

Deadly Pleasures *Mystery Magazine*



MIA P. MANANSALA
Arsenic and Adobo

Best First Mysteries

Mia P. Manansala

New Humorous Cozy Series

Mia P. Manansala is a certified book coach and the author of **ARSE-NIC AND ADOBO**, which garnered starred reviews from *Library Journal*, *Publishers Weekly*, *Booklist*, and *Shelf Awareness*. *The New York Times* stated, “Manansala peppers the narrative with enough red herrings to keep readers from guessing the killer, but the strength of the novel is how family, food and love intertwine in meaningful and complex ways,” which are common themes in her writing. The sequel, **HOMICIDE AND HALO-HALO**, comes out February 8, 2022.

She is the winner of the 2018 Hugh Holton Award, the 2018 Eleanor Taylor Bland Crime Fiction, Writers of Color Award, the 2017 William F. Deek -- Malice Domestic Grant for Unpublished Writers, and the 2016 Mystery Writers of America/Helen McCloy Scholarship. She's also a 2017 Pitch Wars alum and 2018-2021 mentor.

A lover of all things geeky, Mia spends her days procrastinating, playing JRPGs and dating sims, reading cozy mysteries and diverse romance, and cuddling her dogs Gumiho and Max Power.

Find her on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram: @MPMtheWriter or check out her website: www.miapmanansala.com

**Interview
with Mia P. Manasala
From Murder & Mayhem**

(murder-mayhem.com)

Why did you decide to write a murder mystery cozy? Are you a fan of the genre?

I've kind of always loved mysteries, cozy Mysteries in particular. It's something that my mom introduced me to; she got me reading mysteries from a very young age. I grew up with my parents and my grandparents. As a child, I was watching *Matlock* and *Murder She Wrote*. And my mom used to work at Waldenbooks—you remember those?—She would bring home Mary Higgins Clark novels and things like that. And



Mia P. Manansala

now she's a library worker and while there she discovered cozy mysteries... So I started reading the books she was [so] we had something to talk about.

I love the fun and escape that you can have with cozy mysteries. I noticed most of the publishing in general, there was not a lot of representation, [not] a lot of characters that looked like me. This book was me writing what me and my mom always wished we could find on the bookshelves. It was primarily for me [and] it was primarily something that my mom could read because it's a cozy; there's no sex, violence or anything graphic. The fact that other people seem to be enjoying it just means so much because it really is personal in so many ways.

What made you decide to set it in a Filipino restaurant?

Culinary cozies are my favorite of the genre. That's always my mom's favorite [too]. Food is hugely important to me. As a diaspora kid, my parents are Filipino immigrants but I was born and raised in Chicago. So food is like a shorthand for culture. For those of us who haven't been to the homeland and don't know the language, and so [food] is hugely important to me and my family.

It's also an interesting way to explore different ways to show love. I wrote this for my mom, but I also wrote it for my father, who sadly passed before this book deal happened, but he was the cook in the family. He was a prime example of “food as love;” you don't have to say the words, but you know it's there.

It's not only Filipinos or only Filipino Americans who have these ideals, but it's so kind of embedded in the culture that it would feel strange for me to not have that aspect.

You chose to set it outside of Chicago. What was behind that decision to do that?

It was me playing around with the Cozy Mystery tropes. The whole first page was me just having fun. I love this genre but I also realize how ridiculous it can be and how much it is pulled from Rom Com tropes. So I wanted the idea

of a big fish in a small pond; the protagonist who leaves a small town to experience the big city and has to come back. I felt that was a big part of her character. And I wanted it to be fictional, I'm gonna get something wrong. I've been in Chicago for almost my entire life. And I'm still like "Oh, I bet you if I set it here, there's going to be all these people pointing out mistakes." It's just fun creating my own ridiculously named Midwestern small town.

This book gets into topics that you don't usually see in cozies like issues about race and the police. How did you decide to tackle these difficult but necessary topics even though cozy has its tropes?

It was really a fine line to walk because I respect that these are supposed to be fun and escapist because that's why I like them. At the same time, if I was going to write about a Filipina protagonist, it would be insincere to pretend that that's not a part [of their lives]. In the bigger books that features a character who is non-white, it's about that, right? It's about the struggle. I didn't want that.

She's a character who happens to be Filipino. It is not the story, but it informs who she is and how she moves [in] the world and also how the world views her. There were aspects that I kind of had to go back and tweak a little bit. Little things where she's having that interrogation with Detective Park and she has a realization that the way she's moving and speaking can come off really aggressive. So she has to physically take a step back.

It's those little things that maybe wouldn't occur to a white person in this kind of situation. I remember reading a cozy by an author—I otherwise really enjoy her work—where her protagonist got upset with this police officer, and she threw a handful of peanuts at him. [It] felt like the height of privilege. That would never happen to me; I could never get away with that.

You can acknowledge these things exist without making it about that necessarily. I want to stay true to the genre and what the expectations are. But I also

want to stay true to who the character is and how she would really have to move throughout the world.

What else do you want readers to know about the book?

I want readers to learn about and be interested about the cultural aspects I brought in. But I also want them to understand that I'm just one person and this is not representative of all Filipino and Filipino Americans because I feel that is a weight that a lot of marginalized creators carry. If you are the one voice, people assume "Oh, that is the way all Filipinos behave or how they all think or what they all care about." No, this is from my perspective. [Macapagal]'s not me. Everyone was kind of an amalgam of the experiences I've had growing up and people I knew growing up.

If it makes you more interested in reading other Filipino authors or trying Filipino food—our food is amazing—that's amazing. But also know that I'm just one voice and I really hope they take the time to find other voices that are out there.

ARSENIC AND ADOBO

By Mia P. Manansala

Berkley \$16.00

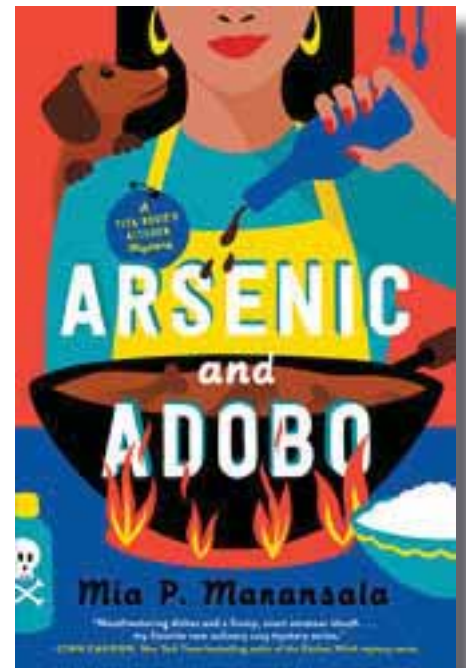
Rating: A-

Reviewed by Kristopher Zgorski

While it is not the work for which she received the William F. Deek-Malice Domestic Grant for unpublished writers, Mia P. Manansala's **ARSENIC AND ADOBO** feels so authentically from her soul, readers will recognize how this is the novel Manansala was destined to write – as only she could.

ARSENIC AND ADOBO falls squarely into the cozy mystery tradition with all the beloved tropes and expectations that come along with that designation, however, the focus on Filipino culture brings a fresh, new perspective readers will not have seen before – especially in the crime fiction genre.

Our main character – and eventual amateur sleuth – is Lila Macapagal, who has returned to Shady Palms, Illinois after a particularly difficult break-up only



to be challenged with helping to save her Tita Rosie's Kitchen, which is a family-run restaurant suffering a downturn in foot traffic. When one particularly vicious food critic – who also happens to be Lila's ex-boyfriend – dies in the restaurant, Lila's bad times suddenly get even more complicated. Fortunately for Lila, Filipino families stick together; no one is going to leave her out in the cold for a crime she didn't commit. And Lila is not going to let the Kitchen close!

Lila's family and friends are people whom readers will want to spend more time with. Notice that this did not say characters, and that is because Mia P. Manansala has that elusive gift that allows her to truly bring her fictional creations to life – as though they are occupying the house next door. Particularly delightful is the bantering, yet loving nature exhibited by the trio of April, Mae, and June (the Calendar Crew), the reciprocated loyalty of her best friend, Adeena, and the "required for a cozy" pet, the endearing doggie, Longganisa. Manansala could have easily settled on the diversity that the Filipino family brings to the table, but instead she populates her world with a rainbow's worth of varied individuals representing many backgrounds and experiences. Sort of like the real world, huh?

Mia P. Manansala also respects the intelligence of her audience. When

she uses terms that may be unfamiliar to readers, she finds clever ways to get the meaning across without having to spoon-feed each definition to her audience. The descriptions of the food alone are going to have readers seeking out the nearest Filipino restaurant for dinner... which they will eat without putting the book down. **ARSENIC AND ADOBO** is a fast and fun read, with a mystery that plays fair without being too obvious and just enough romantic tension to offset the murder. Readers will be clamoring for their next meal at Tita Rosie's Kitchen, so anticipation for the next in this series will be high.

First Mystery, Crime and Thriller Novels 2021

It has been many years since we have done a cover article on First Mysteries of the Year (DP #60, 2010). In that issue the cover article covered 80 first novels. It was interesting to see which authors out of the 80 have exhibited staying power. Leading that pack from the Class of 2010 would be Attica Locke, Alan Bradley, Stuart Neville, Brad Parks, Emily Griffiths, Emily Arsenault, Rory Clements, Harry Dolan, Gerald Elias, Lyndsay Faye, Sebastian Fitzek, Andrew Grant (now going by Andrew Child), Mark Greaney, Bryan Gruley, Matt Hilton, Malla Nunn, Kwei Quarrey, Anders Roslund, Robert Rotenberg, Roger Smith (now writing as James Rayburn), James Becker, Sean Black, Rebecca Cantrell, Jon Stock (now writing as J.S. Monroe) and Andrew Williams. I was surprised to see so many authors, all with a book published within the last two years or with a book coming out shortly.

Sadly fallen by the wayside have been Lou Manfredi, Claude Izner, Sophie Littlefield, Stefanie Pintoff, Michael Robertson, Daniel Suarez, Dennis Tafoya and Jamie Freveletti, all of whom have not had a book published for several years. But never say never. We may see them come back as so many other authors have done. Who knows

what they have accomplished during the pandemic?

It will be very interesting to look at this article several years down the road to see which of the 50 first-time authors listed herein have been able to create long-lasting, stable careers.

This time around, I would also like to do something a bit different – and that is include a No So New Newcomers Section of authors who may have published in the past but have just recently come to much wider attention of the mystery reader's scene. One of my favorite books of the year, **FIVE DECEMBERS** by James Kestrel, fits that Newcomer category.

You will notice that 22 out of 50 novels listed in this article are in the psychological/domestic suspense category. That is not surprising when one considers the wave of enthusiasm for such fiction, spurred on by novels such as **GONE GIRL** by Gillian Flynn, **THE GIRL ON THE TRAIN** by Paula Hawkins and **THE GUEST LIST** by Lucy Foley. Is it a wave that will pass or a strong current that is with us from now on?

Cozy Mystery

MANGO, MAMBO, and MURDER

By Raquel V. Reyes
Crooked Lane \$26.99

Rating: B-

Reviewed by Kristopher Zgorski

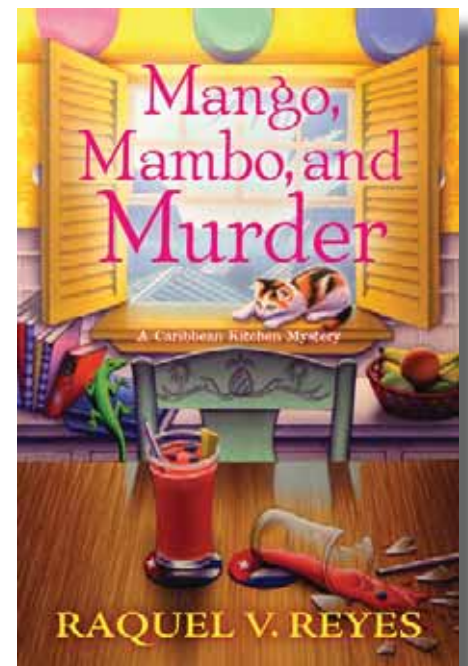
Like all corners of the crime fiction community, the cozy mystery sub-genre has recently seen an influx of new, diverse voices creating a sense of vitality and freshness that will hopefully bring more readers to the entire breadth of this incredibly multi-faceted style of writing, which is too-often maligned by those with little experience reading these popular novels. One of those new books making a deserved splash is **MANGO, MAMBO, AND MURDER** by Raquel V. Reyes.

MANGO, MAMBO, AND MURDER features Miriam Quinones-Smith, a Cuban-American food anthropologist who has recently relocated to Coral Shores, Miami with her husband and

toddler son. (Never mind the fact that the husband sometimes acts like a child himself.) The move may not be ideal for Miriam and her career – complicated by the fact that they are now closer to her mother-in-law (from hell) – but at least Miriam's best friend Alma is nearby for the needed support. Finding ways to ply her trade in this new location is challenging, but eventually Miriam takes on the role of "cooking expert" for a local morning show.

Raquel V. Reyes spends some time allowing readers to get to know the core group of characters and even includes some briefer interactions with acquaintances who will likely become more prominent as the series progresses. Cozy mysteries really are strengthened by the reader's connection to the characters, so this time investment pays off by allowing them to bond with Miriam before the mystery kicks in.

An unexplained death at an invitation-only luncheon is mysterious enough, but a second death certainly sends off alarm bells. When her best friend, Alma, becomes the prime suspect, this is the final impetus for Miriam to start an amateur investigation into the crimes. Due to her ability to blend in, the official detective on the case eventually enlists Miriam's help. Weaving some lighter moments with the more serious elements of the core



mystery allows for reading **MANGO, MAMBO, AND MURDER** to remain fun even when it explore heftier topics.

Reminiscent of how Mia P. Manasala handled the topic in her debut, **ARSENIC AND ADOBO**, Raquel V. Reyes uses food as the universal language. Her descriptions of traditional dishes will have readers salivating and the inclusion of some recipes at the end, make it that much easier to eat your way through this cozy novel.

Speaking of language, it may seem like a small thing, but Raquel V. Reyes is to be commended for having the bravery to allow the native language of her characters to shine. This does mean that some interactions are presented without translation, so readers unfamiliar with Spanish must use context clues to determine what is being said. However, this only adds to the authenticity of the work, especially given the Miami setting and helps to reinforce the fact that the United States is indeed a multi-lingual nation.

MANGO, MAMBO, AND MURDER is the first in the Caribbean Kitchen mystery series, leaving readers anxious for a return visit with Miriam and the gang.

Legal Thriller

WHILE JUSTICE SLEEPS

by Stacey Abrams
Doubleday, \$28.00

Avery Keene, a brilliant young law clerk for the legendary Justice Howard Wynn, is doing her best to hold her life together—excelling in an arduous job with the court while also dealing with a troubled family. When the shocking news breaks that Justice Wynn—the cantankerous swing vote on many current high-profile cases—has slipped into a coma, Avery’s life turns upside down. She is immediately notified that Justice Wynn has left instructions for her to serve as his legal guardian and power of attorney. Plunged into an explosive role she never anticipated, Avery finds that Justice Wynn had been secretly researching one of the most controversial cases before the court—a

proposed merger between an American biotech company and an Indian genetics firm, which promises to unleash breathtaking results in the medical field. She also discovers that Wynn suspected a dangerously related conspiracy that infiltrates the highest power corridors of Washington.

As political wrangling ensues in Washington to potentially replace the ailing judge whose life and survival Avery controls, she begins to unravel a carefully constructed, chesslike sequence of clues left behind by Wynn. She comes to see that Wynn had a much more personal stake in the controversial case and realizes his complex puzzle will lead her directly into harm’s way in order to find the truth.

Booklist Starred Review

Crime Novels

NORTHERN HEIST

by Richard O’Rawe
Melville House, \$26.99

Rating: A-

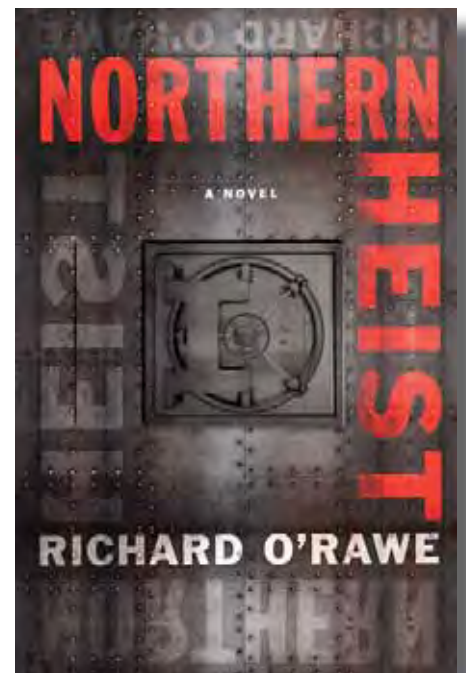
Reviewed by George Easter

James “Ructions” O’Hare and his uncle, Panzer O’Hare, are Irish crooks who specialize in bank robberies. For the last two years Ructions has been planning in great detail his biggest job yet. It involves getting inside information from Eleanor Proctor, the disgruntled wife of the bank manager (he cheated on her) and then executing a dual tiger kidnapping, which is holding hostage the families of the two bank employees holding master keys to the vault. Ructions will only employ a small number of people he trusts and they will only know their particular role and not the overall plan. Tight lips are emphasized.

The plan seems perfect if you don’t take into account the human element. And there are forces working against Ructions of which he is unaware.

The robbery is played out against the background of Belfast in 2004 and the uneasy peace between the IRA and other parties. If the IRA catches wind of the robbery it will demand a hefty tax on the proceeds.

NORTHERN HEIST is a very



intense novel with a number of subplots that could all go wrong. The author is a former member of the IRA and writes what he knows. His forte’ is intricate plotting. And getting the reader to root for a very flawed character is no mean feat.

This is a first-time author to keep one’s eye on. I expect great things from him in the future.

THE THOUSAND CRIMES OF MING TSU

by Tom Lin
Little, Brown, \$28.00

Orphaned young, Ming Tsu, the son of Chinese immigrants, is raised by the notorious leader of a California crime syndicate, who trains him to be his deadly enforcer. But when Ming falls in love with Ada, the daughter of a powerful railroad magnate, and the two elope, he seizes the opportunity to escape to a different life. Soon after, in a violent raid, the tycoon’s henchmen kidnap Ada and conscript Ming into service for the Central Pacific Railroad.

Battered, heartbroken, and yet defiant, Ming partners with a blind clairvoyant known only as the prophet. Together the two set out to rescue his wife and to exact revenge on the men who destroyed Ming, aided by a troupe of magic-show performers, some with supernatural powers, whom they meet

on the journey. Ming blazes his way across the West, settling old scores with a single-minded devotion that culminates in an explosive and unexpected finale. Booklist Starred Review, Amazon Editor's Pick

SIXTEEN HORSES

by Greg Buchanan

Flatiron Books, \$27.99

In Ilmarsh, England, local police detective Alec Nichols discovers sixteen horses' heads on a farm, each buried with a single eye facing the low winter sun. After Veterinary Forensics expert Cooper Allen travels to the scene, a pathogen is discovered lurking within the soil, and many of those who have come into contact with the corpses grow critically ill.

A series of crimes comes to light – disappearances, arson, and mutilations – and in the dark days that follow, the town slips into panic and paranoia. Everything is not as it seems. Anyone could be a suspect. And as Cooper finds herself unable to leave town, Alec is stalked by an unseen threat. The two investigators race to uncover the truth behind these frightened and insidious mysteries – no matter the cost.

EDGE OF THE GRAVE

by Robbie Morrison

Pan Macmillan, £12.99 (U.K only)

Glasgow, 1932. When the son-in-law of one of the city's wealthiest shipbuilders is found floating in the River Clyde with his throat cut, it falls to Inspector Jimmy Dreghorn to lead the murder case – despite sharing a troubled history with the victim's widow, Isla Lockhart.

From the flying fists and flashing blades of Glasgow's gangland underworld, to the backstabbing upper echelons of government and big business, Dreghorn and his partner 'Bonnie' Archie McDaid will have to dig deep into Glasgow society to find out who wanted the man dead and why.

All the while, a sadistic murderer stalks the post-war city leaving a trail of dead bodies in their wake. As the case deepens, will Dreghorn find the killer – or lose his own life in the process? Winner of the McIlvanney Prize for Best Scottish Crime Novel of 2021

Psychological\Domestic Suspense

THE PHOTOGRAPHER

By Mary Dixie Carter

Minotaur \$27.99

Rating: B-

Reviewed by Kristopher Zgorski

Photographs are virtually ubiquitous in all of our lives; we want to document those special moments – even sometimes the mundane ones – so that we can look back on them and reminisce. However, unless it is a selfie or a photograph we have taken ourselves, one rarely thinks about the person behind the camera lens. Mary Dixie Carter has written **THE PHOTOGRAPHER** to show us what a huge – and potentially deadly – mistake that lack of acknowledgement could potentially be.

Delta Dawn (yes, she was named for the Tanya Tucker song) makes a living by photographing the special events of others. Her specialty is children's birthday parties, where she seems to have an uncanny knack for capturing the most random candid shot that completely expresses the emotions of the moment. As **THE PHOTOGRAPHER** opens, Delta is working for Amelia and Fritz Straub, hired to document their daughter Natalie's eleventh birthday. While roaming their gorgeous home, Delta cannot help but marvel at the sophisticated and privileged life this family leads. It is a life she would do just about anything to obtain for herself.

Fortunately for Delta – and for Delta only – Amelia feels a kinship with this talented artist. After inviting Delta to babysit at the last minute, the two women begin a friendship that eventually exposes their most heartfelt struggles. The more Amelia begins to rely on Delta, the clearer it becomes that there may be an agenda at play here that far exceeds sharing chardonnay after a busy day.

Mary Dixie Carter is laser-focused on the narrative about Delta and the Straub family. She keeps this book streamlined and addictive by doing away with almost anything that does not deal directly with this main plot. The lack of multiple subplots will surprise some readers, but as they read the reason becomes all too clear. This is an author who wants to immerse her reader in Delta Dawn's obsessive mind so completely that even as we watch her do horrible things, it is impossible to look away. **THE PHOTOGRAPHER** only succeeds if the reader connects with Delta Dawn, however, that connection can take many forms – curiosity, empathy, abhorrence, sympathy, fear, fascination, or possibly even for some, admiration (now that is a scary thought!) Whatever that bond is for each reader, that is what carries this narrative along to its shocking conclusion.

In crime fiction, the unstable and obsessive character is often a male stalker of some sort. By simply switching the gender, Mary Dixie Carter is able breath new energy into a trope that could easily have seemed dated and rehashed. But rest assured, that while Delta Dawn has many traits we have seen in other characters in the crime fiction canon, Mary Dixie Carter has somehow made her feel fresh, unusual, and utterly dangerous. Every page turn is like another detour around crazy town.

Mary Dixie Carter's **THE PHOTOGRAPHER** is a fast read that consumes the mind of the reader until the final page is turned. The truly scary realization is that after witnessing this snapshot into the mind of an obsessive narcissist, the reader may never look at a simple photograph the same way again.



Mary Dixie Carter

THE ANATOMY OF DESIRE

by L. R. Dorn

William Morrow \$27.99

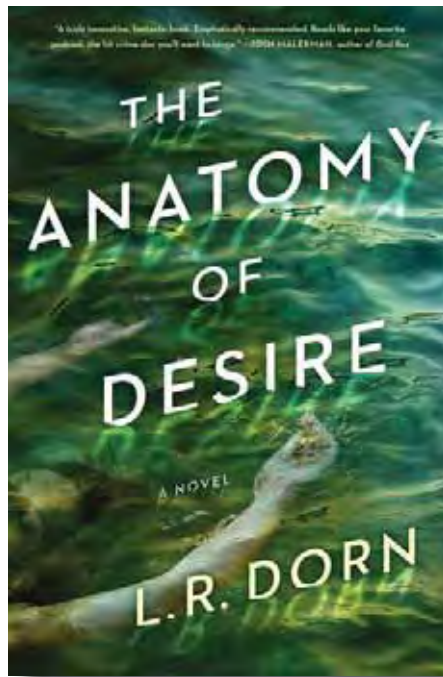
Rating: A-**Reviewed by Kristopher Zgorski**

Experimental narratives have long been part of the literary tradition, which also means they have made their way into the crime fiction realm. Recent books like Janice Hallett's **THE APPEAL** (told entirely via email communications) or modern classics like JJ Abram/Doug Dorst's **S** (using handwritten marginalia and loose ephemera to expand the narrative) and the Edgar-Award-winning Young Adult novel, **SADIE**, by Courtney Summers (which incorporates a multi-voice podcast between the singular voice of the book's protagonist) all prove that there are countless ways to alter the traditional novel format in order to tell the most compelling story possible. The writing team using the moniker L. R. Dorn will most certainly be added to this list with their debut, **THE ANATOMY OF DESIRE**.

THE ANATOMY OF DESIRE is presented as a transcript to a true crime documentary with the speaker of each monologue or statement clearly identified, followed by what that person actually had to say. These statements range in size from a mere sentence to longer diatribes. There are longer sections that transcribe what happens in the courtroom, but again only via the use of dialogue. Since it is immediately clear that the novel serves as the foundation for a fictional docuseries, readers are conscious of the fact that the writer/director Duncan McMillan is manipulating the proceedings by choosing what is revealed and when it is disclosed to the audience in order to elevate the tension in his finished product.

At the heart of the story is Cleo Ray, a young woman who was raised in a strict, conservative environment by ultra-religious parents. After asserting her independence, she has established herself as a fitness expert and has risen in the ranks to become one of the world's most famous social media influencers. When a leisurely canoe excursion in Inyo County, California (an extremely conservative location) ends with Cleo on the run and Rebecca Alden – the friend she was with – drowned, that perfect life begins to crumble to dust.

The docuseries transcript highlights



key moments in the narrative from Cleo's arrest to the public outcry, the trial – with both the prosecution and defense case presented, and finally the resolution and aftermath. The courtroom aspect of the novel works well to keep readers flipping the pages anxious to know what the verdict will be. Reader's loyalty will no doubt shift multiple times throughout the exposé. Since there is no exposition in **THE ANATOMY OF DESIRE**, L. R. Dorn expects the reader to do the work of building the scenes in their mind, imagining how they unfold, and ultimately drawing their own conclusions. The two authors that make up L. R. Dorn both have backgrounds in screenwriting, which serves them well here. They have the skills necessary to bring characters fully to life with only the use of their spoken words and dialogue. Readers may find it a bit disconcerting at the start, but it is not very long before one could identify each speaker without even needing the provided attribution tags.

THE ANATOMY OF DESIRE is inspired by Theodore Dreiser's *An American Tragedy*. Readers familiar with that classic work will notice similarities in names and set-pieces from that earlier work, but L. R. Dorn is intent on making this a tragic morality tale for the modern age, so topics like the power of social media, celebrity

idolatry, fluid sexuality, and the clash between conservative ideals and liberal freedoms are forefront.

THE ANATOMY OF DESIRE would be a success even for a veteran author, but the fact that this is a debut is quite astonishing and portends for greater things in the future. There are certain to be many fans anxious to see what comes next from this inventive writing duo.

Starred Reviews in Publishers Weekly and Library Journal.

NEVER SAW ME COMING

by Vera Kurian

Park Row, \$27.99

It would be easy to underestimate Chloe Sevre... She's a freshman honor student, a legging-wearing hot girl next door, who also happens to be a psychopath. She spends her time on yogalates, frat parties and plotting to kill Will Bachman, a childhood friend who grievously wronged her.

Chloe is one of seven students at her DC-based college who are part of an unusual clinical study of psychopaths—students like herself who lack empathy and can't comprehend emotions like fear or guilt. The study, led by a renowned psychologist, requires them to wear smart watches that track their moods and movements.

When one of the students in the study is found murdered in the psychology building, a dangerous game of cat and mouse begins, and Chloe goes from hunter to prey. As she races to identify the killer and put her own plan for revenge into action, she'll be forced to decide if she can trust any of her fellow psychopaths—and everybody knows you should never trust a psychopath.

Booklist Starred Review

THE FIRST DAY OF SPRING

by Nancy Tucker

Riverhead Books, \$27.00

Chrissie is eight and she has a secret: she has just killed a boy. The feeling made her belly fizz like soda pop. Her playmates are tearful and their mothers are terrified, keeping them locked indoors. But Chrissie rules the roost -- she's the best at wall-walking, she knows

how to get free candy, and now she has a feeling of power that she never gets at home, where food is scarce and attention scarcer.

Twenty years later, adult Chrissie is living in hiding under a changed name. A single mother, all she wants is for her daughter to have the childhood she herself was denied. That's why the threatening phone calls are so terrifying. People are looking for them, the past is catching up, and Chrissie fears losing the only thing in this world she cares about, her child. Publishers Weekly Starred Review, Amazon Editor's Pick

MADAM

by Phoebe Wynne
St. Martin's, \$27.99

For 150 years, high above rocky Scottish cliffs, Caldonbrae Hall has sat untouched, a beacon of excellence in an old ancestral castle. A boarding school for girls, it promises that the young women lucky enough to be admitted will emerge "resilient and ready to serve society."

Into its illustrious midst steps Rose Christie: a 26-year-old Classics teacher, Caldonbrae's new head of the department, and the first hire for the school in over a decade. Rose quickly discovers that behind the school's elitist veneer lies an impenetrable, starkly traditional culture that she struggles to reconcile with her modernist beliefs--not to mention her commitment to educating "girls for the future."

It also doesn't take long for Rose to suspect that there's more to the secret circumstances surrounding the abrupt departure of her predecessor--a woman whose ghost lingers everywhere--than anyone is willing to let on. In her search for this mysterious former teacher, Rose instead uncovers the darkness that beats at the heart of Caldonbrae, forcing her to confront the true extent of the school's nefarious purpose, and her own role in perpetuating it. Amazon Editor's Pick

I DON'T FORGIVE YOU

by Aggie Blum Thompson
Forge, \$15.99

An accomplished photographer and

the devoted mom of an adorable little boy, Allie Ross has just moved to an upscale DC suburb, the kind of place where parenting feels like a competitive sport. Allie's desperate to make a good first impression. Then she's framed for murder.

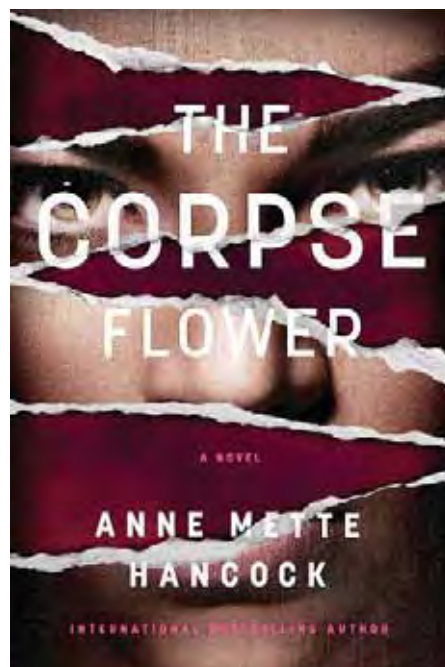
It all starts at a neighborhood party when a local dad corners Allie and calls her by an old, forgotten nickname from her dark past. The next day, he is found dead.

Soon, the police are knocking at her door, grilling her about a supposed Tinder relationship with the man, and pulling up texts between them. She learns quickly that she's been hacked and someone is impersonating her online. Her reputation?socially and professionally?is at stake; even her husband starts to doubt her. As the killer closes in, Allie must reach back into a past she vowed to forget in order to learn the shocking truth of who is destroying her life.

THE CORPSE FLOWER

Anne Mette Hancock
Crooked Lane, \$26.99

Danish journalist Heloise Kaldan is in the middle of a nightmare. One of her sources has been caught lying, and she could lose her job over it. Then she receives the first in a series of cryptic and unsettling letters from a woman named Anna Kiel.



Wanted in connection with the fatal stabbing of a young lawyer three years earlier, Anna hasn't been seen by anyone since she left the crime scene covered in blood. The police think she's fled the country until homicide detective Erik Schäfer comes up with a lead after the reporter who originally wrote about the case is found murdered in his apartment. Has Anna Kiel struck again, or is there more than one killer at large? And why does every clue point directly to Heloise Kaldan?

Meanwhile, the letters keep coming, and they hint at a connection between Anna and Heloise. As Heloise starts digging deeper, she realizes that to tell Anna's story she will have to revisit the darkest parts of her own past--confronting someone she swore she'd never see again. Kirkus Starred Review.

THE SANATORIUM

Sarah Pearse

Pamela Dorman Books, \$27.00

Half-hidden by forest and overshadowed by threatening peaks, Le Sommet has always been a sinister place. Long plagued by troubling rumors, the former abandoned sanatorium has since been renovated into a five-star minimalist hotel.

An imposing, isolated getaway spot high up in the Swiss Alps is the last place Elin Warner wants to be. But Elin's taken time off from her job as a detective, so when her estranged brother, Isaac, and his fiancée, Laure, invite her to celebrate their engagement at the hotel, Elin really has no reason not to accept.

Arriving in the midst of a threatening storm, Elin immediately feels on edge--there's something about the hotel that makes her nervous. And when they wake the following morning to discover Laure is missing, Elin must trust her instincts if they hope to find her. With the storm closing off all access to the hotel, the longer Laure stays missing, the more the remaining guests start to panic.

Elin is under pressure to find Laure, but no one has realized yet that another woman has gone missing. And she's the only one who could have warned them just how much danger they are all in.

Booklist Starred Review, Amazon
Editor's Pick

ALL HER LITTLE SECRETS

by Wanda M. Morris
William Morrow, \$27.99

Ellice Littlejohn seemingly has it all: an Ivy League law degree, a well-paying job as a corporate attorney in midtown Atlanta, great friends, and a “for fun” relationship with a rich, charming executive, who just happens to be her white boss. But everything changes one cold January morning when Ellice arrives in the executive suite and finds him dead with a gunshot to his head.

And then she walks away like nothing has happened. Why? Ellice has been keeping a cache of dark secrets, including a small-town past and a kid brother who's spent time on the other side of the law. She can't be thrust into the spotlight—again.

But instead of grieving this tragedy, people are gossiping, the police are getting suspicious, and Ellice, the company's lone black attorney, is promoted to replace her boss. While the opportunity is a dream-come-true, Ellice just can't shake the feeling that something is off.

When she uncovers shady dealings inside the company, Ellice is trapped in an impossible ethical and moral dilemma. Suddenly, Ellice's past and present lives collide as she launches into a pulse-pounding race to protect the brother she tried to save years ago and stop a conspiracy far more sinister than she could have ever imagined.

WHO IS MAUD DIXON?

by Alexandra Andrews
Little Brown, \$28.00

Rating: C-

Reviewed by Larry Gandle

Florence Darrow works as an editor's assistant in a Manhattan publishing house. She desperately wants to be a successful novelist. When she is told that she doesn't have what it takes, she leaves and, apparently by chance, becomes the assistant of a major best-selling author, Helen Wilcox. When Helen decides that they must travel to Morocco to do research on her next book, things get extremely murky. The



plot eventually becomes a cat and mouse game between the two of them. The result can be fatal for one of them.

It took almost half the book before the plot takes a turn into a somewhat more interesting realm. Once in Morocco, the story heats up. However, the plot becomes increasingly contrived, convoluted and any semblance of realism must be put aside. These women are two of the most odious main characters a reader will come across. Characters are mostly stereotypes and the two main protagonists are totally unrealistic but serve the idiotic plot well. Perhaps if the reader wants to totally shut off their brain, this book may be acceptable entertainment but will never rise above the level of a cartoon.

Starred Reviews in Kirkus, Publishers Weekly & Booklist

WHERE THE TRUTH LIES

by Anna Bailey
Atria Books, \$27.00

When seventeen-year-old Abigail goes missing, her best friend Emma, compelled by the guilt of leaving her alone at a party in the woods, sets out to discover the truth about what happened. The police initially believe Abi ran away, but Emma doesn't believe that her friend would leave without her, and when officers find disturbing evidence in the

nearby woods, the festering secrets and longstanding resentment of both Abigail's family and the people of Whistling Ridge, Colorado begin to surface with devastating consequences.

Among those secrets: Abi's older brother Noah's passionate, dangerous love for the handsome Rat, a recently arrived Romanian immigrant who has recently made his home in the trailer park in town; her younger brother Jude's feeling that he knows information he should tell the police, if only he could put it into words; Abi's father's mercurial, unpredictable rages and her mother's silence. Then there is the rest of Whistling Ridge, where a charismatic preacher advocates for God's love in language that mirrors violence, under the sway of the powerful businessman who rules the town, insular and wary of outsiders.

But Abi had secrets, too, and the closer Emma grows to unraveling the past, the farther she feels from her friend. And in a tinder box of small-town rage, and all it will take is just one spark—the truth of what really happened that night—to change their community forever.

WALKING THROUGH NEEDLES

by Heather Levy
Polis Books, \$26.00

Rating: B+

Reviewed by Kristopher Zgorski

One of the joys of being a voracious reader is that it allows one to explore new writers on the scene, without ignoring our tried-and-true favorites. After all, a new writer today could very well be a legend of tomorrow. There is often a freedom in debuts, a sense that the writer is willing to take chances that perhaps someone further along in their career might not be willing to risk. Take for example Heather Levy's **WALKING THROUGH NEEDLES** – a book that stands out as quite unique among a cookie-cutter world of psychological crime novels.

The moment one begins reading **WALKING THROUGH NEEDLES**, it is clear this is going to be a raw and unflinching journey – as emotional for the reader as it is for the characters

within story. Heather Levy's authorial voice has an immediate, unapologetic, and erotic-tinged vibe that simultaneously lulls and lures any reader willing to give consent. And really, readers should know going in that this is a deeply disturbing story that could contain triggers related to many sexual topics, so please proceed with caution.

WALKING THROUGH NEEDLES is told by two characters – one female and one male – and takes place primarily in two time-periods. Each of these characters – step-siblings Sam and Eric – is given a voice in both time-periods, so readers are able to witness their growth and evolution across the years. In 1994, these two characters are in their later teens, a time of great confusion and experimentation and by the time readers see them again in 2009, life lessons have been learned and hopefully some wisdom gained. Some of the strongest passages involve the older versions of these two, reflecting on their youth – something all humans are prone to do, however the past these two share is a traumatic one. Judging whether this forced reflection is truly healing is a debate that will be waged for years, but there is little doubt that Heather Levy allows it all to unfold before the reader's eyes.

In a nutshell, the past presents a blended family dynamic that is troubled (at best) and toxic (at worst), leading to events that cause Sam and Eric to lose contact for years. Their lives are once again up-ended when a murder in 2009 leads to Eric becoming the prime suspect and Sam wanting – needing – to defend him, even though doing so may mean exposing some secrets Sam would much rather never reveal.

In many ways, this seems like a book that only Heather Levy could have written. She is fearless in tackling a myriad of difficult themes and topics, but also brave enough to include some non-traditional sexual kinks – always managing to do both with compassion, understanding, and lack of judgement. While this book may be too dark from some readers, it does welcome an extremely talented crime writer to the fold and watching how her style develops

over the next few novels is going to be fascinating.

YES, DADDY

by Jonathan Parks-Ramage
Mariner, \$25.00

Rating: B-

Reviewed by Kristopher Zgorski

It appears we are in a renaissance period for crime fiction from LGBTQ+ perspectives. It is not that these stories never existed before, but now we are witnessing the end of the days when they were deemed “special interest” or hidden away in the farthest reaches of the local bookstore. Just as we are seeing with *Writers of Color*, other marginalized voices are resonating with a wider swath of the reading public. Many authors are taking the existing sub-genres and the tropes that are so familiar to fans of crime fiction and disrupting their expectations by introducing LGBTQ+ characters and themes in ways that are both creative and impactful.

Take for example, Jonathan Parks-Ramage's **YES, DADDY**. This novel weaves threads of both domestic suspense and gothic romance together with the coming-of-age tale of a young gay man trying to find his footing in world where his youthfulness and naivety become burdens that others abuse, flaunt, and ultimately weaponize.

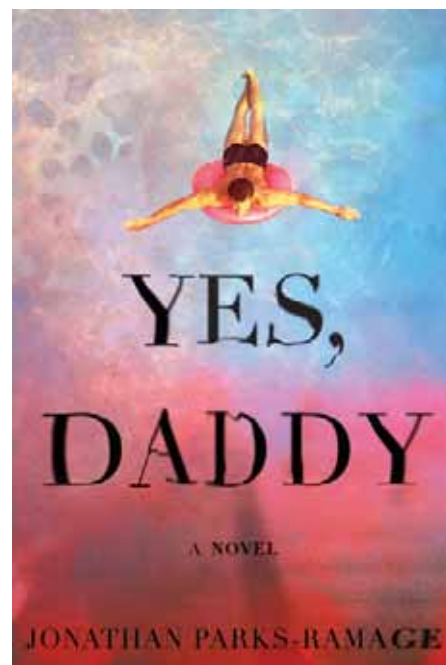
Jonah Keller yearns to one day be a

famous playwright, but he is tired of the struggles necessary to reach this goal. He knows first-hand that those with money have a better chance of gaining the power and influence needed to succeed. When he sees an opportunity to meet Pulitzer-Prize-winning playwright Richard Shriver, he hopes that maybe his luck is changing. But, instead of a mentorship, Jonah and the much-older Richard begin a steamy love affair. Lulled by the lavish treatment bestowed upon him, Jonah is oblivious to the many signs that this fantasy lifestyle conceals much darker truths. When Richard invites Jonah to his secluded compound in the Hamptons, what should be a relaxing getaway instead becomes the start of a nightmare.

Domestic Suspense fans will recognize the dynamic of the powerful man who wants to control every aspect of the relationship, all while manipulating minor details in subtle ways. Meanwhile, it is impossible not to think back to the gothic novels of Victoria Holt and Phyllis A. Whitney when witnessing Jonah being swept away – not to a castle or monastery – but to an estate in the ultra-rich Hamptons. There is even a direct reference to Daphne du Maurier's **REBECCA** within the novel. By centering Jonah Keller in the role of the virginal “ingénue,” Jonathan Parks-Ramage shatters the illusion that only women are victims of this type of abuse and control.

It is even possible to list off the trope elements within **YES, DADDY**. Everything from gaslighting and complicity to self-esteem issues and trauma, yet because they are detailed in the context of a gay relationship, these elements feel fresh and untested. **YES, DADDY** leaves readers with the sense the regardless of gender, unsolicited magnanimous gestures often come with hefty price tags. At one point, Richard even says to Jonah “The things we worship eat us alive” and that will resonate with readers in profound ways as they follow along on Jonah's unfortunate journey.

YES, DADDY speeds along at a propulsive pace and the fact that Jonathan Parks-Ramage eliminates any extraneous scenes or information make



this a speedy read; however, readers will find themselves ruminating on much that occurred long after closing the cover. Without a doubt, those readers will eagerly await Jonathan Parks-Ramage's next novel.

Booklist Starred Review

BEFORE THE RUINS

by Victoria Gosling
Henry Holt, \$26.99

It's the summer of 1996 and school's out forever for Andy, her boyfriend Marcus, her best friend Peter, and Em. When Andy's alcoholic mother predicts the apocalypse, the four teenagers decide to see out the end of the world at a deserted manor house, the site of a historic unsolved mystery. There they meet David – charming and unreliable, he seems to have appeared out of nowhere.

David presents an irresistible lure for both Andy and Peter and complicates the dynamics of their lifelong friendship. When the group learns that a diamond necklace, stolen fifty years ago, might still be somewhere on the manor grounds, the Game – half treasure hunt, half friendly deception – begins. But the Game becomes much bigger than the necklace, growing to encompass years of secrets, lies, and, ultimately, one terrible betrayal.

Publishers Weekly Starred Review,
Amazon Editor's Pick

ALL HER LITTLE SECRETS

by Wanda M. Morris
Morrow, \$27.99

Ellice Littlejohn seemingly has it all: an Ivy League law degree, a well-paying job as a corporate attorney in midtown Atlanta, great friends, and a "for fun" relationship with a rich, charming executive, who just happens to be her white boss. But everything changes one cold January morning when Ellice arrives in the executive suite and finds him dead with a gunshot to his head. And then she walks away like nothing has happened. Why? Ellice has been keeping a cache of dark secrets, including a small-town past and a kid brother who's spent time on the other side of the law. She can't be thrust into the spotlight—again.

Booklist Starred Review

And the steady stream of books with "Girl" in the title is still flowing unabated.

GIRL, 11

by Amy Suiter Clarke
Mariner, \$25.00

Rating: A-

Reviewed by Jeff Pople

Set in Minneapolis, *GIRL, 11* joins other recent books, such as Megan Goldin's *Night Swim*, in weaving the format and tension of a true crime podcast into a contemporary crime novel. The story follows podcaster Elle Castillo as she investigates a decades-old serial killer cold case. The Countdown Killer (TCK) terrorised Minneapolis over a four year period as he targeted increasingly younger women and girls, before abruptly stopping. Elle is not convinced that TCK is dead and when a listener promises her a lead to the killer's identity she rushes to his apartment, only to find his murdered body. As new killings occur Elle is convinced that TCK is back, but the police are reluctant to believe her, and she finds herself isolated as she tries to finally track the killer down before another young girl dies.

This is a gripping, well written and briskly paced thriller that quickly draws the reader in and keeps them engaged until the last page. Amy skilfully alternates the telling between Elle's podcasts about the earlier murders and her current experiences while trying to unearth TCK's identity. The use of the chatty, informative podcasts is a clever device that allows Amy to introduce background information smoothly and quickly into the story without the slowing pace. The staging of the podcasts also allows for the information to be released in a way that maximises the suspense and keeps the reader engaged and occasionally surprised.

The contemporary investigation into the killings linked to the podcast is also well handled, and Amy ramps up the tension as the book races to an exciting and bloody climax. Although some of the twists are guessable, the book certainly delivers a couple of good surprises. The characters are well crafted, and Amy keeps a clear focus on the killer's



victims and the effects of his actions, rather than revelling in his gruesome actions.

Overall, this is a very assured debut. There is the occasional lapse in credibility, and Elle becomes a bit annoying as a character as the book progresses, but it is easy to ignore these quibbles and continue reading to the powerful conclusion.

DEAD DEAD GIRLS

by Nekesa Afia
Berkley Prime Crime, \$16.00, June 2021

Rating: C-

Reviewed by Ted Hertel

In 1916 teenager Louise Lloyd was kidnapped, managing to free herself after getting the drop on the criminal who took her and several other young girls captive. Ten years pass and Louise, seemingly having put the past behind her, has managed to settle into a normal life. She works in a Harlem café by day and spends her nights in speakeasies and dance clubs. But suddenly young Black women like Louise are being murdered, often left in front of the place she works. After trouble with the white cops, she is given a choice: help solve the case or end up in jail. The cops think a Black woman will be more readily trusted by other Blacks, so she takes the assignment. But soon she and her family become the target for the killer.

This debut novel, labelled “A Harlem Renaissance Mystery,” was a disappointment. I knew little about the Harlem Renaissance before I started the novel and by the time I finished it, I knew nothing more. The setting, which should have been wonderfully evocative, was instead generic. Generic nightclubs, stores, restaurants, housing, and employment, all put together without any feel for an era or a locale. Further, the crimes were ordinary in both execution (pardon the pun) and description. Oddly, there was no outpouring of grief over the frequent deaths nor was there even superficial concern in the community about them. The killer was soon apparent. When the murders were solved, some things were still left unexplained. This read more like a young adult novel than a full-blown in-depth examination of motives, sort of like Nancy Drew Goes to Harlem.

The strongest part of the book was the attention paid to Louise’s family, particularly the love given by her to her younger twin sisters. The family dynamics were well-handled, showing the strong values they held in their lives. It’s too bad that such detail could not have been applied to the rest of the novel.

NICE GIRLS

by Catherine Dang

William Morrow, \$27.99

Mary used to be such a nice girl. She was the resident whiz kid of Liberty Lake, Minnesota—the quiet, chubby teen with the scholarship to an Ivy League school. But three years later, “Ivy League Mary” is back—a thinner, cynical, restless failure who was kicked out of Cornell at the beginning of her senior year and won’t tell anyone why. Taking a job at the local grocery store, Mary tries to make sense of her life’s sharp downward spiral.

Then beautiful, magnetic Olivia Willand goes missing. A rising social media star, Olivia is admired by everyone in Liberty Lake—except Mary. Once Olivia’s best friend, Mary knows better than anyone that behind the Instagram persona hides a willful, manipulative girl with sharp edges. As the town obsesses over perfect, lovely Olivia, Mary

wonders if her disappearance might be tied to another missing person: nineteen-year-old DeMaria Jackson, whose case has been widely dismissed as a runaway.

Who is the real Olivia Willand, and where did she go? What happened to DeMaria? As Mary pries at the cracks in the careful facades surrounding the two missing girls, old wounds will bleed fresh and force her to confront a horrible truth.

MY SWEET GIRL

by Amanda Jayatissa

Berkley, \$26.00

Ever since she was adopted from a Sri Lankan orphanage, Paloma has had the best of everything—schools, money, and parents so perfect that she fears she’ll never live up to them.

Now at thirty years old and recently cut off from her parents’ funds, she decides to sublet the second bedroom of her overpriced San Francisco apartment to Arun, who recently moved from India. Paloma has to admit, it feels good helping someone find their way in America—that is until Arun discovers Paloma’s darkest secret, one that could jeopardize her own fragile place in this country.

Before Paloma can pay Arun off, she finds him face down in a pool of blood. She flees the apartment but by the time

the police arrive, there’s no body—and no evidence that Arun ever even existed in the first place.

Paloma is terrified this is all somehow tangled up in the desperate actions she took to escape Sri Lanka so many years ago. Did Paloma’s secret die with Arun or is she now in greater danger than ever before? Amazon Editor’s Pick

GIRL A

by Abigail Dean

Viking, \$27.00

Lex Gracie doesn’t want to think about her family. She doesn’t want to think about growing up in her parents’ House of Horrors. And she doesn’t want to think about her identity as Girl A: the girl who escaped, the eldest sister who freed her older brother and four younger siblings. It’s been easy enough to avoid her parents—her father never made it out of the House of Horrors he created, and her mother spent the rest of her life behind bars. But when her mother dies in prison and leaves Lex and her siblings the family home, she can’t run from her past any longer. Together with her sister, Evie, Lex intends to turn the home into a force for good. But first she must come to terms with her siblings—and with the childhood they shared.

What begins as a propulsive tale of escape and survival becomes a gripping psychological family story about the shifting alliances and betrayals of sibling relationships—about the secrets our siblings keep, from themselves and each other. Who have each of these siblings become? How do their memories defy or galvanize Lex’s own? As Lex pins each sibling down to agree to her family’s final act, she discovers how potent the spell of their shared family mythology is, and who among them remains in its thrall and who has truly broken free.

Booklist Starred Review, Amazon Editor’s Pick

GIRLS WITH BRIGHT FUTURES

by Tracy Dobmeier &

Wendy Katzman

Sourcebooks, \$16.99

College admissions season at Seattle’s Elliott Bay Academy is marked



by glowing acceptances from top-tier institutions and students as impressive as their parents are ambitious. But when Stanford alerts the school it's allotting only one spot to EBA for their incoming class, three mothers discover the competition is more cutthroat than they could have imagined.

