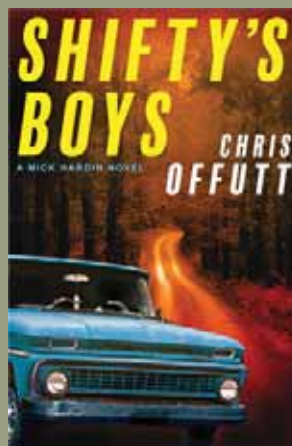
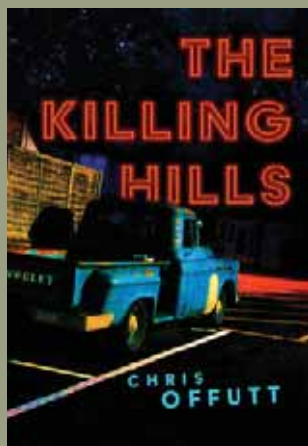
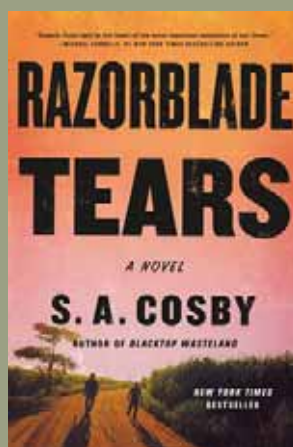
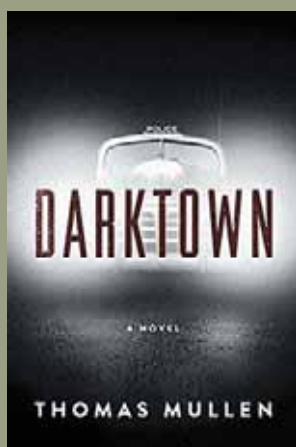


Deadly Pleasures *Mystery Magazine*



The Best of Southern Noir



Southern Noir

by George Easter

& DP Staff

I've seen the term "Southern Noir" thrown around a lot lately. Sometimes it is called Rural Noir, Country Noir, Hillbilly Noir or Redneck Noir. It probably covers some of the same types of novels that are referred to as Southern Gothic or Grit Lit. What Southern Noir has in common with these other terms is that it refers to hardboiled, gritty crime novels set in the southern states of Texas, Mississippi, Louisiana, Arkansas, Kentucky, Tennessee, Oklahoma, Alabama, Virginia, West Virginia, Georgia and the Carolinas. I consider crime fiction set in Florida a sub-genre of its own.

In the "old-days," the term "noir" was characterized by cynicism, fatalism and moral ambiguity. Characters in noirish novels were usually trapped in a downward spiral and their stories didn't have a good ending.

But now it seems that over the last decade or so the term "noir" has taken on the much broader meaning of gritty, hard-boiled crime fiction. It is more of a marketing device now than a term with an exact meaning.

And the descriptive term "noir" is now applied to various regions of the world. We have all heard of Bush Noir (Australian crime fiction set in that country's hinterland), Scottish Noir (Val McDermid, Stuart MacBride, Stuart Neville, Ian Rankin) and Irish Noir (Ken Bruen). And now there is Southern Noir, which has been capturing a lot of attention over the last few years – especially with the advent of S.A. Cosby

and his award-winning novels.

Anyone who is acquainted with the North and South regions of the United States knows that there are significant cultural and historical differences between the two. Southern Noir emphasizes those differences and gives us glimpses into what, to most of us, is an unfamiliar culture.

For purposes of this article, I am including novels set in the South that are gritty and hardboiled, even if they don't fit the technical definition of noir. Most of them have rural settings, but a few are set in cities. I'll let you figure out if they deserve to be called Southern Noir or not – if you can figure out exactly what that means.

Chris Offutt



To my mind, the recent works of Chris Offutt epitomize the best of Southern Noir. Chris grew up in Kentucky at the foot of the Appalachian Mountains. He has written widely over the past 30 or so years producing mainstream fiction novels, short stories, poetry, TV scripts, nonfiction articles, memoirs – and even comic books. Recently he has turned his focus to crime fiction, first with **COUNTRY DARK** (2018) and most recently with the superb crime novels, **THE KILLING HILLS** (2021) and **SHIFTY'S BOYS** (2022). They represent a vivid depiction of the area he grew up in.

I started noticing Chris Offutt's name as I read positive reviews about **THE KILLING HILLS**. Unfortunately it came out during the height of the pandemic and I never got a copy of it to read and review. Then at the end of last year, I noticed that it appeared on five "best of the year" lists, including one from our contributor Mike Ripley. That year-end process of gathering all of the "best" lists, usually results in my finding a book or two that I should have read, but didn't. **THE KILLING HILLS** was that book for me. I got hold of a copy, devoured it, loved it and became passionate about it and its author. Fortunately for me, not long after reading **THE KILLING HILLS**, I gained access to an advance electronic copy of its sequel **SHIFTY'S BOYS** which comes out June 7, 2022. I liked it as much as the first in the series.

Reviews of the Mick Hardin Series

THE KILLING HILLS

by Chris Offutt

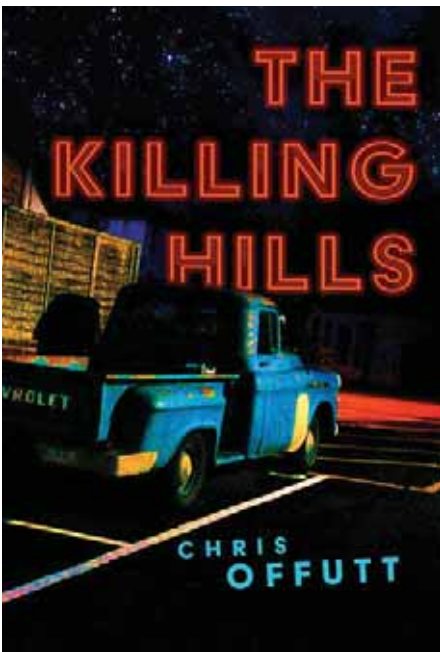
Grove Atlantic, \$26.00, June, 2021

Mick Hardin #1

Rating: A

Home on leave, Army CID investigator Mick Hardin, finds out that his expectant wife's baby may not be his, which has put his mental state and marriage into a state of turmoil.

His sister, the newly minted sheriff, asks him for help on her first murder case and he agrees. Mick's knowledge of



the eastern Kentucky hills of his childhood with its nuanced customs and the genealogy of its multi-generational families proves invaluable in the investigation. In these hills, familial blood and loyalty are everything – something that outsiders don't always recognize.

Unorthodox would be an apt adjective to describe Mick's methods of investigating and bringing the guilty to justice. But in his heart, Mick is a kind man and his way of doing things reflect that kindness.

What stood out immediately to me is the quality and insightfulness of Offutt's prose. I often skip over descriptive passages written by other authors, but not in this case. The author's lyrical prose was something to be savored. Here's a little snippet, "Every child had learned the words: 'As we forgive those who trespass against us,' a strong and generous message that neglected to include a timeframe. In the hills it was handier to forgive trespassers after killing them."

If I had read this in 2021 when it came out, **THE KILLING HILLS** would have been on my list of best mysteries of that year.

SHIFTY'S BOYS

by Chris Offutt

Grove Atlantic, \$27.00, June, 2022

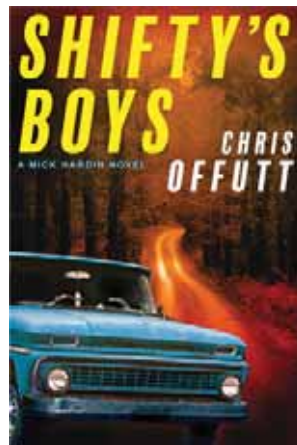
Mick Hardin #2

Rating: A

The premise of this wonderfully-told tale is quite simple. Mick Hardin is home on leave from the army, recovering from an IED attack and dealing with his imminent divorce. Barney Kissick, the local heroin dealer is found dead in the center of town and Mick is asked by Barney's mother, Shifty Kissick, to find out who killed her son. Shifty was impressed with how Mick handled things in the first book of the series, **THE KILLING HILLS**, and doesn't trust the police to get to the bottom of things.

Before long, Mick becomes aware that this is not a simple drug deal gone bad. There are bigger forces at play. And when those forces sense that Mick is getting too close to the truth, they try to silence him. Bad move on their part.

There is a lot more going on in this story, but I don't want to spoil any surprises for you. In just two relatively short novels, Chris Offutt has made me a dedicated fan of this series which I will eagerly read as each new episode comes out. Write faster, Chris.

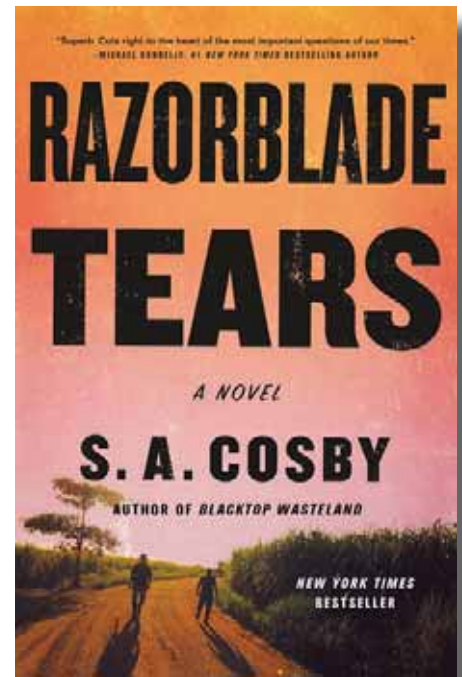


Three Other Writers of Southern Noir of Special Note

S. A. Cosby

We have sung the praises of this exceptional writer over and over again. See the cover article in *DP* Issue 92 for more details about Shawn Cosby and reviews of his mega-hit novels:

BLACKTOP WASTELAND (2020)
– Winner of the Barry Award for Best



Novel

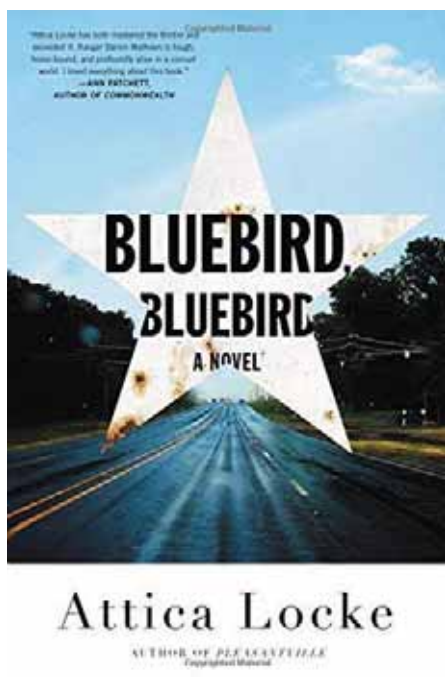
RAZORBLADE TEARS (2021) –
Nominated for this year's Barry Award
for Best Novel

Attica Locke



Attica Locke was born in Houston, Texas where her civil-rights activist parents named her after the Attica Prison Riot. She has written five crime novels and spends most of her recent working life writing scripts and producing shows for Netflix and Hulu. When she comes out with a new book I plan to do a more

extensive cover article on Attica and her work. Her two most recent crime novels in the Highway 59/Texas Ranger Darren Matthews series are reviewed below. I listened to audio versions of both books and highly agree with the following reviews by Larry Gandle and Kristopher Zgorski.



BLUEBIRD, BLUEBIRD

by Attica Locke

Winner of Edgar Award for Best Novel

Mulholland, \$26.00

Highway 59/Texas Ranger

Darren Matthews #1

Rating: A

[Reviewed by Larry Gandle]

Darren Matthews is a black Texas Ranger living near Houston. He is from the rural East Texas region and is currently on suspension for a deadly confrontation over which his career is being decided by a grand jury. A call from a friend in the FBI asks him to look into the murder of Michael White, a black man killed in Luck, a small town on Highway 59. Darren agrees and drives to Luck which consists of a black-owned diner, a bar frequented by white supremacists and not much else. Upon his arrival, a small restaurant owned by Geneva Sweet whose husband was killed by robbers six years ago, is surrounded by police as a white woman's body was just found in the bayou behind the

building. Darren examines all of these deaths. He must confront the white supremacists, the town's secrets and deep racial history and tension. Of course, his life is also at stake.

This is a book that truly needs time to grow on you. There is no rapid action. Instead, there is a careful rendering of the characters and their back stories. We must take the time to know who we are spending the book with. The locale also becomes quite real and skillfully painted. The result is a literary crime fiction novel written by a supremely talented young writer who has already written three well regarded books. Personally, I have been unable to read two of her previous books but this one I allowed to wash over me. It worked. Once the reader gets to know the main characters, the story becomes increasingly tense and quite riveting. Darren Matthews reminds me of Harry Bosch in his relentless search of the truth even if it is inconvenient or dangerous. He is primarily a loner and married to his job with a hapless wife left to the side. The solution is clever and the exposition done reasonably well without the villain holding the gun on the hero. This is an excellent crime fiction novel and one of the best books of the year.

HEAVEN, MY HOME

by Attica Locke

Mulholland, \$27.00

Rating: A

[Reviewed by Kristopher Zgorski]

It was clear with the publication of **BLUEBIRD, BLUEBIRD** in 2017 that Attica Locke's Highway 59 mystery series was going to be something special. This was further confirmed when this overdue author won the Best Novel Edgar Award for that gem of a book the following year.

When last readers saw Texas Ranger Darren Mathews, he was picking up the pieces from a particularly grueling time in rural Lark, Texas. **HEAVEN, MY HOME** picks up very shortly afterwards and finds Mathews dealing with troubles back at home. The marriage that is so important to Darren is on shaky ground, just on the edge of an emotional precipice brought about by

his own poor decisions. Meanwhile, his mother is manipulating him with some explosive information she obtained – information that could destroy Darren's career, his reputation, and the lives of several others.

When the opportunity to work a case in Marion County, Texas arises, Darren finds himself wanting to help, but also knowing that by leaving he is putting everything else at risk. However, it turns out that those in charge want to place him within the vortex of the investigation not necessarily to discover the whereabouts of the missing boy, but rather to gain vital intel regarding the actions of the Aryan Brotherhood of Texas (ABT). Readers know that Darren Mathews is a man who holds justice as a beacon and there is no way that he will do one without doing the other, all while also trying to salvage what is left of his own life.

Never one to shy away from potential controversy, Attica Locke has this complex mystery unfold against the backdrop of Donald Trump's election as president. While other works in the crime fiction field have referenced this watershed moment in American political history, **HEAVEN, MY HOME** is likely the first to juxtapose it so skillfully beside dramatic moments that highlight and reflect the problematic



and dangerous rhetoric of that administration.

Through it all, Attica Locke deepens the already intricate characterizations of her cast of characters. So real do these people feel that readers would be forgiven for expecting to hear updates about them on the local news broadcasts. And it is impossible to end this review without taking a moment to highlight Attica Locke's lush writing and her ability to elicit emotion with precise word choice, sentence structure, and by varying the rhythm of language. Just as the title of this novel comes from the country-blues music native to the location, Attica Locke's writing makes a music all its own, seducing the reader with each new lyrical flourish. Expect to see **HEAVEN, MY HOME** on "best of" and award lists in the coming months. Read it immediately and then join me in anxiously awaiting the next Highway 59 novel from the one and only Attica Locke.

Thomas Mullen



Thomas Mullen was born in Rhode Island and is a graduate of Oberlin College. He is married, has two children and lives in Atlanta, Georgia. What makes Thomas a bit unusual in my mind is that he is white and writes so knowledgeably about the black culture of Atlanta. His *Darktown* series consists of three crime novels (so far).

I've listened to audio versions of the first two and plan to listen to the third this month. Larry Gandle reviewed the third (see below) and gave it a B+, which is a good rating for Larry. If this book is anywhere near the quality of the first two, I expect to give it a rating of A. I'll let you know in the future how that turns out.

The Darktown Series

DARKTOWN

by Thomas Mullen

Atria/37 Ink, \$26.00, 2016

Darktown #1

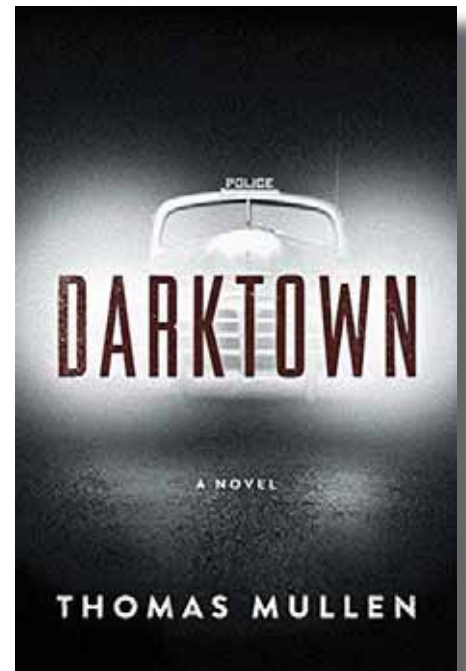
Rating: A

[Reviewed by George Easter]

Political pressure causes the town fathers of Atlanta, Georgia to hire its first eight black police officers. But that doesn't keep these same power brokers from severely restricting what the black officers can and can't do. For instance, they are to police only black neighborhoods (Darktown) and aren't allowed in police headquarters. They must work out of the basement of a gym and they can't question nor arrest white suspects. Their beats are walking ones – no police cars for the black officers. Their fellow white officers treat them with undeserved disdain and condescension.

Enter two of the new recruits. Lucius Boggs is a WWII vet and college graduate. He is the son of a well-respected preacher and was brought up with high standards. His partner, Tommy Smith, is another WWII vet who is cut from rougher cloth and is a bit of a hot head and womanizer. But they both want to police in the right way. It's just that they keep running into situations where "the right way" is not a clear, clean path.

Boggs and Smith seem to be the only police officers who care when Lily Ellsworth, a black girl, last seen by them in a car driven by a white man, later shows up beaten to death. The white police are content to sweep the whole matter under a rug. But Boggs and Smith dig deeper – under the radar because if their white bosses knew what they were doing, they could lose their jobs. They soon run afoul of the corrupt and racist



white cop Dunlow, who is out to squash them. Dunlow's junior partner, Denny Rakestraw, wants to do the right thing and is continually thwarted by Dunlow. Boggs and Smith eventually find a sympathetic ally in Rakestraw, but he is bound by custom and rules as much as the two black policemen.

DARKTOWN is a winner on many levels. The story line is wonderfully brought to life by a gifted writer. It packs quite an emotional impact as the reader witnesses social injustice on a large scale. Boggs and Smith are noble knights who fight the good fight with the meager weapons afforded them.

LIGHTNING MEN

by Thomas Mullen

Atria/37 Ink, \$26.00, 2016

Darktown #2

Rating: A

[Reviewed by George Easter]

Atlanta police officers Lucius Boggs and Tommy Smith return in this sequel to **DARKTOWN**.

One plot line of this fine crime novel involves a white neighborhood (in which white police officer Denny Rakestraw lives), into which three black families move (including Tommy Smith's sister and brother-in-law). This creates a combustible situation. Some of the white neighbors contribute to a fund to buy the three black families' homes, but

before that can happen, the money is supposedly stolen and one of the black couples is arrested for the crime.

Another narrative follows Lucius Boggs and his girlfriend Julie as they prepare to get married. She has a son Sage by a prior relationship and intentionally failed to mention that Jeremiah, her former boyfriend and father to her son, has spent the last few years in prison. Jeremiah is now out of prison and shows up on Julie's doorstep wanting to be part of his son's life. Julie is adamant about excluding him. Friction ensues.

A third plot involves a few Ku Klux Klan members being duped into intimidating a white businessman, which leads to his untimely death.

The issue of race relations is pervasive in this series and nowhere is it better on display than in viewing how the Atlanta police department treated its black cops in the late 1940s. It makes one blood boil to read this series and realize that it is all based on the reality of the times.

Words fail me to convey to you how well written and emotionally charged the Darktown novels are. I wish I had read them when they first came out so that I could have more timely trumpeted their excellence in the hope of increasing word-of-mouth buzz. But it isn't too late to read them, so if you haven't, please do. I can't think of a better series to read in a book club. They contain so much food for thought and discussion.

MIDNIGHT ATLANTA

by Thomas Mullen

Little Brown UK, \$26.99, 2020

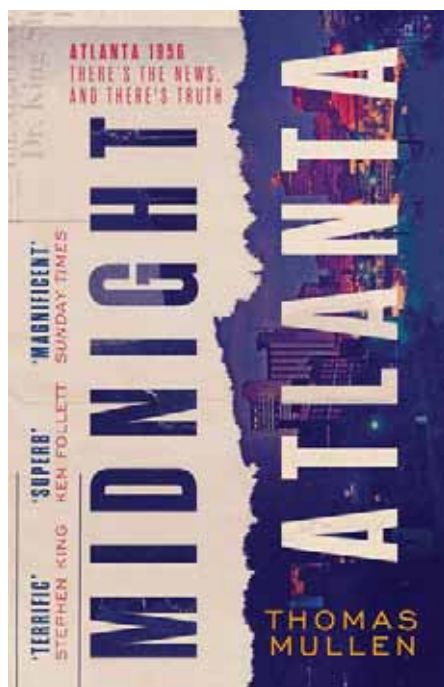
Darktown #3

CWA Gold Dagger Nominee

Rating: B+

[Reviewed by Larry Gandle]

In Atlanta, 1956, Arthur Bishop, editor of the leading black newspaper, is shot and killed in his office. Tommy Smith, one of Bishop's reporters, was sleeping downstairs and, after calling in the shooting, is arrested for murder. Once Tommy is released, he decides to investigate the murder on his own. As a black man and ex-cop, Tommy can get people to speak to him who would ordinarily slam the door in his face.



Also attempting to solve the murder is Joe McGinnis, a white police sergeant in charge of a squad of black police officers. For some reason, the FBI, communists and PIs are also involved in what appears to be a cover up. At the same time, black civil rights activists such as Martin Luther King are leading a bus strike in Birmingham and schools are slowly being integrated. There is a lot of hate out there in the streets and this will place Smith, McGinnis and his squad into harm's way.

This is the third book in the Darktown series referring to the black section of Atlanta. The author has written an intriguing book that combines a PI novel, police procedural, thriller and historical novel together into a very compelling read. Characters are well developed but they do get put through the ringer as racist cops and criminals surround them. With multiple-points-of-view chapters, the pacing moves swiftly and the plot is never boring. This is a solid crime fiction novel unique for its historical perspective. It is a worthy member of the CWA shortlist for the Gold Dagger Award.

As one might expect, considering the history of the South, many of the crime

novels set there deal with the issue of race relations. I grew up in racially integrated schools (in New York) and was blessed with parents who were unprejudiced so I have always had empathy and sympathy for all ethnicities, especially my African-American friends from my childhood. I remember being incensed by the racial prejudice depicted in movies such as *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *To Sir With Love* and *In The Heat of the Night*. The recent novels by S. A. Cosby, Attica Locke and Thomas Mullen have further fueled my indignation. The writing of these three writers is superb and, together with that of Chris Offutt, represent the best of Southern Noir.

Debut Southern Noir

And now for some new authors on the scene.

DON'T KNOW TOUGH

by Eli Cranor (Soho Crime, \$24.95, March 2022)

Rating: A-

[Reviewed by Ted Hertel and George Easter]

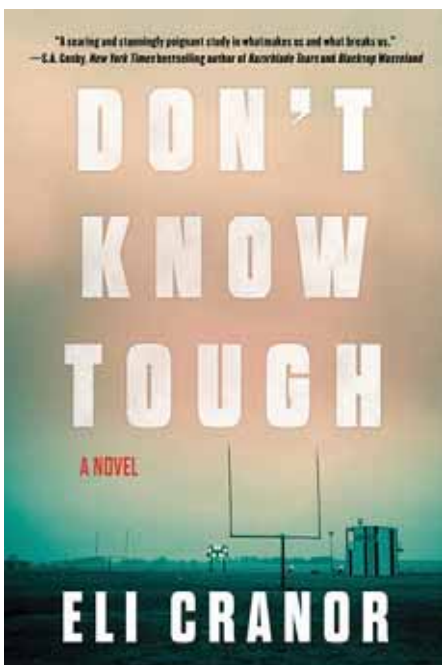
After high school football coach Trent Powers is fired from his California job, he moves with his family to Denton, Arkansas, to take the same position there. They're now in the Bible Belt, where everybody, he is told, is on God's team. Powers sees it as his mission to save one lost boy, Billy Lowe, a talented but troubled "sawed-off white boy . . . built hard and low to the ground." Lowe is an abused, often violent (on and off the field) young man who speaks in a Black dialect. When he crosses the line one night on the field, Powers takes him into his own home. After all, the team is in the playoffs for the first time in years and Powers needs Billy in order to win games. But when his abuser, Billy's mom's boyfriend, is found murdered, the boy goes on the run. How can one man save someone who no longer cares?

Eli Cranor's novel was the winner of the Peter Lovesey First Crime Novel Contest (after over two hundred rejections!). It's a powerful look at the forces that can push a person to explode in

violence, taking it out on everybody within his range. Told in alternating chapters from Billy's first-person point of view (his voice filled with that convincing dialect) to omniscient third-person, the story moves at the speed of a running back having an open field in front of him and a pack of defenders hard on his tail. The author is able to dig deeply into the psyche of the young men under Powers' tutelage, as well as the hopes and fears of the parents who are wrapped up in the lives of their kids. All the characters are sharply and realistically drawn, each one having the course of their lives changed by the actions of one young football player. Life and death choices lead to sacrifice as the novel spins toward its perhaps inevitable conclusion.

Author Cranor was a football player and high school coach in an Arkansas town much like Denton. Trying to change the lives of his often troubled players took such a great toll on him that he was left both physically and emotionally exhausted, causing him to leave the coaching profession and turn to writing. This novel rings with that authenticity, taking a deep dive into the world of high school football in a town filled with fanatics of all kinds, where the game is a distraction from the pain of everyday life.

DON'T KNOW TOUGH is a mix-



ture of God, sports, and family that makes for compelling reading. To paraphrase Norman Maclean, in this town there was no clear line between religion and football. It's *Friday Night Lights* meets *Deliverance* meets noir. This is a terrific debut from an author who pretty much lived the story. I can't wait to see what he does next.

George Easter's Take:

I listened to the audio version of **DON'T KNOW TOUGH**, narrated by the author – and he was fabulous with his authentic-sounding voices. If there is a spectrum for darkness and noir, this novel is at the far end of that spectrum.

PAY DIRT ROAD

by Samantha Jayne Allen
Minotaur, \$27.99, April

Rating: C+

[Reviewed by George Easter]

Annie McIntyre is a college graduate, but like many of her classmates, has had a difficult time finding a job that matches her education. So she has come home to Garnett, Texas and works as a waitress in the meantime.

When a close friend (and fellow waitress) is found murdered, Annie is deeply disturbed. Someone she works with is arrested for the crime, but she doesn't think he is guilty.

It so happens that Annie's grandfather is a private detective (supposedly retired) and he agrees to take Annie on as an apprentice so she can look into the matter of her friend's murder for the accused's mother who has hired her grandfather's agency to prove her son's innocence.

PAY DIRT ROAD is more of a character study of Annie McIntyre and her hometown than it is a mystery. The narrative flow is constantly interrupted by the author taking side roads to explore things that have nothing to do with solving the murder mystery. In the end, the murderer isn't revealed by Annie's detection skills, but by the villain revealing his/her own identity.

This novel has been highly praised in other quarters and as such is listed in our DP List of the Best of 2022, so I may be wrong in my assessment. I'll let you be the judge.

Other Southern Noir Novels Reviewed

THE KINGDOMS OF SAVANNAH

by George Dawes Green
Celadon Books, \$26.99, July

Rating: B-

[Reviewed by George Easter]

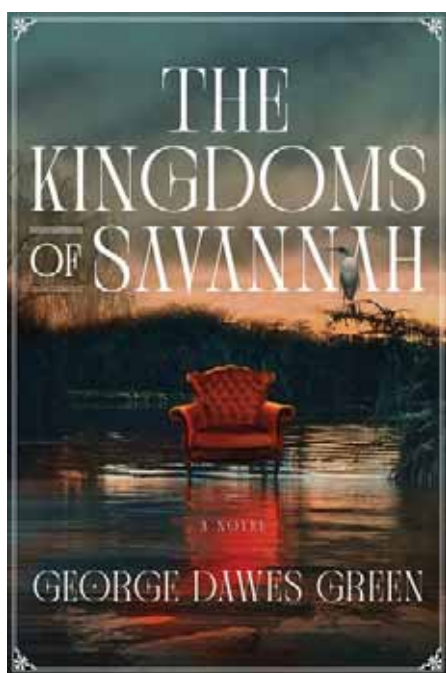
The city of Savannah, Georgia epitomizes the Old South and is the backdrop to this mystery novel that borders on mainstream fiction.

The domineering doyenne of Savannah society is Morgana Musgrove, the matriarch of a very dysfunctional family (mainly her fault), comprised of two sons who dislike each other and two daughters who have little respect for their mother. Morgana throws lavish annual charitable events, but secretly is running out of money. One of her side businesses is, of all things, a private detective agency she inherited from her dead husband.

A bar called Bo Peep's is one of Savannah's favorite gathering places and Morgana's granddaughter Jaq works there part-time as a bartender. Two of her friends, Luke and Stony, come in one night for a good time and Stony (a contract archeologist) begins talking about a mysterious nearby "Kingdom" inhabited by the King's Soldiers. It doesn't make any sense to Jaq.

Within an hour Luke is dead and Stony is missing.

Not long after that a derelict building burns down and a charred body is found in its wreckage. The owner of the building, Archie Guzman, is known for cutting corners and he is arrested for arson and homicide. Everyone thinks he's guilty. But when the "Guz" offers Morgana \$200,000 as a retainer to find out who set fire to his building, she grabs at the chance to right her financial ship. Morgana then proceeds to inveigle her four children and granddaughter Jaq to help with the investigation that takes them from the stately homes of the rich to the homeless camps of the dispossessed. Slowly (and I mean slowly) a plot is uncovered that involves a multi-million dollar land grab and the desecration of an import-



ant (but unknown to the public) site of historical significance.

I found **THE KINGDOMS OF SAVANNAH** a tough read. The pace of the novel was slow and the narrative jumped around a lot. Much of what was happening didn't make a lot of sense until the final reveal. Except for Jaq and Ransom Musgrove, the characters were largely unlikeable. However, **KINGDOMS** does give us considerable insight into how a city in the Old South operates. It just isn't anywhere that I would care to live. The writer certainly has talent, just not the kind of talent that I appreciate.

George Dawes Green made a big splash in 1994 with his **THE CAVE-MAN'S VALENTINE**. If I remember correctly, Barry Gardner (for whom the Barry Awards are named) reviewed it quite favorably. It won the Best First Mystery Edgar Award in 1995. Surprisingly, George Dawes Green only wrote two more books – **THE JUROR** in 1994 and **RAVENS** thirteen years later (gasp!) in 2009. Not exactly a book a year, which conventional wisdom has long dictated as a prerequisite for a successful writing career. Now he's coming out with his fourth book in 28 years.

What would a treatment of Southern Noir be without a review of a Dave Robicheaux novel by the masterful James

Lee Burke?

A PRIVATE CATHEDRAL

by James Lee Burke

Simon & Schuster, \$28.00, 2020

Rating: A

[Reviewed by Ted Hertel]

Dave Robicheaux finds himself caught between two warring families, the Shondells and the Balangies, longtime enemies in the New Iberia, Louisiana, underworld. In purest Romeo and Juliet style, teenagers Johnny Shondell and Isolde Balangie have fallen in love and run away after Isolde was given to Johnny's uncle as a sex slave (well, okay, maybe not *totally* like Romeo and Juliet!). In his search to find them, Robicheaux, as usual, manages to aggravate his enemies to the point where one of them hires a most unusual assassin, a time traveler from the sixteenth century named Gideon Richetti. Richetti travels on a ghost ship that both Robicheaux and his friend Clete Purcel (who also likes to poke the bear) see coming in their dreams. In order to rescue the two young people, Robicheaux will have to overcome his own troubled past and defeat an invincible foe.

All right, if all of that sounds like a good bit too much of a jumble, don't worry. James Lee Burke manages to pull all of these disparate elements of crime, romance, horror, and science fiction together seamlessly. It's not the first time he's added supernatural elements to one of his stories (e.g., **IN THE ELECTRIC MIST WITH CONFEDERATE DEAD**, which is one of the all-time great book titles). This is the twenty-third book (and third in what the author considers his trilogy of **ROBICHEAUX**, **THE NEW IBERIA BLUES**, and now this novel) in Burke's consistently entertaining series featuring this on-again off-again detective. Set after the death of Robicheaux's second wife, in the days before 9/11 changed so many things in our world, it is an examination of the origin of evil that is assailing the world still today.

When "the Bobbsey Twins from Homicide" are back in town, pretty

much anything can happen. But of course it turns out that the enemy of Dave's enemy is still Dave's enemy. So the bullets fly and people die. When the world becomes too much, when loss and despair come with the rising of the sun, when the truth isn't an easy burden to bear, Robicheaux and Purcell find help coming from a most unlikely source. Mix all of these components with Burke's unparalleled poetry of prose and you have one of the best novels of 2020, one that looks back more than twenty years but could not be more relevant today, politically, socially or morally. This may be Burke's finest novel yet, which is saying quite a lot. Read it. I don't think you'll be disappointed.

WHAT'S DONE IN DARKNESS

By Laura McHugh

Random House \$27.00

Rating: A

[Reviewed by Kristopher Z]

Laura McHugh has made a career of writing literary mysteries set in atmospheric locations, but with **WHAT'S DONE IN DARKNESS** she stakes her claim as the queen of rural. This novel is a tightly-coiled narrative with the venomous bite of a rattlesnake. By distilling the action down to its emotional core, McHugh gifts readers with a gem of a novel that resonates profoundly and lingers in the mind long after the final page is turned.

WHAT'S DONE IN DARKNESS begins on the day that seventeen-year-old Sarabeth Shepherd is abducted from a roadside farm-stand in rural Arkansas. This first chapter oozes with ambience and unease. Readers will be impressed that such a brief chapter conveys so much valuable information – all in exquisitely crafted prose – before culminating in a cliffhanger ending that requires the reader to continue.

From here, the narrative begins its alternating structure of present-day action interrupted by scenes from the past. In the present Sarah now works at an animal rescue facility. She has dropped the "beth" from her name in an effort to leave behind her traumatic past. It is not very long before readers learn that



Sarabeth was found on the roadside, left for dead, one week after her abduction. She's been "free" for five years, but Sarah has never fully dealt with the scars of that week in captivity. She thought by fleeing the Ozarks she could start over, but then Nick Farrow finds her.

Nick is investigating a series of abductions that are eerily similar to Sarah's experience; he is hoping that she will answer a few questions that might benefit the investigations. What starts as a conversation eventual leads to Sarah returning to her hometown, unprepared to face the truths that still cause her nightmares. Sarabeth's ultra-religious family, and the community in which they live, have secrets that hide in the darkness, ready to consume Sarah (and others) once again.

Laura McHugh pulls no punches with documenting the aftereffects of trauma and the differing paths to recovery. Her prose is hypnotic, lulling readers into a sense of security, yet always aware there is danger lingering beyond each page turn. Sarah's bond with her sister roots the story in family, even as readers get the sense that this community is full of fractured households. When the foundation is built on secrets, any revelation can lead to the destruction of the whole.

WHAT'S DONE IN DARKNESS is only about 250 pages, so the quick reading time allows for immersion far beyond what is commonly found. Readers get to know Sarah (and Sarabeth) on such an intimate level, that at times the desire to just give her a hug is overwhelming. She is not a character that

will be forgotten anytime soon.

There is little doubt that **WHAT'S DONE IN DARKNESS** deserves to be the book that makes Laura McHugh a household name, but she has released a string of exceptional works that readers can now explore as they wait for her next masterpiece.

THE UNWILLING

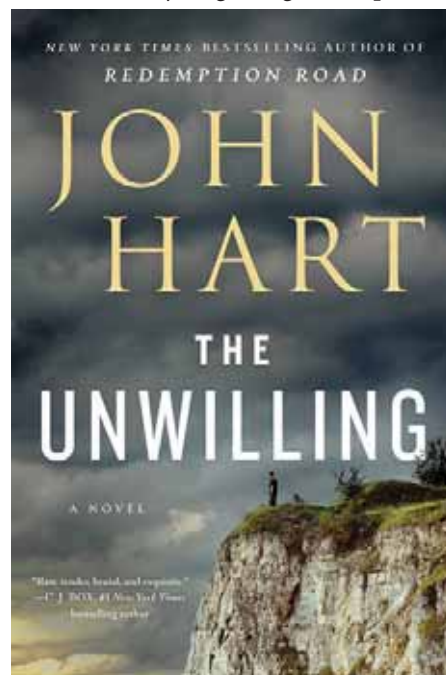
by John Hart

St. Martin's, \$27.99, February 2, 2021

Rating: A-

[Reviewed by Larry Gandle]

In the South during the Vietnam war, Gibby has grown up with two brothers affected by the war. His oldest brother was killed there and his other brother, Jason, came back a changed man. Jason is just getting out of prison



after a couple of years for drugs. He is now out and wants to have some relationship with Gibby but their parents do not want him around. Their mother is overprotective of Gibby and their father is a local police detective who has written off his second son but feels conflicted over that. What sets off this compulsively readable plot is when a young woman is found brutally murdered and Jason is arrested for it. It seems someone in the prison is controlling things on the outside. Gibby decides to investigate and this leads him into danger that could threaten his life and the life of his best friend, Chance.

There is so much to this brilliant novel- family loyalty, friendship, coming of age and the horrors of the Vietnam war. Characters are well thought out and for the most part realistic, but the villains are over the top. This book reminds me in various ways of Thomas Harris' **SILENCE OF THE LAMBS** in that the villain, X, is a brutal psychopath but, also, brilliant and very rich allowing him vast resources. Once it takes off, the plot is relentless, and the book is difficult to put down. My only complaint is that the action and situation is sometimes over the top especially in the climactic scenes. It is a fun read and will confirm John Hart as one of the best crime fiction writers working today. Just recall, this author is the only one to win two Best Novel Edgar Awards for two consecutive books, **DOWN RIVER** in 2008 and **THE LAST CHILD** in 2010 (for which he also earned a Barry Award for Best Novel). He is back in that rare form, once again. Highly recommended.

SHE RIDES SHOTGUN

by Jordan Harper

Ecco, \$26.99, 2017

Rating: A+

[Reviewed by Kristopher Zgorski]

When starting a debut novel there is always the sense of the unknown, so when a reader discovers something truly excellent by a new-ish author it can feel like the discovery of a secret treasure trove that will enrich life for years to come. This is the experience that comes with reading **SHE RIDES SHOTGUN**

by Jordan Harper.

The “she” in **SHE RIDES SHOTGUN** is eleven-year-old Polly McClusky and readers would be hard-pressed to find a character more deserving of being called fierce. Because she is eleven-years-old, she doesn’t even know how unique she is – but that only makes her more endearing to readers.

As the novel opens, Polly’s father, Nate, has discovered that his actions in prison have resulted in some very bad men putting out a hit on the people he holds most dear. He doesn’t reach his ex-wife in time, but Nate manages to “kidnap” Polly from the school grounds before the evil can find her. Despite the fact that he is trying to save her, the police are now hunting him down as well.

What follows for the next 270+ pages is a road trip quite different than readers are used to. Not unlike Odysseus on his journey home, Polly’s travels are as much physical as they are mental and emotional. **SHE RIDES SHOTGUN** is a coming-of-age story shrouded with noir attitude. It is gritty, yet tender; it is intense, yet chill; and it is damn good. Nate indoctrinates Polly to criminal ways, but as readers watch Polly learn each new skill, they realize these are the things that just might keep her alive when the shit hits the fan.

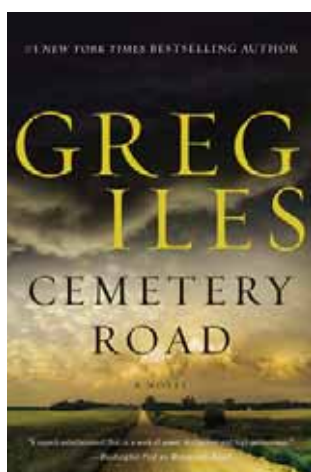
Jordan Harper writes in a sparse style, one that feels simplistic; yet is anything but. Each sentence – in fact, each word – seems carefully chosen and calculated to lull readers under a spell. There is a rhythm to these words that works magic. Setting the book aside feels like returning to a world that has been forever altered because of where you have been.

As far as debut novels go, one could hardly expect a better example of how to do it right; but frankly, that under-values **SHE RIDES SHOTGUN**. There are rarely books this exemplary even late in a writer’s career. Jordan Harper negotiates multiple viewpoints with ease – the chapters from Polly’s POV honestly feel as though they were written by a young girl, while the sections Nate narrates hum with edgy menace and loyal devotion. Several other memorable characters share in the storytelling, but

it is these two characters who ultimately captivate readers.

Well, there is one other character that will latch onto your heart, never to let go – Polly’s teddy bear. Readers, you will not understand the emotions this stuffed toy elicits from deep within you, but you will own them when they inevitably appear. Keep the tissues handy!

Jordan Harper should be very proud and might as well start clearing his shelves now to make room for the awards that will rightfully be coming his way. **SHE RIDES SHOTGUN** is a massive achievement – a book that will never be forgotten.



CEMETERY ROAD

by Greg Iles
Morrow, \$28.99

Rating: A

[Reviewed by Larry Gandle]

Marshall McEwan is a successful reporter working in Washington D.C. He is in print and he is on TV. He has even won a Pulitzer prize for war reporting. Now he must return to Bienville, the small Mississippi town he is from as his father is terminally ill and he must tend to the business of running the family newspaper. When a man, who was his surrogate father is found murdered in the river, Marshall begins to look into the death. This leads him into a confrontation with the Poker Club, a group of powerful local businessmen who will apparently stop at nothing to get their way- including murder. To add to the complexity, Marshall begins to carry on an affair with Jet Matheson, the wife of his best friend from childhood. It is ob-

vious that no good can come from this.

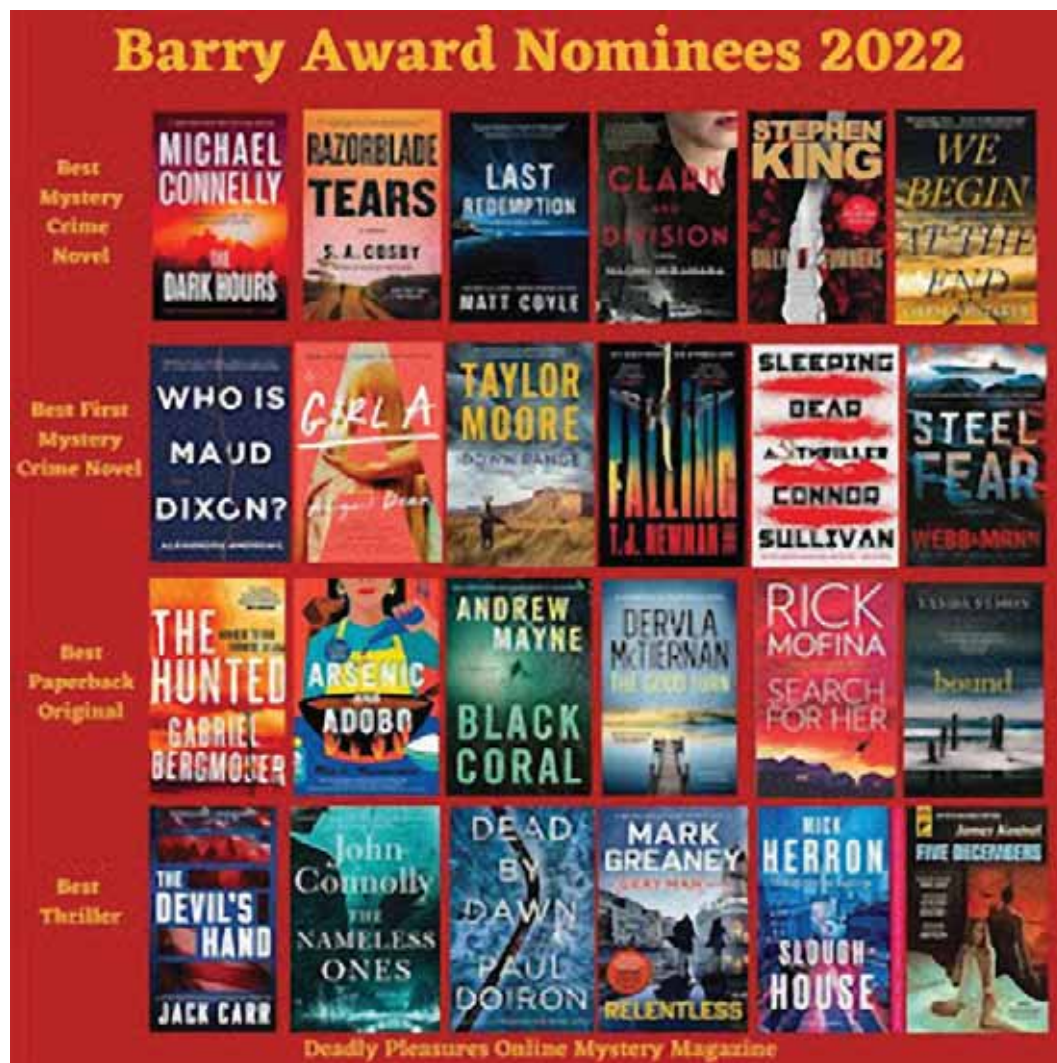
CEMETERY ROAD is another epic novel written in the same style as the **NATCHEZ BURNING** trilogy. Greg Iles creates a profoundly realistic setting from which to set his unique cast of characters. The author is brilliant at juxtaposing various storylines into each other from the present and the past. The traditions and secrets of a small Southern town come vividly to life. The plot is compelling, and the pages do move rapidly to the inevitable but satisfying conclusion. One point of criticism is the excessive expository dialogue near the end. So much of it seems unnecessary and given the extreme length of the book, there was plenty of room to divulge some of this material earlier. It is still another great read by this incredibly prolific author. NOTE-- there is considerable discussion about politics in the book. Personally, I found that there is so much more to this book than the politics that it wasn’t a big deal. Highly recommended -- one of the best of the year.

Others Southern Noir

Writers

Ace Atkins
Wiley Cash
Thomas H. Cook
Kelly J. Ford
Tom Franklin
Melissa Ginsburg
John Grisham
Jordan Harper
Jake Hinkson
David Joy
Kris Lackey
Joe R. Lansdale
Elmore Leonard
John McMahon
Brian Panowich
James Sallis
J. Todd Scott
Michael Farris Smith
James Wade
Stacy Willingham
Daniel Woodrell

There’s lots of good reading in this subgenre’. I hope you fix yourself a mint julep, sit in an easy chair and dive in.



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 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

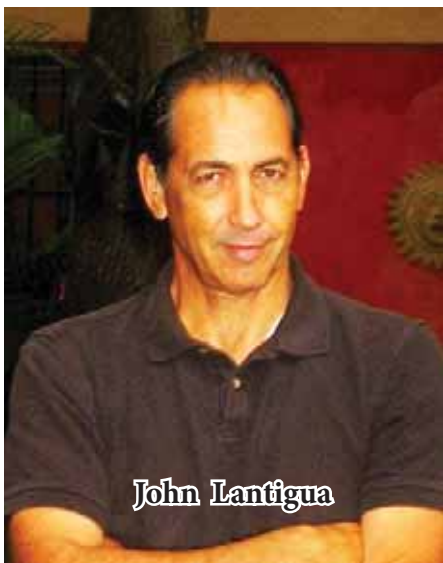
THE DEVIL'S HAND, Jack Carr
 THE NAMELESS ONES, John Connolly
 DEAD BY DAWN, Paul Doiron
 RELENTLESS, Mark Greaney
 SLOUGH HOUSE, Mick Herron
 FIVE DECEMBERS, James Kestrel

Please vote now!
Thanks.

