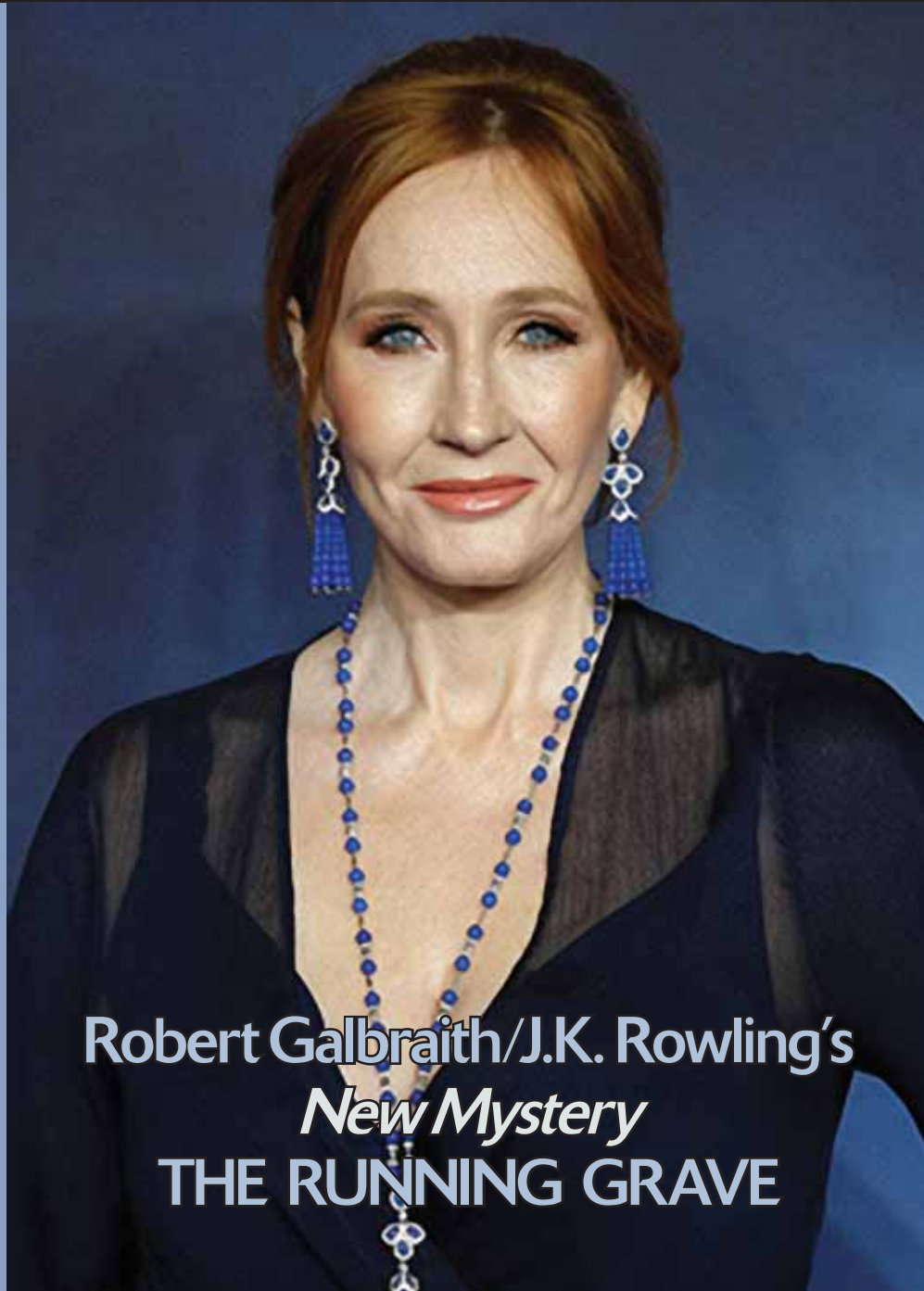


# *Deadly Pleasures* *Mystery Magazine*



**Robert Galbraith/J.K. Rowling's**  
*New Mystery*  
**THE RUNNING GRAVE**

# Robert Galbraith's

## *Cormoran Strike – Robin Ellacott* *Series*

When J.K. Rowling (Joanne) wrote her hugely successful Harry Potter series and amassed a fortune from book sales, movies, merchandise and theme parks, it would have been easy for her to sit back on her laurels and enjoy the fruits of her labors. But she is the particular type of writer who so enjoys the creative process that she is almost compelled to write.

Somewhere around 2011 Joanne decided to write a crime novel, but she wanted it judged on its own merits without consideration of her worldwide fame. So she adopted a male pen name – Robert Galbraith. It came out in 2013 as **THE CUCKOO'S CALLING** by Robert Galbraith.

Joanne is quoted as saying, "I've always loved reading detective stories. Most of the Harry Potter stories are whodunits at heart (**ORDER OF THE PHOENIX** is more of a why-did-he), but I've wanted to try the real thing for a long time. As for the pseudonym, I was yearning to go back to the beginning of a writing career in this new genre, to work without hype or expectation and to receive totally unvarnished feedback. It was a fantastic experience and I only wish it could have gone on a little longer."

And why didn't it go "on a little longer?" Apparently, Robert Galbraith's true identity was leaked by Judith Callegari, who heard the information from her best friend's husband, a lawyer in a law firm that represented Rowling. Then *The Times* ran a computer program that compared the Harry Potter

writings to those of Robert Galbraith and confirmed that all the writings were most probably written by the same person.

Once J.K. Rowling was "outed," the publishers issued very large second printings of **THE CUCKOO'S CALLING** and it sold very well worldwide. With this book, Joanne introduced two of my favorite characters in crime fiction – Cormoran Strike and Robin Ellacott, who have continued to appear in six more titles (so far) published under the name of Robert Galbraith. One of the highlights of reading this series is to see the development of these two characters, who grow and change in each book.

In 2020, a controversy arose regard-



ing a tweet and follow-up comment that J. K. Rowling made about the transgender community. It brought out a lot of Twitter-bashing and I'm sure it was the impetus for the plot of **THE INK BLACK HEART** which involved Twitter trolls.

Here are the facts about that controversy.

On June 6, 2020, Rowling retweeted an op-ed piece that discussed "people who menstruate," apparently taking issue with the fact that the story did not use the word "women." "People who menstruate.' I'm sure there used to be a word for those people. Someone help me out. Wumben? Wimpund? Woomud?" she wrote.

That initial retweet garnered a lot of backlash, but the Harry Potter author did not relent and wrote about her views in more detail. "If sex isn't real, there's no same-sex attraction. If sex isn't real, the lived reality of women globally is erased. I know and love trans people, but erasing the concept of sex removes the ability of many to meaningfully discuss their lives. It isn't hate to speak the truth," she tweeted. "The idea that women like me, who've been empathetic to trans people for decades, feeling kinship because they're vulnerable in the same way as women—i.e., to male violence—'hate' trans people because they think sex is real and has lived consequences—is a nonsense."

She continued, "I respect every trans person's right to live any way that feels authentic and comfortable to them. I'd march with you if you were discriminat-



Robin Ellacott

Cormoran Strike

ed against on the basis of being trans. At the same time, my life has been shaped by being female. I do not believe it's hateful to say so."

**My comment:** It's a strange world we live in when what is perceived as political and social correctness oppresses common sense and freedom of speech.

## The Setting of the Series

Most of the stories are set in modern-day London, but investigations can take them outside of the city as well.

## The Characters

**Cormoran Strike.** Cormoran Blue Strike was born on 23 November 1974, in Truro, Cornwall, England, although his family lived in St. Mawes. He spent half his childhood there and half in London (as well as time at a "quasi-mystical commune in Norfolk"), according to the whims of his mother's itinerant lifestyle.

Always very bright and a determined student, Strike attended Oxford University and studied for a history degree for about two years.

He dropped out of Oxford at age 20 to join the British military. There, he

served in the the Special Investigation Branch, specifically the Royal Military Police. While in the military, he spent time in Afghanistan, Angola, the Balkans (including Bosnia), Cyprus, Germany and Iraq.

Strike is described as a 6-foot-3, 16-stone (about 225 pounds) giant of a man with short compact hair that is extremely curly. Half of his right leg is missing. It was blown off in Afghanistan whilst investigating a Killed In Action during his time in the Special Investigation Branch of the Army. He wears a prosthetic leg that often gives him discomfort, if not overwhelming pain; sometimes, when his knee is very sore, he abandons the prosthetic leg and uses crutches instead.

Although Strike can be grumpy and judgmental of others, he does have an outgoing, mischievous personality and a good sense of humour that can sometimes be described as gallows humour. Because of the frequent moves he made as a child, he developed "an advanced set of social skills" that made him know "how to fit in, to make people laugh, to render himself acceptable to almost anyone." And, of course, his personality is driven by a strong sense of curiosity and desire to find the truth.

Strike's parents were rock star **Jonny**

**Rokeby** and **Leda Strike**, super groupie. He has met his father only twice — when he was seven years old and Leda surprised Rokeby at a recording studio, and when he was eighteen years old and headed off to uni. Neither encounter was positive. Strike looks nothing like his father — instead, he's a self-described "spitting image" of his mother's brother, **Ted Nancarrow**, his surrogate father.

In all, Strike has eight half-siblings from his parents' numerous pairings. He is close to only **Lucy Fantoni**, his younger half-sister with whom he was raised. When Strike was nine and Lucy seven their **Uncle Ted** and **Aunt Joan** took them away from their negligent mother and raised them in St. Mawes until they were adults. Both Cormoran and Lucy have great affection for Ted and Joan because of the stability and love they received at their hands.

As the series progresses Strike is slowly creating positive relationships with some of his other half-siblings — but not his father. His mother Leda died when Strike was nineteen.

When **THE CUCKOO'S CALLING** opens, Strike has just broken up with **Charlotte Campbell**, a wealthy and beautiful socialite, with whom he had a relationship for sixteen years. Charlotte has mythomania — the pathological tendency to lie; her lies are "woven into the fabric of her being, her life." Their relationship was a tumultuous one, with Charlotte at one point standing on a roof and threatening to jump, and then later calling Strike from a psych hospital and begging him to come get her. Strike reflects on the years with Charlotte as "the torture, the madness and occasional ecstasy."

**Robin Ellacott.** Robin Venetia Ellacott was born on October 9, 1984. She started dating Matthew Cunliffe at the age of sixteen whilst attending the same secondary school. Robin studied psychology at university before dropping out for a reason unknown until revealed in **CAREER OF EVIL**. She moved to London with Matthew in February 2010 and started working for Temporary Solutions. The day after becoming engaged to Matthew, Robin begins

temping for Cormoran Strike as his secretary/assistant. As the series progresses Robin moves up the career ladder to become Strike's partner and equal.

Robin has three brothers: **Stephen, Martin and Jonathan**. Robin's parents are **Linda and Michael Ellacott**.

Since she was a child, Robin's career ambition had always been to become a detective/investigative profiler. Her brothers had laughed at her for saying she was going to catch robbers, so she kept the ambition secret after that.

Robin is a "petrol-head" and loves driving. After leaving university, she took a couple of advanced driving courses, as suggested by her father, to get her out of the house. Her skills are greatly appreciated by Strike who, since the fateful explosion on the road in Afghanistan, is afraid of anyone else driving him besides professional drivers.

Robin is very brave and sometimes takes unnecessary risks. Strike is protective of her and Robin chafes at the protection at times.

## Cormoran Strike's Friends

**Nick and Ilsa Herbert.** Nick Herbert is one of Strike's oldest friends. They met at "a good rough old comprehensive" school in London when they were teenagers.<sup>1</sup> It was at Strike and Nick's joint eighteenth birthday party that Nick met the girl who would eventually become his wife, Ilsa. She grew up with Strike in St. Mawes in Cornwall, where they attended the village school together whenever Strike was living with his aunt and uncle. They are a port in the storm of life for Strike and often give him sound advice.

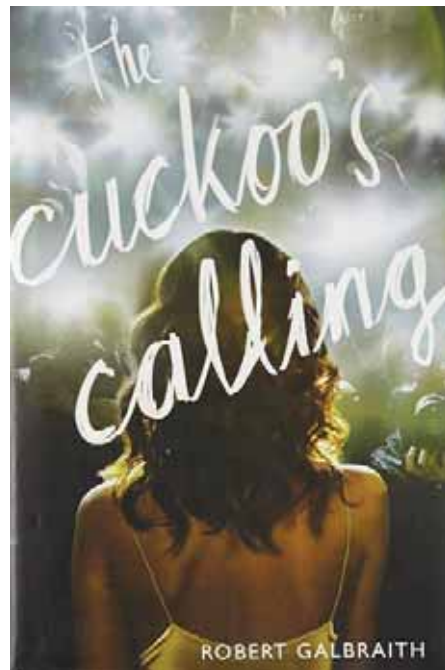
**Shanker.** Shanker and Strike (who Shanker calls Bunsen, for reasons Strike no longer remembers) met when they were teenagers. Strike's mother, Leda, took Shanker in at their Whitechapel squat after he was hurt in a gang street fight, and she looked after him (as best she could) while he healed. He ended up staying around, becoming fiercely loyal to Leda and somewhat of a brother to Strike. As adults, Shanker and Strike are

old friends, but mainly business associates of sorts. Shanker is Strike's connection to London's criminal underworld, providing him useful information and intel. But "Strike never forgot what Shanker was, nor did Shanker ever forget what Strike was," as they work on opposite sides of the law. And it's always business — Strike pays Shanker for every service performed.

**Spanner.** Spanner is the younger brother of Nick Herbert and is Strike's computer tech. In this day and age, every good detective needs someone savvy in the ways of computer technology.

Each book in the series brings a whole new cast of characters to mesh with those that continue from book to book. To describe some of the characters in latter books might result in spoilers.

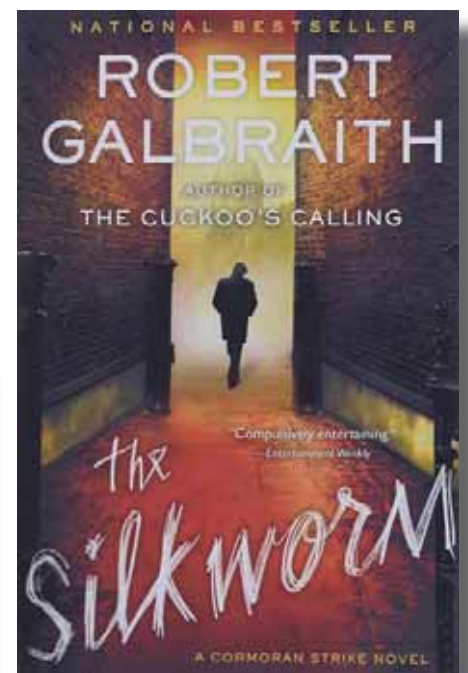
## The Books



**THE CUCKOO'S CALLING** (2013). After losing his leg to a land mine in Afghanistan, Cormoran Strike is barely scraping by as a private investigator. Strike is down to one client, and creditors are calling. He's also broken off a sixteen-year relationship and is living in his office.

Into his life step two people. The first is Robin Ellacott, who is Strike's new temporary secretary, who proves to be a godsend.

The second is a new and wealthy client — John Bristow, who wants Strike to look into the death of his sister. She is the legendary supermodel Lula Landry, known to her friends as the Cuckoo, who famously fell to her death a few months earlier. The police ruled it a suicide, but John refuses to believe that. The case plunges Strike into the world of multimillionaire beauties, rock-star boyfriends, and desperate designers.



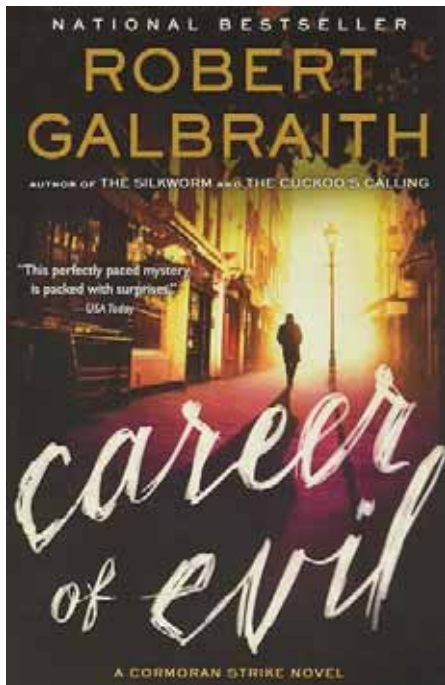
**THE SILKWORM** (2014). When novelist Owen Quine goes missing, his wife calls in private detective Cormoran Strike. At first, Mrs. Quine just thinks her husband has gone off by himself for a few days—as he has done before—and she wants Strike to find him and bring him home.

Owen, a former literary genius whose attempts to recreate his past success have failed, disappeared around the same time his latest book, **BOMBYX MORI**, was leaked to London's literary community.

But as Strike investigates, it becomes clear that there is more to Quine's disappearance than his wife realizes. The novelist has just completed a manuscript featuring poisonous pen-portraits of

almost everyone he knows. If the novel were to be published, it would ruin lives - meaning that there are a lot of people who might want him silenced.

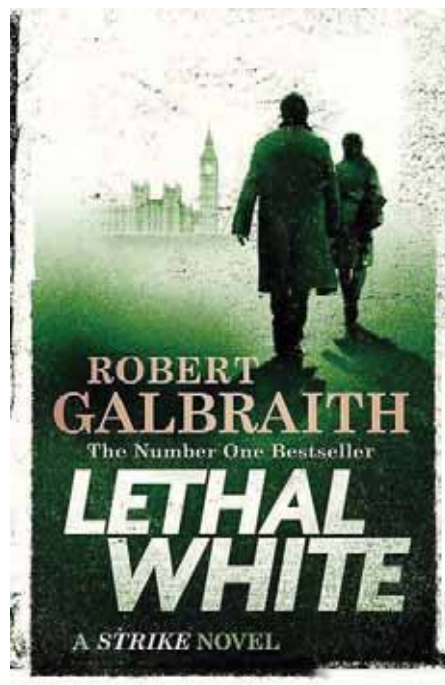
Then Quine is found brutally murdered under bizarre circumstances.



**CAREER OF EVIL** (2015). When a mysterious package is delivered to Robin Ellacott, she is horrified to discover that it contains a woman's severed leg. Her boss, private detective Cormoran Strike, is less surprised but no less alarmed. There are four people from his past who he thinks could be responsible - and Strike knows that any one of them is capable of sustained and unspeakable brutality.

**LETHAL WHITE** (2018). When a troubled young man named Billy asks Cormoran Strike to help him investigate a crime he witnessed as a child, the private eye is left deeply troubled. While Billy is obviously mentally distressed and cannot remember many concrete details, there is something sincere about him and his story. But before Strike can question him further, Billy bolts from his office in a panic.

Trying to get to the bottom of Billy's story, Strike and Robin Ellacott -- once his assistant, now a partner in the agency -- set off on a twisting trail that leads them through the backstreets of



London, into a secretive inner sanctum within Parliament, and to a beautiful but sinister manor house deep in the countryside.

And during this labyrinthine investigation, Strike's own life is far from straightforward. His newfound fame as a private eye means he can no longer operate behind the scenes as he once did. Plus, his relationship with his former assistant is more fraught than it ever has been; Robin is now invaluable to Strike in the business, but their personal relationship is much, much trickier than that.

### Reviews of the Most Recent Three Series Novels

#### TROUBLED BLOOD

by Robert Galbraith

Mulholland, \$29.00, 927 pages (2020)

Rating: A

Reviewed by George Easter

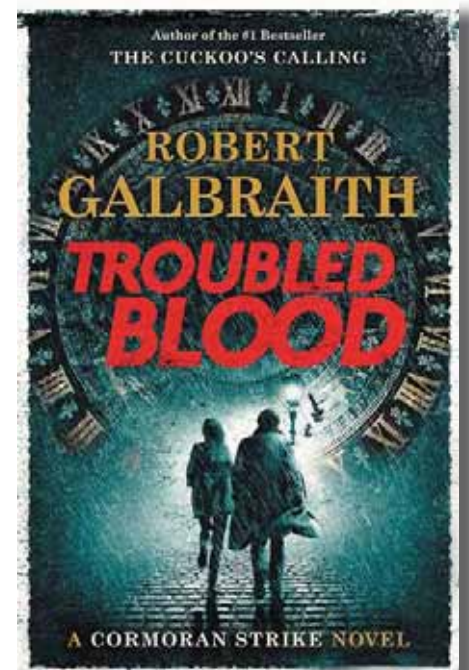
The private investigation agency run by Cormoran Strike and his business partner Robin Ellacott is thriving. They have added a full-time secretary/receptionist and three more private detectives. With the addition of more personnel come more cases to follow. Hence, the 927 pages. But the main case is an almost impossible one to

solve, which both Strike and Robin find intriguing. The client is a woman whose mother, Dr. Margot Bamborough, went missing forty years ago. An exhaustive, yet troubled police investigation revealed no trace of her. It was widely thought at the time that convicted serial killer Dennis Creed was responsible, but Creed never confessed to this crime nor was there ever any credible evidence that he was the perpetrator.

So Strike and Robin begin all over again, interviewing witnesses or relatives of deceased witnesses. Some prove difficult to find or reluctant to talk, but the investigation grinds slowly forward, revealing hidden motives and lies.

On the personal front, Strike is dealing with the impending death of a beloved aunt who helped raise him, while Robin is frustrated by the delaying tactics of her soon-to-be ex-husband in finalizing their divorce. It is due to the brilliance of the author that the romantic tension between the two (whom everyone around them recognize as perfect for each other) is suspended over such a long story arc (five books so far). I read the books in this series as much to read about the inch forward progress in the Strike/Robin relationship as to read the excellent mystery.

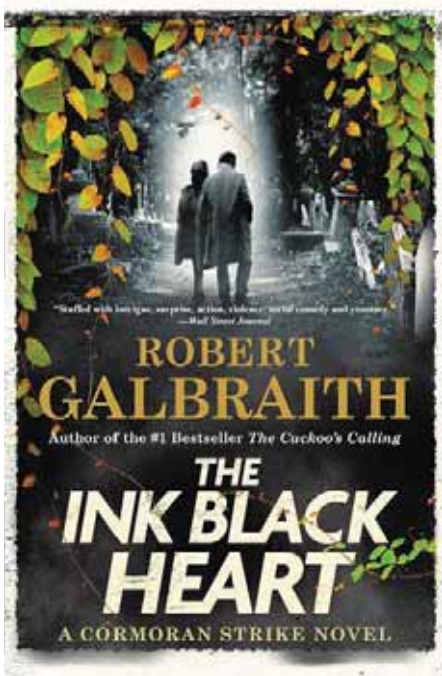
For some, this novel at 927 pages may seem too long. Yet, as I read and



thoroughly enjoyed it, I couldn't think of how one would edit it down to make it shorter. It is a long, well-told story and I had absolutely no trouble with it keeping my interest throughout. I hope her next one is 1,200 pages (write fast).

There are so many red herrings that I stopped trying to guess the outcome and just let it unroll.

Tip: this series must be read in order of publication. Another tip: if it is uncomfortable for any of you to handle a large book that is nearly 3 lbs, then it may be advisable to get the e-book edition and read it on a tablet. And by all means, read it and then spread the word.



### THE INK BLACK HEART

By Robert Galbraith

Mulholland Books; \$32.00 (2022)

Rating: A

Reviewed by Meredith Anthony

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

This doorstopper of a novel is, in hard cover, 1000 pages of sheer pleasure. If you have not read the first five books in the Cormoran Strike and Robin Ellacott series, I seriously advise you to do

so. Start with **CUCKOO'S CALLING** and read them in order. Some series don't really need to be read this way, but this one profits by it. In this series, the reading experience is significantly enhanced by watching the arc of the two detectives' lives evolve over the books. But even if you dive into this as a stand-alone, it's worth the serious commitment of time.

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

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

The social issues that come into play during the investigation are also up-to-date: racism, pedophilia, xenophobia, white supremacy, abelism, homophobia,

eating disorders, body dysmorphia, and more.

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

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

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

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

3. If you must get into new tech, you will have strange formatting issues to solve. Do texts appear in talk bubbles as they do on your phone? Do chat rooms appear in timed synchronized columns, to facilitate knowing which players are in the game at the same time? Galbraith uses three parallel columns of chat which in a hardback book, means reading down a column on facing pages then turning a page or two to continue; then going back to the start of the second column, following it to its end, then going back to the beginning of column three. I shudder to think of how this formatting plays on Kindle or Nook.

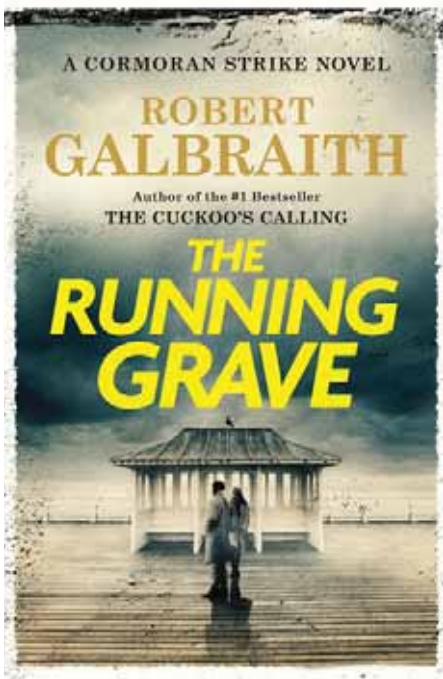
4. Revenge is not only a staple in the arsenal of murder motives in crime fiction, it is the source of much inspiration among authors, as well. I cannot help but think that the recent history of J.K. Rowling's trolling by online bullies

might have something to do with the depiction of the vicious cyberbullies at the heart of **THE INK BLACK HEART**. I can only say this: You go, girl!

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

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

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



### **THE RUNNING GRAVE**

By Robert Galbraith  
Mulholland Books; \$32.50  
(October 2023)

**Rating: A**

**Reviewed by Meredith Anthony**

**First line:** "Will, we're appalled to learn from your personal tutor yesterday that you've dropped out of university and joined some kind of religious movement."

**THE RUNNING GRAVE** is the seventh novel in Robert Galbraith's excellent Cormoran Strike series and it is brilliant. Easily the best entry in the wonderful, London-based private detective series that began with **THE CUCKOO'S CALLING** in 2013.

In **THE RUNNING GRAVE**, Strike and his partner Robin Ellicott take on a case for Sir Colin Edensor, whose son has suddenly dropped out of university and joined a cult. The Universal Humanitarian Church seems to be somewhere between Scientology and the Children of God, indulging in everything from fraud and brainwashing to rape and child sex trafficking and torture. High profile businessmen, authors and actors are prominent members and the church has temples in London and other major U.K. cities in addition to a large farm in Norfolk. Cities around the world have outposts. The leader is charismatic. The indoctrination thorough. The organization gets larger all the time, preying on the weak, the damaged and the gullible.

The two detectives take the case. Robin goes undercover as a rich, feckless society girl and joins the church. Strike starts interviewing former cult members. Mayhem ensues.

Before I go any further, let's address the elephant in the room. And by elephant, I mean the sheer size of this book. Galbraith's last book, **THE INK BLACK HEART**, ran 927 pages. And although I loved it, it was clearly too long. There were too many characters, many badly differentiated, and some formatting problems because the author peppered the text a panoply of blogs, videos, emails, chat rooms, and other media. The hardcover edition of **THE RUNNING GRAVE** weighs in at 945 pages but this time there's hardly a scrap of waste. The exception is the unnecessary and distracting I CHING texts which precede each chapter. See my note below.)

Galbraith is breaking new ground with the long-form mystery, matching or surpassing geopolitical thrillers which have traditionally run long. The length allows her to burrow into the mystery and the characters with a welcome thoroughness. And it's pretty much a straight narrative after some correspondence at the beginning to set the scene. Mercifully, I don't think there's a single flashback or any other narrative gimmick. We see the past in the memories of characters as they are being questioned. (This is a welcome change from so many authors who manufacture suspense by parceling out flashbacks throughout to amp up the interest in what may be a sub-par story.)

The length also allows her to advance the emotional arc that began with Robin and Cormoran's first meeting in **THE CUCKOO'S CALLING**. Their attraction to each other has been simmering, sidelined by many impediments, including marriage (hers), love affairs (mostly his), fear of failure, and fear of harming their growing business rapport. Each time one of them comes close to confessing their interest, something or someone always seems to intervene.

Like unrequited love, thwarted love is a great engine to drive a series. The bittersweet romance plotline is a welcome counterpoint to the harsh violence of the case work. Galbraith's command of this dichotomy is breathtaking. The suspense generated in the personal storyline is every bit as amazing as the tension created by the plot.

One side note: Did you ever have one of those nights when you woke up thinking about an obscure Rolling Stones' song and then noticed a similarity to a passage in Dante, which you happen to be re-reading? So you lay awake going through the lyrics in your head and finding more and more commonalities and pretty soon you have your laptop in bed and are frantically making notes about how Mick Jagger and Virgil are soulmates, and you can't wait to publish a blog post telling the world? But when you wake up in the morning with your cheek stuck to the keyboard and your head aching, you realize you had a wine-fueled nocturnal episode of

craziness and you drink two glasses of water and sleep for another four hours?

Well, Robert Galbraith had one of those nights and in a fit of delirium, I suspect, started linking the **I CHING** to her latest Cormoran Strike novel. Evidently, no one at her publisher's had the balls to tell her to hydrate and sleep it off. So, every chapter of **THE RUNNING GRAVE** has its attendant **I CHING** quotation. At first, like a diligent reviewer, I tried very hard to make sense of them and sometimes got a glimmer of a link but I soon flagged and shrugged off the annoying quotes as the gibberish they are. Note to Robert Galbraith: Next time, drink lots of water and get some sleep.

But back to the book. **THE RUNNING GRAVE** is wonderful, readable, relatable, and surprising. Lots of secrets and lies and revelations and twists. A must read!

## Websites



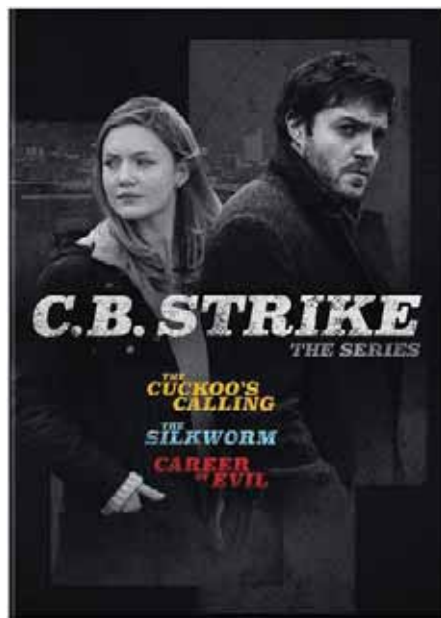
There is a fabulous (unofficial) fan website called **strikefans.com** which is truly impressive as to the amount of information it displays and the visual beauty of the site. It was the major source of information I used to develop this article.

The website provides separate casts of characters for each book which proves helpful to the reader -- especially in regards to the last three books which have a ton of characters to keep track of.

The official website of the series is **robert-galbraith.com** and is also quite attractive and informative.

## The TV Productions

The Cormoran Strike novels have been adapted for television with the first five book adaptations available for viewing. The TV series is extremely well cast with Tom Burke as Cormoran Strike and Holliday Grainger as Robin Ellacott. The supporting cast is superb



as well.

The first three adaptations were shown on U.S. TV on Cinemax under the name *C. B. Strike*. The fourth, *Lethal White*, and the fifth, *Troubled Blood*, were released on HBO Max. I believe that all five series are now available for viewing on HBO and HBO Max -- as well as other platforms. Some platforms are calling the series, *Strike*



and have dropped the "C.B."

Production of the sixth, *The Ink Black Heart*, will begin in early 2024, with the same cast.

When I read a new Robert Galbraith book, I now see in my mind Tom Burke and Holliday Grainger as the main characters of the book.

The British do a much finer job of adapting books to film than the Americans who all seem to want to fiddle with what already is a good thing. I would say that the TV adaptations are as good, if not better, than the books.

## Conclusions

Why would I devote space in *Deadly Pleasures* to a mega-successful author who doesn't need the publicity? It's simple. This is a great series and I like to highlight the best of crime fiction and this series exemplifies that.

But it is not a perfect series. I found some aspects of the second book, **THE SILKWORM** quite distasteful. And all of the tweets and secret identities found in the sixth book, **THE INK BLACK HEART**, were confusing to me, but apparently not to Larry Gandle and others. The length of some of the books may be an impediment to reading them, but I would say, that in most cases, the length is justified because of the breadth of the stories. A good editor could have pared them down a little, but not a lot. I certainly prefer the way the lengthy novels are published now as opposed to the alternative, which would be a novel published in two volumes. Of course this is no problem for those that experience these books as audio or electronic versions (Kindle).

For me, my enthusiasm for this series has risen with each entry. I'm totally locked into the characters of Strike and Robin and am anxious to see where their lives are going. Along the way I'm exposed to some intriguing and puzzling mysteries.

The author has been quoted as saying she envisions the series being ten books long. However, she has also said there will be thirteen. Who knows, but we should have at least three more! Whoopee! Only another 3,000 some-odd pages to go. Whew!

# Marv Lachman -- R.I.P



Marv Lachman recently passed away at the age of 91. Marv read mysteries over a span of 80 years and was known for his avid participation in what we call mystery fandom. In addition, Marv was also a renowned scholar and critic. I considered him a good friend and I will miss him dearly. My sincere condolences to Carol and the family. He lived a good, full life.

Marv has won several awards including an Edgar Award for his collaboration with Otto Penzler, Chris Steinbrunner and Charles Shibuk on the **ENCYCLOPEDIA OF MYSTERY AND DETECTION**. He was the first recipient of the Don Sandstrom Award for Lifetime Achievement in Mystery Fandom and an early recipient of the David Thompson Special Service Award. At the 2019 Dallas Bouchercon and the 2023 San Diego Bouchercon Marv also received Special Service Awards.

He is the author of five non-fiction mystery reference works, the latest being **THE HEIRS OF ANTHONY BOUCHER: A HISTORY OF MYSTERY FANDOM**, which, among other topics, tells in great detail the history of his favorite convention -- Bouchercon.

Marv has been a Fan Guest of Honor at Bouchercon and LeftCoast Crime.

For decades Marv has been the unofficial obituarian of the mystery fiction world. He would comb the obituary pages of major newspapers to find reports of deaths of people with even the most obscure connection to the mystery world. He published his extensive findings in the British mystery fanzine **CADS**.

Short story mystery fiction has always been a love of Marv's. Each year for decades he would publish a list of the best mystery short stories of the year.

Over the years he has contributed

articles, columns and reviews for a number of publications starting with the *Armchair Detective* and then for 30 years provided a regular column for *Deadly Pleasures Mystery Magazine*. He could be a tough critic at times, but he always backed up his opinions with sound reasoning.

But what about the man himself? Marv is one of the nicest people you will ever meet. Kind, selfless, generous and always willing to impart his encyclopedic knowledge in a humble way.

When I joined mystery fandom in 1991, Marv was one of my best mentors. I value my memories of numerous interactions with Marv and his wife Carol. I can still hear his distinctive voice in my mind.

Here is the official obituary:

## MARVIN LACHMAN 1932-2023

Marvin Lachman died of complications related to cancer. He grew up in the Bronx, New York, the son of Louis and Helen (Rickner) Lachman. He graduated from Stuyvesant High School and the City College of New York. Then he suffered through his two years of service as a draftee in the U.S. Army. But because he was stationed in New York for part of his time in the service and had access to the USO, he became a fan and scholar of theatre. Following his honorable discharge he moved to Los Angeles where, in 1956 he was introduced to the future love of his life, Carol Ganelin. Six weeks later, on January 12, 1957 they were married, and stayed that way until his death. On March 15, 1958, their son Steven was born in the Bronx. Marvin was a loving and patient father.