Tech giant Alicia turns to her fortune and status to fight for her reluctant daughter's place at the top. Kelly, a Stanford alum, leverages her PTA influence and insider knowledge to bulldoze the path for her high-strung daughter. And Maren makes three: single, broke, and ill-equipped to battle the elite school community aligning to bring her superstar down.

That's when, days before applications are due, one of the girls suffers a near-fatal accident, one that doesn't appear to be an accident at all.

As the community spirals out of control, three women will have to decide what lines they're willing to cross to secure their daughters' futures...and keep buried the secrets that threaten to destroy far more than just college dream

Publisher's Weekly Starred Review

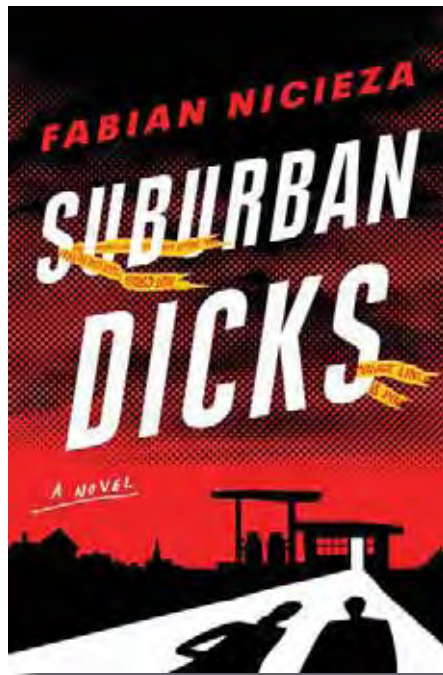
THE OTHER BLACK GIRL

by Zakiya Dalila Harris

Atria, \$27.00

Twenty-six-year-old editorial assistant Nella Rogers is tired of being the only Black employee at Wagner Books. Fed up with the isolation and micro-aggressions, she's thrilled when Harlem-born and bred Hazel starts working in the cubicle beside hers. They've only just started comparing natural hair care regimens, though, when a string of uncomfortable events elevates Hazel to Office Darling, and Nella is left in the dust. Then the notes begin to appear on Nella's desk: LEAVE WAGNER. NOW. It's hard to believe Hazel is behind these hostile messages. But as Nella starts to spiral and obsess over the sinister forces at play, she soon realizes that there's a lot more at stake than just her career.

Detection Novels



SUBURBAN DICKS

by Fabian Niecieza

Putnam, \$27.00, June

Rating: A-

Reviewed by George Easter

Strap yourself in for a wildly improbable and enormously fun ride.

Andie Stern seems like your typical suburban New Jersey housewife with four rambunctious kids and one more on the way. Her days are spent carting her kids around from one activity to another – day after day of the same old, same old. Andie pines for her former career as a budding (and brilliant) FBI profiler, but those days are beyond the horizon in her rear-view mirror.

One day, one of her kids desperately has to go “number 1,” so she pulls into a gas station. Two bumbling, rookie cops are there, just having arrived to find a murdered attendant. They won't let Andie use the restrooms and her daughter can't hold it any longer and pees all over the crime scene.

During all this fuss Andie has observed what has occurred there and has formulated hypothesis and conclusions that differ with the police version released the next day.

This is where the story takes a huge leap. Andie ties a seemingly innocuous conversation with girlfriends about their town's denial of permits to build swimming pools with the murder of the gas

station attendant (who is from India). Some of you might find that leap highly improbable (it is) and stop reading right there. You'll miss a lot of fun if you do.

Andie teams up with local, disgraced journalist Kenneth Lee, whom she knew in high school, and together they go in search of a murderer and investigate a decades-old conspiracy.

In mysteries there are some protagonists that just stand out by their force of personality and their likeability. Andie Stern is such a character. You may cringe at her maternal skills, but she is so entertaining that I became an instant fan.

Beware: there is quite a bit of New Jersey profanity with Andie being the family's biggest contributor to their swear words jar.

I can see Janet Evanovich fans flocking to this title. The debut garnered Starred Reviews in **Kirkus** and **Publishers Weekly**

STEEL FEAR

by Brandon Webb & John David Mann

Bantam, \$28.00

Rating: A-

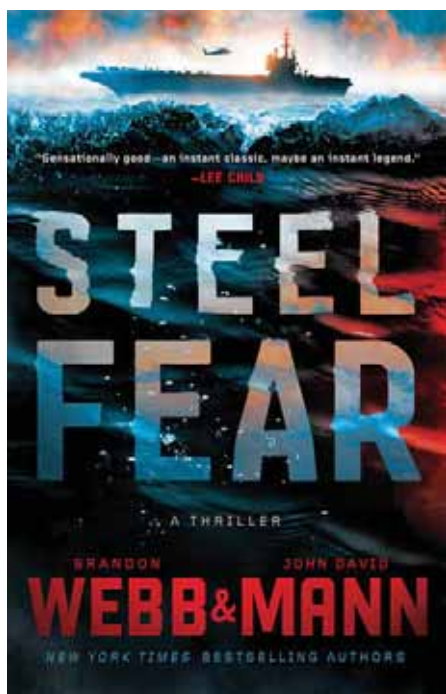
Reviewed by George Easter

If you look at the cover art and combine it with the title **STEEL FEAR**, you might think that this novel is a war-action thriller. It is NOT. It is a murder mystery set on the modern-day U.S. aircraft carrier, the Abraham Lincoln.

The ship is at the near end of a months-long deployment and will shortly be sailing to San Diego. The morale of the crew is poor, due mostly to the inept leadership of Captain Eagleberg. And this is one of the first things that Navy SEAL sniper Finn (no last name, unless you count the X on his enlistment papers) notices as he comes on board for a ride home.

There is a mystery surrounding Finn's orders and his failed attempts to reach his platoon and his best friend Kennedy. Why is he being sent home? And why didn't they just put him on a plane? Haunted by gaps in his memory, Finn wonders what really happened to cause civilian deaths on his last assignment.

Finn is a first-rate soldier, but what



he really excels in is observation – and the ability to make quick and accurate deductions from what he sees. To get the lay of the “land,” Finn spends his first few days roaming the huge ship and learning its layout to the very last detail.

Most of the narrative is seen through Finn’s eyes, but there are two other main characters whose thoughts we are privy to: Monica Halsey, a helicopter pilot who is reeling from the death of a close friend and fellow helicopter pilot; and Command Master Chief Robbie Jackson, a good man and a better officer, who feels compelled (against orders) to investigate the disappearance of two crew members, apparent suicides.

When more murders occur, Finn comes under suspicion.

Reading a mystery set on an aircraft carrier is something I’ve never experienced before and I found the setting fascinating. **STEEL FEAR** is a riff on the oft-used locked room puzzle. But what a huge locked room! And there are 6,000 people on board, which makes for an impossible number of suspects. However, the authors are up to the task and what we get is a very exciting and well-thought-out mystery. Webb & Mann have written a number of non-fiction works, but this is their first novel. What a great start!

There are a couple of chapters at the

end of the book which serve as a preview of the next book in what will become a series. Can’t wait to read it. This novel received Starred Reviews in **Booklist** and **Publishers Weekly**.

THE ART OF DEATH

by David Fennell
Zaffre, £12.99

Rating: B

Reviewed by Jeff Poppel

British author David Fennell makes a solid crime debut with his novel about a serial killer who likes to display his victims as pieces of art.

THE ART OF DEATH starts in macabre fashion with newly promoted D.I. Grace Archer being called to manage the crowd around some gruesome art exhibits that have been left in a public area. She quickly realises, however, that the displays are not mannequins, but the bodies of dead homeless men floating in formaldehyde. Although she is not liked at Charing Cross station where she has been promoted to, Grace is assigned to the murder investigation and finds herself racing against time to stop the killer/artist known as @nonymous before he strikes again.

Fennell ably leads the reader down some twisty, dark paths as the book powers its way to a suspenseful conclusion. There are some horrific moments and Fennell is good at conveying the impact of the killings on the families of those killed. The characters are generally well crafted, particularly Grace and her offside DS Harry Quinn, although a couple, most notably Grace’s rival DI Rodney Hicks, verge on caricature.

In all, **THE ART OF DEATH** is an entertaining thriller that will appeal to those who enjoy books about tenacious police detectives tracking down deviously smart serial killers, ala M. W. Craven and Mark Billingham. I picked the identity of the killer at first mention, but still enjoyed watching the story unfold and Grace’s efforts to overcome the various obstacles, both personal and professional, placed in her way.

A solid read.

WE KNOW YOU REMEMBER

by Tove Alsterdal

Harper, \$28.99

Rating: A-

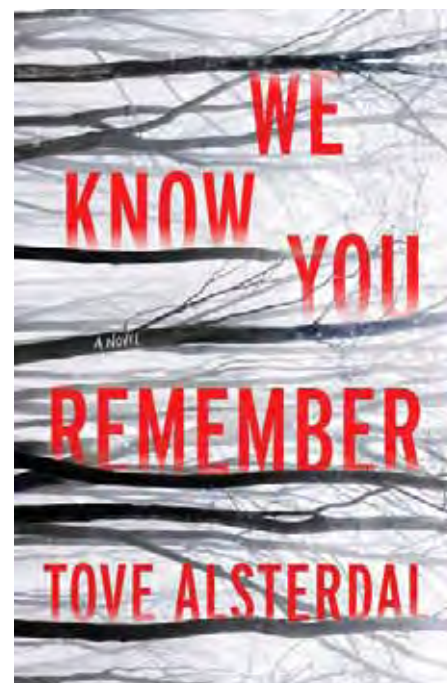
Reviewed by George Easter

When the body of an old man is found brutally murdered and lying in a bathtub, the police immediately suspect the son, Olaf Hagström, who not only found his father’s body but also is a convicted murderer. Years ago, at the age of fourteen, Olaf confessed to raping and murdering a young girl. But he would never say what he did with the body.

Local police detective Eira Sjödin becomes heavily involved in the investigation and her local knowledge proves invaluable. Pursuing clues in the present case, causes Eira to take a close look at the old case involving Olaf’s conviction.

It soon becomes clear that Olaf has a valid alibi, but that doesn’t stop the social media firestorm that ensues. Some local toerags, incited by what they have been reading on their phones, decide it would be a good idea to set fire to the old man’s house with Olaf in it. It turns out to be a very bad idea.

Then, as the story progresses, the dead body of another young man is discovered in the area where Olaf’s victim had allegedly disappeared. It seems like crimes are happening faster than the police can solve them. But the plot is so intricately woven, that we, the readers,



can't help but be drawn in and impressed when the crimes are ultimately solved.

The only complaint I have with **WE KNOW YOU REMEMBER** is its pacing which is quite slow and caused me some difficulty in getting into the story. Otherwise, it is a fine example of quality Nordic crime fiction and deserving of the Publishers Weekly Starred Review and Winner of Glass Key Award For Best Nordic Crime Fiction.

HELLO, TRANSCRIBER

by Hannah Morrissey

Minotaur, \$27.99, November 30, 2021

Rating: B-

Reviewed by George Easter

Hazel Greenlee is living a pretty bleak life in a pretty bleak town. She's in a marriage with a man she no longer loves and her required romantic intimacy is physically painful. The one ray of sunshine is her new job as a police transcriber on the night shift. A naturally fast typist (111 wpm with 98% accuracy), Hazel enjoys the reports she types, which give her an insider view of police work. And as an aspiring novelist, she makes good use of the information flowing through her fingers as she transcribes each night.

She is intrigued by one particular detective, Nikolai Kole, who has an attractive voice. When she finally meets Nik, her attraction to him goes into hyperdrive. And he seems to be very attracted to her as well. There is quite a lot of space devoted to this relationship (too much for my tastes) in the novel, but I guess it can be excused on the grounds that it provides an avenue for Hazel to become heavily involved in the Nik's cases.

One of the cases Nik is working on involves a drug dealer known as the Candy Man, because of his penchant for selling drugs to kids. And if that isn't enough of a problem, some of Candy Man's associates start dying of drug overdoses and stabbings.

As the investigation unfolds, Hazel will discover just how far she will go for her story, even if it means destroying her marriage, her career, and any chance she has of getting out of Black Harbor alive.

Because if she's learned one relentless truth about this place, it's the fact that everybody lies.

Every once in awhile I run across a crime novel like this with no likable characters. I have to find someone to like or a book doesn't work for me. This one didn't work for me. There are some elements that were good, especially the idea of a police transcriber doing more than just typing. But the main characters were too mentally ill and damaged for me to enjoy reading about their plight. .

Library Journal Starred Review

EVERY LAST FEAR

by Alex Finlay

Minotaur, \$26.99

March, 2021

Rating: A-

Reviewed by George Easter

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.

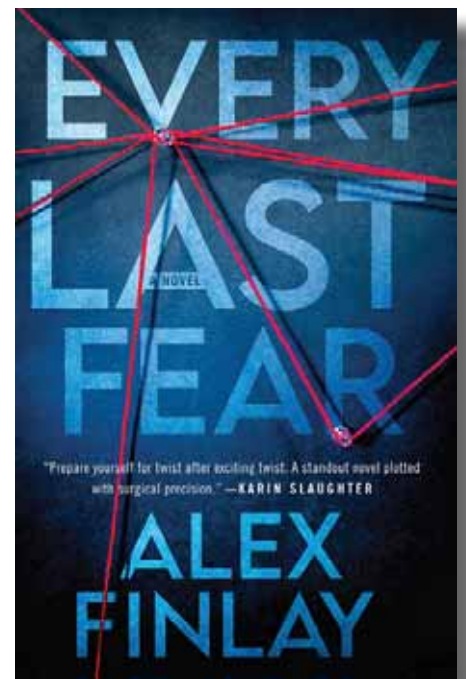
When Matt returns to his hometown for the funeral of his family members, he and Agent Keller uncover facts that some are desperate to keep secret.

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.

AS THE WICKED WATCH

by Tamron Hall



Morrow, \$27.99

When crime reporter Jordan Manning leaves her hometown in Texas to take a job at a television station in Chicago, she's one step closer to her dream: a coveted anchor chair on a national network.

Jordan is smart and aggressive, with unabashed star-power, and often the only woman of color in the newsroom. Her signature? Arriving first on the scene—in impractical designer stilettos. Armed with a master's degree in forensic science and impeccable instincts, Jordan has been able to balance her dueling motivations: breaking every big story—and giving a voice to the voiceless.

From her time in Texas, she's covered the vilest of human behaviors but nothing has prepared her for Chicago. Jordan is that rare breed of a journalist who can navigate a crime scene as well as she can a newsroom—often noticing what others tend to miss. Again and again, she is called to cover the murders of Black women, many of them sexually assaulted, most brutalized, and all of them quickly forgotten.

All until Masey James—the story that Jordan just can't shake, despite all efforts. A 15-year-old girl whose body was found in an abandoned lot, Masey has come to represent for Jordan all of the frustration and anger that her job

often forces her to repress. Putting the rest of her work and her fraying personal life aside, Jordan does everything she can to give the story the coverage it desperately requires, and that a missing Black child would so rarely get.

Publishers Weekly and Booklist Starred Reviews

Thrillers

THE HUNTED

by Gabriel Bergmoser
Harper Collins, \$16.99

Rating: A

Reviewed by Jeff Popple

One of my recent favorites for pure reading pleasure is Gabriel Bergmoser's outstanding piece of 'outback noir', **THE HUNTED**.

Frank runs a truck stop on a lonely highway in outback Australia. It is a solitary existence, which has only recently been broken by the arrival of his granddaughter, Allie, who has been sent to stay with him to fix her attitude. It is a fragile relationship, which is put under considerable pressure when an injured young woman arrives at the service station with a fired shotgun under the front seat of her car. Frank and a handful of customers tend to her wounds, but soon several cars turn up demanding that they hand over the woman. Suddenly the small group are thrust into a deadly stand-off, with no hope of rescue.

This is a fast paced and violent novel that grabs you from the opening pages and does not let go until the final gunshot. The story alternates between the bloody confrontation at the truck stop and the equally violent backstory of the wounded girl, the tough and resilient Maggie, and the lead-up to her pursuit by a group of armed men and women. The viewpoint moves frequently between the various characters and Bergmoser skilfully uses it to ramp up the tension and occasionally surprise the reader.

As to be expected, most of the characters have dark shadows in their past and Bergmoser does a very good job of fleshing out his desperate cast and making them credible, especially the young

British tourists who just happen to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. The central characters of Frank, Allie and Maggie are also very well drawn, and it is interesting to watch them change and grow as the book progresses. Bergmoser's portrayal of the armed men in pursuit of Maggie also neatly showcases the toxic side of Australian masculinity.

While some Australian crime fiction creates an idyllic version of outback Australia, this is not the case here. The early chapters quickly establish the vastness and loneliness of the Australian outback, and the human dangers which lurk there, as well as the beauty and harshness of the countryside. Some of the events may seem to stretch credibility, but there is, unfortunately, a terrifying reality to them.

This is an outstanding debut and one of the most thrilling and visceral novels I have read this year. There are some minor concerns about the plot, but these are easily overlooked as the story races along to its blood-soaked conclusion. This is Jack Reacher for adults.

DOWN RANGE

by Taylor Moore
William Morrow, \$27.99

Rating: B+

Reviewed by George Easter

Garrett Kohl is a deep cover DEA Agent/former Green Beret on assign-

ment in Afghanistan. When he happens upon a village massacre he manages to save the life of a young Afghan boy named Asadi. Through his CIA contacts, Garrett is able to bring Asadi home to the Texas Panhandle when he is sent there on a short mission. Garrett is reunited with his crusty father and is surprised how easily his father and Asadi fall into step with one another because Garrett never had that kind of relationship with his father while growing up.

Upon arrival, Garrett is shocked to find that his once peaceful ranching community is being terrorized by a band of criminals who have their fingers into local law enforcement and local businesses. Then his family gets threatened and Garrett brings out his DEA and Green Beret training to fight back. The criminals don't know what they are up against.

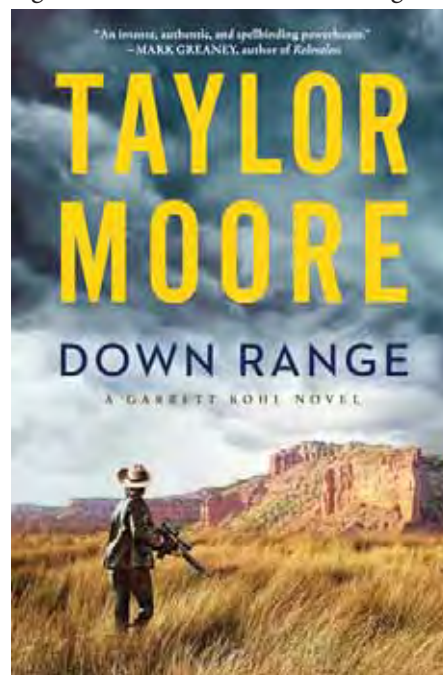
This is a quick and easy thriller read. The action near the end of the book was a bit over the top for me, but other than that, I quite enjoyed my first experience with a Taylor Moore novel. It won't be my last.

DOWN RANGE got a Starred Review in **Library Journal**.

CAPTIVE

by Fiona King Foster
Ecco, \$26.99

In a secessionist rural state that has cut itself off completely from urban centers, where living is hardscrabble and poor but "free," Brooke Holland runs a farm with her husband, Milo, and two daughters. When escaped criminal Stephen Cawley attacks at the farm, Brooke's buried talents surface, and she manages to quickly and harshly subdue him. She is convinced that he has come in retribution for the blood feud she thought she escaped years ago. Brooke sets out to bring Cawley to justice, planning to use the bounty on his head to hide her family far from danger. Fearing that other members of Cawley's infamous family will soon descend, Brooke insists Milo and the girls flee with her, travelling miles on foot across an unforgiving landscape to reach the nearest marshal. Their journey, started at the



onset of winter with little preparation, brings already strained family dynamics to the breaking point.

Kirkus & Booklist Starred Reviews

SLEEPING BEAR

by Connor Sullivan

Atria/Emily Bester, \$27.00

Rating: A-

Reviewed by George Easter

Still reeling from the untimely death of her young husband, Cassie Gale decides to travel from her home in Montana to the wilds of Alaska, taking only her dog for company. She needs some alone time to heal. Soon after she arrives at a nice camping area, a quick series of mysterious events occur and she is rendered unconscious. When it is obvious that she has disappeared, her father, James Gale, her sister and friends come from Montana to search for her and her faithful dog.

It turns out that Cassie isn't the only camper to go missing in this area of the Alaskan panhandle. And once her father finds himself on the right track, he calls in a whole bunch of government assets to help him.

Meanwhile, Cassie wakes up and finds herself in a Russian prison (yes, a Russian prison!). If you don't buy that premise, you can stop reading right there. I bought it, so I continued on. She is being held for nefarious reasons, one of which is a sort of Russian Hunger Games that top Russian officials bet on. When high-ranking General Sokolov sees her picture, he immediately orders her to be returned to safety and held until he can get to the prison. He has a long-held grudge against Cassie's father whom he blames for his son's death. The General has recognized the strong family resemblance.

Events come to a crisis point when old enemies confront each other in this exciting thriller by new author Connor Sullivan. I see good things ahead for this writer.

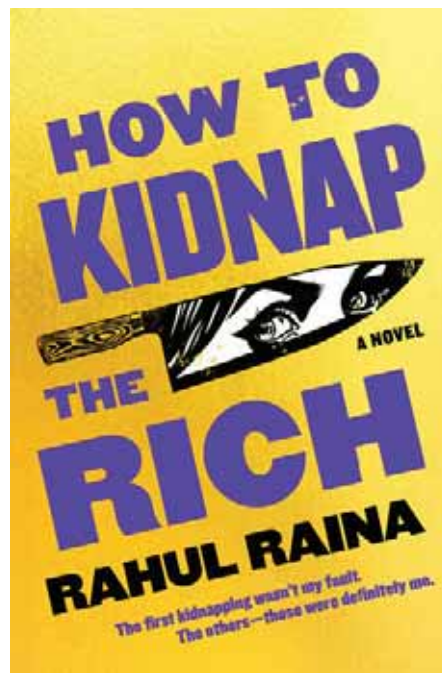
HOW TO KIDNAP THE RICH

by Rahul Raina

Harper Perennial, \$17.00

Rating: A-

Reviewed by George Easter



Ramesh Kumar, the son of an odious tea seller, grows up in dire poverty in Old Delhi, India. But he is taken under the wing of a kind French Catholic nun, Sister Claire, who sees intelligence and potential in the young Ramesh and strives to give him a good education. Though it's challenging, Ramesh is succeeding with his schooling until Claire dies with the job unfinished. But Ramesh has learned enough so that as a young adult, he establishes his own business as an education consultant to the rich. But what he really does is take the national educational exams for wealthy, but lazy or stupid young men, so they can get into prestigious schools.

Things go awry when one of his lazy young men, Rudi, places first among 10,000 examinees of the All India exams. The results open up untold opportunities for both Rudi and Ramesh.

Before you know it, Rudi has been snatched up to host a national quiz show and Ramesh goes along as his executive assistant (the power behind the throne). They both become wealthy, but neither one is very happy. Rudi just wants someone to love him for himself and not his fame. Ramesh wants to escape his world of lies and deceit and become the good person that Sister Claire wanted him to be. And how can Ramesh hope to capture the heart of an attractive assistant producer whom he has a crush

on?

Then, out of the blue, Rudi and Ramesh are kidnapped and held for ransom. That's when things get really interesting.

There is a lot of humor in this narrative. But as Raina is telling Ramesh's story, he is shoveling in loads and loads of social commentary on all sorts of Indian cultural issues such as pervasive corruption in education, politics and the police, the entertainment industry, and most of all, the almost impossible upward movement from one's caste and social station. I don't understand all of his allusions, but it doesn't matter because Raina's rapid-fire style of storytelling propels the narrative at such a pace that I didn't care if I wasn't getting everything. (I'm curious as to how this novel was received in India.)

If you are looking for a fresh voice and something refreshingly different from what you usually read, I recommend you give this a try.

I've been on a kick lately reading Indian authors or authors with Indian roots, such as Abir Mukherjee and Vaseem Khan (recent winner of the CWA Historical Dagger), two of my all-time favorites. It shouldn't come as any surprise that these are writers of great talent who have risen to considerable heights in the world of crime fiction. Look for a cover article on writers with roots in the Indian subcontinent sometime in the future. I've got a few more Indian writers that I need to sample to do such an article justice.

BREAKOUT

by Paul Herron

Grand Central, \$28.00, April

Rating: B+

Reviewed by George Easter

It can't be a good thing if you are ex-cop Jack Constantine, who now finds himself in prison for killing those responsible for the murder of his pregnant wife. But wait ... things can get even worse – in the form of a convergence of two Category 5 hurricanes merging into one megastorm. When the storm hits, the correctional officers at Ravenhill flee (except for a rookie, Kiera Sawyer, who is left behind) and the 800 inmates are

left on their own to survive. It becomes questionable which poses the greatest danger: the storm outside or the inmates inside, who seem intent on settling scores with a killing frenzy. Jack is one of those who want to settle up with the surviving members of the team who killed his wife. And there is a crime boss who blames Jack for his incarceration, during which his beloved wife died in his absence.

Kiera and Jack team up with the plan of traversing the prison blocks to get to the place where they just maybe can get to higher ground to an abandoned part of the prison complex. Meanwhile water is pouring into the prison and the walls are crumbling.

Herron keeps the tension ratcheted up but in the end there seemed too many obstacles to realistically prevail against and I became skeptical and jaded. It is a great premise for a novel and I give kudos to the author for coming up with the idea. It is not a long book, but I feel it would have served the reader well if it had been shorter.

IN THE COMPANY OF KILLERS

by Bryan Christy

Putnam, \$27.00, April

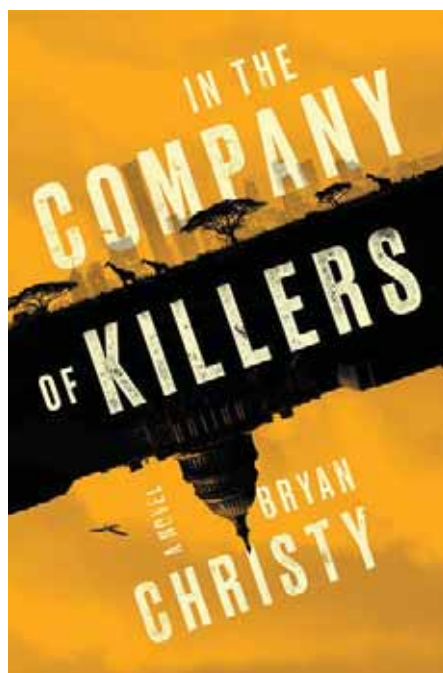
Rating: A-

Reviewed by George Easter

Tom Klay is a highly regarded international journalist who works for the prestigious magazine *The Sovereign*. Years ago he was involved in a fatal accident while he was driving drunk. A young boy died and he has never been able to forgive himself.

Most of his time has recently been spent in Africa where he has written several pieces on endangered species and the rampant poaching of big game animals. On one fact-finding trip to Kenya, his good friend Bernard is murdered and he is wounded. Tom is sure that a notorious poacher named Ras Botha is responsible and seeks ways to bring the man down.

Meanwhile, back at the magazine, there is a changing of the guard and Tom is not too happy about it. His boss has cancer and the company is being sold to a ruthless billionaire who undoubtedly will take it in a new direc-



tion – one that Tom is not sure he wants to follow.

Unbeknownst to all but a handful of people (including his boss who recruited him), Tom Klay is also a fact-finding agent for the CIA. His cover as a travel-anywhere, talk-to-anyone investigative reporter is perfect cover for CIA intelligence gathering.

Bent on revenging his friend's death, Tom is at a crossroads and doesn't know whether he wants to continue working for the CIA and working for *The Sovereign*. The CIA comes up with a solution: work with former lover Hungry Khoza who is set to prosecute Botha and bring him to justice. So Tom takes on this one last assignment, little knowing that it would turn out to be much bigger than he envisioned.

Bryan Christy certainly has writing chops. **IN THE COMPANY OF STRANGERS** has garnered three starred reviews (out of four) in the library journals, a sure indicator that the author knows what he is doing. The spying aspect of the novel is quite minimal. I would categorize it more as a novel of revenge. It does meander a bit here and there, but the overall quality of the writing counterbalances any of that. Overall, a very impressive and morally ambiguous first novel.

FALLING

by T. J. Newman

Avid Reader Press, \$28.00

Rating: A-

Reviewed by George Easter

The plot of this thrilling novel is quite simple: Bill Hoffman is a pilot whose family is being held hostage. He hears this news after his plane is in flight and he is told that he will receive instructions to crash the plane near the end of the flight. A photograph of his wife in an explosive vest is sent to his phone. In the meantime, he is to talk to no one. So the book is about how Bill goes about saving his passengers as well as his family.

The FBI catch wind of what is going on and we read of their attempts to save Bill's family, while Bill is handling his own challenges on the plane.

This is a what-happens-next thriller which is highly suspenseful. As each twist occurs, I kept wondering, "How is are they going to get out of this one?" I love novels about people who use their smarts to survive.

FALLING is the kind of book you either buy into and enjoy or you dismiss as too improbable to consider it entertaining. Larry didn't like it. (See his review in his review column herein.) I did. This is your chance to see whose opinion most closely mirrors your own. By the way, my wife Michele, whom I consider a tough critic, liked it a lot as well. Starred Reviews in *Library Journal*, *Booklist* & *Publishers Weekly*.

SHIVER

by Allie Reynolds

Headline, £12.99

Rating: A-

Reviewed by Jeff Pople

Set in an isolated ski lodge high up in the French Alps, Australian author Allie Reynolds provides an enjoyable and exciting twist on the classic crime plot of a group of characters trapped in a remote location and being killed off because of some old secrets.

It is with some reluctance that Milla accepts an invitation to a reunion in the cosy Alp resort that saw the peak of her snowboarding career, but she is keen to see the charismatic Curtis one

more time. She has not seen Curtis, or the other three invitees, since the tragic events ten years ago when the beautiful Saskia went missing during the finals of the snowboarding championships. When they get to the lodge, they find it deserted and their only way back down the mountain closed off. A series of nasty events open up old wounds and they soon realise that they do not know who has invited them there, or for what purpose. With a snowstorm approaching, and old secrets coming to the surface, the threats become more severe.

This is a very accomplished debut novel that quickly draws you in and keeps you interested and guessing all the way to the final dark twist. Allie makes good use of the alternating storyline, between the present and the events ten years ago, to ratchet up the suspense and the book steadily twists its way through several good surprises. The characters are nicely developed and the moving back and forth between the two timelines helps to flesh out them and allows the reader to see them grow and change. Milla is particularly well done, and she is an engagingly flawed narrator, who has her own parcel of secrets. She is a very nuanced character and Allie breathes real life into her and makes her interesting.

Allie is a former professional free-style snowboarder who spent five years competing in the Alps, and elsewhere, and she brings a good deal of credibility to the snowboarding scenes. She provides an interesting insider perspective on the atmosphere and tricks of a snowboard competition and skilfully portrays the various personalities involved. She also nicely captures the danger of being stuck in the snow and generates a good sense of foreboding as the snowstorm approaches the lodge.

A very enjoyable read. Starred Reviews in Kirkus & Library Journal

HER NAME IS KNIGHT

Yasmin Angoe

Thomas & Mercer, \$24.95

Stolen from her Ghanaian village as a child, Nena Knight has plenty of motives to kill. Now an elite assassin for a powerful business syndicate called the

Tribe, she gets plenty of chances.

But while on assignment in Miami, Nena ends up saving a life, not taking one. She emerges from the experience a changed woman, finally hopeful for a life beyond rage and revenge. Tasked with killing a man she's come to respect, Nena struggles to reconcile her loyalty to the Tribe with her new purpose.

Meanwhile, she learns a new Tribe council member is the same man who razed her village, murdered her family, and sold her into captivity. Nena can't resist the temptation of vengeance – and she doesn't want to. Before she can reclaim her life, she must leverage everything she was and everything she is to take him down and end the cycle of bloodshed for good.

Library Journal Starred Review

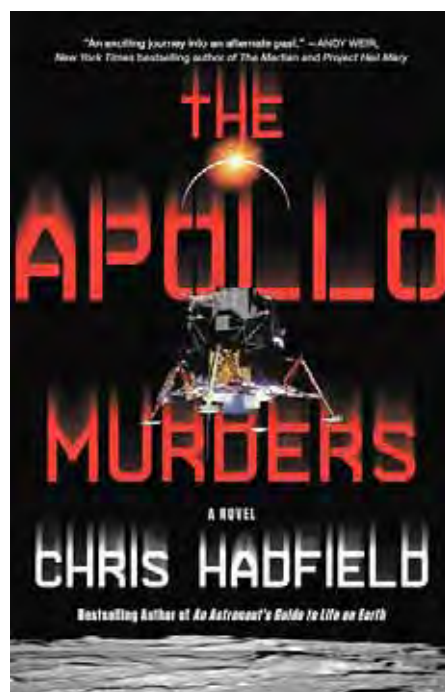
THE APOLLO MURDERS

by Chris Hadfield

Mulholland, \$28.00

1973: a final, top-secret mission to the Moon. Three astronauts in a tiny spaceship, a quarter million miles from home. A quarter million miles from help.

NASA is about to launch Apollo 18. While the mission has been billed as a scientific one, flight controller Kazimieras "Kaz" Zemeckis knows there is a darker objective. Intelligence has



discovered a secret Soviet space station spying on America, and Apollo 18 may be the only chance to stop it.

But even as Kaz races to keep the NASA crew one step ahead of their Russian rivals, a deadly accident reveals that not everyone involved is quite who they were thought to be. With political stakes stretched to the breaking point, the White House and the Kremlin can only watch as their astronauts collide on the lunar surface, far beyond the reach of law or rescue.

Library Journal and Publishers Weekly Starred Reviews

History Mysteries

A DEADLY FORTUNE

by Stacie Murphy

Pegasus Crime, \$25.95

Amelia Matthew has done the all-but-impossible, especially for an orphan in Gilded Age New York City. Along with her foster brother Jonas, she has parleyed her modest psychic talent into a safe and comfortable life. But safety and comfort vanish when a head injury leaves Amelia with a dramatically-expanded gift. After she publicly channels an angry spirit, she finds herself imprisoned in the notorious insane asylum on Blackwell's Island. As Jonas searches for a way to free her, Amelia struggles to control her disturbing new abilities and survive a place where cruelty and despair threaten her sanity. Andrew Cavanaugh is familiar with despair. In the wake of a devastating loss, he abandons a promising medical career—and his place in Philadelphia society—to devote himself to the study and treatment of mental disease. Miss Amelia Matthew is just another patient—until she channels a spirit in front of him and proves her gift is real. When a distraught mother comes to Andrew searching for her missing daughter—a daughter she believes is being hidden at the asylum—he turns to Amelia. Together, they uncover evidence of a deadly conspiracy, and then it's no longer just Amelia's sanity and freedom at stake. Amelia must master her gift and use it to catch a killer—or risk becoming

the next victim.

Publisher's Weekly Starred Review

WINDHALL

by Ava Barry

Pegasus Crime, \$25.95

1940s Hollywood was an era of decadence and director Theodore Langley was its king. Paired with Eleanor Hayes as his lead actress, Theo ruled the Golden Age of Hollywood. That ended when Eleanor's mangled body was discovered in Theo's rose garden and he was charged with her murder. The case was thrown out before it went to trial and Theo fled L.A., leaving his crawling estate, Windhall, to fall into ruin. He hasn't been seen since.

Decades later, investigative journalist Max Hailey, raised by his gran on stories of old Hollywood, is sure that if he could meet Theo, he could prove once and for all that the famed director killed his leading lady. When a copycat murder takes place near Windhall, the long reclusive Theo returns to L.A., and it seems Hailey finally has his chance.

When Hailey gets his hands on Theo's long-missing journals, he reads about Eleanor's stalkers and her role in Theo's final film, *The Last Train to Avalon*, a film so controversial it was never released to the public. In the months leading up to her death, something had left her so terrified she stopped coming to work. The more Hailey learns about Avalon, the more convinced he becomes that the film could tell him who killed Eleanor and why she had to die.

Booklist and Publishers Weekly Starred Reviews

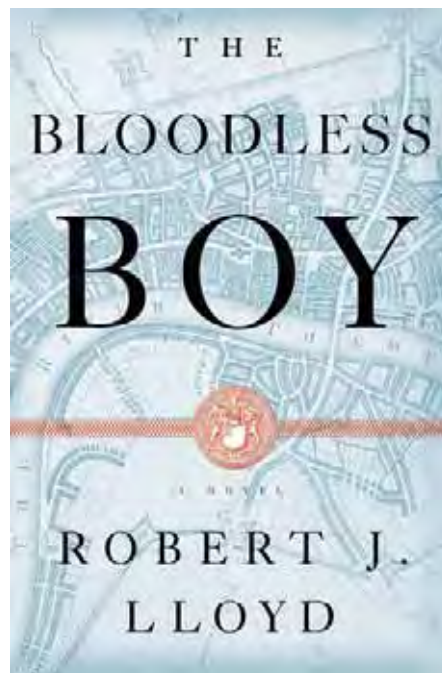
THE BLOODLESS BOY

by Robert J. Lloyd

Melville House, \$29.99

The City of London, 1678. New Year's Day. Twelve years have passed since the Great Fire ripped through the City. Eighteen since the fall of Oliver Cromwell and the restoration of a King. London is gripped by hysteria, and rumors of Catholic plots and sinister foreign assassins abound.

When the body of a young boy drained of his blood is discovered on the snowy bank of the Fleet River, Robert



Hooke, the Curator of Experiments at the just-formed Royal Society for Improving Natural Knowledge, and his assistant Harry Hunt, are called in to explain such a ghastly finding—and whether it's part of a plot against the king. They soon learn it is not the first bloodless boy to have been discovered.

Meanwhile, that same morning Henry Oldenburg, the Secretary of the Royal Society, blows his brains out, and a disgraced Earl is released from the Tower of London, bent on revenge against the King, Charles II. Wary of the political hornet's nest they are walking into – and using scientific evidence rather than paranoia in their pursuit of truth – Hooke and Hunt must discover why the boy was murdered, and why his blood was taken.

Not So New Newcomers

The following novels are by authors who have written other novels but have not come to the attention of many of us mystery reviewers and mystery fans until recently. For that reason, their novels feel like first novels, but technically are not. Last year, experienced writer, S. A. Cosby, was largely unknown to the mystery reading public until his blockbuster, award-winning

BLACKTOP WASTELAND was published. So that's what I mean by the term "not so new newcomer." It is a veteran writer who has suddenly broken out of relative obscurity.

FIVE DECEMBERS

by James Kestrel

Hard Case Crime, \$22.99

Rating: A

Reviewed by George Easter

Late November, 1941. Honolulu, Hawaii. Police detective Joe McGrady catches a late-night double murder case and when he goes to investigate the murder scene (for the second time) he has a shoot-out with a man whom everyone supposes is the murderer. The perpetrator is dead and Joe is unharmed.

It turns out that one of the victims is a young Japanese woman and the other is the nephew of a Navy Admiral. They were murdered in a particularly gruesome way – apparently with a trench knife, a combination brass knuckles and knife in one.

It looks like the case is closed, even though McGrady thinks that there were at least two perps involved. Further investigation leads the police to suspect a very large man named John Smith shares culpability. But unfortunately Mr. Smith has flown to Hong Kong. So



McGrady follows suit and flies to the same destination, which in 1941 entailed several stops along the way. When he reaches the stop-over island of Wake, Joe finds that a young soldier has just recently been found murdered in the same manner as his other two victims. Now he knows for sure he is on the right track.

When Joe arrives in Hong Kong, he quickly tracks down “John Smith,” but before he can do anything about it December 7, 1941 arrives and war breaks out throughout the Far East and he finds himself in a very precarious position. To write more would give away too many surprises.

James Kestrel is the pen name of a writer of several novels and if **FIVE DECEMBERS** is any indication, he has gone from apprentice to master status. Everything about his book is terrific. It is mostly a novel of detection, but will also appeal to fans who like elements of romance and thriller fiction. The writing is smooth and flows without interruption. One grows to care deeply for the main protagonists. All is wound up in a very satisfactory climax. This is a WOW book for me. When I turned the final page, I said (out loud), “Wow!” I hope you find it to be a “wow” book also. If I were to recommend just one 2021 title for you to read, it would be this one. It’s that good.

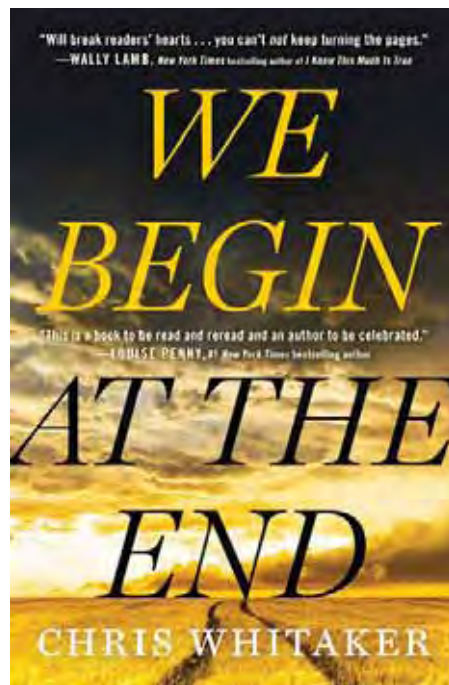
WE BEGIN AT THE END

by Chris Whitaker
Henry Holt, \$27.99

Rating: A-

Review by Larry Gandle

Duchess Day Radley is a very precocious thirteen-year-old living in a small California coastal community. She is fiercely protective of her five-year-old brother, Robin, while their mother, Star, is unable to take care of them due to her drinking and self-absorption. Walk is the local Police Chief who grew up with Star and his best friend, Vincent King, who he helped convict for causing the death of Star’s sister thirty years ago. Well, Vincent is getting out of prison and Walk will pick him up while, hopefully, aiding Vincent’s return to free-



dom. Another death soon occurs which may put Vincent back behind bars but Walk is convinced of his innocence and must now try to prove it.

This is, overall, a well written character driven regional mystery with some thoughtfully created characters. However, I could not buy into Duchess as a thirteen-year-old. She knows too much, is way too promiscuous and in no way thinks like a child. I am not convinced she is realistic, at all. Yet, she, along with Walk, are the central characters of this very long novel. Minor characters are superficial and stereotypic. The plot is quite compelling and there are plenty of twists and turns throughout. The story just seems to go on and on with some pointless episodes that serve no purpose other than to bulk up the book. There is enough emotional devastation, as well as, surprises along the way to raise this book above the ordinary. It is still highly recommended and one of the year’s best.

A MAN NAMED DOLL

by Jonathan Ames
Mulholland, \$26.00

Rating: A-

Reviewed by George Easter

Happy Doll (don’t ask how he got that name) is a Navy vet and ex-LAPD. Now he calls himself a P.I., but one with no current clients. He makes do by working as a bodyguard (graveyard

shift) at a local Thai spa that offers its clients special services. He is there to protect the female employees from clients who have trouble with the concept of “no.”

Two events occur that change his life. One is when an old friend, in need of a kidney transplant, asks him for one of his kidneys. Doll procrastinates in his response and his buddy seeks a more dangerous alternative. The other is when a drugged-up client of the spa threatens the life of one of the girls and Doll winds up in a life-and-death struggle.

When his buddy comes to his door he has been shot in the stomach and soon after dies. Happy goes in search of the villain or villains, with unpredictable results.

At 177 pages, this is an enjoyable, quick read, full of quirky characters and a thrill-paced and exciting plot line. I hope this is the beginning of a series. Happy Doll makes me happy.

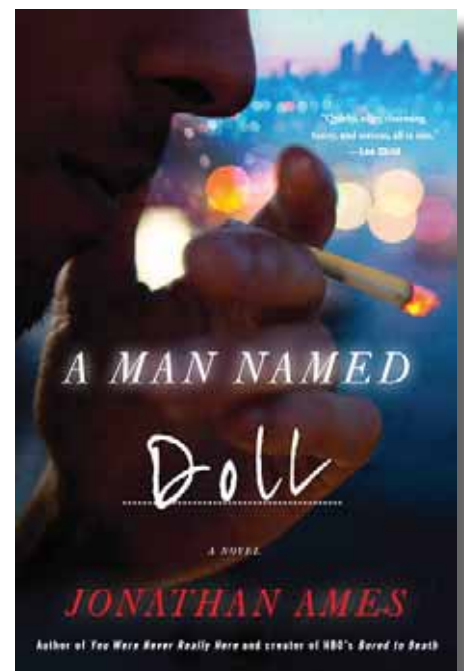
FINLAY DONOVAN IS KILLING IT

By Elle Cosimano
Minotaur \$26.99

Rating: A

Reviewed by Kristopher Zgorski

Crime fiction readers who occasionally stray into the Young Adult category will likely already know the name Elle Cosimano. After all, her 2015 release,





NEARLY GONE, was nominated for an Edgar Award. Now Cosimano is turning her attention to more mainstream crime fiction – and if **FINLAY DONOVAN IS KILLING IT** is any indication of her niche, she is going to be a welcome addition to the ranks.

The tone of **FINLAY DONOVAN IS KILLING IT** lies somewhere between hilarious and heartfelt, or conversely satire and seriousness. Elle Cosimano draws the reader in with some unabashedly uproarious set-pieces before pulling back the layers to reveal a deeper emotional core. Regardless of the nuance, Cosimano's prose is always elegant and addictive.

FINLAY DONOVAN IS KILLING IT starts with a moment every author wishes they had thought of. Our heroine – Finlay – is meeting with her agent at the local Panera. As they discuss the plot of her new novel and how it must be a “hit” to elevate her “contract,” they are overheard by a stranger who comes to believe that Finlay is a killer for hire. But rather than report her to authorities, this woman wants to pay Finlay (a hell of a lot of money) to knock off her scoundrel of a husband.

Finlay can certainly use the money, but kill someone? Finlay thinks maybe if she just trails the loser, she will uncover a way to help without the need

for bloodshed. One misadventure after another gets Finlay tangled in a knot that puts her own life at risk. Fortunately, she gains a side-kick and accomplice in her former nanny, Vero (short for Veronica.) You know those friends that you could call on to help dispose of a body? Put Vero at the top of that list – literally! With Finlay and Vero we have the Lucille Ball and Ethel Mertz of crime-solving...er crime-causing...er whatever you want to call it. These two are a match made in literary heaven and will keep readers entertained with their hijinks.

Juxtaposed with all of this madcap adventure is the serious business of single parenting, especially during a contentious divorce where a new (beautiful) step-parent is soon to be involved.

Like the hitman plot that fuels the novel, these domestic scenes vary between comedically silly and tragically unfortunate. While Elle Cosimano keeps the surface light, there are real-world issues on display here and readers will come away with more respect for working parents.

Reading Elle Cosimano's **FINLAY DONOVAN IS KILLING IT** is like eating a mixed collection of bon-bons while lounging next to a crackling fire under a cozy blanket – you never know where the next bite will take you, but you know it will warm your heart, comfort your soul, and be damn satisfying. Fortunately, this is the start of a series, so Finlay and gang will be back for more misadventures soon – and hopefully for years and years to come.

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T Introducing ... Lee Goldberg's Eve Ronin *by George Easter*

Lee Goldberg is a veteran novelist and scriptwriter with close to 40 novels to his name. So why is he in this column entitled "Introducing?" Most of you are familiar with his name and his work. Well, the answer is that I want to "introduce" and recommend to all of you Lee's latest series, featuring Eve Ronin, a newly appointed homicide detective with the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department.

The Character of Eve Ronin

Here's how Eve got to be a homicide detective, despite her youth and relative inexperience: "Eve was previously a deputy out in Lancaster and unknown to anyone on the LAPD or anywhere else. But four months ago, while off duty, she witnessed actor Blake Largo, who starred as the invincible action hero



Deathfist in a globally successful string of movies, assault a woman in a restaurant parking lot. Eve confronted him, he took a swing at her, and she put him on the ground. She pressed his million-dollar fave to the pavement until police arrived. A bystander got it all on video with his phone and uploaded it to YouTube. The video got eleven million hits in less than a week. Now everybody called her Deathfist. "

The Sheriff's department was going through a rough patch at the time and this viral video lifted its image considerably. So the Sheriff played the situation for all it was worth and when Eve was offered a promotion to homicide, the public loved it. Not so much her fellow cops who felt that she had manipulated the situation to get an undeserved promotion.

Eve is teamed up with Duncan Pavone, a veteran detective just months away from retirement. Once they get to know each other, they make a fine pair, with Duncan acting as a fatherly mentor. Sometimes Eve takes Duncan's advice to heart and sometimes not. And like all good detectives, Eve is relentless – quite often to the point of sleepless exhaustion. But compared with a seasoned detective such as Harry Bosch, she is unskilled and makes mistakes. We are witnesses to her seasoning process for she is smart enough to learn from those mistakes.

Eve is attractive and single, but quite independent, so marriage does not seem to be on the horizon. Her father was largely absent during her childhood and she feels little affection toward this itinerant TV/movie producer. Her mother is a would-be Hollywood actress who is



Lee Goldberg

obsessed with her looks and is constantly giving Eve advice on how to look better, which Eve summarily ignores. There is also a sister who is a nurse and seems to be much more level-headed than Eve's parents. Complicating family relations are the offers from TV to make Eve's life into a TV series. The parents are chomping at the bit to be part of this production. Eve wants nothing to do with a TV series, but is eventually convinced to sign a contract so she can have some control over how she is portrayed.

The Eve Ronin Series takes place over a short span of time and is set against the backdrop of the devastating California wildfires. The author has stated that all three novels are based on real events.

The Novels

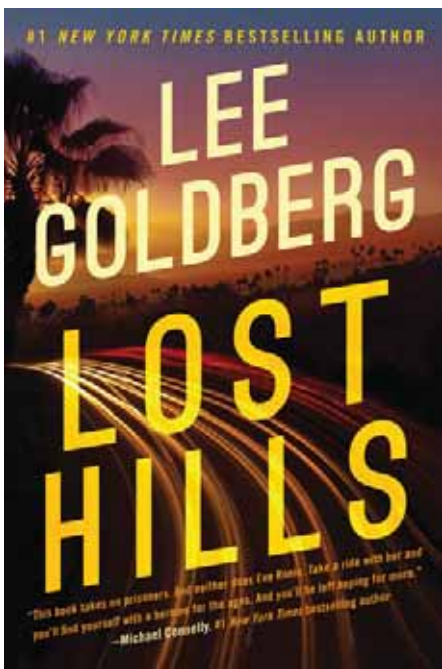
LOST HILLS

by Lee Goldberg

Thomas & Mercer, \$24.95, 2020

Rating: A-

Eve Ronin has a lot to prove as a newly-minted homicide detective. And as luck would have it, here first homicide case is a real puzzler. She and her partner Duncan Pavone are called to the home of a mother and her two children. There is blood spatter everywhere but no bodies. One is hoping that at least the children survived. But if they did,



where are they?

Any police investigation that involves young children is hypercharged with urgency. The ex-husband/father of the children and the mother's current boyfriend come under close scrutiny.

