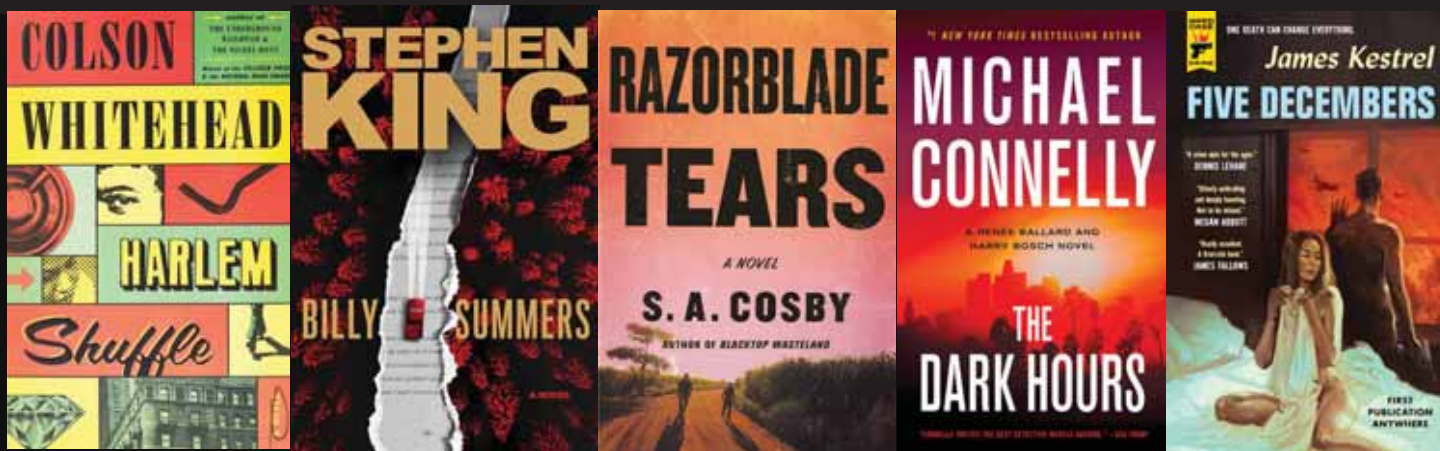


# *Deadly Pleasures* *Mystery Magazine*



## *The Best of the Best 2021* *Critics' Choice*



# The Quest to Find the Best of the Best for 2021

The primary purpose of *Deadly Pleasures Mystery Magazine* is to find the best mysteries, crime novels and thrillers of the year and to make you aware of them. There are so many books in the genre published each year that we all need help sifting the wheat from the chaff. That's what we do for you each year.

The **first step** in the process starts with compiling the list we call **The DP List** which we publish in each issue as it grows throughout a given year. You will also find a link to that list called "Year's Best" on the homepage of our website (which is updated between issues). We rely on starred reviews in the four principal library journals (Publishers Weekly, Kirkus, BookList and Library Journals) as the beginning point for The DP List. To get on The DP List, a novel must have garnered at least one starred review. If it only gets one starred review it has to also get a very favorable review in *Deadly Pleasures Mystery Magazine* to get on the list. We are adding another criterion this year: a mention on the amazon.com Best Mysteries of the Month lists (Both Larry Gandle and I have high confidence in the amazon monthly lists.) Every once in a while there is an exceptional novel that was missed by the library journals and which is deemed worthy to be put on the list. These usually are novels published abroad (Canada, Australia and the U.K.) that have not yet been published in the U.S. It always takes awhile at the beginning of the year to get many novels on The DP List, but as the year goes on, it fills out nicely. Through diligent research, I was able to come up with 29 novels for the 2022 DP

List (see page 32 herein). The DP List is a good indicator of some of the titles that will eventually appear on year-end "Best" lists. In 2021, 17 of the top-rated 21 crime novels appeared on The DP List. (see page 17 herein for top-rated 2021 mysteries) That's 81 per cent. My goal for 2022 is to be near 90 %.

The **second step** in the process is the reading and reviewing by our staff of reviewers, who read across a wide range of mysteries and thrillers. We are able to determine some of the best of the year by seeing which books our reviewers liked the most, but we always miss some. It's impossible for our staff to read everything. That's why we need the third step

The **third step** in the process is one that Larry Gandle and I take on (with help from J. Kingston Pierce of The Rap Sheet website). It begins in November and continues through to the end of the year. It is a compiling of all of the "Best of the Year" lists that are published during that period of time. Then I create a list of every book from every "Best" list and indicate which list or lists every book appeared on. From that list I develop a report of how many mentions a title may have and a list of the most mentioned titles on the "Best" lists. That report I call The Best of the Best. (Found on page 17 herein).

**Fourth Step.** I then use The DP List, DP reviewers' reviews which culminate in their end-of-year "Best" lists, and the Year-End report of The Best of the Best to come up with a preliminary Barry Award Nominations list with four categories (Best Novel, Best First

Novel, Best Paperback Original and Best Thriller). I ask for input (suggestions for additions and deletions to the preliminary list) from the Barry Award committee members. Then we each vote for our 6 top choices. This results in The Barry Award Nominations, which represent *Deadly Pleasures'* Best of the Best List.

In 2020 I found 50 "Best" lists. In 2021, I discovered 85 "Best" lists. Some lists are better than others. We have no way of knowing how widely read are the creators of most of these lists, but for our purposes I have given equal weight to each list.

One problem that did crop up in getting an accurate "mentions" count was when a title wasn't published in the U.S. and the U.K. in the same year. **WE BEGIN AT THE END** by Chris Whitaker was a 2020 title in the U.K. and a 2021 published novel in the U.S. The opposite was true for **WINTER COUNTS** by David Heska Wanbli Weiden. It was published in the U.S. in 2020 and in the U.K. in 2021. These two novels appeared on "Best" lists in both 2020 and 2021, which throws the numbers of mentions off a little. This will be an ongoing problem with a few titles each year.

I just wanted you all to be aware of the time and effort that goes into the Barry Awards nominations and providing you with educated choices for your reading pleasure. It isn't an off-the-cuff activity, but a year-long (very exhilarating) process.



# Experts' Lists

## Best Mysteries of 2021

### Deadly Pleasures Staff

#### Ali Karim's Best

THE PASSENGER, Ulrich Boschwitz  
 WHEN GHOSTS COME HOME,  
 Wiley Cash  
 THE DEVIL'S ADVOCATE,  
 Steve Cavanagh  
 THE QUIET PEOPLE, Paul Cleve  
 THE DARK HOURS, Michael Connelly  
 THE NAMELESS ONES, John Connolly  
 RAZORBLADE TEARS, S. A. Cosby  
 THE LAST THING YOU BURN,  
 Will Dean  
 PROOF OF LIFE, R. J. Ellory  
 ISLAND REICH, Jack Grimwood  
 THE SURVIVORS, Jane Harper  
 SLOUGH HOUSE, Mick Herron  
 THE NIGHT SHE DISAPPEARED,  
 Lisa Jewell  
 BILLY SUMMERS, Stephen King  
 NOT A HAPPY FAMILY, Shari Lapena  
 I KNOW WHAT I SAW by  
 Imran Mahmood  
 THE NIGHT GATE, Peter May  
 1979 by Val McDermid  
 THE LAST GUESTS, J. P. Pomare  
 THE DARK REMAINS, Ian Rankin &  
 William McIlvanney

#### Donus Roberts' Best

RAZORBLADE TEARS, S. A. Cosby  
 FIVE DECEMBERS, James Kestrel  
 THE DARK HOURS,  
 Michael Connelly  
 WE BEGIN AT THE END,  
 Chris Whitaker  
 THE DEVIL'S ADVOCATE,  
 Steve Cavanagh  
 THE SURVIVORS, Jane Harper

#### Mike Ripley's Best

RAZORBLADE TEARS, S. A. Cosby  
 GIRL A, Abigail Dean  
 GARDEN OF ANGELS, David Hewson

THE APRIL DEAD, Alan Parks  
 THE TRAWLERMAN, William Shaw  
 DARK REMAINS, Ian Rankin &  
 William McIlvanney  
 THE KILLING HILLS, Chris Offutt  
 TURF WARS, Olivier Norek

#### Best Thrillers

TRIPLE CROSS, Tom Bradby  
 HOW TO BETRAY YOUR COUN-  
 TRY, James Wolff  
 THE MERCENARY, Paul Vidich  
 THE COVER WIFE, Dan Fesperman  
 RED TRAITOR, Owen Matthews  
 JUDAS 62, Charles Cumming

#### Best Re-issue of the Year

THE PASSENGER, Ulrich Alexander  
 Boschwitz

#### Jeff Pople's Best

##### Best Crime Novel

FIVE DECEMBERS, James Kestrel  
 THE DARK REMAINS, William  
 McIlvanney/Ian Rankin  
 THE DARK HOURS,  
 Michael Connelly  
 RAZORBLADE TEARS, S A Cosby  
 THE HOUSEMATE, Sarah Bailey  
 THE KILLING KIND, Jane Casey  
 THE LONG GAME, Simon Rowell  
 WHEN YOU ARE MINE,  
 Michael Robotham

##### Best Thriller

SLOUGH HOUSE, Mick Herron  
 ISLAND REICH, Jack Grimwood  
 DEAD BY DAWN, Paul Doiron  
 THE NAMELESS ONES,,  
 John Connolly  
 CROCODILE TEARS, Alan Carter  
 BLOOD TRAIL, Tony Park  
 THE OLD ENEMY, Henry Porter

##### Best Debut

STEEL FEAR, Brandon Webb  
 and John David Mann  
 FALLING, T J Newman  
 SHIVER, Allie Reynolds  
 CUTTER'S END, Margaret Hickey  
 STILL, Matt Nable

GIRL, 11, Amy Suiter Clarke

#### Larry Gandle's Best

RAZORBLADE TEARS, S.A. Cosby  
 FIVE DECEMBERS, James Kestrel  
 APRIL IN SPAIN, John Banville  
 WE BEGIN AT THE END,  
 Chris Whitaker  
 THE UNWILLING, John Hart  
 THE DARK HOURS, Michael Connelly  
 BILLY SUMMERS, Stephen King  
 HARLEM SHUFFLE,  
 Colson Whitehead  
 WHO THEY WAS, Gabriel Krauze

#### Kristopher Zgorski's Best

RAZORBLADE TEARS, S. A. Cosby  
 1979, Val McDermid  
 BATH HAUS, P. J. Vernon  
 THE COMMANDMENTS,  
 Óskar Guðmundsson  
 DEATH AT GREENWAY,  
 Lori Rader Day  
 GONE FOR GOOD,  
 Joanna Schaffhausen  
 THE LAST THING TO BURN,  
 Will Dean  
 THE POSTSCRIPT MURDERS,  
 Elly Griffiths  
 THE SAVAGE KIND, John Copenhaver  
 THE TURNOUT, Megan Abbott  
 THE ANATOMY OF DESIRE,  
 L. R. Dorn  
 ARSENIC AND ADOBO,  
 Mia P. Manansala  
 WALKING THROUGH NEEDLES,  
 Heather Levy  
 THE PROJECT, Courtney Summers  
 THE LAST HOUSE ON NEEDLESS  
 STREET, Catriona Ward

#### L. J. Roberts' Best

DARK SKY, C.J. Box  
 THE DARKEST EVENING,  
 Ann Cleeves  
 STATE OF TERROR, Hillary Clinton



and Louise Penny  
DEAD GROUND, M.W. Craven  
THE STOLEN HOURS, Allen Eskens  
THE CUSTOM HOUSE MURDERS,  
Ashley Gardner  
TRANSIENT DREAMS, Donna Leon  
BLACK CORAL, Andrew Mayne  
TO THE DARK, Chris Nickson  
FINAL OUT, Sheldon Siegel

### **“Mystery “ Mike Bursaw’s Best**

#### **Best Novel**

RAZORBLADE TEARS, S. A. Cosby  
FIVE DECEMBERS, James Kestrel  
THE DARK HOURS, Michael Connelly  
THE DEVIL’S ADVOCATE,

Steve Cavanagh

LAST REDEMPTION, Matt Coyle  
LIGHTNING STRIKES,

William Kent Krueger

#### **Best First Novel**

STEEL FEAR, Webb & Mann  
SLEEPING BEAR, Connor Sullivan

#### **Best Paperback Original**

BULLET PROOF, Mark Dawson  
NEVER LET ME DOWN AGAIN,  
Mark Dawson

#### **Best Thriller**

SAVAGE ROAD, Chris Hauty  
THE ISLAND, Ben Coes  
DEAD BY DAWN, Paul Doiron  
HOUSE STANDOFF, Mike Lawson  
BLACK ICE, Brad Thor

### **Mike Dillman’s Best**

#### **Best Novel**

RAZORBLADE TEARS, S. A. Cosby  
FIVE DECEMBERS, James Kestrel  
EVERY VOW YOU BREAK,

Peter Swanson

MURDER AT WEDGEFIELD  
MANOR, Erica Ruth Neubauer  
THE RULE, David Jackson (UK)  
THE DEVIL’S ADVOCATE,

Steve Cavanagh (UK)

LAST REDEMPTION, Matt Coyle  
A DEADLY TWIST, Jeffrey Siger

#### **Best Thriller**

THE DEVIL’S HAND, Jack Carr  
DEAD BY DAWN, Paul Doiron  
THE ISLAND, Ben Coes  
HOUSE STANDOFF, Mike Lawson  
THE LEFT-HANDED TWIN,  
Thomas Perry

#### **Best First Novel**

STEEL FEAR, Webb & Mann  
SLEEPING BEAR, Connor Sullivan

#### **Best Paperback Original**

SEARCH FOR HER, Rick Mofina

### **Steele Curry’ Best**

#### **Best Novel**

RAZORBLADE TEARS, S. A. Cosby  
FIVE DECEMBERS, James Kestrel  
THE DARK HOURS, Michael Connelly  
BILLY SUMMERS, Stephen King

THE NIGHT GATE, Peter May

PROOF OF LIFE, R. J. Ellory

BLOOD GROVE, Walter Mosley

DEAD OF WINTER,

Stephen Mack Jones

THE CONSTANT MAN, Peter Stenier

A DEADLY TWIST, Jeffrey Siger

LAST FLIGHT TO STALINGRAD,

Graham Hurley

KYIV, Graham Hurley

THE DEVIL’S ALTERNATIVE,

Steve Cavanagh

THE MERCENARY, Paul Vidich

#### **Best First Novel**

DAMASCUS STATION,

David McCloskey

STEEL FEAR, Brandon Webb &

John David Mann

NORTHERN HEIST, Richard O’Rawe

#### **Best Paperback Original**

THE GOOD TURN, Dervla McTiernan

THE INHERITANCE,

Gabriel Bergmoser

WHERE ANGELS REST, Peter Ritchie

THE RABBIT HOLE, Mike Nicol

SIROCCO, Dana Haynes

FORTUNE, Ian Hamilton

#### **Best Thriller**

SLOUGH HOUSE, Mick Herron

THE OLD ENEMY, Henry Porter

ISLAND REICH, Jack Grimwood

WHEN YOU ARE MINE,

Michael Robotham

THE NAMELESS ONES, John Connolly

### **Ted Hertel’ Best**

RAZORBLADE TEARS, S.A. Cosby

THE SURVIVORS, Jane Harper

LIGHTNING STRIKE,

William Kent Krueger

ROCK PAPER SCISSORS, Alice Feeney

WEDDING STATION, David Downing

PALACE OF THE DROWNED,

Christine Mangan

THIEF OF SOULS, Brian Klingborg  
FRIEND OF THE DEVIL, Ed Brubaker

and Sean Phillips

CLARK AND DIVISION,

Naomi Hirahara

DEATH AT GREENWAY,

Lori Rader-Day

DIAMOND AND THE EYE,

Peter Lovesey

SLEEPLESS, Romy Hausmann

ROAD OF BONES, James R. Benn

WAR WOMEN, Martin Limon

### **George Easter’s Best**

#### **Best Novel**

FIVE DECEMBERS, James Kestrel  
RAZORBLADE TEARS, S. A. Cosby  
BILLY SUMMERS, Stephen King  
WE BEGIN AT THE END,

Chris Whitaker

THE DARK HOURS, Michael Connelly

DEAD GROUND, M. W. Craven

THE TRAWLERMAN, William Shaw

THE HOUSEMATE, Sarah Bailey

#### **Best First Novel**

STEEL FEAR, Brandon Webb &  
John David Mann

SUBURBAN DICKS, Fabian Nicieza

#### **Best Paperback Original**

THE HUNTED, Gabriel Bergmoser  
BLACK CORAL, Andrew Mayne  
THE GOOD TURN, Dervla McTiernan  
HOW TO KIDNAP THE RICH,

Rahul Raina

BOUND, Vanda Symon

#### **Best Thriller**

SLOUGH HOUSE, Mick Herron

DEAD BY DAWN, Paul Doiron

THE ISLAND, Ben Coes

SAVAGE ROAD, Chris Hauty

ISLAND REICH, Jack Grimwood

### **Other Experts**

#### **Oline Cogdill**

Nationally Syndicated Reviewer

#### **Best Novels**

THE TURNOUT, Megan Abbott  
THE COLLECTIVE, Alison Gaylin  
THE DARK HOURS, Michael Connelly  
THESE TOXIC THINGS,

Rachel Howzell Hall  
 RAZORBLADE TEARS, S. A. Cosby  
 1979, Val McDermid  
 DREAM GIRL, Laura Lippman  
 THE PERFUME THIEF,  
 Timothy Schaffert  
 CLARK AND DIVISION,  
 Naomi Hirahara  
 LIGHTNING STRIKE,  
 William Kent Krueger  
 THE SURVIVORS, Jane Harper  
 THESE SILENT WOODS,  
 Kimi Cunningham Grant  
 PALACE OF THE DROWNED,  
 Christine Mangan  
 WHAT'S DONE IN DARKNESS,  
 Laura McHugh  
 THE LOST VILLAGE, Camilla Sten  
 HAIRPIN BRIDGE, Taylor Adams  
 VELVET WAS THE NIGHT,  
 Sylvia Moreno-Garcia  
 WHEN GHOSTS COME HOME,  
 Wiley Cash  
 THE NEIGHBOR'S SECRET,  
 L. Alison Heller  
 PICKARD COUNTY ATLAS,  
 Chris Harding Thornton  
**Best Debuts**  
 WHO IS MAUDE DIXON?,  
 Alexandra Andrews  
 GIRL A, Abigail Dean  
 THE OTHER BLACK GIRL,  
 Zakiya Dalila Harris  
 MY SWEET GIRL, Amanda Jayatissa  
 ARSENIC AND ADOBO,  
 Mia P. Manansala  
 MANGO, MAMBO, AND MURDER,  
 Raquel V. Reyes  
 ALL HER SECRETS, Wanda M. Morris

## **Sarah Weinman**

**Mystery Reviewer**

**The New York Times**

RAZORBLADE TEARS, S. A. Cosby  
 DEAD DEAD GIRLS, Nekesa Afia  
 WHO IS MAUDE DIXON?,  
 Alexandra Andrews  
 FIVE DECEMBERS, James Kestrel  
 CLARK AND DIVISION,  
 Naomi Hirahara  
 HOW TO FIND YOUR WAY IN THE  
 DARK, Derek B. Miller  
 VELVET IS THE NIGHT,  
 Sylvia Moreno-Garcia  
 THE COMFORT OF MONSTERS,

Willa C. Richards  
 MURDER UNDER HER SKIN,  
 Stephen Spotswood  
 THE MAN WHO DIED TWICE,  
 Richard Osman  
 U UP?, Catie Disabato

## **Sarah Lyall**

**The New York Times**

**Best Thrillers**

56 DAYS, Catherine Ryan Howard  
 NEVER SAW ME COMING,  
 Vera Kurian  
 THE SECRET TALKER, Geling Yan  
 THE PLOT, Jean Hanff Korelitz  
 THE TEMPLE HOUSE VANISHING,  
 Rachel Donohue  
 A LINE TO KILL, Anthony Horowitz  
 THE DROWNING KIND,  
 Jennifer McMahon  
 I AM NOT WHO YOU THINK I AM,  
 Eric Rickstad  
 NORTHERN SPY, Flynn Berry  
 THE ANOMALY, Herve' Le Tellier

## **Tom Nolan**

**Wall Street Journal**

**Best Mystery Fiction of 2021**

THE DARK HOURS, Michael Connelly  
 FIND YOU FIRST, Linwood Barclay  
 THE JUDGE'S LIST, John Grisham  
 THE MAN WHO DIED TWICE,  
 Richard Osman  
 MOTHER MAY I, Joshilyn Jackson  
 THE PLOT, Jean Hanff Korelitz  
 RIZZIO, Denise Mina  
 SMOKE, Joe Ide  
 THE TURNOUT, Megan Abbott  
 THE VANISHING POINT,  
 Elizabeth Brundage

## **Maxim Jakubowski**

**Crime Fiction Reviewer**

**Crime Time**

WINTER COUNTS, David Heska Wan-  
 bli Weiden – 2020 title in U.S.  
 ONE NIGHT, NEW YORK,  
 Lara Thompson  
 RAZORBLADE TEARS, S. A. Cosby  
 THE GARDEN OF ANGELS,  
 David Hewson  
 CASE STUDY, Graeme Macrae Burnet  
 THE HOUSE UPTOWN,  
 Melissa Ginsburg  
 THE KILLING HILLS, Chris Offutt

SAINT X, Alexis Schahtkin  
 (2020 title in U.S.)  
 HOW TO KIDNAP THE RICH,  
 Rahul Raina  
 OXYGEN, Sasha Mafini

## **Ayo Onatade**

**Shots Magazine**



RAZORBACK TEARS,  
 S. A. Cosby  
 SUNSET SWING, Ray Celestin  
 THE LAST THING TO BURN,  
 Will Dean  
 BULLET TRAIN, Kotaro Isaka  
 TRUE CRIME STORY, Joseph Knox  
 DREAM GIRL, Laura Lippman  
 EDGE OF THE GRAVE, R  
 obbie Morrison  
 BLACK DROP, Leonora Nattrass  
 TURF WARS, Olivier Norek  
 WINTER COUNTS,  
 David Heska Wanbli Weiden  
 Worthy Mentions  
 THE NAMELESS ONES, John Connolly  
 DAUGHTER OF NIGHT,  
 Laura Shepherd-Robinson  
 THE OXFORD BROTHERHOOD,  
 Guillermo Martinez  
 THE RABBIT FACTOR,  
 Antti Tuomainen  
 THE DARK HOURS, Michael Connelly  
 THE ROYAL SECRET, Andrew Taylor  
 DOLPHIN JUNCTION, Mick Herron  
 RIZZIO, Denise Mina  
 HARLEM SHUFFLE,  
 Colson Whitehead

## **Laura Wilson**

**Crime Fiction Reviewer**

### **The Guardian**

SILVERVIEW, John le Carre'  
 GIRL A, Abigail Dean  
 THE FIRST DAY OF SPRING,  
 Nancy Tucker  
 RICCARDINO, Andrea Camilleri  
 WINTER COUNTS, David Heska Wan-  
 bli Weiden – 2020 title in U.S.  
 Also Notable  
 RAZORBLADE TEARS, S. A. Cosby  
 TRUE CRIME STORY, Joseph Knox  
 DAUGHTER OF NIGHT,  
 Laura Shepherd-Robinson  
 HOW TO KIDNAP THE RICH,  
 Rahul Raina  
 BULLET TRAIN, Kotaro Isaka

### **Barry Forshaw**

**Financial Times**

#### **Best Crime Fiction of 2021**

SUNSET SWING, Ray Celestin  
 RAZORBLADE TEARS, S. A. Cosby  
 WINTER COUNTS, David Heska Wan-  
 bli Weiden – 2020 title in U.S.  
 GIRL A, Abigail Dean  
 THE SURVIVORS, Jane Harper  
 Also Notable  
 WHERE GOD DOES NOT WALK,  
 Luke McCallin  
 TRUE CRIME STORY, Joseph Knox  
 THE DARK REMAINS,  
 William McIlvanney & Ian Rankin  
 DAUGHTER OF NIGHT,  
 Laura Shepherd-Robinson  
 THE DEVIL AND THE DEEP BLUE  
 SEA, Stuart Turton

### **Jake Kerridge**

**Crime Fiction Reviewer**

**The Daily Telegraph**

THE TURNOUT, Megan Abbott  
 DEAD DEAD GIRLS, Nekesa Afia  
 CASE STUDY, Graeme Macrae Burnet  
 THE DARK REMAINS,  
 William McIlvanney & Ian Rankin  
 DOLPHIN JUNCTION, Mick Herron  
 THE RABBIT FACTOR,  
 Antti Tuomainen  
 FOLLOW HER HOME, Steph Cha  
 (2013 title in U.S.)  
 THE OXFORD BROTHERHOOD,  
 Guillermo Martinez  
 RAZORBLADE TEARS, S. A. Cosby  
 TALL BONES, Anna Bailey

### **Victoria Selman**

**Crime Fiction Reviewer**

**The Independent and Crime Time FM**

GIRL A, Abigail Dean  
 VINE STREET, Dominic Nolan  
 THE ART OF DEATH, David Fennell  
 THE NIGHT HAWKS, Elly Griffiths  
 THE BERESFORD, Will Carver  
 FOR YOUR OWN GOOD,  
 Samantha Downing  
 FIVE MINDS, Guy Mornpuss  
 RAZORBLADE TEARS, S. A. Cosby  
 56 DAYS, Catherine Ryan Howard  
 PEOPLE LIKE HER,  
 Ellery Lloyd

### **Paul Burke**

**Crime Time**

RAZORBLADE TEARS, S. A. Cosby  
 THE KILLING HILLS, Chris Offutt  
 TRUE CRIME STORY, Joseph Knox  
 VINE STREET, Dominic Nolan  
 DREAM GIRL, Laura Lippman  
 TALL BONES, Anna Bailey  
 BRAZILIAN PSYCHO, Joe Thomas  
 THE KHAN, Saima Mir  
 HOTEL CARTAGENA,  
 Simone Buchholz  
 A FINE MADNESS, Alan Judd

### **Adam LeBoer**

**Financial Times**

#### **Best Thrillers 2021**

TO THE LAKE, YanaVagner  
 THE WHISTLEBLOWER,  
 Robert Peston  
 RED TRAITOR, Owen Matthews  
 THE SABOTEUR, Simon Conway  
 THE PASSENGER, Ulrich Alexander  
 Boschwitz

### **Mark Sanderson**

**and Joan Smith**

**The Times (U.K.)**

#### **16 Best Crime Books of 2021**

RABBIT HOLE, Mark Billingham  
 THE APPEAL, Janice Hallett  
 THE STONING, Peter Papathanasiou  
 THE WAITER, Ajay Chowdhury  
 VINE STREET, Dominic Nolan  
 FATAL ISLES, Maria Adolfsson  
 HOUSE WITH NO DOORS, Jeff Noon  
 THE GIRL WHO DIED,  
 Ragnar Jonasson

THE LAST SNOW, Stina Jackson

THE DARK, Emma Haughton

BLOOD GROVE, Walter Mosley

THE APRIL DEAD, Alan Parks

THE KHAN, Saima Mir

CONSOLATION, Garry Disher

A NARROW DOOR, Joanne Harris

THE DARK REMAINS, Ian Rankin &

William McIlvanney

### **John Dugdale and James Owen**

**The Times (U.K.)**

#### **14 Best Thrillers of 2021**

BILLY SUMMERS, Stephen King  
 SLOUGH HOUSE, Mick Herron  
 EXIT, Belinda Bauer  
 THE LAST HOUSE ON NEEDLESS  
 STREET, Catriona Ward  
 GIRL A, Abigail Dean  
 A MAN NAMED DOLL,  
 Jonathan Ames  
 THE OLD ENEMY, Henry Porter  
 THE HUNT AND THE KILL,  
 Holly Watt  
 WIDOWLAND, C. J. Carey  
 STATE OF TERROR, Hillary R. Clinton  
 & Louise Penny  
 JUDAS 62, Charles Cumming  
 THE APOLLO MURDERS,  
 Chris Hadfield  
 THE SUNSET SWING, Ray Celestin  
 THE KILLING HILLS, Chris Offutt

### **Declan Burke**

**The Irish Times**

SLOUGH HOUSE, Mick Herron  
 THE FAVOUR, Sarah Vaughan  
 WATCH HER FALL, Erin Kelly  
 UNTRACEABLE, Sergei Lebedev  
 THE CUT, Christopher Brookmyre  
 THE LAST TAXI DRIVER, Lee Durkee  
 THE NAMELESS ONES, John Connolly  
 THE GOOD NEIGHBOURS,  
 Sarah Langan  
 THE THERAPIST, Helene Flood  
 A NARROW DOOR, Joanne Harris  
 THE KILLING HILLS, Chris Offutt

### **Declan Hughes**

**The Irish Times**

#### **Best Crime Fiction 2021**

DREAM GIRL, Laura Lippman  
 THE SURVIVORS, Jane Harper



**Declan Hughes**

HIDDEN LIES, Rachel Ryan  
 BLOOD TIES, Brian McGilloway  
 A MAN NAMED DOLL,  
 Jonathan Ames  
 VERA KELLY IS NOT A MYSTERY,  
 Rosalie Knecht  
 PALACE OF THE DROWNED,  
 Christine Mangan  
 THE PLOT, Jean Hanff Koretz  
 A SLOW FIRE BURNING,  
 Paula Hawkins  
 56 DAYS, Catherine Ryan Howard

### **Natasha Cooper**

#### **Literary Review**

#### **Eight Crime Novels of 2021**

PHOSPHATE ROCKS, Fiona Erskine  
 EDGE OF THE GRAVE,  
 Robbie Morrison  
 BULLET TRAIN, Kotaro Isaka  
 THE WAITER, Ajay Chowdhury  
 THE HUNT AND THE KILL,  
 Holly Watt  
 BLACK DROP, Leonora Nattrass  
 THE RUSSIAN DOLL, Marina Palmer  
 THE FIRST DAY OF SPRINGS,  
 Nancy Tucker

### **Steve Reads**

#### **(Steve Donoghue)**

Best Books of 2021: Mystery  
[stevedonoghue.com](http://stevedonoghue.com)

THE MITFORD TRIAL,  
 Jessica Fellowes  
 THE RETURN OF THE PHARAOH,  
 Nicholas Meyer  
 WHAT THE DEVIL KNOWS,  
 C. S. Harris  
 THE HOUSE OF ASHES, Stuart Neville  
 BONE RATTLE, Marc Cameron  
 ROAD OF BONES, James R. Benn  
 THE HERON'S CRY, Ann Cleeves  
 THE BROKEN SPINE,  
 Dorothy St. James  
 THE DARK HEART OF FLORENCE,  
 Tasha Alexander  
 THE BOMBAY PRINCE, Sujata Massey

### **Ryan Steck**

#### **The Real Book Spy**

#### **20 of the Best Thrillers 2021**

BLACK ICE, Brad Thor  
 THE CELLIST, Daniel Silva  
 ENEMY AT THE GATES, Kyle Mills  
 THE DEVIL'S HAND, Jack Carr  
 FALLING, T. J. Newman  
 RAZORBLADE TEARS, S.A. Cosby  
 FIND ME, Alafair Burke  
 AMERICAN TRAITOR, Brad Taylor  
 RELENTLESS, Mark Greaney  
 DARK INTERCEPT,  
 Andrews & Wilson  
 DARK SKY, C. J. Box  
 THE HIKE, Landon Beach  
 THE BEIRUT PROTOCOL,  
 Joel C. Rosenberg  
 LIGHTNING STRIKE,  
 William Kent Krueger  
 Tom Clancy TARGET ACQUIRED,  
 Don Bentley  
 PRODIGAL SON, Gregg Hurwitz  
 SUBVERSIVE ADDICTION,  
 Christopher Rosow  
 SLEEPING BEAR, Connor Sullivan  
 THE ISLAND, Ben Coes  
 THE NIGHT SHE DISAPPEARED,  
 Lisa Jewell  
 SAVAGE ROAD, Chris Hauty  
 THE BREAKER, Nick Petrie  
 THE SPY DEVILS, Joe Goldberg  
 SMOKE, Joe Ide  
 BEFORE SHE DISAPPEARED,  
 Lisa Gardner

### **Carole E. Barrowman**

Milwaukee Journal Sentinel  
 Best Mystery 2021

RAZORBLADE TEARS, S. A. Cosby  
 VELVET WAS THE NIGHT,  
 Silvia Moreno-Garcia  
 CLARK AND DIVISION,  
 Naomi Hirahara  
 MRS. MARCH, Virginia Feito  
 WHEN GHOSTS COME HOME,  
 Wiley Cash  
 THE JIGSAW MAN, Nadine Matheson  
 THE LAST HOUSE ON NEEDLESS  
 STREET, Catriona Ward  
 THE HOLLYWOOD SPY,  
 Susan Elia MacNeal  
 LIGHTNING STRIKE,  
 William Kent Krueger  
 THE BURNING GIRLS, C. J. Tudor

### **The Rap Sheet**

#### **Contributor Lists**

#### **Best Crime Fiction 2021**

#### **J. Kingston Pierce**

#### **Editor of The Rap Sheet**

WE BEGIN AT THE END,  
 Chris Whitaker  
 BLACKOUT, Simon Scarrow  
 DAUGHTERS OF NIGHT,  
 Laura Shepherd-Robinson  
 THE DARK REMAINS, William  
 McIlvanney & Ian Rankin  
 THE GOOD TURN, Dervla McTiernan  
 THE CASE OF THE MURDEROUS  
 DR. CREAM: THE HUNT FOR A  
 VICTORIAN ERA SERIAL KILLER,  
 Dean Jacob  
 Other Favorites  
 SILVERVIEW, John le Carre'  
 THE HOUSE ON VESPER SANDS,  
 Paraic O'Donnell  
 WIDOWLAND, C. J. Carey  
 RAZORBLADE TEARS, S. A. Cosby  
 HOW TO FIND YOU WAY IN THE  
 DARK, Derek B. Miller  
 THE SHADOWS OF MEN,  
 Abir Mukherjee

### **Fraser Massey**

#### **(The Rap Sheet)**

BILLY SUMMERS, Stephen King  
 LIGHTSEEKERS, Femi Kayode  
 ONCE UPON A TIME IN HOLLY-  
 WOOD, Quentin Tarantino  
 SLOUGH HOUSE, Mick Herron  
 UNDER COLOR OF LAW,  
 Aaron Philip Clark

### Other Favorites

NORTHERN SPY, Flynn Berry  
FIVE DECEMBERS, James Kestrel  
1979, Val McDermid  
TRUE CRIME STORY, Joseph Knox  
NEVER SAW ME COMING,  
Vera Kurian

### Kevin Burton Smith

(The Rap Sheet)  
A MAN NAMED DOLL,  
Jonathan Ames  
AN ELDERLY LADY MUST NOT BE  
CROSSED, Helene Tursten  
FRIEND OF THE DEVIL, Ed Brubaker  
& Sean Phillips  
BILLY SUMMERS, Stephen King  
EVERY CITY IS EVERY OTHER  
CITY, John McFetridge  
Other Favorites  
BLOOD GROVE, Walter Mosley  
CLARK AND DIVISION,  
Naomi Hirahara  
HELL AND GONE, Sam Wiebe  
DOLPHIN JUNCTION, Mick Herron  
SO FAR AND GOOD, John Staley  
SLEEP WELL, MY LADY,  
Kwei Quartey

### Jim Napier

(The Rap Sheet)  
FIND YOU FIRST, Linwood Barclay  
FIVE DECEMBERS, James Kestrel  
DIAMOND AND THE EYE,  
Peter Lovesey  
SLOUGH HOUSE, Mick Herron  
SEVEN DOWN, David Whitton

### Jim Thomsen

(The Rap Sheet)  
ONCE UPON A TIME IN HOLLY-  
WOOD, Quentin Tarantino  
HOW TO FIND YOUR WAY IN THE  
DARK, Derek B. Miller  
THE NIGHT ALWAYS COMES,  
Willy Vlautin  
GETAWAY, Zoje Stage  
LOSER BABY, Jason Bovberg  
Other Favorites  
VELVET WAS THE NIGHT,  
Silvia Moreno-Garcia  
HARLEM SHUFFLE,  
Colson Whitehead  
FIVE DECEMBERS, James Kestrel

UNDONE VALLEY, William R. Soldan  
THE LOW DESERT, Tod Goldberg

### Steven Nester

(The Rap Sheet)  
SMOKE, Joe Ide  
RAZORBLADE TEARS, S. A. Cosby  
FELONIOUS MONK,  
William Kotzwick  
DOUBLE SOLITAIRE, Craig Nova  
Other Favorites  
PICKARD COUNTY ATLAS,  
Chris Harding Thornton  
A BLIZZARD OF POLAR BEARS,  
Alice Henderson  
BLOOD GROVE, Walter Mosley  
CITY ON THE EDGE, David Swinson  
RELENTLESS, Mark Greaney  
(note: Ali Karim's list was posted under  
DP Contributors list)

### Kellye Garrett

**Mystery Maven**  
**6 Favorites of 2021**  
MY SWEET GIRL, Amanda Jayatissa  
THE COLLECTIVE, Alison Gaylin  
HER NAME IS KNIGHT,  
Yasmin Angoe  
DREAM GIRL, Laura Lippman  
ARYA WINTERS AND THE TIRA-  
MISU OF DEATH, Amita Murray

### Abby Endler

**Crime By The Book**  
**10 Best Crime Books of 2021**  
(crimebythebook.com)  
Best Book of 2021: **56 DAYS**,  
Catherine Ryan Howard  
Best Debut Thriller: **MY SWEET**  
**GIRL**, Amanda Jayatissa  
Best Plot Twist: **SURVIVE THE**  
**NIGHT**, Riley Sager  
Best Setting: **THE SANATORIUM**,  
Sarah Pearse  
Best Dark Comedy: **FOR YOUR OWN**  
**GOOD**, Samantha Downing  
Best "Chiller": **THE LOST VILLAGE**,  
Camilla Sten  
Best Action Thriller: **RAZORBLADE**  
**TEARS**, S.A. Cosby  
Best Nordic Noir Series Installment:  
**THE BUTTERFLY HOUSE**,  
Katrine Engberg  
Best "Popcorn Read": **SHIVER**,

### Allie Reynolds

Best Short Story Collection:  
**THE JEALOUSY MAN**, Jo Nesbø

### Lesa's Favorites -- 2021

(lesasbookcritiques.com)  
LIGHTNING STRIKE,  
William Kent Krueger  
THE HIDING PLACE, Paula Munier  
THE KILLING HILLS, Chris Offutt  
TRICKY, Josh Stallings  
RAZORBLADE TEARS, S. A. Cosby

### Booklist Queen

**Best of 2021**  
(www.booklistqueen.com)  
**Best Psychological Thrillers**  
THE DISAPPEARING ACT,  
Catherine Steadman – Top Pick  
WE WERE NEVER THERE,  
Andrea Bartz  
THE WOMAN OUTSIDE MY DOOR,  
Rachel Ryan  
SURVIVE THE NIGHT, Riley Sager  
ROCK PAPER SCISSORS, Alice Feeney  
**Best Domestic Thrillers**  
PEOPLE LIKE HER,  
Ellery Floyd – Top Pick  
MOTHER MAY I, Joshilyn Jackson  
NOT A HAPPY FAMILY, Shari Lapena  
APPLES NEVER FALL, Liane Moriarty  
THE GOOD SISTER, Sally Hepworth  
**Spooky Bestseller Thrillers**  
THE DROWNING KIND,  
Jennifer McMahon – Top Pick  
THE LOST VILLAGE, Camilla Sten

### Crime Thrillers

THE SURVIVORS,  
Jane Harper – Top Pick  
WHEN THE STARS GO DARK,  
Paula McLain  
THE LAST THING HE TOLD ME,  
Laura Dave  
BEFORE SHE DISAPPEARED,  
Lisa Gardner  
FALSE WITNESS, Karin Slaughter  
THE NIGHT SHE DISAPPEARED,  
Lisa Jewell  
A SLOW FIRE BURNING,  
Paula Hawkins

# Publications' Lists

## Best Mysteries of 2021

### The Washington Post's Best

RAZORBLADE TEARS, S. A. Cosby  
A LINE TO KILL, Anthony Horowitz  
THE LONELY MAN, Chris Power  
NORTHERN SPY, Flynn Berry  
SLEEP WELL MY LADY, Kwei Quartey  
THE PLOT, Jean Hanff Korelitz  
DREAM GIRL, Laura Lippman  
56 DAYS, Catherine Ryan Howard  
SILVERVIEW, John le Carre'  
CLARK AND DIVISION,  
Naomi Hirahara

### Kirkus' Best of 2021

NORTHERN SPY, Flynn Berry  
RAZORBLADE TEARS, S. A. Cosby  
INFINITE, Brian Freeman  
THE CORPSE FLOWER,  
Anne Mette Hancock  
THE OTHER BLACK GIRL,  
Zakiya Dalila Harris  
BILLY SUMMERS, Stephen King  
UNTRACEABLE, Sergei Lebedev  
THE MAN WHO DIED TWICE,  
Richard Osman  
UNTHINKABLE, Brad Parks  
A LONELY MAN, Chris Power  
FALSE WITNESS, Karin Slaughter  
LADY JOKER, VOLUME 1,  
Kaoru Takamura  
HARLEM SHUFFLE,  
Colson Whitehead

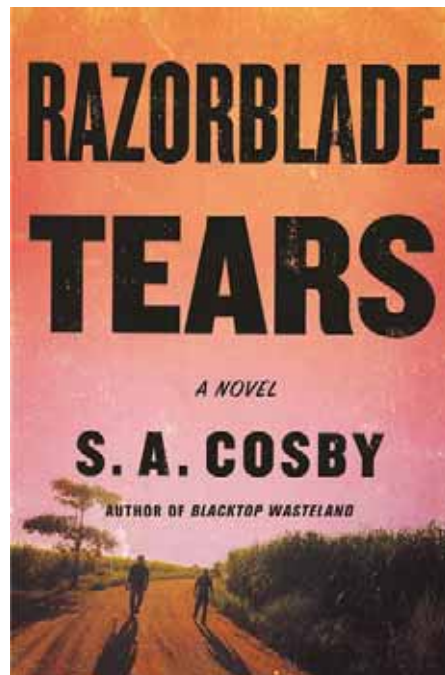
### Publishers Weekly's Best

THE ANATOMY OF DESIRE,  
L. R. Dorn  
THE ANOMALY, Herve' Le Tellier  
BLACK ICE, Carin Gerhardsen  
THE BLOODLESS BOY, Robert J. Lloyd  
FIVE DECEMBERS, James Kestrel  
MIDNIGHT WATER CITY,  
Chris McKinney  
THE PHOTOGRAPHER,  
Mary Dixie Carter  
THE PLOT, Jean Hanff Korelitz  
THE PUSH, Ashley Audrain

STEEL FEAR, Brandon Webb &  
John David Mann  
THESE TOXIC THINGS,  
Rachel Howzell Hall  
WHO IS MAUDE DIXON?,  
Alexandra Andrews

### Library Journal Best

Liz French and Lesa Holstine  
THE TURNOUT, Megan Abbott  
RAZORBLADE TEARS, S. A. Cosby  
CLARK AND DIVISION,  
Naomi Hirahara  
LIGHTNING STRIKE,  
William Kent Krueger  
DREAM GIRL, Laura Lippman  
VELVET WAS THE NIGHT,  
Sylvia Moreno-Garcia  
THE KILLING HILLS, Chris Offut  
MANGO, MAMBO, AND MURDER,  
Raquel V. Reyes  
TRICKY, Josh Stallings  
HARLEM SHUFFLE,  
Colson Whitehead



### The Globe and Mail

#### Best Thrillers 2021

APRIL IN SPAIN, John Banville  
DARK ROADS, Chevy Stevens  
EXIT, Belinda Bauer  
FALLING, T. J. Newman  
HARLEM SHUFFLE,  
Colson Whitehead  
SILVERVIEW, John le Carre'  
STATE OF TERROR, Hillary Clinton &  
Louise Penny  
SUFFERANCE, Thomas King  
THE OTHER BLACK GIRL,  
Zakiya Dalila Harris  
WE ARE WATCHING ELIZA BRIGHT,  
A. E. Osworth

### Time Magazine's

#### Must-Read Crime Fiction 2021

These seven crime fiction titles were  
included in Time Magazine's 100 Must-  
Read Books of 2021  
THE COMMITTED,  
Viet Thanh Nguyen  
HARLEM SHUFFLE,  
Colson Whitehead  
THE OTHER BLACK GIRL,  
Zakiya Dalila Harris  
RAZORBLADE TEARS, S. A. Cosby  
SILVERVIEW, John le Carre'  
WHO IS MAUDE DIXON?,  
Alexandra Andrews  
WHO THEY WAS, Gabriel Krauze

### Esquire's Best

These five crime/mystery/thriller novels  
were included in Esquire magazine's 50  
Best Books of 2021  
BILLY SUMMERS, Stephen King  
HARLEM SHUFFLE,  
Colson Whitehead  
FALLING, T. J. Newman  
THE OTHER BLACK GIRL,  
Zakiya Dalila Harris  
THE COMMITTED,  
Viet Thanh Nguyen

### Good Housekeeping Best

These seven mysteries were included in  
Good Housekeeping Magazine's 55 Best  
New Books of 2021  
THE PUSH, Ashley Audrain  
THE WIFE UPSTAIRS,  
Rachel Hawkins

GIRL A, Abigail Dean  
THE LOST APOTHECARY,  
Sarah Penner  
WHILE JUSTICE SLEEPS,  
Stacey Abrams  
THE TURNOUT, Megan Abbott  
HARLEM SHUFFLE,  
Colson Whitehead

### Marie Claire's Best

These ten mysteries were included in  
Marie Claire's 2021 Best Books  
THE PUSH, Ashley Audrain  
GIRL A, Abigail Dean  
WHEN THE STARS GO DARK,  
Paula McLain  
THE LAST THING HE TOLD ME,  
Laura Dave  
WHILE JUSTICE SLEEPS,  
Stacey Abrams  
THE OTHER BLACK GIRL,  
Zakiya Dalila Harris  
WE WERE NEVER HERE,  
Andrea Bartz  
A SLOW FIRE BURNING,  
Paula Hawkins  
THE NIGHT SHE DISAPPEARED,  
Lisa Jewell  
STATE OF TERROR, Hillary Clinton &  
Louise Penny

### Woman&Home Magazine

(www.womanandhome.com)

THE MAN WHO DIED TWICE,  
Richard Osman  
THE MARLOW MURDER CLUB,  
Robert Thorogood  
PEOPLE LIKE HER, Ellery Lloyd  
THE NIGHT SHE DISAPPEARED,  
Lisa Jewell  
ROCK PAPER SCISSORS, Alice Feeney  
THE HOLLOWS, Mark Edwards  
THAT NIGHT, Gillian McAllister  
WATCH HER FALL, Erin Kelly  
TALL BONES, Anna Bailey  
THE LAST HOUSE ON NEEDLESS  
STREET, Catriona Ward  
THE LAMPLIGHTERS, Emma Stonex  
EVERY VOW YOU BREAK,  
Peter Swanson  
THE WIFE UPSTAIRS,  
Rachel Hawkins  
WHO IS MAUD DIXON?,  
Alexandra Andrews

THE ECHO WIFE, Sarah Gailey  
THE COFFINMAKER'S GARDEN,  
Stuart MacBride  
THE LAST THING YOU BURN,  
Will Dean  
\*there were a few non-2021 titles that  
were deleted.

### Parade Magazine

(parade.com)

These 13 novels were among Parade's  
Best Books of 2021  
THE LAST THING HE TOLD ME,  
Laura Dave  
THE MAIDENS, Alex Michaelides  
THE PUSH, Ashley Audrain  
HARLEM SHUFFLE,  
Colson Whitehead  
THE ROSE CODE, Kate Quinn  
THE PLOT, Jean Hanff Korelitz  
THE LOST APOTHECARY,  
Sarah Penner  
THE MAN WHO DIED TWICE,  
Richard Osman  
ROCK PAPER SCISSORS, Alice Feeney  
WE BEGIN AT THE END,  
Chris Whitaker  
EVERY LAST FEAR, Alex Finlay  
THE OTHER BLACK GIRL,  
Zakiya Dalila Harris  
BILLY SUMMERS, Stephen King

New Zealand's

### LISTENER Magazine

Best Crime & Thriller 2021

BEFORE YOU KNEW MY NAME,  
Jacqueline Bublitz  
1979, Val McDermid  
DREAM GIRL, Laura Lippman  
EXIT, Belinda Bauer  
HARLEM SHUFFLE,  
Colson Whitehead  
THE LAST GUESTS, J. P. Pomare  
THE QUIET PEOPLE, Paul Cleve  
RAZORBLADE TEARS, S. A. Cosby  
SILVERVIEW, John le Carre  
THE STONING, Peter Papathanasiou  
TREASURE & DIRT, Chris Hammer  
WINTER COUNTS, David Heska Wan-  
bli Weiden – 2020 title in U.S.

