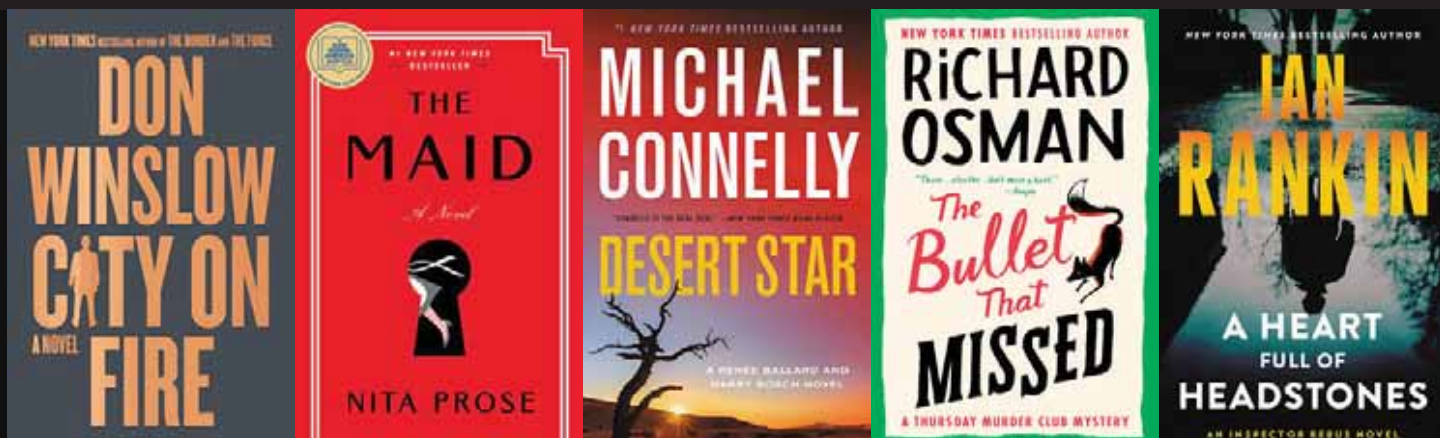


Deadly Pleasures

Mystery Magazine



The Best of the Best 2022

Critics' Choice



The Quest to Find the Best of the Best for 2022

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

The **first step** in the process starts with compiling the list we call **The Deadly Pleasures Best of (2022) List** which we publish in each issue as it grows throughout a given year. You will also find a link to that list called "Year's Best" on the homepage of our website (which is updated between issues). We rely on starred reviews in the four principal library journals (*Publishers Weekly*, *Kirkus*, *BookList* and *Library Journals*) and the amazon editors monthly picks as the beginning point for this List. To get on **The Deadly Pleasures Best of 2022 List**, a novel must have garnered at least one starred review. If it only gets one starred review it has to also get a very favorable review in *Deadly Pleasures Mystery Magazine* to get on the list. Every once in a while there is an exceptional novel that was missed by the library journals and which is deemed worthy to be put on the list. These usually are novels published abroad (Canada, Australia, Ireland and the U.K.) that have not yet been published or reviewed in the U.S.

The Deadly Pleasures Best of (Year) List is a good indicator of some of the titles that will eventually appear on year-end "Best" lists.

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

The **third step** in the process is one that Larry Gandle and I take on. It begins in November and continues through to the end of the year. It is collecting of all of the "Best of the Year" lists that are published during that period of time.

Then I create a list of every book from every "Best" list and indicate which list or lists every book appeared on. From that list I develop a report of how many mentions a title may have and a list of the most mentioned titles on the "Best" lists. That report I call **The Best of the Best**. (found on page 17 herein).

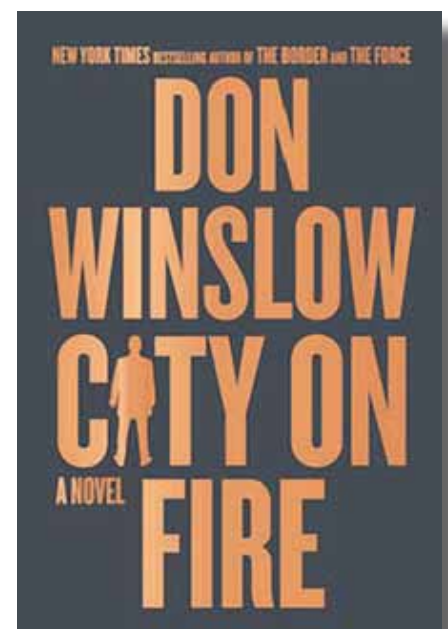
Fourth Step. I then use **The Deadly Pleasures Best of (2022) List**, *DP* reviewers' reviews which culminate in their end-of-year "Best" lists, and the Year-End report of **The Best of the Best** to come up with a preliminary Barry Award Nominations list with four categories (Best Novel, Best First Novel, Best Paperback Original and Best Thriller). I ask for input (suggestions for additions and deletions to the preliminary list) from the Barry Award committee members. Then we each

vote for our 6 top choices. This results in **The Barry Award Nominations**, which represent *Deadly Pleasures'* Best of the Best List.

In 2022, I discovered 85 "Best" lists. Some lists are better than others. We have no way of knowing how widely read are the creators of most of these lists, but for our purposes I have given equal weight to each list.

One problem that crops up in getting an accurate "mentions" count is when a title wasn't published in the U.S. and the U.K. in the same year. Three examples from 2022 are Michael Robotham's **LYING BESIDE YOU**, Benjamin Stevenson's **EVERYONE IN MY FAMILY HAS KILLED SOMEONE** and Janice Hallett's **THE TWYFORD CODE**. These three novels will have U.S. editions coming out in 2023, but they already appeared on "Best" lists in 2022 because of their 2022 U.K. editions. This throws the numbers of mentions off a little. This will be an ongoing problem with a few titles each year.

Now onward and upward to 2023 which already portends to be another excellent year for our favorite kind of reading.



Experts' Lists

Best Mysteries of 2022



Deadly Pleasures Staff

Ali Karim

THE ACCOMPLICE, Steve Cavanagh
 LYING BESIDE YOU,
 Michael Robotham
 NO PLAN B, Lee and Andrew Child
 DESERT STAR, Michael Connelly
 THE FURIES, John Connolly
 CITY ON FIRE, Don Winslow

Donus Roberts

DESERT STAR, Michael Connelly
 GIRL ON ICE, Erica Ferencik
 THE RUNAWAY, Nick Petrie
 THE ACCOMPLICE, Steve Cavanagh
 THE MAID, Nita Prose
 THE BULLET THAT MISSED,
 Richard Osman
 VIVIANA VALENTINE GETS HER
 MAN, Emily Edwards
 THE BIG BUNDLE, Max Allan Collins

Jeff Popple Crime

THE DARK FLOOD, Deon Meyer
 DESERT STAR, Michael Connelly
 A HEART FULL OF HEADSTONES,
 Ian Rankin
 EVERYONE IN MY FAMILY HAS
 KILLED SOMEONE,
 Benjamin Stevenson
 LYING BESIDE YOU,

Michael Robotham (2023 title in U.S.)
 THOSE WHO PERISH, Emma Viskic
 THE FURIES, John Connolly
 THE ACCOMPLICE, Steve Cavanagh

Thriller

BAD ACTORS, Mick Herron
 YESTERDAY'S SPY, Tom Bradby
 THE MATCHMAKER, Paul Vidich
 WINTER WORK, Dan Fesperman
 COLD FEAR, Webb & Mann
 ONE STEP TOO FAR, Lisa Gardner

Debuts

THE TORRENT, Dinuka McKenzie

(Australia only)

WAKE, Shelley Burr
 BLACK RIVER, Matthew Spencer
 (in U.S, June, 2023)
 THE PARTISAN, Patrick Worrall
 DIRT CREEK, Hayley Scrivenor

Meredith Anthony

THE BULLET THAT MISSED,
 Richard Osman
 KILLERS OF A CERTAIN AGE,
 Deanna Raybourn
 THE MIMICKING OF KNOWN
 SUCCESSES, Malka Older
 A WORLD OF CURIOSITIES,
 Louise Penny
 DESERT STAR, Michael Connelly
 A GAME OF FEAR by Charles Todd
 ANTHEM by Noah Hawley
 GIRL IN ICE by Erica Ferencik
 FINLAY DONOVAN KNOCKS 'EM
 DEAD by Elle Cosimano
 SHIFTY'S BOYS by Chris Offutt
 BAD ACTORS by Mick Herron
 THE GATEKEEPER by James Byrne
 THE INK BLACK HEART,

Robert Galbraith
 CONFIDENCE, Denise Mina
 ROCK OF AGES, Timothy Hallinan
 PAY DIRT ROAD,
 Samantha Jayne Allen
 GOOD RICH PEOPLE,
 Eliza Jane Brazier

Larry Gandle

CITY ON FIRE, Don Winslow
 NOTES ON AN EXECUTION,
 Danya Kukafka
 WINTER WORK, Dan Fesperman
 THE FAMILY CHAO,
 Lan Samantha Chang
 THE RUNAWAY, Nick Petrie
 THINGS WE DO IN THE DARK,
 Jennifer Hillier
 BLOOD SUGAR, Sascha Rothchild
 THE ACCOMPLICE, Steve Cavanagh
 DESERT STAR, Michael Connelly

ANYWHERE YOU RUN,

Wanda Morris
 BEFORE YOU KNEW MY NAME,
 Jacqueline Bublitz
 OCEAN STATE, Stuart O'Nan
 SHIFTY'S BOYS, Chris Offutt

Kristopher Zgorski

THE LAST KING OF CALIFORNIA,
 Jordan Harper – Favorite
 A WORLD OF CURIOSITIES,
 Louise Penny
 FINLAY DONOVAN KNOCKS 'EM
 DEAD, Elle Cosimano
 THE SECRETS WE SHARE,
 Edwin Hill
 THE MURDER RULE,
 Dervla McTiernan
 ANYWHERE YOU RUN,
 Wanda M. Morris
 1989, Val McDermid
 LIKE A SISTER, Kellye Garrett
 THE UNDISCOVERED DEATHS OF
 GRACE MCGILL, C.S. Robertson
 SECRET IDENTITY, Alex Segura

Debuts

SINKHOLE, Davida G. Breier
 DIRT CREEK, Hayley Scrivenor
 DEVIL'S CHEW TOY, Rob Osler
Uncategorizable "Crime Fiction"
 A HISTORY OF FEAR, Luke Dumas
 THE OTHER SIDE OF NIGHT,
 Adam Hamdy

L. J. Roberts

THE VIOLIN CONSPIRACY,
 Brendan Slocumb
 A MATTER OF TIME, Claire Askew
 ROBBED BLIND, Gerry Boyle
 FORSAKEN COUNTRY, Allen Eskens
 FOX CREEK, William Kent Krueger
 DYING FALL, Cynthia Harrod-Eagles
 THE LADY WITH THE GUN ASKS
 THE QUESTIONS, Kerry Greenwood
 (short stories)
 THE BLOOD COVENANT,
 Chris Nickson

A DARK STEEL DEATH,
Chris Nickson
SHIFTY'S BOYS, Chris Offutt
A WORLD OF CURIOSITIES,
Louise Penny
THE MAID, Nita Prose
A HEART FULL OF HEADSTONES,
Ian Rankin
LAST CALL, Sheldon Siegel
DOUBLE JEOPARDY, Sheldon Siegel
THE FIRES OF EDO, Susan Spann

“Mystery “ Mike Bursaw Best Novel

DOOMED LEGACY, Matt Coyle
FOX CREEK, William Kent Krueger
THE ACCOMPLICE, Steve Cavanagh
DESERT STAR, Michael Connelly
PORTRAIT OF A WOMAN,
Daniel Silva
HELL AND BACK, Craig Johnson
Best Paperback Original
GOERING'S GOLD, Richard O'Rawe
FINALE, Ian Hamilton
THE SANDMAN, Mark Dawson
THE NINETEEN, Jake Needham

Best Thriller

COLD FEAR, Webb & Mann
WITH A MIND TO KILL,
Anthony Horowitz
TRAITORS DANCE, Jeff Abbott
LAST ORPHAN, Gregg Hurwitz
THE RUNAWAY, Nick Petrie
IN THE BLOOD, Jack Carr
SIERRA SIX, Mark Greaney
SEVENTEEN, John Brownlow

Mike Dillman

STAY AWAKE, Megan Golden
REDEMPTION, Mike Lawson
IN THE BLOOD, Jack Carr
THE NINETEEN, Jake Needham
ONE STEP TOO FAR, Lisa Gardner
A FLICKER IN THE DARK,
Stacy Willingham
THE RUNAWAY, Nick Petrie
SHIFTY'S BOYS, Chris Offutt
GOERING'S GOLD, Richard O'Rawe
THE ACCOMPLICE, Steve Cavanagh
(U.K. only)
LYING BESIDE YOU,
Michael Robotham (U.K. only)
ALIAS EMMA, Ava Glass

Steele Curry

KATASTROPHE, Graham Hurley —
favorite of the year (U.K. only)
A WORLD OF CURIOSITIES, Louise
Penny – co-favorite of the year
DESERT STAR, Michael Connelly –
co-favorite of the year
BETRAYAL, David Gilman (U.K. only)
EVEN THE DARKEST NIGHT,
Javier Cercas
SIERRA SIX, Mark Greaney
THE SULTAN OF SARAWAK, Ian
Hamilton
THE DARK FLOOD, Deon Meyer
BAD ACTORS, Mick Herron
THE NINETEEN, Jake Needham
HAMMERMAN: A Walking Shadow,
Mike Nicol (South Africa only)
GOERING'S GOLD, Richard O'Rawe
PORTRAIT OF AN UNKNOWN
WOMAN, Daniel Silva
COLD FEAR, Brandon Webb and John
David Mann
BLOWBACK, James Patterson and
Brendan DuBois
THE ACCOMPLICE: Steve Cavanagh
(U.K. only)
THE SURVIVOR,
Simon Conway (U.K. only)

Ted Hertel

Novels

THE RUNAWAY, Nick Petrie
FOX CREEK, William Kent Krueger
BILLIE STARR'S BOOK OF SORRIES,
Deborah E. Kennedy
DIRT CREEK, Hayley Scrivenor
DAISY DARKER, Alice Feeney
THE BIG BUNDLE, Max Allan Collins
A HEART FULL OF HEADSTONES,
Ian Rankin
THE FIELDS, Erin Young

Debuts

DIRT CREEK, Hayley Scrivenor
EVEN THE DARKEST NIGHT,
Javier Cercas
DON'T KNOW TOUGH, Eli Cranor

George Easter

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 (2023 title in U.S.)
CITY ON FIRE, Don Winslow
THE BLACKBIRD,
Tim Weaver (U.K. only)
THE ACCOMPLICE, Steve Cavanagh
(U.K. only)

Debuts

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

Paperback Original

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

Thrillers

BAD ACTORS, Mick Herron
THE RUNAWAY, Nick Petrie
SIERRA SIX, Mark Greaney
ALIAS EMMA, Ava Glass
KILLERS OF A CERTAIN AGE,
Deanna Raybourn
SEVENTEEN, John Brownlow
THE PARTISAN, Patrick Worrall
(2023 title in the U.S.)

Short Story Collection

DALZIEL & PASCOE HUNT THE
CHRISTMAS KILLER, Reginald Hill

Robin Agnew

Novels

ALL THE QUEEN'S MEN, SJ Bennett
UNDER LOCK & SKELETON KEY,
Gigi Pandian
THE WOMAN IN THE LIBRARY,
Sulari Gentill
BACK TO THE GARDEN,
Laurie R. King
THE LINDBERGH NANNY,
Mariah Fredericks
THE WEDDING PLOT, Paula Munier
KILLERS OF A CERTAIN AGE,
Deanna Raybourn
A WORLD OF CURIOSITIES,
Louise Penny
NO STRANGERS HERE,
Carlene O'Connor
BLACKWATER FALLS,
Ausma Zehanat Khan
Historical Mysteries
SECRETS OF THE NILE,
Tasha Alexander
BECAUSE I COULD NOT STOP FOR

DEATH, Amanda Flower
 A BRIDE'S GUIDE TO MARRIAGE
 AND MURDER, Dianne Freeman
 A BEND OF LIGHT, Joy Jordan-Lasky
 LIGHT ON BONE, Kathryn Lasky
 MOTHER, DAUGHTER, TRAITOR,
 SPY, Susan Elia MacNeal
 THE UNKEPT WOMAN,
 Allison Montclair
 THE ECHOES, Jess Montgomery
 THE BANGALORE DETECTIVES
 CLUB, Harini Nagendra
 MURDER IN WESTMINSTER,
 Vanessa Riley

Hank Wagner

TARGETED, Stephen Hunter
 THE PARADOX HOTEL, Rob Hart
 DARK HORSE, Greg Hurwitz
 THE LEMON MAN, Keith Bruton
 MOVIELAND, Lee Goldberg
 SECRET IDENTITY, Alex Segura
 RX MAYHEM, Nina Abbott
 THE HANDLER, M. P. Woodward
 SCOURGE OF THE SCORPION,
 Will Murray
 SHUTTER, Ramona Emerson
 QUARRY'S BLOOD, Max Allan Collins
 AMOK, Barry Eisler
 THE BURGLAR WHO MET FREDER-
 IC BROWN, Lawrence Block
 THE GHOST IN YOU,
 Ed Brubaker and Sean Phillips
 FOLLOW ME DOWN,
 Ed Brubaker and Sean Phillips

Kevin Burton Smith

RACING THE LIGHT, Robert Crais
 THE OLD WOMAN WITH THE
 KNIFE, Gu Byeong-mo
 RANDOM, Penn Jillette
 FOLLOW ME DOWN,
 Ed Brubaker & Sean Phillips
 BYE BYE BABY, Ace Atkins
 ONE-SHOT HARRY, Gary Phillips
 BAD ACTORS, Mick Herron
 HELL AND GONE, Sam Wiebe
 SECRETS TYPED IN BLOOD,
 Stephen Spotswood
 KNOCK OFF THE HAT,
 Richard Stevenson
 SECRET IDENTITY, Alex Segura

Craig Sistorson

CITY ON FIRE, Don Winslow

BEFORE YOU KNEW MY NAME,
 Jacqueline Bublitz (debut)
 WAKE, Shelley Burr (debut)
 THE PAIN TOURIST, Paul Cleave
 DESERT STAR, Michael Connelly
 DON'T KNOW TOUGH, Eli Cranor
 (debut)
 LIKE A SISTER, Kellye Garrett
 THE DEVIL TAKES YOU HOME,
 Gabino Iglesias
 THE PERFECT CRIME, edited by Va-
 seem Khan & Maxim Jakubowsk
 1989, Val McDermid
 EVERYONE IN MY FAMILY HAS
 KILLED SOMEONE, Benjamin Steven-
 son (US in January 2023)
 THOSE WHO PERISH, Emma Viskic

Mike Ripley

KATASTROPHE, Graham Hurley
 YESTERDAY'S SPY, Tom Bradby
 WINTER WORK, Dan Fesperman
 DEAD RICH,
 G. W. Shaw (William Shaw)
 KALMANN, Joachim B. Schmidt
 THE LAST TO DISAPPEAR, Jo Spain
 MAY GOD FORGIVE, Alan Parks
 EDITH AND KIM, Charlotte Philby
 THE MATCHMAKER, Paul Vidich
 QUEEN HIGH, C. J. Carey
 ASHES IN THE SNOW,
 Oriana Ramunno
 BASIL'S WAR, Stephen Hunter

Other Experts

Oline Cogdill

Nationally Syndicated Reviewer
Best Novels

THE CARTOGRAPHERS,
 Peng Shepherd
 BACK TO THE GARDEN,
 Laurie R. King
 ANYWHERE YOU RUN,
 Wanda M. Morris
 SECRET IDENTITY, Alex Segura
 WE LIE HERE, Rachel Howzell Hall
 DESERT STAR, Michael Connelly
 THINGS WE DO IN THE DARK,
 Jennifer Hillier
 LIKE A SISTER, Kellye Garrett
 KILLERS OF A CERTAIN AGE,

Deanna Raybourn
 HER LAST AFFAIR, John Searles
 FORSAKEN COUNTRY, Allen Eskens
 THE FIELDS, Erin Young
 THE DROWNING SEA,
 Sarah Stewart Taylor
 TWO NIGHTS IN LISBON,
 Chris Pavone
 RACING THE LIGHT, Robert Crais
 COUNTERFEIT, Kirsten Chen

Best Debuts

JACKAL, Erin E. Adams
 PAY DIRT ROAD,
 Samantha Jayne Allen
 BEFORE YOU KNEW MY NAME,
 Jacqueline Bublitz
 SHUTTER, Ramona Emerson
 THE MARSH QUEEN,
 Virginia Hartman
 ALL THAT'S LEFT UNSAID,
 Tracey Lien
 THE VERIFIERS, Jane Pek
 DIRT CREEK, Hayley Scrivenor
 A FLICKER IN THE DARK,
 Stacy Willingham
Best Short Stories
 MARPLE: Twelve New Mysteries,
 various authors
 BEST AMERICAN MYSTERY AND
 SUSPENSE 2022, edited by Jess Walter
 & Steph Cha
 HOTEL CALIFORNIA,
 edited by Don Bruns

Sarah Weinman

Mystery Reviewer
The New York Times

Best Debuts

DON'T KNOW TOUGH, Eli Cranor
 PORTRAIT OF A THIEF, Grace D. Li

Best Standalones

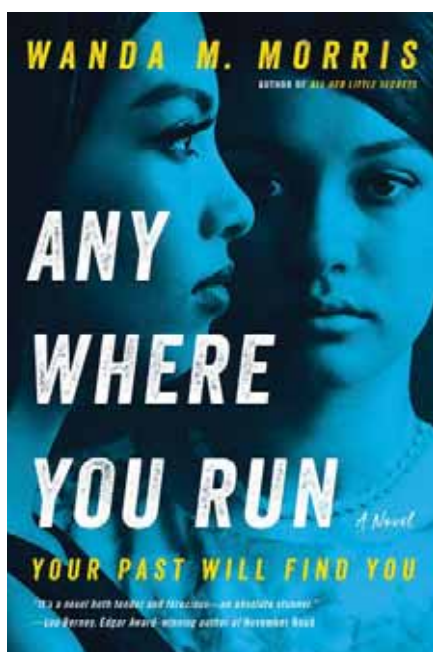
REAL EASY, Marie Rutkoski
 THE LOST KINGS, Tyrell Johnson
 GANGLAND, Chuck Hogan
 ANYWHERE YOU RUN,
 Wanda M. Morris
 SURVIVOR'S GUILT, Robyn Gigg

Best in a Series

VERA KELLY LOST AND FOUND,
 Rosalie Knecht
 SECRETS TYPED IN BLOOD,
 Stephen Spotswood

Best Overall

NOTES ON AN EXECUTION,
 Danya Kukafka

**Best in Genre Nonfiction**

THE LIFE OF CRIME, Martin Edwards

Sarah Lyall

The New York Times

Best Thrillers

THE APPEAL, Janice Hallett
 BROKEN SUMMER, J. M. Lee
 THE OTHER SIDE OF MIDNIGHT,
 Adam Hamdy
 BLOOD SUGAR, Sascha Rothchild
 THE MURDER RULE,
 Dervla McTiernan
 THE ISLAND, Adrian McKinty

Margaret Cannon

The Globe and Mail (U.K.)

A TWIST OF A KNIFE,
 Anthony Horowitz
 THE BULLET THAT MISSED,
 Richard Osman
 NINE LIVES, Peter Swanson
 ALL HER LITTLE SECRETS,
 Wanda M. Morris (2021 title in U.S.)
 A WORLD OF CURIOSITIES,
 Louise Penny
 DEEP HOUSE, Thomas King
 BLACKWATER FALLS,
 Ausma Zehanat Khan
 FOX CREEK, William Kent Krueger
 THE DARK FLOOD, Deon Meyer
 THE APPEAL, Janice Hallett

Laura Wilson**Crime Fiction Reviewer**

The Guardian (U.K.)

MORE THAN YOU'LL EVER KNOW,
 Katie Gutierrez
 THE TWYFORD CODE, Janice Hallett
 WRONG PLACE, WRONG TIME,
 Gillian McAllister
 THE BULLET THAT MISSED,
 Richard Osman
 THE COOK, Ajay Chowdhury
 THE DEVIL TAKE YOU HOME,
 Gabino Iglesias
 THE UNDISCOVERED DEATHS OF
 GRACE MCGILL, C S Robertson
 A WORLD OF CURIOSITIES,
 Louise Penny
 MEANTIME, Frankie Boyle
 THE PARTISAN, Patrick Worrall
 WAKE, Shelley Butt
 THE MAID, Nita Prose
 A HEART FULL OF HEADSTONES,
 Ian Rankin
 GIVE UNTO OTHERS, Donna Leon
 THE MURDER BOOK,
 Mark Billingham
 BLEEDING HEART YARD,
 Elly Griffiths
 MAY GOD FORGIVE, Alan Parks
 MAROR, Lavie Tidhar
 BLUE WATER, Leonora Natrass
 THE LOST MAN OF BOMBAY,
 Vaseem Khan
 QUEEN HIGH, C. J. Carey
 BREAKING POINT, Olivier Norek
 THE MOOSE PARADOX,
 Antti Tuomainen

Jake Kerridge

The Telegraph (U.K.)

QUEEN HIGH, C. J. Carey
 LADY JOKER, Volume 1, Kaoru
 Takamura (2021 title in U.S.)
 A HEART FULL OF HEADSTONES,
 Ian Rankin
 A SEASON IN EXILE, Oliver Harris
 THE BULLET THAT MISSED,
 Richard Osman
 MURDER BEFORE EVENSONG,
 Reverend Richard Coles
 THE TWYFORD CODE, Janice Hallett
 THE COMPANION, Lesley Thomson
 THE PERFECT CRIME, Edited by
 Vaseem Khan & Maxim Jakubowski
 THE INK BLACK HEART,
 Robert Galbraith

Barry Forshaw

Financial Times (U.K.)

A HEART FULL OF HEADSTONES,
 Ian Rankin
 BLUE WATER, Leonora Natrass
 THE LOST MAN OF BOMBAY,
 Vaseem Khan
 THE TWYFORD CODE, Janice Hallett
 (2023 title in U.S.)
 THE DARK FLOOD, Deon Meyer
**Others appeared on the
 Crime Time website**
 THE ACCOMPLICE, Steve Cavanagh
 QUEEN HIGH, C. J. Carey

Adam LeBoer

Financial Times (U.K.)

Best Thrillers

THE SURVIVOR, Simon Conway
 SLEEP WHEN YOU'RE DEAD,
 Jude O'Reilly
 QUEEN HIGH, C. J. Carey
 SEVENTEEN, John Brownlow
 A TRAITOR'S HEART, Ben Creed

Ayo Onatade

Crime Fiction Reviewer

Shots Magazine (U.K.)

BAD ACTORS, Mick Herron
 THE DEVIL TAKES YOU HOME,
 Gabino Iglesias
 THREE ASSASSINS, Kotaro Isaka
 THE SKELETON KEY, Erin Kelly
 (2023 title in U.S.)
 CONFIDENCE, Denise Mina
 BLUE WATER, Leonora Natrass
 BREAKING POINT, Olivier Norek
 SECRET IDENTITY, Alex Segura
 THE SPIRIT ENGINEER, A. J. West
 CITY ON FIRE, Don Winslow
Honorable Mention
 DESERT STAR, Michael Connelly
 THE FURIES, John Connolly
 LIKE A SISTER, Kellye Garrett
 SHIFTY'S BOYS, Chris Offutt
 A WORLD OF CURIOSITIES,
 Louise Penny
 A HEART FULL OF HEADSTONES,
 Ian Rankin
Non-Fiction
 A HISTORY OF TREASON,
 Chris Day et al
 THE LIFE OF CRIME, Martin Edwards

Mark Sanderson and Joan Smith

The Times (U.K.)

THE SECOND CUT, Louise Welsh –
Times Crime Novel of the Year

THE INK BLACK HEART, Robert Galbraith – **Sunday Times Crime Novel of the Year**

A KILLING IN NOVEMBER,
Simon Mason

THE COOK, Ajay Chowdhury
REPTILE MEMOIRS, Silje Ulstein

THE TWYFORD CODE, Janice Hallett
(2023 title in U.S.)

CITY ON FIRE, Don Winslow
LIFE SENTENCE, A.K. Turner

THE MURDER BOOK,

Mark Billingham

SOMETIMES PEOPLE DIE,

Simon Stephenson

THE COMPANION, Lesley Thomson

THE TRENCHES, Parker Bilal

THE CLIFF HOUSE, Chris Brookmyre
EVERYONE IN MY FAMILY HAS

KILLED SOMEONE,

Benjamin Stevenson

BLEEDING HEART YARD,

Elly Griffiths

A HEART FULL OF HEADSTONES,
Ian Rankin

John Dugdale and James Owen

The Times (U.K.)

Best Thrillers

HEAT 2, Michael Mann & Meg Gardiner – **Times Thriller of the Year**

WRONG PLACE, WRONG TIME,
Gillian McAllister – **Sunday Times**

Thriller of the Year

THE BERLIN EXCHANGE,

Joseph Kanon

THE SKELETON KEY, Erin Kelly

THE GARDEN OF ANGELS,

David Hewson

A FLICKER IN THE DARK,

Stacy Willingham

KATASTROPHE, Graham Hurley

BAD ACTORS, Mick Herron

A TIDY ENDING, Joanna Cannon

SUSPECT, Scott Turow

WINTER WORK, Dan Fesperman

THIS IS THE NIGHT THEY COME
FOR YOU, Robert Goddard

TWO STORM WOOD, Philip Gray
THE RECRUIT, Alan Drew

Maxim Jakubowski

Crime Reviewer (U.K.)

Crime Time FM

CITY ON FIRE, Don Winslow

THE MAID, Nita Prose

HEAT 2, Michael Mann &

Meg Gardiner

HOW TO FIND YOUR WAY IN THE

DARK, Derek B. Miller

MAROR, Lavie Tidhar

SHOOT THE MOONLIGHT OUT,

William Boyle

QUEEN HIGH, C. J. Carey

Declan Hughes

The Irish Times

DALZIEL & PASCOE HUNT THE
CHRISTMAS KILLER, Reginald Hill
A WORLD OF CURIOSITIES,

Louise Penny

BIG RED, Jerome Charyn

THE DAZZLE OF THE LIGHT,

Georgina Clark

THE LIFE OF CRIME, Martin Edwards

(non-fiction)

RUN TIME, Catherine Ryan Howard

WHILE SHE SLEEPS, Arlene Hunt

CRUEL DEEDS, Catherine Kirwan

HER LAST WORDS, E.V. Kelly

THE FURIES, John Connolly

THE WINTER GUEST, W. C. Ryan

THE COLLECTIVE, Alison Gaylin

(2021 title in U.S.)

SEASONAL WORK AND OTHER

KILLER STORIES, Laura Lippman

BAD ACTORS, Mick Herron

PUNISHMENT,

Ferdinand von Schirach

THE ISLAND OF LOST GIRLS,

Alex Marwood

A SEASON IN EXILE, Oliver Harris

THE BOOK OF THE MOST PRE-

CIOUS SUBSTANCE, Sara Gran

DEAR LITTLE CORPSES,

Nicola Upson

Natasha Cooper

Literary Review (U.K.)

THE SKELETON KEY, Erin Kelly
A HEART FULL OF HEADSTONES,

Ian Rankin

THE BOOKSELLER OF INVERNESS,

S. G. MacLean
THE EMPTY ROOM,
Brian McGilloway
A CERTAIN HUNGER,
Chelsea G. Summers

Barbara Peters

Poisoned Pen Bookstore

Novels

THE HACIENDA Isabel Canas

THE DOUBLE AGENT,

William Christie

CAPTAIN GREY'S GAMBIT,

J. H. Gelernter

THE CLOISTERS, Katy Hays

PORTRAIT OF A THIEF, Grace D. Li

THE APPEAL, Janice Hallett

THE CLUB, Ellery Lloyd

THE MAID, Nita Prose

HIDDEN PICTURES, Jason Rekulak

LAVENDER HOUSE, A. C. Rosen

Paperback Originals

THE LITTELST LIBRARY,

Poppy Alexander

THE HUNTING SEASON,

Tom Benjamin

LOCH DOWN ABBEY,

Beth Cowan-Erskine

IN HER BOOTS, K. J. Dell'Antonia

THE PATIENT, Jane Shemlit

Others

MARPLE, Various Authors – short
stories

THE LIFE OF CRIME, Martin Edwards
– non-fiction

Patrick Millikin

Poisoned Pen Bookstore

DESERT STAR, Michael Connelly
RAZORBLADE TEARS, S. A. Cosby
(2021 title)

SHUTTER, Ramona Emerson

PAPERBACK JACK, Loren D. Estleman

WINTER WORK, Dan Fesperman

THE BOOK OF MOST PRECIOUS

SUBSTANCE, Sara Gran

THE DEVIL TAKES YOU HOME,

Gabino Iglesias

THE DARK FLOOD, Deon Meyer

ONE-SHOT HARRY, Gary Phillips

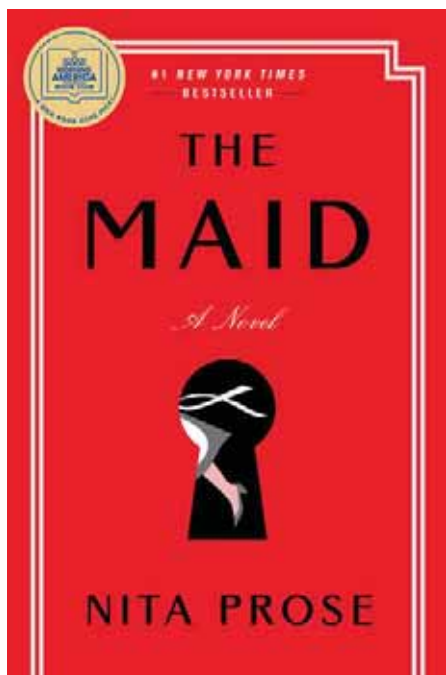
CRIPPLED JACK, Boston Teran

AFTER THE LIGHTS GO OUT,

John Vercher

Booksellers' Lists

Best Mysteries of 2022



Amazon

(www.amazon.com)

CITY ON FIRE, Don Winslow
 THE MAID, Nita Prose
 KILLERS OF A CERTAIN AGE,
 Deanna Raybourn
 THE GOLDEN COUPLE,
 Greer Hendricks & Sarah Pekkanen
 THE LIES I TELL, Julie Clark
 THE HACIENDA, Isabel Canas
 THE OVERNIGHT GUEST,
 Heather Gudenkauf
 THE VIOLIN CONSPIRACY,
 Brendan Slocumb
 LAVENDER HOUSE, Lev AC Rosen
 SHUTTER, Ramona Emerson
 HIDDEN PICTURES, Jason Rekulak
 WHAT HAPPENED TO THE
 BENNETTS, Lisa Scottoline
 THE HOUSEMAID, Freida McFadden
 ANYWHERE YOU RUN,
 Wanda M. Morris
 ALL GOOD PEOPLE HERE,
 Ashley Flowers
 THE BUTCHER AND THE WREN,

Alaina Urquhart
 CAROLINA MOONSET,
 Matt Goldman
 BLEEDING HEART YARD,
 Elly Griffiths
 FORSAKEN COUNTRY, Allen Eskens
 WINTER WORK, Dan Fesperman

Barnes & Noble

(www.barnesandnoble.com)

HEAT 2, Michael Mann &
 Meg Gardiner
 A WORLD OF CURIOSITIES,
 Louise Penny
 ALL GOOD PEOPLE HERE,
 Ashley Flowers
 THE BULLET THAT MISSED,
 Richard Osman
 GIRL, FORGOTTEN,
 Karin Slaughter
 THE BUTCHER AND THE WREN,
 Alaina Urquhart
 THE PARIS APARTMENT, Lucy Foley
 THE MAID, Nita Prose
 FOX CREEK, William Kent Krueger
 CITY ON FIRE, Don Winslow

Booktopia

Australian Bookstore

(www.booktopia.com.au)

DENIZEN, James McKenzie Watson
 DAY'S END, Garry Disher
 DIRT TOWN (DIRT CREEK in U.S.),
 Hayley Scrivenor
 WAKE, Shelley Burr
 LYING BESIDE YOU,
 Michael Robotham (Feb, 2023 in U.S.)
 ALL THAT'S LEFT UNSAID,
 Tracey Lien
 BLACK RIVER, Matthew Spencer
 (2023 in U.S.)
 THE RISING TIDE, Ann Cleeves
 THE WOMAN IN THE LIBRARY,
 Sulari Gentil
 THE TORRENT, Dinuka McKenzie
 THE MURDER RULE,

Dervla McTiernan
 THE MOTHER, Jane Caro
 EVERYONE IN MY FAMILY HAS
 KILLED SOMEONE,
 Benjamin Stevenson
 GIRL, FORGOTTEN, Karin Slaughter
 MURDER IN WILLIAMSTOWN,
 Kerry Greenwood
 DESERT STAR, Michael Connelly
 EXILES, Jane Harper (2023 in U.S.)
 THE TILT, Chris Hammer
 THE BULLET THAT MISSED,
 Richard Osman
 CONVICTION, Frank Chalmers

Waterstones

Cosy Crime

THE SATSUMA COMPLEX,
 Bob Mortimer
 THE BULLET THAT MISSED,
 Richard Osman
 MURDER BEFORE EVENSONG,
 Reverend Richard Coles
 MARPLE: Twelve New Stories
 MURDER MOST ROYAL, S. J. Bennett
 THE MAID, Nita Prose
 BLOOD ON THE SIBERIAN SNOW,
 C. J. Farrington
 A SONG OF COMFORTABLE
 CHAIRS, Alexander McCall Smith
 DEVIL'S DELIGHT, M. C. Beaton
 THE CAT WHO CAUGHT A KILLER,
 L. T. Shearer

Detectives

THE INK BLACK HEART,
 Robert Galbraith
 A HEART FULL OF HEADSTONES,
 Ian Rankin
 THE TWIST OF A KNIFE,
 Anthony Horowitz
 1989, Val McDermid
 LIVID, Patricia Cornwell
 THE RISING TIDE, Ann Cleeves
 MEANTIME, Frankie Boyle
 THE ACCOMPLICE, Steve Cavanagh
 DESERT STAR, Michael Connelly
 DARK MUSIC, David Lagercrantz
 THE FURIES, John Connolly
 THE MURDERS AT FLEAT HOUSE,
 Lucinda Riley
 BLEEDING HEART YARD,
 Elly Griffiths
 THE LONG KNIVES, Irvine Welsh
 BLACK LAKE MANOR, Guy Morpuss
 THE TREES, Percival Everett

Thrillers

NO PLAN B, Lee Child &
Andrew Child
THE BUTCHER AND THE WREN,
Alaina Urquhart
THE SKELETON KEY, Erin Kelly
DO NO HARM, Jack Jordan
THE BOYS FROM BILOXI,
John Grisham
NOTES ON AN EXECUTION,
Danya Kukafka
THE IT GIRL, Ruth Ware
NEXT IN LINE, Jeffrey Archer
GENESIS, Chris Carter
THE FAMILY REMAINS, Lisa Jewell
THE ENIGMA OF ROOM 622,
Joel Dicker
TWO STORM WOOD, Philip Gray
THE ISLAND, Adrian McKinty
RUN, ROSE, RUN, Dolly Parton,
James Patterson
RED MIST, Ant Middleton
THE PARTY HOUSE, Lin Anderson
THE 6:20 MAN, David Baldacci
CITY ON FIRE, Don Winslow
THE CLIFF HOUSE, Chris Brookmyre
VERITY, Colleen Hoover
THE RETREAT, Sarah Pearse
TWO NIGHT IN LISBON,
Chris Pavone
A TIDY ENDING, Joanna Cannon
WRONG PLACE WRONG TIME,
Gillian McAllister
Espionage
THE PARTISAN, Patrick Worrall
DOUBLE OR NOTHING,
Kim Sherwood
BAD ACTORS, Mick Herron
WITH A MIND TO KILL,
Anthony Horowitz
EDITH AND KIM, Charlotte Philby

Book Depository

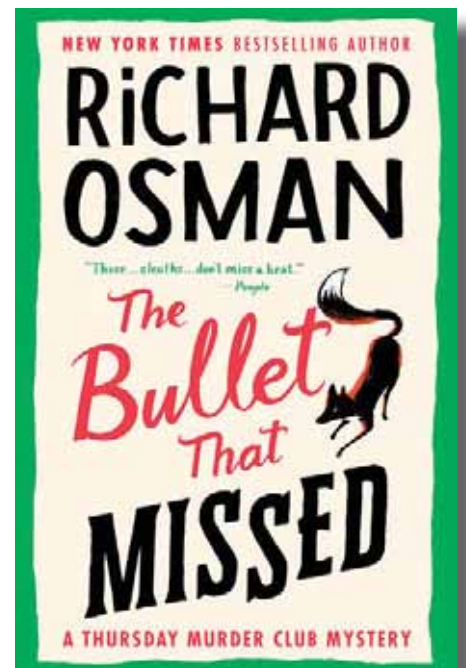
THE INK BLACK HEART,
Robert Galbraith
THE BULLET THAT MISSED,
Richard Osman
A HEART FULL OF HEADSTONES,
Ian Rankin
THE TWIST OF A KNIFE,
Anthony Horowitz
ONE STEP TOO FAR, Lisa Gardner
BLEEDING HEART YARD,
Elly Griffiths
GIRL, FORGOTTEN, Karin Slaughter

THE DARK, Sharon Bolton
BETTER THE BLOOD,
Michael Bennett (2023 in U.S.)
THE PARIS APARTMENT, Lucy Foley
1989, Val McDermid
THIS IS THE NIGHT THEY COME
FOR YOU, Robert Goddard
HEAT 2, Michael Mann &
Meg Gardiner
TAKE YOUR BREATH AWAY,
Linwood Barclay
A FLICKER IN THE DARK,
Stacy Willingham
WOLF PACK, Will Dean
HARLEM SHUFFLE,
Colson Whitehead (2021 in U.S.)
THE MITFORD VANISHING,
Jessica Fellowes
PAYDAY, Celia Walden
WHEN EVIL WAKES, Mark Griffin
DESPERATION IN DEATH, J. D. Robb
THE GIRLS WHO DISAPPEARED,
Claire Douglas
HOPE TO DIE, Cara Hunter
CHRISTMAS IS MURDER,
Val McDermid
SUNDIAL, Catriona Ward
THE RAILWAY DETECTIVE'S
CHRISTMAS CASE, Edward Marston
WANT YOU DEAD, Steve Frech
THE YOUNGER WIFE, Sally Hepworth
DARK MUSIC, David Lagercrantz
MY DARLING DAUGHTER,
J P Delaney
HANDS DOWN, Felix Francis
MURDER IN THE FALLING SNOW,
Cecily Gayford
THE ENGAGEMENT,
Nasheema Lennon
CITY OF THE DEAD,
Jonathan Kellerman
22 SECONDS, James Patterson &
Maxine Paetro
DESPERATE UNDERTAKING,
Lindsey Davis
TRIPLE CROSS, James Patterson
NEXT IN LINE, Jeffrey Archer
A HELPING HAND, Celia Dale
PICTURE YOU DEAD, Peter James
A SONG OF COMFORTABLE
CHAIRS, Alexander McCall
THE WINNERS, Fredrik Backman
MURDER ON THE CELTIC,
Edward Marston
FOUL LADY FORTUNE, Chloe Gong

THE SIX WHO CAME TO DINNER,
Anne Youngson

Thriftbooks/Book Riot

THE RUNAWAY, Nick Petrie
THE PARIS APARTMENT, Lucy Foley
THE BULLET THAT MISSED,
Richard Osman
IN THE BLOOD, Jack Carr
THE MAID, Nita Prose
THE IT GIRL, Ruth Ware
THE INK BLACK HEART,
Robert Galbraith
THE BUTCHER AND THE WREN,
Alaina Urquhart
ALL GOOD PEOPLE HERE,
Ashley Flowers
THE 6:20 MAN, David Baldacci
THE OVERNIGHT GUEST,
Heather Gudenkauf
FAIRY TALE, Stephen King
THE RECOVERY AGENT,
Janet Evanovich
THE BOYS FROM BILOXI,
John Grisham
SPARRING PARTNERS, John Grisham
ABANDONED IN DEATH, J. D. Robb
22 SECONDS, James Patterson &
Maxine Paetro
RUN ROSE RUN, Dolly Parton &
James Patterson
THE HOUSE ACROSS THE LAKE,
Riley Sager
GOING ROGUE, Janet Evanovich



Publications' Lists

Best Mysteries of 2022

The Washington Post

by Nora Krug and Stephanie Merry

BAD ACTORS, Mick Herron
THE BULLET THAT MISSED,
Richard Osman
THE CHRISTIE AFFAIR,
Nina de Gramont
INSOMNIA, Sarah Pinborough
ON JAVA ROAD, Lawrence Osborne
KNOCK OFF THE HAT,
Richard Stevenson
THE LOVE OF MY LIFE, Rosie Walsh
THE MAID, Nita Prose
ONE-SHOT HARRY, Gary Phillips
THE VIOLIN CONSPIRACY,
Brendan Slocumb
THE VERIFIERS, Jane Pek
A WORLD OF CURIOSITIES,
Louise Penny

Kirkus

THE 6:20 MAN, David Baldacci
DIABLO MESA, Preston & Child
THE CHRISTIE AFFAIR,
Nina de Gramont
THE BERLIN EXCHANGE,
Joseph Kanon
THE BULLET THAT MISSED,
Richard Osman
TWO NIGHTS IN LISBON,
Chris Pavone
THE MAID, Nita Prose
KILLERS OF A CERTAIN AGE,
Deanna Raybourn
WHAT HAPPENED TO THE BEN-
NETTS, Lisa Scottoline
SECRET IDENTITY, Alex Segura

In Best Fiction List

THE FAMILY CHAO,
Lan Samantha Chang
THE PARADOX HOTEL, Rob Hart

In Best Indie List

PESTICIDE, Kim Hays

Publishers Weekly

ALL THAT'S LEFT UNSAID,

Tracey Lien
ANYWHERE YOU RUN,
Wanda M. Morris
BLACKWATER FALLS,
Ausma Zehanat Khan
BLOOD SUGAR, Sascha Rothchild
DEAR LITTLE CORPSES,
Nicola Upson
DEATH AND THE CONJUROR,
Tom Mead
DOUBLE EXPOSURE, Ava Barry
HER PERFECT TWIN, Sarah Bonner
JACKAL, Erin E. Adams
THE KINGDOMS OF SAVANNAH,
George Dawes Green
TARGETED, Stephen Hunter
THE WHEEL OF DOLL,
Jonathan Ames

Library Journal

by Liz French and Lesa Holstine

SHUTTER, Ramona Emerson
THE WOMAN IN THE LIBRARY,
Sulari Gentill
ALIAS EMMA, Ava Glass
ANYWHERE YOU RUN,
Wanda M. Morris
A WORLD OF CURIOSITIES,
Louise Penny
KILLERS OF A CERTAIN AGE,
Lev A. C. Rosen
LAST CALL AT THE NIGHTINGALE,
Katharine Schellman
GEIGER, Gustaf Skordeman

Booklist

ANYWHERE YOU RUN,
Wanda M. Morris
THE ISLAND, Adrian McKinty
THE IT GIRL, Ruth Ware
ONE-SHOT HARRY, Gary Phillips
SECRET IDENTITY, Alex Segura
SHRINES OF GAIETY, Kate Atkinson
TWO NIGHTS IN LISBON,
Chris Pavone

Wall Street Journal

by Tom Nolan

DESERT STAR, Michael Connelly
THE CHRISTIE AFFAIR,
Nina de Gramont
THE ENIGMA OF ROOM 622,
Joel Dicker
THE MURDER OF MR. WICKHAM,
Claudia Gray
A TWIST OF A KNIFE,
Anthony Horowitz
THE GOODBYE COAST, Joe Ide
DARK MUSIC, David Lagercrantz
THE BULLET THAT MISSED,
Richard Osman
THE DIAMOND EYE, Kate Quinn
THE IT GIRL, Ruth Ware

Esquire

These crime/mystery/thriller novels
were included in Esquire magazine's 50
Best Books of 2022
ANTHEM, Noah Hawley
NOTES ON AN EXECUTION,
Danya Kukafka

New Zealand's LISTENER Magazine

BETTER THE BLOOD,
Michael Bennett (2023 title in U.S.)
BLUE HOTEL, Chad Taylor
CITY ON FIRE, Don Winslow
THE DOCTOR'S WIFE, Fiona Suss-
man
EXILES, Jane Harper (2023 title in
U.S.)
HEAT2, Michael Mann &
Meg Gardiner
THE HERETIC, Liam McIlvanney
THE PERFECT CRIME, Edited by
Vaseem Khan & Maxim Jakubowski
REMEMBER ME, Charity Norman
THE SLOW ROLL, Simon Lendrum
WAKE, Shelley Burr
Also under fiction:
ACT OF OBLIVION, Robert Harris

The Herald (Scotland)

Best Scottish Crime Novels

by Barry Didcock

Gleaned from a longer list that included
non-crime fiction
SHRINES OF GAIETY, Kate Atkinson

MAY GOD FORGIVE, Alan Parks
A HEART FULL OF HEADSTONES,
Ian Rankin
A MATTER OF TIME, Claire Askew

The Indian Express

by Paromita Chakrabarti

THE BULLET THAT MISSED,
Richard Osman
THE TWIST OF A KNIFE,
Anthony Horowitz
THE INK BLACK HEART,
Robert Galbraith
NOTES ON AN EXECUTION,
Danya Kukafka

Dayton Daily News

by Vick Mickunas

SHIFTY'S BOYS, Chris Offutt
THINGS WE DO IN THE DARK,
Jennifer Hillier
CONFIDENCE, Denise Mina
THE BURGLAR WHO MET FRED-
RIC BROWN, Lawrence Block
A HEART FULL OF HEADSTONES,
Ian Rankin
THE DEAL GOES DOWN,
Larry Beinhart
RACING THE LIGHT, Robert Crais
EVERY CLOAK ROLLED IN BLOOD,
James Lee Burke
THE ISLAND, Adrian McKinty
THE HIDDEN ONE, Linda Castillo
WHEREABOUTS UNKNOWN,
Merecith Doench
BLUE BOOK, Tom Harley Campbell

Mystery and Suspense Magazine

(www.mysteryandsuspense.com)

THE GOLDEN COUPLE,
Greer Hendricks & Sarah Pekkanen
CITY ON FIRE, Don Winslow
RECKLESS GIRLS, Rachel Hawkins
THE MAID, Nita Prose
IN THE BLOOD, Jack Carr
THE RECOVERY AGENT,
Janet Evanovich
THE MATCH, Harlan Coben
THE PARIS APARTMENT, Lucy Foley
(two horror titles were deleted from the
original list)

Websites' Lists Best Mysteries of 2022

The Rap Sheet

(therapsheet.blogspot.com)

J. Kingston Pierce – Editor

THE GOLDENACRE, Philip Miller
HOT TIME, W. H. Flint
BLACKWATER FALLS,
Ausma Zehnant Khan
DEATH IN BLITZ CITY, David Young
WAKE, Shelley Burr
A TRAITOR'S HEART, Ben Creed
UNDER A VEILED MOON,
Karen Odden
YESTERDAY'S SPY, Tom Bradby
QUEEN HIGH, C. J. Carey
THE LIFE OF CRIME, Martin Edwards
– non-fiction

Kevin Burton Smith

(see under DP Contributors lists)

Ali Karim

(see under DP Contributor's lists)

Stephen Miller

HEAT 2, Michael Mann &
Meg Gardiner
AN HONEST LIVING, Dwyer Murphy
THE LIFE OF CRIME, Martin Edwards
– non-fiction

Jim Napier

A HEART FULL OF HEADSTONES,
Ian Rankin
NOT YOUR CHILD, Lis Angus
GOING TO BEAUTIFUL,
Anthony Bidulka
BLIND DATE, Brenda Chapman
L.A. BURNING, D. C. Taylor
FENIAN STREET, Anne Emery
LIKE A SISTER, Kellye Garrett

Fraser Massey

MAROR, Lavie Tidhar
CITY ON FIRE, Don Winslow
ASHES IN THE SNOW,
Oriana Ramunno
EVEN THE DARKEST NIGHT,
Javier Cercas
TRESPASS, Clare Clark
NOTES ON AN EXECUTION,
Danya Kukafka

A KILLING IN NOVEMBER,
Simon Mason

PORTRAIT OF A THIEF, Grace D. Li
COUNTERFEIT, Kirstin Chen
THE BERLIN EXCHANGE,
Joseph Kanon

Jim Thomsen

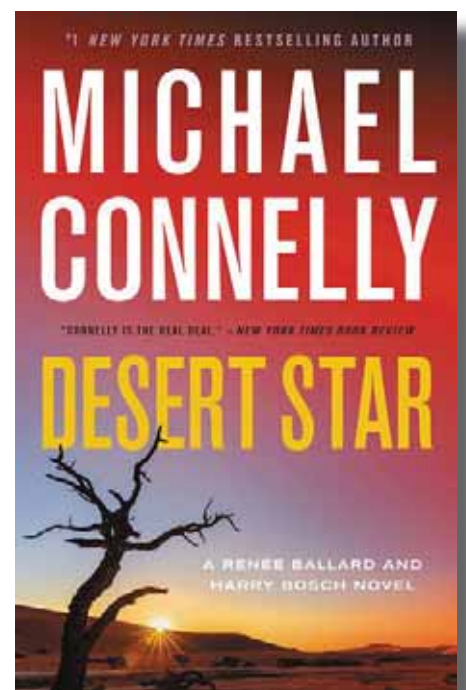
OTHER PEOPLE'S SECRETS,
Meredith Hambrook
BLACKOUT, Erin Flanagan
GANGLAND, Chuck Hogan
A THOUSAND STEPS,
T. Jefferson Parker
BENEATH CRUEL WATERS,
Jon Bassoff

CITY ON FIRE, Don Winslow
THE DEVIL HIMSELF, Peter Farris
DAMNATION SPRING, Ash Davidson
TWENTYMILE, C. Matthew Smith
IT DIES WITH YOU, Scott Blackburn

Audible

(audible.com)

THE MAID, Nita Prose



THE GOLDEN COUPLE,
Greer Hendricks & Sarah Pekkanen
SHUTTER, Ramona Emerson
ONE OF US IS DEAD, Jeneva Rose
COUNTERFEIT, Kirsten Chen
ALL THE GOOD PEOPLE HERE,
Ashley Flowers
HAWK MOUNTAIN, Conner Habib
THE QUARRY GIRLS, Jess Lourey
Six Audible Originals were deleted from
this list

Goodreads Choice Award (www.goodreads.com)