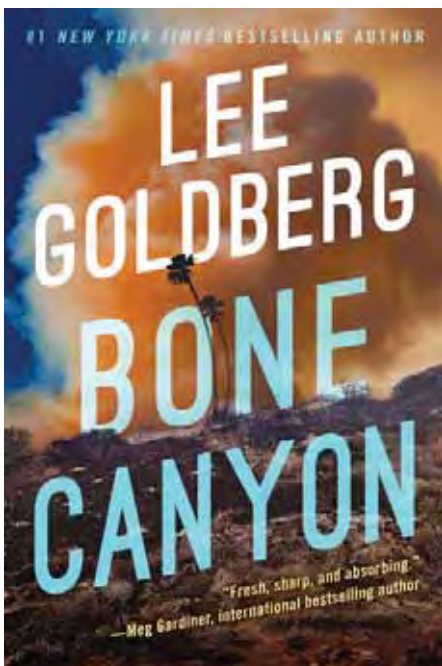
All elements of the story are handled well. A very promising start to a new series.

BONE CANYON

by Lee Goldberg

Thomas & Mercer, \$24.95, 2021

Rating: A-



Each summer devastating wildfires erupt all over California. One such fire in the Santa Monica Mountains, uncovers the charred remains of a woman named Sabrina Morton, who disappeared some years before. Just prior to Sabrina's disappearance she had reported that she'd been raped by a group of men, all sporting a certain tattoo. That clue leads to the possibility of some bad cops in the department.

Then a second set of bones are found and they are identified as belonging to Debbie Crawford, a fifty-something woman who had an ongoing feud with her wealthy neighbor, who becomes a clear suspect. But Eve suspects that there is more to Debbie's death than just a disgruntled neighbor.

Eve and Duncan are helped in their investigation by a forensics anthropologist, who Eve finds romantically interesting. But does she have time for such feelings?

Clean, fast prose and dialogue propel this intriguing narrative to a satisfactory ending.

GATED PREY

by Lee Goldberg

Thomas & Mercer, \$24.95, 2021

Rating: A-

Los Angeles County Sheriff's detective Eve Ronin and her soon-to-retire partner, Duncan Pavon are assigned the task of catching a gang of home invaders who have been plaguing a neighborhood of McMansions. They set a trap for the criminals and it works to a certain extent. When the criminals show up and Eve and Duncan try to arrest them (without the promised backup), all hell breaks loose. End result: three dead. One thief jumps to his death, another is shot by Duncan, while the third escapes to a nearby supermarket where the security guard shoots and kills him.

The police brass want the case closed, but Eve has a lot of unanswered questions such as:

Were there more than three men in the home invasion gang?

How did they gain access to gated communities?

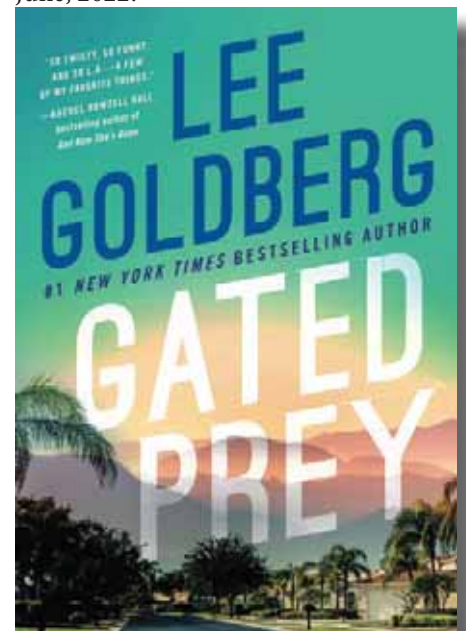
Why didn't police backup arrive timely? Could it have something to do with

her meteoric rise to homicide detective or her unmasking some bad cops in the Lost Hills Police station? She knows she has made some enemies among her colleagues, but it seems beyond the pale to leave her and Duncan hanging in the wind without backup.

So Eve keeps digging. And while she is doing that, a dead fetus shows up in a trash can and she uncovers a Gordian knot to untangle.

I always appreciate an easy-flowing narrative that keeps me turning the pages. And that's what you get with Lee Goldberg's deft hand.

A fourth novel in the series, **MOV-IELAND**, is scheduled to be published in June, 2022.



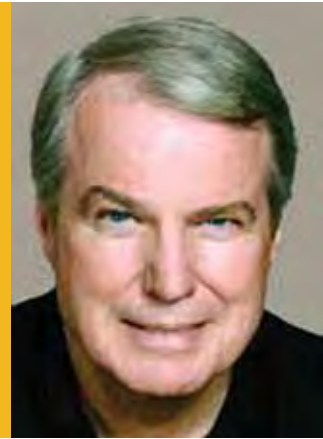
Eve Ronin is a great character and one that I will follow for as long as Lee Goldberg writes novels about her. The books in the series are relatively short (under 300 pages) and hence, quick, enjoyable reads.

Goldberg's work in this series is comprised of a nice mixture of fascinating characters, vivid scenery, realistic crime procedures, plot-propulsive dialogue and boffo endings. It would be a step too far to compare this series to the Harry Bosch/Renee Ballard series by Michael Connelly, but there are some pleasant similarities. I'm always on the lookout for novels to tide me over during the hiatus between Michael Connelly novels, and the Eve Ronin series really fits the bill for me in that regard.

My Greek Reading Feast

2021

By Steele Curry



At long last, my wife Judy and I returned to Skiathos, Greece for our annual summer holiday here. We have been coming to this beautiful island for over 40 years but the pandemic ruled out doing so in 2020. Fortunately, the Greek government has made it easy for fully vaccinated travelers to now enter the country without having to quarantine.

Skiathos is blessed with many beautiful beaches, warm friendly locals, and lots of casual restaurants with terrific food and excellent Greek rosé wine. It's low key, the opposite of Mykonos. The majority of my time at our Skiathos summer home (which we call *Lizard in the Sun*) is spent reading mysteries and thrillers on the terrace overlooking the sparkling blue Aegean Sea. Here are some of the books I read this summer:

A DEADLY TWIST by Jeffrey Siger (Sourcebooks/Poisoned Pen Press 2021 hardcover/trade paperback).

To launch myself into a proper Greek frame of mind, I always start my Skiathos summer reading with the newest novel by Jeffrey Siger in his impressive Chief Inspector Andreas Kaldis series. Kaldis is in charge of the Greek Police's Special Crimes Unit responsible for cases of national concern and corruption. While Kaldis is based in Athens, each of the author's eleven thrillers in this series is set in a different Greek region or location of historical and cultural significance.

A DEADLY TWIST takes place on the large island of Naxos where Kaldis and his usual cast of colorful associates, friends and family are engaged

in investigating the disappearance of a high-profile female journalist. Soon, several dead bodies complicate matters as tensions grow between the island's preservationists and those promoting large-scale tourist developments. Along the way, the author masterfully exposes his readers to the beauty, history and culture of Naxos.

Jeffrey Siger is a wonderful storyteller whose love of Greece is infectious.

THE CELLIST by Daniel Silva (Harper, New York 2021 hardcover).

I've been a big fan of this author's Gabriel Allon series but the latest one is quite a disappointment. Allon leads his Israeli intelligence team in a quest to undermine the financial empire of the Russian president and expose the massive long-standing money launder-

ing operations of "the world's dirtiest bank" (modeled after the Deutsche Bank). Set in recent current times, the plot also includes descriptions of the Trump presidency and the attempted coup to take down America's democracy. Unfortunately, it's all too predictable and a rehash of Allon's character and background.

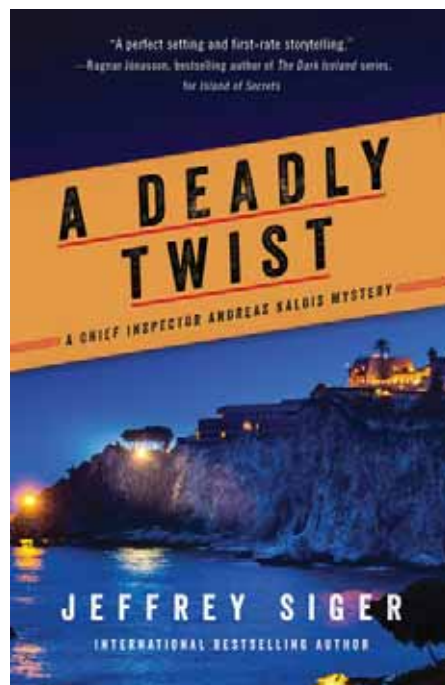
For his next novel, the author needs to take a break from writing about Allon and come up with some fresh new material.

THE AEGEAN AFFAIR by Walter Satterthwait (Dell 1982 paperback original).

Have been saving this book to read in Skiathos. Author's second novel, largely set on the fictional Greek island of Asporgos. Former US Army Special Forces soldier who deserted and started another life as a smuggler is coerced into disrupting a major crime lord's heroin operation. This is a hard-edged, compelling thriller with lots of femme fatales, killers and other irredeemable characters. Satterthwait bowed out in 2020. He'll be missed.

DEAD NORTH by Sandy Mccutcheon (Beacon Books, Oldham, U.K. 2021 trade paperback).

British Detective Inspector Nicole Parry begins an investigation that takes her from London to Helsinki to the wilds of Finland near its border with Russia. MI6 and the CIA are adamant that this case be buried. Regardless, Parry teams up with a Finnish Intelligence officer, has to decipher some of his country's mythology, and becomes immersed in the local culture in an



attempt to defuse a plot that will upend world politics. Who knew that Finland could be this exciting?

McCutcheon is an Australian author, playwright, actor, journalist and broadcaster. His novels include four terrific thrillers featuring Savva Golitsyn, a retired KGB spy living in Australia. His writing reflects a special sensitivity to worldwide cultural nuances.

BORDERLANDS by Brian Mcgilloway (Macmillan, U.K. 2007 hardcover; Constable 2021 trade paperback).

Yes, I'm late to the party. **BORDERLANDS** is the first of five novels in the author's impressive series featuring Garda Inspector Benedict Devlin. Post the Troubles in Ireland, Devlin starts out investigating the murder of a teen-aged girl and then the death of another teenager. He senses there is a connection to these killings and the disappearance 25 years ago of a woman linked to one of his senior colleagues. More murders follow. Devlin's virtue is tested. Neighbors commit arson, possibly as a result of Devlin's dog killing their sheep. Fortunately, Devlin is assisted by the capable Sergeant Caroline Williams. A sixth novel in this series, **BLOOD TIES**, is scheduled for publication in September 2021.

THE DEVIL by Nadia Dalbuono (Scribe Publications, London 2020 paperback).

The fifth novel in the author's superb series featuring Rome Detective Leone Scamarcio, the son of a former leading Mafioso. This time, Scamarcio is tasked with investigating the death of a young troubled man undergoing treatment by the Vatican's chief exorcist. Soon afterwards, a close friend of the first victim is found murdered. Scamarcio's investigation encounters high-level government corruption, a history of long-standing drug company payoffs, threats from a senior Mafioso and Vatican intransigence. Meanwhile his girlfriend is on the verge of giving birth to their child. In the midst of all this, when Scamarcio's former lover returns from Calabria, can he resist temptation?

A DEATH IN MAYFAIR by Mark Ellis (Headline Accent, London 2019 trade paperback).



This is the author's fourth historical novel in his series featuring Scotland Yard detective Frank Merlin set just before or during WW II. The first three novels had a strong espionage element to them. **A DEATH IN MAYFAIR** has Merlin and his team investigating serious crimes committed in London involving a suicide, movie stars, underage prostitutes, Satanists, drug dealers and big-time gangsters. While this time Merlin doesn't have to contend with any spies, it's December 1941 and the Japanese have attacked Pearl Harbor.

BORROWED LIGHT by Graham Hurley (Orion, London 2010 hardcover; Orion, London 2011 trade paperback) and **HAPPY DAYS** by Graham Hurley (Orion, London 2012 hardcover/trade paperback).

About four years ago, I started reading this author's 12-book series featuring DI Joe Faraday and DC Paul Winter in order of publication. It soon became apparent to me that this was an exceptional series, the equal or better of any British crime series I had ever read. Faraday in particular is a compelling character of depth and poignancy. In 2019, I ordered the last two books in the series to be sent to our place in Greece so I could read them there during the summer of 2020. Then COVID happened and I had to wait until now to

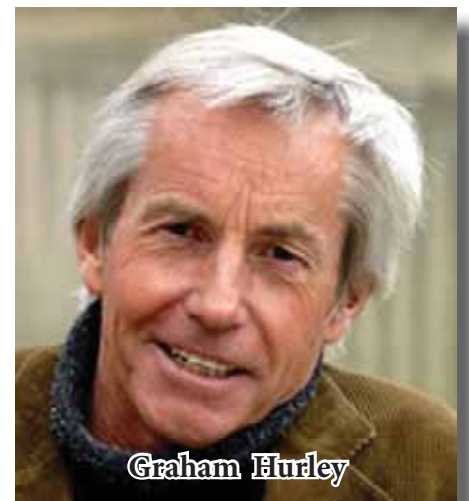
read them.

BORROWED LIGHT describes the end game for Faraday. Both Faraday and his French girlfriend Gabrielle are in a serious car crash in Egypt. Then, Gabrielle becomes totally consumed with looking after a badly burned little Palestinian girl from Gaza. Faraday returns to Portsmouth and is placed in charge of a complex case involving four murdered victims who were found in a farmhouse destroyed by fire.

Meanwhile, Winter is realizing that he needs to extricate himself from his relationship with former drug lord Bazza Mackenzie before it's too late to save himself. Bazza has decided to run for political office despite his financial empire crumbling. He wants Winter to recover a large stash of cocaine that he thinks another former drug king stole from him.

It's difficult to disclose many details about **HAPPY DAYS** without giving too much away about the storyline. It's basically the dénouement of the series, tying everything together. At the beginning, it is understandably quite sad. Perhaps Bazza's demise was a touch prolonged as he strives to get elected to Parliament. Winter will be lucky if he can survive Bazza's vengeance.

Graham Hurley is a truly outstanding storyteller but some of his staunchest fans have not forgiven him for the ending to **BORROWED LIGHT**. The depth of character development and the intensity of the plots in this series are definitely impressive.



INDIGO SLAM by Robert Crais (Hyperion, New York 1997 hardcover; Hyperion, New York 2014 trade paperback).

Sometimes I ask myself why am I chasing around trying to discover new authors and being often disappointed when I have lots of books by tried and true, terrific authors available to re-read. Recently, I hugely enjoyed re-reading all of Michael Connolly's Bosch novels. After reading **INDIGO SLAM**, I plan on doing the same thing with all of Robert Crais' Elvis Cole and Joe Pike novels. This is vintage Crais writing in top gear, revealing that, despite all of his tough guy persona, Elvis has a soft heart. When three children retain him to find their missing father for a grand fee of \$200, off he goes on the case with Joe Pike in tow. Of course, nothing is quite as it seems and soon they are duking it out with Russian gangsters, U.S. Treasury agents and Vietnamese nationalists. I loved it.

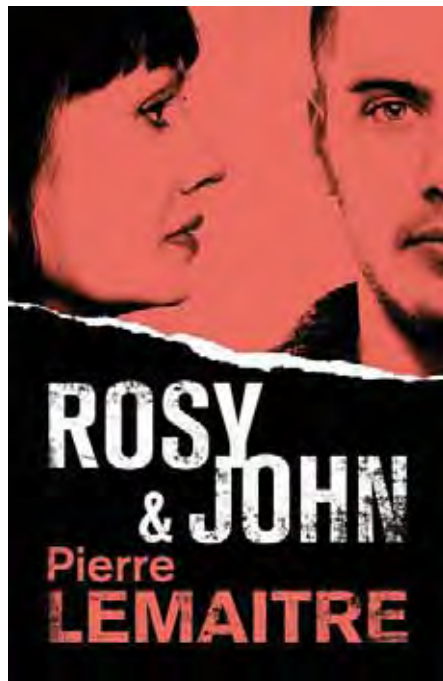
THE SEARCHER by Tana French (Viking, New York 2020 hardcover/trade paperback)

It's going to be tough to top this novel for sheer reading pleasure. After 25 years in the Chicago police force and a sudden divorce, Cal Hooper decides to start an entirely new life for himself and buys a small rundown dwelling and property in a remote village in Ireland. There's a local pub, an assortment of odd characters and a matchmaker trying to fix Cal up with her widowed sister. Everything is laid back and peaceful until a young local kid interrupts Cal's renovations with a request that he find this person's missing older brother. Against his better judgment, Cal gets drawn into pursuing this quest and discovers that this part of Ireland could bring him more troubles than Chicago ever did.

Tana French is a lyrical and brilliant storyteller, living in Dublin. Every facet of *The Searcher* is masterfully written.

ROSY & JOHN by Pierre Lemaitre (MacLehose Press, London 2021 paperback).

Whew, the tension in this novella zips along as Commandant Camille Verhoeven is confronted with a young man who admits to having planted sev-



en lethal bombs throughout Paris with one set to explode every 24 hours. His demands are simple – release his imprisoned mother and himself, give them 5 million Euros and put them on a plane to Australia. Verhoeven doubts that even the heavy-handed Counterterrorism brigade will be successful in causing this individual to reveal the location of his bombs.

This is a follow-up to the author's prize-winning *Brigade Criminelle* trilogy featuring Camille Verhoeven. It's impossible to put it down. A hardcover edition may have been published in 2017.

WHEN YOU ARE MINE by Michael Robotham (Sphere, London 2021 hardcover/trade paperback).

Philomena McCarthy is early in her career as a London Metropolitan Police officer when she intervenes in a domestic assault incident involving a decorated police detective and his girlfriend. He happens to be married with two young children. Phil happens to be the daughter of a former crime lord. She gets drawn into other related assault cases, the murder of a London journalist and a precarious relationship. The consequences are severe.

WHEN YOU ARE MINE is a compelling tale of obsession, police corruption and domestic abuse. The plot has

momentum, the characterization is deft, and the dialogue is crisp and clever. One has to wonder, however, about Phil's poor judgment and somewhat reckless behavior.

LIVING PROOF by John Harvey (William Heinemann, London 1995 hardcover; Arrow Books, London 2005 paperback)

This is the seventh novel in John Harvey's 12-book classic series featuring Detective-Inspector Charlie Resnick. First, Resnick is put in charge of investigating a series of vicious attacks on the clients of prostitutes in Nottingham. Then, he is also assigned to provide protection for a brassy best-selling American female author at a local book convention. Not sure whether the author resists the opportunity to give readers a parody of what happens at book conventions but he includes Ian Rankin and Sarah Dunant in cameo roles at this one. In between his exotic sandwiches and rapt admiration of jazz, Resnick once again displays his intuitive style of investigation.

THE NIGHT BEFORE MORNING by Alistair Moffat (Birlinn, Edinburgh 2021 trade paperback)

An alternative history thriller. In the closing days of WW II, Germany drops an atomic bomb on London and coerces the Allies into capitulating by the threat of wiping out New York and Leningrad with similar atomic bombs unless they do so. England is now occupied by the German Nazis but a small group of resisters based in the Borders region of Scotland decides to fight back. Could Germany be bluffing about having more atomic bombs?

A Scottish author, this is Moffat's debut novel.

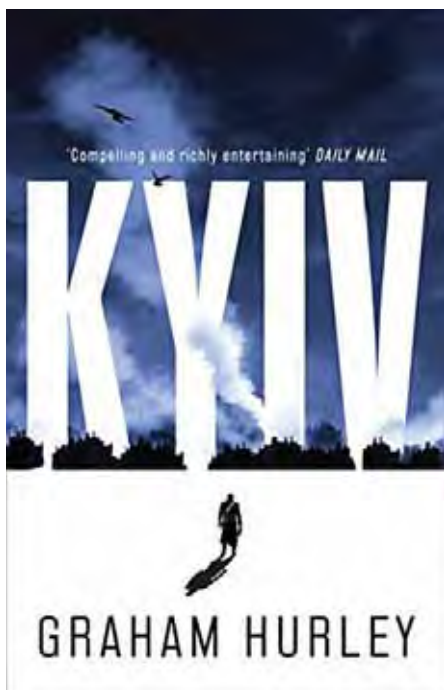
THE LIST by Barry Gilder (Jacana Media, South Africa 2018 trade paperback).

Wow, this book came to me like a rocket out of left field. I can't even remember who recommended it. **THE LIST** is absolutely one of the all-time finest espionage novels I've ever come across – right up there with the very best of Graham Greene, John le Carré, Robert Littell, Charles McCarry and Daniel Silva.

It covers activities by South Africa's apartheid and anti-apartheid forces in their contest for power and influence from 1979 through to an imagined 2020. Shortly after Mandela became president in 1994, it was rumored that he received a secret list from former apartheid intelligence officials of their agents who had been infiltrated into the upper levels of the ANC during the struggle years. Mandela apparently ignored this information. Some years later, a new president authorizes a small secret task force to investigate the identity of the agents on this list and to determine if any of them are subverting the goals of his government.

I find it amazing that this novel received so little attention outside of South Africa. This is fictionalized history close to the bone at a watershed time for South Africa. Gilder has had a long-standing involvement in South African intelligence and secret service circles at a senior level working both against the apartheid government and afterwards for the new government. Prior to that, Gilder did stints as a protest musician, political activist, revolutionary soldier and spy for ANC's military arm. He now serves as South Africa's Ambassador to Syria and Lebanon.

KYIV by Graham Hurley (Head of Zeus, London 2021 hardcover).



A searing account of German and Russian brutality in their 1941 battle for control and the occupation of Kyiv, the largest city in the Ukraine, including the mass murder of thousands of its Jewish residents by the Nazi SS. Treachery abounds on all sides – in Kyiv, Moscow, Berlin and London. A valiant Scotsman seeks to unmask Kim Philby. Two courageous women find love in the midst of this maelstrom of war and betrayal. That **KYIV** is not for the faint-hearted reader is an understatement.

Graham Hurley is a brilliant storyteller. **KYIV** is the sixth novel in his excellent *Spoils of War* series. The others are **FINISTERRE**, **AUORE**, **ESTOCADA**, **LAST FLIGHT TO STALINGRAD** and **RAID 42** in that order.

DARKNESS RISING by A. A. Dhand (Corgi Books/Quick Reads, London 2020 trade paperback).

DARKNESS RISING is a prequel novella in A. A. Dhand's Detective Inspector Harry Virdee series. Harry wants to clear the case of two murdered minor drug dealers ASAP before a major drug gang-war breaks out on Bradford's streets. He knows the identity of the killer; he just needs to be able to stitch him up, to hell with the proper rules and procedures. Meanwhile, Harry's wife Saima is about to deliver their first child.

May I confess that I'm a big fan of this author's Harry Virdee series. The four prior books in the series were a delight to read. Harry is a terrific character and Dhand is a marvelous storyteller. In 2021, his stand-alone novel **THE BLOOD DIVIDE** was published by Bantam Press in London.

THE NAMELESS ONES by John Connolly (Hodder & Stoughton, London 2021 hardcover/trade paperback)

This is a muscular novel, written with great style and intensity. Five Serbian war criminals, headed up by the Vuksan brothers, butcher four individuals in an Amsterdam canal house. The killers were a product of the genocidal Balkan conflicts that occurred during the 1990s following the disintegration of the former Yugoslavia. Two American assassins, Angel and Louis, decide to seek revenge for this act as the victims



were close friends of theirs. Charlie Parker's offer of help is declined. What follows is a manhunt across Europe with many casualties and the murky involvement of American Intelligence, the French police, the Serbian authorities, terrorist smugglers, a high-powered Austrian lawyer and a possible witch.

The nineteenth novel in the author's powerful Charlie Parker series, **THE NAMELESS ONES** is based on meticulous research and a deep understanding of the evil that humans can inflict on one another. It mainly features Angel and Louis as opposed to Charlie Parker and has only a minor supernatural element compared with many of the prior books in this series.

THE REDBREAST by Jo Nesbo (Harvill Secker, London 2006 hardcover; Vintage Books, London 2006 trade paperback)

From the start, I have enjoyed reading all of Nesbo's Harry Hole novels but some more than others. **THE REDBREAST** is in the latter camp. Harry Hole investigates multiple murders, tries to trace an extremely expensive rifle designed for assassinations that was illegally brought into the country, loses a close associate (doesn't this happen in most of the Hole novels?) and drinks a lot. The plot is a bit farfetched and overly long. That Harry Hole is such an

engaging character is why I continue to look forward to reading each book in this series. In particular, I thought the most recent Harry Hole novel, **KNIFE**, was outstanding.

NIGHT RUNNERS by Richard Crompton (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, London 2018 hardcover/trade paperback)

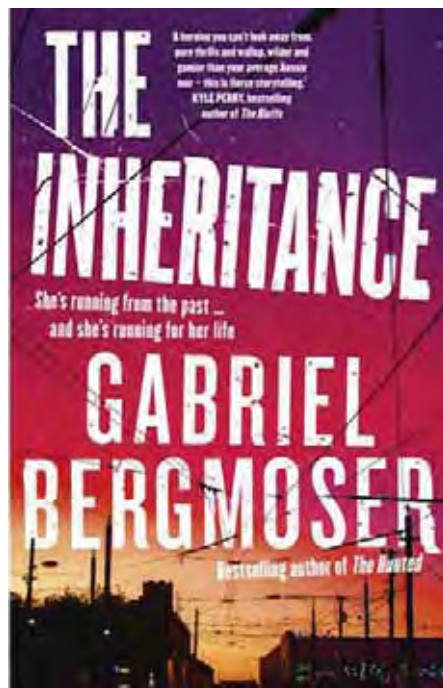
This is the third and final book in the author's superb series featuring Detective Mollel of the Nairobi Police Force. Coming from the Maasai tribe and being intolerant of corruption, Mollel is an outsider to other city police. In addition to Mollel, the second main character of this series is Nairobi, Kenya's burgeoning capital city with a metropolitan population of over 9 million.

NIGHT RUNNERS has Mollel investigating the disappearance of a girl who may have been murdered. Such disappearances are occurring frequently in Nairobi. A large part of the city is under the control of a powerful crime lord who is obstructing Mollel's inquiries. The colorful cast also includes a young charismatic senior police official gunning for the position of police chief or higher, a faded but still glamorous female TV star, a crackpot witch doctor of a psychiatrist with a surprisingly extensive clientele, Mollel's steadfast police partner Kiunga, and his hip son Adam who disconcertedly may want to follow in his father's police footsteps. As this is a society where corruption is rampant at all levels, it's extremely difficult for Mollel to know whom he can trust.

The first two books in this series are **THE HONEY GUIDE** and **HELL'S GATE**.

THE INHERITANCE by Gabriel Bergmoser (Harper Collins, Sydney, Australia 2021 trade paperback)

The author's second novel featuring Maggie, about the toughest female you'll ever encounter. Pursued by drug dealers, a biker gang and the Melbourne police, Maggie has to stab, bash, cut, shoot and burn in order to stay on her quest to find her mother who abandoned her in the care of an abusive father. With no friends or allies other than a bent cop, Maggie leaves behind a string of damaged adversaries and dead bodies



everywhere she goes. For sheer sustained momentum and mayhem, **THE INHERITANCE** has few peers. It's hard to imagine what Maggie could do for an encore but I'm sure Bergmoser is working on it.

BLOOD COUNTS by Martin O'Brien (Preface Publishing, London 2010 trade paperback); **THE DYING MINUTES** by Martin O'Brien (Preface Publishing, London 2012 trade paperback); and **KNIFE GUN POISON BOMB** by Martin O'Brien (Mobuk Press 2015 trade paperback)

BLOOD COUNTS is the sixth book in the author's series featuring Chief Inspector Daniel Jacquot, mainly set in or around Marseilles. It's been a while since I read and enjoyed the earlier books but **BLOOD COUNTS** may be the best so far in the series. Jacquot is on the trail of two assassins who have already murdered six persons. Each of the victims is the nearest and dearest to one of the policemen and a magistrate that were connected to a shootout one year earlier which took the lives of two bodyguards from Corsica. Jacquot has a good idea of the identity of the individual master-mining these acts of vengeance with the two assassins but is unable to prove it. He comes to realize that his beloved girlfriend Claudine and her daughter are the next targets of the

killers as he himself was also involved in the original shootout. The singer George Benson has a cameo role to play. It's not much of a spoiler to disclose that the ending is close-run and bloody.

THE DYING MINUTES, the seventh in the series, starts off in 1978 with the attempted heist of three truckloads of gold bullion that goes wrong. Someone had tipped off the police and in the ensuing gun battle four of the robbers and one bent cop were killed. During the melee, one of the trucks carrying 75 gold bars disappears. Twenty years later, two competing major crime lords each launch a massive hunt for this missing gold and begin murdering everyone even remotely connected with the original robbery to obtain information leading to the missing gold.

Jacquot is now stationed in Cavailon, Provence where he is currently on sick leave recuperating from injuries incurred previously on the job. To his surprise, a book-collecting fisherman unexpectedly bequeaths his motor launch to Jacquot. With time on his hands, Jacquot decides to undertake his own unofficial investigation into the background of this fisherman to understand how he came to own such an expensive motorboat. Could he have somehow been involved with the missing gold? The Chief Inspector of the Marseilles police responsible for investigating the slew of new murders just happens to be a former girlfriend of Jacquot's. Can he remain faithful to his pregnant partner?

KNIFE GUN POISON BOMB, the eighth in the series, starts off in 1999 with Jacquot investigating the knife stabbing killings of a steadily increasing number of men in various towns and villages throughout Provence. The perpetrator has been nick-named "The Silent Blade". Meanwhile, a rogue Russian arms dealer arrives in Marseilles on his way to assuming a new life somewhere in the South Pacific. He is being hunted by Ivory Coast rebels, an Afghanistan warlord and the CIA who all want him dead. Somehow, he ends up also becoming a target of the Silent Blade. In the midst of this, Jacquot's girlfriend Claudine is about to give birth to twins.

O'Brien is a marvelous storyteller, skillfully weaving the sights, sounds, smells and food of the Marseilles region of France into the texture of his Jacquot novels. An added bonus to these novels is the author's deft characterization of Jacquot, especially his relationship with Claudine. Overall, this is crime fiction writing at its best.

BILLY SUMMERS by Stephen King (Scribner, New York 2021 hardcover; Hodder & Stoughton, London 2021 trade paperback)

Can't remember the last time I cried at the end of a novel but this did it for me. Stephen King's virtuosity as a writer is in full force with **BILLY SUMMERS**. An American sniper vet turns hitman, turns author, turns big-hearted. This is a fast moving thriller, a war memoir, a love story, and a tutorial on becoming a writer. And King seamlessly pulls it all together.

One last contract and Billy can retire. Unfortunately, his clients underestimate Billy and think they can get away with double-crossing him. Now, if only he hadn't rescued that 21-year old girl who had just been gang-raped. But, when you have to crisscross the country and keep below the radar of the bad guys who have put a \$6 million bounty on your head, maybe Billy is lucky to have her along. As road trips go, this is a tough ride.

BILLY SUMMERS shows that Stephen King is that rare author who excels at any genre he puts his mind to.

RAZORBLADE TEARS by S. A. COSBY (Flatiron Books, New York 2012 hardcover; Headline Publishing, London 2021 trade paperback)

For an encore to **BLACKTOP WASTELAND**, **RAZORBLADE TEARS** sure came up aces. The plot has such a high torque on it, you have to stop reading every few chapters to catch your breath. A powerful unknown man coerces a biker gang into murdering a gay couple and then orders the bikers to find and kill a young woman in hiding to prevent her from revealing his identity. This is a bad decision – the fathers of the two gay men are two of the toughest, hardest ex-convicts in all of Virginia and they are determined to

exact retribution for the shooting deaths of their two sons, regardless of the many obstacles they encounter.

While these two protagonists are in some ways polar opposites, one being a family-oriented Black business owner and the other being in his own words “a hell-raising, whiskey-drinking, hard-loving redneck son of a bitch”. The first, Ike, stayed on the straight after prison and built up a successful lawn maintenance company. The second, Buddy Lee, lived a subsistence existence as an alcoholic in a trailer park. They do, however, have certain things in common. Both fathers are carrying a great deal of guilt over vehemently refusing to accept that their sons were gay, both have volcanic tempers, and both are no strangers to using violence to accomplish their ends.

RAZORBLADE TEARS is a story about the growing relationship between Ike and Buddy Lee, their violent quest to redeem themselves over how badly they treated their sons, the tribulations of coming out and being a member of the LGBTQ community, and what it means to be Black, especially in a southern state such as Virginia. The plot is a runaway bullet train, the characterization is brilliant, the dialogue is pitch perfect and the setting is totally authentic. No question about it, S. A. Cosby is an au-

thor at the top of his craft.

A GOOD DEATH by **ELIZABETH IRONSIDE** (Hodder & Stoughton, London 2000 hardcover; Felony & Mayhem Press, New York 2008 trade paperback)

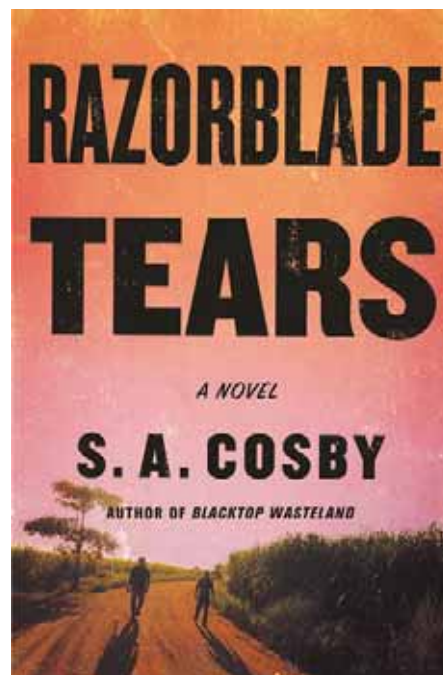
A GOOD DEATH takes place in 1944-1945 during the end of the German Occupation in France and just after its liberation. It highlights the murkiness of knowing exactly what was taking place as the various factions of the Resistance were competing for power and playing the lead role in dispensing summary justice to those accused of collaborating with the enemy. Prior to the liberation of France, the communist Resistance groups were more interested in having the Germans wipe out the other Resistance groups than in fighting the Germans themselves.

As soon as hostilities ceased in France, Major Theo Cazalle, the member of General de Gaulle's inner circle responsible for mediating between him and the Resistance, returns to his home deep in the French countryside. There he finds his wife with her hair shorn for being a collaborator, some of his closest friends in the local Resistance killed by the Germans, and a senior SS Officer murdered and left nude on the front steps of his house. **A GOOD DEATH** is the story of Cazalle's attempt to uncover the facts behind these events. Treachery, duplicity, venality abound. After all, this is France.

This is the fifth mystery novel by Elizabeth Ironside, the pseudonym for Lady Catherine Manning, the wife of a former British Ambassador to the U.S.

Confession – the books included in my Greek reading roundup are usually just those books that I enjoyed reading. Books that failed to hold my interest or didn't appeal to me were omitted, admittedly something that is highly subjective.

More information on Steele's passion for books and his favorite current mystery/thriller authors can be found in the Meet Steele section of his youth mentoring website at www.COTWguides.com.



Editor's Message



In the Mood. One of the wonderful things about being a fan of mystery, crime and thriller fiction is its diversity due to its many, many sub-genre's.. I am blessed beyond measure to own a large library of mystery novels (over 12,000) so when I'm in the mood to read a female private eye novel I can go to my shelves and take a Linda Barnes (my favorite of the 1990s era) off the shelf. The same goes for when I'm in the mood for an action thriller (Mark Greaney is the best writing today) or a intelligently written British police procedural (Reginald Hill is a master). The same goes for my current stack of books that have recently come from publishers and the fairly large number of advances I've downloaded to my Ipad.

I generally am reading anywhere from 6-10 books at the same time, just waiting for one of them to "catch fire" and when that happens I'll race to the end with just that one. It's not that I'm not enjoying the others in the pile because I most likely am liking reading them. Otherwise I stop reading and go on to something else. It's just that I guess I have a short attention span and if the book is easy to put down at the end of a chapter I usually do that and pick up one of the others I'm reading. This reading style may seem odd to many of you, but that is the way I've read for many years – especially since the days when mysteries were 190-200 pages long and could be read in a couple of sittings.

Sometimes I'll look at a book that I know I want to read, but I'm just not in the mood for that type of mystery or thriller. But a week or two later, I may be more amenable to that particular novel. I know that's pretty whimsical, but it is what it is and it has worked for me. I'm spoiled for choice.

David Mark Has Been Busy. One of my favorite police detective series is the DS Aector McAvoy series by David

Mark. Through 2019 there have been eight entries in this highly entertaining series set in Hull, England. It features a big, hulking Scottish detective with a heart of gold, married to a gypsy. McAvoy's boss Trish Pharaoh features heavily in each narrative. The surrounding cast is as interesting as the main protagonists. But over the last couple of years, I haven't seen a new McAvoy novel come out. I was despairing that David may have set the series aside to do other things. But it isn't like he has taken the Pandemic Era off. He published 3 novels in 2019, 5 in 2020 and 2 so far in 2021 and 2 scheduled for 2022 already. That equals 12 novels in 4 years! Yikes.



David Mark

Happily for me, two of those novels are McAvoy novels: **DARKNESS FALLS** (a McAvoy prequel) due out in either November, 2021 or February, 2022 (I've seen both dates) and **PAST LIFE** in either September or December, 2021 (I've seen both dates). If you haven't read this series, you should. Start with **DARK WINTER**, which is readily available in the U.S. The two new McAvoy's are published in the U.K. only so far... and that takes me to another topic I want to mention. See next paragraph.

British Crime Novels Published in the U.S. For many years I noticed that many excellent British crime novels weren't being published in the U.S., or

if they were, they were greatly delayed in publication. I wanted to make you *DP* readers aware of what was available, as I know that many of you are fans of British crime fiction. So, many such novels (published only in the U.K.) were reviewed in the pages of *Deadly Pleasures* and talked about in columns by Mat Coward and now Mike Ripley. We also came up with a Best British Barry Award and presented those for years. Then American publishers seemed to catch on and more and more British crime fiction was not only being published in the U.S., but timely published in the U.S. (Soon after or simultaneously with British publication). We did keep on highlighting British crime fiction in the magazine but pointed out that in most cases these books were readily available in the U.S. We also discontinued the Best British Barry Award as it seemed redundant and made the Barry Best Novel inclusive of British crime novels as well as any others published in English in the world.

But I have been noticing a reversal of that trend lately. More and more crime novels by British authors (and even prominent British writers) have not been appearing on our shores of late. The Pandemic has certainly wreaked havoc on British and American publishing timetables and so I hope this trend is temporary. Also the tidal wave of domestic/psychological suspense being published in the U.S. has eliminated a number of "slots" in a publisher's "line" that might otherwise be filled with what we consider more "traditional" mysteries (police detective, amateur detective, historical mystery, private eye, etc.). There simply may not be as much space to fit these British crime novels into American publishers' lines right now.

I cite the following examples of excellent crime novels (and series) published in the U.K.: but not in the U.S. Some of the authors were published in the U.S., but no longer. Others have never been published here.

M.W. Craven – superb Washington Poe/Tilly Bradshaw series

William Shaw – last book published here was **SALT LANE**. There have been three novels since then.

Felix Francis – no American publication date as of yet for his latest. **ICED** was published in U.K. in September, 2021.

Robert Goddard – his last **THE FINE ART OF INVISIBLE DETECTION** has not yet been published in the U.S.

Other writers who should be published here are:

A. A. Dhand

Dominic Nolan

Peter Hanington

Stephen Leather

Stuart MacBride

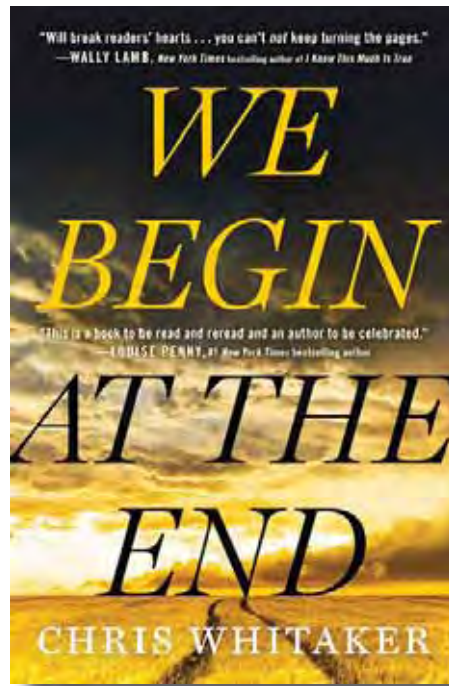
Jack Grimwood

Simon Kernick

Vaseem Khan (new series)

A head-scratcher is the case of Thomas Mullen, the American writer of **DARKTOWN** and **LIGHTNING MEN** set in post-WWII Atlanta, both published to acclaim here in the U.S. The third in the series, **MIDNIGHT ATLANTA**, was published in the U.K. last year to rave reviews (and is available from amazon.com), but to my knowledge has no American publisher.

My Strange Path to Reading One of the Best Books of the Year. In the Spring of 2021, I started hearing a lot of buzz about **WE BEGIN AT THE END** by Chris Whitaker. I was unfamiliar with the author but was impressed by the fact that the crime novel had garnered two starred reviews in the library journals. I got a hold of a copy and for some reason got quickly mired down in my initial attempt to read the book. Larry Gandle came to the rescue and read it instead and gave it an A- rating, which is a very high grade for Larry. I dismissed **WE BEGIN AT THE END** as most probably a very good book – just not my kind of book. Then as the year progressed and the CWA Awards came out, lo and behold, **WE BEGIN AT THE END** won the prestigious CWA Gold Dagger for Best Crime Novel of the Year. A short time later what I consider the second most prestigious crime fiction award in the U.K, the Theakston Old Peculier Awards gave **WE BEGIN AT THE END** the Theakston Old Peculier Crime Novel of the Year Award. Again,



that caused me to sit up and take notice.

The past couple of years I've been trying to read more and more of the novels that by year's end will most likely show up on lists of the year's best mysteries, crime novels and thrillers. One reason for this is so that my reading aligns with our Barry Award nominating process. Another is the compilation of the **DP List** (of the best books) for each issue of *Deadly Pleasures*.

Even though I had given **WE BEGIN AT THE END** a shot, I wasn't sure I had given it a fair shot, so I resolved to read the book no matter what. With renewed determination, I started again and found it slow going, but I persevered, reading 5-10 pages a day, putting it down and going on to other books that I was more enthusiastic about reading. Then an amazing thing (to me) happened long about page 110 or so. It was like looking at one of Magic Eye pictures that don't make a lot of sense until to make you eyes go in and out of focus. Suddenly you see a three dimensional picture that wasn't apparent when you first look at it.

From that point I finished the 367-page novel in a couple of days. It is definitely a WOW book for me. There were so many startling surprises in the last 50 pages or so, that my emotions were sent on a roller-coaster. I came very close

to tears (something I never do) by the book's end.

WE BEGIN AT THE END turned out to be not only an outstanding example of crime fiction but also a remarkable piece of fine literature. While other books will fade from my memory, this one will stay fixed. It is that memorable.
Rating: A

Missing DP Columns? You may notice that there is no Marv Lachman column in this issue. Nor is there a full L. J. Roberts review column. Both have experienced some health issues recently and have promised to resume their columns in the next issue. I miss having their valued input and wish them a complete and speedy recovery.

Best Mysteries of the Year. Now is the time of year when experts, publications and websites start publishing their lists of the best mysteries, crime novels and thrillers of the year. Last year Larry and I were able to locate 50 such lists and collate them to find consensus as to which are the best books of the year.

Many of the early lists will be posted on our website, www.deadlypleasures.com. Please check in regularly if you are interested. In the next issue of *DP* I will publish all of the "Best" lists and my compilation, as I did last year. You won't find this anywhere else.

There are always good books that I find during this process that I would not otherwise have noticed.

Two of the novels that appeared at the top of last year's list compilation, **BLACKTOP WASTELAND** by S. A. Cosby and **WINTER COUNTS** by David Heska Wanbli Weiden, went on to win a number of awards, including the two major Barry Awards.



Assistant Editor's Message



I am, apparently, the type of reader who needs structure to my reading list. For example, starting in mid-October to early January, I am reading the best books of the previous year based on the 'best of the year' lists in anticipation of the Edgar Award shortlists from the MWA which come out around January 19 -- the birthday of Edgar Allen Poe.



Edgar Awards

The Edgar Award Best Novel and Best First Novel by an American Author shortlists will usually take me into March or April depending on how many of the books I have preciousely read. I will then read a few new books that I want to read just before the CWA announces the longlists (which I typically do not read) but might pick a few of the books to read in anticipation of the shortlist announcement and will read the Gold and Steel Dagger and Creasey Award shortlists when they are announced. This will take up my time from June into early August.



Besides crime fiction, I like to read literary fiction as a change of pace. For

that I look forward to the Man Booker Prize longlist of thirteen books which come out in late July and will occupy my time until early September. After reading them this past year, I was exhausted with reading and could not pick up any book to read for several weeks. This has never happened before to me. I am always in the middle of some book. The reason is quite simple -- Bouchercon was cancelled.



Crime fiction conventions get me excited to read. They renew my energy. Whether it is the International Thriller Writers convention in New York in early July, Left Coast Crime in February or March, or Bouchercon -- especially Bouchercon. At these conventions, we meet fellow fans, reviewers, writers and



publisher's publicity people. We all will discuss what are the best books recently published in the genre. It is impossible to not have books to read after leaving these conventions. These books occupy me until the Best of the Year lists come out starting in mid-October and increasing in number through November and December. George and I scour the internet looking for these lists. Last year, George tallied the 50 lists that we found. It was an impressive achievement and the resulting list of the top ten books with the most mentions is, undoubtedly, one of the best of the "best" lists of the year. We will be doing that again this

year.

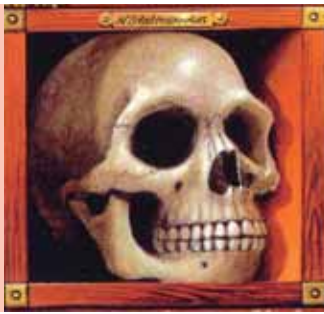
However, this year for the second year in a row, there was no Bouchercon convention. None of us are getting younger and with the recent deaths of mystery luminaries like Caroline Todd and Bill Gottfried, it reminds us that life is way too short and we missed precious time with our friends. Bouchercon always gets me excited to get back to reading.

With so many books to read and no specific direction on what to read, I actually floundered for weeks. Rather than pick up a book, I would find anything else to do. It was **FIVE DECEMBERS** by James Kistrel (which George and I rave about elsewhere in this issue) that got me back on track. With the Publisher's Weekly Best Mysteries and Thrillers list just out, the wave of "Best" Lists has begun and I again will have structure to my reading. I envy those of you that can just pick up and read whatever you want. That is just not me!



Deadly Pleasures Mystery Magazine is committed to finding the best in mystery, crime and thriller fiction and recommending those novels to you.

The DP List 2021



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 2021. Titles in blue indicate titles added since the last issue of *DP*. As we near year end and a lot of lists for “Best Mysteries and Thrillers” appear, you will find a lot of the titles on those lists appeared first on this DP List. I hope you make good use of this list to guide your reading.

Best Novels

****THE TURNOUT** by Megan Abbott (Putnam, \$27.00). Dara and Marie Durant have been dancers since they can remember. Growing up, they were homeschooled and trained by their glamorous mother, founder of the Durant School of Dance. After their parents' death in a tragic accident nearly a dozen years ago, the sisters began running the school together, along with Charlie, Dara's husband and once their mother's prized student. Marie, warm and soft, teaches the younger students; Dara, with her precision, trains the older ones; and Charlie, sidelined from dancing after years of injuries, rules over the back office. Circling around one another, the three have perfected a dance, six days a week, that keeps the studio thriving. But when a suspicious accident occurs, just at the onset of the school's annual performance of *The Nutcracker*—a season of competition, anxiety, and exhilaration—an interloper arrives and threatens the sisters' delicate balance. **PW, LJ, BL & DP**

****THE HOUSEMATE** by Sarah Bailey (Allen & Unwin, in Australia

only). Three housemates. One dead, one missing and one accused of murder. Dubbed the Housemate Homicide, it's a mystery that has baffled Australians for almost a decade. Melbourne-based journalist Olive Groves worked on the story as a junior reporter and became obsessed by the case. Now, nine years later, the missing housemate turns up dead on a remote property. Olive is once again assigned to the story, this time reluctantly paired with precocious millennial podcaster Cooper Ng. As Oli and Cooper unearth new facts about the three housemates, a dark web of secrets is uncovered. The revelations catapult Oli back to the death of the first housemate, forcing her to confront past traumas and insecurities that have risen to the surface again. **DP**

****FIND YOU FIRST** by Linwood Barclay (Morrow, \$27.99). Tech millionaire Miles Cookson has more money than he can ever spend, and everything he could dream of—except time. He has recently been diagnosed with a terminal illness, and there is a fifty percent chance that it can be passed on to the next generation. Two decades ago, a young, struggling Miles was a sperm donor. Somewhere out there, he has kids—nine of them. And they might be about to inherit both the good and the bad from him—maybe his fortune, or maybe something much worse.