### Suspense Magazine

(suspensemagazine.com)

Crimson Scribe

Best Suspense Novel of 2021

THE NINJA BETRAYED,  
Tori Eldridge  
**Cozy**  
ARSENIC AND ADOBO,  
Mia P. Manansala  
LITTLE BLACK BOOK, Kate Carlisle  
MURDER AT KEYHAVEN CASTLE,  
Clara McKenna  
STYLED FOR MURDER,  
Nancy J. Cohen  
**Debut**  
BLACKOUT, Marco Carocari  
FINDING TESSA,  
Jaime Lynn Hendricks  
SAVING GRACE, Debbie Babitt  
THE GUILTY HUSBAND,  
Stephanie DeCarolis  
**Romantic Suspense**  
A GOOD DAY FOR CHARDONNAY,  
Darynda Jones  
SAY GOODBYE, Karen Rose  
THE ARRANGEMENT,  
Kiersten Modglin  
THE UNFORGIVEN, Heather Graham  
**Historical**  
ABIGAIL OF VENICE, Leigh Russell  
THE LOST APOTHECARY,  
Sarah Penner  
THE VENICE SKETCHBOOK,  
Rhys Bowen  
THE WORLD PLAYED CHESS,  
Robert Dugoni

**Horror**

COME WITH ME, Ronald Malfi  
SURVIVE THE NIGHT, Riley Sager  
THE LAST HOUSE ON NEEDLESS  
STREET, Catriona Ward

CHASING THE BOOGEYMAN,  
Richard Chismar

**Suspense Thriller**

FINLAY DONOVAN IS KILLING IT,  
Elle Cosimano  
HER PERFECT LIFE,  
Hank Phillippi Ryan  
RAZORBLADE TEARS, S. A. Cosby  
THE DEVIL'S HAND, Jack Carr  
THE FAMILY TREE,  
Steph Mullin & Nicole Mabry  
THE LEFT-HANDED TWIN,  
Thomas Perry  
THE NEXT WIFE, Kaira Rouda  
THE STRANGER IN THE MIRROR,  
Liv Constantine  
BONE RATTLE, Marc Cameron

# Websites' Lists

## Best Mysteries of 2021

### Goodreads Choice Award

Best Mystery and Thriller

([www.goodreads.com](http://www.goodreads.com))

**THE LAST THING HE TOLD ME,**

**Laura Dave – Winner**

THE MAIDENS, Alex Michaelides

BILLY SUMMERS, Stephen King

THE PUSH, Ashley Audrain

ARSENIC AND ADOBO,

Mia P. Manansala

HARLEM SHUFFLE,

Colson Whitehead

APPLES NEVER FALL, Liane Moriarty

THE WIFE UPSTAIRS,

Rachel Hawkins

ROCK PAPER SCISSORS, Alice Feeney

RAZORBLADE TEARS, S. A. Cosby

LOCAL WOMAN MISSING,

Mary Kubica

THE SURVIVORS, Jane Harper

THE GOOD SISTER, Sally Hepworth

THE NIGHT SHE DISAPPEARED,

Lisa Jewell

WE BEGIN AT THE END,

Chris Whitaker

THE PLOT, Jean Hanff Korelitz

NOT A HAPPY FAMILY, Shari Lapena

A SLOW FIRE BURNING,

Paula Hawkins

EVERY LAST SECRET, A. R. Torre

ALL HER LITTLE SECRETS,

Wanda M. Morris

### NPR – Best Mysteries

([www.npr.org](http://www.npr.org))

WHO IS MAUDE DIXON?,

Alexandra Andrews

THE LOST VILLAGE, Camilla Sten

THIS THING BETWEEN US,

Gus Moreno

DREAM GIRL, Laura Lippman

SUMMER SON, Lee Mandelo

DESTROY ALL MONSTERS,

Ed Brubaker & Sean Phillips

THE TURNOUT, Megan Abbott

THE WOMAN IN THE PURPLE

SKIRT, Natsuko Imamura

THE DEATH OF JANE LAWRENCE,

Caitlin Starling

WE ARE WATCHING ELIZA BRIGHT,

A. E. Osworth

HUMMINGBIRD SALAMANDER,

Jeff Vandermeer

WE WERE NEVER THERE,

Andrea Bartz

OUR WOMAN IN MOSCOW,

Beatriz Williams

DIAL A FOR AUNTIES,

Jesse Q. Sutanto

BUILD YOUR HOUSE AROUND MY

BODY, Violet Kupersmith

VELVET WAS THE NIGHT,

Silvia Moreno-Garcia

THE OTHER BLACK GIRL,

Zakiya Dalila Harris

WE RUN THE TIDES, Vendela Vida

MY SWEET GIRL, Amanda Jayatissa

HARLEM SHUFFLE,

Colson Whitehead

THESE TOXIC THINGS,

Rachel Howzell Hall

QUIET IN HER BONES, Nalini Singh

MY HEART IS A CHAINSAW,

Stephen Graham Jones

THE VIXEN, Francine Prose

THE TREES, Percival Everett

A SLOW FIRE BURNING,

Paula Hawkins

THE COMMITTED,

Viet Thanh Nguyen

RAZORBLADE TEARS, S. A. Cosby

A TOWN CALLED SOLACE,

Mary Lawson

HOW THE ONE-ARMED SISTER

SWEEPS HER HOUSE, Cherie Jones

WIDESPREAD PANIC, James Ellroy

THE POSTSCRIPT MURDERS,

Elly Griffiths

\*Children's, Young Adult, one horror novel and one non-fiction book were deleted from the original list

### Novel Suspects

([www.novelsuspects.com](http://www.novelsuspects.com))

Debuts

NEVER SAW ME COMING,

Vera Kurian

LIGHTSEEKERS, Femi Kayode

WE ARE WATCHING ELIZA BRIGHT,

A. E. Osworth

WHO IS MAUDE DIXON?,

Alexandra Andrews

THE OTHER BLACK GIRL,

Zakiya Dalila Harris

LIES WE BURY, Elle Marr

DIAL A FOR AUNTIES,

Jesse Q. Sutanto

BREAKOUT, Paul Herron

NICE GIRLS, Catherine Dang

### The Bibliofile

(<https://the-bibliofile.com>)

THE LAST THING HE TOLD ME,

Laura Dave

THE MAIDENS, Alex Michaelides

THE WIFE UPSTAIRS,

Rachel Hawkins

THE GOOD SISTER, Sally Hepworth

LOCAL WOMAN MISSING,

Mary Kubica

THEN THE STARS GO DARK,

Paula McLain

FOR YOUR OWN GOOD,

Samantha Downing

THE NIGHT SHE DISAPPEARED,

Lisa Jewell

THE MAN WHO DIED TWICE,

Richard Osman

A SLOW FIRE IS BURNING,

Paula Hawkins

NEVER SAW ME COMING,

Vera Kurian

THE BURNING GIRLS, C. J. Tudor

TOO GOOD TO BE TRUE,

Carola Lovering

EVERY LAST FEAR, Alex Finlay

SURVIVE THE NIGHT, Riley Sager

FINLAY DONOVAN IS KILLING IT,

Elle Cosimano

YOU'LL BE THE DEATH OF ME,

Karen M. McManus

### BookPage

([www.bookpage.com](http://www.bookpage.com))

SILVERVIEW, John le Carre

CLARK AND DIVISION,

Naomi Hirahara

RAZORBLADE TEARS, S. A. Cosby  
DEAD DEAD GIRLS, Nekesa Afia  
VELVET WAS THE NIGHT,  
Silvia Moreno-Garcia  
THE MADNESS OF CROWDS,  
Louise Penny  
THE OTHER PASSENGER,  
Louise Candlish  
THE MAN WHO DIED TWICE,  
Richard Osman  
BAD MOON RISING, John Galligan  
MANGO, MAMBO, AND MURDER,  
Raquel V. Reyes

## Masterpiece Mystery!

Best Mystery Books of 2021

Recommended by Bestselling Authors  
([www.pbs.org](http://www.pbs.org))

Tana French's Choice  
PICKARD COUNTY ATLAS,  
Chris Harding Thornton  
Walter Mosley's Choice  
RAZORBLADE TEARS, S. A. Cosby  
Karin Slaughter's Choice  
GIRL A, Abigail Dean  
Anthony Horowitz's Choice  
THE GIRL WHO DIED,  
Ragnar Jonasson  
S. A. Cosby's Choice  
ARSENIC AND ADOBO,  
Mia P. Manansala  
Ian Rankin's Choice  
HYDE, Craig Russell

## CrimeReads

(<https://crimereads.com>)

Best Novels

BATH HAUS, P. J. Vernon  
THE TURNOUT, Megan Abbott  
HARLEM SHUFFLE,  
Colson Whitehead  
THE COLLECTIVE, Alison Gaylin  
VELVET WAS THE NIGHT,  
Silvia Moreno-Garcia  
DREAM GIRL, Laura Lippman  
RAZORBLADE TEARS, S. A. Cosby  
CLARK AND DIVISION,  
Naomi Hirahara  
THE HOUSE OF ASHES, Stuart Neville  
BY WAY OF SORROW, Robyn Gigl

Best Debuts

THE OTHER BLACK GIRL,  
Zakiya Dalila Harris  
THE REVELATIONS, Erik Hoel  
REPRIEVE, James Han Matton – a

horror novel  
DEAR MISS METROPOLITAN,  
Carolyn Ferrell  
HELLO, TRANSCRIBER,  
Hannah Morrissey  
NEVER SAW ME COMING,  
Vera Kurian  
WHO IS MAUDE DIXON?,  
Alexandra Andrews  
A LONELY MAN, Chris Power  
WHO THEY WAS, Gabriel Krauze  
ALL HER LITTLE SECRETS,  
Wanda M. Morris

Best Historical Fiction (Almost All  
Mysteries)

A NET FOR SMALL FISHES, Lucy Jago  
THE LOST APOTHECARY,  
Sarah Penner  
THE GREAT MISTAKE, Jonathan Lee  
THE BOMBAY PRINCE, Sujata Massey  
DEATH AT GREENWAY,  
Lori Rader-Day  
THE PERFUME THIEF,  
Timothy Schaffert  
THE MONSTERS OF CHAVEZ  
RAVINE, Debra Castaneda  
PALACE OF THE DROWNED,  
Christine Mangan  
VELVET WAS THE NIGHT,  
Silvia Moreno-Garcia  
THE COMMITTED, V  
iet Thanh Nguyen

Best Noir

VELVET WAS THE NIGHT,  
Silvia Moreno-Garcia  
RAZORBLADE TEARS, S. A. Cosby  
WHAT'S DONE IN DARKNESS,  
Laura McHugh  
THE HOUSE UPTOWN,  
Melissa Ginsburg  
JUST THIEVES, Gregory Galloway  
HEAVEN'S A LIE, Wallace Strobry  
SHOOT THE MOONLIGHT OUT,  
William Boyle

THE KILLING HILLS, Chris Offutt  
TOKYO REDUX, David Peace  
BLOOD GROVE, Walter Mosley

Best International Crime Fiction

LADY JOKER, Volume One,  
Kaoru Takamura  
THE WOMAN IN THE PURPLE  
SKIRT, Natsuko Imamura  
THE NIGHT WILL BE LONG, S  
antiago Gamboa  
BULLET TRAIN, Kotaro Isaka  
PEOPLE LIKE THEM, Samira Sedira

LEMON, Kwon Yeo-sun  
WE TRADE OUR NIGHT FOR SOME-  
ONE ELSE'S DAY, Ivana Bodrožić  
THE TRANSPARENCY OF TIME,  
Leonardo Padura  
THE ANOMALY, Herve' Le Tellier  
UNTRACEABLE, Sergei Lebedev

Best Espionage

IMPOSTER SYNDROME, Kathy Wang  
THE MERCENARY, Paul Vidich  
THE PERFUME THIEF,  
Timothy Schaffert  
NORTHERN SPY, Flynn Berry  
SLOUGH HOUSE, Mick Herron  
UNTRACEABLE, Sergei Lebedev  
SILVERVIEW, John le Carre'  
THE N'GUSTRO AFFAIR,  
Jean-Patrick Manchette  
A WOMAN OF INTELLIGENCE,  
Karin Tanabe

THE CELLIST, Daniel Silva

Best Psychological Thrillers

THE MADNESS OF CROWDS,  
Louise Penny  
BATH HAUS, P. J. Vernon  
THE COLLECTIVE, Alison Gaylin  
RHODE ISLAND RED,  
Charlotte Carter  
THE PUSH, Ashley Audrain  
THE RETREAT, Elisabeth de Mariaffi  
YOU LOVE ME, Caroline Kepnes  
ANIMAL, Lisa Taddeo  
THE OTHER BLACK GIRL,  
Zakiya Dalila Harris  
BAD HABITS. Amy Gentry

## Book Riot

(<https://bookriot.com>)

ARSENIC AND ADOBO,  
Mia P. Manansala  
DIAL A FOR AUNTIES,  
Jesse Q. Sutanto  
THE COLLECTIVE, Alison Gaylin  
THE POSTSCRIPT MURDERS,  
Elly Griffiths

## DeadGood

([www.deadgoodbooks.co.uk](http://www.deadgoodbooks.co.uk))

Sixteen authors pick their favorites Amy  
McClulloch: THE SANATORIUM, Sar-  
ah Pearse; WHEN THEY FIND HER,  
Lia Middleton  
Ajay Chowdhury: SILVERVIEW,  
John le Carre'  
Shari Lapena: THE MAN WHO DIED

TWICE, Richard Osman  
 Jane Corry: THE THURSDAY MURDER CLUB, Richard Osman – 2020 title  
 Tom Hindle: A LINE TO KILL, Anthony Horowitz; THE APPEAL, Janice Hallett  
 Claire Douglas: THE NIGHT SHE DISAPPEARED, Lisa Jewell  
 Tim Weaver: THE NOTHING MAN, Catherine Ryan Howard – 2020 title  
 Stuart MacBride: THE ROYAL SECRET, Andrew Taylor  
 Andrea Mara: THE PUSH, Ashley Audrain  
 Sam Lloyd: FOR HER OWN GOOD, Samantha Downing  
 Giles Kristian: BILLY SUMMERS, Stephen King  
 Gillian McAllister: LIE BESIDE ME, Gytha Lodge  
 Nancy Tucker: SAFE, S. K. Barnett  
 Simon Lelic: THE WHOLE TRUTH, Cara Hunter  
 C. J. Tudor: THE DEVIL AND THE DARK WATER, Stuart Turton – 2020 title  
 Gytha Lodge: THAT NIGHT, Gillian McAllister

### **New York Public Library** (www.nypl.org)

THE BURNING GIRLS, C. J. Tudor  
 THE ECHO WIFE, Sarah Gailey  
 FINLAY DONOVAN IS KILLING IT, Elle Cosimano  
 THE JIGSAW MAN, Nadine Matheson  
 NORTHERN SPY, Flynn Berry  
 RAZORBLADE TEARS, S.A. Cosby  
 ROCK PAPER SCISSORS, Alice Feeney

VELVET WAS THE NIGHT, Silvia Moreno-Garcia  
 ALL HER LITTLE SECRETS, Wanda M. Morris  
 CLARK AND DIVISION, Naomi Hirahara  
 56 DAYS, Catherine Ryan Howard  
 HOSTAGE, Clare Mackintosh  
 MIRRORLAND, Carole Johnstone  
 NEVER SEE ME COMING, Vera Kurian  
 RUBY RED HERRING, Tracy Gardner

### **BookBub**

(www.bookbub.com)

by Kristina Wright

ALL HER LITTLE SECRETS, Wanda M. Morris  
 THE LAST THING HE TOLD ME, Laura Dave  
 BILLY SUMMERS, Stephen King  
 THE SURVIVORS, Jane Harper  
 THE WIFE UPSTAIRS, Rachel Hawkins  
 ARSENIC AND ADOBO, Mia P. Manansala  
 FINLAY DONOVAN IS KILLING IT, Elle Cosimano  
 THE PLOT, Jean Hanff Korelitz  
 56 DAYS, Catherine Ryan Howard  
 THE MAIDENS, Alex Michaelides  
 CLARK AND DIVISION, Naomi Hirahara  
 NOT A HAPPY FAMILY, Shari Lapena  
 SILVERVIEW, John le Carre  
 RAZORBLADE TEARS, S. A. Cosby

### **She Reads**

(https://shereads.com)

THE SURVIVORS, Jane Harper  
 THE HOUSE UPTOWN, Melissa Ginsburg  
 SAVING GRACE, Debbie Babitt  
 LIES WE BURY, Elle Marr  
 WHILE JUSTICE SLEEPS, Stacey Abrams  
 THE HUNTING WIVES, May Cobb  
 THE OTHER BLACK GIRL, Zakiya Dalila Harris  
 RAZORBLADE TEARS, S. A. Cosby  
 NOT A HAPPY FAMILY, Shari Lapena  
 JUST ONE LOOK, Lindsay Cameron  
 THE HUSBANDS, Chandler Baker  
 THE TURNOUT, Megan Abbott  
 A SLOW FIRE BURNING, Paula Hawkins  
 THESE TOXIC THINGS, Rachel Howzell Hall  
 FRIENDS LIKE THESE, Kimberly McCreight  
 NICE GIRLS, Catherine Dang  
 NEVER SAW ME COMING, Vera Kurian  
 THE NIGHT SHE DISAPPEARED, Lisa Jewell  
 ROCK PAPER SCISSORS, Alice Feeney  
 APPLES NEVER FALL, Liane Moriarty  
 LAST GIRL GHOSTED, Lisa Unger  
 AS THE WICKED WATCH, Tamron Hall

### **Crime Fiction Lover**

#### **Awards**

(https://crimefictionlover.com)

Best Crime Novel

THE NIGHT HAWKS, Elly Griffiths – Winner

RAZORBLADE TEARS, SA Cosby – Editor's Choice

THE DARK REMAINS, Ian Rankin and William McIlvanney  
 THE DEVIL'S ADVOCATE, Steve Cavanagh

I KNOW WHAT I SAW,

Imran Mahmood

TRUE CRIME STORY,

Joseph Knox

1979 by Val McDermid

Best Debut Crime Novel

THE SOURCE, Sarah Sultoon – Winner

WINTER COUNTS, David Heska



**Wanbli Weiden – Editor's Choice**

BLACK DROP, Leonora Natrass  
EDGE OF THE GRAVE,  
Robbie Morrison  
THE WAITER, Ajay Chowdhury  
BURYING THE NEWSPAPER MAN,  
Curtis Ippolito

**Best Crime Novel in Translation**

THE GIRL WHO DIED, Ragnar  
Jonasson, translated by Victoria Cribb  
– Winner

**RICCARDINO by Andrea Camilleri,  
translated by Stephen Sartarelli –  
Editor's Choice**

HOTEL CARTAGENA, Simone Buch-  
holz, translated by Rachel Ward  
BULLET TRAIN by Kotaro Isaka,  
translated by Sam Malissa  
THE RABBIT FACTOR by Antti Tuo-  
mainen, translated by David Hackston  
COLD AS HELL by Lilja Sigurdardottir,  
translated by Quentin Bates  
LITTLE REBEL by Jerome Leroy, trans-  
lated by Graham H Roberts

**Bookreporter Reviewers'**

**Best**

([www.bookreporter.com](http://www.bookreporter.com))

These crime novels and thrillers were  
gleaned from the Bookreporter's 20 Best  
Books Lists

SMOKE, Joe Ide  
THE STRANGER IN THE MIRROR,  
Liv Constantine  
LOCAL WOMAN MISSING,  
Mary Kubica  
GIRL, 11, Amy Suiter Clarke  
THE GUIDE, Peter Heller  
HELLO, TRANSCRIBER,  
Hannah Morrissey  
THE MAN WHO DIED TWICE,  
Richard Osman  
THESE SILENT WOODS,  
Kimi Cunningham Grant  
DREAM GIRL, Laura Lippman  
JUST THIEVES, Gregory Galloway  
THE TURNOUT, Megan Abbott  
THE APOLLO MURDERS,  
Chris Hadfield  
BILLY SUMMERS, Stephen King  
THE MADNESS OF CROWDS,  
Louise Penny  
DOG EAT DOG, David Rosenfelt  
A BLIZZARD OF POLAR BEARS,  
Alice Henderson

RIGHT BEHIND HER, Melinda Leigh  
THE OTHER BLACK GIRL,  
Zakiya Dalila Harris  
THE PUSH, Ashley Audrain  
THE LAST THING HE TOLD ME,  
Laura Dave

RAZORBLADE TEARS, S. A. Cosby (2)  
LAST REDEMPTION, Matt Coyle  
GUMSHOE GONE, Rob Leininger  
GUMSHOE IN THE DARK,  
Rob Leininger

PAY OR PLAY, Howard Michael Gould  
MURDER AT GREYSBRIDGE,  
Andrea Carter

THE OC, D.P. Lyle  
BAD SCENE, Max Tomlinson  
THE KAISER'S WEB, Steve Berry  
THE MAIDENS, Alex Michaelides  
BLOODLESS, Preston & Child  
EVERY VOW YOU BREAK,  
Peter Swanson

PICKARD COUNTY ATLAS, Chris  
Harding Thornton

THE LAST HOUSE ON NEEDLESS  
STREET, Catriona Ward

MY SWEET GIRL, Amanda Jayatissa  
A CHRISTMAS LEGACY, Anne Perry  
THE LEFT-HANDED TWIN,  
Thomas Perry  
THE ROSE CODE, Kate Quinn

**Death Becomes Her**

**Top Five Books of 2021**

(As found on the Crime Fiction Lover  
website)

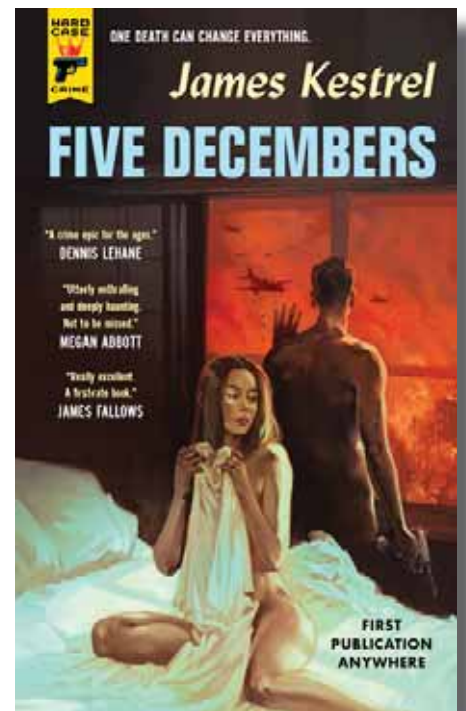
BEFORE SHE DISAPPEARED,  
Lisa Gardner – Top Pick  
THE DARK HOURS, Michael Connelly  
THE DEVIL'S ADVOCATE,  
Steve Cavanagh  
HOSTAGE, Clare Mackintosh  
THE WAITER, Ajay Chowdhury

**Rough Justice**

**Top Five Books of 2021**

(As found on the Crime Fiction Lover  
website)

THE KILLING HILLS, Chris Offutt  
GOOD NEIGHBOURS, Sarah Langan  
HOW TO BETRAY YOUR COUNTRY,  
James Wolff  
FIVE DECEMBERS, James Kestrel  
CHILDREN OF CHICAGO,  
Cynthia Pelayo – Horror



**Crime Time FM**

([www.crimetime.co.uk](http://www.crimetime.co.uk))

**Best Crime Novels of 2021**

RAZORBLADE TEARS. S.A. Cosby –  
Crime Novel of the Year  
VINE STREET, Dominic Nolan  
– runner up  
THE VILLAGE OF EIGHT GRAVES,  
Seichi Yokomizo  
THE TURNOUT, Megan Abbott  
THE FIRST DAY OF SPRING,  
Nancy Tucker  
FUTURE PERFECT, Felicia Yap

**Grab This Book**

([grabthisbook.net](http://grabthisbook.net))

**My Top Ten Reads 2021**

THE MURDER BOX, Olivia Kiernan  
BLOOD SUMMER, Steven Dunne  
THE FAMILY TREE,  
Steph Muller and Nicole Mabry  
FRAGILE, Sarah Hilary  
TRUE CRIME STORY, Joseph Knox  
56 DAYS, Catherine Ryan Howard  
BLACK REED BAY, Rod Reynolds  
THE QUIET PEOPLE, Paul Cleave  
DEAD MAN'S GRAVE, Neil Lancaster  
PHOSPHATE ROCKS, Fiona Erskine

**CBC Books**

**Best Canadian Mysteries 2021**

([www.cbc.ca](http://www.cbc.ca))

The following are gleaned from its list of

Top Canadian Fiction  
 FIND YOU FIRST, Linwood Barclay  
 LOST COMMUNITY, Daniel Kalla  
 OPERATION ANGUS, Terry Fallis  
 VELVET WAS THE NIGHT,  
 Silvia Moreno-Garcia  
 STATE OF TERROR, Louise Penny &  
 Hillary Rodham Clinton  
 THE PUSH, Ashley Audrain  
 THE APOLLO MURDERS,  
 Chris Hadfield  
 DARK ROADS, Chevy Stevens  
 AUGUST INTO WINTER,  
 Guy Vanderhaeghe

## Literary Hub

### Best Reviewed Books of 2021

#### Mystery and Crime

(<https://lithub.com>)

HARLEM SHUFFLE,  
 Colson Whitehead  
 THE COMMITTED,  
 Viet Thanh Nguyen  
 THE OTHER BLACK GIRL,  
 Zakiya Dalila Harris  
 BILLY SUMMERS, Stephen King  
 RAZORBLADE TEARS, S.A. Cosby  
 SILVERVIEW, John le Carré  
 VELVET WAS THE NIGHT,  
 Silvia Moreno-Garcia  
 DREAM GIRL, Laura Lippman  
 A LONELY MAN, Chris Power  
 THE PLOT, Jean Hanff Korelitz

## Real Simple

([www.realsimple.com](http://www.realsimple.com))

These eight titles were among Real Simple's 59 Best Books of 2021

THE ANOMALY, Herve' Le Tellier  
 AS THE WICKED WATCH,  
 Tamron Hall  
 APPLES NEVER FALL, Liane Moriarty  
 ROCK PAPER SCISSORS, Alice Feeney  
 THE LAST THING HE TOLD ME,  
 Laura Dave  
 DO NO HARM, Christina McDonald  
 BEFORE THE RUINS, Victoria Gosling  
 THE PUSH, Ashley Audrain

## Air Mail

### Eight Best Mysteries 2021

THE PLOT, Jean Hanff Korelitz  
 NORTHERN SPY, Flynn Berry  
 THE GUIDE, Peter Heller  
 SUMMER WATER, Sarah Moss

1979, Val McDermid  
 THE TURNOUT, Megan Abbott  
 A LINE TO KILL, Anthony Horowitz  
 FIND YOU FIRST, Linwood Barclay

## Stop, You're Killing Me!

### Favorite Debut Novels 2021

WHO IS MAUDE ADAMS?,  
 Alexandra Andrews  
 WHERE THE TRUTH LIES,  
 Anna Bailey  
 WINDHALL, Ava Barry  
 THE PHOTOGRAPHER,  
 Mary Dixie Carter  
 IN THE COMPANY OF KILLERS,  
 Bryan Christy  
 FINLAY DONOVAN IS KILLING IT,  
 Elle Cosimano  
 GIRLS WITH BRIGHT FUTURES,  
 Tracy Dobmeier & Wendy Katzman  
 THE OTHER BLACK GIRL,  
 Zakiya Dalila Harris  
 THE CONDUCTORS, Nicole Glover  
 BREAKOUT, Paul Herron  
 ARSENIC AND ADOBO,  
 Mia P. Manansala  
 A DEADLY FORTUNE, Stacie Murphy  
 FALLING, T. J. Newman  
 NORTHERN HEIST, Richard O'Rawe  
 THE LOST APOTHECARY,  
 Sarah Penner  
 DIAL A FOR AUNTIES,  
 Jesse Q. Sutanto  
 THE FIRST DAY OF SPRING,  
 Nancy Tucker  
 WE BEGIN AT THE END,  
 Chris Whitaker (not a debut)

## Booklist Editor's Choice

([www.booklistonline.com](http://www.booklistonline.com))

GIRL A, Abigail Dean  
 HARLEM SHUFFLE,  
 Colson Whitehead  
 WHO IS MAUDE DIXON?,  
 Alexandra Andrews  
 BILLY SUMMERS, Stephen King  
 BLIND TIGER, Sandra Brown  
 CITY ON FIRE,  
 Don Winslow (delayed until 2022)  
 DEAD OF WINTER,  
 Stephen Mack Jones  
 DREAM GIRL, Laura Lippman  
 FIVE DECEMBERS, James Kestrel  
 RAZORBLADE TEARS, S. A. Cosby  
 THE THOUSAND CRIMES OF MING

TSU, Tom Lin

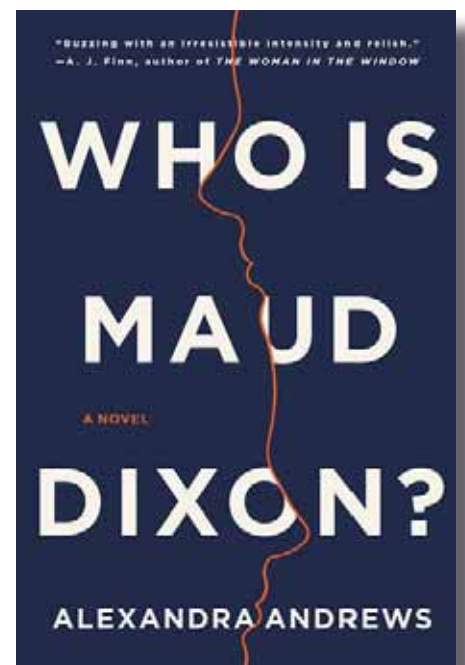
## Booklist Mystery Reviews of the Day 2021

ALL HER LITTLE SECRETS,  
 Wanda M. Morris  
 APRIL IN SPAIN, John Banville  
 ARSENIC AND ADOBO,  
 Mia P. Manansala  
 BASIL'S WAR, Stephen Hunter  
 DEAD BY DAWN, Paul Doiron  
 DREAM GIRL, Laura Lippman  
 A GOOD MOTHER, Lara Bazelton  
 THE LAST MONA LISA,  
 Jonathan Santlofer  
 THE NEIGHBOR'S SECRET,  
 L. Alison Heller  
 A SLOW FIRE BURNING,  
 Paula Hawkins  
 WHILE JUSTICE SLEEPS,  
 Stacey Abrams

## Man of Many

([manofmany.com](http://manofmany.com))

These six crime novels were on a list of  
 20 Best Books of 2021  
 ENEMY AT THE GATES, Kyle Mills  
 THE LAST THING HE TOLD ME,  
 Laura Dave  
 THE PUSH, Ashley Audrain  
 APPLES NEVER FALL, Liane Moriarty  
 HARLEM SHUFFLE,  
 Colson Whitehead  
 JAILHOUSE LAWYER,  
 James Patterson & Nancy Allen



### Amazon's Best

RAZORBLADE TEARS, S.A. Cosby  
 WE BEGIN AT THE END,  
 Chris Whitaker  
 THE PLOT, Jean Hanff Korelitz  
 THE DARK HOURS, Michael Connelly  
 THE MAN WHO DIED TWICE,  
 Richard Osman  
 THE LAST THING HE TOLD ME,  
 Laura Dave  
 BILLY SUMMERS, Stephen King  
 THE FIRST DAY OF SPRING,  
 Nancy Tucker  
 FALSE WITNESS, Karin Slaughter  
 LIGHTNING STRIKE,  
 William Kent Krueger  
 APPLES NEVER FALL, Liane Moriarty  
 WHEN GHOSTS COME HOME,  
 Wiley Cash  
 THE GOOD SISTER, Sally Hepworth  
 THE MADNESS OF CROWDS,  
 Louise Penny  
 CHASING THE BOOGEYMAN,  
 Richard Chizmar  
 CLARK AND DIVISION,  
 Naomi Hirahara  
 THE STOLEN HOURS, Allen Eskins  
 HOW LUCKY, Will Leitch  
 FALLING, T. J. Newman  
 THE MAIDENS, Alex Michaelides

### Barnes & Noble's Best

SILVERVIEW, John le Carre'  
 THE MADNESS OF CROWDS,  
 Louise Penny  
 THE MAN WHO DIED TWICE,  
 Richard Osman  
 FALSE WITNESS, Karin Slaughter  
 WHILE JUSTICE SLEEPS,  
 Stacey Abrams  
 THE HERON'S CRY, Ann Cleeves  
 MRS. MARCH, Virginia Feito  
 THE GUILT TRIP, Sandie Jones  
 THE MAIDENS, Alex Michaelides  
 CLARK & DIVISION,  
 Naomi Hirahara

### Booktopia's Best

**Australian Bookstore**  
 (www.booktopia.com.au)

THE HOUSEMATE, Sarah Bailey  
 BEFORE YOU KNEW MY NAME,  
 Jacqueline Bublitz  
 THE DARK HOURS, Michael Connelly  
 THE LAST THING HE TOLD ME,

Laura Dave

THE WAY IT IS NOW, Garry Disher  
 THE CHASE, Candice Fox  
 TREASURE & DIRT, Chris Hammer  
 THE MAN WHO DIED TWICE,  
 Richard Osman  
 WHEN YOU ARE MINE,  
 Michael Robotham  
 WILD PLACE, Christian White

### Murder by the Book 's Best

**Portland Mystery Bookstore**

IN THE COMPANY OF KILLERS,  
 Bryan Christy  
 THE WINDSOR KNOT, S. J. Bennett  
 THE PLOT, Jean Hanff Korelitz  
 SMOKE, Joe Ide  
 EXIT, Belinda Bauer  
 BRYANT & MAY: ORANGES AND  
 LEMONS, Christopher Fowler  
 PICKARD COUNTY ATLAS,  
 Chris Harding Thornton

### Waterstone's Best

**Detective Fiction**

THE APPEAL, Janice Hallett  
 THE MAN WHO DIED TWICE,  
 Richard Osman  
 THE DARK REMAINS, Ian Rankin &  
 William McIlvanney  
 RICCARDIO, Andrea Camilleri  
 THE HERON'S CRY, Ann Cleeves  
 OVER MY DEAD BODY, Jeffrey Archer  
 A THREE DOG PROBLEM,  
 S. J. Bennett  
 A LINE TO KILL, Anthony Horowitz  
 THE ROYAL SECRET, Andrew Taylor  
 1979, Val McDermid  
 THE SANATORIUM, Sarah Pearce  
 A HAUNTING AT HOLKHAM,  
 Anne Glenconner  
 THE DARK HOURS, Michael Connelly  
 THE MIDNIGHT LOCK, Jeffery Deaver  
 THE DEVIL'S ADVOCATE,  
 Steve Cavanagh  
 TRUE CRIME STORY, Joseph Knox  
 THE MIDNIGHT HOUR, Elly Griffiths  
 DEATH AND CROISSANTS,  
 Ian Moore  
**Thrillers**  
 A SLOW FIRE BURNING,  
 Paula Hawkins  
 BETTER OFF DEAD,  
 Lee Child, Andrew Child  
 BILLY SUMMERS, Stephen King

MAGPIE, Elizabeth Day

THE MAIDENS, Alex Michaelides  
 NEVER, Ken Follett  
 THE APOLLO MURDERS,  
 Chris Hadfield  
 THE JEALOUSY MAN (sh.st.),  
 Jo Nesbo  
 FALLING, T. J. Newman  
 JUDAS 62, Charles Cumming  
 APPLES NEVER FALL, Liane Moriarty  
 A NARROW DOOR, Joanne Harris  
 HEATWAVE, Victor Jestin  
 THE JUDGE'S LIST, John Grisham  
 STATE OF TERROR,  
 Hillary R. Clinton, Louise Penny  
 THE PRESIDENT'S DAUGHTER,  
 Bill Clinton, James Patterson  
 THE HEIGHTS, Louise Candlish  
 THE KHAN, Saima Mir  
 SIXTEEN HORSES, Greg Buchanan  
 COLD JUSTICE, Ant Middleton  
 RIZZIO, Denise Mina  
 THE NAMELESS ONES, John Connolly

### Book Depository's Best

THE MAN WHO DIED TWICE,  
 Richard Osman  
 SILVERVIEW, John le Carre'  
 APRIL IN SPAIN, John Banville  
 THE BURNING GIRLS, C. J. Tudor  
 BETTER OFF DEAD,  
 Lee Child & Andrew Child  
 STATE OF TERROR, Hillary Clinton &  
 Louise Penny  
 BLACKOUT, Simon Scarrow  
 THE LAST HOUSE ON NEEDLESS  
 STREET, Catriona Ward  
 TURN A BLIND EYE, Jeffrey Archer  
 MAGPIE, Elizabeth Day  
 HOW TO RAISE AN ELEPHANT,  
 Alexander McCall Smith  
 LEFT YOU DEAD, Peter James  
 A GAMBLING MAN, David Baldacci  
 THE UNHEARD, Nicci French  
 JOURNEY OF THE PHARAOHS,  
 Clive Cussler & Graham Brown  
 THE CHOICE, Kerry Barnes  
 COULD YOU SURVIVE MIDSOMER?,  
 Simon Brew  
 THE HUNTING, Stephen Leather  
 THE JEALOUSY MAN, Jo Nesbo  
 THE BURNING, Jonathan Kellerman  
 THE ISLAND HOUSE,  
 Amanda Brittany

# What Do These "Best" Lists Tell Us?

No one compiling these 85 "Best" lists has read every mystery, crime novel and thriller written in 2021. Hence, the lists are opinions based on the limited number of books each "expert" has read this past year, combined with personal tastes. In other words, these lists are very subjective. So where can we find objectivity?

The more agreement (consensus) we can find among the lists, the more objective conclusions can be drawn about which novels are the Best of 2020!

So the following is a list of the number of appearances particular novels made on the 85 "Best" Lists you find on the preceding pages. These are the Best of the Best.

## Compilation of List Appearances

### 44 Mentions

RAZORBLADE TEARS, S.A. Cosby

### 17 Mentions

BILLY SUMMERS, Stephen King  
HARLEM SHUFFLE,  
Colson Whitehead

### 14 Mentions

FIVE DECEMBERS, James Kestrel  
THE DARK HOURS, Michael Connelly

### 13 Mentions

DREAM GIRL, Laura Lippman  
THE OTHER BLACK GIRL,  
Zakiya Dalila Harris – Debut

### 12 Mentions

THE MAN WHO DIED TWICE,  
Richard Osman  
CLARK AND DIVISION,  
Naomi Hirahara  
THE TURNOUT, Megan Abbott  
THE PLOT, Jean Hanff Korelitz

### 11 Mentions

VELVET WAS THE NIGHT, Silvia  
Moreno-Garcia  
THE LAST THING HE TOLD ME,  
Laura Dave  
SILVERVIEW, John le Carre'

### 10 Mentions

THE SURVIVORS, Jane Harper  
THE PUSH, Ashley Audrain – Debut

### 9 Mentions

SLOUGH HOUSE, Mick Herron  
WE BEGIN AT THE END,  
Chris Whitaker  
GIRL A, Abigail Dean – Debut  
WHO IS MAUDE DIXON?, Alexandra  
Andrews – Debut  
ARSENIC AND ADOBO,  
Mia P. Manansala – Debut  
THE DARK REMAINS, William McIl-  
vanney & Ian Rankin

### 8 Mentions

THE LAST THING HE TOLD ME,  
Laura Dave  
GIRL A, Abigail Dean  
A SLOW FIRE BURNING,  
Paula Hawkins  
THE NIGHT SHE DISAPPEARED,  
Lisa Jewell  
1979, Val McDermid  
FALLING, T. J. Newman

### 7 Mentions

THE DEVIL'S ADVOCATE,  
Steve Cavanagh  
NORTHERN SPY, Flynn Berry  
LIGHTNING STRIKE,  
William Kent Krueger  
THE MAIDENS, Alex Michaelides  
THE DARK REMAINS, William McIl-  
vanney & Ian Rankin

### 6 Mentions

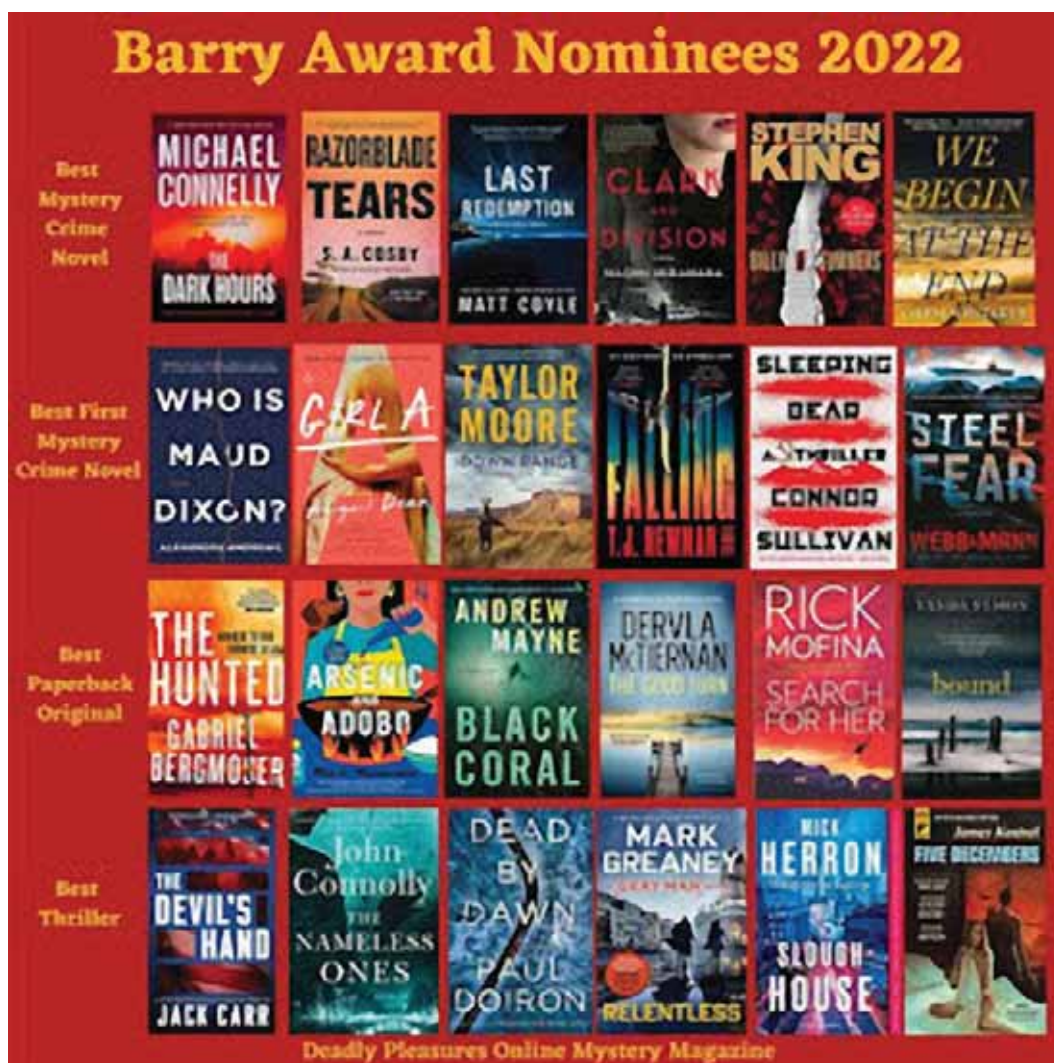
STATE OF TERROR, Hillary Clinton &  
Louise Penny  
THE NAMELESS ONES, John Connolly  
ROCK PAPER SCISSORS, Alice Feeney  
56 DAYS, Catherine Ryan Howard  
NEVER SAW ME COMING,  
Vera Kurian  
THE LAST HOUSE ON NEEDLESS  
STREET, Catriona Ward  
STEEL FEAR, Webb & Mann  
WE BEGIN AT THE END,  
Chris Whitaker

### 5 Mentions

THE PUSH, Ashley Audrain  
FINLAY DONOVAN IS KILLING IT,  
Elle Cosimano  
THE WIFE UPSTAIRS,  
Rachel Hawkins  
SMOKE, Joe Ide  
TRUE CRIME STORY, Joseph Knox  
NOT A HAPPY FAMILY, Shari Lapena  
APPLES NEVER FALL, Liane Moriarty  
ALL HER LITTLE SECRETS,  
Wanda M. Morris  
BLOOD GROVE, Walter Mosley  
THE COMMITTED,  
Viet Thanh Nguyen  
PICKARD COUNTY ATLAS, Chris  
Harding Thornton

### 4 Mentions

EXIT, Belinda Bauer  
WHEN GHOSTS COME HOME,  
Wiley Cash  
THE WAITER, Ajay Chowdhury  
THE ISLAND, Ben Coes  
THE LAST THING YOU BURN,  
Will Dean  
DEAD BY DAWN, Paul Doiron  
ISLAND REICH, Jack Grimwood  
THESE TOXIC THINGS,  
Rachel Howzell Hall  
THE GOOD SISTER, Sally Hepworth  
A LINE TO KILL, Anthony Horowitz  
MY SWEET GIRL, Amanda Jayatissa  
PALACE OF THE DROWNED,  
Christine Mangan  
THE MADNESS OF CROWDS,  
Louise Penny  
THE LONELY MAN, Chris Powers  
FALSE WITNESS, Karin Slaughter  
THE FIRST DAY OF SPRING,  
Nancy Tucker  
THE BURNING GIRLS, C. J. Tudor



## 2022 Barry Award Nominations

The winners of these awards will be announced at the Opening Ceremonies at the Minneapolis Bouchercon on September 8, 2022.

All readers of *Deadly Pleasures* are qualified to vote. Please submit votes to [george@deadlypleasures.com](mailto:george@deadlypleasures.com) by August 1, 2022.

### Best Mystery/Crime Novel

THE DARK HOURS, Michael Connelly  
 RAZORBLADE TEARS, S. A. Cosby  
 LAST REDEMPTION, Matt Coyle  
 CLARK AND DIVISION,  
 Naomi Hirahara  
 BILLY SUMMERS, Stephen King  
 WE BEGIN AT THE END,

Chris Whitaker

### Best First Mystery/Crime Novel

WHO IS MAUDE DIXON?,  
 Alexandra Andrews  
 GIRL A, Abigail Dean  
 DOWN RANGE, Taylor Moore  
 FALLING, T. J. Newman  
 SLEEPING BEAR, Connor Sullivan  
 STEEL FEAR, Brandon Webb & John  
 David Mann

### Best Paperback Original

THE HUNTED, Gabriel Bergmoser  
 ARSENIC AND ADOBO,  
 Mia P. Manansala  
 BLACK CORAL, Andrew Mayne  
 THE GOOD TURN, Dervla McTiernan

SEARCH FOR HER, Rick Mofina  
 BOUND, Vanda Symon

### Best Thriller

THE DEVIL'S HAND, Jack Carr  
 THE NAMELESS ONES, John Connolly  
 DEAD BY DAWN, Paul Doiron  
 RELENTLESS, Mark Greaney  
 SLOUGH HOUSE, Mick Herron  
 FIVE DECEMBERS, James Kestrel

Many, many thanks to our nominating committee members who put a lot of time (reading and evaluating) and then nominating. They are: Larry Gandle, Maggie Mason, Ali Karim, Kristopher Zgorski, Jeff Popple, Oline Cogdill, Steele Curry, Don Longmuir, Donus Roberts, Mike Dillman, Mystery Mike Bursaw and yours truly. We mourn the loss of committee member Kris Schorer.

# Larry Gandle Critiques

## TheEdgars



It is once again time for me to evaluate the Edgar nominations in the categories of Best Novel and Best First Novel by an American Author. I have been doing this for a number of years and each year I wonder if it is my last because the nominations have become so eclectic and often don't reflect the general consensus as to what are the best mystery novels of the year. Last year, the Edgar nominations were most notable for the glaring omission of **BLACKTOP WASTELAND** by S. A. Cosby, which was generally considered by most critics and fans to be the best crime novel of the year. I swore this year that I would not review the Edgar nominees if **RAZORBLADE TEARS** was not nominated. As you can see in this issue's cover article on the Best of the Best, that it is faraway the leading contender for Best Mystery/Crime Novel of the year. Well, here I am reviewing the Edgars because the nominating committee had the good taste to nominate **RAZORBLADE TEARS** – and another of the most highly acclaimed novels of 2021 – **FIVE DECEMBERS**.

### Best Novel

#### **RAZORBLADE TEARS**

by S. A. Cosby

Flatiron Books, \$26.99

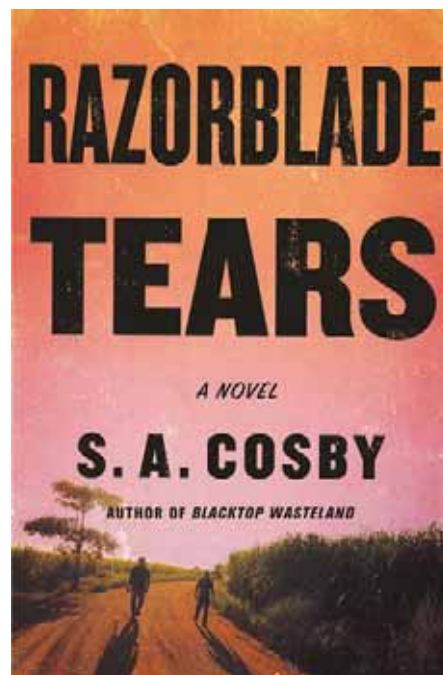
**Rating: A+**

Ike and Bobby Lee are attending their son's funerals. Their sons were married to each other and both were brutally killed- gangland style. Ike is an imposing black man who owns and runs a landscaping business and Bobby Lee is a racist redneck currently unemployed. Both of them are ex- cons and both of them treated their gay sons miserably. They were terrible fathers and feel re-

morse over their relationships with their sons. In an effort to assuage their guilt, they join forces in order to avenge their son's deaths even if it means they must sacrifice their own lives. The police have put the murder investigation on hold as they have no new leads. It is up to Ike and Bobby Lee to uncover the truth no matter how dangerous to themselves and, in Ike's case, his family.

The mystery community has been raving about **BLACKTOP WASTELAND**, in my mind, was the best novel of last year. Believe it or not, this book is even better. Now, I will admit that reality must be suspended at times. However, this book is not only an exciting thriller, there is much depth to the writing, as well. Race, LGBT, class structure is all covered here. Ike and Bobby Lee form an unlikely pair who reminded me of Tony Curtis and Sidney Poitier in *The Defiant Ones*.

Both characters learn a lot about tolerance and respect from each other.



There is also much humor in some of their exchanges. Crime fiction is not necessarily about literary fiction. It is really about entertainment and how the particular story reflects reality. This book does both. Michael Connelly is a close friend of mine. While reading one of his stories, I quoted one of his many truly literary passages so beautifully written to him. He told me that he was having a really good writing day when he wrote that. Well, Shawn had a lot of good writing days with this book. The plot is totally compelling and the pacing is relentless, overall. I could not put it down. Well, after two superb books, I am really excited about this author. In fact, I will say that no other author has excited me as much about their work since Lee Child. Highly recommended.

#### **FIVE DECEMBERS**

by James Kestral

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 Misérables*. 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.

#### HOW LUCKY

by Will Leitch  
Harper, \$25.99

**Rating: B+**

Daniel lives in a Athens, Georgia, a university town. He has an online job working for a small airline. He lives alone but has some close friends. However, he has a debilitating neuromuscular disorder that renders him unable to speak or walk. He could barely move. One morning as he sat outside his apartment, he notices a young Asian woman

getting into a car. A few days later he discovers that she has disappeared. Using his friends and attempting to communicate with the police, he tries to explain what he knows. He eventually uses the internet to communicate which brings him directly into danger.

Daniel's 'voice' is what makes this novel unique. The witness to a crime being a handicapped individual brings immediately to mind *REAR WINDOW* and this is in essence an updated version of that classic book. The plot eventually becomes increasingly unrealistic, and, in a sense, cozy. Nonetheless, it is a very clever work that was selected by the Book of the Month Club so it has received some good notice. The super creation of Daniel's character makes me recommend this entertaining and relatively quick read.

#### NO ONE WILL MISS HER

by Kat Rosenfeld  
Morrow, \$27.99

**Rating: B**

In Copper Fall, a small town in rural Maine, Lizzie Oullette is found dead- her body mutilated and her face put through the garbage disposal in the sink. It is a gruesome scene but her reputation is as the town whore raised in the local junkyard, which is currently burning. Lizzie's husband, Duane, has disappeared. Detective Ian Bird investi-



gates. He travels several hours south in order to speak to Adrienne Richards, a beautiful and wealthy socialite married to a very successful businessman. Adrienne, for some unknown reason, is renting Lizzie's Lake House. What is their connection? Lizzie narrates the story from beyond the grave. Why is she dead and who killed her?

So, a psychological suspense novel with an unreliable narrator and a huge twist in the middle of the story. Sound familiar? The plot is compelling, characters are well developed and the twist is clever and quite unexpected. However, this has been done dozens of times over the years. I kept asking myself, 'why was this book selected by the Edgar Committee above all the other really good psychological suspense books published this past year alone?' I could not come up with a really good answer. The book is entertaining but really nothing special.

#### THE VENICE SKETCHBOOK

by Rhys Bowen

Lake Union Publishing, \$24.95

**Rating: DNF**

I cannot review much of the plot of this book as I only lasted 50 pages. I would never have attempted to review it except it is totally and inexplicably on the Edgar shortlist for Best Novel. From what I gather, Juliet Browning loves Venice and is in love with a man there. She moves there and gets caught up as a spy in WWII. In 2001, her great niece, Caroline Grant, inherits her sketchbook and three keys which sets off her journey of discovery to Venice. I am sure there will also be a love interest for her.

Rhys Bowen is a very nice lady and has written many books. She also has many fans. This review is nothing personal. To place her book on the same list as *RAZORBLADE TEARS* is totally bewildering to me. I looked at the list of books submitted to the Edgar Committee. All the books widely considered the best of the year were on the list. To select this one above the others is truly baffling. First of all, the writing is awful. I am referring to the dialogue which comes off as totally amateurish. The characters are a superficial and

stereotypic bunch. As a cozy and a romance novel, the book is not to my taste but I could look past that if it was even somewhat well written. The depiction of the locale is like a travelogue with no real insight into the setting. Just based on the fifty pages I read, the plot seems both predictable and silly. With today's books full of hyperrealism and containing a well thought out critique of modern society, this book is a true lightweight. I am not saying there is anything wrong with this. I really think Rhys wanted to write a light and entertaining book that harkens back to the golden age of crime fiction. She might very well have done that but in this August setting, the book is very much out of place. Not my cup of tea.

### Best First Novel by an American Author

#### WHAT COMES AFTER

by JoAnne Tompkins  
Riverhead Books, \$28.00

**Rating: B+**

In a small town, along the coast in Washington State. Two young teenagers are killed. Daniel, good looking and popular, is brutally murdered by his best friend, Jonah. His suicide note confesses to the crime. Why he killed Daniel is unknown. The deaths leave behind Isaac, Daniel's grieving father and his next-door neighbor, Lorrie, Jonah's mother. Evangeline, a sixteen-year-old homeless girl appears from out of the woods. Both Jonah and Lorrie develop a relationship with the girl who is hiding something. Did she know their children? Did she have anything to do with their deaths? Can the three of them establish a relationship to help each other get through the future together?

This book begs the question -- what makes a novel fit into the crime fiction category? In my mind, a crime must be the central focus of the work. This could and usually does mean a murder or robbery occurs and the crime is investigated or the perpetrators must be pursued and brought to justice. This novel is not that at all. A crime occurs. The solution becomes quickly apparent and the novel



is really about how the survivors deal with it. It is more of a literary novel but uniquely fits into the genre of crime fiction. It is a debut effort so the plot goes on too long and there are numerous pointless episodes. The characters are the strength of the book. All of them are beautifully created. The author uses alternate chapter point of view which includes Jonah on his last day alive as a means of revealing exactly what happened and why. In future works, I see the author delving more into literary fiction that crime fiction. She is very talented and well deserves the accolades this book has received including the Edgar Award shortlist. Highly recommended.

#### THE DAMAGE

by Caitlin Wahrer  
Pamela Dorman Books, \$27.00

**Rating: B+**

In rural Maine, Tony is called to the local hospital as his younger brother, Nick, was brought in battered and raped. He is traumatized both physically and mentally. It seems Nick was going to meet a guy he was interested in at a local bar, but he never showed up. Instead a handsome stranger struck up a conversation with him and they wound up in a local motel. Nick claims he was knocked out and woke up bleeding from his rectum and covered with bruises. It does

not take long for Detective Rice to locate the accused rapist, Raymond Walker. Now comes the issue as to whether Nick wants to proceed with a trial. The decision will rend apart his family including his brother, Tony, Tony's wife, Julia and their children. Tony is bent on revenge while Julia must hold him in check before someone gets killed.

This is another crime fiction story in which the violent episode occurs at and is solved at the beginning of the book. The plot of the book is how the characters respond to it. For a debut, it is a remarkable achievement filled with deep rich characterizations and a story that will keep a reader glued to the page throughout. Alternate point of view chapters ratchets up the suspense. There are some clever twists. The story does go on too long reminiscent of a debut author. There is way too much expository description and dialogue at the end. Nonetheless, it is a solid first effort and worthy of being on the Edgar shortlist for Best First Novel.

#### DEER SEASON

by Erin Flanagan  
University of Nebraska Press, \$21.95

**Rating: B+**

In Guthram, Nebraska, 1985, a teenager goes missing. Deer Season has just begun and intellectually handicapped, Hal Bullard, has just gone off hunting with a couple of local acquaintances. Hal works on a farm for Alma and Clyl Coatagen, who, treat him like a son. When Hal comes back from his trip, he seems to forget what happened on the return drive but there is blood in his truck bed and a dent in the fender. He claims he shot a deer and that is the reason for the blood in the truck. Unfortunately, when a teenage girl goes missing, the locals all point to Hal as the culprit.

This debut novel from a small press is a quite a discovery by the Edgar Committee for Best First Novel. The book is an examination of life in a small town with the innate gossip, social cliques, and the prejudice it entails. The strength of this work are the characters and the setting. Underlying the plot is the girl's disappearance- why and who or whom is responsible. These are simple salt of

the Earth people and how they deal with a potential tragedy is truly fascinating and makes for some great reading. Very well done and highly recommended.

### **NEVER SAW ME COMING**

by Vera Kurian  
Park Row, \$27.99

**Rating: C-**

Seven students have a full scholarship at a DC University. The reason they are in a clinical psychology study evaluating psychopaths. They each wear a watch that tracks their movements and their moods. Chloe Sevre is one of the students who decided to attend the school and participate in the program so she could murder a student, Wil Bachman, who did her wrong in the past. Some of the psychopaths start to die. Who is killing them and why?

The plot of this book, inexplicably shortlisted for an Edgar best first novel, is truly preposterous. On top of that, it is way too long and insufferably boring. There is an attempt at humor which usually fell flat for me. Characters are mostly cardboard cutouts. It can be mildly entertaining given the right circumstances such as stuck somewhere with nothing else to read. It is overall a forgettable read and I would avoid.

### **SUBURBAN DICKS**

by Fabian Nicieza  
Putnam, \$27.99

**Rating: DNF**

In suburban New Jersey, a gas station attendant is killed. He is of Asian Indian descent. Andie Stern, a short, very pregnant mother of five, comes upon the murder scene. The police, of course, are incompetent, bumbling fools and also racists. So, Andie must solve the crime along with a twenty-eight-year-old disgraced Pulitzer prize winning reporter named Kenneth Lee, desperate to find a new story. The two of them drive all over the state investigating the crime in the Indian community while uncovering innate racism.

In order to enjoy this book, the reader must buy into the fact that these two amateur sleuths are more talented than the police. Personally, I simply

could not. I found the plot banal with the attempted humor falling flat. Characters are all caricatures and probably not meant to be taken seriously. I lasted 100 pages into this book when I realized

I am not having any fun. This book might be enjoyed by those who are fans of Richard Osman. It's not for me and it is very surprising to see it on the Edgar shortlist.

## **Edgar Award Nominations 2022**

### **Best Novel**

THE VENICE SKETCHBOOK, Rhys Bowen  
RAZORBLADE TEARS, S. A. Cosby  
FIVE DECEMBERS, James Kestrel  
HOW LUCKY, Will Leach  
NO ONE WILL MISS HER, Kat Rosenfeld

### **Best First Novel by an American Author**

DEER SEASON, Erin Flanagan  
NEVER SAW ME COMING, Vera Kurian  
SUBURBAN DICKS, Fabian Nicieza  
WHAT COMES AFTER, JoAnne Tompkins  
THE DAMAGE, Caitlin Währer

### **Best Paperback Original**

KILL ALL YOUR DARLINGS, David Bell  
THE LIGHTHOUSE WITCHES, C. J. Cooke  
THE ALBUM OF DR. MOREAU, Darvi Gregory  
STARR SIGN, C. S. O'Kinneide  
BOBBY MARCH WILL LIVE FOREVER, Alan Parks  
THE SHAPE OF DARKNESS, Laura Purcell

### **The Simon & Schuster Mary Higgins Clark Award**

THE SECRET LIFE OF MISS MARY BENNET, Katherine Cowley  
RUBY RED HERRING, Tracy Gardner  
CLARK AND DIVISION, Naomi Hirahara  
THE SIGN OF DEATH, Callie Hutton  
CHAPTER AND CURSE, Elizabeth Penney

### **The G. P. Putnam's Sons Sue Grafton Memorial Award**

DOUBLE TAKE, Elizabeth Breck  
RUNNER, Tracy Clark  
SHADOW HILL, Thomas Kies  
SLEEP WELL, MY LADY, Kwei Quartey  
FAMILY BUSINESS, S. J. Rozan



## John Malcolm

by Martin Edwards



I'm sorry to report the death of another stalwart of British crime writing from the 1980s and 90s, John Malcolm. That was the pen-name of John Malcolm Andrews, who served as Chair of the Crime Writers' Association in 1994-5. I got to know John in the early days of my writing career and we had numerous enjoyable conversations. He was a quiet, pleasant man who was clearly both a capable businessman and a great expert on antiques.