He was passionate about a number of things – theatre, tennis, birding, show music, classical music, English language, but especially mysteries of which

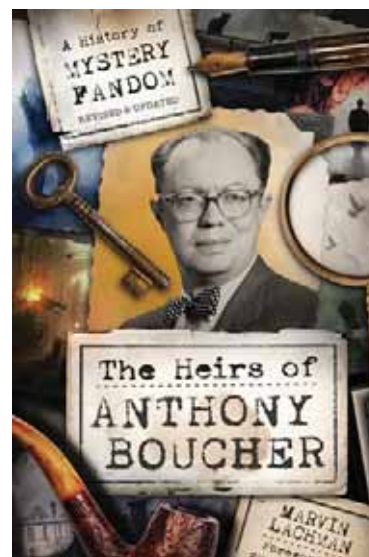
he became one of the world's preeminent scholars, writing extensively about the field in books and magazines. He was recognized by the Mystery Writers of America with "Edgar" and "Raven" awards, as well as many other awards.

As to tennis, he started playing at 17 and played his last set at 87, at which time he said "I think playing for 70 years is enough."

Marvin and Carol moved from the Bronx to Suffern NY in 1979 and then to Santa Fe in 1988 where they lived for more than 35 years.

Marv and Carol took great pride in starting the Friends of the Library Bookstore at the Southside Branch of the Santa Fe Public Library.

Besides wife Carol and son Steven, Marvin is survived by grandson Matthew Lachman (of Washington D.C.), granddaughter Shannon Dennis (of Menlo Park, CA) and great granddaughters Anna and Zoe. Marvin loved and was proud of all of them.



# Mini--Reviewed to Death

## THE PEACOCK AND THE SPARROW

by I. S. Berry  
Atria Books; \$28.00, May  
Debut Novel

**The Author:** I.S. Berry (Ilana) worked a number of years for the CIA in the Middle East and is very familiar with the setting of this novel since she lived there. Because of her CIA background, Ilana was not allowed to show **anyone** her manuscript until the CIA had approved it for public consumption. That means she couldn't even share it with her husband, nor any potential contacts in publishing (agents, editors, etc.). She worked for five years in a complete vacuum with no feedback as to how well the book was doing. Ilana's instincts must be pretty good because she turned out quite a book.

**First line:** I hated the smell of Rashid's cigarettes.

### The Plot:

Set during the Arab Spring era with protests against the monarchy, America's presence in Bahrain is tenuous and there are suspicions that Iran is funding or arming the dissidents. Junaid, a poet, has been imprisoned and tortured on the grounds that he secretly leads the rebellion. CIA spook Shane Collins has a cover as a low-level diplomat and his informant, Rashid may or may not be a double agent. The young, upcoming station chief, Whitney Mitchell, is a thorn in Collins' side. Collins is having a desultory affair with the wife of a colleague. But that quickly ends when Collins falls under the spell of Almaisa, a local artist. Then quite quickly the complications in his life begin to spin out of control.

## Meredith Anthony

I.S. Berry's debut spy novel, **THE PEACOCK AND THE SPARROW** is a knockout! A tour de force that seems like it's written by a sure, practiced hand, the first-person account of an aging, dissolute, disaffected American spy in the tiny kingdom of Bahrain in 2012. And is there a more compelling trope than the aging, dissolute, disaffected spy?

The first-person descriptions of the country with its discontents, its slums in high contrast to its gleaming modern buildings, and its feckless cadre of bored, wealthy, careless expats are full of telling details and world-weary observations. It would be intolerably depressing if it weren't rendered in sumptuous, lush prose. The gorgeous writing makes the bleak reality of the country's unrest and its precarious political balance stand out in high contrast.

Highly recommended for espionage aficionados who lean more towards Graham Greene than John le Carré.

**Rating: A**

## George Easter

The structure of **THE PEACOCK AND THE SPARROW** is different from a lot of the thriller fiction that we like to read. It is not necessarily fast-paced until near the end of the novel and the reader is often wondering where the story line is going. The main character is not particularly likeable. The prose is beautifully rendered and the ending quite shocking. Many of the questions I had at the beginning of my reading were satisfactorily answered by the end. When I finished the book I knew I had read something special and that it was a story that would stay with me for quite



some time.

This is a book that requires some perseverance for the various strands of the story to coalesce. But the payoff is worth the wait. **THE PEACOCK AND THE SPARROW** should be in the running for Best First Novel consideration when awards time comes around.

**Rating: A**

## Michael Dillman

This was a welcome change from the 900+ **THE RUNNING GRAVE** by Robert Galbraith, which I was enjoying, but even with half the book done it did not seem like I was making any progress. I really liked **THE PEACOCK AND THE SPARROW** more. The story was very interesting and kept me wanting to figure out what was going to happen, given its many twists and turns. I was intrigued by the characters. I actually had to go to a map to find the setting of the book. I would highly recommend this book. **Rating: A**

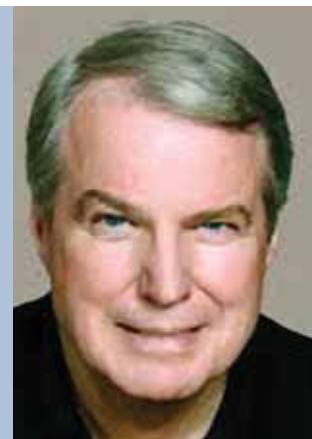
## Publishers Weekly

"The plot's many twists will captivate readers. And Berry's gorgeous prose is its own reward with echoes of le Carré and Graham Greene." **Starred Review**

# My Greek Reading Feast

## 2023

by Steele Curry



On June 2, my wife Judy and I arrived back in Greece for our annual, three-month summer holiday here. For nearly 50 years, our family has had a villa on the stunning island of Skiathos. While it's only seven miles long and 4-5 miles wide, Skiathos has over 60 beaches ringing the island. For us, it's paradise being back here.

The majority of my time at *Lizard in the Sun*, as we call our Skiathos summer home, is spent reading mysteries and thrillers on the terrace overlooking the sparkling blue Aegean Sea. In a typical summer here, I read about 35 novels, many of them by new authors including translated editions. This year I changed course and added to the mix quite a few older novels by some of my favorite all-time authors.

Previously, I always started off my summer reading with Jeffrey Siger's newest Chief Inspector Andreas Kaldis novel set in Greece. This time, however, I'm going to have to wait until February 2024 for the next one to be published. Sigh.

Here are the books I enjoyed reading this summer in the order I read them:

**MIDDLEMEN** by Scott Thornley (Spiderline 2023 trade paperback Toronto)

**MIDDLEMEN** is the author's fifth novel in his superb series featuring Detective Superintendent MacNeice, set in a fictitious city in Eastern Canada. A bloodied runaway dog leads MacNeice and his sidekick DI Fiza Aziz to a

forest where they uncover evidence of two homicides but no bodies. Shortly afterwards, a number of dead bodies start turning up, a professor is abducted in broad daylight and a spate of cases involving persons disappearing in other jurisdictions come to light. Can MacNeice prove that these crimes are all related? Is the head of an international crime gang responsible for organizing these disappearances and murders, much like a business, shielded by several layers of middlemen?

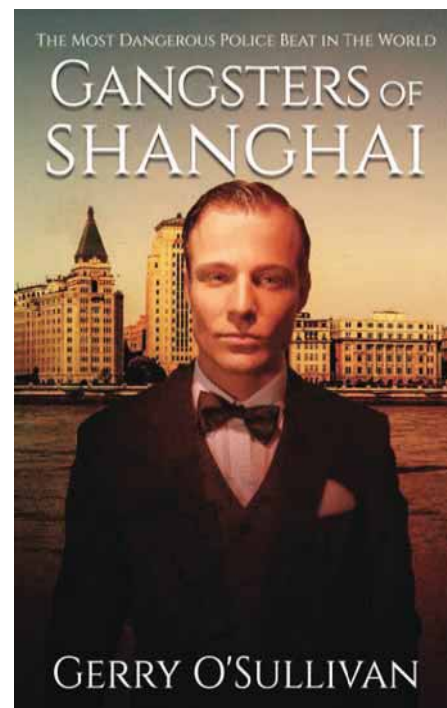
As was the case with the author's earlier MacNeice novels, **MIDDLEMEN** is well-written with engaging leading characters (both good and bad), excellent dialogue, a well-developed setting and a compelling, fast-moving plot. MacNeice, a widower, is an impressive, strong protagonist. I'm greatly looking forward to the next novel in this series.

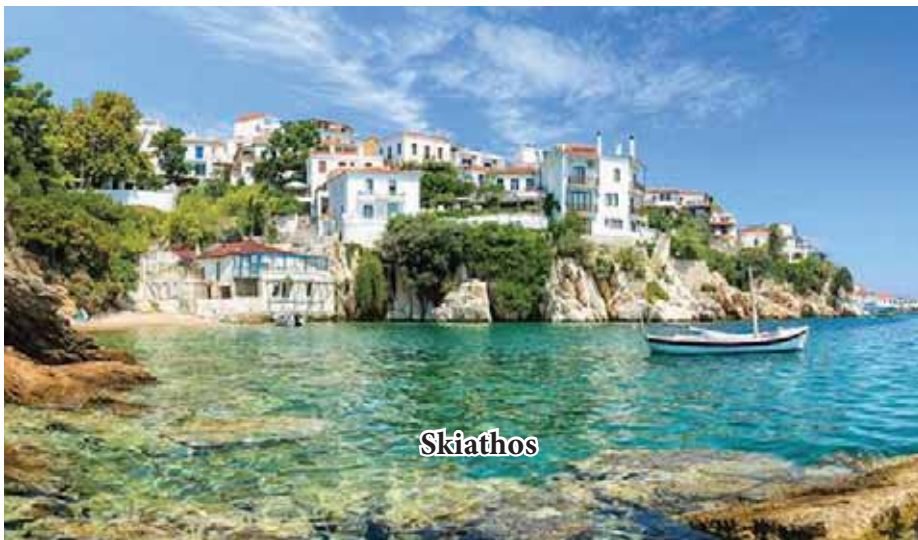
**GANGSTERS OF SHANGHAI** by Gerry O'Sullivan (Rosetta No. 3 A/C Pty Ltd. first thus 2015 trade paperback Australia)

Irish/Australian author's first novel, alternatively set in Ireland from 1917 to 1924 during "The Troubles" and in Shanghai from 1924 to 1937 when its International Settlement and the French Concession existed in isolation from the rest of Greater Shanghai. In 1924, Michael Gallagher immigrates from Ireland to join the Shanghai Municipal Police. At this time, Shanghai was flourishing as the Paris of the East. But underneath its glittering surface, a large number of competing forces were vying for power – gangsters, corrupt police

officials, Communists, the KMT Chinese Nationalist party and the Japanese.

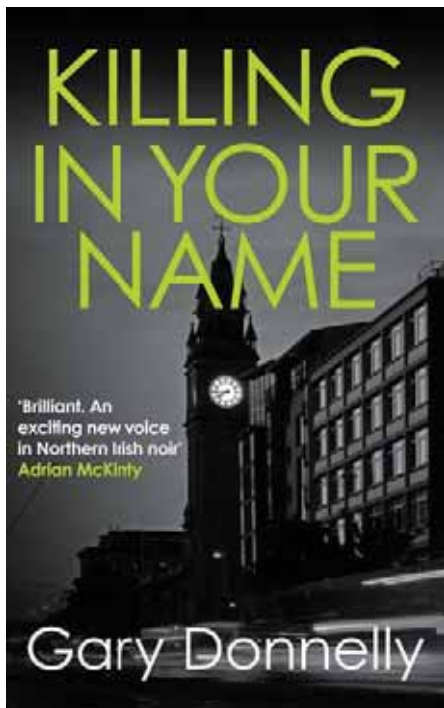
**GANGSTERS OF SHANGHAI** is the fascinating story of how Constable Michael Gallagher manages to navigate throughout this turbulent and dangerous period in Shanghai's existence while continuing to search for his childhood aristocratic girlfriend who may also have ended up somewhere in Shanghai. In every respect, this novel represents historical mystery fiction at its best with vivid depictions of every facet of Shanghai in its glory days. Unfortunately, we're going to have quite a wait for the next O'Sullivan novel as the author told me, "I am a one book in 10 years kind of writer."





**KILLING IN YOUR NAME** by Gary Donnelly (Allison & Busby first thus 2020/2021 trade paperback London)

Irish author's second novel in his outstanding DI Owen Sheen series, following on from his debut **BLOOD WILL BE BORN** (2020). Sheen discovers the headless body of a young boy that was placed in a peat bog about 50 years earlier. Shortly afterwards, a string of murders start occurring in various locations in Belfast, some of which appear to be connected to the covering up of the activities of a covert British Army unit that was operating along the border of what is now Northern Ireland and



the Irish Republic in the 1970s. Others seem to have been carried out as a form of retribution against a long-standing secret cabal of high officials, politicians and senior community members that engaged in *Black Magic* and the abuse of young boys. Sheen and his tight-knit cadre of associates, including sometime girlfriend DC Aoife McCusker, are determined to seek justice for all of the victims despite the lackluster support of his superiors in Northern Ireland's Police Service (the PSNI).

**KILLING IN YOUR NAME** is a high-octane murder mystery with a powerful cast of characters, a colorful setting and a blistering plot of clever twists and turns. Donnelly is a brilliant storyteller who deserves much greater recognition.

**NEVER ASK THE DEAD** by Gary Donnelly (Allison & Busby first thus 2012 trade paperback London)

This is the author's third and best DI Owen Sheen novel. The storyline is absolute gangbusters. The character development is superb. The settings are totally authentic. **NEVER ASK THE DEAD** represents the top tier of today's crime fiction.

Sheen and his crew at the Police Service Northern Ireland's Serious Historic Offences Team (SHOT) get pulled into investigating the "Cyprus Three" killing of three IRA operatives in 1987. This leads them on a search for the identity of TOPBRASS, perhaps the highest level

double agent of the entire Troubles era that plagued Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. Shortly afterwards murdered bodies start piling up. Unfortunately, Sheen's unit seems to always be just one step behind in apprehending the multiple suspected perpetrators. In the process of their investigations, Sheen and several members of SHOT themselves become targeted for kidnapping and even assassination.

As the head of SHOT, Sheen is assisted by his sometime girlfriend DC Aoife McCusker; Geordie Brown, an old-school detective coaxed out of retirement by Sheen; and Jackson Stevens, a rookie policeman who happens to be the nephew of Sheen's superior officer. In addition, Hayley White, a transgender intuitive consultant and close friend of McCusker's, and Dermot Fahey, an investigative journalist, both also play an important role in SHOT's investigations.

I fervently hope this series has legs. Gary Donnelly is a terrific storyteller.

**AGE OF VICE** by Deepti Kapoor (Riverhead Books 2023 hardcover New York/Fleet 2023 trade paperback London)

The start of a new trilogy. India and New Delhi on steroids. The Wadia family exercises widespread control over a major region of India where they live the high life on a tide of extreme corruption, violence and cruelty. The patriarch's son, Sunny, takes decadence and self-abuse to a new high, all the while he is protected by Ajay, a trusted hard-man and fixer who pulled himself out of abject poverty and fought his way up through the Wadia ranks. Sunny finds himself drawn into an intense affair with Neda, an investigative journalist. Ajay and Neda pay a high price for their involvement with Sunny who is prepared to sacrifice everything and everyone to receive the approval of his father, Bunty.

Kapoor is quite the storyteller with a unique style that propels the reader's interest throughout the somewhat bumpy and long plot of **AGE OF VICE**. Hard to put down but I doubt, however, that anyone will be in a rush to visit India after reading this novel.

**PERMANENT REMOVAL** by Alan S. Cowell (A Vireo Book/Rare Birds Books first thus 2019 trade paperback Los Angeles)

Thinly fictionalized historical mystery fiction set in the twilight days of apartheid South Africa and some 18 years afterwards. An ex-U.S. Ambassador to South Africa returns to investigate on his own who betrayed the four anti-apartheid activists, known as the Cradock Four, who were brutally murdered by South Africa's security forces. One of the victims was a leader in The Struggle and a good friend of the ex-Ambassador's. This novel authentically describes the black cloud of treachery, violence, betrayal and desperation that hung over South Africa during the fight to end apartheid.

**VOODOO RIVER** by Robert Crais (Hyperion 1995 hardcover/Hachette 1996 paperback)

Author's fifth Elvis Cole and Joe Pike novel is one of his best ever. Elvis is hired to find the birth parents of an adopted female TV star. That takes him to New Orleans, Baton Rouge and a few small Louisiana communities where some very tough, dangerous locals are conducting illicit business. They also abhor any outsiders poking into their affairs, especially when Elvis takes an interest in a 36-year old unsolved murder that may be connected to his original assignment. Of course, along the way, Elvis falls for the charms of gorgeous Baton Rouge lawyer Lucy Chenier. And, of course when the going gets rough, he asks his partner Joe Pike to join him in Louisiana. Naturally, much mayhem and violence follows.

**SUNSET EXPRESS** by Robert Crais (Ballantine 2005 hardcover/Ballantine 2005 paperback)

Winner of the Shamus Best P.I. Novel Award and the author's sixth Elvis Cole and Joe Pike novel, **SUNSET EXPRESS** again shows Robert Crais at his best. This time, Elvis is hired by a big-time defense attorney to confirm that a LAPD Detective tampered with the evidence linking his wealthy client with the violent murder of the client's

wife. When Elvis finds that claim is bogus and uncovers other witnesses that may undermine the attorney's case, he needs Joe Pike's help to try to protect the witnesses from being eliminated by the attorney's Chief of Security and his minions. Elvis and Joe become determined to take down the attorney even though the senior ranks of the LAPD and the California DA are reluctant to do so. Despite some challenges, Lucy Chenier and Elvis become further attached. As so often happens with the author's novels, there is quite the gun battle towards the end of the story.

For terrific characterization, snappy dialogue, colorful LA settings and roller coaster plots, Robert Crais is consistently tough to beat.

**COCKROACHES** by Jo Nesbø (Harvill Secker 2013 hardcover London/Vintage Crime 2014 trade paperback New York; translated by Don Bartlett)

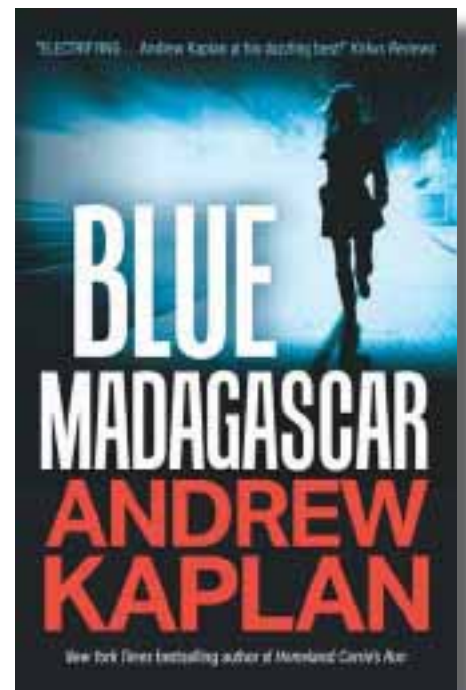
This is the author's actual second Harry Hole novel. It was published in Norway in 1998.

Hole is sent to Bangkok to investigate the murder of the Norwegian Ambassador there. No one expects or wants him to succeed. There are a lot of secrets being covered up and a number of senior officials in Norway as well as in Thailand strongly want things to stay that way. Hole joins a small Bangkok Police Homicide unit and tries to unravel what actually happened.

With **COCKROACHES**, the author is starting to gear up his masterful storytelling skills.

**BLUE MADAGASCAR** by Andrew Kaplan (Smugglers Lane Press 2021 trade paperback)

This cracker jack of a thriller is set in contemporary times – the leading U.S. presidential candidate is clearly a threat to American democracy, a high level mole has been selling every U.S. military and defense secret to Russia, China, Iran and whoever else would pay since 1990, and an international club of sex trafficking A-listers is operating with apparent immunity. When an elderly American is shot dead in a jewelry robbery in Nice, France, U.S. Homeland Security Special



Agent Casey Ramirez is plucked from her mid-level position to single-handedly try to uncover the dead man's secret before the Russians, various mafia clans and some undisclosed senior American Intelligence officials do so.

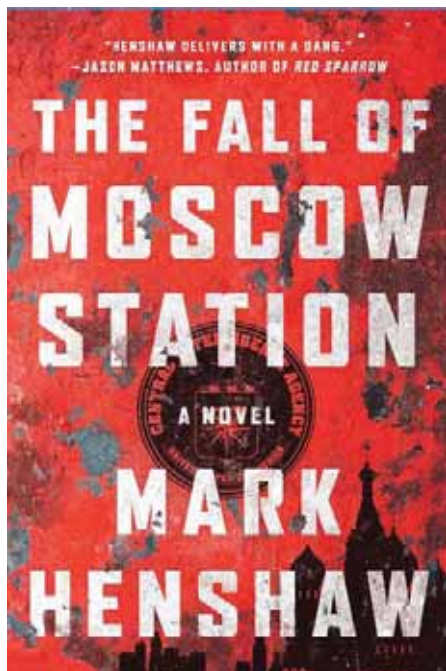
Casey's quest takes her on a tumultuous ride through some 15 different cities in Europe, the U.S., Panama and Mexico where she is often the target of a female Russian KGB/FSB agent, assassins or worst. About the only person Casey can trust is a handsome (naturally) French Prosecutor. The ending is quite a grabber.

**BLUE MADAGASCAR** is the author's first thriller to feature the indomitable Casey Ramirez. I hope we don't have to wait long for her return.

**THE LONG LAVENDER LOOK** by John D. MacDonald (Faucett 1964 paperback/Random House 2013 trade paperback with Intro by Lee Child)

What's a summer without reading several of MacDonald's masterful Travis McGee novels? **THE LONG LAVENDER LOOK** starts out with McGee and his sidekick Meyer being framed for a murder and arrested in a small backwater Florida County by a hard-nosed but efficient local Sheriff. McGee's high-priced lawyer gets them released but not before Meyer is brutally attacked

by one of the Sheriff's deputies. Earlier, some local residents were suspected of pulling off a \$100 million bank heist. As McGee investigates who went to the trouble of setting them up, bodies pile up, including some attractive females who may have known too much. Along the way, readers are treated to McGee and Meyer's thoughtful musings about the human condition and the meaning of life.



**THE FALL OF MOSCOW STATION** by Mark Henshaw (Gallery Books 2016 hardcover/Pocket Books 2017 paperback)

This is the third of four thrillers in the author's espionage series featuring Kyra Stryker and Jonathan Burke of the CIA's Red Cell special ops think tank. A high level CIA official has defected to Russia and discloses the names of every agent in the CIA's Moscow Station and their assets working in the Kremlin. Stryker and Burke are tasked with counteracting some of the ensuing damage, first in Berlin and then in Moscow, largely on their own. Fortunately the heads of the two largest rival Russian intelligence services, the FSB and the GRU, are locked in a deadly power struggle.

It is obvious that Henshaw is highly knowledgeable about the history and practices of the world of modern day es-

spionage. For the most part, **THE FALL OF MOSCOW STATION** is a riveting spy thriller and Stryker and Burke are compelling central characters. The same applies to the other three novels in this series. Some sections of this book, however, violated what has become my favorite saying – that's more information than I need to know.

It strikes me that Henshaw would be the ideal author for a thriller based on the current war in the Ukraine, again starring Stryker and Burke.

**THE REDEEMER** by Joe Nesbø (Harvil Secker 2009 trade paperback London/Knopf 2013 hardcover; translated by Don Bartlett)

The author's sixth Harry Hole novel, originally published in Norway in 2005, vividly demonstrates the depth and scope of his writing talents, especially in the storyline's complex plotting, the settings and the characterization of Harry Hole and the other leading cast members, both villainous and otherwise. To say that Nesbø never takes his foot off the gas in **THE REDEEMER** is an understatement.

A former Croat resistance fighter with the nickname "Little Redeemer" has become a professional assassin who carries out contract killings in various European cities. His current assignment is to assassinate a senior official in the Norwegian Salvation Army based in Oslo. To complicate matters, the target has a look-alike brother. Hole and his police associates become involved when the wrong brother is killed but it's obvious the assassin will stop at nothing to complete his original mission. More than one person is seeking redemption in this tale.

**THE REDEEMER** is further evidence for the case that Nesbø is the premier author of Nordic crime fiction.

**THE EAGLE HAS LANDED** by Jack Higgins (Williams Collins 1975 hardcover London/Henry Holt 1975 hardcover New York/Penguin Books 2020 trade paperback London)

What a pleasure it is to reread this classic WW II espionage thriller by such a talented storyteller. **THE EAGLE HAS**

**LANDED** was the author's breakout book after writing 37 previous novels under various pen names. Later it was made into a movie.

German Intelligence discovers that PM Churchill is scheduled to spend a relaxing weekend at a remote country house near the small English village of Studley Constable, Norfolk in several weeks. Himmler decides that this is an opportunity for the Germans to send in a team of elite paratroopers under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Kurt Steiner to kidnap Churchill and bring him back to Germany. Liam Devlin, a member of the Irish Republican Army, is coerced into joining a local German female agent to make advance preparations in Norfolk. What could go wrong? Perhaps everything.

This WW II tale has everything for a great, entertaining read – two standout central characters (Devlin and Steiner), a host of other well-defined colorful characters, a high octane plot with lots of furious action, a fleeting passionate romance, authentic settings both in Germany and England, and a double-reverse ending, all written with verve and style by one of the all-time best thriller authors.

**PREY FOR THE SHADOW: a Terra Alta Investigation** by Javier Cercas (MacLehose Press 2023 hardcover London; translated by Anne McLean)

Spanish author's second Terra Alta Investigation novel, featuring the tough-as-nails but big-hearted Inspector Melchor Marin who is still recovering from his wife's killing in a deliberate car accident and continuing to pursue his long-standing investigation into the murder of his hooker mother years earlier. Melchor is asked by his former boss to come to Barcelona on a temporary basis to help uncover those involved in blackmailing Barcelona's female mayor with a sex tape.

**PREY FOR THE SHADOW**, in my opinion, is not in the same league as the author's first Terra Alta novel, **EVEN THE DARKEST NIGHT**. In parts, it is too salacious for my taste. And, the plot is rambling and rather predictable with a few missing pieces at the end.



Javier Cercas

**George's Take:** I was anxious to read this after enjoying **EVEN THE DARKEST NIGHT** (Crime Fiction in Translation Dagger Winner) so much. **PREY FOR THE SHADOW** is certainly not as good as its predecessor. The narrative seemed unfocused at times and the crimes involved are certainly despicable. But I felt that the ending was quite satisfying and helped redeem some of the parts of the book that were less than perfect. I give it a rating of B.

**THE BLOOD OF OTHERS** by Graham Hurley (Head of Zeus 2023 hardcover)

The eighth novel in the author's Spoils of War series is an exceptional story of a young Canadian reporter's life working on a large London newspaper during wartime, and the events culminating in the short-lived British/Canadian raid on seaside Dieppe in Nazi-occupied France in August 1942. This operation was a debacle from start to finish with fewer than half of the over 6,000 invaders, who were mainly Canadian soldiers, surviving to return to Britain afterwards in one piece or another. Contrary to prior sketchy British reconnaissance, the Germans had heavily fortified Dieppe and were in a strong position to inflict heavy losses on any invading force there. Part of the novel provides the German perspective

through the eyes of a high-ranking official in German Military Intelligence.

The author captures this time in history with soul, total authenticity, and a way of making the players vividly real, including Noel Coward, Lords Beaverbrook and Mountbatten. He also brilliantly illustrates the madness of war and the damage it imposes on everyone involved. Resisting the temptation to place the principal blame for the fiasco of Dieppe on Mountbatten, the author rightly says that PM Churchill and General Montgomery shared the ultimate responsibility for not cancelling such an ill-fated, costly operation.

While the actual battle scenes form a small part of **THE BLOOD OF OTHERS**, its underlying message is that war is an abomination caused by politicians, conducted by generals and dearly paid for by the rank and file combatants and attendant civilians. The secondary message is the folly of "mission impossibles", those operations destined to fail spectacularly through a combination of hubris, shockingly poor intelligence, and ignorance of local conditions. Dieppe was a classic case of a *mission impossible* in its entirety. Yet surprisingly, such *mission impossibles* keep reoccurring again and again throughout the ages, sometimes on a dramatically larger scale (Iraqi, Afghanistan and Ukraine).

This is one of those rare occasions where I slowed down the pace of my reading to prolong the pleasure of reading this book. Then, upon finishing it, I wanted to immediately reread it. Graham Hurley writes like a dream in every possible respect. He has a magical ability to place the reader in the middle of every scene.

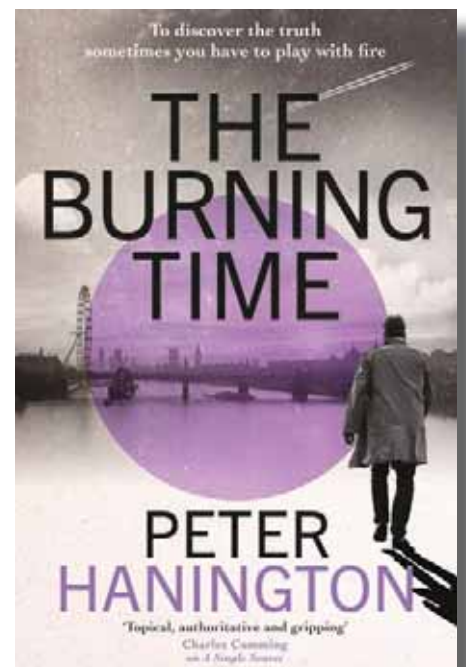
**THE BURNING TIME** by Peter Hanington (Baskerville/John Murray 2023 hardcover London)

The author's fourth thriller to feature London journalist William Carver is timely and superbly written. Australian super-star scientist and ecco-entrepreneur, Clive Winner, has about 30 - 40 cutting-edge geoengineering projects underway around the globe trying to find esoteric ways to mitigate climate change, funded by various Western

governments and large private investors. A number of them involve making interventions in how climate functions, including cloud alteration – brightening and thinning.

A senior British civil servant suggests to Carver on the QT that there might be a big story in Winner's unusually close ties to the British PM. After doing some research, Carver pulls his team together to investigate Winner and his activities. It turns out that a large number of individuals engaged in Winner's projects have experienced suspicious deaths. As his investigation progresses, Carver has to confront the machinations, influence and tactics of the all-powerful fossil fuel industry.

One of the most interesting characters in **THE BURNING TIME** is the fictional Professor Edith Walston in the role of Britain's leading cloud scientist. Walston had served as an adviser to Winner in the past, expressing concern about some of Winner's projects – "a very bad idea . . . rushing into a dramatic, world-reshaping technology in a huge hurry." She also pointed out, "Weather is unpredictable . . . People have forgotten what unpredictable means. It doesn't mean that something is hard to predict or that it's odd or erratic. Unpredictable means impossible to predict. The weather behaves in ways that can't be foreseen or foretold."



**THE BURNING TIME** raises the question, given the value of the global fossil fuel industry is around six or seven trillion pounds (\$8 trillion U.S.), what happens when countries and companies – entire industries in fact – when groups of powerful people with a major stake in fossil fuels begin to feel threatened?

**THE COLLECTOR** by Daniel Silva (Harper 2023 hardcover)

I'm feel like I'm on a roll – here's another timely, outstanding thriller. This is the author's twenty-third Gabriel Allon novel and, in my opinion, one of the very best in this excellent series. Israeli master spy Allon is enjoying retirement living in Venice with his wife and two children when he is gently coerced into the task of finding the world's most valuable stolen painting. Along the way, Allon discovers that his quest is tied into a geopolitical conspiracy on the part of the Kremlin involving the Russian/Ukrainian war.

In addition to his usual crew borrowed from Israeli Intelligence, Allon recruits a beautiful Danish computer hacker and professional thief to help him recover the missing painting and stop the Russians from plunging the world into nuclear warfare. This new character, Ingrid Johansen, gives Allon a run for his money, as the saying goes. Hopefully, Johansen will again be one of the leading players in the next Allon thriller.

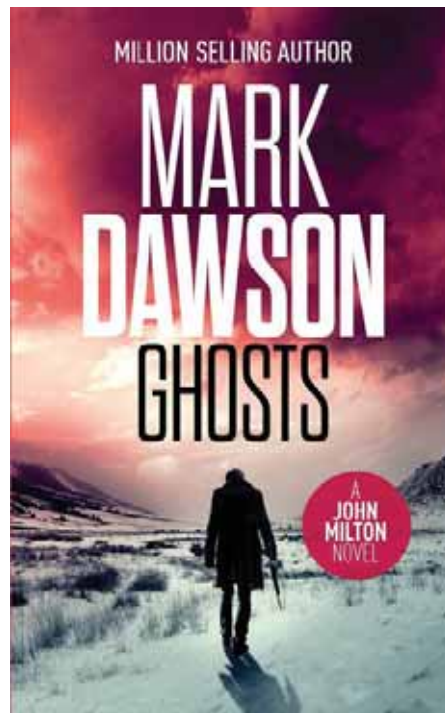
**THE COLLECTOR** presents both the author and Gabriel Allon at the absolute top of their game. Fun, entertaining, but scarily plausible.

**POLICE** by Jo Nesbø (Knopf 2013 hardcover/Vintage Crime 2014 trade paperback; translated by Don Bartlett)

The author's tenth Harry Hole novel originally published in Norway in 2013. Three police officers have been viciously slain at the scenes of crimes they once investigated but failed to solve. Hole is asked to come out of retirement to join a small unit of the Oslo Crime Squad as a "special consultant" to help investigate these murders despite the fact that he and the new Oslo Chief of Police are

not at all on good terms. Unfortunately, such killing continue to occur. There is no shortage of prime suspects. Is this the work of two serial killers working together? It soon becomes apparent that everyone involved in pursuing the investigation and their loved ones are in danger, Hole included.

A complex, multi-layered, fast-moving plot with lots of unexpected surprises, plus a large cast of vividly drawn characters, starting of course with Hole, make **POLICE** one of Nesbø's finest novels. In addition, Don Bartlett continues to do an outstanding job of translating the author's novels.



**GHOSTS** by Mark Dawson (Black Dog Publishing 2014 trade paperback)

Some time ago, "Mystery" Mike Bur-saw recommended I read this thriller, the fourth in what is now a 20-book series featuring John Milton, the most dangerous assassin in Group Fifteen, a UK Secret Intelligence covert unit tasked with eliminating undesirables. After carrying out over 100 assassinations around the world, Milton has resigned and left the organization. The problem is that Control, the head of Group Fifteen, has decided that it is now Milton who needs to be assassinated just as he did with the previously ranked

number one Group Fifteen assassin who had left the organization and is in hiding. When Milton is arrested in a small Texas town on trumped up charges, to his surprise a Russian Secret Service agent arranges for his release and takes him to Moscow to meet with Control's Russian counterpart who is holding Milton's oldest friend as a hostage. And the plot roars on with lots of high-octane twists and turns in London, Hong Kong and Russia.

You were correct, "Mystery" Mike, this is a winner of a thriller on all counts. Now I just need to figure out which Milton novel to read next. There are grounds for thinking that the Milton novels may have served as a precursor to John Brownlow's Assassin novels.

**HARDBALL** by Jimmy Sangster (Henry Holt 1988 hardcover/Brash Books 2019 trade paperback)

Author's third novel in his James Reed series, following **SNOWBALL** and **BLACKBALL** which I also thoroughly enjoyed. Ex-London cop Reed ended up marrying a beautiful, wealthy California actress. After a couple of years, they had a friendly divorce and she left him a Malibu beach property with a main house to rent and a guest house where he lives. A new English tenant has just moved in when Reed discovers three murdered bodies in the main house and the new tenant nowhere to be found. Shortly afterwards, Reed is hired by a powerful London banker to find the killers. This leads Reed on a treacherous romp back to London, then to France, the Caribbean and again back to London where he has to draw on some of his old contacts to survive.

