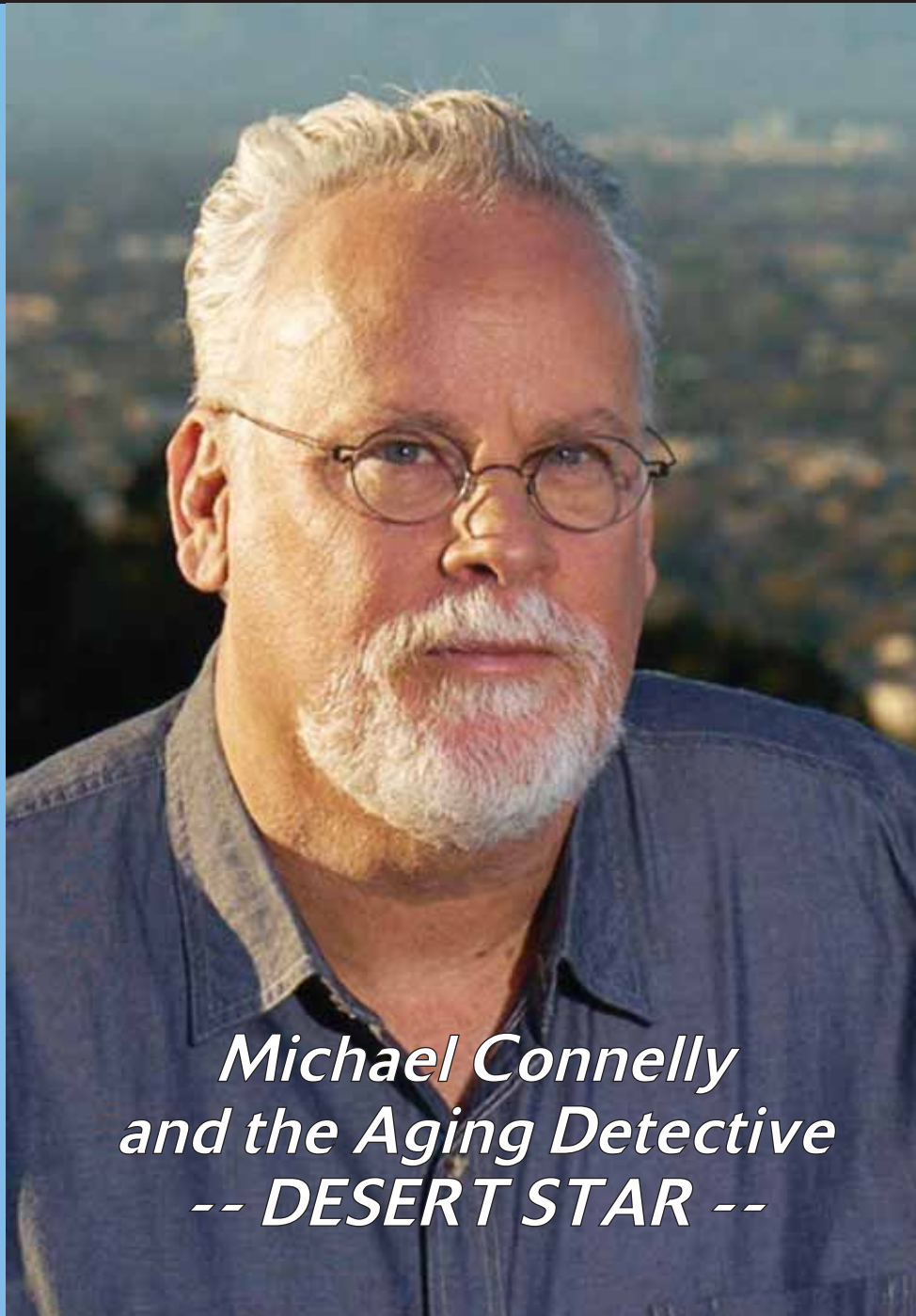


Deadly Pleasures *Mystery Magazine*



Michael Connelly
and the Aging Detective
-- DESERT STAR --

Michael Connelly

The Aging of Harry Bosch

DESERT STAR

by Michael Connelly

Little, Brown, \$29.00, November
Renée Ballard and Harry Bosch #5

Rating: A

Renée Ballard and Harry Bosch are soul mates, not in a romantic sense, but in their obsession to bring murderers to the justice that their victims deserve. And that doesn't mean that they always get along. They're both alpha dogs after all. And at the end of their last case (**THE DARK HOURS**) and the beginning of this one, Harry is upset with Renée because she had quit the police force and committed to going into partnership with Bosch to solve cold cases.

Then she went back to the police when the chief of police told her she could "write her own ticket," and left Harry out in the cold. But not for long.

Fast forward a few months, and the Open-Unsolved Unit is being reconstituted with Renée Ballard as its head. One of the driving forces behind this act is newly elected Councilman Pearlman who wants to see his sister's cold case solved.

Renée goes to Harry Bosch's home with hat in hand, to ask him to volunteer to work for the unit. Her carrot is the Gallagher family case, which Harry wasn't able to solve when he was on the force. The Gallagher family case is Harry's "white whale" case (a reference to **MOBY DICK** and Captain Ahab's obsession with the white whale.). This is a dream job for both Renée and Harry so they reunite.

Harry's Cold Cases in DESERT STAR

Sarah Pearlman – sister of Councilman Pearlman who was raped and murdered years ago as a teenager.

The Gallagher Family – father, mother, son & daughter all murdered and buried in the desert. This is a case that Harry worked on with no resolution although he thinks he knows who did it, but can't find the perp.

DESERT STAR is another superb mystery by the master. I personally

Characters in the Open-Unsolved Unit

(includes possible future
continuing characters)

Renée Ballard, Unit Head and only sworn LAPD officer

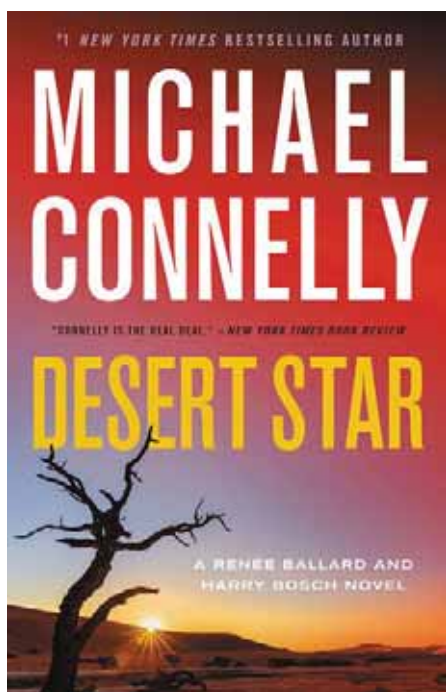
Harry Bosch, volunteer investigator
Thomas Laffont – retired FBI – reviewing cases for genetic genealogy follow-up

Lilia Aghzafi – 20-year veteran of Las Vegas Metro – reviewing cases for genetic genealogy follow-up

Paul Masser, retired deputy D.A.. Good with search warrants, legal questions and prosecution strategies

"Lou" Rawls – 10-year veteran of Santa Monica PD, now successful businessman and Councilman Pearlman's insider. Doesn't pull his weight and is probably there only to spy on the unit for Pearlman

Colleen Hatteras – no police experience. An in-house genealogist, internet researcher and empath. Harry is leery about her, with good reason.



consider Michael Connelly to be the best living mystery writer and, **for my tastes**, the best mystery writer of all time. He may not be the most influential (A. Conan Doyle, Agatha Christie, Raymond Chandler), but he writes the kind of story I want to read and he writes it better than anyone I know. His body of work is just so impressive. And he doesn't seem to be slowing down at all. His last few novels are as good as any he has ever written. I don't expect everyone to agree with me, but I'll bet there are at least a few out there who do. In a recent interview with The Crew Review, Michael said that he doesn't plan to die with a pen in his hand and that his output will slow down at some point in the

future, but for right now he is energized and enjoying his writing experience.

The Aging of Harry Bosch

Harry Bosch is 70 years old (as revealed in **DESERT STAR**) and is still a viable detective. When we first met in him in the Edgar-Award-winning **THE BLACK ECHO**, he was a relatively young detective using his skills gained as a tunnel rat in Vietnam. A lot of water has gone under the bridge since then. His creator, Michael Connelly, has chosen to age him in real time, which, in the last several books has caused Michael to come up with creative ways to keep Harry doing what he does best – detecting.

In **THE CROSSING** (2015) Harry has left the LAPD before they could fire him, then hires his half-brother defense attorney Mickey Haller to sue the department for forcing him out. Then Mickey asks Harry to do something particularly uncomfortable for Harry – detect for the defense. He reluctantly agrees and his former colleagues on the force accuse him of crossing over to the dark side. Fortunately Harry and Mickey are able to prove Mickey’s client innocent.

The next book, **THE WRONG SIDE OF GOODBYE** (2016), finds Harry deciding to become a private eye and his first client is a dying billionaire who wants Harry to find what happened to a girl he fell in love with as a young man. She may have given birth to his child, who would, if still alive, be his only natural heir.

In **TWO KINDS OF TRUTH** (2017), Harry takes on a volunteer part-time job helping out the under-funded San Fernando police department. He is also facing the accusations of a death-row inmate who claims Bosch framed him and that new DNA evidence proves it. Harry knows that the man is a killer and has to find a way to keep him in prison.

“I write in real time. My characters age, and Bosch is aging out,” Connelly says. “Hopefully, I’m gonna be writing longer than Bosch is gonna be detecting, so it was kind of like looking for a new

protagonist to carry on.”

THE LATE SHOW (2017) introduces the young, night-shift LA cop Renee Ballard and Harry Bosch makes a cameo appearance in the book – just enough to show that Renee and Harry have the same DNA when it comes to their approach to police work. Now, even if Harry Bosch sadly succumbs to age and or death, we have a worthy successor in place to continue his quest for justice. Four more novels, which chronicle the collaboration between Renee and Harry, have followed: **DARK SACRED NIGHT** (2018), **THE NIGHT FIRE** (2019), **THE DARK HOURS** (2021) and this year’s **DESERT STAR** (2022).

Near the end of **THE DARK HOURS**, we find out that Harry Bosch has been diagnosed with chronic myeloid leukemia and is being treated with chemotherapy. He apparently was exposed to dangerous radiation during the events that took place in **THE OVERLOOK** (2007). His leukemia doesn’t seem to affect his actions in **DESERT STAR**, but there is an ominous reveal at the end of the book that makes me wonder how much longer we can enjoy Harry Bosch’s superb skill set. Pray for a miracle of modern medicine – or a divine one. For me, life without Harry Bosch, would leave quite a void. Renee Ballard may be a worthy successor and a wonderful character in her own right, but she’s no Harry Bosch – at least not yet. One consolation -- there are 24 Bosch crime novels and I’ve started to re-read them. They hold up very well and are, in some cases, like reading them for the first time because I don’t remember the details.

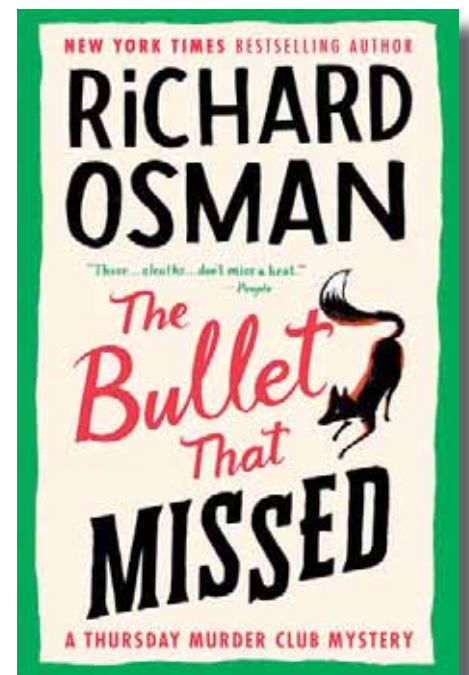
The Aging Detective/ Protagonist Is As Popular As Ever

Any of you who have attained your “golden years” will notice that a certain invisibility comes with age. You are often ignored by those younger than you. And just as often you are underestimat-

ed – especially when it comes to electronics and anything digital (sometimes with good reason). Just because one has lost some of one’s physical dexterity and hasn’t kept up with the latest and greatest technological advances (“If it does everything I want it to do, why should I upgrade?”), it is assumed that one is just a step removed from the rest home. On the plus side, when we are noticed, almost everyone trusts us – it just goes with age. That’s a perfect scenario for an elderly sleuth to work in – invisible, underestimated and trusted.

Senior sleuths are seen as underdogs and it is usually quite easy for them to exceed expectations – especially if their mental faculties are still working at optimum levels. Everyone likes to see underdogs rise up and overcome the challenges they face. Hence, the universal popularity of senior sleuths like Miss Marple, Agatha Raisin, Mrs. Polifax, and Horace Rumpole,.

We have a recent surge in the popularity of senior sleuths (and killers), most likely spurred by the success of Richard Osman’s **THE THURSDAY MURDER CLUB**. Here are some recent examples.



THE BULLET THAT MISSED
by Richard Osman
Pamela Dorman/Viking, \$27.00, September

Thursday Murder Club #3

Rating: A-

The Thursday Murder Club (Elizabeth, Joyce, Ron and Ibrahim) is back for its third outing – and it brings along our favorite ancillary characters Bogdan, Chris and Donna as well. As they debate which cold case to take on next, Joyce suggests the disappearance and possible death of Bethany Waites, a local TV presenter, whose car was pushed off a cliff several years ago. A body was never recovered. Bethany had been investigating a tax fraud operation worth over £10 million and told colleagues that she was close to uncovering the person behind the fraud.

Soon after they begin their snooping, two of their prime suspects show up dead. And not long after, their paths cross with an ex-KGB colonel and a murderous money launderer known as the Viking, who take the plot in new directions.

THE BULLET THAT MISSED is a mix of clever plotting, wry humor and delicious characterization. The bullet may have missed, but the author hit the mark and this series is **not** to be missed.

A Conversation with

Richard Osman,

author of

THE BULLET THAT MISSED
A Thursday Murder Club Mystery



The Thursday Murder Club returns for their third whodunit in **THE BULLET THAT MISSED**. What was your inspiration for the novel?

I really wanted to write a book set in the world of television, to draw on my former career a little bit. So much happens behind the scenes in television, and I have met so many extraordinary on-screen personalities who are definitely potential murderers. This book begins with our first meeting with local news legend Mike Waghorn. He was the perfect character for me. Nearly 70-years-old, he is incredibly famous in his local area. He has a great mystery for the gang to solve, and I knew Joyce would immediately have a crush on him. Alongside that storyline, as I always like to make Elizabeth's life as difficult as possible, I gave her a near-impossible task in this book, just to see how she coped with it.

What has surprised you most developing the Thursday Murder Club series? Has your writing process changed over three books as you continue to build the world of Elizabeth, Rob, Ibrahim, and Joyce?

I love how close readers have become to the characters. Everybody has a favorite, though my favorite changes day-by-day. They are all kind, but also all tough, and they each have their own ways of making us laugh and cry. I love the people who are drawn to them, too, and how important they have become to the books. I'm always surprised how important Bogdan, Chris, and Donna, who are now honorary members of the gang, have become to the books. If I didn't put enough Bogdan in a book, for example, I know that my editors and my readers would be furious. Quite right, too. There are a couple of new additions in **THE BULLET THAT MISSED** too, who I think will be sticking around for the next adventure. I just love throwing trouble at all of these completely different characters and seeing which one comes up with a solution this time.

Friendship and its importance are recurring themes in THE BULLET THAT MISSED as our sleuths reflect on the relationships they have built later in life. As newcomer Viktor reflects: "People drift in and out of your life, and, when you are younger, you know you will see them again. But now every

old friend is a miracle." Why was it important to explore this now?

In **THE THURSDAY MURDER CLUB**, Joyce makes the observation that you always know when you're doing something for the first time, but you rarely know when you're doing something for the last time. Friendships are a very important example of that. There will always be people in our life who we are never going to see again. You don't choose your family, but you do choose your friends, and I love the strength of the friendships between Joyce, Elizabeth, Ron, and Ibrahim, and the lengths they will go to protect each other and to protect their friends. They know that one day they will lose each other, and they make the most of the days they have.

The cold case that the Thursday Murder Club is investigating in THE BULLET THAT MISSED involves the disappearance of a local TV anchor. How did your experience as a television producer and host inform the mystery?

There is a sequence in **THE BULLET THAT MISSED** where Joyce and Elizabeth visit the recording of a daily quiz show, and I adored writing it because I have been presenting daily quiz shows for many, many years. I loved writing it through their eyes. I should say though that, without giving away spoilers, no audience member has ever brought a gun into one of my TV recordings before.

Every installment introduces readers to new "fan favorite" characters. The gang's fixer Bogdan, mob boss Connie, and this book's newcomers, ex-KGB officer Viktor and the mysterious Viking. How do you breathe so much life into each and every character?

When I introduce new characters, I try to imagine they're the lead characters in their own novel. Probably the only new major character in this book that I wouldn't want to write a whole novel about is Joyce's dog, Alan. Although, now I say that, I'm kind of tempted to try. Dogs solving crime, is that a profitable

niche?

You just discovered that one of your ancestors formed an amateur crime-solving gang in 19th century Brighton. Can you tell us a bit about these crime solvers? Will what you discovered find its way into a Thursday Murder Club story in future?

Yes, I discovered on a British TV show that my great, great, great, great, great grandfather, Gabriel Gillam, a fisherman and smuggler, uncovered the body in one of England's most notorious 19th century murder cases. Even better, he was aided by his wife and mother, as they formed their very own band of plucky amateur detectives. I was able to visit the site of the murder, the old inn where the inquest took place, and the crown court where the murderer was convicted and sentenced to death. I would love to write a story one day about Gabriel, Mary, and Elizabeth (yes, the gang even had their very own Elizabeth) solving crimes in 1820s Brighton.

DEATH AT PARADISE PALMS

by Steph Broadribb

Thomas & Mercer, \$16.99, October
Retired Detectives Club #2

Rating: B+

The Florida-based Retired Detectives Club gained some notoriety in **DEATH IN THE SUNSHINE** by out-detecting the police and solving a murder. The Club is comprised of Philip, a retired DCI and his wife Lizzie, who is a crime scene expert. Also in the group are Rick, a retired FBI agent and Moira, a British detective who left the force under a cloud and is now living under an assumed name.

So when movie producer (and husband of a famous – but aged movie star) Cody Ziegler goes missing, his wife Olivia calls Moira and Rick instead of the police.

A ransom demand for \$1million soon appears and the team goes into action to meet the kidnapper's demands (no police). Then Cody's car turns up in a nearby lake with a shocking surprise inside and the case becomes that much

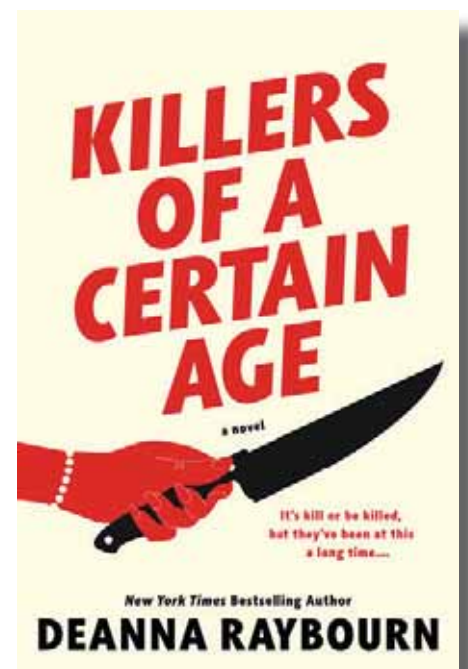
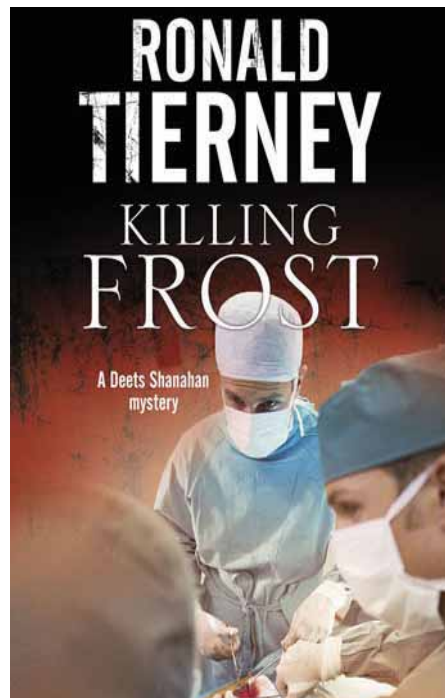
more complicated. And to make matters worse, each member of the team is struggling with a personal issue.

It's always pleasing to witness characters who are considered by some to be "beyond their prime" show up much younger and less talented detectives.

One might make comparisons between this team of sleuths and the Thursday Murder Club and that would be justified in some respects (two men, two women living in a retirement community). But this team is quite different than the Thursday Murder Club. For one, the RDC is comprised of retired professional law enforcement officers, whereas the TMC are all amateurs, except for one who was a spy. Also, the humor of TMC is missing here.

This series is well plotted and the flawed characters are likeable and sometimes even admirable. There's nothing here to blow you away, but if you want to spend a few hours with entertaining diversion, give this series a try. Call this Thursday Club light.

My favorite senior sleuth is Deets Shanahan who is an Indianapolis private eye in an 11-book series written by Ronald Tierney. The last in the series is **KILLING FROST**, which was published in 2015. Check them out.



Senior Killers

Then there are some crime novels and thrillers featuring senior killers, a recent trend. Here's a sampling.

KILLERS OF A CERTAIN AGE

by Deanna Raybourn

Berkley, \$27.00, September

Rating: A-

Four women (Billie, Helen, Mary Alice and Natalie) have retired after working as assassins for an organization known as the Museum. The goal of the Museum is to rid the world of bad people. The foursome were recruited as young 20 year-olds and are now in their 60s. We find them enjoying a Caribbean cruise as a going-away present from the Museum. But a former colleague (assassin) is recognized as a member of the crew and they sense that perhaps they are being targeted by the Museum. So they manage to surreptitiously escape the ship before it blows up.

Now they have to find out what the dickens is going on. Only the Board (the top three members of the Museum) can authorize assassinations, but those assassinations are based on extensive research, not just a whim. It turns out that someone has been lying about them and they are being wrongfully targeted. So they use their skills to eliminate the

threat against them. They realize that their physical prowess is in decline so they depend on their ingenuity and the fact that they are now “old” and therefore invisible to most of the public.

A very clever plot with engaging characters. Just a couple of quibbles. In the opening chapters it was hard to distinguish the four female characters one from another. By the end of the book that was no problem. Also there is a chaotic action scene at the end of **KILLERS** that stretches credulity to the max. But overall, it is an entertaining experience. Their methods of killing their adversaries are especially clever.

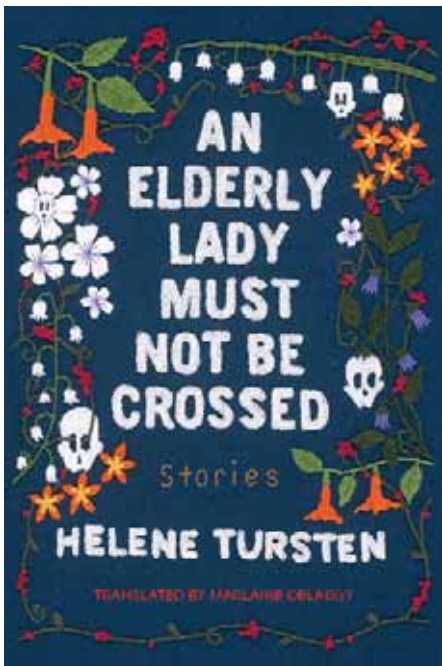
KILLERS OF A CERTAIN AGE received a starred review in all four library journals which is a rare feat. I’m not aware of any other mystery this year with that many starred reviews.

AN ELDERLY LADY MUST NOT BE CROSSED

by Helene Tursten

Soho Crime, \$14.99, October, 2021

Rating: A-



This series of six connected short stories (that read like a novel) continues the “adventures” of 88-year-old Maud whom we first met in the delightful **AN ELDERLY LADY GETS HER WAY**. Her method of dealing with the

problems she encounters has a certain permanence attached to it. Maud is definitely someone who shouldn’t be crossed.

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

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

Long may Maud live.

Very clever and highly entertaining.

A BEGINNER’S GUIDE TO MURDER

by Rosalind Stopps

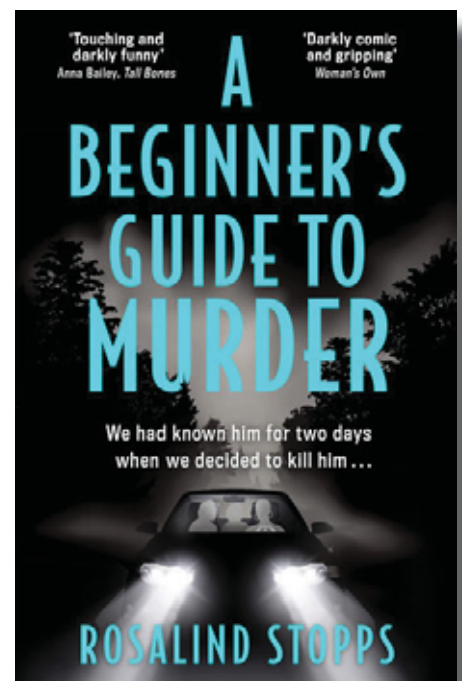
HQ, \$12.99, July, 2021

Rating: B+

Three elderly women living solitary, lonely lives meet at a Pilates class and decide to go for some tea after the class. Suddenly, seventeen-year-old Nina rushes into the tea shop and she’s obviously in distress. She says that an evil man is chasing her and she needs to hide. So the three women help her. It turns out that she is being held against her will in a bordello.

Grace, Meg and Daphne immediately bond over their desire to help Nina out of her situation. None trust the police to solve the problem. So they come up with what seems to them the only solution that will set Nina free: murder her tormentor. The problem is that none of them know how to go about killing someone and getting away with it. So they consult an ex-con friend of Daphne’s.

Alternating chapters are told in the voices of the four protagonists. Through flashbacks, the reader is informed about their life trials -- and their strengths and weaknesses.



One might presume that **A BEGINNER’S GUIDE TO MURDER** is a cozy, but it is definitely not. The subject matter alone takes it out of that category. I would categorize it as a crime novel with serious psychological suspense overtones. The characters are fleshed-out quite well and are easy to cheer for. And the novel treats the important subject of human trafficking and society’s seeming inability to put an end to it. So some people become vigilantes to help the victims.

THE OLD WOMAN AND THE KNIFE

by Gu Byeong-mo

Hanover Square Press, \$19.99, March

No Rating: Not Reviewed

At sixty-five, Hornclaw is beginning to slow down. She lives modestly in a small apartment. But Hornclaw is not like other people. She is an assassin.

Double-crossers, corporate enemies, cheating spouses—for the past four decades, Hornclaw has killed them all with ruthless efficiency, and the less she’s known about her targets, the better. But now, nearing the end of her career, she has just slipped up. An injury leads her to an unexpected connection with a doctor and his family. As Hornclaw’s world closes in, this final chapter may also mark her own bloody end.

Introducing ...

A. F. Carter's *Delia Mariola*

by George Easter

Normally I would give you a synopsis of the author's career at this point. But very little is publicly known about A. F. Carter other than that he is a male who lives and works in New York City. It is thought that he is a writer writing under a pseudonym. That's it, folks. I even approached his publisher Otto Penzler at the latest Bouchercon and he smiled and refused to divulge any information about A. F. Well, whoever he may be, he's a heck of a good writer and hence this column. He has written three novels to date. The first is a stand-alone called **ALL OF US** (2020). The second and third crime novels are part of a new series as described below.

The Detective Delia Mariola Series

THE YARDS

by A. F. Carter

Mysterious Press, \$25.95

September, 2021

Delia Mariola #1

Rating: A-

Baxter is a depressed Rust Belt town (I'm guessing Ohio) and the setting for this excellent series. Most of its inhabitants lead quiet, desperate lives. One such person is single mother Git O'Rourke who works at a nursing home and wants a better life for her young daughter Charlie and herself. Every once in a while Git feels the need for a one-night stand, but the latest one ends in disaster. Her latest fling, Bradley Grieg, winds up in a motel room passed out from heroin. When Grieg got his fix, he left open his bag and Git sees its full of cash – a life-changing amount of cash.

The next day Git's "date" is found

shot in the head in his motel room and the police, headed by Detective Delia Mariola, appear on scene to investigate. First order of business – look at the motel security footage. Git shows up on the surveillance footage but the image is of bad quality and the police don't have enough to identify her.

Mariola is a fine detective, probably better than her run-down city deserves. Intelligent, dogged and intuitive, she pursues this case while trying to manage her personal life as a single mother. And then there's her difficult mother to deal with. Another story.

It turns out that Grieg was a "runner" for local crime boss Carl Schmidt and his up-and-coming son Connor Schmidt. They don't care about Bradley Grieg's death but they do care about their missing money.

So Git finds herself in the crosshairs of the police and the local crime boss. She hopes that a successful job interview for a job in a faraway place will be her ticket to exit before anything bad happens to her or her family.

I found the author's sparse writing compelling, but the strength of this crime novel is in the in-depth characterizations of Git O'Rourke and Delia Mariola – especially Delia.

THE HOSTAGE

by A. F. Carter

Mysterious Press, \$26.95

September, 2022

Delia Mariola #1

Rating: A-

Things appear to be turning for the better for the depressed Rust Belt town of Baxter.

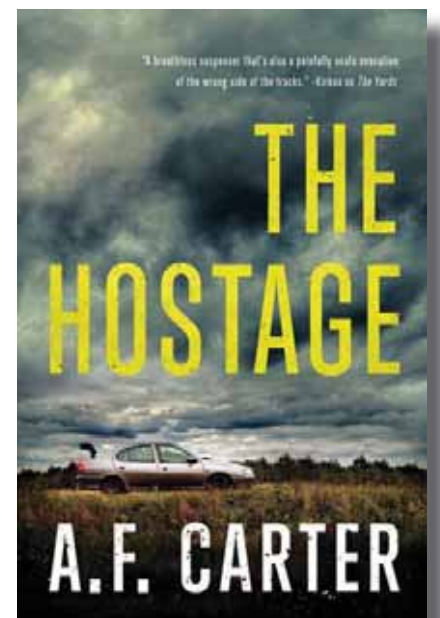
A new Nissan manufacturing plant

is scheduled for construction in the near future, with the promise of good, high paying jobs in the offing. The city leaders are concerned that crime be kept to a minimum to present a squeaky clean image to Nissan. So they give newly appointed police Captain Delia Mariola the task of making this happen. First on the list are a known number of drug dealers. Raids commence, but then something bigger happens that temporarily derails the clean-up plan. The 15-year-old daughter of the lead bidder on the plant construction project is kidnapped.

The reader is privy not only to the investigation to find the girl, but also to what the girl is experiencing and thinking. Elizabeth is not your typical teenager. She's brilliant and quickly starts devising plans to escape. But her kidnapers are professionals who have done this before and they won't make it easy for her.

The FBI takes over the case, but the girl's wealthy family don't have much confidence in the FBI and they ask Mariola to run a parallel investigation, following some lines of enquiry that she knows the FBI is ignoring.

Once again in this novel (as in **THE YARDS**), we find two strong female characters to admire – Elizabeth and Delia – in whose words the intriguing story is told. The resolution is particularly satisfying.



DP Calendar



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/>

May 11-14, 2023

Crimefest

Bristol, England

Guests of Honor: Andrew Child, Ann Cleeves, Martin Edwards, Robert Goddard, Zoe Sharp

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

May 30 – June 3, 2023

Thrillerfest XVIII

August 30 - September 3, 2023

Sheraton Times Square, NYC

Guests of Honor: Charlaine Harris,

Walter Mosley, Michael Connelly, Jack Carr, Oyinkan Braithwaite

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

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/>



August 28 – September 1, 2024

Bouchercon

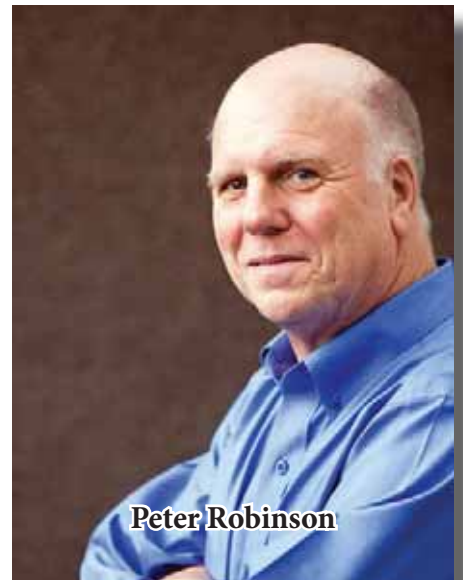
Murder and Mayhem in Music City

Nashville, Tennessee

Guests of Honor: Harlan Coben, Heather Graham, Anthony Horowitz, Mick Herron, V. M. Burns, Brad Thor, Kelli Stanley, Rachel Howzell Hall, J. T. Ellison

Website: <https://www.bouchercon2024.com/>

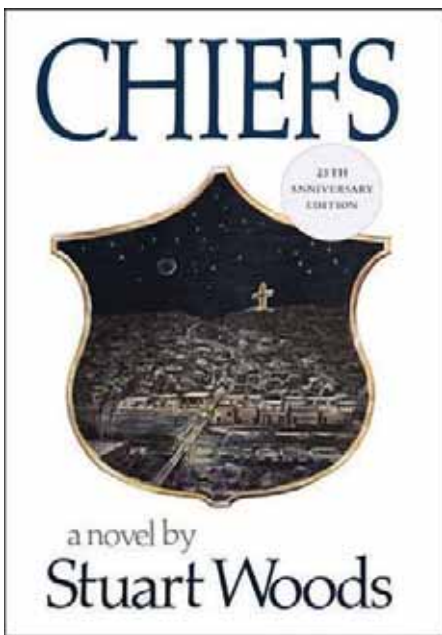
The mystery fiction community has lost quite a few significant authors over the last few months. Condolences to the families.



Peter Robinson

Peter Robinson died on October 4 in Toronto, Canada after a brief illness. He introduced Detective Chief Inspector Alan Banks, in his first novel, **GALLOW'S VIEW** (Viking, 1987). He wrote 28 DCI Banks novels (**STANDING IN THE SHADOWS** will be published posthumously in 2023) and 6 stand-alones as well as a number of short stories. The DCI Banks TV series was adapted into the ITV series from 2011 to 2017, featuring Stephen Thompson as Banks. Robinson received the 2020 Grand Master Award from Crime Writers of Canada. He was 72. His best novel is **IN A DRY SEASON**, for which he won the Barry and Anthony Awards.

Stuart Woods, author of at least 90 novels, passed away quietly in his sleep at the age of 84 at his Connecticut home. He burst onto the scene in 1981 with his Edgar Award-winning **CHIEFS**, about



three generations of lawmen and the murder of a teenager in a small southern town. This was later made a CBS miniseries starring Charlton Heston, Danny Glover, Billy Dee Williams and John Goodman. By the end of his career, he was churning out five mysteries per year, most of which featured the attorney Stone Barrington.



Dame Angela Lansbury is most famous among mystery fans for her iconic role as Jessica Fletcher in the television series **Murder, She Wrote**. She passed away five days short of her 97th birthday. A fabulous actress and an even better human being.

Elizabeth Gunn died on August 30 in Helena, Montana after a long illness. The former inn-keeper, private pilot, live-aboard sailor, scuba diver and travel writer began writing mystery novels with **TRIPLE PLAY** (Walker, 1997). This first novel features Jake

Hines, a police detective of fictional Rutherford, Minnesota, modeled after Rochester, Minnesota. There were 9 more Hines novels. She started another series starting with **COOL IN TUCSON** (Severn, 2008), introducing Sara Burke, a divorced police detective in Tucson, Arizona. She was 95.

Michael Malone died on August 19 of pancreatic cancer at his home in Clinton, Connecticut. His first mystery novel, **UNCIVIL SEASONS** (Delacorte, 1983), introduced Cuddy Mangum and Justin Savile, two police detectives in fictional Hillston, N.C. After writing the second Cuddy-Justin novel, **TIME'S WITNESS** (Little Brown, 1989), Malone served as head writer on the ABC-TV



Michael Malone

soap opera "One Life to Live" from 1991 to 1996, and won an Emmy in 1994. His short story, "Red Clay" first published in the anthology **MURDER FOR LOVE** (edited by Otto Penzler; Delacorte 1996) won the 1997 short story Edgar, and was collected in his story collection, **RED CLAY, BLUE CADILLAC** (Source-books, 2002). He was writing the fourth Cuddy-Justin novel when he died at the age of 79.

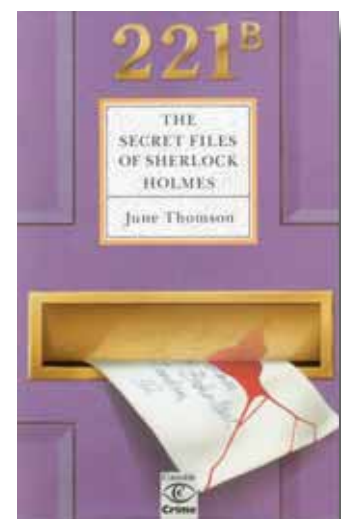
Michael Pearce passed away at the age of 88. He was the author of the Mamur Zapt, the British head of Cairo's Political CID in Cairo, series; the Dimitri Kameron, a lawyer in Kursk, Russia series, and the Sandor Pelczynski Seymour series (A Dead Man in ... series) about a multilingual office with England's Special Branch in the early 1900s.

His novel **THE MAMUR ZAPT AND THE SPOILS OF EGYPT** (1992)

won the Crime Writers' Association's Last Laugh Award for funniest crime novel. **DEATH OF AN EFFENDI** (1999) was shortlisted for the Ellis Peters Award for best historical crime novel.

June Thomson has passed away at age 92. Martin Edwards writes, "June was a former teacher who made a radical but effective change of course during her writing career. She established a considerable reputation with a long series of well-written novels featuring Chief Inspector Jack Finch (who was re-named Rudd in the US, to avoid confusion with another series detective called Finch). Her early books drew comparisons with P.D. James, whose style resembled hers in some ways, and she seemed destined to become an equally prominent figure in the genre. Despite her great success, that never quite happened, and only three more Finch books appeared after 1991, as she began to concentrate her energies more on stories of a very different kind -- about Sherlock Holmes. There are countless Holmes pastiches, but June's stories were truly outstanding.

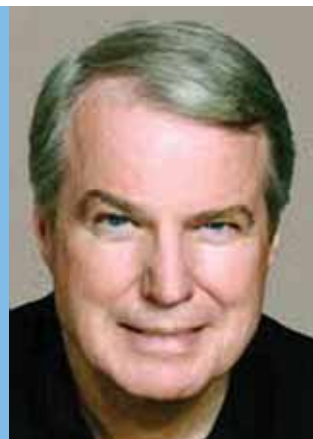
"Having admired her work for a long time (her first novel was published way back in 1971) I was thrilled when June wrote a couple of original short stories - 'Deus Ex Machina' and 'Coming Home' - for anthologies I was editing. To publish her work was both a pleasure and a privilege. She also wrote a terrific biography, **HOLMES AND WATSON**. I treasure my inscribed copies of her books and I shall miss her."



My Greek Reading Feast

2022

By *Steele Curry*



My wife Judy and I returned to Skiathos, Greece for our annual summer holiday here on June 2. Our family has had a place on this beautiful island for almost 50 years. About eight miles long and 4-5 miles wide, Skiathos has over 40 beaches ringing the island. For us, it's as close to paradise as anywhere in the world.

The majority of my time at our Skiathos summer home (which we call *Lizard in the Sun*) is spent reading mysteries and thrillers on the terrace overlooking the sparkling blue Aegean Sea. Here are some of the books I read this past summer:

ONE LAST CHANCE by Jeffrey Siger (Poisoned Pen Press 2022 hardcover/trade paperback)

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

ONE LAST CHANCE is mainly set on Ikaria, a somewhat barren, rugged island about 130 miles east of Athens in the Aegean Sea. Known for the unusual longevity of its residents whose average lifespan is ten years longer than Greeks elsewhere, Ikaria has always had a troubled relationship with the central

government of Greece. At the end of the Greek civil war that followed WW II, some 13,000 communists were uprooted and banished to Ikaria by the victors.

The long-time personal assistant of Kaldis discovers that elderly Ikariots are experiencing a series of unexplained deaths across the island. A recently ordained priest is somehow involved. Meanwhile, Kaldis and his associates are investigating a case of police corruption and drug trafficking back in Athens. Would it be a stretch if all of this eventually became intertwined?

As Siger did with the other Greek locales in his prior novels, the author superbly describes the history, culture and character of Ikaria and its residents. Perhaps, this is one of those cases where the setting trumps the plot. It is obvious,

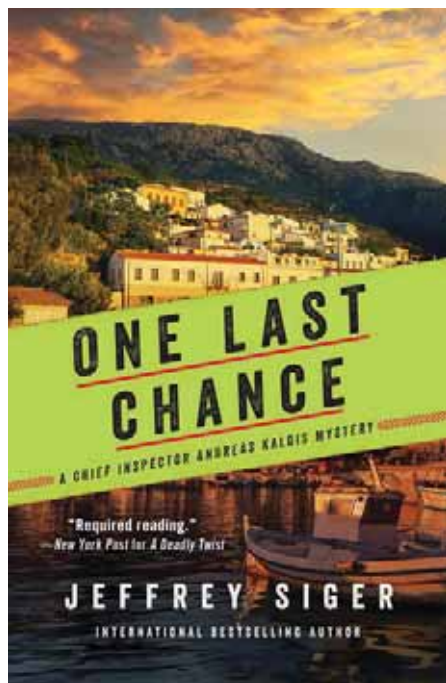
however, that Siger has a deep love for all things Greek.

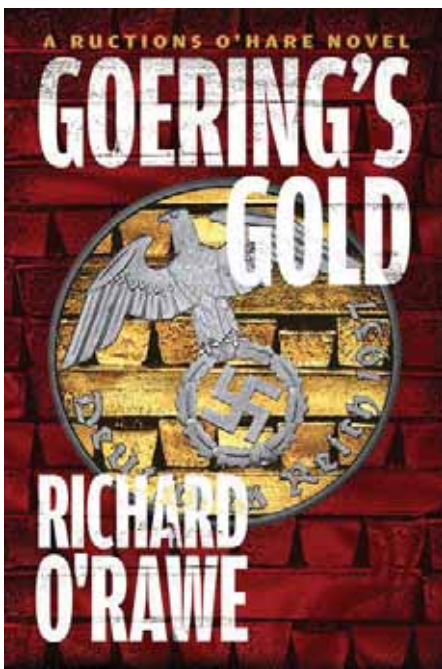
RELENTLESS by Mark Greaney (Berkley 2021 hardcover/trade paperback)

For non-stop action macho thrillers, it's hard to top Mark Greaney's Gray Man series. Like its nine predecessor Gray Man novels, *Relentless* is fast-paced, well-written, meticulously researched and packed with traitors of many stripes. Set mainly in Berlin, **RELENTLESS** has Courtland Gentry, aka the Gray Man, on an off-the-books (aren't they all) mission to prevent the assassination of the American ambassador to Germany by a group of terrorists that have close to limitless resources. Fortunately, the Gray Man is able to call on his old associate Zack Hightower and former Russian Foreign Intelligence Service officer now CIA contractor Zoya Zakharova to help him battle his adversaries. Naturally, it's a close call on who is going to prevail. I just wish the author didn't have to use nearly 700 pages to complete his stories.

GOERING'S GOLD by Richard O'Rawe (Melville House 2022 trade paperback)

Last year, I thought that the author's debut novel *Northern Heist*, featuring the Irish rogue Ruictions O'Hare, was going to be tough to top – wrong. **GOERING'S GOLD** is even better. This time, Ruictions is being pursued by the IRA, neo-Nazis, Interpol and the police in Northern Ireland. Can he find the huge stash of gold bullion believed to be hid-





den in Ireland by Goering just prior to the end of WW II before everyone else seeking it? The key to locating the gold may reside with Goering's ceremonial, diamond-studded baton now in the possession of Serge Mercier, a close friend of Ructions'. Buffeted by stock market losses, Ructions can't resist the challenge despite his girlfriend's disapproval. The twists and turns in this tale are marvelous. Surely this talented author is going to give us more Ructions thrillers.

LOVE AND THEFT by Stan Parish (Doubleday 2020 hardcover/Anchor Books 2022 trade paperback)

Alex Cassidy and his crew have been pulling off daring high-end heists for some 20 years. He decides they will perform one last job, stealing a seven million dollar necklace from the Graff jewelry store in Las Vegas, before he retires from "the life". While the robbery is successful, it was caught on a video that goes viral. Shortly afterwards, Alex falls hard for Diane Alison, a woman from his past. Then, Alex, Diane and her son go on a vacation to Tulum, Mexico where they meet up with Alex's daughter. Upon arriving, Alex and his closest associates are forced into undertaking a risky kidnapping for the head of the cartel that controls the Cancún area. The outcome takes place in Spain's Costa del Sol in a finale of betrayals, surprises and

deadly action. As the saying goes, this thriller is hard to put down.

BITTER WASH ROAD by Garry Disher (Soho Crime 2014 hardcover/Viper 2020 trade paperback London)

Disher is widely regarded as the king of Australian noir. This is his first Constable Paul 'Hirsch' Hirschhausen novel. After acting as a whistle-blower, Hirsch has been demoted to a one-person police outpost in a small rural community in South Australia. There, he soon finds his hands full with cases involving a teenage girl found dead by the side of a road, the apparent suicide of the wife of an abusive husband, and a series of sex crimes committed by persons of influence and power.

Jeff Pople recommended **BITTER WASH ROAD** to me as one of Disher's best novels. I thoroughly enjoyed it.

THE EXTREMIST by Nadia Dalbuono (Scribe 2018 trade paperback London)

Nadia Dalbuono has to be one of the most under-appreciated authors of terrific cop thrillers in existence. **THE EXTREMIST** is the author's fourth novel featuring Detective Leone Scamarcio, a member of the Roman Police's elite Flying Squad and the son of a former Mafia crime boss. This time Scamarcio is battling the Intelligence agencies of Italy, the U.S. and the U.K. to prevent a major terrorist bombing in Rome. His girlfriend is being held as leverage to shut him down. Scamarcio enlists a local top mobster, an Italian journalist, a jailed convict, an American TV producer and several ex-members of AISE, Italy's spy agency responsible for foreign intelligence, to help him defuse a city-wide terrorist attack.

Dalbuono has written five Scamarcio novels – **THE FEW** (2014), **THE AMERICAN** (2016), **THE HIT** (2018), **THE EXTREMIST** (2018) and **THE DEVIL** (2020). They would make a compelling TV series. I just hope the author continues this marvelous series.

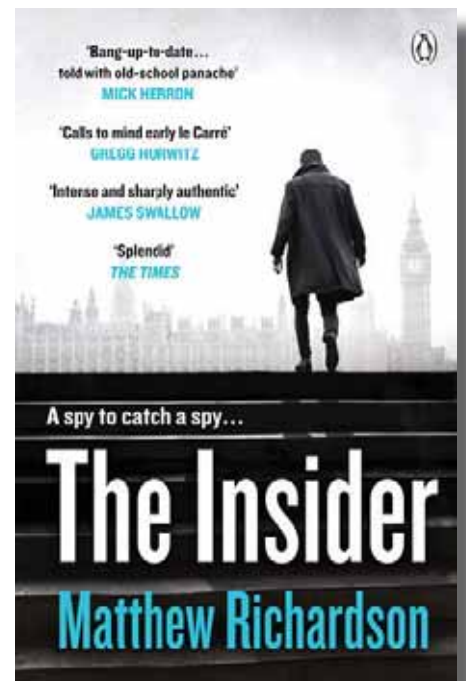
NEMESIS by Anthony Riches (Aries/Head of Zeus 2021 trade paperback)
This is the author's first contempo-

rary thriller, starring Michael Bale with London's Metropolitan police force as a close protection officer. After the drug overdose of his sister, Bale focused his life on two tracks – the professional one of guarding persons in high-level positions, including cabinet ministers and even the U.S. president, and the dark-side one of exacting revenge on those responsible for his sister's death. Both tracks feature well-choreographed, high-octane mayhem and violence with Bale in various modes of shooting, killing, defending and surviving. Great stuff – well-written, attention-grabbing, despicable villains, vaguely realistic – but definitely not for the fainthearted.

I can't wait to read the second Michael Bale novel, **TARGET ZERO**, published in April of 2022.

THE INSIDER by Matthew Richardson (Penguin Books 2021 trade paperback London)

This was one of the best espionage novels of 2021. The central character, Solomon Vine, was formerly in charge of counter-intelligence at Britain's Secret Service but left that position, as the saying goes, "under a cloud". The government's National Security Adviser asks Vine to come out of retirement to help her undertake an off-the-books search to locate a Russian mole believed to be

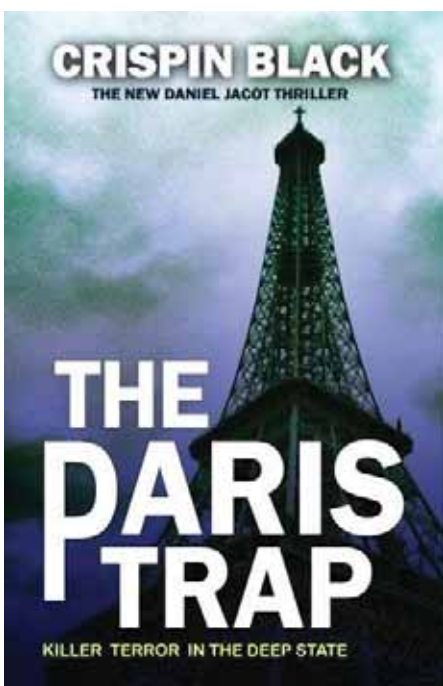


one of the most senior members of the British military, civil service or Intelligence establishment. Packed with authentic tradecraft, **THE INSIDER** takes readers on a twisty path of deceptions, betrayals, political machinations and murders. Maybe the pebble at the end was a bit too much but who's to quibble. The author seems clairvoyant in depicting the threat posed by Russia. I try to be sparring in the use of the term "brilliant" in describing any book but **THE INSIDER** merits it.

This is the author's second novel, featuring Vine. The first, **MY NAME IS NOBODY**, was not of the same caliber.

THE PARIS TRAP by Crispin Black (Gibson Square 2017 trade paperback London)

The author's second espionage novel. Clever, sophisticated, fun. Britain's National Security Adviser and the director of DGSI (France's Security Service) team up to pursue a major terrorist plot involving the planned large-scale bombing of two locations in Britain and two in France. They second Colonel Daniel Jacot of the Royal Celtic Guards Regiment to the French Foreign Legion to lead this mission. Jacot has a storied background from serving in a wide range of military and covert engagements in Northern Ireland, the Balkans



and other hot spots. As a result of being severely wounded in the Falklands War, Jacot has long been struggling with PTSD.

THE PARIS TRAP features a trail of murders, complex betrayals, the Mossad, code breakers, fine French food and wine, a bit of romance, and many snippets of fascinating French history involving the military, de Gaulle, Napoleon and the Foreign Legion. Largely set in Paris, this novel also beguiles readers with its descriptions of the City of Light.

This was one of those rare instances where I deliberately slowed down the pace of my reading to stretch out my enjoyment of the novel.

BLOOD IN THE WATER by Jack Flynn (Minotaur Books 2019 hardcover/2020 trade paperback)

Hard-edge action, a rollercoaster plot, betrayals galore, a large cast of colorful villains and sort-of-good guys, Boston's coldest winter on record, and a passel of gun fights, bombings and stabblings – this thriller has it all. The Boston harbor chief and his daughter are in peril, a female FBI agent goes way over the line, a serial killer from El Salvador intends to murder as many Americans as he can, rogue members of one of the most dangerous criminal gangs in the world are seeking to extend their power.

Jack Flynn appears to be an alias of the author David Hosp who has written seven prior thrillers. If that is so, I suspect that **BLOOD IN THE WATER** is the best of the bunch.

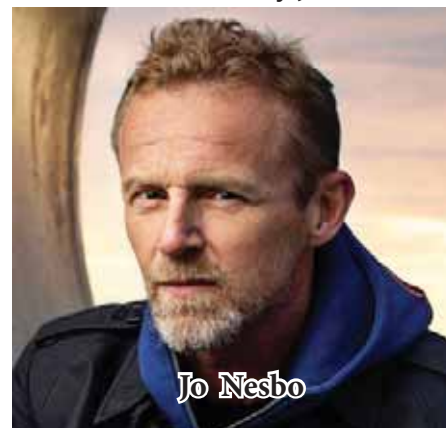
KILLER'S ART by Mari Jungstedt (Stockholm Text 2013 trade paperback New York)

This is the Swedish author's fourth novel featuring Superintendent Anders Knutas and the [journalist](#) Johan Berg. Set mainly in Gotland but also in Stockholm, **KILLER'S ART** takes the reader into Sweden's high-end art world where wheeling, dealing, and stealing intersect with drugs, prostitution and murder. It's a complex police procedural overlaid with members of the media struggling to uncover what is happening.

