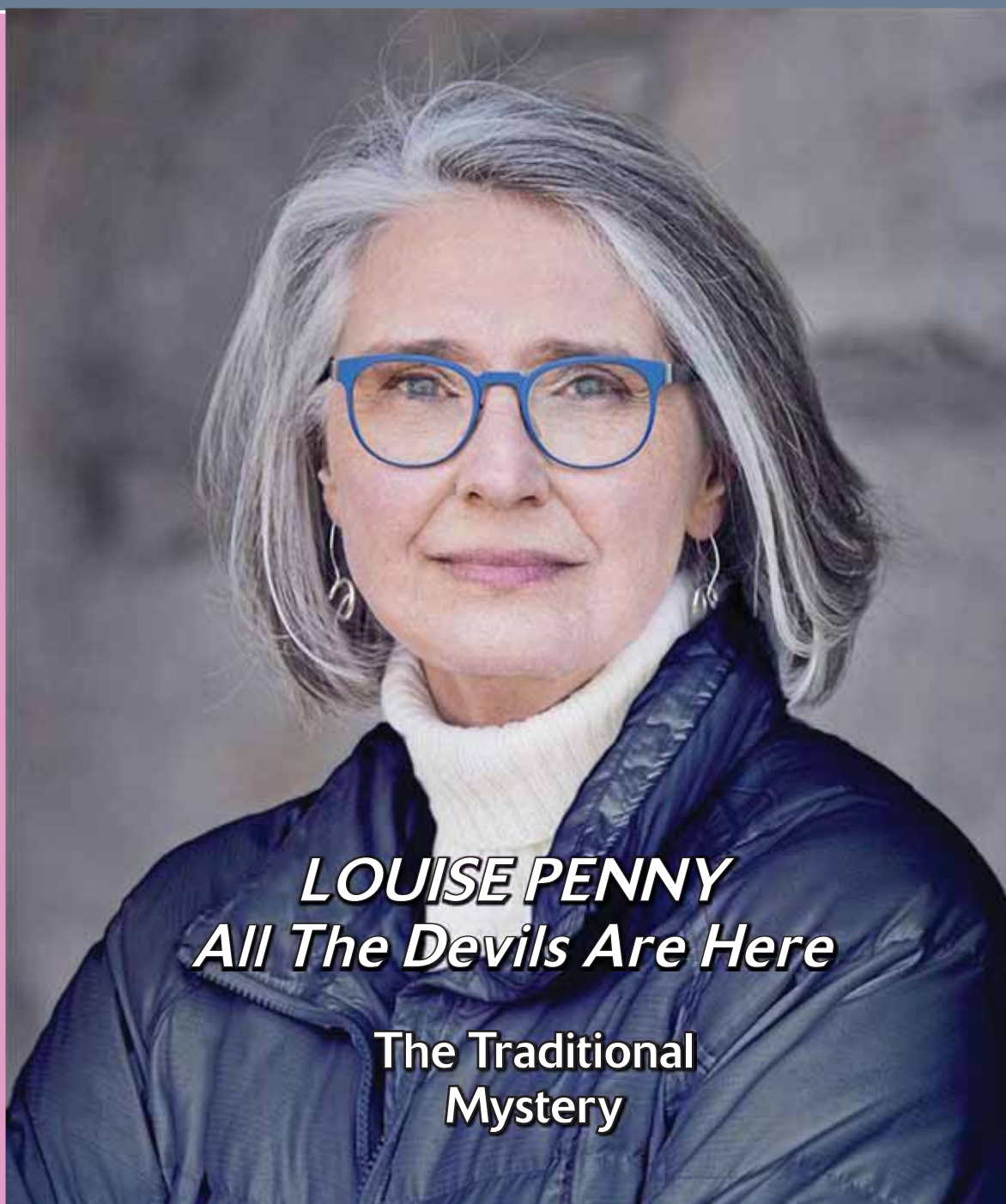


Deadly Pleasures

Mystery Magazine



LOUISE PENNY
All The Devils Are Here

**The Traditional
Mystery**

Louise Penny

Queen of the Traditional Mystery

By Kristopher Zgorski



By all accounts, the name Louise Penny is now known to most crime fiction fans, but that has not always been the case. Through a combination of dedication, hard work, and wonderfully storytelling, Louise Penny has risen in stature to the point that each new novel is practically guaranteed to debut on the *New York Times* bestseller list – often in the top spot. Without ever losing her humility, Louise Penny won over the hearts of countless readers who consider her fictional characters friends along this journey we call life.



STILL LIFE, Louise Penny's debut novel was released in 2005 in Canada and the U.K., and 2006 in the U.S. The novel immediately gained the notice of the crime fiction community, winning some of the leading awards bestowed upon the genre, including this magazine's Barry Award for Best First Novel. It is there that she began to amass her legion of fans – readers dedicated to the traditional mystery who long for a lead character they can stand behind and always support. Chief Inspector Armand Gamache was that character and the fictional village of Three Pines took hold in the imaginations of those early readers. From this small, but devoted early audience, word of mouth about Louise Penny's unique creation began to spread. The first quartet of novels were set during and paid homage to the seasons of the Canadian landscape. **STILL LIFE** is set in picturesque Fall, **A FATAL GRACE**, which is also known as **DEAD COLD**, documents a chilling winter, **THE CRUELEST MONTH** takes place around the Easter holiday in Spring, and **A RULE AGAINST MURDER**, which is also known as **THE MURDER STONE**, highlights Summer. Knowing that she did not want to run into Cabot Cove-syndrome, it was this fourth book when Louise Penny began to allow her characters to travel outside

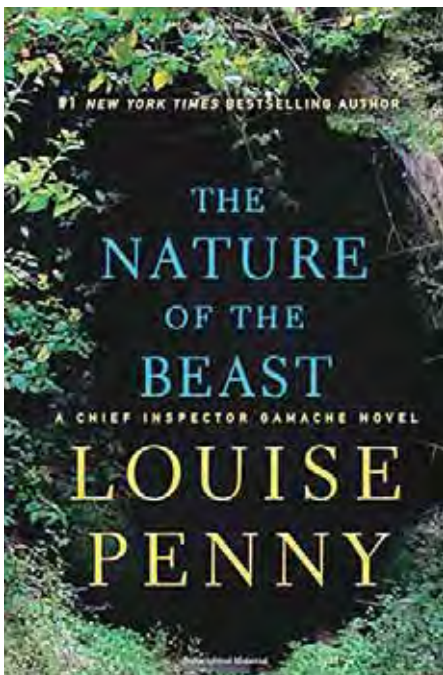
of Three Pines to uncover mysteries in other locations. Each of them is a traditional mystery with clues provided to the reader who wishes to try to solve the case along with the characters.

Despite Chief Inspector Gamache being a member of La Sûreté du Québec and serving as the main character in the series, Louise Penny's Three Pines books are not typical police procedurals. While there is certainly plenty of details about how investigations proceed, the presence of the quirky village residents places these novels more into the traditional mystery mold. Readers latch onto their favorites among the supporting cast: whether it be the crotchety-old poet, Ruth Zardo; artist-in-residence Clara Morrow; Gabri and Olivier, the gay couple that runs the town's bistro; Jean-Guy Beauvoir, Gamache's colleague and friend, or Myrna Landers who runs the local bookstore and acts as everyone's therapist. They become like family and when they hurt, so does the reader. Which makes it even more heartbreaking when, with book five – **THE BRUTAL TELLING** – the damage hits closer to home for this makeshift family and their fans.

A RULE AGAINST MURDER found Armand Gamache solving a crime at a popular Canadian resort hotel, but it was **BURY YOUR DEAD**

when Louise Penny first began to really weave true Canadian history into her plots. Here, Gamache visits Quebec City where a body is discovered in a research library. At this point the novels in the series begin to stray from Three Pines more regularly, every other book or so, thereby maintaining some realism to the constant criminal investigations. With **A TRICK OF THE LIGHT**, **THE BEAUTIFUL MYSTERY**, **HOW THE LIGHT GETS IN**, and **THE LONG WAY HOME**, Louise Penny's writing seems to take on a new level of spiritual awareness and humanism. The plots remain traditional mysteries first and foremost, but readers can also find blueprints for how to live a better life by being a nobler person among the pages of those novels. As has been the case from the start of the series, Louise Penny's characters are flawed human beings, but they – most especially Gamache – are always striving to do better, to learn and grow, even when that is personally painful.

THE NATURE OF THE BEAST finds Louise Penny making another pivot. In contrast to the other novels in the series, this is a book that reads very much like a traditional thriller. The stakes are possibly the highest they have ever been for Gamache's investigation and there is a ticking timeclock feel to the progression of the action. It is not



unusual for Louise Penny to try new things. With a series of this length that is practically necessary to keep readers invested, so it is possible to look at individual novels and realize that something like **THE BEAUTIFUL MYSTERY** (set in an isolated monastery) really harkens to the locked-room mystery tradition. Similarly, while **BURY YOUR DEAD** is set in modern times, the case at the core becomes historical in nature.

Like many mystery series, readers can join this journey at any point, but Louise Penny's Three Pines series is one that really rewards devotion. Readers can feel the interconnectedness of the books and how lessons from earlier affect things down the road. This is never clearer than in the overarching storyline from **A GREAT RECKONING**, **GLASS HOUSES**, and **KINGDOM OF THE BLIND**. Each of these books has a unique central mystery that is the main focus, but there is a larger storyline that crosses over these books and readers who experience all three novels will find themselves fully satisfied at the conclusion of this storyline arc.

Due to the outcome of the previous book, **A BETTER MAN** finds Armand Gamache once again in a new role. This feels like a transitional book taking us from the early novels in the series to a new future. Which brings us to **ALL THE DEVILS ARE HERE**. Of all the

books, this is probably the one where it is easiest for new readers to enter the series if they do not wish to start at the beginning. **ALL THE DEVILS ARE HERE** is the first Three Pines novel to travel internationally – finding Gamache and his wife Reine-Marie visiting family in Paris, France where once again murder follows.

The Three Pines – Chief Inspector Gamache Series

STILL LIFE (Rating: B) – Barry Award, Anthony Award, Dilys Award, CWA New Dagger Award, Arthur Ellis Award, Finalist 2010 Barry Award for Best Novel of the Decade

A FATAL GRACE [DEAD COLD] (Rating: A-) – Agatha Award

THE CRUELEST MONTH (Rating: B-) – Agatha Award

A RULE AGAINST MURDER [THE MURDER STONE] (Rating: A)

THE BRUTAL TELLING (Rating: B+) – Agatha Award, Anthony Award

BURY YOUR DEAD (Rating: A+) – Agatha Award, Anthony Award, Dilys Award, Macavity Award, Arthur Ellis

Award, Nero Award

A TRICK OF THE LIGHT (Rating: A) – Anthony Award

THE BEAUTIFUL MYSTERY
(Rating: A-) – Anthony Award,
Macavity Award, Agatha Award

HOW THE LIGHT GETS IN
(Rating: A), Left Coast Crime
Calamari Award

THE LONG WAY HOME (Rating: A)

THE NATURE OF THE BEAST
(Rating: B) – Left Award

A GREAT RECKONING (Rating: A-)
Barry Award, Agatha Award, Anthony
Award, Macavity Award, Lefty Award

GLASS HOUSES (Rating: A)
– Agatha Award

KINGDOM OF THE BLIND
(Rating: B)

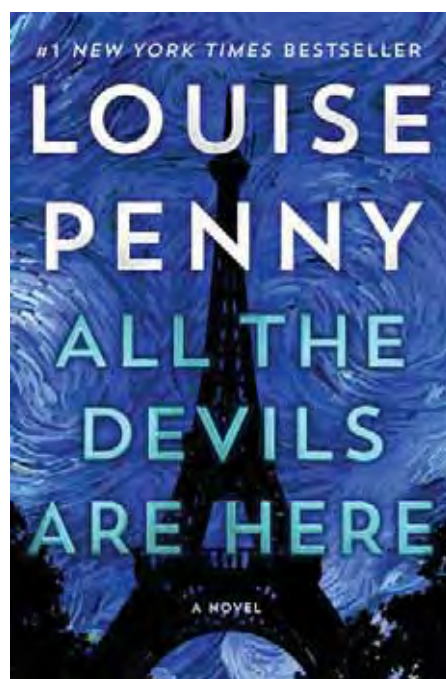
A BETTER MAN (Rating: B-)

ALL THE DEVILS ARE HERE
(Rating: A)

Besides the awards she has won, her novels have been nominated 31 other times. It is safe to say that Louise Penny is the most lauded (in terms of awards and award nominations) of any living mystery writer.

ALL THE DEVILS ARE HERE
by Louise Penny
Minotaur, \$28.99
Rating: A

Louise Penny's Three Pines mystery series featuring Chief Inspector Armand Gamache has grown from the early books that struggled to find a readership to its current ubiquity where the series is so incredibly beloved and every new entry is almost guaranteed instant bestsellerdom. Over the course of fifteen novels, Louise Penny has made Three Pines and its residents feel like home for so many readers. On rare occasions she has strayed from the confines of



her mythical village to explore other parts of Canada, such as Quebec City, an isolated monastery, a luxury resort hotel, and even the Canadian/United States border. However, **ALL THE DEVILS ARE HERE** (the sixteenth and latest novel in the series) will be the first to take Gamache outside of Canada. Where, one might ask? The series is off to Paris, France.

Not unlike predecessors such as Jessica Fletcher and Hercule Poirot, where Armand Gamache travels, murder is sure to follow. Armand Gamache and his wife Reine-Marie are in Paris for a much-needed respite: one that allows them to reconnect with their children, to be present for the birth of another grandchild, and to provide Gamache precious time with his godfather, the billionaire Stephen Horowitz. After a lovely dinner, their serene walk home is shattered by a tragic accident that gravely injures Stephen. Even though Gamache is certain this was an intentional attack on his cherished father-figure, being in a foreign country strips him of any authority – however that does not mean that he is unable to investigate.

What follows is a refreshingly slow excavation of Stephen Horowitz's history – and the many secrets within. The word slow here is used to imply a

methodical and organized examination of every small facet of the case, not as a pejorative meant to criticize in any way. Louise Penny's writing skill allows her to create tension out of even the most innocuous of details and to elevate the risk with every sublime moment, so what readers end up with is a fully-immersive experience where they journey with the investigators through the course of their inquiries.

Investigators is the correct word here, as well. Since Gamache has no agency to run an official investigation in Paris, France, he must rely on his team – his family – in new ways. Of course, his former colleague-turned-son-in-law Jean-Guy Beauvoir is by his side at every turn and each dead-end. Longtime series fans will relish the prominent role Reine-Marie is afforded in **ALL THE DEVILS ARE HERE**. Her research skills as a librarian prove invaluable and it is delightful to see her interact with her husband on this more professional level – with their core love and respect always serving as the foundation.

While dedicated fans will no doubt be dismayed that most of the other Three Pines residents only appear briefly in this novel, that development makes **ALL THE DEVILS ARE HERE** an ideal place for new readers of the series to begin. There has been a larger story at play over the course of the previous few novels that may have been challenging to join *in medias res*, but with most of that resolved at this point, readers unfamiliar with the Three Pines series can pick up **ALL THE DEVILS ARE HERE** and following along with little confusion.

Louise Penny has never been a writer to follow any set formula, so these deviations in *All The Devils Are Here* are not unexpected. Readers can rest assured that this still feels like an authentic Three Pines/Chief Inspector Armand Gamache mystery and in many ways it is setting the stage for the novels moving forward. There is no doubt that Louise Penny's existing fans and the new ones who discover her with **ALL THE DEVILS ARE HERE** will gladly follow her wherever that journey takes us.

The Traditional Mystery by George Easter

Most mystery fans will agree on what a traditional mystery is, but over the past couple of decades there have been heated discussions about what a cozy mystery is. I can only give you my opinion and hope that I come close to the mark.

1. All cozy mysteries are traditional mysteries, but not all traditional mysteries are cozies. Cozy mysteries are a quite specific subset of traditional mysteries.

2. A traditional mystery is what we grew up calling a murder mystery or a whodunnit. Think Agatha Christie. It involves a serious crime, usually a murder; an unknown perpetrator of the crime; a detective or detectives (mostly amateur) as the protagonist(s), who use(s) deduction to solve the crime; a finite number of suspects; some misdirection; and, finally, a surprise ending in which the perpetrator's identity and motives are revealed. Generally, traditional mysteries contain very little profanity, sex or violence. Hardboiled P.I. novels, most police procedurals, crime novels, psychological/domestic suspense novels, thrillers, heist capers, espionage and hardboiled police novels are all examples of non-traditional mysteries.

3. The characteristics of a cozy (that distinguish it from other traditional mysteries) are: an amateur detective (almost always a female) with a fun occupation or hobby that involves womanly arts or one that women enjoy (baking, sewing, quilting, animal care/pet ownership, innkeeper, cooking-recipes, libraries, book store or craft store ownership). Often the female protagonist will become romantically involved with the handsome policeman who is also investigating the crime. The titles of the cozies (often puns and plays on words) and the cover art of cozies are another clue. The focus of the cozy plot is as much on the relationships between the characters as it is on the mystery plot. Cozies have a lighter touch than other traditional mysteries. This has resulted in criticism of them as being

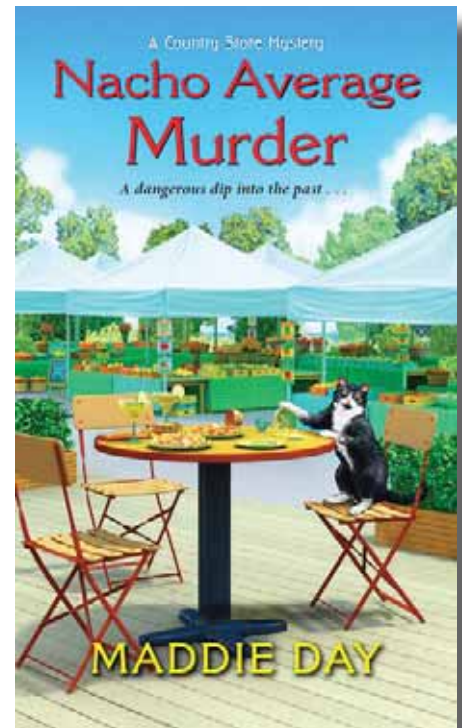
too inconsequential and fluffy for those mystery fans who prefer more realism. Otto Penzler said this about cozies, "There's an idealized, almost fantasy world element to the real cozies, based on a secure feeling that even though the stories involve a murder or two, it really is a good world where bad things are pretty much limited to bad people and things will always come out right in the end for the good ones." When fans of cozies read one, they are transported to a world they would like to experience, not the world that they actually live in.

4. The characteristics of a traditional mystery that is not a cozy are: faster pace, a little more realistic violence, a more complex plot, more character development, a harsher world and the treatment of more serious and uncomfortable societal problems. It should be noted that historical mysteries fit the mold of a traditional mystery. The paradox of the term "traditional mystery", as it is used today, is that it describes all traditional mysteries **except** cozy mysteries, which as I've already mentioned are one form of traditional mysteries. Confused? Join the crowd.

A WARNING: From the author Elizabeth Zelvin, "...woe betide anyone who calls a book a cozy to the author's face, if the author does not herself (or himself) define the work as a cozy." I've personally had G. M. Malliet and Louise Penny tell me that they think of themselves as "traditional mystery writers."

5. Conclusion: the line between a cozy and a traditional mystery is still a bit blurred, but most of us non-cozy readers recognize where it is and don't cross it, unless we want to. I have no problem with cozy fans and hope they find great enjoyment in reading them. My dear, sainted mother was a fan of traditional and cozy mysteries. I hold her and our reviewer of cozies, Maggie Mason, in the highest regard.

Every once in a while I'll get a kick out of a cozy title. The last time was with **NACHO AVERAGE MURDER** by Maddie Day. I'm still chuckling. Cozies are certainly popular and sell very well. But I'll stay on the other side of the line and enjoy my more traditional mysteries.



It should be mentioned that there has been a decided uptick in the popularity of Golden Age Mysteries due to the success of the British Library Crime Classics Series, Otto Penzler's American Mystery Classics and now the Library of Congress Crime Classic series. The traditional mystery, in its original form, is enjoying a deserved renaissance.

Some of the Best Traditional (Not Cozy) Writers are: Louise Penny, Anthony Horowitz, Martin Edwards, G.M. Malliet, Christopher Fowler, Charles Todd, Martin Walker, Julia Spencer-Fleming, Peter Lovesey, Rhys Bowen, Cara Black, Laurie R. King, Elizabeth George, Charles Finch, Abir Mukherjee, Vaseem Khan, Richard Osman, David Rosenfeld, Jacqueline Winspear, Alan Bradley, Martha Grimes, Alexander McCall Smith, Sherry Thomas, and Elly Griffiths.

Reviews of Recent Recommended Traditional Mysteries

ONE BY ONE
by Ruth Ware

Gallery/Scout Press, \$27.99

Rating: A



Ruth Ware

[Reviewed by Larry Gandle]

The staff of the hugely popular internet startup, Snoop, decide to have their corporate retreat at a luxurious ski lodge high in the French Alps. Soon after their arrival, with the first presentation in the morning, the fireworks start. The two co-founders, Topher and Eva, practically come to blows on whether to sell the company and pocket over a hundred million Euros. Topher does not want to sell while Eva insists on it. They each have their loyal supporters and decide on holding off on further discussions while they go skiing. One of them disappears in what appears to be a tragic accident until others in the group start dying one by one. Told by alternate chapter points of view between Liz, a shareholding outsider who is mousy and awkward and Erin, the young lady on the chalet staff who is responsible for them enjoying themselves, things get increasingly tense as everyone perceives danger all around.

This is an incredibly clever traditional murder mystery until it becomes a compelling thriller in a cat and mouse format with a twist thrown in at the end. The book is incredibly fun and is hard to put down. Some reviewers describe this book as a modern version of *AND THEN THERE WAS NONE*. However, it is not that at all. It is two almost completely separate books in one -- part

traditional mystery and the last part a thriller. It is easily one of the best books of the year. The author has gotten so much more skilled as a storyteller since writing *THE WOMAN IN CABIN 10*, which I found unrealistically juvenile. Highly recommended.

THE THURSDAY MURDER CLUB

by Richard Osman

Pamela Dorman Books/Viking, \$26.00

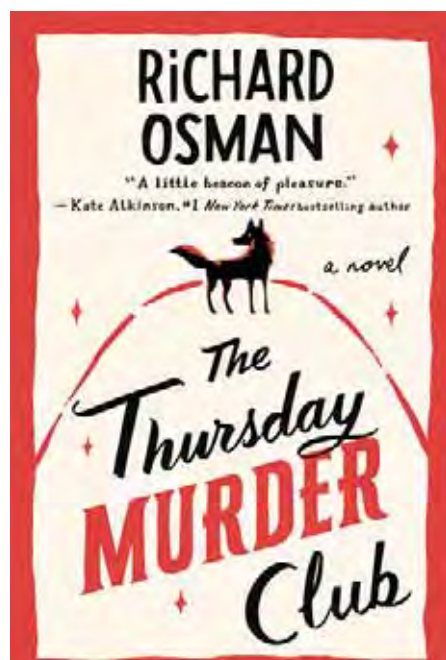
First Mystery

Rating: A

[Reviewed by George Easter]

The Thursday Murder Club is a group formed by Penny, a retired police detective and four of her friends who are residents of Coopers Chase, one of the U.K.'s most attractive retirement communities set in rural Kent. They meet each week to discuss some of Penny's cold cases and come up with new avenues for investigation. Then Penny suffers a debilitating stroke and is no longer able to communicate. But the other four continue on without her.

There is the exuberant Elizabeth, who hints of her background with British Intelligence, and who is able to talk herself into or out of any situation. Recent addition Joyce is a former nurse and has such a pleasant personality that one might underestimate her talents and abilities. She is the Dr. Watson of the group and chronicles their actions. Big



Red Ron is an infamous labor agitator and, when forceful speech is required, he's their man. Joining him on the male side is former psychiatrist/therapist Ibrahim, the stat geek of the Thursday Murder Club.

The owners of Coopers Chase, the unscrupulous Ian Ventam and his builder/junior partner Tony Curran, have acquired adjoining land and plan to build an addition to Coopers Chase. Just one problem -- the location is a cemetery full of bodies of the nuns who previously lived on the property where Coopers Chase now sits. Permission has been granted to move the bodies, but the locals and residents are up in arms about it.

When a murder occurs, the Thursday Murder Club springs into action and inveigles their way into the police investigation. DCI Chris Hudson and his enthusiastic partner PC Donna De Freitas don't seem to know what hit them until it is too late. The four amateurs out-investigate the police at every turn.

The first half of the book often had me chuckling out loud with its subtle and not-so-subtle British humor. But things get serious in the second half, which is time for some brilliant detection by our lovely band of retirees.

Im so pleased that this first mystery is such a big hit. It is a perfect book to read anytime, but especially during a pandemic. It lifts the spirit with its ingenuity, wit and warm characters. The author is a famous TV celebrity in the U.K., but he's also a darned good writer (notice my use of traditional mystery acceptable language). Richard Osman seems to be channeling his inner Edmund Crispin or Colin Watson.

Here's hoping we'll see more of this august group of amateur sleuths in follow-up traditional mysteries.

MOONFLOWER MURDERS

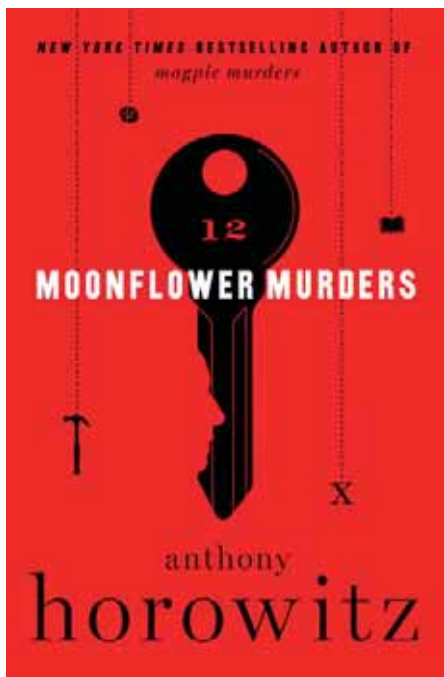
by Anthony Horowitz

Harper, \$28.99

Rating: A-

[Reviewed by George Easter]

Retired editor (see *MAGPIE MURDERS*) Susan Ryeland appears to the uninformed observer to be living a dream, owning and running a small



hotel on Crete with her steady boyfriend Andreas. But the hotel has difficulty making a profit, so when Susan gets a chance to earn £10,000 by returning to England and investigating the disappearance of a young wife and mother, she jumps at the chance to find out what happened to Cecily, who helps run the chic Suffolk hotel owned by her parents.

One of Susan's former writers Alan Conway (since deceased) wrote a mystery based on this same Suffolk hotel (and its loosely disguised staff), where he stayed some years ago around the time when there was a murder that occurred during Cecily's wedding. A handyman employed by the hotel was found guilty of the murder and has been in prison for the last eight years. Cecily finally got around to reading Conway's mystery and saw something in there that greatly upset her. It seemed to Cecily that the handyman is innocent, but before she can reveal what she has learned, she disappears.

Susan Ryeland's initial investigation reveals very little as far as promising clues, so she decides to re-read Alan Conway's murder mystery and we, the readers, are treated to a second mystery novel within a mystery novel. Still no "bright light" revelation comes from the novel, but as her interviews continue, Susan remembers things from the novel that begin to make more sense to her.

Then, in Golden Age mystery fashion, all the relevant characters are gathered together in one place for the final reveal.

Anthony Horowitz's creativity and ingenuity are on full display here. This is a complex puzzle mystery that should satisfy any fan of the mystery genre.

Reviews of Traditional History Mysteries

Undoubtedly the sub-genre of mystery fiction where most traditional mysteries can be found today is the historical mystery one. And it makes sense, because so many of these history mysteries harken back to the puzzle mystery structure of a Golden Age mystery. Here are some fine examples.

MIDNIGHT AT MALABAR HOUSE

by Vaseem Khan

Hodder & Stoughton, £16.99

Rating: A-

[Reviewed by George Easter]

This story takes place during the aftermath of Partition, which separated India from newly formed Pakistan in the late 1940s. It is a time of great social upheaval, and one change, though seemingly minor in scale compared to others, was the appointment of India's first female policewoman, Inspector Persis

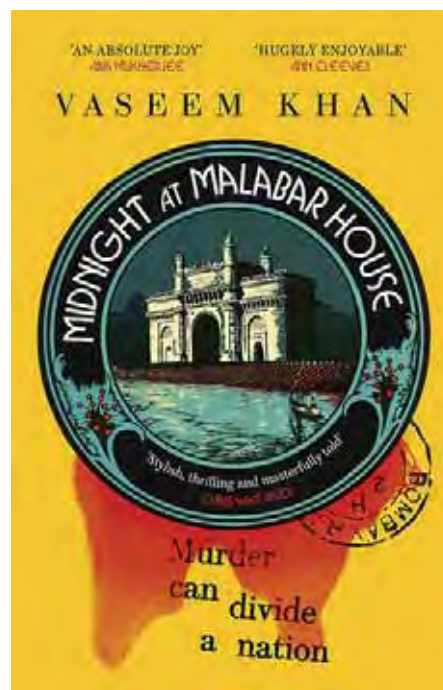
Wadia. Of course this is met with great resistance among the ranks of male policemen, but Persis is a determined woman and anxious to prove herself. She is assigned to Bombay's Malabar House, the city's most unwanted police unit. It is there that Persis finds herself on New Year's Eve while her male colleagues are enjoying the celebrations. The phone rings and Persis suddenly has to assume the lead in an investigation into the death of English businessman and government consultant Sir James Herriot. His body has been discovered trouserless and murdered at his New Year's Eve Party.

Inspector Persis Wadia finds that Herriot's public persona (cheerful and kind) does not comport with his private one as a womanizer and corrupt businessman. But when one of his servants confesses to the killing, Persis receives a lot of pressure from above to close the case. But she doesn't believe the confession and continues to investigate. Helping her along the way is a British criminalist (crime scene investigator) named Archie Blackfinch, with whom Persis forms an awkward partnership.

At home, Persis lives with her bookshop owning father, who is still grieving the loss of his wife, Sanaz, and is unwilling yet to divulge the circumstances surrounding her death to Persis. Aunt Nussie is insistent in her plans to get Persis married and producing children, but marriage will mean having to leave the police, and Persis hasn't worked so hard to get to where she is to let go of her ambitions and ideals so lightly.

MIDNIGHT AT MALABAR HOUSE proceeds at a rapid pace through the various investigative lines taken by Persis until a satisfying conclusion in the wrap-up scene, where all the suspects are gathered together for the final reveal. The author is a great fan of the traditional mystery and uses all of its tropes to good effect.

This start of a new series is a departure for Vaseem Khan from his delightful Baby Ganesh Agency series, which he has promised to get back to. In the meantime, an Inspector Persis Wadia sequel, **THE DYING DAYS**, is scheduled to be published in the U.K. in July,



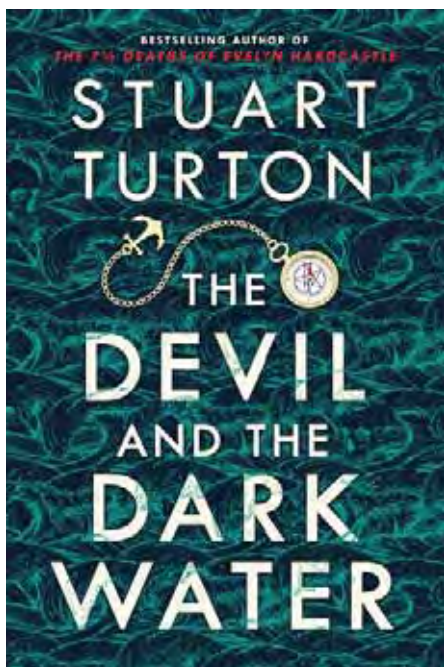
2021.

THE DEVIL AND THE DARK WATERby Stuart Turton
Sourcebooks, \$26.99**Rating: B-**

[Reviewed by Larry Gandle]

In 1634, a ship is leaving Batavia (what is now Jakarta, Indonesia) bound for Amsterdam carrying spices for the Dutch East India Company. It is also loaded with many jewels and a secret device which is to be delivered to the board of the company. Aboard the ship is Samuel PIPPS who loves to solve crimes (detectives did not exist then). He is in shackles, accused of an unknown crime, and is to be executed for it. With him is his trusted sidekick, Arent Hayes -- a huge behemoth of a man who is his bodyguard. Also onboard are various dignitaries, their families and a vicious crew. Among them, it seems, is a demon called Old Tom who wants to exact revenge on various passengers. The result is a tumultuous journey full of fatalities with a deadly storm thrown in for good measure.

This is a huge book -- 500 pages long. It is a swashbuckling tale which will keep a reader's interest until it is realized the story is too long and repetitious. There are so many superfluous episodes. Throughout the story, reality must be suspended and the denouement is 50+



pages of an unsatisfying resolution with endless explanations one more bizarre than another. The story is compelling. The characters well drawn. The research of the sailing ships of that time appears to be thorough and there is a strong sense of locale and setting. It desperately needed editing and too be honest, the whole thing is just foolish nonsense. After spending so much time reading this book, I closed it with an unsatisfying sense that I just wasted a whole lot of hours. Bottom line -- best to avoid despite so much critical praise.

George's Take

I basically agree with Larry on this one. The book is too long and would have been better if it had been edited down. There were all sorts of shifting loyalties among a large cast of characters. It was impossible to predict how any of the characters, except Arent Hayes and Sara, the wife of the Governor-General (the two principal protagonists), would act. The resolution is clever, but again, too long in its reveal. I can see why this novel got a lot of critical acclaim because the author's imagination is quite extraordinary. But not everything the author did with that imagination worked for me. **Rating: B**

MORTMAIN HALL

by Martin Edwards

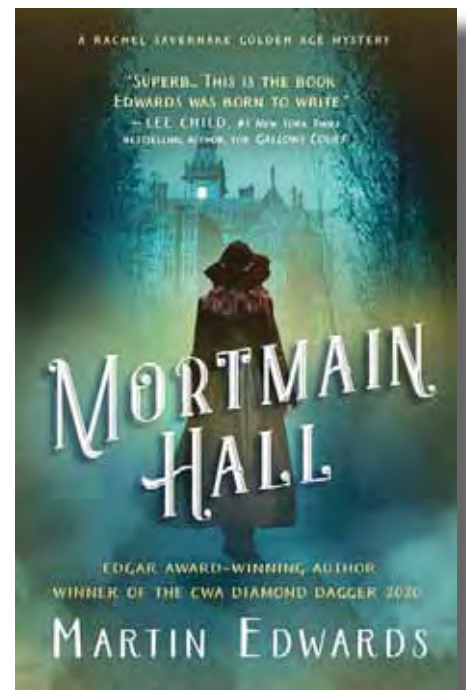
Head of Zeus, £18.99, in U.S., Poisoned Pen Press, \$15.99

Rating: B+

[Reviewed by George Easter]

What happens when a true crime junkie meets another true crime junkie? **MORTMAIN HALL** happens. This book, as does its predecessor **GALLOWES COURT**, revolves around the lives of the wealthy Rachel Savernake, who has a inordinate interest in any unsolved murder, and her friend, the inquisitive reporter Jacob Flint.

The time is the early 1930s, just as the world is entering a devastating economic collapse. Rachel Savernake, the heir to a large fortune amassed by her unlikeable father, seems to be unfazed by what is happening outside the walls of her London mansion. There she is handled with great care by the Truelove family, Cliff, Martha and Hetty, who



are more like cherished relatives than servants. Rachel's natural beauty could make her the belle of the ball, but she chooses to remain aloof from most social concerns so as to devote the majority of her time to the pursuit of justice and amateur crime investigation.

Rachel is introduced to Leonora Dobell, another crime enthusiast and mistress of Mortmain Hall, by Jacob Flint and the two agree to meet to talk over their mutual interest. Leonora's area of expertise is miscarriages of justice and she has set up a strange gathering of three people whom she perceives to have gotten away with murder. She invites Rachel to attend the gathering at Mortmain Hall. Fireworks ensue.

Rachel's motivations are still a bit of a mystery to me and she is a bit difficult to warm up to, but that will keep me reading this series to find out more and to try to "make friends with her."

I'm very pleased with the success that Martin Edwards, this year's winner of the CWA Diamond Dagger (Lifetime Achievement), has experienced with this new set of Golden-Age mysteries. It is the type of thing that Martin was born to write. His expertise on the traditional British whodunnit is legendary and he puts it to marvelous use writing this series.

There are a couple of extras thrown

into **MORTMAIN HALL**. One is a hand-drawn map of Mortmain Hall and its surroundings and the other is a chapter at the end of the book titled **Cluefinder** which lists 34 clues that the author liberally sprinkled throughout the narrative. Cluefinders were included in a number of Golden-Age mysteries.

AN EXTRAVAGANT DEATH

by Charles Finch
Minotaur, \$27.99

Rating: B+

[Reviewed by George Easter]

London, 1878. After Charles Lennox ferrets out some corruption in Scotland Yard, it is thought best not to further embarrass the Yard by being in London for the controversial trial, so Charles accepts an offer from Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli to undertake a quasi-diplomatic mission for the Queen. In other words, he is told to “get out of town.” Fortunately, Charles has long held a desire to visit the United States.

Arriving in New York City to some fanfare, Charles is immediately immersed in old Knickerbocker society and its new robber baron Gilded Age splendor. His reputation as a skilled sleuth precedes him and it seems that everyone of note wants to meet the famous detective.

Then Charles receives a desperate request from the very wealthy William

Stuyvesant Schermerhorn, who is in Newport, Rhode Island, the summer retreat for the New York City elite. It appears that Lily Allingham, a beautiful young 19-year-old girl, has been murdered. She was to be engaged to Schermerhorn’s son and the father fears for his son’s reputation. A special train is dispatched to take Charles to Newport, where he provides the reader with a detailed account of what life is like among the very rich such as the Astors and the Vanderbilts. Charles has led a privileged life, but nothing like this.

Being on unfamiliar ground, Charles has to start from scratch. Eventually a few suspects emerge and Charles crosses them off the list one by one. Until there is one left, whom he confronts at the social event of the season, Lady Astor’s ball.

The mystery elements were well done, but I think that the depiction of Gilded Age Newport with its “cottages” of 70 to 100+ rooms is what I will remember most. The author’s attention to historical detail is quite impressive.

MURDER IN OLD BOMBAY

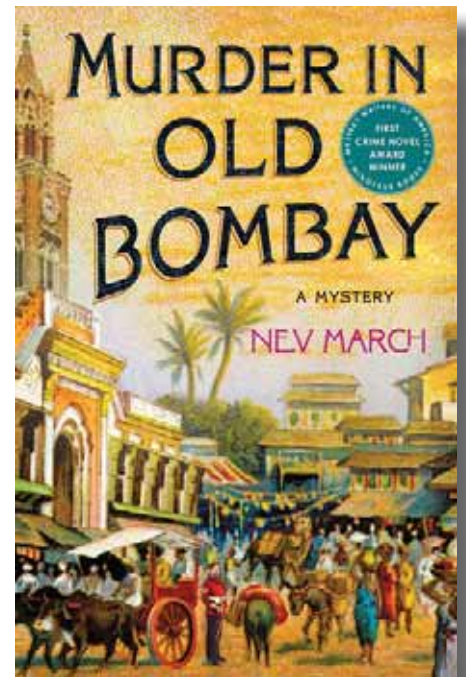
by Nev March
Minotaur, \$26.99

Rating: B-

[Reviewed by George Easter]

Army Captain Jim Agnihotri, the son of an unknown English father and an Indian mother, is badly wounded in military action and has been recuperating over the past year. One of his pastimes is rereading the Sherlock Holmes canon. Knowing that his career as a soldier is over Jim wonders if he may have a new one as a detective. Jim has been intrigued by a news article recounting the death of two young women who fell from a Bombay university tower. And Jim is moved by Adi Framji, the widower of one of the women, who insists that his wife and the second victim, his sister, did not commit suicide. So Jim approaches the Framji family and is hired to investigate these deaths. Aside from his work, Jim grows to admire the family, the only one he has ever gotten to know, having been orphaned at age two.

The investigation goes as one might



expect, with many Sherlockian references and even some disguises. The socially unacceptable romance that develops between Jim and Diana Framji is totally unbelievable and shifted the storyline away from being a historical mystery to being more a historical romance – not to my liking. If you like historical romance novel, you should enjoy this one. It is peopled with interesting characters and lots of red herrings.

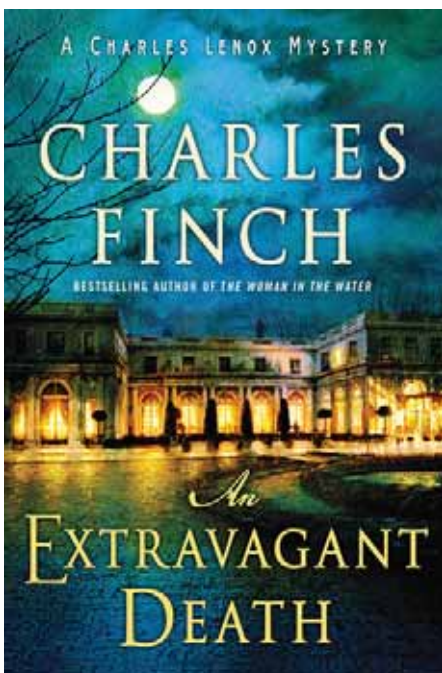
Keeping on Schedule

This issue was published three months to the day after the last issue was published and sent out. I have made a commitment to stick to a strict 3-month schedule and I should be able to keep to it.

DP #90 is 98-pages long, which is 14 pages more than the normal print issue was. So digital subscribers are getting more content for less money.

If you miss reading **DP** in the interim between issues, please go to [www..deadlypleasures.com](http://www.deadlypleasures.com) where I post news and items of interest on an almost daily basis.

Here’s to a return to normal life. I get my first Covid-19 shot on January 23rd.



Letters



Keith Hurst

I discovered *Deadly Pleasures Mystery Magazine* several years ago when I was trolling (different meaning now) through publications to find a readable thriller and crime review magazine. It has become an important part of my reading life.

The first thing that struck me immediately was how inexpensive the magazine is, taking into account the volume of reviews and the quality of the literary reviews in it.

At that time, I had purchased all of my books from booksellers in hard copy and I of course had my favourites. I also had a huge bookcase.

Deadly Pleasures opened my eyes to quality mystery, crime and thriller authors I had never read before. Luckily before my bookcase collapsed and/or I went broke one of my children bought me an e-reader. Fortunately for me, unlike George, I love my I-Pad and carry it with me with my Kindle app including hundreds of extra books.

Now because of you and your fellow reviewers, instead of 20 favourite authors, I have hundreds and look forward to regular releases from them.

My life (crazy busy anyway) has just got a little busier and with each new issue I scour the pages for new authors to add to the others. I love science fiction as well, but that genre is fighting for my time and losing.

Although I have not met George, I feel like a follower and find that his ratings are usually right on the mark.

Please keep up the good work.

Forest Williams

Finished going thru *DP* #89 last night. Is your best ever! So full of good info. I made a note to buy Max Tomlinson & Spencer-Fleming which I had not heard of before. I also enjoyed Tom Kiernan's comment about how he

uses Fantastic Fiction to help him keep track. That is the best site, and I am on it everyday. I also have developed my own spread sheet system to help me keep track. I have several categories:

READ BOOKS – my current list of buys and what is coming to buy, and which dealer I need to go to to see if they will have signed copies.

AUTHORS WHO HAVE NOT PUBLISHED RECENTLY – sort of the fall back sheet for my secondary authors who may not be as prolific, but who I continue to follow, either to buy a new one of theirs, or just to keep track and maybe to move on to one of the next

(on the above two lists, I print the new books coming in one color, and the books I do not have with no color)

DECEASED AUTHORS – the title speaks for itself

SALE LIST – don't know what to do with this one, as I can never figure out how to sell. Will do that when I retire.

NON-FANTASTIC FICTION – a very short list

ALL PAPERBACKS – Authors who publish in paper only

BRUCE KAHN BOOKS – a collector who has the most pristine copies of books I have ever seen. I have mostly accumulated these from Between The Covers store.

Then I color code the authors depending on where I have them: BASEMENT, LIBRARY at Beach, MAN CAVE #1, MAN CAVE #2, UPSTAIRS at Beach

Running out of room, but this hobby gives me so much pleasure (not *Deadly*!) that I am now a BOOKAHOLIC!

Could not resist telling you about my system and Tom's letter to you hit my hot button. [Ed. Note: *TWO Man Caves!* Wow! We're all jealous.]

Lee Goldberg

[In reference to his article on the



Lee Goldberg

Hardman series published in the last issue] Thank you so much! Post-script, in the year or so since I wrote that article, I have discovered and published a long-lost, never-published, final HARDMAN novel entitled *ALL KINDS OF UGLY*, which scored rave reviews from *Publishers Weekly* and *Kirkus*... and I also released his unpublished (and substantially revised) novels *DUST IN THE HEART*, *A TALENT FOR KILLING*, and *THE SPY IN A BOX*, which also scored great trade reviews. I wish Ralph Dennis and Bill Crider were alive to see it.

I have one more unpublished Ralph Dennis manuscript -- a novel about college basketball -- that I'll be revising releasing in late 2020, early 2021. At that point, every novel Ralph wrote, published and unpublished, will have been released.

Steele Curry

Just finished Jake Needham's latest book, *MONGKOK STATION*, and thought it was terrific. Inspector Samuel Tay was in great form. John August, his deadly associate Claire and Jack Shepherd all got involved in helping Tay pursue his investigation. For his backstory, Jake gave a vivid depiction of the turmoil Hong Kong is currently experiencing. I highly recommend you read *Mongkok Station*. It should be a strong candidate for the Paperback of the Year

Award. [I agree. See my review.]

Jeff Poppo

I watched a bit of The Night of a Thousand Authors (see www.deadly-pleasures.com for more information) and thought it was pretty good – an impressive array of authors. It was interesting to see the interactions between the various authors – I came away with new appreciation for some of them. [Still available to watch on YouTube]

I have been remiss in not e-mailing and telling you how much I enjoyed the last **DP** – I thought it was a great issue. Based on your recommendation I went and read **THE LAST FLIGHT** (just called **THE FLIGHT** here in Australia) and really enjoyed it. It kept me hooked until the end.

Your list of captivity books was really good, the only other one I could readily think of was an early Liza Cody, **BAD COMPANY**, where Anna Lee is locked up in a cellar with a teenage girl – I remember it as being pretty good.

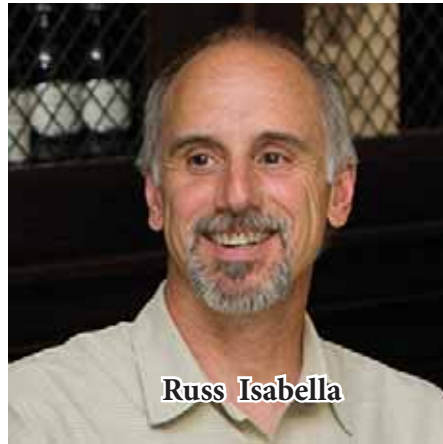
Like always, your comments reminded me how close our reading preferences are – I liked your comments on Val McDermid – I too regard her **A PLACE OF EXECUTION** as one of the best crime novels of the past 20 years or so! Very cleverly plotted book.

I saw your article on the Publisher Weekly Best novels – I can only say that I have read three of the books on the list, none of them would feature on my 'Best of the Year' list. I thought that **SEVEN LIES** was an okay domestic novel, but only barely qualified as a crime novel, and was not a thriller like the publishers were claiming. **EIGHT PERFECT MURDERS** was solid, but not a top one for me. And **THE END OF OCTOBER** was an interesting virus thriller, that was let down by some average writing and a weak ending. I also could not get over how the main character deserted his wife and kids in the middle of a crisis – admittedly he was trying to save the world, but it was an odd note for me. The rest I haven't read.

Russ Isabella

[The former Assistant Editor of **DP**]
I finally have had a chance to look

through Issue #89. Wow. I'm glad you mentioned that it's 10 pages longer than usual because I didn't think I'd remembered issues being this long. Kind of amazing. The issue looks really nice, and it's fun to see so many of the usual suspects contributing. I'm going to have to take some time looking through the reviews and developing a reading list, with special attention to your A-list. I also loved the Letters, which must make you feel very good about **DP**, as they should. It's an insanely impressive publication, and it blows my mind to think about how long you have been pouring your heart into it. Thank you for sharing it with me. [We all miss you.]



Russ Isabella

Jane Miles

Congratulations on the PDF issue #89 of **Deadly Pleasures**. I especially like being able to search the issue for authors of special interest.

I thought Julie Clark's **THE LAST FLIGHT** was excellent, and hope we see more of her soon. Her first book was good, but I thought this thriller was even better.

I also thought **TROUBLED BLOOD** [by Robert Galbraith] was excellent. And I don't see why it offended anyone. In books, murderers dress up to confuse their victims. Does putting a fake cast on your arm make the author disrespectful of handicapped persons??? I just don't understand the uproar. I got the book from our library and was at first put off by the 900 + pages -- but it was a speedy read (heavy, also!).

Also recently finished Anthony Horowitz's **MOONFLOWER MURDERS**. He's always entertaining

But my absolute favorite of all has been **THE THURSDAY MURDER CLUB** by Richard Osman. Maybe it's because we live in a retirement community -- but I haven't laughed so hard in a long time. Many of the happenings (such as the parking police) seemed true to life! The book was funny, and also a good mystery. I see on amazon that #2 in the series is scheduled for 2021 and I can't wait!

I'm also eager for Jane Harper's **THE SURVIVORS**, and appreciated the sneak peak review on your website.

Now off to start Connelly's **THE LAW OF INNOCENCE**. I'm sure it will be an enjoyable read!

Thanks so much for putting together your remarkable magazine. I can see that you, your associate editor and your reviewers work very hard. I was always excited when I received the copy of the magazine in the mail, and I remain excited about the email PDF. I have a nice folder in my files so I can keep all the issues. I just want you and your associates to know you're very much appreciated.

Lee Vernon

I just wanted to let you know what a great job you have been doing with the **DP** website. I particularly enjoyed the **Good Ol' Days Game**. What a hoot as they might have said back in the 50s! Your lined stockings answer kind of threw me as I knew that wasn't the proper term, but I could not remember what they were called. I did a online search and spotted seamed stockings. Of course, it was seamed! Memory just need a jog. [I'll make the change.]

Those old covers were amazing. On #27, I guessed an all white basketball team. On #14, I guessed wearing only one fishnet stocking and rolled up denim jeans. Apparently rolled up cuffs are still fashionable. Back in the old days, it was done for growth spurts and hand me downs, not fashion. You saw patched jeans instead of ripped jeans.

In closing, more thanks for the summary Best of 2020 posted on the website. I've already used it for searches. [For the rest of you, this summary of the Best of 2020 is included in this issue.

Larry Gandle on

The CWA Dagger Awards



Please note -- this column was written (and posted) prior to the award winners being announced. So, my picks were made before the actual winner was named. Also, my reviews in all categories will be listed from my pick to my least favorite in each category.

GOLD DAGGER

This year's shortlist is a strong one. They are all very good to excellent, which made my reading experience much better than it has been in prior years.

WHAT YOU PAY FOR

by Claire Askew

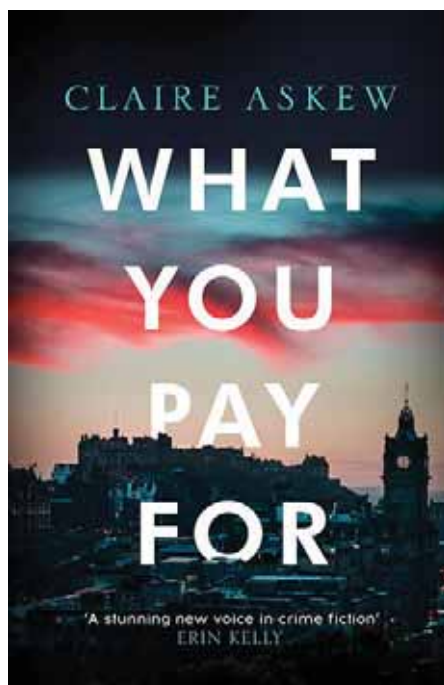
Hodder and Stoughton, \$26.99

Rating: A

DI Helen Birch of the Edinburgh police is depressed in that she is remembering her brother's disappearance fourteen years ago. She is convinced he is dead but her mother, who has since passed away, was convinced he was still alive. Her mother was right. Charlie returns to Birch's home and she discovers that he is the source of a raid that took down a major mobster but without his evidence the crime lord will soon go free. It seems Charlie became a member of the mob many years ago and now has much to atone for. Birch must make a choice- arrest her long-lost brother, Charlie, or let the mob boss go free. There is a lot riding on this choice. Eventually both Birch's life, as well as Charlie's are at risk as the mobsters target them.

This is a brilliant second novel. Not only are the characters so well realized but they have a moral dilemma. Charlie should turn himself in and testify against his old boss but Helen should

arrest him and arrange a deal to convince him to testify. Alternate chapter form keeps the plot buzzing along as we learn about Charlie's past and Helen's current problems. It is difficult to put down this excellent novel. Initially I thought it would be one of those dull dreary British police procedurals, but, it is far from that. Highly recommended and an excellent addition to the CWA Gold Dagger shortlist. It is my pick for the award.



NOVEMBER ROAD

by Lou Berney

Morrow, \$26.99

Rating: A-

In November, 1963, Frank Guidry, a loyal henchman to New Orleans mobster, Carlos Marcello, is asked to drive a car to Houston. Kennedy is assassinated and he is again asked to go to Houston to pick up the car and drive it into the ocean. He quickly realizes that he is a potential leak in the assassination and

finds himself in mortal danger as Marcello's hitman is sent after him. He flees west to Las Vegas where he hopes a rival of Marcello will help him out.

In the meantime, Charlotte Ray, a disgruntled housewife living in Woodrow, Oklahoma with a drunken husband, decides to leave with her two children giving them a chance at a better life. Broken down in Arizona, she meets Frank Guidry who quickly realizes that Charlotte and her two girls will be an excellent shield hiding him from Carlos loyalists and the hitman. But the mobster crowd is too clever for that and they soon close in on him with Charlotte and the two girls in the way. Things get bloody really quickly leading to the surprise ending.

This book has been raved about by many reviewers of crime fiction. I will join their ranks. The author is an excellent writer for the genre. His characters are well fleshed out. The story is clever and compelling. The length is not excessive, and the multiple points of view alternating chapters is an excellent technique to keep the reader's interest. Highly recommended. It was also shortlisted for the Ian Fleming Steel Dagger Award.

JOE COUNTRY

by Mick Herron

Soho, \$26.95

Rating: A

The disgraced MI5 spies at Slough House all have their own problems they must deal with. New recruit, Lech Wicinski, is trying to discover how he was found with child porn on his work computer. Louisa Guy feels an obligation to find the lost son of her now deceased ex-lover in Wales. When Jackson Lamb finds out a man responsible for killing a member of Slough House may

be after the son Louise is searching for, he sends out the troops to possibly kill him.

I have not really liked the Slough House books before. This is the sixth book in the series and probably the fourth I have read or attempted to read. So many times our impression of a book can be determined by what we read immediately before this book and the expectation in that it is supposed to be a thriller. The style of writing is such that the plot moves along slowly and there are so many characters to keep straight that it makes the reading of the book initially quite demanding. In other words, to appreciate the books, the reader must work for it. Whenever I approached a Mick Herron book, I had most likely come off reading a few international thrillers and simply was not in the right frame of mind for the Slough House books. This time, knowing how slow these books are, I read several slow and dull books that were longlisted for the Booker Prize for literary fiction. They made **JOE COUNTRY** a pleasure to read. It is still a slow read and George emailed me a list with a description of each of the characters. I will say, initially, the characters can be confusing as there are probably up to six separate subplots involving each of them. However, as the book progresses, the subplots coalesce into perhaps two or three very much related plots and the pacing picks up to thriller pace. It is really a unique style of writing and with some concentration, at least initially, it really works. Jackson Lamb is one of the most comical characters I have read in quite some time. I laughed out loud on numerous occasions. I confess that by giving the book it's due, I really liked it as I do value originality. I fully understand why the Brits nominate Mick Herron every year. Consider me now transformed from a hater to a fan. This is a well-deserved member of the CWA shortlist for the Gold Dagger. Highly recommended.