That love of antiques played a central part in his novels. He introduced Tim Simpson in **A BACK ROOM IN SOMERS TOWN** (1984) and the Tim Simpson books were a staple of the Collins Crime Club, a first class list with a very good editor, Elizabeth Walter. John inscribed a number of copies of his books for me, and I found them sound, capable pieces of work, good to

read even if (like me) one knows next to nothing about antiques.

John also published two non-series novels which I haven't read, as well as several non-fiction books about antiques and many articles. Born in 1936, he was educated at St John's College, Cambridge, where he studied engineering. His business career meant that he travelled extensively and he worked as a management consultant as well as a machinery broker.

I haven't seen John in person for a long time but the two last stories that he published both appeared in anthologies that I edited; the most recent, 'The Marquis Wellington Jug', appeared in **MOTIVES FOR MURDER**. He was diagnosed with Parkinson's in 2004, but we corresponded many times and I was delighted when he agreed to contribute an essay to **HOWDUNIT**. In fact, he was one of the first Detection Club members to do so, and took a keen interest in the book's fortunes. I imagine that it was the last piece he wrote concerned with the crime genre. Ultimately he succumbed to cancer on 30 October this year. My condolences to his widow Geraldine and his son Sam. I shall remember him with affection as a good companion who was always willing to give some time to a young fellow crime writer.

## Wilbur Smith

by Mike Ripley

Ten years ago I defended Wilbur Smith, who has died aged 88, from a ridiculous personal attack in the **Daily Telegraph** (a newspaper I had proudly written for in the last century) which made much of the fact that his fourth wife was forty years his junior and [cared] very little for his books.

In rare public appearances (in this country) Smith made numerous remarks about the need for 'real men' in leadership roles and how he personally was proud of fathering numerous children 'without ever having to change a nappy.' All of which made Wilbur Smith the sort of guy I probably wouldn't be happy having a pint down the local with, even if his 'local' did happen to be

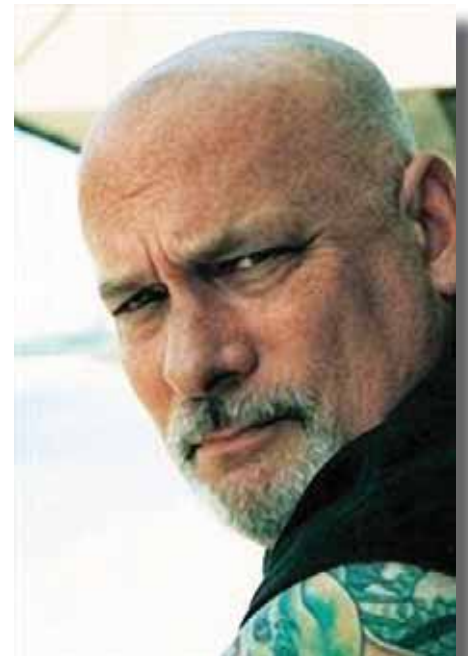
in the Maldives, and especially not having learned of the amount of 'big game' he had shot on safari (two elephants; lions and leopards too many to count).

But there is no denying that Wilbur Smith's brand of Africa-based adventure fiction, openly influenced by Rider Haggard, had a tremendous impact on the British thriller scene in the 1960s and the reading habits since of many young males, who became loyal fans, not just here but across the world.

His books were tremendously popular in India - one fan announcing he was to be buried with his collection - and Italy, where he was given the Seal of the City of Milan in 2013. I long since stopped telling people, when visiting Italy, that I was a writer because I would immediately be asked if I knew Wilbur Smith and there was always such disappointment when I said I did not.

## G. M. Ford

by Janet Rudolph



G.M. Ford was the author of 6 Frank Corso novels, well as 12 mysteries featuring Seattle private investigator Leo Waterman, and several standalone novels. Perhaps my favorite remains **WHO IN HELL IS WANDA FUCA?**, the first in the Leo Waterman series. It was nominated for both the Anthony and the Shamus awards.

He will be missed.

## Gordon McAlpine

by Janet Rudolph



Edgar nominated author Gordon McAlpine has passed away at the age of 62. Way too young. McAlpine was such a wonderful talented quirky writer. He wrote as Gordon McAlpine and Owen Fitzstephen. Some of my favorite novels of his: **WOMAN WITH A BLUE PENCIL**, **THE BIG MAN'S DAUGHTER**, and **HAMMETT UNWRITTEN**. He also wrote a trilogy of middle grade novels, *The Misadventures of Edgar and Allan Poe*, as well as short fiction in journals and anthologies. McAlpine taught at Chapman University in Orange, California, for many years.

## Medora Sale a.k.a.

## Caroline Roe

by Janet Rudolph



Caroline Medora Roe died suddenly on November 7 at the age of 84. Well

known to the mystery world as both Medora Sale and Caroline Roe, she received her PhD in Medieval Studies at the University of Toronto. She published 7 mystery novels under the name Medora Sale, and 8 mysteries under the name Caroline Roe. She was awarded the Crime Writers of Canada's Arthur Ellis First Novel award in 1985 for **MURDER ON THE RUN. AN ANTIDOTE FOR AVARICE** won the Barry Award for Best Paperback Original Mystery Novel in 1999. She was president of both Crime Writers of Canada (1989-90) and Sisters in Crime (1998-99). My sympathy goes out to her family and friends. She will be missed.

## Andrew Vachss

by J. Kingston Pierce



A reader reminded me yesterday that I hadn't yet mentioned the passing of attorney and author Andrew Vachss. He died on December 27 at age 79, with one last book still to be published.

The Gumshoe Site notes that New Yorker Vachss "was a federal investigator in sexually transmitted diseases, and a labor organizer and a prison director for violent juvenile offenders before becoming an attorney for abused children and adolescents. He wrote his first novel, **FLOOD** (Donald I. Fine, 1985), introducing 'outlaw investigator' Burke and his gang, which was nominated for the 1986 Shamus Award for best first novel. The Burke series ends with **ANOTHER LIFE** (Pantheon, 2008). He wrote *The Cross* trilogy and the *Dell and Dolly* trilogy and several standalones and a number of short stories."

## Lefty Award Nominations 2022

Presented by the Left Coast Crime Convention

### Best Mystery Novel

RUNNER, Tracy Clark  
RAZORBLADE TEARS,  
S. A. Cosby  
LAST REDEMPTION, Matt Coyle  
LIGHTNING STRIKES,  
William Kent Krueger  
BATH HAUS, P. J. Vernon

### Best Debut Mystery

WHO IS MAUDE DIXON?,  
Alexandra Andrews  
BLACKOUT, Marco Carocari  
THE OTHER BLACK GIRL,  
Zakiya Dalila Harris  
ARSENIC AND ADOBO,  
Mia P. Manansala  
ALL HER LITTLE SECRETS,  
Wanda M. Morris

### Best Humorous Mystery

CAJUN KISS OF DEATH,  
Ellen Byron  
MIMI LEE CRACKS THE CODE,  
Jennifer Chow  
FINLAY DONOVAN IS KILLING  
IT, Elle Cosimano  
HOW TO BOOK A MURDER,  
Cynthia Kuhn  
MANGO, MAMBO, AND  
MURDER, Raquel V. Reyes  
FOGGED OFF, Wendall Thomas

### Best Historical Mystery

THE CRY OF THE HANGMAN,  
Susanna Calkins  
THE SAVAGE KIND,  
John Copenhaver  
CLARK AND DIVISION,  
Naomi Hirahara  
THE BOMBAY PRINCE,  
Sujata Massey  
THE MIRROR DANCE,  
Catriona McPherson  
DEATH AT GREENWAY, Lori  
Rader-Day



Emilya Naymark describes herself as having been born in a country that no longer exists. Right off the bat -- a woman shrouded in mystery. She escaped with her parents, lived in Italy for awhile and eventually ended up in New York.

She is the author of the Laney Bird novels **HIDE IN PLACE** (2021) and **BEHIND THE LIE** (2022).

Her short stories appeared in **A STRANGER COMES TO TOWN**, edited by Michael Koryta, **SECRETS IN THE WATER, AFTER MIDNIGHT: TALES FROM THE GRAVEYARD SHIFT**, *River River Journal*, **SNOW-BOUND: BEST NEW ENGLAND CRIME STORIES 2017**, and **1+30: THE BEST OF MYSTORY**.

When not writing, Emilya works as a visual artist and reads massive quantities of psychological thrillers, suspense, and crime fiction. She lives in the Hudson Valley with her family. Her husband is a retired NYC undercover policeman.

### The Laney Bird Series Characters

**Laney Bird** had a demanding job as an undercover NYPD cop. But that necessitated her artist husband Theo to stay home and care for their difficult child, Alfie. "Theo complained that he had no time to paint, Couldn't, he said, not after a day of hide-and-seek and story time and naps not taken." Eventually

Theo had had enough and left Laney and Alfie high and dry. No contact and no support. This coincided with Laney's career imploding when her undercover sting to take down a major drug kingpin goes terribly wrong. So she quits her job and flees to the relative safety of the Hudson River Valley in Upstate New York and puts down roots in the small town of Sylvan. There she drives a bus to make ends meet and is living a very unsatisfactory life, bitter at not being able to do the job she loves (detecting) and heartbroken over losing the love of her life. Her main focus turns to her son Alfie.

**Alfie Bird** is a troubled child. And that was before his beloved father deserted the family. Now he's a troubled teen who doesn't fit in with his fellow schoolmates. At heart, he is a good person, but he seems to attract trouble like a magnet attracts iron.

**Holly Dubois** is Laney's kind and helpful neighbor. Everybody loves Holly, with good reason. Holly is a great help to Laney in **HIDE IN PLACE**. But in the second novel, **BEHIND THE LIE**, Holly is the one who finds herself in deep trouble. It should be noted that Holly suffers survivor's guilt over the drowning death of her older sister when they were teenagers.

**Oliver Dubois** is Holly's very patient and loving husband. He is employed at a research facility where he heads up a team that is developing a drug to extend life. Oliver becomes a center point in the second novel.

## Introducing ... *Emilya Naymark* by George Easter

### The Novels

#### **HIDE IN PLACE**

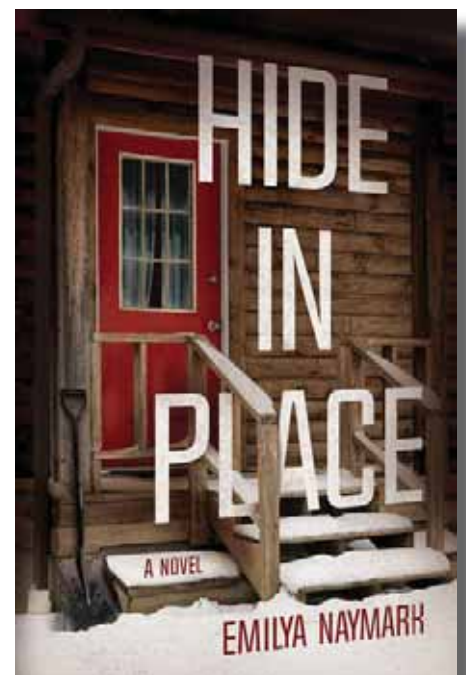
by Emilya Naymark

Crooked Lane Books, \$27.99

#### **Rating: A-**

A parents' greatest nightmare come true is the death of a child. A close second to that is the kidnapping of a child. Parents are left to wonder: "Is the child still alive?", or "Is the child being abused?", or "Is there a way to get the child back alive and unharmed?", or "Are the police doing everything possible to solve the crime?"

So when Alfie, the misfit son of former undercover cop (now single mom – bus driver) Laney Bird, disappears, Laney is understandably highly distraught. The small-town police seem to be doing everything they can, but



that doesn't stop her from using her skills to dig deeper than the cops are digging.

Three years previously Laney was working on a racketeering case against the Russian mob when her cover was blown. There are several flash-backs to the time when Laney is handling that case – which eventually blew up in her face. When it looked like she might be in danger of mob retribution, she moved from the environs of New York City to the Hudson Valley area in upstate New York. The only job she could find was that of a school bus driver. But even that job is disrupted by her son's frequent emotional outbreaks in school.

Her search for Alfie takes her back to her police days and to how little she really understood about those last days with a badge and a gun.

This debut novel builds slowly and at the outset I had little sympathy for Laney or Alfie because I couldn't identify with them, but that changed about half-way through the novel – and then it was a race to the finish, which was both exciting and satisfying.

### **BEHIND THE LIE**

by Emilya Naymark

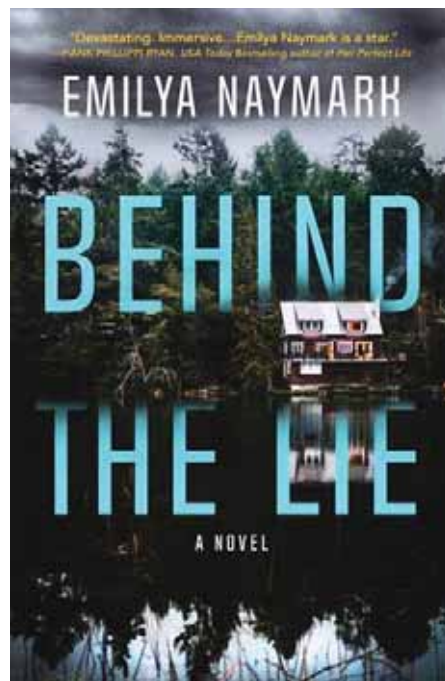
Crooked Lane Books, \$27.99

Laney Bird #2

**Rating: A-**

This sequel to **HIDE IN PLACE** starts off with quite a bang. A raucous neighborhood block party ends with Oliver Dubois, one of Laney Bird's neighbors, driving his truck through his front door, as another house catches on fire and two women go missing – one of them Laney's best friend, Holly Dubois, the other a recent move-in Vera Volkin. The husband of the other missing woman is found wounded and refuses to identify the party who shot him. This is not what one would expect to happen in this sleepy Hudson Valley town of Sylvan.

It is about a year since the events chronicled in **HIDE IN PLACE** occurred. Laney has been hired by a local private investigation firm and she is



loving her work.

The local police are baffled as to the cause of these events and Oliver isn't talking. So Laney decides to look into the matter, while at the same time trying to track down a missing teenager. It turns out that the bullet that wounded her neighbor was shot from her gun, which she thought was locked up in her gun safe. Laney begins to suspect that her son Alfie may be mixed up in this mess as well. So she goes into hyper-protective mode.

The reader is privy to the fact that Holly has dug herself a deep financial hole (that she has kept from her husband Oliver) and is about to lose her family home to foreclosure. The new neighbors, the Volkins, offer her a lifeline, but it involves stealing secrets from her husband Oliver's company. At first she balks but then relents. And thus begins a downward spiral.

Naymark's empathetic characters and tense plotting have made me a fan of her work. Laney Bird is a survivor who rises above her life's problems and forges ahead. I'm a sucker for books about survivors

I suggest that you give Emilya Naymark's mysteries a try, if you haven't already.

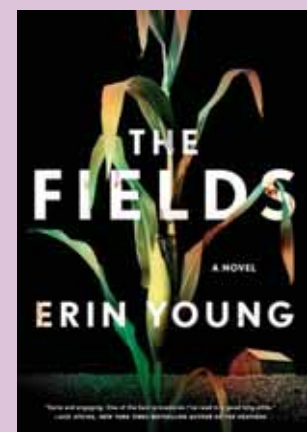
## **When a "Debut Crime Novel" Isn't a Debut Novel**

**THE FIELDS** by Erin Young is being lauded as a fine "debut crime novel."

As Robyn Young, the author has also written a number of historical thrillers about the Knights Templar, which rode the wave of interest created by Dan Brown's **THE DA VINCI CODE**.



She certainly wouldn't qualify as a first-time published author, but since **THE FIELDS** is her first crime novel, is it accurate to call it a "debut" novel? I don't think so. In this instance, **THE FIELDS** would not qualify for a Best First Mystery Barry Award. We like to honor first-time authors with that award. It would be considered for the Best Mystery category.



## Editor's Message



**Cover Article.** I know that there is a lot of data in the cover article, but there is also a lot of good information to point you towards some very good reading. Personal taste always comes into play. I certainly don't read a highly praised novel if it is one that doesn't interest me. However, among the list of the best of the best, there should be something for everyone's tastes so pick out a few you haven't read yet and enjoy.

**Faye Kellerman's Last Decker/Lazarus Novel.** *THE HUNT* is being published August 23, 2022 by William Morrow. It is the 27<sup>th</sup> in the Peter Decker and Rina Lazarus series which started in 1986 with the award-winning *THE RITUAL BATH*. Recently I downloaded a digital version of *THE HUNT* and was surprised by its dedication that says, "And finally, to all my fans who have supported my books and me, I dedicate the final Peter Decker and Rina Lazarus novel to you. I could not have done this without you. Thank you, thank you, thank you." At age 70, is Faye Kellerman retiring from writing or going to

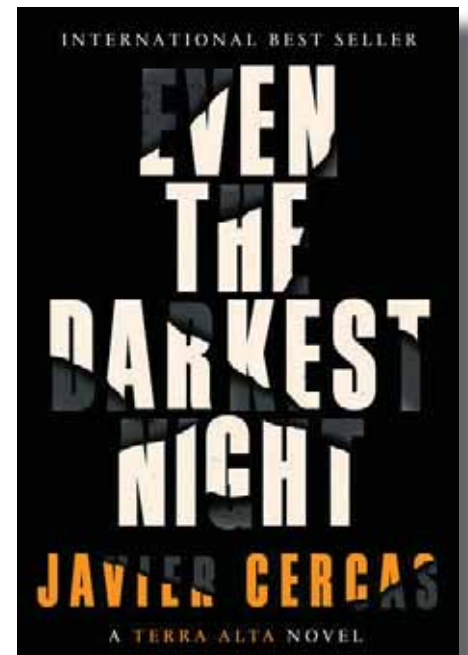
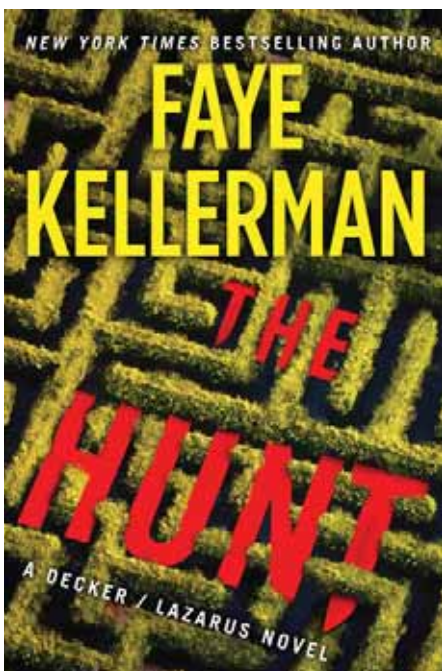
start something new? Time will tell.

**The DP List 2022.** It always takes a few months to get a good list of the best books of 2022 going, but I'm always quite happy with how The DP List turns out by year's end. Starting this year we are adding some more expertise to the list's creation. In the past, we relied only on starred reviews in the four major library journals and/or a very positive review in *Deadly Pleasures* to add a title to the DP List. This year we will use those same criteria and add one more: amazon.com's monthly lists of best mysteries and thrillers. For the last year I've been posting these lists on the first day of each month when they come out. Larry Gandle and I are very impressed with the obvious expertise that goes into creating these lists. Amazon's year-end "best" list is one of the best we have seen. In other words, we have as much confidence in amazon's lists as we do in the library journals' starred reviews.

**Death of a Barry Award Committee Member.** A member of our Barry Award Nominating Committee, Kris Schorer, passed away on January 6, 2022 from cancer. I never met Kris in person, but had numerous, very enjoyable telephone conversations with her over the years. Kris didn't attend mystery conventions so I doubt if any of you knew her personally. She was a super fan of mysteries and read about 200 of them a year (that's why she was on the Committee). I loved her for her good taste and her enthusiasm for good writing. She would email me whenever she read a book she deemed Barry-Award-worthy. She took her place on the Barry Award Nominating Committee very seriously. She was a good friend and I will miss her. Rest in Peace, Dear Kris.

**The [www.deadlypleasures.com](http://www.deadlypleasures.com) Website.** I've been putting a lot of work

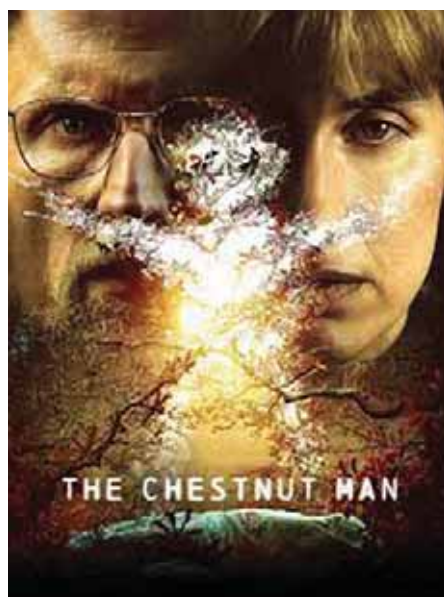
into the website so that it is a place that you will want to go to for interesting info on the world of mystery fiction. Since the last issue there have been 95 posts made. I encourage you to check in at least weekly, if not daily. It's like this column on steroids. So if you like this column, you'll love the website. It also gives you a sneak peak of what the new covers will look like and updates The DP List regularly so you don't have to wait three months to find out what new books are being touted as the best of the year. The publication date of each issue is also indicated so you will know exactly when to expect each new issue. I've been doing a good job of getting each issue out timely now that we've gone digital. So you can expect a new one every three months. Please send any changes in email addresses because that is the only means of contact now.



**How I Found One of the Best Crime Novels of the Year.** I ran across a post on the Internet from M.W. Craven who won the CWA Gold Dagger for *THE PUPPET SHOW*. I love his Poe/Tilly series so I was interested in what his choices for Best of 2021 were. He admitted that not all of his choices were published in 2021 and they included 2022 novels which he read in advance of publication. His favorite of the year intrigued me – **EVEN THE DARKEST**

**NIGHT** by Spanish author Javier Cercas. The plot line sounded fascinating and so I looked it up and found that it is going to be published by Knopf in the U.S. in June, 2022. I contacted people at Knopf and they sent me a pdf of the book, which I devoured in a few days. I will publish my review in the next issue of *DP*, which will be closer to the date of publication (which publishers appreciate). My wife, a very tough critic, read it and said, "Very good. It didn't read like a translated book. Very smooth." It is on my growing shortlist of my favorites of the year (which include two May releases, **BAD ACTORS** by Mick Herron and **THE DARK FLOOD** by Deon Meyer). These three wonderful reads will definitely be on The DP List 2022. Just a heads up.

**A couple of viewing recommendations.** My evenings are usually devoted to reading, but every once in a while I take a break and watch some good TV. Most of you are probably ahead of me in watching all of the seasons of *Shetland*, the fine series based on the books and characters of Ann Cleeves. It has an excellent cast and the storylines for each season are quite suspenseful. There are six seasons so far and a seventh has been filmed but not yet released. The sixth season ends on quite a cliff-hanger, so I'm anxious to watch Season 7 when it come out. Viewed on Britbox.



One of my favorite novels of 2019 was **THE CHESTNUT MAN** by Soren Svestrup. It went on to win the Barry Award for Best First Mystery. Now it is a six -part series on Netflix. It is an excellent adaptation that my wife and I binge-watched. It helps a production to have 6 hours to work with. Jeff Popple also praised it.

I am a little annoyed that the author Soren Svestrup hasn't published a sequel to **THE CHESTNUT MAN** yet.

Season 1 of the *Slow Horses* adaptation for the Apple+ streaming platform has been filmed and will be released on April 1, 2022. I'm anxious to see what the excellent cast can do with Mick Herron's wonderful work.

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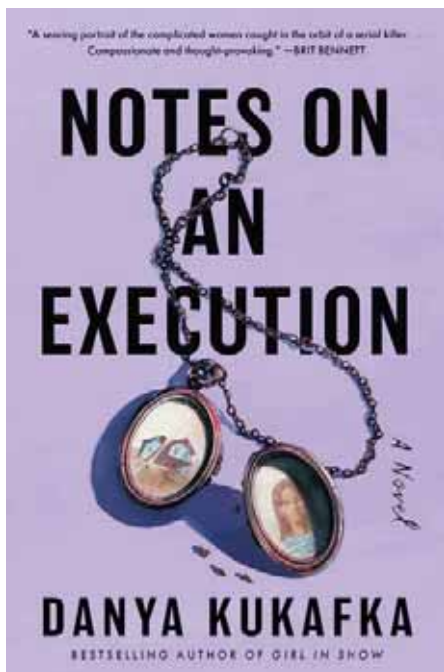
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## Assistant Editor's Message

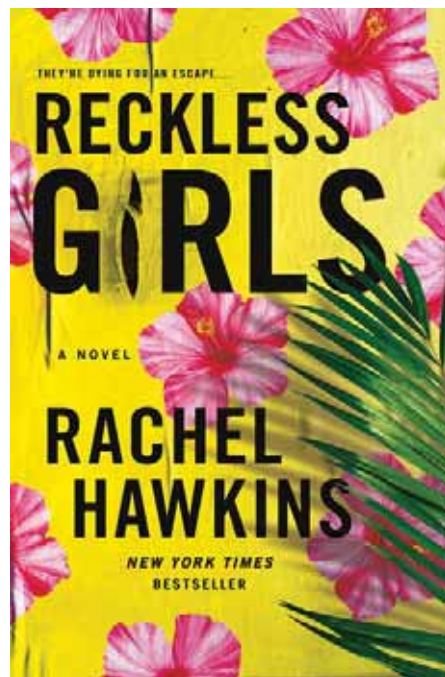


Well, as I completed my annual reading and reviewing of the Edgar shortlists with their usual hits and misses, I get this feeling of freedom -- the freedom to read any book I so choose. At times it could be overwhelming. So how will I select my next reads?

Every month I start with the Amazon Best of the Month list, that George re-post on the 1st of each month on [www.deadlypleasures.com](http://www.deadlypleasures.com). Amazon's editorial staff does manage to select some of the best mysteries and thrillers. This will be the basis of my upcoming reading. In January they selected **THE MAID** by Nita Prose -- a debut that I did read and review elsewhere in this issue. In February, the best book is **THE PARIS APARTMENT** by Lucy Foley -- also read and reviewed herein. Some of the other books mentioned that caught my interest are **THIS MIGHT HURT** by Stephanie Wrobel (who also wrote the Barry-Award-nominated **DARLING ROSE GOLD**), **THE OVERNIGHT GUEST** by Heather Gudenkauf, and **NOTES ON AN EXECUTION** by Danya Kukafka (More below).

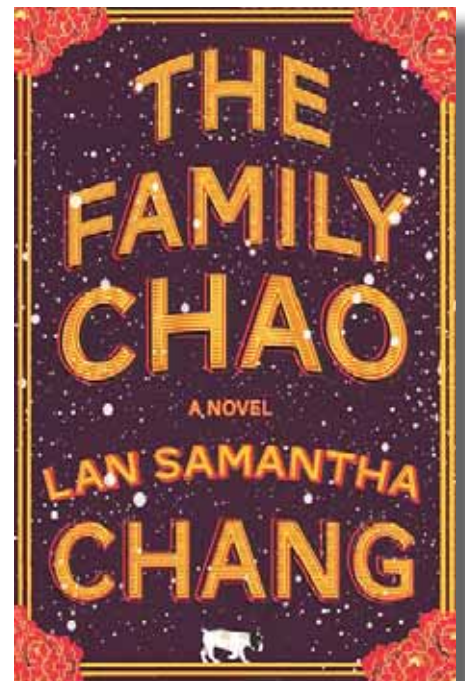


I also will look for popular books. These are books destined for the best-seller list. For example, **THE PARIS APARTMENT** by Lucy Foley or **RECKLESS GIRLS** by Rachel Hawkins. The Book of the Month Club selects books that are often predictable choices for a wide readership. If one or two of the BOMC books look good, I might opt to read them.



Rarely does *The New York Times* have a crime fiction book on the front page. **NOTES ON AN EXECUTION** by Danya Kukafka was featured recently which would mean it is a literary crime novel to take notice of. That is usually my favorite type of book. This will definitely be read.

Another way I select books is whether the book received a starred review from *Publisher's Weekly*, *Booklist*, *Library Journal* or *Kirkus*. They also put out anticipated books of the year. These starred reviews are the major building block of The DP List of the best books of the year, found in each issue of *DP* and



on [www.deadlypleasures.com](http://www.deadlypleasures.com)

Books that have recently caught my eye include **REAL EASY** by Marie Rutkoski, **THE FAMILY CHAO** by Lan Samantha Chang, **THE HOUSE ACROSS THE LAKE** by Riley Sager and the debut mystery **A FLICKER IN THE DARK** by Stacy Willingham.

Of course we all look for books by authors we have read and liked. Harlan Coben is coming out with **THE MATCH**. Also I am looking forward to **CITY ON FIRE** by Don Winslow and **LAPVONA** by Otessa Moshfegh.

As far as thrillers, I will read **TARGETED** by Stephan Hunter -- always a favorite of mine, **BOX 88** by Charles Cumming, **SIERRA SIX** by Mark Greaney, **THE BERLIN EXCHANGE** by Joseph Kanon and **THE RUNAWAY** by Nick Petrie which I already read and reviewed elsewhere in this issue.

## DISTRACTION

However, what invariably happens with George and me is that we can easily get distracted by some new book showing up on Netgalley or an advance reading copy arriving on our doorsteps. These new books may replace the above on my TBR list before I get around to reading them. We never catch up! We are spoiled for choice and it's a wonderful thing!

# What's In A Name?

## A Subjective Investigation

by  
Meredith Anthony

Did you ever wonder? Not 'who dun-it?' or 'will they get away with it?' But where the hell that book got its title? And whether it matters.

Many of us have poor retention for book titles. I myself have bought many a promising-sounding book only to find I'd already read it. I had just forgotten the title. And since book titles are not protected by copyright (they are too short to qualify), there can be multiple books with one title. Case in point, Amazon lists 5 novels titled **BLIND JUSTICE**. The only way to protect a book title is to apply for trademark protection, which is not easy to get unless you have a distinctive brand such as Harry Potter in the name.

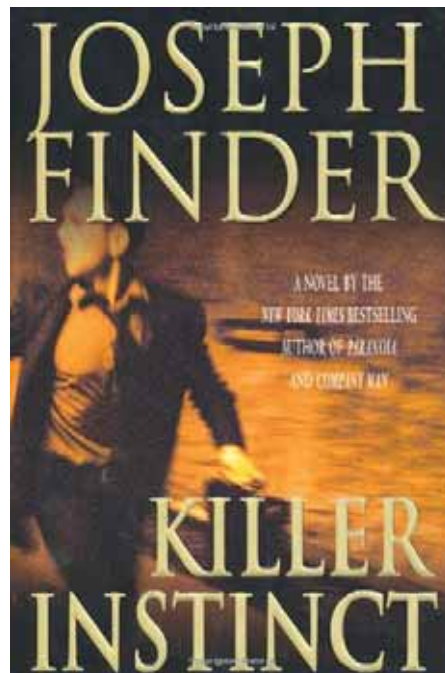
Of course, many titles are forgettable. Many have little or nothing to do with the content of the book. They may be meaningless combinations of words. In fact, the professional author's service site, Reedsy.com actually offers a handy 'Book Title Generator' which promises one of 10,000+ titles if you follow the prompts and input info about your book.

How much does a title matter? Consider the smash hit **GONE GIRL**. I think you could make a case for it getting a big push from the provocative and alliterative title. How much less interesting it would be if it were titled **MISSING WIFE**, for instance. **GONE GIRL**, famously, started a mini-trend of titles with the word 'girl.' It was followed by another best-seller, Paula Hawkins' **THE GIRL ON THE TRAIN**. Other entrants include excellent thrillers like **THE WRONG GIRL**, by the amazing Hank Phillippi Ryan and Karin Slaughter's wonderful **PRETTY GIRLS**.

Lisa Scottoline contributed **DADDY'S GIRL**. Ken Bruen weighed in with the brilliant **GALWAY GIRL**. The rest are perhaps more forgettable. Test yourself: How many more can you name?

How do titles happen? I talked to several authors about their experience.

Charles Todd, of the mother-son writing team that created the amazing and long-running Ian Rutledge series, told me that they insist on finishing each book before they even discuss the title, much to their publisher's annoyance. Publishers prefer to have a title to start drumming up enthusiasm very early in the publishing process. During the writing process, the co-authors simply referred to the work-in-progress as Rutledge #14 or Bess #9.



Best-selling author Joseph Finder says he thinks up his own titles, usually,

while he is writing the book. He told me he was typing the phrase "killer instinct" while writing **KILLER INSTINCT** and suddenly felt a chill. "I knew that was the title."

I asked Lee Child about the titles for his long-running Jack Reacher books. He said, "I'm all over the map in terms of when they were decided, and who by. I figure of the 24 they have fallen into three camps. Some, like **BLUE MOON**, popped into my head before I started writing and was fixed in my mind. About another third kind of emerged as I went along. The final third still had working titles (sometimes just like "Reacher #19) until after they were finished, whereupon my editor would suggest. **WORTH DYING FOR** and **A WANTED MAN** were in that category."

Other authors start with a title and write the book to match.

But back to content, let's look at some of the trends used by great authors of the genre and their titles. And please remember, that the categories and groupings are meant to be helpful. The examples and opinions are mine alone. Feel free to disagree.

### One Word or Two?

Short titles are definitely in right now. One word titles are a fad that comes and goes but like Preston and Child's Pendergast, never seems to die. Lee Child favors two-word titles but he also gave us **PERSUADER** and **PERSONAL**. Stephen King delivered the succinct **IT**.

An interesting sub-category is the compound word. Lee Child's **TRIPWIRE**. Nevada Barr's **FIRESTORM**. Christa Faust's **HOODTOWN**. My own **LADYKILLER** (yes, there have been several), and **HELLMOUTH** are examples.

Lee Child uses a lot of two-word titles. Some are wonderful like the great first Jack Reacher novel, **KILLING FLOOR**. Others are less evocative, but Lee Child's books transcend their titles. I would personally buy a book called **GARBAGE CAN**, if it had Lee's name on it.

One basic formula seems to use one genre-related key word (blood, death,

killer, murder, black, night, evil) and one contrasting noun (dance, look, work, etc.). Most of these seem to be computer-generated by Reedsy.

Among the more inventive are Tony Spinoza's irresistible, **HOSE MONKEY**, Michael Connelly's **BLOOD WORK** or **LINCOLN LAWYER**, Christa Faust's amazing **MONEY SHOT**.

### Quotations

Quotes are always popular. The Bible (via religious hymn titles) aptly gave Julia Spencer Fleming some of the titles for her excellent series about an Episcopal priest including **I SHALL NOT WANT**. She also uses a biblical variant for **A DARKNESS UNTO DEATH**.

Robert Gleason used Shakespeare for his international thriller, **THE EVIL THAT MEN DO**.

### Place Names and People Names

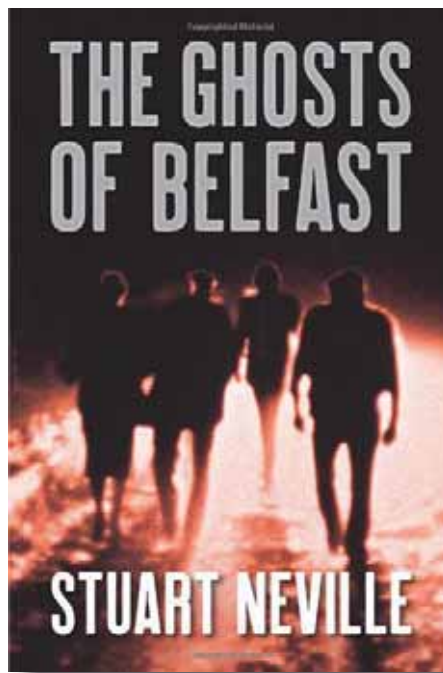
My personal feeling is that place names along with people names make for the weakest titles. There's Meg Gardiner's **CHINA LAKE**, William Kent Kreuger's **IRON LAKE**, and Candice Fox's **CRIMSON LAKE**—all excellent books but maybe they could use better titles.

Geography fares better when it's modified. And urban. Consider Jason Starr's **TWISTED CITY**, Michael Connelly's **CITY OF BONES**, Ed McBain's **BIG BAD CITY**, Linda Fairstein's **TERMINAL CITY** and Jim Fusilli's **HARD, HARD CITY**. **NEW YORK DEAD** is the first of Stuart Woods' Stone Barrington novels. **LA DEAD** is the sixth. **BALTIMORE BLUES** is the first Tess Monaghan book by Laura Lippman, who also wrote **IN A STRANGE CITY**.

There are exceptions. Dennis Lehane's great **MYSTIC RIVER**, although the subtle complex connotations of the word 'mystic' gives it some gravitas. But Lou Berney's excellent **NOVEMBER ROAD** deserves a bigger and better name.

Of course, William Kent Kreuger uses place names or geographical features in most of his titles and he has a large following.

But when place names are incorporated into a title, it can be wonderful.



Stuart Neville's brilliant **THE GHOSTS OF BELFAST**, for example. Or again, Ken Bruen's gorgeous **GALWAY GIRL**.

Cara Black's wonderful series, each set in a different Paris neighborhood, uses a simple but effective place-based formula: **MURDER ON THE LEFT BANK**, **MURDER IN THE MARAIS**, **MURDER ON THE ISLE SAINT-LOUIS**.

Interestingly, very few mysteries are named for characters. The first Lee Child was **KILLING FLOOR**, not **JACK REACHER**. Michael Connelly's first Harry Bosch book was **THE BLACK ECHO**, not **HARRY BOSCH**. James Patterson wrote 11 Alex Cross books with titles torn from nursery rhymes (**JACK & JILL**, **POP GOES THE WEASEL**) before he wrote **CROSS**, which began a series of titles with plays on Alex Cross' name: **DOUBLE CROSS**, **CROSS COUNTRY**, **CROSS MY HEART**.

My feeling is that a character name for a title doesn't do a mystery or thriller any favors. But it abounds in literary fiction (high lit, to crabby genre writers), from **DON QUIXOTE** to **JANE EYRE** to **REBECCA** to **CARRIE**. Sometimes it seems to signal a sub-par book. After the brilliant books with wonderful titles, **The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test**, *Bonfire of the Vanities* and *A Man in Full*, Wolfe delivered the egregious *I Am*

*Charlotte Simmons*. Is it a coincidence that both the book and the book title were awful?

**ROSE GOLD** from the great Walter Mosley is named after a character, but the name also reads as something else, in this case a precious metal, so an exception is granted. He uses this sly trick in several other titles, like **LITTLE GREEN** and **CHARCOAL JOE**. Another worthy exception is Joe Ide's **IQ**, which is both the smartness measure and also the initials of his very intelligent lead character.

Of course, Jeff Lindsay's excellent 8-book series incorporates his murderous main character's name in each alliterative title. Who could resist **DARKLY DREAMING DEXTER** or **DEARLY DEVOTED DEXTER**?

Venturing into cozy territory, the delicious Catriona McPherson gives us the Dandy Gilver series with Dandy's unfortunate name in each title of the first few books. **DANDY GILVER AND THE PROPER TREATMENT OF BLOOD STAINS** is one example.

### Personal Descriptors

Another fairly weak alternative is the character summary. Is it just me or does anyone else get annoyed by the high lit attempts to fix women in a man's world such as **THE HANGMAN'S DAUGHTER**, **THE AVIATOR'S WIFE**, a trend mocked by Michael Chabon who invented **THE ARSONIST'S DAUGHTER** in *Wonder Boys*? In the mystery world we have Ruth Ware's **THE WOMAN IN CABIN 10**, Paula Hawkins' **THE GIRL ON THE TRAIN**.

Some mysteries follow this path with more success. Duane Swiercznski's amazing **THE BLONDE**. Lisa Scottoloni's **DIRTY BLONDE**. Michael Connelly's **THE CONCRETE BLONDE**.

### Colors

John D. Macdonald wrote more than 20 Travis McGee novels, each incorporating a color in the title: from **THE DEEP BLUE GOOD-BY** to **BRIGHT ORANGE FOR A SHROUD** to **THE LONELY SILVER RAIN**. Walter Mosley also used colors in the titles of his long-running Easy Rawlins series. **DEV-**

**IL IN A BLUE DRESS** and, my personal favorite, **LITTLE GREEN** stand out among them.

### Numbers

As bloggers and, before them, magazine writers all know, some of the most read articles have numbers in them. No one knows why, but a number seems to draw many more readers. Lawrence Block's **EIGHT MILLION WAYS TO DIE**, is a good example. James Grady's wonderful, **SIX DAYS OF THE CON-DOR** is another. Or consider the quirky, under-appreciated novel by Troy Cook, **47 RULES OF HIGHLY EFFECTIVE BANK ROBBERS**. Or, dare I say it, E L James' **FIFTY SHADES OF GRAY**? Stephen King gave us **11.22.63**.

### Killer Nicknames

These can be provocative. Michael Connelly's **THE POET**, for instance. Or Jeffrey Deaver's excellent **COFFIN DANCER** and his remarkable Lincoln Rhymes debut novel, **THE BONE COLLECTOR**. **HIT MAN** is the first book in Lawrence Block's beloved Keller series.

### Booze-related Mysteries

There is a strange and delightful sub-trend that uses titles that allude to drinking. Lawrence Block's **WHEN THE SACRED GIN MILL CLOSES** comes to mind. Also his **A DROP OF THE HARD STUFF**. There's Con Lehane's **BEWARE THE SOLITARY DRINKER**. One of my favorite recent novels is William Lashner's **THE BARKEEP**. Dennis Lehane gave us **A DRINK BEFORE THE WAR**. And a special shout-out to the first book of Jim Fusilli's excellent, unfinished series, **CLOSING TIME**.

Joe Konrath has a wonderful, droll series about a cop named Jacqueline 'Jack' Daniels. Among them: **RUSTY NAIL**, **WHISKEY SOUR**, **BLOODY MARY**, **SHAKEN, STIRRED**, **DIRTY MARTINI** and **LAST CALL**. All wonderful reads.

### Series Titles

Some series have a built-in title gimmick. Who could resist Sue Grafton's epic Kinsey Milhone series that ran

through the alphabet from **A IS FOR ALIBI** to **Y IS FOR YESTERDAY**.

Similarly, the delightful series of nearly 30 Stephanie Plum books by Janet Evanovich almost all feature a number in the title: **ONE FOR THE MONEY**, **TWO FOR THE DOUGH**, **THREE TO GET DEADLY**.

Repetitive elements in series titles can help fans recognize new entries. The books that follow **HIT MAN** in Lawrence Block's Keller series are **HIT LIST**, **HIT PARADE**, **HIT AND RUN**, and **HIT ME**.

John Sandford's long-running Lucas Davenport series began with **RULES OF PREY**. The latest in the 30+ series are **NEON PREY** and **MASKED PREY**. He has said that he's long run out of phrases with 'prey' that make any kind of sense. It doesn't matter. His books are so terrific that he could write **EAT, PREY, LOVE**, or **KNEEL PREY** and still sell millions.

### Puns

Talking about titles, let's give a nod to the cozy. Puns, fractured phrases and other word play are the stock in trade of this subgenre'.

Even if you don't typically read cozies, try Jeffrey Cohen, who also writes as E J Copperman. They're wonderful, starting with the hilarious **AS DOG IS MY WITNESS** or **A FAREWELL TO LEGS** or **IT HAPPENED ONE KNIFE**.

### Thought Provoking Titles

Craig Johnson's excellent Walt Longmire series that starts with **THE COLD DISH**. It took me a second or two to realize it referred to revenge -- a dish best served cold. Great book. Great title. Lee Child's **BLUE MOON** also takes a moment or two. You might first think of the song of that name. But when you consider that "once in a blue moon" is synonymous with a rare occurrence or coincidence you get it.

John Verdon's **THINK OF A NUMBER** is not only the book title but also the book set-up, one of the best ever.

### Great Titles

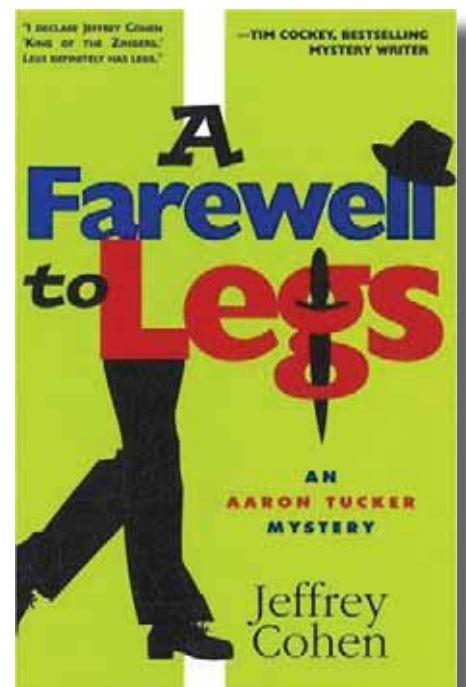
Note: this is the most subjective section of all. You will think about cat-

egories, length, types of titles and make your own list.

What makes a great title? Again, everyone will have personal preferences. Mine? I love a good evocative phrase, long or short.

Some of my favorite books have amazing titles. My husband Larry Light's **TOO RICH TO LIVE**. Thomas Harris' **SILENCE OF THE LAMBS**. The great Ken Bruen's **THE KILLING OF THE TINKERS**. English author Anna Blundy's sly and wonderful **THE BAD NEWS BIBLE**. Peter Blauner's groundbreaking **SLOW MOTION RIOT**. Lou Berney's **THE LONG AND FARAWAY GONE** (which also has one of the all-time great set-ups). Just when you think Lee Child doesn't bother to think up good titles, he comes along with **BAD LUCK AND TROUBLE**. And that takes us back to Walter Mosley, **TROUBLE IS WHAT I DO**. And no list of great titles would be complete without a shout out to one of my favorite novels of all time—Jennifer Egan's epic **A VISIT FROM THE GOON SQUAD**. I won't spoil the title by explaining it. Find out for yourself.

I think Lee Child summed it up best. He told me, "I think titles can be super-important, but it's mysterious."



*It's About Crime***Marv Lachman****The Short Stop**

Edgar Allan Poe invented the detective story as a *short* story, but it seems that most mystery writers and fans prefer it at novel length. For more than twenty years, Crippen and Landru, founded by Doug Greene and now operated by Jeff Marks, has worked mightily to keep the form alive. Investigation of their 2021 output shows why their books are so highly thought of by scholars, critics, and a small subset of fans. All three books reviewed below are trade paperbacks, priced at \$22.

**HILDEGARDE WITHERS: FINAL RIDDLES ?** by Stuart Palmer is part of their Lost Classics Series and provides considerable variety in its contents. Following an enthusiastic introduction by Steven Saylor, there are ten stories of Withers, two Sherlockian pastiches,

a story about Palmer's other series detective, Howard Rook, an article on how Palmer became a Sherlockian, and a true crime piece.

In the 1930s Palmer was a very popular mystery author with many of his novels turned into movies at RKO. Edna May Oliver, the first and best Withers, flawlessly portrayed her overbearing manner and imaginative detective work. James Gleason was perfect as her long-suffering friend Inspector Oscar Piper. Anyone who has seen the films will easily imagine the protagonists while reading the stories, of which "The Return of Hildegard Withers" is probably best, though I have a soft spot for "You Bet Your Life," in which Groucho Marx tangles with Hildegard on his then-popular television show. Also good is "The Stripteaser and the Private Eye," about the newspaperman-unlicensed private eye Howard Rook.

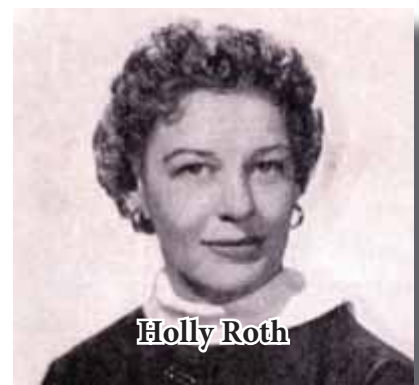
In 1954, when they were in their early twenties, William Link and Richard Levinson had a story in the beloved *EQMM* Department of First Stories. They went on to write 15 stories for *AHMM*, and then they struck paydirt in Hollywood, creating *Columbo* in a play and a popular TV show, plus bringing into being *Mannix* and *Murder, She Wrote*. Edited by Joseph Goodrich, with an introduction by Tom Straw, **SHOOTING SCRIPT AND OTHER MYSTERIES** has 17 of the 18 stories Link and Levinson published between 1954 and 1966, including that first story from 1954 "Whistle While You Work."

Most of the stories are short, but the L boys were expert at drawing the reader into the plot early, sometimes in the first

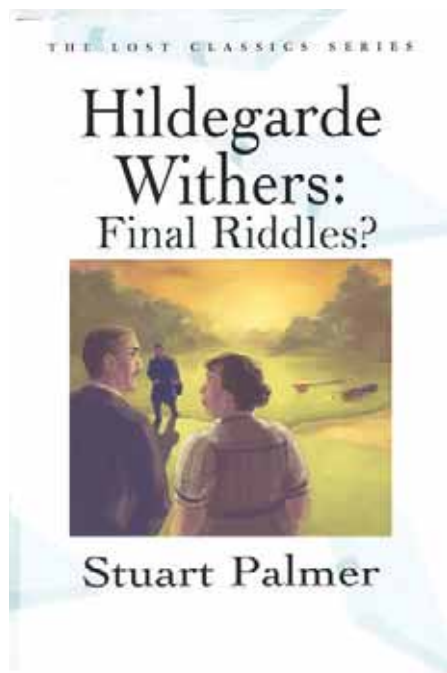
paragraph. Especially good is "Memory Game," in which they are prescient, using the idea of trivia contests in bars decades before they became popular. Other stories are short, but good, often using the "biter bit" endings characteristic of *AHMM* in its early days. I found "Jessica" to be one of the better amnesia stories I've read. Even in their early days Link and Levinson were too good to be forgotten.

Also forgotten, except by those who loved them, are the Con Games stories of Robert Edward Eckels. He was one who wrote in that sub-genre between 1969 and 1986. **NEVER TRUST A PARTNER**, the title of Eckels' book, is also the title of a story from *EQMM* that was selected by Hubin as one of the year's best. There are 17 stories, plus the usual helpful complete bibliography of short stories found in all Crippen & Landru books. The book contains all the stories about his main series characters, Lang and Lovell, who are usually involved in art forgery, and Major Henry T. McDonlevy, who usually deals with gambling background.

Eckels had 55 stories published, of which 17 are in this book, so there are enough for a second collection. I can already think of several worthy of a second volume.

**Notes on Novels  
Recently Read****Holly Roth**

In 1964 mystery writer Holly Roth was lost at sea, having fallen off a yacht in the Atlantic Ocean. The circumstances were strange, but there was no evidence of a crime, and she was not im-





portant enough to get much space in the newspapers. I found the circumstances of her death unusual enough to cause me to read several of her novels. **THE CONTENT ASSIGNMENT** (also published as **THE SHOCKING SECRET**) (1954) is a Cold War novel narrated by a British newspaperman, John Terrant, who has fallen in love with Ellen Content, a civilian U.S. Army employee in Berlin who disappears after a trip home on the *Queen Elizabeth*. The plot is rather simple with some excitement as John searches for her in the Russian zone of Berlin and later in New York City. The Berlin portion may remind you of *The Third Man*. Suspense builds up gradually. There is a satisfying if difficult to accept solution. What I found especially interesting in a case of real life imitating fiction, is that ten years before Holly Roth's death, Ellen Content is described during her disappearance as "lost at sea."

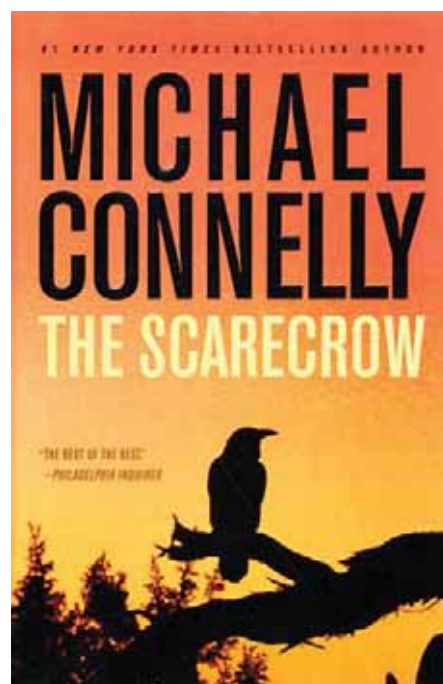
Roth's **SHADOW OF A LADY** is a better book, though it contains similarities to **THE CONTENT ASSIGNMENT**. Laura Selby has disappeared. Her fiancé, John Seton-Smith becomes a suspect when the decomposed remains of a woman turns up in the trunk of Selby's car in France. Again, there are similarities to real life. Laura "has an almost unreasonable

hatred of water and boats." There is talk of Laura's first husband having possibly been pushed off a boat to his death by drowning. He was a famous artist who had a habit of falling off yachts, though he couldn't swim.

The plot is good with some neat surprises. There is humor, especially when two Cockney characters discuss the saying "Murder Wills Out." Because this book was published in 1957, be prepared to ignore some male chauvinism from otherwise likable characters in order to read a very good mystery.

As I've said before, Michael Connelly writes faster than I can read. That is why, since I read his books in the order in which they were published, I've only just finished his 2009 book while he's publishing in 2022. I've read two of his books recently trying to catch up.

**THE BRASS VERDICT** (2008) is 567 door-stopping pages in paperback, but I could only find one page that seemed unnecessary, a description of a strike by screenwriters. Though Harry Bosch has a relatively small, but important, role in the book, this is mostly about Mickey Haller, and there is much fascinating detail regarding what is called "lawyering," especially in the selection of a jury. Haller has to defend a movie executive accused of murder in this most engrossing legal thriller.