KILLER'S ART was originally published in 2010 by Corgi in the U.K.

Henning Mankell must have approved of this author's writings.

THE SNOWMAN by Jo Nesbo



(Harvill Secker 2010 hardcover London/Vintage Crime Black Lizard 2016 trade paperback)

What's a summer without reading at least one Nesbø mystery? **THE SNOWMAN**, featuring series character Inspector Harry Hole, showcases why I believe that Nesbø is the finest living Scandinavian/Nordic Noir author. Unexpected twists and turns, damaged souls galore, multiple macabre killings, ongoing generational damage, vulnerable characters, unraveling relationships, and of course a serial killer – **THE SNOWMAN** has it all.

THE SNOWMAN was made into quite a good film by Universal Studios.

ARKHANGEL by James Brabazon (Michael Joseph 2020 hardcover London/Penguin Books 2021 trade paperback London)

Author's second Max McLean novel meets every criteria for a thriller in spades – an indestructible British assassin engaged in non-stop, pulsating, hardcore violent action as he relentlessly tries to unlock the mystery behind a unique 100 U.S. dollar bill that the Russians, Brits, Israelis and Americans all are determined to steal from him. Early in the plot, Max leads his pursuers on probably the wildest high-speed motorcycle race in the history of thriller fiction. As the story rockets along from Paris to Jerusalem to north-west Russia, Max is shot, badly banged up and stabbed countless times. A mathemat-

ical riddle is at the heart of his quest. The body count is high. Perhaps, it's not a surprise to learn near the ending that the survival of mankind's freedom is likely at stake.

This novel was also published as a trade paperback in the U.S. under the title **ALL FALL DOWN** by Berkeley in 2021. For an exhausting read, **ARKHANGEL** is hard to top.

CHINAMAN'S CHANCE by Ross Thomas (Simon & Schuster 1978 hardcover/Thomas Dunne 2005 trade paperback)

From time to time, I intersperse my reading with an old favorite. Rereading **CHINAMAN'S CHANCE** made me realize just how much most of Ross Thomas's 25 novels trump a great deal of the new stuff I've been reading. When it comes to character-driven stories told with fabulous dialogue and panache, Thomas has few peers in the mystery world. Otto Penzler put me on to Thomas in an article Otto wrote on him in *The Armchair Detective* magazine when I first started my collecting "career" many years ago.

CHINAMAN'S CHANCE features the indomitable Artie Wu and his partner Quincy Durant, plus a popular three-sister singing group, an ex-CIA renegade, a high-level mobster, a wealthy businessman, a corrupt police



chief and an assortment of oddly named lesser characters. Wu and Durant are fixers who take on risky non-government assignments involving political chicanery, financial scams, grifters, con men and backstabbers. Of course, some of the players don't survive. It's a fun ride that starts with a dead pelican and provides a bunch of entertaining twists and turns as it rolls along.

If I was being banished to a desert island and could only take one author's books, it would be those of Ross Thomas.

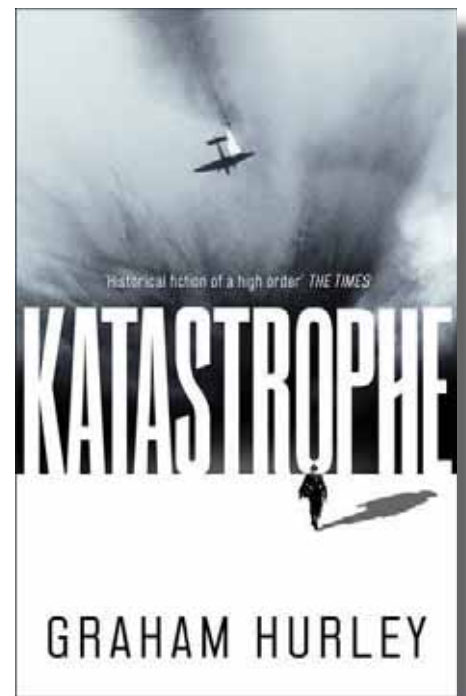
THE BOTANIST by M. W. Craven (Constable 2022 hardcover/trade paperback London)

The sixth novel in the author's Washington Poe series is, as the British say, a corker. Unconventional, old school Detective Sergeant Poe, his close associate Serious Crime Analysis Section profiler Tilly Bradshaw and Poe's boss Detective Inspector Stephanie Flynn are tasked with investigating an ingenious serial killer who sends poems and pressed flowers to some of England's most despised personages before murdering them in an undetectable manner. At the same time, Poe undertakes a second case to exonerate a close friend, the pathologist Estelle Doyle, accused of killing her father.

Craven is a talented storyteller. I'm looking forward to the next novel in this series, **THE MERCY CHAIR**, scheduled for publication on June 1, 2023.

KATASTROPHE by Graham Hurley (Head of Zeus 2022 hardcover/trade paperback London)

The seventh novel in the author's outstanding *Spoils of War* series. The title summarizes Germany's fate at the end of WW II. One of the central characters, Werner Nehmann/Mikhail Magalashvili (original Georgian name), a German journalist at Joseph Goebbels' Ministry of Propaganda, was captured by the Russians at Stalingrad, sent to the Gulag and now is headed back to Berlin in the last days of its collapse. Stalin believes the Germans, Americans and British are all working behind his back on ways to double-cross the Russians.



He blackmails Nehmann to work for the Russians. Fortunately, Nehmann has some strong allies, especially Wilhelm Schultz, an *Abwehr* spy hunter.

A passage from **KATASTROPHE** described Nehmann's thoughts at his meeting with Stalin:

"Power, as Nehmann knew only too well, touched a certain kind of nerve. It bred a merciless blurring of means and ends. It justified the most extreme of measures. Surrounded by enemies, real or imagined, you simply dispensed with them all."

A major part of the novel involves Britain's loss of power and influence as the war is ending. Two notable characters at MI5, Tam Moncrieff and his boss Ursula Barton, are fighting a losing battle with Kim Philby at MI6 over control of the British Intelligence establishment.

KATASTROPHE is storytelling at its finest. Its scope, depth and intensity are beyond impressive. Friendship, survival, betrayal, paranoia are interwoven throughout the lives of its many central characters. The previous *Spoils of War* novels are **FINISTERE**, **AUORE**, **ESTOCADA**, **LAST FLIGHT TO STALINGRAD**, **RAID 42** and **KYIV** in that order. All are highly recommended.

IRON RIVER by T. Jefferson Parker (Dutton 2010 hardcover/New American

Library 2011 trade paperback)

This is the third novel in the author's blistering Charlie Hood series. This time, Charlie is on loan to the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives' *Operation Blowdown* from the L.A. Sheriff's Department. Charlie's ATE unit is charged with shutting down the massive amount of guns being smuggled into Mexico for the warring drug cartels there. At an ATE takedown, the son of Benjamin Armenta, the head of Mexico's Gulf Cartel, is accidentally killed by an ATE agent. Armenta vows to enact extreme vengeance and both the American and Mexican authorities seem to be unable to stop him.

Just as Don Winslow did with his *Power of the Dog* series, **IRON RIVER** brilliantly conveys the depth, complexity and hopelessness of the war between law enforcement on both sides of the border and the powerful drug cartels. This is a western saga of strong-willed, tough, courageous agents battling powerful, ruthless and vicious forces of evil. Charlie Hood is lucky to survive.

QUANTUM OF SOLACE: THE COMPLETE JAMES BOND SHORT STORIES by Ian Fleming (Penguin 2008 hardcover London/Penguin 2008 trade paperback Penguin New York)

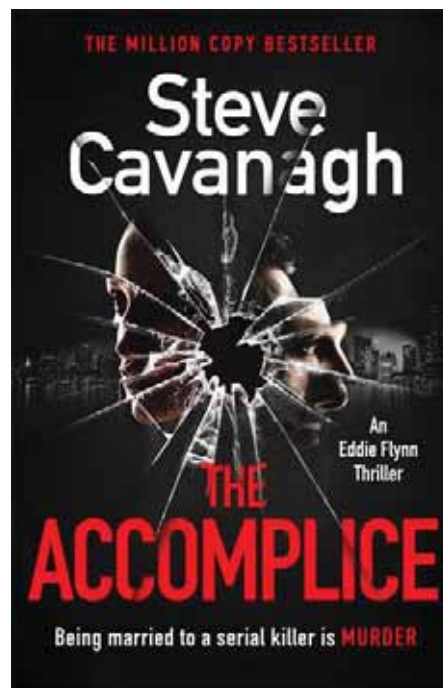
Ian Fleming's collected nine James Bond short stories, each one a polished diamond illustrating the outstanding quality of the author's writings. The ones whose setting describes the marine life of Jamaica and the Seychelles are exceptional. Of course, some of them include beautiful females in distress who turn out to be deadly. Bond's cosmopolitan tastes and sophistication are on full display. *The Hildebrand Rarity* is my favorite of these tales. I had forgotten just how gifted Ian Fleming was as a writer. **DOCTOR NO** is going to the top of my reread list.

EVERY DAY ABOVE GROUND by Glen Erik Hamilton (William Morrow 2017 hardcover/Faber & Faber 2018 trade paperback London)

Author's third thriller featuring former Army Ranger Van Shaw. This protagonist attracts nonstop trouble like

a magnet. The plot careens from one dustup to another with Shaw in constant peril, his friends in constant peril, and a young teenage girl and her invalid father in constant peril. Along the way, at least a dozen dead bodies pile up. It's a challenge to untangle all of the villains. The ending might be just a touch too pat.

THE ACCOMPLICE by Steve Cavanagh



nagh (Orion 2022 hardcover London/Orion 2022 trade paperback London)

Author's seventh Eddie Flynn novel is definitely the best in the series. New York lawyer and former conman Flynn and his team are defending the wife of a serial killer accused of being his accomplice. They are convinced she is innocent. Her husband goes by the name of the Sandman and is continuing to murder victims while her trial progresses. The FBI has him as #1 on its U.S. most wanted list. Is it possible that Flynn and his associates can all be bamboozled?

THE ACCOMPLICE is a strong candidate for a 2022 Best Novel Award.

THE DREADUL LEMON SKY by John D. Macdonald (J. B. Lippincott 1974 hardcover/Fawcett Gold Medal 1975 paperback)

Of the author's 21 Travis McGee novels, **THE DREADUL LEMON SKY**

is usually rated as one of the top six in this classic series. An old female friend of McGee's shows up at his houseboat, named *The Busted Flush*, asking him to safeguard a large amount of cash for her. Several weeks later she was killed in a suspicious accident. McGee and his longtime sidekick Meyer decide to investigate the circumstances behind her death and where the cash came from. In the process, McGee has to survive an attempted stabbing, a shooting, a bombing and almost being run over. Naturally, he still has time to bed several attractive females. Along the way, Meyer offers quite a few life-lessons, including the best way to fall asleep (page 38 in the paperback).

FLETCH by Gregory McDonald (Bobbs-Merrill 1974 hardcover/Avon 1976 paperback)

As the summer was winding down, I needed a sure-fire winner of a read. **FLETCH**, the first of the author's nine-book series featuring the rascal Irwin Fletcher, aka Fletch, was the perfect choice. Working as an undercover reporter on a story regarding beach drug trafficking, Fletch is approached by a wealthy businessman who wants to hire Fletch to murder him in one week's time. Trying to avoid paying alimony to his two ex-wives and working for an editor he despises, Fletch needs to discover what is behind such an unusual offer while also completing his article for the newspaper.

Fletch is, of course, a wonderful character and the author's writing is tremendously entertaining and imaginative. This book won the Edgar Award for Best First Novel and was made into a movie.

THE INSPECTOR BARLACH MYSTERIES – THE JUDGE AND HIS HANGMAN & SUSPICION by Friedrich Dürrenmatt (University of Chicago Press 2016 trade paperback)

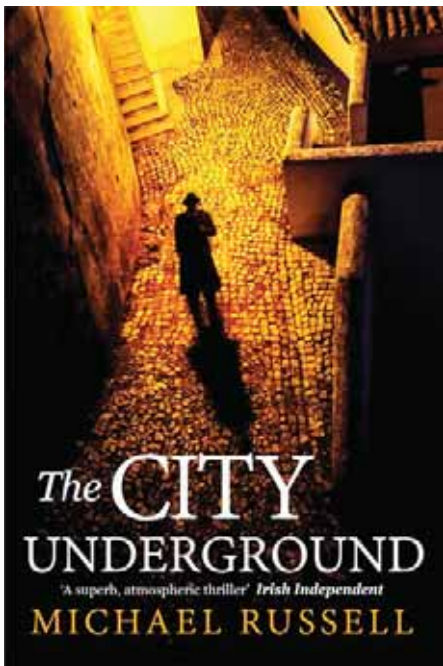
Eons ago, when I began to venture into the realm of translated mystery fiction, Swiss author and playwright Dürrenmatt was one of the first to captivate me with the quality of his writings. Two of his short novels, **THE JUDGE AND**

HIS HANGMAN (originally published in 1950) and **SUSPICION** (originally published in 1951), feature the aging Swiss Inspector Barlach at the end of his career. These novels reflect the struggle that Europeans were having at that time in coming to terms with the atrocities committed by the Germans particularly at the death camps. Inspector Barlach has devoted his life almost single-mindedly to seeking justice to the exclusion of almost everything else. Doing so has embroiled him in a crisis of values as he twists good and evil to achieve his ends.

This edition is newly translated by Joel Agee. **THE JUDGE AND HIS HANGMAN** has had four adaptations for TV series and one for a film. In addition, it was published under the title **END OF THE GAME**. **SUSPICION** was also published under the title **THE QUARRY**. In 1958, the author produced another excellent mystery novel, **THE PLEDGE: Requiem for the Detective Novel**.

THE CITY UNDERGROUND by Michael Russell (Constable 2022 hardcover/trade paperback London)

Irish author's seventh novel featuring Inspector Stefan Gillespie of the Special Branch of Ireland's Garda police force. It's 1941 and Ireland is



officially neutral in England's war with Germany. As is common with police and Intelligence services everywhere, there is fierce competition between Special Branch and Irish Military Intelligence over information, power and influence. During this time, the IRA is still active in Ireland and the Irish Free State (later to be known as Northern Ireland) while Nazi spies try to infiltrate both countries with the support of most elements of the IRA. Tracing such spies, foiling IRA plots and safeguarding the security of Ireland is Special Branch's remit. Gillespie is in the thick of it, heightening his own risk by pursuing an unofficial investigation into a 20-year-old killing by the Irish police.

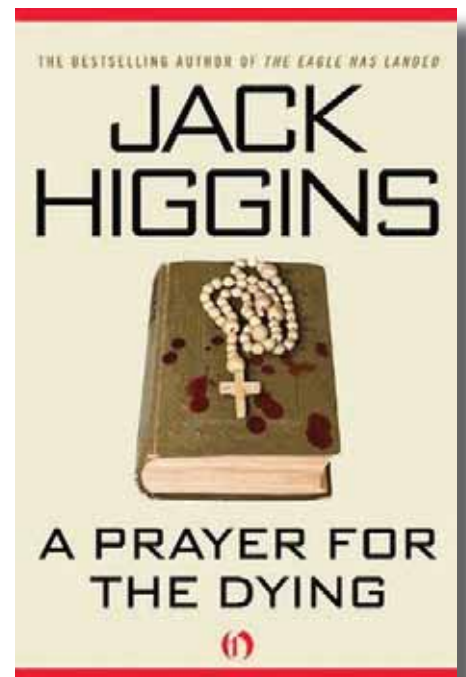
This is a well-written mystery novel, not a thriller, to be enjoyed by anyone with an interest in that troubled period of Ireland's history. I also enjoyed the prior six novels in this series.

WRATH OF THE LION by Harry Patterson/Jack Higgins (John Long 1964 hardcover London as by Harry Patterson/Open Road Media 2010 trade paperback New York as by Jack Higgins)

One of the author's best stand-alone thrillers originally published under the name of Harry Patterson. Former military hard-man Neil Mallory is tasked by British Intelligence to assist France's Deuxième Bureau and its Brigade Criminelle to find a rogue submarine connected to the O.A.S. rebels seeking to overthrow de Gaulle's government. Most of the action is set in the Channel Islands but some of the backstory concerns Britain's dealing with the Chinese Communist guerrillas in Malaya. Smoothly written, interesting characters, a fast-moving plot with lots of treachery, an element of romance, and considerable violence. When it comes to writing entertaining thrillers, Higgins was a master of the craft.

A PRAYER FOR THE DYING by Jack Higgins (William Collins 1973 hardcover London/Open Road Media 2010 trade paperback New York)

Ex-IRA hitman Martin Fallon is



coerced into killing the rival of a crime boss in the north of England. A Catholic priest witnesses the shooting. This puts him and his blind niece at risk. Fallon tricks the priest into not disclosing the murder to the police. This ends up putting Fallon in deadly opposition to the crime boss and his gang of degenerate associates.

Martin Fallon is one of the author's standout characters. *A Prayer for the Dying* was made into a film.

This summer I read fewer books than I usually do in Greece, partly as a result of having COVID, plus having our two grandsons stay with us. Even more unusual was that some 15 books did not make it past my 50-page rule for various reasons, almost all by new authors. I obviously have to do a much better job of screening reviews before ordering my books.

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

Deadly Pleasures Best of 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 mysteries, crime novels and thrillers of 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 Mystery 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**

****THE MURDER BOOK**, Mark Billingham (Atlantic Monthly Press,

\$26.00). Tom Thorne finally has it all. In Nicola Tanner and Phil Hendricks, Thorne has good friends by his side. His love life is newly reformed by a promising relationship and he is happy in the job he has devoted his life to. As he sets off hunting the woman responsible for a series of grisly murders, Thorne has no way of knowing that he will be plunged into a nightmare from which he may never wake. A nightmare that has a name. Thorne's past threatens to catch up with him and a ruinous secret is about to be revealed. If he wants to save himself and his friends, he will have to do the unthinkable. Tom Thorne finally has a lot to lose. **PW, BL, AZ & DP**

****TREASURE STATE**, C. J. Box (Minotaur, \$28.99). Private Investigator Cassie Dewell's business is thriving, and her latest case puts her on the hunt for a slippery con man who's disappeared somewhere in the "treasure state". A wealthy Florida widow has accused him of absconding with her fortune, and wants Cassie to find him and get it back. The trail takes Cassie to Anaconda, Montana, a quirky former copper mining town that's the perfect place to reinvent yourself. As the case develops, Cassie begins to wonder if her client is telling her everything.

On top of that, Cassie is also working what's easily one of her strangest assignments ever. A poem that promises buried treasure to one lucky adventurer has led to a cutthroat competition and five deaths among treasure-hunters. But Cassie's client doesn't want the treasure. Instead, he claims to be the one who hid the gold and wrote the poem. And he's hired Cassie to try to find him. Between the two cases, Cassie has her hands full. **BL, 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 relation-

ships 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**

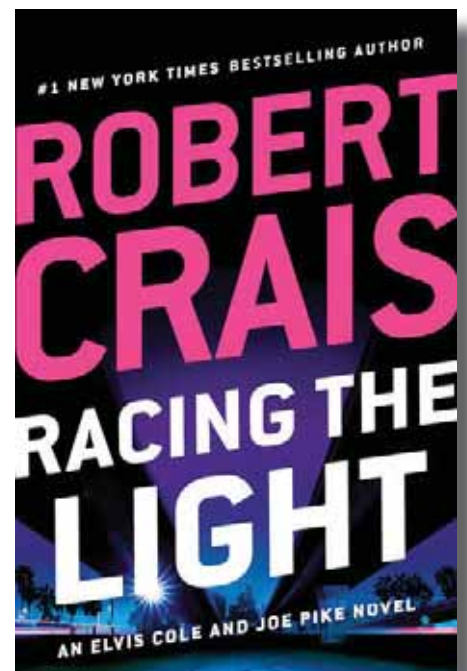
****DESERT STAR**, Michael Connelly (Little, Brown, \$29.00). A year has passed since LAPD detective Renée Ballard quit the force in the face of misogyny, demoralization, and endless red tape. But after the chief of police himself tells her she can write her own ticket within the department, Ballard takes back her badge, leaving "the Late Show" to rebuild and lead the cold case unit at the elite Robbery-Homicide Division. For years, Harry Bosch has been working a case that haunts him—the murder of an entire family by a psychopath who still walks free. Ballard makes Bosch an offer: come volunteer as an investigator in her new Open-Unsolved Unit, and he can pursue his "white whale" with the resources of the LAPD behind him.

First priority for Ballard is to clear the unsolved rape and murder of a sixteen-year-old girl. The decades-old case is essential to the councilman who supported re-forming the unit, and who could shutter it again—the victim was his sister. When Ballard gets a "cold hit" connecting the killing to a similar crime, proving that a serial predator has been at work in the city for years, the political pressure has never been higher. To keep momentum going, she has to pull Bosch off his own investigation.

PW, BL, AZ & DP

****THE FURIES**, John Connolly (Atria/Emily Bester, \$28.00). Private investigator Charlie Parker is unwittingly drawn into a world of vengeance. John Connolly pits Parker against two separate—but vitally connected—investigations, which prove to be among the most complicated of his entire career. In **The Sisters Strange**, criminal Raum Buker arrives in Portland, only for a shocking act of theft to threaten not only his own existence but those of his former lovers—the enigmatic sisters Strange. And in the title novel, **The Furies**, Parker must protect two women under threat as Portland shuts down in the face of a global pandemic. Unbeknownst to him, however, these clients are more capable of taking care of themselves than anyone could have imagined. **PW& AZ**

****RACING THE LIGHT**, Robert Crais (Putnam, \$29.00). Adele Schumacher isn't a typical worried mom. When she hires Elvis to find her missing son, a controversial podcaster named Josh Shoe, she brings a bag filled with cash, bizarre tales of government conspiracies, and a squad of professional bodyguards. Finding Josh should be simple, but Elvis quickly learns he isn't alone in the hunt—a deadly team of mysterious strangers are determined to



find Josh and his adult film star girlfriend first.

With dangerous secrets lurking behind every lead, Elvis needs his friend Joe Pike more than ever to uncover the truth about Josh, corrupt politicians, and the vicious business cartels rotting the heart of Los Angeles from within. And when Elvis's estranged girlfriend Lucy Chenier and her son, Ben, return, he learns just how much he has to lose... if he survives. **BL, AZ & DP**

****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**

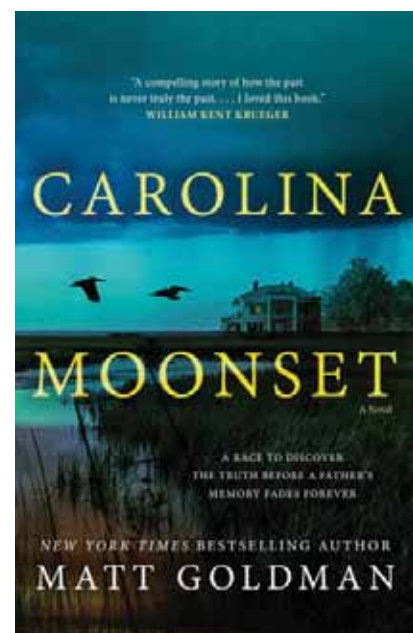
****LIKE A SISTER**, Kellye Garrett (Mulholland, \$28.00, March). When the body of disgraced reality TV star Desiree Pierce is found on a playground in the Bronx the morning after her 25th birthday party, the police and the media are quick to declare her death an overdose. It's a tragedy, certainly, but not a crime. But Desiree's half-sister Lena Scott knows that can't be the case. A graduate student at Columbia, Lena has spent the past decade forging her own path far from the spotlight, but some facts about Desiree just couldn't have changed since their childhood. And Desiree would never travel above 125th Street. So why is no one listening to her? Despite the bitter truth that the two haven't spoken in two years, torn apart by Desiree's partying and by their father, Mel, a wealthy and influential hip-hop mogul, Lena becomes determined to find justice for her sister, even if it means untangling her family's darkest secrets—or ending up dead herself.

LJ, PW & DP

****THE WOMAN IN THE LIBRARY**, Sulari Gentill (Poisoned Pen Press, \$26.99). The ornate reading room

at the Boston Public Library is quiet, until the tranquility is shattered by a woman's terrified scream. Security guards take charge immediately, instructing everyone inside to stay put until the threat is identified and contained. While they wait for the all-clear, four strangers, who'd happened to sit at the same table, pass the time in conversation and friendships are struck. Each has his or her own reasons for being in the reading room that morning? it just happens that one is a murderer. **PW, AZ & LJ**

****CAROLINA MOONSET**, Matt Goldman (Forge, \$29.99, \$16.99). Joey Green has returned to Beaufort, South Carolina, with its palmettos and shrimp boats, to look after his ailing father, who is succumbing to dementia, while his overstressed mother takes a break. Marshall Green's short-term memory has all but evaporated, but, as if in compensation, his oldest memories are more vivid than ever. His mind keeps slipping backwards in time, retreating into long-ago yesterdays of growing up in Beaufort as a boy. At first this seems like a blessing of sorts, with the past providing a refuge from a shrinking future, but Joey grows increasingly anxious as his father's hallucinatory arguments with figures from his youth begin to hint at deadly secrets, scandals, and suspicions long buried and forgotten. **PW, AZ & DP**



****BLEEDING HEART YARD**, Elly Griffiths (Mariner, \$27.99). When Cassie Fitzgerald was at school in the late 90s, she and her friends killed a fellow student. Almost twenty years later, Cassie is a happily married mother who loves her job—as a police officer. She closely guards the secret she has all but erased from her memory. One day her husband finally persuades her to go to a school reunion. Cassie catches up with her high-achieving old friends from the Manor Park School—among them two politicians, a rock star, and a famous actress. But then, shockingly, one of them, Garfield Rice, is found dead in the school bathroom, supposedly from a drug overdose. As Garfield was an eminent—and controversial—MP and the investigation is high profile, it's headed by Cassie's new boss, DI Harbinder Kaur, freshly promoted and newly arrived in London. The trouble is, Cassie can't shake the feeling that one of them has killed again. **PW & AZ**

****RECKLESS GIRLS**, Rachel Hawkins (St. Martin's Press, \$27.99, February). Six stunning twentysomethings are about to embark on a blissful, free-spirited journey—one filled with sun-drenched days and intoxicating nights. But as it becomes clear that the group is even more cut off from civilization than they initially thought, it starts to feel like the island itself is closing in, sending them on a dangerous spiral of discovery. When one person goes missing and another turns up dead, the remaining friends wonder what dark currents lie beneath this impenetrable paradise – and who else will be swept under its secluded chaos. **BL, 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

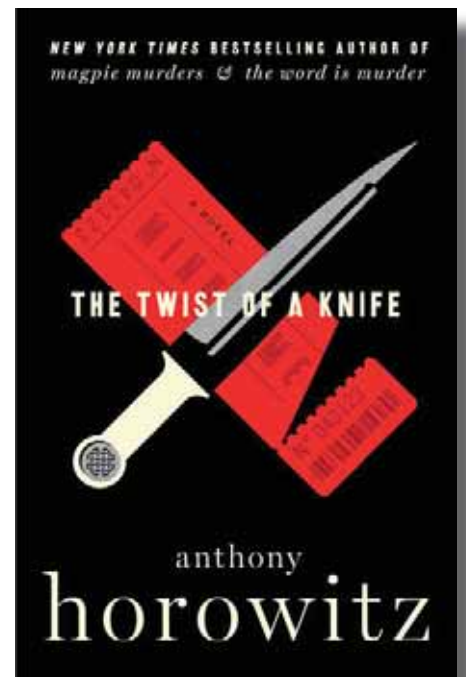
and released due to lack of evidence. Detective Chief Inspector Kusanagi of the Homicide Division of the Tokyo Police worked both cases. The neighborhood in which the murdered girl lived is famous for an annual street festival, featuring a parade with entries from around Tokyo and Japan. During the parade, 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 surrounding 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 TWIST OF A KNIFE**, Anthony Horowitz (Harper, \$29.99). "I'm sorry but the answer's no." Reluctant author, Anthony Horowitz, has had enough. He tells ex-detective Daniel Hawthorne that after three books he's splitting and their deal is over. The truth is that Anthony has other things on his mind. His new play, a thriller called *Mindgame*, is about to open at the Vaudeville Theater in London's



West End. Not surprisingly, Hawthorne declines a ticket to the opening night. The play is panned by the critics. In particular, Sunday Times critic Margaret Throsby gives it a savage review, focusing particularly on the writing. The next day, Throsby is stabbed in the heart with an ornamental dagger which turns out to belong to Anthony, and has his fingerprints all over it. **BL, LJ, PW & AZ**

****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**

****BILLIE STARR'S BOOK OF SORRIES**, Deborah E. Kennedy (Flatiron Books, \$27.99). Jenny Newberg, Queen of Bad Decisions, is about to make another one. In a small town where everyone knows everyone's business, down-on-her-luck single mother Jenny is on a first-name basis with the



debt collector at the bank, who is moving toward foreclosure. She is constantly apologizing to her precocious young daughter, Billie Starr, who is filling a book with her mother's sorries. Then a pair of strangers in black suits offers her a hefty check to seduce someone known as the Candidate. But nothing ever goes as Jenny plans, and she is swept into the Candidate's orbit. Surrounded by a wide universe of new ideas, she realizes how constrained her life has been and she starts to see how much more she might be capable of. And when her world is rocked to its core and Billie Starr may be in danger, Jenny is forced to do what she once thought impossible: trust in herself and her own power to make things right. **PW & DP**

****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 ev-

idence, Detective Joon Linna recognizes an eerie connection between Jenny's murder and a death declared a suicide years before. **PW & DP**

****BLACKWATER FALLS**, Ausma Zehanat Khan (Minotaur, \$27.99, November). Girls from immigrant communities have been disappearing for months in the Colorado town of Blackwater Falls, but the local sheriff is slow to act and the fates of the missing girls largely ignored. At last, the calls for justice become too loud to ignore when the body of a star student and refugee--the Syrian teenager Razan Elkader--is positioned deliberately in a mosque. Detective Inaya Rahman and Lieutenant Waqas Seif of the Denver Police are recruited to solve Razan's murder, and quickly uncover a link to other missing and murdered girls. But as Inaya gets closer to the truth, Seif finds ways to obstruct the investigation. Inaya may be drawn to him, but she is wary of his motives: he may be covering up the crimes of their boss, whose connections in Blackwater run deep. **AZ, PW, BL**

****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). Commissarion Guido Brunetti #31. Brunetti is approached for a favor by Elisabetta Foscarini, 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. Foscarini'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**

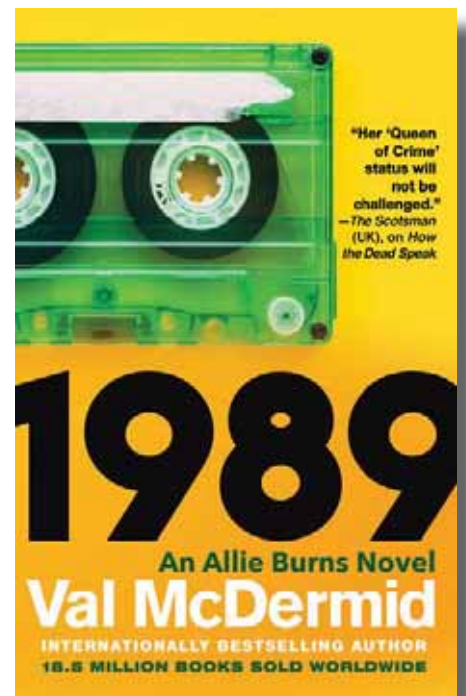
****THE ACCOMPLICE**, Lisa Lutz (Ballantine, \$28.00, January). Owen Mann is charming, privileged, and chronically dissatisfied. Luna Grey is secretive, cautious, and pragmatic. Despite their differences, they form a bond the moment they meet in college. Their names soon become indivisible—Owen and Luna, 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, DP & AZ**

****THE LAST PARTY**, Clare Mackintosh (Sourcebooks, \$27.99). On New Year's Eve, Rhys Lloyd has a house full

of guests. His vacation homes on Mirror Lake are a success, and he's generously invited the village to drink champagne with their wealthy new neighbors. But by midnight, Rhys will be floating dead in the freezing waters of the lake. On New Year's Day, Ffion Morgan has a village full of suspects. The tiny community is her home, so the suspects are her neighbors, friends and family?and Ffion has her own secrets to protect. **AZ, PW & LJ**

****FALL GUY**, Archer Mayor (Minotaur, \$28.99). A high-end stolen car is discovered in Vermont. A car filled with stolen items from a far-flung two stage burglary spree. But it's what is in the trunk that brings Joe Gunther and his team from the Vermont Bureau of Investigation. In the trunk is the body of burglar in question - one Don Kalfus. Complicating matters, while the body was found in Vermont, it appears he was probably killed in the next state over, New Hampshire. The task force charged with finding out why Kalfus is murdered soon faces another problem. Within the pile of stolen cell phones found in the car is evidence of a notorious unsolved child abduction case from years earlier. **BL, PW, AZ & DP**

****1989**, Val McDermid (Atlantic Monthly, \$27.00). It's 1989 and Allie Burns is back. Older and maybe wiser, she's running the northern news operation of the Sunday Globe, chafing at losing her role in investigative journalism and at the descent into the gutter of the UK tabloid media. But there's plenty to keep her occupied. The year begins with the memorial service for the victims of the bombing of Pan Am Flight 103 over Lockerbie, Scotland, but Allie has barely filed her copy when she stumbles over a story about HIV/AIDS that will shock her into a major change of direction. The world of newspapers is undergoing a revolution, there's skullduggery in the medical research labs and there are seismic rumblings behind the Iron Curtain. When murder is added to this potent mix, Allie is forced to question all her old certainties. **PW & 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 Griesel 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 LAST TO VANISH**, Megan Miranda (Scribner, \$27.99, July). As this propulsive story begins, a string of unsolved disappearances has long haunted the North Carolina mountain town of Cutter's Pass, where Abigail Lovett manages The Passage Inn. This small, close-knit town is thrust into the spotlight when journalist Landon West, who was staying at the inn to investigate the story of the vanishing trail, disappears himself. When Landon's brother shows up looking for answers, Abby can't help but feel the town closing ranks—and she, who moved to Cutter's Pass ten years ago, is still on the outside. When she finds incriminating evidence that may bring them closer to the truth, Abby soon discovers how little she knows about her coworkers, neighbors, and even those closest to her. **BL & PW**

****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**

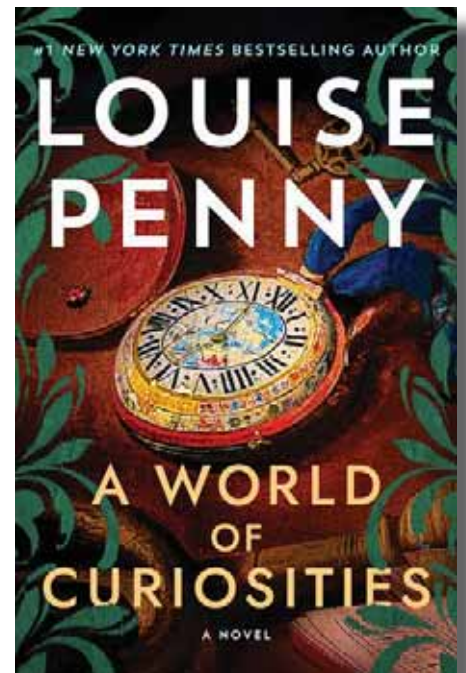
****ANYWHERE YOU RUN**, Wanda M. Morris (Morrow, \$28.99). It's the summer of 1964 and three innocent men are brutally murdered for trying to help Black Mississippians secure the right to vote. Against this backdrop, twenty-one year old Violet Richards finds herself in more trouble than she's ever been in her life. Suffering a brutal attack of her own, she kills the man responsible. But with the color of Violet's skin, there is no way she can escape Jim Crow justice in Jackson, Mississippi. Before anyone can find the body or finger her as the killer, she decides to run. With the help of her white beau, Violet escapes. But desperation and fear leads her to hide out in the small rural town of Chillicothe, Georgia, unaware that danger may be closer than she thinks. **LJ, AZ, PW, BL & DP**

****BEHIND THE LIE**, Emily 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. **Kirkus, BL & DP**

****A WORLD OF CURIOSITIES**, Louise Penny (Minotaur, \$29.99, November). As the villagers prepare for a special celebration, Armand Gamache and Jean-Guy Beauvoir find themselves increasingly worried. A young man and woman have reappeared in the Sûreté du Québec investigators' lives after many years. The two were young children when their troubled mother was murdered, leaving them damaged, shattered. Now they've arrived in the village of Three Pines. But to what end? Gamache and Beauvoir's memories of that tragic case, the one that first brought them together, come rushing back. Did their mother's murder hurt them beyond repair? Have those terrible wounds, buried for decades, festered and are now about to erupt? As Chief Inspector



Gamache works to uncover answers, his alarm grows when a letter written by a long dead stone mason is discovered. In it the man describes his terror when bricking up an attic room somewhere in the village. Every word of the 160-year-old letter is filled with dread. When the room is found, the villagers decide to open it up. As the bricks are removed, Gamache, Beauvoir and the villagers discover a world of curiosities. But the head of homicide soon realizes there's more in that room than meets the eye. There are puzzles within puzzles, and hidden messages warning of mayhem and revenge. **PW**

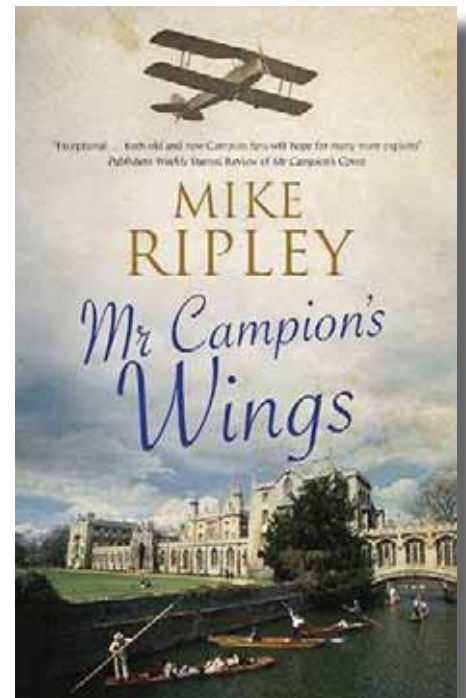
****ONE-SHOT HARRY**, Gary Phillips (Soho Crime, \$24.95, April). LOS ANGELES, 1963: African American Korean War veteran Harry Ingram earns a living as a news photographer and occasional process server: chasing police radio calls and dodging baseball bats. With racial tensions running high on the eve 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**

****KILLERS OF A CERTAIN AGE**, Deanna Raybourn (Berkley, \$27.00). Billie, Mary Alice, Helen, and Natalie have worked for the Museum, an elite network of assassins, for forty years. Now their talents are considered old-school and no one appreciates what they have to offer in an age that relies more on technology than people skills. When the foursome is sent on an all-expenses paid vacation to mark their retirement, they are targeted by one of their own. Only the Board, the top-level members of the Museum, can order the termination of field agents, and the women realize they've been marked for death. Now to get out alive they have to turn against their own organization, relying on experience and each other to get the job done, knowing that working together is the secret to their survival. They're about to teach the Board what it really means to be a woman—and a killer—of a certain age. **Kirkus, LJ, BL, PW & DP**

****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**

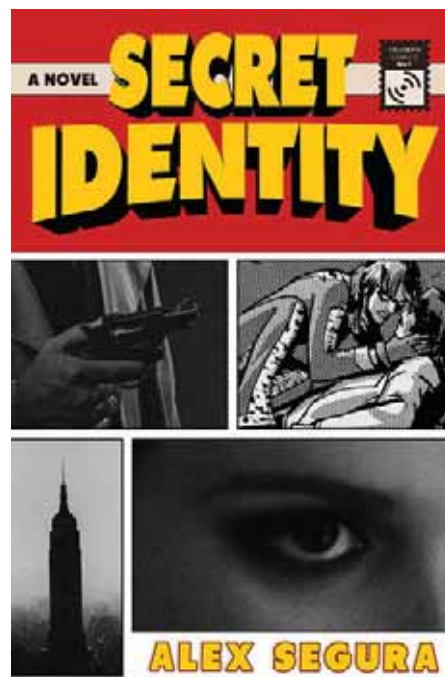
****REAL EASY**, Marie Rutkoski (Henry Holt, \$26.99, January). It's 1999 and Samantha has danced for years at the Lovely Lady strip club. She's not used to mixing work and friendship – after all, between her jealous boyfriend and his young daughter, she has enough on her plate. But the newest dancer 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 & DP**

****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**

****SECLUDED CABIN SLEEPS SIX**, Lisa Unger (Park Row, \$27.99). What could be more restful than a weekend getaway with family and friends? An isolated luxury cabin in the woods, spectacular views, a hot tub and a personal chef. Hannah's generous brother found the listing online. The reviews are stellar. It'll be three couples on this trip with good food, good company and lots of R & R. But the dreamy weekend is about to turn into a nightmare. A deadly storm is brewing. The rental host seems just a little too present. The personal chef reveals that their beautiful house has a spine-tingling history. And the

friends have their own complicated past, with secrets that run blood deep. **LJ, AZ & Kirkus**

****DEAR LITTLE CORPSES**, Nicola Upson (Crooked Lane, \$26.99, August). September 1st, 1939. As the mass evacuation takes place across Britain, thousands of children leave London for the countryside, but when a little girl vanishes without a trace, the reality of separation becomes more urgent and more deadly for those who love her. In the chaos and uncertainty of war, Josephine 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. **BL & PW**

****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**

****THE IT GIRL**, Ruth Ware (Gallery/Scout Press, \$28.99). April Clarke-Cliveden was the first person Hannah Jones met at Oxford. Vivacious, bright, occasionally vicious, and the ultimate It girl, she quickly pulled Hannah into her dazzling orbit. Together, they developed a group of devoted and inseparable friends—Will, Hugh, Ryan, and Emily—during their first term. By the end of the year, April was dead. Now, a decade later, Hannah and Will

are expecting their first child, and the man convicted of killing April, former Oxford porter John Neville, has died in prison. Relieved to have finally put the past behind her, Hannah's world is rocked when a young journalist comes knocking and presents new evidence that Neville may have been innocent. As Hannah reconnects with old friends and delves deeper into the mystery of April's death, she realizes that the friends she thought she knew all have something to hide...including a murder. **PW, BL, LJ & AZ**

****THE KEY TO DECEIT**, Ashley Weaver (Minotaur, \$27.99, June). London, 1940. After years of stealing from the rich and giving to the poor?well, to themselves, anyway?Ellie McDonnell and her family have turned over a new leaf as they help the government's war effort. It's true that the straight-laced Major Ramsey didn't give them much choice, but still, Ellie must admit she doesn't miss breaking and entering as much as she might have thought. What she does miss is the challenge of unlocking an impossible code and the adrenaline rush that comes from being somewhere she shouldn't. So when Major Ramsey turns up unannounced with another job, she can't say no. A woman's body has been found floating in the Thames, with a bracelet locked onto her wrist, and a cameo locket attached to it. It's clear this woman was involved in espionage, but whose side was she on? **BL & 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**

Best First Mystery Novels

****JACKAL**, Erin E. Adams (Bantam, \$27.00, October). Liz Rocher is coming home . . . reluctantly. As a Black woman, Liz doesn't exactly have fond memories of Johnstown, Pennsylvania, a predominantly white town. But her best friend is getting married, so she braces herself for a weekend of awkward, passive-aggressive reunions. Liz has grown, though; she can handle whatever awaits her. But on the day of the wedding, somewhere between dancing and dessert, the couple's daughter, Caroline, disappears—and the only thing left behind is a piece of white fabric covered in blood. As a frantic search begins, with the police combing the trees for Caroline, Liz is the only one who notices a pattern: A summer night. A missing girl. A party in the woods. She's seen this before. Keisha Woodson, the only other Black girl in Liz's high school, walked into the woods with a mysterious man and

was later found with her chest cavity ripped open and her heart removed. Liz shudders at the thought that it could have been her, and now, with Caroline missing, it can't be a coincidence. As Liz starts to dig through the town's history, she uncovers a horrifying secret about the place she once called home. Children have been going missing in these woods for years. All of them Black. All of them girls. **PW & AZ**

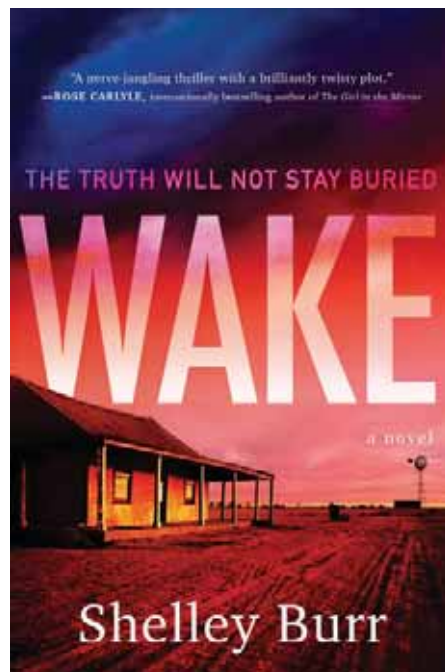
****PAY DIRT ROAD**, Samantha Jayne Allen (Minotaur, \$26.99, April). Annie McIntyre has a love/hate relationship with Garnett, Texas. Recently graduated from college and home waitressing, lacking not in ambition but certainly in direction, Annie is lured into the family business a private investigation 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**

****SINKHOLE**, Davida Breier (University of New Orleans Press, \$18.95). Lies from the past and a dangerous present collide when, after fifteen years in exile, Michelle Miller returns to her tiny hometown of Lorida, Florida. With her mother in the hospital, she's forced to reckon with the broken relationships she left behind: with her family, with friends, and with herself. As a teenager, Michelle felt isolated and invisible until she met Sissy, a dynamic and wealthy classmate. Their sudden, intense friendship was all-consuming. Punk rocker Morrison later joins their clique, and they become an inseparable trio. They were the perfect high school

friends, bound by dysfunction, bad TV, and boredom?until one of them ends up dead. Forced to confront the life she turned her back on fifteen years ago, she begins questioning what was truth and what were lies. Now at a distance, Michelle begins to see how dangerous Sissy truly was. **DP**

****BEFORE YOU KNEW MY NAME**, Jacqueline Bublitz (Atria/Emily Bester). When she arrived in New York on her eighteenth birthday carrying nothing but \$600 cash and a stolen camera, Alice Lee was looking for a fresh start. Now, just one month later, she is the city's latest Jane Doe. She may be dead but that doesn't mean her story is over. Meanwhile, Ruby Jones is also trying to reinvent herself. After travelling halfway around the world, she's lonelier than ever in the Big Apple. Until she stumbles upon a woman's body by the Hudson River, and suddenly finds herself unbreakably tied to the unknown dead woman. **AZ & DP**

****WAKE**, Shelley Burr (Morrow, \$27.99). The tiny outback town of Nannine lies in the harsh red interior of Australia. Once a thriving center of stockyards and sheep stations, years of punishing drought have petrified the land and Nannine has been whittled



down to no more than a stoplight, a couple bars, and a police station. And it has another, more sinister claim to fame: the still-unsolved disappearance of young Evelyn McCreery nineteen years ago. Mina McCreery's life has been defined by the intense public interest in her sister's case—which is still a hot topic in true-crime chat rooms and on social media. Now an anxious and reclusive adult, Mina lives alone on her family's sunbaked destocked sheep farm. Enter Lane Holland, a young private investigator who dropped out of the police academy to earn a living cracking cold cases. Before she died, Mina's mother funded a million-dollar reward for anyone who could explain how Evelyn vanished from her bed in the family's farmhouse. The lure of cash has only increased public obsession with Evelyn and Mina—but yielded no answers. Lane wins Mina's trust when some of his more unconventional methods show promise. But Lane also has darker motivations, and his obsession with the search will ultimately risk both their lives—and yield shocking results. **DP**

****EVEN THE DARKEST NIGHT**, Javier Cercas (Knopf, \$30.00, June). Melchor, the son of a prostitute, went to prison as a teenager, convicted of working for a Colombian drug cartel. Behind bars, he read a book that changed his life: *Les Misérables*. Then his mother was murdered. He decided to become a cop. A new case, in Terra Alta, a remote region of rural Catalonia—the murder of a wealthy local man and his wife—will turn Melchor's life upside down yet again. **BL, 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**

****A HISTORY OF FEAR**, Luke Dumas (Atria, \$27.99, December). Grayson Hale, the most infamous murderer in Scotland, is better known by a different name: the Devil's Advocate. The twenty-five-year-old American grad student rose to instant notoriety when he confessed to the slaughter of his classmate Liam Stewart, claiming the Devil made him do it. When Hale is found hanged in his prison cell, officers uncover a handwritten manuscript that promises to answer the question that's haunted the nation for years: was Hale a lunatic, or had he been telling the truth all along? Unnervingly, Hale doesn't fit the bill of a killer. The first-person narrative that centers this novel reveals an acerbic young atheist, newly enrolled at the University of Edinburgh to carry on the legacy of his recently deceased father. In need of cash, he takes a job ghostwriting a mysterious book for a dark stranger, but has misgivings when the project begins to reawaken his satanophobia, a rare condition that causes him to live in terror that the Devil is after him. **Kirkus & PW**

****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. **AZ & 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**

****PESTICIDE**, Kim Hays (Seventh Street Books, \$17.95, April). When a rave on a hot summer night erupts into violent riots, a young man is found the next morning bludgeoned to death with a policeman's club. Seasoned detective Giuliana Linder is assigned to the case. That same day, an elderly organic farmer turns up dead and drenched with pesticide. Enter Giuliana's younger—and distractingly attractive—colleague Renzo Donatelli to investigate the second murder. Giuliana's disappointment that they're on two different cases is tinged with relief—her home life is complicated enough without the risk of a fling. But when an unexpected discovery ties the two victims into a single case, Giuliana and Renzo are thrown closer

together than ever before. Dangerously close. Will Giuliana be able to handle the threats to her marriage and to her assumptions about the police? If she wants to prevent another murder, she'll have to put her life on the line—and her principles. **DP**

****ALL THAT'S LEFT UNSAID**, Tracey Lien (Morrow, \$27.99). Just let him go. These are the words Ky Tran will forever regret. The words she spoke when her parents called to ask if they should let her younger brother Denny out to celebrate his high school graduation with friends. That night, Denny—optimistic, guileless, brilliant Denny—is brutally murdered inside a busy restaurant in the Sydney suburb of Cabramatta, a refugee enclave facing violent crime, an indifferent police force, and the worst heroin epidemic in Australian history. Returning home to Cabramatta for the funeral, Ky learns that the police are stumped by Denny's case: a dozen people were at Lucky 8 restaurant when Denny died, but each of the bystanders claim to have seen nothing. Desperately hoping that understanding what happened might ease her suffocating guilt, Ky sets aside her grief and determines to track down the witnesses herself. With each encounter, she peels back another layer of the place that shaped her and Denny, exposing the seeds of violence that were planted well before that fateful celebration dinner: by colonialism, by the war in Vietnam, and by the choices they've all made to survive. **PW & DP**

****DEATH AND THE CONJUROR**, Tom Mead (Mysterious Press, \$25.95). In 1930s London, celebrity psychiatrist Anselm Rees is discovered dead in his locked study, and there seems to be no way that a killer could have escaped unseen. There are no clues, no witnesses, and no evidence of the murder weapon. Stumped by the confounding scene, the Scotland Yard detective on the case calls on retired stage magician-turned-part-time sleuth Joseph Spector. For who better to make sense of the impossible than one who traffics in illusions? Spector has a knack for explaining the inexplicable, but even he finds that there is more to

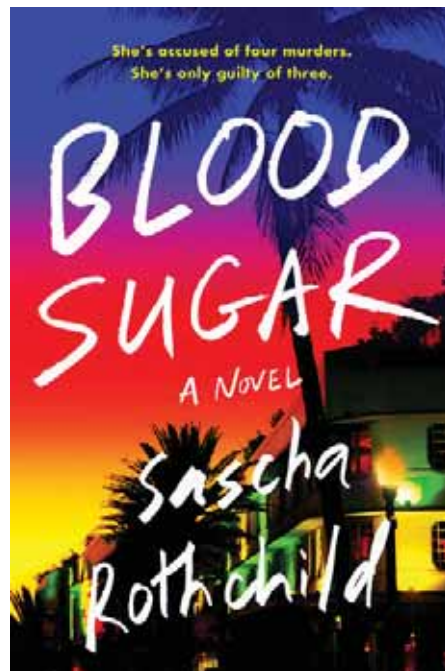
this mystery than meets the eye. As he and the Inspector interview the colorful cast of suspects among the psychiatrist's patients and household, they uncover no shortage of dark secrets – or motives for murder. When the investigation dovetails into that of an apparently-impossible theft, the detectives consider the possibility that the two transgressions are related. And when a second murder occurs, this time in an impenetrable elevator, they realize that the crime wave will become even more deadly unless they can catch the culprit soon. **PW & 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. **LJ, 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 & DP**



****LAST CALL AT THE NIGHTINGALE**, Katharine Schellman (Minotaur, \$27.99, June). New York, 1924. Vivian Kelly's days are filled with drudgery, from the tenement lodging she shares with her sister to the dress shop where she sews for hours every day. But at night, she escapes to The Nightingale, an underground dance hall where illegal liquor flows and the band plays the Charleston with reckless excitement. With a bartender willing to slip her a free glass of champagne and friends who know the owner, Vivian can lose herself in the music. No one asks where she came from or how much money she has. No one bats an eye if she flirts with men or women as long as she can keep up on the dance floor. At The Nightingale, Vivian forgets the dangers of Prohibition-era New York and finds a place that feels like home. But then she discovers a body behind the club, and those dangers come knocking. Caught in a police raid at the Nightingale, Vivian discovers that the dead man wasn't the nameless bootlegger he first appeared. With too many people assuming she knows more about the crime than she does, Vivian finds herself caught between the dangers of the New York's underground and the world of the city's wealthy and careless. **PW & AZ**

****DIRT CREEK**, Hayley Scrivener (Flatiron Books, \$27.99). When twelve-year-old Esther disappears on the way home from school in a small town in rural Australia, the community is thrown into a maelstrom of suspicion and grief. As Detective Sergeant Sarah Michaels arrives in town during the hottest spring in decades and begins her investigation, Esther's tenacious best friend, Ronnie, is determined to find Esther and bring her home. When schoolfriend Lewis tells Ronnie that he saw Esther with a strange man at the creek the afternoon she went missing, Ronnie feels she is one step closer to finding her. But why is Lewis refusing to speak to the police? And who else is lying about how much they know about what has happened to Esther?