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

Once again I have completed a list of my favorite short stories that I read in the previous year. It's something I've been doing with pleasure for more than fifty years. I found great variety in subject matter and even in length. One of my picks (by Barb Goffman) was only two pages long, while others were over twenty pages. Making choices, after reading over two hundred stories, was difficult. Consider that stories, albeit good, by the following authors did not make my list of ten: Michael Bracken, O'Neil De Noux, Brendan DuBois, Josh Pachter, and Cornell Woolrich.

My favorite story of the year was John Lantigua's "Death and the Coyote," a story that combined a good plot and fine regional writing about Miami.

**John Lantigua**

Here, alphabetically by author, is the list of Lachman's favorite short stories

for 2021:

Pat Black "Wing Man" *EQMM* Nov.-Dec. 2021

Emily Devenport "Until You've Seen Their Shadows" *AHMM* July-Aug. 2021

Kevin Egan "Lydia's Law" *AHMM* May-June 2021

Barb Goffman "That Poor Woman" *EQMM* Jan.-Feb. 2021

John Lantigua "Death and the Coyote" *EQMM* Nov.-Dec. 2021

Tom Larsen "El Cuerpo en el Barril" *AHMM* July- Aug. 2021

Michael Mallory "There's Nothing Funny About Murder" *AHMM* Jan.-Feb. 2021

S. J. Rozan "Chin Yong-Yun Takes The Stage" Crippen & Landru Pamphlet 2021

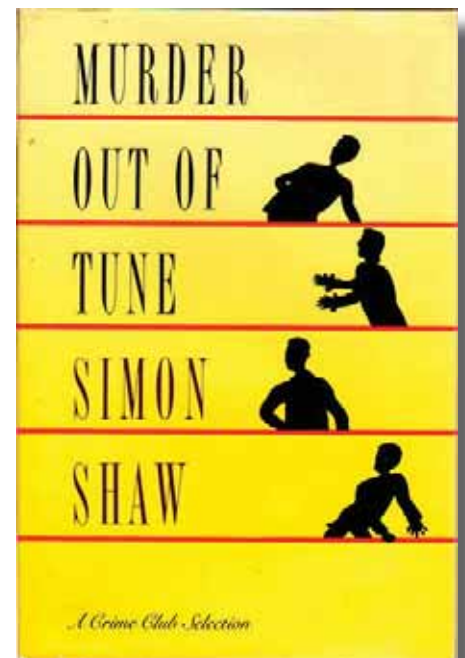
Kristine Kathryn Rusch "DNF" *EQMM* Sept.-Oct. 2021

Mark Thielman "The Map Dot Murder" *AHMM* Sept.-Oct. 2021

**Notes on Novels
Recently Read**

Barzun and Taylor raved about Robert Bernard's **DEADLY MEETING** (1970), but I'll merely use one of my usual expressions :Good but Not Great. Although I have little experience with Academia, it certainly seemed authentic

to me. It even includes an MLA (Modern Language Association) meeting where murder occurs. MLA even resembles, to some extent, Bouchercon or Left Coast Crime. On hand then, and later for another murder, are the members of the English Department at "Wilton University," a small, imaginary New England university. The politics of a small group of male teachers (remember this was published in 1970) and their wives/girl friends is interesting. (This was a time when the women's role was mainly to help their husband's career.) There are too many detectives (a police lieutenant, a clearly innocent teacher, and, for comedy relief, a British professor who will remind you of Margaret Rutherford playing Miss Marple. However, the ending is logical and somewhat surprising, with fair play clues.



Just as one will learn a lot about academic politics from **DEADLY MEETING**, there is a wealth of information about the British theatre in Simon Shaw's **MURDER OUT OF TUNE** (1988), the first book in his series about actor Philip Fletcher. I'll risk giving away some plot by saying that Fletcher is also a killer, maybe even a future serial killer, because by page 60 of the Bantam paperback edition he has killed an actor, of whom he was jealous. The rest of the book deals with Fletcher's ambition to

secure the title role in a television series about Sir Walter Raleigh, not letting anyone get in his way. Fletcher makes an interesting protagonist. His planning a murder is unusual, a nice inverted change from most mysteries which involve detection. He is also an unsympathetic character whose ego shows up in his speech, for example, when he says, "Of course I don't believe in God, but that doesn't rule out the possibility of His believing in me."

This book is a must for theatre fans, and a bonus for those who like a good mystery too.

Doom With a View

Eddie Muller scheduled *The Turning Point* (1952) for his Noir Alley show on TCM, but then he somehow finds noir features in many mysteries. I'm just happy that at 10 P.M. Mountain Time, on Saturdays, I can usually find a good mystery on TCM, let alone looking for noir there. This movie belongs to a small sub-genre of films, those that depict the work of legislative committees investigating organized crime. (If you're old enough, think of the Kefauver Committee.) Though William Holden had already played in *Sunset Boulevard*

when he made this film and would soon win an Oscar for *Stalag 17*, he appeared in this relatively inexpensive movie, playing a cynical reporter (isn't that a redundancy?). Holden is the close friend of Edmond O'Brien, Chief Investigator for an inquiry into the rackets run by Ed Begley who delivers a subtle performance as a mob boss, avoiding simplistic black-and-white acting. Alexis Smith plays O'Brien's fiancée. She was in movies from 1941 onward, always acting well, but it wasn't until 1971 and the Sondheim Broadway musical *Follies* that she got the recognition she deserved.

The Turning Point runs a fast, suspenseful 85 minutes, and its ending may surprise you.



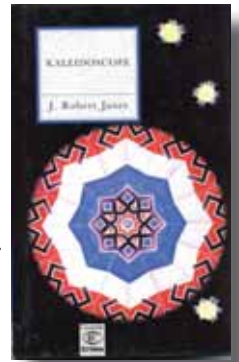
J. Robert Janes



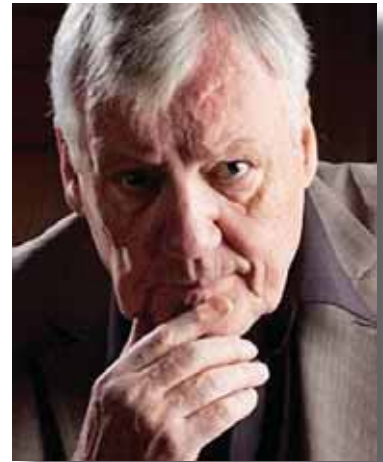
Long-time Bouchercon attendees have had opportunities to get acquainted with this gentleman with a sly smile — the Canadian author J. Robert Janes. In fact, I met Bob the first morning of my first Bouchercon in 1991 Pasadena. He is best known for his series set during World War II in Europe. The featured detectives were Chief Inspector Jean-Louis St-Cyr of France's Sûreté and Detektiv Inspektor Hermann Kohler of the Nazi Gestapo. It is a well-written series but never took off like Philip Kerr's

Bernie Gunther series eventually did.

I collected his books in the Constable British editions with wonderful Terry Pastor cover art on them. Here is a sample:



Jack Higgins



Born Henry Patterson in England in 1929, the teacher turned writer—best known for his 1975 novel, **THE EAGLE HAS LANDED** — was 92 years old when he expired April 9th on Jersey, in the Channel Islands.

Less than a week later, Neil Nyren, Patterson's former editor at G.P. Putnam's Sons (and now editor-at-large for CrimeReads) contributed a touching remembrance of the author to *Publishers Weekly*. You really should read it in its entirety, but here's Nyren's conclusion:

[Patterson] loved what he did, and he was proud to be a member of the thriller community.

In 2009, I was in London to help him celebrate his 80th birthday. A roomful of his friends, family, and colleagues were there, and I'll share what I told them then: Some people are good writers, I said, and some writers are good people. But when you have both in the same person, that's a treasure you hold onto.

Harry Patterson was a treasure. I will always hold onto him.



Editor's Message



New Feature on Website. There is a link on the front page of www.deadlypleasures.com just below my photo in the upper left hand corner, that says "Year's Best." That is where I post the DP List of the Best Books of 2022 and I periodically add to the list as I become aware of new books and indicate which books were added since the last issue of DP was published. I've also added lists of contributors' favorite books of 2022 so far. This will give you a further idea of what we think are the best books of the year (that we've read to date). So far, I've gotten lists from Larry Gandle, Jeff Popple and Steele Curry (and one of my own). If you want to submit your own list, I'll consider adding it to ours.

Don Winslow Retiring. Don Winslow announced that he has decided to give up writing, after decades in the publishing world and multiple seven-figure Hollywood deals, in order to launch a digital army and direct his energy full-time to his other passion: politics. I thought the timing of this announcement was odd because it pretty much coincided with the launch of his novel **CITY ON FIRE**, which is being billed as the first of a trilogy. But it made more sense when I heard from a reliable source who talked to Don Winslow about this and found that the other two books in the trilogy are already written. So Don may have retired, but we will be getting at least two more novels from him in future years.

Robert Galbraith aka J. K. Rowling. **THE INK BLACK HEART** by Robert Galbraith (J.K. Rowling) is coming out August 30, 2022, which, under ordinary circumstance, would have been perfect timing for me to put her on the cover of the next issue of **DP**. But she and her novels are shrouded in secrecy before publication. I called her editor at Mulholland to see if I could get an

advance reading copy but he doesn't even have one. He's never met or talked to her (makes me wonder what "editing" services he provides her?) and no one sees the book until it is published. Well that's not going to work. **THE INK BLACK HEART** is 1024 pages long according to amazon.com. Her last one was 927 pages and I loved every one of them. I would postpone her cover until the issue in the Fall, but I've already promised to put Michael Connelly on that cover. I guess I'll have to wait to make J.K. Rowling a **DP** cover girl some time in the future. Que lastima!



FIVE DECEMBERS by James Kestrel. Many of us here at **DP** have been singing the praises of **FIVE DECEMBERS**, my favorite read of 2021. It was a very pleasant surprise when I learned that it won the Edgar Award for Best Novel. It is rare that the Edgar Awards validate any of my opinions, so I'll enjoy this while it lasts.

Report from Left Coast Crime Convention in Albuquerque, New Mexico. I posted this on the website but some of you may not visit the site frequently so I'm going to include it in this column as well.

"It is so good to see each other in person," was a refrain that was heard over and over during the convention and it wasn't just the fans who were saying it. The authors were equally as happy.

I'm not a regular attendee of Left Coast Crime (average attendance around 500) because I prefer the larger Bouchercon events and my wife only lets me off the leash once a year. But it had been about 2-1/2 years since I had seen my good friends and I was going to take the opportunity while Covid was subsiding (hopefully for good) to meet and break bread with them.

It really was great to see many old friends such as "Mystery" Mike Bur-saw (my roommate), Maggie Mason, Nancy Mitchell, Chris Aldrich and the Fan Guest of Honor at the convention – Kristopher Zgorski.

"Mystery" Mike is a bookseller and has sold books at Bouchercon for several decades. As a result, he hasn't attended a convention panel in 25 years, so this was a chance for him to finally experience some panels and there were some good ones. I'm also not a big panel attendee (I'd rather smooze with authors and friends), and I enjoyed the ones I attended. The interview of Mick Herron by his editor was especially good. One story from that interview: Mick confessed that he hadn't re-read his *Slow Horses* series for a long time when he was asked to consult on the TV series (now appearing on Apple TV+). During one consulting session when the script writer was reading a bit of dialogue for the show, Mick started shaking his head. When asked why, Mick said, "Jackson Lamb would never say that." Mick was abashed when the writer told him that the Jackson Lamb dialogue was lifted from Mick's novel. [This got a big laugh from the audience]

Mike Lawson (the Joe Demarco series) is one of my favorite authors so we (Mystery Mike and I) went to dinner with Mike and his lovely wife Gayle on Friday night. Mike's career keeps sailing along at a good speed. His first stand-alone thriller, **REDEMPTION**, just came out. Then it's back to his wonderful Joe DeMarco series next year.



David Weiden, Kent Krueger, David Morrell, Mystery Mike, Matt Coyle

Mystery Mike and I set up an author dinner on Friday night and invited some new and old friends for an evening of conviviality. Those who came were David Morrell, John McMahon, David Heska Wanbli Weiden, Matt Coyle (and his vivacious girlfriend, Juliet Grossman, who is a public defender), Glen Erik Hamilton, Lee Goldberg, William Kent Krueger and Reed Farrel Coleman. We laughed a lot. As I was leaving, David Morrell was the last to get up. I asked our waiter if he knew who Rambo was and he enthusiastically replied, "Yes!" Then I pointed to David and told the waiter that he was the creator of Rambo. We walked over to David and I asked him if he could give the waiter something signed by him and he pulled a card out of his wallet and signed it. The waiter was over the moon!

Authors I got to know better: David Heska Wanbli Weiden (a lively personality), John McMahon (I've got to read more of his P. T. Marsh series!) and Matt Goldman. Matt Goldman is coming out with a standalone, **CAROLINA MOONSET**, on May 31st. He gave me an advance copy which I have just finished reading. I liked it quite a bit and it is reviewed in this issue.

Of any kind of convention panel, the one I enjoy the most is a panel where the panelists talk about their favorite mysteries. Apparently Kristopher Zgorski has similar tastes in panels because he arranged an excellent one called Books By Decade. The panelists were

Kristopher Zgorski (reviewer, blogger), DruAnn Love (reviewer), Janet Rudolph (in absentia), Judy Bobolick (fan), and Lucinda Surber (convention organizer and webmaven).

On Saturday, those of us in attendance who know Marv Lachman made a special effort to connect with Marv and Carol Lachman, who live an hour away in Santa Fe, and we had a wonderful luncheon with them. In attendance were Marv and Carol Lachman, Thom Walls, Nancy Mitchell, Maggie Mason, Mystery Mike Bursaw, Kate Derie, George Easter, Ken Wishnia and his wife. It was definitely a highlight. Because of his advanced age and various infirmities (he turns 90 years old on July 6th), Marv has decided to forego attendance at any future mystery conventions, so we don't know when we will see Marv and Carol again.

On Saturday night, I was asked

to present the Lefty Award for Best Mystery Novel (because I had been a previous Left Coast Crime Fan Guest of Honor – Tucson, 2000). It was my honor to present William Kent Krueger the award for his novel **LIGHTNING STRIKE**. I commented that I also presented Kent with an award for his first novel **IRON LAKE**.

Many thanks to Lucinda Surber and Stan Ulrich for putting on a great convention and overcoming a lot of challenges.

For photos of these events, go to <http://new.deadlypleasures.com/2022/04/13/left-coast-crime-convention-report/>

It looks as if Covid has died down enough (I hope it stays that way) for us to meet in person again. There is a whole slate of in-person conventions on tap for us to attend. I have started up the DP Calendar again and you may find it herein on page 68. I'm especially looking forward to this year's Bouchercon in Minneapolis. There are three authors whom I never met who are guests of honor at Bouchercon. They are S. A. Cosby, Jo Nesbo and Attica Locke. And there are two other reasons to go. One is to present the Barry Awards in person. A virtual Barry Award presentation just doesn't cut it for me. And the other is to see good friends like Larry Gandle, Ted Hertel and Ted Fitzgerald whom I haven't seen in a long time. I also hope to see many of you there. As I write this I am starting to see rumblings of new Covid variants and an uptick in cases. Hope for the best.



Marv Lachman seated with friends standing

Associate Editor's Message



The opening of a book is of crucial importance to an author and a reader. It is not so much the first sentence but at least the initial ten to fifteen pages. Most of us who read a lot of books can assess the skill of a writer in the first ten pages but to seriously consider a book many of us use the fifty-page rule – if it doesn't interest us in the first fifty pages, then move on to another book. If I do not complete a crime fiction book, I will usually attempt to review it with the caveat that I did not finish. I will always let the reader know why it did not appeal to me.

Consider the first sentence or two. Sometimes it can be gimmicky, but often it can set the tone for the book. In *OCEAN STATE* by Stuart O'Nan, (reviewed elsewhere in this issue), the narrative begins with "When I was in eighth grade my sister helped kill another girl. She was in love, my mother said, like it was an excuse." This brilliantly manages to set off the plot of the book. Another example is by one of the finest atmospheric crime fiction writers Thomas H. Cook in *BREAKHEART HILL*, "This is the darkest story I have ever heard and all my life I have labored not to tell it." This clearly sets up the tone of the book which will be grim.



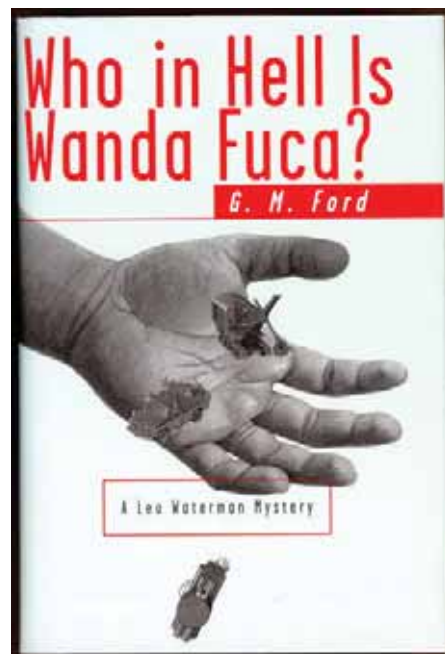
A humorous example which has proved memorable to me for years but not the book or the author states, "Las Vegas is my kind of town! But... here I am stuck in dull dreary rainy Belfast."

I am sure you have experienced

great opening lines – such as from Herman Melville's *MOBY DICK* or Daphne DuMaurier's *REBECCA* which come immediately to mind. Opening lines do not have to be memorable but merely competent. A bad one will set off red flags.



So many books begin with a prologue. To me they are often a distraction as the story begins with the first chapter -- not with the prologue. In crime fiction, the prologue will depict a murder which usually has no true significance to the story until many pages and chapters later. At that point, I have usually forgotten the prologue and often have to go back and reread it as a reminder. Perhaps it might be best to forgo the prologue and instead proceed with an exciting first chapter to bring

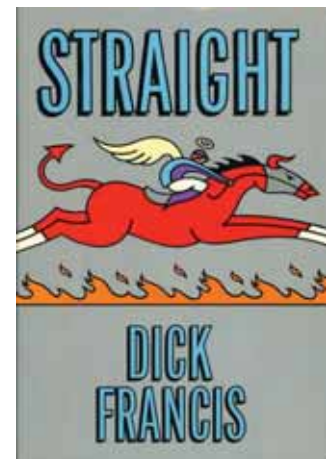


the reader immediately into the story.

One more pet peeve is when we meet a character at the beginning of a novel and spend several pages with them getting to know them fairly well as they proceed with the minutiae in their lives. Then they are immediately killed off and we never hear about them again. It just seems like a monumental waste of time.

Sometimes the first chapter has nothing to do with the actual plot. I remember a very compelling first chapter in *WHO IN THE HELL IS WANDA FUCA* by G.M. Ford. The main character is trying to talk a jumper off a ledge of a building. It was incredibly suspenseful and so well written. However, once the situation was resolved, the book devolved into a very routine regional PI novel. I wound up only liking that first chapter.

Crime fiction is supposed to be primarily entertaining. It is the job of the author to do just that. A flat opening especially with a previously unfamiliar author can be a major turn off. Any 'prepublished' writer should keep this important fact in mind. We shouldn't judge a book by its cover. But we should judge a book by the first few pages. It can make all the difference in the world. So many books – so little time.



Editor's note: My favorite opening lines of any crime novel is from Dick Francis' *STRAIGHT*. "I inherited my brother's life. Inherited his desk, his business, his gadgets, his enemies, his horses and his mistress. I inherited my brother's life, and it nearly killed me." Just try and not continue reading the book -- I dare you!

The DP List 2022



Titles listed garnered starred reviews in the four library journals (*Publisher's Weekly*, *Kirkus*, *Booklist* and *Library Journal*), An Amazon Editors' Choice, and/or a glowing review in *Deadly Pleasures* as indicated. These books are the best of the best for 2022. Titles in blue indicate titles added since the last issue of *DP*. I hope you make good use of this list to guide your reading.

Best Novels

****JANE AND THE YEAR WITHOUT A SUMMER**, Stephanie Barron (Soho Crime, \$27.95, February). May 1816: Jane Austen is feeling. She attributes her poor condition to the stress of family burdens, which even the drafting of her latest manuscript—about a baronet's daughter nursing a broken heart for a daring naval captain—cannot alleviate. Her apothecary recommends a trial of the curative waters at Cheltenham Spa, in Gloucestershire. Jane decides to use some of the profits earned from her last novel, *Emma*, and treat herself to a period of rest and reflection at the spa, in the company of her sister, Cassandra. Cheltenham Spa hardly turns out to be the relaxing sojourn Jane and Cassandra envisaged, however. It is immediately obvious that other boarders at the guest house where the Misses Austen are staying have come to Cheltenham with stresses of their own—some of them deadly. But perhaps with Jane's interference a terrible crime might be prevented. **PW & AZ**

****EVERY CLOAK ROLLED IN BLOOD**, James Lee Burke (Simon & Schuster, \$27.00, Holland Family). Novelist Aaron Holland Broussard is

shattered when his daughter Fannie Mae dies suddenly. As he tries to honor her memory by saving two young men from a life of crime amid their opioid-ravaged community, he is drawn into a network of villainy that includes a violent former Klansman, a far-from-holy minister, a biker club posing as evangelicals, and a murderer who has been hiding in plain sight.

Aaron's only ally is state police officer Ruby Spotted Horse, a no-nonsense woman who harbors some powerful secrets in her cellar. Despite the air of mystery surrounding her, Ruby is the only one Aaron can trust. That is, until the ghost of Fannie Mae shows up, guiding her father through a tangled web of the present and past and helping him vanquish his foes from both this world and the next. **PW, BL & AZ**

****SLEEPWALK**, Dan Chaon (Henry Holt, \$27.99). Sleepwalk's hero, Will Bear, is a man with so many aliases that he simply thinks of himself as the Barely Blur. At fifty years old, he's been living off the grid for over half his life. He's never had a real job, never paid taxes, never been in a committed relationship. A good-natured henchman with a complicated and lonely past and a passion for LSD microdosing, he spends his time hopscotching across state lines in his beloved camper van, running sometimes shady often dangerous errands for a powerful and ruthless operation he's never troubled himself to learn too much about. He has lots of connections, but no true ties. His longest relationships are with an old rescue dog that has post-traumatic stress and a childhood friend as deeply entrenched in the underworld as he is, who, lately, he's less and less sure he can trust. Out of the

blue, one of Will's many burner phones heralds a call from a twenty-year-old woman claiming to be his biological daughter. She says she's the product of one of his long-ago sperm donations; he's half certain she's AI. She needs his help. She's entrenched in a widespread and nefarious plot involving Will's employers, and for Will to continue to have any contact with her increasingly fuzzes the line between the people he is working for and the people he's running from. **BL, PW & AZ**

****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, AZ & PW**

****THE MATCH**, Harlan Coben (Grand Central, \$29.00). Wilde #2. After months away, Wilde has returned to the Ramapo Mountains in the wake of a failed bid at domesticity that confirms what he's known all along: He belongs on his own, free from the comforts and constraints of modern life. Suddenly, a DNA match on an online ancestry database brings Wilde closer to his past

than he's ever dreamed, and finally gives Wilde the opening he needs to track down his father. But meeting the man brings up more questions than answers. So Wilde reaches out to his last, most desperate lead, a second cousin who disappears as quickly as he resurfaces, having experienced an epic fall from grace that can only be described as a waking nightmare.

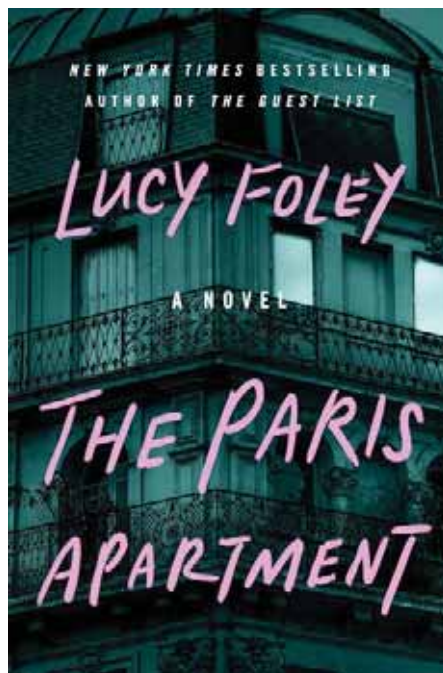
Was his cousin's downfall a long time coming? Or was he the victim of a conspiracy as cunning as it is complex? And how does it all connect to the man once known as The Stranger, a treacherous fugitive with a growing following whose mission and methods have only turned more dangerous with time? **LJ & AZ**

****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, AZ & BL**

****GIRL IN ICE**, Erica Ferencik (Gallery/Scout Press, \$27.00). Valerie "Val" Chesterfield is a linguist trained in the most esoteric of disciplines: dead Nordic languages. Despite her successful career, she leads a sheltered life and languishes in the shadow of her twin brother, Andy, an accomplished climate scientist stationed on a remote island off Greenland's barren coast. But Andy is gone: a

victim of suicide, having willfully ventured unprotected into 50 degree below zero weather. Val is inconsolable—and disbelieving. She suspects foul play. **BL, PW & AZ**

****THE PARIS APARTMENT**, Lucy Foley (Morrow, \$28.99, February). Jess needs a fresh start. She's broke and alone, and she's just left her job under less than ideal circumstances. Her half-brother Ben didn't sound thrilled when she asked if she could crash with him for a bit, but he didn't say no, and surely everything will look better from Paris. Only when she shows up – to find a very nice apartment, could Ben really have afforded this? – he's not there. The longer Ben stays missing, the more Jess starts to dig into her brother's situation, and the more questions she has. Ben's neighbors are an eclectic bunch, and not particularly friendly. Jess may have come to Paris to escape her past, but it's starting to look like it's Ben's future that's in question. The socialite – The nice guy – The alcoholic – The girl on the verge – The concierge. Everyone's a neighbor. Everyone's a suspect. And everyone knows something they're not telling. **AZ & DP**



****RECKLESS GIRLS**, Rachel Hawkins (St. Martin's Press, \$27.99, February). Six stunning twentysome-

things 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, DP & 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 & DP

****THINGS WE DO IN THE DARK**, Jennifer Hillier (Minotaur, \$27.99, July). When Paris Peralta is arrested in her own bathroom?covered in blood, holding a straight razor, her celebrity husband dead in the bathtub behind her?she knows she'll be charged with murder. But as bad as this looks, it's not what worries her the most. With the unwanted media attention now sur-

rounding her, it's only a matter of time before someone from her long hidden past recognizes her and destroys the new life she's worked so hard to build, along with any chance of a future.

Twenty-five years earlier, Ruby Reyes, known as the Ice Queen, was convicted of a similar murder in a trial that riveted Canada in the early nineties. Reyes knows who Paris really is, and when she's unexpectedly released from prison, she threatens to expose all of Paris's secrets. Left with no other choice, Paris must finally confront the dark past she escaped, once and for all. **DP**

****THE GOODBYE COAST**, Joe Ide (Mulholland, \$28.00, February). Present-day L.A. Philip Marlowe, against his better judgement, accepts two missing person cases, the first a daughter of a faded, tyrannical Hollywood starlet, and the second, a British child stolen from his mother by his father. At the center of *The Goodbye Coast* is Marlowe's troubled and confounding relationship with his father, a son who despises yet respects his dad, and a dad who's unable to hide his bitter disappointment with his grown boy. **Kirkus & BL**

****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**

****NOTES ON AN EXECUTION** by Danya Kukafka (Morrow, \$27.99, January). Ansel Packer is scheduled to die in twelve hours. He knows what he's done, and now awaits execution, the same chilling fate he forced on those girls,

years ago. But Ansel doesn't want to die; he wants to be celebrated, understood. Through a kaleidoscope of women—a mother, a sister, a homicide detective—we learn the story of Ansel's life. We meet his mother, Lavender, a seventeen-year-old girl pushed to desperation; Hazel, twin sister to Ansel's wife, inseparable since birth, forced to watch helplessly as her sister's relationship threatens to devour them all; and finally, Saffy, the detective hot on his trail, who has devoted herself to bringing bad men to justice but struggles to see her own life clearly. As the clock ticks down, these three women sift through the choices that culminate in tragedy, exploring the rippling fissures that such destruction inevitably leaves in its wake. **DP & AZ**

****GIVE UNTO OTHERS**, Donna Leon (Atlantic Monthly, \$27.00, March). Commissar Guido Brunetti #31. Brunetti is approached for a favor by Elisabetta Foscari, a woman he knows casually, but her mother was good to Brunetti's mother, so he feels obliged to at least look into the matter privately, and not as official police business. Foscari's son-in-law, Enrico Fenzo, has alarmed his wife (her daughter) by confessing their family might be in danger because of something he's involved with. Since Fenzo is an accountant, Brunetti logically suspects the cause of danger is related to the finances of a client. Yet his clients seem benign: an optician, a restaurateur, a charity established by his father-in-law. However, when his friend's daughter's place of work is vandalized, Brunetti asks his own favors—that his colleagues Claudia Griffoni, Lorenzo Vianello, and Signorina Elettra Zorzi assist his private investigation, which soon enough turns official as they uncover the dark and Janus-faced nature of a venerable Italian institution. **BL & AZ**

****THE MISSING PIECE**, John Lescroart (Atria, \$28.00, Dismas Hardy #19). No one mourned when San Francisco DA Wes Farrell put Paul Riley in prison eleven years ago for the rape and murder of his girlfriend. And no one

is particularly happy to see him again when he's released after The Exoneration Initiative uncovered evidence that pinned the crime on someone else. In fact, Riley soon turns up murdered, surrounded by the loot from his latest scam. But if Riley was really innocent all along, who wanted him dead? To the cops, it's straightforward: the still-grieving father of Riley's dead girlfriend killed the former prisoner. Farrell, now out of politics and practicing law with master attorney Dismas Hardy, agrees to represent the defendant, Doug Rush—and is left in the dust when Rush suddenly vanishes. At a loss, Farrell and Hardy ask PI Abe Glitsky to track down the potentially lethal defendant. The search takes Glitsky through an investigative hall of mirrors populated by wounded parents, crooked cops, cheating spouses, and single-minded vigilantes. **Kirkus & AZ**

****HIDEOUT**, Louisa Luna (Doubleday, \$27.00, March). Alice Vega has made a career of finding the missing and vulnerable against a ticking clock, but she's never had a case like that of Zeb Williams, missing for thirty years. It was 1984, and the big Cal-Stanford football game was tied with seconds left on the clock. Zeb Williams grabbed the ball and ran the wrong way, through the marching band, off the field, and out of the stadium. He disappeared into legend, replete with Elvis-like sightings and a cult following.

Zeb's cold trail leads Vega to southern Oregon, where she discovers an anxious community living under siege by a local hate group called the Liberty Boys. As Vega starts digging into the past, the mystery around Zeb's disappearance grows deeper, and the reach of the Liberty Boys grows more disturbing. Everyone has something to hide, and no one can cut to the truth like Alice Vega. But this time, her partner Max Caplan has his own problems at home, and the trouble Vega finds might be too much for her to handle. **BL & AZ**

****THE ACCOMPLICE**, Lisa Lutz (Ballantine, \$28.00, January). Owen Mann is charming, privileged, and

chronically dissatisfied. Luna Grey is secretive, cautious, and pragmatic. Despite their differences, they form a bond the moment they meet in college. Their names soon become indivisible—Owen and Luna, Luna and Owen—and stay that way even after an unexplained death rocks their social circle. They're still best friends years later, when Luna finds Owen's wife brutally murdered. The police investigation sheds light on some long-hidden secrets, but it can't penetrate the wall of mystery that surrounds Owen. To get to the heart of what happened and why, Luna has to dig up the one secret she's spent her whole life burying. **BL & AZ**

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 Gries-

sel 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. **Kirkus, AZ & DP**

****THE ECHOES**, Jess Montgomery (Minotaur, \$27.99, April). As July 4, 1928 approaches, Sheriff Lily Ross and her family look forward to the opening of an amusement park in a nearby town, created by Chalmer Fitzpatrick – a veteran and lumber mill owner. When Lily is alerted to the possible drowning of a girl, she goes to investigate, and discovers schisms going back several generations, in an ongoing dispute over the land on which Fitzpatrick has built the park. Lily's family life is soon rattled, too, with the revelation that before he died, her brother had a daughter, Esme, with a woman in France, and arrangements have been made for Esme to immigrate to the U.S. to live with them. But Esme never makes it to Kinship, and soon Lily discovers that she has been kidnapped. Not only that, but a young woman is indeed found murdered in the fishing pond on Fitzpatrick's property, at the same time that a baby is left on his doorstep. **Kirkus & AZ**

****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**

****SHIFTY'S BOYS**, Chris Offutt (Grove Press, \$27.00, June). Sequel to **THE KILLING HILLS**. Mick Hardin is home on leave, recovering from an IED attack, when a body is found in the center of town. It's Barney Kissick, the local heroin dealer, and the city police see it as an occupational hazard. But when Barney's mother, Shifty, asks Mick to take a look, it seems there's more to the killing than it seems. Mick should be rehabbing his leg, signing his divorce papers, and getting out of town—and most of all, staying out of the way of his sister Linda's reelection as Sheriff—but he keeps on looking, and suddenly he's getting shot at himself. **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 photographs. 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. **PW, AZ, Kirkus & BL**

****OUR AMERICAN FRIEND**, Anna Pitoniak (Simon & Schuster, 26.99, February). Tired of covering the grating dysfunction of Washington and

the increasingly outrageous antics of President Henry Caine, White House correspondent Sofie Morse quits her job and plans to leave politics behind. But when she gets a call from the office of First Lady Lara Caine, asking Sofie to come in for a private meeting with Lara, her curiosity is piqued. Sofie, like the rest of the world, knows little about Lara—only that Lara was born in Soviet Russia, raised in Paris, and worked as a model before moving to America and marrying the notoriously brash future president. When Lara asks Sofie to write her official biography, and to finally fill in the gaps of her history, Sofie's curiosity gets the better of her. She begins to spend more and more time in the White House, slowly developing a bond with Lara—and eventually a deep and surprising friendship with her. Even more surprising to Sofie is the fact that Lara is entirely candid about her mysterious past. The First Lady doesn't hesitate to speak about her beloved father's work as an undercover KGB officer in Paris—and how he wasn't the only person in her family working undercover during the Cold War. **Booklist & AZ**

****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**

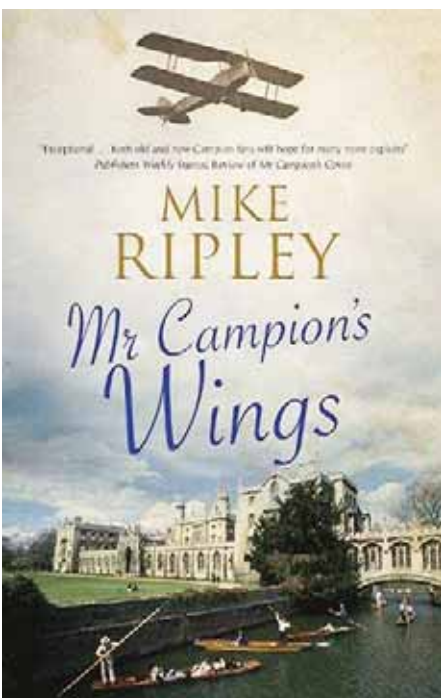
****WHEN YOU ARE MINE**, Michael Robotham (Scribner, \$24.99, January). Philomena McCarthy is a young, ambitious police officer with the elite Metropolitan Police in London. When she responds to a domestic violence call, she finds the victim, Tempe Brown, trying to protect her abuser, a married man named 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 information 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**

****LAST SEEN ALIVE**, Joanna Schaffhausen (Minotaur, \$27.99, February). Boston detective Ellery Hathaway met FBI agent Reed Markham when he pried open a serial killer's closet to rescue her. Years on, their relationship remains defined by that moment and by Francis Coben's horrific crimes. To free herself from Coben's legacy, Ellery had to walk away from Reed, too. But Coben is not letting go so easily. He has an impossible proposition: Coben will finally give up the location of the remaining bodies, on one condition – Reed must bring him Ellery. Now the families of the missing victims are crying out for justice that only Ellery can deliver. **PW & DP**

****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**

****NINE LIVES**, Peter Swanson (Morrow, \$27.99). Nine strangers receive a list with their names on it in the mail. Nothing else, just a list of names on a single sheet of paper. None of the nine people know or have ever met the others on the list. They dismiss it as junk mail, a fluke—until very, very bad things begin happening to people on the list.

First, a well-liked old man is drowned on a beach in the small town of Kennewick, Maine. Then, a father is shot in the back while running through his quiet neighborhood in suburban Massachusetts. A frightening pattern is emerging, but what do these nine people have in common? Their professions range from oncology nurse to aspiring actor, and they're located all over the country. So why are they all on the list, and who sent it? **BL & AZ**

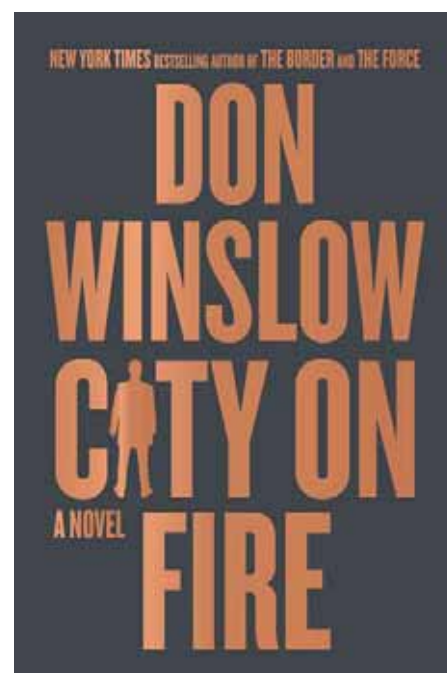
****L.A. BURNING**, D.C. Taylor (Crooked Lane, \$26.99, February). Cody Bonner, identical twin, daughter of a major movie star, a teenage street kid in Los Angeles, a bank robber at nineteen, and a prison inmate at twenty. When she's released after six years, she returns to L.A. with a purpose: to learn the truth about her sister Julie, who washed up on a Malibu beach a year earlier. The connection between the twins was so powerful that the day Julie died, Cody collapsed in the prison yard. Now that bond is driving her to seek justice—at any cost. **PW & DP**

****A GAME OF FEAR**, Charles Todd (Morrow, \$28.99, February). Spring, 1921. Scotland Yard sends Inspector Ian Rutledge to the sea-battered village of

Walmer on the coast of Essex, where amongst the salt flats and a military airfield lies Benton Abbey, a grand manor with a storied past. The lady of the house may prove his most bewildering witness yet. She claims she saw a violent murder—but there is no body, no blood. She also insists she recognized the killer: Captain Nelson. Only it could not have been Nelson because he died during the war. Everyone in the village believes that Lady Benton's losses have turned her mind—she is, after all, a grieving widow and mother—but the woman Rutledge interviews is rational and self-possessed. And then there is Captain Nelson: what really happened to him in the war? The more Rutledge delves into this baffling case, the more suspicious tragedies he uncovers. **PW & AZ**

****THE LOVE OF MY LIFE**, Rosie Walsh (Pamela Dorman Books, \$28.00, March). Emma loves her husband Leo and their young daughter Ruby: she'd do anything for them. But almost everything she's told them about herself is a lie. And she might just have got away with it, if it weren't for her husband's job. Leo is an obituary writer; Emma a well-known marine biologist. When she suffers a serious illness, Leo copes by doing what he knows best – researching and writing about his wife's life. But as he starts to unravel the truth, he discovers the woman he loves doesn't really exist. Even her name isn't real. When the very darkest moments of Emma's past finally emerge, she must somehow prove to Leo that she really is the woman he always thought she was. But first, she must tell him about the other love of her life. **Kirkus, AZ & PW**

****CITY ON FIRE**, Don Winslow (Morrow, \$28.99). Until a beautiful modern-day Helen of Troy comes between the Irish and the Italians, launching a war that will see them kill each other, destroy an alliance, and set a city on fire. Danny Ryan yearns for a more "legit" life and a place in the sun. But as the bloody conflict stacks body on body and brother turns against brother, Danny has to rise above himself. To save



the friends he loves like family and the family he has sworn to protect, he becomes a leader, a ruthless strategist, and a master of a treacherous game in which the winners live and the losers die. From the gritty streets of Providence to the glittering screens of Hollywood to the golden casinos of Las Vegas, Danny Ryan will forge a dynasty. **Kirkus, PW, AZ & DP**

****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 & AZ**

****THE SHADOW OF THE EMPIRE**, Qui Xiaolong (Severn House, \$27.99, February). Judge Dee Renjie, Empress Wu's newly appointed Imperial Circuit Supervisor for the Tang Empire, is visiting provinces surrounding the grand capital of Chang'an. One night a knife is thrown through his window with a cryptic note attached: 'A high-flying dragon will have something to regret!' Minutes after the ominous warning appears, Judge Dee is approached by an emissary of Internal Minister Wu, Empress Wu's nephew. Minister Wu wants Judge Dee to investigate a high-profile murder supposedly committed by the well-known poetess and courtesan, Xuanji, who locals believe is possessed by the spirit of a black fox. **PW & AZ**

Best First Novels

****PAY DIRT ROAD**, Samantha Jayne Allen (Minotaur, \$26.99, April). Annie McIntyre has a love/hate relationship with Garnett, Texas. Recently graduated from college and home waitressing, lacking not in ambition but certainly in direction, Annie is lured into the family business—a private investigation firm—by her supposed-to-be-retired grandfather, Leroy, despite the rest of the clan's misgivings. When a waitress at the café goes missing, Annie and Leroy begin an investigation that leads them down rural routes and haunted byways, to noxious-smelling oil fields and to the glowing neon of local honky-tonks. As Annie works to uncover the truth she finds herself identifying with the victim in increasing, unsettling ways, and realizes she must confront her own past—failed romances, a disturbing experience she'd rather forget, and the trick mirror of nostalgia itself—if she wants to survive this homecoming. **BL, LJ, AZ & DP**

****DON'T KNOW TOUGH**, Eli Cranor (Soho Crime, \$24.95, March). Trent Powers relocates his family from Anaheim to Arkansas to take over as head coach of the Denton Pirates, a high school football team powered by

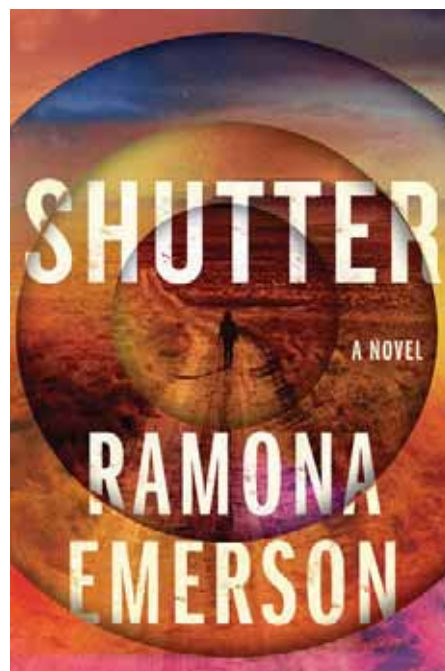
a volatile but talented running back named Billy Lowe. Billy comes from an extremely troubled home: a trailer park where he is terrorized by his unstable mother's abusive boyfriend. Billy takes out his anger on the field, and it's not long before he crosses a line. Instead of punishing him, though, Trent takes Billy into his home, hoping to protect his star player as the Pirates begin their playoff run. But when Billy's abuser is found murdered, nothing can stop an explosive chain of violence that could tear the town apart. **BL, AZ & DP**

****SHUTTER**, Ramona Emerson (Soho Crime, \$27.95, August). Rita Todacheene is a forensic photographer working for the Albuquerque police force. She is almost supernaturally good at capturing details. In fact, Rita has been hiding a secret: she sees the ghosts of crime victims who point her toward the clues that other investigators overlook. As a lone portal back to the living for traumatized spirits, Rita is terrorized by nagging ghosts who won't let her sleep and who sabotage her personal life. Her psychologically harrowing ability was what drove her away from her hometown on the Navajo reservation, where she was raised by her grandmother. When Rita is sent to photograph the scene of a supposed suicide

on a highway overpass, the furious, discombobulated ghost of the victim—who insists she was murdered—latches onto Rita, forcing her on a quest for revenge against her killers, and Rita finds herself in the crosshairs of one of Albuquerque's most dangerous cartels. **DP**

****GREENWICH PARK**, Katherine Faulkner (Gallery, \$27.99, February). Helen's idyllic life—handsome architect husband, gorgeous Victorian house, and cherished baby on the way (after years of trying)—begins to change the day she attends her first prenatal class and meets Rachel, an unpredictable single mother-to-be. Rachel doesn't seem very maternal: she smokes, drinks, and professes little interest in parenthood. Still, Helen is drawn to her. Maybe Rachel just needs a friend. And to be honest, Helen's a bit lonely herself. At least Rachel is fun to be with. She makes Helen laugh, invites her confidences, and distracts her from her fears. But her increasingly erratic behavior is unsettling. And Helen's not the only one who's noticed. Her friends and family begin to suspect that her strange new friend may be linked to their shared history in unexpected ways. When Rachel threatens to expose a past crime that could destroy all of their lives, it becomes clear that there are more than a few secrets laying beneath the broad-leaved trees and warm lamplight of Greenwich Park. **Kirkus, BL & AZ**

****THE BANGALORE DETECTIVES CLUB**, Harini Nagendra (Pegasus, \$26.95, May). When clever, headstrong Kaveri moves to Bangalore to marry handsome young doctor Ramu, she's resigned herself to a quiet life. But that all changes the night of the party at the Century Club, where she escapes to the garden for some peace and quiet—and instead spots an uninvited guest in the shadows. Half an hour later, the party turns into a murder scene. When a vulnerable woman is connected to the crime, Kaveri becomes determined to save her and launches a private investigation to find the killer, tracing his steps from an illustrious brothel to an Englishman's mansion. She soon finds that sleuthing in a sari isn't as hard as it



seems when you have a talent for mathematics, a head for logic, and a doctor for a husband. **BL, AZ, PW & DP**

****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. **IJ, BL, AZ & DP**

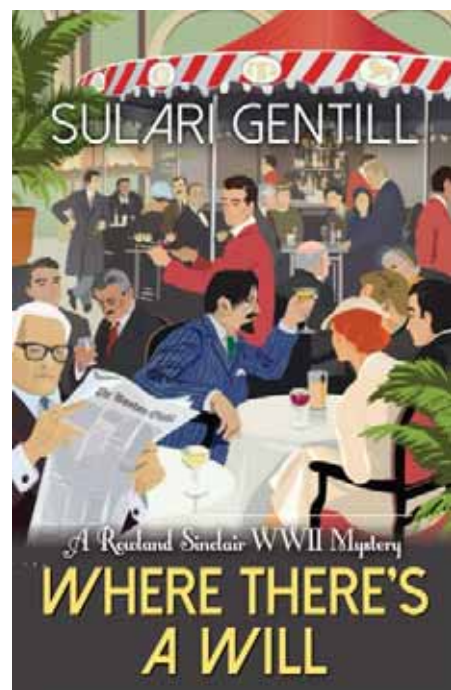
****BLOOD SUGAR**, Sascha Rothchild (Putnam, \$27.00). "I could just kill you right now!" It's something we've all thought at one time or another. But Ruby has actually acted on it. Three times, to be exact. Though she may be a murderer, Ruby is not a sociopath. She is an animal-loving therapist with a thriving practice. She's felt empathy and sympathy. She's had long-lasting friendships and relationships, and has a husband, Jason, whom she adores. But the homicide detectives at Miami Beach PD are not convinced of her happy marriage. When we meet Ruby, she is in a police interrogation room, being accused of Jason's murder. Which, ironically, is one murder that she did not commit, though a scandal-obsessed public believes differently. As she undergoes questioning, Ruby's mind races back to all the details of her life that led her to this exact moment, and to the three dead bodies in her wake. Because though she may not have killed her husband, Ruby certainly isn't innocent. **PW & AZ**

Best Paperback Originals

****DEATH IN THE SUNSHINE**, Steph Broadribb (Thomas & Mercer, \$15.95, March). After a long career as a police officer, Moira hopes a move to a luxury retirement community will mean she can finally leave the detective work to the youngsters and focus on a quieter life. But it turns out The Homestead is far from paradise. When she discovers the body of a young woman floating in one of the pools, surrounded by thousands of dollar bills, her crime-fighting instinct kicks back in and she joins up with fellow ex-cops and new neighbours Philip, Lizzie and Rick to investigate the murder. **AZ & DP**

****THE HEIGHTS**, Louise Candlish (Atria, \$16.99, March). 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, AZ & 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 MURDER OF MR. WICKHAM**, Claudia Gray (Vintage, \$17.00). The happily married Mr. Knightley and Emma are throwing a party at their country estate, bringing together distant relatives and new acquaintances—characters beloved by Jane Austen fans. Definitely not invited is Mr. Wickham, whose latest financial scheme has netted him an even broader array of enemies. As tempers flare and secrets are revealed, it's clear that everyone would be happier if Mr. Wickham got his comeuppance. Yet they're all shocked when Wickham turns up murdered—except, of course, for the killer hidden in their midst. Nearly everyone at the house party is a suspect, so it falls to the party's two youngest guests to solve the mystery: Juliet Tilney, the smart and resourceful daughter of Catherine and Henry, eager for adventure beyond Northanger Abbey; and Jonathan Darcy, the Darcys' eldest son, whose adherence to propriety makes his father seem almost relaxed. In this tantalizing fusion of Austen and Christie, from New York Times bestselling author Claudia Gray, the unlikely pair must put aside their own poor first impressions and uncover

the guilty party—before an innocent person is sentenced to hang. **BL & AZ**

****THE RED CANOE**, Wayne Johnson (Agora, \$16.95). Buck, government name Michael Fineday, Ojibwe name Miskwa' doden (Red Deer) is on the brink of suicide. He has just been served divorce papers by his wife Naomi, who is fed up with his savior complex and the danger it often attracts to their door. Living on the border of Shakopee Mde-wakanton Sioux Community reservation, Buck makes a living as a boatbuilder and carpenter. He spends his days alone, trying to win the trust of a feral cat...until a semi-feral girl shows up, fascinated by the canoe Buck is building. Lucy, Ojibwe name Gage' bineh, (Everlasting Bird), lives in a trailer alone with her father, a local policeman struggling with PTSD which is compounded by the loss of Lucy's mother. Just barely fifteen she has lived with a lifetime of abuse, while knowing that if she ever spoke out, her father would bear the consequences. Buck senses Lucy is in trouble and doesn't hesitate to come to her defense. **BL & LJ**

****HOMICIDE AND HALO-HALO**, Mia P. Manansala (Berkley, \$15.99, February). Things are heating up for Lila Macapagal. Not in her love life, which she insists on keeping nonexistent

despite the attention of two very eligible bachelors. Or her professional life, since she can't bring herself to open her new café after the unpleasantness that occurred a few months ago at her aunt's Filipino restaurant, Tita Rosie's Kitchen. No, things are heating up quite literally, since summer, her least favorite season, has just started. To add to her feelings of sticky unease, Lila's little town of Shady Palms has resurrected the Miss Teen Shady Palms Beauty Pageant, which she won many years ago—a fact that serves as a wedge between Lila and her cousin slash rival, Bernadette. But when the head judge of the pageant is murdered and Bernadette becomes the main suspect, the two must put aside their differences and solve the case—because it looks like one of them might be next. **IJ & AZ**

****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 & AZ**

****THE NEXT TIME I DIE**, Jason Starr (Hard Case Crime, \$14.95). Steven Blitz didn't think about his own safety when he saw the man trying to force a woman into his car. He stepped in to defend her, and got a knife to the gut for his troubles. But when he wakes up in the hospital from what should have been a fatal wound, he finds the whole world changed – a different president in the White House, a loving family when he'd been on the verge of divorce, more money in the bank than he's ever seen. There's a dark side, though: in this world, Steven Blitz is not a good man.