FORCED CONFESSIONS

by John Fairfax
Little Brown, £18.99

Rating: B+

William Benson is an ex-con convicted of murder sixteen years ago. Despite his conviction, some powerful barristers supported him including Helen Camberly who is actively dying of cancer. Benson is now a member of the bar dedicating himself to the defense of others. His current case concerns the murder of Dr Menderez, a physician from Spain who was living in London. Menderez had apparently fallen in love with his therapist, Karen Lynwood, and it seems that her husband, John, has killed the doctor because of the relationship he had with his wife. Things are not what they appear to be, however. Benson, now with a brilliant reputation, will do all he can to defend Karen and her husband. This is if Benson's demons from his past don't take over completely.

This is an excellent legal novel with a compelling trial at its heart. The characters are well portrayed and complex creations. The problem is that there are so many characters that it is hard to keep track of them. I think reading the previous two novels in the series will help but I often found it confusing when trying to decipher exactly who the characters were. It is too much work for a crime fiction novel. A number of twists occurred at the end which appeared to be endless. I liked the book but it is about 50 pages too long.

GOOD GIRL, BAD GIRL

by Michael Robotham
Scribner, \$27.00

Rating: B

Evie Cormac is the name given to a young teenager/woman found in a hidden room in a house where a man was brutally murdered. She won't tell anyone her name or her age. She remains unidentified living in a psych hospital as she has repeatedly run away from any foster home she was placed into. Cyrus Haven is a forensic psychologist who must evaluate Evie to determine if she can be released. He eventually agrees to foster care Evie in his own home. In the meantime, Jodie Sheehan, a high school skating champion is found dead in a park. She appears to be murdered. Cyrus is called to investigate. Evie ap-



pears to have a special talent. She could tell if anyone is lying by observing them speaking. Cyrus uses Evie to help solve the crime. This places them both into danger.

GOOD GIRL, BAD GIRL is a solid suspense novel. It is a bit too lengthy and slow in developing but once it hits its stride, the plot moves quickly to the exciting, but silly, climax. Evie and Cyrus are interesting and complex characters with tragic pasts. The story is clever and compelling enough to keep a reader's interest. This, not the best of the work we have seen from Michael Robotham, IMHO.

DEATH IN THE EAST

by Abir Mukherjee
Pegasus, \$25.95

Rating: B-

In 1922, Calcutta police detective Captain Sam Wyndham is off to an ashram in a small village in India in order to receive treatment to end his addiction to opium. At the same time, , in alternate chapter form, the story switches back to 1905 London where Sam is involved in the investigation of an ex-girlfriend of his. Slowly- excruciatingly slowly- the two stories merge together in a most improbable way leading to a locked room mystery.

This book is supposed to be an hom-

age to Agatha Christie. I can't imagine she would be pleased with the result. There are three separate stories here -- the London murder of 1905, the ashram treatment and finally Sam's recuperation in the local town where he comes upon a villain from his past. There are way too many impossible coincidences in this book. India is a very large country and it seems to be near impossible to randomly run into someone you have been seeking from the past especially in a remote tiny village. Characters are mostly cardboard cutouts. The pacing is languid, and the plot is way too long. The killer is easy to figure out and the technique of the murder is beyond idiotically complex. It is a wonder this book is shortlisted for the CWA Gold Dagger Award. It is easily the weakest book in the series. I did like the others for their authenticity to the time and place. This one is not recommended.

My Pick
WHAT YOU PAY FOR

by Claire Askew

The Winner

GOOD GIRL, BAD GIRL

by Michael Robotham

**IAN FLEMING STEEL
DAGGER AWARD**

This category has always been bewildering to me. When it was first established, George and I were elated that thrillers would get their own award. It seemed to us that thrillers never received the respect they deserved. There is a definite art to the thriller novel and they are prized due to their ability to keep the reader glued to the pages as opposed to their literary merit. Unfortunately, the judges in the CWA were given a vague classification that the book needed to be written in "the same vein as an Ian Fleming novel" Hence, literary, atmospheric and slow spy thrillers began to win the award with occasional years when Lee Child or Dan Silva would be shortlisted. In an effort to clarify the criteria, the CWA defined the Steel Dagger books as,

"Ian Fleming said there was one essential criterion for a good thriller, 'one simply has to turn the pages'. Eligible books in this category are thrillers set in any period and include, but are not limited to, spy fiction, psychological thrillers and action/adventure stories."

So "not limited to" means they could fall anywhere in the genre. This year the book selection falls well into the category except for one of them as delineated below.

NOVEMBER ROAD

by Lou Berney
Morrow, \$26.99

Rating: A-

(see plot description under its Gold Dagger nomination in this article)



THE WHISPER MAN

by Alex North
CeladonBooks, \$26.99

Rating: B+

Tom Kennedy and his son, Jake decide to have a fresh start after the death of Tom's wife. They move to another town and into a house that, unbeknownst to them, has a checkered past and is thought to be haunted. A six-year-old child disappears even after Frank Carter, a serial killer who lived in the town prying on the children there, has been imprisoned for years. Could it be a copycat killer? It seems that Jake

may be next in that he hears a whispering man at night. When the missing child turns up dead, the stakes get much higher and Jake seems to be in imminent danger.

Alex North has created an eminently readable thriller written in multiple points of view. Using the different voices ratchets up the suspense. Characters are reasonably created but there are some stock comic book figures. The house is truly scary but the silly thing is that once it becomes apparent that Jake is seriously in danger, why stay in the house? This book has been shortlisted for the Ian Fleming Steel Dagger and it is certainly a compulsive enough thriller to be considered for the Award. Recommended.

BETWEEN TWO EVILS

by Eva Dolan
Raven Books, £7.99

Rating: B

Joshua Ainsworth, a physician who works at Long Fleet, an immigrant woman's detention center in Cambridgeshire, is found murdered in his home. DS Ferreira and DI Zigic are assigned the investigation. It appears that women might have been abused while being held in the facility but the administration is being closed mouthed about it. At the same time, Walton, accused of being a serial rapist and killer, has been released on a technicality. He is threatening DS Ferreira in that he is trying to locate his wife and child who are in witness protection. Dealing with these two cases will place both Ferreira and Zigic into danger as they must navigate violent family relationships and coverups.

I have several questions about this novel after having completed it. First of all, why is it so long? The book stands at a remarkable 468 small typed pages. I wonder if anyone edits this author who is not on the scale of a Stephan King or JK Rowling. What is more incredible and a testament to the author, is that I stuck with it and finished the novel. Only two plot points kept the narrative manageable and the characters are well developed. The book is far from perfect with way too much repetition and

pointless episodes bulking up an already overlong book. The second question I have is why is this book on the shortlist for the Ian Fleming Steel Dagger? It is not at all written in the same vein as the Fleming work. It is a very long British police procedural. The book would be a much better fit in the Gold Dagger category. Despite the length, it is a compelling read and I would recommend it but not as a spy novel or thriller.

ONE WAY OUT

by A.A. Dhand
Transworld, £7.99

Rating: B-

On a beautiful Sunday afternoon in Bradford, UK, in the city's center, a message goes up on the movie screen to flee the area as a bomb will go off in 20 minutes. The crowds flee and a bomb levels the city center. It turns out the local right-wing militia wants four of the organizers of a radical Muslim group to be killed or another bomb will go off in a random mosque killing over a thousand Muslims. DCI Harry Vardee is called upon to find the four organizers of the radical Muslims. It turns out that his wife is in the mosque to be demolished if he fails, heightening the personal cost. He must find a way to locate the four before another disaster occurs.

There is a lot that occurs with the characters in the previous three novels



making the reading a bit more complex. The book is okay but highly forgettable. The writing is somewhat stilted with awful dialogue and cardboard characters—almost all are quite boring. The plot will keep the reader's interest and the length is manageable. Obviously, I didn't love the book and found it overlong in spite of its brief length. It is forgettable fluff.

THIS IS GOMORRAH
(US Title: **THE GOMORRAH GAMBIT**)

by Tom Chatfield
Mulholland, \$27.00

Rating: C+

Azi Bello is a brilliant computer hacker working out of a shed in his backyard. He is very adept at getting into all types of sites— the more difficult, the better. When he enters into the dark networks, he comes across a fellow hacker named Munir who has information on terrorist activity throughout Europe by the Islamic State. When Munir puts her life into his hands, Azi is suddenly confronted by a shadowy organization that recruits him whether he likes it or not. The goal is to infiltrate the network and to discover exactly what the Islamic State is up to and to stop them. However, nothing is truly what it seems to be.

This is an interesting concept that simply got way too technical for me. If the reader is adept and familiar with technical jargon, the book might work better for you. The plot is compelling enough to keep the pages turning, in spite of, the confusing depictions of hacking. The climactic scene is downright idiotic with the villain holding the gun divulging all. Characters are stock figures, overall, and the actual plot way over the top. I really can't recommend this book and I am confused as to why it is honored by appearing on the Crime Writer's Association shortlist of the Ian Fleming Steel Dagger Award for best thriller.

COLD STORAGE

by David Koeppe
Ecco, \$27.99

Rating: C-

A horrific fungus is found in the

western desert of Australia. A team from the United States investigates and they discover the town empty of life and every resident on the roof of their house eaten away to their bones. When one of the team is killed, the town is firebombed and a sample is placed into a huge Midwestern United States government storage facility. A couple of young people, hired to watch the facility, break into the cold storage area where the fungal samples are kept setting off a comedy of errors.

I am totally disappointed in this book. The first chapter set up a potential situation where the world could have been at stake. The suspense could have been intense. Instead, the author went onto an in-depth character study of several of the most uninteresting people you would ever want to meet. Rather than a global crisis it became personal and totally idiotic. Deers and cats and rats and cockroaches are killed but coming alive from the fungus. It is way past suspending belief. The author could have made this a suspenseful and compelling book throughout. Instead it is a crushing and totally stupid bore. Avoid!

My Pick

NOVEMBER ROAD

by Lou Berney

The Winner

NOVEMBER ROAD

by Lou Berney

THE JOHN CREASEY
(NEW BLOOD) DAGGER

This category is supposed to feature first time authors. The rules state,

"This award is for the best crime novel by a first-time author of any nationality first traditionally published in the UK in English during the Judging Period. 'Best crime novel by a first-time author' means that the author must not have had a novel of any sort traditionally published before under any name whatsoever. In the case of novels with more than one author, all the authors must meet this requirement."

It is an astounding oversight that

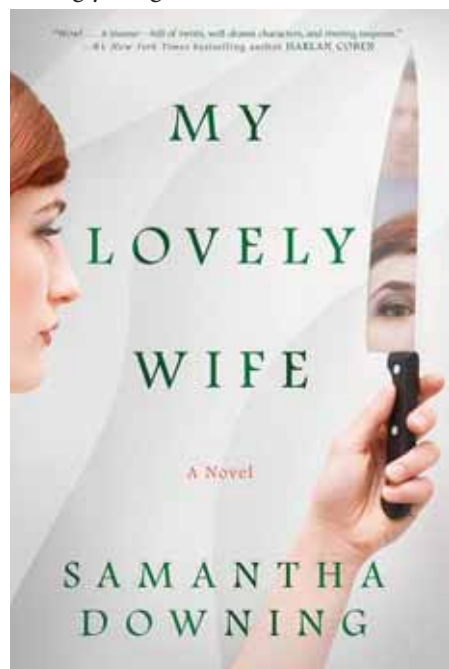
both the judges and the CWA committees failed to notice that Steph Cha has written three previous novels before having real success with her latest, **YOUR HOUSE WILL PAY**. I brought this issue up to the chair of the daggers and he had no problem with it after reading the first sentence of the above description. However, when I told him to read the next sentence, the problem became apparent. I was contacted by the secretary of the CWA who informed me that it is too late to remove the book from the list as it would embarrass the author. My response was to not remove the book but just inform the committee members so they will be aware of it. I would hope they would do the right thing and award an actual first novel with the Creasey Dagger. This in no way should be interpreted as a disparagement of **YOUR HOUSE WILL PAY**, which I consider a fine novel.

MY LOVELY WIFE

by Samantha Downing
Berkeley, 26.00

Rating: B

Millicent and her husband have been married for fifteen years. They are raising two children and appear, on the surface, to be a hard-working normal family. Yet, they have a secret hobby or passion. The two of them like killing young women and have done



so four times already. It appears as if they will never be caught- that is- until they make a mistake which might bring them down unless they could figure out something ingenious.

This is truly a remarkable debut effort. There are plenty of surprises and twists in store. The story is about two serial killers, so, assume the narrator (the unnamed husband) is totally unreliable. It is hard to identify with this couple, as they are both monsters. Expect major twists and turns- some of which you won't see coming while others are obvious. The book is totally entertaining and the fact that this is a debut author is kind of exciting, especially, if she has more plots like this one in mind.

THE MAN ON THE STREET

by Trevor Wood
Quercus, \$19.61

Rating: B

Jimmy Mullen is a homeless veteran of the Falklands War who still has nightmares related to the trauma he suffered at that time. Now, in 2012, while sleeping on a bench, he witnesses what appears to be a murder. Initially, he is not willing to get involved but when the victim's daughter asks the public for help, Jimmy reluctantly steps forward. This places him directly into the crosshairs of the killer.

This is a solid first novel. Jimmy is absolutely pulverized throughout the book making his subsequent recoveries increasingly unrealistic. The plot is reasonably compelling with the characters being somewhat stereotypic. Reality must be suspended in numerous instances- especially with the heroics at the end. The book is silly but entertaining. As a first effort, it is commendable.

THE WRECKAGE

by Robin Morgan-Bentley
Orion, \$19.62

Rating: B

Ben, a private school teacher, is on his way to work as he does every workday, when a man jumps in front of his car and Ben hits him. This sets off a chain of events which will change

the life of the man's wife Alice, her son, Max and Ben, himself. Yet nothing is truly how it appears to be.

This domestic suspense novel moves at an agonizingly lethargic pace. Everything the characters do is described in exact detail which can be quite frustrating. The author slowly sets up every scene and every interaction between Ben and Alice. There is, eventually, a twist but not one that will truly surprise the reader and, by the time it comes, has little bearing on the actual plot. The chapters are told in alternate character perspective which heightens interest as so many of the same events are looked at completely differently by Ben and Alice. The book is entertaining but isn't really a superior novel in the domestic suspense subgenre. A mild recommendation.

LITTLE WHITE LIES

by Philippa East
Harper Collins, \$16.99

Rating: B-

Anne White looked away from her daughter for a second seven years ago while on a train and hasn't seen her since then. However, her daughter, Abigail, inexplicably reappeared in a police station. She is brought back to her family. She disappeared when she was eight years old but is now fifteen. Of course, she is not the same person as before the disappearance. She is a brooding secretive teenager and resentful, for some reason. Yet, she appears physically healthy and well educated for her age. Eventually, the reader discovers exactly what happened all those years ago and the family must come together and heal.

This is an excruciatingly slow novel but always fascinating. There are many questions that need to be answered and eventually they all are. There are a number of twists and surprises near the end making the last fifty pages fly by. The pacing, however, was way too slow and for most of the book the story was tedious. This is a mild recommendation.

YOUR HOUSE WILL PAY

by Steph Cha
Ecco, \$26.99

Rating: B

Just following the riots in Los Angeles after the beating of Rodney King, Jung-Ja Han, a Korean woman, argues with a sixteen-year-old black woman and kills her. In an apparent miscarriage of justice, Han receives no jail time. Now decades later, Han is shot as she is leaving the pharmacy she works at. Undoubtedly, the crime is related to the prior shooting but who actually did it. The book follows the younger generation of both Han and the young black girl as they deal with the latest shooting.

The book has had a lot of buzz. It is well written with some reasonably realistic characterizations but in many ways, the plot dragged. The reaching out between the two families, I did not buy at all. It was extremely unrealistic, IMHO. Some call this book an instant classic. I will say it is quite forgettable. And somewhat dull. It is also a fourth novel and should not be eligible for the Creasey Dagger.

My Pick**MY LOVELY WIFE**

by Samantha Downing

The Winner**THE MAN ON THE STREET**

by Trevor Wood



Rest In Peace



It's been a tough year in the world of mystery fiction, both at home (the loss of *DP* Reviewer Sally Sugarman) and the community at large. For me personally I was shocked the most by the recent passing of **Parnell Hall**. A fixture at

**Parnell Hall**

mystery conventions, Parnell has always been considered one of the good guys of the mystery fiction world. He passed away from Covid 19, which he apparently caught in the hospital where he had a successful lung transplant.

Here is one story about Parnell that is vivid in my memory: Around the year 2000, I caught a taxi with Parnell Hall and Harlan Coben to take us to the airport (from Bouchercon). I sat in the front seat and they sat in the back. They started talking about their careers and the upshot was that because they wrote mysteries infused with a lot of humor, they didn't think that critics and fans took them seriously enough. Harlan said that he was going to try a new tack to become a better-selling author. It was the very next year in 2001 that **TELL NO ONE**, Harlan's breakout book, was published and the rest is history. I've often wondered what could have happened if Parnell (a gifted writer himself) had followed a similar tack. Parnell never achieved best-sellerdom, but he was a solid midlist writer, with a talent for deft plotting.

A death of great significance to the

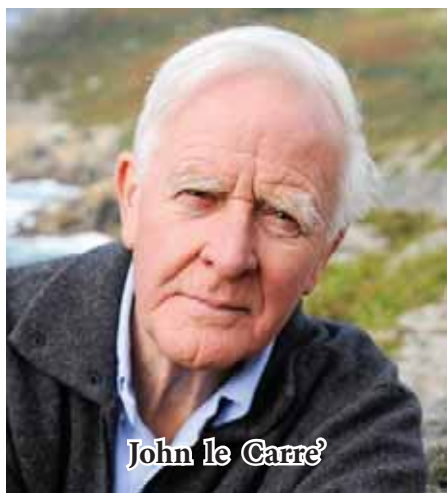
world of espionage and international thriller fiction is that of the legendary **John le Carré**. Here is a short tribute to him written by Steele Curry.

On December 12, 2020, David Cornwell, better known by his penname John le Carré, died, having authored 25 novels and one memoir. He started his career as a spy for Britain's MI5 and then MI6 before his first novel, *Call for the Dead*, was published in 1961, introducing his readers to the spymaster George Smiley, the central character in five of le Carré's novels and a supporting one in four.

While most of le Carré's novels featured the world of espionage, they all brilliantly portrayed the themes of moral ambiguity, treachery, betrayal and institutional corruption. A strong element of the author's popularity, however, was based on the quality and style of his writing highlighted by complicated plotting, descriptive characterizations, the way he conveyed the mood and atmosphere of his settings, and a sophisticated treatment of the frailty of personal relationships.

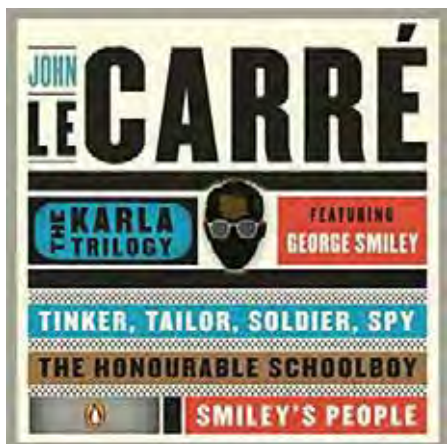
For le Carré, perhaps unconsciously Smiley served as a metaphor for Britain's decline as a world power during the Cold War – a lonely, steadfast, dowdy, vulnerable being with streaks of brilliance. Obviously, the opposite of Ian Fleming's James Bond.

Since the early 1960s, I've obsessively devoured le Carré's novels as soon as they were published. Some I've gone back and read a second time. I believe that le Carré's finest novels are his *The Quest for Karla* trilogy – **TINKER, TAILOR, SOLDIER, SPY** (1974)*, **THE HONOURABLE SCHOOLBOY** (1977) and **SMILEY'S PEOPLE** (1980) – that chronicled Smiley's battle with the Russian spymaster Karla at the height of the Cold War. It is likely that these three



books will stand the test of time as the pinnacle of espionage-related fiction by a British author.

Of all of le Carré's novels, I disliked **A PERFECT SPY** (1986), a loosely fictionalized account of his sociopath, drunk, duplicitous, loser of a father. Plowing through 463 pages devoted to a total cad is just not my idea of reading pleasure. Tellingly, le Carré regarded this as his best novel. In the end, the author paid for his father's funeral but didn't attend it.



For readers unfamiliar with le Carré, after **The Quest for Karla Trilogy** I recommend you read **THE SPY WHO CAME IN FROM THE COLD** (1963), **THE RUSSIA HOUSE** (1989), **THE LITTLE DRUMMER GIRL** (1983) and **OUR KIND OF TRAITOR** (2010) but pass on **CALL FOR THE DEAD** (1961), **A MURDER OF QUALITY** (1962), **THE LOOKING GLASS WAR** (1965), **A SMALL TOWN IN GERMANY** (1968), **THE NAIVE AND SENTI-**

MENTAL LOVER (1971), **THE TAILOR OF PANAMA** (1996), **A DELICATE TRUTH** (2013), **A LEGACY OF SPIES** (2017) and **AGENT RUNNING IN THE FIELD** (2019). The other books are good entertainment but not that notable.

Unlike Len Deighton, le Carré didn't know when to quit writing. His weakest novels were his later ones when he had become embittered in his outspoken criticism of the U. S., the British political establishment and the war on terror.

Other Recent Deaths

John Lutz, who was a deft hand at all kinds of fiction that fits under the umbrella of "mystery," died recently at the age of 81. He was a past president of both Mystery Writers of America and Private Eye Writers of America, and won the prestigious awards from both organization (the Edgar and the Shamus). I remember him as a quiet, but distinguished presence at several Bouchercons. I was a fan of his Fred Carver private eye series of ten novels, all of which I greatly enjoyed. Fred is an ex-cop disabled by a hold-up man's bullet, who has turned to private investigating. The series is set in Florida and is a fine example of the best in male private eye fiction of the 1980s and 1990s.



MWA Grandmaster **William Link** is best known for his work done in partnership with the late Richard Levinson. Their biggest claim to fame was the creation of the TV show **Columbo**. The pair had a four-decade's long career in writing for TV. They also created the series of **Mannix** and **Murder, She Wrote**. In 2010, the publisher Crippen & Landru came out with **THE COLUMBO COLLECTION** of short stories.

Jill Paton Walsh, who is best known to mystery readers as the author who continued the Lord Peter Wimsey series with four additional novels, passed away recently at age 83.

Richard Lupoff, mystery and science fiction author left this mortal coil on October 20 at age 85.

He is best known among mystery fans for his Lindsey and Plum series which began in 1988 with **THE COMIC BOOK KILLER**.

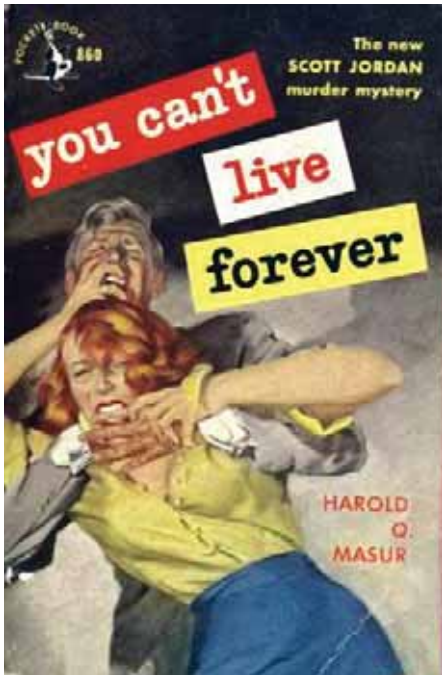
Alanna Knight is a Scottish crime writer best known for her Inspector Faro novels (19) and her

Rose McQuinn series of seven novels. She passed away recently at the age of 97.

Lawyers Can Be Fun

by George H. Madison

"It started with a summons, a brunette, and a Turk. The summons was in my pocket, the brunette was in trouble and the Turk was dead." -- discovered in a bathtub, no less. That snappy attention getter is pure pulp at its best and serves as the opening paragraph of Harold Q. Masur's **YOU CAN'T LIVE FOREVER** (1950), the third of eleven in the popular Scott Jordan series that ran from 1947-1983.



During that period, Jordan appeared in eleven full length novels and a PBO short story collection, **THE NAME IS JORDAN** (1962). He wrote over 500 short stories and three non-Jordan books.

Masur was a New York City guy. Born there on January 29, 1909, he spent his final days in NYC's late 20th century

burial ground: Boca Raton, located on the east coast of Florida. He died there, age 86, on September 16, 2005. Masur received both his B.A. and Juris Doctor from the highly esteemed NYU. From 1935-42, he practiced law prior to serving in the U.S. Air Force from 1942-45.

While in the service, he began to write for the pulps; continuing to contribute to them until the late 1940s. He learned their basic formula and easily adopted their style from the hundreds of pulp magazines that he purchased cheaply from the many NYC back date magazine stores that flourished from the 1930s to the '60s.

Masur largely rejected Earle Stanley Gardner's approach to a lawyer hero although he recognized Perry Mason as a successful and lucrative commercial entity. Masur once quipped that District Attorney Hamilton Burger stood for hamburger and queried – "How could one D.A. indict so many innocent people?" Scott Jordan was not a Perry Mason doppelganger.

He admired Richard Sale – another neglected writer; whom he described as "a consummate story teller who became very wealthy." Sale followed the money to Hollywood as a screenwriter and later became a producer and director.

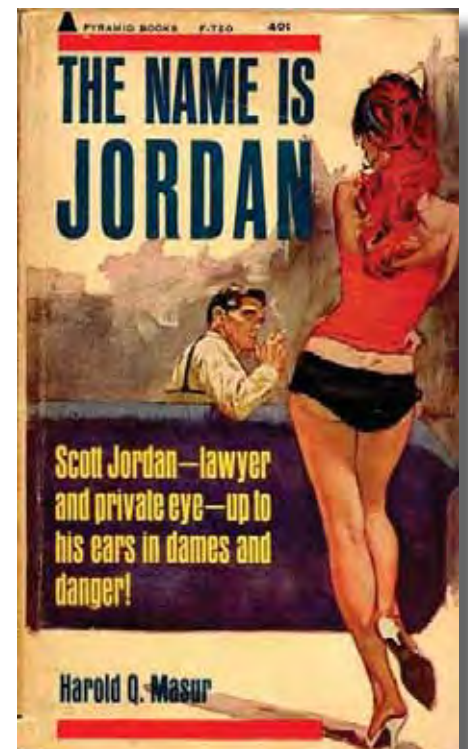
As one of the many returning GI's from WWII, Masur had little money and less direction. He took up residence with his sister on Staten Island, NYC's most remote borough, then only accessed by a ferry boat ride. He consequently resumed the practice of law, and his books achieved the commercial success that permitted him to return to the City. He later became a popular



lecturer, taught writing, served as the President of the MWA and was their General Counsel.

Masur was an interesting fellow. An early biography indicated that he worked in summer stock and briefly was a tennis pro. When asked what the "Q" in his name stood for, he replied: "The family story is that my father looked at me in the cradle and said that we finally had some QUALITY in the family." Always inquisitive, he extensively researched art forgery and included it in Jordan's final case, **THE MOURNING AFTER** (1983), written sixteen years after his penultimate Scott Jordan effort.

Masur practiced law for over 50 years. He resided on Manhattan's toney East Side and used his professional



experiences to great advantage in his books. He never embraced Gardner's courtroom gimmicks. Instead, he intended to affect a more Nero Wolfe approach to cases with Jordan acting as both Wolfe and Archie Goodwin. For plots, he culled the pages of the New York Law Journal, snatching cases and embellishing them with Jordan's voice. All benefit from tight plotting clever dialogue, relentless pacing and satisfying conclusions.

Scott Jordan is an excellent attorney, one who has argued before the U.S. Supreme Court and has an office in nearby Rockefeller Center. He is urbane and appealing, and has been described as nice looking in a Gregory Peck way. Although well educated, he is a fit and reliable man in a fight.

Jordan chooses to live in a well-appointed, comfortable hotel suite. He listens to classical music and drinks fine, adult beverages. A confirmed bachelor he enjoys women but is not overly controlled by his libido. The closest he ever came to establishing a permanent relationship was with Dulcy in his first adventure, **BURY ME DEEP**. Pity he didn't take the plunge. I approved of her, but suspect that Masur abandoned the character fearing that she would complicate future installments. Jordan is not a womanizer, but his roving eye and frequently engaging casual relationships attest to his masculinity.

Rather than describing hackneyed, unrealistic and silly courtroom scenes, Masur has Jordan utilize his legal expertise to assist him in his investigations. Jordan remains poised and ever resourceful as he narrates each book in the first person.

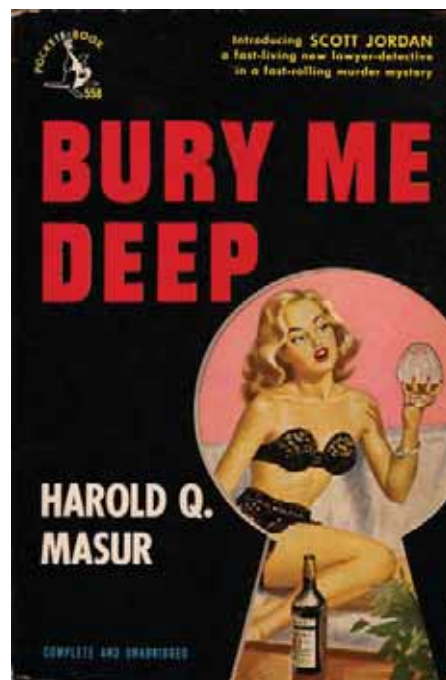
One of the attractions of a Jordan book is the recurring characters. They are led by NYPD Detective Lt. John Nola, Homicide East. He is an intelligent, hardworking cop with whom Jordan shares a working relationship; one based on trust. Masur writes: "Generally the police officer was always a big, fat, dumb Irishman. I decided to use a smart Italian to be different."

Unlike Nero Wolfe's Inspector Cramer, Nola respects Jordan and acknowledges the results of his investigations.

He frequently protects him from a particularly arrogant D.A., who is always an obnoxious windbag, as well as from his staff that emulates his poor attitude and antagonistic behavior.

Two others in the supporting case are P.I. Max Turner and Jordan's secretary, Cassidy, who is loyal and dependable. Turner is Nero Wolfe's Saul Panzer; competent, reliable and always ready to assist. Of Cassidy Masur writes: "they (detectives) all had gorgeous secretaries.....Mine was fat, forty and faithful." Masur is, indeed, different.

I initially read Masur's **METROPOLITAN OPERA MURDERS** (1951), ghost written for Helen Traubel, a popular soprano/personality of the day. He was severely restricted by the desired format. Nonetheless, the writing was good enough to arouse my interest in him. After reading his first Scott Jordan, **BURY ME DEEP**, I was so enthralled that I purchased the other ten episodes and his short story collection.



Masur was an original. He was neither Rex Stout nor Earle Stanley Gardner; although certain comparisons are inevitable. His books presume that a reader possess a modicum level of sophistication to be fully enjoyed.

The highly esteemed Anthony Boucher described Masur's Scott Jordan as "Perry Mason with much better

prose." Dare I add that he is fun and a pleasure to read.

Scott Jordan Series

BURY ME DEEP (1947)

SUDDENLY A CORPSE (1949)

YOU CAN'T LIVE FOREVER (1950)

SO RICH, SO LOVELY, AND SO DEAD (1952)

THE BIG MONEY (1954)

TALL, DARK, AND DEADLY (1956)

THE LAST GAMBLE (1958)

SEND ANOTHER HEARSE (1960)

THE NAME IS JORDAN (1962) – PBO
– 10 short stories

MAKE A KILLING (1964)

THE LEGACY LENDERS (1967)

THE MOURNING AFTER (1983)

He also authored three stand-alone mystery/crime novels:

THE ATTORNEY (1973) – a complex trial mystery.

THE BROKER (1981) – a murder in the high rent district and the aforementioned, less than epic – **METROPOLITAN OPERA MURDERS** (1951)

A Nice Letter by Jeanette Voss

I can't tell you how excited I was to read your review of **TROUBLED BLOOD** by Robert Galbraith because I felt exactly the same way. It could have gone on for another 300 pages and I would have been happy. The build up of the relationship between the two characters has been masterful, and I can hardly wait for the next book in the series. I'm glad it didn't take as long between books four and five as it did between three and four.

The magazine looks great – I miss the paper format, but it's nice to see all color, and I know it must be much nicer for you to work with. I had visited the website and seen the review of **THE THURSDAY MURDER CLUB** by Richard Osman and I purchased it and thoroughly enjoyed it too.

Editor's Message



Sally Sugarman, Long-time DP Reviewer Passes Away. We are very sad to announce the passing of long-time *DP* Reviewer Sally Sugarman. I never met Sally but she came highly recommended as a reviewer of history mysteries by Sue Feder when Sue discontinued her history mystery newsletter. Sally wrote for us for many years and I was always appreciative of her knowledgeable reviews. I had no idea she was as old as she was. Making it to 91 years old is quite an accomplishment. A detailed obituary outlining Sally's many accomplishments is posted on www.deadlypleasures.com

With the recent deaths of Norma Dancis and now Sally Sugarman *DP* is definitely more male-oriented, so I'm in the process of replacing them with two female reviewers.



Sally Sugarman

Will We Be Able to Attend New Orleans Bouchercon in 2021? A lot can happen between now (I'm writing this the third week of January, 2020) and August 25, 2021, the opening day of Bouchercon. As of right now effective Covid-19 vaccines are just rolling out and will be available to the over-65 set (which is the major demographic of a

typical Bouchercon) by mid-February to early March of 2021, depending on one's age, health condition and where you live. I don't know what the timeline is for the general public under 65 receiving vaccinations, but I suspect it will be well before August, 2021, especially since two vaccines have been approved by the FDA and more are likely to follow.

Once I'm vaccinated (twice) and a month (I've recently heard it may be a shorter period than that) has passed for the vaccine to become fully effective, then I'm good to go to New Orleans. I'm optimistic that we all will be able to attend. Some coming from foreign lands, such as *DP* contributors Jeff Popple, Ali Karim and Steele Curry, will have to see travel restrictions to and from the United States lifted.

Mystery Mike Bursaw is one of the Chairs for the convention. He tells me that he is prepared for any contingency. He has made alternative plans for a full, normal size convention (1,600 to 2,000 attendees), a scaled-down convention (800 attendees), or a virtual convention. In the event that the convention cannot be held in person, all membership fees will be returned to the fans who have signed up for the convention. Likewise the hotel will not hold you to reservations if you decide to cancel. So if you are like me and have a severe case of cabin fever, and you would like to attend Bouchercon next August, there is no financial risk if you sign up today at www.bouchercon2021.com. It really helps the convention with start up costs if you do.

I've really missed seeing all my close mystery friends in 2020, so I hope and pray that my optimism turns into reality. The last Bouchercon in New Orleans was one of the best and most enjoyable and it would be a blast to replicate that experience.

One project I've been involved with is reading the slush pile of short stories

for the upcoming Bouchercon Anthology (proceeds going to charity). It started off as a bad experience in that I was forced to read one bad story after another. But as bad as that experience was there was a silver lining: it made me appreciate even more the talent of the writers of the published books that I was reading at the time. Several others were enlisted in this short story duty, including Marv Lachman, Mike Bursaw, Brendan DuBois and Ted Hertel. Mercifully we were able to whittle the 400 or so submissions down to a manageable 20 or so very good stories and we voted on those to come up with 10-12 excellent stories.



As I was for the past New Orleans Bouchercon, I will again assume the role of publisher liaison for the acquisition of thousands of books to be given away free in New Orleans at the Bouchercon Book Bazaar. I'll be sending out notices about that to publishers in May, 2021, by which time we should have a pretty good idea of the viability of an in-person Bouchercon.

Website Progress. I made all the improvements that I promised in the last issue. My goal has been to post something new on about a daily basis, so that if you get in the habit of going there on a regular basis, you won't be disappointed with the same old, same old. Some readers have told me that they have now made it their home page so when they go to their computers in the morning it is the first thing they see.

It's been pretty easy to come up with multiple posts at year's end with all the best mysteries of the year lists (50 of which I have compiled and put into this issue). I've also gotten started with my George's Mystery Library videos, in which I explain certain aspects of book collecting and show examples from my

library. There is a post about them on the website or they can be found on YouTube by searching for “George’s Mystery Library.” If you miss **Deadly Pleasures** during the 3-month hiatus between issues, then go to the website for news, reviews and other things that I think would interest a mystery fan like you.

Also on the website’s Year’s Best 2020 – The DP List, there are constant updates to the List (indicated in blue type), so you can go to that part of the website and get the most current, up-to-date information on best books of the year. With the start of a new year, it always takes at least a couple of months to get the DP List going again, so please be patient.

My Reading During the Pandemic. 2020 has been like no other year in my reading experience. First of all, because of being shut in (and totally bored with TV and streaming), I had a lot more time to read. Before I retired, I would read between 70 and 80 novels per year. Last year I read 99 mystery/thrillers. In 2020 I wound up with 140 novels read (5 or 6 were audio books) and I enjoyed the majority of them. For the first time, I kept a running page count of the books read, which turned out to be 46,637 pages or an average of 333 pages per book. And I had some time to go back and read some of the really good mysteries that I missed (someone else read and reviewed them for the magazine) and that’s been highly rewarding for me. Attica Locke’s **BLUEBIRD, BLUEBIRD** and **HEAVEN, MY HOME** were particularly impressive.

I’m so grateful for my parents who

taught me the value of books and of reading. I’ve felt sorry for those non-readers who have suffered boredom and malaise during this pandemic. If I was ever feeling down, I could just pick up a good book and within a few minutes be vicariously living someone else’s life, which in every case was more exciting and distracting than mine. I would feel a little guilty about it sometimes because of all the sadness and struggles around me, but I’d read on nevertheless.

My goal for 2021 is to read at least 100 pages per day. That’s very doable for me.

Welcome to L J Roberts. I was still working on replacing Norma Dancis when I heard the sad news about Sally Sugarman’s passing. I was looking for someone who would be a good fit for the magazine and someone who is skilled and experienced. I found that someone in L J Roberts. She jumped right in and sent me a review column on very short notice. You will find it in the Review section of this issue.

By way of introduction, here is a little bit about her -- in her own words.

“Was there a time when I did not read? If there was, I don’t remember it, with my reading covering the range of genres. However, my one constant love has always been mysteries.

I joined the DorothyL email group early on with the “Nom de Clavier,” or typewriter name, of “The Honorable Phryne Fisher,” and started writing snippet reviews, mainly so I would remember who and what I liked. Those grew in length and notice until I was asked by Barbara Peters of Poisoned



L J Roberts

Pen Books to review their books. From 2003-2006, I then evaluated manuscripts using Robert Rosenwald’s list of nine elements to consider.

In January 1994, I established the East Bay Mystery Readers’ Group (ebmrg.org), and in 2009, created the review site *LJ’s Mystery Reviews—It is purely my opinion* (booksaremagic.blogspot.com).

Things snowballed and I contributed reviews to

- 2010-2012 the Australian subscription newsletter, *Calamity’s Corner*,

- 2010-2014 for Sally Powers’ e-newsletter *I Love a Mystery*,

- 2011 was a paid reviewer for *The Strand Magazine*, and

on-going associations with

- 2006 Steve Lewis’ *Mystery*File*

- 2010 Janet Rudolph’s magazine

Mystery Readers’ Journal

I also have a reviews email distribution list of several hundred people, post to several mystery sites on Facebook, have over 3,000 reviews on GoodReads, and am delighted to be a part of *Deadly Pleasures Online Mystery Magazine*.

Oh, and I crochet for charity.



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Assistant Editor's Message



Whenever I drive to work, I listen to a book on Audible. Usually I would listen to nonfiction because I have come to realize that there is a potentially huge difference between listening to a book and physically reading one. For example, I initially listened to a book entitled **REAL LIFE** by Brandon Taylor as it was shortlisted for the Booker Prize. I had a very tough time getting through half of it when I gave up. However, multiple people mentioned the book excellent so I tried an experiment and ordered and read the physical book. Well, it was great! Not necessarily recommended for crime fiction fans but definitely for literature fans. The actual reading allowed me to grasp so many more details that were lost on my drive. When we drive and listen to an audiobook, our minds can be distracted with our concentrating on driving and will usually wander, so we lose a lot when listening to a fictional book – especially in such a setting. Therefore, I will usually listen to nonfiction or, if fiction, a thriller that will not require total concentration. We, as reviewers, must keep this in mind and differentiate how we ‘read’ the book. We should disclose that we listened to a book vs. physically read a book, but often we could do both. On Amazon if you buy the Kindle version, you might be offered a discount on the audiobook on Audible. It will seamlessly move between the two mediums, keeping track where you are, thereby allowing the reader/listener to get through books much faster.

In looking through the winners of last year's Barry Awards, I wish I paid more attention to the novel of the decade category. The winner of that award was Robert Crais who won for **SUSPECT**. First, I will admit it was a very entertaining book and worthy of the best of the year, if the readership is so inclined. But it's a “dog” novel for

crying out loud. The author places us inside the head of a dog frequently throughout the book. It is kind of silly because we really have no idea what a dog's thought process would be. It just seems to me that a book with more gravitas should have been selected. It is not often we select a novel of the decade and I just think we blew it in this case. By the way, I don't even think it is Robert Crais' best book. [Editor's note to readers who voted for **SUSPECT**: *Larry just doesn't get it, does he? Larry, I sentence you to listen to Paul McCartney sing **Let It Be** 10 times.*]

Have you noticed how long the modern crime fiction books are today? So often they are endless and filled with pointless episodes which do nothing to advance a plot but rather simply bulk up the books, most likely, as per the publisher's wishes.

There was a time that mysteries could be easily read in one or two evenings. Anthony Boucher wrote reviews when only a couple of hundred mysteries were published every year, and each mystery averaged about 200 pages in length. He read quickly and was able to actually read almost every mystery published in a given year. So when he came up with his best of the year list it was from a position of strength. I envy him for that.

I advised a friend of mine, who is a midlist author, to try to write shorter books. I have never read one of his books because I did not want to commit to reading a book of that length. If I read a book over 500 pages, there has to be a really compelling reason to do so. The point I am trying to make is that these authors that bulk up their books are likely turning off a lot of readers. Elmore Leonard wrote ten rules for writers. Among them is “Avoid detailed descriptions of characters”; “Don't go into great detail describing places and things”;

and most importantly “Try to leave out the part that most readers tend to skip.” Though written to be humorous, there is certainly a lot of truth in those words.

Lee Child is a friend of mine. He told me early in the year (preCovid) that he was retiring and passing on Reacher to his brother, Andrew Grant. He forced Andrew to change his pen name to Andrew Child. Andrew is a midlist author who has never had a fraction of the success his brother has had. His writing style is very different – slower and more deliberate. However, he has experience writing crime fiction for years. So, the idea was intriguing and I told Lee it might be a brilliant way for him to bow out.

Well, having read **THE SENTINEL**, I have to admit that the jury is still out. Andrew's slower writing style and depth of characters, though admirable in other books, simply does not work with the Reacher series. To me, this was not only the weakest of the series by far, but, for the first time, I found it to be a chore to complete a Reacher book. I will give the next one a try, but, if it is the same, I will let the series go.

George and I have been searching for the Best of the Year lists on crime fiction from as many reputable sources that we could come up with (see extensive lists herein). They are compiled in an article in this issue. There are several books that keep appearing on multiple lists. I will read as many of them that I can before the Edgar shortlists are announced near the end of January (in hopes that some will appear on those shortlists).

However, one thing I wanted to mention is that we must all keep in mind that these “best” lists are limited to what the author of the list has read. Therefore, many books will not be listed that would be if they were actually read by that individual. Some of these lists are way too long and some are truly bewildering in that the books listed can be considered relatively obscure. But they are always fun to look at and compare to what we actually did read. Once in a while our own tastes and choices are validated.

Here's to good reading in 2021!

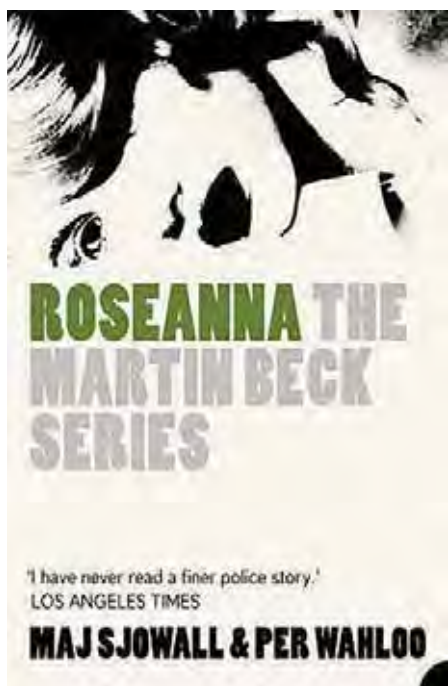
Sjöwall & Wahlöö's Classic Martin Beck Series

by Donus Roberts

In the summer of 2020 I discovered Wendy Lesser's newest book entitled **SCANDINAVIAN NOIR**, which I reviewed in my column in *Deadly Pleasures* Fall, 2020. Ms. Lesser spent considerable time writing about crime novelists from three Scandinavian countries: Sweden, Norway and Denmark. She devoted particular attention to two Swedish novel crime series, The Martin Beck Novels of Maj Sjöwall & Per Wahlöö--and the Kurt Wallendar crime novels of Henning Mankell.

I was familiar with the work of most of the Scandinavian novelists Wendy Lesser discussed. I was particularly interested in her opinions regarding the husband and wife writing team of Maj Sjöwall and Per Wahlöö--and Henning Mankell. Clearly Ms. Lesser was enthralled with both of these series, as I am.

After I read **SCANDINAVIAN NOIR**, I decided to re-read some of the novels, and I started with **ROSEANNA**, the first of ten novels in what has be-



come known as the Martin Beck series. I subsequently reviewed **ROSEANNA** in *DP*, Fall, 2020. About Roseanna I wrote, "Looking back at my reading diary, I know that I read this book in March, 1976. I remember that after I read the book, I made purchasing the series my number one priority..."

I should add that from that point until now, I have always listed **ROSEANNA** among the five best crime novels I have ever read, and the best police procedural novel I have ever read; I was also motivated to re-read the entire series for two additional reasons. As a bookstore owner I am often asked by customers to share my favorite novels, and that often includes the mystery/crime genre. As the years have passed, fewer people had ever heard of Maj Sjöwall, Per Wahlöö, and the Martin Beck Series. I decided that I must re-read the entire series to discover if my feeling about the novels would remain the same. I was also assisted in my decision by Covid 19, which struck my wife and myself on October 2nd like a ton of bricks; we were hospitalized for nine days, and when released, could barely read because we would fall asleep immediately. This motivated me to finish the Martin Beck series because the novels are shorter than the usual novels written today, and I could sleep-read my way through them easier as I recovered.

So between about October 15th and December 20th I struggled through the remaining nine Martin Beck novels in a row. I was blown away. They were even better than I remembered. I especially observed clever writing techniques which I missed the first time.

My immediate reaction was that I had to share my experience with this set of novels in the hope that more readers can experience crime writing at its best. If this idea doesn't find me pelted with



rocks, I may try the same scheme with Henning Mankell.

Who is this incredible writing team with the strange foreign names of Maj Sjöwall and Per Wahlöö? Louise France, who spent much time interviewing Maj Sjöwall after her husband died, writes: "It might count as one of the most remarkable writing collaborations in the history of publishing. A man and a woman, a couple, sit down every evening to write. Dinner is over, their children are in bed. She's never written a book before. He's a published author, but not with anything like this. They write in long hand, through the night if necessary. One chapter each. The following evening they swap chapters and type them up, editing each other as they go along. They don't argue, at least not about the words. These seem to flow naturally."

Their plan, before they started, was to write ten books in ten years. Each book would have 30 chapters. Every one of the novels would center on the same policemen, most of them middle-aged, in Stockholm's National Homicide Department. Often little happens, for pages at a time, yet reader's remain mesmerized over the incredible character development of the several police detectives, all male. They planned each

book to be a Marxist critique of society, "to hold up a mirror to social problems in 1960s Sweden, and to a larger extent the Western World in the 1960s.

The influence of these two writers on the world of subsequent crime writers is uncontested. Without their series of novels we would not have the superb crime novel series of either Ian Rankin or Henning Mankell. Steig Larson was mesmerized by their ten novel series and hoped to replicate it. Death intervened after only three novels. Both Jo Nesbo and Michael Connelly have frequently remarked about the influence of Sjöwall and Wahlöö on their own crime writing.

If Maj Sjöwall and Per Wahlöö had not been introduced to each other on more or less a blind date, Louise France writes, "the set of ten books would not have existed; and if they hadn't fallen in love, the books would be nowhere near as good as they are."

Per Wahlöö died in 1975, at the age of 49, just as their tenth and final book was going to press. Maj Sjöwall, who was nine years younger, died on April 29, 2020. Their crime series became world famous. They won an Edgar Award with the novel, **THE LAUGHING POLICEMAN**. Yet they lived just above the poverty line, and after Per Wahlöö died his widow Maj Sjöwall survived by small royalties from the books and occasional speeches around the



Ever since the '70s, Maj Sjöwall and Per Wahlöö were the godfathers of Scandinavian crime. They broke the crime novel in Scandinavia from the kiosks and into the serious bookstores.

— Jo Nesbo —

AZ QUOTES

world. They were the ultimate artists: satisfied that they had created books for the ages while money was only temporary and fleeting. Late in life Maj Sjöwall, always the modest voice, said, "I never thought the books would last all my life or that I'd still be thinking of them after all this time."

More than anything else, our lives are enriched by the characters with whom we associate, including ourselves. In fiction the same is true. The detective characters make this series extraordinary. Wendy Lesser writes, "To begin with, there is Martin Beck himself, who exhibits rectitude, fairness, a decent sense of empathy even for murderers, a useful skepticism about the criminal justice system, a healthy dislike of stupidity, careerism, and greed, and a willingness to let those around him do their best work..."

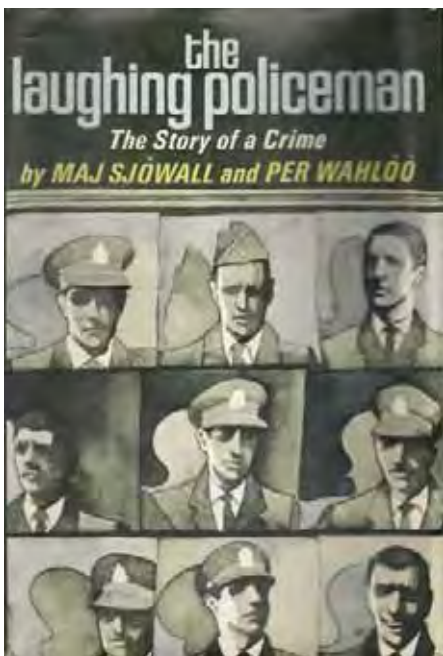
Beck's second in command on the National Homicide squad is Lennart Kollberg. Wendy Lesser calls him "one of the great characters of detective fiction," and I know of no fictional member of a police force who is greater. Martin Beck is always called by his full name. Kollberg is always called Kollberg. Sjöwall & Wahlöö have several similar writing techniques that make their characters memorable. Fredrik Melander is ordinary in every way except for his memory, which is incredible. Gunvald Larsson has exceptional strength and bravery. Einar Ronn is dull and unimaginative, but his dogged persistence opens leads in several cases. Now the novels in the order written.

1965: **ROSEANNA**, Martin Beck Police Mystery (1). The body of a young

woman is found in a canal south of Stockholm. She has been strangled and sexually assaulted. The job of the police was virtually impossible; first they must establish her identity before having a chance to find her killer. There are no missing women and no one recognizes a picture of the victim. The Homicide Division expands the case all over Sweden, then all across Europe, then to the United States, then to a most unlikely place in the United States, Lincoln, Nebraska. The victim is a librarian, but she led a life much different than the librarian stereotype.

Maj Sjöwall and Per Wahlöö were planning the series, and had an idea for the first novel but not a plan. One day while they were crossing a river on a ferry, Per was riveted by a striking American woman standing on the deck. After watching her for a time, he told Maj Sjöwall, "We have our first victim." **ROSEANNA** sold moderately well, but older women readers were put off by the graphic, realistic description of the murdered, naked, dead woman. Some other readers also objected to bedroom scenes, but as they say, "times were a-changing."

1966: **THE MAN WHO WENT UP IN SMOKE**, Martin Beck Police Mystery (2). Martin Beck is ready to go on a family holiday with his wife from whom he is increasingly estranged. He is saved from the holiday by an assignment to Hungary to see if he can find a journalist, Alf Matsson, who has mysteriously disappeared. Usually such plotted mysteries in foreign countries turn into travelogues, but Sjöwall/Wahlöö avoided the trap. Keep in mind that the Russians have taken over this part



of Europe so Martin Beck has to step lightly around their presence.

Returning to Sweden, Beck joins his team for the grand finale into Matsson's disappearance. Once again, it is dogged investigation, not luck, that cracks the case. Although this novel is not as good as **ROSEANNA**, it was received very well; the Swedish duo had established a reputation from which they would never look back.

1967: **THE MAN ON THE BALCONY**, Martin Beck Police Mystery (3). In this novel the reader knows the killer from the very beginning, because the author puts him in the book's title, but the police have no way of knowing, and the author uses this ruse to allow the reader to participate in efforts to end these hideous types of crime.

At this point in the series, it is clear that the authors are confident in their abilities so that previous plots or parts of plots will not be duplicated. It is with this book that the author's social agenda emerges. It is also a good lesson that obvious clues are not always relevant. Marcia Muller was very impressed

with this novel, as she was in the series; she reviewed three of the Martin Beck novels for **1000 MIDNIGHTS: THE AFICIONADO'S GUIDE TO MYSTERY AND DETECTIVE FICTION** by Marcia Muller and Bill Pronzini in 1985.

1968: **THE LAUGHING POLICEMAN**, Martin Beck Police Mystery (4). Back in the 1970s, this novel was commonly considered the best of the series, perhaps because it received the Edgar Award. It still is viewed very highly, but once the staggering scope of the entire series unfolded, picking the best is both difficult and unnecessary.

in the late 1970s, the *Armchair Detective*, then the most renowned of all crime fan magazines, weighed in upon the Sjöwall/Wahlöö series. In the Spring, 1979 issue of the *Armchair Detective* Frank Occhiogrosso wrote a major article entitled **THE POLICE IN SOCIETY: THE NOVELS OF MAJ Sjöwall AND PER Wahlöö**.

Occhiogrosso writes: "...Sjöwall and Wahlöö suggest a growing malaise in the country characterized by a feeling of deprivation of individualism, an

annihilation of selfhood, that erupts repeatedly in protests against prevailing governmental institutions and policies." In this case protests are directed against the United States, but Swedish policies are aligned with the United States.

Gunvald Larsson, one of the Stockholm Homicide team, makes a thematic summary at the end of **THE LAUGHING POLICEMAN**, after the murderer turns out to be a respected businessman and pillar of the community. "I'll tell you something I've never said to anyone else. I feel sorry for nearly everyone we meet in this job. They're just a lot of scum who wish they'd never been born. It's not their fault that everything goes to hell and they don't understand why. It's the types like this one (the killer) who wreck their lives. Smug swine who think only of their so-called status. Who think they can order others about merely because they happen to be better off. There are thousands of such people...we never get at them. We only see their victims."