Sangster was a gifted storyteller with a special talent for clever dialogue, characterization and plotting, somewhat along the vein of Ross Thomas. I'm definitely going to read the next two books in this series, **FIREBALL** and **FASTBALL**. The author died in 2011.

**THE SCARLET RUSE** by John A. Macdonald (Faucett 1973 paperback/Random House 2013 trade paperback with Intro by Lee Child)

Devotees of this author's Travis

McGee series usually rank **THE SCARLET RUSE** as one of his best. McGee's sidekick Meyer brings him a "salvage job" involving an elderly rare stamp dealer and his money-laundering hardcase client's close to \$500,000 of missing stamps. For a number of reasons, McGee wants to turn it down but finds himself unable to do so. Naturally, the plot contains several major villains, a clever con job, murder, several beautiful women who seem to find McGee irresistible, and high jeopardy for our hero. As is always the case with this series, the reader is treated to numerous pearls of wisdom by McGee and Meyer. In **THE SCARLET RUSE**, the author also has McGee express sharp criticism of the way in which specific major corporations are causing serious damage to the environment.

**THE CITY OF GOD** by Michael Russell (Constable 2023 hardcover)

The author's eighth Irish Inspector Stefan Gillespie novel is largely set in 1943 Occupied Rome where a number of countervailing forces are at play – the SS and German Gestapo going about their sordid business of trying to maintain control of the City, the Italian police under the thumb of the Germans clashing with the Partisans intent on terrorizing the occupiers, and the Vatican where some of its officials are helping refugees escape the Nazis while others are complicit in supporting the Germans with the Pope refusing to take a moral stand against any of the Nazi atrocities. Off to the side sits the small embassy of neutral Ireland that counts for little of consequence.

Stefan is given the assignment by the Irish Department of External Affairs of going to Rome to recover several boxes of incriminating files held by a former Irish ambassador to Germany now living in Rome and collaborating with the Germans. This probably means Stefan has to burgle them. Once in Rome, he takes on the additional task of investigating the vicious killing of a young priest of his acquaintance with the leading suspect being a giant of a Coat priest who had engaged in committing atrocities with the Ustaše

Russell does a masterful job of conveying the intense atmosphere and tension that prevailed throughout Rome and inside the Vatican at that time. The diverse cast of characters in **THE CITY OF GOD** is well delineated. The historical settings of Rome and the Vatican permeate the novel. And, the plot is a survival course for Stefan although why the author put a big chunk of the end at the start is a bit of a mystery, at least to me. The evil perpetrated by the Nazis is in full display, especially their treatment of the Jews in Rome.

It is inevitable that **THE CITY OF GOD** is going to be compared to the novel **MY FATHER'S HOUSE** by Joseph O'Connor published earlier this year to some acclaim. Both are set in Rome and the Vatican at the identical time. While Monsignor Hugh O'Flaherty is the leading protagonist in **MY FATHER'S HOUSE**, he also has a role to play in **THE CITY OF GOD** as the most active senior official within the Vatican assisting refugees and escaped Allied POW's flee the Nazis. For me, **THE CITY OF GOD** had a somewhat broader scope and was more hard-edged and multi-layered but **MY FATHER'S HOUSE** was perhaps an easier read.

**SMILEY'S PEOPLE** by John LeCarré (Hodder & Stoughton 1980 hardcover/ Penguin 2011 trade paperback; Intro by John LeCarré)

The third novel in the author's renowned *Karla Trilogy* featuring British spy chief George Smiley. In recent summers, I reread the first two, **TINKER, TAILOR, SOLDIER, SPY** and **THE HONOURABLE SCHOOLBOY** with my favorite being the second in the *Trilogy*, partly because of its various settings in Hong Kong and South-East Asia as well as its pace.

Set in England, Germany and Switzerland, **SMILEY'S PEOPLE** has Smiley in retirement deciding to make one last sweeping attempt to vanquish his long-standing KGB rival and nemesis Karla. Many of Smiley's loyal former associates and operatives come out of the woodwork to lend him a helping hand. Despite the plot being a bit ponderous, the characters somewhat faded, and the

settings described with more information than I at least needed to know, **SMILEY'S PEOPLE** is a fitting finale for LeCarré's classic *Karla Trilogy*.

**A GAME FOR HEROES** by Jack Higgins (Originally published as by "James Graham": Macmillan 1970 hardcover/as by Jack Higgins: Harper 2013 paperback London)

Mike Ripley rates this as one of the author's best thrillers and I agree. Mainly set on the fictional Occupied island of St Pierre in the Channel Islands near the close of WW II where the local German SS Commandant seems determined to fight on regardless of the impending surrender of Germany. British commando Lieutenant-Colonel Owen Morgan ends up working with Germany Sergeant-Major Manfred Steiner to overpower the local garrison of SS troops there. Unfortunately, the two of them are in love with the same St Pierre woman. The author hoped this tale would again demonstrate the futility of launching commando excursions against the enemy with the best example being Dieppe.

**THE CARETAKER** by Gabriel Bergmoser (Harper Collins 2023 trade paperback Sydney, Australia)

Australian author's third novel is somewhat of a departure from his first two impressive thrillers. Charlotte, the wife of a murdered big-time drug dealer, is on the run from both the police and her husband's gangster associates. Independently a hitman and a mysterious "author" both find her working as a caretaker in a deserted off-season tiny alpine resort. To say that Charlotte has to be exceptionally resourceful in order to survive is an understatement. This makes for a grabber of a plot.

Of the new books that I read this summer, **THE BLOOD OF OTHERS** by Graham Hurley was my favorite, followed closely by **BURNING TIME** by Peter Harrington. Both are UK editions but you can order them from Blackwells bookstore in England for reasonable prices and free shipping.

# Letters

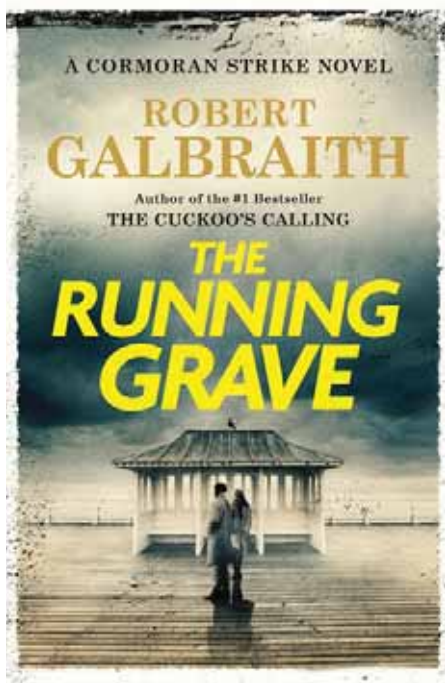


## Joel Rosenthal

Congratulations on 100 issues that is a major accomplishment! Although I am only in my second year as a subscriber I wanted to let you know how much I enjoy each issue. I have one suggestion, I really appreciate the "about the book" tidbit that LJ Roberts has for each book that she reviews giving the mystery category, geography and time period. I wish every *DP* writer did the same thing. [*Good food for thought*]

## Kim Hays (Switzerland)

I enjoyed what you wrote about your favorites among Amazon's "best" list—I can't WAIT for my Kindle version of **RESURRECTION WALK** by Michael Connelly to land in my emails. Any day now! And I wanted to tell you how much I loved **THE RUNNING GRAVE**. I have been a Cormoran/Robin fan since **A CUCKOO'S CALLING** was first published, and I even got through all those endless emails in her last book.



The way my husband and I "read" **THE RUNNING GRAVE** was by taking the excellent audiobook on a 25-day road trip around Spain and listening to all 34 hours of it as we traveled from Bern to Santiago de Compostela, from Cadiz to Granada, and Granada to Valencia. Sadly, we didn't quite make it home on that one book—we had to start a new mystery after Valencia. The actor who reads the book is superb, and we were entranced. If the book had gone on for another ten hours, we would have been perfectly happy. I thought this was her best book in quite a while! I will very much enjoy seeing what the upcoming *Deadly Pleasures* issue has to say about **THE RUNNING GRAVE**!

## Richard Goutal

### First some background for my question:

For the last 7 years, in our mystery book club, at the end of our book discussions, we go around the circle and ask each person to give their score or grade. Although we use numerics, it is similar to the way your reviewers use A, A-, B, C+ and so on. I always remind them of how I had to give a numerical grade on high school report cards, and we were not allowed by the school principal during the first 3 quarters to give a grade lower than 55 (even if they did nothing), because it would sink a kid's chances of raising his grade in subsequent quarters. So in the book club, a 60, 55, and 50 is a "fail" for that reader and 50 is the lowest they are allowed to use. Likewise, 90-92 = A- and 93-96 = A and 97-100 = A+ The A+ being quite rare indeed.

The purpose of this is at least two-fold: It is a way of show the comparative range of opinions we had for a given book. Second, if they keep track, it is a

way for them to discover at the end of a year which books they actually liked best. In the last few years I have been listing the group's average scores for each book. The list is available on our website as a means of newcomers finding books that were judged really good by the group.

The list includes this advice to anyone using the list:

Keeping a record of the scores is a relatively recent goal. Only 3 scores are listed from before 2014, then via the "oral tradition." To understand the scores, know that MBC participants seldom, if ever, score a book higher than 94; and rules prohibit scores lower than 50. With that in mind, here is guidance for interpreting the group participants' average score for a book:

Scores 86 and higher can be considered a positive recommendation, and even more so the higher it is.

Scores 73 and lower can be considered a recommendation against choosing the book to read.

Scores between 74 and 85 are hard to interpret. For example, an 81 might be considered a solid B-, or, it could also indicate a polarized reaction with half the group really liking it and the other half really disliking it. In other words, scores in this range are difficult to rely on one way or the other.

In addition, participants can also say that they didn't read the book or finish the book for lack of time. (DNR, DNF) They cannot grade the book. Probably sometimes this included people who just didn't like the book, and so they didn't finish it.

Lately, we have more people not finishing because they don't like a book after reading 30 pages due to extreme violence or other things they don't like. I have suggested they report "NWT" meaning - "not worth my time." But again, they are not giving a score.

### My Questions:

What happens to books that your reviewers pick up, and then just don't like them, and stop reading them. Maybe one reviewer in *DP* has reviewed it with a solid "B" and another reviewer just stops reading it. And doesn't review it (I presume). (I don't recall reading "F"

reviews — are there any?) If there is no representation from a reviewer that just couldn't read the rest, doesn't that skew what DP readers get in a more positive frame, even though that is not what is true of the average of your reviewers?

I understand that there is a difference between a publication for the world with book reviews that impact real live authors and their careers, and a book club in which their ratings are seen only by those that access the list from our website (very few people!).

Still, I am asking this since the question is raised by some members that feel that those that gave a book an "NWT" is like giving it an "F". This was the case with 4 out of 14 participants in August. (The book was **RIGHT AS RAIN** by George Pelecanos. "Too dark.") They want the low grades averaged in with those that read the whole book. I disagree.

Anyway, just wondering your thoughts as it applies to your reviewers on books they don't finish reading and would be inclined to give it an "F" or "D" for whatever a reason.

Is there an actual policy you use with them? Or an unwritten guide that reviewers go on, like - "don't like it, don't report it"?

Thoughts?

[Editor's Comments: We have discussed this issue a few times over the years but since you are relatively new to DP I don't suppose you have read those discussions. Here is our policy regarding positive, negative and DNR or DNF reviews. Our main goal at **Deadly Pleasures** is to point readers to the best in mystery, crime and thriller fiction, so most of our reviews are positive. There are so many good books being published each quarter that we don't have the time to read them all, not the space to review them all. With so much to recommend, we don't want to waste space "warning readers" about books to avoid. I, particularly, don't want to waste my time reading books that don't work for me. I'm looking for the good, better and best – not the bad, worse or worst.

I don't assign or require reviewers to read specific books so they are likely to

read books they think they will like. They are fans just like you and don't want to waste time reading something they don't like. Just because we reviewers may start a book but not finish it doesn't necessarily make the book a bad book, just one that isn't working for us. We all have different reading tastes that come into play. I don't think the DNR or DNF ratings tell us much about the book – it tells us more about the reader/reviewer. So I don't encourage their use. Sometimes I stop reading a certain book, even though it is a good one, because I'm distracted by the shiny, new book that just arrived. The book I stopped reading doesn't deserve to be described as "did not finish."

What is vitally important for readers of **Deadly Pleasures** is to find the reviewers in the magazine who have similar tastes to their own. A review outside of that context has little value. There must be a trust built up between reviewer and fan/reader. One way to do that is to read the book chosen for the Reviewed to Death column and compare your opinion to those who contributed to the column.

COVID caused an interruption to that column being included in every issue (publicists working from home didn't have the normal access to books to send for the RTD column), but I'm getting back to the stage where I will plan ahead and have that column appear on a more regular basis.

I do encourage reviewers to include a negative review from time to time to show our readers that we don't look at everything through rose-colored glasses and have some critical sense. Yes, there have been D and F ratings, but they are not frequent. Both Larry Gandle and I recently gave very low ratings to the otherwise highly praised **THE DEVIL TAKES YOU HOME** by Gabino Iglesias (2022). It was really a horror novel, masquerading itself as crime fiction, which I found quite offensive.

I hope this answers your questions. By the way, it was great to meet you at Bouchercon. All the best to your reading group – it sounds marvelous. And thanks for your tips on how to run an efficient readers group.]



# Deadly Pleasures Best of 2023



Titles listed garnered starred reviews in one or more of 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. Many of the books listed herein will be found on year-end Best of 2023 lists and some will be nominated for our Barry Awards. All sub-genre's of the mystery/crime fiction and thriller world are represented. Added titles in [blue](#).

## 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? **BL & PW**

**\*\*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. **PW & DP**

**\*\*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**

**\*\*THE LAST DANCE**, Mark Billingham (Atlantic Monthly Press, \$28.00). Maverick sleuth Declan Miller is back at work following the murder of his wife (and amateur ballroom dancing partner) Alex. Working with new partner and heavy metal enthusiast DS Sara Xiu, he is tasked with investigating the double killing of gangland family scion Adrian Cutler and IT consultant Barry Shepherd at the Sands Hotel. Initial evidence suggests a hired gun and a botched job. The search for the hitman begins and Miller begins to reconnect with his old network—his ballroom dancing friends, homeless informant Finn, and even the ghost of his wife who keeps showing up in his kitchen. The fact Alex had been investigating the Cutler family prior to her death complicates things, and as Miller gets closer to the truth, he realizes the danger is walking right up to his doorstep. **PW, AZ & DP**

**\*\*STORM WATCH**, C. J. Box (Putnam, \$29.00, March). When a prominent University of Wyoming professor goes missing, authorities are stumped.

That is, until Joe Pickett makes two surprising discoveries while hunting down a wounded elk on his district as an epic spring storm descends upon him. First, he finds the professor's vehicle parked on a remote mountainside. Then Joe finds the professor's frozen and mutilated body. When he attempts to learn more, his investigation is obstructed by federal agents, extremists, and Governor Colter Allen. Nate Romanowski is rebuilding his falconry company—and financing this through crypto mining with the assistance of Geronimo Jones. He's then approached by a shadowy group of local militant activists that is gaining in power and influence, and demanding that Wyoming join other western states and secede from the union—by force, if necessary. They ask Nate to throw in with them, but he's wary. Should he trust them, or is he being set up? As a storm of peril gathers around them, Joe and Nate confront it in different ways—and maybe, for the first time, on opposite sides. **PW, AZ & Kirkus**

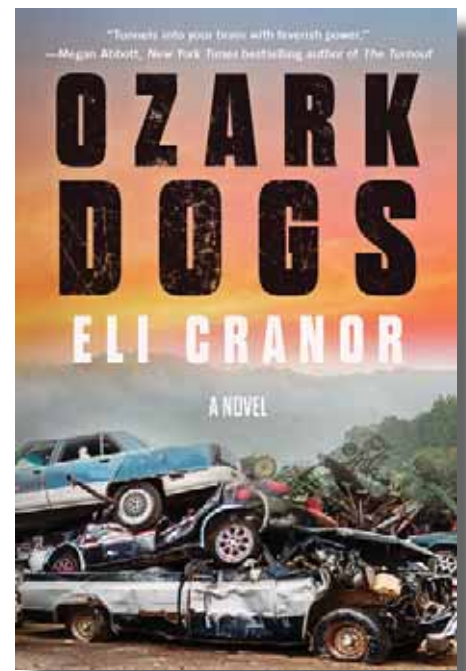
**\*\*THE RAGING STORM**, Ann Cleeves (Minotaur, \$29.00). When Jem Rosco – sailor, adventurer, and legend—blows into town in the middle of an autumn gale, the residents of Greystone, Devon, are delighted to have a celebrity in their midst. But just as abruptly as he arrived, Rosco disappears again, and soon his lifeless body is discovered in a dinghy, anchored off Scully Cove, a place with legends of its own. This is an uncomfortable case for Detective Inspector Matthew Venn. Greystone is a place he visited as a child, a community he parted ways with. Superstition and rumor mix with fact as another body is found, and Venn finds his judgment clouded. **PW, LJ, AZ & Kirkus**

**\*\*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? **AZ & DP**

**\*\*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. **PW, BL, LJ, AZ & DP**

**\*\*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. **BL & DP**

**\*\*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**

**\*\*SAVING EMMA**, Allen Eskens (Mulholland, \$28.00). When Boady Sanden first receives the case of Elijah Matthews, he's certain there's not much he can do. Elijah, who believes himself to be a prophet, has been locked up in a psychiatric hospital for the past four years, convicted of brutally murdering the pastor of a megachurch. But as a law professor working for the Innocence Project, Boady agrees to look into Elijah's file. When he does, he is alarmed to find threads that lead back to the death of his colleague and friend, Ben Pruitt, a man shot to death four years earlier in Boady's own home. Ben's daughter, Emma, has lived with Boady and Boady's wife Dee ever since that awful night. Now fourteen years old, Emma has been growing distant, and soon makes a fateful choice that takes her far from the safety of her godparents. Desperate to bring her home, and to free an innocent man, Boady must do all he can to investigate Elijah's case while fighting to save the family he has deeply come to love. **Kirkus, PW, DP & AZ**

**\*\*GOOD BAD GIRL**, Alice Feeney (Flatiron Books, \$29.99). Twenty years after a baby is stolen from a stroller, a woman is murdered in a care home. The two crimes are somehow linked, and a good bad girl may be the key to discovering the truth. Edith may have been tricked into a nursing home, but at eighty-years-young, she's planning her

escape. Patience works there, cleaning messes and bonding with Edith, a kindred spirit. But Patience is lying to Edith about almost everything. Edith's own daughter, Clio, won't speak to her. And someone new is about to knock on Clio's door...and their intentions aren't good. With every reason to distrust each other, the women must solve a mystery with three suspects, two murders, and one victim. **PW, LJ & AZ**

**\*\*THE RUNNING GRAVE**, Robert Galbraith (Mulholland, \$32.50). Private Detective Cormoran Strike is contacted by a worried father whose son, Will, has gone to join a religious cult in the depths of the Norfolk countryside. The Universal Humanitarian Church is, on the surface, a peaceable organization that campaigns for a better world. Yet Strike discovers that beneath the surface there are deeply sinister undertones, and unexplained deaths.

In order to try to rescue Will, Strike's business partner, Robin Ellacott, decides to infiltrate the cult, and she travels to Norfolk to live incognito among its members. But in doing so, she is unprepared for the dangers that await her there or for the toll it will take on her. **AZ & DP** (no starred reviews because of no advance reading copies prior to publication)

**\*\*GANGSTERS DON'T DIE**, Tod Goldberg (Counterpoint, \$28.00). Mafia hit-man-turned-rabbi Sal Cupertine is ready to get out of the life. But it's not going to be easy. His once-brilliant plan to pass himself off as Rabbi David Cohen is unraveling. Enemies on both sides of the law are hot on his trail. His wife and son are unreachable in witness protection and are probably in danger. In order to find his family, get out of the desert alive, and salvage his long-sought-after happy ending, Sal is going to have to confront some very bad people from his past. Native American kingpin Peaches Pocotillo has wrested control of Chicago's mob family while expanding his criminal empire in the west, and now seeks to settle an old score with Sal. These two antiheroes have a history that stretches back

decades, and the blood feud between Peaches and Sal will lead them to a violent showdown deep in the heart of the low desert. **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, ritualistic 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 & AZ**

**\*\*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**

**\*\*BLACK SHEEP**, Rachel Harrison (Berkley, \$27.00). Nobody has a "normal" family, but Vesper Wright's is truly...something else. Vesper left home at eighteen and never looked back—mostly because she was told that leaving the staunchly religious community she grew up in meant she couldn't return. But then an envelope arrives on her doorstep. Inside is an invitation to the wedding of Vesper's beloved cousin Rosie. It's to be hosted at the family farm. Have they made an exception to the rule? It wouldn't be the first time Vesper's been given special treatment. Is the invite a sweet gesture? An olive branch? A trap? Doesn't matter. Something inside her insists she go to the wedding. Even if it means returning to the toxic environment she escaped. Even if it means reuniting with her mother, Constance, a former horror film star and forever ice queen. When Vesper's homecoming exhumes a terrifying secret, she's forced to reckon with her family's beliefs and her own crisis of faith in this deliciously sinister novel that explores the way family ties can bind us as we struggle to find our place in the world. **PW, LJ & AZ**

**\*\*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, the more tension she feels developing between her and Chess. As secrets from the past come to light, equally dangerous betrayals from the present also emerge—and it begins to look like the villa will claim another victim before the summer ends. **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 Proof-rock, 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**

**\*\*HAPPINESS FALLS**, Angie Kim (Hogarth, \$28.00). "We didn't call the police right away." Those are the electric first words of this extraordinary novel about a biracial Korean American family in Virginia whose lives are upended when their beloved father and husband goes missing.

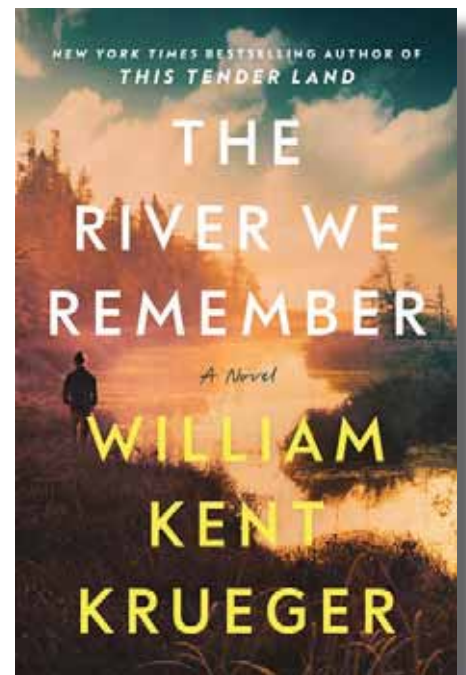
Mia, the irreverent, hyperanalytical twenty-year-old daughter, has an explanation for everything—which is why she isn't initially concerned when her father and younger brother Eugene don't return from a walk in a nearby park. They must have lost their phone. Or stopped for an errand somewhere. But by the time Mia's brother runs through the front door bloody and alone, it becomes clear that the father in

this tight-knit family is missing and the only witness is Eugene, who has the rare genetic condition Angelman syndrome and cannot speak. What follows is both a ticking-clock investigation into the whereabouts of a father and an emotionally rich portrait of a family whose most personal secrets just may be at the heart of his disappearance. **AZ, Kirkus & BL**

**\*\*BRIGHT YOUNG WOMEN**, Jessica Knoll (Simon & Schuster/Marysue Rucci Books, \$27.99). The book opens on a Saturday night in 1978, hours before a soon-to-be-infamous murderer descends upon a Florida sorority house with deadly results. The lives of those who survive, including sorority president and key witness, Pamela Schumacher, are forever changed. Across the country, Tina Cannon is convinced her missing friend was targeted by the man papers refer to as the All-American Sex Killer—and that he's struck again. Determined to find justice, the two join forces as their search for answers leads to a final, shocking confrontation. **PW, BL, Kirkus, 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 – including 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. **PW & DP**

**\*\*THE RIVER WE REMEMBER**, William Kent Krueger (Atria, \$28.99, September). On Memorial Day, as the people of Jewel, Minnesota gather to



remember and honor the sacrifice of so many sons in the wars of the past, the half-clothed body of wealthy landowner Jimmy Quinn is found floating in the Alabaster River, dead from a shotgun blast. Investigation of the murder falls to Sheriff Brody Dern, a highly decorated war hero who still carries the physical and emotional scars from his military service. Even before Dern has the results of the autopsy, vicious rumors begin to circulate that the killer must be Noah Bluestone, a Native American WWII veteran who has recently returned to Jewel with a Japanese wife. As suspicions and accusations mount and the town teeters on the edge of more violence, Dern struggles not only to find the truth of Quinn's murder but also put to rest the demons from his own past. **BL, AZ & 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 disappearing 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 gossipy 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. **BL, AZ & DP(2)**

**\*\*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. **Kirkus, LJ, BL, AZ & DP(4)**

**\*\*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. **BL & DP**

**\*\*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, AZ & PW**

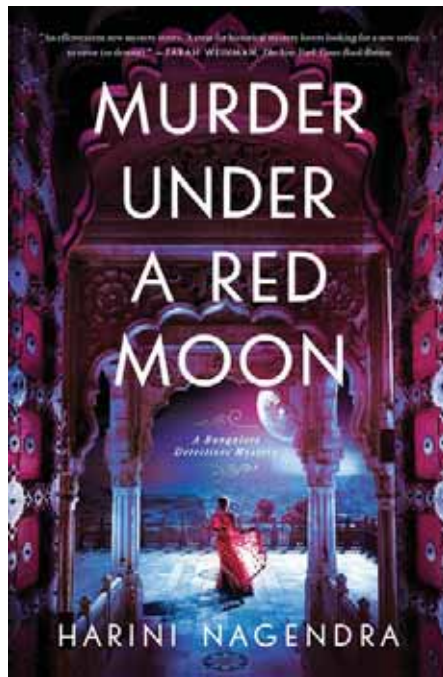
**\*\*TELL ME WHAT I AM**, Una Mannion (Harper, \$30.00, August). Nessa Garvey’s sister Deena vanished without a trace in Philadelphia in 2004. In all that time, Nessa has never once doubted what her instincts told her: her sister’s ex-husband has gotten away with an unspeakable crime. Nessa’s niece, Ruby, is raised by her father, the man Nessa suspects, in rural Vermont, on the shores of Lake Champlain. Ruby learns how to hunt, how the plants and trees grow, how to avoid making her father angry. The one question she longs to ask is the one she knows she cannot voice: What really happened to her mother? Over fourteen years, four hundred miles apart, these two women slowly begin to unearth the family history of insidious power and control that has shaped them both in such different ways. But can they reach each other in time? **PW & PW**

**\*\*THE MURDER WHEEL**, Tom Mead (Mysterious Press, \$26.95, July). “Can you solve the Ferris wheel murder case?” When a sensational killing rocks 1938 London, local newspaper ads offer a hefty sum to the person who can say whodunnit. A man has been shot dead at the top of a Ferris wheel, and his wife? the only other person in their carriage? insists on her innocence. But who else could have fired the deadly bullet and escaped unseen? The sheer implausibility of the claim is enough to whip the press into a frenzy and, for young and idealistic Edmund Ibbs, the lawyer representing the accused, that frenzy may be his only hope at discovering the truth of the mysterious murder. As he digs into the case, Ibbs unwittingly enters a shadowy web of conspiracy and murder, soon finding himself implicated in not one but two seemingly impossible crimes. First, a corpse appears out of thin air during a performance by a famed illusionist, then a second victim is mortally wounded in a locked dressing room backstage. Edmund is in exactly the wrong place at the wrong time, attracting the suspicion of Scotland Yard inspector George Flint. His only hope at freedom comes in the form of retired stage magician Joseph Spector,

a man steeped in the art of misdirection, who happens to be in the audience for the deadly show. Spector's mastery of illusion is capable of piercing the veil of deceit, but will his deductive powers be strong enough to explain this utterly confounding series of crimes? **PW & AZ**

**\*\*THE STOLEN COAST**, Dwyer Murphy (Viking, \$27.00, July). Jack might be a polished, Harvard-educated lawyer on paper, but everyone in the down-at-the-heels, if picturesque, village of Onset, Massachusetts, knows his real job: moving people on the run from powerful enemies. The family business—co-managed with his father, a retired spy—is smooth sailing, as they fill up Onset's holiday homes during the town's long, drowsy off-season and help clients shed their identities in preparation for fresh starts. But when Elena, Jack's former flame—a dedicated hustler who's no stranger to the fugitive life—makes an unexpected return to town, her arrival upends Jack's routine existence. Elena, after all, doesn't go anywhere without a scheme in mind, and it isn't long before Jack finds himself enmeshed in her latest project: intercepting millions of dollars' worth of raw diamonds before they're shipped overseas. **PW & Kirkus**

**\*\*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 sudden-



ly put in danger, Kaveri realizes that she might be getting uncomfortably close to the truth. **PW, DP & BL**

**\*\*PHILANTHROPISTS: Inspector Mislan and the Executioners** by Rozlan Mohd Noor (Arcade Crimewise, \$26.99, March). Eight months after the assassination attempt that nearly ended his life, Inspector Mislan Latif is back on twenty-four-hour duty with his assistant, Detective Sergeant Johan Kamaruddin, when the call comes in: double murder in a house in the police district of Sentul. The two dark-skinned men were killed identically, execution-style. In the master bedroom of the rental, in plain sight on the bed, is almost three pounds of drugs, while no identifying documents, wallets, phones, and the like are to be found. No shots were heard, or the neighbors won't admit to hearing them, but someone called the killings in to notify the police. In the area, drugs are rampant and also foreign nationals, legal and illegal. If the vics were foreign, without papers, where do they start? **PW & DP**

**\*\*STRANGE SALLY DIAMOND**, Liz Nugent (Gallery/Scout Press, \$27.99). Reclusive Sally Diamond causes outrage by trying to incinerate her dead father. Now she's the center of attention, not

only from the hungry media and police detectives, but also a sinister voice from a past she does not remember. As she begins to discover the horrors of her early childhood, Sally steps into the world for the first time, making new friends, big decisions, and learning that people don't always mean what they say. But who is the man observing Sally from the other side of the world, and why does he call her Mary? And why does her new neighbor seem to be obsessed with her? **PW, AZ & DP**

**\*\*48 CLUES INTO THE DISAPPEARANCE OF MY SISTER**, Joyce Carol Oates (Mysterious Press, \$26.95). Marguerite, a beautiful woman, has disappeared from her small town in Upstate New York. But is foul play involved? Or did she merely take an opportunity to get away for fun, or finally make the decision to leave behind her claustrophobic life of limited opportunities? Her younger sister Gigi wonders if the flimsy silk Dior dress, so casually abandoned on the floor, is a clue to Marguerite's having seemingly vanished. The police examine the footprints made by her Ferragamo boots leaving the house, ending abruptly, and puzzle over how that can help lead to her. Gigi, not so pretty as her sister, slowly reveals her hatred for the perfect, much-loved, Marguerite. Bit by bit, like ripping the petals off a flower blossom, revelations about both sisters are uncovered. Subtly, but with the unbearable suspense at which Joyce Carol Oates excels, clues mount up to bring to light the fate of the missing beauty. **PW, BL & AZ**

**\*\*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, DP & Kirkus**

**\*\*CODE OF THE HILLS**, Chris Offutt (Grove Press, \$27.00, June). Mick Hardin is back in the hills of Kentucky. He'd planned to touch down briefly before heading to France, marking the end to his twenty-year Army career. In Rocksalt, his sister Linda the sheriff is investigating the murder of Pete Lowe, a sought-after mechanic at the local racetrack. After another body is found, Linda and her deputy Johnny Boy Tolliver wonder if the two murders are related. Linda steps into harm's way just as a third body turns up and Mick ends up being deputized again, uncovering evidence of illegal cockfighting, and trying to connect all the crimes. **Kirkus, LJ, AZ & DP(2)**

**\*\*THE LAST DEVIL TO DIE**, Richard Osman (Pamela Dorman Books, \$29.00). It's rarely a quiet day for the Thursday Murder Club. Shocking news reaches them—an old friend has been killed, and a dangerous package he was protecting has gone missing. The gang's search leads them into the antiques business, where the tricks of the trade are as old as the objects themselves. As they encounter drug dealers, art forgers, and online fraudsters—as well as heart-ache close to home—Elizabeth, Joyce, Ron, and Ibrahim have no idea whom to trust. With the body count rising, the clock ticking down, and trouble firmly on their tail, has their luck finally run out? **LJ, AZ & DP**

**\*\*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

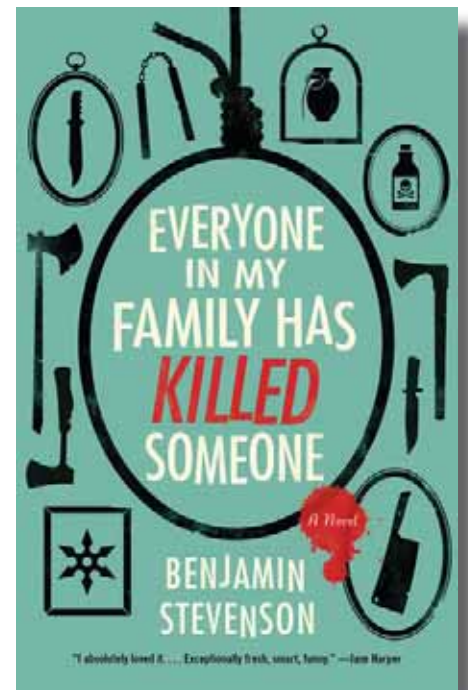
to see it. And she is determined to open Florida's eyes and unleash her true self. When an unexpected reprieve gives both women their freedom, Dios's fixation on Florida turns into a dangerous obsession, and a deadly cat-and-mouse chase ensues from Arizona to the desolate streets of Los Angeles. **PW & DP**

**\*\*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, AZ & DP(3)**

**\*\*HOW CAN I HELP YOU**, Laura Sims (Putnam, \$27.00). No one knows Margo's real name. Her colleagues and patrons at a small-town public library only know her middle-aged normalcy, congeniality, and charm. They have no reason to suspect that she is, in fact, a former nurse with a trail of countless premature deaths in her wake. She has turned a new page, so to speak, and the library is her sanctuary, a place to quell old urges. That is, at least, until Patricia, a recent graduate and failed novelist, joins the library staff. Patricia quickly notices Margo's subtly sinister edge, and watches her carefully. When a patron's death in the library bathroom gives her

a hint of Margo's mysterious past, Patricia can't resist digging deeper—even as this new fixation becomes all-consuming. **AZ, LJ & PW**

**\*\*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(3)**



**\*\*KILL SHOW**, Daniel Sweren-Becker (Harper, \$27.00). Sara Parcell disappeared without a trace on a crisp April morning in Frederick, Maryland. Her tragic story was a national obsession and the centerpiece of a controversial television docuseries that followed her disappearance in real time. But is it possible that everyone missed the biggest secret of all?

