asks Skinner to meet Brass to discover what new evidence he has. Proud then disappears. Then Brass is found dead.

Skinner digs into the case files and finds serious holes in the department’s original prosecution. As he digs deeper, questions pile up. Is Proud’s absence an acknowledgment of guilt? Were the original murderer and Brass’ killer the same?

Once again, Jardine has presented Skinner with a twisty, complicated plot. Jardine writes so clearly and cleverly that the reader both understands all the issues and implications and is surprised and satisfied by the solution. Not only does Jardine keep the complex plot under control, he successfully manages the enormous cast. There are few physical thrills, but Jardine keeps the intellectual tension at a high level.

The book has limited availability. It is only available in the U.S. at Barnes & Noble in its Nook version, and Amazon is only selling the Kindle and paperback editions. This is a pity, since the book merits the wider readership of libraries. Jardine is at the top of his form here.

Getting Away With Murder

by Mike Ripley



Blame Brexit

I predicted last month that the May column would be late in arriving. This, of course, was due to the fact that we would have left Europe on B-Day at the end of March. Like everyone who promised a painless Brexit, I was lying.

From the Newsroom

There is a long and distinguished history of journalists writing thrillers. Gerald Seymour (one himself) famously said that after Frederick Forsyth's **DAY OF THE JACKAL**, 'it should be part of a journalist's knapsack to have a thriller', but there were plenty of earlier examples: Duncan Kyle, Alan Williams, Hammond Innes, Ian Fleming and many more since.

This month sees three thrillers from experienced news reporters in television and radio, all dealing with events close to recent headlines.



The tag-line to **SECRET SERVICE** (Bantam) by ITN anchorman Tom Bradby proposes the question What if you knew the next prime minister was a Russian spy? To which the rather cynical answer might be 'I wouldn't be at all surprised'; but it is a real problem for rising star of MI6 Kate Henderson who is tipped off to the prospect whilst eavesdropping on a conclave of Russian spies. Or is it a set-up, a classic piece of disinformation by Russians wanting to mess with our heads and democratic processes? (Brexit seems to have done that job for them quite thoroughly.)

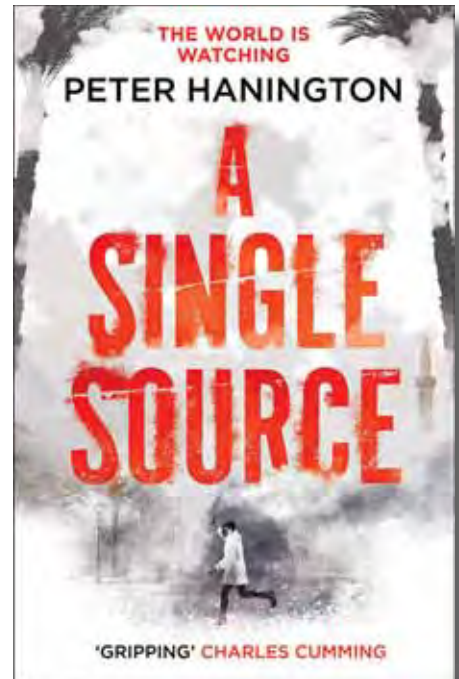
Whilst hunting the truth, and mindful of inter-service rivalries, Kate Henderson realises there is also a mole inside MI6 (when is there not?), all the time juggling a complicated, but not untypical, family life comprising surly teenagers, husband and a mother suffering dementia, and surviving some explosive violence along the way.

If the identity of the mole is not that difficult to fathom, Tom Bradby does an excellent job of squeezing the tension out of the day-to-day business of spying and the domestic life of a female intelligence officer and the novel, unusually for a traditionally masculine genre, is populated by a large number of well-drawn female characters. Kate's mother in particular is a wonderfully bitter figure and the family repartee, raddled with black humour, is priceless as well as probably realistic.

In days of yore, or at least back in the last century, critics and reviewers were fond of talking about 'the difficult second novel' and a much over-used phrase was used in review columns to celebrate when a new author had 'jumped the second novel hurdle with ease'. Eric Ambler cheerfully debunked this tradition when he told the story of his own agent lecturing him on the subject thus: 'Most

writers have problems with their second book, sometimes with their third. You were lucky, you had all your problems with your first!'

Which is a long-winded way of saying that BBC radio journalist Peter Hanington has had absolutely no problem with his second thriller, **A SINGLE SOURCE**, published by Two Roads. In fact, I think it superior to his debut **A DYING BREED** and although I know it is dangerous to offer new writers too much praise or alcohol, I recount the Eric Ambler story because whilst reading **A SINGLE SOURCE**, I was constantly thinking that had he been around in this century, it would have been just the story the old master would have wanted to tell.



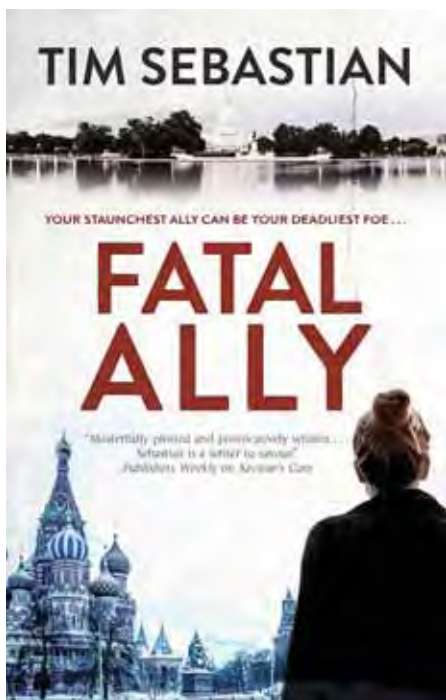
Hanington's old-school journalist hero William Carver is in Cairo in 2011 and all his newshound senses tell him that the Arab Spring is about to get sprung on Egypt and so secures local sources to enable him to follow the events in Tahir Square and the peaceful uprising fuelled by social media that was to prove neither peaceful nor ultimately successful. But being ahead on that international news story is not enough for Carver as he has sniffed out another involving illegal arms shipments by British companies, possibly under political protection from Whitehall.

In parallel with this narrative is a truly heart-breaking story of two Eritrean migrants hoping to get to Italy, who embark on that modern Via Dolorosa across sub-Saharan Africa in the far from tender care of people smugglers. How the two narratives combine to give Carver more than just a single source for his story is ingenious and, dare I say it, rather Ambler-esque.

A SINGLE SOURCE is a considered, almost deceptively suspenseful thriller with a host of well-drawn characters, including hard-bitten foreign correspondents, young idealistic Egyptian girls, creepy public relations men, a grotesque (and totally credible) arms-dealer and a wonderfully slimy Cairo hotelier. It is written by a journalist whom you feel has been there and done that – or at least some of it – with skill and humanity, and no unnecessary pyrotechnics.

I am also looking forward to **FATAL ALLY** by Tim Sebastian, which is published at the end of the month by Severn House. Sebastian, a veteran television journalist and the former BBC correspondent in both Washington and Moscow, knows his stuff and his contemporary spy story revolves around a betrayed defector, American skuldugery, internal Russian conflicts and the current nightmare that is Syria.

Just over a year ago in an on-stage



interview with Dame Stella Rimington, the former head of MI5, we tried to think (but failed) of other female fictional spies to compare with her creation Liz Carlyle. Now two come along in the same month: Tom Bradby's Kate Henderson and Tim Sebastian's Margo Lane.

Recent Books

Several years ago Peter Guttridge moved over to the Dark Side, switching from comedy crime thrillers to more straightforward murder mysteries set in the new homicide capital of England, Brighton.