JACKAL, Erin E. Adams
THE BOOK OF COLD CASES,
Simone St. James
A FLICKER IN THE DARK,
Stacy Willingham
THE FAMILY REMAINS, Lisa Jewell
THINGS WE DO IN THE DARK,
Jennifer Hillier
ALL GOOD PEOPLE HERE,
Ashley Flowers
THE FAMILY GAME,
Catherine Steadman
THE VIOLIN CONSPIRACY,
Brendan Slocumb
WRONG PLACE, WRONG TIME,
Gillian McAllister
THE IT GIRL, Ruth Ware
THE GOLDEN COUPLE,
Greer Hendricks & Sarah Pekkanen
KILLERS OF A CERTAIN AGE,
Deanna Raybourn
MORE THAN YOU'LL EVERY KNOW,
Katie Gutierrez
THE OVERNIGHT GUEST,
Heather Gudenkauf
DAISY PARKER, Alice Feeney
THE HOUSEMAID, Freida McFadden
THE PARIS APARTMENT, Lucy Foley
THE MAID, Nita Prose
THE BULLET THAT MISSED,
Richard Osman
THE NIGHT SHIFT, Alex Finlay
In the Fiction Section:
NOTES ON AN EXECUTION,
Danya Kukafka

NPR

(www.npr.org)

SECRET IDENTITY, Alex Segura
WINTER WORK, Dan Fesperman
ANYWHERE YOU RUN,

Wanda M. Morris
THE VIOLIN CONSPIRACY,
Brendan Slocumb
PORTRAIT OF A THIEF, Grace D. Li
THE VERIFIERS, Jane Pek
THE OLD WOMAN WITH THE
KNIFE, Gu Byeong-Mo
REPUTATION, Sarah Vaughan
CRUZ, Nicolas Ferraro
EVEN THOUGH I KNEW THE END,
C. L. Polk
SHUTTER, Ramona Emerson
YOU'RE INVITED, Amanda Jayatissa
THE OTHER SIDE OF NIGHT,
Adam Hamdy
THE PARADOX HOTEL, Rob Hart
ARE YOU SARA?, S. C. Lalli
MY ANNIHILATION,
Fuminori Nakamura
WE SPREAD, Iain Reid
THE DEVIL TAKES YOU HOME,
Gabino Iglesias
THE PALLBEARERS CLUB,
Paul Tremblay
THE PARIS APARTMENT, Lucy Foley
THE CONFESSIONS OF MATTEW
STRONG, Ousmane K. Power-Greene
KILLERS OF A CERTAIN AGE,
Deanna Raybourn

BookPage

(www.bookpage.com)

BLOOD SUGAR, Sascha Rothchild
THE CAGE, Bonnie Kistler
GEIGER, Gustaf Skördeman
THE HALF LIFE OF VALERY K,
Natasha Pulley
LAVENDER HOUSE, Lev AC Rosen
LITTLE SISTER, Gytha Lodge
SOMETIMES PEOPLE DIE,
Simon Stephenson
WINTER WORK, Dan Fesperman
THE WOMAN IN THE LIBRARY,
Sulari Gentil
YOU'RE INVITED, Amanda Jayatissa

Booklist Queen

(www.booklistqueen.com)

Best Psychological Thrillers

ALL GOOD PEOPLE HERE, Ashley
Flowers – Top Pick
THE IT GIRL, Ruth Ware
REPUTATION, Sarah Vaughan
THE LIES I TELL, Julie Clark
A FLICKER IN THE DARK,

Stacy Willingham

Best Mystery Thrillers

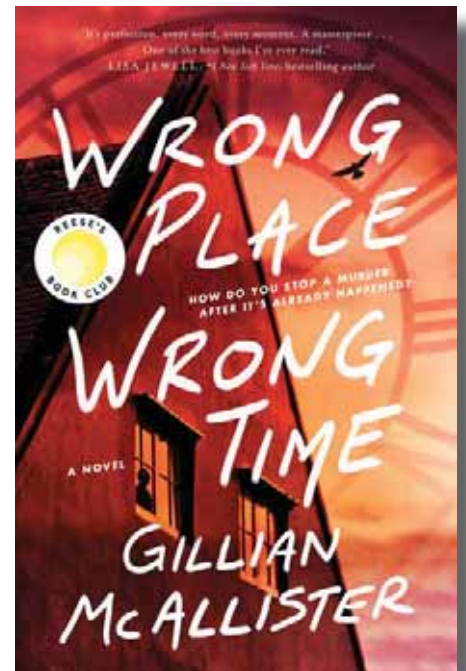
ALIAS EMMA, Ava Glass – Top Pick
RECKLESS GIRLS, Rachel Hawkins
THE NIGHT SHIFT, Alex Finlay
THE 6:20 MAN, David Baldacci

Best Domestic Thrillers

THE PERSONAL ASSISTANT,
Kimberly Belle – Top Pick
THE YOUNGER WIFE, Sally Hepworth
THE GOLDEN COUPLE,
Greer Hendricks & Sarah Pekkanen

Celebrity Book Club Picks

THE MAID, Nita Prose – Top Pick
THE VIOLIN CONSPIRACY,
Brendan Slocumb
COUNTERFEIT, Kirstin Chen
WRONG PLACE, WRONG TIME,
Gillian McAllister



CrimeReads

(<https://crimereads.com>)

Best Novels

NOTES ON AN EXECUTION,
Danya Kukafka
KILLERS OF A CERTAIN AGE,
Deanna Raybourn
THE MIDCOAST, Adam White
BLACKWATER FALLS,
Ausma Zehanat Khan
THE VIOLIN CONSPIRACY,
Brendan Slocumb
SECRET IDENTITY, Alex Segura
LIKE A SISTER, Kellye Garrett

THE FAMILY CHAO,
Lan Samantha Chang
PARADAIS, Fernanda Melchor
DON'T KNOW TOUGH, Eli Cranor
MORE THAN YOU'LL EVER KNOW,
Katie Gutierrez
SHRINES OF GAIETY, Kate Atkinson
AFTER THE LIGHTS GO OUT,
John Vercher
THE DAUGHTER OF DOCTOR
MOREAU, Silvia Moreno-Garcia
THE DEVIL TAKES YOU HOME,
Gabino Iglesias
ON JAVA ROAD, Lawrence Osborne
ANYWHERE YOU RUN,
Wanda M. Morris
AN HONEST LIVING, Dwyer Murphy
LADY JOKER, Vol. 2, Kaoru Takamura
COMPLICIT, Winnie M. Li

Best Espionage Novels

YESTERDAY'S SPY, Tom Bradby
THE SCENT OF BURNT FLOWERS,
Blitz Bazawule
FOUL LADY FORTUNE, Chloe Gong
BOX 88, Charles Cumming
THE MATCHMAKER, Paul Vidich
THE LUNAR HOUSEWIFE,
Caroline Woods
VERA KELLY LOST AND FOUND,
Rosalie Knecht
BAD ACTORS, Mick Herron
ALIAS EMMA, Ava Glass
OUR AMERICAN FRIEND,
Anna Pitoniak

Best Psychological Thrillers

HOW TO SURVIVE EVERYTHING,
Ewan Morrison
SECLUDED CABIN SLEEPS SIX,
Lisa Unger
THE SCHOOL FOR GOOD MOTH-
ERS, Jessamine Chan
PLEASE JOIN US, Catherine McKenzie
HOKULOA ROAD, Elizabeth Hand
THINGS WE DO IN THE DARK,
Jennifer Hillier
SIGN HERE, Claudia Lux
BABYSITTER, Joyce Carol Oates
1989, Val McDermid
LIKE A SISTER, Kellye Garrett

Best Noir Fiction of 2022

CITY ON FIRE, Don Winslow
REAL BAD THINGS, Kelly J. Ford
KISMET, Amina Akhtar
ONE-SHOT HARRY, Gary Phillips
SHIFTY'S BOYS, Chris Offutt
IRON ANNIE, Luke Cassidy

VANDA, Marion Brunet
PORTRAIT OF AN UNKNOWN
LADY, Maria Gainza
REAL EASY, Marie Rutkoski
COMPLICIT, Winnie M. Li
SECRET IDENTITY, Alex Segura
THE DEVIL TAKES YOU HOME,
Gabino Iglesias
DON'T KNOW TOUGH, Eli Cranor
NOTES ON AN EXECUTION,
Danya Kukafka
AN HONEST LIVING, Dwyer Murphy

Best Debuts

MORE THAN YOU'LL EVER KNOW,
Katie Gutierrez
THE VIOLIN CONSPIRACY,
Brendan Slocumb
THE MIDCOAST, Adam White
THE HACIENDA, Isabel Canas
PATRICIA WANTS TO CUDDLE,
Samantha Allen
DON'T KNOW TOUGH, Eli Cranor
THE BANGALORE DETECTIVES
CLUB, Harini Nagendra
PORTRAIT OF A THIEF, Grace D. Li
PAY DIRT ROAD,
Samantha Jayne Allen
AN HONEST LIVING, Dwyer Murphy

Best Historical Fiction

(Almost All Mysteries)

THE POISON MACHINE,
Robert J. Lloyd
THE HACIENDA, Isabel Canas
A DANGEROUS BUSINESS,
Jane Smiley
ALL THE BLOOD WE SHARE,
Camilla Bruce
THE DAUGHTER OF DOCTOR
MOREAU, Silvia Moreno-Garcia
TRUST, Hernan Diaz
SHRINES OF GAIETY, Kate Atkinson
THE LINDBERGH NANNY,
Mariah Fredericks
THE TORQUED MAN, Peter Mann
THE FERVOR, Alma Katsu
THE DISAPPEARANCE OF JOSEF
MENGELE, Olivier Guez
LAVENDER HOUSE, Lev A. C. Rosen
THE LIONESS, Chris Bohjalian
ONE-SHOT HARRY, Gary Phillips
ANYWHERE YOU RUN,
Wanda M. Morris

Best International Crime

PARADAIS, Fernanda Melchor
THE OLD WOMAN WITH THE
KNIFE, Gu Byeong-Mo

FISH SWIMMING IN DAPPLED SUN-
LIGHT, Riku Onda
LADY JOKER, Vol. 2, Kaoru Takamura
DEATH ON GOKUMON ISLAND,
Seishi Yokomizo
TRINITY, TRINITY, TRINITY,
Brian Bergstrom
PORTRAIT OF AN UNKNOWN
LADY, Maria Gainza
MY ANNIHILATION,
Fuminori Nakamura
THE DISAPPEARANCE OF JOSEF
MENGELE, Olivier Guez
THE MISSING WORD,
Concita de Gregorio

Best Sci-Fi and Speculative Mysteries

DEAD SILENCE, S. A. Barnes
TELL ME AN ENDING, Jo Harkin
THE CARTOGRAPHERS,
Peng Shepherd
STATION ETERNITY, Mur Lafferty
THE VIOLENCE, Delilah S. Dawson
BRAKING DAY, Adam Oyebarji
WRONG PLACE, WRONG TIME,
Gillian McAllister
THE SPARE MAN,
Mary Robinette Kowal
BEAT THE DEVILS, Josh Weiss
THE PARADOX HOTEL, Rob Hart

Marilyn's Mystery Reads

Best of 2022

(www.marilynsmysteryreads.com)

THE GATEKEEPER, James Byrne (Al-
geria/United States),
GIRLS WHO LIE, Eva Björg Egisdóttir
(England/Iceland),
LOOK CLOSER, David Ellis (England),
SILENT PARADE, Keigo Higashino
(Japan),
PORTRAIT OF A THIEF, Grace Li
(United States/China),
THE DYING DAY, Vaseem Khan
(India),
GONE BY MORNING, Michele Wein-
stat Miller (United States),
THE SHADOWS OF MEN,
Abir Mukherjee (India),
DO NO HARM, Robert Pobi
(United States),
DIE AROUND SUNDOWN, Mark
Pryor (Germany),
THE LEFT-HANDED TWIN, Thomas
Perry (United States),
KILLERS OF A CERTAIN AGE,

Deanna Raybourn (England/Europe/
Caribbean),
COLD AS HELL, Lilja Sigurdadóttir
(Iceland),
NINE LIVES, Peter Swanson (United
States).

Scribd

(www.scribd.com)

THE PARIS APARTMENT, Lucy Foley
WRONG PLACE, WRONG TIME,
Gillian McAllister
RECKLESS GIRLS, Rachel Hawkins
HEAT 2, Michael Mann &
Meg Gardiner
MORE THAN YOU'LL EVER KNOW,
Katie Gutierrez
CITY ON FIRE, Don Winslow
THE IT GIRL, Ruth Ware
THE FAMILY REMAINS, Lisa Jewell
FOX CREEK, William Kent Krueger
NINE LIVES, Peter Swanson
BLOOD WILL TELL, Heather Chavez
A FLICKER IN THE DARK,
Stacy Willingham

DeadGood

(www.deadgoodbooks.co.uk)

Twelve authors pick their favorites for
2022
Jane Corry: THE FAMILY REMAINS,
Lisa Jewell
Disha Bose: THE PUSH, Ashley
Audrain (2021 title in U.S.)

Nikki Smith: THE GIRLS WHO DIS-
APPEARED, Claire Douglas
Shari Lapena: ACT OF OBLIVION,
Robert Harris
Tom Hindle: ALIAS EMMA, Ava Glass
Heather Darwent: IDOL, Louise O'Neill
Emily Koch: SUMMER FEVER,
Kate Riordan
Claire Douglas: BREATHLESS,
Amy McCulloch
Sara Ochs: ONE OF THE GIRLS,
Lucy Clarke
Gytha Lodge: THE TWINS,
L.V. Matthews
Gregg Hurwitz: POSTER GIRL,
Veronica Roth
James Buckler: HEAT 2, Michael Mann
& Meg Gardiner

Crime By The Book

by Abby Endler

(crimebythebook.com)

YOU'RE INVITED, Amanda Jayatissa
THE LAST HOUSEWIFE,
Ashley Winstead
THE IT GIRL, Ruth Ware
THE HACIENDA, Isabel Canas
THINGS WE DO IN THE DARK,
Jennifer Hillier
THE MIRROR MAN, Lars Kepler
RUN TIME, Catherine Ryan Howard
DAISY DARKER, Alice Feeney
THE HOUSE ACROSS THE LAKE,
Riley Sager
REPTILE MEMOIRS, Silje Ulstein

Live and Deadly

by Mary Picken

(liveanddeadly.net)

THE UNDISCOVERED DEATHS OF
GRACE MCGILL, C. S. Robertson
THE GIFTS, Liz Hyder
THE SHOT, Sarah Sultoon
MAY GOD FORGIVE, Alan Parks
YOUNG MUNGO, Douglas Stuart
BLACK HEARTS, Doug Johnstone
FISH SWIMMING IN DAPPLED
SUNLIGHT, Riku Onda
THE SKELETON KEY, Erin Kelly
(2023 title in the U.S.)
THE LOST MAN OF BOMBAY,
Vaseem Khan
AN HONOURABLE THIEF,
Douglas Skelton
THE WINNERS, Fredrik Backman

DASHBOARD ELVIS IS DEAD,
David F. Ross
RIVER CLYDE, Simone Bucholz –
Book of the Year

New York Public Library

(www.nypl.org)

THE APPEAL, Janice Hallett
I'LL BE YOU, Janelle Brown
KILLERS OF A CERTAIN AGE,
Deanna Raybourn
LIKE A SISTER, Kellye Garrett
MAGIC, LIES, AND DEADLY PIES,
Misha Popp
NEVER NAME THE DEAD,
D. M. Rowell
SHUTTER, Ramona Emerson
STAY AWAKE, Megan Goldin
YOU'RE INVITED, Amanda Jayatissa

The Real Book Spy

by Ryan Steck

(<https://therealbookspy.com>)

OATH OF LOYALTY, Kyle Mills –
Best Thriller of 2022

Action, Political, and Spy Thrillers

PORTRAIT OF AN UNKNOWN
WOMAN, Daniel Silva
RISING TIGER, Brad Thor
IN THE BLOOD, Jack Carr
HOSTILE INTENT, Don Bentley
SIERRA SIX, Mark Greaney
END OF DAYS, Brad Taylor
STORM RISING, Chris Hauty
DARK HORSE, Gregg Hurwitz
THE LIGHTNING ROD, Brad Meltzer
THE LAST SENTINEL,
Simon Gervais

DARK FALL, Andrews & Wilson
THE MAZE, Nelson DeMille
NO PLAN B, Lee Child &
Andrew Child

TOM CLANCY- RED WINTER,
Marc Cameron

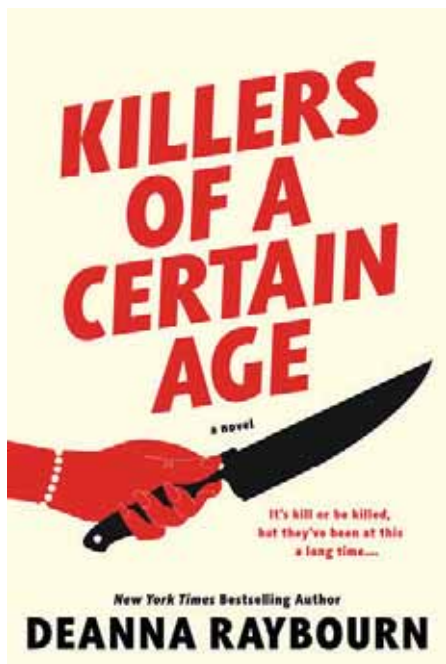
FIRESTORM, Taylor Moore

Mysteries/Crime Fiction

SHADOWS REEL, C. J. Box
NARRATOR, Landon Beach
THE OTHER SIDE OF NIGHT,
Adam Hamdy

THE ISLAND, Adrian McKinty
HEAT 2, Michael Mann and
Meg Gardiner

THE BLAME HOUSE, Sandie Jones
FOX CREEK, William Kent Krueger



WHAT SHE FOUND, Robert Dugoni
 WHAT HAPPENED TO THE
 BENNETTS, Lisa Scottoline
 CITY ON FIRE, Don Winslow
 GOING ROGUE, Janet Evanovich
 DESERT STAR, Michael Connelly
 THE HIDDEN ONE, Linda Castillo
 THE TWIST OF A KNIFE,
 Anthony Horowitz
 THE FAMILY GAME,
 Catherine Steadman

Crime Fiction Lover Reviewers

(<https://crimefictionlover.com>)

Death Becomes Her (Sandra Mangan)
 THE CLIFF HOUSE, Chris Brookmyre
 DESERT STAR, Michael Connelly
 THE BLACKBIRD, Tim Weaver
 A HEART FULL OF HEADSTONES,

Ian Rankin

TWO STORM WOOD, Philip Gray

Erin Britton

THE TWYFORD CODE, Janice Hallett
 (2023 title in U.S.)

MARPLE – Twelve New Stories
 DEAR LITTLE CORPSES,
 Nicola Upson

THE TRUST, M. H. Eccleston
 DEATH OF A BOOKSELLER,
 Bernard J. Farmer

Crime Fiction Lover (Garrick Webster)

THE TWIST OF A KNIFE,
 Anthony Horowitz

CRY WOLF, Hans Rosenfeldt
 CITY ON FIRE, Don Winslow
 THE OLD WOMAN WITH THE
 KNIFE, Gu Byeong-Mo

FIVE MOVES OF DOOM, A. J. Devlin

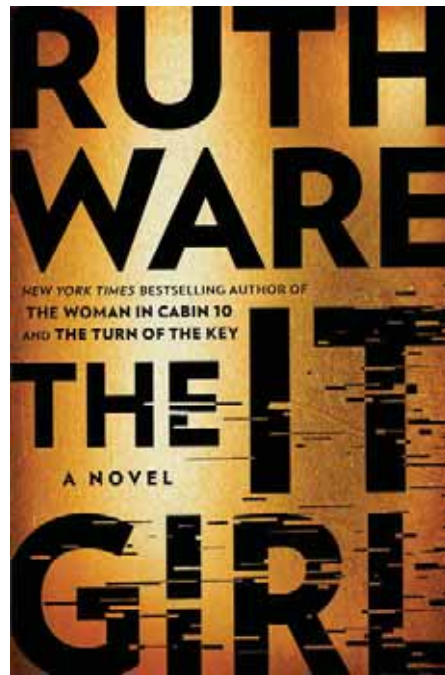
Vicki Weisfeld

COVER STORY, Susan Rigetti
 DISAPPEARED, Bonnar Spring
 IT'S NEWS TO ME, R. G. Belsky
 THE PAIN TOURIST, Paul Clevé
 FISH SWIMMING IN DAPPLED
 SUNLIGHT, Riku Onda

Sonja van der Westhuizen

MOVIELAND, Lee Goldberg
 THE EYE OF THE BEHOLDER,
 Margie Orford

THE DARK FLOOD, Deon Meyer
 SECRET IDENTITY, Alex Segura
 WHATEVER GETS YOU THROUGH
 THE NIGHT, Charlie Higson



Jen Ryland

(www.jenryland.com)

THE IT GIRL, Ruth Ware
 THE CHRISTIE AFFAIR,

Nina de Gramont

WRONG PLACE, WRONG TIME,

Gillian McAllister

DAISY DARKER, Alice Feeney

TWO NIGHTS IN LISBON,
 Chris Pavone

THE VIOLIN CONSPIRACY,
 Brendan Slocumb

SheReads Awards

(<https://shereads.com>)

THE MAID, Nita Prose – Winner

A FLICKER IN THE DARK,
 Stacy Willingham

BLACKMAIL AND BIBINGKA,
 Mia P. Manansala

DAISY DARKER, Alice Feeney
 FINLAY DONOVAN KNOCKS 'EM
 DEAD, Elle Cosimano

NOTES ON AN EXECUTION,
 Danya Kukafka

THE BULLET THAT MISSED,
 Richard Osman

THE LAST HOUSEWIFE,
 Ashley Winstead

THE LIES I TELL, Julie Clark
 THINGS WE DO IN THE DARK,
 Jennifer Hillier

WE LIE HERE, Rachel Howzell Hall
 WRONG PLACE, WRONG TIME,

Gillian McAllister

Best Historical Fiction:

THE CHRISTIE AFFAIR,

Nina de Gramont

THE DIAMOND EYE, Kate Quinn

Steve Reads (Steve Donoghue)

stevedonoghue.com

THE BANGALORE DETECTIVES
 CLUB, Harini Nagendra

THE BURGLAR WHO MET FREDRIC
 BROWN, Lawrence Block

THE MITFORD VANISHING,
 Jessica Fellowes

GIVE UNTO OTHERS, Donna Leon
 A SUNLIT WEAPON,

Jacqueline Winspear

WHEN BLOOD LIES, C. S. Harris

HATCHET ISLAND, Paul Doiron

DEATH AND THE CONJUROR,
 Tom Mead

TO KILL A TROUBADOR,

Martin Walker

SHOWSTOPPER, Peter Lovesey

Crime Fiction Lover Awards

(<https://crimefictionlover.com>)

Best Crime Novel

THE LOCKED ROOM, Elly Griffiths
 – Winner

THE SHADOWS OF MEN, Abir
 Mukherjee (2021 title) –

Editor's Choice

THE ACCOMPLICE, Steve Cavanagh
 THE TWIST OF A KNIFE, Anthony
 Horowitz

CITY ON FIRE, Don Winslow
 THE TWYFORD CODE, by Janice
 Hallett (2023 in U.S.)

Best Debut

A CHRISTMAS MURDER OF
 CROWS, D.M. Austin – Winner
 BAD FOR GOOD, Graham Bartlett –

Editor's Choice

BREAKING, by Amanda Cassidy
 THE REDEEMER, Victoria Goldman
 DON'T KNOW TOUGH, Eli Cranor
 MORE THAN YOU'LL EVER KNOW,
 Katie Gutierrez

Best Indie Crime Novel

THE WOMAN IN THE LIBRARY,
 Sulari Gentill – Winner

FIVE MOVES OF DOOM, A.J. Devlin
 – Editor's Choice

HOW TO MURDER A MARRIAGE,
Gabrielle St. George
UNJUST BIAS, Liz Mistry
THE CORPSE WITH THE T
URQUOISE TOES, Cathy Ace
A MOURNING SONG,
Mark Westmoreland

Best Crime Novel in Translation
THE DARK FLOOD, Deon Meyer,
translated by K.L. Seegers – Winner
THE OLD WOMAN WITH THE
KNIFE, by Gu Byeong-Mo,
translated by Chi-Young Kim –
Editor's Choice

FISH SWIMMING IN DAPPLED
SUNLIGHT, Riku Onada,
translated by Alison Watts
TURF WARS, Olivier Norek,
translated by Nick Caistor
EVEN THE DARKEST NIGHT,
Javier Cercas,
translated by Anne McLean
THE REPTILE MEMOIRS,
Silje Ulstein,
translated by Alison McCullough

Grab This Book (grabthisbook.net)

DARK OBJECTS, Simon Toyne
DEMON, Matt Wesolowski
THE UNDISCOVERED DEATHS OF
GRACE MCGILL, C. S. Robertson
THE JUNCTION, Norm Konyu
UP CLOSE AND FATAL,
Fergus McNeill
OLD BONES LIE, Marion Todd
THE BLOOD TIDE, Neil Lancaster
TRULY, DARKLY, DEEPLY,
Victoria Selman
DEAD RICH, G. W. Shaw
VINE STREET, Dominic Nolan
(2021 title)

Lit Hub'Book Marks Best Reviewed Books of 2022

Mystery and Crime
(<https://lithub.com>)

PARADAIS, Fernanda Melchor
DEVIL HOUSE, John Darnielle
ACT OF OBLIVION, Robert Harris
CITY ON FIRE, Don Winslow
BAD ACTORS, Mick Herron

THE BULLET THAT MISSED,
Richard Osman
LUCKENBOOTH, Jenni Fagan
THE CHRISTIE AFFAIR,
Nina de Gramont
HEAT 2, Michael Mann and
Meg Gardiner
HONEST LIVING, Dwyer Murphy

Stop, You're Killing Me www.stopyourekillingme.com **Debut Novels**

DEEP WATER, Emma Bamford
A KILLING IN COSTUMES,
Zac Bissonette
THE GATEKEEPER, James Byrne
HOT TIME, W. H. Flint
THE APPEAL, Janice Hallett
DEATH AND THE CONJUROR,
Tom Mead
THE BANGALORE DETECTIVES
CLUB, Harini Nagendra
DEVIL'S CHEW TOY, Rob Osler
THE VERIFIERS, Jane Pek
THE MAID, Nita Prose
BLOOD SUGAR, Sascha Rothchild
REAL EASY, Marie Rutkoski
GEIGER, Gustaf Skördeman

Novel Suspects

(www.novelsuspects.com)
A FLICKER IN THE DARK,
Stacy Willingham

NOTES ON AN EXECUTION,
Danya Kukafka
DESERT STAR, Michael Connelly
THE WOMAN IN THE LIBRARY,
Sulari Gentill
SECRET IDENTITY, Alex Segura
THE OVERNIGHT GUEST,
Heather Gudenkauf
ANYWHERE YOU RUN,
Wanda M. Morris
JACKAL, Erin E. Adams
THE DEVIL TAKES YOU HOME,
Gabino Iglesias
RAZORBLADE TEARS,
S.A. Cosby – a 2021 title

Lesa's Book Critiques

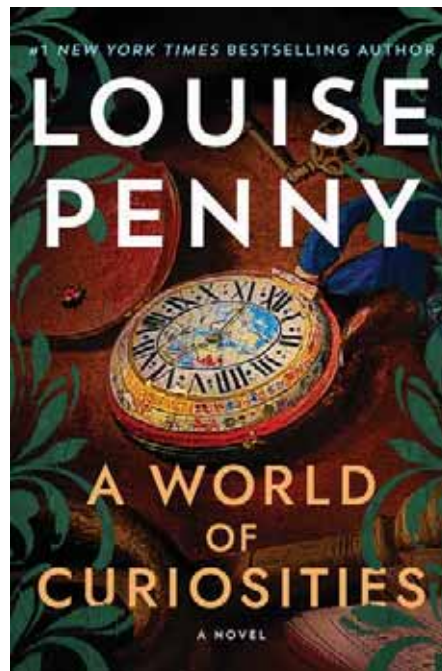
Lesa Holstine

(<https://lesasbookcritiques.com>)
THE SHADOW OF MEMORY,
Connie Berry
KAIJU PRESERVATION SOCIETY,
John Scalzi
HOW TO BE A WALLFLOWER,
Eloisa James
THE DEAD ROMANTICS,
Ashley Poston
KILLERS OF A CERTAIN AGE,
Deanna Raybourn
MURDER AT THE JUBILEE RALLY,
Terry Shames
THE PLOT AND THE PENDULUM,
Jenn McKinlay
A WORLD OF CURIOSITIES,
Louise Penny

Air Mail

by Lisa Hericksson
(airmail.news/books)

THE APPEAL, Janice Hallett
THE INK BLACK HEART,
Robert Galbraith
CITY ON FIRE, Don Winslow
THE GOLDENACRE, Philip Miller
THE LINDBERGH NANNY,
Mariah Fredericks
THE LAST PARTY,
Clare Mackintosh
THE VIOLIN CONSPIRACY,
Brendan Slocumb
DO NO HARM, Robert Pobi



The Best of the Best

2022



No one compiling these 85 “Best” lists has read every mystery, crime novel and thriller written in 2022. Hence, the lists are opinions based on the limited number of books each expert has read this past year, combined with personal tastes. In other words, these lists are very subjective. So where can we find objectivity?

The more agreement (consensus) we can find among the lists, the more objective conclusions can be drawn about which novels are the Best of 2022.

So the following is a list of the number of appearances particular novels made on the 85 “Best” Lists you find on the preceding pages. These are the Best of the Best. To find which lists a certain title is on, use Ctrl F on a PC or Command F on a Mac.

Compilation of Best Lists of 2022 Appearances

22 Mentions

Winslow, Don, CITY ON FIRE

20 Mentions

Prose, Nita, THE MAID

19 Mentions

Connelly, Michael, DESERT STAR

17 Mentions

Osman, Richard,
THE BULLET THAT MISSED

15 Mentions

Rankin, Ian,
A HEART FULL OF HEADSTONES

13 Mentions

Morris, Wanda M.,
ANYWHERE YOU RUN

12 Mentions

McAllister, Gillian,
WRONG PLACE, WRONG TIME
Segura, Alex, SECRET IDENTITY
Raybourn, Deanna,
KILLERS OF A CERTAIN AGE
Ware, Ruth, THE IT GIRL

11 Mentions

Cavanagh, Steve, THE ACCOMPLICE
(U.K. only)

Penny, Louise,
A WORLD OF CURIOSITIES

Kukafka, Danya,
NOTES ON AN EXECUTION
Mann, Michael & Meg Gardiner,
HEAT 2

10 Mentions

Herron, Mick, BAD ACTORS
Slocumb, Brendan,
THE VIOLIN CONSPIRACY
Willingham, Stacy,
A FLICKER IN THE DARK

9 Mentions

Hillier, Jennifer,
THINGS WE DO IN THE DARK

8 Mentions

Offutt, Chris, SHIFTY’S BOYS
Garrett, Kellye, LIKE A SISTER
Meyer, Deon, THE DARK FLOOD
Emerson, Ramona, SHUTTER
Fesperman, Dan, WINTER WORK
Horowitz, Anthony,
THE TWIST OF A KNIFE
Galbraith, Robert,
THE INK BLACK HEART

7 Mentions

Cranor, Eli, DON’T KNOW TOUGH
Flowers, Ashley,

ALL THE GOOD PEOPLE HERE
Foley, Lucy, THE PARIS APARTMENT
Petrie, Nick, THE RUNAWAY
Burr, Shelley, WAKE
Iglesias, Gabino,
THE DEVIL TAKES YOU HOME

6 Mentions

Glass, Ava, ALIAS EMMA
Krueger, William Kent, FOX CREEK
Rothchild, Sascha,
BLOOD SUGAR
Scrivenor, Hayley,
DIRT CREEK (DIRT TOWN)
Gentill, Sulari,
THE WOMAN IN THE LIBRARY
Robotham, Michael,
LYING BESIDE YOU(2023 in U.S.)
Nina de Gramont,
THE CHRISTIE AFFAIR
Carey, C. J., QUEEN HIGH (2023 in US)
Pavone, Chris,
TWO NIGHTS IN LISBON
Hallett, Janice, THE APPEAL
Hallett, Janice, THE TWYFORD CODE
(2023 in US)
Hendricks, Greer & Sarah Pekkanen,
THE GOLDEN COUPLE
Phillips, Gary, ONE-SHOT HARRY
McKinty, Adrian, THE ISLAND
Li, Grace D., PORTRAIT OF A THIEF
Byeong-Mo, Gu,
THE OLD WOMAN WITH THE
KNIFE
Feeney, Alice, DAISY DARKER

5 Mentions

Cercas, Javier,
EVEN THE DARKEST NIGHT
Carr, Jack, IN THE BLOOD
Griffiths, Elly,
BLEEDING HEART YARD
Jewell, Lisa, THE FAMILY REMAINS
O’Rawe, Richard, GOERING’S GOLD
Stevenson, Benjamin, EVERYONE IN
MY FAMILY HAS KILLED SOMEONE
(2023 title in US)
McDermid, Val, 1989
Rosen, Lev A. C.,
LAVENDER HOUSE
Khan, Ausma Zehanat,
BLACKWATER FALLS
Gutierrez, Katie,
MORE THAN YOU’LL EVER KNOW

The Great Depression

Mysteries

The Great Depression was a world-wide economic downturn that began in 1929 and lasted until 1939 (there is disagreement among historians as to exactly when it ended). It was the longest and most severe depression ever experienced by the industrialized Western world, sparking fundamental changes in how our economy is managed. No one ever wanted to see a repeat. Consider that it also occurred a mere ten years after the end of The Great War (World War I) and the Spanish Flu Pandemic, both of which were devastating in terms of loss of life and severely disrupted national economies.

A region in the Midwestern United States suffered a double whammy during the 1930s – what has become known as the Dust Bowl. The area experienced severe droughts which led to high winds and choking dust. As a result, livestock died and crops failed. Farmers went bankrupt and were left with nothing when the banks foreclosed on their mortgages.

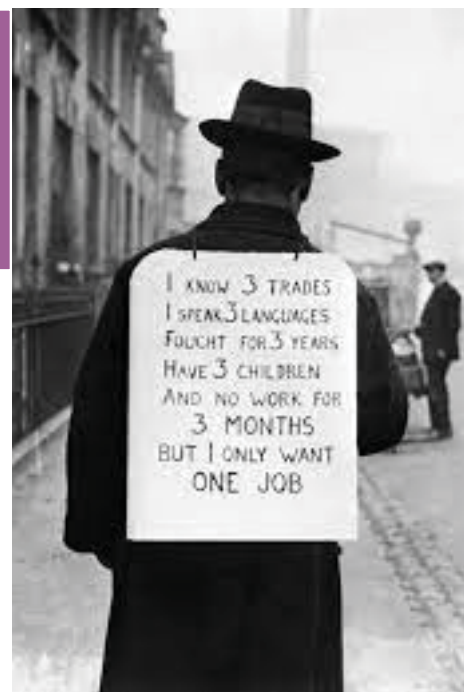
The last three years of Prohibition coincided with the beginning of the Great Depression.

I'm not old enough to have experienced The Great Depression, but I am old enough to remember the effects that it had on my parents. My father refused to go into debt for anything. My mother once told me a story that she and my father were down to their last 25 cents and they went and bought a quart of milk and a newspaper. We may be going through some tough economic times in our country (and the world) right now, but I think we can be grateful that it isn't as tough as the Great Depression Era was. Reading mysteries set during the Depression can show us how our ancestors survived that calamity and give us inspiration to get through our own challenges.

I've always been impressed by characters in mystery fiction who are survivors by nature and necessity. We find a lot of that type of character in the novels of such authors as Harold Adams, Fred Harris and newcomer Laurie Loewenstein. Laurie explains why she set her series during this time period of upheaval.

"With its massive dust storms, bankrupt farms and abandoned towns, the 1930s Dust Bowl became a landscape of blind hope, endurance, deception, desperation...and death. Setting my mystery series in this time and place offered me a chance to explore this unique period and place and the folks who toughed it out.

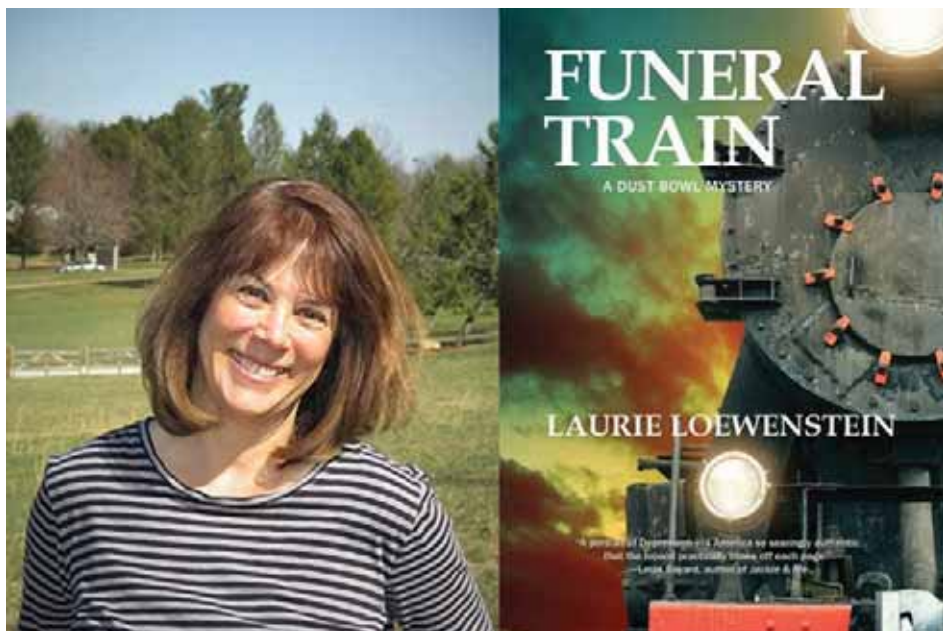
"I imagine Sheriff Temple Jennings as an upright man struggling to keep the peace in his small western Oklahoma town. He reigns in wandering cattle, breaks up fights at the local roadhouse and, remorsefully, maintains order when impoverished farms are auctioned. Occasionally there is a homicide



to solve. He gets help from both his deputy and his wife, Etha, who cooks for the prisoners in the jail next door to the sheriff's residence and often plays a critical role in solving the case.

"I come from a long line of Midwesterners—both small-town merchants and farmers as well as feisty women—and this legacy inspires my series."

What follows are a few reviews (some retrieved from the deep *Deadly Pleasures* vaults) and lists of the authors and their works that are set in the U.S.

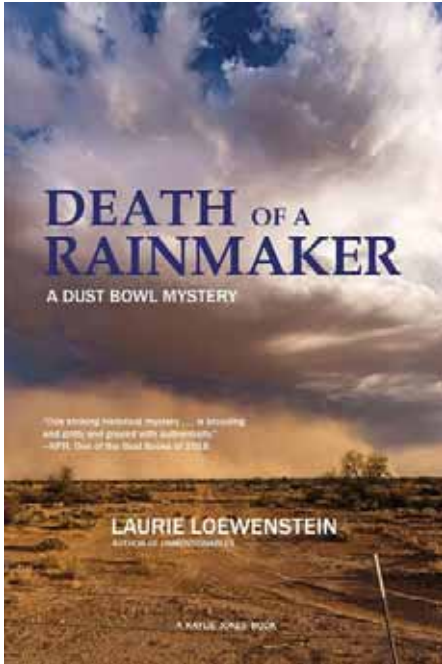


during the Great Depression.

Laurie Loewenstein

Series Character: Sheriff Temple Jennings

Setting: Depression-Era Oklahoma
DEATH OF A RAINMAKER (2018)



FUNERAL TRAIN

by Laurie Loewenstein

Ashkashic Books, \$18.95, October, 2022

Dust Bowl (Temple Jennings) #2

Reviewed by Meredith Anthony
Rating: A

First line: There was a railroad crossing out that way.

Let me just say I'm not crazy about historicals, especially the U.S. in the 1930s. The cover line: A Dust Bowl Mystery filled me with dread. The Great American Depression generally leaves me, well, depressed. But Laurie Loewenstein's **FUNERAL TRAIN** is so beautifully written that I left my baggage behind and just climbed aboard.

FUNERAL TRAIN centers around a passenger train derailment in small-town Oklahoma. Over a dozen people are dead and many more seriously injured. Sheriff Temple Jennings is not only in charge of the investigation but he also has a personal stake since his wife Etha was injured in the train wreck,

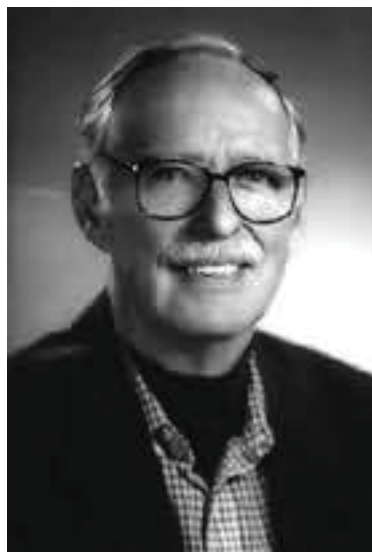
coming back from an out-of-town visit.

Assisted by his young deputy and a railroad detective named Claude Steele, Temple sifts through the evidence and the accounts of victims and first responders to solve the mystery of what happened to the passenger train. They uncover and solve several minor crimes along the way. The irrepressible Etha also lends a hand while she's herself on the mend.

The writing is both lyrical and direct, without the condescension that many historical authors bring to their descriptions of people in extreme circumstances long ago.

Some subplots involving racism, domestic violence and the disabled feel a bit shoehorned into a story that had no need of extra help.

Harold Adams



Series Character: Carl Wilcox,

Itinerant sign painter

Setting: Depression-Era South Dakota

Barry Gardner (for whom the Barry Awards are named) describes the author: "Harold Adams writes about Carl Wilcox, a ne'er-do-well in a small town in South Dakota during the Depression. His books are fine evocations of a time and place, and of the people who were there then. A friend remarked that Adams wrote the same book over and over again, but I don't think that is quite accurate; the lead character has evolved

over the course of the series, for one thing. But even if he did, it's a series I've enjoyed very much, and look forward to enjoying in the future."

THE MAN WHO WAS TALLER THAN GOD

by Harold Adams
(Walker, 1995, 1992)

Reviewed by Allen J. Hubin (in 1993)

THE MAN WHO WAS TALLER THAN GOD

THE MAN WHO WAS TALLER THAN GOD starts out dead in this 1930's Carl Wilcox adventure. He's Felton Edwards, 6-1/2 feet of him stretched out in a sandpit near Hope, South Dakota, where Wilcox is earning some food, if not money, painting some signs. Carl's reputation has preceded him: the town cop emphatically doesn't want him messing in the investigation and warns Carl off his woman as well. Hope's mayor thinks the cop might be a little too limited – or too involved in the crime – and so hires Wilcox to poke around. The dead man proves to have left something of a trail of women to be sorted out – motive enough, if Edward's financial schemes weren't another. Pleasantly atmospheric storytelling. This book won the Shamus Award for the Best Private Eye Novel of 1992.

HATCHET JOB

by Harold Adams
(Walker, \$19.95, 1996)

Reviewed by Gordon Magnuson
(in 1997)

I've been catching up on my reading of Harold Adams' novels. Carl Wilcox is a character as real as Hensley's Don Robak, and I suspect the two would have liked each other.

Wilcox is asked to go to Mustard, South Dakota to investigate the murder of the town cop Lou Dupree, who met with "overexposure to an axe." The cop, separated from his wife, was also known for amorous activities. Wilcox's investigation involves the murdered cop's wife, the wife of the local doctor and coroner, as well as the cool and self-possessed schoolteacher Yvette Hamsun. Since Wilcox has an eye for females himself, he experiences some interesting emo-

tional connections while attempting to discover what powerful hatred could have resulted in four precisely directed axe blows to Dupree. Wilcox must also negotiate the political waters being frequently oiled by Mayor Toolefson. As usual Adams evokes a vivid picture of Depression-era South Dakota and small-town life. Very well done.



MURDER (1981)
 PAINT THE TOWN RED (1982)
 THE MISSING MOON (1983)
 THE NAKED LIAR (1985)
 THE FOURTH WIDOW (1986)
 THE BARBED WIRE NOOSE (1987)
 THE MAN WHO MET THE TRAIN
 (1988)
 THE MAN WHO MISSED THE PARTY
 (1989)
 THE MAN WHO WAS TALLER
 THAN GOD (1992)
 A PERFECTLY PROPER MURDER
 (1993)
 A WAY WITH WIDOWS (1994)
 THE DITCHED BLONDE (1995)
 HATCHET JOB (1996)
 THE ICE PICK ARTIST (1997)
 NO BADGE, NO GUN (1998)
 LEAD, SO I CAN FOLLOW (1999)

Fred Harris

Series Character: Sheriff Okie Dunn

Setting: Depression-Era Oklahoma

COYOTE REVENGE (1999)
 EASY PICKIN'S (2000)

Elmore Leonard

Series Character: Deputy U.S. Marshal Carl Webster

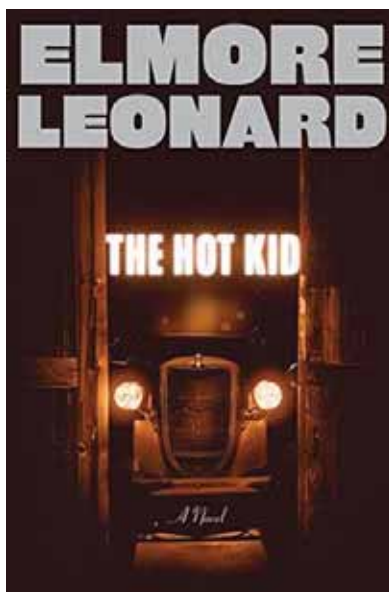
We're in the early '30s here, just as a dust cloud is rolling across the Oklahoma plains--the days of Bonnie and Clyde, when gangsters captured the public attention. Deputy U.S. Marshal Carl Webster, who at age 15 shot a man trying to steal his cows is six years later dispensing similar justice to lawbreakers.

THE HOT KID

by Elmore Leonard
 Morrow, 2005

Rating: B+

Reviewed by George Easter (in 2005)



Carl Webster, since his first personal encounter with crime as a teenage witness to a brutal robbery by notorious crook Emmet Long, has sought justice. His keen mind and sharpshooter's eye quickly build him a hot reputation in the U.S. Marshall's Service, especially after he declares, "If I have to pull my

weapon, I'll shoot to kill."

Jack Belmont has big dreams. His goal is to join John Dillinger as Public Enemy No. 1. This young outlaw is off to a good enough start that Webster is hot on his trail.

Vivid characters, sparse prose and crackling dialogue are found in this book. I just wish the protagonist was one that I could warm up to.

UP IN HONEY'S ROOM (2006)
 COMFORT TO THE ENEMY (2010) –
 short stories

Linda L. Richards



Series Character: Kitty Pangborn, secretary to Depression-Era L.A. private eye Dexter Thereoux

DEATH WAS THE OTHER WOMAN
 (2008)

DEATH WAS IN THE PICTURE (2008)
 DEATH WAS IN THE BLOOD (2013)

Max Allan Collins

Series Character: Elliott Ness, famous for taking down Al Capone, in the following four novels, shows the grit and determination that made him a household name.

THE DARK CITY (1987)
 BUTCHER'S DOZEN (1988)
 BULLET PROOF (1989)
 MURDER BY THE NUMBERS (1989)

Editor's Message



New Blood. I am very pleased – over the moon, in fact – to announce that four veteran crime fiction and thriller reviewers have consented to join our *Deadly Pleasures Mystery Magazine* staff starting with this issue.

This all came about when I learned that *Mystery Scene Magazine* was ceasing publication. At Bouchercon, it was Robin Agnew (a *Mystery Scene* reviewer) who informed me about this happening and she quickly asked, “Do you need another reviewer?” To which I gleefully responded, “You bet!” Robin writes very well and I see her filling a void that was created when our reviewers Norma Dancis (traditional mysteries) and Sally Sugarman (historical mysteries) passed away. (No, the positions are not haunted.) Robin brings a world of experience not only as a reader, fan, and reviewer but also as a bookseller, having run Aunt Agatha’s Mystery Bookshop in Ann Arbor, Michigan for many years. She was a loyal customer of *Deadly Pleasures* before the store closed. Robin still maintains the Aunt Agatha’s website that contains interesting current information about mystery fiction.

Well, that got me thinking about other *Mystery Scene* reviewers whom I have admired over the years. So I asked three of them to join us and they graciously accepted.

There’s Hank Wagner, whose area of expertise is thriller fiction, and since we have a thriller column in our magazine, he is a natural fit. He co-wrote/compiled with David Morrell one of my top 5 favorite reference works: **THRILLERS: 100 MUST READS**. Hank told me he’s working on a sequel.

Then there is Kevin Burton Smith, whose lively writing style and eclectic tastes make reading his reviews a joyful experience. He will focus on P.I. and hardboiled crime fiction (and anything else that may catch his eye). You may

have encountered him on his Thrilling Detective website and blog or as a contributor to The Rap Sheet website.

Last, but not least, is New Zealander/now living in London, Craig Sisterson. His focus will be on the Australian and New Zealand crime novel as well as the U.K. crime fiction scene. His latest effort is a short story anthology **DARK DEEDS DOWN UNDER** (reviewed herein by Kristopher Zgorski on page 59), which features works of Australian and New Zealand crime writers. He is the creator of the Ngaio Marsh Awards for the Best in New Zealand crime fiction.

I’ve renamed the Australian Review column. It will now be called “Down Under Crime,” and will contain Australian and New Zealand crime fiction reviews from Jeff Popple and Craig Sisterson.

Deadly Pleasures Mystery Magazine has a great group of reviewers right now, but these four put us into the stratosphere. I’m excited for what they will bring to the magazine and to you, the mystery reader. Stay tuned.

2022 Trends. It’s time to look back at 2022 and at the new and continuing trends in mystery fiction that I’ve noticed.

The strong flow of psychological/domestic suspense novels continues unabated in 2022. As most of you are aware, this type of mystery is not my favorite, but that doesn’t mean that I won’t read it. My fear is that it crowds out some other types of mysteries that I would like to read. I generally wait until the end of the year to see what the best of p/d suspense is so I don’t have to read anything mediocre. This year I chose to read the highly rated **WRONG PLACE, WRONG TIME** by Gillian McAllister, which I found to be an excellent read. Very creative plotting. I highly recommend it to those of you who like domes-

tic suspense novels.

Another trend created by the popularity of The Thursday Murder Club series, the *Knives Out* film, **THE MAID** by Nita Prose and the *Only Murders in the Building* streaming series is more traditional – puzzle mysteries being published. Together with that are the reprinting of old classic puzzle mysteries by Otto Penzler, the Poisoned Pen Press and, in the U.K., the British Library. All good for us readers.

A recent wave of new Australian and New Zealand crime fiction writers are finding their way to U.S. publication. They are hot! – and very good. I’m reading and enjoying a lot of them right now (based on Jeff Popple’s recommendations), so don’t ignore the Down Under Crime column. If you do, you’ll miss out on a lot of excellent books – most of them available now or in the near future in the U.S. – or easily obtained from overseas.

After years of book prices being pretty static, they are now creeping up. It’s not unusual to see hardcovers by major authors priced at \$30.00 to \$32.00. The old adage that one should be able to buy a paperback for the price of a good lunch and a hardback for the price of a good dinner seems to be holding true.

If you like British crime fiction and you order books from the U.K., you see deflation in prices because of the favorable dollar to English pound exchange rate. It’s a great time to buy British books from the U.K. (\$1.00 = £0.81) and it’s happened at a good time when U.S. publishers are not publishing nearly as much from the U.K. as they used to.

For several years before the Pandemic, American publishers were doing a pretty good job of bringing British crime fiction to our shores. But, of late, I’ve noticed a return to the old days, when some of the best from the U.K. was ignored by the U.S. publishing establishment. Where are U.S. editions of great writers such as Steve Cavanagh, Andrew Taylor, Simon Kernick, Stuart McBride, M.W. Craven, Graham Hurley, Stephen Leather, Rory Clements, Brian M. Gilloway, David Gilman and Tim Weaver? Hmm. All male writers. Perhaps some reverse discrimination.

Sounds like we need a British Brothers in Crime organization.

Writers of color and various ethnic backgrounds are being published at a greater rate than previously. For some time Walter Mosley seemed like a lone man in the wilderness. (I know there were other African American crime writers, but none of his stature.) Now we have S.A. Cosby and Wanda M. Morris (and a slew of others) to keep him company. A number of crime writers from India are being published in the U.S. and the U.K., whereas several years ago it was hard to find any. Up until recently, mysteries about Native Americans (o.k., Indigenous Americans) have been written by Caucasian Americans such as the Hillermans, William Kent Krueger, Margaret Coel and Craig Johnson. (To be fair, these authors have always treated their Native American characters and attendant cultures with great respect.) Now we see such mysteries also being written by Native Americans such as Ramona Emerson, David Heska Wanbli Weiden, and Marcie R. Rendon.

Mysteries and historical romance novels set in Europe during World War II, featuring female protagonists, are all the rage now. Veteran mystery writers Anne Perry, Cara Black., Susan Elia MacNeal, Kate Quinn, Lisa Scottoline and Jacqueline Winspear are fanning these flames.

2023 Looks Very Promising. I've already read twenty novels that are coming out this year and I've been surprised at how good they have been. Expect a lot of A's and A-'s in my reviews.

Where have you been? I've been waiting four years for the next Reed Farrel Coleman novel to appear (six years if you don't count the two recent Robert B. Parker/Jessie Stone novels). When I talked to Reed last year at LeftCoast Crime he said his next book would be out in late 2022. I just got an arc from Blackstone for his **SLEEPLESS CITY**, which is coming out in June, 2023 -- finally!. I'm half-way through and loving it. Review to follow.

Associate Editor's Message



For the third year in a row, George has scoured the internet for the lists of best crime fiction and thrillers of the year. It is a very unique endeavor and one that few of us would attempt as it is extremely time consuming. George enjoys doing it so we benefit by getting an excellent reading list. Rather than trying to name a clear best book of the year (unlike last year when **RAZORBLADE TEARS** was way out in front), just note what the top twenty books are. They are all excellent reads.

I am often amused by George getting excited when his best of the year list matches up with some of the noteworthy others. What George doesn't quite understand or refuses to recognize is that, after reading almost exclusively crime fiction from all over the world for over half a century, he is one of the foremost authorities on crime fiction today. His knowledge of the field is truly immense and encompasses countries from all over the world -- Great Britain, Ireland, Australia, South Africa, Scandinavia, the EU and Asia. There are few well regarded authors that he has not read. For example, in my last conversation with him, he has listed a dozen books to be published next year that he has already read and most of them I have never heard of. Anyone who has put out a 'best of' list should be excited that their list agrees with George's list!

Some of these lists are better than others. When someone puts out a list entitled the best thrillers of the year that encompasses only domestic suspense novels written by women, then there is a bit too much bias there. The list should be properly titled "the best domestic suspense novels of the year by female authors." There is value in that list -- but just name it what it is.

Some of the lists are too long. One website (Popsugar) has a list of over 140 "best" books. There is really no value

in that list unless it is to help publishers publicize a book as on the best of the year list as per that website or bookstore. Reviewers should be able to limit their lists as well. I try to keep mine to less than twelve. In fact, my initial list was only five or six books but George asked for some more.

One thing we must all remember -- the lists are all limited by what the list creator/reader or readers actually do read of the books published in the past year. George commented on how well I did in that my best list correlates quite well with the Best of the Best List. That totally has to do with my reading selection all year. I look at the best of the month list from Amazon, Kirkus and Publisher's Weekly starred reviews, the Deadly Pleasures Best of the Year list as well as books that are mentioned by knowledgeable readers like George.