Punctuated by a Greek chorus, which gives voice to the remaining children

of the small, dying town, this novel explores the ties that bind, what we try and leave behind us, and what we can never outrun, while never losing sight of the question of what happened to Esther, and what her loss does to a whole town. **PW, BL, AZ & DP**

****THE VIOLIN CONSPIRACY**, Brendan Slocumb (Anchor Books, \$28.00, February). Growing up Black in rural North Carolina, Ray McMillian's life is already mapped out. But Ray has a gift and a dream—he's determined to become a world-class professional violinist, and nothing will stand in his way. Not his mother, who wants him to stop making such a racket; not the fact that he can't afford a violin suitable to his talents; not even the racism inherent in the world of classical music. When he discovers that his beat-up, family fiddle is actually a priceless Stradivarius, all his dreams suddenly seem within reach, and together, Ray and his violin take the world by storm. But on the eve of the renowned and cutthroat Tchaikovsky Competition—the Olympics of classical music—the violin is stolen, a ransom note for five million dollars left in its place. Without it, Ray feels like he's lost a piece of himself. As the competition approaches, Ray must not only reclaim his precious violin, but prove to himself—and the world—that no matter the outcome, there has always been a truly great musician within him. **BL & DP**

****THE BUTCHER AND THE WREN**, Alaina Urquhart (Zando, \$27.00, September). Something dark is lurking in the Louisiana bayou: a methodical killer with a penchant for medical experimentation is hard at work completing his most harrowing crime yet, taunting the authorities who desperately try to catch up. But forensic pathologist Dr. Wren Muller is the best there is. Armed with an encyclopedic knowledge of historical crimes, and years of experience working in the Medical Examiner's office, she's never encountered a case she couldn't solve. Until now. Case after case is piling up on Wren's examination table, and soon she is sucked into an all-consuming cat-

and-mouse chase with a brutal murderer getting more brazen by the day. **AZ**

Best Paperback Original Mystery Novels

****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 build-

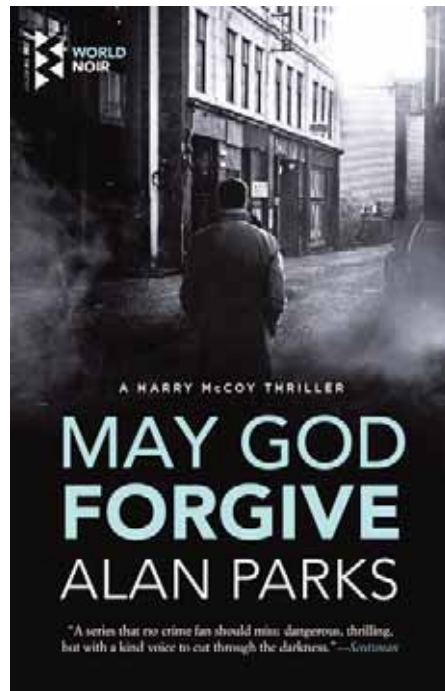
ing. Lucy, Ojibwe name Gage' bineh, (Everlasting Bird), lives in a trailer alone with her father, a local policeman struggling with PTSD which is compounded by the loss of Lucy's mother. Just barely fifteen she has lived with a lifetime of abuse, while knowing that if she ever spoke out, her father would 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. **LJ & AZ**

****GOERING'S GOLD** by Richard O'Rawe (Melville House, \$17.99, May). When WWII ended, the allies discovered that a huge amount of gold bullion plundered by Nazi Reichsmarschall Hermann Goering had gone missing. Some believed the gold had been hidden in a train box car in Poland. Others that it was secreted in Lake Toplitz in the Austrian Alps. And a few thought it was buried in the Republic of Ireland, which was neutral during the war. When ex-IRA soldier Ructions O'Hare stumbles on a piece of Nazi memorabilia once owned by Goering, he begins to think that those who suspect the gold was in Ireland just might be on to something.

But for Ructions to return to Ireland is easier said than done. For a start, the IRA is after him for not paying them a cut from a huge bank robbery he carried out in Belfast. And then there's the Neo-Nazis, who believe that Goering's gold rightfully belongs to them, and who are happy to kill anyone who gets in their way. **PW & DP**

****MAY GOD FORGIVE**, Alan Parks (World Noir, \$16.99, May). An arson attack on a hairdresser's has left five dead. 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 little time 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. **PW & DP**



****THE VERIFIERS**, Jane Pek (Vintage, \$17.00, February). Claudia Lin is used to disregarding her fractious family's model-minority expectations: she has no interest in finding either a con-

ventional 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**

****THE ACCOMPLICE**, Steve Cavanagh (Orion, £12.99, July – UK only). The Sandman killings have been solved. Daniel Miller murdered fourteen people before he vanished. His wife, Carrie, now faces trial as his accomplice. The FBI, the District Attorney, the media and everyone in America believe she knew and helped cover up her husband's crimes. Eddie Flynn won't take a case unless his client is innocent. Now, he has to prove to a jury, and the entire world, that Carrie Miller was just an-

other victim of the Sandman. She didn't know her husband's dark side and she had no part in the murders. But so far, Eddie and his team are the only ones who believe her. **DP (2)**

****THE DOUBLE AGENT**, William Christie (Minotaur, \$27.99, November). Alexsi Smirnoff - a Russian orphan - was trained as an agent by the Russian Secret Service and inserted into Nazi Germany, where he rose to a position in German intelligence services. As the war grinds on, trapped between two brutal dictatorships, Alexsi betrays both sides in a desperate ploy that succeeds...and fails. His false identities burned, his life at risk, Alexsi attempts to disappear in the hills - but is caught by the British. Recruited by the SIS, and by "C" himself, Alexsi is once again a double agent. Initially betrayed by a Soviet agent inside the SIS (Kim Philby), Alexsi is sent beyond the reach of the Soviets, into Italy with a new identity as a sergeant in the German army. Settled into the headquarters of Field Marshall Albert Kesselring, Alexsi finds himself



at the nexus at a critical point in World War II, balancing between the various forces vying for control in the Vatican, the Italian resistance, and the brutal German Army determined to maintain control of Northern Italy. And Alex-

si, finally forced to choose sides over his own survival. **PW & AZ**

****BOX 88**, Charles Cumming (Mysterious Press, \$27.95, January). Lachlan Kite is a member of BOX 88, an elite transatlantic black ops outfit so covert that not even MI6 and the CIA are certain of its existence -- but even the best spy can't anticipate every potential threat in a world where dangerous actors lurk around every corner. At the funeral of his childhood best friend, Lachlan falls into a trap that drops him into the hands of a potentially deadly interrogator, with his pregnant wife, also abducted, being held as collateral for the information he's sworn on his own life to protect. **Kirkus, PW, BL & DP**

****HATCHET ISLAND**, Paul Doiron (Minotaur, \$27.99, June). A call for help from a former colleague leads Maine game warden investigator Mike Bowditch and his girlfriend Stacey Stevens on a sea kayaking trip to a research station far off the coast. Stacey spent summers interning on the island, a sanctuary for endangered seabirds, and they are shocked by the atmosphere of tension they encounter when they come ashore. The biologists are being threatened and stalked by a mysterious boatman who they suspect is trespassing on the refuge late at night. And now the sanctuary's enigmatic founder, whose mind has been slowly unraveling, has gone missing. Camped on an islet for the night, Mike and Stacey waken to the sound of a gunshot. When they return to the refuge at dawn, their darkest fears are confirmed: two of the three researchers have been brutally murdered and the third has disappeared, along with the island skiff. Mike's quest to find the missing man leads to a nearby island owned by a world-renowned photographer and his equally brilliant wife. **BL, AZ, PW**

****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. **Kirkus, PW, BL, AZ & DP**

****THE CHASE**, Candice Fox (Forge, \$27.99, March).

“Are you listening, Warden?”

“What do you want?”

“I want you to let them out.”

“Which inmates are we talking about?”

“All of them.”

With that, the largest manhunt in United States history is on. In response to a hostage situation, more than 600 inmates from the Pronghorn Correctional Facility, including everyone on Death Row, are released into the Nevada Desert. Criminals considered the worst of the worst, monsters with dark, violent pasts, are getting farther away by the second.

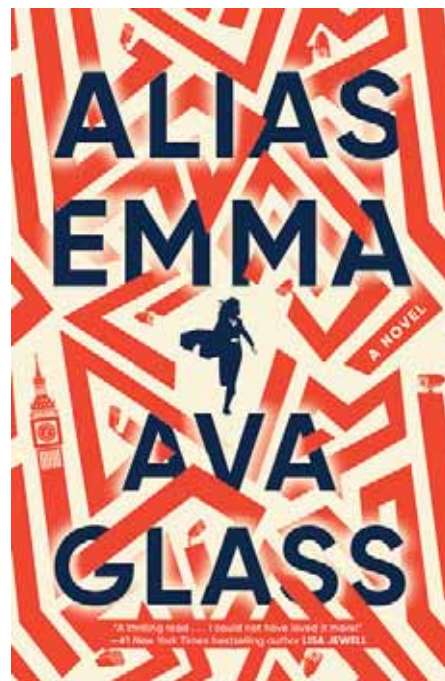
John Kradle, convicted of murdering his wife and son, is one of the escapees. Now, desperate to discover what really happened that night, Kradle must avoid capture and work quickly to prove his innocence as law enforcement closes in on the fugitives.

Death Row Supervisor, and now fugitive-hunter, Celine Osbourne has focused all of her energy on catching Kradle and bringing him back to Death

Row. She has very personal reasons for hating him – and she knows exactly where he's heading... **BL & AZ**

****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

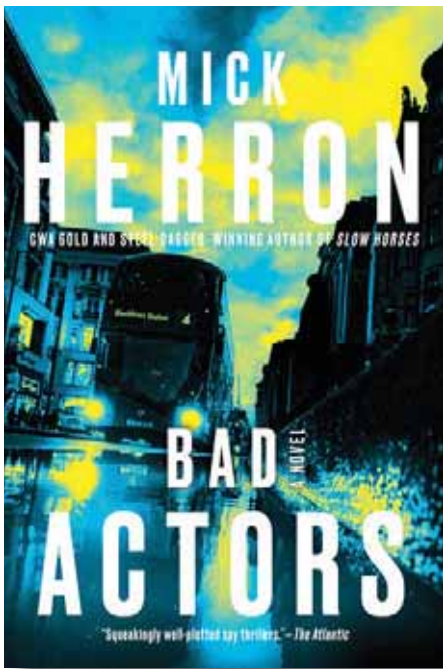


****ALIAS EMMA**, Ava Glass (Bantam, \$27.00). Emma Makepeace #1. Nothing about Emma Makepeace is real. Not even her name. A newly minted secret agent, Emma's barely graduated from basic training when she gets the call for her first major assignment. Eager to serve her country and prove her worth, she dives in headfirst. Emma must covertly travel across one of the world's most watched cities to bring the reluctant—and handsome—son of Russian dissidents into protective custody, so long as the assassins from the Motherland don't find him first. With London's famous Ring of Steel hacked by the Russian government, the two must cross the city without being seen

by the hundreds of thousands of CCTV cameras that document every inch of the city's streets, alleys, and gutters. Buses, subways, cars, and trains are out of the question. Traveling on foot, and operating without phones or bank cards that could reveal their location or identity, they have twelve hours to make it to safety. This will take all of Emma's skills of disguise and subterfuge. But when Emma's handler goes dark, there's no one left to trust. And ALL just one wrong move will get them both killed. **LJ, BL, PW, 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**

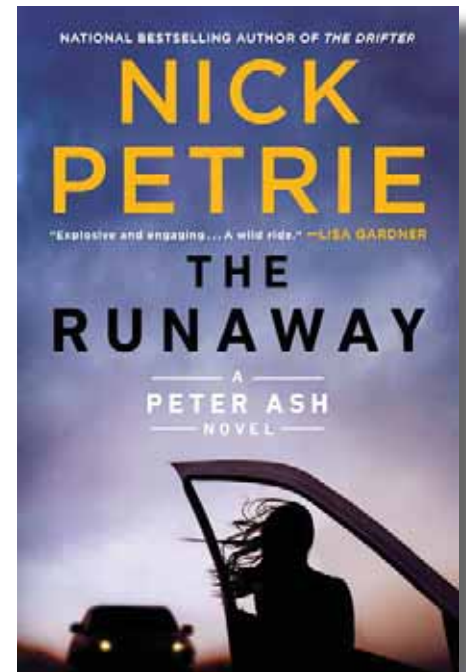
****THE BERLIN EXCHANGE**, Joseph Kanon (Scribner, \$28.00, February). Berlin. 1963. The height of the Cold War. An early morning spy swap, not at the familiar setting for such exchanges, or at Checkpoint Charlie, where international visitors cross into the East, but at a more discreet border crossing, 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**

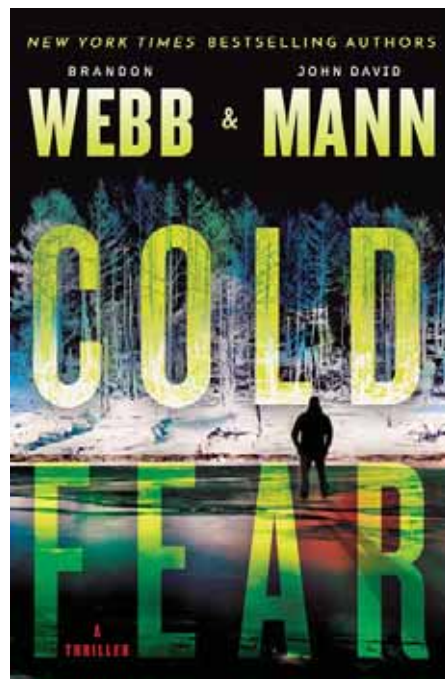


****THE INVESTIGATOR**, John Sandford (Putnam, \$29.00, Letty Davenport #1). By age twenty-four, Letty Davenport has seen more action and uncovered more secrets than many law enforcement professionals. Now a recent Stanford grad with a master's in economics, she's restless and bored in a desk job for 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**

****PORTRAIT OF AN UNKNOWN WOMAN**, Daniel Silva (Harper, \$29.99). Legendary spy and art restorer Gabriel Allon has at long last severed ties with Israeli intelligence and settled quietly in Venice, the only place where he has ever truly known peace. His beautiful wife, Chiara, has taken over the day-to-day management of the Tiepolo Restoration Company, and their two young children are discreetly enrolled in a neighborhood scuola elementare. For his part, Gabriel spends his days wandering the streets and canals of the watery city, bidding farewell to the demons of his tragic, violent past. But when the eccentric London art dealer Julian Isherwood asks Gabriel to investigate the circumstances surrounding the rediscovery and lucrative sale of a centuries-old painting, he is drawn into a deadly game of cat and mouse where nothing is as it seems. Gabriel soon discovers that the work in question, a portrait of an unidentified woman attributed to Sir Anthony van Dyck, is almost certainly a fiendishly clever fake. To find the mysterious figure who painted it—and uncover a multibillion-dollar fraud at the pinnacle of the art world—Gabriel conceives one of the most elaborate deceptions of his career. If it is to succeed, he must become the very mirror image of the man he seeks: the greatest art forger the world has ever known. **Kirkus, BL, 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



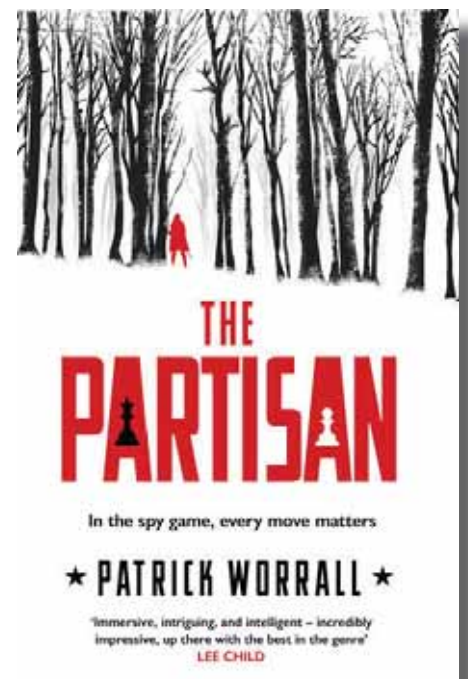
German intelligence arrive at her door. Nothing about her marriage is as it seems. She had been targeted by the Matchmaker—a high level East German counterintelligence officer—who runs a network of Stasi agents. These agents are his "Romeos" who marry vulnerable women in West Berlin to provide them with 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. **BL & DP**

****THE PARTISAN**, Patrick Worrall (Bantam Press, £16.99, June – in U.K. only). It is the summer of 1961 and the brutal Cold War between East and West is becoming ever more perilous. Two young prodigies from either side of the Iron Curtain, Yulia and Michael, meet at a chess tournament in London. They don't know it, but they are about to compete in the deadliest game ever played. Shadowing them is Greta, a ruthless resistance fighter who grew up the hard way in the forests of Lithuania, but who is now hunting down some of the most dangerous men in the world. Men who are also on the radar of Vassily, perhaps the Soviet Union's greatest spymaster. A man of cunning and influence, Vassily was Yulia's minder during her visit to the West, but even he could not foresee the consequences of her meeting Michael. **DP**



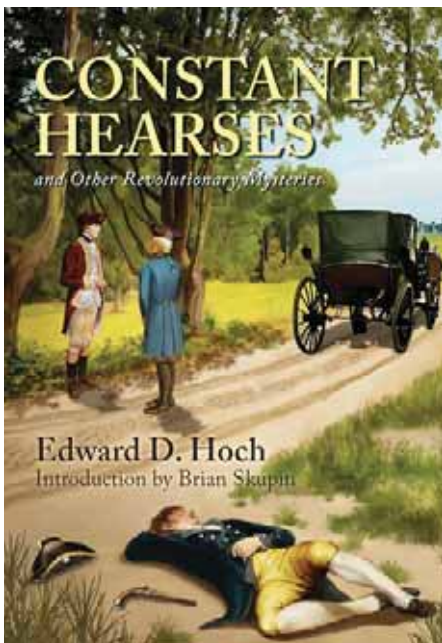
It's About Crime

Marv Lachman



The Short Stop

Edward D. Hoch created a small army of detectives in his fiction, 28 different sleuths. Crippen & Landru has been issuing collections of them, and now they've come to Alexander Swift, who works for George Washington but finds time to solve crimes too. All 13 stories of Swift are included in **CONSTANT HEARSEs: AND OTHER REVOLUTIONARY MYSTERIES**. As a bonus in this 2022 collection there are also all the stories (five) about Sir Gideon Parrot, who is very much a Golden Age sleuth.



Readers of Hoch, who wrote more than 900 stories, know he constructed fair play mysteries in which the reader is given the clues needed to solve the case. Hoch provides fast-moving, albeit com-

plex, plots in the Swift stories, but one also gets much historical background on the Revolutionary War, with real people and events., including Benedict Arnold, adding to the interest. In "The Hudson Chain" it is the chain pulled across the river to prevent the British fleet from sailing north. One of the best stories is "Duel at Dawn," in which Swift must go to New York City which is still in British hands.

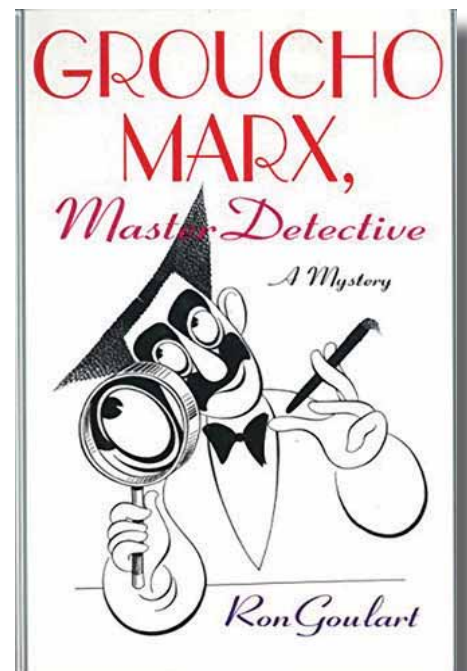
Notes on Novels Recently Read

Ever have the feeling that you are the only person in the world reading a particular book? I did while reading Bruce Graeme's **CARDYCE FOR THE DEFENSE** recently. It's not that Graeme is unknown. He was a popular writer in England, especially for his Blackshirt series which I mentioned in my last column while reviewing a book written by his son under the pseudonym "Jeffrey Ashford." **CARDYCE FOR THE DEFENCE** was published in England in 1936 but never in the U.S. I read a copy that showed its age, but it was worthwhile because Graeme was a good story teller.

Graeme created a memorable title character, Jeremy Cardyce, an elderly barrister who gave up his unsuccessful practice to use a small inheritance to become a self-styled "book worm" and virtually a recluse. He comes out of his shell when his beloved goddaughter asks him to defend her in a divorce action. (Although this book is in Hubin's bibliography, the only crimes in it are adultery and possible rape. His goddaughter is not even sure whether she *was* raped!)

There is no detection, but Graeme tells us much about the law, though I wondered that the attorneys were allowed to ask so many leading questions without objections. Graeme builds considerable suspense in the civil action. It makes a welcome change to have a case not involving murder.

Ron Goulart has written many humorous tales of mystery and science fiction, which made him the perfect writer to do a series of six books that started with **GROUCHO MARX, MASTER DETECTIVE** (1998). Goulart has also written definitive books about comic strips and detectives in pulp magazines. Groucho, aided by a script writer for his new radio program, is investigating the death of a young actress, with whom Groucho had a brief affair in the past. The police call it suicide; Groucho doesn't agree

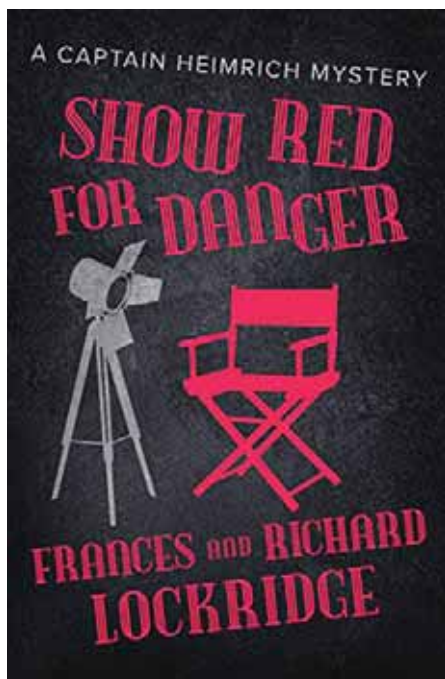


The book is set in 1937, a temporarily slow period in the Marx Brothers career. Groucho is plagued with a sponsor who would make Groucho's proposed radio show a flop. He is also pitted against gangsters who would kill even the famous comedian to prevent his success at solving the case. It's not exactly a very complex mystery, and clues and suspects are rare. However, Goulart has created punch lines that are consistently humorous, including

some that I can hear Groucho delivering as I read them.

Barzun & Taylor and Anthony Boucher raved about John and Emery Bonett's **A BANNER FOR PEGASUS** (1951). It's a book I can easily recommend, though I consider it good, not great. The setting is a small English town, delightfully named Teeple Tottering. Pegasus, a major British film company is on location there, filming an unlikely story, one that seems reminiscent of the Lady Godiva legend. Predictably, there is a murder, though not until we are half way through the book. The movie-making background is well done.

The Bonetts' series detective Professor Mandrake is there to solve the murder, but local reporter Hazel Fairweather steals the show, racing across the countryside, finding romance and clues, writing two reporters worth of copy, overhearing conversations and generally endearing herself to this reader.



SHOW RED FOR DANGER (1960) is part of the series Richard and Frances Lockridge wrote about Captain Heimrich of the Putnam County Police. Heimrich is a good detective but a distracting one, with many verbal tics, such as starting almost every sentence with the word "now." His romance with the widow Susan Faye is well handled though after a while we grow weary of

Heimrich deprecating himself. Susan is especially important to the plot, being in danger of losing both her clothing and her life in an exciting climax.

An Important clue is a fabric design and without an illustration the reader is hard put to assess its significance. The whole plot is not great, and there are too few suspects. Yet, there are some little delights in the book, including an in-joke as to the possibility of someone being indicted for murder which is described as "arrestingly improbable." For those who know New York City, there is pleasure when the Lockridges describe the local newspapers by showing how their political viewpoints lead to different coverage of the murder case. I'm not a dog lover, but I'll credit the Lockridges with creating a wonderful minor character in Susan's pessimistic Great Dane "Colonel."

Michael Connelly is human! I had some problems with his otherwise terrific book **9 DRAGONS** (2009). There is a dying message which is hard to believe. Connelly is no Ellery Queen at planting that type of clue is his mysteries. The killer has too small a role and by the end of the book was almost forgotten by me. It's obvious to anyone reading the series that Harry Bosch feels he is on a mission to eradicate crime, and Connelly mentions it perhaps more often than he needs to.

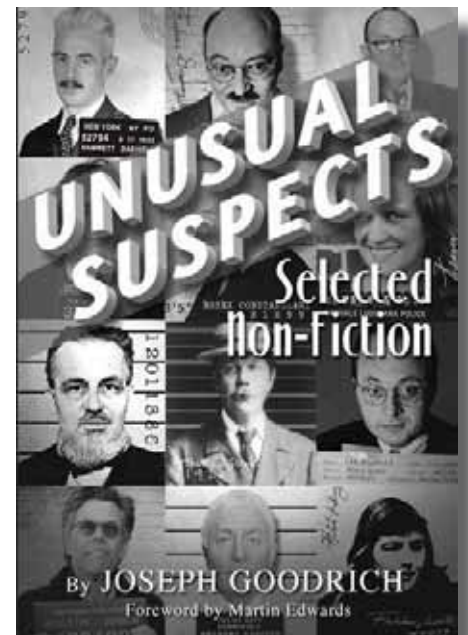
The good points in **9 DRAGONS** far outweigh the above negatives. Connelly does an outstanding job of picturing the life of Asians in Los Angeles where they live in a "cultural divide." Ballistics plays a more important role in this book than in previous Bosch novels, and the information provided is riveting. Also on the positive side is Connelly's gift for narrative drive that makes one want to keep reading. Midnight doesn't exist in the world of Connelly readers.

Books *About* the Mystery

There are millions of mystery readers. Based on attendance figures at conventions in the U.S. and Great Britain and numbers of readers of fan magazines, there may be

about 2,000 fans who like to read (or hear) *about* the mystery. That number may be exaggerated because many of the people who go to Bouchercon, for example, are would-be writers, not what can be called "true fans."

Joseph Goodrich is my idea of a true fan. He's won an Edgar for one of his dramas, and he's written other plays about Nero Wolfe. He's had short stories published in *EQMM* and *AHMM*. He's written non-fiction about the conflicts of the Ellery Queen team.



For those who love to read *about* the mystery, there are not many books available to recommend, but one surely is **UNUSUAL SUSPECTS** (2020) by Goodrich. His cleverly titled book contains 30 articles about mystery writers as varied as Ellery Queen, Dashiell Hammett, Elizabeth Daly, Nicholas Meyer, and Stephen Sondheim. There is a long article about a now forgotten writer. Derek Marlowe, that is a masterpiece of research. Taking only a few pages, Goodrich deftly sums up the life and death of David Goodis. Fascinating is his description of how he dramatized a Nero Wolfe mystery **THE RED BOX**. True fans and others should not miss this book.

My Bouchercon Report

George Easter

Macavity/Barry Awards Ceremonies

As usual, the Barry Awards and the Macavity Awards were presented during the Opening Ceremonies of Bouchercon on Thursday night. A couple of things were out of the ordinary this year. One was that Janet Rudolph was absent and asked me to present her Macavity Awards, which I was happy to do. The other was that I had asked two-time Barry Award winner (**MYSTIC RIVER** and **GONE, BABY GONE**) Dennis Lehane to present the Barry Award for Best Mystery, which he presented to his friend Shawn (S.A.) Cosby for **RAZORBLADE TEARS**. Shawn was the big winner of the convention. He won the all three Best Mystery of the Year Awards (Barry, Macavity and Anthony) as well as an Anthony for Best Short Story. He gave heartfelt acceptance speeches for all the awards but he took some extra time with the Anthony Award. When he finished, Shawn received a standing ovation, something I have never seen before at Bouchercon. He certainly is something special – a wonderful blend of talent and humility.



S. A. Cosby & Dennis Lehane

Best Panel

My favorite panel that I attended was called On The Silver Screen, moderated by Kate Melmon. The authors Karen Dionne, Jeffery Deaver, Jo Nesbo and Dennis Lehane talked about their written works being converted to movies or television. Their stories were fascinating. All agreed that it is best for authors to sit back and cash the checks and let the film producers do all the work without their input. The moderator asked the panel what was the first movie they saw as children and what was their reaction. Jo Nesbo said that when he was a young boy his older brother went to see *The Guns of Navarone*, came home and told Jo in great detail about the movie. Jo, of course, was mesmerized by the whole experience. Years later he got to watch the film himself and was disappointed. His brother's description plus Jo's own imagination were a lot better than the actual film. Karen Dionne's book **THE MARSH KING'S DAUGHTER** (Barry Award winner) is in post-production and should be available sometime next year. She has seen it and is very pleased with how it turned out. Dennis Lehane told a funny story about working on *The Wire*.

Old Friends Week

Although some of my closest friends in the mystery community were not at Bouchercon this year, most notably "Mystery" Mike Bursaw, Steele Curry and Larry Gandle (recovering from gall bladder surgery – which he has done and reports that he is fine), there were others whom I was able to see and have satisfactory and enjoyable chats with. Former review columnists for *DP*, Donus Roberts, Bev DeWeese and Beth Fedyn were there. It had felt like

ages since I'd last had personal contact with them. Bev is suffering from the effects of advanced age but is still sharp as a tack. It was also fun to talk to Al Abramson, David Magayna, Kim Krabill, Peter Rozovsky, Judy Bobalick, Steve Stillwell (grumpy as ever), Dave & Cindy Scott, David Brown and others. One subscriber of ours came up to me and declared, "You cost me a lot of money!" Then proceeded to tell me about reading the magazine and making a long list of books to buy which she does online. She then told me that she loved the magazine.

Fun Dinners

On Wednesday night I invited myself to go with friends Ted Hertel and Ted Fitzgerald, who were standing outside the hotel with S. J. Rozan. They didn't seem to mind my butting in so we walked about two blocks to Hell's Kitchen and had a very enjoyable meal. Ted has worked for years with the Shamus Awards sponsored by the Private Eye Writers of America. So I asked him about the present state of that sub-genre of late. From my perspective private eye fiction isn't as popular as it has been in decades past. But he was able to convince me that my opinion may be wrong. As we were leaving, we had a short conversation with Barbara Peters about some of her challenges in running The Poisoned Pen Bookstore in Scottsdale, Arizona during the Pandemic. Apparently getting books back and forth across the Canadian border was and still is a nightmare. S. J. Rozan's next book is a standalone co-written with another author.

Friday night was dinner with Donus Roberts, his daughter Robin and good friend Kirk Shryoc. You may be familiar with Donus from his review column in *DP*. I admire his energy and drive because, in retirement, he has created and built a very successful bookstore in North Dakota. Robin teaches high school English and is her father's out-of-town used book buyer. She had some interesting tales to tell about some of her more unusual experiences. Kirk is a relatively new crime fiction/thriller fan

and his first Bouchercon was Toronto in 2017. He's fun to be with because he's like a kid in a candy store finding great new authors to read and collect. He's quickly become one of my favorite fans to be around. He is also the Treasurer of the Bouchercon National Board.

I always reserve a night to share a meal with two of my best friends and favorite people Maggie Mason and Nancy Mitchell. They are real "foodies" and the annual meal is a result of many hours of research coming up with the best restaurants in the area and making reservations months in advance. I'm used to more mundane fare so it is a special treat (and a new adventure) to go with them to the special places that they find – and I'm never disappointed. This year it was at the Spoon and Stable, where the portions were small and therefore there was room for dessert, which I almost never had. Everything was a little different than what I was used to (in a good way) and the waiter was really, really good.

Three Authors I Was Anxious To Meet

There were three authors in attendance at Bouchercon whom I was most looking forward to meeting for the first time. They were: S. A. Cosby, Attica Locke and Jo Nesbo. I met all three and I was totally impressed. Shawn is a big man with the easy, friendly country manner of someone raised in rural Virginia. At some point during the week he commented that, if he had known he was going to win all the awards he did, he would have bought a suit. We're glad he didn't. He came across as being at ease with being himself. We saw him surrounded by a number of young black women who were clearly excited to be in his company. I hope they didn't consider themselves groupies. I wondered if I should warn them that Shawn's wife owns a funeral business and they could be easily taken care of.

When I talked to Attica Locke, she turned out to be as charming and gracious as could be. I told her how much I liked her Texas Ranger series (*BLUEBIRD*, *BLUEBIRD* and *HEAVEN IS*

MY HOME) and complained that she doesn't write fast enough to satisfy her fans. She says that she is working on the third in that series.

My only opportunity to interact with Jo Nesbo was doing some paging of books for signature. Jo speaks English very well but has a somewhat reserved personality. With such a short name he can sign a high volume of books in a short period of time.

Site for 2026 Bouchercon

Calgary, Canada has been approved for the site of the 2026 Bouchercon. I'm excited about that for two reasons other than the normal ones I have for going to an annual Bouchercon. When my father immigrated from England, he first went to Calgary, Canada. I've never been there. The other is that it is the home of Steele Curry, a valued contributor to *Deadly Pleasures*. The University of Calgary is known for its extensive collections of genre fiction, especially science fiction. A few years ago Steele donated his sizeable collection of crime fiction and spy thrillers to the University of Calgary and it is housed in a special wing. I want to visit the library and hope that Steele can arrange a tour.

Dennis Lehane

When Dennis published his first book, *A DRINK BEFORE THE WAR*, in 1994 he was an instant hit with the mystery fiction crowd I hung out with. Somewhere around the same time as his book came out Gary Warren Niebuhr



Maggie & Dennis Lehane

decided to sponsor a convention that celebrated private eye fiction and he called it EyeCon. I'm pretty sure that was the first "mystery" convention that Dennis attended. As my friends and I recognized him and told him how much we liked his first novel, I can still remember my first impression of Dennis as being somewhat bewildered by all the attention that came as an unexpected shock. Well, apparently Maggie Mason was the very first fan he met at that convention and when he encountered her at Bouchercon this year he not only remembered her by name but also recounted that early experience and thanked her for being so welcoming to the community. Maggie was walking on cloud nine for the rest of the convention when she wasn't stalking Dennis to get a picture taken with him and another with him and Shawn Cosby. Dennis' main reason for being at the convention was to support Shawn. Much like James Crumley passed a mantle (of future stardom) onto Dennis, Dennis wants to pass a similar mantle onto Shawn. There is a new Dennis Lehane novel (*SMALL MERCIES*) coming out in April, 2023.

No Real Book Spy

I was finally going to meet Ryan Steck, the creator of the wonderful The Real Book Spy website dedicated to the thriller novel subgenre. We've corresponded in the past and I was glad to see that he was scheduled to present a Tribute to Vince Flynn on Friday morning. But when I got to the panel room, he wasn't on the podium. I found out that he and his family had contracted Covid – for the third time! I felt bad for missing him again but far worse for what he and his family have had to go through. Best wishes for quick recovery to him and his family. Hank Phillippi Ryan also missed due to testing positive for Covid. We always miss her smiling face when it is not present.

Quick Takes

Saw Otto Penzler who has recently turned 80, but looks 70 and in very good shape. I asked him about a new writer of his (Mysterious Press), A. F. Carter,

whose first two books greatly impressed me. The only biographical information available for the public is that A. F. lives and works in New York City. I did worm out of him that A.F. is a veteran writer and is male, but that was it. It's apparently a tightly held secret.

James Byrne, author of **THE GATEKEEPER**, was easily "outed" as veteran writer Conrad Haynes.

Joe Finder says that he took a break from writing during the Pandemic shutdown, but he is back at work on his next novel.

Charles Todd was the perfect gentleman but it seemed to me that he was a little lost without his mother at his side.

P.J. Tracy – I haven't seen her since she and her mother won a Barry Award eons ago for **MONKEEWRENCH**. But she remembered me and I got a big hug, which was nice. Another writer carrying on despite the loss of a co-writing mother.



Karen Odden – I was asked by SallyAnne McCartin, a publicist and a friend, to make contact with this history mystery writer, which I did at the Soho reception. A pleasant and informative conversation ensued. Karen told me that Sally had given her the mission of finding me as well, so we had a picture taken of us together to send to Sally with the message "Mission Accomplished." By coincidence I received Karen's new book from her publisher Crooked Lane today. Stay tuned. Kristopher Zgorski reviews her second novel in his column herein.

Soho Crime Reception

Bouchercon usually has a round of

publisher party/receptions, but this year I only noticed the Soho Crime one. If there were others, I wasn't aware of them. In fact, there was not the publisher presence at Bouchercon this year that there usually is. I don't know the reason for that other than possibly Covid or budget considerations. St. Martin's Minotaur and Morrow were conspicuously absent. Atria, Sourcebooks, Kensington and Forge had small book giveaways in the Hospitality Suite, but that was it.

Back to Soho Crime, one of my favorite publishers. I met its publisher Bronwen Hruska and Mick Herron's editor Juliet Grames at Left Coast Crime earlier this year and I wanted to have more interaction with them and get to know them better, which I did. They have such a fine line of authors and are always finding more. Peter Lovesey and Mick Herron are perennial favorites of mine. I really liked their publication of the debut novel **SHUTTER** by Ramona Emerson this year.

Book Bazaar

There was a Book Bazaar again this year. I like this convention feature. You get a certain number of tickets and you go into a room with books stacked up on a number of tables. You pick the four books you want, hand in your tickets and leave the room with your books. It's much better than the old method of the convention stuffing the convention bags with books. More often than not, they were books you weren't interested in reading.

Connie Perry, who ran the New Orleans Bouchercon and is a whiz at organization, is a permanent employee of the Bouchercon National Board now and is charged with helping each local committee put on their Bouchercons. She sat me down and asked me to be the Book Bazaar publisher liaison for the next four Bouchercons. She wasn't completely sure about next year's San Diego, but Nashville, New Orleans and Calgary are sure things. I had this job for the first New Orleans convention and I have a system down pat so I won't have to re-invent the wheel. I'm concerned about the Calgary Book Bazaar

and getting books across the border, but we have a few years to work on that.

Two Book Recommendations from Oline Cogdill

Oline Cogdill is a nationally-syndicated reviewer and a member of our Barry Award nominating committee. Hers is an opinion I value highly so each time I encounter her I ask for recommendations. This time around she had two. She called Wanda M. Morris (**ALL HER LITTLE SECRETS** 2021 and **ANYWHERE YOU RUN** 2022) as the "real deal" and a woman who "can really write well." Her other recommendation was a first mystery – **ALL THAT'S LEFT UNSAID** by Trace Lien. I'm going to follow up on her recommendations.

Overall Impressions

First of all, it was so good to see everyone in person after what seemed like a very long time. I expected more hiccups than occurred and the convention seemed to be pretty well run. There were 1301 paid attendees, a little more than expected – due to a surge of late signees. We knew the Book Dealers Room would not have the same number of dealers as usual and Mystery Mike's absence was sorely felt by many. But I understand that the organizers tried very hard to get more and their pleas went unheeded. The hospitality suites had coffee and pastries in the early morning, but nothing else for the rest of the day. I suspect that this was due to lack of budget or publisher sponsorship, something I hope and expect will improve with future Bouchercons as we learn to deal with the continuing presence of Covid in our nation.



Editor's Message



Big News in the Mystery Magazine World. Print magazines seem to be going the way of newspapers. For many years, the big kahuna of the mystery fiction world has been *Mystery Scene*, edited by Kate Stine with the help of her able husband Brian Skupin. Many of you have seen or subscribed to the glossy, polished magazine and have admired it as have I. It has recently announced that its November, 2022 issue will be its last – unless someone buys the business and takes it over. But I think that is unlikely in this day of high printing and postage costs – and possible declining advertising revenue. I am sad to see this happen. It was a great source of information and inspiration for me. Its columnists and reviewers are top-notch. I will miss reading it while eating my Cheerios for breakfast.

Name Change for The DP List. As most of you are aware, The DP List 2022 is a list of the best mysteries, crime novels and thrillers of the year. But for those outside of the *DP* family, I'm not sure the name "DP List" is understood, so for the sake of clarification to all who come in contact with our magazine, I have decided to rename it **Deadly Pleasures Best of 2022**.

Biggest Issue of DP Ever. At 96 pages, this is the biggest issue of *DP* I've ever published. One reason is that it is the last issue of the year and our column **Deadly Pleasures Best of 2022** has grown to be quite a bit larger than it has been in the past, due mostly to my considering amazon's monthly list of the best of mystery, crime and thrillers as an added criterion (in addition to the four library journals and positive reviews in *DP*) in choosing titles for the list.

As we approach the season when critics, publications and mystery websites announce their best of the year lists, I'm hoping that most of the

titles found on those lists will already be found in the **Deadly Pleasures Best of 2022** list. Be sure to check out our website (www.deadlypleasures.com) over the next 6 weeks or so as I will post the "best" lists as I find them. Last year there were over 80 such lists. **DP** reviewers and contributors' best lists will be posted around December 1.

There will be some exciting additions to the magazine staff in the near future, but I'm unable to announce them until December. Keep your eye on deadlypleasures.com for that announcement.



Deluxe Edition of THE GODFATHER. On October 11th Putnam published a Deluxe edition of the iconic crime novel **THE GODFATHER** by Mario Puzo, which was originally published in 1969. It's list price is \$50.00.

In 2019, at the Dallas Bouchercon, we honored **THE GODFATHER** as one of the most influential crime novels of the last 50 years.

The original first edition is hard to find in an excellent condition because the black cover was made out of flimsy paper and was easily wrinkled showing white crease marks. For collectors it became known for one of the worst dustjackets ever because of this problem. It went into multiple printings and was a worldwide bestseller. A nice 1st edition, first printing will probably set you back \$500 to \$1500. Signed first editions can go as high as \$50,000 (for one signed by Mario Puzo and Marlon Brandon.)

George Easter's Best of 2022

Best Mystery/Crime Fiction Novels

DESERT STAR, Michael Connelly
 THE DARK FLOOD, Deon Meyer
 THE BOTANIST, M. W. Craven
 (U.K only)
 SHIFTY'S BOYS, Chris Offutt
 LYING BESIDE YOU, Michael Robotham (U.K only, 2023 title in U.S.)
 CITY ON FIRE, Don Winslow
 THE BLACKBIRD, Tim Weaver
 (U.K only)

Best First Mysteries

EVEN THE DARKEST NIGHT,
 Javier Cercas
 BLOOD SUGAR, Sascha Rothchild
 WAKE, Shelley Burr
 THE MAID, Nita Prose

Best Paperback Original Mysteries

THE LEMON MAN, Keith Bruton
 GOERING'S GOLD,
 Richard O'Rawe
 MAY GOD FORGIVE, Alan Parks
 PESTICIDE, Kim Hays

Best Thrillers

BAD ACTORS, Mick Herron
 THE RUNAWAY, Nick Petrie
 SIERRA SIX, Mark Greaney
 ALIAS EMMA, Ava Glass
 KILLERS OF A CERTAIN AGE,
 Deanna Raybourn

I reserve the right to make additions or changes with two more months of reading to consider.



Associate Editor's Message



In June of 2015, when Donald Trump gave his intention-to-run speech at the Trump Plaza, he said, "When Mexico sends its people, they're not sending their best...They're sending people that have lots of problems, and they're bringing those problems with us. They're bringing drugs. They're bringing crime. They're rapists. And some, I assume, are good people."

In my opinion, there are too many crime fiction novels in which the Mexican people depicted fit into Trump's exaggerated description of Mexican immigrants. The worst example I have read is **THE DEVIL TAKES YOU HOME** by Gabino Iglesias (see my review herein). There is not one redeeming character in the book. They are drug runners, criminals, rapists, killers and demons. There is not one good person among them. The book depicts a living hell. I honestly never think of Mexico nor Mexicans like that. This is the type of book that amplifies Trump's description. I found this book racist and it being written by a Latin writer makes this even more perplexing. Also the crime elements are overshadowed by the horror elements of the story.

This is a world Don Winslow explored with his Cartel trilogy. Those books are more solidly grounded in reality even though some may disagree with the author's politics. As great as Winslow's books are, after completing them, I lost any interest into venturing into Mexico again. He also has scenes of hellish violence impacting Mexican citizens. However, Don Winslow has a very good reason for writing about the violence and I appreciate the fact that the books are historical crime fiction thrillers. He has since moved on from Mexico examining crime in the NYC police, as well as, mobsters in Rhode Island.

In my mind, I do not appreciate gratuitous violence especially if one particular people and country are targeted. Crime fiction often takes place in the underbelly of a society. However, the plot will occasionally come up for air into normal society. Gabino Iglesias appears to stay focused on the most negative elements of the Mexican criminal life and does not venture into the light of normal society at all -- at least in this work. I don't ever want to read another crime fiction book about the Mexican Cartel.

Much better crime fiction novels with a Mexican setting include **VELVET WAS THE NIGHT** by Silvia Moreno-Garcia. Her books are rooted in an historical context but lack the visceral violence that impugns the reputation of the Mexican people as a whole.

On a more positive note, I have been reading and reviewing crime fiction for about twenty-five years. At the beginning of my reviewing life, I was introduced both in books and in person to multiple young writers just starting their crime fiction writing careers. Three of those were Harlan Coben, Laura Lippman and Rick Riordan. They all won the Edgar Award for best paperback original with their series. I remember I did not particularly like the crime fiction of Rick Riordan, or the ruminations of Laura Lippman's Tess Monahan. I did like the early books of Harlan Coben who had a unique and humorous writing style. There was also Dennis Lehane who was writing a gritty PI duo series set in Boston. Interestingly, all four of their careers soared after they wrote their first stand alone. I was reminded of this when recently I read that Rick Riordan's YA series is on cable TV. I know his YA books are a huge success. It is a pleasure watching these writers' careers grow. I feel like I was there in the

beginning.

George and I are excited as we enter the 'best of the year list' season. We have tried all year to keep up with what is considered the finest crime fiction. As I am writing this, Barnes and Noble just released their list. We will search the globe for any credible list and George will collate them for the ultimate list. Believe me, the best books will become very apparent when we are finished.

Barnes & Noble Best Mysteries of 2022

HEAT 2

by Michael Mann & Meg Gardiner

A WORLD OF CURIOSITIES
by Louise Penny

ALL GOOD PEOPLE HERE
by Ashley Flowers

THE BULLET THAT MISSED
by Richard Osman

GIRL, FORGOTTEN
by Karin Slaughter

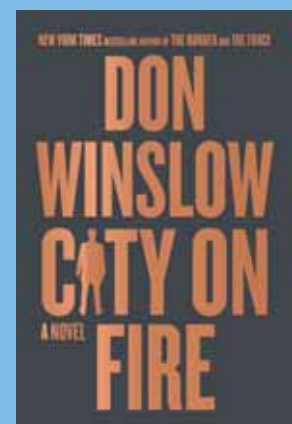
THE BUTCHER AND THE WREN by Alaina Urquhart

THE PARIS APARTMENT
by Lucy Foley

THE MAID by Nita Prose

FOX CREEK
by William Kent Krueger

CITY ON FIRE by Don Winslow



A Visit From the Book Broad

Meredith Anthony



THE INK BLACK HEART

By Robert Galbraith
Mulholland Books; \$32.00

Rating: A

First line: Of all the couples sitting in the Rivoli Bar at the Ritz that Thursday evening, the pair that was having the most conspicuously good time was not, in fact, a couple.

This doorstopper of a novel is, in hard cover, 1000 pages of sheer pleasure. If you have not read the first five books in the Cormoran Strike and Robin Ellacott series, I seriously advise you to do so. Start with **CUCKOO'S CALLING** and read them in order. Some series don't really need to be read this way, but this one profits by it. In this series, the reading experience is significantly enhanced by watching the arc of the two detectives' lives evolve over the books. But even if you dive into this as a stand-alone, it's worth the serious commitment of time.

THE INK BLACK HEART centers on a hit YouTube cartoon series, *The Ink Black Heart*, that is on the verge of becoming a Netflix movie. Think *The Addams Family* meets *Coco*. The creators, Josh Blay and Edie Ledwell, a former couple, still collaborate and are the objects of interest of a huge fanbase. Some of the stans have created a successful game based on the cartoon called *Drek's Game*. And when Netflix makes a movie deal for the cartoon, the chat on the game site turns toxic as fans target Edie Ledwell as a sell-out and troll her mercilessly. She comes to the Strike Detective Agency. Robin Ellacott, while drawn to her, nevertheless turns down the case. They don't investigate cybercrimes and they have too big a caseload to help.

She refers her to another agency. Soon afterward, Edie is killed and her partner, Josh, is badly wounded and partially paralyzed. When Edie's family and her Netflix producer come to Strike and Ellacott for help finding the identity of the leader of the bullying fans, Cormoran and Robin take on the case.

A novel of mammoth proportions with an epic number of participants and suspects make this one of the most complex crime novels of the year. I thought longingly of the days when Tolstoy's **WAR AND PEACE** was published with a list of characters along with their various titles, patronymics and nicknames. And since many of **THE INK BLACK HEART** characters also have an alias in the on-line game, it becomes a feat of concentration to keep them all in mind. The more obsessive (or smart) reader might want to keep a list. Or a spreadsheet.

The social issues that come into play

during the investigation are also up-to-date: racism, pedophilia, xenophobia, white supremacy, abelism, homophobia, eating disorders, body dysmorphia, and more.

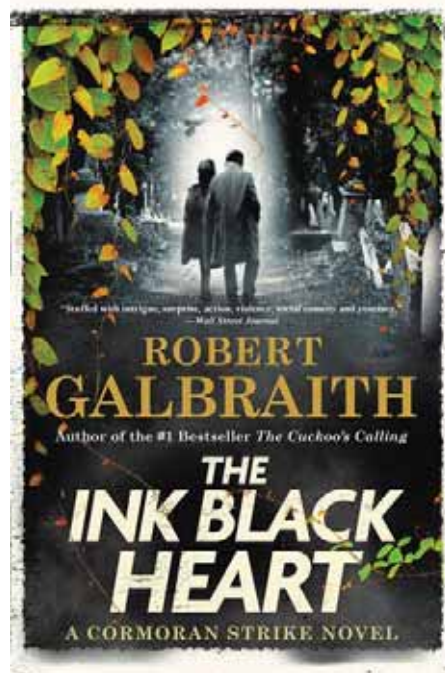
The novel's ending is satisfying and the book also advances the sliding-doors relationship between Cormoran and Robin. They never seem to be on the same page at the same time. The combination of solved murders and unsummated love is as powerful as ever.

There are many, many things to love about this series and this novel in particular. But there are a few issues and/or quibbles.

1. It seems to me it's time for writers to retire the epigraph. Use one at the novel's start, if you must, but please don't use one at the start of every chapter. It's pretentious, it's distracting, and it's just downright annoying. Christina Rossetti? No. Just, no.

2. Authors are urged to use caution when trying to update their approach to take in the latest technology. Jennifer Egan arguably started this trend with **A VISIT FROM THE GOON SQUAD** (one of my all-time favorites) and continued it with **THE CANDY HOUSE** where she posits a tech mogul who has invented a new tech sensation. More recently, Denise Mina accesses podcasts in **CONVICTION**. Now Robert Galbraith brings us a YouTube sensation, an on-line game, and various chatrooms, Tweets, emails, and messages.