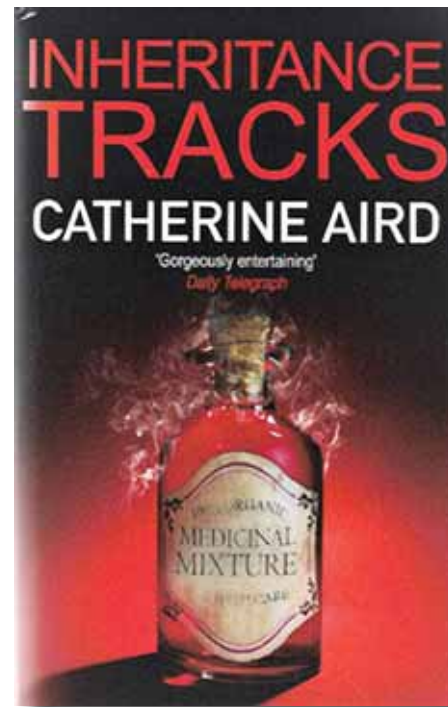
SWIMMING WITH THE DEAD, published by Severn House, is the sixth in Peter's 'Brighton Series' featuring his ensemble cast of police detectives, this time with DI Sarah Gilchrist taking the lead, able assisted (where would she be without him?) by her sergeant with the wonderfully Dickensian name, Bellamy Heap.

Although Brighton and its environs are clearly the focus of all villainy (the book even name checks the crime writing of Peter James), Guttridge has never been reluctant to spread the action and there are side-bars here in Scarborough, Edinburgh, the Lake District and Thailand, justifying the title that nowhere near open water is safe. In **SWIMMING WITH THE DEAD**, terrible things happen to hard-core open water swimmers (swimming the Channel is almost seen as something for wimps) and Guttridge lists the potential dangers facing them (apart from homicide) with glee.

I had no idea that going for a quick dip at the seaside or down the local lido could be so dangerous; and I also learned, though it has nothing to do with swimming, what Peyronie's Disease is, without the horror of having to Google it.

As always, Guttridge's prose is clear and unfussy and there are occasional flashes of the acerbic wit – especially during a Twittersphere spat between extreme sportsmen – which characterised his much-missed Nick Madrid series when he was in comic-crime mode.

They might say there's no such thing as a British 'cosy' murder mystery any more, but they'd be wrong. Catherine Aird has been writing them for more than four decades, even inventing her own county – Calleshire – as a backdrop to the investigations of Detective Inspector C. D. (naturally known as 'Seedy') Sloan and his sidekick DS Crosby who is, with the best will in the world, not the sharpest drawing-pin in the police stationery store.



INHERITANCE TRACKS, from Allison & Busby, is her latest Calleshire saga, though I do miss the county map which used to come with her earlier titles, and centres on the provisions of a will dating from the 1850s by the inventor of Mayton's Marvellous Mixture, an immensely profitable Victorian tonic elixir of virtually no medicinal value. Where there's a Will, or in this case a complicated Trust, there is usually a murder or two to thin out the possible recipients and poison seems to be a popular method.

However cosy and comforting this sort of traditional mystery may seem, never forget that Catherine Aird really does know her way around a dispensary and the uses and abuses of ergot or St Anthony's Fire (and its relative, LSD). She also, along the way, explains a significant plot point in John Galsworthy's

The Forsyte Saga and gives one reason why Soames Forsyte was often in a bad mood, though I am sure there were others.

I did so want to enjoy James Ellroy's **PERFIDIA** when it came out five (five?) years ago, but was worn down by the author's relentless, rapid-fire delivery of an over-long narrative in the clipped, pared-down prose style he has made his own. Not surprisingly, the second instalment of his new 'L.A. Quartet', *This Storm* from Heinemann, poses many of the same problems.

Starting where **PERFIDIA** left off at the end of 1941, **THIS STORM** gives a bigger role to Hideo Ashida, the Japanese-American forensic chemist working for the LAPD, which naturally is dominated by Dudley Smith. The plot involves the internment of Japanese-American citizens, war profiteering, a gold bullion heist, Japanese submarines threatening the west coast (shades of Spielberg's 1941 – that wasn't funny either), Nazi infiltration into South America and a fascist Catholic movement in Mexico.

Convoluting to say the least, and many a reader will be put off trying to connect the loose ends by the prospect of wading through 500+ pages of self-indulgent Ellroyan prose, which is a pity as there is clearly a good novel in here somewhere, totally swamped by the pretentiousness.

As the glorious sunlit uplands of a Brexit Britain still elude us – though the situation may have changed by the time I finish this sentence – crime novels from Scandinavia are still slipping through tariff-free and two are worthy of note.

Stefan Ahnhem has already been labelled the 'true heir to Stieg Larsson' though that should not be held against him. His latest novel, the 500+ page **MOTIVE X** from Head of Zeus, shows why he has won the accolade of Swedish Crime Writer of the Year, with its setting – the medieval city of Helsingborg, a troubled detective with the rather cool name of Fabian Risk, a shocking opening piece of violence (against a woman, naturally) involving a fishing line and a shovel, an epidemic



Stefan Ahnhem

of random murders, a smattering of sex, a touch of cross-dressing, drugs and a close encounter in a jacuzzi.

THE CARRIER by Mattia Berg, from MacLehose Press, is, unusually, an international thriller ranging across America, Europe and, of course, Sweden. I don't really know why I said 'unusually' as I'm sure lots of good end-of-the-world-jeopardy thrillers are written by Swedes, but we are programmed to think in terms of 'Scandi-noir' murder stories. The Carrier in question is the man who carries the nuclear briefcase for the American President, but the real question is who is he taking his orders from and what happens if he decides to disappear?

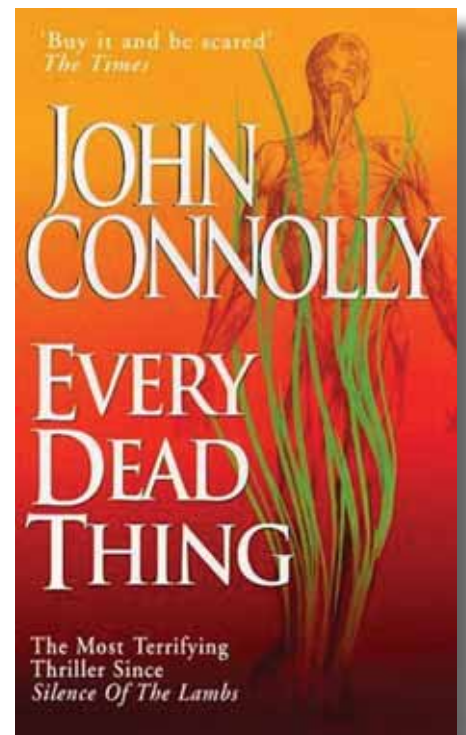
There is much fascinating background on the history of nuclear weapons including 'the most macabre mathematical experiment ever to be carried out' at Hiroshima and Nagasaki and the moral questions are not shirked. There is also a fabulous description of the 'gigantic sortie' which makes up a Presidential visit to Sweden with an 'entourage worthy of the Sun King himself' on board Air Force One and five other identical Boeings from Andrews Air Force Base – something which will have a certain Swedish teenage climate change campaigner chaining herself to the school railings again.

More Books

I received John Connolly's new 700+page blockbuster **A BOOK OF BONES** (Hodder) too late to tell readers of the April column that Charlie

Parker and his back-up team of Angel and Louis have returned and are on an international, and very bloody, quest in search of the missing pages of *The Fractured Atlas*, a book of unspeakable evil – though I think I've heard that description applied to one of mine before now...