As we move onto the books of 2023, I realize I cannot put the books of 2022 to rest yet as the Edgar Award nominations are already out -- to be followed by the CWA shortlists later in the year, both of which I critique. And there's also the Barry Award nominating process. In the meantime, I wish you all a great New Year of reading the best books of 2023.

My Favorite Crime Novel of 2022



Deadly Pleasures Best of 2023



Titles listed have garnered starred reviews in the four library journals (*Publisher's Weekly*, *Kirkus*, *Booklist* and *Library Journal*), an Amazon Editors' Choice, and/or a glowing review in *Deadly Pleasures*, as indicated. These books are the best of the best for 2023. I hope you make good use of this list to guide your reading. Many of these titles will appear on year-end "Best of 2023" lists.

Usually at the beginning of each year, this list is very short. I have taken the liberty of making educated guesses as to future titles that will be well reviewed. If that turns out to not be the case, I will delete the title(s).

Best Mystery & Crime Novels

****BEWARE THE WOMAN**, Megan Abbott (Putnam, \$28.00, May). And Jacy felt like she finally did. Newly married and with a baby on the way, Jacy and her new husband, Jed, embark on their first road trip together to visit his father, Dr. Ash, in Michigan's far-flung Upper Peninsula. The moment they arrive in the cozy cottage in the lush woods, Jacy feels bathed in love by the warm and hospitable Dr. Ash, if less so by his house manager, the enigmatic Mrs. Brandt. But their Edenic first days take a turn when Jacy has a health scare. Swiftly, vacation activities are scrapped, and all eyes are on Jacy's condition. At the same time, whispers about Jed's long-dead mother and complicated family history seem eerily to be impeding upon the present. As the days pass, Jacy begins to feel trapped in the cottage, her every move surveilled, her body under the looking glass. But are her fears founded or is it paranoia, or cabin fever,

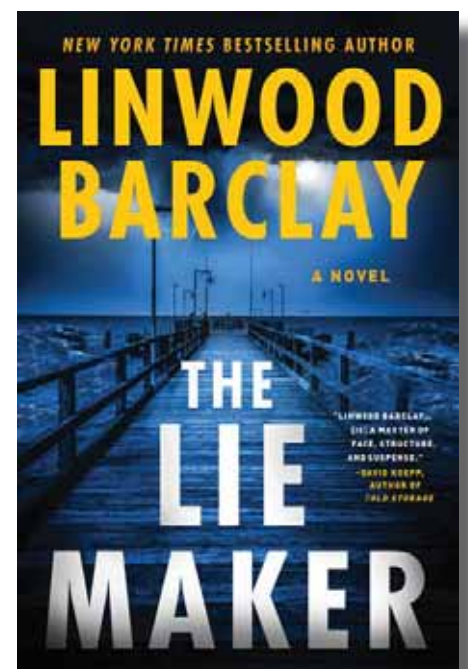
or—as is suggested to her—a stubborn refusal to take necessary precautions? The dense woods surrounding the cottage are full of dangers, but are the greater ones inside?

****LOCUST LANE**, Stephen Amidon (Celadon, \$28.00, January). On the surface, Emerson, Massachusetts, is just like any other affluent New England suburb. But when a young woman is found dead in the nicest part of town, the powerful neighbors close ranks to keep their families safe. In this searing novel, Eden Perry's death kicks off an investigation into the three teenagers who were partying with her that night, each a suspect. Hannah, a sweet girl with an unstable history. Jack, the popular kid with a mean streak. Christopher, an outsider desperate to fit in. Their parents, each with motivations of their own, only complicate the picture: they will do anything to protect their children, even at the others' expense. **BL, AZ & DP**

****THE HOUSEMATE**, Sarah Bailey (Polis, \$27.99, April). Three housemates. One dead, one missing and one accused of murder. Dubbed the Housemate Homicide, it's a mystery that has baffled Australians for almost a decade. Melbourne-based journalist Olive Groves worked on the story as a junior reporter and became obsessed by the case. Now, nine years later, the missing housemate turns up dead on a remote property. Olive is once again assigned to the story, this time reluctantly paired with precocious millennial podcaster Cooper Ng. As Oli and Cooper unearth new facts about the three housemates, a dark web of secrets is uncovered. The revelations catapult Oli back to the death of the first

housemate, forcing her to confront past traumas and insecurities that have risen to the surface again. **DP (2)**

****THE LIE MAKER**, Linwood Barclay (Morrow, \$30.00, May). Your dad's not a good person. Your dad killed people, son. These are some of the last words Jack Givins' father spoke to him before he was whisked away by witness protection, leaving Jack and his mother to pick up the shattered pieces of their lives as best they could. Years later, Jack is a grown man with problems of his own. He's a talented but struggling author, barely scraping by on the royalties from his moderately successful first book. So when the U.S. Marshals approach him with a lucrative opportunity, he's in no position to turn them down. They're recruiting writers like Jack to create false histories for people in witness protection—people like Jack's father. The coincidence is astonishing



to Jack at first, but he soon realizes this may be a chance to find his dad. Only there's one problem—Jack's father hasn't made contact with his handlers recently, and they have no idea where he is. He could be in serious danger, and Jack may be the only one who can find him. **DP**

****HELL BENT**, Leigh Bardugo (Flatiron, \$29.99, January). Find a gateway to the underworld. Steal a soul out of hell. A simple plan, except people who make this particular journey rarely come back. But Galaxy "Alex" Stern is determined to break Darlington out of purgatory – even if it costs her a future at Lethe and at Yale. Forbidden from attempting a rescue, Alex and Dawes can't call on the Ninth House for help, so they assemble a team of dubious allies to save the gentleman of Lethe. Together, they will have to navigate a maze of arcane texts and bizarre artifacts to uncover the societies' most closely guarded secrets, and break every rule doing it. But when faculty members begin to die off, Alex knows these aren't just accidents. Something deadly is at work in New Haven, and if she is going to survive, she'll have to reckon with the monsters of her past and a darkness built into the university's very walls. **PW, BL, AZ and Kirkus**

****THE WRITING RETREAT**, Julia Bartz (Atria/Emily Bester, \$27.00, February). Alex has all but given up on her dreams of becoming a published author when she receives a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity: attend an exclusive, month-long writing retreat at the estate of feminist horror writer Roza Vallo. Even the knowledge that Wren, her former best friend and current rival, is attending doesn't dampen her excitement. But when the attendees arrive, Roza drops a bombshell—they must all complete an entire novel from scratch during the next month, and the author of the best one will receive a life-changing seven-figure publishing deal. Determined to win this seemingly impossible contest, Alex buckles down and tries to ignore the strange happenings at the estate, including Roza's erratic behavior, Wren's cruel mind games, and the alleged haunting of the mansion itself.

But when one of the writers vanishes during a snowstorm, Alex realizes that something very sinister is afoot. With the clock running out, she's desperate to discover the truth and save herself.

Kirkus, BL & AZ

****BLAZE ME A SUN**, Christoffer Carlsson (Hogarth, \$28.00, January). In February 1986, the Halland police receive a call from a man who claims to have attacked his first victim. I'm going to do it again, he says before the line cuts off. By the time police officer Sven Jörgensson reaches the crime scene, the woman is taking her last breath. For Sven, this will prove a decisive moment. On the same night, Sweden plunges into a state of shock after the murder of the prime minister. Could there possibly be a connection? As Sven becomes obsessed with the case, two more fall victim. For years, Sven remains haunted by the murders he cannot solve, fearing the killer will strike again. Having failed to catch him, Sven retires from the police, passing his obsession to his son, who has joined the force to be closer to his father. Decades later, the case unexpectedly resurfaces when a novelist returns home to Halland amid a failed marriage and a sputtering career. The writer befriends the retired police officer, who helps the novelist—our narrator—unspool the many strands of this engrossing tale about a community confronting its shames and legacies. **Kirkus**

****WHERE ARE THE CHILDREN NOW?**, Mary Higgins Clark & Alafair Burke (Simon & Schuster, \$26.99, April). Now, more than four decades since readers first met Nancy and her children in **WHERE ARE THE CHILDREN?**, comes the thrilling sequel to the groundbreaking book that set the stage for future generations of psychological suspense novels. A lawyer turned successful podcaster, Melissa has recently married a man whose first wife died tragically, leaving him and their young daughter, Riley, behind. While Melissa and her brother, Mike, help their mom, Nancy, relocate from Cape Cod to the equally idyllic Hamptons, Melissa's new stepdaughter goes missing. Drawing on

the experience of their own abduction, Melissa and Mike race to find Riley to save her from the trauma they still struggle with—or worse. **DP**

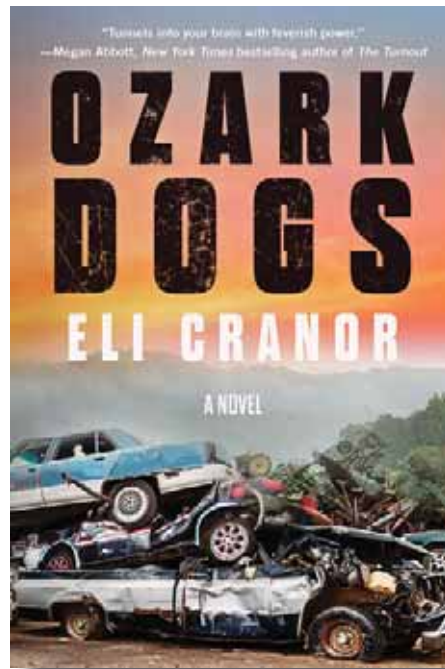
****I WILL FIND YOU**, Harlan Coben (Grand Central, \$30.00, March). David Burroughs was once a devoted father to his three-year-old son Matthew, living a dream life just a short drive away from the working-class suburb where he and his wife, Cheryl, first fell in love—until one fateful night when David woke suddenly to discover Matthew had been murdered while David was asleep just down the hall. Half a decade later, David's been wrongly accused and convicted of the murder, left to serve out his time in a maximum-security prison—a fate which, grieving and wracked with guilt, David didn't have the will to fight. The world has moved on without him. Then Cheryl's younger sister, Rachel, makes a surprise appearance during visiting hours bearing a strange photograph. It's a vacation shot of a bustling amusement park a friend shared with her, and in the background, just barely in frame, is a boy bearing an eerie resemblance to David's son. Even though it can't be, David just knows: Matthew is still alive. David plans a harrowing escape, determined to achieve the impossible – save his son, clear his own name, and discover the real story of what happened. But with his life on the line and the FBI following his every move, can David evade capture long enough to reveal the shocking truth? **DP**

****THE SENATOR'S WIFE**, Liv Constantine (Bantam, \$28.00, May). After a tragic chain of events led to the deaths of their spouses two years ago, DC philanthropist Sloane Chase and Senator Whit Montgomery are finally starting to move on. The horrifying ordeal drew them together, and now they're ready to settle down again—with each other. As Sloane returns to the world of White House dinners and political small talk, this time with her new husband, she's also preparing for an upcoming hip replacement—the latest reminder of the lupus she's managed since her twenties. With their hectic

schedules, they decide that hiring a home health aide will give Sloane the support and independence she needs postsurgery. And they find the perfect fit in Athena Karras. Seemingly a godsend, Athena tends to Sloane and even helps her run her charitable foundation. But Sloane slowly begins to deteriorate—a complication, Athena explains, of Sloane's lupus. As weeks go by, Sloane becomes sicker, and her uncertainty quickly turns to paranoia as she begins to suspect the worst. Why is Athena asking her so many probing questions about her foundation—as well as about her past? And could Sloane be imagining the sultry looks between Athena and her new husband?

****ALL THE SINNERS BLEED, S.** A. Cosby (Flatiron, \$27.99, June). Titus Crowne is the first Black sheriff in the history of Charon County. A former FBI agent and security expert, Titus came home to take care of his father and look out for his troubled younger brother. He ran for Sheriff to make a difference, especially in the Black community which has so often been treated unfairly by the police. But a year to the day after his election, a school shooting rocks the town. A beloved teacher is killed by a former student, and as Titus attempts to deescalate and get the boy to surrender, his deputies fire a fatal shot. In the investigation, it becomes clear that the student they shot had been abused by the dead teacher, as well as by unidentified perpetrators. The trail leads to buried bodies - and dark secrets. As Titus tries to track down a killer hiding in plain sight, while balancing daily duties like protecting Confederate pride marchers, he must face what it means to be a Black man wearing a police uniform in the American South.

****OZARK DOGS, Eli Cranor** (Soho Crime, \$26.95, April). After his son is convicted of capital murder, Vietnam War veteran Jeremiah Fitzjurls takes over the care of his granddaughter, Joanna, raising her with as much warmth as can be found in an Ozark junkyard outfitted to be an armory. He teaches her how to shoot and fight, but there



is not enough training in the world to protect her when the dreaded Ledfords, notorious meth dealers and fanatical white supremacists, come to collect on Joanna as payment for a long-overdue blood debt. Headed by rancorous patriarch Bunn and smooth-talking, erudite Evail, the Ledfords have never forgotten

what the Fitzjurls family did to them, and they will not be satisfied until they have taken an eye for an eye. As they seek revenge, and as Jeremiah desperately searches for his granddaughter, their narratives collide in this immersive story about family and how far some will go to honor, defend—or in some cases, destroy it.

****A KILLING OF INNOCENTS,** Deborah Crombie (Morrow, \$30.00, February). On a rainy November evening, trainee doctor Sasha Johnson hurries through the evening crowd in London's historic Russell Square. Out of the darkness, someone jostles her as they brush past. A moment later, Sasha stumbles, then collapses. When Detective Superintendent Duncan Kincaid and his sergeant, Doug Cullen, are called to the scene, they discover that she's been stabbed. Kincaid immediately calls in his detective wife, Gemma James, who has recently been assigned

to a task force on knife crimes which are on the rise. Along with her partner, detective sergeant Melody Talbot, Gemma aids the investigation. But Sasha Johnson doesn't fit the profile of the task force's typical knife crime victim. Single, successful, career-driven, she has no history of abusive relationships or any connection to gangs. Sasha had her secrets, though, and some of them lead the detectives uncomfortably close to home. **LJ & DP**

****SCORCHED GRACE,** Margot Douallhy (Gillian Flynn Books, \$27.95, February). When Saint Sebastian's School becomes the target of a shocking arson spree, the Sisters of the Sublime Blood and their surrounding New Orleans community are thrust into chaos. Patience is a virtue, but punk rocker turned nun Sister Holiday isn't satisfied to just wait around for officials to return her home and sanctuary to its former peace, instead deciding to unveil the mysterious attacker herself. Her investigation leads her down a twisty path of suspicion and secrets, turning her against colleagues, students, and even fellow Sisters along the way. And to piece together the clues of this high-stakes mystery, she must at last reckon with the sins of her own past. **PW & AZ**

****RED QUEEN,** Juan Gomez-Jurado (Minotaur, \$27.99, March). Antonia Scott – the daughter of a British diplomat and a Spanish mother – has a gifted forensic mind, whose ability to reconstruct crimes and solve baffling murders is legendary. But after a personal trauma, she's refused to continue her work or even leave her apartment.

Jon Gutierrez, a police officer in Bilbao – disgraced, suspended, and about to face criminal charges – is offered a chance to salvage his career by a secretive organization that works in the shadows to direct criminal investigations of a highly sensitive nature. All he has to do is succeed where many others have failed: Convince a recalcitrant Antonia to come out of her self-imposed retirement, protecting her and helping her investigate a new, terrifying case.

The case is a macabre, ritualis-

tic murder – a teen-aged boy from a wealthy family whose body was found without a drop of blood left in it. But the murder is just the start. A high-ranking executive and daughter of one of the richest men in Spain is kidnapped, a crime which is tied to the previous murder. Behind them both is a hidden mastermind with even more sinister plans. And the only person with a chance to see the connections, solve the crimes and successfully match wits with the killer before tragedy strikes again...is Antonia Scott. **DP**

****THE TWYFORD CODE**, Janice Hallett (Atria, \$27.00, January). Forty years ago, Steven “Smithy” Smith found a copy of a famous children’s book by disgraced author Edith Twyford, its margins full of strange markings and annotations. When he showed it to his remedial English teacher Miss Iles, she believed that it was part of a secret code that ran through all of Twyford’s novels. And when she disappeared on a class field trip, Smithy became convinced that she had been right. Now, out of prison after a long stretch, Smithy decides to investigate the mystery that has haunted him for decades. In a series of voice recordings on an old iPhone from his estranged son, Smithy alternates between visiting the people of his childhood and looking back on the events that later landed him in prison. But it soon becomes clear that Edith Twyford wasn’t just a writer of forgotten children’s stories. The Twyford Code holds a great secret, and Smithy may just have the key. **PW & AZ**

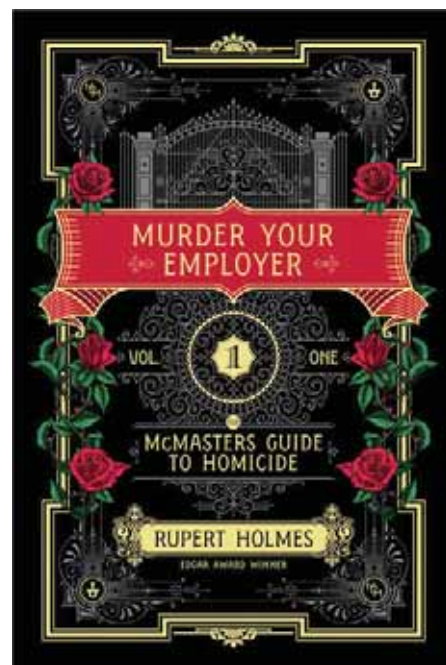
****EXILES**, Jane Harper (Flatiron Books, \$27.99, January). Federal Investigator Aaron Falk is on his way to a small town deep in Southern Australian wine country for the christening of an old friend’s baby. But mystery follows him, even on vacation. This weekend marks the one-year anniversary of Kim Gillespie’s disappearance. One year ago, at a busy town festival on a warm spring night, Kim safely tucked her sleeping baby into her stroller, then vanished into the crowd. No one has seen her since. When Kim’s older daughter makes a

plea for anyone with information about her missing mom to come forward, Falk and his old buddy Raco can’t leave the case alone. As Falk soaks up life in the lush valley, he is welcomed into the tight-knit circle of Kim’s friends and loved ones. But the group may be more fractured than it seems. Between Falk’s closest friend, the missing mother, and a woman he’s drawn to, dark questions linger as long-ago truths begin to emerge. What would make a mother abandon her child? What happened to Kim Gillespie? **BL, PW & DP**

****THE VILLA**, Rachel Hawkins (St. Martin’s Press, \$28.99, January). As kids, Emily and Chess were inseparable. But by their 30s, their bond has been strained by the demands of their adult lives. So when Chess suggests a girls trip to Italy, Emily jumps at the chance to reconnect with her best friend. Villa Aestas in Orvieto is a high-end holiday home now, but in 1974, it was known as Villa Rosato, and rented for the summer by a notorious rock star, Noel Gordon. In an attempt to reignite his creative spark, Noel invites up-and-coming musician, Pierce Sheldon to join him, as well as Pierce’s girlfriend, Mari, and her stepsister, Lara. But he also sets in motion a chain of events that leads to Mari writing one of the greatest horror novels of all time, Lara composing a platinum album—and ends in Pierce’s brutal murder. As Emily digs into the villa’s complicated history, she begins to think there might be more to the story of that fateful summer in 1974. That perhaps Pierce’s murder wasn’t just a tale of sex, drugs, and rock & roll gone wrong, but that something more sinister might have occurred—and that there might be clues hidden in the now-iconic works that Mari and Lara left behind. Yet the closer that Emily gets to the truth. **Kirkus, AZ & BL**

****MURDER YOUR EMPLOYER, The McMasters Guide to Homicide**, Rupert Holmes (Avid Reader, \$28.00, February). Who hasn’t wondered for a split second what the world would be like if a person who is the object of your affliction ceased to exist? But then

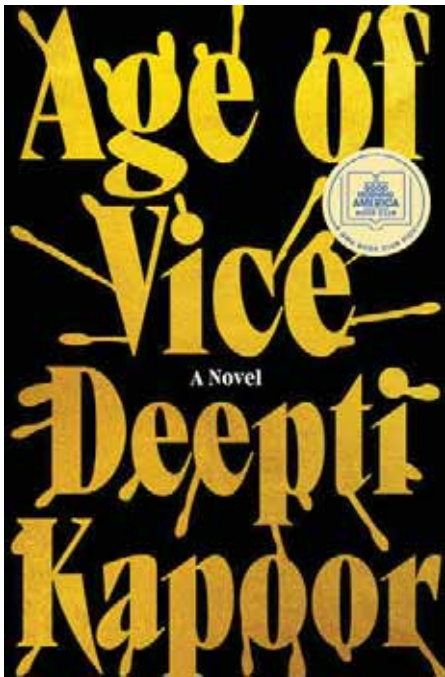
you’ve probably never heard of The McMasters Conservatory, dedicated to the consummate execution of the homicidal arts. To gain admission, a student must have an ethical reason for erasing someone who deeply deserves a fate no worse (nor better) than death. The campus of this “Poison Ivy League” college—its location unknown to even those who study there—is where you might find yourself the practice target of a classmate...and where one’s mandatory graduation thesis is getting away with the perfect murder of someone whose death will make the world a much better place to live. **LJ & AZ**



****DON'T FEAR THE REAPER**, Stephen Graham Jones (Gallery/Saga Press, \$27.99, February). Four years after her tumultuous senior year, Jade Daniels is released from prison right before Christmas when her conviction is overturned. But life beyond bars takes a dangerous turn as soon as she returns to Proofrock. Convicted Serial Killer, Dark Mill South, seeking revenge for thirty-eight Dakota men hanged in 1862, escapes from his prison transfer due to a blizzard, just outside of Proofrock, Idaho. Dark Mill South's Reunion Tour began on December 12th, 2019, a Thursday. Thirty-six hours and twenty bodies later, on Friday the 13th, it would be over. Might be considered horror.

PW, Kirkus & AZ

****AGE OF VICE**, Deepti Kapoor (Riverhead Books, \$30.00, January). New Delhi, 3 a.m. A speeding Mercedes jumps the curb and in the blink of an eye, five people are dead. It's a rich man's car, but when the dust settles there is no rich man at all, just a shell-shocked servant who cannot explain the strange series of events that led to this crime. Nor can he foresee the dark drama that is about to unfold. In the shadow of lavish estates, extravagant parties, predatory business deals and calculated political influence, three lives become dangerously intertwined: Ajay is the watchful servant, born into poverty, who rises through the family's ranks. Sunny is the playboy heir who dreams of outshining his father, whatever the cost. And Neda is the curious journalist caught between morality and desire. Against a sweeping plot fueled by loss, pleasure, greed, yearning, violence and revenge, will these characters' connections become a path to escape, or a trigger of further destruction? **BL, PW, LJ & AZ**



****AN HONEST MAN**, Michael Koryta (Mulholland Books, \$29.00, July). Israel Pike was a killer, and he was an honest man. They were not mutually exclusive. After discovering seven men murdered aboard their yacht – includ-

ing two Senate rivals – Israel Pike is regarded as a prime suspect. A troubled man infamous on Salvation Point Island for killing his own father a decade before, Israel has few options, no friends, and a life-threatening secret. Elsewhere on the island, 12-year-old Lyman Rankin seeks shelter from his alcoholic father in an abandoned house only to discover that he is not alone. A mysterious woman greets him with a hatchet and a promise: "Make a sound and I'll kill you." As the investigation barrels forward, Lyman, Israel, and the fate of the case collide in immutable ways.

****ALL THAT IS MINE I CARRY WITH ME**, William Landay (Bantam, \$28.99, March). One afternoon in November 1975, ten-year-old Miranda Larkin comes home from school to find her house eerily quiet. Her mother is missing. Nothing else is out of place. There is no sign of struggle. Her mom's pocketbook remains in the front hall, in its usual spot. So begins a mystery that will span a lifetime. What happened to Jane Larkin? Investigators suspect Jane's husband. A criminal defense attorney, Dan Larkin would surely be an expert in outfoxing the police. But no evidence is found linking him to a crime, and the case fades from the public's memory, a simmering, unresolved riddle. Jane's three children—Alex, Jeff, and Miranda—are left to be raised by the man who may have murdered their mother. Two decades later, the remains of Jane Larkin are found. The investigation is awakened. The children, now grown, are forced to choose sides. With their father or against him? Guilty or innocent? And what happens if they are wrong? **DP**

****MOSCOW EXILE**, John Lawton (Atlantic Monthly, \$28.00, April). Charlotte is a British expatriate who has recently settled in the nation's capital with her second husband, a man who looks intriguingly like Clark Gable, but her enviable dinner parties and soirées aren't the only things she is planning. Meanwhile, Charlie Leigh-Hunt has been posted to Washington as a replacement for Guy Burgess, last seen disap-

pearing around the corner and into the Soviet Union. Charlie is soon shocked to cross paths with Charlotte, an old flame of his, who, thanks to all her gossip parties, has a packed pocketbook full of secrets she is eager to share. Two decades or so later, in 1969, Joe Wilderness is stuck on the wrong side of the Iron Curtain, held captive by the KGB, a chip in a game way above his pay grade—but his old friends Frank and Eddie are going to try to spring him out of the toughest prison in the world. All roads lead back to Berlin, and to the famous Bridge of Spies.

****SMALL MERCIES**, Dennis Lehane (Harper, \$30.00, April). In the summer of 1974 a heatwave blankets Boston and Mary Pat Fennessey is trying to stay one step ahead of the bill collectors. Mary Pat has lived her entire life in the housing projects of "Southie," the Irish American enclave that stubbornly adheres to old tradition and stands proudly apart. One night Mary Pat's teenage daughter Jules stays out late and doesn't come home. That same evening, a young Black man is found dead, struck by a subway train under mysterious circumstances. The two events seem unconnected. But Mary Pat, propelled by a desperate search for her missing daughter, begins turning over stones best left untouched—asking questions that bother Marty Butler, chieftain of the Irish mob, and the men who work for him, men who don't take kindly to any threat to their business. **DP**

****PROM MOM**, Laura Lippman (Morrow, \$30.00, July). Amber Glass has spent her entire adult life putting as much distance as possible between her and her hometown of Baltimore, where she fears she will forever be known as "Prom Mom"—the girl who allegedly killed her baby on the night of the prom after her date, Joe Simpson, abandoned her to pursue the girl he really liked. But when circumstances bring Amber back to the city, she realizes she can have a second chance—as long as she stays away from Joe, now a successful commercial real estate developer, married to a plastic surgeon, Meredith, to whom he

is devoted. The problem is, Amber can't stay away from Joe. And Joe finds that it's increasingly hard for him to ignore Amber, if only because she remembers the boy he was and the man he said he was going to be. Against the surreal backdrop of 2020 and early 2021, the two are slowly drawn to each other and eventually cross the line they've been trying not to cross. And then Joe asks Amber to help him do the unthinkable.

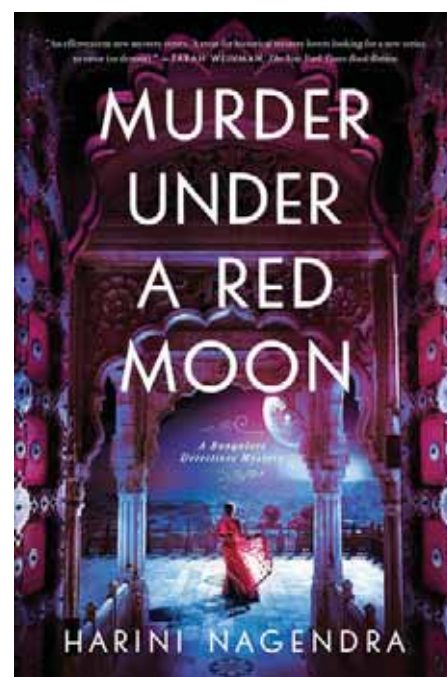
****PARIS REQUIEM**, Chris Lloyd (Pegasus Crime, \$27.00, February). Paris, 1940. As the city adjusts to life under Nazi occupation, Detective Eddie Giral struggles to reconcile his job as a policeman with his new role enforcing a regime he cannot believe in, but must work under. He's sacrificed so much in order to survive in this new world, but the past is not so easily forgotten. When an old friend—and an old flame—reappear, begging for his help, Eddie must decide how far he will go to help those he loves. PW, AZ & BL

****I HAVE SOME QUESTIONS FOR YOU**, Rebecca Makkai (Viking, \$28.00, February). A successful film professor and podcaster, Bodie Kane is content to forget her past—the family tragedy that marred her adolescence, her four largely miserable years at a New Hampshire boarding school, and the murder of her former roommate, Thalia Keith, in the spring of their senior year. Though the circumstances surrounding Thalia's death and the conviction of the school's athletic trainer, Omar Evans, are hotly debated online, Bodie prefers—needs—to let sleeping dogs lie. But when the Granby School invites her back to teach a course, Bodie is inexorably drawn to the case and its increasingly apparent flaws. In their rush to convict Omar, did the school and the police overlook other suspects? Is the real killer still out there? As she falls down the very rabbit hole she was so determined to avoid, Bodie begins to wonder if she wasn't as much of an outsider at Granby as she'd thought—if, perhaps, back in 1995, she knew something that might have held the key to solving the case. BL & PW

****STANDING DEAD**, Margaret Mizushima (Crooked Lane, \$28.99, March). Deputy Mattie Cobb and her sister, Julia, travel to Mexico to visit their mother, but when they arrive, they discover that she and her husband have vanished without a trace. Back in Timber Creek, Mattie finds a chilling note on her front door telling her to look for “him” among the standing dead up in the high country. The sheriff's department springs into action and sends a team to the mountains, where Mattie's K-9 partner, Robo, makes a grisly discovery—a body tied to a dead pine tree. Mattie is shocked when she realizes she knows the dead man. And then another note arrives, warning that Mattie's mother is in desperate straits. In a last-ditch gambit, Mattie must go deep undercover into a killer's lair to save her mother—or die trying.

****EVERY MAN A KING**, Walter Mosley (Mulholland, \$28.00, February). When friend of the family and multi-billionaire Roger Ferris comes to Joe with an assignment, he's got no choice but to accept, even if the case is a tough one to stomach. White nationalist Alfred Xavier Quiller has been accused of murder and the sale of sensitive information to the Russians. Ferris has reason to believe Quiller's been set up and he needs King to see if the charges hold.

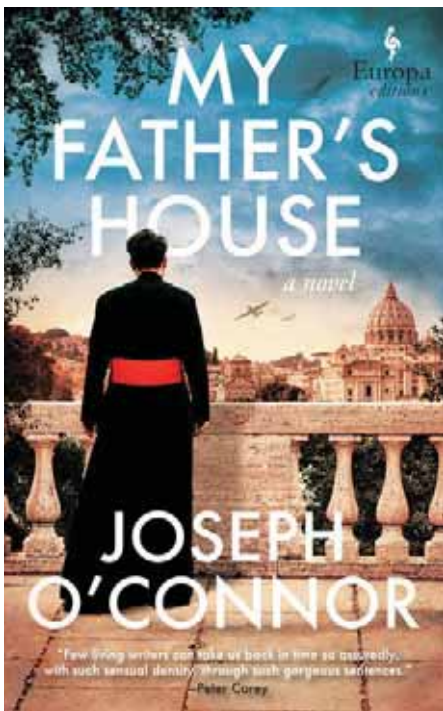
****MURDER UNDER A RED MOON**, Harini Nagendra (Pegasus, \$26.95, March). When new bride Kaveri Murthy reluctantly agrees to investigate a minor crime to please her domineering mother-in-law—during the blood moon eclipse, no less—she doesn't expect, once again, to stumble upon a murder. With anti-British sentiment on the rise, a charismatic religious leader growing in influence, and the fight for women's suffrage gaining steam, Bangalore is turning out to be a far more dangerous and treacherous place than Kaveri ever imagined—and everyone's motives are suspect. Together with the Bangalore Detectives Club—a mixed bag of street urchins, nosy neighbours, an ex-prostitute, and a policeman's



wife—Kaveri once again sleuths in her sari and hunts for clues in her beloved 1920s Ford. But when her life is suddenly put in danger, Kaveri realizes that she might be getting uncomfortably close to the truth. PW & BL

****KILLING MOON**, Jo Nesbo (Knopf, \$29.00, May). THE HUNT IS ON AND THE POLICE ARE RUNNING OUT OF TIME. Two young women are missing, their only connection a party they both attended, hosted by a notorious real-estate magnate. When one of the women is found murdered, the police discover an unusual signature left by the killer, giving them reason to suspect he will strike again. THEY'RE FACING A KILLER UNLIKE ANY OTHER. And exposing him calls for a detective like no other. But the legendary Harry Hole is gone—fired from the force, drinking himself to oblivion in Los Angeles. It seems that nothing can entice him back to Oslo. Until the woman who saved Harry's life is put in grave danger, and he has no choice but to return to the city that haunts him and track down the murderer. CATCHING HIM WILL PUSH HARRY TO THE LIMIT. He'll need to bring together a misfit team of former operatives to accomplish what he can't do alone: stop an unstoppable killer.

****MY FATHER'S HOUSE**, Joseph O'Connor (Europa Editions, \$27.00, February). September 1943: German forces have Rome under their control. Gestapo boss Paul Hauptmann rules over the Eternal City with vicious efficiency. Hunger is widespread. Rumors fester. The war's outcome is far from certain. Diplomats, refugees, Jews, and escaped Allied prisoners flee for protection into Vatican City, the world's smallest state, a neutral, independent country nestled within the city of Rome. A small band of unlikely friends led by a courageous Irish priest is drawn into deadly battle of wits as they attempt to aid those seeking refuge. **BL, PW, AZ & Kirkus**



****SING HER DOWN**, Ivy Pochoda (MCD, \$28.00, May). Florence "Florida" Baum is not the hapless innocent she claims to be when she arrives at the Arizona women's prison – or so her ex-cellmate, Diosmary Sandoval, keeps insinuating. Dios knows the truth about Florida's crimes, understands the truth that Florence hides even from herself: that she wasn't a victim of circumstance, an unlucky bystander misled by a bad man. Dios knows that darkness lives in women too, despite the world's refusal to see it. And she is determined to open Florida's eyes and unleash her true self.

When an unexpected reprieve gives both women their freedom, Dios's fixation on Florida turns into a dangerous obsession, and a deadly cat-and-mouse chase ensues from Arizona to the desolate streets of Los Angeles. **DP**

****A LINE IN THE SAND** by Kevin Powers (Little, Brown, \$29.00, May). One early morning on a Norfolk beach in Virginia, a dead body is discovered by a man taking his daily swim—Arman Bajalan, formerly an interpreter in Iraq. After narrowly surviving an assassination attempt that killed his wife and child, Arman has been given lonely sanctuary in the US as a maintenance worker at the Sea Breeze Motel. Now, convinced that the body is connected to his past, he knows he is still not safe. Seasoned detective Catherine Wheel and her newly minted partner have little to go on beyond a bus ticket in the dead man's pocket. It leads them to Sally Ewell, a local journalist as grief-stricken as Arman is by the Iraq War, who is investigating a corporation on the cusp of landing a multi-billion-dollar government defense contract. As victims mount around Arman, taking the team down wrong turns and towards startling evidence, they find themselves in a race, committed to unraveling the truth and keeping Arman alive—even if it costs them absolutely everything.

****LYING BESIDE YOU**, Michael Robotham (Scribner, \$27.99, February). As a boy, Cyrus Haven survived a family massacre and slowly pieced his life back together. Now, after almost twenty years, his brother is applying to be released from a secure psychiatric hospital—and Cyrus is expected to forgive Elias and welcome him home. Elias is returning to a very different world. Cyrus is now a successful psychologist, working with the police, sharing his house with Evie Cormac, a damaged and gifted teenager who can tell when someone is lying. Evie has gone back to school and is working part-time at an inner-city bar, but she continues to struggle with authority and following rules. When a man is murdered and his

daughter disappears, Cyrus is called in to profile the killer and help piece together Maya Kirk's last hours. Police believe she was drugged and driven away from the same bar where Evie is working. Soon, a second victim is taken, and Evie is the only person who glimpsed the man behind the wheel. But there's a problem. Only two people believe her. One is Cyrus. **Kirkus & DP(3)**

****EVERYONE IN MY FAMILY HAS KILLED SOMEONE**, Benjamin Stevenson (Mariner, \$30.00, January). Everyone in my family has killed someone. Some of us, the high achievers, have killed more than once. I'm not trying to be dramatic, but it is the truth. Some of us are good, others are bad, and some just unfortunate. I'm Ernest Cunningham. Call me Ern or Ernie. I wish I'd killed whoever decided our family reunion should be at a ski resort, but it's a little more complicated than that. Have I killed someone? Yes. I have. **PW, AZ & DP(2)**

****THE END OF THE ROAD**, Andrew Welsh-Huggins (Mysterious Press, \$26.95, April). Myles's courtroom testimony should have put Pryor, their one-eyed ringleader, behind bars after the bank robbery gone wrong, yet somehow Pryor got off scot-free while Myles served time. Now, upon his release, Myles decides he is done with his life of crime? a change that will only be possible if he can kill Pryor and turn over a new leaf. Pryor has other ideas, and the collision between these two deadly forces soon leaves the ex-con in critical condition, clinging to life in a hospital bed. With Myles in recovery, it's up to his girlfriend Penny to avenge her lover and salvage their chance at normalcy. As Pryor and his cronies prepare for their biggest score yet—stealing the legendary fortune said to be hidden in a farmhouse outside their small Ohio town—Penny is hot on their heels. But is she prepared for the carnage Pryor will gleefully wreak on the path to his prize? **DP**

****ALL THE DANGEROUS THINGS**, Stacy Willingham (Minotaur,

\$27.99, January). One year ago, Isabelle Drake's life changed forever: her toddler son, Mason, was taken out of his crib in the middle of the night while she and her husband were asleep in the next room. With little evidence and few leads for the police to chase, the case quickly went cold. However, Isabelle cannot rest until Mason is returned to her – literally. Except for the occasional catnap or small blackout where she loses track of time, she hasn't slept in a year. Isabelle's entire existence now revolves around finding him, but she knows she can't go on this way forever. In hopes of jarring loose a new witness or buried clue, she agrees to be interviewed by a true-crime podcaster, but his interest in Isabelle's past makes her nervous. His incessant questioning paired with her severe insomnia has brought up uncomfortable memories from her own childhood, making Isabelle start to doubt her recollection of the night of Mason's disappearance, as well as second-guess who she can trust... including herself.

BL & AZ

****CITY OF DREAMS**, Don Winslow (Morrow, \$30.00, April). Hollywood. The city where dreams are made. On the losing side of a bloody East Coast crime war, Danny Ryan is now on the run. The Mafia, the cops, the FBI all want him dead or in prison. With his little boy, his elderly father and the tattered remnants of his loyal crew of soldiers, he makes the classic American migration to California to start a new life. A quiet, peaceful existence. But the Feds track him down and want Danny to do them a favor that could make him a fortune or kill him.

And when Hollywood starts shooting a film based on his former life, Danny demands a piece of the action and begins to rebuild his criminal empire. Then he falls in love. With a beautiful movie star who has a dark past of her own. As their worlds collide in an explosion that could destroy them both, Danny Ryan has to fight for his life in a city where dreams are born. Or where they go to die.

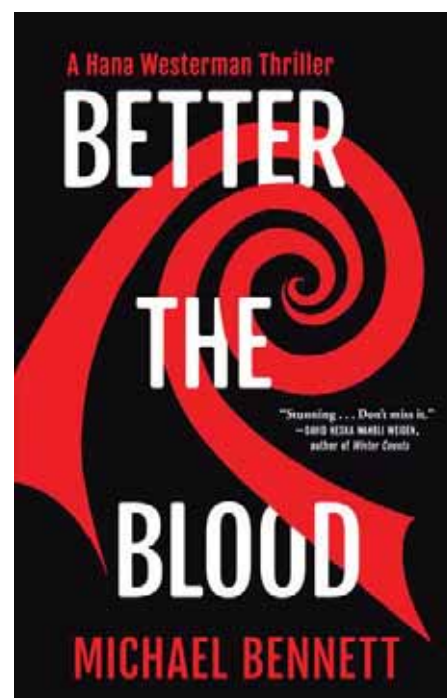
****THE WHITE LADY**, Jacqueline

Winspear (Harper, \$30.00, March). A reluctant ex-spy with demons of her own, Elinor finds herself facing down one of the most dangerous organized crime gangs in London, ultimately exposing corruption from Scotland Yard to the highest levels of government. The private, quiet "Miss White" as Elinor is known, lives in a village in rural Kent, England, and to her fellow villagers seems something of an enigma. Well she might, as Elinor occupies a "grace and favor" property, a rare privilege offered to faithful servants of the Crown for services to the nation. But the residents of Shacklehurst have no way of knowing how dangerous Elinor's war work had been, or that their mysterious neighbor is haunted by her past.

It will take Susie, the child of a young farmworker, Jim Mackie and his wife, Rose, to break through Miss White's icy demeanor—but Jim has something in common with Elinor. He, too, is desperate to escape his past. When the powerful Mackie crime family demands a return of their prodigal son for an important job, Elinor assumes the task of protecting her neighbors, especially the bright-eyed Susie. **LJ, BL & Kirkus**

Best Debut Mystery -- Crime Novels

****LOCUST LANE**, Stephen Amidon (Celadon, \$28.00, January). On the surface, Emerson, Massachusetts, is just like any other affluent New England suburb. But when a young woman is found dead in the nicest part of town, the powerful neighbors close ranks to keep their families safe. In this searing novel, Eden Perry's death kicks off an investigation into the three teenagers who were partying with her that night, each a suspect. Hannah, a sweet girl with an unstable history. Jack, the popular kid with a mean streak. Christopher, an outsider desperate to fit in. Their parents, each with motivations of their own, only complicate the picture: they will do anything to protect their children, even at the others' expense. **BL, AZ & DP**



****BETTER THE BLOOD**, Michael Bennett (Atlantic Monthly, \$27.00, January). A tenacious Maori detective, Hana Westerman juggles single motherhood, endemic prejudice, and the pressures of her career in Auckland CIB. Led to a crime scene by a mysterious video, she discovers a man ritualistically hanging in a secret room and a puzzling inward-curving inscription. Delving into the investigation after a second, apparently unrelated, death, she uncovers a chilling connection to an historic crime: 160 years before, during the brutal and bloody British colonization of New Zealand, a troop of colonial soldiers unjustly executed a Maori Chief. Hana realizes that the murders are *utu*—the Maori tradition of rebalancing for the crime committed eight generations ago. There were six soldiers in the British troop, and since descendants of two of the soldiers have been killed, four more potential murders remain. Hana is thus hunting New Zealand's first serial killer. **Kirkus, AZ, PW & DP**

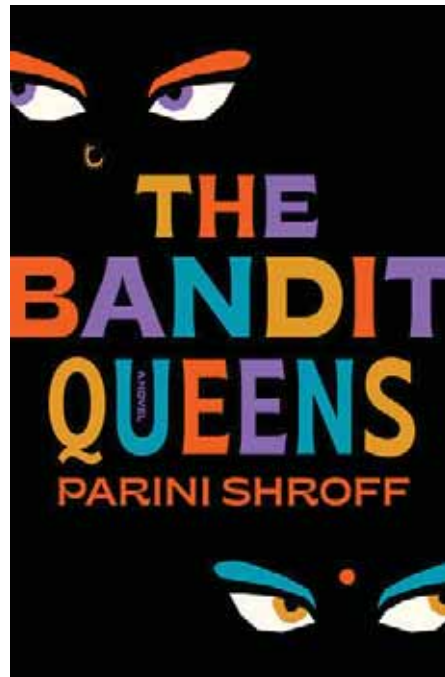
****HOW I'LL KILL YOU**, Ren DeStafano (Berkley, \$27.00, March). Sissy has an...interesting family. Always the careful one, always the cautious one, she has handled the cleanup while her serial killer sisters have carved a path

of carnage across the U.S. Now, as they arrive in the Arizona heat, Sissy must step up and embrace the family pastime of making a man fall in love and then murdering him. Her first target? A young widower named Edison—and their mutual attraction is instant. While their relationship progresses, and most couples would be thinking about picking out china patterns and moving in together, Sissy's family is reminding her to think about picking out burial sites and moving on. Then something happens that Sissy never anticipated: She begins to feel protective of Edison, and before she can help it, she's fallen in love. But the clock is ticking, and her sisters are growing restless. It becomes clear that the gravesite she chooses will hide a body no matter what happens; but if she betrays her family, will it be hers? **PW, LJ & BL**

****STONE COLD FOX**, Rachel Koller Croft (Berkley, \$27.00, February). Like any enterprising woman, Bea knows what she's worth and is determined to get all she deserves—it just so happens that what she deserves is to marry rich. Filthy rich. After years of forced instruction by her mother in the art of swindling men, a now-solo Bea wants nothing more than to close and lock the door on their sordid partnership. When Bea chooses her ultimate target in the fully loaded, thoroughly dull and blue-blooded Collin Case, she's ready to deploy all of her tricks one last time. The challenge isn't getting the ring, but rather the approval of Collin's family and everyone else in their 1 percent tax bracket, particularly his childhood best friend, Gale Wallace-Leicester. Going toe-to-toe with Gale isn't a threat to an expert like Bea, but what begins as an amusing cat-and-mouse game quickly develops into a dangerous pursuit of the grisly truth. Finding herself at a literal life-and-death crossroads with everything on the line, Bea must finally decide who she really wants to be. **PW, Kirkus & LJ**

****THE GOLDEN SPOON**, Jessa Maxwell (Atria, \$27.00, March). Every summer for the past ten years, six awe-struck bakers have descended on

the grounds of Grafton, the leafy and imposing Vermont estate that is not only the filming site for "Bake Week" but also the childhood home of the show's famous host, celebrated baker Betsy Martin. The author of numerous bestselling cookbooks and hailed as "America's Grandmother," Betsy Martin isn't as warm off-screen as on, though no one needs to know that but her. She has always demanded perfection, and gotten it with a smile, but this year something is off. As the baking competition commences, things begin to go awry. At first, it's merely sabotage—sugar replaced with salt, a burner turned to high—but when a body is discovered, everyone is a suspect. **PW, Kirkus & LJ**



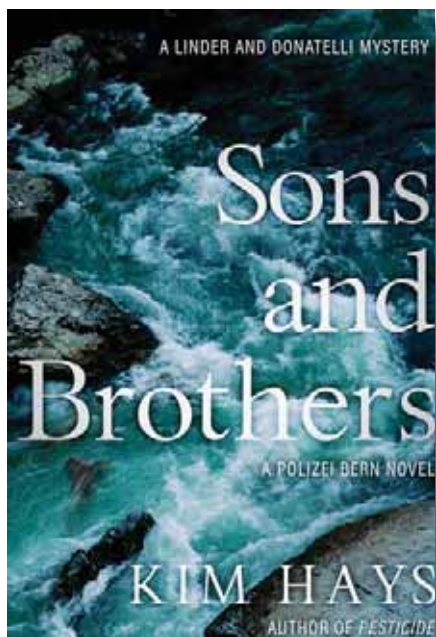
****THE BANDIT QUEENS**, Parini Shroff (Ballantine, \$28.00, January). Five years ago, Geeta lost her no-good husband. As in, she actually lost him—he walked out on her and she has no idea where he is. But in her remote village in India, rumor has it that Geeta killed him. And it's a rumor that just won't die. It turns out that being known as a "self-made" widow comes with some perks. No one messes with her, harasses her, or tries to control (ahem, marry) her. It's even been good for business; no one dares to not buy her jewelry. Freedom must look good on Geeta, because now other women are

asking for her "expertise," making her an unwitting consultant for husband disposal. And not all of them are asking nicely. **BL, LJ & AZ**

****CITY UNDER ONE ROOF**, Iris Yamashita (Berkley, \$27.00, January). When a local teenager discovers a severed hand and foot washed up on the shore of the small town of Point Mettier, Alaska, Cara Kennedy is on the case. A detective from Anchorage, she has her own motives for investigating the possible murder in this isolated place, which can be accessed only by a tunnel. After a blizzard causes the tunnel to close indefinitely, Cara is stuck among the odd and suspicious residents of the town—all 205 of whom live in the same high-rise building and are as icy as the weather. Cara teams up with Point Mettier police officer Joe Barkowski, but before long the investigation is upended by fearsome gang members from a nearby native village. **Kirkus, PW, AZ & LJ**

Best Paperback Original Mystery/Crime Novels

****HIDE**, Tracy Clark (Thomas & Mercer, \$16.99, January). When a young red-haired woman is found brutally murdered in downtown Chicago, one detail stands out: the red lipstick encircling her wrists and ankles. Detective Harriet Foster is on the case, even though she's still grieving the sudden death of her partner. As a Black woman in a male-dominated department, Foster anticipates a rocky road ahead acclimating to a new team?and building trust with her new partner isn't coming easily. After another victim turns up with the same lipstick markings, Foster suspects she's looking for a serial killer. Through a tip from a psychiatrist, Foster learns about Bodie Morgan: a troubled man with a twisted past and a penchant for pretty young redheads with the bluest eyes. As Foster wades into Morgan's sinister history, the killer continues their gruesome assault on Chicago's streets. **DP**



****SONS AND BROTHERS**, Kim Hays (Seventh Street Books, \$17.95, April). Walking his dog along Bern's Aare river on an icy November night, a surgeon in his seventies is hit in the face and thrown into the river to drown. When his bruised corpse is found, his watch is missing. A mugging gone wrong? The more Swiss police detective Giuliana Linder and her assistant Renzo Donatelli learn about Johann Karl Gurtner, the more convinced they are that his death was not random. Talking to Gurtner's family raises as many questions as it answers, but one thing becomes clear: the surgeon's relationship with his middle son, Markus, was grim. Tracking others who might have had reason to hate Gurtner, Giuliana and Renzo find themselves once again dealing with their attraction to one another and their ambivalence about having an affair.

Behind their investigation, another story has been unfolding. During the year leading up to Gurtner's death, his son Markus became friends with a former classmate of his father's from the village where the two men grew up. Unlike the privileged young Gurtner, Jakob Amsler was forcibly removed from his mother at nine and contracted to live and work on a village farm. From Jakob, Markus learns that his father's early life contains some very

odd secrets—secrets that Giuliana and Renzo are now trying to uncover. **DP**

****EVERY THING SHE FEARED**, Rick Mofina (MIRA, \$18.99, April). When a teen falls while taking a selfie at the edge of a cliff, the last thing she sees before plummeting to her death is Katie Harmon, the nine-year-old girl she was babysitting, looking down at her. Investigators gather at the scene, and Katie's mother, Sara, rushes to comfort her daughter. Yet there's a small, secret ping of alarm in Sara's heart that she cannot share—though rookie detective Kim Pierce senses it. For years, others have tried to unravel this secret. From true-crime podcasters to a haunted journalist searching for a killer who vanished after being released from prison several years ago. And now, with detectives tightening the focus of their investigation, Sara is consumed by her darkest fear—that the babysitter's death was not an accident.

****BLACK RIVER**, Matthew Spencer (Thomas & Mercer, \$16.99, June). During a stifling summer in Sydney, the body of a chaplain's daughter is found wrapped in black plastic on the deserted grounds of an elite boarding school. Is it the work of the killer who's been stalking the privileged neighborhoods along the Parramatta River? Gut instinct tells Detective Sergeant Rose Riley something even more devious might be at play. Eager to find the so-called Blue Moon Killer before he strikes again, Riley forms an uneasy alliance with Adam Bowman, a journalist with a valuable, and unsettling, link to the school's history. As Riley's investigation takes her deep into the secret lives of Sydney's prominent citizens, Bowman delves into the darkest places of his own childhood for answers. When their paths converge, Riley must use every bit of her cunning to stop another murder. **DP**

Best Thriller

****NIGHT FLIGHT TO PARIS**, Cara Black (Soho Crime, \$27.95,

March). October 1942: it's been two years since Kate Rees was sent to Paris on a British Secret Service mission to assassinate Hitler. Since then, she has left spycraft behind to take a training job as a sharpshooting instructor in the Scottish Highlands. But her quiet life is violently disrupted when Colonel Stepney, her former handler, drags her back into the fray for a risky three-pronged mission in Paris. Each task is more dangerous than the next: Deliver a package of forbidden biological material. Assassinate a high-ranking German operative whose knowledge of invasion plans could turn the tide of the war against the Allies. Rescue a British agent who once saved Kate's life—and get out. Kate will encounter sheiks and spies, poets and partisans, as she races to keep up with the constantly shifting nature of her assignment, showing every ounce of her Oregonian grit in the process.