As Miles begins to search for the children he's never known, aspiring film documentarian Chloe Swanson embarks on a quest to find her biological father, armed with the knowledge that twenty-two years ago, her mother used a New York sperm bank to become pregnant. When Miles and Chloe eventually connect, their excitement at finding each other is overshadowed by a series

of mysterious and terrifying events. One by one, Miles's other potential heirs are vanishing—every trace of them wiped, like they never existed at all. **PW & LJ**

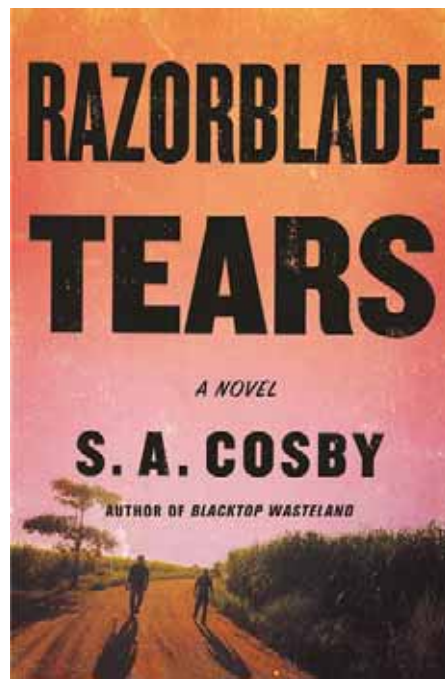
****NORTHERN SPY** by Flynn Berry (Viking, \$26.00). A producer at the BBC and mother to a new baby, Tessa is at work in Belfast one day when the news of another raid comes on the air. The IRA may have gone underground in the two decades since the Good Friday Agreement, but they never really went away, and lately bomb threats, security checkpoints, and helicopters floating ominously over the city have become features of everyday life. As the news reporter requests the public's help in locating those responsible for the robbery, security footage reveals Tessa's sister, Marian, pulling a black ski mask over her face. The police believe Marian has joined the IRA, but Tessa is convinced she must have been abducted or coerced; the sisters have always opposed the violence enacted in the name of uniting Ireland. And besides, Marian is vacationing on the north coast. Tessa just spoke to her yesterday. When the truth about Marian comes to light, Tessa is faced with impossible choices that will test the limits of her ideals, the bonds of her family, her notions of right and wrong, and her identity as a sister and a mother. Walking an increasingly perilous road, she wants nothing more than to protect the one person she loves more fiercely than her sister: her infant son, Finn. **Kirkus & BL**

****THE PASSENGER** by Ulrich Alexander Boschwitz (Metropolitan Books, \$24.99). Berlin, November 1938. Jewish shops have been ransacked and looted, synagogues destroyed. As storm troopers pound on his door, Otto Silbermann, a respected businessman who fought for Germany in the Great War, is forced to sneak out the back of his own home. Turned away from establishments he had long patronized, and fearful of being exposed as a Jew despite his Aryan looks, he boards a train. And then another. And another . . . until his flight becomes a frantic odyssey across Germany, as he searches first for information, then for help, and finally for escape. **Kirkus & DP**

****FALLEN**, Linda Castillo (\$27.99). When a young woman is found murdered in a Painters Mill motel, Chief of Police Kate Burkholder is shocked to discover she once knew the victim. Rachael Schwartz was a charming but troubled Amish girl who left the fold years ago and fled Painters Mill. Why was she back in town? And who would kill her so brutally? Kate remembers Rachael as the only girl who was as bad at being Amish as Kate was – and those parallels dog her. But the more Kate learns about Rachael's life, the more she's convinced that her dubious reputation was deserved. As a child, Rachael was a rowdy rulebreaker whose decision to leave devastated her parents and best friend. As an adult, she was charismatic and beautiful, a rabble-rouser with a keen eye for opportunity no matter who got in her way. Her no-holds-barred lifestyle earned her a lot of love and enemies aplenty – both English and Amish. As the case heats to a fever pitch and long-buried secrets resurface, a killer haunts Painters Mill. Someone doesn't want Rachael's past – or the mysteries she took with her to the grave – coming to light. As Kate digs deeper, violence strikes again, this time hitting close to home. Will Kate uncover the truth and bring a murderer to justice? Or will a killer bent on protecting a terrible past stop her once and for all –and let the fallen be forgotten? **BL & PW**

****THE NAMELESS ONES** by John Connolly (Atria, \$28.00). In Amsterdam, four bodies, violently butchered, are discovered in a canal house, the remains of friends and confidantes of the assassin known only as Louis. The men responsible for the murders are Serbian war criminals. They believe they can escape retribution by retreating to their homeland. They are wrong. For Louis has come to Europe to hunt them down: five killers to be found and punished before they can vanish into thin air. There is just one problem. The sixth. **PW & DP**

****RAZORBLADE TEARS** by S. A. Cosby (Flatiron, \$26.99). Ike Randolph has been out of jail for fifteen years, with not so much as a speeding ticket in all that time. The last thing he



expects to hear is that his son Isiah has been murdered, along with Isiah's white husband, Derek. Ike had never fully accepted his son but is devastated by his loss. Derek's father Buddy Lee was almost as ashamed of Derek for being gay as Derek was ashamed his father was a criminal. Buddy Lee still has contacts in the underworld, though, and he wants to know who killed his boy. Ike and Buddy Lee, two ex-cons with little else in common other than a criminal past and a love for their dead sons, band together in their desperate desire for revenge. **Booklist, Kirkus & DP**

****LAST REDEMPTION** by Matt Coyle (Oceanview, \$26.95). When Moira asks Rick Cahill to monitor her son, Luke—who's broken a restraining order to stay away from his girl-friend—a simple surveillance explodes into greed, deceit, and murder. Luke goes missing, and Rick's dogged determination compels him to follow clues that lead to the exploration of high finance and DNA cancer research. **PW & DP**

****DEAD GROUND** by M. C. Craven (Constable, £16.99, available only in the U.K. in June). Detective Sergeant Washington Poe is in court, fighting eviction from his beloved and isolated croft, when he is summoned to a backstreet brothel in Carlisle where a man has been beaten to death with a baseball bat.

Poe is confused -- he hunts serial killers and this appears to be a straightforward murder-by-pimp - but his attendance was requested personally, by the kind of people who prefer to remain in the shadows. As Poe and the socially awkward programmer Tilly Bradshaw delve deeper into the case, they are faced with seemingly unanswerable questions: despite being heavily vetted for a high-profile job, why does nothing in the victim's background check out? Why was a small ornament left at the murder scene -- and why did someone on the investigation team steal it? And what is the connection to a flawlessly executed bank heist three years earlier, a heist where nothing was taken. **DP**

****THE LAST THING TO BURN** by Will Dean (Atria, \$27.00). On an isolated farm in the United Kingdom, a woman is trapped by the monster who kidnapped her seven years ago. When she discovers she is pregnant, she resolves to protect her child no matter the cost, and starts to meticulously plan her escape. But when another woman is brought into the fold on the farm, her plans go awry. Can she save herself, her child, and this innocent woman at the same time? Or is she doomed to spend the remainder of her life captive on this farm? **PW**

****WEDDING STATION** by David Downing (Soho Crime, \$27.95). February 27, 1933. In this stunning prequel to the John Russell espionage novels, the Reichstag parliament building in Berlin is set ablaze. It's just a month after Hitler's inauguration as Chancellor of Germany, and the Nazis use the torching to justify a campaign of terror against their political opponents. John Russell's recent separation from his wife threatens his right to reside in Germany and any meaningful relationship with his six-year-old son, Paul. He has just secured work as a crime reporter for a Berlin newspaper, and the crimes which he has to report—the gruesome murder of a rent boy, the hit-and-run death of a professional genealogist, the suspicious disappearance of a Nazi-supporting celebrity fortune-teller—are increasingly entangled in the wider nightmare engulfing Germany. **BL & DP**

****THE KING OF INFINITE SPACE** by Lyndsay Faye (Putnam, \$27.00). Meet Ben Dane: brilliant, devastating, devoted, honest to a fault (truly, a fault). His Broadway theater baron father is dead—but by purpose or accident? The question rips him apart. Unable to face alone his mother's ghastly remarriage to his uncle, Ben turns to his dearest friend, Horatio Patel, whom he hasn't seen since their relationship changed forever from platonic to something...other. Loyal to a fault (truly, a fault), Horatio is on the first flight to NYC when he finds himself next to a sly tailor who portends inevitable disaster. And who seems ominously like an architect of mayhem himself. A retelling of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. **PW & BL**

****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**

****THE POSTSCRIPT MURDERS** by Elly Griffiths (Houghton, Mifflin, \$25.00). The death of a ninety-year-old woman with a heart condition should not be suspicious. Detective Sergeant Harbinder Kaur certainly sees nothing out of the ordinary when Peggy's caretaker, Nataalka, begins to recount Peggy Smith's passing. But Nataalka had a reason to be at the police station: while clearing out Peggy's flat, she noticed an unusual number of crime novels, all dedicated to Peggy. And each psychological thriller included a mysterious postscript: *PS: for PS*. When a gunman breaks into the flat to steal a book and its author is found dead shortly thereafter—Detective Kaur begins to think that perhaps there is no such thing as an

unsuspicious death after all. **BL & DP**

****ISLAND OF THIEVES** by Glen Erik Hamilton (Morrow, \$27.99). Van Shaw is hired to evaluate the safeguards for the art collection of eccentric business magnate Sebastien Rohner. Then Rohner reveals to Van the real reason he's been recruited: to prevent another professional burglar from stealing the art. Rohner wants to set a thief to catch a thief. While questioning the bizarre nature of the job, Van accepts the lucrative offer and arrives at the island estate during an international summit that Rohner is hosting. Shortly after beginning his surveillance of Rohner's highly secure gallery wing, Van stumbles across the murdered body of one of the honored guests along the rocky shore. Wary of Rohner's true intentions, Van knows the homicide detectives on the case—and perhaps Rohner as well—think he's the prime suspect and will turn his life upside down in their search for proof. **PW, LJ & DP**

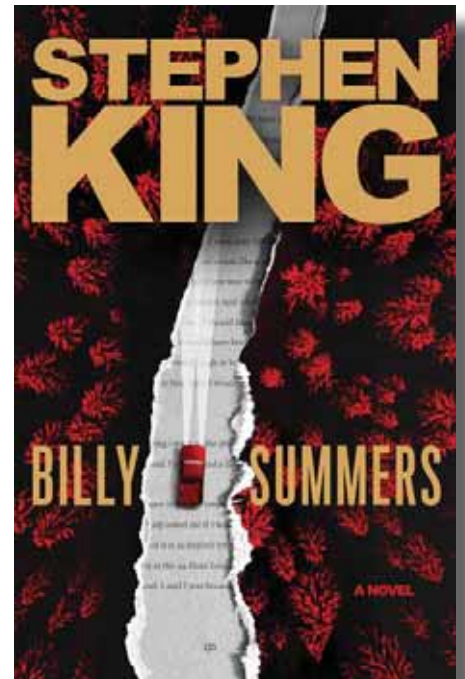
****THE UNWILLING** by John Hart (St. Martin's, \$27.99). Jason won't speak of the war or of his time behind bars, but he wants a relationship with the younger brother (Gibby) he hasn't known for years. Determined to make that connection, he coaxes Gibby into a day at the lake: long hours of sunshine and whisky and older women. But the day turns ugly when the four encounter a prison transfer bus on a stretch of empty road. Beautiful but drunk, one of the women taunts the prisoners, leading to a riot on the bus. The woman finds it funny in the moment, but is savagely murdered soon after. Given his violent history, suspicion turns first to Jason; but when the second woman is kidnapped, the police suspect Gibby, too. Determined to prove Jason innocent, Gibby must avoid the cops and dive deep into his brother's hidden life, a dark world of heroin, guns and outlaw motorcycle gangs. **BL & DP**

****CLARK AND DIVISION** by Naomi Hirahara (Soho, \$27.95). Set in 1944 Chicago, Edgar Award-winner Naomi Hirahara's eye-opening and poignant new mystery, the story of a young woman searching for the truth about her revered older sister's death, brings to focus

the struggles of one Japanese American family released from mass incarceration at Manzanar during World War II. **LJ & DP**

****FIVE DECEMBERS** by James Kestrel (HardCase Crime, \$22.99). December 1941. America teeters on the brink of war, and in Honolulu, Hawaii, police detective Joe McGrady is assigned to investigate a homicide that will change his life forever. Because the trail of murder he uncovers will lead him across the Pacific, far from home and the woman he loves; and though the U.S. doesn't know it yet, a Japanese fleet is already steaming toward Pearl Harbor. **BL, PW, LJ & DP**

****BILLY SUMMERS** by Stephen King (Scribner, \$30.00). Billy Summers is a man in a room with a gun. He's a killer for hire and the best in the business. But he'll do the job only if the target is a truly bad guy. And now Billy wants out. But first there is one last hit. Billy is among the best snipers in the world, a decorated Iraq war vet, a Houdini when it comes to vanishing after the job is done. So what could possibly go wrong? How about everything. **Kirkus, BL, PW & DP**



****THE PLOT** by Jean Hanff Korelitz (Celadon, \$28.00). Jacob Finch Bonner was once a promising young novelist with a respectably published first

book. Today, he's teaching in a third-rate MFA program and struggling to maintain what's left of his self-respect; he hasn't published anything decent in years. When Evan Parker, his most arrogant student, announces he doesn't need Jake's help because the plot of his book in progress is a sure thing, Jake is prepared to dismiss the boast as typical amateur narcissism. But then . . . he hears the plot. Jake braces himself for the supernova publication of Evan Parker's first novel: but it never comes. When he discovers that his former student has died, presumably without ever completing his book, Jake does what any self-respecting writer would do with a story like that. He writes and publishes it.

In a few short years, all of Evan Parker's predictions have come true, but Jake is the author enjoying a wave of fame and wealth. Then an e-mail arrives, the first salvo in a terrifying, anonymous campaign: You are a thief, it says. **PW**

****LIGHTNING STRIKE** by William Kent Krueger (Atria, \$27.00). Aurora is a small town nestled in the ancient forest alongside the shores of Minnesota's Iron Lake. In the summer of 1963, it is the whole world to twelve-year-old Cork O'Connor. But when Cork stumbles upon the body of a man he revered hanging from a tree in an abandoned logging camp, it is the first in a series of events that will cause him to question everything he took for granted about his hometown, his family, and himself. Cork's father, Liam O'Connor, is Aurora's sheriff and it is his job to confirm that the man's death was the result of suicide, as all the evidence suggests. In the shadow of his father's official investigation, Cork begins to look for answers on his own. **LJ & DP**

****DIAMOND AND THE EYE** by Peter Lovesey (Soho Crime, \$27.95). If there's one thing detective Bath Peter Diamond has no patience for, it's a dumb git trying to get involved in one of his investigations—for example, a Philip Marlowe-wannabee private investigator like the self-styled Johnny Getz (his card claims he Getz results). But fate has saddled Diamond with this trial. A Bath antiques dealer, Septimus "Seppy"

Hubbard, has disappeared without a trace, and his daughter, Ruby, has hired Johnny Getz to find him. When a dead body is discovered in Seppy's locked-up store, the missing persons case becomes a murder investigation, and now Diamond has to collaborate with the insufferable private eye. **BL & DP**



****1979** by Val McDermid (Atlantic Monthly Press, \$27.00). For journalist Allie Burns, however, someone else's bad news is the unmistakable sound of opportunity knocking, an opportunity to get away from the "women's stories" her editors at the Scottish daily *The Clarion* keep assigning her. Striking up an alliance with budding investigative journalist Danny Sullivan, Allie begins covering international tax fraud, then a group of Scottish ultranationalists aiming to cause mayhem ahead of a referendum on breaking away from the United Kingdom. Their stories quickly get attention and create enemies for the two young up-and-comers. As they get closer to the bleeding edge of breaking news, Allie and Danny may find their lives on the line. **PW, Kirkus & DP**

****THE MAIDENS** by Alex Michaelidis (Celadon, \$27.99). Edward Fosca is a murderer. Of this Mariana is certain. But Fosca is untouchable. A handsome and charismatic Greek tragedy professor at Cambridge University,

Fosca is adored by staff and students alike—particularly by the members of a secret society of female students known as *The Maidens*. Mariana Andros is a brilliant but troubled group therapist who becomes fixated on *The Maidens* when one member, a friend of Mariana's niece Zoe, is found murdered in Cambridge. **PW & BL**

****VELVET WAS THE NIGHT** by Silvia Moreno-Garcia (DelRey, \$28.00). 1970's Mexico City. Maite is a secretary who lives for one thing: the latest issue of *Secret Romance*. While student protests and political unrest consume the city, Maite escapes into stories of passion and danger. Her next-door neighbor, Leonora, a beautiful art student, seems to live a life of intrigue and romance that Maite envies. When Leonora disappears under suspicious circumstances, Maite finds herself searching for the missing. Meanwhile, someone else is also looking for Leonora at the behest of his boss, a shadowy figure who commands goon squads dedicated to squashing political activists. Elvis is an eccentric criminal who longs to escape his own life: He loathes violence and loves old movies and rock 'n' roll. But as Elvis searches for the missing woman, he watches Maite from a distance—and comes to regard her as a kindred spirit who shares his love of music and the unspoken loneliness of his heart. Now as Maite and Elvis come closer to discovering the truth behind Leonora's disappearance, they can no longer escape the danger that threatens to consume their lives, with hitmen, government agents, and Russian spies all aiming to protect Leonora's secrets—at gunpoint. **BL, Kirkus, PW & LJ**

****APPLES NEVER FALL** by Liane Moriarty (Henry Holt, \$28.99). If your mother was missing, would you tell the police? Even if the most obvious suspect was your father? This is the dilemma facing the four grown Delaney siblings. The Delaneys are fixtures in their community. The parents, Stan and Joy, are the envy of all of their friends. They're killers on the tennis court, and off it their chemistry is palpable. But after fifty years of marriage, they've finally sold their famed tennis academy and are

ready to start what should be the golden years of their lives. So why are Stan and Joy so miserable? The four Delaney children – Amy, Logan, Troy, and Brooke – were tennis stars in their own right, yet as their father will tell you, none of them had what it took to go all the way. But that’s okay, now that they’re all successful grown-ups and there is the wonderful possibility of grandchildren on the horizon. One night a stranger named Savannah knocks on Stan and Joy’s door, bleeding after a fight with her boyfriend. The Delaneys are more than happy to give her the small kindness she sorely needs. If only that was all she wanted. **Kirkus, BL**

****THE SHADOWS OF MEN**

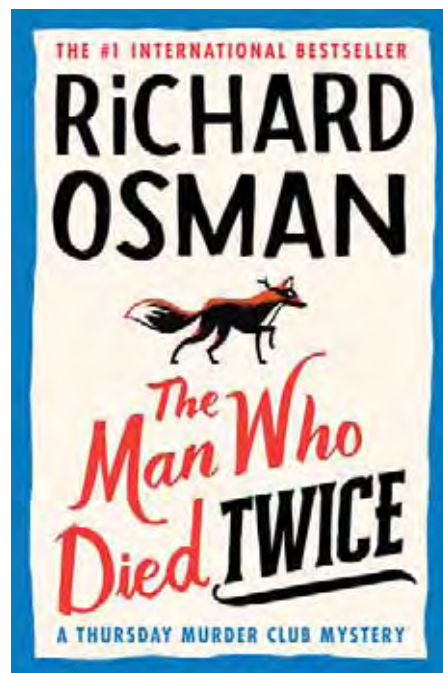
by Abir Mukherjee (Pegasus Crime, \$25.95). Calcutta, 1923. When a Hindu theologian is found murdered in his home, the city is on the brink of all-out religious war. Can the officers of the Imperial Police Force—Captain Sam Wyndham and Sergeant “Surrender-Not” Banerjee—track down those responsible in time to stop a bloodbath?

Set at a time of heightened political tension, beginning in atmospheric Calcutta and taking the detectives all the way to bustling Bombay, the latest instalment in this remarkable series presents Wyndham and Banerjee with an unprecedented challenge. Will this be the case that finally drives them apart? **PW & DP**

****THE COMMITTED** by Viet Thanh Nguyen (GroveAtlantic, \$27.00). The Committed follows the Sympathizer as he arrives in Paris as a refugee. There he and his blood brother Bon try their hands to capitalism in one of its purest forms: drug dealing. The Sympathizer is both charmed and disturbed by Paris. As he falls in with a group of left-wing intellectuals and politicians who frequent dinner parties given by his French Vietnamese “aunt,” he finds not just stimulation for his mind but also customers for his merchandise. But the new life he is making has dangers he has not foreseen, from the oppression of the state, to the self-torture of addiction, to the seemingly unresolvable paradox of how he can reunite his two closest friends, men whose worldviews put

them in absolute opposition. **Kirkus & PW**

****THE KILLING HILLS** by Chris Offutt (Grove Press, \$26.00). Mick Hardin, a combat veteran now working as an Army CID agent, is home on a leave that is almost done. His wife is about to give birth, but they aren’t getting along. His sister, newly risen to sheriff, has just landed her first murder case, and local politicians are pushing for city police or the FBI to take the case. Are they convinced she can’t handle it, or is there something else at work? She calls on Mick who, with his homicide investigation experience and familiarity with the terrain, is well-suited to staying under the radar. As he delves into the investigation, he dodges his commanding officer’s increasingly urgent calls while attempting to head off further murders. And he needs to talk to his wife. **PW & BL**



****THE MAN WHO DIED TWICE** by Richard Osman (Pamela Dorman Books, \$26.00). Elizabeth, Joyce, Ron and Ibrahim—the Thursday Murder Club—are still riding high off their recent real-life murder case and are looking forward to a bit of peace and quiet at Cooper’s Chase, their posh retirement village. But they are out of luck. An unexpected visitor—an old pal of Elizabeth’s (or perhaps more than just a

pal?)—arrives, desperate for her help. He has been accused of stealing diamonds worth millions from the wrong men and he’s seriously on the lam. **Kirkus & DP**

****THE MADNESS OF CROWDS**

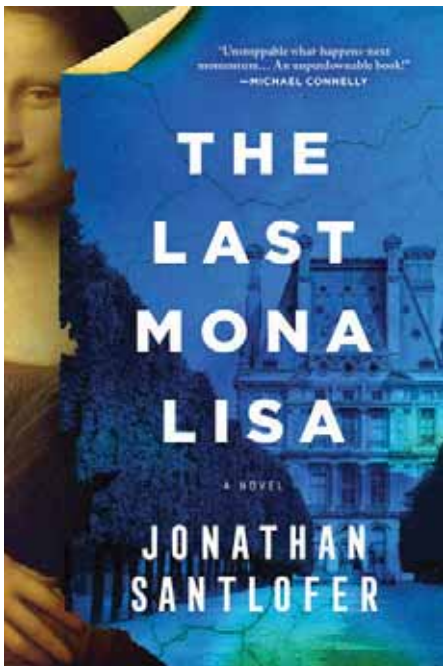
by Louise Penny (\$28.99). While the residents of the Québec village of Three Pines take advantage of the deep snow to ski and toboggan, to drink hot chocolate in the bistro and share meals together, the Chief Inspector finds his holiday with his family interrupted by a simple request. He’s asked to provide security for what promises to be a non-event. A visiting Professor of Statistics will be giving a lecture at the nearby university.

While he is perplexed as to why the head of homicide for the Sûreté du Québec would be assigned this task, it sounds easy enough. That is until Gamache starts looking into Professor Abigail Robinson and discovers an agenda so repulsive he begs the university to cancel the lecture. They refuse, citing academic freedom, and accuse Gamache of censorship and intellectual cowardice. Before long, Professor Robinson’s views start seeping into conversations. Spreading and infecting. So that truth and fact, reality and delusion are so confused it’s near impossible to tell them apart. When a murder is committed it falls to Armand Gamache, his second-in-command Jean-Guy Beauvoir, and their team to investigate the crime as well as this extraordinary popular delusion. Starred Reviews in **BL, PW, Kirkus & LJ**

****DEATH AT GREENWAY** by Lori Rader-Day (Morrow, \$27.99). Bridey Kelly has come to Greenway House—the beloved holiday home of Agatha Christie—in disgrace. A terrible mistake at St. Prisca’s Hospital in London has led to her dismissal as a nurse trainee, and her only chance for redemption is a position in the countryside caring for children evacuated to safety from the Blitz. Chasing ten young children through the winding paths of the estate grounds might have soothed Bridey’s anxieties and grief—if Greenway were not situated so near the English Channel and the rising aggressions of the war. When a body washes ashore near the

estate, Bridey is horrified to realize this is not a victim of war, but of a brutal killing. **PW & DP**

****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**



****THE LAST MONA LISA** by Jonathan Santlofer (Sourcebooks Landmark, \$27.99 and \$16.99). August, 1911: The Mona Lisa is stolen by Vincent Peruggia. Exactly what happens in the two years before its recovery is a mystery. Many replicas of the Mona Lisa exist, and more than one historian has wondered if the painting now returned to the Louvre is a fake, switched in 1911. Present day: Art professor Luke Perrone digs for the truth behind his most famous ancestor: Peruggia. His search attracts an Interpol detective with something to prove and an unfamiliar but curiously helpful woman. Soon, Luke tumbles deep into the world of art and forgery, a land of

obsession and danger. **PW, BL & DP**

****GONE FOR GOOD**, Joanna Schaffhausen (Minotaur, \$27.99). The Lovelorn Killer murdered seven women, ritually binding them and leaving them for dead before penning them gruesome love letters in the local papers. Then he disappeared, and after twenty years with no trace of him, many believe that he's gone for good. Not Grace Harper. A grocery store manager by day, at night Grace uses her snooping skills as part of an amateur sleuth group. She believes the Lovelorn Killer is still living in the same neighborhoods that he hunted in, and if she can figure out how he selected his victims, she will have the key to his identity. Detective Annalisa Vega lost someone she loved to the killer. Now she's at a murder scene with the worst kind of déjà vu: Grace Harper lies bound and dead on the floor, surrounded by clues to the biggest murder case that Chicago homicide never solved. **PW, BL & DP**

****FALSE WITNESS**, Karin Slaughter (\$28.99). Leigh Collier has worked hard to build what looks like a normal life. She's an up-and-coming defense attorney at a prestigious law firm in Atlanta, would do anything for her sixteen-year-old daughter Maddy, and is managing to successfully coparent through a pandemic after an amicable separation from her husband Walter. But Leigh's ordinary life masks a childhood no one should have to endure ... a childhood tarnished by secrets, broken by betrayal, and ultimately destroyed by a brutal act of violence. On a Sunday night at her daughter's school play, she gets a call from one of the firm's partners who wants Leigh to come on board to defend a wealthy man accused of multiple counts of rape. Though wary of the case, it becomes apparent she doesn't have much choice if she wants to keep her job. They're scheduled to go to trial in one week. When she meets the accused face-to-face, she realizes that it's no coincidence that he's specifically asked for her to represent him. She knows him. And he knows her. More to the point, he may know what happened over twenty years ago, and why Leigh has spent two decades avoiding her past.

BL & PW

****THE PROJECT** by Courtney Summers (Wednesday Books, \$18.99). Lo Denham is used to being on her own. After her parents died in a tragic car accident, her sister Bea joined the elusive community called The Unity Project, leaving Lo to fend for herself. Desperate not to lose the only family she has left, Lo has spent the last six years trying to reconnect with Bea, only to be met with radio silence. When Lo's given the perfect opportunity to gain access to Bea's reclusive life, she thinks they're finally going to be reunited. But it's difficult to find someone who doesn't want to be found, and as Lo delves deeper into The Project and its charismatic leader, she begins to realize that there's more at risk than just her relationship with Bea: her very life might be in danger. **Kirkus, BL & DP**

****CITY ON THE EDGE** by David Swinson (Mulholland, \$28.00). In 1973, 12-year-old Graham Sanderson, the narrator of this outstanding thriller from Swinson (the Frank Marr PI series), moves with his family to Beirut, Lebanon, where his father, a Foreign Service officer, is posted to the U.S. embassy. For Graham, it's an opportunity to make two expat friends who will help him explore the delights and occasional risks of a new place and different culture. Observant and inquisitive, Graham soon becomes aware of the underlying sense of danger and imminent violence that hangs over the city, the result of forces he can't understand. When Graham discovers that his father carries a gun and holds clandestine late-night rendezvous with strangers, the boy suspects he may be working for the CIA. Events take a darker turn after Graham secretly witnesses the murder of an Arab by a foreigner, possibly an American involved in illegal gunrunning. **PW**

****AN ELDERLY LADY MUST NOT BE CROSSED** by Helene Tursten (Soho, \$14.95). Just when things have finally cooled down for 88-year-old Maud after the disturbing discovery of a dead body in her apartment in Gothenburg, a couple of detectives return to her doorstep. Though Maud dodges their questions with the skill of an Olympic

gymnast a fifth of her age, she wonders if suspicion has fallen on her, little old lady that she is. The truth is, ever since Maud was a girl, death has seemed to follow her. In six interlocking stories, memories of unfortunate incidents from Maud's past keep bubbling to the surface. Meanwhile, certain Problems in the present require immediate attention. Luckily, Maud is no stranger to taking matters into her own hands . . . even if it means she has to get a little blood on them in the process. **BL & DP**

****THE CONSEQUENCES OF FEAR** by Jacqueline Winspear (Harper; \$). October, 1941. Daily bombing raids have made it perilous to move about London, yet among the Londoners "doing their bit" to aid the war effort are fleet-footed boys who run messages for government offices while dodging debris and aerial raids. On one such errand, a young runner witnesses a murder destined to send shock waves through the secret war plans of British and Free French agents. It will take psychologist and investigator Maisie Dobbs to prove the truth of the frightened boy's story and unravel the geopolitical significance of the killing. **PW & BL**

****LAST GIRL GHOSTED** by Lisa **Unger** (Park Row, \$27.99). She met him through a dating app. An intriguing picture on a screen, a date at a downtown bar. What she thought might be just a quick hookup quickly became much more. She fell for him—hard. It happens sometimes, a powerful connection with a perfect stranger takes you by surprise. Could it be love? But then, just as things were getting real, he stood her up. Then he disappeared—profiles deleted, phone disconnected. She was ghosted. **PW, Kirkus & LJ**

****WE BEGIN AT THE END** by Chris Whitaker (Henry Holt, \$27.99). Duchess Day Radley is a thirteen-year-old self-proclaimed outlaw. Rules are for other people. She is the fierce protector of her five-year-old brother, Robin, and the parent to her mother, Star, a single mom incapable of taking care of herself, let alone her two kids. Walk has never left the coastal California town where he and Star grew up. He may have become the chief of police, but he's still trying to

heal the old wound of having given the testimony that sent his best friend, Vincent King, to prison decades before. And he's in overdrive protecting Duchess and her brother. Now, thirty years later, Vincent is being released. And Duchess and Walk must face the trouble that comes with his return. **Kirkus, PW & DP**

****HARLEM SHUFFLE** by Colson Whitehead (Doubleday, \$28.95). To his customers and neighbors on 125th street, Carney is an upstanding salesman of reasonably priced furniture. He and his wife Elizabeth are expecting their second child. Cash is tight, especially with all those installment-plan sofas, so if his cousin Freddie occasionally drops off the odd ring or necklace, Ray doesn't ask where it comes from. He knows a discreet jeweler downtown who doesn't ask questions, either. Then Freddie falls in with a crew who plan to rob the Hotel Theresa—the "Waldorf of Harlem"—and volunteers Ray's services as the fence. The heist doesn't go as planned; they rarely do. **PW, BL & DP**

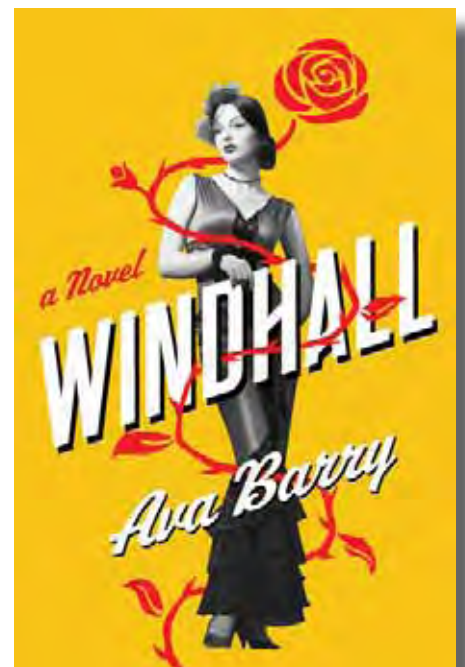
Best First Novels

****WHO IS MAUDE DIXON?** by Alexandra Andrews (Little, Brown, \$28.00). Florence Darrow is a low-level publishing employee who believes that she's destined to be a famous writer. When she stumbles into a job as the assistant to the brilliant, enigmatic novelist known as Maud Dixon — whose true identity is a secret — it appears that the universe is finally providing Florence's big chance. The arrangement seems perfect. Maud Dixon (whose real name, Florence discovers, is Helen Wilcox) can be prickly, but she is full of pointed wisdom -- not only on how to write, but also on how to live. Florence quickly falls under Helen's spell and eagerly accompanies her to Morocco, where Helen's new novel is set. Amidst the colorful streets of Marrakesh and the wind-swept beaches of the coast, Florence's life at last feels interesting enough to inspire a novel of her own. But when Florence wakes up in the hospital after a terrible car accident, with no memory of the previous night — and no sign of

Helen — she's tempted to take a shortcut. Instead of hiding in Helen's shadow, why not upgrade into Helen's life? Not to mention her bestselling pseudonym.

Kirkus, PW & BL

****WINDHALL** by Ava Barry (Pegasus Crime, \$25.95). 1940s Hollywood was an era of decadence and director Theodore Langley was its king. Paired with Eleanor Hayes as his lead actress, Theo ruled the Golden Age of Hollywood. That ended when Eleanor's mangled body was discovered in Theo's rose garden and he was charged with her murder. The case was thrown out before it went to trial and Theo fled L.A., leaving his crawling estate, Windhall, to fall into ruin. He hasn't been seen since. Decades later, investigative journalist Max Hailey, raised by his gran on stories of old Hollywood, is sure that if he could meet Theo, he could prove once and for all that the famed director killed his leading lady. When a copycat murder takes place near Windhall, the long reclusive Theo returns to L.A., and it seems Hailey finally has his chance. When Hailey gets his hands on Theo's long-missing journals, he reads about Eleanor's stalkers and her role in Theo's final film, *The Last Train to Avalon*, a film so controversial it was never released to the public. In the months leading up to her death, something had left her so terrified she stopped coming

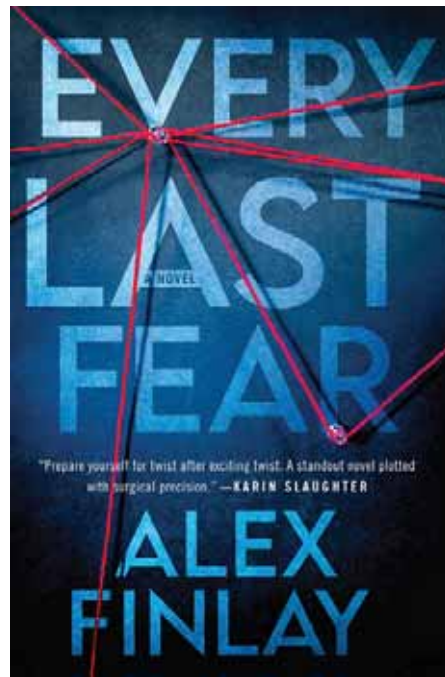


to work. The more Hailey learns about Avalon, the more convinced he becomes that the film could tell him who killed Eleanor and why she had to die. **BL & PW**

****IN THE COMPANY OF KILLERS** by Bryant Christy (Putnam, \$27.00). Tom Klay is a celebrated investigative wildlife reporter for the esteemed magazine *The Sovereign*. But Klay is not just a journalist. His reporting is cover for an even more dangerous job: CIA agent. Klay's press credentials make him a perfect spy--able to travel the globe, engage both politicians and warlords, and openly record what he sees. When he needs help, the Agency provides it to him, and asks little in return. But while on assignment in Kenya, Klay is attacked and his closest friend is murdered. Soon Klay's carefully constructed double life unravels as his ambition turns to revenge. **PW, Kirkus, BL & DP**

****THE ANATOMY OF DESIRE** by L. R. Dorn (Morrow, \$27.99). Claire Griffith has it all, a thriving career, a gorgeous boyfriend, glamorous friends. She always knew she was destined for more than the life her conservative parents preached to her. Arriving in Los Angeles flat broke, she has risen to become a popular fitness coach and social media influencer. Having re-branded herself as Cleo Ray, she stands at the threshold of realizing her biggest dreams. One summer day, Cleo and a woman named Beck Alden set off in a canoe on a serene mountain lake. An hour later, Beck is found dead in the water and Cleo is missing. Authorities suspect foul play, and news of Cleo's involvement goes viral. Who was Beck? An infatuated follower? Were she and Cleo friends or lovers? Was Beck's death an accident . . . or murder? **PW & LJ**

****EVERY LAST FEAR** by Alex Finlay (Minotaur, \$26.99). After a late night of partying, NYU student Matt Pine returns to his dorm room to devastating news: nearly his entire family--his mom, his dad, his little brother and sister--have been found dead from an apparent gas leak while vacationing in Mexico. The local police claim it was an accident, but the FBI and State Department seem



far less certain – and they won't tell Matt why. The tragedy makes headlines everywhere because this isn't the first time the Pine family has been thrust into the media spotlight. Matt's older brother, Danny – currently serving a life sentence for the murder of his teenage girlfriend Charlotte – was the subject of a viral true crime documentary suggesting that Danny was wrongfully convicted. Though the country has rallied behind Danny, Matt holds a secret about his brother that he's never told anyone: the night Charlotte was killed Matt saw something that makes him believe his brother is guilty of the crime. When Matt returns to his small hometown to bury his parents and siblings, he's faced with a hostile community that was vilainized by the documentary, a frenzied media, and memories he'd hoped to leave behind forever. Now, as the deaths in Mexico appear increasingly suspicious and connected to Danny's case, Matt must unearth the truth behind the crime that sent his brother to prison – putting his own life in peril and forcing him to confront his every last fear. **DP**

****CAPTIVE** by Fiona King Foster (Ecco, \$26.99). In a secessionist rural state that has cut itself off completely from urban centers, where living is hardscrabble and poor but “free,” Brooke Holland runs a farm with her

husband, Milo, and two daughters. When escaped criminal Stephen Cawley attacks at the farm, Brooke's buried talents surface, and she manages to quickly and harshly subdue him. She is convinced that he has come in retribution for the blood feud she thought she escaped years ago. Brooke sets out to bring Cawley to justice, planning to use the bounty on his head to hide her family far from danger. Fearing that other members of Cawley's infamous family will soon descend, Brooke insists Milo and the girls flee with her, traveling miles on foot across an unforgiving landscape to reach the nearest marshal. Their journey, started at the onset of winter with little preparation, brings already strained family dynamics to the breaking point. **Kirkus & BL**

****THE OTHER BLACK GIRL** by Zakiya Dalila Harris (Atria, \$27.00). Twenty-six-year-old editorial assistant Nella Rogers is tired of being the only Black employee at Wagner Books. Fed up with the isolation and microaggressions, she's thrilled when Harlem-born and bred Hazel starts working in the cubicle beside hers. They've only just started comparing natural hair care regimens, though, when a string of uncomfortable events elevates Hazel to Office Darling, and Nella is left in the dust. Then the notes begin to appear on Nella's desk: LEAVE WAGNER. NOW. It's hard to believe Hazel is behind these hostile messages. But as Nella starts to spiral and obsess over the sinister forces at play, she soon realizes that there's a lot more at stake than just her career. **PW, BL, Kirkus, LJ & DP**

****FALLING** by T. J. Newman (Avid Reader Press/Simon & Schuster, \$28.00). You just boarded a flight to New York. There are one hundred and forty-three other passengers onboard. What you don't know is that thirty minutes before the flight your pilot's family was kidnapped. For his family to live, everyone on your plane must die. The only way the family will survive is if the pilot follows his orders and crashes the plane. Enjoy the flight. **LJ, BL & PW**

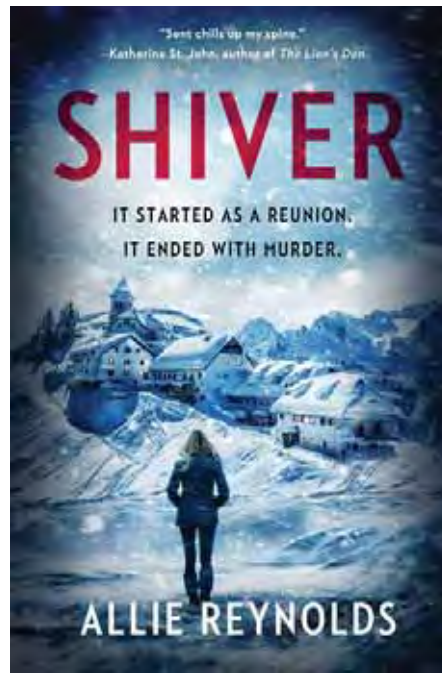
****SUBURBAN DICKS** by Fabian Nicieza (Putnam, \$27.00). Andie Stern

thought she'd solved her final homicide. Once a budding FBI profiler, she gave up her career to raise her four (soon to be five) children in West Windsor, New Jersey. But one day, between soccer games, recitals, and trips to the local pool, a very pregnant Andie pulls into a gas station--and stumbles across a murder scene. An attendant has been killed, and the bumbling local cops are in way over their heads. Suddenly, Andie is obsessed with the case, and back on the trail of a killer, this time with kids in tow. She soon crosses paths with disgraced local journalist Kenneth Lee, who also has everything to prove in solving the case. A string of unusual occurrences--and, eventually, body parts--surface around town, and Andie and Kenneth uncover simmering racial tensions and a decades-old conspiracy. **Kirkus, PW & DP**

****NORTHERN HEIST** by Richard O'Rawe (Melville House, \$26.99). Nobody robs banks in Belfast without the IRA getting a cut -- not even former Provo James 'Ructions' O'Hare. But when word gets around O'Hare may be up to something, the pressure from the IRA begins.

Ructions' trusts his crack squad of former paramilitary compadres, and has full confidence in his audacious plan: To literally empty the biggest bank in Belfast by kidnapping the families of two employees - known as a "tiger" kidnapping -- in order to force them to help Ructions and his crew get into the bank's vault. But keeping the plan -- and the money -- from the IRA is another plan entirely, one requiring all Ruction's cunning and skill. **PW**

****SHIVER** by Allie Reynolds (Putnam, \$27.00). When Milla accepts an off-season invitation to Le Rocher, a cozy ski resort in the French Alps, she's expecting an intimate weekend of catching up with four old friends. It might have been a decade since she saw them last, but she's never forgotten the bond they forged on this very mountain during a winter spent fiercely training for an elite snowboarding competition. Yet no sooner do Milla and the others arrive for the reunion than they realize something is horribly wrong. The resort



is deserted. The cable cars that delivered them to the mountaintop have stopped working. Their cell phones--missing. And inside the hotel, detailed instructions await them: an icebreaker game, designed to draw out their secrets. A game meant to remind them of Saskia, the enigmatic sixth member of their group, who vanished the morning of the competition years before and has long been presumed dead. **Kirkus, LJ & DP**

Best Thrillers

****2034: A Novel of the Next World War** by Elliot Akerman & James Stavridis (Penguin, \$27.00). On March 12, 2034, US Navy Commodore Sarah Hunt is on the bridge of her flagship, the guided missile destroyer USS John Paul Jones, conducting a routine freedom of navigation patrol in the South China Sea when her ship detects an unflagged trawler in clear distress, smoke billowing from its bridge. On that same day, US Marine aviator Major Chris "Wedge" Mitchell is flying an F35E Lightning over the Strait of Hormuz, testing a new stealth technology as he flirts with Iranian airspace. By the end of that day, Wedge will be an Iranian prisoner, and Sarah Hunt's destroyer will lie at the bottom of the sea, sunk by the Chinese Navy. Iran and China have

clearly coordinated their moves, which involve the use of powerful new forms of cyber weaponry that render US ships and planes defenseless. In a single day, America's faith in its military's strategic pre-eminence is in tatters. A new, terrifying era is at hand. **Kirkus & BL**

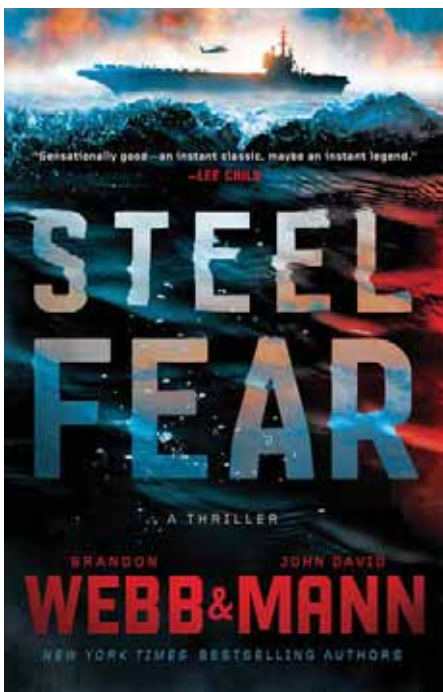
****DEAD BY DAWN** by Paul Doiron (Minotaur, \$27.99). Mike Bowditch is fighting for his life. After being ambushed on a dark winter road, his Jeep crashes into a frozen river. Trapped beneath the ice in the middle of nowhere, having lost his gun and any way to signal for help, Mike fights his way to the surface. But surviving the crash is only the first challenge. Whoever set the trap that ran him off the road is still out there, and they're coming for him. **BL, PW & DP**

****SLOUGH HOUSE** by Mick Herron (SohoCrime, \$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? With a new populist movement taking hold of London's streets and the old order ensuring that everything's for sale to the highest bidder, the world's a dangerous place for those deemed surplus. Jackson Lamb and the slow horses are in a fight for their lives. **BL & DP**

****THE OLD ENEMY** by Henry Porter (GroveAtlantic, \$26.00). Paul Samson is living in London, picking up extra work for a private security company tailing a mysterious employee of a powerful environmental NGO, when he is suddenly the target of more than one clumsy assassination attempt. As Samson works to figure out who is trying to kill him and why, he learns of other assassination attempts carried out on two of his former partners: legendary former spy Robert Harland has been murdered in a remote corner in Estonia; and the billionaire Denis Hisami has been poisoned with a nerve agent while testifying before Congress. With his life in danger, Samson goes on the run and

tries to piece together what he, Harland, and Hisami could possibly know that's enough to get them killed. **BL & DP**

****STEEL FEAR** by Brandon Webb & John David Mann (Bantam, \$28.00). The moment Navy SEAL sniper Finn sets foot on the USS Abraham Lincoln to hitch a ride home from the Persian Gulf, it's clear something is deeply wrong. Leadership is weak. Morale is low. And when crew members start disappearing one by one, what at first seems like a random string of suicides soon reveals something far more sinister: There's a serial killer on board. Suspicion falls on Finn, the newcomer to the ship. After all, he's being sent home in disgrace, recalled from the field under the dark cloud of a mission gone horribly wrong. He's also a lone wolf, haunted by gaps in his memory and the elusive sense that something he missed may have contributed to civilian deaths on his last assignment. Finding the killer offers a chance at redemption . . . if he can stay alive long enough to prove it isn't him. **BL, PW & DP**



Best Paperback Originals

****THE HUNTED** by Gabriel Bergmoser (Harper Collins, \$16.99). Frank is a service station owner on a little-used Australian highway who just wants a

quiet life. His granddaughter has been sent to stay with him to fix her attitude, but they don't talk a lot. When a badly injured young woman arrives at Frank's service station with several cars in pursuit, Frank and a handful of unsuspecting customers are thrust into a life-or-death standoff. But who are this group of men and women who will go to any lengths for revenge? And what do they want? Other than no survivors ...? **DP**

****THE LOST GIRLS** by Jessica Chiarella (Putnam, \$17.00). It's been more than twenty years since Marti Reese's sister, Maggie, disappeared. Only eight-years-old at the time, Marti can't remember what happened, just that Maggie got into a car and never returned. After years of grief and countless false leads, Marti is coping as best she can: abandoning her marriage, drinking to forget, and documenting her never-ending search via a true-crime podcast. But when the podcast becomes an unexpected hit and Marti thinks she's finally ready to put it all behind her, a mysterious woman calls with new information that could lead her down a dangerous path.

For years, Ava Vreeland has been fighting to overturn her brother's murder conviction. After finding strange similarities between the two cases, Ava is certain there's a connection between the murder and Maggie's disappearance, one that could prove her brother's innocence. **PW & LJ**

****THE GRANDMOTHER PLOT** by Caroline B. Cooney (Poisoned Pen Press, \$16.99). A stoner glass blower and a gossip-mongering collector meet in a nursing home. Freddy and Laura make up two impossibly different sides of the exact same coin. Freddy leads a life of little responsibility; he's an affable bro who's fumbled into some shady side hustles to bolster his artistic ambitions. He's caring for grandma since everyone else in the family has a real job. Laura's doing right by Aunt Polly to make up for mom dying alone. You know, floating through life one day at a time. That is, until a fragile old woman, already close to death, is murdered in the room next door. Freddy freaks out and Laura starts snooping. **PW**

****THE NINJA BETRAYED** by Tori Eldridge (Agora Books, \$16.95). Things get personal for Chinese-Norwegian modern-day ninja Lily Wong in Hong Kong when she dives into the dangerous world of triads, romance, and corporate disaster during the height of the pro-democracy protests. **LJ**

****BAD MOON RISING** by John Galligan (Atria, \$17.00). Sheriff Heidi Kick has a dead body on her hands, a homeless young man last seen alive miles from the Bad Axe. Chillingly, the medical examiner confirms what Sheriff Kick has been experiencing in her own reoccurring nightmares of late: the victim was buried alive. As the relentless summer heat bears down and more bodies are discovered, Sheriff Kick also finds herself embroiled in a nasty reelection campaign. These days her detractors call her "Sheriff Mommy"—KICK HER OUT holler the opposition's campaign signs—and as her family troubles become public, vicious rumors threaten to sway the electorate and derail her investigation. Enter Vietnam veteran Leroy Fanta, editor-in-chief of the local paper who believes Heidi's strange case might be tied to a reclusive man writing deranged letters to the opinions section for years. With his heart and liver on their last legs, Fanta drums up his old journalistic instincts in one last effort to help Heidi find a lead in her case, or at least a good story... **Kirkus & DP**

****THE PERFECT FAMILY** by Robyn Harding (Gallery, \$16.99). Thomas and Viv Adler are the envy of their neighbors: attractive, successful, with well-mannered children and a beautifully restored home. Until one morning, when they wake up to find their porch has been pelted with eggs. It's a prank, Thomas insists; the work of a few out-of-control kids. But when a smoke bomb is tossed on their front lawn, and their car's tires are punctured, the family begins to worry. Surveillance cameras show nothing but grainy images of shadowy figures in hoodies. And the police dismiss the attacks, insisting they're just the work of bored teenagers. Unable to identify the perpetrators, the Adlers are helpless as the assaults escalate into violence, and worse. And each new

violation brings with it a growing fear. Because everyone in the Adler family is keeping a secret—not just from the outside world, but from each other. And secrets can be very dangerous. **PW & BL**

****ARSENIC AND ADOBO** by Mia P. Manansala (Berkley, \$16.00). When Lila Macapagal moves back home to recover from a horrible breakup, her life seems to be following all the typical rom-com tropes. She's tasked with saving her Tita Rosie's failing restaurant, and she has to deal with a group of matchmaking aunties who shower her with love and judgment. But when a notoriously nasty food critic (who happens to be her ex-boyfriend) drops dead moments after a confrontation with Lila, her life quickly swerves from a Nora Ephron romp to an Agatha Christie case. **LJ, PW & BL**

****BLACK CORAL** by Andrew Mayne (Thomas & Mercer, \$15.95). Sloan McPherson and the Underwater Investigation Unit have discovered a van at the bottom of a murky Florida pond. Sealed inside the watery tomb are the bodies of four teenagers who disappeared thirty years ago after leaving a rock concert. To authorities, it looks like a tragic accident. To Sloan, it looks like murder. Every piece of evidence is starting to connect to a string of cold case vanishings throughout Florida. Clue by clue, Sloan navigates the warm, dark waters where natural predators feed, knowing that the most dangerous one is still above the surface – nesting and dormant. **Kirkus & DP**

****A GOOD TURN** by Dervla McTiernan (Blackstone, \$16.99). While Detective Cormac Reilly faces enemies at work and trouble in his personal life, Garda Peter Fisher is relocated out of Galway with the threat of prosecution hanging over his head. But even that is not as terrible as having to work for his overbearing father, the local copper for the pretty seaside town of Roundstone. For some, like Anna and her young daughter, Tilly, Roundstone is a refuge from trauma. But even this village on the edge of the sea isn't far enough to escape from the shadows of evil men. **DP**

****SEARCH FOR HER** by Rick Mofina (Mira, \$9.99). At a truck stop



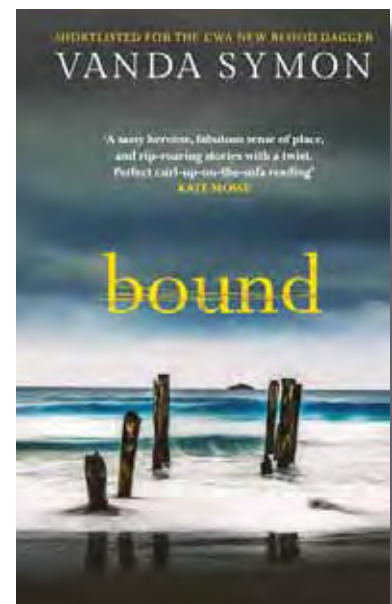
near Las Vegas, fourteen-year-old Riley Jarrett vanishes from her family's RV, turning their cross-country dream of starting over into a nightmare. Investigators have their work cut out for them. The massive, bustling truck plaza in the desert is the perfect place for someone to disappear—or be taken. Detectives pursue every chilling lead as all eyes fall to the newly blended family with a tragic past. With the clock ticking down on the likelihood that Riley's alive, suspicions run deep. Everyone—from Riley's mom to her stepdad to her stepbrother and her ex-boyfriend—has something to hide. **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 & DP**

****HOW TO KIDNAP THE RICH** by Rahul Raina (HarperPerennial, \$17.00). Brilliant yet poor, Ramesh

Kumar grew up working at his father's tea stall in the Old City of Delhi. Now, he makes a lucrative living taking tests for the sons of India's elite—a situation that becomes complicated when one of his clients, the sweet but hapless eighteen-year-old Rudi Saxena, places first in the All Indias, the national university entrance exams, thanks to him. Ramesh sees an opportunity—perhaps even an obligation—to cash in on Rudi's newfound celebrity, not knowing that Rudi's role on a game show will lead to unexpected love, followed by wild trouble when both young men are kidnapped. **BL & DP**

****BOUND** by Vanda Symon (Orinda Books, \$15.95, November, 2021). The New Zealand city of Dunedin is rocked when a wealthy and apparently respectable businessman is murdered in his luxurious home while his wife is bound and gagged, and forced to watch. But when Detective Sam Shephard and her team start investigating the case, they discover that the victim had links with some dubious characters. The case seems cut and dried, but Sam has other ideas. Weighed down by her dad's terminal cancer diagnosis, and by complications in her relationship with Paul, she needs a distraction, and launches her own investigation. And when another murder throws the official case into chaos, it's up to Sam to prove that the killer is someone no one could ever suspect. **DP**



Central Booking

Kristopher Zgorzki



GIRLS WHO LIE

By Eva Björg Ægisdóttir

Orenda \$15.00

Rating: B+

Iceland continues to assert itself as the source of some of the strongest crime fiction being written today. Last year, Eva Björg Ægisdóttir released her award-winning debut novel, *The Creak on the Stairs*, during a worldwide pandemic and yet readers still discovered it and were blown away by the strength of this first novel. The second book in the Forbidden Iceland series, **GIRLS WHO LIE**, is now making its way out into the world, proving that Ægisdóttir's initial success was no mistake – she is a first-class writer able to capture her audience with authentic ambiance, realistically-flawed characters, complex plotlines, and unforgettable resolutions.