Worth the price of admission alone is an afterword by John Connolly celebrating the twentieth anniversary of his debut chiller **EVERY DEAD THING** and his career to date in the field of gothic supernatural crime fiction that he has mostly made his own, though there are now some new kids on that spooky noir block. I was particularly taken with his story of how at signings, fans would plead with him to protect his subsidiary characters, especially one of his hero's faithful guardians. He claims



that 'Whatever you do, don't kill Angel' is the most frequent comment he gets at public events, and I can relate to that.

John also mentions his early worries over the reaction of reviewers to that first novel, of which I seem to still have a bound proof copy from 1999. I cannot trace my review of it at this distance, though I'm sure it was a good one. Certainly the follow-up, **DARK HOLLOW**, got five stars in my *Daily Tele-*

graph column in February 2000. And I distinctly remember John at one of his book launches (in the days when I got invited to them) publicly acknowledging the encouragement he had received from reviewers, thanking Mark Timlin and myself by name.

Swan Song

If the wonderful Bernie Gunther series of thrillers had to end, no one in their right minds would have wanted it to be due to the death of Philip Kerr a year ago at an unreasonably young age. Knowing that his cancer was terminal, Philip finished his 14th Gunther novel only weeks before his death and **METROPOLIS**, published this month by Quercus, shows what a masterful storyteller he was.

Set in 1928 Berlin during the last gasps of the Weimar Republic we find Bernie as a new member of the city's famed Homicide Squad on the trail of one, possibly two, serial killers preying on prostitutes, of which there are plenty, and crippled war veterans, of which there are even more. The back-drop is of decadent night clubs with all sexual preferences catered for, organised crime, institutionalised anti-Semitism, the Expressionist films of Fritz Lang and the emerging National Socialist party.

Our hero is the younger Bernie that we have only glimpsed before; younger but not necessarily innocent. Already a hard drinker and busy sharpening the cynical wisecracks that would stand him in good stead in future, even darker, days. His views on musical theatre in particular are priceless, especially when it is revealed he's watching a rehearsal of *The Threepenny Opera*.

METROPOLIS is a first rate crime novel and a superb historical crime novel, and should win prizes in both categories. If nothing else (and there is much to admire here), the fantastic depth of Philip Kerr's research is fully on show and one can only stand back in wonder and admiration.

The posthumous novel is published with a heartfelt, if bittersweet, Introduction by Ian Rankin who recalls those



heady days, almost thirty years ago, of the informal group of emerging crime writers known as 'Fresh Blood' and his admiration for Philip's work even then. Ian also rightly notes that Philip was great fun to have a drink with 'mixing light gossip with deep insights into politics.'

I can certainly vouch for that and have dined out often on stories of him in our Fresh Blood days – some of them unrepeatably on a family webpage – but the last time I lunched with Philip, a month or so before the Brexit vote, the table talk was mostly about politics. We both laughed, perhaps nervously, at the possible outcome of the referendum and even, remembering our German history, admitted that people sometimes do vote for the strangest things.

Sorcerer's Apprentice



Since the debonair and depressingly young Jake Kerridge restored the art of crime fiction reviewing to that once great newspaper the *Daily Telegraph*, I have followed his career with interest. Recently he postulated a working definition of Domestic Noir to describe one of the most popular trends in current crime fiction as where 'a woman takes 400 pages to realise her husband is a wrong 'un.'

He then went on to suggest that a sub-sub-genre was necessary to cover the rapidly growing number of novels where groups of 'friends', usually aided and abetted by social media (whatever that is) discover that one or more of them is or are wrong 'uns. Jake suggested Chum Noir but I have a problem with that involving memories of an unfortunate shark-fishing 'accident' off Martha's Vineyard some years ago (Acquitted) and I prefer my own newly-coined term: BFFN Noir, or Best Friends For Never Noir.

Unreliable friends, like narrators, are everywhere these days and it is only a matter of time before a self-appointed authority on this sub-sub-genre compiles a reader's history of the most important examples. It could well be called Air Kiss Bang Bang.

...And More Books

M.J. Arlidge, sometimes known as Matt, is another Penguin author with a new novel out this month. **A GIFT FOR THE DYING** is a stand-alone thriller set in America, rather than one of his immensely successful series of DI Helen Grace novels, all of which had creepy nursery-rhyme related titles such as **EENY MEENY, LITTLE BOY BLUE** and **HIDE AND SEEK**. The particular 'gift' in his new novel belongs to a teenage girl who not so much 'sees dead people' but rather sees how living people are going to die (spoiler alert: usually horribly).

I think it was George Clooney's aunt Rosemary who actually sang Lord help the mister who comes between me and my sister in the film *White Christmas* (dubbing the voices of the on-screen

talent) and surely it is the ultimate earworm when reading **THE BETTER SISTER** by Alafair Burke, out this month from Faber.

Two sisters share the same husband. The husband is murdered. Domestic noir doesn't come much more noirish.

Despite what the author might say, I don't think Chris Brookmyre's **FALLEN ANGEL**, published by Little, Brown, really is 'a holiday read that will pin you to the sunbed.'

Anyone remotely familiar with Brookmyre's work will know that he doesn't do relaxing, poolside reads, especially not when his subject matter includes a child gone missing whilst on holiday in Portugal, a family reunion sixteen years on, some toxic parenting and a spider's web worthy of Shelob when it comes to conspiracy theories.

Personally, I wouldn't take this on holiday, and certainly not to Portugal. I'd recommend reading it with the doors locked and the windows shuttered and with a large Scotch in one hand. I do like the title though.

I have no idea whether or not Steve Cavanagh is a member of the Crime Writers' Association. He is such a genial and effusive chap that he probably isn't, but if he was his membership might be called into question as in his new, stand-

alone novel **TWISTED** from Orion, he reveals the unpalatable truths that all crime writers are incredibly rich and also psychopaths.

TWISTED does have more twists than a basket full of cobras and at least two sharp-intake-of-breath moments. Cavanagh, who hails from Belfast, does his American setting well enough, zipping around the country with ease, though the geography is a little hazy at times – where exactly is Port Lonely? – and I was surprised to find that Americans talked about 'paving flags' (the concrete slabs which make up the sidewalk) as they do in Yorkshire and, I'm guessing, in Belfast. I also learned the expression 'bun flask' from which coffee is being constantly poured.

Which brings me to this month's nigger: coffee in crime fiction. In olden days the reader just knew that when a character in a Peter Cheney novel put out a cigarette 'and lit a fresh one', the author was doing exactly that. The same applied to characters in Alistair MacLean thrillers when they poured themselves a large malt whisky.

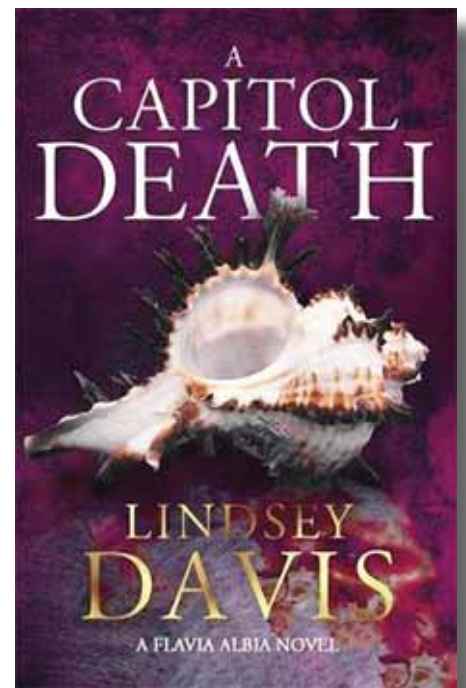
Nowadays, its characters pouring, making, buying or just craving coffee which litter the pages of contemporary crime fiction and the reader is well aware that this is the author taking a break rather than anything to do with the plot of the novel. Test my theory for yourself on the next new title you read and count how many coffee breaks there are in the narrative.