****FEARLESS**, M. W. Craven (Flatiron Books, \$27.99, July). Ben Koenig used to head the US Marshal's elite Special Operations Group. His team hunted the bad guys – the really bad guys, and he could find anyone. Then one day Koenig himself disappeared. Koenig has been on the run for six years. Now suddenly his face is on every television screen in the country and his cover is blown. A woman has gone missing, and her father will do anything to find her. He wants Koenig to discover what happened, no matter the cost. The trail leads Koenig to a small town in the burning heat of the Chihuahuan Desert, where some people have a secret they'll do anything to protect. But Koenig has a secret of his own: a unique condition that makes him unable to feel fear. Now Koenig is coming for them. And they should be afraid. **DP**

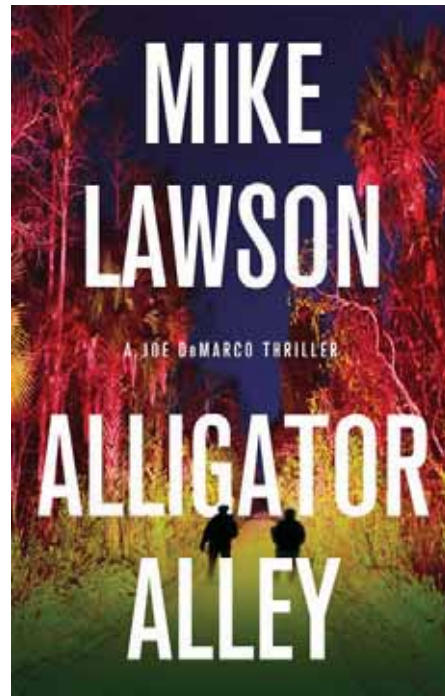
****KILLING ME**, Michelle Gagnon (Putnam, \$28.00, May). Amber Jamison cannot believe she's about to become the latest victim of a serial killer—she's savvy and street smart, so when she gets pushed into, of all things, a white windowless van, she's more

angry than afraid. Things get even weirder when she's miraculously saved by a mysterious woman...who promptly disappears. Who was she? And why is she hunting serial killers? You'd think escaping one psychopath would be enough, but Amber's problems are just beginning. Her close call has law enforcement circling a past she's tried to outrun. So she flees across the country, ending up at a seedy motel in Las Vegas with a noir-obsessed manager and a sex worker as her unlikely companions...and danger right behind. She's landed in the crosshairs of the world's most prolific killer, caught up in a deadly game that's been going on for years. To survive, she's forced to dust off her old playbook and partner with someone she can't trust. **DP**

****BURNER**, Mark Greaney (Berkley, \$29.00, February). When you kick over a rock, you never know what's going to crawl out. Alex Velesky is about to discover that the hard way. He's stolen records from the Swiss bank that employs him, thinking that he'll uncover a criminal conspiracy. But he soon finds that he's tapped into the mother lode of corruption. Before he knows it, he's being hunted by everyone from the Russian mafia to the CIA. Court Gentry and his erstwhile lover, Zoya Zakharova, find themselves on opposites poles when it comes to Velesky. They both want him but for different reasons. That's a problem for tomorrow. Today they need to keep him and themselves alive. **PW & DP**

****THE BULLET GARDEN**, Stephen Hunter (Atria/Emily Bester, \$28.99, January). July, 1944: The lush, rolling hills of Normandy are dotted with a new feature—German snipers. From their vantage points, they pick off hundreds of Allied soldiers every day, bringing the D-Day invasion to its knees. It's clear that someone is tipping off these snipers with the locations of American GIs, but who? And how? General Eisenhower demands his intelligence service to find the best shot in the Allied military to counter this

deadly SS operation. Enter Pacific hero Earl Swagger, assigned this crucial and



bloody mission. With crosshairs on his back, Swagger can't trust anyone as he infiltrates the shadowy corners of London and France for answers. **BL & AZ**

****ALLIGATOR ALLEY**, Mike Lawson (Atlantic Monthly Press, \$27.00, February). When Andie Moore, a 23-year-old working in the DOJ's Inspector General's Office, is murdered in cold blood in Florida's Everglades, it falls on DeMarco to get to the bottom of things. Paired with Emma, an enigmatic, retired ex-spy with seemingly endless connections in the military and intelligence communities, they venture south to the scene of Andie's murder: Alligator Alley. DeMarco and Emma waste no time in identifying two suspects—a pair of crooked, near-retirement FBI agents named McIntyre and McGruder. But as they keep digging, it becomes clear that these FBI agents weren't acting alone, and that this goes much deeper than just the murder of an innocent 23-year old woman. **BL, PW & DP**

****GOING ZERO**, Anthony McCarten (Harper, \$30.00, April). TWO HOURS TO VANISH

Ten Americans have been carefully selected to Beta test a ground-breaking piece of spyware. Pioneered by tech-wunderkind Cy Baxter in collaboration with the CIA, FUSION can track anyone on earth. But does it work? Each participant is given two hours to 'Go Zero' – to go off-grid and disappear – and then thirty days to elude the highly sophisticated Capture Teams sent to find them. Any Zero that beats FUSION will receive \$3 million. If Cy's system prevails, he wins a \$90 billion-dollar government contract to revolutionize surveillance forever. For one contestant, an unassuming Boston librarian named Kaitlyn Day, the stakes are far higher than money, and her reasons for entering the test more personal than anyone imagines. Kaitlyn needs to win as badly as Cy needs to realize his own ambitions. They have no choice but to finish the game and when the timer hits zero, there will only be one winner. **DP**

****THE COLLECTOR**, Daniel Silva (Harper, \$32.00, July). Legendary art restorer and spy Gabriel Allon joins forces with a brilliant and beautiful master-thief to track down the world's most valuable missing painting but soon finds himself in a desperate race to prevent an unthinkable conflict between Russia and the West.

****BLIND FEAR**, Brandon Webb & John David Mann (Bantam, \$28.99, July). By day, AWOL Navy SEAL Finn is hiding out on Vieques, a tiny island paradise off the eastern coast of Puerto Rico, living in a spare room behind a seafood restaurant owned by a blind local. By night he scours the dark web, hunting for the rogue officer responsible for the crimes he is accused of committing. But Finn's world is about to be turned upside down by a new nightmare, when his employer's two grandchildren go missing. To find them, he'll have to infiltrate the island's dangerous criminal underbelly and expose a shadowy crime network known as La Empresa—even if it means exposing himself in the process. **DP**

A Visit From the Book Broad

Meredith Anthony



THE BULLET THAT MISSED

By Richard Osman

Viking; \$27.00

Thursday Murder Club #3

Rating: A

First line: Bethany Waites understands there is no going back now.

I'm happy to report that the third book in Richard Osman's exceptional Thursday Murder Club series is as wonderful as the first two. **THE BULLET THAT MISSED** is a delightful read, exquisitely plotted, violent and funny.

The four senior citizens who live in a retirement village in England use their various skills and a dollop of charm to solve cold cases. The mysterious death of a female journalist has never been solved and the four friends seek out a well-known news anchor who knew her. So begins the complicated and thoroughly enjoyable thriller, **THE BULLET THAT MISSED**. Also involved are Russian mobsters, an incarcerated drug lord with a Nespresso machine in her cell, a premature burial, and more than twenty million in diamonds.

Of the many sub-genres in which mysteries are routinely categorized, perhaps the most commonly denigrated are cozies. A cozy is often described as a book with a pun in the title about a bunch of women sitting around quilting while the cat solves the mystery. But there is a crop of cozies that transcend the formula: **THE NUMBER ONE LADIES DETECTIVE AGENCY** by Andrew McCall Smith, the Asperger's Mysteries by E.J. Copperman and Jeff Cohen, the Finlay Donovan books by Elle Cosimano, and, of course, The Thursday Murder Club series by Rich-

ard Osman. They are fresh, funny, smart and very, very good.

BLAZE ME A SUN

By Christoffer Carlsson

Translated by Rachel Willson-Broyles

Hogarth; \$28.00

Rating: B

First line: It was the summer Evy Carlén got very sick, realized she didn't have long to live, and confided in me that she knew what had happened to Sven Jörgensson and his son, Vidar, up in Tiarp.

The newest Swedish thriller writer, Christoffer Carlsson, has given us **BLAZE ME A SUN**, a long, slow burn that puts a couple of murders in a small, rural Swedish town under a microscope. The first murder had taken place in 1986, notable because it happened the

night the Swedish Prime Minister, Olof Palme, was shot and killed in Stockholm. Sven Jörgensson was a policeman who was first on the scene and tried to save the life of the savagely beaten young woman who was found in her car. She died on the way to the hospital. Sven started investigating the crime and when the second, similar crime occurred, it became the case that haunted him for the rest of his life.

The plot is intriguing but the pace is glacially slow and the tone, overall, is glum. Scandinavian writers seem to have a predilection for glum. At one point, someone describes the locale as beautiful and I was startled. I had assumed it was as barren and colorless as the characters.

While I was reading, I was sure the perpetrator was one of two minor characters. I was right both times. But if you have a thing for Scandi Noir, and don't mind the meditative pace, you might want to give it a try.

WELCOME TO THE GAME

By Craig Henderson

Atlantic Monthly Press; \$27.00

Rating: C

First line: Spencer winced as his potential buyer made a rough shift.

British TV personality and writer Craig Henderson's debut novel about a driver is a near miss. **WELCOME TO THE GAME** centers on Spencer Burnham, a former British rally driver who lives in Detroit and becomes a driver for a gangster. Dominic McGrath launders dirty money for various criminal enterprises. McGrath is charismatic and ultracool and kills with impunity.



Spencer, who has a 12-year-old daughter, became a serious alcoholic when his wife died and supplements it with pills and coke and petty crime. He is still an expert driver. And a driver for a criminal enterprise is a great hook. Plenty of exciting car chases, near misses and mayhem. But it's hard to root for Spencer who seems to be an intractable loser.

I've noticed a common trope in thrillers that use a young daughter as a kind of shorthand to define a good guy who just needs to get his act together. In this case, Spencer is so self-defeating that even a preteen girl can't balance his massive bad behavior. Henderson adds a running commentary from the wise and helpful dead wife, but even that does not cut it.

Henderson seeks to develop his location and its vernacular into a compelling setting not unlike the Baltimore of *The Wire* or the Albuquerque of *Breaking Bad*. And Detroit, in its decline, is ripe for this kind of treatment. Unfortunately, he falls short.

WELCOME TO THE GAME has a long and overly complicated plot with various criminal gangs, clean and dirty cops, over-zealous child protection officials and a core group of vicious crooks and killers. But the muddled writing and twists and turns overwhelm the thinly drawn characters and make you long for a straightaway.

It's hard for a reviewer to resist automotive metaphors when a book is about a driver. Stuck in second gear, car wreck and crash and burn leap to mind.

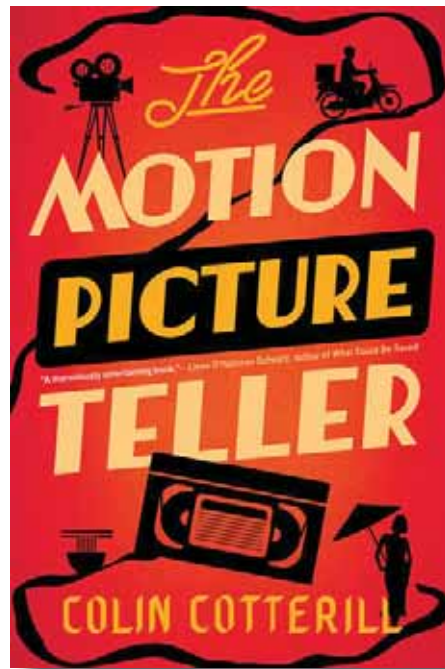
THE MOTION PICTURE TELLER

By Colin Cotterill
Soho Crime; \$27.95
Rating: A

First line: There were two worlds.

Absolutely unique, Colin Cotterill's **THE MOTION PICTURE TELLER** is a terrific thriller set in Bangkok. It provides a deep dive into a subculture, not at the lowest level of poverty, but not far up the food chain. Think *Slum Dog Millionaire* mashed up with *Cinema Paradiso* and set in Thailand

Supot is a Thai mailman and his



best friend Ali runs a video rental store. Neither makes much money. Both adore films. Thai films, foreign films, any films. One night, a neighborhood scrap man brings in a box of old videos he's somehow acquired and the boys give him a few coins for them. One of the items is a hand-labeled video called Bangkok 2010 which turns out, for the friends, to be one of the best Thai movies of all time. They watch it again and again and obsess about it. Even with their encyclopedic knowledge of Thai filmmaking, the video is a mystery. They have never heard of or seen any of the filmmakers or actors.

They decide they must find out who made the film and why it has never been released. And that mystery propels the book.

Supot's quest is absorbing, in turns funny and poignant. The answers he finds come at a cost. I highly recommend this stunningly original book.

JACKAL

By Erin E. Adams
Bantam Books; \$27.00
Rating: C

First line: Tanisha Walker loved the stars.

Erin Adams' **JACKAL** is a gut punch

of a debut novel. The voice is fresh and absolutely authentic and draws you in to an extent rarely found in thrillers, even those written by the most acclaimed writers.

Unfortunately, the novel derails at around the two-thirds mark. I have rarely been so hopeful about a novel. Or so disappointed.

Johnstown, Pennsylvania, best known for its disastrous flood in the 1800's, is Liz Rocher's hometown. Black girls like Liz are very rare in nearly all-white Johnstown and Liz fled for big-city life as quickly as she could. Now, she is back in town for her childhood best friend's wedding outside of town. Her prickly relationship with her mother and her best friend's pre-wedding jitters are bad enough but during the wedding dinner the bride and groom's young daughter goes missing. Liz had promised to keep an eye on her but she vanished without a trace into the woods.

As the town mobilizes for the search, Liz gradually picks up mentions of a string of Black girls who disappeared, one each year around the same time. Each was explained, a runaway, a victim of abuse, a hunting accident, a wild animal attack. Liz also gets uncomfortable vibes from the police and the white patriarchy who run the town. Theories are advanced. From a monster in the woods, to a secret KKK cell, no one is above suspicion and no one is safe.

Peppered throughout the narrative are chapters from the POV of the girls who vanished. There are also traces of the thoughts of the perpetrator. But as the novel progresses, the writing becomes less lyrical and more irrational until this A-Child-Is-Missing book veers off into territory that is more Stephen King than Harlan Coben.

Since this is Erin E. Adams' first novel and since her Author's Note references a lot of input from publishing professionals, I'm guessing that this would have been a more straightforward and better novel without all the help. The gorgeous and authentic voice that begins the story devolves into awkward and messy gibberish. I'm hoping that the author delivers again and keeps her next book on track.

THE FAMILY CHAO

By Lan Samantha
Norton; \$16.95
Rating: B

First line: For thirty-five years, everyone supported Leo Chao's restaurant.

Lan Samantha's **THE FAMILY CHAO** is a complicated book: it's a family saga, an account of the immigrant experience, a coming of age novel, a foodie's journal, and a small-town memoir. Oh, and a murder mystery.

Of course, it's also a reimagining of **THE BROTHERS KARAMAZOV** in America. Like in Javier Cercas' **EVEN THE DARKEST NIGHT**, the reverential tribute to **LES MISERABLES**, is only partially successful. Sometimes the problem with so-called literary mysteries is that they succeed at neither.

Leo Chao and his wife Winnie immigrated from China and settled in a small town in Wisconsin, opening a restaurant and introducing Midwesterners to Chinese food. They prosper and raise three sons to adulthood before Winnie leaves Leo to live out her last years in a nearby Spiritual House with Buddhist nuns. Like all families, the Chaos have their ups and downs but, basically, they all hate Leo. The sons all come back to town for the restaurant's annual Christmas party and the next morning Leo is found dead.

The novel jumps back and forth is time and among the characters to explain Leo's many flaws and the extent to which his misbehavior has injured his loved ones. Each of his sons, in particular, have a motive for patricide.

It is not for nothing that the plural of the family name is Chaos.

MOTHER DAUGHTER TRAITOR SPY

By Susan Elia MacNeal
Bantam; \$28.00
Rating: C

First line: Imagine—it's a year from now, 1941, or maybe even '42—and Germany and the Axis have won the war," Hermann Schwinn was saying in a thick accent.

Susan MacNeal's **MOTHER DAUGHTER TRAITOR SPY** is a romantic spy novel set in Los Angeles in the run up to the Second World War. A mother and her college graduate daughter relocate from New York to the West Coast to make a fresh start. Blonde and blue-eyed, they are quickly embraced by local Nazi supporters and almost as quickly recruited as spies for the government.

Marred by clunky writing almost as dated as the events depicted, the novel feels old fashioned and stale, despite the efforts to shoehorn in some proto-feminism and diversity awareness. The characters are thinly drawn, the plot is predictable, and the moments of jeopardy quickly resolved.

Compare this to James Kestrel's excellent **FIVE DECEMBERS** which also incorporates romance and history in the same period. No contest.

BOUND

By Vanda Symon
Orenda Books; \$8.99
Sam Shepard #4
Rating: A-

First line: The image of the clock's hands burned into her retinas as she stared, willing her eyes to stay focused, there, on that spot.

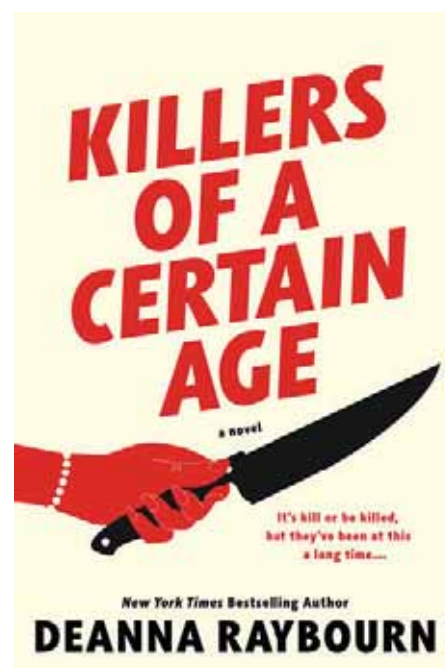
BOUND by Vanda Symon is an excellent, if conventional, police procedural set in New Zealand. Detective Sam (Samantha) Shepard leads the investigation of a gruesome murder when a local businessman is shot at close range and his wife is gagged and bound nearby.

When one of the suspects is found dead, and the other goes missing, the tension ratchets up.

A Kiwi Michael Connelly, Symon does an exceptional job of juggling Sam's personal and professional issues while advancing the case. The New Zealand setting in the city of Dunedin, and the Kiwi-inflected dialect lends interest, as well.

KILLERS OF A CERTAIN AGE

By Deanna Raybourn
Berkley; \$27.00



Rating: A

First line: "My mother always says it's common as pig tracks to go around with a run in your stocking," Helen says, eyeing Billie's ripped hosiery critically.

KILLERS OF A CERTAIN AGE—and what a great title that is—by Deanna Raybourn is a delightful mashup of **THE THURSDAY MURDER CLUB** with the movie, **REDS**, which stood for Retired, Extremely Dangerous.

Four women in their sixties are given a luxury cruise on the Mediterranean for their years of service to a shadowy ex-government agency. In fact, they have been elite assassins for forty years. What began as a mission to identify and terminate Nazis in hiding around the world, has become a special squad that eliminates all kinds of high-level undesirables: drug lords, sex traffickers, dictators, and the like. Highly trained and experienced, they perceive a threat to them before it happens, manage to escape and go off grid. They must find out who is behind the kill order and why the four of them have been targeted.

A MAN NAMED DOLL

By Jonathan Ames
Mulholland; \$16.99
Happy Doll #1

Rating: A-

First line: Shelton had always been a hard man to kill.

A MAN NAMED DOLL by Jonathan Ames introduces Happy Doll, an ex-military, ex-cop, private investigator. Doll is quirky and relatable. He's in Freudian analysis and is maybe a little too attached to his dog.

When a sick friend asks him to donate a kidney, Doll, disconcerted, asks for time to think it over. By the time he is prepared to say yes, his friend turns up dying of a bullet wound. Regretful and saddened, Doll vows to find his friend's killer.

Although the exposition is a little clunky and the action slow to brew, the depiction of the underside of L.A. is memorable. Washed up television stars and shady cops and unscrupulous gangsters all meet in this noir thriller.

Doll is the most engaging noir protagonist in years. You will want to follow his further adventures, if he can survive this one.

THE WHEEL OF DOLL

By Jonathan Ames
Mulholland; \$26.00
Happy Doll #2
Rating: A

First line: One of my flaws is that I'm a great one for asking questions, but I'm mediocre to poor at answers.

Jonathan Ames' **THE WHEEL OF DOLL** is an exceptional noir thriller! Happy Doll, a scarred Los Angeles PI, is a bundle of contradictions. He is trying to be a good Buddhist. He is lethally aggressive, but only when he has to. He uses illegal drugs, but only to self-medicate. He has a soft spot for dogs and ex-girlfriends. He specializes in finding missing persons.

When a woman named Mary DeAngelo hires Doll to find her mother, Ines, Doll's former lover, he can't turn her down. But the level of violence he encounters along the way severely challenges his Buddhist principles.

Written in the first person like all

classic PI noir thrillers, **THE WHEEL OF DOLL** follows Happy as he tracks down Ines and then the men behind the plot to kill her. The writing is spare and crisp. The settings evocative. The pacing breathless. The violence realistic and scarring.

But Doll also has memories and yearnings and heart. There is a scene in a hotel bathroom with a double-amputee that is heartbreakingly beautiful and poignant.

THE WHEEL OF DOLL is the second in the Doll series. It is better than the first one, **A MAN NAMED DOLL**. But if you, like me, prefer to read a series in order, you will want to begin at the beginning. As a stand-alone, **THE WHEEL OF DOLL** is a nearly perfect noir novel. If you're a fan of this genre, it's a must read!



NO PLAN B

By Lee Child and Andrew Child
Delacorte Press; \$28.99
Reacher #27
Rating: A

First line: The meeting was held in a room with no windows.

NO PLAN B is a brilliant Jack Reacher thriller, the 27th in the series; the third by Lee Child writing with Andrew Child. **NO PLAN B** explodes off the page with non-stop action, several twisty plots, and a host of well-drawn

and memorable characters.

"If you see something, say something," is a national anti-terrorism campaign slogan. Jack Reacher has his own version: If you see something, do something. When he gets a glimpse of a photograph he shouldn't see, it sets him in motion. When he witnesses a seemingly random crime, he picks up the pace. When he sees the tip of an iceberg, he starts swimming. Before long, he's a one-man army bearing down on a massive and highly organized criminal enterprise. Mayhem ensues.

Much has been written about the changes in the series since Lee Child acquired a coauthor. Most of it has been pointless, mean-spirited bitching. I'm hoping **NO PLAN B** puts the complainers to rest. It's a great read. Well-paced, well-plotted, and well-executed. It's a terrific thriller. Note to the supposed Lee Child purists: Shut up.

BLOWN BY THE SAME WIND

By John Straley
Soho Press; \$27.95
Cold Storage #4
Rating: D

First line: It was late spring of 1968 and the abbot of the Gethsemane was shaken to the core of his faith.

BLOWN BY THE SAME WIND is the fourth book in John Straley's Cold Storage novels (I have not read the first three) set in the eponymous town in Alaska. Think Jack London mashed up with Raymond Chandler and you get the general idea.

It is 1968. Thomas Merton (an actual historical character), a monk from Kentucky, has written a book about faith that becomes an accidental best-seller. His abbot recommends a time-out in a remote part of the world to let the unwelcome attention subside. The brother makes his way to Cold Storage where he is not the only interloper, nor the strangest one. Two well-heeled good old boys from the U.S. South come up ostensibly for the fishing but they seem to have a hidden agenda.

The first third of the book is solid exposition: the town, the weather, the

landscape, the wildlife, the usual. The people are a collection of the usual stereotypes: the gorgeous love-child who doesn't realize the effect she has on men, the Vietnam vet with PTSD, the hippies who just want to smoke weed and commune with nature, the level-headed bar owner, the ex-cop from the lower 48 who keeps an eye out for trouble, the fishermen, the bears. You can almost hear the voice of Morgan Freeman narrating the travelogue for the Discovery Channel. I was just getting ready to either fall asleep or fling the book against the wall when I read something so startling that I sat straight up and forgot all about that incipient nap. I won't spoil it but it was the equivalent of listening to someone's elderly grandfather's boring life story and then having him mention that he'd been Marilyn Monroe's first lover. It fell on the sleepy book like a bombshell. Unfortunately, it was a dud.

The shot of adrenaline, while welcome, was not enough. It wasn't handled well enough to become any more than an interesting sideshow. The book builds, very slowly, toward a climax. When it comes, the author cuts away, letting the one big action scene be recounted years later and far away. This is unbelievably irritating. Did his nerve fail him? Did he think it was more literary to bury the action? Did he sadistically decide to torment the patient few who stuck with him by denying them the catharsis? Did he scare himself by thinking up a genuinely promising subplot and stick his head back in the sand? Who knows?

The book staggers and stumbles to a messy conclusion. It ends, as it starts, with exposition and a meditation on nature. Ho hum.

A HEART FULL OF HEADSTONES

By Ian Rankin

Little, Brown; \$28.00

Rating: Not Rated, Not Finished

First line: John Rebus had been in court plenty of times, but this was his first time in the dock.

Is it just me or is this series seriously played out? After more than 25 John Rebus novels, Ian Rankin offers **A HEART**

FULL OF HEADSTONES, a novel as inane and ponderous as its title.

The pace is very slow. The tone is uniformly glum. The characters, the usual assortment of exhausted Scottish police officers and mostly petty criminals. The plot a shopworn tale of corrupt cops, nasty prison guards and abused prisoners. Rebus himself stands accused.

I staggered through about a third of it.

If you're a massive Ian Rankin fan, you'll probably buy it on autopilot, and read it the same way. If you're not, I don't recommend this as a gateway drug.

Why do some long running series just keep getting better? I think it has to do with the main character, and whether they keep getting better. After a double-digit series, I can still happily dive into the latest exploits of Jack Reacher, Jack Taylor, Ian Rutherford, Harry Bosch, Lincoln Rhyme, Alex Cross, Armand Gamache or Precious Ramotswe. But when the series' center is as joyless and world weary as John Rebus, I just want to do something else. Anything else.

TINA, MAFIA SOLDIER

By Maria Rosa Cutrufelli

Translated by Robin Pickering-Iazzi

Soho Crime; \$24.95

Rating: Unrated. Not finished.

First line: The separation was sharp, obvious, desired.

Maria Rosa Cutrufelli's **TINA, MAFIA SOLDIER** may be a good novel about a Sicilian woman who works her way to the top ranks of the local Mafia but I can't verify it. The book, or maybe just the translation, makes for an annoying read, full of inchoate descriptions, word clouds and sentence fragments, and I couldn't read much of it.

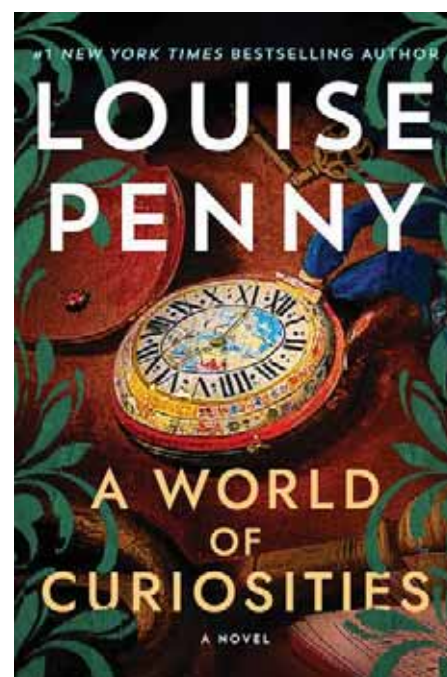
A WORLD OF CURIOSITIES

By Louise Penny

Minotaur Books; \$29.99

Rating: A

First line: "Oh, *merde*."



Louise Penny's amazing Inspector Gamache series continues with **A WORLD OF CURIOSITIES**, an excellent addition to one of the best long series around. Chief Inspector Armand Gamache, head of homicide for the Sûreté du Québec, is haunted by some of his most horrific cases. Now, a figure from his past returns to haunt him. A series of puzzles need to be deciphered. Will Gamache be able to unravel the mystery in time?

Bibliophiles with OCPD struggle to categorize Penny's work. Strictly speaking, the stories are police procedurals beginning with a crime or crimes that need to be solved and proceeding to the resolution. But that seems too narrow a focus for these books. Some call her novels cozy for their depiction of a loving community of families and friends. Some call her books thrillers because they frequently have high stakes and international consequences. Some call her noir for her detailed depiction of horrendous crimes and her dissection of the darkest pathologies.

She is both up to the minute in her exploration of challenging issues of child abuse, pedophilia, misogyny and racism, and yet not afraid to introduce elements of magic realism that elevate and enhance the action. She explores good and evil in a way that makes you

realize how many authors only pay lip service to the concept. She isn't afraid to put the good under a microscope, as well as the evil. Add to this the writing itself, so lyrical and gorgeous that the term literary fiction is not far off the mark. So where do we shelve Louise Penny? Take your pick.

Among the many pleasures of the Armand Gamache series is the inclusion and often the focus on arts that don't usually have a place in crime novels. Her coterie of characters, the friends and neighbors in the village of Three Pines, include a well-known painter and an award-winning poet. Penny's plots frequently revolve around a painting which is described in detail, and then described again and again as various aspects of the work come to light. She also frequently refers to poems in the local woman's canon and uses lines of poetry to illuminate and enhance the action.

Think, for a moment, about what an amazing feat it is for a crime writer to so beautifully and meaningfully depict works of art. To include fine art in crime detection. To show Chief Inspector Gamache as a well-read and well-rounded polymath, instead of the focused and relentless bloodhound found elsewhere. Instead of the typical damaged, alcoholic, divorced cop, Armand is a loving family man, an excellent boss, and a devoted mentor.

THE REFUSAL CAMP

Stories by James R. Benn
Soho Press; \$26.95

Rating: Not rated. Not all stories were read completely.

James R. Benn is an award-winning author of the Billy Boyle series of World War II mysteries. **THE REFUSAL CAMP** is his first published collection of short stories. I can only assume that his reputation ensured their publication. The publication was probably the product of the same reasoning as Elon Musk ruining Twitter and Kanye West ruining his reputation: they are too big to fail and no one had the nerve to stand up and tell them, "It's crap."

This disagreeable mess of short stories are mainly about war. They seem

to be cut from the same cloth as the old boy's adventure stories in ancient pulps, a nasty mixture of O'Henry and Jack London. Ghostly, derivative descriptions, hackneyed dialogue and smug little twist endings. Ugh. The ones that aren't war-related include a terrible ghost story and one single science fiction effort.

The science fiction story, "Glass" is the exception. It's a wonderful tale that was previously published in 2021 in *Alfred Hitchcock Mystery Magazine*. It is delightful to read and leaps off the page in a way that the other eight stories fail to do. It's both an homage and a super-hero origin story—if your super-hero is Stephen King. Read it. It's almost worth the price of the volume.

LOCUST LANE

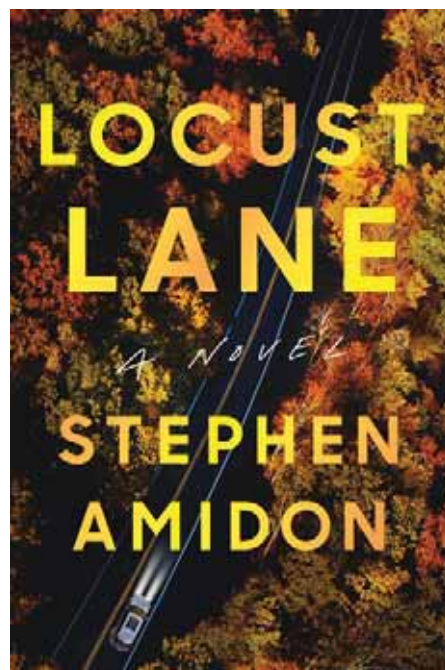
By Stephen Amidon
Celadon Books; \$26.99

Rating: A

First line: He hit the dog on Locust.

Stephen Amidon's **LOCUST LANE** is a suburban noir thriller that packs a gut punch. It starts out in Harlan Coben territory but quickly veers into the Harlan Ellison zone.

A girl is killed in a wealthy neighborhood of an upscale Massachusetts



town. She had been partying with three other kids who quickly become suspects. What had fueled the crime? Drinking, drugs, sex? All of the above. Add in a soupçon of bullying, insecurity, self-harm, privilege, religion, race and xenophobia and you've got all the ingredients. Throw in the rich, entitled parents, their lawyers, and a successful restaurateur, and you've got the recipe for a fine noir dish. Simmer as the pace heats up and the tension becomes relentless. Delicious. Chef's kiss.

Let me mention that I don't like place names as book titles. It's lazy and weak. Boo. But I do like an author with the balls to kill (or at least injure) a dog in the first line. Bravo.

OCEAN STATE

By Stewart O'Nan
Atlantic Monthly Press; \$27.00
Rating: B-

First line: When I was in eighth grade, my sister helped kill another girl.

Stewart O'Nan's **OCEAN STATE** is a deep dive into adolescence. It's well-written and well-paced, but I didn't care for it. Think Megan Abbott on downers. Yikes.

Despite its excellent and provocative first line, **OCEAN STATE** (a terrible, annoying book title, by the way) is a microscopic dissection of teenage angst. It's like an autopsy—you know what's in there but you don't really want to examine every icky, smelly, nasty bit of it.

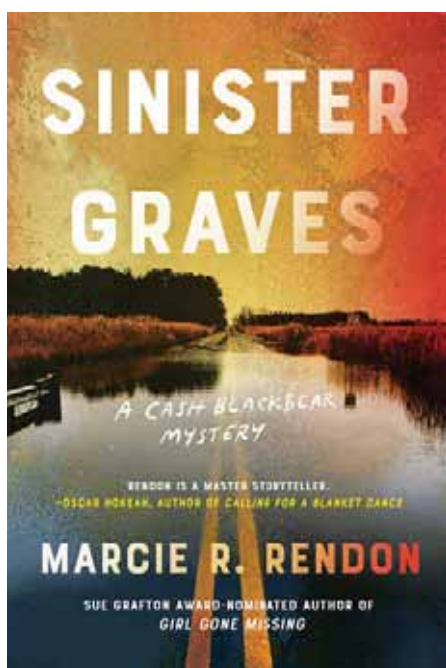
The book also never lives up to its beginning. You do eventually find out pretty much what happened, but by the time all is revealed, you just don't care anymore. Anyway, round up the usual suspects: economic disparity, puberty, raging hormones, team sports, body dysmorphia, competitive nature, self-doubt, despair, jealousy, broken families, poor role models, genetic flaws. It's all there. Enjoy.

SINISTER GRAVES

By Marcie R. Rendon
Soho Crime; \$27.95

Rating: A-

First line: Cash sat in a battered



fishing boat on a murky floodwater that was heading to the Red River.

Marcie R. Rendon's **SINISTER GRAVES** is an excellent Native American noir, somewhere between a procedural and an amateur sleuth. Call it sleuth-in-training. It's also got a touch of the supernatural. It's the third book in a Cash Blackbear mystery series, but functions as a stand-alone. I haven't read the first two, but the series shows promise.

The protagonist, Renee "Cash" Blackbear is a 19-year-old Ojibwe woman living in Minnesota near Fargo, North Dakota. The local sheriff, Wheaton, asks her to help identify a young Native woman found in the floodwaters. Cash drives around, asks some questions, and uncovers not only the woman's name but a bigger mystery that involves racism, abuse, religious exploitation, black market baby selling and murder.

Cash is the lovechild of Walt Longmire and Kate Shugak. If Craig Johnson, writing from Wyoming, and Dana Stabenow, writing from Alaska, met halfway, they would be in Marcie R. Rendon's Minnesota. Throw in a little Nevada Barr and you're all set.

I expect this to turn into a profoundly enjoyable long-running series.

YESTERDAY'S SPY

By Tom Bradby
Atlantic Monthly Press; \$27.00

Rating: B

First Line: In another time and place, it would have taken all of Harry's self-control not to laugh at the spectacle in front of him.

Tom Bradby's **YESTERDAY'S SPY** is a good spy thriller set in Iran in the early 1950's, right after WWII. Harry Tower is an aging British spy and returns to Tehran when his only son, an idealistic journalist, has disappeared. Estranged from his son after his wife's death, Harry searches for Sean against the backdrop of the coup that put the Shah in control of Iran and its oil riches. Swarming with British agents, Americans, Russians and other players, Iran is a powder keg waiting to be ignited. Harry teams up with his son's Iranian girlfriend and uses every contact, every favor and every secret from a lifetime of covert action.

Interspersed with flashbacks to Germany before the war and to a desperate, failed mission years earlier, **YESTERDAY'S SPY** unpacks its secrets slowly.

Is there anything sadder than an old spy? Their skills are rusty, their politics are suspect, their colleagues are fewer and their superiors more willing to pass them by. **YESTERDAY'S SPY** has a slow start but picks up speed and races to an exciting finish. Bradby is not as charmingly eccentric as John le Carré, nor as hip and funny as Mick Herron. But for spy enthusiasts, he'll do.

THE MURDER OF MR. WICKHAM

By Claudia Gray
Vintage Books; \$17.00

Rating: A-

First line: The marriage of Mr. and Mrs. Knightly of Donwell Abbey had been a surprise to those who knew them best and not in the least surprising to those who knew them hardly at all.

Claudia Gray's delicious fanfic, **THE MURDER OF MR. WICKHAM**, will delight all who love Jane Austen best and will not in the least please those

who love her only in a serious and scholarly way.

Using characters from the Austen canon, including **PRIDE AND PREJUDICE**, **EMMA**, **NORTHANGER ABBEY**, **MANSFIELD PARK**, and **SENSE AND SENSIBILITY** and setting the story a bit later, in 1820, Claudia Gray has crafted a delightful cozy mystery set at a house party given by the Knightleys at Donwell Abbey. When the odious Mr. Wickham turns up, uninvited, he offends nearly everyone present. His schemes include fraud, blackmail, and sexual assault. Nearly every one of the dozen guests has a motive to kill him. One of them does.

When the local magistrate seems convinced that a stranger, probably a gypsy, is the culprit or perhaps one of the servants, a charming pair of amateur sleuths decides to perform their own investigation. That they are the marriage-age son of one pair of guests and the marriage-age visiting daughter of family friends just adds to the fun.

By the way, extra points to Claudia Gray for making one character a convincing Asperger's sufferer, by describing the symptoms without naming the syndrome or breaching the period ethos. Brava!

DESERT STAR

By Michael Connelly
Little Brown; \$29.00

Rating: A

First line: Bosch had the pills lined up on the table ready to go.

The newest title in the Renée Ballard and Harry Bosch series, **DESERT STAR**, is, like most of the thirty plus Connelly books that preceded it, a straight-up procedural. Ballard is head of a newly formed cold case squad in the LAPD. She brings Bosch out of retirement to help, luring him with the promise of working on his own unsolved cases with the resources of the task force, as well as others. One priority case involves the unsolved killing of a prominent politician's sister many years earlier. But Harry's own *bête noire* is the unsolved murder of a family—father, mother, sis-

ter, brother—found buried in a shallow grave in the desert years ago.

The two cases are reviewed, witnesses and suspects are found and questioned, evidence is looked at with fresh eyes, the latest forensic tests are run. Slowly, new facts and theories emerge, the trail is followed, pieces come together. Textbook procedural stuff. But none of that explains why this book—why any of the Bosch or Ballard books—are so extraordinarily good. The writing is spare and not overly descriptive. There's no attempt to wring emotion from horrific crime scenes. There is scarcely a wasted word. The characters don't flaunt their flaws or back-stories. No late nights drinking and smoking and looking into the abyss.

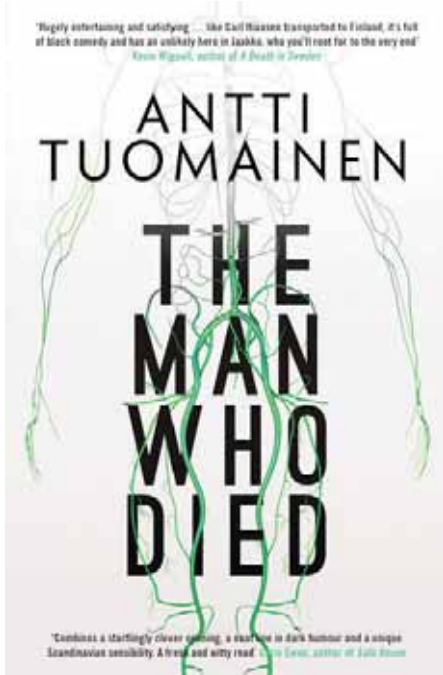
But the drive that good detectives have, the determination to solve the crime, to catch the criminal, to identify the perpetrator, is the moral engine that propels the books. The pace is not fast but it is relentless. The desire to clear the cases becomes our own. We read because we, too, care.

THE MAN WHO DIED

By Antti Tuomainen

Translated by David Hackston

Orenda Books; \$14.95



Rating: A

First line: "It's a good job you provided a urine sample, too."

Finnish writer Antti Tuomainen's funny, dark **THE MAN WHO DIED** was actually published in his home country a couple years ago, but I'm just catching up with it. If you haven't read it yet, add it to your list.

It has a great opening—a small town businessman has gone to the doctor with a bunch of odd symptoms and is told that blood tests confirm that he's been poisoned and that the effects, while progressing slowly, are irreversible. He's going to die. Soon. And he's been murdered.

This is fine psychological noir. As much a meditation on death—and life—as a thriller, and the first-person protagonist, Jaakko Kaunismaa, takes time to reflect on his coming demise. But he has other items on his to-to list. He must find out who killed him, and he needs to shepherd his fledgling mushroom business through a critical juncture.

Thoroughly enjoyable, utterly original, **THE MAN WHO DIED** is by turns funny and tragic and always mesmerizing. Highly recommended.

THE MIMICKING OF KNOWN SUCCESSES

By Malka Older

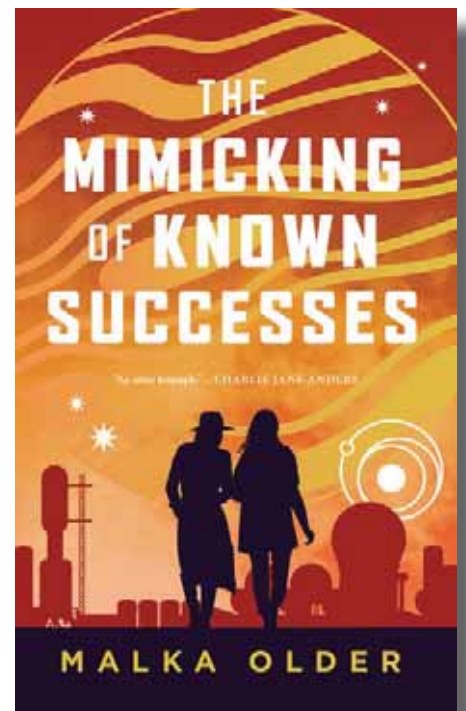
Tor Dot Com; \$19.99

Rating: A

First Line: The man had disappeared from an isolated platform; the furthest platform eastward, in fact, on the 4⁰⁶³' line, never a very popular ring.

She had me from **WATERSHIP DOWN!**

For those who like crossover mystery/science fiction, I highly recommend the excellent **THE MIMICKING OF KNOWN SUCCESSES**. Malka Older has set a police procedural on Giant, a



moon of Jupiter, many years after mankind has rendered Earth uninhabitable. Mossa, an Investigator, has been sent to the academic community Valdegeld to trace a professor who has disappeared. She enlists the help of her former girlfriend, Pleiti, who is herself now an academic researcher. Together, they talk to the man's colleagues and pursue the clues as the disappearance seems increasingly to have an import beyond a simple missing person's case.

Pleiti's research has to do with the environment and ecosystems on Earth before it was ruined. If she and her fellow scientists can map the lost ecosystem, they may be able to re-grow it from cells and samples in storage on Giant. In the course of her research, Pleiti talks about a book she is studying: "There's a wealth of descriptions of the flora and fauna in a highly circumscribed, clearly identified area... Have you any idea of the range of plants wild rabbits might eat?" The image of a future scientist on a livable but inhospitable planet poring over **WATERSHIP DOWN** undid me.

Beyond the case another question looms: will Mossa and Pleiti rekindle their college romance?

I adored this book. Give it a try.

Neither Tarnished Nor Afraid

Kevin Burton Smith



Long time reader, first time columnist. Yeah, it's me. Welcome to my first column for *Deadly Pleasures*, where I'll be trying to deal with assorted private eye (or at least private eye adjacent) fare. I'll be covering books, of course, probably some movies or TV shows, and maybe even a comic or two.

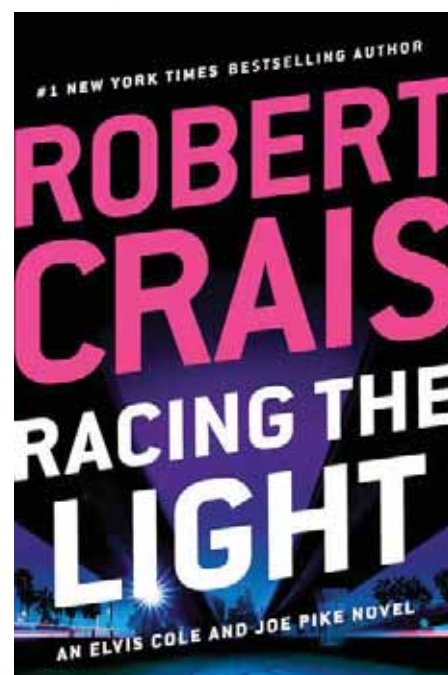
For those of you who don't know me, I'm the founder and editor of a cyber scribble called *The Thrilling Detective Web Site* which has been clogging up the internet for a quarter of a century, and I've written articles about "tough dicks and janes who make trouble their business—and not their hobby" for a slew of magazines, blogs and web sites. I also occasionally attend mystery conventions and have appeared on assorted panels. I'll be at Bouchercon this year—if you want me, I'll be in the bar. I'm also a proud member of the Private Eye Writers of America, and I'm already

bored talking about myself. So let's get on with it...

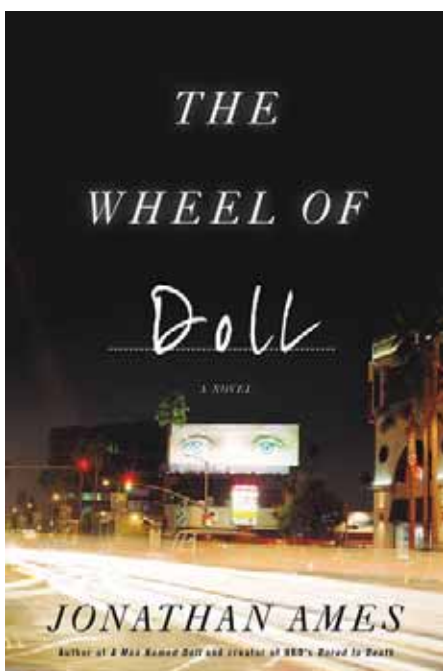
Not since John Shannon's Jack Liffey has a P.I. gone through such an emotional and physical wringer, but only two books in, Jonathan Ames' *Happy Doll* is coming up fast. Before *THE WHEEL OF THE DOLL* (Mulholland) even begins, the downwardly mobile Los Angeles eye with the unfortunate monicker has lost a kidney, received a disfiguring facial scar, and had his heart smashed to smithereens. After the emotional tsunami of the series debut, the sophomore effort is only a slight letdown—mostly because Happy's bartender friend is absent from the mix and not mentioned at all (and damn it, I sorta liked her). Fortunately, his trusty canine companion George, "half Chihuahua, half terrier of some kind and quite springy," is back to greet Happy when he returns home from his travails. And Lord knows Happy needs a friendly face after this latest case, which sees the detective traveling to Olympia, Washington, searching for an ex-lover, Ines Candle, on behalf of her daughter, who's married to a wealthy jackass Happy doesn't trust at all. And it's soon clear there's more to finding Ines than a simple missing persons case.

Ines, a homeless junkie, has fallen on harder times than most people will ever face, and Happy's attempts to save her and set the world right may be more than the half-ass Buddhist can take. Ames isn't afraid to get down and dirty, and this series could easily tip over into hard-boiled parody were it not for the fact Ames writes like a dream, filling the pages with breathtaking action and heartbreak, and characters who matter, not just to the reader but to each other—something only the best writers pull off.

--Like Robert Crais, another writer not afraid to put a little heart into his hard-boiled tales of Hollywood eye Elvis Cole. His latest, *RACING THE LIGHT* (G.P. Putnam & Sons), not only features a crackerjack case for him to solve, but



finally (at least for the time being) resolves the whole shit-or-get-off-the-pot Lucy relationship. Yeah, some reader's disdain for on-again/off-again lover reaches almost Susan Silverman levels, but not me—either I'm too sensitive, or else I'm getting soft, but I like my heroes to have some sort of credible emotional depth, and to care for a woman who can hold her own (and is a bit more evolved than Honey West). An accomplished Louisiana lawyer, a single mom and the survivor of a genuinely toxic marriage, Lucy and her son Ben are coming for a visit, and Lucy wants to "talk"—but that's just a sidebar to the rollicking main event, because Elvis and his eternally fierce partner Joe Pike are in



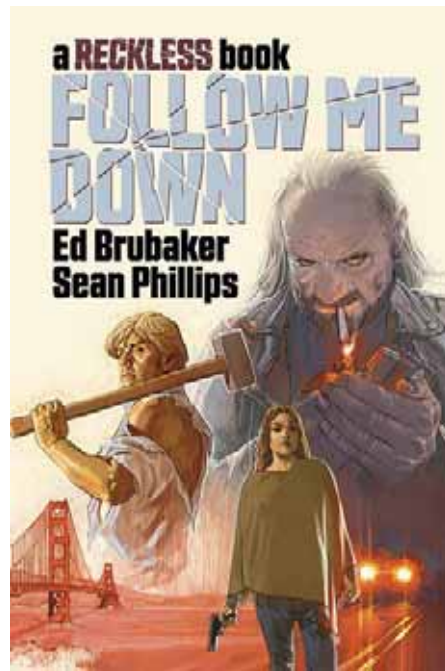
the midst of a complex missing persons case that's threatening to go completely off the rails.

They're hired by an eccentric woman with plenty of few secrets of her own to find "Josh Shoe," her muckraking podcaster son, who seems to have vanished while researching a story—as has a young sex worker he's previously interviewed. Everyone dismisses Josh as just another social media doofus trolling for likes, but soon enough, bodies start to pile up, and Elvis and Joe realize somebody out there is playing for keeps.

This may be Crais' best since **L.A. REQUIEM**, and probably my favorite book of 2022.

Maybe I really am getting soft. Anyway, my third pick this month, **FOLLOW ME DOWN** (Image Comics) by American writer Ed Brubaker and U.K. artist Sean Phillips, is another heartbreaker. This fifth volume in the acclaimed series of hardcover graphic novels unearths a surprising new side to L.A.'s cold, cynical Ethan Reckless. The FBI dropout turned slacker shamus who'd rather watch old movies or surf, doesn't really look for work—he only takes cases that interest him. And he doesn't get involved. Ever.

Until a neighbour, Francis, asks for a favor. Ethan reluctantly agrees—he owes him—and points his battered van north, heading for San Francisco, a city still recovering from the recent October 1989 quake ("they're still pulling bodies from the wreckage"). His goal? To find Francis' daughter-in-law Rachel, an ex-junkie, who's taken a powder, leaving her husband (Francis' son) in bad shape. Reckless figures he'll find the runaway wife "in some basement, dead, with a needle in her arm" but soon realizes she's "in a much worse place than that." Seems the psychologically damaged Rachel has some long-overdue scores to settle, and somehow Mr. Never-Get-Involved—much to his own surprise—agrees to accompany Rachel on her mission of vengeance, ripping into family secrets like some alternate-universe Lew Archer—although Ross Macdonald's soft-spoken gumshoe probably never



smashed a portable TV over a scumbag's head just to get a few answers...

Meanwhile, Phillips' noirish artwork, all fine lines and heartbreak and clearly deeply researched, nails the dark, tattered vibe of a time and place: the jails, the cheap motel rooms, the lonely beaches, the battered cars and the broken people—the attention to detail is so perfect it hurts. But not as haunting and bittersweet as the drawn-out concluding coda that fades into black—one of the most moving epilogues I've witnessed in a long time.

Well, that's it for now. You can email me at kvnsmith@thrillingdetective.com, or visit me at thrillingdetective.com.



2023 Left Coast Crime "Lefty" Award Nominations

Best Mystery Novel

Kellye Garrett, **LIKE A SISTER**
Laurie R. King, **BACK TO THE GARDEN**

James L'Etoile, **DEAD DROP**
Gigi Pandian, **UNDER LOCK & SKELETON KEY**

Louise Penny, **A WORLD OF CURIOSITIES**

Alex Segura, **SECRET IDENTITY**

Best Debut Mystery Novel

Erin E. Adams, **JACKAL**
Eli Cranor, **DON'T KNOW TOUGH**
Ramona Emerson, **SHUTTER**
Meredith Hambrock, **OTHER PEOPLE'S SECRETS**
Harini Nagendra, **THE BANGALORE DETECTIVES CLUB**
Rob Osler, **DEVIL'S CHEW TOY**
Jane Pek, **THE VERIFIERS**

Best Humorous Mystery Novel

Ellen Byron, **BAYOU BOOK THIEF**
Jennifer J. Chow, **DEATH BY BUBBLE TEA**
A.J. Devlin, **FIVE MOVES OF DOOM**
T.G. Herren, **A STREETCAR NAMED MURDER**
Catriona McPherson, **SCOT IN A TRAP**

Bill Gottfried Award for Best Historical Mystery

Dianne Freeman, **A BRIDE'S GUIDE TO MARRIAGE AND MURDER**
Catriona McPherson, **IN PLACE OF FEAR**
Wanda M. Morris, **ANYWHERE YOU RUN**
Karen Odden, **UNDER A VEILED MOON**
Ann Parker, **THE SECRET IN THE WALL**
Iona Whishaw, **FRAMED IN FIRE**

A Plot Thickens

Robin Agnew



A KILLING OF INNOCENTS

by Deborah Crombie

William Morrow, \$30.00, February
Duncan Kincaid/Gemma James #19

Rating: A-

I have long been a fan of Deborah Crombie's meticulous and beautifully plotted police novels set in contemporary London. Her series characters, Gemma James and Duncan Comrie, are married cops who vary in rank through the series but who both move steadily up the chain of command. In this 19th outing, Duncan is working in the field as a Detective Inspector and Gemma is stuck in a frustrating desk job. They make their home in Notting Hill, their large, busy, and happy family providing a sidebar to the main plot.

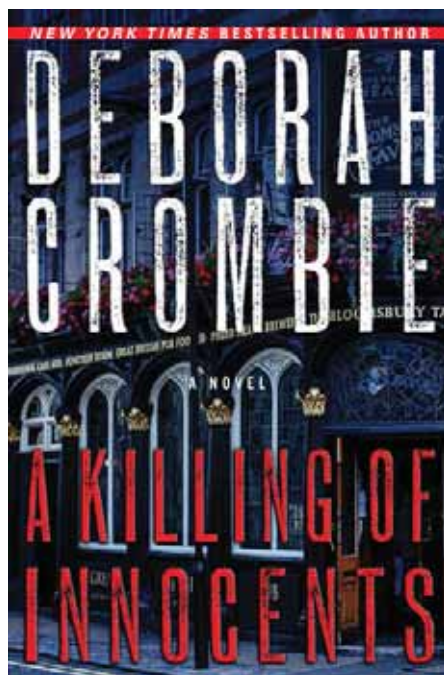
Crombie's series installments pivot between Gemma and Duncan's investigations, and this novel is mostly Duncan's. He catches the murder of a young doctor, Sasha, who was stabbed while walking through a park near her hospital. There are no witnesses (other than a five year old) and seemingly, no motive either. When one of Sasha's co-workers is killed in a similar fashion, Duncan turns to Gemma, who is presently heading up a knife crimes unit.

The second victim was an especially unpleasant and vindictive nurse, and other than mutual dislike, the connection between the two victims seems tenuous. As the police unravel the lives of the victims, the dead woman (a doctor in training, what we would probably call an intern or resident) seems universally liked, and the nurse, the opposite. The work of Duncan and his team is careful yet interesting, and Crombie has assembled, through now 19 books, a varied crew around Duncan. Because of Gemma's present assignment, she's also

involved, even going undercover in one enjoyable scene.

The new characters that struck a chord with me were Sasha's flatmate, a young potter and sculptor named Tully, and Sasha's brother, who only brings complications to the table. He is, as a British friend of my mother's used to say, a bad hat, so on top of the grief Sasha's parents go through, they are also forced to worry about their son, who has disappeared. Crombie has a way of creating characters that assume an almost tangible reality in your mind and as I read, I could almost "see" Tully.

I could not put this one down. Sometimes Crombie can elaborate a theme, but in this novel, the plot seems to be the thing, along with Crombie's often exquisite prose and sharply rendered characters. If there's a theme, it's probably revenge, but mostly it's a complex look at a complicated set of crimes. What a wonderful return for



this beloved series.

HIDDEN IN THE PINES

by Victoria Houston

Crooked Lane, \$29.99, January

Lew Ferris #2

Rating: B+

This was my first time reading a Victoria Houston novel, the second in her series focusing on Sheriff Lew Ferris. Set just outside tiny Rhinelander, Wisconsin, in a northern part of the state where lots of people like to summer, the setting creates a situation where there's lots of money on the part of some residents and lots of hard work on the part of others.

Houston salts her story with interesting women. There's Lew herself, newly elected Sherriff, and hoping to still get in some fly fishing time, there's Dani, her admin, who wanted to be a beautician and so gets time off for manicures when needed, and there's Judith Hanson, just retired, and returning north to her parent's place to see if she can figure out the mystery behind her sixteen year old sister's death many years back. She takes a job working for Lew, despite her daughter's request for her to buy a condo and move near her and the grandkids.