As with **THE CREAK ON THE STAIRS**, the protagonist of **GIRLS WHO LIE** is Elma, Chief Investigating Officer for the Akranes, Iceland police department. But as with that earlier novel, readers get to know not only Elma and Elma's partner, Sævar, but also others around the police station and villages. In addition to this, Ægisdóttir does an excellent job of fleshing out each of the characters involved in the case being investigated, despite Elma's perspective being the dominant voice throughout the novel. Other characters are given some moments to take center stage and, in particular, there are a series of un-dated vignettes which tell the story of a mother and daughter from when the baby was two-months old until ten-years-old. This is a storytelling technique Ægisdóttir employed in her debut novel as well – readers do not exactly know how these vignettes connect

to the main storyline, but as the novel progresses things start to fall into place, allowing the reader to stay just a hair's breadth ahead of Elma and her team.

The central case that Elma is investigating is the death of Marianna who vanished from her home and whose body was recently discovered among the local lava fields. The assumption was that Marianna had left of her own accord, but now it appears it was the result of murder. Wanting to find answers for Hekla, Marianna's fifteen-year-old daughter, Elma never expects to encounter roadblocks around every new turn in the investigation. Part of Hekla's story is not meshing with the evidence, and Elma feels that the key to this case lies in figuring out exactly what happened the afternoon Marianna first went missing.

Meanwhile, Elma's personal life is also a shambles: Her sister wants help

planning a celebration Elma would rather not be involved with, and Elma now has two very different men wooing her for a date and no idea which to choose. Readers who found Elma a bit prickly in the first novel will see some growth in her character here and maybe just a hint that she could have a brighter future if she would just get out of her own way.

There is something about Eva Björg Ægisdóttir's writing style that is hypnotizing. Readers fall under her spell and follow along, unaware of the passage of time around them, only focused on the danger that lurks in these isolated coastal communities, and longing for justice to be achieved. This is a complex mystery with many angles of investigation, but even when things get the most twisted, there is never any confusion and always the sense that Ægisdóttir will bring this to a satisfying conclusion.

There is no telling what type of case Elma is going to get tangled up in next time, but it's clear that fans of this series will be waiting with anxious anticipation for the day Eva Björg Ægisdóttir's next book is announced.

(Kudos once again must go to Victoria Cribb for another beautiful translation.)

LIGHTNING STRIKE

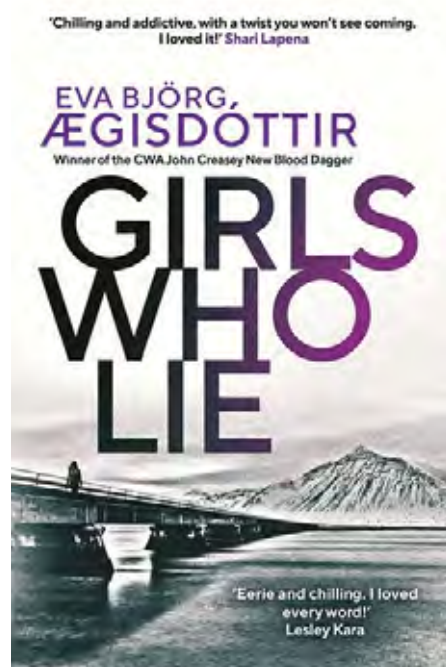
By William Kent Krueger

William Morrow \$26.99

Rating: A

When it comes to regional crime fiction, one would be hard-pressed to find a more accomplished practitioner than William Kent Krueger. In both his Cork O'Connor series and his stand-alone literary mysteries, location is a central focus and readers can always count on being transported. With his latest release, **LIGHTNING STRIKE**, William Kent Krueger travels back to 1963 to give his loyal fans a glimpse at the origins of Cork's sense of justice and his precarious placement in the larger society. Because it is a prequel, it is also an excellent way for new readers to discover this first-class writer's ability to impart so much wisdom with his words while also telling a gripping crime story.

Like all the books in the Cork



O'Connor series, the title of the novel comes from a very specific location. Lightning Strike is an abandoned logging camp near, Aurora Minnesota with a complex and storied history. Finding out more about this location throughout the book factors into the plot so that is best left for readers to discover on their own, however, it is not a spoiler to say that the novel opens with a young Cork stumbling upon a body hanging from a tree within Lightning Strike in what most will eventually assume was a suicide. However, Cork's father Liam is the sheriff of Aurora, so he has grown up around investigations of crimes and various evidence leads Cork believes people are jumping to the wrong conclusion.

Since it is 1963 in rural Minnesota, Cork is given more freedom than he probably would be today. Being out of the watchful eye of adults allows he and his friends to begin their own amateur investigation into this man's death, even while his father is also not sure about the claim of suicide and embarks on a more official inquiry into the case. These two parallel investigations will change all the parties involved. The dynamic between father and son is clearly important to William Kent Krueger and watching how that unfolds in one of the true delights of **LIGHTNING STRIKE**.

Fans of the series know that this area of Minnesota is populated by many indigenous groups, mainly of the Anishinaabe Ojibwe peoples. Cork himself – through his mother's lineage – is one-quarter Ojibwe, so it is no surprise that many of the novels in the series feature discussion of the racial injustices experienced by these indigenous populations and **LIGHTNING STRIKE** is no exception. What is different is that Cork is twelve years old, so what happens during his impromptu investigation will have a lasting impression on him as he grows and eventually becomes a sheriff himself.

William Kent Krueger writes in a lyrical manner, weaving together nature and nurture in unique ways. The crime is always the backdrop for his storytelling, but the beauty within his narrative really comes from his understanding of human nature and his ability to bring

the natural world to life. Readers will find themselves returning to entire paragraphs, just to luxuriate in the masterful prose of a born storyteller.

After this slight detour to **LIGHTNING STRIKE**, it is likely William Kent Krueger will return to the series with Cork as an adult, but when readers make their next return visit with Cork, they will have a new appreciation for him and a better understanding of the impact his father had on his life. For that, we are most certainly richer in spirit.

William Kent Krueger has won a Barry Award for Best First Novel for **IRON LAKE** and a Barry Award for Best Novel for **ORDINARY GRACE**.

THE TURNOUT

By Megan Abbott

G.P. Putnam Sons \$27.00

Rating: A

It has been roughly three years since Megan Abbott released **GIVE ME YOUR HAND**, so fans are eager to snag a copy of her new novel, **THE TURNOUT**. In many ways, this novel is a natural progression from her previous books looking at the culture of cheerleaders, gymnasts, and scientists. With **THE TURNOUT**, Abbott turns her word-lens to the often-maligned arena of professional ballet with stunning results that only a writer as gifted as Megan Abbott could uncover.

The Durant School of Dance is a family-run ballet school with a strong reputation in an aging edifice. Dara and Marie Durant grew up as students under their mother's leadership of the school, but since her tragic death years ago, they have kept the school running, aided by Charlie – a former student and now Dara's husband – in the back room taking care of financial matters.

These three have formed a bond that works, keeping things going like clockwork. Megan Abbott refers to them as a trio so often that it becomes a leitmotif that echoes throughout the early chapters of the novel. When an accident at the school results in a fourth invading the sanctum of this group, trouble brews. It certainly does not help



that this man is an ultra-masculine construction worker completely alien to the world of ballet. This ebb and flow of erotic energy is the propulsive fuel that leads to disaster.

The plot of **THE TURNOUT** will only work if the two sisters have distinct and recognizable personalities, but fortunately there is no crime writer working today who is better than Megan Abbott at crafting female characters who are both authentic and unique. As sisters, Dara and Marie, have many similarities which make their relationship one of grudgingly mutual respect; but where there are differences, they often manifest at opposite ends of the spectrum resulting in almost constant conflict. Navigating these two extremes is not unlike dancing a pas de deux at the elite level in front of a sell-out crowd at a storied ballet institution.

Megan Abbott made a smart and considered choice in using *The Nutcracker*, a ballet that most everyone has at least heard of, for the backdrop of **THE TURNOUT**. Through the eyes of Abbott's characters, it is easy to view the Nutcracker himself as a symbol of sexual maturity, crossing that unseen barrier between youthful naiveté and adult desires. As the dancers vie for parts in the upcoming production, tensions and emotions hit peak levels.

Using the holiday season as a backdrop for these conflicts stands in stark contrast to the joyous emotions typically associated with that season.

Megan Abbott has always been a wordsmith and **THE TURNOUT** is no different. Her word choice, tone, and pacing hypnotize readers as though the musical prose keeps a steady rhythm of its own. One does not just read a Megan Abbott novel, one is consumed by it, becomes part of it, and ultimately is altered by the emotions she is able to unleash via it. Ballets often start with simple and beautiful storylines, but ultimately end in tragic love stories – Megan Abbott knows this and leads the reader down the destined path, with completely unexpected results. **THE TURNOUT** is another masterwork in a career that contains no stumbles.

GONE FOR GOOD

By Joanna Schaffhausen

Minotaur \$27.99

Rating: A+

If a series debut rests squarely on the shoulders of the lead protagonist, Joanna Schaffhausen's **GONE FOR GOOD** could hardly ask for a more worthy advocate than Detective Annalisa Vega. After four books (and counting) in her popular and well-received debut series, Schaffhausen is now launching a second series that is sure to have readers flocking to the bookstore to grab a copy.

Twenty years ago, The Lovelorn Killer murdered seven women before vanishing without a trace. His trademark of ritually binding his victims using complex knots and then sending a love letter dedicated to them to the local newspaper confounded the authorities, but also generated fascination and fear in the general public.

Over the years since, groups of amateur detectives have risen in popularity and dedicated their time to solving these types of cold cases. Grace Harper is a member of one such group of true crime fanatics and she may have uncovered the vital clue that would break the Lovelorn Killer case wide open. Except, now she too is dead, another victim of this hedonistic predator.



Detective Annalisa Vega knows from personal experience the trauma losing someone to this serial killer imparts of those left behind. Her father worked the case before retiring from the police department. Even now, suffering the effects of dementia, he is unable to get beyond the feelings of failure he internalizes because he was not able to protect his family, his friends, his community. When Annalisa arrives at the crime scene where Grace Harper's body is on display and Lovelorn information and memorabilia is scattered about, she knows this is her chance to catch this elusive killer and honor her father's legacy. But to do so, Annalisa Vega must figure out what Grace and her group of amateur investigators were able to uncover – one of those clues is the vital piece that will lead to all the answers.

Joanna Schaffhausen crafts characters that are so multi-dimensional that readers will feel they are living, breathing individuals. Bonding almost immediately with Annalisa Vega, each reader will enjoy following her investigation even as it becomes obvious that every step closer puts her very life in danger. But this depth of character doesn't just end there – every character on the page is complex and fascinating. The Vega family has many members and each of them bring a wealth of quirks to the

table – many of which will surely be examined more closely in future books in the series. Partnered with her ex-husband for this investigation, yet pining for her childhood sweetheart (who returns to town just as the case heats up), Annalisa Vega finds herself with multiple suitors and readers will be split on who she should maintain a relationship with.

The true crime group that Grace Harper was a member of certainly contains its share of quirky individuals, each of whom bring something unique to the table. Then there are the various family members and friends of previous victims whom Annalisa and her ex-husband must re-interview in hopes of finding something that was overlooked during the earlier investigation. Many of these people will elicit sympathy from the reader, making for an emotional reading experience.

The plot of **GONE FOR GOOD** is incredibly well-constructed with red herrings and unexpected twists around every dark corner. Spoilers would be too challenging to avoid, so suffice to say Schaffhausen leads readers to a satisfying conclusion before springing on them still more labyrinthine revelations that truly shock. The rich tapestry that is in place once **GONE FOR GOOD** is complete signals that readers are in for a truly rewarding and wholly-original journey across this particular series of novels. Count me among those who are eager for the next book immediately. Meanwhile, check out Joanna Schaffhausen's other series while you await the return of Annalisa Vega.

THE FAMILY PLOT

By Megan Collins

Atria \$27.00

Rating: B

THE FAMILY PLOT by Megan Collins is the story of a unique family obsessed with true crime. Think of the Lighthouse family as a blend of the Blackwoods from Shirley Jackson's *We Have Always Lived in the Castle*, the Addams Family, and whatever documentary show is on the Investigation Discovery channel this evening – this

will give you an idea of how quirky, moody, and unusual each member of this family truly is.

The Lighthouse parents raised their four children on a home-schooling curriculum devoted to the study of true crime cases and anniversary “celebrations” of the lives that were lost. Dahlia Lighthouse – yes, she was named after the infamous Black Dahlia case – has been away from the family for years, unable to deal with the mysterious disappearance of her twin brother, Andy, years earlier. Forced to return for her father’s funeral, Dahlia is beyond apprehensive, but things take a drastic turn when Andy’s body is found already occupying their father’s grave, dead from an ax blow to the head.

Dahlia wants to place the blame for the death on the sinister serial killer who has preyed on her community for decades, but the longer she stays in the family’s isolated and foreboding mansion, the more questions that arise. And with those questions come the revelations about various secrets and lies from the past.

True crime fanatics will find much to love within the pages of **THE FAMILY PLOT**. Megan Collins cleverly drops references to actual crimes in every chapter. While one child mourns the loss of her twin brother, her other



brother sets out to open a murder museum using their family and the artifacts they have amassed as a draw, her sister spends every waking moment creating miniature dioramas of famous crime scenes, and her mother bakes cookies... badly.

While all of this sounds grim and depressing, Megan Collins has a way of luring the reader in with evocative prose and enough quirky humor to offset the creepy vibe...but rest assured, this remains a chilling read of gothic suspense. Collins has crafted a modern satire that skewers – among other things – society’s obsession with violent death. The ending is both unexpected and unavoidable in equal measures, leaving the reader with much to contemplate.

Megan Collins’ crime fiction output so far marks her as an author willing to take chances – each new novel contains a compelling plot concept which she then populates with unforgettable characters and redolent settings. There is no telling what will be next, but there will be no shortage of fans waiting anxiously to discover what suspenseful journey Megan Collins will take us on next.

1979

By Val McDermid

Atlantic Monthly Press \$27.00

Rating: A+

Val McDermid is a legend in the crime fiction world. She has written ground-breaking books, such as the Lindsay Gordon series featuring a lesbian lead character; the *Wire in the Blood* novels (her criminal profiler series that is often imitated but never duplicated); one of the most iconic crime fiction standalone novels of all time, *A Place of Execution*; and the list goes on and on. So, it might seem strange to say that she may be embarking on her magnum opus with the release of her latest novel, **1979**, and yet that might just be the reality.

1979 is the start of a new series in which each of the four subsequent novels will advance one decade. In the end, readers will have five novels – **1979**, **1989**, **1999**, **2009**, **2019** – all featuring newspaper reporter, Allie Burns. It is



certainly no accident that this means the series will end just before the pandemic hits the World – a dilemma all writers are currently struggling with. While it is impossible to predict what the over-arching series will look like, **1979** gives readers many clues about what Val McDermid may be trying to accomplish here.

While **1979** features a number of different crimes, it is so much more than a crime novel – it is a testament to its time-period, a snapshot view of our history. In many ways, it serves as a reverse crystal ball, allowing readers to see how society **was** and thus able to trace the “evolution” forward to how society currently **is**. It is also a hyper-accurate depiction of life behind the scenes at a second-tier newspaper of the day – and certainly, everyone knows that the journalism industry has seen seismic changes across the years.

Allie Burns is our lead character and the namesake of the series. In **1979**, she is twenty-something-years-old and has recently relocated to Glasgow and taken a job at the Clarion newspaper. Like most women at the time, Allie’s assignments focus on “women-centric” stories, pop culture articles, and general fluff pieces, but she aspires for more, longing to prove herself and make a difference. When she teams up with Danny Sullivan, the only man on the newsroom

floor who treats her like a human, the two begin to investigate and write about a high-level financial crimes enterprise. But this is not the only story they are working on together. During one of Allie's information-gathering outings, she uncovers what could be a terrorist plot threatening all of Scotland. If she is right, this would be a story big enough to solidify the names Allie Burns and Danny Sullivan in the annals of newspaper investigative reporting stardom.

Val McDermid peppers the narrative with many authentic references for 1979. Everything from the music playing in the background, the books and movies the public are enjoying, and the news items that society was interested in – many of which allow for the drawing of direct links to topics of enjoyment and concern in today's culture. Again, the crimes in this novel serve mainly as a backdrop for the development of these characters and a glimpse into their world. Readers will be excited to see how their favorite characters grow and change not only throughout this novel, but ultimately across the series as a whole. Joining them again in 1989, it is going to be fascinating to see where they are in their lives, how their "world" has changed, and what they are doing about it.

While it is too early to know where this series will rank in the crime fiction canon, the quality of 1979 ensures that Val is taking this project extremely seriously and if the next books are even half as good as 1979, readers will be rewarded with some excellent high-quality novels for years to come. Get in at the ground floor and join the cult of readers who are going to consider Allie Burns a friend, a guide, and a prophet of the past.

THE MISSING HOURS

By Julia Dahl
Minotaur \$25.99

Rating: A

THE MISSING HOURS is Julia Dahl's first stand-alone crime novel and with it she proves herself an astute chronicler of human nature – especially when in the midst of stress-fueled



incidents and trauma recovery. Dahl wastes no time before throwing readers into a troubling situation and follows it up with a propulsive through line that practically demands a one-sit reading experience.

Claudia Castro lives the privileged life her wealthy upbringing afforded her. She has parlayed this notoriety into trendy Instagram fame, acceptance into the new freshman class at NYU, and the general perks of popularity. But she has also felt the sting of having her every move documented for the masses. So, it makes perfect sense when Claudia wakes from a drunken stupor, with only the vaguest of memories from the previous evening, that she freaks out and isolates herself.

During this self-imposed exile, Claudia's sister goes into early labor and when Claudia is a no-show at the hospital, the family chalks it up to Claudia's youthful, selfish behavior. Unaware of the family drama occurring over a number of weeks, Claudia connects with another resident in her dorm building, Trevor, and begins to rely on him to bring her food and information about the outside world.

That is until a scandalous video shot during Claudia's "blackout" surfaces, and everyone is shocked and confused by what they are seeing. After attempt-

ing to reach Claudia, her family's worries escalate, reaching a fever pitch when they discover that the young woman seems to have vanished.

The novel's title alone serves multiple purposes – it is clearly meant to call to mind the actions of the traumatic evening, which Claudia cannot completely recollect, but it is also an apt description of that time-period when the Castro family and friends are unable to locate Claudia.

Julia Dahl cleverly uses three points-of-view to unspool her narrative. Readers are privy to Claudia's thoughts and concerns about what happened that evening, they are given a glimpse into her family life via her sister, Edie, and then they witness the shifting notions that plague Trevor as he tries to make an honest connection with Claudia. As these points-of-view reflect off each other and weave into a whole cloth account of what occurred, readers remain one step ahead of all the characters. Thus, as things shift from confusion and concern to blame and revenge, Julia Dahl needs no help in convincing readers of the correct course of action.

This is a writer unwilling to pull any punches when it comes to documenting Claudia's journey towards understanding and recovery. Julia Dahl skillfully makes the reader complicit in all the various forms of trauma faced by women and their bodies, thereby eliciting the empathy that is needed for this storyline to succeed. Because the reading experience is so speedy, many readers will not realize just how affected they are by the multiple plot threads until they finish the novel and are able to reflect on these characters and what they have gone through.

Unforgettable is a word that is too often used when describing the plots of books and films, but with **THE MISSING HOURS**, Julia Dahl has indeed crafted a work that will linger in readers' minds for years to come. Hopefully this is just the beginning of a string of powerful stand-alone novels from this talented author.

Julia Dahl won a Barry Award for Best First Novel for **INVISIBLE CITY**.

From The Waterfront

Ted Hertel



LIGHTNING STRIKE

by William Kent Krueger

Atria Books, \$27.00, August 2021

Rating: A

It is the summer of 1963 in the small town of Aurora, Minnesota. In order to earn a merit badge, twelve-year-old Cork O'Connor and his friend Jorge are hiking in the Superior National Forest at the edge of the Boundary Waters. But when they arrive at a clearing, they find the body of their friend Big John Manydeeds hanging from a tree. Cork's father, Liam, is the sheriff of the county and at first glance the death appears to be a suicide. But young Cork can't accept that possibility. After all, Big John had been "cured" by Henry Meloux, the Ojibwe Mide healer. Tensions grow on the reservation as the residents believe Big John would never take his own life. Liam, however, insisting on evidence, stands by his original decision. Then a teenage girl from another nearby reservation goes missing, adding to Liam's problems and increasing the tension between the whites and the Ojibwe. Cork, one-quarter Ojibwe himself, sets out to take Meloux' advice to "follow the crumbs" in order to discover the truth on his own.

In this powerful prequel William Kent Krueger turns back the clock to what should have been the halcyon days of Cork O'Connor's youth, only to find that those times were anything but peaceful and quiet. Krueger has proven his mastery of writing as if he were in the skin of young people in such stand-alone novels as *Ordinary Grace* and *This Tender Land*. Here he gives us the story of Cork's introduction to violent death, coupled with the creation of forever friendships, and the tragic loss that

would shape his life.

The common theme that has run through all of the Cork O'Connor series is the bond between parent and child. Here Cork must try to put together the pieces of the puzzles that are his father and their relationship with each other. Not everything is simple or easy to understand for a boy not yet thirteen. He is exposed to racial tension, even in his own home, as his grandmother is a full-blooded Ojibwe. She is very confrontational with her sheriff son-in-law over their differing views on the manner of Manydeeds' death.

Much of the book revolves around The Indian Relocation Act of 1956. While we are all familiar with the relocation of the Japanese population into internment camps during World War II, not nearly as much as been written about this Act which was allegedly designed to solve the so-called "Indian problem." Under the Act, reservations were closed, Native Americans were transported to urban settings, and promised housing and jobs. These were all lies, the effects of which the novel examines as another shameful act in American history. As Santayana said, "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it."

So, yes, this is a coming of age novel, but it is so much more. It is the loss of innocence. Cork is a spirit divided, two worlds in one body: Shinnob and Irish. His journey takes him on a path to reconcile these two worlds, one will lead him to discover his destiny and shape the rest of his life. Before it is over, he will be haunted by death and tragedy, stripped forever of his naivety. But he will have helped Big John Manydeeds walk The Path of Souls, so that both John's and Cork's hearts will find peace.

CLARK AND DIVISION

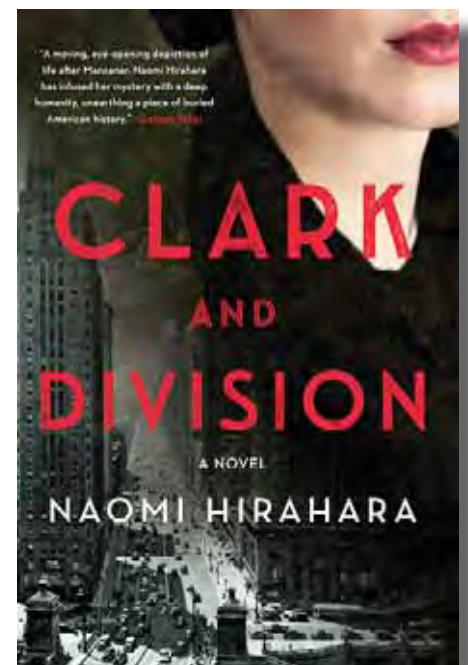
by Naomi Hirahara

Soho Crime, \$27.95, August 2021

Rating: A

1941 California. Pearl Harbor has just been bombed. The United States is at war with Japan. Over one hundred thousand people of Japanese ancestry are rounded up and sent to one of ten "War Relocation Centers" (for which read "internment camps," a euphemism for "concentration camps"), where they were incarcerated for much of the Second World War. Aki Ito and her family were assigned to a camp in Manzanar, California. In September 1943 Aki's sister Rose was given permission to leave for Chicago. A few months later Aki and her family were allowed to follow Rose. But on their arrival in Chicago, another horror compounded the one they had just left. Rose had fallen in front of a subway train and been killed the night before her family arrived. Twenty-year-old Aki refuses to believe that her sister committed suicide and sets out to learn the truth of Rose's death.

CLARK AND DIVISION represents the culmination of three decades of research by Edgar Award winning author Naomi Hirahara. The California-born daughter of survivors of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima, she has



dedicated much of her career to recording the Japanese American experience. She has collected oral histories and dug into documents about the mass incarcerations. In so doing she has brought to life in this novel the experiences of the Japanese people who were imprisoned for nothing more than their nationality, another shamefully indefensible act of the United States government.

Yet this is more than an historical look at the horrors of war. It is also a look at the lives of those affected, who came through the experience to triumph over it. This is a well-plotted mystery with characters the reader will care about, particularly Aki Ito, who searches for justice for her sister. She must go up against the police, who consider Rose's "suicide" just another Japanese woman killing herself. Aki plunges on, following up leads that the police refuse to see. She believes her sister's life counted, even if the cops don't, so her anger grows. It is not an easy quest but she will refuse to give up until she knows the truth.

Hirahara brings the city of Chicago to life in this atmospheric novel, with its dance halls, gambling parlors, many neighborhoods, discrimination, and violence. Its themes of immigration, assimilation, cultural and race relations, and justice for minorities are still in play today. This is a timely novel that is successful both as an engrossing mystery and as a cautionary tale about what mankind can do to itself in terrible times.

As an aside it was interesting to read **Lightning Strike** and **Clark and Division** back-to-back, as both involve similar themes of oppression, relocation of innocent people, and clear violation of human rights. It's a sad lesson that is still unlearned.

DEATH AT GREENWAY

by Lori Rader-Day

William Morrow, \$16.99, October 2021

Rating: A-

April 1941. As the war rages in Europe, parents across London seek to move their children to "war nurseries" in supposedly safer inland areas. One



such sanctuary is offered up by Mr. and Mrs. Max Mallowan (perhaps better known to mystery readers as "Mrs. And Mr. Agatha Christie") at their holiday home, Greenway. Two young women are hired as nurses to watch over ten young children who have been moved there. A terrible mistake at a hospital has led the disgraced "Bridey" Kelly there, seeking redemption, while the other, "Gigi" Kelly, seems to have no affinity with, or interest in, children. But Greenway is not a safe place, being located near the English Channel where the war is closing in. When a murdered body washes up on shore and Gigi vanishes, Bridey and the children find themselves in unexpected danger with a killer on the loose and mysteries to unravel.

Lori Rader-Day has created a heavily character-driven novel in **Death at Greenway**, perhaps her best writing since her highly-praised first novel, *The Black Hour*. Yes, there is mystery here (what else could you expect since Dame Agatha makes the occasional appearance in the book?) but what really will hold the reader are the individual and carefully drawn characters that populate the story. Further, it is based on true events, but reimagining what it might have been like to have spent the early years of World War II in the home of the famous author. As one of her characters

says, "Everything is stories. But some are built on truth, or half-truth, at least."

In Christie's mysteries, there is always someone who seeks the truth and serves justice. But with Agatha, frequently gone to London and away from Greenway, will it be up to the extremely insecure Bridey to be the truth-seeker, bringing justice to the community reeling from the murder and disappearance? How does anyone prioritize one death in the midst of thousands killed in the war? As Gigi's secret past begins to be exposed, Bridey must continue to care for the children on her own, all the while studying Christie's books to try to discover how a villain could be revealed.

At the same time, there is raised the question of how men are praised for their war efforts while women are overlooked. "They would erect stone plinths to lay wreaths on for the men . . . Where would they build the remembrances to the valor of the women who had died, who had protected, who had sacrificed? It was not just a generation of men who was lost or changed. It was all." What about the young children? What price did they pay for being sent away by their parents, only to have them returned after the war, not knowing who these older adults were that they could not remember? Without beating the reader over the head, the author makes her points on these issues very clear.

This is a very different novel from Rader-Day, one filled with suspense and darkness, but also hope. It will be one the reader will long remember.

DIAMOND AND THE EYE

by Peter Lovesey

Soho Crime, \$27.95, October 2021

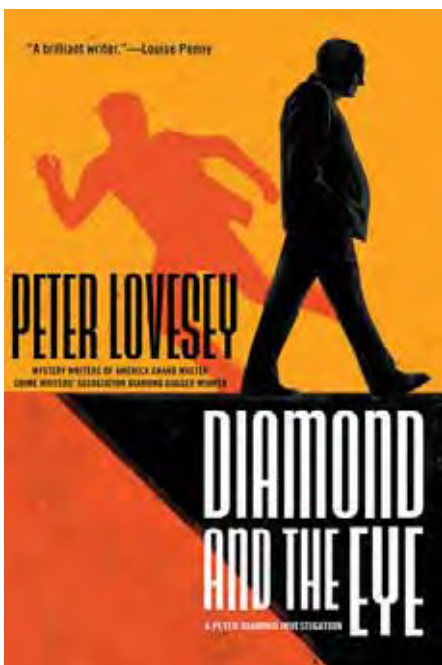
Rating: A

Bath, England, police detective Peter Diamond is having a pint (well, okay, his third pint) when he is approached by private investigator Johnny Getz (who, his business card proclaims, "Gets Results"). Getz has been hired by the daughter of the owner of an antiques shop to find her father. Diamond wants to have nothing to do with this. But Getz concocts a pack of lies ("I'm a private eye, not the Pope. Truth-tell-

ing isn't in the job description.") and gets his new friend "Pete" to meet him and the daughter at the antique shop. There the trio pretty much stumble over a dead man lying in a coffin. Now the missing person case has become a murder investigation, bringing all of Diamond's crew on the scene, where he is anything but ably assisted by Johnny Getz.

This is the twentieth entry in the award-winning Peter Diamond series written by MWA Grandmaster and CWA Diamond (how very appropriate!) Dagger winner. This is a fine follow-up to his 2020 fifty-year celebration of publishing. Told with more than a bit of humor, this is a very clever send-up of both the police and private detective genres.

The story is told in alternating chapters from the third-person perspective of the police, while Johnny Getz narrates his side of the story in true first-person private detective style. Getz clearly thinks more of his abilities than Diamond does – and Diamond would be correct in that view. Getz' version of events is littered with references to crime writers and their detectives, from Hammett's Continental Op to Travis McGee to V.I. Warshawski. Apparently he gets most of his methods from fiction. He knows that getting beaten up and shot comes with the territory, and so when it happens to him, he's just fine



with it. Even when it comes to sleeping with a suspect, he keeps grounded by projecting himself into chapter one of *The Big Sleep*. Diamond considers him a "deluded fantasist." The relationship between the two makes for great reading.

At the end it is a race to the finish line between "Pete" and Getz and the reader can probably guess who is going to win that contest. But it really doesn't matter because getting there is so much fun. I would love to see an entire novel built around Johnny Getz. Heck, "Pete" could even be the guest star in that one. In any event, this clever story is one of my favorite Lovesey novels – and I think it might just become one of yours, as well.

George's Take: Peter Lovesey never resorts to formula, so each new book is unlike any of his other books. In this one he examines the natural friction that occurs when a private eye tries to insinuate himself into Peter Diamond's murder investigation.

Peter Lovesey continues to entertain and amaze me with his talent. **Rating: A-**

THE GIRL WITH NO PLACE TO HIDE

by Marvin Albert

Black Gat Books, \$10.99, October 2021

Rating: A-

Angela wants help from boxing manager Steve Canby, but what she gets is perhaps even better in Jake Barrow, a private eye currently between jobs. He comes to her rescue outside a bar where she is being attacked by a guy even bigger than Jake. For her protection Jake naturally invites her home with him. This does not do her any good when Jake leaves in response to what turns out to be a false alarm. When he returns, she is gone. In his search to find her – and in the best P.I. tradition – he manages to get beaten up, poisoned, shot, and discover he has no client to pay him for his trouble. He soldiers on anyway, of course.

Originally published in 1959 by Gold Medal Books under the name Nick Quarry, this is a solid, fast-moving, tightly written tale. This is the third



of six books in the Barrow series. The characters are well-defined, mixing in the innocent and the guilty, from women on the run to fixers of boxing matches. The plot is hard-hitting (literally!) and believable, harking back to those days of crime novels that delivered a thoroughly entertaining story in fewer than 200 pages. This is a wonderful throw-back novel with a nice '50s feel to it. It's good to see it back in print.

Marvin H. Albert wrote under a number of pseudonyms (in addition to Quarry, these included Al/Albert Conroy and Anthony Rome, among others) in a variety of genres, from mysteries to westerns and even movie novelizations. In Los Angeles he began working on screenplays, but eventually he moved to the south of France. In 1976 he was nominated for Mystery Writers of America's Best Novel Edgar Award for *The Gargoyle Conspiracy*. Albert died in 1996 in France.

SLEEPLESS

by Romy Hausmann

Flatiron Books, \$26.99, ebook \$13.99,

October 2021

Rating: A-

Nadja Kulka is on the run for reasons initially unknown. She collapses in a

gas station but when she regains consciousness, she darts from the shop and takes off once again. She's been in jail before, convicted of the murder of her mother. But this time she has been asked by her only friend, Laura, to help bury the body of the friend's lover before her violent husband can find out about the murder. That body is now in the back of Nadja's car, a good reason to keep on the move. Remember Murphy's Law: anything that can go wrong will go wrong. This book sets out to prove that point.

I've been extremely short on the facts of this novel because it is so convoluted that either I could take this minimalist route or I would have had to go on for several pages. I'll leave additional plot details to the reader to discover because there are so many twists and turns (some more believable than others) that to say more would spoil the fun. This is also a caution that the reader needs to pay very close attention to everything because for the first hundred or more pages it is unclear (purposefully) who is doing what to whom when and where and how – and especially why.

Romy Hausmann is a German author whose previous novel, the very well-received *Dear Child*, was also filled with twists and initial confusion. It was also a fascinating reading experience. But Hausmann's dark new psychological thriller surpasses the earlier one in keeping the reader guessing. With the exception of the occasional bizarre choice of words, the book was smoothly translated by Jamie Bulloch.

The story is initially told from three different sources: the first person point of view of Nadja in 2019, the third person omniscient from 2014 including another murder, and correspondence written but never sent by someone to someone else (neither of whose identities is revealed until well into the novel). Thus the close attention I mentioned previously.

We're all familiar with the concept of the unreliable narrator. In this novel *everyone* is unreliable. Motives are murky, as characters compound mistakes with guilt over past actions, making horrible decisions that lead to nothing but

further trouble. The characters are generally unlikeable, enigmatic but expertly developed. They raise the question: what would you do if your only friend in the world asked you to cover up a murder she committed, including wanting you to bury the body? Many might have answered the question differently than Nadja does (for example, "Call the cops!"), but then that wouldn't have made for much of a story, would it? Hausmann manages to seamlessly tie all these threads and timelines together for a story that will keep the reader on the edge of their seat.

One of the characters says late in the book "that's exactly what you need in this world: a will and tenacity." The same could be said for the reader working their way through this novel. But have patience because by the end it will all make sense and you'll be stunned. It's seldom I recommend a book filled with mostly unlikeable characters, but if you like intelligently told, twisty tales, this one is for you.

THE NIGHT WATCH/THE DARK WINDOW

by Thomas Walsh

Stark House, \$15.95, November 2021

Rating: B+

Stark House, from its Crime Classics



imprint, has reprinted two fine novels in one volume dating back to the 1950s. The book opens with an informative introduction to author Thomas Walsh by Jim Doherty. Walsh started out as a reporter but sold his first short story while he was a civilian writer for the Army. He wrote widely for the pulps, especially *Black Mask*, and the slicks, like *The Saturday Evening Post*. Many of his stories found their way to Hollywood. In 1950 Walsh sold his first novel, *Nightmare in Manhattan*, serialized first in the *Post* the year before. This won the Edgar Award for Best First Novel. That brings us to his second novel:

THE NIGHT WATCH (1952), which was also serialized in six consecutive issues of the *Post* the preceding year (under the title *The Killer Wore a Badge*). Three cops (the "good," the "bad," and the "indifferent") are assigned to surveillance duty. The brass believe that a bank robber who had killed a security guard during the theft will show up at his wife's apartment. The three are on night watch, each with their own motive. McAllister wants to capture the criminal and recover the money. Ahern just wants to be sure he does nothing to screw up his pension. Sheridan wants to rob the bandit and disappear with the dough. In the apartment next to the wife lives an attractive nurse who manages to catch McAllister's eye through his binoculars and there you have the basis for this suspenseful tale. The story is darkly atmospheric, as everything comes to a head late one night when death strikes again and everyone's plans fall to pieces.

If the plot sounds familiar, it may be because this book was turned into the 1954 film *Pushover* with Phil Carey, Fred MacMurray, and (in her film debut) Kim Novak.

THE DARK WINDOW (1956) was Walsh's third novel, also serialized for six issues in the *Post* under the title *Reservation for Murder*. No cops here though former police officer Cassidy, who had been shot in a holdup, now heads up security for a Manhattan hotel. His psychological scars are still with him, however. Cassidy gets wind of a criminal plot underway in the hotel

when he spots two of the “usual suspects” in the corridors. One of them dies and Cassidy eventually links this to a plot against a Bishop who has escaped from behind the Iron Curtain. It will take everything Cassidy has to overcome his demons to stop the theft of the funds donated to the bishop.

Of the two stories, I had a slight preference for the consistently suspenseful **Night Watch**. But both make for good noir reading. Walsh wrote eight more novels, the last in 1968. But he continued to be a prolific short story writer, even winning another Edgar Award (for Best Short Story) in 1978 for “Chance After Chance,” published in *Ellery Queen’s Mystery Magazine*. He died in 1984.

THE NEIGHBOR’S SECRET

by L. Alison Heller

Flatiron Books, \$27.99, October 2021

Rating: B

Bubbling beneath the surface of the lovely suburb of Cottonwood Estates lie secrets best left buried. But when the local book club begins to gather, it doesn’t take long for the past to come rising to the surface and meet the present head on. Why doesn’t Lena want to come out of her beautiful home? Why does Annie try to make friends with her? Why is Annie’s daughter Rachel acting out (beside the obvious reason that she is a teenage girl!)? Who – and why – is the vandal defacing mailboxes, breaking windows, and over time escalating damage? Can Jen make friends when her sociopathic son has just stabbed a classmate? And most importantly perhaps, who killed Bryce Neary in the night fifteen years ago?

The book title is **The Neighbor’s Secret**, but really it would be more appropriately titled in the plural: **The Neighbors’ Secrets**, since all of the book club members seem to have them. The author has managed to keep things hidden until the end, slowly dropping clues along the way. That may be a problem, as every once in a while we get a very short (frankly, too short) flashback to events that occurred fifteen years earlier. Of course this device is used to peel

back the secrets but it ultimately leads to a bit of confusion in the telling of the story. I often had to refer back several chapters to reconnect with the earlier events. While by the end of the book everything fit together, it was not the easiest journey getting there. None of that was helped by the occasional unidentified first person narration.

However, this is an enjoyable satire on book clubs with their snacks, liquor (and plenty of it!), and gossip. Some humorous fun is poked at suburban life while the book moves swiftly through short chapters. The characters are well-defined with their flaws and foibles. They speak their dialogue realistically. Although the curiosity level for the reader is higher than the tension level, this is still an entertaining look at the question of how far some people will go to protect their children – and their secrets. The answer here is: pretty far.

Can we trust our neighbors – and can *they* trust *us*?

TELL A NOVELLA

TRIAL UNDER FIRE

by Zoe Sharp

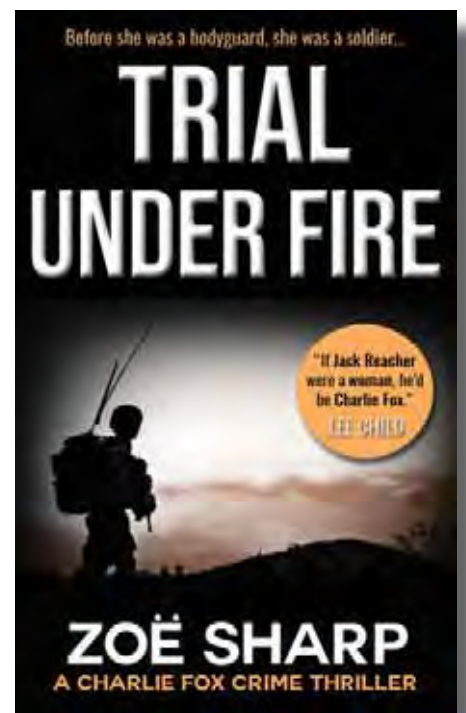
ZACE Ltd., \$2.99/ebook, \$8.50/paper,

August 2021

Rating: A-

Charlotte “Charlie” Fox is on Special Forces duty in Afghanistan. Because of her expertise as a sniper she is added into an operation to rescue the crew of a crashed helicopter, in spite of the fact that women in the British army were specifically prohibited from front line combat. The helicopter crew had been on its way to rescue some hostages and capture a high level enemy target. Charlie will have to make some difficult combat decisions about if, when, and who to shoot in order to protect the team and get everyone out alive. She is on a mission so “hush-hush” that the men even refuse to disclose their names, leading Charlie’s people to refer to them (behind their backs, of course) for want of a better name as “the Spice Girls: Scary, Posh, Sporty, and Ginger.”

This is a prequel to Zoe Sharp’s



excellent series about personal protector Charlie Fox. I am no expert at all about the technical details of combat weaponry, but the author certainly is and writes about it, and combat itself, so authentically readers will believe they are there. The characters, even in this one hundred page novella, are thoroughly developed. The suspense level is high from the beginning and does not let up until the very end. Every moment is filled with tension and terror, as one never knows where the next bullet will come from, in a place where it can be impossible to distinguish friend from foe.

As a woman in a “man’s army,” Fox has to double down to earn the respect of her fellow soldiers. But she is more than up to the task in this compelling story. My one quibble with the tale is that maybe there is just a bit too much of the flashbacks with her parents and their problems with Charlie’s career choice, but that is a minor quibble at best.

If you’ve read and loved the by now lengthy Fox series, this is your opportunity to see some of what made her the fascinating, intelligent, and tough protagonist she came to be. On the other hand, if you have never read Sharp’s work, you need to ask yourself “why not?” This is a solid introduction

to Charlie and her skills. When you are done, you will want to plunge right into her subsequent adventures which outdo even this one.

THE OLD-TIMER IN THE CORNER

Davis Dresser, using the pseudonym Brett Halliday, created lanky red-headed detective Michael Shayne in the 1939 novel *Dividend on Death*. It had twenty-one publisher rejections before being bought by Henry Holt & Co. In that novel, Shayne is hired by young, beautiful, and naive (naturally!) Phyllis Brighton to keep her from murdering her own mother. By the end of that first book, she has thrown herself into Shayne's arms, but he tells her to go away and grow up (not so naturally for Shayne!). But over the span of the next couple of books, she returns and has apparently grown up. They get engaged and then married. Now you're up to date for the eighth novel in the series:

BLOOD ON THE BLACK MARKET (1943) is set during WWII, those halcyon days of gas and food rationing. Why isn't Shayne serving in the armed forces? I have no idea but here he's doing his bit for the U.S. by going after vicious racketeers running a black market scheme involving gas and tires. He gets drawn in when Clem Wilson, a friend of his who owns a gas station, is brutally murdered in the middle of a call to Shayne for help. He sees Clem's killers as traitors to the country. Shayne tells his buddy Chief of Miami Detec-

tives Will Gentry that Clem revealed information to him about the killers in the phone call, but Mike refuses to share it with him. Obstruction of justice, anyone? It is also an outright lie. He's doing this to try to draw the killers out so he can deal with them himself. This is what could have been called Mike Hammer style justice but Hammer didn't come into print until 1947. Shayne also proceeds to punch out a cop in the performance of the cop's duty of hauling him in and still Gentry lets him go. But Shayne never let the law or rules stand in the way of justice, which was one of the things that readers loved about him.

As the story moves along in its 200 pages (ahhh, weren't those the Good Old Days?), Shayne meets a beautiful "she-lawyer," as he refers to her numerous times (oops, maybe not so Good Old Days after all!) and she (naturally, again) tries to seduce him. But is she hooked up with the gangsters? Or is she one of the good she-lawyers? Here's a clue: she refers to an oral comment Shayne makes, saying "That's a libelous statement." Ummmm, no. Libel is a *published* false statement. She meant "slander." Back to that Central American law school you attended, She-Lawyer!

Of course without cell phones, Shayne has to stop at drug stores every couple of chapters to call someone. By the end of Dresser's run on the series, Shayne has probably stopped at every drug store in the Greater Miami area. He is also forced to use pencils to make notes, since ballpoint pens still hadn't been invented.

Now here's the kicker in this whole thing and why I chose this book of the thirty Shayne novels that Dresser wrote before turning the series over to ghost writers, most notably Robert Terrall. We find this on page one of the book without any other preamble or explanation: "[The phone] was in the other apartment one flight up where *he had lived with Phyllis before her death.*" (emphasis mine). WHAT?? Just like that his wife is dead? According to "Halliday," "at least ninety percent of the fan letters I receive ask . . . 'What happened

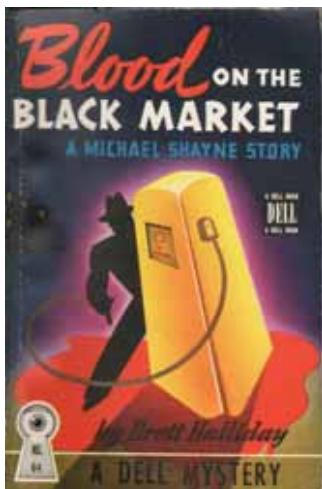
to Phyllis?'" (emphasis in original) Gee, I wonder why that would be!

So in 1956 – 13 years later for those not keeping count – Dresser published **Heads You Lose**, which is *word for word identical* to **Blood on the Black Market**. (Yes, I read them side-by-side. *Note to self*: Get a life!) There is a note in the 1958 Dell paperback reprint: "The text of this book is a revised edition of . . . *Blood on the Black Market.*" (emphasis in original) So then what's the revision, you might ask? It's a thirteen page Foreword explaining that less than three years after their marriage, Phyllis died in childbirth. It then goes on to summarize every Shayne novel up through *The Blonde Cried Murder* (1956). So basically Dresser wrote a Foreword plugging the entire series to date, stuck it on the front of his 1943 novel, changed the book's title, and sent it out into the world as basically a new Shayne novel. Nice work if you can get it.

Anyway, if you want to try a different sort of Mike Shayne story, also written by Dresser, check out *She Woke to Darkness* (1954) in which "Halliday" tells a first person story about when he had to call on Shayne for help because he'd become involved in a murder inquiry in New York. It begins with the author attending the Mystery Writers of America's Edgar banquet. While there "Halliday" meets up with real life mystery writers – such as Fred Dannay, Helen Reilly, Veronica Parker Johns, and more – as well as editors and the like. It's an interesting change of pace from other Shayne novels.

BOOKS READ IN ORDER OF PREFERENCE

LIGHTNING STRIKE
DIAMOND AND THE EYE
DEATH AT GREENWAY
CLARK AND DIVISION
THE GIRL WITH NO PLACE TO HIDE
SLEEPLESS
TRIAL BY FIRE
THE NEIGHBOR'S SECRET
THE NIGHT WATCH
THE DARK WINDOW



Maggie's Cozy Mystery Cafe'

Mary Mason



TWISTED TEA CHRISTMAS

by Laura Childs

Berkley Prime Crime, \$26.00
23rd in the Tea Shop Mystery series
Rating B+

I love "visiting" Charleston and the Indigo Tea Shop. Christmas is certainly a magical time to visit, and Theodosia Browning knows how to make magic. Theo and her staff have many themed teas planned, and also are catering a party for a wealthy Charlestonian woman at her fabulous home. Drucilla Heyward may be very wealthy, but she is a giving person, supporting many charities.

Sadly, the tea party ends in tragedy when Drucilla is found in a heap on the floor with a syringe in her neck. Murder wasn't on the menu, and neither was the theft of a Renoir painting and several diamond rings. Drucilla's death is a tragedy for her friends and the charities to which she donated so generously. Theo can't resist looking into the crime, as she was the first person to find Drucilla.

There are many suspects, some more obvious than others. Theo and company are up to the task, and with skill and intuition can solve the crime. Theo is put in a bad situation, but rescued by some unexpected, yet adorable heroes.

As usual, my mouth is watering at the descriptions of the food and teas the Indigo Tea Shop provides. I wish it were real. I thank Ms. Childs for steering me to Poogans Porch restaurant, as it was wonderful. My only quibble with this book was I would have liked to see a bit more of Drucilla, as she seemed to be a wonderful character. I'm looking forward to another trip to Charleston

and the Indigo Tea Shop

GOD REST YE, ROYAL GENTLEMEN

by Rhys Bowen

Berkley Prime Crime, \$26.00
15th in the royal spyness series.