Crime writers addicted to caffeine? It's just as well that we are all so rich and successful that we will be able to afford a decent Blue Mountain roast after Brexit.

Post Scriptum

Lindsey Davis' latest Flavia Alba novel of mis-deeds and murder in Imperial Rome, *A Capitol Death* (Hodder) is not just a welcome addition to any decent crime fiction library, but could find a place in any self-respecting archaeology section.

I say this because it attempts to answer one of the mysteries of Ancient Rome. We are all – well, anyone with a

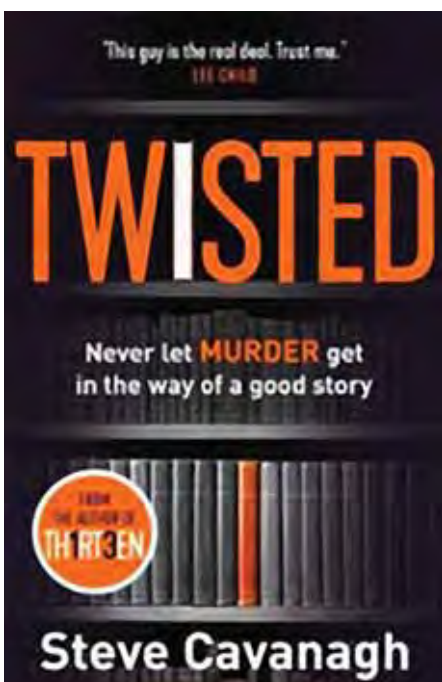


classical education (okay, so that limits it) – familiar with the legend of the Tarpeian Rock, named after Tarpeia, the daughter of Spurius Tareius, the commander of the Roman Capitol during the war with the Sabines following the rape of their women. (Surely you've heard of that.)

Tarpeia supposedly tried to betray Rome, and was executed as a traitor. Or she was killed by the Sabines, or she was a local deity with a cult of followers who is now long forgotten. Whatever; traitors to Rome were reputedly punished by being 'hurled from the Tarpeian Rock' – a phrase used many a time in MI6 (where classical educations predominate) during the Cold War – but no one was ever quite sure exactly where the Tarpeian Rock was supposed to have been. Well, apart from the Rome Tourist Board that is, which advertises tours and visits.

Traditionally situated below the Capitol, Lindsey has followed new theories and scholarship and positioned it in the Arx (the old Citadel), in 89AD. I will have to read *A Capitol Death* very carefully to check her hypothesis, but that's always been an enjoyable chore in the past.

Do Mention the War



It is inevitable that the 'Martin Bora' novels of Ben Pastor will be compared to the 'Bernie Gunther' thrillers of the late Philip Kerr. Both feature German protagonists caught up in the maelstrom of World War II, and although there are clear differences – Gunther is a socialist-leaning cynical detective who is a reluctant soldier; Bora is an aristocrat, devout Catholic and professional soldier who finds himself a reluctant detective – both series of books share the same DNA of excellent story-telling.

Coincidentally, Ben Pastor's sixth Bora thriller, *The Horseman's Song*, to appear here is now published by Bitter Lemon just as the last Philip Kerr novel, *Metropolis* is published posthumously next month by Quercus.

Both series place their protagonists in different settings and time periods, something guaranteed to upset the obsessive-compulsive reader who wants to read a series 'in chronological order'.

Metropolis is set in the Weimar Germany of 1928, whereas **THE HORSEMAN'S SONG** has Martin Bora earning his spurs as an army officer fighting for the Nationalists in the Spanish Civil War in 1937.

There are, I think, thirteen Bora novels so far published in Italy (although written in English by the bilingual Verbena Pastor), but only six

have made it to the UK, covering Bora's wartime career, as a Wehrmacht officer, in Poland, Rome, Verona, Crete and the Russian front. In *The Horseman's Song*, we find a younger Bora on the front line of a vicious civil war in the hot, dusty sierras outside Aragon, struggling with his conscience and academic training as a philosopher, at the random and senseless violence around him. His story is counterpointed by that of an American fighting for the other side as a volunteer in the International Brigade, and the two collide when the body of the famous poet Garcia Lorca is found in no-man's land.

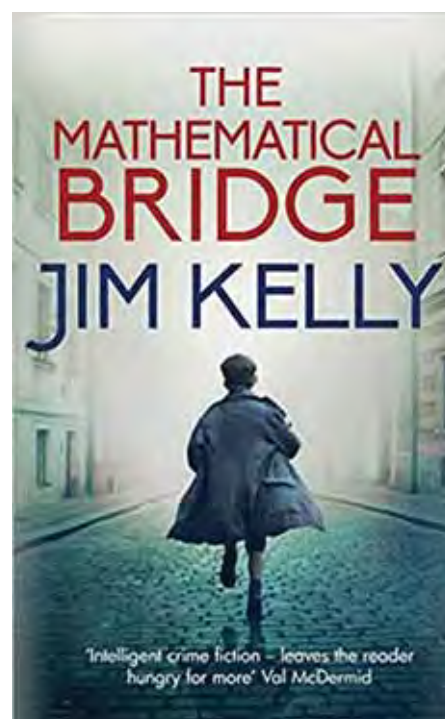
Initially suspected of murdering the poet himself, Bora is drawn into playing detective, blissfully unaware (initially) of the hornets' nest he is kicking. At one chilling point, a suspicious German Abwehr officer tells him: 'You're not nearly as clever as you think, but it's fun watching you try.'

THE HORSEMAN'S SONG (a reference to a Lorca poem) is a long, detailed study of a thinking, professional soldier who has, on a daily basis, to balance the danger, boredom, waste and pain of a military life with his privileged upbringing, his cultural and religious beliefs and his sense of duty. Nobody does that better than Ben Pastor.

Turning to the home front, specifically Cambridge, in WWII, Jim Kelly gives us a second case for Detective Inspector Eden Brooke, set in early 1940 in **THE MATHEMATICAL BRIDGE**, out now from Allison & Busby.

Eden Brooke is a fascinating character, a 'nighthawk' in that his eyesight really only works at night following a traumatic event during the First World War. In some ways this gives him an advantage in the black-out of wartime Cambridge, but not necessarily one he wants especially when a young boy is placed in a sack and thrown into the River Cam to drown like an unwanted pet.

The young victim turns out to be one of a group of Irish children evacuated from a poor London parish and an Irish connection looms large when there is an explosion at an electronics factory engaged in war work (damaging an early

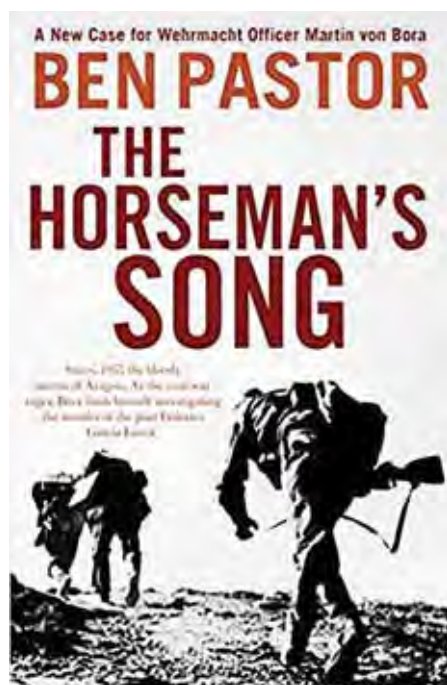


television transmitter) which seems like the work of the IRA.