This is a cozy-ish set up but the story itself is not so cozy, and Houston writes with the crisp assurance of a seasoned thriller writer. She introduces the wealthy Brinkerhoff family, whose newly constructed home is the talk of the town, and then sets the stage for the murder of a young woman, eerily similar to that of Judith's sister many years ago. The police work involved is meticulous, and there are two cases that intertwine, leading to a satisfying resolution.

I loved the sense of place here, and I loved the company of the women I found in it as I was reading. Houston has a narrative flow that moves her story with lightning speed – I was sorry to close the cover when I was finished.

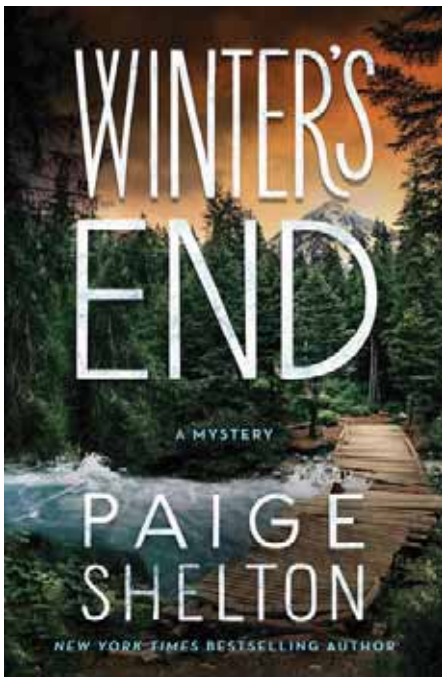
WINTER'S END

by Paige Shelton,

Minotaur, \$26.99, December, 2022

Alaska Wild #4

Rating: B+



In the fourth book featuring writer in hiding Beth Rivers, spring is coming, and tiny Benedict, Alaska, is preparing for their annual “Death Walk.” When things thaw after winter, the whole community assembles for a head count, and anyone missing is tracked down. On this spring day, the missing include a very old man who lives alone in a remote cabin, a married couple, and the husband of a woman Beth has been making friends with, Kaye. Beth accompanies her buddy Orin, the town librarian (who also occasionally does some kind of special government ops) to check on the old man. When they find him, he’s OK, but in bad shape, and Beth waits with him while Orin goes for help.

What follows is the kind of leisurely, wild storytelling Shelton excels at. She does a wonderful job of establishing this far-flung community, as well as depicting the beauty and raw power of nature – emphasizing the care that must be taken with it and the respect it must be given – while also providing a good story. Al, the old man, comes back down the hill but it’s not Orin who turns up to help get him, it’s the local law. Orin is now also missing.

Her friend Kaye, it turns out, was a member of a family in the midst of a long-standing feud. When Kaye

reaches out to the other family, all kinds of trouble follows. As Beth untangles the threads of Kaye’s life, fearing for her friend (with good reason), she also learns about this vast and lengthy family feud.

Lots of secrets come out in this book, many of them about Beth’s past, but some about other characters in the novel, notably Vi, Beth’s landlady. Beth, insatiably curious and with a way of looking at and understanding a crime scene spatially, her skills giving the cops some reason to ask for her advice. But she also hares off on her own – not an unusual thing in Alaska – and ends up off in the wild by herself (also not unusual), winding up in some perilous situations.

These are really enjoyable books. The setting is wonderful, and the characters are rich, well drawn and memorable – I always look forward to spending time with Beth and everyone in Benedict. I did miss Orin, who is mostly absent, but the oddball characters that compose the feuding families in question more than make up for his absence, as does Al’s arrival in town. The pacing of the stories is good, with revelations folding out naturally from each other, making the progression of the narrative an organic one. It seems almost like real life, but it’s real life as depicted by a gifted storyteller.

LAST SEEN IN LAPAZ

by Kwei Quartey

Soho Crime, \$27.95. February

Emma Djan #3

Rating: B

I have enjoyed both Kwei Quartey’s older series featuring Detective Darko and the newer one with private detective Emma Djan. Quartey is truly both a social justice writer as well as a mystery writer, his clever plots often framing difficult issues. He’s written about street children, alcoholism, internet scams and sexual harassment on the job. The first in this series, **THE MISSING AMERICAN**, was to me the strongest, as it set Emma on her path to being a private detective after a harassment issue that occurred while she was with the police. Emma’s character is unusual, strong,

and interesting, and it made the first novel all the better.

In this novel, Emma is entrenched in her job as a private detective, and the detection parts of the story frame the main portion of the novel, which covers human trafficking. It’s a brutal read. The books are set in Ghana, where Quartey himself was born, though he’s made his life as a doctor in California. He obviously has a special love for Ghana and is skilled at conveying the feel of street life (both high and low), giving the reader the feel of actually being in downtown Accra.

The story centers on a missing young woman, Ngozi, whose Nigerian parents are completely frantic after their law school-bound daughter vanishes without a word. She had a much older boyfriend and as the story unfolds, it appears that she’s with this man. Quartey’s skill as a portraitist is put to good use here. Ngozi’s youth, beauty and naivete are expertly conveyed, as is the character and story of her boyfriend, Femi. When Femi is murdered and Ngozi again disappears (after good work by Emma and her team uncover that she has in fact been seen in Ghana) the panic and detective work accelerate.

Quartey then takes a long, and for this reader, painful, detour through the world of human trafficking. Femi had been in prison, and on release,



teamed up with an old buddy “helping” migrants cross the borders between Nigeria and Europe, with the promise of a better life and better work abroad. The truth is far more sinister – Femi is no travel agent, and the migrants endure the draining of their families’ resources, thirst in the desert, as well as beatings and worse at the hands of their drivers. When they do reach Libya, gateway to perhaps Ghana or even Europe, they are detained and the squeeze is put on for more money. Some of them are sold into slavery in Libya. The women that manage to reach Ghana are often put to work as prostitutes.

Quartermeyer personalizes the story by highlighting the story of one pair of migrants “helped” by Femi, and by the plight of a sex worker in Accra who Ngozi tries to assist. As Femi’s character unfurls, it’s clear his main motivator is greed. Meanwhile, reading this story (which I am sure is based on fact), your heart will be broken. I was relieved when the story of the migrants was broken up by Emma’s return and the sharp detective work that resolves the case. This is not a book for the fainthearted.

PICTURE IN THE SAND

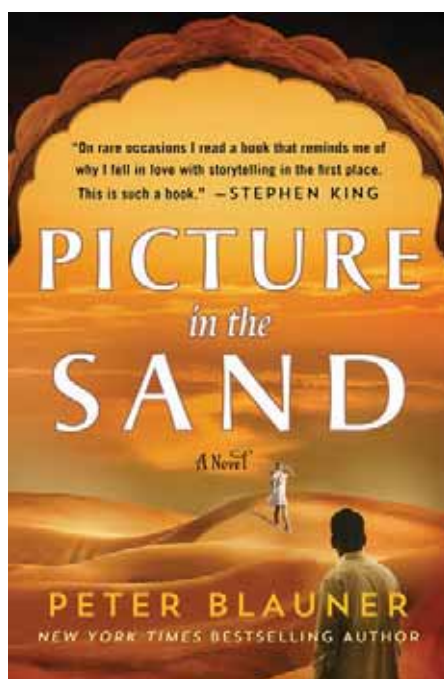
by Peter Blauner

Minotaur, \$27.99, January

Rating: A-

This sweeping, enjoyable novel by Peter Blauner isn’t really a mystery, but it has a crime at its center. Set in both the present (with the present day story functioning as a framing device) and in 1952, where Ali, the central character, has just gotten a job as a driver on Cecil B. DeMille’s *The Ten Commandments*. In the present, Ali’s Egyptian-American grandson, Alex, has shunned his ivy league college admission and disappeared, refusing to communicate with his family. When Alex does agree to communicate with his grandfather, Ali begins to tell him the story of his life.

With the severe judgment of the young and radicalized, Alex is disdainful that his grandfather worked for DeMille, who he feels appropriated Egyptian culture for his own purposes. When he discovers that as the driver of



DeMille’s car, Ali accidentally ran over and killed a man, Alex’s disdain only grows. But in the course of making the film, Ali himself becomes radicalized. He also sees that actions taken by the Muslim Brotherhood are not always actions he agrees with. His grandson, in the present, is finding the same thing to be true in the radical group he is himself committed to.

Ali is also torn by his attraction to a woman who works on the set alongside him. It is definitely Ali’s coming of age story, as well as the coming of age story of an Egypt finding a new life freed from the shackles of British rule. It’s also a fabulously entertaining look at the filming of *The Ten Commandments*. The logistics of not only filming in the desert – portions of the film were actually shot on the Sinai – and in the management of the huge cast and crew required on a film of that scope are completely fascinating.

You may come out of this read with a more nuanced view of the Middle East and you will certainly emerge with a real love for Ali, who is brave, human, scared, loyal, and intelligent as well as massively stupid at times. He’s a wonderful tentpole for this epic read, making it understandable and relatable. That’s certainly a virtue of storytelling, one that’s discovered, in the course of

this novel, by Alex. This was a wonderful read.

COLD SNAP

Maureen Jennings

Level Best Books, \$28.95/\$16.95,

November, 2022

Paradise Cafe #3

Rating: B+

I love this sweet yet salty series from Maureen Jennings, set in 1930’s Toronto. The 1st World War is an uncomfortable memory, and the second one looms. The main series character is private investigator Charlotte Frayne. Her boyfriend, Hilliard, is a partner in the Paradise Café, founded by WWI vets who spent time in prison camps and got through some of their days dreaming about the food that meant “home” to them. Every night they serve up a homely meal to scores of Toronto’s impoverished. That’s the sweet part of the series.

The salty part is Jennings’ bent toward social justice themes, and in the 1930s, the overriding issue was the rise of Hitler and the uncomfortably close to home tide of anti-semitism. Charlotte catches two cases, one concerning her long lost mother, a woman who is a virtual stranger to her, and the other involving her boss’ cousin, a journalist critical of Hitler who has fled Germany. Charlotte’s mother has turned up because she wants Charlotte to locate a baby she put up for adoption long ago.

Her boss’ cousin is another matter. Charlotte is supposed to offer him protection, but he keeps evading her and slipping away, chased by various incidents of violence, one involving a death. In Jennings’ capable hands, the two plot threads are deftly handled, with the main story involving the manifestation of violent hatred toward the “other.” The man Charlotte is trying to protect is something of a cipher as far as behavior and motivation goes, but he is an interesting and fully realized character. Jennings is such a pro – this book moves along, the characters memorable and well-drawn, with a well-done twist toward the end. This series is a rewarding read I always look forward to.

Central Booking

Kristopher Zgorski



EVERYONE IN MY FAMILY HAS KILLED SOMEONE

by Benjamin Stevenson
Mariner Books, \$30.00, January
Rating: A+

There are many different things that can make a novel a critical darling. It could be the depth of characterization that resonates with the reader. Sometimes the setting is brought to life in such a realistic way that readers feel transported. Or maybe the plot is just so clever and well-constructed that it is impossible not to be impressed with the author's skill in conceiving it. Even the specific way a story is told can make it a favorite, especially when that style is so unique it feels completely original and cutting-edge. When all those examples—and more—are in play within the same novel, readers know they have stumbled upon a classic-in-the-making, a book that will stand the test of time because it appeals to a wide audience for a variety of reasons. That is the experience most readers will have when they pick up **EVERYONE IN MY FAMILY HAS KILLED SOMEONE** by Benjamin Stevenson.

Alone, the plot of **EVERYONE IN MY FAMILY HAS KILLED SOMEONE** would pique enough interest to cause most readers to investigate further, but by the end of the Prologue, it will be clear how different this novel will be. It's in the telling where Benjamin Stevenson truly shines.

The Cunningham family—one that happens to be populated by criminals—is gathering at a secluded ski resort to celebrate a family reunion of sorts. If anyone is honest, it is mainly the release from prison of Ernest's brother that has necessitated the gathering. The only

problem is that Ernest was responsible for getting his brother convicted, so everyone is on pins and needles waiting to see how their first interaction will proceed. The first sentence of the novel—the same as the book's title—tells us that every member of this family has killed someone and now Ernest wants to tell us, the reader, all about that. So, it is a shock to neither the Cunningham Family nor the reader that even before the entire group has gathered, a dead body is discovered.

But Ernest, a devotee of crime fiction, has already told the reader that he knows all the tricks of the crime genre and wants to assure them that he is not playing games, he's not an unreliable narrator, and that his telling of the story is completely fair play, so that the reader can truly investigate as the storyline unspools. To prove this, he even tells the reader in the Prologue the page number on which every death in the novel

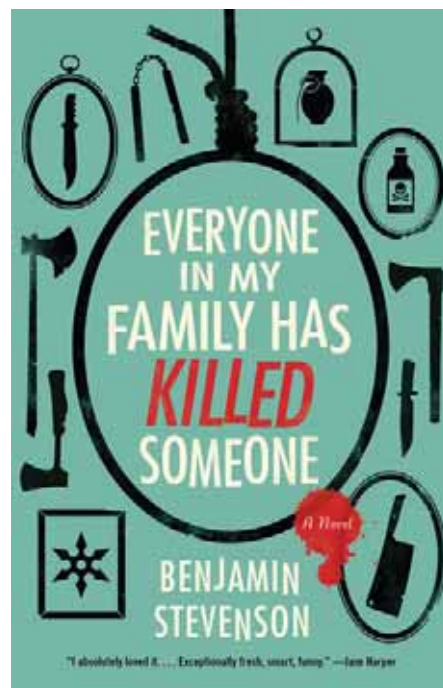
will take place. And there are fourteen deaths. Ernest stops his recitation and directly addresses the reader telling them to hold him accountable (unless of course the typesetter screwed up and the page numbers shifted.) At this point, the reader will—and should—laugh and will suddenly understand exactly what kind of narrator Ernest is going to be.

Ernest will continually break the fourth wall, addressing the reader directly. He is hilarious in all his observations, both about his family and about the world. The plot of the novel is complex—in that it has many characters, a wide timeline, and more than enough family secrets to fill Fort Knox—so when things get to a critical point, he will stop and go over what we know, what we have learned, and what readers might still need answers for. It's almost like having someone hold your hand as you are reading the novel, keeping you invested. Not that there was ever a chance that any crime fiction fan could or would stop reading.

EVERYONE IN MY FAMILY HAS KILLED SOMEONE is very much of the cozy tradition. There is no sex, light language, and any excessive violence—remember, there are fourteen deaths—is kept off the page. Like many cozy mysteries, humor and laugh-out-loud moments dominate. But there is also some intangible element that allows this book to resonate with readers who typically prefer darker, grittier crime novels as well. It's a masterclass on how to appeal to the widest possible audience without compromising the trademarks that make each sub-genre so unique.

EVERYONE IN MY FAMILY HAS KILLED SOMEONE is an award-worthy novel that uses the history of our beloved genre to full effect. It will have readers cracking up one minute, shaking their head with incredulity the next, and gripping the pages in tense worry throughout. (And, most will never look at an oven mitt the same way again after they reach that particular page.)

It's only January and already Benjamin Stevenson's **EVERYONE IN MY FAMILY HAS KILLED SOMEONE** has staked its claim as the crime novel of 2023. Could another book come



along that surpasses this totally original, one-of-a-kind read? Sure it's possible... miracles do happen. But if that is the case, then really the reader is the winner, as that will have to be another truly unforgettable novel. Until then, re-reads of *Everyone In My Family Has Killed Someone* will have to do.

BLAZE ME A SUN

by Christoffer Carlsson
Hogarth, \$28.00, January

Rating: B+

Scandinavian crime fiction has a reputation of being some of the most morally complex and gritty writing available in the genre. This of course is a stereotype, but like most stereotypes, it is rooted in some grains of truth. One recent example from the region — **BLAZE ME A SUN** by Christoffer Carlsson—certainly supports this theory, while also demonstrating that with new writers entering the field, Nordic noir continues to evolve beyond any attempts to pigeonhole it as just one thing.

Christoffer Carlsson is the youngest winner of the Best Swedish Novel of the Year award and from the moment readers begin **BLAZE ME A SUN**, they will understand why. His use of language is almost transcendent in both beauty and purpose. (It would be remiss not to highlight translator Rachael Willson-Broyles here as well, as certainly her contribution allowed this stunning work to be enjoyed by a wider audience.) While this longer novel is a commitment, readers will find themselves so transported by the work that the time investment is easily justified—the larger contemplations of guilt, responsibility, and familial bonds are a bonus that will linger far longer than any minor outlay of a few hours reading.

BLAZE ME A SUN has an unusual beginning, dropping readers late into a story that is generations in the making. Those first few chapters may leave readers on unstable ground, unsure of where to center themselves, but very quickly, the novel flashes back in time and proceeds in strict chronological order. The plot itself—albeit, not the execution or the take-home—is simple enough.



On the Winter night in 1986 when Swedish Prime Minister Olof Palme is assassinated, a local policeman named Sven Jörgensson is called in to investigate the rape and murder of a woman. The perpetrator has called the station stating, “I’m going to do it again,” which would put everyone on high alert, if there weren’t larger Global concerns also in play.

This case becomes even more complicated when two more women are killed. In many ways, it becomes Sven Jörgensson’s obsession. So much so that his inability to solve this crime becomes a psychological burden and something he passes on to his son, Vidar, who becomes a policeman and continues the attempts to solve these serial crimes and possibly discover a link between them and Palme’s assassination.

The third string of the story—and the one that brings us back to the start of the novel—is the journey of a novelist who becomes fascinated with the same unsolved cases. This writer grew up in the area and knew the Jörgenssons, so his interest in the case comes with some nostalgia about his own youth. What this novelist uncovers about the crime will send shockwaves through the years and through a community left damaged in the wake of senseless violence.

BLAZE ME A SUN is not an

action-packed read, but the case in question is so compelling that the pages of the novel turn faster and faster as the tension and suspense increases. The multiple timelines allow for the constant feeling of forward momentum, even when the action takes unexpected detours. It is no surprise that **BLAZE ME A SUN** is already considered a game-changing novel in the Nordic noir canon.

Christoffer Carlsson is already a household name in his native land, but *Blaze Me a Sun* will find new fans eager to read his other works.

THE BLUE BAR

by Damyanti Biswas
Thomas & Mercer, \$15.95, January
Blue Mumbai #1

Rating: B

Knowing that an Indian author, who resides in Singapore, has written a crime novel set in Mumbai, it is only natural that some readers would expect a work that sheds new light on old perspectives and something that might defy standard expectations because of the clashing cultural sensibilities. What they might not anticipate—but clearly should—is that in addition to that, they are about to experience a novel that feels both fresh and unexpected, while still holding true to the tenets of the genre. At least that is what will happen for those who decide to pick up **THE BLUE BAR** by Damyanti Biswas.

The miasma of shifting time allows **THE BLUE BAR** to beat to its own drum. Readers learn that in 2002, Tara Mondal—a struggling bar dancer—has accepted a strange assignment from one of the establishment’s clients. Tara is supposed to wear a blue sequined dress to the local train station, allow the crowd to see her, and then vanish from sight. Only problem is that after completing this task, Tara is never seen again.

In present day, Inspector Arnav Singh Rajput—who was once Tara’s lover—has never come to terms with her disappearance, when he suddenly has much bigger concerns: a serial killer targeting women around Mumbai. At var-

ious scenes a scattering of blue sequins is discovered by investigators and Arnav can't help but link this clue back to his missing love. Is it possible that the same case will allow Arnav to uncover the serial killer stalking Mumbai festivals and also uncover the mystery behind Tara's disappearance?

THE BLUE BAR is a very "Indian" book, which is what we want when we ask that authors write books that are authentic to their experiences. Readers unfamiliar with this locale, the customs, and the culture, will need to get up to speed quickly, but if they allow themselves to absorb the ambience presented on the page, it won't be long before they are consumed by the action. Damyanti Biswas knows this may be challenging, so she often has Arnav reiterate important facts and developments in the case. This actually helps readers who may struggle with keeping everything in mind, while also juggling unfamiliar names, foreign words, and the serpentine plotline.

Gritty imagery and raw, unfiltered language place *The Blue Bar* squarely in the noir tradition, but Damyanti Biswas balances this with glimpses of the glamorous side of Mumbai society. Readers are given a view of that city that feels authentic, with both verve and vitality to spare. With shifting points of view from Tara and Arnav's perspectives, readers watch as the various threads intertwine to expose the corruption and violence that bubble just below Mumbai's surface. There is another point of view that is occasionally deployed, but readers need to experience that for themselves.

With **THE BLUE BAR**, Damyanti Biswas has staked her claim on Mumbai as a setting for gripping crime fiction. Readers will eagerly await their next trip to India with this talented author as their guide.

DARK DEEDS DOWN UNDER

Edited by Craig Sistrerson

Clan Destine Press, \$29.99, June, 2022

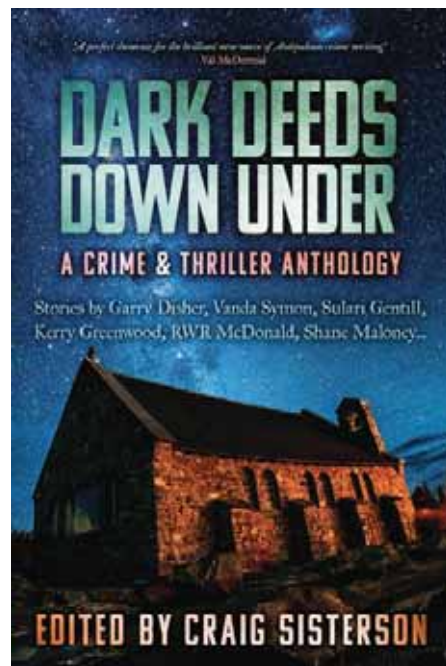
Rating: B-

The crime fiction community knows Craig Sistrerson for his excellent book reviews (now in *Deadly Pleasures*), his

stellar panel moderation, and his overall extensive background knowledge of the genre itself, but being unable to sit back and rest, Sistrerson is also the editor of two excellent short story anthologies. The second of which, **DARK DEEDS DOWN UNDER: A Crime and Thriller Anthology**, was released in 2022 and will be a revelation for many readers who are unfamiliar with the crime fiction output from Australia and New Zealand.

DARK DEEDS DOWN UNDER: A Crime and Thriller Anthology contains nineteen stories from some of the best practitioners of crime writing from that region of the world. Some names like Kerry Greenwood, Aoife Clifford, R. W. R. McDonald, and Sulari Gentill may be familiar to the most well-read among us, but the vast majority are likely to be new discoveries.

Several of the authors use their most famous fictional characters as the centerpiece of their story. Admittedly, this can at times be challenging for new readers as it seems part of the puzzle is missing—all that foreknowledge of a character that comes with following them through a series of novels. However, by and large, even readers completely unfamiliar with those authors (and/or characters) will find the resulting stories enjoyable in their own right.



A few of my favorites include:

"Nancys Undercover" by R. W. R. McDonald featuring Tippy Chan and her gay Uncles, Pike and Devon, once again getting caught up in another crazy crime caper. Fans of vintage Nancy Drew mysteries will find much to love about this band of outcasts saving the day.

Narrelle M. Harris' "Observations on a Tragedy" which serves as a guidepost through the collection, with each of the Three Acts appearing randomly between other stories. This one hit both my love of mystery and my love of the-ater and most certainly left me wanting more from this author and her clever (both in mind and in creation) narrator.

In Dinuka McKenzie's "Skin Deep," the author crafts a backstory for her series character—Detective Sergeant Kate Miles—providing the perfect launching pad for new readers to discover how this biracial character came to be the loyal and trustworthy beacon of hope readers of her debut have come to love.

And I can't not mention Kerry Greenwood. In "The Rooming House," baker and part-time sleuth Corinna Chapman is once again on the case in a cozy-ish mystery that uses layers to build depth—to both characters and plot.

Speaking of which, the stories in **DARK DEEDS DOWN UNDER: A Crime and Thriller Anthology** cover the vast breadth of sub-genres which the crime fiction moniker incorporates. There are true mysteries, some suspense tales, a few that more closely resemble thrillers, set in both contemporary and in "other" times. Some take themselves very seriously, while others acknowledge how much fun it can be to solve a crime—while trying to stay alive.

All in all **DARK DEEDS DOWN UNDER: A Crime and Thriller Anthology** is a great collection to add to your personal library shelves. It is sure to expand your horizons as it provides stories by authors from distant lands, sometimes with different sensibilities, but always with the same aim of providing some justice in our chaotic world.

HIDE

by Tracy Clark

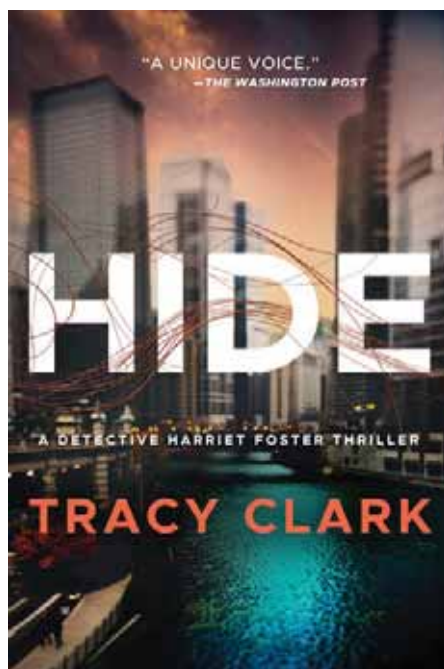
Thomas & Mercer, \$16.99, January
Detective Harriet Foster #1**Rating: A+**

Tracy Clark amassed quite a fan following with her Cass Raines mystery series (including **BROKEN PLACES** and **BORROWED TIME**), so when news broke that she was leaving this beloved character behind, there was obvious disappointment and concern. The release of *Hide* proves this was all unnecessary. Everything fans love about that first series—a strong female lead character, a rooted sense of place (again Chicago), touches of humor, and well-crafted mystery plots—is present in *Hide*, only kicked up several notches. **HIDE** is the best thing Tracy Clark has written to-date and the sky seems to be no limit for the future.

Despite starting a new job in a new precinct, Detective Harriet Foster carries with her enough baggage to reach some far-flung destination with an extended stay in mind. She's divorced, she has lost a child to senseless violence, and most recently her previous partner committed suicide, seemingly out of nowhere. And she's also Black in a society that continues to undervalue people based on race and gender. But Harri knows if she doesn't jump back into the game now, she likely never will.

At her new station, Harri is assigned the partner we would all dread. He's old-school in the worst definition of the word—meaning he does minimum work and jumps to maximum conclusions. And he clearly doesn't think Harriet is ready or able to handle the job. It's unclear if his issue is that she is a woman or that she is Black, but readers will get the sense that it is both things and more. Needless to say, Harri is about to prove him wrong in so many different ways.

Their first case involves a young red-headed woman killed in downtown Chicago. A prime suspect is located near the body, but Harri thinks there is more to the case and won't stop investigating. When another murder is committed while their suspect is in custody, it's



clear that not only was Harri correct, but they also now have a serial killer on their hands.

Interspersed with this central police procedural are some POV chapters that lean more heavily towards domestic suspense. Bodie Morgan, a troubled man obsessed with red-headed females, has recently been released from care and his sister is trying to ensure he stays on the straight and narrow. Fans of crime fiction will correctly predict the intersection of these two cases, but Tracy Clark has the twists and turns ready to keep this from being as cut and dried as it may seem.

The plotting of **HIDE** is extremely tight. A plethora of characters are introduced, keeping the reader on their toes and likely also expanding the canvas for future entries in this series. Tracy Clark keeps things moving with short chapters and consistent cliffhangers that virtually force the reader to read just one more chapter—until before too long **HIDE** is over and the reader is craving the next novel immediately—like a drug addict jonesing for another hit.

Fans—both new and old—can rest assured that **FALL**—the sequel to **HIDE**—will be released by year's end, ensuring that 2023 goes down as the year of Harriet Foster and more importantly, as the year of Tracy Clark.

YOU NEVER SAID GOODBYE

by Luca Veste

Sourcebooks, \$16.99, November, 2022

Rating: B

Luca Veste is a popular crime fiction author based in the United Kingdom. While many readers in his native land are familiar with his work, he has not yet completely broken through over here in the United States. His latest novel, **YOU NEVER SAID GOODBYE**, should go a long way towards helping to correct this oversight.

The difficulty Luca Veste may be having gaining an audience here in the States is more likely related to the wide breadth of styles he writes rather than any deficiency in the books themselves. He has skillfully executed thrillers, police procedurals, darker noir tales, and more. **YOU NEVER SAID GOODBYE** itself straddles subgenres but is most likely to appeal to readers who enjoy domestic/psychological suspense and thrillers. What is always present for Luca Veste—regardless of the style of novel in question—is a fidelity to character and careful and precise plotting.

Sam Cooper's mother died in a tragic car accident twenty-five years ago, when Sam was just nine years old. Her death devastated Sam's father and shattered any hopes of a normal childhood for the innocent boy. Yet, somehow Sam managed to overcome this rough start and now has a normal, relatively happy life. Until the day he gets the call telling him that his father—who he has been estranged from—has been violently attacked. Barely reaching his bedside in time, Sam's father is able to tell him one last thing...his mother is still alive.

This revelation sends Sam on a hunt for the truth. Why would a father lie about this? But if it's true, what kind of mother would allow her family to suffer like that, thinking for years that she was gone? And Why? Sam has to find the answers and it's not long before he realizes there are others following the same trail—a path that leads to America.

Once the action of the novel shifts continents, the thriller aspects really kick in. Luca Veste can write fight scenes and car chases like the masters,

keeping readers breathless and the pages flying. As one would expect, each new revelation sends Sam down another dark alley and has readers wondering where it will all end.

It could be argued that there are one or two too many complications in the plot of **YOU NEVER SAID GOODBYE**, but most readers will only realize that the book is moving at lightening speed and won't care how the author managed to achieve that feat. It is Sam Cooper—as the readers primary conduit into the story—that shines through at the novel's primary strength. He's relatable, flawed, and certainly able to fend for himself—but he also has a good heart and readers will ache for him to find the answers that will help him heal.

Here's hoping that American readers will give Luca Veste and You Never Said Goodbye a chance. It is a thrilling journey that manages to feel familiar without being derivative and is populated with characters that readers won't soon forget.

STANDING BY THE WALL

by Mick Herron

Soho Crime, \$16.95, November, 2022

Rating: B+

Ho Ho Ho! Yes, that's Roddy Ho and the Slow Horses gang being referred to in **STANDING BY THE WALL**. The series of spy novels written by Mick Herron and featuring his quirky collection of bumbling, but loveable (some of them anyway) MI5 agents is treasured by readers around the world. They have even been adapted into the hit Apple+ streaming series, *Slow Horses*. As with any long-running series, the author has also written a few lesser-known novellas set using the same World canvas and characters from the main series. Until now, these have only been available separately, but for the holiday season, Mick Herron's US publisher, SOHO Press has released a collection which gathers the four existing novellas and a newly-commissioned Christmas-themed novella under one cover – *Standing By the Wall*.

The new story, "Standing By the Wall," will be the major draw here for fans who have already read the other

novellas, but that story is more than worth the purchase of this collection. In it, Mick Herron uses elements from Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* and the classic holiday film *It's A Wonderful Life* to reveal new depths within reader's favorite characters. It begins with our favorite curmudgeon boss, Jackson Lamb, asking Roddy Ho to digitally alter a photograph from his past. Despite it being Christmas Eve, Roddy Ho is thrilled to show off his technological skills. Meanwhile, River Cartwright stops by Slough House after his convalescence only to find himself invited to the "office gathering" at a local pub—perhaps his worst nightmare. As with the main novels, so much of Mick Herron's style relies on how he allows the action to unfold, rather than solely what is actually happening plotwise. These shorter works allow the author to fill in some important informational gaps that might seem out of place or superfluous when incorporated within the main novels, but by the end of "Standing By the Wall," readers will discover some critical details that seem likely to become integral in the next Slough House novel. "Standing By the Wall" reminds readers that the holidays are all about family—even totally dysfunctional ones—and proves that ghosts not yet laid to rest have a way of making their presence known at the most inopportune times.

"The List" is the earliest of the no-



Mick Herron

vellas collected in this new anthology. Written in 2015, the story deals with the death of Dieter Hess, an old spy who was keeping a second, secret, bank account—possibly revealing his true nature as a double-agent. Set in the time before the core novels begin, this story exposes some of the internal politics at play in Regent's Park and eventually, Jackson Lamb finds himself tangled up in the mess.

The next novella in the collection is "The Marylebone Drop" (aka "The Drop") is unique in its focus. When Solomon "Solly" Dortmund witnesses what can only be a secret information exchange at an out-of-the-way café, the ensuing investigation will reach the highest ranks of the spy agency.

"The Catch" is the third novella and was originally released in 2020. Like the first two novellas, this one features John Bachelor, an integral figure in the evolution of MI5 and Slough House. In this one, John is on the hunt for a client he hasn't seen in quite some time. It's a battle with his old demons in an effort to reaffirm his relevancy in an organization that seems hell-bent on changing with the times.

Possibly the most interesting of the novellas for stalwart fans of the Slough House books is "The Last Dead Letter." It was previously included in a collection of Mick Herron short stories called **DOLPHIN JUNCTION**. This novella recounts Jackson Lamb's early days in the service and gives fans a glimpse of the evolution of a man who has become the unlikely of heroes. He is a man for whom loyalty is the highest of praise, even if he has the most cantankerous bedside manner possible.

Mick Herron and his novels are now iconic in crime fiction and spy thriller circles, so this new anthology — **STANDING BY THE WALL**— is perfect for both fans and newcomers to his fictional creation. Give the gift of Slough House to someone you love—or even someone you just kind of like.

LITTLE RED HOUSE

by Liv Andersson

Crooked Lane Books, \$28.99,
December, 2022

Rating: B

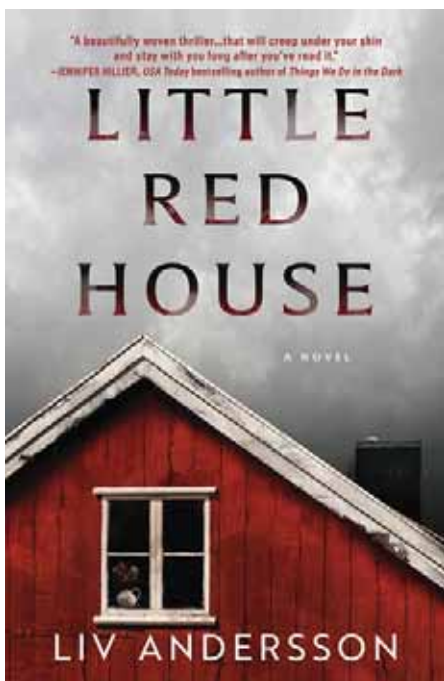
Authors take on pen names for a variety of reasons, but the most common is a desire to signal that their new book is very different from what readers have seen from them previously. That is certainly the case for Liv Andersson—the new nom de plume used by Wendy Tyson—with her release of **LITTLE RED HOUSE**. It cannot be stressed enough that this book is very unlike Tyson's previous work. **LITTLE RED HOUSE** is a dark noir tale unafraid of venturing down some truly depraved avenues with more than it's share of WTF moments. This is not a book for every reader, but for those that are willing to take a risk, it proves to be a rewarding reading experience.

Talking about **LITTLE RED HOUSE** is almost impossible without spoilers, but let's give it a go. The book is told with dual timelines—1997 and present day. In the past section, Eve Foster travels to New Mexico looking for her missing 16-year-old daughter, Kelsey. Readers know from the opening chapter that Kelsey is locked away in a dank cellar, fighting for her life. The present-day portion of the tale is narrated by Constance Foster, one of Eve's adopted twin daughters. Eve has just died under unusual circumstances

and the reading of her will proves to be the start—or end—of a very twisted plan. Eve has left the bulk of her estate and thirty million dollars to the favored child, Constance's twin sister Lisa; while Connie herself receives only a dilapidated shack in New Mexico. Connie is sure this is another chess move in a sick game that has dominated her life.

From this simple description, veteran crime fiction readers are likely already drawing conclusions and predicting the trajectory of this storyline. Let me assure you, **LITTLE RED HOUSE** is going to far weirder and unexpected places than most readers would ever be able to imagine. This is both a good and bad thing. Most readers crave new and fresh ideas, books that defy expectations while surprising with each turn of the page. However, some readers also get very uncomfortable being taken outside of their comfort zone. If you are in the latter category, **LITTLE RED HOUSE** may not be the book for you. To fully enjoy this novel, readers will have to suspend more than the average amount of disbelief and just go with the flow as each wicked development takes the storyline to deeper and darker places. And in the end, most people will want to forget that these types of things—some even worse, unfortunately—really do occur in the real world.

Wendy Tyson has a loyal following in the cozy community. **LITTLE RED HOUSE** violates every traditional guideline for that sub-genre. While nothing is technically gratuitous, Liv Andersson pulls no punches when it comes to sex, language, and violence (especially against women). All of this is necessary for the tale the author is telling here but it could easily be Exhibit One in any argument in favor of trigger warnings. In many ways, it is this willingness to go to these forbidden places that makes **LITTLE RED HOUSE** stand out from the crowd. This wildly unexpected narrative satisfies in ways that readers might not even know they need. And it will leave fans wondering what type of book Liv Andersson could possibly write to follow this crazy tale.



On George's Nightstand

Here are some of the books I'm reading or about to read. No guarantee I'll finish any particular one. But if I finish a particular book, odds are I will review it in the magazine.

AGE OF VICE, Deepti Kapoor

STANDING DEAD, Margaret Mizushima

EVERY MAN A KING, Walter Mosley

STONE COLD FOX, Rachel Koller Croft

CITY UNDER ONE ROOF, Iris Yamashita

BLACK WOLF, Kathleen Kent

THE DEVIL'S RANSOM, Brad Taylor

PARIS REQUIEM, Chris Lloyd

MURDER YOUR EMPLOYER, Rupert Holmes

QUEEN HIGH, C. J. Carey

PAST LIFE, David Mark

BLACKSTONE FELL, Martin Edwards

Already read for the next issue -
KILLING ME, Michelle Gagnon
THE DEVIL YOU KNOW,

Chris Hauty

THE LIE MAKER, Linwood Barclay
CODE OF THE HILLS, Chris Offutt

ALL THE SINNERS BLEED, S. A. Cosby

BLIND FEAR, Webb & Mann
FEARLESS, M. W. Craven

From The Waterfront

Ted Hertel



THE BIG BUNDLE

by Max Allan Collins

Hard Case Crime, \$22.99, December 2022

Nate Heller #18

Rating: A

In 1953 six-year-old Bobby Greenlease is kidnapped. His wealthy parents call on the services of private investigator Nathan Heller, who had represented them in another matter some years earlier. Robert Greenlease insists on having the kidnapping of his son handled on his terms with as little interference from the FBI and police as possible. The kidnappers pick up the ransom, as scheduled, but Bobby is not returned. The kidnappers, however, assure the family that he'll be back, safe and sound, within twenty-four additional hours. But then half of the \$600,000 ransom disappears and things take a turn for the worse. Five years later Heller is called back to try to find the missing money. But Washington politics, Bobby Kennedy, and Jimmy Hoffa all manage to get tangled up with Heller's efforts to help Greenlease once again.

All of the Heller novels are based in solid fact, thoroughly researched, with details of the characters and their eventual fates detailed at the conclusion of the story. Of course the real-life kidnapping of Bobby Greenlease is nowhere near as well-known as the 1932 abduction and murder of the Lindbergh baby. Heller had investigated that crime, as well, in Max Allan Collins' **STOLEN AWAY** (1992). In spite of the outcome of that case, he is once again entrusted with finding and returning a missing child to his parents.

Collins is a master (actually an MWA Grand Master!) at finding a plausible

method of inserting his long-running fictional detective into the events of the day. He does this by using actual places, events and real people such as Kennedy, Hoffa, Chuck Berry, and Drew Pearson to add authenticity to the narrative. In doing so Collins immerses the reader in the 1950s' era lifestyle. What's even more remarkable is that he's been doing this for forty years, since his 1983 debut Heller novel, **TRUE DETECTIVE**.

If you've never read a Heller novel, don't be discouraged by the fact that this is the eighteenth book (plus a number of short stories) in the series. The chronicles are not published in any specific order, moving around in time from the days of Capone and Nitti to Monroe and the Kennedys. But this one, the first from Hard Case Crime, is as good a place to jump in as any other. Then you'll want to go back to the 1920s and start with that first one in what is one of



the finest historical crime novel series being published today.

MY DARKEST PRAYER

by S. A. Cosby

Flatiron Books, \$16.99, December 2022

Rating: A-

It has been said that God answers all prayers, even the darkest ones. It's just that sometimes the answer is "No!"

Former Marine and sheriff's deputy Nathan Waymaker is known as a man who can help others who can't get help from the authorities. Several parishioners of a local church in their small Southern town visit Waymaker with a request to look into what they believe is the murder of their black pastor when the white cops write it off as suicide. The biracial Waymaker is willing to help (their offer of several thousand dollars was an added incentive), figuring it can't hurt to just ask a few questions. But he soon discovers that while even the preacher's porn star daughter has no interest in her father's death, plenty of others do. Those people do not want it looked at too closely because secrets in a small town do not stay buried forever. Nathan has enough secrets in his own past that he needs to keep hidden. So to help him navigate his way through gangsters and crooked cops in order to get to the truth behind the death, Waymaker has to call upon a sociopathic friend to cover his back. What could possibly go wrong with *that* plan?

Those who are acquainted with S. A. Cosby's terrific novels, **BLACKTOP WASTELAND** and **RAZORBLADE TEARS**, may be surprised to learn that **MY DARKEST PRAYER** is actually his debut novel. First published in 2018, Flatiron Books purchased the rights to it from the previous publisher and is now making it available in a trade paperback edition. The book shows very few signs of it being a first novel. Instead it arrives with all the power and conviction of Cosby's later volumes, together with his familiar themes of racism and the importance of family. The author's strong voice drives the realism of the story.

Cosby has combined carefully drawn characters, both good and bad, with a

suspenseful plot. The dialogue is pitch perfect, so evocative of small town Southern life. The book filled is with vicious confrontations and believable sexual situations, mixed with generous helpings of humor and profanity, all coming together in a violent conclusion. While it may not be to everybody's taste, for most readers this story will grip them from the start right through to the final pages.

Cosby has three solidly entertaining books under his belt. Southern noir at its best. I can't wait to see what he will produce next.

1989

by Val McDermid

Atlantic Monthly Press, \$27.00, October 2022

Allie Burns #2

Rating: B

Former investigative journalist Allie Burns is now running the northern news operation of the *Sunday Globe*, based in Manchester. In spite of being frustrated with her change of position, she begins the year 1989 covering the Lockerbie tragedy memorial service. But it isn't long until she comes upon a story about the growing HIV/AIDS crisis that sets her investigative nose to twitching, sending her to Edinburgh. Even as the Iron Curtain begins to show cracks, Allie's next lead takes her into dangerous East Berlin, still under the control of the state security service, the Stasi. Meanwhile, her life partner gets an offer she can't refuse that would change their lives forever, if Burns can get out of East Berlin alive.

This is Val McDermid's second novel in her Allie Burns series, the first being *1979*. Burns has matured since the previous book but is now less than enchanted with her present position, working for a media mogul whose primary interest seems to be making money at the expense of journalism. Further, seeking revenge, someone wants him dead and has already laid the trap.

The story thrusts Burns into the thick of the news, with the rise of the AIDS crisis and the effects of East Berlin and the Soviet Union approaching their final days. As always McDermid creates

compelling characters and, in these novels particularly, inserts them flawlessly into real world politics and events. Settings of Manchester, Edinburgh, and Berlin are all brought to life. Allie and her partner Rona have a realistic relationship, caring deeply for each other. Themes of revenge, sexuality, a variety of social issues, homophobia, and antisemitism are realistically handled. However, while this is an interesting and informative look at the late 1980s, for me the book had neither the complexity nor the narrative drive of some of McDermid's earlier works, such as *A PLACE OF EXECUTION*. Still, it is recommended reading for its historical elements, even if you aren't familiar the earlier novel in the series. As Faulkner wrote, "The past is never dead. It's not even past."

A HEART FULL OF HEADSTONES

by Ian Rankin

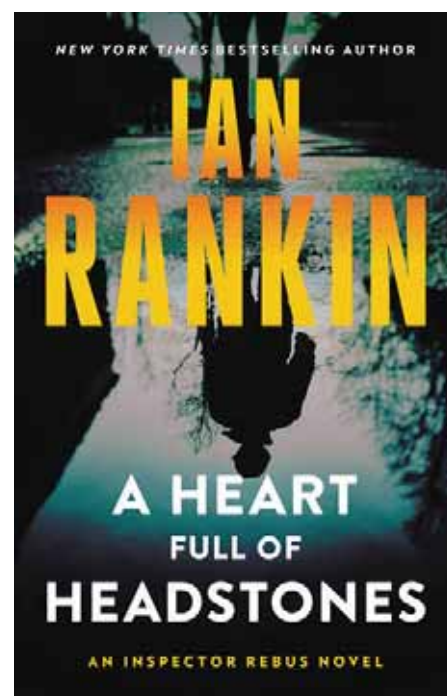
Little, Brown and Company, \$28.00

Rebus #24

Rating: A

As the novel opens, retired police detective John Rebus is on trial for committing a crime that could put him in prison for the rest of his life. How he got there is the story of the rest of the book. Rogue cops infest a local police station, covered up by the police hierarchy. But one bent and very violent cop, charged with domestic abuse, has agreed to blow the whistle on the operation to save his own neck. Rebus also finds himself the target of the investigation, since he had done favors for other cops in that crooked station, receiving money and gifts in return. After all, Rebus had a reputation for bending every rule to the breaking point in order to get results. Meanwhile Rebus has also been hired by a gangster of his long-time acquaintance to find a long-missing and thought dead man, a man who has suddenly reappeared. He's a busy man trying to stay one step ahead of the investigation until he makes what could be a fatal mistake.

This is the twenty-fourth novel in Ian Rankin's long-running and consistently excellent series about John Rebus. Set in Edinburgh and environs in the time of



COVID, Rankin has put his protagonist in a situation that could end him entirely. There are several plot threads here that the author manages to pull together very nicely, culminating in Rebus' trial. But Rebus had done what he always does: he saw a bad man and he tried to do something about it. This story gives Rebus the opportunity to look back on his past, and the less than legal methods he sometimes used to achieve what he perceived as justice.

In all fairness to readers, one must know that the tale is left unresolved. While we discover the nature of the crime Rebus has committed, we don't learn Rebus' fate. For some that alone might be a reason not to start reading the book in the first place since this is designed to be a two-part story. I, too, had hoped for a resolution, but what's here is so compellingly written (I could barely put the book down) that I can still highly recommend it. Old friends (Siobhan Clarke, the faithful pup Brillo) and enemies (the slimy Malcolm Fox, the now-wheelchair bound criminal "Big Ger" Cafferty) make their reappearance. On balance I can recommend this as one of the best novels of the year, so I look forward to its resolution in the next volume.

THE MOTION PICTURE TELLER

by Colin Cotterill

Soho Crime, \$27.95, January 2023

Rating B+

Thailand, 1996. Supot, a postman with the Royal Thai Postal Service, lives in two worlds: the real one, which he hates; and the world of motion pictures. He loves to watch movies with his best friend, Ali. Fortunately Ali owns a video store. One day the two manage to obtain a box of VHS tapes that includes a film neither of them were familiar with: **Bangkok 2010**. They watch it and are enthralled by its dystopian nature and, in particular, the gorgeous female lead character, Siriluk. While Ali works on a screenplay of his own, Supot delves into the film itself, becoming obsessed with finding Siriluk. Just who is she and why has the film never been released? What is the secret of **Bangkok 2010**?

Here is a thoroughly entertaining story, yet it is a mystery without a murder – without a crime, for that matter. Colin Cotterill has crafted one of the most absorbing novels of the year (and it's only January as the book is published). Gently humorous, filled with pop culture film references from Bogie to **The Blob**, from von Sternberg's **The Blue Angel** to Tati's **Mon Oncle**, film buffs and mystery fans alike will be charmed by the characters and their story.

Cleverly interspersed in between Supot's and Ali's individual pursuits are pages of the **Bangkok 2010** screenplay, so the reader can visualize what the two men are seeing as they watch the film again and again. Cotterill based this story on a screenplay he had worked on some years ago, though nothing had ever come of the film itself. We readers are all the richer for that experience. If you liked Cotterill's Dr. Siri series, you will also enjoy this stand alone.

DOOMED LEGACY

by Matt Coyle

Oceanview Publishing, \$27.95,

November 2022

Rick Cahill #9

Rating B+

Private investigator Rick Cahill is suffering from chronic traumatic encephalopathy (CTE), the “pro football disease.” As his disease has gotten worse, he is subject to angry fits of “red rage,” that have driven his wife Leah to leave him and take their fourteen-month-old daughter Krista with her. Cahill wants to win them back but before he can do that, he is asked by Sara Bhandari, an employee of one of his clients, to look into upper management hiring people without getting proper background checks on them. He takes the matter on a pro bono basis, of course, only to find days later that the Sara has been brutally raped and murdered. Coincidence? Cahill thinks not and begins to investigate the murder. Along the way he encounters a shady private investigative firm which stops at nothing to harass (and worse) its rivals.

This is the ninth novel in Matt Coyle's Anthony and Shamus Award winning Rick Cahill series. Coyle continues to put his protagonist through the medical wringer. Hampered by fugue state CTE and constantly at odds with his wife (whom he had promised he would avoid doing any dangerous work), Cahill finds many obstacles in his way to the truth. But he's resourceful, plays by his own rules and damn the consequences, even if those conse-

quences result in the loss of his loved ones. Because sometimes a person has to do what's right even if the law says it's wrong.

Coyle delves deeply into Cahill's emotions, real problems realistically played out in a real world situation. He has to make sure that justice will be done. But is this quest a desperate substitute for having his family at home? The price of the investigation gets higher as he is framed for sexually harassing the dead woman, losing that corporate client but discovering a pattern of intimidation and force being used by the other detective agency.

As we've come to expect from Coyle, he has delivered a hard-boiled novel of a man who will go to any lengths, whether he can see the danger around him or not, to get results. This is a fine series, one that any reader of dark and dangerous mysteries will enjoy.

George's Take: I was saddened to see Rick Cahill go through the medical issues he is facing. He is a character I've grown to admire as I've read all nine of this excellent series. It is hard to see where the series goes from here. I wouldn't be surprised to see Matt Coyle try something new with his next novel. I rate **DOOMED LEGACY** with an A-.

WHAT LIES IN THE WOODS

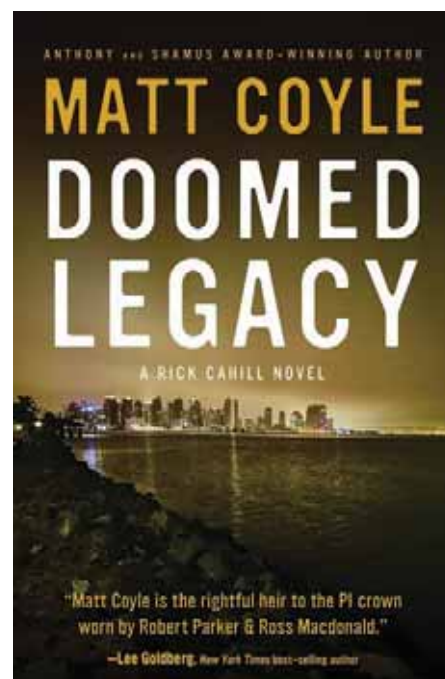
by Kate Alice Marshall

Flatiron Books, \$28.99, eBook \$14.99,

January 2023

Rating: A-

Eleven-year-old Naomi Shaw believed in magic. That is, right up until she was attacked in the woods by a knife-wielding stranger who savagely stabbed her some seventeen times, leaving her for dead. The attack was witnessed by Olivia and Cass, her two best friends with whom she had been hiking. She survived the assault and she and her friends were able to describe the man who did it to the cops. The man, a serial killer wanted for six murders, was caught, tried and convicted thanks in large part to the girls' testimony. The girls were proclaimed heroes. All was right with the world. Except the



girls were all liars. Naomi never saw her attacker. For twenty-two years the girls kept their dark secrets. But now the killer has died in prison and Olivia wants to tell the truth about that day. Naomi wants to find out what really happened to her, but someone does not want that truth to come out.

This is a wildly disturbing thriller with lots of twists (some of which a reader might see coming). It digs deeply into Naomi's disturbing emotional state. She has never fully recovered from the horrors of the attack. While she puts her physical scars on display for all to see, she keeps her interior scars mostly hidden. She knows the weight of a secret and the urge to bury herself beneath it.

Told in the first person, the reader feels all of that weight, an oppressive, all-encompassing fear, not so much of what's to come but as of what has already happened. Things that can never be forgotten that will eventually burst to the surface, whether it destroys her relationships with other people or destroys Naomi herself. This suspenseful and atmospheric novel will keep readers glued to the final pages, although some suspension of disbelief may at times be needed.

The clever title, **WHAT LIES IN THE WOODS**, can easily be taken two ways: "lies" as either a verb or a noun. Your choice. Personally, I go with the noun.

THE SCORNE

by David Putnam

Oceanview Publishing, \$27.95,

February 2023

Bruno Johnson #10

Rating: B+

Bruno Johnson, ex-cop and ex-con, has been spending his life with his pregnant wife Marie and ten rescued kids since Bruno has been on the run in Costa Rica. But his father approaches him, asking him to accompany Bruno's long-estranged mother back to L.A. for reasons he won't disclose. But when Maria goes into a difficult labor, her life and that of the baby is saved by Dr. Vargas. When the doctor's wife asks



Bruno to go to L.A. to find their daughter Layla, Bruno recognizes the debt he owes them and decides to undertake both tasks. But little is as it seems as Layla has fallen in with the leader of a notorious criminal gang exploiting women and children. Bruno's mother, meanwhile, has absconded with his father's twenty-two thousand dollars in savings.

This is the tenth novel in David Putnam's entertainingly ultra-violent Bruno Johnson series. Four of those previous novels involve Bruno's life before he went on the lam. Those who have been with the novels since the beginning will know that they are in for one wild ride. In this case it's Bruno Johnson coupled with his buddy Drago (and his equally vicious dog Waldo) who take on men who prey on women who sell their babies for their next drug hit. Combine that with tracking down a mother who deserted Bruno when he was young and you have one fast-moving tale where the tension never lets up. Putnam always finds a legitimate way to get Bruno back to L.A. where he is wanted for robbery, murder, and kidnapping and the cops are eager to throw him back in prison. This makes his journey to L.A. all the more dangerous.

The book also takes time to explore parent-child relationships without

getting in the way of the story. Bruno's terrible relationship with his mother is a prelude to Mrs. Vargas' uncomfortable relationship with Layla. How each of those mothers treated her child is then contrasted with the love that Layla has for the child she bore with the gang leader and the lengths she will go to (or make Bruno and Drago go through) to rescue him from his criminal father.

Of course with tales of this nature, in which it's just two men (okay, and a dog) against hordes of the bad guys (and make no mistake, these *are* very bad guys), it takes a willing suspension of disbelief to get to the end of the battles that Bruno and Drago encounter. Most of that armed warfare is Bruno's idea, but now he must remind himself that he has a wife and new baby at home that he should put first. This tears at him, at times making him pull back from getting involved in too much violence. But when it comes down to it, Bruno has to be true to himself and fight for justice for the children he is trying to rescue from evil.