3. If you must get into new tech, you will have strange formatting issues to solve. Do texts appear in talk bubbles as they do on your phone? Do chat rooms appear in timed synchronized columns, to facilitate knowing which players are in the game at the same time? Galbraith uses three parallel columns of chat



which in a hardback book, means reading down a column on facing pages then turning a page or two to continue; then going back to the start of the second column, following it to its end, then going back to the beginning of column three. I shudder to think of how this formatting plays on Kindle or Nook.

4. Revenge is not only a staple in the arsenal of murder motives in crime fiction, it is the source of much inspiration among authors, as well. I cannot help but think that the recent history of J.K. Rowling's trolling by online bullies might have something to do with the depiction of the vicious cyberbullies at the heart of **THE INK BLACK HEART**. I can only say this: You go, girl!

George's Take: I was going to write a full review of **THE INK BLACK HEART** but when I read Meredith's excellent review, it covered all of the points I wanted to make. I don't rate it quite as high as Meredith does (A-) -- just too many social media posts and a puzzling array of too many characters in the narrative.

This is the kind of novel that I suspect one will either love or hate. See L J Roberts' review herein. Followers of the series will probably love it because they are invested in the principle characters and will enjoy the interplay between Cormoran Strke and Robin Ellicott. Readers who are just coming to the series will not like the length of the book (over 1000 pages) and other aspects as we have already noted.

This is a series best read in order starting with **THE CUCKOO'S CALLING**.

1989

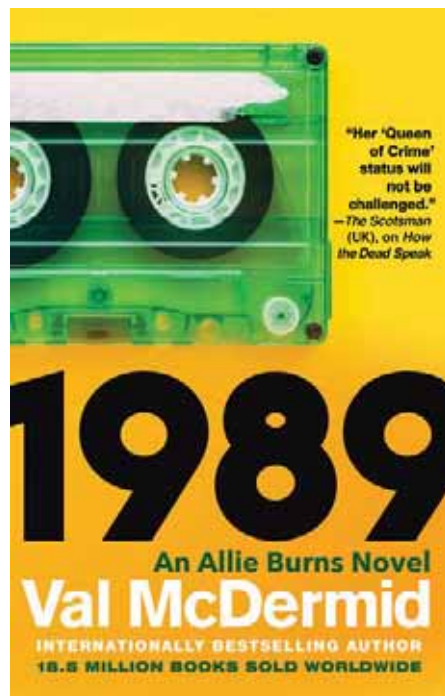
By Val McDermid

Atlantic Monthly Press; \$27.00

Rating: A-

First line: Finally the weather turned.

The incomparable Val McDermid has given us another obsession—1989, an Allie Burns novel about an intrepid investigative reporter for Scotland's *Sunday Globe*, a newspaper recently



bought by crass Rupert Murdoch-style media mogul, Ace Lockhart, who wants to turn it into a sensationalist tabloid.

Set in 1989, Allie covers all the major news of the day including the Lockerbie airplane crash, the AIDs crisis, soccer hooliganism, and conditions behind the Berlin Wall in East Berlin. But when Ace Lockhart does her a favor and demands one in return, it really gets dangerous. Allie and her partner, Rona, a features freelancer, face separation as well as personal and professional disaster.

I can't wait for the next one. I'm going to party like it's 1999!

CONFIDENCE

By Denise Mina

Mulholland Books; \$28.00

Rating: A

First line: Lisa Lee had been posting short films on her YouTube channel for a year before she disappeared.

CONFIDENCE is an exceptional thriller by the amazing Denise Mina.

Denise Mina, one of my all-time favorite authors, published **CONVICTION** in 2019, so when I received **CONFIDENCE**, the second Anna and Fin mystery, I started by re-reading **CONVICTION**. It is one of my favorite books and I had assumed it was a standalone.

I liked it even better on the second reading and recommend it to readers who are new to Denise Mina, or who like to read series books in order. (I do.) And I was excited to read the follow-up, **CONFIDENCE**.

Denise Minna is remarkable, not only for the plotting, pacing, and sheer brilliance of her prose. She is also an extremely versatile author. Her Paddy Meehan novels are charming, although by no means cozy. Her standalones, like **THE LONG DROP**, can be harsh, brutal and unforgiving. Her procedurals are richly absorbing. Her latest series, the Anna and Fin books, have it all. They are as dark and deep and complicated as any noir thriller. But they have a soft, humane core in the characters of Anna, a sometimes-suicidal assault survivor, and Fin, an anorexic former rock star. Anna and Fin team up to do podcasts and use them to investigate and solve a couple of tangled mysteries. **CONVICTION** and **CONFIDENCE** are both high-stakes international thrillers. They are also road trips, mismatched buddy movies, comedies of manners, amateur sleuths, and more.

CONFIDENCE takes our podcasters in pursuit of a fellow online denizen who has disappeared. She was an urbex, an urban explorer who goes into abandoned buildings and videotapes and narrates what she sees. Urban explorers were at the heart of a minor David Morrell novel from 2005, **CREEPERS**, not his best, but memorable for the depiction of the urbex phenomenon. Break into abandoned buildings to explore. At night. What could go wrong? Right?

When the urban explorers find a rare religious object in an abandoned chateau in France, all hell breaks loose. Everyone wants this thing, either for its value as an artifact or for its reputed religious significance. For better or for worse, Anna and Fin have the inside track.

THE DARK FLOOD

By Deon Meyer

Translated by K. L. Seegers
Atlantic Monthly Press; \$27.00

Rating: A-

First line: Captain Benny Griessel heard the racing footsteps, the urgent shout; his Hawks colleague Vusi Ndabeni calling them, come, come quickly, there's a cash-in-transit heist, happening right now.

Deon Meyer's excellent South African police procedural, **THE DARK FLOOD**, is the latest in a series about Benny Griessel and the elite Hawks unit of the Cape Town police. I had not read Meyer's previous books, but I was surprised at how easily I slipped into this one.

Translated from the Afrikaans, the book's English is peppered with Afrikaans words and slang. There is a helpful glossary at the back of the book, but most of the italicized words can be picked up through context and lend an authenticity to the narrative.

The issues in the book that impel the story include poor leadership, corruption at the highest levels, economic turmoil, lingering racial discord, and persistent sexism. Sound familiar?

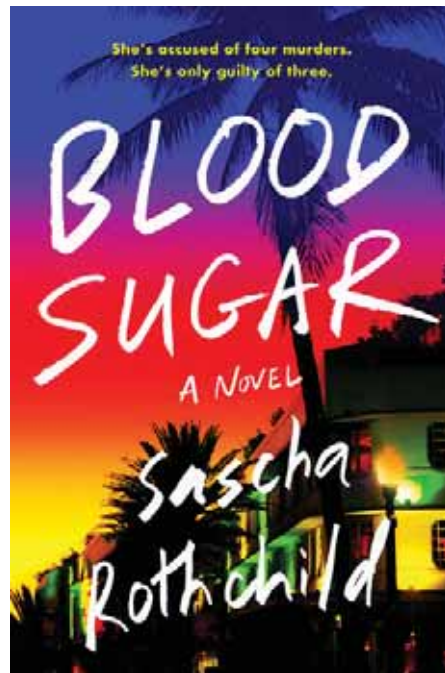
THE DARK FLOOD alternates scenes from two parallel stories. Two veteran members of Cape Town's Hawks police unit have been demoted and sent to a smaller city as punishment. Their first case is the disappearance of a college student whose mother insists they investigate even though the campus officials say kids disappear all the time and turn up again in a few days.

Meanwhile, Sandra Steenberg, a beautiful real estate agent, has mounting money problems that she has concealed from her beloved and sensitive writer husband. Offered a big commission property sale by a disgraced billionaire, Sandra can't say no although the guy has a reputation as a greedy womanizing pig.

BLOOD SUGAR
By Sascha Rothchild
Putnam; \$27.00
Rating: B+

First line: The waves weren't that big.

Sascha Rothchild's thriller, **BLOOD SUGAR**, has a great beginning. In fact,



it has a great cover line: "She's accused of four murders. She's only guilty of three." There is no way I could not read this novel!

And it begins so perfectly. It's like reading a psychopath's diary. Complete with excuses, explanations, and denials that she is, in fact, a psychopath. Delightful.

The frame story, that Ruby Simon is in a police station being interviewed concerning a murder by a detective who seems also to know about the first three, is excellent. Gradually, through the detective's questioning and a series of flashbacks, we piece together Ruby's childhood, her intelligence, family and friends, her education and training for her profession. She's a psychologist, of course.

I loved this book, but I have one reservation. As Ruby is more deeply ensnared in the investigation of the one murder she isn't guilty of, the book falters slightly. Ruby is such a strong character and so resourceful that I was led to believe she would be able to disentangle the web she's caught in and get herself out of the trap. Instead, she is saved by a friend, a man, as surely as any damsel in distress in a fairy tale castle.

The denouement is clever, well-motivated, and satisfying but I was disappointed at Ruby's lack of agency in her escape. I expected better from a psycho-

path of her caliber.

That said, it's a hell of a good read.

REPTILE MEMOIRS

By Silje Ulstein
Translated by Alison McCullough
Grove Press; \$27.00
Rating: B+

First line: That first time, his body was a paradox.

REPTILE MEMOIRS is a powerful Norwegian noir debut by Silje Ulstein and manages to be just as slow and creepy as her topic: a girl in love with a snake. Of course, she's not the first. Listen, I had a first husband who—but this isn't about me. It's about a girl in love with a snake. It's also about the snake. And a few other people, and the police who investigate the disappearance of a young girl.

Reminiscent of Vickie Hendricks' fine 1999 noir novel, **IGUANA LOVE**, it explores the brain of its damaged heroine and her growing addiction to a reptilian paramour. It also has traces of *The Shape of Water*, the ghostly, sentimental Oscar winning movie about a woman and a man-fish combination.

The novel has two timelines, two principal locations, and many points of view. At first it seems confusing but soon settles into a complex thriller with at least two crimes and many possible solutions.

Speaking of POVs, is there a new trend here or is it just a strange coincidence, but Ulstein actually gets into the head of the snake in question. We are asked to identify with a tiger python whose needs and wants and care and feeding are examined from the inside. See my review of **KISMET** for the use of a raven's POV. At least here, I kept reading. Actually, the novel would have worked just as well, and perhaps better, without the snake POV chapters. But it is intriguing to see if she can make it work and she does. Just barely.

REPTILE MEMOIRS is about actions and consequences, far-reaching consequences. Ripples on a pond. It is about guilt and atonement, crime and retribution.

The book is too long, there are a few too many characters, and there is some clunky writing that can't be written off to translation problems. Ulstein references the Midgard Serpent, a figure in Norse mythology about the end of days. You might recognize him from Marvel Comics as one of Thor's nemeses. And there are a few too many snake-related turns of phrase. "...they shed their skins..." "The flame, rising like a snake toward the sky..." "...it would be like prodding at a viper's nest." It's a writing program hack and might be fun in a classroom but is jarring and jejune in a thriller. Enough already. That said, **REPTILE MEMOIRS** is a unique thriller. It's new, it's shocking, it's dark, and it's original.

THE GATEKEEPER

By James Byrne
Minotaur Books; \$27.99
Rating: A

First line: Dez sits in a compound on the coast of Algeria.

THE GATEKEEPER is a glorious, big, silly, sly, highly enjoyable thriller. James Byrne is a pseudonym for a journalist from Portland, Oregon. My advice: quit your day job and write more like this!

Dez Limerick is former military, a Brit who roams the world playing bass guitar, romancing women way out of his league, and righting wrongs as they come his way. He cracks jokes as frequently as he cracks heads. And that's often.

After a short action prologue that demonstrates Dez's skills and his wit and his calm under fire, the book follows Dez to California where he is playing in a rock/blues/soul cover band and minding his own business. When he accidentally stumbles onto a kidnapping attempt where an armed crew attack the security team surrounding a wealthy and beautiful woman, Dez doubles down and easily dispatches the bad guys.

The plot escalates, ratcheting up from the attempted kidnapping by a zigzagging path to finally reach a world-changing geopolitical power

play. The pacing is fast and the action is satisfying. But it's Dez himself who is the main attraction here. Short in stature but powerfully built, Dez dispatches bikers, skinheads, neo-Nazis, rogue members of the U.S. military, and dozens of private security personnel. He takes a few beatings but ultimately prevails. He metes out special punishment to any who have hurt women or insulted gay men.

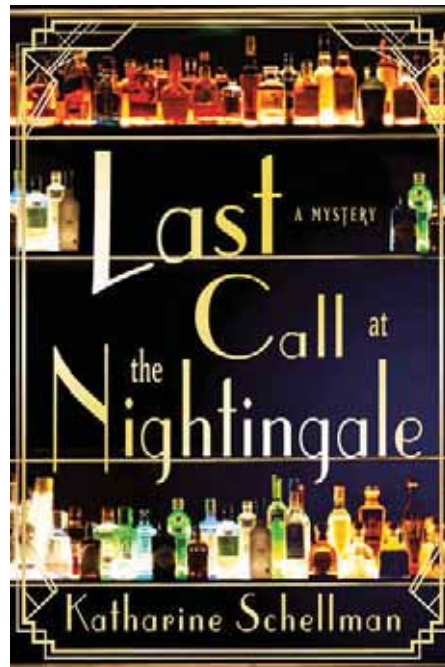
Think Jack Reacher. On steroids. Right? Actually, the comparison to Lee Child is inevitable. Courtly and charming to women, lethal to men who have aligned with far-right values, and intolerant of greedy capitalists who want to rule the world, Dez is a one-man army with an unerring moral compass and a laugh-out-loud sense of humor.

The daffy plot has just enough gravitas to keep you reading, the villains have just enough money and muscle to keep you cheering Dez on, the beautiful woman has enough brains to keep you from killing yourself. I loved this book and wished it would never end.

LAST CALL AT THE NIGHTINGALE

By Katharine Schellman
Minotaur; \$27.99
Rating: B

First line: The long, drawn-out wail of a trumpet could hide almost any-



thing.

What is it about America in the 1920's that attracts mediocre novelists like catnip to a tabby? The latest entry into this vexing subgenre is Katharine Schellman's **LAST CALL AT THE NIGHTINGALE**, and, luckily, it's not the worst.

It starts slow, it's overly detailed, and just as I was going to put it aside, it kicked into gear. It manages to evoke, if not the Jazz Age, whatever that was, but the longing of young women who end up in New York with no money and no prospects, to have fun. Whether it was the Roaring Twenties or the disco era or the punk scene or the raves, New York has always been a magnet for the bright, the young, and the eager iconoclasts who come to break the rules and find themselves.

The Nightingale is an illegal dance club, a speakeasy, where the jazz is hot and the drinks are plentiful. Irish orphan Vivian Kelly and her protective older sister Florence are barely scraping by with jobs sewing clothes for rich women and not enough to eat. But Vivian loves to dance and finds a home of sorts in The Nightingale, where there are always willing dance partners and a girl can usually get someone to buy her a drink. Unfortunately, Vivian also finds a dead body and that sets the plot in motion.

Asked by Honor, the club owner, to keep her eyes and ears open, Vivian becomes a reluctant amateur sleuth and draws some unwelcome and dangerous attention along the way.

What sets the book apart is the evocation not just of a nightclub, but of a LGBTQ nightclub in which the races mix and a curious young woman can dance with as many men or women as she pleases.

Vivian Kelly has legs. **LAST CALL AT THE NIGHTINGALE** is the first of a series.

THE MURDER BOOK

By Mark Billingham
Atlantic Monthly Press; \$26.00
Rating: A-



First Line: He watches the gate and wonders.

Mark Billingham's *THE MURDER BOOK* is the latest in his long-running Tom Thorne series and it is excellent. Like a British Michael Connelly at the top of his game, Billingham transforms the police procedural into an elevated art form by setting a puzzle, then ratcheting up the stakes, again and again.

In this one, Thorne and his sidekick Tanner are back on the job and in pursuit of a female serial killer who takes grisly souvenirs from her victims. Absorbing as the case is, it gets worse when the puppet master behind the killings is their old nemesis.

The appeals of Billingham's books are the fast pace, the twisty plotting and, above all, the engaging characters who are complex and relatable.

THE MURDER BOOK, however, employs a device that I really don't like: a prologue or teaser chapter before the book really starts that prefigures the book's ending. I'm sure it's meant to draw the reader in and keep them reading to see how the strange and baffling chapter fits in, but it's just annoying and actually condescending to readers. We don't need a gimmick to engross us or keep us reading. Just write it and we will come.

DARK RIVERS TO CROSS

By Lynne Reeves
Crooked Lane; \$27.99

Rating: B

First line: It happens in November.

Lynne Reeves Griffin is a mental

health professional who writes thrillers under the name Lynne Reeves. Not surprisingly, they often feature mental health problems or family dysfunction. *DARK RIVERS TO CROSS* is a didactic take on domestic violence, focusing on a woman who escapes her violent and abusive husband to raise her children in seclusion under an assumed name. What could go wrong?

The point she seems to be making is that if domestic violence is wrong, keeping secrets from your family is even worse. Trying to shield her sons from learning about their father's destructive nature, she tells them they are adopted. She inadvertently piques their curiosity about their birth family and sets in motion a plot that inevitably results in bringing the psychotic father back into her life and theirs.

Lena Blackwell has chosen to live in a secluded area and run a rustic resort with her sons. But as the sons grow up, they begin to have questions. All the textbook reactions to domestic violence are on display here. The victim feels fear. Check. Guilt. Check. Embarrassment. Check. She covers up the results and deceives her friends and relatives about the reality of the abuse. But the truth has a way of coming out, despite her efforts to keep it concealed. The family secrets are even more destructive than the violence they are concealing.

The main characters in *DARK RIVERS TO CROSS* compel your interest and the setting is nicely realized. But the underlying lesson plan shows through and the teachable moments jump out to slow the action.

Marred by uneven writing and a tendency to build to a crescendo and then back off, the book falters even as it educates. I think she failed the plot in favor of not being exploitative. Maybe this is why mental health providers don't usually write mysteries. Maybe they should stick to textbooks.

THE MIDCOAST

By Adam White
Hogarth; \$27.00

Rating: B

First line: Back when I lived out of

state, people always used to get excited when they found out where I was from.

THE MIDCOAST, a slow burn of a debut novel from Adam White, is more literary than mystery, but despite its glacial pace, it works.

The mid-coast of Maine is the locale and the intersecting lives of two families from the same small town are delineated in microscopic detail. Long before there is any hint of trouble the atmosphere of menace begins to build. The pace, while slow, is expertly handled and the long build-up to the reveal is remarkably suspenseful.

Andrew, a would-be writer, teaches English in the high school. He comes from Maine and came back after college to raise his family. Ed Thatch has risen from uneducated lobsterman to hometown royalty with a string of financial ventures including various businesses and lots of real estate. He and his wife Steph are raising their own family and are making plans to send their eldest girl, a star athlete, to a top college. Andrew eventually becomes suspicious of Ed's meteoric rise and starts to investigate how a humble lobsterman could amass so much.

The book frequently flashes back to their teenage years when they briefly worked together one summer, and beyond to various turning points in Ed's life. By the time the inevitable tragedy has kicked in, Andrew is ready to piece together what actually happened.

THE GOLDENACRE

By Philip Miller
Soho Crime; \$26.00

Rating: A-

First line: Ned Silver was being banged out.

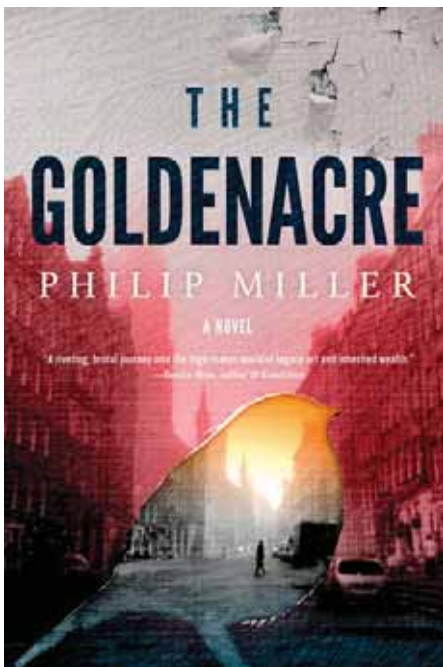
Philip Miller's *THE GOLDENACRE* is a big, gorgeous mess of a book. It is a literary thriller in the tradition of *THE GOLDFINCH* or *ALL THE LIGHT WE CANNOT SEE*, but better! In *THE GOLDENACRE*, the suspense is real, the stakes are high, and the mystery actually gets resolved. Donna Tartt and Anthony Doerr write as if they wanted

to produce a thriller but were afraid they would lose their literary credentials if they actually did. But Philip Miller gleefully risks his library card and pens an excellent thriller set in the high-stakes art world. He freely mixes actual artists and history with his own creations in this enjoyable thriller that is part cerebral and part noir.

Thomas Tallis, no relation to the composer, is an art inspector for the British government. He is sent to Edinburgh to authenticate *The Goldenacre*, a masterpiece painted by Charles Rennie Mackintosh. The owners want to donate it to a public museum and take a huge and badly needed tax write-off. Since it's been in the same family for decades, both Tallis and the family expect a speedy resolution. But Tallis proves to be diligent and what should have been a rubber stamp soon becomes a protracted investigation.

Meanwhile, a world weary and dyspeptic reporter, Shona Sandison, has an investigation of her own. A local painter of some renown has been murdered and it seems more complicated than the break-in gone wrong that the police think it is. Although art isn't usually her beat, Shona doggedly pursues the thread of the mystery. Soon the two investigations converge.

THE GOLDENACRE is a procedural by amateur sleuths. Or rather, by



professionals who are not policemen. Both the reporter and the art expert are unexpectedly conscientious, and refuse to give up even as the violence escalates around them, and the danger they are each in becomes apparent.

The writing is gorgeous, whether it's describing gruesome body parts or the lyrical beauty of great art.

THE GOLDENACRE is a rare treat—a literary thriller that delivers on the thriller end. No anemic questions linger, like where is that damned Goldfinch? Or will the big diamond ever be found in its watery hiding place?

KILL ALL YOUR DARLINGS

By David Bell
Berkley; \$27.00

Rating: B

First Line: Grendel doesn't bark when my key hits the lock.

KILL ALL YOUR DARLINGS is a serviceable thriller with an academic setting. Creative writing professor Connor Nye has lost his edge. He has lost his beloved wife and son in a bizarre accident. His students need more help and mentoring than he feels capable of providing. He is having a dry spell in his own writing and feels the pressure to publish or not get tenure. Even his dog is old and sick and needy. When one of his students leave her hand-written manuscript with him for review and then disappears, well, the temptation is just too much for him.

As is usual, when the protagonist is a professor of creative writing at a small college he finds his own writing career stalled. See **THE WONDER BOYS** by Michael Chabon (which was made into a first-rate movie with Michael Douglas and Robert Downey Junior – the thinking woman's sex symbols!). If the book is a thriller, however, the professor steals a novel by one of his students and publishes it as his own with disastrous results. See **THE PLOT** by Jean Hanff Korelitz.

KILL ALL YOUR DARLINGS is a readable, well-paced addition to this academic thriller subgenre. Experienced thriller readers will spot the suspects,

red herrings and plot twists from the get go. But it's not a bad read.

Special note to publishers: Please stop putting quotes or tag lines on thriller covers saying: "A twist you'll never see coming!" I always see them coming. Always. That doesn't mean I won't enjoy the ride. But don't say that. It's insulting and disingenuous and downright annoying.

THE BREAK

By Katie Sise
Little a; \$24.95

Rating: C

First line: I became a mystery writer when my dad was killed.

Domestic thriller **THE BREAK** by Katie Sise is a psychological thriller that almost works. I was rooting for it but quickly lost my enthusiasm. The core idea, that a smart, successful woman would suffer a mental breakdown from a traumatic childbirth experience, is the kind of literary conceit that doesn't hold up to much scrutiny. And scrutiny is not lacking here. This book is so over-written that every event, every character trait, every thought, every possibility is reported, repeated, analyzed, and rehashed so many times that I began to fear for my own sanity, as well as the protagonist's.

Actually, there are two protagonists, Rowan, a beautiful and successful novelist, and June, a beautiful and hopeful ingenue. The chapters alternate and the women are both written in first person. Rowan is a bestselling author married to a gorgeous, equally successful screenwriter. June quickly lands a dream job on her first try and a gorgeous boyfriend who is quite smitten with her. There are many other characters, red herrings all, who are described in the same excruciating detail. By the time a crime (finally!) occurs, there are so many suspects, motives, and opportunities that you just long for a resolution—any resolution. And when the long-awaited culmination comes, of course it is written multiple times with multiple solutions dangling in front of us and then cruelly snatched away. It's like *Clue*, on steroids.

Because the characters are all amazingly beautiful and wildly successful, **THE BREAK** reads like an overheated romance novel mashed up with an over-plotted domestic thriller. I think there is a serviceable novella buried in there somewhere, but it's exhausting to have to exhume it beneath the layers of fat. Books that are this over-written are insulting and condescending to the reader. Trust us. We get it. Please don't tell us again.

One last note about the unfortunate title, **THE BREAK**. Setting aside psychotic and coffee, the break that is top of mind for most of us is Ross and Rachel's. Give me a break. Seriously. Just not this one.

THE ISLAND

By Adrian McKinty
Little, Brown; \$28.00
Rating: D

First line: A crow with a skeptical yellow eye was watching her from the lightning-struck eucalyptus tree.

Adrian McKinty's **THE ISLAND** is a tedious us-versus-them mystery. A doctor from Seattle goes to Australia for a medical conference and brings his new wife, Heather, and two disaffected kids with him. They do some sight-seeing but the bored kids have their hearts set on seeing a koala. When a sketchy guy at a ramshackle beach joint offers to take them to a remote island where koalas roam free, Tom dithers a little, but with some prodding from the jaded kids, twelve and fourteen, he agrees.

This is the first in a series of poor choices. The second is trying to cover up an accident and angering the island's residents, an isolated, seedy rural family. Soon the tribe of angry Australian ersatz hillbillies is in hot pursuit of Heather and the kids.

The characters are standard prototypes, both the hapless vacationing family and the evil locals who seek to prey on them. The action is a mind-numbing series of close calls and near misses.

THE CHAIN, McKinty's great earlier thriller, had an excellent premise and a twisty, suspenseful plot. Here,

his writing is less crisp and his tired plotting induces little but yawns. To demonstrate urgency, he actually writes: "Ticktock. Ticktock." I'm not kidding.

In his acknowledgements, McKinty credits his agent for pushing the idea for this book. I'm surprised he wasn't crediting an AI program. I think if you put in the basic ingredients: dysfunctional family, angry yokels, isolated island, the program would take a minute (Ticktock. Ticktock) and churn out **THE ISLAND**.

THE ISLAND is made for TV. No, really. It's made for TV and will soon actually be a Hulu series. The characters are perhaps so blandly described to allow a wide range of casting options. The location is such a generic scrubby island that it can be shot anywhere, from Canada to South Carolina to Florida. The cliff-hangers designed for the end of each episode come with metronomic regularity. Cue the theme music. (Possibly recycling the iconic song from *Deliverance*.)

A blurb on the book's cover intones, "You'll never go on vacation the same way again." I don't know about that, but maybe you'll never underestimate a scrappy 24-year-old massage therapist from Seattle again. That's for sure.

ROCK OF AGES

By Timothy Hallinan
Soho Crime; \$27.95
Rating: A

First line: The drum solo had gone on so long that it seemed to be taking place in geological time, and there was no indication that it was nearing an end.

ROCK OF AGES, the latest in the Junior Bender series from Timothy Hallinan, is a wonderful read—the perfect combination of dark violence and smart humor.

The conceit behind the series is that gangsters, when they have a problem, can't call the cops or use legitimate PIs, so they employ one of their own. The idea is that it takes a crook to catch a crook. Junior Bender is the crook they use.

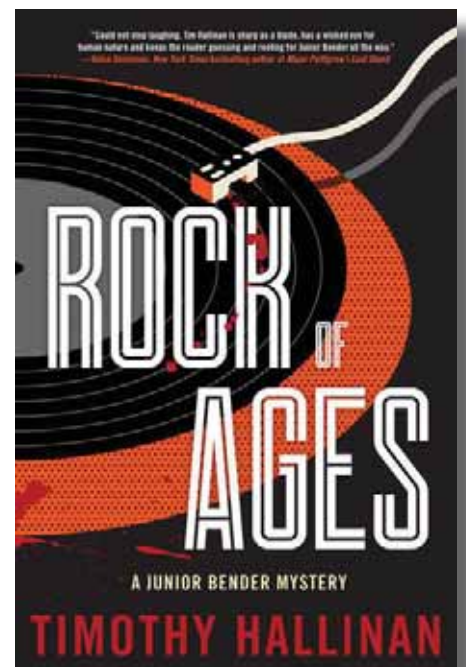
I caught up with the first Junior Bender book, **CRASHED**, and found

the origin story. A major crook sets up Junior, a very successful Los Angeles burglar, and uses the leverage to make Junior help with a complex case that involves stolen art, a drug addicted former child star, and a porn movie.

ROCK OF AGES is a more polished and even funnier update to the series. This delightful book finds Junior acting as fixer for a top Hollywood gangster, Irwin Dressler. Dressler has invested in a rock and roll oldies tour and he suspects that someone on the tour is stealing money from him. Since Dressler is very powerful and very old, he has to find and stop the embezzlement before any of the other gangsters think he's losing his touch due to age and infirmity. He enlists Junior to scout out the tour as it's about to play its three LA concerts and see which one of the four younger gangsters involved is the thief.

Junior's first-person account of the preparations for the oldies show at a decrepit LA venue is hilarious. The band members hate the rival bands and usually each other. These superannuated rockers are members of made-up bands with gorgeous names like Rat Bite, Wet Spot, and Goat Motor and the Cranks. But with little effort you can trace the bands back to their probable models from the '60s and '70s and the eras of rock, punk, and beyond.

I fell in love with Junior early on



when he quoted an obscure Spanish-born philosopher while describing a band: “George Santayana once defined a fanatic as someone who doubles his effort when he’s forgotten his aim, and the drummer was well into Santayana territory.”

Junior’s work is impeded by the presence of his delightfully snarky teenage daughter, Rina, who is just old enough to be interested in how her father makes a living. The scenes where Junior tries to talk to his daughter about his profession, torn between wanting to impress her and wanting her not to end up a crook like him, are priceless.

Also, worth the price of admission, an aging groupie named Lavender whose recounting of the glory days is irresistible. I love this series. And I love this book, in particular.

I’LL BE YOU

By Janelle Brown
Random House; \$28.00
Rating: D

First line: “You be me, and I’ll be you,” I whispered.

Speaking of cover lines—those one-sentence descriptions or teasers that appear on book covers to sell books—they’re designed to pique our interest. Sometimes, of course, they send us running for the exit. When you are reviewing books and committed to reading a lot of them, the cover lines and blurbs become “tells” that alert you to either coming pleasure or pain. For me, the words that strike fear and angst most quickly in my heart on a book jacket are these: “amnesia,” “family secrets,” “The Roaring Twenties,” “writer’s block,” or “twins.”

I’LL BE YOU is a ghastly, California-based twin book from bestselling author Janelle Brown. Samantha and Eleanor are identical twins who were so gorgeous as children that they were “discovered” and given a part (which they shared) in a TV series. Eventually, they had their own series as teenage twins. Now adults who have grown apart, they have little in common. Sam stayed in show business and is a failed

actress and frequently relapsing pill addict and alcoholic. Elli married well and has a nice life and a small business, but wishes for a child of her own, although doctors tell her she can’t have one. Then one of them joins a cult. And—wait for it—the other goes to her rescue.

It’s hard to root for either of these dull women, both of them losers of epic proportions. This grim premise is not helped by the bad overwriting. Each twin is depicted in minute detail. Every character flaw is delineated and every bruise prodded and poked. Psychologic details are mined over and over again. The author seems to actually hate women. The two protagonists, their feckless, neglectful mother, the other cult members. Even the cult is woman-led and purports to be a feminist self-help group while all the time enriching only the greedy female guru at the top. Ugh.

Strangely, after plodding through most of the book’s tedious, repetitive descriptions of these unhappy women, the book finally builds toward a crescendo of sorts—the rescue from the cult. But this single opportunity for action is lost. I know that this complaint is the equivalent of saying that a restaurant has bad food and the portions are small. But there it is.

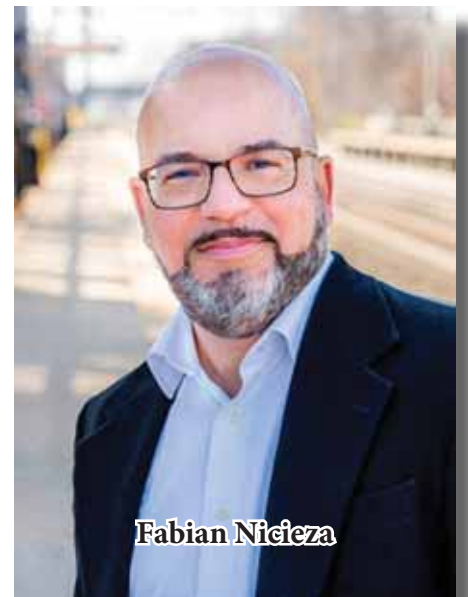
I found I was actually rooting for the evil, self-help guru. True, she squeezed a great deal of money out of her clients, but I think she deserved every penny just for listening to them whine. It can’t have been easy.

It is worth noting that one odd tic of the author’s is the sense of smell. Hardly a page goes by that does not include how someone smells—of sweat, of fear, of unwashed hair, of what they had for lunch. This is not endearing. If you must read **I’LL BE YOU**, my advice is: do not start with a full stomach.

SURBURBAN DICKS

By Fabian Niecieza
Putnam; \$27.00
Rating: A

First line: Satkunananthan Sasmal would have been the first to admit he’s had worse nights working the midnight shift at his uncle’s Valero station.



Fabian Niecieza’s **SUBURBAN DICKS** (love the title) is a delicious, twisty, funny and insightful thriller. It unpacks the myth of suburban utopia (did we ever actually think the suburbs *were* utopia?) and skewers all its denizens—from soccer moms to commuter dads, from big-city-wannabes who fell short to big fish swaggering in small ponds, from bitter, entitled whites to angry immigrants pursuing the American dream and finding it wanting.

Set in a special branch of hell between Princeton and Trenton, the small townships of New Jersey stand in for all the exurban sprawls across America where the big issues of racism, xenophobia, white supremacy, and bigotry of every stripe play out every day.

SUBURBAN DICKS is the story of Andrea Stern, a brainy Jewish housewife who gave up her shot at the FBI to have a bunch of kids with a man who’s not worthy of her. Together with her childhood friend, Kenny Lee, an Asian American reporter who broke one big story and then pissed away his opportunity at big time journalism, they investigate a crime. Kenny was in love with Andrea when they were children and maybe still is but that doesn’t help their uneasy partnership as they try to solve a homicide in their suburban patch. It also doesn’t help that Andrea is enormously seven months pregnant with her fifth, and that the FBI man she enlists to help out is the gorgeous hunk who got

away back in college.

It's a first novel by comic book writer Fabian Nicieza who is one of the brains behind the brilliant *Deadpool* and other Marvel hits.

By turns hilarious, poignant, socially relevant, and pleasantly twisty, **SUBURBAN DICKS** is a must read for its improbable characters, pitch-perfect setting, and satisfying resolution. If you like your thrillers smart, with a side of humor, this is for you. I adored it.

KISMET

By Amina Akhtar

Thomas & Mercer; \$24.95

Rating: Not rated; not finished

First line: The sound of the shovel hitting yet another rock made her shudder.

Most readers have a limit, a benchmark when deciding to read a new book. For some, it's the first line or first paragraph or first chapter. For many it's the first 50 pages or first 100. For me, it's birds. In the case of **KISMET** by Amina Akhtar, I made it to page 65 before the birds got to me.

Ronnie Khan is a timid, orphaned, second generation Pakistani living in Queens who meets a rich, beautiful wellness coach named Marley. Marley persuades Ronnie to sell her family home and move with her to Sedona which is famous for its large and active community of healers, clairvoyants, psychics, crystal sellers, Tarot card readers, yoga instructors and other New Age types. On one of her first cleansing hikes in Arizona, Ronnie stumbles on a dead body.

The point of view switches between Ronnie, Marley, and several others, including the unnamed killer. Some chapters are written from the POV of some of the large, black ravens that frequent the area.

Now I don't mind getting in the heads of the heroine, her off-kilter friend, the murderer, and assorted local nut jobs and red herrings, but when I'm asked to get in the heads of the local birds, I draw the line. The term bird-brain comes to mind. Apologies to Poe.

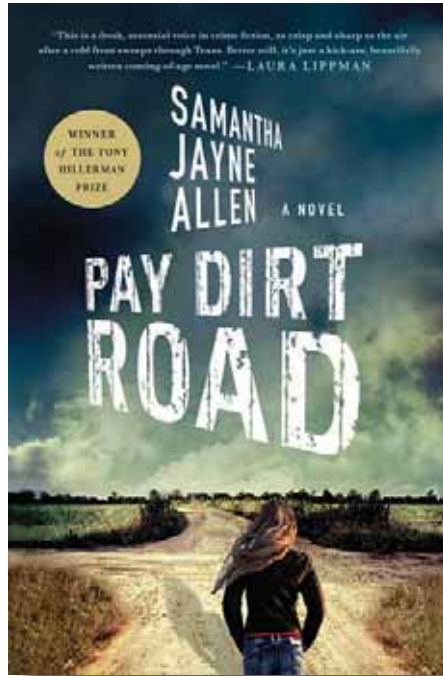
Read it if you want to. I'm out of here.

PAY DIRT ROAD

By Samantha Jayne Allen

Minotaur; \$27.99

Rating: A



First line: At night we rode up to the old railroad tracks on the west side of town, turned the headlights off, and waited for the dead to appear.

The very well might be the sleeper book of the year. **PAY DIRT ROAD** is a debut novel by Samantha Jayne Allen and it is a powerhouse. An instant classic, it resonates far beyond its small-town Texas setting and sits in the sweet spot between mystery and literary fiction.

Annie McIntyre, back in her small town after going away for college, is waiting tables in the local diner and trying to decide what to do with her life. When a fellow waitress goes missing, she feels a growing need to find her and find out what happened.

Annie has an extensive family and each one seems to have a different reason for wanting her to stay away from the investigation. But when the waitress turns up dead and a fellow employee is suspected of her murder, Annie can't stop her search, no matter how dangerous it becomes.

No description of the plot, however, can prepare you for the impact of this novel. Allen's writing swoops and soars. The town comes alive. The threads of the story tangle and knot. Annie's feelings, her longing to accomplish something, to do something, be somebody, break through with aching ferocity. The tug of home and kin. The lure of the unknown and its possibilities. She's at the verge of a decision that will change her life. I suspect all readers will relate and be transported back to the life-changing fork in their own road.

The combination of age-old small-town tropes and up-to-the-minute issues is irresistible.

We'll have to invent a new term. Literary mystery is too small. This is a big achievement. A book to recommend, to reread, to savor. Read it. You've hit Pay Dirt.

Anthony Award Winners 2022

Best Mystery Novel

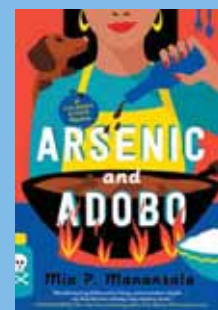
RAZORBLADE TEARS
by S.A. Cosby

Best First Mystery Novel

ARSENIC AND ADOBO
by Mia P. Manansala

Best Paperback/EBook/ AudioBook

BLOODLINE by Jess Lourey



Central Booking

Kristopher Zgorzki



UNDER A VEILED MOON

by Karen Odden
Crooked Lane Books, \$29.99
Inspector Corravan #2
Rating: B

With **UNDER A VEILED MOON**, the second in her Inspector Corravan series, Karen Odden weaves together political unrest and societal flaws to craft a page-turning historical mystery.

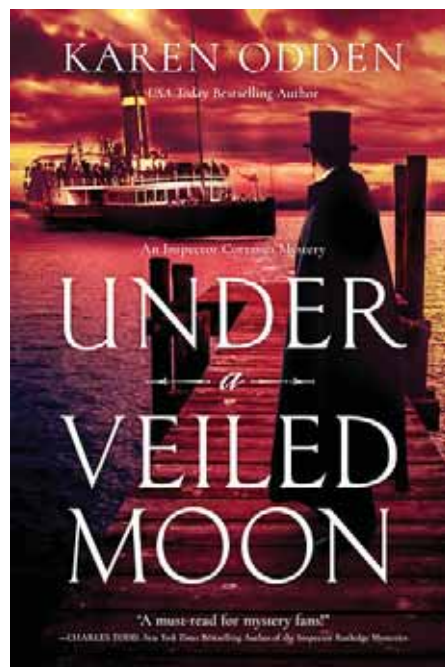
On an evening in September of 1878, London is shaken to its core by a horrific maritime disaster upon the Thames. Was it an accident or a well-orchestrated assault by a fringe political group out of Ireland? The investigation into the incident places Inspector Michael Corravan right in the middle of a personal quandary. Between his Irish heritage and his loyalty to Scotland Yard, Corravan must find a way to navigate the personal, professional, and political ramifications without sacrificing his own integrity.

Centering the crime in the novel around the Irish Republican Brotherhood (IBS) was an inspired choice that allows Karen Odden to reveal more of Corravan's past, including his special bond with the Irish Doyle family who adopted him as one of their own and the many choices – not all of them admirable – that he has made across the years. Once again, his “lady-friend,” Belinda Gale proves to be just as formidable as Corravan, further elevating their complex relationship in the eyes of the reader.

Fans of methodical police procedurals will be impressed with Odden's careful and precise plotting. Couple that with the authentic period details that make the setting as interesting as the plot itself, not to mention the many believable characters readers will instantly

feel attached to and you have all the ingredients for some damn fine historical crime fiction. The heart and humanity of all the players in this tale are presented on the page allowing the reader to feel as though they have been embraced by a comforting hug, despite the fact that murder and a real-life tragedy form the backbone of what Karen Odden presents in *Under a Veiled Moon*.

Historical fiction is at its best when readers can relate to the goings-on in personal ways. The prejudice and hateful rhetoric surrounding the Irish immigrants in the United Kingdom during this period feels all too relevant as the world witnesses the appalling treatment of refugees around the world – and around our corners – on the daily news. Books like **UNDER A VEILED MOON** can cause readers to reflect on modern societal ills without the heavy-handedness being hurled at them like grenades from all directions in the real world.



Due to the multiple strands of storytelling, Karen Odden is able to plant enough seeds for growth in future novels to ensure that the Inspector Corravan series continues for many years to come.

HIDE

by Kierstan White
Del Rey, \$27.00

Rating: B

Kiersten White's **HIDE** can be read on two vary distinct levels: as a thrilling adventure story with horror elements or as a subtle commentary on the horrors of modern society. The fact that both readings work equally well is a testament to Kiersten White's skill as an author and the strength of the clever literary conceit which forms the core of the novel.

On the surface, the plot seems simple enough. Fourteen participants agree to play a game in order to win \$50,000. The goal of the competition is to stay hidden for seven days in an abandoned amusement park. Every evening, the contestants will gather at the homebase for rest and a chance to fortify their supplies. From dawn to dusk, the contestants must evade the “seekers” in any way they choose – such as hiding alone, running around, sabotaging others, or maybe by forming an alliance. The rules are just that simple, but there can only be one winner. Once a player is “found,” they are out of the game.

What the contestants do not know, is how—or maybe why—they were chosen to participate in this unique competition. It is a diverse group with varied backgrounds. A graffiti artist, a fitness instructor, a social media influencer, a writer, a gas station attendant, a military veteran, a salesman, and more. The reader's strongest connection is with Mackenzie Black, aka Mack, a young adult “nobody” living in a group homeless shelter. What the other contestants don't know is that Mack has survived before. She is that Mackenzie Black, the one whose father went on a now infamous killing spree killing his entire family, except for Mack who was able to hide until the police arrived. Some

might view that as an unfair advantage, but for Mack it was—and is—just a matter of survival.

At the last minute, just prior to the start of the game, the participants are also told that if they can locate a leather-bound book hidden within the dilapidated amusement park rides and detritus left with years of un-use, they will be eligible for an additional advantage. They are not told that this book holds the key to the mythology that surrounds the land on which the Amazement Park, as it was once called, was built.

The social commentary aspects of **HIDE** are harder to explain; they are best experienced within context while reading the book. Suffice to say, in many ways, the participants of the game are outcasts, denied the privilege bestowed upon others. It is a look at how there are always monsters out there in the world seeking to devour us – and how sometimes that monster is us.

Kiersten White has crafted an extremely tight story in **HIDE**. The book clocks in at less than 240 pages, adding to the feeling that it must be consumed as quickly as possible. White dispenses with the tradition of having chapters and instead only orients the reader by highlighting the start of each day of the competition, adding to the countdown aspect of the novel. Once the book is discovered, readers are given glimpses of the diary entries it contains, helping to reveal the truth of what this competition is all about.

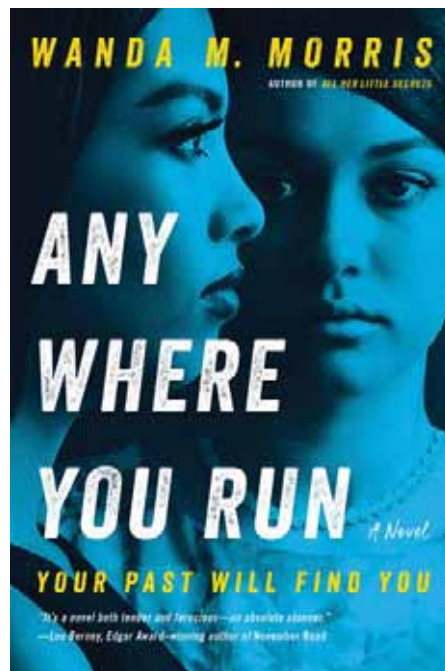
Kiersten White's **HIDE** is a memorable reading experience and should appeal to fans of many different genres.

ANYWHERE YOU RUN

by Wanda M. Morris
Morrow, \$28.99

Rating: A+

When Wanda M. Morris released her debut novel—a contemporary thriller set in and around a Georgia law office called **ALL HER LITTLE SECRETS** – she quickly became a critical darling, a fan favorite, and a multi-award-nominated and multi-award-winning juggernaut. Anticipation was high for this talented author's next novel.



Understandably, many readers expected another contemporary thriller with legal themes, but Wanda M. Morris refused to take the expected or easy route and this week is releasing **ANYWHERE YOU RUN**, a historical novel set in the Jim Crow South featuring two strong and unforgettable female lead characters literally running for their lives. Rest assured, *Anywhere You Run* is every bit as good as that stunning debut novel, and in many ways Wanda M. Morris has exceeded some very-high expectations.

Set in 1964, **ANYWHERE YOU RUN** begins with two sisters—Violet and Marigold Richards—who reside in Jackson, Mississippi. Life there isn't easy, but it is familiar. But when Violet is brutally assaulted and the man responsible ends up dead, she knows she must flee, leaving both her home, and more importantly, her sister. Leaving in the middle of the night with the man she loves, a white man, the two plan to head North, where the color of Violet's skin, and their forbidden mixed-race love, will supposedly be less of a detriment. However, when Violet unexpectedly finds herself in Chillicothe, Georgia—familiar to readers as an important location in **ALL HER LITTLE SECRETS** – she decides to change her name and stay there awhile. Violet meets some local residents who embrace her, along with a few who just see her as another

potential maid around town, but the small community begins to feel like a home of sorts.

Meanwhile, back in Mississippi, Violet's older sister Marigold is hoping to make a difference in the world. With aspirations of going to law school, she currently works for the Mississippi Summer Project – an advocacy group working towards civil rights for all citizens. Marigold has just discovered she is pregnant, and when the hopes that the father will step up to his obligations are dashed, she finds herself floundering. Now with her sister accused of murder—not to mention gone—Marigold decides it is time that she left as well, heading to Washington, DC, where she hopes that Violet will someday join her.

The strength of **ANYWHERE YOU RUN** rests squarely on the shoulders of these two sisters. Wanda M. Morris has crafted two distinct and fleshed-out characters with whom readers will immediately bond. Despite the historical time period of the novel, readers will know women like Violet and Marigold in their present day lives. Women to be admired and respected for so many reasons, not the least of which is their overall moral fiber and inner strength. Both sisters serve as narrators for their own portions of the story and readers will commiserate in their ache to be reunited.

ANYWHERE YOU RUN is also a thriller, so readers need a villain. Well, to be clear, there are many villains in this story—one of them being society itself—but to help with the forward momentum of the novel, Wanda M. Morris creates Mercer Buggs, a man hired to track down Violet and bring her back to Mississippi to face some sort of reckoning, though Mercer is unclear what that really means. He just needs the money to take care of his family and will do whatever it costs to make that happen. Mercer gets point-of-view chapters of his own, and while his struggles are real, readers will continue turning the pages quickly in hopes that Violet is able to evade this danger hot on her heels.

No review of **ANYWHERE YOU RUN** would be complete without a mention of the historical accuracy which

Wanda M. Morris imbues throughout the novel. This is an author who knows her stuff when it comes to the Jim Crow laws and their effect on community. Wanda M. Morris refuses to sugarcoat reality to ease the delicate sensibilities of some readers and the book is stronger because of it. Each of the locations in the novel is authentically depicted and Morris instinctively knows just when to include some telling period detail(s) that help to keep readers rooted in the past. Now that fans know she can write both contemporary and historical thrillers, the excitement to see what Wanda M. Morris creates next is higher than ever. Somehow, I think she will once again meet and exceed any and all expectations.

1989

by Val McDermid

Atlantic Monthly Press, \$27.00

Allie Burns #2

Rating: A

With **1989**, Val McDermid continues her latest series starring Allie Burns. In this unique sequence of novels – each set ten years after the previous entry – McDermid chronicles the life of journalist Allie Burns as she navigates the ever-changing landscape of the newspaper industry, highlighting major landmark events in both her home country of Scotland and the world at large.

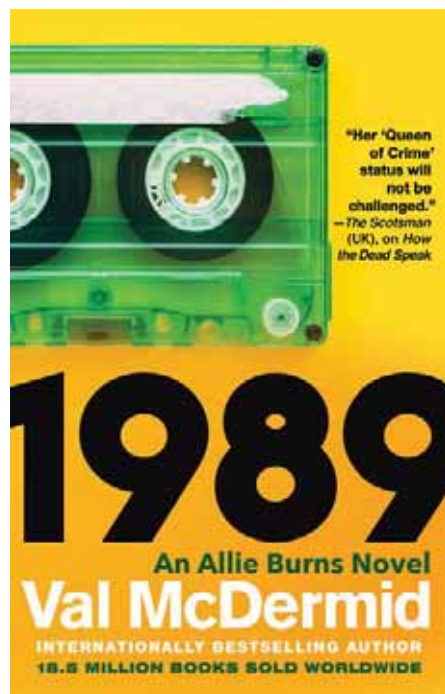
Following the documented events in **1979**, Allie Burns and her girlfriend, Rona Dunsyre, have relocated from Glasgow to Manchester to begin their lives together as a couple. Allie has given up her job as an investigative journalist to oversee a contingent of freelancers for a tabloid newspaper despite her belief that the Sunday Globe is more interested in sensationalism and gossip than hard-hitting news stories.

1989 begins with Allie Burns covering the memorial service for the families devastated by the recent Lockerbie bombing and ends with Allie uncovering a horrific scandal decades in the making – with stops along the way that expose corruption in the field of AIDS research, the crumbling of the Eastern Bloc, and the senseless tragedy that

occurred at Hillsborough Stadium (to name just a few.) Both Allie and Rona are working for Wallace ‘Ace’ Lockhart – a Rupert Murdoch-like media mogul who once lost everything, built himself back up to legendary status, and will now protect his business – and family – at any cost.

Unlike most crime novels, **1989** isn’t interested in following just one case from beginning to end. This is a series where the true strength of the whole is fashioned from the interconnectedness of smaller pieces – a look at how society is altered not only by seismic events, but also by smaller seemingly innocuous choices. Allie Burns serves as the reader’s metaphorical Yellow Brick Road, leading them down a path that is fascinating, flawed, and ultimately redemptive.

Only a prodigious talent like Val McDermid would risk dropping a murder in the final seventy pages of a novel and then follow it up with a compelling investigation, several unexpected revelations, and a thoroughly cathartic conclusion. Lesser authors would have built an entire novel around that death and still not have managed to grab the reader’s attention and elicit such emotion from the proceedings. This is how one knows they are in the hands of a master of her craft.



In a fitting tribute to McDermid’s own past, **1989** contains multiple references to the expanding proliferation of female-led PI novels that inspire not only Allie Burns in the book, but also Val McDermid in real life. As she did in **1979**, Val McDermid also provides a playlist of music designed to transport readers back to the late-‘80s.