As well as providing a satisfying mystery, Jim Kelly conjures up a wintry wartime Cambridge very well, with one or two nice touches such as the venerable Michaelhouse College and a college porter with the superb name of Doric.

Blogging Down Under

That wise and discerning Australian reviewer of crime fiction Jeff Popple (*Canberra Times*, *Canberra Weekly*, *Deadly Pleasures*, etc.) has ventured into the blogosphere and launched murdermayhemandlongdogs.com to share his interests in murder and mayhem when it comes to fiction and 'long dogs', which is not a new sub-genre of hard-boiled Westerns but refers to Jeff's own very real dachshunds, which don't look





hard-boiled at all.

Jeff has kicked off his blog by announcing a regular feature, Trashy Tuesday, which highlights the rather garish covers used on thrillers of a certain era, a subject close to own heart. His first choice is a 1971 Australian Pan edition of Victor Canning's **THE WHIP HAND**. All the standard tropes are there: the blonde in the bikini, the Schmeisser-wielding Nazi thug and, of course, the swastika. But, as Jeff rightly points out, do not be fooled or too quick to judge a book by its cover. Victor Canning (1911-1986) was a far better writer than this 'bang-bang' cover might suggest and **THE WHIP HAND**, first published in 1965, introduced a short series of novels featuring Rex Carver, a British private eye with close links to the Intelligence services.

Long before then, Canning was a best-selling author, specialising in thrillers mostly set in foreign countries because, as he said, 'in England you could always call a policeman' and many were based on his experiences in Europe during World War II when he formed a friendship with Eric Ambler. I have been tracking down some of his earlier work and recently treated myself to a much-loved first edition of **THE HOUSE OF THE SEVEN FLIES**, his

1952 treasure-hunt adventure set in Holland. Canning's clear, straight-forward prose, a vulnerable hero and considerable feel for the watery Dutch landscape, boats and sailing, still works very well indeed. The novel is older than I am, and certainly holds up better.

I Spy

I hear rumours everywhere that the spy story is making a come-back, to which my usual response is: did it ever go away? The villains may change – Cheka, OGPU, Nazis, KGB, Stasi, so forth, so fifth – and the conflicts; the current battleground, not surprisingly, being that special place in Hell, Brexit. Mick Herron gave us a tongue-in-cheek novella **THE DROP** late last year and now Alan Judd puts Brexit shenanigans centre stage in his new novel **ACCIDENTAL AGENT** from Simon & Schuster.

Judd's gentle and gentlemanly head of MI6 Charles Thoroughgood (a happily-married Smiley rather than a randy Bond) is overseeing a valuable source of inside information coming from a mole code-named Timber Wolf, within the EU Brexit negotiating team. But is the Euro-mole too good to be true and is his MI6 handler really to be trusted? As spying on one's European Union part-

ners is frowned upon by MI6's political masters (though they love the information being gleaned), Thoroughgood has to tread carefully as well as dealing with a possible terrorist threat close to home and the Health & Safety protocols nowadays involved when a British spy goes overseas. He also has to keep an eye on internal complaints raised through Human Resources when a senior MI6 officer is accused of sexual harassment.

The accusation is a vague one and seems to baffle our spy chief (who is Old School and still thinks of HR as 'Personnel'), as female staff members feel uncomfortable around the accused and they call him 'the bus conductor...' because he's always jiggling the loose change in his pocket when he talks to them'. No wonder the head of MI6 is bemused. When did anyone last see a bus conductor?

Don't expect bombs, bullets and car chases, but **ACCIDENTAL AGENT** delivers on many levels; a character-driven, very English spy story which could not be more topical, even though the facts of the Brexit negotiations have proved more fantastical than Judd's fiction.

Half Century

The distinguished crime writer Peter Lovesey is celebrating his 50th year on the dark side of fiction, but there is absolutely nothing of the Darth Vader about Peter, who is to receive a Lifetime Achievement award at the Bouchercon convention (also, I believe, in its fiftieth year) in Dallas in the Autumn. [Editor's comment: I will have the privilege of interviewing him at Bouchercon.]

When Peter was awarded the Cartier Diamond Dagger in 2000 (after thirty years in the business), I interviewed him for a well-known magazine and cheekily asked that as he had a lifetime achievement award, could he stop now? Thankfully, a second lifetime achievement has had little effect on Peter's output as a new novel featuring his policeman hero Peter Diamond, **KILLING WITH CONFETTI**, will be published by Sphere in July.





A PAPERBACK CONFIDENTIAL

PROFILE -- Margaret Millar

by Brian Ritt



Margaret Millar (née Sturm). Born in Kitchener, Ontario, Canada, 1915. Died in Montecito, California, 1994.

Margaret Millar attended the Kitchener-Waterloo Collegiate Institute, Ontario, and the University of Toronto (1933-36), majoring in classic literature. In 1939 she married former classmate Kenneth Millar, who later became one of the most celebrated mystery novelists of the 20th century under the name Ross Macdonald. For the first twenty years of their marriage, though, Margaret was the more successful author. Things were reversed during the later years after her husband's Lew Archer series became the classic we know it as today. Throughout their lives, each of them claimed the other was the better writer. Ken was the first to sell professionally with a short story but Maggie was the first to sell a novel.

Millar started out writing lightly comic mysteries but later moved on to standalone novels of psychological suspense. Her first novel was *The Invisible Worm* (1941), which featured a psychiatrist detective named Paul Prye, characterized as "dressed in immaculate white flannels topped with a navy blue blazer, [who] looked like a man of the world, and the rather quizzical smile in his blue eyes suggested that he was also a man amused at the world." She wrote two more books featuring Prye, *The Weak-Eyed Bat* (1942) and *The Devil Loves Me* (1942), before taking a supporting character from the Prye series, Inspector Sands of the Toronto Police Department, and featuring him in his own two-book series, *Wall of Eyes* (1943) and *The Iron Gates* (1945).

Beginning in 1950, most of Millar's books were set in California; she and her husband had moved to Santa Barba-

ra-fictionalized as San Felice or Santa Felicia in her novels—during the late '40's. In 1955, she won an Edgar award from the Mystery Writers of America for her novel, *The Beast In View* (1955). Anthony Boucher wrote that the book was "so detailedly convincing a study in abnormal psychology, so admirably written with such complete realization of every character, that the most bitter antagonist of mystery fiction may be forced to acknowledge it as a work of art." In a discussion of contemporary detective fiction, no less a name than Agatha Christie praised Miller as "very original."

Though her books are not generally considered detective mysteries, Millar was particularly noted for her surprise endings, foreshadowed but never spelled out for the reader until the final page. In the area of film, her novel *The Iron Gates* was optioned by Warner Brothers for Bette Davis, but the movie was never produced. However, in the early '60s, two of her novels—*Beast in View* and *Rose's Last Summer* (1965)—were adapted for the TV anthology series *Alfred Hitchcock Presents* and *Thriller*. Over her nearly fifty year career Millar was nominated for Edgar Awards twice, and in recognition of her overall achievements in the mystery field was awarded the Grand Master Award by the Mystery Writers of America in 1983.

Millar was also active in the conservation movement in California. She and her husband helped found a chapter of the National Audubon Society and her observations on the wildlife near her home were collected in her autobiography, *The Birds and the Beasts Were There* (1968). In 1965 she was named a Woman of the Year by the *Los Angeles Times*.