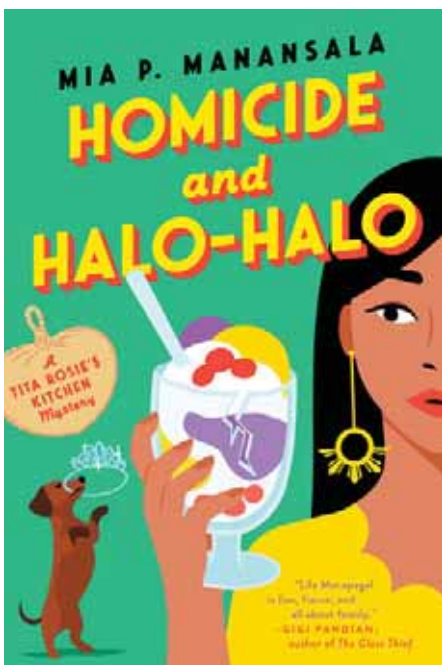
And now he's got to get himself out of serious trouble without even knowing what it is he's done wrong. **DP (2)**

****THE MARLOW MURDER CLUB**, Robert Thorogood (Poisoned Pen Press, \$16.99, Marlow Murder Club #1). Meet Judith: a seventy-seven-year-old whiskey drinking, crossword puzzle author living her best life in a dilapidated mansion on the outskirts of Marlow. Nothing ever happens in Marlow. That is, until Judith hears her neighbor shot while skinny-dipping in the Thames. The local police don't believe her story. It's an open and shut case, of course. Ha! Stefan can't be left for dead like that. Judith investigates and picks up a crew of sidekicks: Suzie the dogwalker and Becks the vicar's wife. Together, they are the Marlow Murder Club. When another body turns up, they realize they have a real-life serial killer on their hands. And the puzzle they set out to solve has become a trap from which they might never escape... **PW & AZ**

Best Thrillers

****DREAM TOWN**, David Baldacci (Grand Central, \$29.00, Archer #3). It's the eve of 1953, and Aloysius Archer is in Los Angeles to ring in the New Year with an old friend, aspiring actress Liberty Callahan, when their evening is interrupted by an acquaintance of Callahan's: Eleanor Lamb, a screenwriter in dire straits. After a series of increasingly chilling events—mysterious phone calls, the same blue car loitering outside her house, and a bloody knife left in her sink—Eleanor fears that her life is in danger, and she wants to hire Archer to look into the matter. Archer suspects that Eleanor knows more than she's saying, but before he can officially take on her case, a dead body turns up inside of Eleanor's home . . . and Eleanor herself disappears. **Kirkus & AZ**

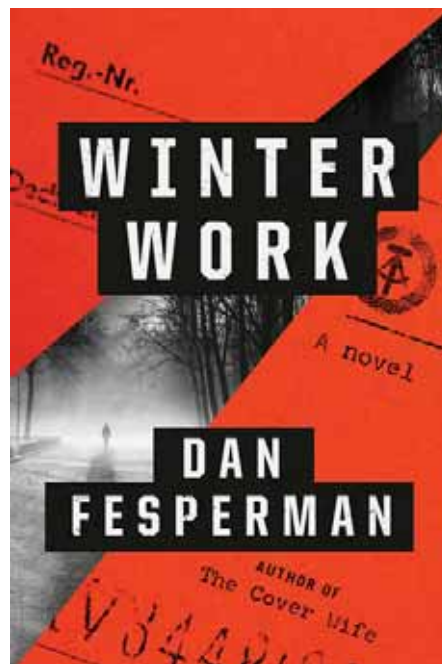
****IN THE BLOOD**, Jack Carr (Atria/Emily Bester, \$28.99, Terminal List #5). A woman boards a plane in the African country of Burkina Faso having just completed a targeted assassination for



the state of Israel. Two minutes later, her plane is blown out of the sky. Over 6,000 miles away, former Navy SEAL James Reece watches the names and pictures of the victims on cable news. One face triggers a distant memory of a Mossad operative attached to the CIA years earlier in Iraq—a woman with ties to the intelligence services of two nations...a woman Reece thought he would never see again. Reece enlists friends new and old across the globe to track down her killer, unaware that he may be walking into a deadly trap. **AZ & DP**

****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 interrogation, 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 & DP**

****WINTER WORK** by Dan Fesperman (Knopf, \$28.00, July). On a chilly early morning walk on the wooded outskirts of Berlin, Emil Grimm finds the body of his neighbor, a fellow Stasi officer named Lothar, with a gunshot wound to the temple and a pistol in his right hand. Despite appearances, Emil suspects murder. A few months earlier he would have known just what to do, but now, as East Germany disintegrates, being a Stasi colonel is more of a liability than an asset. More troubling still is that Emil and Lothar were involved in a final clandestine mission, one that has clearly turned deadly. Now Emil must finish the job alone, on uncertain ground where old alliances seem to be shifting by the day. Meanwhile, CIA agent Claire Saylor, sent to Berlin to assist an Agency mop-up action against their collapsing East German adversaries, has just received an upgrade to her assignment.



She'll be the designated contact for a high-ranking foreign intelligence officer of the Stasi, although details are suspiciously sketchy. When her first rendezvous goes dangerously awry, she realizes the mission is far more delicate than she was led to believe. **DP**

****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, AZ & 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 superforecaster—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 intelligence'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. **PW, BL, AZ & 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 & DP**

****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 ISLAND**, Adrian McKinty (Mullholland, \$28.00). After moving from a small country town to Seattle, Heather Baxter marries Tom, a widowed doctor with a young son and teenage daughter. A working vacation overseas seems like the perfect way to bring the new family together, but once they're deep in the Australian outback, the jet-lagged and exhausted kids are so over their new mom. When they discover remote Dutch Island, off-limits to outside visitors, the family talks their way onto the ferry, taking a chance on an adventure far from the reach of iPhones and Instagram. But as soon as they set foot on the island, which is run by a tightly knit clan of locals, everything feels wrong. Then a shocking accident propels the Baxters from an unsettling situation into an absolute nightmare. When Heather and the kids are separated from Tom, they are forced to escape alone, seconds ahead of their pursuers. Now it's up to Heather to save herself and the kids, even though they don't trust her, the harsh bushland is filled with danger, and the locals want her dead. Heather has been underestimated her entire life, but she knows that only she can bring her family home again and become the mother the children desperately need, even if it means doing the unthinkable to keep them all alive. **PW, AZ & BL**

****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**

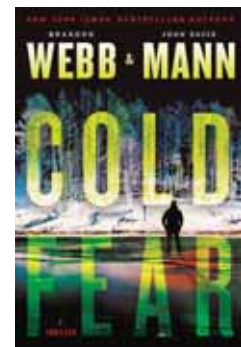
****THE INVESTIGATOR**, John Sandford (Putnam, \$29.00, Letty Davenport #1). By age twenty-four, Letty Davenport has seen more action and uncovered more secrets than many law enforcement professionals. Now a recent Stanford grad with a master's in economics, she's restless and bored in a desk job for U.S. Senator Colles. Letty's ready to quit, but her skills have impressed Colles, and he offers her a carrot: feet-on-the-ground investigative work, in conjunction with the Department of Homeland Security. Several oil companies in Texas have reported thefts of crude, Colles tells her. He isn't so much concerned with the oil as he is with the money: who is selling the oil, and what are they doing with the profits? Rumor has it that a fairly ugly militia group—led by a woman known only as Lorelai—might be involved. Colles wants to know if the money is going to them, and if so, what they're planning. Letty is partnered with a DHS investigator, John Kaiser, and they head to Texas. When the case quickly turns deadly, they know they're on the track of something bigger. Lorelai and her group have set in motion an explosive plan . . . and the clock is ticking down. **LJ, AZ & 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**



A Visit From the Book Broad

Meredith Anthony



A GAME OF FEAR

By Charles Todd

William Morrow, \$28.99

Rating: A

First line: Too often, Rutledge thought as he shut the door of the flat, carried his valise to the motorcar, and set out for the coast of Essex, humor has a malicious twist to it.

A GAME OF FEAR is a brilliant gem of a novel, the 24th in the extraordinary Inspector Ian Rutledge series. Set in 1921 a few years after World War I, Scotland Yard Inspector Rutledge is sent to investigate an incident in a small village in Essex, a couple hours south of London. He is accompanied by the omnipresent voice in his head, Hamish MacLeod, a Scotsman who served under Rutledge in the war and who Rutledge was forced by circumstances to execute for insubordination when he refused an order during the ghastly battle of the Sommes. Ironically, it was Hamish's dead body that kept Rutledge alive when a shell killed and buried the remaining members of their squad. Rutledge was the only survivor. Shell-shocked, the otherwise intelligent and level-headed Inspector now carries the reminder of the horror of war with him everywhere. Together, one alive, one dead, they make a poignant and affecting team.

The specific incident in Essex involves a well-born widow who reported that she witnessed a murder at night in her garden. Watching from her bedroom window in a stately home, she saw one man kill another. She recognized the killer but knew he was long dead. Having no telephone, she locked herself in her bedroom and reported the incident in the morning. But no body or blood was found and no trace of foul

play. Because of her social station, Scotland Yard is asked to send someone to look into it—Ian Rutledge, who is often sent to remote parts of Great Britain to investigate murders. He takes the case seriously and begins to uncover other deaths in the past and one more in the present. The stately home, now hosting tours to pay for the upkeep, was adjacent to a military airfield during the war. The widow and the soldiers stationed nearby co-existed peacefully enough, for the most part, but there were strange incidents, as well. Rutledge unravels the tangled plot with his usual skill and determination. As Rutledge solves the crime, a parallel story line furthers his own story. His ongoing emotional fallout from the war, his quest for redemption, his need for love, his moral fiber. In **A GAME OF FEAR**, as in Rutledge's own life, the past informs the present and must be reckoned with.

Each novel in this unique series is a perfect gem. Each is complex, well-plot-

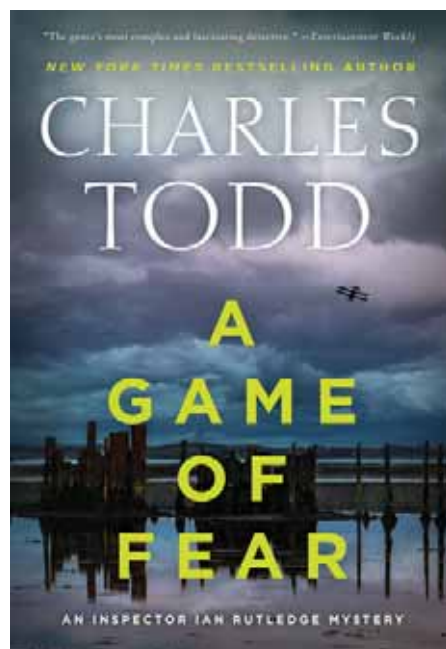
ted, beautifully written, and lavishly detailed. Each can be read with satisfaction as a stand-alone, but reading the series in order provides an additional emotional resonance as the central character confronts challenges both external and internal.

There are many pleasures to be found in this series. There is the historical detail of the post-war years, the effect of the first world war on an area's economics and industries, its families, its society. Each novel takes place in a corner of England (and occasionally Scotland and Wales) and lovingly details the character of the locale, its industry, its history, its people, and its secrets. The characters are well-drawn, memorable and complex. (By the way, why has no one made this into a TV series? I'm looking at you, BritBox! Hell, I'm looking at you, Netflix!)

What sets the fine novels of the Rutledge series apart is its emotional heft. It sounds big themes and explores big ideas: morality, loyalty, atonement, grief, service, duty, love. And it is not afraid to confront ethical dilemmas and conflicts.

Why do we read mysteries? Is it for the thrills? Is it to test our deductive skills against those of the protagonist? Is it to feel superior to the criminals, the wrong-doers? Is it to confront the evil that people do, and then to feel relief as the orderly world is restored when the mystery is resolved? It may be all those things but I like to feel that we also read to find out how to live, how to be a good person, a moral person, in a world of ambiguity and compromise and meanness. That is why we should read Charles Todd. It makes us better.

The loss this past year of the amazing Caroline Todd, half of the mother-son writing team behind the Ian Rutledge



books and the wonderful Bess Crawford series, was devastating to me and to all her friends and fans. I know we all hope very much that both series will continue in the capable hands of Charles Todd.

THE MAID

By Nita Prose

Ballantine Books, \$27.00

Rating: B

First line: I am your maid.

THE MAID is an arresting, first person narrative, told in the voice of a hotel maid, a woman invisible to most. We soon realize that Molly is different. It gradually becomes clear that she probably falls somewhere on the autism/Asperger's spectrum. She's quite bright but she misses social cues and is often baffled by the behavior of the people around her. Her beloved grandmother, who raised her, has died and now Molly lives alone and friendless. But she has a job she loves. She's a maid in a grand old hotel and her perfectionist bent lends itself to thorough cleaning. Then, one day she finds a guest's dead body. Molly quickly progresses from witness, to suspect, to amateur detective. Maybe because she lives by a set of rigid rules, she holds our interest and our sympathy throughout.

Much is said lately about the unreliable narrator in mysteries. **GONE GIRL** and **GIRL ON A TRAIN** are both examples. Criminals and liars and blackout drunks tell the story. The reader is tasked with reading between the lines to figure out what really happened. I love books that make me work hard. A first person protagonist on the autism spectrum is a variant on the unreliable narrator. Maybe a socially challenged narrator. Or an otherly oriented narrator.

One of my favorite recent books is **RUBBERNECKER** by Belinda Bauer, about a medical student with Asperger's syndrome who uncovers and solves a mystery. One of my favorite series is E. J. Copperman and Jeff Cohen's Asperger's Mystery series. The books are funny, and touching and insightful. **THE QUESTION OF THE MISSING HEAD** is the first of five and it's terrific.

THE MAID is a good addition to

this new subgenre.

ANTHEM

By Noah Hawley

Grand Central, \$29.00

Rating: A

First line: There they are. America's future.

Speaking of high lit... This is a big book. **ANTHEM** is definitely a contender for that elusive perennial prize, Great American Novel, following Kurt Anderson's **TURN OF THE CENTURY**, Jennifer Egan's **A VISIT FROM THE GOON SQUAD**, and David Foster Wallace's **INFINITE JEST**. Every decade or so gets its own candidates for GAN, it seems.

ANTHEM begins big: a fugue on what's wrong with this country, with the world, with humankind. It's a shocking beginning, a scream, a cry for help. Not everyone will be pleased. But it settles into a novel, with a story, with characters and a mystery. I found it amazing. But I wouldn't be a bit surprised if someone hated it, couldn't get started, couldn't finish. It's highly political, a savage indictment of the far right, but it's also a fable. Think **AMERICAN PSYCHO** meets Narnia.

The title, **ANTHEM**, is appropriate since it's a song, loud and proud, a mess of a song, complete with strange references and odd juxtapositions. The writing itself is disturbing, a wonderful tangled mess of sentence fragments, song lyrics, advertising slogans, biblical references, political incidents, the boy scout handbook, news stories, price tags, math, forest fires, and asides to the reader, all poured into a plot that swirls and surges and disturbs.

Set in a near future that is post-Trump, post-pandemic, post-BLM, post-#MeToo, post-modern, **ANTHEM** is also the story of a couple of preteens who might be able to save the world, if they don't get martyred along the way. Have they been kidnapped or liberated? Are they yesterday's survivors or tomorrow's victims? An epidemic of teenage suicides has rocked the nation and the world. People are shocked and fearful. People are oblivious and narcissistic. There is more than one reference to



Nero fiddling while Rome burned. There is a Jeffrey Epstein figure complete with his own Giselle.

Now, there are two kinds of people in the world: People who think children are the future and that they should be nurtured and cherished. And then there are people who have read **LORD OF THE FLIES**. I tend to be in the latter camp, but even I had a soft spot for Noah Hawley's ragtag bunch of adolescents who might actually be the future.

FIVE DECEMBERS

By James Kestrel

Hard Case Crime, \$22.99

Rating: B+

First line: Joe McGrady was looking at a whiskey.

FIVE DECEMBERS is a perfect marriage of mystery and history, war and crime. It's a police procedural and a global thriller and an intimate romance, all at once. These inherent contradictions are the heart of its charm. It is both epic and microscopic. It's war noir.

It starts with a crime and a cop who is assigned to investigate. Simple enough. But the place is Honolulu and the date is late November, 1941. Days before the attack on Pearl Harbor. And the hunt for the killer of two young people in Hawaii slowly begins to interweave with the war itself. Luckily, the cop, Joe McGrady, is like a dog with a bone. He can't stop thinking about the snarled threads of the murder that takes him to Guam, Wake Island, Yokohama, and Tokyo. Caught up in World War II, captured, imprisoned, tortured, he refuses to quit. He brings the same

relentless drive to his love life.

The five months referenced in the title are 1941 through 1945. The only odd thing about the plotting is that McGrady actually sits most of the war out. Not in a POW camp or a Nazi torture chamber, but hidden by a sympathizer in the Far East where he lives in relative luxury. After reading in the Acknowledgements that James Kestrel's agent insisted he cut 60,000 words from his original draft, I suspect that's where the war happened. In fact, the war is not the central theme of this book. It's the small incidents that matter, that might have big consequences.

The style is Chandler. The scope is Wouk or Michener.

FIVE DECEMBERS. Come for the history. Stay for the mystery. But be warned: It's more noir than war.

THE ANOMALY

By Hervé Le Tellier;

translated by Adriana Hunter

Other Press, \$16.99

Rating: A

First line: It's not the killing, that's not the thing.

Hervé Le Tellier's French thriller, **THE ANOMALY**, is dystopian fiction at its best. An updated **CANTERBURY TALES**, a fractured fable for troubled times, a post-pandemic **DECAMERON** for today. The precipitating event is not a religious pilgrimage or a deadly plague, but a baffling occurrence that defies logic, the laws of physics, religious dogma or any other explanation. A true anomaly.

A large portion of **THE ANOMALY** is devoted to how people react to the impossible—both those directly affected by the event and people who hear about it and react. Naturally, the effect on outsiders runs the gamut, from scientists to religious fanatics, families to global leaders. The middle section of the novel offers a 'bomber crew' as we follow a contract killer, an abused child, a depressed novelist, a Nigerian rock star, a lovelorn suitor and more. **THE ANOMALY** recalls **ON THE BEACH** by Nevil Shute which posited an apocalyptic event and then offered vignettes detail-

ing a variety of reactions. More recently, Ben H. Winters' epic **LAST POLICEMAN** trilogy wedded that scenario to an investigation with great effect.

Personally, my favorite thing about **THE ANOMALY** is the science behind it. It harkens back to September 11, 2001, when, in the case of the airplane diverted from Boston, all emergency plans failed. Le Tellier posits that a team of scientists and mathematicians were assembled to rewrite thorough emergency protocols to prevent a recurrence. The resulting model identified 37 basic scenarios, each with up to 20 contingent pathways, resulting in about 500 situations, along with accompanying responses. They turned in their report. Then the Department of Defense asked what if something happened that did not fit any of the scenarios. They came up with one more plan. Two young scientists agreed to each carry a burner cell phone to be used only in such a case. Ten years later these phones rang.

What is the deal with air travel? Is the airplane the new locked room? Is there a new subgenre: airplane thrillers? It seems like there's a spate of them recently: Chris Bojalian's excellent **FLIGHT ATTENDANT**, Noah Hawley's brilliant **BEFORE THE FALL**, T. J. Newman's **FALLING**, and Julie Clark's **THE LAST FLIGHT** (and if you count spaceships, **THE APOLLO MURDERS**, **THE MARTIAN**, etc.). And now, from France, we have Hervé Le Tellier's **THE ANOMALY**, which begins with an Air France flight to JFK which runs into serious turbulence over the Atlantic.

WHAT HAPPENED TO THE BENNETTS

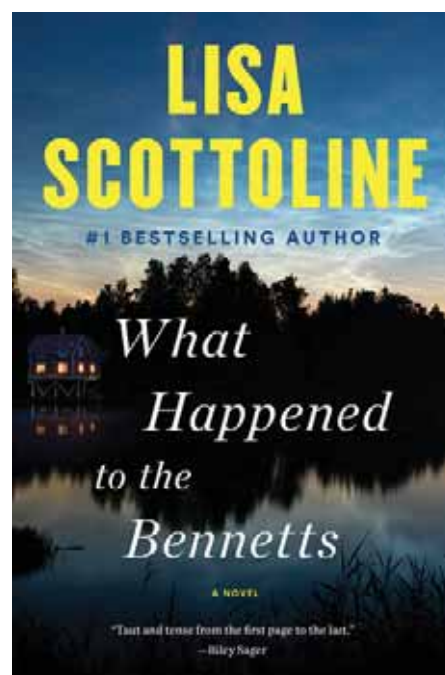
By Lisa Scottoline

Putnam, \$28.00

Rated: A-

First line: I glanced in my rearview mirror at the pickup truck, which was riding my bumper.

From the first page of this excellent thriller, you know you're in good hands. Lisa Scottoline is a brilliant writer. Fierce, focused, economical and yet warm and generous. She sketches the main characters, a suburban family of four, so deftly that you are immediately



hooked and completely involved in this domestic thriller that quickly reaches for higher stakes.

When tragedy strikes the family, you embark on a relentless ride to find healing, love, and justice. What begins as a carjacking gone horribly wrong pits Jason Bennett against a widening circle of evil-doers that threaten his family, his livelihood, his reputation and his life. Although it goes big, widening the circles of repercussions to include some of the highest reaches, it never surrenders its focus on the family, which changes and changes again in the light of each new revelation.

There is a lot of action, expertly detailed, and a satisfyingly high body count. There is also a microscopic examination of a marriage with its cracks and fissures and weaknesses and strengths. In fact, it's rare for a thriller this good to also have deeply engaging characters. If the plot and pacing are good, you frequently get tissue thin or cardboard-brittle stereotypes. If the characters are thoroughly drawn, the stakes may be as small as can-this-marriage-be-saved. Lisa Scottoline is a gifted writer who can write a complex plot which morphs and changes every time you, like the protagonist, figure it out. She also builds real, relatable individuals whose quirks are captivating and whose struggles are engrossing. **WHAT**

HAPPENED TO THE BENNETTS is a terrific thriller by an exceptional writer.

THE RESTING PLACE

By Camilla Sten;
translated by Alexandra Fleming
Minotaur Books, \$25.19

Rating: D

First line: The light in the small room is cold, the stark white glare of an eco-friendly bulb.

I have probably read worse books than the Swedish thriller, **THE RESTING PLACE**, but I can't recall when. Imagine putting Stephen King, Shirley Jackson and, a dash of James Patterson in a blender. The resulting cocktail would be gruesome, and not in a good way.

Combine the sudden frights of King, the flat affectless prose of Jackson, and the short chapters of Patterson. Puree.

THE RESTING PLACE.

The protagonist is, surprise, surprise, damaged. Eleanor is a woman who suffers from prosopagnosia, a rare disorder also known as face blindness. Now, I love unreliable narrators as much as the next guy, but really? Face blindness? Let me guess, she witnesses a murder but can't recognize or describe the killer. Bingo!

There are two alternating first person narrators: one in the present, one in the past. **THE RESTING PLACE** dredges up all the standard scares: the narrator du jour hears a sound behind her. She whirls around. No one is there. Or maybe someone is... Now imagine an endless string of these tepid scares and you'll approximate the reading experience.

Eleanor witnessed her grandmother's murder but can't identify the killer. Could it be someone she knows? Maybe. After her obligatory breakdown she finds she has inherited a house that she didn't know existed. Naturally, it is in a remote location. She goes there with her boyfriend, her lawyer, and her angry aunt. Mayhem ensues.

The alternate story line, set in 1965, is narrated by a young woman who serves as a maid in the house in question. She isn't happy. It's not a happy place. Mayhem ensues.

But actually, there's not enough mayhem and it doesn't ensue fast enough. The characters are stock, the mood is glum, the pace is plodding, the descriptions repetitive. The plot devices include a not very mysterious family mystery, a snowstorm that isolates the participants, and a dumb waiter. Evidently, not sure there was enough suspense, the author also gave nearly every character two names. That's not suspenseful, it's just annoying.

A British thriller also recently used prosopagnosia as a plot device. Alice Feeney's **ROCK PAPER SCISSORS** uses the condition for the husband in a bad marriage. See my review below.

There are four little words that cause every thriller publisher's heart to flutter: "translated from the [Swedish, Norwegian, Icelandic]." But Steig Larsson, Jo Nesbo, and Arnaldur Indridason can rest easy. Far from **THE RESTING PLACE**.

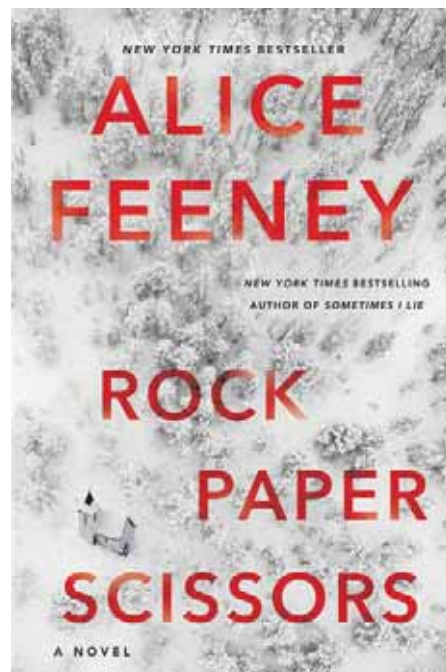
ROCK PAPER SCISSORS

By Alice Feeney
Flatiron Books, \$27.99

Rating: B

First Line: My husband doesn't recognize my face.

This excellent British domestic thriller, **ROCK PAPER SCISSORS**, makes an interesting contrast with the medi-



ocre Swedish thriller, **THE RESTING PLACE**. They use the same building blocks: 1. A protagonist who suffers from prosopagnosia, a rare disorder also known as face blindness; 2. Two first person narrators; 3. A couple who leave their home in the city to go to a remote location during a snowstorm; and 4. A crime witnessed by someone who can't describe the killer.

ROCK PAPER SCISSORS is engaging and suspenseful and unravels slowly as we begin to see that each narrator—the charmingly named Mr. and Mrs. Wright—has secrets that would be catastrophic to the marriage. The first person accounts are interspersed with letters written by the wife to her husband on 10 consecutive anniversaries and never delivered. They provide some context and also allude to mysterious and potentially damaging secrets. A clever narrative device deepens the mystery.

The husband and wife have been having problems and their marriage counselor suggests they go away for a weekend. When Amelia wins a weekend in Scotland at a secluded converted chapel, it seems perfect. It isn't.

I love mysteries about writers. Adam Wright is a successful screenwriter but most of his achievements have been adaptations of other people's novels for the screen. He longs to tell his own stories. Amelia loves animals and works for a home for stray dogs.

Because both Amelia and Adam have secrets and tell lies, **ROCK PAPER SCISSORS** has more than a whiff of **GONE GIRL**. You will find your sympathies shifting again and again as more is revealed. As the weekend destination adds strange and frightening elements, the couple tries to decipher the mystery of who or what brought them there and what it means. It becomes apparent that more than their marriage is at stake. Maybe their lives.

SILENT PARADE

By Keigo Higashino;
translated by Giles Murray
Minotaur Books, \$27.99

Rating: C

First line: Glancing up at the wall

clock, he saw that there were only twenty minutes to go until ten o'clock.

This glacially slow police procedural from Japan is the fourth in the Detective Galileo series. It is my first, so I can't speak to its place in the canon, but it is perfectly serviceable as a stand-alone if you don't mind the slow pace.

The plot, set in Tokyo, revolves around two murders and two shattered families. Two much loved girls are dead, years apart. The same suspect has been arrested in both cases but because the evidence is all circumstantial, he is set free each time. The survivors suffer and yearn for justice, for revenge. And then the suspect is found dead, in a classic locked-room mystery, with no signs of foul play, no marks on the body, no drugs or poisons found at autopsy. The detectives in charge of the case(s) call upon a colleague, a professor of physics at a local university, who has helped solve difficult cases before. Professor Yukawa is known as Detective Galileo for his prowess in applying science to the complexities of crime. His legendary ratiocination is hard at work in this police procedural plus. If you like words like ratiocination, you probably won't mind the measured pace. Like Sherlock Holmes, Nero Wolfe and Hercule Poirot, Yukawa assists the hardworking but more pedestrian police in weighing the evidence and putting together the disparate pieces of one of the most complicated puzzles in the annals of crime.

SILENT PARADE has its pleasures. It's depiction of everyday life in a Tokyo neighborhood can be charming, its characters well-delineated. The chapters switch POVs among the participants. But I found **SILENT PARADE** a slow plod rather than a brisk march. I saw some parts of the solution very early. Some, not so much. But while the resolution is satisfying, even the classic final section, where the case is resolved, falls apart, is resolved again, and then again, seemed little more than tedious.

THE DEATHWATCH BEETLE

By Kjell Eriksson;
translated by Paul Norlen
Minotaur; \$27.99

Rating: B+

First line: *You won't get away!*

This excellent psychological thriller from Sweden is the 9th in a series by Kjell Eriksson. It's my first. I liked it enough to go back to the beginning and read the first entry. I liked it, too. If you are a reader who appreciates a good series read in order, start with **THE PRINCESS OF BURUNDI**, the first book in the Ann Lindell series. If you just want a good, atmospheric Scandinavian thriller, pick up **THE DEATHWATCH BEETLE**. It functions perfectly well as a stand-alone.

Ann Lindell is a middle-aged former homicide detective who is living on the remote Swedish island of Gräsö with her boyfriend Edvard. A woman from the island who had disappeared four years ago, was recently sighted and Ann can't resist getting involved in the mystery of Cecilia's disappearance. The rumors of her possible return stir up old feelings and grievances among the island's residents, including her aging parents and two former lovers. The second mystery is the death four years ago of Cecilia's last lover, Casper. His boat was recovered but his body was never found. Some on the island thought it was an accident or a suicide. Some thought Cecilia herself had killed him. Some thought her controlling father had killed him to prevent them leaving together. Some thought it was one of her former lovers.

The title insect is a wood-boring beetle that can be heard scratching, scratching, scratching in old wood walls. It never stops. Ann Lindell is like that. Asked why she cares about Cecilia's fate, Ann replies disarmingly, "I don't like mysteries."

Gräsö itself is depicted with skill and care. Like islands all over the world, there is a tension between the residents and the summer people who visit or keep second homes there. But it is the characters who elevate this book above its mystery peers. Cecilia herself is brilliantly drawn and refreshingly unlike the usual women in thrillers. She is smart, well-educated, and has been successful in business. And she is catnip to men. Neither Madonna nor whore, she has a rich interior life, but her phys-

icality sets her apart. She is irresistible. She is almost literally a femme fatale. Her sexuality and her undeniable appeal are limned without prejudice. Her lovers each would do almost anything to make her stay.

The POVs jump around so you get some idea of the interior life of each character. And they are a fascinating bunch, each one with a dark secret or two, and each one with a motive for one or more murders.

For a small island with a population under a thousand, there are a lot of deaths and a lot of creative methods—gunshots, knifings, bludgeonings, strangulations, drownings, and even bow and arrows. Go Swedes!

GOOD RICH PEOPLE

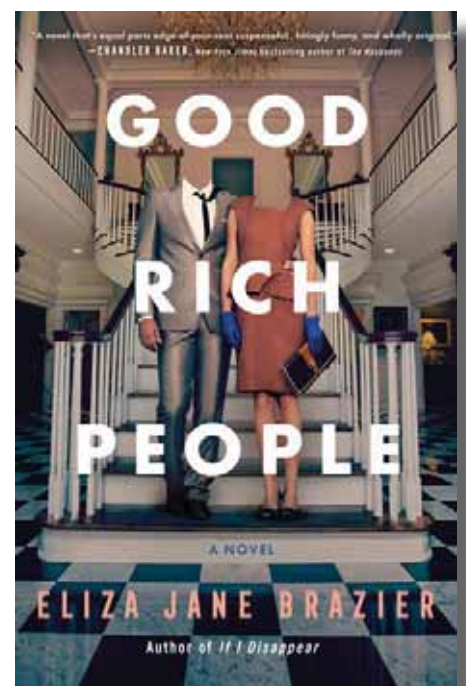
By Eliza Jane Brazier
Berkley, \$27.00

Rating: A-

First line: There is blood in the fountain turning the water an eerie rust color.

This fresh, modern thriller hits the sweet spot between satire and horror. If you felt a tingle of schadenfreude reading about supermodel Julia Fox breaking up with Kanye West, you'll love this kinky look at the shenanigans of the super-rich.

GOOD RICH PEOPLE. First of all,



it's a book-length oxymoron, deeply superficial. In Eliza Jane Brazier's hands the title alone is an oxymoron. But this is not a throw-away book with a gimmick. This is a philosophical look at the very rich and the very poor. As if Nietzsche had written a biography of Jeffrey Epstein. As if Kafka had penned a tell-all about the Kardashians. I loved it.

Lyla is beautiful and rich. She has married Graham, the beautiful, very rich son of Margo, who is beautiful and mega-rich. The three of them live in close proximity in the ridiculously rich LA hills. The sublet part of their estate to the hapless Demi, a young woman who becomes the subject of their obsession. They hate each other and they hate their friends. They are bored. They play games. Sick deadly games. People die.

GOOD RICH PEOPLE is so cinematic it's irresistible to cast it. Margo is like a cross between Celine Dionne and Cher, with a touch of the Crypt-keeper. There is more than a whiff of toxic femininity. The beautiful son, Graham, is, of course, Chris Pine or Wes Bentley. Lyla and Demi could be Amanda Seyfried and Mila Kunis, or the Olsen twins, or even a couple of the lesser Kardashians. There is a nine-tiered garden modeled after the levels of Hell in Dante. The final set piece is an epic party scene that is a breath-taking mash-up of Kubrick's *Eyes Wide Shut* and Bergman's *Seventh Seal*.

The POV hops around among the players. The writing is witty and thought-provoking. Some of my favorite lines: "My nostrils fill with her heavy scent... It's like death but more expensive." "This is a low-security prison. It's like a country club without champagne." "Giving someone what they want is the worst thing you can do to a person." And "Every time a privileged person takes ownership, an angel gets his wings."

But beneath the glitz is a modern Faust story. One character remarks, "It's just a game. We're not playing for your fucking soul." But they are. And they do.

THE FIELDS

By Erin Young
Flatiron Books, \$27.99

Rating: C

First line: She ran without thinking, without direction, desperation driving her deep into the fields.

THE FIELDS is a dark procedural set in Iowa corn country and the first body is found in the cornfields by a drone checking on a path of broken stems. The police officer in charge of the investigation recognizes the body as that of an estranged childhood friend.

But the stakes escalate from "this time it's personal" to "this time it's national" and maybe all the way to "this time it's international," over the course of the novel.

If procedurals are your jam, you will want to get in on the ground floor of this new series. Erin Young checks all the boxes: a damaged cop with a past, a town in an economic downturn, a grisly murder, multiple suspects, additional murders at appropriate intervals, and an assortment of individual, political and corporate villains. Some of the plot twists are telegraphed and are somewhat less surprising than the author seems to think.

I found the novel atmospheric and the setting fully realized. On the other hand, the plot seems formulaic and some of the tropes a bit tired. Enter FBI agents resented by the locals. This is MY case and I'm going to solve it, dammit. Enter the disaffected niece. Adults are all liars and I can take care of myself.

But the slowly emerging villainy of the politicians, the businessowners, and the faceless corporations, while fairly standard, still holds some interest and produces some thought-provoking twists.

The intersection of Big Ag and Big Pharma. Who knew?

THE APPEAL

By Janice Hallett
Atria Books; \$27.00

Rating: C-

First line: Dear both, As discussed, it is best you know nothing before you read the enclosed.

I usually love books that play with

form. From **DADDY LONGLEGS** to **BRIDGET JONES' DIARY** to **WHERE'D YOU GO, BERNADETTE?** and **U UP**, a great entry from Catie Di-sabato, novels have been told in letters, diary entries, emails, IMs, texts, and, in one memorable section of Jennifer Egan's **A VISIT FROM THE GOON SQUAD**, PowerPoint.

THE APPEAL is a British epistolary thriller that explores a crime through a roughly chronological series of notes, emails, texts, phone calls, legal documents and more, by and among a large cast of characters. Most of the missives touch on one of three subplots: an amateur theatrical production that many of them are acting or otherwise involved in; the money-raising attempts of the family and friends of a young cancer victim who needs an expensive treatment; and some mysterious events concerning medical workers who served in Africa in the near past.

Janice Hallett has crafted a puzzle thriller that initially moves quickly and allows the reader to read between the lines in messages that can be unwittingly revealing. Her character, Isabel Beck, a lonely, needy nurse, is a good case in point. Enthusiastic and insufferable, she has no idea how much everyone loathes her.

But despite Hallett's best efforts, the clever format sags somewhere in the middle and unpacks the various crime(s) too slowly and deliberately. The setup is so long and so convoluted that even the most dedicated puzzle-solver will be thwarted. There is also some annoying misdirection. A frame of sorts is provided by a lawyer and a pair of consultants who analyze the documents and themselves try to solve the puzzle. And the final indignity is that some of the clues are withheld until the end. For puzzle enthusiasts, this is a no-no. What started off so well, lapses into overwhelming tedium and terminal messiness.

The crimes themselves include one murder, a couple cases of fraud, and a minor assault or two. The list of individuals (there are several such lists at various points) numbers more than 70. You do the math.

Despite the modern technology, it has a fusty air. **THE APPEAL** reads as if you had given Agatha Christie a cell phone. There is an old-fashioned atmosphere that no microchip can dispel.

DESOLATION CANYON

By P.J. Tracy

Minotaur Books; \$27.99

Rating: C+

First Line: A perfect Los Angeles morning: A cloudless sky so devastatingly blue, you'd swear God had Photoshopped it; a hint of sea in the air that embraced you in a balmy hug; palm fronds waving laconically in a gentle breeze.

P.J. Tracy delivers a very readable procedural set in L.A. Using the standard toolbox—dedicated but damaged cop, even more damaged ex-military type, baffling murder case, clues that lead in strange directions, hints of a vast criminal conspiracy—she crafts a thriller that holds interest as the scope of the case expands. Margaret Nolan is a homicide detective who has killed in the line of duty. It haunts her. Luckily, she stumbles upon a murder. A man is found dead on the grounds of the luxurious Bel-Air Hotel. The case and its complications take her mind off most of her problems, which includes guilt for a line-of-duty shooting, survivors' guilt and grief for her dead brother, her grieving parents, some iffy decisions in her social life. But then the case and her personal problems come together. Eventually her own mother will need to be rescued from the bad guys' desert stronghold. **DESOLATION CANYON** refers to the location of a desert spiritual retreat that preys on the rich is a front for the Russian mafia whose dirty dealings include money-laundering, fraud, human trafficking, smuggling, drugs, and arms.

I just have one tiny problem with **DESOLATION CANYON**. For such a vast conspiracy set in and around L.A., the cast of characters seem to include all the people in Nolan's inner circle—the boyfriend, the ex-military guy, the mother who decides she needs desert-based grief therapy, the father who goes to bring her home. At every turn of

the plot, someone she knows pops up. The denouement has more family members than most Thanksgiving dinners. This buffet table of Nolan family values is a lot to swallow.

This is the second book in a new series for Tracy (now writing solo after the passing of her mother and co-writer on her long-running Monkeewrench series). I haven't read the first entry, **DEEP INTO THE DARK**, but this one stands up on its own. Series completists may want to start with the first.

THE NEXT TIME I DIE

By Jason Starr

Hard Case Crime; \$14.95

Rating: A-

First line: Late Friday evening, I'm in my home office, honing my opening statement for the Jeffrey Hammond murder trial.

Jason Starr delivers good clean economical novels that don't waste a word or your time. The provocatively titled **THE NEXT TIME I DIE** is a lean, tense thriller that never seems rushed but leaves you breathless. Steven Blitz (note the evocative name!) gets dumped by his wife and, stopping at a convenience store for some cigarettes, intervenes in an argument between a woman and a man. He is killed for his trouble. A knife to the gut. But he wakes up in a hospital with no stomach wound and finds a slightly different reality.

Some things have changed for the better—Steven's wife loves him and he has an adorable 6-year-old daughter and more money. But some things have changed for the worse—he has evidently been banging the nanny and has murdered her abusive father. On the good side, the 9/11 attack on the World Trade Center never happened and Trump is not president, but on the other hand someone has a photograph of him burying the nanny's dad's body.

The resolution, or lack of one, is maybe a wee bit disappointing, but, really, where do you go from a set-up like this? The ending is not too problematic. In this case it's not the destination, it's the journey, that's important.

I highly recommend this fine novel that leaps off the page and grabs you by

the throat.

But is it just me, or is something happening in the mystery community that should be acknowledged? Some of our best authors are turning out some strange stuff. Whiffs of the supernatural are becoming commonplace and Raymond Chandler and Rex Stout are lurching around stiff-armed like cosplay fans at a *Walking Dead* convention.

Personally, I think it's the chain of recent troubling events: the election to the presidency of a delusional, crazed monster; the rise of the right-wing fringe culminating in an armed uprising that threatened the underpinnings of democracy; the global COVID epidemic with its unlimited variants; and maybe even the rise of crypto-currency, climate change, and the brutal Russian assault on their former territory. It's a world where anything can happen and reason and order can no longer be relied upon. It's a world where the unexpected, even the impossible, suddenly becomes the norm. I think mystery writers who have always explored the boundaries of morality, friendship, love, loyalty, and decency where they tipped over into violence, sexual aggression, hate, greed, and savagery, are now saying, "Well, if anything can happen, then what if...?"

What if...?

Here's "What if?" We have Noah Hawley imagining a world where an army of children secede from the insanity and establish a base camp in the neo-wilderness. We have Hervé Le Tellier positing a plane landing twice and discharging a second load of the same passengers a month or two later. And we have Jason Starr offering an ordinary guy a second or third chance to get it right. I think what they all want is a do-over. I think we all do.



Central Booking

Kristopher Zgoriski



THE SORORITY MURDER

By Allison Brennan
MIRA \$9.99

Rating: B-

Looking at the description of Allison Brennan's **THE SORORITY MURDER**, readers will notice a number of crime fiction tropes are in play – the death of a young (female) college student, a podcast hoping to solve this cold case, a missing diary, a plot that unspools across dual timelines, and a complex, slightly blemished, lead investigator (or two). However, this is a veteran author who manages to put a fresh and unique spin on her tale of lies, manipulation, and murder.

Much of that vibrancy in **THE SORORITY MURDER** lies at the feet of Regan Merritt. While Regan is brought in to help a student with his senior project – a podcast hoping to discover new information regarding the death of a student and sorority sister, Candace Swain, three years prior – Regan will immediately intrigue readers and become the focal point of the advancing plot. Regan Merritt is a former U. S. Marshal who left the service under tragic circumstances. Her father is also former law enforcement, with a connection to the area where the crime took place. Regan remains dedicated to justice so when her personal trauma sometimes becomes overwhelming, she is able to work through it by helping others – making the case a bit of a cathartic moment for her.