**THE SCARECROW** (2009) has only 419 pages in its hardcover edition, and it is almost as good as **THE BRASS VERDICT**. It brings back, after many years, Jack McEvoy, the protagonist of **THE POET** (1996). Writers are often told to write about what they know, Connelly's own experience as a newspaperman shines through on every page of this book. It starts with McEvoy being fired, although it is called "involuntary separation." We are reminded that newspapers are in trouble as people rely on other media like television and the internet for their news. Given two weeks to train his replacement, who will be paid a lot less than he is, he becomes involved with a serial killer. There's no lack of suspense here, but Connelly identifies the killer very early in the game. I would have preferred if Connelly had presented the reader with more suspects and allowed McEvoy and Rachel Hanning to try to identify the killer by good-old fashioned detection. Yes, Rachel is back. She has had a romantic relationship with Bosch in the past and now has one with McEvoy, causing this reader to suspend disbelief. Computers are important in this book, as they are in the real world, although the technology descriptions may be a bit much for Luddites like me. The technology in no way keeps this book from being a yarn that will keep readers awake if they start it too late in the day.

I can't recall the last time I *re-read* a mystery. I did it with Agatha Christie's **MURDER FOR CHRISTMAS** (1938), published in the U.S. as **A HOLIDAY FOR MURDER**) I reread it at Christmas time (her British publisher used to advertise "A Christie for Christmas), but I'm too much of a Scrooge for that to be the reason. I just wanted to see if she was as good as I remembered from fifty years ago. **SHE IS**. This is one of Christie's most clever puzzles with many suspects. Despite her reputation for only writing puzzles, she is able to draw characters so well in this book that they became very real to me.

# The DP List 2022



Titles listed garnered starred reviews in the four library journals (*Publisher's Weekly*, *Kirkus*, *Booklist* and *Library Journal*), appeared on amazon.com's best mysteries of the month lists (AZ) and/or received a glowing review in *Deadly Pleasures* as indicated. These books are the best of 2022.

I hope you make good use of this list to guide your reading.

## Best Novels

**\*\*THE FAMILY CHAO**, Lan Samantha Chang (Norton, \$28.00, February). The residents of Haven, Wisconsin, have dined on the Fine Chao restaurant's delicious Americanized Chinese food for thirty-five years, content to ignore any unsavory whispers about the family owners. Whether or not Big Leo Chao is honest, or his wife, Winnie, is happy, their food tastes good and their three sons earned scholarships to respectable colleges. But when the brothers reunite in Haven, the Chao family's secrets and simmering resentments erupt at last. Before long, brash, charismatic, and tyrannical patriarch Leo is found dead – presumed murdered – and his sons find they've drawn the exacting gaze of the entire town. The ensuing trial brings to light potential motives for all three brothers: Dagou, the restaurant's reckless head chef; Ming, financially successful but personally tortured; and the youngest, gentle but lost college student James. As the spotlight on the brothers tightens and the family dog meets an unexpected fate, Dagou, Ming, and James must reckon with the legacy of their father's outsized appetites and their own future survival. **Kirkus & PW**

**\*\*THE CHRISTIE AFFAIR**, Nina

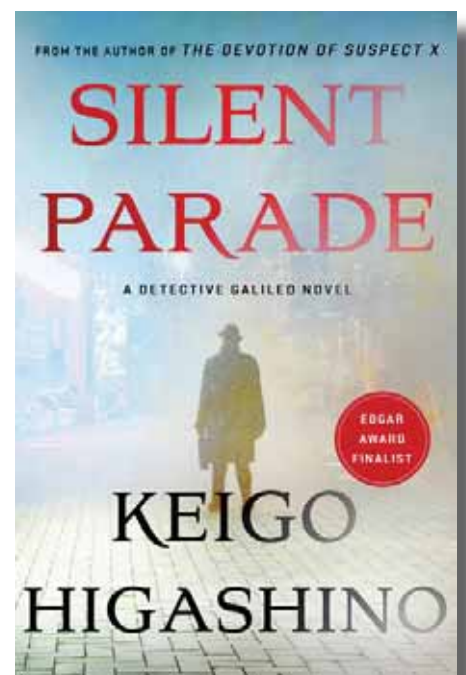
de Gramont (St. Martin's, \$27.99, February). "A long time ago, in another country, I nearly killed a woman. It's a particular feeling, the urge to murder. It takes over your body so completely, it's like a divine force, grabbing hold of your will, your limbs, your psyche. There's a joy to it. In retrospect, it's frightening, but I daresay in the moment it feels sweet. The way justice feels sweet." The greatest mystery wasn't Agatha Christie's disappearance in those eleven infamous days, it's what she discovered. London, 1925: In a world of townhomes and tennis matches, socialites and shooting parties, Miss Nan O'Dea became Archie Christie's mistress, luring him away from his devoted and well-known wife, Agatha Christie. The question is, why? Why destroy another woman's marriage, why hatch a plot years in the making, and why murder? How was Nan O'Dea so intricately tied to those eleven mysterious days that Agatha Christie went missing? **Kirkus & BL**

**\*\*THE FINAL CASE**, David Guterson (Knopf, \$27.00, January). A girl dies one late, rainy night a few feet from the back door of her home. The girl, Abeba, was born in Ethiopia. Her adoptive parents, Delvin and Betsy Harvey—conservative, white fundamentalist Christians—are charged with her murder. Royal, a Seattle criminal attorney in the last days of his long career, takes Betsy Harvey's case. An octogenarian without a driver's license, he leans on his son—the novel's narrator—as he prepares for trial. **Kirkus & AZ**

**\*\*RECKLESS GIRLS**, Rachel Hawkins (St. Martin's Press, \$27.99). Six stunning twentysomethings are about to embark on a blissful, free-spirited journey?one filled with sun-drenched

days and intoxicating nights. But as it becomes clear that the group is even more cut off from civilization than they initially thought, it starts to feel like the island itself is closing in, sending them on a dangerous spiral of discovery. When one person goes missing and another turns up dead, the remaining friends wonder what dark currents lie beneath this impenetrable paradise – and who else will be swept under its secluded chaos. **BL & AZ**

**\*\*SILENT PARADE**, Keigo Higashino (Minotaur, \$27.99, January). A popular young girl disappears without a trace, her skeletal remains discovered three years later in the ashes of a burned out house. There's a suspect and compelling circumstantial evidence of his guilt, but no concrete proof. When he isn't indicted, he returns to mock the girl's family. And this isn't the first time he's been suspected of the murder of a young girl, nearly twenty years ago he was tried and released due to lack of evidence. Detective Chief Inspector Kusanagi of the Homicide Division of the Tokyo Police worked both cases. The neighborhood in which the murdered girl lived is famous for an annual street festival, featuring a parade with entries from around Tokyo and Japan. During the parade, the suspected killer dies unexpectedly.



His death is suspiciously convenient but the people with all the best motives have rock solid alibis. DCI Kusanagi turns once again to his college friend, Physics professor and occasional police consultant Manabu Yukawa, known as Detective Galileo, to help solve the string of impossible-to-prove murders.

LJ & PW

**\*\*THE MIRROR MAN**, Lars Kepler (Knopf, \$28.95, January). Sixteen-year-old Jenny Lind is kidnapped in broad daylight on her way home from school and thrown into the back of a truck. She's taken to a dilapidated house, where she and other girls face horrors far beyond their worst nightmares. Though they're desperate to escape, their captor foils everyone of their attempts. Five years later, Jenny's body is found hanging in a playground, strung up with a winch on a rainy night. As the police are scrambling to find a lead in the scant evidence, Detective Joona Linna recognizes an eerie connection between Jenny's murder and a death declared a suicide years before. **PW & DP**

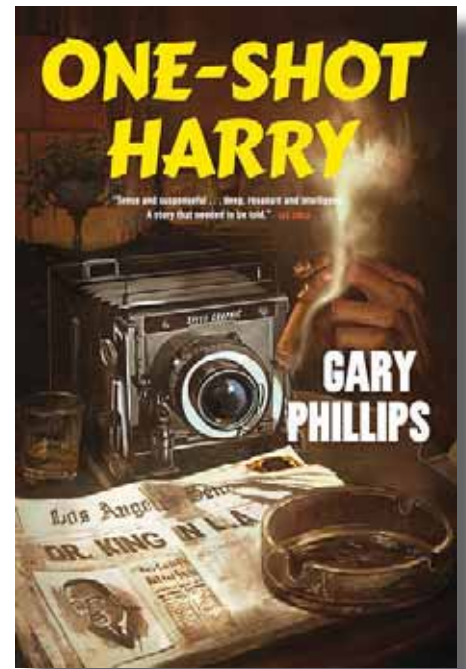
**THE MURDER RULE**, Dervla McTiernan (William Morrow, \$27.99, May). In 2019 Hannah Rokeby cons her way into the Innocence Project clinic run by Professor Rob Parekh at the University of Virginia. Why? The answer lies in her mother's diary from 1994 when she worked as a cleaner in Maine. There she met uber-rich Tom Spencer and his friend Michael Dandridge. Now Tom is dead and Michael is in prison following the rape and murder of Sarah Fitzhugh for which he protests his innocence. Hannah is convinced that Michael is a murderer who ruined her mother's life so she is going to do everything she can to slyly sabotage the Innocence Project's work on behalf of Dandridge. The story is told mostly by Hannah, interspersed with extracts from her mother Laura's diary. **DP**

**THE DARK FLOOD**, Deon Meyer (Atlantic Monthly, \$27.00, May). Having jeopardized their careers in an unauthorized investigation that threatened to reveal the corruption in South

Africa's halls of power, Benny Griessel and Vaughn Cupido have been demoted from the elite Hawks police unit. Assigned to investigate the disappearance of Callie de Bruin, a young university student and brilliant computer programmer, they hit dead ends until the trail, including the death of a fellow officer, leads to a series of gun heists and the alarming absence of certain weapons from the police registry. As Griessel and Cupido intensify their search for de Bruin, real estate agent Sandra Steenberg confronts her own crisis: state corruption has caused the real estate market to crash. When billionaire Jasper Boonstra contacts her to represent a major property he wants to sell, she pushes aside her concerns about his notorious reputation. And then Boonstra himself disappears. **DP**

**\*\*BEHIND THE LIE**, Emilya Nymark (Crooked Lane, \$26.99, February). A transplant to the upstate New York hamlet of Sylvan, all Laney wants is a peaceful life for herself and her son. But things rarely remain calm in Laney's life—and when her neighborhood summer block party explodes in shocking violence and ends with the disappearance of her friend and another woman, she'll need all her skills as a PI to solve a mystery that reaches far beyond her small town. As people closest to Laney fall under suspicion, the local authorities and even her colleagues question her own complicity. And then there's fifteen-year-old Alfie, her complicated and enigmatic son, obviously hiding something. Even as Laney struggles to bury evidence of her boy's involvement, his cagey behavior rings every maternal alarm. **PW & DP**

**\*\*ONE-SHOT HARRY**, Gary Phillips (Soho Crime, \$24.95, April). LOS ANGELES, 1963: African American Korean War veteran Harry Ingram earns a living as a news photographer and occasional process server: chasing police radio calls and dodging baseball bats. With racial tensions running high on the eve of Martin Luther King's Freedom Rally, Ingram risks becoming a victim at every crime scene he pho-



tographs. When Ingram hears about a deadly automobile accident on his police scanner, he recognizes the vehicle described as belonging to his good friend and old army buddy, a white jazz trumpeter. The LAPD declares the car crash an accident, but when Ingram develops his photos, he sees signs of foul play. Ingram feels compelled to play detective, even if it means putting his own life on the line. Armed with his wits, his camera, and occasionally his Colt .45, "One-Shot" Harry plunges headfirst into the seamy underbelly of LA society, tangling with racists, leftists, gangsters, zealots, and lovers, all in the hope of finding something resembling justice for a friend. **Kirkus & BL**

**\*\*MR. CAMPION'S WINGS**, Mike Ripley (Severn House, \$28.99, January). Cambridge, 1965. The honorary doctorate ceremony for Albert Campion's wife takes a dramatic turn when Lady Amanda is arrested by Special Branch for breaking the Official Secrets Act. Never before having taken much interest in his wife's work in cutting-edge aircraft design, Mr Campion sets out to discover more about the top-secret Goshawk Project in which Amanda is involved. He quickly realizes he is not the only one keen to learn the secrets of the project. When a badly mutilated body is discovered at the Goshawk

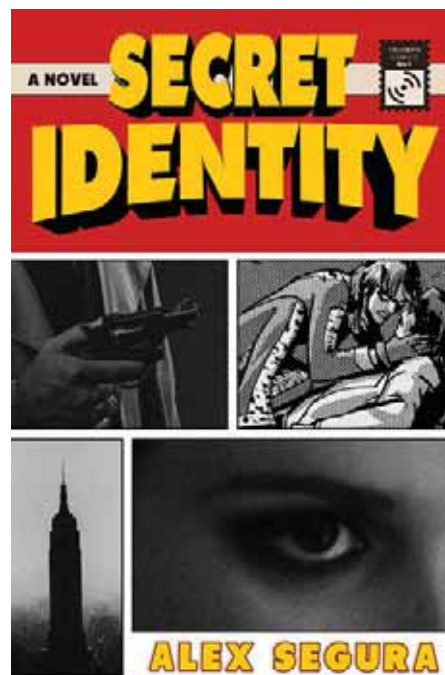
Project's hangar – the result, it would appear, of a bizarre accident – Campion is drawn into a turbulent mix of industrial espionage and matters of national security. And as he attempts to get to the bottom of the deadly goings-on, it seems that the bicycles and punts are almost as dangerous as the aircraft. **PW & DP**

**\*\*WHEN YOU ARE MINE**, Michael Robotham (Scribner, \$24.99, January). Philomena McCarthy is a young, ambitious police officer with the elite Metropolitan Police in London. When she responds to a domestic violence call, she finds the victim, Tempe Brown, trying to protect her abuser, a married man named Darren Goodall, a decorated Scotland Yard detective afraid of no one. As Philomena pursues the case against him, she not only encounters resistance from her police force colleagues but also becomes dangerously entangled with the victim—who is not at all whom she appears to be—much to the increasing endangerment of herself and Henry, her fiancée. Complicating matters is Philomena's estranged father Edward McCarthy, a powerful man who has built a criminal empire along with his brothers. Philomena has long tried to pursue her career as a police officer without her father's involvement, but as she falls under suspicion of stalking and harassing Goodall, her father becomes involved. **Kirkus, PW, AZ & DP**

**\*\*REAL EASY**, Marie Rutkoski (Henry Holt, \$26.99, January). It's 1999 and Samantha has danced for years at the Lovely Lady strip club. She's not used to mixing work and friendship – after all, between her jealous boyfriend and his young daughter, she has enough on her plate. But the newest dancer is so clueless that Samantha feels compelled to help her learn the hustle and drama of the club: how to sweet-talk the boss, fit in with the other women, and make good money. One night, when the new girl needs a ride home, Samantha agrees to drive: a simple decision that turns deadly. Georgia, another dancer drawn into the ensuing murder and missing person investigation, gathers infor-

mation for Holly, a grieving detective determined to solve the case. Georgia just wants to help, but her involvement makes her a target. As Holly and Georgia round up their suspects, the story's point of view shifts between dancers, detectives, children, club patrons – and the killer. **Kirkus, PW & AZ**

**\*\*SECRET IDENTITY**, Alex Segura (Flatiron, \$27.99, March). It's 1975 and the comic book industry is struggling, but Carmen Valdez doesn't care. She's an assistant at Triumph Comics, which doesn't have the creative zeal of Marvel nor the buttoned-up efficiency of DC, but it doesn't matter. Carmen is tantalizingly close to fulfilling her dream of writing a superhero book. That dream is nearly a reality when one of the Triumph writers enlists her help to create a new character, which they call "The Lethal Lynx," Triumph's first female hero. But her colleague is acting strangely and asking to keep her involvement a secret. And then he's found dead, with all of their scripts turned into the publisher without her name. Carmen is desperate to piece together what happened to him, to hang on to her piece of the Lynx, which turns out to be a runaway hit. But that's complicated by a surprise visitor from her home in Miami, a tenacious cop who is piecing everything together



too quickly for Carmen, and the tangled web of secrets and resentments among the passionate eccentrics who write comics for a living. **PW, BL & Kirkus**

**\*\*DESOLATION CANYON**, P.

J. Tracy (Minotaur, \$27.99). LAPD Detective Margaret Nolan is struggling to move forward after the death of her brother in Afghanistan and taking a life in the line of duty. Her stoic parents offer little support – they refuse to address anything difficult, and she's afraid their relationship is eroding beyond the point of recovery. The days off are the hardest, because they give Margaret time to think. A moment of weakness leads to cocktails with a colleague?an attraction she knows could be dangerous?at the luxurious Hotel Bel-Air bar. A stroll through the grounds leads to a grim discovery beneath the surface of Swan Lake: the body of a successful attorney who made his fortune in international trade. **PW & AZ**

**\*\*THIS MIGHT HURT**, Stephanie Wrobel (Berkley, \$26.00, February). Natalie Collins hasn't heard from her sister in more than half a year. The last time they spoke, Kit was slogging from mundane workdays to obligatory happy hours to crying in the shower about their dead mother. She told Natalie she was sure there was something more out there. And then she found Wisewood. On a private island off the coast of Maine, Wisewood's guests commit to six-month stays. During this time, they're prohibited from contact with the rest of the world—no Internet, no phones, no exceptions. But the rules are for a good reason: to keep guests focused on achieving true fearlessness so they can become their Maximized Selves. Natalie thinks it's a bad idea, but Kit has had enough of her sister's cynicism and voluntarily disappears off the grid. **BL, LJ & PW**

## Best First Novels

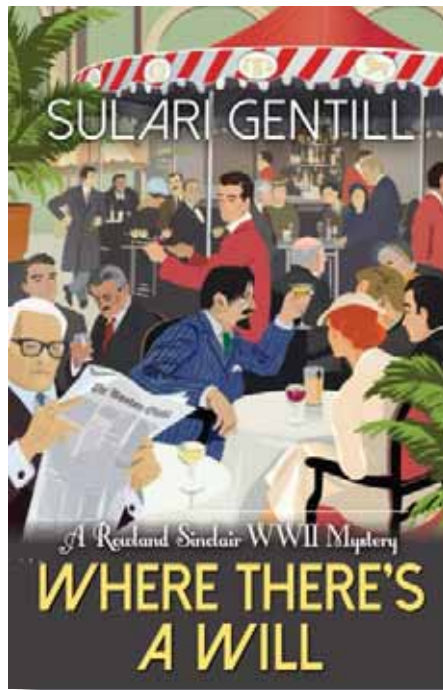
**\*\*THE MAID**, Nita Prose (Ballantine, \$27.00, January). Molly Gray is not like everyone else. She struggles with

social skills and misreads the intentions of others. Her gran used to interpret the world for her. Since Gran died a few months ago, twenty-five-year-old Molly has been navigating life's complexities all by herself. No matter—she throws herself with gusto into her work as a hotel maid. Her unique character, along with her obsessive love of cleaning and proper etiquette, make her an ideal fit for the job. But Molly's orderly life is upended the day she enters the suite of the infamous and wealthy Charles Black, only to find it in a state of disarray and Mr. Black himself dead in his bed. Before she knows what's happening, Molly's unusual demeanor has the police targeting her as their lead suspect. She quickly finds herself caught in a web of deception, one she has no idea how to untangle. **LJ, BL & AZ**

## Best Paperback Originals

**\*\*THE HEIGHTS**, Louise Candlish (Atria, \$16.99). The Heights is a tall, slender apartment building among warehouses in London. Its roof terrace is so discreet, you wouldn't know it existed if you weren't standing at the window of the flat directly opposite. But you are. And that's when you see a man up there—a man you'd recognize anywhere. He may be older now, but it's definitely him. But that can't be because he's been dead for over two years. You know this for a fact. Because you're the one who killed him. **PW & BL**

**\*\*WHERE THERE'S A WILL**, Sulari Gentill (Poisoned Pen Press, \$15.99, January). American millionaire Daniel Cartwright has been shot dead: three times in the chest, and once in the head. His body is found in Harvard Yard, dressed in evening attire. No one knows who he planned to meet there, or why the staunch Oxford man would be caught dead at Harvard—literally. Australian Rowland Sinclair, his mate from Oxford and longtime friend, is named executor of the will, to his great surprise—and that of Danny's family. Events turn downright ugly when the will all but disinherits Danny's siblings



in favor of one Otis Norcross, whom no one knows or is able to locate. Amidst assault, kidnapping, and threats of slander, Rowly struggles to understand Danny's motives, find the missing heir, and identify his friend's killer before the clock—and his luck—run out. **PW & DP**

**\*\*THE VERIFIERS**, Jane Pek (Vintage, \$17.00, February). Claudia Lin is used to disregarding her fractious family's model-minority expectations: she has no interest in finding either a conventional career or a nice Chinese boy. She's also used to keeping secrets from them, such as that she prefers girls—and that she's just been stealth-recruited by Veracity, a referrals-only online-dating detective agency. A lifelong mystery reader who wrote her senior thesis on Jane Austen, Claudia believes she's landed her ideal job. But when a client vanishes, Claudia breaks protocol to investigate—and uncovers a maelstrom of personal and corporate deceit. **Kirkus & PW**

## Best Thrillers

**\*\*BOX 88**, Charles Cumming (Mysterious Press, \$27.95, January). Lachlan Kite is a member of BOX 88, an elite

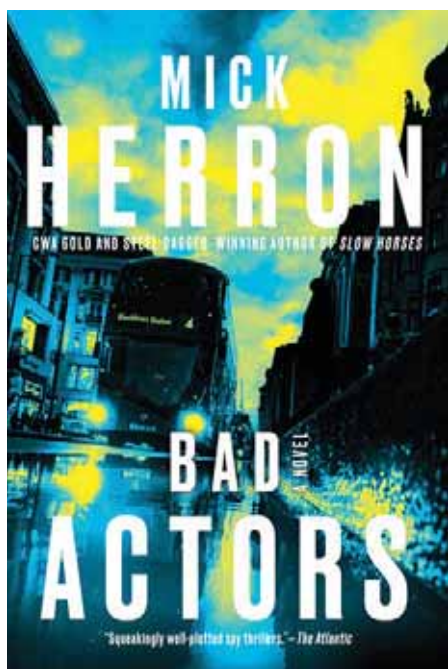
transatlantic black ops outfit so covert that not even MI6 and the CIA are certain of its existence—but even the best spy can't anticipate every potential threat in a world where dangerous actors lurk around every corner. At the funeral of his childhood best friend, Lachlan falls into a trap that drops him into the hands of a potentially deadly interrogator, with his pregnant wife, also abducted, being held as collateral for the information he's sworn on his own life to protect. **Kirkus, PW & BL**

**\*\*ONE STEP TOO FAR**, Lisa Gardner (Dutton, \$27.00, January). This novel sends missing persons expert Frankie Elkin into a national forest in Wyoming looking for a young man who disappeared without a trace. But when the search team encounters immediate threats to their survival, Frankie realizes she's up against something very dark—and she's running out of time.

**Kirkus, BL, AZ & DP**

**\*\*SIERRA SIX**, Mark Greaney (Berkley, \$28.00, February). Before he was the Gray Man, Court Gentry was Sierra Six, the junior member of a CIA action team. In their first mission they took out a terrorist leader, at a terrible price. Years have passed. The Gray Man is on a simple mission when he sees a ghost: the long-dead terrorist, but he's remarkably energetic for a dead man. A decade of time hasn't changed the Gray Man. He isn't one to leave a job unfinished or a blood debt unpaid. **PW & DP**

**BAD ACTORS**, Mick Herron (Soho Crime, \$27.95, May). In London's MI5 headquarters a scandal is brewing that could disgrace the entire intelligence community. The Downing Street super-forecaster—a specialist who advises the Prime Minister's office on how policy is likely to be received by the electorate—has disappeared without a trace. Claude Whelan, who was once head of MI5, has been tasked with tracking her down. But the trail leads him straight back to Regent's Park itself, with First Desk Diana Taverner as chief suspect. Has Taverner overplayed her hand at last? Meanwhile, her Russian counterpart, Moscow intel-



ligence's First Desk, has cheekily showed up in London and shaken off his escort. Are the two unfortunate events connected? Over at Slough House, where Jackson Lamb presides over some of MI5's most embittered demoted agents, the slow horses are doing what they do best, and adding a little bit of chaos to an already unstable situation. **DP**

**\*\*TARGETED**, Stephen Hunter (Atria/Emily Bester, \$28.99, January). After his successful takedown of a dangerous terrorist, Bob Lee Swagger learns that no good deed goes unpunished. Summoned to court by the United States Congress, Swagger is accused of reckless endangerment by a hardheaded anti-gun congresswoman. But what begins as political posturing soon turns deadly when the auditorium where the committee is being held is attacked. **PW & BL**

**\*\*THE BERLIN EXCHANGE**, Joseph Kanon (Scribner, \$28.00, February). Berlin. 1963. The height of the Cold War. An early morning spy swap, not at the familiar setting for such exchanges, or at Checkpoint Charlie, where international visitors cross into the East, but at a more discreet border crossing, usually reserved for East German VIPs. The Communists are trading two American students caught helping people to escape

over the wall and an aging MI6 operative. On the other side of the trade: Martin Keller, a physicist who once made headlines, but who then disappeared into the English prison system. Keller's most critical possession: his American passport. Keller's most ardent desire: to see his ex-wife Sabine and their young son.

The exchange is made with the formality characteristic of these swaps. But Martin has other questions: who asked for him? Who negotiated the deal? The KGB? He has worked for the service long enough to know that nothing happens by chance. They want him for something. Not physics—his expertise is out of date. Something else, which he cannot learn until he arrives in East Berlin, when suddenly the game is afoot. **BL & Kirkus**

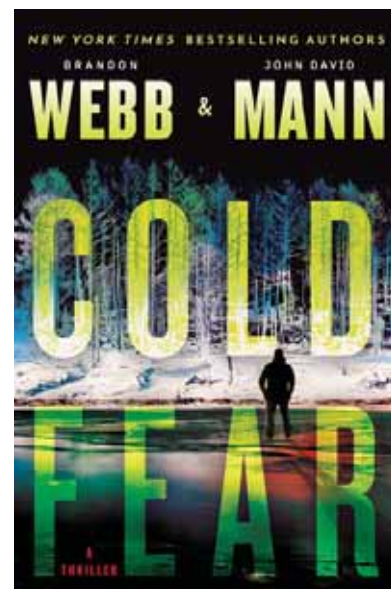
**\*\*THE RUNAWAY**, Nick Petrie (Putnam, \$27.00, January). War veteran Peter Ash is driving through northern Nebraska when he encounters a young pregnant woman alone on a gravel road, her car dead. Peter offers her a lift, but what begins as an act of kindness soon turns into a deadly cat-and-mouse chase across the lonely highways with the woman's vicious ex-cop husband hot on their trail. The pregnant woman has seen something she was never meant to see . . . but protecting her might prove to be more than Peter can handle. **Kirkus & DP**

**\*\*THE MATCHMAKER**, Paul Vidich (Pegasus, \$25.95, February). Berlin, 1989. Protests across East Germany threaten the Iron Curtain and Communism is the ill man of Europe. Anne Simpson, an American who works as a translator at the Joint Operations Refugee Committee, thinks she is in a normal marriage with a charming East German. But then her husband disappears, and the CIA and Western German intelligence arrive at her door. Nothing about her marriage is as it seems. She had been targeted by the Matchmaker—a high level East German counterintelligence officer—who runs a network of Stasi agents. These agents are his "Romeos" who marry vulnerable

women in West Berlin to provide them with cover as they report back to the Matchmaker. Anne has been married to a spy, and now he has disappeared, and is presumably dead. **BL & DP**

**COLD FEAR**, Brandon Webb & John Mann (Bantam, \$28.00, June). Sequel to **STEEL FEAR**. Disgraced Navy SEAL Finn is on the run. A wanted man since he jumped ship from the USS Abraham Lincoln, he's sought for questioning in connection to war crimes committed in Yemen by a rogue element in his SEAL team. But his memory of that night—as well as the true fate of his mentor and only friend, Lieutenant Kennedy—is a gaping hole. Finn learns that three members of his team have been quietly redeployed to Iceland, which is a puzzle in itself; the tiny island nation is famous for being one of the most peaceful, crime-free places on the planet.

His personal mission is simple: track down the three corrupt SEALs and find out what really happened that night in Yemen. But two problems stand in his way. On his first night in town a young woman mysteriously drowns—and a local detective suspects his involvement. What's worse, a SEAL-turned-contract-killer with skills equal or better to his own has been hired to make sure he never gets the answers he's looking for. And he's followed Finn all the way to the icy north. **DP**



# Befuddled by Booze

by George H. Madison

Raymond Chandler and Dashiell Hammett are two icons of the early American detective novel. Neither, however, exited planet earth in a graceful or dignified manner. The following snapshot of Chandler in 1946 says as much about the juggernaut Hollywood studio system as it does about Chandler's deteriorating mental condition during his glassy-eyed, inebriated days; the rude winter of his life. For that matter, Hammett was no teetotaler either.

*The Blue Dahlia* (1946) is from an original screenplay by Chandler (1888-1959), who was a gifted screenwriter. Writing for noir films, he earned two Academy Award nominations; one for *Double Indemnity* (1944) and the other for *The Blue Dahlia*. He later wrote the screenplay for Hitchcock's noirish *Strangers on a Train* (1951). Chandler's road to *Dahlia*, however, is a Hollywood legend.

The producer John Houseman had formed a friendship with the notoriously cranky Chandler. No easy task since Chandler had become a hopelessly drunken curmudgeon; even publicly referring to Veronica Lake as "Moronica.". But both men were British public school products and that somehow bonded them.

Paramount rewarded Chandler with a lucrative contract after the success of *Double Indemnity*. He had written a 120-page manuscript that Houseman viewed as a perfect vehicle for Alan Ladd, who was scheduled to return to the armed services in three months. Paramount paid a hefty sum for it, as well as an additional fee for a completed screenplay. Although Chandler held Hollywood in contempt, he eagerly accepted its money. One major problem

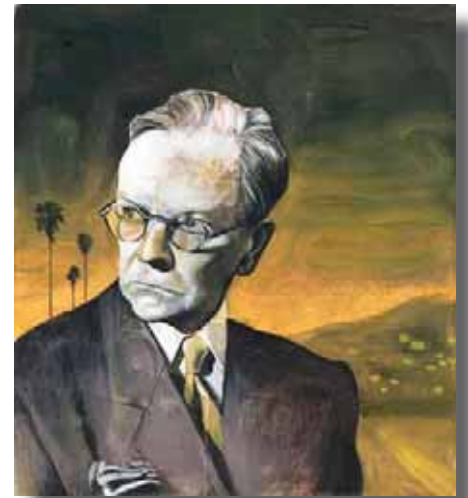
arose -- he developed "writer's block."

At the moment Chandler was dry -- on the wagon, but he was convinced that he could only finish the screenplay while drunk. In an unorthodox -- to say the least -- arrangement, Chandler was to remain in a state of inebriation during the final stage of the script writing.

The elaborate provisions that were put in place included two limousines 24 hours a day with drivers to run errands, six secretaries working in teams and a direct line to the studio switchboard. During the last eight days, Chandler didn't draw a single sober breath. There were nurses on hand 24 hours a day to insure that he didn't drink himself to death, and twice a day a doctor came to give him intravenous injections. He didn't eat a speck of food. A glass of booze and euphoria were his constant companions, and *The Blue Dahlia* was filmed with eight days to spare. Truly bizarre!

*Dahlia* has a simple story to tell; sadly one all too often experienced by our returning WWII veterans. Johnny Morrison (Alan Ladd), accompanied by two war buddies, returns home to find he's been cuckolded by his unrepentant wife, Helen (Doris Dowling). Her heartwarming welcoming sentiment is: "I take all of the drinks I like, any place! I go anywhere I want to with anyone I want. I just happen to be that kind of girl." Helen is a real noir woman, and a sloppy drunk, too.

Johnny is willing to forgive her transgressions until it is revealed that her drunken negligence resulted in their son's death in an auto accident. No wonder he is the prime suspect when she is murdered. He has motive, provo-



cation and opportunity.

Even Helen's paramour is a lowlife. The unlikeable Eddie Harwood (Howard da Silva) is a mobster who owns the Blue Dahlia nightclub. He may often be found surrounded by the requisite merry band of sociopathic hoods.

After confronting Helen and while walking in the rain, Johnny is, coincidentally, picked up by Harwood's estranged wife, Joyce (Veronica Lake). Arriving in Malibu, they hear a radio report that Helen has been murdered and that Johnny is a wanted man. Working together, Lake and Ladd unravel the mystery and reveal the killer.

Their task is not easy. The landscape is littered with other suspects. They include Johnny's two fellow returning veterans. Buzz (William Bendix) was severely wounded and carries a metal plate in his head causing blackout and fits of rage. The other, George (Hugh Beaumont) appears too steady and calm under the circumstances. Even Harwood and Joyce are not above suspicion.

Incidentally, can anyone provide a reasonable explanation as to why da Silva would choose Dowling over Lake? Cataracts? It's a mystery for the ages and the sages to solve.

The casting was standard. Veronica Lake (1919 or 1922-1973) and Alan Ladd (1913-1964), two unlikely screen stars, were naught but popular Hollywood creations. Both were diminutive, resembling a pair of delicate porcelain dolls. At 4'11", Lake was the perfect physical match for Ladd who stood 5'5" on a very good day. They were blonde and slight,

each possessing acting ability that ran the gamut of emotions from A to B. Their appeal was visual as they stoically floated through scenes as though on remote control while delivering their lines in a flat monotone. Lake wore a much imitated peek-a-boo hairstyle, while Ladd simply wore a vacuous facial expression.

As an aside. So popular was Lake's "peek-a-boo" look that it became a fad and the government asked her to stop wearing her hair long for the duration of WWII because women in war plants were catching their long hair in machines. Her change of hairstyle was widely hailed, advertised and celebrated as an act of patriotism.

Neither Lake nor Ladd were ever secure in their stardom and both proved to be fragile human beings. *Dahlia* was to be Lake's final big film. She became a barmaid in New York City and moved to Vermont, where she died at age 50 or 53 from a combination of hepatitis and acute alcoholism. Meanwhile, Ladd enjoyed some success, notably *Shane* (1953), but committed suicide employing barbiturates and alcohol to do the job. Real noir endings in the classic Hollywood style.

William Bendix (1906-1954) is superbly effective as Buzz, a forever war damaged vet. In less capable hands, Buzz could've been a self-pitying stereotype, but Bendix brings nuance to the role. Thanks to Chandler and director George Marshall, his dialogue is intelligent and at times sardonic. Even his justifiable anger and bitterness is skillfully tinged with confusion and a touch of bewilderment. Bendix captures the complex emotions of a man who through no fault of his own finds himself compromised by fate.

Bendix was born in Manhattan, although he is best recalled as portraying a Brooklynite in 1940's films. His acting roots were on Broadway. As a 15-year-old, he was a batboy for the New York Yankees and was befriended by Babe Ruth. In a classic Hollywood moment, Bendix played Ruth in Hollywood's bio-picture *The Babe Ruth Story* (1948).

His burly physique made him equally believable as a loyal and fearless friend when in need or a vicious thug for hire (*The Glass Key* – 1942 – opposite Ladd). Equally effective in comedy roles, Bendix is fondly remembered as the bungling, blustering Chester A. Riley in radio and TV's *The Life of Riley*. He enjoyed a prolific Hollywood career, and was most often seen as an uncomplicated, slightly dense but loveable guy. Bendix died at age 48 from natural causes.

Doris Dowling (1923-2004) was the perfect noir tramp. In *Dahlia*, she is wonderfully heartless and despicable. She is a perfect candidate to be murdered. In her personal life, Dowling may best be remembered as the 7<sup>th</sup> wife of the iconic clarinetist Artie Shaw. But since he was married eight times, perhaps it's not much of a distinction.

Her older sister, Constance Dowling (1920-1969) was perfection in two notable noirs – *The Black Angel* (1946) and a personal favorite, *Blind Spot* (1947). Whereas, Constance was a dazzling, finely styled beauty, Doris looks were somewhat common – Claire Trevor like. Doris went on to compile a long list of TV credits.

Howard da Silva (1909-1986) was born to be a villain, one with a built in snarl. A Broadway veteran, da Silva was

forever tarnished by his blacklisting during the 1950's McCarthy Hearing's purge of Communists in Hollywood. In *Dahlia*, he is type cast and adequate.

Hugh Beaumont (1909-1982) is fine as the stable and trustworthy George. He became a leading man in Poverty Row movies; appearing as Michael Shayne in several PRC Studio installments, but his lasting fame is based on the TV show, *Leave It to Beaver* where he was Ward Cleaver.

Familiar character actor Will Wright (1894-1962) appears as the hotel detective, "Dad" Newell.

I must take umbrage at the undeserved condemnation of George Marshall (1891-1975) as the choice to direct *Dahlia*. With its numerous distractions and logistical challenges, Marshall was very much the correct choice. He was the consummate pro, and in a fifty year career, he filmed close to 100 films for Paramount Studios. In fact, Marshall was widely praised for this direction of *Dahlia*.

Marshall was compelled by the US Navy to change the film's denouement. I believe that Chandler's original one was too predictable and maudlin; a reflection of his often depressed, sometimes irrational mind. Hollywood employed the same device to spare audiences from the suicidal mind of author Cornell Woolrich. Chandler was always a marginally stable man. His experience during *Dahlia* is quite revealing; clearly showing this major talent in decline. Nevertheless, it remains an entertaining film, one with clever dialogue, a good plot and a satisfying conclusion. It certainly was an unorthodox journey from pen to screen.

Must good noir be so dark that it is not safe to view absent a night light? *Dahlia* with its disillusioned hero, a forever scared WWII veteran, a drunken, unfaithful, criminally negligent wife and other assorted miscreants is dark enough for me. *Dahlia* is an entertaining film, replete with clever dialogue, a good plot and a satisfying conclusion. Perhaps its most severe critics should give it another squint.



# Central Booking

*Kristopher Zgorzki*



## DEATH AT GREENWAY

By Lori Rader-Day

William Morrow Paperbacks \$16.00

**Rating: A**

Writers take risks every time they put pen to paper – or well, fingers to keyboard. Balancing reader expectations with the desire to grow as an artist can be tricky. Lori Rader-Day has never been an author who was content with the status quo – each of her books is unique in style, execution, and intention. In what is easily her most seismic shift yet, her latest novel, **DEATH AT GREENWAY**, is a historical novel that blends elements of crime, suspense, and women's fiction.

There is no denying that Lori Rader-Day has always been an author who places the highest value on character. This remains true with **DEATH AT GREENWAY**. Rather than rush the start of the novel, Rader-Day spends the time necessary to acquaint the reader with Bridget “Bridey” Kelly, a character they are about to spend 400+ pages with. This is most important because Bridey's life is about to experience a sojourn of life-changing proportions and readers are lucky enough to have a front row seat to watch it unfold.

Hired as one of two nurses tasked with the caretaking of ten young children who have been evacuated for safety reasons in the midst of World War II, Bridey and her colleague Gigi relocate with the children to Greenway – the isolated summer residence of Agatha Christie. In the tradition of a *bildungsroman*, much of the narrative is devoted to how that experience changes Bridey and the evolution of her friendship with Gigi.

While the discovery of a body swept ashore on the Greenway estate – seem-

ingly a victim of foul play – and the subsequent search for answers places this novel firmly in the crime fiction category, the focus here is more on individual secrets and their interconnectedness with the homefront realities during wartime. **DEATH AT GREENWAY** is very much a look at the collateral damage of war; a portrait of people doing the right thing in difficult times, while never shying away from the complexities of what the “right thing” is.

Lori Rader-Day unspools her narrative with a cacophony of voices. There is never a question that Bridey is our focal character, but by allowing readers to glimpse events through multiple points-of-view, Rader-Day adds depth and verisimilitude to the proceedings. It is worth mentioning here – in the effort to assuage expectations – that Agatha Christie herself only briefly appears during the novel. In many ways this deep-dive character study owes more

to another of the Golden Age authors – Margery Allingham – then to Christie's more puzzle-like oeuvre.

The success of historical fiction depends as much on what is not included as it does on what actually appears on the written page. If the reader is burdened with too many facts and details, the experience becomes too much like a textbook; and yet in order for the period to come alive for the reader there must be enough specifics and ambiance for the solid grounding of the narrative. This is an elusive demarcation that varies widely, but in **DEATH AT GREENWAY**, Lori Rader-Day walks this tightrope with aplomb.

There is no telling where Lori Rader-Day's writerly journey will take her next, but readers can rest easy knowing she will approach whatever it is with the same level of commitment and clear talent which she bestowed on this, her first venture into historical territory. Expect to see **DEATH AT GREENWAY** on quite a few award shortlists in the coming months.

## THE MOTHER NEXT DOOR

By Tara Laskowski

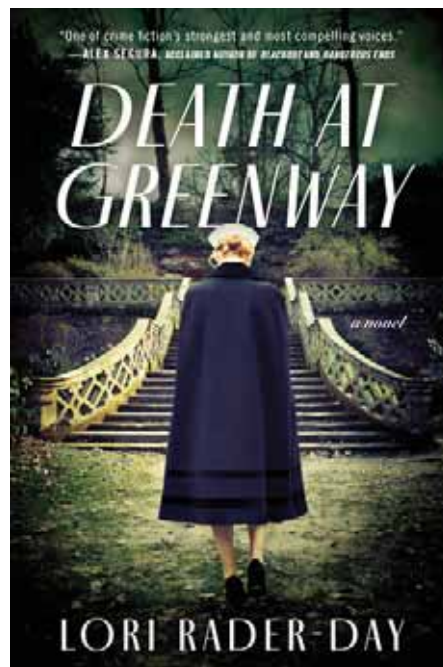
Graydon House \$16.00

**Rating: B-**

With **THE MOTHER NEXT DOOR**, a novel of suburban suspense, Tara Laskowski has gifted readers with the most addictively readable book of the season. It is virtually impossible to stop reading **THE MOTHER NEXT DOOR** until the entirety of it has been consumed, and even then, its themes will linger in the reader's mind for days afterward.

In her debut crime novel, **ONE NIGHT GONE**, Laskowski used her deep understanding of the psychology of women to tell a gripping tale set during the off-season of a typical beach community. For **THE MOTHER NEXT DOOR**, she turns her attention to a coveted cul-de-sac community in the outskirts of Washington, DC, but the astute contemplation of women's minds remains.

Theresa Pressley has just moved to the neighborhood known as Ivy Woods with her husband – the new Principal





at the local school – and her teenage daughter, Lily. Having once lived near the area while attending college, Theresa always dreamed of owning a home in this popular enclave – though maybe never truly believed it might happen. Sometimes dreams do come true. But dreams can turn to nightmares.

Kendra McCaul is the unofficial head of the “Ivy Five,” a group of women from the neighborhood – most of them mothers – who welcome Theresa to the neighborhood with open arms. In fact, given that the “Ivy Five” is now really only four, there is a spot among their clique if Theresa wants – and can earn – it. Laskowski brings each of the women within this group to life with telling details, unique personalities, and realistic foibles.

The bulk of **THE MOTHER NEXT DOOR** takes place across the seven weeks leading up to Ivy Woods’ premiere social event of the year, their Halloween spectacular. Tara Laskowski employs narrative chapters from both the perspectives of Theresa and Kendra to unspool the many complicated secrets hiding within this community. Theresa is navigating her way through the tangled “Ivy Five” relationships as that group is trying to suss out her worthiness to join. And meanwhile, everyone is trying to be the best mother possible for their beloved offspring.

It cannot be overstated how well Tara Laskowski understands – and is able to convey – the myriad of thoughts going through these women’s minds. Readers will feel as though they are watching a championship chess game play out before their eyes, with the victor entirely uncertain and maybe the “prize” unwanted. It is a strange, albeit accurate, dichotomy when you position competition beside companionship. These are traits that are by nature in conflict – which makes them perfect as the underlying structure of a crime novel.

As with **ONE NIGHT GONE**, some plot elements in **THE MOTHER NEXT DOOR** tie back to the past. Laskowski finds clever ways to impart that knowledge without needing to devote a large page count to history. This helps to achieve the desired goal of keeping the reader invested in the action leading up to the fabled Halloween party, while also being mindful of how our past decisions and deeds have a ripple-down effect.

Readers will race to the end to find out how all the threads are linked, but Tara Laskowski has some late-game complications to make that journey a bumpy one for her characters. This is an author who knows how to make her readers care about the outcome and succeeds in satisfying. Wherever Tara Laskowski travels next, her fans will be happy to take up residence.

#### THE COMMANDMENTS

By Óskar Guðmundsson

Corylus Books \$5.99

Kindle, \$5.13

**Rating: A**

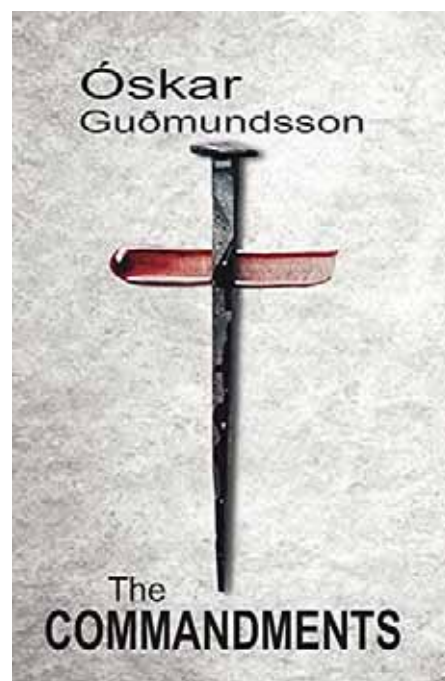
Crime fiction readers who have experienced the works of Arnaldur Indridason, Yrsa Sigurdardóttir, Ragnar Jónasson, and/or Eva Björg Áegisdóttir will have noticed that these Icelanders seem to have an innate ability to write about the darkest of subject matters without straying into gratuitous violence or salacious detail – all while managing to maintain the deep emotional resonance and pillar of morality readers of the genre desire. That national trend continues with **THE COMMANDMENTS**, the first novel from Óskar

Guðmundsson to be translated into English.

In **THE COMMANDMENTS**, Óskar Guðmundsson tackles the endemic scandal of child abuse that has swept through the world’s religious institutions. He does so without pulling any punches and specifically focuses on the long-term effects this type of betrayal has on its victims.

Salka Steinsdóttir is a former detective taking an extended leave to deal with some personal matters when she gets a request from a colleague at the Akureyri division to assist on a new investigation. It is felt that her insight would be valuable as she had previously investigated the victim – Hróbjartur, a parish priest – after an unsuccessfully-proven claim of abuse years prior. Now it was looking like someone was taking justice into their own hands.

Faced with a local police chief who is less than friendly and a temporary partner who has never worked a violent crime case, Salka sets out to uncover the truth behind Hróbjartur’s murder. That path leads her to several other accused clergy and as the victims continue to fall, it’s clear they have a serial killer in their midst. The group of boys who made the original accusations become the prime suspects, but as Salka digs deeper into the past, the disappearance



of another boy years earlier lingers as a thread that must be tied off.

Meanwhile, facing an impending divorce, Salka spends some isolated time fly-fishing when she meets Magnús, a fellow police officer who strikes her fancy. However, juggling a new relationship and a high-profile criminal investigation proves to be challenging. Especially since Salka hasn't yet signed those divorce documents.

Óskar Guðmundsson allows his story to unfold in natural order. By varying the chapter lengths and strategically placing the various investigative reveals, he lures his readers into reading long into the night. Like Alfred Hitchcock, Guðmundsson understands that anything he writes on the page would pale in comparison to the horrors created in the reader's own imagination, so he provides just enough details to haunt the reader while keeping the worst offences off the printed page.

This is also an author who is skilled at providing enough distraction – and possible suspects – that even the most seasoned crime-fiction reader will be faced with surprises at the conclusion. And yes, surprises – in the plural – is correct here.

**THE COMMANDMENTS** is a solidly-written crime novel that will stay with readers long after they turn those final pages. When faced with the legacy of abuse, are there ever really any good solutions?

As with any translated work, a nod must be given to the person faced with that task. Here Quentin Bates – a seasoned translator and author of his own Icelandic crime novels – proves again to be one of the best in the business. Bates presents writing that is naturalistic and easy-to-read while also allowing the “voice” of Óskar Guðmundsson to remain present at all times.

### **COLD AS HELL**

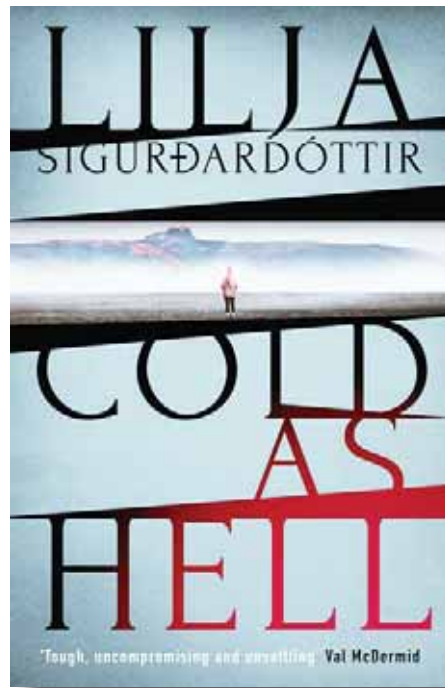
By Lilja Sigurðardóttir

Orenda Books \$15.99,

February, 2022

**Rating: B**

Everyone knows that Iceland is a nation that has a very low crime rate



and homicides are the rarest of all, but as readers have seen through their excellent crime fiction output, that does not mean that there are not mysteries to be solved. One of the true dangers of Iceland has been missing persons – people will wander out into the harsh landscape never to be seen or heard from again. It is with the premise of a missing sister that Lilja Sigurðardóttir launches her new five-book series with **COLD AS HELL**.

When Áróra hears from her mother that her unpredictable sister – Ísafold – can't be reached, she assumes Ísafold is just being difficult as usual. Even though Áróra is the younger sibling, she has always been the more responsible one, having to rescue Ísafold on far too many occasions. It is for this reason – among many – that Iceland is not Áróra's favorite place, but a plea from her mother means she must return.

Her search for her sister begins with Björn, the drug-dealing boyfriend who has always been a source of trouble. Ísafold's neighbors also seem oddly tight-lipped when confronted by Áróra, leading her to suspect there is more to this disappearance than she originally suspected.

Áróra has been working as a financial crime investigator, so while she has some experience with conducting

deep-dive investigations, a missing persons case – especially one so personal – is a bit out of her comfort zone. When she hears that her “Uncle” Daníel, a proper police officer, is in the area, she reaches out for his help, granting access to some information that would otherwise have been difficult to obtain.

Lilja Sigurðardóttir has already proven herself a master at crafting complex female characters who reveal their many layers slowly over time with her Reykjavik Noir series (*Snare, Trap, Cage*), but her development of Áróra is next level. Because of her feelings of being an outsider, readers bond with Áróra quickly and as more is learned about her history she quickly becomes the glue that keeps readers invested in this twisty tale. Her unfamiliarity – or unease – with Iceland also makes Áróra the perfect traveling companion for readers new to the Nordic noir tradition.

Speaking of, Lilja Sigurðardóttir is far too skilled a writer to limit her story to one mystery. Sub-plots abound here – some of which will eventually tie together in unexpected ways – including financial improprieties in Iceland's hotel industry and the immigration issues surrounding another resident of Ísafold's building. The fact that Sigurðardóttir accomplishes all this with short, gripping chapters allows readers to feel comfortable in her manipulative hands.

These other plot threads allow for the creation of some truly memorable – and extremely disturbing – secondary characters. Those shall be left for the reader to discover on their own, but be prepared for icy chills to run up the spine and hot flashes to boil over while reading **COLD AS HELL**. Lilja Sigurðardóttir wraps everything up into a completely believable resolution, leaving readers anxious to spend more time with Áróra.

(Readers will hardly know that **COLD AS HELL** was not originally written in English, proving once again that Quentin Bates is one of the great translators of Iceland crime fiction.)

**DO I KNOW YOU?**

By Sarah Strohmeyer  
Harper Paperbacks, \$16.00

**Rating: B-**

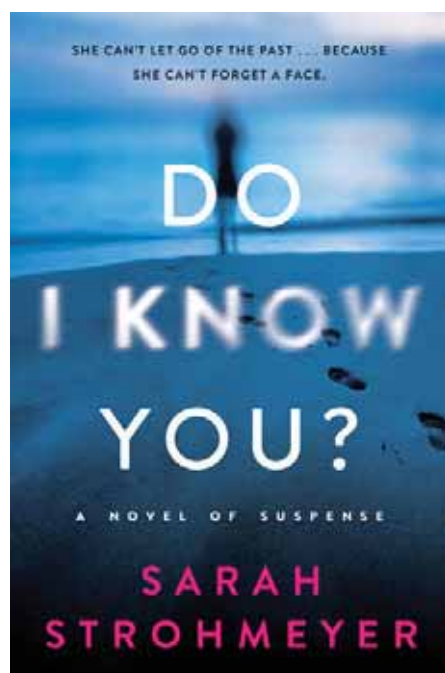
Sarah Strohmeyer amassed many loyal fans years ago with her quirky and unique mystery series starring Bubbles Yablonsky, so when it was announced that she was returning to the crime fiction fold with a new suspense novel, much rejoicing ensued. That book, **DO I KNOW YOU?**, will certainly satisfy both existing fans and new readers just discovering this talented author.

**DO I KNOW YOU?** is very different than Strohmeyer's now-iconic cozy series. However, it shares many traits with those earlier books: idiosyncratic characters, a perfect balance of pathos and humor, clever wordplay, and a plot rooted in contemporary society.

Jane Ellison is our lead character and she has a unique ability – she is a “super recognizer,” meaning that she can remember every face she has ever seen and match that with suspects at a later date with only a fleeting glimpse. This talent has led her to work in airport security. As the novel opens, Jane is going about her daily job when she recognizes – on the arm of William Pease (partial heir to an empire) – the woman she feels is responsible for her sister's disappearance and presumed death. The only problem is that with power comes special treatment and before she can confront Bella, they are released and headed to the family compound.

After losing her job, Jane is unable to let the whole matter go, and she and her boyfriend set out on an investigation of their own – right in the shadows of the big Pease family wedding. Of course, nothing goes to plan, but Jane on a mission is a juggernaut that will not be stopped.

The Pease Family is one for the ages – unlike most nuclear families seen in fiction (or reality, for that matter.) Their loyalty to each other and their overwhelming ambition does feel authentic for a family of their “celebrity”



stature (think the Kardashians crossed with the Sackler clan), but readers will pick up on both the ick factor and the hubris surrounding them.

The fact that Jane's sister was working at an event for the Pease family on the night she disappeared makes Jane's obsession with the family understandable. What is rewarding is that Strohmeyer manages to place Jane in the focal position while allowing readers to question much of what she believes. Since not many readers will know – or even have heard of – “super recognizers,” the lingering doubt of its validity along with Jane's other “issues” sets her up as a different type of unreliable narrator, one the reader feels compassion for.

Sarah Strohmeyer juggles multiple storylines throughout **DO I KNOW YOU?** Each reader is likely to have their own favorite or preferred storyline, however this is an author who can successfully pull them all together by the end. That ending comes with a fast and furious sequence of reveals and developments that certainly stretch credibility, while at the same time are believable enough in the world of **DO I KNOW YOU?** to satisfy the reader.