Rating: A

Lady Georgianna Rannoch is excited to be celebrating her first Christmas season as a married woman. Georgie realizes that as mistress of a large country estate, she will need to entertain. Sadly, she has not found a suitable cook, and has to resort to placing a help wanted ad.

She's rescued by a timely invitation from one of husband Darcy's aunts. Aunt Ermintrude is a friend of the Queen and relays the Queen's request that Georgie and Darcy go to stay near Sandringham with his aunt.



Plans get further confused when her Brother Binky and his odious wife Fig invite themselves to stay for the holidays. Georgie had brought her beloved Grandfather to visit for the holidays, and unfortunately he doesn't feel comfortable with the new location. He stays with the servants and the rest of the clan makes the journey. That includes Georgie's mother who shows up unexpectedly, to avoid celebrating the holiday in 1935 Germany with her lover, Max.

When they arrive, they find 2 more couples there, as well as the dreaded Wallis Simpson. The Prince had asked that she be made welcome there, which meant he could visit her, as she would NOT be welcomed by the royal family. The King's health is worrisome which is putting a damper on the occasion.

When some of the Royals go on a shooting party, something the King enjoys, the Prince of Wales has a close call, calling a halt to the hunt. Mrs. Simpson also has an accident that didn't cause any severe harm. She does decide to go to London, without telling the prince. Things aren't going smoothly, but Georgie is determined to make the best of it. Then when Georgie and the Prince are set to go on a ride, he cancels at the last minute to try to stop Mrs. Simpson from leaving the area. That leaves Georgie and an aide, Dickie Altrungham to go on the ride. The weather is chilly with a mist, and Dickie and his horse go ahead of Georgie. She discovers him on the ground, severely injured. He dies after repeating the word tapestry.

There is much concern, both for the dead man, and the fear that he was mistaken for the Prince, and killed in error.

Are there anarchists, Nazis or Irish rebels in the area threatening the monarch? Georgie and Darcy are intent on solving the mystery, and they do so at great peril to themselves. One bright thing is the adoption of some adorable puppies and their mother by the newlyweds.

This is a series I look forward to with glee. I feel like I'm a visitor with a family that is so different from my life, I enjoy the change of pace. Georgie has grown into a capable young woman, and Queenie, her less than perfect maid/cook is still making things "interesting" for all. I'm looking forward to the next in the series with great anticipation.

CLARK & DIVISION

by Naomi Hirahara (Soho, \$27.95)
Stand alone Historical mystery.

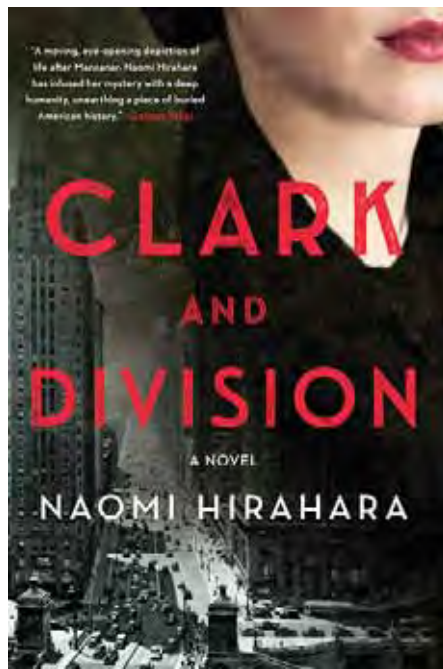
Rating: A

Aki Ito, her parents, and sister Rose were among the Japanese-American citizens who were uprooted from their life and sent to Manzanar Internment camp. They made the best of an impossible situation, and eventually were sent to Chicago, a totally different environment than California. Rose was released their prior to the rest of the family, and was sent to Chicago.

When the family arrives, they find that Rose has died in a subway, ruled a suicide. Aki and her parents are devastated. Aki looked up to Rose, and was looking forward to seeing her beloved sister again. Aki is certain that there is no way Rose would take her own life, and decides to look into the matter.

Aki finds people who knew or were close to Rose, but is frustrated at the lack of information she receives. It's as if they are afraid of talking about Rose or her fate. Aki is also dealing with going from a close knit community in California to a totally different life. The weather, living conditions and lack of a safe community take it's toll.

In the end, the truth is found, but is that enough? This was a look at a shameful time in America. I wasn't aware of the movement of the Japanese Americans to Chicago from the intern-



ment camps. Rose was a young woman who had to grow up quickly, and deal with the decline of her parents, due to the loss of their previous lifestyle. I enjoyed this story, and was appalled at this chapter in my countries history.

DEFENDING BRITTA STEIN

by Ronald H. Balson
St. Martin's Press, \$27.99.

Legal mystery.

Rating: A

When an elderly local Chicago restaurateur is chosen to receive an award from a local Danish/American Association, not everyone is happy about it. Another Danish emigree, Britta Stein is incensed. She knows that Ole Henryks is not the WWII hero he has claimed to be. Britta takes action by painting things like traitor, war criminal, etc. on the wall of Ole's restaurant.

Her identity as the tagger is discovered when a camera is placed to record the "vandal". She's fined and then sued by Henryks for defamation of character. A partner in a large, prestigious law firm has contacted Attorney Catherine Lockhart hoping she will agree to represent Britta.

Catherine is impressed by Britta and her granddaughter, Emma, also an attorney. She agrees to take the case and her

husband, Liam will do the investigations into Britta's accusations.

Britta is not the easiest client to work with. She wants to tell her story in excruciating detail, which takes time the defense doesn't have. The reason for it (a good one) is revealed, and has an important surprise. Britta did have health issues that made me fear for the outcome.

Ole is represented by a very brash attorney who knows how to play to the crowd and the press. Luckily, Catherine is able to figure out a way to get him to play into her hands. Liam is able to find important information about the facts of the case. It could easily go either way, depending on the skill of the attorneys, and the way the Ole and Britta are perceived as truthful or not.

I loved this book. I have always had a fascination with WWII, and reading this book gave me an insight to the way the Danish people managed to thwart the German occupation of their country. Good triumphing over evil is something to cheer for.

I was feeling as Catherine did and wanted Britta to speed up telling her tale, but realized she had a good reason for taking her time when she finally reached a certain point in her tale. Thankfully, she had also written things down.

I highly recommend this book.



Deadly Pleasures

George Easter



STOLEN HOURS

by Allen Eskens
Mulholland, \$28.00

Rating: A-

When Allen Eskens returns with characters from his phenomenally good novel **THE LIFE WE BURY**, it is always a good thing for me. In this case we follow newly graduated law student Lila Nash, who has landed her dream job as a prosecutor-in-training for Hennepin County. Her relationship with her boyfriend Joe Talbert is as good as it's ever been and things are really going well for her – until her boss is replaced by someone who bears her a grudge and she is assigned to work for the tough Andi Fitch.

The narrative is divided into two tracks. The first follows Lila, while the other gives us a view of the life of Gavin Spencer, a particularly vile serial rapist and murderer. We are privy to the extreme measures Gavin takes to cover up his crimes. His latest victim is Sadie Vault, who has been drugged, raped and then tossed into a swift river near a large falls. She wakes up just in time to desperately swim to safety, where she is rescued. Sadie remembers that her abductor had a lisp and then she connects that fact with a wedding photographer she encountered earlier in the week who also had a similar speech impediment. She is able to identify him in a lineup and he is put in jail without bail. Detective Nikki Vang agrees that Gavin Spencer is likely Sadie's abductor but she can find no physical evidence to support a case – just a lot of circumstantial evidence.

When this case crosses Lila's desk, she feels a strong desire to put the person responsible in prison for a long time. Rape is a hot-button issue for her

as she was a victim in her high school years. This becomes very personal to Lila in more ways than one.

Once you get into the meat of this excellent novel, expect the unexpected. Lots of twists and turns. In my mind, Allen Eskens' name stands for excellence in crime writing. He is on my annual "must read" list.

THE DARKNESS KNOWS

by Arnaldur Indridason
Minotaur, \$27.99

Rating: B+

Retired Detective Konrad leads a quiet life of solitude after his beloved wife passed away from cancer. He is content to while away the hours in meaningless routine and finds joy in visiting his son and grandchildren at his son's home.

But one of his unsolved cases from thirty years ago rears its bloody head when the body of Sigurvan is discovered

in a melting glacier. Sigurvan's business partner, Hjaltain, was a suspect at the time of the man's disappearance, but was released for lack of evidence. Now the police have renewed interest in Hjaltain and have arrested him again. Surprisingly, Hjaltain says he will only talk to Konrad, so Konrad's former colleague and friend Marta asks him for his help and he reluctantly complies.

When Konrad meets with Hjaltain (who is in bad health), the man insists that he is innocent, but Konrad is at a loss to know what the man wants him (Konrad) to do about it. Two weeks later Hjaltain dies and for all intents and purposes, the case looks like it will remain unsolved.

Then Konrad receives a visit from a woman named Herdis, who claims that her brother Villi witnessed a large 4-wheel vehicle and its driver acting suspiciously at the time of Sigurvan's disappearance. Later her brother was killed in a hit-and-run "accident." Because of its tenuous connection to the Sigurvan case, Konrad starts looking into the hit and run.

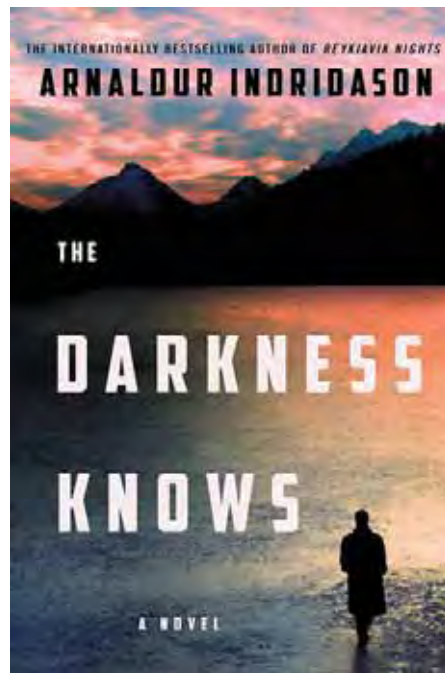
These are seemingly impossible cold cases to solve, but Konrad has all the time in the world and he starts chipping away at both of them. Konrad is a patient investigator and the reader must be of the same mindset. It takes a lot of patience on the part of Konrad and the reader to get to a quite satisfying resolution of the storyline. Konrad is quite flawed and not always likeable, but all the more realistic because of that. And he has that one characteristic that all great fictional detectives have – tenacity. If this is the beginning of a new series by the author, it will be interesting to see where he will go with it.

THE CHAOS KIND

by Barry Eisler
Thomas & Mercer, \$24.95, \$15.95

Rating: B-

Barry Eisler has collected a fairly large number of interesting characters over his 20-year writing career. In **THE CHAOS KIND** he has banded most of them together into a sort-of Justice League. We have his primary character John Rain who is enjoying retirement



with his equally deadly partner Delilah. Then there is his other main series character Livia Lone with her tenuous love interest Dox.

They all get involved in a case that surrounds the wealthy Andrew Schrader who has been arrested for sexual-related crimes (think Jeffrey Epstein). He is putting pressure on some high-ranking officials in the U.S. government to get him out of this mess – or he will release damaging sex tapes of their illegal escapades. First order of business is to kill Assistant US Attorney Alondra Diaz who is aggressively moving forward with the case. Former marine sniper Cox and black-ops veteran Daniel Larison are sent to make sure that hit doesn't happen.

Then the rest of the book is a race to see who can get a hold of the incriminating videos first. There are even national security implications because if they were to fall into the hands of a foreign power, their value for blackmailing high government officials would be enormous.

The writing is smooth and the action exciting. I just didn't find the plot all that believable. I've been a big fan of the Barry-Award-winning Barry Eisler over the years, but this is my least favorite of his novels. His characters work best as individuals or when paired up with one of his other principal characters. Their talents are too dissipated when thrown together with a large group.

VELVET WAS THE NIGHT

by Silvia Moreno-Garcia
Del Rey, \$28.00

Rating: A-

Mexico City in the early 1970s. The government, in cahoots with paid goons (known as Hawks), seeks to suppress any dissent by young communists and anti-establishment types. This turned into what was later called the Dirty War. The story is told through the eyes of Elvis (one of the Hawks) and 30-year-old legal secretary Maite – both hopeless romantics.

Maite is hired to look after the cat of fellow tenant Leonara but, when Leonara doesn't return as expected, Maite goes in search of her. She needs

the promised money to get her car back from the repair shop. Her quest intersects with the Hawks who are also looking for Leonara and, in particular, pictures that Leonara has hidden. Elvis follows Maite in hopes she will lead him to Leonara. While searching Maite's apartment, Elvis comes across a room filled with book and vinyl records, two things that he has great interest in and he is duly impressed.

Eventually these two characters meet and see in each other the person they have been looking for. Now they just have to figure out how to get out of the dangerous situation they find themselves in.

The author's prose is first rate and she has created two intriguing and likable characters (warts and all) in Elvis and Maite. It is a strange kind of love story, but one that works. I expect this to be on some of the Best of 2021 Lists that will shortly appear.

BILLY SUMMERS

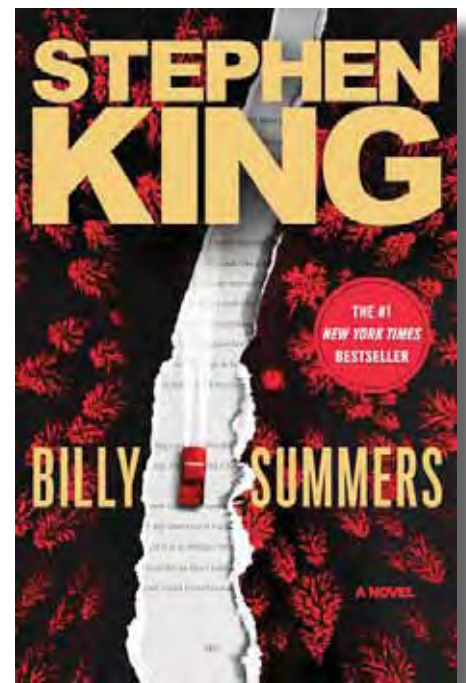
by Stephen King
Scribner, \$30.00

Rating: A

Billy Summers is exceptionally accurate with a rifle or gun. This innate skill made him a valuable military asset in the Iraq war, but it was hard to translate that skill into a marketable one when Billy returned to civilian life. However, there were some in the mob who were acquainted with Billy and his skills so they put him to work. But Billy insisted on only killing "bad" people, like the man who killed his sister at an early age (still a child himself at the time, Billy shot that "bad" man to death).

Billy seems a pretty transparent person on the surface. He projects himself as a simpleton to those for whom he works. He carries an Archie comic book with him when he is in the presence of mobsters. He wants to be underestimated by his bosses just in case they ever plan to double-cross him. In his private moments Billy is reading Emile Zola and other great literary writers.

But Billy is tiring of this life and often wonders if he himself is a "bad" man. So he decided that his next job will be his last. Billy has already put



away a handsome sum in his off-shore accounts and the more than 1\$ million he has been offered by Nick, a Las Vegas mobster, should support Billy well for the rest of his life. Billy has done other successful jobs for Nick in the past. But it's a complicated hit that will require living under cover for possibly many months. The target is also a hitman who is presently in custody in a prison in another state. The word on the street is that this hitman is going to roll on one of his powerful customers so that man has put an expensive contract on the said incarcerated hitman. There appears to be only one window of opportunity to get at the turncoat. He is expected to make a court appearance at the local courthouse at some unannounced time in the next few months.

Billy is tasked with setting himself up in an adjoining high-rise that provides a good angle for shooting someone arriving at the courthouse. He is to be given short notice of this arrival so he has to be prepared at a moment's notice to make the hit. His cover story for being in the building is that he is a writer working on a book.

Billy uses the time to write about his life and finds that he enjoys doing so. It turns out that Billy actually has a talent for writing and we are privy to each chapter as he finishes it.

The hit occurs. Billy's boss has an escape plan that he is expected to follow, but it doesn't smell right to Billy so he has planned his own means of safe egress. Along the way he encounters Alice, a young woman badly beaten, whom he picks up and nurses back to health. They become partners in Billy's eventual escape as it now is apparent that Billy is the one being hunted.

I was completely captivated by this stunning crime novel (no horror elements whatsoever) by an obvious master of his craft. It is a character study of depth and empathy. While I have no interest in horror fiction -- and I haven't read much written by Stephen King -- I certainly hope he keeps writing crime novels because I'll read them with great enjoyment.

**DAUGHTER OF
THE MORNING STAR**

by Craig Johnson
Viking, \$28.00

Rating: B

County Sheriff Walt Longmire is asked by his friend Tribal Chief Lolo Long to look into who is sending her niece Jaya threatening notes, much like ones that Jaya's sister received before she disappeared. Jeanie caught a ride home from a party a year ago and disappeared into a snowstorm when the van broke down. Walt's sidekick Henry Standing Bear tags along because the reservation is Henry's world and not Walt's.

Jaya is a damaged and angry teenager, as one would expect for a girl with an alcoholic mother, an absent father and a missing sister. The one thing she has going for her is that she is a basketball phenom. But Jaya doesn't seem to care about her teammates and they don't care about her. Over the course of the novel, Jaya learns some hard lessons and mellows out a bit with the help of Walt and Henry (and others who care about her).

The investigation into Jeanie's disappearance has Walt and Henry interviewing all the occupants of the van on that fateful night. It is slow going because most of them have nothing to add to the known facts. But over time, Walt and Henry get an inkling of an idea that white supremacists may be involved.

DAUGHTER OF THE MORNING STAR also shines important light on an issue that I was unaware of: the astoundingly high number of Native American women who go missing each year (much higher than the national average). There is also a fair amount of native mysticism in the book, which didn't bother me, but may be bothersome for those who don't like any woo-woo in their crime fiction.

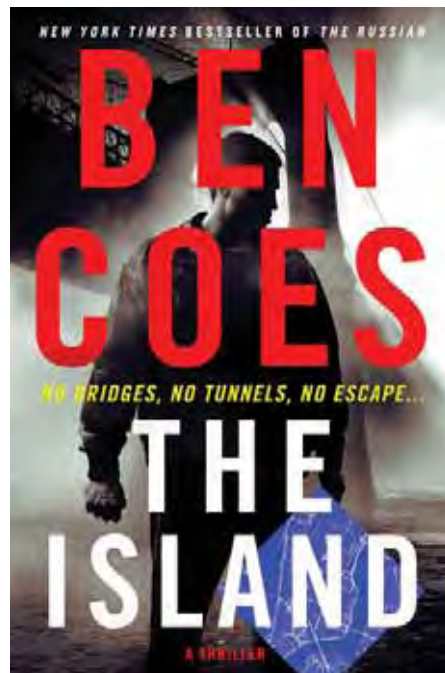
All in all, I would rate this a good, but not great read.

THE ISLAND

by Ben Coes
St. Martin's, \$27.99

Rating: A-

Ben Coes has gained a well-deserved reputation for creating plots that encompass believable, yet horrendous threats to U.S. security. This time around, the Supreme Leader of Iran comes under the thrall of an extreme Jihadist named Mansour who convinces the addle-brained leader that it would be a good idea to take another bite of the apple, in this case the Big Apple. And while they are at it, why not take down the Federal Reserve and the President of the United States? Mamoud wants just one little, tiny favor in return for all this: let him eliminate CIA operative Dewey Andreas, who has been a thorn in Iran's side for years. The operations are given the green light.



So, fairly early in this thriller, Dewey walks into his favorite D.C. eatery and encounters mayhem. His innate ability to instantaneously assess a dangerous situation and effectively counterattack are the only things between Dewey and certain death.

Meanwhile, President Dellenbaugh is scheduled to address the U.N. General Assembly in New York City and CIA Director Hector Calibrisi is growing concerned that there may be a terrorist attack on POTUS. When warned that he should call off the visit, the President declines because it would send the wrong message to the world.

As one would expect in a Ben Coes thriller, all hell breaks loose in the last third of the book and Dewey Andreas is right in the middle of it.

The terrorist attack is all too plausible and gives me shivers just to contemplate what could actually happen. That's what Ben Coes does with all of his thrillers.

It's been three years since the last Ben Coes novel and that has been way too long. He's certainly in the top tier of today's action thriller writers. Note to Ben: don't take so long to come out with your next one.

**AN ELDERLY LADY MUST NOT BE
CROSSED**

by Helene Tursten
Soho Crime, \$14.99

Rating: A-

This series of six connected short stories (that read like a novel) continues the "adventures" of 88-year-old Maud whom we first met in the delightful **AN ELDERLY LADY GETS HER WAY**. Her method of dealing with the problems she encounters has a certain permanence attached to it. Maud is definitely someone who shouldn't be crossed.

Several stories take us back to Maud's earlier years and inform us about how she refined her techniques for dealing with life's bullies and anyone who stood in the way of her achieving her modest goals. These include using Christmas gingerbread cookies to attain her objectives. The author kindly includes recipes for a naughty and a nice

batch of these gingerbread cookies.

The final story (a novella) chronicles her vacation to South Africa and Zimbabwe and ends with a surprising display of generosity on the part of Maud. Of course, along the way she also cleverly dispatches someone who turns out to be quite a villain.

Long may Maud live.

Very clever and highly entertaining.

THE JUDGE'S LIST

by John Grisham
Doubleday, \$29.95

Rating: A-

I'll state at the outset that I'm not enough of a John Grisham fan to read every novel he writes, but I do dip my toe in every once in awhile. In the case of **THE JUDGE'S LIST**, I was immediately intrigued by the plot line and read it in just a few days.

Grisham brings back a character, Lacy Stoltz, whom he introduced in **THE WHISTLER**. She works for the Florida Board of Judicial Conduct, which investigates claims of judicial misconduct. These usually are allegations of bribery and conflicts of interest. And if the truth be known, Lacy is getting bored with the job. So when someone contacts her with claims that a certain judge is a serial killer, Lacy perks up and takes notice.

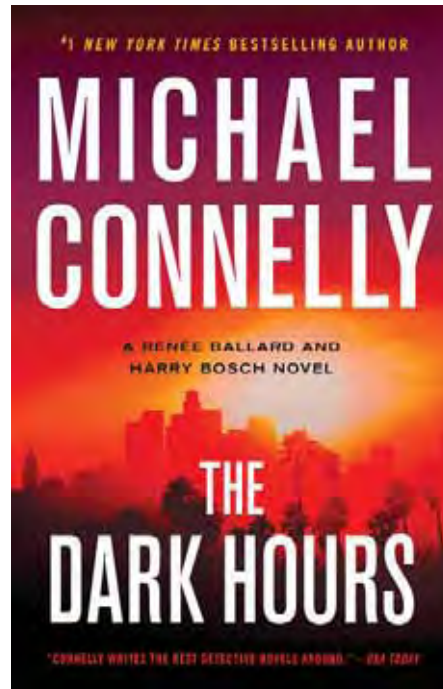
The informant's name is Jeri Crosby, but she also goes by a number of other names. Jeri's father was murdered twenty years ago and the culprit was never found. She is obsessed with the case and has dedicated her life and resources into finding out who was responsible and bringing that person to justice.

Jeri is convinced that she has found the murderer – Ross Bannick. There are two problems though. One is that he is now a powerful judge, and two, there is no direct evidence of his crimes – just a lot of circumstantial evidence and numerous connections to murder victims. It doesn't take long at all for the reader also to become convinced, when Grisham provides us with some of Bannick's thoughts.

So this whodunnit quickly morphs into a "how to catch the whodunnit." And that's where Grisham uses his plot-

ting skills to entertain us with a twisty-turny roller-coaster ride.

This was a great, fun read, as one would expect with the best of Grisham.



THE DARK HOURS

by Michael Connelly
Little, Brown, \$29.00

Renée Ballard and Harry Bosch #4

Rating: A

The highlight of my reading year is when I sit down with the new Michael Connelly novel. His recent addition of a new major character, LAPD detective Renée Ballard, has only added to my enjoyment of Michael's work.

This crime novel opens up on New Year's Eve in Los Angeles. I wasn't aware of this, but it is a time when hundreds of celebrants shoot guns into the air. So where do we find Ballard and her reluctant partner, Lisa Moore? Sitting in a patrol car under an overpass until the rain of lead is over.

A few minutes after midnight, they receive a call to a scene where an auto shop owner has been fatally hit by a bullet in the midst of a crowd of street partygoers. Ballard quickly sees that the bullet wound is not from one that fell from the sky but from a gunshot fired horizontally at close range.

Later on, a ballistic test shows that the bullet came from a gun that was

used years earlier to murder another victim. The case was never solved, which must have grated on the lead detective, one Harry Bosch.

So once again, the police detective Renée Ballard joins forces with the private-sector Bosch to dig deeper into both cases. And, at the same time Ballard is following up on several rape cases that involve a pair of rapists acting together, known as the Midnight Men.

Meanwhile, the LAPD is experiencing a number of changes due to the pandemic and the "defund-the-police" movement. Police apathy is rampant and Ballard is determined to fight her way through it.

The ending leaves us with some interesting cliff-hangers to be resolved in future novels in the series.

I'm so glad that Michael Connelly came up with a young female version of Harry Bosch so that this series will continue for decades to come. Many share my opinion that Michael Connelly is simply the best crime novelist alive today. He is to crime fiction what Walter Cronkite was to the nightly news – a trusted voice – trusted to provide excellence in whatever he writes.

PAY OR PLAY

Howard Michael Gould
Severn House, \$28.99

Charlie Waldo Series #3

Rating: B+

Paying a harsh, self-imposed penance for a terrible misstep on a case, former LAPD superstar detective Charlie Waldo lives a life of punishing minimalism deep within the woods, making a near religion of his eco-commitment to owning no more than One Hundred Things. At least, he's trying to. His PI girlfriend Lorena keeps drawing him back to civilization.

When an old adversary, drug boss Don Q strong-arms Charlie into investigating the seemingly accidental death of a vagrant, Lorena agrees he can work under her PI license on one condition: that he helps her with a high-maintenance celebrity client – the wildly popular courtroom TV star Judge Ida Mudge, whose new mega-deal makes her a perfect target for blackmail. (Sur-

prisingly, Charlie is a fan of the Judge's irreverent podcast.)

The Judge wants Lorena and Charlie to look into the death of an old college acquaintance at a fraternity pledge event – which was ruled to be an accident. The Judge wants to know if it was a murder and, if so, who committed it?

This series can be quite entertaining because Charlie is like no other detective in mystery fiction. But he can also be somewhat annoying in his rigid determination to have as near zero effect on the environment as possible. Despite this being a noble goal, at times Charlie's lack of common sense in this regard can be frustrating. Nevertheless, one has to admit that Charlie is pretty good at detection. Good, but not great, is my assessment of **PAY OR PLAY**.

LAST REDEMPTION

by Matt Coyle

Oceanview, \$26.95, November, 2021
#8 in Rick Cahill Series

Rating: A

In the past P.I. Rick Cahill has been a magnet that attracted one dangerous situation after another. But he has traded the mean streets for his home office computer. Now he makes a living doing background searches for major corporations. His body has taken enough punishment and he has promised his fiancée, Leah Landingham, that he has turned in his Rottweiler for a soft kitty. The major reason for this transformation is that Leah is pregnant and that promise for a bright future has opened up an entirely new vista for Rick.

But he can't turn down a friend in need of help, especially if that friend is Moira MacFarlane, his former cohort. Her son Luke, a programming genius, is in trouble. His ex-girlfriend has taken a restraining order out against him. Moira wants Rick to monitor Luke to make sure he doesn't violate the order.

Then Luke goes missing. And the police are looking for him in connection with the murder of Luke's boss.

Rick's tenacity ultimately leads to...., yup, you guessed it...danger and more bodily abuse.

LAST REDEMPTION is a thrilling ride and lives up to the high bar that



Matt Coyle has already set for himself. The Afterword left me wondering what is next for Matt Coyle. Is he going to start a new series with an entirely new character or perhaps a spin-off series with Moira? Whatever Matt Coyle writes in the future, I'll be there with him. He's a real talent.

THE LEFT-HANDED TWIN

by Thomas Perry

Mysterious Press, \$25.95 Jane Whitefield
Series #9

Rating: A-

Jane Whitefield is happily married to a doctor who happens to be a wonderful and patient man. She has promised to leave her secret and dangerous life's work (helping people in danger to disappear by adopting new identities) behind and devote herself to their life together. But despite her good intentions, Jane just can't refuse to help those in need of her particular expertise.

Jane maintains a safe house, in another name, where she used to shelter her clients. On a routine maintenance visit to the house, she finds a young woman in hiding, who has come all the way from LA to upstate New York to seek Jane's help. In her prior life she had a control freak of a boyfriend whom she cheated on. The boyfriend then murders the man she cheated with

and is acquitted at a trial where she testified against him. So now he's after her, using all of his resources, including the Russian mob, to find her and get his revenge.

The mob is involved because they know that Jane has hidden many people with mob ties and, if they can capture Jane and extract from her the present whereabouts of the people she has hidden, it may mean millions of dollars in their pockets.

The story line culminates on the Hundred Mile Wilderness Trail of Maine, where Jane is relentlessly pursued by Russian mobsters and has to use all of the skills she learned as a young Native American to survive in this wilderness.

Of course, Thomas Perry always peppers his thrillers with a lot of unknown facts that enhance the narrative. He is such a pro at giving us readers what we want and have come to expect from him: an intelligent, thrilling ride.

FAMILY BUSINESS

by S. J. Rozan

Pegasus Crime, \$25.95, December, 2021

Rating: B+

Lydia Chin and her partner Bill Smith are hired by Mel Wu to accompany her to the NYC building that she just inherited from her uncle, Tong gang leader Big Brother Choi, who died of a heart attack. The building is the headquarters of her uncle's gang and also acts as the gang's residence.

Mel wants to look over the building and decide what to do with it. But she doesn't feel safe going to what she expects will be a hostile environment.

Here are some of the things that Lydia, Bill and Mel encounter on this and subsequent visits:

- a dead Tong leader, Choi's chief lieutenant
- a burgeoning intra-gang battle for control of the Tong
- a high-powered developer whose neighborhood redevelopment project hinges on his buying the Tong building
- a local Chinatown heritage foundation which opposes the

redevelopment project. One of its spokesmen is Lydia's own brother.

- rumors of a treasure hidden somewhere in the Tong building

Added to the list of problems is the fact that Mel's sister (unbeknownst to Mel) is being blackmailed by the developer to put pressure on Mel to sell the building to him.

Lydia must be at the top of her game to successfully navigate through the treacherous waters before her. And she is.

FAMILY BUSINESS is all that we have come to expect from S. J. Rozan – a very satisfying mystery story with many insights into Chinese-American culture.

ISLAND OF THIEVES

by Glen Erik Hamilton
Morrow, \$27.99
Van Shaw series #6

Rating: A-

Van Shaw was trained by his grandfather to become a master thief and even though he has left that life behind, his reputation still remains. Van is hired by Sebastian Rohner, a wealthy tycoon, to test the security at a storage facility by stealing a heavily guarded object. He passes the test with flying colors and then Rohner asks him to come to his private island and protect his valuable



art collection during a business conference. The money is right so Van agrees.

But when he arrives on the island, Rohner's employees put up roadblocks to Van's mission and he begins to suspect that he's being set up as a scapegoat for something that is about to occur.

Then one morning he discovers a body along the shore. The Chinese scientist suffered a heavy blow to the head. Accident or murder? Van alerts Rohner's chief of staff, who in turn, calls the police. After a cursory investigation, the island is evacuated except for Rohner and his inner circle, and the police begin a more intense investigation.

Van suspects that he will become a suspect in what he believes is a murder, so he goes in search of the real culprit. Meanwhile there is another murder and evidence points to Van as the murderer, so he goes on the run from police.

Van Shaw is one of the more interesting characters in mystery fiction. He is extremely likeable and loyal to those he loves, but doesn't mind bending the law when it suits his needs. As an ex-Ranger and a master thief (mostly retired), he has all the tools he needs to be a credible and exciting action hero (anti-hero?) .

ISLAND OF THIEVES provides him ample opportunity to show his physical and mental skills.

The novel is a nice combination of good detection and thrilling action. Just my kind of book!

Historical Mysteries

THE RETURN OF THE PHARAOH

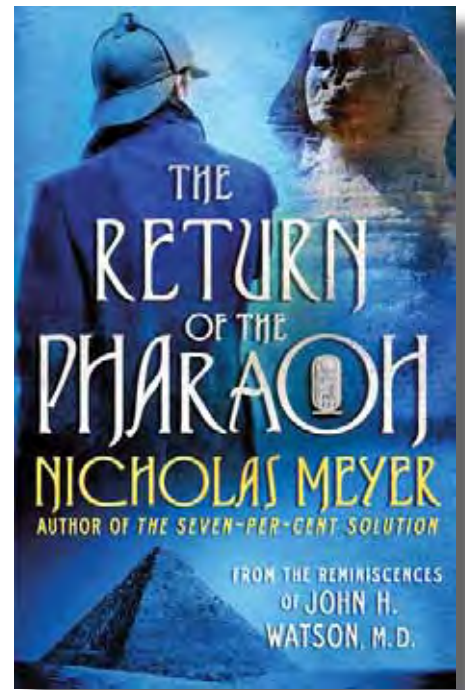
by Nicholas Meyer
Minotaur, \$25.99, November, 2021

Rating: B+

Another of Dr. Watson's hidden journals comes to light thanks to Nicholas Meyer, who is known for re-invigorating Sherlockonia back in the 1970s with **THE SEVEN-PERCENT SOLUTION**.

This time it's 1910 and Dr. Watson and his wife Juliet are traveling to Egypt so that she can be treated for her tuberculosis in a dry climate.

With long days to spend on his own, Dr. Watson sets off to explore Cairo. And lo and behold, who should he run



into but his old friend Sherlock Holmes – in disguise as a Colonel Arbuthnot. He's on a case for the Brazilian-born wife of a wealthy English Duke who has disappeared somewhere in Egypt while pursuing his passion for ancient Egyptian artifacts. As is typical, they join forces and several other mysteries pop up in due course as well as dead bodies.

The duo learn that the Duke has been traveling in the company of Fatima Gassim, an exotic dancer who may also be a spy. Along the way they pick up an expert in ancient Egypt, one Howard Carter, who a decade later would become world famous for his team's discovery of the tomb of King Tut. The trail they follow eventually leads to a climax in the Valley of the Kings, where Holmes and Watson find their lives dangerously threatened.

The plot of **THE RETURN OF THE PHARAOH** has so much forward thrust, I found that when the murderer is ultimately revealed at the end I had almost forgotten there was a murder mystery involved.

This was a fun romp through early 20th century Egypt with Dr. John Watson and Sherlock Holmes as our guides. You don't have to be a fan of Sherlock Holmes to enjoy this one.

Maggie Mason's Take: I enjoyed this book. I loved the feeling of being in

Egypt at an exciting time. Holmes & Watson are shown in a different manner than in the Doyle books, but are nevertheless believable by the change in times and cast of characters. I was especially awed by the efforts to save people from a train disaster.

I'll happily read another reminiscence of Dr. Watson (by Nicholas Meyer) when it appears at some future date.

THE SHADOWS OF MEN

by Abir Mukherjee

UK: Harvill Secker £12.99,

November 11, 2021

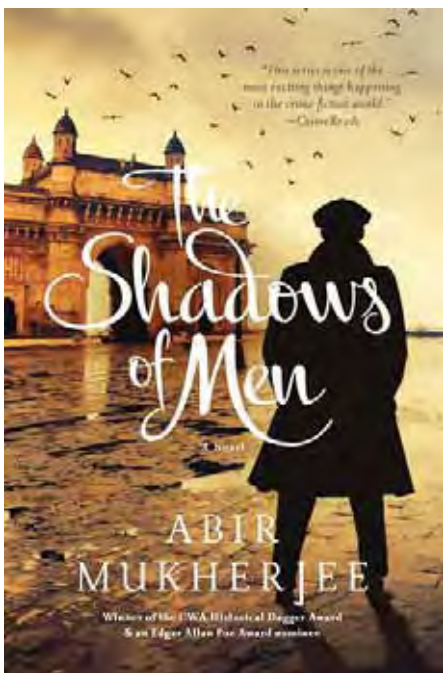
US: Pegasus Crime, \$25.95,

November 11, 2021

Sam Wyndam #5

Rating: A-

Calcutta, 1923. Mahatma Gandhi has just been jailed and tension between Hindus and Muslims rises to a fever pitch when a Hindu theologian, Prashant Mukherjee, is found murdered. Around the same time, a terrorist attack sends Lord Taggart to the hospital where he is fighting for his life. Sergeant Surendranath Banerjee, on a secret mission for Lord Taggart, is implicated in these events and must go on the run to have any chance of clearing his name. Of course, he can count on the help of his compatriot Captain Sam Wyndham, who risks his career to



get to the bottom of things. And aiding in the effort is Sam's on-again, off-again love interest Annie Grant and her friend, wealthy Parsee Ooravis Colah. If only Lord Taggart would wake up from the coma, all would be o.k., but that is by no means a sure thing.

To further complicate matters, Sergeant Banerjee is having a crisis of conscience. His family is all in favor of independence for India, but Banerjee works for the British controlling power structure that is keeping many Indians from prospering. Should he quit? Will this cause a rift between Captain and Sergeant?

Their search for the truth takes them from their home turf of Calcutta to the bustling city of Bombay to track the movements of Muslim politician Farid Gulmohamed, who may hold the secret to what is going on.

This series is in the top tier of history mystery fiction being published today. Abir Mukherjee is brilliant in his historical display of India on its path to independence.

MURDER AT THE SAVOY

by Jim Eldridge

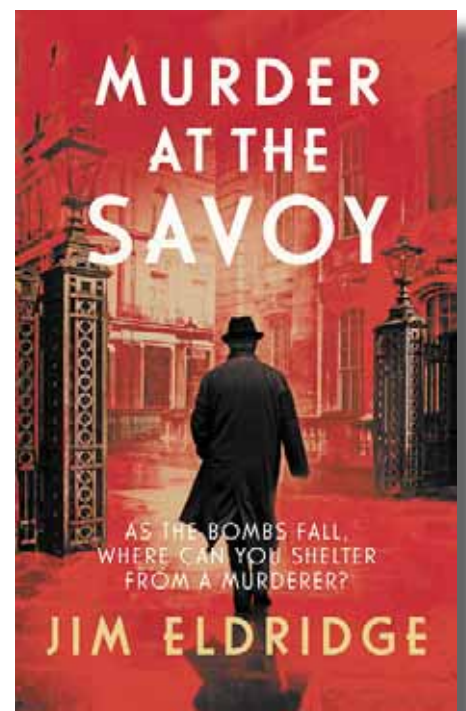
Allison & Busby, \$25.00

Coburg & Lampson series #2

Rating: B+

The time is September, 1940 at the height of the Blitz that is decimating parts of London. The swanky Savoy Hotel offers its high-class guests a safe air raid shelter which can be found in the deep bowels of the hotel. A group of East End residents approach the hotel one day and demand access to its air raid shelter (as the ones provided to them are inadequate). Much to their surprise, they are granted access but overnight one of the hotels guests is murdered in the shelter and suspicious falls on the East Enders and particularly one of their lot who turns out to be the son of the murder victim.

Detective Chief Inspector Coburg and his partner Sergeant Lampson of Scotland Yard are assigned the case. Coburg is recently married to jazz pianist Rosa Weeks (who plays a role in the resolution of the case) and is of noble



birth. In taking on the case, he takes over for the local Inspector Lomax, who highly resents being displaced and works behind the scenes to undermine Coburg.

As the investigation proceeds, two more people with connections to the Savoy are found murdered. Coburg's attention eventually is focused on a group of fifth columnists – wealthy people who oppose Winston Churchill's tactics and favor coming to peace terms with Adolph Hitler.

MURDER AT THE SAVOY is the second in the Chief Inspector Coburg series and is a charming, entertaining, old-fashioned whodunnit. The good guys are really good and likeable, and the bad guys are really bad and despicable. Sometimes it's nice to read a novel where the lines are clear.

The series is full of accurate historical detail and I have to admit that I have always found The Blitz a fascinating time period to read about. If you are like me, you will enjoy this series. And be sure to read Robert Barnard's **OUT OF THE BLACKOUT**, John Lawton's **BLACK OUT** and the recent **DEATH AT GREENWAY** by Lori Rader-Day for more excellent mysteries about that same period.

Order of Preference of Books I've Reviewed in This Issue

FIVE DECEMBERS
WE BEGIN AT THE END
BILLY SUMMERS
THE DARK HOURS
LAST REDEMPTION
STEEL FEAR
STOLEN HOURS
PRESENT TENSE
THE ISLAND
AN ELDERLY LADY...
SUBURBAN DICKS
DIAMOND & THE EYE
ISLAND OF THIEVES
THE SHADOWS OF MEN
FALLING
EVERY LAST FEAR
THE JUDGE'S LIST
THE LEFT-HANDED TWIN
HOW TO KIDNAP THE RICH
NORTHERN HEIST
VELVET WAS THE NIGHT
SLEEPING BEAR
COMPANY OF KILLERS
A MAN NAMED DOLL
DARKNESS KNOWS
DOWN RANGE
FAMILY BUSINESS
THE RETURN OF THE PHARAOH
MURDER AT THE SAVOY
PAY OR PLAY
DAUGHTERS OF
THE MORNING STAR
BREAKOUT
THE CHAOS KIND
COLD SUN
HELLO, TRANSCRIBER

[Some of these novels I liked equally well, which made it hard to create this list of preferences. When looking at the list, assume that I liked the book above a title nearly as much as I liked the book below a title. Lots of good books! If you can't remember the author of one of these books, just search the book title in this issue. Ctrl F in Windows, Command G in Apple. It sure is a lot easier to find material in the digital issues compared with the old print ones.]

In the Next Issue #94, I already have reviews for

THE MIRROR MAN, Lars Kepler
QUARRY'S BLOOD, Max Allan Collins
THE INVESTIGATOR, John Sandford
SIERRA SIX, Mark Greaney
THE RUNAWAY, Nick Petrie
BYE BYE BABY, Ace Atkins
WHERE THERE'S A WILL, Sulari Gentil

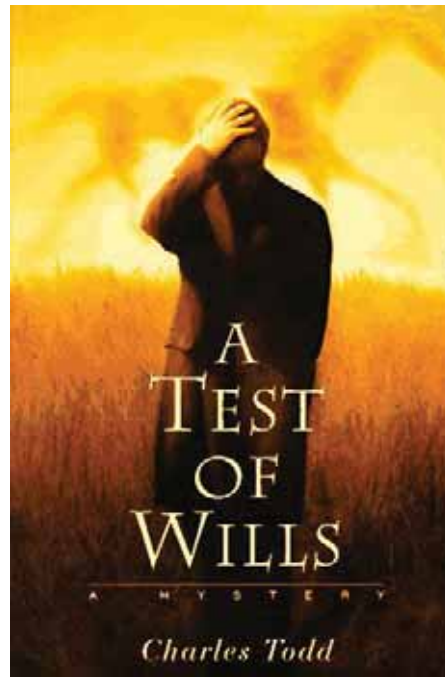
Caroline Todd A Remembrance by George Easter

This is a remembrance I had hoped never to write because Caroline Todd has been one of the most wonderful people that I've ever met. She was a pure delight to spend time with.

Caroline was one-half of a writing team (mother and son), who publish under the name of her son, Charles Todd.

They burst onto the scene in 1994 with **A TEST OF WILLS**, the first of the Inspector Ian Rutledge series (which will number 24 when **A GAME OF FEAR** comes out in 2022). It won our very first Barry Award for Best First Novel and remains to this day one of my all-time favorite mysteries.

It wasn't until several years later that it was revealed that "Charles Todd" was



really Caroline and Charles Todd writing together. As a reader of their works, it didn't phase me in the least.

I've had a number of occasions over the years when I've had an opportunity to spend time with Caroline and Charles, but the one I treasure the most was several years ago when I found out that they were going to do a signing at the local Salt Lake City bookstore called The King's English. I contacted them



and told them I would like to be their guide for the day so I picked them up at their hotel and went to lunch with them. I remember at lunch making a plea to find a lasting love interest for their main protagonist Inspector Rutledge. He seems so lonely to me that it would have been the merciful thing to do. But I got no commitments from them, so I guess they had their own timetable mapped out for such a thing. Unfortunately it was a rainy day so my tour of Salt Lake City did not entail getting out of my car, but I did manage to give them an idea of its history and its main sites. Then I took them to their signing to finish off a wonderful day – for me – and I hope for them.

We would meet regularly at Bouchercons and it was always a joyous occasion for us all. Caroline and Charles were long-time subscribers to *Deadly Pleasures* and, as such, were a great support to me.

I don't know how Caroline and Charles shared their writing responsibilities, but their output is nothing short of amazing – 38 novels in approximately 25 years – and novels of such high quality! They were experts in plotting a finely tuned mystery novel and it is hard to imagine the hours of research that have gone into writing each novel.

Caroline has left quite a legacy for the world of mystery fans to read and re-read. She will never be forgotten – especially by those who knew and loved her.

Rest in Peace., my dear.

L J Roberts

It is purely my opinion



THE BURNING GIRLS

by C.J. Tudor – Standalone
Ballentine Books, February 2021
352 pp.

Rating: A

First Sentence: *"It's an unfortunate situation."*

Reverend Jack Brooks and 14-year-old daughter Flo have been transferred to Chapel Croft in Sussex. A community with a very dark past including the burning of martyrs, disappearance of two girls, and the suicide of a priest. With no one being who they seem and not knowing who to trust, can Jack and Flo survive while exposing closely-guarded secrets?

The best books grab you from page one and don't let go. This book does just that. One thing to know; there are a lot of bodies; new, old, spectral, and real. The story is more suspense than mystery, and never boring.

Tudor has a compelling voice. It's engaging and conversational in both outward dialogue and internal thoughts. Jack and daughter Flo hold one's attention and curiosity to know more. It's nice that Flo acts appropriately for her age. However, both occasionally suffer from going into danger alone, yet both are also smart, brave and interesting.

Beyond the elements of voice and character, there are a plethora of memorable passages: another indication of a great author. Tudor makes one stop and think—"We all have our hiding places. Not just physical ones. Places deep inside where we put away the things we don't want other to see."

Rather than having an unreliable narrator, this is the case of "trust no one" in the best possible way. No one is who they seem and everyone has secrets.

There are an abundance of very effective plot twists and revelations from

beginning to end. Some of them scare, some cause one to gasp, all of them surprise.

The only problems were a couple silly, editing issues. Ignore them.

THE BURNING GIRLS is a great, escapist read, especially for those who like a bit of dark, eepy-creepy. There is a supernatural element, but doesn't stop an enjoying an engrossing, page-turning book that keeps one reading way too late into the night, but one may want to leave the light on. The story holds one's attention from first page to last and makes one happy Tudor has more books to read.



DEAD BY DAWN

by Paul Doiron – 12th in series
Minotaur Books, Jun 2021, 304 pp.

Rating: D

First Sentence: *"The hill is steep here, and there is no guardrail above the river."*

Books are things to be treasured and take great care of them. One shouldn't write in them, or bend down corners. Hardcover belongs in mylar ar-

chival covers as soon as they arrive, and and their spines never broken. But not this one. A print copy of this book, rather than an e-copy of this book, should have the pages removed out with abandon and reorganized so the story could be read in chronological order.

You see, the author decided to write the story alternating between the present, and the very recent past; truly a gap of an hour, perhaps. The story is jumping back and forth like the ball in the championship ping-pong tournament and can drive one crazy.

One assumes at some point, the past will with meetup with the present, but one may not wait that long before becoming screamingly frustrated. Not only does the style make the story nearly impossible to read, but it also removes most of the suspense which would have been otherwise palpable. Perhaps if one had a paper copy, they'd skip to the end just to see how it comes out. Frankly, however, no reader should feel the need to do that.

For pity's sake, what happened to the idea of starting the story at the beginning and carrying it straight through to the end; no prologue, no flashing back and forth, no portents: just telling a suspenseful story!

It seems the pandemic rendered too many authors incapable of editing, not rambling, including far more extraneous information than remotely needed, muddling the plot, including every character they can imagine, and falling prey to using devices that drive some readers mad with frustration. Sadly, this is one of those. **DEAD BY DAWN** is heart-breaking. Paul Doiron's other books with his great characters, information about Maine and being a game warden there, are wonderful to read. One dearly hopes his next book returns to telling a cracking story in a straight timeline fashion.

Lookin' For A Few Good Books

Larry Gandle



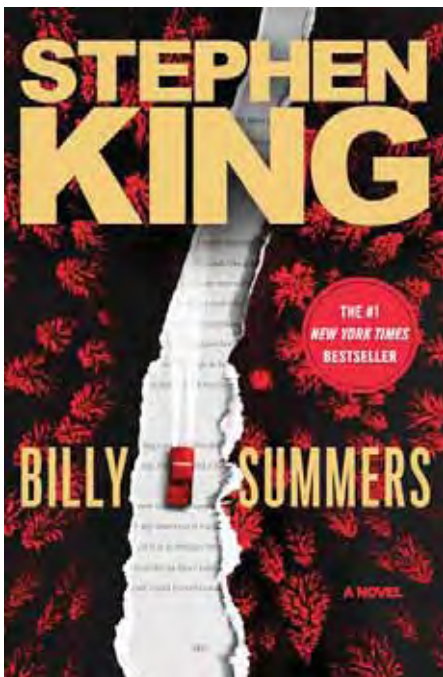
BILLY SUMMERS

by Stephan King
Scribner, \$30.00

Rating: A

Billy Summers is a hired assassin but will only kill truly evil people. He is hired to do one last hit before retiring. It will prove to be a big payday once the job is done. However, as expected, eventually, everything goes wrong. It becomes apparent that he will need to ensure he is paid after the job so people will die. It places him directly into danger.

There is so much to this long but incredibly well written crime fiction novel. There is no horror here at all- well maybe a tiny bit related to a previous King work. King is a genius at characterization. Billy becomes so very real, as does the life in this small town. There is a pause in the action as the small-town life is perfectly captured. Few authors



can create such rich characters, as well as, such imaginative and compelling plots with realistic dialogue. I have said before JK Rowling and Stephen King are two of the most popular authors on the planet as a result of this. This book is wonderful and one of the best crime fiction novels of the year.

THE CELLIST

by Daniel Silva
Harper, \$28.99

Rating: B-

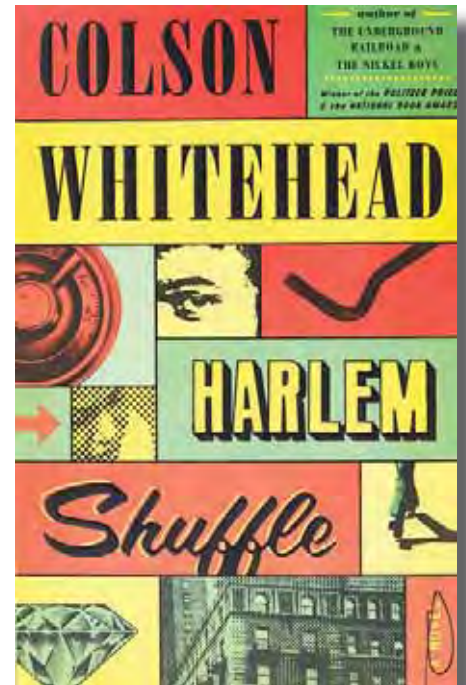
Victor Orlov, a rich Russian businessman and frequent critic of the current Russian regime, is living in exile in London. He is found dead- poisoned- in his home. Gabriel Allon owes his life to Orlov and takes on the investigation to discover the truth. The path leads through a Swiss banker who just so happens to be a beautiful cellist. By following the money, Gabriel looks higher and higher into the Russian hierarchy to the Russian President himself. This, of course, places Gabriel into grave danger.