Lucas Vega is the student that Regan is assisting. He has a past with the victim – no surprise there – giving his search for the truth verve and validity. Brennan wisely allows the true reason for Lucas's obsession to slowly reveal itself in tandem with their investigation.

Coupled with the perfectly-timed revelations about Regan's past forever bonds them both in the book itself and in the reader's mind. They are an unlikely pairing, but one that is easy to root for, especially as things get more intense and the danger reaches their doorsteps.

The case in question took place after the annual sorority shindig three semesters back. Candace Swain was murdered, her body discovered not far from the University. However, Lucas has uncovered knowledge that there is a one-week gap between when Candace went missing and when her body was discovered, and he is convinced that someone on campus knows where she was for those days. With roadblocks and unwilling witnesses at every turn, Lucas and Regan must remain flexible and diligent in their efforts to find new evidence.

Allison Brennan's narrative documents a realistic path for an amateur investigation. Regan's work history gives them some added credibility, but each step forward on the search for the truth follows a logical journey from one recently-uncovered fact to the next. So often in books of this nature, there will be leaps of faith and lucky coincidences that seem like flights of fancy, but Brennan has carefully plotted this investigation in order to avoid this pitfall. Even the final explanations of what happened bypass any epic twists to present a logical motive, casting a tragic air upon the entire affair.

Fans of character loyalty will be thrilled to know that Regan Merritt will return next year in another suspense novel from Allison Brennan. No doubt, the events of **THE SORORITY MURDER** will have altered Regan's trajectory and readers will be anxious to witness

her growth as they join her for what is sure to be another fascinating investigation.

BURYING THE NEWSPAPER MAN

By Curtis Ippolito
Red Dog Press \$10.99

Rating: B+

Thousands of books are published every year and yet the reading public only becomes aware of a small cross-section of those titles. Marketing teams at the big publishers and the limited space at mainstream media outlets often dictate how widespread knowledge of a particular title becomes. The vast majority of the output must rely on coveted blurbs from established writers, strong word-of-mouth from fellow readers, the author's active social media presence, and perhaps a top-notch cover design to garner the eyeballs and interest of future fans. When all those elements come together – as is the case with Curtis Ippolito's **BURYING THE NEWSPAPER MAN** – a "little" book gets a fighting chance in the crowded marketplace.

Ippolito wastes no time diving into his story, drawing readers in before they even realize what is happening. On the first few pages, California cop Marcus Kemp is patrolling his typical beat – San Diego's famed Ocean Beach community – discovers a stolen car containing a dead body in the trunk. However, it is not just any body, it's the body of the man who abused Kemp in his youth back in Texas, leaving scars that have yet to heal. Keeping this fact from his colleagues, Marcus Kemp sets out to figure out why the "newspaper man" is now in San Diego, who killed him and why, and just possibly how he can help this individual get away with a crime that ultimately made the world a safer place.

With that setup, readers are virtually guaranteed to race through the next 220 pages or so. Marcus Kemp is an easy to root for "anti-hero" and the comprehensive look back at his troubled childhood further endears him within reader's hearts. Readers love to witness a damaged character overcome their challenges in spectacular, albeit realistic,

fashion. Even as Marcus makes choices and decisions that seem antithetical to his career in law enforcement, his humanity and heart shine through, making it easy to be on his side. Populating his “investigation” with a cadre of unique and interesting side characters allows Curtis Ippolito to hone his skills at bringing fictional people to life on the written page with just the briefest of salient details and pitch-perfect dialogue.

As important as character development is, Curtis Ippolito’s real ace-in-the-hole is his ability to transport the reader to the various locations central to the storyline. Whether it is the free-wheeling beach communities around San Diego, the iconic downtown corridor (including the convention center), or a historic view of small-town Texas, each setting is brought vividly to life to such an extent that readers can smell the sea air and/or hear the hustle-and-bustle of daily life. This is a writer who understands the power of setting and uses it to full advantage throughout his narrative.

BURYING THE NEWSPAPER MAN is a dark novel, firmly entrenched on the noir side of the crime fiction scale. Sexual abuse is a tricky subject to use as the backdrop for any novel – let alone a first novel – but Ippolito approaches the topic with compassion and respect for the victim, detailing the long-term effects this loss of innocence has on survivors. There is no magic cure-all here as readers get the sense that this journey toward healing and self-love is only just beginning for Marcus Kemp. Whether Curtis Ippolito intends to tell further stories featuring Marcus Kemp remains to be seen, but either way, those who read **BURYING THE NEWSPAPER MAN** will never forget him.

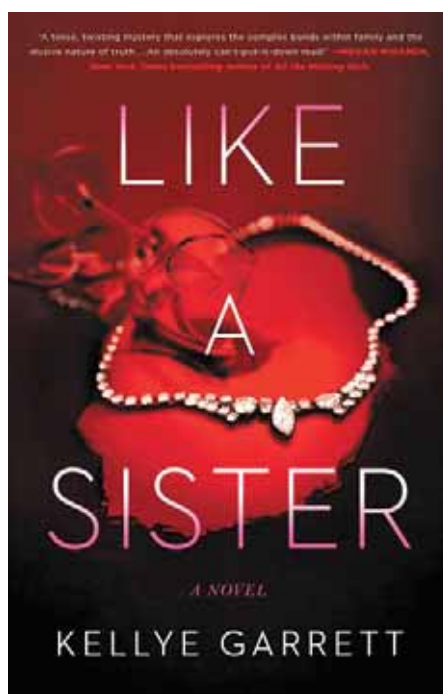
LIKE A SISTER

By Kellye Garrett

Mulholland Books \$28.00

Rating: A+

Some people are just born storytellers, able to craft narratives that feature fascinating characters in compelling plots with an ease that seems magical. Add Kellye Garrett to that list.



After two nearly perfect light-hearted cozy mysteries, Garrett turns her pen to the slightly more menacing domestic suspense arena and knocks it out of the park. **LIKE A SISTER** will undoubtedly amass Kelley Garrett a legion of fans willing to follow her lead anywhere.

For years now, Kellye Garrett has worked tirelessly to promote diversity of all kinds within the crime fiction community and with **LIKE A SISTER** she places herself front and center in advancing that cause within the domestic suspense sub-genre. For that she will be commended, however that should not be thought of as **LIKE A SISTER**’s crowning achievement – for that one only needs to examine how cleverly-paced and tightly-plotted this novel actually is. Kellye Garrett sets the trap in the early pages of her narrative and before readers realize it, they will be under her spell all the way to the finish.

Lena Scott hasn’t spoken to her half-sister Desiree Pierce in over two years. It is not that she doesn’t care about Desiree, but the two have nothing in common – other than a father – and Lena has spent too many late nights bailing Desiree out of trouble.

As a reality star – albeit one on a rollercoaster of a career – Desiree Pierce is used to living her life in the spotlight, with every move she makes documented

on social media. But as so often happens, the public impression and the truth do not always align. When your entire existence is filtered to filth, is it possible to uncover the human between the glam and the slam? Meanwhile, Lena has spent her life distancing herself from her media-centric family and is quite content in her more laid-back and private lifestyle. Two very different women, both of whom are strong Black role models in their own way.

LIKE A SISTER begins with Lena discovering that Desiree has been found dead at a Bronx playground, a passing that the authorities are more than happy to chalk up to an accidental overdose. But despite their differences and the recent estrangement, Lena knows her half-sister had no reason to be in the Bronx, nor would she have defaced her flawless skin with the track marks associated with needle use. Determined to expose the truth, Lena sets out on an amateur investigation into Desiree’s final days.

Evidence quickly points to an incident from Desiree’s past, requiring Lena to reach out not only to the father who has never shown her the love she deserved, but also to Desiree’s best friend, former lover, and various acquaintances. Throughout this journey, Kellye Garrett highlights inequities, stereotypes, and biases of all types without ever allowing the novel to stray into direct social commentary. This author’s first and foremost goal is to entertain her reading public while remaining true to societal realities – warts and all.

The plotting within **LIKE A SISTER** is extremely tight. Kellye Garrett has crafted a completely believable path for Lena’s makeshift investigation, allowing her – and the reader – to absorb each new revelation before following those clues to the next likely destination. A cadre of authentic characters provide more than enough suspects to keep readers guessing and the ultimate reveal more than satisfies. Fans – and let it be known that anyone who reads **LIKE A SISTER** will be a fan – will turn the last page already anxious for Kellye Garrett’s next domestic suspense thriller.

THE ACCOMPLICE

By Lisa Lutz

Ballantine Books \$28.00

Rating: A-

Lisa Lutz is one of crime fiction's most unpredictable practitioners. Opening a new Lisa Lutz novel is like taking a step into the dark unknown, aware that potential danger lurks around every turn as the storyline coils its labyrinthine path to unexpected places. This week, Lisa Lutz releases yet another spellbinding standalone – **THE ACCOMPLICE**.

THE ACCOMPLICE is the story of two friends – Owen and Luna – who meet in college and quickly become inseparable. Their bond is uniquely strong, able to survive years of evolution with nary a scratch to show for the strain. Never straying into romantic or sexual territory, Owen and Luna are nevertheless rarely apart – even once they begin to have lives of their own. This loyalty of friendship is what will first pull readers into their story. Why do they have this undeniable connection?

But this is a crime novel, so Lisa Lutz also provides not one, but two, mysterious deaths to keep readers invested. The first mysterious death occurs while Owen and Luna are in college. The narrative slowly builds to this death as readers are introduced to Owen and Luna and watch how their connection develops. It is often said that platonic male/female friendships are rare, but in this novel readers witness how circumstances and chemistry can combine to create bonds that are indestructible.

The second timeline occurs after Owen and Luna have married other people – developments that do not alter their friendship in the slightest. When Owen's wife is found brutally murdered, the police investigation threatens to expose all the secrets of this unusual bond – some of which, Owen and Luna haven't even shared with each other.

Readers would have reason to worry in lesser hands, but with Lisa Lutz they can proceed, confident that this is an author who is so fully in control of her craft that the risk of disappointment is minimal. **THE ACCOMPLICE** is not an action-packed thriller, nor does

it have incredible twists that readers would never expect. Everything in this novel blossoms directly from the friendship of Owen and Luna. Lisa Lutz has created two characters that could not really be more different and yet, every interaction on the page is believable and compelling. Just as Owen and Luna are forever bonded within the narrative, readers will find that they are intrigued by both of these characters equally and that thinking of them as separate entities becomes virtually impossible.

Pacing within a fictional work is challenging to nail, but in **THE ACCOMPLICE**, Lisa Lutz makes it look like child's play. She never rushes the developments that are so important to the story arc, but she manages to also never let the reader's interest wane. What we end up with is **two** deep character studies surrounded by **two** captivating mystery plots that are chock full of other interesting and fully-developed side characters. The resolution is realistic and satisfying without the need for cheesy gimmicks or unnecessary twists. Lisa Lutz is an author asserting confidence in the story she has created, not allowing the literary marketplace to dictate her path, and **that** will surely bring a legion of new fans to this phenomenal author.

THE UNDISCOVERED DEATHS OF GRACE MCGILL

By C. S. Robertson

Hodder \$15.99

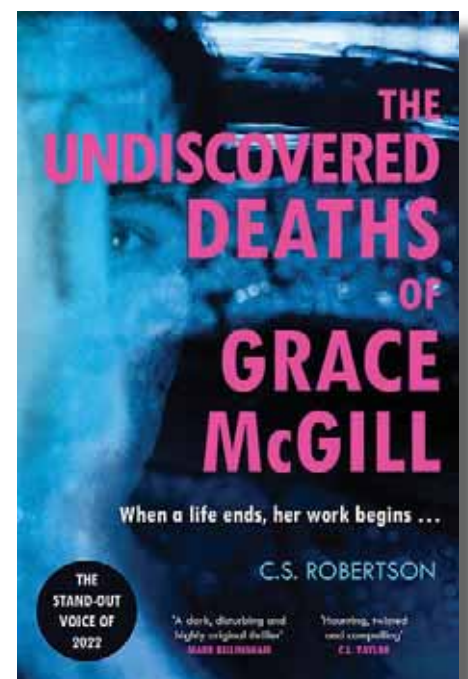
Rating: A

THE UNDISCOVERED DEATHS OF GRACE MCGILL by C. S. Robertson is the type of book that once read is not easily forgotten. The impact lingers for a multitude of reasons, but they all boil down to the fact that Robertson is a gifted talent who uses all the tricks in the authorial toolbox to elicit real emotion from the reader at every stage of this journey. This should not come as too much of a surprise, given that C. S. Robertson is a new penname for Craig Robertson, who has already amassed a loyal readership based on previous novels. **THE UNDISCOVERED DEATHS OF GRACE MCGILL** will certainly satisfy those

existing fans, but it is also poised to be a breakout book that expands Robertson's readership exponentially.

Grace McGill is a character unlike any previously seen on the crime fiction landscape. She is a loner – and a lonely – woman whose level of empathy seems infinite. Her chosen career involves crime scene clean-up, but of a very specific type. Grace McGill will come in and sanitize the homes of people who passed and remained undiscovered for extended periods of time. Because of her solitary life, Grace feels a connection with these individuals on a visceral level, horrified that their lives were so empty that no one even noticed they were gone. Grace is meticulous in her work – not only making sure that any harmful toxins have been removed from the premises, but also doing general cleaning and straightening-up as a sign of respect for those forgotten people. Grace even attends their funerals, which is just one of many decisions that seem to indicate her bond with the deceased borders on the unhealthy.

It is at the clean-up job following the discovery of Tommy Agnew's long-decaying body – and the later funeral – that Grace notices some strange coincidences that lead her to believe there is a larger story at play with this man's death. Among Agnew's



belongings, Grace finds a photograph taken years earlier in Bute, Scotland and her research into this past is about to expose secrets that have been buried for far too long. Secrets that will lead to other deaths. Secrets that Grace McGill cannot remain silent about.

THE UNDISCOVERED DEATHS OF GRACE MCGILL is told entirely in the first-person voice of Grace McGill – an inspired decision that instantly bonds the reader with this unforgettable character. That choice also allows for the many mysterious secrets to unspool slowly, despite the police involvement that Grace’s insights elicit. **THE UNDISCOVERED DEATHS OF GRACE MCGILL** takes the reader on an emotional roller-coaster, never avoiding the difficult aspects of death, so readers should prepare themselves. The journey is as much about Grace McGill’s self-assessment as it is about the larger mystery that propels the plot. Each reader will turn the last page having their own personal opinion regarding various aspects of the novel, which ensure that this is a novel that will be discussed for years to come.

SECRET IDENTITY

By Alex Segura

Flatiron Books \$28.99

Rating: A+

Alex Segura’s career path in crime fiction – while enviable – is the result of hard-work and determination bolstered by a truly exuberant personality and genuine respect for those he has met along the journey. When his new novel, **SECRET IDENTITY**, hits the shelves next week, Segura’s success may seem like an overnight sensation to some, but loyal crime fiction readers have been rooting for Alex for years. His Pete Fernandez series amassed an increasingly fanatic following (and its fair share of award recognition) across the five novels featuring this flawed, but lovable, hero. Never one to rest on his laurels, Alex Segura now turns to what he knows best – the comic book industry – and skillfully weaves that into an unforgettable crime plot with #ownvoice elements; an iconic lead character; a gritty, authentic depiction of historical New York; and more

than a dash of innovative creativity.

Alex Segura takes a risk right from the start by placing a bisexual Latinx heroine at the heart of **SECRET IDENTITY**. When readers first meet Carmen Valdez, she is working as the administrative assistant to Jeffrey Carlyle – editor-in-chief and owner of Triumph Comics. It’s the 1970’s and Triumph Comics is a third-tier – or more accurately a no-tier – company in the floundering comic book industry. For her part, Carmen views her current position as a stepping-stone towards becoming a comic creator herself, despite getting signs from every direction that women are not yet respected in this industry. Regardless of the seeming hopelessness of her situation, Carmen’s work ethic is undeniable.

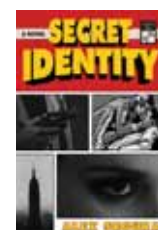
When one of Triumph Comics’ stable of content creators reaches out to Carmen after hours to ask for her help in creating a new, more “modern” superhero, Carmen sees this as an opportunity to prove her worth. The only problem is that this man insists that Carmen keep her involvement a secret, at least until the comic becomes successful. The plan seems sketchy, but Carmen agrees, only to find her hopes thwarted when her co-creator is found dead and there is no one left to backup her claim of involvement in the creation of *The Lethal Lynx*.

Alex Segura takes his time getting to this death – despite it being the central crime element of the novel. The early chapters of **SECRET IDENTITY** recount the origin story of both the Lethal Lynx and of Carmen Valdez herself. Running in parallel, readers find out about Carmen’s past, growing up in Miami – as backstory elements are woven into the current day narrative – alongside examples of the creative process behind crafting a new comic book superhero from whole cloth. This proves to be a masterful move as it forever bonds both Carmen and The Lynx in the reader’s mind. The inclusion of pages from *The Lethal Lynx*’s comic book adventures is an inspired decision that elevates the verisimilitude surrounding the battle over ownership of this character.

As Carmen sets out to prove that she helped to create The Lynx, she is forced to investigate matters on the downlow. This places her in some unsavory locations and requires her to re-evaluate her opinions of many co-workers in the Triumph Comics family. Hot on her heels is an official investigation by the NYPD, necessitating that Carmen make some risky – and Lynx-like choices. Meanwhile, her personal life (in the form of an ex-lover showing up out of the blue) only complicates matters for Carmen. Alex Segura really shines in his depiction of this personal side of Carmen Valdez. Writers are too often criticized for writing characters who have life experiences different than their own and yet here is a prime example of how unbelievably successful this can be when approached with grace, respect, and humility.

At a time when diversity is a rallying-cry for much of the crime fiction community, Alex Segura truly walks the walk. Throughout **SECRET IDENTITY**, Segura never shies away from using Carmen’s native language without need of fussy or creative ways to provide translation. This choice – which may seem radical to some – only elevates the authenticity of the work and astute readers are always able to use context clues to understand the gist of what is being said. There is little doubt that Carmen Valdez will be a much-referenced character in any future discussion of diversity within crime fiction, but most important of all is that her humanity will resonate with readers from all backgrounds, helping to unify us all.

There is no better compliment than saying that only Alex Segura could have written **SECRET IDENTITY**. His historic knowledge of the comic industry combined with a formidable Latinx heroine makes **SECRET IDENTITY** one of the highlights of 2022.



From The Waterfront

Ted Hertel



THE RUNAWAY

by Nick Petrie

Putnam, \$27.00, January

Rating: A

It has often been said that no good deed goes unpunished – and is that ever the case here. Combat vet and PTSD sufferer Peter Ash is minding his own business when he comes across a broken-down car and Helene, a very frightened, very pregnant woman on the run from her abusive husband. He's the sort of guy who can't leave a person in danger behind, so he naturally offers her a ride. But her husband is only a few minutes away from catching up with her. Ash gets caught in a trap, loses the woman to her abuser, and sets out to rescue her once again, only to discover that the husband has the same, if not better skills, that Peter himself has. Time to call in the Marines, in the form of his lover June and his combat buddy Lewis.

This is the seventh in Nick Petrie's consistently entertaining Peter Ash series and it is one of his best. Ash is a man who wasn't built to turn away from trouble and here he pulls out all the stops in his efforts to save Helene from her abuser. This is exactly the kind of thriller I most enjoy: one man who is out to protect an individual from a cadre of evil men, here led by a man who is obsessed with control, sex, and murder. Ash is not James Bond, saving the world from a megalomaniac. He is a person who sees a wrong and sets out to right it. He has the training and abilities to do just that in a believable fashion.

The reader will care about Petrie's in-depth characters. He gets into their heads and their emotions. Peter's continuing evolution from his PTSD is nicely demonstrated here. The action

scenes (and there are plenty of them) are fast-moving, realistic, and detailed. This is a page-turning novel with sections of short chapters, each section ending on a cliff-hanger making this a difficult book to put down. While we recognize that Ash will likely live on to fight another villain in another book, the suspense is still genuine in that we won't know how he'll escape from whatever predicament he finds himself in or who else may not make it out alive.

Fortunately, his supporting cast is excellent. Both June and Lewis have important skills that they are willing to use in the pursuit of justice. Here both of them make valuable contributions to help Peter. The only one missing is the faithful dog, Mingus, "doggone" it! But it is the pregnant victim of abuse, Helene, who really stands out, growing from a frightened girl into a strong capable adult. The story is set in the desolate landscape of Nebraska, Montana and surrounding states, with that solitude being central to the themes of the book. Here people must rely on themselves to survive...with a little help from their friends.

If you like Lee Child's Jack Reacher novels or Zoe Sharp's Charlie Fox books, then this is the series for you.

FADEOUT

by Joseph Hansen

Soho Syndicate, \$15.00, January

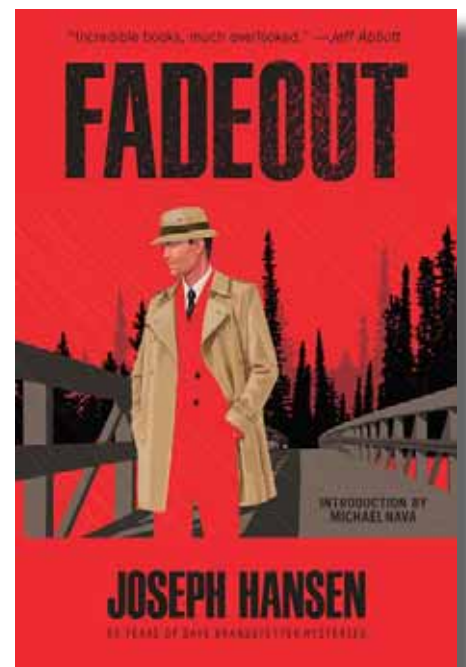
Rating: A

Medallion Life Insurance assigns death claims investigator Dave Brandstetter to look into the disappearance of a southern California radio personality named Fox Olson. Olson, a failed writer but a successful folksinger, is presumed dead by his wife (and just about everybody else) following an automobile

accident. His wrecked car is found after it was driven off a bridge and swept away in a flooding arroyo, but Olson's body has not been located. Brandstetter smells a rat and digs into the case. Was it accidental death, suicide, murder, or an intentional disappearance?

This novel was first published in 1970 and was groundbreaking due to the fact that both the creator and his creation were gay (although author Joseph Hansen preferred and used the term "homosexual"). As the new introduction by Michael Nava points out, at that time "49 of 50 states criminalized gay sex between consenting adults." Throughout his twelve volume Brandstetter series, Hansen wanted to send a message to his straight readers that "homosexuals were pretty much like everyone else in the world." Dave is mourning the loss of his male lover of twenty years as the novel opens, humanizing him immediately. This theme of loss and missed opportunities runs through the novel, letting the reader know that Dave's world is no different than our own. It is brilliantly handled, not hitting the reader over the head to make a point, but nonetheless clearly and intelligently presented.

The plot here is really secondary to the human emotions that are presented through believable characterizations. Hansen's language and descriptions, punctuated with dry humor, flow



smoothly in lines like “Her voice had the terrible fake cheerlessness of a death ward nurse” or “He dismissed the girl with an embalmed smile.” This is a morally complex noir novel, set in small town California the mid-1960s, coming in at well under two hundred pages. There isn’t a wasted word in it. It is a landmark novel, one that deserves its re-publication more than fifty years after it first appeared.

Joseph Hansen was 46-years-old when **Fadeout** was first published. Before it was accepted Hanson had been writing gay pulp fiction for years for small presses. Twenty-two years after its 1970 appearance, Hansen was recognized by the Private Eye Writers of America with its Lifetime Achievement Award. Yet other recognition, including the Edgar Award, eluded him. He died in 2004. But there is good news on the horizon: Soho plans to re-release all twelve novels in the series before the end of 2022. Look for them. They are all at least as good as this one.

SECRET IDENTITY

by Alex Segura

Flatiron Books, \$27.99, March

Rating: B+

In the mid-’70s the comic book world is beginning to find itself falling on hard times. While DC and Marvel are at least holding their own, the much smaller Triumph Comics is struggling to stay above water. Carman Valdez, an assistant at Triumph, wants nothing more to create a new breakthrough superhero series. But she’s a woman in a male dominated field. She sees her chance when one of her male Triumph colleagues approaches her and together they create “The Lethal Lynx,” a female hero. But when the proposal is accepted, Carmen finds that her name is not attached to it. Worse, her colleague is found dead, her finished scripts turned in (also without her attribution). But when the renamed *Legendary Lynx* becomes a huge hit that could salvage Triumph, Carmen sets out to discover the truth behind the killing and to get credit for her work on the Lynx.

Author of both mystery series (the Pete Fernandez mysteries) and comics/

graphic novels, Alex Segura is the perfect choice for writing this history-based novel of the comic book industry. He has incorporated numerous mentions of the real creators of that era, from Stan Lee to Jack Kirby to Steve Ditko on the Marvel Comics side to Julius Schwartz, Dennis O’Neil and Neal Adams from DC, along with famous characters (Captain America, The Flash, and many more) and other smaller comics companies, such as Charlton and Warren, as well as the EC purge of the 1950s. This all adds to the fun of the book for comics fans who will know these creators’ names and their invaluable contributions to the “all in color for a dime” realm. Those readers not familiar with these names will learn some history of the “four-color world” and will find no impediment to understanding the story Segura tells.

Segura captures 1975 New York City well. With its crime-ridden streets, filthy subways, food (especially pizza), cockroaches, and more, he has shown the reader in a most distinctive way a city that is careening toward financial ruin. Further, the book contains illustrations from *The Legendary Lynx* comic book (drawn by Sandy Jarrell), which enhance the atmospheric descriptions of Segura.

But of course readers of the deadly pleasures of mysteries will want to know how well the book holds up from the crime point of view. I’m glad to say it does so very well. Carmen, a flawed protagonist who doesn’t have the initial courage to stand up for herself, manages to grow over the course of the story, taking the investigation into her own hands. Loaded with potential suspects, each with their own motive, Carmen must sort through them while putting herself into danger. The solution is satisfactory and the epilogue is a final sad commentary about life in the comics business.

The theme of an outsider trying to find justice, trying to reclaim an identity and a long-denied legacy resonates throughout not only the story itself, but also of the comic book Carmen has created. Marginalized as a woman, both she and the Lynx want recognition for

what they are doing. Not an easy task for either of them.

DOUBLEBLIND

by Libby Fischer Hellman

Red Herring Press, \$17.99, March

Rating: B

Emily Waldorf dies within minutes of receiving a COVID booster shot. Then two more people who got their inoculations at the same location also die shortly afterward. Private investigator Georgia Davis is retained by Emily’s sister to get answers. After being stonewalled by witnesses, Davis joins forces with the F.B.I. as a confidential source in return for protection against danger from people who don’t want her to find answers. Then, on a family bonding trip to Nauvoo, Illinois, several people confuse her with Eden, an abused and on-the-run Fundamentalist Mormon wife who bears an uncanny resemblance to Georgia. The investigator becomes the victim of a hit-and-run attempt as a result. This sets her on a path to try to locate and protect the young woman.

We’ve suffered through the pandemic for the last two years – why would anyone want to read about it in our “escapist” fiction? Isabelle Allende was quoted as saying, “The experience of the whole planet frozen in place because of a virus is so extraordinary that I am sure it will be used extensively in literature.” Libby Fischer Hellmann has her own answer to the question: Make it interesting and entertaining. She has accomplished both in **DoubleBlind**, which are really two separate stories. While both are interesting, it is the one about the Mormon woman that is the more absorbing. The COVID portion of the book, once it gets past the rather slow and technical details of the creation and distribution of the vaccine, finally hits its stride before being tied up rather too quickly.

However, right from the early introduction of the frightened Eden, readers will find themselves sympathizing with her plight. Running from Nauvoo, which had been the onetime home of the Mormons before most of them moved to Utah, Eden finds herself pursued by her gun- and drug-running

husband and his friends. Georgia's accidental encounter with those who will stop at nothing to either kill Eden or return her to her cruel husband puts Georgia and her family in the sights of the vicious sect. This ultimately leads to a fast-moving and violent confrontation with the criminal gang.

Combining an up-to-the-minute tale of crime in the COVID era with fundamentalist Mormon noir (there's a phrase I never thought I'd find myself using!), Hellmann has put together an engrossing story that will appeal to her regular readers and win her new ones.

MURDER AT THE PORTE DE VERSAILLES

by Cara Black

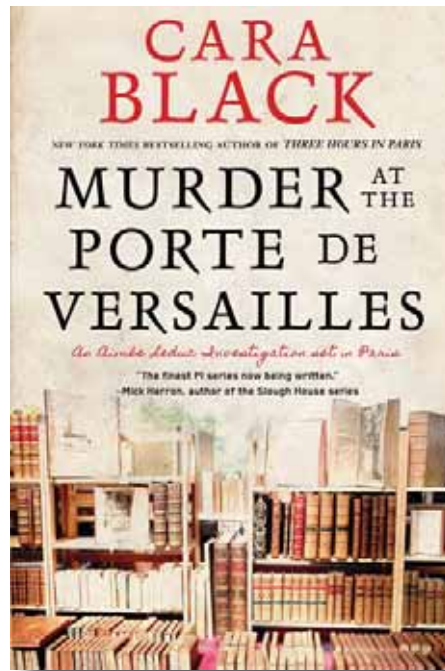
Soho Crime, \$27.95, March

Rating: A-

November 2001, two months after the horror of 9/11. Parisians are also living with terrorist threats. Security consultant and private detective Aimée Leduc is hosting a birthday party for her three-year-old daughter when a bomb goes off at a police laboratory, severely injuring her friend Boris. Traces of the explosive Semtex are found under his fingernails. Aimée refuses to believe that Boris was involved in any way with the bombing, although the unconscious man immediately becomes the number one suspect. The bombing appears to be linked to radical factions in the city, as well as a cold case her late police detective father had been involved in.

This is the twentieth installment in Cara Black's consistently well-researched and entertaining Leduc novels. Rife with references to both well-known and hidden Paris locales, the always fashionable Aimée manages to get herself entangled with French secret police as they draft her into using her connections to assist them. But are they and the police looking only to pin the explosion and a resulting death on her friend? More deaths follow, as well as an attack on Aimée herself.

The theme of family runs through this novel. Other things may change us, as the French say, but we start and end as family. Aimée's family consists of characters regular readers will be glad



to see return, from daughter Chloé to godfather Morbier to lover Melac, who wants Aimée to move from Paris to live with him in Brittany. But who would Aimée be without Paris?

Come take a tour of *La Ville Lumière* with its blue-lit *bateaus-mouches*, Notre Dame with the inky wash of the Seine, Saint Michel's spot-lit fountain, past the dark expanse of the Jardin du Luxembourg, then skirting Montparnasse and into the fifteenth arrondissement and its view of the Eiffel Tower. Aimée pursues justice on behalf of Boris, often at the neglect of her work and that precious family. She frequently relies on her late father's advice: put in the work or it will haunt you later. But could doing so eventually estrange her from her loved ones?

As Aimée seeks to determine why anyone would set off bombs in a police laboratory, she begins to suspect that there is much more to the motive than terrorism. That discovery could cost her everything, including her life. As always Black writes a deeply layered, complex story, filled with twists, a marvelous travelogue, and those all-important family ties.

NIGHT RAIDER/BAY PROWLER

by Barry N. Malzberg,
writing as Mike Berry

Stark House, \$15.95, March

Rating: C+

Vietnam veteran and New York City narcotics cop Burt Wulff goes off the deep end when he finds that his fiancée has overdosed . . . but was it accidental or did his enemies kill her as a warning to him to lay off? He quits the force but hangs on to his guns, then hits the streets looking to destroy a drug chain. Starting with the lowest links, the men pushing the dope to the buyers on the street, Wulff blasts (literally) his way up the chain, killing with no compunction. He has become "The Lone Wolf."

Following the success of Don Pendleton's Executioner series, Barry N. Malzberg was hired by Berkley to produce ten novels in ten months about an ex-law enforcement officer who would declare war on the drug trade. He produced as required and, because the books were not unprofitable, wrote four more over the next two years. Over the course of the series, Wulff grew crazier and crazier.

Basically, The Lone Wolf series can be looked at as one extremely long novel told in fourteen chapters, each one book in length. The entire series is one long arc, each novel taking place in a different city. This volume collects the first two of those novels (each about one hundred pages long). Filled with nearly non-stop violence, they reminded me of old-time pulp novels, written with abandon and pretty much designed to be read that same way. Small time hoods understand pressure points and a punch in the mouth, often followed by a bullet to the brain, one by one up the chain. Wulff considered himself to be a dead man already, killed at least in spirit by the death of his fiancée. Villains couldn't do anything to hurt a dead man, while The Wolf's victims simply became impersonal objects to him, often referred to as "things" (as in "the thing on the floor [was] whimpering"). Of course he found that there was no end to the chain. Someone was always ready to step in and take over, as Wulff went from New York to San Francisco in these two novels (and many more locales in succeeding stories in the series).

If you like hard-boiled pulp-style

action, with a psychotic protagonist out for revenge, this series is for you.

The Short Circuit

SMALL FELONIES 2

by Bill Pronzini

Stark House, \$15.95, April

Rating: A

Mystery Writers of America Grand Master Bill Pronzini not only writes terrific novels (dip into any in his “Nameless Detective” series or stand-alone award winners like *Snowbound* or *A Wasteland of Strangers*), he also has published an amazing variety of more than three hundred short (and “short short”) stories. This collection contains fifty stories, each two thousand words or less, and every one of them well worth reading.

A man seeks justice and absolution in the form of seeking out his own executioner (*Night Walker*, written with Barry N. Malzberg, who co-wrote thirteen other stories with Pronzini in this anthology). “Nameless” seeks a bail jumper but instead meets a man who has no son in the shattering *Home Is the Place Where*, one of three Nameless stories collected here. There’s a shocking confession in a park (*Betrayal*). Nothing ever happens in the sleepy little town of Summerville – until it does (1971’s *I*

Know a Way, the oldest story here). A monster dwells in the suburbs (in the appropriately named *Monster*). There’s a different kind of monster entirely in the only previously unpublished story here, *Such Things as Nightmares Are Made Of*, which asks the question: “Are our dreams a reflection of our past . . . or a premonition of our future? These are only a few of the tales that will keep you saying, “Well, okay, I can read just one more” and then find that you can’t stop.

Any way you look at it, this book has something for everyone who loves stores of crime, detection, psychological suspense, noir, fantasy, humor, and twists. Each one is a tightly written gem that can be read in five minutes or less, perfect that moment just before you want to drop off to sleep – only to then discover it’s suddenly impossible to do so.

READER, I BURIED THEM

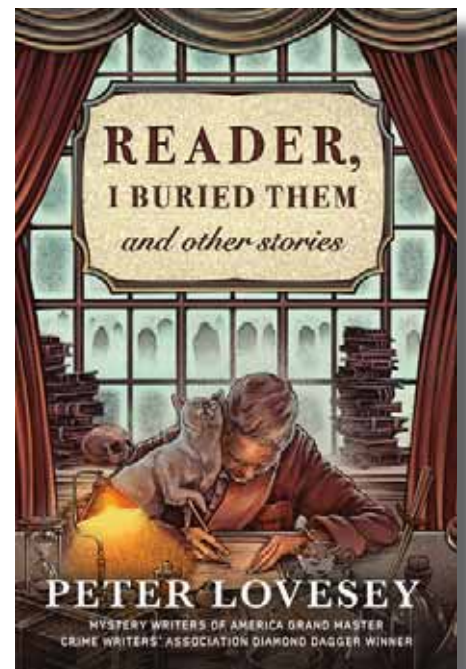
by Peter Lovesey

Soho Crime, \$27.95, February

Rating: B+

Mystery Writers of America’s Grand Master Peter Lovesey has been publishing novels (more than forty) and short stories (well over one hundred) for more than fifty years now. This latest collection of stories includes his very first short tale published in 1973, *The Bathroom*, about a murder in (where else?) a bathroom. Ruth Rendell enjoyed the tale so much she got in contact with Lovesey and encouraged him to keep writing short fiction. He listened, as of course who wouldn’t listen to Ruth Rendell? This collection also includes *The Tale of Three Tubs*, his commentary on *The Brides in the Bath* (in *The Life of Sir Edward Marshall Hall*), which Lovesey had read when he was a mere child of ten and then later inspired him to write his first published short story.

Most of the eighteen collected stories are from more recent times. Three are previously unpublished to this book, including *And the Band Played On*, the humorous and very touching story of a grandfather who kept singing the title song that meant so much to him. There is also *Formidophobia*, in which the reader learns that not all scarecrows are

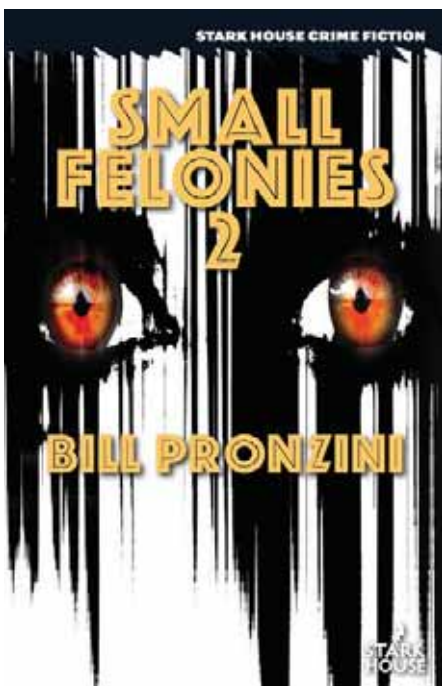


as child-friendly as the one in the *Wizard of Oz*. Or there is *Gaslighting*, with its theater setting, an interesting take on the play and film *Gaslight*, though for me this one ended a bit too abruptly.

A common theme that seems to run through many of the stories is individuals who are unexpectedly exposed to crime. Take the story from which the collection got its name, *Reader, I Buried Them*, in which group of monks, each with assigned tasks, run afoul of the one who is the gardener and gravedigger. Or the beekeeper in *Sweet and Low* as another of many examples.

Old friends appear in this anthology, as well. Chief Inspector Peter Diamond (described by another character as “an overweight slob”) is conned into hosting a Christmas holiday gathering at his home and needs to get out of his duties in *A Three Pie Problem*. A convenient murder solves that problem. Don’t miss Edgar Allan Poe in *The Deadliest Tale of All*. And who could resist this opening line in *Remaindered*: “Agatha Christie did it” . . . and reader, she did in fact do it in this clever and entertaining tale with some nice twists.

Dig into this book anywhere and you will not be disappointed. If you haven’t read Lovesey before, this should get you picking up his novels and other short story collections.





The OldTimer Corner

Earl Derr Biggers created Charlie Chan, a Honolulu detective sergeant, who appeared, surprisingly enough, in only six novels (although a seventh by other authors came along many years after Biggers died in 1933 at age 48). I say “surprisingly” since there were at least forty-four Chan films made, not to mention many foreign language versions. Of course it is well-known that Chan was often portrayed by Caucasian actors, like Warner Oland (Swedish, he played Chan in 16 films. He’d also played Fu Manchu), Sidney Toler, and Roland Winters. Chan had a radio program (different series on three networks) in which he was portrayed once again by Caucasian actors. There were television adaptations (including one with Ross Martin playing Chan!), a comic strip (that ended after WWII started. Chan was Chinese, for God’s sake, not Japanese!), several comic book series (one created by Joe Simon and Jack Kirby, better known for having created Captain America and many other Golden Age comic book characters), board games and even a short-lived Broadway play. Not bad for a character about whom so few novels were written.

The Harvard educated Biggers found his first success with the novel **Seven Keys to Baldpate** (1913) but it was with

the publication of the first Chan novel, **The House Without a Key** (1925), that he found lasting success, thanks to Chan’s popularity. All of the Chan stories were first serialized in periodicals before publication in book form. Biggers has said that the inspiration for Chan was real life detective Chang Apana, a Chinese-Hawaiian member of the Honolulu Police Department who had solved numerous cases.

THE CHINESE PARROT (1926) is Biggers’ second Chan novel. The detective is hired to safeguard the valuable Phillimore necklace on its journey from Honolulu to California where it is to be delivered to its buyer, the wealthy P. J. Madden. While the necklace was originally intended to be transported to New York, Madden changes his mind and wants it dropped off at his California ranch instead. Suspecting some trickery is up, Chan and Bob Eden, the son of the jeweler who brokered the sale, go to the ranch but stall the delivery until they can discover the problem. When the ranch’s parrot is heard to shriek “Help! Murder! Put down the gun” and a murder happens shortly thereafter, the detective knows that their instincts were right.

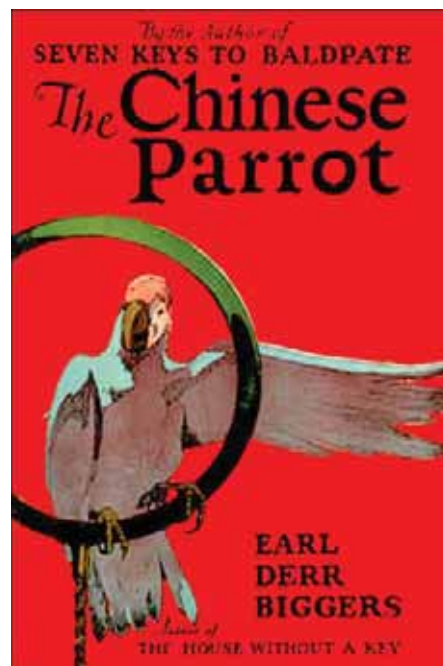
Keep in mind that this novel is now ninety-six years old and times have radically changed. Chan disguises himself as a cook-houseboy for Madden. This

requires him to speak throughout much of the book in pidgin English, using such phrases as “Maybe you wantee catch ‘em moah fiah, hey, boss?” Chan recognizes just how awful this is for him, telling Eden, “Silly talk like that hard business for me. Chinese without accustomed dignity is like man without clothes, naked and ashamed....but by the bones of my humble ancestors, I will not say ‘velly.’”

Along with that sort of cringe-worthy dialogue, there are also racist slurs against the Chinese which I will not quote. Getting past that sort of thing may be difficult for a lot of people.

However, if one can put that in the rear view mirror, there is much to make the mystery worthwhile. The story is loaded with Chinese proverbs such as “Successful detective is plenty often man on whom luck turns smiling face” and “He who rides on tiger can not dismount.” At one point Chan, father at this point of ten children, tells one of his cohorts that “You act like number one detective,” bringing back memories of Charlie’s Number One Son (often played by Keye Luke as Lee Chan) from the films. This is a fine portrait of Hollywood in the mid-1920s, “the most picturesque factory town in the world.” The book is filled with gentle humor such as when Chan, answering someone who questioned whether he was amazed by the resolution of the case, replied, “Surprised detective might as well put on iron collar and leap from deck. He is finished.”

A brief word on the physical copy of the book I own. It is Pocketbook #68, 6th printing from November 1943. It is probably the worst condition copy of the very few editions of that particular printing that exists. It literally fell apart in my hands into three separate sections, two of which came loose from the binding. It looks as if at one time someone dropped it into the bathtub while reading it (*it was not me!*) Water-stained and wrinkled, I’ve owned it since I was a kid. I probably paid a nickel for it in a used book store I frequented and even at that price, I got ripped off, condition-wise. But it was still fun to read and report on here.



Maggie's Cozy Mystery Cafe'

Mary Mason



CITIZEN K-9

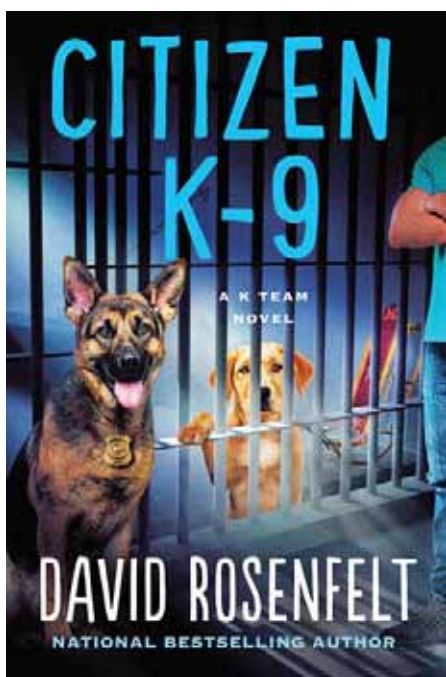
By David Rosenfelt,
Minotaur Books, \$27.99

K Team #3

Rating: A

In another visit to Patterson, NJ, we are again privy to the workings of the K team, a team of retired cops (human & canine) along with one man army Marcus and as needed legal assistance from Andy Carpenter, attorney for dogs in need of legal aid.

The Patterson PD has hired the K team to help solve a cold case. Ex cop Corey Douglas and his canine partner Simon Garfunkel team with Carpenter's wife Laurie Collins, also an ex cop. One man army Marcus is also on the team, which is a cause for relief and wonder. The case is a local mystery. Ten years ago at a 10th high school reunion, 2 students vanished into thin air.



Looking into a 10 year old crime is not easy, but the K team is up to the challenge. Interviewing reunion attendees after a decade is hard as memories fade. Luckily one alum has some material from the reunion stored away. It is a help, as is some interviews with friends of one of the missing students.

The team also has contacts with a number of less than stellar citizens. The mob could be involved in the case, but is there a valid reason for the disappearance, or more likely murder of the 2 people. The victims were not close friends, nor were they linked in any way other than being at the same event.

Along the way of the investigation, the team seeks the help from a local professor, and even tries to make contact with different factions of the local mob. The results are puzzling, though the team is able to put a "W" in the column when they solve the case with an answer that made my jaw drop.

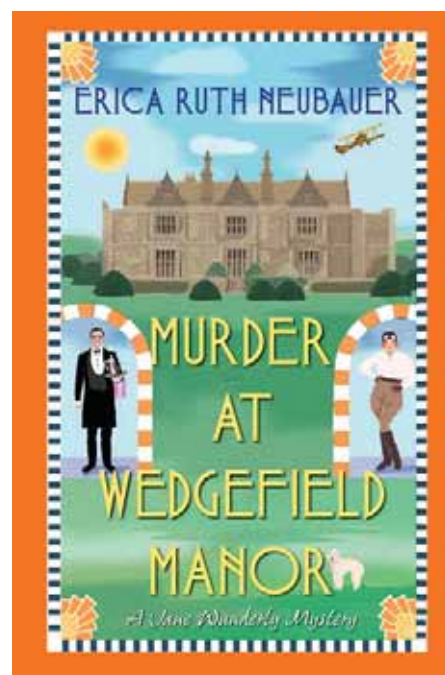
I thoroughly enjoy this series. It's nice that Andy Carpenter makes a brief appearance, as I'm a big fan of his, but I also like to see Laurie & Corey shine, and Simon the k9 also proves his worth. I'm anxiously waiting the next in the series.

MURDER AT WEDGEFIELD MANOR

by Erica Ruth Neubauer
Kensington, \$26.00
Jane Wunderly #2

Rating: B+

American widow Jane Wunderly and her aunt Millie are returning to America after the events in Egypt (recounted in the first in the series). They stop in England to see one of Millie's old friends and lover at his country



home. WWI has ended and their host, Lord Hughes, has helped the recovery by hiring several ex soldiers in various jobs around the estate.