Readers will hope that Sarah Strohmeyer's gap between mystery novels is not quite so long next time,

now that they have been given another sample of her ability to craft compelling and addictive narratives of suspense.

**THE QUIET PEOPLE**

By Paul Cleave  
Orenda Books \$15.99  
March, 2022

**Rating: B+**

I have long said the New Zealand-based crime writer Paul Cleave is one of the most under-appreciated authors in the crime fiction community. From his first book to the latest, every entry in his oeuvre is worthy of best-seller status and critical acclaim. And yet while he is very popular – and an award-winning author – in his native country, many American crime fans have not discovered his books. Hopefully that will change with the release of **THE QUIET PEOPLE**, which just may be his best book yet.

With a very simple premise, Paul Cleave weaves a gripping suspense novel that keeps readers guessing right up until the end. Cameron and Lisa Murdoch are a married couple who also happen to be a successful crime-writing duo. As they are working to finish their latest novel, Cameron opts to take their seven-year-old son to the fair – as Zach can sometimes have behavioral challenges which are distracting at best and over-whelming at worst. After a rough day at the fair, Zach gets the sense that he is a burden to his parents and threatens to run away. Not really thinking much of it – all kids say that at one time or another – Cameron and Lisa go to bed with visions of a better tomorrow. In the morning, Zach is gone.

As any true crime fan knows, the first suspects in every case are those closest to the victim, and here that means the parents. It doesn't help their case that the Murdoch's have said for years during various conventions and live television interviews that because they have written so many clever crime novels, they could easily get away with a real crime. Did Zach's unpredictable outbursts and behavioral problems

drive these parents to do the unthinkable? Or is there something else going on?

The case gets major media coverage – both the legitimate kind as well as the more scandal-laden aspects of the press always looking for the juiciest piece of gossip. The police investigation is headed by Detective Inspector Rebecca Kent and her team. Paul Cleave allows the narrative to unfold from both the perspectives of Cameron Murdoch and Rebecca Kent, so readers get both civilian and official viewpoints on how a missing persons case is investigated. There is a third voice that factors into the novel. Mr. What If? is the imaginary voice that works on a subconscious level to help the Murdoch's plot out compelling novels for their fans. But now, Mr. What If? seems hell-bent on making Cameron think of the worst possible scenarios and outcomes for his missing son.

The strength of this novel – and in fact, all of Paul Cleave's work – is the fully-fleshed out characters that populate the tale. Even the most minor players are etched out with surprising depth which means the reader becomes invested in the ultimate outcome for all those involved. Fans who hang out with real crime writers will recognize

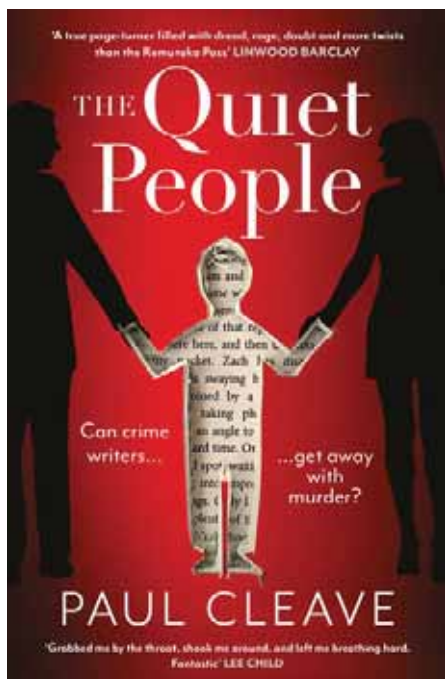
the tendencies for those in the industry to casually say that they could get away with a crime or how their search engine histories would put them on a watch list. This is a hazard of the profession and Paul Cleave nails the difficult reality a potential suspect would be put through if faced with such an investigation.

Paul Cleave also uses another technique to increase the suspense – and believe me, this book is incredibly tense throughout. Cleave will often end a chapter with a character discovering some new piece of evidence but doesn't reveal what it is to the reader. Instead, he allows the exposure of that critical clue to unspool in the next chapter as the character further investigates that lead. This prevents repetition and keeps the action moving forward like a jet plane.

Right at the middle of the novel there is an extended sequence of chapters that starts with an unruly mob outside the Murdoch home and ends with an explosive car crash. Any reader whose heartbeat and blood pressure are not elevated by the end of that section should immediately head to the hospital. This is a high-tension, high-risk, sequence of events that forever alters the trajectory of the novel in a way readers will not see coming. From that point forward, setting **THE QUIET PEOPLE** aside for any amount of time becomes an impossible task.

Crime fiction fans who remember the importance of the stuffed teddy bear in Jordan Harper's **SHE RIDES SHOTGUN** should prepare themselves to once again be emotionally invested in a child's plush toy to an extent that is hard to explain or rationalize. That is the beauty of fiction.

The twists continue to pile up as Paul Cleave leads readers to the conclusion of **THE QUIET PEOPLE**. By the end, readers will find themselves holding their breath hoping for the best, but prepared for the worst. And they will certainly be back for Paul Cleave's next suspense novel.



## The Agatha Award Nominations

### Best Contemporary Novel

CAJUN KISS OF DEATH  
by Ellen Byron  
WATCH HER by Edwin Hill  
THE MADNESS OF CROWDS  
by Louise Penny  
HER PERFECT LIFE  
by Hank Phillippi Ryan  
SYMPHONY ROAD  
by Gabriel Valjan

### Best Historical Novel

MURDER AT MALLOWAN HALL  
by Colleen Cambridge  
CLARK AND DIVISION  
by Naomi Hirahara  
THE BOMBAY PRINCE  
by Sujata Massey  
DEATH AT GREENWAY  
by Lori Rader-Day  
THE DEVIL'S MUSIC  
by Gabriel Valjan

### Best First Novel

THE TURNCOAT'S WIDOW  
by Mally Becker  
A DEAD MAN'S EYES  
by Lori Duffy Foster  
ARSENIC AND ADOBO  
by Mia P. Manansala  
MURDER IN THE MASTER  
by Judy L. Murray  
MANGO, MAMBO,  
AND MURDER  
by Raquel V. Reyes



# A Visit From the Book Broad

*Meredith Anthony*



This is my first column for *DP* and a big thank you to George Easter for inviting me. A big shout-out to him and my *DP* colleagues whose reviews I have been reading with great pleasure for years. Like Ted Hertel, I am also an author. Like L.J. Roberts, I love and notice first lines. Like Larry Gandle, I have a short fuse. Like George Easter, I read a lot and in a wide range of sub-genres, from thrillers and noir to amateur sleuths and cozies. Medical and legal and space thrillers. Private eyes and police procedurals. Gay and chick lit. Stand-alones and series. Historical and futuristic. Assassins and spies. Hyper-real, up to the minute, and magic realism. Whatever it is, I prefer to write about the books I like best so that they can reach the widest audience. But, Gandle-style, I'm not afraid to warn you off the worst.

The title of this column is a tribute to my favorite book, Jennifer Egan's *A VISIT FROM THE GOON SQUAD*.

[FULL DISCLOSURE: I have a passing acquaintance with many mystery authors. I have met Hillary Rodham Clinton, said hello to Stephen Spotswood, shared a meal with Louise Penny, and had many, many drinks with Heather Graham. Jane K. Cleland is a good friend. (Luckily, I am also a big fan, so you can imagine how lovely it is to be able to recommend her.)]

## STATE OF TERROR

By Hillary Rodham Clinton  
and Louise Penny

Simon & Schuster, \$30.00

**Rating: A**

**First line:** "Madame Secretary," said Charles Boynton, hurrying beside his boss as she rushed down Mahogany

Row to her office in the State Department. "You have eight minutes to get to the Capitol."

This gripping political thriller is a product of the alliance of former Secretary of State and US Senator, Hillary Clinton and award-winning and best-selling author Louise Penny. Neatly leveraging Clinton's deep knowledge of the national and global political arena and Penny's strong character sense, expert pacing and emotional heft, *State of Terror* is a great read and a sobering commentary on political realities. Although it is fiction, the whispers and echoes of recent administrations, politicians and players cannot be ignored.

Ellen Adams, the new Secretary of State, is surprised to have been tapped for the job by the man she opposed and lost to in the election. The complex plot has a global reach and involves saving the world, rescuing an errant son, and learning to love a less capable new president whose job she should have had.

(I'm looking at you, Obama.)

Louise Penny is one of my favorite authors. Her skill at depicting horrific violence, including its emotional toll on those left behind, is at full play here. As is her gift for bringing to life complicated characters.

Ellen Adams' relationships with her staff are especially deft, including her long-time friend and now counselor, Betsy, with whom she shares a charming intellectual word game.

Watch for mentions of the previous administration's President Dunn, now retired and stirring the pot from his residence in Palm Beach. Hilarious! And disturbing.

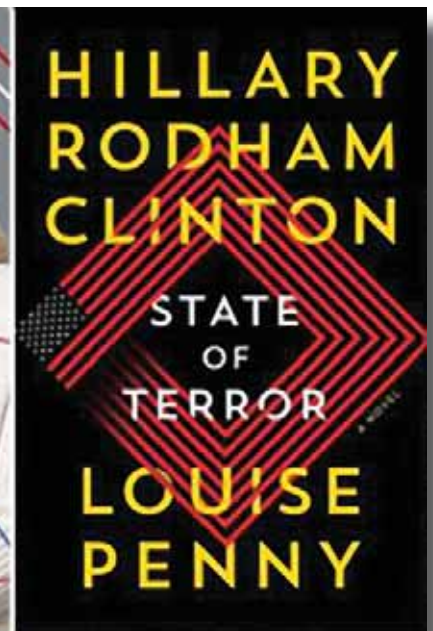
## APOLLO MURDERS

By Chris Hadfield

Mulholland Books, \$28.00

**Rating: D**

**First line:** "I lost my left eye on a beautiful autumn morning with not a cloud in the sky."



Fans of perhaps the newest subgenre, space thrillers, will want to dip into **APOLLO MURDERS**, but if you are not a space completist, you might want to steer clear.

Set in 1973, this alternate history posits an additional Apollo mission to the moon with a secret agenda to disable a Russian space station with superior spying capabilities.

Written by an accomplished former astronaut, Chris Hadfield, the sense of authenticity he brings to his descriptions of the preparations for and execution of the mission are undercut by a preposterous plot. For a 3-man mission, it racks up a startling body count as mission specialists have fist fights and shoot-'em-ups leaving space as littered with bodies as a cowboy saloon in a western. I call it, Appalling Murders.

I'm sorry, Mr. Hadfield, but you shouldn't have quit your day job.

### **FORTUNE FAVORS THE DEAD**

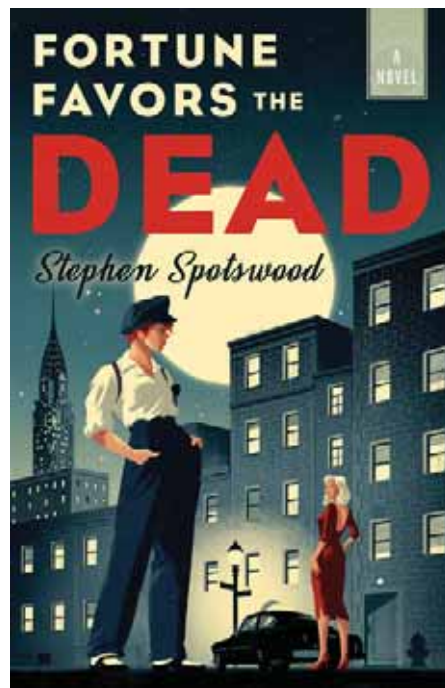
By Stephen Spotswood  
Vintage Crime, \$16.00

**Rating: B+**

**First line:** "The first time I met Lillian Pentecost, I nearly caved in her skull with a piece of lead pipe."

New York City in the 1940s. A brilliant and irascible detective who rarely leaves home. A charismatic and capable assistant who does the legwork and sometimes throws a punch or a knife. A mysterious locked-room murder among the city's elite. Sound familiar? It's not Nero Wolfe, it's Lillian Pentecost. Her disability is MS, not obesity. Her sidekick and the novel's narrator, Willow-jean "Will" Parker, is more than a match for Archie Goodman.

We get an opening action sequence and a deft and unique origin story for Will. She ran away from an abusive home to join a circus where she apprenticed with many of the acts as she grew to adulthood. The description of her circus years and the skills she picked up there are priceless. She learned sharp-shooting, bareback riding, aerial work, various kinds of fakery. She reports that she didn't pick up many skills from the freaks: "You're either blessed with a tail or you're not."



The plot is suitably complex and loaded with suspects and secrets. Will and Lillian use their research and interviewing skills to unravel the various motives. There is also some gunplay. These *femmes* are *fatale*.

Leavened with humor throughout, this debut novel has an enviably seasoned tone. A sequel, **MURDER UNDER HER SKIN**, has recently been published. I, for one, hope for a long series.

### **THE UNFORGIVEN**

By Heather Graham  
Mira, \$28.99

**Rating: A-**

**First line:** "There was nothing like being in the water, and nothing at all like diving."

Some series, like Julia Spencer Fleming's and Louise Penny's, need to be read in order, from the beginning. Some, like Lee Child's (and now Lee Child/Andrew Child's) don't. Heather Graham's Krewe of Hunters series is in the second camp. I don't read everything Heather Graham writes (I think she actually writes even faster than I can read!), but I drop in once in a while with great pleasure. **THE UNFORGIVEN** made me glad I did.

A gorgeous, evocative prologue, set in the sunny Florida Keys, introduces

15-year-old Katie Delaney on a day that starts out perfect but is interrupted by an unspeakable crime that will change her life. Twelve years later, Katie is living in New Orleans, taking tourists on mule-drawn carriage rides and telling them the stories and myths that make The Big Easy such an intriguing city to visit.

When a grisly crime brings reminders of the horror that changed her girlhood, Katie finds herself drawn in to the search for a killer who may or may not have come back from the dead.

Graham's strength is her ability to ground a story in the present with all its bustle and turmoil—tourists and locals, restaurants and bars and jazz joints—and to casually reference characters, some of them law enforcement officers, who see and talk to the dead.

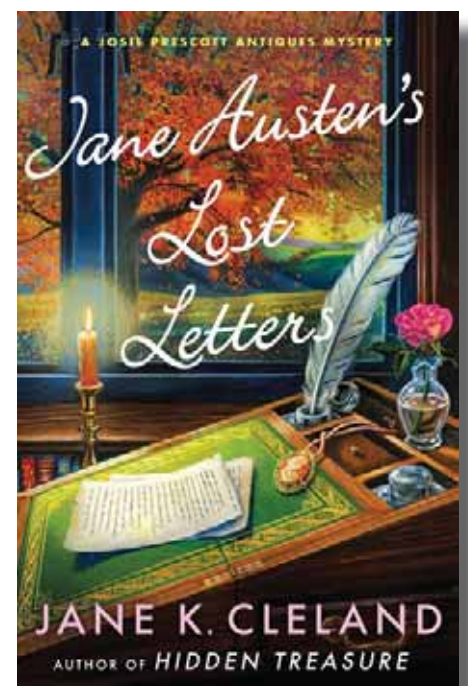
Hoping to find insight into her own tragic history, Katie reluctantly teams up with her former nemesis—the officer who tried to pin the previous crime on her uncle—to try to solve the present murders and break the cycle whose origins lay in NOLA's past.

### **JANE AUSTEN'S LOST LETTERS**

By Jane K. Cleland  
Minotaur Books, \$26.99

**Rating: A**

**First line:** "The operator assigned to





camera one rolled the dolly toward me, framing the shot.”

Antiques appraiser, Josie Prescott, is hosting her TV show, *Josie's Antiques* as this entry in Jane Cleland's long-running mystery series begins. Focused on one part of the complex and arcane antiques trade, each of these novels centers on an antique. The details about how objects and documents are authenticated or exposed as frauds are all part of the fun.

Josie, whose small, New England town is as rife with murders as Jessica Fletcher's Cabot Cove, unravels the most puzzling cases using her expertise with antiques and her sharp people skills. Several crimes in the series have a “this time it's personal” slant and this one revolves around some Jane Austen letters that may or may not be authentic and may or may not have come to her via her dead father.

There's a mystery woman who might know something about Josie's dad. There is an interesting pair of rival antiques experts, one of whom ends up dead. And Josie herself comes close to adding to the body count.

Cleland's novels are frequently labeled as cozies. To my mind, this is too limiting. Except for a lamentable absence of swear words and sex scenes, I think they are solidly in the traditional mystery, amateur sleuth camp. Josie might own a cat, but the cat never solves the mystery.

If you are new to the series, you can start at the beginning and enjoy a mild character arc and the development of the ancillary characters. Or you can also just dive in. **JANE AUSTEN'S LOST LETTERS** functions as a tight stand-alone and you can always go back and catch up with the rest of the series if you fall in love, as I did, with the smart, ambitious, slightly prickly Josie.

As a side note, I'm always happy to see a female character who takes charge of her life and prospers, with a thriving business, devoted friends and employees, a good, strong personal relationship, and a couple of contented cats. Josie has a few secrets, but, for the most part, she is a feminist role model.

### **RAZORBLADE TEARS**

by S. A. Cosby  
Flatiron, \$26.99

**Rating: B+**

**First line:** “Ike tried to remember a time when men with badges coming to his door early in the morning brought anything other than heartache and sorrow, but try as he might, nothing came to mind.”

Two lethally dangerous ex-cons, an angry alcoholic redneck and a bitter African-American, are natural enemies. The only thing they hate worse than each other are the folks who killed both their sons. And, by the way, both of them hated that their sons were gay and had married each other.

When Ike and Buddy team up to find and punish the killers, it looks like the worst buddy-movie, pulp-fiction set-up ever invented. The plot tests their ability to take punishment and mete it out. The writing tests the reader's ability to withstand the repetitive and overwritten first chapters. However, if you do manage to hang in there—and no jury would convict you for bailing out—you may find yourself, as I did, smitten with these egregious men—criminals, bad fathers, vengeance-driven maniacs who harbor secret moral codes and hearts of gold. Seeing them come to terms and grow into reluctant friendship is worth the journey. And after the painfully repetitive set-up, the

author settles into a lively prose style reminiscent of a jacked-up Raymond Chandler.

Full of colorful crazy violence and flamboyant foul language, **RAZOR-BLADE TEARS** is richly leavened with original, laugh-out-loud humor.

### **THE PLOT**

By Jean Hanff Korelitz  
Celadon Books, \$28.00

**Rating: B-**

**First Line:** “Jacob Finch Bonner, the once promising author of the “New & Noteworthy: (*The New York Times Book Review*) novel *The Invention of Wonder*, let himself into the office he'd been assigned on the second floor of Richard Peng Hall, set his beat-up leather satchel on the barren desk, and looked around in something akin to despair.”

You may have noticed that mystery fiction these days is more streamlined than it used to be. It starts later in the story, sometimes daring the reader to catch up. It moves fast and eschews subplots, extraneous characters, and even adverbs in its race to capture and hold the reader's attention and zip along the finish. Not Jean Hanff Korelitz.

Korelitz begins **THE PLOT** with perhaps the most hackneyed set-up—a third-rate university in New England where a washed-up, once-promising novelist, full of self-loathing and angst, is teaching creative writing to a bunch of dimwits. And Korelitz takes her time, milking the situation for most of the first 100 pages. But her prose is so layered and so evocative that I found myself putting aside my usual impatience and slowing my inner clock. I was happy to just curl up and go along for the ride.

The long middle section ratchets up the suspense. But it's not actually suspense, is it? It generates instead a kind of propulsive, pervasive, existential dread, as if the book were the love child of Jean Paul Sartre and James Patterson.

The last section of this very noir mystery pulls together the twisted strands of **THE PLOT**, one of which I guessed very early. The ending will

satisfy the darkest noir fans.

It's interesting that the recent "Bad Art Friend" controversy that played out in *The New York Times Magazine* and *The New Yorker* centered around a dispute between writers about who owns a story—the person it happened to or the writer who writes about it. (Google the conflict if you missed it.) **THE PLOT** is that incident on steroids.

### THE JOY AND LIGHT BUS COMPANY

By Alexander McCall Smith  
Pantheon, \$27.00

**Rating: A**

**First Line:** "It was a question to which Mma Ramotswe, like many women in Botswana, and indeed like many women in so many other places, gave more than occasional thought."

The No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency novels constitute without a doubt the best cozy series even written. Set in Botswana, the adventures follow Precious Ramotswe and her colleague Grace Makutsi as they confront cases requiring their detective skills, mostly learned from a book, **THE PRINCIPLES OF PRIVATE DETECTION**. They also typically encounter at least one, more personal problem, close to home. Told with humor, skill, generosity and a deep

reservoir of wisdom, you can snuggle into them knowing that all will be happily resolved, if not in the expected way.

In **THE JOY AND LIGHT BUS COMPANY**, Mr. J.L.B. Matekoni is feeling a little dissatisfied with his lot in life. His efforts to achieve something bigger provide some cause for concern, even as Mma Ramotse and Mma Makutsi investigate a family conflict with a dying father, expectant heirs, and a loyal caretaker. It's like an African episode of *Succession*.

I love big messy profane and violent books as much as the next girl, but I cannot recommend highly enough this excellent, long-running cozy series from the prolific Alexander McCall Smith. Naturally, they profit by being read in order, but just dip into one. Any one. This one.

### WE BEGIN AT THE END

By Chris Whitaker  
Henry Holt, \$27.99

**Rating: A**

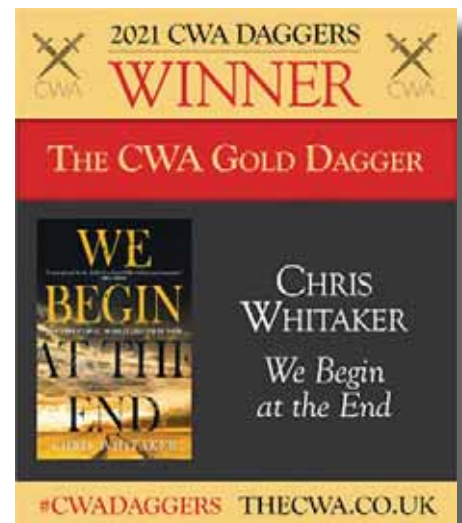
**First line:** "You see something and you raise your hand."

This is an excellent, immersive thriller, the kind that you sink into—its characters and emotion take you over so completely that they color your own life while you are reading it.

A tragedy more than a decade in the past has left a mark on each of the characters, residents of a small California town that itself shows the beginnings of blight. Each person is damaged in their own way. Duchess Day Radley is a thirteen-year-old girl and a self-proclaimed outlaw. She has been forced by circumstance to grow up too fast and assume too much responsibility. Her beautiful mother, Star, holds her secrets as close as her addictions. The town police chief, Walk, is a damaged cop, but not in the usual way.

**WE BEGIN AT THE END** guards its secrets jealously. The reader, like the characters, must work hard to unravel the tangled skein. The reward is worth the effort.

At mystery conventions over the years one perennial topic of discus-



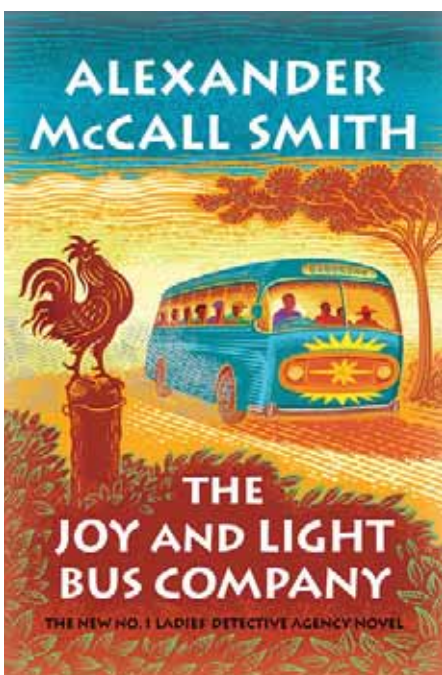
sion is the division of books into genre fiction and literary fiction. Is it a real distinction? Is it meaningful? Are the issues different or just the writing? Do the puzzles at the heart of high lit books like **THE GOLDFINCH** not echo the puzzles at the heart of pulp fiction or noir? Wherever you come down on this topic, there is occasionally a mystery so beautifully written or emotionally resonant that it bridges the gap: **THE GREAT GATSBY**, Dennis Lehane's **MYSTIC RIVER**, any book by Louise Penny. **WE BEGIN AT THE END** is such a book.

Speaking of high lit, the young protagonist, Duchess, has her roots in Harper Lee's classic **TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD**. She's like a hard luck version of Scout. The surname Radley is surely not an accident.

Move over, high lit. There's a new sheriff in town.

### \*BOOKS READ IN ORDER OF PREFERENCE

**WE BEGIN AT THE END**  
**JANE AUSTEN'S LOVE LETTERS**  
**STATE OF TERROR**  
**THE JOY AND LIGHT**  
**BUS COMPANY**  
**THE UNFORGIVEN**  
**FORTUNE FAVORS THE DEAD**  
**RAZORBLADE TEARS**  
**THE PLOT**  
**APOLLO MURDERS**



# From The Waterfront

## Ted Hertel



### ROAD OF BONES

by James R. Benn

Soho Crime, \$27.95, September 2021

**Rating: A-**

September 1944. Captain Billy Boyle is flown into a Soviet airfield in the Ukraine to investigate the murder of two intelligence agents, one American and one Soviet. The Russians and the Americans are conducting Operation Frantic, a shuttle bombing mission over Germany. Boyle, much to his disgust, is paired with a NKVD agent with whom he had history earlier during the war. The Russians are adamant that the two agents were killed by an American – and that, true or not, the investigation had better come to that conclusion. Boyle's buddy, Staff Sergeant "Big Mike" Miecznikowski, was flown in on a separate B-17 Flying Fortress, which was shot down as Boyle watched from the plane he was in. Now Boyle has two goals: to find the killer of the intelligence agents and to rescue his long-time friend lost in

the middle of Soviet territory.

Billy Boyle marches into yet another actual World War II battle, one of the most harrowing that author James R. Benn has put him in. Boyle's initial flight in a Flying Fortress is terrifying as it wings its way over German territory, shrapnel pounding the planes and bullets ripping into them from Messerschmitts. But later Boyle also has to ride along with the *Nachthexen*, the Night Witches, those daring young Soviet women in their flying machines, performing night bombing missions in biplanes. Benn nail-bitingly describes each of these chilling flights so different in style, keeping readers on the edge of their seats.

The author reveals the horror of the Soviet penal camps, from the titular "road of bones" where those who die while building the road are simply buried under it to camps where families are brutally punished for "crimes" committed by their children or parents. But the novel is also laced with sardonic humor ("[T]here is no ... theft in the Soviet Union. There is no need in our classless society. All I would be doing is redistributing wealth held by Western capitalists.").

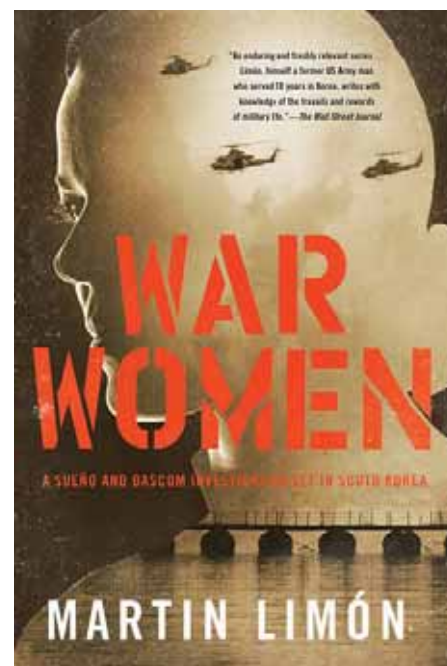
"The enemy of my enemy is my friend." Or maybe not, as who can ever trust the Russians? Or even other Americans in this novel filled with double and triple crosses. The only way to truly trust is to be constantly suspicious. Readers would be well-advised to keep that in mind as they follow this complex, twist-filled novel right to its finish.

### WAR WOMEN

by Martin Limón

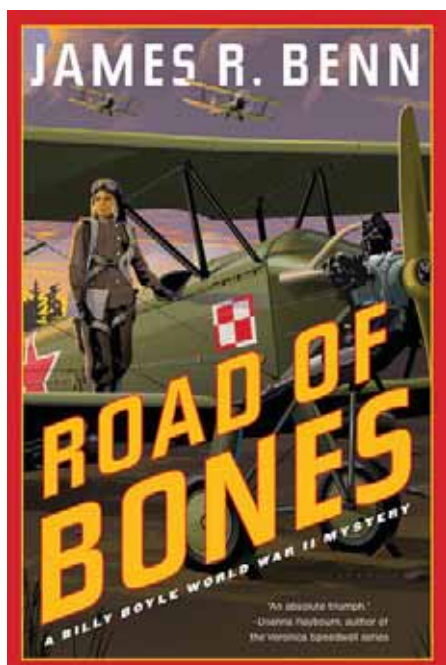
Soho Crime, \$27.95, November 2021

**Rating: A-**



South Korea, mid-1970s. U. S. Army CID Sergeants George Sueño and Ernie Bascom have a two-fold problem. Cecil Harvey, a senior NCO in charge of the 8<sup>th</sup> Army's classified documents, has gone missing with a top-secret document that could get him court-martialed. He's a sort of friend of the two agents and they want to get Harvey back to base with as little blowback as possible. If that wasn't enough, "tabloid rag" the *Overseas Observer* reporter Katie Byrd Worthington has threatened to publish incriminating photos and a story about the mistreatment of women in the military that could land high-ranking officials in big trouble. When she finds herself in a Korean jail, Sueño and Bascom are tasked with getting her out and negotiating against publication of that damaging story.

Martin Limón, who spent ten years serving with the military in Korea, knows the landscape well. From boxy Kimchi cabs to "business women" in form-fitting shorts and six-inch heels to the sights, sounds, and smells of the cities and rural areas, Limón lays out an atmospheric picture of life in the Army and in the country of South Korea. Corruption is widespread and political machinations abound. Korean elites want U. S. Defense Department contracts and bribery is the means to get them.



The reader is also given a look at military life. Whether one is right or wrong has nothing to do with logic. It's based solely on just one thing: rank. If a soldier is outranked, it doesn't matter if they are right. All that matters is who's got more stripes.

What makes this novel particularly timely is its depiction of women in the military. Sexual assault runs rampant while the leadership does its best to ignore or bury all such claims using the old "he said, she said" rationale. Failing to protect the women is seen as less harmful to a military career than having nude photographs of the officer taken during a drunken orgy published. Revealing photos could lead to forced retirement or court-martial. Rapes? Well, those are always negotiable. After all, it's unpatriotic to badmouth the boys overseas. And most Americans didn't even know that women were serving right beside them. It's a hell of a way to run a military base. War women? More like war *on* women.

Reading these two novels, back-to-back, paints a disturbing picture of the differing treatment of women in the military. Of course, they are only snapshots of a moment in time, but I still found the contrast to be horrifying. In *Road of Bones* Russian women were given planes (granted, they were old bi-planes, but nonetheless...), drafted into daring and very dangerous aerial combat, and proudly took the name *Nachthexen*. But in *War Women* American females in the army were abused and sexually assaulted. Both served their respective countries but only one group was honored while the other was an object of sexual desire, humiliation, and rape.

### THE DARKNESS KNOWS

by Arnaldur Indridason

Minotaur, \$27.99, August 2021

**Rating: C+**

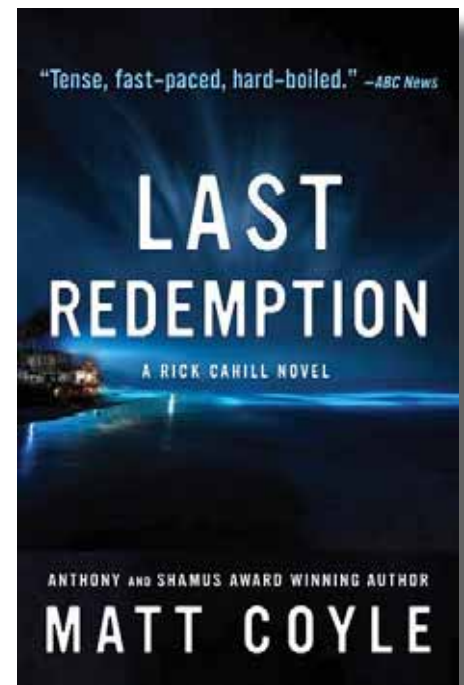
An Icelandic tour guide discovers the perfectly preserved body of a long-missing man on a now melting glacier. (I suspect that nothing in Guide School had ever taught her what to do when one finds a dead body on a glacier!) The man, a Reykjavik businessman named

Sigurvin, had disappeared thirty years earlier, but now that he has been unearthed (unsnowed?), the police reach out to Konrád. He had been in charge of the case those many years ago. The only real suspect, the never-charged but now incarcerated for some other crime Hjaltalín, will only talk to the now-retired detective. Basically, all the man does is once again proclaim his innocence. The cold case (obvious pun definitely intended), however, continues to nag at Konrád because can a cop ever really retire from this sort of situation? Then a new witness steps forward, the sister of a boy (at the time) who had seen Sigurvin on the night of his disappearance. But the boy was killed in a hit-and-run some years later. Is there a connection between the two deaths?

This is a thorough and very slow moving book. There are corrupt cops in this mainly character driven novel, tiny incremental steps in the investigation, and not as much description of the country of Iceland as I would have hoped. While the extremely slow pace of the investigation would probably be very accurate in real life, it did become tiresome over the course of hundreds of pages. Some of the clues seemed to come out of nowhere in terms of importance and seemed improbable of having a bearing on anything relating to the murder. A Boy Scout troop? Really? The book does pick up just a bit as it approaches its denouement but it takes a long time to get there. Add to this, Konrad's sad backstory (awful childhood, deceased wife, and more), and it is a rather depressing tale. On the other hand it is Nordic Noir and that explains that, I suppose.

This is the first book (originally published in 2014) in Indridason's latest series to be translated into English. Unfortunately, I found the translation to be a bit stilted. At one point, for example, in reference to a business partner, the term chosen was "sleeping partner." I suspect the translator meant "silent partner," since there was no evidence of any other sort of relationship.

All in all, this was a disappointing start for this new series.



### LAST REDEMPTION

by Matt Coyle

Oceanview Publishing, \$26.95, November 2021

**Rating: B+**

As if a slow recovery from his bout with blindness hadn't been enough, private investigator Rick Cahill is now suffering from chronic traumatic encephalopathy (CTE), the "pro football disease." But then his long-time and best friend Moira MacFarlane asks for Cahill's help surveilling her 24-year-old son Luke, who may be violating a domestic violence restraining order. When Luke goes missing and his boss ends up dead, the investigation turns much more serious.

As with many private investigator novels, this one starts off slowly, with Cahill questioning numerous witnesses. But Anthony and Shamus Award winning Matt Coyle is an expert at laying the groundwork for a complex and suspenseful novel. The danger to Cahill increases exponentially when he confronts hostile suspects and discovers that two thugs are also searching for Luke. Hampered by fugue state CTE and constantly at odds with Moira as all roads seemingly point to her son as the killer, Cahill finds many obstacles in his way to the truth. But he's resourceful,

plays by his own rules and damn the consequences.

Coyle has created a believable plot centered around corporate espionage and Big Pharma that reads like it was ripped from today's headlines. Filled with likeable protagonists and dangerous villains, this story comes down to several brutal confrontations with deadly results. Cahill finds that he has one last shot at redemption if he can only live long enough to see it to fruition. This eighth Cahill novel is a fine addition to the series. I just hope that it's not the last one.

### DEATH UNDER THE PERSEIDS

by Teresa Dovalpage

Soho Crime, \$27.95, December 2021

**Rating: C-**

The seemingly lucky Mercedes Spivey and her husband Nolan have won a five-day cruise from Florida to Cuba, even if she doesn't remember entering any sweepstakes. Though suspicious they decide to go anyway. Once onboard Mercedes runs into several people she knows through an ex-boyfriend. Oddly enough they have also received a free cruise. Coincidence? I think not! But one of the acquaintances disappears on the first day of the cruise. Then the other dies under mysterious circumstances and Nolan vanishes. As Mercedes searches for her husband on the streets of Old Havana, she begins to wonder if she will be next on the list?

On the plus side, the book has wonderful descriptions of mouth-watering food, Cuban architecture, history of the island, and the lifestyle of an average Cuban (in this case, Mercedes' grandmother).

But right from the start there are so many things that simply do not work here. Clearly the free tickets are a scam of some nature, though the reader won't know why until well into the story. After the first person disappears, Mercedes overhears someone mentioning that they heard "a big splash, like a body" but they do not bother to report it to anyone, nor does Mercedes. As an aside, this identical thing happened in Dovalpage's novella, *Death of a Telenovela Star*: body overboard and no one reports

it after hearing a splash. If anyone in this novel had ever acted with common sense, this story could not have been told.

Further Mercedes comes across as a flirt, a mercenary (though she claims to be naïve), an obsessive gold digger, and a man hunter, dumping boyfriends whenever anyone better (by which she means "richer") comes along. She is a selfish whiner, even going so far as to discard out of sheer jealousy pages of a novel her then boyfriend was writing because the writing took time away from her. There simply is not one ounce of sympathy created for her.

One of the few revelations that Mercedes has is that somewhere along the line she had strayed from true love. But she has absolutely no idea what "true love" is. It turns out that this is not a mystery novel at all. Instead it is a romance, one of repeated efforts to find true love in a man's wallet. It is also one with a totally preposterous ending that I simply cannot recommend.

### THE FIELDS

by Erin Young

Flatiron Books, \$27.99, January 2022

**Rating: A-**

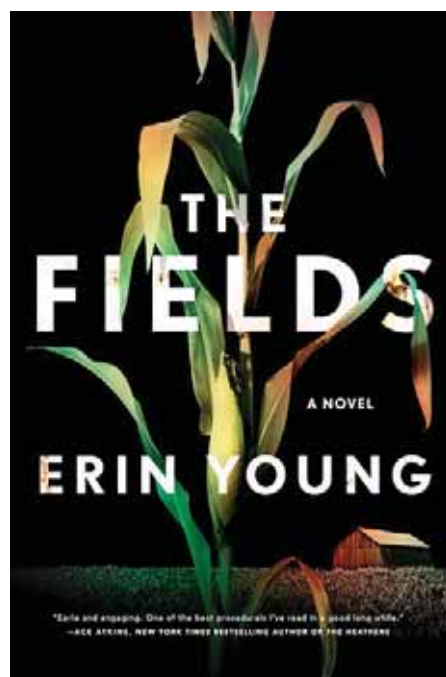
Sergeant Riley Fisher, newly-appointed head of investigations for the Black Hawk County Sheriff's Department is

called to the scene of a violent killing in an Iowa cornfield. Chloe Miller, the victim, turns out to have been a childhood friend of Fisher's. The field in which she was found was a family farm that was in competition with a much larger corporate farming operation. Shortly after the police begin their search for the killer, a second equally brutal murder is discovered. Then a mysterious white van begins snatching homeless people off the streets. But Riley has secrets of her own that she has to conceal in order to lead the murder cases. Further, she must work with officers jealous of her recent promotion, some of whom are out to see that she fails.

Mix in Big Agriculture versus locally owned farms (who would have thought that would be the "seed" for suspense?), corrupt local and statewide politics that have far reaching implications, a few more murders, and complex motives and you have this solid and very well polished debut novel from Erin Young. The author lives in Brighton, England, but writes with authentic knowledge of the ins and outs of America's small towns and big politics. The rural setting is realistically drawn, with the loss of jobs and cities becoming ghost towns as people move away in order to earn a living. The acknowledgements in the back of the book make it clear that she had plenty of stateside research assistance and to her credit Young managed to pull it all together to make for a compelling police procedural.

There are a lot of characters in this book and it wasn't always easy to keep them all straight. Sometimes points of view shifted, but the story was always best told through Riley's third-person eyes. In spite of that, the reader's attention should be held from the page-turner of an opening through to the suspenseful violent conclusion.

Riley knows that real-life monsters, such as the one she is searching for, aren't like those in the fairy tales of her youth. That's the thing about monsters. If you aren't careful, you won't see them coming. Having said that, be aware that the book is occasionally grisly in its dark descriptions of the murders, serial killings, and violence, so it may not be



for everyone. But those who appreciate well-constructed multi-layered mysteries with flawed characters should find this very much to their liking.

### MY ANNIHILATION

by Fuminori Nakamura

Soho Crime, \$27.95, January 2022

**Rating: C-**

“Turn this page, and you may give up your entire life” reads the first sentence of this unusual novel. A man, for reasons unknown, plans to take on the identity of one Ryodai Kozuka. In the motel room where he planning on transforming himself, he finds various identity cards, a lengthy manuscript and a suitcase. The manuscript is a confessional diary revealing the psychological motives of a killer – and the suitcase contains the corpse of a woman. Then the doorbell rings. These are only the first steps in the examination of the twisted minds of killers.

This story is told in three parts. There is the first person narration of the nameless man, interspersed with large sections of the manuscript. There are also documents and recordings. In addition there is a lot of introspection, psychoanalysis, overly excessive electroconvulsive therapy, dream interpretation, and manipulation of memories, mingled with sexual fantasies and murder. Much of this is extremely unpleasant and often uninteresting reading.

What keeps the book moving forward over its relatively short course is the identities of the characters and their ultimate reveals. Nothing and no one is what and who it seems. In the end we are led to believe that even the tamest person has the potential to become a criminal. In the same way even the most patient reader can become put off and bored by this story. I’ve read and enjoyed previous novels by Nakamura but I cannot recommend this one.

## THE SHORT CIRCUIT

### DEATH COMES LAST:

*The Rest of the 1950s*

by Gil Brewer, edited by David Rachels  
Stark House, \$17.95, November 2021

**Rating: A-**

Gil Brewer was a prolific writer who started out writing “serious novels,” but fortunately for us mystery and crime fans, he turned to paperback originals after a sale to Gold Medal in 1951. Those were also serious novels, just perhaps not in the way Brewer thought of them. He wrote hundreds of short stories, noir thrillers, westerns, men’s adventure stories, many of which were published and a good number of which were not. This is the fourth volume of Brewer’s stories David Rachels has edited and there is not a bad tale among them. When I say “short story,” I mean *really* short. Many of the collected stories here are less than ten pages long, with only one in excess of twenty pages. Tiny, twisty noir gems filled with suspense even at three pages long.

There are stories of men dragged back into crime against their will, along with the consequences (“Final Appearance”) or at the insistence of a sultry and irresistible woman (“Goodbye, Jeannie”). Do you like tales where the twist only comes in the last sentence? Try “Stop Off.” “Motive for Murder” reveals, well, a horrible motive for murder. Sometimes cops don’t listen to a person, so “I Saw Her Die” goes to unheard of lengths to prove a point to them. The title story “Death Comes Last” (clocking

in at nineteen pages – almost a novella for Brewer!) involves a man who cannot get a woman out of his head until five minutes after her rejection he sees another gorgeous lady on the beach. Then things really start to go wrong for everybody. *You* can’t go wrong dipping into this collection at any point.

As bonuses, included are two short stories written by Brewer’s father, also named Gil Brewer. Both are tightly written and as short as most of his son’s work. There is also one never before published work from Gil (the son), “The Golden Scheme,” a violent and sexy revenge Western, one of several in the book. There is a complete bibliography of every one of the younger Brewer’s short stories to round out the book. If you like your classic noir jolts to come in short doses, this book is highly recommended.

### THIS TIME FOR SURE:

**Bouchercon Anthology 2021,**

Edited by Hank Phillippi Ryan

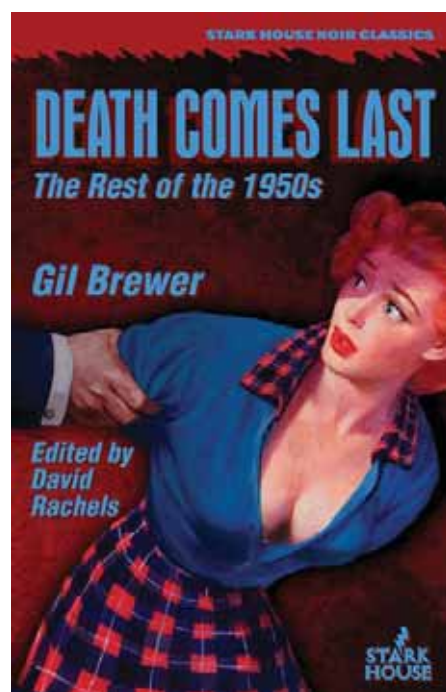
Down & Out Books, \$18.95/ebook \$7.99,

September 2021

**Rating: A-**

Full disclosure: I served as a preliminary round judge for this anthology, but all final decisions were made by the editor of the book.

They say that revenge is a dish best served cold – and this collection from the New Orleans Bouchercon, the World Mystery Convention, of 2021 proves it. Edited by the multi-award winning Hank Phillippi Ryan, this collection of stories from Bouchercon’s Guests of Honor, invited authors, and contest winners from the mystery community at large is chock full of tales of just that sort. Whether it is slights from years past (Steve Shrott’s “The Body” or Andrew Welsh-Huggins “The Lake”), love and marriage (Elizabeth Elwood’s “The River of My Return,” one of my very favorite stories in the book, or Elisabeth Elo’s “The Underappreciated Wife”), crimes of passion (Sharon Bader’s “To Catch a Thief or Two”), or double crossing bad guys (Alex Segura’s “Everybody’s Got a Cousin in Miami”), there is something in this collection that will appeal to everybody.



In addition to those gasp-inducing tales, the Guests of Honor have given us entertaining stories, as well. Charles (and Caroline) Todd's contribution, "A Matter of Duty," is an elegant Ian Rutledge murder mystery set in London in 1919. Heather Graham's appropriately set New Orleans tale, "Strange Things in the Name of Love," gives readers the secret history of that city. Craig Johnson opens the book with Walt Longmire and polka in the time of COVID in "Music Appreciation."

These are stories filled with irony and humor, danger and twists. Once you start dipping into them, you'll want to keep going. I think you'll find this collection of twenty-two stories to be a bargain at less than a buck a tale.

## HEY GROWNUPS! COMICS!!

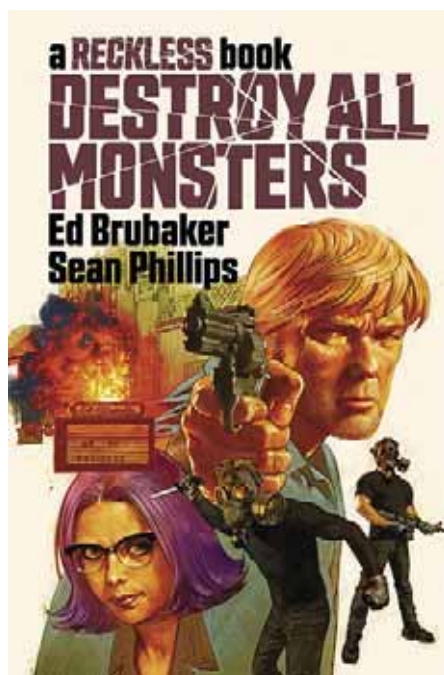
Several issues ago I reviewed writer Ed Brubaker and artist Sean Phillips' first two Reckless graphic novels. These two have collaborated many times before on such terrific collected series as *Criminal* and *The Fade Out*. This is now their third in the Reckless series at about 150 pages long. A fourth book, *The Ghost in You*, is expected in 2022.

**RECKLESS:  
DESTROY ALL MONSTERS**  
by Ed Brubaker and Sean Phillips  
Image Comics, \$24.99, October 2021)

**Rating: A-**

Former FBI agent Ethan Reckless, undercover as a 70's radical, got out of the business after a bomb blast by his own underground revolutionaries injured him and killed everyone else in the group. Eventually he turned to helping people who couldn't seem to get any help from the cops when they were in trouble.

Los Angeles 1988. Ethan and his best friend Anna, after solving "The Case of the Dirty Diapers" (no, really!), take on a much higher profile matter for a city councilman looking to destroy the man who had ruined the councilman's father's business and life. The two find



their way into Gerard Runyan's life through other people he has victimized, setting off a chain reaction of violence, destruction, and death. Dirty cops, dirty politics, and dirty photographs all play a part in this fast-moving tale of revenge where little goes according to plan and twists abound. It is also a story of friendship with bonds that are difficult to break, though Ethan certainly tries his best to ruin his relationship with Anna.

Brubaker writes excellent crime stories and this one is top of the line. Couple it with Phillips moody and fully appropriate art style and this is a book not to be missed.

## THE OLD-TIMER IN THE CORNER

George Harmon Coxe, born in 1901, was a newspaperman who wrote love stories, sports tales and adventure stories for the pulps as a sideline. He eventually specialized in crime fiction, often being published monthly in *Black Mask*. In the mid-1930s he also worked as an MGM screenwriter, but found that he preferred writing novels. Coxe created a number of series characters over his 63 books, the final one being published in 1975. He received Mystery Writers of America's Grand Master Award in 1964.

Coxe passed away in 1984.

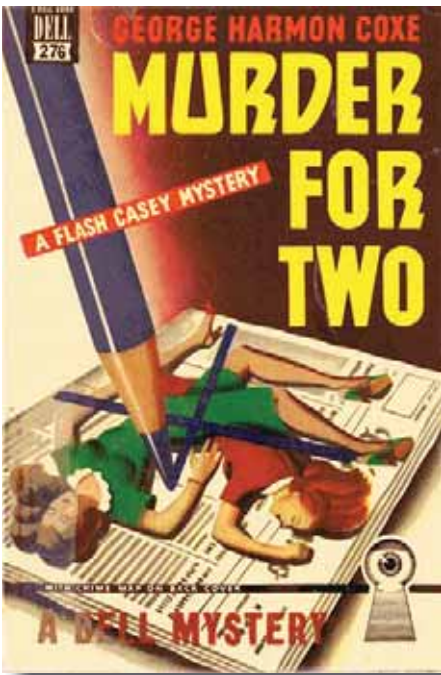
Coxe's best-known creation was probably Jack "Flashgun" Casey. The character first appeared in *Black Mask* in the story "Return Engagement" (March 1934) and returned to that magazine for 21 more short stories and two serialized novels. Casey was so popular that the stories spawned two movies, a radio program that lasted for nine years (1943-1950, 1954-1955), comic books, and a two season television series (1951-1952), most notable for its lead actor Darren McGavin, in his first television role, for most of the run. In one of his earliest television jobs Sidney Lumet directed some episodes. McGavin is quoted as saying about the TV series, "The cast of *Crime Photographer* didn't go down fighting. They took off for the hills. It was so bad that it was never re-run, and that's saying something when you recall the caliber of television programs in those days."

Interestingly enough, while there were 22 short stories about Casey, there were only five novels, three of which were not even written until the 1960s, after the radio and TV series were long gone and perhaps forgotten. Let's look at the second (as it says on the cover of the Dell paperback) "Flash Casey Mystery."

**MURDER FOR TWO** (1943). Flash Casey, the best newspaper photographer in Boston, works for the *Express*. On orders of his boss, he is stuck dragging around Karen Harding, a young (and of course attractive) female student as he



**George Harmon Coxe**



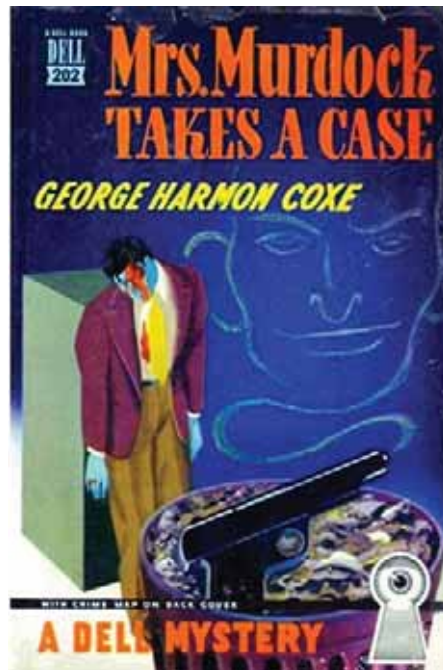
gets involved in the murder of columnist for the paper. She had “nerves and curves,” but followed often dangerous stories. One of those investigations may have led to her death. Casey is friends with the lieutenant on the case but when a second killing follows shortly after the first, he finds that he can follow leads the cops don’t have (probably because he keeps evidence to himself like any ordinary person would do instead of turning it over to the cops! Yeah, right). Harding is also concerned about her boyfriend, who has been defrauded and sent to prison in a battle over a plastics process he invented. Flash gets mixed up in that, as well.

The title of this book, when it was serialized in *Black Mask*, was the much better **BLOOD ON THE LENS**. Nonetheless, this is an entertaining story, well-written, with a straightforward plot, which was a hallmark of Coxe’s crime fiction. Casey is a tough protagonist (though in one amusing instance here he gets taken down by two college kids who catch him off guard) with a touch of humor and an eye for the ladies.

The book, set during World War II, opens with Casey just having been rejected for enlistment by the Army. He thinks “the Army took guys with glasses and bad ears and half their teeth gone; and just because [I] was a little

over thirty-five and had a trick knee that had been operated on three times they told [me I’d] better wait for a while.” So at least we know why he was available on the home front to beat up criminals instead of just taking their pictures.

Coxe’s other principal protagonist, Kent Murdock, was also the best newspaper photographer in Boston, but for a different Boston newspaper, the *Courier-Herald*. Go figure. Obviously Coxe knew how to wring an idea for all it’s worth! Murdock also had an eye for the ladies, but unlike Casey, Murdock was actually married and stayed true to his vows. Fun fact to know and tell: in the sixth book in the series, Murdock refuses to take a case. So wife Joyce Murdock takes the case herself in order to solve a double murder, in a book cleverly titled **MRS. MURDOCK TAKES A CASE** (1941). In spite of the fact that there were 23 Murdock novels, and one film, he is probably significantly less well-known than Flashgun Casey. Nevertheless, here are some comments on his fifth recorded case:



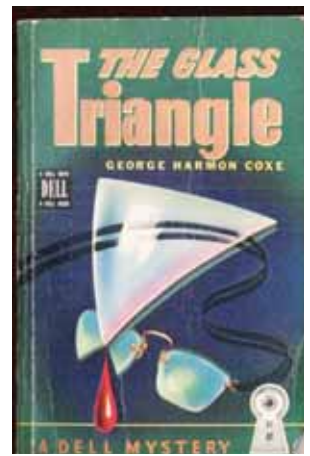
**THE GLASS TRIANGLE** (1940) finds Kent Murdock up to his neck in trouble. He manages to stumble on a dead body in a hotel room, but decides not to report it. (What is it with these photographers that they keep evidence to themselves? Do they think they are

private detectives? HA!) Guess what happens next? Right you are! The body disappears, just like it was never there. But Kent finds a small glass triangle overlooked by the cops when they finally investigate. Murdock gets involved with Hollywood movie makers (remember what I said before about author Coxe’s work for MGM? Yup, he made use of that, as well). Much of the action takes place in a Boston hotel and adjoining office building. Where does a dead body go to hide? If you think a glass triangle is of little consequence, what would you make of a winder for a wrist watch, also a clue here? This is a solid outing in an entertaining series, one that for the most part still holds up well today.