Ten years after these events, the people who knew Sara best are finally ready to talk. In this genre-bending novel,

Daniel Sweren-Becker fashions an oral history around the seemingly familiar crime of a teenage girl gone missing. Yet **KILL SHOW**, filled with diabolical twists and provocative social commentary, is no standard mystery. Through “interviews” with family members, neighbors, law enforcement, television executives, and a host of other compelling characters, Sweren-Becker constructs a riveting tale about one family’s tragedy—and Hollywood’s insatiable desire to exploit it. **PW, AZ & Booklist**

**\*\*PLAYING IT SAFE**, Ashley Weaver (Minotaur, \$28.00, May). As the Blitz continues to ravage London, Ellie McDonnell – formerly a safecracking thief, but currently determined to stay on the straight and narrow to help her country – is approached by British Intelligence officer Major Ramsey with a new assignment. She is to travel under an assumed identity to the port city of Sunderland and there await further instructions. In his usual infuriating way, the Major has left her task as vague and mysterious as possible. Ellie, ever-ready to aid her country, heads north, her safecracking tools in tow. But before she can rendezvous with the major, she witnesses an unnatural death. A man falls dead in the street in front of her, with a note clutched in his hand. Ellie’s instincts tell her that the man’s death is connected in some way to her mission.

Soon, Ellie and the major are locked in a battle of wits and a race against time with an unknown and deadly adversary, and a case that leads them to a possible Nazi counterfeiting operation. **BL & PW**

**\*\*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. **BL & AZ**

**\*\*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. Yet in her quest to uncover the truth behind the family’s pursuit of Jim, Elinor unwittingly sets out on a treacherous path—yet it is one that leads to her freedom. **LJ, BL, DP & 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**

**\*\*GLORY BE**, Danielle Arceneaux (Pegasus, \$26.95). It's a hot and sticky Sunday in Lafayette, Louisiana, and Glory has settled into her usual after-church routine, meeting gamblers at the local coffee shop, where she works as a small-time bookie. Sitting at her corner table, Glory hears that her best friend—a nun beloved by the community—has been found dead in her apartment.

When police declare the mysterious death a suicide, Glory is convinced that there must be more to the story. With her reluctant daughter—who has troubles of her own—in tow, Glory launches a shadow investigation into Lafayette's oil tycoons, church gossips, a rumored voodoo priestess, nosey neighbors, and longtime ne'er-do wells. **PW, 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**



**\*\* THE PEACOCK AND THE SPARROW**, I. S. Berry (Atria Books; \$28.00, May). Set during the Arab Spring era with protests against the monarchy, America's presence in Bahrain is tenuous and there are suspicions that Iran is funding or arming the dissidents. Junaid, a poet, has been imprisoned and tortured on the grounds that he secretly leads the rebellion. CIA spook Shane Collins has a cover as a low-level diplomat and an informant, Rashid, who may or may not be a double agent himself. The young, upcoming station chief, Whitney Mitchell, is a thorn in Collins' side. Collins is having a desultory affair with the wife of a colleague. But that quickly ends when Collins falls under the spell of Almaisa, a local artist. Then quite quickly the complications in his life begin to spin out of control. **PW & DP (3)**

**\*\*THE BITTER PAST**, Bruce Borgos (Minotaur, \$28.00, July). Porter Beck is the sheriff in the high desert of Nevada, north of Las Vegas. Born and raised there, he left to join the Army, where he worked in Intelligence, deep in the shadows in far off places. Now he's back home, doing the same lawman's job his father once did, before his father started to develop dementia. All is relatively quiet in this corner of the world, until an old, retired FBI agent is found killed. He was brutally tortured before he was killed and clues at the scene point to a mystery dating back to the early days of the nuclear age. If that wasn't strange enough, a current FBI agent shows up to help Beck's investigation. In a case that unfolds in the past (the 1950s) and the present, it seems that a Russian spy infiltrated the nuclear testing site and now someone is looking for that long-ago, all-but forgotten person, who holds the key to what happened then and to the deadly goings on now. **LJ & DP**

**\*\*THE GOLDEN GATE**, Amy Chua (St. Martin's, \$28.00, September). In Berkeley, California, in 1944, Homicide Detective Al Sullivan has just left the swanky Claremont Hotel after a drink in the bar when a presidential candidate is assassinated in one of the rooms upstairs. A rich industrialist with enemies among the anarchist factions on the far left, Walter Wilkinson could have been targeted by any number of groups. But strangely, Sullivan's investigation brings up the specter of another tragedy at the Claremont, ten years earlier: the death of seven-year-old Iris Stafford, a member of the Bainbridge family, one of the wealthiest in all of San Francisco. Some say she haunts the Claremont still. The many threads of the case keep leading Sullivan back to the three remaining Bainbridge heiresses, now adults: Iris's sister, Isabella, and her cousins Cassie and Nicole. Determined not to let anything distract him from the truth – not the powerful influence of Bainbridges' grandmother, nor the political aspirations of Berkeley's district attorney, or the interest of China's First Lady Madame Chiang Kai-Shek in his findings?

Sullivan follows his investigation to its devastating conclusion. **BL, AZ & LJ**

**\*\*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, AZ & LJ**

**\*\*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

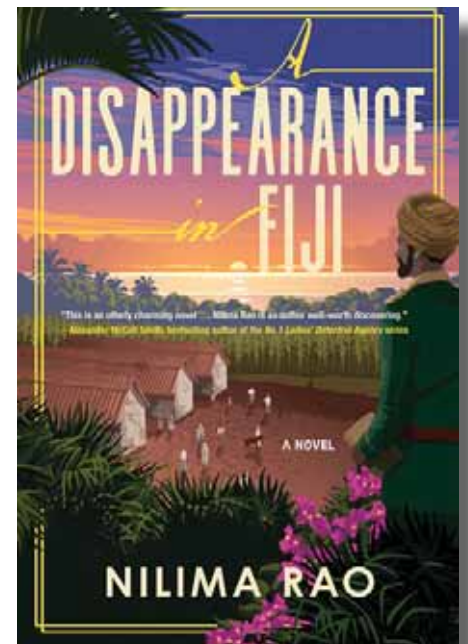
clear that the gravesite she chooses will hide a body no matter what happens; but if she betrays her family, will it be hers? **PW, LJ, AZ & BL**

**\*\*SCORCHED GRACE**, Margot Douaihy (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**

**\*\*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**

**\*\*MURDER BY DEGREES**, Ritu Mukerji (Simon & Schuster, \$27.99). Philadelphia, 1875: It is the start of term at Woman's Medical College of Pennsylvania. Dr. Lydia Weston, professor and anatomist, is immersed in teaching her students in the lecture hall and hospi-

tal. When the body of a patient, Anna Ward, is dredged out of the Schuylkill River, the young chambermaid's death is deemed a suicide. But Lydia is suspicious and she is soon brought into the police investigation. Aided by a diary filled with cryptic passages of poetry, Lydia discovers more about the young woman she thought she knew. Through her skill at the autopsy table and her clinical acumen, Lydia draws nearer the truth. Soon a terrible secret, long hidden, will be revealed. But Lydia must act quickly, before she becomes the next target of those who wished to silence Anna. **PW, Kirkus, AZ and LJ**



**\*\*A DISAPPEARANCE IN FIJI**, Nilima Rao (Soho Crime, \$25.95, June). 1914, Fiji: Akal Singh, 25, would rather be anywhere but this tropical paradise—or, as he calls it, “this godforsaken island.” After a promising start to his police career in Hong Kong, Akal has been sent to Fiji as punishment for a humiliating professional mistake. Lonely and grumpy, Akal plods through his work and dreams of getting back to Hong Kong or his native India. When an indentured Indian woman goes missing from a sugarcane plantation and Fiji's newspapers scream “kidnapping,” the inspector-general reluctantly assigns Akal the case. Akal, eager to achieve redemption, agrees—but soon

finds himself far more invested than he could have expected. Now not only is he investigating a disappearance, but also confronting the brutal realities of the indentured workers' existence and the racism of the British colonizers in Fiji—along with his own thorny notions of personhood and caste. Early interrogations of the white plantation owners, Indian indentured laborers, and native Fijians yield only one conclusion: there is far more to this case than meets the eye. **BL, PW, AZ & DP**

**\*\*A MOST AGREEABLE MURDER**, Julia Seales (Random House, \$27.00, June).

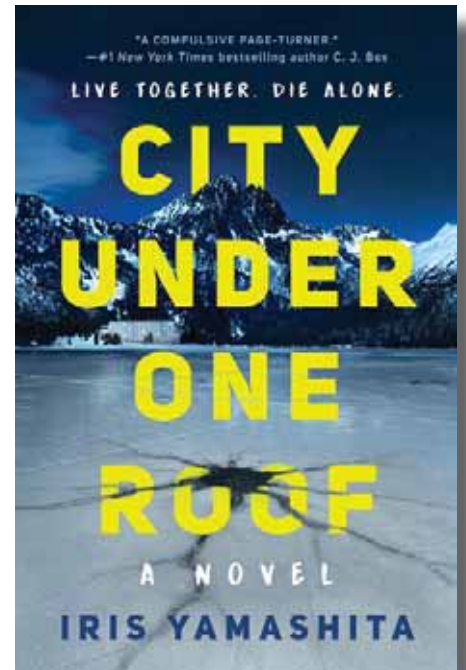
Feisty, passionate Beatrice Steele has never fit the definition of a true lady, according to the strict code of conduct that reigns in Swampshire, her small English township—she is terrible at needlework, has absolutely no musical ability, and her artwork is so bad it frightens people. Nevertheless, she lives a perfectly agreeable life with her marriage-scheming mother, prankster father, and two younger sisters—beautiful Louisa and forgettable Mary. But she harbors a dark secret: She is obsessed with the true crime cases she reads about in the newspaper. If anyone in her etiquette-obsessed community found out, she'd be deemed a morbid creep and banished from respectable society forever. For her family's sake, she's vowed to put her obsession behind her. Because eligible bachelor Edmund Croaksworth is set to attend the approaching autumnal ball, and the Steele family hopes that Louisa will steal his heart. If not, Martin Grub, their disgusting cousin, will inherit the family's estate, and they will be ruined or, even worse, forced to move to France. So Beatrice must be on her best behavior . . . which is made difficult when a disgraced yet alluring detective inexplicably shows up to the ball. Beatrice is just holding things together when Croaksworth drops dead in the middle of a minuet. As a storm rages outside, the evening descends into a frenzy of panic, fear, and betrayal as it becomes clear they are trapped with a killer. **AZ, PW & Kirkus**

**\*\*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**

**\*\*THE TUMBLING GIRL**, Bridget Walsh (Gallic Books, \$17.95, May). 1876, Victorian London. Minnie Ward, a feisty scriptwriter for the Variety Palace Music Hall, is devastated when her best friend is found brutally murdered. She enlists the help of private detective Albert Easterbrook to help her find justice. Together they navigate London, from its high-class clubs to its murky underbelly. But as the bodies pile up, they must rely on one another if they're going to track down the killer – and make it out alive. **PW & LJ**

**\*\*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,**

**DP & LJ**



### Best Paperback Original Mystery/Crime Novel

**\*\*BOOMTOWN**, A. F. Carter (Mysterious Press, \$17.95). Police captain Delia Mariola is still struggling to drive the predatory drug dealers from the rustbelt town of Baxter, before the new Nissan plant owners lose faith in this forgotten corner of America. It doesn't help that a boomtown has grown up just outside of city limits—a wild west designed to feed every unsavory desire of the workers building the plant. And like vultures homing in on the weak, criminal gangs from the big cities have also been drawn to the boomtown, knowing how freely money will flow to those willing to supply drugs and women to these workers far from home, looking for comfort and distraction. With no police actively enforcing the rule of law in the unregulated town, the criminals have turned on each other as they try to claim control.

In the midst of this drug war, a young prostitute's body turns up on the streets of Baxter, well within Delia's jurisdiction to investigate. Hoping this might be the case that allows her to finally be able to crack down on Boomtown, Delia is relentless in her pursuit of

the killer and the group she believes is behind the criminal enterprises plaguing her streets. But Delia isn't the only person looking for the murderer. Two strangers have arrived in town, claiming to be the family of the deceased and possibly looking for a version of justice that has more to do with back hills vigilantism than the court of law. This complicates everything for Delia, who is unfairly made the target of criticism not only for the criminals running amuck in Boomtown, but also as a woman and lesbian in a small-town police force. **AZ & DP**

**\*\*DEATH IN FINE CONDITION**, Andrew Cartmel (Titan, \$16.95, June). Cordelia knows books. An addict-turned-dealer of classic paperbacks, when she's not spending her days combing the charity shops and jumble sales of suburban London for valuable collector's items, she's pining for the woman of her dreams and nimbly avoiding her landlord's demands for rent. The most elusive prize of all, her white whale, has surfaced — a set of magnificent, vintage Sleuth Hound crime novels. Gorgeous, and as rare as they come. Just one problem. They're not for sale. Still, that won't stop a resourceful woman like Cordelia... One burglary later, the books are hers. Unfortunately, the man she's just robbed turns out be one of London's most dangerous gangsters, and now he's on her trail and out for blood. **PW & AZ**

**\*\*THE BENEVOLENT SOCIETY OF ILL-MANNERED LADIES**, Alison Goodman (Berkley, \$16.99, May). Lady Augusta Colebrook, "Gus," is determinedly unmarried, bored by society life, and tired of being dismissed at the age of forty-two. She and her twin sister, Julia, who is grieving her dead betrothed, need a distraction. One soon presents itself: to rescue their friend's goddaughter, Caroline, from her violent husband. The sisters set out to Caroline's country estate with a plan, but their carriage is accosted by a highwayman. In the scuffle, Gus accidentally shoots and injures the ruffian, only to discover he is Lord Evan Belford, an acquaintance

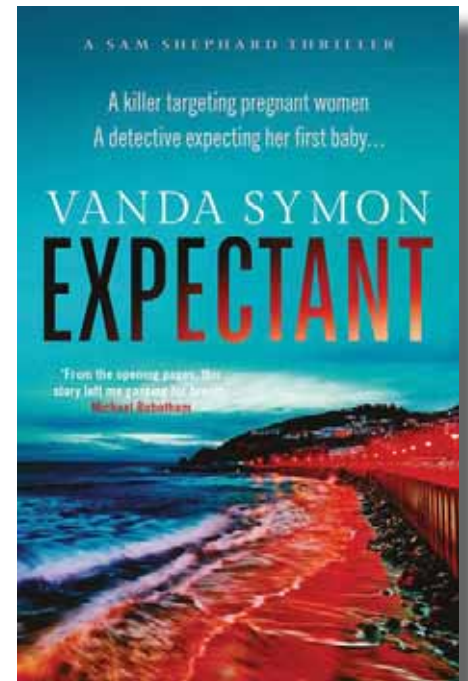
from their past who was charged with murder and exiled to Australia twenty years ago. What follows is a high adventure full of danger, clever improvisation, heart-racing near misses, and a little help from a revived and rather charming Lord Evan. Back in London, Gus can't stop thinking about her unlikely (not to mention handsome) comrade-in-arms. She is convinced Lord Evan was falsely accused of murder, and she is going to prove it. She persuades Julia to join her in a quest to help Lord Evan, and others in need—society be damned! **LJ & AZ**

**\*\*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. **AZ**



**\*\*EXPECTANT**, Vanda Symon (Orenda, \$16.99, September). The shocking murder of a heavily pregnant woman throws the New Zealand city of Dunedin into a tailspin, and the devastating crime feels uncomfortably close to home for Detective Sam Shephard as she counts down the days to her own maternity leave. Confined to a desk job in the department, Sam must find the missing link between this brutal crime and a string of cases involving mothers and children in the past. As the pieces start to come together and the reali-

sation dawns that the killer's actions are escalating, drastic measures must be taken to prevent more tragedy. For Sam, the case becomes personal, when it becomes increasingly clear that no one is safe and the clock is ticking. **DP(3)**

**\*\*THE LAST SONGBIRD**, Daniel Weizmann (Melville House, \$17.99, May). A struggling songwriter and Lyft driver, Adam Zantz's life changes when he accepts a ride request in Malibu and 1970s music icon Annie Linden enters his dented VW Jetta. Bonding during that initial ride, the two quickly go off app—over the next three years, Adam becomes her exclusive driver and Annie listens to his music, encouraging Adam even as he finds himself driving more often than songwriting. Then, Annie disappears, and her body washes up under a pier. Left with a final, cryptic text—'come to my arms'—a grieving Adam plays amateur detective, only to be charged as accomplice-after-the-fact. **Kirkus**

**\*\*THE MAN IN THE CORDUROY SUIT**, James Wolff (Bitter Lemon Press, \$15.95, June). The story of an internal investigation into the past of a British spy suspected of having been turned by Russian agents. British intelligence is in a state of panic. Cracks are appearing, or so a run of disciplinary cases would suggest. To cap it all, Willa Karlsson, a retired secret services officer collapses, the victim of what looks like a Russian poisoning. Leonard Flood is ordered to investigate – and quickly. Notorious for his sharp elbows and blunt manner, Leonard's only objective is to get the job done, whatever the cost. When Leonard discovers that he is also a suspect in the investigation and that Willa's story is less a story of betrayal than one of friendship and a deep sense of duty, he must decide whether to hand her to her masters or to help her to escape. **PW**

## Best Thrillers

**\*\*ASSASSIN EIGHTEEN**, John Brownlow (Hodder & Stoughton, £20.00, August; in U.S. Hanover Square



Press, April, 2024, \$18.99). Agent Seventeen, the most infamous hit man in the world, has quit. But whoever wants to become Assassin Eighteen must track him down and kill him first. So when a bullet hits the glass inches from his face, he knows who fired it—doesn't he?

It turns out that the sniper isn't the hardened killer he was expecting. It's Mireille—a mysterious silent child abandoned in the woods with instructions to pull the trigger. Reuniting with his spiky lover, Kat, Seventeen has to protect Mireille and discover who sent her to kill him and why. But the road he must travel is littered with bodies. And the answer, when it comes, will blow apart everything Seventeen thought he knew. **DP**

**\*\*FLAGS ON THE BAYOU**, James Lee Burke (Atlantic Monthly, \$28.00, July). In the fall of 1863, the Union army is in control of the Mississippi river. Much of Louisiana, including New Orleans and Baton Rouge, is occupied. The Confederate army is retreating toward Texas, and being replaced by Red Legs, irregulars commanded by a maniacal figure, and enslaved men and women are beginning to glimpse freedom.

When Hannah Laveau, an enslaved woman working on the Lufkin plantation, is accused of murder, she goes on the run with Florence Milton, an aboli-

tionist schoolteacher, dodging the local constable and the slavecatchers that prowl the bayous. Wade Lufkin, haunted by what he observed—and did—as a surgeon on the battlefield, has returned to his uncle's plantation to convalesce, where he becomes enraptured by Hannah. **AZ, PW, BL & Kirkus**

**\*\*THE VICAR**, A. J. Chambers (Blackstone, \$26.99, September). Terry Nolan, an off-the-books MI5 operative known as The Vicar, has been officially dead for the past thirty years. But when Nolan is attacked in Boston, it becomes clear his cover is blown. Even worse, his Parishioners – the network of spies who work under The Vicar – have all been compromised.

Nolan races to New York to try and find his last remaining agent, Shae, whom he personally recruited years ago. Instead, he finds Kristen, a young civilian who is determined to save Shae, too – and who may know more than she's letting on. In the search for his missing agent, Nolan intercepts intelligence that indicates weapons of mass destruction are on their way to Britain's four largest cities. **DP (2)**

**\*\*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 & AZ**

**\*\*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. **AZ & DP**

**\*\*THE TRAITOR**, Ava Glass (Bantam, \$28.00, September). An MI6 operative is found dead, locked in a suitcase inside his own apartment. Despite an exhaustive search, no fingerprints are found at the scene. Emma Makepeace and her handler, Ripley, know an assassination when they see one, and such an obvious murder can mean only one thing: Someone is sending a message.

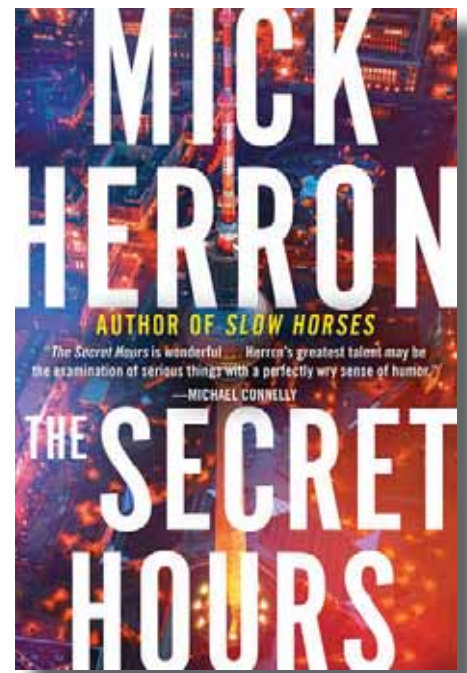
As she digs into his past, Emma discovers that the unfortunate spy had been investigating two Russian oligarchs based in London. He'd become obsessed with the idea that the two were spies, aided by a third man—whose identity he had yet to uncover. When he shared his findings within MI6 in the weeks before he died, the response came back fast and clear: Drop the investigation and move on. Had he uncovered a secret that cost him his life?

To pick up where he left off without ending up in a suitcase of her own, Emma goes undercover on one of the oligarch's million-dollar yachts, scheduled to set sail from the Cote D'Azur to Monaco. Under other circumstances, this would be a dream vacation. But if Emma's real identity gets discovered, it's a death sentence. **PW & DP**

**\*\*MALIBU BURNING**, Lee Goldberg (Thomas & Mercer, \$28.99). Hell comes to Southern California every October. It rides in on searing Santa Ana winds that blast at near hurricane force, igniting voracious wildfires. Master thief Danny Cole longs for the flames. A tsunami of fire is exactly what he needs to pull off a daring crime and avenge a fallen friend. As the most devastating firestorms in Los Angeles' history scorch the hills of Malibu, relentless arson investigator Walter Sharpe and his wild card of a new partner, Andrew Walker, a former US marshal, suspect that someone set the massive blazes intentionally, a terrifying means to an unknown end. While the flames rage out of control, Danny pursues his brilliant scheme, unaware that Sharpe and Walker are closing in. **LJ, AZ & 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, AZ & DP**

**\*\*THE SECRET HOURS**, Mick Herron (Soho Crime, \$27.95). Two years ago, a hostile Prime Minister launched the Monochrome inquiry, investigating "historical over-reaching" by the British Secret Service. Monochrome's mission was to ferret out any hint of misconduct by any MI5 officer—and allowed Griselda Fleet and Malcolm Kyle, the two civil servants seconded to the project, unfettered access to any and all confidential information in the Service archives in order to do so. But MI5's formidable First Desk did not become Britain's top



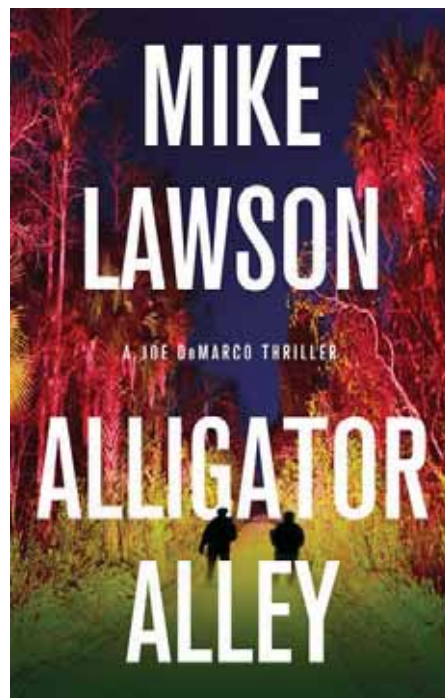
spy by accident, and she has successfully thwarted the inquiry at every turn. Now the administration that created Monochrome has been ousted, the investigation is a total bust—and Griselda and Malcolm are stuck watching as their career prospects are washed away by the pounding London rain. Until the eve of Monochrome's shuttering, when an MI5 case file appears without explanation. It is the buried history of a classified operation in 1994 Berlin—an operation that ended in tragedy and scandal, whose cover-up has rewritten thirty years of Service history. **PW, BL, LJ, AZ & 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 shad-

owy corners of London and France for answers. **BL & AZ**

**\*\*RED LONDON**, Alma Katsu (Putnam, \$27.00). After her role in taking down a well-placed mole inside the CIA, Agent Lyndsey Duncan arrives in London fully focused on her newest Russian asset, deadly war criminal Dmitri Tarasenko. That is until her MI6 counterpart, Davis Ranford, personally calls for her help. Following a suspicious attack on Russian oligarch Mikhail Rotenberg's property in a tony part of London, Davis needs Lyndsey to cozy up to the billionaire's aristocratic British wife, Emily Rotenberg. Fortunately for Lyndsey, there's little to dissuade Emily from taking in a much-needed confidante. Even being one of the richest women in the world is no guarantee of happiness. But before Lyndsey can cover much ground with her newfound friend, the CIA unveils a perturbing connection between Mikhail and Russia's geopolitical past, one that could upend the world order and jeopardize Lyndsey's longtime allegiance to the Agency. **BL & AZ**

**\*\*BLACK WOLF**, Kathleen Kent (Mulholland, \$29.00, February). It is 1990 when Melvina Donleavy arrives in Soviet Belarus on her first undercover mission with the CIA, alongside three fellow agents—none of whom know she is playing two roles. To the prying eyes of the KGB, she is merely a secretary; to her CIA minders, she is the only one who can stop the flow of nuclear weapons from the crumbling Soviet Union into the Middle East. For Mel has a secret; she is a “super recognizer,” someone who never forgets a face. But no training could prepare her for the reality of life undercover, and for the streets of Minsk, where women have been disappearing. Soviet law enforcement is firm: murder is a capitalist disease. But could a serial killer be at work? Especially if he knew no one was watching? As Mel searches for answers, she catches the eye of an entirely different kind of threat: the elusive and petrifying “Black Wolf,” head of the KGB. **PW, AZ & DP**



**\*\*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, AZ & 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. **BL, AZ & DP(2)**

**\*\*TO CATCH A STORM**, Mindy Mejia (Atlantic Monthly, \$28.99, August). When her husband's car is found abandoned and on fire—in the middle of a rainstorm—Eve Roth becomes the police's number one suspect. After all, her husband was suspended from the University of Iowa for inappropriate conduct with a student, and who else but an atmospheric physicist could incinerate a car in a downpour? But Eve has no idea why her husband disappeared. She's desperate to find him, both for herself and her beloved, disabled father-in-law. Jonah Kendrick appears on their doorstep with a theory. He's seen Eve's husband, bound and bleeding in a barn. Claiming to be a psychic detective who dreams of the lost, Jonah has helped find missing people his entire life. He dreamed about a young woman trapped in the same barn months ago, and she's still missing. As a firm believer in the laws of nature, Eve rejects anything to do with psychics, but their investigations soon collide. As the temperature drops and Iowa turns to ice, Eve and Jonah race across the state to discover what happened to the people they've lost. But the truth is more deadly either of them expected, and the physicist and the psychic must learn to believe in each other if they want to escape this storm alive. **PW & AZ**

**\*\*DROWNING**, T. J. Newman (Avid

Reader/Simon & Schuster, \$28.00, May). Six minutes after takeoff, Flight 1421 crashes into the Pacific Ocean. During the evacuation, an engine explodes and the plane is flooded. Those still alive are forced to close the doors—but it's too late. The plane sinks to the bottom with twelve passengers trapped inside. More than two hundred feet below the surface, engineer Will Kent and his eleven-year-old daughter Shannon are waist-deep in water and fighting for their lives. Their only chance at survival is an elite rescue team on the surface led by professional diver Chris Kent—Shannon's mother and Will's soon-to-be ex-wife—who must work together with Will to find a way to save their daughter and rescue the passengers from the sealed airplane, which is now teetering on the edge of an undersea cliff. There's not much time. There's even less air.  
**Kirkus, LJ, AZ & DP**

**\*\*ZERO DAYS**, Ruth Ware (Gallery/Scout Press, \$29.99, June). Hired by companies to break into buildings and hack security systems, Jack and her husband, Gabe, are the best penetration specialists in the business. But after a routine assignment goes horribly wrong, Jack arrives home to find her husband dead. To add to her horror, the police are closing in on their suspect—her. **BL, AZ & DP**

**\*\*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**

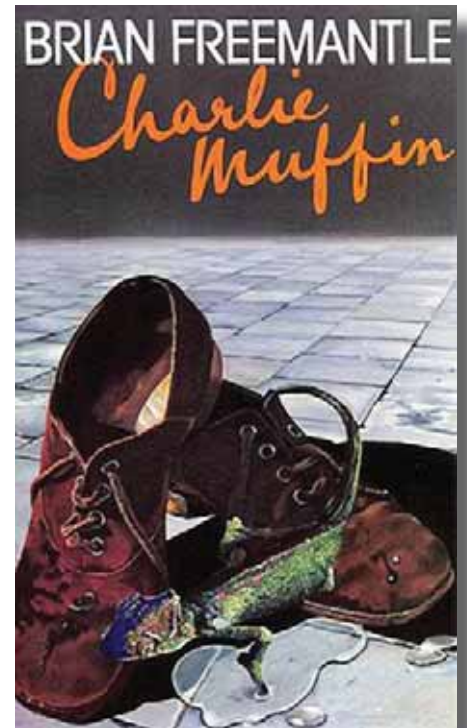
## Editor's Message



**Best of 2023 Lists.** The tide of "Best Mysteries, Crime Novels and Thrillers of 2023" lists will start flowing any day now. I hope to collect at least 80 such lists as I did last year and, once collated, come up with the Best of the Best of 2023 list, which I'll publish first on the website and then in the February, 2024 issue of *DP*, with additional material not to be found on the website. I will post all of the best lists that I find on the website so please keep checking in daily from now until the end of the year if you are interested in those lists. It's always a fun exercise for Larry and me. I've got a pretty good idea of what most of the best mystery, crime and thriller novels will be because of my research in putting together the Deadly Pleasures Best of 2023 List -- but there are always some surprises.

**Column Changes.** This issue contains the last Mike Ripley column as he is retiring from writing them. See my remarks at the beginning of his column. Reviewer Robin Agnew would like to concentrate her reviews for the magazine on historical mysteries so her column has been re-named the Historical Emporium. And since Maggie Mason does not review as many cozy/traditional mysteries as she has done in the past, we are renaming her column 'The Cosy-Traditional Café' and Robin Agnew will supply us with at least a couple of reviews for that column besides what Maggie comes up with.

**Re-Reading Charlie Muffin.** I sat next to debut author I.S. Berry at a dinner at Bouchercon this year. We had an engaging conversation regarding her novel **THE PEACOCK AND THE SPARROW** and about spy fiction in general. At one point I mentioned that my favorite spy fiction series is the Charlie M series by Brian Freemantle. Ilana had never heard of it. That



shouldn't have surprised me since she's half my age. So I promised to send her the first book in the series (**CHARLIE M**, published in 1977) when I returned home – which I did. But it got me thinking about how much I enjoyed reading the Charlie M books so I went to my shelf and took down my copy of the first book and started to read it for the first time in over thirty years. I finished it in two days (mercifully it was only 192 pages). My memory was that the next few titles weren't as good as the first, but that proved no impediment as I picked up one as soon as I finished another. I'm just finished book seven (**CHARLIE MUFFIN SAN**) right now and am having a ball. I remember the plot of the first book being spectacular and that some of the subsequent plots paled by comparison (although Charlie is faced with some pretty stiff tasks). I didn't find that to be the case this time around because the totally engaging character of Charlie Muffin shines through. I told Ilana that this is

my favorite spy series and that is true. But after more thought on the matter I would say that it shares the top spot with Mick Herron's *Slow Horses* series. Charlie M would have fit right in with the crowd at Slough House, all of whom are considered expendable by the top tier of British Intelligence. Yet most of them seem to survive and often outwit their so-called superiors.

#### Quote From Author Jane Smiley.

"A novel is a way for two people who don't know each other (author and reader) to interact intellectually and emotionally. So if I'm reading **PRIDE AND PREJUDICE**, for example, I can relate to Elizabeth Bennett when she gets insulted by Mr. Darcy. That's what the novelist wants you to do. Often, when you're reading a novel that appeals to you, you feel a sense of connection to the author in a way that is different from any other form of literature. And as you become more aware of how the characters in the novel are feeling and thinking, you also become more aware of how you're feeling and thinking. So reading is a form of emotional education." AARP Bulletin October 2023

**Getting a Bit Lazy.** As I write my reviews, the opinion part of the review is easy, but the plot summary can be a little bit of work. I noticed that other **DP** reviewers had read and reviewed several of the books that I had also read, so I just tacked my opinion ("George's Take") onto the tail end of their reviews and saved myself some work (7 reviews in total). Hence, you will see fewer reviews than normal in my review column.

#### Things I Learned at Bouchercon.

1. Archer Mayor has decided to hang up his pen. He started the Joe Gunther series in 1988 to give readers a taste of what life is like in his much-loved state of Vermont. He told his editor that after thirty three novels, he has no more to say on the subject.

2. The real identity of A.F. Carter, who writes the Delia Mariola series (**THE YARDS, THE HOSTAGE** and **BOOMTOWN**) has been revealed. He

is veteran writer Stephen Solomita. I did an Introducing... column on A. F. Carter in Issue #97.

3. When asked about when to expect the next Ben Coes thriller, his editor said that he didn't know when he would get it because Ben is so wealthy from his hedge fund days that he has no financial incentive to write.

4. Don't live in Florida if you want to attend an August-September Bouchercon. Larry Gandle couldn't attend due to his airport in Tampa being shut down by a hurricane.

5. COVID isn't over. I returned home from Bouchercon and within a couple of days tested positive for COVID. I had successfully avoided the disease for 3 years but Bouchercon got me. Fortunately it was a very light case. I've had worse flu and colds.

6. Kim Hays, who came all the way from Switzerland to attend, is as delightful in person as I expected her to be -- judging from my email correspondence with her previously. She also writes a heck of a good police procedural. She sent me a pdf of her third in the series and I will get to that once this issue is sent.

#### Additions to the Dagger Awards.

Starting next year there will be two new Dagger Awards sponsored by the Crime Writers Association, raising the number of Dagger Awards to thirteen. The CWA Twisted Dagger will highlight the best of psychological thrillers, suspense thrillers and domestic noir. The CWA Whodunnit Dagger will feature the best of cosy crime, traditional crime and Golden Age mysteries. Does that mean that Agatha Christie can win a Whodunnit Dagger in 2024? Vaseem Khan, Chair of the CWA, said: "Earlier this year, when I took over as Chair of the Crime Writers' Association, I pledged to add two new Dagggers to our awards roster. One of my aims as CWA Chair is to evolve the CWA's offering in line with the genre. The Dagggers should not be static."

Our own Larry Gandle does not like the idea. "Too many Dagger Awards. If a crime novel or thriller is truly the best of the year, it should be included in the

Shortlists for the Gold Dagger, the Steel Dagger or the New Blood Dagger (first novels). Adding new Dagger awards just waters everything down."

**My comment:** I don't consider psychological suspense novels to be "thrillers."

**My Reading Goals.** I generally have a goal to read ten books per month (100 pages a day). Last year I tried to read more -- with a goal of 150 for the year, but I fell a bit short at 147 because of the holidays at year's end. I revised my goal to a reasonable 120 this year and, as I'm at 105 on November 1, I should reach that goal easily. I don't try to read everything on the Deadly Pleasures Best of 2023 list -- just those that I think I will like.

**The Time Has Come -- Phase I.** After seeing how much work has been involved in wrapping up the estates of my sister and my in-laws, I am determined to not be too much of a burden on my heirs. So what to do with the 10,000+ mysteries and thrillers I have in my house? I've received great joy over the years in reading and collecting them, but I have to get realistic about moving some of them on. So a few weeks ago my good friend (and mystery book dealer) Mystery Mike Bursaw came to my house for a few days and we packed up 1500 of my best books and shipped them to Indiana for him to sell. There aren't many bookdealers nowadays that can handle large collections and Mystery Mike isn't getting any younger either, so I felt it was a good time to do this. Oh no! -- I have spaces on my shelves for more books now!