1969: **THE FIRE ENGINE THAT DISSAPPEARED**, Martin Beck Police Mystery (5). Maxine Clark, writing for **EURO CRIME**, explains. A large house, which is under police observation, blows up. Was it arson or just an accident. Due to a coincidence brought about by his own personality quirks, Gunvald Larsson, a senior detective, witnesses the explosion that destroys the house; he also emerges as a hero by rescuing some of the inhabitants from a certain death. Because Larsson was concussed, he is taken off the case. Larsson is very disgruntled, and he conducts a parallel investigation, including unofficial interviews that are hilarious.

A side-plot in this novel is Martin Beck's disintegrating marriage. His sixteen year-old daughter announces that she is moving out of the house. Before leaving, she offers her father some liberating but far-out advice that he finds both shocking and exhilarating. When I reread this novel, I realized that I overlooked is quality 40 years ago. Now it is much more toward the top of my favorites list.

1970: **MURDER AT THE SAVOY**, Martin Beck Police Mystery (6). A



Swedish industrialist is shot while dining in a posh hotel in Malmo, which is located on the far southern tip of Sweden. Per usual there are no telling clues, but there are immense international ramifications. Martin Beck is sent to Malmo because he is head of the homicide team. For the first time in this series, Martin Beck is heavily pressured by his superiors who need an arrest to reduce the political pressure.

The *New York Times* reviewed this book when it came out in English translation in 1972. They published, "The authors are among the great realists of the genre. And the interest in their books lies not so much in the actual mystery (Sjöwall and Wahlöö often take the easy way out, as they do in this book) as in the exhaustive way real police officers do their job."

1971: **THE ABOMINABLE MAN:** A Martin Beck Police Mystery (7). A man who is gravely ill in a hospital is brutally murdered. At first we assume the murderer is the abominable man in the book's title, but as the plot continues it becomes clear that the adjective does not apply to the killer.

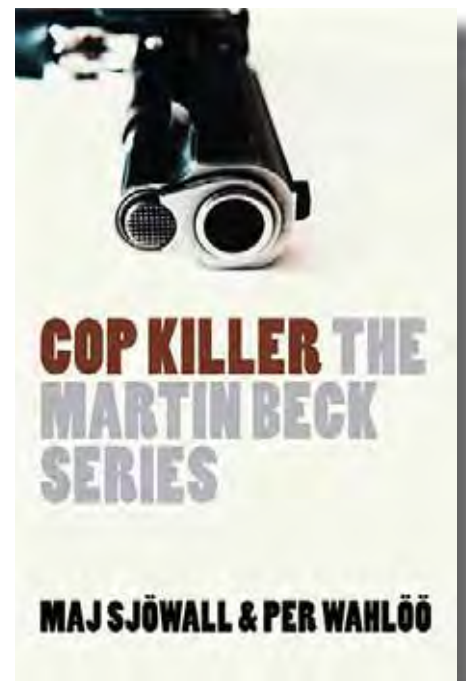
Sjöwall and Wahlöö are famous for writing about police investigations that take a long time to solve, but most of the events in this novel occur during one long night. Einar Ronn is the first

detective to be called to the scene of the crime, followed by Martin Beck. Usually, Martin Beck works with Lennert Kollberg, so in this investigation Ronn becomes a well-rounded character for the first time. Ronn is very good at methodical. At the end of this novel Martin Beck was seriously wounded in the chest by a rooftop sniper. It is the first time that anyone in this crime unit sustained a life-threatening injury.

This crime resembles many current examples of police crime that plague our system and bring public disrespect to the police. Maxine Clarke in her **EUROCRIME REVIEW**, comments, "In his own mind, Martin Beck had to admit that the whole thing seemed pointless. In the course of his active (police) career, the guilty officer had of course maltreated hundreds of people. Only a few of them had lodged written complaints and Ronn's brief investigation had uncovered only a few of these. But many years of experience had taught him (Beck) that most of his work was in fact pointless, and that even the things that provided results in the long run almost always look pointless to begin with."

1972: **THE LOCKED ROOM:** A Martin Beck Police Mystery (8). It wasn't until the eighth novel in the series that Maj Sjöwall and Per Wahlöö attempted a "locked room" mystery. Locked room mysteries were very prevalent during the Golden Age, and of course Edgar Allan Poe started the mystery/crime field with a locked room mystery, **THE MURDERS IN THE RUE MORGUE**.

In Stockholm, a woman holds up a bank and in the process accidentally shoots and kills a customer who tries to disarm her. Miles away Karl Edvin Svard is found shot dead through the heart in a room where all doors and windows are locked. Martin Beck is out of action for months because he was shot and nearly killed by a sniper in **THE ABOMINABLE MAN**. While Beck is recuperating, he looks at the background of the victims and arrives at an interesting connection among the shooting, which ultimately solves the



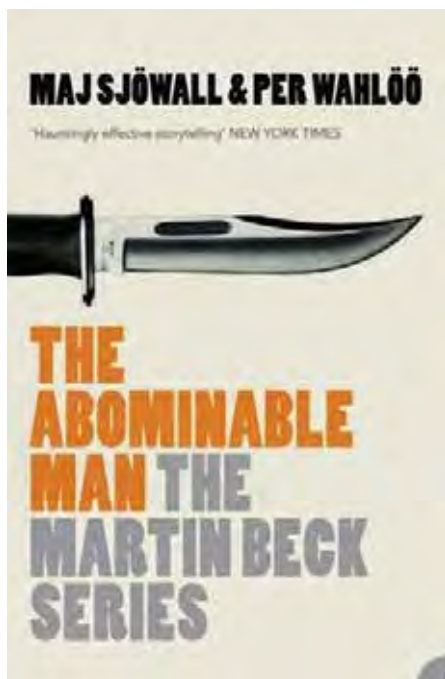
case.

Reviewing the book for **CRIME-PIECES**, Sarah Ward writes: "I suppose the least interesting aspect of the book is the locked room element. They're not my favorite type of crime books, and I wasn't much interested in the reveal of how the crime had been committed, although there is a clever twist to the culprit being caught. What the locked room element does though, is introduce the character of Rhea Nielsen, a new love interest for Martin Beck. Perhaps not the best book in the series, but redeemed I think by the sly ending."

I agree with Sarah Ward's assessment. I think it is the weakest book in the series, but it still is better than 95% of what is being written today.

1974: **COP KILLER:** A Martin Beck Police Mystery (9). Novel number nine in the series takes advantage of previous crimes and criminals by integrating them into the plot of this novel. It is a very effective technique for this novel, but if you read this series of novels out of order you will spoil your reading of two previous novels in the series: **ROSEANNA** and **THE MAN WHO WENT UP IN SMOKE**.

In this novel, the reader can easily recognize one of the grand themes of the series, that there is a pervading



sense that things have deteriorated to a state where they are becoming unendurable. Martin Beck spends time in a small provincial town in southern Sweden; on the surface it seems like an idyllic place compared to Stockholm or even Malmo, but underneath it steams with the same corruption as its bigger counterparts. Moreover, Swedish residents in both country and city seem resigned to the facts as irreversible. It is an observation that would apply equally to the United States, born out by recent occurrences.

Also, at the beginning of the series, all police, including the Homicide division, seemed to be on the side of law and order; their solitary mission was to protect the citizens of Sweden. By this novel, more and more, police and crime happen together. If this trend was interfering with law and order in Sweden in the early 1970s, how much it has worsened in Western societies since then.

Near the end of this novel, the most fervent and moral member of the Homicide team, Lennart Kollberg, resigns from the department. His resignation is an indictment of a force that has become politicized, bureaucratized, incompetent and corrupt, and it ends with a ringing denunciation: "After twenty-seven years of service, I find that I am so ashamed of my profession that my conscience will no longer permit me to practice it."

1975: **THE TERRORISTS**: A Martin Beck Police Mystery (10). Maj Sjöwall & Per Wahlöö had completed their objective virtually on time. It should have been a happy occasion, but it wasn't. About four years previous, Wahlöö fell ill from a ruptured pancreas. They tried all types of cures, but by the time they came to write **THE TERRORISTS** Per was very sick. They knew the end was near, but could he last until the last book was written? They rented a bungalow in Malaga, and for the first and only time Wahlöö did most of the writing. Sjöwall became the editor. She said, "Sometimes he would just fall off the chair because he couldn't write any more. In the

morning the words would be illegible." They returned from Spain in March, 1975, and sent the book to the printer. Wahlöö died in June, about the same time as the book was published.

In the novel a visiting Latin American president is blown to bits as his motorcade moves through the streets of his hosts capital city. An eighteen-year-old girl, wearing a gardening knife on her belt and carrying a leather bag, is arrested as she steps up to a teller's window of a Stockholm bank. She is charged with attempted armed robbery. Elsewhere a killer stalks his victim, then attacks and clubs him to death with an iron bar. As readers we sense that these isolated incidents, which occurred long distances apart, are related. It will take longer than usual to bring all of these investigations together, and that is why **THE TERRORISTS** is the longest book in the series.

Ten years before, Sjöwall and Wahlöö began the series with the murder of **ROSEANNA**. Now there is a secret terrorist organization called ULAG that sells death to the highest buyer; it attacks around the world, but especially in the Western World. Martin Beck knows that his homicide squad will be tested to the limit because a controversial United States senator is coming to Stockholm, and ULAG has marked him for extinction. So much has happened between **ROSEANNA** and **THE TERRORISTS**, in just ten years.

I will close this essay on the Mar-

tin Beck novels with some of my own opinions on the quality of the writing. Great literary works are always judged on the quality of the writing. I am not advocating that these novels should compete with **WAR AND PEACE**. But I am saying that these novels are as well written as **WAR AND PEACE**. Somehow the simultaneous writing of both Sjöwall and Wahlöö created a new voice, neither masculine or feminine, and it worked to create several of the most memorable characters that crime fiction has to offer. Added to this mix is the theme of societal change.

Frank Occhiogrosso, writing in the spring, 1979 issue of *The Armchair Detective*, sums up my opinions and as well adds to them.

"However much one may want to contest some of the sometimes question-begging sociological conclusions in the novels of Maj Sjöwall and Per Wahlöö, one must still, I think, acknowledge the uniqueness of their achievement, for the novels do contain an evolving vision of society, and thus our authors elevate the detective story to a plane on which it can be considered seriously. And by integrating this vision of a society in flux with accounts of men doing their work in the midst of this flux and being irreversibly affected by it even as they in turn affect it, Sjöwall and Wahlöö have put together writings that lay some claim to be called an oeuvre, a body of work of some lasting artistic significance.



It's About Crime

Marv Lachman



The Short Stop

Even rarer than a detective novel with detection and fair play clues is a short story with those attributes. A welcome exception is “The Oxford Ghosts” by Jane Jakeman in the September-October 2020 issue of *EQMM*. Jakeman is a busy writer, having also written four historical mysteries and works of fantasy. She also is an art historian.

“The Oxford Ghosts” starts with a college boating crew finding a dead student in the water. She is the third young woman at St. Helena’s College to die that way recently. Stepping in as acting principal of St. Helena, a college at Oxford University, and amateur sleuth is Octavia Tenbaker. The college atmosphere is extremely well described. Justice and the reputation of Oxford University are at stake. Octavia deals with clues, both physical and psychological.

Another story sure to be on my list of favorite stories for 2020 is “My People” by Liza Cody in *EQMM* for November-December 2020. This is a story about her series character Shareen Manasseh who has only appeared in short stories. Shareen is a British police constable working undercover, having infiltrated a group of climate protestors who are creating problems in London. She is concerned about climate, but she is also shocked by brutal behavior by the police, resulting in the apparent death of one of the protestors. This is a crime story but it is more, one of the best stories to use psychological insight as it tells of the conflict troubling a police officer, torn between her own beliefs and

her desire to perform her job as a police constable.

Notes on Novels Recently Read

I’ve been asked why, unlike other *DP* reviewers, I mostly review older books, instead of current mysteries. I don’t think that older mysteries are necessarily better than what is published now, but they are at least as good. If *DP* readers are, like me, interested in pursuing the past history of their hobby, I feel I can provide some insights and suggestions. I also hope to bring some variety to *DP* where some current books are reviewed by as many as three reviewers. (I am not referring to “Reviewed to Death,” currently in lockdown.)

Mystery fans who suffer from bibliomania will enjoy **THE BOOKMAN’S TALE: A NOVEL OF OBSESSION** (2013) by Charlie Lovett. Its protagonist, Peter Byerly, is a bookselling author, beset by depression after his young wife has died. During a casual visit to a book shop in Hay on Wye he comes upon a painting that has been left inside a book. To his astonishment, the woman in the picture appears to be his late wife. His interest in books is renewed, but more important for this book he turns detective, trying to learn who the woman is. He becomes involved in possible forgery of a document which, if it can be authenticated, would prove that it was William Shakespeare who wrote all the plays attributed to him. A weakness is the action shifting too often between the late 16th and early 17th century on one hand, and the late 20th century on

the other, and this flashback technique does disturb the narrative but does not obscure all the book lore and an exciting plot and climax.

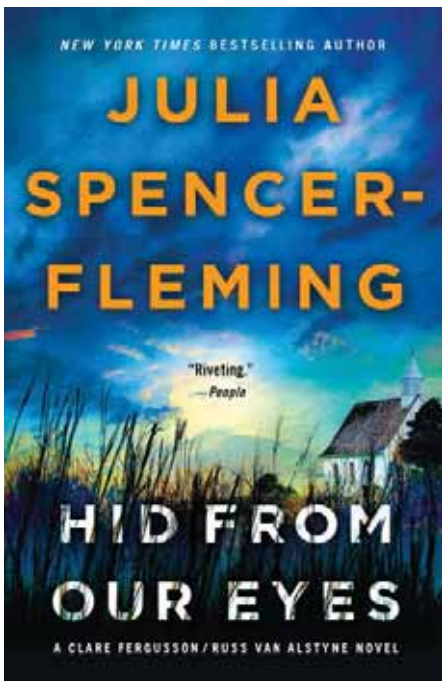
I accumulated many books by the prolific Gary Alexander without reading any until I read that he had died. I then read, as a sort of tribute to him, and to my pleasure, **PIGEON BLOOD** (1988), the first book in his Supt. Bamsan Kiet series. Kiet is chief of police in “Hickorn,” the mythical capital of the equally fictional kingdom of “Luong.” Luong contains many elements of Viet Nam, Laos, Thailand, and other countries of Southeast Asia. (Alexander was wounded and received the Purple Heart for his service in Viet Nam.) The crime in the book, in addition to drug smuggling, is the murder of an American commercial pilot in Hickorn. The murder and its investigation fails to get too much attention, but Alexander makes his fictional country fascinating. His telling is amusing, and he has created in Kiet a character who sounds like Charlie Chan and has all of the good points of that much maligned (in these days of political correctness) Asian sleuth.

Edward Grierson’s **REPUTATION FOR A SONG** (1952) begins at the onset of a young man’s trial for the murder of his father. More an inverted crime novel



than a whodunit, it faces us (and the British jury) with the question of whether the defendant acted in self-defense, and if so was he justified. What seems a simple book proves anything but with the psychological description of the defendant's mother, one of the most complex characters I've encountered in my mystery reading. For those who like courtroom mysteries this provides an excellent picture of the British legal system.

While I may not review many current books, I am enough a fan of Julia Spencer- Fleming's series about Clare Fergusson and Russ Van Alstyne that I've read them all. **HID FROM OUR EYES** (2020), the latest, is very timely. There are calls to defund the police of Millers Kill, New York, entirely. Meanwhile, the Reverend Clare is dealing with her drug and alcohol addiction problems.



Spencer-Fleming, like Lovett, uses different points in time to tell her story: 1952, 1972, and the present, which is actually 2006, based on internal evidence. In each year a young woman was found dead, and the medical examiner could not find a cause of death. Sounds like impossible crimes, but don't expect the author to play totally fair with the reader, nor to provide motivation that is

strictly believable.

Spencer-Fleming is guilty of some unnecessary padding as she emulates mainstream fiction by describing her characters' personal lives in depth, while occasionally holding the mystery plot in abeyance for too many pages. Not to worry, her narrative picks up and the book's 432 pages move quickly to a satisfying ending.

Books About the Mystery Story

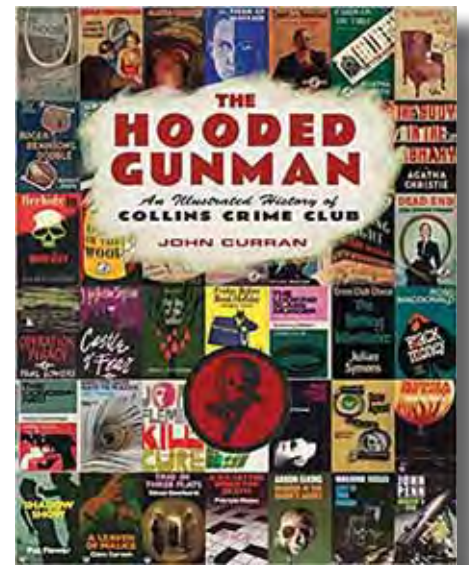
FREDERIC DANNAY, Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine AND THE ART OF THE DETECTIVE SHORT STORY by Laird R. Blackwell was published in trade paperback in 2019 by McFarland, priced at \$49.95. The book is 218 pages and has no illustrations. Its appeal is primarily to diehard fans of mystery short stories and being one of them, I must say the price seems rather high.

Though Dannay, half of the Queen team, was also famous as a mystery novelist, Blackwell emphasizes his role as an editor. He makes a good case for Dannay being the one who kept the mystery short story alive with *EQMM* and the many anthologies he edited. The book covers *EQMM* from its beginning in 1941 only through the end of 1980, though Blackwell does include some material after 1980, for example, discussing Edward D. Hoch's remarkable record of writing short stories for *EQMM*, having a story in every issue from 1973 through 2008.

There is unfortunate confusion as Blackwell uses the terminology and description that Dannay used many years ago, for example: “Moderns,” “Old Masters,” “New Masters,” and “Tyros.” Calling Allingham, Hammett, and John Dickson Carr “New Masters” in 2019 seems inappropriate. Blackwell constantly uses the phrase “Queen as Champion” in referring to the stories Dannay liked and published, as if there had been a competition for them. There are some errors that should have been

avoided. For example the Edgar award is given out by Mystery Writers of America, not Crime Writers of America, whose acronym, CWA, if it existed, allows confusion with the British CWA.

This is a book for what the author calls “Dyed in the Blood” short story fans. Too little is written about the mystery short story, even in the best fan magazines. Blackwell provides the names of dozens of authors from the years 1941 through 1980 who are still worth reading. He also clears up years of confusion by giving the original titles of stories whose title Dannay changed.



In 1992 Ellen Nehr wrote the Doubleday Crime Club Compendium 1928-1991 about a leading U.S. publisher of crime fiction. It was a notable achievement, with dust jacket blurbs of every book they published and ninety gorgeous color photographs of some of their best covers. Now comes a history of the 65 years of the British equivalent: the Collins Crime Club in **THE HOODED GUNMAN** (2019) by John Curran. If Curran's name sounds familiar it may be because he is probably the world's leading expert on Agatha Christie and has written prize-winning books about her work. This book proves that Curran is equally knowledgeable about crime fiction in general. Yes, the main attraction of the book may be its 2,100 book covers, all in color, something we can scan for hours with pleasure.

But there is much more. There is a dust jacket blurb for every book Crime Club published. In addition, Curran provides information and succinct opinions about many of the books and their authors. He spots dust jacket errors and points out where too much of the plot has been revealed, potentially spoiling reader's surprise. There is history, including the clubs that preceded the Collins Crime Club and *Hush Magazine*, which Collins also published. Covers of the rare Hush are also reproduced. Curran writes of the social conditions that made mystery reading so popular beginning in the 1920s. His introduction and notes are virtually a history of detective fiction, especially its "Golden Age."

Doom with a View

I don't usually review crime plays in this portion of my column because there are virtually no crime plays to review. Things were different in 1955 when, in the U.S. Army, I was on leave in New York, before being reassigned to Newfoundland. In three days I saw three superb crime plays: *The Bad Seed* by Maxwell Anderson, *The Desperate*

Hours by Joseph Hayes, with Paul Newman as an escaped criminal who with two others invades Karl Malden's home, and Agatha Christie's *Witness for the Prosecution*.

This was Christie's favorite play, and it proved to have "legs," being successful in all media in which it was presented. A short story published in 1933, it became the title story of a collection of ten Christie stories published in the U.S. in 1948. In 1953 Christie adapted it into a play that was a great success, playing 468 performances in London. The original ending to the short story was changed, but Christie had no problem with that; she encouraged the change.

In 1954 *Witness* came to New York. It was even more popular than in London, with 646 performances. Francis L. Sullivan had the main role of defense attorney Sir Wilfrid Robarts. Two decades before, Sullivan had played Hercule Poirot on stage and had become a good friend of Christie. He died in 1956 at the too-early age of 54.

Billy Wilder co-wrote and directed the movie version of *Witness for*

the Prosecution in 1957, the one you are most likely to see. You probably won't have to leave your home to do so. Charles Laughton was Sir Wilfrid and also in the cast were Marlene Dietrich and Tyrone Power, plus many of the leading British supporting actors then in Hollywood. Laughton often has a twinkle in his eye and is a delight as the eccentric lawyer; Billy Wilder gives him many opportunities to be humorous. The film keeps the London-New York ending to the play, including the climax that totally surprised me in 1955.

What is George Reading For Future Issues of DP?

1. The seven Slough House novels of Mick Herron for the next issue of *DP*. Two down, five to go. Mick Herron will be featured on the cover and his latest, **SLOUGH HOUSE**, will be spotlighted. The article will also contain a primer on the world of Slough House which should be of great help to the uninitiated. All *DP* readers are encouraged to read the first in the series, **SLOW HORSES**, in the next three months. It takes some patience, so persevere.

2. The four Steph Broadribb thrillers featuring bounty hunter Lori Anderson. Three down, one to go. For an article in a future *DP*.

3. The three John Galligan – Bad Axe mysteries set in Wisconsin. One down, two to go. For an article in a future *DP*.

4. Liz Moore's highly acclaimed **LONG BRIGHT RIVER** (500 pages) will be last book read in my preparation for the Barry Award nomination process which will occur in March, 2021.



The DP List 2020



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 2020. Titles in blue indicate titles added since the last issue of *DP*. In the interests of space, the plot descriptions of all but the most recently added titles have been deleted. You may find them on the website under Year's Best link (just under the masthead).

Best Novels

****AMNESTY** by Aravind Adiga (Scribner, \$26.00). Danny—formerly Dhananjaya Rajaratnam—is an illegal immigrant in Sydney, Australia, denied refugee status after he fled from Sri Lanka. Working as a cleaner, living out of a grocery storeroom, for three years he's been trying to create a new identity for himself. And now, with his beloved vegan girlfriend, Sonja, with his hidden accent and highlights in his hair, he is as close as he has ever come to living a normal life. But then one morning, Danny learns a female client of his has been murdered. The deed was done with a knife, at a creek he'd been to with her before; and a jacket was left at the scene, which he believes belongs to another of his clients—a doctor with whom Danny knows the woman was having an affair. Suddenly Danny is confronted with a choice: Come forward with his knowledge about the crime and risk being deported? Or say nothing, and let justice go undone? **PW, Kirkus & DP**

****VICTIM 2117** by Jussi Adler-Olsen (Dutton, \$28.00). **DP & BL**

****THE RED HOUSE** by James R. Benn (Soho Crime, \$27.95). **J PW & DP**

****A BEAUTIFUL CRIME** by Christopher Bollen (Harper, \$28.99). **LJ & PW**

****CITY OF MARGINS** by William Boyle (Pegasus, \$25.95).. **PW & LJ**

****A PRIVATE CATHEDRAL** by James Lee Burke (Simon & Schuster, \$28.00). **BL & PW**

****THE LAST FLIGHT** by Julie Clark (Sourcebooks, \$26.99). **PW & DP**

****THE BOY FROM THE WOODS** by Harlan Coben (Grand Central, \$29.00). **LJ & DP**

****FAIR WARNING** by Michael Connelly (Little, Brown, \$29.00). **Kirkus & BL**

****THE LAW OF INNOCENCE** by Michael Connelly (Little, Brown, \$29.00). On the night he celebrates a big win, defense attorney Mickey Haller is pulled over by police, who find the body of a former client in the trunk of his Lincoln. Haller is immediately charged with murder but can't post the exorbitant \$5 million bail slapped on him by a vindictive judge. Mickey elects to represent himself and is forced to mount his defense from his jail cell in the Twin Towers Correctional Center in downtown Los Angeles. All the while he needs to look over his shoulder—as an officer of the court he is an instant target. **PW, BL & DP**

****CUT TO THE BONE** by Ellison Cooper (Minotaur, \$27.99). **BL & PW**

****FLORIDA MAN** by Tom Cooper (Random House, \$28.00). Florida, circa 1980. Reed Crowe, the eponymous Florida Man, is a middle-aged beach bum, beleaguered and disenfranchised, living on ill-gotten gains deep in the jungly heart of Florida. When sinkholes start opening on Emerald Island, not only are Reed Crowe's seedy businesses—a moribund motel and a shabby amusement park—endangered, but so are his secrets. **Kirkus & PW**

****BLACKTOP WASTELAND** by S. A. Cosby (Flatiron, \$26.99). **BL, DP & LJ**

****THE GOODBYE MAN** by Jeffery Deaver (Putnam, \$28.00). **BL & PW**

****THE BLAZE** by Chad Dundas (Putnam, \$26.00). **Kirkus, PW, BL**

****THE FAMILIAR DARK** by Amy Engel (Dutton, 26.00). **PW & BL**

****HIS & HERS** by Alice Feeney (Flatiron, \$27.99). When a woman is murdered in Blackdown, a quintessentially British village, newsreader Anna Andrews is reluctant to cover the case. Detective Jack Harper is suspicious of her involvement, until he becomes a suspect in his own murder investigation. **PW & DP**

****THE SEARCHER** by Tana French (Viking, \$27.00). Cal Hooper thought a fixer-upper in a bucolic Irish village would be the perfect escape. After twenty-five years in the Chicago police force and a bruising divorce, he just wants to build a new life in a pretty spot with a good pub where nothing much happens. But when a local kid whose brother has gone missing arm-twists him into investigating, Cal uncovers layers of darkness beneath his picturesque retreat, and starts to realize that even small towns shelter dangerous secrets. **LJ & PW**

****RUNNING OUT OF ROAD** by

Daniel Friedman (Minotaur, \$26.99).
PW & Kirkus

****THE NIGHT SWIM** by Megan Goldin (St. Martin's, \$27.99). **BL & PW**

****THE CABINETS OF BARNABY MAYNE** by Elsa Hart (Minotaur, \$26.99). London, 1703. In a time when the old approaches to science coexist with the new, one elite community attempts to understand the world by collecting its wonders. Sir Barnaby Mayne, the most formidable of these collectors, has devoted his life to filling his cabinets. While the curious-minded vie for invitations to study the rare stones, bones, books, and artifacts he has amassed, some visitors come with a darker purpose. **LJ & PW**

****LITTLE SECRETS** by Jennifer Hillier (Minotaur, \$26.99). Marin had the perfect life. Married to her college sweetheart, she owns a chain of upscale hair salons, and Derek runs his own company. They're admired in their community and are a loving family?until their world falls apart the day their son Sebastian is taken. A year later, Marin is a shadow of herself. The FBI search has gone cold. The publicity has faded. She and her husband rarely speak. She hires a P.I. to pick up where the police left off, but instead of finding Sebastian,

she learns that Derek is having an affair with a younger woman. This discovery sparks Marin back to life. She's lost her son; she's not about to lose her husband, too. **DP**

****MOONFLOWER MURDERS** by Anthony Horowitz (Harper, \$28.99). **DP**

****THE MIST** by Ragnar Jonasson (Minotaur, \$27.99). **LJ, Kirkus & PW**

****LONE JACK TRAIL** by Owen Laukkanen (Mulholland, \$28.00). **Kirkus & PW**

****HAMMER TO FALL** by John Lawton (GroveAtlantic, \$26.00). **PW, BL & Kirkus**

****ONCE YOU GO THIS FAR** by Kristen Lepionka (Minotaur, \$26.99). **BL & PW**

****THE FINISHER** by Peter Lovesey (Soho Press, \$27.95). **PW & DP**

****THE LAST HUNT** by Deon Meyer (Atlantic Monthly, \$27.00). **PW, BL & DP**

****THE HOLDOUT** by Graham Moore (Random House, \$28.00). **PW & LJ**

****LONG BRIGHT RIVER** by Liz Moore (Riverhead, \$26.00). **BL, DP & LJ**

****DEATH IN THE EAST** by Abir Mukherjee (Pegasus, \$25.95). **PW, LJ & DP**

****THE KINGDOM** by Jo Nesbo (Knopf, \$28.95). Roy has never left the quiet mountain town he grew up in, unlike his little brother Carl who couldn't wait to get out and escape his troubled past. Just like everyone else in town, Roy believed Carl was gone for good. But Carl has big plans for his hometown. And when he returns with a mysterious new wife and a business opportunity that seems too good to be true, simmering tensions begin to surface and

unexplained deaths in the town's past come under new scrutiny. **BL & Kirkus**

****THE SHADOWS** by Alex North (Celadon, \$26.99). You knew a teenager like Charlie Crabtree. A dark imagination, a sinister smile--always on the outside of the group. Some part of you suspected he might be capable of doing something awful. Twenty-five years ago, Crabtree did just that, committing a murder so shocking that it's attracted that strange kind of infamy and inspired more than one copycat. Paul Adams remembers the case all too well: Crabtree--and his victim--were Paul's friends. Paul comes home to take care of his mother and it's not long before things start to go wrong. Paul learns that Detective Amanda Beck is investigating another copycat that has struck in the nearby town of Featherbank. **PW & BL**

****HARD CASH VALLEY** by Brian Panowich (Minotaur, \$26.99). **BL & LJ**

****ALL THE DEVILS ARE HERE** by Louise Penny (Minotaur, \$28.99). **BL, PW & LJ**

****UNDER PRESSURE** by Robert Pobi (Minotaur, \$26.99). **PW & DP**

****THESE WOMEN** by Ivy Pochoda (Ecco, \$27.99). **LJ & PW**

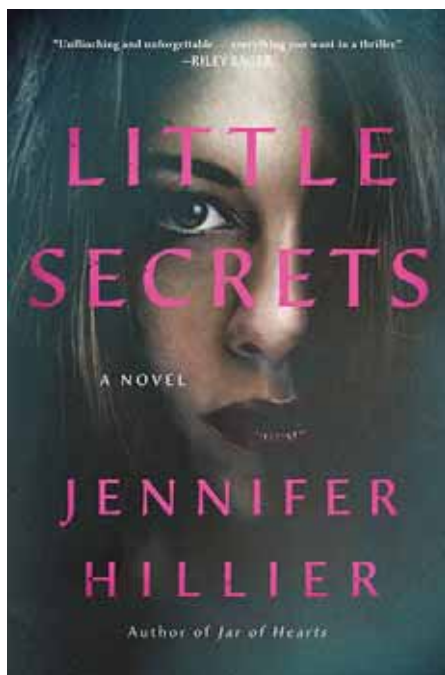
****WHEN SHE WAS GOOD** by Michael Robotham (Scribner, \$26.00). **Kirkus, BL & DP**

****DAUGHTERS OF DARKNESS** by Sally Spencer (Severn House, \$28.99). **PW & BL**

****EIGHT PERFECT MURDERS** by Peter Swanson (Morrow, \$27.99). **BL, PW, Kirkus & DP**

****TIE DIE** by Max Tomlinson (Oceanview, \$26.95). **BL & DP**

****THE DEVIL AND THE DARK WATER** by Stuart Turton (Sourcebooks,



\$26.90). It's 1634 and Samuel Pippis, the world's greatest detective, is being transported to Amsterdam to be executed for a crime he may, or may not, have committed. Travelling with him is his loyal bodyguard, Arent Hayes, who is determined to prove his friend innocent. **Kirkus & PW**

****CONFESSIONS ON THE 7:45** by Lisa Unger (Park Row, \$27.99). **BL & PW**

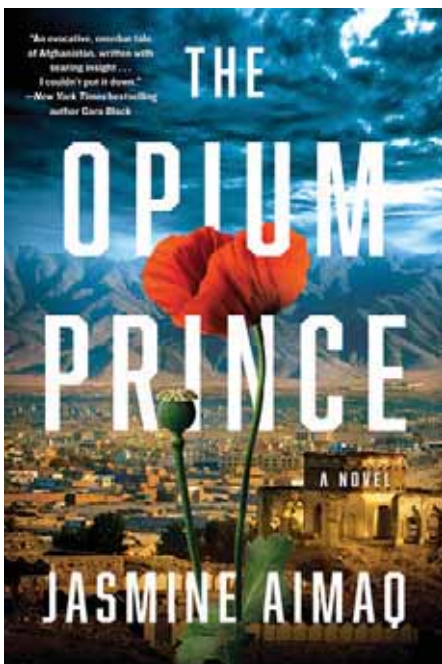
****THE SHOOTING AT CHATEAU ROCK** by Martin Walker (Knopf, \$25.95). **PW & BL**

****ONE BY ONE** by Ruth Ware (Gallery/Scout Press, \$27.99). **LJ, DP & BL**

****HOLD YOUR BREATH, CHINA** by Qiu Xiaolong (Severn House, \$28.99). **BL & PW**

Best First Novels

****THE OPIUM PRINCE** by Jasmine Aimaq (Soho Crime, \$27.95). On the drive out of Kabul for an anniversary trip with his wife, Daniel accidentally hits and kills a young Kochi girl named Telaya. He is let off with a nominal fine, in part because nomad tribes are ignored in the eyes of the law, but also



because a mysterious witness named Taj Maleki intercedes on his behalf. Wracked with guilt and visions of Telaya, Daniel begins to unravel, running from his crumbling marriage and escalating threats from Taj, who turns out to be a powerful opium khan willing to go to extremes to save his poppies. **PW & BL**

****THE FINDERS** by Jeffrey B. Burton (Minotaur, \$26.99). Mason "Mace" Reid lives on the outskirts. **BL & LJ**

****HOW QUICKLY SHE DISAPPEARS** by Raymond Fleischmann (Berkley, \$26.00). **BL**

****A BURNING** by Megha Majumdar (Knopf, \$25.95). **LJ, BL & DP**

****THE THURSDAY MURDER CLUB** by Richard Osman (Pamela Dorman Books, \$26.00). **Kirkus, PW & DP**

****FORTUNE FAVORS THE DEAD** by Stephen Spotswood (Doubleday, \$26.95). It's 1942 and Willowjean "Will" Parker is a scrappy circus runaway whose knife-throwing skills have just saved the life of New York's best, and most unorthodox, private investigator, Lillian Pentecost. When the dapper detective summons Will a few days later, she doesn't expect to be offered a life-changing proposition: Lillian's multiple sclerosis means she can't keep up with her old case load alone, so she wants to hire Will to be her right-hand woman. Then along comes the Collins case... **PW**

****FIREWATCHING** by Russ Thomas (Putnam, \$26.00). **PW & LJ**

****WINTER COUNTS** by David Heska Wanbli Weiden (Ecco, \$27.99). **PW & DP**

Best Thrillers

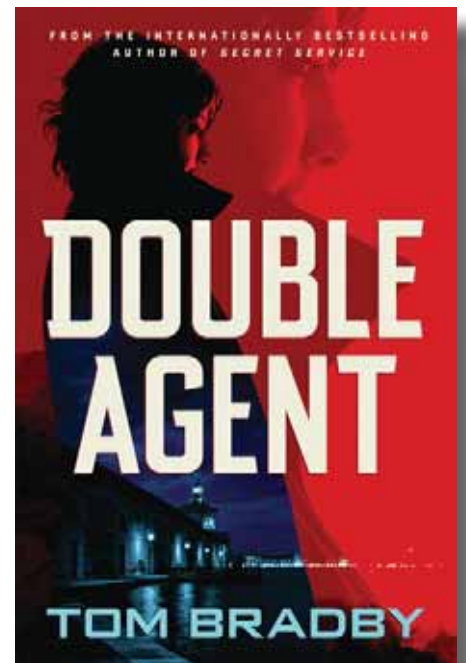
****INSIDIOUS** by Brett Battles (Independently published, \$14.95). **DP**

****WITHOUT SANCTION** by Don

Bentley (Berkley, \$27.00). **BL & DP**

****THREE HOURS IN PARIS** by Cara Black (Soho, \$27.95). **Kirkus, LJ & BL**

****DOUBLE AGENT** by Tom Bradby (Atlantic Monthly, \$26.00). Kidnapped in Venice by a Russian defector, Kate Henderson knows she's in trouble. But when he offers her conclusive evidence that the British Prime Minister is a live agent working for Moscow, Kate's holiday quickly becomes the start of her next mission. The defector has proof of the PM involved in a sordid scandal? a video supposedly used to blackmail him into Russian service decades prior? and a financial paper trail that undeniably links him to the Russians, but his



motives are anything but clear. Riddled with doubt that the evidence she is presented with may not in fact be as bulletproof as it seems, Kate reopens the investigation into the PM. As she works through the case, Kate runs up against key people at the heart of the British Establishment who refuse to acknowledge the reality in front of them. And, more worryingly, clear signs that there's still a mole in her department. **BL & DP**

****HOUSE ON FIRE** by Joseph Finder (Dutton, \$28.00). **BL & PW**

****ONE MINUTE OUT** by Mark Greaney (Berkley, \$28.00). **PW & DP**

****HOUSE PRIVILEGE** by Mike Lawson (Grove Atlantic, \$26.00). **PW, BL & DP**

****THE WILD ONE** by Nick Petrie (Putnam, \$26.00). **PW & DP**

****THE ORDER** by Daniel Silva (Harper, \$28.99). **Kirkus & BL**

****THE LAST TOURIST** by Olen Steinhauer (Minotaur, \$27.99). **BL & PW**

****THE COLDEST WARRIOR** by Paul Vidich (Pegasus, \$25.95). **LJ & PW**

****THE END OF OCTOBER** by Lawrence Wright (Knopf, \$27.95). **BL & PW**

Best Paperback Originals

****THE DECENT INN OF DEATH** by Rennie Airth (Penguin, \$16.00). **PW**

****WHEN NO ONE IS WATCHING** by Alyssa Cole (Harper, \$16.99). Sydney and Theo's deep dive into the history of their Brooklyn neighborhood quickly becomes a dizzying descent into paranoia and fear. Their neighbors may not have moved to the suburbs after all, and the push to revitalize the community may be more deadly than advertised. **PW & BL**

****BAD DAY AT THE VULTURE CLUB** by Vaseem Khan (Redhook Books, \$15.99). **DP**

****RUNNING FROM THE DEAD** by Mike Knowles (ECW, \$15.95). **Kirkus, PW, BL & DP**

****MONGKOK STATION** by Jake Needham (Half Penny, \$15.99). **DP**

****HIDE AWAY** by Jason Pinter (Thomas & Mercer, \$15.95). **BL, LJ &**

DP

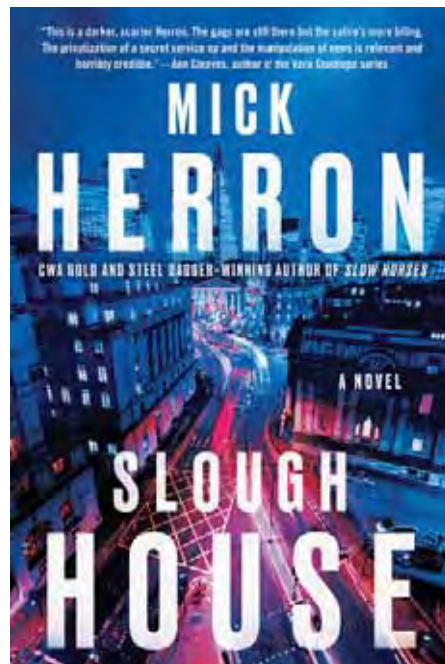
****THE SILENCE OF THE WHITE CITY** by Eva Garcia Saenz (Vintage Crime/Black Lizard, \$16.95). **PW & Kirkus**

****DARKNESS FOR LIGHT** by Emma Viskic (Allen & Unwin). **DP**

****THE NAMES OF THE DEAD** by Kevin Wignall (Thomas & Mercer, \$15.95). **DP**

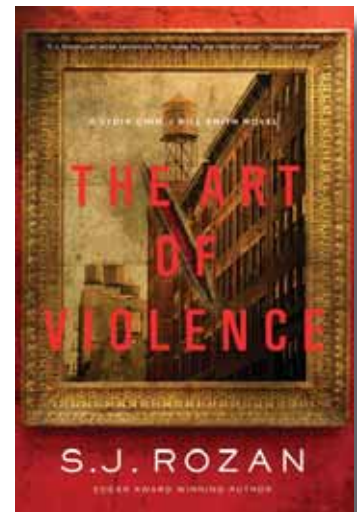
And a Look Ahead to 2021

****BEFORE SHE DISAPPEARED** by Lisa Gardner (Dutton, \$27.00). When Frankie Elkin, a recovering alcoholic on a mission to find missing people that the system has forgot, arrives in Mattapan, Boston and starts asking around about Angelique, a missing teenage girl, the locals and the detectives still on Angelique's floundering case are suspicious. But if Frankie's hard knock life taught her anything, it's that if you keep asking questions, someone is going to crack. As her amateur investigation starts to take shape, people around Mattapan start paying attention. And before long Frankie's quest to find Angelique turns into more than she, or anyone else, bargained for. **BL & PW**



****SLOUGH HOUSE** by Mick Herron (Soho, \$27.95). At Slough House—MI5's London depository for demoted spies—Brexit has taken a toll. The “slow horses” have been pushed further into the cold, Slough House has been erased from official records, and its members are dying in unusual circumstances, at an unusual clip. No wonder Jackson Lamb's crew is feeling paranoid. But are they actually targets? **BL & DP**

****STRANGER AT THE DOOR** by Jason Pinter (Thomas & Mercer, \$15.95). When Rachel Marin discovers an ominous email her son's teacher sent to her just before his murder, she knows she must help bring his killer to justice. But soon a figure from her past reappears, threatening to expose Rachel's darkest secrets if she doesn't tread lightly. And when her son is recruited by a shadowy businessman who may be connected to the murder, Rachel knows this has just gotten very, very personal. **PW & BL**



****THE ART OF VIOLENCE** by S. J. Rozan (Pegasus, \$25.95). Former client Sam Tabor, just out of Greenhaven prison after a five-year homicide stint, comes to Bill Smith with a strange request. Sam is a colossally talented painter whose parole was orchestrated by art world movers and shakers, but Sam's is convinced that since he's been out he's killed two women. He doesn't remember the killings but he wants Smith, one of the few people he trusts, to investigate and prove him either innocent or guilty. **PW & BL**

Central Booking

Kristopher Zgorzki



LOCKDOWN

by Peter May
Quercus, \$ 16.99
Rating: C+

When Peter May first wrote **LOCKDOWN** years ago, publishers turned it down because the dystopian scenario was unrealistically bleak and readers would not be able relate to the idea of mandatory quarantine. My how things have changed! With the world in crisis from the Covid-19 Coronavirus pandemic, May's publisher has rushed publication of **LOCKDOWN** so that it can be available to his fans. To be sure, reading this book in the midst of crisis may not be every reader's idea of a distracting afternoon, but there is also something to be said for being enveloped in such a similar story that has even a minutia of resolution. Individuals will need to make their own decision on if/when to read it, but **LOCKDOWN** is a thriller that feels more immediate than most and certainly deserved to make its way into the world.

LOCKDOWN begins with London already deep in a state of limited movement, virus outbreak, and dangerous conditions. D. I. Jack MacNeil is just a day away from retiring from the Metropolitan Police. MacNeil's role in the department has been diminishing and he feels that the stresses of his career caused his marriage to end in shambles. Now he is determined to do right by his young son and focus on something other than his job.

That is, until the workers scrambling to build a temporary hospital to house the sudden surge in patients discover a satchel on-site. Inside this bag are a set of human bones – a child – stripped

of all flesh. Since these bones appeared overnight, this becomes an immediate priority investigation. But how will MacNeil discover the identity of this victim and find the perpetrator(s) while the entire city is under strict quarantine?

Remembering that Peter May wrote this long before anything like this had ever happened, he does an amazing job of bringing to life what life in lockdown would look like. There is some comfort to be had in that his depiction of this crisis is slightly worse than the reality – he shows readers a city under martial law and a virus that is even deadlier than Covid-19, but the sadly now-iconic reality is present as well. There is the limited grocery runs, the shortage of supplies, the fear of most citizens, and those few who are determined to forego the rules for their own betterment. It is a sobering look at our current situation, but the idea that this one man, MacNeil, is so dedicated to his job that he must find justice for this innocent child is reassuring in a way that was previously unthinkable.

To make matters worse, not only does Jack MacNeil need to mitigate his risks in terms of the virus while doing his investigation, a professional killer with ties to the murder is hot on his heels. Peter May keeps the tension high with readers wondering which of the two will get to each witness first. This exciting cat and mouse game takes place all across a deserted London – from secluded neighborhoods to secret underground clubs to the legendary London Eye. **LOCKDOWN** is a fast read that demands to be consumed as quickly as possible.

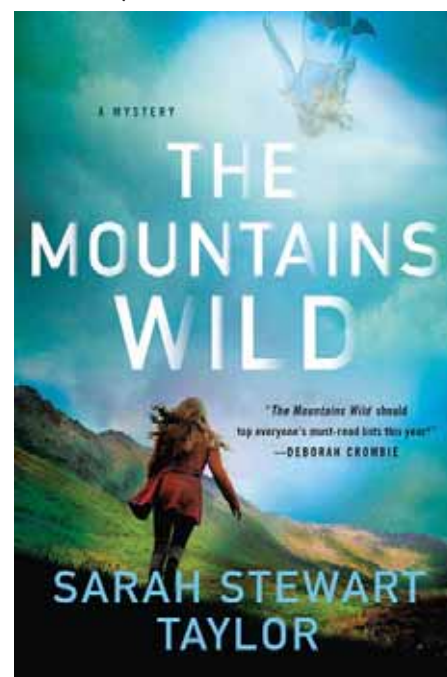
It is also worth noting that Peter May has populated his London with as diverse a cast of characters as one might

expect from this bustling metropolis. Again, remembering that this novel was written quite a while ago, this reveals that Peter May was far ahead of the curve in terms of bringing needed diversity to the crime fiction landscape. For that reason alone, **LOCKDOWN** would be a welcome addition to his repertoire, but fortunately for readers it also proves to be one heck of a thriller – albeit one that feels almost prescient.

THE MOUNTAINS WILD

by Sarah Stewart Taylor
Minotaur, \$27.99
Rating: B-

Sarah Stewart Taylor amassed quite a following for her debut traditional mystery series featuring university professor Sweeney St. George who specialized in art history related to funerals and gravestones. After the last of that four-book series was released, Taylor took an extended hiatus from crime fiction to raise her family. Thankfully for her fans, she is ready to return to the fold with a new novel. **THE MOUNTAINS WILD** will be released next week and while it is very different from the Sweeney St. George series, it still features Sarah Stewart Taylor's ability to craft relatable characters and build a strong sense of place. Even the funerary art history element makes a small, but



significant, appearance.

The heroine of **THE MOUNTAINS WILD** is Maggie D'arcy, and readers are sure to fall in love with this character. Maggie is feisty and unpredictable, but she is also loyal and caring. The novel takes place in two time-periods – 2016 and 1993. The two timelines weave in and out of each other in unique ways allowing Taylor to unspool her story with masterful technique.

In 1993, Maggie's family was notified that her beloved cousin Erin had gone missing while on a vacation in Dublin, Ireland. Because she and Erin were very close in age and grew up as best friends, Maggie volunteers to travel overseas to see if she can locate her cousin. Despite working closely with the Irish Garda for weeks, any trace evidence discovered fails to lead to any significant sign of Erin herself and eventually Maggie returns home to share the tragic news with her family.

However, the Garda reach out again in 2016, after Erin's very distinctive scarf is discovered near the location where another young woman has gone missing. With her Uncle now older and not in the best of health, it falls on Maggie to return to the Emerald Isle once again in the hopes of finding Erin – or at least finding out what happened to her. Maybe this time her involvement will help authorities find Niamh Horrigan as well. It's no surprise to Maggie when suspects in Erin's disappearance seem to be linked to this new case as well and she is determined to get some answers.

Sarah Stewart Taylor clearly loves Ireland. The location is brought vividly to life – in both time periods – to such an extent that it virtually becomes another character on the page. The plot requires Maggie to explore both the residential areas and the vast, uncharted natural landscapes of this beautiful country. Readers who have recently read Dervla McTiernan may notice a similar method of incorporating Ireland's troubled history in the mystery plot without allowing it to overwhelm or become pedantic.

Readers receive a very satisfying and unexpected conclusion to the core case in **THE MOUNTAINS WILD**, but this

will not be the last they see of Maggie D'arcy. This is the launch of a new series and there are many avenues yet to be explored for this character – both on domestic shores and across the pond in Ireland. Fans of Sarah Stewart Taylor can rejoice at her return to our favorite genre and those who have not yet read this talented author can now join the fandom.

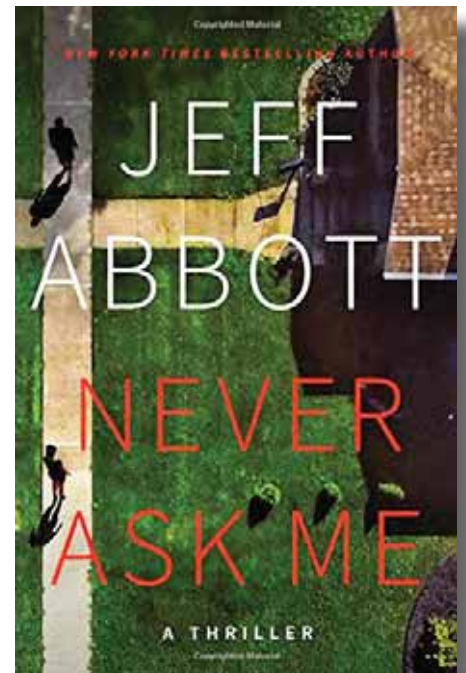
NEVER ASK ME
by Jeff Abbott
Grand Central, \$27.00
Rating: B

With **NEVER ASK ME**, Jeff Abbott returns to the exclusive enclave of Lakehaven, Texas – the iconic setting of several of his stand-alone thrillers. Like *Blame* and the others, **NEVER ASK ME** stands on its own with only the fictional setting uniting them. **NEVER ASK ME** focuses on the Winding Creek subdivision, bordered on one side by the greenbelt – a wilderness path that meanders its way behind many of the homes in the community.

Sometimes you pick up a book and just have no idea what type of journey you are about to partake in. **NEVER ASK ME** is one of those books. Jeff Abbott eases the reader in with what seems like a traditional crime component – a murder that needs to be solved – but then rips the rug out from under the reader, exposing the more thriller-esque backstory that led to this current predicament. This makes for an extremely satisfying, and at time shocking, reading experience.

NEVER ASK ME opens with two teenagers, Ned Roberts and Julia Pollitt, exploring the wooded area around their homes in search of digital critters to capture while playing the hottest new videogame on their cellphones. Things take a turn for the worse when they stumble upon Ned's mother, dead, seemingly on display upon a secluded park bench. The discovery of Danielle's body exposes both of these prominent families to unbelievable stresses, communal suspicion, and internal strife.

The plot in this novel unfolds from many points of view. The four members



of the Pollitt are given multiple chapters: The mother, Iris; her husband, Kyle; their daughter, Julia; and their adopted child, Grant. But there is also commentary on the unfolding drama from other unique sources. There are the police interview transcripts relevant to the discovery of Danielle's body, as well as a few snippets from the notes of a journalist working on a true-crime article related to the incident. The last piece of the puzzle is probably the most interesting, and also the most complex: Iris Pollitt's adoption journal – an accounting of her family's trails and tribulations on the path to completing the overseas adoption of their son, Grant.

At the same time the investigation into Danielle's murder is taking place, Grant is receiving anonymous e-mails telling him that his family has been lying to him. But if they truly have lied, what is it they are trying to keep from him? And who is this mysterious person who seems to know more than they should? In an effort to find out, Grant reaches out to Danielle's boyfriend's son, a computer expert and technical wiz. As the sphere of influence expands, so do the risks to everyone involved.

The title phrase – “never ask me” – is uttered by several characters and the topic about which it refers shifts and progresses as the novel unfolds. As the tangled web between these two families

grows increasingly dangerous, readers will find their reading pace reaching frenetic levels. There is a point where the desire to know what the hell is going on gets so intense that the final section of the novel must be consumed in as few sittings as possible.

With **NEVER ASK ME**, Jeff Abbott has provided the perfect novel for the strange summer ahead. It is a quick read that easily distracts from our real-world problems, while entertaining and surprising readers in equal measure.

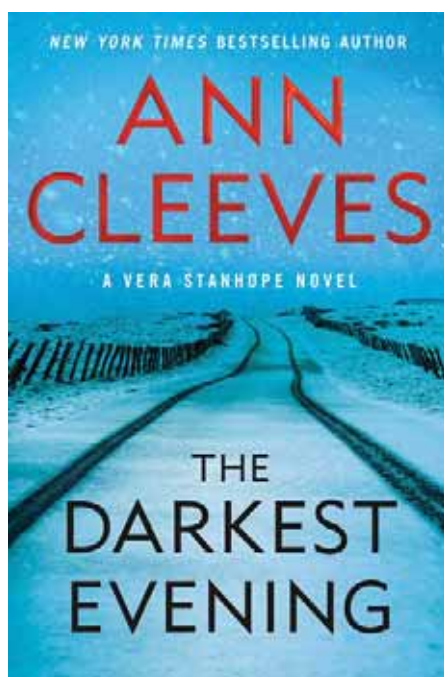
THE DARKEST EVENING

by Ann Cleeves
Minotaur, \$27.99

Rating: B

To the delight of readers everywhere, Ann Cleeves – and more specifically her beloved creation, Detective Inspector Vera Stanhope – return in **THE DARKEST EVENING**, the most recent novel from this acclaimed practitioner of the traditional procedural mystery. As with all of her novels, Ann Cleeves constructs **THE DARKEST EVENING** to follow in the footsteps and styling of crime fiction's golden age, while ensuring that all the surrounding elements firmly position it as a contemporary work – creating this timely timelessness to her oeuvre which while hard to explain, is easy to recognize, and proves to be altogether magical and seductive.

THE DARKEST EVENING begins with Vera Stanhope traveling home



from a pre-Christmas celebration with her co-workers when she loses her way and eventually stumbles upon an abandoned vehicle. Always wanting to help, Vera approaches the car's open door only to discover that the driver is no where to be found – concerning enough, but the unchaperoned toddler in the back seat intimates that this is likely more than just standard winter car troubles. Vera is sure that someone is in serious trouble.

Scooping up to child, Vera orients herself and heads for Brockburn, a state home not far away. This house belongs to some Stanhope relatives whom Vera has not visited in quite some time. Her arrival interrupts a party in progress, but the forecast for extreme weather quickly has everyone wanting to head home. Unfortunately, when one of the neighbors arrives to pick up his daughters, the body of a woman is discovered on the pathway headed towards Brockburn.

Vera is able to get her team into the area before the blizzard hits, but quickly everyone's movements become restricted. What follows is Ann Cleeves using the trope of the secluded and isolated village in which a killer resides to force Vera Stanhope to reacquaint herself with her father's side of the family, while also making every effort to expose a murderer. As Agatha Christie and

others have done, Ann Cleeves buries a number of secrets amongst this isolated cadre of folk; some are related to the death of this young woman, while others are interesting red-herrings that allow the characters to blossom into flesh-and-blood people.

Since the investigation involves characters from all levels of the social hierarchy in this small village, Ann Cleeves is able to make small, but important observations about human interaction. Part of the search for answers leads to a medical facility where Joe Ashworth is forced to face some of his own worries and demons. Another beloved member of Vera team, Holly, also plays a significant role in **THE DARKEST EVENING**, showing her growth as a police professional and as a human. As is typical with an Ann Cleeves novel, the depiction of the investigation and the logical leaps made by the authorities feel authentic and accurate; and all the necessary clues are there for observant readers to figure things out, but obfuscated successfully by a skilled author.