Other notable novels include *A Stranger in My Grave* (1960), the story of

a woman who has a recurring nightmare in which she sees her own grave; *The Fiend* (1964), about a man who is friendly with children but who finds himself the main suspect when a little girl disappears; *How Like an Angel* (1962), featuring Joe Quinn, a former private eye who searches for a missing man inside a religious cult called The True Believers. Though she only wrote a handful of short pieces in her long career, oddly enough both her first and last sales were shorts.

Further Reading:

THE INVISIBLE WORM (1941)
THE WEAK-EYED BAT (1942)
WALL OF EYES (1943)
FIRE WILL FREEZE (1944)
DO EVIL IN RETURN (1950)
VANISH IN AN INSTANT (1952)
BEAST IN VIEW (1955)
AN AIR THAT KILLS (1957)
THE LISTENING WALLS (1959)
A STRANGER IN MY GRAVE (1960)
HOW LIKE AN ANGEL (1962)
THE FIEND (1964)
BEYOND THIS POINT ARE MONSTERS (1970)
ASK FOR ME TOMORROW (1976)
MERMAID (1982)
BANSHEE (1983)

If you like Margaret Millar, you might like: Helen Nielsen, Dorothy B. Hughes

This is the seventh in a series of articles about the crime writers from the 1940s to the 1960s, as found in PAPERBACK CONFIDENTIAL by Brian Ritt (Stark House, \$19.95, 2013). Reprinted by permission of Stark House and the author. This reference book is highly recommended to collectors of vintage crime paperbacks.

Recent Paperbacks of Note



Softboiled to Mediumboiled

Adams, Ellery, **MURDER IN THE READING ROOM** (Kensington, \$7.99).
 Baker, Bree, **NO GOOD TEA GOES UNPUNISHED** (Sourcebooks, \$7.99).
 Blackwell, Juliet, **BEWITCHED AND BETROTHED** (Berkley, \$7.99).
 Buckley, Julia, **DEATH WAITS IN THE DARK** (Berkley, \$7.99).
 Buckley, Julia, **DEATH IN A BUDAPEST BUTTERFLY** (Berkley, \$7.99).
 Cass, Laurie, **BOOKING THE CROOK** (Berkley, \$7.99).
 Chien, Vivien, **MURDER LO MEIN** (St. Martin's, \$7.99).
 Conte, Cate, **THE TELL TAIL HEART** (St. Martin's, \$7.99).
 Eaton, J.C., **PINOT RED OR DEAD?** (Lyrical Underground, \$15.95).
 Imrie, Celia, **A NICE CUP OF TEA** (Bloomsbury, \$18.00).
 Kashian, Tina, **ONE FETA IN THE GROUND** (Kensington, \$7.99).
 Kelly, Diane, **DEAD AS A DOOR KNOCKER** (St. Martin's, \$7.99).
 Klein, Libby, **RESTAURANT WEEKS ARE MURDER** (Kensington, \$7.99).
 McKinlay, Jenn, **DYING FOR DEVIL'S FOOD** (Berkley, \$7.99).
 Mugavero, Liz, **MURDER, SHE MEOWED** (Kensington, \$7.99).
 Orr, Jill, **THE UGLY TRUTH** (Prospect Park, \$16.00).
 Randall, Shari, **DRAWN AND BUTTERED** (St. Martin's, \$7.99).
 Ryan, Sofie, **NO ESCAPE CLAWS** (Berkley, \$7.99).
 Sennfelder, Debra, **THE HIDDEN CORPSE** (Kensington, \$7.99).
 Swanson, Denise, **LEAVE NO SCONE UNTURNED** (Sourcebooks, \$7.99).
 Weiss, Kirsten, **PIE HARD** (Kensington, \$7.99).

Mediumboiled to Hardboiled

Alger, Cristina, **THE BANKER'S WIFE** (Putnam, \$16.00).
 Billingham, Mark, **THE KILLING HABIT** (Grove Atlantic, \$16.00).
 Brennan, Allison, **NOTHING TO HIDE** (St. Martin's, \$8.99).
 Brewer, Gil, **REDHEADS DIE QUICKLY and Other Stories** (Stark House, \$19.95).
 Camilleri, Andrea, **THE OVERNIGHT KIDNAPPER** (Penguin, \$16.00).
 Coleman, Patrick, **CHURCHGOER** (Harper Perennial, \$16.99).
 Collins, Max Allan, **GIRL MOST LIKELY** (Thomas & Mercer, \$15.95).
 Daniels, Natalie, **TOO CLOSE** (Harper, \$16.99).
 Daugherty, Christi, **THE ECHO KILLING** (Minotaur, \$16.99).
 Demaris, Ovid, **THE HOODS TAKE OVER** (Black Gat, \$9.99).
 Frear, Caz, **SWEET LITTLE LIES** (Harper, \$16.99).
 Goodman, Carol, **THE NIGHT VISITORS** (Morrow, \$15.99).
 Gordon, David, **THE BOUNCER** (Mysterious Press, \$16.00).
 Grimes, Martha, **THE KNOWLEDGE** (Grove Atlantic, \$16.00).
 Gunnis, Emily, **THE GIRL IN THE LETTER** (H Review, \$16.99).
 Hart, John, **THE HUSH** (St. Martin's, \$16.99).
 Houston, Victoria, **DEAD BIG DAWG** (Gallery, \$16.99).
 Jewell, A. B., **THE MAN WHO WOULDN'T DIE** (Morrow, \$16.99).
 Kara, Lesley, **THE RUMOR** (Ballantine, \$17.00).
 Kardos, Michael, **BLUFF** (Mysterious Press, \$16.00).
 Kernan, Olivia, **THE KILLER IN ME** (Dutton, \$16.00).
 Kirk, Shannon, **GRETCHEN** (Thomas & Mercer, \$15.95).
 Lawler, Liz, **DON'T WAKE UP** (Harper, \$16.99).
 Lepionka, Kristen, **WHAT YOU WANT TO SEE** (Minotaur, \$17.99).
 Lloyd, Amy, **ONE MORE LIE** (Hanover Square, \$15.99).

Lynch, Christina, **THE ITALIAN PARTY** (St. Martin's Griffin, \$17.99).
 Mackay, Malcolm, **SAVIORS: Two Novels** (Little, Brown, \$17.99).
 Mackintosh, Clare, **LET ME LIE** (Putnam, \$16.00).
 McAllister, Gillian, **THE GOOD SISTER** (Putnam, \$16.00).
 Mofina, Rick, **MISSING DAUGHTER** (MiraBooks, \$9.99).
 Oates, Joyce Carol, **NIGHT GAUNTS and other stories** (Mysterious Press, \$16.00).
 Osborne, Lawrence, **ONLY TO SLEEP** (Hogarth, \$16.00).
 Padura, Leonardo, **GRAB A SNAKE BY THE TAIL** (Bitter Lemon, \$14.95).
 Steadman, Catherine, **SOMETHING IN THE WATER** (Ballantine, \$17.00).
 Stembridge, Gerard, **WHAT SHE SAW** (Harper, \$15.99).
 Viel, Tanguy, **ARTICLE 353** (Other Press, \$15.99).
 Zander, Joakim, **THE FRIEND** (Harper, \$16.99).