Jane is an avid reader of mystery novels, and happy to sample the books in the ample library. She's also taking flying lessons from one of the ex servicemembers on the staff, hired to also give lessons to Lord Hughes. Sadly, one of the veterans, Simon Marshall, was killed in a crash of one of the estate cars. The crash was not an accident as the brake cables were cut. A knife belonging to Lord Hughes was found in the vicinity.

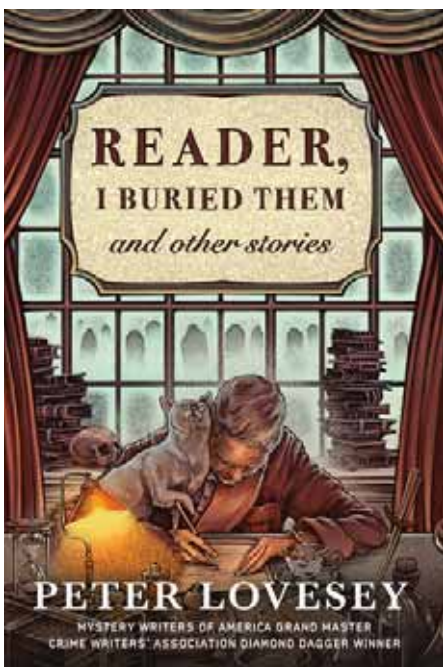
There are other strange happenings on the estate, with strangers seen on the grounds in the dark, as well as visiting relatives that don't always get along with others on the estate. The employees are for the most part devoted to their employer, something that

might not be said of all of his relations. His adopted daughter is in fact his daughter, with Millie being her mother. A bright spot in the guest list is Mr. Redvers, a man Jane met in Egypt on her last adventure.

When Jane is pushed into a stream, while looking for clues, she realizes that there may be much more danger than was previously imagined. Sure enough, the plane has been sabotaged, something that the instructor, Captain Hammond, can deal with. Who would have been the target for that crime?

When more relatives show up, the estate isn't the serene getaway it once was. With lives at stake, Jane & Redvers must team up again to solve the mystery. Lord Hughes may not have been squeakily clean in his business dealings, but he doesn't seem the type for murder, especially with his concern for veterans with disabilities and emotional issues. It's up to Jane & Redvers to prove his innocence, and they do it with the reader cheering them on all the way.

I enjoyed this book and wish I had received the first in the series to read. I don't feel I missed anything vital to my enjoyment of the second book, but would have loved to read about the events in Egypt. I'm looking forward to where her travels take Jane next time.



READER, I BURIED THEM and Other Stories

By Peter Lovesey

Soho, \$27.95

Rating: A

This collection of short stories by the clever mystery writer Peter Lovesey is an example of the skill of a master craftsman. Short stories are an art form to me. A very small amount of time/space given to create an event or situation, explore it and get a resolution. Lovesey has shown himself very capable of creating wonderful stories, and having them set in various eras and places.

Edgar Allen Poe was used to perfection. My feeling was if the even described didn't happen, without a doubt it could have done so. He also uses his famed character Peter Diamond in a holiday tale of murder. Lovesey also gives the personal touch to the mystery of the Brides in the bath, along with sharing his inspiration for choosing that particular story.

My favorite, though, is set in a bookstore. The owner is found dead, and there is a question of who will inherit the stock of the store, said to contain some very valuable mysteries. I was wishing I could be a part of that scenario, perhaps to score the treasures.

I do say that all the stories were very enjoyable, and I recommend the book very highly.

DEATH OF A TELENODELA STAR

by Teresa Dovalpage

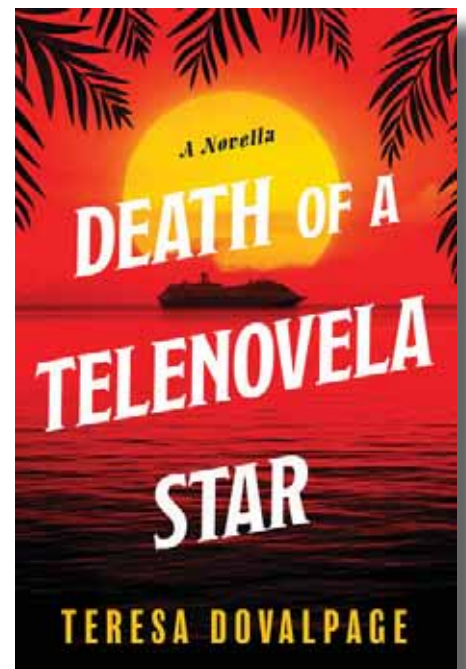
Soho, \$7.99)

Standalone Novella

Rating: B

When former Havana police detective Marlene Martinez decided to take her niece Sarita on a cruise, she had no idea what she was in for. Since her move to Miami, Marlene's life is much more serene than her life as a cop. However, taking a teenager on a cruise is in itself an "adventure" but when you throw in a hot male telenovela star also on the cruise, things get very complicated.

Carloalberto is a handsome Telenovela star, currently appearing in a



reality tv show. The Terrific Two features actors and screenwriters pitching their ideas to Hollywood producers. Carloalberto and his screenwriting partner, Helen Hall, are one of the last three teams on the show. His young fans are sure they will win, and he really needs the win as he is in serious debt. Sarita is obsessed with him, and tries every chance she gets to put herself in his path. Marlene is getting experience dealing with a lovesick teenage girl. Marlene is still recovering from a romance gone bad, and just needs a vacation. She does meet the ship's pastry chef, who has an amazing cake, and begins a friendship which may lead to romance.

Sadly for Carloalberto, things don't work out for him very well. His team is eliminated from the show, and he has gone missing on the ship, failing to go on an excursion he and his wife had planned. Later his body is found in the ocean. His cell phone was found on the ship and has a message that appears to be a suicide note. Marlene isn't sure about that, and eventually uncovers the truth of the death.

The end of the book was interesting, and made me wonder what I would do in the same situation. I was very frustrated reading about wonderful pastries, ones I have never seen before.

Deadly Pleasures

George Easter



HELL AND GONE

by Sam Wiebe
Harbour, \$18.95, March
Dave Wakeland #3

Rating: A-

In Vancouver, Canada, P.I. Dave Wakeland happens to look out his second story office window and witness a robbery in progress across the street. Not only do the robbers make off with a lot of money, but they also leave a trail of seven bodies in their wake.

Wakeland is reluctant to tell the police all that he saw, but he soon finds out that he cannot ignore what happened as he has a vested interest in finding out who is responsible.

The police want his help and surprisingly so does the leader of the Exiles motorcycle gang.

And, just when Wakeland is getting close to solving the crime, the robbers start turning up dead. Who can he trust? He questions the motivations of Deputy Chief Constable MacLeish and the venerable neighborhood leader (possible Triad boss), Uncle Roy Long. Wakeland even doubts those closest to him – his business partner Jeff Chen and his romantic partner, policewoman Sonia Drego.

HELL AND GONE is fast paced (short chapters) and kept my interest throughout. Now I have another male private eye series to read along with my annual dose of Robert Crais and Matt Coyle.

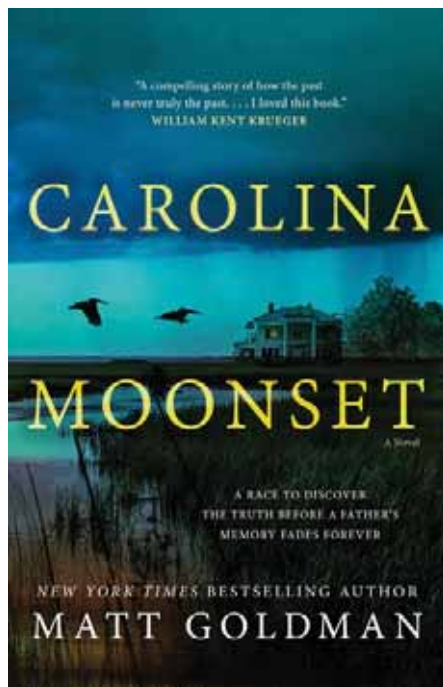
CAROLINA MOONSET

by Matt Goldman
Forge, \$29.99, May
Standalone

Rating: A-

Joey Green has returned to Beaufort, South Carolina to see how his parents

are doing and to help them with anything they need. Recently it was discovered that his father Marshall Green (a retired physician) was suffering from lewy body dementia which has robbed him of his short-term memory while leaving his long-term memory largely intact. And Marshall starts recalling early unfiltered memories, some of which prove as mysterious as they are disturbing.



Joey is divorced with two children and now an eligible bachelor. Those close to him put their matchmaking skills into overdrive and introduce him to Leela, also divorced with children and the daughter of the Marshall's new neighbors. Sparks fly on their first date, which has to be one of the most unusual dates I've ever read about. It's worth reading the book just to read their scintillating dialogue.

Then a prominent citizen of Beaufort

is murdered not far from the Marshall home and suspicion falls on Marshall Green. Joey goes into protective overdrive and he and Leela form an investigative team to find out who the real killer is. The solution lies in the secrets of the past.

The writing in **CAROLINA MOONSET** is of the highest quality. There were so many passages that stood out for their beauty of language and insight into life that I lost count. The characters are memorable. The story is told with so much heart one would think that the author was writing his own family's story.

Matt Goldman is someone to whom we should be paying a lot more attention. I certainly will in the future.

SILENT PARADE

by Keigo Higashino

Minotaur, \$27.99, December, 2021

Rating: b+

A Tokyo neighborhood is well known for its annual street festival and parade. And it is during this "silent parade" that a man, suspected of murdering two young women over a twenty-year period, is himself found murdered – in a locked-room situation. The families of the two female murder victims are immediately suspect, but they all turn out to have solid alibis.

Detective Chief Inspector Kusanagi of the Homicide Division of the Tokyo Police worked both of the unresolved murder cases of the young women and is assigned this one as well. When he runs into dead ends, Kusanagi once again calls upon his friend, physics professor Manabu Yukawa, known as Detective Galileo, to lend a hand.

The dead villain was so dislikable that I found myself rooting for the killer to get away with it. I'm not sure that is what the author intended.

The plot of this slow-paced crime novel is described in intricate detail. It is a throwback to the classic puzzle mysteries of the Golden Age of Mystery. If you are a fan of Christie, Carr and Sayers, you will love this mystery and the others in the series. I give it high marks for ingenious plotting, but I prefer novels with more pace to maintain

my interest.

L.A. BURNING

by D. C. Taylor

Crooked Lane, \$27.99, February

Rating: B+

Cody Banner has just gotten out of prison after serving a six-year term, and is hell-bent on finding out who killed her identical twin Julie while she was locked up. Cody has some leverage, being the daughter of a major movie star and has the means to spend time in investigating rather than earning a living.

Cody's search takes her into the glitzy world of Hollywood with its lavish parties and sexually abusive power brokers. She sets her sights on Harry Groban whose past would raise the ire of the #MeToo advocates. Helping guide Cody through the morass is a former classmate – now successful movie producer.

Never one to heed the law, Cody has no compunction in breaking it often in her search for justice. But she's smart enough to know that if she is caught, it's right back to prison for her.

The author is David C. Taylor, author of the 3-book Michael Cassidy series, the first of which, **NIGHT LIFE**, was nominated for an Edgar Award in 2016. I hope this turns into a series as well. Cody Banner is an engaging character and the easy-flowing narrative is full of life and energy. Good stuff.

THE MAID

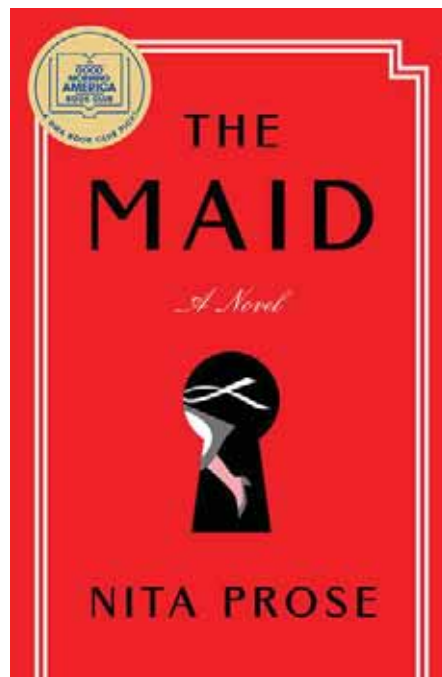
by Nita Prose

Ballantine, \$27.00, January

Rating: A-

One would probably say that Molly Gray falls somewhere on "the spectrum." This 25-year-old struggles with social nuance. Her Gran interprets the world for Molly and has come up with simple rules for Molly to live by. She has a job that suits her passion for cleanliness and order to a T – she's a valued maid at the high class Regency Grand Hotel.

But since Gran died a few months ago, Molly is having difficulty making ends meet on her maid's salary. With



steely determination, she tries not to worry about that too much because she really does enjoy her well-ordered life -- stocking her cart with miniature soaps and bottles, returning each room in the hotel to a state of perfection.

One morning that order is shattered when Molly enters the suite inhabited by the wealthy Charles Black, to find him dead in his bed. The police suspect Molly had a hand in the man's death and she has to find out what really happened to save herself. Fortunately, Molly has more friends than she realizes and they soon come to her aid.

The story is narrated by Molly and I was impressed with Molly's distinct and consistent speech mannerisms that remain consistent throughout the novel. This traditional cozy mystery is certainly a major cut above most other cozies. All the buzz about this book is well-deserved. Not my ordinary fare, but a nice change of pace. I expect to see it on year-end "best" lists and award-nomination shortlists.

DEATH IN THE SUNSHINE

by Steph Broadribb

Thomas & Mercer, \$15.95, March
The Retired Detectives Club #1

Rating: B+

When a young woman is found floating in a pool, dead from a gunshot

wound to her chest, it soon becomes apparent that the police aren't doing a good job of investigating the crime. So four residents, all are retired from various policing careers, band together to find justice for the young woman. At first glance, this might seem to be a knock-off of The Thursday Murder Club series by Richard Osman, but there are far more differences than similarities. The main one being that the detectives in **DEATH IN THE SUNSHINE** aren't really amateur detectives. They are police detectives -- not long retired -- who haven't forgotten the skills they earned over long careers. Please don't read this expecting something similar to Osman's works.

The team is comprised of Moira, a British detective who left her job under a cloud of controversy, the married British couple of Philip and Lizzie, and retired DEA agent Rick. They all live in a Florida retirement community called the Homestead. Moira is trying to maintain a low profile and is forced out of her shell by the officious Philip, whose bossiness is offset by the mellow and easy-to-like Rick.

Not only aren't the police doing their job, they resent any interference by our intrepid "amateur" investigators. As their secret investigation progresses, we learn more and more about their pasts.

Having read the author's excellent Lori Anderson series, I was looking forward to reading this new one by Steph Broadribb -- which I found a pleasant diversion, but not quite as good as the first series.

A sequel to **DEATH IN THE SUNSHINE** entitled **DEATH AT PARADISE PALMS** will be out later this year in November.

DIRTY OLD TOWN

by Gabriel Valjan

Level Best Books, \$15.95, January, 2020
Shane Cleary #1

Rating: B

Boston, Massachusetts 1975. Shane Cleary is a Vietnam vet, an ex-police-man who testified against a crooked cop and was blackballed, and now a down-and out private eye. Behind on his apartment rent, he's been sleeping in

his office.

Quite suddenly (late in the early morning), Cleary is summoned to the house of the wealthy Brayton Braddock, who is married to Cleary's ex-girlfriend (the "love" of his life). Bray is being blackmailed hires Cleary to find the blackmailer and put a stop to it. While there is no love lost between Cleary and Bray, Cleary needs the money so he accepts the case.

On another track, Cleary is asked by Bill, a fellow veteran and a cop, to find a certain Roger Sherman, who is missing. It is a private matter and Bill does not want to involve his colleagues in blue.

Both cases turn out to be much more complicated than they appear at first glance. Cleary eventually gets involved with a whole host of unsavory characters including a mob boss, his hitman and a bunch of powerful people with their moneyed interests to protect.

This is a slim volume at 158 pages, but it is jammed packed with clever lines. The plot didn't always set a clear course, but all was satisfactorily revealed in the end. There are noticeable shades of Robert B. Parker and Dennis Lehane in the writing and setting.

I first became acquainted with the author's name because he had two different novels nominated for the Agatha Awards this year, which I thought was quite an accomplishment for a writer I was heretofore unfamiliar with. Then I noticed some attractive graphics he created to illustrate several mystery award nominations for Janet Rudolph. I asked Janet for his contact information and he graciously gave me permission to use the graphics and then sent me a copy of this novel to read and review. Thanks, Gabriel.

THE DARK FLOOD

by Deon Meyer

Atlantic Monthly Press, \$27.00, May
Benny Griessel #7

Rating: A

This narrative follows close on the heels of the forceful **THE LAST HUNT** (2020), which I considered one of the top books of that year. This sequel is every bit as good.

All Benny Griessel and his partner



Deon Meyer

Vaughn Cupido want to do is to be left alone to do the job they do so well – investigate complex crimes and bring the bad guys to justice. But the police higher-ups and state-capture corruption seem to interfere and that is what has recently happened. Griessel and Cupido chose to do the job the right way and that has resulted in their ejection from the elite squad know as the Hawks and a demotion to a location outside of their home base of Cape Town – in the town of Stellenbosch. They look on the bright side – at least they are still policemen, which they consider a calling more than a job.

Griessel and Cupido land a case of a missing university student (a brilliant computer hacker) – a case that heretofore would have been considered below their talent level – but beggars can't be choosers and they pursue it with dogged determination.

On another narrative track we follow the doings of Sandra Steenberg, a talented realtor working in a depressed housing market. She has kept her family's dwindling finances secret from her husband so he can concentrate on the book he is writing. Her children's private schooling, their home and car are all at risk. But suddenly there is a ray of hope -- the wealthy but disgraced millionaire Jasper Boonstra has asked

her to sell one of his splendid properties. But everything about the sale must be kept secret including the seller's name.

When Boonstra disappears, Griessel and Cupido are called in to investigate and things get quite dicey for all involved. Has the tycoon absconded or is he dead?

For comic relief we have Cupido's wonderful monologues on the difficulties of his current restrictive diet.

There are other plot lines including the death of a young policeman which bring in the wonderful Lt. Col. Mbali Kaleni (The Flower), their former boss.

If you like crime novels with intelligent plotting, charismatic characters and riveting suspense, you can't do much better than the Deon Meyer novels. I've been beating this drum for a number of years now. I hope that all of you are now following the beat. This will be at or near the top of my best mysteries of 2022 list.

TAKE YOUR BREATH AWAY

by Linwood Barclay

William Morrow, \$27.99, May

Rating: A-

When Andrew Mason's wife Brie disappears while he is away on a fishing trip, the police suspect that he had something to do with it. And so does the community, who effectively shun him. So Andy moves to another town, takes on another name and tries to rebuild his life. His original house is sold and not soon after, razed to the ground, with a newly constructed home rising on the lot.

Six years pass and things are looking up for Andy. His construction business is doing fairly well and he's in a committed relationship with Jayne, who brings a moody teenaged son into the relationship.

Then a woman with a striking resemblance to Brie shows up at his old address, screaming, "Where's my house? What's happened to my house?" She is seen by the next door neighbor who reports her appearance to the police. Then the woman disappears. The police, in the person of the original detective on the case, Marissa Hardy, have a whole new set of questions for Andy – was that

really Brie? And if so, where has she been all these years?

I admire Linwood Barclay's imaginative plotting which, to me, bears a great resemblance to that of Harlan Coben. **TAKE YOUR BREATH AWAY** is the best Linwood Barclay puzzle mystery that I've read in some time. He is constantly coming up with surprise after surprise throughout the whole narrative. Great escape reading!

THE MURDER RULE

by Dervla McTiernan

William Morrow, \$27.99, May

Rating: A-

In 2019 Hannah Rokeby cons her way into the Innocence Project run by Professor Rob Parekh at the University of Virginia Law School. 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. Hannah's mother became convinced that Dandridge killed his friend Tom. And this is a bitter truth that Hannah has grown up believing. Now she is old enough to do something about it.

For the last several years Michael Dandridge has been in prison following a conviction for the rape and murder of Sarah Fitzhugh. Michael protests his innocence and there is enough doubt

that the Innocence Project takes on his case and succeeds in getting the conviction overturned. But then the district attorney files for a new trial and the Innocence Project goes into overdrive.

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, even if he is innocent of this particular charge.

The story is told mostly by Hannah, interspersed with extracts from her mother Laura's diary. There is quite a clever twist near the end of the story that I didn't see coming. Mind-blowing.

This is quite a departure in style for one of my favorite authors. Here Dervla is an Irish lass, now living in Australia, writing about American legal goings-on. Her talent amazes me.

THE SELF-MADE WIDOW

by Fabian Nicieza

Putnam, \$27.00, June

Suburban Dicks #2

Rating: B+

Ex-FBI profiler Andie Stern is now a suburban housewife with five kids – one an infant. Yet she still yearns for her former professional life and will go to great lengths to investigate **anything**.

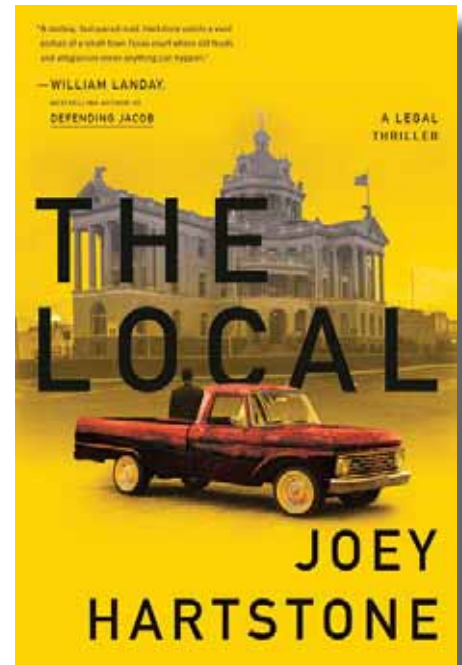
She belongs to a small group of neighborhood friends who meet frequently to share food and opinions. Andie secretly calls the group "The Cellulitists." When one of the group, Molly Goode, loses her husband at a suspiciously young age, Andie decides to delve deeper into the Goode's marriage.

Meanwhile, Andie's investigative colleague, journalist Kenny Lee, takes a break from filming a documentary of their last case (see **SUBURBAN DICKS**), to help Andie in her search for truth.

My history with this series: I read and really enjoyed the humorous aspects of the first in the series, **SUBURBAN DICKS** and considered it among the top first mystery novels of 2021. But as I collected all of the "best" lists of 2021 (see the cover article of last issue of *DP*), I was surprised by the noticeable absence of **SUBURBAN DICKS** on those lists. I don't think of myself as elitist

(that if I like a book, everyone should like that same book), but I am surprised when I like a book and I can't find anyone else who likes it (as much as I do). Then along came the Edgar Award nominations and **SUBURBAN DICKS** was nominated for an Edgar Award. Slim validation, but some validation of my opinion at least.

For me, **THE SELF-MADE WIDOW** didn't have the same energy and bite as did its predecessor, which I enjoyed. It required too much suspension of disbelief and wasn't as humorous as **SUBURBAN DICKS**. Mildly entertaining.



THE LOCAL

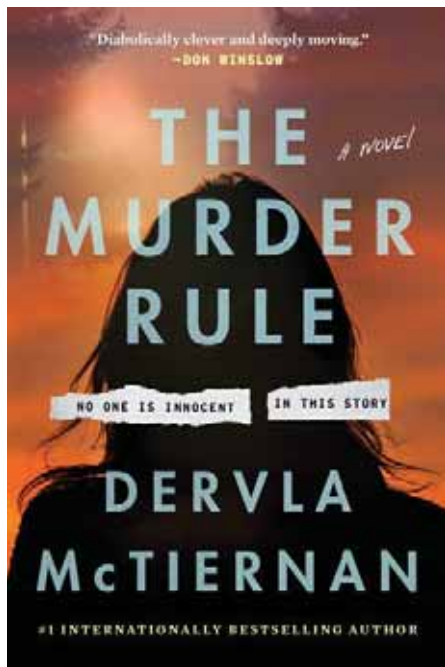
by Joey Hartstone

Doubleday, \$27.99, June

Rating: A-

The Federal courthouse of the Eastern District of Texas (in the relatively small town of Marshall, Texas) has become the go-to place in the U.S. to file patent related cases, mainly because of its reputation for speedy jury trials and large awards. Judge Gardner, a well-respected jurist, is mainly responsible for the court's reputation, which he has nurtured for many years.

Out-of-town attorneys partner up with local lawyers who have the right to practice law in Texas and know how



to sway a local jury. One of the best local attorneys is James Euchre. His latest client is a hothead millionaire named Amir Zawar, whose company is being sued for alleged software patent infringement.

At a preliminary hearing, Zawar doesn't like how Judge Gardner is handling matters, which results in a heated argument. A few days later Judge Gardner is found murdered in the courthouse parking lot. The evidence the police collect points to Zawar, who claims innocence. He demands that Euchre represent him, despite the lawyer's protestations that he doesn't practice criminal law. Also troubling Euchre is the fact that Judge Gardner was his friend and mentor. If Euchre determines that his client is guilty of the crime, he has a serious conflict of interest.

The case eventually proceeds to an exciting trial with many surprising revelations. Don't be fooled by the fairly prosaic title. This is an excellent legal thriller – probably the best I've read since the last Michael Connelly/Mick Haller mystery.

NO ACCIDENT

by Steven Havill

Poisoned Pen Press, \$15.99, March
Posadas County #25

Rating: B-

Carlos Guzman and his fiancée Tasha are a young, attractive couple who enjoy exercising together. They've got a new tandem bike that they've taken for a spin when a pickup truck slams into their bike – twice and then races off. Obviously not a simple hit-and-run accident.

When news reaches Carlos' mother, Undersheriff Estelle Reyes-Guzman, she and her physician husband race to California to support their son and future daughter-in-law. Carlos has more serious injuries than Tasha and several corrective surgeries are in his future, but he is in good spirits when his parents arrive.

One of the policemen investigating the crime is a former Posadas county police officer, Eddie Mitchell. Estelle and Eddie are good friends so the Guzman family is getting the best efforts of

the police. Estelle is allowed to "consult" on the investigation and that's OK with her... until it's not.

It's not too long until an employee of the bike shop where Carlos bought the tandem is found murdered and all of the employees of the shop come under close scrutiny.

This is a series that one reads for the continuing characters and I haven't read enough of the novels in the series to become invested in those characters. For me the plot wasn't enough to carry the book and I never got in that "reading zone." Fans of this series will undoubtedly enjoy **NO ACCIDENT** more than I did.

MOVIELAND

by Lee Goldberg

Thomas & Mercer, \$25.95/\$15.95, June

Eve Ronin #4

Rating: A-

Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department homicide detective Eve Ronin's latest case involves a shooting in the picturesque Malibu Creek State Park, famous for being a backdrop for many Hollywood movies. Is this the latest in a series of sniper attacks?

No one but Eve's partner, the soon-to-be retired Duncan "Donuts" Pavone seems to have noticed the number of people injured by a mysterious sniper or

snipers. By Duncan's count the number of attacks is up to eight and date back to before Eve came to Lost Hills. When Duncan and Eve bring up the possibility of these cases being connected to their superiors, they are ordered to keep quiet and threatened with severe sanctions if they become loose-tongued. But have you ever heard of a good police detective in crime fiction that did that?

A side plot line that provides some humor is the preparations going into a TV production based on Eve's life as a police detective that involves her mother (a wanna-be actress) and her father (a second-rate film producer). Eve is less than enthusiastic about the project but she may need the money for a legal defense so she has agreed to it.

One worry that I've had over the story arc of the four series entries is the imminent retirement of Donuts. He makes such a great partner for Eve that I can't envision her without him. You'll have to read **MOVIELAND** to see the clever way that Eve and Lee Goldberg find a workable solution to this dilemma.

I love this intelligently written series for its memorable characters and intriguing plots. Lee Goldberg is one of those authors with natural-born storytelling gifts. One starts at page one and the story smoothly flows without a hitch until you reach "The End." You've been enlightened and entertained all along the way.

BOX 88

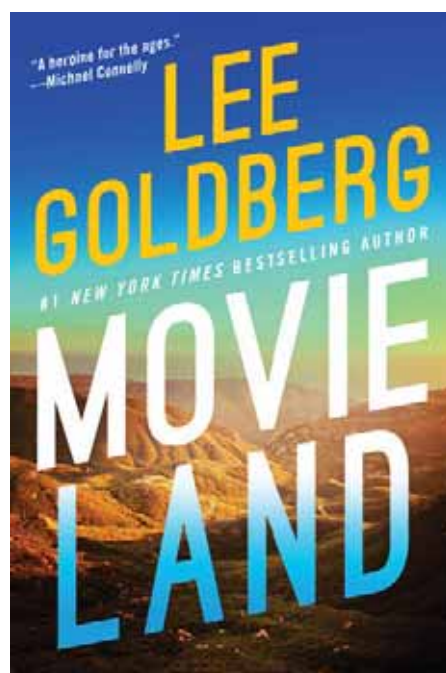
by Charles Cumming

Mysterious Press, \$27.95

Rating: A-

What is Box 88? It is an elite British/American intelligence organization that is so secret that MI6 and the CIA are unaware of its existence. But that might not last much longer. Lachlan Kite is a longtime agent for Box 88. He is happily married and about to become a father to a son that he and his wife affectionately refer to as "Rambo."

While attending a funeral for a close friend, Lachlan is kidnapped and whisked away to an unknown location. Someone is after information that only Lachlan has stored in his brain. What is wanted relates to events that happened



thirty years ago when Lachlan, just out of a posh boarding school, was recruited by Box 88 and sent on a mission to spy on a friend and his family in the south of France as they play host to one of Iran's most powerful and dangerous men. Things did not go well there and Lachlan would just as soon keep those memories buried.

Lachlan's pregnant wife is under threat and he must use all of his wits to find a way out of this dilemma – for his own sake and that of his family. Fortunately, there are other good forces on Lachlan's side, but he doesn't know how much he can count on them in this situation.

This suspenseful thriller indicates that Charles Cumming is right up there with Mick Herron in writing some of the best spy novels of our age. I look forward to reading its sequel, **JUDAS 62**, available only in the U.K. so far.

THE BANGALORE DETECTIVES CLUB

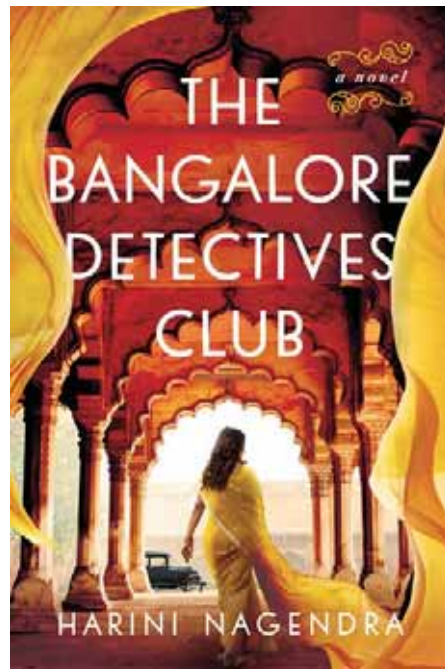
by Harini Nagendra
Pegasus, \$26.95, May
Kaveri and Ramu #1

Rating: A-

Mystery fiction publishers seem to be paying a lot more attention these days to crime novels that have some nexus to India. And in the near future I will do a cover article on the subject.

The latest entry in this trend is by Harini Nagendra who is a college professor in Bangalore, India and an incurable fan of mystery/crime fiction.

THE BANGALORE DETECTIVES CLUB features a young, ambitious woman named Kaveri who recently has begun her arranged marriage to a well-to-do doctor named Ramu Murthy in 1920's Bangalore. She is fortunate that he is kind and understanding and the marriage is flourishing. But Kaveri wants to be more than a woman who cares for her house and eventually raises any children that may come along. She is very good at math and hopes her husband will allow her to continue her educa-



tion at the university level.

One night, at a party at the prestigious Century Club, Kaveri goes into the garden for a breath of fresh air and witnesses an uninvited guest in the shadows. Soon thereafter a dead body is discovered.

When a vulnerable woman of short acquaintance is arrested for the murder, Kaveri believes the police are seeking an easy resolution to the crime and she becomes determined to prove the woman innocent by finding the real killer. Kaveri's search takes her to places high and low and along the way we learn a lot about 1920's India under British rule. The author has skillfully infused the narrative with many cultural and historical nuances which certainly enhanced my reading experience.

While some might regard this is a cozy historical mystery, I think any novel set in India that depicts the deplorable conditions of its poor cannot be called a "cozy." This is a solid, admirable traditional mystery and I look forward to more in the series.

It is unusual for a debut mystery to garner two starred reviews in the library journals, which this one did. We will definitely consider it when the time for Barry Award nominations comes around.

Lefty Awards 2022

Best Mystery Novel

LIGHTNING STRIKES, William
Kent Krueger – Winner

RUNNER, Tracy Clark
RAZORBLADE TEARS, S. A. Cosby
LAST REDEMPTION, Matt Coyle
BATH HAUS, P. J. Vernon

Best Debut Mystery

ALL HER LITTLE SECRETS,
Wanda M. Morris – Winner

WHO IS MAUDE DIXON?,
Alexandra Andrews
BLACKOUT, Marco Carocari
THE OTHER BLACK GIRL,
Zakiya Dalila Harris
ARSENIC AND ADOBO,
Mia P. Manansala

Best Humorous Mystery

MANGO, MAMBO, AND MURDER, Raquel V. Reyes – Winner
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
FOGGED OFF, Wendall Thomas

Best Historical Mystery

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

Action Thriller Corner



George Easter Reviews

BAD ACTORS

by Mick Herron
Soho Crime, \$27.95, May
Slow Horses #8

Rating: A

In each book in this British series there is decided tension between Diana Taverner (known behind her back as “Lady Di”), who is now First Desk at MI 5’s Regent’s Park headquarters (the big cheese), and the lowly, outcast minions that toil in obscurity at Slough House. There is no love lost between them. But the wily Jackson Lamb (boss of Slough House) always seems to find a way to get the upper hand on “Lady Di.”

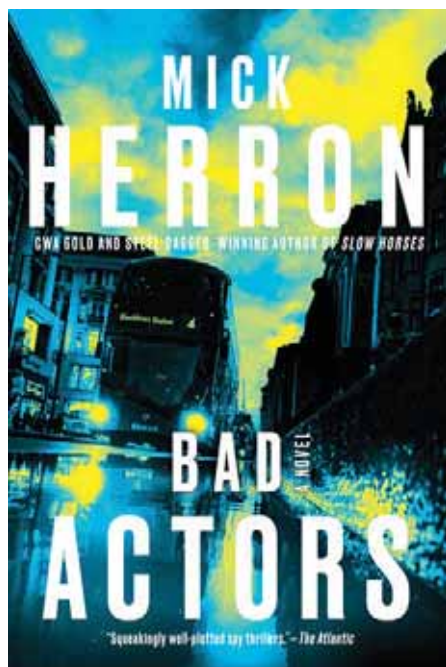
Enter the Prime Minister’s attack dog, Anthony Sparrow, who is threatening to disturb that delicate balance of power, for his goal is to get rid of Diana Taverner and replace her with a figure-head loyal only to the PM. If Lady Di goes, the Slow Horses may also be put out to pasture or sent to a glue factory. So those at Slough House find themselves in the unexpected and uncomfortable position of being on “team Lady Di”.

It turns out that Dr. Sophie de Gier, a Downing Street who advises the Prime Minister’s office on how policy is likely to be received by the electorate, has disappeared without a trace. And there is some evidence that she is a Russian plant, which, if true, would be a major scandal for the government and particularly for the odious Anthony Sparrow. His plan is to have de Gier killed and blame it on Diana Taverner. But he doesn’t count on interference by our beloved Slow Horses.

A subplot involves the Russian First Desk, who has his hands all over the

Gier debacle, but for reasons that are not at first apparent.

The usual crew are present for **BAD ACTORS**, with one exception, River Cartwright, whose fate at the end of the previous book, **SLOUGH HOUSE**, was not clear. But we get plenty of chaotic action from Roddy Ho and Shirley Dander in particular (think *Keystone Cops*). John Bachelor takes on a bigger role than he has before in the series novels (he’s mostly featured in the series’ novellas), as does the deposed Claude Whelan, former First Desk, who makes a surprising contribution to the story line. Jackson Lamb is his usual genius manipulator self.



Each episode of this series is a delicious meal to be enjoyed at leisure. But, like Chinese food, it only lasts a short time. Then I feel like re-reading it to further savor its delights.

Be sure to tune into *Slow Horses*, the

British TV production based on the first novel in the series, now streaming on Apple+ TV. It’s an excellent adaptation with a star-studded cast, and serves as a good introduction to the Slow Horses characters.

SNOWSTORM IN AUGUST

by Marshall Karp
Blackstone, \$28.99, June

Rating: A-

Mexican drug lord Joaquin Alboroto’s son and wife are in a New York City courtroom to see all charges against the son dropped and him become a free man again. But they don’t count on the fact that the respected judge in the case is dying of cancer and he has a death wish which won’t be good for the Alboroto family.

So begins Joaquin Alboroto’s war of revenge on New York City. His first act is to send a helicopter with crop-dusting capability over Central Park, to drop 4,000 pounds of cocaine on the unsuspecting population below. In such concentration, the “snowstorm” of the title proves deadly to the unsuspecting Central Park visitors.

New York City has an ineffectual mayor and the police chief is a bureaucrat of the worst kind. So nothing is being done to protect the Big Apple from further attacks.

Some NYC-loving billionaires have pooled their resources to create an extra-legal force, headed by an ex-police chief and his former NYPD captain Danny Corcoran. The team they put together has serious skills and are not impeded by legal rules. Computer hacking, illegal entry, electronic eavesdropping – all good. Just don’t get caught.

And so begins the defense of New York City and the counter-offensive against the Alboroto Cartel.

I have to admit that I was surprised at how good this story was and how much I enjoyed reading it. Very smooth writing and excellent pacing propel this thriller along to a boffo ending. If this isn’t turned into a series, I’ll be shocked. It’s all set up to be one – and a good one at that.

THE NINETEEN

by Jake Needham
Half Penny, May
Jack Shepherd #6

Rating: B+

No one in power anticipated fully the events of 9/11 or much more effort would have been made to stop them. Historians and terror experts have been sifting through the rubble to find out more about the lead-up to 9/11 so as to prevent such catastrophes in the future. Mystery/thriller writers are also mining the depths of this seminal event. Just last year, Dan Fesperman came out with **THE COVER WIFE**, which dug deep into the conspiracy behind 9/11. It's chilling plot is set in Germany.

Now it's Jake Needham's turn at "what might have been" and he sets the beginning of **THE NINETEEN** in Malaysia, where in January 2000 nearly a dozen of Osama bin Laden's most trusted lieutenants gathered secretly to plan an attack on America, an attack the world would one day simply call 9/11.

When the meeting ended, some of the Al-Qaeda commanders returned to Afghanistan, but the rest went to Bangkok. Why did they go to Bangkok as soon as they set the plan for 9/11 into motion? No one knew. The CIA lost track of them.

This novel is the story of four Americans in Bangkok -- Jack Shepherd, two local DEA men, and the FBI special agent at the American Embassy -- who banded together in January 2000 to try to do what the CIA couldn't or wouldn't do. Find the Al-Qaeda commanders who were in the city and discover what they were planning.

Danger and violence ensue.

Jake Needham is a smooth storyteller and it is a joy to read his well-thought-out novels. But I did have two quibbles with **THE NINETEEN**. One is [spoiler alert] that the author kills off one of his sympathetic characters that he has spent a lot of time building up in the reader's mind. The other is that the ending left me cold and wanting more resolution than it gave (reflecting what really happened in 2001). But **THE NINETEEN** is still a worthy, thought-proving novel

to read and I'm glad I did.

UPON THE BLOODSTAINED LAND

by John A. Connell
Nailhead Publishing, \$27.99
Mason Collins #6

Rating: A-

Former U.S. Army CID detective Mason Collins finds himself aboard an illegal ship overflowing with Jewish refugees bound for Palestine. His mission is not so much to help the refugees, but to get to Jerusalem and meet up with Laura Talbot, who is bearing his child. The time is April, 1947 and Palestine (under British "protection") is near a boiling point with the British, Jews and Arabs at each others throats.



Laura is an international reporter who travels to the world's hotspots to get her stories. When Mason and Laura finally meet up, she tells him about the latest story that she has been working on -- about adjoining villages, one Jewish and the other Arab. Her interviews there have uncovered some dangerous goings-on and she is in hiding, fearing for her life.

Mason's plan is to get Laura "out of Dodge" as quickly as possible. But before that can happen, Laura is seriously wounded and Mason is forced to stay put to protect her and find those responsible for her injuries.

The action-packed plot is much more complicated than what I have described and the author does a wonderful job of making the reader feel that he/she is really there in 1947 Palestine. I've read all six in the series and am hooked for life.

A note on the quality of the actual book. The hardcover copies I have are of superior quality with a really sturdy binding and beautiful color cover art. These are fine books inside and out. Collectors of hardback 1st editions will know what I mean when I say that it is a pleasure to hold a John A. Connell book in my hands. They are highly prized in my book collection.

INSURRECTION DAY

by Chris Hauty
Atria -- Kindle Novella, \$1.99,
Hayley Chill #2.5

Rating: B+

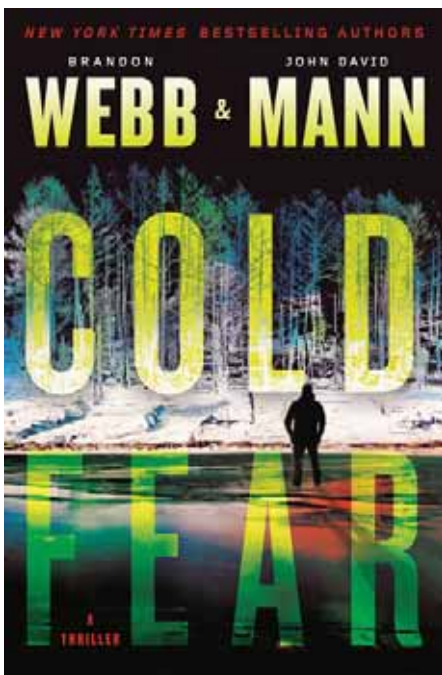
This is Chris Hauty's fictitious embellishment of the events of January 6, 2021. As protestors storm the Capitol Building in Washington, D. C., there are some subtle, but vitally important subplots being carried out under the chaos of the event.

Hayley Chill, the heroine of the author's Dark State series, is at the Capitol and steps in to rescue a powerful senator and his staff. While so engaged, she uncovers shocking evidence that the insurrection has its origin with one of the U.S.'s longtime enemies. With no ally in sight, Hayley goes in search of the foreign operatives who have left the Capitol with documents and information of critical national importance.

The fast-paced narrative propelled me through a number of exciting passages to a satisfying ending. I'm a fan of this series and the character of Hayley Chill. If I were ever in a fight I'd want her on my side. It's hard to avoid the politics of this event. Even the term "insurrection" annoys some folks. But, Chris Hauty does a pretty good job of doing just that. I don't think the word "Trump" was even used.

COLD FEAR

by Brandon Webb & John David Mann
Bantam, \$28.00, June
Finn #2

**Rating: A-**

This is a sequel to the Barry Award-nominated **STEEL FEAR**.

It all goes back to one fateful night in Yemen when some civilians are killed and Finn is blamed for their deaths. His memories of that night are foggy at best. But he knows in his heart that he is not responsible. But now AWOL from the Navy, Finn has gone to Iceland to get some answers from three members of his team who have been quietly deployed there. Unbeknownst to him, a fellow SEAL is hot on his trail with orders to kill Finn.

Shortly upon his arrival, the police discover the body of a young woman who has recently drowned. The police suspect that somehow Finn was involved because his image was caught on surveillance cameras near the scene.

So Finn must avoid the police and a ruthless killer bent on his destruction, while finding the truth about that crucial night in Yemen.

I am a big fan of this series as it combines elements of detection with exciting scenes of action. I can't wait to see where the authors take the enigmatic Finn next. As I've written previously, this series is marketed as a "thriller" and it certainly lives up to that billing. But there is enough good detection to satisfy just about any mystery fan – especially

those who eschew action thrillers.

THE GATEKEEPER

by James Byrne
Minotaur, \$27.99, June

Rating: C+

Desmond Aloysius Limerick ("Dez" to all) is a retired mercenary -- and enthusiastic bass guitarist, currently living in Southern California, enjoying the sun and sitting in on the occasional gig, when the hotel he's at falls under attack from a team of professionals. Their goal is the abduction of Petra Alexandris, chief legal counsel of Triton Expeditors, a major military contractor and daughter of Triton's CEO. The team's well-planned op runs into a spanner in the person of Dez, who foils the kidnapping attempt and endears himself to the intended victim.

With nothing better to do, Dez agrees to help Alexandris with another problem she's having – someone has embezzled more than a billion dollars from her company and left few tracks behind. But Dez is a gatekeeper – one who opens doors and keeps them open – and this is just a door of another kind. And the door he opens leads to a dangerous conspiracy involving media manipulation, militias, an armed coup, and an attempt to fracture the United States itself.

On the plus side we have Dez, who is a charismatic character with serious skills and an ego to match. There are also some exciting action scenes as one would expect in an action thriller such as this. But on the negative side the plot became more and more preposterous as it went along. For me to enjoy a thriller such as this, the plot has to be at least somewhat believable. This one sadly was not. Note to James Byrne: if you bring back Dez (and I hope you do), please surround him with a story that doesn't insult our intelligence.

ARMORED

by Mark Greaney
Berkley, \$28.00, July

Rating: A-

Close Protection Agent Joshua Duffy was so dedicated to his job that he was willing to lose life and limb to protect his "primary." On his last mission in

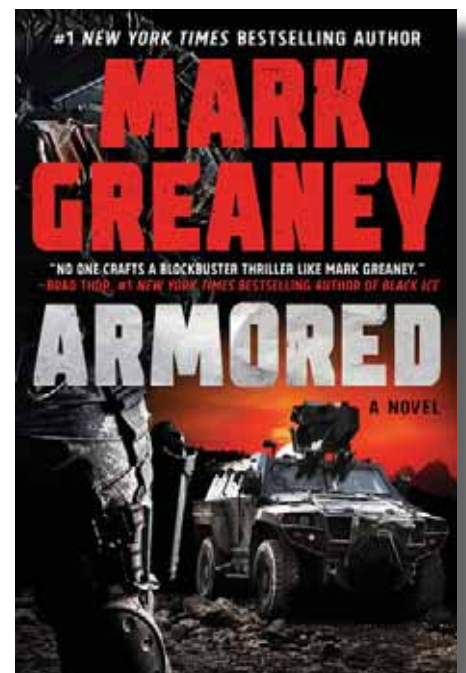
Lebanon, he was able to do just that after running a gauntlet of fire, but when the dust settled, Joshua had lost his lower left leg.

With his disability, Joshua is no longer considered among the elite agents and finds himself out of a job. He returns home to his wife and family and takes the only job he can find – as a mall cop in New Jersey. Not only does Joshua hate his job, but it isn't earning him enough to pay all his bills.

Joshua needs a miracle and it comes in the form of an old comrade-in-arms (who is unaware of his missing leg) who offers him a well-paying job in Mexico for the less-than-reputable company Armored Saints.

It is a high risk three-week mission, guarding a group of officials and experts sponsored by the UN to broker peace between the dangerous drug cartels in the region known as Espinazo del Diablo—the Devil's Spine. Not long after the mission begins, all hell breaks loose and continues at a murderous pace through the remainder of **ARMORED**.