Ann Cleeves has now written nine Vera Stanhope books and yet she manages to make each of them feel as fresh and exciting as when readers first met Vera back in **THE CROW TRAP**. This author's ability to transform the standard tropes in unique ways is a testament to her talent and commitment to the mystery genre. Readers appreciate that she never cuts corners on her way to revealing the culprit. **THE DARKEST EVENING** will please both long-time fans as well as new readers unfamiliar with Vera Stanhope.

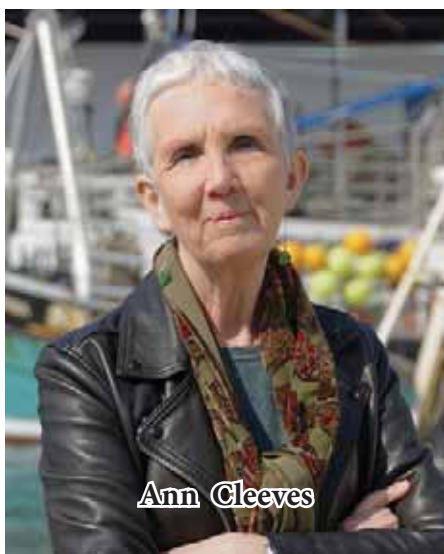
AND NOW SHE'S GONE

by Rachel Howzell Hall

Forge, \$27.99

Rating: A+

Rachel Howzell Hall continues to prove that she can write anything; and that when she does, she will always knock it out of the park. Whether it's a touching personal essay like "I Don't Know This Word" (from the *Private Investigations* anthology) or a hard-hitting short story such as "Down, Girl" (in the *Shattering Glass* anthology),



Ann Cleeves



readers know they are going to be consumed by the experience and come out the other side entertained and educated. Rachel Howzell Hall can write iconic series characters like Lou Norton who appears in the **LAND OF SHADOWS**, **SKIES OF ASH**, **TRAIL OF ECHOES**, and **CITY OF SAVIORS**; as well as compelling stand-alone crime novels (like **THEY ALL FALL DOWN**) that pay homage to history, while blazing a path through the community's unfortunate stronghold on past censure and erasure of minority voices. With her latest work, Rachel Howzell Hall once again tackles a much beloved sub-genre – the Private Eye novel – in her own inimitable way. **AND NOW SHE'S GONE** blends the procedurals aspects of the Lou Norton series with the psychological bent of **THEY ALL FALL DOWN**, resulting in one of the strongest books of the year; a novel that will be nearly impossible to forget.

For Grayson Sykes, nothing is black and white and everything is black and white. Even the allusion in her nickname – Gray – places her in that area “between,” a place that could be a destination, but might just as easily be an area of transition from one point to another. So, it is fitting that Grayson is taking on her first big case at Rader Consulting, the private investigation

agency she works for. Her assignment is to find Isabel Lincoln at the request of her husband, Dr Ian O'Donnell. Grayson should know better than to expect this search to go smoothly – little in her life has followed the path of least resistance – but there was no way she could have predicted the truth behind this disappearance.

Very little can be said about the plot of **AND NOW SHE'S GONE** because every well-placed and perfectly timed revelation in this serpentine plot feels like a gift to the reader, earned and appreciated in equal measure. The current day search for Isabel is occasionally interrupted by flashbacks which recount a tragic story zeroing in on the cult of toxic masculinity that runs rampant in our society. Gray's endeavor to find Isabel is described thoroughly and readers get a real sense of what the life of a PI is like. Gray's closest friends work with her at the firm and form a support team that lends a hand with data-mining, research, and other backup duties. Rachel Howzell Hall throws in some wonderful distractions – in the form of romantic entanglements – that will delight readers even as they confound Grayson.

The strength of this novel lies squarely on the shoulders of Grayson Sykes. Fortunately, she is a one-of-a-kind character that is more than up to the task – charming readers in a way that is not often witnessed. Grayson Sykes is a worthy successor to the lineage of Black female private investigators that includes the likes of Barbara Neely's Blanche White, Mma Precious Ramotswe from *The No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency* series, and Dayna Anderson from the books by Kellye Garrett. It is unclear if **AND NOW SHE'S GONE** is the start of a series or not, but even based solely on this one outing, Rachel Howzell Hall has crafted a character that readers will reflect upon fondly for many years to come. Anyone interested in the evolution of crime fiction must read **AND NOW SHE'S GONE**, as this is a novel that brings diversity to the genre without the need to centralize the Black experience as the focal point of the book, while at the same time this

book never shies away from its roots. It is a refreshing angle for a suspense novel and one that has been missing/ignored for far too long.

THE LAST RESORT

by Susi Holliday
Thomas & Mercer, \$15.95
Rating: B

When Susi Holliday's **THE LAST RESORT** begins, seven strangers board an airplane on their way to a remote island for a mysterious weekend arranged by an elusive host. With that setup, it is impossible for crime fiction genre fans not to immediately think of Dame Agatha Christie's *And Then There Were None*. Those allusions certainly do not stop there. However, Holliday also succeeds in bringing this plotline into the modern age by incorporating some technological aspects that feel cutting-edge and timely, allowing readers into the minds of the characters in a fresh approach.

Amelia is the character readers hear from the most – ironic (maybe) given that she is the one person on the island dealing with faulty mechanical equipment. Susi Holliday also gives all the other female members of the group at least one chapter to share their internal thoughts. Interrupting it all on occasion are sections that relate unattributed



events that occurred in the Summer of 2000. It does not take a mystery fan to know that those encounters are somehow related to the present-day action on this remote island.

Each of the four women and three men have secrets. The method by which Holliday exposes those long held nuggets of information is unique both for the readers and the characters. By revealing them in this way, the impact is altered for the characters in the novel, allowing readers to “read into” the true meanings of the others’ reactions. It is interesting how each of the secrets is related to timeless emotions – anger, fear, rejection, and guilt to name just a few; but the connection to modern culture via concepts like social media, surveillance, and beyond opens some new angles of exploration.

By tagging each chapter with a countdown to the “big bash” planned for the guests on this island, readers feel the dramatic pull required to keep them turning pages, faster and faster. This technique, borrowed from the thriller genre, works extremely well for this narrative. The homage to *And Then There Were None* pretty much guarantees that not everyone will survive this weekend and this ticking clock reinforces this idea. The title of the novel also alludes to these possible demises, but also serves the function of having multiple meanings that only become clear as the novel reaches its conclusion.

Susi Holliday has never been one to shy away from unique storylines that often blur the artificial lines between genres. Readers looking for something innovative that also celebrates the origins of the crime genre would be well-served by checking out Susi Holliday’s **THE LAST RESORT**.

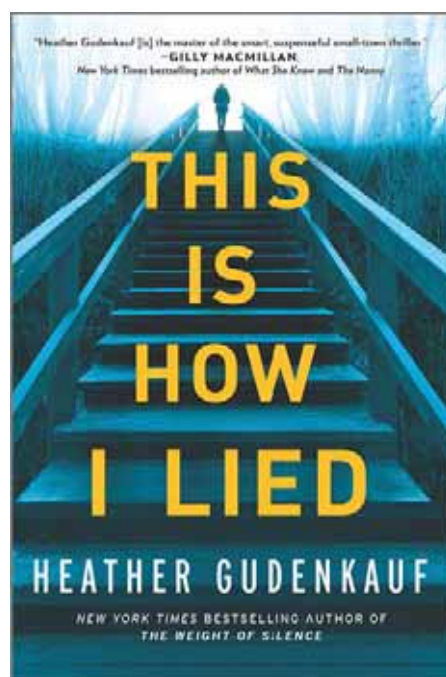
THIS IS HOW I LIED

by Heather Gudenkauf

Park Row, \$28.99

Rating: B

Heather Gudenkauf has a loyal following of fans and it is easy to see why. Each of her novels feature strong women in challenging situations with



plots that grab you by the throat as they simultaneously tear out your heart. Gudenkauf has the unique ability to breathe life into all of her characters; not simply the lead protagonists, but every single person that graces the pages of her work. Readers become invested in the outcome and in the process learn that each of us is flawed, albeit some worse than others. Take **THIS IS HOW I LIED** for example: this rich tapestry of characters and events weave together a story that exposes the multitude of ramifications wrought by toxic behavior and how everyone can get caught up in playing the blame game.

In 1995, Eve Knox’s body was found by her best friend Maggie and Eve’s younger sister Nola, hidden within the cave system surrounding Grotto, Iowa. Despite some strong suspects, the case went unsolved and the trust around town was shattered. Twenty-five years later, Maggie is now a detective and a newly-discovered piece of evidence thrusts her into heading up a follow-up investigation. With all the major players still residing in Grotto, Maggie must navigate her strained relationships in order to discover the truth of what happened to her beloved friend.

THIS IS HOW I LIED is told from

three points of view (Maggie, Nola, Eve) through two time periods (2020 and 1995), making for a complex structure that could have been the novel’s downfall. However, Heather Gudenkauf is a skilled writer who never loses control of the various threads within the story and successfully leads her readers through the narrative without a moment of confusion. In fact, the cleverly-placed recounting of past events serve as touchstones, always reminding the reader that what happened to Eve on that day in 1995 was not a single event, but a series of unexpected encounters sadly aimed toward a tragic end.

While the novel is primarily focused on explaining what happened to Eve Knox, it is also the story of Maggie Kennedy-O’Keefe and Nola Knox. Maggie’s father oversaw the original investigation and with him now suffering from debilitating dementia, she wants to make him proud by solving the case that haunted him for years. Despite being seven months pregnant, Maggie will do anything to find justice for her friend, even if that means exposing a past that too many people wish would remain buried. Not the least of whom is Nola Knox, whose contentious relationship with her older sister is only overshadowed by her creepy interest in dead things and their bodily remains, in particular. Nola has secrets of her own and therapy transcripts for her court-mandated sessions give readers much-needed insight into her actions. Can these two women put their conflicts aside long enough to uncover the truth of Eve’s death?

Just as the title implies, **THIS IS HOW I LIED** is centered on the many fabrications that plague this narrative. Readers stay invested trying to discover which was the lie that ultimately led to murder. It would be advisable to start this novel only when there is sufficient time to devote, as Heather Gudenkauf has made this one incredibly difficult to set aside unfinished. Her fans will be anxious to hear what type of tale her next novel will spin.

From The Waterfront

Ted Hertel



BLIND VIGIL

by Matt Coyle

Oceanview Publishing, \$26.95

December 2020

Rating: B+

Blinded by a gunshot wound to the face nine months earlier, private investigator Rick Cahill has been living a dark existence with the help of some friends. He has given up his P.I. job since he can't see to drive or surveil anyone. But when his friend Moira McFarland asks him to sit in on an interview with his old but now estranged friend Tuck Muldoon, he can't refuse her. Cahill knows that Moira is just throwing him a bone because he needs the money, but takes the job anyway. Turk wants his girlfriend Shay followed because he no longer trusts her. The two tail Shay to a mysterious rendezvous and report back to Turk. But the next morning, she's found murdered and Turk is the prime suspect. Moira believes Turk committed the crime, but Cahill doesn't. He goes out on his own, blindly (literally) looking for the one thing that had given his life meaning: pursuing the truth.

This is the seventh novel in Matt Coyle's Anthony and Shamus Award winning Rick Cahill series. In it Cahill faces what is perhaps his greatest challenge: how to you help a friend charged with murder when you can't even see where you are going. Here, after Moira refuses to work with him, Rick becomes attached to the defense team. He finds that he is nothing more than a heroic symbol, a visible supporter of his friend but not an active participant in Turk's defense. This further goads him into taking on the case by himself. He's seen as a loose cannon who can't play by the rules. But that's okay because he will

follow his own unconventional methods to save his old friend.

The book has many of the P.I. tropes that one might expect, filled with good banter, tight situations, a ruthless killer, a love interest, and the like. But as always, it is what Coyle does with these conventions that make the book stand out. The author has done his homework on how the blind are just differently-abled than the sighted, from counting steps to enhancement of the other senses to how to get along in a sighted world. As we've come to expect from Coyle, he has delivered a hard-boiled novel of a man who will go to any lengths, whether he can see the danger around him or not, to help a friend in trouble. And here I had been worried that after the events of *Lost Tomorrows* that there would never be another Cahill novel. I'm glad I was wrong, as this solid entry in the series proves.



THE SURVIVORS

by Jane Harper

Flatiron Books, \$27.99/eBook \$14.99

February 2021

Rating: A

When Kieran Elliott and his young family return home to the small coastal town of Evelyn Bay, Tasmania, his past comes rushing back to haunt him. As a result of a disastrous mistake he made years twelve years earlier, two lives were lost and families were destroyed. Now he is back because his father is suffering from dementia and his mother is packing up to move along with her husband. In spite of his guilt over the deaths of his brother and another acquaintance, Kieran reconnects with old friends. But when the body of a murdered woman is discovered shortly after his return, old secrets begin to be exposed. That death recalls the disappearance of a teenage girl on the same day the two men died twelve years ago.

Jane Harper has created a tightly told, beautifully written, and suspenseful novel. More than that, it is filled with wonderfully drawn characters, many of whom are caught in traps not necessarily of their own making but with tendrils leading into the past. It is atmospheric, filled with details of life in a small town on a beach in Tasmania with its violent storms, a sunken wreck of a ship, caves with deep tunnels, cliffs overlooking the water, and unexplained mysteries. Harper deftly captures the nuances of the locale, with its petty rivalries, misunderstandings, and fear. The tumultuous sea acts as a metaphor for the town and its hidden secrets, while tensions rise as the new investigation continues.

The puzzle that Harper weaves throughout the deliberately slowly paced work will grip the reader, as trust is shattered, truths are revealed, families broken apart, and friendships unravel until the book's shattering ending arrives in another storm. It is a novel of guilt, remorse, injustice, and regret, all skillfully woven together seamlessly into a realistic work of literary power I cannot recommend highly enough.

DEAR CHILD

by Romy Hausmann

Flatiron Books, \$26.99/eBook \$13.99

October 2020

Rating: B+

Lena Beck, a young woman, goes missing from the streets of Munich, Germany. Fourteen years pass before a serious automobile accident turns up an injured woman. Along with her is a thirteen-year-old girl named Hannah. Hopes are high that Lena has finally been found. Her parents come to the hospital for a joyful reunion, but her shattered father, desperate for the woman to be his beloved daughter – after all, she has a telltale scar on her forehead – finds that the pieces don't seem to fit together right. This in spite of the fact that the child Hannah is a dead-ringer for Lena at that age. However, Hannah knows more than she is telling. In fact just about everyone in the story has secrets. And what about Hannah's younger brother who was left behind to clean up the stains from the carpet in the windowless shack they lived in?

DEAR CHILD is Romy Hausmann's first English language novel, translated smoothly here from German by Jamie Bulloch. It is a character driven novel full of twists and turns, right up through the final page. Narrated pretty

much unreliably by Lena, Hannah, and Matthias (Lena's father), it keeps the reader off-balance throughout. Each narrator has a different style and tone of speech. Yet none of it feels like cheating. It's a game of who is actually who and what truly went on while Lena was missing, all peeled back slowly, revealing the horrors of a life in captivity.

This psychological thriller examines the question of whether one can ever truly escape the hell of brutalization, torture, and deprivation of a normal life, even if freed from captivity. Does freedom equal safety? This fast paced, disturbingly dark novel will keep you turning the pages, even with its sometimes unlikeable characters. Although set in Germany, there is little sense of place, which makes it all the more ominous since something like this could shockingly happen anywhere.

Try to avoid reading too much about this novel before you start it. That way you'll be able to discover all the reveals as they come along, maintaining a higher degree of suspense and surprise. I've deliberately kept the plot information here to an absolute minimum. It's worth it not to know too much at the outset of this skin-crawling tale of how one person can destroy, physically and mentally, so many innocents' lives.

THE OPIUM PRINCE

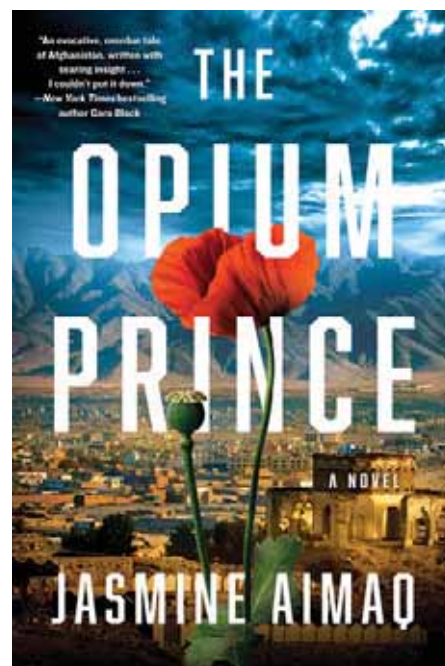
by Jasmine Aimaq

Soho Crime, \$27.95

December 2020

Rating: A-

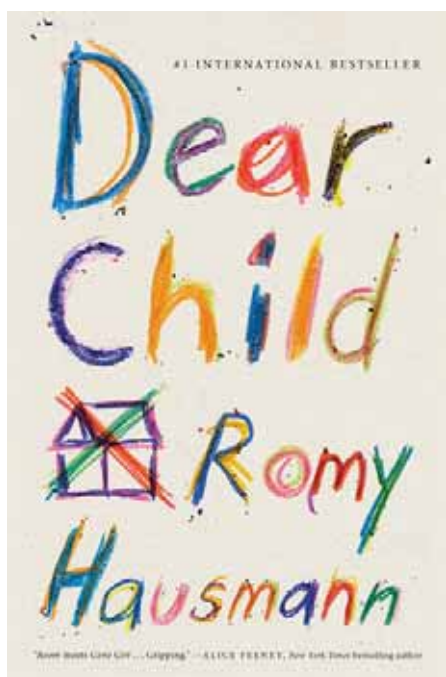
Pre-war Afghanistan, 1977. Daniel Sajadi, employed by a U.S. foreign aid agency whose purpose is to help farmers stop growing poppies and teach them how to plant food products instead, strikes and kills a nine- or ten-year-old girl named Telaya while driving inattentively. He is let off with a small fine, payable to the impoverished parents thanks to the help of Taj, a stranger who steps in with an offer of assistance. But that help comes with a price. Taj is a powerful opium kahn, a man whose poppy fields are the next ones scheduled for destruction. He blackmails Sajadi with threats of violence unless he will



change the targeted field to a less productive one not controlled by Taj. When Sajadi gives in, things begin to spiral out of control as the Communists in the country begin to try to take charge.

This is Jasmine Aimaq's debut and a strong one it is. Heavily character driven, but still maintaining a high degree of suspense, the novel is an in depth examination of the roots of the problems between the rich and the poor, between criminal activities, fragile political regimes, war, and outside influences that have wracked the country for decades. As Sajadi tries to do his job in the face of Taj's blackmail, he constantly hears the voice of the dead Telaya haunting him, driving him closer to madness.

The novel is rich with the sights and sounds and smells of the country: unpaved roads, snowcapped mountains, naan baking in fiery holes in the ground, the stench of donkeys in the streets contrasting with the perfume of acacia trees and roses, all vividly described, as is a visit to an opium den. Politics and religion, at war with each other, pervade the poppy-rich country and the story Aimaq is telling. "Karl Marx had it backward. Religion wasn't the opiate of the masses. Opium was the religion of the masses, making new converts every day . . ." Is there any real difference between radical Communists and the radical religious? Aren't fanatic-



ics just fanatics no matter their cause?

Sajadi, as many of the characters do, come across as unlikeable in this story of family. He can't take time away from the destruction of the poppy field to return home for his sister-in-law's funeral back in the States. Nor can he go back when his wife is giving birth to their child. He keeps going into the face of danger rather than the safety of his home in the U.S. To some that might be realistic while others might find it reprehensible. But in any event it is realistic even if the choice seems to outsiders to be foolish. Because throughout the book, lines shift frequently between what is right and what is wrong, between who is an ally and who suddenly has become an enemy. Not only are lives lost here, but innocence as well. This is a fascinating look at a time and a place where law and order depend on who is administering it, "where the only real laws were those of nature, and the only real orders those of a warlord."

THE MAN IN MILAN

by Vito Racanelli
Polis Books, \$26.99
October 2020
Rating: C

Two NYPD detectives are assigned to investigate the brutal murder of Gaitano Muro, a resident of Milan, Italy, who was carrying diplomatic identification. But the Italian consulate denies any knowledge of the dead man, while a variety of bureaucratic police obstacles are thrown in their way. Only when the policewoman sister of the victim arrives do the detectives begin to make some headway. The only way they can make further progress is to travel to Italy, where the three are caught up in the notorious (and real life) Ustica plane disaster and its possible cover-up twenty-two years earlier. They find themselves in the many tendrils of the Gladio, Italy's shadowy political, and very powerful, cabal. As they try to untangle the web weaved around them, their lives are thrust into international intrigue and danger.

This debut novel by Vito Racanelli is at times both too simple and too com-

plex. When the cops head to Italy, they manage to violate just about every possible rule in the book, illegally carrying guns, breaking into tombs, sneaking away from their police escorts, all in a search for a set of tapes relating to the so-called Ustica massacre.

On June 27, 1980, Itavia Flight 870, a McDonnell Douglas DC-9 passenger jet en route from Bologna to Palermo, Italy, crashed into the Tyrrhenian Sea between the islands of Ponza and Ustica, killing all 81 people on board. The circumstances surrounding this continue to be a source of controversy. Was it shot down in a dogfight between NATO and Libyan fighter jets, as the Prime Minister of Italy at the time alleged? Was there a terrorist bomb on board the plane? Or was it shot down by a missile, as Italy's top criminal court ruled? And in any event, how does this all tie in with Gaitano's murder twenty-two years after the plane crash? Author Racanelli postulates his own theories but never provides a clear answer.

The book is a lovely tourist guide to Rome, Ustica, and Milan, but for me the story fell short on solutions (which of course I realize is a possibility when dealing with a true but unsolved incident) – and isn't that what a mystery novel should have? There are some more-than-suggested behind the scenes machinations but they weren't detailed enough to satisfy me.

SATAN TAKES THE HELM

by Calvin Clements
Black Gat Books, \$9.99
October 2020
Rating: B

Martin Lewandowski is out of work when he hears word that the Eastern Trader, a freighter, is in need of a skipper. He interviews for the job with Joyce Sloan, an attractive woman who turns out to be the ship owner's wife. Martin gets the job and signs on for a trip from San Francisco to Shanghai. Trouble ensues when Martin and Joyce fall for each other. Captain Sloan is old, crippled, and horribly scarred. It is obvious Joyce, who is accompanying her aged husband on the ship, married him for



his money. As the Eastern Trader sets sail for China, Martin has an interest in replacing Sloan, not only as captain of the ship but also as Joyce's lover.

Calvin Clements began writing after twenty years as a fireboat pilot for the NYC Fire Department. While he only wrote four novels, of which **Satan Takes the Helm**, was the first, he was a prolific movie and TV screenwriter. Among many other things, he wrote 39 episodes of **Guns Smoke**. This book was published in 1952 by Gold Medal, home to many paperback original novels filled with action, violence, and sex (not that there's anything wrong with that!).

This book is a solid example of what was both right and wrong with stories published back in those days. While some things were pretty predictable (the initial hot romance between Martin and Joyce being the most obvious example), the story rings with authenticity when describing the ship, the seamen on the ship and the sympathetic character of the injured Captain Sloan. The reader is given a realistic glimpse of the difficult life onboard the Trader, from petty (and not so petty) squabbles of the crew to the dangers awaiting them from the weather and the sea itself. The tension mounts early, as the elderly Sloan learns of the affair between his wife and his

new skipper. When Sloan threatens to put Martin ashore in Shanghai, Joyce realizes action must be taken. It is the nature of that action that drives the rest of the book to its violent climax. This is a very readable noir story, well told at under 200 pages.

TELL A NOVELLA

It's unusual if I get one novella a decade to review but here are four (including two in one volume) that arrived within days of each other:

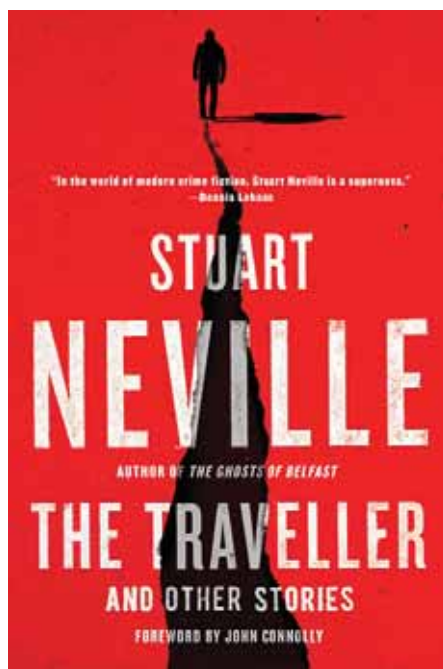
THE TRAVELLER AND OTHER STORIES

by Stuart Neville
Soho Crime, \$27.95
October 2020

Rating: B

This book collects a dozen short stories and one novella from Stuart Neville. It is divided into two sections: *New Monsters* and *Old Friends*, the latter of which includes "The Traveller" novella. *New Monsters* includes one story ("The Night Hag") written for this collection. These seven standalone short stories are a nice mix of both crime and supernatural. The crime stories often involve the disappearance/death of a family member (a mother in "Coming in on Time" or a father in "London Safe," one of the more chilling tales in this volume, or a child in "Echo"). The supernatural/horror tales include (once again) the disappearance of a child ("The Green Lady." I'm beginning to sense a theme here!) or the nightmare world of sleep paralysis (the frightening "The Night Hag"). "Queen of the Hill" manages to combine crime and a horror aspect based on Irish mythology. All in all, these shorts are generally compelling and terrifying.

Old Friends is of a different sort. Each of these five short stories ties into characters that have appeared in one or more of Neville's full-length novels. Origins and backstories are told in this part to enhance those characters. While entertaining, they might be more interesting to those who've read the author's



earlier books (which were for the most part very good).

The final story in the collection is the novella "The Traveller." It, too, is based on earlier novels and this is its first appearance in print. It follows the latter days of Jack Lennon and his daughter Ellen, who both appeared in previous volumes, as has the Traveller. Those who haven't read that book will find that this story is still accessible but that there are a number of things that are not explained sufficiently or at least weren't to my satisfaction. However, what is here should drive the reader forward even without a full explanation of just who the characters are and what and why everything is happening. But I would encourage you to read those earlier novels first, starting with *The Ghosts of Belfast*, in order to get the full meaning of what is going on here.

All in all, this is a solid collection of hard-boiled writing from a fine author.

NOT WORTH THAT MUCH / MONEY IS THE DRUG OF CHOICE

by Wilson Toney
Stark House Press, \$15.95
January 2021
Rating: B

Thirty year veteran private detectives John Wallis ("Bug") and Dave Roche ("Pronounced 'Rock,'" though most

everyone calls him "Roach") work for the National Detective Agency in an unnamed city. In the first short novel (around 120 pages) in this double-novella book the agency is hired to investigate the death of Claude Farraday who got burned up in a hit-and-run. Farraday's firm held a Key Personnel insurance policy on him "for a cool five million." The employer naturally wants its money from the insurance company, National's client. The insurer is suspicious because it's the third Key Personnel policy it's had to pay off in a year. Bug and Roche are assigned to the case, while Starkey, a third detective in the firm, looks for a missing person, last seen at a soup kitchen. When the woman in charge of the shelter is murdered, Starkey realizes this is more than just a missing persons case.

The second novella finds the detectives working for a pharmaceutical company. Inventories of narcotic drugs are coming up short. The company wants to find out how the drugs are going missing. Invoices show they are being shipped and receipts show the drugs have arrived, but by the time they are ready to be issued, the boxes turn up short of medications when opened. The detectives uncover corporate corruption, greed, drugs sold to the underworld, and an affair. The detectives get in the way of the cops, the FBI and the DEA (or maybe it's the other way around!).

On a casual reading, one might think that these stories were written back in the 1950s or '60s, but they are all modern day short novels. Still, they have the flavor of the old Gold Medal or other paperbacks of that earlier era, just with the addition of computers, GPS systems, cellphones, and the like. Instead of Richard Prather's Shell Scott or Carter Brown's Al Wheeler, we have their soft-boiled latter day cousins, only without the sex. There is a lot of humor, more of the "makes me smile rather than laugh out loud" type, so it doesn't get in the way of the stories, which are straightforward, about dedicated detectives who have the usual affection and annoyance toward each other and their jobs.

These are the second and third

Bug and Roche novels, following their well-received debut, *Alibi for a Dead Man*. Wilson Toney didn't take up writing until he retired from being an engineer after nearly fifty years. Let's hope he continues to write more of these entertaining stories, a nice shift from high violence and brutal death in these difficult times.

DEATH OF A TELENODELA STAR

by Teresa Dovalpage

Soho Crime, \$7.99

August 2020

Rating: C-

Marlene Martinez, a former Cuban cop turned Miami baker, is on a Caribbean cruise with her niece, Serita, a gift for the young teen's *quinceañera*. Also on board ship is Cuban telenovela star Carloalberto and his entourage. Serita is enamored of the star, doing everything in her power to attract his attention. Marlene's trained detective skills come to believe the man is in some sort of trouble with shady characters surrounding him and his nerves on edge. When murder occurs, Marlene must rely on her expertise to find a killer when the police overlook clues.

This novella is slight in more ways than one. It comes in at 118 pages and is more of a travelogue of Marlene and Serita's time aboard ship and visiting such locales as Belize and Chichén Itzá. Author Teresa Dovalpage captures the cruise ship life, with its gambling, dancing, and drinking very well and provides tempting descriptions of fascinating places to visit.

The mystery itself is also very slight. It takes a long time for it to develop in such a short tale. And when it comes, it is neither unexpected nor all that interesting. It's also puzzling that when former cop Marlene hears a splash she believes sounds like a body being tossed into the sea, she doesn't bother reporting it to anyone. What's up with that? Further, there is more than enough teenage angst here to get in the way of the plot. It's things like this that make the book, easily read in one sitting, disappointing.

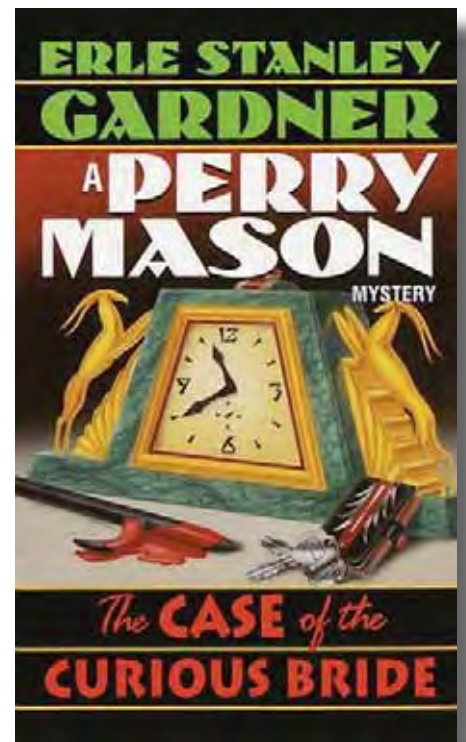
THE OLD-TIMER IN THE CORNER

I realized recently that I have over time acquired more books than I can probably read in my lifetime. Well, okay, I actually realized that about forty years ago. So I decided I need to pick up the pace of reading them. Most of what I've read in the twenty years I've been reviewing for *Deadly Pleasures* (and don't get me wrong: it has been a pleasure for me!) are review books of varying quality (mostly good to outstanding) while neglecting the thousand and more books on my shelves. So I've decided I'm going to read more of my own stash and cut back a bit on reviews.

When I mentioned this to our fearless editor, George suggested that I could "feel free . . . to add reviews of any of the 'old timers' to [my] column." So from time to time I'll be adding a review of a book from forty or fifty years or so ago, which shows you just how far behind I am, since I have enough books to read until I'm about 250 years old. That should hold me. Ahhh . . . so many books, so little time.

But first of all, a tip of the hat to Baroness Orczy, who – in addition to crafting stories about the Scarlet Pimpernel – created perhaps the original Nameless Detective with *The Old Man in the Corner*, from which I've borrowed (okay, stole with a slight alteration) the title of this column within a column.

This time around I decided to read an Erle Stanley Gardner Perry Mason novel. I read so many of these when I was in high school (and read them out of order, not that that made any real difference) that now all these years later I had a hard time remembering which I had read and which I hadn't. I was sure I'd read the first few books (and plenty of the later ones) but could not recall **THE CASE OF THE CURIOUS BRIDE** (1934), so that's where I started.



Mason knows his client, Helen Crocker, is lying to him right from the start. She tells him that "a friend of hers" (nudge nudge, wink wink) wants to know if a person could be convicted of murder if there was no corpse. The "friend's" husband has been missing for seven years, now presumed dead, and the so-called friend wants to remarry. Perry basically kicks her out of his office, only to find that Della Street has already taken a retainer (\$50 – a lot of money in those depression era days) from her. She also left her purse behind and it naturally contained a gun. So Mason sets out to find her but it's not so easy since even the name she gave was a lie. She is eventually found and charged with the murder of her husband. Mason pulls out all the stops to save her. This is a fast moving tale of a con man, bigamy, blackmail, and the murder of someone who *really* needed to be murdered!

Okay, isn't that the basic plot of all the Perry Mason novels? Sure, but Gardner manages to put his own spin on things every time. In these early Mason stories (this is the fifth in the long-running series) he acts more as a detective who is also an attorney,

so it's fun to see. Yes, Paul Drake is there and handles the more mundane stuff while Mason goes around tailing people, checking out the murder scene and even stealing evidence, substituting something else in its place. Looks like it's time for that disbarment hearing, Perry! The trial scenes are fun and relatively realistic, as Gardner himself was a trial lawyer.

It's also fun to see how people got along without cellphones and other modern "conveniences." Every time someone needed to write something, they would pull out a pencil from their pocket since of course no one had a ball point pen. Phrases like "Hells bells, Perry," or "She took a runout powder" abound in these novels. In this book Drake walks into Mason's office, only to discover Della with her hand covering Perry's. "Della Street's sympathetic hand dropped to [Perry's]. Fingers – fingers that had grown strong from pounding typewriter keys – squeezed a message of silent understanding." That's what passed for sex in those books!

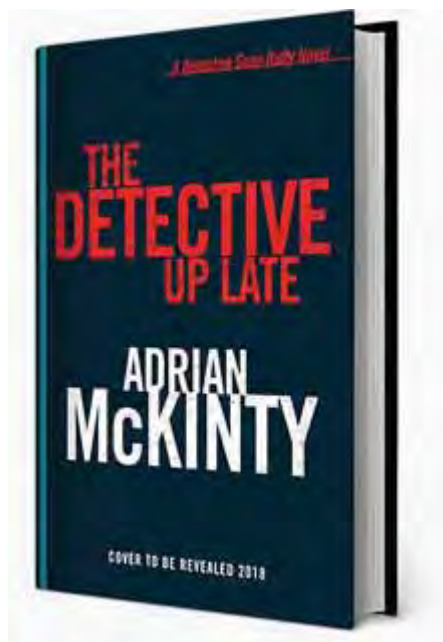
Anyway, it's all great fast reading fun. Even if you've never read a Perry Mason novel (or never read one of the early ones – longtime nemesis Hamilton Burger does not appear until the sixth book in the series, *The Case of the Counterfeit Eye*), take a trip back in time and discover what you've missed.

Reviewed Novels in Order of Preference

THE SURVIVORS
THE OPIUM PRINCE
DEAR CHILD
THE BREAKER
BLIND VIGIL
THE RED HORSE
SATAN TAKES THE HELM
NOT WORTH THAT MUCH / MON-
EY IS THE DRUG OF CHOICE
THE TRAVELLER AND OTHER
STORIES
THE MAN IN MILAN
DEATH OF A TELENVELA STAR

Coming This Fall THE DETECTIVE UP LATE

by Adrian McKinty



What was once announced as a trilogy, the Sean Duffy series will continue in its seventh outing with **THE DETECTIVE UP LATE** (Blackstone, October, 2021).

It's the dawn of the new decade, and Detective Inspector Sean Duffy is more than happy to slam the door on the grisly '80s, clinging to the hope that the '90s might prove more peaceful for the people of Belfast. Duffy looks forward to embarking on his own personal new chapter, spending more time with his longtime partner, Beth, and daughter, Emma, as he switches to being a part-timer at the Carrickfergus RUC.

Before Duffy can shift gears though, a missing person report captures his attention. A fifteen-year-old girl from a seedy local caravan park has vanished without a trace. Duffy's sense that this is more than a case of a teenage runaway is soon confirmed as he uncovers a network of lurid middle-aged men closely connected with the girl. Fearing that every second lost could mean the case remaining unsolved, Duffy urgently tries to uncover what happened to the girl—while simultaneously having to manage a mercurial triple agent.

The Lefty Award Nominations

Best Humorous Mystery Novel

Ellen Byron, *MURDER IN THE BAYOU BONEYARD*

Jennifer J. Chow, *MIMI LEE GETS A CLUE*

Carl Hiaasen, *SQUEEZE ME*
Cynthia Kuhn, *THE STUDY OF SECRETS*

J. Michael Orenduff, *THE POT THIEF WHO STUDIED THE WOMAN AT OTOWI CROSSING*
Sung J. Woo, *SKIN DEEP*

Best Historical Mystery Novel

for books set before 1970

Susanna Calkins, *THE FATE OF A FLAPPER*

Dianne Freeman, *A LADY'S GUIDE TO MISCHIEF AND MURDER*

Laurie R. King, *RIVIERA GOLD*

Catrina McPherson, *THE TURNING TIDE*

Ann Parker, *MORTAL MUSIC*

James W. Ziskin, *TURN TO STONE*

Best Debut Mystery Novel

Daisy Bateman, *MURDER GOES TO MARKET*

Mary Keliikoa, *DERAILED*

Erica Ruth Neubauer, *MURDER AT THE MENA HOUSE*

Richard Osman, *THE THURSDAY MURDER CLUB*

Halley Sutton, *THE LADY UPSTAIRS*

David Heska Wanbli Weiden, *WINTER COUNTS*

Best Mystery Novel

Tracy Clark, *WHAT YOU DON'T SEE*
S.A. Cosby, *BLACKTOP WASTELAND*

Matt Coyle, *BLIND VIGIL*
Rachel Howzell Hall, *AND NOW SHE'S GONE*

Louise Penny, *ALL THE DEVILS ARE HERE*

Maggie's Cozy Mystery Cafe'

Mary Mason



THE GIFT OF THE MAGPIE

by Donna Andrews

Minotaur, \$25.99

28th in Meg Langslow series

Rating: A

The holidays in Caerphilly, Va. are a time for joy. The town has a diverse population, mostly nice, kind people. Meg Langslow and her large family are perfect examples. This year the community created a service organization: Helping Hands for the Holidays. Neighbors helping neighbors with projects too hard or expensive. Meg is in charge, so it's running smoothly, until faced with a larger than life task.

A resident, nicknamed Harvey the Hoarder, has finally been convinced to accept help cleaning out his very very cluttered home. Neighbors have complained to the authorities, and greedy relatives are circling like vultures. Rumor has it there is a treasure buried in

the piles and piles of "stuff." Meg comes up with a solution to the problem, and enlists volunteers to help with the task. A vacant building will be used to store the items, and Harvey will be able to sort through them at his own pace.

Meg's husband Michael is preparing a holiday show, Meg's grandfather and her cousin Rose Noire are in disagreement over how to handle a (magnum?) of Magpies, and Meg's twin sons are desperate to find the perfect gift for those on their list. Never a dull moment in this town.

Things take a turn for the worse when Harvey is attacked in his garage. There is no shortage of suspects, and to make matters worse, there is a vehicle pileup that has caused a power outage. Meg realizes that could mean the alarm system at the storage building will not be working, so she enlists her dog Spike (aka the evil one) and her brothers large dog as security guards. It worked, to a point, but Meg is up to any challenge and saves the day (with Canine assistance).

I love this series, and have previously expressed my wish that Caerphilly existed, as I would probably set speed records moving there. The drawback is my own home, where I'm getting really tired of things I'm looking for hiding from me. I'd be sure to give Helping Hands another challenge, but I know there up to it.

SILENT BITE

by David Rosenfelt

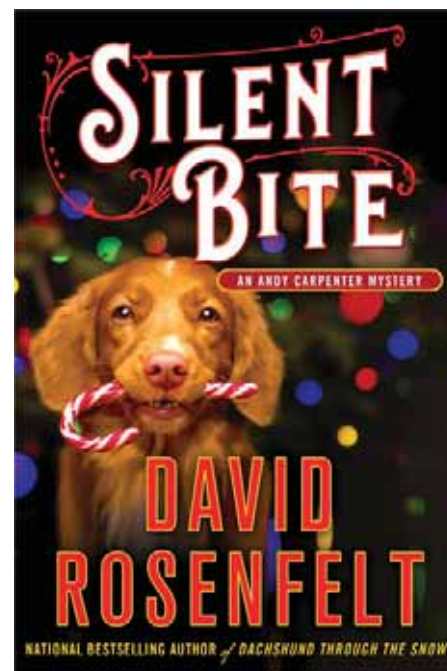
Minotaur, \$25.99

22nd in Andy Carpenter series

Rating: A

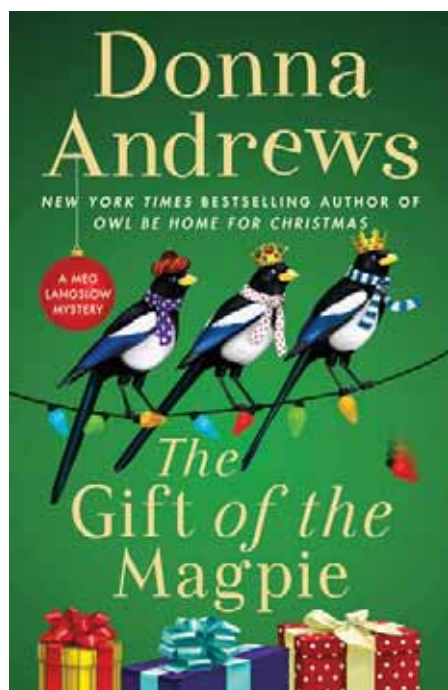
It's always a joyous time when a new Rosenfelt book arrives, and this is no exception.

Andy Carpenter and family have returned from a cruise, and are making their first stop on dry land, to the Tara Foundation. Partner Willie Miller



has called and asked for Andy to come ASAP. It's always a pleasure for Andy to see the Foundation and the animals they are saving.

Sadly, this stop brings legal work for Andy. Andy wants to put RET. at the end of his name, but keeps getting cases he can't refuse. This latest one doesn't seem to be an easy win. Tony Birch has been arrested for murder, the victim being a member of the same gang who testified against him years ago. After sentencing, Tony yelled threats at Frankie Zimmer. Tony served time, due to Zimmer's false testimony, but since his release he's reformed. He got a job at a garage after release and now owns it. He's been an upstanding citizen since his release from prison. While incarcerated, he was roommates with Willy.



Willy believes in his innocence, and so Andy reluctantly takes the case, sure it's a loser. Things do get more tangled when other members of Tony's former gang end up murdered. Sadly, the murders took place prior to Tony's incarceration so he's considered to be the culprit in those crimes. When Tony's garage is torched, Andy starts to think everything is just too easy for the prosecutions case. In typical Andy fashion, using his team of crack investigators, canine assistants, and Marcus, he figures out the true criminal and helps another falsely accused man go free.

This series is one of my favorites. I do confess that when I see Andy wants to retire, I yell at the book saying "Don't you dare." I highly recommend this book and the entire series. I'm already impatient for the next one.

HIDDEN TREASURE

by Jane Cleland

Minotaur, \$26.99

13th in Josie Prescott series

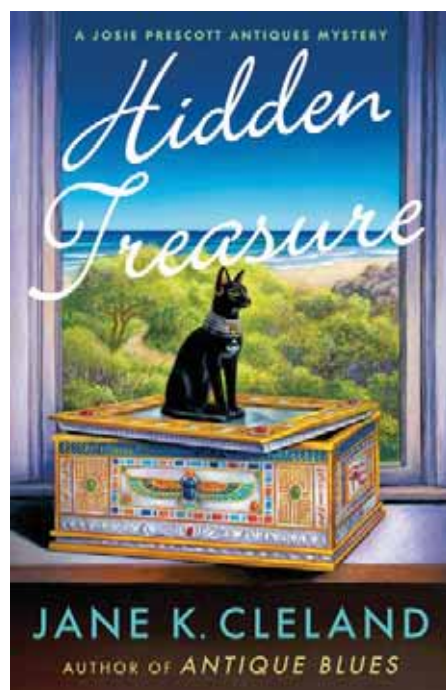
Rating: B+

Josie & her husband Ty have purchased their dream home. A Victorian in Rocky Point, NH., the gingerbread house. A dream come true reveals a mystery. The seller, Maudie Wilson, has moved into an assisted living facility nearby, at the urging of her 2 nieces. The nieces want to ensure everything has been removed from the house, which Josie agrees to allow. After the inspection, Josie learns that a family treasure hasn't been located. One niece is a bit threatening, concerned Josie will keep the treasure if she finds it. Josie assures her that won't happen, and does find the treasure in a boarded up dumb waiter.

Being accustomed to documenting items, she films the piece in situ and throughout the recovery. It's a trunk with a box hidden inside. The box is jewel encrusted and contains a cat sculpture. Not sure if the jewels are real, nor the history of the cat, Josie is very careful to ensure the items are handled with care. She makes plans to return the items to Maudie, but when she arrives, she finds one of the nieces instead.

Celia has been bludgeoned to death.

Another mystery crops up, where is Maudie? She was not in her apartment, and no one has heard from her. She doesn't answer her phone or return messages, which is normal for her. Josie is at sea, wondering what to do with the treasure, but soon that becomes moot as the treasure has disappeared. Josie later thinks she may be able to find the treasure, and she does, but is attacked. When she recovers, she finds the treasure has disappeared. Using common sense, and help from friends, Josie tracks down Maudie. She also helps in solving both the murder and the whereabouts of the treasure. Her connections help discover the value of the treasure.



I enjoy this series and always learn a bit about collectibles. Cleland shows her expertise in the field in a very relatable way. Josie is an interesting person, one who is always available to help if called upon. The town of Rocky Point is charming and makes me want to pay a visit, especially to one of Josie's tag sales. My checkbook might never recover, so it's a good thing it's fiction.

THE RED HORSE

by James R. Benn

Soho, \$27.95

Fourteenth in the Billy Boyle WWII series

Rating A

After the events in the previous book, Billy finds himself in England at St. Albans Convalescent Hospital, a place for recuperation and recovery. Billy has been through the wringer and worries about his love, Diana, who has been captured by the Nazis and about his friend Kaz, who has a serious heart condition. Billy had tried to deal with all the issues facing him via drugs, and has had to deal with that. One joyful bit of news is Kaz's sister, long thought to be dead, is alive and in the same camp as Diana.

St. Albans isn't a normal hospital, it is also a secure facility because many of its patients are in possession of military secrets. At least that's the intention.

One of the methods used for recovery is electro-shock. Billy is rescued from that kind of treatment and has made great strides towards recovery. He witnesses a horrific death, a man seemingly committing suicide by throwing himself off a tower. Billy isn't so sure it was suicide, and is asked to investigate.

His investigations lead him to wonder just what is going on at the facility. There is a floor off limits to most staff and patients. Billy infiltrates the area and finds patients sessions with the psychiatrist are being taped. There are more deaths, and being a patient, his normal investigatory methods are not available. With the help of Kaz, Big Mike, and Billy's own skills, the deaths are solved, and there is hope for the future.

This is a series I look forward to and have always enjoyed. Benn's knowledge of WWII history is extensive, and he imparts the information in a skilled and engaging way. In my junior high years, I was very interested in WWII and read a lot of books. I also talked to an Uncle whose unit freed a concentration camp. But each book in the series has given me more information and in a way that is entertaining. I'm afraid that the end of the war will (fictionally) come too soon and hence, the end of this excellent series.

Deadly Pleasures

George Easter



MONGKOK STATION

by Jake Needham

HP, \$15.99

Rating: A-

Inspector Samuel Tay (now retired) is asked by some shady American “friends” to look into the disappearance of Emma Lau, a young, female medical student in Hong Kong. So the crusty, somewhat antisocial detective flies from his home in Singapore to the beleaguered city in the midst of demonstrations and riots. Since Tay is operating on unfamiliar ground, a local fixer, Jack Shepherd (the star of Needham’s other series), is brought in to help. And as backup, the extremely dangerous Claire is there to keep everyone safe.

The stakes: Emma Lau’s mother is Hong Kong’s Chief Executive. What only a handful of people know – Emma is also the secret daughter of the Vice President of the United States who has sanctioned Tay’s mission.

Emma seems to have disappeared one day in the crowded streets of the sketchy neighborhood of Mongkok. First order of business is to find out if one of the Chinese triads has kidnapped her. Once that question is answered, the investigative group gets an unexpected ally, a Chinese triad crime boss who willingly uses his vast resources to do some of the necessary groundwork.

The investigation turns up the fact that there are five other young women of privilege who have disappeared in Mongkok over the last year and a half. They have never been seen again. Could all of these “cases” be related?

As the story progresses along we get a lot of Tay’s musings about life, women, smoking, Hong Kong and death – and most of all – coffee, coffee, coffee! A few days into the investigation he gets

a personal medical surprise that takes some time away from the investigation to resolve.

My favorite part of this book and of the other one in the series that I read (*THE GIRL IN THE WINDOW*) is the appearance of Tay’s deceased mother in the middle of the night. The sparring dialogue between them is absolutely hilarious. She says she is there to tell him two important things. Of course, Tay doesn’t believe that his mother is actually communicating from beyond the veil. But then there is the question of the chair at the foot of his bed that wasn’t there when he went to sleep.

Jake Needham is probably a name that many of you are unfamiliar with. He lives mostly in Asia and his books are not published by a major U.S. publisher. You probably won’t find Jake Needham titles at your local bookstore (if it still exists) or your local library. He

was at a Bouchercon a few years ago and that is where I met him.

To get copies of his books, I would first try mysterymikes.com which has most of Jake’s books and many of them signed. They are also available on the big book websites.

Needham’s novels are well worth the small effort it takes to get them. They are well written and loaded with wise observations and appropriately spaced humor. Tay is an intriguing character who is at once likeable and unlikeable. It keeps the readers on their toes. The Far East settings and customs are described in wonderful detail.

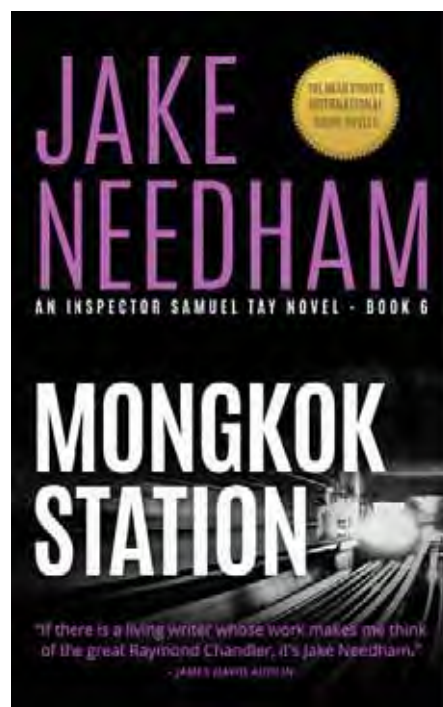
Steele Curry’s Take on MONGKOK STATION

Inspector Samuel Tay Takes On Hong Kong

The recently retired senior homicide Singapore detective Samuel Tay is asked by his old friend John August to come to Hong Kong to track down a missing girl. Upon arriving, he finds out her mother is the Chinese-appointed Chief Executive of Hong Kong and her undisclosed father just happens to be the Vice President of the U.S. For political reasons, the search for the kidnapped girl has to be kept strictly under wraps. Tay reluctantly assumes the lead in the investigation with the support of August’s close associate Claire, trouble-shooting lawyer Jack Shepherd and a senior member of the Hong Kong criminal Triad gangs.

The city of Hong Kong plays a prominent role in this novel. Since the turnover of Hong Kong by the British to China in 1997, the Chinese government has been steadily extinguishing the last remaining protections of Hong Kong’s freedom. In response, the city of more than eight million residents has been constantly rocked by large democracy demonstrations. These have intensified since Beijing imposed a tough new security law on Hong Kong this past summer. To say that these actions have profoundly transformed the prior vibrant character of Hong Kong for the worse would be an understatement.

The author captures the current desperate atmosphere of Hong Kong superbly with a terrific storyline, a



cast of colourful characters, and crisp, droll dialogue. As I've said before, Jake Needham's writing style reminds me a lot of Ross Thomas. I'm keenly looking forward to reading more about Inspector Tay. **Rating: A**

THE LAW OF INNOCENCE

by Michael Connelly

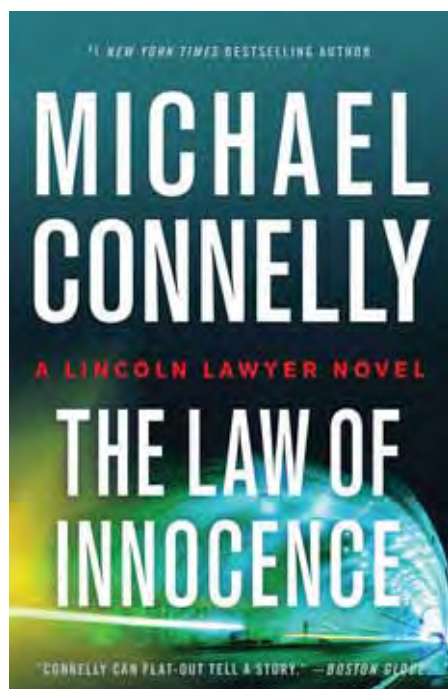
Little, Brown, \$29.00, November, 2020

Rating: A

In this, the sixth Mickey Haller legal thriller, we find Mickey having just celebrated another court victory when he is pulled over by a cop who notices what looks like blood dripping from the trunk of Mickey's car. Yep, you guessed it: there's a dead body in there playing trunk music and Mickey is arrested for murder.

We, the readers know he is innocent, but there is a lot of evidence against him – as well as a fierce prosecutor who is hell bent to put Mickey away. He decides to represent himself but is hampered by having to stay in jail, being unable to post his exorbitantly high bail. So Mickey must prepare his defense while incarcerated.

Legal machinations fill a large part of this book but did not slow the plot. All of it was fascinating. The resolution comes a little bit out of left field, but that is a minor quibble. I read this



almost non-stop in a period of less than 24 hours – the only interruption was a necessary visit to my sister who has been ill. As soon as I got home, I sat down and finished it. This is not unusual behavior for me with a Michael Connelly book. He's simply the best – the gold standard for relentlessly paced, page-turning reads. 2020 might be a disaster in too many ways to mention, but two Michael Connelly books in the same year do a lot to mitigate the pain.

BLIND VIGIL

by Matt Coyle

Oceanview, \$26.95

Rating: A-

As the story opens up, Rick Cahill is still recovering from a gunshot wound suffered nine months previously. It has caused almost total blindness, but doctors tell him that there is a chance that his sight may return, but if, when and how much are still to be determined.

Rick doesn't know what he will do professionally but he has pretty much decided not to return to private investigation – too much damage to himself and to those whom he loves.

Moira MacFarlane, a close friend and colleague, asks for some help on an investigation that she is reluctant to take on – to follow the girlfriend of Rick's best friend, to see if she is seeing someone else. Moira had a prior similar case that ended with her client killing his lover. But Rick assures her that his buddy would never do that.