Both of these Dell Mapbacks I read for this article (and many others in these two series) were “mapbacks,” showing scenes of the crime on the back cover. These were pieces of “art” that showed buildings, street locations, interiors of apartments, etc., where the crime(s) took place. They add a fun dimension to the books.

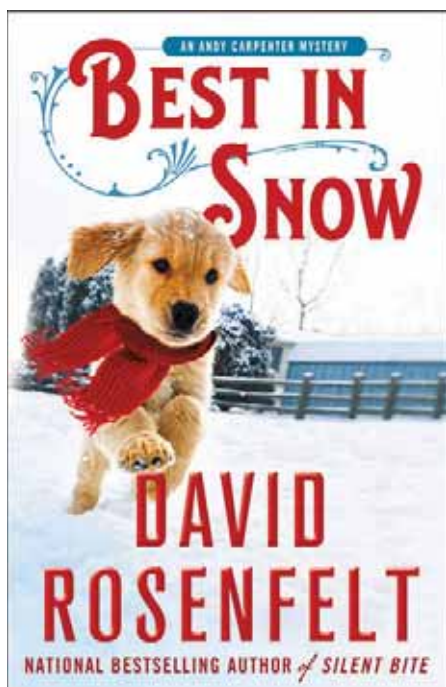
#### BOOKS READ IN ORDER OF PREFERENCE

ROAD OF BONES  
DEATH COMES LAST  
WAR WOMEN  
LAST REDEMPTION  
THE FIELDS  
THIS TIME FOR SURE:  
BOUCHERCON ANTHOLOGY 2021  
RECKLESS:  
DESTROY ALL MONSTERS  
THE DARKNESS KNOWS  
MY ANNIHILATION  
DEATH UNDER THE PERSEIDS



# Maggie's Cozy Mystery Cafe'

*Mary Mason*



## **BEST IN SNOW**

by David Rosenfelt

Minotaur, \$25.99

Andy Carpenter series #25

**Rating A**

Andy Carpenter admits to not wanting to work. He's a lawyer whose cases mostly feature a dog in distress or possible loss of their owner to prison if Andy can't work his magic. Andy is a dog person in capital letters. He and his family are lucky enough to have Tara, a wonderful golden retriever share their home with them. Also in the canine family is Sebastian, a basset hound and Hunter a pug. Andy inherited a LOT of money from his father and obtained a huge settlement for a client he proved innocent. They started a dog shelter, which has been a lifesaver for many dogs.

Andy is walking the 3 dogs when Tara finds something "interesting." She

has dug up a human hand. Andy calls the police and they find the body of Alex Oliva, mayor of Patterson. Soon Andy has a new client, a former reporter who claimed to have evidence of misconduct by the mayor. He was given proof by a staffer who later denied it, and the evidence was found to be fake. Bobby Nash is found in a crashed car with blood matching the mayors in the trunk. He is arrested and hospitalized. Bobby's former boss at the newspaper and Andy's good friend, editor Vince Sanders calls Andy and convinces him to take Bobby's case.

Andy gets his team together and begin the investigation of his clients case. Many things don't make sense, like why would Bobby leave the body in a public place, how could he commit a brutal murder and have no blood on his person, as it was proven by the timeline he could not have had a chance to clean himself up.

Bobby is fed poison while in the hospital, which is another puzzle. Why would someone try to kill a man who is believed to be guilty of murder. Luckily, he has Andy Carpenter for an attorney. Andy doesn't give up and does bring justice to bear.

This is a favorite series of mine, and I am already anxious for the next book. In real life, Rosenfelt and his wife also rescue dogs, many dogs. I was fortunate to visit them before they moved 25 dogs to Maine from California. I finally had the opportunity to meet and pat many dogs so that I felt I had enough dog love that day. Highly recommended.

## **AN ETERNAL LEI**

by Naomi Hirahara

Prospect Park Books, \$17.99, PBO

Second in series

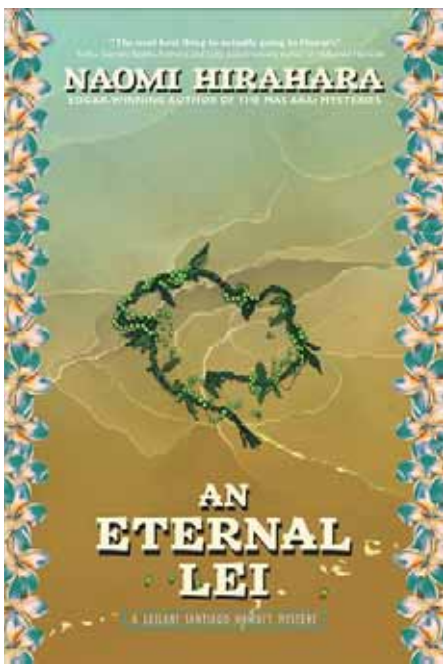
**Rating: B+**

Leilani Santiago is a member of a large family living on the Hawaiian island of Kaua'i. Leilani had returned to the island after leaving school in the state of Washington. During the Corona Virus pandemic, life is harder than ever for small businesses.

The Santiago's had a shaved ice business which was doing well prior to the pandemic. Now they are trying to figure out how to manage on a much reduced income. Located at Waimea Junction near their Killer Wave Surf Shop, the Lee Families flower shop, D-Man's corner watering hole, and Books & Suds a soap and book store their landlord is trying to get off the ground.

Dani Santiago is frantic at seeing a woman in the water, worried she is dead. Leilani rushes to action, with her





sister Sophie. They are able to bring her out of the water, and begin CPR. The woman is taken to the hospital where she is saved. The big question is who is she and what was she doing in the water. She had been wearing a Lei from the Lee's shop. The lei had mokihana berries in it. The berries can cause a serious rash and reaction.

Leilani's good friend Court Lee is there and concerned about the woman. Court is very pregnant and her husband is concerned about her. The woman is found to be a Japanese travel agent named Yumi Hara. She is staying at a plush B&B, one of the few on the island. The mystery is why she came to the island during a pandemic. Though alive, she remains in a coma.

To make matters more confusing, there is a protest at another rental property, one that has off island frat boys partying. The islanders are upset that the visitors may be spreading the virus. A shot rings out and it is feared that the owner of the property, an attorney, may have been killed. It turns out that the victim was Ted, a nurse from off the island. Shot by the property owner in self defense as Ted had a machete. The machete was found to be stolen.

Yumi regains consciousness and reveals her reason for coming to the

island: to find her daughter that she had given up to a scam artist.

The scam appears to have been widespread and though it was years ago, Leilani is able to solve the crime, rescue Yumi once again and even bring some happiness to many islanders.

I enjoyed this story and I really felt like I was visiting Hawaii. I appreciated the glossary. I would have liked a cast of characters as well, but that is just an age related wish.

### THE TWELVE JAYS OF CHRISTMAS

by Donna Andrews

Minotaur, \$25.99

Meg Langslow series #30

Rating: A

I always enjoy a trip to Caerphilly, Virginia, and a visit with Meg and company. It's nearly Christmas, and Meg will have her hands full with more than the large number of relatives visiting. Also in residence, grudgingly, is Roderick Castlemayne, a noted wildlife artist. He was hired to illustrate a book of birds for Meg's grandfather.

To say he is a pain is an understatement. The wombats in the basement just add to the fun.

Another issue to be addressed is the upcoming nuptials of Meg's brother



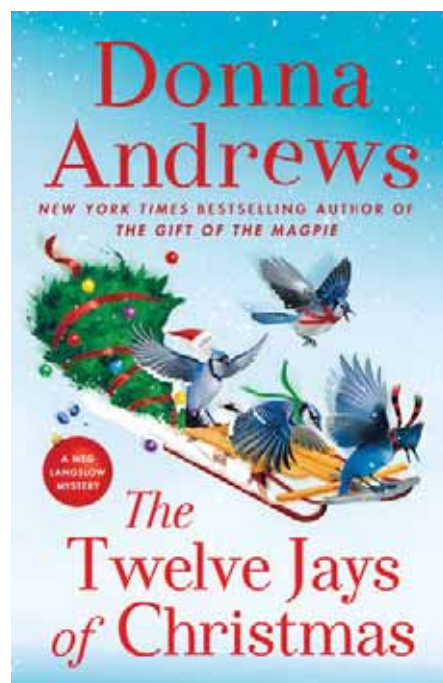
Donna Andrews

Rob & his fiancée Delaney. The couple don't want a large wedding, which is contrary to the wishes of the mothers. The mothers are joining forces to change figure out how to take charge.

Castlemayne is himself a big nuisance, but when creditors, ex-wives and others keep trying to get in the house, It's almost too much for Meg. Her husband Michael & their 2 sons are on a skiing trip, one that Meg missed out on due to an injury, so her usual support staff is unavailable. The situation gets worse when Castlemayne is murdered. A blizzard is raging and the murderer uncaged the birds that were used as models for the book.

Naturally, it falls on Meg to figure out the murderer, which includes outing an imposter. Meg is up to the task and eventually a happy holiday is achieved.

This is one of my favorite series. I keep saying I'd like to move to Caerphilly, but I'm thinking maybe just get a summer home, as I don't do well with blizzards. I would do well with the town and the homey feeling. Maybe open a bookstore?? I would love that almost as much as I love reading this series. Maybe Donna Andrews has an idea on how to live my dream.



# Deadly Pleasures

## George Easter



**LAST SEEN ALIVE**  
by Joanna Schaffhausen  
Minotaur, \$27.99  
Ellery Hathaway #5

**Rating: A-**

Ellery Hathaway was the last victim of serial killer Frances Coben – and the only one to escape alive. Her rescue was the work of FBI agent Reed Markham and Ellery and Reed now have an unshakeable bond, but a troubled relationship.

There are still suspected victims of Frances Coben that remain unfound. Now, after seventeen years in prison, Coben is finally willing to reveal some of his secrets, but he will only tell them to Ellery Hathaway – in person. Still dealing with the psychological damage wrought by Coben, Ellery reluctantly agrees – for the sake of the victims' families.

Before the meeting in prison takes place, a body of a young woman is discovered – with her hands removed – Coben's signature. There's obviously a copycat killer, but the question arises: Is

Coben orchestrating other killings while in solitary confinement in prison?

**LAST SEEN ALIVE** is chock full of edge-of-your-seat suspense. It is also quite dark in content -- so squeamish readers, be advised. Even though it is the 5<sup>th</sup> book in the series, it could be read as a standalone. An excellent read for a cold winter's night. Just make sure the doors are locked.

**MOON LAKE**  
by Joe R. Lansdale  
Mulholland, \$28.00

**Rating: B-**

When Daniel Russell was thirteen years old his father, in a fit of despair, drives their car with Daniel and all their worldly possessions off a bridge and into Moon Lake. Daniel somehow survives due to the efforts of a black girl named Ronnie and her father, who take him in and foster him for a few months. Has Daniel finally found the family he has been missing all these years? It is clear to the reader that Daniel has landed in good place where he will prosper, but the police locate a distant aunt who is reluctantly willing to raise him. So Daniel's teen years are spent in a remote house hours away from Moon Lake.

But once he reaches adulthood, Danny, now a reporter and writer, decides to return to Moon Lake to get answers to questions he still has about what happened a decade before. What Daniel finds is a town in the iron grip of the town council, which has its own secrets. The lake has largely dried up and is revealing skeletal remains, including some that are believed to have belonged to Danny's mother.

Danny reconnects with Ronnie, who is now a cop, and together they investigate the town's strange goings-on.

Threats and intimidation ensue and it becomes clear that certain people are willing to kill to keep their secrets from being revealed.

It is always a pleasure to read Lansdale's lyrical prose. However, as this story progressed, it became more problematic for me as the plot veered towards the unbelievable.

**THE MIRROR MAN**  
by Lars Kepler

Knopf, \$28.95, January, 2022

**Rating: A-**

The married team who write under the name of Lars Kepler has served up another tense and dark tale of abduction and murder with Detective Joona Linna charged with finding those responsible – and perhaps, saving a life or two by acting quickly.

On the surface this novel seems like many that have come before: young girls kidnapped, held in captivity and eventually murdered. Seen and read that before. But in the capable hands of Lars Kepler, it turns into something quite compelling.

Five years ago the disappearance of a young teenaged girl, apparently abducted, created a media firestorm, but the police were never able to find her. Now in the present day, her murdered body is found in a public park. The only witness to the deed is a psychiatric patient who can't remember any pertinent details.

With little to go on, Joona makes a breakthrough when he ties the death to a previous case. Then another girl's body shows up and it's a race against time to find who is responsible before anyone else is kidnapped or killed.

This is a page-turner, but not for the easily-frightened reader. Well told, but very dark.

**WHERE THERE'S A WILL**  
by Sulari Gentill

Poisoned Pen Press, \$15.99

January, 2022

The 11<sup>th</sup> in the Rowland Sinclair Series

**Rating: B+**

Ever since my law school days, I've been fascinated with crime fiction that involves a will contest. There's nothing like a big pot of money to stir up



Joanna Schaffhausen

in-fighting among the apparent heirs and beneficiaries.

The time is the mid-1930s and when this novel opens up, Rowland Sinclair and his entourage of traveling friends (Edna, Clyde and Milton) are just about to leave Singapore and head home to Australia. But Rowland is shocked to receive news that his Oxford chum, the wealthy American millionaire Daniel Cartwright, has been shot dead, three times in the chest and once in the head. His body was found in Harvard Yard, dressed in evening attire.

To his great surprise, Rowland is named executor of the will. So the group is off to Boston to give Rowland a chance to fulfill his friend's wishes. Events turn downright ugly when the will is read and it all but disinherits Danny's siblings in favor of one Otis Norcross, whom no one seems to know or is able to locate.

Amidst assault, kidnapping, and threats of slander, Rowland struggles to understand Danny's motives, find the missing heir, and identify his friend's killer before the clock--and his luck--run out. Along the way, we are treated to appearances by famous people of that era -- Marion Davies, Randolph Hearst, Errol Flynn, Scott and Zelda Fitzgerald, and a particularly odious Joe Kennedy.

Each chapter begins with a news

clipping from that era. They are highly entertaining and informative -- and add to the enjoyment of the novel.

Sulari Gentill is masterful in blending an exciting plot with a sharp, historical look at the 1930s in different parts of the world. Her prose flows as if effortlessly written and the cast of characters grows with each novel in the series. If you haven't tried this series, you should. Its longevity is a testament to its quality.

#### BYE BYE BABY

by Ace Atkins  
Putnam, \$28.00

**Rating: B-**

This aptly named mystery is the last of the Spenser novels to be written by Ace Atkins and it shows that he has run out of steam in his telling of a pretty lackluster story.

Spenser is brought in to act as a bodyguard for Congresswoman Carolina Garcia-Ramirez who is receiving death threats. As a woman of color, Carolina is used to such threats from white supremacists and political extremists and doesn't take them seriously. Fortunately for Carolina, her chief of staff does. Spenser is reluctant to take on the job, but is encouraged to do so by his longtime lover Susan Silverman, who is a big fan of the congresswoman. Threats turn to vandalism and violence, but Spenser keeps Carolina safe.

An FBI agent warns Spenser that something big is in the offing, so Spenser and Hawk dig into an extremist group called The Minutemen, led by a wealthy Harvard grad named Bishop Graves. Fireworks ensue and the story is wrapped up in an expected fashion.

Robert B. Parker wrote 39 Spenser novels and Ace Atkins has written 10 more. Now, the series will continue under the able hand of Mike Lupica. I started reading them in 1973 as a young man of 28. I'm sure that Spenser will outlive me, but I'm no longer sure that is a good thing.

#### QUARRY'S BLOOD

by Max Allan Collins  
Hard Case Crime, \$12.95  
February, 2022

Quarry #16

**Rating: B+**

Quarry has left his professional life as a hit man behind him and has gracefully retired to manage his rental properties and lead a quiet life.

But two things crop up to spoil Quarry's retirement idyll. One is the appearance of a mysterious young lady who knows an awful lot of his deeply buried secrets. But what does she want? The other is a team of hunters who seem bent on spilling Quarry's blood. Who would want to kill him? He's old news. Quarry surmises it is perhaps someone out for revenge for his killing of a family member, or a client who wants to be sure that his/her involvement in any crimes doesn't come to light.

On Quarry's journey to find out who is behind the two hitmen sent to kill him, he takes us on a trip into his past and we are re-acquainted with several figures such as LuAnn in Biloxi.

This is no different from other Quarry novels: it is smoothly written and fast paced. This is the kind of series where one can jump in anywhere -- even with **QUARRY'S BLOOD**, which is purported to be the last of the series (I've heard **that** before).

#### READER, I BURIED HIM

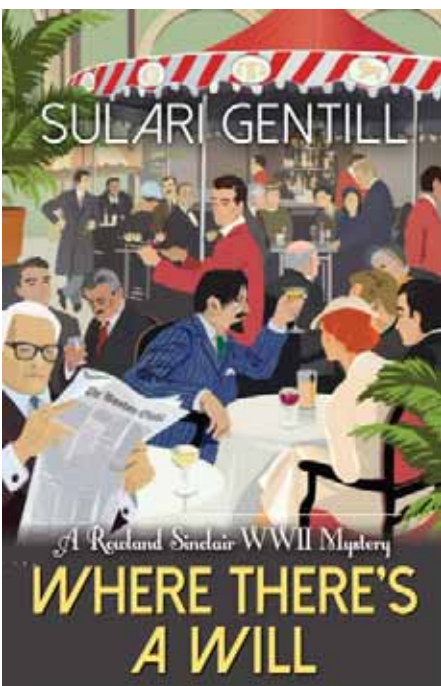
by Peter Lovesey  
Soho Crime, \$27.95

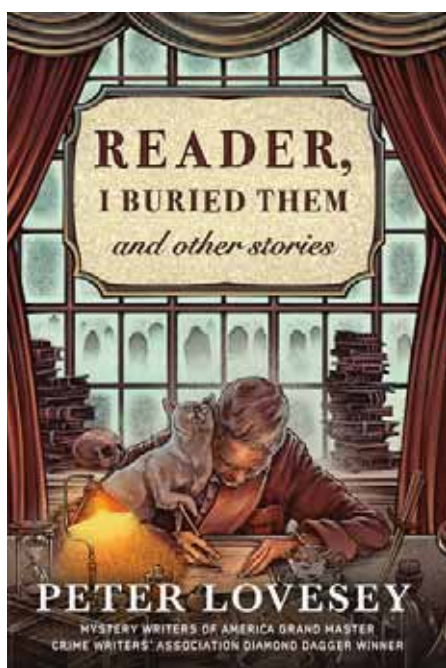
**Rating: A**

The work of a good short story writer is generally noted for cleverness and that is just what this collection of short fiction by the incomparable Peter Lovesey exhibits -- ingenuity in spades.

Over the years, Peter Lovesey has written 100 short stories and this collection is a good sampling of that work.

It's always hard for me to reviews a short story collection because often the stories are quite different one from another. Let's just say that this collection is well worth the time to read it. There was only one story that I didn't care for, "The Homicidal Hat," written for *Malice Domestic*. My favorites were the title story, "Reader, I Buried Them," "Angela's Alterations," "The Bitter Truth," "Ghosted," "Formidophobia," "A Three Pie Problem" -- a Peter Diamond story, and





“Remaindered.”

This is a must-read for Peter Lovesey fans and for those who appreciate clever short fiction. He is a master of this form.

### THE MATCH

by Harlan Coben  
Grand Central, \$29.00  
Wilde #2

**Rating: B+**

Wilde, from **THE BOY FROM THE WOODS** (2020), is back for a second outing. His story is well known: he was found in the woods in which he had been living for several years as an abandoned child. No one knows his history, including Wilde. But that is about to change. For Wilde has submitted his DNA to an online ancestral database and there is a match. But what should have been a simple DNA match turns out to be much more complex. Would you expect anything less in a Harlan Coben novel?

On another track, we follow the activities of an ultra-secret group called Boomerang, created by Chris Taylor, formerly known as The Stranger (**THE STRANGER** – 2015). Its sole purpose is doling out justice to super internet trolls who take their malicious falsehoods a giant step too far. Their justification: people who destroy lives should have theirs destroyed. One such person who experienced an epic fall from grace

due to such trolling turns out to be Wilde’s second cousin. And thus the two story lines merge.

When I read **THE BOY FROM THE WOODS** I thought it was one of the best books of the year so I was anxious to read this follow-up. Although **THE MATCH** intrigued me on an intellectual level, it didn’t on an emotional one. It was kind of flat, so I don’t rate it as highly as I did the first in the series. However, Coben does a good job of wrapping things up at the end. Kudos for treating a timely topic. Good but not great.

### THE NIGHT SHIFT

by Alex Finlay  
Minotaur, \$27.99, March, 2022  
**Rating: B+**

It’s New Year’s Eve 1999. Y2K is looming and portending disaster. Then nothing happens. Well, except at a Blockbuster Video Store in New Jersey, where four female teenaged employees and their manager, working late, are attacked. Only one inexplicably survives. Police quickly identify a suspect, the boyfriend of one of the victims, who flees and is never seen again.

Fast forward fifteen years, when an eerily similar situation occurs when teenaged employees are attacked at an ice cream store in the same town, and again only one makes it out alive.

Both survivors of these catastrophic events heard the attacker say, “Good-night, pretty girl.” So the cops are sure that the two mass murders are connected.

**THE NIGHT SHIFT** is told from multiple points of view:

Ella, the lone survivor from the Blockbuster murders, who is now a psychologist helping with the investigation.

Sarah Keller, a pregnant FBI agent, whom we first met last year in **EVERY LAST FEAR**.

Atticus, Keller’s local police help. He has the best comment of the book, “In the movies, the detectives always end up interviewing witnesses at a strip club, and it seemed like it would be pretty cool. But this is awful.”

And, Chris, an assistant prosecutor, who holds a connection to the suspected murderer in the Blockbuster case.

A solid job of plotting, peppered with believable characters, make **THE NIGHT SHIFT** an enjoyable read. Another good, but not great novel.

### SHADOWS REEL

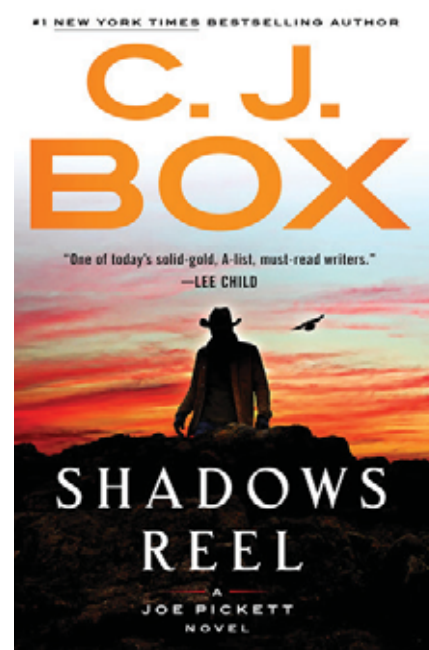
by C. J. Box  
Putnam, \$28.00  
Joe Pickett #22

**Rating: A-**

Truth is often stranger than fiction so I have to temper my feelings when I encounter something in a novel that seems unrealistic or highly improbable (an often mental criticism of mine) and wonder if that strange something is actually based on fact.

In Box’s latest novel, one of the three narrative lines opens up when Marybeth Pickett, the local librarian, finds an unmarked package left on the library doorstep and inside the package, a photo album that illustrates the life of a major Nazi government official. I wondered how Chuck Box had come up with that crazy idea. At the back of the book, he states that this story line is based on a real event that actually happened to a Wyoming librarian. Truth is stranger than fiction.

The second narrative thread comes about when Joe is asked to investigate a moose poaching incident and he comes across a local fishing guide who has been tortured and murdered.



The last storyline is a carry-over from the last book in the series, **DARK SKY**, in which Nate Romanowski's wife is attacked and his highly valuable falcons are stolen. Nate is hot on the trail of the malefactor and his precious birds.

So here, C. J. Box has served up three good stories for the price of one. What a bargain – and what a good reading experience as well.

### REDEMPTION

by Mike Lawson

Atlantic Monthly, \$26.00

**Rating: A-**

The handsome and charismatic Jamison Maddox is a former Wall Street whiz kid, now convicted for insider trading. He only avoided jail time by informing on his three partners in crime. Jamison is adrift, with little direction as to what he should do with the rest of his life. His wealthy and self-centered mother is no help as she has always considered Jamison more of a burden than a cherished child.

Out of the blue, Jamison receives a strange job offer with a reasonable salary to do research for a small company with its offices in the sleepy town of Redemption, Illinois. He immediately accepts.

But Jamison soon finds out that this is not a normal company. What

surprises him the most is how security conscious the company is. It is a firing offense to talk to anyone about what you are working on except your boss who gives you research assignments. He works on the second floor of the company building and is forbidden access to the third floor where the company executives have their offices. Jamison must submit to random lie detector tests and suspects that he is under electronic and physical surveillance. His somewhat mundane research tasks don't seem to merit all this security. But since Jamison intends to mind his own business, he goes along to get along.

Jamison strikes up a friendship with a beautiful work colleague named Gillian, which, despite her being married to his boss, blossoms into something quite magical. But Gillian is an unhappy woman who wants to escape her life in Redemption. So when she feels the time is right, she tells Jamison her dreams for the future and asks him to run away with her. His answer is an emphatic "yes!"

By this time, Jamison is aware that the company is involved in illegal practices, but is still mostly unaware of exactly what those are. The company might let Jamison leave, but Gillian is privy to all of their activities and doesn't have that option. If she leaves, the company will come after her to kill her. Gillian knows too much and is an existential threat to the company's continued viability.

The tech-savvy Gillian knows all this and so when they leave, she puts down a false trail and the couple go completely off the grid. Thus begins a tense cat-and-mouse game between the two parties with surprising twists and turns along the way to a satisfying resolution.

I had my doubts about **REDEMPTION**, Mike Lawson's first standalone thriller. As I got into the book, I was struggling to find a character that I could identify with or one that I even liked. It was looking like I would be giving this one a lower rating than any of his Joe DeMarco novels that had all garnered A's and A-'s. But the boffo ending redeemed the novel for me. Mike Lawson is really quite a talent.

I don't know if it was intentional on the author's part, but I noticed shadows of John Grisham's **THE FIRM** in my reading of **REDEMPTION**. I hope that this standalone has even just a fraction of the success of that novel. It deserves it.

### THE INVESTIGATOR

by John Sandford

Putnam, \$29.00

Letty Davenport #1

**Rating: A-**

Can you say, "spin-off?" That is what John Sandford has created with one of his most charismatic characters from his "Prey" series – Letty Davenport, the multi-talented daughter of Lucas Davenport.

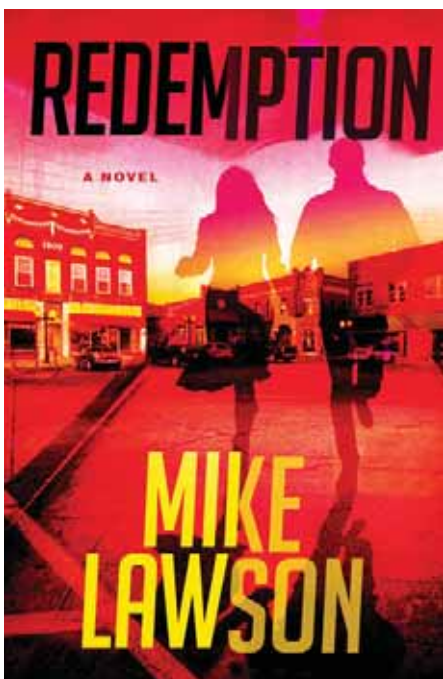
She has recently graduated from Stanford University with a masters degree in economics and is working in a boring desk job for U.S. Senator Colles. Letty is on the verge of quitting when the Senator offers her a task that she can really get her teeth into. Letty then quickly accepts a job of doing investigative work in conjunction with the Department of Homeland Security.

The Senator is concerned with reports of thefts of crude oil in his state of Texas. It isn't so much the thefts that concern him – that's a law enforcement task. It's the rumors that the money from the sale of the crude is being used by a newly formed militia group to plan and carry out future terrorist attacks. Colles wants to know if the rumors are true and what the militia is targeting.

Teamed up with DHS investigator John Kaiser (a former Delta operative), Letty and her new partner head to Texas and quickly make progress on the crude oil theft investigation. Letty learned an awful lot about detection at the knee of her father and combined with her high intelligence, she is definitely an alpha sleuth.

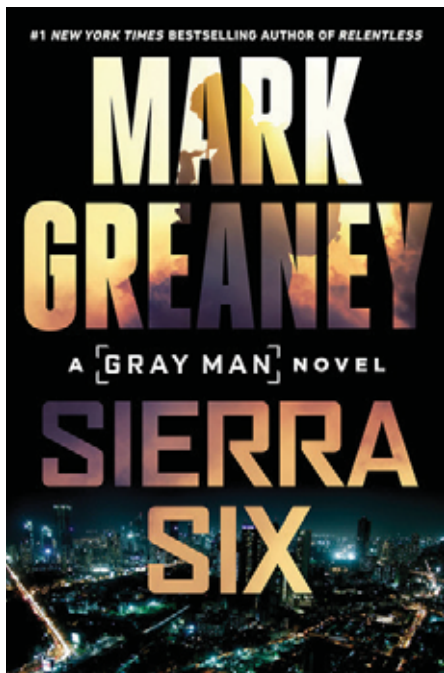
Soon Letty and her partner are up against a well-organized militia group led by a shadowy woman who goes by the name of Jael.

Just when I had just about given up on John Sandford (I didn't care for the last two Prey books I read), here he comes up with something fresh and



appealing. **THE INVESTIGATOR** is my kind of thriller with a good mix of intelligent investigative techniques and realistic action. If you haven't read a John Sandford novel in awhile, this fast read would be a good one to pick up.

### Now For Some Real Action!



#### SIERRA SIX

by Mark Greaney

Berkley, \$28.00, February, 2022

Gray Man #11

**Rating: A**

This exciting narrative switches back and forth from the present day to a period twelve years ago when Court Gentry was a young CIA loner asset known as Violator. At that point in time, he is ordered to join a CIA Ground Branch paramilitary team as its junior member – Sierra Six. This requires Court to learn a whole new set of skills as a member of Golf Sierra. It doesn't prove easy for him. And not all of his new teammates are welcoming.

Golf Sierra is tasked with taking out a terrorist leader, which assignment they accomplish – but at a terrible price: not every member of Golf Sierra makes it back to base.

Going to the present day, the Gray Man has taken a side job which should be a piece of cake. All he is asked to do is to infiltrate the grounds of the Turkish embassy in Algeria and plant a small eavesdropping device there. But the operation goes pear-shape when the Gray Man peers into a window and sees the face of the should-be-dead terrorist staring back at him.

Well, you can guess the rest. The Gray Man sets out to do what he thought had already been done. There is a blood debt that must be paid.

Along the way, we learn a lot about Court Gentry – the Violator, Sierra Six and the Gray Man.

I'll be surprised if I read an action thriller as good as this one in 2022. Mark Greaney is at the top of his game. He's the gold standard as far as I'm concerned.

#### ONE STEP TOO FAR

by Lisa Gardner

Dutton, \$27.00, January, 2022

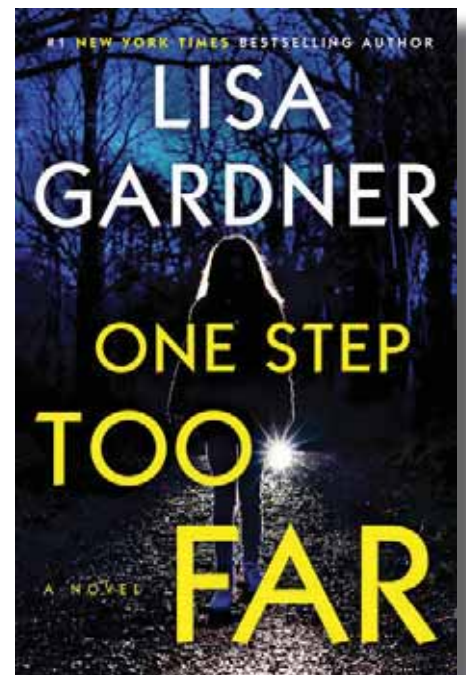
Frankie Elkin #2

**Rating: A-**

Missing persons expert Frankie Elkin joins a search party going into a national forest in Wyoming looking for a young man (or more likely his remains) who disappeared without a trace some years before. The young man's mother is dying and she has asked her husband to bring Tim home before she goes. But when the search team encounters immediate threats to its survival, it becomes apparent that someone or some thing doesn't want the team to accomplish its mission.

A little bit about Frankie Elkins – she is a recovering alcoholic who, a number of years ago, became fixated with solving cold cases of people who disappeared. She wants to give closure to the friends and relatives who remain in an emotional limbo. Frankie has no fixed abode and works at part-time jobs to provide the bare necessities of life. She reads newspapers and combs the internet for interesting cases to pursue.

"My name is Frankie Elkin and finding missing people is what I do. When the police have given up, when the public no longer remembers, when



the media has never bothered to care, I start looking. For no money, no recognition, and most of the time, with no help...Why do I do what I do? Because at the end of the day, the people left behind matter as much as the ones who are missing."

We first met Frankie in last year's **BEFORE SHE DISAPPEARED**. And now she's a series character whom I want to follow. This is a full-on, action thriller that could have been written by C. J. Box, but with a little more character development. This one is even set in Wyoming.

#### W.E. B. Griffin ROGUE ASSET

by Brian Andrews & Jeffrey Wilson

Putnam, \$28.00

Presidential Agent Series #9

**Rating: A-**

The covert Presidential Agent program was shut down five years ago. But newly-elected President Natalie Cohen needs to resurrect it because the Secretary of State Frank Malone has been kidnapped from his Cairo hotel and no one has a clue who did it nor where the Secretary of State is being held.

This leads to the former Presidential Agent Charley Castillo being called out of retirement. But, because of Charley's age (57), it is deemed that he needs a younger man to do the heavy lifting. So Captain P. K. "Pick" McCoy, USMC,

is relieved of his current duties in the Middle East and flown to Washington, D.C. to be assigned to the Presidential Agent team as a Presidential Agent-in-training.

Along the way they are joined by a spook (a logistics marvel) who goes by so many names that Castillo decides to just call him "Junior." One of Junior's assets in Egypt is Ani Shaheen who gleans a crucial clue from a source, minutes before the source is run down by a truck.

The team of four heads off to Sudan, where they suspect the Secretary of State is being held. There, they dig deep into the internal politics of the country as they seek answers to their larger question. All the time, the clock is ticking and they don't know how much time they have left to rescue a living or dead Secretary of State.

Years ago I read a couple of the early books in this series and quite enjoyed them. I can't remember why I didn't continue reading the series but, if this thriller is any indication, I should have been a more faithful reader. Recently, the veteran thriller writing team of Brian Andrews and Jeffrey Wilson were asked to take over this series franchise. This is the first novel that I have read of their work and I must say that I'm quite impressed. The action scenes were well described and exhilarating. And there were quite a few of them along the way. The very likeable team of four, with their varying skill sets and talents, added verisimilitude and "juice" to the narrative.

#### **THE RUNAWAY**

by Nick Petrie

Putnam, \$27.00

Peter Ash series #7

**Rating: A-**

War veteran Peter Ash is driving through northern Nebraska in his old green Chevy pickup on his way to Wisconsin, when he encounters a young pregnant woman alone on a gravel road, her car out of commission. Peter doesn't realize that she is being pursued by her vicious ex-cop husband, who has been keeping her a virtual prisoner in their remote farmhouse.

Peter soon finds himself in mortal danger, trapped between two vehicles. His only avenue of escape is a jump off a cliff into the icy river water below.

Peter feels terrible about abandoning the young woman to her fate and so, once he is clear of danger, he drives right back into it. A damsel in distress is just too much for his conscience to ignore. But it is no easy rescue for the evil husband is one smart dude with skills equal to or better than Peter's.

I've been a fan of this series since its inception with **THE DRIFTER**, which won the Barry Best First Novel Award in 2017.

Nick Petrie knows how to deliver a memorable narrative with exciting scenes and realistic action. That's all I ask of a good thriller writer and he certainly delivers in this one and in the series as a whole.

#### **SEA STORM**

by Andrew Mayne

Thomas & Mercer, \$15.95

February, 2022

Underwater Investigative Unit #3

**Rating: B+**

A cruise ship, apparently the victim of a terrorist attack, is sinking off the coast of Fort Lauderdale, Florida and the Coast Guard is requesting assistance. Adrenaline junkie Sloan McPherson and her colleague Scott

Hughes of the Underwater Investigative Unit (UIU) answer the call. They are successful in rescuing several crew members trapped in flooded cabins in the tense opening scenes.

When the crisis is over and the FBI come on board to investigate, the UIU is sidelined, which doesn't sit well with Sloan, who thinks the FBI isn't following up on crucial clues. So she and Hughes decide to investigate on their own.

I've read all three of this series and have found them to be enjoyable entertainments – not perfect, but quite readable. However, with **SEA STORM**, I was troubled by the villain's motivations. It seemed to me that he could have accomplished his goals by much less elaborate and destructive means. In other words, his blowing up a massive cruise ship didn't seem like something a person in his position would do. Way over the top. Will I stop reading this series? No. Because I like the characters and the action too much.

#### **NO WAY BACK**

by J. B. Turner

Thomas & Mercer, \$15.95

**Rating: C**

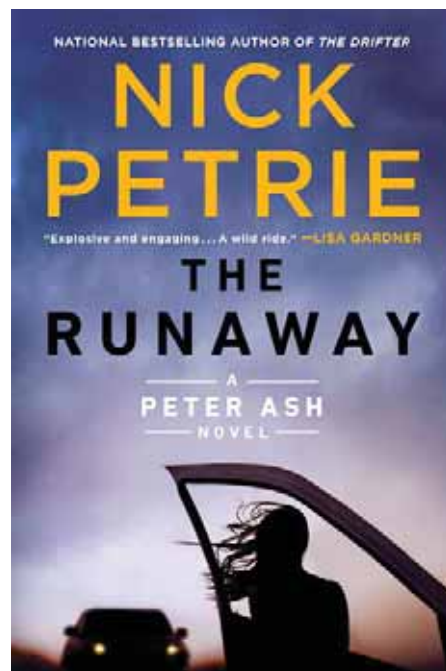
Internal Affairs NYPD detective Jack McNeal is separated from his wife Caroline, a prominent Washington, D.C. reporter. He still loves her deeply and becomes concerned when he hears that she has disappeared. Unfortunately, her murdered body is later found floating in the Potomac River and Jack is suspect number one in the eyes of the police.

Amidst his grief, Jack sets out to find who was responsible for his wife's death and his investigation leads to some powerful people with closely guarded secrets.

This thriller fell apart for me fairly quickly as the plot veered from improbable to wildly improbable.

I've heard from a trusted source that the author has written some good books, but this isn't one of them. Fair warning: stay away.

**An Oldie But a Goodie**



**THE EYE OF THE TIGER**

by Wilbur Smith  
Doubleday, 1975

**Rating: A**

It's been at least 45 years since I last read this excellent thriller but, with the recent passing of the author, I was curious if my opinion of it would change with the passage of time. It didn't.

The setting is St. Mary's Island in the Indian Ocean, where we find Harry Fletcher, former thief, now plying his trade as a mostly-honest charter skipper of a big-game fishing boat. But when the times get financially tough, he does make occasional "night smuggling runs" to supplement his income.

Harry's latest charter proves most challenging. He is hired by a couple of British toughs to help them explore the shores of an uninhabited island. They are joined by a naive young man from England who is an expert diver. Harry soon discovers something in his dives that causes the two thugs to become lethal. The young diver is murdered and Harry is seriously wounded. And you know how dangerous a wounded animal can be. Harry manages to turn the tables on the other two and nearly dies before he reaches landfall.

Once nursed back to health, Harry starts researching what was found

underwater and that research takes him to London where he meets up with the young diver's sister, Sherry North, and they form a bond.

Together they go in search of a treasure of untold value. But there are still bad forces lurking in the background. Lots of danger and action ensue. And a lot of surprises – not all of them good. There are also many underwater scenes with a lot of natural dangers depicted for those who like to snorkel and scuba dive.

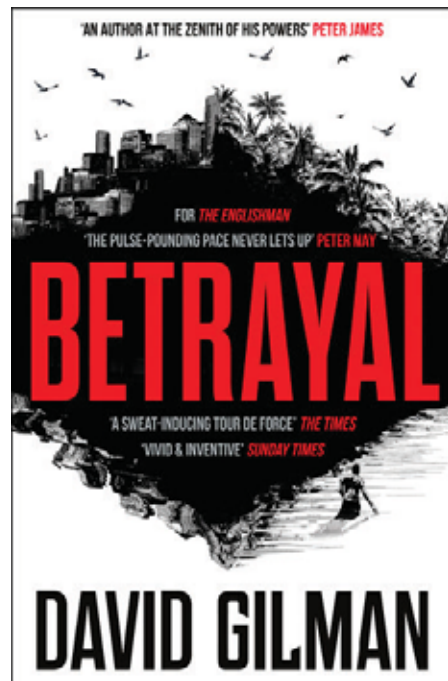
This is one of the novels that got me hooked on action thrillers. It holds up very well, despite the fact that Harry is portrayed as something of a male chauvinist at times. At one point when he is musing about settling down with Sherry, Harry comments about being tired of cooking and cleaning house. That would not go over well with today's women.

If you are a fan of action thrillers and haven't read **THE EYE OF THE TIGER**, you should get a hold of a copy. I read it to honor Wilbur Smith's recent passing.

### Books Reviewed in This Issue in Order of Preference

READER, I BURIED THEM  
EYE OF THE TIGER  
SIERRA SIX  
THE WAITER (UK)  
THE RUSSIAN WIFE (UK)  
THE RUNAWAY  
LAST SEEN ALIVE  
SCARE ME TO DEATH (UK)  
THE INVESTIGATOR  
ONE STEP TOO FAR  
ROGUE ASSET  
STANDING ALONE (UK)  
THE MIRROR MAN  
REDEMPTION  
GOOD COP, BAD COP (UK)  
SHADOWS REEL  
THE NIGHT SHIFT  
WHERE THERE'S A WILL  
SEA STORM  
QUARRY'S BLOOD  
THE MATCH  
NO LESS THE DEVIL (UK)  
MOON LAKE  
BYE BYE BABY  
NO WAY BACK

### Here's a last-minute review from Steele Curry:

**BETRAYAL**

by David Gilman

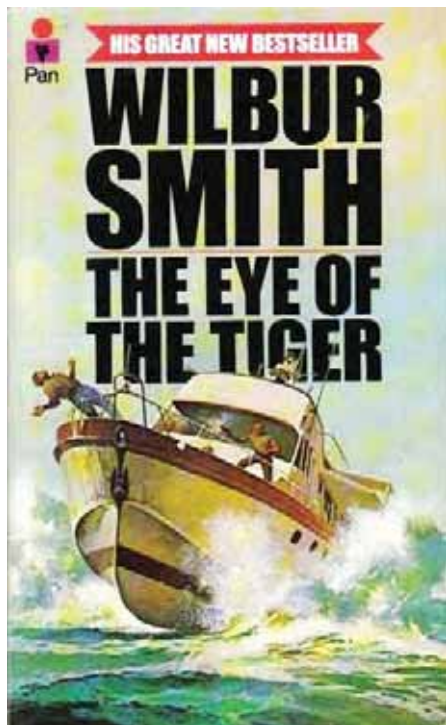
Head of Zeus, £18.99, January 2022

**Rating: A+**

Published at the start of the year, this has to be the most outstanding novel for thriller fans in all of 2022. The author introduced the central character, Dan Raglan, in his prior excellent thriller, **THE ENGLISHMAN**. **BETRAYAL** is even better.

Raglan is drawn to the U.S. to look for a former comrade from the French Foreign Legion who has disappeared. Along the way, he encounters rogue officers in the American intelligence establishment, a well-connected drug and arms trafficker, and an Iranian female assassin. Framed for a number of related murders, Raglan teams up with disgraced FBI agent Jenna Voss and gets support from some of his former associates from the Legion. The hunted become the hunters. The end game is a covert base in Honduras.

The last part of the book is a stunner and reminds me of *Apocalypse Now*. **BETRAYAL** would make a great movie. Gilman is an outstanding storyteller.



# L J Roberts

*It is purely my opinion*



## STATE OF TERROR

by Hillary Clinton and Louise Penny –  
Standalone

Simon & Schuster / St. Martin's Press,  
Oct 2021, 486 pp.

**Rating: A+**

*First Sentence: "Madame Secretary," said Charles Boynton, hurrying beside his boss as she rushed down Mahogany Row to her office in the State Department. "You have eight minutes to get to the Capitol."*

Secretary of State Ellen Adams is flying back from the first diplomatic assignment of her term, a failed meeting in South Korea. Given no time to freshen up, she is summoned to the office of the President of the United States, a man who would love to see her fail at her job. State Department employee Anahita Dahir receives a cryptic text which she originally dismisses as spam. A terrorist in London, suddenly makes the message clear to Anahita which sends the Secretary on an international diplomatic mission to stop a monster from destroying cities, and lives, around the world.

The sure sign of a good book is one starts, intending to read only the first two pages but ending up continuing past midnight. That is a good book. Waking up at 4 a.m. and reading for several more hours, that makes a winner. So it was with "State of Terror." The writing is wonderful in that one can hear the voices of both Clinton and Penny. There are classic touches of humor, and lines one wants to remember—"The true nature of terror is the unknown. The truly terrible thrives in silence."

How nice to have protagonists be women of a certain age who aren't young, gorgeous, and don't need a man to rescue them. They are strong, capable, smart, and very determined. At

the same time, they are human; willing to question their own judgment, while trusting their own instincts and reason. In other words, these are women one would want to know and even better, be.

This is not a political book, but one of true suspense. It is a fascinating look at the role, albeit, we hope, somewhat exaggerated, of a Secretary of State. There is an excellent building of tension every step along the way. The inclusion of a family member in danger could be trite but was not. For fans of Louise Penny, there are clever Easter eggs scattered along the way and crossover references to her Three Pines series. With each chapter, there's a new twist; with each page, the tension mounts.

STATE OF TERROR is an exciting, suspenseful roller-coaster ride with wonderfully done twists, and a compelling plot. Just when you think things may okay, there is an intriguing hint of uncertainty, and a possible hint to a

next book. One certainly hopes there is a next book. One of the best reads of 2021, it is highly recommended.

## THE NESTING

By C.J. Cooke – Standalone  
HarperCollins, Oct 2020

**Rating: B+**

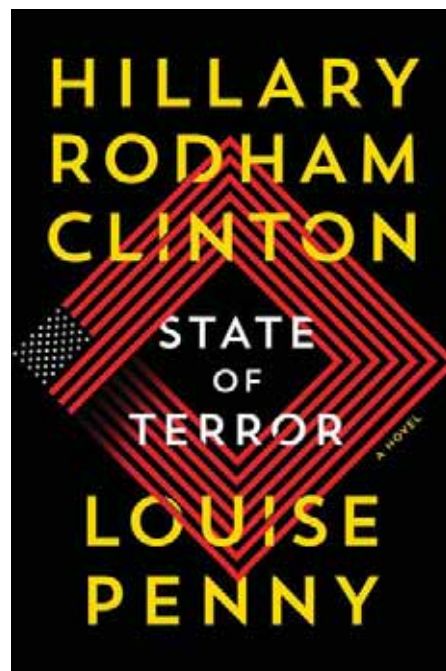
*First Sentence: Aurelia sprints through the dark forest, her white night-dress billowing like a cloud, her strides long and swift across the carpet of bark and brambles.*

Lexi Ellis has a troubled past but grabs an opportunity. She becomes Sophie Hallerton, nanny to the daughters of architect Tom Faraday on an isolated property in Norway. Far from an idyllic situation, there are things that can't be explained and the suspicion that Farraday's late wife didn't die by suicide after all.

This is one of the rare times the prologue actually works. Cooke's descriptions, metaphors, and inclusion of Norse folk tales add to the pleasure of the story. Tom is an annoying and perhaps inept architect, but his youngest daughter, Gaia is delightful. One appreciates how Lexi/Sophia grow through the story. She is strong; a survivor. When she commits an acts traditional thought of as "too stupid to live," it makes sense and is in keeping with her personality.

Cooke is very good at seeding doubt about the characters. While not at huge fan of unreliable characters, it works perfectly here. The story alternates between two time periods but in a way that is clearly indicated and not at all confusing.

For those who enjoy a bit of paranormal mixed with suspense, this is very well done. Norse folktales, elk, spectral figures are a few of the bump-in-the-



night elements. There is quite a bit of foreshadowing, but it works. However, the twists, metaphors—"Grief is not a mere felling—it's an isotropic space.", pacing, characters, plot, concept and heart-pounding climax completely offset those issues. Her descriptions make both locations and emotions real.

**THE NESTING** is far from the typical Scandinavian noir. It's a book one doesn't put down, and an author to be read again.

### THE STOLEN HOURS

By Allen Eskens

Mullhallond Books, Sept 2021, 310 pp.

**Rating: B+**

*First Sentence: Lila Nash counted her steps as she walked from the kitchen to the bathroom of her apartment.*

Lila Nash needs one thing-- to pass the bar exam to become a licensed attorney and prosecutor in the office of the Hennepin County Attorney. That is if Frank Dovey, a power defense attorney, doesn't destroy her reputation beforehand. Of greater concern to Lila is a barely alive woman is pulled from the Mississippi River, evoking memories of a horrible attack she suffered eight years prior. The police believe they know the current attacker, but they, along with Lila, are in a fight to bring him to justice.

What an evocative opening chapter. Can anyone ever really comprehend the effects of an experience such as Lila's? Not wasting any time Eskens introduces the villain, creating a sense of fear.

The principal characters are immediately identified with the standouts being Lila, Detectives Niki Vang, and Marty Lopez. One can't help but admire Lila's determination and resolve to assist the investigation despite the possible risk to herself, and trauma she suffered eight years ago. However, it can be hard to feel a connection with Lila.

Esken's interesting approach makes the case seem almost too easy, yet he makes a smooth transition of the story from being a police procedural to a legal thriller. Although here are some very good twists, some are predictable.

In the past, some of Eskens' work has been deeply disturbing and emotionally

charged. In contrast, this book seems too superficial. The story touches on hard, serious topics yet the author skims across them as if they are under the ice. One knows they are they, but they feel glossed over.

**THE STOLEN HOURS** is part police procedural, part legal suspense. While it is a good read, it's not Eskens' best work.

### LAST CALL

by Sheldon Siegel

Mike Daley/Rosie Fernandez- #13

Self-published, \$12.99

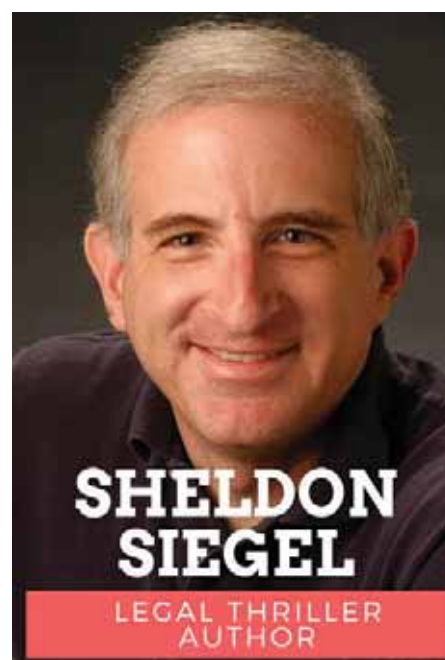
**Rating: A+**

*First Sentence: At ten-thirty a.m. on Tuesday, December first, Judge Elizabeth McDaniel was running an hour behind schedule.*

As every lawyer knows, representing a relative is a bad idea. But DA Mike Daley finds this is a rule made to be broken when his nephew, Joey Dunleavy, is accused of killing a cop behind the family-named bar he manages. Joey and the victim, police officer Eddie Corcoran, were seen arguing in the bar. Later Corcoran's body is found in the alley behind the bar. Joey is covered in Corcoran's blood and a knife engraved with Joey's name was found next to the body. When Joey is charged with first degree murder, Mike and his PI brother, Pete, must find the real killer to clear Joey of the charges, before the case goes to trial.

Siegel begins with a courtroom scene imbued with humor. This serves to introduce the protagonists as well as the author's use of Mike's internal dialogue. While some may find the inclusion of the latter to be distracting, it provides an honest look at the steps of the legal process. With Siegel's use of realistic dialogue, one always learns aspects of the law from his books. The author's summary of the characters is helpful to new readers and a nice reminder to followers of the series.

The author's love of San Francisco is apparent and presents an accurate picture of it being a town of multi-generational families, made of up neighborhoods and great places to eat. For the foodies, there's a temptation to make a



list and eat their way around the City. And for locals, it's fun to see mentions of places one has been, and learn of new places to go. The one thing of which one may be assured is the accuracy of Siegel's geographic representations. Although Mike's family plays a significant role, it nicely balanced and doesn't overwhelm the plot. Even so, there is a wonderfully emotional scene toward the end, and a nod to the impending pandemic.

The plot is interesting and informative. There is the usual frustration with the police and the realization that their rush to convict is politically motivated, rather than ensuring they have the real killer. The information as to what it takes for Mike to go from working for the DA's office, to handling Joey's case pro bono is fascinating. The investigation is laid out step-by-step and filled with unique, fully-developed characters. The sense of working against the clock effectively heightens the suspense, and the twists are effective.

**LAST CALL** is a very good legal mystery without all the oft-times histrionics of other writers. Far from making it dull, the accurate depictions of an investigation and trial provide plenty of interest and excitement.

### BLOOD MOON

by Alesandra Sokoloff

Matthew Roarke #2

Thomas & Mercer, Feb 2015, 313 pp.

**Rating: A-**

**First Sentence:** Twenty-five years have passed since a savage killer terrorized California, massacring three ordinary families before disappearing without a trace.

FBI Agent Matthew Roarke is conflicted. As a child, Cara Lindstrom, was the only survivor of her family's massacre by a man known as The Reaper. Now, twenty-five years later, Cara kills those who prey on innocent girls. Knowing why she kills doesn't help; Roarke knows he must arrest her. After learning of the recent murder of a family with details very similar, too similar, to that of Cara's family. Could The Reaper be back? Or has he been killing all along?

Sokoloff creates an excellent sense of place. Wherever Roarke is, one is right beside him. There is a tiny element of the supernatural in the plot, but more as an element of racing against the clock. An effective dream sequence plays a part, as does the author's evocative descriptions—"Dawn is a curious shade of gray; the fog drifting outside the window above her is so thick it is nearly impossible to tell the time of day."

The characters of Roarke and Cara support the theme of the moon; light versus dark. Part of Cara's appeal is that there is something mercurial about her. The sense that she is tuned into a different knowledge of the world. One is left conflicted as to whom they should support; Roarke on the side of the law, or Cara, knowing her past and present. Although the story is told with alternating points of view between the two, it works well.

The author brings Roarke's team to life while providing a connection back to the series' first book, "The Huntress." Then, there is Agent Epp, an interesting character perceptive of both Roarke and Cara.