1500 Books

## Associate Editor's Message



As many of you know, Bouchercon is the world mystery conference. It will vary by location and date. Previously, the target date was around Columbus Day or Indigenous Peoples Day (depending on your viewpoint) around October 12. Now, most likely to decrease cost, the event occurs at the end of August. This is the height of hurricane season in the southeast. This year, as I was eagerly anticipating attending the event for the first time in years, sure enough, a storm developed and passed up the western coast of Florida closing our airport the day of my departure and most of the next day. Thankfully, it missed our city. It is incredible in that every single morning for weeks has been clear and fine for flying until that one.

I missed the event and am not at all surprised. Next year it is in Nashville and I am fully anticipating being there. It is less than a two-hour direct flight



away. I would have no problem going even for a day, if necessary. I missed participating on two panels but George ably filled in for me. What makes me especially sad is that none of us are getting younger and this was a great way to catch up with friends as well as getting my annual adrenaline shot for reading and reviewing crime fiction. Of note -- I saw on the internet some photos of the audience at the panels. It looked like a nursing home! Wheel chairs, oxygen tanks, nasal cannulas. Yes, we are definitely not getting younger.

We recently received an email from a reader, Richard Goutal (see page 18). He discussed the grading system of his

book club that uses number grades to rate books. Since the book is preselected, some members can choose not to read the book after a number of pages and can rate it DNF -- did not finish, DNR -- did not read and one that I really do not like -- NWT -- not worth my time. How can you possibly know a book is not worth your time if you haven't read it? The first two should suffice and I do occasionally use those ratings myself -- especially when I am reading and reviewing an award shortlist.

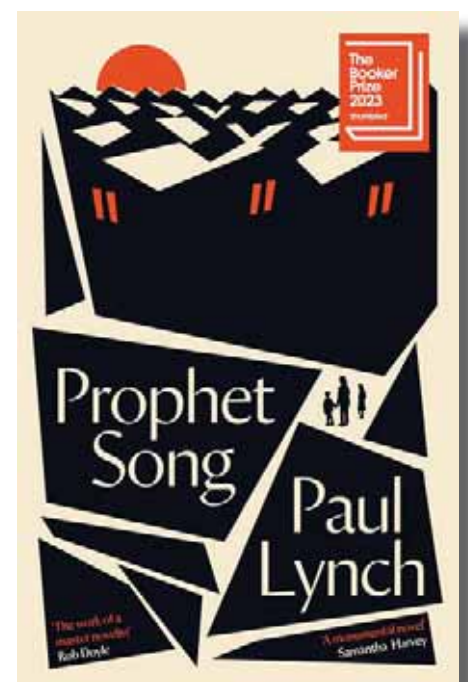
Dick then asks what happens if reviewers pick up a book, don't like it and put it down. If the reviewer doesn't mention it and give it a DNF or DNR, won't that skew the results to be more positive? I agree with what Dick is implying. If a reviewer picks up a book and doesn't finish it, it should be mentioned. I have often asked reviewers to be more balanced in their reviews. Otherwise, if every book is reviewed positively, then it is not worth reading the reviews. Just look at the titles in a review column and know the reviewer liked it. Personally, I do give books negative reviews as I often say my allegiance is to the reader -- not the author. Once an author sells a book, the book becomes a commodity and my job is to let the reader know whether it is worth buying. My honesty has led to some uncomfortable moments when I meet the author whose book I did not review favorably. This has happened numerous times -- I assure you. And yes, I have given numerous D ratings and a rare F rating.

The reviewers in this magazine are never required to read any particular book. Therefore, the books are carefully preselected by each reviewer based on what they think they will enjoy reading and hence the overall positive reviews. The focus of the magazine is to find the best books to recommend to you the

reader. However, every reviewer can write negative reviews. I really don't think they want to write too many of them for various reasons, principally among them that they don't want to waste their time on a mediocre or bad books. There are only a couple of us reviewers that will consistently write bad reviews -- mainly myself and Meredith. By the way, if I give a negative review, I will always specifically mention the problem I had with it. That is only fair.

There is a column in this magazine that George brilliantly created called 'Reviewed to Death' in which numerous reviewers read the same book, rate it and write a few lines as to their feelings on it. This is where you might see negative reviews and will get an idea as to the tastes of each reviewer participating.

I have just completed my annual reading of the Booker Prize longlist. This is a major literary award and by reading the list, I often read some of the best literary books published in a given year. Hence, not as many reviews in my review column for this issue. I will make up for it in the next issue. I did review one book called **PROPHET SONG** by Paul Lynch (Oneworld, £16.99) which I consider one of the best books I have read in years. It is a suspense novel and well worth reading.



# A Visit From the Book Broad

*Meredith Anthony*



## THE SECRET

By Lee Child and Andrew Child  
Delacorte Press; \$28.99, October  
Jack Reacher #28

**Rating: A**

**First line:** Keith Bridgeman was alone in his room when he closed his eyes.

**THE SECRET** is the latest Jack Reacher thriller from Lee Child and Andrew Child, and it's a doozy.

A nearly perfect thriller, **THE SECRET** is set in the 1990s when Reacher is still in the Army and his brother Joe is still alive. Reacher, first seen wrapping up a gun tampering case at a base in Illinois when he is called back to D.C. His new assignment is to try to find out who is killing the scientists involved in a top secret government project in India in the 1960s. The secret project employed 6 scientists and was hidden inside a larger, more legitimate project. A disgruntled employee had committed a small act of sabotage that happened to have big consequences. Over a thousand people died and the government covered it up. The employee killed himself. Case closed. Now, with the project long ended and all the scientists retired, someone has started to kill the entire 6-man team. Reacher is joined by a woman from the FBI, a man from the CIA and a guy from Treasury. Tasked with working in secrecy, they start looking at the historical records, searching for a clue.

The Secretary of Defense, who ordered the task force, has a personal stake in the outcome. He had been in charge of the project in India and had met his wife there, a scientist who worked at the lab, but not in the secret area.

As Reacher and his team close in on

the identity of the killer, they begin to get close to the action. With Reacher in the mix, of course, mayhem ensues.

Completely satisfying, **THE SECRET** unfolds its secrets slowly. But the clock is ticking. Will Reacher and his team solve the mystery? Will they die trying? And who led the top secret project? Will they die, too?

Challenging and twisty, **THE SECRET** delivers. Is it as perfect a thriller as the earlier Reachers? I'd say, yes. The plot is solid and absorbing, the characters well drawn and relatable. The prose unadorned and propulsive. Maybe a trace of the sly humor with which Reacher always approached his actions has been lost, but on the plus side, the pace is even better, fast and compelling.

Highly recommended for Reacher creatures.

## THE TRAITOR

By Ava Glass  
Bantam Books; \$28.00, September  
Emma Makepeace #2

**Rating: A**

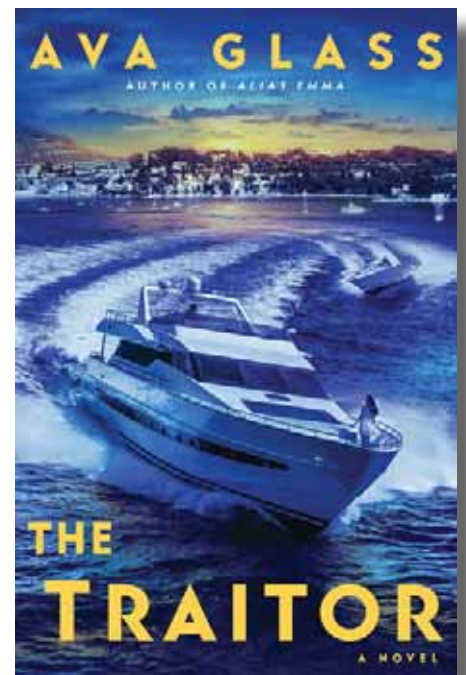
**First line:** He was exhausted.

Ava Glass' excellent British spy thriller, **THE TRAITOR**, features female MI6 agent, Emma Makepeace, in a fresh, female-centered James Bond update. A young MI6 agent has been killed in London. An arms dealer is suspected and Emma goes undercover on a Russian oligarch's private yacht to find out who his co-conspirators are and what they are up to that would warrant such a conspicuous crime. What could go wrong? As usual, there's a mole in the Circus. Mayhem ensues.

Emma is more likely to use her wits in a tight situation, but she can deliver a

mean kick, throw a good punch, and use a knife when she has to. She also speaks truth to power, including calling them out on any trace of misogyny.

Highly recommended for spy buffs.



## THE ROPE ARTIST

By Fuminori Nakamura  
Translated by Sam Bett  
Soho Press; \$36.95, May

**Rating: B**

**First line:** When I was a kid I got sucked into a tiny whirlpool.

Fuminori Nakamura's **THE ROPE ARTIST** is either a pornographic novel marred by rambling discussions of psychology, myth and philosophy, or a complicated literary police procedural set in Japan's underground SMD sex clubs. It offers a look at the bondage discipline called kinbaku, the art of tying up a person, usually a woman, for

the sexual pleasure of the rope artist, the audience, and the woman herself. This dangerous sadomasochistic discipline is at the heart of **THE ROPE ARTIST**.

The story begins with a crime scene and is told from the point of view of a police detective assigned to investigate the death of a rope artist. The detective quickly realizes the evidence points to a sex worker he knows, and knows well. Eventually the story is taken up from the point of view of a second detective who investigates a series of additional murders stemming from the first one.

The complex psychopathology of rope artists and their submissive women is examined in the context of the series of crimes. Hemp and its roots in mythology, Japanese history, and Shinto practice are explained. The story itself is twisted and tightly braided. Almost everyone has a second or even a third name, either an alias, a stage name or a pet name. Two of the women have had surgery to resemble each other and another woman as well.

In translation, the writing is by turns gorgeous and lurid. Definitely not for the faint of heart. Japanese psychosexual noir.

### **DROWNING**

By T. J. Newman

Avid Reader Press; \$28.00, May

**Rating: A**

**First line:** Will Kent opened his eyes just in time to see the engine explode.

T. J. Newman's **DROWNING** is the reason they call them thrillers! From the killer first sentence to the last page, the action and the suspense never let up. **DROWNING** is the story of a plane crash and a desperate rescue operation, and it takes place over just a few hours. With minimal flashbacks and exposition, the major characters are quickly drawn and the action is non-stop.

Flight 1421, a passenger jet out of Honolulu, undergoes a catastrophic failure minutes after take-off. Unable to control the plane, the pilots have no choice but to ditch—make an emergency landing on the water. The plane crashes into the Pacific.

Will Kent is on board with his 11 year old daughter Shannon. He is a structural engineer. His soon-to-be-ex-wife, Chris, is an expert diver and underwater construction professional and just happens to be working on the Navy ship when it is ordered to rescue survivors. Their marriage was shattered by the accidental death of their other daughter a few years before. Now Chris is on the front lines of the attempt to rescue a small group of survivors who include her husband and daughter.

The action sequences on the plane, in the ocean, and on the Coast Guard and Navy ships sent to attempt to rescue the survivors are all first rate. The pacing is breathless. The similarities to *Titanic* are unmistakable, but not belabored. The plot device that puts the husband and wife on the scene and with skills that may save their lives is a bit too big a coincidence, but once you get past that, the book is a delight.

My favorite sidelight—the role reversal. The guy is in jeopardy and his only thought is to keep his daughter safe. The wife swings into high gear and uses every bit of her considerable skill, ingenuity and endurance to lead the rescue effort to bring them back safely, at any cost. Who doesn't love a woman with a blow torch?

A first-rate thriller.

### **PICTURE IN THE SAND**

By Peter Blauner

Minotaur Books; \$27.99, January

**Rating: A**

**First line:** Mother, I'm sorry for what I have to tell you.

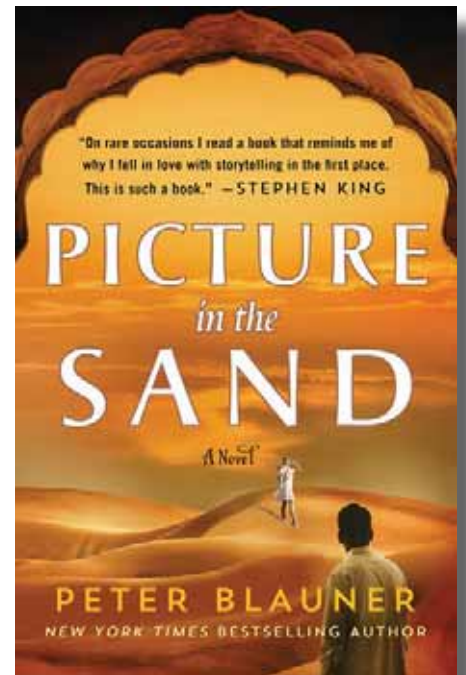
A new Peter Blauner book is a big event and **PICTURE IN THE SAND** does not disappoint. This is a literary thriller whose tightly braided story threads include the coming of age of a young, star-struck Egyptian in the 1950's, the complicated geopolitics of the Middle East, the film shoot of Cecil B. DeMille's *The Ten Commandments* in the desert outside Cairo, and the radicalization of a young man in Brooklyn in 2014.

Peter Blauner's topics have been very

diverse but the particular nexus of the personal and the political is his sweet spot. There was an amazing moment in his first novel, **SLOW MOTION RIOT**, when a terrifying gangster gets ready for a battle to the death and we watch as he decides what to wear. This book, too, despite its wide-angle lens on the sweep of history, frequently zooms in on the civilizing detail. This is what elevates Blauner's writing and makes it great.

The precipitating event is an accidental killing of a religious leader in Egypt. The mystery is in the consequences and the suspense is will the perpetrator be identified and punished.

The frame story is a series of emails between a grandfather in America and his disaffected grandson who is training to be a terrorist in Syria. By telling the story of his own youth and the tumultuous political climate of the time, the grandfather tries to help the young man come to terms with the world and the movement he's become part of.



### **WINDFALL**

By Wendy Corsi Staub

William Morrow; \$18.99, July

**Rating: B**

**First line:** Hello, and welcome to a brand-new season of *Disappearing Acts*.

Wendy Corsi Staub's new chick lit

thriller, **WINDFALL**, is a suspenseful puzzle book, with four women, one man, and a baby isolated from the outside world by wildfires and dangerous terrain on the California coast. Three of the women, Leila, Mollie and J.J. are 40 year old former college roommates who have won a billion dollar lottery. The other woman, Shea, and the man, Beck, are part of a firm hired to protect and guide UHNWI (ultra-high net worth individuals) as they adapt to sudden wealth.

To plan for safely claiming the money, the five of them go to a former movie star's isolated estate outside of Los Angeles. What could go wrong? Wildfires rage around them, cellphone service is almost nonexistent, and the haunted history of the mansion comes to light. Then one of the lottery winners goes missing.

The winning ticket is safe. Or is it? The missing movie star is dead. Or is she? The helpful woman and her partner, a former lover, are there to help. Or are they? The three women are best friends. Or are they?

The book is a fugue of bad luck, wrong choices, buried secrets, and fraught mental states. A fun summer read.

**THE SPY COAST**

By Tess Gerritsen

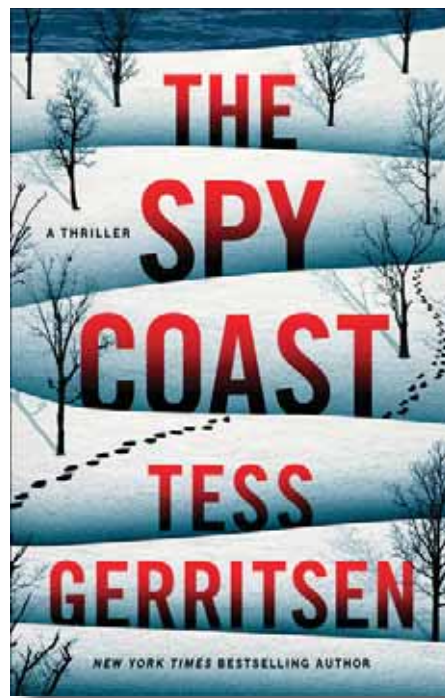
Thomas & Mercer; \$28.99, October

**Rating: A**

**First line:** She used to be the golden girl.

Tess Gerritsen's **THE SPY COAST** is an excellent, female-centric spy thriller. Think **THE THURSDAY MURDER CLUB** but serious. Or the movie *Reds*, but directed by Christopher Nolan.

In the small town of Purity on the Maine Coast, several retirees from the CIA have made a home. They meet for martinis now and then under the guise of a book club. When one of them is visited by a current CIA agent and asked about her last assignment, Maggie knows that something has gone terribly wrong. Pretty soon that agent turns up dead and Maggie has to revisit the past



and its painful memories if she is to have any kind of a future.

The story cuts between past and present. Maggie fell in love when she was undercover and decided to leave the CIA and marry her unwitting lover. But it happens that he is a peripheral character in an op and she is asked to carry out one last mission, going on a trip with her fiancé and the subject of the CIA investigation. When it all goes wrong, Maggie is left with nothing. When she goes in search of the fellow agent who ruined her life, luckily her fellow retirees go with her. They have to find the missing agent and uncover the truth about what happened. Excellent suspense, relatable characters, a unique plot.

**THE MISTRESS OF BHATIA HOUSE**

By Sujata Massey

Soho Press; \$27.95, July

Perveen Mistry #4

**Rating: B-**

**First line:** Sisters will fight.

Sujata Massey's **THE MISTRESS OF BHATIA HOUSE** is a legal thriller set in Bombay in 1922. It is the fourth in a series of Perveen Mistry novels. Perveen is the first woman lawyer in Bombay. She attended Oxford since women could not receive a law degree in India. But she

cannot practice in England because she is an Indian. Perveen is in practice with her father, a noted attorney. She can prepare cases in Bombay but needs a male barrister to present them in court where women cannot speak. She is in love with an Englishman but cannot marry him since she had an early arranged marriage and cannot be granted a divorce. Her personal and professional goals are thwarted at every turn. **CATCH 22** on the subcontinent? But Perveen is smart and determined.

There is an unfortunate incident at a society party that injures the young heir to a fortune. His maid is also hurt while saving him. Perveen is drawn into the case when she finds that the heroic maid has been arrested and charged with aborting her own child. The wealthy family she works for has abandoned her. A proto-feminist, Perveen takes up the case despite her father's warnings. She interviews many witnesses and uncovers an elaborate plot that reaches the upper tiers of Bombay society.

This novel is a deep dive into a society on the cusp of change. Perveen circumvents most of the rules impeding her with cleverness and charm. She pursues justice for her client using every trick in her considerable arsenal, even when it puts her in harm's way herself.

There are lots of characters, lots of secrets, lots of subplots, lots of women's issues. Think *Bridgerton* written by E. M. Forster. Or a Merchant-Ivory version of Betty Friedan. Sujata Massey, over-rated in my opinion, is having a moment. Not my cup of darjeeling, really.

**DEADLOCK**

By James Byrne

Minotaur Books; \$28.00, August

Dez Limerick #2

**Rating: A**

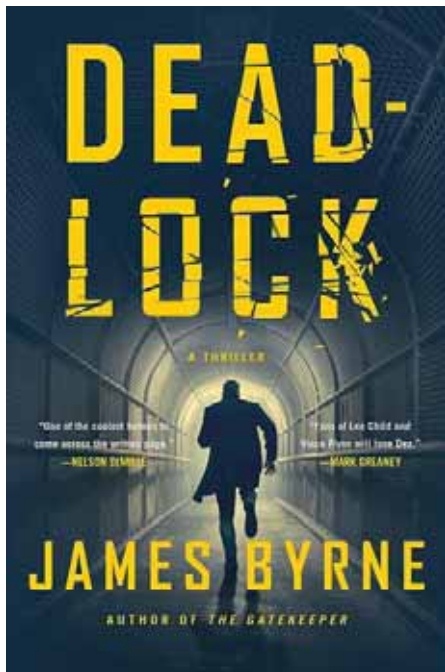
**First line:** Desmond Aloysius Limerick has been ordered to fly into Baku, Azerbaijan, under a false name, carrying nothing but a change of clothes and a paperback Michel Bussi mystery in the original French.

James Byrne's **DEADLOCK** is a bril-

liant thriller, a worthy follow-up to his stunning debut, **THE GATEKEEPER**. Perfectly paced, urgently suspenseful, **DEADLOCK** is a classic thriller from the initial inciting incident through the escalating stakes to the ultimate showdown. It's a classic with the big-hearted ex-military loner with mad skills who wades in to help a friend and gets embroiled in a multinational terror plot that threatens global mayhem. But what James Byrne adds—the special sauce—is the wit and humor that accompany our hero as he single-handedly saves the world.

Dez Limerick is a short, broad, bowlegged Brit with a thick accent and an irreverent attitude. He roams around playing guitar and looking out for his friends. When a girl singer he plays backup for asks for his help, he doesn't hesitate. Her sister, a business journalist, has been threatened and a source has been killed. The clues point to the greenest tech company in Portland, Oregon. Turns out the do-gooders are up to no good. It's as if Facebook set itself up as a force for social good, then allowed a sociopathic criminal to build an election-stealing platform and raise a treasonous militia. Oh wait, that actually happened.

The stakes ratchet up to a national, then international level. The bad guys



have a veritable army. Dez has Dez.

Well worth reading. A welcome addition to the thriller canon with more humor than usual for high-stakes, world-domination fare. I loved it.

**George's Take:** I'm quite taken by the "can-do" personality of Dez Limerick, but I find his ability to get out of tight spots (some of his own making) quite unbelievable. **Rating: B**

### A HAUNTING IN HIALEAH GARDENS

By Raul Palma

Dutton; \$27.00, October

**Rating: C**

**First Line:** It was Christmastime in Miami, and Hugo hadn't been sleeping well because every time he tried, he'd feel his indebtedness drop into bed with him, this invisible thing.

A supernatural mystery crossover, Raul Palma's debut novel, **A HAUNTING IN HIALEAH GARDENS** marries the story of a Bolivian immigrant living in Miami, with a tale of the demons that haunt the oppressors of the downtrodden. Hugo Contreras, orphaned and struggling, has escaped his harsh childhood working in the dangerous silver mines that claimed the life of his brother. He was happily married until his wife died of cancer, racking up enormous medical bills in the process. He works for a botanica, a kind of spiritual department store for believers in Sante-ria. He is a non-believer, but his employer, Lourdes, knows that he has spiritual powers so he works as a babálawo and uses candles, amulets, chicken blood and bones to banish evil spirits.

Hugo himself is haunted by memories of his beloved dead wife, and the growing mountain of debt that is suffocating him. When the reprehensible debt collection attorney, Alexi Ramirez, who has been hounding him for years, calls to ask for a cleansing ritual to get rid of the demons that are haunting him and his family, Hugo makes a bargain. He will help the man in exchange for erasing his debt. The trouble is that Hugo has demons of his own: anger, regret, loss, betrayal, fear, self-pity, all of



which come close to overwhelming him. Will Hugo succeed in saving Alexi's family and coming to terms with the memories of his own? Will he bring the corrupt villain to justice? Or will the dark forces win?

Is this a mystery with a strong metaphorical bent or a supernatural novel set in present day Miami? It's not perfect, but a strangely compelling hybrid worth reading.

### THE HELSINKI AFFAIR

By Anna Pitoniak

Simon & Schuster; \$27.99, November

**Rating: A**

**First line:** It wasn't exactly the sensible thing to do, standing outside in the hot noon sun in July in Rome.

What fan of John LeCarre' hasn't longed for a spy novel as absorbing as his? Well, now we have Anna Pitoniak's excellent spy thriller, **THE HELSINKI AFFAIR**.

Amanda Cole, a second generation CIA agent, is rising through the ranks. On weekend duty at the American Embassy in Rome, she gets a walk-in, a Russian who insists that a US Senator is going to be assassinated in Cairo. Her boss shrugs off the intel as unsupported and improbable. When the Senator dies, Amanda is promoted to Station Chief in Rome and develops the walk-in as a source. Her father is so proud. She also is given a secret file kept by the Senator. Her father's name appears in the hand-written notes. With the help of an older agent, Kath Frost, Amanda's investigation reveals a global conspiracy, and a window on the past when she was a child and her father was stationed in

Helsinki.

The plot is satisfyingly complex, the characters are well-drawn and relatable, and the ending gripping. But the real charm lies in the psychological turmoil at the intersection of the personal and the political. Highly recommended!

### TIDES OF FIRE

By James Rollins

William Morrow; \$32.00, August  
Sigma Force #17

**Rating: B+**

**First line:** From the bow of the HMS *Tenebrae*, Commander Leland Macklin stared into the fiery mouth of hell.

Remember the scene in the *Barbie* movie when the Kens are all mansplaining (Ken-splaining?) the *Godfather* or the chord progressions in “Stairway to Heaven” to the seemingly adoring Barbies? Well, James Rollins has staked out new territory in author-splaining in his excellent new thriller, **TIDES OF FIRE**. You have to wade through a map, two schematics, a cast of characters, Notes from the Scientific Record, Notes from the Historical Record, and 3 epigraphs before you can even find the first line of the narrative. As it turns out, it’s worth it.

James Rollins’ **TIDES OF FIRE** is a sci-fi thriller incorporating geopolitics and a world-ending threat in a race to untangle a historical mystery and save the planet. The plot ranges from ancient aboriginal mythology to up-to-the-minute science, and from geology to marine biology to interplanetary exploration and beyond.

Marine biologist Phoebe Reed and her post-grad student Jazz Patel have been asked by an Australian billionaire William Byrd to participate in the Titan project, including an exploration of the deepest trenches under the Pacific. Gray Pierce, commander in the top secret Sigma Force is in Hong Kong celebrating the second birthday of his son with Seichan, the boy’s former terrorist mother, and Guan-yin, the boy’s grandmother and dragonhead of a dangerous Triad. Valya Mikhailov, Gray’s old Russian adversary appears, looking for

revenge. But there is also danger from another contingent. The Chinese have lost a nuclear sub somewhere under the Coral Sea and have sent a heavily armed military force to prevent Western powers from recovering it. Then the earthquakes start and the volcanos begin to erupt.

Excellent plotting, escalating suspense, and well-drawn characters make this a tight thriller that takes place over just a few days in locations from China to Indonesia to New Zealand.

### CALL ME HUNTER

By Jim Shockey

Emily Bestler Books/Atria; \$27.99,

October

Debut Novel

**Rating: D**

**First line:** Zhivago is dead.

Jim Shockey’s debut sci-fi thriller, **CALL ME HUNTER** starts well. A woman in North Carolina receives a hand-delivered, type-written manuscript in her mailbox. Since she is a reporter, this is only slightly disturbing. She begins to read.

The manuscript tells a story in many parts, beginning with the birth of a strange child in a small U.S. town in the 1960s, to a secret location in Russia, to Canada, with detours all over the world. Hunter is antisocial, probably autistic but he has a superpower: he can spot great art at a glance. He is recruited by a secret society and trained to use his gift for their gain.

The reporter, Nyala, becomes obsessed by his story and laboriously fact-checks it. She and her best friend leave their newspaper jobs to follow the story’s trail across the country to Vancouver Island, a trail that grows dangerous and difficult.

Speaking of fact-checking, which the author invites the reader to do, the claim that art forgery is the third-highest-grossing criminal activity in the world is clearly ridiculous. One UN site lists 9 international criminal activities led by the drug trade, human trafficking, migrant smuggling, and arms sales. Art forgery does not appear on the list.

Overwritten and repetitive, the narrative that started so well becomes bloated and unwieldy. The secret of the mystery manuscript is glaringly obvious quite early to everyone but the heroine. The story devolves into an overwrought, conventional conspiracy tale about an evil secret society. The book goes from can’t-put-down to hate-to-pick-up by the midpoint. The plot is revealed to be increasingly silly as the language grows ever more turgid. The last third of the book is as much torture as the secret society hands out to anyone who crosses it. Ugh.

### THE TAKEN ONES

By Jess Lourey

Thomas & Mercer; \$16.99, September

**Rating: A**

**First line:** The sun smiled violently overhead, causing the tar beneath Rue’s blue-striped Adidas to glisten and pulse.

I have two words for author Jess Lourey: “More, please.” **THE TAKEN ONES**, the first book in a new series of Steinbeck and Reed thrillers, is an exceptional procedural. Amazingly suspenseful, there are two or three ticking clocks and as many twisty plot lines. Do not miss this one!

In a Minnesota town in 1980, three



little girls walk through a stretch of woods to get to a swimming hole. Two of them disappear. The third walks out with no memory of what happened. More than 40 years later, a woman is found who had been buried alive. She is identified as one of the missing girls. The police officers who investigate are refreshingly different and way more interesting than usual.

**THE TAKEN ONES** is a brilliant procedural, introducing the neurotic cold case detective, Evangeline (Van) Reed. Her home, office and car are filled with clutter and debris. Her insomnia is punctuated only by vivid nightmares. Her abusive childhood haunts her. She is joined by forensic scientist, Harry Steinbeck. Compulsively neat and perfectly groomed, Harry is Van's polar opposite. They make the perfect team. Her instincts, honed by childhood trauma, and his scientific skills and insight mesh even though their temperaments clash. This is the beginning of a great new series.

I have two more words for author, Jess Lourey: "Write faster."

#### **HER LAST AFFAIR**

By John Searles  
Mariner; \$18.99, March  
**Rating: B-**

**First line:** Every marriage has its secrets.

John Searles very noir novel, **HER LAST AFFAIR**, hardly qualifies as a mystery. There's no who-done-it, no investigation, no justice. There is, however, plenty of crime. Murder, disfigurement, bigamy, adultery, revenge, and more. There's also angst, recrimination, regret, and a general sense of pervasive dread.

The structure of the book is more a series of short stories or vignettes which eventually link up in surprising and mostly horrific ways.

Skylla, a 75-year-old blind widow reminisces about her marriage. Then she rents a cottage to a boarder. Linelle longs for her first love, then finds him. Then her husband catches her baring

herself on a video chat. Jeremy believes that scars from his disfiguring teenage acne prevent him from finding love. He tries a laser treatment. Teddy is a Brit who used to work as a pirate at Disney World. Maryanne wants to make amends for making poor decisions in her youth. Maureen is sorry she slept with a married man.

Plot points involve a pure-bred standard poodle with an anxiety problem, a syringe wielded by a former nurse, a Lincoln with a bad battery, a defunct drive-in movie theatre, a bunch of broken mannequins, and a host of movie references.

#### **BAD, BAD SEYMOUR BROWN**

By Susan Isaacs  
Atlantic Monthly Press; \$28.00, May  
**Rating: A**

**First line:** In the universe of 1990s Brooklyn bad guys, Seymour Brown, CPA, had risen way above most of the goons and gangsters.

Susan Isaacs' **BAD, BAD SEYMOUR BROWN** is a delightful read. A father/daughter team of PIs, each with a background in law enforcement, investigate a minor incident that relates to a cold case. Isaacs' trademark humor invigorates this PI novel set in Long Island and New Jersey.

Thirty years ago, mob accountant and money launderer, Seymour Brown was killed along with his wife Kim when an arsonist set his house on fire. His five-year-old daughter April survived. The police investigated but could not charge anyone with the crime. Now April, a professor of film studies at Rutgers, was nearly run down by an SUV on campus. The license plates had been taped over and the tinted windows made it impossible to see who was driving. April calls the police and asks that a message be sent to the detective she remembers best from her childhood.

Corey Geller and her father Dan Schottmann take the case and unpack a tangled web of crimes and revenge. It is refreshing to find a couple of PIs who are both happily married and, with

both couples living in the same house, along with Corey's daughter, getting along amazingly well.

Family issues are worked out over the course of the investigation in a way that is fresh and welcome in a genre where angst and anger and regret so frequently prevail. I loved it.

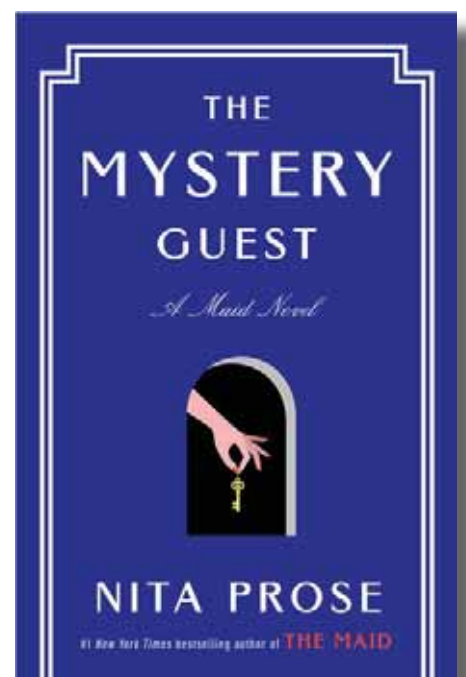
#### **THE MYSTERY GUEST**

By Nita Prose  
Ballantine Books; \$29.00, November  
Molly Gray #2  
**Rating: B+**

**First line:** My gran once told me a story about a maid, a rat, and a spoon.

I'm delighted to report that Nita Prose's **THE MYSTERY GUEST** is a delightful and satisfying sequel to her excellent debut novel, **THE MAID**, which won several awards including *Deadly Pleasures'* own Barry.

Molly Gray, hotel maid at the Regency Grand, is now Head Maid. Her autism, which takes the form of perfectionism and an obsession with cleaning, has been put to good use. Her late gran would have been proud. But when a big-time author comes to give a talk in the hotel's tearoom, he ends up dead on the spotless floor. The police suspect that a member of the hotel's staff was



involved. Molly begs to differ.

The effort to find out who killed J.D. Grimthorpe leads Molly to call up her own past. Her beloved gran had once worked for Mr. Grimthorpe and Molly herself had spent time at the peculiar mansion that Grimthorpe called home. Does Molly's past provide a glimpse of the secret that led to Grimthorpe's death?

Told in first person, Molly's voice is literal, a bit naïve, but scrupulously honest. Her recall and her reexamination of the past are laser focused. Like tarnished silver getting a good polishing, the truth stands revealed and gleaming.

Maybe not quite as perfect as **THE MAID**, **THE MYSTERY GUEST** is nonetheless a satisfying and charming sequel.

**GATED PREY**

By Lee Goldberg

Thomas & Mercer; \$15.95, 2021

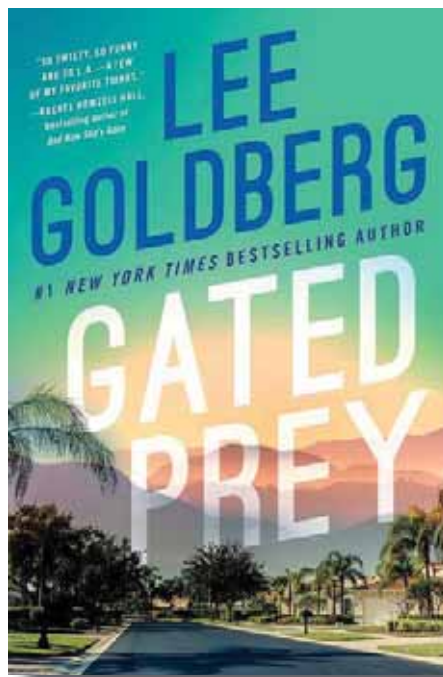
**Rating: B**

**First line:** Eve Ronin was topless under her black Chanel suit jacket, so everybody she encountered at Bristol farms supermarket had their eyes on her chest.

Lee Goldberg's **GATED PREY** is a LA procedural set in a moneyed enclave in Calabasas. The title, which sounds like fan-fic John Sandford, actually refers to the gated community where Eve and her partner, Duncan Pavone, are living undercover.

When the sting goes wrong, the violent intruders they were seeking to entrap are all dead. Case closed, right? Wrong. Over the objections of their superiors, Ronin and Pavone continue to pursue the people behind the home invasion ring and mayhem ensues.