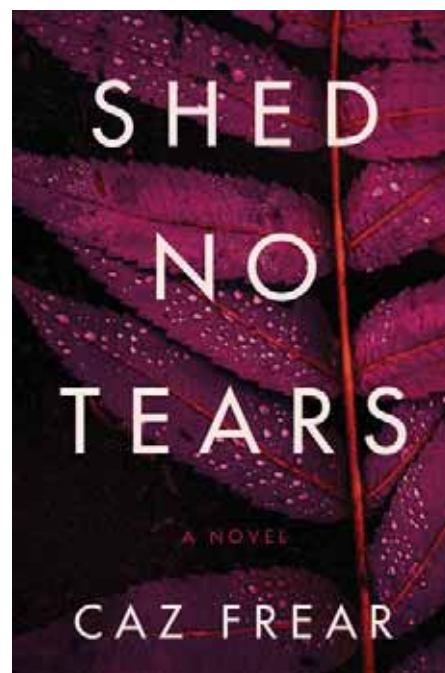
[Spoiler alert] Well, you guessed it, the girl winds up dead and Rick's best friend is the chief suspect.

Despite his handicap, Rick uses Uber and voice-activated commands on his cell phone and computer to investigate the murder and clear his friend. You have to admire the author's ingenuity in creating believable ways for his blind protagonist to carry on a difficult investigation.

Matt Coyle is at the top of his game. No one is writing better private eye mysteries than Matt. I've loved every one of them.

SHED NO TEARS

by Caz Frear



Harper, \$26.95

Rating: B+

I'll say it at the outset that this is a series that should be read in order, starting with the Barry-Award-nominated **SWEET LITTLE LIES**. It is also important to get a good fix on the continuing characters, most of whom belong to a brilliant crime-solving team. First off, we encounter DS Cat Kinsella, who has been successful so far in hiding her past as the daughter of a minor criminal and her first-hand knowledge of the criminal underworld. She is brash and brilliant. Then there's the likeable sidekick, family man and mentor DS Luigi Parnell who is a perfect calming influence on the excitable Cat. The team is headed by the aptly named DCI Kate Steele, smart in both dress and mind. The snappy, clever and entertaining dialogue found in the team's headquarters is among the best in mystery fiction. Worth the price of the novel alone.

Bones of a murder victim are discovered in faraway Caxton. These prove to be the remains of Holly Kemp, whose disappearance was blamed on the convicted Christopher Masters, otherwise known as the Roommate Killer. A witness had seen them together near the time of Holly's disappearance. But as Cat and the team start to investigate things just don't add up. Is there someone else responsible for Holly's death?

There is a lot of police procedure (not all of it edge-of-your-set exciting) between this realization and the resolution. I have to admit to putting the book down (despite the great dialogue) a few times before picking it back up to finish it.

The ending finds us wondering what is the future for Cat. I guess we'll all have to wait until the next Caz Frear novel to find out. Overall a great series, with this third one, a mild disappointment compare to the other two. If we get no more crime novels from Susie Steiner (because of her health problems), we could do a lot worse than reading Caz Frear novels. They have similar protagonists with similar smart mouths.

Robert B. Parker's SOMEONE TO WATCH OVER ME

by Ace Atkins
Putnam, \$27.00

Rating: B-

In this latest episode in the ageless Spenser series (he's still lifting impossibly heavy weights and undergoing heart-bursting workouts). Since I started reading Spenser novels in 1973, it seems like he should be at least in his 70s now, but he certainly doesn't act like it.

It doesn't take long for the reader to recognize who the two main villains of this story are patterned after – headline-grabbing Jeffrey Epstein and his alleged partner-in-crime Ghislaine Maxwell, now reincarnated by Ace Atkins as sociopath billionaire Peter Steiner and his procurer Poppy Palmer.

Mattie Sullivan (**LULLABY**) is now a college student with a part-time job working and training with Spenser. She brings him a case that she wants to handle: a young, under-aged girl who was sexually abused by an older man, who kept her laptop and backpack and wouldn't return them. So Mattie and Spenser go in search of the laptop and find much more – a whole string of victims of Peter Steiner's twisted appetites. Some are willing to testify and others have been scared off or paid off by Steiner's minions.

Spenser get in contact with private and public sources to build a case against Steiner. Meanwhile, he and

Hawk decide to see what will happen if they stir up the hornet's nest – Spenser style.

The parties dance around each other until an exciting denouement on the billionaire's private island, where Spenser encounters an old enemy who has caused him great injury – the Gray Man.

A Spenser novel reads like it was written by Superman – “faster than an airplane, more powerful than a locomotive! Able to leap tall buildings at a single bound.” But it's also like Chinese food – after just a few hours (which is all it takes to read a 315-page novel with few words on each page) -- you're hungry again, despite the too numerous descriptions of every bit of food ingested by the superhero.

A STRANGER AT THE DOOR

by Jason Pinter
Thomas & Mercer, \$15.95

Rating: B+

This is a sequel to last year's much praised **HIDE AWAY**. Rachel Marin was widowed under tragic circumstances and, seeking safety for herself and her two children, she has moved to Ashby, Illinois and adopted another name and identity. The local police now recognize her impressive investigative skills and have hired her on a part-time basis. There is also a budding relationship with a less-than-hunky police officer, Detective John Serrano, who is stable and kind. The only glitch in her life is the behavior of her teenage son Eric who is acting quite remote.

Then Eric's high school teacher, Matthew Linklater, is murdered just before he sent Rachel a puzzling email. While trying to unravel that mystery, Evie Boggs, a figure from Rachel's past, reappears and threatens to reveal all of Rachel's secrets if she doesn't drop her investigation into the teacher's death.

On top of all this, Rachel's son is being recruited (along with other local boys) by local businessman Bennett Brice with promises of big money in the offing. What does the businessman want her son to do? As Rachel delves deeper, she begins to suspect that Brice may have something to do with the

Linklater murder, all the more reason to get Eric away from Brice.

The character of Rachel Marin is the star of this production and will keep me coming back for future novels about her and her family. The story flow is smooth and pleasing and the story line engrossing. **A STRANGER AT THE DOOR** didn't have the punch of **HIDE AWAY**, but it was still an enjoyable read.

NOT DARK YET

by Peter Robinson
William Morrow, \$28.99

March, 2021

Rating: A-

First, let's get the characters of this novel straight, especially if you haven't kept up with the latest cases of DCI Alan Banks. On his team is long-time colleague Annie Cabot. Peter is also good friends with Annie's artist father, Ray and his live-in lover Zelda.

When wealthy real estate magnate Connor Blaydon is found murdered, Banks' Yorkshire crime squad investigates. A close inspection of Blaydon's mansion reveals a cache of spy cams in bedrooms and a collection of digital recordings of people in compromising positions. One such video (poor quality) shows a young woman being raped. The perpetrator's identity is not clear but there is enough of the girl's face to eventually make an identification. Annie



Cabot pursues this case.

Meanwhile, unbeknownst to her friends, Zelda is pursuing a course of revenge against those who kidnapped her as a teenager and sold her into a life of sex slavery. Her actions lead her to being kidnapped again and Banks must dig deep into her life to find out who is responsible for taking her and to try to rescue her.

Events play out with surprising results, not all of them good.

This is the best Peter Robinson novel that I have read in some time. Full of good detection, suspenseful thrills and lots and lots of references to music.

EVERY LAST FEAR

by Alex Finlay

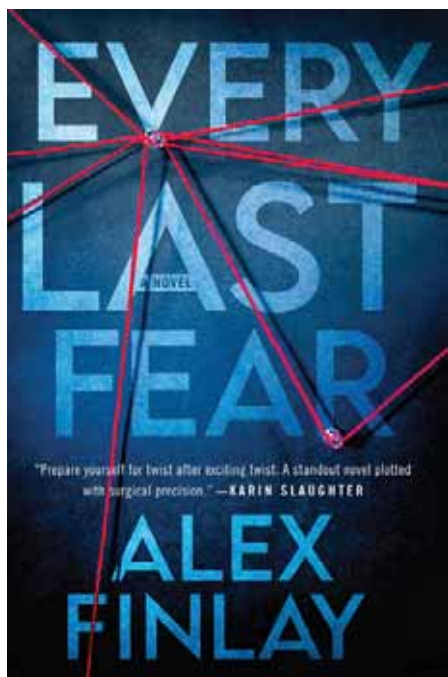
Minotaur, \$26.99

March, 2021

Rating: A-

Matt Pine is a student at NYU and one night he finds that almost his entire family – father, mother, sister and younger brother – have been found dead at a Mexican resort. Local police claim it was accidental death, but the FBI, in the person of Agent Sarah Keller, is skeptical. Matt's older brother Danny is in prison for the murder of a girlfriend, so he escaped the fate of the rest of his family.

Erin, Matt's dad, had been obsessed with proving Danny's innocence. He



participated in a documentary which outlined the facts of Danny's case and promoted his innocence. The documentary got wide coverage and not everyone was happy about it, especially some of the residents of the Pine's hometown, which was not shown in a good light.

When Matt returns to his hometown for the funeral of his family members, he and Agent Keller uncover facts that some are desperate to keep secret.

EVERY LAST FEAR is a promising and well-plotted first novel, which one would expect to receive award consideration.

This is the "buzz" book of early 2021. It has a Harlan Coben-esque plot with an intriguing premise.

THE SILENCE OF THE WHITE CITY

by Eva García Sáenz

Vintage Crime, \$16.95

Rating: B+

This is the first of a trilogy starring Inspector Unai López de Ayala, known as "Kraken," whose specialty is getting into the minds of murderers, especially serial killers. The setting of the novels is the Basque region of Spain. The series has been enormously popular in Spanish-speaking countries around the world and now is available in English.

Kraken is charged with investigating a series of ritualistic murders, which are eerily similar to ones that terrorized the citizens of the Spanish city of Vitoria, twenty years earlier. The perpetrator of those earlier murders is still in prison, which raises two questions. Are we dealing with a copycat or is the convicted murderer innocent?

Kraken, still in grief over the loss of his pregnant wife two years prior, is helped by his long-time partner, Estí and by his new boss, the beautiful, yet married Alba.

What happened twenty years ago? The victims were sets of male and female bodies, staged with the hand of one on the cheek of another. It started with newborn babies, then five-year olds, then ten-year olds, then fifteen-year-olds. The bodies were left in places of cultural or archaeological



significance. Eventually the murderer, the well-known archaeologist Tasio de Zapata was arrested by his twin brother, Ignacio. The case was a news sensation. The murders stopped and Tasio has spent the last twenty years in prison, but is soon to be released. And then a week before the release, bodies of two 20-year-olds are found posed as the other victims from twenty years ago were posed.

The things that I found appealing about this novel are the intricate plot, the major characters who are flawed but sympathetic, the history of the locale and the unusual local customs. What I wasn't pleased with was the length of the book (508 pages) and the constant jumping around of its chapters going from one story line and time frame to another story line and possibly another time. Also the extra large cast of characters demanded a list of them at the beginning of the book, but none was supplied. However, there was a map of the city of Vitoria, which was helpful. This novel required a dedicated concentration by the reader for it all to make sense, which it eventually does.

The second book in the trilogy, **THE WATER RITUALS**, will be out March 30, 2021. I'm reading it right now. There was a hook at the end of the first novel and I want to see how it plays out.

Stay tuned.

A DEADLY TWIST

by Jeffrey Siger
Sourcebooks, \$26.99
April, 2021
Rating: A-

Jeff Siger's latest Andreas Kaldis mystery takes us to the relatively untouched Greek island of Naxos, where investigative journalist Nikoletta Ellis has disappeared while researching two stories. One is about a mysterious hit man who has chosen her to write about his life story; and the second is a routine piece on the expanded tourism vs. nature preservation debate going on among Naxos inhabitants. Did someone kidnap Nikoletta because she uncovered something that put her life in danger?

When the body of an unidentified male is found at the base of a cliff where Nikoletta was last seen, Kaldis sends his chief deputy, Yianni, to investigate, using the reporter's notebooks as guides to his search. Yianni survives a near fatal automobile accident, when the car he and a fellow policewoman are in, is forced off a mountainous road. Kaldis and a coterie of associates, including his wife, rush to the island to continue what Yianni started, while his deputy recuperates.

The following investigation leads Kaldis and his cohorts into dangerous

territory to discover some long-time secrets of illegal activity on Naxos, protected by powerful people in Greece.

Reading a novel in this series is always a treat. There is so much to like: great characters, an intriguing story line and a wonderful setting. Enjoy.

WILDFIRE

by Nick Oldham
Severn House, \$28.99
Rating: B+

BAD TIMING

by Nick Oldham
Severn House, \$28.99
Rating: B+

I'm reviewing these two books together because they are really one story. What I like so much about the novels in this series is that they are every bit as much action thrillers as they are police detective novels. I thought that when Henry Christie retired from the police force and took up being the landlord of the Tawny Owl that Nick Oldham would move on to other characters. But Nick keeps finding a way to realistically involve Henry is what he does best: put himself in danger and solve crimes.

WILDFIRE starts out with using Henry's country pub/guest house as a coordinating center for fighting the wildfires that are sweeping across rural Lancashire. When one nearby couple doesn't respond to his welfare calls, Henry visits their house and finds a grisly murder scene.

Meanwhile the police are experiencing a rash of major crimes across the county. Henry is reluctantly drafted in to assist the police and teamed up with DC Diane Daniels, a former, valued colleague.

In **BAD TIMING**, Henry and a friend are fishing when they spot a body in the water. It turns out to be the daughter of the couple whose murders were chronicled in **WILDFIRE**.

Henry Christie finds himself joining forces with Diane Daniels once again. The deaths appear to be linked, and when Henry and Diane stumble upon an execution in progress and narrowly avoid becoming victims themselves, Henry embarks on a mission to bring a

merciless gunman to justice, as well as a personal quest for revenge.

Both novels are very quick reads (with about 215 pages each) and exciting to follow. Great way to pass an evening or two.

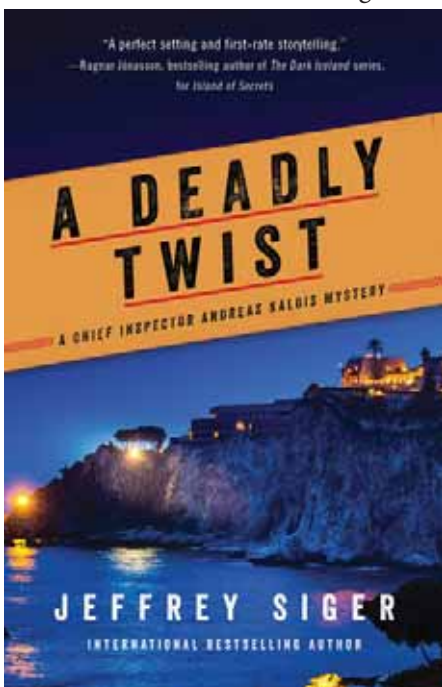
THE VANISHED

by Brett Battles
Independently-published, \$15.99
Rating: A-

This 15th Jonathan Quinn novel starts out recounting events from nine years ago, when his team who work for "The Office," is hired by Mariko Hirahara, to protect her sister Keiko, an eminent Japanese scientist from an evil industrialist (Marcel Gideon) whose intents seem to be to take unfair advantage of Keiko. There is a price on the ultra reclusive Gideon's head as he is a persona non grata with many Western governments. The mission turns out to be a complete dumpster fire. Keiko, under heavy disguise, walks out of a hotel right in front of Quinn, who fails to recognize her (he is still gauged by that omission). And Gideon never shows up. Keiko has not reappeared anywhere in the last nine years, but her sister Mariko is still searching for her and using the assets of The Office.

The present-day mission (in conjunction with the FBI) of protecting chess Grandmaster and Russian dissident Dimitri Melnikov from a Russian assassin goes all according to plan until the extraction phase when the roof literally caves in. FBI agents are dead and a full investigation is underway. In the meantime, The Office is grounded and its employees are told to go take a vacation until they are cleared of any malfeasance.

Then comes news that Mariko has been found murdered in France and Quinn's team decide to vacation in France despite pandemic shutdowns. Keeping their actions secret from the FBI, Quinn looks into her murder and eventually runs up against a company run by Marcel Gideon. Is it possible that Keiko is being held captive by that company? The team makes use of their formidable surveillance techniques – they can bug anything. Locks are no prob-



lem. And it's amazing what information a quality drone can provide. Observing how the team operates is as enjoyable as witnessing the scenes of action that they often participate in.

What I admire most about this series is Brett Battles' mastery of seemingly effortless prose. The story simply flows smoothly with no hiccups along the way. He has shown that a talented, self-published author can be very successful in today's market.

Two of Lee Goldberg's Found Manuscripts

FIREBALL
by Jimmy Sangster
Brash Books, \$16.99
Rating: B+



Back in the late 1980s Henry Holt published a series of three entertaining novels by Jimmy Sangster in a series featuring British ex-cop James Reed (SNOWBALL, HARDBALL and BLACKBALL). Reed left the police force and did some work as a bodyguard and that is where he met the famous movie star Katherine Long. Work eventually became play and then marriage. It lasted four years until Katherine was unfaithful. The divorce was amicable and because Katherine felt guilty for causing

the breakup, she gave Reed her Malibu beach house in the divorce settlement. Since then Reed has lived off the rental income of the property and leads a beach-bum lifestyle, which involves exercise, alcohol, women, and good food. But trouble has a way of finding Reed, ruining his idyll at random intervals.

Enter Lee Goldberg, author, publisher and literary sleuth. Lee discovered that there was a fourth James Reed novel, **FIREBALL**, and has brought it out under his own imprint, Brash Books.

Reed becomes enamored with a beautiful woman that he meets at a local tennis club, but, before long she turns up dead. With nothing better to do, Reed decides to look into the matter. His investigation leads him to New York City and the uncovering of a blackmail scheme.

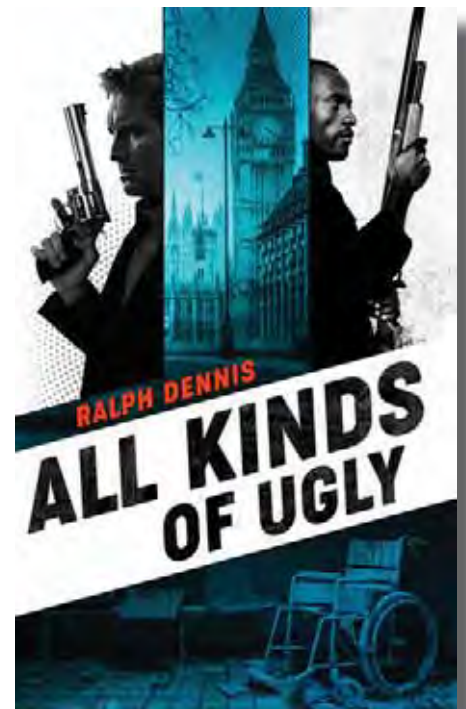
The reader is never quite sure what Reed's motivation is. One has to assume that he is stubborn and once he has a bone in his mouth, he's not going to let it go. Even though Reed is technically not a P.I., he acts like one and all the novels in the series have that P.I. feel.

The writing is a cut above the standard fare for 1980's P.I. novels. **FIREBALL** is a quick and entertaining read. I was glad to have another opportunity to sample a series that I thought was finished long ago.

ALL KINDS OF UGLY
by Ralph Dennis
Brash Books, \$16.99
Rating: B+

This is the heretofore unpublished thirteenth novel in the Hardman series (see article in DP #89). The protagonist is Jim Hardman, a former Atlanta cop, who was forced to resign over a false corruption allegation. He works as an unofficial private investigator and when Hardman needs backup he calls on Hump Evans, a retired African American NFL player. (Think Spenser and Hawk without the annoying Susan Silverman.)

A prominent attorney hires Hardman to go to London to find the missing heir to Harrison Gault, a wealthy businessman from Georgia. He returns with the heir's pregnant wife. But the story



doesn't end there and Hardman keeps getting drawn into the Gault family circle.

The prose is sparse and taught, reflecting hardboiled fiction of the 1970s and 1980s. Lee Goldberg has resurrected this series of thirteen novels because he felt that the series was mistakenly marketed as men's action rather than serious hardboiled crime fiction. The novels pre-date Robert B. Parker's Spenser series but are remarkably similar. I recommend that you give the series a try, starting with the first, **ATLANTA DEATHWATCH**.

Reviewed Novels in Order of Preference

THE LAW OF INNOCENCE
BLIND VIGIL
A DEADLY TWIST
MONKOK STATION
THE VANISHED
EVERY LAST FEAR
THE SILENCE OF THE WHITE CITY
SHED NO TEARS
A STRANGER AT THE DOOR
WILD FIRE
BAD TIMING
FIREBALL
ALL KINDS OF UGLY
WATCH OVER ME

L J Roberts

It is purely my opinion

LONG RANGE

By C.J. Box

G.P. Putnam's Sons 2020, 368 pp., \$28.00

Rating B+

First Sentence: The sleek golden projectile exploded into the thin mountain air at three thousand feet per second.

A grizzly attack causes game warden Joe Pickett to leave his district and join members of the Predator Attack Team. Joe has suspicions about the attack but is called away before being able to investigate further. A shooter targets a local judge, seriously wounding the judge's wife. The shot came from an extremely long-range, and Joe's best friend Nate Romanowski is suspected. This leaves Joe to find the killer, clear his friend, and uncover the answer to the bear attack.

Talk about a hook! Box sets the scene well, contrasting the beauty of the location with the cold, hard terror of a lethal element coming from through the air so that one experiences the horror of when the two elements combine. The suspense continues once we join Joe.

LONG RANGE, the 20th book in the series, is both exciting, and an education in everything from grizzly bears, the technology that enables a cell phone to be tracked even in a no-service area, an air force of predator birds, and long-range rifles. Box explains each of these in a way that is fascinating even to urban dwellers, and each has an important role to play in the plot. There is a nice piece of information regarding the role of a Wyoming game warden which helps explain Joe's involvement in the shooting investigation.

The characters are alive. Some are those series readers have met before.

Some carry over from a previous book, but in a way that their backstory is apparent and their incorporation into the present story handled seamlessly. There are good guys; bad guys, and those about whom we are uncertain, which adds to the suspense.

Joe is compelling, refreshing for his imperfections—not the best on horseback, not the finest shot, has a penchant for destroying his county vehicle--and his phobias, particularly his fear of flying. Marybeth, his wife, is a true partner both in their marriage and due to her position as director of the county library, which can aid in Joe's investigation. The personal side of Joe and his wife's struggle being empty nesters personalizes and humanizes them.

One of the characters who has developed and changed most in the series is Nate Romanowski. The suspense and excitement always escalate whenever Nate appears. The friendship between Nate and Joe is admirable. When you combine the two men in a scene, non-stop action ensues.

It is not all action, however. While not overtly political, the story does connect to present events—"It was a new political world, Joe had learned. Politicians who were snared in scandal didn't fight back or resign in shame, because there was no personal shame."

One may identify one of the villains quite early, others are less obvious, and one whose appearance may cause series readers to roll their eyes in dismay. Box's wry humor is always a pleasure and "Pickett's charge" a definite high point.

LONG RANGE has an exciting, dramatic climax followed by a wonderful ending making one feel it was over all too soon.

THE BLACK CAGE

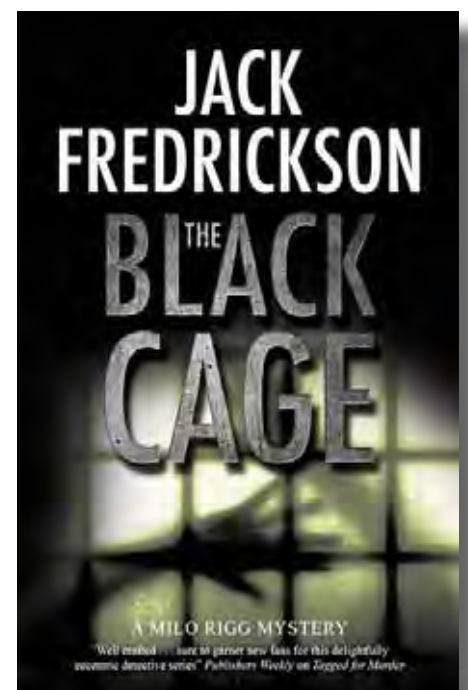
By Jack Fredrickson

Severn House 2020, 224 pp., \$28.99

Rating B+

First Sentence: The color had been sucked from everything, not just the dead. This is not the first time the bodies of naked kids have been found by the water. The last time, known as the Stemec Henderson murders, were three boys. The position of the girls was the same.

Milo Rigg is a reporter who has lost his byline due to perceived inappropriate behavior while on his last story. Still working in a city where police corruption is the norm, on a paper at the edge of going under, submitting his stories under his boss's name, and suffering nightmares about his late wife, the old case comes alive when new bodies are discovered. Now, with a new boss, and new clues, Rigg is determined to follow



the story to the killer and to regain his reputation.

If one has previously read Fredrickson, this is a book darker in tone and emotion than his previous works, and that's not a bad thing as it's always nice to see an author stretch. The introduction to Milo through his interaction with senior sheriff's deputy Jerome Glet is very effective. As a character, Milo stands out. Fredrickson makes one feel the pain of his loss, both personally and professionally, his frustration with his job, the demise of print newspapers overall, and the corruption and ineptitude of the police. Without words, one feels the turmoil of Milo's emotions-- "There was no 'before' to it, no past. It was still all so damned present."

Fredrickson's descriptions are evocative. They perfectly reflect the tragedy of the scene-- "Snow began to fall in big wet flakes, like tiny shrouds descending to cover the horror of what had been found there." One is very effectively drawn into the story by hints, traces of things; by intriguing references to people, places, and events.

The inclusion of the news articles, along with Milo having other small stories to write, adds realism to the story and provides details in a concise manner without filling space with exposition. Fredrickson accurately, and sadly, conveys what has happened to print newspapers-- "...the third floor, the reporters' floor, was now a ghost town. Half the cubicles were empty... People no longer read the ink of the news; ... they wanted that in tiny bits on screens that they could delete in an instant if it was too upsetting or demanded too much concentration..."

The increase in tension is subtle and very well done. There is one point where one may think they understand what is happening and suspicions arise. It's best, to trust Milo and follow along as he builds scenarios, setting out to prove, or disprove them.

Milo's recurring dream of the black cage is a constant theme. However, the reveal of the association is both anti-climactic but strangely satisfying. There are a lot of characters, but Fredrickson is very good at reminding one of who

each character is and their role. The plot twists are well-timed and very effective.

THE BLACK CAGE has a startling climax, an excellent final twist, a nice tie-up, and a strangely bittersweet ending. It is important to note that, although dealing with the deaths of children, the story is not gruesome in that the murders happen off-page and are a fait accompli when one learns of them. Milo is a character hopes to see in future books.

THE DREAMER

By Sheldon Siegel

Sheldon M. Siegel, Inc., 2020, 342 pp., \$19.99

Rating A-

First Sentence: The Honorable Elizabeth McDaniel glanced at her watch, rested her chin in her palm, and spoke to me in a world-weary tone still bearing a trace of her native Alabama.

Mercedes "Mercy" Tejada is a Dreamer who was brought to the United States as a baby. Now she's accused of murdering her boss, James Beard Award recipient, Carlos Cruz. Carlos was known for sexually harassing his female staff, particularly Mercy. Now, he is dead in an alley, Mercy kneeling over him, and her prints on the knife next to him. San Francisco Public Defenders Rosie and Mike are against the clock to prove Mercy innocent, and to keep her, and her family, from being deported.

Siegel begins his 11th book with an amusing vignette that pleases and establishes Mike Daley as a sharp, clever, and well-established lawyer. The way in which we meet the others in Mike's life, especially his ex-wife and boss, Rosie Fernandez, is handled succinctly, but with clarity.

undocumented. Siegel takes on the issue of undocumented workers. What is nice is that the story addresses the issue from a moral perspective, rather than a political one.

Reading about a city one knows well always adds a personal touch. However, even when it is a city unknown to the reader, some things have become sadly universal in urban areas—"A homeless man asked me for change. A man in a Warriors jersey offered me a fentanyl. A woman in a halter top asked me if I was looking for a date."

THE DREAMER has an excellent twist and good questions are raised during the investigation. One doesn't normally think of the initial, information-gathering phase of a case as being suspenseful. Under Siegel's deft hand, it is.

It may be a classic trope, but it is always interesting to have a victim everyone wants to kill. But watching Rosie and Mike prepare a case with no other suspects, and no witnesses, based on a defense of SODDI ("some other dude did it"), and with the prosecution not meeting the burden of proof beyond a reasonable doubt makes things all the more engrossing.

THE DREAMER is a well-done legal mystery with a very satisfying affirmation at the end. Siegel is an under-appreciated author who writes excellent legal procedurals.

ALL THE DEVILS ARE HERE

By Penny, Louise

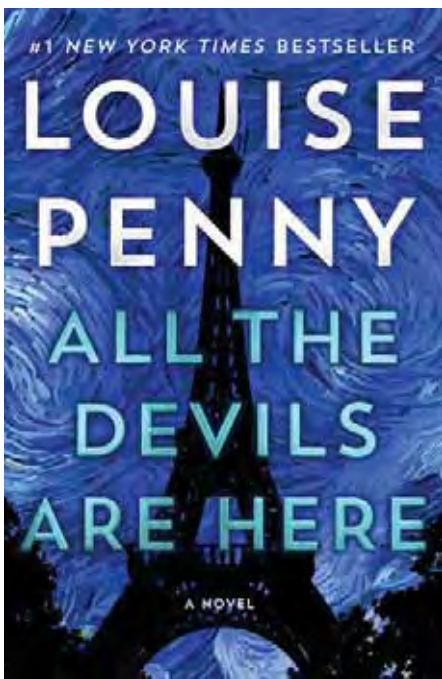
Minotaur Books 2020, 448 pp, \$14.99

Rating A+

First Sentence: "Hell is empty, Armand," said Stephen Horowitz.

Chief Inspector Armand Gamache





trusted.

Although not an issue for new readers, series readers may have a sense of being a stranger in a strange land having the story set outside the usual environs of Canada and Three Pines. This was an effective decision as it is echoed by Gamache having the same sense of not knowing who to believe, who to trust. It illustrates the duplicity of people and is effective in heightening the suspense and tension. The connections made back to Three Pines and the *Sûreté du Québec* are nicely done.

With each book, series readers question whether Penny can improve on the last book, and yet, in this 16th book, she does. Penny has captured perfectly that sense of having found the city of one's soul and portrays it perfectly. The mystery is well-plotted as it grows upon itself and is delightfully complex taking one down unexpected roads. Yet, more than a mystery, this is a story of relationships, and with that comes wisdom.

Penny employs her characters wisely. Involving family members as part of an investigation can be risky. However, in this case, no one is superfluous; neither are any of their roles forced or out of character. Each has skills that contribute, and each is humanly imperfect with weaknesses and foibles. In other

words, they are real. Even the use of an unseen, yet critical, character is wonderfully done. The theme of abandonment, which appears in various ways through Penny's books, is heartfelt and recognizable to so many.

Penny's ability to place the reader within the story is second to none. Sitting in the hospital, awaiting news of a loved one, you feel, hear, and smell the starkness and desperation of those who are there, and the unwillingness to give up hope. Her use of dialogue is evocative. The banter between Jean-Guy and Armand is always something one anticipates and enjoys, but this was lovely as well--"Please, Dad," Daniel now said. "Tell me you were a commando." "Better." His father leaned closer and dropping his voice further. "I taught commandos."

When reading Penny, there are always lines that make one stop and consider, small lessons to be learned--"It had taken Beauvoir years to see the power of pausing. And of patience. Of taking a breath to consider all options, all angles, and not simply acting on the most obvious." She teaches one the value of seeing not only what is there, but what is not; what is real, and what is facade, and that--"People believe what they want to believe. Beginning with their own lies." "Hell is the truth seen too late," said Reine-Marie."

ALL THE DEVILS ARE HERE is Penny's best book to date. It is complex, suspenseful, and emotional with a small touch of the paranormal. It has a cracking good, twisty plot, and an excellent ending. Most of all, it demonstrates Penny's continuing growth as an author and, I suspect, as a person. And isn't that the goal of us all?

NO FIXED LINE

By Dana Stabenow

Head of Zeus, 2020, 336 pp, £4.99

Rating A+

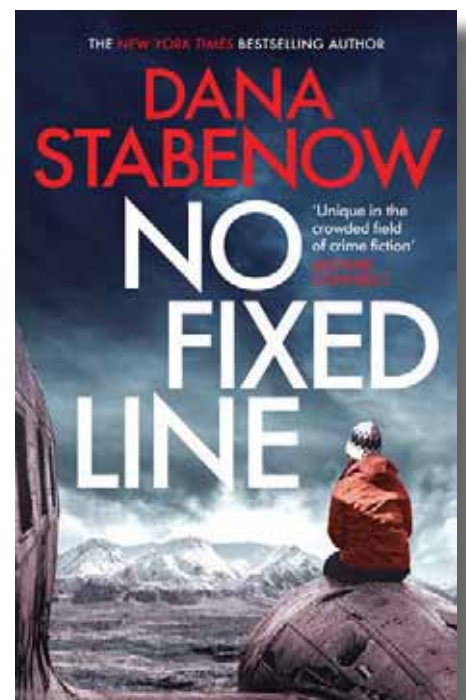
First Sentence: Anna was a warm, heavy weight against his side, her eyes closed, her breathing deep, her tears drying in faint silvery streaks on her cheeks.

Matt Grotsdidier and Laurel Mega-

nack are spending New Year's Eve at Kate Shugak's cabin bolt hole at Canyon Hot Springs. Their romantic interlude is interrupted by the sound of an engine, and the crash of a plane. What they did not expect to find was two young children, belted together in a seat. Further investigation reveals a body buried in the snow, and a whole lot of drugs. Meanwhile, Erland Bannister, who tried to have Kate killed more than once, has died. But why did he make her the trustee of his estate and the head of his foundation?

Stabenow captures one's interest from the very first sentence. Her writing is evocative and visual. It captivates, involves, and becomes real. And it moves, no long narratives here; just writing which keeps one turning the page. One also realizes just how timely are the themes of her story. But it's the details of dealing with Alaska that make one's eyes widen. For those who follow the series, this is an Alaska very different from the state as it was in the beginning, which only adds to the interest.

The story is perfectly balanced between the action, the pastoral, and the wonderfully normal, human moments. The transition between these elements segues perfectly, one to the next. It



is fascinating to see how Kate's mind works; how she walks through the possible scenarios of traps Bannister may have set for her. Her comparison of a modern minimalist office lobby, using the term "dead perfection" from a Tennyson poem and comparing it to a columbarium is identifiable.

One can't but love the references to other writers: Dick Francis, Ellis Peters, Damien Boyd, Adrian McGinty, John Sandford, and even Tennyson. Such things make the character seem real—"To quote the late, great Dick Francis, life keeps getting steadily weirder."—along with references to food—"...caribou steak with loaded baked potatoes and canned green beans fried with bacon and onions."

Stabenow weaves the issues of poverty, drugs and government cutbacks seamlessly into the story through the conversations of the characters. She offsets that by observing the way people in the park care for one another. The plot meanders a bit between the characters and the mystery involving the children, but doesn't life? There is romance and a bit of erotic heat, but it then stops before becoming too graphic. Quite satisfying is Kate's justifiable anger at law enforcement not having gone after someone they knew was a criminal. Valid and significant points are made about the status of things without being preachy, and the suggestion of a future threat is intriguing without being an end-destroying cliffhanger.

NO FIXED LINE is a great pleasure to read. Even as the 22nd book in the series, it has everything a really good book should: well-developed characters, a compelling plot that keeps one turning the pages, excellent dialogue, a touch of humor, well-done suspense, well-placed twists, and a perfectly executed ending. Thank you, Dana Stabenow.

THE LAST PASSENGER

By Charles Finch

Minotaur Books 2020, 304 pp, \$27.99

Rating A+

First Sentence: On or about the first day of October 1855, the City of London, England decided it was time once and for all that Charles Lenox be married.

In this third, and final, prequel Charles Lenox is still working to establish himself as an enquiry agent. Asked to visit the scene of a gruesome murder, he finds someone has gone to extraordinary lengths to remove anything which might lead to the victim being identified. Although Inspector Dunn blames the murder on gangs, Lenox convinces Sir Richard Mayne, now Commissioner of the Police, to let him assist with the investigation. On a personal front, Charles is having to fend off his female relatives and friends who are determined to find him a suitable wife.

It is lovely to have an opening which makes one smile, as this one does. It's also nice that, even for those of us who follow the series, Finch provides an introduction of Lenox, his situation, appearance, and ambition, as well as other major characters, including Lady Jane and her husband, Lord Deere. Neither does Finch overlook the secondary characters. The way in which Finch introduces them, includ-

ing the members of Lenox's household, is seamless. No long explanations, yet we have a sense of each character's personality. In fact, some of them are among the most interesting, particularly freed slave Josiah Hollis from Atlanta, and a young newsboy.

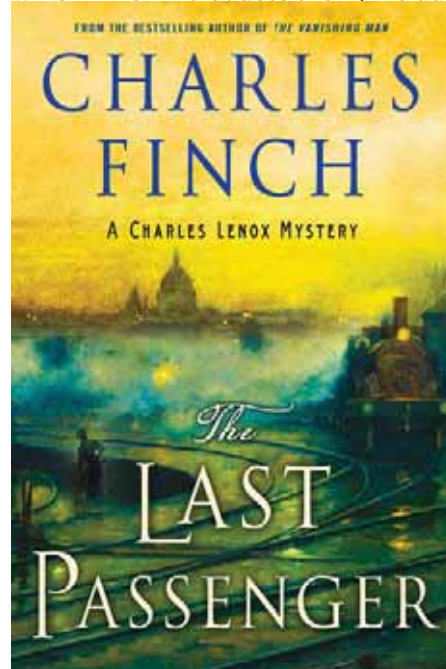
One appreciates Finch's voice and that it has something of the formality of the period in which the book is set—"Hemstock strolled in without a care in the world. You had to hand him that much: He had insouciance."

The plot is nicely divided between the investigation and Lenox's personal life. The repartee between him and his older brother Edmund is delightful. His courtship of Miss Catherine Ashbrook provides a delightful excuse for quoting *Pride and Prejudice* and a lesson in the history of the idiom "mind your p's and q's."

Finch perfects the balance of providing information on the slave trade, including discussion of the treatment of slaves, but keeping it a part of the plot, rather than the focus of it. It is interesting to see our history through British eyes. Yet an encounter which makes one cringe is Lenox taking Hollis to a doctor who proclaimed—"He was not expert in their kind."

This is the transitional book for Lenox showing his passing into maturity both in his life and his business. A conversation between Lenox and Hollis is thoughtful, enlightening, and causes one to reflect. Another conversation with Jane illuminates the reason why marriage for love often wasn't the priority for women of the period. Both are examples of excellent writing.

THE LAST PASSENGER is a wonderful book. There are well-timed, well-done plot twists. The logic behind Lenox's deductions is clever, yet not overly contrived. Rather than being focused on suspense, although that is there, it is a book that speaks to injustice, maturing, and friendship, true friendship. The end, particularly, stays with one long after closing the book.



Lookin' For A Few Good Books

Larry Gandle



LONG BRIGHT RIVER

by Liz Moore

Riverhead Books, \$26.00

Rating: A

Mickey is a Philadelphia Police Officer who patrols crime ridden neighborhoods filled with drug addicts and prostitutes. She worries about her sister, Kacey, who is both an addict and a streetwalker. They never speak to each other but Mickey watches over her from afar. Dead women are turning up in the neighborhood as a serial killer is on the loose. Mickey must solve the crime for fear that her sister may be next.

There is so much more to this book than the simple plot line stated above. There are complex family dynamics and friend relationships that make this such a powerful story. The title is misleading as there is no 'long bright river' but the term is used more as an allegory. The plot is straightforward told from a first-person narrative of Mickey and it does move swiftly. There are a number of twists that are surprising to Mickey,

as well as, the reader. This book is on many best of the year lists and deservedly so. Highly recommended.

DJINN PATROL ON THE PURPLE LINE

by Deepa Anappara

Random House, \$27.00

Rating: B

In a crowded smoggy city in India, children are disappearing. Nine-year-old Jai has lost two classmates in the span of a few days. The police are not doing anything so Jai and his friend, Pari, decide to become detectives and solve the disappearances. They plunge into the local bazaar in an effort to discover clues not heeding the danger they are in. Eventually the disappearances hit much closer to home and the stakes rise considerably. The question always remains- where are the missing children?

One of the great difficulties a writer must experience if writing first person as a nine-year-old child, is to accurately depict the thoughts that that child

would have. They are the thoughts of a child- not an adult. In my opinion, the author fails resoundingly. The words, the situations, the reasoning is not at all that of a child. The dialogue is so very stilted- and I refer specifically to the dialogue with Guru in the city. It almost reads as a young adult novel. However, overlooking the obvious flaws, the plot is compelling and I managed to read most of the book in one day. This novel has been named on a few best of the year lists. I am not sure I agree but it is great for the pool or the plane. A mild recommendation.

WHO THEY WAS

by Gabriel Krauze

4th Estate Books, 14.99

Rating: A

South Kilburn is a part of London no tourist would ever want to see. It is on the outskirts of the city and consists of concrete sidewalks and towers of poorly maintained apartments with dark and dangerous stairwells. Gabriel AKA Snoopz is a member of a gang who operate at the fringes of society. Crime and drugs are routine parts of everyday. Through Gabriel, we meet his friends, lovers, associates, family and his enemies. Knife fights occur for honor and robbing outsiders is done to buy a new pair of high end athletic shoes or Rolex watches. Gabriel is attending "uni" or the university to get a degree in English literature. He gets by with little effort as he is unusually bright. This is in stark contrast to the rest of his life. The education is what he hopes is his ticket out of this life.

WHO THEY WAS is a remarkable debut novel that was longlisted for the Booker Prize for literature. Gabriel Krauze lived this life and it is evident



on the pages. He makes all the violence seem so very normal. What is truly unique about this book is the fact that it is written almost completely in British slang which the reader will eventually understand for the most part. He is, in essence, teaching the reader a new language. It is brilliant. Anthony Burgess did a similar thing in **A CLOCKWORK ORANGE** but that language was totally fictitious. There are scenes that are heartbreaking and the characters are tragic figures leading a very rough life. Gabriele Krauze is not writing crime fiction as we know it. The crime in his books are so much more alive and real. Highly recommended for those readers who are willing to put a bit more effort into a read as it is a slow read due to the language but always fascinating.

DEACON KING KONG

by James McBride

Riverhead Books, \$28.00

Rating: A

In September, 1969, a year rich in historical events, an elderly black deacon called Sportcoat, walks up to a 19-year-old drug dealer in South Brooklyn and shoots him. Sportcoat is always drunk on local moonshine known as King Kong. He only manages to shoot off the dealer's ear and expresses his disappointment in the teen -- a former aspiring baseball pitcher. This sets off a

number of events some of which are quite wacky. By the end of the book, we meet a whole host of characters including inept assassins, misunderstood gangsters, misguided youths and regretful elders illustrating sociological divides, race relations, unfulfilled desires, religion and crumbling neighborhoods. Is it a crime novel? Well since the central event is a shooting, it would certainly fit the bill. Yet, it is so much more than a crime novel.

The characters are so richly developed and so very different -- there are no stereotypes. The author is talented enough to make the book, at times, laugh-out-loud humorous. There are various plotlines throughout the book illustrating the trials and travails of the characters. At the center is always Sportcoat who forgot he shot the teen and can't imagine why he did so. As a result there is a price on his head. This is a relatively fast read and one that will take you away from our current situation. It is on many best of the year lists especially in the literary circles as opposed to the crime fiction circles where it still has a strong presence. Highly recommended.

THE ABSTAINER

by Ian McGuire

Random House, \$27.00

Rating: B

In Manchester, England, 1867, three men are hanged. They are rebels, Fenians-- a secret society intent on ending England's rule in Ireland by any means necessary including violence. Stephan Doyle, a veteran of the Civil War in the United States is sent over to help the Fenians institute a plan to create fear and chaos. It is up to Head Constable James O'Connor to thwart the plot and capture Doyle. Yet, O'Connor is haunted by the demons of his past which are coming back to him. Both men will hunt each other from Manchester to rural Pennsylvania each wanting to kill the other.

THE NORTH WATER was one of my favorite books of the year by this author. It is a riveting novel which was longlisted for the Booker Prize. **THE ABSTAINER** is also a richly atmo-

spheric historical novel. Characters are well created and lifelike. The plot moves swiftly. There is no doubt this is a very well written crime fiction novel. It is the ending that I have a problem with. It came out of nowhere and is totally inconsistent with the rest of the carefully created plot. Crime fiction readers want a conclusion that is satisfactory in some way. It is something we have come to expect. This one is one of the most unsatisfying that I have read in quite some time. It is not as if the author was writing about historical figures where accuracy must be obeyed. He notes in the acknowledgements that both Doyle and O'Connor are fictional creations. Therefore, he was not obligated to end the book in the way he did. As a result, I really cannot recommend this book despite how good the first 95% of the book is written.

A TIME FOR MERCY

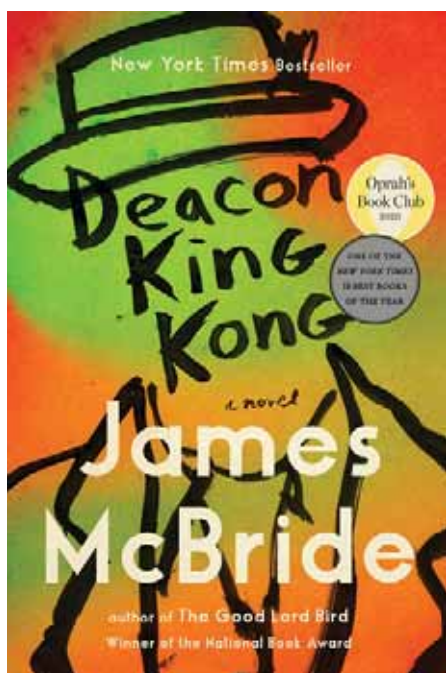
by John Grisham

Doubleday, \$29.95

Rating: B

In Clanton Mississippi, 1990, Drew Gamble, a sixteen-year-old shoots and kills his mother's boyfriend who is passed out drunk on his bed. Drew's mother lies apparently lifeless in the kitchen after a severe beating from this man. Fearing for his life, as well as his sister's, Drew gets the man's gun, points it to the man's temple and pulls the trigger. Unfortunately, the man is a highly regarded local deputy. Drew is to be placed on trial for his life. Jake Brigance is compelled to defend him by a local judge as nobody else wants the case. Besides being paid next to nothing, Jake is placed into danger from the deputy's violent family members. It seems to be a lose-lose case for Jake that will certainly bankrupt him. Yet, he feels it is morally wrong to put this young man to death and will do all he can to prevent it.

John Grisham can tell a compelling tale. No doubt about it. The characters reveal great depth. I did find Jake to be hopelessly idealistic and annoyingly so. The trial is totally compelling but to get there requires hundreds of pages of superfluous and tedious episodes and details. Either nobody



will edit John Grisham or the publisher likes really long books. Getting past the length, it is well written and entertaining which is what a legal thriller is meant to be. Recommended.

THE SENTINEL

by Lee and Andrew Child
Delacorte, \$28.99

Rating: C-

Reacher arrives in a small town outside of Nashville. He notices some men initially tailing and then attempting to kidnap a man walking in the street. The man, Rusty Rutherford, was recently fired from his job as the town IT person when the computers got hijacked and the programs held at ransom. No computers are working as everything is locked up. Reacher, of course, foils the attack and gets involved in halting a plot to potentially infiltrate the elections. Thinking back to **KILLING FLOOR** and its propulsive energy makes me realize that if this book proceeded that one, there would never be a Reacher series and Lee would have sunk into obscurity. This book is so overwritten that it sinks into mediocrity. I forced myself to finish it just so I could review it completely. I didn't care about any of the characters. The plot moved alternatively in a slow dull fashion and in a fast action thriller manner typical of Lee's previous works.. Honestly, I forced myself to continue reading it. I will give Andrew one more try but if it is anything as slow, dull and needlessly complex as this one, I will stop following the series.

SNOW

by John Banville
Hanover Square Press, \$27.99

Rating: B+

In 1959, Detective Inspector St. John Strafford is assigned to a murder of a Catholic priest in rural County Wexford, Ireland. The priest was killed in Ballyglass House, an old manor of the Osborne family which has certainly seen better times. Strafford must also deal with the disappearance of his own deputy. The snow falls isolating the manor and the village even more. Suspects abound from the members of the family, the caretaker of the horses to the



estranged brother in law. Yet, Strafford meets resistance from one and all.

Banville has written a traditional mystery that excels at characterization which makes this particular novel stand out. The body of the priest is found in the library with a dagger. Banville does make light of the obvious stereotype of the Golden Age British mysteries. The book is fun and the fact that it is written by an award winning master of literature (who has previously claimed how much easier it is to write a mystery novel than a literary novel) there is a depth to, not only the characters, but, the depictions of the locale as well. Highly recommended.

WHITE IVY

by Susie Yang
Simon & Schuster, \$26.00

Rating: B

Ivy is a young woman raised outside of Boston by Chinese Immigrants. Initially she becomes a skilled shoplifter courtesy of the lessons her grandmother taught her. As a young girl she develops a crush on the son of a Senator, Gideon Speyer. He barely notices her and they go their separate ways until years later when they are brought back together again at a New Year's Eve party given by Gideon's sister. They slowly start to date and their relationship becomes increasingly serious until Ivy is brought back

into contact with an old boyfriend who threatens to destroy the relationship between Ivy and Gideon. Ivy realizes she must do something truly drastic so she could marry the man of her dreams. A clever little twist at the end sorts things out quite nicely.

It is difficult to call **WHITE IVY** a crime fiction novel. Yes, there is a crime but very late in the book -- a crime that is not the central tenant of the novel -- rather a means to an end. This is more of a coming of age novel and perhaps a story about family dynamics. It was interesting enough to get through but the only reason I decided to pick it up in the first place is the buzz surrounding it. It is entertaining and perfect for a plane ride (when it is something we do again) or the pool. This is a mild recommendation.

THE GOLDEN CAGE

by Camilla Lackberg
Knopf, \$28.95

Rating: B

Faye fell in love with Jack when they were both students in business school. Jack was infatuated with her, at that time, and they wed. Faye helped Jack start up a new company which was a quick success. They had a daughter and Faye stayed home to raise her giving up her own promising future. However, it wasn't long before Jack stopped paying attention to her and after she discovered he was having an affair, he did not hesitate in throwing Faye out on her own. However, Jack does not know Faye's past. She is definitely not one to cross. She will take her time but she will have her revenge.

This is a solidly entertaining domestic suspense novel. The writing style is a bit clunky but it is a translated work. I found the setup of Jack being able to throw Faye out of her house as being simply unrealistic. Jack is too much of a stock figure. Therefore, some reality needs to be suspended throughout the book. The plot does move swiftly and to judge it by the story alone without getting into the writing style, it is highly entertaining. I just wish it had a bit more substance. Recommended.

DEAR CHILD

by Romy Hausman
Flatiron Books, \$26.99

Rating: B

From a windowless shack in the woods a young woman, Lena, runs out the door, through the woods and gets hit by a car in the road. She wakes up in a hospital. With her is a young girl who has also escaped the shack. Lena was kidnapped, perhaps fourteen years ago. She is fearful her abductor will want her back. She is initially disoriented and can give little information while the young girl who claims to be her daughter is not talking. The police do not have much to go on to figure out what is happening. Yet, Lena is sure her life is in danger.

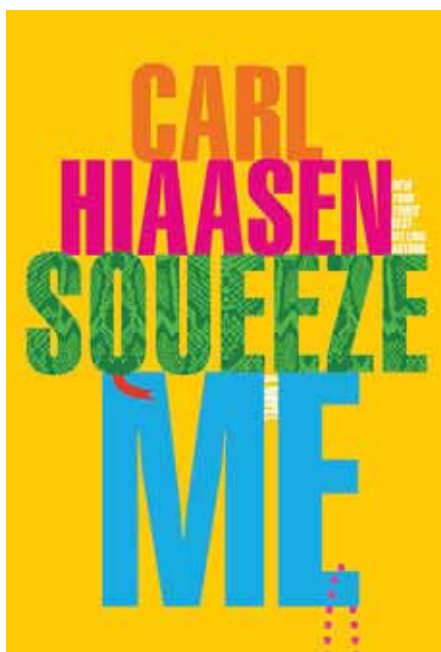
This is a book that is difficult to give a plot summary without giving away one of the many plot twists. The set up is clever and the plot is quite compelling. The characters, however, come off as stilted and often stereotypic. Given that the book is translated from German, there appears to be something lost in the translation. There are so many psychological suspense novels being written today that it can be hard to differentiate them sometimes. The book is entertaining but forgettable. It is also a bit too long. But it would be great for the pool or plane.

SQUEEZE ME

by Carol Hiaasen
Knopf, \$28.95

Rating: B+

At a Palm Springs charity ball, an elderly socialite, Kiki Pew, vanishes. Angie Armstrong, wildlife wrangler, is called to the event to remove a sixteen foot python with a large protuberance in the center of its body. There is little doubt what is inside the snake but the manager of the venue wants to keep it quiet for fear of loss of business revenue if people discovered the truth. He, therefore, hires two totally incompetent thieves to steal the snake from Angie's freezer (where she is keeping it before disposing of it). Things go wrong and Kiki's body is found. The President who is in his winter White House nearby is blaming illegal immigrants for the murder, specifically, Diego from Hon-



duras, who is totally innocent but it does not matter because he fits the President's profile. Angie knows exactly what happened to Kiki and she tells everyone but nobody can counteract the President. She will do whatever is necessary to see Diego.

Carl Hiaasen's novels are humorous satires of southeast Florida and the politics of the time. This one skewers Trump, code name Mastodon (without naming him) and it really is quite funny even if you do support him. The characters are a wacky bunch – all grossly exaggerated stereotypes. There are so few well done and truly laugh-out-loud funny books written today, but this is one of them. The author is a master at writing them. This is one of his best. Recommended.

George Easter's Take: I give this hilarious novel a B+ for its mystery plot and an A- for its entertainment value. It is the most fun read of any I've experienced this year, but it is irreverent to the max. So be forewarned. If even 10% of the things he attributes to the President are true ... [fill in the blanks]

THE GUEST LIST

by Lucy Foley
Morrow, \$27.99

Rating: B

At a wedding on a remote island off the Irish coast, the guests are spooked

by the lights going out and a scream in the night. A young woman rushes in covered in blood. The story then goes back a day as the various guests arrive to the wedding. Through alternate point of view chapters, we slowly discover the backgrounds and various grievances of the characters- the bride, the wedding planner, the plus one, the groom and the bridesmaid and the best man. Things are perfectly planned but as the characters slowly unravel, things go quickly off the rail. Interspersed with the chapters, there are small snippets of the current episode at the wedding with the blood and a possible body.

This must be the most unpleasant bunch of characters I have ever spent time with. All of them have some major issues which slowly are exposed. The author uses the wedding night bloody episode as a draw for the reader to keep progressing through the book. It is a somewhat unusual structural element and one that is used with good purpose. The suspense keeps ratcheting up as we near the end. The author plays fair with the reader and the solution is quite clever. This book is a unique twist on the traditional mystery format. Recommended.



Reviewed Novels in Order of Preference

WHO THEY WAS
DEACON KING KONG
ONE BY ONE (cover article)
LONG BRIGHT RIVER
SNOW
SQUEEZE ME
THE ABSTAINER
WHITE IVY
A TIME FOR MERCY
THE GOLDEN CAGE
DJINN PATROL ON THE PURPLE
LINE
DEAR CHILD
THE GUEST LIST
DEVIL AND THE DARK WATER
(cover article)
THE SENTINEL

Action Thriller Corner



Ted Hertel Review

THE BREAKER

by Nick Petrie

Putnam, \$27.00, January 2021)

Rating: B+

Combat veteran and PTSD sufferer Peter Ash has returned to Milwaukee as a (wrongly accused) fugitive from justice in Iceland. As a result he has been keeping a low profile, along with his lover June Cassidy. But one day, as he, June and their friend Lewis, are sitting in a café, they spot a man with an assault rifle going into the Public Market. The two men follow and are able to chase off the gunman but not before he steals and then discards the phone of another man and shoots up the market's parking lot. The shooter escapes on a high-powered electric bicycle and the victim also takes off before the cops arrive. June, now working at a local newspaper, writes up the story, leaving Lewis and Peter's involvement anonymous. But when June is attacked, Peter steps in to protect her (though, frankly, she is pretty good at protecting herself!). Their search for the attacker and the shooter leads them into the high-tech world of corporate espionage, along with a dose of brutal murder, as Peter's low-profile life blows wide open.