Now that **1979** and **1989** have been released, Val McDermid’s Allie Burns series is shaping up to be one of crime fiction’s greatest achievements – both ironic and fitting for a sequence of novels that might not even exist were it not for the worldwide Covid pandemic. Fans will be hanging on tenterhooks waiting to see what Allie Burns’ life looks like in **1999**, **2009**, and the final book in the series, **2019**. What everyone can agree on is that Val McDermid is most definitely the “wielder of the pen” we want to take us there.

THE OTHER SIDE OF NIGHT

by Adam Hamdy

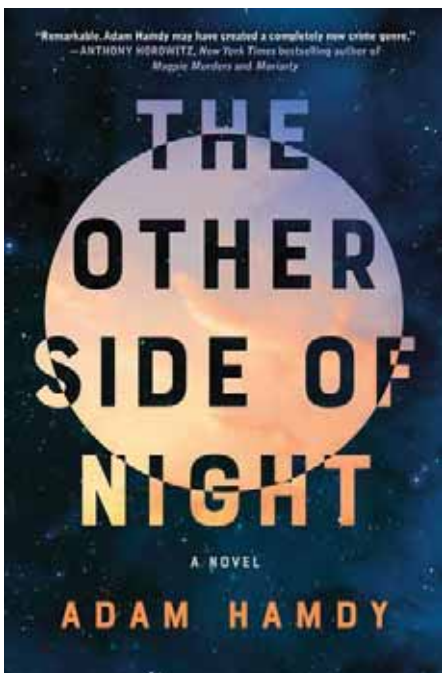
Atria, \$27.00

Rating: A+

Adam Hamdy’s **THE OTHER SIDE OF NIGHT** is one of those rare books that is truly unclassifiable, which means that it is also the perfect book to be Exhibit A in any discussion of why the whole concept of categorization is illogical, reductive, and ultimately pointless. A novel can be – and likely is – many things at once; and what that meaning is to each reader will vary vastly. Nowhere is this more evident than with **THE OTHER SIDE OF NIGHT**.

David Asha was last seen stepping off the cliffs of the Peak District. Most assumed he was overwhelmed by the loss of his wife, but why would he choose to leave his young son parentless? Harriet Kealty is a discredited police officer, not because of what she did, but rather because she is unable to prove what she did not do. Linking these two lives together is Ben Elmys. Ben is Harri’s ex and an old friend of the Asha family who now serves as the caretaker for David’s son, Elliott.

A cryptic note written in the margins of a secondhand book lead Harri



down an audacious path that is both frightening and comforting in equal measure. Is this message an indication of murder? Or might it mean something completely different?

There are at least three stories at play here. David Asha's decision to write a book about his greatest regret – his separation from his son. Harriet's police work – both past and present. And Ben Elmys' guardianship of Elliott – and the secret he shares with the boy which changes everything.

Spoilers would be impossible to avoid by going any deeper into this story. **THE OTHER SIDE OF NIGHT** is best consumed with as little expectation and foreknowledge as possible. This is not the story it seems to be from the start, but it will be the story you need by the end. I use "you" here intentionally because **THE OTHER SIDE OF NIGHT** is a book that will have very personal ramifications for each reader, but those effects will be different depending on the life led by each particular reader.

Adam Hamdy's prose elevates what is already a very lofty novel to incredible heights – at times feeling like poetry. Along with the standard viewpoints expected, *The Other Side of Night* includes transcripts from a trial, extracts from a book, journal entries from multiple sources, private letters meant for specific eyes only, and so much more.

THE OTHER SIDE OF NIGHT is a mystery in the sense that life is a mystery. Sure, there is a crime to be solved, but what really matters is the metaphysical quandaries that surround the core. It will be a rare reader who can get to the end without some type of deep emotional reaction – perhaps wonder, sadness, confusion, love, delight, awe, empathy, envy, or fear. More than likely, it will be a combination of some or all these core emotions and countless ephemeral asides as well. It's a mystery; it's a love story; it's a tragedy; it's a thriller, an adventure, and a quest. It is all of that and none of that.

Make no mistake, **THE OTHER SIDE OF NIGHT** is a book that is meant to heal on whatever level you need healing. A thought-provoking meditation on existence that resonates in the reader's mind long after the final pages are turned. In a true feat of storytelling magic, the slowly unfolding story must be consumed as quickly as possible, almost as though the answers will be out-of-reach if one doesn't get there fast enough. But perhaps it is in the seeking of answers where we all get it wrong. Who's to say?

Easily the most unexpected book of the year, Adam Hamdy's **THE OTHER SIDE OF NIGHT** is unforgettable – and it is more than feasible such a statement, devoid of specifics, is all the recommendation that is needed.

CALYPSO, CORPSES, AND COOKING

by Raquel V. Reyes
Crooked Lane Books, \$28.99
Miriam Quiñones-Smith #2
Rating: B

By following **MANGO, MAMBO, AND MURDER** with **CALYPSO, CORPSES, AND COOKING**, Raquel V. Reyes establishes that her Caribbean Kitchen mystery series will be delighting cozy crime readers for years to come. Miriam Quiñones-Smith and the diverse community and culture she surrounds herself with continue to bring spice and vitality to the cozy mystery sub-genre.

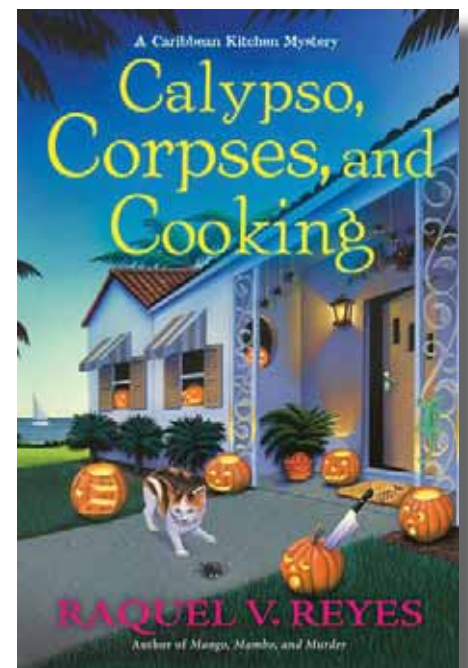
The victim ratio in **CALYPSO,**

CORPSES, AND COOKING is quite high, but Raquel V. Reyes successfully keeps the light-hearted tone and delightful fun on full display throughout. As with the first in the series, Reyes ups the authenticity factor high by engaging the reader with descriptions of the delicious Cuban food, the promise of a calypso band, and just the right sprinkling of her native language.

Once again, the family dynamic takes center stage, with Miriam's passive-aggressive mother-in-law pulling enough shenanigans to really raise the reader's ire. But the always resourceful Miriam navigates this challenging relationship with skill and style, all while leaving no stone unturned in her amateur investigation(s).

Fall is not the season most associated with the more tropical Miami, so taking readers behind the scenes of Coral Shores' off-season was a superb choice, reminding readers that all communities—even those more associated with the glitz and glamour of hot summer nights—have changing seasons and beloved traditions.

After **CALYPSO, CORPSES, AND COOKING**, cozy mystery fans will be standing in line to see what Raquel V. Reyes—and Miriam Quiñones-Smith—are cooking up next.



THE CASE OF THE DISGRACED DUKE

by Cathy Ace
Four Tails, \$15.99
WISE Enquiries Agency #5
Rating: B

The women who lead Cathy Ace's WISE Enquiries Agency series continue to delight in the fifth entry, **THE CASE OF THE DISGRACED DUKE**. Once again, the quirky and vexing citizens of Anwen-by-Wye clash, leaving the four members of WISE Enquiries to pick up the pieces and patch the conflicts.

As with the other books in the series, Cathy Ace juggles multiple storylines—and multiple mysteries—simultaneously, often highlighting how they connect to, or at the very least, influence each other. The same goes for the women of the Agency: Annie, Carol, Christine, and Mavis each have their own unique skill set, but they have learned over the course of the series that their talents work best in conjunction. Many hands make light work, as the saying goes.

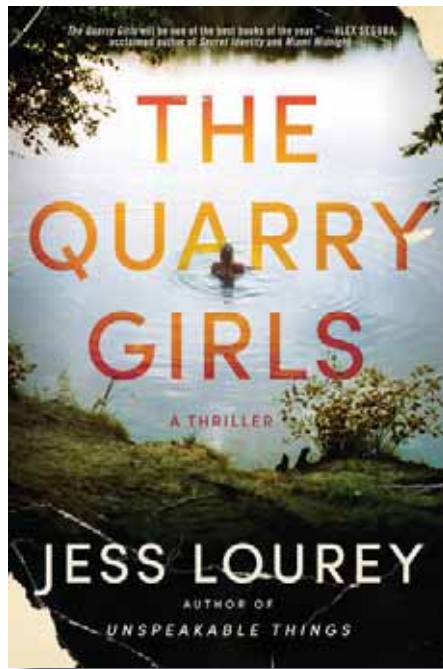
Speaking of, despite the fact that Cathy Ace's series is on the lighter side, the ramifications of such tawdry crimes often risk ruin for the Duke of Chellingworth's family and friends. With their loyalty to Althea, the dowager duchess, the WISE Agency women are determined to save the day and prevent a tarnished birth for the newest member of the family.

Fans of the series will hope that the wait for the next WISE Enquiries Agency novel is not quite as long as the wait for **THE CASE OF THE DISGRACED DUKE**, while knowing that whenever it arrives, the visit to the Welsh countryside will be most enjoyable—and likely deadly.

THE QUARRY GIRLS

by Jess Lourey
Thomas & Mercer, \$15.95
Rating: A

After writing a fun and successful cozy mystery series of twelve novels (each tied to one of the months), Jess Lourey shifted gears to write a collection of poignant crime fiction standalones



inspired by true crimes that took place in and around her native Minnesota. Unlike many novels which contain true crime origins, Lourey is careful to make sure she is not sensationalizing the events and chooses to center her works on the victims – both those directly affected and those whose lives are altered simply by their proximity to such traumatic criminality – and in doing so, elicits empathy from the reader while successfully telling gripping and original narratives. **THE QUARRY GIRLS** is the latest of these true crime-inspired novels and it just might be Jess Lourey's best work yet.

St. Cloud Minnesota in the late 1970s has the small-town rural feel parents seek out when looking for a place to raise their families, but some small towns also harbor secrets. Jess Lourey's depiction of Pantown brings the area to life with all the vivid detail and menacing ambiance needed to keep the reader turning the pages. The town – like its citizens – always seems on the cusp of extinction, with secrets buried deep and danger around each corner.

When her friend Maureen fails to arrive at the party she promised to attend, Heather and her circle of friends all fear the worst, but no one else seems to care. After all, teens run away all the time. But when Heather and Brenda see something – something they can never

tell anyone else – the trajectory of their lives are forever altered. As young girls around Pantown continue to go missing, Heather realizes that the safety of her younger sister lies squarely in her hands alone. And when Heather puts her mind to something, she never goes down without a fight.

What happens when children are forced to grow up too fast, when every adult around them fails in their duty to protect and comfort? The coming-of-age story for Heather is one of resilience, self-confidence, and skepticism; but it is also a warning for parents, a beacon to other young girls in distress, and a spotlight on society's shortcomings.

Like **UNSPEAKABLE THINGS** and **BLOODLINE**, Jess Lourey's **THE QUARRY GIRLS** is ultimately a morality tale – almost a dark fairy tale except that the plots are rooted in reality and the danger is all-too-real. The sad fact is that there is no shortage of past crimes to prompt Jess Lourey's creative mind, but readers can rest easy knowing that this author will approach every idea with deep reverence for the victims and a goal of providing a healing and heartfelt journey – for both the characters and their readers – within the pages of some truly exceptional crime fiction.

Best Books of 2022

If this is a subject that interests you, be sure to check the **Deadly Pleasures** website: www.deadlypleasures.com over the next six weeks starting on about November 15th.

I will be posting a number of Best Mystery, Crime Novel and Thriller lists over that period of time. Larry and I get a real kick out of doing this so that we can refer the very best to you.

If you come across such a list that I haven't posted yet, please contact me at george@deadlypleasures.com

From The Waterfront

Ted Hertel



THE GOODBYE COAST

by Joe Ide

Mulholland Books, \$28.00, February

Rating: B

Present day Los Angeles. Twenty-nine-year-old private investigator Philip Marlowe is on the case – or rather on the cases. Fading movie star Kendra James (“She looks like Grace Kelly without the grace”) has hired him to find her runaway step-daughter, seventeen-year-old Cody. Cody’s dad had been murdered on the beach in front of their Malibu home six weeks earlier and now the girl was gone. It doesn’t take Marlowe long to track her to her boyfriend’s home in a seedy area of L.A., where he manages to prevent her from being shot by an assailant. The suspicious Marlowe stashes her with his cop father while he investigates who is trying to kill her and why. Meanwhile he gets hired by Ren Stewart, who has flown in from London, to find her son who has been taken by her husband, the boy’s father. Two new cases, two missing kids, and two lying clients add up to two very dangerous problems for Marlowe involving the rich and famous, the Armenian mob, drugs, murder, and a most difficult relationship with his dad.

The first question I have to ask is “why?” Why “update” Philip Marlowe? Why bring him into 2022 as a young man? Unfortunately, I don’t have the faintest idea. There is little, if anything, here that reminds me of Raymond Chandler’s iconic creation. Yes, the book is set in Los Angeles, but for me that was about it. There was some wise-cracking, sure, but nothing about that distinguished this Marlowe version from any other smart-mouthed P.I.

There have been a number of other attempts at post-Chandler Marlowe stories. Two come to mind immediately. In the early 1990s Robert B. Parker finished Chandler’s *Poodle Springs*, then wrote his own authorized Chandler novel, *Perchance to Dream*. In 2018 Lawrence Osbourne’s *Only to Sleep* was set thirty years earlier with a 72-year-old Marlowe—age pretty much appropriate—on what might be his last case. But it was Chandler’s writing that set his novels (only seven completed) apart from other writers. Filled with wild metaphors and told in atmospheric language, the stories dripped authenticity. There’s very little of that here, I’m sorry to say.

What is here, covered over with somebody named Marlowe, is a pretty solid private eye novel. There is plenty of humor (broader than Chandler’s), interesting plotting (although trying to crossover the two plots was a bit awkward), and in particular Marlowe’s love-hate relationship with his father. Unlike *The Big Sleep*, where even Chandler had no idea who killed chauffeur Owen Taylor, there is a satisfactory wrap up of both cases. By the way, if you want to know the answer to the Taylor murder, read Terence Faherty’s thoroughly entertaining novella “Sleep Big” (one of the stories in his *The Hollywood Op* collection).

So, feel free to wander down these mean streets if you must go. Just don’t expect to find Philip Marlowe walking beside you.

BAD DAY BREAKING

by John Galligan

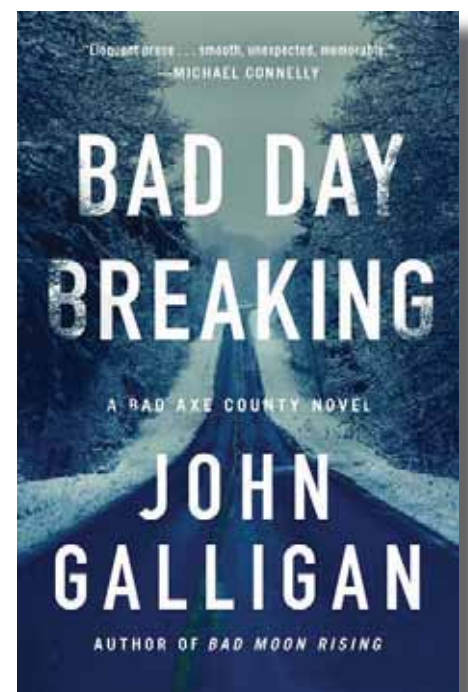
Atria, \$17.00, August 2022

Rating: B-

A strange religious cult is occupying property in Bad Axe County, Wisconsin. A group of armed citizens wants to get them out of the area by any means, legal or illegal. So when one of the cult members is found dead, floating in the river, it’s up to Sheriff Heidi Kick to investigate. She’s no fan of the cult, but neither is she happy with the locals’ angry reaction to their presence. Things only get worse when she learns, in the most dangerous way, that a violent drug-dealing ex-boyfriend she once ratted out to the cops has turned up after being released from a lengthy prison term and he’s out for revenge.

This is the fourth novel in Wisconsin author John Galligan’s Bad Axe County series. In it he explores how a wild young woman like Heidi could reform and become a successful cop. She is a strong protagonist but with a bent toward indecisiveness when she should act. Some of the best scenes in the novel involve her attempting to extricate herself from danger, including a gripping sequence early on when she is trapped in an icy river and the vengeance-seeking ex-boyfriend shows up. Let’s just say he is not helpful.

The scenes in the cult are frightening, particularly when “security” in the form of four recent parolees arrives to protect the “prophet-father” and his



wife as the group prepares to depart the town. Sexual assault and murder are rampant within the walls of the group. Galligan has created a terrifying situation for the young women there, one of whom is trying to report to a retired F.B.I. agent digging into the financial dealings of the group. Her life and those of her children are seriously at risk.

Other aspects did not work as well for me. I would have expected the sheriff to have been more decisive in her actions, rather than letting circumstances dictate what she does. She foolishly trusts someone from her drug days and it causes no end of trouble for her. All of this shows a lack of street smarts or even plain old common sense on her part. The four parolee security team came across in speech and action as a bunch of buffoons, one of whom takes enough horse tranquilizers to, well, kill a horse, but doesn't have a similar effect on him. And sadly, a lot of animals are murdered in the course of the book. The good aspects of the novel outweighed the bad but not by much.

SHUTTER

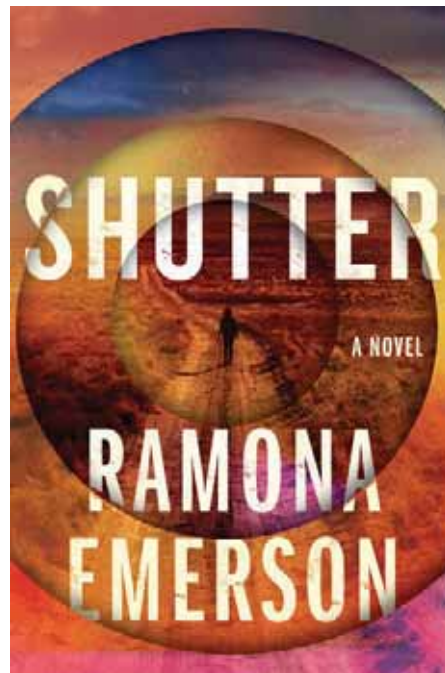
by Ramona Emerson

Soho Crime, \$27.95, August

Rating: B+

Rita Todacheene sees dead people – and a lot of them – in her job as a forensic photographer with the Albuquerque police department. She has always been able to see ghosts ever since she was a young Navajo girl. These ghosts have been able to point her to clues about their killers. But never has she been as haunted as she is now by the spirit of Erma Singleton. The cops think she committed suicide but the dead Erma tells Rita otherwise and won't stop hounding her until the photographer does something about it. Erma even brings along other spirits of murder victims to push Rita to find the young woman's killer.

Ramona Emerson, author of this paranormal thriller, is an award-winning Diné filmmaker and former Albuquerque PD forensic photographer. She draws upon her own life experiences in the New Mexico Navajo Nation to create life and death on that reservation in



this, her debut novel. Everything here is seen through the eye of a wide variety of cameras, from the simplest pinhole camera to the beauty of the Hasselblad portraiture. Frame by frame Rita brings the dead, if not literally, at least back to some semblance of life as they help (and hinder) her in finding their killers. But as her grandfather warned her, “[t]here are going to be some spirits on this side that don’t have good intentions. They will want to use your gift to do their bidding . . . they can grab you . . . or they can make you crazy.” Rita has had this connection to the dead for years and is obsessed with taking their pictures.

Rita also learns that it is not only spirits that can be evil, but of course humans can be as well. She learns from the first person account of her grandmother of the horrors inflicted upon the Indigenous people in the so-called “Indian Boarding Schools.” But Rita has her own horrors that thrust themselves upon her in the form of the murdered Erma, who refuses to let her go until her murder is solved – and it does come close to driving Rita crazy.

Emerson brings a personal sense of life on the reservation to her storytelling, drawing on actual cases she observed. The reader is immersed in Diné culture as Rita seeks justice for the abandoned and forsaken. This is a novel

unlike any other, a welcome debut that will hold the reader in suspense through to the final goosebump-inducing scene.

THE GOLDENACRE

by Philip Miller

Soho Crime, \$27.95, June

Rating: B-

Charles Rennie Mackintosh’s masterpiece painting, *The Goldenacre*, is about to be donated to the Edinburgh Public Gallery but first must have its provenance authenticated for tax purposes by government agent Thomas Tallis. A simple enough job, it seems, since the artwork has been in the same family for a century. But when a warning in the form of a severed human tongue arrives at the Gallery, and the family seems intent on making it difficult for Tallis to actually view the painting, things take a nasty turn. That, coupled with several violent killings somehow connected to the painting, makes Tallis’ work more complicated than he had ever anticipated. Joining forces with determined newspaper reporter Shona Sandison, the two must discover how the painting is intertwined with the murders before they become the next victims. Will their investigation prove the old adage that “art is a lie that happens to be true?”

Edinburgh author Philip Miller has created a darkly atmospheric novel, treading the paths of that city with its cathedrals, river, hills, pubs, and monuments. This Scottish noir is filled with quirky and not always likeable characters, though that is leavened with touches of humor (“I used to be a nihilist, but I realized there was no point.”). The morose Tallis, in the midst of a divorce and trying to rebuild his reputation, leads a very dismal life. His alcohol and drug usage were off the deep end, to the point of foolish embarrassment. While some of the plot resolutions will be obvious to many readers, it is the author’s style and sense of place that will hold their attention.

Readers interested in the dark underbelly of the art world, along with the demise of the newspaper industry, will find plenty here to absorb. Others will enjoy the setting of this lovely old city (as an example, the New Town part

of Edinburgh is already some 200 years old!). This literate but weakly plotted story should still keep readers going through to the unexpected conclusion.

BILLIE STARR'S BOOK OF SORRIES

by Deborah K. Kennedy

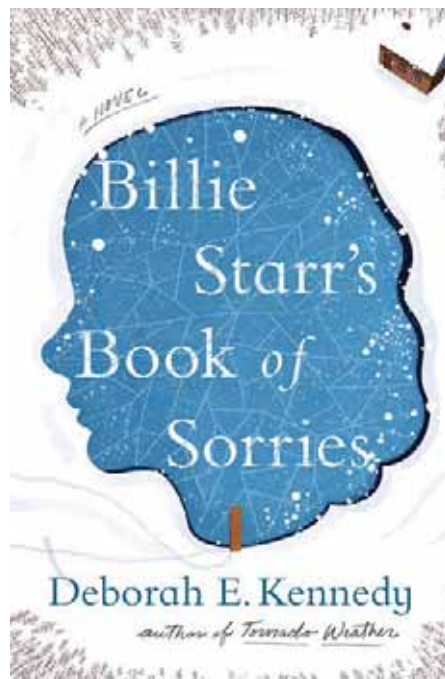
Flatiron Books, \$27.99, October

Rating: A

Every decision Jenny Newberg has made in her life has been the wrong one. But those disasters pale in comparison to what she is about to do. Hired by mysterious men in black suits, she will be paid enough money to stave off foreclosure of her and her daughter Billie Starr's rundown home. All she has to do is seduce a married gubernatorial candidate while wearing a wire. What could possibly go wrong with that? Well, first off, she should have known to get the money up front because she surely wasn't going to get it afterward. Things only get worse when the candidate decides to hire her to be his campaign's receptionist, a job which she reluctantly takes only because she still needs the money. Meanwhile, she is constantly apologizing to Billie Starr for everything going wrong in their lives.

This is Edgar nominee (for Best First Novel) Deborah K. Kennedy's second novel, one that has an underlying tone of menace overlaid with the failures and horrors of Jenny Newberg's daily life. Every page drips with the never-ending pain of her existence. Yet one cannot help but root for her to succeed, no matter how hopeless that possibility may seem. Beautifully realized characters, both good and dangerous, populate the novel, together with the melancholy atmosphere of a cold Indiana winter. Yet there is a thread of malaprop humor that occasionally breaks the tension ("Politics is a crooked game . . . in need of constant vaccination." "I think you mean 'validation.'").

Even precocious Billie Starr refuses to stand by her mother's side when trouble assails them. Every apology that Jenny makes to her daughter is recorded in the child's Book of Sorries she keeps hidden in her room. Themes of hope and trust wind through the novel until Jenny realizes that she has no one to



trust other than herself as she finally learns to take a stand against those who belittle her and use her for their own ends.

As one character tells Jenny late in the book, "Life. It breaks your heart." This book will also break your heart. But trust in yourself to have hope for Jenny Newberg. She deserves it.

THE PARIS MANUSCRIPT

by Joseph Goodrich

Perfect Crime Books, \$17.00, April

Rating: B+

Paris, April 1919. The Great War has ended and life is returning to some semblance of pre-war days. The rich are still living the high life and into that circle come injured veteran Ned Jameson and his wife Daisy. But along with them are those who would seek to profit from the wealthy, through nasty photographs and incriminating letters. When one of those blackmailers is murdered at a party attended by the Jamesons, the suspects are many, including Daisy herself. After all the murdered man's last words were "Day...Zee...." There are betrayals upon betrayals, but just who deceived whom is the question. It will take the skills of Marcel Proust, with a bit of help from Ned, to sort through the decay surrounding the killing before justice can be done . . . or was it?

Joseph Goodrich is an Ed-

gar-Award-winning playwright and he brings his skills to this debut novel, set in and so reminiscent of the Golden Age of mystery writing. Told with the frequent use of flashbacks of Jameson's reflections in 1979, some sixty years after the events of the main story, Goodrich makes wonderful use of the sights, sounds, and tastes of Paris in both 1919 and after the Second World War as Ned and Daisy return to catch up with old friends. In keeping with the Golden Age theme, Proust explains everything to all in a traditional drawing room (of sorts), methodically revealing the killer's identity. Naturally, there are a few twists the come along before the close of the story. But it all wraps up logically and satisfactorily.

Goodrich has the ability to create characters that the reader will care about, especially during the most difficult times of their lives. This is a tale of love, deception, and loss, wrapped in the memories of days of youth when death was far away.

THE RESEMBLANCE

by Lauren Nossett

Flatiron Books, \$28.99, November

Rating: B-

Police detective Marlitt Kaplan is first on the scene of a hit and run on the campus of the University of Georgia in Athens. A student identified as Jay Kemp was struck and killed by his own car driven by someone, witnesses agreed, who was smiling and looked just like the victim. Her investigation leads her to Kemp's fraternity, where she is told that he was well-liked by all. But she soon learns that the frat boys may not be as guiltless as they first appeared. Their Rule Number One: "Never betray the brotherhood." Kaplan's digging into the Greek systems on campus leads to a horrific, near lethal, attack on her. As the powers in the police department suspend her to prevent her search for answers, Marlitt learns that the campus fraternity is not the only brotherhood that must not be betrayed.

This is Lauren Nossett's first novel, a complex police procedural set in the halls of acadamia. It takes a long and unflatteringly critical look at the

fraternity system that exists on many college campuses. Anyone who has joined and/or suffered through the frat life may be all too familiar with the frightening underbelly of that system. Told at times in unpleasant detail, it may be too difficult for those with gentler sensibilities to read. Others who stand with the courageous detective, willing to risk her life in the face of both university and police opposition, will satisfactorily make the journey to the end. As one of Marlitt's mother's colleagues points out early on, "hell is empty, all the devils are here." It is those devils who will stop at nothing to prevent their secrets from being exposed.

There are some subplots that do get in the way of the principal story. For example, one that comes out of nowhere (and eventually goes nowhere) is that after Kaplan is attacked, she can suddenly speak German. There eventually is an explanation but that entire bit only slows down the plot unnecessarily. That wasn't the only place where the pacing was a bit uneven. After Marlitt is attacked, too much time is spent on her recovery, detracting from the forward movement of the plot. Other examples of these problems exist, as well. However, in the long run, the pros slightly outweigh the cons.

The Short Circuit

SOUTH CENTRAL NOIR

edited by Gary Phillips

Akashic Books, \$16.95, September 2022

Rating: B+

Launched in 2004 with **BROOKLYN NOIR**, Akashic Books has published over one hundred Noir collections since then, with more to come. This one collects fourteen stories by a wonderful variety of award-winning authors. Indeed, stories in other books in the Noir series have been frequently nominated for and won mystery awards.

Here, author and editor Gary Phillips has gathered his chosen authors to write about South Central, one of L. A.'s most iconic neighborhoods. As he puts it in his introduction, "you'll find stories of those walking the straight and narrow

– until something untoward happens . . . Other times the steps they take are to get themselves or people they care about out from under."

So here you'll walk those streets with Sang-Woo, the Korean proprietor of South Park Liquor who believes he's struck it rich with insurance money when his store is burned to the ground during the riots after the acquittal of the cops who beat Rodney King in 1992. But as his wife always told him, "When you gamble, all luck bad luck, even good luck." So true, as Steph Cha relates in her tale "All Luck." Or take Jeri Westerson's ghost story "The Last Time I Died," where we learn that "All Jesus had to do was be crucified. He never had to go to an all-girl's Catholic high school." The reader gets a tour, courtesy of Gar Anthony Haywood, of Watts Towers, a thirty-three year project combining steel rebar, concrete, scraps of porcelain, tile, and glass into seventeen giant spires and interconnected structures (the sad and unexpected resolution of "All That Glitters").

The last day of the Kokusai Theatre on Crenshaw is chronicled in Naomi Hirahara's "I Am Yojimbo," a cautionary tale of what can happen when fourteen-year-old Eric finds some left behind videotapes under a theater seat. What they contain is too horrible to be imagined –

and, worse, someone desperately wants them back. Will he find protection in the Bushido Code he learned from watching Toshiro Mifune films? Editor Phillips contributes his own story, "Death of a Sideman," combining music and murder with the infiltration of the Black Panthers and other Black organizations by the FBI. Tendrils reaching back from the present to the 1992 riots prove that long-held vengeance still finds a way to rear its head.

Other stories make reference to people and happenings in the history of that area of the city, all of which are worth reading. We should not forget the events or the (often now long gone) locations set out here. These and the other stories pack a solid wallop. Lessons like these need to be learned and remembered.

SHERLOCK HOLMES:

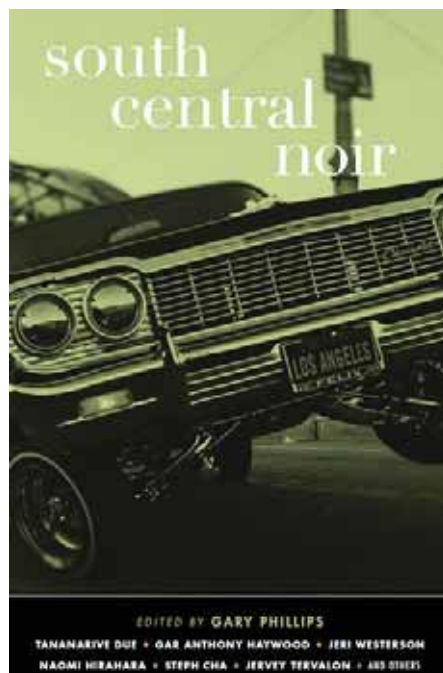
A Detective's Life

edited by Martin Rosenstock
Titan Books, \$15.95, September

Rating: B

So, do we really need more Sherlock Holmes stories? Well, yes, when they are as entertaining as the twelve that are found in this new volume, the sixth in the series from Titan and the second edited by Martin Rosenstock. This collection features short stories that cover the entire span of Holmes' career, from early days in Baker Street through to his retirement years. Along the way, many of Holmes' regular (and even the occasional Irregular!) supporting cast make their appearance. Doctor Watson, of course, narrates most of the tales, though Mycroft also gets his share of recounting. Lestrade, Gregson, and Mrs. Hudson make their appearances, as well.

There are tales of the supernatural, such as Stuart Douglas' "The Adventure of the Spiritualist Detective," set in 1881, shortly after Holmes and Watson began to share rooms in Baker Street." Or some years later, as Peter Swanson's "Witanhurst Ghost" bedevils both a young woman and Holmes. That adventure involved Shakespeare, such did Derrick Belanger's "The Adventure of the Misquoted Macbeth," wherein a debt

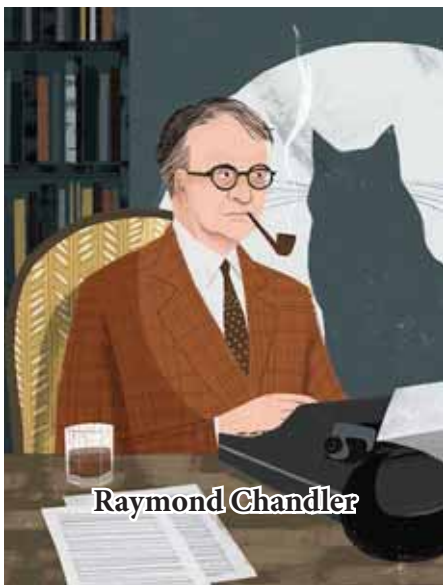


collector receives a mysterious message only Holmes can decode. Cara Black's "The Prideaux Monograph" finds the two men at a séance where the son of Oscar Wilde seeks to find a lost manuscript of his father's.

Mycroft and Sherlock have "An Encounter with Darkness," when they come upon the likes of Moriarty and Colonel Sebastian Moran at the Diogenes Club in a tale of espionage. At the turn of the century, before Holmes leaves his lodgings for good, he and Watson undertake their "Last Baker Street Adventure," in David Stuart Davies' tale of a woman's plea to the great detective to save her husband from being convicted of murder.

This solidly entertaining collection concludes with Eric Brown's "Peril at Carroway House," wherein a 72-year-old wheelchair-bound Holmes is approached by a young woman concerning the theft of a tiara from a locked safe inside of a locked room. But could this woman be the daughter of *the* woman, Irene Adler? All these questions, and more, are resolved in this fine anthology.

The Old Timer in the Corner



Raymond Chandler

Having reviewed Joe Ide's Philip Marlowe novel earlier in this column, I thought it would be fun to get that

version of the detective out of my head by reading an actual Marlowe tale written by Raymond Chandler. Enough is known about both Chandler and Marlowe that further details here are not really needed, so I thought I'd chose a perhaps less remembered novel than **THE BIG SLEEP** or **FAREWELL, MY LOVELY**. This time around I went with:



THE HIGH WINDOW (1942).

Marlowe is hired by another crotchety old person to solve a crime, this time to find a missing gold doubloon. The wealthy, port-swilling ("it's medicine," she affirms, taking yet another slug of the stuff), Elizabeth Murdock claims that the now vanished daughter-in-law she hates has stolen the coin, worth some \$10,000 (in the days when \$10,000 was some real money). She wants Marlowe to recover it without making any contact with her son about it. Marlowe wants \$25 a day plus expenses to help. He takes the job and finds he's being tailed by an inept private eye who then is murdered before he can meet with Marlowe. The trail leads to a gambler and then to the gambler's wife ("From thirty feet away she looked like a lot of class. From ten feet away she looked

like something made up to be seen from thirty feet away"), and then to a black-mailer. More murder follows. So, just where is that gold doubloon? And who really took it and killed in order to keep secrets? As Marlowe concludes, "The white moonlight was cold and clear, like the justice we dream of but don't find."

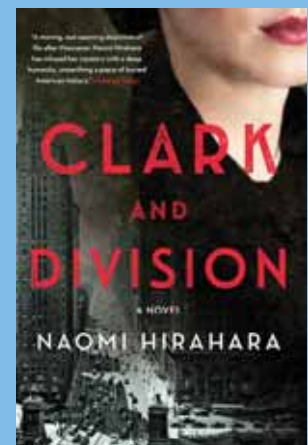
It's nice to be able to pull an old-paper smelling, crumbling, nearly eighty years gone paperback off the shelf and read what is now a historical novel of Los Angeles in the 1940s. Filled with wonderful characters and a pretty straightforward plot, lovely language, and some wise-cracking along the way, this book and most of Chandler's Marlowe novels and short stories are clearly worth reading (and re-reading) to discover how a master author and Edgar winner (for Best Novel for **THE LONG GOODBYE**) went about his craft, leaving an all too small output for us to enjoy today.

The Macavity Award Winners 2022

Best Mystery Novel
RAZORBLADE TEARS,
S. A. Cosby

Best First Mystery Novel
ARSENIC AND ADOBO,
Mia P. Manansala

Best Historical Mystery
CLARK AND DIVISION,
Naomi Hirahara



Deadly Pleasures

George Easter



ALL HER LITTLE SECRETS

by Wanda M. Morris

Morrow, \$27.99, November, 2021

Rating: A-

Last year I saw this title appear on some of the year-end “Best Mysteries” lists and then pop up as an Anthony and Lefty Award nominee. Then at Bouchercon, while sitting next to my esteemed colleague Oline Cogdill, she made a comment that Wanda M. Morris is “the real deal.” When Oline speaks, I listen. So I came home determined to read **ALL HER LITTLE SECRETS** and I did. I found it to be quite the page-turner.

Ellice Littlejohn is a 40s-something successful in-house attorney for an Atlanta corporation. But her success has come at a cost. She is a single African-American woman and is having an affair with her white boss. She has successfully hidden her poor upbringing in a small Georgia town (with its secrets) and the fact that she has a law-breaking younger brother.

Everything is going according to her life plan until one morning she goes to work early to have a regular meeting with her boss and finds him shot dead in his office. She panics and leaves his body to be discovered by someone else.

The company she works for is experiencing protests outside its corporate offices because of its lack of hiring of minorities. Ellice is immediately promoted to head of the legal department (Executive Vice President) and she suspects it is more to quell the protests than to give her the position that she feels she has earned.

She soon comes to suspect that there are some illegal shenanigans going on in the Executive Suite and that her bosses may be setting her up as a scapegoat.

Could this be the cause of her boss’ death?

Wanda M. Morris writes with authority about the corporate life described in **ALL HER LITTLE SECRETS**. She herself has been a corporate attorney in Atlanta for many years. Her writing is crisp and flows smoothly. And most importantly, she is a natural and gifted storyteller.

THE SHADOW MURDERS

by Jussi Adler-Olsen

Dutton, \$28.00, September

Department Q #9

Rating: B+

The publisher’s plot description is better than anything I can come up with, so here it is:

“On her sixtieth birthday, a woman takes her own life. When the case lands on Detective Carl Mørck’s desk, he can’t imagine what this has to do with Department Q, Copenhagen’s cold cases division, since the cause of death seems apparent. However, his superior, Marcus Jacobsen, is convinced that this is related to an unsolved case that has been plaguing him since 1988.

At Marcus’s behest, Carl and the Department Q gang—Rose, Assad, and Gordon—reluctantly begin to investigate. And they quickly discover that Marcus is onto something: Every two years for the past three decades, there have been unusual, impeccably timed deaths with connections between them that cannot be ignored, including mysterious piles of salt at the scenes. As the investigation goes deeper, it emerges that these “accidents” are in fact part of a sinister murder scheme.”

My analysis: All the cases that Department Q attempts to solve involve clever criminals who excel at covering

up their crimes and avoiding the law. In this case the clever mastermind is the leader of a group of vigilantes who believes the group has been “chosen” to rid the world of people who do despicable things. They have been good at covering their tracks for years, so it takes the “out-of-the-box” thinking of Carl, Rose, Assad and Gordon to come up with a way to arrest them.

I enjoyed reading **THE SHADOW MURDERS** but it is not the best of the series. For that, read the first in the series, **THE KEEPER OF LOST CAUSES** and my personal favorite **THE MARCO EFFECT**. This novel ends with quite a cliff-hanger, to be resolved in the next Department Q novel, which is said to be the final novel in the series.

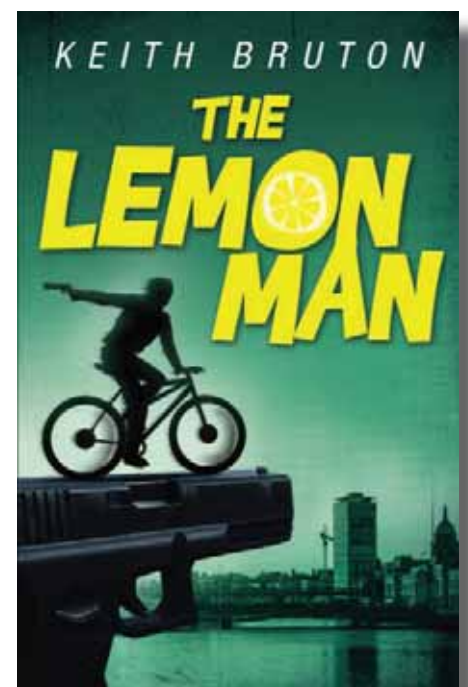
THE LEMON MAN

by Keith Bruton

Brash Books, \$18.99, May

Rating: A-

If you are a fan of quirky characters, you’ll love **THE LEMON MAN**. Patrick Callan is young man who has carved out a career as a hitman. But not your ordinary hitman. He rides a bicycle around the street of Dublin, Ireland wearing bedroom slippers. He is cavalier about his hits. No detailed preparation such as following the intended target, getting to know his/her life patterns. Patrick



just shows up and plays it by ear – not always with good results.

His only tip of the hat to organization is his daily short list of things to do. For example, the list may be: 1. Buy Food. 2. Visit Ma. 3. Kill Henry O’Neil.

Patrick’s personal life is quite well-ordered. He lives in an upscale flat and is visited frequently by his girlfriend Olivia who happens to be a high-end call girl.

When Patrick goes to kill Henry O’Neil, which he does in short order, Patrick doesn’t realize that there is a baby in the apartment until he hears it cry out. What is he to do? He can’t just leave it with his dead father. So he grabs it and makes a quick exit. He has no prior experience with babies so he calls on friends (and eventually Olivia) to help take care of it.

Now Patrick’s life is not so well-ordered and his new domestic distractions have caused him to bungle what should have been easy and routine killings, putting his employment in jeopardy. Did I mention that he also picks up a loveable dog from one of his botched hits?

A hitman stuck with a baby and a dog. How could that be anything but humorous and that is exactly what **THE LEMON MAN** is – a very funny and enjoyable read. It’s also an accomplished debut novel.

FORSAKEN COUNTRY

by Allen Eskens

Mulholland Books, \$28.00, September
Max Rupert #4

Rating: A-

Detective Max Rupert has always considered himself a good person, but he did something bad at the end of **THE DEEP DARK DESCENDING** (2017) and he can’t forgive himself. So he retires from the police force and takes his moral dilemma with him to a remote cabin, where he’s been living the life of a hermit for the last three years. He’s seeking some form of atonement, but not finding it.

Then Max is approached by the former sheriff of the nearby town. Lyle Voight is an old friend who hasn’t seen or heard from his daughter Sandy or his 6-year-old grandson Pip in days and

he is convinced that Sandy’s abusive ex-husband Reed has something to do with their disappearance. The new sheriff, who is a friend and former colleague of Reed’s, refuses to investigate. There is evidence that Sandy went off on her own.

Reluctantly Max finds himself helping Lyle to investigate the disappearance and Max begins calling in favors from his ex-partner Nikki Vang. The investigation ultimately leads to an exciting chase through the Boundary Waters (shades of William Kent Krueger!) of northern Minnesota.

I’ve read all of Allen Eskens’ works and consider him one of the top writers of crime fiction today. His first book, **THE LIFE WE BURY**, is on my all-time favorites list. In **FORSAKEN COUNTRY** he plays on the emotions of the reader by killing off a sympathetic character early on in the story and the reader (if anything like me) becomes invested in seeing justice done and a particularly dislikeable villain revealed. For all of his presumed faults, Max Rupert is an admirable character and it is pleasing to see him emerge from his shell and pursue an avenue of redemption.

CONFESS, FLETCH

by Gregory McDonald

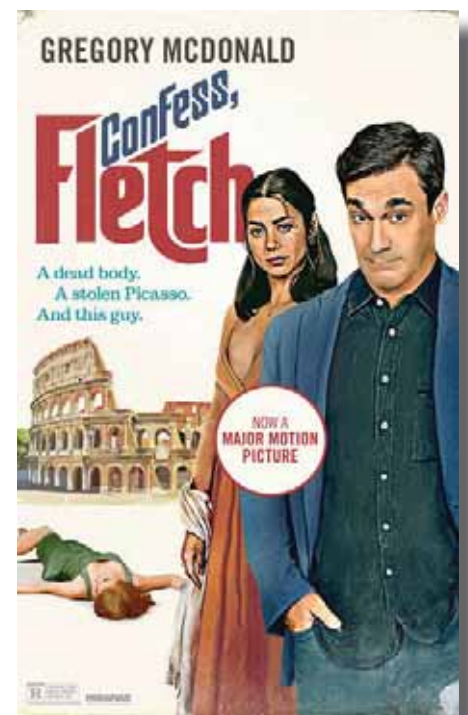
Blackstone, \$15.99

Fletch #2

Rating: B+

This is a reprint of the second mystery in the Fletch series that was so popular during the 1970s and 1980s. It has been reprinted to coincide with the motion picture of the same name starring Jon Hamm as Fletch.

As we open the book, we find Fletch in Boston where he is looking for some stolen paintings owned by the family of his new fiancée. He is house trading his home in Italy for a luxury apartment in Boston. After dropping off his luggage in his new digs, he goes to dinner. Upon returning, he finds the dead body of a young woman in his bed. Of course the police, in the person of eccentric police detective Francis Xavier Flynn (who later has his own spin-off series of mysteries), believes that Fletch committed the crime. So the rest of the book has Fletch



in search of the stolen art and avoiding arrest for a crime he didn’t commit.

This series is known for its witty and crackling dialogue as well as Fletch’s unpredictable behavior, which often doesn’t make any sense until the book’s finale.

It was a nice blast from the past. However, if memory serves me correctly the quality of the series deteriorates after the first two or three.

FALL GUY

by Archer Mayor

Minotaur, \$28.99, September
Joe Gunther #33

Rating: A-

Vermont is a relatively small state that is bordered on the south by Massachusetts, on the west by New York, on the east by New Hampshire (long border) and on the north by Canada. Maine is also close by. So the Joe Gunther police procedurals often involve multi-state investigations and inter-departmental cooperation as criminals have an easy time crossing state lines to avoid capture.

When a high-end stolen car is recovered in Vermont, the police find a lot of surprises as well. There is the dead body of minor thief Don Kalfus in the trunk and two phones. One phone has kiddy

porn on it and the other is an ancient phone with ties to a cold case of a child abduction. So right off the bat we have a complex case with four crimes to investigate. Joe Gunther of the Vermont Bureau of Investigation engages his Brattleboro team (Willie, Sammie and others) to help him. It turns out that while the body was found in Vermont, it appears the victim was probably killed in New Hampshire.

If you like detailed police procedure (and I do), no one does it better than Archer Mayor. **FALL GUY** is a pleasant way to wile away a few hours in excellent diversion. I had a hard time putting it down.

HANDS DOWN

by Felix Francis

Crooked Lane Books, \$28.99, November
Sid Halley #6

Rating: B+

Most of Dick Francis' mystery thrillers were standalones, but he did have two characters that he brought back in other books – the one-handed private eye Sid Halley and steeplechase jockey Kit Fielding. When the mantle of crime writing was passed from Dick to his son Francis, I guess Sid Halley went along with it. Felix has since published two Sid Halley novels, with **HANDS DOWN** being the latest.

Big News! Sid Halley has undergone a hand transplant and it has taken a lot of getting used to. But his wife Marina can't stand it. She tells him, "I've tried my best to love it, but every time you reach out for me with it, I still feel like I'm being touched by a complete stranger, and it makes me shudder." With that bombshell delivered, Marina, with their nine-year-old daughter Saskia in tow, takes off for her parents' home in the Netherlands. Sid loves his wife and doesn't want to lose her, but he knows that to follow her right then would be a mistake.

Soon however, Sid is embroiled in a case. Gary Bremmer, an ex-jockey trainer friend called him about some death threats but before Sid can look into the matter, his friend's stable yard is burned to the ground and Gary is found dead. The police think suicide, but Sid

doesn't agree. So he and his colleague Chico go snooping around and uncover a conspiracy to fix horse races (classic Dick Francis plot).

I've always enjoyed the Sid Halley novels and have read all six of them. This is no exception. I'm glad that Felix is back on firm ground after his misstep with his last book **ICED**. Good, clear writing with sympathetic characters make **HANDS DOWN** a winner.

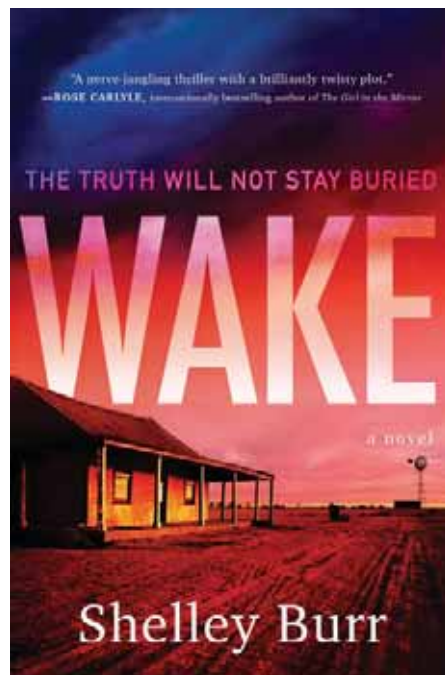
WAKE

by Shelley Burr

Morrow, \$27.99, October

Rating: A-

The small town of Nannine, New South Wales is a shadow of what it was twenty years ago, a severe drought being the cause of its decline. It was once the site of one of Australia's most infamous crimes – the disappearance of 9-year-old Evelyn McCreery. Her sister Mina has become a recluse except for an occasional trip to town for essentials and a 3-hour drive to the library to see her only friend, Alanna Rennold, who shares the loss of a sister. Public interest in the Evelyn's case was kept alive for many years through the efforts of their mother and because of a \$1 million reward. Online sites like MyMurder remain active following any lines of enquiry that they can.



The reward attracts a private investigator, Lane Holland, who has a well-earned reputation for finding missing people. He is initially rebuffed by Mina and the few townspeople left, but he shows patience and is able to demonstrate his skills sufficiently for Mina to soften her stance. Perhaps he can succeed where others have failed. And he has great motivation for he has secrets of his own.

This novel owes a debt to Jane Harper's **THE DRY** which created its own mystery subgenre: Australian Outback crime. It's a fine example of that subgenre and a wonderful debut novel.

It's simply amazing to me how many new, talented Australian writers are finding their way to our shores. And there is a whole slew of them lining up for their chance at publishing success. I hope we give them all a warm welcome. I can't think of any group of writers writing better crime fiction at the present time.

STANDING BY THE WALL

by Mick Herron

Soho Crime, \$16.95, November

Rating: A-

Mick Herron has previously published three novellas in the Slough House series — **The List**, **The Marylebone Drop** and **The Catch**. Now those three novellas have been collected into one volume — along with two heretofore unpublished (to my knowledge) novellas — **The Last Dead Letter** and **Standing by the Wall**.

The first three novellas center around John Batchelor, who is sometimes referred to in passing in the Slow Horse novels. He is a "milkman" who is tasked with looking after retired spies to make sure they are behaving.

The List. Dieter Hess, an aged spy, is dead -- and John Bachelor, his MI5 handler, is in deep, deep trouble. Death has revealed that the deceased had been keeping a secret second bank account—and there's only ever one reason a spy has a secret second bank account. The question of whether he was a double agent must be resolved, and its answer may undo an entire career's worth of spy secrets.

The Marylebone Drop. Old spooks carry the memory of tradecraft in their bones, and when Solomon Dortmund sees an envelope being passed from one pair of hands to another in a Marylebone café, he knows he's witnessed more than an innocent encounter. But in relaying his suspicions to John Bachelor, who babysits retired spies like Solly for MI5, he sets in motion a train of events that will alter lives.

The Catch. John Bachelor is the saddest kind of spy: not a joe in the field, not even a desk jockey, but a milkman—a part-time pension administrator whose main job is to check in on aging retired spies. Late in his career and having lost his wife, his house, and his savings after a series of unlucky choices, John's been living in a dead man's London apartment, hoping the bureaucracy isn't going to catch up with him and leave him homeless. But keeping a secret among spies is a fool's errand, and now John has made himself eminently black-mailable. And Lady Di from Regent's Street is just the kind of spy to get her hooks into poor John Bachelor.

The last two novellas, **The Last Dead Letter** and **Standing by the Wall**, are set more firmly in Slough House and feature characters we are more familiar with, foremost among them, Jackson Lamber, the head of Slough House. We get a glimpse of Lamb's days as a spy in Berlin before the Wall came down.

This collection is a rich treat for fans of the series and it will have to hold us for awhile since I've heard it will be some time before the next Slough House novel is out. Mick's next will be a stand-alone novel. And stay tuned for Season 2 of *Slow Horses* airing on Apple TV+ on December 2, 2022.