History Mystery

Ashley, Jennifer, **DEATH IN KEW GARDENS** (Berkley, \$15.00).
 Atkinson, Kate, **TRANSCRIPTION** (Little, Brown, \$16.99).
 Brightwell, Emily, **MRS. JEFFRIES DELIVERS THE GOODS** (Berkley, \$16.00).
 Dudley, Lawrence, **NEW YORK STATION** (Blackstone, \$16.99).
 Huber, Anna Lee, **AN ARTLESS DEMISE** (Berkley, \$16.00).
 MacNeal, Susan Elia, **THE PRISONER IN THE CASTLE** (Bantam, \$17.00).
 Oliveira, Robin, **WINTER SISTERS** (Penguin, \$17.00).
 Purcell, Laura, **THE POISON THREAD** (Penguin).
 Wilson, Andrew, **DEATH IN A DESERT LAND** (Atria, \$17.00).

Thrillers

Bonnier, Jonas, **THE HELICOPTER HEIST** (Other, \$17.99).
 Hamilton, Ian, **FATE: THE LOST DECADES OF UNCLE CHOW TUNG** (Spiderline, \$15.95).
 Lawson, Mike, **HOUSE WITNESS** (Grove Atlantic, \$16.00).
 Lockhart, Timothy J., **PIRATES** (Stark House, \$15.95).
 Scott, Joel, **ARROW'S FALL** (ECW, \$15.95).

Sneak Previews

Upcoming Mysteries



July, 2019

- 2 Ian Hamilton, **THE MOUNTAIN MASTER OF SHA TIN** (Ava Lee)
- 2 Caz Frear, **STONE COLD HEART** (Kat Kinsella)
- 2 Alison Gaylin, **NEVER LOOK BACK**
- 2 Riley Sager, **LOCK EVERY DOOR**
- 2 Matthew Betley, **RULES OF WAR** (Logan West)
- 2 S. J. Rozan, **PAPER SON** (Lydia Chin/Bill Smith)
- 2 Caite Dolan-Leach, **WE WENT TO THE WOODS**
- 2 Paul Doiron, **ALMOST MIDNIGHT** (Mike Bowditch)
- 2 Cristina Alger, **GIRLS LIKE US**
- 2 David Bell, **LAYOVER**
- 2 Spencer Quinn, **HEART OF BARKNESS**
- 2 Garry Disher, **UNDER THE COLD BRIGHT LIGHTS**
- 2 Andrew Wilson, **DEATH IN A DESERT LAND** (Agatha Christie)
- 6 David Gordon, **THE HARD STUFF** (Joe the Bouncer)
- 6 Aoife Clifford, **SECOND SIGHT**
- 9 Peter Lovesey, **KILLING WITH CONFETTI** (Diamond)
- 9 Ace Atkins, **THE SHAMELESS** (Quinn Colson)
- 9 Jo Nesbo, **KNIFE** (Harry Hole)
- 9 Keith McCafferty, **A DEATH IN EDEN** (Sean Stranahan)
- 9 Adrian McKinty, **THE CHAIN**
- 9 Sheila Connolly, **KILLER IN THE CARRIAGE HOUSE**
- 9 Kristen Lepionka, **THE STORIES YOU TELL** (Roxane Weary)
- 9 Jonathan F. Putnam, **HOUSE DIVIDED** (Lincoln/Speed)
- 9 Brett Battles, **THE DAMAGED** (Quinn)
- 10 Wallace Strobry, **SOME DIE NAMELESS**
- 11 Dana Stabenow, **NO FIXED LINE** (Kate Shugak) – U.K. edition
- 16 J. Todd Scott, **THIS SIDE OF NIGHT**

- (Chris Cherry)
- 16 David Rosenfelt, **BARK OF NIGHT** (Andy Carpenter)
- 16 Linda Castillo, **SHAMED** (Kate Burkholder)
- 16 Ellison Cooper, **BURIED**
- 16 Daniel Silva, **THE NEW GIRL** (Gabriel Allon)
- 23 Laura Lippman, **LADY IN THE LAKE**
- 23 Michael Robotham, **GOOD GIRL, BAD GIRL**
- 23 David Baldacci, **ONE GOOD DEED**
- 26 Mark Greaney & Rip Rawlings, **RED METAL**
- 30 Stephen Hunter, **GAME OF SNIPERS** (Bob Lee Swagger)
- 30 Lisa Gardner, **NEVER TELL**
- 30 Lindsey Davis, **CAPITOL DEATH** (Flavia Alba)
- 30 Iris Johansen, **SMOKESCREEN**

August, 2019

- 1 Peter James, **DEAD AT FIRST SIGHT** (Roy Grace)
- 6 Ben Coes, **THE RUSSIAN** (Rob Tacoma)
- 6 Karin Fossum, **THE WHISPERER** (Sejer)
- 6 Robert Pobi, **CITY OF WINDOWS**
- 6 Ruth Ware, **THE TURN OF THE KEY**
- 6 Lindsey Davis, **A CAPITOL DEATH** (Flavia Alba)
- 6 Donna Andrews, **TERNS OF ENDEARMENT** (Meg Langslow)
- 6 Martha Grimes, **THE OLD SUCCESS** (Richard Jury)
- 6 Hayden Beck (Stuart Neville), **LOST YOU**
- 6 Rees Bowen, **LOVE AND DEATH AMONG THE CHEETAHS** (Royal Spyness)
- 6 Barbara Cleverly, **INVITATION TO DIE** (Inspector Redfrye)
- 6 J. P. Delaney, **PERFECT WIFE**
- 6 Hallie Ephron, **CAREFUL WHAT**

YOU WISH FOR

- 6 Claire Kendal, **I SPY**
- 6 Rob Leininger, **GUMSHOE ROCK** (Mortimer Angel)
- 13 William Shaw, **PLAY WITH FIRE** (Breen/Tozer)
- 13 Steve Cavanagh, **THIRTEEN** (Eddie Flynn)
- 13 Howard Michael Gould, **BELOW THE LINE** (Charlie Waldo)
- 13 T. Jefferson Parker, **THE LAST GOOD GUY** (Roland Ford)
- 13 C. J. Box, **BITTERROOTS**
- 13 Ellen Hart, **TWISTED AT THE ROOT** (Jane Lawless)
- 13 David Handler, **MAN IN A WHITE LINEN SUIT** (Stewart Hoag)
- 13 Jamie Mason, **HIDDEN THINGS**
- 13 Alex Segura, **MIAMI MIDNIGHT** (Pete Fernandez)
- 20 Hank Phillippi Ryan, **MURDER LIST**
- 20 Fred Vargas, **THE POISON WILL REMAIN** (Comm. Adamsberg)
- 20 David Lagercrantz, **THE GIRL WHO LIVED TWICE** (L. Salander)
- 20 Julia Keller, **THE COLD WAY HOME** (Bell Elkins)
- 20 Louisa Treger, **THE DRAGON LADY**
- 20 James Brabazon, **ALL FALL DOWN** (Max Mclean)
- 20 Colin Cotterill, **SECOND BIGGEST NOTHING** (Siri Palboun)
- 20 Jim Swain, **NO GOOD DEED** (Lancaster/Daniels)
- 20 R. H. Herron, **STOLEN THINGS**
- 27 Sara Lovestam, **THE TRUTH BEHIND THE LIE**
- 27 Preston & Child, **OLD BONES** (Nora Kelly)
- 27 Michael Laurence, **EXTINCTION AGENDA**
- 27 Lorenzo Carcaterra, **TIN BADGES**
- 27 Karin Slaughter, **LAST WIDOW** (Sara Linton/Will Trent)