This is the sixth novel in Nick Petrie's consistently entertaining Peter Ash series. Petrie is an author who avoids writing the same book twice. Where past novels have generally concentrated primarily on Peter and his personal relationships, here Petrie tells the story from many different points of view. While this works well in the context of the tale, it also shifts the spotlight from those personal relationships. Still, the "Gang of Three" comes together at the end to

right a variety of wrongs.

Peter's sense of claustrophobia seems to be diminishing and is not the hindrance it has been earlier. This allows him more freedom of movement indoors. However, it is being replaced to some extent by a sense of fear and concern for June as she is stalked by the killer while Peter is not always able to be with her. But they are not alone. As an added plus for all you fans of Mingus, the one-hundred-fifty pound mutt from **The Drifter**, he appears here again since Ash is back in Milwaukee. As Peter discovers, he comes in very handy, as well.

The tech industry plays a huge part in the novel. A bit of suspension of disbelief may be required, since some of the technology is borderline speculative, although Petrie does defend this aspect in his Acknowledgements section at the very end of the book. Of course things like this (I can't comment on what it is without spoiling the story) do become less speculative – and more frightening – every day.

Suffice it to say that the book moves quickly, with lots of the sort of action the reader of the series has come to expect, including a wild ride through the streets of Milwaukee, a cheerful but vicious killer on the loose, plenty of suspense and danger, man (and woman) against machine, a young tech genius (is there any other kind?), and our old friends Peter, June, and Lewis, not to mention Mingus. Who could ask for more?

George Easter Reviews

DOUBLE AGENT

by Tom Bradby

Atlantic Monthly, 26.00

Rating: A-

[**Spoiler Alert:** If you haven't read the first in the series, **SECRET SERVICE**, there are elements of the plot description that will spoil the surprise found at the end of **SECRET SERVICE**. My recommendation is to read that excellent spy novel first before you read this review and the second book in the series, **DOUBLE AGENT**.]

Senior MI6 officer Kate Henderson had her happy home life with husband and two teenaged children blow up at the end of **SECRET SERVICE** when she discovered that her husband had been a spy for Russia and had just defected to that country. If Kate had been a schoolteacher, she would have found her husband's betrayal devastating. But for Kate, a high-ranking official in MI6, it was doubly so.

A few months have passed and Kate and her children are still struggling with the bomb that went off in their lives. She knows that her now ex-husband still loves the children so when he pleads with her to take them to Venice so he can spend a day or so with them, she relents – but only because she thinks it will be good for her son and daughter. Otherwise she is not in a forgiving mood – even when he tells her how miserable his life is and how sorry he is for what has happened.

While in Venice, Kate is temporarily kidnapped by the son of a Russian oli-



garch. His father is under house arrest in Russia having recently come into disfavor with the Russian President. The son wants help getting his father and other family members out of Russia and into a safe landing in the West. In return for that help, the son will give British Intelligence conclusive evidence that the British Prime Minister is an agent working for Moscow. The proof includes a video of the PM (earlier in this life) having a dalliance with an under-aged girl. This has been used to blackmail the PM into complying with Russia's wishes. There are also financial documents of large payouts that link the PM to the Russians. Of course Kate and MI6 need to have some idea that these supposed proofs are valid and not part of a hoax being played to remove the PM.

So Kate starts her own investigation and soon becomes convinced that there is a Russian mole in her organization. Her search for truth leads to some exciting action scenes near the end of the book.

The character of Kate is just terrific. She's honest, brave and whip smart. First and foremost, Kate wants to do the right thing, but in the murky world of 21st century espionage it is not always clear what that is. If any of you are missing the Cold War espionage novels of the 1970s and 1980s, this series is for you.

EDDIE'S BOY

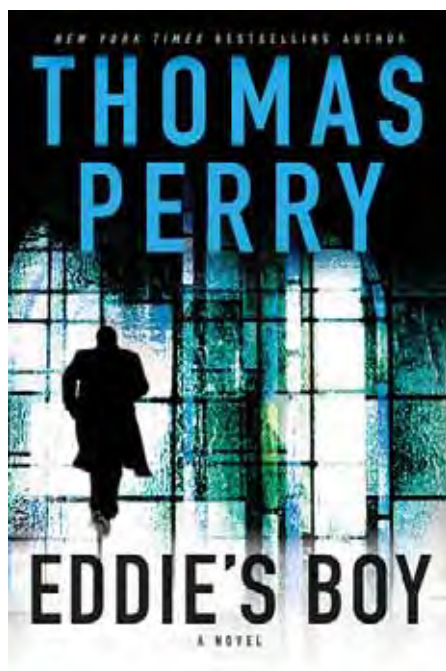
by Thomas Perry

Mysterious Press, \$26.00

Rating: A-

Wow! It's been 38 years since Thomas Perry won an Edgar Award for his first novel, **THE BUTCHER'S BOY** (1982). A sequel followed ten years later with **SLEEPING DOGS** (1992). Then nineteen years go by with no Butcher's Boy novels. In 2011, **THE INFORMANT** caught us up with this fascinating character's life. And now, at the end of 2020 we get a fourth – and in my opinion – the best Butcher's Boy novel, in which we learn so much about his early life and what turned him into such a dangerous assassin.

The Butcher's Boy now goes by the name of Michael Shaeffer and lives



a peaceful life in England with his wealthy wife. He has successfully eluded those American crime bosses who would wish him dead. That is, until his wife's annual summer party brings unwelcome strangers to his home to kill him. Of course they wind up dead or there wouldn't be any story to tell. Michael then takes off under an assumed name to Australia, only to be met with more assassins.

Michael finally determines that whoever is after him has too good an intelligence operation for him to evade, so he decides to switch from defense to offense, find out who ordered his death and eliminate him. This involves Michael going back to his home town, which brings back a rush of memories (the most interesting parts of the book for me) – including prior liaisons with married ladies which I found quite over-the-top, but that is just me. But one of those ladies provides a pivotal escape for Michael, so I'll forgive the author.

A lot of this novel follows the plot line of prior Butcher's Boy novels (survive, identify, attack, eliminate, go home) but it was quite a satisfying capstone to a series I've been reading and enjoying for almost forty years.

Thomas Perry just keeps putting out winner after winner, year after year. Thank you, Thomas. Now bring back the Old Man. Or I'd settle for another

Burglar.

RELENTLESS

by Mark Greaney

Berkley, \$28.00

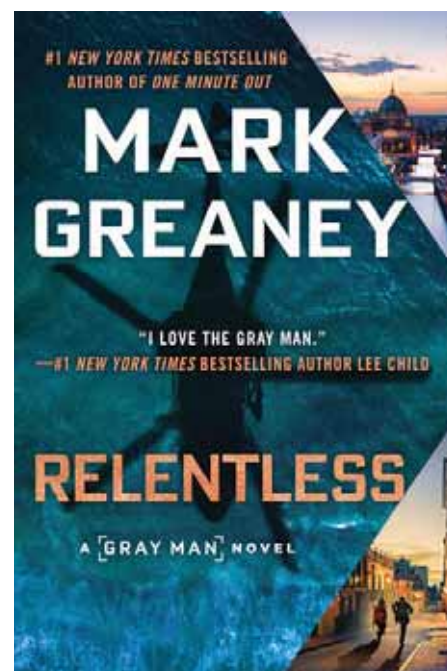
February, 2021

Rating: A

Court Gentry, Zack Hightower and Zoya Zakharova are the components of a secret CIA – affiliated team of “fixers,” known as the Poison Apple. Zack is sent to Venezuela to find a rogue CIA agent that absconded with a valuable software program that, among other things, can identify CIA agents in foreign lands. His mission is unsuccessful and Zack winds up in prison. Out of desperation, Court Gentry (the Gray Man) is dispatched on the same mission, despite his unhealed injuries. He is a bit more successful, but has to beat a hasty retreat to avoid the same fate as that of Zack Hightower.

Then, the still less than 100% Court is sent to Berlin to act as a deep cover backup to Zoya, who is infiltrating a shady private intelligence firm with some dicey connections to bad actors. He does his best to protect Zoya, who has a band of Russian assassins on her tail, while he suspects that his prior mission has something to do with his present one.

I read novels like this for the adrenaline rush I get when experiencing realistic action scenes that put me right



in the center of the fictional danger zone. Vicarious thrills work for me. Mark Greaney is the best at writing heart-pounding scenes of danger. But Nick Petrie, Brett Battles and Ben Coes aren't far behind.

RELENTLESS is just another example of Mark Greaney's consistently high quality writing. I've read all of the ten Gray Man novels and they are all top-notch. I love it when I read one book after another of a good series and don't experience a clunker among the whole bunch.

SAVAGE ROAD

by Chris Hauty

Atria/Emily Bester, \$27.00

January, 2021

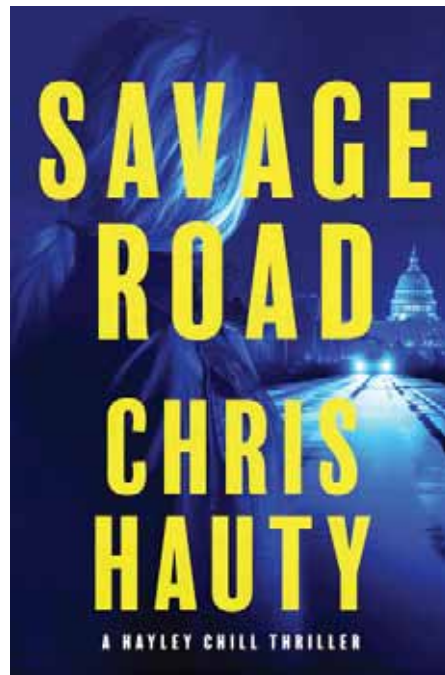
Rating: A-

I strongly recommend that you read the first book in this series, **DEEP STATE**, before you read **SAVAGE ROAD**. There is a big surprise at the end of the first book that governs how this one proceeds. If you plan to follow my advice, don't read this review. It contains major spoilers.

Hayley Chill is deeply committed to the Deep State, not the amorphous group touted by conservatives as the bogey man, but a small, anonymous group of highly placed government officials whose goal is to protect the interests of the United States. She has a highly placed position in the White House, from where she can carry out her master's plans. Right now she is the liaison between the Deep State and the U.S. President, who, as revealed at the end of **DEEP STATE**, is a Russian agent that Hayley has flipped into a double agent.

Troubles arise when a series of debilitating cyber attacks are thought to be instigated by Russian interests. The situation escalates until the U.S. finds itself on the brink of war. Hayley isn't convinced that Russia is the culprit and goes in search of the perpetrator of the attacks.

It is a high hurdle for an author of highly successful first novel to come back strong with a second. But Chris Hauty has certainly done that. In fact, as much as I admired **DEEP STATE**, I like **SAVAGE ROAD** even more. It's full of non-stop action and exciting twists



and turns. I read its last 100 pages in a blur.

DARK SKY

by C. J. Box

Putnam, \$28.00

Rating: B+

The premise is pretty simple. The Wyoming governor wants some favors from a tech mogul. The billionaire, known worldwide as "Steve2", wants to go elk hunting in the wilds of Wyoming. The governor assigns the trustworthy Joe Pike to be his guide. Ordinarily Joe wouldn't take on a job like this, but the governor makes it pretty plain that Joe's job is on the line if he refuses.

Unbeknownst to Steve2 and Joe Pike, there is a party of three (a father and two sons) that is stalking them. They are seasoned hunters and have a grudge against Steve2 whom they blame for the death of their daughter/sister. When Joe's close friend Nate Romanowski and Joe's daughter Sheridan find out that Joe is in trouble, they ride to the rescue.

This is a straight thriller (as opposed to many of the Pike novels, which are novels of detection with a lot of action thrown in). Joe Pike is pitted against foes with far superior weaponry and equipment, as well as equal knowledge of the terrain. It plays out pretty much as one would expect and that is the reason I didn't give it a higher grade. Good but not great.

RUN FOR COVER

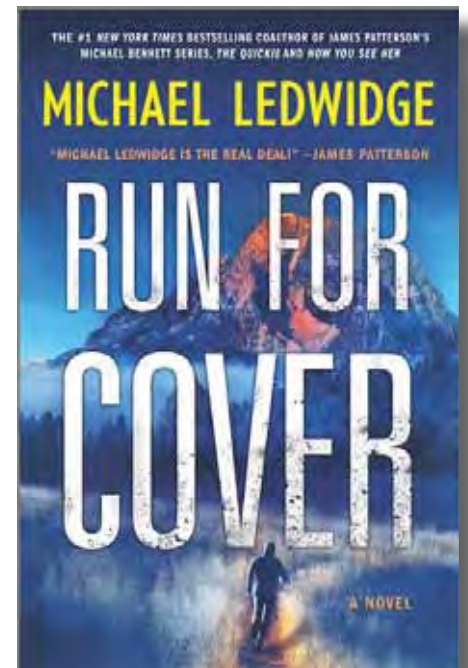
by Michael Ledwidge

Hanover Square Press, \$27.99

Rating: B+

The first in the series, last year's **STOP AT NOTHING**, was one of my favorites of 2020, so I was pleased when I heard there was going to be a sequel. Let me explain a bit about the main character's background. Michael Gannon is ex-military. He was a member of Task Force Orange, a special mission reconnaissance unit specializing in electronic surveillance and covert border transit. High-risk, sneak-and-peak missions where they wanted to softly penetrate into places where US forces weren't officially welcomed. Once the team proved successful, they went through CIA espionage training at the Farm. They were taught to steal cars, pick locks and bluff their way out of tight situations. Another member of the team, John Barber, became like a brother to Gannon. Raised in central Utah, John was a consummate hunter and as such, taught Gannon the finer arts of tracking.

As the story opens, we find Gannon living on John Barber's land in a tricked-up trailer with all the comforts of home. Because of the events of **STOP AT NOTHING**, Gannon is trying to keep as low a profile as possible, living off the grid with his college-aged son Declan.



But trouble has a way of finding its way to Gannon's door when he agrees to help John investigate what happened to his older brother Owen, a park ranger, who was shot and killed in Grand Teton Park.

Gannon soon finds himself teamed up with tenacious FBI agent Kit Hagen on the trail of a dangerous mystery and a head-on collision course with a ruthless killer whose skills at war are as deadly as they come.

RUN FOR COVER is well done, but not as good as **STOP AT NOTHING** so I was a bit disappointed, but only because of the comparison. I'll continue to follow this series and look forward to new entries.

THE OUTSIDE MAN

by Don Bentley
Berkley, \$27.00

Rating: B

This sequel to last year's **WITHOUT SANCTION** certainly opens with a bang. Former DIA operative Matt Drake is driving in downtown Austin, Texas, when he is attacked by a professional hit team. The fast-thinking Drake is able to repel the attack in an exciting and realistic action sequence. But he is left wondering who is targeting him and why?

So Drake and his invalid buddy Frodo go in search of answers, which eventually brings him once again in contact with a sinister organization operated by an Arab known only as the Devil.

Things get dicey when Drake tries to track down the Devil and encounters betrayal and endangerment to those closest to him.

I was all in with this thriller until the author introduced the Devil as a character, whom I found way over the top. There are some exciting action scenes (especially the opening one) that rescued the book for me, but I think that the author needs to work a bit more on his plotting chops to make things more believable.

A SHADOW INTELLIGENCE

by Oliver Harris
Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, \$25.00

Rating: B-

Elliott Kane is an experienced MI6 intelligence officer just back in England after a lengthy undercover assignment that has just been compromised. He's in search of his on-again, off-again lover Joanna, who is working now on the periphery of British intelligence. All Kane finds is evidence that she has disappeared somewhere in Kazakhstan, having left him with a cryptic video and a plea for help. The video shows Kane in a place he's never been in, an apartment with a dead man. Kane knows the video has been doctored, but he doesn't know why.

So without official sanction, Kane travels to Kazakhstan, a country he is somewhat familiar with and we, the readers, become quite informed about. The country is experiencing something of a cultural and economic revolution and the powerful surrounding nations of China and Russia are competing for influence there. Western business interests are also vying for the money in Kazakhstan.

The author Oliver Harris is especially well-schooled on the ins and outs of modern spycraft, the internal working of Kazakhstan and how social media can be used to influence a nation's politics and society. His knowledge is on full display and is quite impressive. What he lacks as a writer is any sense of pace, at least if **A SHADOW INTELLIGENCE** is any indication. The novel was easy to put down, which I did many times, before finishing it. With so much information being infused into the narrative, it became a confusing ride. But the author did do a fine job in clearly wrapping everything up at the end.

A sequel to this novel, **ASCENSION**, will be published in July, 2021.

THE POWER COUPLE

by Alex Berenson
Simon & Schuster, \$28.00

Rating: C+

Alex Berenson has decided to take a break from his popular John Wells spy series (which I greatly admired), to give us this twisty standalone. I wish he hadn't. The author has attempted to mix the current hot genre of domestic suspense with the ever popular one of spy fiction. It didn't work for me.

We follow the lives of Rebecca and Brian Unsworth and their two teenage children, Kira and Tony. By all appearances the parents are very successful in their respective professions of FBI Special Agent for Counterterrorism (Rebecca) and Coder for the National Security Agency (Brian). But for a long time they struggle to make ends meet and keep the level of lifestyle that Rebecca feels is her due. Then Brian develops a highly profitable gambling app and they are able to live happily without the stress of money worries.

As the couple's 20th anniversary approaches, they decide to take a European vacation with their kids to celebrate the occasion. Everything goes well until one night Kira fails to return home from a nightclub. She has been abducted. Rebecca and Brian are distraught beyond words and call in all their resources from their employers to find out what has happened to Kira and how to get her back. As time passes, secrets from both their pasts come to light and the situation becomes a lot more complicated than originally thought.

The writing and pacing were fine, but Rebecca and Brian became more and more unlikeable as one read further into the novel. By the end, I didn't care what happened to them, which took all the air completely out of my reading experience. Unless you're really into the unreliable narrator/domestic suspense type of fiction, my advice is to skip this one. A much better novel that successfully melded the two genres was **NEED TO KNOW** by Karen Cleveland. Give that one a try instead of this one.

History Mystery Potpourri



Sally Sugarman Reviews

HALF MOON STREET

by Alex Reeve
Felony and Mayhem, 2019
Rating A

Leo Stanhope is an assistant to a coroner taking down the man's notes and sewing up bodies after him. He also sometimes assists the officer who communicates to the family member what has been determined the cause of death. Leo has been in love with a young prostitute he visits once a week. He has dreams of them marrying and settling down. Image his shock when her body appears on the slab. Since there is a blow to the back of her head, the coroner ignores some of the other signs that the body offers about the cause of death. Leo becomes obsessed with finding out who murdered his beloved.

Complicating his investigation is the fact that Leo is a man in a woman's body. The story takes place in Victorian London. As with many of the sexual possibilities that are now described and discussed, they have been around for many centuries with different ages and societies dealing with them differently. In Victorian society where much happened that was not discussed, transsexuality was one of these topics.

This is the first of what the publisher says will be a series about Leo. Given this first book, it is a series to follow. Leo is complex. The reader learns a great deal about his early life. There is a wonderful moment in the book when a woman with whom he has been working to uncover the mystery involving the death of her husband and its possible connection to the death of Leo's love and who knows his secret completely

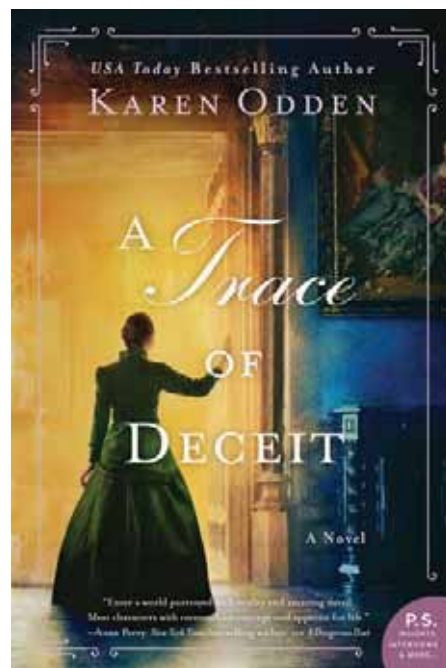
accepts him as a man because of his stupidity about women.

The police force is dealt with in an uncomplimentary fashion as are most of the members of Victorian society. The exceptions are the working class and those whom those in power reject. Leo is a chess player and this does affect his approach to some of the mysteries he is trying to solve. It is hard to believe that any one experiencing the physical abuse which Leo does could survive as well as he does. This is a book absorbing in its own right, but even more worthy of attention because of the relationship between Leo and a particular society and time.

A TRACE OF DECEIT

by Karen Odden
William Morrow, 2019
Rating: A

This story is narrated by Annabelle Rowe, an art student, who discovers her



only brother Edwin has been murdered when she finds two Scotland Yard Inspectors in his studio. She has come to check on their usual Tuesday meeting. As a talented painter, Edwin has had a turbulent life, but he seemed to have settled down and begun changing his life. He had been working on cleaning up a valuable painting which was to be auctioned off. The painting is missing. Tracking it and the murderer are both priorities.

Annabelle wants to be a part of the investigation. The young inspector in charge of the case seems willing to accept her help, even though his superior would not approve. The two of them interview a variety of people involved in Edwin's work on the painting. Entering the Victorian world at this point in time seems almost comforting. The only media one encounters is a sensationalist newspaper which offers misleading information about the crime. Our attention is focused on a particular event, not general chaos.

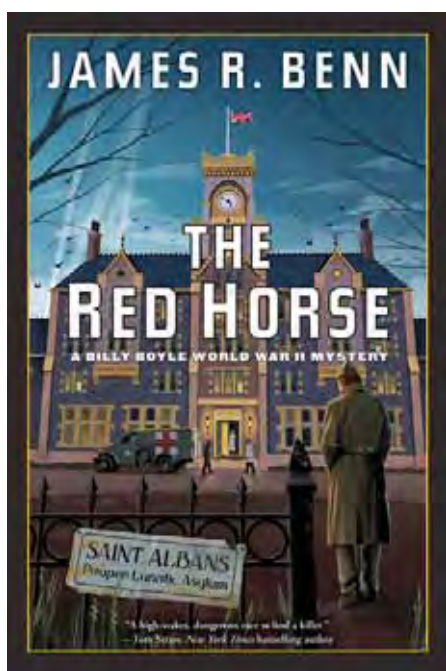
Annabelle even has time to instruct the inspector in how to look at a painting, at what is left out as well as what is there. Good advice in any situation, but particularly apt in a murder investigation. At Edwin's funeral, Annabelle sees some familiar figures from Edwin's past whom she cannot quite place. This leads to a further examination of his unhappy family life, his time at school as well as his gambling and jail term for forging a painting.

All of the characters are well developed and their interviews build to context that moves at a steady pace towards the resolution. The book is well written and although the mixing of the romance and mystery genres often presents problems, the growing relationship between Annabelle and the inspector is handled well. This is a book well worth reading and an author well worth following.

Ted Hertel Review

THE RED HORSE

by James R. Benn
Soho Crime, \$27.95
Rating: B+



Following the fall of Paris, as described in **WHEN HELL STRUCK TWELVE**, the previous book in the series, Captain William "Billy" Boyle and his friend Lt. Piotr "Kaz" Kazimierz are convalescing in Saint Albans Pauper Lunatic Asylum, about an hour outside London. Boyle is suffering from exhaustion, tremors, and drug withdrawal, while Kaz has developed a serious heart problem. To make matters worse, both Boyle's fiancée and Kaz' sister are being held by the Nazis. If that's not enough, Boyle witnesses a patient falling to his death from a tower at the hospital. He believes he saw another person on the tower with the victim. As a cop before the war began, Billy feels the need to investigate. With tactic approval from the powers that be at the hospital, he undertakes a most dangerous search for a killer, while hampered at all times by his mental and physical problems. Did he really see someone else on the tower? Or was it the drugs? But when more death strikes, Boyle knows he is on the right track.

This is James R. Benn's fifteenth novel of Billy Boyle in World War II. It is different from its predecessors in that most of those novels found Boyle somewhere near a major battle, caught up in events like the fall of Paris. Here, however, Boyle is far from the action taking place in Europe as he seeks to recover

from "shell shock." Always filled with historical accuracy (although I don't think the term "out to lunch," used here to refer to a person whose mental acuity is in question, came into being until the 1950s), Benn is able to demonstrate that the enemy might be wearing the same uniform as their fellow combatants.

There are some horrifying moments as Boyle and others are given electroshock therapy, soldiers return mute from battle, spies eavesdropping on psychiatric patients while taping their answers, and people who survived countless battles dying at the hands of people they trusted. All of this is shrouded in secrets, all for the good of the war effort, for the greater good of society. Saint Albans was designed to keep this locked up tight in the minds of its "patients." Billy comes to realize that if the walls could talk, they would scream.

Boyle must conceal or destroy evidence if he is to bring a killer to justice. All the while he finds himself even more disenchanted with the war than he recently has been. He sees the duplicity and the manipulation of lives of soldiers and civilians while death is being dealt from the comfort of London offices. Boyle realizes that he has been complicit in these acts, as well, having killed in the name of peace, willing to sacrifice many lives to save those he loves. Further, he must make a deadly decision that could forever change – or even end – his relationship with his friend Kaz.

The author keeps the reader guessing about resolutions right up until the end. Boyle must use everything he has learned about secrets, lies, and betrayal to get the results he needs. Does that make him any better (or worse) than anyone else he has met on this path? As issues of trust come to the forefront, if one can't trust a right bastard, who can one trust? This is a solid addition to an excellent series.

Maggie Mason Review

THE LAST MRS. SUMMERS

by Rhys Bowen

Berkely, \$26.00

Fifteenth in the Royal Spyness series

Rating A

Georgie O'Mara nee Rannoch is enjoying married life. Marriage to Darcy is blissful, and their finances are much improved. What mars the happiness is Darcy's needing to leave for his top secret work. Luckily, Georgie's good friend Belinda can provide an adventure. Belinda inherited a small cottage in Cornwall. She hadn't been there in years, and asked Georgie to come with her to view the property.

The two friends set off on what is expected to be a quick trip to evaluate the property. A kind way to describe it is unlivable. They run into a woman Belinda knew as a child. Rose Summers was the daughter of a servant at Trewoma Hall. Belinda visited relatives nearby during summers, and ran around with other young people. Rose was at the edge of the clique and never quite accepted. Now, things have changed and she is married to the owner of the Hall. She's invited them to stay with her at the hall. This is awkward as Belinda had a fling with her husband, Tony.

Things take a turn for the worst when Tony is found dead in Belinda's room. Belinda holding the presumed murder weapon doesn't help. Georgie knows her friend is innocent, and sets out to prove it. Matters are complicated by a relative of Belinda's, a moocher, showing up as well as another man from the 'set' of young people who hung around together in their youth. Georgie manages to save the day, as any fan of this series could expect.

This series is a must read for me. I enjoy the time travel to a gentler time, and my imagination goes wild thinking of the fabulous frocks worn. It's a joy to see Georgie secure in life and love, and I eagerly await the next in the series.



Experts' Lists

Best Mysteries of 2020

Deadly Pleasures Staff

Ali Karim Best of 2020

A PRIVATE CATHEDRAL, James Lee Burke
 FAIR WARNING, Michael Connelly
 TROJAN HORSE, S. Lee Manning
 THE SENTINEL, Lee Child and Andrew Child
 BLACKTOP WASTELAND, S. A. Cosby
 KILL A STRANGER, Simon Kernick
 LONG BRIGHT RIVER, Liz Moore
 MOONFLOWER MURDERS, Anthony Horowitz
 THE HUNTED, Gabriel Bergmoser

Mike Ripley's Best of 2020

HAMMER TO FALL, John Lawton
 A SONG FOR THE DARK TIMES, Ian Rankin
 BLACKTOP WASTELAND, S. A. Cosby
 PAINTED IN BLOOD, Ilaria Tuti
 THE GOOD KILLER, Harry Dolan
 THE SPLIT, Sharon Bolton
 BRIXTON HILL, Lottie Moggach
 THE NIGHT OF THE SHOOTING STARS, Ben Pastor
 ANGEL'S INFERNO, William Hjortsberg

Jeff Pople's Best of 2020

Novels

DIRTY SOUTH, John Connolly
 A SONG FOR THE DARK TIMES, Ian Rankin
 BLACKTOP WASTELAND, S. A. Cosby
 CONSOLATION, Garry Disher
 WHEN SHE WAS GOOD, Michael Robotham
 THE LAST HUNT, Deon Meyer
 THE GOOD TURN, Dervla McTiernan
 HAMMER TO FALL, John Lawton
 THE NIGHT SWIM, Megan Goldin
 AFTER DARK, Dominic Nolan
 TRUST, Chris Hammer
 DOUBLE AGENT, Tom Bradby

Debuts

THE THURSDAY MURDER CLUB, Richard Osman

THE HUNTED, Gabriel Bergmoser
 THE BLUFFS, Kyle Perry

Larry Gandle's Best of 2020

Novels

AMNESTY, Aravind Adiga
 LITTLE SECRETS, Jennifer Hillier
 THE WIFE STALKER, Liv Constantine
 EDDIE'S BOY, Thomas Perry
 DEATH IN HER HANDS, Otessa Moshfegh
 ONE BY ONE, Ruth Ware
 SUMMER HOUSE, James Patterson & Brendan DuBois
 A BURNING, Megha Majumdar
 VANISHING HALF, Brit Bennett
 THE LAST FLIGHT, Julie Clark
 WHO THEY WAS, Gabriel Krauze
 SNOW, John Banville
 BLACKTOP WASTELAND, S. A. Cosby
 LONG BRIGHT RIVER, Liz Moore
 DEACON KING KONG, James McBride

Debut Novels

ROSE GOLD, Stephanie Wrobel
 MY DARK VANESSA, Kate Elizabeth Russell

Thriller Novels

WITHOUT SANCTION, Don Bentley
 HOUR OF THE ASSASSIN, Matthew Quirk
 THREE HOURS IN PARIS, Cara Black
 THE SHADOWS, Alex North
 HOUSE ON FIRE, Joseph Finder
 THE BOY IN THE WOODS, Harlan Coben

George Easter's Best

Best Novels

THE LAST FLIGHT, Julie Clark
 VICTIM 2117, Jussi Adler-Olsen
 THE FINISHER, Peter Lovesey
 THE LAST HUNT, Deon Meyer
 TROUBLED BLOOD, Robert Galbraith
 BLACKTOP WASTELAND, S. A. Cosby
 THE LAW OF INNOCENCE, Michael Connelly

HOUSE PRIVILEGE, Mike Lawson
 BLIND VIGIL, Matt Coyle
 THE BOY IN THE WOODS, Harlan Coben
 MOONFLOWER MURDERS, Anthony Horowitz
 THE CURATOR, M. W. Craven

Best First Novels

THE THURSDAY MURDER CLUB, Richard Osman
 WINTER COUNTS, David Heska Wanbli Weiden
 DEEP STATE, Chris Hauty

Best PBOs

DARKNESS FOR LIGHT, Emma Viskic
 THE MONGKOK STATION, Jake Needham
 HIDE AWAY, Jason Pinter
 RUNNING FROM THE DEAD, Mike Knowles
 BAD DAY AT THE VULTURE CLUB, Vaseem Khan
 PLAIN SIGHT, Bruce Robert Coffin
 BAD NEWS TRAVELS FAST, James Swain

Best Action Thrillers

THE WILD ONE, Nick Petrie
 INSIDIOUS, Brett Battles
 ONE MINUTE OUT, Mark Greaney
 EDDIE'S BOY, Thomas Perry
 THE MAN ON THE STREET, Trevor Wood
 THE RUNNER, Stephen Leather
 DOUBLE AGENT, Tom Bradby

Steele Curry's Best of 2020

Best Novels:

A PRIVATE CATHEDRAL, James Lee Burke
 BLACKTOP WASTELAND, S. A. Cosby
 LADY JAIL, John Farrow
 ROAR BACK, John Farrow
 THE ENGLISHMAN, David Gilman
 THE RHINO CONSPIRACY, Peter Hain
 HAMMER TO FALL, John Lawton
 KILL CHAIN, Dominic Martell
 THE LAST HUNT, Deon Meyer
 EDDIE'S BOY, Thomas Perry
 ALL THE DEVILS ARE HERE, Louise Penny
 THE CITY UNDER SIEGE, Michael Russell (U.K.)
 TROUBLE IS WHAT I DO, Walter Mosley
 BROKEN, Don Winslow
 THE LAW OF INNOCENCE, Michael Connelly

THE SUMMER HOUSE, James Patterson
& Brendan DuBois

Debut Novels:

THE REFLECTING POOL, Otho Eskin
DEEP STATE, Chris Hauty
GERMANIA, Harald Gilbers

Best Paperback Originals:

FIFTY FIFTY, Steve Cavanagh
THE DIAMOND QUEEN OF SINGA-
PORE, Ian Hamilton
FORESIGHT: THE LOST DECADES OF
UNCLE CHOW TUNG, Ian Hamilton
MONGKOK STATION, Jake Needham
THE NAMES OF THE DEAD,
Kevin Wignall

**Kristopher Zgorski's Top
Picks 2020**

Louise Penny,
ALL THE DEVILS ARE HERE
Rachel Howzell Hall,
AND NOW SHE'S GONE
S. A. Cosby, BLACKTOP WASTELAND
Lisa Unger, CONFESSIONS ON THE 7:45
Hank Phillippi Ryan, THE FIRST TO LIE
Aimee Molloy,
GOODNIGHT BEAUTIFUL
Julia Spencer-Fleming,
HID FROM OUR EYES
Jennifer Hillier, LITTLE SECRETS
Lori Rader-Day, THE LUCKY ONE
Kim Powers, RULES FOR BEING DEAD
Ivy Pochoda, THESE WOMEN
Ragnar Jonasson, WINTERKILL
John Fram, THE BRIGHT LANDS
Alex Pavesi, THE EIGHTH DETECTIVE
David Heska Wanbli Weiden,
WINTER COUNTS

L. J. Roberts

LONG RANGE, C. J. Box
CONSOLATION, Garry Disher
THE LAST PASSENGER, Charles Finch
THE BLACK CAGE, Jack Fredrickson
WHO SPEAKS FOR THE DEAD,
C. S. Harris
THE FINISHER, Peter Lovesey
ALL THE DEVILS ARE HERE,
Louise Penny
THE DREAMER, Sheldon M. Siegel
NO FIXED LINE, Dana Stabenow
THE SLEEPING NYMPH
(PAINTED IN BLOOD), Ilaria Tuti

**"Mystery" Mike Bursaw's
Best of 2020**

BLIND VIGIL, Matt Coyle
THE WILD ONE, Nick Petrie
DEEP STATE, Chris Hauty
HOUSE PRIVILEGE, Mike Lawson
ONE MINUTE OUT, Mark Greaney
SAVAGE SON, Jack Carr
THE MAN WHO NEVER WAS,
Mark Dawson
EDDIES BOY, Thomas Perry
FIFTY FIFTY, Steve Cavanaugh
NEXT TO THE LAST STAND,
Craig Johnson
BAD NEWS TRAVELS FAST,
James Swain
THE PRESIDENTS DOSSIER,
James Scott
THE LAW OF INNOCENCE,
Mike Connelly
WINTER COUNTS,
David Heska Wanbli Weiden

**Oline Cogdill
Nationally Syndicated
Reviewer
Best Novels**

BLACKTOP WASTELAND, S. A. Cosby
AND NOW SHE'S GONE,
Rachel Howzell Hall
THESE WOMEN, Ivy Pochoda
A BEAUTIFUL CRIME,
Christopher Bollen
THE MOUNTAINS WILD,
Sarah Stewart Taylor
LITTLE SECRETS, Jennifer Hillier
THE LAW OF INNOCENCE,
Michael Connelly
CONFESSIONS ON THE 7:45, Lisa Unger
THE KINGDOM, Jo Nesbo
A SONG FOR THE DARK TIMES,
Ian Rankin
PRETTY AS A PICTURE, Elizabeth Little
NEVER ASK ME, Jeff Abbott
WE ARE ALL THE SAME IN THE
DARK, Julia Heaberlin
THEY'RE GONE, E. A. Barris
SQUEEZE ME, Carl Hiaasen
THE SUN DOWN MOTEL,
Simone St. James
NO BAD DEED, Heather Chavez

Best Debuts

THE SAFE PLACE, Anna Downes
THE EIGHTH DETECTIVE, Alex Pavesi
WINTER COUNTS,
David Heska Wanbli Weiden
DARLING ROSE GOLD,
Stephanie Wrobel

**Marilyn Stasio
Mystery Reviewer
The New York Times**
THE RABBIT HUNTER, Lars Kepler
SHATTERED JUSTICE, Susan Ferlong
THE EVIL THAT MEN DO,
John McMahon
THE TRUANTS, Kate Weinberg
PERFECT LITTLE CHILDREN,
Sophie Hannah
DON'T TURN AROUND, Jessica Barry
HARD CASH VALLEY, Brian Panowich
PLEASE SEE US, Caitlin Mullen
THE FORGER'S DAUGHTER,
Bradford Morrow
LADY CHEVY, John Woods

**Sarah Lyall
Best Thrillers 2020**

The New York Times
THE SEARCHER, Tana French
TO TELL YOU THE TRUTH,
Gilly Macmillan
ONE BY ONE, Ruth Ware
THESE WOMEN, Ivy Pochoda
THE EIGHTH DETECTIVE, Alex Pavesi
THE GUEST LIST, Lucy Foley
YOU AGAIN, Debra Jo Immergut
MOONFLOWER MURDERS,
Anthony Horowitz
HI FIVE, Joe Ide
THE PATIENT, Jasper DeWitt

**Otto Penzler's Ten Best
Mysteries 2020**

MOONFLOWER MURDERS,
Anthony Horowitz
THE SEARCHER, Tana French
EDDIE'S BOY, Thomas Perry
WOBBLE TO DEATH, Peter Lovesey
THE FORGER'S DAUGHTER,
Bradford Morrow
THE LAW OF INNOCENCE,
Michael Connelly
THE MIST, Ragnar Jonasson
THE SENTINEL,
Lee Child, Andrew Child
THE BEST OF MANHUNT, Edited by
Jeff Vorzimmer
AN INCONVENIENT WOMAN, S
tephanie Buelens

**Barbara Peters
The Poisoned Pen**
FRESHWATER FOR FLOWERS, Valerie

Perrie
THE GIRL IN THE MIRROR,
Rose Carlyle
DEEP STATE, Chris Hauty
FIFTY WORDS FOR RAIN,
Asha Lemmie
THE END OF OCTOBER,
Lawrence Wright
EIGHT DETECTIVES, Alex Pavesi
THE THURSDAY MURDER CLUB,
Richard Osman
THE RUSSIAN PINK, Matthew Hart
WINTER COUNTS,
David Heska Wanbli Weiden
ESCAPING DREAMLAND,
Charlie Lovett

Laura Wilson
Crime Fiction Reviewer
The Guardian

THE MAN IN THE STREET
by Trevor Wood
TRUE STORY by Kate Reed Petty
DJINN PATROL ON THE PURPLE LINE
by Deepa Anappara
BLACK RAIN FALLING by Jacob Ross
THREE-FIFTHS by John Vercher
THE THURSDAY MURDER CLUB
by Richard Osman
YOUR HOUSE WILL PAY by Steph Cha
WHEN NO ONE IS WATCHING
by Alyssa Cole
LEAVE THE WORLD BEHIND
by Rumaan Alam
BLACKTOP WASTELAND
by S. A. Cosby
REMAIN SILENT by Susie Steiner
BROKEN (six novellas) by Don Winslow
MAGPIE LANE by Lucy Atkins
OUR FATHERS by Rebecca Wait
SUMMER OF RECKONING
by Marion Brunet
WE BEGIN AT THE END
by Chris Whitaker
THE SEARCHER by Tana French
THE LAST PROTECTOR
by Andrew Taylor
THE DEVIL AND THE DARK WATER
by Stuart Turton
BENT by Joe Thomas
CRY BABY by Mark Billingham

Adam Woog
Seattle Times 10 Favorite
Crime Novels of 2020
THREE HOURS IN PARIS by Cara Black

A PRIVATE CATHEDRAL
by James Lee Burke
HE STARTED IT by Samantha Downing
THE LAST PASSENGER by Charles Finch
LAST DANCE by Jeffrey Fleishman
JUST WATCH ME by Jeff Lindsay
PRETTY AS A PICTURE
by Elizabeth Little
THE FINISHER by Peter Lovesey
LONG BRIGHT RIVER by Liz Moore
THE NIGHTWORKERS by Brian Selfon

J. Kingston Pierce
**The Rap Sheet ([https://
therapsheet.blogspot.com/](https://therapsheet.blogspot.com/))**
THE DEVIL AND THE DARK WATER,

Stuart Turton
MIDNIGHT ATLANTA,
Thomas Mullen (U.K.)
DO NO HARM, Max Allan Collins
BLACK SUN RISING, Matthew Carr
MOONFLOWER MURDERS,
Anthony Horowitz
DEADLAND, Sara Paretsky
THE FINISHER, Peter Lovesey
GRAVE'S END, William Shaw
DEATH IN THE EAST, Abir Mukherjee
GERMANIA, Harald Gilbers

Jake Kerridge
The Daily Telegraph
A SONG FOR THE DARK TIMES,
Ian Rankin
TROUBLED BLOOD, Robert Galbraith
THE LESS DEAD, Denise Mina
YOUR HOUSE WILL PAY, Steph Cha
THE TREATMENT, Michael Nath
MAGPIE LANE, Lucy Atkins
THE THURSDAY MURDER CLUB,
Richard Osman

Barry Forshaw
Financial Times
Best Crime Novels 2020
BROKEN, Don Winslow
THE DEVIL AND THE DARK WATER,
Stuart Turton
A SONG FOR THE DARK TIMES,
Ian Rankin
THE SEARCHER, Tana French
THREE-FIFTHS, John Vercher

Adam LeBor
Financial Times

Best Thrillers 2020
BOX 88, Charles Cumming
THE DEAD LINE, Holly Watt
THE ENGLISHMAN, David Gilman
THE RUNNER, Stephen Leather
THE PALADIN, David Ignatius

Mark Sanderson
and Joan Smith
The Times (U.K.)
Best Crime Books of 2020
The Times Crime Novel of the Year
Denise Mina, THE LESS DEAD
The Sunday Times
Crime Novel of the Year
Robert Galbraith, TROUBLED BLOOD

Ragnar Jonasson, THE MIST
Chris Hammer, SILVER
Lucy Foley, THE GUEST LIST
Riku Onda, THE AOSAWA MURDERS
Alex Pavesi, EIGHT DETECTIVES
Alan Parks,
BOBBY MARCH WILL LIVE FOREVER
John Vercher, THREE-FIFTHS
Donna Leon, TRACE ELEMENTS
D. A. Mishani, THREE
Mark Billingham, CRY BABY
Ian Rankin,
A SONG FOR THE DARK TIMES
Emma Viskic, DARKNESS FOR LIGHT
Joe Ide, HI FIVE
John Banville, SNOW

John Dugdale
and James Owen
The Times (U.K.)
Best Thriller Books of 2020
The Times Thriller of the Year
Rosamund Lupton, THREE HOURS
The Sunday Times
Thriller of the Year
SQUEEZE ME, Carl Hiaasen

Don Winslow, BROKEN
Ben Creed, CITY OF GHOSTS
Scott Turow, THE LAST TRIAL
Juris Jurjevics, PLAY THE RED QUEEN
Nicci French, HOUSE OF CORRECTION
Holly Watt, THE DEAD LINE
Charlotte Philby, A DOUBLE LIFE
Simon Conway, THE STRANGER
Ariel Lawhon, CODE NAME HÉLÈNE

Jo Nesbo, THE KINGDOM
Tana French, THE SEARCHER

Ayo Onatade

Shots Magazine and ShotsMag Confidential

THE LAW OF INNOCENCE, Michael
Connelly

THE DIRTY SOUTH, John Connolly
BLACKTOP WASTELAND, S. A. Cosby

LIKE FLIES FROM AFAR, K. Ferrari
INTO THE FIRE, Gregg Hurwitz

THE LESS DEAD, Denise Mina
THE LOST AND THE DAMNED,

Oliver Norek

EIGHT DETECTIVES, Alex Pavesi

THESE WOMEN, Ivy Pochoda
RULES FOR A PERFECT MURDER

(EIGHT PERFECT MURDERS),

Peter Swanson

CITY OF SPIES, Mara Timon

THE DEVIL AND THE DARK WATER,

Stuart Turton

Kellye Garrett

A Mystery Maven's Favorite Whodunits, Thrillers and Capers of 2020

(Published on the Goodreads Site)

PRETTY AS A PICTURE, Elizabeth Little
AND NOW SHE'S GONE,

Rachel Howzell Hall

BLACKTOP WASTELAND, S. A. Cosby

PRETTY THINGS, Janelle Brown

FROM BEER TO ETERNITY,

Sherry Harris

THEY'RE GONE, E. A. Barres

THE LADY UPSTAIRS, Halley Sutton

WHEN NO ONE IS WATCHING,

Alyssa Cole

WINTER COUNTS,

David Heska Wanbli Weiden

WHAT YOU DON'T SEE, Tracy Clark

Publications' Lists

Best Mysteries of 2020

The Washington Post

CITY OF MARGINS by William Boyle

DEAD LAND by Sara Paretsky

DJINN PATROL ON THE PURPLE

LINE by Deepa Anappara

LONG BRIGHT RIVER by Liz Moore

THE MISSING AMERICAN

by Kwei Quarley

ONE BY ONE by Ruth Ware

THE SEARCHERS by Tara French

SQUEEZE ME by Carl Hiaasen

THREE HOURS IN PARIS

by Cara Black

TROUBLE IS WHAT I DO

by Walter Mosley

Kirkus

FAIR WARNING, Michael Connelly

THE GOLDEN CAGE, Camilla Läck-

berg ; translated by Neil Smith

PRECIOUS YOU, Helen Monks Takhar

ALL THE DEVILS ARE HERE,

Louise Penny

THE BOURNE EVOLUTION,

Brian Freeman

THE KINGDOM, Jo Nesbø ; translated

by Robert Ferguson

DEAD LAND, Sara Paretsky

TAKE ME APART, Sara Sligar

EIGHT PERFECT MURDERS,

Peter Swanson

ONE BY ONE, Ruth Ware

A SHADOW INTELLIGENCE,

Oliver Harris

Publishers' Weekly

AND NOW SHE'S GONE,

Rachel Howzell Hall

BLACK SUN RISING, Matthew Carr

THE CABINETS OF BARNABY

MAYNE, Elsa Hart

THE DEVIL AND THE DARK

WATER, Stuart Turton

EIGHT PERFECT MURDERS,

Peter Swanson

THE END OF OCTOBER,

Lawrence Wright

THE FAMILIAR DARK, Amy Engel

THE FORGER'S DAUGHTER,

Bradford Morrow

THE GOLDEN CAGE,

Camilla Läckberg

SEVEN LIES, Elizabeth Kay

THE WICKED SISTER, Karen Dionne

WINTER COUNTS,

David Heska Wanbli Weiden

Library Journal Best Crime Fiction 2020

By Vicki Briner, Liz French and Lesa Holstine

DJINN PATROL ON THE PURPLE

LINE, Deepa Anappara

BLACKTOP WASTELAND, S. A. Cosby

THE SEARCHER, Tana French

UNSPEAKABLE THINGS, Jess Lourey

THE THURSDAY MURDER CLUB,

Richard Osman

ALL THE DEVILS ARE HERE,

Louise Penny

HIDE AWAY, Jason Pinter

THE MOUNTAINS WILD,

Sarah Stewart Taylor

WINTER COUNTS,

David Heska Wanbli Weiden

Wall Street Journal

THREE HOURS IN PARIS, Cara Black

THE BRAMBLE AND THE ROSE,

Tom Bouman

TROUBLED BLOOD, Robert Galbraith

CLEAN HANDS, Patrick Hoffman

HI FIVE, Joe Ide

PRETTY AS A PICTURE, Elizabeth Little

THE THURSDAY MURDER CLUB,

Richard Osman

ALL THE DEVILS ARE HERE,

Louise Penny

ONE FATAL FLAW, Anne Perry

EIGHT PERFECT MURDERS,

Peter Swanson



Websites' Lists

Best Mysteries of 2020

Websites' and Media Lists

Goodreads Choice

<https://www.goodreads.com>

Best Mystery Award 2020

THE GUEST LIST, Lucy Foley –
Winner

HOME BEFORE DARK, Riley Sager

THE WIVES, Tarryn Fisher

THE SUN DOWN MOTEL,

Simone St. James

THE SEARCHER, Tana French

WHEN NO ONE IS WATCHING,

Alyssa Cole

LONG BRIGHT RIVER, Liz Moore

THE BOY FROM THE WOODS,

Harlan Coben

ONE BY ONE, Ruth Ware

THE DEVIL AND THE DARK

WATER, Stuart Turton

NPR

<https://www.npr.org/books/>

Best Mysteries and Thrillers 2020

MEXICAN GOTHIC,

Silvia Moreno-Garcia

MOONFLOWER MURDERS,

Anthony Horowitz

THIS IS MY AMERICA, Kim Johnson

LONG BRIGHT RIVER, Liz Moore

CATHERINE HOUSE,

Elisabeth Thomas

PIRANESI, Susanna Clarke

DJINN PATROL ON THE PURPLE

LINE, Deepa Anappara

AMNESTY, Aravind Adiga

THE ONLY GOOD INDIANS,

Stephen Graham Jones

THE MISSING AMERICAN,

Kwei Quartey

A SHADOW INTELLIGENCE,

Oliver Harris

SISTERS, Daisy Johnson

LEAVE THE WORLD BEHIND,

Rumaan Alam

WHEN NO ONE IS WATCHING,

Alyssa Cole

WHY FISH DON'T EXIST, Lulu Miller

THE SEARCHER, Tana French

SLIPPERY CREATURES, K. J. Charles

MIDNIGHT AT THE BARCLAY

HOTEL, Fleur Bradley

WINTER COUNTS,

David Heska Wanbli Weiden

BLACKTOP WASTELAND, S. A. Cosby

Novel Suspects

<https://www.novelsuspects.com/>

Top Five Picks for Best Mystery & Suspense 2020

THE MISSING AMERICAN,

Kwei Quartey

THE BOY FROM THE WOODS,

Harlan Coben

TROUBLE IS WHAT I DO,

Walter Mosley

DEACON KING KONG,

James McBride

DJINN PATROL ON THE PURPLE

LINE, Deepa Anappara

The Bibliofile

<https://the-bibliofile.com/>

Best Mysteries & Thrillers 2020

By Jennifer Marie Lin

THE GUEST LIST by Lucy Foley

HOME BEFORE DARK by Riley Sager

A GOOD MARRIAGE

by Kimberly McCreight

INVISIBLE GIRL by Lisa Jewell

LITTLE SECRETS by Jennifer Hillier

THE SUN DOWN MOTEL

by Simone St. James

MOONFLOWER MURDERS

by Anthony Horowitz

THE RED LOTUS by Chris Bohjalian

BIG LIES IN A SMALL TOWN

by Diane Chamberlain

MEXICAN GOTHIC

by Silvia Moreno-Garcia

THE BOY IN THE WOODS

by Harlan Coben

THE NIGHT SWIM by Megan Goldin

THE SHADOWS by Alex North

ONE BY ONE by Ruth Ware

WHEN YOU SEE ME by Lisa Gardner

ONE OF US IS NEXT

by Karen M. McManus

THE LAST FLIGHT by Julie Clark

THE WIFE AND THE WIDOW

by Christian White

THE OTHER MRS. by Mary Kubica

EIGHT PERFECT MURDERS

by Peter Swanson

HIS & HERS by Alice Feeney

Amazon Best Mysteries and Thrillers of 2020

BLACKTOP WASTELAND, S. A. Cosby

THINGS IN JARS, Jess Kidd

THE THURSDAY MURDER CLUB,

Richard Osman

THE LAW OF INNOCENCE,

Michael Connelly

THE SEARCHER, Tana French

THE DEVIL AND THE DARK

WATER, Stuart Turton

ALL THE DEVILS ARE HERE,

Louise Penny

THE SUN DOWN MOTEL,

Simone St. James

UNSPEAKABLE THINGS, Jess Lourey

WINTER COUNTS,

David Heska Wanbli Weiden

SQUEEZE ME, Carl Hiaasen

THE GUEST LIST, Lucy Foley

THE ORDER, Daniel Silva

LONG BRIGHT RIVER, Liz Moore

AND NOW SHE'S GONE,

Rachel Howzell Hall

DEAR CHILD, Romy Hausmann

THE DIRTY SOUTH, John Connolly

THE LAST FLIGHT, Julie Clark

THE BOY FROM THE WOODS,

Harlan Coben

BookPage

<https://bookpage.com/>

Best Mystery & Suspense 2020

PERFECT LITTLE CHILDREN,

Sophie Hannah
 THE DEVIL AND THE DARK
 WATER, Stuart Turton
 WHEN NO ONE IS WATCHING,
 Alyssa Cole
 DEAR CHILD, Romy Hausmann
 TAKE ME APART, Sara Sligar
 THE BRIGHT LANDS, John Fram
 THE BOOK OF LAMPS AND
 BANNERS, Elizabeth Hand
 THE DISTANT DEAD, Heather Young
 MEXICAN GOTHIC,
 Sylvia Moreno-Garcia
 BLACKTOP WASTELAND, S. A. Cosby

Booklist Queen

<https://booklistqueen.com/>

Best Thriller Books of 2020

Best Psychological Thriller

Books 2020

DEAR CHILD,

Romy Hausmann – Top Pick
 THE GIRL FROM WIDOW HILLS,
 Megan Miranda
 HIS & HERS, Alice Feeney
 CONFESSIONS ON THE 7:45,
 Lisa Unger

Best Domestic Thriller Books

INVISIBLE GIRL,

Lisa Jewell – Top Pick

THE RED LOTUS, Chris Bohjalian
 THE SAFE PLACE, Anna Downes
 THREE PERFECT LIARS, Heidi Perks

Spooky Bestselling Thrillers 2020

HOME BEFORE DARK,

Riley Sager – Top Pick

THE SUN DOWN MOTEL,

Simone St. James

MEXICAN GOTHIC,

Sylvia Moreno-Garcia

Best Crime Thrillers 2020

THE NIGHT SWIM,

Megan Goldin – Top Pick

THE GUEST LIST, Lucy Foley

ONE BY ONE, Ruth Ware

LONG BRIGHT RIVER, Liz Moore

THE HOLDOUT, Graham Moore

THE SEARCHER, Tana French

Murder & Mayhem

<https://murder-mayhem.com/>

Best Mystery and Thrillers

THE MISSING AMERICAN,

Quei Quartey
 DEVOTED, Dean Koontz
 FIRST CUT,
 Judy Melinek & T. J. Mitchell
 HOME BEFORE DARK, Riley Sager
 THE SUN DOWN MOTEL,
 Simone St. James
 THE OTHER PEOPLE, C. J. Tudor
 THRASH, Jason Palmer
 CITY OF MARGINS, William Boyle
 THE LAW OF LINES, Hye-young Pyun
 THE COYOTES OF CARTHAGE,
 Steven Wright
 FAIR WARNING, Michael Connelly
 THE BODY DOUBLE, Emily Beyda
 THE SEARCHER, Tana French
 BLACKTOP WASTELAND, S. A. Cosby
 TROUBLE IS WHAT I DO,
 Walter Mosley