A FEARSOME MOONLIGHT BLACK

by David Putnam

Level Best Books, \$18.95, October
Bone Detective #1

Rating: A-

This is a story told in two "books." In the first, we see and experience what Dave Beckett, a young, naive and enthusiastic cop, sees and does on the streets of West Valley, California. We also witness the budding romance between



Dave and Beth, his high school crush, who is still mourning the loss of her boyfriend who disappeared two years before. Book 1 ends with an exciting scene in which Dave barely escapes with his life.

Book 2 jumps ahead eight years and we find Dave has moved on to become a homicide detective with a Sheriff's Department. He is much more hardened by this time but still suffers the effects of some of his experiences chronicled in Book 1. Dave is in and out of trouble with his bosses for skirting the line with his conduct and eventually is temporarily banished to the lowest detective rung – that being the Bone Detective. The nearby desert periodically reveals the bones of surreptitiously buried bodies and it's the Bone Detective's job to look into those somewhat hopeless cases. But this also gives Dave time to work on some of the unsolved cases he was investigating in Book 1.

The author was a cop similar to Dave Beckett and in his "Author's Note," he says that Book 1 is almost entirely autobiographical -- while Book 2 is fiction. But both are written with great authenticity. Book 1 is reminiscent of the early work of Joseph Wambaugh which depicts the everyday life of a policeman. Book 2 is a fine detective story and whodunnit.

I've read a few of David Putnam's

Bruno series and I especially liked his latest **THE SINISTER**, but there is a sameness to those novels and I thought it would be nice if he broke away from them for awhile and wrote something fresh and different. He has and you should read it.

RACING THE LIGHT

by Robert Crais

Putnam, \$28.00, November, 2022

Elvis Cole #19

Rating: A-

What should have been a routine missing persons case turns out to have all sorts of unexpected angles. Adele Schumacher is not your typical mom worried about her missing son, a controversial podcaster named Josh Shoe. The police are no help because the son is an adult and could have gone anywhere on this own.

Adele and her husband are not your average parents. They are brilliant (but idiosyncratic) scientists protected by a team of government agents.

What should have been simple turns into something quite complex – and dangerous. Apparently Josh was working on a podcast that certain powerful business interests are willing to do anything to quash. Mayhem and death ensue as Elvis and his sidekick Joe Pike uncover the truth behind Josh Shoe's fearful departure.

On the plus side, Elvis' old girlfriend Lucy Chenier and her son Ben return from Louisiana to brighten up Elvis' life. Is there a chance that Elvis' life is about to experience a major change?

I can't remember ever being disappointed in a Robert Crais mystery. He's a must-read for me. Always highly enjoyable.

THE ZERO NIGHT

by Brian Freeman

Blackstone, \$26.99, November
Jonathan Stride #11

Rating: A-

Jonathan Stride has taken a year off from his job as a Duluth police detective to recover from a near-fatal gunshot wound. But his replacement as head of detectives and former partner Maggie Bei lands a difficult case of kidnapping

and possible murder, so she more or less orders him back into the saddle.

Attorney Gavin Baxter tells the police that his wife has been kidnapped and he has already paid her kidnappers \$100,000 for her release. But the wife is still missing.

Meanwhile, Stride's wife Serena is suffering emotional turmoil due to the death of her abusive mother (it's complicated) and has been removed from the kidnapping investigation. She takes it upon herself to look more closely at a two-year-old suicide.

The prolific Brian Freeman is churning out a lot of novels lately, but if **THE ZERO NIGHT** is any indication, the quality of his work is still quite high. This excellent police procedural packs an emotional punch and is a real page-turner. Give it a shot.

DOOMED LEGACY

by Matt Coyle

Oceanview, \$27.95, November

Rick Cahill #9

Rating: A-

Now settled down with a wife and child, P.I. Rick Cahill has left the mean streets of La Jolla, California and its environs for the mean carpet of his home office, doing background checks, skip tracing and the like. Ugh. So boring. But a promise is a promise and Rick knows his wife won't stand for his usual shenanigans that often put him squarely in the face of mortal danger. And he is afraid to tell her about the latest effects of his CTE, a degenerative disease which causes brief spells of intense rage. A lot to deal with for a character we have come to know as one of the good guys.

Sara Bhandari is his contact with Fulcrum Security and asks him to investigate some irregularities in her company's procedures that are worrying her. Then she turns up dead. This isn't something Rick can ignore, so he does what he does best – investigate.

Award-winning Matt Coyle has done it again. This series is a must-read for me. He's at the top of his game with **DOOMED LEGACY** – a great, fast-paced story, full of danger and surprise. But I'm saddened by the medical problems that Rick Cahill is experiencing.

There appears to be little hope in sight so I don't know how much longer this series can run. Matt may have to come up with another character and series or pull a medical miracle out of his hat. Whatever he does, I'll read it with great enthusiasm.

BOMBAY MONSOON

by James W. Ziskin

Oceanview, \$27.95, December

Rating: A-

Barry-Award-winning author James W. Ziskin is taking a break from his Ellie Stone series to pen this novel set in 1975 Bombay, India. The newly arrived American reporter Danny Jacobs is getting the lay of the land and working on developing some exciting stories for the UNI news service when Prime Minister Indira Gandhi imposes strict media censorship as part of her domestic "Emergency." Of course, the emergency was hers alone and it was a move of political brute force to keep herself in power. But it makes Danny's job infinitely more difficult.

And by the way, Danny arrives in the midst of Monsoon season so almost every outdoor scene is accompanied by rain.

In developing his contacts, Danny makes friends with his wealthy neighbor Willy Smets, who holds wonderful par-

ties in which Danny is able to meet and get to know influential people. He is almost immediately smitten with Sushmita, Willy Smets' lover. And it seems the feeling is mutual. Trouble looms on the horizon.

Danny interviews a terrorist responsible for the death of a police officer and secretly takes a snapshot of the man's face, a dangerous thing to do. Later the terrorist regrets this interview and tries to kill Danny. Meanwhile some of Smet's shady dealings come to light and Danny's life comes under threat due to these revelations. Action ensues.

Ziskin's prose is eminently readable and he tells an interesting story. I like Danny Jacobs as a character, but there are times during the narrative when he seems lost or indecisive. At those times I have to admit that I missed the feistiness of Ziskin's series character Ellie Stone.

MURDER BOOK

by Thomas Perry

Mysterious Press, \$27.95, January, 2023

Rating: B+

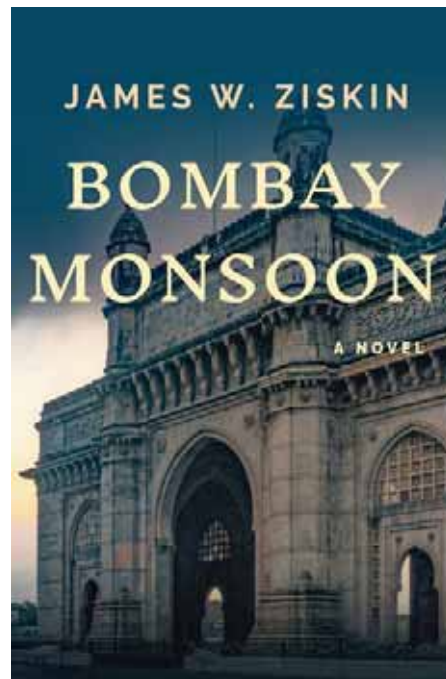
U.S. Attorney Ellen Leicester becomes suspicious when a sudden crime wave hits several small midwestern towns. She turns to her ex-husband Harry Duncan, an ex-cop and private investigator for help. Harry is reluctant but finds it hard to say "no" to Ellen.

Unorthodox would describe Harry's investigative methods. And one of these methods is writing a work journal that he calls his "murder book." Harry writes down all the details of his investigations: people, places, crimes, and, yes, murders.

Only in town for an hour or two, Harry experiences what Ellen is talking about when two thugs try to shake him down. Bad luck for the thugs. Harry is well versed in how to handle such a situation.

Organized crime out of Chicago seems to be the root of this evil and Harry seeks to eliminate the problem at its source.

There is something quite Reacher-esque about **MURDER BOOK** -- lone wolf come to small-town America armed with high intelligence and mar-



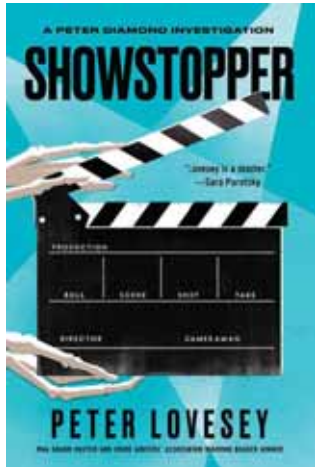
tial skills and takes on powerful forces. I guess if it works for Lee Child, it can work for Thomas Perry. Just seemed a bit derivative to me. Lots of good action and detection along the way to entertain the reader.

SHOWSTOPPER

by Peter Lovesey
Soho Crime, \$27.95

Peter Diamond #21, December

Rating: A-



Are the tabloids right and is the six-year-old hit TV show *Swift* jinxed? It has experienced a jaw-dropping series of serious mishaps during its relatively short life. Most recently, Daisy Summerfield, who plays bad-girl heroine Caitlin Swift's crooked mum, suffers a heart attack when she returns home and is surprised by a burglar. Other misfortunes:

1. The actress cast as the star pulled out of the show before it began
2. An engineer is burned in a fire in a sound equipment van
3. Two stuntmen are injured in a rooftop chase
4. Assistant producer Dave Tudor disappears
5. Dan Burbage, who plays Sergeant Monaghan, suffers permanent brain damage in a climbing accident
6. Creator/producer Mary Wroxeter dies of acute alcohol poisoning
7. Jacob Nicol, a rigger who just started to work on *Swift*, disappears on a location shoot at an abandoned WWII airfield.

The irascible Peter Diamond is tasked with investigating whether all

these incidents are coincidental or whether there is something sinister going on. Not an easy task, but one he is happy to take on because there is nothing much in the way of murder going on and there are rumblings about disbanding his unit.

SHOWSTOPPER is a police procedural that is chock full of investigative detail and is best read straight through so as to keep the facts straight in one's mind. Peter Lovesey continues to amaze with his ingenious plotting and pleasing style. I'm sure the members of the British crime writing community (and we American fans as well) consider him a national and international treasure. Peter won the very first Barry Best Mystery Award for **BLOODHOUNDS**.

THE BIG BUNDLE

by Max Allen Collins

Hard Case Crime, \$25.95, December

Nate Heller #18

Rating: B

Collins first brought his most acclaimed character, Nathan Heller, to mystery fans in 1983 with the Shamus-award winning **TRUE DETECTIVE**. Eighteen novels in the series have followed over the years. The author involves Heller in a series of real life historical events such as the Lindbergh baby kidnapping (**STOLEN AWAY**) and solves these cases in a way that may differ from the accounts you find in history books. Along the way the reader gains insights into the actual historical events and perhaps some things that historians may have gotten wrong.

It is now 1953 and Nate, the successful owner of a detective agency, is called on by the wealthy Greenlease family to help regarding the kidnapping of their son Bobby. Things don't go well and Nate is asked to find out what went wrong and who was responsible. Nate's search has him walking a fine line between organized crime bosses and Bobby Kennedy who is trying to take them down.

THE BIG BUNDLE is full of well-researched and fascinating details (another hallmark of this series) as well as interesting historical characters. This

novel and others in the series are highly recommended to fans of hard-boiled crime fiction and/or historical mysteries.

PICTURE IN THE SAND

by Peter Blauner

Minotaur, \$27.99, January, 2023

Rating: B+

This creation makes one admire the creativity of the author. It is a story within a story. It all kicks off in 2015 when the young, idealistic Alex Hassan turns his back on his loving Egyptian-American family and runs off to Syria to become a terrorist. He refuses to communicate with anyone but his grandfather Ali. Entreaties to return home are ignored, so Ali tries a different tactic – telling Alex his own story and his experiences with Islamic terrorists. So the book is made up of Ali's story interspersed with the email communications between Alex and Ali.

Ali Hassan's story: 1952 Egypt. The action takes place against the backdrop of Nasser's rise to power in Egypt, which is still smarting from British occupation and the 1948 defeat by Israel.

Ali Hassan is a star-struck young man in love with anything coming out of Hollywood. In college he formed a Student Cinema Society, which rented and distributed movies. Ali also made short films and reviewed many others. When Cecil B. DeMille comes to Egypt to film *The Ten Commandments*, Ali inveigles his way onto the set and winds up being DeMille's driver and chief gopher. On his first day as driver, Ali maneuvers the car through an increasingly violent street demonstration and accidentally hits and kills a religious scholar. There are repercussions throughout the story because of this one act. It results in Ali getting caught up with the Muslim Brotherhood and their terrorist designs.

What follows is a meandering story with lots of unexpected turns. The author deserves praise for his creative plotting and in-depth characterization. The historical details are an added plus. If you're in the mood for something out of the ordinary, give **PICTURE IN THE SAND** a try.

Lookin' For A Few Good Books

Larry Gandle



THE TREES

by Percival Everett
Greywolf, \$16.00

Rating: A

The setting is Money, Mississippi, the town where Emmett Till, a fourteen-year-old black youth was murdered in 1955 for allegedly whistling at a white woman. Today that woman, known as Granny C, is the matriarch of a dysfunctional and moronic white family. Her son, Wheat Bryant is found murdered next to a mutilated corpse of a young black man. After both bodies are brought to the morgue, the body of the black corpse mysteriously disappears and eventually reappears next to another murder victim. Can this be Emmett Till's ghost enacting his revenge? Two black detectives from the Mississippi Bureau of investigation are brought in to aid the local police. They are a wisecracking duo who manage to make the local white population look like a bunch of buffoons.

THE TREES is a brilliant novel which moves adroitly through multiple genres. It is a police procedural, a horror novel, a literary novel condemning racism and a philosophical treatise on historical violence and retribution. The writing is skilled while the characters can be both rich and well rounded but also awful ignorant racist stereotypes. The pacing is swift and the question as to what exactly is going on makes the pages fly. The novel can be read on multiple levels- as a propulsive police procedural or a thoughtful but surprisingly comic take on our racist past. It is shortlisted for the Booker Prize, 2022 and, having read the longlist of thirteen novels, this one is my favorites. Highly recommended.

PORTRAIT OF AN UNKNOWN WOMAN

by Dan Silva
Harper, \$29.99

Rating: B

Gabriel Allon, former head of Israeli intelligence, has retired and now works at his family business restoring old artwork. He is approached by his old friend, Julian Isherwood, to investigate a painting that has suddenly appeared and sold for a very large sum of money. It is a portrait of a woman attributed to Sir Anthony Van Dyck. Gabriel examines it and considers it a very skillfully drawn fraud. He investigates attempting to discover who the forger is while being drawn into a multibillion dollar fraudulent industry encompassing the world of fine art. Naturally, there are people who would rather see Gabriel dead with so much wealth at stake.

This is the first Gabriel Allon novel which isn't a spy thriller. Yet, the world of art fraud can be equally as deadly. The plot is reasonably compelling but the stakes are much less here than in the usual Gabriel Allon novel. It is simply about money and what nefarious individuals will do to obtain it. This is a reasonably compelling novel but not the best from Dan Silva. Recommended.

ANYWHERE YOU RUN

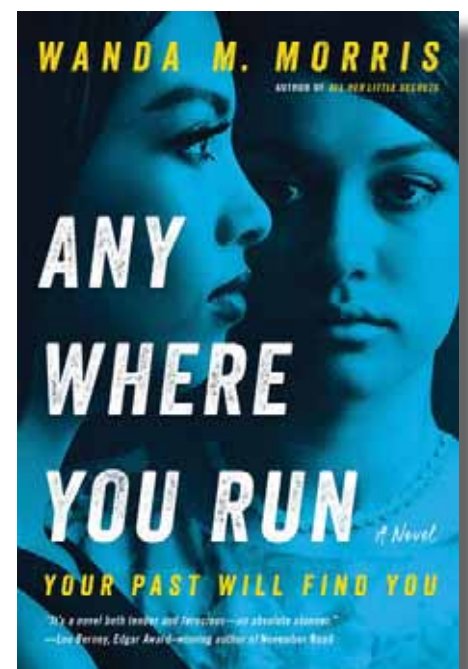
by Wanda M. Morris
Morrow, \$28.99

Rating: A-

In the summer of 1964, three civil rights workers are killed in Mississippi. Violet Richards, a black woman living in nearby Jackson, Mississippi, is running away after killing a man who attacked and raped her. She flees to a small town

in Georgia where a cousin lives. She leaves behind her older sister, Marigold, who is pregnant by a man who has left town. When the police come looking for her sister, Marigold knows she must leave as well. She marries a worthless and dangerous husband, and they move to Cleveland. Marigold soon realizes she has been followed by a man from her hometown looking for Violet to enact revenge. Of course, it doesn't take long to realize both of their lives are at risk.

Wanda Morris, with her second novel, shows her superior ability at storytelling. The writing is a bit choppy, at times, but the story always remains compelling. Told in alternate chapter form between the various characters, suspense is slowly ratcheted up until the climactic ending. The setting is in the Jim Crow south. It is what the sisters are attempting to escape but they soon realize, things are not completely different further north. The characters



are well created but there are certainly some stereotypes mixed in- usually the villains. The plot is entertaining, and reality must be suspended, at times. I look forward to see what this author plans for her next book. Highly recommended.

BLOW BACK

by James Patterson and Brendan Dubois
Little, Brown, \$29.00
Rating: C

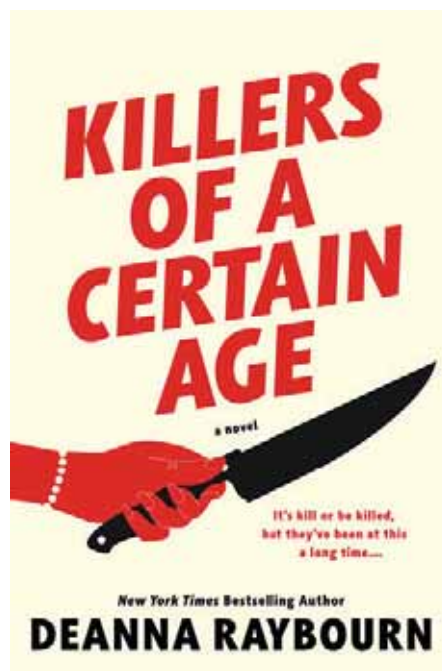
U.S. President Keegan Barrett is elected into office after serving as the Director of the CIA. He is on a vendetta to rid the world of some nasty people. He secretly orders CIA agents Liam Grey and Noa Himel to carry out and lead the various missions to take out the undesirables. In a sense, they are clearing the world of some real trash but they are concerned because the attacks are not sanctioned by any other office. In other words, it is unconstitutional. Barrett becomes increasingly unhinged to the point of possible war with China. Liam and Noa must try to stop him.

This is the worst novel I have read by James Patterson and any other co-author including Brendan. Characters are coming and going and they were difficult to keep up with. Most are stereotypes. The premise of the novel is an exaggeration and reality must be totally suspended. The conclusion is no surprise. I listened to the audio version of the book. A very good male and female narrator interchanged the read based on whether it was Liam's or Noa's story. That served no purpose. The same characters were read by both a female and male author. It was very distracting. Either one of them could have more than adequately handled the task. Not recommended in any form.

KILLERS OF A CERTAIN AGE

by Deanna Raybourn
Berkeley, \$27.00
Rating: B+

Four female assassins have been trained over forty years ago by a



shadowy organization to kill bad people. They have made a very nice living and have just retired. While celebrating on a cruise ship, they soon make the discovery that the four of them have been targeted for death by their own organization. The four of them will use their well-honed skills to get to and eliminate the individuals who have issued the contract on them.

This book is a tremendous amount of fun. Though the characters and the plot cannot truly be taken seriously, they are a clever bunch and it is compelling reading to witness how they work. The book is satisfying on many levels. There is a plot that doesn't let up making it the type of book the reader cannot wait to get back to. The characters are sympathetic to the reader and often quite humorous. The trade craft involved is not only fascinating but entertaining as well. There is a bit too much unrealistic exposition at the end, but, the conclusion remains quite satisfactory. Highly recommended for originality.

WE SPREAD

by Iain Reid
Scout Press, \$26.99
Rating: C-

Penny is an artist living alone in an

apartment. She is of an advanced age and is losing her ability to care for herself alone. Years ago, her longtime partner arranged that she go to a beautiful assisted living home out of the city and in the woods. The time comes to move after another fall in her apartment. The home is quite beautiful, and Penny likes the three other guests there. However, her reality changes as she begins to witness things that are very unsettling. Time passes way too quickly and there is an increasing blurriness to real vs imagined.

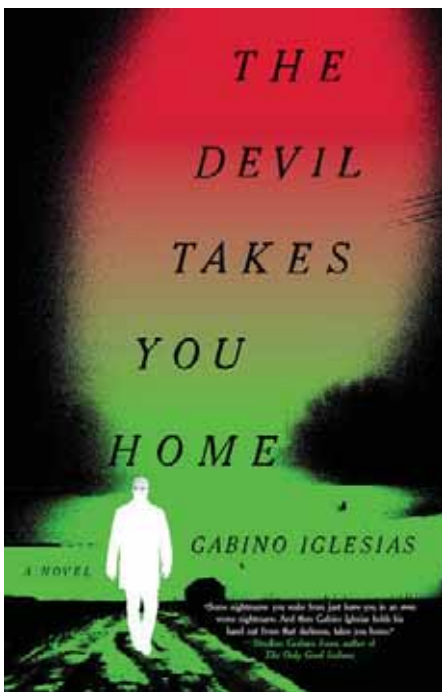
The story examines the aging process and how it destroys our minds. The plot gets increasingly cloudy to the point of total confusion. It reaches a point that the reader will second guess why they ever opened this book in the first place. **I'M THINKING OF ENDING THINGS** by this author was one of the scariest and most suspenseful books I have ever read. This book - though reasonably interesting, is a crushing disappointment to me. I feel like I wasted my time reading it. As much as I recommend his first book, this one I would advise you to avoid.

THE DEVIL TAKES YOU HOME

by Gabino Iglesias
Mulholland, \$28.00
Rating: D-

Mario suffers a tragedy that tears apart his family. In an effort to save his critically-ill daughter, he takes a job that requires an assassination of an odious man. The pay is good but in an effort to piece together his life, Maro decides to join forces with a member of a cartel to eventually steal a large sum of money which he decides will make him whole. The result is a descent into a living hell between Texas and Mexico where it is likely he will never make it out alive.

This is one of the worst books I have ever read. Gratuitous violence mixes with a hellishly unrealistic portrait of Mexicans and their lives between Texas and Mexico. The plot is not only completely depressing but it's portray-



al of any character in this book-- all Mexican-- is so bleak and dismal that the stereotype of the Mexicans intricately involved in the drug cartels is given way too big a stage. There is not one redeeming character in this book. Graphic displays of violence actually made me nauseous. Throwing a horror element into the plot blended reality and fantasy into a total nightmare scenario. I hate how this author portrayed the Mexican people. The conclusion is beyond bleak with no redeeming qualities. I listened to the book which was narrated skillfully but long passages in Spanish were unnecessary. Please avoid this book. You will be glad you did.

George's Take. Larry and I often disagree as to the worthiness of a particular crime novel or thriller. It's one of the things we enjoy about each other -- playfully arguing a book's merits and demerits. But regarding this novel, we are in total agreement. I have to admit that I gave up listening to the audio version of **THE DEVIL TAKES YOU HOME** about 2/3 of the way through it. There is a gratuitous scene of child mutilation that is absolutely horrific. The sad thing is that the author knows how to put words together in a skillful way. He just needs to find some better storytelling chops.

The 2022 Barry Award Winners

Best Mystery/Crime Novel

RAZORBLADE TEARS, S. A. Cosby (Flatiron Books) – Winner

THE DARK HOURS, Michael Connelly (Little, Brown)

LAST REDEMPTION, Matt Coyle (Oceanview)

CLARK AND DIVISION, Naomi Hirahara (Soho Crime)

BILLY SUMMERS, Stephen King (Scribner)

WE BEGIN AT THE END, Chris Whitaker (Henry Holt)

Best First Mystery/Crime Novel

SLEEPING BEAR, Connor Sullivan (Emily Bestler/Atria) – Winner

WHO IS MAUDE DIXON?, Alexandra Andrews (Little, Brown)

GIRL A, Abigail Dean (Viking)

DOWN RANGE, Taylor Moore (William Morrow)

FALLING, T. J. Newman (Simon & Schuster)

STEEL FEAR, Brandon Webb & John David Mann (Bantam)

Best Paperback Original

THE GOOD TURN, Dervla McTiernan (Blackstone) – Winner



THE HUNTED, Gabriel Bergmoser (HarperCollins)

ARSENIC AND ADOBO, Mia P. Manansala (Berkley)

BLACK CORAL, Andrew Mayne (Thomas & Mercer)

SEARCH FOR HER, Rick Mofina (MIRA)

BOUND, Vanda Symon (Orenda Books)

Best Thriller

FIVE DECEMBERS, James Kestrel (HardCase Crime) – Winner

THE DEVIL'S HAND, Jack Carr (Emily Bestler/Atria)

THE NAMELESS ONES, John Connolly (Emily Bestler/Atria)

DEAD BY DAWN, Paul Doiron (Minotaur)

RELENTLESS, Mark Greaney (Berkley)

SLOUGH HOUSE, Mick Herron (Soho Crime)

L J Roberts

It is purely my opinion



ALL THE HIDDEN TRUTHS

by Claire Askew

Hodder & Stoughton, Jan 2018

D.I. Helen Birch #1

Rating: A

First Sentence: Moira Summers was on the top deck of the number 23 bus, her face turned up to the sun like a cat – it was the first day that year that could really have been called hot.

At Three River's College in Edinburgh, Scotland, student Ryan Summers kills thirteen young women, injures a young man, and kills himself. The public wants someone to blame and refuses to believe that Ryan's mother, Moira, hadn't known this would happen.

Someone, possibly Agatha Christie, once wrote that every murder has three victims: the person killed, their family, and the family of the killer. Never has a book better exemplified that truth. Newly promoted D.I. Helen Birch's first case is to determine Ryan's motive for the killing while protecting his mother. Moira Summers must deal with the guilt over her son's actions, questioning whether she could have seen and/or prevented them, while being threatened by the parents of the victims and the public. Ishbel Hodgekiss, mother of Abigail, the first victim, must deal with her grief and the anger of her husband, Aidan. Grant Lockley, an investigative journalist, is only interested in a headline and making a name for himself.

Askew brings the victims and their pain to life in a palpable way. She makes one take a hard look at how the public reacts to such incidents. The weakest characters are D.I. Birch, and the woman she assigns to protect Moira. That is offset by the excellent characterizations of Moira herself, and Ishbel. Lockley serves as a necessary diversion designed

to anger the reader while exemplifying today's exploitative media.

Downside: For being set in Scotland, there is very little sense of place. However, one may be grateful to the publisher for not "Americanizing" the language, as the local idioms and dialects do confirm the location of the story. The book could have been tightened up considerably. There are sections one may find oneself skimming, which is never a good sign.

Askew ends the book in a very interesting way, one that may leave one feeling somewhat ambivalent, but also with a sense of triumph. It is, at times, emotionally difficult to read.

ALL THE HIDDEN TRUTHS

isn't a mystery in the classic sense. To quote D.I. Birch—"... a crime with no bad guy? Victims are all there is." It is, however, a powerful read as the plot is timely and relevant. Askew provides an important look at things happening around us. This is a book one may be glad to have read as it can alter one's perspective.

THE RISING TIDE

by Ann Cleeves

Minotaur Books, 2022

D.I. Vera Stanhope #10

Rating: A-

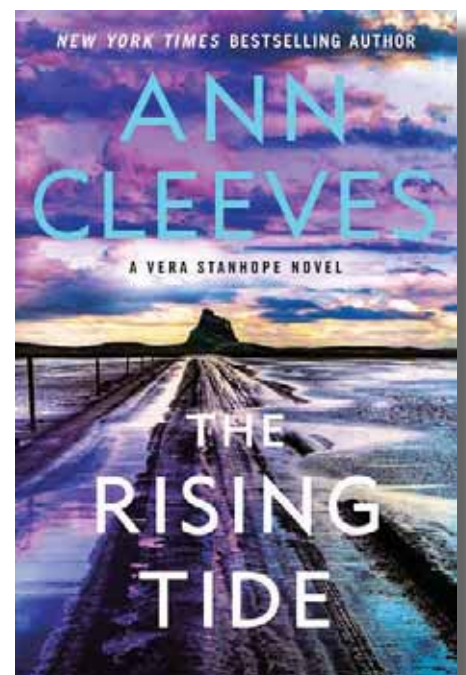
First Sentence: Philip was the first of the group to the island.

It is the 10th Anniversary of Only Connect, a group of friends who've been meeting every five years for fifty years at Pilgrims' House on Holy Island, a place that can only be reached at low tide via a causeway. The group is down to Annie, Daniel, Lou, Ken, Rick, and Phillip; Isobel having crossed the causeway too late and having drowned several years before, and Charlotte who stopped com-

ing. When one of the group is found hanged, Vera and her team are called in. Was it a suicide or murder?

Cleeves introduces the characters in such a way that they become fully dimensional. One learns their backgrounds and how they interconnect. Although the story is written with multiple points of view, it is Annie, the organizer and mainstay, who is the principal of the secondary characters and the one with the greatest depth of character—"The years, stretching ahead of her, seemed empty, devoid of light or fun." Cleeves presents a myriad of suspects, trying to glean the motive, which is not at all obvious, fully engages the reader.

The author is skilled at hinting of something coming without ever using actual portents. Nor does she resort to prologues which is such a relief. For those who both read the books and



watch the television series, it must be said that it's a pleasure to still have Joe Ashworth as Vera's second in the books—"her surrogate son, and her conscience. ... Her boy. Her favourite. Sometime, she supposed, she'd have to release him and send him out into the world beyond her sphere of influence, but not yet. She'd miss him too much."

Cleeves' books are strongly characters driven, and Holly Island becomes another character in this story. As Vera rarely leaves Northumberland, this is a delightful change of scene. It also sets up a barrier and threat to the investigation. Vera is such a strong, clever character. She is not perfect, occasionally vulnerable and sometimes has self-doubts. She's human.

If there is a criticism, it is that there is considerable repetition and too much time spent on the professional competition between Joe and Holly—"She didn't dislike Joe, but she saw him as competition." Vera knows exactly how to lead her team to get the best out of each of them, and Cleeves doesn't do things without having a purpose. Learning the reason for the focus is a game changer.

THE RISING TIDE is yet another example of Cleeves' skillful writing, especially including a reference to COVID without dwelling on it. The ending is powerful, and one must applaud Ms. Cleeves for it. The story leaves one anxious for the next book.

FORSAKEN COUNTRY

by Allen Eskens

Mulholland Books, Sept 2022

Max Rupert #2

Rating: A

First Sentence: Max Rupert laced his fingers behind his head and settled into his pillow to await the ghosts.

Max Rupert was a top-notch cop until three years ago after his wife's death. As self-imposed punishment for a critical decision he made, Max lives as a virtual hermit until Lyle Voight, a former sheriff and friend, begs Max's help. Lyle's daughter Sandy, and her son Pip have disappeared. Lyle believes Sandy's ex-husband, Reed Harris, is involved, but the new sheriff, Sheriff Bolger, refuses to investigate. Max, with

some help from his former partner in Homicide, Niki Vang, agrees with Lyle, culminating in a race to stop Reed before he escapes through the Boundary Waters into Canada.

Be cautioned: An early scene is grim, yet not as descriptive as it could be. It reaches in and grabs at one's heart and, for some readers perhaps, their greatest fear. Eskens pulls us into Max's reluctance at being drawn in, yet he still has an ever-present instinct to help. The characters, good and bad, are vivid and well-developed. One appreciates Max's discomfort at asking Niki for help and is relieved their mutual attraction is mentioned early in the story. Their dialogue, something at which Eskens excels, provides humor and relief to a desperate situation.

Esken's ability to convey the emotions of each character is remarkable, particularly as the story progresses. The sense of desperation and fear is palpable. He establishes a clear sense of place, particularly when he takes the story into the Boundary Waters. One feels the cold and senses the danger from both man and nature on the flight to Canada.

In this follow-up to "Deep Dark Descending," witnessing Max's internal battle is painful and his attempt at penance is something at which he fails. The plot is compelling and causes one to ask hard questions. Has not everyone

done something, big or small, for which they are guilty? Can one truly escape even if no one, or only one person, knows? Despite his sin, his crime, his humanity is still there. Is that enough? How does one weigh one person's crime against another's? Can one person achieve grace while another does not? It is fascinating for an author to stretch to such a level while writing a fast action, gritty crime novel. Even more so, when the questions are left unanswered.

FORSAKEN COUNTRY is a first-rate book of personal introspection offset by drama and suspense. It is a study in shades of grey. Are there any circumstances in which murder is justified? Can one, should one be forgiven for such an act? It makes one question whether anyone is all good or all evil. What is the price of redemption? Not even Eskens provides an answer, but he does leave one wondering where Max goes from here.

THE INK BLACK HEART

by Robert Galbraith (aka J.K. Rowling)

Mulholland Books, Aug 2022

Cormoran Strike #6

Rating: F

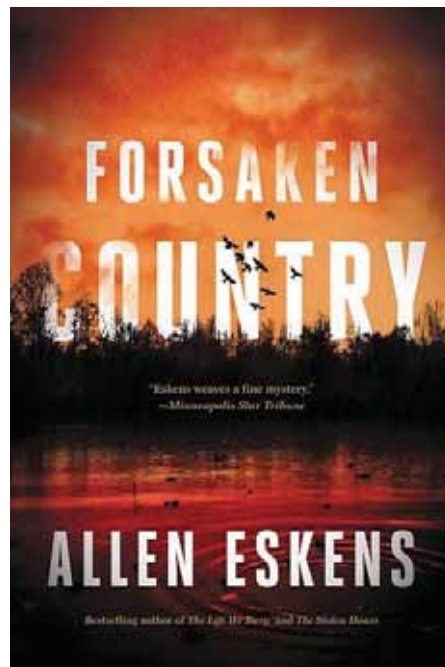
First Sentence: Of all the couples sitting in the Rivoli Bar at the Ritz that Thursday evening, the pair that was having the most conspicuously good time was not, in fact, a couple.

Edie Ledwell begs PI Robin Endicott for help. Edie, who created a popular cartoon, claims she is being persecuted by an anonymous online figure called Anomie. The detective agency initially refuses the case, but after Edie is murdered, Strike and Robin become determined to uncover Anomie's real identity.

This review will be short, and not very sweet, as opposed to the book. Robert Galbraith (aka J.K. Rowling) had all the time and money in the world to write an excellent book. Instead, it appears she didn't really care. It seems, too, she decided neither an editor nor a proofreader was needed.

The grammatical errors are appalling:

"...sitting alone at the partners' desk in the agency's small office in Denmark



Street, killing time before setting out to view a flat in Acton by reviewing the Groomer file.” WHAT?????? How about...

“...killing time by reviewing the Groomer file before setting out to view a flat in Acton.”

The writing overall seems juvenile and amateurish.

Page after page of faux magazine articles and tweets is not good writing or particularly clever. It's filler. One has the impression that even the publisher wasn't that impressed. In the Kindle version, the layout and font size of the tweets were unreadable. Anyone with vision problems would find it very difficult to read.

THE INK BLACK HEART, in my view, isn't worth one's time, a lot of time due to its length, or money when there are so many better books. The best thing I can say is that I received a refund when I returned the book. I'll wait for the television series, thanks. At least, that is something done well.

MURDER IN THE ETERNAL CITY

Ashley Gardner

JA/AG Publishing, Sept 2022

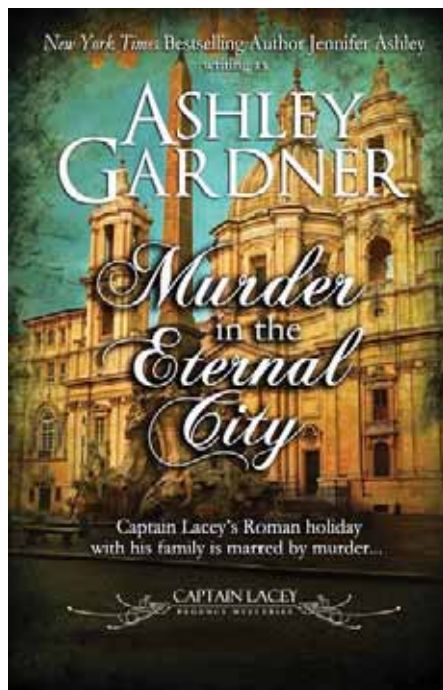
Captain Gabriel Lacy #16

Rating: A

First Sentence: The first English Person I encountered as I wandered the vast city of Rome in February of 1820 was a man I already knew.

Captain Gabriel Lacey, and his loyal bodyguard Brewster, are in Rome with Lord Grenville. He has been commissioned by James Denis, criminal overlord of London, to obtain a small marble statue while he is there. In the process, he encounters a man he thought to be dead who asks for his help. Lacey is also asked to help prevent Conte Trevisan, an aristocrat, from ruining his daughter. Lacey is further tasked with discovering the murderer of Conte De Luca, man who owns the statue Denis desires.

One is always a bit afraid that a series, by the 16th book, may become repetitive or stale. There is no fear of that with Gardner. Her books are very much character driven, and what great characters they are. Their lives continue to develop and change with time. And



what wonderful characters they are. One of the best things about Lacey is that he is not a superhero. He doesn't win every fight or always come to the correct conclusion. But he is surrounded by those who support him, and he's willing to change his mind. Brewster, Lacey's bodyguard, is a pleasure. More than simply muscle, he is intelligent, well read, and clever.

Lord Grenville does play a role, albeit less than in some books, as does Lacey's wife Donata, who appears later in the story. One appreciates that Gardner has avoided the trope of having the wife become actively involved in the investigation.

Gardner's descriptions create a visual picture of place and time, even including the earthquakes which are common to Italy. She does an excellent job of switching from the gentility of the drawing room to the danger of the streets. Although most of the story is set in Rome, one is also taken to Herculaneum, Pompeii, and Napoli, bringing the locations to life and seamlessly incorporating their history. Art is an important element of the story along with the rising popularity of opera, and the looting of ancient treasures. In fact, it is a piece of art that provides the final twist at the end.

MURDER IN THE ETERNAL

CITY is a delightfully twisty book, where one never knows who can be trusted and people are not always what they seem. It is exciting and suspenseful, tempered by scenes of Lacey and his much-loved wife, Donata. One hopes this series will continue for many books to come.

THE OVERNIGHT GUEST

by Heather Gudenkauf - Standalone

Park Row, Jan 2022, 336 pp

Standalone

Rating: F

First Sentence: On August 12, 2000, Abby Morris, out of breath with sweat trickling down her temple, was hurrying down the gray ribbon of gravel road for her nightly walk.

Crime writer Wylie Lark is snowed in at the farmhouse where she retreated to write. The setting is perfect as two decades earlier, two people were murdered there, and a girl disappeared. What she doesn't expect is to find a child nearly frozen in the snow, or that someone is desperate to find them.

There is nothing worse than starting out reading a prologue pretending to be Chapter One, a character who is too stupid to live, and a woman willing to put up with physical abuse. The author lost my attention from the very beginning.

THE OVERNIGHT GUEST is yet another book with multiple storylines, alternating narrators, and multiple points of view. While some may appreciate that style of writing, I found it a tiresome and annoying device.

THINGS WE DO IN THE DARK

by Jennifer Hillier

Minotaur Books, Jul 2022

Standalone

Rating: D

First Sentence: There's a time and place for erect nipples, but the back of a Seattle police car definitely isn't it.

Paris Peralta's husband has been murdered. Covered in blood, and holding a straight razor, she is immediately arrested. Her greatest fear is that the media attention will result in Paris' true identity and past being exposed by her mother, Ruby Reyes, who is in prison for a similar crime. Ruby will claim Paris

was guilty of that murder, too.

The first line of this book sets the tone, and it goes straight downhill from there. The biggest problem with this book is that it was filled, absolutely filled, with unlikable characters. There really isn't one with whom one can identify or empathize.

Back story can be a good thing. Drowning the reader in back story is not. And a backstory that often makes one's skin crawl is even worse. Yes, it was understandable and explained why the character was as she was, but one would need something to make one care about the character. Instead, she made some horrendously stupid decisions both in the past and in the present.

Although this wasn't meant to be a police procedural, the lack of any normal procedure was almost comical. Any author who writes books involving the police should at least know the basics.

There was no real suspense; no breath-catching twists. The perpetrator was obvious very early on in the book, and the outcome was predictable.

THINGS WE DO IN THE DARK was an overlong, convoluted story with characters about whom one may not care less. Apparently, Hillier has written other highly rated books, but one couldn't tell that by this one.

THE BOOKSTORE SISTERS

by Alice Hoffman

Amazon Original Stories – Nov 2022
Standalone Short Story

Rating: B+

First Sentence: *The letter to Isabel Gibson arrived on a Tuesday, which had always been the unluckiest day of the week.*

Isabel Gibson had left Brinkley's Island, Maine, far behind and is now living in New York City. Her parents are dead, the family bookstore is nearly bankrupt, and she has broken completely from her sister, Sophie. Still, she can't ignore the letter which draws her back to the Island, and to the past.

Isabel is a character with whom many may easily identify—"She could even forget that she had once been considered the girl most likely to become somebody, when she'd turned out to be

nobody in particular." Many may also identify with being estranged from their family or a family member. Hoffman conveys that situation very well.

As a lover of books, one desperately wants to get their hands on the bookshop and straighten things up. There's a sense that, as with the relationship of the two sisters, it had once been wonderful. The question is whether it could be again. And then there is Violet, Sophie's daughter who doesn't like to read yet compares Isabel to Mary Poppins; Hank the Labrador, and Johnny Lenox, Isabel's childhood friend growing. Of those, Sophie can be irritating as she is always in tears. However, the letter from her mother that Isabel finds is worth shedding a few tears over.

THE BOOKSTORE SISTERS is a quick read filled with lots of very good truths. It's a lovely little, short story, sometimes reading a bit juvenile, but with a good lesson to be learned.

FOX CREEK

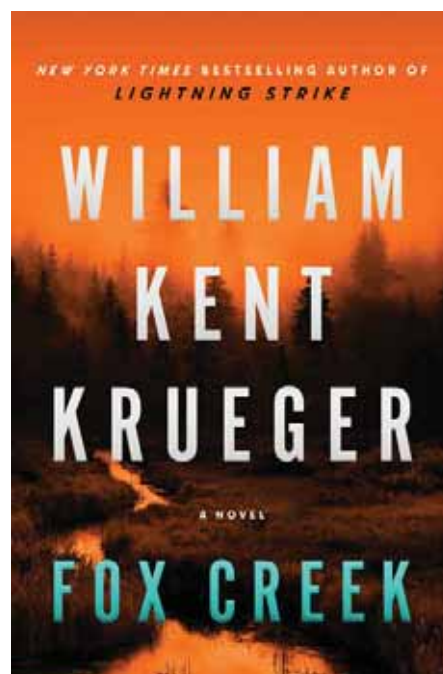
by William Kent Krueger

Atria Books, Aug 2022

Cork O'Connor #19

Rating: A+

First Sentence: *It's after the lunch rush, and the man at the window orders a Sam's Special, large fries, and a chocolate shake, a pretty standard request.*



Henry Meloux, an ancient Ojibway healer, has had visions of his own death. Dolores Morriseau has come to Henry for solace and advice. Cork O'Connor's wife, and Henry's niece, Rainy, agrees to assist Henry. All is well until three men, one of whom tricked Cork into leading them to Henry's, show up intent on killing Dolores. The only choice Henry has is to lead the two women into the woods and head for the Boundary Waters to keep the three of them safe. Anton Morriseau, Dolores' brother-in-law, hunter, and cop with the Leech Lake Tribal Police, arrives and proves to Cork the man claiming to be related to Dolores is an imposter. He and Cork head off to find Henry, Dolores, and Rainy, not knowing the danger they will all be in.

There is a prologue, but it works, providing the perspective of one of the principal characters. The story is told in present tense from three points of view with the transitions indicated by the chapter heading. This prevents any confusion on the part of the reader.

Krueger has created an excellent ensemble of characters in Cork, Rainy, and Henry. Cork's son, Stephen, and Rainy's nephew, Daniel, also play a significant role. However, none of them are perfect and Cork's realization of a failure is one that can be felt and understood.

One can't help but admire Henry's philosophy toward death—"He understands his death is an experience neither to fear nor to welcome. It is simply a place toward which he has been walking since the moment of his birth." I also was taken by Henry always referring to the Native Indians as "The People," which conveys dignity and rightfulness. There are no weak characters here, all the supporting characters are significant to the story and well defined.

What is particularly interesting with this book is the character LaLoup, the tracker hired by the villain, and the change he undergoes. This is a character one hopes may return in future books.

It also has a mysterious message saying "Kill Catie" adds to the complexity of the plot. It's not unusual to have a story focused on the hunted, and

the hunters. Krueger takes it one step farther by adding another layer, and then the weather on top of it all, making it particularly exciting. Krueger's writing is visual due to his strong sense of place, and ability to convey emotions. Any time both the protagonists and the villains are up against a deadline the tension and suspense are heightened. In this case, each side knows they will experience serious consequences if they fail.

Krueger is a wonderful writer and reading the Author Notes is strongly recommended. Although this book can be read as a standalone, reading the entire series is a special treat.

FOX CREEK is an excellent and exciting read. This is not a book one will put down and come back to later. The theme is timely and important. The characters are excellent. In a review by John Purcell, he noted—"Cork is the center, but Henry is the heart." I couldn't have put it better. The ending is reassuring, but only if we pay attention. There are some good lessons to be learned.

THE KILLING HILLS

by Chris Offutt

Grove Press, 2021

Mick Harden #1

Rating: A+

First Sentence: The old man walked the hill with a long stick, pushing aside mayapple and horseweed, seeking ginseng.

Combat veteran Mick Hardin is now with the Army Criminal Investigation, Division. Currently home on leave, he needs to resolve issues with his pregnant wife, but his leave time is running out. His sister, Linda, is the newly appointed sheriff the town's Mayor wants fired. With a murder case on Linda's hands, and an inexperienced deputy, she turns to Mick for help.

There's nothing better than discovering an author one has not read previously and immediately getting drawn in by the author's voice and the characters. Offutt starts off with a chapter of wonderful description and ending with an eyebrow-raising revelation. Along the way, Hardin uses wonderful imagery—"The vulnerable always died early. Death begat death..."

Each character is strong and important to the story. One appreciates Hardin's approach of ---"I don't want nobody else to get killed, ...I had enough of it overseas. If I can stop it, I will." Mick isn't a character who goes in hard unless it's warranted. His scene with Mullin's mule and the front porch is delightful. Whereas the interaction between Mick and his wife, and his subsequent action, is raw yet Hardin truly captures the sense Mick's emotions.

Mick's sister, Linda, holds her own in the story—"There never was a body in Eldridge County that most folks didn't already know who did it. Usually a neighbor, a family, or drugs. ... This is different." Deputy Johnny Boy Tolliver, who gets car sick and believes ghosts exists but only in certain environments, is a particular favorite.

There is an underlying theme of family and love, even if that love is misguided. Offutt shows that even though a family may not have much, the strength of that love can determine certain choices, and not always in a positive way.

It can become a bit confusing keeping track of some of the characters who have both proper names and nicknames, yet Offutt fleshes each out character making them real people.

Some may not care for the way Offutt portrays the people of Kentucky, but it's important to remember he is depicting one region, and not even all the people of that region. While set in Appalachia, the book could have been set in almost any state with a concentration of people who live in the backcountry. The dignity of the people is reflected in their wisdom and philosophy on life. Mick shares—"...one of his grandfather's lessons. Searching interfered with the ability to find. ... *At night don't look for an animal trail, just walk where the trees aren't. See shapes and colors, not the thing itself.*"

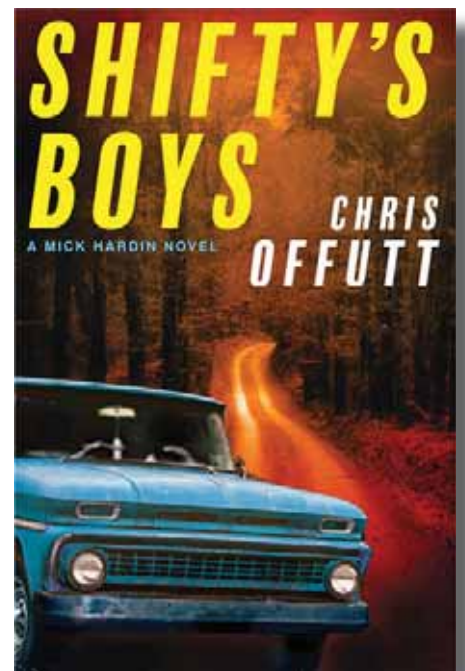
THE KILLING HILLS is a book that is unexpected in the very best way. The characters, dialogue, and descriptions are excellent. That's not to say there isn't violence; there is. Even so, Offutt is an author one may wish to follow.

SHIFTY'S BOYS

by Chris Offutt

Grove Press, Jun 2022

Mick Harden #2



Rating: A

First Sentence: At age eight, Albin decided to be a race-car driver when he grew up.

Mick Hardin's life isn't going well. He is on medical leave from the Army CID, dealing with the end of his marriage, and living in his late mother's house now owned by his sister, Linda, who is running for re-election as the sheriff of Rocksalt. Things are even worse for Barney Kissick, known as "Fuckin' Barney," a known drug dealer who was found shot to death in the parking lot of Western Auto. At Mick's last conversation with Shifty Kissick, Barney's mother, they were both armed. Now she wants him to find Barney's killer.

Offutt's descriptions often have a lyrical quality to them—"There was a palpable energy in the hills from the trees still in flower, the opening leaves of softwoods, and the infant animals."

The book is built on the strong, yet very human, characters. Mick is recovering from an IED injury and dealing with the betrayal of his soon-to-be ex-wife, trying to get off a dependency on drugs and alcohol to dull his pain. Linda wants to prove herself as sheriff by winning the election even if it means rescuing a dog from a tree. Deputy Johnny Boy Tolliver may have a weak stomach and a fear of ghosts, but he loves his job and is observant, organized, and resourceful. Shifty Kissick wants to know who killed her son. He may have been a drug dealer, but he

was her boy, and not the first she has lost or will lose.

Mick is a wonderfully atypical protagonist. From his experience in the military, he knows the value of life—"Fuckin' Barney got shot down like a dog. The guy might kill somebody else. There's never just one. If I can stop it, I will. I had enough of people dying to last a lifetime." Even Linda, is aware of it—"Despite being capable of violence, he operated from a base of compassion that surprised her." Even his stature is unexpected—"Shorter than everyone, including Linda, he exuded a sense of restrained power."

There are wonderful idioms which reflect the speech of the region such as describing someone as—"Keen as a briar. Crazy as a soup sandwich."

SHIFTY'S BOYS is darker, more violent, than Offutt's first book "The Killing Hills." Of Mitch, Offutt writes--"He'd become what he despised—a retribution killer." However, it's a very good read with great characters, and excellent dialogue, including thought provoking, backcountry wisdom. "He wondered how often people tried to convince themselves that homicide was acceptable in service to the greater good." This seems to be a common theme these days and an interesting one to ponder.

A WORLD OF CURIOSITIES

by Louise Penny

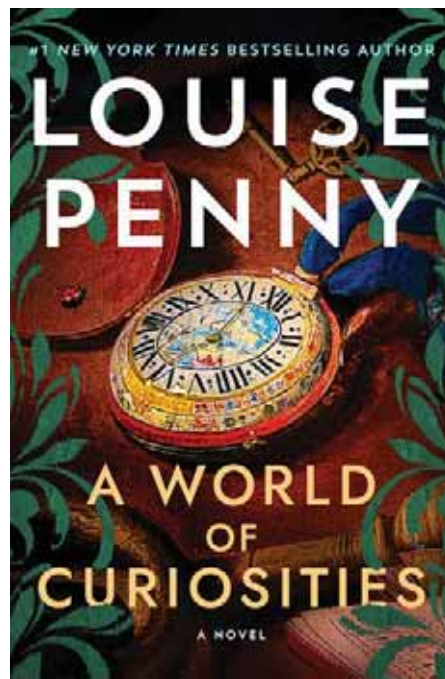
Minotaur Books, Nov 2022

Chief Inspector Armand Gamache #18

Rating: A+

First Sentence: "Oh, merde."

Going to the past can be painful and dangerous. It is there where Chief Inspector Gamache and Agent Jean-Guy Beauvoir first meet during the case of two children so emotionally damaged they may have murdered their own mother, Clotilde Arsenault. The older sister, Fiona, is sent to prison, while the brother, Sam, is deemed too young to be tried. Returning to the present, Gamache and his wife, Raine-Marie, take in a now-released Fiona and facilitated her enrollment in the École Polytechnique, from which she is now graduating along with Harriet, bookshop owner and ex-psychologist, Myrna Lander. Natalie Provost, a survivor of the Montreal Massacre where 14 were killed and 13 were wounded, all women, is receiving a special award. Sam show-



ing up at the graduation and is planning to stay in Three Pines, is an unwelcome surprise to Gamache, who never trusted the young man.