Eve Ronin, whose first big case was so sensational that Hollywood is trying to make a TV series based on her life, fears that her looks get in the way of her police work. Her colleagues suspect that her looks, rather than her instincts and skills, are responsible for her promotion. Her character owes much to the



female lead in *Castle*. Her banter with her partner is priceless, trading insults, sharing information about everything including her fame, his retirement and boob tape.

Lee Goldberg is a delightful and prolific author. I haven't read the first 2 books in his Eve Ronin series, but they are well worth catching up with.

**NATURAL BEAUTY**

By Ling Ling Huang

Dutton; \$27.00, April

**Rating: B-**

**First line:** Even the door is beautiful.

If you've been longing for a mashup of Stephen King and Gwyneth Paltrow, look no further. Ling Ling Huang's **NATURAL BEAUTY** is a sci-fi mystery hybrid set in the extreme reaches of the beauty industry. Part corporation gone amok thriller and part down on her luck girl finds dream job that's just too good to be true cautionary tale, **NATURAL BEAUTY** is an interesting and different take on the beauty culture and corporate America that almost works.

The narrator is a Chinese American piano prodigy who has left the Conservatory after some mysterious accident and is struggling to make a living washing dishes. A chance meeting

with a beautiful customer leads to a job offer at Holistik, selling the hot new high-end beauty line. Encouraged to take advantage of all company treatments, supplements and products, she becomes as ethereally beautiful as the staff and the clientele. She is also able to support her disabled parents. But she catches glimpses of a dark under-side at Holistik. And the deeper she becomes involved with the staff and owners, the more the negative side emerges.

Although it begins well, the narrative bogs down with the increasingly fantastical happenings. It goes off the rails and never recovers its stride. A near miss.

**MURDER IN ADMONISHMENT**

By Anne Cleeland

Artemis Press; \$14.99, March

Doyle & Acton #17

**Rating: A**

**First line:** Detective Sergeant Kathleen Doyle listened in as Detective Sergeant Isabella Munoz spoke to their Senior Investigating Officer over her mobile phone.

I loved Anne Cleeland's British procedural, **MURDER IN ADMONISHMENT**. The main characters, a married couple, both work for the London police and they are as interesting and strangely compelling as any protagonists I've come across for a long time. Detective Sergeant Kathleen Doyle is an Irish red-head with a good brain, a smart mouth, and a touch of second sight. Her husband and superior officer,



Chief Inspector Michael Acton, is an Earl and has a brilliant mind, patrician charm and a tendency to manipulate everyone in his orbit to suit his own devices.

When Doyle is assigned to a murder case involving a dead policewoman in a dodgy neighborhood, she is also asked to work with a different partner than usual. Other anomalies crop up. The Medical Examiner has been replaced by an assistant. Progress on the case seems to be blocked at every turn. Is it happenstance or part of a vast conspiracy of silence? Who or what is behind the crime? Is the coverup official policy?

Come for the satisfying British procedural. Stay for the compelling marital dynamics.

### FEARLESS

By M. W. Craven

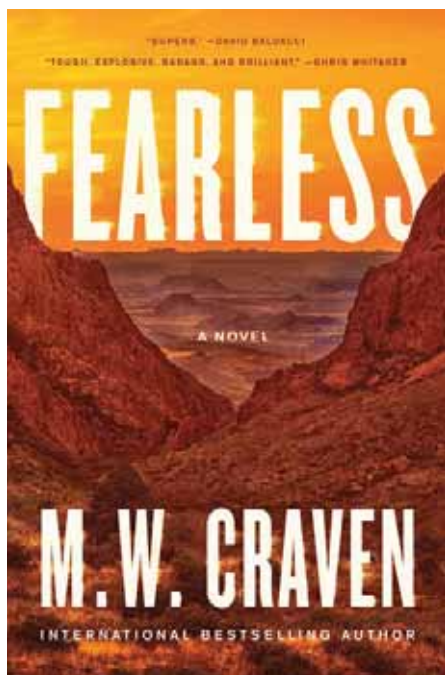
Flatiron Books; \$27.99, July

**Rating: B**

**First line:** Six was kind of an insult.

M.W. Craven's **FEARLESS** is a very good thriller about an ex-military loner who wanders around righting wrongs and helping people. About half way between Jack Reacher and The Gray Man.

In fact, you don't have a series as important as the Lee Child and Andrew



Child Reacher books without seeing a crop of wanna-be's spring up. How many adorable sassy girls have walked in Stephanie Plum's high heels? How many world-weary reformed alcoholics have plodded in Bosch's wake? But now, publishers are demanding a key differentiator – a gimmick that will set this iteration apart from the pack. Enter Ben Koenig, and as trumpeted by the book's title, he cannot feel fear.

Luckily, not too much is made of this character quirk. My favorite comes early: an officer arrests him and comments, "You don't scare easy, do you, sir?" Koenig responds: "You have no idea."

Koenig is a former US Marshal who was with a top secret unit. He had disappeared for several years after a mission went badly wrong. Now, in a complicated set piece at the beginning, he has been flushed out by his old boss Mitchell Burrige. And, yes, this time it's personal. Mitch's daughter has been kidnapped. Ben is the only one Mitch trusts to find her.

Paired with a former teammate, Jen, a surly woman who dislikes him, Ben sets out to rescue the girl.

Nicely complicated and full of action, **FEARLESS** isn't a bad read while you wait for the next Jack Reacher or Gray Man.

### UNDER THE TUSCAN GUN

By Tess Rafferty

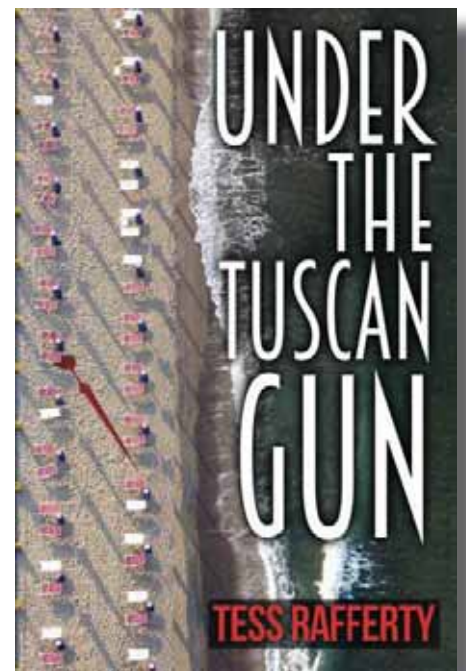
\$11.99, 2020

**Rating: A**

**First line:** "I've killed Elin and put her body in the trunk of my car."

Tess Rafferty's sexy and twisty **UNDER THE TUSCAN GUN** is the first book in the Kat Kelly series and it's a great read!

Part chick lit, part amateur detective, part travel mystery, **UNDER THE TUSCAN GUN** is set in Italy where down-on-her-luck TV writer Kat Kelly and her husband Mike, also between jobs, are vacationing. Kat's friend Sunny, who married an Italian and moved to Italy some years earlier, is staying at



her friend Elin's large, well-appointed villa in Tuscany. Elin had been a well-known model and had recently married and moved to Italy. Since Sunny was coming to visit, Elin generously also invited Kat and Mike to join them. Elin isn't there when Kat and Mike, known as The Husband, arrive. But half of Italy is. Between the staff and the relatives and friends and hangers-on, the villa is lively. When Elin is found, murdered, everyone is ordered to remain while the polizia investigate the crime. And they are all suspects, even the pair of tiny, ancient women dressed all in black.

Kat and Sunny start investigating on their own, and this takes the form of many outings to restaurants, to vineyards for wine tastings, and to the beach. All meals and wine pairings are dissected with loving care, as are the family secrets. There's even a recipe for a delicious feyatini, a coarse chicken liver paté, that's to die for.

**UNDER THE TUSCAN GUN** is smart and funny, with a great mystery plot, travel tips, wine lore, and marriage advice! Rafferty's writing has great style--easy breezy, and yet with heart. If you like chick lit mysteries, you'll love this. If you love Elle Cosimano, Catie Disabato or Harley Jane Kozak, you'll adore Tess Rafferty!

## From The Waterfront

Ted Hertel



### SMALL MERCIES

by Dennis Lehane

Harper Collins, \$30.00, April

Rating: A+

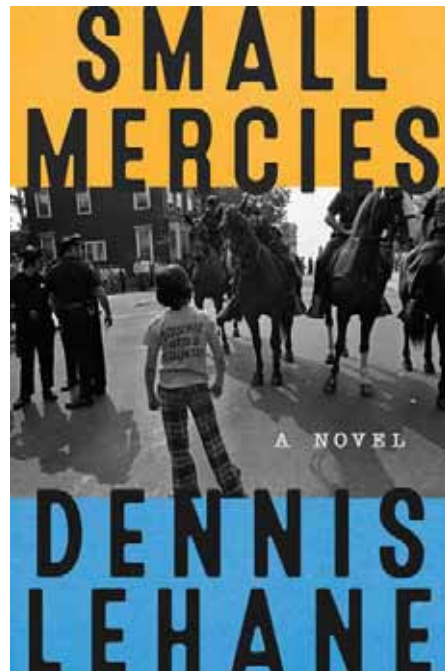
On a hot summer day in Boston, 1974, Mary Pat Fennessy says goodbye to her daughter Jules. When Jules hasn't returned home the next day, her mother sets out on an increasingly dangerous and violent journey that leads her from the housing projects of Southie and the Irish mob that rules the area to Fort Independence on Castle Island. The same night that Jules disappears, the body of a twenty-year-old black man is found in the city's subway system. How these two events connect leads only to more death and heartbreak. Set against the increasingly explosive desegregation of Boston's public schools, can Mary Pat find her daughter before the mob can stop her?

This is perhaps Dennis Lehane's most complex and fully realized novel since **THE GIVEN DAY**. He creates a small but violent world at a flashpoint in history. Fennessy is one tough protagonist, not merely because she is looking for her lost daughter, but also because she grew up in Southie which honors its old traditions. "You never take a step back. Not here. Not ever." Mary Pat simply refuses to stand down, knowing Jules' life depends on her. Lehane surrounds her with an equally well-developed cast, including mob boss Marty Butler, police detective Bobby Coyne, and others, each seeming to want to help her but each has their own motive in hindering her. The harsh, profane dialogue of '70s bitterness rings true.

The backdrop of Boston's school desegregation fight, from the courts to

the streets, is forcefully presented. The marches and rallies, including one with a spit upon Teddy Kennedy, are set forth in detail with everything from the sweat to the anger to the hate spewed from both sides. Drugs are pervasive. Vietnam peeks out from the background. Even though the war is over, its brutalizing legacy still remains.

This is a powerful novel, one of the best of the year. Its prejudice, hate, fear, anger, and love burst through the pages, making it impossible to forget. Don't miss it.



### GOOD BAD GIRL

by Alice Feeney

Flatiron Books, \$28.99, August

Rating: B+

A baby is snatched right out from under the nose of a woman who finds herself distracted for a few minutes

in a supermarket. Twenty years later, Edith, an eighty-year-old woman in a senior living facility, makes a break for it with Patience, a young aide. Left in her wake is the murdered administrator of the nursing home. Edith had been put in the home against her will by her daughter Clio. Meanwhile, Frankie is searching for the daughter who left her when Frankie refused to tell her who her father was. All of these women find themselves tied together by the death of the administrator and all of them are lying.

This is a classic unreliable narrator novel. Who to believe is the question . . . except that not just one of them is unreliable, they all are. This makes for a very interesting novel, so interesting that it may be necessary to make a list of just who said what and when and why. Relationships keep changing as additional facts come to light, but can even those facts be trusted? Saying too much more just would give away the reveals that come rapid fire as the story draws to its far from inevitable resolution.

"[People are] very good at hiding [their] true [selves] from the rest of the world." So true. This book is a bit like watching Kurosawa's *Rashomon*, where each character has a different view of the events that transpired, mixed with their own lies about what happened. Often those lies are mere misperceptions, the result of not having all the information needed for the truth. Other times, well, a lie may be just a lie for expediency's sake. Just as with Alice Feeney's other twisty books, you will think that you have it all figured out, but you probably don't.

"We are all stardust and stories," Edith says at one point. It's just that some stories are better than others. This is one of them.

### SOMEBODY'S DONE FOR

by David Goodis

Stark House, \$15.95, August

Rating: B+

Calvin Jander, out for a lovely day fishing, instead gets caught up in a storm. His boat capsizes and, after being ignored by two men in a boat

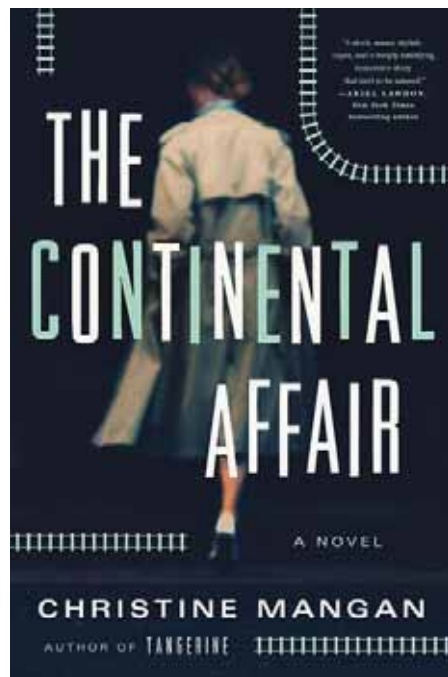
(though one does surreptitiously toss him a life preserver), he finally washes up on a beach. A young woman named Vera finds him, feeds him, and clothes him. But they are soon discovered by the violent bully Gathridge, the man in the boat who didn't throw him the life preserver. Jander now finds himself in more trouble than he thought possible. But he hasn't seen anything yet. Vera is a member of a family of criminals hiding from the cops in an abandoned property where every move that Jander makes brings him closer to death. His fishing trip has turned into a nightmare from which he has little chance of escape.

David Goodis (1917-1967) was a prolific writer for the pulps before moving on to Hollywood in 1942. His success came with his novel **DARK PASSAGE** (1946), made into the classic Bogart and Bacall film (1947). **SOMEBODY'S DONE FOR**, originally published in 1967, was his final and perhaps best novel.

Danger, desire, and disaster are stock in trade for Goodis and there is plenty of all of this here. The suspense mounts quickly as Jander must pit each of the three criminals against each other in order to save his own life. He realizes that as much as he has quickly come to care for Vera, he really is unsure if she is trustworthy, since one of the gang is her own psycho father. Can he escape? Can he dare take Vera with him? Would she even want to go? Maybe in the long run, not just *somebody* but rather *everybody* is done for in one way or another in this dark novel.

**THE CONTINENTAL AFFAIR**  
by Christine Mangan  
Flatiron Books, \$27.99, August  
**Rating: B**

It's the 1960s and two strangers on a train meet for the first time. Except they are neither strangers nor meeting for the first time. At first they just pretend to be. They are traveling together from Granada, Spain (by bus), to Paris and then on to Istanbul by way of Belgrade (by that train). They keep running *into* each other, although each



of them is running *from* something. In Louise's case it is money she has recently stolen. In Henri's case it is people who want him to recover money that he has let her steal in the first place. Those people would also like her dead. He is not very willing to oblige on either count. Each has awful secrets that they have covered up with lies, secrets that will eventually come spilling out, set against the glamour of Europe. This is a story of two people running, but are they running in the same direction or away from each other?

This is Christine Mangan's follow up novel to 2021's terrific **PALACE OF THE DROWNED**. While this latest novel is not up to the standard set by the earlier one, it doesn't miss the target by all that much. It is tremendously atmospheric, capturing the sights and sounds of each city the two pass through. From the vastness of Grenada's Alhambra fortress, where things first begin to go dizzily out of control, to the Tuileries gardens in the City of Light and through to the maze of the Grand Bazaar in Istanbul where the chase comes to its end, this novel moves along quickly. If you enjoy loving and stylish descriptions of travel and European cities, this book serves as a very nice guide to places you may not have visited and brings them alive.

However, Henri's failure to confront Louise in Grenada and recover the money she has taken seems inexplicable. Of course, had he done so, this would have been nothing more than a short story. But he just wants to leave his troubles behind him, knowing full well however that he must go back eventually anyway. This struck me as hollow reasoning. Instead, he lets things play out, opening both of them up to even more danger. That suspension of disbelief aside, Mangan has done a nice job ratcheting up the suspense during the long train ride as each of them slowly exposes their secrets and lies to the other.

### **DROWNING**

by T. J. Newman

Avid Reader Press, \$28.00, May

**Rating: B+**

"Will Kent opened his eyes just in time to see the engine explode." Flight 1421, from Honolulu to San Francisco, crashes into the Pacific a mere six minutes into its flight and soon sinks from sight into the depths of the ocean with twelve passengers and crew still onboard. Others have managed to "escape" the plane, only to be caught up in the burning jet fuel that comes to surround the plane. *Will* a rescue come in time? *Can* a rescue even be effected? *Who* would be brave enough to undertake it? *How* could it even be accomplished anyway, hundreds of feet beneath the surface?

This is an incredibly suspenseful novel, T. J. Newman's follow-up to her very well-received **FALLING**, also set on a plane. Newman was a flight attendant and she certainly knows what she is writing about. There are some technical aspects that might slow the story for a few minutes but it then immediately picks right back up. Her characters, while well-drawn in and of themselves, are pretty much a clichéd group: the brilliant parent with his young child, the older couple still in love, the obnoxious buffoon that everyone comes to hate, the brave and daring crew. But don't let that dissuade you from this tale of the passengers struggle to survive which consumes almost the entire novel. There is

also a nearly unbelievable head-slapping coincidence involved, though it does not very much get in the way of the story once you accept it.

This visual story is very clearly destined for film, reminding me of **THE POSEIDON ADVENTURE**. As soon as one problem appears to be solved, another rears its ugly head, continually ratcheting up the suspense right until the final pages. It can easily be read in one long sitting, say on a flight from Honolulu to . . . wait, never mind. Read it at home instead!

### PROUD SORROWS

by James R. Benn

Soho Crime, \$27.95, September

Rating: B+

Norfolk, England. November 1944. Billy Boyle only thinks he's getting a little R&R leave from his World War II service. He finds himself in England, staying at the home of his lover, Diana Seaton, while he awaits her arrival. Seaton Manor is a nice quiet place to relax while believing that the war is far away. But it all comes home to him when a German bomber washes up off the English coast – with the corpse of a murdered British officer in the pilot seat. The plane had crashed two years earlier. Nearby Marston Hall is currently being used for the interrogation of German P.O.W.s, making the crash a matter of national security. Diana returns, only to find what she and Billy had hoped to be a pleasant idyll away from war has turned into Billy having to investigate not only the crash but also the murder of a local villager right under Billy's nose.

As with all of his earlier Billy Boyle novels, author James R. Benn has seamlessly mixed historical fact with fiction in this eighteenth entry in the series. He includes glimpses of Captain Ian Carmichael (perhaps more familiar to viewers of *Masterpiece Theater* as wealthy sleuth Lord Peter Wimsey), as well as the two young princesses, Elizabeth and Margaret, working in the gardens at Sandringham House, which kingly residence plays a major role in this novel. Benn adds to the mixture such real-life orga-

nizations as the Ritchie Boys (trained at Fort Ritchie, Maryland, for interrogation and intelligence operations) and the extreme and anti-Semitic British Union of Fascists.

Into this factual mix Benn adds the usual cast of familiar faces. In addition to Boyle and Diana, Baron Piotr Kazimierz and First Sergeant "Big Mike" Miecznikowski play large roles, continuing to move their stories along as the end of the War approaches. But is there trouble in paradise for Billy and Diana when the ex-Boston cop finds himself making more time for investigating than romancing?

Boyle must work to solve three mysteries before he can get back to spending time with Diana: what was the downed German bomber doing on the British coast? Why (and how) was there a murdered British officer sitting in its cockpit? What did the shell-shocked local veteran know that got him knifed? Does the answer to these questions lie in love or greed? Or something even darker and more sinister? Boyle will not let go until he finds the solution in this clever and suspenseful addition to Benn's outstanding series.

### THE LAST DANCE

by Mark Billingham

Atlantic Monthly Press, \$28.00, July

Rating: A-

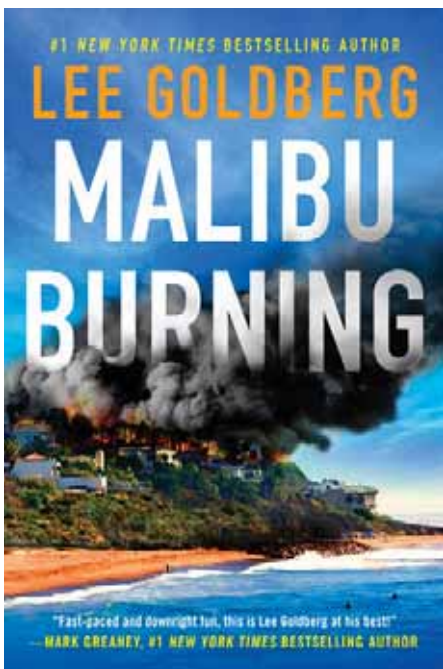
DS Declan Miller and his new partner DS Sara Xiu are assigned to the murder of Adrian Cutler, son of a well-known criminal in the drug and sex trade. Cutler's body is discovered in a seedy hotel room, while a second murdered man is found in the adjacent room. "Not going to look good on Tripadvisor," Miller says. Cutler was shot in the head in the same fashion as Miller's wife Alex, a DI investigating the Cutler crime organization, had been. Was this a botched job and the wrong man killed? If so, which was the wrong man? Is there a connection between Cutler's death and the death of Miller's wife?

This is Mark Billingham's first novel in his new series and it introduces a most interesting set of characters.



Miller, still buried in grief, carries on "conversations" with his now dead wife. He owns a pair of rats named Ginger and Fred who "could probably do a with a PR push. But, to be fair, that whole plague thing was a long time ago." The book, as can be seen from the several examples here, has a strong vein of humor running through it. Miller's partner Xiu is a heavy metal enthusiast who often doesn't grasp his jokes. There's also his homeless friend Finn and the people with whom Miller and his wife ballroom danced.

All while Miller and Xiu are investigating the double murder, another team is looking into Alex's slaying. Miller has no compunction against interfering in that investigation, much to his disliked boss's objections. This and his other affectations keep him human after the tragedy of Alex's murder. The intriguing plot is well-handled and satisfactorily resolved. But the book has an open ending regarding Alex's death, one which will lead to one or more subsequent novels. This is an excellent police procedural and a writer as talented as Billingham is bound to keep us entertained with the search for Alex's killer. The author gets a lot of credit for changing gears from his always entertaining Tom Thorne series, but he has successfully done so.



### MALIBU BURNING

by Lee Goldberg

Thomas & Mercer, \$28.99, September

**Rating: B**

U.S. Marshal Andrew Walker is given an ultimatum by his pregnant wife, who wants him to have a safer job: find a new job or find another place to live on his own. He gets the new job: as a deputy in the arson and explosives unit of the L. A. County Sheriff's Department. Doesn't sound all that much safer. Nevertheless, as some of the most massive firestorms in history are scorching the Malibu hills, Walker and Walter Sharpe, his more seasoned partner, suspect that someone has set the blazes intentionally. They must race against time and flames before the death toll rises, little knowing that the arsonist is an old enemy of Walker from his days as a marshal.

Firefighters, of course, are arsonists' best friends. The firefighters pour thousands of gallons of water all over the fire crime scene, then tromp around it further destroying evidence. Lee Goldberg fills the book with insights into the mind of an arsonist and those who seek to stop him. The relatively short tale by today's standards (under 300 pages) moves along at a rapid pace, at times not necessarily totally believable but always entertaining. The descriptions of the

inferno and its effects are realistically chilling, though it may be difficult to read for some who lived through the actuality of the fires mere months ago.

The arsonist, Danny Cole, is also well-developed. The reader is given insight into his plans and state of mind, as well as that of his girlfriend, Karen Tennant. Tennant was also Cole's attorney but more than willing to become a con artist. "I've already got the law degree to prove it," she says, justifying the change in career. Cole is portrayed at least in part as a modern day Simon Templar, a refreshing change from most criminals (fictional or otherwise) today. But overall the risks the fire poses to thousands of people, and many thousands of acres of trees and wildlife, well outweigh any other motive Cole might have.

This apparently is the first in a series for the arson investigators. It's an entertaining and humorous caper book, one that goes down quickly but will make you look for the fire next time. I give it four alarms out of five.

**George's Take:** This is a combination of a novel of detection, a caper novel and a thriller, so one is getting a lot for the price of the book. This was an enjoyable and fast read for me. **Rating: B+**

### CODE OF THE HILLS

by Chris Offutt

Grove Press, \$27.00, June

Mick Hardin #3

**Rating: B**

Mick Hardin is returning to civilian life in the hills of Kentucky after spending twenty years in the U.S. Army CID. But so much for retirement. He has barely arrived in Rocksalt when he reluctantly finds himself in the middle of a murder investigation being handled by his sister Linda, the sheriff. When she is shot, Mick takes a job as a deputy to the acting sheriff. More death follows, leading the new deputy to seek answers in Detroit, where he has to make a perhaps life-altering deal with the devil. Mick finds that he must put off his planned trip to France in an effort to bring justice for Rocksalt's victims.

This is the third novel in Chris Offutt's "southern noir" saga of Mick Har-

din. While I didn't find it as compelling as the prior two novels, **THE KILLING HILLS** and **SWIFTY'S BOYS**, it was still a thought-provoking look at the idea of justice in those hills. Mick learns that justice sometimes should be tempered with mercy. After all, should someone be arrested for the very same things that Mick himself would do in their situation? Of course, not everyone would agree with that philosophy. The story combines action and humor in just the right proportions. It seems that Mick can handle his investigations much better than he has handled his personal life with its failed and tentative relationships. The dialogue of the South and the attitudes on the Detroit streets all ring true in this tightly written novel. The contrast between the two worlds Mick must inhabit is well-drawn. Unfortunately Linda disappears too early on in the book. More of her would have been appreciated. But this relatively short novel will still entertain the reader through to the end.

### ODYSSEY'S END

by Matt Coyle

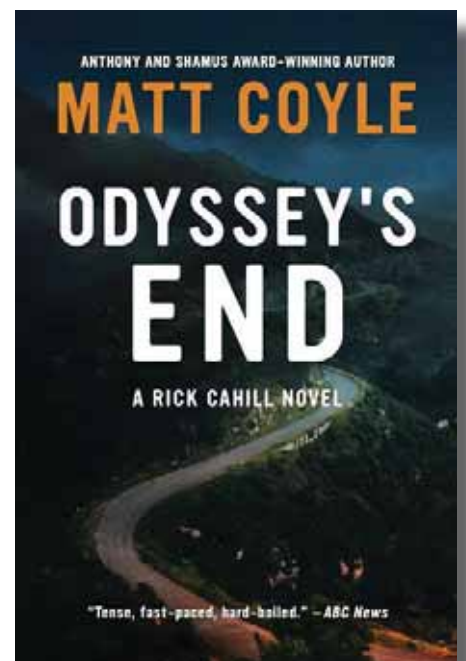
Oceanview Publishing, \$27.95, N

ovember

Rick Cahill #10

**Rating: B+**

Peter Stone, an old enemy of Rick



Cahill, trusts the private investigator sufficiently to hire him to find his daughter Angela. She doesn't know that Stone is her father but he needs to ask her for a kidney to save his life. Rick only takes the case because it pays enough to secure his daughter's future. The F.B.I., however, comes after Cahill, thinking that Stone wants him to find a man named Raskin. Stone claims not to know Raskin, but that doesn't stop the F.B.I. from hounding Cahill. If that isn't enough trouble, the Russian mobster whose daughter Cahill killed years earlier is out of prison and coming after Cahill, as well. Not to mention the degenerative brain disease CTE that is slowly killing Rick, the violent effects of which have resulted in his wife leaving him and taking their daughter with her.

This is the tenth novel in Matt Coyle's consistently entertaining and award-winning series. From the title alone, it sounds like it might even be the final one. While this case looks straightforward, it turns out to be anything but that. Cahill gets dragged into a very modern day cryptocurrency scheme that has gone wildly out of control, while bodies continue to pile up around him, so much so that he eventually has to continue his investigation while hiding out from just about everybody. Cahill has grown and developed over the series. He is now a man fighting not only for his life, but also for the love of his wife and daughter.

Cahill has known for a long time that one often has to do what is right even when the law says it's wrong. Pursuing the truth no matter the cost to his family, to himself, whatever the damage was. But now things have changed. He has decided that this would be it, his final quest. His last case. His odyssey's end. If indeed it turns out that way, he will be missed. But I'll look forward to wherever Matt Coyle goes from here.

**George's Take.** I've read all ten of the Rick Cahill series and I've been impressed with and enjoyed every one of them, despite the fact that Matt Coyle mistreats his protagonist sometin' terrible. Cahill can't catch a break no matter how hard he tries. It does seem like this is the end of the road for Cahill, but

Matt Coyle has surprised me before. Perhaps he will enter his protagonist in an experimental medical program like Michjael Connelly did recently with Harry Bosch. It will be interesting to see what Matt Coyle comes up with next. Whatever it is, I'll read it with high anticipation. Rating: A-

## THE INNS (AND OUTS) OF COURT

### LOVE BETRAYAL MURDER

by Adam Mitzner

Blackstone Publishing, \$26.99, May

Rating: B

New York City attorney, the unhappily married Vanessa Lyons, begins an affair with Matthew Brooks, another attorney at their law firm. When he makes partner, and Vanessa is assigned to work with him on one of the firm's biggest cases, they continue the relationship in spite of a clear firm policy against partners being involved with associates. They keep the affair secret but are eventually found out. When they deny the affair, Vanessa is fired while Matt continues on without repercussions. That is, until Vanessa sues the firm for sexual harassment and wrongful termination. But when a brutal

murder follows the resolution of that litigation, everything is turned upside down.

The title here says it all: Love. Betrayal. Murder. On the one hand falling in love can give a person's life purpose in a way that nothing before had. On the other hand (as lawyers are famous for saying) falling in love is a sure path to ruin. Maybe the truth falls somewhere in between.

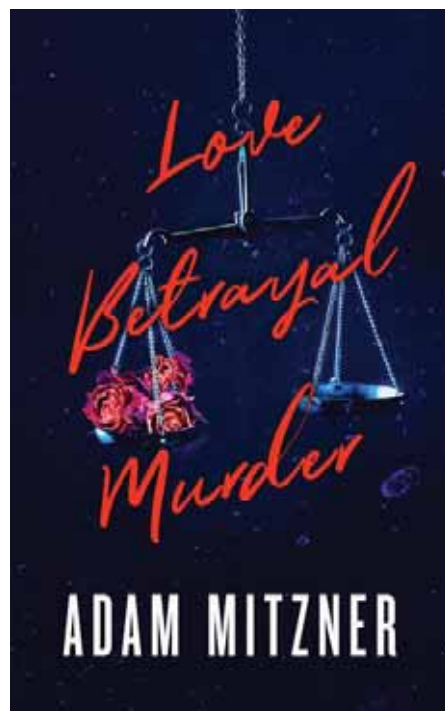
This is a cleverly plotted legal thriller that gives the reader two trials (albeit with some repetition) for the price of one. Fairly authentic in its legal procedure, if not necessarily in originality (boy meets married girl, boy and girl fall in love, girl sues boy after break up, somebody dies), the story moves along swiftly to its twisty (though not necessarily totally believable) ending.

Author and attorney Adam Mitzner does not bog the story down in legal technicalities, but does give the reader enough information to make the story believable right up until those last few pages. He knows that he needs to keep the story moving and he does just that, since most readers won't care about the accuracy of a lawyer's courtroom antics. Mitzner knows his legal stuff and how to get it out on the page without overwhelming or boring the reader with it.

Further, the tale takes place right as the #MeToo movement is just beginning, adding credibility to the sexual harassment litigation. The shock of the murder victim, coming when it did, was a surprise that then propelled the second half of the novel. Generally, I am not a fan of legal thrillers, but this one was satisfying from the legal perspective, even if it was wanting in some other areas. Still, it was fun, suspenseful, and made for fast reading.

## THE OLD-TIMER IN THE CORNER

My wife and I recently went to the movies to see **A HAUNTING IN VENICE**, the latest in Kenneth Branagh's Hercule Poirot film adaptations. I thought it would be fun to look up the source material and compare the two.





So I went to my bookshelf and pulled off:

### HALLOWE'EN PARTY by Agatha Christie (1969)

In a town outside of London, thirteen-year-old Joyce is helping Ariadne Oliver and others set up for an evening's Halloween festivities for teenage girls. In the course of arranging things, she mentions that she had once witnessed a murder. No one pays much attention to her, since she is known to be a boastful braggart. But one person apparently believed her, since following the party



Joyce is found face down in the “bobbing for apples” barrel, quite dead. Mystery writer Oliver runs off to fetch her friend Hercule Poirot because she suspects that the girl may have been murdered.

Poirot shows up and begins the

investigation into the suspicious death. But did the child really see a murder and, if so, does he have to find someone who killed twice? He talks and talks and talks to a lot of people. While he's busy talking, the killer strikes again – and may not yet be finished. Of course he solves the case, though with a solution that struck me as a bit off (although, admittedly I am no Hercule Poirot, as I often cannot even find what I'm looking for in the refrigerator until my wife points out that it's right there in front of my face!).

This is one of Poirot's last recorded cases and, frankly, I found it to be one of the weaker books in the long-running (and generally excellent) series. However, there was some mild humor to slightly lighten the story of children being murdered. Christie was not afraid to kill off the occasional kid, though by the late '60s this wasn't all that unusual in mysteries.

I'm not here to review the movie, but as you may have noted, the book is clearly set in England, and never once mentions Venice. There's no séance. There are only a few characters and events in the book that are also in the movie. Is the killer in both even the same? Come on, I'm not going to tell you that. What I will say is that I enjoyed both versions, though if you've never read a Christie mystery (and I find that hard to believe), you would want to start with a different novel.

Anthony Lane, the critic for the *New Yorker*, made the following observation about the film: “I'm already looking forward to their next reworking of Christie: ‘The Body in the Library,’ perhaps relocated to the freezer aisle of Walmart.” That pretty much sums up my thoughts on this adaptation, as well.

### THE SHORT CIRCUIT

#### GHOSTS FROM THE LIBRARY

Edited by Tony Medawar  
Collins Crime Club, an imprint of HarperCollins, \$16.99, 2022

**Rating: B+**

This book just crossed The Old-Timer's desk and it certainly deserves mentioning. It's a hardcover collection



of thirteen of the very best Golden Age writers' lesser known short stories, all with a supernatural theme so appropriate to the Halloween season. This is Collins Crime Club's sixth volume of mostly previously uncollected and/or “lost” stories. The difference is that, whereas previous anthologies in this series concentrated on mystery and suspense tales, this volume is subtitled *Lost Tales of Terror and the Supernatural*. As I said, perfect for reading on a fall or winter's night around the time of All Hallows Eve.

From 1928 there is Daphne du Maurier's *Terror* about things in the night. Anthony Berkeley's previously unpublished *The Green Dress* asks the question: can a dress also be a ghost? More spooky doings in Arthur Conan Doyle's unpublished in his lifetime *The Haunted Grange of Goresthorpe*. Q. Patrick gives us the final case of Lieutenant Timothy Trant in the horror of 1953's *The Red Balloon*. Perhaps most intriguing of all is a 1954 radio play by Agatha Christie entitled *Personal Call*, where a telephone call from a ghost might just be warning of death past and future. That one also features Inspector Narracott from Christie's **THE SITTAFORD MYSTERY** (1931).

But there are other tales here, as well, including from Josephine Tey, Christina Brand, Margery Allingham, John Dickson Carr, and others. Each story is followed by a lengthy and informative biography of the author. Further, \$16.99 for a hardbound book of almost 300 pages is unheard of these days.