SheReads

<https://shereads.com>

Best Thrillers of 2020

THE LAST FLIGHT, Julie Clark –

Winner Best Thriller

AND NOW SHE'S GONE,

Rachel Howzell Hall

THE SUN DOWN MOTEL,

Simone St. James

LONG BRIGHT RIVER, Liz Moore

ONE BY ONE, Ruth Ware

DON'T LOOK FOR ME, Wendy Walker

THE GUEST LIST, Lucy Foley

WHEN NO ONE IS WATCHING,

Alyssa Cole

LITTLE SECRETS, Jennifer Hillier

MEXICAN GOTHIC,

Sylvia Moreno-Garcia

CrimeReads

<https://crimereads.com>

Best Crime Novels of 2020

BLACKTOP WASTELAND, S. A. Cosby

THESE WOMEN, Ivy Pochoda

LITTLE CRUELITIES, Liz Nugent

THE GUEST LIST, Lucy Foley

LITTLE SECRETS, Jennifer Hillier

A PRIVATE CATHEDRAL,

James Lee Burke

NO ONE IS WATCHING, Alyssa Cole

THE BOOK OF LAMPS AND

BANNERS, Elizabeth Hand

SHADOW GARDEN, Alexandra Burt

THE COYOTES OF CARTHAGE,

Steven Wright

Best Noir Fiction 2020

THE LAW OF LINES, Hye-Young Pyun

CLEAN HANDS, Patrick Hoffman

SARAH JANE, James Sallis (2019 title)

THE BOOK OF LAMPS AND BAN-

NERS, Elizabeth Hand

THE BIG MAN'S DAUGHTER,

Owen Fitzstephen

WINTER COUNTS,

David Heska Wanbli Weiden

LOVE AND THEFT, Stan Parish

BLACKTOP WASTELAND, S. A. Cosby

ONCE YOU GO THIS FAR,

Kristen Lepionka

TROUBLE IS WHAT I DO,

Walter Mosley

Best Debut Novels of 2020

THE BRIGHT LANDS, John Fram

DJINN PATROL ON THE PURPLE

LINE, Deepa Anappara

TRUST ME, Richard Z. Santos

THE LAST STORY OF MINA LEE,

Nancy Jooyoun Kim

WINTER COUNTS,

David Heska Wanbli Weiden

THE NIGHT WORKERS, Brian Selfon

THE COYOTES OF CARTHAGE,

Steven Wright

WHITE IVY, Susie Yang

THE TALENTED MISS FARWELL,

Emily Gray Tedrowe

THESE VIOLENT DELIGHTS,

Micah Nemerever

DeadGood

www.deadgoodbooks.co.uk

15 Authors Pick the Best

Crime Novels of 2020

Jane Corry:

THE THURSDAY MURDER CLUB,

Richard Osman

Sarah Pearce:

THE KINGDOM, Jo Nesbo

Ragnar Jonasson:

EIGHT DETECTIVES' Alex Pavesi

RULES OF PERFECT MURDERS

(EIGHT PERFECT MURDERS),

Peter Swanson

GALLOWS ROCK, Yrsa Sigurdardottir;

MOONFLOWER MURDERS,

Anthony Horowitz

Tana French:

ONE BY ONE, Ruth Ware

Lisa Jewell:

THE OTHER PASSENGER,
Ruth Candlish;
ONE BY ONE, Ruth Ware;
JUST MY LUCK, Adele Parks

Tim Weaver:

RECURSION, Blake Crouch

Gregg Hurwitz:

RECURSION, Blake Crouch

Sam Lloyd:

THREE HOURS, Rosamund Lupton

Cara Hunter:

THREE HOURS, Rosamund Lupton

PLAYING NICE, J.P. Delaney

THE END OF HER, Shari Lapena IM-

PERFECT WOMEN, Araminta Hall-

THE NOTHING MAN,

Catherine Ryan Howard

Rosamund Lupton:

WE BEGIN AT THE END,

Chris Whitaker

Heidi Perks:

WE BEGIN AT THE END,

Chris Whitaker

Rebecca Reid:

YOU CAN TRUST ME, Emma Rowley

Lauren North:

ALL IN HER HEAD, Nikki Smith

Tony Parsons:

GOING BACK, Neil Lancaster

Jorn Lier Horst:

THE LAW OF INNOCENCE & FAIR

WARNING, Michael Connelly

Sara Weinman

The Crime Lady

Favorite Crime Fiction

2020

WHEN NO ONE IS WATCHING,

Alyssa Cole

BLACKTOP WASTELAND, S. A. Cosby

THE SEARCHER, Tana French

AND NOW SHE'S GONE,

Rachel Howzell Hall

VERA KELLY IS NOT A MYSTERY,

Rosalie Knecht

PRETTY AS A PICTURE,

Elizabeth Little

LONG BRIGHT RIVER, Liz Moore

THESE WOMEN, Ivy Pochoda

TAKE ME APART, Sara Sligar

A CERTAIN HUNGER,

Chelsea G. Summers

New York Public Library Best Crime, Mysteries and Thrillers 2020

THE AOSAWA MURDERS, Riku Onda

DEAR CHILD, Romy Hausmann

DON'T LOOK FOR ME, Wendy Walker

THE GIRL IN THE MIRROR,

Rose Carlyle

LONG BRIGHT RIVER, Liz Moore

THE THURSDAY MURDER CLUB,

Richard Osman

LitHub

Best Reviewed Mystery and Crime Fiction 2020

THE SEARCHER, Tana French

SNOW, John Banville

THE THURSDAY MURDER CLUB,

Richard Osman

BLACKTOP WASTELAND, S. A. Cosby

DJINN PATROL ON THE PURPLE

LINE, Deepa Anappara

THE DEVIL AND THE DARK

WATER, Stuart Turton

THESE WOMEN, Ivy Pochoda

BROKEN, Don Winslow

SAINT X, Alexis Schaitkin

LONG BRIGHT RIVER, Liz Moore

Criminal Element Newsletter

Best Books 2020

THE SAFE PLACE, Anna Downes

BLACKTOP WASTELAND, S. A. Cosby

LITTLE SECRETS, Jennifer Hillier

WHEN NO ONE IS WATCHING,

Alyssa Cole

THE LAST TOURIST, Olen Steinhauer

DOPEWORLD: Adventures in the

Global Drug Trade, Niko Vorobyov

TO TELL YOU THE TRUTH,

Gilly MacMillan

HARD CASH VALLEY,

Brian Panowich

THE CABINETS OF BARNABY

MAYNE, Elsa Hart

EIGHT PERFECT MURDERS,

eter Swanson

ONE BY ONE, Ruth Ware

MOONFLOWER MURDERS, Anthony

Horowitz

Mystery People

[https://mysterypeople.](https://mysterypeople.wordpress.com/)

[wordpress.com/](https://mysterypeople.wordpress.com/)

Scott Montgomery's 10 Best Crime Novels of 2020

NEXT TO LAST STAND,

Craig Johnson

BLACKTOP WASTELAND, S. A. Cosby

WINTER COUNTS,

David Heska Wanbli Weiden

THE FAMILIAR DARK, Amy Engel

THE POISON FLOOD, Jordan Farmer

CITY OF MARGINS, William Boyle

THE LESS DEAD, Denise Mina

LOST RIVER, J. Todd Scott

BROKEN, Don Winslow

THAT LEFT TURN AT

ALBUQUERQUE, Scott Phillips

LINE OF SIGHT, James Queally

Crime Fiction Lover

<https://crimefictionlover.com>

Rough Justice: Top Five

Books of 2020

THE SILENCE OF THE WHITE CITY,

Eva Garcia Saenz

DEAR CHILD, Romy Hausmann

THE LADY UPSTAIRS, Halley Sutton

PLAY THE RED QUEEN,

Juris Jurjevics

WHEN THESE MOUNTAINS BURN,

David Joy

Crime Fiction Lover Top Five Books of 2020

HINTON HOLLOW DEATH TRIP,

Will Carver

WINTERKILL, Ragnar Jonasson

THE KINGDOM, Jo Nesbo

THE BOOK OF LAMPS AND

BANNERS, Elizabeth Hand

BROKEN, Don Winslow

Lesa's Book Critiques

<https://lesasbookcritiques.com/>

Lesa Holstine's Favorite

Books of 2020

CLOSELY HARBORED SECRETS,

Bree Baker

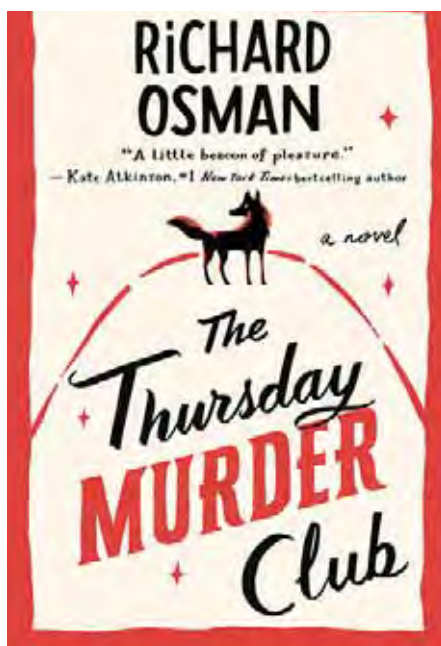
THE SOLACE OF BAY LEAVES,

Leslie Budewitz

THE BOY FROM THE WOODS, Har-

lan Coben

NEXT TO LAST STAND,
Craig Johnson
UNSPEAKABLE THINGS, Jess Lourey
THE THURSDAY MURDER CLUB,
Richard Osman
ALL THE DEVILS ARE HERE,
Louise Penny
LINEAGE MOST LETHAL,
S. C. Perkins
HIDE AWAY, Jason Pinter
A MURDEROUS RELATION,
Deanna Raybourn
THE BODY IN THE GARDEN,
Katharine Schellman
THE MOUNTAINS WILD,
Sarah Stewart Taylor
(some non-mysteries deleted from this
list – go to website for full list)



Open Letter Review

Best Thrillers

by Steve Donoghue

[https://openlettersreview.com/
posts/the-best-books-of-2020-
thrillers](https://openlettersreview.com/posts/the-best-books-of-2020-thrillers)

THE RABBIT HUNTER, Lars Kepler
THE FAMILIAR DARK, Amy Engel
THE EMPTY BED, Nina Sadowsky
DEVOLUTION, Max Brooks
ONE MINUTE OUT, Mark Greaney
INTO THE FIRE, Gregg Hurwitz
HIDE AWAY, Jason Pinter
HOUSE ON FIRE, Joseph Finder
A BEAUTIFUL CRIME,

Christopher Bollen
THE END OF OCTOBER,
Lawrence Wright

Best Mysteries

by Steve Donoghue

[https://openlettersreview.com/
posts/the-best-books-of-2020-
mystery](https://openlettersreview.com/posts/the-best-books-of-2020-mystery)

THE MITFORD SCANDAL,
Jessica Fellowes
IN THE SHADOW OF VESUVIUS,
Tasha Alexander
TROUBLE IS WHAT I DO,
Walter Mosley
THE KING'S JUSTICE,
Susan Elia MacNeal
SALT RIVER, Randy Wayne White
THE DECENT INN OF DEATH, Ren-
nie Airth
THE KING'S BEAST, Eliot Pattison
DEATH ON TUCKERNUT, Francine
Matthews
REVOLVER ROAD, Christi Daugherty
WHAT IS TIME TO A PIG?, John
Straley

Suspense Magazine

<https://suspensemagazine.com>

Best Cozy Mystery

MURDER IN THE BAYOU
BONEYARD, Ellen Byron
JANE DARROWFIELD:
PROFESSIONAL BUSYBODY,
Barbara Ross
SNOWED UNDER, Mary Feliz
KILLER KUNG PAO, Vivien Chien

Best Debut Novels

DEEP STATE, Chris Hauty
WITHOUT SANCTION, Don Bentley
THE LAST DAY,
Andrew Hunter Murray
A BURNING, Megha Majumdar

Best Romantic Suspense

POINT OF DANGER, Irene Hannon
AFTER SUNDOWN, Linda Howard &
Linda Jones
THICK AS THIEVES, Sandra Brown
BURN YOU TWICE, Mary Burton

Best Historical

THE BLUES DON'T CARE,
Paul D. Marks
MURDER AT KINGSCOTE,
Alyssa Maxwell

BODY IN THE GARDEN,
Katherine Spellman
THE VANISHING HALF, Brit Bennett

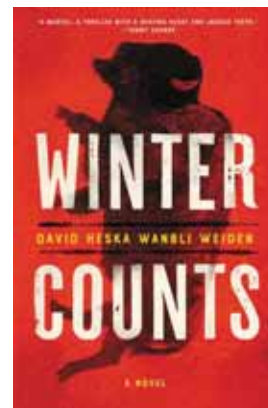
Best Suspense Thriller

COVER YOUR TRACKS,
Daco S. Auffenorde
HOUSE ON FIRE, Joseph Finder
INVISIBLE GIRL, Lisa Jewell
NEAR DARK, Brad Thor
SAVAGE SON, Jack Carr
SINS OF THE MOTHER,
August Norman
THE NEW HUSBAND, D. J. Palmer
BLACKTOP WASTELAND, S. A. Cosby
ONE BY ONE, Ruth Ware
NIGHT SWIM, Megan Goldin
**HOME BEFORE DARK, Riley Sager –
Winner of Crimson Scribe Award**
(categories for Best Young Adult, Best
Dark Urban Fantasy, Best True Crime,
Best Anthology, and Best Horror are not
included. If interested go to website and
view magazine in its entirety.)

Air Mail – Crimes and Misdemeanors

Best Eight Mystery Books of 2020

THE RABBIT HUNTER, Lars Kepler
THE LAST HUNT, Deon Meyer
THE SILENCE OF THE WHITE CITY,
Eva García Sáenz
TROUBLED BLOOD, Robert Galbraith
(J.K. Rowling)
EIGHT PERFECT MURDERS,
Peter Swanson
WINTER COUNTS,
David Heska Wanbli Weiden
THE LAST FLIGHT, Julie Clark
BLACK SUN RISING, Matthew Carr



What Do These "Best" Lists Tell Us?

No one compiling these 50 "Best" lists has read every mystery, crime novel and thriller written in 2020. Hence, the lists are opinions based on the limited number of books each "expert" has read this past year, combined with personal tastes. In other words, these lists are very subjective. So where can we find objectivity?

The more agreement (consensus) we can find among the lists, the more objective conclusions can be drawn about which novels are the Best of 2020.

So the following is a list of the number of appearances particular novels made on the 50 "Best" Lists you find on the preceding pages. Just like when cream rises to the top, the more appearances on these lists *may* indicate the novels with the highest quality. Using the Key to Abbreviations you can see on which lists a novel appears.

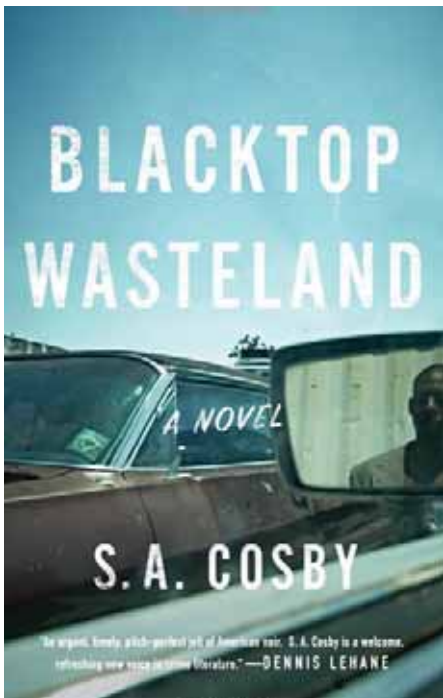
Compilation of List Appearances

22

BLACKTOP WASTELAND, S. A.

Cosby

NPR, TG, AZ, BP, OC, Geo, LG, LJ, RIP, AK, JP, SC, MM, KZ, CR(2), AO, SW, KG, LH, CE, MP, SM



14

THE SEARCHER, Tana French

GR, TG, WAPO, AZ, FT, BLQ, LJ, TT, NPR, MM, NYT, SW, LH, OP

WINTER COUNTS, David H.W.

Weiden

OC, AZ, Geo, LJ, PW, KZ, NPR, KG, CR (2), MB, MP, AM, BarP

12

LONG BRIGHT RIVER, Liz Moore

GR, WAPO, AZ, BLQ, ST, NPR, AK, SR, SW, LG, NYPL, LH

ONE BY ONE, Ruth Ware

GR, BF, WAPO, KIRK, BLQ, NYT, SR, DG(2), LG, CE, SM

THE THURSDAY MURDER CLUB,

Richard Osman

TG, AZ, DT, Geo, LJ, JP, WSJ, DG, NYPL, LH, LBC, BarP

9

THE DEVIL AND THE DARK

WATER, Stuart Turton

GR, TG, AZ, BP, FT, JKP, PW, AO, LH

WHEN NO ONE IS WATCHING,

Alyssa Cole

GR, TG, NPR, BP, SR, CR, SW, KG, CE

MOONFLOWER MURDERS,

Anthony Horowitz

Geo, JKP, NPR, AK, BF, NYT, DG, CE,

Key to Abbreviations (in alphabetical order):

AM = Air Mail
AK = Ali Karim
AO = Ayo Onatade
AZ = Amazon
BF = Bibliofile
BLQ = Booklist Queen
BP = BookPage
BarP = Barbara Peters
CE = Criminal Element
CFL = Crime Fiction Lover
CR = CrimeReads
DG = DeadGood
DT = Daily Telegraph
FT = Financial Times
Geo = George Easter
GR = GoodReads
JP = Jeff Popple
JKP = J. Kingston Pierce
KIRK = Kirkus
KG = Kellye Garrett
KZ = Kristopher Zgorski
LBC = Lisa's Book Critiques
LG = Larry Gandle
LH = Lit Hub
LJ = Library Journal
LJR = L J Roberts
MB = Mystery Mike Bursaw
MM = Murder & Mayhem
MP = Mystery People
NPR = NPR Radio
NS = Novel Suspects
NYPL = New York Public Library
NYT = New York Times
OC = Oline Cogdill
OL = Open Letter
OP = Otto Penzler
PW = Publishers' Weekly
Rip = Mike Ripley
SC = Steele Curry
SM = Suspense Magazine
SR = She Reads
ST = Seattle Times
SW = Sara Weinman
TG = The Guardian
TT = The Times, The Sunday Times
WAPO = Washington Post
WSJ = Wall Street Journal



OP

EIGHT PERFECT MURDERS, Peter Swanson
KIRK, BF, PW, WSJ, NYT, DG, AO, CE, AM

8

THE SUN DOWN MOTEL, Simone St. James
GR, BF, AZ, OC, BLQ, BF, MM, SR

THE GUEST LIST, Lucy Foley
GR, BF, AZ, BLQ, TT, NYT, CR

THE BOY FROM THE WOODS, Harlan Coben
GR, BF, AZ, Geo, LG, NPR, NS, LBC

ALL THE DEVILS ARE HERE, Louise Penny
KIRK, AZ, LJ, SC, KZ, WSJ, LJR, LBC

7

A SONG OF DARK TIMES, Ian Rankin
DT, FT, AK, OC, TT, RIP, JP

AND NOW SHE'S GONE, Rachel Howzell Hall
OC, AZ, KZ, PW, SR, SW, KG

DJINN PATROL ON PURPLE LINE, Deepa Anappara
TG, WAPO, LJ, NPR, NS, CR, LH

THESE WOMEN, Ivy Pochoda
KZ, NYT, OC, CR, AO, SW, LH

LITTLE LIES, Jennifer Hillier
BF, OC, LG, KZ, SR, CR, CE

BROKEN, Don Winslow
FT, TG, TT, SC, LH, MP, CFL

THE EIGHTH DETECTIVE, Alex Pavesi
KZ, OC, TT, NYT, DG, AO, BarP

6

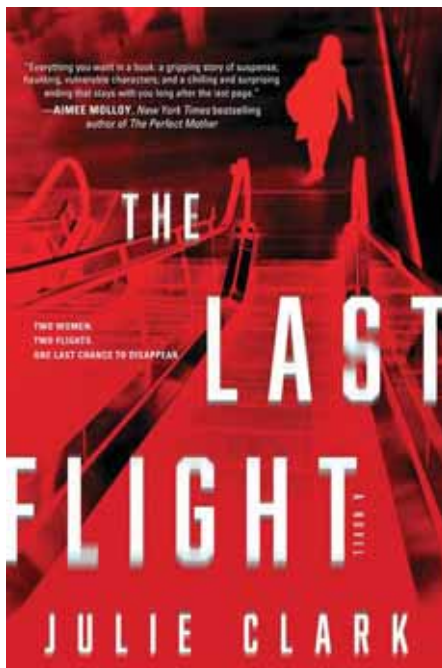
PRETTY AS A PICTURE, Elizabeth Little
ST, OC, AZ, WSJ, SW, KG

THE LAW OF INNOCENCE, Michael Connelly

AZ, Geo, MB, AO, SC, OP

TROUBLE IS WHAT I DO, Walter Mosley
WAPO, SC, NS, MM, CR, OL

THE LAST FLIGHT, Julie Clark
BF, AZ, Geo, LG, SR, AM



5

MEXICAN GOTHIC, Sylvia Moreno-Garcia
BP, BLQ, NPR, BF, SR

EDDIE'S BOY, Thomas Perry
SC, Geo, MB, LG, OP

THE KINGDOM, Jo Nesbo
TT, KIRK, OC, DG, CFL

DEAR CHILD, Romy Hausmann
AZ, BP, BLQ, NYPL, CFL

HOME BEFORE DARK, Riley Sager
GR, BLQ, BF, MM, SM

TROUBLED BLOOD, Robert Galbraith
DT, TT, Geo, WSJ, AM

DEEP STATE, Chris Hauty
Geo, SC, MB, SM, BarP

4

SQUEEZE ME, Carl Hiaasen

WAPO, AZ, OC, TT

THREE HOURS IN PARIS, Cara Black
ST, LG, WAPO, WSJ

A PRIVATE CATHEDRAL, James Lee Burke
ST, AK, SC, CR

FAIR WARNING, Michael Connelly
AK, KIRK, MM, DG

THE FINISHER, Peter Lovesey
JKP, Geo, ST, LJR

THE MISSING AMERICAN, Quei Quartey
NPR, NS, WAPO, MM

THE LESS DEAD, Denise Mina
DT, TT, AO, MP

HIDE AWAY, Jason Pinter
LJ, Geo, LBC, OL

THE NIGHT SWIM, Megan Goldin
BF, BLQ, JP, SM

THE LAST HUNT, Deon Meyer
Geo, SC, JP, AM

3

CONFESSIONS ON THE 7:45, Lisa Unger
OC, BLQ, KZ

DEADLAND, Sara Paretsky
JKP, WAPO, KIRK

HAMMER TO FALL, John Lawton
RIP, SC, JP

THREE HOURS, Rosamund Lupton
TT, DG (2)

THE DIRTY SOUTH, John Connolly
JP, AZ, AO

TAKE ME APART, Sara Sligar
KIRK, BP, SW

THE COYOTES OF CARTHAGE, Steven Wright
MM, CR(2)

SNOW, John Banville
TT, LG, LH

THE SAFE PLACE, Anna Downes
OC, BLQ, CE

THE FORGER'S DAUGHTER,
Bradford Morrow
NYT, PW, OP

THE MIST, Ragnar Jonasson
TT, KZ, OP

THE FAMILIAR DARK, Amy Engel
PW, MP, OL

CITY OF MARGINS, William Boyle
MM, WAPO, MP

**THE BOOK OF LAMPS AND
BANNERS**, Elizabeth Hand
BP, CR, CFL

UNSPEAKABLE THINGS, Jess Lourey
AZ, LJ, LBC

THE MOUNTAINS WILD, Sarah
Stewart Taylor
OC, LJ, LBC

ONE MINUTE OUT, Mark Greaney
Geo, MB, OL

INTO THE FIRE, Gregg Hurwitz
AO, DG, OL

HOUSE ON FIRE, Joseph Finder
LG, OL, SM

INVISIBLE GIRL, Lisa Jewell
BF, BLQ, SM

THE RABBIT HUNTER, Lars Kepler
NYT, OL, AM

BLACK SUN RISING, Matthew Carr
JKP, PW, AM

THE END OF OCTOBER, Lawrence
Wright
PW, OL, BarP

THE RED LOTUS, Chris Bohjalian
BF, BLQ

DARKNESS FOR LIGHT, Emma
Viskic
TT, Geo

THE DEAD LINE, Holly Watt
TT, FT

THE GOLDEN CAGE, Camilla
Lackberg
KIRK, LG

PERFECT LITTLE CHILDREN,
Sophie Hannah
NYT, BP

A SHADOW INTELLIGENCE, Oliver
Harris
NPR, KIRK

THE BRIGHT LANDS, John Fram
BP, KZ

BLIND VIGIL, Matt Coyle
Geo, MB

HI FIVE, Joe Ide
WSJ, NYT

WE BEGIN AT THE END, Chris
Whitaker
DG (2)

PRETTY THINGS, Janelle Brown
AZ, KG

CLEAN HANDS, Patrick Hoffman
CR, WSJ

THE AOSAWA MURDERS, Riku
Onda
TT, NYPL

DON'T LOOK FOR ME, Wendy
Walker
SR, NYPL

**THE CABINETS OF BARNABY
MAYNE**, Elsa Hart
PW, CE

HARD CASH VALLEY, Brian
Panowich
NYT, CE

THE SUMMER HOUSE, James Patter-
son & Brendan DuBois,
LG, SC

GERMANIA, Harald Gilbers,
JKP, SC

DEACON KING KONG, James Mc-
Bride
NS, LG

NEXT TO LAST STAND, Craig
Johnson
MP, LBC

PLAY THE RED QUEEN, Juris
Jurjevics
TT, CFL

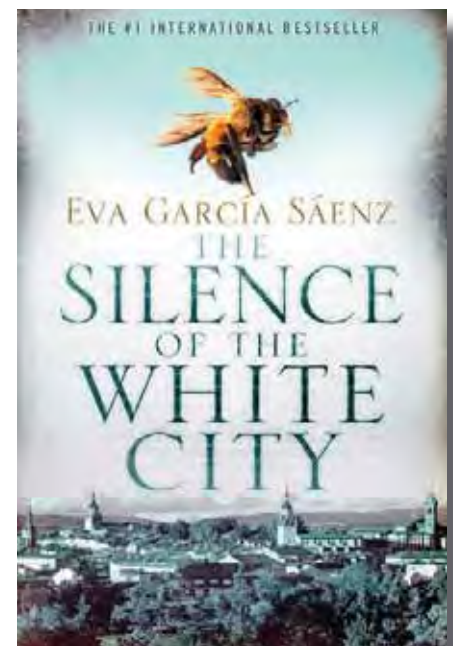
A BEAUTIFUL CRIME, Christopher
Bollen
OC, OL

WITHOUT SANCTION, Don Bentley
LG, SM

A BURNING, Megha Majumdar
LG, SM

SAVAGE SON, Jack Carr
MB, SM

**THE SILENCE OF THE WHITE
CITY**, Eva García Sáenz
CFL, AM



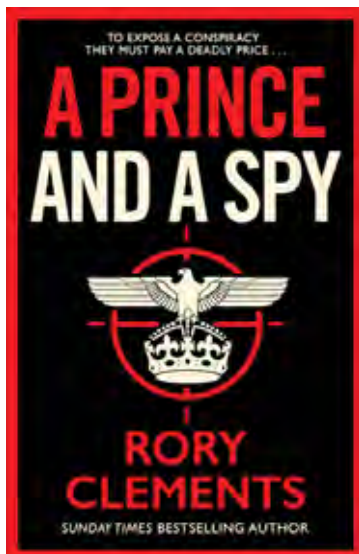
HIS & HERS, Alice Feeney
BF, BLQ

What's New In the U.K.



DEATH OF A GREEN-EYED MONSTER, M. C. Beaton (Constable, £16.99, Feb., 2021). Hamish's new constable, Dorothy McIver, may be the most beautiful woman he's ever seen. Completely bewitched by her wide blue eyes, Hamish spends the summer traveling with her up and down Sutherland until finally, he can take it no longer. He gets down on one knee beside the Land Rover and begs her to marry him -- and to his amazement and delight, she says yes. But the wedding is not to be -- at least not yet. Instead, Hamish finds himself with a new murder on his hands -- and himself as the prime suspect.

A PRINCE AND A SPY, Rory Clements (Zaffre, £16.99, January, 2021). Sweden, 1942 - Two old friends meet. They are cousins. One is Prince George, Duke of Kent, brother of the King of England. The other is Prince Philipp von Hesse, a committed Nazi and close friend of Adolf Hitler. Days later, Prince George is killed in a plane crash in the north of Scotland. The official story is that it was an accident --



but not everyone is convinced. There is even a suggestion that the Duke's plane was sabotaged, but with no evidence, Cambridge spy Tom Wilde is sent north to discover the truth.

THE THREE LOCKS, Bonnie MacBird (Collins Crime Club, £14.99, March, 2021). In the West End, a renowned Italian escape artist dies spectacularly on stage during a performance -- immolated in a gleaming copper cauldron of his wife's design. In Cambridge, the runaway daughter of a famous don is found drowned, her long blonde hair tangled in the Jesus Lock on the River Cam. And in Baker Street, a mysterious locksmith exacts an unusual price to open a small silver box sent to Sherlock & Watson.

THE COFFIN MAKER'S GARDEN, Stuart MacBride (HarperCollins, £18.99, Jan., 2021). As a massive storm batters the Scottish coast, Gordon Smith's home is falling into the North Sea. But the crumbling headland has revealed what he's got buried in his garden: human remains. With the storm still raging, it's too dangerous to retrieve the bodies and waves are devouring the evidence. Which means no one knows how many people Smith's already killed and how many more he'll kill if he can't be found and stopped.

A HOSTILE STATE, Adrian Magson (Severn House, £20.99, Feb, 2021). Ambushed by a surprise attack, it's clear that someone must have had advance warning of Marc Portman's arrival in Lebanon. But who is his unseen enemy -- clearly one with considerable resources -- and why do they want him dead? Concluding there must be an active leak at the heart of the CIA, Portman finds himself virtually alone and on the run, hung out to dry by the powers-that-be.

THE NIGHT GATE, Peter May (Riverrun, £20.00, March, 2021). In a sleepy French village, the body of a man shot through the head is disinterred by the roots of a fallen tree. A week later a famous art critic is viciously murdered in a nearby house. The deaths occurred more than seventy years apart. Asked by a colleague to inspect the site of the former, forensics expert Enzo Macleod quickly finds himself embroiled in the investigation of the latter.



BLOOD TIES, Brian McGilloway (Constable, £19.99, March, 2021). How can a dead woman avenge herself on her killer twelve years after her murder? This is the puzzle facing Ben Devlin in his latest case. He is called to the scene of a murder - a man has been stabbed to death in his rented room and when his identity is discovered Devlin feels a ghost walk over his grave as he knows the name Brooklyn Harris well. As a teenager, Harris beat his then-girlfriend Hannah Row to death, and then spent twelve years in prison for the murder.

ONE WAY STREET, Trevor Wood (Quercus, £18.99, March, 2021). The word on the street is that a rogue batch of Spice -- the zombie drug sweeping the inner cities -- is to blame, but when one of Jimmy's few close friends is caught up in the carnage, loyalty compels him to find out what's really going on. **One Way Street** sees the welcome return of Jimmy Mullen, the homeless, PTSD-suffering, veteran as he attempts to rebuild his life following the events in **The Man on the Street**.

U.K. Reviews



Jeff Popple Reviews

THE WITCH HUNTER

by Max Seeck
Welbeck, £8.79

Rating: B

Fans of Nordic noir and serial killer thrillers will enjoy **THE WITCH HUNTER** by Max Seeck.

Popular Finnish author Roger Koponen is in Savonlinna at a book reading when his wife is murdered on a snow swept night in a seemingly bizarre occult ritual at their house on the coast near Helsinki. When more bodies are found in quick succession it appears that a serial killer is on the loose taking inspiration from Koponen's bestselling trilogy about a witch hunter. Is it the work of an obsessive fan or are there more sinister motives at play?

Leading the investigation into the killings is Detective Jessica Niemi, a very capable Helsinki detective with a mysterious past that we gradually get glimpses of. She is aided by a well fleshed-out collection of quirky colleagues and a gruff boss whose health is clearly fading. As the murders mount it becomes clear that they somehow link back to Jessica.

Unlike a lot of Nordish noir, this is a fast moving thriller with plenty of twists and turns and several well staged surprises. The plot is well constructed, and the details on witchcraft and the occult are fascinating and smoothly woven into the story. The suspense steadily mounts throughout the book, and the final fifty pages, or so, are very difficult to put down.

The settings around Helsinki are interesting and well described and Seeck makes you feel the cold and the icy winds. There are the usual quirky

details and characters that you expect in a Nordish crime novel and the dialogue is sharp and witty.

My only reservations with **The Witch Hunter** are the series of overly prominent flashbacks involving Jessica, which are awkwardly positioned and initially a little confusing, and, after a terrific build-up, the odd ending falls flat. Nevertheless, I quite enjoyed it and keenly rushed through the second half of the book to see how it ended.

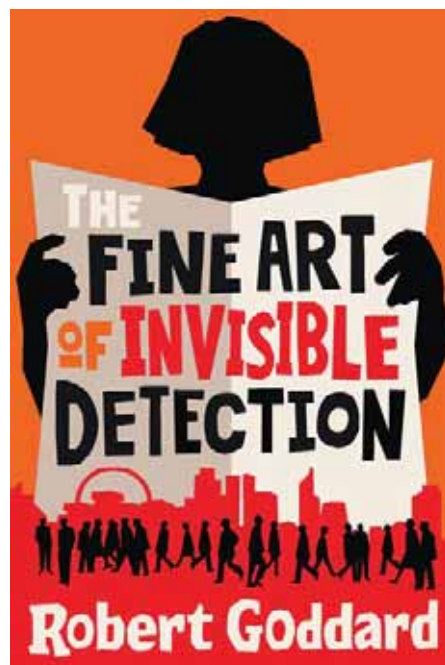
THE FINE ART OF INVISIBLE DETECTION

by Robert Goddard (Bantam, £18.99 – March 2021)

Rating: A-

Robert Goddard is the master of the twisty, unpredictable thriller and **THE FINE ART OF INVISIBLE DETECTION** is another surprising web of deception, greed and murder.

The book opens in Tokyo with



Umiko Wada trying to get to get through another day. Widowed at a young age and with no children, she is trying to avoid scrutiny, and her mother, by working as a secretary to a private detective. Her life is pleasingly simple and mainly consists of coffee runs, diary management and paperwork, until she becomes involved in a new case involving the suspicious death of a Japanese businessman in London in 1977. New details have come to light about his death and Wada, who speaks fluent English, travels to London to meet with a man who claims to have information about how he died. Meanwhile, Londoner Nick Miller is contacted by an old family friend about the true identity of his father, who he has never met. Two seemingly unconnected events, but in Goddard's skilled hands they weave together into a clever, surprising plot that moves in very unexpected directions.

In recent years Goddard seems to have moved away from his complex, intriguing historical crime novels into the thriller field, with faster moving and often more violent tales about conspiracies and desperate characters. **The Fine Art Of Invisible Detection** is certainly more in the thriller field and is a pacey, exciting novel that races from Tokyo to London to the English countryside and Iceland, before returning for a tense climax on a beach in Cornwall.

The storyline is interesting, and involves some very up-to-date ideas, and the characters are well crafted and engaging. Wada in particular is a very interesting and credible character, who turns out to be more resourceful than she first appears.

The end result is a very enjoyable thriller that kept me guessing all the way to the terrific conclusion and the final reveal. My only reservation was the odd title choice, which had very little to do with the story.

Ali Karim Review

TROJAN HORSE

by S Lee Manning
Encircle Publications £13.50 PBK

Rating: A-

Choices often define who we are, and in the hands of this author, may determine who will live, and who will die in this exciting narrative. *Trojan Horse* poses the moral dilemma 'is the death of a single person justifiable when the lives of 'the many' hang in the balance?'

This breathless debut reads as if penned by an established wordsmith, due to the pace, backdrop and characters that stand upright on the page, forcing the reader to race toward a startling denouement.

The narrative is striated with ethical dilemmas which underpin the action, making the reader work for their entertainment. Centre stage is the figure of Kolya [Nikolai Ivanovich Petrov], an intriguing US operative of a shady organisation [ECA] that lies beneath the shadows of the National Security Agency, as another acronym within the American Intelligence community.

The mystery of Gina Antonia who was tasked to infiltrate Mihai Cruza is raised within ECA. She *was* a young operative attempting to extract digital data from Cruza and his organisation, because signs led ECA to believe that an international plot was underway; one that posed mass casualties for a purpose – as yet undisclosed.

That's the setup in this *International Thriller*, but things take several unexpected turns for ECA, especially for Kolya. It seems the stake used against missing agent Gina Antonia by Mihai Cruza, belays his own Romanian family heritage. Though, the use of a stake to impale also indicates wordplay, for the stakes in this spy-game reveal themselves as being deadly. That's when the narrative gets interesting as the title's word-play suggests.

In order to uncover the danger that Cruza has put into play, the enigmatic head of ECA - Margaret Bradford hatches a plan, a countermeasure. Eastern Europe becomes a destination where the **TROJAN HORSE** will be placed. The trouble is - it gets hard to work out who is working for who, because the proceedings are coated in grey – no black or white.

Kolya finds himself at the nucleus of

Cuza's digital puzzle, becoming Bradford's countermeasure, one that will either see him killed, or thousands of others will feel the fire.

The novel is a fast read, short chapters broken into almost filmic sequences – free from exposition, instead filled with tradecraft and historical details that place the story into context. There is anxiety, as the battle appears between two men, Kolya and Cuza – however the stakes are higher, for behind the antagonist and protagonist lurks unspeakable consequences.

This debut is extraordinary in the way it distracts one's consciousness from the woes of the oppressive reality we find ourselves in.

Highly recommended.

George Easter Reviews

BEFORE HE KILLS AGAIN

by Margaret Murphy

Joffe Books, \$12.99 trade paper,

\$0.99 Kindle

Rating: A-

Liverpool DC Cassie Rowan is finding juggling her personal life (as main "parent" figure to her 15-year-old brother, Neil) and her time-demanding professional life a challenge. Right now she is working undercover disguised as a street walker to catch the "Furman," a perp who is brutally attacking sex workers and other helpless women. Cassie almost catches him and would have but for the mind-boggling incompetence of her misanthropic backup Wicks, who leaves her to deal with a man much stronger and bigger than herself. So the Furman escapes, free to maim and perhaps kill many other women, including possibly Cassie.

The major problem in the investigation is identifying the perpetrator. He leaves no forensic evidence to speak of and even his victims have a difficult time describing his physical characteristics. The search for the Furman is arduous and fraught with difficulty.

There is a second story line involving psychoanalyst Alan Palmer and some of his patients. Eventually the two stories merge.



Words to describe **BEFORE HE KILLS AGAIN** are intense, edgy, and dark -- and in the end (whew!) satisfying. This is the first appearance of DC Cassie Rowan and I hope to see her again.

As always, Margaret Murphy handles the mystery elements with a masterful hand. It should be noted that she has signed on with Joffe Books in the U.K., whose marketing strategy is to publish reasonably priced Kindle editions (to build readership) and trade paperback editions. If you have access to a Kindle (or other tablet), it's a no-brainer to download some Margaret Murphy crime novels. All of her backlist of out-of-print novels are now available on Kindle as well. Go have a feast!

Comment: Even now, thirty years after the publication of Lynda La Plante's **PRIME SUSPECT** (immortalized on TV by Helen Mirren as Jane Tennison), it seems as if female British policewomen are still being mistreated by their male counterparts. Will this be an eternal struggle? Or is the situation in reality better now and this is just a plot device that current crime writers use a lot because in the minds of the readers it is so believable?

WINTERKILL

by Ragnar Jonasson



Ragnar Jonasson

Orenda, £14.99

Rating: B+

Over the course of five books in this series, Ari Thór has progressed from a rookie to now being the Police Inspector in charge of police matters in the remote Icelandic town of Siglufjörður. He is separated from his girlfriend, who lives in Sweden with their three-year-old son. But Ari is excited about the approaching Easter weekend when she and his son are coming for a visit.

Ari is enjoying being reunited with his son and he is wondering if his relationship with his girlfriend Kristin can be rekindled. But the death of a nineteen-year-old girl, in an apparent suicide, puts a crimp in his weekend plans. Those who knew her can't believe she would commit suicide – she was a normal well-adjusted girl with big plans for her future. But Ari feels compelled to dig a bit deeper into the girl's life for the sake of the parents.

As the investigation slowly progresses, Ari Thór interviews a number of people who knew the dead girl but none seems suspicious to him, although, as he reflects, 'appearances could be deceptive and nothing was ever completely black or white.' Most significantly, the motive for her death – whether murder or suicide – continues to elude him -- this in a community where everyone knows everyone else or is related.

Ari's investigation is impeded by a massive snowstorm that hits over the weekend. Then he hears about an old man in a rest home who has written, "she was murdered", on his wall. In visiting the rest home, Ari is reacquainted with an old flame and a few sparks fly. So now he's torn between an old girlfriend (mother of his son) who is wishy washy about their relationship and the opportunity of a new, rekindled romance with a former love interest.

Jonasson wraps up this 6-book series well, with a satisfying resolution to the case and with hope for happiness on the horizon for Ari Thór. At times Ari's personal life and problems overshadow the mystery elements of the novel, but I was o.k. with that.

KILL A STRANGER

by Simon Kernick

Headline, £14.99

Rating: B+

Kate and Matt are recently engaged and Kate is two-months pregnant. They run a luxury hotel in Sri Lanka that Kate owns. Business is slow so they decide to return to their homeland, England to take advantage of its excellent medical care.

A few days later Matt arrives late

at night to find a dead woman in his bed. It is not Kate and, while that makes Matt enormously relieved, he is still wondering what is going on. Soon Matt finds out that Kate has been kidnapped when he sees a video of her in a life-threatening situation. To get Kate back, Matt is given three tasks: 1. dispose of the woman's body; 2. kill a certain man; and 3. retrieve a thumb drive from the man. He sets off to do what is required, but of course things don't go according to plan.

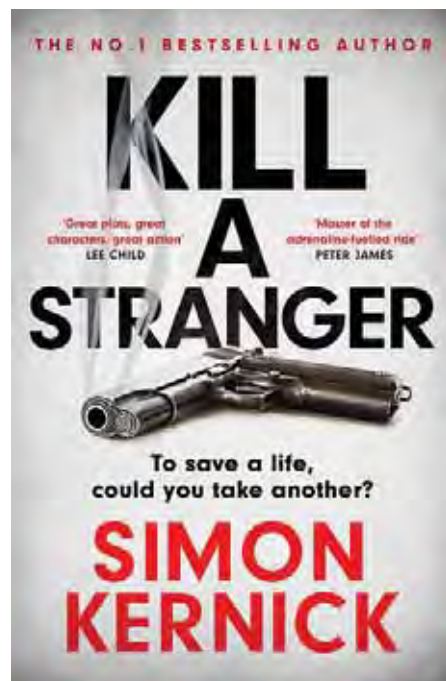
There are so many surprises in this excellent thriller that I don't want to give any of them away. They seem to come with every chapter. What I will say is don't believe anything that anyone says. This book is generously populated with unreliable narrators (which becomes evident quite soon in the book), but I'm not giving anything away because in the Preface DCI Cameron Doyle says, "...I think they're all lying."

The impossibility of the situation reminded me of a Harlan Coben novel, but one on overdrive. As in his past books, Simon Kernick has created many "impossible" situations that blur the lines of strict morality. **KILL A STRANGER** is suspenseful to the max!

Jeff Popple's Take: You always know what you are going to get with a Simon Kernick novel; fast frenetic action and plenty of it, and this is certainly the case with **KILL A STRANGER**.

Of course, being a Simon Kernick novel, nothing is as it seems and the story races down some dark alleyways, bouncing from surprise to surprise as the tension steadily increases. Shifting viewpoints and timelines, also add to the suspense and the book builds to a terrific climax.

Kernick has always been the wilder British cousin of Harlan Coben and **KILL A STRANGER** delivers the twists and turns and outrageous reversals that we have come to expect from his books. Some suspension of disbelief is required, but it is well worth it, as it is highly entertaining read. **Rating: A-**



Getting Away With Murder

Mike Ripley



2020: The Year and the People Just Gone

Few will mourn the passing of the year 2020, though many will lament the passing of some fine crime writers.

Publishing in general was hit by the pandemic which resulted in the staff of many firms operating from home, cut off from their filing cabinets, supplies of review copies and their favourite restaurants. Libraries and bookshops were severely affected as were the book wholesalers who supply them. Many titles were deferred for months, sometimes a year, others slipped out with none of the fanfare they deserved. In sheer volume, though, it seems to have been a bumper year for crime and thriller fiction.

Here I must declare my usual caveats that (a) I do not claim my database is comprehensive, (b) the workings of many publicity departments has been (understandably) erratic this year, (c) this column is still on the Naughty Step of some publishers (they know who they are), (d) my arithmetic is suspect at best and after a festive case of Amarone, not to be trusted.

However, I estimate that there were 634 new crime and thriller titles published in the UK in 2020, which is roughly one every 13 hours 48 minutes. These were books (not eBooks) published by commercial publishers (i.e. not self-published) for the first time in the UK.

Interestingly, though perhaps not surprisingly given the popularity (among editors and agents) of the domestic noir sub-genre, the number of female authors continues to rise. Traditionally, women writers have been responsible for just over a third of all crime fiction titles (which, of course, is not the same as sales, nor, indeed, readers) but in 2015

this proportion rose to 37%, then 45% in 2019 and 47% in 2020.

And so, unlike the rest of the country, especially now Brexit has been well-and-truly done, crime fiction seems in rude health, but sadly, cruel 2020 has claimed some notable victims.

The deaths of thriller writer Alan Williams and American mystery writer Walter Satterthwait, although neither were unexpected, were both a personal loss for me as I knew them and had the pleasure of editing new editions of some of their novels.

The death of Jill Paton Walsh was a particular blow to the Dorothy L. Sayers Society who will be forever grateful for her 'continuation' novels featuring Lord Peter Wimsey and the passing of John Le Carré produced a host of tributes from around the world and prompted his many fans into an ongoing 'favourite title' meme. (Mine is **A PERFECT SPY** if anyone is remotely interested.)

And in early December, sad tidings from Edinburgh reporting the death of Alanna Knight, MBE at the age of 97, after a writing life of more than fifty years and over sixty books.

A successful writer of romantic fiction before she turned to crime in 1988



Alanna Knight

with the first in her best-known series of mysteries featuring Victorian detective Inspector Faro, Alanna completed six novels whilst in her nineties, one of which, **MURDER AT THE WORLD'S EDGE**, will be published posthumously in May by Alison & Busby. On hearing of her death, former Edinburgh neighbour Ian Rankin described her as 'a stalwart of the crime-writing scene' and, given that she was at work on a new novel at the time, that 'she died with her boots on.'

Q: When will there be good news?

A: Now



At last, at the fag-end of the plague year, there was some good news. The award-winning crime writer Andrew Taylor, the most popular panelist (because he knows things) in CrimeFest's iconic quiz I'm Sorry I Haven't A Clue, has need of a bigger trophy cabinet having received the Historical Writers' Association award for best novel of 2020 for **THE KING'S EVIL**.

For fans of Andrew's 'Marwood and Cat' series set in Restoration London there is more good news. A fifth instalment, **THE ROYAL SECRET**, is due to be published in April by Harper Collins.

And yet more good news from HarperCollins who, in June, will publish the collected **SHORT STORIES OF REGINALD HILL (VOL. I)**.

Reg Hill (1936-2012) and I became good friends from the time I joined the legendary Collins Crime Club with my first novel in 1988.

As he lived at the diagonally opposite end of England from me, we saw each other only occasionally at conventions and festivals in London, or Manches-



ter or Nottingham, but for more than twenty years we were, in those pre-email days, pen-pals and I still have many of Reg's letters (often illustrated with pictures of cats) and postcards, usually featuring gloomy statues of stoic Ancient Greeks. His correspondence was always insightful and screamingly funny, with never a bad word about anyone except Scandinavians.

Initially, it was unusual

There was a time when the use of an author's initials instead of their given first names was a talking point and a distinctive promotional tool, as, once encountered, few readers would forget such famous names as J.R.R. Tolkien, J.K. Rowling, P.D. James or J.R. Hartley.

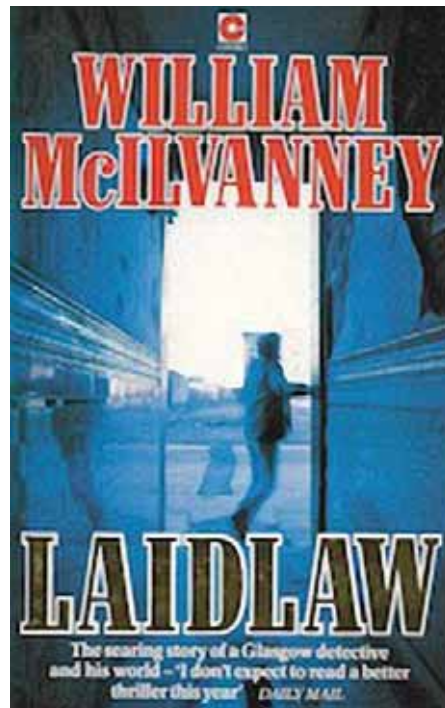
Over the past couple of years, however, it seems to be becoming the norm rather than the exception in crime fiction – for other genres I cannot speak – and I for one am finding this rather impersonal and not a little confusing. Among the current crop, several of whom I have met and found charming as well as talented, are: A. K. Benedict, B.A. Paris, S.K. Sharp, M.W. Craven, W.C. Ryan, M.J. Hyland, A.K. Turner (there may be two of them), T.F. Muir, M.K. Hill, T.M. Logan, C.J. Box, K.J. Maitland, S.A. Cosby, M.J. Arlidge, C.J. Tudor, C.L. Taylor, L.C. Tyler, V.L. Valentine, T.A. Wilberg, D.K. Fields and R.J. Bailey (who has also used the names Reno Smith and Deke Thornton).

Taken to the extreme it could perhaps be a useful piece of re-branding, should an author fancy a new identity. Who could fail to be tempted by a new

novel from K.E.N. Bruen, for instance? But overall, life was so much simpler when all one had to worry about was who the hell is B.Traven?

Highly Recommended

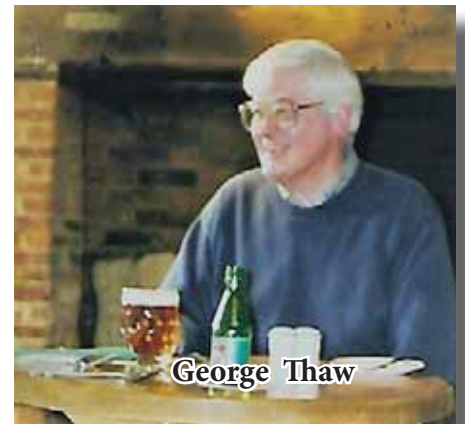
They always say, or they used to, that personal, word-of-mouth recommendation of a book is worth more than paid-for advertising, though I suspect the saying originated among publishers who had just had their promotional budgets slashed.



In the early days of my crime-writing life, however, I do remember being personally recommended a particular title by two people within a few days of each other, in the same week back in 1988. The book was the magnificent **LAIDLAW** by William McIlvanney which, arguably, gave birth to the 'Tartan Noir' school of crime fiction. Not surprisingly, the two people who pressed this title on me (which I immediately sought out and purchased) were both Scots.

One was Val McDermid, whose forceful enthusiasm for the book – over a couple of pints in The Two Chairmen in Soho as I remember – was such that I was convinced that my career would be over before it had started if I did not read it.

The other was George Thaw, then the books editor of *The Daily Mirror* and a near-neighbour out in the wilds of East Anglia as well as a fellow commuter. On those daily train journeys with George, he constantly tested my knowledge of the genre and shared his memories, often affectionate but occasionally libellous, of some of the biggest names in the business.



I will always be grateful that he steered me to many good writers – Lindsey Davis was one – but especially William McIlvanney. A couple of years later, I returned the favour by recommending to him the debut novel of Minette Walters, even lending him my first edition of **THE ICE HOUSE**, which, come to think of it, I never got back.



All this came to mind recently when I heard that McIlvanney (1936-2015) had left, on his death, the bare bones of a fourth novel featuring his influential detective Laidlaw and that the task of completing it had fallen to Ian Rankin, surely the perfect author to fill both William McIlvanney's and Jack Laidlaw's boots.

When **THE DARK REMAINS** by the dream team of McIlvanney & Rankin, is published by Canongate, I will make a pilgrimage to The Two Chairmen to drink its health. If, that is, I am allowed. Soho will probably be in Tier 6 by then, which will have given me time to re-read the entire Laidlaw trilogy, reissued by Canongate in 2020 in covers which, laid end to end give a panorama of Laidlaw's Glasgow beat.

Dick Francis

I read my first Dick Francis thriller, **ODDS AGAINST**, in 1967. It was a Pan paperback edition which cost me 3/6d (17½p to the youngsters). I still have it.



When my parents saw me engrossed in the book, they both, independently, said 'Devon Loch' when they spotted the name of the author. At the time, I, as an unworldly 14-year-old, had no idea what they were talking about. Neither of my

parents read thrillers and neither were remotely interested in horse racing (the idea of going into a bookmakers' would have given my mother the vapours) but both remembered the news coverage of Dick Francis, the Queen Mother's jockey and his dramatic ride on Devon Loch in the 1956 Grand National which ended so tragically within sight of the winning post.

Probably twenty-five years later, in my capacity as the crime fiction reviewer for the *Daily Telegraph* (a once-great newspaper which reviewed crime fiction) I was invited to the launch party of the newest Dick Francis novel at, I think, Claridge's hotel. I was excited for two reasons: firstly, the annual Francis book launch was **the** fashionable party of the crime writing season, and, secondly, I had a bone to pick with the author.

At the time I had a proper job, working for The Brewers' Society, the trade association for beer and pubs. Their offices were in a post-war building on Portman Square and the Society occupied the ground floor and also floors 1 and 4. Floors 2 and 3 were sub-let to The Jockey Club, although the two bodies rarely mixed. (I never got a decent tip on a horse from them, but then they never got any beer from me.)

In a recent novel, Dick Francis had his hero burgle The Jockey Club at night in search of a vital clue, by forcing entry via the roof. Dick had not realised that the brewers had offices on the floor above the jockeys and his hero had actually broken into an archive which contained beer bottle labels going back to the 1850s.

Getting Dick alone, I introduced myself and immediately pointed out his (understandable if you didn't work there) mistake in the geography of 42 Portman Square. He listened politely, admitted his oversight, then smiled and put an arm around me and said "Come and have a glass of champagne and don't tell anyone else." From then on, I was invited to every Francis launch party until Dick's passing, at which point his son, and co-author, Felix continued the tradition.

I last talked with Dick at the launch

of **SILKS** in 2008, where he signed a copy of his book for me and, once again, pressed a glass of champagne on me.



Mike & Dick Francis

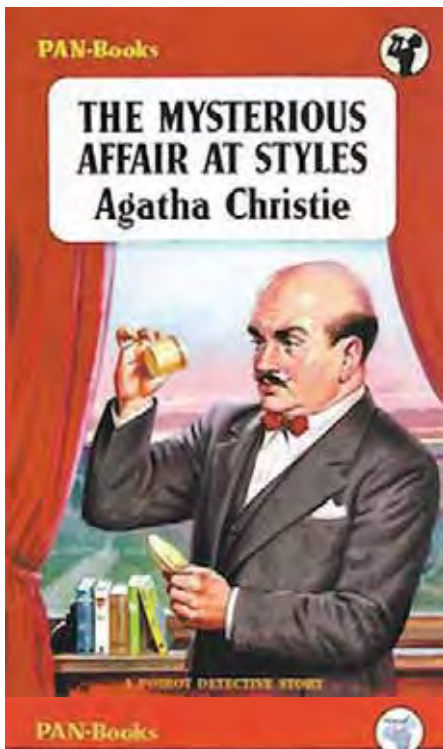
Sadly, due to Covid restrictions, for the first time since 1964, there was no Francis launch party in September and publication of Felix's new novel **ICED** has been rescheduled for 2021. It is particularly disappointing as this year would have been the centenary of Dick's birth and a double cause for celebration, but the occasion will be marked with a rather more permanent memorial.