The book is really a bore until the last 50 pages. Politics plays a huge role and this will disenfranchise many readers. There is so much detailed financial descriptions that the book reads more like a textbook than a thriller. The characters are well depicted and actually save the book. It is true that Silva is calling attention to the Russian hierarchy stealing money from it's own people and there isn't any better way of making a plot based on finances exciting. The last part of the book is the most satisfying as a thriller but also the most unrealistic. This is another disappointment from an author I read every time a new book comes out. I think I need to be more selective.

HARLEM SHUFFLE

by Colson Whitehead
Doubleday, \$28.95

Rating: A-



Ray Carney owns a furniture store in Harlem in the 1960s. He tries to stay straight but his cousin, Freddie, always seems to drag him into the criminal element. He therefore will fence stolen items and sell them to dealers throughout the city. Things turn ugly after a heist at a local hotel in which Freddie disappears with some of the loot and Ray is looked at as his accessory. It will take all of his wits to escape with his life and the life of his wife and child.

What sets this story apart from others in the genre is the superb characterizations and the depiction of the locale. These individuals are truly alive. There are no stereotypes here. Harlem is vividly portrayed and lots of research went into accurately describing the

area of 60 years ago. The problem is the pacing. Most of the book is written in a slow deliberate style with episodes of action interspersed with the plot. It took me much longer to read than a usual book of this size in the genre. The writing is superb enough to rate it as one of the best books of the year.

BETTER OFF DEAD

by Lee and Andrew Child
Delacorte Press, \$28.99

Rating: B

Reacher, wondering out west, comes upon a Jeep crashed alongside a road in the Arizona desert on the border with Mexico. There is a woman slumped at the wheel. Her name is Michaela Fenton and she is searching for her brother, who is apparently into some very bad things. To locate her brother, she must convince a fearsome criminal, Dendocker, to disclose her brother's location. Anyone who works for Dendocker fears him and would rather die than cross him. Given that Reacher decides to help her. This, of course, will lead to many deaths until the truth becomes known.

This Reacher novel is a marked improvement over the last one, *THE SENTINEL*. The action starts from page one, as does the body count. The authors have apparently heard the clamoring of the fans and returned to the old form. There is less characterization and dialogue and much more action scenes. In fact, the body count is higher than any Reacher book in recent memory. The book is silly but very much more entertaining than *THE SENTINEL*. It appears that the Child partnership is starting to get the hang of it. Recommended for Reacher fans.

FIVE DECEMBERS

by James Kestrel
Hard Case Crime, \$22.99

Rating: A

Rarely does a book come along that is both epic in scope but personal by nature. The sort of book that the reader might think -- they just don't write them like this anymore! In the midst of a preponderance of women's



psychological suspense novels comes a truly remarkable and original story set in the Pacific rim of WWII.

Joe McGrady is a detective in the Hawaiian Police Department working in Honolulu in December 1941. He is assigned a case involving the brutal torture and slaying of a young man and a young woman in a remote supply barn on the island. It turns out the man is the nephew of an Admiral stationed on the island. So, the case becomes a much bigger deal than originally thought. As Joe works the case, the investigation takes him across the Pacific to Hong Kong just as the war breaks out. Joe is placed into a very dangerous situation.

The setting for this compulsive plot is vast encompassing the Pacific Islands, Hong Kong and Tokyo during the war. The story is quite intimate, however. Joe McGrady relentlessly pursues the killer no matter how long it takes like Javert in *Les Miserables*. Characters are realistic and the reader will very much find Joe to be quite sympathetic. Within the historical context there are elements of romance novels, police procedurals, and thrillers. The book is relatively long but the reader will be drawn in quickly. I cannot recommend the book highly enough. If you have not yet read the book, I consider you fortunate because

you are in for a treat.

APRIL IN SPAIN

by John Banville
Hanover Square Press, \$27.99)

Rating: A

On the northern coast of Spain, near San Sebastian, Quirke, a Dublin pathologist, is trying to relax with his wife, Evelyn. He comes across a female physician named Angela, who he is convinced is April Lattimer, the supposedly dead friend of his daughter, Phoebe. April was supposedly killed by her brother who then committed suicide. Quirke tells Phoebe to come down there to identify the woman. Phoebe is accompanied by a police Detective John St. Stafford. Unbeknownst to any of them, an assassin also goes there in an effort to silence Angela if she is, in fact April. In the climactic scene, the conflicts will all play out.

John Banville is a master of characterization. The first half of the book is a study of the characters of Quirke and his relationship with his wife, Evelyn. After he calls Phoebe, characters are introduced one by one and their backgrounds are slowly revealed. Once we get to know everybody, the plot accelerates forward to the climactic conclusion. Banville is such a skilled writer that he can bring both a sense of realism and intrigue to just about any scene. His books are wonderful and this one is no exception.

Order of Preference of Books Reviewed in This Issue

FIVE DECEMBERS
BILLY SUMMERS
APRIL IN SPAIN
HARLEM SHUFFLE
BETTER OFF DEAD
THE CELLIST

Australian Crime Fiction



Reviews by Jeff Popple

CUTTERS END

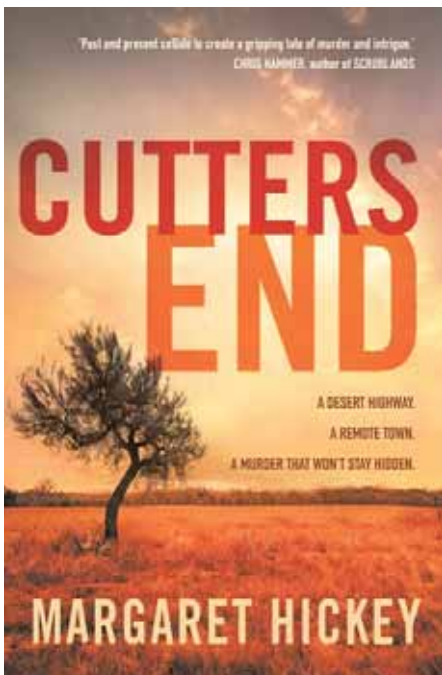
by Margaret Hickey

Penguin,

Rating: A-

Set in the South Australian outback, **CUTTERS END** is a well constructed and very engaging debut crime novel that explores some important issues about the unevenness of justice.

Three decades ago, a burnt and broken body was discovered in scrub off the Stuart Highway, some 300 kilometres south of the small town of Cutters End. The death was ruled an accident, but many people suspect it was murder, including a high-profile celebrity who is pushing for the case to be re-opened. Detective Sergeant Mark Ariti is given the chance to resurrect his career by re-investigating the case and confirming the original finding. Things are complicated for Ariti, however, as he knows



some of the people tangentially involved in the case, and as he digs old secrets come to the surface.

This is a well written novel that steadily draws the reader into its grip. Some sleight of hand by the author plays with the reader's expectations early in the novel and Margaret effectively uses the dual time line of 1989 and 2021 to generate interest and suspense. As the story progresses, more mysteries are revealed and the tension mounts as Ariti and local police constable Jagdeep Kaur close in on the solution to the morally complex case.

There is a lot to like in this book, especially the depth of the characterisations and the rich descriptions of the Australian countryside. Margaret also brings to life the dusty single building stops along the Stuart Highway and the dynamics of small town relationships in Cutters End. The depiction of Australian society in the 1980s rings true and Margaret smoothly weaves some complex moral issues into the story without over-burdening it. There are also some neat twists towards the end, and the final resolution is satisfying and credible.

On the other hand, some more suspense and tension would have been welcomed towards the end, and there were a couple of errors in the proof version that I read. These are minor quibbles, however, and overall **CUTTERS END** is a really enjoyable slice of outback crime.

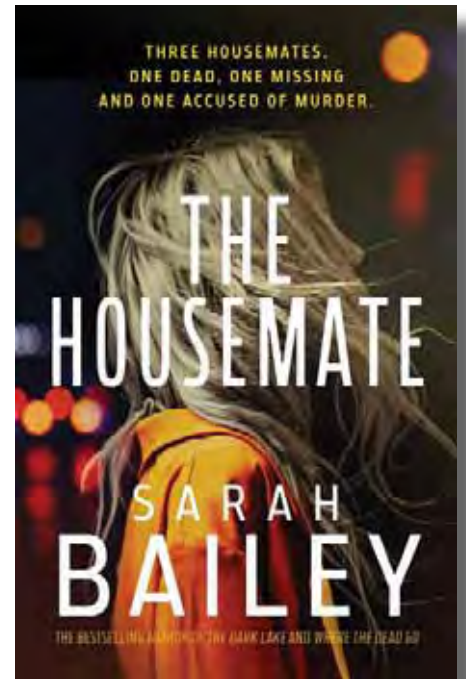
THE HOUSEMATE

by Sarah Bailey

Allen & Unwin

Rating: A

Nine years ago, the 'Housemate Homicide' drew national attention to a Melbourne suburb where three young female housemates lived in apparent



happiness, until one was found murdered and another went missing. The third was accused of murder and went to jail. Now the missing housemate has turned up dead on a remote rural property and questions are being asked about what really happened.

Olive (Oli) Grove worked on the 'Housemate Homicide' as a junior reporter and became obsessed with the case. She also had a tangential connection to the police investigation, which has continued over the years. With the discovery of the missing housemate, she is once again assigned to the story and becomes caught up in a dark web of secrets that bring up old traumas for her.

THE HOUSEMATE is a really impressive mystery story that reminds me of Val McDermid's early stand-alone novels. As with those early books by McDermid, the dual timeline plot has depth and complexity, the characters are

credible and interesting and running through the book is an undercurrent of darkness that gradually works its way to the surface. Like a magician, Sarah is very adept at distracting the reader with false leads, while she subtly builds up a plot that unleashes several good surprises and goes in unexpected directions. She has also created an engagingly complex character in the form of the troubled, but persistent, Oli Grove.

Woven into the story is a rich seam of issues around the media, policing and relationships, which gives a good texture to the story. She also explores the dynamic between Gen Y and Millennials, as she partners Oli with the precocious millennial podcaster Cooper Ng, who represents the new way of doing the news. The wrestle between the two over the virtues of traditional journalism versus the digital platforms and podcasts is interesting and adds a nice contemporary feel.

There are some slow patches and repetition in the first half of the book, but there is always plenty of interest and the final third bristles with tension as the book races to an exciting and surprising conclusion. Sarah has already drawn considerable acclaim, and a Ned Kelly Award, for her trilogy of books about DS Gemma Woodstock, but I think that **THE HOUSEMATE** represents another step up for her and is a very strong novel.

George's Take: This was a WOW book for me. Complexly plotted, **THE HOUSEMATE** is as much a novel of detection as it is a domestic suspense novel -- and a heck of a good one at that. Here's hoping that the talented Ms. Bailey makes this into a series and regains a publishing contract here in the States.

Rating: A

THE DEEP

by Kyle Perry
Michael Joseph

Rating: A

One of the stand-out Australian crime fiction debuts of 2020 was Kyle Perry's evocative Tasmanian novel **THE BLUFFS**.

Set in the remote wilderness of Tasmania's Great Western Tiers, **THE**

BLUFFS was an evocative and well written novel that centred on the disappearance of a group of teenage girls whilst on a school camp.

Now with **THE DEEP**, Perry moves to the rugged and dangerous coast of southeastern Tasmania and a more complex plot.

The story opens in dramatic fashion, when a thirteen-year-old boy staggers out of the ocean, bruised and weirdly tattooed. The boy appears to be Forest Dempsey, who has been missing for seven years along with his mother and infamous drug runner father, Jesse. The Dempsey family have run the local area's lucrative drug trade for generations, under the cover of their successful fishing business, and have established a small empire around the popular tourist destination of Shacktown. Since the disappearance of Jesse, the business has been successfully managed by his brother Davey, under the watchful eye of family matriarch Ivy. With Forest's reappearance, however, the equilibrium of the business is undermined, especially with rumours that the dreaded drug kingpin Blackbeard is intending to move in on the family business.

THE DEEP is a richly textured novel with a strong cast of well-fleshed-out characters and a carefully considered plot that twists and turns its way to a

violent and moving conclusion. The opening sections require careful reading, as the various characters and their complex relationship to each other and the plot are introduced, but once underway the pace picks up considerably and is helped along by flashes of violence and unexpected deaths. It is possible to anticipate some of the twists, but Perry pulls off some good surprises all the way down to the last sentence.

Central to the plot is Perry's masterful construct of Shacktown and the Dempsey family. Similar to American writers like Don Winslow, Perry has used the intricacies of the drug trade to create a strong family drama and social commentary within the framework of a crime novel. It is an impressive feat that is well supported by some credible characters, particularly the troubled Mackerel Dempsey and the determined Ahab Stark, who change and grow as the plot progresses, and add a real depth to the story.

Also impressive is Perry's evocative descriptions of the Tasmanian coastline and the dangerous waters that batter the rocks and beaches. As with his first novel, Perry brings to life a little known part of Tasmania and makes it an important part of the story.

THE LONG GAME

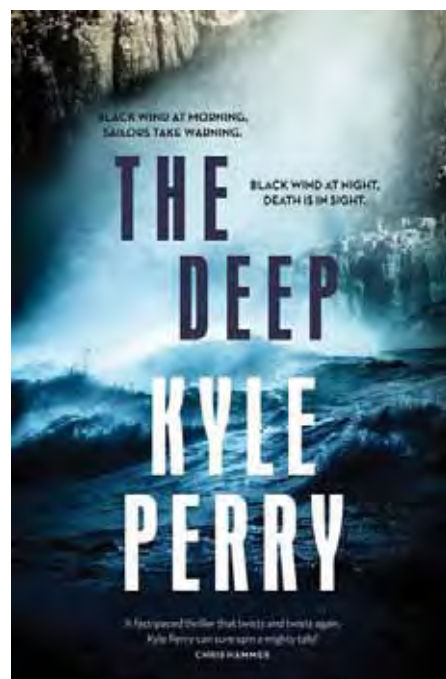
by Simon Rowell

Text

Rating: A

The story opens with Detective Sergeant Zoe Meyer of the Victorian police returning to duty following an unexplained incident. On her first day back, accompanied by a service dog, she is assigned a murder case involving the stabbing of a local surfer in a house not far from Portsea beach. An obvious suspect is quickly identified and arrested, but Zoe is not convinced, and as she digs further into the case she senses that something is terribly amiss. Isolated by her colleagues, Zoe finds herself under threat and in danger.

THE LONG GAME is a highly polished piece of crime fiction. Rowell has a naturally engaging narrative style and the story flows smoothly from beginning to end. Although there is not a lot





of action at the start, Rowell maintains a tight grip on the reader's attention with some clever plotting and an interesting storyline. Once underway, the plot unfolds at a steady pace and the ending brings some good shocks and genuine tension. There are a couple of coincidences, but these do not detract from what is a very finely constructed book.

Zoe is a credible, interesting character with a good backstory, that is eventually revealed, and her personal life does not overly intrude into the dynamics of the investigation. In fact, all the characters are carefully crafted and nicely fleshed out. The story is also enhanced by Rowell's real gift for believable, unadorned dialogue, and the banter between the members of the investigation team rings true, as does the interactions between the police and the various witnesses and suspects. Overall, the police work is convincingly conveyed and adds interest to the story.

THE LONG GAME is a very entertaining crime novel that is elevated above much of the competition by its easy flowing style, nicely limned characters, vivid descriptions of Melbourne's beachside suburbs and strong sense of credibility. I really enjoyed it.

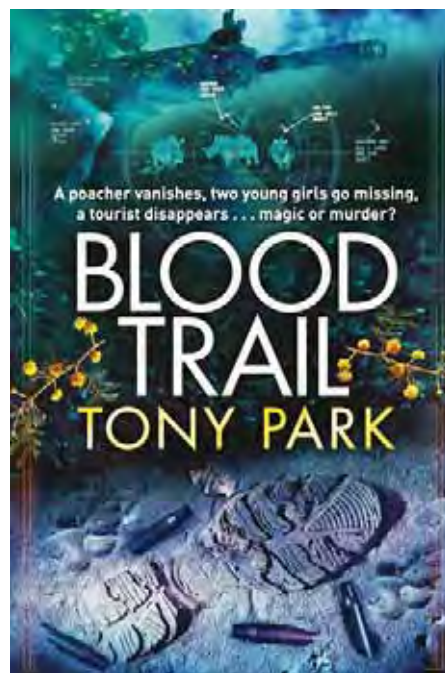
BLOOD TRAIL
by Tony Park

Macmillan
Rating: A-

Sydney author Tony Park is one of my favourite thriller writers and his African based novels are always a joy to read.

His latest one, **BLOOD TRAIL**, returns to his favoured theme of wildlife poaching, but is given an up-to-date polish by looking at how COVID-19 has worsened the situation due to the collapse of the tourist industry. The story opens with safari guide and tracker Mia Greenaway being thwarted by a poacher who seems to be able to disappear into thin air. Despite having some of the best trackers in South Africa, the anti-poaching team is unable to catch the wily poacher who is mercilessly reducing the numbers of rhinos in the Game Reserve. Meanwhile Tony Park regular, Police Captain Sannie van Rensburg, is trying to locate two missing local girls, while dealing with a devastating personal crisis.

Central to both storylines, is the growing use of 'umuthi', African traditional medicine, by poachers to avoid being caught. The poachers believe that the potions and talismans purchased from traditional healers can make them disappear or be impervious to the rangers' bullets. These magical potions often rely on animal, or even human, body



parts, thus increasing the impact on the local wildlife. It is a fascinating twist on the ongoing battle between poachers and rangers and adds an extra dimension to the story.

As with most of Park's novels, **BLOOD TRAIL** is a fast-moving story that is propelled by several exciting episodes of violence and a sense of mounting tension as the battle between the rangers and the poachers intensifies and a tourist goes missing.

Unlike a lot of authors who have recently said that they are avoiding setting their novels during the current pandemic period, Tony Park dives in and makes good use of COVID-19 as a backdrop to the story. The pandemic and its effect on the local population is seamlessly integrated into the plot and, in many ways, is the driving impetus for the action. From heartfelt descriptions of volunteers dispersing COVID aid parcels to local villagers, to the rise of 'virtual safaris' that would-be tourists can watch from their homes around the world, Park does a good job of setting out how the pandemic is effecting everyday life in rural South Africa.

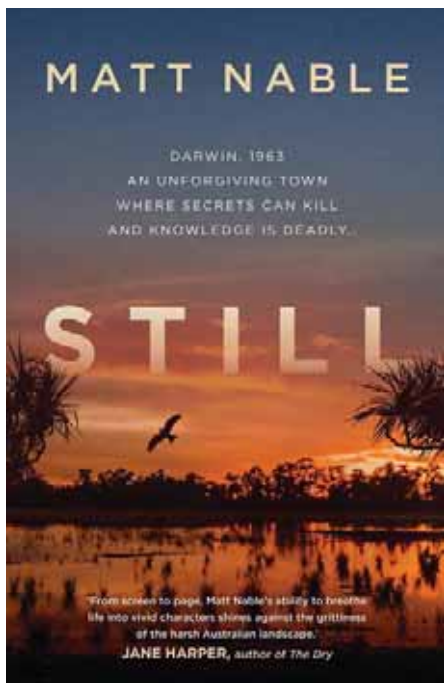
The book is also enhanced by Park's evocative descriptions of the African countryside and wildlife and the interesting nuggets of animal lore that he slips. All this description and information, however, does not significantly slow the nicely plotted story and the various strands come together in an action-drenched, final 100 pages, or so.

As usual, the characters are well fleshed out and convincing, and fans of Park's books will enjoy the reappearance of popular regulars, such as tracker Sean Bourke and his dog Benny. Even former mercenary Sonja Kurtz gets a mention.

In all, this is a really enjoyable thriller with a good plot, some nice twists, engaging characters and plenty of action. Recommended.

STILL
by Matt Nable
Hachette
Rating: B+

Set in Darwin in 1963, **STILL** is a character-driven crime novel with a



good level of tension and a strong sense of foreboding. The story features Senior Constable Ned Potter, who finds a brutally beaten body dragged from the shallow marshland. Potter suspects murder, but his superiors are keen to cover it up, and when more deaths occur, he finds himself increasingly isolated and under threat.

This is a very evocative novel that excels in its characterisations and depictions of life in Darwin in the 1960s. Potter is a flawed and interesting character who drinks too much, but tries to do the right thing. The other characters also have a gritty realism to them, particularly Charlotte Clarke, a young married woman bored with her life and unhappy with her marriage. When a chance encounter occurs with an injured man she finds her life turned upside down.

The descriptions of Darwin and the surrounding countryside are vivid and ring very true. Nable's portrayal of abuse and racism are carefully handled, and although the book is set nearly sixty years ago, the themes are just as relevant today. There is considerable tension, but the pacing is a little uneven at times and requires a little patience. The story goes down some dark, crocodile infested, streets before building to a realistic and moving conclusion, although I suspect that some crime readers will be expect-

ing more brio and action.

In all, **STILL** is a well written and credible novel that is a must for fans of Jane Harper's **THE DRY**.

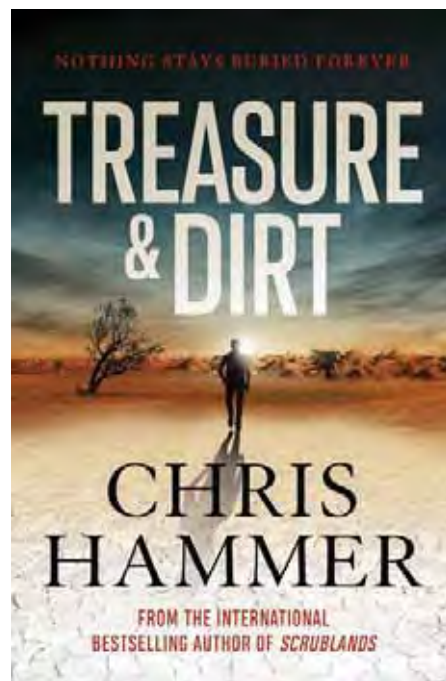
TREASURE & DIRT

by Chris Hammer
Allen & Unwin, \$A32.99

Rating: A

Chris Hammer powered his way into the top echelons of Australian crime writing with his award winning debut novel **SCRUBLANDS**, and consolidated his standing with two good follow-up books about journalist Martin Scarsden.

Now with his fourth novel he turns his attention to the outback opal mining community of Finnigan's Gap, and a set of largely new characters. Sydney homicide detective Ivan Lucic, who had a minor role in the Scarsden books, is sent to Finnigan's Gap to investigate the death of an opal miner, who has been found crucified and left to rot down in his mine. With his usual senior partner, Detective Inspector Morris Montifore, being held back in Sydney over incidents that occurred at the end of the last Scarsden book, **TRUST**, Lucic is accompanied by a young inexperienced investigator with local knowledge of the opal town, Nell Buchanan. Once there they find a strange concoction of desperate miners, jet-setting billionaires trying to



do a deal and a strange religious cult. Hampered by uncooperative local police and influential mining interests, they find themselves being investigated by internal affairs as they close in on the killer.

TREASURE & DIRT is a richly plotted novel with various strands that smoothly come together as the book moves towards the surprising and bloody climax. Hammer adroitly weaves various elements into his story and regular readers of his books will appreciate the references back to *Trust* and the continuation of themes from that book.

As with **SCRUBLANDS**, Hammer vividly captures the scorching landscape of Australia and the people who scramble to make a living in the harsh locale. His descriptions are evocative and honest, and he paints the outback in an unsentimental light that captures the beauty and the harshness. With his well-trained journalist's eye, he quickly captures a scene and effortlessly imparts a wealth of background information on a range of topics from the mechanics of opal mining, to share manipulation and the dangers of dehydration.

As with the earlier books, all the characterisations are astute, well developed and subtly drawn. The central pairing of Lucic and Buchanan come across as credible characters with believable flaws and uncertainties and Hammer maturely develops their working relationship. The other characters are also well developed, and Hammer generally avoids the sort of caricatures you often find in crime fiction.

Overall, **TREASURE & DIRT** is a very impressive and entertaining crime novel. I really enjoyed the depth of the plot and the vividness of the descriptions of Finnigan's Gap and thought it is probably Hammer's best novel to date. Some trimming would have enhanced the tension, but overall it is a very fine novel.

Note: **TREASURE & DIRT** is being released in the United Kingdom in early 2022 under the title of **OPAL COUNTRY**.

CROCODILE TEARS

by Alan Carter

Fremantle Press, \$A32.99

Rating: A

Alan Carter is one of those authors who does not seem to get the attention that he so richly deserves, which is a shame as his books are always good and his latest, **CROCODILE TEARS**, is one of the year's best crime thrillers.

CROCODILE TEARS is the fifth book in his series about Philip 'Cato' Kwong and features a dual plot involving the Western Australian police detective and the dodgy former Australian Intelligence agent, Rory Driscoll. Badly effected from events in the previous books Cato is worn out and suffering from the occasional lapses in attention, which cause him to 'zone out' at times. A new case involving the brutal murder of a former policeman, invigorates him a bit and sets him off on a dangerous search for the truth. Meanwhile Driscoll is on the run with a motley group of whistle-blowers who are due to give evidence to an international hearing in Darwin. With some serious gunmen after them, Driscoll is desperately trying to stay alive long enough to work why he also has a price on his head. Separately, Cato and Driscoll find themselves on a path that leads back to some bloody events in Timor-Leste many years ago.

Carter's use of the dual storyline works really well, with Cato's steady investigation nicely complementing the action of Driscoll's efforts to stay one step ahead of his pursers. The story moves along at a cracking pace and there are enough betrayals and double-dealings to fill a dozen books. Carter sideswipes the reader with some good surprises and there is the requisite amount of gunfire and action, including a very suspenseful encounter in suburban Perth.

Enhancing the story are some richly established characters, especially the tough and resourceful Driscoll who is beginning to develop a conscience after years of being the Government's go-to-guy for dirty dealings in the Pacific region. For me he is the stand-out character in the book, although Cato's wife Sharon gives him a run for his money.

As usual, Carter creates a nice sense of place, whether he is describing the

suburbs of Perth or the jungle fringes of Timor-Leste, and his observations on politics and society are sharp and insightful. The use of Timor-Leste as the impetus for a spy novel is also fresh, and it is interesting how Carter weaves international espionage concerns into the story. There are also some subtle flashes of dark humour.

In all, **CROCODILE TEARS** is a terrific read. You do not need to have read the early Cato books to enjoy it, but it certainly adds to the pleasure if you have.

George Easter Review**PRESENT TENSE**

by Natalie Conyer

Clandestine Press, \$21.00, 2019
(on Book Depository)

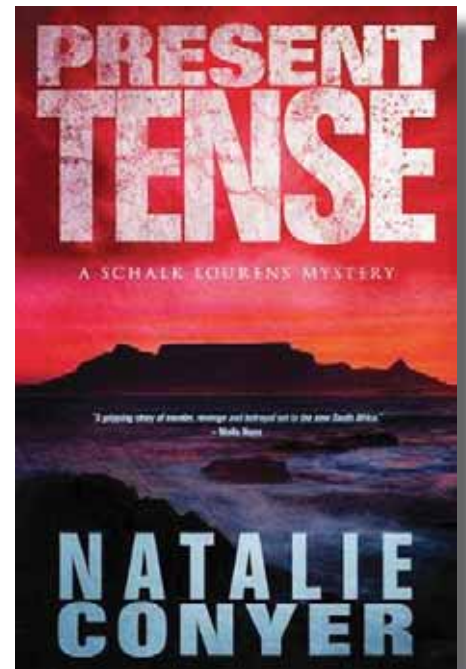
Winner of the Ned Kelly Award

Rating: A

Capetown, South African police detective Captain Schalk Lourens is a veteran cop who started his career during the apartheid era. Being white during that period of time was a definite advantage, but times have changed and Lourens must be very careful how he maneuvers these days. He doesn't trust many of his black colleagues including his boss Lieutenant Sisi Zangwa and the Police Commissioner, General Nkosi. And the reverse is true as well. They don't trust him. The one exception is his comrade Captain Joepe Fortune, with whom Lourens has a strong bond.

Lourens and Fortune have been called to a crime scene on an up-scale farm, where the burned remains of the farm's owner Piet Pieterse are found. He was "necklaced." In other words, a tire was placed around his neck, his body doused with gasoline and then set afire. This was a method of execution during apartheid to kill collaborators. Is this an obvious clue or a means to divert attention from the responsible party?

It turns out the Pieterse was Schalk Lourens old boss, the one who trained him in detection techniques and Lourens knows quite a bit about him, which aids in the investigation. Long story short: a suspect is apprehended, but is killed while in jail. Lourens is ordered



to close the case, but continues to investigate surreptitiously. Something doesn't feel right about this.

Meanwhile, there is a national election coming up soon, which has created a great deal of tension (thus, I suspect, the title **PRESENT TENSE**). Lourens is tasked with keeping the peace at political rallies and events and in doing so comes to suspect that some of the political bigwigs have something to do with the Peterse murder. More deaths ensue and danger lurks around every corner – especially for Lourens who is poking his nose into things that the powers-that-be want left unnoticed.

This is my kind of detective novel. Great characters and a puzzling plot to unwind. Natalie Conyer's writing is crystal clear and a pleasure to read. So far, **PRESENT TENSE** has only been published in Australia (American publishers take note). But is well worth reaching out and buying a copy from Book Depository (free shipping). I was reminded of the best of one of my favorite writers – Deon Meyer – who treats the same South African issues. This is another shining example of the present strength of Australian crime writing.

I want to thank Steele Curry for his high recommendation of this book, which inspired me to get a copy and read it. Jeff Popple is also very high on this Ned Kelly Award-winning novel.

What's New In the U.K.



NEXT OF KIN by Kia Abdullah (HQ, £14.99, September). Leila Syed receives a call that cleaves her life in two. Her brother-in-law's voice is filled with panic. His son's nursery has called to ask where little Max is. Leila was supposed to drop Max off that morning. But she forgot. Racing to the carpark, she grasps the horror of what she has done. What follows is an explosive, high-profile trial that will tear the family apart. But as the case progresses it becomes clear there's more to this incident than meets the eye...

THE LOST by Simon Beckett (Trapeze, £14.99, November). Ten years ago, the disappearance of firearms police officer Jonah Colley's young son almost destroyed him. A plea for help from an old friend leads Jonah to Slaughter Quay, and the discovery of four bodies. Brutally attacked and left for dead, he is the only survivor. Under suspicion himself, he uncovers a network of secrets and lies about the people he thought he knew - forcing him to question what really happened all those years ago.

JUDAS 62 by Charles Cumming (HarperCollins, £14.99, October). 1993: Student Lachlan Kite is sent to post-Soviet Russia in the guise of a language teacher. In reality, he is there as a spy. Top secret intelligence agency BOX 88 has ordered Kite to extract a chemical weapons scientist before his groundbreaking research falls into the wrong hands. But Kite's mission soon goes wrong and he is left stranded in a hostile city with a former KGB officer on his trail. 2020: Now the director of BOX 88 operations in the UK, Kite discovers he has been placed on the 'JUDAS' list - a record of enemies of Russia who have been targeted for assassination. Kite's fight for survival takes him to Dubai,

where he must confront the Russian secret state head on.

ICED by Felix Francis (Simon & Schuster UK, £20.00, September). Miles Pussett is a former steeplechase jockey. Now he gets his adrenaline rush from riding down the Cresta Run, a three-quarter-mile Swiss ice chute, head first, reaching speeds of up to eighty miles per hour. Finding himself in St Moritz during the same weekend as White Turf, when high-class horseracing takes place on the frozen lake, he gets talked into helping out with the horses. It is against his better judgement. Seven years before, Miles left horseracing behind and swore he would never return. When he discovers something suspicious is going on in the races, something that may have a profound impact on his future life, Miles begins a search for answers. But someone is adamant to stop him - and they'll go to any lengths to do it.

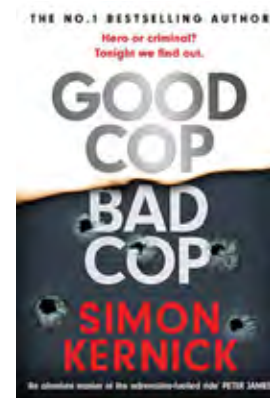
GOOD COPY, BAD COP by Simon Kernick (Headline, £16.99, November). Undercover cop Chris Sketty became a hero when he almost died trying to stop the most brutal terror attack in UK history. With the suspects either dead or missing, the real motive remains a mystery. But someone is convinced Sketty is a liar. A criminal mastermind. A murderer. Blackmailed into revealing the truth, Sketty will share a twisting tale of betrayal, deception and murder...with a revelation so shocking that nothing will be the same again.

THE HUNTING by Stephen Leather (Hodder & Stoughton, £16.99, November). British doctor Raj Patel puts his own life on the line to treat the injured in war-torn Syria. His medical skills help casualties survive against all the odds. But Raj needs to rely on a completely different set of skills when he is

taken hostage in a dangerous case of mistaken identity. Billionaire big-game hunter Jon van der Sandt is driven by revenge - his family have been killed by jihadist terrorists and he wants his vengeance up close and personal. He has hired ex Special Forces hard men to snatch the ISIS killers from the desert and transport them halfway across the world to the vast wilderness of his American estate. But they grab Raj by mistake, and once the killing begins it's too late to plead mistaken identity. To survive, he'll have to become as ruthless a killer as the man who is hunting him.

DARKNESS FALLS by David Mark (Head of Zeus, £8.99, November). A Detective Sergeant McAvoy Prequel. Newly appointed DS McAvoy is an outsider to his new force and must confront his darkest fears, while hunting a killer that nobody else believes in. In a landscape at once tender and brutal, McAvoy must tread the path between the darkness and the light, before facing an enemy who will brand him for life.

THE SHADOW AT THE DOOR by Tim Weaver (Michael Joseph, £16.99, November). It's a night just like any other in the Conister home - but then Paul heads upstairs and never comes back. When his wife Maggie goes to see where he is, she can't find him. His phone and wallet are by the bed. The windows are locked from the inside. Paul has vanished. Missing persons investigator David Raker is an expert in locating the lost. So when he's hired by Maggie, he knows that in every disappearance - however impossible it seems - there's an answer. What he doesn't know yet is that his search for Paul Conister will become linked to three other mysteries .



U.K.

Reviews



Jeff Pople Review

THE SABOTEUR

by Simon Conway

Hodder & Stoughton, £16.99

Rating: B

Simon Conway's **THE STRANGER** (2019) was a very readable spy novel that moved along at a cracking pace and dazzled with its authentic set-pieces set in the Middle East. The later stages set in London stretched credibility, but overall it was a very entertaining read.

THE SABOTEUR takes up where **THE STRANGER** left off, with the terrorist Guy Fowle being freed by a Russian hit squad who want access to the millions he has salted away. MI6 agent Jude Lyon is soon on his trail, as Fowle begins to put in place a Russian 'doomsday' plan designed to bring Britain to its knees.

THE SABOTEUR is a very fast



paced thriller that smoothly moves through one explosive set-up after another. Conway keeps his foot firmly on the accelerator as the body count mounts and the book rockets to the large scale climax. There is enough convincing spying and military detail to keep fans of action thrillers happy, but the story lacks the bureaucratic and political manoeuvrings that made *The Stranger* so interesting.

Jude and his colleagues, and enemies, have a credible gritty feel to them and the background information is interesting and smoothly inserted into the story. There is also some good reflections on the current geo-political environment.

In all, it is an enjoyable, page turning thriller, provided you are willing to suspend a reasonable amount of disbelief.

Steele Curry Review

WHERE ANGELS REST

by Peter Ritchie

(PR Publishing, £9.99,

September, 2021

Rating: A

Since 2017, former senior police officer Peter Ritchie has written a blistering series of six novels featuring Detective Superintendent Grace Macallan with the Scottish Police Force. In **WHERE ANGELS REST**, Macallan's investigation of three murders in Scotland, including a young female reporter, reveals the existence of a team of ex-soldiers used for illegal killings in Northern Ireland during the Troubles, then assassinations in the Middle East and now contract killings in the U.K. and internationally.

When an undercover policeman in

Dublin reports that a local gang boss has contracted the planned killing of his two main rivals, it appears that this is somehow connected with the Scottish murders. Macallan joins forces with her counterpart in Dublin to mount a large operation to arrest the contract killers and those responsible for directing them. Meanwhile, the British military hopes to cover-up its past misdeeds in Northern Ireland and a criminal mastermind with ties to Russian organized crime knows Macallan is determined to become his nemesis.



Peter Ritchie

WHERE ANGELS REST is an outstanding story of the challenges facing today's police forces and what is involved in mounting a major operation against the criminal world. The author is at the top of his game – the characterization is insightful, the police procedures described are authentic and the action is fast moving. This is crime fiction writing at its best. The earlier Macallan novels are **CAUSE OF DEATH** (2017), **EVIDENCE OF DEATH** (2018), **SHORES OF DEATH** (2018), **WHERE NO SHADOWS FALL** (2019) and **OUR LITTLE SECRETS** (2021).

Ali Karim Reviews

THE PASSENGER

by Ulrich Alexander Boschwitz

Puskkin Press, £14.99

Rating: A+

Written in a fury over four weeks, this novel was Boschwitz's method of coping with the events of November 1938 in Germany, or rather trying to comprehend the horrors of Kristallnacht. A deeply thought-provoking novel, it has become my favourite crime-thriller of 2021, despite first appearing in 1939 and now re-discovered – it acts as a warning, a message from the past to the people of the present.

The narrative details the journey[s] businessman Otto Silbermann undertakes following ransacking of his home in November 1938, Berlin - attempting to flee the horrors of the Nazi occupation of Germany. The National Socialists are embedded throughout all the societal structures of Germany, so he evades detection by changing trains, traveling alone throughout Germany with only paranoia as his companion. The people Silbermann meets and the situations he has to confront, make this a fascinating chase thriller, but one that provokes deep contemplation.

They say “*paranoia is a heightened sense of awareness*” and for Silbermann it is also a descent into the darkest edges of a personal hell – a test of mental and physical endurance.

The memory of reading this novel will lay in the mind like the shards



of glass that fell in November 1938, throughout Germany.

FRAGILE

by Sarah Hilary
Macmillan, £12.99

Rating: A

Last time around, I wrote “*The fork in the road is not just for the reader, it’s also written for the writer as she leaves behind a challenge. How do you ‘top’ this one?*” when I read Hilary’s **NEVER BE BROKEN**.

I’m pleased to report that Hilary’s latest tops her last novel, but how? In a phrase, she achieved the challenge by writing a stand-alone, parking up her award-winning Marnie Rome police procedural series, and entering the shadows of the Gothic.

Though contemporary, **FRAGILE** has roots, sinews, tendrils that reminded me of the past, of a dream, because the writing has an abstract aura, part-imagined and part-nightmare. It also recalled a line from another book, another film - one that haunts many of us to this day, because “last night I dreamt I went to Manderley again.”

Set ostensibly in London, but with threads to Wales, we have rejection, redemption, horror and an understanding of the terrors of childhood and how they can reappear in adulthood. I don’t wish to detail the plot, because the narrative is best sampled without any clues as to the path Hilary will take the reader. The surety of the writer’s ability to engage the reader’s mind is at a counterpoint to the slipperiness of where the road leads.

Some will recall *Manderley*, in the manner that some will recall *Starling Villas* when the book is put down. The dream-like quality of the writing style should come with a warning, because in any dream there lurk monsters.

In word, *creepy* as hell itself - but with *heart*.

THE DEVIL'S ADVOCATE

by Steve Cavanagh
Orion, £12.99

Rating: A

It takes rare literary skill in pro-

ducing a courtroom drama that is as compelling and thrilling as a car chase, yet remaining deeply thought-provoking. This latest episode in the life of *weird-lawyer* Eddie Flynn should come with a warning because it will deprive the reader of a night’s sleep, such is the compelling nature of the narrative.

Flynn and his team leave New York, heading to America’s Deep South. Flynn’s task is to defend a man, Andy Dubois accused of the unspeakable murder of a student. It appears that Dubois’ original advocate, Warren has vanished and all around there is danger. The District Attorney, the Pastor, the Sheriff and their agents of evil are straited throughout all the societal ramparts of Buckstown, Alabama. And so, begins this tale of *High Noon*, gunplay and the shadows of that *Bad Day at Black Rock*.

Novels of this intensity are not created in a vacuum, because they reflect and warn readers that the evils of the past, lay dormant and that it’s the job of good people to confront the bad people in our midst.

The acknowledgements help explain how the *fictional* and the *real* co-exist outside of the vacuum of existence. Cavanagh’s latest work does not require a book mark, however it’s worth investing in leather gloves to prevent papercuts on your fingers as the pages turn with increasing velocity as the dénouement approaches.

And two from the U.S.

ENDINGS

by Linda L. Richards
Oceanview, \$26.95

Rating: A-

The prolific Ms Richards has [yet again] re-invented herself and her writing – this time taking her readers into a dark and troubling world. Then again, the *protagonist* or *antagonist* [Richards leaves the distinction to the reader’s value-system] is also in the process of re-inventing herself.

Written in an urgent first-person, present-tense style, she leaves the name of [let’s call her, *the lead-character*] unwritten – one has to be cautious in

understanding that even good people can be driven to doing bad things. Like Patricia Highsmith, like Thomas Harris before her, Richards explores the linkage between the good and the bad that resides within the human condition.

When the reality of the lead-character implodes, her life torn apart, she is confronted by choices, by moral dilemmas as she gathers up the flotsam and jetsam of her past; reassembling them into a new shape, or is it a shadow?

Though marketed as a 'thriller' per se, **ENDINGS** is far more than what was considered a 'penny dreadful'. It is a thought-provoking parable of sorts, an exploration of the costs of re-invention, of redemption and questions motivation, and if ever the ends justify the means. It can of course be read as an exciting story, or if one reads between the lines, it becomes far more.

I found it useful to check the dictionary definition[s] of 'Assassin' when I put the book down. A fast and furious read, it will rest in the mind for far longer, than the journey that this novel took to read; the exploration of the perils of reinventing oneself in a world cloaked in darkness.

Despite the gender switch, I was reminded of a line from True Detective "The world needs bad men. We keep the other bad men from the door." Because when the door is closed, we have endings – plural, not singular.

NERVE ATTACK

by S. Lee Manning

Encircle, \$28.99

Rating: B+

The test [in my opinion] of a writer's skill is rarely the debut novel, it's the novelist's ability to climb back on the horse to pen a sophomore work that engages the reader even more elegantly. Debut novels are often written blindly, the follow-up has to take the reader on a new journey, one that requires the bar to be raised.

Last year, surrounded by a troubling reality - I enjoyed an escape thanks to a

Lee Manning's thrilling debut **TROJAN HORSE**. I hoped that her sophomore work would engage the reader, and

provide a respite from the complexity of 2021's reality. I'm glad to report, that **NERVE ATTACK** succeeded. There is peculiar comfort in seeing the return of Kolya (aka Nikolai Ivanovich Petrov), despite the horror that will follow this troubled / traumatised protagonist as the dominoes tetter on the green-baize of the geopolitical table. We are also introduced to a name from Kolya's past, Dimitri Lemonsky and before you can yell 'Novichok' and don a hazmat suit, the *game is afoot*.

An international thriller of some considerable power, we see Manning's protagonists and antagonists zip between North America and the Russian Federation, as well as all points-in-between to prevent catastrophe. Who knew Vermont could be so dangerous?

Thrillers are occasionally described [in some literary circles] as containing characters carved from cardboard. No such accusation can be aimed at Manning's **NERVE ATTACK**, for the author's characterisation is deft, brush-stroke in style as they stand upright on the page and description kept vivid but concise so the propulsion of the story is not affected – instead it's actually enhanced.

As a sophomore novel, Manning's follow-up to **TROJAN HORSE**, attacks the reader's nerves [pun intended] as they cling to the book as if their hands were nailed to the binding.

George Easter Reviews

ICED

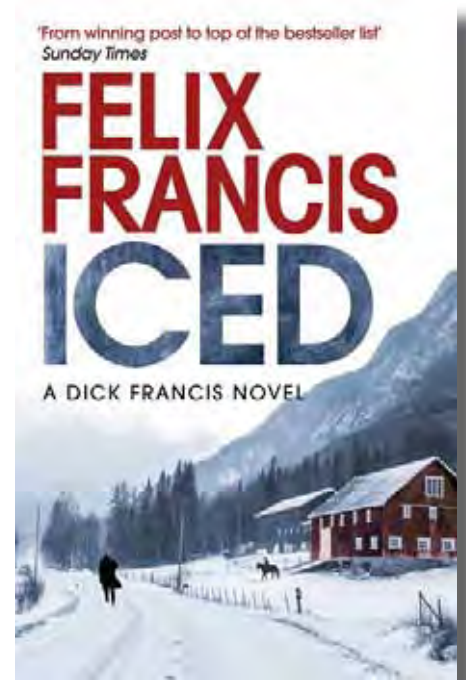
by Felix Francis

Simon & Schuster, £20.00

(No U.S. publication announced yet)

Rating: B-

This is the story of Miles Pussett who loses his parents in separate tragic events and harbors a deep guilt because of their deaths. Miles father was a championship jockey and as a young teenager, Miles decides to follow in his father's footsteps, even though his mother is against it. We see him start out doing menial labor in the stables and finally getting a chance to ride



horses. Then we witness his progression through the jockey ranks with its big ups and downs. Unfortunately Miles has trouble coping with the downs and turns to alcohol.

The timeline of **ICED** switches back and forth between his time as a jockey and the present day when he no longer is plying that trade. These alternating chapters are not indicated by words such as "Now" and "Then," and I'd often have to quickly figure out which period of time was being described.

The pacing of the novel was very un-Dick Francis-like and had very little action or tension. What took up major portions of the book was a deep dive into Miles' mental health issues – PTSD, panic attacks, survivor guilt, the pressure to maintain a low weigh and his growing recognition of his alcoholism. Also a lot of ink was spent in describing in great detail the daily life of a young jockey. There was no crime until very late in the book and it didn't take a Sherlock Holmes to figure out whodunnit.

Since he no longer races horses, Miles goes each year to St. Moritz, where he competes in the Cresta run, which entails him hurtling himself down an ice run on a flimsy toboggan at speeds up to 80 miles per hour. It is purely for the fun of the adrenalin rush. But while there, he is reacquainted with

some of his associates (including his former boss) in the horse racing world. He is very reluctantly enlisted to help out with some horses due to an injury to the person who was to perform those duties. And while doing his assigned tasks he inadvertently sees something he wasn't supposed to see.

If you are interested in a novel that treats the journey that a young man takes to become a respected jockey and a tale that does a good job at examining various mental health issues, you'll probably like **ICED**. But if you are expecting the usual thrills that come with a Felix or Dick Francis novel, you may come away feeling disappointed.

I was disappointed in **ICED** as I had been waiting two years for it to come out so I could do a cover story on it and its author Felix Francis. I'll have to wait for the next novel, which I understand will be a Sid Halley (his father's most famous character) one. I have enjoyed many of Felix's novels in the past and, of course, loved his father's work as well. Until then. [It should be noted that I could find no mention of a U.S. publication of this novel. I wonder if his American publisher took a pass on it.]

POISON

by Sally Spencer

DCI Monika Paniatowski #14

Severn House, £20.99; in U.S. \$28.99

Rating: B

DCI Monika Paniatowski appears to be the target of Jordan Gough, who is Whitebridge's biggest benefactor and owner of the local newspaper. He apparently doesn't forget slights even if they happened many years ago.

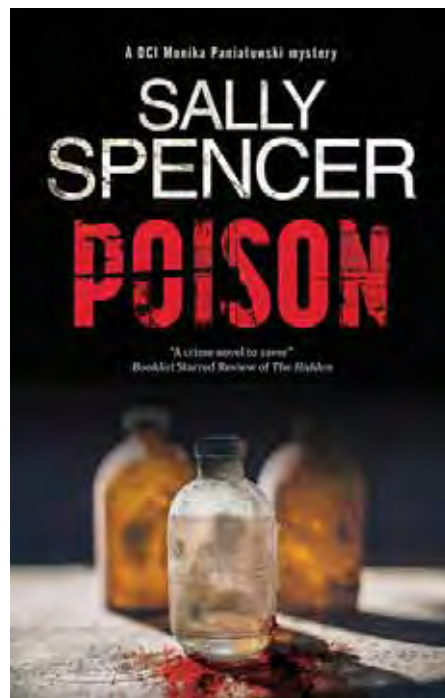
When the DCI is summoned to Gough's home, she suspects alternative motives are at play. He claims to have received letters telling him that he's being poisoned, but can't produce the letters or any proof of the poison claim. She considers it a waste of time – especially when she has a more pressing case to follow. But the thought lingers, "Why would he specifically ask for the police officer he hates?"

Then Jordan Gough dies – from a poisoned pepper steak. And the local

papers criticize her for not following up more on Gough's claims.

POISON highlights the varied and valuable talents of Monika's team of detectives.

I've been reading this series and the one that preceded it (Inspector Woodend) for many years and have greatly enjoyed my experience. The novels are always well plotted and well conceived. We follow the continuing characters through their professional and personal lives, both fraught with conflict and leavened with success from time to time. They will probably never win any awards but they have maintained a high level of excellence over the years and deserve to be more widely read.



UNHOLY MURDER

by Lynda La Plante

Zaffre, £20.00;

in U.S. pbo \$16.00, August 19, 2021

Tennison #7

Rating: B+

Detective Jane Tennison and her partner are called out on a rainy day to a construction site where a coffin has been uncovered by a mechanical digger. The ground used to be home to a convent/orphanage and it is thought that when the property was sold a coffin was unwittingly left behind.

But things take a bad turn when the autopsy of the amazingly well-preserved corpse indicates a stabbing and a burial while still alive.

The first order of business is to identify the corpse and for that the detectives talk to people who used to live in the convent/orphanage. They do discover the identity of the murder victim and also tales of physical and mental abuse on the part of the Mother Superior and her right-hand nun. And, as one might expect, their investigations are hindered by high church officials. But this is a case where Jane Tennison's immediate bosses are on her side.

This is a solid police procedural that jumps from one baffling puzzle to unravel to another, all the while taking a deep dive into the corruption of a church hierarchy. There is a nice blend between the past and present events, the police procedures, and the investigators. We get to know well the characters, their personalities and their quirks as well as follow a compelling investigation to find out the perpetrator.

In the early 1990s mystery fans became enamored of a new hardboiled crime series called **Prime Suspect**, which starred the incomparable Helen Mirren as DCI Jane Tennison. This series broke new ground by portraying the difficulties of a female senior police officer in an otherwise all-male world of employment. There are seven seasons of **Prime Suspect** available on dvd and streaming services. Three of the seasons were also issued as novels to compliment the popularity of the tv shows. Jump ahead to 2015 when Lynda La Plante began another series called **Tennison**, which depicts Jane Tennison's early years as a junior policewoman. It only lasted one season, but the books about the early Jane Tennison, which started with **TENNISON** (2015), now number seven in total (so far), with a new one being published each year. They are available in trade paperback in the U.S.