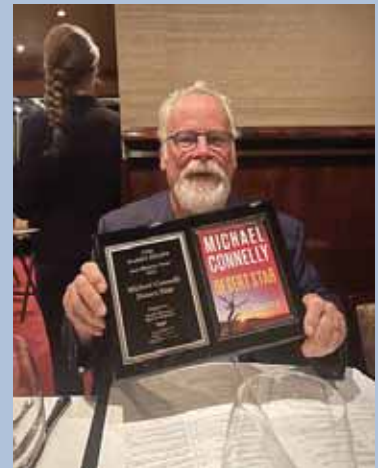
Ghosts! Enter stage right!

# The 2023 Barry Award Winners

## Best Mystery or Crime Novel

**DESERT STAR, Michael Connelly – Winner**

THE ACCOMPLICE, Steve Cavanagh  
THE DARK FLOOD, Deon Meyer  
SHIFTY’S BOYS, Chris Offutt  
SECRET IDENTITY, Alex Segura  
CITY ON FIRE, Don Winslow



## Best Debut Mystery or Crime Novel

**THE MAID, Nita Prose – Winner**

BEFORE YOU KNEW MY NAME, Jacqueline Bublitz  
DON’T KNOW TOUGH, Eli Cranor  
SHUTTER, Ramona Emerson  
BLOOD SUGAR, Sascha Rothchild  
DIRT CREEK, Hayley Scrivenor



## Best Thriller

**KILLERS OF A CERTAIN AGE,  
Deanna Raybourn – Winner**

IN THE BLOOD, Jack Carr  
WINTER WORK, Dan Fesperman  
SIERRA SIX, Mark Greaney  
BAD ACTORS, Mick Herron  
GOERING’S GOLD, Richard O’Rawe



# Novels of Sensation and Other Stuff

*Hank Wagner*



Stephen King's favorite character, Holly Gibney (previously featured in his Bill Hodges/Mr. Mercedes trilogy, the uncannily creepy novel **THE OUTSIDER**, and in the novella "If It Bleeds") returns in the eponymous **HOLLY** (Scribner, September 2023, 464 pages, \$30.00), investigating, at the behest of a distraught mother, the disappearance of a young woman named Bonnie Dahl. While the police choose to believe she is a runaway, her distraught mother feels that she might be the victim of foul play. As Holly digs into the case, she uncovers a suburban nightmare perpetrated by the most unlikely killers you have ever encountered.

The book, essentially a case study of one of King's favorite characters, is creepy and enthralling because of its utter realism; it CAN happen here, and it probably happens more than we'd be comfortable knowing. To add to the creepiness, it is set during the COVID

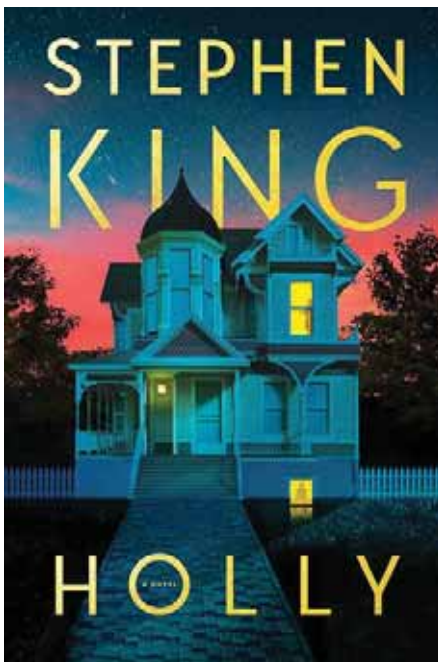
pandemic. King further establishes Holly as a modern Sherlock Holmes, replete with odd habits and quirks, but also with uncanny insight and focus. She even has a trio of Watson types, for sanity checks and backup. King's writing remains in the top tier; its comforting to this Constant Reader that he continues to perform at such a high level at a time when other writers would be slowing down or considering putting down their pens. **Rating: A**

Next up is **LOW DOWN ROAD** (Hard Case Crime, July 2023, 288 pages, \$15.95) Scott Von Doviak's terrific follow up to 2019's well received **CHARLESGATE CONFIDENTIAL**. No less a personage than the aforementioned Mr. King effusively describes the new book as "A great f\*\*king story." Seriously see for yourself, that very blurb is featured prominently on the front cover, above the stellar cover art, which evokes any number of seventies tv shows, or ensemble movies featuring a bunch of good old boys trying them damndest to evade cigar chompin,' constantly cussing Smokies sporting Stetsons. Set in 1974, it tells the story of Chuck and Dean Melville, two cousins who, after an awesomely bad streak of luck, try to turn things around by delivering a massive amount of marijuana to a buyer who thinks he can move the product to consumers attending Evel Knievel's attempt to jump the Snake River Canyon. They thus embark on a perilous journey from Texas to Idaho, pursued by both the law and the dealer from whom they "borrowed" the marijuana; en route, they have side adventures worthy of Odysseus. Throughout, Von Doviak holds readers spellbound, expertly evoking the era, milking each

scene for every last ounce of humor, action, adventure, and suspense. Folks who experienced that era will no doubt appreciate the numerous cultural references which the author sprinkles throughout this thoroughly compelling crime saga. **Rating: A**

Hard Case hits another one out of the park with its publication of **TOO MANY BULLETS** (October 2023, 304 pages, \$26.99), Max Allan Collins' twentieth installment in his consistently wonderful Nate Heller series. Here, Heller relates his experiences looking behind the curtains at the 1968 assassination of his good friend Bobby Kennedy; as is the case with most of the Heller books, there is a story behind and within the story, featuring a wide variety of ne'er do wells and shady characters. It's also an excellent callback to Collins' first Nate Heller thriller, 1983's **TRUE DETECTIVE**. **Rating: A**

F. Paul Wilson delivers a satisfying conclusion to the medical/science fiction thriller (a reimagining of his 1976 debut novel **HEALER**) that began in 2021's **DOUBLE THREAT** (Forge, June 2021, 384 pages, \$26.99) with **DOUBLE DOSE** (Gordian Knot Books, September 2023, 382 pages, \$16.99). This winning pair of books tells the story of con artist Stanka Daley (she goes by her last name), who ekes out a living perpetrating "victimless" scams, until the day she accidentally acquires a strange partner, a suddenly sentient alien symbiote who bonds with her, in the bargain granting her the power to heal certain maladies. Her desire to change her ways, and to help her fellow humans, leads her to embark on a very dangerous path, fraught with peril, but also personal



reward and growth. As with most of Wilson's recent work, these books tie to his Adversary Cycle and his so-called Secret History of the World, which also encompasses his popular Repairman Jack series. They also brought back memories of the late Robert Heinlein's memorable **I WILL FEAR NO EVIL**.

**Rating(s): B+**

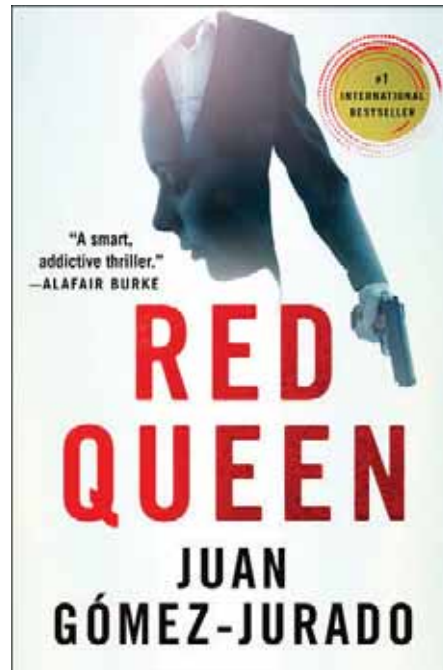
**ALL THE SINNERS BLEED**, by S. A. Cosby (Flatiron Books, June 2023, 352 pages, \$27.99) is his fourth novel, and my first as a reader. Being told by several people that **it is not even his best (plenty of advocates for two of his previous books, RAZORBLADE TEARS, and BLACKTOP WASTELAND)** was surprising, since I found this book so enthralling. Within, Cosby updates police procedurals and serial killer novels, putting his own stamp on those winded sub genres with a great cast and setting, seasoned by current (long lived actually, but recently flaring) social issues. I could be mistaken, but I felt a strong Joe R. Lansdale/Donald Ray Pollock vibe permeating this narrative. **Rating: A**

Some books start with a bang; the action in Paul Doiron's **DEAD MAN'S WAKE** (Minotaur, June 2023, 320 pages, \$29.00) starts with a "percussive thump" of a motorboat striking something on a darkened lake. His senses already on high alert due to the presence of a careless jet skier in the area, Maine Game Warden (of the Wildlife Crimes Division) Mike Bowditch investigates, and finds a severed arm floating near the presumed accident sight. This gruesome discovery leads to more gruesome discoveries, and Bowditch finds himself involved in a homicide investigation. Besides murder, there's scandal in the air, and no end of suspects.

This is my first time reading Barry and Strand Award winner Doiron's work, but it won't be my last. Doiron delivers a gripping police procedural, set in a unique milieu, peopled with interesting characters, and titillating subplots. I thoroughly enjoyed watching Bowditch go about his business, and my

visit to the lake, the inspiration for the play and later the movie, *On Golden Pond*; the drama in Doiron's novel is vastly different than those other vehicles, but just as entertaining, in the end.

**Rating: B+**



**RED QUEEN**, by Juan Gomez-Jurado, (Minotaur, March 2023, 384 pages, \$27.99) is an origin story for a dynamic duo comprised of lawman Jon Guitierrez, and Antonia Scott, the "Red Queen" of the title. A rash of kidnappings brings the disgraced police officer and the brilliant but reclusive Scott together, with Jon doing his level best to inspire and influence Antonia to lend the full range of her extraordinary abilities to solve the crimes before even more mayhem occurs.

I enjoyed this fast, slick, well-constructed book, a bestseller imported from Spain, the first of three novels planned. It does not rise to the level the publishers would like you to believe (the publicity materials breathlessly mention books like **DAY OF THE JACKAL** and **EYE OF THE NEEDLE**, and iconic characters like Lisbeth Salander, and Sherlock Holmes and John Watson), but it does sport an interesting plot and an above average antagonist; while not particularly demanding, it does grab, hold, and earn your attention. **Rating: B+**

Last, and unfortunately least, is **CALL ME HUNTER**, by Jim Shockley (Atria, October 2023, 416 pages, \$27.99) a book I desperately tried to like. I was intrigued by its central conceit, which posited the existence of a shadow organization that obtains long lost works of art and sells them to collectors who wish to remain anonymous. The organization is staffed by individuals with a unique talent, to recognize the innate beauty and genuineness of these items; enabled by the organization, known as One World, these individuals scour the earth for these treasures, obtaining them through **any** means.

The story of One World is told indirectly by relating the experiences of Nyala, a young woman who finds out about her past via the missives of a secret observer/protector, who introduces himself into her life by sending her on a quest to discover his history. The protector, an agent of One World, slowly reveals himself to her, thus also revealing the inner working of One World, and, oddly, tidbits from her own personal history. As she diligently follows his clues, Nyala learns about herself, and why One World has suddenly taken an interest in her.

Reading this novel was an odd experience, as my interest in its core ideas kept me reading, even as I genuinely wrestled with the notion of putting it down after I passed my traditional the fifty-page "just not doing it for me" landmark. And, despite those profound misgivings, I did indeed finish. In the final analysis, this book felt like an attempt to mimic recent novels from Dean R. Koontz; the author seems to have absorbed only the worst lessons that those books have to teach, while not benefitting from Koontz's innate storytelling skills, mimicking his excesses and misfires while ignoring his strengths. It was competent enough, especially for a first novel, but, overall, the execution was lacking, and the "reveal" unsurprising and uninspiring. **Rating: C**

# The Cozy - Traditional Mystery Cafe'

## Maggie Mason Reviews



### AGATHA WHISKEY

by Colleen Mullaney with photography  
by Jack Deutsch.

A Mystery themed cocktail recipe book.

**Rating: B+**

I enjoyed this book a lot. I'm not a big drinker, and only enjoy the taste of certain adult beverages, but I liked the way the book tied into the works of one of the world's most famous mystery writers. There is a section on techniques, and a very handy guide to making simple and flavored syrups. Not sure I'll ever do it, but I'm certainly prepared.

Each of the recipes is tied into a story or book by Dame Agatha. Since I detest Gin, Whiskeys of all sorts, Kahlua and anything coffee related or anything bitter, not all recipes were to my taste, but unless the reader is a strict tea totaller, I'm guessing there is something for every taste.

My favorites were: Passion Fruit Martini (Vodka) from *A Murder is Announced*, Poirot's White Christmas from *Hercule Poirot's Christmas*, Black Magic from *The Pale Horse*, & The Lobby from *At Bertram's Hotel*.

### HONEY DROP DEAD

by Laura Childs

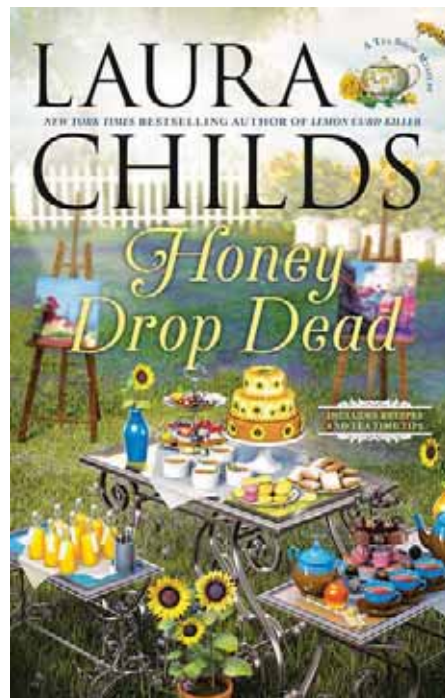
Berkley Prime Crime, \$28.00

Tea Shop #26

**Rating: A**

Theodosia Browning, owner of the Indigo Tea Shop in Charleston SC. has the honor of doing a special tea at a new park, featuring local foliage and a beekeeping project. Themed teas are always tasty and elegant, and this would seem to be the same, except for a rogue "beekeeper" who attacks some guests with toxic smoke.

Theo charges after the miscreant, and scared him away, but not before the beautiful event is ruined. Also ruined is the new art gallery owner's hopes and dreams. Holly Burns the gallery owner has had her dream of a successful gallery opening shattered due to this disaster.



Theo is asked to help discover who ruined the affair, and also killed a local politician. With her usual common sense and knack for finding out the truth, Theo begins an investigation. Finding skeletons in the victims closet, and a boatload of enemies, a second murder occurs, and the suspects reveal a level of intrigue and misbehavior that doesn't fit the lovely city of Charleston.

Nevertheless, Theo pursues justice, and that involves a thrilling and dangerous swamp chase. But justice is served, along with yummy tea and delightful baked goods.

I really enjoy this series, though I'll never make the goodies found in the recipe sections of the books. I do thank the author for her recommendations of Charleston. I have gone to Poogan's Porch restaurant every time I've visited Charleston and never been disappointed. The only disappointment is the lack of the Indigo Tea Shop. Sadly it only exists in these books

### PROUD SORROWS

by James R. Benn

Soho Crime, \$27.95

Billy Boyle #18.

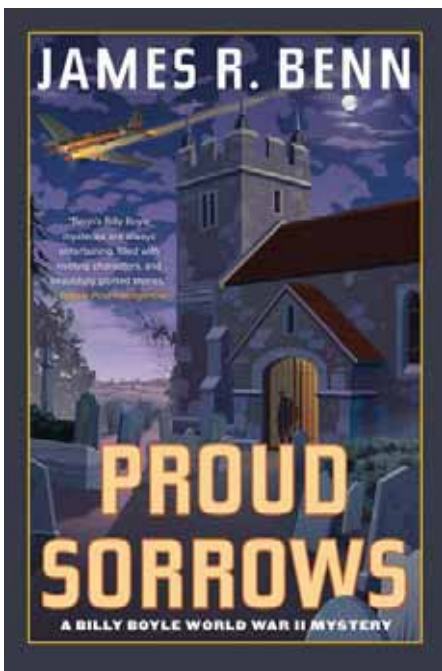
**Rating: A**

It's November, 1944 in England and Billy Boyle is able to relax while on leave. He's at the ancestral home of his love Diana.

Her family has welcomed him to Seaton Manor for much needed R & R. Billy and Diana are able to spend some time together, which made me very happy for the couple.

Sadly, the war again intrudes as a German Bomber that had crashed in the nearby sea resurfaced. The plane had the body of a British officer in the pilot seat, in uniform. This brings up a lot of concerns, especially as a village nearby is the home of a military intelligence operation with POWs housed there. This is a top secret facility due to the mission involving the German POWs being kept there.

Billy is now investigating the crash, and what had appeared to be a failed attack on Britain may be something much more serious. Billy's friend Kaz, a Polish



noble and Sgt. "Big Mike" are also on the scene to help Billy determine the nature of the plane crash and the mystery of the pilot's identity.

When a local man is murdered, the situation gets even more confusing. The man was a vagrant, living rough and wandered all over the area. He may have had information about the plane crash that could have been the reason for his murder. It's up to Billy and his team to figure it out, and they do as a sinister plot is revealed and has to be dealt with.

This is a favorite series of mine, and while the series is nearing the end of WWII, I'm confident that Billy will "re-up" after the war and continue to provide valued service to our Country. With the Korean war on the horizon, that might be where we may see Billy and company head in the future. I still wish for World Peace, knowing that Billy could be an asset to the army even in Peace time.

**MURDER IN WILLIAMSTOWN**

by Kerry Greenwood

\$16.99, trade paperback of a hardcover original)

Phryne Fisher #25

**Rating: A**

Phryne Fisher is delighted that her two adopted daughters are going to help

at the Blind Institute as a part of their schools Good Works program. Ruth is assigned to help in the kitchen, which fits her skill set. Jane is assigned to help in the office, a job which will prove very useful.

Phryne has a new love interest, Jeffrey, who invites her for dinner and to attend a fashionable party. Jeffrey is an academic, a professor of literature who has a real flair for revealing the wealth of great literary experiences.

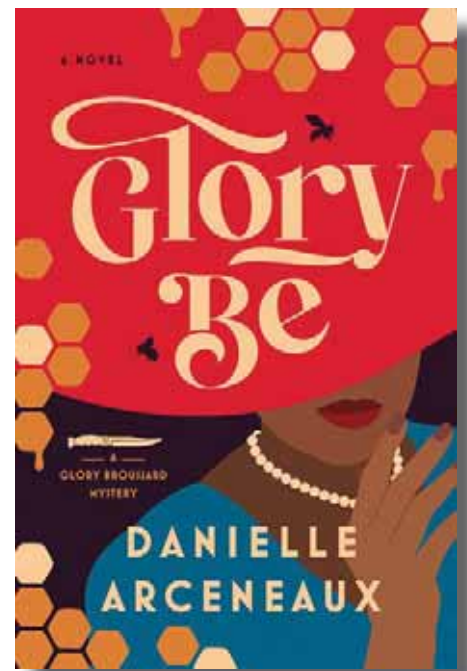
A problem has come up, with nasty notes delivered anonymously to Phryne's home. She solves that mystery with the help of Tinker, a young man who she has given shelter and a sense of belonging to her household.

While on her way to visit Jeffrey at his home, Phryne discovers a broken pipe, with the remains of opium in it. She promptly reports it to the local police, though they don't give it much attention. As Jeffrey's guest at a party given by one of his colleagues, more intrigue happens. How their host can afford a very lavish lifestyle on an educator's salary is a mystery, one Phryne is able to solve

Another mystery is the disappearance of funds from the Blind Institute. Jane has discovered discrepancies and with Phryne's help uncovered a devious embezzlement scheme, with a culprit that made my jaw drop. Phryne is also successful in discovering the opium smugglers, and putting an end to that threat to the city.

I enjoy reading these books, and loved the TV series and movie which brought the wonderful fashions to life. Highly recommended.

**Robin Agnew  
Reviews**



**GLORY BE**

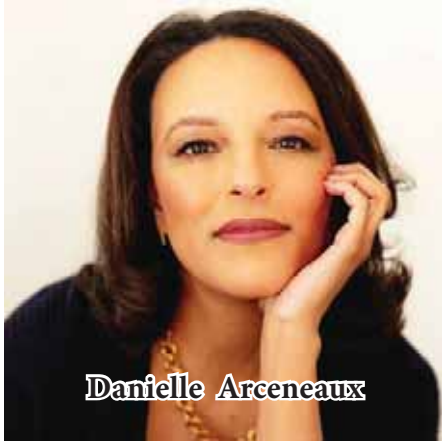
By Danielle Arceneaux

Pegasus Crime, \$26.95, October

**Grade: A+**

Great books are like a song. They have a melody and a rhythm all their own, and envelop you in their reality. Danielle Arceneaux's debut novel, **GLORY BE**, might be Patti LaBelle's *Lady Marmalade*. Glory, the heroine of the novel, is an older, heavier black woman living in LaFayette, Louisiana. She's a widow and fills her time with church, the local Red Hat Society, and heading to the coffee shop Sunday afternoons to run her business - she's a bookie. Her life is in chaos, and it's not made any better when her best friend, Amity, is found dead, an apparent suicide. Like many a mystery heroine before her, Glory is certain Amity's death is not a suicide, and begins trying to prove it.

Glory is a bit of an outcast in town for various reasons. Her house has been condemned by the city - she's a bit of a hoarder - and the Red Hat ladies want nothing to do with her after a poor catering decision on her part. Luckily, Glory's daughter Delphine has come home from New York, on the run herself from a failing marriage. She's on leave from her law firm and she throws herself, first of all, into clearing Glory's home of the accumulations of things.



**Danielle Arceneaux**

Together, the two of them start to look into Amity's murder themselves, despite the local police chief (and high school beau of Delphine's) telling them to knock it off or they'll get themselves in trouble.

They surely do get in trouble, running down various leads that involve fentanyl, dog fights, bees, and a slashed tire. Glory is finding some power within herself, though, to continue the investigation into the local chemical company that Amity (who was a nun) and the local priest had taken on. She manages to find a solid, smoking gun trail of clues.

This is all pretty typical mystery stuff, even cozy mystery stuff. What is not cozy are Arceneaux's observations and lived experience of racism in the deep south. It's matter of fact and heartbreaking at the same time. As Glory declares to Delphine early on, "... when it comes to black women getting hurt or disappearing, folks look the other way. No one is working overtime for us. Damn, they ain't doing their jobs at a basic level. And I'm tired of it. No one is coming to save us. If we want the truth, we're going to have to go out and find it."

Miraculously, the book is not a polemic. It's a lot of things. It's a great story – one of the more vivid first novels I've read – and the characters are flat out fantastic. Glory herself is a three-dimensional miracle. Arceneaux has a tight way with a phrase and a story – the book clocks in at just over 250 pages – and her observations hit you and stay with you. Some of Glory's revelations as

she experiences the events in the book are moving, memorable and, dare I say, spiritual. Please make her acquaintance. You'll be changing your reading life for the better.

### **MURDER AND MAMON**

By Mia P. Manansala  
Berkley, \$16.00, September  
Tita Rosie's Kitchen #4  
**Grade: B+**

This is one of the more charming, youthful, and vital series in the cozy universe, combining many traditional cozy elements – cooking, coffee, a dog, family dynamics – and giving all these elements a new kind of flair through the cultural background of the main character and the diversity of the cast. Series heroine Lila Macapagal now has her own place, the Brew Ha café, next to her Tita Rosie's restaurant. Her large Filipino family makes for a rich setting for the books, and in this installment, her extended gaggle of aunties – called the "Calendar Crew" are starting their own business venture: a laundromat. They are getting set to open during the town Spring Clean event.

Staying with one of the aunties is a cousin, Divina, about Lila's age. It's unclear quite what Divina is doing there but it seems to be tied to parental displeasure in some way, and they've

sent her to the US from her home in the Philippines. Divina, a recent art school graduate, is hoping to own her own gallery some day, though how to go about it seems a mystery to her at the moment. Luckily the calendar crew ladies put her to work, and soon she's running errands all over town for them.

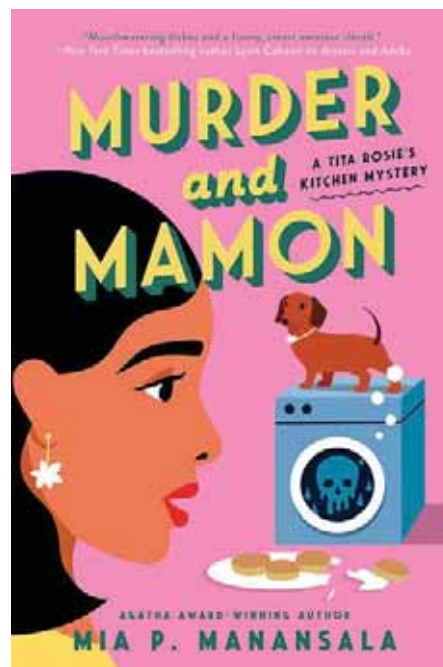
The laundromat is suffering some setbacks however: it's been vandalized, and the women are getting threatening letters every day. When one of the family is killed and another is put in the hospital, Lila and her friends get into the investigative action, with the help of recently retired from the police force Jonathan (now dating Tita Rosie) and Lila's boyfriend, Jae, the town dentist and Jonathan's brother.

Much of the mischief, if not the murder itself, seems to spring from the aunties "speaking their minds" – aka gossiping about everyone in town, spreading helpful "facts" that often turn out to damage or hurt the people involved. They've been instrumental in breaking up a marriage, causing a woman to lose her job, etc. The aunties insist that they're just telling the truth but – the truth hurts, and Manansala actually has a point to make about the dangers and damage of gossip. Inside a fun and cozy read, there's a message.

In a mystery, the writer can go one of two ways with the victim: the victim can be someone universally hated and disliked, pegged from the first page as deserving of their fate; or the victim can be someone sympathetic, even beloved. Manansala goes with door number two, and that choice adds some extra emotional heft to the story she's telling.

There's also a wonderful scene where Lila hires a non-binary server to work at her café. This is something that simply would not have been included in a mystery novel ten – or even five – years ago. Manansala continues to blow some fresh air through this genre. It's also obviously a genre she loves. This is not a revolutionary cozy, really, but it's one reflecting attitudes and mores of a new generation. This is truly one of the pleasures of the series.

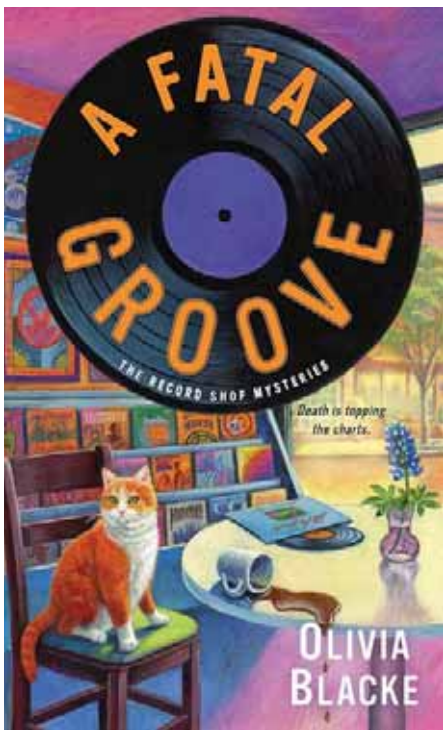
The other pleasures: wonderful characters - and the food! Everyone in



this book is constantly eating incredibly delicious sounding Filipino food. There are recipes at the end and if I'm not enough of a baker to bake a chiffon cake (the mamon of the title) I'm sure there's a reader who is. The mystery itself is cleverly assembled with enough clues and red herrings to make the resolution a satisfying one. It seems like this series is settling in for a nice long run.

**A FATAL GROOVE**

By Olivia Blacke  
 St. Martin's, \$8.99, July  
 Record Shop #2  
**Grade: B+**



This kick ass new series delivers on plot, character and setting. I was a fan of book one (**VINYL RESTING PLACE**), and this sophomore effort from Blacke is just as strong. Set in small town Texas, sisters Junie, Tansy and Maggie run a combo coffee-vinyl record shop, drawing collectors from nearby music capital, Austin. As this book opens, Sip & Spin is manning a booth at the local bluebonnet festival (google an image, Texas bluebonnets are stunning), selling coffee and DJing in between live music sets.

As the morning starts, Juni and her sister Tansy are visited at their booth by

the mayor, selling him a cup of coffee. He's unsatisfied with the plain brew they can supply off site, and when Juni runs back to the store for some missing supplies, she decides to drop by city hall with a cup of the mayor's favorite brew. Instead, she finds him dead in his office, holding a cup of Sip & Spin coffee, and all eyes turn to Tansy, who poured it for him.

This of course is enough to kick Juni into investigative mode – no way is her sister a killer, and so she starts her gentle investigation of the death, which of course turns out to be murder. The backdrop of the bluebonnet festival is a good one, and one of the events at the festival is a hole digging contest. Back in 1956, bank robbers made off with the town's payroll, burying it on their way out of town before being killed, and every year there's a hole digging contest to see if the loot can be found.

As Juni continues to investigate, it becomes clear the mayor was obsessed with the lost treasure, and he's joined by a few other competitive obsessives, including Juni's uncle Calvin. Calvin is prone to long civic history lectures at the drop of a hat, but they are there for a reason: the clever Blacke is able to advance her story through Calvin's words and then have him thrown exasperatedly off stage by one of his nieces. It gives the readers background.

The small town details of high school rivals, now grown, for Juni, old flames, and the loyal relationship between the sisters makes this book an even richer read. Juni has two old flames, both great choices: Teddy, her mailman and former high school buddy, and her ex Beau, the lone detective on the town police force, who broke her heart but is an annoyingly charming good guy with a great smile. It would be hard to choose between them, but luckily that's not my problem – it's Juni's. I'm looking forward to seeing it play out.

The plot in this book was well done and well thought out, revealing the killer at the right moment with good storytelling laying the path for the reveal. There are righteous clues and if some of them are slightly obvious, the reading experience was so pleasant I didn't care.

Juni is a great character and I can't wait to follow more of her adventures.

**Macavity Award  
 Winners 2023**

**Best Mystery Novel**

**A WORLD OF CURIOSITIES,**  
 Louise Penny – Winner

**BACK TO THE GARDEN,**  
 Laurie R. King  
**TWO NIGHTS IN LISBON,**  
 Chris Pavone

**A HEART FULL OF HEAD-  
 STONES,** Ian Rankin  
**KILLERS OF A CERTAIN AGE,**  
 Deanna Raybourn  
**SECRET IDENTITY,** Alex Segura

**Best First Mystery**

**THE MAID,** Nita Prose – Winner

**BEFORE YOU KNEW MY NAME,**  
 Jacqueline Bublitz  
**FIVE MOVES OF DOOM,**  
 A.J. Devlin  
**SHUTTER,** Ramona Emerson  
**DEVIL'S CHEW TOY,** Rob Osler  
**THE VERIFIERS,** Jane Pek

**Best Historical Mystery**

**LAVENDER HOUSE,**  
 Lev A.C. Rosen – Winner

**THE LINDBERGH NANNY,**  
 Mariah Fredericks  
**IN PLACE OF FEAR,**  
 Catriona McPherson  
**ANYWHERE YOU RUN,**  
 Wanda M. Morris  
**THE SECRET IN THE WALL,**  
 Ann Parker  
**ONE-SHOT HARRY,** Gary Phillips

**Best Biographical**

**MY LIFE OF CRIME,** Martin  
 Edwards – Winner

# Deadly Pleasures

## George Easter



### AN HONEST MAN

by Michael Koryta  
Mulholland Books, \$29.00, July  
**Rating: A-**

Israel Pike has served a number of years in prison for the murder of his father. He's now released and has returned to his home – Salvation Point Island, Maine, where he leads a secluded life on a sparsely populated island.

One day he sees a yacht adrift off shore and rows out to it to see what is amiss. He finds seven dead bodies and a lot of questions. Israel's uncle, Sterling Pike, is the local law and they despise each other. Naturally, Israel is considered a prime suspect because of his record, but there is no evidence linking him to the crimes.

Elsewhere on the island, 12-year-old Lyman Rankin is just trying to survive the abuse his alcoholic father metes out. He often finds shelter in an abandoned house and one day he discovers he's not alone. A young injured woman confronts him with a hatchet and threatens him to keep quiet or die. Eventually they become friends and Lyman gets food and clothing for her.

As the two storylines merge, the potential for danger and violence escalates.

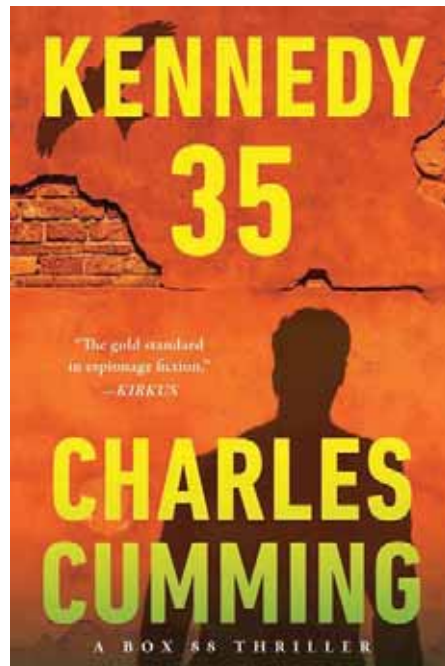
What can often be overlooked in a fast-paced crime novel such as **AN HONEST MAN** is Michael Koryta's skill with language. The dialogue is Leonard-esque and the prose quite elegant.

### KENNEDY 35

by Charles Cumming  
Mysterious Press, \$27.95, November  
Box 88 /Lachlan Kite #3  
**Rating: A-**

For those yet to read a Box 88 thriller, some explanation is in order. Box 88 is an off-the-books, top secret organization formed by powerful interests in Britain and America to do intelligence work that the formal agencies like the CIA and MI6 could not be seen doing.

The story opens with Lachlan Kite, the head of Box 88, visiting his estranged wife and newborn daughter in Sweden – in hopes of mending his marriage relationship and spending time with his new baby. But his visit is interrupted by a message from an old school friend, Eric Appiah, who wants Kite to come to Senegal and meet with him on an urgent matter.



One of the problems with the Kite marriage is that he doesn't share enough about his work with his wife and so he tries to correct that by telling her about his history with Eric Appiah, which takes him back to 1995. Kite and his

then girlfriend Martha Raines go to Senegal to play a role in a plan to kidnap Augustin Bagaza, who was one of those responsible for the genocide that occurred in Rwanda. Through no fault of Kite, the mission goes horribly wrong.

Back in the present Kite arrives in Senegal and is informed by Appiah that there is an American investigative journalist who is about to publish the story of the botched operation in 1995. Is the reporter aware of Box 88 and is its existence threatened by the reporter's story? These are questions that Kite must quickly find answers to.

Once back in the U.K., Kite comes up with a plan to thwart the threat posed by the reporter. But he quickly finds that there are now additional elements in play that further complicate his mission.

Charles Cumming is a veteran espionage novelist and a favorite among discerning fans of such fiction. We spy fiction fans are fortunate to live in times when new books by authors such as Mick Herron, Tom Bradby, John Lawton, I.S. Berry, Ava Glass, Paul Vidich and Stella Rimington are so readily available.

### NO RESERVE

by Felix Francis  
Crooked Lane, \$29.99, September  
**Rating: B+**

Theo Jennings is an auctioneer working for a bloodstock sales company in Newmarket, England. He is surprised and shocked when a sale he is handling at the auction block goes way beyond the expected sales price. Later, while in the men's room in a stall, he overhears a conversation between the two bidders. What is said leads Theo to believe that the two men colluded to jack up the sales price. Then the \$3 million dollar horse is found dead in its stall.

Theo reports what he has heard to his boss, but without further evidence, the matter goes nowhere. That is not satisfactory for Theo and he starts poking at what turns out to be a hornet's nest. He barely escapes being run over and other bodily harm.