Plans are afoot to erect a bronze statue of Dick Francis at Aintree Racecourse – Dick was involved in saving the racecourse and the Grand National long after his days as a jockey – and the statue will be part funded by public subscription. Members of the public (readers as well as racing fans) can contribute via www.justgiving.com/crowdfunding/dick-francis-statue-fund

Judging by the covers



When I first flipped through the pages of **COVER ME**, my instinct was to run to the library here at Ripster Hall to discover how my collection of vintage paperbacks had been stolen. Fortunately, my security precautions (an under-butler on 24-hour duty with a blunderbuss and, of course, the hounds...) were intact, but a significant number of my paperback collection do appear in Colin Larkin's wondrous **COVER ME: THE VINTAGE ART OF PAN BOOKS 1950-1965** [Telos].



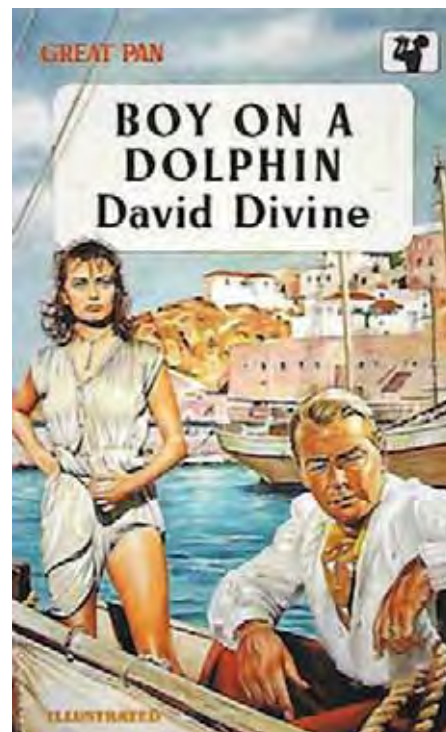
THE MOVING TARGET
A LEW ARLESS THRILLER
John Ross Macdonald



Not all Pan paperbacks were thrillers or crime stories, though many famous titles and fictional detectives did figure in what Colin Larkin calls the golden age of lush, painted cover art. Notably an unflattering but instantly recognisable portrait of Hercule Poirot in action and American private eye 'Lew Arliss' (possibly misheard) in a cover design which hopefully never got to the printer's.

Apart from the sumptuous illustrations, **COVER ME** gives a useful potted history of popular paperbacks in general (James Fenimore Cooper's **THE LAST OF THE MOHICANS** being one of the earliest in 1866) and Pan Books in particular. I did not know, until now, that the iconic Pan logo of Pan playing a pipe which usually appeared in the top right corner of the cover and on the spine, was designed by Mervyn Peake. Nor did I know that a publisher's logo is often known as a 'colophon' which proves you learn something every day. However, I do know (as the author does not) that Kenneth More was the star of *Reach For the Sky* and not *The Dam Busters*.

Novels which were filmed and film 'tie-ins' feature throughout in the days before an expensive still from a film or television drama could be used and one



has to admire the portraiture of the Pan artists who captured stars such as David Niven (numerous times), Dirk Bogarde and Richard Todd and here, Sophia Loren and Alan Ladd in 1957 and John Wayne in 1958.

For me, this is blissful nostalgia but **COVER ME** is also a vital resource for students of art and design, the history of popular fiction and the days, pre-Amazon, when you really could tell a book by its cover.

Critic's Choice (or Choice Critics)

As if the year 2020 was not grimly memorable enough, it also marks the twentieth anniversary of when I experienced that ultimate curse of the newspaper crime fiction critic: seeing someone else's name on top of their regular review column.

It happened to me on the whim of a newly-appointed literary editor, who often regard reviewing 'genre' as opposed to 'proper' fiction as patronage to be disbursed among friends and colleagues, and I took the hint and realised that my career as the *Daily Telegraph* crime critic was over after eleven years and having reviewed at least 420 crime

novels in print. (I say 'at least' as I have press cuttings for 420 but I may have missed or lost some over the years.)

I was not the first newspaper reviewer to suffer this indignity – I know both Harry Keating and Jessica Mann were similarly treated and I am sure I will not be the last. In my case, however, unemployment did not last long. I was already reviewing for several magazines and just before Christmas was recruited by the *Birmingham Post* where the late F.E. 'Bill' Pardoe had reviewed crime fiction for many years.

Thus Mike Ripley's Crime Guide in the *Telegraph* became Mike Ripley's Crime File in the *Birmingham Post* in January 2001.

Now appearing monthly, that column was to cover more than 500 titles in the following eight years (when the *Post* changed formats) and that first one featured one of Donald James' Russian thrillers, the latest Kate Ivory crime novel by Veronica Stallwood, the new Michael Connelly and Mercy Alexander, the only novel by George Tiffin, but the most enthusiastic review was reserved for the news that all eight of Lionel Davidson's written between 1960 and 1992, were to be reissued by Arrow and I am delighted to say are still in print today.

Having touched last month on the sterling work being done by crime fiction reviewers on *The Times*, it was remiss of me not to mention that Joan Smith has returned, I am delighted to say, to the reviewing fold in *The Sunday Times*. A noted crime writer herself, I reviewed her novel *FULL STOP* in 1995 saying that it was 'Witty, literate and with a climax worthy of Hitchcock.'

I just thought I'd mention that before my new book comes out in the Spring...

The Last Spiral?

One of the highlights of the regular lunches I took with the late Marcel Berlins, the distinguished crime fiction critic for the *Times*, was his attempt to get me to correctly pronounce the name of the hit French television show *Engrenages*, which is known here on BBC 4 as *Spiral*.



Marcel and I were both dedicated fans of this most excellent ensemble cop show set in the badlands (and law courts) of contemporary Paris, and though first created in 2006 and shown by the BBC for at least ten years, it is surprisingly little known here. In fact, I have only met one person other than Marcel, who admitted to watching it though he (a crime writer) agreed that it was superior to anything from Scandinavia or the Sicily of both the young and old Inspectors Montalbano (although the scenery is more attractive). [Ed. Note: in the U.S., several seasons can be seen free on Amazon Prime for members]

The Postbag Bulges Twice

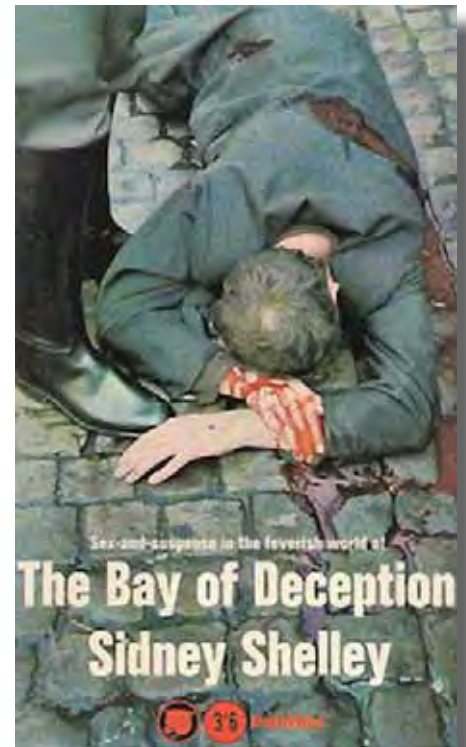
My casual remark about a bumper postbag to this column last month sparked off a positive deluge of correspondence with messages arriving by post, email, owl and raven. There were the usual polite (and much appreciated) votes of thanks from publishers and authors for mentioning their books and a smattering of the slightly acerbic and more terse missives from authors asking why their books had not been mentioned (usually for legal reasons).

But the bulk of the postbag was made up of an outpouring of support for the French television series *Spiral*, which really warmed my heart as I had thought myself a voice crying in the Parisian wilderness until now. I find my enthusiasm is shared by at least thirty publishers, editors, crime writers and readers and one, a very distinguished crime writer, declared that she had 'a thing about grubby vests' and even cited a line from Byron to justify her obsession.

And having reported on Geoffrey

Osborne's first novel in more than 40 years, I am contacted by a trusted book dealer (who holds the coveted 'By Appointment to Ripster Hall' patent) who proudly announced that he had two Osborne first editions in stock, one of them **TRAITOR'S GAIT**, first published by Robert Hale in 1969.

On the same theme of vintage thrillers, an American publisher, whose tastes in crime fiction I usually admire, writes to say he will be purchasing a copy of **KISS KISS BANG BANG**, an award-winning history of vintage British thrillers, to check whether one of his favourite thrillers, **THE BAY OF DECEPTION** by Sidney Shelley is mentioned.

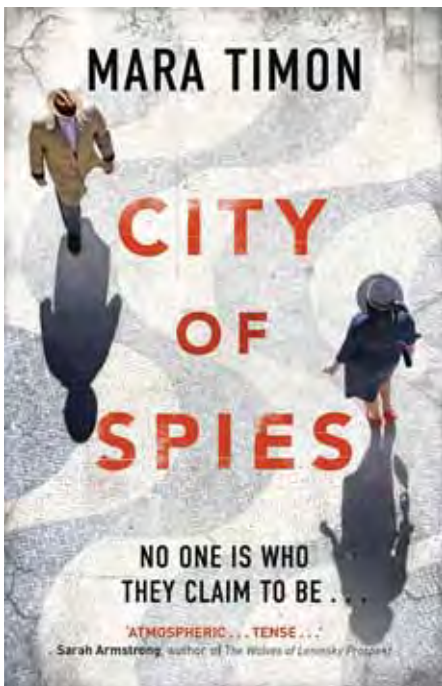


Sadly, the award (etc. etc.) does not and as penance the incompetent author has immediately tracked down a copy. First published in 1964, this thriller (as yet only glanced at) poses a number of questions. Was it really written by the great-nephew of Percy Bysshe Shelley, a professional soldier who became the

8th Baronet of Castle Goring, who spent much of his long life (1880-1965) in France? Was this the Sidney Shelley who also wrote **THE MCKENZIE BREAK**, a thriller about German prisoners-of-war in a camp in Scotland during WWII, which was made into a rather good film in 1970? Was the book first published or edited in America? Early indications suggest this: 'trousers' are 'pants', 'petrol' is 'gasoline', a car driver 'floorboards' the accelerator, and the French eat 'rutabegas' though no true Frenchman would ever admit to eating turnips, even during wartime.

Such questions must be answered and so I will read it properly and report back at a future date by which time I am sure my knowledgeable readers will have already supplied the answers.

Also from across the Atlantic, Canada's leading bibliophile when it comes to thrillers and crime fiction writes demanding my opinion on Mara Timon's **CITY OF SPIES** [Zaffre] but sadly I have to tell him that for legal reasons, I have not read it.



A long-time reader (but first time correspondent) from England writes to share my enjoyment of *Spiral* whilst also recommending another French policier series, *Braquo*, which ran from 2009 to 2016, as 'well-filmed and gritty... so different from much recent TV,

particularly the vogue for missing or dead children ...'

He also insists that I keep an eye out for the fourth novel in the 'Butcher's Boy' series begun by Thomas Perry back in 1982, titled **EDDIE'S BOY** which is due out this month.

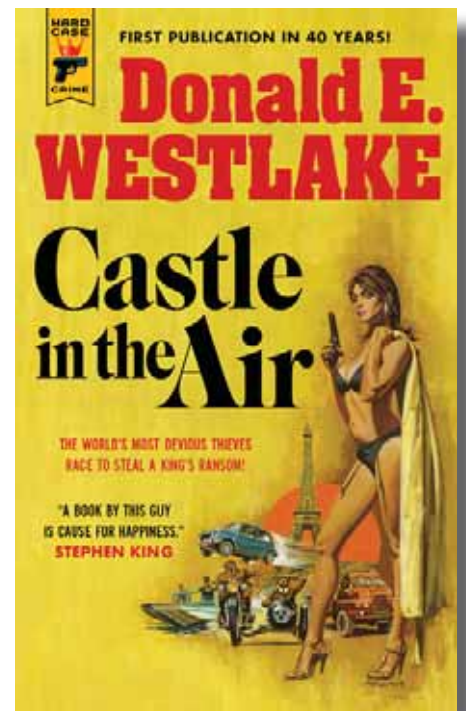
It is a long time since I read anything by the award-winning Thomas Perry and I will certainly keep an eye out for this latest instalment in a series where the hitman hero has aged in near real time since his first appearance, although I am as yet unsure who will be publishing **EDDIE'S BOY** in this country.

A further recommendation of some vintage hardboiled crime fiction comes from California publisher Stark House and their wonderfully-named imprint Black Gat, who have introduced me to the author Calvin Clements (1915-1997) via his 1952 novel **SATAN TAKES THE HELM**.

Clements wrote only four novels before switching to a prolific career writing for American television shows (including 39 episodes of *Gunsmoke*). **SATAN TAKES THE HELM** sits firmly in the classic tradition of post-war noir—think black-and-white films like *Double Indemnity* and *The Postman Always Rings Twice* – and don't be surprised to find that Satan is a woman (and don't think that title hasn't already been used). In this case, the femme fatale is the co-owner and predatory wife of the captain of a tramp freighter trading to the Orient out of San Francisco, for whom a marriage of convenience has become inconvenient and a new First Officer for the ship looks like a suitable replacement for the twin roles of Captain and husband. You just know this won't end well.

Following another unsolicited recommendation I will also be keeping a bloodshot eye out for **CASTLE IN THE SKY** by that Grand Master of American crime writing Donald Westlake (1933-2008).

First published in 1980 and now revived by Hard Case Crime [Titan Books], I am told this is one of Westlake's light-hearted 'caper' stories, as opposed to his tougher outings under

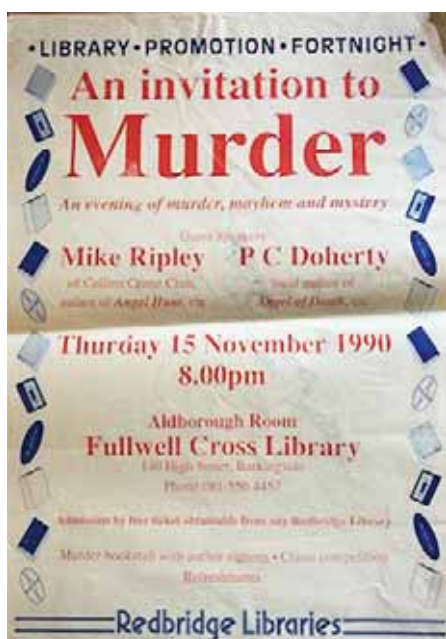


numerous pen-names. I also have read that it was written for the benefit of the IRS and so perhaps the author's heart wasn't quite in it. However, as it is set in the Europe, mainly Paris, of forty years ago, I am intrigued to discover Westlake's take on things European. In the year when Brexit "gets done," I fancy a trip down memory lane to those halcyon days and if anyone can cheer me up, Donald Westlake can.

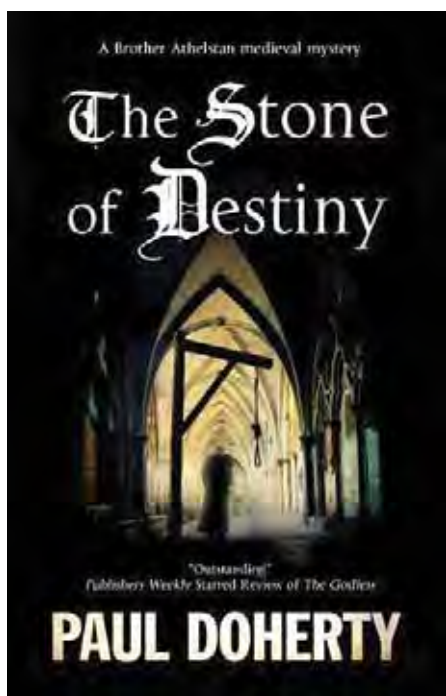
Letters to this column can be sent via shotseditor@yahoo.co.uk with 'GAWM' in the subject line, where they may be cheerfully ignored, just as was this anonymously donated picture of a dust jacket which came without further comment.

Tweaking the Memory

As I am now of an age where remembering the right day to put the bins out can be counted as a victory, it is pleasant to discover something which brings back a clear memory of specific events of thirty years ago. Such a discovery was made whilst sorting the contents of a dusty filing cabinet here at Ripster Hall and coming across a poster which reminded me exactly where I had been on Thursday (sic) 15th November – and who I was meeting for the first time.



I was in Fulwell Cross Library in Barkingside, having been driven there by Maxim Jakubowski of *Murder One* (who I think helped organise the event), to talk crime fiction with local hero and prolific writer of history-mysteries, Paul Doherty. At the time, Paul had written six of seven novels whereas my third had just been published and I assumed that Paul's seniority in the publishing stakes was the reason the sell-out audience treated him with such reverence, being particularly well-behaved when he was speaking, hanging on his every word.



It was only afterwards that I realised Paul was the headmaster of a distinguished local Catholic High School and our audience knew better than to heckle the headmaster. Paul and I have kept in touch over the years; he was a generous reviewer of my forays into historical fiction and his books have always given me pleasure as well as teaching me much medieval history.

I am delighted to learn that his 112th book (I told you he was prolific) will be published next month by Severn House, and even more pleased to learn that **THE STONE OF DESTINY** is another title to feature Brother Athelstan, the hero of one of Paul's most popular – and my favourite – series.

And someone who remembers exactly what he was doing fifty years ago – winning prizes with his debut crime novel – is Peter Lovesey. To commemorate half a century in the crime writing business, a special collector's edition of that famous debut, **WOBBLE TO DEATH**, has been produced by American publisher Soho Press.

It comes with an Afterword by the author and a Foreword by Jeffrey Deaver.

Books of the Last Few Months

The UK may have left Europe but thankfully Europe hasn't left the imaginations of our best thriller writers. David Hewson has set previous novels in Spain, the Netherlands, Denmark and even the Faroe Islands, but is probably best known for his crime novels set in Italy. In **THE GARDEN OF ANGELS** [Crème de la Crime] he takes us to Venice and to areas of the city which tourists rarely venture, and, for the most part, back in time to the winter of 1943.

Mussolini has been toppled; the Germans have moved in to shore up the Fascist regime and deportations of Jews have begun in earnest. The Allies have invaded and partisans of all political persuasions are active, with each action prompting a violent reprisal. The horrors of war finally come to sleepy, isolated Venice when, just as the Nazis,

their 'Black Brigade' lap-dogs and a turncoat 'Jew hunter' arrive to 'cleanse' the Jewish community in the famous Venetian ghetto, so too do a brother-and-sister pair of resistance fighters on the run. Their plight, and the fates of those who help them as well as hunt them is the core of the story is told in flashback through the journals a dying man bequeaths to his grandson.



Yet this is not a straightforward thriller of wartime heroic. Yes, there are heroics, sometimes in the most unlikely way, betrayals and great tragedies, proving that in such a situation, nothing is straightforward and passive inaction might just be the greatest sin. **THE GARDEN OF ANGELS** is populated by complex, superbly-drawn characters and Hewson cleverly creates sympathy for even the most unlikely ones, but the star of the show is Venice itself, its dank, cramped alleyways and faded glories. This is not the Venice of tourists sunning themselves in St Mark's Square or on lazy gondola rides, but of an icy winter in a city under occupation where fishermen, weavers, policemen, café owners and disillusioned priests struggle to survive and do the right thing, whatever that is.

David Hewson has written some excellent thrillers. This one, by turns

suspenseful and achingly sad, is one of his best.

Since it was originally announced, Graham Hurley's latest historical thriller has not only been delayed by six months, but re-named as **LAST FLIGHT TO STALINGRAD** [Head of Zeus]. It is the fifth instalment of his 'Wars Within' series, which itself has been renamed 'Spoils of War'. Whatever the series is known as, it is an outstanding achievement, a sequence of novels set in WWII with overlapping characters, in the main on the German side, each fighting a personal war of survival within the larger conflict, often at close quarters with leading figures in the Nazi hierarchy.

In **LAST FLIGHT TO STALINGRAD**, the central character is Werner Nehmann, a journalist at Goebbels' Ministry of Propaganda, who is growing ever more cynical and might just be too clever for his own good, especially when he makes a copy of a compromising letter Goebbels has entrusted him to deliver. Retribution is swift and Nehmann is sent to the Russian front to write morale-boosting dispatches from Stalingrad, just as winter takes hold. As if he does not have enough to worry about, he is befriended by the Abwehr intelligence service and falls afoul of the SS after witnessing one of their local atrocities,



for which he eventually extracts a very bloody revenge.

Fans of the series will be pleased to know that thanks to Covid-induced delays, they have only to wait until July for the sixth instalment, **KYIV**, in which I suspect we are still on the Russian front (specifically Kiev in the Ukraine). I for one cannot wait as the series proves what a fine writer Hurley is, and one totally in command of his research.

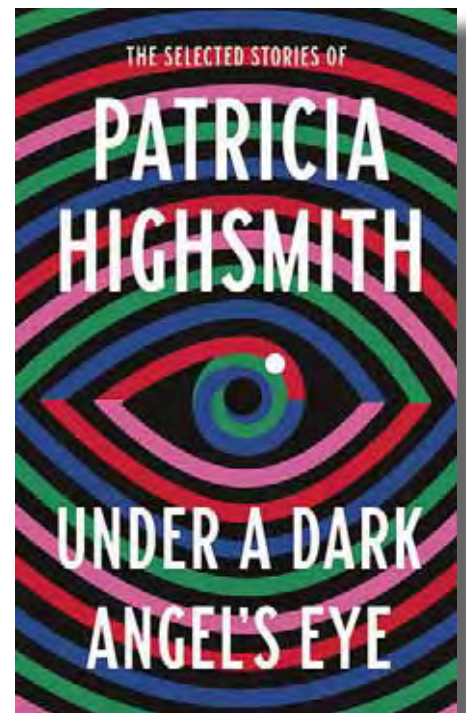
C.J. Tudor scares the hell out of me. Well, actually, she doesn't but her books do and with **THE BURNING GIRLS** [Michael Joseph] has carved (probably with a serrated blade) a niche for herself as the queen of very spooky crime fiction, the sort which incorporates the tropes of the horror story and stirs in a strong flavour of the supernatural.

An urban vicar – very cunningly introduced – complete with rebellious teenage daughter, is transferred from Nottingham to a tiny rural parish of Chapel Croft in Sussex which has a history of Protestant martyrs burned by Mary Tudor. It also has a more recent tragedy to cope with, the unexplained disappearance of two young girls thirty years ago, plus an unfortunate track record when it comes to previous vicars. And then there are the ghostly apparitions of girls on fire, a plague of voodoo dolls, a hidden crypt, a haunted chapel, an old dark well (what other sort is there?) and a smattering of Satanic graffiti.

If the new parish seems to be a hellish maelstrom, just for good measure quite a few nasties follow on from the vicar's old stomping ground and a violent conclusion is inevitable. Vengeance is mine, as someone or other once said.

Many years ago, as the crime fiction critic for that once-great newspaper the *Daily Telegraph*, I sent a memo to the literary editor suggesting that when a new Patricia Highsmith novel appeared, I should review it under the headline: The Talented Miss Highsmith by the Less-Talented Mr Ripley. Sadly, it was not to be, but twenty-five years on, in Highsmith's centenary year, I get the chance to enjoy a collection of her short stories.

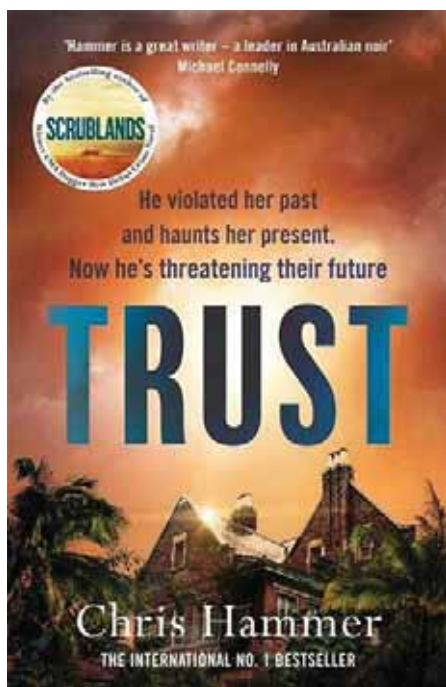
UNDER A DARK ANGEL'S EYE,



published by Virago, which also includes two previously unknown stories, will confirm all the adjectives used to describe Highsmith's writing: dark, disturbing, mordantly funny, gimlet-eyed, razor-sharp – I could go on. A fitting tribute to one of the greats of crime fiction.

Martin Scarsden must be the unluckiest – or luckiest – journalist in Australia, as wherever he hangs his hat, violence occurs and the past throws up skeletons faster than Ray Harryhausen used to. This is a journalist who doesn't have to look too hard to find newsworthy stories, they fall on him from a great height. In previous outings (**SCRUBLANDS** and **SILVER**) trouble has followed Chris Hammer's hero, his newly-acquired girlfriend and stepson in rural towns in New South Wales. In **TRUST** [Wildfire] the action moves swiftly to urban Sydney and encounters with dishonest (and in one case dead) undercover cops and very dodgy property developments including buildings with unsuitable cladding, the very thought of which is enough to make the flesh crawl.

TRUST is a fine example of top-notch Australian crime fiction and there is no doubt that Chris Hammer is one of its leading lights now, but I would like to see what he could do without his alter



journalist ego protagonist Scarsden. Surely, Martin has suffered enough.

Jane Harper, like Chris Hammer a former journalist, is certainly the reigning Queen of Australian crime fiction, following her award-winning debut **THE DRY** and (I thought) the equally impressive **FORCE OF NATURE**. There is little doubt that her fourth novel, **THE SURVIVORS** [Little Brown] will be another international bestseller for her in a subgenre I have seen described as outback noir, though in **THE SURVIVORS** the outback is not desert or forest scrub, but a coastal town in Tasmania, a community dependent on the sea and beach for its living and, occasionally, dying.

It is something of a slow-burner plot-wise, but as always Jane Harper excels at creating an atmospheric landscape – or in this case, seascape – for her characters to come to grips with.

Of all the Uruguayan crime writers I have read I can honestly say I have enjoyed none more than Mercedes Rosende, whose first novel to appear in English is **CROCODILE TEARS** [Bitter Lemon] and is described as a ‘blackly comic caper’.

Well, there’s certainly a caper (or two) involved, an overweight amateur detective called Ursula (who is tailing another Ursula), a dodgy lawyer, a

depressive petty criminal, a total psycho and an ambitious police captain called Lionilda Lima (who never forgets she is a Capricorn), which is a heady mix and although out-loud belly-laughs may be few (or perhaps lost in translation), this is still an interesting read. In particular the scenes set in Uruguayan prisons are powerfully done. Not a lot of giggles here, but probably depressingly accurate.

If your preference is for a more cosy take on an American private eye story set in the years post-WWII, then Stephen Spotswood has created a new detective duo who are definitely more Big Snuggle than Big Sleep. **FORTUNE FAVOURS THE DEAD** [Wildfire] introduces the genteel lady detective Lilian Pentecost and her circus-trained young sidekick Willowjean Parker. Lilian Pentecost is, I suspect, ahead of her time in that she sleeps under a duvet (quite radical for 1946 New York) and is referred to throughout as ‘Ms’ rather than ‘Miss’ which may be the author’s wokeness showing through.

Otherwise the period detail seems believable but then everything I know about 1946 New York comes from Rex Stout’s **THE SILENT SPEAKER**, with Nero Wolfe and Archie Goodwin setting a very high bar for private eye duos.

If you are a fan of the French TV

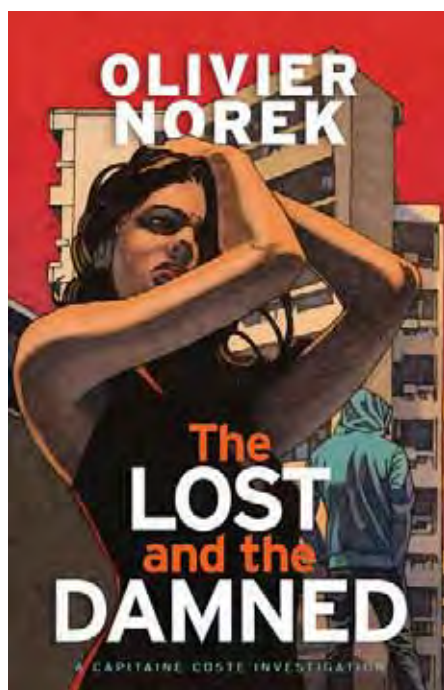
series **Spiral** (see precious reference) then you will be familiar with the landscape of the banlieues if not the actual term, which refers to the suburbs or outskirts of Paris beyond the ring road around the inner city. This is the setting for **THE LOST AND THE DAMNED** by Olivier Norek, a former investigator with the gendarmerie in Paris and scriptwriter for **Spiral**. His thrillers set in the grim, tourist-unfriendly suburbs and featuring an ensemble cast of policemen and women, are bestsellers in France where this, the first in a ‘Banlieues Trilogy’ was published in 2013. Hats off, therefore, to MacLehose Press for finally bringing us the English edition.

The cops in **LOST AND THE DAMNED** are a fascinating, far from innocent bunch, faced with a daily litany of crime and political jockeying from other agencies. The murders (and cover-ups) they have to deal with are particularly brutal and not for the weak-of-stomach, and the book imparts lots of inside knowledge on police work in these Parisian badlands, from the most common Serbian insults to the cost of a ‘steribox’ (€1) and where to find them. This is tough, grungy and bleak crime writing of the highest order. If only the French had a word for noir...

In **MY TIME OF DYING** [Long Midnight] by Douglas Lindsay could be the first crime novel set in the (ongoing) coronavirus crisis. I suspect it was written in that eye of the hurricane period before the second spike and the latest restrictions imposed by the Scottish government which would surely have caused more headaches other than the ones they suffer from hangovers, for disgraced (and often disgraceful) DS Thomas Hutton and his Scottish police colleagues.

But how are social distancing and face-masks going to help catch a killer who inflicts a death by a thousand cuts on his victims? Not that that worries DS Hutton as much as where the next fix for his sex addiction is coming from.

Being Douglas Lindsay, the whole thing is done at a blistering pace with shotgun-blasts of barbs going in all directions, pitch-black humour and



myriad references to popular culture and, as seems a regular occurrence nowadays, to Estonia and Lithuania. This is dark, brutal Tartan Noir in all its foul-mouthed glory. Not for readers of a delicate disposition – a bit like being stuck in a lift with Frankie Boyle.

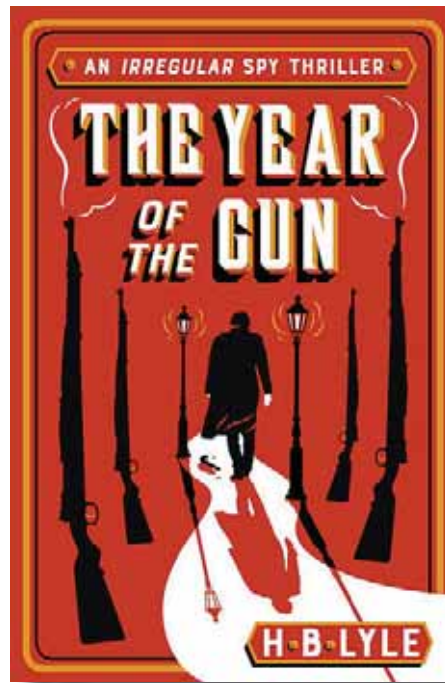
Sebastian Fitzek is a bestselling author not only in his native Germany but throughout Europe and if you enjoy psycho noir (if there is such a sub-genre) then his new thriller **THE PACKAGE** [Head of Zeus] will not disappoint. The protagonist, Emma, after a troubled childhood then, as a young married woman, falls foul of a serial rapist killer known as The Hairdresser, who shaves the heads of his victims.

She survives, but badly traumatised and become a 'shut-in' in her Berlin home, alone (well, not quite) except for the intruders she imagines might be in there with her. Then a mysterious package is delivered to her door even though addressed to a neighbour who might or might not exist.

Fitzek squeezes every ounce of claustrophobic suspense out of the situation and readers begin to get the sneaking suspicion that they are either eavesdropping on a patient/psychiatrist session or have been kidnapped and held hostage in someone else's nightmare.

The introduction of his 'Irregular' spy Wiggins, recruited to an infant British security service after being mentored as a youth by Sherlock Holmes, three years ago was greeted with nods of appreciation by purring fans of spy fiction. Now Wiggins returns for a third adventure, initially far from Baker Street in Queenstown in Ireland, in the year 1912, which turns out to be **THE YEAR OF THE GUN** by H.B. Lyle [Hodder].

The year is significant as is the place, for Queenstown was the last port of call for the Titanic before its Atlantic rendezvous to restock the cocktail bars with ice, and Wiggins finds himself thrown off the ship after an 'altercation' over a game of cards with other passengers (third class of course). Having one lucky escape, Wiggins is soon in need of another one, or more, as he travels to Dublin – then Britain's poorest city – and becomes involved with local



gangsters running guns on behalf of the increasingly violent Nationalist movement, though a cargo of arms and ammunition would also be tempting to equally militant Unionists.

Wiggins does eventually make it to New York but his time there, and return journey, is peppered with betrayals and violence, which his mentor Sherlock would have understood, and a sexual encounter of which he would probably disapprove.

It took me a disgracefully long time to twig that the pen-name 'Bella Ellis' was a condensation of two other pen-names: Currer Bell and Ellis Bell, pseudonyms used by Charlotte and Emily Brontë. It is, fittingly, the pen-name of journalist and novelist Rowan Coleman for **THE DIABOLICAL BONES** [Hodder], her latest mystery to feature the three Brontë sisters (plus brother Branwell) as detectives tracking a vicious child killer up on the wuthering heights of nineteenth century Yorkshire.

Fortunately, in 1845, there are plenty of opportunities for the talented trio to take a break from the tedium of writing and follow their passion for amateur detection (as the Bell Brothers) on the moors above Haworth, as opposed to nearby Bradford where there are "Constables everywhere you look, spoiling the fun" – at least according to Char-

lotte.

I wonder what the late Robert Barnard – crime-writer and chairman of the Brontë Society – would have made of it. I suspect he would have been publicly outraged whilst privately squirming with pleasure.

A couple of years ago I was invited to have lunch with David Baldacci when he visited London but sadly, owing to a medical misfortune, I could not make it, which was a pity as I had wanted to ask him how he managed to write so many bestselling thrillers in so many different series. By my count – and I may be wrong – Baldacci has established eight contemporary and one historical series of novels, plus one in the Young Adult genre and one series of children's books.

In **DAYLIGHT** [Macmillan] he chooses a hero and a heroine from two of his established series – FBI agent Atlee Pine and US Army investigator John Puller – and teams them up in an investigation into the Vincenzo family of New Jersey. When the investigation turns up leads to cold cases, one of which may connect to the disappearance of Atlee Pine's twin sister at the age of six, it all becomes very personal.

Times A-Changing

Having mentioned a former crime fiction reviewer for *The Times*, I should mention the current one, Mark Sanderson, who is doing an absolutely splendid job, as is his relatively new colleague James Owen who reviews thrillers.

In his column James Owen recently recommended three new thrillers – **CITY OF GHOSTS** by Ben Creed, **CITY OF SPIES** by Mara Timon and Edward Wilson's **PORTRAIT OF THE SPY** as a Young Man – all of which, for legal reasons, I was totally unaware.

Pip! Pip! The Ripster

[Segments of Mike's columns that appear on Shots Magazine (www.shotsmag.co.uk) are here printed by permission of the author and Shots Magazine. Please go to the site to view complete columns.]

Recent Paperbacks of Note



Softboiled to Mediumboiled

Alexander, Ellie, **CHILLED TO THE CONE** (St. Martin's, \$8.99).
 Baker, Bree, **CLOSELY HARBORED SECRETS** (Sourcebooks, \$7.99).
 Berenson, Laurien, **WATCHDOG** (Kensington, \$8.99).
 Brown, Rita Mae, **SCARLET FEVER** (Ballantine, \$17.00).
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 Grimes, Martha, **OLD SUCCESS** \ (Grove Press, \$16.00).
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 Harris, Sherry, **ABSENCE OF ALICE** (Kensington, \$7.99).
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 Lillard, Amy, **MURDER BETWEEN THE PAGES** (Sourcebooks, \$7.99).
 Logan, Elizabeth, **FISHING FOR TROUBLE** (Berkley, \$7.99).
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Mediumboiled to Hardboiled

Armstrong, Kelley, **ALONE IN THE WILD** (Minotaur, \$17.99).
 Bohjalian, Chris, **THE RED LOTUS** (Vintage, \$16.00).
 Box, C. J., **LONG RANGE** (Putnam, \$9.99).
 Bruen, Ken, **GALWAY GIRL** (Mysterious Press, \$16.00).
 Coben, Harlan, **THE BOY IN THE WOODS** (Morrow, \$16.99).
 Collins, Max Allan, **SKIM DEEP** (HardCase Crime, \$10.95).
 Craig, Christie, **DON'T LOOK BACK** (Grand Central, \$7.99).
 Crombie, Deborah, **A BITTER FEAST** (Morrow, \$16.99).
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 Schaffhausen, Joanna, **ALL THE BEST LIES** (Minotaur, \$17.99).
 Schultz, Emily, **LITTLE THREATS** (Putnam, \$16.00).
 St. James, Simone, **BROKEN GIRLS** (Berkley, \$9.99).
 Sutton, Hailey, **THE LADY UPSTAIRS** (Putnam, \$16.00).
 Swanson, Peter, **BEFORE SHE KNEW HIM** (Morrow, \$9.99).
 Thomas, Russ, **FIREWATCHING** (Putnam, \$17.00).
 Torre, A. R., **EVERY LAST SECRET** (Thomas & Mercer, \$15.95).
 Turow, Scott, **THE LAST TRIAL** (Grand Central, \$16.99).
 Wegert, Tessa, **DEATH IN THE FAMILY** (Berkley, \$17.00).
 White, Randy Wayne, **SALT RIVER** (Putnam, \$9.99).
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(Morrow, \$9.99).
 Wortham, Reavis Z., **LAYING BONES**
 (Poisoned Pen Press, \$15.99).

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 Thomas, Will, **LETHAL PURSUIT** (Minotaur, \$9.99).
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Thriller

Battle, Brett, **THE VANISHED** (\$15.95)
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 DeMille, Nelson, **THE DESERTER** (Pocket, \$9.99).
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 Harper, Karen, **UNDER THE ALASKAN ICE** (Mira, \$9.99).
 Hood, Joshua, **TREADSTONE RESURRECTION** (Putnam, \$9.99).
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 Macallister, Greer, **THE ARCTIC FURY** (Sourcebooks, \$16.99).
 Petrie, Nick, **THE WILD ONE** (Putnam, \$9.99).
 Quirk, Matthew, **HOOR OF THE ASSASSIN** (Morrow, \$9.99).

Sneak Previews Upcoming Mysteries



January, 2021

- 1 Cythia Harrod-Eagles, **CRUEL AS THE GRAVE** (Slider)
- 5 Chris Hauty, **SAVAGE ROAD** (Hayley Chill)
- 5 James Grippando, **TWENTY** (Jack Swyteck)
- 5 Brad Taylor, **AMERICAN TRAITOR** (Pike Logan)
- 5 Joseph Schneider, **WHAT WAITS FOR YOU** (Tully Jarsdel)
- 5 Ian Hamilton, **FORTUNE** (Uncle Chow Tung)
- 5 Lee Goldberg, **BONE CANYON** (Eve Ronin)
- 12 Nick Petrie, **THE BREAKER** (Peter Ash)
- 12 Jason Pinter, **A STRANGER AT THE DOOR** (Rachel Marin)
- 12 Faye Kellerman, **THE LOST BOYS** (Decker/Lazarus)
- 12 Kwei Quartey, **SLEEP WELL, MY LADY** (Emma Djan)
- 14 J. B. Turner, **HARD VENGEANCE** (Jon Reznick)
- 19 Jeff Abbott, **NEVER ASK ME**
- 19 Lisa Gardner, **BEFORE SHE DISAPPEARED**
- 19 Allie Reynolds, **SHIVER**
- 19 Jessica Fellowes, **THE MITFORD TRIAL** (Mitford Murders)
- 19 Kate Mosse, **THE CITY OF TEARS**
- 21 Stephen Leather, **THE HUNTING**
- 26 Bill Pronzini, **THE PARADISE AFTERFAIR** (Carpenter & Quincannon)
- 26 Gregg Hurwitz, **PRODIGAL SON** (Orphan X)
- 26 C. J. Tudor, **THE BURNING GIRLS**
- 26 Tim Dorsey, **TROPIC OF STUPID** (Serge Storms)
- 26 Alafair Burke, **FIND ME**
- 26 Eliza Jane Brazier, **IF I DISAPPEAR**

- 2 John Hart, **THE UNWILLING**
- 2 Walter Mosley, **BLOOD GROVE** (Easy Rawlins)
- 2 Catriona McPherson, **SCOT ON THE ROCKS** (Last Ditch)
- 2 Gwen Florio, **BEST LAID PLANS** (Nora Best)
- 2 Belinda Bauer, **EXIT**
- 2 Kelley Armstrong, **A STRANGER IN TOWN** (Rockton)
- 2 Michael Ledwidge, **RUN FOR COVER** (Michael Gannon)
- 2 Joshua Hood, **THE TREADSTONE EXILE** (Treadstone)
- 4 Robert Dugoni, **A COLD TRAIL** (Tracy Crosswhite)
- 4 Dana Stabenow, **SPOILS OF THE DEAD** (Liam Campbell)
- 4 Sebastian Fitzek, **PASSENGER 23**
- 9 Mick Herron, **SLOUGH HOUSE** (Slow Horses)



February, 2021

- 2 Jane Harper, **THE SURVIVORS**

- 9 Michael Koryta, **NEVER FAR AWAY**
- 9 Victor Methos, **CRIMSON LAKE ROAD** (Jessica Yardley)
- 9 Alex Berenson, **THE POWER COUPLE**

- 9 C. J. Tudor, **THE BURNING GIRLS**
9 Linda Castillo, **A SIMPLE MURDER**
(Kate Burkholder – ss)
9 Martyn Waites, **THE SINNER** (Tom Killgannon)
16 Charles Finch, **AN EXTRAVAGANT DEATH** (Charles Lenox)
16 Mark Greaney, **RELENTLESS** (Gray Man)
16 Charles Todd, **A FATAL LIE** (Ian Rutledge)
16 Hope Adams, **DANGEROUS WOMEN**
16 Helen Cooper, **THE DOWNSTAIRS NEIGHBOR**
16 Bella Ellis, **THE DIABOLICAL BONES** (Bronte Sisters)
16 J. A. Jance, **MISSING AND ENDANGERED** (Sheriff Brady)
23 Joe Ide, **SMOKE** (IQ)
23 Russ Thomas, **NIGHTHAWKING** (DS Adam Tyler)
23 Steve Berry, **THE KAISER'S WEB** (Cotton Malone)
23 Eva Garcia Saenz, **THE WATER RITUALS** (Kraken)
23 Joanne Fluke, **TRIPLE CHOCOLATE CHEESECAKE MURDER** (Hannah Swensen)
23 John Gilstrap, **CRIMSON PHOENIX** (Victoria Emerson)

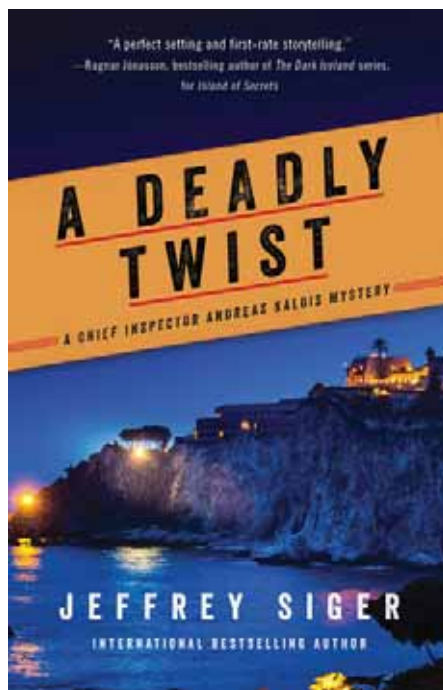
March, 2021

- 2 Don Bentley, **THE OUTSIDE MAN** (Matt Drake)
2 Elly Griffiths, **THE POSTSCRIPT MURDERS**
2 David Downing, **WEDDING STATION** (John Russell)
2 Viet Thanh Nguyen, **THE COMMITTED** (the Sympathizer)
2 Flynn Berry, **NORTHERN SPY**
2 Loren D. Estleman, **THE EAGLE AND THE VIPER**
9 Joel C. Rosenberg, **THE BEIRUT PROTOCOL** (Marcus Ryker)
9 James Rollins, **KINGDOM OF BONES** (Sigma Force)
9 Rick Mofina, **SEARCH FOR HER**
9 Vivien Chen, **FATAL FRIED RICE** (Noodle Shop)
9 Lynda La Plante, **JUDAS HORSE** (Jack Warr)
9 Donna Leon, **TRANSIENT DESIRES** (Guido Brunetti)
16 Andrea Camilleri, **THE COOK OF THE HALCYON** (Montalbano)
16 Harlan Coben, **WIN**

- 16 Peter Robinson, **NOT DARK YET** (DCI Banks)
18 Robert Goddard, **THE FINE ART OF INVISIBLE DETECTION**
21 Alma Katsu, **RED WIDOW**
21 Ragnar Jonasson, **WINTERKILL** (Dark Iceland/Ari Thor)
23 Jacqueline Winspear, **THE CONSEQUENCES OF FEAR** (Maisie Dobbs)
23 Nina Siegal, **YOU'LL THANK ME FOR THIS**
23 Janet Evanovich & Steve Hamilton, **THE BOUNTY** (Fox & O'Hare)
30 William Deverell, **STUNG** (Arthur Beauchamp)
30 Paula Munier, **THE HIDING PLACE** (Mercy Carr)
30 Allison Brennan, **TELL NO LIES** (Mobile Response)

April, 2021

- 6 Jeffrey Siger, **A DEADLY TWIST** (Andreas Kaldis)



- 6 Camilla Sten, **THE LOST VILLAGE**
6 Jennifer McMahon, **THE DROWN-ING KIND**
6 David Rosenfelt, **ANIMAL INSTINCT** (K Team)
6 Wallace Stroby, **HEAVEN'S A LIE** (Crissa Stone)
6 Ann B. Ross, **MISS JULIA HAPPILY EVER AFTER**
6 Anna Lee Huber, **A WICKED CONCEIT**

- 6 David Hewson, **THE GARDEN OF ANGELS**
6 Alan Parks, **BOBBY MARCH WILL LIVE FOREVER** (Harry McCoy)
6 Andy McNab, **SAS: RED NOTICE**
6 Michael Wiley, **HEAD CASE** (Sam Kelson)
6 Caro Ramsay, **ON AN OUTGOING TIDE** (Andersen & Costello)
6 Michael Kurland, **WHATEVER THE COST** (Welker & Saboy)
6 Marcia Talley, **DONE DEAD** (Hannah Ives)
6 Robin Yocum, **THE SACRIFICE OF LESTER YATES**
6 Jason Hough, **INSTINCT**
12 John Sandford, **OCEAN PREY** (Davenport/Flowers)
13 Bryan Christy, **IN THE COMPANY OF KILLERS**
13 Will Thomas, **DANCE WITH DEATH** (Barker & Llewelyn)
13 S. A. Lelchuk, **ONE GOT AWAY** (Nikki Griffin)
13 Jack Carr, **THE DEVIL'S HAND** (James Reece)
13 M. L. Longworth, **THE VANISHING MUSEUM ON THE RUE MISTRAL** (Provençal)
16 Mike Lawson, **HOUSE STANDOFF** (Joe DeMarco)
20 Jonathan Ames, **A MAN NAMED DOLL**
20 Carole Johnstone, **MIRRORLAND**
20 David Baldacci, **A GAMBLING MAN** (Archer)
20 Will Dean, **THE LAST THING TO BURN**
20 Amy Suiter Clarke, **GIRL, 11**
27 Jenn McKinlay, **FOR BATTER OR WORSE** (Cupcake Bakery)

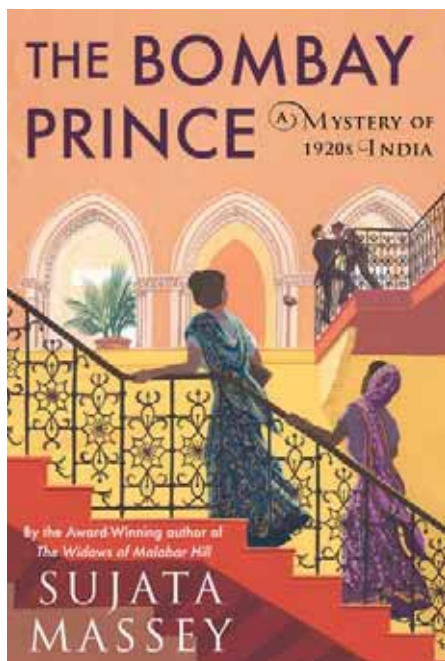
May, 2021

- 1 Quentin Bates, **BETRAYAL**
4 Stephen Mack Jones, **DEAD OF WINTER** (August Snow)
4 Stephen Hunter, **BASIL'S WAR** (WWII)
4 Linwood Barclay, **FIND YOU FIRST**
4 Ragnar Jonasson, **THE GIRL WHO DIED**
4 A. J. Cross, **DEVIL IN THE DETAIL** (Will Traynor)
4 Brian Klingborg, **THIEF OF SOULS** (Inspector Lu Fei)
11 Jeffrey Deaver, **THE FINAL TWIST** (Colter Shaw)

- 11 R. H. Herron, **HUSH LITTLE BABY**
 11 David Ricciardi, **SHADOW TARGET** (Jake Keller)
 11 Ashley Weaver, **A PECULIAR COMBINATION** (Electra McDonnell)
 11 Steven Konkoly, **SKYSTORM** (Ryan Decker)
 11 Kylie Logan, **A TRAIL OF LIES** (Jazz Ramsey)
 18 Ben H. Winters, **THE QUIET BOY**
 18 Mary Kubica, **LOCAL WOMAN MISSING**
 18 Carolyn Haines, **INDEPENDENT BONES** (Sarah Booth Delaney)
 18 David Fisher, **THE EXECUTIVE ORDER**
 25 David Housewright, **WHAT DOESN'T KILL US** (McKenzie)
 25 Martin Walker, **THE COLDEST CASE** (Bruno)
 25 Mettie Ivie Harrison, **THE PRODIGAL DAUGHTER** (Linda Walheim)
 25 David Gordon, **AGAINST THE LAW** (Joe the Bouncer)
 25 David Swinson, **CITY ON THE EDGE**
 25 Mary Dixie Carter, **THE PHOTOGRAPHER**

June, 2021

- 1 Sujata Massey, **THE BOMBAY PRINCE** (Perveen Mistry)



- 1 Nelson DeMille, **THE MAZE** (John Corey)

- 1 Eric Van Lustbader, **THE KOBALT DOSSIER** (Evan Rider)
 1 A. J. Tata, **CHASING THE LION**
 1 Spencer Quinn, **TENDER IS THE BITE** (Bernie Little/Chet)
 1 Alex Michaelides, **THE MAIDENS**
 8 Allison Montclair, **A ROGUE'S COMPANY** (Right Sort of Marriage Bureau)
 8 Catherine Steadman, **THE DISAPPEARING ACT**
 8 Henry Porter, **THE OLD ENEMY** (Paul Samson)
 8 Andrews & Wilson, **SONS OF VALOR**
 9 Charles Todd, **AN IRISH HOSTAGE** (Bess Crawford)
 15 John McMahon, **A GOOD KILL** (P. T. Marsh)
 15 James Ellroy, **WIDESPREAD PANIC**
 15 Leonard Goldberg, **THE ABDUCTION OF PRETTY PENNY** (Daughter of Sherlock)
 22 Sarah Stewart Taylor, **A DISTANT GRAVE** (Maggie D'arcy)
 29 Paul Doiron, **DEAD BY DAWN** (Mike Bowditch)
 29 Elly Griffiths, **THE NIGHT HAWKS** (Ruth Galloway)
 29 Jeffrey B. Burton, **THE KEEPERS** (Mace Reid K9)
 29 Riley Sager, **SURVIVE THE NIGHT**
 29 Steven Saylor, **DOMINUS** (Pinarius Family)

July, 2021

- 6 Connor Sullivan, **SLEEPING BEAR**
 6 Megan Abbott, **THE TURNOUT**
 6 S. A. Cosby, **RAZORBLADE TEARS**
 6 Linda Castillo, **FALLEN** (Kate Burkholder)
 6 David Rosenfelt, **DOG EAT DOG** (Andy Carpenter)
 6 Liv Constantine, **THE STRANGER IN THE MIRROR**
 6 Mick Finlay, **ARROWOOD AND THE MEETING HOUSE MURDERS**
 7 James Carlos Blake, **THE BONES OF WOLFE**
 13 Arnaldur Indridason, **THE DARKNESS KNOWS** (Konrad)
 13 B. A. Paris, **THE THERAPIST**
 13 Oliver Harris, **ASCENSION** (Elliot Kane)
 13 Gabriel Bergmoser, **THE HUNTED**
 20 Bracken MacLeod, **CLOSING COSTS**
 20 Trevor Wood, **ONE WAY STREET** (Jimmy Mullen)

- 20 S. C. Perkins, **FATAL FAMILY TIES** (Ancestry Detective)
 27 Lindsey Davis, **A COMEDY OF TERRORS** (Flavia Albia)
 27 Glen Erik Hamilton, **ISLAND OF THIEVES** (Van Shaw)
 27 Karin Slaughter, **FALSE WITNESS**

August, 2021

- 3 Mark Billingham, **RABBIT HOLE**
 3 Max Tomlinson, **BAD SCENE** (Colleen Hayes)
 3 Donna Andrews, **MURDER MOST FOWL** (Meg Langslow)
 3 Chevy Stevens, **DARK ROADS**
 3 James Swallow, **SHADOW** (Marc Dane)
 3 Alafair Burke, **FIND ME**
 3 Taylor Moore, **DOWN RANGE** (Garrett Kohl)
 3 Claire Douglas, **THEN SHE VANISHES**
 10 Joanna Schaffhausen, **GONE FOR GOOD**
 10 Sarah Warburton, **YOU CAN NEVER TELL**
 17 Ben Coes, **THE ISLAND** (Dewey Andreas)
 17 Hannah Dennison, **DANGER AT THE COVE**
 24 William Kent Krueger, **LIGHTNING STRIKE** (Cork O'Connor)
 24 Sheila Connolly, **THE SECRET STAIRCASE** (Kate Hamilton)
 24 Michael Laurence, **THE ELIMINATION THREAT**

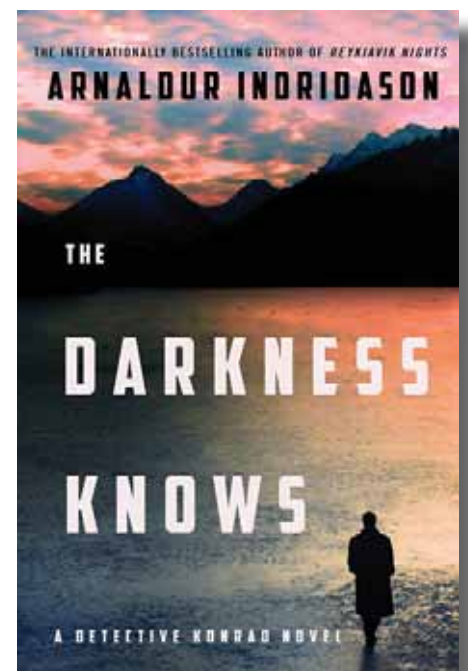


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