THE SHORT CIRCUIT

BLACK IS THE NIGHT: Stories Inspired by Cornell Woolrich

Edited by Maxim Jakubowski

Titan Books, \$24.95, October 2022

Rating: A-

Noir writer Cornell Woolrich (1903-1968), who also wrote as George Hopley and William Irish, created stories about ordinary people often caught up in crime, filled with *femme fatales*, taut writing with nerve-wracking suspense. His many familiar novels include *Phantom Lady*, *The Bride Wore Black*, *I Married a Dead Man*, and several dozen others. His 1942 short story "It Had to Be Murder" was turned into Alfred Hitchcock's *Rear Window* but only after a lot of litigation over its ownership. But as the book's editor, Maxim Jakubowski points out in his introduction, "Woolrich died a miserable death, almost straight out of one of his own tales." In fact he suffered a leg amputation due to diabetes. Neil Gaiman, in a foreword,

expounds on this slightly, saying that “[Woolrich] had ended his days in (appropriately enough) a wheelchair in a New York hotel lobby, glowering at the world.”

So this anthology of twenty-nine new stories and one 2004 poem by a wide variety of award-winning authors has been put together to recognize and honor Woolrich’s legacy. Dip in anywhere and you won’t be disappointed. Among the stories are such gems as Joe R. Lansdale’s “Missing Sister,” about a brother with a peculiar and creepy hobby. Or “The Woman Who Never Was,” by Martin Edwards, in which a man encounters a phantom lady . . . or does he? We have James Sallis’ “Parkview,” in which an old retired cop tries to solve The Case of the Missing Wombat. A woman is murdered and a man across the way witnesses and videos it in Charles Ardai’s “Sleep! Sleep! Beauty Bright.”

There’s no drop off in quality among the tales here. For example, Bill Pronzini gives us “The Long Road Down,” teaching the lesson that sometimes you just have to bury the body. Or editor Jakubowski’s contribution, “What Happens After the End,” when a hitwoman begins to see people she *knows* that she killed still walking around. O’Neil De Noux in “Blue Moon Over Burgundy” tells about a young man who believes

that once you have found her, never let her go . . .

I want to single out one contribution in particular. That is from Barry N. Malzberg, Woolrich’s agent in the last years of Woolrich’s life and probably the person who knew him best. In “The Phantom Gentleman,” Malzberg follows up a short piece he wrote for *Ellery Queen’s Mystery Magazine* (“Cornell” in the April 1972 issue) in which he tried (and succeeded) to get to Woolrich’s “basic thematic/psychological concerns...” In this latest effort the reader is given further brief but thought provoking insights into the late author’s life. It’s worth the price of the book itself.

My sole complaint about this excellent collection is that there is no biographical information about any of the contributors in the book. Such information would be helpful to readers. Sure, we’ve all heard of some of the authors but I’m willing to wager that not all who pick up the book will recognize every name associated with the contributions.

THE BEST OF MANHUNT 3

Edited by Jeff Vorzimmer
Stark House, \$21.95, December 2022

Rating: A-

THE BEST OF MANHUNT 4: THE JACK RITCHIE STORIES

Edited by Jeff Vorzimmer
Stark House, \$15.95, December 2022

Rating: A-

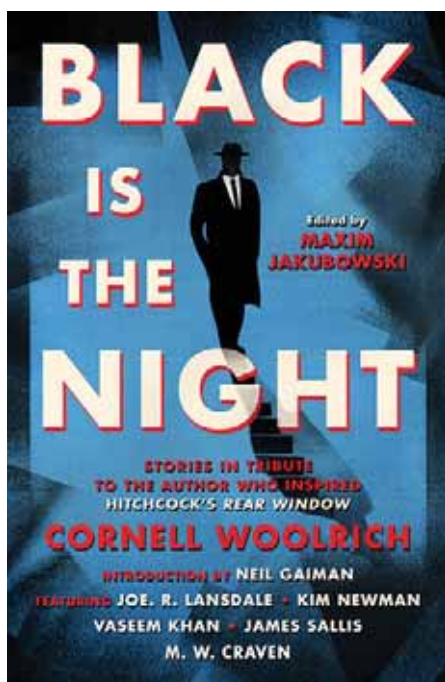
First appearing on newsstands in late 1952, the digest-size *Manhunt* was the acknowledged successor to *Black Mask*, which had ceased publication the year before, as the venue for high-quality crime fiction. By April of 1956 it was being billed as the “World’s Best-Selling Crime-Fiction Magazine.” In its pages, over its 114 issue 14-year run, appeared a veritable Who’s Who of the world’s greatest mystery writers including: Ed McBain, Mickey Spillane, Richard Deming, Jonathan Craig, Hal Ellson, Robert Turner, Jack Ritchie, Frank Kane, Craig Rice, Fletcher Flora, Talmage Powell, Richard S. Prather, David Alexander, Harold Q. Masur, Gil Brewer, Helen Nielsen, Erskine Caldwell, Henry Slesar,



David Goodis, Lawrence Sanders, John D. MacDonald, Clark Howard, Fredric Brown, Donald E. Westlake, Harlan Ellison, Harry Whittington and Steve Frazee.

The covers were bold and brassy, with women in various stages of undress, often being set upon by men in one way or another. Each issue was filled with hard-boiled stories of crime, cops, private eyes, sex, and ordinary people caught up in often violent death and destruction. The magazine is still much sought after by collectors today. But here is a way to get the thrill of the stories without having to mortgage the house. Each of these volumes is filled to the brim with a variety of stories from those masters of that post-pulp era. Volume 3 has thirty tales, while the fourth volume, devoted entirely to Jack Ritchie, contains an additional twenty-eight. A bargain at those prices.

Volume 3 contains William P. McGivern’s “Old Willie,” in which a man seeks vengeance for a woman wronged. Donald Hamilton gives the reader a picture of the horrors of life on the road after an atomic war in “Throwback.” In “By His Own Hand” Rex Stout gives us a different private dick than usual who investigates death upon the wicked stage. Mike Shayne has been hired to



protect a woman who winds up being murdered right under his nose in Brett Halliday's "The Reluctant Client."

In one of two stories by Richard Deming, "Custody," a woman kills her abusive husband and the only witness is her young son. William Campbell Gault's series investigator Joe Puma is hired to deliver the ransom for a kidnapped woman in "Stolen Star." A simple job – but when is anything ever simple for Joe Puma? Sometimes a man's just gotta do what a man's just gotta do, especially if there's eighty grand on the line, in Joe Gore's "Down and Out." Philip Marlowe is hired by a mobster in trouble with the Outfit, in Raymond Chandler's "Wrong Pigeon." But who is the real target?

These are all topnotch stories, told in quick, short bursts. This is an excellent compilation covering the magazine's fourteen years of publication. You really can't go wrong with any of the tales. In addition the front of the book reproduces twenty hard-hitting (literally!) and sexy *Manhunt* covers in glorious color. As with the previous review of the Cornell Woolrich tribute volume, however, there is no biographical information about the authors.

The Jack Ritchie volume is just as good. He produced almost 350 tightly written short stories, most less than 3,000 words in length. Brilliant dialogue, stark noir prose, and twist endings were Ritchie's hallmarks. Editor Jeff Vorzimmer calls him "the hard-boiled O. Henry."

His first story in *Manhunt*, "My Game, My Rules," appeared in July 1954, about a hitman who plays by his own rules. He is hired to take out the big man in a small town. Among the many other fine stories here is "Hold Out," in which two kidnappers deal with a man just a bit short of money. "Devil Eyes" asks the question: how many people does it take to plan and carryout a murder anyway? In "Degree of Guilt," a man is accused of sexually assaulting a young girl and her father must do something about it.

Ritchie's last *Manhunt* story appeared in 1965. In "Going Down?" a man and a cop debate which of their

lives is worse – while standing on the edge of a building. There are also reprints of five stories (in addition to the twenty-three from *Manhunt*) that appeared in other magazines, such as *Mantrap*, *Murder!*, and *Smashing Detective Stories*. Most all of these stories are told in the first person. Instead of the lurid, violent (those are not complaints!) covers of volume 3, the front cover of this collection contains twenty reproductions of the lurid, violent opening pages of some selected Ritchie stories, a nice bonus.

You can't go wrong with either of these collections.

THE OLD TIMER IN THE CORNER

Having reviewed an anthology of stories *inspired* by Cornell Woolrich earlier in this column, I dusted off some of the old material on my shelves and pulled out a few of Woolrich's short stories to read *the real thing* this time around.

In the 1930s Woolrich began writing dozens of suspense tales for the pulp magazines, particularly *Black Mask* and *Detective Fiction Weekly*. His first novel, **THE BRIDE WORE BLACK**, appeared in 1940 and heavily influenced both *noir* writing and film. He also published novels and short stories under the pseudonyms William Irish (**PHANTOM LADY** and **I MARRIED A DEAD MAN** are but two examples) and George Hopley (**NIGHT HAS A THOUSAND EYES** and **FRIGHT**), "George Hopley" being his middle names. His stories were often set among the downtrodden, living in the seedy areas of town, caught up in a web of circumstances that often cannot be understood by the protagonist. Woolrich did not write any continuing series so the reader could never be certain of the fate of the principal characters, adding to the suspense of the story.

His short stories were tightly written examples of desperation mingled with nail-biting tension and terror. Perhaps the best known of those short stories is "It Had to Be Murder" (1942), which

was made into the Hitchcock film *Rear Window*. Other lesser-known tales included one in which a man knows he's going to be murdered by his unfaithful wife, yet tells the cops not to lift a finger to stop her. Then she kills him – or does she? That question forms "The Detective's Dilemma" (1940). Ellery Queen (Frederic Dannay) said that this is "Another highly charged, emotionally packed, suspense-filled detective novelet by the late Cornell Woolrich."

Then there's "Dime a Dance" (1938) in which a taxi-dancer is found murdered in her apartment. Her killer left eight or ten dimes behind, one for each dance he had with her after stabbing her to death, all while the phonograph played "Poor Butterfly" over and over. Queen/Dannay described this story as "A distinguished yarn of the hard-boiled school, with the impact of a machine gun and the jingle of honky-tonk." This tale is narrated in the first person by a second dancer who comes face to face with the killer.

Here's a bit of an oddity. Woolrich's short story "Mystery in Room 913" (1938) was reprinted in the February 1949 issue of *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine* in two parts, one as by Woolrich ("The Suicide Room") and the second half as by Irish ("The Murder Room"). It's a classic Golden Age mystery complete with diagrams, mysterious deaths, coincidence, and a bizarre but thoroughly entertaining solution.

Woolrich was a master of dark suspense and readers can dip into most of his stories knowing that they will be kept on the edge of the seat until the very end. Give Woolrich a try if you can find him. "It Had to Be Murder," for example, is available online.



Maggie's Cozy Mystery Cafe'

Mary Mason



DEVIL'S DELIGHT

by M.C. Beaton with R.W. Green

Minotaur \$26.99

Agatha Raisin #33

Rating: B+

Agatha Raisin can't help but stumbling across crimes, even on her way to the wedding of her police friend, Bill Wong. Agatha and her assistant, Toni, are surprised to see a naked man run toward them. They soon discover they are in an area near a naturist club. The running man is a member, and they discover the corpse of another member of the club.

Two sisters who own an ice cream company are members of the club, and one has just been made a widow. He was locked in an ice cream freezer and left to die. Toni and Agatha strip down to visit the club and try to determine who killed the man. Agatha's friend, Sir Charles Fraith, has property near the club and is called on to assist the investigation.

In typical Agatha Raisin style, she hooks up with a younger, good looking man. The fling doesn't last long, as Agatha realizes he's a narcissist, and that doesn't go over well with Agatha. She does have a flirtation with the head of the naturists. Agatha and company do discover the murderer and bring justice to the victim.

This book shows perhaps a more cautious Agatha, given her past problems with the opposite sex. This time, she realizes a handsome face is not enough for a relationship. I was also impressed that she was able to go au naturel in the company of younger, fitter Toni. I started reading this series

at the beginning, when I was younger than Agatha. I'm now older than she is, and wish I could retain my youth as she has.

In the forward to the book, I enjoyed Green's description of Carsely, the village Agatha retired to. It made the book seem to come alive. I'm looking forward to the next in the series.

SHUTTER

by Ramona Emerson

Soho Crime, \$25.95, 2022

Debut Novel

Rating: A

SHUTTER is set in Albuquerque Where the lead character Rita To-clacheene is a forensic Photographer.

For as long as she can remember she has been blessed or cursed, depending on your perspective, with being able to see spirits. As a child she was gifted with hours of silence for up to 24 hours.

Rita is a specialist because of how

precise she is in her work. When called to a crime scene it's because the police need to get it right. Flashbacks to her childhood on the Navajo reservation give foundation to her (gift).

At every crime scene she is confronted by another spirit wanting answers.

In this book, Rita is called on to photograph a death that may be suicide or murder. The spirit of the dead woman conveys the fact that she did not jump.

Rita is able to lead the investigators to determine the cause of death is murder, without revealing her "source". In the course of the investigation she finds that this murder is linked to a series of murders which are all different M.O.'s. through all the different incidents Rita is tormented by the spirits and some investigators who are unaware of her gift. The case wrapped up clearly.

I found myself wanting to skip forward to the contacts with spirits and their relationship to the crimes (mostly murder).

This debut novel makes me hope for a long running series.

ARSENIC AND ADOBO

by Mia P. Manansala

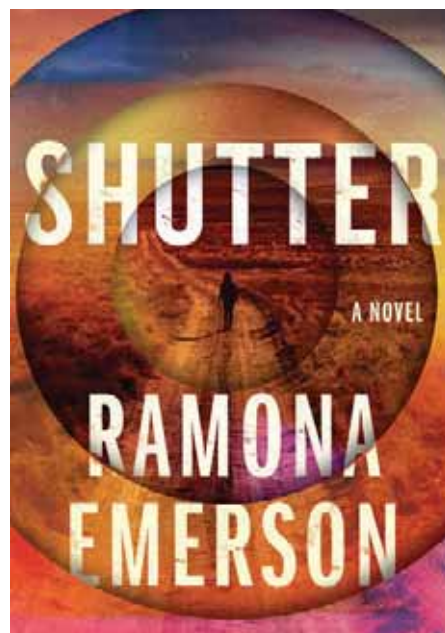
Berkley, \$16.00

Tita Rosie's Kitchen #1

Rating B+

Lila Macapagal is a young woman who has returned to her home after living in Chicago. A small town is an adjustment, but her family needs her and she is keeping busy helping run her Aunt Rosie's Filipino restaurant. There are other aunts in the area, keen to get Lila married off.

Sadly, Lila's ex is the local paper's restaurant critic, and seems to be doing his best to ruin the business with his horrible (and false) reviews. He's aided



by a crooked building/business inspector. Lila tries to find the connection, and has gotten to know many other restaurant owners. When her ex drops dead after a confrontation, both Lila and Rosie are subject to an investigation, seemingly endless, by the police.

Using any resource she has, old friends, relatives, etc., Lila does bring justice to her aunt, and happiness to the customers who love the restaurant.

I enjoyed this book, though I was very frustrated at not being able to sample the delights Lila and Rosie produced. I've enjoyed some Filipino food, but this book showed me I haven't fully explored all possible products.

THE PERFECT CRIME

Edited by Vaseem Khan and Maxim Jackubowski
Harper Collins, \$28.99.

Rating: A

The 22 crime stories from around the world in this book should appeal to most, if not all mystery readers.

My favorite stories were set in vastly different locales.

S.A. Cosby's "The Mayor of Dukes City" is set in small town America. The town is not too small to have a bar that can be considered a dive bar.

Vaseem Khan's "Darjeeling" took

me to India, a country I'll probably never visit in person.

Rachel Howzell Hall's CLOUT CHASER was a short trip to Los Angeles.

David Heska Wanbli Weiden's HOOCH took me to an Indian reservation.

Walter Mosley's BRING ME YOUR PAIN led me to a new view of Santa Monica CA.

Amer Anwar's QUIET NIGHT IN showed me a London I never saw as a tourist.

These were my favorite stories, but the rest were also enjoyable and enlightened. The book merits a wide readership if only for the diversity. The cost of the book is a fraction of the cost to visit even just one story location. For instance, gas for me to and from San Diego to Los Angeles, California.

DASHING THROUGH THE SNOWBIRDS

by Donna Andrews
Minotaur, \$26.99
Meg Langslow #32

Rating: A

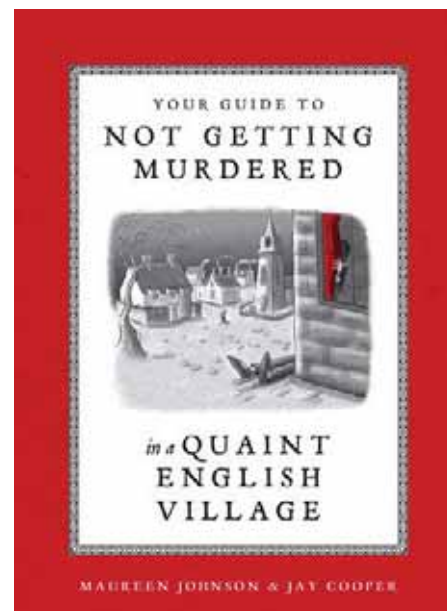
Christmas is a wonderful time of year, especially in Caerphilly Va. This year it's going to be a little different, as in addition to the influx of many family members, Meg & company are hosting some Canadians who are working with her Brothers company on a genealogy project. Their boss is a real pain in the arse, totally unfit to work at the company, much less be the leader.

When he's murdered, there is no lack of suspects, given his incompetence, and general nastiness. All of this is made worse by the fact that the results of the genealogy DNA analysis is faulty and people are angry and even suing the company.

Given that Meg is one of the most able and competent people in the history of our world, it's no wonder she again puts on her sleuthing cap and figures out not only whodunnit, but how to help the Canadians get home for the holidays.

I'm always amazed at how many people are able to spend time in Caerphilly, something I yearn to do. The townspeople are often featured in the series, which I enjoy, but as in this book, others are brought in to round out the cast and show new points of view and experiences.

I can't say enough positive things about this series. Long may Meg and her family and friends continue to amaze and delight us.



YOUR GUIDE TO NOT GETTING MURDERED IN A QUAIN T ENGLISH VILLAGE (Illustrated)

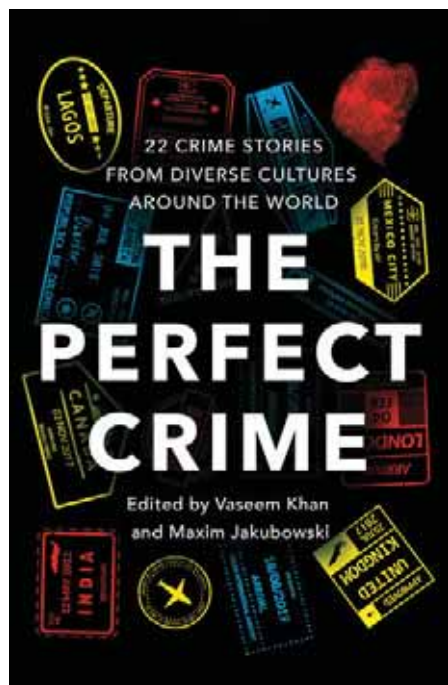
By Maureen Johnson & Jay Cooper.
Ten Speed Press. \$16.99, 2021

Rating: B+

I feel this book is an homage to the works of Edward Gorey, one of my favorite illustrators and authors.

The guide shows pitfalls to visiting small British towns, all explained fully and included are black, gray, white and red illustrations. It is very thorough, giving examples of family members of the gentry, typical villagers, and village locations.

First published in 2021, it's in a fourth printing, so clearly there is a lot of interest in the subject.



Deadly Pleasures

George Easter



I WILL FIND YOU

by Harlan Coben

Grand Central, \$30.00, March

Rating: A-

Is this a Harlan Coben plot, or what?! David Burroughs has been in prison for the last five years for killing his 3-year-old son Matthew. He loved his son and has no memory of the killing, but the evidence is so overwhelming that he doesn't fight the conviction and lives a life of quiet desperation in a solitary prison cell. His wife has divorced him and remarried. He has rebuffed any visits from friends or relatives. David just wants to wallow in his misery.

Then his former sister-in-law Rachel makes a surprise appearance at the prison to show him a recent photograph. It shows a recent vacation shot at an amusement park that a friend shared with Rachel. At the edge of the picture is a young boy of about 8 years of age who clearly has a port-wine stain on his cheek similar to the one that his son Matthew had. He also looks a lot like Matthew. In that moment, David's whole life changes. He knows that his son is still alive and that he was wrongly convicted.

Now he has to figure out how he can get out of prison – to find his son and clear his name.

There is a lot of tension in **I WILL FIND YOU**, but my advice is to just sit back and enjoy the ride. It's so much fun!

TROUBLE

by Katja Ivar

Bitter Lemon, \$15.95

Hella Mauzer #3

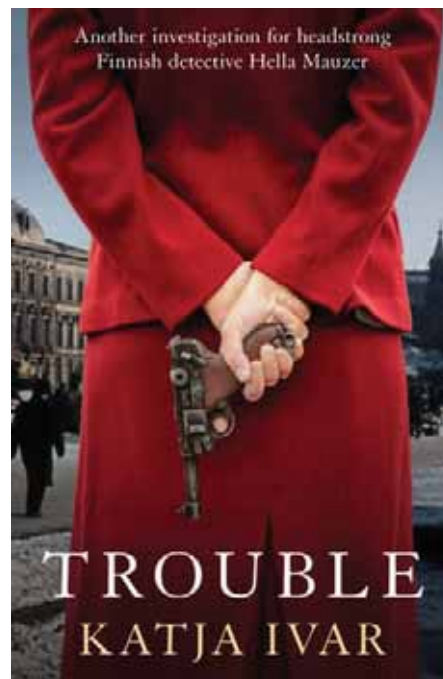
Rating: B+

O.K., I admit it. I read this book because I was fascinated by its cover,

which turned out to have very little to do with the story, but I wasn't disappointed in my reading experience. (An aside: as a boy I thought the German luger pistol was the coolest looking gun ever made. A further aside: I played with cap pistols in games of cowboys and Indians and War throughout my early childhood. It didn't lead to me becoming a gun nut. I don't own a real gun, nor have I ever.)

Helsinki, Finland, June, 1953. We find Hella Mauzer no longer a police-woman, but now a private investigator. She is still suffering from the childhood trauma of losing her parents and siblings to a supposed hit and run accident when she was quite young.

Hella is asked by her former boss to do a background check on Johannes Heikkinen, a man who is a member of the Finnish secret service.. He is being considered for a job in the police hierar-



chy. She agrees to take the assignment on the condition that she be given access to the files on her family's "accident."

As Hella digs into Heikkinen's background she becomes concerned when she finds out that Heikkinen's wife suffered from depression and died when their house caught on fire.

While Hella's thoughts meander back and forth between her present assignment and remembrances of her family, the narrative stalls a bit. But not for long. It soon picks up as she follows up leads on both her background check and the death of her family.

Underestimated by many, Hella is able to bring both "cases" to satisfying and surprising conclusions.

This is a quick, easy and enjoyable read. The author grew up in Russia and the U.S., but lives in France and writes in English, so this is not a translation.

THE TWIST OF A KNIFE

by Anthony Horowitz

Harper, \$29.99, November, 2022

Hawthorne & Horowitz #4

Rating: A

The successful collaboration between author Anthony Horowitz and the prickly ex-detective Hawthorne is at an end. Three books (**THE WORD IS MURDER**, **THE SENTENCE IS DEATH** and **A LINE TO KILL**) is enough and the publisher's contract is fulfilled. "No," is what Horowitz tells the disappointed Daniel Hawthorne when asked about a possible fourth book. Besides, Horowitz is concentrating all of his efforts on his new play **Mindgame**, which is about to open in London's Vaudeville Theater.

Unfortunately the play's opening is far from a success. One critic for the **Sunday Times**, the vitriolic Margaret Throsby, is especially savage in her review where she focuses on what she considers a flawed script. Ouch!

The next day, Throsby's murdered body is discovered along with a murder weapon – a dagger belonging to Horowitz with his fingerprints on it. Motive, means and damning evidence leads the police, in the person of an old enemy DI Cara Grunshaw, to the author's door. Now he really needs Hawthorne's help

and regrets his prior rebuff. Will the eccentric and reclusive Hawthorne help? The answer is an eventual “yes.” But Hawthorne makes Horowitz twist in the wind a bit.

Then there is a second murder of a theater critic. Uh oh.

THE TWIST OF A KNIFE has a very satisfying denouement as the strands of the story coalesce in a final gathering of suspects in a classic Agatha Christie-esque scene.

Much has been said about the author’s inspired insertion of himself into the mystery narrative. But equally impressive is the scintillating dialogue between Horowitz and Hawthorne – especially when snarky remarks are flying.

You can jump in anywhere you want in this series, but, by all means, jump in.

Anthony Horowitz has long been recognized as a master of his craft and with each new book (thank heavens he is so prolific) that reputation gets more and more lodged in stone.

THE BUTCHER AND THE WREN

by Alaina Urquhart

Zando, \$27.00, September, 2022

Rating: B

If you liked **SILENCE OF THE LAMBS**, you’ll probably like **THE BUTCHER AND THE WREN**, with its brilliant pathologist Dr. Wren Muller in search of an elusive serial killer called The Butcher.

The reader is privy to what is going on in the minds of both The Butcher and The Wren. Then midway through the book there’s a significant right turn that ratchets up the suspense.

My thoughts:

1. The prose was excellent. Outside of *The Butcher and The Wren*, the other characters are pretty one-dimensional.

2. It was too gory for my tastes. Fortunately the book is short.

3. Publicity for the book made too much of the fact that the debut author is “famous” for her Morbid true crime podcasts. I didn’t care about that and evaluated the book on its merits

4. The ending of the novel sets up for a sequel very nicely.

5. Will I read a sequel? Probably, but

only if it is short. I wouldn’t be able to handle 400 pages of this stuff.

THE CHIMERA CLUB

by Chuck Greaves

Tallow Lane Books, \$18.95, May, 2022

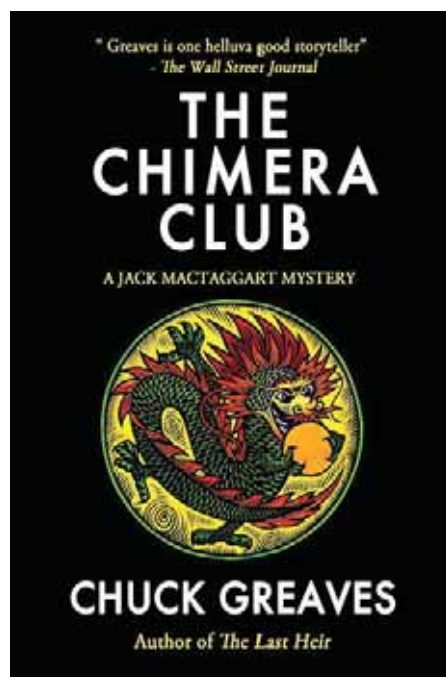
Jack MacTaggart #4

Rating: B+

The Harvey Weinstein-esque film producer Ari Goldstone is found in his hotel suite, naked and tied to the bedposts. He is also very dead, apparently from stab wounds. His reputation for using his power platform to sexually abuse young women is legendary and recently a bevy of his victims have joined to sue him for damaging their lives.

A small trace of blood found in the sink drain of the hotel room is traced back to the DNA of disgraced financier Jimmy Kwan, whose daughter Mae, a fashion model turned nightclub owner, was one of Goldstone’s victims many years ago.

Jimmy Kwan is arrested when he steps off a plane in the U.S. and is immediately jailed. His daughter Mae seeks the services of the crackerjack attorney Jack MacTaggart to defend her father. There is some evidence that Jimmy was out of the country when the murder occurred, but how does one explain the DNA evidence to a jury who is steeped in *CSI* – TV lore?



Greaves is a veteran crime writer and knows how to structure a story with a puzzling plot and characters one grows to care about. I was a big fan of this series when the first three books in it (**HUSH MONEY** – 2012, **GREEN-EYED LADY** – 2013 and **THE LAST HEIR** – 2014) came out from Minotaur Books. These were highly entertaining legal mysteries akin to Steve Cavanagh’s Eddie Flynn series. I was sorry to see the series die in 2015 only to be surprised when it was resurrected by a small press in 2022. Will there be more? I hope so.

BETTER THE BLOOD

by Michael Bennet

Atlantic Monthly Press, \$27.00,

January, 2023

Rating: A-

Tenacious Maori detective Hana Westerman is dedicated to her job, but there are always internal conflicts when her Maori sensibilities come up against white prejudice and the mistreatment of the Maori people.

If one were to compare the historical background of British colonialism in New Zealand in this book to that of westward in the United States, and change the oppressed race from Maori to Native American, **BETTER THE BLOOD** would read about the same. It was interesting to note the similarities of New Zealand history to U.S. history.

Hana is sent to a crime scene by a mysterious video and there she discovers a body in a hidden room. It is the first of several bodies she is led to by similar videos.

Before too long, the identity of the killer is revealed and it turns from a whodunit to a howdunit. In this case, how is the killer going to be caught. I’ll let you find out who he is, but suffice it to say that his motivation is to shine a light on the evils of British colonialism and the injustices perpetrated on the Maori people.

So Hana finds herself in a tough position. She is sympathetic to the motives of the killer but duty bound to catch and stop him from killing more.

Along the way we are privy to a fascinating history lesson, much of which, as

a distant American, I was unaware. It is always a plus to add to one's knowledge while reading a well-crafted mystery. This first novel is sure to gain award consideration and propel the author to bigger and better things in the future.

SEA CASTLE

by Andrew Mayne

Thomas & Mercer, \$16.99, February
Underwater Investigation Unit #4

Rating: B

The Florida Underwater Investigation Unit, comprised of three people, including this series main protagonist Sloan McPherson, is in bureaucratic limbo. There are those who want it disbanded and there are those who would like it to continue seeing it use its unique skill set to further crime investigation. It awaits a final decision and is inactive for now.

So when the body of a young woman washes ashore on a Fort Lauderdale beach, Sloan McPherson is called in to consult, not to investigate. The investigation is conducted by Gwen Wylder, a Miami homicide detective who has alienated most of her colleagues by various negative behaviors. The only saving grace that Gwen has is her smarts, which are impressive. But Gwen's cooperation comes at a price: she wants Sloan's fresh eyes to comb through seemingly unrelated cold-case murders and disappearances because Gwen believes there is a possible serial killer trolling the Florida coast. The higher-ups don't believe in Gwen's theory.

Eventually Sloan's review of the cases starts to bear fruit and new connections between the cases are made. Then another woman disappears and the two are frantic to find her before she becomes a fresh murder victim.

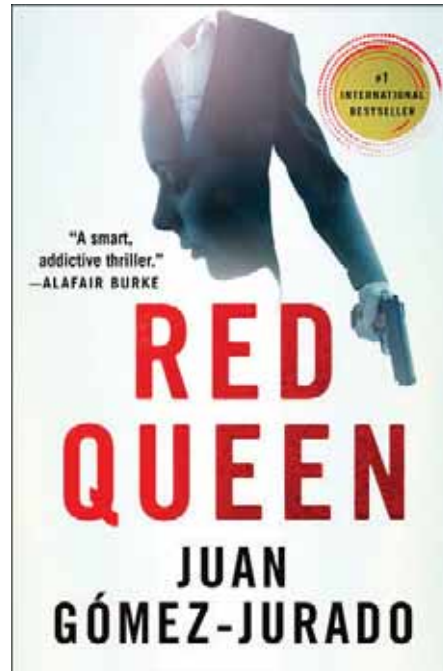
One of the elements that has made this such an enjoyable series for me is the ocean-based action and detection that are found in the first three books. That is mostly absent in **SEA CASTLE**. It is an adequate police procedural, but my hope is that the series returns to the sea (and under it), and if the information on the last page of the novel is any indication, that is what will happen

with number five in the series. Mayne's writing is very smooth and seemingly effortless.

RED QUEEN

by Juan Gómez-Jurado
Minotaur, \$27.99, March
Red Queen # 1 of 3

Rating: A



The setting is modern day Spain. There are two main characters in **RED QUEEN**, the first novel of a trilogy. One is Antonia Scott, who is the daughter of a Spanish mother and a British diplomat. She is a forensic and crime scene specialist par excellence, but became a recluse a couple of years ago when her beloved husband was seriously injured, remaining in a coma to this day. She works for a secretive organization that handles what might become highly sensitive cases if they don't keep lids on them. Her only contact with the outside world is by phone with her wise English grandmother. Her "handler," known only by the name Mentor, has been trying to get Antonia to come out of her shell and back in the game, but has been unsuccessful.

The second main character is Jon Gutierrez, the overweight (but strong), gay policeman from Bilbao who has a soft streak that has gotten him in recent trouble when he tried to help a prostitute get out from under the thumb of

her abusive pimp by planting drugs on the pimp. It all blew up in his face and he is now facing possible jail time and certain dismissal from the police force.

Mentor approaches Gutierrez with an offer: get Antonia to attend a puzzling crime scene and he'll make Gutierrez's troubles go away. (Mentor has the ear of influential people.) Initially it seems like he will fail in his mission but the fates intervene and Antonia agrees to take a look – just a look – nothing else. But, of course, the crime scene piques her interest as her super IQ goes into overdrive and it's off to the races for her.

The case involves a teen-aged boy from a wealthy family whose body was found without a drop of blood left in it. But the murder is just the start. A high-ranking executive and daughter of one of the richest men in Spain is kidnapped, a crime which is tied to the previous murder.

I've seen Antonia Scott compared to Lincoln Rhyme, Clarice Starling and Lisbeth Salander, but I don't buy that comparison, unless it is only highlighting Antonia's brain power. She has her own unique personality that is quite different from that trio. I have to admit that I haven't warmed up to Antonia yet. She is very standoffish, even to the reader. Perhaps that will change with book 2 or 3 of the trilogy. By contrast, Jon Gutierrez is quite likeable and surprisingly adds quite a bit to the investigation, while at the same time protecting Antonia.

This book sold over 2 million copies in Spain which has a population of 47 million people. That means 4% of the Spain's people bought this book. By contrast, if that were the U.S., with its 332 million population, **RED QUEEN** would have sold 13 million copies here. I think Minotaur would be happy to see those sales numbers. They might even be satisfied with a slightly lower number.

I can see why it was so popular in Spain. It is a rollicking good tale, peopled with memorable characters and devilishly clever crimes. It is being made into a TV streaming series that should appear in late 2023. Its se-

quels, **BLACK WOLF** (Winter '24) and **WHITE KING** (Winter '25) will, I'm sure, be worth the wait. Don't be put off by the references of its being in a trilogy. **RED QUEEN** can be read as a stand-alone and holds up very well as a single book.

Spanish crime fiction has certainly tweaked my interest, especially after I read last year's **EVEN THE DARKEST NIGHT** by Javier Cercas – one of my favorites of the year. Keep 'em coming.

SMALL MERCIES

by Dennis Lehane
Harper, \$30.00, April

Rating: A+

With **SMALL MERCIES**, Dennis Lehane has set the 2023 mystery award bar very high. I will be surprised if I read a better crime novel this year.

It's 1974 Boston and life-long "Southie" resident Mary Pat Fennessey gets involved in the demonstrations against school busing. She is vehemently against sending her white daughter to a predominantly black high school.

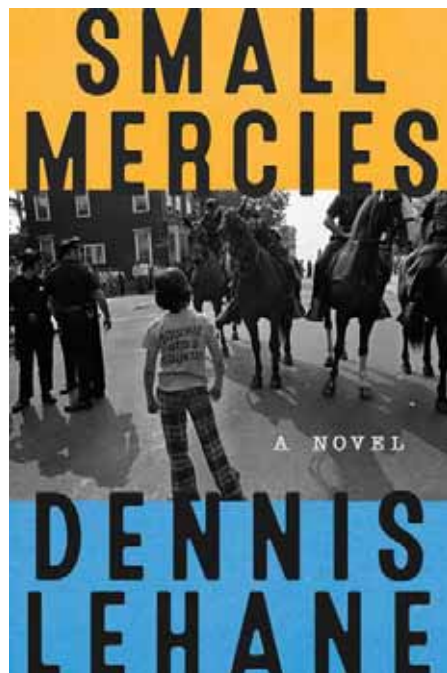
Then one night Mary Pat's teenage daughter Jules stays out late and doesn't come home. That same evening, a young black man is found dead, struck by a subway train under suspicious circumstances.

Days pass and Mary Pat conducts a desperate search which includes asking the local Irish mob boss Marty Butler for help. Marty tries to diffuse the situation with money, but Mary Pat remains undeterred. If Jules is still alive, she will find her. If she is dead, her death will be revenged.

But Mary Pat soon starts snooping in areas (the death of the young black man) that bother the neighborhood powers that be and the intimidation escalates.

SMALL MERCIES treats many of the same themes as does **RAZOR-BLADE TEARS** by S. A. Cosby. But this time, we are looking at the inconsistencies of racial prejudice through the eyes of a white woman, not a black man (I know we catch more than a glimpse of white prejudice from the **RAZOR-BLADE** character Buddy Lee, but Ike Randolph's black perspective pervades

the tale). As Mary Pat conducts her search she comes to realize that some of her long-held beliefs in community, race and justice are slowly changing.



Near the end of the book, Mary Pat reveals her new-found knowledge in this powerful passage: (warning – contains racial slurs and a plot spoiler) "When you're a kid and they start in with all the lies, they never tell you they're lies. They just tell you this is what it is. Whether they're talking about Santa Claus or God or marriage or what you can or can't make of yourself. They tell you Polacks are this way and wops are another and don't even get us started on spics and the niggers but you sure can't trust them. And they tell that's the Way. And you, you're an [f-ing] kid, you think, I want to be part of the Way. I sure don't want to be outside the Way. I gotta live with these people my whole life. And it's warm in there. So warm. The rest of the world? That's so [f-ing] cold. So you embrace it, you know?...And then you dig in because now you got kids and you want them to feel warm. And you spread the same lies to them, mainline them into their blood. Until they become the kinda people who can chase some poor boy into a train station and [kill him.] My daughter's dead ...because I sold my daughter lies. And before she ended up swallowing them? She knew

it. They always know it. They know it at five. But you keep repeating the lies until you wear them down. That's the worst of it – you wear them down until you scoop all the good out of their hearts and replace it with poison."

That is one of the most powerful passages I've ever read in crime fiction and it will stay with me forever.

THE END OF THE ROAD

by Andrew Welsh-Huggins
Mysterious Press, \$26.95, April

Rating: A-

Pryor is a one-eyed crime boss who planned a bank robbery that went south. Myles was his getaway driver. When Myles was arrested, he gave up Pryor in a vain hope to get immunity from prosecution. But Pryor walked free due to coerced witness testimony and Myles was left holding the bag.

Now, a few years later, Myles has just been released from prison into the loving arms of his loyal girlfriend Penny. Myles has turned over a new leaf and wants to go straight, but doesn't think Pryor will let him.

A confrontation between the two leads to Myles being hospitalized in critical condition.

Penny realizes that the only hope for a peaceful life with Miles (if he survives), is to kill Pryor. So she gets a gun and goes in search of the malefactor.

Meanwhile, Pryor has come up with another idea for a robbery, which is beginning to play out.

On another path we follow the very sympathetic Deputy Sheriff J.P. as his investigation into the murder of an elderly couple brings him onto a collision course with Pryor.

Noirish until near the very end, **THE END OF THE ROAD** has an especially heart-thumping climax. Andrew Welsh-Huggins has some serious writing skills on full display.

THE RESCUE

by T. Jefferson Parker
Forge, \$28.99, April

Rating: B+

This is a dog story. I'm a cat lover and can't be bothered with walking a dog. But I've been fascinated to find

out that I've really enjoyed recent "dog" mysteries by Robert Crais, Margaret Mizushima and Paula Munier. I guess if I don't have to clean up after them, they're pretty cool in my mind – loyal, resourceful and highly trained.

THE RESCUE by T. Jefferson Parker follows Robert Crais' script by which the reader is privy to the rudimentary thoughts of Felix, the dog who is the center of the story. No, the dog doesn't have any human qualities of raciocination. But it does have one heck of a sniffer. It can find anything and that talent has been noticed by good and bad people alike.

When journalist Bettina Blazak travels to Tijuana to do a human interest story about a dog who is being treated for a gunshot wound, Bettina feels an instant connection to the animal and asks the veterinarian if she can adopt him. Soon she's on her way home to California with her newly-named Felix. Her story goes viral and is seen by the dog's real owner, who has used him to sniff out drug cartel's valuables so that he can steal them and split the profits with a rival cartel's boss.

It seems that Felix is not a Mexican street dog, but a highly trained drug-sniffing dog once employed by the DEA. Former owners want Felix back. Rival drug lords either want to kidnap Felix or kill him depending on which action benefits them the most.

I'm always impressed by Parker's writing. It's immediately evident from the first page to the last. As enjoyable a read as **THE RESCUE** was for me, there were parts of the narrative that stretched credulity to the max and I did find it a bit similar to **SUSPECT** by Robert Crais.

SONS AND BROTHERS

by Kim Hays

Seventh Street Books, \$17.95, April
Giuliana and Renzo #2

Rating: A-

Walking his dog along Bern's icy Aare river, Johann Karl Gutner, a surgeon in his seventies, drowns. When his bruised corpse is found, his watch is missing. A mugging gone wrong? The more Swiss police detectives Giuliana

Linder and Renzo Donatelli learn about Johann Karl Gurtner, the more convinced they are that he was no random accident victim. There were a lot of people who had good reason not to like him.

Their investigation focuses on the black sheep of the family, Markus, a successful photographer who has been estranged from his father for years. Add to that Markus' history of violence and substance abuse.

Following other leads, Giuliana and Renzo are also led back to the village of Heidmatt, where Dr. Gutner was raised. Did something happen decades ago that shaped Dr. Gutner's life and possibly his death?

This short plot description doesn't do justice to the complexity of plotting that makes **SONS AND BROTHERS** such a pleasing police procedural/novel of detection. Kim Hays gives great value for your money. At \$17.95, **SONS AND BROTHERS** is the bargain of the year.



DARK ANGEL

by John Sandford

Putnam, \$29.95, April
Letty Davenport #2

Rating: B+

To be honest, I lost interest in the Lucas Davenport series several years ago. But when the first of the Letty Davenport (Lucas' daughter) series came out last year (**THE INVESTIGATOR**), I decided to give Sandford another try and I found that I quite enjoyed this "new" character.

Letty works for the Department of Homeland Security and for Senator Christopher Colles, chairman of the Senate Homeland Security Committee. In her latest case Letty is on loan to the NSA. She is asked to go undercover with Rod Baxter, a brilliant computer nerd, in order to infiltrate a cell of hackers known as Ordinary People. The hackers may be targeting the natural gas supply of a northeastern city with a ransomware attack.

Once situated in Los Angeles, nothing goes according to plan and Letty discovers that her bosses have been less than forthright and transparent with her and Rod.

There is a reason why John Sandford has sold a gazillion books. He's easy to read, his plots are full of surprises, there are good action scenes for the adreneline junkies and his characters are likeable and sometimes even admirable. Give this series a try. I think you'll like it.

DOWN A DARK RIVER

by Karen Odden

Crooked Lane, \$26.99, November, 2021
Inspector Corravan #1

Rating: A-

It's 1878 London. Inspector Corravan grew up in London's seedy East End as an orphan taken in by the loving Ma Doyle and raised with her family. He did stints as a bare knuckle boxer and a dock worker before joining the police force. He has an upper-class lover named Belinda who seems quite happy with their unusual relationship that includes regular Thursday night visits.

Corravan started his police career as a Thames river policeman, but transferred to Scotland Yard when he discovered corruption within his police unit. Now the Yard is working under the shadow of a corruption scandal that came to light the previous autumn.

Corravan is in the midst of case involving the disappearance of Mrs. Beckford, the wife of a wealthy man. She is apparently mentally deranged and has run off. He is making headway in finding her, when the bodies of young women are found floating in river boats and Corravan and his able assistant Stiles are assigned that case as well.

What proves most puzzling about his new case is the lack of any connection between the murdered young women or their families. Someone is killing young women of good breeding, but there appears to be no obvious motive for doing so.



Karen Odden

Karen Odden's fine writing and intriguing plotting make this series a must read for fans of historical mysteries (and other types of crime fiction). I didn't expect to like this novel as much as I did. It proved hard for me to put down. Now on to the second in the series, **UNDER A VEILED MOON** (2022), which was reviewed by Kristopher Zgorski in the last issue of DP (#97) on page 51.

THE BANDIT QUEENS

by Parini Shroff

Ballantine, \$28.00, January

Rating: B+

This novel might be dubbed an Indian domestic suspense novel. But I suspect that it has also crossed over into mainstream fiction and has attracted those fans as well because of its fine writing.

The plot centers around Geeta who lives alone after Ramesh, her drunk and abusive husband, deserted her five years ago. But you know what a small-town rumor mill can do with that. Many of her neighbors believe that she killed

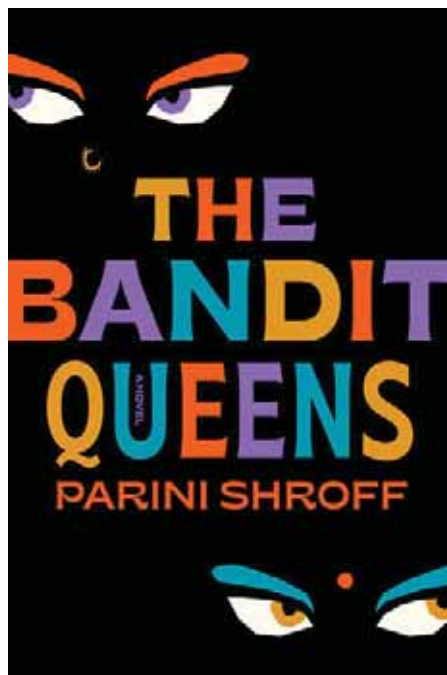
him and somehow disposed of his body. So even if Geeta is shunned, she is also feared by many.

The title of the book refers to Geeta's hero, a real-life Bandit Queen, Phoolan Devi, who inspires Geeta to get revenge on men who do women wrong.

By the standards of her village, Geeta lives pretty well, having established a business as a talented jewelry maker. But her relative financial security is endangered by a neighbor's husband Samir, who is threatening to steal her savings.

So she and her neighbor Farah decide it is in their mutual interest to do away with Samir and they do so. Geeta thinks this is the end of the matter, but word leaks out to a select few of the women in the town who pressure her to do the same for them that she did for Farah.

There is a lot to like in **THE BANDIT QUEENS** – intriguing characters, a revealing look into what life in a small village in India is like, and how women in India survive despite systemic male oppression. I would have rated this book higher because there are aspects of it that deserve an A. But I have to admit **THE BANDIT QUEENS** isn't my kind of book. It's all about relationships and geared toward a female readership. Give me good detection, action, danger any day over relationships and I'll be happy



in my reading. So consider the B+ rating highly biased.

As crime fiction goes, **THE BANDIT QUEENS** is something out of the ordinary. If you read this fine novel and have a differing opinion, please email me. I won't be surprised or offended. It has garnered two starred reviews (*Booklist* and *Library Journal* as well as being chosen as an amazon editors' pick for January). I expect it to appear on some best of 2023 lists at the end of this year.



Peter Robinson

STANDING IN THE SHADOWS

by Peter Robinson

Morrow, \$30.00, April

Alan Banks #28

Rating: B+

The narrative switches between the present (2019) when an archaeologist discovers a human skeleton and 1980, when a young woman, Alice Poole is found murdered. Seemingly unrelated incidents, which later prove to have a nexus.

Detective Superintendent Banks and his small team of loyal minions dive into the seemingly impossible task of identifying who the skeleton belongs to. The investigation is painstakingly slow and along the way we hear a lot (sometimes too much) about Banks' musical choices (in the car and at home).

As always with Peter Robinson the plotting is excellent – especially how the author wraps up the book. This may be the last Alan Banks novel – unless there is one in the pipeline – because Peter recently died unexpectedly. We've lost a charming man and an excellent writer, but his writing will live on.

Action Thriller Corner



George Easter Reviews

SEVENTEEN: Last Man Standing

by John Brownlow
Hodder & Stoughton, £14.99; in U.S.,
Hanover Square Press, \$27.99,
November, 2022

Rating: A

Did you know that there have been seventeen super-assassins in the last 100 years or so? – each one succeeding the prior one. The assassin known as Seventeen is now at the pinnacle of his profession. But it is a tenuous position. All it takes is letting your guard down for a second and an upstart may take you out and assume your position as Eighteen.

After completing an unsatisfactory assignment in Berlin that left him with questions, Seventeen is asked by his handler to find Sixteen, who vanished without a trace, but is rumored to still be alive. Apparently the only way for Seventeen to keep his position in the assassination hierarchy is to kill the man who held the title before him, and if he refuses, every assassin in the world will be on his back. (Why? This is the part of the narrative that didn't make much sense to me, but it is pivotal to the story, so I just went along with it. Apparently, a numbered assassin can never retire. The only way to get out of the game is to be killed. Sixteen has broken this rule, hence Seventeen's mission.)

Using some serious detection skills, Seventeen eventually traces Sixteen's location to a remote area of South Dakota, where Sixteen has built himself an unassailable hideout. So Seventeen patiently waits to find Sixteen's chink in his armor. His first attempt at assassination leads to failure. And now Sixteen

is aware of his presence and a clash of the titans ensues.

Debut novelist, but experienced screen writer, John Brownlow adds an exciting cinematic quality to his text. The action scenes really pop! Short James Patterson-esque chapters abound – 158 of them in a 407-page book. It took a little while for me to warm up to Seventeen, but as more is revealed about his history and his intentions, I eventually did. If you are into cleverly staged action thrillers, **SEVENTEEN** is for you. Just suspend your disbelief a bit and go with the flow.

I listened to a fascinating interview with the author, John Brownlow (<https://www.buzzsprout.com/1686667/11376728-john-brownlow-in-person-with-paul>) in which he reports that **SEVENTEEN** is the first of a series. The next episode will tell the back story of Sixteen.



HARD TO BREAK

by Michael Ledwidge

Hanover Square, \$27.99, January, 2023

Michael Gannon #3

Rating: B

Mike Gannon has enemies in high and low places and they are out to get revenge. He's been lying low in a remote area of Utah for the last couple of years (see **RUN FOR COVER**) and now thinks that it is safe to come out of hiding. He's always wanted to go to Alaska and hunt grizzly bears so he books a trip. But when Mike arrives, he discovers there are some men there who are hunting him. And he gets caught.

Wisked off to Latin America, Mike finds himself in life-threatening danger. But before killing him, his captor wants to play with Mike a bit – hunger games play with him. Can Mike turn the tables and escape?

This is a fun action series. I especially liked the first one, **STOP AT NOTHING**. The subsequent two, while still entertaining, aren't quite as cleverly plotted. **HARD TO BREAK** requires substantial suspension of disbelief, but I'll keep reading the series. Not as good as a Mark Greaney or Nick Petrie thriller, but nonetheless highly entertaining.

AMOK

by Barry Eisler

Thomas & Mercer, \$28.99,

December, 2022

Dox #1

Rating: B+

If you've read many Barry Eisler novels, you will have run into an engaging character called Dox (Carl Williams) before. He has appeared in the John Rain and Livia Lone series. But **AMOK** is the first Eisler thriller to feature Dox as the main character – in his earlier life.

As the story opens in 1991, we find Dox at loose ends and at home in Tuscola, Texas after his military service (Marine sniper) and a short stint as a CIA contractor. His father was put in prison years before for abusing Dox's mother and sister. Now the time is approaching when his father is to get out and the whole family is concerned about what the father will do.

Anxious for more action than his

hometown can provide, he takes a \$50,000 CIA contract to go to the island of East Timor in Indonesia and protect Isobel Amaral, a young doctor who has information that the ruling powers want to keep secret.

What follows is a burgeoning love story set in the chaos of an oppressed nation pushing strongly for its independence.

When Dox finishes his contract in Timor, he returns home to deal with his father, who still has an emotional hold over him.

There were parts of this story that I simply didn't buy, but overall **AMOK** was an engaging read. It was nice to read the back story of a character I've been reading about for years. And, of course, Eisler excels with his believable action scenes.

TARGET ZERO

by Anthony Riches

Head of Zeus, £9.99, January

Mickey Bale #2

Rating: A-

Mickey Bale, formerly a close protection officer with the Met, is now on his own and looking for work. He answers an ad from a powerful Russian oligarch who is looking for a man with his skills to join his protection team. But MI5 also has its eyes on the same oligarch and suspects that he is aiding a team of Russian terrorists who plan to unleash military-grade Sunburn missile warheads on the London population and blame it on jihadists. So MI5 induces Mickey to act as their eyes and ears inside the oligarch's palatial estate.

There is realistic and entertaining action throughout **TARGET ZERO** and as one would expect, events come to a gripping climax. This is the kind of book one hopes never falls into the hands of a jihadist terrorist. Too many good ideas for them in it.

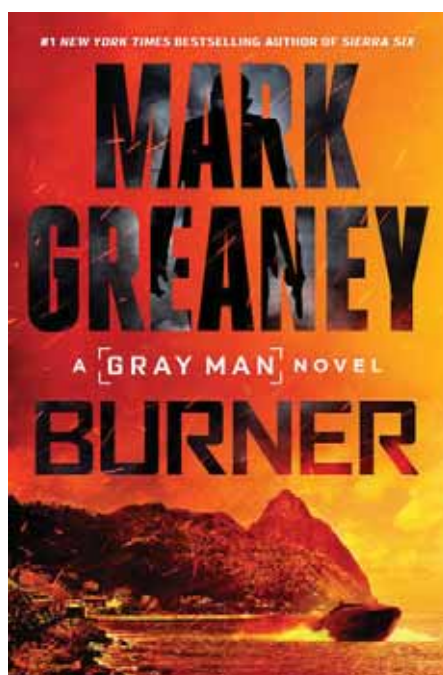
Riches does a great job with this sequel to the equally enjoyable **NEMESIS** (2021).

BURNER

by Mark Greaney

Berkley, \$29.00, February

Gray Man #12



Rating: A

Court Gentry (the Gray Man) floats in and out of favor with the CIA. At present he is on the outs with them, so he has taken a private contract from a wealthy Ukrainian to blow up mega-yachts owned by Russian oligarchs – a clear reprisal for the Russian incursion into Ukraine. There's more than one way to fight a war.

I'm sure there are good Swiss banks, but the ones we encounter in crime and thriller fiction are dirty – servicing the needs of criminals, totalitarian regimes, and corrupt government officials. Alex Velesky works for such a dirty Swiss bank, which has been aiding the Russian regime in its nefarious and covert acts around the globe. Velesky objects to the Ukrainian War and wants to strike a blow against Russia so he downloads a ton of sensitive material that would damage Russia's secret relationships if it became public (think Edward Snowden) and then flees Switzerland. Bank officials catch wind of what he has done before Velesky gets too far and the chase is on.

In a strange twist of fate both Gentry and his love interest Zoya (also a very capable assassin who is fighting her recent descent into alcoholism) are dispatched by dueling parties to find Velesky and retrieve the information. Star-

crossed lovers doesn't begin to describe their relationship. They eventually meet up, figure things out and join forces.