Mark Greaney is a master at this type of action thriller. **ARMORED** was initially written as an audio-only book – with a full-cast of voices. But Mark's editor at Berkley talked him into making it an in-print novel as well. Good move.



As I read along I noticed certain similarities to the old Alistair MacLean thrillers that I cut my teeth on. See if you can spot what I'm referencing.

THE MATCHMAKER

by Paul Vidich

Pegasus, \$25.95, February

Rating: B+

It is autumn in 1989 Berlin. The Wall is about to fall but no one on either side is aware that that is going to happen.

Anne Simpson, an American who works as a translator at the Joint Operations Refugee Committee, has been happily married to Stefan Kohler, a charming East German for the last few years. His piano tuning skills are much in demand so he travels a lot.

When Stefan disappears and is presumed dead, Anne is questioned by the CIA and West German Intelligence and she soon becomes aware that her husband is not who she thought he was. It turns out that Stefan was an East German intelligence officer operating as a "Romeo" under the control of the Matchmaker. Anne's life crumbles as she realizes that her spontaneous courtship and marriage to Stefan was all an East German Stasi plot to spy on American interests. She is one of many victims of a network of "Romeos."

Western interests are desperate to catch the illusive Matchmaker because it is believed that he knows the identity of a mole within the American intelligence services. And Anne may be the key because she once saw a photo of the Matchmaker that her husband inadvertently left on his desk. No one but Anne seems to know what he looks like.

Time is running out as the Berlin Wall falls and chaos engulfs East Germany. But what if Anne's husband is not dead? And what if Anne has her own motives for finding the Matchmaker to deliver a different type of justice?

After quite a slow start, the plot picks up momentum after the half-way mark and speeds to a surprising ending. Vidich certainly captures the feel of a Cold War spy novel and I admire

his writing style. However, for my tastes, it was just too easy to put down and read something else with more pace.

TARGETED

by Stephen Hunter

Emily Bester/Atria, \$28.99, January

Bob Lee Swagger #12

Rating: B+

The same political forces that seek to de-fund the police and criticize their legal and reasonable actions are out to "target" Bob Lee Swagger for his use of excessive force in taking down a terrorist sniper.

A Congressional Committee, headed by an anti-gun Nancy Pelosi look-alike, has been convened in Idaho, with its main purpose to discredit Swagger to the point that the Justice Department will indict him.

With exceptionally able counsel to aid him, Bob Lee testifies before the committee and everything seems to be going well until the last day of the hearing, when the congresswoman and her cohorts come up with an ingenious line of attack that puts Swagger in danger of prosecution.

Then suddenly everything changes.

A small group of Chechen criminals, who are being transported to a high security prison, overcome their guards and take command of the prison bus – which they proceed to ram into the building where the Congressional hearing is being held.

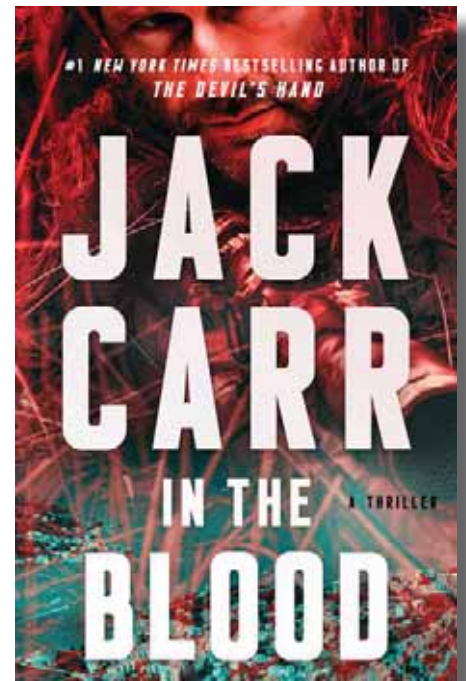
These thugs immediately take the VIP's (including Swagger) hostage and demand a helicopter ride to the nearest airport and a jet plane to take them back to their native country.

So now the people who were accusing Swagger of using unwarranted violence, may be dependent on his skills to save their lives.

I liked **TARGETED** more than I thought I would. It was thought-provoking and exciting in its resolution. But be advised that it has a political agenda in its telling.

IN THE BLOOD

by Jack Carr



Atria/Emily Bester, \$28.99, May
James Reese (Kill List) #5

Rating: A-

Aliya Galin is an Israeli operative who befriended Navy SEAL James Reese many years ago in Iraq. They formed a close working relationship of mutual respect. It never became intimate because both were married, but they liked each other a lot.

Aliya has recently completed an assignment that involved a targeted assassination (for Israel) in the African country of Burkina Faso. Shortly after boarding her plane for a return trip, it is blown out of the sky.

When Reese hears of Aliya's death, he rushes to the area to find those responsible. But unbeknownst to him, Reese is being drawn into a deadly trap by the skilled sniper who killed his friend Freddy Strain. Our hero has made many enemies who are in positions of power. And they haven't forgotten his past deeds, so Reese has to sleep with one eye open – most probably for the rest of his life.

IN THE BLOOD races along with well-written action scenes and lots of twists and turns, which I consider a successful formula for a thriller such as this.

L J Roberts

It is purely my opinion



THE LADY WITH THE GUN ASKS THE QUESTIONS

by Kerry Greenwood

Short Story Collection

Poisoned Pen Press, \$15.99, May

Rating: A

Opening: Dear Reader, Thank you very much for buying this book (and if you haven't bought it yet, please do so—I have cats to feed...

Only Kerry Greenwood could make an "Apologia" as interesting and delightful to read as the actual stories. Not only do I recommend readers start with there, and not skip "On Phryne Fisher" which is the author's introduction. From there, one jumps into the wonderful world of 17 wonderful short stories. There is also a very helpful Glossary at the end.

As per usual, one always has favorite stories.

- "Hotel Splendide," a case of a missing husband and a missing hotel room, starts one off with the perfect amount of information as to Phryne's background, her style, her ability to take charge, and her enviable sangfroid.

- "The Body in the Library" pairs Phryne and DI Jack Robinson and a not-so-pious reverend.

- "Death Shall be Dead" includes DI Jack Robinson and a dog. How can one resist that? and

- "The Bells of St. Paul's" begins with a tea at the Windsor that leaves one salivating and includes a message in the bells.

One wishes a few of the stories were novellas and a couple would make wonderful full-length novels.

The book may particularly appeal to fans of Phryne. There's not a lot of introduction to the secondary characters. The settings and the time at which

the story occurs also jump around a bit. Even so, for new readers, this is an excellent way to experience Phryne and her world, and for those who already love Phryne, there is still the overwhelming desire to be her when one grows up.

THE LADY WITH THE GUN ASKS THE QUESTIONS is a treat. Some of the stories were previously published, some have been reworked slightly, and four are brand new. They are piquant, thoroughly entertaining, and not overly complicated. One may read one, a few, or all of them at a sitting as reading them may have the effect of potato chips; one just isn't enough.

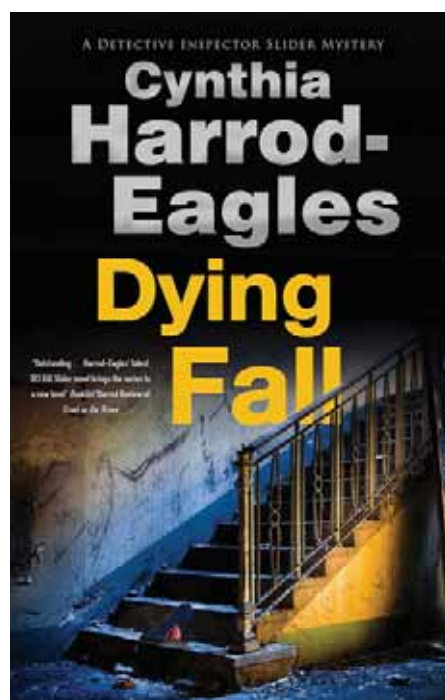
DYING FALL

By Cynthia Harrod-Eagles

Severn House, \$28.99, February

Bill Slider #23

Rating: A



First Sentence: 'I thought after all this time I'd know everywhere in Shepherd's Bush,' said Slider.

An anonymous call leads the police to a house where a woman lays dead at the bottom of the stairs. First glance indicates a suicide. Police Constable (PC) D'Arblay disagrees, and Detective Chief Inspector (DCI) Bill Slider agrees. Without an initial identity of the victim, witnesses, or motive, it's a hard case for the Shepherd's Bush homicide team to solve. The more they learn, the more complex the case becomes and the harder it is to prove.

From the first chapter heading, one is treated to Harrod-Eagles' skill with words. Her unique descriptions—"Shepherd's Bush Green was littered with sun worshippers, the men stripped to the waist – the glare off their blue-white bodies could have brought a plane down."—and her humor. The description of characters is unique yet brings a visual image immediately to mind. Phrases such as—"Atherton moved like a cat, except that he did not spray the furniture as he passed."—make her writing is such a pleasure to read. And who but Bill Slider would quote Tennyson at a murder scene.

Bill Slider's family is an element in the series. Their involvement is realistic without overshadowing the plot. Slider's wife, Joanna, is in a position common to many women, a mother with her own career. The family adds dimension to Slider and contrast to his second in command, confirmed bachelor and ladies' man, Detective Sergeant Inspector (DSI) Atherton.

One of the best things about the book is that it is a true mystery with an ensemble cast. Each member of Slider's team is fully developed and plays an

important role. Also appreciated is the loyalty Slider's boss, Detective Superintendent (DS) shows for his men.

The case is unusual and interesting. Clues are tracked down from learning the victim's identity, piecing together her associates, bit-by-bit learning the motive, eliminating suspect, and to finally identifying the killer. A young man plays a significant role in the plotline and Slider's interactions with him are both sensitive and extremely well done. There are excellent twists when the team uncovers a second, and possibly a third death, which were also thought to be suicides. This forces the team to go back and investigate the past.

Dying Fall is a first-rate police procedural/mystery based on a murder and what is needed to solve the crime. There are no car chases or gun fights, just a hard, nose-down investigation with twists, humor, and an excellent cast of characters.

THE VIOLIN CONSPIRACY

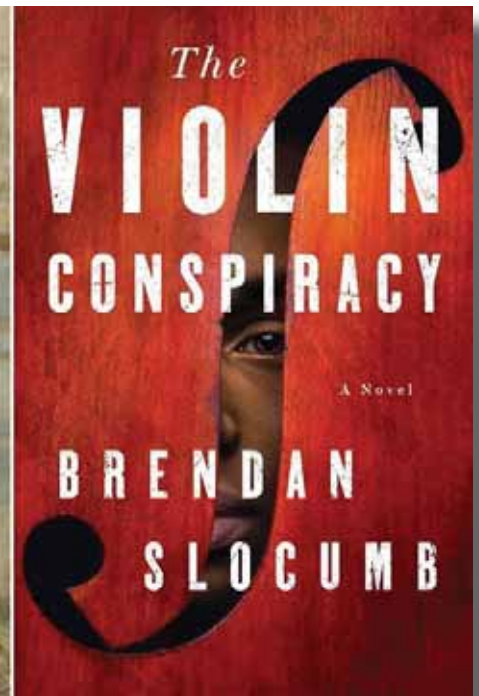
by Brendan Slocumb – 1st book
Anchor, \$28.00, February

Rating: A+

First Sentence: On the morning of the worst, most earth-shattering day of Ray McMillian's life, he ordered room service: scrambled eggs for two, one side of regular bacon (for Nicole), one side of vegan sausage (for him), one coffee (for Nicole), one orange juice (for him)

Ray McMillian is black and a classical violinist. He has overcome poverty, racism, and the censure of his own mother. Two people have been his principal support; his Grandma Nora who gifted him the violin which had belonged to his once enslaved great-great-grandfather, and his violin teacher, Janice Stevens. After being in New York City with his girlfriend Nicole for several days, he is about to leave for the Tchaikovsky Competition in Russia when he discovers his beloved violin, confirmed to be a Stradivarius, has been stolen and is being held for a \$5 million ransom.

An indication of a gripping read is when one starts a book at 10 p.m. and reads straight through until 3 a.m. From



first page to last, this is a book impossible to put down as it is so much more than a mystery.

While a crime has been committed, this is a book about racism and greed. But it also shows that with the love and support of just a few people, as well as determination, perseverance, and passion, one can accomplish great things. Still, too, there is a mystery within the mystery. Much of the story's tension arises from the question of who really owns his \$10 million Stradivarius. This becomes a battle between Ray, his family, and the Marks family whose ancestors owned Ray's PopPop.

An unusual format takes one from the present to Ray's childhood and progressively forward to the present. One is drawn into Ray's life. From his experiences with casual and overt racism, from beginning with a school violin to the Strad, one grows as Ray does. However, it is the descriptions of Ray's playing and performing that are truly transportive. Comparisons to the book/series "Queen's Gambit" about a young, female chess master, are to be expected.

THE VIOLIN CONSPIRACY is a remarkable debut. It is not a perfect book, yet one really doesn't care. It is a book that leaves one thinking long after closing the covers and may even draw one back for a second reading.

SHADOWS REEL

by C.J. Box

G.P. Putnam's Sons, \$28.00, March
Joe Pickett #22

Rating: F

First Sentence: Lorne Trumley had called dispatch to report a dead moose on his ranch.

Game Warden Joe Pickett goes to the scene where allegedly a moose has been burned. Instead, he finds the tortured and burned body of a local fishing guide. Librarian Marybeth Pickett receives an anonymous package containing the photo album of a former Nazi officer. The Pickett's friend, falconer Nate Romanowski, is tracking the man who attacked his family and stole his falcons. "This won't end well."

It is challenging when an author whose entire catalogue of books one has loved, writes one that is painful to read, and not in a literary sense. All the elements one normally loves seem to be missing. What happened to the warm, supportive relationship between Joe and his wife, Marybeth? Where is the subtle humor that has been a trademark of Box's writing?

Political viewpoints seem to be the theme de jour and certainly not everyone will agree with various points of view. However, a writer is usually expected to maintain some degree of

objectivity or, at the very least, do their research. Box missed both these marks by an extremely wide margin. The author's usual high-quality storytelling is painfully absent. The crass, sexist descriptions of the woman in the bar would embarrass pulp fiction authors of 1940s.

SHADOWS REEL could have been a good book with an intriguing plot, particularly as related to the photo album. Unfortunately, there was so much about this book that was cringeworthy, it wasn't worth spending the time to finish. The only bright spot was the Pickett daughters. The worst part is that it causes one to question even reading the next book.

BRING HER HOME

By S.A. Dunphy – 1st in series
Bookouture, \$22.99, August, 2021

Rating: B

First Sentence: I left his body where I knew it would be found, nestled gently in the tidal mud of the Thames in the shadow of the Tate Modern in Southwark.

A man known only by the Celtic rune Uruz or ?, murders the former professional and personal partner of criminal behaviorist Jessie Boyle and is now stalking her. After retiring from London's Metropolitan Police, Jessie returns home to Ireland. Her friend, Dawn Wilson, newly appointed Police Commissioner of Ireland, calls in an old debt.

Penelope (Penny) O'Dwyerhe, the daughter of Ireland's Taoiseach (Prime Minister) is gone. The kidnapper threatens to kill her unless the police find her first. They have twelve days. Serial killer Frederick Morgan, imprisoned for life, claims he has the information needed to save Penny, but Jessie is the only one with whom he will negotiate. As Boyle and her team investigate, they learn there is much more to Penny than first thought, and that she is not the only woman who has gone missing.

There are a lot of threads and characters in this story. There is much to like, and Dunphy's voice galvanizes the reader to continue reading. But there are several things which, upon reflection, cause one to pause.

The book, in some ways, feels introductory, a prologue to the upcoming series while clearly being a story in and of itself. One is introduced to every character, including the secondary ones, with each given a separate chapter detailing their background.

As opposed to interfering with the story, the characters are brought to life with even the bad guys given full dimensionality and shades of gray. However, one may wonder at the necessity of this and how many of these characters will reappear in the future.

The principal police characters: Jessie Boyle, Detective Seamus Keneally, genealogist and IT tech Terri Kehoe, and Dawn Wilson are an interesting, diverse team, each with strengths and weaknesses. They contrast and complement each other and are characters one wants to know. When at risk, the tension is palpable as one doesn't want any harm to come to them.

The story includes quite a bit of ancient folklore and references to Celtic artifacts. While germane to the plot, this slows the pace and can lead to confusion with the number of characters who spiral off the person who fashions himself after the folklore character of Uruz or ?. One already knows he will be back.

BRING HER HOME is an exciting read with great characters, occasional good humor, and powerful suspense. The book would have benefited from stronger editing. Even with a satisfactory ending, once one thinks about it, it causes curiosity about the fate of several characters. Book two awaits. It will be interesting to see how things progress.

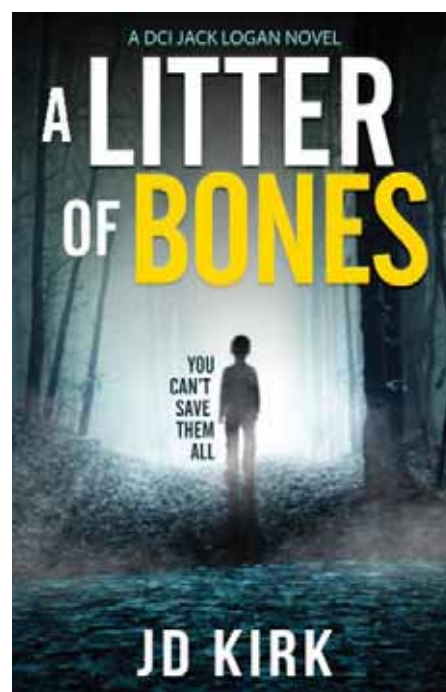
A LITTER OF BONES

by J.D. Kirk – 1st in series
Zertex Crime, \$12.99

Rating: A+

First Sentence: The total collapse of Duncan Reid's life began with a gate I the arse-end of nowhere.

The past comes back to haunt DCI Jack Logan. A boy has disappeared, and the case has all the characteristics of "Mister Whisper," a serial child-killer Logan put away ten years ago. When another child goes missing, Jack is sent to lead the investigation. Did Jack have



the wrong man all those years ago? Is this a copycat? Either way, Jack needs to do everything possible to rescue the boy.

It takes very little time to recognize the quality of Kirk's writing and his skill for dialogue. He provides a well-done introduction to Logan's team and their personalities. Sinead and DC Hamza Khaled are particularly well utilized in their roles.

One appreciates the hints of humour with their very Scottish flair—"But in a minute, I'm going to hear a cry for help from within this house, giving me no choice but to break this door down and investigate." ...Sinead hesitated, then nodded. ...He watched as Sinead leaned past him, turned the handle, and pushed the door open. "It's the Highlands," she told him. "We don't always lock our doors." What a good example of Logan being out of his element while showing his fallibility.

Kirk establishes an excellent sense of place, whether it be a small, mid-terrace house, or an open area. Yet it is the excellence of conveying the fear and frustration of the family which is particularly compelling. His ability to escalate suspense is palpable, cementing the plot as being a ripping page turner filled with wicked twists. Be aware that there are scenes related to animal torture, and others not for the faint of stomach.

LITTER OF BONES is a straight-through, non-stop read filled with great characters, action, suspense, emotional impact, twists and just enough humor for balance. There are no portents, just a wicked good story that keeps on turning the pages. It is dark, and there are scenes unpleasant to read, yet the positive qualities outweigh the negative and compel one to read the next book.

George's Take: I read this based on L. J.'s recommendation. We are both big fans of M.W. Craven's work and she told me, "If you like Mike Craven, you will like J. D. Kirk." And I did. Excellent plotting, and a very likeable and somewhat eccentric central character. L.J.'s review is spot on. I am torn between rating this an A or an A-, so I'll just say it's better than an A-.

LOST GRAVES

by S.A. Dunphy – 2nd in series
Bookouture, \$11.99, January

Rating: B+

First Sentence: A small boy stood in the clearing amid the oak and hazel trees and stared at the macabre object his dog had just excavated from the soil of the forest floor, gripping the animal's collar to restrain it from tearing the severed human hand apart.

Joe Keenan and his young son Finbar are Travellers who've made camp for the night at the edge of the Derrada Woods when Finbar comes across a corpse. Although Joe is arrested, the members of the National Bureau of Criminal Investigations; Jesse Boyle, criminal behaviorist, DS Seamus Keneally and historian and computer genius Terri Kehoe, who are called in to investigate under the command of Irish Police Commissioner Dawn Wilson, doesn't believe Joe is guilty. More bodies are found, some dating back 20 years. Locals blame the deaths on a vampire, the Abhartach. Joe Keenan is hesitant about helping the investigation as he is on the run from a group of Travellers threatening to kill him.

What an excellent opening. One is drawn immediately into the story and the characters. Even the chapter headings are evocative.

Jessie Boyle, Seamus Keneally and

Terri Kehoe make a great team. Jessie's observations and analysis are interesting to follow, Seamus' ability to eat constantly without ever getting a drop on himself, and Terri's computer expertise bring the characters to life. One has become accustomed to investigative teams being able to find whatever information they want via computer. It is a nice change to have someone acknowledge the GIGO—Garbage In, Garbage Out—unreliability of data.

In this second book of the series, once again the author falls victim to over plotting. While the folklore is interesting, it somewhat overwhelms the story, as does the serial-killer trope. There is an attempt to introduce a sense of the paranormal with the idea of the Abhartach, a vampire-like creature, one never quite buys into it, and links to the seemingly omniscient character of Uruz from the previous book "Bring Her Home."

Dunphy excels at suspense. He creates a true spine-chilling creepiness that makes one catch their breath. Although, he is guilty of overkill, he maintains a degree of logic to the plot. What was effective was the inclusion of case notes of a former detective. This added veracity to the story, as did information on the psychology of the Travelling people. They are a group on which there is rarely a focus. The epilogue is nicely done, while a major weakness is the use of completely unnecessary portents.

LOST GRAVES is a good, fast, completely engrossing diversionary read. The thing that really holds it together is the principal characters. Dunphy falls into the category of a guilty pleasure read, and that's not a bad thing. While this second book is a step forward, a much stronger editor is to be desired. Even so, the books are ripping reads and the next is already in the queue.

SOMETHING WICKED

by David Housewright
Minotaur Books, \$26.99, May
Rushmore McKenzie #19

Rating: C

First Sentence: "Jenness Crawford's voice trembled with rage"

Rushmore McKenzie may have retired from the police force, but when a friend of his wife, Nina, asks for help, McKenzie can't refuse. Jenness believes someone murdered her grandmother despite a lack of evidence. However, her biggest concern is that her siblings want to sell their 1883 home, hotel and restaurant, struggling since the pandemic, to developers. The Sons of Europa, a group calling for the preservation of white families, wanting her to sell so zoning laws might be changed, and no one wants that.

Housewright can be relied upon for an excellent sense of time and place, and wonderful dialogue. His realistic inclusion of life in the time of COVID was very well done. He deals with the issues of white supremacy, racism, greed, deceptiveness, infidelity, and more while being objective and non-preachy.

McKenzie, Nina, and the town's sheriff Deb are the ones who hold the story together and maintain our interest. There is a danger inherent with a plot which centers on a family rivalry; the characters tend to be unpleasant. That was certainly the case here. While Jenness avoided that curse, she was overshadowed by the other characters.

There were significant weaknesses to the book. Exposition can be interesting but unless it moves the plot forward, it's filler. Predictability is boring. Highly dramatic points at 50 percent and 75 percent makes one think of "Midsomer Murders." It becomes predictable rather than suspenseful. An ending that tells, rather than shows, seems lazy. Classifying this story as a "locked-room mystery" is deceptive, and a major loose thread, even when acknowledged in the epilogue, wonders why it was there in the first place. Housewright is usually better than this. It appeared his heart just wasn't into this book.

SOMETHING WICKED relies on the strength of its principal characters and they don't disappoint. A protagonist with a strong, committed, supportive relationship is such a pleasure. It may not overcome everything but serves as the core for a decent way to spend a day.

Lookin' For A Few Good Books

Larry Gandle



NOTES ON AN EXECUTION

by Danya Kukafka

Morrow \$27.99

Rating: A

Ansel Packer is on death row and is to be executed in twelve hours. He has killed four women and must now pay the ultimate price. It is through the story of three women affected by him and the killings that the story is told. Lavender is his mother who made a fateful decision that led to his fractured upbringing. Hazel is the twin sister of Ansel's wife who bears witness to her sister's awful marriage and there is Saffy, the detective, who, as children growing up with him, knew that there was something seriously and dangerously wrong with Ansel. She is hot on his trail and will stop at nothing to prove he is a serial killer. They all narrate their stories in alternate chapter form with Ansel trying to give his version of the events. The result is a searing examination of violence and how these women deal with it.

The writing of this literary suspense novel is so often quite beautiful that some passages bear rereading. Characters are well thought out and each of their stories are compelling as they fill in the holes in the narrative. It is the alternate point of view chapters that move back and forth in time that keeps the storytelling fresh. There is even a subplot of a possible eleventh hour escape to hold the reader's interest. This is a book to read slowly for the writing and to re-read for the plot. Highly recommended.

THE FAMILY CHAO

by Lan Samantha Chang

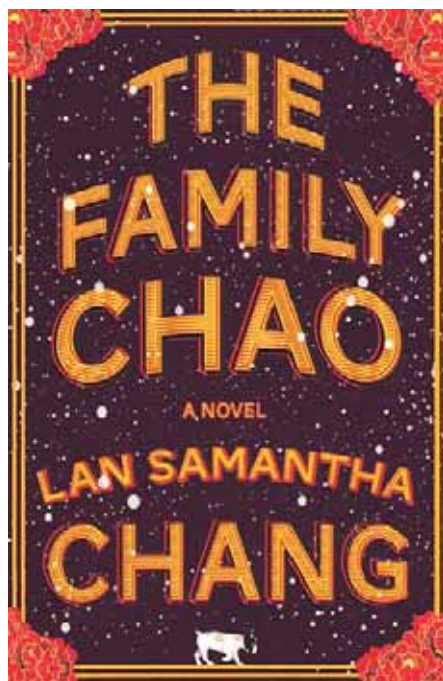
Norton, \$28.00

Rating: A-

In Haven, Wisconsin, the Chao family have owned and ran a Chinese

American restaurant for about 35 years. Leo Chao, the father, is tyrannical and quite cruel to his sons, Dagou, the chef of the restaurant, Ming, the middle son who is financially successful but is brooding and unhappy, and James, the college premed who travels home for the holidays. Unfortunately, the family dynamics explode and someone is killed. This leads to a murder trial but something about the murder does not seem to fit.

It does take a while to truly get into the story. Multiple characters are introduced quickly and it can be difficult to keep them apart. However, as the reader progresses through the pages, the cast quickly takes clear shape. When the murder occurs about a third of the way into the book, the pacing of the plot quickens. There is a surprise at the end which is actually quite clever. But the book is much more than a murder mystery. It is a very well written literary



style novel of a dysfunctional family as a result of the cruel personality of the patriarch. The characters are carefully constructed and so very realistic. The story eventually becomes quite riveting. Highly recommended.

THIS MIGHT HURT

by Stephanie Wrobel

Berkley, \$26.00

Rating: C-

Natalie Collins has not heard from her sister, Kit, in many months. She receives an email telling her that if she didn't visit her sister, the secret she was keeping from her will be told to Kit by somebody else. Kit has been secluded from the outside world living in a cult on an island off the coast of Maine. The group called Wisewood, is led by a woman called The Teacher. The residents are cut off from the world- no communication and no email. So Nat, wondering who sent her the email, will now have to go visit Kit. When she arrives, she is met with hostility and resistance. It soon becomes apparent that Kit will need rescuing whether she likes it or not.

With this silly premise, the story is as unrealistic as are the characters. The plot is reasonably compelling, at least initially, then goes on too long. As the inevitable climax approaches, reality must be increasingly suspended. The result is a forgettable book which you might want to take to the beach -- and leave there.

KILLING FLOOR

by Lee Child

Putnam, \$23.95

Rating: B+

After watching the excellent Amazon production, *Reacher*, I wondered how

faithful the series is to the book. As it turns out, the show is very faithful. There are some changes in the characters such as Kliner's son plays a much more prominent role in the show than in the book. But overall, it's pretty accurate. I reviewed this book when it was first published in 1998. I haven't read it again since then. Lee Child also read *Killing Floor* for the first time since he wrote it. He thought it was quite entertaining and he wondered if his writing has improved since then as he really enjoyed it. Given the number of superficial characterizations and the occasionally unnecessary plot points, I don't think he has to concern himself with that. He has gotten a lot better. However, for a first novel it remains superb.

Jack Reacher, an Army veteran and wanderer, gets off a Greyhound bus in Margrave, Georgia just because Blind Blake, a long dead Blues musician died there. He wants to know how he died and why. He is almost immediately arrested in a diner and accused of murder. He eventually teams up with Finley, the chief of detectives and Roscoe, a female police officer to solve the murders and uncover a criminal enterprise in the town.

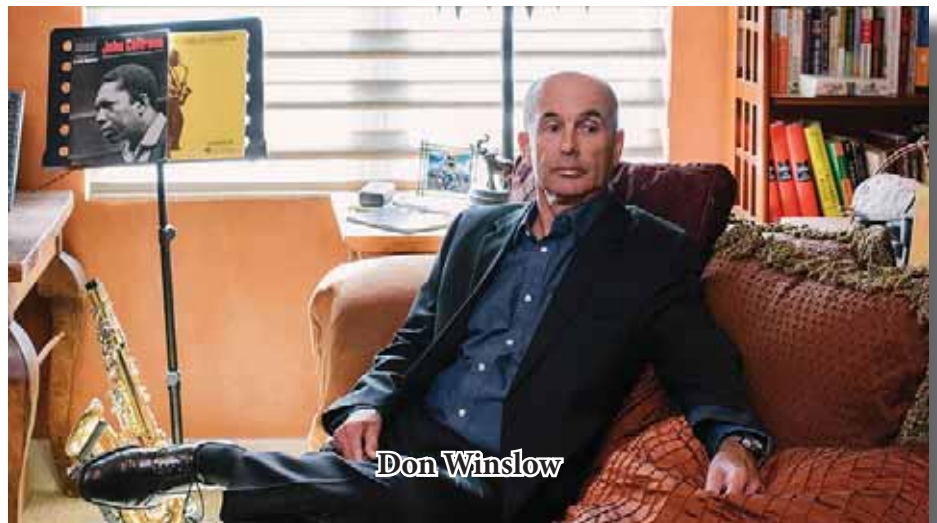
The plot is incredibly clever. Lee writes with a style that is staccato quick-short sentences. It moves the plot along and the tension never wavers. Lee has not yet perfected his characterizations except for the main characters. This one was written in first person. That is hardly the case in most of his books. When George and I first read this book, we were enthralled. So were millions of other readers. This book went on to win the Barry Award for Best First Novel in 1998. If you never read a Reacher novel before, start with this one. Even if you have read them all, go back and reread this one. Like Lee and myself, you will have a good time.

CITY ON FIRE

by Don Winslow
Morrow, \$28.99

Rating: A

From the moment Danny Ryan sees Pam come out of the water, he knows she will be trouble. Unfortunately, he



was completely correct. She leaves an Italian gangster for an Irish one. Honor is at stake and the result is a brutal gang war between the Irish and the Italians in Providence, Rhode Island. Family allegiances pits former friends against each other in a desperate struggle for dominance. Death comes frequently and the body count continues to rise.

In a modern take of *THE ILIAD*, Don Winslow has crafted a superb crime novel filled with lifelike characters- some are innately cruel, some try to do the right thing and some are downright stupid. The plot is riveting and the pacing swift. Don Winslow is one of our best epic storytellers especially when it relates to gang violence. This book is reported to be the first in a trilogy. It is well worth reading and highly recommended. Certainly, one of the best novels of the year.

TARGETED

by Stephen Hunter
Atria, \$28.99

Rating: B

Master sniper Bob Lee Swagger has just taken out a terrorist threat at the end of the previous book. Now, he is recovering from his wounds. However, the US Congress is after him for what they consider reckless endangerment as buoyed by an anti- gun congresswoman. Hearings are held in Boise to make it easier for the wounded sniper to attend. However, the hearings are attacked by violent Chechen terrorists and the people that were trying to bring Swagger

down are relying on him to save them.

As usual, Stephen Hunter has written a very entertaining book. It is a simple thriller and as such will keep the reader turning the pages. There is interspersed throughout the book a story of the ancestors of Swagger from the 1700s written in the style of the times. It is distracting from the main plot but eventually it all comes together in the end. Reality must be suspended throughout. Characters are stereotypes and lack depth. I suspect Steve was writing a satire of the far left members of congress who will condemn military heroes and defund the police.

WINTER WORK

by Dan Fesperman
Knopf, \$28.00

Rating: A-

In 1990, just after the fall of the Berlin wall, a Stasi officer is found dead near his dacha outside of Berlin. It appears to be suicide but Emil Grimm, a fellow Stasi official, suspects murder. Emil feels his own life is threatened by Moscow thugs as the whole social order is changing. He must look for help from their former adversaries to make it out alive. Clair Saylor, a CIA agent, is assigned to bargain with him- his safety in exchange for information on covert spies in the CIA. However, their first planned meeting does not go as planned and Clair is made acutely aware of just how dangerous this assignment will be.

Reading a Dan Fesperman book is like looking back at history with a

critical eye. The books place characters into a dangerous situation while transporting the reader into that specific time and place. They are immersive experiences. No reader can close a Dan Fesperman book without learning something. This book is no exception. Characters are full and rich creations. The setting is vividly portrayed, though reality must occasionally be suspended, the plot is solidly entertaining. Perhaps the book does go on a bit too long with detail, it is never dull. The author feels this is possibly his best work. He may be right. The book is highly recommended.

THE CHASE

by Candice Fox
Forge, \$27.99

Rating: C-

600 inmates at Pronghorn Correctional Facility are set free in the Nevada desert due to a hostage situation. John Kradle, convicted of killing his family, is among them. Kradle knows he is innocent and is desperate to prove it. He needs to get back to his home to get answers. However, Homer Carrington, a vicious psychopathic killer has attached himself to Kradle and will not let him go off on his own.

In addition, Celine Osbourne, supervisor on death row is after him alone as she rates a man who kills his family to be the worst prisoner on death row. Kradle must figure out a way to lose them so he will not have to return to prison for a crime he did not commit.

Also in the mix is Trinity Parker, a US Marshall, who hunts down the convicts -- especially Burke David Schmitz who is on a mission to shoot up a crowd and change the world order while slaughtering many innocents.

This thriller is incredibly unfocused. Characters are introduced throughout the book and are difficult to keep track of. If the author just focused on the Kradle story -- the most compelling of them all- it would have led to a tighter plot. Instead the plot is difficult to follow. The characters are, overall, superficial and stereotypic. There is also a playful comedic sense which can be jarring considering the brutality of the story. The book is entertaining, but reality must

be suspended throughout. Personally, I found it to be a silly waste of time.

George Easter's Take: I agree with Larry that **THE CHASE** jumps all over the place and tries to do too much. But early on, I decided to go along for the ride and the exciting action scenes and found those to be rousing. **Rating: B-**

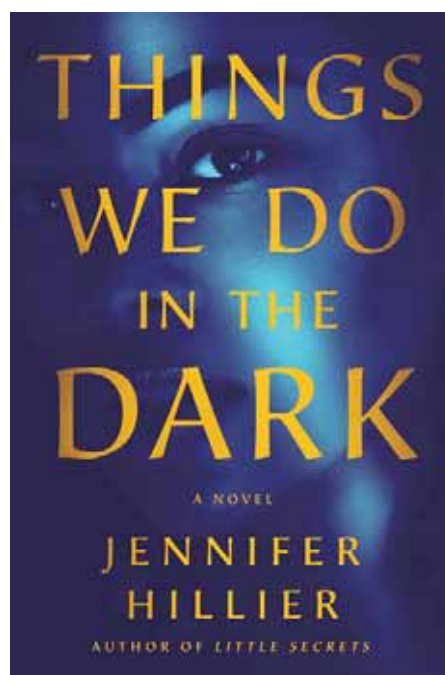
THINGS WE DO IN THE DARK

by Jennifer Hillier
Minotaur, \$27.99

Rating: A-

Paris Paralta is arrested in her bathroom while she is found covered in blood and holding a straight razor. Her husband, a famous comedian, lies dead in the bathtub with his femoral artery sliced open. Paris fell and hit her head so she remembers nothing. She must deal with the loss of her husband and of her freedom. She is especially concerned with the media uncovering her past life which she fled from as her life might be in danger.

This is a very compelling story of suspense filled with well-constructed characters and comprised of a plot with several twists to keep the pages turning. The book is a bit too long but it never wanes in maintaining reader's interest. Several plot lines intertwine throughout eventually coming together at the end. Reality must be suspended, at times, but



this book's purpose is to entertain not enlighten. So that is not a problem. This is easily the best book I have read by Jennifer Hillier who is quickly becoming my favorite author of domestic suspense novels. Highly recommended if domestic suspense is to your taste.

ONE-SHOT HARRY

by Gary Phillips
Soho, \$26.95

Rating: DNF

In Los Angeles, 1963, Harry Ingram works as a freelance photographer and process server. As a Black man, he is limited on where he could go, as well as, what news media will take his photos. When an old army buddy, Ben Kinslow, is found dead after apparently driving his car off Mullholland Drive, the police declare it a suicide and close the case. Harry is not sure so he decides to investigate on his own. This brings him into contact with the underbelly of LA society and, of course, places himself in danger.

I have known who Gary Phillips was for decades but have never read any of his books. He then went into writing for graphic novels. This is the first time (that I am aware of) that he has been published by a well-known publishing house. I decided to read his latest as Soho Press is really pushing this book. Let me be clear -- I do not like PI novels -- especially those that are slow while introducing what feels like dozens of characters and an increasingly complex plot. In other words, PI novels. This one is no exception. It is well written, however, and characters are well rounded and realistic. The setting is very well portrayed, and the plot is generally interesting. It just moved too slow for me and after reaching the halfway point, it was getting to be more of a struggle to want to pick it up again. However, for fans of the PI subgenre, I have little doubt this book would appeal to you. Just because I gave it a 'Did Not Finish' rating does not at all mean this particular book is bad. It is just not for me.

THE BOOK OF COLD CASES

by Simone St. James
Berkeley, \$27.00

Rating: B-

In 1977, Claire Lake Oregon was the center of the worldwide news as Beth Greer, a wealthy but socially isolated twenty- three-year-old was on trial for killing two men randomly by shooting them in the head. She was acquitted and went back to living in isolation in her home- the Greer Mansion. The crime has remained unsolved. In 2017, Shea Collins runs a website and blog about cold cases. She lives in Claire Lake and is shocked when Beth Greer decides to meet with her to be interviewed as she has never agreed to an interview before by anyone. As they meet at the mansion, the truth slowly comes to Shea but the secrets of the house could cause great danger to her.

This book was shaping up to be a totally compelling read. But ghosts got in the way. As crime fiction readers, we are willing to suspend reality but that could only go so far for some of us. In this case ghosts make an appearance. I was really hoping they will not make a profound impact on the plot. Unfortunately, they do. This otherwise very good suspense thriller with well-rounded main characters goes totally off the rails of reality in the last twenty pages. This almost ruined this book for me. If it was earlier, I would have put the book down. The sad thing is the final resolution did not need an otherworldly spirit to divulge the truth. In fact, ghosts are totally unnecessary to this plot. The book was shaping up as a rating of B+ to A- but in the end, it earns a B- rating and a mild recommendation because of the stupid ghosts.

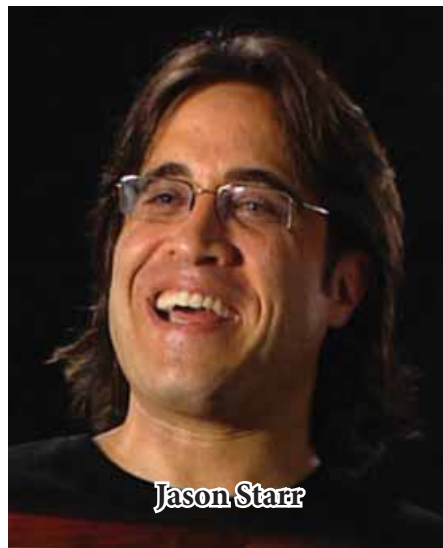
THE NEXT TIME I DIE

by Jason Starr

Hard Case, \$14.95

Rating: B+

Steven Blitz is a lawyer living in suburban New York City. He is defending a serial killer and the trial is about to start. He just received notice that his wife is leaving him for another woman. They have no children. He is pretty miserable. Steven goes to a gas station and sees a man beating a woman. When he steps in to defend her, he is stabbed in the abdomen and feels his life bleeding



out around him. He wakes up in a hospital with a head injury, a wife who loves him and actually has a daughter who adores him. There is a new President and the Twin Towers are still standing. He realizes it is an alternative reality and he thinks that maybe he might finally be happy. Well, it appears the Steven Blitz whose life he enters is not such a nice guy. Things go south quickly unless Steven can change things.

I have known Jason Starr for years but have never read anything he has written. He has written several novels with Ken Bruen with Hard Case Crime. This is the first book they published by him alone that I am aware of. It is an incredibly clever book with a plot that is compelling enough to be classified as a science fiction thriller. It asks the question- can we change our life if given a chance? As in any science fiction novel, reality must be suspended but the reader knows that. The characters are adequately portrayed with some stock figures. The book is a pleasant surprise for me and totally entertaining. Highly recommended for fans of science fiction thrillers.

BAD ACTORS

by Mick Herron

Soho, \$27.95

Rating: DNF

I have never reviewed a book in which I have gotten halfway through it and still had no idea what was happening. I listened to this book on Audible and started it three times because each

time I could not follow the plot. The problem is characters are introduced every page or two and if the reader is not aware of who is who, it is incredibly easy to get lost. The third time I was determined to finish but after getting halfway through and not really knowing what is happening, I decided to read the physical book. It didn't help! I read JOE COUNTRY a couple of years ago and loved it. I was fully expecting to enjoy this book as well. However, this book is nothing but a series of seemingly pointless conversations. As a crime fiction book- often called a 'spy thriller' this book is way too much work. Unless you already love the series and know all the characters, I would advise you to perhaps start with the first book of the series, SLOW HORSES. Even I liked that one.

HEAVEN

by Mieko Kawakami

Europa Editions, \$23.00

Rating: B+

The story is narrated by a 14-year-old boy with a lazy eye. He is viciously bullied by the boys in his class at school. The punishment he suffers is overwhelming to him and adversely affects every part of his life. He is befriended by Kojima, a female classmate also subjected to bullying. She feels the two of them should be friends as they certainly understand each other. They write letters to each other and agree to get together outside the school but manage to do so rarely. Eventually their friendship becomes known to the bullies in the school. This leads to a shattering climax.

Is bullying a crime? It should be and, as such, this book should be considered a crime fiction novel. However, given that it is considered literary fiction, it asks certain questions on the nature of suffering. Through these teenagers, there is a wisdom way beyond their years. Their conversations are unrealistic. For example, there is a scene where the narrator confronts one of the bullies and asks him why he does it. His response is quite profound essentially saying he simply doesn't care about him. He means absolutely nothing to him. It is a frightening but realistic explanation.

The climactic ending is surreal but the final scene gives hope in looking at the world in a new way. The book is relatively brief. The characters a bit too mature in thought and ideology for their age. Dialogue is unrealistic. The narrative, however, is compelling. This book is on the shortlist of the International Booker Awards. It is recommended for those that like a more literary and thought provoking work.

OCEAN STATE

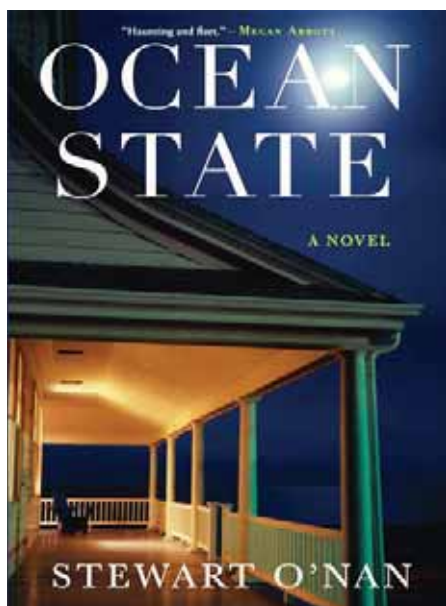
by Stuart O’Nan

Grove Press, \$27.00

Rating: A-

The first line of this book set in a working class coastal town in Rhode Island in 2009, states, “When I was in eighth grade my sister helped kill another girl. She was in love, my mother said, like it was an excuse.” Over half of the book gets us to that first line and the rest of the tale is the aftermath. The story is told from the perspective of four women. Angel, the killer, her sister, Marie, Birdy, the victim and Carol, the mother. There is a sense of inevitability as the tragedy plays out. There are no unreliable narrators or surprising plot twists to spice up the storyline. It is just a bite of sad reality.

This is a wonderfully compelling read. We know what is to occur and all we could do is hope it doesn’t happen. However, that is not true to life. Characters and dialogue are realistic and very well thought out. The reader will get



to know all of these women quite well. Though ancillary characters might be a bit superficial, it does not take away from the intense reality of the story. The book is just the right length to not get too preachy or sentimental. It is crime fiction but feels so real. Highly recommended.

ELENA KNOWS

by Claudia Piñeiro

Charco Press, \$15.95

Rating: B+



Rita is found dead hanging from a rope in a church belfry. Though the case was quickly ruled a suicide, her mother, Elena, refuses to believe it. Elena suffers from an advanced form of Parkinson’s disease so she physically could not investigate on her own. Elena claims her daughter would never have gone to the belfry because it was raining and she was deathly afraid of lightening strikes that have occurred there. After using up all her avenues of assistance, including the local police, Elena embarks on a long journey to visit someone who will hopefully shed light on what happened. Alternate chapters depict the current painful journey of Elena with the visions of the past leading up to Rita’s death.

This author, from Argentina, is known for her crime fiction novels in South America. This one is quite unique. There is persistent intrigue in that the reader will wonder what happened to Rita. There is a lot of political discourse in the book concerning the woman’s right to abortion, the imposition of religion on a woman’s independence and mother-daughter relationships. The ending and conclusion appears to be inevitable and so very sad. Highly recommended.

The Agatha Award Winners



Best Contemporary Novel

CAJUN KISS OF DEATH by
Ellen Byron – Winner

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

DEATH AT GREENWAY by
Lori Rader-Day – Winner

MURDER AT MALLOWAN HALL by Colleen Cambridge
CLARK AND DIVISION
by Naomi Hirahara
THE BOMBAY PRINCE
by Sujata Massey
THE DEVIL’S MUSIC
by Gabriel Valjan

Best First Novel

ARSENIC AND ADOBO by Mia
P. Manansala – Winner

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

**Congratulations to the Winners
and Nominees!**

Australian Crime Fiction



Jeff Poppo Reviews

EVERYONE IN MY FAMILY HAS KILLED SOMEONE

by Benjamin Stevenson (Penguin,
\$A32.99).

Rating: A+

Benjamin Stevenson's **EVERYONE IN MY FAMILY HAS KILLED SOMEONE** is easily the most original and entertaining book I have read so far this year.

Stevenson's first two crime novels, **GREENLIGHT** (aka **SHE LIVES IN THE VINES**) and **THE OTHER SIDE OF MIDNIGHT** were very good, and probably underappreciated, straight crime novels on the darker side of the genre. They both featured good twisty finales, but apart from the ability to surprise, they are nothing like **EVERYONE IN MY FAMILY HAS KILLED SOMEONE**, which is an amusing and witty novel, that plays homage to the classic British murder mystery.