Sokoloff creates effective and perfectly timed plot twists, constantly building the suspense. On one hand, she thinks through the logic of situations, putting the pieces together. On the other, it is the forensics and following the clues, es-

pecially seeing what others should have seen, that give real power to the story. Amazing the things to be learned.

**BLOOD MOON** is an exciting read, and a wonderful addition to the "Huntress" saga. Start at the beginning and prepare to become addicted.

### THE SLEEPING NYMPH

By Ilaria Tuti – 2<sup>nd</sup> of trilogy  
Soho Crime, Sep 2020, 458 pp.

**Rating: B**

**First Sentence:** *Teresa often thinks of death.*

A 70-year-old painting, "The Sleeping Nymph," has become a case for Superintendent Teresa Battaglia when testing discovers it was painted in blood and contains small matter of a human heart. The subject was a real woman who died in 1945. The artist is still alive but hasn't spoken a word in decades. But who was this mystery woman? Who killed her? It is up to Teresa to find out.

The opening is more than just a hook, it is emotion at its most raw. Tutti doesn't write with words, she writes with images. She doesn't just show places, she takes one there, engaging all the senses. She is an author who makes one think and feel and underlining passages to be remembered—"Teresa was aware that memory was not a process of reproduction, but of reconstruction," and "*A memory is nothing more than a single clear moment recorded fortuitously by the mind and surrounded by many others, all out of focus.*" There are so many such moments—"Tempus valet, volat, velat." Time is valuable, it flees and it conceals.

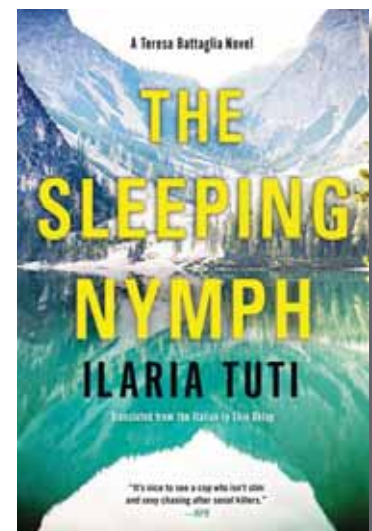
The description of Superintendent Teresa Battilana gives one the sense of the energy which emanates from her. The relationship between Teresa and her second, Insp. Massimo Marini, is more than batman to boss but less than parent to child. There is respect, caution, a bit of fear, and distance yet caring. The banter and teasing between them is delightful. Both are complicated characters with very real fears about which one learns as the story progresses. At a point of crisis for Teresa, Tuti makes palpable Teresa's fear and confusion. The character of Blanco Zago and

her human detection dog Smoky are wonderful and unexpected, but Tutti specializes in the unexpected. Blanco's explanation as to how a sniffer dog works is educational, as is the information about the partisans.

The plot deals with a murder, both during WWII and in the present, yet each element is critical to the story. The history one learns is important, as it looks at a very different culture and beliefs within a country. It is refreshing to have a book set in a less-familiar location and the Resia Valley is certainly that. It is a place where the residents live in an isolated, genetically pure commune, speak an archaic dialect, and where mysticism still lives.

As wonderful as is the writing, and as interesting as is some of the extraneous information, the plot is convoluted. The story would be much better and more suspenseful, not to mention shorter, with a strong editor at hand. The middle section is a bit of a slog, and Massimo's personal struggles do become tiresome. Even so, there is good suspense. One can't help but admire and feel the same loyalty to Teresa as does her team. She lets nothing stand in the way of solving the mystery.

**THE SLEEPING NYMPH** is not a slam bang type of book, and not up to the standard of Tutti's first book, "Flowers Over the Inferno." However, it is a progressive journey through history and pain, both past and present. It is self-realization and hope. It requires patience, and it is worth the journey.



# Lookin' For A Few Good Books

*Larry Gandle*



## STATE OF TERROR

by Hillary Rodham Clinton  
and Louise Penny  
Simon & Schuster, \$30.00

**Rating: B**

When comparing the difference between a thriller and a mystery novel, the example typically involves a ticking bomb. In a mystery novel the bomb would have detonated, and the rest of the novel would involve an investigation to catch the perpetrators. In a thriller, preventing the explosion would be the key and suspense would be ratcheted up in an effort to save lives. In this novel, both techniques are used – one at the beginning of the novel and one in the end.

An incompetent President has just left office and a new administration has just entered the White House. President Williams has just named Ellen Adams his Secretary of State. Ellen runs a media conglomerate and is a harsh critic of the new President. This is Williams way of having her removed from her very vocal position as she agrees to assume duties as Secretary. A junior foreign service officer (FSO) receives a text which appears to be indecipherable with a list of number. When two bombs go off on buses in Europe, the FSO realizes the text is a clue about when and where the explosions will take place. She tries to inform her superiors but is unable to until it is too late. What ensues is the exposition of a plot to bomb multiple places in the United States. Ellen must search for the truth which will take her to Afghanistan, Pakistan, Moscow and Europe in an effort to prevent a catastrophe.

The book is an interesting concept and bears comparison to the Patterson/Clinton books. Once again, a popu-

lar bestselling author is paired with a Clinton in an effort to write a thriller from the perspective of their particular highest office served. Will Bill Clinton, it is the President and with Hillary it is the Secretary of State. The author will guide them through the book and most likely be responsible for the plot and the general writing of the novel with the Clintons used as technical advisors. In this case, Louise Penny is the writer responsible for the plot. She is not a thriller writer but writes a somewhat cozy series that takes place in a small town. Therefore, characters are more fully developed but at the cost of a propulsive plot. The problem with this book is too many characters are in the story and they are hard to keep track of. The plot really slowed in the middle of the book as Ellen preposterously flew into some of the most dangerous countries on the planet. As the climax of the novel is reached, the plot picks up to a some-

what satisfactory conclusion.

Please note -- there is much in the way of politics in this book. The reader might be put off by the fictional treatment of characters who are based on real individuals. The bottom line -- entertaining but overall not a superior thriller.

## HER NAME IS KNIGHT

by Yasmin Angoe  
Thomas and Mercer, \$24.95

**Rating: B**

Nena Knight is an elite assassin working for a powerful organization called The Tribe. She originally came from a small village in Ghana which was razed by a local warlord. She was one of the few to survive the massacre. She is given an assignment to kill a man she respects and actually saves his life. She soon realizes that one of the council members of the Tribe- which consists of displaced Ghanaians, is the man who razed her village murdering her family and friends. To take him down in an act of vengeance would be akin to betraying the organization. She must decide what to do.

Women do not write thrillers like men. I am not saying this in a negative way but there is a pattern to the thrillers they write in which romance plays a role center stage. Episodes of high adventure are interspersed with some hunky male lead if the thriller heroine is a female. This one is no exception. Characters are well drawn with many stock ones interspersed. The pacing is sluggish at times. However, the book is reasonable fun and this is a mild recommendation.



## STEEL FEAR

by Brandon Webb  
and John David Mann

Bantam, \$28.00)

**Rating: B-**

Finn, a Navy SEAL sniper, is ordered to board the aircraft carrier USS Abraham Lincoln, in order to get home. As soon as he boards, people start disappearing and it soon becomes apparent that there is a serial killer aboard the ship. Finn stays apart and observes. He notes the leadership is lacking from the captain and the staff. Finn does face his own demons. He is returning home in disgrace after a failed mission and there are gaps in his memory that he cannot recall things. Nonetheless, he is an easy suspect for the murders. He must prove his innocence and discover the true killer before he becomes the next victim.

The plot is an interesting concept. A deserted island mystery about an aircraft carrier makes for an unusual setting. The authors really make the ship come alive. They are obviously very familiar with the workings of an aircraft carrier and as such makes the setting a major player in the book. The characters are well created and quite realistic for the most part. The plot moves along at a rapid clip but, unfortunately, it simply goes on too long. The climax and conclusion become unrealistic and stereotypical. The book is entertaining but ultimately flawed.

### **DAMASCUS STATION**

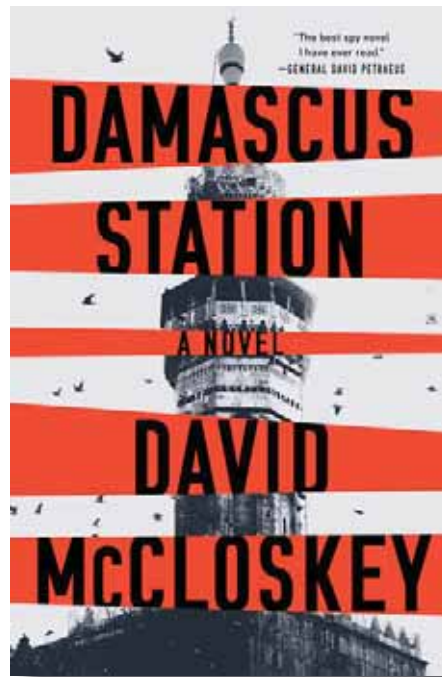
by David McCloskey

Norton, \$27.99

**Rating: B**

Sam Joseph is a CIA case officer assigned to Syria. He goes to Paris to recruit a Syrian Palace official named Marion Haddad. They get into a forbidden relationship and both go back to Damascus to solve the death of another American spy. To discover the true killer, they must infiltrate the highest levels of government placing both of their lives in serious peril.

This book is endless! I wonder if an editor exists for this well-known publishing house. Make no mistake—this is a superb spy novel infused with realism. The entire plot seems to exist in actual historic terms. The problem is the plot often becomes tedious and



the story is overwritten. It took me two weeks to get through it because of the meticulous details. I really didn't think the attention to detail is truly worth it in the end. Characters are realistic which goes along with the plot and setting. However, the bottom line is this is a recommendation but with a caveat that the book is way too long.

### **LEMON**

by Kwan Yeo-sun

Other Press, \$20.00

**Rating: B**

It is Summer of 2002 in South Korea when an eighteen-year-old woman, Kim Hae-on, is found brutally murdered. She was a remarkably beautiful woman which could have led to jealousy from both men and women. Two suspects emerged—Sin, the boy who was last seen driving her in town and Han Manu, who claimed to have seen them. When their alibis checked out, the case went cold and remains unsolved. Kim's sister, Da-on continues to look into the crime until the surprising truth is revealed.

This novella is told from the perspective of two of Kim's classmates and her sister. The murder is seen through different eyes. The chapters move through time from 2002 to the present day. The characters age and the murder is still center stage. Entirely

changing perspective and the year is a clever way to reflect on the last two decades. The solution is surprising and satisfactory. The novel is refreshingly brief with little unnecessary filler passages to bulk up the book. Recommended for its uniqueness.

### **WHEN CHRISTMAS COMES**

by Andrew Klavan

Mysterious Press, \$21.95

**Rating: B+**

Sweet Haven appears to be a quaint, quiet and idyllic town on a lake. Now that it is Christmas time, and a beautiful young woman has been killed—stabbed by her boyfriend Travis Blake, an ex-Army Ranger, there is a feeling of wonder as to why Travis would commit murder and fully confess to it. The town is filled with ex-military as an Army base is nearby. Cameron Winter is asked to look into the murder by Travis' lawyer. Winter has an innate ability to see things in certain situations that others could not. As Winter looks into the situation, he begins to question Travis' guilt in spite of the confession and video footage. Winter has some of his own problems that he has to grapple with. Can he prove Blake innocent while grappling with his own demons?

As you would imagine, this book is not a feel-good Christmas novel. It is a tale of some very bad and some damaged people. Characters are richly developed and there is always a sense that things are not nearly as they appear to be. The plot moves swiftly and the conclusion is reasonably surprising and quite satisfactory. It is an entertaining novel but not one to read if looking for Christmas cheer.

### **THE PASSENGER**

by Ulrich Alexander Boschwitz

Metropolitan, \$24.99

**Rating: B**

In Berlin, 1938, Jews are being arrested throughout the city by Nazi storm troopers. Otto Silbermann, a successful businessman, escapes from his apartment just as the storm troopers are at his door. With limited resources, he must establish a plan to stay out of the Nazi's hands. He soon discovers that he has

few friends with enemies all around him. He can't trust anybody. The only way he can keep out of the authorities' hands is to ride the train throughout the country. While onboard, he comes across a whole host of characters few that he could trust. Can he remain free and possibly escape across the border?

Ulrich Boschwitz was twenty-three years old when he wrote this novel in 1938 just after the Kristallnacht pogroms. That, of course lends the novel a sense of immediacy. It has been reprinted earlier this year to some positive reviews. The plot is unique and the pacing somewhat slow once Otto is on the trains. The character of Otto I found a caricature making outrageous statements and demands when he is obviously in no position to make any requests. Specifically, when his business partner- a member of the Nazi party- is willing to pay him 40,000 francs for his business. He is lucky to obtain enough money to possibly make his escape. Instead he rants and raves and antagonizes him. Otto really is not a likeable protagonist in spite of his overwhelming circumstances. The plot eventually gets bogged down with an ending that is disappointing. It could have been so much better.

### THE LAST THING HE TOLD ME

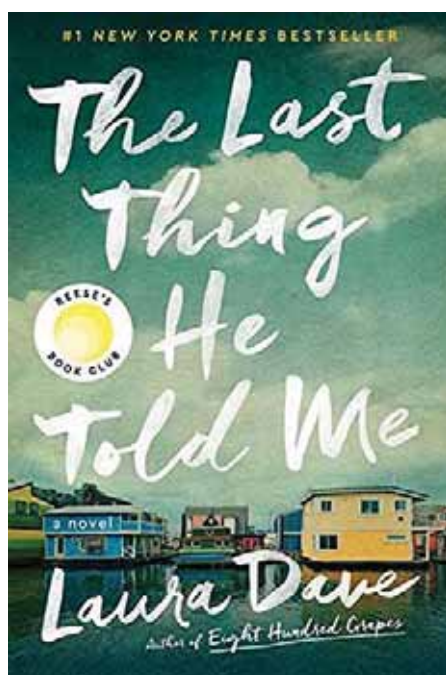
by Laura Dare

Simon & Schuster, \$27.00

**Rating: B-**

Hannah Michaels, a woodworking creator of furniture, receives a cryptic note from her newlywed husband, Owen, which simply says, 'Protect her.' Hannah realizes he is talking about his daughter- her step daughter- sixteen-year-old Bailey. Hannah and Bailey soon become detectives. With little to work on they focus on Owen's past which includes a trip to San Antonio where Owen attended a wedding somewhere- maybe. Improbably and requiring some major suspension of reality, they slowly figure out the truth. Owen was not anything close to who he said he was.

The plot of this mindless thriller is contrived and not only improbable but downright idiotic. Characters are super-



ficial and stereotypic. This is not a novel to read in order to savor the words or phrases. It is a straightforward suspense novel that is simply written in order to entertain. It does that reasonably well but it still manages to be overwritten and about a hundred pages too long. This is a very mild recommendation and it amazes me to think that this book won the best of the year from the Goodreads readers. Given that it beat out **RAZORBLADE TEARS** tells me that this is an award I will pay no attention to in the future.

### THE ANOMALY

by Herve Le Tellier (author), Adriana

Hunter (translator)

Other Press, \$16.99

**Rating: B+**

A plane, on its descent to JFK airport, hits turbulent air so ferocious that it is considered a once-in-a-decade phenomenon. The passengers on the plane feel they are about to die. They are a diverse bunch ranging from a contract killer, a literary writer about to hit major fame, a Nigerian pop star who is secretly gay, and others. They live their lives for a few months then something totally unexpected happens and everything changes.

There is a certain thriller element in this book. But it really is more of

a philosophical treatise that asks the question- who would we be if we made a different choice at certain points of our lives. These characters will find that out. The plot is initially totally compelling as we meet these characters before and immediately after the turbulent plane ride. It then delves into how these characters lives change- some are more interesting than others. Ultimately, the book becomes a touching tale on what we would do as a society to prevent major change. Recommended for those readers who prefer a more literary tale.

### ROCK PAPER SCISSORS

by Alice Feeney

Flatiron Books, \$27.99

**Rating: B**

After ten years of marriage, Adam and Amelia Wright are ready for a change- possibly to end it. They win a weekend in Scotland and hope to resuscitate their empty relationship. Adam is a very successful screenwriter and (convenient for the plot) has face blindness- he cannot recognize faces- even that of his own wife. The house they are staying in is both mysterious and scary. One of them is not telling the real truth about the weekend retreat. Also, it is possible only one of them will be going home.

This is another psychological suspense novel with unreliable narrators who hold back just enough information to keep the reader in suspense. Alternate point of view chapters ratchets up the suspense as the answers very slowly come out. It is a relatively quick read and quite entertaining with a nice plot twist at the end. The writing is good enough for this type of book where plot and suspense reign king. Given the fact that it seems like every other book is a psychological suspense novel with unreliable characters, this one is a bit better than average. Recommended for those who enjoy these types of novels.

### THE NORTHERN SPY

by Flynn Berry

Viking, \$26.00

**Rating: B-**

Tessa is a producer at BBC in Belfast. It has been two decades since the Good Friday Agreement but the IRA is back

to bombing. When a raid comes on the air, a reporter asks the public for help in identifying the members. Much to Tessa's horror, she sees her sister, Marion, pull a ski mask over her face. She just spoke to her sister yesterday and had no idea Marion was a member of the new IRA. Tessa does not believe in Marion's guilt in spite of what was witnessed on television. She must convince, not only the police, but herself. She goes after the truth even though it will bring risk not only onto herself, but also her son, Finn.

The plot is slow and dull until the climactic conclusion. It is well written with mostly well drawn characters and some stereotypes. The pacing is languid which will turn some readers off. Other reviews have pointed out historical and geographic inaccuracies throughout the book. I can't comment on that. Overall, it was an okay read but not one I would enthusiastically recommend to those not familiar with modern Irish history.

#### CLARK AND DIVISION

by Naomi Hirahara  
Soho, \$27.95)

**Rating: B**

In Chicago, 1944, Aki Ito, a twenty-year-old Japanese American, arrives in the city with her parents after being released from Manzanar camp, a prisoner of the US Government. They were moved further east to keep them away from the West Coast during the war. They were expecting to be greeted by Aki's older sister, Rose. However, on arrival, they are informed that Rose committed suicide the night before by jumping in front of a subway train. Aki refuses to accept suicide as the cause of Rose's death and decides to look into the matter on her own as the police have no interest in the case already declared a suicide.

The good -- there is a lot of historical information in the novel and the amount of research that went into the novel is copious and is easily evident. The setting has been carefully considered and there is even a map on the inside covers. The reader will learn a lot about the Japanese internment and forced migration during WWII. The writing is excellent in depicting the lo-

cale. Main characters are solid creations with many stereotypes thrown in. The bad- because of so much historical detail the author put into the book, the plot moved at a lethargic pace. Every single thing Aki does is described in such minute detail that the book took much longer to read. Eventually I stopped reading the minutia and the story picked up considerably. The dialogue is stilted and I never bought into the plot twist at the end. The bottom line- it is a good book, will inform the reader about a disgraceful part of our history, but reading it is slow going.

#### VELVET WAS THE NIGHT

by Silvia Moreno-Garcia  
Del Ray, \$28.00

**Rating: B-**

Mexico City in the 1970s was filled with students protesting the government. Communists infiltrated college campuses and with Cuba a short distance away, the CIA felt there was a real threat of Mexico becoming a Communist nation. Maite is a secretary living in the city in a small apartment. She occasionally watches the pets of her neighbors to earn a little more money. Lenora, a beautiful woman across the hall asks her to watch her cat for a week-end. Maite agrees but Leonora disappears. Maite wants to find her so she can unload the cat and get paid.

In the meantime, Elvis, who works with a gang known as the Hawks, is eventually put in charge of finding Leonora as she possesses something his boss needs. Eventually Maite and Elvis are on a collision path to meet while surrounded with some deadly companions.

The book is well written but the plot moves at a lethargic pace as the author feels the need to fully describe every nuance concerning her two main characters. The characters of Maite and Elvis are well rounded and the reader will develop some empathy with them. However, every other character is a superficial stereotype. It seems as if the author based the plot on a real event and tried to back her plot into it. I never bought into Maite getting herself totally tangled

up into finding Leonora for a lousy 30 dollar equivalent for watching the cat. Bullets fly and people die but nobody seems to care. The climax and conclusion are unrealistic. This book has been very well regarded by multiple crime fiction reviewers and critics. Not me.

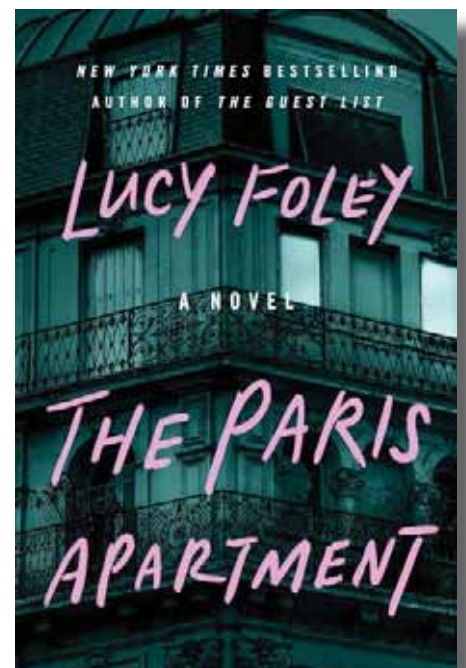
#### THE PARIS APARTMENT

by Lucy Foley

Morrow, \$28.99, February, 2022

**Rating: B+**

Jess has come to Paris in an effort to flee her past life. She asks her half-brother, Ben, if she could stay with him temporarily. He grudgingly agrees but when she arrives at his apartment, he is nowhere to be found. Furthermore, the apartment appears to be way above his means. The police, of course, are worthless (this is a crime suspense novel) so Jess needs to find out what happened on her own. The cast of characters who live in the building make her life interesting. From a mysterious old lady who is the concierge and lives in a little house in the courtyard, to Nick, Ben's old friend, to a wealthy socialite couple upstairs, to Mimi, an odd young lady infatuated with Ben, her gregarious roommate, and Andre, an alcoholic waste of a man. The house is full of mystery with hidden staircases and a dark dank basement with a valuable wine cellar. She tries to



enlist their aide in finding Ben to little avail until slowly the pieces start to fall into place while putting herself at potentially deadly risk.

Lucy Foley has written another superb domestic suspense novel. Told in alternate point of view chapter form, she manages to ratchet up the suspense. The pacing never really slows down. The author has managed to create a truly realistic and creepy setting. Characters are all interesting and well fleshed out. The solution, I must admit, is a bit disappointing. However, the book is solidly entertaining. Highly recommended.

### **RECKLESS GIRLS**

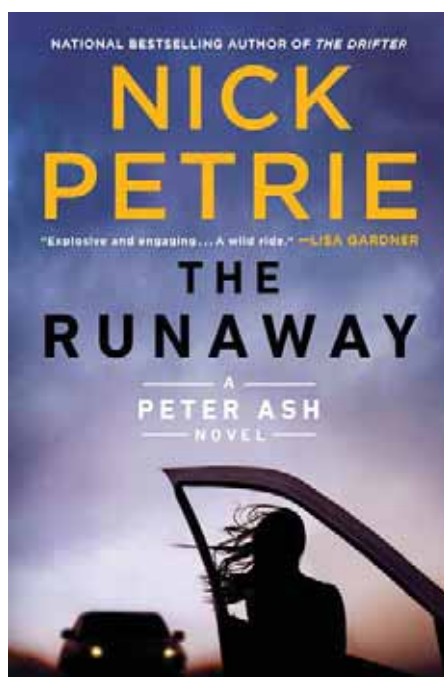
by Rachel Hawkins

St Martin's, \$27.99, January, 2022

**Rating: B**

Lux, having no family left and with a wonderlust for travel and adventure falls in love with Nico, another free spirit, and decides to travel with him to Hawaii on his boat. Once there, the boat needs repairs so they remain indefinitely until two young women approach them and ask Nico to take them to a remote Pacific Island named Meroe. The island has a terrible history including cannibalism but is now deserted. The women offer to pay for the boat repairs and pay Nico a hefty fee for the two-week trip. Lux decides to go along. Once they arrive, another couple is already there. This sets up a complex social dynamic which brings on the most primitive nature of these individuals. Things get increasingly dangerous and possibly fatal as the weeks progress.

**RECKLESS GIRLS** is a solidly entertaining tale with a host of interesting and varying characters. The compelling plot never lets up on the suspense. The setting is well portrayed. The solution is clever though reality must be suspended. Personally, I found that when things began to become increasingly dangerous, the reason to remain on the island became increasingly unrealistic. This book will prove to be an excellent companion on the plane or by the pool. Recommended.



### **THE RUNAWAY**

by Nick Petrie

Putnam, \$27.00

**Rating: A-**

Helene is a young woman working in a remote small town in Montana at a gas station for a boss who pays her slave wages and makes multiple sexual overtones. Her life is totally controlled by this man and when the opportunity to flee comes, she jumps in a truck with two men and leaves it behind.

Peter Ash, an ex-Marine war vet, is driving through northern Nebraska on a rural road, he encounters a young very pregnant woman near a disabled car. The young woman claims to be fleeing her ex-cop husband and they are soon being pursued by four men in two vehicles with multiple rifles that they have no problem using. Peter is suddenly placed in a situation where he must save both of their lives. He will be pitted against a vicious villain who simply has no regard for a human life no matter who they are. He must use all of his resources that he developed in the military and even that may not be enough as the body count begins to pile up.

Nick Petrie has written his best novel yet. The character of Peter Ash is unique in itself. However, his desire to help others- strangers in trouble- at whatever cost to himself is quite reminiscent

of a particular character named Jack Reacher. The suspense and action never let up throughout this superb thriller. The characters are well rounded and the author takes care in not making the villain totally and unrealistically evil. His intentions are well understood. With the future of the Lee Child franchise in doubt, this is an excellent means for readers to pick up a book every bit as good as the Reacher books at its best. This is one of the best thrillers I have read in quite some time and is highly recommended.

### **THE FINAL CASE**

by David Guterson

Knopf, \$27.00, January 2022

**Rating: C-**

In Washington State, a nameless narrator, who happens to be a fiction writer, is helping his elderly father with necessary transportation and research in a case he has taken on pro bono. It is the case of religious fundamentalist parents responsible for the death of a young Ethiopian girl that they adopted. His father expects to lose the case but feels that everyone deserves a fair trial.

I am well aware of David Guterson's first book, **SNOW FALLING ON CEDARS**. It was highly regarded almost thirty years ago. I had high hopes for a well written trial thriller. Instead I got one of the wordiest books I have every read. The author ruminates endlessly. Dialogue, when it occurs, is absurdly long and impossibly and unrealistically articulate. The author went on so many tangents concerning other characters, no matter how minor, that I often forgot what the actual storyline is about. The plot so often becomes so incredibly trivial that I found myself skipping passages of the book. The author certainly has all the skills necessary to write a good book but I feel he chooses to write what he considers a literary work. There is no coherence. In looking at the interest in his work since *Cedars*, on Amazon, there are always less than one hundred reviews. So, in thirty years, this author has not managed to build up his readership. Maybe that is just fine for him and his publisher but I will not read him again.

## THE MAID

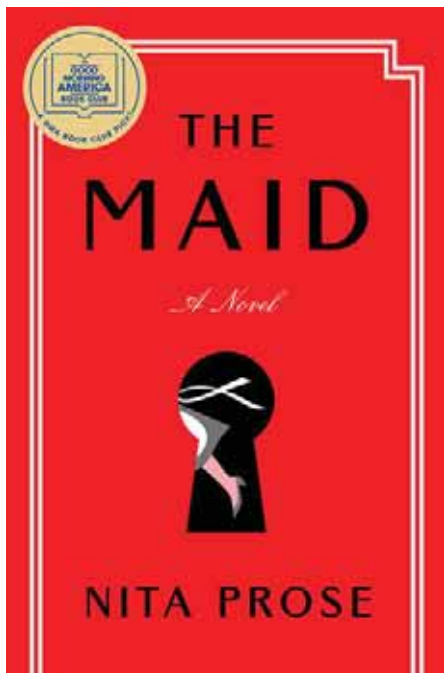
by Nita Prose

Ballantine Books, \$27.00, January 2022

**Rating: B**

Molly Gray is a socially inept maid in a luxurious hotel. She is twenty-five years old and recently lost her grandmother who set out certain rules for her. Molly the Maid takes pride in her cleaning skills and loves her job. Her life changes when she discovers the dead body of Charles Black -- a nasty but wealthy businessman. She places her trust in the wrong people and soon finds herself embroiled in possible murder.

The book is written in a first-person narrative from the viewpoint of Molly. The reader quickly becomes aware that Molly has some unnamed psychological dysfunction making it hard for her to relate to others. She is extremely naïve and is particularly horrible at judging others. Initially this character of Molly was quite fascinating. How Molly reacts to the world is compelling reading. For the first three quarters of the book, the plot is unusual as we see Molly struggle to get to the truth in spite of her social disability but in the last fourth the plot devolves into a silly cozy with everything wrapped up in a nice pink bow. It is so disappointing. However, the book is entertaining and recommended.



## Order of Preference of Books Reviewed

THE RUNAWAY  
THE PARIS APARTMENT  
WHEN CHRISTMAS COMES  
THE ANOMALY  
RECKLESS GIRLS  
STATE OF TERROR  
ROCK PAPER SCISSORS

CLARK AND DIVISION  
LEMON  
THE MAID  
VELVET WAS THE NIGHT  
PASSENGER  
DAMASCUS STATION  
HER NAME IS KNIGHT  
THE LAST THING I TOLD HER  
STEEL FEAR  
THE NORTHERN SPY  
THE FINAL CASE



Left Coast Crime #32

### Southwest Sleuths

Albuquerque, New Mexico  
April 7-10, 2022

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### Welcome to Left Coast Crime 2022: Southwest Sleuths

Guest of Honor  
**Mick Herron**



Guest of Honor  
**Catriona McPherson**



Fan Guest of Honor  
**Kristopher Zgorski**



Toastmaster  
**Kellye Garrett**



Ghost of Honor  
**Tony Hillerman**



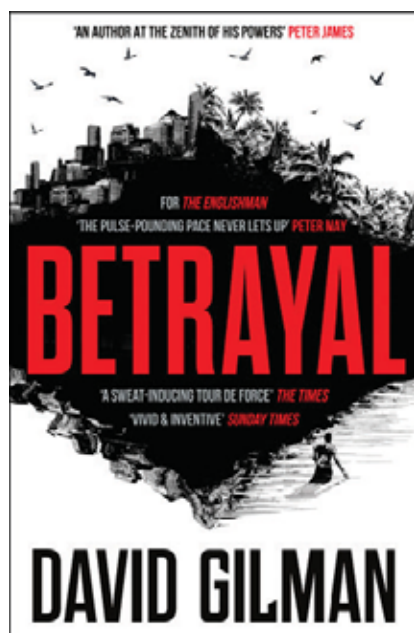
#### Proof of COVID-19 Vaccination Will Be Required for Left Coast Crime 2022

To protect us all and in line with convention best practices, LCC attendees will be required to provide proof of full vaccination before check-in. We'll be finalizing things when we get closer to April, but are planning to have a pre-clearance procedure in the weeks leading up to the convention, as well as the option of on-site proof.

## What's New In the U.K.



**BETRAYAL**, David Gilman (Head of Zeus, £18.99, January, 2022). Sequel to **THE ENGLISHMAN**. It has been many years since Dan Raglan served in the French Foreign Legion, but the bonds forged in adversity are unbreakable and when one of his comrade calls for help, Raglan is duty-bound to answer. A fellow-legionnaire, now an intelligence officer at the Pentagon, disappears. He leaves only this message: should he ever go missing, contact Raglan. But Raglan's not the only one looking for the missing man. From the backstreets of Marseilles, Raglan finds himself following a trail of death that will lead him to Florida, to the camaraderie of a Vietnam vet in Washington D.C., and into the heart of a bitter battle in the upper echelons of the US intelligence community.



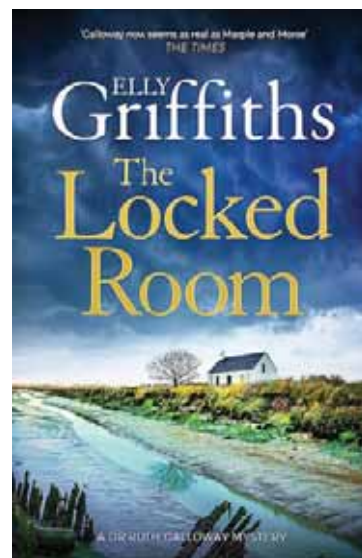
**DEAD END STREET**, Trevor Wood (Quercus, £14.99, January, 2022). A group of vigilantes are carrying out a

campaign of harassment against the homeless, hounding them both verbally and physically to get them off the streets. Jimmy Mullen is approached by his friend Gadge, who wants to confront the people behind it but Jimmy has finally got his life back on track. He's working at a hostel for 18 to 25-year-olds and he's reluctant to get involved in anything dodgy. Gadge decides to go it alone but is attacked by two of the vigilantes. The police find him unconscious in an alley, covered in blood. Problem is, there's a dead body in the alley too and it's his blood that Gadge is covered in. He's also got the murder weapon in his hand.

**THE DARKEST SEASON**, R. J. Ellory (Orion, £20.99, February). Running from a troubled childhood, Jack Devereaux left home as soon as he could and never looked back - until the day a stranger calls, begging him to return to his hometown of Jasperville, Quebec. Jack's brother Calvis - the little boy he left behind more than twenty years ago - has viciously attacked a man and left him for dead. Nobody knows why he did it, though Jack suspects it has something to do with the Jasperville girls who were lost all those years ago. But as he begins the long journey home through the frozen, unforgiving landscape, Jack isn't wondering why his little brother lost his mind. He's wondering why it took so long.

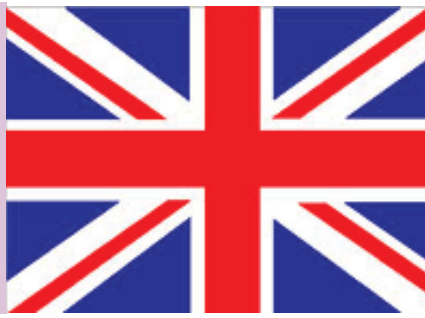
**THE COUPLE AT THE TABLE**, Sophie Hannah (Hodder & Stoughton, £16.99, February). You're on your honeymoon at an exclusive couples-only resort. You receive a note warning you to 'Beware of the couple at the table nearest to yours'. At dinner that night, five other couples are present, and none of their tables is any nearer or further away

than any of the others. It's as if someone has set the scene in order to make the warning note meaningless - but why would anyone do that? You have no idea. You also don't know that you're about to be murdered, or that once you're dead, all the evidence will suggest that no one there that night could possibly have committed the crime.



**THE LOCKED ROOM**, Elly Griffiths (Quercus, £20.00, February). Ruth is in London clearing out her mother's belongings when she makes a surprising discovery: a photograph of her Norfolk cottage taken before Ruth lived there. Her mother always hated the cottage, so why does she have a picture of the place? The only clue is written on the back of the photo: Dawn, 1963. Ruth returns to Norfolk determined to solve the mystery, but then Covid rears its ugly head. Ruth and her daughter are locked down in their cottage, attempting to continue with work and home-schooling. Happily, the house next door is rented by a nice woman called Zoe, who they become friendly with while standing on their doorsteps clapping for carers. Nelson, meanwhile, is investigating a series of deaths of women that may or may not be suicide. When he links the deaths to an archaeological discovery, he breaks curfew to visit the cottage where he finds Ruth chatting to her neighbour whom he remembers as a carer who was once tried for murdering her employer. Only then her name wasn't Zoe. It was Dawn.

# U.K. Reviews



## Jeff Poppo Reviews

### DARKNESS FALLS

by Robert Bryndza  
Thomas & Mercer, £19.99

**Rating: A**

Robert Bryndza first gained attention with his series about London detective Erika Foster. The books had a strong serial killer theme to them and attracted a strong following, especially in the United Kingdom.

In 2019 Bryndza shifted to a new character, former police detective Kate Marshall who was eking out an existence as a lecturer at a small coastal English university and trying to forget the traumas of her past. Containing hints of *Silence Of The Lambs*, *Nine Elms* was a significant step-up for Bryndza and was a gripping tale that held attention till the end.

**DARKNESS FALLS** is the third book in the Kate Marshall series and once again Bryndza has produced a well-crafted tale that entertains and surprises. Kate, and her work partner Tristan, now manage a small local private detective agency and are struggling to stay afloat when they are offered a substantial job. Young female journalist Joanna Duncan went missing twelve years ago after exposing a political scandal. She was never found and while the police appear to have given up on the case, Joanna's mother is desperate to find out what really happened. Kate and Tristan go back over the old files and find some unfollowed leads that suggest that Joanna was onto something far more sinister than anyone first believed.

Bryndza has really matured as an author, and **DARKNESS FALLS** unfolds with clockwork precision as Kate and Tristan convincingly work their

way through old clues and well described suspects. Some more recent murders add a good touch of suspense to the proceedings and the book has a really nice flow to it. The characterisations are rich and interesting, and the descriptions of the southern English coastline add good texture to the book.

Red herrings and false leads are adroitly woven into the story, and while I correctly identified some of the key clues, I could not work out what they meant. After some clever detection by Kate, the story builds to a good and surprising ending, and there is plenty of tension in the closing chapters.

A very enjoyable British crime novel and my favourite of the Bryndza books so far.

### THE LAST TIME SHE DIED

by Zoe Sharp  
Bookouture, £10.99

**Rating: A-**



Zoe Sharp is probably best known for her high octane novels about former soldier and professional bodyguard Charlie Fox. In their heyday, the Charlie Fox novels were 'must reads', but I thought that the more recent books tapered off a bit in their appeal. Zoe has also more recently tried her hand at another series featuring CSI Grace McColl, but it does not seem to have taken off.

The good news is that Zoe's latest book, **THE LAST TIME SHE DIED**, is a strong return to form and is probably the best thing she has done in a while.

**THE LAST TIME SHE DIED** revolves around Blake Claremont, who disappeared ten years ago when she was fifteen years old. No one ever reported her as missing, with her father, Gideon Fitzroy, a former Member of Parliament, saying that he was sure that she would come back. But those who buried her ten years ago know that she won't be coming back. However, now that her father is dead, in a suspicious car accident, a woman calling herself Blake has returned. Is it really Blake, or an opportunist after her father's money? Detective John Byron does not know if it is Blake or not, but he is surprised by the fear that she generates and when someone shoots at her on a winding rural road, he has to ask: who wants her dead?

From the disturbing opening pages, Zoe draws the reader in with consummate skill as the story unfolds and the mystery deepens as to what is happening. The frequently shifting viewpoint also helps to build the suspense, and Zoe is very good at misleading the reader and maintaining interest.

The cast of characters are very nicely drawn, especially Blake and John Byron, but also the supporting cast of PC Jane Hudson and the young teenage step-daughter of Fitzroy, Lily. As the book progresses, the plot moves through some good twists and turns to an exciting and unexpected conclusion that kept me keenly turning the pages.

Perhaps the resolution was a little too neat and convenient, but otherwise it is hard to fault this very engaging and enjoyable crime novel.

**THE RUSSIAN WIFE**

by Barry Maitland

Allen &amp; Unwin, \$A32.99

Brock &amp; Kolla #14

**Rating: A-**

**THE RUSSIAN WIFE** is the fourteenth entry in Barry Maitland's popular series about London detectives David Brock and Kathy Kolla, and opens up with Brock re-instated as a Detective Chief Inspector following the events of **THE PROMISED LAND**, albeit in the Fraud Division. Kathy is now leading one of the Metropolitan Police's Murder Investigation teams and a chance remark by Brock over a celebratory lunch sets her off on the trail of a possible murderer. As Kathy builds her case against the suspected killer, she finds herself under investigation for corruption and her career in jeopardy. Meanwhile, Brock becomes embroiled in the dangerous world of international art fraud when the wife of a prominent art collector is found dead.

This is a clever and engaging crime novel, which once more demonstrates Maitland's mastery of the detective mystery. The central characters of Brock and Kolla are engaging and flawed, and the secondary characters are well fleshed-out and intriguing. The dual plotlines are well constructed and full of interest, and Maitland produces his typical mid-book twist, which upturns expectations and adds to the mystery. As the book nears the end, the surprises increase, and Maitland neatly wraps up the various strands of his plot with a flourish in the closing pages.

As always, the plotting is first rate, but a lot of the book's pleasure comes in seeing how Brock and Kolla have aged and changed. Maitland does a good job in conveying Brock's unsettledness and uncertainty early in the book, and Kolla continues to grow and mature as a character. There are a lot of poignant reflections in the book, but not enough to derail the plot or slow the story. The book is also enhanced by Maitland's seamless inclusion of interesting background information on art forgery and architecture.

Some of the police detail lacks the



credibility that other authors bring to the genre, but overall **THE RUSSIAN WIFE** is a very enjoyable read.

**George's Take:**

I've read all fourteen of the Brock and Kolla novels, starting in 1994 with **THE MARX SISTERS**. When Maitland is on his game, his work is among the very best of the British detective scene. Occasionally he writes a so-so novel. Fortunately, he has written far more outstanding crime novels than his lackluster ones. **THE RUSSIAN WIFE** is among his best. The mix of British fine art and murder worked very well – and it was nice to catch up with Brock and Kolla after about a 3-year absence. There is a very tense section of the book in which Kolla's professional career is in great jeopardy and I thought the resolution of that situation was a little too facile. Otherwise I would have rated this a straight A.

So far **THE RUSSIAN WIFE** has only been published in Australia, where the author lives. It certainly deserves a much wider audience. Highly recommended. Once again I turned to Book Depository to get my copy. **Rating: A-**

**GOOD COP BAD COP**

by Simon Kernick

Headline, £16.99

**Rating: B+**

You always know what you are going to get with a Simon Kernick novel; fast frenetic action and plenty of it, and this is certainly the case with **GOOD COP BAD COP**.

Fourteen years ago undercover cop Chris Sketty shot to fame as the man who almost died trying to stop a brutal terror attack in the heart of London. Although he was acclaimed as a hero, some had their doubts about Sketty's role in the events that day. With all the suspects either dead or missing, however, there is little evidence to contradict Sketty's version. That is now set to change, with the detective blackmailed into revealing what really happened all those years ago. Gradually over the course of a long night, the truth about that day, and what led up to it, is finally going to be revealed.

Kernick excels at this type of twisty, ingenious story and the book rockets from one murderous surprise to the next. The shifting timeline between the past and the present, and the alternating viewpoint between Sketty and the mysterious Dr Teller who is hearing the former cop's confession, helps to build the suspense and keeps the reader off guard as the real story is revealed. There is plenty of action and violence, and the book races to a terrific climax, and a succession of surprises all the way down to the last line of the book.

Kernick has always been the wilder British cousin of Harlan Coben, and **GOOD COP BAD COP** delivers the twists and turns, and outrageous reversals, that we have come to expect from his books. Some suspension of disbelief is required, but it is well worth it, as it is highly entertaining read.

**MR CAMPION'S WINGS**

by Mike Ripley

Seyn House, £20.99

**Rating: A-**

Those who like traditional British detective stories with a touch of humour, will greatly enjoy **MR CAMPION'S WINGS** by Mike Ripley.

This is the ninth book in Mike Ripley's seamless and enjoyable continuance of the Albert Campion novels by Margery Allingham, and once more

features Mike's marvellous sense of humour and his love for history.

In recent books Ripley has taken Campion into the 1970s, but with **MR CAMPION'S WINGS** he goes back to 1965 and involves Allingham's detective in a bit of Cold War spying. The story opens in Cambridge with the honorary doctorate ceremony for Albert Campion's wife, Lady Amanda, who is a leading aviation engineer. The ceremony takes a dramatic turn for the worse when she is arrested by Special Branch for breaking the Official Secrets Act. Never before having taken much interest in his wife's work in cutting-edge aircraft design, Campion sets out to discover more about the top-secret Goshawk Project in which Amanda is involved in, so as to clear her name. He quickly realizes he is not the only one keen to learn the secrets of the project and when a badly mutilated body is discovered at the Goshawk Project's hangar he is drawn into a turbulent mix of industrial espionage and possible matters of national security.

Mike Ripley's Campion books are always a good source of light fun and mystery, and this another enjoyable romp. The story moves along at a pleasant cantor and there are some good surprises and the occasional gunshot. Campion is always an engaging char-

acter and there are plenty of amusing observations and witty asides. Interesting bits of historical detail are nicely scattered throughout the book and the depiction of Cambridge, and England, in the 1960s seems credible to an outsider like me.

Fans of the original Campion books will probably appreciate the references to earlier escapades and characters, and Ripley also smoothly weaves into his stories subtle references to 1960s British spy and adventures novels.

In all, an entertaining hark back to the Golden Years of British detective writing.

### SCARE ME TO DEATH

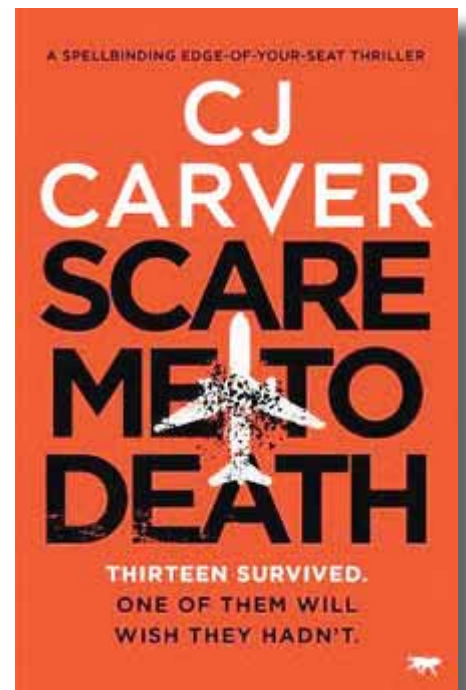
by C.J. Carver

Bloodhound, £10.49

Rating: B+

Sixteen years ago a bomb brought an international flight down in Morocco, killing 214 people. Thirteen people survived the crash, including Kaitlyn Rogers whose murdered body has just been found in a London Airbnb. The police believe that she was killed by a new boyfriend, a nerdy accountant with some dodgy clients. However, DC Lucy Davies is not convinced, especially as evidence emerges that her death is linked to the bombing sixteen years before. Enlisting the help of her friend, former MI5 agent Dan Forrester, Lucy begins to look into the circumstances around the bombing and finds a web of corruption reaching from Morocco to London.

This is an enjoyable thrill-a-minute action novel that races from the original plane crash to current day killings in Morocco and London, and a terrific climax. Carver is very good at this sort of free flowing thriller and she knows how to keep the plot moving and the action coming. The scenes in Morocco are evocative and exciting and there are plenty of surprises as the police investigation unfolds in London. It is fun and very readable, but after awhile the co-incidences begin to mount up. The story involves characters and relationships from Carver's previous three books about Forrester and Davies, and elements from these books add a



complexity to the story that is not really needed.

I am a big fan of Carver's novels, especially last year's *THE SNOW THIEF*, but this one seemed a little rushed to me. I also thought that it would have worked better as a stand-alone novel, rather than being jammed into the Forrester and Davies series. There are some clever ideas and good reflections on how businesses manipulate crises, but a couple of the sub-plots seemed to be tacked on

#### George's Take:

Like Jeff, I am also a fan of C. J. Carver's work going back to her CWA Debut Dagger-winner **BLOOD JUNCTION**, written under her full name Caroline Carver. Some of you may remember her from her appearances at Bouchercon some years ago.

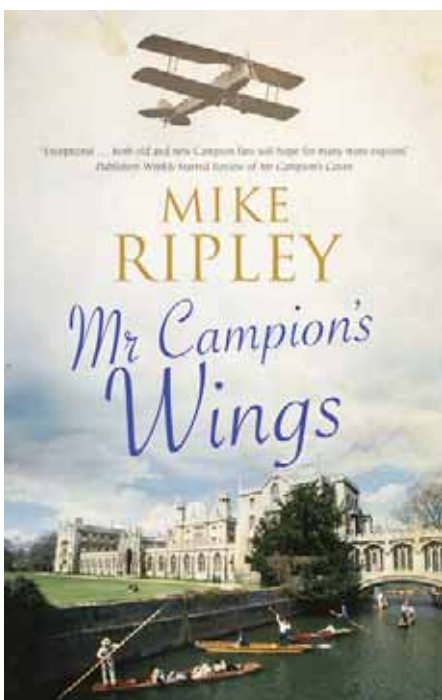
I'm late to the Forrester and Davies series, but I've ordered the first two and hope to catch up soon. **SCARE ME TO DEATH** is very smoothly written and is a page-turning, easy read. Yes, there are some noticeable coincidences, but I didn't let them bother with my enjoyment of the story. **Rating: A-**

### THIS IS THE NIGHT THEY COME FOR YOU

by Robert Goddard

Bantam, £17.60, March

Rating: A-



I always look forward to the novels by Robert Goddard and his latest book, **THIS IS THE NIGHT THEY COME FOR YOU**, is another clever, twisty tale that kept me engrossed and surprised from beginning to end.

The plots of Goddard's books are always difficult to explain because they move in such unexpected directions that it is hard to describe them without ruining the joy of the many surprises. Suffice to say, **THIS IS THE NIGHT THEY COME FOR YOU**, opens in Algiers with Superintendent Mouloud Taleb being seconded to work with a female agent, Hidouchi, from the country's feared secret service. They are instructed to pursue a former agent, now on the run after twenty years in prison for his part in a high-level corruption scandal. Taleb is close to retirement and does not want to become caught up in dangerous conspiracies, but he is gradually drawn into Hidouchi's search for the former agent and his mysterious backer. Meanwhile, an unexpected visit from someone in his past draws Stephen Gray out of his rural lethargy and sets him on the search for the real truth about his sister's disappearance in Paris nearly sixty years ago. Two seemingly unconnected events, but in Goddard's skilled hands they weave together into a clever, surprising plot that slithers along like an

out-of-control snake.

In recent years Goddard seems to have moved away from his complex, intriguing historical crime novels into the thriller arena, with faster moving and often more violent tales about conspiracies and desperate characters. **THIS IS THE NIGHT THEY COME FOR YOU** is certainly more in the thriller field, and after a slowish start the book picks up pace in the second half and races from Algiers and Hampshire to violent confrontations in the French countryside and Paris.

The storyline is interesting, and Goddard's background information on the struggle for Algerian Independence and the subsequent violent events that gripped that poor country is fascinating. The characters are well crafted and engaging, particularly the world weary Taleb who has suffered so much. The Algerian Secret Service agent Hidouchi is also an interesting character and Goddard rounds her out in unexpected ways.

The end result is a very enjoyable thriller that kept me engaged all the way to the tense and exciting conclusion and the final revelations. Warmly recommended.

## George Easter Reviews

### GOOD COP BAD COP

by Simon Kernick

Headline, £16.99

Rating: A-

The title might sum up what the author cut his teeth on (his initial series featuring the ethically challenged Dennis Milne) and continues to earn money on – the morally ambiguous life of a modern-day cop. In this particular case, we take a deep dive into the life of Chris Sketty, whose career as a policeman is going nowhere when he accepts an assignment to go undercover to get evidence against a crooked cop named Baz Cleaver. Chris is assigned to the same unit as Baz and slowly gains his trust. Then he is asked to do some shady things for Baz and his cohorts, which he does and finds himself in some very awkward situations. This culminates

in a terrorist attack at a local restaurant which was supposed to be a meeting to discuss a gun purchase. Chris alerted the authorities about this meet and was as shocked as everyone else when men started mowing down the restaurant customers. Chris leaps into action and performs some heroic acts but is shot for his troubles. His remaining years before retirement are spent at a desk.

Some fifteen years after the terrorist attack, Dr. Ralph Teller, who lost his wife in the attack, invites Chris to his home and proceeds to blackmail him (Chris still has some untold secrets) into telling him everything that went on when he went undercover – and we, the readers, are privy to that tale. In the end we are forced to ask ourselves, “was Chris a good cop or a bad cop?”

There are more surprises to follow as Simon Kernick delivers another clever and thrilling tale of loyalty and betrayal.

### NO LESS THE DEVIL

by Stuart MacBride

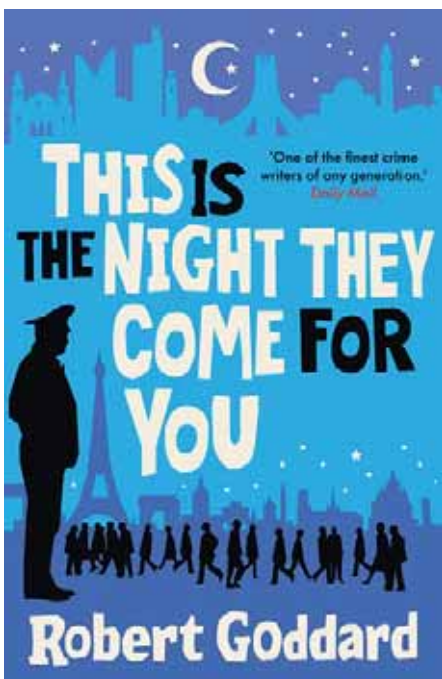
Bantam Press, £20.00, April, 2022

Rating: B+

Serial killer novels are not everyone's cup of tea, but if you can wade through some grisly details of eviscerated bodies, **NO LESS THE DEVIL** is a pretty darn good one... well, until the end when it gets a little weird.

The search for the killer known as the Bloodsmith has dragged on for 17 long months and is looking more and more like a failure and a policing embarrassment. Top officials have bowed out and given this porker to DI Tudor who will likely end up being a scapegoat. DS Lucy McVeigh and her rotund, jovial partner DC Fraser (“Dunk”) trudge on despite little or no evidence to follow. But McVeigh is known for thinking outside of the box and by doing so, she makes slow but steady progress in the case.

That is, when she isn't distracted by Benedict Strachan who, at age eleven, killed a homeless man and has spent the last sixteen years in prison. Now released, he's living in fear – “They” are out to get him, especially if he talks to the police. He asks for Lucy's help but then disappears after being severely



beaten.

Lucy's investigation takes her to an elite private school and she begins to suspect that there's more going on there than the teaching of Greek and Latin.

I always enjoy Stuart MacBride's crime novels. His smooth writing propels the narrative along with nary a hitch. The ending got a little strange, but I understand that the author was setting the scene for future novels with DS Lucy McVeigh who is certainly a strong-enough character to carry a successful series.

### THE WAITER

by Ajay Chowdhury

Harvill Secker, £12.99

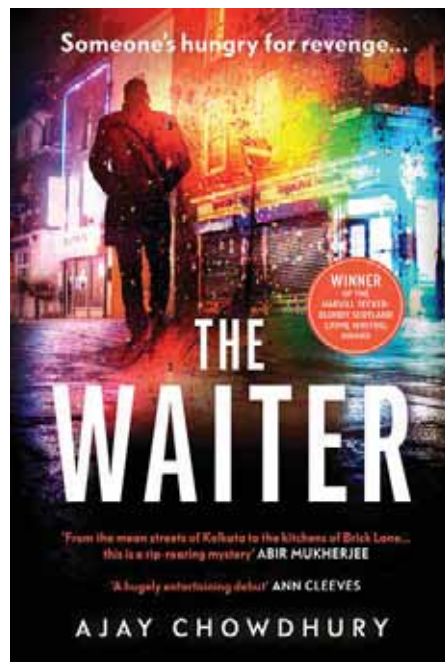
**Rating: A-**

The hero of this debut novel is Kamil Rahman, a police detective from Kolkata, India, who has left in disgrace after being double-crossed by his colleagues and fumbling a murder investigation surrounding the death of a famous Bollywood actor. He has fled all the way to London, England, where he is working as a waiter in a family friend's (Saibal Chatterjee) restaurant, Tandoori Knights.