While I was typing this review I clicked on a YouTube video of Tina Turner singing, "You're simply the best – better than all the rest." Because that's what Mark Greaney is. He's simply the best – better than all the rest. If you are into action thrillers, Mark Greaney's Gray Man series is a must read and sure to entertain long into the night when you should be sleeping.

DIRTY WAR

by Stephen Leather

Hodder & Stoughton, £16.99,

October, 2022

Spider Shepherd #19

Rating: A-

In the last days of the Afghan War, those Afghanis who help the U.S. and British forces were desperate to get themselves and their families out of the country when the U.S. and the U.K. began the full-scale withdrawal of troops – fearing the Taliban reprisals which were sure to come. One such translator, Sayyid Habibi, whom MI5 operative Spider Shepherd had managed to rescue in a daring mission, was given a new life in the U.K.

Now, some time later, it appears the Sayyid is a wolf in sheep's clothing. His wife has come forward and is claiming the he is an Islamic State jihadist and that he is planning a terrorist atrocity in the U.K.

Who better than Spider Shepherd to put on the case? Teamed with Farah Nuri, a young Pashto translator for MI5, they form and execute a plan to find Sayyid and his cohorts and foil his planned attack.

This has a favorite format of mine – part thriller – part novel of detection – both well executed.

For me, Stephen Leather never fails to deliver the goods.

STILL STANDING

by Stephen Leather

Hodder & Stoughton, £20.00, January

Matt Standing #3

Rating: B+

Matt Standing is a member of the

elite SAS special forces unit in the U.K. Among his comrades in arms are Billy and Pete Green, identical twins. When Billy receives news that Pete has been found dead (an apparent suicide according to Thai authorities), Matt accompanies Billy to Thailand to find out what happened to Pete. They both agree that Pete wouldn't have committed suicide.

The explanations they receive from the police are less than satisfying and both are upset that Pete's body wasn't preserved so they could take it back to England for burial. Instead it was mysteriously cremated.

With the help of Matt's friend Spider Shepherd (one of Leather's long-standing series characters), Matt is able to find out that Pete was looking into the disappearance of a sister of one of Pete's mates. She had come to Thailand in the company of a notorious crime boss and hasn't been heard from for months.

Not long after their arrival, Matt and Billy come under attack, leaving Standing to investigate on his own. And he's now on the run from corrupt police and the crime boss who will do anything to keep his operation humming along without interference. He clearly needs help so he once again calls Spider Shepherd who sends him help in the form of ex-pat Lex Harper (another recurring character in Stephen Leather's thrillers) who lives in Thailand. Now tooled up, Standing and Harper go on the offensive.

The storyline of **STILL STANDING** is quite straightforward with few surprises. Nevertheless, I thoroughly enjoyed it – mainly due to Stephen Leather's storytelling skills, clear prose and believable action scenes. And it's nice to see crossover characters appear – especially ones we've come to know from other books.

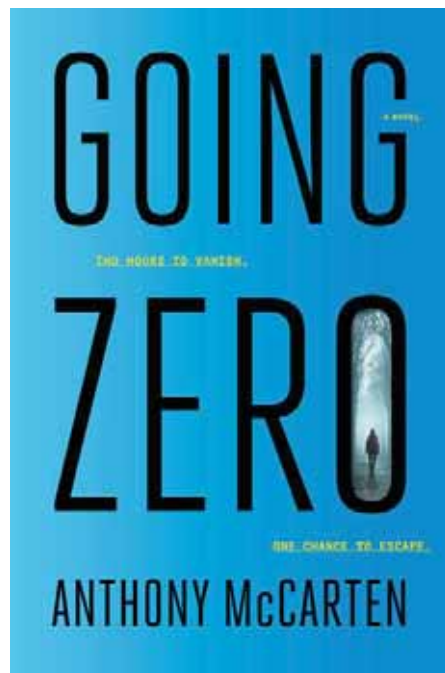
Stephen Leather provides a nice break from some of the more serious crime fiction that I read.

GOING ZERO

by Anthony McCarten
Harper, \$30.00, April

Rating: A-

The premise is pretty simple. Tech millionaire Cy Baxter has developed



(with the help of the CIA and NSA) a software program called FUSION, that can track anyone on earth. 1984 anyone? To show it's capabilities, a test has been proposed with ten participants who must hide from FUSION for thirty days in order to get their \$3 million reward. Each participant is given two hours to go off-grid and disappear. Then search teams are sent to find them. If just one participant eludes detection there is more than \$3million dollars at stake. Cy may lose out on a \$90 billion government contract that will revolutionize surveillance forever.

One participant is a shy Boston librarian named Kaitlyn Day and she surprises Cy Baxter by being particularly evasive.

As I was reading along I found the details of the story fascinating, but I was puzzled a bit by the absence of an essential element of any good thriller – danger. It was a question of whether the participants got caught or didn't get caught. No dangerous consequences involved. Then midway through the story, there is a big surprise and the story veers off in a different direction. And finally – some danger.

GOING ZERO is a great debut thriller that contains a lot of thought-provoking material as well as a great plot.

ALLIGATOR ALLEY

by Mike Lawson
Atlantic Monthly Press, \$27.00,
February, 2023
Joe Demarco #16

Rating: A-

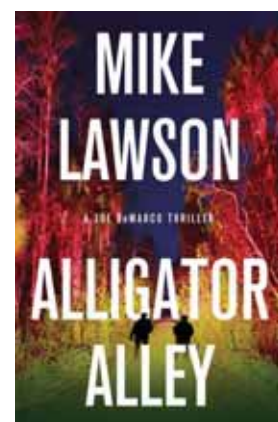
When Andie Moore, a 23-year-old working in the DOJ's Inspector General's Office, is murdered in cold blood in Florida's Everglades, her boss, Congressional Medal of Honor winner Henry Cantor, implores Speaker of the House Mahoney to have his team investigate privately. Henry suspects that local FBI agents may be involved in the murder so he doesn't trust the official investigation.

So Mahoney dispatches his "fixer" Joe DeMarco to look into the matter. He takes Emma, a retired spy with impressive connections to military and intelligence sources, who takes no prisoners.

The victim was looking into a case of Medicare fraud, which was suspiciously closed before resolution by two less-than-stellar FBI agents, named McIntyre and McGruder. Were they responsible for Andie's death? Is this a cover-up?

While Joe works the physical evidence, Emma calls on her contacts for digital and forensic know-how. They pretty much figure out who is directly responsible for the murders but suspect that there are higher powers behind the perpetrators' actions.

Mike Lawson is a great storyteller. I have never been disappointed in one of his novels and **ALLIGATOR ALLEY** is no exception. Very few mystery/thriller writers are this consistently good.



Novels of Sensation and Other Stuff

Hank Wagner



"When one door closes another door opens," or so they say, certainly the case when *Mystery Scene* announced last August that it was shutting down its print operations; I had written for them for around two decades at that point, after being introduced to the estimable Kate Stine by the legendary Ed Gorman around the turn of the century (just loving saying that, also, postponing things for two weeks just so I can use the word "fortnight"). Shortly after that door shut in classic Maxwell Smart fashion, I received a call from the august George Easter asking if I'd like to write for *Deadly Pleasures*. Needless to say, I jumped at the chance, and dove through that opening door. "I'll need something by mid-January," said George.

Shortly after I dove, I fell (awkwardly) while cutting my lawn, rupturing my left quadriceps. Surgery, with an expected healing period of six weeks, was required. That surgery didn't take, so I had another, right before Christmas. I'm still in the midst of that healing period as of this writing (if all goes well, I'll be allowed to start many months of painful rehab soon). So when George called this week, I was surprised to hear the deadline was imminent. My focus had been elsewhere. So, this first piece may be terse, unfocused and disjointed, much as I have been lately. Oh, did I mention I tested positive for Covid two days before George called?

The hits, as they say, just keep on coming.

Okay, let's talk thrillers.

I'll kick thus off with **THE PERFECT ASSASSIN: A Doc Savage Thriller** (Grand Central Publishing, 2021). A collaboration between James Patterson and Brian Sitts, it tells the sto-

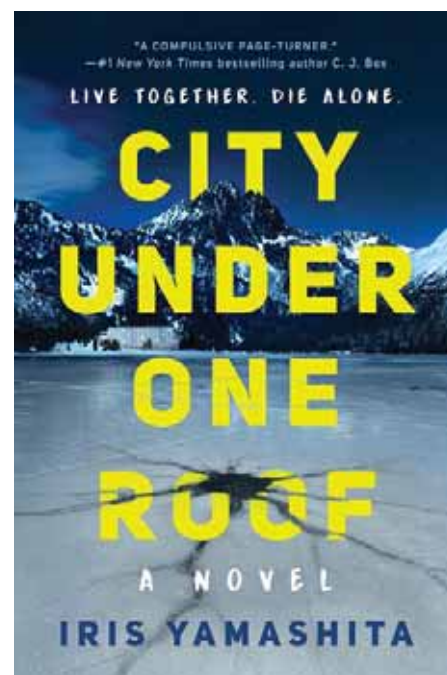
ry of that fabled adventurer's grandson, the rather ordinary Prof. Brandt Savage, who is kidnapped off the street and subjected to a rigorous mental and physical conditioning program that literally unlocks every ounce of his potential. The reason for his abduction? I'll leave that for readers to discover on their own, as it represents the metaphorical backbone of this fast paced, action-packed series launch. Reminiscent of the pulps that inspired it, it's a quick, fun, undemanding read. **Rating: B+**

Judging by the reviews I've seen, Patterson and Sitts were far less successful in their earlier relaunch of that other titan of the pulps, The Shadow, a character that certainly seems to be inextricably bound to the depression era that birthed him. It's a shame that they didn't adhere more closely to that model, one which is explored in thorough, loving fashion by Will Murray in his non-fiction tome, **DARK AVENGER: The Strange Saga of the Shadow** (Odyssey Publications, 2022), a follow up to his equally insightful **MASTER OF MYSTERY: The Rise of the Shadow** (Independently published, 2021). In **DARK AVENGER**, pulp-smith Murray collects a series of informative articles about the character's creators, and about the seven "phases" of Shadow stories, providing a complete overview of the pulp adventures of the character, which ran from 1931 through 1949. **Rating: A**

Not one to sit on his hands, Murray also published not one but two volumes of Lovecraftian tales in 2022, appropriately titled **THE WILD ADVENTURES OF CTHULHU, Volumes 1 and 2** (Odyssey Publications). They each collect 10 genre bending tales of the macabre

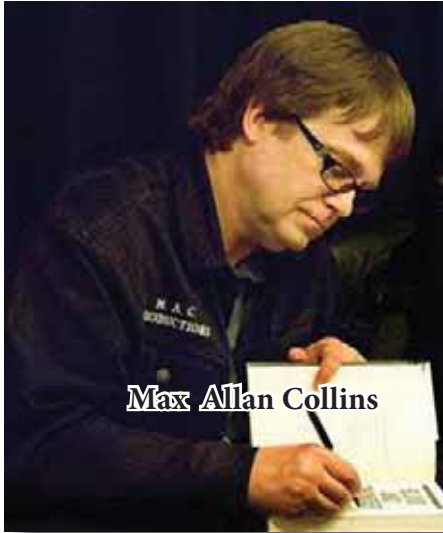
first published in a stunning variety of venues. Each story is well worth your time, faithful to the source material, but each putting Murray's unique spin on the franchise. The guy revels in playing in pulp sandboxes; I consider myself fortunate to be a recipient of the products of that predilection. **Rating: B+ for both volumes.**

To round things out, let me make brief mention of a very promising debut, and of the latest books from two writers who feature highly on my personal pantheon.



The promising debut is **CITY UNDER ONE ROOF** (Berkley, 2023), by Iris Yamashita. The book lives up to the effusive praise which dominates the back cover of its dust jacket, which is peppered with words like "gripping," "unsettling," "claustrophobic," "atmospheric," "compelling," "clever," "tense,"

“compulsive” and “spectacular.” It’s all that and more, essentially a locked room mystery set in a small town where every citizen harbors deep, dark secrets. I think this one is sure to land on most reviewers “Year’s Bests” lists. **Rating: A**



Max Allan Collins

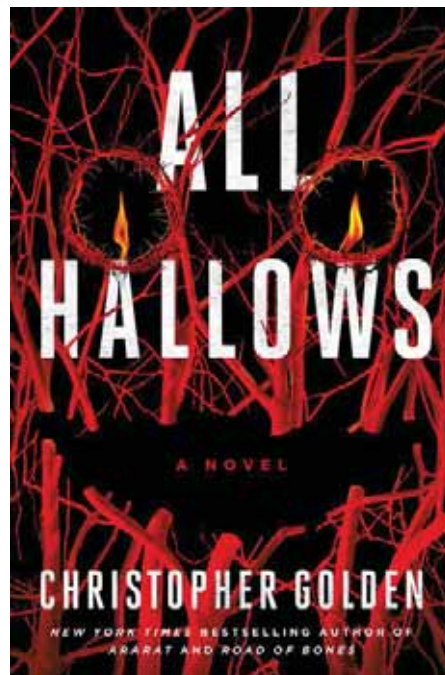
The first writer in my pantheon is Max Allan Collins, who just published **THE BIG BUNDLE** (Hard Case Crime), his eighteenth Nathan Heller thriller. Collins once again proves to be the undisputed master of faction, chronicling the secret adventures of his fictional PI, who finds himself in the middle of some of the most sensational, real-life cases of the past century. His unique blend of fact and fiction has proved a winning formula for nearly four decades now. **Rating: A**



Christopher Golden

The second is Mr. Christopher Golden, who celebrated the end of his third decade as a published writer with the publication of **ALL HALLOWS** (St. Martins), a gripping supernatural thriller set on Halloween night 1984, in the fictional suburb of Coventry, Massachusetts. Reading this skillful blend of the mundane and the supernatural, you’ll likely come to the same conclusion as one of its characters, namely, that nothings that happens in the foreboding woods surrounding the town could be more dreadful, more terrifying, than the selfish cruelty of ordinary people. This one comes on the heels of his sensational 2022 thriller, **ROAD OF BONES**.

Rating: A+



Agatha Award Nominations 2023



Best Contemporary Novel

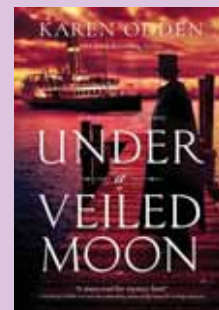
BAYOU BOOK THIEF, Ellen Byron
DEATH BUBBLE TEA,
Jennifer J. Chow
FATAL REUNION, Annette Dashofy
DEAD MAN’S LEAP,
Tina de Bellegarde
A WORLD OF CURIOSITIES,
Louise Penny

Best Historical Novel

THE COUNTERFEIT WIFE,
Mally Becker
BECAUSE I COULD NOT STOP FOR
DEATH, Amanda Flower
THE LINDBERGH NANNY,
Mariah Fredericks
IN PLACE OF FEAR,
Catriona McPherson
UNDER A VEILED MOON,
Karen Odden

Best First Novel

CHEDDAR OFF DEAD, Korina Moss
DEATH IN THE AEGEAN,
M.A. Monnin
THE BANGALORE DETECTIVES
CLUB, Harini Nagendra
DEVIL’S CHEW TOY, Rob Osler
THE FINALIST, Joan Long
THE GALLERY OF BEAUTIES,
Nina Wachsman



L J Roberts

It is purely my opinion



SAFE

By Jane Adams
Joffe Books, June, 2020
Standalone
Rating: A

First Sentence: *Blood on her hands, blood on her face, on her clothes. Blood everywhere.*

Lauren is the daughter of Kyle Sykes, a criminal who is forcing her into marriage with Charlie Perrin, the son of her father's rival counterpart. When Charlie tries to rape Lauren, she manages to get his gun and kill him. Knowing her father will kill her, as he did her mother, Lauren goes to the man who cared for her after her mother's death, Harry Prentice. On the run and targeted by both Sykes and Perrin, Harry trains Lauren to use a gun, and to avoid capture, also giving her a number to call if he's killed. That number takes her to Petra, an undercover agent embedded within the Perrin family. D.I. Toby Clarke doesn't believe the Perrin families' story that Charlie accidentally shot himself, but soon realizes he can't trust his fellow officers. Can Clarke and Petra save Lauren?

There is no prologue here, but an opening that's violent and terrifying. Lauren is a young woman caught between two very powerful crime families, including her own father who is willing to use her as a bargaining chip for power. Through the story, one understands why Lauren feels she can't depend on anyone but herself. Lauren seems too capable for her actions until one remembers what she's seen and done, and that she is fighting for her very life without knowing who she can trust.

This isn't a book one puts down. It grabs one and keeps the reader capti-

vated from beginning to end. Harry, Lauren's, surrogate father, knows who these people are and of what they are capable, yet his loyalty to Lauren touches the emotions. At the same time, with his background, he is anything but a kindly uncle.

Although it is a police procedural, Lauren is the focus with the police almost being secondary characters. Yet their roles do play an important part. They are there and it will be interesting to see how their roles change as the series progresses. The betrayal within the police department is somewhat cliché, but it works and infuriates the reader.

SAFE is a police procedural that falls into the category of noir. It is dark and violent, skilled at creating a sense of fear and dread. It is also thoroughly engrossing and extremely fast-paced with an ending that is intriguing. "Kidnap" is the next book up and is certain to be on many readers' lists.



THE ZERO NIGHT

By Brian Freeman
Blackstone Publishing, November, 2022,
Lt. Jonathan Stride #11
Rating: A-

First Sentence: *The man with the briefcase sat on a bench in the drowning rain.*

Lt. Jonathan Stride has been on medical leave after nearly dying of a gunshot wound. Now, his former colleague, Maggie Bei, is urging him to come back when Attorney Gavin Webster asks for his help. He claims his wife has been kidnapped, but despite paying the ransom, she has not been returned. Stride's wife, Serena, is 6,607 days into her recovery from alcoholism. Hearing her abusive, drug-addicted, alcoholic mother has died tests Serena's strength and recovery. Can she keep her life, and marriage, together while helping Stride solve a crime?

This book has some serious plus points as well as negative points. To get the negative points out of the way, the plot focused too much on all the angst of the characters. Many of us may have known abuse victims and those who are addicts. Both are horrible situations. Although one empathizes with the characters, especially Serena whose inner struggle and pain is conveyed very well, it all becomes too dark; too heavy. There is also one really bad "too-stupid to live moment."

There needs to be some light in the story other than as provided by Maggie Bei, Strides' replacement while he is on medical leave. Without her, the story would have been without any humor. It was her friendship with Stride that kept things moving forward. Serena's relationship with the bartender is much

more toxic than Stride's with Maggie, and a test of her strength. One longs for books or a series with a family such as is found in Donna Leon's "Brunetti" series or Cynthia Harrod-Eagles' "Bill Slider" series. But all was not lost.

THE ZERO NIGHT does have a plot that is wonderfully twisty-turny. There are a lot of excellent red herrings and some good suspense with an ending that is very well done. Unfortunately, the next book is intended to be the end of the series. One hopes the characters will have found some sense of healing and normalcy.

NO ACCIDENT

By Steven F. Havill

Poisoned Pen Press, March
Posadas County Mystery #25

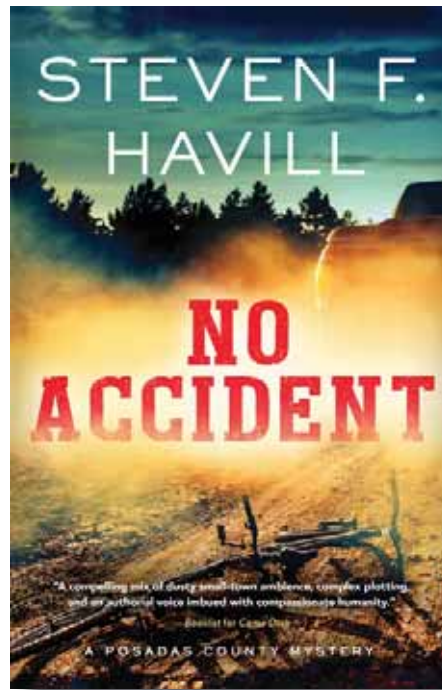
Rating: A+

First Sentence: "Oh, Mama!"

When a call reaches Undersheriff Estelle Reyes-Guzman that her son and his girlfriend have been in a serious accident, she, her husband, and family, gather in California to learn that Carlos and Tasha were riding a tandem bicycle when they weren't just struck by a pickup truck, but that the driver reversed and ran over them again. This was clearly no accident. An employee at the bike shop, who had borrowed the truck that mowed down Carlos and Tasha, is found shot dead in a dumpster. Fortunately, the Briones police know of Estelle's reputation and invite her to join in the investigation.

What a treat to "discover" a new series on its 25th book. Even more interesting is to learn that the series began with a male protagonist, Sheriff Bill Gastner, who introduced Estelle Reyes-Guzman to the series when she was 19 and promoted her to Undersheriff in the 12th book. Kudos to the author for realizing his initial character was getting too old and switching things up completely.

There is so much to recommend this book. It starts with one crime scene in New Mexico and ends in the courtroom adjudicating the initial crime. This demonstrates the role, and limits, of the police.



One can become incredibly tired of angst. With Reyes-Guzman, there is a strong family unit. They are loving and fully supportive of one another. They also bring humor to the story which is refreshing.

One appreciates seeing different branches of law enforcement work together and hopes that's a more accurate presentation of what really occurs. While Estelle is very much involved, she is also very aware and respectful of boundaries and jurisdictions. Rogue cops may be exciting, but one doubts they last that long.

It is suspected that those who know firearms will truly appreciate Havill's writing. The author holds an associate of applied science degree in gunsmithing.

NO ACCIDENT holds one's interest from the first page to the last. If one is looking for high action, this isn't it. If one is looking for an excellent follow-the-clues police procedural with well-done red herrings and unexpected twists, pull up a chair.

THE CLOISTERS

By Katy Hays

Atria Books, November, 2022

Standalone

Rating: C

First Sentence: *Death always visited*

me in August.

Ann Stillwell has been desperate to leave Walla Walla, Washington. When the opportunity arises to be a summer intern at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City, she is thrilled. When she arrives, she learns things have changed and she ends up being an assistant curator at the magnificent satellite museum The Cloisters, which specializes in European medieval art and architecture, with a focus on the Romanesque and Gothic periods, all things Ann loves. Soon she learns that her boss and co-worker are fascinated by the occult, particularly Tarot Cards, and the gardener is willing to break the law. But it's death, both past, and present, that alters everything.

The Cloisters has a fascinating history and is a particularly wonderful museum that should be visited. The author does an excellent job of bringing the museum to life and capturing the work that goes on behind the scenes of the museums. And that was truly the best part of the book. Second to that, was the information on the history of Tarot cards, especially very old sets, and how they were made. Unfortunately, that is not enough to make a good book.

As a mystery, the book fails badly. None of the characters are particularly likable. They are all superficial and highly predictable, as is the plot. The book just goes on, and on, and on. Nothing really happens until about two-thirds of the way through, by which time one doesn't particularly care. To use the excuse of Fate/Change without any regard for morality is weak in the extreme. It is also false logic.

THE CLOISTERS is an interesting book for those who love art and museums, but that's about it, and it's not enough to make a compelling read. The mystery aspect is poorly done and the characters are not interesting enough to want to see again. This is a book where the setting eclipsed the story.

DOUBLE JEOPARDY

By Sheldon Siegel

Sheldon M. Siegel, Inc.-October 2022

Mike Daley #14

Rating: A

First Sentence: *The Honorable Robert J. Stumpf Jr. arched a bushy gray eyebrow over the top of his aviator-style glasses, flashed a charismatic smile, and spoke to me in a commanding baritone leaving no doubt that he was in charge of his stuffy courtroom the Department Seventeen on the second floor of San Francisco's crumbling Hall of Justice.*

After serving three tours in Afghanistan, Lenny is living on the streets of San Francisco taking OxyContin for the pain from his injuries. Trying to help fellow-street person Annie, he gives her a bottle with his last three Oxy. So how did Annie die from the fentanyl found in Lennie's bottle? After a year in jail, Lenny's case is about to come up. His public defender has been called to Southern California to care for her mother who is believed to have COVID, and no one knows what to expect. Criminal Defense Attorney Mike Daley steps in and agrees to take over the case. With everything closing, including trials, Mike has very little time to find witnesses and build a case, all the while risking his own health.

Many authors have tried setting books at the beginning of, or during, COVID. Siegel has, by far, been the one to capture it the best. He picks it up at the very beginning of the pandemic when little was known about what to do or how long it would last, and the introduction of Zoom into everyday life and the common lexicon..."I don't think "Zoom" is a verb." "It will be—just like Google." That uncertainty adds a very strong level of suspense to the story.

There are times where the conversations may seem repetitive. Then one realizes how realistic it is when talking about the same subject to many different people, and how representative of most conversations during those days. Yet it is Mike's personal relationships that truly hold the book together. There is such a wonderfully strong core of family whether actually related or not.

It is the mystery that intrigues the reader. How can one have a pill bottle belonging to one person, with their prints on the outside, but the pills within the bottle not be theirs? Because of the danger, Mike is left doing much

of his own investigative work in highly dangerous and infection-prone areas, which is an interesting difference. Even with all the concern over COVID, Siegel doesn't lose the importance, or tragedy, of the fentanyl crisis.

For some, however, it is the courtroom scenes that shine, particularly Mike's uncertainty about them and his inner monologue. The latter provides the advantage of seeing the events and knowing Mike's thoughts on them. Rather than being intrusive, it's informative and, often, humorous.

DOUBLE JEOPARDY is an excellent legal mystery set during the beginning months of the coronavirus, and Sheldon Siegel retains his place as an 'auto-buy' author.

A DARK STEEL DEATH

By Chris Nickson – 10th in series
Seyn House, Sep 6, 2022,
Tom Harper #10

Rating: A

First Sentence: *The car slid quickly through the streets.*

In the midst of WWI, critical war-effort manufacturing sites are attacked by a saboteur. First, an explosion at the munitions factory, then a fire at the army clothing depot. This is followed by two shootings, one at the steelworks, and the other at the hospital. With his superior down ill, it is up to Harper and his team, to stop the terrorist, while at home, dealing with his wife's dementia, and his daughter Mary's grief after losing her fiancé in the war.

Nickson is such a good writer. Although this is the tenth book in the series, it is easily read as a standalone, or an entry point into the series. As with all of his books, the characters, are multidimensional and highly relatable. Harper comes to life. He has his responsibilities as a policeman, but also his responsibilities with his family. One feels his concerns and, at times, his fatigue. Harper knows when it is important to act with the cooperation of others, particularly the Army. He is an excellent leader with Ash, his second, perfect in that role. One can't help but admire Miss Sharp, Harper's wonder-

fully efficient secretary. At the same time, there is a lovely humility to Harper..."He'd be the first chief constable to live in Sheepscar, not one of the green suburbs, and certainly the first to make his home above a pub. The thought cheered him.", while feeling empathy for those in the trenches.

The author's research of Leeds, its history, and its participation in the war effort are impeccable. He doesn't try to paint Leeds as a pretty place, but as one of the early industrialized towns filled with dirt, grime, workers, and the poor struggling to get by..."Sometimes Harper found it hard to recall if there had ever been any bright colours in Leeds." His sense of realism is strong. The inclusion of historical figures, such as Neville Chamberlain, at the time the head of the Department of National Service, is appropriate and well done.

Although the focus is on capturing the Saboteur, there are other cases the police need to address as well, such as an accident between a tram and a lorry with three dead, adding veracity to the story. Nor does Nickson short the details of the times..."The café at Leeds Market had bacon, and proper buns... He sat back and relished the taste, slathering everything in HP sauce and washing it down with hot, dark tea."

A DARK STEEL DEATH is an excellent police procedural with very good characters and good, realistic relationships. It's nice to have a procedural where the police follow the clues. There is very good suspense with excellent plot twists and bits that tug at one's heart.



Lookin' For A Few Good Books

Larry Gandle



ALL THAT'S LEFT UNSAID

by Tracey Lien
Morrow, \$27.99

Rating: B+

Ky Tran and her family are heartbroken when her younger brother, Denny, is brutally murdered in a busy Asian restaurant in Cabramatta, Australia. In spite of all the people present, everybody claims to have seen nothing. Ky begs the police for information and the frustrated detective gives her the information from the investigation. Ky then visits the witnesses and slowly develops a full picture of what occurred.

The novel is a tale about the Vietnamese refugee experience in Australia. It is a tragedy and very well told. It is a novel filled with realistic characters and it is through their individual stories that Ky gets to the truth. The plot is compelling and the truth lends a sense of worthless tragedy. This is a very well written book and this is a definite recommendation.

NO PLAN B

by Lee and Andrew Child
Delacorte, \$28.99

Rating: B

In Colorado, a woman is killed falling beneath the wheels of a bus. Reacher witnesses it and sees someone push her. This sets off the action as Reacher traces the murderer to a small town in Mississippi where there is a secret conspiracy involving ownership of a prison. People are illegally making money there and make the mistake of not considering Reacher a threat. As the body count increases, they realize the errors of their ways. However, it is way too late.

It is interesting that after so many

years, Lee has gone back to a plot very reminiscent of KILLING FLOOR, the first Reacher novel. There are some similarities ie. small town, big conspiracy, comic book villains- enough to remind readers of what it was like in the beginning. The book is entertaining, a bit too long and very predictable. Personally, I do not feel the same excitement as I used to with every new Reacher novel. Yet, I keep reading them.

THE IT GIRL

by Ruth Ware
Gallery/Scout Press, \$28.99

Rating: B+

Hannah Jones lives her dream by attending Oxford University. Her first day she meets her roommate, April Clarke-Cliveden, a wealthy spoiled woman with the personality to attract others into her orbit. She is the so-called

'It Girl'. The two quickly form a group of friends with Will, the boyfriend of April, Hugh, Ryan and Emily. However, by the end of the first year, April is dead- murdered by an Oxford porter, as accused by Hannah.

Years later, the porter has died and a young investigative reporter contacts Hannah and implies that he has doubts about the Porter's guilt. This throws Hannah into a crisis and she reconnects to her old friends in order to seek out the truth. It seems they all have something to hide increasing the doubt Hannah already has. Perhaps she had convicted the wrong person.

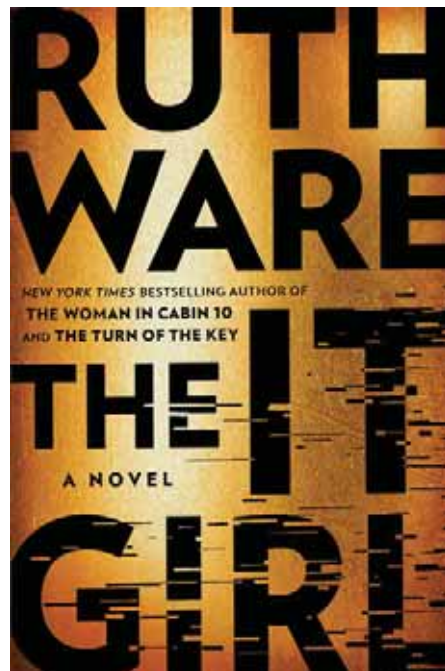
THE IT GIRL is a compelling mystery. We are given adequate clues throughout the book and the truth slowly becomes clear. The plot is compelling and reasonably swift. The author alternates chapters between Before the murder and After eventually coalescing everything together. The characters are well constructed and all interesting. The length of the book was definitely too long. Too many twists and unnecessary episodes lead to the excessive length. Nonetheless, this is a well written and engrossing murder mystery. Recommended.

TWO NIGHTS IN LISBON

by Chris Pavone
MCD, \$28.00

Rating: B

Ariel Pryce wakes up in Lisbon in her hotel room without her husband, John. She knows something is wrong. He does not answer his phone and left no message as to why he is gone. She gets no answers from the police or the American Embassy. To add to the confusion, she must confront the fact



that perhaps she really doesn't know her husband as well as she thought she did. After a whirlwind romance, they were recently married. A phone call asking for a ransom demand of 3 million dollars confirms her fears. She does not have that kind of money but there is a person from her past that she might be able to get it from. This will bring up some very bad memories.

The plot is very clever with multiple surprises thrown in. It is the uneven pacing that was a bit problematic. Too many times the pacing slows down to a lethargic pace. It appears to have been written to bulk up the book as it could have easily been a hundred pages shorter. Characters are reasonably well rounded for a thriller. The locale of Lisbon is carefully crafted and it is obvious the author spent time there to fully describe it. There is a huge twist at the end which I will admit is pulled off quite well. This is an entertaining book and is a recommendation for the pool or the plane.

THE TWIST OF THE KNIFE

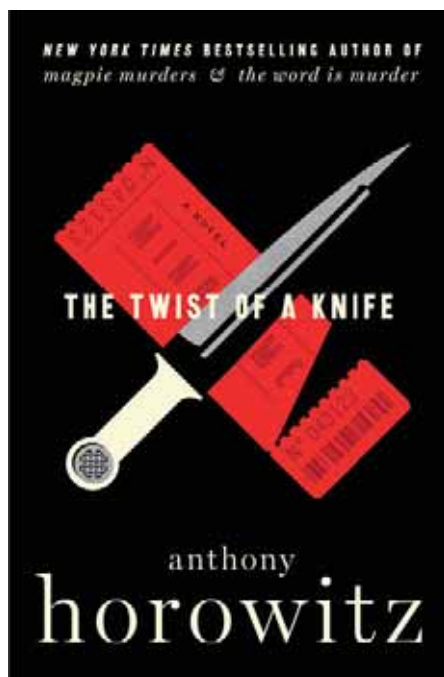
by Andrew Horowitz

Harper, \$29.99

Rating: B+

Anthony Horowitz, the character in the novel and not the real author, has called it quits with documenting the crime solving adventures of his partner, Daniel Hawthorne. Horowitz is moving onto other things including writing a thriller Broadway show reminiscent of *Sleuth* or *Death Trap*. However, after opening night, there is a murder and the murder weapon has Horowitz's fingerprints all over it. This makes him the primary suspect and the detective investigating is holding a grudge against him. Horowitz could spend years in prison for a murder he did not commit. There is only one man who could help him- Hawthorne. He must desperately patch up his relationship with him and discover the real killer.

In a sense, this book harkens back to the golden age of crime fiction- a mystery to solve and the reader is challenged with discovering the solution along with the detective. Hawthorne and Horowitz



are obvious derivative characters from the Holmes and Watson team with Horowitz serving the role of the chronicler. The plot is always fascinating and often amusing. The characters are an esoteric bunch with some stereotypes thrown into the mix. The book is very entertaining and almost makes me want to go back and read the previous books in the series. Recommended.

THE OTHER SIDE OF NIGHT

by Adam Hamdy

Atria, \$27.00

Rating: C-

Harriet Kealty is a disgraced police officer who would love to clear her name. While in a second-hand bookstore, she finds a book on the floor. In the book is a handwritten plea stating, "Help, he's trying to kill me." She investigates and discovers the book was previously in the possession of David Asha who walked off a cliff leaving his son, Eliot, an orphan. She soon discovers the surrogate parent of Eliot is Ben Elmys, who she fell in love with a year ago and who unceremoniously dumped her. Did Ben Elmys have anything to do with David's death?

The first half of this book appeared to be a solid crime fiction novel with multiple intriguing puzzles. It is the

second half- part two that things veer off into pure science fiction. It became downright stupid and forget any semblance of realism. I truly cannot remember reading a book that went from really good to a total train wreck as this one is. This type of science fiction including time travel and different dimensions, does not blend well with realistic crime fiction. There is too much of a sense of cheating and the puzzles created by the author get answered in a totally fantastic and implausible way. I really liked part one but hated part two so the book earns a C- and a strong recommendation to avoid.

Walter Mosley Wins CWA Dagger Award



The Diamond Dagger Award "recognizes authors whose crime-writing careers have been marked by sustained excellence, and who have made a significant contribution to the genre." His ground-breaking first novel, *A DEVIL IN A BLUE DRESS* was published in 1990. He has published 60 novels since then, including the just released *EVERY MAN A KING*. Congratulatorys to Walter on this well-deserved recognition. He will be given his prestigious prize during a ceremony to take place in London in July.

Down Under Crime



Due to the recent popularity of Australian/New Zealand crime fiction, *DP* is expanding the irregular column reporting on same and adding another expert, Craig Sisterson, to what Jeff Pople has been doing for the last several years. Many of these titles are available in the U.S. as American publishers are picking up Australian/New Zealand writers right and left.

Jeff Pople Reviews



DEAD TIDE

by Fiona McIntosh
Michael Joseph, \$A32.99
Rating: B

Fiona McIntosh has enjoyed good success in Australia and overseas with her novels about London detective, DS Jack Hawksworth. Now with the fourth book in the series, *DEAD TIDE*, she brings Hawksworth down under to Australia.

While recovering from the events of his last case, Hawksworth is enjoying a sabbatical from police work and is lecturing at a London university. The death of one of his students, however, piques his interest and he soon finds himself on the trail of a deadly new trend that has its origins in Australia. With grudging

agreement from his boss, Hawksworth heads to South Australia where he identifies a cynical international crime consortium.

Shifting the viewpoint between a variety of characters, including an unhappy housewife who plays a major role in unravelling the crime network, Fiona steadily builds the suspense as the various threads come together. The book moves along at solid pace and there is a wealth of interesting detail woven into the story.

The characters are pleasant and engaging, and the descriptions, particularly of South Australia's Yorke Peninsula, are vivid and evocative. Some suspension of disbelief is required, but overall this an enjoyable tale that will appeal to fans of Peter James' Inspector Grace series.

WILD CARD

by Simon Rowell
Text, \$A32.99, in U.S. Kindle, \$9.99
Zoe Mayer & Harry #2
Rating: A

Simon Rowell is an under-appreciated Australian crime writer who has not enjoyed the success overseas that he deserves. His *THE LONG GAME* was one of my favourite Australian crime novels of 2021 and his latest one is almost as good.

WILD CARD once again features Detective Sergeant Zoe Mayer of the Victorian Police Force, and her trusty service dog, Harry. It opens with the discovery of a body in a burnt-out area of grassland on the Victorian banks of the Murray River, the dividing line between New South Wales and Victoria. The victim has two bullet wounds to the head and is quickly identified as Freddie Jones, an influential bikie from the New

South Wales side of the border. Zoe and her team are dispatched to the crime scene and find themselves caught in the middle of warring criminal factions and deadly local secrets.

This is a very accomplished novel. Rowell is a skilled writer who creates a great cast of credible characters and sets them down in a vivid authentic location. The plotting is smart and believable, and the story moves along at a decent pace. This is not a flashy novel with lots of wild twists, but instead is a well-constructed police story that engages the reader and keeps them interested. There are, however, a couple of good, unexpected turns to the plot, as well as a few shocks, along the way to a tense and surprising ending.

Zoe's relationship with her service dog Harry is nicely handled, and moving, and becomes an important part of the story. Readers of *THE LONG GAME* will know why Harry is in Zoe's



life, but Rowell also gradually reveals the reason for it for new readers to the series.

One of Rowell's strengths is his ability to create good, interesting characters and this is once again on display in **WILD CARD**, along with his fine ear for dialogue. In all, it is a very enjoyable read. If I have any reservations, it is that the final revelation did not ring completely true to me, but it was certainly unexpected.

Craig Sisterson Reviews



BEFORE YOU KNEW MY NAME

by Jacqueline Bublitz

Emily Bestler Books, \$17.99,

November 2022

Rating: A

Last year, there was only one debut that made the shortlist for the CWA Gold Dagger, aka the famed British mystery writing organisation's premier prize celebrating the world's best English-language crime writing. Alongside the likes of SA Cosby's brilliant, multi-award-winning *Razorblade Tears*, and two-time Edgar winner John Hart's *The Unwilling*, sat this stunning, trope-challenging tale from a first-time, much-rejected New Zealand author who calls herself an 'accidental crime writer'.

Now available in the United States, *Before You Knew My Name* takes a scene any fan of New York cop shows will be familiar with – an early morning jogger stumbling across a body – and spins it off in a new and intriguing direction. Instead of following the cops

investigating the crime, readers are taken deep into the lives of the victim, and the jogger. What would it be like to find a dead body, and how would you deal with that when answers don't come as quickly as a one-hour TV show?

Hoping they can 'make it there', or at least escape their recent lives, eighteen-year-old Alice Lee and thirtysomething Ruby Jones, are drawn to New York City, unaware their lives will soon forever be connected. Alice Lee is a Midwest teen fleeing family tragedy and a controlling older man. Ruby Jones is 'the other woman' to a soon-to-be-married man, an Australian looking to reinvent herself. A few weeks after her arrival in Manhattan, Ruby is running through a morning storm in Riverside Park when she's shocked to discover the body of a young woman sprawled on the rocks. A traumatic whirlwind: police detectives and death up close. Ruby can't shake it, and needs to discover more about a young woman reduced to 'Jane Doe' and a case file. Can her new friends in the 'death club', help? Meanwhile Alice Lee watches on as her body becomes just another job for those who deal with death on a regular basis. Headlines splashed, then the world moves on. Except Ruby Jones.

Frankly, having seen plenty of hype about **BEFORE YOU KNEW MY NAME** before I read it, I wasn't quite sure what to expect. Many 'big buzz' books fall short. This one doesn't and it's easy to see why it won or was shortlisted for major awards in the UK, Australia, and New Zealand prior to its US publication. Whether you call it literary crime or a victim-centred mystery, it's a beguiling tale that deep-dives into characters that are often on the periphery of crime novels, scratches at your emotions, and gets your mind whirring in some different ways. Bublitz writes beautifully about dark events and some horrifying themes with some warmth and humour, and offers rich characterization of female lives, fears, and desires. A very good read from a new author with a fresh perspective.

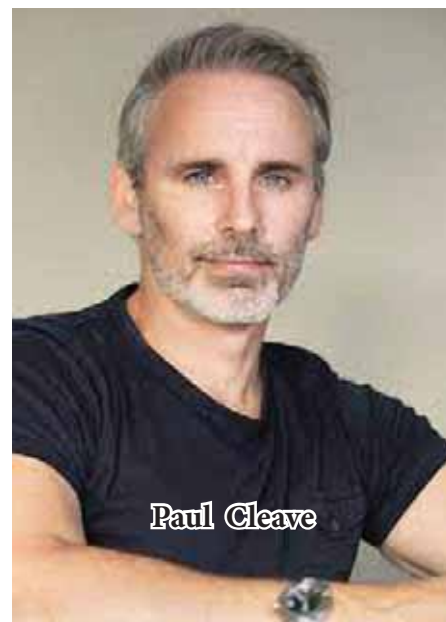
THE PAIN TOURIST by Paul Cleave

Orenda Books, \$16.95, 2023

Rating: A

For the first decade of his award-winning career, international bestseller Paul Cleave usually featured either troubled investigator Theo Tate or captivating serial killer Joe Middleton, aka 'the Christchurch Carver', in his page-whirling novels. His debut, **THE CLEANER** – now being made into six-part TV drama *Dark City* – introduced Joe and was an overnight sensation in Europe, seeing Cleave rub shoulders with Stieg Larsson and Lee Child atop the annual bestseller list in Germany. Years later a sequel, 2013's **JOE VICTIM**, was nominated for Barry and Edgar Awards. But in recent years Cleave, the Dark Prince of Antipodean Noir, has focused on a string of brilliant, mind-bending standalones starring the likes of a dementia-suffering author who may be a killer (**TRUST NO ONE**), a rural cop who threw away his career to save a young girl only for her to vanish again years later (**WHATEVER IT TAKES**), and a boy who starts getting deadly visions after an unusual operation (**A KILLER HARVEST**).

So, one of the many enticing aspects of Cleave's new novel, **THE PAIN TOURIST**, is the much-awaited return of Theo Tate. No longer a cop, Tate is drawn into a tricky situation when a young man, James Garrett, emerges from a coma nine years after he was



Paul Cleave

shot in the head the night his parents were killed in a botched home invasion. Tate investigated the original crime; the culprits never found. Now Tate's old colleague DI Rebecca Kent is charged with closing the ice-cold case, while also hunting a dangerous killer, 'Copy Joe', who is mimicking the infamous Christchurch Carver. Can Tate help, unofficially, or will his old ways and new problems get in the way of justice?

Matters are further complicated by James' eidetic recollection of an entire life he 'lived out' during his long coma, which seems to crossover with real events. Did he overhear a killer's confession?

Cleave is a master at turning up the blowtorch on his characters, placing them in untenable situations and never going easy on them or the reader. In **THE PAIN TOURIST**, he delivers a superb tale, masterfully balancing multiple viewpoints, investigations, and ongoing threats – all building to a thrilling crescendo. While it's terrific to have Theo Tate back on the page, this book is so much more, blending cop novel and thriller, and stretching genre expectations with shades of magic realism.

IN HER BLOOD

by Nikki Crutchley

HarperCollins Australia, A\$32.99 (Nov 2022 Aust/NZ release),

Rating: B+

After beginning her mystery writing career a few years ago with some good small-town murder mysteries that earned her accolades and award short-listings, Waikato librarian turned author Nikki Crutchley swerved into psychological thrillers. Her latest, *In Her Blood*, conjures a delightfully creepy vibe as the lives of two sets of sisters entangle across decades in an ominous old hotel in the countryside that harbours a dark history. And perhaps an even darker present.

Jac Morgan never wanted to return to her hometown in rural New Zealand, a place where her alcoholic mess of a father lives in a RV in a camping ground with Jac's teenage sister Charlie, and locals remember Jac as the girl

who sparked the tragic house fire that killed her mother. But now Charlie has vanished, and Jac can't rely on her father or the local police to help. Frustrated, she stumbles into a role cleaning the once-splendid Gilmore Hotel ahead of its annual Open Day. Giving her an excuse to stay local and snoop around town, while keeping her somewhat out of sight of those who remember her for all the wrong kinds of reasons. But is the 'haunted house' of Jac's childhood cursed? How much has the terror of wounded soldiers leached into the walls? Or the disappearance 20 years ago of eccentric matriarch Iris's beloved daughter Paige?

Spanning two timelines and multiple perspectives, Crutchley crafts a disturbing tale laced with rural Gothic vibes that's full of flawed and dysfunctional characters that keep readers on edge. We never feel on solid ground with Jac, let alone the likes of Iris and her remaining daughter Lisa. There's a sinister scratching at the edge of what we can see. A good read from a talented storyteller.

EXILES

by Jane Harper

Flatiron Books, \$27.99, 31 January 2023

Rating: A-

Six years ago Jane Harper burst onto

the international crime scene with a remarkable debut, **THE DRY**, which hauled readers around the world into the parched farming landscapes of rural Australia, introduced federal investigator Aaron Falk, won many awards, and sold millions of copies worldwide.

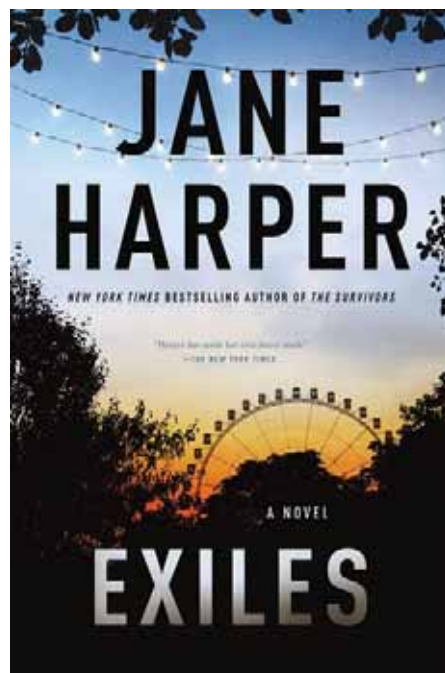
The Melbourne author's blend of slow-burn mystery writing with a deep sense of people and place proved no one-hit wonder, as Harper then took readers from rain-drenched mountain ranges (**FORCE OF NATURE**) to arid Queensland cattle ranches (**THE LOST MAN**) to the surging tides of coastal Tasmania (**THE SURVIVORS**) in a string of excellent novels that cemented her as a modern Queen of Crime.

Her success also opened eyes and doors worldwide for her fellow antipodean crime writers, cracking open a treasure trove of exciting crime tales from Down Under for international readers.

In her fifth novel, **EXILES**, Harper soaks readers in the springtime vibes of a festival in South Australian wine country, while also offering the highly anticipated return of federal investigator Aaron Falk (portrayed by Eric Bana in the recent film adaptation of **THE DRY**, and the upcoming **FORCE OF NATURE**).

The chardonnay had been flowing, ice creams dripping, and the Ferris Wheel whirring all through the day at the Marralee Valley Annual Food and Wine Festival. No one noticed the basinet in the pram bay wasn't empty until the evening. Six-week old Zoe Gillespie was swaddled inside, hidden from view. Her father was dining with his parents at a nearby Italian restaurant, her mother Kim had vanished. Two days later, Kim's shoe was found by the local reservoir.

Aaron Falk had been at the Marralee festival the day Kim Gillespie vanished, and returns a year later for the christening of his friends Greg and Rita Raco's son, postponed due to the tragedy. Kim's husband Rohan is also there. Her teenage daughter Zara, from a previous relationship with Greg's brother Charlie, is determined to find answers, despite most people accepting that Kim, suffer-



ing from post-partum depression, had flung herself into the reservoir

Over the course of several days, Falk and Raco, along with local police sergeant Rob Dwyer, try to shake loose the memories of those returning to the annual festival, hoping for new information, hoping for some answers. Harper spins a delicious tale that sneaks up on readers. For much of the novel it's a rich family and small-town drama; she doesn't rely on constant twists and turns and ongoing murderous events to power the mystery narrative, instead drawing us in slowly and exquisitely, making later revelations even more powerful. Perhaps too slow burn for some crime readers, but those with patience or an established love of Harper's oeuvre will find lots to love.

**EVERYONE IN MY FAMILY HAS
KILLED SOMEONE**

by Benjamin Stevenson

Mariner Books, \$30, 17 January 2023

Rating: A

It's abundantly clear that award-winning Australian author and standup comic Benjamin Stevenson is having plenty of fun in his latest mystery novel. After establishing himself with two very good books – the first a true crime-entwined tale set amongst the vineyards of the Hunter Valley, its sequel an ingenious thriller about one million people watching a TV presenter kill themselves on air – Stevenson revels in the history of the mystery genre with **Everyone in MY FAMILY HAS KILLED SOMEONE**. And it's fabulous.

Ernest 'Ernie' Cunningham is a struggling author of crime writing 'how-to' guides who has a fractured relationship with his infamous family. But he can't avoid the call to a snowy mountain resort for a 'modern family' reunion to mark the release of his brother Michael from prison. It's a tension-filled weekend from the very beginning. So, a cast of people with simmering tensions brought together in a remote location. So far, so Agatha

Christie. It's a stressful situation not least because one, Michael is now with Ernie's wife, two, many in the family blame Ernie for Michael being in prison – he did testify, after all – and three, as the title says, everyone in the Cunningham family has killed someone. "Some of us, the high achievers, have killed more than once," Ernie tells readers early on. So when a body is uncovered in the snow, seemingly burned despite the icy surrounds, suspects certainly aren't thin on the ground.

As the pages turn, Stevenson delivers a startlingly clever mystery that delights in the longstanding tropes and traditional 'rules' of the genre. At the start he outlines Catholic priest and mystery author Ronald Knox's famous 'Ten Commandments of Detective Fiction' from the late 1920s (Knox was a member of the famed Detection Club, alongside the likes of Christie, Dorothy L Sayers, and GK Chesterton). Of primacy: play fair. Our narrator Ernie even tells us from the start that there will be many deaths, and on what pages they'll occur. Having tied his own hands a little, Stevenson then performs some brilliant sleight of hand among the storytelling – giving the readers far more than usual, while still managing to surprise and delight. **EVERYONE IN MY FAMILY HAS KILLED SOMEONE** harkens back to Golden Age classics while still providing plenty of freshness and modern perspective. It's a book that dances with 'meta', and is very, very good.

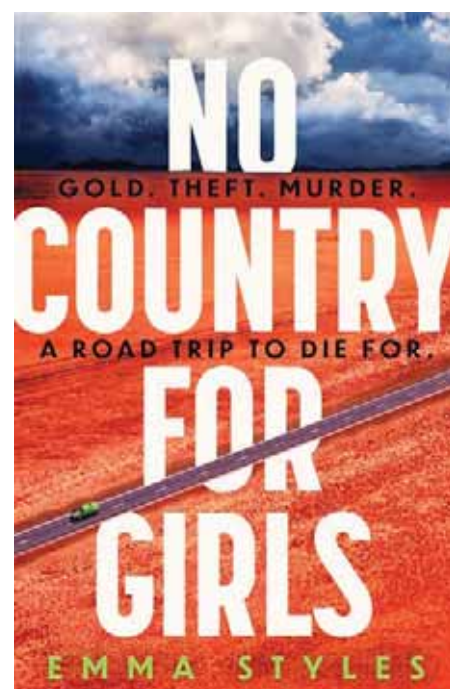
NO COUNTRY FOR GIRLS

by Emma Styles

Little Brown, A\$32.99 (August 2022
UK/Aust/NZ release),

Rating: A-

If Emma Styles' first thriller makes it to the big screen one day it'd be easy to envisage the Hollywood tagline as something along the lines of 'Thelma and Louise meets Mad Max', but there's a lot more to this debut than the transplant of a feminist road trip clas-



sic to an Australian desert setting.

NO COUNTRY FOR GIRLS is the riveting tale of two young women from messy family situations thrust together in the wilds – urban and rural – of Western Australia, and the carnage that ensues. After a night that goes all kinds of wrong, Aboriginal law student Nao and fists-first high schooler Charlie end up at the wheel of a dead man's twin-cab flatbed truck with a bag of stolen gold bars stashed under the passenger seat and little idea where they're heading. Styles does an adroit job hurling readers into the action from the get-go, creating a helter-skelter sense as Nao and Charlie try to co-exist while on the run. Tension bubbles and boils as we ride through stark landscapes with two young women who don't trust each other. Can they come together to survive, or will one betray the other? Could the secrets each is keeping get them killed?

There's a fabulous rawness to Styles' debut crime tale; strong voices and viewpoints that aren't polite or prettied up. Gritty and gripping, **NO COUNTRY FOR GIRLS** marks the emergence of a talented new crime voice, and I'm excited to read whatever Styles writes next.

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

Sheraton Times Square, NYC

Guests of Honor: Charlaine Harris,

Walter Mosley, Michael Connelly, Jack Carr, Oyinkan Braithwaite

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

July 20-23, 2023

Theakson Old Peculier

Crime Writing Festival

Harrogate, UK

Guests of Honor: TBA

Website: <https://harrogateinternationalfestivals.com/crime-writing-festival/>



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/>

September 15-17, 2023

Bloody Scotland

Stirling, Scotland

Special Guests: TBA

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

September 28-30, 2023

Capital Crime

London, UK

Special Guests TBA

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



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/>



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

[deadlypleasures.com](http://www.deadlypleasures.com) for frequent posts about the world of mysteries. The Deadly Pleasures Best of 2023 list will be updated between issues.

What's New In the U.K.