The story is told from the perspective of Ernie Cunningham, a crime aficionado and author of a book on how to write murder mysteries. In keeping with Ronald Knox's classic '10 Commandments of Detective Fiction', Cunningham strives to play fair as both the narrator and the sleuth: "Everything I tell you will be the truth, or, at least, the truth as I knew it to be at the time that I thought I knew it. Hold me to that." There are no supernatural agencies or unexplained twins involved and the murderer is not introduced late in the novel. And in the opening section, Cunningham also tells the reader on what pages "deaths in this book either happen or are reported to have happened."

I will not attempt to describe the plot, other than to say that it revolves

around a strange family reunion in a snowed-in resort in the Australian alps and involves several killings, in the past and the present. The basic premise of the story is that everyone in Cunningham's family has killed someone: "Some of us, the high achievers, have killed more than once." The novel is divided into sections about each member of Cunningham's family, and the discovery of a murdered body early in the book, gives the story the momentum it needs, as Cunningham tries to work out who the murderer is before more killings can occur.

When he is not writing crime fiction, Stevenson is an award-winning comedian, and half of a musical comedy duo with his identical twin brother, and **EVERYONE IN MY FAMILY HAS KILLED SOMEONE** reflects his gift for sharp, astute observations and fun. The humour and the wit, however, does not overwhelm the story

and the novel is a cross between a classic 'Golden Age' murder mystery, Daniel Craig's **KNIVES OUT** and **Richard Osman's THE THURSDAY MURDER CLUB**, but with more bite.

The narration is crisp and fast paced, and fans of classic British murder mysteries will appreciate Cunningham's wry reflections on the crime novel and the applicability of Knox's Commandments to the 21st Century.

At the core of the book, however, is a good mystery plot, and the various twists and turns will keep regular crime readers happy. One of the twists is easy to guess, but the rest are well hidden, and the book builds to a tense and exciting conclusion. The twists are all underpinned by fairly placed clues and some clever red herrings, and the cast of suspects are an interesting and engaging bunch. The final resolution is well thought out and Stevenson delivers good surprises all the way down to the last page. A stellar performance!

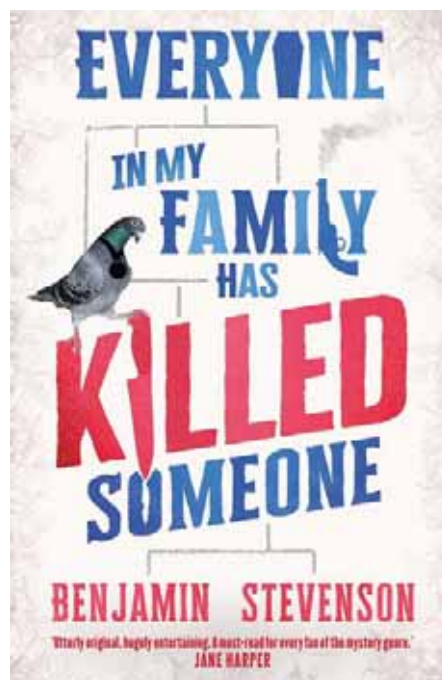
THE TORRENT

by Dinuka McKenzie
Harper Collins, \$A32.99

Rating: A

There have been some outstanding Australian crime fiction debuts in very recent years by a diverse range of authors, including Kyle Perry, Gabriel Bergmoser and Chris Hammer. Now there is a new author that you can add to that list, Dinuka McKenzie.

Dinuka McKenzie's **THE TORRENT** is a very strong first novel that impresses with the depth of its characters and its confident plotting. The story opens with heavily pregnant Detective Sergeant Kate Miles counting down the handful of days left before she goes on maternity leave. She is hoping for a quiet week, but a violent hold-up



at a fast-food restaurant in the northern New South Wales town where she works soon ruins any hope of a peaceful exit. The crime incites a media storm and Kate finds herself under pressure from politicians, her boss and the family of the injured girl to quickly solve the case. Things are further complicated when she is also given the closed case of a man who drowned in the recent summer floods to review.

With the days ticking down, Kate must juggle conflict at work, her own family's needs and the growing sense that there is more to both cases than she realises.

This is a very engaging crime novel that certainly holds attention from beginning to end. Dinuka is a gifted writer, and she quickly draws the reader into Kate's world and immerses them in the various conflicts swirling around her. The characterisations are credible and interesting, particularly Dinuka's portrayal of Kate. Unlike the recent flood of troubled, flawed, white, single male detectives, Kate is a happily married, half Sri Lankan, pregnant mother of a small child and the primary breadwinner in her family. Not surprisingly, she has to deal with a range of prejudices at work, while also managing a believable array of personal problems. It is a compelling portrait of a female policewoman juggling motherhood with the demands of being a detective in regional Australia.

The plotting has a good deal of credibility to it and the book moves in some unexpected directions before arriving at the tense and poignant conclusion. There are no big twists or surprises, but the logical unfolding of the plot keeps you interested and Dinuka does well in building the sense of menace. The local community is also convincingly portrayed and there is a good sense of place. An enjoyable first novel.

WAKE

by Shelley Burr
Hachette, \$A32.99

Rating: A-

WAKE by Shelley Burr also shows a maturity of writing that is often missing in debut novels.

Nineteen years ago young Evelyn McCreery went missing from the bedroom she shared with her twin sister, Mina, on the family's outback property on the edge of the small town of Nannine. Despite a large reward, Evelyn was never found, and Mina's life has been defined ever since by the intense public interest in the case. Enter private investigator Lane Holland who desperately needs the still unclaimed reward money. With Mina's reluctant help he revisits the disappearance and another possibly related missing person case.

This is a well written and absorbing cold case crime story with a strong sense of place and a good set of characters. The various strands of the plot take a little while to set in place, but once underway it is a captivating read.

The descriptions of the harsh interior of Australia and the struggling town of Nannine are evocative and accurate, and they nicely enhance the story and help build the creepy atmosphere. The pacing could be brisker, but overall it is a very confident and entertaining novel that will appeal to fans of Jane Harper and Chris Hammer.

THOSE WHO PERISH

by Emma Viskic

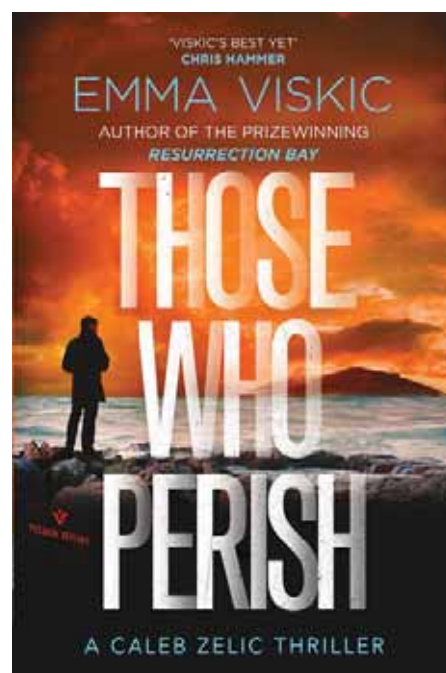
Echo, \$A29.99

In U.S., \$14.95, July

Rating: A

THOSE WHO PERISH is the fourth novel in Emma Viskic's award winning series about deaf Melbourne private eye Caleb Zelic, and is arguably the best of the series so far.

The book opens in dramatic fashion with Caleb in the early hours of the morning frantically dashing to help his wayward brother, Anton. He arrives at the nearly deserted boardwalk at Resurrection Bay where his brother is supposed to be, only to find himself being shot at by a sniper and his brother fleeing. Caleb's subsequent investigation leads him to a small, wind-punished island off the Victorian coast, where Anton is in rehab and the locals are being picked off by a deadly killer. With his wife due to give birth, Caleb is reluctant to become caught up in more danger,



but a sense of familial responsibility drags him into the strange activities on Muttonbird Island.

This is a gripping read with finely nuanced characters that you care about, and a plot that sizzles with suspense. The story starts with a bang and the pace rarely lets up, as Caleb becomes caught up in a series of events that quickly spiral out of his control. Emma expertly moves the story along with barely a false note, and the plot twists and turns its way through several cleverly positioned red herrings, and a rising body count, to an exciting climax.

The characterisations are superb throughout and even the most minor of characters are imbued with a sense of credibility. The tortured Caleb Zelic is a terrific character and Emma expertly captures his strengths and his sense of fragility. The reader very quickly comes to care for Caleb, and this sense of involvement adds to the tension, as you worry about his poor decisions and his capacity to survive.

Also enhancing the story are some vivid descriptions of Muttonbird Island, sharp-eyed reflections on modern society and credible dialogue. There are also flashes of wry humour.

In all, another taut and gripping tale by Emma Viskic that entertains while packing an emotional punch.

53RD ANNUAL CONVENTION

Sept 8-11, 2022

Hilton Minneapolis

LOU BERNEY

S.A. COSBY

BOU





CH

ELLEN HART



WILLIAM KENT KRUEGER

ATTICA LOCKE



ER

JO NESBØ

ALEXANDER McCALL SMITH

TOASTMASTERS

JESS LOUREY

LORI RADER-DAY



CO

SPECIAL GUESTS

JEFFERY DEAVER

DENNIS LEHANE



N

Land of 10,000 Crimes

bouchercon2022.com

DP Calendar



We're back to having in-person mystery conventions and there is a whole slate of ones to choose from.

May 31-June 4, 2022

Thrillerfest

New York, NY

Special Guests: Frederick Forsyth, Diana Gabaldon, Alafair Burke, Joseph Finder, Veronica Roth

Website: <https://thrillerfest.com/>



June 11, 2022

Maine Crime Wave

Portland, ME

Special Guests: Katherine Hall Page, Steve Almond, Frankie Bailey, Paul Doiron, Edwin Hill, Chris Holm, Kathryn Miles, Caitlin Wahrer, James Ziskin

Website: <https://www.mainewriters.org/maine-crime-wave/>

July 21-24, 2022

Theakston Old Peculier Crime Writing Festival

Harrogate, UK

Guests of Honor: Lynda La Plante, Paula Hawkins, Tess Gerritsen, Michael Connelly, Lucy Foley, Charlie Higson, John Connolly, C.L. Taylor and Kathy Reichs

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

ing-festival/



September 8-11, 2022

Bouchercon

Minneapolis, MN

Guests of Honor: Lou Berney, SA Cosby, Ellen Hart, William Kent Krueger, Attica Locke, Jess Lourey, Jo Nesbo, Lori Rader-Day, Alexander McCall Smith

Website: <https://www.bouchercon2022.com/>

September 29 – October 1, 2022

Capital Crime

London, England

Guests of Honor: TBA

Website: <https://www.capitalcrime.org/product/capital-crime-festival-2022/>



March 16-19, 2023

Left Coast Crime

Trouble in Tucson

Tucson, Arizona

Guests of Honor: J. A. Jance, Glen Erik Hamilton, Sujata Massey, Ellen Byron, Dru Ann Love

Website: <https://leftcoastcrime.org/2023/>

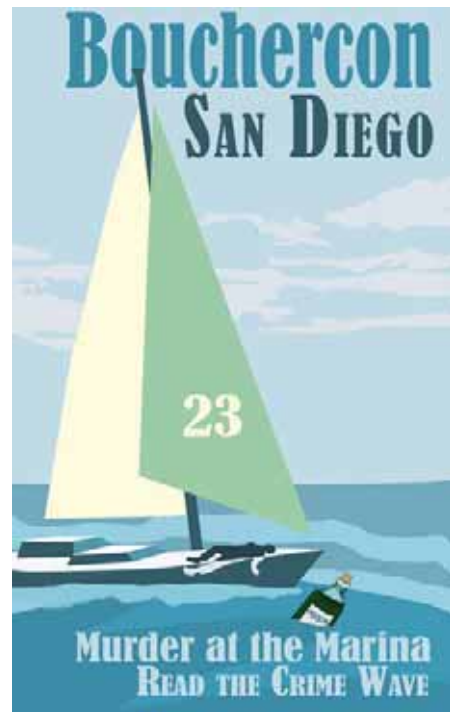
April 28-30, 2023

Malice Domestic

Bethesda, Maryland

Guests of Honor: Hank Phillippi Ryan, Vaseem Khan, Abir Mukherjee, Ann Cleeves, Barb Goffman, Tonya Spratt-Williams

Website: <https://www.malicedomestic.org/>



August 30 - September 3, 2023

Bouchercon

Murder at the Marina

San Diego, California

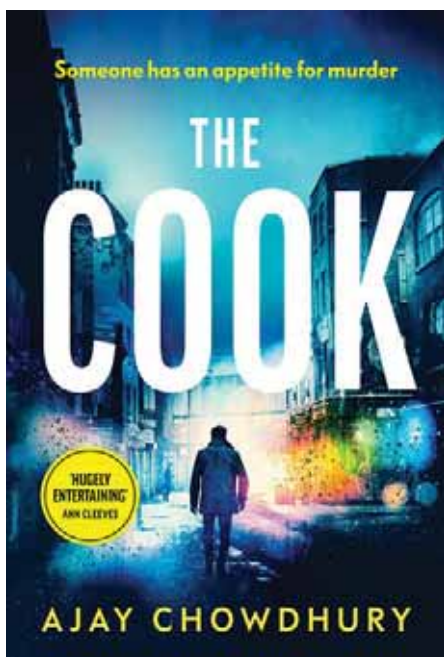
Guests of Honor: David Baldacci, Ann Cleeves, Jacqueline Winspear, Naomi Hirahara, C. J. Box, Kate Carlisle, Dru Ann Love

Website: <https://bouchercon2023.com/>

What's New In the U.K.



THE COOK, Ajay Chowdhury (Harvill Secker, £12.99, May). Kamil Rahman is a cook in a Brick Lane restaurant. But he used to be a detective back in Kolkata. When a young woman Kamil knows is murdered the police are convinced her boyfriend is the culprit. Kamil isn't so sure and feels he has no choice but to start his own investigation. Meanwhile, his friend and restaurant manager, Anjoli, is troubled by a rise in the number of homeless deaths in their local area. Initially the cases seem unrelated, but as the duo dig deeper, they discover connections that stretch from London to Lahore. Together they take on the indifference of the authorities to the homeless and the casual racism that pervades the investigation of killings of Muslims - all while trying to stop a supremely intelligent murderer who always seems to be several steps ahead of them.

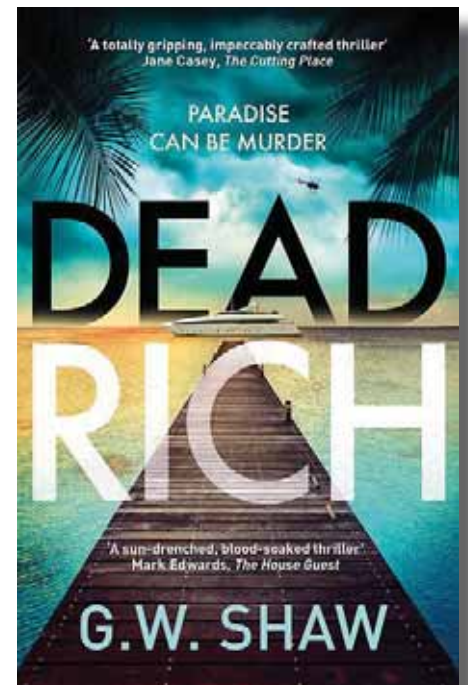


MAY GOD FORGIVE, Alan Parks (Canongate, £14.99, April; in U.S., Europa World Noir, \$17.00). Glasgow is a city in mourning. An arson attack on a hairdresser's has left five dead. Tempers are frayed and sentiments running high. When three youths are charged the city goes wild. A crowd gathers outside the courthouse but as the police drive the young men to prison, the van is rammed by a truck, and the men are grabbed and bundled into a car. The next day, the body of one of them is dumped in the city centre. A note has been sent to the newspaper: one down, two to go. Detective Harry McCoy has twenty-four hours to find the kidnapped boys before they all turn up dead, and it is going to mean taking down some of Glasgow's most powerful people to do it.

LYING BESIDE YOU, Michael Robotham (Sphere, £18.99, June). Twenty years ago, Cyrus Haven's family was murdered and only he and his brother survived. Cyrus because he hid. Elias because he was the killer. Now Elias is being released from a secure psychiatric hospital and Cyrus, a forensic psychologist, must decide if he can forgive the man who destroyed his childhood. As he prepares for the homecoming, Cyrus is called to a crime scene in Nottingham. A man is dead and his daughter, Maya, is missing. Then a second woman is abducted. The only witness is Evie Cormac, a troubled teenager with a gift for knowing when people are lying.

DEAD RICH, G. W. Shaw (William Shaw) (Riverrun, £16.99, May). Kai, a carefree once-successful musician is invited by his new Russian girlfriend Zina to join her family's Caribbean holiday. Impulsively accepting he learns

that Zina is the daughter of a Russian oligarch, Stepan Pirumov and that the trip is aboard his yacht, the Zinaida, moored in St Thomas in the US Virgin Islands. The crew consists of Captain Marius Falk, the first mate Erin Wade and a hastily assembled staff, including a chief stewardess Marissa from Miami, a chief engineer from Lagos and a personal trainer from Los Angeles. All know how to behave around the very rich. On arrival, Kai discovers that the head of security has been arrested, armed guards are below deck, there's an onboard panic room and a strong sense of all not being quite right beneath the gleaming surfaces of the Pirumov's lives.



DEAR LITTLE CORPSES, Nicola Upson (Faber & Faber, £14.99, May). 1 September, 1939. As the mass evacuation takes place across Britain, thousands of children leave London for the countryside, but when a little girl vanishes without trace, the reality of separation becomes more desperate and more deadly for those who love her. In the chaos and uncertainty of war, Josephine Tey struggles with the prospect of change. As a cloud of suspicion falls across the small Suffolk village she has come to love, the conflict becomes personal, and events take a dark and sinister turn.

U.K. Reviews



Jeff Pople Reviews

TWELVE SECRETS

by Robert Gold
Sphere, £12.99

Rating: A-

After co-authoring three titles in James Patterson's *Bookshots* series, Robert Gold makes his solo crime debut with **TWELVE SECRETS**.

Twenty years ago Ben Harper's older brother, and his friend, were killed in horrific circumstances by two teenage girls that they knew from school. The murders have long cast a shadow over Ben's life, but thanks to his friends, and the support of his close-knit hometown community near London, he has moved on and is now a successful crime journalist. However, a fresh murder case with links to his brother's death, upturns all that he thought that he knew about that day twenty years ago, and sets him on a quest to uncover long held secrets.

This is a very enjoyable read. Gold has learnt well from his experience with James Patterson, and **TWELVE SECRETS** unfolds in a smooth manner that keeps you eagerly turning the pages to find out what happens next. There is not a lot of action, but the unravelling of the interesting plot and the frequent twists keeps the suspense and the interest high. Gold skilfully shifts the viewpoint between Ben's first person narration and the perspective of other characters to maximise the mystery, and the structuring of the story around twelve secrets works quite well. Ben and the other characters are interesting and credible, and there are enough surprises to keep you engaged. I really liked the easy flow of the writing and the story, and the book has strong

tele-movie feel to it. There are some stretches of credibility, but not enough to detract from the enjoyment of the book.

THE INTERVIEW

by C. M. Ewan
Macmillan, £14.99

Rating: A-

Chris Ewan has a string of solid thrillers to his credit, as well as the entertaining 'Good Thief's Guide' series of crime books. Now as C. M. Ewan he has written an enjoyable 'concept' thriller that hooks you in from the opening pages.

The basic premise is that publicist Kate Harding is invited to a late Friday afternoon interview for her dream job at an innovative public relations firm. The interview is on the thirteenth floor of a new, stunning, glass-panelled, high rise building in the heart of London. Kate is nervous about the interview, and well

she should be as the questions quickly become more and more weirder, and Kate finds herself trapped in the building and facing a strange inquisition.

This is a pulse racing thriller that goes down some very unexpected paths. Ewan is very good at gradually drawing out the real reason for the interview, and keeping the suspense high as the various elements are introduced. There are twists galore, and the final conclusion is tense and very emotionally charged.

Some suspension of disbelief is needed at times, but overall **The Interview** is a well-grounded and engaging thriller.

THE HIDING PLACE

by Simon Lelic
Penguin, £8.99

Rating: B+

THE HIDING PLACE is a good follow-up to Simon Lelic's last novel, **THE SEARCH PARTY**, which introduced the detective pairing of DI Robin Fleet and DS Nikki Collins. Assigned to cold cases after the events in **THE SEARCH PARTY**, the pair are called into action when the body of a long dead schoolboy is discovered in an abandoned chapel crypt at Beaconsfield, an expensive and prestigious English boarding school. The body belongs to Ben Draper who went missing in 1997 after a game of 'hide and seek' that went wrong. Among the 'seekers' was Callum Richardson, who is now a prominent media and political celebrity, and Fleet finds himself under considerable pressure to close the case in a politically acceptable way.

Using a dual timeline and shifting point of view, Lelic alternates between Fleet's investigation and the events back in 1997 when disaffected newcomer Ben Draper came under the spell of three older students, including the charismatic Richardson. The dual unfolding works well, and Lelic maintains a good level of interest as both storylines smartly move to their respective conclusions.

The characters are well-developed and Lelic provides revealing insights into the private lives of Fleet and Collins, without slowing the story too much. He is also very good at bringing forth the personality of Ben and his struggles to fit in. The book touches



on a range of issues from loneliness to homelessness to the politics of policing and the lasting effects of childhood experiences, particularly those at boarding schools, on individuals. At its core, however, it is a good murder mystery and Lelic skilfully brings the novel to a surprising conclusion.

This is a well written and entertaining novel that will not disappoint regular readers of British police mysteries.

LYING BESIDE YOU

by Michael Robotham

Sphere, £18.99 - June

Cyrus Haven & Evie Cormac #3

Rating: A

Michael Robotham is one of those authors who rarely, if ever, disappoints.

It has been eighteen years since his first novel, *THE SUSPECT*, appeared and in the intervening years, I have only been slightly disappointed with one of his novels.

LYING BESIDE YOU is the third book in his series about forensic psychologist Cyrus Haven and troubled young adult, Evie Cormac, and finds Cyrus dealing with problems on several fronts.

Twenty years ago, Cyrus' family was murdered by his older brother Elias who suffered from hallucinations and voices

in his head. Now Elias is being released from a secure psychiatric hospital and Cyrus must decide if he can forgive the man who destroyed his childhood. As he prepares for the homecoming, Cyrus, who is a consultant to the police, is called to a crime scene in Nottingham. A man is dead and his daughter, Maya, is missing. The police quickly settle on a suspect, but Cyrus is less sure and then a second woman is abducted.

LYING BESIDE YOU is another cleverly plotted and well-crafted novel by Robotham. As usual, the writing is first class, and Robotham has a real skill for being able to quickly draw the reader into the story. The opening account of the murder of Cyrus' parents and sisters is emotionally powerful and, as always with his books, it is the telling small detail that stays in your mind and connects you to the story.

The central storyline about the missing women is engaging and interesting, and there are enough logical twists and turns to satisfy even the most jaded crime reader. The book builds to a terrific climax, that is given extra intensity by Robotham's ability to create well fleshed out characters that you come to care about.

There are perhaps a couple of unnecessary coincidences, but overall this an outstanding book and one of my favourite crime reads of the year, so far.

George Easter Reviews

THE BOTANIST

by M. W. Craven

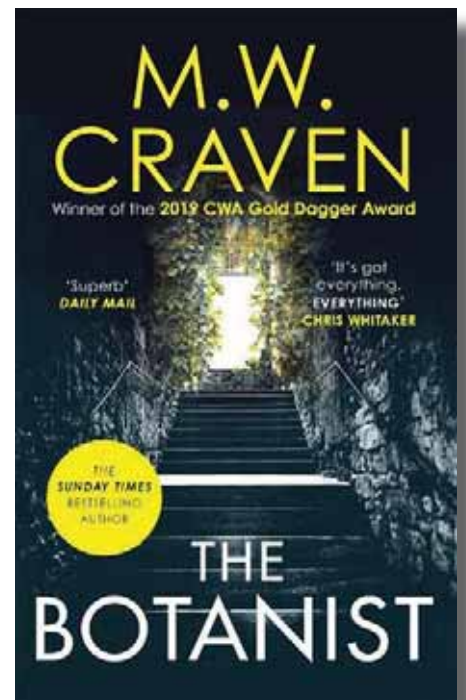
Constable, £16.99, June, 2022

Washington Poe-Tilly Bradshaw #5

Rating: A

The publication of a new Poe/Tilly crime novel is always a cause for celebration in my house. Each new entry in this superb series inevitably winds up on my list of personal favorites of the year. *Que lástima* that the series is only published in the U.K. – so far.

In *THE BOTANIST* (don't let the prosaic title fool you!), irascible Detective Sergeant Washington Poe receives a call for help from friend and work colleague Estelle Doyle, an eminent



pathologist, who is accused of the murder of her wealthy father. The evidence against her is pretty damning and will test Poe's skill to disprove – especially the presence of Doyle's tracks in the snow going into her father's house and no other tracks leaving.

But before he can dig into Estelle's case he is called away to investigate the high profile murders of a killer the press has dubbed The Botanist. His first victim was killed by poison while being interviewed on TV. The second victim was given a warning so the police took extreme measures to keep him safe – but to no avail. The victims are people who have done reprehensible things so public outrage is tempered.

So Mike Craven has given us a twofer – two puzzling locked-room mysteries for the price of one and they are both dandies! This is one of those series I read as much for the wonderful characters as I do for the scintillating plots. Masterful job.

THE CUTTING SEASON

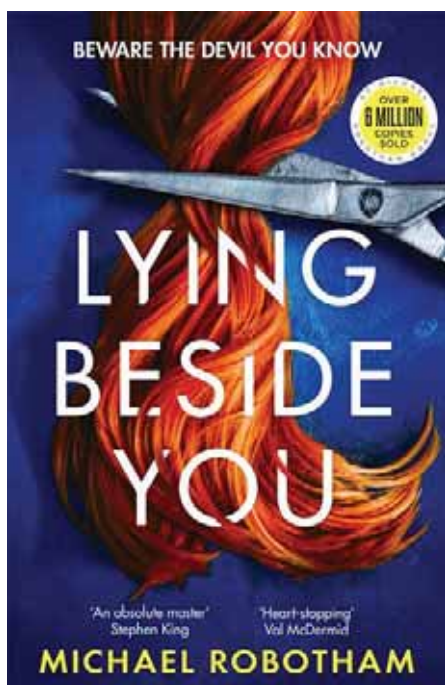
A Novella

by M.W. Craven

Constable Quick Reads, £1.00, May

Rating: A

I'll read anything by M.W. Craven, so when I saw that a "Quick Reads" novella featuring Washington Poe and Tilly



Bradshaw was coming out, I quickly grabbed a copy of it.

Poe and Tilly are brought into a murder case where a pound of flesh has been carved out of the seemingly blameless victim. Tilly uses her unrivalled tech skills to find a motive and a probable suspect. Then Poe is warned off of approaching the suspect by higher ups. Poe doesn't like to be told "no." So he figures out a clever, round-about way to get justice.

A delicious tale. Loved every one of its 131 pages. I even learned the origin of the term "bluetooth."

EVEN THE DARKEST NIGHT

by Javier Cercas,

translated by Anne McLean

Knopf, \$30.00, June in U.S.

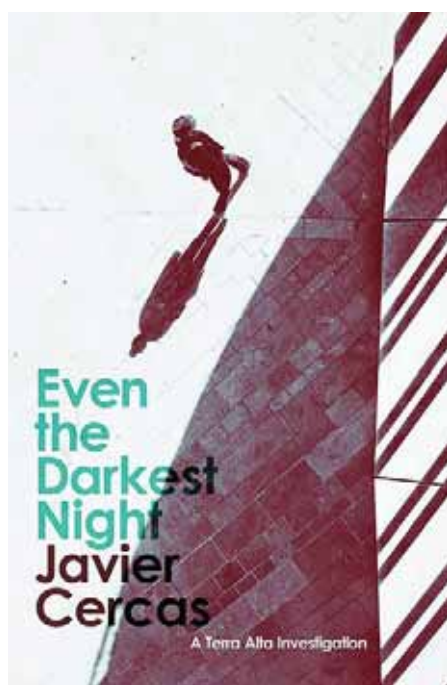
In U.K., MacLehose, £16.99, February

Terra Alta Series #1

Rating: A

Melchor Marin is a young police detective in the Spanish backwater of Terra Alta. "Nothing ever happens in Terra Alta." And for the last four years of his being stationed there, that is true. But one fateful night, the town's wealthiest benefactor and his wife are brutally murdered in what appears to be a professional killing, and Melchor and his partner Salom play critical roles in the ensuing investigation. Unfortunately, no damning evidence is uncovered and after a few months, the case is closed and the police move on to other things. But Melchor has a hard time letting go.

As the story progresses, we slowly put together all the pieces of Melchor's life up to this point in time. A son of a prostitute, he grew up in abject poverty and, as a young man, was trained by the drug cartel he worked for to drive and to shoot. And he was so good at both that he became the driver for one of the cartel leaders. Arrested as part of a police raid on the cartel's activities, he was put in prison for four years. There, he found himself under the protection and influence of the prison librarian, known as the French-



man, who gave him Victor Hugo's **LES MISERABLES** to read. And that experience changed his life. Interestingly enough, it was Inspector Javer that he most related to and eventually he becomes a policeman because of that book and its characters. His first private mission as a policeman is to find out who murdered his mother, but his investigation fizzles out – to his great disappointment.

As a rookie policeman in Barcelona, Melchor thwarts a terrorist attack with his shooting skills and becomes a national hero. Fearful of reprisals against him, his superiors send him to the remote Terra Alta to keep him safe. There he goes to the local library to find more novels like **LES MISERABLES** to read and makes acquaintance with the librarian Olga, a beautiful woman fifteen years his senior. They form a bond discussing great literary works and that bond eventually results in their marriage and her giving birth to their daughter, whom they name Cosette (of course).

The story eventually resolves itself with a number of surprises along the way – and some tragedy. The narrative is memorable and will stay with me for some time.

There are some apparent simi-

larities between Melchor Marin and Michael Connelly's Harry Bosch. Both are sons of prostitutes who are murdered and both are good cops who care deeply about justice for crime's victims. They both have a sole daughter. The title also has echoes of Connelly titles as well (**A DARKNESS MORE THAN NIGHT** and **DARK SACRED NIGHT**). But that is where the similarity ends. Each character is quite different from the other and that's as it should be.

I thought that this finely translated novel was like that of another great Spanish crime writer, Carlos Ruiz Zafon's **THE SHADOW OF THE WIND**, in that they both combined elements of a good crime novel with elements of praiseworthy mainstream fiction – dare I say -- "great literature?"

What first attracted me to this novel was the comments that crime writer M.W. Craven (one of my favorite writers) made about it, "Winner of Spain's biggest literary prize – the Premio Planeta – and I can see why. The best book I read this year." The year is still young, so I'm a bit reluctant to say the same thing. But I can definitively state that **EVEN THE DARKEST NIGHT** is an exceptional novel which should appeal to a wide audience of readers – not just mystery readers. It certainly should be considered for a Barry Best Novel Award. And it should appear on a lot of "Best of 2022" lists as well. It will certainly be on mine.

I've heard rumblings that this may be turned into a series. I certainly hope so. I'll be first in line to read any sequels.

THE LAWLESS LAND

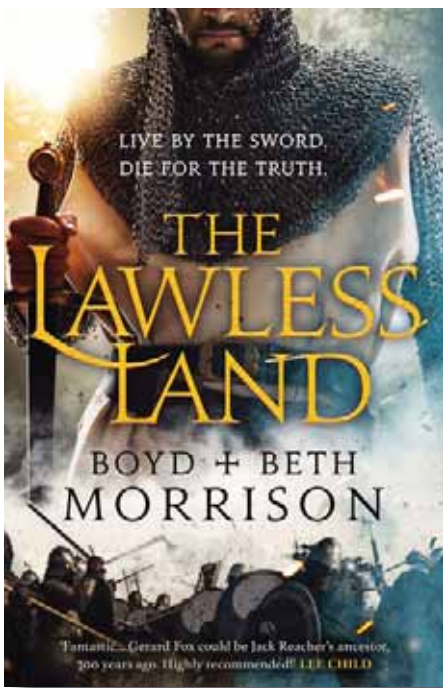
by Boyd & Beth Morrison

Head of Zeus, £18.99;

in U.S. \$29.99, May

Rating: A-

Gerard Fox is a knight who returns home to England to find that he has been robbed of his ancestral home and excommunicated from the Church by the power-hungry Cardinal Dominic Molyneux. While traveling on a rural



road Fox rescues Isabel, a woman from a group of men who are hell-bent on kidnapping her.

What ensues is a chase across England and France. Fox is determined to keep Isabel safe from those who want to kidnap her. Isabel has a sacred relic that she is sworn to keep out of Molyneux's hands. Together they use their strength, skill and wiles to get out of many difficult situations.

I grew up on tales of Knights of the Round Table, Robin Hood, the Crusades and Ivanhoe (both in books and in movies) and they always captured my imagination. So it shouldn't have been much of a surprise when I found myself reading **THE LAWLESS LAND** and thoroughly enjoying it. The writers played to their strengths. Boyd used his thriller-writing chops to infuse lots of action and danger to the plot and his sister Beth used her medieval historical expertise to inform us of what it was really like to live in 1351 England and France.

Some could criticize some aspects of this tale. The good characters are good and the bad characters are bad. Not a lot of nuance there. But once I got into the zone of the story, I didn't care. It was a lot of fun and it took me back to my childhood.

DEVIL'S PEAK (also published as INFANTA)

by Deon Meyer

Hodder & Stoughton, £14.99, 2007

Benny Griessel #1

Rating: A

I've been getting so much enjoyment out of reading the Benny Griessel novels by Deon Meyer (set in South Africa) that I went back to see if I had read all of them to date. I discovered that I had missed the first in the series, **DEVIL'S PEAK**, published in 2007.

As this novel opens, we find Detective Benny Griessel in the depths of an alcoholic addiction. His wife has thrown him out of their house and has given him a six-month ultimatum to clean himself up if he ever wants to come home to be with her and their two children.

On the professional front Benny is heading up a team to apprehend a vigilante killer known as Artemis, who is killing people who have harmed children in well publicized cases – but got away with it. We, the readers, know Artemis to be Thobela Mpayipheli, a character who appears in a number of Deon Meyer novels, who has lost his son to two low-lives who have escaped justice. For obvious reasons, the public is not necessarily on the side of the

police in this situation.

Another thread is that of a prostitute (with a dangerous secret) telling her life story to a rural minister and this thread doesn't make a lot of sense until the end when all threads of the narrative converge.

I can't recommend this series enough. It is certainly on my top 10 list of favorite series of all time. Which begs the question, what are my favorite series? Dang. I'm going to have to work on that. Ten might be too limiting.

An Oldie but Goodie

NICKERS

by Robert T. Price

Constable Crime, £16.99, 1998

Kenny Madigan #1

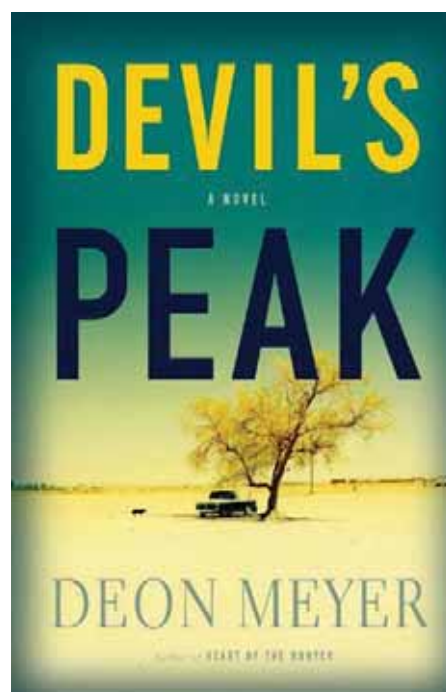
Rating: A-

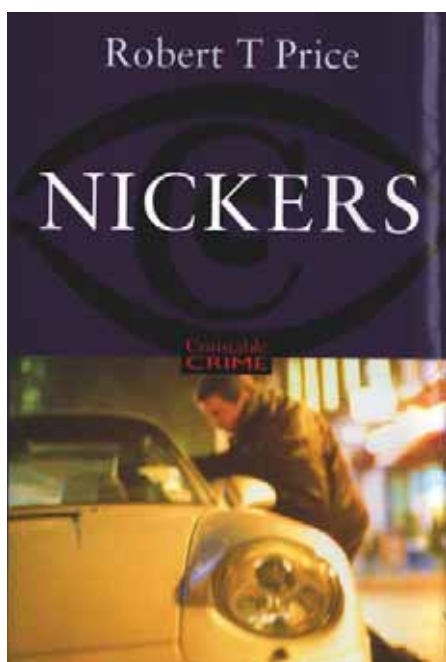
The title does not refer to a person's underwear. A "nicker" is also a thief, one who "nicks" stuff. And that thief is the lovable Kenny Madigan, who is recruited by the nefarious Quinn to steal up-market automobiles on order. Quinn also owns Lone Harp Auto Repair, a legitimate business that hides his illegal activities, where Kenny works during the day.

Kenny does a lot of prep work before each car snatch and they all go very smoothly until one night when he opens the boot of the stolen car and finds a gun pointed at his face. It seems like there are some other forces at play who want to take over Quinn's various businesses. But Kenny, due to his lock picking skills, manages to escape. He wants to quit, but Quinn won't let him.

Instead Kenny turns detective to get enough evidence against Quinn so that the police can shut him down.

The author infuses **NICKERS** with a lot of energy with his lively and witty style. It was a pleasure to re-read this short novel of 172 pages after so many years. Now on to its sequel, **GRIEVOUS**, which finds Kenny trying to go straight.





Back in the 1970s through the 1990s I was a big fan of the “lovable rogue” trend in British crime fiction. There was the antique expert/thief Lovejoy series by Jonathan Gash (**THE JUDAS PAIR** – 1977), which was very popular. Neville Steed created the antique toy expert Peter Marklin series beginning with **TINPLATE** (1986). Dan Mallett, the roguish poacher created by Frank Parrish (**FIRE IN THE BARLEY** – 1977), was also a favorite of mine. Similar to that one was the rascally gunsmith Keith Calder (**DEAD GAME** – 1979) series written by Gerald Hammond. John Malcolm also deserves mention for the art expert Tim Simpson series (**A BACK ROOM IN SOMERS TOWN** – 1984).

Ali Karim Review

NOBODY BUT US

by Laure Van Rensburg
(Michael Joseph, £14.99, April).

Rating: B+

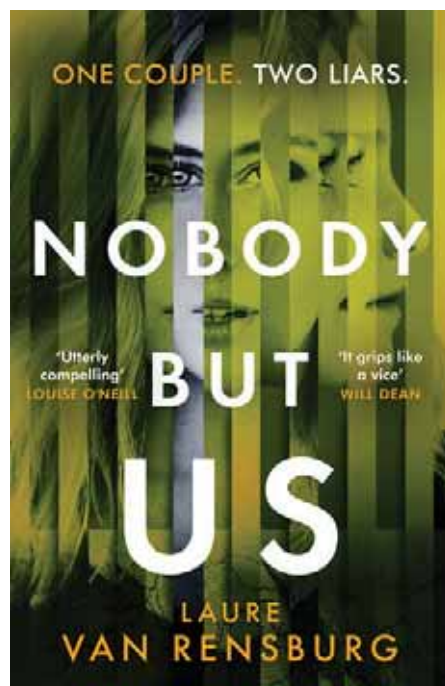
This powerful debut novel has the ability to lure the reader into a spider’s web. Superficially a romance that soon becomes something far more disturbing, nay distressing as Rensburg proves that love can be deadly.

Literature Professor (and academic)

Steven Harding and his lover, graduate student Ellen Masterson head for a romantic weekend in a secluded cabin on the Chesapeake Bay. Though little appears as it is presented, for their weekend will turn into something far more dangerous.

Written in a claustrophobic style, with shifting points of view, the reader soon realises the ground under the feet of the characters is unsteady. Who is the protagonist, and who is the antagonist? This is the question because the narrative viewpoints shift as unnervingly as does the readers sympathies and preconceptions.

Prescient and jarring, this unex-



pected and unheralded debut novel takes the current #MeToo and *male-female dynamic* and refracts them through a dark prism making the reader question what is real and what is artifice.

One has to atone for past sins, or does one? That is the question for the reader, as is the adage ‘*does retribution amount to atonement?*’

The reader must consider that when other eyes are viewing the proceedings of our lives; are our friends, our lovers, and our acquaintances really that friendly?

I have to leave a warning.

Theakston Old Peculier Crime Novel of the Year Nominees

The award, now in its 18th year, is presented Harrogate International Festivals and recognizes the best crime novels published in the UK and Ireland in paperback over the past year. Readers can vote online for their favorite book among the listed titles, with voting closing on [Thursday] May 26.

GIRL A, Abigail Dean

THE HERON’S CRY, Ann Cleeves

TALL BONES, Anna Bailey

BLOOD TIES, Brian McGilloway

THE CUT, Chris Brookmyre

THE LESS DEAD, Denise Mina

THE NIGHT HAWKS, Elly Griffiths

WATCH HER FALL, Erin Kelly

I KNOW WHAT I SAW,

Imran Mahmood

TRUE CRIME STORY, Joseph Knox

DAUGHTERS OF NIGHT,

Laura Shepherd-Robinson

DEAD GROUND, M.W. Craven

RABBIT HOLE, Mark Billingham

SLOUGH HOUSE, Mick Herron

THE DEVIL AND THE DARK

WATER, Stuart Turton

MIDNIGHT AT MALABAR HOUSE,

Vaseem Khan

THE LAST THING TO BURN,

Will Dean

THE TRAWLERMAN, William Shaw

The winner among these excellent 18 books will be declared during this year’s Theakston Old Peculier Crime Writing Festival, to be held in Harrogate, England, from July 21 to 24. He or she will receive a check for **£3,000**, plus an engraved oak beer cask, reportedly “hand-carved one of Britain’s last coopers from Theakstons Brewery.”

Editor’s Note: I’ve read several of these novels and want to read more of them. It’s an excellent list for those of you who love British mystery/crime novels. My vote went to M. W. Craven’s **DEAD GROUND**, but if I had two votes I would have also voted for **THE TRAWLERMAN** by William Shaw.

Getting Away With Murder

Mike Ripley



Parties On

After a two-year moratorium it seems that publishers have resumed the noble tradition of throwing parties and the first out of the blocks this (financial) year was a delightful soiree hosted by HarperCollins Fiction. Crime fiction reviewers were represented by myself, my Shots colleague the voluptuous Ayo Onatade and Laura Wilson, pictured here all trying not to giggle at the antique camera being used by the photographer.



Ayo, Laura & Mike

We were sorely tempted by early proofs of **MARPLE**, an anthology coming in September, which sees Agatha Christie's famous detective starring in twelve new stories written by contemporary female crime-writers including Val McDermid, Dreda Say Mitchell, Elly Griffiths and Lucy Foley.

I Spy, Don't Spy



Charlotte Philby & the Ripster

It was a positive joy to attend a book launch in London (quite exciting really after being quarantined in the Eastern Marches for so long) and a particular pleasure to meet the charming Charlotte Philby to celebrate her novel *Edith and Kim* [Borough Press] which I reviewed last month.



Mike & Dame Stella

I understand that another female writer who knows a fair bit about spies and spying, Dame Stella Rimington, the former head of MI5, also had a new novel out in March.

Sadly, for legal reasons, I can tell you nothing about **THE DEVIL'S BARGAIN** other than that it is by Dame Stella and it is published, it is rumoured, by Bloomsbury.

I can, however, tell you something about the new James Bond novel, *With A MIND TO KILL* by Anthony Horowitz because those jolly nice people at Jonathan Cape have sent me an advance copy.

Horowitz's third (and possibly last) entry into the Bond canon picks up two weeks after *The Man With The Golden Gun* ends, includes the funeral of 'M' and the action moving to Moscow and East Berlin.

And I have had a sneak preview of the forthcoming historical spy thriller

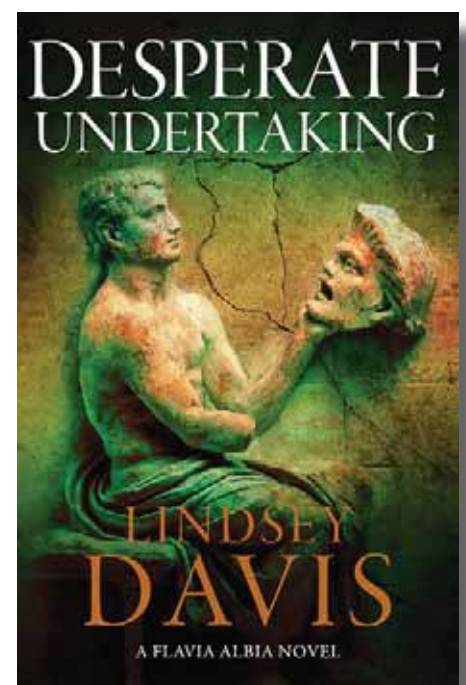
THE PRIME MINISTER'S AFFAIR by Andrew Williams, which will be published by Hodder in June.

The Prime Minister in question is Ramsey Macdonald and the setting the 1920s and '30s and anyone who knows Andrew's fiction (and if you are a fan of, say, Alan Furst or Robert Littell, you should) can expect his usual immaculate research coupled with a sharp eye for a plot.

Recent Books

Thanks to the generosity of the author rather than her publisher, I have been treated to the joyously gruesome Roman mystery [Hodder]. The gruesome bits include murder by crucifixion (a Greek practice, though they pinched it from the Persians) and the use of an over stimulated aurochs (look it up) as a murder weapon. The joyousness comes from the investigation of these deaths, which involve several trips to the undertaker, by Flavia Alba, the sharpest female private investigator to walk the mean via of Rome in AD 89.

Flavia, the adopted daughter of Marcus Didius Falco (who must surely be in danger of being made a god, if only in Colchester, by now), has her work cut out interviewing suspects in the murders of a married couple of itinerant



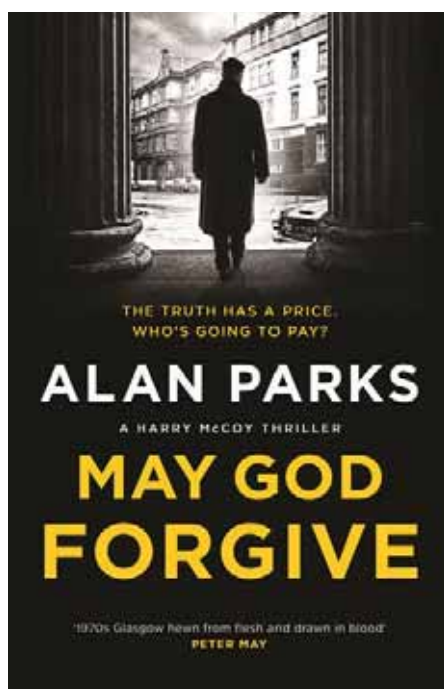
actor-managers pitching for an appearance in one of the many theatres on the Campus Martius. Our leading lady is hindered by the fact that all the usual suspects not only have post-Saturnalia hangovers, but alibis, and chasing them involves an extensive Roman pub crawl.

Flavia needs all her streetwise savvy to untangle motive and opportunity, the means being highly inventive and based in classical drama. This was, remember, the time of gladiators and gory public executions, and actors were often expected to literally die on stage - the audiences of the Glasgow Empire had nothing on a Roman crowd baying for blood.