Myrna and her partner, Billy, are thinking of moving from above the bookshop. Instead, it is suggested they break through to an attic room that had been bricked off by Billy's ancestor and about which he'd only recently learned upon receiving a letter dated 1862. In the room, they find a trove of unusual objects, some of which had been stolen from Gabi and Olivier's bistro, and an enormous painting. The painting looks to be "The Paston Treasure," better known as *A World of Curiosities*, painted in the 1800s and housed in the U.K. But oddly, the painting in Three Pines is a copy filled with modern objects. Also, in the room is something long sought by Raine-Marie; a grimoire, a textbook of magic, inscribed with the name Anne Lamarque, a woman who'd been banished as a witch. After the death of the woman who sent the letter to Billy, Gamache brings in Agent Amelia Choquet to get up an Incident Room in Three Pines in order to learn how all these pieces fit together, and how did they lead to a serial killer Gamache arrested years before.

Penny paints wonderfully visual pictures and is such a lyrical writer. She imbues some of her characters with depth, wisdom and poetry, while others are as basic and ordinary as people often

are. "While he'd [Gamache] become an explorer of human emotions, Jean-Guy Beauvoir was the hunter." Penny also incorporates an informal, yet complete, cast of characters within the story. The reader learns new things about the characters, which keeps them developing and expanding. Ruth, the eclectic poet, provides humor, as well as wisdom and history essential to the plot, while Clara's information about the painting is fascinating.

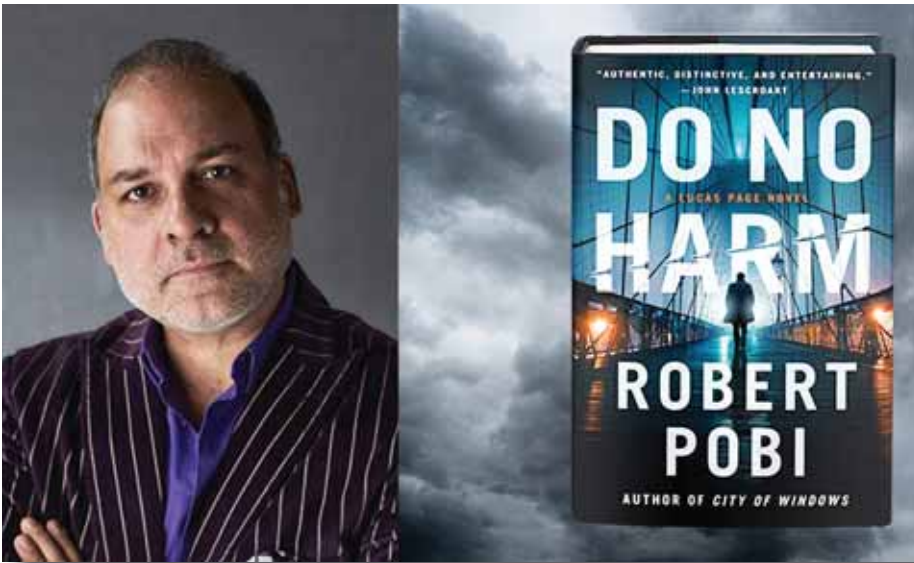
The interspersion of literary quotes and poems adds so much to the book. They may inject humor, but they may also connote other emotions, melancholy, sorrow, or a warning. It's not unusual for the reader to spend time looking up the source material for some of the quotes.

It's hard not to have favorite characters. One may be the brilliant and fascinating character of Amelia Choquet with her complex history. She is described by Myrna as—"If Ruth and a trash compactor had a child,..." Her use of three particular lines at the end of the book is incredibly powerful.

There can't be a story in Three Pines that doesn't include food. While the meals may be simpler than in some previous books, still one is tempted by chilled pea soup, grilled Gruyère and sweet onion sandwiches; salmon, fresh-cut asparagus, baby potatoes, and green salad with vinaigrette; charbroiled steak with chimichurri sauce and frites; and wild mushroom ravioli with sage brown butter.

The story is the most complex Penny has written to date. It begins by jumping back and forth in time yet is easy enough to follow. One must pay attention to the characters and their relationships. There is a lot to this plot that can't be exposed in a review. It isn't a book to stop and start but is best read by becoming completely absorbed in the story.

A WORLD OF CURIOSITIES is filled with misdirection and red herrings at every turn, even though the clues are there. One instinctively knows, at least hopes, everything will be alright, the suspense is such that the end may engender tears of relief. The reader is so invested in the characters, one experiences their pain, fear, and anger, but also their love. This is one of the most suspenseful books Penny has written and one that must have required a tremendous amount of research. It may also be one of her best.



DO NO HARM

by Robert Pobi

Minotaur Books, Aug 2022

Dr. Lucas Page #3

Rating: B+

First Sentence: Dr. Jennifer Delmonico was approaching the second tower, which translated to somewhere around seventeen minutes at her usual pace.

Lucas Page is a polymath, astrophysicist, professor, husband, father, and ex-FBI agent. During a gala with his wife Erin, a surgeon, a video is played memorializing all the doctors who died by suicide or falls in the past year. Page begins to see a pattern in the deaths and contacts the FBI. Page, and Special Agent Alice Whitaker, with whom he's worked before, are joined by NYPD Detective Russo in finding a link between the deaths.

It's not uncommon to have a protagonist with scars or injuries, but Page trumps them all. He has a wealth of scars, a prosthetic arm and leg, and a glass eye. But his brain is very much intact and always working.

The book is, initially, very enjoyable. There is an interesting protagonist, although a lot of characters, excellent dialogue, humor, the author conveyed emotion very well. However, one becomes tired of hearing about Page's injuries and prosthetics.

Pobi's descriptions are great until one becomes annoyed with his use of 15 words where six would have sufficed, and it takes these brilliant people two-thirds of the

book to finally realize the motive the reader may have figured out a long time past. At that point, one starts to look to see how far they've read, and how much is left. That's when it becomes obvious that the author desperately needs an editor. The book should have been 332, not 432 pages long. More is not always better.

An interesting anomaly is when, in talking about a plastic ghost gun made with a 3-D printer, the characters note that the plastic is an "Ender product and they sold somewhere around three hundred thousand pounds last year." Considering the book is set in New York City, and all the characters are American, one wonders how that crept in. There is also a scene with a gunshot wound where the Page's actions make no sense at all and even the most inexperienced person would have known what to do.

The writing is repetitive at times and needed a stronger proofreader. This would have helped the book overall. There are a couple very good twists and red herrings, which are appreciated. However, although it is an amusing trope, cars don't really catch fire and blow up that easily. On the other hand, one might envy Whitacre's driving ability, as long as she's not driving your car.

DO NO HARM is a quick read; it's fast paced, it's violent, it's funny, it has interesting characters, great descriptions—although sometimes they go on far too long. Overall, it's a pretty good read; more than an airplane read certainly, but it really did need tightening up.

FIRES OF EDO

by Susan Spann

Seventh Street Books, Feb 2022

Hiro Hattori/Fr. Matteo #8

Rating: A

First Sentence: *FIRE!*

Samurai Hiro and the Portuguese priest, Father Mateo, that Hiro has been assigned to protect, have arrived in Edo to warn their fellow spies to return to Kyoto since their lives are in danger. A fire sends them to assist the fire brigade, headed by Daisuke, a fellow member of Iga Ryu who bullied Hiro when they were children. This is the third recent fire, yet this one reveals the partially dismembered body of yet another samurai. A bookshop owner and his apprentice are arrested and may die unless Hiro and Father Mateo can save them, the guild, and even their own lives which are now at risk.

What a wonderful look at 16th Century Japan, its villages, and its technique for fighting fires. But this was no gentle time. Spann makes clear how harsh feudal life, and law, could be.

Hiro and Father Mateo Ávila de Santos, along with their delightful housekeeper Ana, and her cat Gato, are characters one enjoys spending time with, as well as they do with one another. As usual, it is best to start this series at the beginning to understand the character development. Part of the intrigue is in following them travel to the Portuguese colony at Yokoseura where Father Mateo can be kept safe until Japan names a new shogun, a matter fraught with danger and spies from rival sides. Yet it is in their travels where they find themselves embroiled in murder and great danger.

One can't set a book set in Japan without talking about the food—"Paper-thin slices of fresh *sashimi* rested on delicate, palm-sized dishes glazed the color of autumn leaves. Nearby, a pair of whole grilled fish sat side by side on a rectangular, black-glazed plate. Coils of pale, fragrant steam rose from the covered soup bowl and the heaping of rice on the far lacquered tray. Beside the rice, two tiny plates of bite-sized *tsuke-mono* rounded out the meal."

But it's the mystery and the characters involved that keep the pages

turning. You have Daisuke, commander of the fire brigade and Hiro's long-time adversary; Hanzō, a famous ninja commander and leader of the Iga ryu, and Hiyoshi who is politically ambitious and wants to be the new head of the fire brigade. One does wish the Cast of Characters was listed at the beginning of the book, rather than the end.

FIRES OF EDO is suspenseful, with plenty of twists and a very dramatic climax. It is educational as Spann includes actual historical figures. It's a quick, engrossing read and a very good addition to the series.

COLD MOON

by Alexandra Sokoloff
Thomas & Mercer, Jul 2015,
Agent Matthew Roarke #3

Rating: A-

First Sentence: The moon is high, spilling icy light through the pine branches.

Cara Lindstrom has been caught and is awaiting trial. When the prosecution's witness goes missing, the case falls apart and Cara is released. Agent Matthew Roarke is a man who is seriously conflicted and is obsessed by Cara. He knows her history and her motive; she saved his life. But he can't ignore the fact that she has killed, no matter the reason. Now there are more deaths. The style is that of Cara, but could be copycat killings committed by Jade, a young prostitute.

There is no getting around how powerful is this book, and extremely hard to rate. Should one be appalled by Cara, Jade and their actions? Or does one support the fact that "justice" almost always fails women, especially these women?

Cara is a strong, unique character. She is clever, yet ruthless. The more one learns of her past, the more one empathizes with her. Yet, one has a hard time justifying her actions. Having Cara's cousin, Erin, in the story adds a more sympathetic aspect to Cara.

It raises the question of whether some people simply commit bad acts or whether some are truly Evil—"Whether *It* was a separate, independent force or just a word for the evil that humans beings do, Roarke didn't know. He only knew that evil was real. *It* was evil."

Sokoloff's anger at the justice system—"Other countries prohibited the

overseeing of female prisoners by male guards, but US laws put its incarcerated women in constant physical jeopardy in the name of equal opportunity employment."-- and how badly young victims of sexual exploitation are ignored leaps off every page, and rightfully so. She addresses the hard issues of prostitution and human trafficking, as well as the challenges FBI agents have trying to fight those crimes. She raises a very hard question of legality versus morality.

Roarke is critically important. When asked what he wants from Cara, he responds "I want to understand her. ... She believes in some...supernatural force. A living evil." He represents "the system," but one with a conscience that is destroying him. How does one blindly support the law when the law doesn't support the weak? Sokoloff does a wonderful job portraying his internal conflict.

COLD MOON is the third book in this unusual, and unforgettable series that really does need to be read in order. It's not a casual read, but one that grips the reader from the beginning to end. There are six books in the series insisting on being read. Sokoloff is very good at creating tension, but one should be warned: There is graphic violence.

DEATH ON A GALICIAN SHORE

by Domingo Villar
Abacus Reprint Edition, May 2012
D.I. Leo Caldas #2

Rating: A-

First Sentence: Inspector Leo Caldas got out of a taxi and, stepping over the large puddles on the pavement, entered the hospital.

DI Leo Caldas is called out to a small fishing village to sign off on the supposed suicide of Justo Castelo, a local sailor. But something doesn't add up; a suicide doesn't have bound wrists. The more Caldas and Rafael Estevez, his second, investigate, the more complex the case becomes as a decade-old shipwreck and two disappearances add to the mystery.

There is nothing better than reading a book set in a location unfamiliar to the reader. It's nice when we're taken to a small community of hard-working

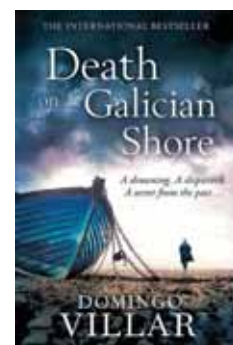
people yet can see commonalities to people everywhere.

Caldas, and his second Estevez, are fascinating protagonists. Caldas is observant, logical, and gets terribly carsick. He is local to the area and hosts a radio program where people air their complaints, almost none of which he can resolve—"After the seventh call, he tallied the score: City police seven, Leo nil." It's nice having his father and grandfather as part of the story. Even the absent wife contributes to who Caldas is. Estevez is not local, much rougher around the edges and just doesn't understand Caldas or the people of the area. He's continually having to be kept in check by Caldas.

Estevez can be a little hard to take, but Caldas manages him well. Between Caldas always being asked if he is the one on the radio, and Estevez always being told he's not from around there, there's just enough mild humor to take the edge off.

The description of food, simple food, may leave one hungry—"Soup from the fridge, made with slab bacon, beef broth, turnip tops, broad beans and potatoes." The excellent descriptions of settings create a strong sense of place as Caldas gets to know the people in this fishing village.

The plot is well constructed with well-drawn characters. The more Caldas digs, the more he finds that secrets from the past have determined the present. **DEATH ON A GALICIAN SHORE** is a very well-done detective story. There's no use of technology here, just basic police work. One thing keeps building on the other with plenty of red herrings and a very good twist toward the end. This is an author worth reading.



Australian Crime Fiction



Jeff Poppo Reviews

STONE TOWN
by Margaret Hickey
(Penguin, \$A32.99)

Rating: A

Margaret Hickey made a good entry into Australia's crime writing ranks last year with her debut **CUTTERS END**, which was recently shortlisted for a Ned Kelly Award for Best Debut Crime Fiction. It was a good read, but her latest novel, **STONE TOWN**, is a more accomplished and better paced book.

Following the events in **CUTTERS END**, Senior Sergeant Mark Ariti took a posting back to the small outback town he grew up in to be with his dying mother. His mother has now passed away, but Ariti has stayed on enjoying the relative peace of the town. That quietness is destroyed, however, when a property developer is found with a bullet to the back of the head and Ariti becomes caught up in the search for a missing policewoman.

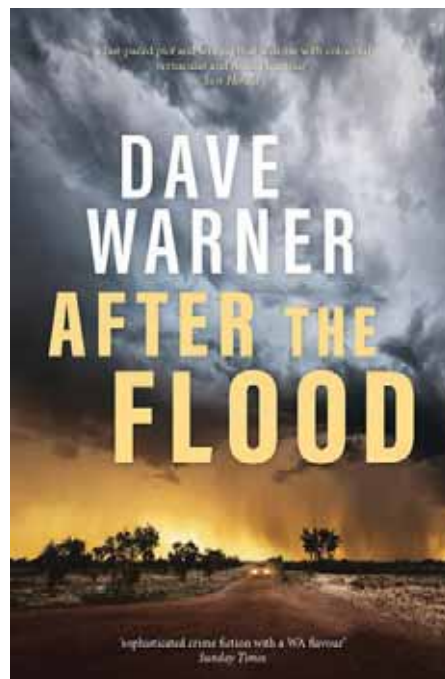
This is an outstanding crime novel. The plotting is very assured, and Margaret keeps the story moving along at a good pace. The plot develops in a believable manner and is peppered with good surprises and flashes of excitement. The characters are well developed and credible, especially the very engaging Ariti. More human than most fictional detectives, Ariti has a good mix of confidence and uncertainty. He is far from perfect, but is a capable copper and considered in his actions. His reflections on his recently deceased mother, and the difficulty of returning to the town in which he grew up, are convincing and moving, and add good texture to the story. He is a very fine addition to the growing ranks of fictional Australian rural police

detectives and is up there with Dave Warner's Dan Clement and Garry Disher's Paul (Hirsch) Hirschhausen as the pick of the current crop.

Margaret also excels in her descriptions of the countryside and the changing nature of the small country towns in which the action takes place. Not only does she capture the sights and sounds of the bush, but also the mood and cadence of life in a small country town and the roles played by the town's women. There are also nice touches of humour, including Ariti's amusing, and highly believable, encounter with enthusiastic birdwatchers.

Most importantly, the book builds to a tense and unexpected climax. I guessed some of it, but most of the twists and turns came as a complete surprise. A very enjoyable read.

AFTER THE FLOOD
by Dave Warner
Freemantle Press, \$A32.99
Dan Clement #3



Rating: A

Dave Warner is one of Australia's premier crime writers, as well as an accomplished musician, and his books are notable for their vivid depictions of Western Australia.

AFTER THE FLOOD follows up **BEFORE IT BREAKS**, which won a Ned Kelly Award, and **CLEAR TO THE HORIZON**, and takes us back to the Western Australian outback town of Broome and dogged police detective Dan Clement.

Clement's work is mainly filled with relatively minor crimes, including the theft of explosives from a mine site and social justice protests at an abattoir, but that changes when a man is found crucified near a remote cattle station. The identity of the dead man is initially a bit of a mystery, but gradually Clement and his team come to realise that something very sinister links the killing to other crimes in the area.

Warner is very good at realistically capturing the mechanics of remote police work in an interesting manner and there is plenty of convincing, gritty police detail here, as well as evocative descriptions of Broome and the surrounds, including a nearby island. The plotting is very good, and Warner keeps you guessing as to where the story is going. The opening sections generate plenty of interest, and the tension steadily increases as the book builds to taut and bloody climax.

Much of the pleasure of **AFTER THE FLOOD** comes from the strong cast of characters that add real texture and credibility to the story. They capture the diversity of views in a small town and help create a vivid sense of place. They are also characters that you come invested in and worry about what hap-

pens to them.

Dave Warner can always be relied upon to produce a stellar piece of crime fiction and **AFTER THE FLOOD** is no exception. Recommended.

EXILES

by Jane Harper

Macmillan, \$A32.99; in U.S., Flatiron Books, \$27.99, January, 2023

Aaron Falk #3

Rating: A-

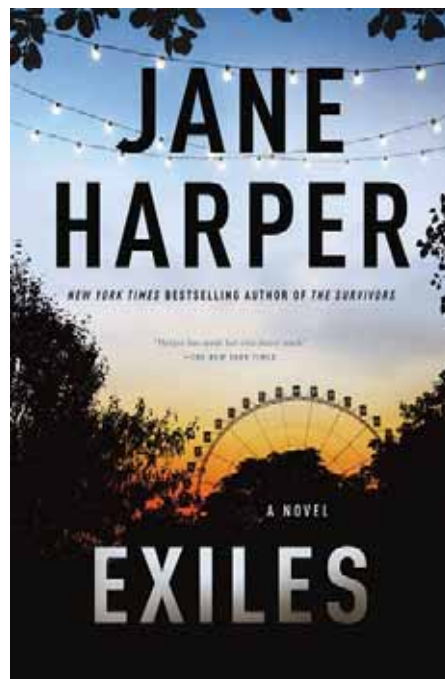
Jane Harper’s latest novel, **EXILES**, brings back the popular detective from her first two novels, **THE DRY** and **FORCE OF NATURE**, Aaron Falk, and moves him from the dry outback to more pleasant climes.

Set in the heart of South Australia’s wine region, **EXILES** revolves around the disappearance of a young mother during a local annual festival. Kim Gillespie’s baby is found alone in her pram towards the end of the night’s festivities. There is no sign of Kim and despite an intensive search she is never found.

A year on and Kim’s absence still casts a long shadow over the community. There is uncertainty and suspicion among her friends and family, as they gather again for the annual festival and to celebrate the christening of the daughter of Falk’s friends, George and Rita Raco. Falk tries to enjoy the family celebration and soak up life in the lush valley, but he finds himself increasingly drawn to the mystery of the missing woman and an earlier death. He also begins to suspect that the tight-knit group of friends gathered together that weekend may be more fractured than it seems.

EXILES is a leisurely paced novel, especially in the opening sections, and Jane takes some time to set up the book’s different strands. She carefully maps out the various elements of the story and keeps the reader guessing as to the outcome all the way to the final reveal. The characters are well fleshed out and interesting, and the portrayal of the local community is rich and convincing.

Enhancing the enjoyment of the story are some interesting developments in



Falk’s personal life, which are maturely and credibly handled. Jane’s portrayal of relationships and how they change over time is also well managed and she is skilled at creating believable younger characters. The book also sensitively handles themes around the impact of lost parental relationships and how too often ‘we see what we expect to see’.

Overall, **EXILES** is an enjoyable read. The opening sections require some patience, but once underway it is a very clever and involving mystery.

George’s Take: Jeff’s description of **EXILES** as “a leisurely paced novel” is spot on. One has to exercise some patience to get to the more interesting parts near the end. I’m a big fan of Jane Harper’s talent so I’m more than willing to be a little indulgent with her set-up. And the clever ending is more than enough of a reward for that patience. It was also nice to see the workaholic Aaron Falk, who has had very little in the way of happiness with relationships, finally find some work and relationship happiness.

THE TILT

by Chris Hammer

Allen & Unwin, \$A32.99

Rating: A-

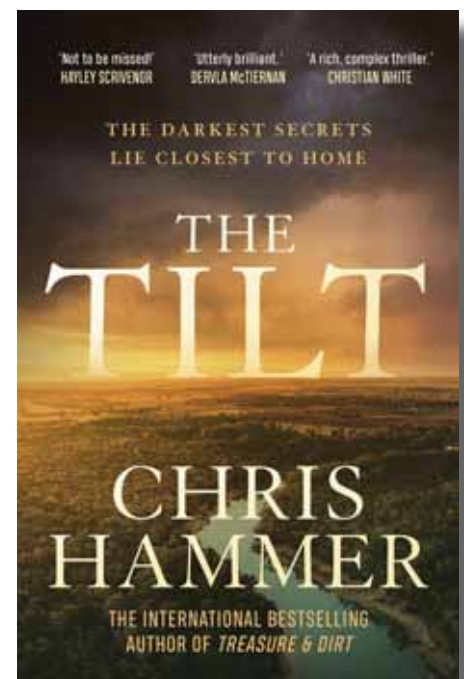
Chris Hammer mixes up a heady brew of murder, rural history, old family

secrets and modern day terrorism in his latest novel, **THE TILT**.

THE TILT re-unites the two key characters from Hammer’s last book **TREASURE & DIRT**, homicide detective Ivan Lucic and Detective Constable Nell Buchanan, who has recently joined the rural homicide team. For their first case they are dispatched to near the New South Wales and Victoria border, where an old skeleton has been discovered in a recently emptied reservoir. The murder seems to date back to the 1940s, but it could also be linked to more recent crimes, and when a further body is discovered, the heat is on Lucic and Nell to quickly solve it.

Nell comes from the local area where the skeleton was found, and as the investigation progresses it seems that her family might have links to the killing and other crimes from the past. Meanwhile Nell also has to deal with some sinister, shadowy figures, who are well armed and willing to inflict violence to achieve their aims.

THE TILT is a big book with a rich amount of detail and gently developing storylines. The story is mainly told from Nell’s perspective as she purses her first investigation and juggles the demands of family, but interweaved into it are extracts from Jimmy Waters’ statement that goes back to his childhood in the



Second World War and Tessa's story of what happened to her in 1973. As the narrative switches between the three gradually merging timelines, Hammer delivers some good surprises and creates an interesting historical narrative of the local area.

Each of the three timelines is convincing and credible, and Hammer accurately portrays the tensions of today and also what it was like in rural Australia in the 1940s and early 1970s. Despite its length, the book moves along at a good pace, aided by the increasing threats against Nell by well-armed locals. Keeping track of the various family members down the years, and their links to the modern crimes, requires some concentration, but it is worth the effort.

The local countryside and rural towns are vividly described, and Hammer gives a strong sense of the history that shaped them. He also convincingly captures the tensions that have emerged in the wake of COVID. With his well-trained journalist's eye, he quickly paints a scene and effortlessly imparts a wealth of background information on a diverse range of topics. The characterisations are astute and subtly drawn, and the central pairing of Lucic and Buchanan are credible and engaging.

In all, **THE TILT** is an impressive and enjoyable novel that delivers a strong ending. Some trimming would have helped the tension, but I think most enjoy Hammer's descriptions and his easy evocation of Australia's recent past.

Note: **THE TILT** will be released in the United Kingdom as **DEAD MAN'S CREEK**.

DAY'S END

by Garry Disher

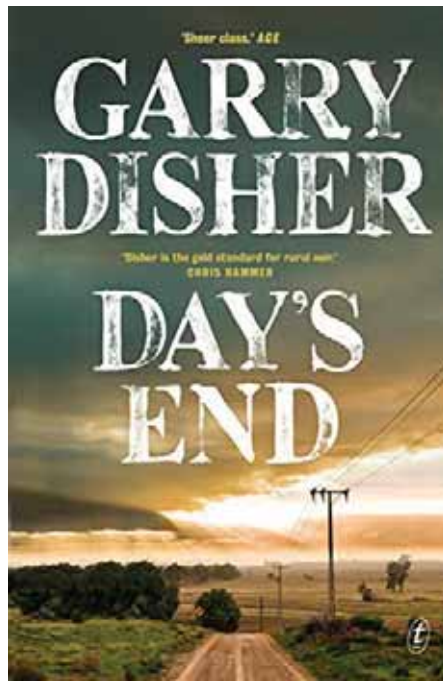
Text, \$A32.99

Constable Paul Hirshhausen #4

Rating: A-

Garry Disher's **DAY'S END** is the fourth in his series about struggling South Australian rural policeman Constable Paul Hirschhausen.

Set during the COVID pandemic,



DAY'S END finds Hirsch managing a range of minor crimes, including car theft, cyber-bullying of a schoolgirl and a range of small time scams. Complicating matters are the tensions arising from the pandemic and the "Covid morons" who refuse to get vaccinated and are attacking those with masks. The discovery of a body in a suitcase further escalates tensions, as does the arrival of a Swedish forensic scientist who is trying to find out what happened to her backpacking son, who went missing while the international borders were closed.

This is a well-crafted crime novel that excels in its characterisations and the subtlety of its plotting. Disher takes a little time to put his story in place, but once underway the various sub-plots move along at a good pace, often heading in unexpected directions. He keeps a good grip on the assorted storylines, and skillfully builds the tension as the various elements come together in a tense conclusion.

The depiction of rural South Australia rings true and Disher shares Ian Rankin's ability to capture the mood of a location through his vivid descriptions of the setting. He also ably captures the mood and detail of community policing in a remote rural area. Hirsch is a very well rounded char-

acter. The pandemic and some horrific events make him more reflective this time around, but he is a very capable detective and Disher skillfully captures his strengths and weaknesses. Personally, the pacing was a little slow for me, but I enjoyed the breadth of the book's concerns and the mature handling of some sensitive issues. A very good book that confirms Disher's place as a master of outback noir.

Note: there are some disturbing scenes involving very young children and animals.

MURDER IN WILLIAMSTOWN

by Kerry Greenwood

Allen & Unwin, \$A32.99

Phryne Fisher #22

Rating: B

The first Phryne Fisher novel, **COCAINE BLUES**, appeared in 1989 and set the tone for the twenty odd novels, all set in the late 1920s, that followed it. Now some thirty years later, helped along by the popular television series and the regrettable movie, the elegant Miss Fisher has become a mainstay of the Australian and international crime fiction scenes.

Set in 1929, **MURDER IN WILLIAMSTOWN** finds Phryne being harassed by threatening letters. She is not too troubled by it and enlists the help of her unflappable apprentice, Tinker, to determine their source. Things, however, quickly spiral out of control and when her lover, Lin Chung, is also threatened, Phryne has to step in and sort things out, as well as solving a murder or two.

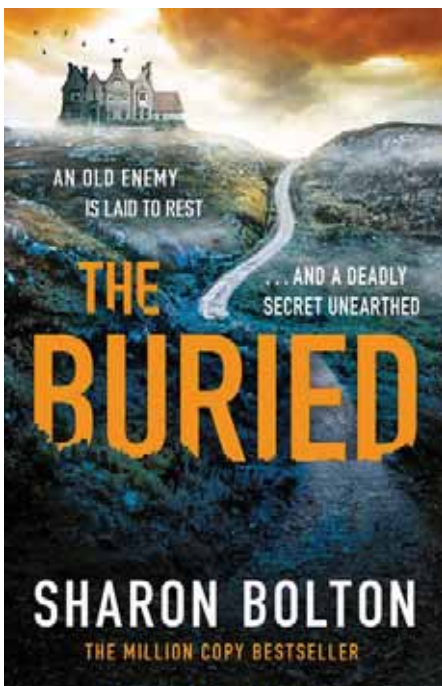
Regular readers of the series will know what to expect and Kerry delivers her usual mixture of light mystery, amusing banter, interesting characters and an abundance of historical detail. The story moves along at a brisk pace and Phryne is her usual charming and capable self. Kerry's touch is light, but there is still some substance in her telling and the book addresses a range of issues that are still relevant today.

An enjoyable romp that also includes a moving and interesting Afterword.

What's New In the U.K.



THE BURIED, Sharon Bolton (Orion, £16.99, November). Florence Lovelady, the most senior serving policewoman in Britain, visits convicted serial killer Larry Glassbrook in prison. Larry is coming to the end of his life but has one last task for Florence: to learn the identity of the remains discovered at children's home Black Moss Manor. The town Florence escaped narrowly with her life still holds many secrets. Will she finally learn the truth? Or will time run out for her first?



WOLF PACK, Will Dean (Point Blank, £16.99, October). Rose Farm is home to a group of survivalists, completely cut off from the outside world. Until now. A young woman goes missing within the perimeter of the farm compound. Can reporter Tuva Moodyson talk her way inside the tight-knit group to find her story? As

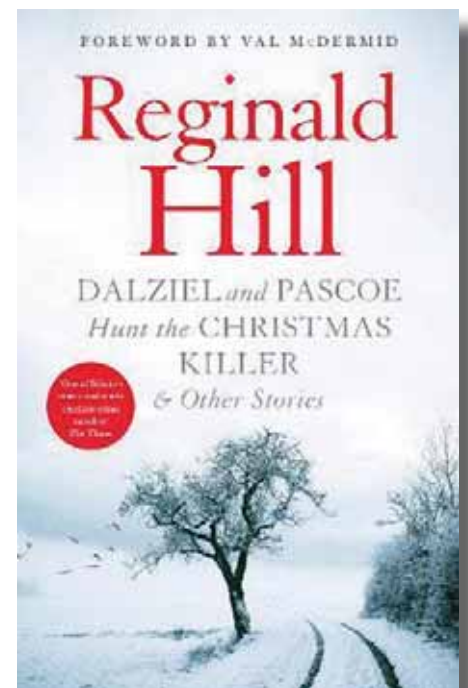
Tuva attempts to unmask the culprit, she gains unique access to the residents. But soon she finds herself in danger of the pack turning against her – will she make her way back to safety so she can expose the truth?

BLACKSTONE FELL, Martin Edwards (Head of Zeus, £20.00, September). 1930. Nell Fagan is a journalist on the trail of a intriguing and bizarre mystery: in 1606, a man vanished from a locked gatehouse in a remote Yorkshire village, and 300 years later, it happened again. Nell confides in the best sleuth she knows, judge's daughter Rachel Savernake. Thank goodness she did, because barely a week later Nell disappears, and Rachel is left to put together the pieces of the puzzle. Looking for answers, Rachel travels to lonely Blackstone Fell in Yorkshire, with its eerie moor and sinister tower. With help from her friend Jacob Flint – who's determined to expose a fraudulent clairvoyant – Rachel will risk her life to bring an end to the disappearances and bring the truth to light.

THE MITFORD SECRET, Jessica Fellowes (Sphere, £16.99, November). It's 1941, and the Mitford household is splintered by the vicissitudes of war. To bring the clan together - maybe for one last time - Deborah invites them to Chatsworth for Christmas, along with a selection of society's most impressive and glamorous guests, as well as old family friend Louisa Cannon, a private detective. One night, a psychic arrives, and to liven things up Deborah agrees she may host a séance. But entertainment turns to dark mystery as the psychic reveals that a maid was murdered in this very same house - and she can

prove it. Louisa steps forward to try to solve the cold case.

DALZIEL AND PASCOE HUNT THE CHRISTMAS KILLER & OTHER STORIES, Reginald Hill (HarperCollins, £16.99, October). A vicar nailed to a tree in Yorkshire. The theft of a priceless artefact during a fire. A detective forced to tell the truth for 24 hours. A body hidden in a basement. From the restless streets of London to the wilds of the Lake District, displaying all his trademark humour, playfulness and clever plotting, this landmark collection brings together the very best of Reginald Hill's short stories for the first time, complete with a foreword from Val McDermid.



THE LOST MAN OF BOMBAY, Vaseem Khan (Hodder & Stoughton, £16.99, August). Bombay, 1950. When the body of a white man is found frozen in the Himalayan foothills near Dehra Dun, he is christened the Ice Man by the national media. Who is he? How long has he been there? Why was he killed? As Inspector Persis Wadia and Metropolitan Police criminalist Archie Blackfinch investigate the case in Bombay, they uncover a trail left behind by the enigmatic Ice Man.

U.K. Reviews



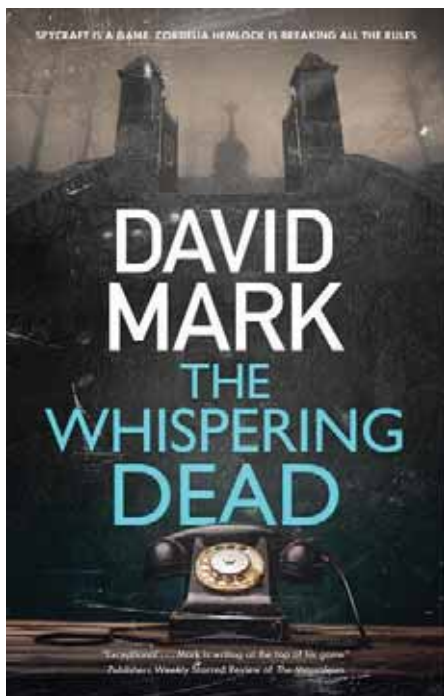
Jeff Pople Reviews

THE WHISPERING DEAD

by David Mark
Severn House, £20.99
Rating: A

THE WHISPERING DEAD is a nasty little gem of a spy novel that kept captivated me from beginning to end.

I really enjoyed David Mark's **THE MAUSOLEUM** from a couple of years ago and **THE WHISPERING DEAD** continues the adventures of Cordelia Hemlock and Felicity Goose. Whereas **THE MAUSOLEUM** started out as a regional British murder mystery before morphing into something much more sinister, **THE WHISPERING DEAD** is quite clearly a spy novel from the beginning. It opens in 2016 with Cordelia, a former Head of MI6, recalling a strange operation that went terribly wrong back



in 1982. Cordelia, still finding her way as an Intelligence Officer in 1982, is tasked with meeting her old mentor, the now disgraced Walt, at Highgate Cemetery. Walt wants to expose the dirty going-ons in Guatemala, whereby the British and the Americans are supporting the local brutal dictatorship as a way of stopping the communists from gaining a foothold there. Her superiors want nothing to do with Walt, but Cordelia agrees to loan her place in the north of England for a debrief. It is a decision that gets her in trouble at work and puts her friends, John and Felicity Goose, in grave danger.

This is a very intelligent and quite gripping spy novel that smoothly unfolds, as the plot weaves its way through several twists and betrayals to the violent ending. The story is told in alternating sections by Cordelia and Felicity, who finds herself held captive and threatened in a remote farmhouse. The shifting viewpoint works well, and Mark skilfully gives each of the women their own distinctive voice, and uses the different perspectives to deepen the suspense. There is also considerable poignancy and subtlety in his descriptions of the personal lives of Felicity and Cordelia and the depth of their friendship, especially as it relates to their lives in 2016.

Interwoven into the story is interesting background material on international politics in 1982 and moving vignettes on the situation in Guatemala. Mark also raises still relevant issues about accountability and morality that add to the depth of the novel.

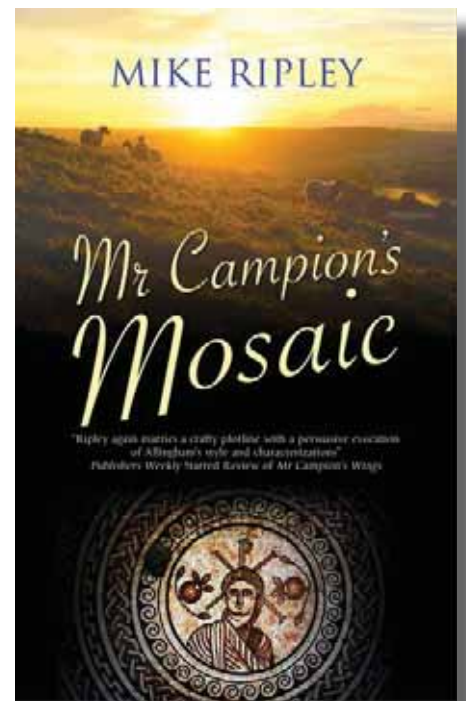
THE WHISPERING DEAD can be read as a stand-alone novel, but those who have read **THE MAUSOLEUM** will have greater appreciation of Cor-

delia's situation and what she has gone through. A thoroughly enjoyable and moving spy story.

MR CAMPION'S MOSAIC

by Mike Ripley
Severn House, £20.99
Rating: B+

Mike Ripley's seamless and enjoyable continuance of the Albert Campion novels by Margery Allingham have become a regular feature of the British crime scene and **MR CAMPION'S MOSAIC**, the tenth in the series, once more features Ripley's marvellous sense of humour and his love for history.



One of the highlights of the Ripley additions has been his creation of Evadne Childe, a mystery writer from the 'Golden Age' of British detective fiction, who featured in the highly enjoyable **MR RIPLEY'S SEANCE**. The latest book is set in 1972, seven years after Evadne's death, and involves some nefarious antics around the BBC remake of a twenty-year-old film adaptation of one of her classic novels, *The Moving Mosaic*. Campion is asked by the Evadne Childe society to investigate why someone would want to sabotage the production of the television show and finds himself in the picturesque village of Kingswalter Manor in Dorset where

filming is due to start.

It is the usual busy plot by Ripley and **MR CAMPION'S MOSAIC** finds the ageing detective caught up in dark secrets from World War II, an impressive Roman mosaic, ghosthunters and murder. The story proceeds at a leisurely pace and is full of interesting historical snippets and cultural references, as well as several amusing inside jokes and references by Ripley. Underlying it all is a good murder mystery that is neatly resolved.

As usual, it is a light and enjoyable treat that will please new and old fans of the series.

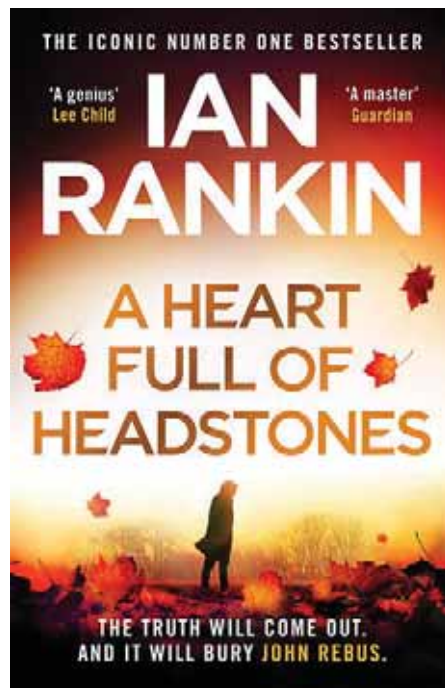
A HEART FULL OF HEADSTONES

by Ian Rankin
Orion, £22.00

Rating: A

The twenty-fourth book in Ian Rankin's much loved series about detective John Rebus, **A HEART FULL OF HEADSTONES**, opens the with former Edinburgh police detective about to face trial for an unspecified crime.

It is a masterful, attention grabbing, opening by Rankin, and just as we are about to find out whether Rebus is pleading guilty or not guilty to the undisclosed charge, the book moves back to the events that put Rebus in jail. Set over an eight day period, we follow Rebus as he undertakes a seemingly innocuous task for the wheelchair bound, ailing gangster 'Big Ger' Cafferty, who wants to find out if a former employee is back from the dead. Meanwhile, a corrupt policeman on domestic abuse charges is threatening to reveal all about the nasty going-ons at the notorious Tynecastle police station. Many of the crimes he is promising to expose are historical, but others are more recent, and he has a lot of people nervous, possibly including Rebus who was infamous for "bending rules and crossing lines" when it suited his view of justice. As Rebus tries to track down the truth about the long-thought dead Jack Oram, his former colleagues, Siobhan Clarke and Malcolm Fox, dig into the allegations about Tynecastle. Gradually both investigations head in the same direction,



which could be disastrous for Rebus.

As usual, this is a well-crafted and always interesting novel by Rankin, which seizes attention from the opening pages and holds it until the unexpected conclusion. The book is slimmer than a lot of recent crime novels, and the story moves along at a good pace with plenty of dips and turns as it makes its way to the final revelation.

There are all the usual, high quality, Rankin hallmarks here: clever plotting, sharp social commentary, gritty characters, a wry sense of humour and the occasional musical reference. Underlying the wit and the occasional light touch, however, is a strong sense of melancholy that permeates the whole novel. In part, this is due to the corruption and endless cycle of violence which features so heavily in the book, but it is also heightened by Rebus' declining health and his reflections on the emotional and moral toll that his career has had on him. Rebus is getting old, and he feels his age in this book, and often reflects on what it means to get old and lose relevance: "he felt more than anonymous. He felt invisible."

Rebus and 'Big Ger' dominate the book, but Rankin also continues to nicely develop the supporting cast of Siobhan Clarke and Malcolm Fox in an engaging manner. Fox does not have the

appeal of Rebus, but Siobhan is growing into a character of real substance, who seems more than capable of carrying a book on her own.

At the core of **A HEART FULL OF HEADSTONES** is a clever plot that engages and holds our attention. The various strands come together in an interesting way that does not over strain credibility, and Rankin delivers some good surprises towards the end. I suspect that the final pages will not please everyone, but the ending is guaranteed to keep us all eagerly awaiting the next instalment.

Ali Karim Review

THE BOOK OF THE MOST PRECIOUS SUBSTANCE

by Sara Gran
Faber and Faber. November

Rating: A

To be released just after the Halloween weekend, this latest from cult author Sara Gran is as apt as it is distracting. Released last year in North America, it finally arrives on our side of the Atlantic thanks to Faber. As thought-provoking and frightening as last year's re-issue of *Come Closer* – it will rest in the mind [and memories] of readers just as uncomfortably.

Ostensibly a love letter to book collectors and bibliophiles, it is far more. It contains the theme of metafiction which striates the narrative – the pursuit of a dangerous book that may, or may not exist - giving Sara Gran the appellation to her unusual novel.

A former author and bibliophile [with the baggage of a troubled childhood], Lily Albrecht has turned into book dealing. Her change of direction was forced upon her, as she sells-off her own book collection in order to pay for the healthcare of husband, Abel, the love of her life who she termed 'the most attractive man I've ever seen'. Like Lily, Abel was a writer, but also an academic who she met while on a book tour for her debut work 'Beauty'. Tragically, while working on her sophomore work [the

aptly titled 'Labyrinth'], Abel's mental health started its decline, until now Abel is no more than a hollow-figure, cared for by the enigmatic Nigerian refugee, Awe.

Gran's narrative opens with a book dealer colleague, 'Shyman' asking her about "The Book of the Most Precious Substance" -- while they rubbed shoulders at an Antiquarian book fair in New York's Grammercy Park. Shayman tells her, in a whisper; if discovered, it could sell for over million dollars or more. It was published in Europe in the 1600s. It's a Latin text of which it is rumoured, only a handful of copies were ever circulated. It's a powerful occult text, with magic intertwined with the erotic. Lily thinks little of it, until another colleague Lucas Markson informs her that Shyman was murdered the previous evening in a mugging gone wrong.

And therein, as the Bard would tell us, 'lies the rub'.

Lily, with little else in her life, starts her pursuit of this mysterious grimoire [allegedly] loaded with potent eroticism. Her trail leads her firstly to the home of voodoo / hoodoo, Louisiana's New Orleans and then into the dark alleys of Europe. Perhaps more importantly, the reader becomes immersed into Gran's evocative and at times hypnotic writing. Characters enter and exit the reader's consciousness subtly, but they leave their traces into memory like stains or scaring.

The intriguing premise of Gran's novel [set in the gentle world of antiquarian book dealing] soon transforms its narrative structure at the midpoint, into a tense thriller.

I would also add that after I put the book down, I quickly downloaded the Audio version and listened to it. The audiobook is most engaging as Gran's words are adroitly presented by the first-person vocal performance of the renowned Carol Monda.

Highly recommended as Gran's continued excursion into the mystical is not only hugely entertaining, but written in an extraordinary style, one that provokes deep thought.

This is a book worth adding to your collection.

George Easter Reviews

THE FINAL BEAT OF THE DRUM

by Sally Spencer

Severn House, £20.99, in U.S.\$29.99,

January, 2023

Monika Paniatowski #8

Rating: A-

This may be the eighth and last novel in the Monika Paniatowski series, but if you are a Sally Spencer (real name: Alan Rustage) fan like I am, you've been reading about Monika for years because she was Inspector Woodend's right hand "man" for most of that twenty-book series. So it is with some sadness that I see her head off into the sunset.

DCI Monika Paniatowski retires from the police and fades into obscurity. Then fifteen years pass and she gets a call for help from her former sergeant Kate Meadows who now manages a shelter for battered women.

Kate has been caught in a compromising position and is being blackmailed by the husband of one of the women in her shelter. Then the husband is found murdered and all evidence points to Kate. Monika gathers her old team together to help their friend.

There are some excellent twists in **THE FINAL BEAT OF THE DRUM** and the final reveal is a shocker. A fitting end to a fine series.

THE BLACKBIRD

by Tim Weaver

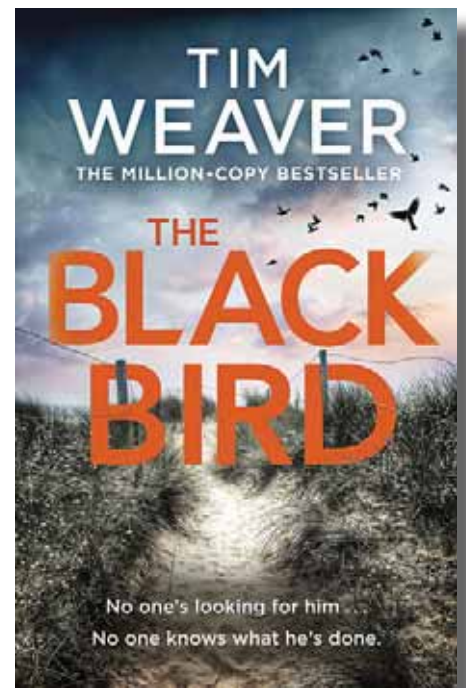
Michael Joseph, £14.99, June

David Raker Missing Persons #11

Rating: A

Just minutes before their car goes off a cliff into a steep ravine, Cate and Aiden Gascoigne are seen on roadside CCTV, happily chatting away. Two witnesses arrive at the scene of the accident right after it happened and both claim they saw no sign of the Gascoignes. The car bursts into flames and when the fire crew arrives, they find no bodies in the vehicle.

This scenario presents a real conundrum, which the police are unable to solve. Two years later, Cate's parents, desperate for answers, hire missing persons investigator David Raker to



investigate. First order of business is to delve into the lives of the two witnesses Audrey Calvert and Zoe Simmons. What he finds is a marked change of lifestyle for these two women after the accident. What could have caused that?

David gets help accessing the police files and photographs on the incident from a Met source, Ewan Trasker, and works his way through the couple's phone records that he gets from Spike, the hacker.

Raker finds himself forced to go on the run as he follows leads that point to Northumberland, and a 30-year-old unsolved case of three murdered women.

To further complicate matters, David is trying to help Colm Healy, a friend who disappeared some years ago and is thought dead. That secret is under threat of revelation, which would put Colm's life in danger.

Describing **THE BLACKBIRD** as "complex," doesn't do it justice. Yet, it is not so full of twists and turns that it is difficult to comprehend. Quite the opposite. Weaver's prose is eminently readable and the pages just flew by.

This will be on my list of best books of the year. It was apparently very popular in the U.K. When I finally got around to buying a hardback copy, it was already in a 5th printing. Most crime novels don't even make it to a 2nd printing.

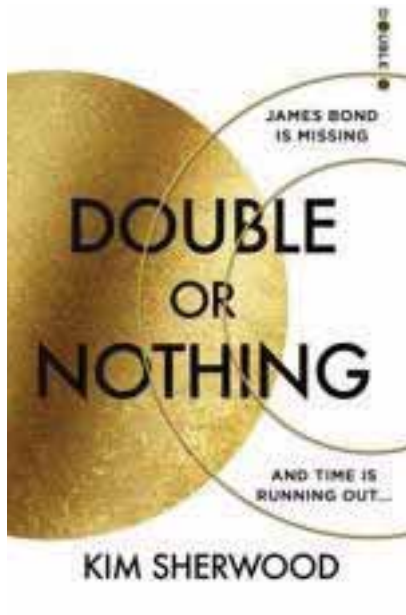
Getting Away With Murder

Mike Ripley



The Land Beyond Bond

Is there a James Bond multiverse? I have no idea what that means, but it might become clear next month with the publication of a new James Bond novel which does not feature James Bond.



DOUBLE OR NOTHING by creative writing lecturer Kim Sherwood [HarperCollins] and written with the blessing of the Ian Fleming estate, poses the question: how do you replace James Bond, who has been missing in action for more than a year? The answer is a triple substitute, with three ‘double-o’ agents stepping up to the plate: Johanna Harwood (003), Joseph Dryden (004) and Sid Bashir (009). It seems that Mon-eypenny has been promoted as well.

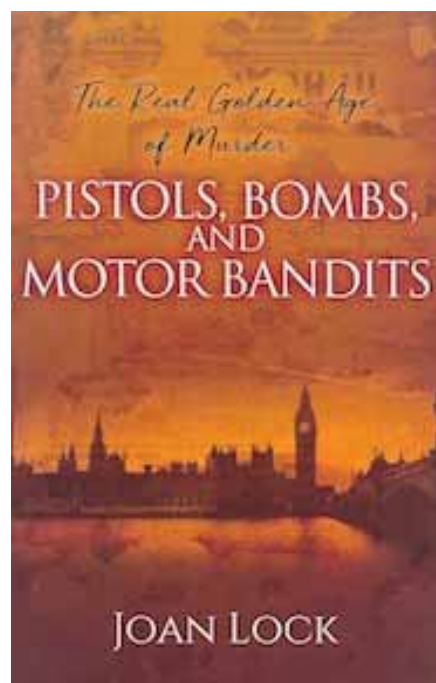
There’s a touch of the superhero about Bashir, who swiftly dispatches several enemies using knives in the opening chapters, and we learn of the private military contractors Ratten-fänger, though it is clear that the real

rat-catchers are the next generation 00-section.

There is also a dodgy tech billionaire, as there often is these days, who claims to be able to control the weather (and reverse climate change), with the resplendent name Sir Bertram Paradise, which got me wondering if it might have been a homage to the little-known 1968 thriller *Counter Paradise* by Nichol Fleming, Ian Fleming’s nephew.

The Real Golden Age

The full title of Joan Lock’s non-fiction study is **THE GOLDEN AGE OF MURDER: PISTOLS, BOMBS AND MOTOR BANDITS** [Robin Books] but even that is not a full description of its contents. Essentially, the book looks at the emergence of the so-called ‘Golden Age’ of English detective fiction in the 1920s and compares the crimes depicted, or suggested, in it with what was



really happening in the world of crime and policing at the time. Joan Lock, being a former police herself as well as an historian of British policing, being in the perfect position to do this.

Perhaps the most surprising thing is the fact that there were no murders in country houses in England in the 1920s and London (with a population of over eight million) was a pretty safe place in 1928 recording a mere 21 murders, a poor showing compared to the 404 in New York, though not if you ventured on to the roads where over 1200 deaths were recorded in traffic accidents.

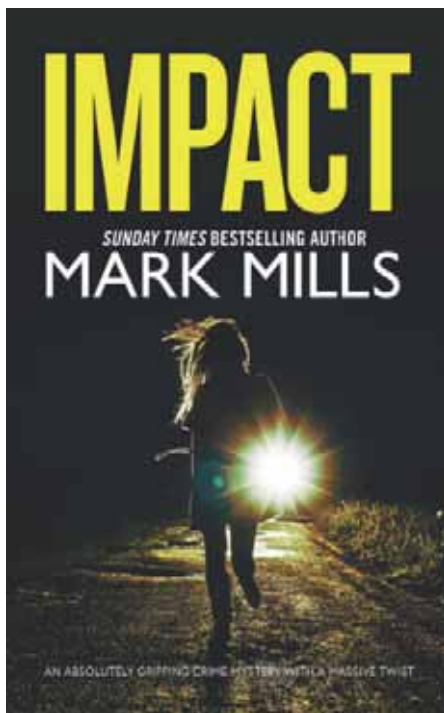
It would have been interesting to know what the law on firearms was back then, given the large amount of weaponry available after the end of World War I, but there are fascinating nuggets about the real crimes rarely covered by ‘GA’ authors, such as horse-chanting and van-dragging and the gangs which terrorised racetracks (pace Graham Greene), though no *Peaky Blinders* as far as I could see. Joan Lock also recounts the failed attempt, in 1923, of a gang of Fenian terrorists to set fire to a Thameside oil refinery, despite it being located next to a gas works and a distillery – surely a worry for a health and safety inspector had there been one – and there are interesting sidebars on the Special Branch and raids on British Communist Party offices.