September, 2019

- 1 Peter Steiner, **THE GOOD COP**
- 1 Scott Reardon, **PANDORA EQUATION** (Prometheus Man)
- 2 S. D. Sykes, **THE BONE FIRE** (Somershill Manor)
- 3 James R. Benn, **WHEN HELL STRUCK THREE** (Billy Boyle)
- 3 Ann Cleeves, **LONG CALL** (Two Rivers)
- 3 Ashley Weaver, **DANGEROUS ENGAGEMENT** (Amory Ames)

- 3 Jenn McKinlay, **WORD TO THE WISE** (Library Lovers)
- 3 Soren Sveistrup, **THE CHESTNUT MAN** (Thulin/Hess)
- 3 Henry Porter, **WHITE HOT SILENCE** (Paul Samson)
- 3 Sean Parnell, **ALL OUT WAR** (Eric Steele)
- 7 Charles Todd, **A CRUEL DECEPTION** (Bess Crawford)
- 10 Andrew Gross, **THE FIFTH COLUMN**
- 10 Reed Farrel Coleman, **Parker's THE BITTEREST PILL** (Jesse Stone)
- 10 P.J. Tracy, **ICE COLD HEART** (Monkeewrench)
- 10 Jeffrey Archer, **NOTHING VENTURED** (William Warwick)
- 10 Paula Munier, **BLIND SEARCH** (Mercy/Elvis)
- 10 Gilly Macmillan, **THE NANNY**
- 17 Craig Johnson, **LAND OF WOLVES** (Longmire)
- 17 Nevada Barr, **WHAT ROSE FORGOT**
- 17 Lee Goldberg, **LOST HILL** (Eve Ronin)
- 17 Lisa Unger, **THE STRANGER INSIDE**
- 17 Attica Locke, **HEAVEN, MY HOME** (Highway 59)
- 17 Amy Stewart, **KOPP SISTERS ON THE MARCH**
- 17 James W. Ziskin, **TURN TO STONE** (Ellie Stone)
- 24 Kyle Mills/Vince Flynn, **LETHAL AGENT** (Mitch Rapp)
- 24 J.A. Jance, **SINS OF THE FATHER** (J.P. Beaumont)
- 24 Jack Flynn, **BLOOD IN THE WATER**
- 24 Archer Mayor, **BOMBER'S MOON** (Joe Gunther)
- 24 Kareem Abdul-Jabbar & Anna Waterhouse, **THE EMPTY CAGE** (Mycroft & Sherlock)

October, 2019

- 1 Tess Gerritsen, **THE SHAPE OF THE NIGHT**
- 1 David Rosenfelt, **DACHSHUND THROUGH THE SNOW** (Andy Carpenter)
- 1 Patricia Cornwell, **QUANTUM** (Captain Chase)
- 8 Deborah Crombie, **A BITTER FEAST** (Kincaid/James)
- 8 John Sandford, **BLOODY GENIUS** (Virgil Flowers)

- 8 Felix Francis, **GUILTY NOT GUILTY**
- 15 Elizabeth Hand, **CURIOUS TOYS**
- 15 Nicholas Meyer, **ADVENTURE OF THE PECULIAR PROTOCOLS** (Holmes/Watson)
- 15 John Connelly, **A BOOK OF BONES** (Charlie Parker)
- 15 Sherry Thomas, **THE ART OF THEFT** (Lady Sherlock)
- 22 John LeCarre', **AGENT RUNNING IN THE FIELD**
- 22 Catriona McPherson, **STRANGERS AT THE GATE**
- 22 Michael Connelly, **THE NIGHT FIRE** (Bosch & Ballard)
- 22 Nelson DeMille, **THE DESERTER**
- 29 Lee Child, **BLUE MOON** (Jack Reacher)
- 29 Tony Tata, **DOUBLE CROSSFIRE** (Jack Mahegan)
- 29 Bonnie MacBird, **THE DEVIL'S DUE** (Sherlock Holmes)

November, 2019

- 5 Joseph Kanon, **THE ACCOMPLICE**
- 5 M.C. Beaton, **BEATING AROUND THE BUSH** (Agatha Raisin)
- 5 Saul Black, **ANYTHING FOR YOU**
- 5 James Rayburn, **ASH**
- 5 Martin Cruz Smith, **THE SIBERIAN DILEMMA** (Arkady Renko)
- 5 JoAnna Carl, **THE CHOCOLATE SHARK SHENANIGANS**
- 11 Allen Eskens, **NOTHING MORE DANGEROUS**
- 12 William Kent Krueger, **THIS TENDER LAND**
- 12 Teresa Dovalpage, **QUEEN OF BONES** (Cuba)
- 12 Will Thomas, **LETHAL PURSUIT** (Barker & Llewelyn)
- 12 Margaret Mizushima, **TRACKING GAME** (Timber Creek K-9)
- 15 Ken Bruen, **GALWAY GIRL** (Jack Taylor)
- 19 David Baldacci, **A MINUTE TO MIDNIGHT** (Atlee Pine)
- 19 Ace Atkins, **Robert B. Parker's ANGEL EYES** (Spenser)
- 19 Robert Harris, **THE SECOND SLEEP**
- 19 Marc Cameron, **Tom Clancy CODE OF HONOR** (Jack Ryan)
- 19 Con Lehane, **MURDER OFF THE PAGE** (42nd St. Library)
- 19 Mark Coggins, **THE DEAD BEAT SCROLL** (August Riordon)
- 26 Alan Furst, **UNDER OCCUPATION**

December, 2019

- 2 S. J. Parris, **TREACHERY** (Giordano Bruno)
- 3 Val McDermid, **HOW THE DEAD SPEAK** (Tony Hill/Carol Jordan)
- 3 Tom Rosenstiel, **OPPO** (Rena/Brooks)
- 3 Loren D. Estleman, **WHEN OLD MIDNIGHT COMES ALONG** (Amos Walker)
- 3 Burt Solomon, **ATTEMPTED MURDER OF THEODORE ROOSEVELT**
- 3 Alice Blanchard, **TRACE OF EVIL** (Natalie Lockhart)
- 3 Cleo Coyle, **BREWED AWAKENING** (Coffeehouse)
- 3 Jeff Lindsay, **JUST WATCH ME**
- 3 Robin Cook, **GENESIS**
- 10 Emily Littlejohn, **SHATTER THE NIGHT** (Gemma Monroe)
- 31 Taylor Stevens, **LIAR'S LEGACY** (Jack & Jill)

January, 2020

- 7 Brad Taylor, **HUNTER KILLER** (Pike Logan)
- 7 Jason Pinter, **HIDE AWAY**
- 14 Chris Hauty, **DEEP STATE**
- 14 Nick Petrie, **THE WILD ONE** (Peter Ash)
- 14 Alex Marwood, **THE POISON GARDEN**
- 21 Joseph Finder, **HOUSE ON FIRE** (Nick Heller)
- 28 Joe Ide, **HI FIVE** (IQ)
- 28 Gregg Hurwitz, **INTO THE FIRE** (Orphan X)
- 28 Lisa Gardner, **WHEN YOU SEE ME**
- 28 C. J. Tudor, **THE OTHER PEOPLE**

February, 2020

- 4 Charles Todd, **A DIVIDED LOYALTY** (Ian Rutledge)
- 4 Robert Dugoni, **A COLD TRAIL** (Tracy Crosswhite)
- 4 Jonathan Kellerman, **THE MUSEUM OF DESIRE** (Alex Delaware)
- 18 Marc Greaney, **ONE MINUTE OUT** (Gray Man)
- 18 Meg Gardiner, **THE DARK CORNERS OF THE NIGHT** (Unsub)
- 25 Steve Berry, **THE WARSAW PROTOCOL** (Cotton Malone)
- 25 James Grippando, **THE BIG LIE** (Jack Swyteck)

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