Despite the gruesomeness of the murders and the squalor of the surroundings, **DESPERATE UNDERTAKINGS** is great fun, shot through with sharp observations on everyday life in Ancient Rome, and the author nobly restrains herself from any jokes about aurochs running amok in a Samian ware emporium, even if I could not.

Can you imagine a tougher, more mean-streeted setting for a hardboiled crime novel than the rough side of Glasgow? How about the same, but back in 1974, when honest (though not perfect) policemen like Harry McCoy had to rub shoulders with very low life and exist solely on alcohol, cigarettes and Pepto-Bismol for his entirely predictable stomach ulcer. He is also a cop who believes in justice rather than the law, often a very bloody justice with no appeal process.

In short, Harry McCoy is the brightest dark star on the Tartan Noir scene for some time and in future critics of Scottish crime fiction will surely be referring to the triumvirate of Laidlaw, Rebus and McCoy. In his fifth outing, **MAY GOD FORGIVE** [Canongate] by Alan Parks, throws McCoy into a maelstrom of murder which he has to navigate 'old school' without computers or mobile phones - this being back in the bad old days of 1974. A young woman is found strangled in churchyard, a shady pornographer is helped to jump off a tall building, one violent local gangster is cosying up to a scheming archbish-



op possibly in the hope of redemption, whilst a rival mobster wants to find his wayward son before the police do. On top of all this, a local hairdressing salon has been fire-bombed by three teenagers, killing the women and girls inside. Although quickly arrested, the trio of arsonists are dramatically sprung from police custody but this is no rescue mission, as the rescuers are vigilantes determined, very brutally, to exact an eye for an eye

MAY GOD FORGIVE is crime fiction which pulls no punches, powerfully told and, at time, heart-breakingly poignant, especially the scenes where McCoy comes into contact with his estranged father. One of the crime novels of 2022.

There have been many American crime novels featuring Irish criminal families, Boston being a favourite setting, where the families copy the structures and macho sensibilities of Italian mafia families, preying on the weaker elements in their local communities. The police and judiciary are bought off and they commit violent crimes with impunity, even though the rewards on offer seem pitifully small and transient. Their lives are dogged by petty jealousies and the constant fear of betrayal as no-one, not even close family members, can

ever really be trusted and, of course, the need for redemption. These are familiar themes, but Don Winslow, as might be expected, gives us a new take on them through the first of a proposed trilogy, **CITY ON FIRE** [HarperCollins].

Set in an area of Rhode Island known locally as 'Dogtown' in 1986, Winslow unveils a saga of two criminal families, one Irish the other Italian, going to war in true Homeric fashion over a perceived insult involving a beautiful woman, who emerges Venus-like from the waves on the local beach. Things rapidly escalate as male egos are bruised and the body count rises. The still small voice of calm is represented by Danny Ryan, the illegitimate son of the Irish mob boss, who is thrust into the role of peacemaker whilst still trying to earn a dishonest living, struggling with a terminally ill wife and determined to make sure his estranged mother (a fascinating character) stays estranged.

Despite a large cast of mostly sad characters living in a tragic bubble of their own pathetic delusions, Winslow rarely lets the pace falter and the stakes are raised when a large shipment of heroin comes up for grabs, drawing the attention of federal law enforcement.

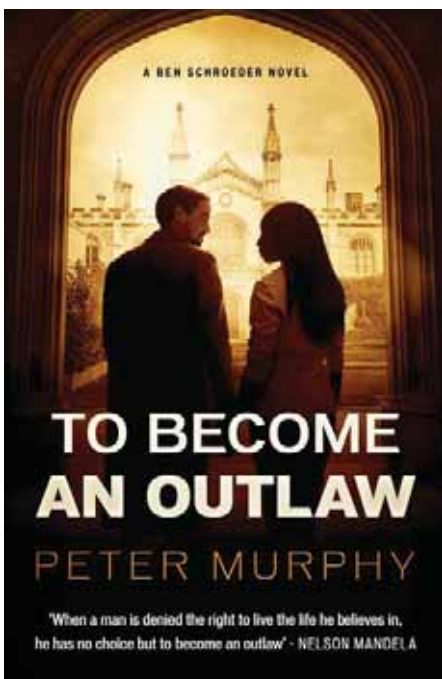
Iceland is back on the crime atlas with a vengeance this month. In **OUTSIDE** by Ragnar Jónasson [Michael Joseph], four apparent friends choose for their reunion to go on a ptarmigan hunting trip in the remote highlands but on their way to the site of the shoot they get blindsided, quite literally, by a snowstorm. Taking shelter in a rescue hut, they find it occupied by a silent, possibly comatose figure sitting nursing a shotgun, but that and the inevitable loss of mobile phone signal are not the nastiest shocks in store.

Told in brief bursts by each main character in succession, you just know that five armed people stranded in an isolated, unheated hut isn't going to end well and it's not long before the reader suspects this might be an elaborate set-up and the crucial questions are who is being set-up and who will survive.

And it may be heresy, but one of my

favourite practitioners of Icelandic noir is not himself an Icelander, but Michael Ridpath, a former City trader who switched careers to become the author of some acclaimed thrillers (ranging from the world of high finance to historic spy stories to nuclear submarine adventures) and a thoroughly satisfying crime series set in Iceland featuring Inspector Magnus Jonson. In **DEATH IN DALVIK** [Yarmer], Magnus investigates a murder in Dalvik, a fishing village on Iceland's northerly coast with a population of 1,400 according to Wikipedia (though probably fewer after this novel). The traditional world of Dalvik is experiencing a very modern pestilence in the form of craze for Bitcoins and a home-grown crypto-currency, Thomocoin, and thank goodness Michael Ridpath is one of the few crime-writers, possibly the only one, capable of explaining such things, though that they become a motive for murder doesn't surprise me at all.

Peter Murphy's series hero barrister Ben Schroeder does not make an appearance in his new novel **TO BECOME AN OUTLAW** [No Exit] until well after half time, when his expertise is called upon to sort out several sensitive legal issues. It sounds churlish to say the first half does not suffer from his absence,



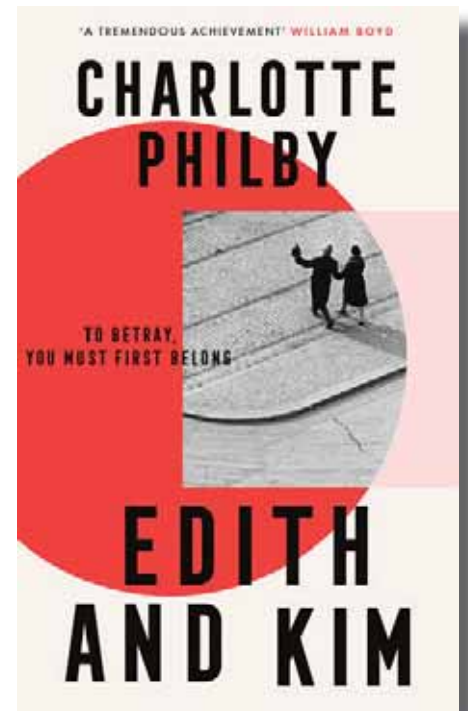
but the establishing plot involving ex-pat South Africans in Cambridge supporting anti-apartheid movements, including the ANC, back home is fascinating enough given that the setting is the late '60s and early '70s and there is a clear and present danger from agents of BOSS, the ferocious Bureau of State Security.

The fairly naïve academic couple at the centre of things get involved in passing funds to campaigners in South Africa via the system of Hawala, which transfers money all over the world based on a number of trusted 'bankers' without the need for sacks of smuggled cash, or indeed, bankers. (It used to be called 'Balti Banking' by CID officers of my acquaintance). Technically, there is nothing illegal about this, unless, of course, it could be funding the purchase of illegal arms or its source was from the drug trade and it seems as if it might. When a double murder and then a further death take place, the police and MI5 start to take notice, as does a Boss 'sleeper' agent very close to home. If nothing else, the couple could well face a charge of money laundering, so enter Ben Schroeder...

TO BECOME AN OUTLAW (a quote by Nelson Mandela) does an excellent job describing the iniquities of apartheid and the need to campaign against it, even though the British government did not, at times, want to upset the South African regime. It is difficult to come to terms with the fact that such a regime could exist in one's own lifetime, but Peter Murphy's legal thriller is a sombre reminder that it did.

No, I wasn't aware of Edith Tudor-Hart (nee Suschitzky) and her connection to the 'Cambridge ring' of spies, the most famous of which was Kim Philby, either until I read **EDITH AND KIM**, the new novel from Borough Press by Charlotte Philby, and quite honestly, I can't think who else could have written it better.

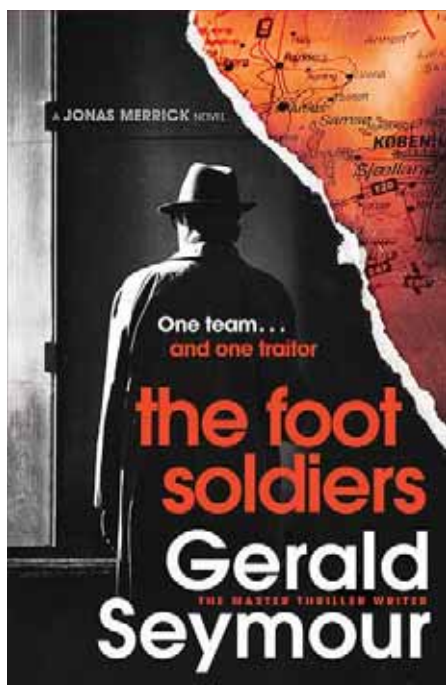
Told with a liberal sprinkling of extracts from SIS security reports (genuine ones as far as I can tell) and letters from Kim Philby in exile in Moscow, Charlotte Philby constructs a Rubik's cube of



fiction around the real lives of a network of spies which, born out of anti-fascist beliefs in pre-war Vienna, showed a dogged faith in Stalin's NKVD (and its dubious track record) as it infiltrated British industry and the intelligence hierarchy.

A talented, Bauhaus-trained photographer, Edith Tudor-Hart, who died in 1973, was far from the kingpin in this network but simply knowing what she did, and knowing who she did, made her a person of some interest to the security services. The paranoia and downright fear she felt - a woman often alone with a mentally disturbed child - is poignantly told and with great skill and compassion. Charlotte Philby has written an intriguing piece of fictionalised espionage history to add to the jigsaw that was her grandfather.

The 'poor bloody infantry' rather than flash (fictional) secret agents are the real heroes of espionage and in **THE FOOT SOLDIERS** [Hodder], veteran journalist and thriller writer Gerald Seymour does them proud. His new novel charts two intelligence operations, one in Russia, one in Denmark, both on the brink of going badly wrong. Make that three operations if you count the activities of a Russian hit-squad being



fed leaked information by a mole in MI6, and four if you add in the MI5 operation to trap the mole.

Heading this latter operation is a spy-catcher as far removed from James Bond (and indeed George Smiley) as is possible. Jonas Merrick is a desk-bound mouse - 'so ordinary, so nondescript' - who commutes to the office daily with nothing more lethal in his briefcase than his sandwiches and always catches the same train home at an evening. His one weakness seems to be coffee and walnut cake and for relaxation he takes his wife and his cat and tows a small caravan to a variety of windswept sites on the southern coast, or in this case on a bird-watching expedition (his wife's idea) to Suffolk. He seems hardly the man to catch a mole and sabotage a Russian hit-squad, especially when the gatekeepers at MI6 refuse to let him into the building! But Merrick is a dogged, methodical operator with a talent for detail, knowing and appreciating that the rough stuff will be done by loyal and brave men and women out in the field.

This is multi-layered spy-fi at its best, with Seymour showing that even after thirty-seven novels he has lost none of his talent for thrilling plots and creating credible and sympathetic characters, nor his journalist's eye for modern espionage tradecraft and techniques (and

often the old ones are the best).

I must admit that my knowledge of modern Algerian politics (at least since the days when Vandals and Byzantines disputed things) has been mostly gleaned from the novels of Alan Williams and Frederick Forsyth, both of whom chose the turbulent 1960's for their settings. I had no idea just how unsettled and violent a place Algeria had been in the thirty years following, and how the wounds inflicted and the crimes committed then still resonate today. Until that is, I read Robert Goddard's new thriller **THIS IS THE NIGHT THEY COME FOR YOU** [Bantam] and after doing so, I feel far-better informed as well as thoroughly entertained by an utterly absorbing thriller.

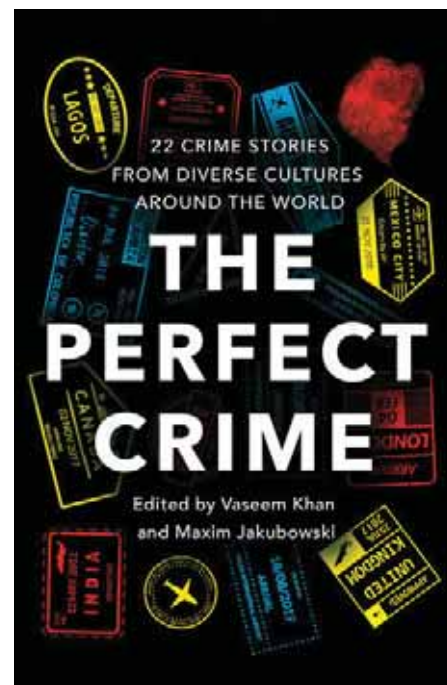
The intricate plot, which has its roots in an incident of brutal state thuggery by France and the revenge taken by Algerian 'freedom fighters' using a naïve Englishman as a stalking horse, has repercussions across the decades as a conspiracy by both the French secret service and a shady Algerian kleptocracy emerges. More deaths and a disputed confession from the past bring the story up to date and forces an unlikely alliance between the ageing, chain-smoking police Superintendent Taleb and the all-action female agent Hidouchi of the Algerian security service.

It all ends in betrayals and violence on the streets of Paris, where it all began sixty years before. Consummately plotted and sprinkled with some memorable characters, Robert Goddard takes unfamiliar subject matter and makes it gripping reading thanks to sheer story-telling expertise.

THE PERFECT CRIME edited by Vaseem Khan and Maxim Jakubowski [HarperCollins] is an anthology which showcases the diversity of crime-writing these days with twenty-two stories from different settings and cultural perspectives.

There are some writers here you will be aware of: Walter Mosley, Mike Phillips, Vaseem Khan, Abir Mukherjee (with a delightful slice of Scottish treachery) and S.A. Cosby. Then there

are some contributors you ought to be aware of, such as Silvia Moreno-Garcia, Oyinkan Braithwaite, Imran Mahmood and David Heska Wanbli Weiden. And then there is the pleasure of discovering new names with stories from America, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. A positive cornucopia of criminal delights.



THE MATCHMAKER by Paul Vidich [No Exit Press] is a stone cold, stone brilliant, Cold War spy thriller of the old school set in Berlin in 1989 as the Wall between East and West comes down.

The CIA are hunting a Stasi spymaster known as The Matchmaker due his establishment of a network of 'Romeo' agents who seduce and marry vulnerable women in the West, thus providing them with a cover for their activities. What neither the Stasi nor the CIA have reckoned with, however, is the reaction of one of 'Juliets' duped into a sham marriage, who has her own score to settle with The Matchmaker and both underestimate the capabilities of the amateur spy when suitably motivated, especially when it's woman scorned.

Scenes of Berlin street-life at the end of the punk era, the actual crumbling of the wall and the subsequent ransacking of personal files in the hastily-abandoned Stasi headquarters, are vividly painted in Vidich's spare prose. He even

gives us a grieving woman at a graveside and a musician who played the zither in a nod to *The Third Man*, making *The Matchmaker* a book crying out to be filmed in black-and-white.

It is nearly thirty years since I reviewed Charlie Higson's early crime novels and he has subsequently been concentrated on his television career and establishing the legend of the young James Bond. Now he returns to adult crime fiction with the darkly comic **WHATEVER GETS YOU THROUGH THE NIGHT** [LittleBrown].

Set on Corfu, though the island's tourist board won't thank him, a tech billionaire has a palace/fortress where he confines, or rather grooms, a platoon of teenage female tennis players and our hero (and his team) is hired to extract one girl in particular, though it turns out she has her own plans for an escape. In the mix are any number of young idle rich professional party-goers, dodgy security guards, a drug-raddled mystic, the local brothel owner and, wouldn't you just know it, Albanian gangsters.

Above all, there's the bat-shit crazy tech entrepreneur presiding over a court which includes the fascinating - but totally bonkers - good time girl Pixie. Money, drugs and drink flow in copious quantities and the final 'extraction'

is a fabulous set-piece. Along the way there are lots of movie references and is a salutary experience to readers of a certain age to discover that the plot of *The Great Escape* has to be explained to a younger generation.

Packed with good gags and eclectic information, such as the proper name for a Jet-Ski and what a Shibari Halo is (I have often seen one in action but never knew what they were called), the book is worth it for the return of a character Dennis 'The Menace' Pike from, if memory serves, *Full Whack* in 1995. Welcome back, Mr Higson...we've been expecting you...(Ed: Read Charlie Higson's exclusive feature here).

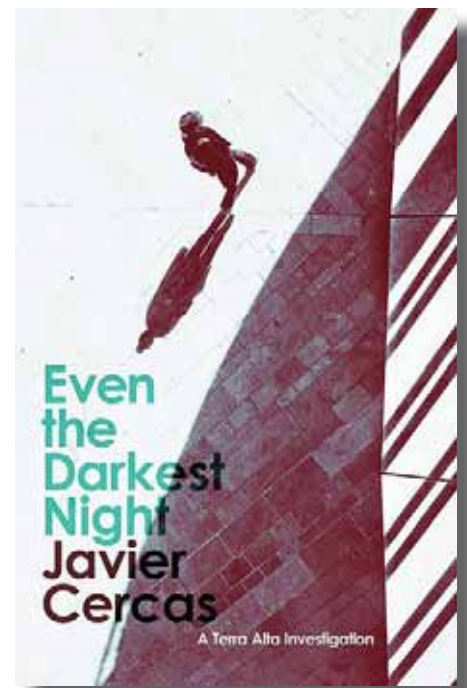
Stuart Neville's new novel **THE HOUSE OF ASHES** [Zaffre] is the story of two sets of crimes against women sixty years apart framed as a ghost story. Set in the wilds of rural Northern Ireland, a grim, isolated farmhouse conceals an appalling (though sadly not unbelievable) history of sex-slavery, murder and other atrocities, its very floors and walls lined with bones.

New owners move in -- a domineering, controlling husband and his mentally fragile wife Sara. It is Sara who is contacted by a previous inhabitant of the house, who turns out to be not so much a former resident as the sole survivor. As the past horrors of the farmhouse are revealed and Sara's present-day relationship collapses into violence, she is trapped, but also in a way saved, by the ghosts in the very fabric of the house.

Terrific, sometimes terrifying, Gothic story-telling.

If you've been denied a holiday in Spain recently, the odds are it wasn't to Terra Alta in Catalonia, but if it was then don't expect a tourist-friendly guide to the local food and drink in **EVEN THE DARKEST NIGHT** by Javier Cercas [MacLehose], because it's not that sort of bucolic crime novel.

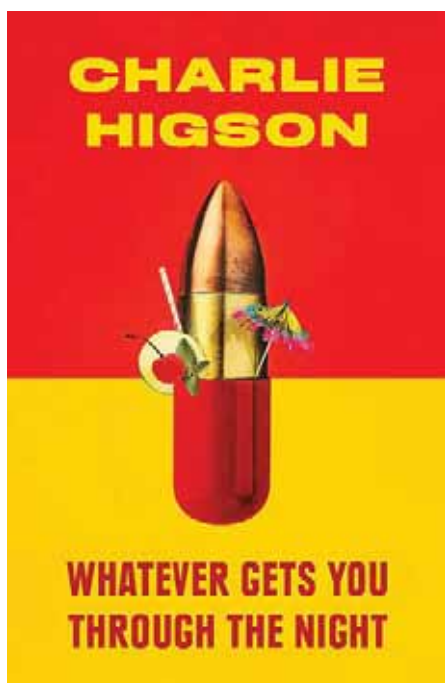
The central crime is the ritualistic torture and murder of an elderly couple, the heads of a powerful business empire, but the focus of the book is the story of



police detective Melchor Marin. The son of a murdered Barcelona prostitute who, as a youth, works as a driver for a Colombian drugs cartel, is arrested, jailed and while in prison devours Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables*, Marin determines to become, on release, a policeman. He not only does so (partly in the hope of finding his mother's killer), but discovers he's quite good at it and quickly establishes his heroic credentials when foiling a terrorist attack.

Marin is due to appear in more 'Terra Alta' novels and though the fact that they are written mostly in the present tense may put some people off, he is definitely a character worth keeping an eye on.

This could be the most aptly-titled debut crime novel of the year because it takes place over one hectic day in the London underworld where virtually everybody dies violently. **A GOOD DAY TO DIE** by Amen Alonge [Quercus] features a multi-cultural cast who kill or are killed with guns (so many guns) and even a grenade and happily mutilate their victims with machetes in search of a valuable diamond bracelet, a bagful of drugs or just in vengeance for an ancient snub or betrayal. And betrayal does seem to be the main driving force in the operation of this very unpleasant world



of drug lords, crime bosses, Russian mafiosi and corrupt policemen. These guys make Reservoir Dogs look like a meeting of Quakers.

The cast of characters is huge and it is often difficult to keep track of them, though the main protagonist's backstory - he is known only as 'Pretty Boy' - told in flashback is heart-breaking at times. Given the ridiculous level of violence throughout, however, few of the supporting cast survive but one cannot deny the power and pace of the story-telling.

The last time I checked, climbing a mountain in the Himalayas (with or without oxygen) did not feature on my Bucket List and after reading **BREATHLESS** by Amy McCulloch [Michael Joseph], I have absolutely no desire to add it even as an afterthought.

To attempt to climb the fourteen highest mountains in the world in a single year without oxygen is the sort of challenge which surely attracts the borderline crazy. In the case of the expedition in *Breathless*, which includes the inexperienced climber and would-be 'adventure journalist' Cecily Wong, it also attracts the homicidal. Written by a Canadian mountaineer of some repute, though the modern term seems to be the quaintly Victorian 'alpinist', the rigours of a high altitude ascent are meticulously described, down to the need to recharge electronic equipment so the climbers can keep up with their emails and Instagram accounts. There are also severe warnings about High Altitude Pulmonary and Cerebral Edemas, which only strengthen my resolve that any activities on my Bucket List will take place at sea level.

I did learn other things: that 'summit' can now be used as a verb when reaching the top of a mountain (as in 'I summit', 'she summits', 'they summited') and also that **BREATHLESS** is a tale of high adventure which leaves the reader, not to put too fine a point on it, breathless.

Spare Coppers

There's never one around when you need one, then suddenly two turn up at once with debut crime novels published on the same day. I am referring, of course, to former Chief Superintendents of police John Sutherland and Graham Bartlett.



THE SIEGE by John Sutherland [Orion], formerly with the Metropolitan Police, and **BAD FOR GOOD** by Graham Bartlett [Allison & Busby], formerly of Brighton & Hove police and an advisor to numerous crime writers, are both published on 23rd June. I am told nothing suspicious should be read into these synchronised forays into crime fiction rather than crime fact. I am assured both authors have solid alibis.

A Day at the Races

If you fancy a day at the races, specifically the first day of the Grand National Meeting at Aintree on 7th April, then you could have the added bonus of seeing the unveiling of the statue of Dick Francis, champion jockey and champion thriller writer.

The siting of the statue, funded by contributions from family, friends, race-goers and readers, at the top of the steps outside the Aintree weighing room, is fitting because apart from his



success as a jockey there, Dick Francis (1920-2010) was also instrumental in the 1982 Grand National Appeal to save Aintree racecourse from housing development.

William Newton's statue of Dick, seen here as a clay model, has been cast in bronze and there is a rumour that the unveiling will be performed by a member of the royal family, who were, famously, keen followers of his riding and then writing careers.

Spies Past and Present

I have just received an advance proof of Tom Bradby's new spy novel, **YESTERDAY'S SPY**, to be published by Bantam in May. I am sure I will enjoy it - as Tom is a good writer and a thoroughly good guy - as much as I enjoyed a book with the same title 47 years ago.



Do Mention the War

Several decades ago, back in the last century when I had a proper job, I used to commute to London in the company of a Fleet Street journalist (and also a respected reviewer of crime fiction) who confided that his ambition, on retirement, was to write a British police procedural story set during World War II. He never did, but twenty years ago, in 2002, Anthony Horowitz created the wonderful television series *Foyle's War* and veteran thriller writer John Gardner published **BOTTLED SPIDER** featuring Woman Detective Sergeant Suzie Mountford.

The police detective in wartime England has been featured with distinction by such as Laura Wilson and Rennie Airth among others, and now comes Jessica Ellicott with **DEATH IN A BLACKOUT** [Severn House], which is set in Hull in 1940.

This looks like the start of a series to feature WPC Wilhelmina ('Billie') Harkness, the unworldly daughter of a Wiltshire Rector who moves to Kingston upon Hull after the death of her mother and within the first twenty-four hours experiences the first Hull Blitz, finds a dead (murdered) body and joins the police force. With absolutely no knowledge of the geography of Hull (the fact that it was then proudly situated in the East Riding of Yorkshire is not mentioned) and with the aid of another constable (were there no detectives in Hull?), Billie survives the bombs and solves the crime in a Hull where nobody mentions Rugby League, they drink fresh coffee from cafetieres at breakfast and steal copies of Lady Chatterley's Lover from the public library.

[Apropos absolutely nothing, my ferocious Scottish grandmother was called Wilhelmina and no-one ever called her 'Billie'.]

The author is American, and clearly so, not just from the spelling ('center', 'offense' etc.) but to the way street directions are given to pedestrians ('take King Edward Street to Victoria Square...then turn east on Alfred Gelder

Street...), but I suppose can be forgiven for not repeating the legend that the chimneys of the Hull Brewery Company were used as navigation aids by incoming German bombers -- and the reason why the brewery survived the war unscathed. (A rumour probably spread by natives, like me, of the West Riding.)

John Gardner's excellent Suzie Mountford series continued with **THE STREETS OF TOWN** and three more novels before John's death in 2007. It was quite an achievement for a man in his mid-to-late Seventies (he was also writing other things), who had been widowed in 1997 from his wife of forty years and was suffering increasingly complicated medical problems.

For the Suzie Mountford books, Gardner drew on his memories of the early war years and based the character on a former girlfriend, Patricia Mountford. When the first book was published, Patricia heard about it, got in touch and

the pair were reunited. At the time of John's death they were engaged to be married.

Best Title Ever

The title I wish I'd thought of belongs to a Netflix series which gloriously catalogues every cliché and trope in the 'domestic noir' playbook, and deliberately so, making *The Woman In The House Across The Street From The Girl In The Window* my current binge-watch guilty pleasure.

The main character is a sommelier of Olympic standard and the outcome of take-your-daughter-to-work-day (in a prison full of serial killers) is stunningly dark. There's also a clue to the identity of the murderer in that very title. Who said Americans couldn't do irony?

Toodles!

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A Paperback Confidential Profile

Chester Himes

by Brian Ritt

This is the tenth in a series of articles about the crime writers from the 1940s to the 1960s, as found in **PAPERBACK CONFIDENTIAL** by Brian Ritt (Stark House, \$19.95, 2013). This volume is highly recommended to those who collect vintage mystery/thriller paperbacks, especially Gold Medals. Reprinted by permission of Stark House and the author.

Chester Himes.

Born in Jefferson City, Missouri, 1909. Died in Moravia, Spain, 1984.



Chester Himes didn't start out as a writer. In fact, he didn't start out as much of anything. When he became a writer, and an accomplished one, he was not acclaimed in his homeland. He did not get invited to Hollywood to earn fat paychecks writing screenplays or to wine and dine with movie stars at ritzy nightclubs such as *Ciro's* and *The Mocambo*. A small part of the reason may have been because of Himes's angry and contentious attitude.

But the main reason was because he

was black. And not ashamed of it.

Chester Himes came from a middle class background. In 1928, he went to prison for armed robbery (he was released in 1936). It was in prison, of all places, where Himes first turned toward literary pursuits. "When I could see the end of my time inside," Himes wrote, "I bought myself a typewriter and taught myself touch typing. I'd been reading stories...in *Black Mask* and I thought I could do them just as well...All you have to do is tell it like it is." (*Twentieth-Century Crime and Mystery Writers*, pg. 539)



Himes's early novels were not of the hardboiled, criminous variety. His first book, **IF HE HOLLERS LET HIM GO** (1945), was autobiographical in nature and dealt with the racism he encountered while trying to find work in the

Los Angeles defense industry during WWII. "It was the look on people's faces when you asked 'em about a job," Himes wrote. "Most of 'em didn't say outright they wouldn't hire me. They just looked so goddamned startled that I'd even asked."

Other books in this vein were **LONELY CRUSADE** (1947), *First Stone* (1953), *The Third Generation* (1954) and *The Primitive* (1955). They were all powerfully written accounts of the racism Himes encountered at various times and places in America. When first published they were not particularly successful—critics and the public found their expressions of hostility too raw.

Frustrated with his career and fed up with racism in America, Himes followed in the footsteps of other black literary expatriates such as Richard Wright and James Baldwin and moved to Europe. He wandered around in different countries for a few years before finally settling in Paris in the mid-1950's. A French editor, Marcel Duhamel, contacted Himes and asked him to write a series of detective novels for the French *Serie Noire* line of American crime fiction. Himes, by now almost broke, happily agreed.

Duhamel gave Himes suggestions about what kind of writing his publisher wanted: "Like motion pictures. Always the scenes are visible...We don't give a damn who's thinking what—only what they're doing...Don't worry about it making sense. That's for the end. Give me 220 typed pages." (*Encyclopedia of Pulp Fiction Writers*, by Lee Server, pg. 140)

Himes took the suggestions, and came up with the following:

The setting: Harlem—dirty, impoverished, chaotic. The heroes: two police detectives, Coffin Ed Johnson and Gravedigger Jones—violent, unpredictable, and profanely funny. The plots: big cons or big capers. The tone: fast-paced, action-packed, raucous—with large dollops of absurdity and deadpan humor.



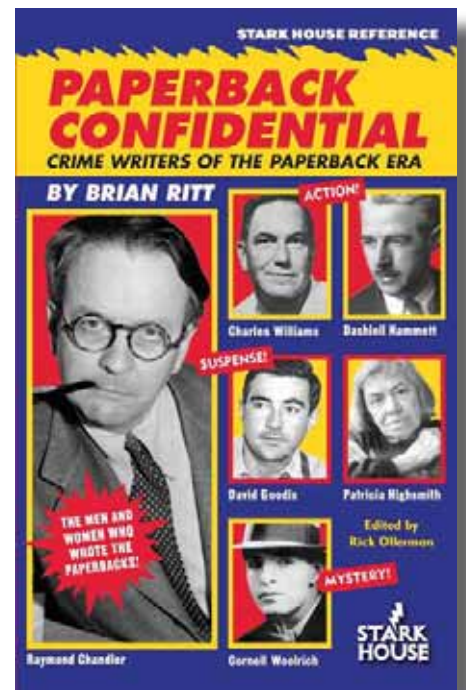
In terms of the fact that these books were genre fiction, they were not potboilers where Himes abandoned writing about his observations about racism in America. Rather, in the same way that writer Rod Serling was able to both cloak and express his personal and political issues within the sci-fi genre for his TV series *The Twilight Zone*, Himes did likewise with crime fiction.

Himes titled his first novel for the Gallimard Serie Noir line, **FOR LOVE OF IMABELLE** (1957). The book was a financial and critical success, and won The Grand Prix de Littérature Policière in 1958. In 1991 the book was made into a successful movie called *A Rage in Harlem*; later printings bear this title. Himes was off and running.

The rest of the series follows Jones and Johnson as they “prowl the streets... connecting with a broad network of junkies, stool pigeons, whores, and pimps, doing what they can to maintain law and order by bashing heads and making deals.” (*The Big Book of Noir*, pg. 275.) In Himes’s later years, he wrote two more autobiographical novels: **THE QUALITY OF HURT** (1972) and **MY LIFE OF ABSURDITY** (1976). He made a few return trips to America, but lived the rest of his life in coastal Spain.

Further Reading:

Coffin Ed Johnson and Grave Digger Jones series (complete):
FOR LOVE OF IMABELLE (1957;
 aka, **A RAGE IN HARLEM**, 1965)



THE CRAZY KILL (1959)
THE REAL COOL KILLERS (1959)
ALL SHOT UP (1960)
THE BIG GOLD DREAM (1960)
COTTON COMES TO HARLEM
 (1965)
THE HEAT'S ON (1966)
 aka **COME BACK, CHARLESTON BLUE**, 1970)
BLIND MAN WITH A PISTOL (1969)
 aka **HOT DAY HOT NIGHT**

Other Novels

IF HE HOLLERS LET HIM GO (1945)
LONELY CRUSADE (1947)
CAST THE FIRST STONE (1952)
THE THIRD GENERATION (1954)
THE PRIMITIVE (1956)
PINKTOES (1961)

Factoid of Interest

The movie poster (see below) of *Cotton Comes To Harlem* was illustrated by the iconic artist Robert McGinnis.



Recent Paperbacks of Note



Softboiled to Mediumboiled

- Barrett, Lorna, **A DEADLY DELETION** (\$8.99).
 Berenson, Laurien, **PUP FICTION** (\$8.99)
 Berry, Tamara, **BURIED IN A GOOD BOOK** (\$8.99)
 Blake, Deborah, **CLAWS FOR SUSPICION** (\$8.99)
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 Dylan, Jess, **FATAL FLOWERS** (\$8.99)
 Elliott, Lauren, **A MARGIN FOR MURDER** (\$8.99)
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 Hollis, Lee, **POPPY HARMON AND THE PILLOW TALK KILLER** (\$8.99)
 James, Miranda, **WHAT THE CAT DRAGGED IN** (\$8.99)
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 Smith, Karen Rose, **MURDER WITH DARJEELING TEA** (\$8.99)
 Wallace, Auralee, **WHEN THE CROW'S AWAY** (\$8.99)

Mediumboiled to Hardboiled

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 Castillo, Linda, **FALLEN** (\$9.99)
 Cornwell, Patricia, **AUTOPSY** (\$9.99)
 Dorn, L. R., **THE ANATOMY OF DESIRE** (\$16.99)
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 Gaylin, Alison, **NEVER LOOK BACK** (\$9.99)
 Goldin, Megan, **THE NIGHT SWIM** (\$9.99)
 Goldman, Matt, **CAROLINA MOON SET** (\$15.99)
 Griffin, Laura, **MIDNIGHT DUNES** (\$8.99)
 Jackson, Lisa, **WICKED WAYS** (\$9.99)
 Jewell, Lisa, **THE NIGHT SHE DISAPPEARED** (\$17.99)
 Jonasson, Ragner, **THE GIRL WHO DIED** (\$17.99)
 Klingborg, Brian, **THIEF OF SOULS** (\$16.99)
 McHugh, Laura, **WHAT'S DONE IN DARKNESS** (\$17.00)
 Moreno-Garcia, Silvia, **VELVET WAS THE NIGHT** (\$17.00)
 Muller, Marcia, **ICE AND STONE** (\$9.99)
 Penny, Louise, **THE MADNESS OF CROWDS** (\$9.99 and \$17.99)
 Reichs, Kathy, **THE BONE CODE** (\$17.99)
 Rendon, Marcie R., **MURDER ON THE RED RIVER** (\$9.99)
 Robotham, Michael, **WHEN SHE WAS GOOD** (\$9.99)
 Siger, Jeff, **ONE LAST CHANCE** (\$15.99)
 Smith, Sherri, **THE RETREAT** (\$9.99)
 Unger, Lisa, **THE STRANGER INSIDE** (\$9.99)

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 Doiron, Paul, **DEAD BY DAWN** (\$17.99)
 Freeman, Brian, **Robert Ludlum's THE BOURNE TREACHERY** (\$9.99)
 Hamilton, Glen Erik, **ISLAND OF THIEVES** (\$8.99)
 Heller, Peter, **THE GUIDE** (\$17.00)
 Hunter, Stephen, **BASIL'S WAR** (\$16.95)
 Mayne, Andrew, **SEA STORM** (\$15.95)
 Newman, T. J., **FALLING** (\$17.99)
 O'Rawe, Richard, **GOERING'S GOLD** (\$17.99)
 Quirk, Matthew, **THE NIGHT AGENT** (\$16.99)
 Ricciardi, David, **SHADOW TARGET** (\$9.99)
 Herron, Mick, **SLOUGH HOUSE** (\$16.95)
 Tata, A. J., **CHASING THE LION** (\$9.99)
 Webb & Mann, **STEEL FEAR** (\$9.99)
 Young, Tom, **SILVER WINGS, IRON CROSS** (\$9.99)

Sneak Previews

Upcoming Mysteries



Disclaimer: with the Covid-19 crisis, many publishers have modified their publishing schedules. This information is the best I could come up with, but there may be changes from the dates for publication that I am not informed about.

May, 2022

- 3 Chris Hauty, **STORM RISING** (Hayley Chill)
- 3 Timothy Hallinan, **ROCK OF AGES** (Junior Bender)
- 3 Nancy Atherton, **AUNT DIMITY AND THE ENCHANTED COTTAGE**
- 3 Deon Meyer, **THE DARK FLOOD** (Benny Griessel)
- 3 Lorenzo Carcaterra, **NONNA MARIA & THE CASE OF THE MISSING BRIDE**
- 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**
- 3 Amy McCulloch, **BREATHLESS**
- 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 Family)
- 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 s.s.)
- 17 Adrian McKinty, **THE ISLAND**
- 22 Rita Mae Brown, **THRILL OF THE HUNT** (Sister Jane)
- 24 Anthony Horowitz, **WITH A MIND TO KILL** (James Bond)
- 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 Adam White, **THE MIDCOAST**
- 7 Timothy Hallinan, **ROCK OF AGES** (Junior Bender)
- 7 Kwei Quartey, **LAST SEEN IN LAPAZ** (Emma Djan)
- 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 Matthew Quirk, **RED WARNING**
- 7 Barbara Hambly, **DEATH AND HARD CIDER** (Benjamin January)
- 7 Tara Moss, **THE GHOSTS OF PARIS** (Billie Walker)
- 7 Don Bentley, **Tom Clancy ZERO HOUR** (Jack Ryan, Jr.)
- 7 Katie Gutierrez, **MORE THAN YOU'LL EVER KNOW**
- 7 David Mark, **BLIND JUSTICE** (Aector McAvoy)
- 7 Paul Doherty, **THE HANGING TREE** (Brother Athelstan)
- 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 Ncieza, **THE SELF-MADE WIDOW** (Stern & 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)
- 28 Philip Miller, **THE GOLDENACRE**
- 28 Catriona McPherson, **IN PLACE OF FEAR**

July, 2022

- 5 Mark Greaney, **ARMORED**
- 5 Linda Castillo, **THE HIDDEN ONE** (Kate Burkholder)
- 5 Tess Gerritsen, **LISTEN TO ME** (Rizzoli & Iles)
- 5 David Rosenfelt, **HOLY CHOW** (Andy Carpenter)

- 5 Ian Hamilton, **FINALE** (Uncle Chow)
 5 Ed Lin, **DEATH DOESN'T FORGET** (Taipei Night Market)
 5 Kathy Reichs, **COLD COLD BONES** (Temperance Brennan)
 5 Denise Mina, **CONFIDENCE** (Anna & Fin)
 5 M. J. Trow, **THE YEOMAN'S TALE**
 5 Graham Hurley, **LIGHTS DOWN** (Enora Andressen)
 5 G. M. Malliet, **AUGUSTA HAWK**
 5 Simon Brett, **DEATH AND THE DECORATOR** (Fethering)
 7 Robert Bryndza, **FATAL WITNESS** (Erika Foster)
 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)
 12 Nadine Matheson, **THE BINDING ROOM** (Anjelica Henley)
 19 Jennifer Hillier, **THINGS WE DO IN THE DARK**
 19 Brad Thor, **RISING TIGER** (Scot Harvath)
 19 Paula Munier, **THE WEDDING PLOT** (Mercy Carr)
 19 Daniel Silva, **PORTRAIT OF AN UNKNOWN WOMAN** (Allon)
 19 Ed Lin, **DEATH DOESN'T FORGET** (Taipei)
 19 Sarah Pearse, **THE RETREAT**
 19 Elizabeth Hand, **HOKULOA ROAD**
 19 Allie Reynolds, **THE SWELL**
 26 Megan Miranda, **THE LAST TO VANISH**
 26 Allison Montclair, **THE UNKEPT WOMAN** (Sparks & Bainbridge)
 26 Karen Cleveland, **THE NEW NEIGHBOR**
 26 Lindsey Davis, **DESPERATE UNDERTAKING** (Flavia)
 26 David Baldacci, **THE 6:20 MAN**

August, 2022

- 2 Karin Slaughter, **GIRL, FORGOTTEN**

- 2 Donna Andrews, **ROUND UP THE USUAL PEACOCKS** (Meg Langslow)
 2 Hayley Scrivenor, **DIRT CREEK**
 2 Ramona Emerson, **SHUTTER**
 2 Jennifer Ashley, **THE SECRET OF BOW LANE** (Below Stairs)
 2 Johanna Mo, **THE SHADOW LILY** (Hanna Dunker)
 2 E. G. Scott, **THE RULE OF THREE**
 2 Peter Tremayne, **DEATH OF A HERETIC**
 2 Humphrey Hawksley, **ICE ISLANDS** (Rake Ozenna)
 2 Rhys Bowen, **WHERE THE SKY BEGINS**
 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)
 9 S. C. Lalli, **ARE YOU SARA?**
 9 Amanda Jayatissa, **YOU'RE INVITED**
 9 Brian Freeman, **I REMEMBER YOU**
 9 Spencer Quinn, **BARK TO THE FUTURE** (Chet)
 9 Matthew Betley, **THE NEIGHBOR HOOD**
 16 Sandie Jones, **THE BLAME GAME**
 16 Mark Pryor, **DIE AROUND SUNDOWN**
 16 Taylor Moore, **FIRESTORM** (Garrett Kohl)
 16 Sandie Jones, **THE BLAME GAME**
 16 Catherine Ryan Howard, **RUN TIME**
 22 Tom Bradby, **YESTERDAY'S SPY**
 23 William Kent Krueger, **FOX CREEK** (Cork O'Connor)
 23 Faye Kellerman, **THE HUNT** (Decker/Lazarus)
 23 Angela Marsons, **FIRST BLOOD** (Kim Stone)
 23 Robert Dugoni, **WHAT SHE FOUND** (Tracy Crosswhite)
 23 Karin Slaughter, **GIRL, FORGOTTEN**
 30 John Galligan, **BAD DAY BREAKING** (Bad Axe)
 30 Alice Feeney, **DAISY DARKER**
 30 Kaoru Takamura, **LADY JOKER, Volume Two**
 30 Martin Waites, **THE GRAVEDIGGER'S SONG**

September, 2022

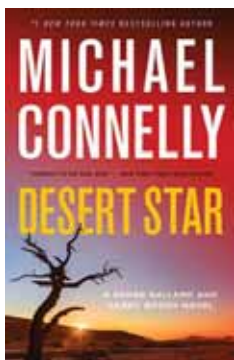
- 6 James R. Benn, **FROM THE SHADOWS** (Billy Boyle)
 6 Craig Johnson, **HELL AND BACK** (Longmire)
 6 Nancy Springer, **ENOLA HOLMES & THE ELEGANT ESCAPE**
 6 Charlie Lovett, **THE ENIGMA AFFAIR**
 6 Deanna Raybourn, **KILLERS OF A CERTAIN AGE**
 6 Ryan Steck, **FIELDS OF FIRE**
 12 James Patterson & Brendan Dubois, **BLOWBACK**
 13 Camilla Trinchieri, **MURDER ON THE VINE** (Tuscan)
 13 Amanda Jayatissa, **YOU'RE INVITED**
 13 Yasmin Angoe, **THEY COME AT KNIGHT** (Nena Knight)
 13 Annelise Ryan, **A DEATH IN DOOR COUNTRY**
 20 C. J. Box, **TREASURE STATE** (Cody Hoyt/Cassie Dewell)
 20 Barry Eisler, **AMOK** (Dox)
 20 Allen Eskens, **FORSAKEN COUNTRY**
 20 Richard Osman, **THE BULLET THAT MISSED** (Thursday Murder Club)
 20 Scott Turow, **SUSPECT**
 20 Gillian McAllister, **WRONG PLACE, WRONG TIME**
 27 Adam Hamdy, **THE OTHER SIDE OF NIGHT**
 27 Archer Mayor, **FALL GUY** (Joe Gunther)
 27 Jussi Adler Olsen, **THE SHADOW MURDERS** (Dept. Q)

October, 2022

- 1 Antii Tuomainen, **THE RABBIT FACTOR**
 4 Nicolas Ferraro, **CRUZ**
 4 M. L. Longworth, **DISASTER AT THE VENDOME THEATER** (Provençal)
 4 Mia P. Manansala, **BLACKMAIL AND BIBINGKA** (Lila Macapagal)
 4 John Sandford, **RIGHTEOUS PREY** (Lucas Davenport & Virgil Flowers)
 11 Marcie R. Rendon, **SINISTER GRAVES** (Cash Blackbear)

- 11 Val McDermid, **1989** (Allie Burns)
 11 Nelson DeMille, **THE MAZE** (John Corey)
 11 S. K. Golden, **THE SOCIALITE'S GUIDE TO MURDER**
 18 Nicci French, **THE FAVOR**
 25 Lee Child & Andrew Child, **NO PLAN B** (Jack Reacher)
 25 Wanda M. Morris, **ANY WHERE YOU RUN**
 25 Stephen Leather, **DIRTY WAR** (Spider Shepherd)

November, 2022



- 1 Robert Crais, **RACING THE LIGHT** (Elvis Cole)
 1 Francine Mathews, **DEATH ON A WINTER STROLL** (Merry Folger)
 1 Sophie Hannah, **THE COUPLE AT THE TABLE**
 1 Ausma Zehanat Khan, **BLACK-WATER FALLS** (Inaya Rahman)
 8 Michael Connelly, **DESERT STAR** (Bosch & Ballard)
 8 Raquel V. Reyes, **CALYPSO, CORPSES, AND COOKING** (Caribbean Kitchen)
 8 Lisa Unger, **SECLUDED CABIN SLEEPS SIX**
 15 Matt Coyle, **DOOMED LEGACY** (Rick Cahill)
 29 Louise Penny, "Title to be Revealed" (Inspector Gamache)

December, 2022

- 6 John Straley, **BLOWN BY THE SAME WIND** (Cold Storage)
 6 Peter Lovesey, **SHOWSTOPPER** (Peter Diamond)
 6 James W. Ziskin, **BOMBAY MONSOON**

Edgar Award Winners 2022

Best Novel

FIVE DECEMBERS, James Kestrel -- Winner

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

Best First Novel by an American Author

DEER SEASON, Erin Flanagan -- Winner

NEVER SAW ME COMING, Vera Kurian
 SUBURBAN DICKS, Fabian Nicieza
 WHAT COMES AFTER, JoAnne Tompkins
 THE DAMAGE, Caitlin Wahrer

Best Paperback Original

BOBBY MARCH WILL LIVE FOREVER, Alan Parks -- Winner

KILL ALL YOUR DARLINGS, David Bell
 THE LIGHTHOUSE WITCHES, C. J. Cooke
 THE ALBUM OF DR. MOREAU, Darvi Gregory
 STARR SIGN, C. S. O'Conneide
 THE SHAPE OF DARKNESS, Laura Purcell

The Simon & Schuster Mary Higgins Clark Award

CLARK AND DIVISION, Naomi Hirahara -- Winner

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

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

RUNNER, Tracy Clark -- Winner

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

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