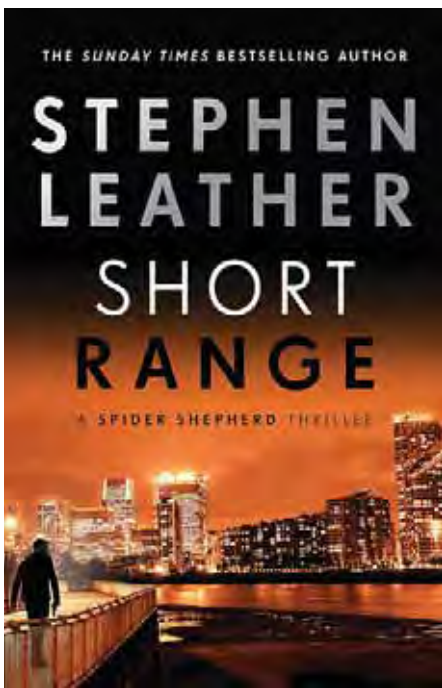
SHORT RANGE

by Stephen Leather

Hodder & Stoughton, £16.99, 2019

Spider Shepherd Series #16

Rating: B+



I've been following this evolving series since 2004 when **HARD LAND-ING**, the first Spider Shepherd thriller, was published. An adrenaline junkie with an eidetic memory, Dan "Spider" Shepherd has gone from soldier to policeman (largely undercover) to MI5 agent over the last seventeen years or so. And what a thrilling seventeen years it has been. This is one of my favorite thriller series and one that should be more widely recognized for its excellence.

In **SHORT RANGE** we find Spider investigating a group of suspected terrorists and crossing paths with a police operation which is using Harry, a 16-year-old boy, as an undercover agent to get evidence against a drug ring. The boy is also the nephew of an anti-Muslim homegrown terrorist that MI5 has its eyes on. So, despite Spider's objections to employing a minor for such dangerous work, Harry is also used to get intelligence on his uncle.

Working flat out, Spider has missed a couple of promised visits to his girlfriend Katra, who is apparently worried about something she won't talk to him about over the phone. When Spider fails to show up for the promised weekend with Katra and his son Liam, on leave from Army training, Katra

discloses to Liam that her desperate sister borrowed money from a Serbian crime boss and when she wasn't able to repay the loan, he forced her to go to work in one of his brothels. The naive Liam volunteers to help Katra, so they travel to her home country of Slovenia to pay off the debt. It doesn't turn out to be that easy and they are kidnapped and held for ransom.

Meanwhile, Spider and his allies pull off a successful sting operation and soon thereafter Spider gets a ransom demand on his phone. Enlisting the aid of a seasoned hostage negotiator and his buttoned-down boss Pritchard, Spider formulates a plan to rescue his loved ones. Not everything goes according to plan.

Even though I didn't like everything that goes down in the denouement, it was quite exciting and realistically described. Leather's fluid prose makes the pages fly by. The Pandemic put me off my pace with this series. I have one more to read and then there is a new one coming out shortly.

An interesting fact about the two-word titles of all of the novels in this series -- the first words of each title are opposites: hard/soft, cold/hot, dead/live and so on. This title, **SHORT RANGE**, followed up on the novel

entitled **TALL ORDER**. I've been reading this series for years and I just noticed this. Shows you how observant I am.

COLD SUN

by Anita Sivakumaran
Dialogue Books, £8.99

Rating: B

London-based Detective Inspector Vijay Patel is about to set off for Tenerife on a long-awaited vacation, when his boss tells him that he is needed in Bangalore, India to investigate the murder of the Sabah Khan, ex-wife of British Foreign Minister Alex Goldblum. His boss says, "The Indians are competent to handle it. It is their turf, after all. However, they've agreed to be guided by some old-fashioned Scotland Yard expertise." He is given no choice. So, vacation postponed, he flies off to India, where he finds himself a stranger in a strange land.

You can imagine his reception. The local police are none too happy – especially the spitfire detective he's assigned to shadow – Assistant Commissioner Chandra Subramaniam. Sabah Khan isn't the only victim of the murderer they are after. A few other bodies of woman have shown up, dressed in identical rose red saris. All have a mysterious head wound.

It doesn't help that DI Patel was an internationally well-known cricket player before suffering a career-ending injury (while playing in India) so his name is well known among the general public. Tie that together with his Scotland Yard background and the Indian media make him a media darling, which hinders, not helps the case.

COLD SUN was an o.k. read, but I didn't find anything special about it. I expected more out of the fractious relationship between Patel and Subramaniam, but the way it played out didn't seem believable. I have been reading so many excellent crime novels by authors of Indian descent recently that I was surprised that this one wasn't as good.



Getting Away With Murder

Mike Ripley



Back in the Groove

After twenty months of enforced social distancing (that's our excuse and we're sticking to it) Shots' very own avengers were able to assemble after an editorial hot-desking session in their new 'pop-up' offices, The Rose & Crown in London's Piccadilly.



Mike, Ayo & the Ripster

Whilst it was a delight to catch up face-to-face with Mike Stotter and Ayo Onatade, the real purpose of the evening was to attend the sumptuous launch party thrown by Felix Francis for his new novel **ICED** [Simon & Schuster].



Felix Francis

A new Dick Francis novel was always celebrated with the first major party of the publishing 'season' and his son Felix has continued that noble tradition. He will be continuing another, he revealed, in that his next book will bring back one of his father's best-loved characters, Sid

Halley.

With Great Influence...

I am well aware that being 'an influencer' (as the young people say) comes with great responsibility. I am constantly reminded of this by the number or correspondents who complain that reading this column puts a strain on their bank balance by tempting them into buying books of which they had not been previously aware. Still, it is rewarding when those whose reading habits I have influenced get in touch, even if they are writing from the bankruptcy courts or a debtors' prison.

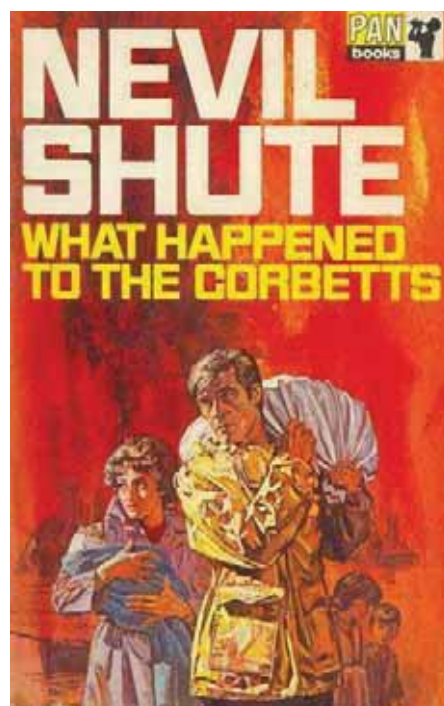
One heart-warming story came to light recently when a reader, having noted my admiration for the story-telling powers of the author Nevil Shute (1899-1960), got in touch to say they had just 'rediscovered' with much pleasure Shute's 1950 novel **A TOWN LIKE ALICE**.

In reply, I encourage my correspondent to try some other Shute titles, including the remarkable **WHAT HAPPENED TO THE CORBETTS** and to our mutual pleasure, my reader reported that he had almost immediately found a 1958 hardback edition, modestly priced, in a second-hand bookshop on the north Norfolk coast.

I call this book remarkable simply because it is, and yet strangely it remains one of Shute's lesser-known titles these days. It is a simple story of a young family adapting to and learning to survive the devastating effect of a mass air raid on Southampton. The enemy dropping bombs on civilian targets is never identified and to many at the time it must have seemed like a piece of horrific science fiction rather than a portent of what was to come. Because -- remark-

ably -- the book was written in 1938 and first published in April 1939, six months before WWII broke out and air raids became reality rather than fiction, Southampton itself being badly 'blitzed' in November 1940.

Nevil Shute, an aeronautical engineer, was more aware than most of what damage aerial bombing could produce and undoubtedly saw the novel as a warning to the authorities to sharpen up their Air Raid Precaution provision. His publishers Heinemann certainly did their bit in 1940, producing a special edition of 1,000 copies for free distribution to ARP wardens.



Recent Books

Box 88 is a covert intelligence organization - a sort of International Rescue for the western democracies - with seemingly endless resources so their agents don't have to resort to fiddling their expenses. Recruited virtually from (public) school, Lachlan Kite is, by 2020, a senior director of Box 88. And that's all you really need to know to enjoy **JUDAS 62** [HarperCollins] the cracking new spy thriller by Charles Cumming.

A 'Judas list' is a vengeful wish list of enemies of Russian intelligence who have been targeted for assassination and



one of the names on it (at number 62) is Peter Galvin, the name he used on one of his first assignment as a trainee agent in 1993. As the story unfolds, mostly in flashback to that ill-fated first mission, we see, in more ways than one, the emergence of the 'perfect spy' and yet, with a knowing nod to Le Carré, Kite acknowledges that he is far from the perfect spy, as he allows his private life to impinge, quite literally, on his debut undercover mission.

The overwhelming sense of suspicion in post-communist Russia is superbly done, proving that little changes, because it isn't paranoia; they really are watching and following you.

THE STONING [MacLehose] is, I think, a first crime novel by Peter Papathanasiou and a mightily impressive one it is too. It adopts one of the fast-becoming standard tropes of outback noir, where the investigator (police detective or journalist) is sent to a small, declining town in the back of beyond with which he had some previously, hopefully forgotten, connection, where something nasty has happened. And in **THE STONING**, something very nasty has happened to the local schoolteacher - the clue is in the title - of the unsavoury town of Cobb, where even the kangaroos have a police record for violence.

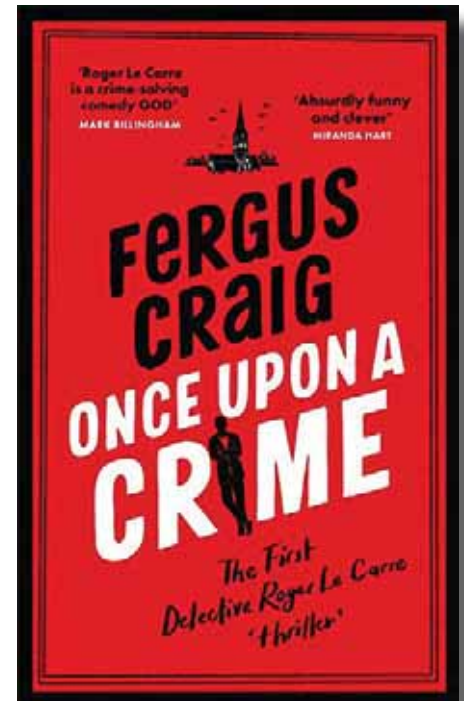
Detective Sergeant George Manolis - a cop who has only fired his gun twice in his entire career - is sent to the dust hole that is Cobb, although the town is not as he remembers it. Not only has it declined in prosperity, is now ravaged by alcohol and drugs and relations with the local indigenous community are at an all-time low, but on its outskirts there is a detention centre where illegal immigrants, asylum seekers, refugees and those without proper papers are corralled. When the local schoolteacher is stoned to death, Muslim detainees are instantly suspected by the xenophobic townsfolk and revenge, or at least public outrage, seem on the cards.

Manolis discovers that conditions in the camp, known locally as 'the brown house', are something Australia should be ashamed of and the author pulls no punches expressing his outrage at the situation. Papathanasiou also describes the emptiness of life in the outback - the wildlife, the heat and the hero being vast distances away from back-up, or a hospital, or even a mobile phone signal - with a grim savagery. Powerful, dramatic stuff.



Comedy crime writing is difficult, so they tell me, and is one of the smallest of sub-genres in the broad church of crime fiction. There have, however, been some notable practitioners of the dark

art, ranging from the satirical to the absurdist, the farcical to the Sit Com, including the divine Sarah Caudwell, Ruth Dudley Edwards, Peter Guttridge, Colin Bateman, Carl Hiaasen, Kinky Friedman, Christopher Brookmyre, Simon Brett and Malcolm Pryce - and those are only the ones I've had a drink with.



ONCE UPON A CRIME by Fergus Craig [Sphere] is a debut toe-dip into the shark-infested custard that is comic crime and seems determined to try every avenue possible in order to raise a laugh. The setting is Exeter - though it falls short of the mean streets of Malcolm Pryce's Aberystwyth and the surreal daftness of Jasper Fforde's Swindon - and the central character, a police detective called Roger LeCarre, is a truly horrible character who seems deliberately and arrogantly stupid. As the police force he belongs to is Devon & Cornwall, there are lots of gags about local rivalries and 'chasing the triads' out of the county across the border into Dorset, and some of them are genuinely funny but they get submerged in the need to make everything into a joke or smart remark, and then explain why it is funny, or smart.

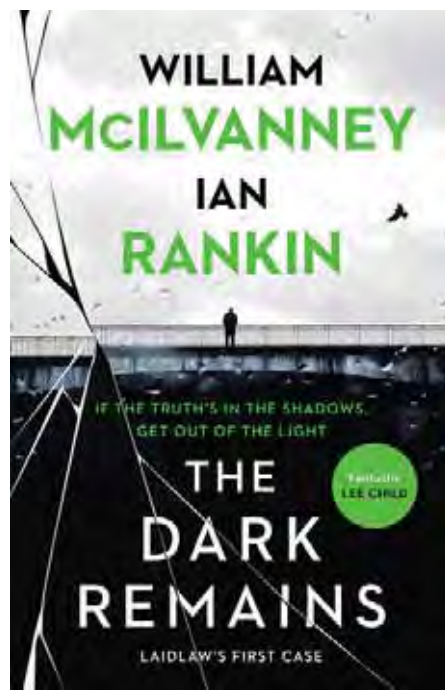
There are also lots, and I do mean lots, of references to people and things which may not be obviously com-

ic - Bradley Walsh for instance (OK, fair enough), the listing of the alcohol-by-volume of various beers on a pub bar, and the Kia Ceed (sic).

This shotgun approach quickly becomes exhausting, even when leavened by gobbits of extraneous information as if lifted directly from a tourist guide or the Good Beer Guide (J.K. Rowling even gets a passing mention as an alumna of Exeter University). But the main problem is the over-the-top character of Roger LeCarre, who is so obnoxious and determinedly obtuse that it's impossible to take him humorously let alone seriously. His method of breaking the news of the murder of her son to a sexy mother is shown in all its gruesome bad taste, but it's a scene which could have been darkly brilliant had it, say, been played by Ricky Gervais in his David Brent persona. When it comes to genuinely stupid policemen being promoted beyond their capabilities for comic effect, then Wilfred Dover in the books of Joyce Porter over fifty years ago is still good template. (Go on, Google them.) But then, what do I know?

In the words of the late William McIlvanney, Jack Laidlaw was a man who 'found himself doing penance for being him' especially in Glasgow on a Friday night: 'the city of the stare'. McIlvanney also called Ian Rankin's creation John Rebus 'the Edinburgh Laidlaw', whereas Ian Rankin has a character tell Laidlaw: 'Your head might be hard but your heart isn't'.

In **THE DARK REMAINS** [Canon-gate], Ian Rankin has written a prequel to McIlvanney's 'Laidlaw' trilogy which broke the ground for the new wave of 'Tartan Noir' crime writers, based on notes left by McIlvanney after his death in 2015. So it's not a 'continuation' novel, nor a completion and it is tempting to think this might be an homage to the writer who inspired him. Well, it probably is, and clearly it is a labour of love, as Rankin has had to exchange his Edinburgh for McIlvanney's Glasgow, and set the novel in 1972, when Ian would have been still at school. Nonetheless, the Laidlaw gang's all here - or should that be the gangs are all here as turf



wars between gangster families simmer following the fatal stabbing of one firm's dodgy lawyer.

Jack Laidlaw, a lowly Detective Constable at this point, and a 'streetman' in the sense that Davy Crockett was a 'woodsman', solves the murder and averts a gang war in his own forthright style, despite the incompetence of his police superiors and his ability to cite John Updike and W.H. Auden along the way. Rankin not only keeps faith with McIlvanney's creation, but even adds a further nod of admiration by having 'his' Laidlaw quote an old school friend called 'Tom Docherty'.

Is **THE DARK REMAINS** merely a worthy homage to one of the godfathers of crime fiction - and not just of the Tartan variety? Well, yes, but there's no 'merely' about it. Is it a good crime novel? Damn right it is.

Another female journalist, this time a naïve trainee fresh from an Oxford degree, features in **THE MAN ON HACKPEN HILL** [Head of Zeus] by J.S. Monroe, who as Jon Stock, has authored some impressive spy fiction in the past.

Bella, our ingénue journalist, dogged by concerns over a mentally ill(?) undergraduate friend, and DI Silas Hart of Swindon CID, find themselves investigating crop circles - something Wiltshire has a reputation for. The latest pair

of elaborate circles are well worth the attention of the police as both have bodies at their centres; one a naked man, the other a woman in a straight-jacket as might have been used in mental hospital. In addition, the complex design of the crop circles depict mathematical formulae which may well be relevant to the work carried out at the secretive Porton Down research centre nearby. Naturally there are dark forces determined to stop Bella and Silas (and a rogue scientist) from getting anywhere near the truth.

Thriller writer Tom Bradby has described the book as 'A kind of Wiltshire Da Vinci Code' but don't let that put you off. It's really rather good.

Something, something, something... Complete

I decided some time ago that my crime fiction education was incomplete because I simply had not read enough Peter Dickinson (1927-2015), the multiple award-winning (two Gold Daggers in successive years) author of crime novels and young adult fiction (a brace of Carnegie Medals) whose detective stories were often compared in style and humour to those of Michael Innes. If the names Peter Dickinson and Michael Innes mean nothing, then shame on you.

To give you a flavour, **THE SEALS** (1970), Dickinson's third novel to feature Detective Superintendent James Pibble, is set on a remote island in the Hebrides which is the home of an order of distinctly strange monks. In his Author's Note prior to Chapter One, Dickinson warns the reader: All the religion in this book is entirely imaginary, and has no reference to any living God....

The Dark Side of Spying

I can't quite remember how I first heard of the fictional spy Charlie Dark. It may have been a reference in one of Dan Fesperman's excellent spy novels or a recommendation by my old friend Randall Masteller who curates the invaluable Spy Guys & Gals website. Either way, I am grateful to both of them

for many things, especially the need to track down a copy of **CHECKPOINT CHARLIE** by one of my favourite American thriller writers, the late Brian Garfield (1931-2018).

It was not an easy book to find as I do not believe it was ever published in the UK and the only edition was the 1981 Mysterious Press one which I have finally acquired thanks to one of my bespoke book dealers. **CHECKPOINT CHARLIE** is not a novel, but a collection of twelve short stories originally written for publication in magazines between 1976 and 1979, which all feature the old, fat, badly-dressed and insubordinate CIA operative Charlie Dark. Charlie is, of course a brilliant agent, thanks to his quick-witted application of years of tradecraft, which is why he gets the difficult jobs, often those which have to be 'off the books', even though he declares himself to be inept with weapons and desperately avoids violence.

Dark's missions take him all over the world, from California to Caracas, Finland to Africa, Australia, Hong Kong, Russia and Berlin (naturally) and, perhaps most unusual of all, the Aleutian Islands. Though this is perhaps not surprising given that Brian Garfield was, in 1969, the author of *The 1000 Mile War*, a history of World War II in the Alaskan and Aleutian Islands theatre of operations.



Charlie Dark is a wonderful creation, disgracefully little known over here, but then I have always felt that Brian Garfield - possibly best known for **DEATH WISH**, famously or infamously filmed by Michael Winner - has been much undervalued on this side of the Atlantic. After cutting his teeth on westerns, Garfield showed he was proficient at spy fiction (**HOPSCOTCH**), crime fiction (**RECOIL**), political thrillers (**LINE OF SUCCESSION**) and historical thrillers (**KOLCHAK'S GOLD**). Always inventive and written in straightforward unaffected prose, anything by Brian Garfield spotted in a second-hand bookshop should be snapped up.

Stark Reminder

Once described as 'the best kept secret in American pulp fiction', Charles Williams (1909-1975) was a fabulous writer of hardboiled crime stories, often with a nautical theme. Although forgotten here, many of Williams' thrillers were published in the UK in the 1960s and were successful as Pan paperbacks, alongside titles by John D. MacDonald and Ross Macdonald (no relation). But Williams' novels seemed to disappear from both bookshops and memory, despite a spurt of interest when the Nicole Kidman/Sam Neill film of his book **DEAD CALM** came out in 1989.

I'm delighted to say that the Charles Williams flag is still being flown from the mast-head of the inventive Stark House Press in America who have just published a double volume containing **ALL THE WAY** (1958) and **THE SAILCLOTH SHROUD** (1959), both of which I can recommend as excellent examples of American noir.

As their condition might suggest, my collection of Charles Williams' thrillers was the result of many years scouring second-hand bookshops and jumble sales, slightly handicapped by buying (on more than one occasion) a book I already had under different title. For example, the Stark House edition of **All The Way** -- the original title -- was better known in the UK as **THE CONCRETE FLAMINGO**.

Good Reads? Good Grief!

My attention has been drawn to a website called Goodreads and a 'review' of Val McDermid's new novel **1979** by someone called Barbara Fisher which, frankly, almost made me choke on my breakfast Sanatogen. I quote verbatim:

A novel without the Internet, where the characters "call on the telephone" rather than message via mobile, or send a letter rather than email is a distraction. To "get" the social, political, economic and technological setting of the 70s you'd have to have been born in 1961 to even have reached the tender age of 18 in 1979 - so we are looking at a current readership of a post aged 60 age group who could begin to find this era relatable. Of course age becomes irrelevant when looking at an era of more widespread interest historically e.g. World War One...But the 70s?!!! Hardly an era of general fascination. And the IRA? When today's terrorism is so very different? How many under 55s can relate to that? It's a poor choice of era/setting for most to relate to I'm afraid.

As an over-55, who often calls people 'on the telephone' and who was a university student and then newspaper reporter in the 1970s - an era when clearly nothing of import happened because the Internet wasn't there - and had first hand experience of the miners' strike, too-close-for comfort encounters with two IRA bomb incidents and the terrorist attack on the Munich Olympic Village in 1972, I found myself speechless.

But I was not the only one to be outraged. A regular correspondent from North Wales, whose opinions I respect, expressed the following view: 'The utter ignorance of how social past makes social present and social future is probably why we keep making the same fatal mistakes again and again, and people like Barbara Fisher get put in charge of a government's PR.'

I couldn't have put it better.

**Pip! Pip!
The Ripster**

A Paperback Confidential Profile

Brett Halliday

by Brian Ritt

Brett Halliday (born Davis Dresser; also wrote as Asa Baker, Matthew Blood, Kathryn Culver, Don Davis, Hal Debrett, Anthony Scott, Anderson Wayne). Born in Chicago, Illinois, 1904. Died in Montecito, California, 1977.

Davis Dresser's private detective, Mike Shayne, although not as well known today, is as much of an American institution as Erle Stanley Gardner's Perry Mason. Shayne's novel-length adventures have sold over thirty million copies; he appeared in hundreds of short stories; he was successfully featured on radio shows, in films, and in a television series; and he had his own digest, *Mike Shayne Mystery Magazine*, which lasted for nearly thirty years.

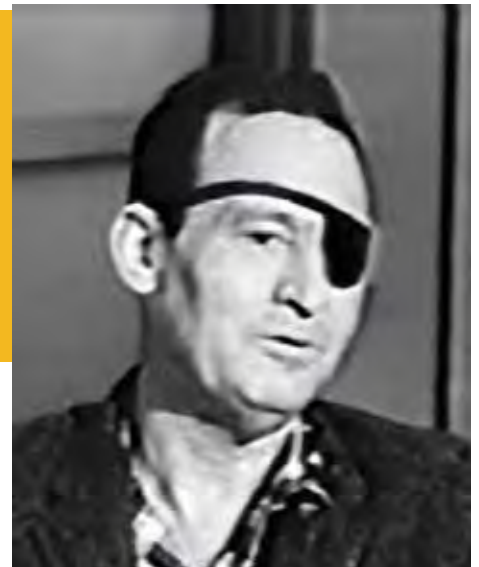
Before starting his career as a writer, Dresser led a rough and tumble life. As a young boy, he poked out his left eye on a barbed wire fence, and wore an eye

patch for the rest of his life. When he was 14 years old, he ran away to join the Army. He served for two years before his real age was discovered and he was discharged. After graduating high school, he worked the oil fields of Texas and California.

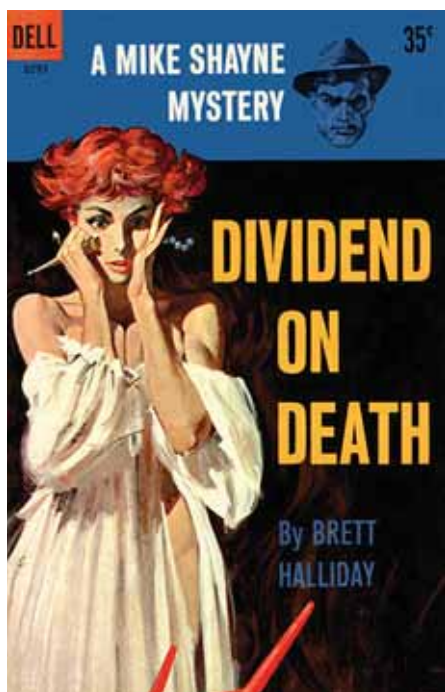
Using the name Brett Halliday, Dresser published his first Mike Shayne novel in 1939 -- **DIVIDEND ON DEATH**. Shayne is a tough, redheaded Irishman, who uses his fists and brains more than his gun. Perhaps Shayne's most distinguishing characteristics are his straightforwardness and logic. According to Dresser, "I think the most important characteristic in [Shayne's] spectacular success as a private eye is his ability to drive straight forward to the heart of the matter without deviating one iota for obstacles or confusing side issues. He has an absolutely logical mind which refuses to be sidetracked." (**FOUR AND TWENTY BLOOD-HOUNDS**, an anthology edited by Anthony Boucher.)

The Shayne novels have a recurring cast of characters: Shayne's wife Phyllis (who appeared in the early novels but was killed off after eight books, in **BLOOD ON THE BLACK MARKET**, 1943); Timothy Rourke, a crime reporter and Mike's drinking buddy; secretary Lucy Hamilton; Chief of Police Will Gentry, Mike's supporter and close friend; and Chief of Detectives Peter Painter, Mike's thorn in the side and ever present antagonist.

Notable titles in the Shayne series include **MURDER WEARS A MUMMER'S MASK** (1943, aka **IN A DEADLY VEIN**), set in a ghost town in Colorado; **THIS IS IT, MICHAEL SHAYNE** (1950), involving the death of



a scandal reporter; and **SHE WOKE TO DARKNESS**(1954), where Brett Halliday himself is a character attending a Mystery Writers of America convention.



Dresser wrote approximately fifty Shayne novels, finally abandoning the series with **MURDER AND THE WANTON BRIDE** (1958). Afterward, the Shayne series continued, ghost-written under the Brett Halliday pseudonym. Writers Ryerson Johnson and Robert Terrell penned the remaining novels, and Mike Avallone, Richard Deming, Dennis Lynds, James Reasoner and a host of others wrote the novelettes



which appeared in *Mike Shayne Mystery Magazine*. The final Shayne novel appeared in 1976, and the digest's run ended in 1985.

The Shayne movie series started with *Michael Shayne, Private Detective* (1940), starring Lloyd Nolan, based on the novel, *THE PRIVATE PRACTICE OF MICHAEL SHAYNE*. 20th Century Fox featured Nolan in six more Shayne films, ending with *Time to Kill* (1942; interestingly, it was based part-

ly on Raymond Chandler's *The High Window*). Low-budget studio PRC resurrected the series in 1946, starring Hugh "Leave It to Beaver" Beaumont as Shayne. A TV series starred Richard Denning, from 1960-61.

Further Reading:

- Mike Shayne series:*
 DIVIDEND ON DEATH (1939)
 THE PRIVATE PRACTICE OF MICHAEL SHAYNE (1940)
 BODIES ARE WHERE YOU FIND THEM (1941)
 THE CORPSE CAME CALLING (1942; as THE CASE OF THE WALKING CORPSE, 1943)
 MICHAEL SHAYNE'S LONG CHANCE (1944)
 MURDER IS MY BUSINESS (1945)
 MARKED FOR MURDER (1945)
 COUNTERFEIT WIFE (1947)
 A TASTE FOR VIOLENCE (1949)
 THIS IS IT, MICHAEL SHAYNE (1950)
 FRAMED IN BLOOD (1951)
 WHAT REALLY HAPPENED (1952)
 SHE WOKE TO DARKNESS (1954)
 DEATH HAS THREE LIVES (1955)
 STRANGER IN TOWN (1955)
 THE BLONDE CRIED MURDER (1956)
 WEEP FOR A BLONDE (1957)
 MURDER AND THE WANTON



BRIDE (1958)

As Asa Baker

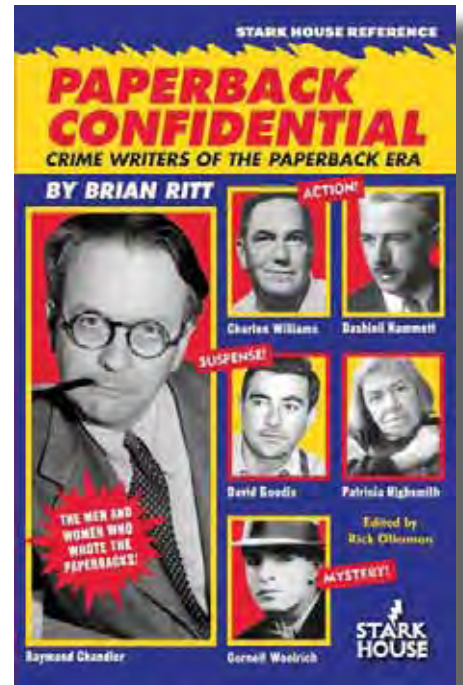
- MUM'S THE WORD FOR MURDER (1938)
 THE KISSED CORPSE (1939)

As Matthew Blood

- THE AVENGER (1952, with Ryerson Johnson)
 DEATH IS A LOVELY DAME (1954, with Ryerson Johnson)

 If you like Brett Halliday, you might like: Marvin Albert, Bart Spicer, Frank Kane

For more on Brett Halliday and Mike Shayne, see Ted Hertel's review of **BLOOD ON THE BLACK MARKET** on page 55 of this issue.



This is the ninth in a series of articles about the crime writers from the 1940s to the 1960s, as found in **PAPERBACK CONFIDENTIAL** by Brian Ritt (Stark House, \$19.95, 2013). This volume is highly recommended to those who collect vintage mystery/thriller paperbacks, especially Gold Medals. Reprinted by permission of Stark House and the author.

Recent Paperbacks of Note



Softboiled to Mediumboiled

Andrews, Donna, **GIFT OF THE MAGPIE** (\$7.99).
 Bruns, Catherine, **THE ENEMY YOU GNOCCHI** (\$8.99).
 Childs, Laura, **EGG SHOOTERS** (\$7.99).
 Coco, Nancy, **HERE COMES THE FUDGE** (\$8.99).
 Conroy, Vivian, **THE GLITTER END** (\$8.99).
 Delany, Vicki, **DEADLY SUMMER NIGHTS** (\$7.99).
 DiRico, Maria, **IT'S BEGINNING TO LOOK A LOT LIKE MURDER** (\$8.99).
 Elliott, Lauren, **TO THE TOME OF MURDER** (\$8.99).
 Erickson, Alex, **DEATH BY HOT APPLE CIDER** (\$8.99).
 Fletcher, Jessica, **MURDER SHE WROTE: KILLING IN A KOI POND** (\$7.99).
 Fluke, Joanne, **CHRISTMAS CUP CAKE MURDER** (\$9.99).
 Granger, Mimi, **DEATH OF A RED-HOT RANCHER** (\$7.99).
 Griffo, J. D., **MURDER AT THE MISTLETOE BALL** (\$8.99).
 Haines, Carolyn, **GARLAND OF BONES** (\$7.99).
 Handler, David, **MAN WHO WASN'T ALL THERE** (\$17.95).
 Hanna, Darci, **MURDER AT THE CHRISTMAS COOKIE BAKEOFF** (\$8.99).
 Henry, Julia, **WREATHING HAVOC** (\$8.99).
 Innes, Louise R., **DEATH AT HOLLY LODGE** (\$8.99).
 Johnson, Maureen, **YOUR GUIDE TO NOT GETTING MURDERED IN A QUIANT ENGLISH VILLAGE**

(\$16.99).
 Kelly, Diane, **GETAWAY WITH MURDER** (\$8.99).
 Lansing, Kate, **MULLED TO DEATH** (\$7.99).
 McKinlay, Jenn, **ONE FOR THE BOOKS** (\$8.99).
 Meier, Leslie, **CHRISTMAS CARD MURDER** (\$8.99).
 O'Connor, Carlene, **MURDER AT AN IRISH CHRISTMAS** (\$8.99).
 Penney, Elizabeth, **CHAPTER AND CURSE** (\$8.99).
 Pressey, Rose, **MURDER CAN FROST YOUR DOUGHNUT** (\$8.99).
 Rosenfelt, David, **SILENT BITE** (\$16.99).
 Sennfelder, Debra, **THE CORPSE IN THE GAZEBO** (\$8.99).
 Smith, Alexander McCall, **HOW TO RAISE AN ELEPHANT** (\$16.00).
 Stewart, Amy, **MISS KIPP INVESTIGATES** (\$15.99).
 Stuart, Amy, **STILL HERE** (\$9.99).



Wallace, Auralee, **IN THE COMPANY OF WITCHES** (\$7.99).
 Wingate, Marty, **MURDER IS A MUST** (\$7.99).

Mediumboiled to Hardboiled

Abbott, Jeff, **NEVER ASK ME** (\$9.99).
 Archer, Jeffrey, **HIDDEN IN PLAIN SIGHT** (\$17.99).
 Atkins, Ace, **Robert B. Parker's SOME ONE TO WATCH OVER ME** (\$9.99).
 Baart, Nicole, **EVERYTHING WE DIDN'T SAY** (\$17.00).
 Banville, John, **SNOW** (\$16.99).
 Box, C. J., **BADLANDS** (\$9.99).
 Bruen, Ken, **CALLOUS** (\$14.99).
 Clark, Mary Higgins, **PIECE OF MY HEART** (\$9.99).
 Connelly, Michael, **THE LAW OF INNOCENCE** (\$9.99).
 Danna, Jen J., **EXIT STRATEGY** (\$9.99).
 Edvardsson, M. T., **A NEARLY NORMAL FAMILY** (\$9.99).
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 North, Alex, **THE SHADOWS** (\$16.99).
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 Pekkanen, Sarah, **THE PERFECT NEIGHBORS** (\$9.99).
 Rankin, Ian, **A SONG FOR THE DARK TIMES** (\$16.99).
 Seeck, Max, **THE ICE COVEN** (\$17.00).
 Selson, Brian, **THE NIGHTWORKERS** (\$17.00).
 Slaughter, Karin, **THE SILENT WIFE** (\$9.99).
 Straley, John, **WHAT IS TIME TO A PIG?** (\$16.99).
 Tracy, P. J., **DEEP INTO THE DARK** (\$9.99).
 Tremblay, Paul, **SURVIVOR SONG** (\$9.99).
 Turow, Scott, **THE LAST TRIAL** (\$9.99).
 Tursten, Helene, **SNOWDRIFT** (\$16.95).

History Mystery

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 Coben, Harlan, **WIN** (\$16.99).
 Perry, Anne, **A QUESTION OF BETRAYAL** (\$17.00).
 Rader-Day, Lori, **DEATH AT GREEN -WAY** (\$16.99).
 Robinson, Maggie, **FAREWELL BLUES** (\$15.99).

Thrillers

Baldacci, David, **A GAMBLING MAN** (\$16.99).
 Bradby, Tom, **DOUBLE AGENT** (\$17.00).
 Hauty, Chris, **SAVAGE ROAD** (\$9.99).
 Mills, Kyle, **VINCE FLYNN: LETHAL AGENT** (\$17.00).
 Rawlings, H. Ripley, **THE KILL BOX** (\$9.99).
 Reich, Christopher, **THE PALACE** (\$9.99).

Sneak Previews Upcoming Mysteries



November, 2021

- 1 Yasmin Angoe, **HER NAME IS KNIGHT**
- 2 William Boyle, **SHOOT THE MOONLIGHT OUT**
- 2 Kathleen Kent, **THE PLEDGE** (Detective Betty Rhyzyk)
- 2 Joseph Knox, **TRUE CRIME STORY**
- 2 Anne Perry, **A CHRISTMAS LEGACY**
- 2 Jenn McKinlay, **KILLER RESEARCH** (Library Lover)
- 9 Michael Connelly, **THE DARK HOURS** (Renee Ballard & Harry Bosch)
- 9 Simon Gervais, **THE LAST PROTECTOR** (Clayton White)
- 9 Ken Follett, **NEVER**
- 9 Nicholas Meyer, **THE RETURN OF THE PHARAOH** (Sherlock Holmes)
- 9 Lynne Truss, **PSYCHO BY THE SEA** (Constable Twitten)
- 9 Alice Henderson, **A BLIZZARD OF POLAR BEARS** (Alex Carter)
- 11 Abir Mukherjee, **THE SHADOWS OF MEN** (Sam Wyndham)
- 16 Martin Limon, **WAR WOMEN** (Sueno & Bascom)
- 16 Kjell Eriksson, **THE DEATH WATCH BEETLE** (Ann Lindell)
- 16 Thomas Perry, **THE LEFT-HANDED TWIN** (Jane Whitefield)
- 16 John Lescroart, **THE MISSING PIECE** (Dismas Hardy)
- 16 Max Allan Collins, **QUARRY'S BLOOD**
- 16 Dirk Cussler, **CLIVE CUSSLER'S THE DEVIL'S SEA** (Dirk Pitt)
- 16 Shelley Noble, **A SECRET NEVER TOLD** (Lady Dunbridge)
- 22 James Patterson, **FEAR NO EVIL** (Alex Cross)
- 23 Elly Griffiths, **THE MIDNIGHT HOUR** (Brighton)

- 23 Tom Rosenstiel, **THE DAYS TO COME** (Rena & Brooks)
- 30 Hannah Morrissey, **HELLO, TRANSCRIBER**
- 30 Sarah Strohmeier, **DO I KNOW YOU?**
- 30 Jeffrey Deaver, **THE MIDNIGHT LOCK** (Lincoln Rhyme)

December, 2021

- 7 Stephen Spotswood, **MURDER UNDER HER SKIN** (Pentecost/Parker)
- 7 Teresa Dovalpage, **DEATH UNDER THE PERSEIDS** (Havana)
- 7 John Straley, **SO FAR SO GOOD** (Cecil Younger)
- 7 Mick Herron, **DOLPHIN JUNCTION** (Short stories)
- 7 Alice Blanchard, **THE WITCHING TREE** (Natalie Lockhart)
- 7 Paige Shelton, **DARK NIGHT** (Alaska Wild)
- 7 John Straley, **SO FAR SO GOOD** (Cecil Younger)
- 7 Christopher Fowler, **LONDON BRIDGE IS FALLING DOWN**

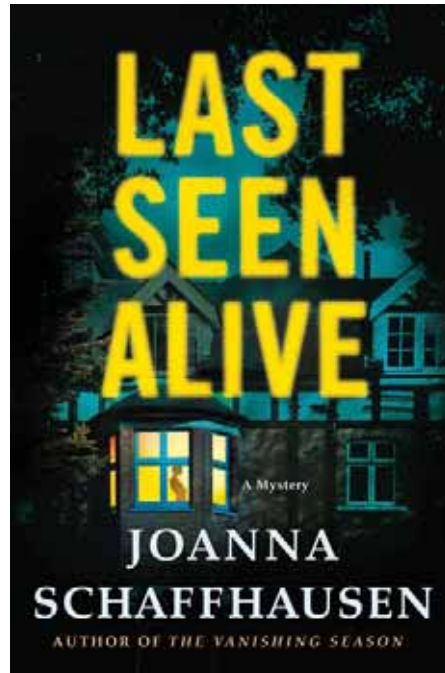


- 7 Victoria Thompson, **CITY OF SHADOWS** (Counterfeit Lady)
 7 S. J. Rozan, **FAMILY BUSINESS** (Chin/Smith)
 7 W.E.B. Griffin, **ROGUE ASSET** (Presidential Agent)
 7 Luke McCallin, **FROM A DARK HORIZON** (Reinhardt)
 14 Jane K. Cleland, **JANE AUSTEN'S LOST LETTERS** (Josie Prescott)
 14 Keigo Higashino, **SILENT PARADE** (Detective Galileo)
 28 Charlie Donlea, **TWENTY YEARS LATER**
 28 Darby Kane, **THE REPLACEMENT WIFE**
 28 Allison Brennan, **THE SORORITY MURDER**
 28 Stuart Woods, **CRIMINAL MIS-CHIEF** (Stone Barrington)

January, 2022

- 4 Nita Prose, **THE MAID**
 4 Rachel Hawkins, **RECKLESS GIRLS**
 4 Michael Robotham, **WHEN YOU ARE MINE**
 4 Leah Konen, **THE PERFECT ESCAPE**
 4 Joanne Harris, **A NARROW DOOR**
 11 Elizabeth George, **SOMETHING TO HIDE** (Lynley/Havers)
 11 T. Jefferson Parker, **A THOUSAND STEPS**
 11 Laura Joh Rowland, **GARDEN OF SINS**
 11 Alafair Burke, **FIND ME**
 11 Stacy Willingham, **A FLICKER IN THE DARK**
 11 Brad Taylor, **END OF DAYS** (Pike Logan)
 18 Sulari Gentill, **WHERE THERE'S A WILL** (Rowland Sinclair)
 18 C. J. Tudor, **THE SIXTH**
 18 P. J. Tracy, **DESOLATION CANYON** (Margaret Nolan)
 18 Jessica Fellowes, **THE MITFORD VANISHING** (Mitford Murders)
 18 Nick Petrie, **THE RUNAWAY** (Peter Ash)
 18 Lisa Gardner, **ONE STEP TOO FAR** (Frankie Elkin)
 25 Lisa Lutz, **THE ACCOMPLICE**
 25 Erin Young, **THE FIELDS**
 25 Lisa Lutz, **THE ACCOMPLICE**

- 25 Joanna Schaffhausen, **LAST SEEN ALIVE**



- 25 Heather Gudenkauf, **THE OVERNIGHT GUEST**
 25 Janice Hallett, **THE APPEAL**

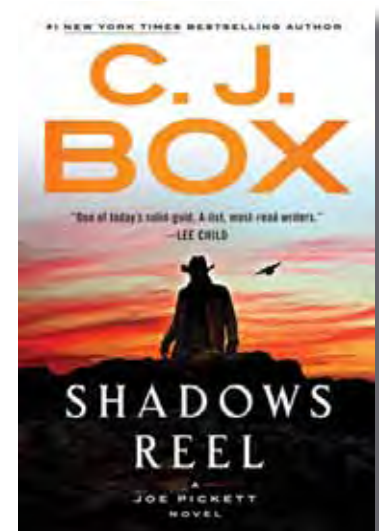
February, 2022

- 1 Elle Cosimano, **FINLAY DONO VAN KNOCKS 'EM DEAD**
 1 Peter Lovesey, **READER I BURIED THEM** (Short Fiction)
 1 Paul Vidich, **THE MATCHMAKER**
 1 Joe Ide, **THE GOODBYE COAST** (Philip Marlowe)
 1 Alan Judd, **A FINE MADNESS** (Christopher Marlowe)
 1 David Handler, **THE LADY IN A SILVER CLOUD** (Stewart Hoag)
 1 Donald E. Westlake, **CALL ME A CAB**
 8 Jonathan Kellerman, **CITY OF THE DEAD**
 8 Gregg Hurwitz, **DARK HORSE** (Orphan X)
 8 Rick Bleiweiss, **PIGNON SCORION & THE BARBERSHOP DETECTIVES**
 8 Emilyya Naymark, **BEHIND THE LIE** (Laney Bird)
 8 Stephanie Barron, **JANE AND THE YEAR WITHOUT SUMMER** (Jane Austen)

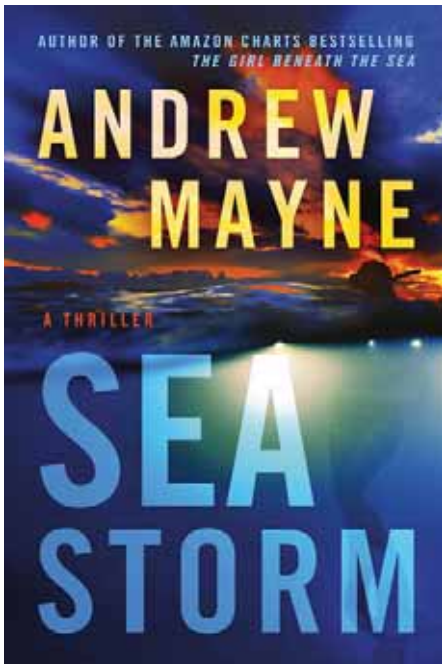
- 15 Adrian McKinty, **THE CHASE**
 15 Kelley Armstrong, **THE DEEPEST OF SECRETS**
 15 Mark Greaney, **SIERRA SIX** (Gray Man)
 15 Deanna Raybourn, **AN IMPOSSIBLE IMPOSTER** (Veronica Speedwell)
 15 Michael Ledwidge, **BEACH WEDDING**
 22 Rob Hart, **THE PARADOX HOTEL**
 22 Joseph Kanon, **THE BERLIN EXCHANGE**
 22 Robert Pobi, **DO NO HARM** (Lucas Page)
 22 J.A. Jance, **NOTHING TO LOSE** (J.P. Beaumont)
 22 Lucy Foley, **THE PARIS APARTMENT**
 22 Stephanie Wrobel, **THIS MIGHT HURT**

March, 2022

- 1 Steven F. Havill, **NO ACCIDENT** (Posadas County)
 1 Marit Weisenberg, **THIS GOLDEN STATE**
 1 Alex Finlay, **THE NIGHT SHIFT**
 1 Rhys Bowen & Clare Broyles (her daughter), **WILD IRISH ROSE** (Molly Murphy Sullivan)
 1 Cara Black, **MURDER AT THE PORTE DE VERSAILLES** (Aimee Leduc)
 1 Louise Candlish, **THE HEIGHTS**
 8 C. J. Box, **SHADOWS REEL** (Joe Pickett)



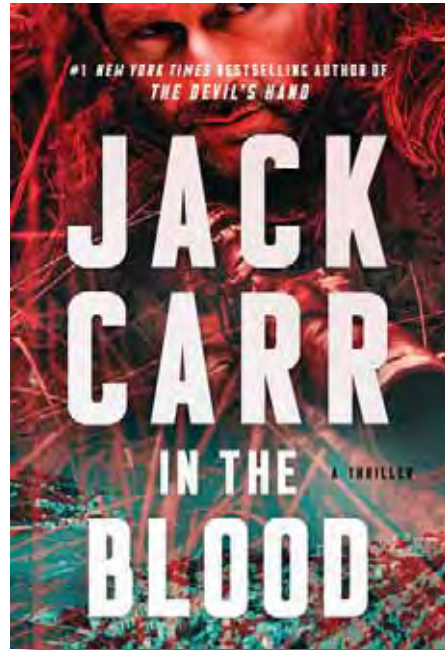
- 8 Kellye Garrett, **LIKE A SISTER**
- 8 Phillip Margolin, **THE DARKEST PLACE** (Robin Lockwood)
- 8 Eli Cranor, **DON'T KNOW TOUGH**
- 8 Louisa Luna, **HIDEOUT** (Alice Vega)
- 8 Sam Wiebe, **HELL AND GONE**
- 15 David Rosenfelt, **CITIZEN K-9**
- 15 Donna Leon, **GIVE UNTO OTHERS** (Guido Brunetti)
- 15 Simone St. James, **THE BOOK OF COLD CASES**
- 15 Max Allan Collins, **TOUGH TENDER** (Nolan)
- 22 Sara Blaedel, **A HARMLESS LIE** (Louise Rick)
- 22 Gigi Pandian, **UNDER LOCK & SKELETON KEY**
- 22 Nancy Allen, **RENEGADE** (Anonymous Justice)
- 29 Camilla Sten, **THE RESTING PLACE**
- 29 Susan Hill, **A CHANGE OF CIRCUMSTANCE** (Simon Serrailer)
- 29 Jess Montgomery, **THE ECHOES** (Kinship)
- 29 Andrew Mayne, **SEA STORM** (Underwater Investigation Unit)



April, 2022

- 5 Anna Downes, **THE SHADOW**

- HOUSE**
- 5 Paige Shelton, **THE BURNING PAGES** (Scottish Bookshop)
- 5 Gary Phillips, **ONE-SHOT HARRY**
- 5 C. S. Harris, **WHEN BLOOD LIES** (Sebastian St. Cyr)
- 12 Jack Carr, **IN THE BLOOD** (James Reece)



- 12 John Sandford, **THE INVESTIGATOR** (Letty Davenport)
- 12 Will Thomas, **FIERCE POISON** (Barker/Llewelyn)
- 12 Sarah Pearse, **THE RETREAT**
- 19 Samantha Jayne Allen, **PAY DIRT ROAD**
- 19 James Rollins, **KINGDOM OF BONES** (Sigma Force)
- 25 Christopher Reich, **ONCE A THIEF** (Simon Riske)
- 26 Jonathan Ames, **THE WHEEL OF DOLL** (Happy Doll)
- 26 Jean-Luc Bannalec, **THE KING ARTHUR CASE** (Dupin)
- 26 Don Winslow, **CITY ON FIRE**
- 26 David Gordon, **THE WILD LIFE** (Joe the Bouncer)

May, 2022

- 3 Timothy Hallinan, **ROCK OF AGES** (Junior Bender)
- 3 Nancy Atherton, **AUNT DIMITY AND THE ENCHANTED COTTAGE**

- 3 Deon Meyer, **THE DARK FLOOD** (Benny Griessel)
- 3 Lorenzo Carcaterra, **NONNA MARIA & THE CASE OF THE MISSING BRIDE**
- 10 Mick Herron, **BAD ACTORS** (Slow Horses)
- 17 Brian Klingborg, **WILD PREY** (Inspector Lu Fei)
- 17 Kerry Greenwood, **THE LADY WITH THE GUN ASKS THE QUESTIONS** (Phryne Fisher short stories)
- 22 Rita Mae Brown, **THRILL OF THE HUNT** (Sister Jane)

June, 2022

- 7 Kwei Quartey, **LAST SEEN IN LAPAZ** (Emma Djan)
- 7 Adam White, **THE MIDCOAST**
- 14 Alan Drew, **THE RECRUIT**
- 21 Lee Goldberg, **MOVIELAND** (Eve Ronin)
- 21 Julie Clark, **THE LIES I TELL**
- 28 Jeffrey B. Burton, **THE LOST** (Mace Reid K-9)

July, 2022

- 5 Tess Gerritsen, **LISTEN TO ME** (Rizzoli & Isles)
- 12 Brandon Webb & John David Mann, **COLD FEAR** (Finn)
- 19 Jennifer Hillier, **THINGS WE DO IN THE DARK**
- 26 Megan Miranda, **THE LAST TO VANISH**



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Subscription Rates

Sample Free (see website)
1 year digital (four issues) \$10.00

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