A close friend of the Chatterjees, millionaire Rakesh Sharma, is turning 60 years old, and Tandoori Knights has been hired to cater the lavish event in the opulent (over-the-top) Sharma mansion. Kamil goes along to help wherever he can, but he can't help but witness some strange goings-on. Why was Rakesh's shrewish first wife invited to the event? And what were Saibal and Rakesh arguing about on the patio? Why was Bollywood actress Taania Raazia flirting with Rakesh in front of Rakesh's trophy wife?

After the party, Saibal and Kamil are called back because Rakesh's dead body was found in the indoor pool. He apparently suffered a serious head wound. Was it an accident or homicide? Kamil immediately goes into crime scene investigating mode, knowing this will be his only chance to examine everything before the police arrive.

When Neha, Rakesh's wife, is arrested on suspicion of murder, Kamil and the Chatterjee's daughter, Anjoli (a good



friend of Neha's) decide to conduct their own investigation and they proceed to interview witnesses.

Interspersed with the current-time narrative are chapters that go back and fill us in on Kamil's murder case in India. The story line is as much about the characters' personal lives (fascinating) as it is about the detection of crime committed. All is resolved in a complex but satisfying ending. Kamil and Anjoli are such charismatic characters that I expect Chowdhury will bring them back for another outing. The door has certainly been left open for that to happen.

British writers of subcontinental descent are making quite a positive impact on British crime fiction (and my personal reading enjoyment). Add Ajay Chowdhury's name to those of Abir Mukherjee, Vaseem Khan and A.A. Dhand, who are some of my favorite crime writers with ties to India.

### STANDING ALONE

by Stephen Leather

Hodder & Stoughton, £16.99

January, 2022 in U.K;

April, 2022 in U.S. (\$26.99)

Matt Standing #2

**Rating: A-**

SAS trooper Matt Standing is being blackmailed by Charlotte Button (a long-standing shady character in Stephen Leather's novels) for an act of

revenge that occurred in the first episode of the series, **LAST MAN STANDING** (2019). If Standing does not do Button's bidding, he will face a murder charge and dismissal from the SAS.

Charlotte Button wants Standing to kill Ryan French, a former U.S. Navy Seal, who has gone rogue as a professional assassin. Standing and Frenchy were comrades in arms in various operations in the Middle East and Standing doesn't want to kill a man whose life he saved on several occasions. But he has no choice.

With a false set of papers, Standing heads off to Humboldt County, California where Frenchy is apparently up to no good. The challenge ahead is daunting. Humboldt County is the U.S. center for legal and illegal marijuana growing, sparsely inhabited by old hippies, Hungarian gangsters, and members of the Outlaw motorcycle gang, Mexican cartels and the Russian Mafia.

Side note: if you want to learn a lot about cannabis farming, this is the book for you. The author has obviously done extensive research on the subject and has imparted his knowledge to us. It's wasted on me. Pun intended.

It's not an easy place to conduct an investigation. Everyone is suspicious of strangers and Matt is a trained soldier, not a trained investigator. It doesn't take long before he has run-ins with security guards and a motorcycle gang.

But within a few days, he has made a friend with Brett, a likeable Vietnam vet and long-time resident of the area, who has a small, illegal grow farm where Standing is invited to stay and work. And in doing so he gets the lay of the land and how to operate in such a lawless region.

Exciting adventures ensue. Standing and Brett rescue some young women held in captivity by ruthless growers and they help a nice family keep their family farm, which is being threatened by Russian Mafia neighbors. Eventually Standing and Frenchy meet up in a surprising way.

Reading a Stephen Leather thriller is a cardio exercise. His action scenes are so well described and exciting that I can feel my heart pounding while I'm reading them. Excellent thriller.

## Getting Away With Murder

*Mike Ripley*



### 2021 Report Card

Despite all the difficulties of 2021 coming hot on the heels of the disruptions of 2020, which have beset the publishing of crime fiction, Shots has, I feel, been doing its bit to keep its readers up to speed. In the year just ended, the army of Shots reviewers covered more than 100 new titles and carried 17 major features. Under the steady hand of Ayo Onatade, the Shotsmag Confidential blogspot hosted more than 340 separate posts and this august column alone mentioned in excess of 200 crime and thriller fiction authors and their books.

My increasingly erratic database -- which does not claim to be exhaustive -- suggests that there were 695 new crime novels published in the UK in 2021. (These were titles published for the first time, not re-issues, and the total does not include eBook only or self-published work.) Given that several publishers have me on their naughty steps, the figure of 695 titles - which is about one new book every 12½ hours - should be taken as a minimum.

Most interesting is the number of crime novels by women (at least 347), which makes females responsible for 49.9% of crime fiction, the highest percentage I have ever recorded. Until last year, and even in the so-called 'Golden Age' of detective fiction, women crime-writers were responsible for between 33-36% of titles -- which is not, of course, the same as sales.

### I Spy Famous Names

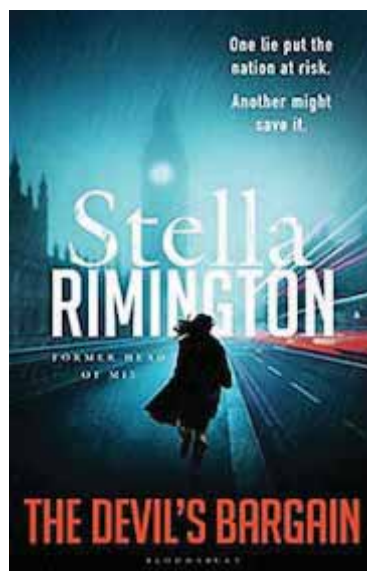
Two famous names in both spy fiction and spy fact feature in the publishing schedule for March this year: Dame Stella Rimington, the former

Director-General of MI5, and Charlotte Philby, granddaughter of Kim, Britain's most notorious (or successful?) traitor.

When I interviewed Dame Stella three years ago at the Slaughter In Southwold crime festival, she indicated that her latest novel, **THE MOSCOW SLEEPERS**, could well be her last as she was thinking of retiring from spy fiction as well as spying.



I am delighted to say she was feeding me a false legend as her new thriller, **THE DEVIL'S BARGAIN**, will be published by Bloomsbury.



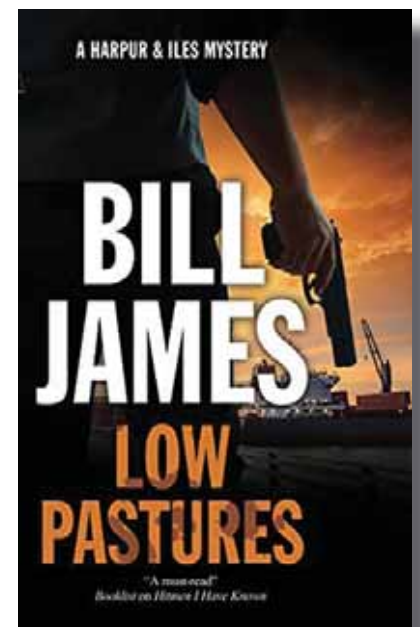
From The Borough Press, in the same month, comes **EDITH AND KIM** by Charlotte Philby, which tells the

story of Edith Tudor-Hart, 'the woman behind the Third Man,' who introduced Kim Philby to his Soviet handler. I have had a sneak preview of Charlotte's novel and I have a feeling it could be her strongest novel yet.

### Coming Up

With bated (or at least masked) breath and crossed fingers, I have perused the 2022 catalogues of various publishers to spot forthcoming titles which are likely to raise my spirits. I am delighted to say I found several new books to add to my WOF (Watch Out For) list, though my TRB (To Be Read) pile is already a Pisa-worthy tower of proofs of new titles, some not due to be published for six months or more.

The first on my list, as it is published this month by Severn House, is **LOW PASTURES**, the 36th 'Harpur and Iles' policier from veteran crime writer Allan Tucker, writing as Bill James, the best known of his several pen-names.



Now 92, Welsh journalist 'Bill James' began writing fiction in 1968 and has published 69 novels and works of non-fiction. His crime writing is highly admired by such as Peter Guttridge and John Harvey, who know a thing or two.

In February Thomas Mogford, whose contemporary 'Mediterranean' thrillers I have much enjoyed in the past, takes

a new name and a new tack with the historical adventure **THE PLAN-THUNTER** as by T.L. Mogford which is set in 1867 at the height of the Victorian obsession with discovering and collecting exotic flora.

As the Dowager Lady Ripster has to be strip-searched on her regular visits to the Chelsea Flower Show, I can confirm that the plant-hunting obsession is very real even now, not to mention dangerous.

April sees two authors who go, sight unseen, on to my TBR pile without passing 'Go.' Lindsey Davis, with **DESPERATE UNDERTAKING** [Hodder] gives us another delightful tale featuring Flavia Alba, her Roman sleuthette and South African maestro Deon Meyer provides another case for his brilliant creation Benny Griessel in **THE DARK FLOOD** [also from Hodder].

And in June, the Rev. Richard Coles -- the coolest vicar on Radio 4 -- marks his debut as a crime-writer with **MURDER BEFORE EVENSONG** published by Weidenfeld.

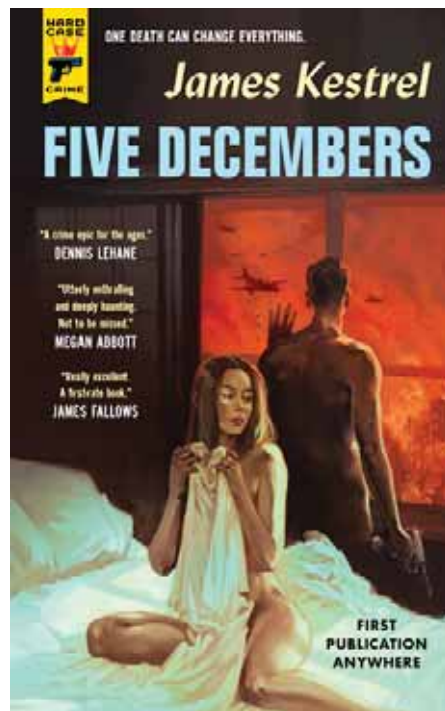


Mike & the Vicar

I met Richard some while ago, funnily enough at a publishing party (and that dates me!) where he was utterly charming and the last person in the room I would have thought would turn to a life of crime.

## Deadly Pleasures Missed

The American magazine (I suppose I should say eZine these days) **Deadly Pleasures** always entertains and informs and its multiple contributors show no remorse when they 'review to death' (their words) new mysteries. It seems a popular technique as far as its readers



go, though I have never been sure what those readers, mostly American, make of this august and upstanding column which is syndicated in each issue.

It is not uncommon for a new book to be reviewed more than once in **Deadly Pleasures** but I could not help but notice in the latest edition that one title was very favourably mentioned no less than four times. **FIVE DECEMBERS** by James Kestrel (a pseudonym), published by Hard Case Crime, is also the subject of a rave review on Steve Powell's website *The Venetian Vase*, and Powell, a leading authority on the work of James Ellroy, is an academic whose views on, and reviews of, crime fiction I take seriously.

The book charts the hunt for a killer across south-east Asia in the months of November and December 1941 -- so you can guess what's coming -- and has been described as a 'terrific' historical crime saga. Of course, for legal reasons, I have not actually read it, so I will just have to wait and see what Santa brings.

## Royal Typo

The Review section of *The Times* on Saturday now carries a regular feature called 'Rereading' and last month it was turned over to thriller writer James

Wolff who waxed lyrically over one of my favourite American crime writers, George V. Higgins and his 1970 debut novel **THE FRIENDS OF EDDIE COYLE**. I found myself in total agreement with everything Wolff wrote and, like him, I have an early paperback edition in my library, along with **COGAN'S TRADE** and several other of his Boston based crime and legal thrillers (which were also pretty good).

Wolff's analysis of Higgins' talent is spot-on, as one might expect from the author of one of the spy thrillers of the year (**HOW TO BETRAY YOUR COUNTRY**), but even he cannot explain why George V. Higgins is a far less well-known name than his contemporaries Robert B. Parker or Elmore Leonard, who, incidentally, was a big fan of Higgins.



My one claim to fame in terms of a connection with the hardboiled maestro Higgins, came more than thirty years ago when Lord Ted Willis, he of Dixon of Dock Green fame, reviewed my **ANGEL HUNT** for the *Daily Telegraph* and went generously over-the-top by suggesting I might be 'mentioned in the same breath as George V. Higgins.' It was, however, too good a quote not to put on the cover of the paperback.

Unfortunately, in the first draft design of that paperback cover, either the designer or a typesetter made a rather crucial mistake and the quote came out as 'mentioned in the same breath as George V.'

## Spotted by The Spectator

My name has not often graced the pages of *The Spectator*, but when it

has, the context has, so far, been quite flattering.

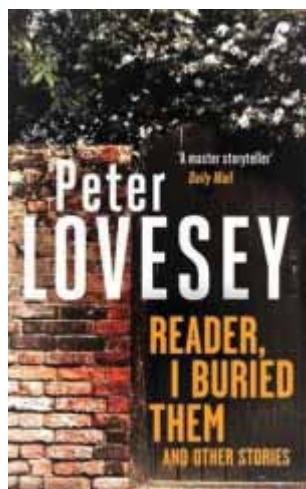
Recently, thriller-writer and former BBC reporter Peter Hanington wrote a piece on haikus and how the short, seventeen-syllable Japanese poetry form had kept him sane during various lockdowns and wormed their way into his fiction. Knowing that Ian Fleming (**YOU ONLY LIVE TWICE**) had played with the haiku, he began to wonder if any other crime writers had included poetry and poets in their work, but it was not until he consulted that walking encyclopaedia of crime writing, Mike Ripley that he realised just how many had.

I was able to suggest a few authors and titles to Peter, not the least being P.D. James' detective Adam Dalgliesh, who is currently experiencing a new lease of life thanks to the recent rather good Channel 5 TV series.



## The Long and the Short

I was always told, when I started out, that crime-writers, however long their careers, should not expect to see more than one or possibly two anthologies of their short stories published as publish-

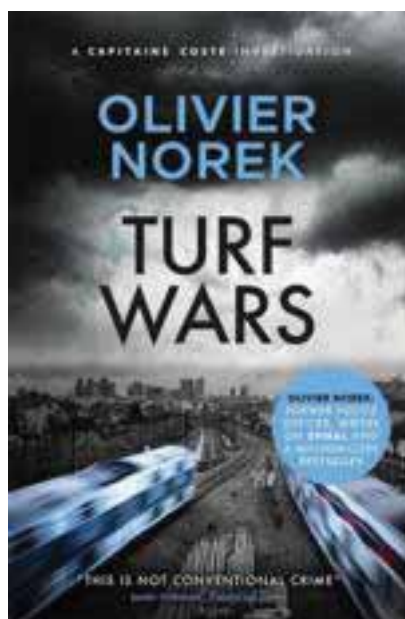


ers and agents both claimed they were a 'hard sell' these days - but what do they know?

Still, it is a remarkable achievement for a crime-writer to be celebrating their sixth collection, though not surprising when that crime-writer is Peter Lovesey, who has been producing high-grade crime fiction for more than fifty years.

His new collection **READER I BURIED THEM** will be published by Sphere in February 2022 and I am told, by one of my trusted moles, that there is a treat in there for fans of Ellery Queen.

## Books of the Quarter



Anyone suffering withdrawal symptoms from the ending of that most excellent French police drama *Spiral* (and who isn't?) should rush out and get acquainted with the work of Olivier Norek, a former Paris policeman and scriptwriter on the series. **TURF WARS** was published in France in 2013 but has now finally made it into English thanks to MacLehose Press, and forms the second volume of Norek's prize-winning 'Banlieues' trilogy. The Banlieues are the modern suburbs of Paris where tourists, if they have any sense, rarely go.

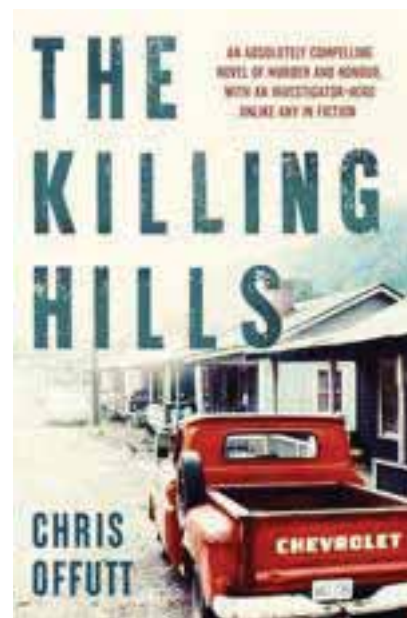
Unforgiving tower blocks, teenage gangsters, a thriving drugs trade and corrupt politicians all have to be patrolled (reluctantly) and contained (barely) by various rival departments

of the French police. A sadistic killing (or two, or three) is the opening shot in a turf war between drug dealers which soon escalates into full-blown riot and civil disorder where the police count themselves just lucky to get out alive.

This is tough stuff and not for the faint-hearted -- or anyone with a cat and a microwave -- but you will have to go a long way to find a better hard-boiled policier.

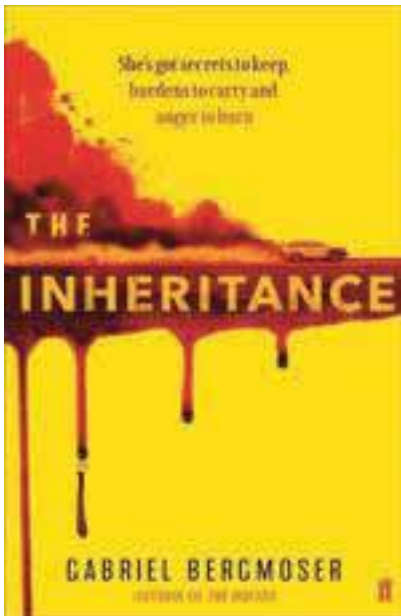
**THE KILLING HILLS** [No Exit] by Chris Offutt takes the bare bones of the traditional hard-boiled American crime story and fleshes them with a layered account of life, death and what passes for family 'honour' in the backwoods Kentucky town of Rocksalt. It's the sort of town where the garages sell tires (sic), petrol and Bibles because they will all 'get you where you need to be.'

Faced with her first murder case, the local sheriff asks her brother, Mick Hardin, for help. Hardin not only knows the local woods, but is a CID agent in the US army, currently home on leave as his (estranged) wife is very pregnant. While his sister fends off local political interference, for which read 'cover up,' Hardin investigates the web of tribal loyalties which govern the isolated families who seem to take a perverse pride in poverty and deprivation - families with fourteen children brought up in a two-room shack - and their ability to hold a



violent grudge for many generations. In fact, their ability to sustain a blood feud makes the average Sicilian vendetta look like an argument over a supermarket car parking spot. It is a place where the only booming industry is the importing of drugs and the only escape route is to move north to Detroit to work for gangsters, or join the army as Hardin did.

It is Hardin's army training which helps him solve the murder, though it has also destroyed his marriage, and in the end it is his army home he returns to. This short, powerful novel evokes, above all else, a terrible sadness about life in the Kentucky hills and the awful inevitability of it all. Hardin's wife is thought too young for a midlife crisis but they came early in the hills. Everything did - death, hardship and loss



I don't think that **THE INHERITANCE** [Faber] by Australian Gabriel Bergmoser qualifies as 'outback noir' as most of the action takes place in Melbourne and its environs, but it is certainly noirish in the sense that nobody is going to come out of this well.

Maggie, daughter of an abusive ex-policeman father is lying low and off the grid (for good reason), concerned only with searching for her missing mother and not really worried about inheriting a secret hard drive from her late father. Unfortunately, others are very interested in it and after alienating a local

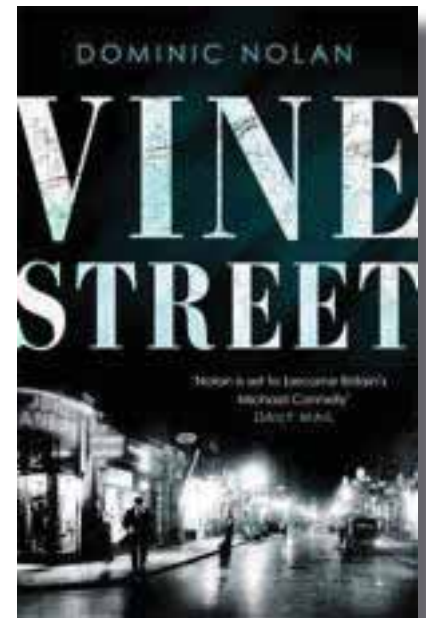
gangster and then a whole squadron of violent bikers, not to mention a cabal of crooked cops, Maggie is determined to find the thing despite seemingly overwhelming odds. Fortunately, she is a resourceful - in the Jason Bourne sense - survivor and proves herself very handy with guns, letter-openers, machetes, a rounders' bat, broken glass, rocks and fire and the violence escalates, to really ridiculous proportions resulting in a body count equivalent to Round One in Squid Game.

It is over-the-top and the grand finale has the feel of a bit of a plot afterthought, but the bloody and violent action never lets up.

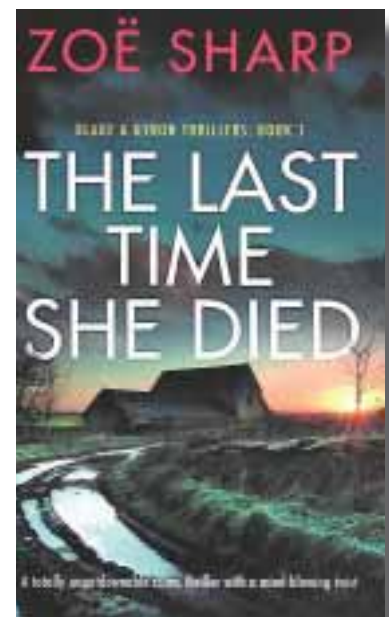
According to the Daily Mail (so it must be true) Dominic Nolan 'is set to become Britain's Michael Connelly' yet his new novel **VINE STREET** [Headline] reminds me more of the work of another American idol, James Ellroy, partly for the breadth of his story spanning nearly 600 pages, and partly for his diversions into visceral, staccato prose often resembling blank verse. Nolan is also, like Ellroy, not frightened to throw in the odd Hollywood name - in this case Tallulah Bankhead on fine, disreputable form.

Set in 1935 and around the legendary Vine Street (next to the Free Parking corner on my Monopoly board) police station, familiar to many upper-class miscreants from squiffy toffs in P.G. Wodehouse to the Marquis of Queensbury, most of the action takes place on the Soho patch of Vice detective Sergeant Leon Geats as he battles the local crime kings as well as his rivals in the Flying Squad. In among the wreaths of Woodbine smoke is the ever-present fear of white slavery, but with new twist: are the girls being trafficked in from Europe really plants by the German Abwehr? (It is 1935 after all).

The period detail seems all there, though I had to look up 'High Top' (an Austin taxi sometimes known as an 'Upright Grand'), as Geats goes about his detecting with his own personal mantra of 'kick-in doors, crack heads.' An epic historical crime novel which, like its hero, pulls few punches.



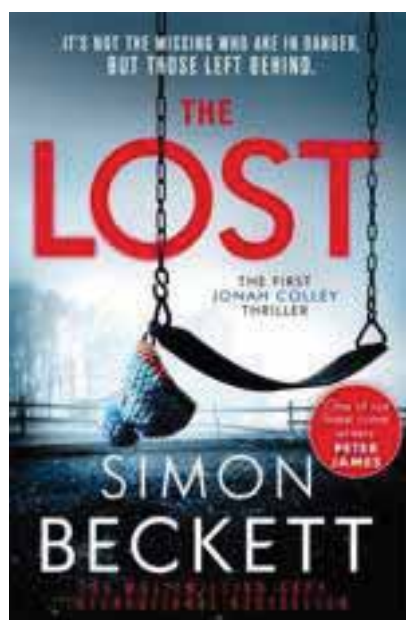
The cover of Zoë Sharp's new thriller **THE LAST TIME SHE DIED** [Book-outure] carries the strapline 'Blake and Byron Thrillers: Book 1' which could be seen as a bit of a spoiler, or at least a puzzle as the two characters in question seem, initially, an unlikely pairing. John Byron is a senior police detective currently not on active duty (for reasons which become clear), whereas 'Blake' is a young woman with a mysterious past who quickly shows her skill as a burglar and clearly has her own agenda when she reappears at the family home after being missing for ten years.



Missing, as a 15-year-old, but never

reported missing by her MP father - not the only suspicious thing about him - Blake appears as if back from the dead at her unlamented father's funeral. This is not a happy home-coming and Byron, on hand to help the local constabulary, is intrigued and then involved as crimes past and present come to light.

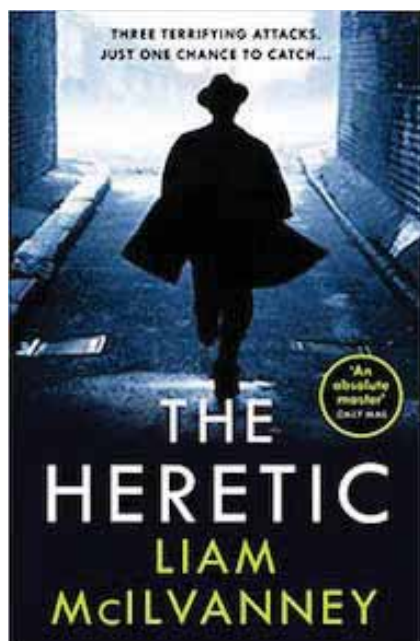
**THE LAST TIME SHE DIED** is a fluent, fast-paced crime thriller, sharply written (as one has to say about an author called Sharp) with several hairpin plot twists and leaves the reader keen to find out what 'Book 2' in the series will bring.



The hero of **THE LOST** by Simon Beckett [Orion] is a policeman, this time a firearms officer, and has also lost a child -- a young son who disappears from a playground in broad daylight.

Ten years later our hero gets a call out of the blue from a colleague he hasn't seen since that loss and, unusually for an experienced firearms officer, he agrees to a midnight meeting without back-up, in a deserted warehouse on the spookily-named Slaughter Quay. The name should have been a clue; it was always going to lead to trouble.

The gangland turf wars of Glasgow in the 1970s have been much covered in crime fiction recently, notably by Alan Parks in **THE APRIL DEAD** and in **THE DARK REMAINS** by William McIlvanney and Ian Rankin. Now Liam McIlvanney (son of William) weighs in



with **THE HERETIC** [HarperCollins], a quite magisterial 500+ page saga.

The 1975 setting in all its grimness is very well realised and McIlvanney shows a wonderful use of language throughout. A woman "unsnares the window"; a murder victim who "had been plunged in the stomach with a breadknife" by his wife while sat in his armchair watching Match of the Day, is "Puddled in blood. His lap sopping"; Glasgow is a "jumped up village" and "a cliff of black tenements".

Terrific stuff.

I wrote last year that I would like to see Australian Chris Hammer expand his work beyond his three (very successful) novels featuring journalist Martin Scarsden and although he cannot resist name-checking his long-suffering series hero, Hammer does just that by moving into **OPAL COUNTRY** [Wildfire].

Once again, the journalistic eye which Scarsden shares with his creator Hammer is used forensically to described, in great detail, the outback town of Finnigan's Gap, its inhabitants and its main industry, the mining of opals. Homicide detective Ivan Lucic is flown in to investigate the murder of a miner who has been found crucified in the shaft of his own opal mine. Lucic comes, of course, with baggage, being regarded as something of a whistle-blower against corruption by his

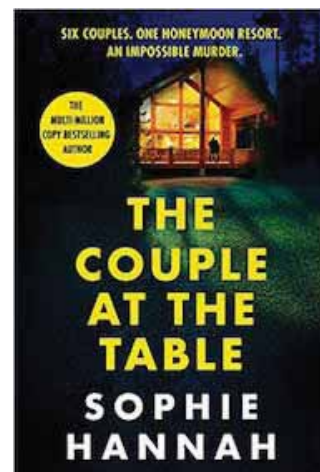
fellow New South Wales police, but in the outback he is assisted by enthusiastic local rookie cop Narelle Buchanan - an excellent creation.

**OPAL COUNTRY** is a long, slow-burner of a thriller, richly rewarding the reader with fine, evocative prose as Hammer is quite brilliant at describing the brutal oven of the Australian interior.

There is a definite trend at the moment for crime novels set in closed-circuit environments if not actually 'locked rooms': luxury resorts, rural retreats, islands, college reunions, company team-building exercises, holiday cabins in the woods, that sort of thing. In Sophie Hannah's **THE COUPLE AT THE TABLE** [Hodder] it's an upmarket, couples-only honeymoon retreat, where sitting down to dinner turns out to be the most dangerous activity on the agenda and where a murder which seems impossible to commit is, of course, committed.

As only to be expected from Sophie Hannah, plot threads from both past and present are deftly woven together, though the actual act of homicide requires a hefty suspension of disbelief. I was reminded of Raymond Chandler's observation (I paraphrase) that if a murderer has to rely on such a set of circumstances, they are probably in the wrong business.

The detective works everything out by gut feeling (and little grey cells?) and by spotting slips of the tongue rather than physical evidence and all the suspects are gathered together in classic style for the final reveal. Sound familiar?



## A Paperback Confidential Profile

# George Harmon Coxe

by Brian Ritt



George Harmon Coxe's most popular character was Flashgun Casey, whose official capacity was as a newspaper photographer at crime scenes, but who inevitably found himself involved in solving crimes due to clues in his photos. During the 1930's-1960's, Casey was a crossover sensation, appearing in pulps, novels, movies, radio and TV. He even had a brief comic book series.

Born in New York, Coxe attended Purdue University in 1920 and Cornell University in 1921. Between 1922-1927, he was a reporter for the *Santa Monica Outlook* and the *Los Angeles Express* in California, and for the *Utica Observer Dispatch* and the *Elmira Star-Gazette* in New York.

Before starting his writing career, Coxe was an avid fan of the pulps, and noticed plenty of crime-solving newspaper reporters, but no photographers in that role. Hence, Flash Casey was born. Casey initially works for *The Boston Globe*, then later for the *Boston Express*. Casey is a rough, hard-drinking, hot-tempered Irishman. Critic J. Randolph Cox sums up a typical Casey plot: "Casey is after a news story in pictures, the opposition (the criminals) don't want him to get those pictures, and the police don't want him to interfere. Casey's interference, of course, delivers the criminals to the police." (*Twentieth Century Crime & Mystery Writers*, pg. 254.)

Casey appeared in over twenty stories in *Black Mask*, in a collection of short stories called *Flash Casey, Detective* (1946), and in five novels: *Silent Are the Dead* (1942), *Murder for Two* (1943), *Error of Judgment* (1961), *The Man Who Died Too Soon* (1962) and *Deadly Image* (1964).

Coxe, in a number of his novels, took Flashgun Casey's occupation and unofficial status as a PI, and revamped the character, naming him Kent Murdock. Murdock, also Boston-based, has several traits which distinguish him from Casey: where Casey has street smarts, Murdock has a more formal education. Murdock is also more sophisticated, urbane, and better mannered. These traits allow him to become involved in crimes amongst Boston's upper-class blue-bloods. In a number of the books, Murdock is married, and he and his wife, Joyce, work as a team. Murdock first appeared in *Murder With Pictures* (1935), which was also Coxe's first novel. Other notable titles include *The Camera Clue* (1937), *Mrs. Murdock Takes a Case* (1947), *Focus On Murder* (1954) and *The Reluctant Heiress* (1965), among others.

Coxe also created three official pri-

vate detectives: Max Hale, Sam Crombie and Jack Fenner. He wrote numerous stand-alone crime novels, as well.

Overall, Coxe wrote over 150 short stories, nearly 65 novels, and numerous screenplays, radio plays, and teleplays. He was elected president of the Mystery Writers of America in 1952 and won the MWA's Grand Master Award in 1964.

### Further Reading:

*Flash Casey series (complete):*

SILENT ARE THE DEAD (1942)

MURDER FOR TWO (1943)

FLASH CASEY, PHOTOGRAPHER (1946, short stories)

ERROR OF JUDGEMENT (1961, published as ONE MURDER TOO MANY, 1969)

THE MAN WHO DIED TOO SOON (1962)

DEADLY IMAGE (1964)

*Kent Murdock series:*

MURDER WITH PICTURES (1935)

THE CAMERA CLUE (1937)

FOUR FRIGHTENED WOMEN (1939)

MRS. MURDOCK TAKES A CASE (1941)

THE CHARRED WITNESS (1942)

THE FIFTH KEY (1947)

THE HOLLOW NEEDLE (1948)

LADY KILLER (1949)

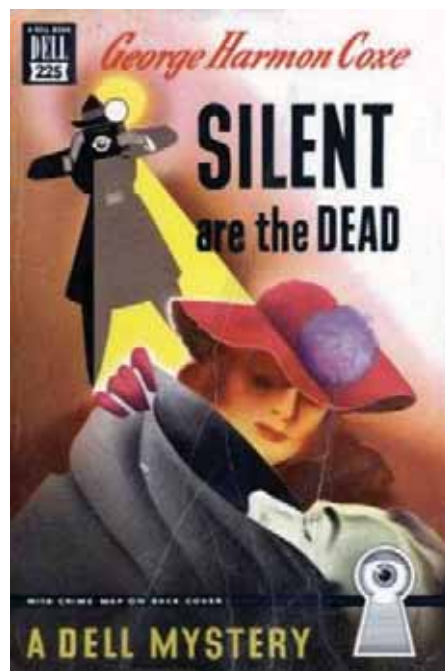
THE WIDOW HAD A GUN (1951)

FOCUS ON MURDER (1954)

THE BIG GAMBLE (1958)

THE LAST COMMANDMENT (1960)

THE RELUCTANT HEIRESS (1965)



[From PAPERBACK CONFIDENTIAL by Brian Ritt, by permission from author]

## Recent Paperbacks of Note



### Soft-Boiled to Medium-Boiled

Alexander, Ellie, **BAKE, BORROW, AND STEAL** (\$8.99).  
Caldwell, Emmie, **STITCHED IN CRIME** (\$8.99).  
Carl, Joanna, **THE CHOCOLATE RACCOON RIGMAROLE** (\$8.99).  
Cates, Bailey, **SPIRITS AND SOUR DOUGH** (\$7.99).  
Chien, Vivien, **HOT AND SOUR SUSPECTS** (\$8.99).  
Cole, Stephanie, **EVIL UNDER THE TUSCAN SUN** (\$7.99).  
Collette, Abby, **A KILLER SUNDAE** (\$16.00).  
Day, Maddie, **BETTER OFF DEAD** (\$8.99).  
Doyle, Carrie, **SOMETHING'S GUAVA GIVE** (\$8.99).  
Ehrhart, Peggy, **DEATH OF A KNIT WIT** (\$8.99).  
Flower, Amanda, **PUT OUT TO PASTURE** (\$8.99).  
Fluke, Joanne, **TRIPLE CHOCOLATE CHEESECAKE MURDER** (\$9.99).  
Kelly, Diane, **BATTEN DOWN THE BELFRY** (\$8.99).  
Klein, Libby, **ANTIQUES AUCTIONS ARE MURDER** (\$8.99).  
Manansala, Mia P., **HOMICIDE AND HALO-HALO** (\$16.00).  
Meier, Leslie, **IRISH PARADE MURDER** (\$8.99).  
Reilly, Linda, **UP TO NO GOUDA** (\$8.99).  
Ryan, Sofie, **TOTALLY PAWSTRUCK** (\$8.99).

### Medium-Boiled to Hard-Boiled

Broadribb, Steph, **DEATH IN THE SUNSHINE** (\$15.95). -- March  
Cobb, May, **THE HUNTING WIVES** (\$17.00).  
Dalton, Julie Carrick, **WAITING FOR THE NIGHT SONG** (\$15.99).  
Dean, Abigail, **GIRL A** (\$17.00).  
Donnelly, Lara Elena, **BASE NOTES** (\$15.95).  
Dorsey, Tim, **TROPIC OF STUPID** (\$15.99).  
Hill, Edwin, **WATCH HER** (\$9.99).  
Jurczyk, Eva, **THE DEPARTMENT OF RARE BOOKS AND SPECIAL COLLECTIONS** (\$16.99).  
Knoll, Jessica, **THE FAVORITE SISTER** (\$9.99).  
Mofina, Rick, **HER LAST GOODBYE** (\$9.99).



Mosley, Walter, **BLOOD GROVE**

(\$16.99).

Parks, Adele, **WOMAN LAST SEEN** (\$16.99).

Pek, Jane, **THE VERIFIERS** (\$17.00).

Sandford, John, **OCEAN PREY** (\$17.00).

St. John, Katherine, **THE SIREN** (\$16.99).

Swanson, Peter, **EVERY VOW YOU BREAK** (\$16.99).

Tudor, C. J., **THE BURNING GIRLS** (\$17.00).

Westlake, Donald E., **CALL ME A CAB** (\$14.95).

### History Mystery

Barry, Ava, **WINDHALL** (\$15.95).  
Bennett, S. J., **THE WINDSOR KNOT** (\$16.99).  
Buckley, Fiona, **FOREST OF SECRETS** (\$17.95).  
Gentill, Sulari, **WHERE THERE'S A WILL** (\$15.99).  
Neubauer, Erica Ruth, **MURDER AT WEDGEFIELD MANOR** (\$15.95).  
Penner, Sarah, **THE LOST APOTHECARY** (\$17.99).  
Charles Todd, **A FATAL LIE** (\$16.99).  
Winspear, Jacqueline, **THE CONSEQUENCE OF FEAR** (\$16.99).

### Thrillers

Abbott, Jeff, **AN AMBUSH OF WIDOWS** (\$16.99).  
Baldacci, David, **DAYLIGHT** (\$9.99).  
Bentley, Don, **THE OUTSIDE MAN** (\$9.99).  
Box, C. J., **DARK SKY** (\$9.99).  
Carr, Jack, **SAVAGE SON** (\$17.00).  
Collins, Max Allan, **QUARRY'S BLOOD** (\$12.95).  
Dugoni, Robert, **THE SILENT SISTERS** (\$15.95).  
Evanovich, Janet & Steve Hamilton, **THE BOUNTY** (\$17.00).  
Hamilton, Ian, **THE SULTAN OF SARAWAK** (\$15.99).  
Hood, Joshua, Robert Ludlum's **THE TREADSTONE EXILE** (\$9.99).  
Pessin, Al, **SHOCK WAVE** (\$8.99).  
Pobi, Robert, **UNDER PRESSURE** (\$18.99).  
Silva, Daniel, **THE CELLIST** (\$17.99).

# Sneak Previews

## Upcoming Mysteries

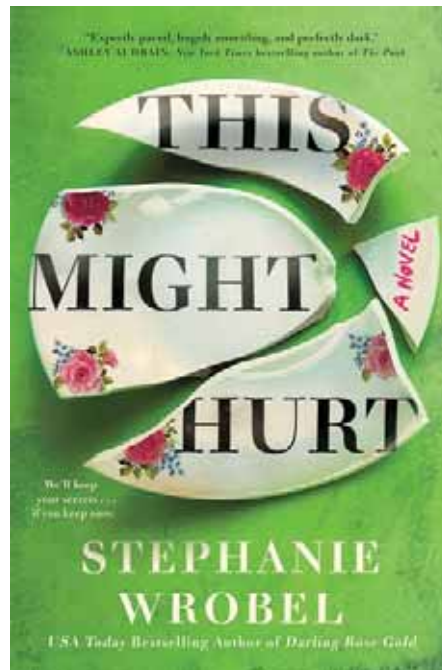


### February, 2022

- 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**
- 1 Allison Buccola, **CATCH HER WHEN SHE FALLS**
- 1 Nina de Gramont, **THE CHRISTIE AFFAIR**
- 1 Charles Todd, **A GAME OF FEAR** (Ian Rutledge)
- 1 Paul Vidich, **THE MATCHMAKER**
- 1 Alex Pine, **THE KILLER IN THE SNOW**
- 8 Jonathan Kellerman, **CITY OF THE DEAD**
- 8 Gregg Hurwitz, **DARK HORSE** (Orphan X)
- 8 Rick Bleiweiss, **PIGNON SCOR BION & THE BARBERSHOP DETECTIVES**
- 8 Emilya 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

- 15 Wayne Johnson, **THE RED CANOE**
- 22 Rob Hart, **THE PARADOX HOTEL**
- 22 Joseph Kanon, **THE BERLIN EXCHANGE**
- 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 Steph Broadribb, **DEATH IN THE SUNSHINE** (Retired Detectives)
- 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)

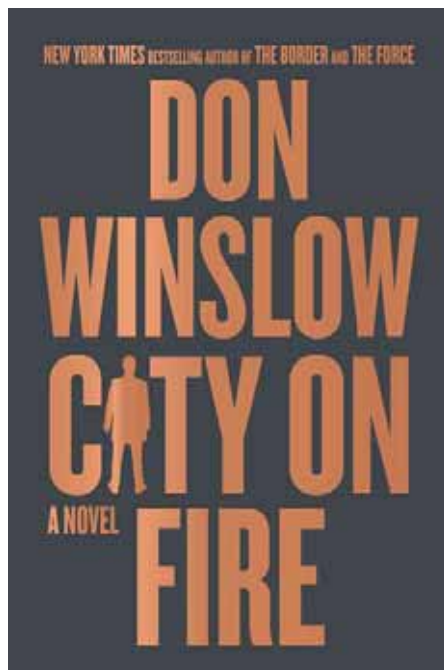
- 1 Cara Black, **MURDER AT THE PORTE DE VERSAILLES** (Aimee Leduc)
- 1 Louise Candlish, **THE HEIGHTS**
- 1 Loreth Anne White, **THE PATIENT'S SECRET**
- 1 Ellery Lloyd, **THE CLUB**
- 1 Nell Pattison, **NOWHERE TO HIDE**
- 1 Rosie Walsh, **THE LOVE OF MY LIFE**
- 8 C. J. Box, **SHADOWS REEL** (Joe Pickett)
- 8 Kellye Garrett, **LIKE A SISTER**
- 8 Mia P. Manansala, **HOMICIDE AND HALO-HALO** (Tita Rosie's Kitchen)
- 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**
- 8 Brad Meltzer, **THE LIGHTNING ROD** (Zig & Nola)
- 8 Candice Fox, **THE CHASE**
- 8 Greer Hendricks & Sarah Pekkanen, **THE GOLDEN COUPLE**
- 8 Sharon Dempsey, **WHO TOOK EDEN MULLIGAN?**
- 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)
- 15 Peter Swanson, **NINE LIVES**
- 22 Janet Evanovich, **THE RECOVERY AGENT**
- 22 Sara Blaedel, **A HARMLESS LIE** (Louise Rick)
- 22 Gigi Pandian, **UNDER LOCK & SKELETON KEY**
- 22 Nancy Allen, **RENEGADE** (Anonymous Justice)
- 22 Peter Swanson, **NINE LIVES**
- 22 Jacqueline Winspear, **A SUNLIT WEAPON** (Maisie Dobbs)
- 29 Camilla Sten, **THE RESTING PLACE**
- 29 Susan Hill, **A CHANGE OF CIRCUMSTANCE** (Simon Serrailier)
- 29 Jess Montgomery, **THE ECHOES** (Lily Ross)
- 29 Jeffrey Fleishman, **GOOD NIGHT, FOREVER** (Sam Carver)

- 29 Andrew Mayne, **SEA STORM**  
(Underwater Investigation Unit)
- 29 Lisa Scottoline, **WHAT HAPPENED TO THE BENNETTS**
- 29 Camilla Sten, **THE RESTING PLACE**
- 29 Korina Moss, **CHEDDAR OFF DEAD** (Cheese Shop)
- 29 Jesse Q. Sutanto, **FOUR ANTIES AND A WEDDING**
- 29 Simon Scarrow, **BLACKOUT**
- 29 Jude Deveraux, **A RELATIVE MURDER** (Medlar)

## April, 2022

- 5 Mike Lawson, **REDEMPTION**
- 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)
- 5 Grace D. Li, **PORTRAIT OF A THIEF**
- 5 Dan Chaon, **SLEEP WALK**
- 5 Sally Hepworth, **THE YOUNGER WIFE**
- 5 Stacie Murphy, **THE UNQUIET DEAD**
- 5 Bill James, **LOW PASTURES** (Harpur & Iles)
- 5 Joshua Hood, **Robert Ludlum's THE TREADSTONE TRANSGRESSION**
- 12 Anne Hillerman, **THE SACRED BRIDGE** (Leaphorn)
- 12 John Sandford, **THE INVESTIGATOR** (Letty Davenport)
- 12 Will Thomas, **FIERCE POISON** (Barker/Llewelyn)
- 12 Sarah Pearse, **THE RETREAT**
- 12 Anne Perry, **THREE DEBTS PAID** (Daniel Pitt)
- 12 Janice Thomas, **FINDING GRACE**
- 19 Samantha Jayne Allen, **PAY DIRT ROAD**
- 19 James Rollins, **KINGDOM OF BONES** (Sigma Force)
- 19 Caite Dolan-Leach, **DARK CIRCLES**
- 19 Sascha Rothchild, **BLOOD SUGAR**
- 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**



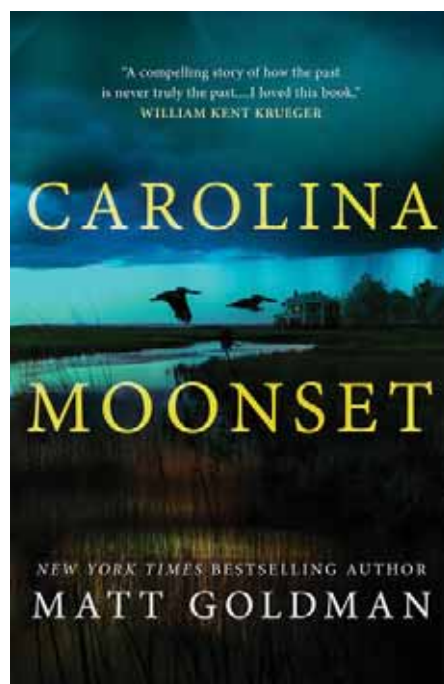
- 26 David Gordon, **THE WILD LIFE** (Joe the Bouncer)
- 26 Janelle Brown, **I'LL BE YOU**
- 26 Allison Brennan, **THE WRONG VICTIM**
- 26 Phoebe Morgan, **THE WILD GIRLS**
- 26 Khurram Rahman, **RIDE OR DIE** (Jay Qasim)
- 26 Marc Cameron, **COLD SNAP** (Arliss Cutter)
- 26 Anna Lee Huber, **A PERILOUS PERSPECTIVE** (Lady Darby)
- 26 Jeneva Rose, **ONE OF US IS DEAD**

## May, 2022

- 3 Chris Hauty, **STORM RISING** (Hayley Chill)
- 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**
- 3 Don Bentley, **HOSTILE INTENT** (Matt Drake)
- 3 Jane Shemilt, **THE PATIENT**
- 3 Claudia Gray, **THE MURDER OF**

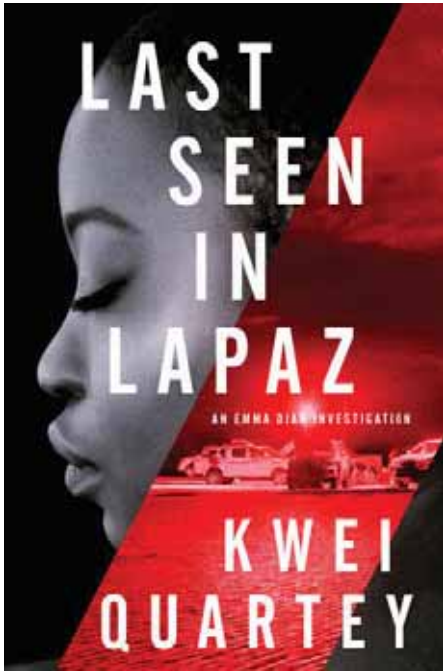
## MR. WICKHAM

- 3 Daniel Kalla, **THE DARKNESS IN THE LIGHT**
- 3 James Grady, **THIS TRAIN**
- 10 Mick Herron, **BAD ACTORS** (Slow Horses)
- 10 Dervla McTiernan, **THE MURDER RULE**
- 10 Gustaf Skordeman, **GEIGER**
- 10 Ashley Weaver, **THE KEY TO DECEIT** ((Electra McDonnell)
- 10 Jon Bassoff, **BENEATH CRUEL WATERS**
- 17 James Lee Burke, **EVERY CLOAK ROLLED IN BLOOD** (Holland)
- 17 May Cobb, **MY SUMMER DARLINGS**
- 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)
- 24 Richard O'Rawe, **GOERING'S GOLD** (Ructions O'Hare)
- 24 Ragnar Jonasson, **OUTSIDE**
- 24 David Housewright, **SOMETHING WICKED** (Rushmore McKenzie)
- 24 Greg Iles, **SOUTHERN MAN** (Penn Cage)
- 31 Matt Goldman, **CAROLINA MOONSET**



- 31 Jack Carr, **IN THE BLOOD** (James Reece)  
 31 Kelley Armstrong, **A RIP THROUGH TIME**  
 31 Nora Murphy, **THE FAVOR**

## June, 2022



- 7 Kwei Quartey, **LAST SEEN IN LAPAZ** (Emma Djan)  
 7 Adam White, **THE MIDCOAST**  
 7 Timothy Hallinan, **ROCK OF AGES** (Junior Bender)  
 7 Martin Edwards, **THE GIRL THEY ALL FORGOT** (Lake District)  
 7 Katharine Schellman, **LAST CALL AT THE NIGHTINGALE**  
 7 James Byrne, **THE GATEKEEPER** (Dez Limerick)  
 7 Chris Offutt, **SHIFTY'S BOYS** (Mick Hardin)  
 7 John Vercher, **AFTER THE LIGHTS GO OUT**  
 7 Marshall Karp, **SNOWSTORM IN AUGUST**  
 7 Sulari Gentill, **THE WOMAN IN THE LIBRARY**  
 7 Barbara Hambly, **DEATH AND HARD CIDER** (Benjamin January)  
 7 Tara Moss, **THE GHOSTS OF PARIS** (Billie Walker)  
 14 Leonard Goldberg, **THE BLUE DIAMOND** (Daughter of Sherlock)  
 14 Alan Drew, **THE RECRUIT**

- 14 Carolyn Haines, **LADY OF BONES** (Sarah Booth Delaney)  
 14 Fiona Barton, **LOCAL GONE MISSING**  
 14 Nina Sadowsky, **PRIVACY**  
 21 Fabian Nicieza, **THE SELF-MADE WIDOW** (Andie Stern & Kenny Lee)  
 21 Lee Goldberg, **MOVIELAND** (Eve Ronin)  
 21 Julie Clark, **THE LIES I TELL**  
 21 Allison Montclair, **THE UNKEPT WOMAN** (Sparks & Bainbridge)  
 21 Sarah Stewart Taylor, **THE DROWNING SEA** (Maggie D'arcy)  
 21 Riley Sager, **THE HOUSE ACROSS THE LAKE**  
 28 Jeffrey B. Burton, **THE LOST** (Mace Reid K-9)  
 28 Ellie Alexander, **DONUT DISTURB** (Bakeshop)  
 28 Paul Doiron, **HATCHET ISLAND** (Mike Bowditch)  
 28 Elly Griffiths, **THE LOCKED ROOM** (Ruth Galloway)

## July, 2022

- 5 Tess Gerritsen, **LISTEN TO ME** (Rizzoli & Isles)  
 5 Mark Greaney, **ARMORED**  
 5 Linda Castillo, **THE HIDDEN ONE** (Kate Burkholder)  
 5 David Rosenfelt, **HOLY CHOW** (Andy Carpenter)  
 5 Ian Hamilton, **FINALE** (Uncle Chow)  
 12 Brandon Webb & John David Mann, **COLD FEAR** (Finn)  
 12 Ruth Ware, **THE IT GIRL**  
 12 Dan Fesperman, **WINTER WORK**  
 12 Simon Toyne, **DARK OBJECTS**  
 12 Nev March, **PERIL AT THE EXPOSITION** (Jim Agnihotri)  
 12 Rachel Howzell Hall, **WE LIE HERE**  
 12 Emma Viskic, **THOSE WHO PERISH** (Caleb Zelic)  
 19 Jennifer Hillier, **THINGS WE DO IN THE DARK**  
 19 Blake Crouch, **UPGRADE**  
 19 Brad Thor, **RISING TIGER** (Scot Harvath)  
 19 Paula Munier, **THE WEDDING PLOT** (Mercy Carr)  
 19 Daniel Silva, **PORTRAIT OF AN UNKNOWN WOMAN** (Gabriel Allon)

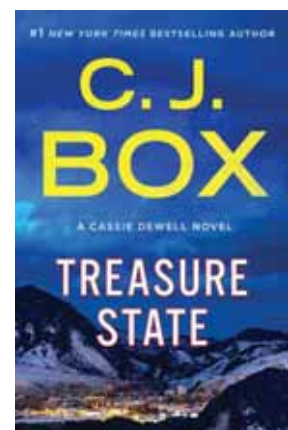
- 19 Ed Lin, **DEATH DOESN'T FORGET** (Taipei)  
 26 Megan Miranda, **THE LAST TO VANISH**  
 26 Karen Cleveland, **THE NEW NEIGHBOR**  
 26 Lindsey Davis, **DESPERATE UNDERTAKING** (Flavia Albia)

## August, 2022

- 2 Karin Slaughter, **GIRL, FORGOTTEN**  
 2 Donna Andrews, **ROUND UP THE USUAL PEACOCKS** (Meg Langslow)  
 2 Hayley Scrivenor, **DIRT CREEK**  
 9 Megan Goldin, **STAY AWAKE**  
 9 Joanna Schaffhausen, **LONG GONE** (Annalisa Vega)  
 9 Robert Pobi, **DO NO HARM** (Lucas Page)  
 9 Nicola Upson, **DEAR LITTLE CORPSES** (Josephine Tey)  
 16 Sandie Jones, **THE BLAME GAME**  
 16 Mark Pryor, **DIE AROUND SUNDOWN**  
 22 Tom Bradby, **YESTERDAY'S SPY**  
 23 Faye Kellerman, **THE HUNT** (Decker/Lazarus)  
 23 Angela Marsons, **FIRST BLOOD** (Kim Stone)  
 30 John Galligan, **BAD DAY BREAKING** (Bad Axe)  
 30 Alice Feeney, **DAISY DARKER**

## September, 2022

- 20 C. J. Box, **TREASURE STATE** (Cody Hoyt/Cassie Dewell)  
 20 Barry Eisler, **AMOK** (Dox)



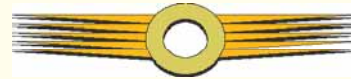
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