In terms of authors who insisted on the ‘play fair’ school of detective fiction, all the usual suspects are there, and there’s a nod to Margery Allingham who, in 1929, was ‘ahead of the curve’ in moving away from mechanical (if ingenious) plots and lifeless characters, despite her debut featuring an aristocratic amateur sleuth and a murder in a country house.

Stunning Impact

By rights, **IMPACT** by Mark Mills [Joffe Books] belongs in the ‘Books of the Month’ section but I wanted to write about it at more length.

The first thing to say is that it is extremely good, whatever the month, and something of a departure for Mark Mills



who has chosen contemporary New England as the setting to introduce an impressive crime-fighting duo: the ambitious young detective Dylan Bodine and his reluctant mentor veteran police detective (and former FBI investigator) Carrie Fuller. There is genuine chemistry between these two characters and surely they are destined for a series – it will be a shame if they are not.

IMPACT begins with a failed assassination attempt (set up as a traffic accident) on a young woman who is about, though she doesn't know it, to inherit control of a huge family fortune. As our police duo, sensing foul play from the off, track down a pair of hired killers, it becomes clear that someone inside the family is pulling the strings. One of the most satisfying crime novels



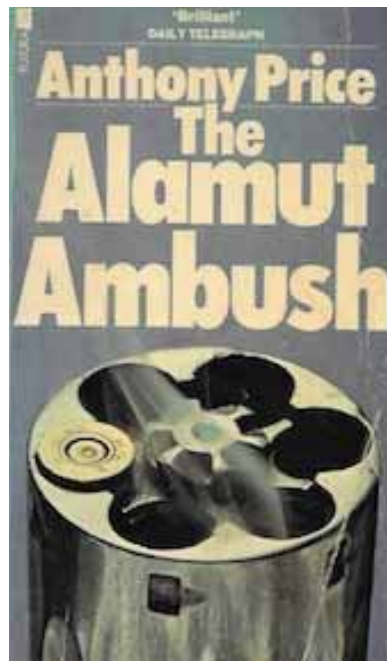
Mike & Mark Mills

I have read this year, both well plotted and well-written.

It is many years since I met with Mark Mills to declare myself a fan of his writing and particularly his historical thrillers such as **THE SAVAGE GARDEN**, **THE INFORMATION OFFICER** and **HOUSE OF THE HANGED**, but **IMPACT** finds him abandoning Eric Ambler territory for the modern American mystery.

There is one particular line in it which struck a chord with me, when one character says, disparagingly, to another: 'Did you get that from a book you bought in an airport?'

Given the context, there is nothing wrong with that sentence but it reminded me of my first visit to America, back in 1979, when I arrived at Heathrow and realised I had forgotten to pack a book to read on the flight. I immediately hit the nearest bookshop and, knowing nothing of the author and attracted solely by the cover, bought a paperback.



That thriller, which I still have, was Anthony Price's **THE ALAMUT AMBUSH**. I began reading as the plane took off and finished it as we landed at Chicago O'Hare. As I could not find any Price books in the US, I had to wait until I returned to England to buy the seven titles in paperback and then every subsequent one of his superb spy stories.

So I, for one, certainly did get some-

thing useful from a book bought in an airport.

Hands Down Regrets

It is with great regret that due to an overseas posting I will miss the launch party for Felix Francis' new novel **HANDS DOWN** [Simon & Schuster] next month.

A Francis launch, first for Dick, then for Dick and Felix, and now for Felix, is one of the endearing traditions of the London crime writing scene and usually marks the start of the Autumn 'season' of publishing parties. I have been privileged to have been invited to these most excellent parties since (I think) about 1991 and can remember only ever having missed two before now, so this will be me coming in a poor third.

I will, however, make sure I have a copy of Felix's new thriller with me on my travels, especially as it features my favourite Dick Francis hero, Sid Halley.

Books of the Quarter

What should you expect from a good historical mystery? Well, a decent mystery, obviously, and interesting characters to guide you through the plot, plus some inside knowledge of a place or period in history you are unfamiliar with. **THE LOST MAN OF BOMBAY** by Vaseem Khan [Hodder] ticks all those boxes, and probably more, with ease.

Set in 1950 in an India finally free from Imperial British rule, Persis Wadia struggles to prove that being the first female police inspector really is a suitable job for an Indian woman, though often the odds seem stacked against her, especially when lumbered with the case of a murdered white man found frozen in the foothills of the Himalayas. A tenuous link brings the body to Bombay, a place where it wasn't so much a case of who casts the first stone, as cast the first stone before it is cast at thee, but almost before Persis can get her teeth into this very cold case, she has a fresh double murder on her hands and a particularly boorish superior officer to deal with.

Persis Wadia is a wonderful charac-

ter, even if in danger of over-thinking her private life (and her father's), never afraid to go it alone or tackle a cipher or code (something becoming a Khan trademark). Eventually she join the dots and solves the multiple murders, whilst avoiding being murdered herself. Along the way, the story is crammed with local colour and fascinating background on India's legion of customs and religions as well as a nugget of history about POW camps in WWII of which I, for one, was totally unaware. So that's another box ticked.



A wise man once told me that there was spy fiction and then there was spy fantasy. **SEVENTEEN: LAST MAN STANDING** by John Brownlow [Hodder] is clearly in the latter category and might just have the impact Robert Ludlum's 'airport thrillers' had half a century ago.

It begins as a spy story, with a classic 'brush pass' in Berlin and then the rather unsavoury removal of the crucial memory stick from the stomach of the courier who has swallowed it. This shouldn't come as a shock as the first-person narrator is a professional assassin who has already killed six people by page 20, as he is number Seventeen in a line of assassins who follow some sort of creed which makes them available to the highest bidder.

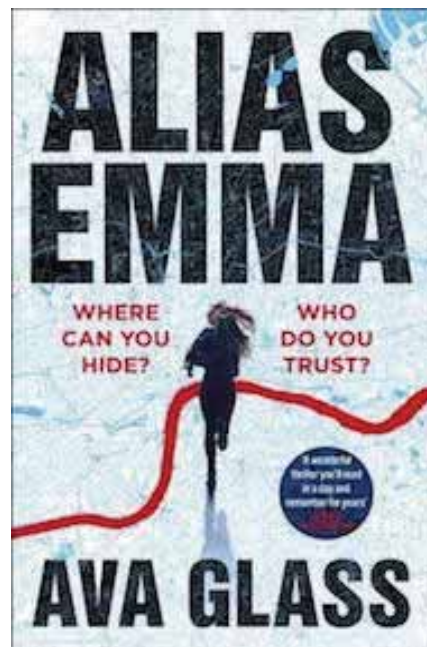
The bulk of the book, though, is a long duel (it seems to go on for weeks)

between Seventeen and number Sixteen in the assassin's premier league, which takes place in the wilds of South Dakota and involves much weaponry, from rocket-launchers to chainsaws, and even an attack by a bear.

The body count is huge and the in-your-face narrative voice will not be to everyone's taste. The enormous amount of stuff which Seventeen has access to, including a Bugatti Veyron or two, is incredible, but then this is turbo-charged, suspend-disbelief spy fantasy of the first order. It does, however, get Brownie points for use of the word **petrichor** – the first time I have ever seen that used in a thriller, and quite correctly too.

I was attracted to **ALIAS EMMA** [Century] by the pen-name of the author, Ava Glass, as Glass is surname in my family tree and I did once consider writing under the name Raymond Glass, after an ancestor. I then found it rather spooky to discover a character called Charles Ripley in the book, though he turns out to be the head of a special unit of MI6 and not a Yorkshire miner as my grandfather Charles Ripley was.

The central character is the Emma of the title (though of course that's not her name), a young agent tasked with escorting the target of a Russian hit squad to safety across London over one night. To make Emma's life more difficult, the Russians have somehow got control of all the CCTV cameras in London, so



Emma must 'go dark' and avoid being tracked by cameras or by her phone, and get across the city from Camden to Vauxhall without being seen, or killed.

For the most part, this is pacy, exciting stuff, though it is surprising how easily 'facial recognition software' can be fooled by pulling on a cheap wig and there are, conveniently, dressing-up boxes to be found along the way. The climax, in Paris, is a tad low key in comparison to the central hectic chase and there is a toe-curlingly touristy scene in the Red Lion pub in Parliament Street as a coda. (Spooks in Whitehall tend to avoid The Red Lion, much preferring to use The Two Chairmen on Dartmouth Street.)

Peter Papathanasiou's second crime novel **THE INVISIBLE** [MacLehose Press] takes his Australian police detective George Manolis back to his Greek heritage following a traumatic shooting while on duty. Add in a recent divorce and the death of his father, Manolis needs to get his head together and so goes back to his roots. It is probably not the best therapy given that he returns to an isolated, rather primitive, part of north-west Greece bordering Albania and Macedonia, which makes it ideal country for smugglers, illegal immigrants, family feuds and wild animals including bears, wolves and snakes – lots of snakes.

Being a cop, he cannot resist getting involved the disappearance of local character Lefty, an 'invisible' citizen in that he is undocumented and lives off the grid, though in this wild region around Lake Prespa, the 'grid' doesn't really amount to much and no-one seems particularly concerned at his disappearance. During his exhaustive, and at times dangerous, search of the area, Manolis uncovers caches of weapons and cash, a village secret dating back to the Greek civil war and the tradition of the 'sworn virgin', but in truth the mystery plot is secondary to the richly described setting, a universe away from the Greece most package holidaymakers get to see.

In **BLACK IS THE NIGHT** [Titan] editor Maxim Jakubowski has assembled a truly international cast of

writers all producing new short stories in tribute to that master of dark (really dark) noir fiction, Cornell Woolrich. The American contributors include names you might expect, among them Joe R. Lansdale, James Grady, Chrles Arda and James Sallis, but the inclusion of Brits, some not usually known for hardboiled noir fiction, may spring a few pleasant surprises.

Look out in particular for neat contributions from Vaseem Khan (even if more Chandler than Woolrich), a spooky piece (as to be expected) from A. K. Benedict, a very Woolrichian – if that’s a word – tragedy set in a Scottish amusement arcade by Donna Moore and a super tale of a tarantula of a trophy wife by Samantha Lee Howe. All worth the price of admission alone, whether or not you know anything about Cornell Woolrich – though of course, you should.

Still in anthology territory, but this time the focus is on a character rather than an author, **MARPLE** [HarperCollins] contains twelve new stories by twelve authors (all female) featuring Agatha Christie’s timeless detective Miss Marple. Some big names – in addition to Christie and Marple – are involved, among them Val McDermid, Lucy Foley, Elly Griffiths and Kate Mosse, so famous in fact that in the ‘About the Authors’ section, the words ‘bestselling’ and ‘bestseller’ feature at least eleven times.

For a far superior slice of rural American noir, go no further than the Kentucky-set thrillers of Chris Offutt. **SHIFTY’S BOYS** [No Exit] is a direct follow-on from last year’s excellent *The Killing Hills* and another case for Mick Hardin, a military policeman on home leave recuperating from a bomb attack on active service, and his sister, the local sheriff. When a local heroin dealer is found dead and no-one in officialdom seems interested, Mick becomes a reluctant private investigator working for the victim’s mother (a wonderful hillbilly matriarch) and an even more reluctant deputy for his sister who is busy seeking re-election by a less-than enthusiastic electorate.

When it comes to rural noir which

can be savoured like the best Kentucky bourbon, Chris Offutt is the real deal.

Podcasting into Print

I have never been a fan of ‘True Crime’ as I find it far too scary, nor have I ever knowingly listened to a ‘podcast’ (though I believe I have featured on one), but it seems that running a true crime podcast is the latest point-of-entry into a career in crime fiction.

This month sees the debut novel of the host of the true crime podcast *Crime Junkie*, American Ashley Flowers, **ALL GOOD PEOPLE HERE** [HarperCollins], which is co-authored by Alex Kiester.

In September, the co-host of the ‘chart-topping show *Morbid: A True Crime Podcast*’ (it says here) Alaina Urquhart’s debut novel **THE BUTCHER AND THE WREN** is published by Michael Joseph.



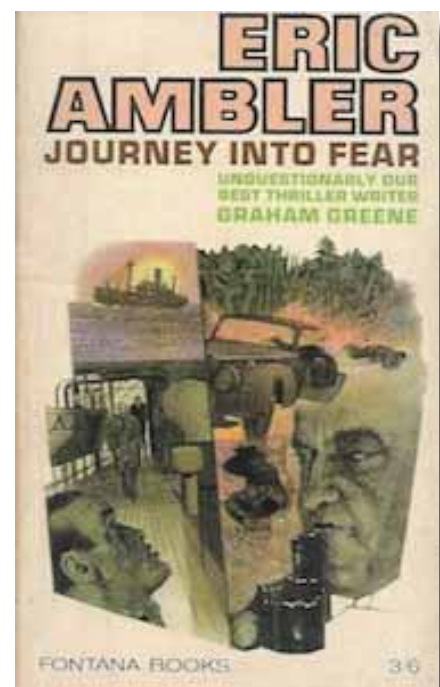
An autopsy technician by trade, Alaina Urquhart has degrees in criminal justice, psychology and biology and the podcast she co-hosts is said to have more than a million listeners and three million views on Tik Tok (whatever that is). From rumours within the book trade, this one is tipped to go straight from the morgue to the top of the bestseller lists, defying those who predicted, or hoped,

that the craze for blood-thirsty serial killers was over.

Going Foreign

Just before departing for Italy last month, I was irritated to be advised by an acquaintance that I must be delighted to be able to take five or six books with me ‘on a Kindle’ and thus save on the weight of my luggage. I was irritated partly because I am unsure what a Kindle is, but also the assumption that I would want to take a load of books with me, as my intention was to get away from the day job. On foreign trips I always take only one book, invariably by an author I trust, as there is little time to read given my ambition to discover all of Italy, one restaurant at a time.

This year, my travelling companion was the ironically titled **JOURNEY INTO FEAR** by Eric Ambler, which I re-read, with great pleasure, for the first time in 52 years. Published in 1940 and set in that first year of the war (before Italy joined in) it is a suspenseful spy story tracking the journey by sea of a British engineer, the unwitting target of Nazi agents, from Istanbul to Genoa. Who on the boat can he trust, as all the other passengers are highly suspicious? Should he have any faith in the protection offered by Colonel Haki of the



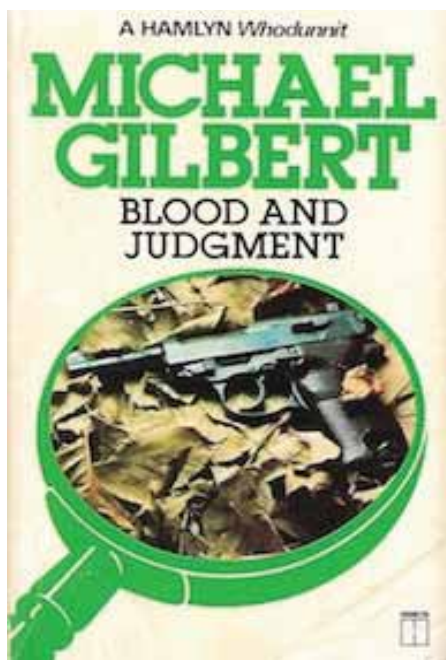
Turkish secret service (one of Ambler's best creations, played by Orson Welles in the original film version)? What can he do when a known assassin joins the ship at a stop-over in Greece?

It is a wonderful thriller, showing Ambler's skill at describing places and (shady) characters with great economy, as an 'ordinary' hero struggles to control his fear when he finds himself totally out of his comfort zone, alone and threatened by ruthless professionals. A masterclass.

Coincidentally on my return I learn that the bespoke London book dealer Peter Harrington is offering a 1939 American first edition of possibly Ambler's most famous thriller, **A COFFIN FOR DIMITROS**, for a mere £1,750. Better known in this country as **THE MASK OF DIMITRIOS**, 'Coffin' was actually Ambler's original title for the book now rightly seen as a classic.

Beyond the Last Page

I once had breakfast with Michael Gilbert. We were staying in the same hotel at some crime writing conference or other and found ourselves sharing a table in the dining room one morning. I knew Michael Gilbert (1912-2006) as a popular and highly-regarded crime writer; he had no idea who I was – there



was no reason he should – but he was charming and polite and we even co-operated on The Times crossword. (Well, I got one clue, he got the rest.)

Recently I acquired **BLOOD AND JUDGEMENT**, his 1959 police procedural which was, although I had not realised it, the first of his novels to feature Detective Sergeant Patrick Petrella, who was to become one of Gilbert's best-known series heroes (he had several and also wrote many fine stand-alone crime novels, most with a strong legal theme).

In Memoriam

I find it hard to believe that it is ten years since the death of my good friend (and, until the introduction of email, pen-pal) Reginald Hill. We were colleagues in the famous Collins Crime Club, where our legendary editor Elizabeth Walter always insisted on using 'Reginald' rather than 'Reg' on the grounds that 'one would never address Agatha Christie as Ag'.

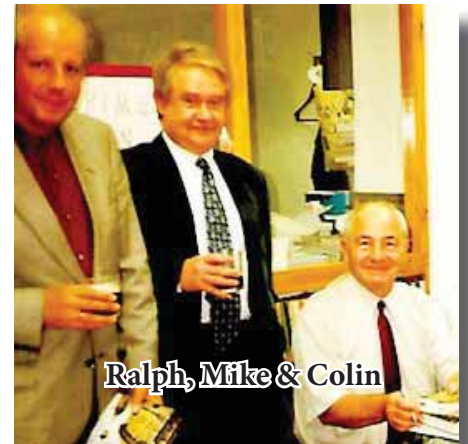
We met at many a convention over the years and one of my first public appearances as a published author was in Manchester on a panel with Reg and Val McDermid and Val has contributed an intelligent and fond Introduction to the collection of Reg's short stories now published as **DALZIEL AND PASCOE HUNT THE CHRISTMAS KILLER & OTHER STORIES** by HarperCollins.

Reg is best known for his mid-Yorkshire dynamic detective duo of Dalziel and Pascoe – one of the best crime series of the second half of the twentieth century – but he was prolific in other fields as well as short stories and anyone who has not yet come across the thrillers he wrote under the pseudonym Patrick Ruell is in for a treat.

On another poignant note, I have to record the death last month of the bookseller Ralph Spurrier, aged 74, after a long illness.

To call Ralph simply a bookseller is to do him an injustice as when it came to crime fiction, he was an enthusiast of the highest order and indeed launched himself as a crime-writer late in life. A reliable fixture at every crime fiction

convention or festival for many years, Ralph always insured that an author's books were there for sale.



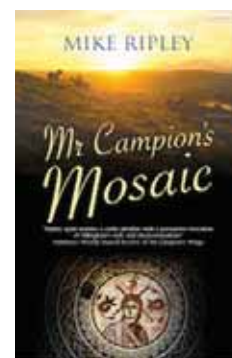
In 1996, Colin Dexter was asked at the very last minute to sign copies of his latest Inspector Morse novel at a London venue. Ralph made sure there were plenty of books for Colin to sign and I (having, in those days, a proper job in the brewing industry) supplied the beer.

Editor's Note: *I met Ralph at several Bouchercons when he would bring British books to sell and for many years he was my source for Brit crime fiction. He was a devoted fan and bookseller and will be missed.*

Last Word

I will take time out to raise a glass in memory of my great friend, the late Colin Dexter, who would have been ninety-two on the birthday we share on St Michael's Day.

I will make sure my birthday celebrations, or the repercussions from them, do not interfere with the launch of **MR CAMPION'S MOSAIC** which is published by Severn House on 4th October.



A Paperback Confidential Profile

Raymond Chandler

by Brian Ritt

This is the eleventh 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.

Raymond Chandler

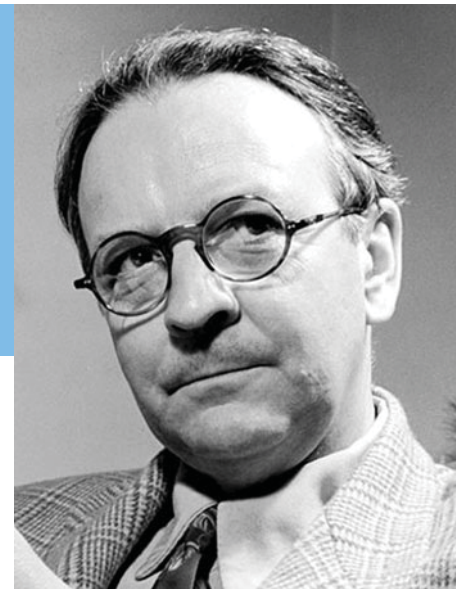
Born in Chicago, Illinois, 1888. Moved to England in 1895. Returned to U.S. in 1912. Died in La Jolla, California, 1959.

Raymond Chandler may be the best known writer of crime fiction of all time. Along with Dashiell Hammett, he is credited with giving birth to the enduring popularity of the crime fiction we read today.

If we know Chandler at all, we know the familiar stories. We know how he grew up in England, and of his early, unsuccessful efforts at writing romantic poetry. We know of his faithful marriage to Cissy, a woman seventeen years his senior. We know that when he moved back to the U.S. (Los Angeles, California, specifically) he worked his way up to an executive position in the oil industry but was fired in 1933, both because of the Depression and because of his heavy drinking. We know he didn't write his first crime-related story ("Blackmailers Don't Shoot," 1933) until he was forty-five years old, and that his first novel (**THE BIG SLEEP**, 1939) wasn't published until he was fifty. We know that movie director Billy Wilder hired Chandler to co-write the screen-

play of Wilder's upcoming film, *Double Indemnity*. We know of Wilder and Chandler's acrimonious relationship, and that Chandler wrote letters to Paramount executives, fussily demanding that Wilder not "swish under Mr. Chandler's nose or to point in his direction the thin, leather-handled malacca cane which Mr. Wilder was in the habit of waving around," and that Wilder not "give Mr. Chandler orders of an arbitrary or personal nature such as 'Ray, will you open the window?' or 'Ray, will you shut the door, please.'"

We know Chandler was a slow worker, polishing his stories fastidiously, and that he only published seven novels during his lifetime: (**THE BIG SLEEP**(1939), **FAREWELL, MY LOVE**(1940), **THE HIGH WINDOW** (1942), **THE LADY IN THE LAKE** (1943), **THE LITTLE SISTER** (1949), **THE LONG GOODBYE**(1953) and



PLAYBACK (1958). We know the main character was Philip Marlowe, private eye. We know about the classic movies made from his books, like *The Big Sleep* and *Murder, My Sweet*, and the film noir screenplays Chandler wrote or co-wrote, like *Double Indemnity*, *The Blue Dahlia*, and *Strangers On a Train*. We know Chandler's (and by extension, Marlowe's) cynicism was a mask to shield his wounded romanticism. We know Chandler could be a snob, an elitist, and, in today's terms, "anal retentive," and that even though he railed so hard against greed, dishonesty and corruption in the world, he was such a nitpicker, and his moral standards were so impossibly high, he probably wouldn't have been happy in any kind of a world. We know that when his wife Cissy died in 1954, the sixty-six year-old Chandler (already an alcoholic) began drinking even more and his health, both mental and physical, drastically deteriorated. Last but not least, we know Raymond Chandler was a master.

So what makes Raymond Chandler so memorable? What's made so many writers cite Chandler as a major influence? What made Hollywood come a-calling? What makes Chandler so quotable? What makes the name Philip Marlowe and the title **THE BIG SLEEP** still familiar today?

Is it the plots? Colorful characters like General Sternwood, Amthor, and Moose Malloy? Atmospheric descrip-

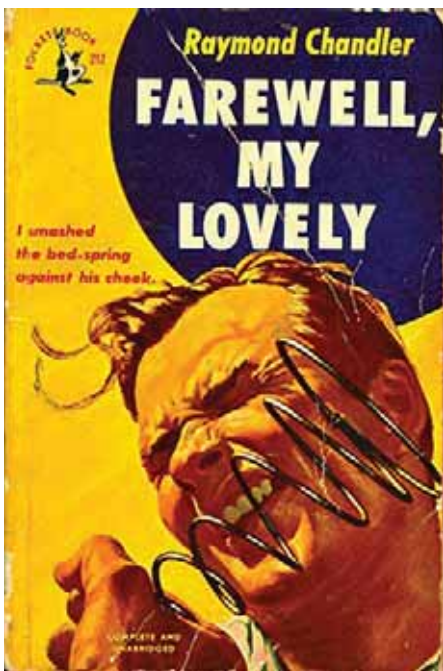
tions of Los Angeles during the 1940's? The wit? The one-of-a-kind similes and metaphors? The incisive critiques of hypocrisy among the wealthy? Is it Marlowe himself?

It is undoubtedly the voice.

The voice of Chandler—whether in his fiction or non-fiction, his dialogue or his descriptions, his prose stories or his screenplays—is what sticks in the mind. The voice of Chandler's makes such an impression that novice writers find themselves imitating it without half realizing it. The voice is precise, cool, and in control. The voice is the voice we wish we had.

“Down these mean streets a man must go who is not himself mean, who is neither tarnished nor afraid...He must be a complete man and a common man and yet an unusual man...He must be the best man in his world and a good enough man for any world.” —“**The Simple Art of Murder**”

“It was a blonde. A blonde to make a bishop kick a hole in a stained glass window.” —**FAREWELL, MY LOVELY**



“If my books had been any worse I should not have been invited to Hollywood and if they had been any better I should not have come.”

—**Selected Letters of Raymond**

Chandler

“Even on Central Avenue, not the quietest dressed street in the world, he looked about as inconspicuous as a tarantula on a slice of angel food.”

—**FAREWELL, MY LOVELY**

“I needed a drink. I needed a lot of life insurance. I needed a vacation. I needed a home in the country. What I had was a hat, a coat and a gun.”

—**FAREWELL, MY LOVELY**

“I don't mind if you don't like my manners. They're pretty bad. I grieve over them during the long winter nights.”

—**THE BIG SLEEP**

“There are blondes and blondes and it is almost a joke word nowadays...There is the soft and willing alcoholic blonde who doesn't care what she wears as long as it is mink or where she goes as long as it is the Starlight Roof and there is plenty of dry champagne...There is the pale, pale blonde with anemia of some non-fatal but incurable type. She is very languid and very shadowy and she speaks softly out of nowhere and you can't lay a finger on her because in the first place you don't want to and in the second place she is reading the Wasteland or Dante in the original, or Kafka or Kierkegaard or studying Provençal... And lastly there is the gorgeous show piece who will outlast three kingpin racketeers and then marry a couple of millionaires at a million a head and end up with a pale rose villa at Cap d'Antibes, an Alfa Romeo town car complete with pilot and co-pilot, and a stable of shopworn aristocrats, all of whom she will treat with the affectionate absentmindedness of an elderly duke saying good night to his butler.” — **THE LONG GOODBYE**

“What did it matter where you lay once you were dead? In a dirty sump or in a marble tower on top of a high hill. You were dead, you were sleeping the big sleep, you were not bothered by things like that. Oil and water were the same as wind and air to you. You just

slept the big sleep, not caring about the nastiness of how you died or where you fell.” —**THE BIG SLEEP**

“To say goodbye is to die a little.” —**THE LONG GOODBYE**

Further Reading:
THE BIG SLEEP (1939)
FAREWELL, MY LOVELY (1940)
THE HIGH WINDOW (1942)
THE LADY IN THE LAKE (1943)
THE LITTLE SISTER (1949)
THE LONG GOODBYE (1953)
PLAYBACK (1958)
POODLE SPRINGS (1989, completed by Robert B. Parker)



Short story collections:
FIVE MURDERS (1944)
FIVE SINISTER CHARACTERS (1945)
FINGER MAN AND OTHER STORIES (1946)
RED WIND (1946)
SPANISH BLOOD (1946)

Editor's Comment: Raymond Chandler's novels were originally published in hardcover, but some of his story collections were published as paperback originals, such as **THE FINGER MAN** and are highly valued in fine condition. There is also some great cover art on some of the reprints.

Recent Paperbacks of Note



Softboiled to Mediumboiled

Adams, Ellery, **MURDER ON THE POET'S WALK** (\$7.99)
 Alexander, Ellie, **CURE FOR WHAT ALES YOU** (\$8.99)
 Archer, Winnie, **BREAD OVER TROUBLED WATER** (\$8.99)
 Berry, Tamara, **ON SPINE OF DEATH** (\$8.99)
 Brecher, Christin, **PHOTO FINISHED** (\$16.95)
 Bruns, Catherine, **A DOOMFUL OF SUGAR** (\$8.99)
 Budewitz, Leslie, **PEPPERMINT BARKED** (\$17.95).
 Byrne, MV, **ISABEL PUDDLES ABROAD** (\$15.95)
 Cass, Laurie, **THE CRIME THAT BINDS** (\$8.99).
 Childs, Laura, **TWISTED TEA CHRISTMAS** (\$8.99)
 Claire, Ann, **DEAD AND GONDOLA** (\$17.00)
 Collette, Abby, **SOUL OF A KILLER** (\$8.99)
 Corrigan, Maya, **BAKE OFFED** (\$8.99)
 Coyle, Cleo, **THE GHOST AND THE STOLEN TEARS** (\$8.99)
 Day, Maddie, **MURDER IN A CAPE COTTAGE** (\$8.99)
 Erickson, Alex, **DEATH BY SPICED CHAI** (\$8.99).
 Henry, Julia, **THE PLOT THICKETS** (\$8.99)
 Hollis, Lee, **MURDER ON THE CLASS TRIP** (\$8.99)
 Lansing, Kate, **TILL DEATH DO US PART** (\$8.99)
 Longworth, M L, **DISASTER AT THE VENDOME THEATER** (\$17.00)
 Manansala, Mia P, **BLACKMAIL AND BIBINGKA** (\$17.00)
 Murray, Amita, **ARYA WINTERS AND THE CUPCAKES OF DOOM**

(\$16.95)
 Pleiter, Allie, **IT CAME UPON A MIDNIGHT SHEAR** (\$8.99)
 Rosenfelt, David, **BEST IN SNOW** (\$16.99)

Mediumboiled to Hardboiled

Ballantyne, Lisa, **THE INNOCENT ONE** (\$16.95)
 Bell, David, **SINCE SHE WENT AWAY** (\$9.99)
 Coben, Harlan, **THE MATCH** (\$17.99)
 Connelly, Michael, **THE DARK HOURS** (\$9.99)
 Deaver, Jeffery, **THE MIDNIGHT LOCK** (\$9.99)
 Eriksson, Kjell, **THE DEATHWATCH BEETLE** (\$17.99)
 Ferencik, Erica, **GIRL IN ICE** (\$17.99)
 Finlay, Alex, **THE NIGHT SHIFT** (\$9.99)
 Gaylin, Alison, **THE COLLECTIVE** (\$17.99)
 Harding, Robyn, **THE SWAP** (\$9.99)
 Harrod-Eagles, Cynthia, **DYING FALL** (\$17.95)
 Hawkins, Rachel, **RECKLESS GIRLS** (\$17.99)
 Hawkins, Rachel, **THE WIFE UPSTAIRS** (\$9.99)
 Henderson, Alice, **A BLIZZARD OF POLAR BEARS** (\$17.99)
 Horowitz, Anthony, **A LINE TO KILL** (\$18.00)
 Johansen, Roy, **KILLER VIEW** (\$9.99)
 Johnson, Craig, **DAUGHTER OF THE MORNING STAR** (\$17.00)
 Lescroart, John, **THE MISSING PIECE** (\$17.00)
 Limon, Martin, **WAR WOMEN** (\$16.95)
 Margolin, Phillip, **THE DARKEST PLACE** (\$9.99).
 Morris, Wanda M, **ANYWHERE YOU**

RUN (\$17.99)

North, Alex, **THE SHADOWS** (\$9.99)
 Scottoline, Lisa, **WHAT HAPPENED TO THE BENNETTS?** (\$9.99)
 Shelton, Paige, **DARK NIGHT** (\$8.99)
 Slaughter, Karin, **FALSE WITNESS** (\$9.99)
 Swanson, Peter, **EIGHT PERFECT MURDERS** (\$9.99)
 Tracy, P J, **DESOLATION CANYON** (\$17.99)
 Willingham, Stacy, **A FLICKER IN THE DARK** (\$17.99)
 Woods, Stuart, **A SAFE HOUSE** (\$9.99)
 Zanetti, Rebecca, **YOU CAN HIDE** (\$8.99)

History Mysteries

Clayton, Meg Waite, **THE POSTMIS -TRESS OF PARIS** (\$18.00)
 Dams, Jeanne, **MURDER IN THE PARK** (\$17.99)
 Lloyd, Robert, **THE BLOODLESS BOY** (\$17.99)
 Loewenstein, Laurie, **FUNERAL TRAIN** (\$18.95)
 MacBird, Bonnie, **THE THREE LOCKS** (\$16.99)
 Ripley, Mike, **MR. CAMPION'S WINGS** (\$17.95)
 Thompson, Victoria, **CITY OF SHADOWS** (\$8.99)

Thrillers

Andrews, Brian, **W E B Griffin ROGUE ASSET** (\$9.99).
 Brown, Sandra, **BLIND TIGER** (\$9.99)
 Carr, Jack, **IN THE BLOOD** (\$9.99)
 Gardner, Lisa, **ONE STEP TOO FAR** (\$9.99)
 Gilstrap, John, **BLUE FIRE** (\$9.99)
 Greaney, Mark, **SIERRA SIX** (\$9.99)
 Griffin, Laura, **VANISHING HOUR** (\$8.99)
 Herron, Mick, **STANDING BY THE WALL** (Soho \$16.95)
 Hunter, Stephen, **TARGETED** (\$17.00)
 McCloskey, David, **DAMASCUS STATION** (\$17.95)
 Moore, Taylor, **DOWN RANGE** (\$9.99)
 Rollins James, **KINGDOM OF BONES** (\$9.99)

Sneak Previews

Upcoming Mysteries



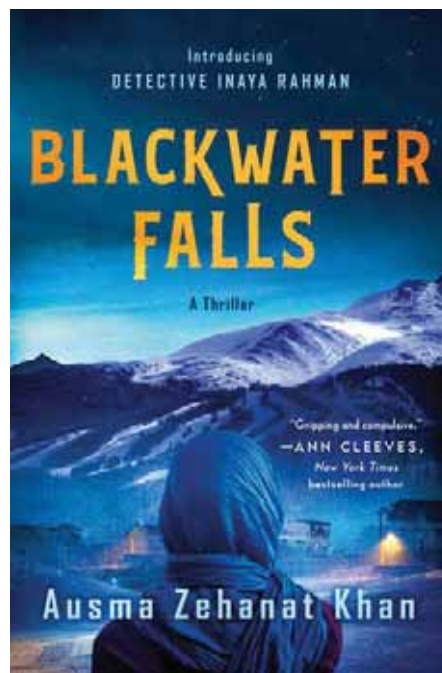
October, 2022

- 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)
- 4 Ava Barry, **DOUBLE EXPOSURE**
- 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**
- 11 David Baldacci, **LONG SHADOWS** (Amos Decker)
- 11 Stuart Woods, **DISTANT THUNDER** (Stone Barrington)
- 18 Nicci French, **THE FAVOR**
- 18 Ian Rankin, **A HEART FULL OF HEADSTONES** (Rebus)
- 25 Lee Child & Andrew Child, **NO PLAN B** (Jack Reacher)
- 25 Wanda M. Moris, **ANY WHERE YOU RUN**
- 25 Stephen Leather, **DIRTY WAR** (Spider Shepherd)
- 25 Patricia Cornwell, **LIVID** (Scarpetta)
- 25 Robert J. Lloyd, **THE POISON MACHINE** (Hunt & Hooke)

November, 2022

- 1 Robert Crais, **RACING THE LIGHT** (Elvis Cole)
- 1 Brian Freeman, **THE ZERO NIGHT** (Jonathan Stride)
- 1 Francine Mathews, **DEATH ON A WINTER STROLL** (Merry Folger)

- 1 Sophie Hannah, **THE COUPLE AT THE TABLE**
- 1 Ausma Zehanat Khan, **BLACKWATER FALLS** (Inaya Rahman)
- 1 Robert Harris, **THE DEVIL'S BLAZE** (Sherlock Holmes 1943)
- 1 Dorothy St. James, **A BOOK CLUB TO DIE FOR** (Beloved Bookroom)
- 1 Ann Claire, **DEAD AND GOLDOLA** (Christie Bookshop)
- 1 B. A. Paris, **THE PRISONER**
- 1 Mick Herron, **STANDING BY THE WALL: The Slough House Novellas**
- 1 Dominic Martell, **SIMYA** (Pascual Rose)
- 8 Michael Connelly, **DESERT STAR** (Bosch & Ballard)
- 8 Raquel V. Reyes, **CALYPSO, CORPSES, AND COOKING** (Caribbean Kitchen)
- 8 Lisa Unger, **SECLUDED CABIN SLEEPS SIX**
- 8 Felix Francis, **HANDS DOWN** (Sid Halley)



- 8 Anne Perry, **A CHRISTMAS DELIVERANCE**
- 8 Catherine Steadman, **THE FAMILY TREE**
- 8 C. J. Tudor, **A SLIVER OF DARKNESS**
- 8 Phillip Margolin, **MURDER AT BLACK OAKS** (Robin Lockwood)
- 13 Stephen Spotswood, **SECRETS TYPED IN BLOOD** (Pentecost & Parker)
- 15 Matt Coyle, **DOOMED LEGACY** (Rick Cahill)
- 15 Elly Griffiths, **BLEEDING HEART YARD**
- 15 Anthony Horowitz, **THE TWIST OF A KNIFE** (Hawthorne)
- 29 Louise Penny, **A WORLD OF CURIOSITIES** (Inspector Gamache)

December, 2022

- 1 Leo J. Maloney, **BLAST WAVE** (Alex Morgan)
- 6 John Straley, **BLOWN BY THE SAME WIND** (Cold Storage)
- 6 Peter Lovesey, **SHOWSTOPPER** (Peter Diamond)
- 6 James W. Ziskin, **BOMBAY MONSOON**
- 6 Jeff Lindsay, **THREE-EDGED SWORD** (Riley Wolfe)
- 6 Victoria Thompson, **CITY OF FORTUNE** (Counterfeit Lady)
- 6 S. A. Cosby, **MY DARKEST PRAYER**
- 6 Robin Cook, **NIGHT SHIFT**
- 6 Max Allan Collins, **THE BIG BUNDLE** (Nate Heller)
- 6 Barry Eisler, **AMOK** (Dox)
- 6 David Mark, **THE WHISPERING DEAD**
- 6 Simon Brett, **WASTE OF LIFE** (Declutter)
- 6 Con Lehane, **MURDER BY DEFINITION** (42nd St. Library)
- 7 Christopher Fowler, **PECULIAR LONDON** (Bryant & May)
- 27 Charlie Donlea, **TWENTY YEARS LATER**

January, 2023

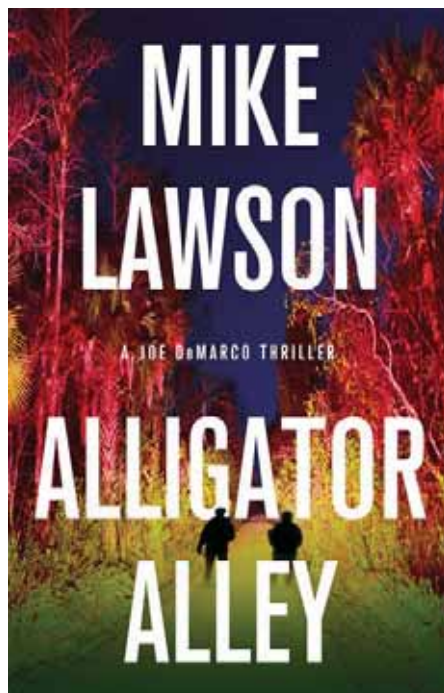
- 1 Will Carver, **THE DAVES NEXT DOOR**

- 3 Christopher Carlsson, **BLAZE ME A SUN**
- 3 Rachel Hawkins, **THE VILLA**
- 3 Peter Blauner, **PICTURE IN THE SAND**
- 3 Jeri Westerson, **COURTING DRAGONS** (Will Somers)
- 3 M. J. Trow, **BREAKING THE CIRCLE** (Margaret Murray)
- 3 Sally Spencer, **THE FINAL BEAT OF THE DRUM** (Paniatowski)
- 3 Michael Wiley, **THE LONG WAY OUT** (Franky Dast)
- 10 Michael Ledwidge, **HARD TO BREAK** (Mike Gannon)
- 10 Ana Reyes, **THE HOUSE IN THE PINES**
- 10 Stacy Willingham, **ALL THE DANGEROUS THINGS**
- 10 Jordan Harper, **EVERYBODY KNOWS**
- 10 Iris Yamashita, **CITY UNDER ONE ROOF**
- 10 Michael Bennett, **BETTER THE BLOOD**
- 10 Mari Hannah, **THE DEEP** (Stone & Oliver)
- 12 Robert Bryndza, **DEVIL'S WAY** (Kate Marshall)
- 17 Thomas Perry, **MURDER BOOK**
- 17 P. J. Tracy, **THE DEVIL YOU KNOW** (Margaret Nolan)
- 17 Preston & Child, **THE CABINET OF DR. LENG** (Pendergast)
- 17 Jessica Fellowes, **THE MITFORD SECRET**
- 17 Benjamin Stevenson, **EVERYONE IN MY FAMILY HAS KILLED SOMEONE**
- 24 Janice Hallett, **THE TWYFORD CODE**
- 24 Brad Taylor, **THE DEVIL'S RANSOM** (Pike Logan)
- 24 Stephen Hunter, **THE BULLET GARDEN** (Earl Swagger)
- 31 Jane Harper, **EXILES** (Aaron Falk)
- 31 C. J. Tudor, **THE DRIFT**
- 31 Elle Cosimano, **FINLAY DONOVAN JUMPS THE GUN**

February, 2023

- 7 Deborah Crombie, **A KILLING OF INNOCENTS** (Kincaid/James)
- 7 Anastaisa Hastings, **OF MANNERS**

- AND MURDER** (Dear Miss Hermione)
- 7 Kwei Quartey, **LAST SEEN IN LAPAZ** (Emma Djan)
- 7 Karen McQuestion, **214 PALMER STREET**
- 7 Mike Lawson, **ALLIGATOR ALLEY** (Joe DeMarco)



- 7 David Putnam, **THE SCORNE** (Bruno Johnson)
- 7 Stephen Graham Jones, **DON'T FEAR THE REAPER** (Indian Lake)
- 7 Iris & Roy Johansen, **MORE THAN MEETS THE EYE** (Kendra Michaels)
- 7 Hank Phillippi Ryan, **THE HOUSE GUEST**
- 7 Owen Matthews, **WHITE FOX** (Alexander Vasin)
- 7 Jonathan Kellerman, **UNNATURAL HISTORY** (Alex Delaware)
- 14 William Kotzwinkle, **BLOODY MARTINI** (Felony Monk)
- 14 Michael Robotham, **LYING BESIDE YOU** (Cyrus & Evie)
- 14 Kathleen Kent, **BLACK WOLF**
- 14 Charles Todd, **THE CLIFF'S EDGE** (Bess Crawford)
- 14 Gregg Hurwitz, **THE LAST ORPHAN** (Orphan X)
- 14, M.C. Beaton & R. W. Green, **DEATH OF A TRAITOR** (Hamish Macbeth)
- 21 Walter Mosley, **EVERY MAN A**

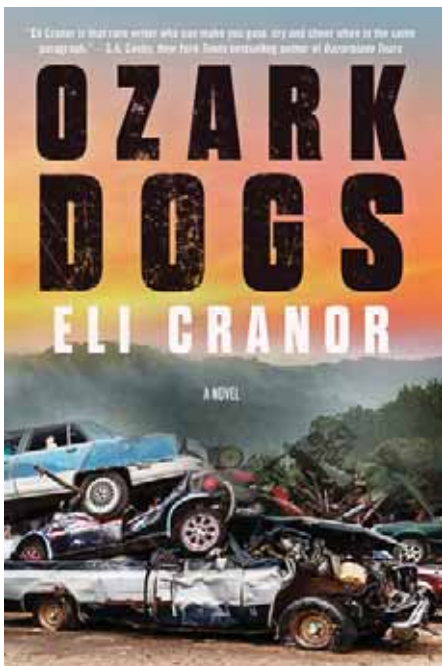
- KING** (Joe King Oliver)
- 21 John Gilstrap, **WHITE SMOKE** (Victoria Emerson)
- 21 Andrew Mayne, **SEA CASTLE** (Sloan McPherson)
- 21 Rick Bleiweiss, **MURDER IN HAXFORD** (Pignon Scorbion)
- 21 Steve Berry, **THE LAST KINGDOM** (Cotton Malone)
- 21 Mark Greaney, **BURNER** (Gray Man)
- 21 David Handler, **THE GIRL WHO TOOK WHAT SHE WANTED** (Stewart Hoag)
- 21 Kelley Armstrong, **MURDER AT HAVEN'S ROCK** (Casey Duncan)
- 28 C. J. Box, **STORM WATCH** (Joe Pickett)
- 28 Sean Doolittle, **DEVICE FREE WEEKEND**
- 28 Tim Dorsey, **THE MALTESE LIZARD** (Serge Storms)
- 28 Nick Pirog, **THE NUMBERS** (Thomas Prescott)

March, 2023

- 1 Zoje Stage, **MOTHERED**
- 7 Cara Black, **NIGHT FLIGHT TO PARIS** (Kate Rees)
- 7 Alex Finlay, **WHAT HAVE WE DONE**
- 7 Laura Childs, **LEMON CURD KILLER** (Theodosia Browning)
- 14 J. A. Jance, **COLLATERAL DAMAGE** (Ali Reynolds)
- 14 Alma Katsu, **RED LONDON** (Red Widow)
- 14 Connor Sullivan, **WOLF TRAP**
- 14 Donna Leon, **SO SHALL YOU REAP** (Guido Brunetti)
- 14 Harlan Coben, **I WILL FIND YOU**
- 14 Juan Gomez-Jurado, **RED QUEEN**
- 14 Jesse Q. Sutano, **VERA WONG'S UNSOLICITED ADVICE TO MURDERERS**
- 14 David Rosenfelt, **GOOD DOG, BAD COP** (K Team)
- 14 Karen Rose, **COLD BLOODED LIAR**
- 14 Debra Webb, **THE NATURE OF SECRETS** (Finley O'Sullivan)
- 14 Sherry Thomas, **A TEMPEST AT SEA** (Lady Sherlock)
- 14 Clive Cussler & Robin Burcell, **THE SERPENT'S EYE** (Fargo)

- 21 Joe R. Lansdale, **THE DONUT LEGION**
- 21 Gigi Pandian, **THE RAVEN THIEF** (Tempest Raj)
- 21 A. J. Tata, **TOTAL EMPIRE** (Garrett Sinclair)
- 28 Josh Weiss, **SUNSET EMPIRE** (Morris Baker)
- 28 Lina Chern, **PLAY THE FOOL**
- 28 Amulya Malladi, **A DEATH IN DENMARK** (Gabriel Praest)
- 28 Robert Dugoni, **HER DEADLY GAME** (Keera Duggan)
- 28 Charlie Donlea, **THOSE EMPTY EYES**
- 28 Lisa Scottoline, **LOYALTY** (Mafia)
- 30 Harini Nagendra, **MURDER UNDER A RED MOON** (Bangalore Detectives Club)

April, 2023



- 4 Eli Cranor, **OZARK DOGS**
- 4 Thomas Mullen, **BLIND SPOTS**
- 4 Paige Shelton, **FATEFUL WORDS** (Scottish Bookshop)
- 4 Loren D. Estleman, **CITY WALLS** (Amos Walker)
- 4 Sally Hepworth, **THE SOULMATE**
- 4 Joshua Hood, Robert Ludlum's **THE TREADSTONE RENDITION** (Adam Hayes)
- 11 Andrew Welsh-Huggins, **THE END OF THE ROAD**

- 11 Will Thomas, **HEART OF THE NILE** (Barker & Llewelyn)
- 11 John Sandford, **DARK ANGEL** (Letty Davenport)
- 11 Rick Mofina, **EVERY THING SHE FEARED**
- 11 Steven James, **BROKER OF LIES** (Travis Brock)
- 11 Kim Sherwood, **DOUBLE OR NOTHING** (Double O)
- 11 Peter Robinson, **STANDING IN THE SHADOWS** (Banks)
- 18 Don Winslow, **CITY OF DREAMS** (Danny Ryan)
- 18 David Baldacci, **SIMPLY LIES**
- 18 Kim Hays, **SONS AND BROTHERS** (Linder & Donatelli)
- 18 Jen Williams, **GAMES FOR DEAD GIRLS**
- 18 C. J. Harris, **WHO CRIES FOR THE LOST** (St. Cyr)
- 18 Samantha Jayne Allen, **HARD RAIN** (Annie McIntyre)
- 25 Dennis Lehane, **SMALL MERCIES**
- 25 Taylor Adams, **THE LAST WORD**
- 25 Victoria Thompson, **MURDER ON BEDFORD STREET** (Gaslight)
- 25 Leslie Meier, **MOTHER OF THE BRIDE MURDER** (Lucy Stone)
- 25 Sarah Graves, **DEATH BY CHOCOLATE MARSHMALLOW PIE** (Jake Tiptree)
- 25 T. Jefferson Parker, **THE RESCUE**
- 25 Marc Cameron, **BREAKNECK** (Arliss Cutter)
- 25 Elly Griffiths, **THE LAST REMAINS** (Ruth Galloway)
- 25 Colleen Cambridge, **MASTERING THE ART OF FRENCH MURDER** (American in Paris)

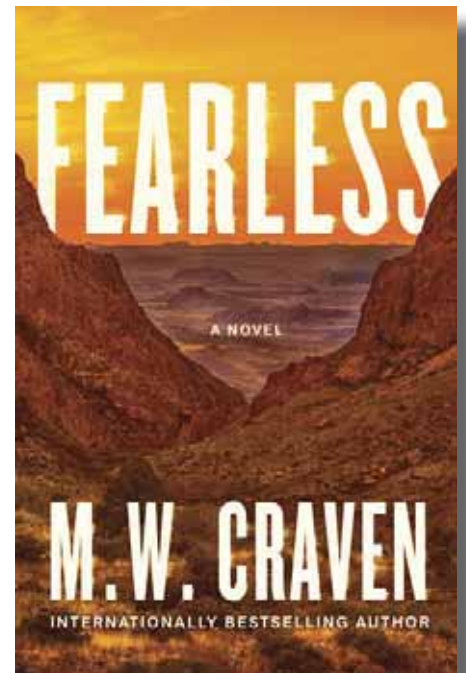
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- 2 Don Bentley, **FORGOTTEN WAR** (Matt Drake)
- 2 Arnaldur Indridason, **THE GIRL BY THE BRIDGE** (Konrad)
- 9 Don Bentley, **FLASH POINT** (Jack Ryan, Jr.)
- 9 Joe Ide, **FIXIT** (IQ)
- 16 Jack Carr, **ONLY THE DEAD** (James Reece)
- 16 Samantha Larsen, **A NOVEL DISGUISE**
- 16 Louise Gagnon, **KILLING ME**

- 16 Joel C. Rosenberg, **THE LIBYAN DIVERSION**
- 23 Chris Hauty, **THE DEVIL YOU KNOW** (Hayley Chill)
- 23 Ivy Pochoda, **SING HER DOWN**
- 23 Emma Rosenblum, **BAD SUMMER PEOPLE**
- 23 Arnaldur Indridason, **THE GIRL BY THE BRIDGE** (Detective Konrad)
- 30 Matt Goldman, **A GOOD FAMILY**
- 30 Megan Abbott, **BEWARE THE WOMAN**
- 30 Ian K. Smith, **THE OVERNIGHTS** (Ashe Cayne)

June, 2023

- 13 Matthew Quirk, **INSIDE THREAT**
- 20 James Rollins, **TIDES OF FIRE** (Sigma Force)
- 27 Nick Petrie, **THE HEAVY LIFT** (Peter Ash)



July, 2023

- 4 David Rosenfelt, **FLOP DEAD GORGEOUS** (Andy Carpenter)
- 11 M. W. Craven, **FEARLESS**
- 11 Steve Goble, **GO FIND DADDY** (Ed Runyon)
- 25 Max Tomlinson, **NIGHT CANDY** (Colleen Hayes)

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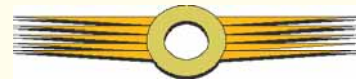
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