THE BROKEN AFTERNOON, Simon Mason (Quercus, £16.99, February). A shocking disappearance. A four-year-old girl goes missing in plain sight outside her nursery in Oxford, a middle-class, affluent area, her mother only a stones-throw away. A triggering response. Ryan Wilkins, one of the youngest ever Detective Inspectors in the Thames Valley force, dishonourably discharged three months ago, watches his former partner DI Ray Wilkins deliver a press conference, confirming a lead. A dark web. Ray begins to delve deeper, unearthing an underground network of criminal forces in the local area. But while Ray's investigation stalls Ryan brings his unique talents to unofficial and quite illegal inquiries which will bring him into a confrontation with the very officials who have thrown him out of the force.

YOU CAN RUN, Trevor Wood (Quercus, £16.99, March). A group of armed mercenaries lay siege to a remote village in Northumberland. Soldiers patrol the streets, telling everyone to stay inside, and the roads are blocked off to prevent anyone coming in or out. Their target: Alex Winter and his 15-year-old daughter, Ruby. When her father is captured, Ruby tries to run, but quickly realises she has another problem - the only people who can save her are the villagers she's shunned for her whole life including the neighbourhood busybody, a disreputable poacher, the village drunk and the local school's troublemaker. Desperate to find her father and to work out who took him and why, she seeks their help. But what if learning the truth means discovering the life she once knew was

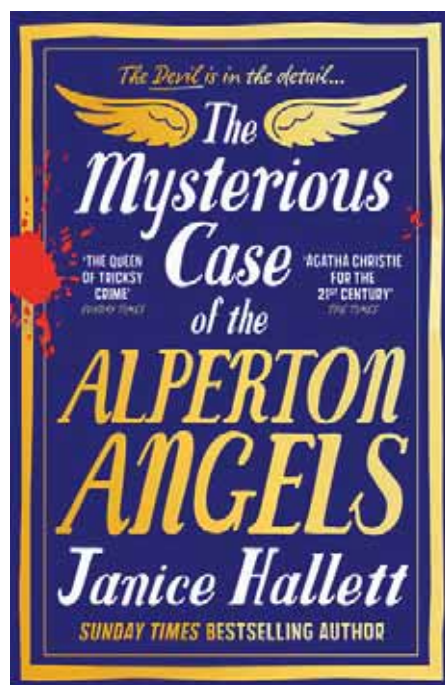
a lie.

THE MYSTERIOUS CASE OF THE ALPERTON ANGELS, Janice Hallett (Viper, £16.99, January). Everyone knows the sad story of the Alper-ton Angels: the cult who brainwashed a teenage girl and convinced her that her newborn baby was the anti-Christ. Believing they had a divine mission to kill the infant, they were only stopped when the girl came to her senses and called the police. The Angels committed suicide rather than stand trial, while mother and baby disappeared into the care system. Nearly two decades later, true-crime author Amanda Bailey is writing a book on the Angels. The Alper-ton baby has turned eighteen and can finally be interviewed; if Amanda can find them, it will be the true-crime scoop of the year, and will save her flagging career. But rival

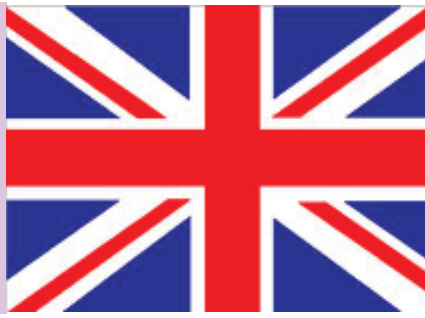
author Oliver Menzies is just as smart, better connected, and is also on the baby's trail. As Amanda and Oliver are forced to collaborate, they realise that what everyone thinks they know about the Angels is wrong. The truth is something much darker and stranger than they'd ever imagined. And the story of the Alper-ton Angels is far from over.

RESURRECTION, David Gilman (Head of Zeus, £20.00, January). Somewhere in the Sahara, on the desolate border between Sudan and Chad, a P51 Mustang with long-range drop tanks slowly emerges from the dunes. Inside, the skeletal remains of a man missing for three decades. His flying jacket bears no insignia, a worn leather attaché case lies by his side, held securely by a manacle around his left wrist. Inside a document men will kill for. Die for. The sands of time have shifted, and whoever finds that aircraft finds information that could expose the most valuable spy the UK intelligence service has ever known. The British, the French, and the Russians are on the trail. And so is Dan Raglan.

THE SHADOWS OF LONDON, Andrew Taylor (HarperCollins, £20.00, March). London 1671. The damage caused by the Great Fire still overshadows the capital. When a man's brutally disfigured body is discovered in the ruins of an ancient almshouse, architect Cat Hakesby is ordered to stop restoration work. It is obvious he has been murdered, and Whitehall secretary James Marwood is ordered to investigate. It's possible the victim could be one of two local men who have vanished - the first, a feckless French tutor connected to the almshouse's owner; the second, a possibly treacherous employee of the Council of Foreign Plantations. The pressure on Marwood mounts as Charles II's most influential courtiers, Lord Arlington and the Duke of Buckingham, show an interest in his activities - and Marwood soon begins to suspect the murder trail may lead right to the heart of government.



U.K. Reviews



Jeff Poppo Reviews

IN THE BLINK OF AN EYE

by Jo Callaghan
Simon & Schuster, £14.99
Rating: B+

Jo Callaghan's slightly futuristic crime novel pairs a recently widowed, London police officer, DCS Kat Frank, with an experimental artificial intelligence entity, basically a computer generated hologram, known as Lock. The intention is to test whether unemotional Artificial Intelligence devices have a role in detecting crime. Kat's small team has been selected as the pilot for the Artificial Intelligence Detective Entity (AIDE) program and are assigned a series of missing person cases, most of which involve young men, to solve.

The story starts a little slowly, but once underway it really draws you in

and gradually grips your attention. The mild science fiction elements are lightly handled and should not be too much of a distraction for hardcore crime readers. The central mystery at the core of the plot works well, and the second half of the book moves along at good pace and builds to a tense and surprising ending. I thought that the cold case policework elements of the story could have been more convincing, but this is a minor quibble.

Jo, who has dealt with significant trauma in her own life, is very good at creating sympathetic characters and at showing the impact of grief on individuals and families. Overall, **IN THE BLINK OF AN EYE** is a well-crafted and engaging crime novel with a good compelling ending.

THE ONLY SUSPECT

by Louise Candlish
Simon & Schuster, £14.99
Rating: B+

Louise Candlish is expert at the twisty psychological suspense novel with a slightly unreliable narrator and an abundance of new and old secrets. **THE ONLY SUSPECT** is another good example of her ability to deceive and trick the reader and keep them happily engaged till the surprising conclusion.

The story opens in the present day with Alex living a comfortable life with his wife Beth in the leafy London suburb of Silver Vale. He is a pleasant enough guy, until Beth announces that the council has given permission for the creation of a nature trail on a local site that's been disused for decades. That piece of parkland has a special significance for Alex, and he is worried that the landscapers will unearth things that

he wants keep secret.

Moving smoothly between the present and tragic events in 1995, Louise steadily builds up the tension and keeps the reading guessing as to what really happened in the past. The pacing is a little slow at first, but certainly picks up once the various strands of the plot are carefully put in place. As always, Louise is very good at creating believable characters and relationships and putting them under pressure and seeing what happens. As well, the dialogue is convincing and occasionally witty, and the descriptions of London in the 1990s and present day Silver Vale are evocative and insightful.

An enjoyable read and a must for those who enjoy well-crafted tales of psychological suspense.

A WINTER GRAVE

by Peter May
Riverrun, £22.99
Rating: A-

Peter May is in fine form in this futuristic crime novel set in a climate change-ravaged 2051.

Despite years of warnings, governments have done little to stave off the pending climate catastrophe and by 2051 vast areas of the planet are under water, or uninhabitably hot, causing severe social disintegration and migration. By contrast, melting ice sheets have brought the Gulf Stream to a halt and northern latitudes, including Scotland, are being hit by snow and ice storms.

It is against this backdrop that Addie, a young meteorologist checking a mountain top weather station, discovers the body of a man entombed in ice. The dead man is an investigative reporter, George Younger, missing for three months after vanishing during what he claimed was a hill-walking holiday. Cameron Brodie, a veteran Glasgow detective, volunteers to be flown north to investigate Younger's death, but he has more than a murder enquiry on his agenda. He has just been given a devastating medical prognosis by his doctor and knows the time has come to face his estranged daughter who has made her home in the remote Highland village.





Arriving during an ice storm, Brodie and pathologist Dr. Sita Roy, find themselves the sole guests at the hotel, where Younger's body has been kept refrigerated in a cake cabinet. But evidence uncovered during his autopsy places the lives of both Brodie and Roy in extreme jeopardy, especially when another storm closes off communications and the possibility of escape.

May uses Brodie's scary flight, in a remotely controlled helicopter, to the Highland village of Kinlochleven to vividly set up the climate challenges facing Scotland in 2051, as well as some of the social changes. Once in Kinlochleven, the pace quickly steps up and the book moves at a briskish pace down some unexpected, and chilly, paths. There is a dark tone to **A WINTER GRAVE** from the opening pages, and there is very little cheerfulness as Brodie has to deal with a raft of challenges and threats, as well as facing up to the ghosts of his past.

Some may find **A WINTER GRAVE** a little preachy at times, but underneath the reflections on climate change and government expediency there is a very good thriller plot at play here, and May certainly ratches up the tension and the action in final quarter of the book. **A WINTER GRAVE** is probably more akin to May's **A COFFIN ROAD** than

is to his Lewis Trilogy, but it is still a gripping and thought provoking read.

THE WHISPERING DEAD

by David Mark

Severn House, £ December, 2022

Cordelia Hemlock #2

Rating: A

David Mark's **THE WHISPERING DEAD** is a nasty little gem of a spy novel that kept me captivated from beginning to end.

I really enjoyed Mark's **THE MAUSOLEUM** from a couple of years ago, and **THE WHISPERING DEAD** continues the adventures of Cordelia Hemlock and Felicity Goose from that book. 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 goes through its paces 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 for most of the book finds herself held captive in a remote farmhouse. This shifting viewpoint works well, and Mark skillfully 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.

The other characters are also very well crafted, including the minor ones, and Mark fleshes them out in interesting ways. The story makes good use of its 1982 setting and there are some nicely described scenes, and some good action, towards the end. Unlike a lot of recent spy fiction it is a relatively slim book and the pacing is good for most of its length.

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 Cordelia's situation and what she has gone through. A thoroughly enjoyable and moving spy story.

Larry Gandle Review

THE CRUCIFIX KILLER

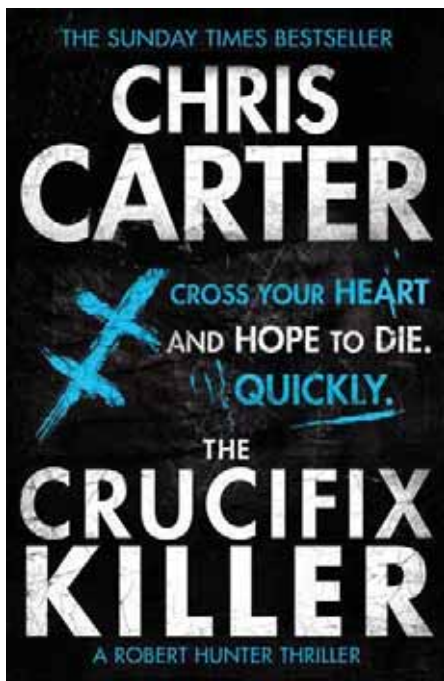
by Chris Carter

Simon & Schuster, 2013, £ 5.53

Rating: B+

The day after Christmas, 2022, I was scrolling through Facebook and came upon a post written by a young woman with a photo of her holding a pile of books. She said she received all the Chris Carter novels and was thrilled because he is her favorite writer. She lives in Great Britain. I will admit I never heard of this author but did a search on Amazon and was intrigued by all of the enthusiastically positive reviews. Therefore, I obtained the first book in this series and I will admit that I am not disappointed.

Robert Hunter is a detective in the homicide division of the LAPD. He solves serial killer crimes. He is haunted by the death of his partner in a boating accident. When a young woman is found brutally murdered in a remote



rundown home in LA, he realizes the serial killer known as the Crucifix Killer is back. This is a case that was supposedly solved two years ago when a pedophile/loner confessed to the crimes. He was executed and the case was put to rest, in spite of the fact that Hunter felt they had the wrong man. Hunter appears to be right and is placed in charge of this new investigation along with his rookie partner, Garcia. They are both talented investigators and will prove to be relentless in their pursuit. The longer they take to solve the case, the more people will die.

This is the debut novel in the Robert Hunter series. This book runs on pure adrenaline. It truly never lets up. The murders are gruesome -- be forewarned. This is definitely not great literature. Dialogue is sometimes clunky, many characters lack depth and are stereotypical in several ways. There is a totally cliché expository scene near the conclusion which seems endless -- two such scenes, in fact. The book lacks the realistic authority of the Michael Connelly Bosch books. Nonetheless, this book is so entertaining that I found myself unable to put it down. This is a debut effort so I will see if he gets substantially better as a writer. Based on reviews, all the books in this series are fast-paced and totally compelling. With the exception of the

expository scenes, I loved it and highly recommend it.

George Easter Reviews

DALZIEL and PASCOE Hunt the CHRISTMAS KILLER & Other Stories
by Reginald Hill

HarperCollins, £16.99, October, 2022

Rating: A

This is a volume of 11 short stories written by the masterful hand of Reginald Hill and finally collected in one anthology ten years after his death. Val McDermid writes a beautiful Foreward paying fitting tribute to one of crime fiction's greats. She states, "I feel lucky to have called him a friend and I still miss him, still mourn the unwritten works." She continues with this conclusion, "I hope you come away from them feeling as I do, that the chance to revisit Reginald Hill's short stories is the best Christmas present any reader could ask for." Amen.

I read these short stories over a period of about 2 weeks. I'd get up and before I got started on the day's busy work, I'd sit down and read one of the stories. It proved to be a great way to start the day. It was such a pleasure to read Reg Hill's beautiful prose and highly skilled use of language. Then there is the clever plotting and distinctive characters found in each gem of a story. Fans of his best series characters, Dalziel and Pascoe, will be delighted by the three stories that feature this duo of opposites. I'd be hard-pressed to pick a favorite story -- they are all so good. Not just good, but delicious!

THE ACCOMPLICE

by Steve Cavanagh

Orion, £12.99, 2022

Eddie Flynn #7

Rating: A+

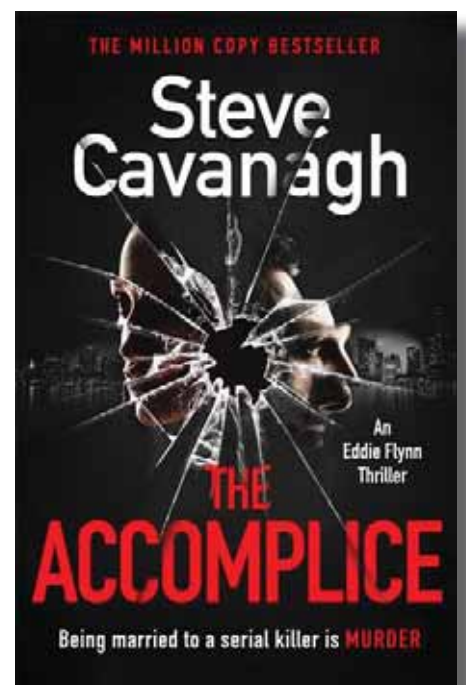
THE ACCOMPLICE is the most enjoyable, best plotted and surprising crime novel I read in 2022. It was a blast from its first page to its last. Unfortunately **THE ACCOMPLICE** is published only in the U.K., but you can get a copy

from bookdepository.com for \$14.94 plus free shipping.

Eddie Flynn is a NYC defense attorney with a limited clientele because he will only take on a client whom he believes to be innocent. Doing otherwise has led to trauma in his past. So when he is approached by Otto Peltier to take defend Carrie Miller, billed by the media as "the most hated woman in America," he refuses the case. But he is persuaded to give Carrie Miller a few minutes of his time, during which Eddie becomes convinced that she is innocent of being her serial killer husband's accomplice in the brutal murders of her husband's victims. So he takes on the case (with a very large payday promised) even though there is scant time to prepare for the imminent trial.

Complicating matters is the fact that the Sandman, Carrie's husband, Daniel Miller (a former hedge fund manager) is still at large and is killing the prosecution's witnesses to save his wife.

Everything in **THE ACCOMPLICE** works -- setting, characterization, plotting, and most of all surprises. This is as close as one can get to a perfect crime novel. Steve Cavanagh is a CWA Gold Dagger winner (**THE LIAR**) and won the Theakston Old Peculier Crime Novel of the Year Award for **THIRTEEN**, which was also nominated for a Barry



Award..

If you like Michael Connelly's Lincoln Lawyer series, you will love Eddie Flynn.

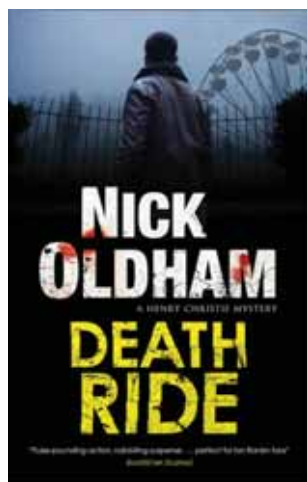
DEATH RIDE

by Nick Oldham

Severn House, \$30.99, March, 2023

Henry Christie #31

Rating: A-



Retired Detective Superintendent Henry Christie is enjoying managing the pub and hotel he co-owns with his sort-of daughter and being a volunteer during the three-day Kendleton Country Fair. On the third day, 13-year-old Charlotte Kirkham goes missing. Did she go off with some boys to annoy her parents or has she been kidnapped?

As the police investigate it appears more and more that Charlotte was taken against her will. Christie has his own suspicions as he recognizes the man with the hamburger concession as an ex-con he sent to prison years ago – for abducting a young girl.

The police investigate (with Christie's help) and things become more complicated as more crimes are committed. Then people close to Christie are put in danger and his life is threatened to be turned upside down.

I've been a big fan of this series for many reasons. Nick Oldham does a great job of weaving thriller elements into puzzling novels of detection. And the continuing characters are a joy to encounter. Oldham is able to pack a lot of story into a small number of pages.

Edgar Award Nominations 2023

Best Novel

DEVIL HOUSE by John Darnielle (MCD)

LIKE A SISTER by Kellye Garrett (Mulholland Books)

GANGLAND by Chuck Hogan (Grand Central Publishing)

THE DEVIL TAKES YOU HOME by Gabino Iglesias (Mulholland Books)

NOTES ON AN EXECUTION by Danya Kukafka (William Morrow)

THE MAID by Nita Prose (Ballantine Books)

Best First Novel by an American Author

JACKAL by Erin E. Adams (Bantam)

DON'T KNOW TOUGH by Eli Cranor (Soho Crime)

SHUTTER by Ramona Emerson (Soho Crime)

MORE THAN YOU'LL EVER KNOW by Katie Gutierrez (William Morrow)

PORTRAIT OF A THIEF by Grace D. Li (Tiny Reparations Books)

Best Paperback Original

QUARRY'S BLOOD by Max Allan Collins (Hard Case Crime)

ON A QUIET STREET by Seraphina Nova Glass (Graydon House)

OR ELSE by Joe Hart (Thomas & Mercer)

CLEOPATRA'S DAGGER by Carole Lawrence (Thomas & Mercer)

A FAMILIAR STRANGER by A.R. Torre (Thomas & Mercer)

The Simon & Schuster Mary Higgins Clark Award

BECAUSE I COULD NOT STOP FOR DEATH by Amanda Flower (Berkley)

THE WOMAN IN THE LIBRARY by Sulari Gentill (Poisoned Pen Press)

THE DISINVITED GUEST by Carol Goodman (William Morrow)

A DREADFUL SPLENDOR by B.R. Myers (William Morrow)

NEVER NAME THE DEAD by D.M. Rowell (Crooked Lane Books)

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

SECRET LIVES by Mark de Castrique (Poisoned Pen Press)

AN UNFORGIVING PLACE by Claire Kells (Crooked Lane Books)

HIDEOUT by Louisa Luna (Doubleday)

BEHIND THE LIE by Emilya Naymark (Crooked Lane Books)

SECRETS TYPED IN BLOOD by Stephen Spotswood (Doubleday)

The Lilian Jackson Braun Memorial Award

THE SHADOW OF MEMORY by Connie Berry (Crooked Lane Books)

BURIED IN A GOOD BOOK by Tamara Berry (Poisoned Pen Press)

SMILE BEACH MURDER by Alicia Besette (Berkley)

DESERT GETAWAY by Michael Craft (Brash Books)

THE MARLOW MURDER CLUB by Robert Thorogood (Poisoned Pen Press)

Getting Away With Murder

Mike Ripley



Old Writers Telling Tales

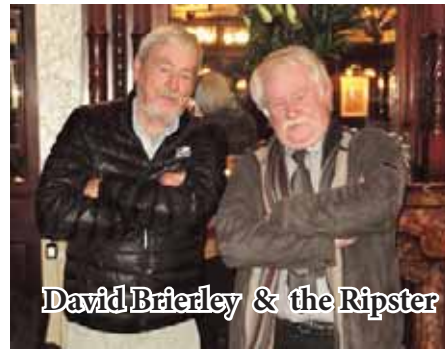
I have recently taken part, thanks to the wonders of modern technology, in a 'podcast' for the sinister Spybrary organisation, an international cabal of devotees of spy fiction. The occasion was to celebrate the latest novel, **DEAD MAN TELLING TALES**, by David Brierley published this month by the spanking new independent publisher Safe House Books, who aim to specialise in spy fiction both reviving vintage titles and, as in this case, issuing new work.



I am, however, familiar with David's earlier work, having had the privilege of editing new editions of Cold War – his iconic 1979 thriller which introduced female protagonist Cody, a secret agent 'as tough as tough and resourceful as a Bond or a Quiller' (according to one expert) – and **BIG BEAR, LITTLE BEAR**, his 1981 masterpiece set in post-war

Europe (the big bear is Stalin, the little one is Berlin) which both *The Observer* and *The Sunday Times* put in 'the Le Carré class.'

I knew David to be an inveterate traveller, as illustrated by the settings of his novels, most notably in countries then behind the Iron Curtain and in the case of **DEAD MAN TELLING TALES**, Latvia in the early years of this century. Legend has it that he was congratulated on the accuracy of his 'tradecraft' in communist Czechoslovakia by a retired

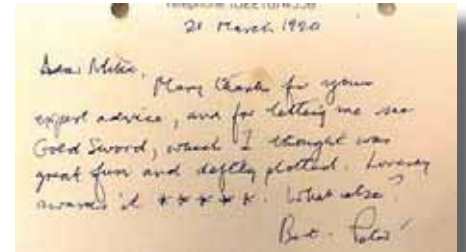


David Brierley & the Ripster

CIA operative who had served there.

More than a decade ago, we would meet in the private rooms of a distinguished London hostelry whenever David came up to town to buy supplies for his annual back-packing expeditions to south-east Asia and I would occasionally receive a photograph of him relaxing in a hammock in the midst of some dense jungle green somewhere. Our discussions at those sessions, though, were not about globe-trotting but rather the swapping of war stories about publishing and other writers and I remember a significant pang of jealousy when David casually mentioned that he had met both Raymond Chandler and Adam Hall.

Over the New Year I was reminded of yet another auld acquaintance whilst paying lip service to my annual resolution to catalogue my personal archive of manuscripts, rejection slips, blackmail notes and letters both threatening and pleasant. As usual, this is a task I never complete, being easily distracted by a piece of nostalgia, in this case, a post card from veteran crime writer Peter Lovesey, dated 21st March 1990.



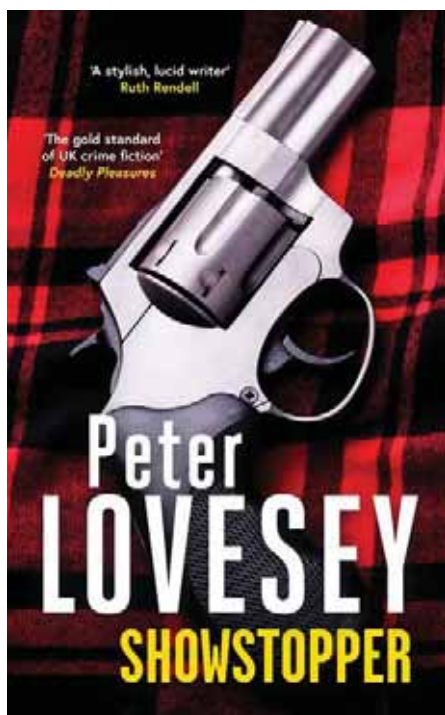
For some reason I must have sent Peter a copy of my short story Gold Sword, though I cannot think why I did as Peter had never done me any harm, but fortunately he thought it 'was great fun and deftly plotted. Lovesey awards it *****. What else?'

I have always assumed that Peter's use of five asterisks meant 'five stars' though of course it could be a polite way of deleting an expletive or two. And I have honestly no idea why he thanked me for my 'expert advice' or what that advice could have been. Although trawling my memory it might have been something along the lines of 'keep up the good work and let's have another two dozen books at least, please.'

If that was my advice, he certainly took it to heart and indeed has kicked off 2023 with new 'Peter Diamond' novel, **SHOWSTOPPER** [Sphere].

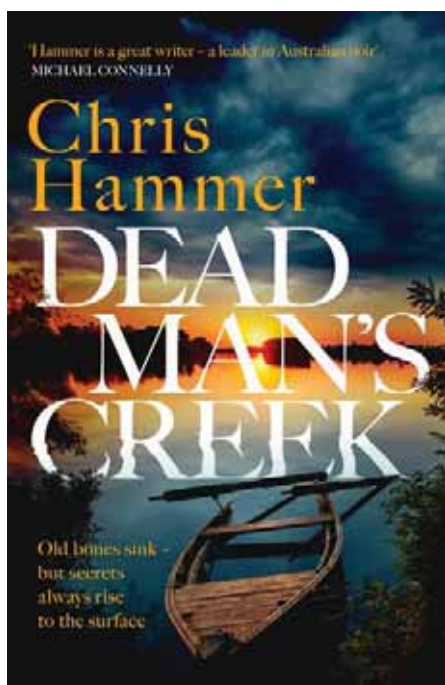
In a lovingly-described Bath, police detective Peter Diamond's latest investigation is into the murky world of television (and the wonderfully-named agents Moore and Moore Talent), in particular the crime series Swift, which is set in the photogenic West Country but, according to Diamond, doesn't contain much policing. Needless to say, it has proved ridiculously popular with the viewing public.

More Days of Yore



As Peter Lovesey has a considerable track-record in television (*Cribb*, *Tales of the Unexpected*, *Rosemary & Thyme*, etc), so knows the highs and lows – mostly lows – of working in that medium and has created a very popular fictional detective, this looks like an ideal mix. I am tempted to give **SHOWSTOPPERS** at least five stars.

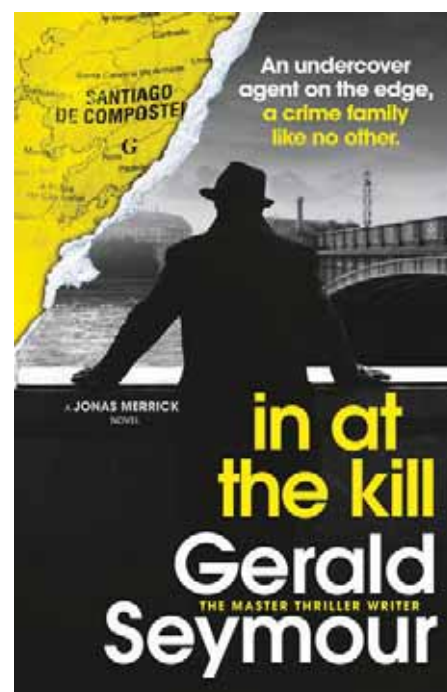
Books of the Quarter



Chris Hammer has found a formula for his own particular brand of what might be called Australian rural noir. He creates an isolated, claustrophobic small town off the beaten track which has a particular environmental threat or problem looming over it, truculent local inhabitants and where there have been murders past and present. Into this lovingly-described and detailed setting he pitches an investigator (a police officer or a journalist) who turns out to have a personal, usually unpleasant, connection to the place. In **DEAD MAN'S CREEK** [Wildfire], Hammer sticks to his formula, but my goodness doesn't he do it well! The main investigator here is homicide detective Nell Buchanan, though Hammer's alter-ego journalist Martin Scarsden does get a name-check, who is called in when a skeleton dating from WWII turns up after an explosive protest by environmental activists. The story unfolds across three narrative strands and Hammer has to keep a lot of plates spinning, but he does it so confidently the result is a thoroughly satisfying crime novel.

As fictional spies go, Jonas Merrick makes George Smiley look like a hyper-active teenager hooked on Grand Theft Auto and is known to his colleagues as 'the eternal flame' because he never goes out. Nonetheless, he is a fascinating character, created by veteran thriller writer Gerald Seymour and making his third appearance in **IN AT THE KILL** [Hodder]. From his office, where he is surrounded by disapproving (much younger) colleagues, or from his touring caravan with only his cat for company, Merrick masterminds an operation which involves an undercover agent laundering dirty money for a crime syndicate in Spain, the surveillance of a notorious criminal family in Liverpool and industrial quantities of cocaine being shipped in a 'semi-submersible' from South America. Even for a man whose mantra is to neither confirm nor deny anything, Jonas would have trouble refuting the fact that this was a tricky one. **IN AT THE KILL** is a modern spy story with background ripped from the headlines and shows

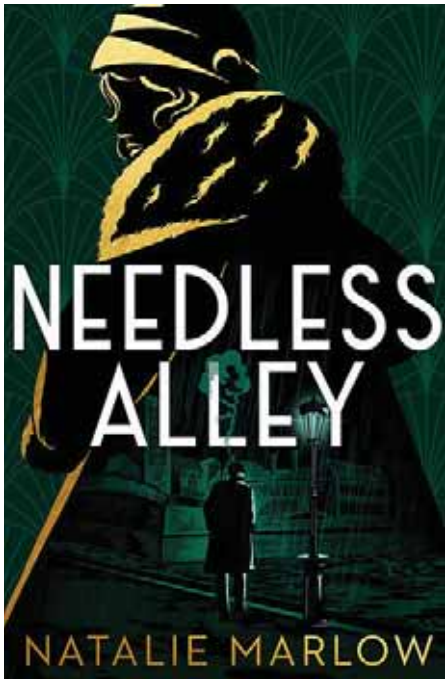
that Seymour has lost none of his appreciation for good espionage tradecraft.



I have only myself to blame for being slightly disappointed in Katja Ivar's new novel **TROUBLE** [Bitter Lemon] as I am a declared fan of her Finnish police detective (now gone private), Hella Mauzer. Given the setting – Finland in 1953 and a very private investigation into the murder of her father, a senior intelligence officer in 1942 – I had hoped to learn more about Finland in both the Cold War and the two wars with Russia in the 1940s, known as the Winter War and then the Continuation War, before the Finns broke their uneasy alliance with Nazi Germany. I was also curious about the SUPO, the Finnish intelligence service, about which I was disgracefully ignorant. **TROUBLE**, however, concentrates on two 'cold case' murders, one Hella discovers and one she has always suspected and she manages to dovetail them into a satisfying, if not exactly legal solution. The strength of the book is the portrayal of how women were – and possibly still are – treated. The blatant sexism would be jaw-dropping were it not so credible.

If there are any drug-taking petrol-heads out there dying for an Elmore Leonard-style thriller, then the wait

might be over with the debut novel of Craig Henderson, **WELCOME TO THE GAME** [Grove Press]. Written by a Brit, with an English central character, but set firmly in Leonard Land (i.e. Detroit), this is an urban thriller of gangs, gangsters, money laundering and driving – lots of driving, which considering the single-parent hero is a hard drinking, coke-snorting, dope-smoking bankrupt dealer in ‘super’ cars, would make several segments on Top Gear. The action is fast and furious (sorry about that), the plot over-complicated with too many minor characters and the violence is cold and cruel. It’s not up to Elmore Leonard’s standard – but what could be? – and although the baddies are impressively bad and genuinely scary, the English fish-out-of-water (except he doesn’t think so) fails to register as either sympathetic or, more importantly, ‘cool’. Along the way, he takes an incredible amount of physical damage which, at times, you think serves him right.

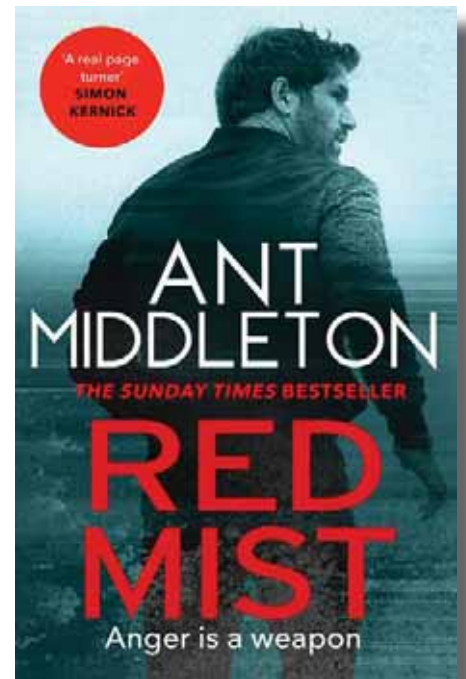


Birmingham 1933, smelly canals, narrowboats and blackshirts from the British Union of Fascists lurking behind the gasometers, but no Spartan haircuts so this is not Peaky Blinders. William Garrett is a private enquiry agent with an office in **NEEDLESS ALLEY** [Baskerville] by Natalie Marlow, whose speciality seems to be arranging the

scenes of adultery required as evidence in a divorce case. Hired by a seedy, but connected, local bigwig to follow his much younger wife, Garrett also finds himself recruited by the wife against his client. Naturally he falls for the (totally innocent) unhappy wife and a slightly toe-curling seduction ensues. Then a shocking double murder puts the plot into overdrive and Garrett, now up to his neck in cocaine and pornography, cuts through friend and family connections to dish out a brutal justice. There may be a couple of instances of anachronistic dialogue and one there is one expression I had never heard before: ‘a twelve-bob note’. Nine, yes, but never twelve.

For the first half of **THE PRISONER** by B.A. Paris [Hodder] the reader is kept completely in the dark, but that’s okay because so too is the lead character. She is a young orphan girl who goes from sleeping on the streets of London to private jet to Las Vegas for a marriage of convenience to an obviously dodgy media millionaire. Along the way she witnesses two murders (just about everyone she comes into contact with gets knocked off) and ends up kidnapped and held in a totally blacked-out cell. Once released, she finds herself in a sort of counter-plot which is all explained in twenty pages of exposition (in New Zealand) and a kindly solicitor in Reading appears out of the blue in Dickensian fashion, to fulfil our heroine’s great expectations. Despite the numerous suspensions of disbelief required, there are genuine moments of tension in **THE PRISONER** even if most of the homicide is done off-stage, plus a poignant take on Stockholm Syndrome and it is written with such pace that it becomes addictive.

Whisper it softly but Jack Reacher just may have a rival in the form of ex-Special Forces soldier turned knight-in-shining-armour vigilante Mallory, who even, like Reacher, is not averse to hitching a ride or catching the bus to take him on his latest quest. **RED MIST** by Ant Middleton [Sphere] is the second outing for Mallory, a character likely to



dismiss a knife attack or a gunfight as ‘a little roughness,’ who finds not a damsel in distress, but a worried white-haired grandfather in a bar in rural Normandy. Fortunately, he has a grand-daughter who could be in distress in Paris and Mallory, itching to help the family, discovers that the grand-daughter has a boyfriend who, if not in distress, is certainly in trouble. The action moves swiftly to Marseilles and then Switzerland and the body count mounts as Mallory finds he has to resort to his military training and skills in order to survive. Yet even when not faced with imminent danger, the character seethes with an unspent energy and rage. Certainly not a guy to get on the wrong side of, and you feel that it might not take much to do so.

A Gentle Spy (Story)

I am a big fan of Alan Judd’s recent spy fiction, but it was only after chancing on the 2016 film *The Exception*, did I realise it was based on a 2003 novel by him, **THE KAISER’S LAST KISS**.

It is a short, really quite romantic spy story set in Holland in the early days of WWII, centred on the household of the exiled Kaiser Wilhelm II, which may be unwittingly harbouring a British spy. It is a clever, nuanced novel, particularly

when the ageing Kaiser meets the new German regime in the form of Heinrich Himmler and the old king has to balance a possible return to position (if not power) against his ingrained, iron-hard snobbery. I recommend it highly and fail to understand how I missed it when it first appeared.

'Tis the Season to be John D.

I no longer expect to receive Christmas cards from publishers, having been 'cancelled' (as I believe the young people say) by so many these days, but I did think one or two might have sent me notice of their December crime fiction titles. But no, not a one.

Fortunately I have a contingency plan for my December reading needs thanks to the services of my bespoke second-hand book dealer and will be feasting on a batch of vintage paperbacks by that old master, John D. MacDonald.

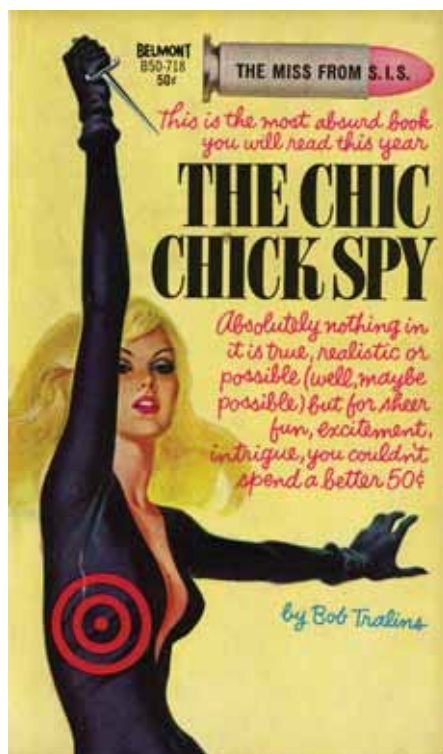


It was more than forty years ago when a fellow commuter into London, Jonathan 'Lovejoy' Gash, insisted that I really must discover John D.'s work. I did, and never looked back. Today I think I have more MacDonald titles in my library than any other author and that's not counting Philip Macdonald or Ross Macdonald, two other firm favourites.

Best Blurb Ever

To get flavour of what a book is about, the innocent reader relies heavily

on the cover and any 'blurb' contributed by the publisher. Until now I was unaware of the work of American Bob Tralins (1926-2010), who wrote more than 250 mystery and science fiction novels, but I much admire for its honest blurbage, his 1966 thriller **THE CHIC CHICK SPY**.



The blurb states unequivocally that: This is the most absurd book you will read this year.... Absolutely nothing in it is true, realistic or possible (well, maybe possible) but for sheer fun, excitement, intrigue, you couldn't spend a better 50 cents.

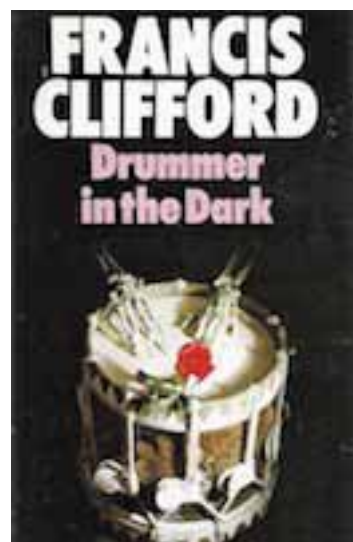
Re-Read of the Month

I have long sung the praises, to anyone who would listen and many who would not, of thriller-writer Francis Clifford, though I have only ever met two readers who also admitted to being big fans; one being the late Harry Keating, the other Professor Barry Forshaw. In advance of tackling a pair of Cliffords I realised I had never read, I picked up one of his spy stories on a whim, just to re-acquaint myself with the author. I was immediately hooked because I had forgotten just how good **DRUMMER IN**

THE DARK was.

Published in 1976, it tells of the British intelligence operation to uncover and disrupt the supply of a new radio-controlled bomb (called a 'Touchbutton' here but today we would label them as sophisticated IEDs) being used by an extremist group of Irish nationalists. The action flits between London, Northern Ireland and Poland, from where the Touchbuttons are being smuggled. The narrative follows not the bombers or their political manipulators, but the spies (and the smugglers) in the shadows in an attempt to stop an increasingly violent campaign of terror, and concentrates on the cost to the individuals involved, especially their private lives.

DRUMMER IN THE DARK was the last novel written by 'Francis Clifford' (Arthur Bell Thompson, 1917-1975) and was published in 1976. His thrillers were much lauded in Britain and the United States and his writing often compared to that of Graham Greene, Elleston Trevor and Gavin Lyall, though his particular grasp of the psychology of men and women under pressure - particularly men in battle - was unrivalled. An outstanding thriller writer, whose work remains inexplicably and disgracefully forgotten.



This column is gleaned from Mike Ripley's monthly columns that appear in the online **SHOTSMag.co.uk** and is re-printed here by permission of the author and the website.

Sneak Previews

Upcoming Mysteries



February, 2023

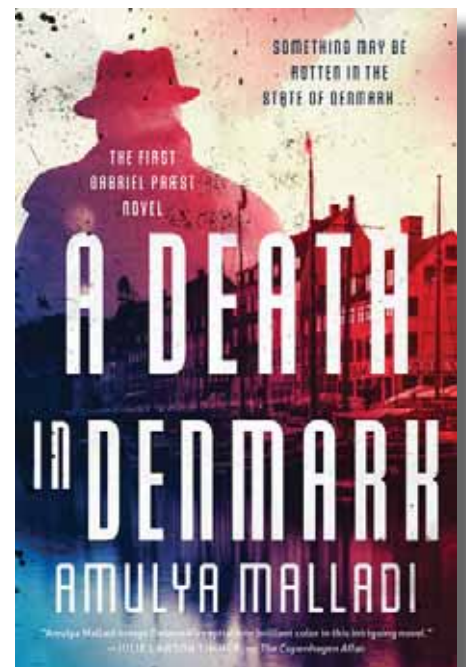
- 7 Deborah Crombie, **A KILLING OF INNOCENTS** (Kincaid/James)
- 7 Anastaisa Hastings, **OF MANNERS AND MURDER** (Dear Miss Hermione)
- 7 Kwei Quartey, **LAST SEEN IN LAPAZ** (Emma Djan)
- 7 Karen McQuestion, **214 PALMER STREET**
- 7 Mike Lawson, **ALLIGATOR ALLEY** (Joe DeMarco)
- 7 David Putnam, **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** (Felonious 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)
- 23 Chris Lloyd, **PARIS REQUIEM** (Detective Eddie Giral)
- 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)
- 28 Alex North, **THE ANGEL MAKER**
- 28 Jack Beaumont, **THE FRENCH MAN**

March, 2023

- 7 Cara Black, **NIGHT FLIGHT TO PARIS** (Kate Rees)
- 7 Alex Finlay, **WHAT HAVE WE DONE**
- 7 Laura Childs, **LEMON CURD KILLER** (Theodosia Browning)
- 7 Christina Dodd, **FORGET WHAT YOU KNOW**
- 7 Paul Doherty, **DARK QUEEN WARY**
- 7 Nick Oldham, **DEATH RIDE** (Henry Christie)
- 7 Chris Nickson, **THE DEAD WILL RISE** (Simon Westow)
- 7 Barbara Hambly, **ONE EXTRA CORPSE**
- 7 William Landay, **ALL THAT IS MINE I CARRY WITH ME**
- 14 J. A. Jance, **COLLATERAL DAMAGE** (Ali Reynolds)

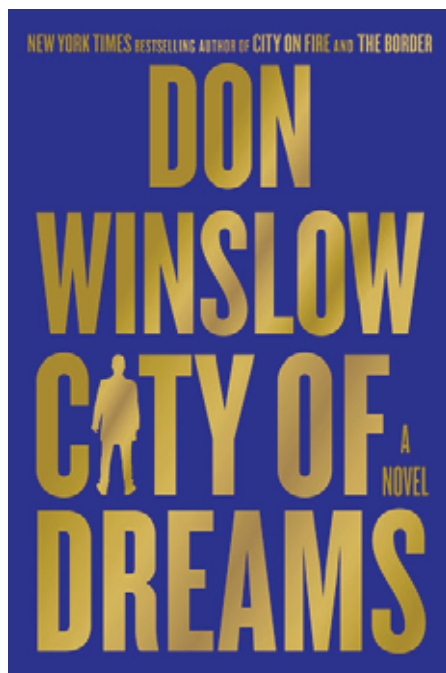
- 14 Alma Katsu, **RED LONDON** (Red Widow)
- 14 Connor Sullivan, **WOLF TRAP**
- 14 Donna Leon, **SO SHALL YOU REAP** (Guido Brunetti)
- 14 Harlan Coben, **I WILL FIND YOU**
- 14 Juan Gomez-Jurado, **RED QUEEN**
- 14 Jesse Q. Sutano, **VERA WONG'S UNSOLICITED ADVICE TO MURDERERS**
- 14 David Rosenfelt, **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)
- 14 Christopher Bollen, **THE LOST AMERICANS**
- 21 Jacqueline Winspear, **THE WHITE LADY** (Elinor White)
- 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)
 28 Rita Mae Brown, **HISS AND TELL** (Harry Harristeen)
 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 Anne Perry, **THE FOURTH ENEMY** (Daniel Pitt)
 11 Kim Sherwood, **DOUBLE OR NOTHING** (Double O)
 11 Peter Robinson, **STANDING IN THE SHADOWS** (Banks)
 11 Alisa Lynn Valdes, **HOLLOW BEASTS** (Jodi Luna)
 11 Anthony McCarten, **GOING ZERO**
 11 Megan Miranda, **THE ONLY SURVIVORS**
 11 Sarah Bailey, **THE HOUSEMATE**
 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)
 18 John Lawton, **MOSCOW EXILE** (Joe Wilderness)
 25 Jean-Luc Bannalec, **THE BODY BY THE SEA** (Brittany)
 25 Dennis Lehane, **SMALL MERCIES**
 25 Taylor Adams, **THE LAST WORD**
 25 Victor Methos, **THE GRAVE SINGER** (Shepard & Gray)
 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)
 25 Caroline Kepnes, **FOR YOU AND ONLY YOU** (Joe Goldberg)
 25 Anne Hillerman, **THE WAY OF THE BEAR** (Chee & Manuelito)
 25 Sarah Strohmeier, **WE LOVE TO ENTERTAIN**
 25 Laura Griffin, **DEEP TIDE**
 25 Victoria Thompson, **MURDER ON BEDFORD STREET**
 25 Adam Sternbergh, **THE EDEN TEST**

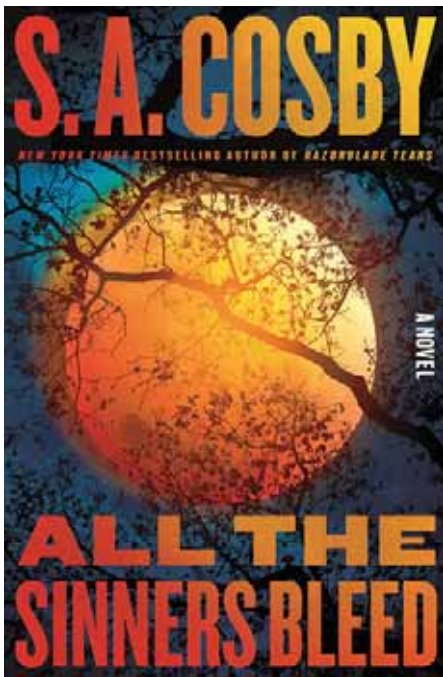


May, 2023

- 2 Don Bentley, **FORGOTTEN WAR** (Matt Drake)
 2 Arnaldur Indridason, **THE GIRL BY THE BRIDGE** (Konrad)
 2 Susan Isaacs, **BAD, BAD SEYMOUR BROWN** (Corrie Geller)
 2 Lorenzo Carcaterra, **NONNA MARIA & THE STOLEN NECKLACE**
 2 Brian Klingborg, **THE MAGIS -TRATE** (Lu Fei)
 9 Don Bentley, **FLASH POINT** (Jack Ryan, Jr.)
 9 Joe Ide, **FIXIT** (IQ)
 9 Martin Cruz Smith, **INDEPENDENCE SQUARE** (Arkady Renko)
 9 Lisa Brideau, **ADRIFT**
 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**
 16 Linwood Barclay, **THE LIE MAKER**
 23 Robyn Gigl, **REMAIN SILENT**
 23 Chris Hauty, **THE DEVIL YOU KNOW** (Hayley Chill)
 23 Ivy Pochoda, **SING HER DOWN**
 23 John Banville, **THE LOCK-UP** (Quirke)
 23 Emma Rosenblum, **BAD SUMMER PEOPLE**
 23 Liv Constantine, **THE SENATOR'S WIFE**
 23 M. P. Woodward, **DEAD DROP**
 23 Isabella Maldonado, **A KILLER'S GAME**
 30 Matt Goldman, **A GOOD FAMILY**
 30 Megan Abbott, **BEWARE THE WOMAN**
 30 Ian K. Smith, **THE OVERNIGHTS** (Ashe Cayne)
 30 Jo Nesbo, **KILLING MOON** (Harry Hole)
 30 Katherine Hall Page, **THE BODY IN THE WEB** (Faith Fairchild)

June, 2023

- 6 Robert McCaw, **RETRIBUTION** (Koa Kane)
 6 Jordan Farmer, **LIGHTHOUSE**



- BURNING** (Harlan Winter)
- 6 Nilima Rao, **A DISAPPEARANCE IN FIJI**
- 6 Stuart Woods & Brett Battles, **NEAR MISS** (Stone Barrington)
- 6 Katharine Schellman, **THE LAST DROP OF HEMLOCK** (Nightingale)
- 6 S. A. Cosby, **ALL THE SINNERS BLEED**
- 13 Alison Gaylin, Robert B. Parker's **BAD INFLUENCE** (Sunny Randall)
- 13 Matthew Quirk, **INSIDE THREAT**
- 13 Chris Offutt, **CODE OF THE HILLS** (Nick Hardin)
- 13 Matthew Spencer, **BLACK RIVER**
- 13 Joshua Moehling, **WHERE THE DEAD SLEEP**
- 13 Alex Marwood, **THE ISLAND OF LOST GIRLS**
- 13 David Gordon, **THE PIGEON** (Joe the Bouncer)
- 20 James Rollins, **TIDES OF FIRE** (Sigma Force)
- 20 Lee Goldberg, **MALIBU BURNING** (Sharpe & Walker)
- 20 Riley Sager, **THE ONLY ONE LEFT**
- 20 Ruth Ware, **ZERO DAYS**
- 20 Robert Bailey, **RICH WATERS** (Jason Rich)
- 20 Anna Lee Huber, **A FATAL ILLUSION** (Lady Kiera Darby)
- 20 Sarah Stewart Taylor, **A STOLEN CHILD** (Maggie D'Arcy)
- 20 Andrea Bartz, **THE SPARE ROOM**
- 20 William Maz, **THE BUCHAREST**

- LEGACY** (Bill Hefflin)
- 20 Julia Heaberlin, **NIGHT WILL FIND YOU**
- 27 Victoria Selman, **TRULY, DARKLY, DEEPLY**
- 27 Dianne Freeman, **A NEWLYWED'S GUIDE TO FORTUNE AND MURDER** (Harleigh)

July, 2023

- 4 David Rosenfelt, **FLOP DEAD GORGEOUS** (Andy Carpenter)
- 11 M. W. Craven, **FEARLESS**
- 11 Sujata Massey, **THE MISTRESS OF BHATIA HOUSE** (Perveen Mistry)
- 11 Steve Goble, **GO FIND DADDY** (Ed Runyon)
- 11 Brad Thor, **DEAD FALL** (Scot Harvath)
- 11 Linda Castillo, **AN EVIL HEART** (Kate Burkholder)
- 11 L. R. Dorn, **WITH A KISS WE DIE**
- 11 Steve Berry & Grant Blackwood, **THE 9TH MAN** (Luke Daniels)
- 11 Leonard Goldberg, **THE WAY -WARD PRINCE** (Daughter of Sherlock Holmes)
- 18 Daniel Silva, **THE COLLECTOR** (Gabriel Allon)
- 18 Samantha Downing, **A TWISTED LOVE STORY**
- 18 Colson Whitehead, **CROOK MANIFESTO** (Ray Carney)
- 18 C. J. Carey, **QUEEN WALLIS (QUEEN HIGH in the U.K.)**
- 25 Shari Lapena, **EVERYONE HERE IS LYING**
- 25 Michael Koryta, **AN HONEST MAN**
- 25 Max Tomlinson, **NIGHT CANDY** (Colleen Hayes)
- 25 Laura Lippman, **PROM MOM**

August, 2023

- 1 Martin Edwards, **THE PUZZLE OF BLACKSTONE LODGE** (Rachel Savernake)
- 1 Naomi Hirahara, **EVERGREEN** (Aki Ito)
- 1 Mindy Mejia, **TO CATCH A STORM**
- 1 Sarah Pekkanen, **GONE TONIGHT**
- 1 Ava Glass, **GAME OF SPIES** (Emma Makepeace)

- 1 Peter James, **PICTURE YOU DEAD** (Roy Grace)
- 8 James Byrne, **DEADLOCK** (Dez Limerick)
- 8 Allison Brennan, **NORTH OF NOWHERE**
- 8 Joanna Schaffhausen, **DEAD AND GONE** (Annalisa Vega)
- 8 Lisa Jewell, **NONE OF THIS IS TRUE**
- 8 Lauren Beukes, **BRIDGE**
- 8 Megan Goldin, **DARK CORNERS**
- 8 Clive Cussler & Robin Burcell, **THE SERPENT'S EYE** (Fargo)
- 9 C. J. Carey, **WIDOWLAND**
- 15 Mark Pryor, **THE DARK EDGE OF NIGHT** (Henri Lefort)
- 15 Ryan Steck, **LETHAL RANGE** (Matthew Redd)
- 15 Ayelet Gundar-Goshen, **WHERE THE WOLF LURKS**
- 15 Sandie Jones, **THE TRADE OFF**
- 27 David Baldacci, **THE WHOLE TRUTH** (Shaw)

September, 2023

- 5 Mick Herron, **THE SECRET HOURS**
- 12 Nick Petrie, **THE HEAVY LIFT** (Peter Ash)
- 12 James Ellroy, **THE ENCHANTERS**

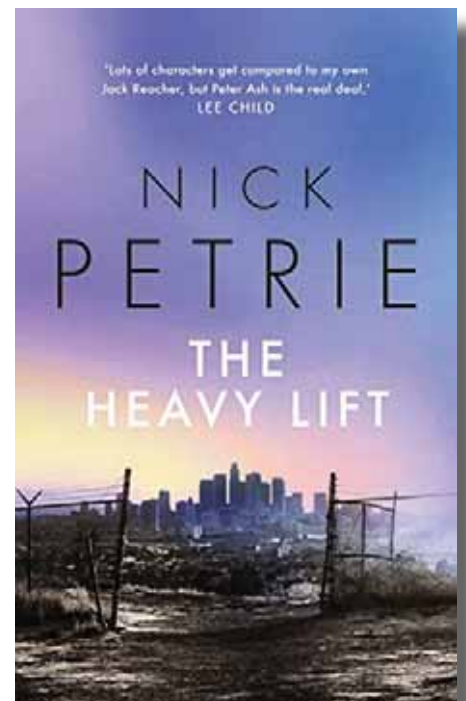


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