Theo is aided in his private inves-

tigation by his new love interest Janis, who works for the same bloodstock sales company that he does. Her position in accounting proves invaluable to him.

This is certainly a crime novel written in the tradition of Dick Francis. The young, single and determined protagonist pitted against devious and clever criminals often resulting in great danger to the young man.

**POSTHUMOUS CHILD**

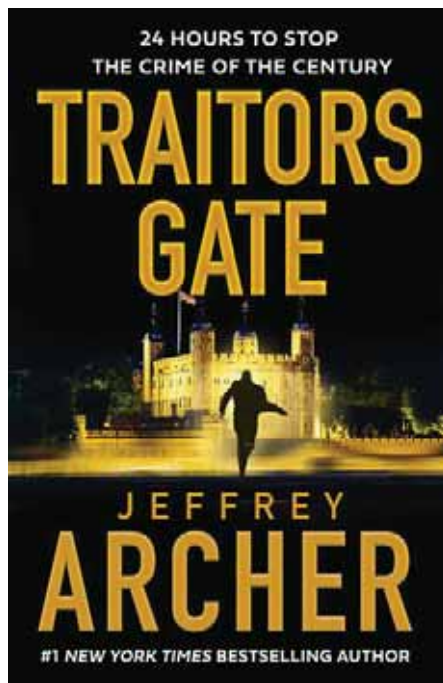
by Rozlan Mohd Noor  
Fixi Novo, \$15.00, August  
Inspector Mislan #6  
**Rating: B+**

A young Malaysian woman named Norita is found dead at a playground in Kuala Lumpur. Forensic examination reveals that the woman was in the early stages of pregnancy and that the fetus had been cut out of her body (but not found with the corpse). Why would anyone do that?

When it is discovered that Norita was having an affair with a married judge, Inspector Mislan surmises that the fetus was removed to prevent any tangible evidence of the affair. He pursues that angle while another possible motive is raised. It involves the belief in some Asian cultures that an amulet made from a fetus can bring wealth and prosperity to the owner. Such amulets can fetch very high prices. Was this the motive?

This is the 6<sup>th</sup> Inspector Mislan police procedural that I've read (see the "Introducing" article in the last issue) and I've really enjoyed this series. But I found the plotting of **POSTHUMOUS CHILD** a bit of a stretch. The interplay of the characters is just as enjoyable as ever and the detective work top notch. I advise anyone who may be thinking of reading this series to start at the beginning with **21 IMMORTALS**. There is a strong underlying story that progresses from book to book. I started with book five and there were some things about Mislan that I didn't fully understand until I went back and read the first four.

**TRAITOR'S GATE**  
by Jeffrey Archer



HarperCollins, \$30.00, September  
William Warwick #6  
**Rating: B+/A-**

William Warwick has experienced a meteoric rise in the ranks of the Metropolitan Police force and now holds the rank of Superintendent. One of his duties is to head a contingent that guards the Crown Jewels when they are transported to Parliament for the annual State Opening or whenever a new Prime Minister is inaugurated.

Enter the wealthy and amoral Miles Faulkner who has had some prior run-ins with Warwick and is seeking a way to reap revenge on Warwick and his close associates. When a policeman who is part of the team that guards the Crown Jewels approaches Faulkner with a meticulous plan to steal the Jewels (which would inevitably result in Warwick's resignation in disgrace), Faulkner eventually agrees to bankroll it and the plan is set in motion.

The details of this caper are quite impressive and well thought out. I give the book high marks for that. However, I found the characters to be either black or white (bad or good) with little or no nuance. I marked it down a bit for that reason. The narrative flows very smoothly and is an easy, fast read – something I always appreciate.

**BLOOD LINES**

by Nelson De Mille and Alex Demille  
Scribner, \$29.99, October  
Scott Brodie & Maggie Taylor #2  
**Rating: A-**

Army CID Agents Scott Brodie and Maggie Taylor found themselves in a heap of trouble after their last mission (**THE DESERTER**) and have been spending all their time in the doghouse (in separate locations) doing mundane tasks. But when Army CID Agents Harry Vance, a veteran counterterrorism agent, is found murdered in a Berlin park (in a Muslim neighborhood), the duo are assigned the task of finding his killer.

The German police are spearheading the investigation and Scott and Maggie are in Berlin to help the police, not conduct their own investigation. But Scott chafes at that restriction, especially when it becomes evident to him that the police are missing certain avenues of investigation – so he quickly goes off the rails and Maggie is forced to follow and do as much damage control as possible.

The authorities suspect this is an act of Islamic terrorism, but Brodie and Taylor soon believe there is more to this case. The reason for Vance's presence in Berlin is unknown, -- and as Brodie and Taylor work to discover what the murder victim was doing in the days and weeks preceding his death, they become immersed in the many conflicts and contradictions of modern Germany—the Arab refugee crisis, the dark legacy of the Cold War and the Stasi secret police, and the imminent threats of a rising neo-Nazi movement.

Ultimately, Brodie and Taylor realize that the murder of Harry Vance was merely the prelude to a much more sinister future event—unless they can unravel the mystery in time to stop it.

**BLOOD LINES** is a fascinating and complex thriller with many more story lines than I can describe in a short review. The authors make a good team and know how to keep the tension at a high level. I was a big fan of **THE DESERTER** and like **BLOOD LINES** equally as well. Dogged investigators

who persevere against substantial odds to get to the truth are among my favorite kind of characters in crime and thriller fiction. My all-time favorite character Harry Bosch and a new favorite, Inspector Mislán, are prime examples of this.

### THE HOUSE OF LOVE AND DEATH

by Andrew Klavan

Mysterious Press, \$26.95, October

Cameron Winter #3

**Rating: B**

Cameron Winter has left behind the life of an operative for The Division (an ultra-secret US Agency) and has become a quiet, boring college English professor. His troubled past makes it difficult for him to form lasting relations so part of each book is devoted to therapy sessions with his therapist Margaret to whom he tells the story of his life.

Cam was born with an innate ability to interpret what happened at a crime scene. So he can't help getting involved in police investigations when he thinks they aren't proceeding correctly.

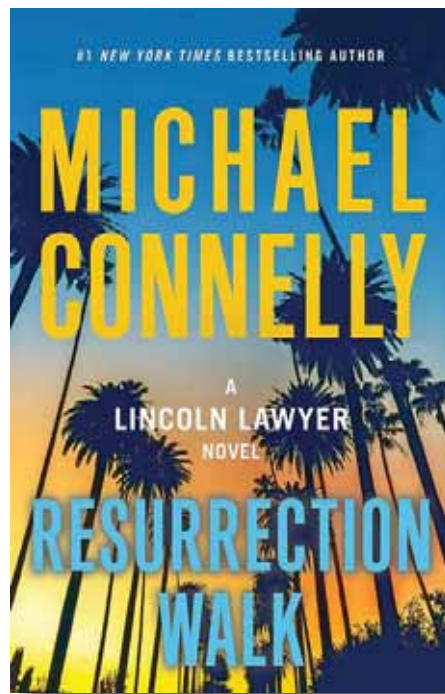
Cam reads a newspaper article about a horrible tragedy that took place in a wealthy suburb of Chicago called Maidenvale, not far from where he lives. Firefighters arrived to a blazing inferno at the gated community home of the Wasserman family, and ran in hoping to save some of the residents. Instead, they pulled out the dead bodies of the husband and wife, their teenage daughter Lila, and their live-in nanny Agnes. Only the 7-year-old son Bobby survived, found hiding in the woods nearby. The deaths were not caused by the fire, however...each were killed by what appeared to be a rifle shot.

The police are searching for the nanny's boyfriend Mateo Hernandez, but Cam thinks they are on the wrong track.

The veteran writer Andrew Klavan writes a solid story of amateur detection with a good puzzle to solve. But somehow, I never engaged with the characters and **THE HOUSE OF LOVE AND DEATH** left me – well – empty.

### RESURRECTION WALK

by Michael Connelly



Little, Brown, \$30.00, November

Mickey Haller #7

**Rating: A+**

The Lincoln Lawyer Mickey Haller has hired his half-brother Harry Bosch so that Harry can have health insurance and get enrolled in a clinical study which includes cancer treatments at UCLA. A year ago Bosch had been working as a volunteer for Renee Ballard's Open-Unsolved Unit when they identified a serial killer who had operating in LA for several years. During the investigation, they also determined that the killer was responsible for a murder for which an innocent man named Jorge Ochoa had been imprisoned. The authorities weren't as convinced and it was due to the efforts of Mickey Haller that Ochoa was finally released from prison. This became a big news story and Haller's office soon became inundated with "I Am Innocent" letters from prisoners from the Western States. Mickey found such satisfaction in getting Ochoa set free that he became determined to do the same for others – his own personal "innocence project."

So one of Harry's assignments, when he's not driving Haller around, is to be the clearing agent for all of the letters, finding the few which have merit. After going through the latest batch, Harry

picks two letters to follow up on. After a brief investigation, Harry dismisses one of the letter writers. That leaves the letter from a woman named Lucinda Sanz, who was imprisoned for murdering her sheriff's deputy husband. She claimed she was pressured into accepting a plea deal (manslaughter) by her own attorney.

When Bosch digs deep into Lucinda's case, he finds things that don't add up and a decidedly hostile sheriff's department. He advises Haller to take the case and it's game on.

The meat of the book is the exciting back and forth between the powerful prosecution team and the wily Lincoln Lawyer who feels he has right on his side.

It is one of the best legal thrillers I've ever read and is my favorite mystery of the year. Michael Connelly is an amazing writer who has created a truly impressive body of work – and he keeps writing great books year after year. Long live Michael Connelly!

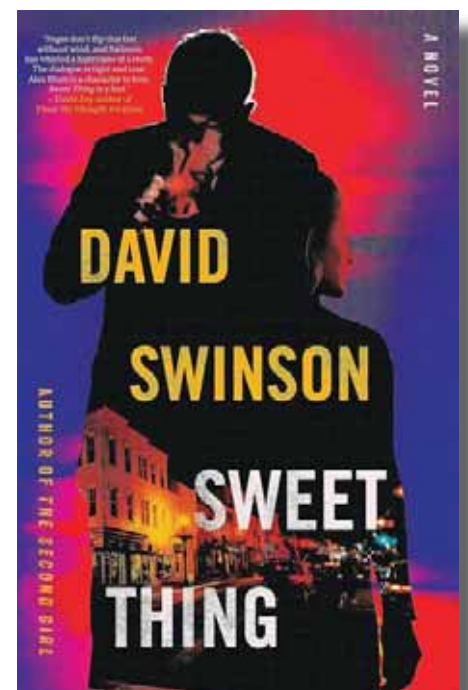
### SWEET THING

by David Swinson

Mulholland, \$29.00, November

**Rating: A-**

I greatly enjoyed reading the author's trilogy featuring Washington D.C. ex-



cop Frank Marr (**THE SECOND GIRL**, **CRIME SONG** and **TRIGGER**). Now, with **SWEET THING**, we return to the same environs (but years before the timing of the trilogy) with narcotics cop Frank Marr as an ancillary character and his colleague, homicide detective Alex Blum as the central figure in this noirish tale. The time is 1999 and there is Y2K concern about what will happen when the year-end clock turns and ushers in a new century (remember those times?)

Blum and his partner, Kelly Ryan, investigate the murder of Chris Doyle and discover that the deceased had a relationship with Artie Holland, Blum's informant from years ago. But they can't find Artie, who has been missing for several days. Artie's live-in girlfriend, Celeste – beautiful, seductive and drug addicted – has no idea where he is. As the story progresses Blum becomes more obsessed with his attraction for Celeste. When Artie's body is discovered, Blum hides evidence that may implicate Celeste and begins a "breaking bad" decline, which leads to further misconduct.

David Swinson lived the life of his characters as a DC cop for many years. His writing reaks of verisimilitude and authenticity. The story line and its crackling dialogue are gritty, violent, profane and fatalistic. It's also very good for those whose tastes aren't offended by such things.

### THE NEW DETECTIVE

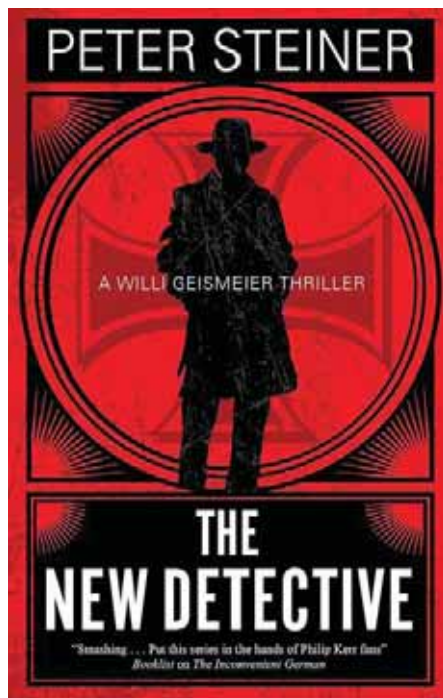
by Peter Steiner

Severn House, \$31.99, December

Willi Geismeyer #4

**Rating: B+**

**THE NEW DETECTIVE** tells the backstory of Willi Geismeyer, whom we have already become acquainted with through three other historical mysteries (**THE GOOD COP**, **THE CONSTANT MAN** and **THE INCONVENIENT GERMAN**). The story starts with Willi becoming "a new detective" in the Munich police department in 1913. It recounts Willi's first cases and then takes a detour for World War I, in which Willi fought and returned a different



man. Further tragedy strikes when the Spanish Flu takes his loved ones away.

Munich has changed also. It has become a nesting ground for a pernicious political movement that will eventually become the Nazi party.

Willi is now back on the police force and is investigating an insurance scam, missing drugs and the mysterious death of a prisoner. When his suspicions focus on a highly regarded doctor whose area of expertise is eugenics, he's told to stand down by department brass.

We're in Bernie Gunther territory here and this series should appeal to Philip Kerr fans. How Peter Steiner weaves historical details into an already fascinating detective story is admirable. I recommend the entire series, not just **THE NEW DETECTIVE**, but this might be a good book to start with if you haven't read any of the series.

### THE MAYORS OF NEW YORK

by S. J. Rozan

Pegasus Crime, \$26.95, December

Bill Smith/Lydia Chin #15

**Rating: B**

The new, female mayor of New York City has a fifteen-year-old son who has disappeared. She doesn't want a media storm so she hires Bill Smith to find him on the q.t. Has he been kidnapped or

did he merely run away?

The more Bill and his partner Lydia Chin investigate, the more puzzling the case becomes. Why did the boy leave, if he did so on his own? What is his obnoxious twin sister hiding? Are there others searching for the boy and why?

Then a teen is found dead and another is wounded by gunfire. Are these incidents related to the mayor's missing son?

When they don't get answers from the people they interview, Bill and Lydia decide to consult the local crime bosses, who are, after all, the real "mayors" of New York City.

**THE MAYORS OF NEW YORK** is an easy, entertaining read. It is good, but not great.

## 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.

**WHO THE HELL IS HARRY**

**BLACK?**, Jake Needham

**SECOND MURDERER**,

Denise Mina

**DARK DIVE**, Andrew Mayne

**HUNTED**, Abir Mukherjee

**AT ANY COST**, Jeffrey Siger

*Already read for the next issue -*

**THE ASCENT**, Adam Plantiga

**THE SILENCE IN HER EYES**,

Armando Lucas Correa

**THE FURY OF BEIJING**,

Ian Hamilton

**HERO**, Thomas Perry

**DREAM TOWN**, Lee Goldberg

**VILLAGE IN THE DARK**,

Iris Yamashita

**KINGPIN**, Mike Lawson

**THE PRICE YOU PAY**, Nick Petrie

**BLACK WOLF**, Juan Gomez-Jurado

**THE BURGLAR WHO MET**

**FREDRIC BROWN**, Lawrence Block

## HISTORICAL EMPORIUM

*Robin Agnew*



### THE SPANISH DIPLOMAT'S SECRET

by Nev March

Minotaur Books, \$27, September  
Captain Jim & Lady Diana #3  
**Grade B+**

With **THE SPANISH DIPLOMAT'S SECRET**, March has produced an almost ideal traditional historical mystery, utilizing classic tropes like setting the book on an ocean liner, challenging the seasick and Sherlock Holmes obsessed detective to solve the case before it lands in England, and lining up a variety of suspects (aka characters) with shady or unknown pasts, including some exotic foreigners. It's all very Agatha Christie in the best way.

The book opens in 1894, with Jim Agnihotri and bride Diana braving an ocean crossing from the US to England, a voyage somewhat spoiled for stoic Jim because of his extreme seasickness. One late night he has a conversation with a fellow passenger, a mysterious Spanish grandee of some sort. Both of the men have served in the army and develop a kinship. The next day, the man is murdered, and the captain challenges Jim, whose day job is as a detective, to solve the case.

Between them Jim and Diana are able to sort out that the killer probably came from the first or second class passengers, as all other classes are locked below and can't access the deck. However, this only slightly narrows the suspect pool, still leaving Jim with a great deal of people to question. This is a novel, however, so March helpfully shortens the suspect list, concentrating on a ship's officer, a handful of first class passengers, and the Spanish diplomat's wife and their servants. The wife has se-

cluded herself in her cabin, only emerging briefly, heavily swathed in black. The dead man obviously had some kind of secret, but what it might be is teasingly uncovered by the author throughout the novel.

Meanwhile there's another incident: a suicide of one of the maids, who jumps overboard. While the ship backtracks and makes every attempt to find her, she cannot be found and they must move on, leaving her for dead. Her bunkmate insists that the voyage is cursed and their cabin is haunted. Diana, who has a fondness for strays, takes the young woman into her and Jim's cabin. Another attack and a disappearance follow, making the voyage even more dangerous. While Jim and Diana are certain everything is connected, they aren't sure quite how, and the overabundance of suspects and clues muddies perilous waters.

This book has a well assembled and



meticulous plot, but I also feel March is at her strongest when she writes about character, presenting powerful passages concerning Jim's traumatic memories of battle, the distance between Jim and Diana that Jim just can't figure out, and even the mysterious process Diana uses to locate a missing person about halfway through the book. Her method relates back to her Zoroastrian culture and references her Indian background. These are affecting elements and March would do well to emphasize them. I enjoyed the solid mystery and the deft recreation of life on board ship, but what I came away with were her memorable slices of character. Even the personality of the murderer, when revealed, is memorable and haunting. I look forward to more installments in this fledgling series.

### PROUD SORROWS

By James R. Benn

Soho Crime, \$27.95, September  
Billy Boyle #18  
**Grade A**

Reading a book by the intelligent and thoughtful James Benn is always a pleasure. He sustains the variety in his long lived WWII Billy Boyle series by alternating between tales of full on battle and more village-y, traditional mysteries. **PROUD SORROWS** is one of the latter. Billy and his girl, Diana, are supposed to be on a much-needed leave, along with their friend Kaz and his sister Angelika, who is recovering from surgery on her leg. They are staying with Diana's father in a village (King's Lynn, coincidentally also the setting for Elly Griffiths' Ruth Galloway novels) that houses a POW camp for high-ranking Nazi officers.

The book opens with a plane crash in the past, and then fast forwards to a few years later, when Billy and Diana discover the wreckage of a Nazi plane on the beach. The discovery becomes even more bizarre when the identity of the corpse is revealed – how did the body of the missing Stephen Elliott, owner of the huge home where the Nazis are presently housed, end up in the plane? Much to Billy's annoyance, his superiors remove him from leave to solve the mystery.

The detective work centers on the occupants of the village, including the dead man's displaced sister, the vicar, Diana's father, and various other locals who fill out a rich suspect list. When a WWI vet is murdered the night of a bombing – right next to Billy, no less – Billy's detective work takes on even more urgency. It's also poignant, as the man, a familiar wandering village figure, suffered from shell shock and refused to sleep inside. "Proud Sorrows" is a wonderful title for this novel, which manages to avoid melancholy but still identifies the different burdens and sorrows war has imposed in different ways on everyone in the novel. Billy is sure his solution is tied to the pain felt by someone he's encountered.

He also comes into contact with a vein of Fascist sympathizers, an underground movement in sympathy with Hitler motivated by the fear that Britain will be overrun with foreigners at war's end. It's countered by the many veterans in the novel who have a total aversion to the Germans they come across, in any capacity.

Benn manages to construct what is basically a traditional village mystery and combine it with some of the thrilling suspense he's also known for. Some of the clever detection scenes in the mansion where the Nazis are housed are traditional in the extreme (Sherlock Holmes is referenced), and the suspense and action scenes are just as well handled. There's also a touch of British history – going back to King John as well as Shakespeare's play about him – that give the book an even richer tapestry and deepen the mystery.

Benn has a sure hand with pacing, and his way with character is nothing short of brilliant. This is an incredible series, worthy of being savored. Start from the beginning!

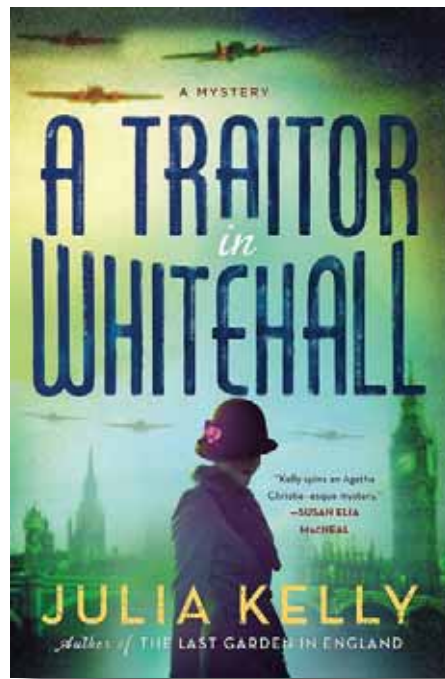
### **A TRAITOR IN WHITEHALL**

By Julia Kelly

Minotaur Books, \$28, October  
Parisian Orphan #1

**Grade: A**

Julia Kelly, who has previously written straight up historical fiction,



makes a slight lane change with her stellar historical mystery debut, **A TRAITOR IN WHITEHALL**, featuring Evelyne Redfern, known as the "Parisian Orphan." Evelyn's glamorous French mother, imprudently married to a feckless English aristocrat, died in Paris, leaving her in care of her aunt. She's spent much of her childhood in boarding school, becoming sadly acquainted with both fending for herself and fending off unwanted questions, or at least pretending those questions don't concern her.

The main story focuses not on Evelyne's childhood, however, but her life in London at the start of the blitz. She's been doing her bit, working a tedious job in a bomb factory, when she's recruited by an old family friend to be a typist in Winston Churchill's wartime bunker. The old family friend (a high up in intelligence though it's not specified exactly in what position) also wants her to "keep her eyes open." He thinks she's intelligent and observant and she proves him right many times over..

Conditions in the bunker are strict. The women in the typing pool work three days on, two off, and when they're "on" they even sleep there. On the other hand it's a pretty safe place to be when the bombs start to fall. Evelyne, not actually trained as a secretary, tries to keep up as best she can while quickly

acquainting herself with her co-workers. When she's sent off one day for a sun-lamp treatment (thought to be beneficial for women who spent so much time underground) she enters the room where it's done, only to find a dead co-worker and the door locked from the outside.

She's freed by one David Poole and the two strike up an uneasy alliance. Poole requests her as his assistant while actually teaming up to conduct their own shadow investigation, separate from the one of the military police. Neither Evelyne nor David have much faith in the abilities of those in charge, and the two of them manage to uncover a major scandal involving not only murder but espionage at the highest level as well.

Kelly structures the book very much as a traditional mystery, with Evelyne and David functioning as buddy detectives, following leads, interviewing suspects, coming up against red herrings, and getting into a tiny bit of danger along the way. Charmingly, Evelyne is a fan of detective novels, busily snapping up new issues from Dorothy Sayers, Ngaio Marsh and Margery Allingham – it almost (but not really) made me wish I'd lived through the blitz myself.

The pacing of this novel is excellent, as is the character development and the relationships that emerge between the characters in the midst of believable tension and well kept secrets, all making this book really hard to put down. I've read a ton of WWII fiction, and with Evelyne's work in the bunker and the up close and personal look at the blitz, this one brings a refreshingly original perspective. Kelly is a wonderful storyteller and I already find myself impatient for the next novel in what I hope will be a very lengthy series.

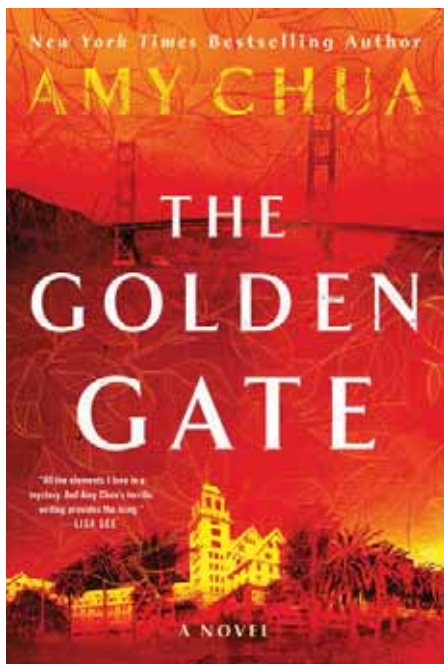
### **THE GOLDEN GATE**

By Amy Chua

Minotaur, \$28.00, September.

**Grade: B+**

This is a first novel from Amy Chua, author of **BATTLE HYMN OF THE TIGER MOTHER**, and it's an ambitious and almost overstuffed concoction set in 1944 San Francisco. Peeling away the



many, many complicated layers of her story, the essential plot line is this: in 1930, two sisters were playing at the Claremont Hotel while their mother played tennis. One of them dies by plunging down a laundry chute. Fast forward to 1944, and a grandmother is giving a deposition to the DA, who is sure one of her granddaughters (one of them the sister of the dead girl) is guilty of murder, and he doesn't mind charging them all if he can't get a straight answer from her.

The murder: one Walter Wilkinson, unsuccessful candidate for president against FDR. It's an easy transposition to imagine Chua is writing about Wendell Wilkie, who did die young, but of a more ordinary heart attack, not a mysterious murder in a hotel room where he was shot at once, moved rooms, and ultimately killed successfully.

It's the background and setting that give the book its almost overstuffed richness. There's the detective on the case, Al Sullivan – he has Americanized his name from Alejo Gutierrez as he is light skinned enough to “pass.” Much of the book centers on race and the sad fact of racial hatred, which, no matter the decade, is unchanged, it's just sometimes the targets of the hatred change. In 1944, much of it was directed at the Japanese after Pearl Harbor, and the US is living through the shame of Japanese internment camps. Al (or Alejo) is a

smart, decent man, one who has some trouble with an ambitious boss who attempts to make every fact fit a pre-determined and convenient solution.

Then there's Madame Chaing Kai-Shek, who indeed lived in the Claremont neighborhood from '43 to '44. The fear of communism was as intense as fear of Nazis at that moment, and Chaing Kai-Shek was the opposite of Mao Tse Tung. Some clues around the body seem to point to a Chinese involved solution. Chua also shares much of the history of San Francisco – as the whites settled and ravaged the native otters for fur, the Sequoias for wood, and asserted white dominance over the native cultures who had been settled in California for hundreds of years.

All this detail, while interesting, sometimes clouds the bones of the mystery, which is an interesting one involving three privileged cousins, any one of whom could be a killer. What's certain is that all of them are gorgeous and seductively charming, and they have a grandmother convinced of their innocence. Tying the narrative together is the lengthy and detailed deposition given by the grandmother who tells the DA that none of her granddaughters are murderers.

The other connecting factor is Al himself, who is fighting against not only a DA who is determined to solve the case, no matter the outcome, and the discomfort he's felt enforcing the internment rules against his Japanese neighbors. His own Mexican father had been forcibly deported when he was a child, but he seems reluctant to connect his experience to that of the Japanese. He's also trying to care for his niece, Miriam, whose mother has abandoned her and who, at 11, is basically raising herself. It's clear she's a preternaturally intelligent child and the two of them are very fond of one another.

Chua has created scads of fascinating background and an interesting mystery. While the threads connect, there are just too many of them, and she muddies the waters by changing the culprit several times. The Claremont is a fabulous setting for a mystery, though: a gorgeous, gracious hotel, seeming to float

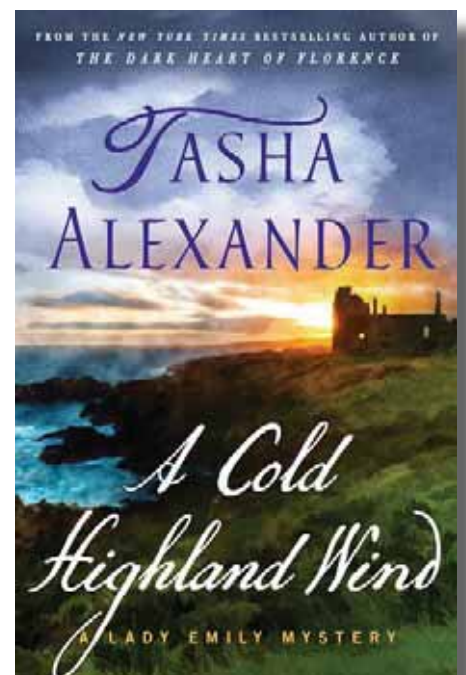
above the hills of San Francisco. This book has atmosphere and character and setting and plot – just too much of all of them. I would be interested to read a second book to see if Chua can winnow and edit.

*George's Take:* This is an ambitious novel and most of it worked for me. Amy Chua attempts to combine the traditional history mystery with the currently popular untrustworthy narrator storyline (in the form of witnesses, not the principal detective). The problem is that too many people are lying and that makes for a bit of a confusing narrative. Things I liked were the historical period that is well described, a protagonist to admire and a puzzling murder to unravel. I rate it a bit higher than Robin and give it a rating of A-.

#### A COLD HIGHLAND WIND

By Tasha Alexander  
Minotaur, \$28, October  
Lady Emily #17  
**Grade: A**

In any long series there are bound to be some books that are simply nutritious and others that are, well, simply delicious. **A COLD HIGHLAND WIND**, the latest instalment in Tasha Alexander's landmark Lady Emily series, falls firmly on the simply delicious side. In



this one Lady Emily and family are in Scotland at their friend Jeremy's estate (aka castle). Their children enjoy Jeremy's "menagerie" (what we would today call a private zoo), and relish tales about the local faeries and kelpies. The action opens at a community party or ceilidh, as the inhabitants gather to hear stories, drink some rum punch and dance.

Unfortunately, there's a bit of a hangover the next morning when Lady Emily's boys discover the body of the estate's gamekeeper while out searching for kelpies. Because Alexander has deftly set up the character of the village community with her opening scene (it's really a master class on how to introduce things), the reader quickly follows as Colin and Emily interview and meet suspects and/or witnesses like the local female doctor, the vicar, his wife, a fetching housemaid and assorted denizens of Jeremy's estate, including his great aunts, who are a hoot.

As always, Alexander threads in a parallel story, taking us from Lady Emily in 1905 to a "Moorish" maid, Tansy, and her mistress, Rossalyn, in 1676. Tansy had come to Rossalyn as a slave, kidnapped from the streets of Tunis, staying on as maid when she's set free. After the death of Rossalyn's beloved husband, the two are expelled from their home in the castle by her brother in law, granted the use of a tiny cottage where the two of them, inexperienced in the household arts, attempt to set up a home. Tansy still takes on the lion's share of the work, and her relationship with Rossalyn, of necessity and circumstance, begins to change. Her repressed desire to be treated as an equal, to return to her homeland and her family and follow her own religion, begin to bubble up. Rossalyn partially accepts the changes, but in the most important ways, she continues to treat Tansy like a servant.

The two story threads are united by location and mythology. In Tansy and Rossalyn's time there was a great fear of witches, resulting in a fair number of charms and talismans (as well as a Shakespeare folio that gets carted around) dotting the landscape. In 1905 there are rune stones left behind by the

Vikings and a missing copy of JANE EYRE, not to mention the kelpies. The death Colin and Emily are investigating is complicated by the fact that the dead man, quite popular with the local ladies, was not who he claimed to be.

These are intelligent and captivating books which compel the reader's attention. Alexander has such a light hand and facility with plot and character that she makes the whole enterprise look easy, even though you know it's anything but. Both plot lines are wrapped up with satisfying resolutions, and I am still not weary, seventeen books in, of Lady Emily and her charming family.

### MURDER BY DEGREES

By Ritu Mukerjee

Simon & Schuster, \$27, October

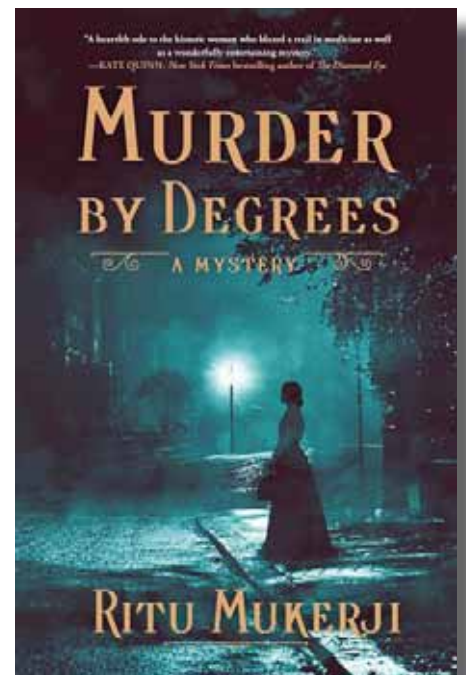
Debut Novel

**Grade: B+**

Set in 1875 Philadelphia, this first novel is a real treat. Main character Lydia Weston is a doctor and, much like Victoria Thompson's Gaslight series, the mystery spins out from her occupation, rare for a woman at that time. The free clinic she helps run sees many denizens of Philly's working class population, allowing Mukerjee a terrific way to ground her story.

In the course of her practice, Dr. Weston becomes friendly with a young chambermaid named Anna Ward. Unfortunately, one day Anna's body is dredged from the Schuylkill River, an apparent suicide. Because she was close to the deceased, Lydia insists on being present at the autopsy. As the author of this novel is a practicing physician herself, the autopsy details are quite specific, giving insight into the minds of doctors and the ways in which they find the messy workings of the human body to be beautiful and interesting. If, however, you don't feel quite the same way about blood and guts, you might want to skim some of these passages.

Anna ends up assisting the two police in charge of the case with their investigation, at first because she knew the victim and was present at the autopsy, but later because she keeps on uncovering clues. After some initial discomfort



on the part of one of the detectives because of Lydia's gender, their working relationship improves once she shows her worth.

The threads of the novel include unravelling Anna's character and origin (she's the sole support of her sister and handicapped brother), the background of the family she works for, and the story of Lydia herself. Lydia is a woman before her time, but you can picture a determined, smart young woman like her finding a way to become a doctor, and in fact there were in fact about 500 women doctors in the U.S. at that time, though few of them were surgeons. One of the many things I love about mysteries is the way that you effortlessly learn so many things along the way to the solution.

As I polished this book off in a day, I can tell you it's a fast and enjoyable read. The pacing is good, with the reveals coming in at appropriately strategic points in the book. The characters, especially Lydia, are crisp and well defined, and if the resolution itself is not a complete surprise, it's at least an interesting and credible one. I enjoyed my time trip back to 1875 - and a great start to what I hope is a long series.

# L J Roberts

*It is purely my opinion*



## THE HANGING PSALM

by Chris Nickson

Severn House, Jan 2019, 224 pp.

Protagonists: Simon Westow, Rose, Jane

**Rating: A**

*First Sentence: They were grave men.*

About the book: Hist/myst; Leeds, England; 1820

Simon Westow, with the help of his wife Rose, and assistant Jane, is a thief-taker. He is hired to find objects which have been stolen and turns the culprit in for arrest. The daughter of a wealthy businessman, John Milner has been kidnapped. Simon is hired to find her and ensure the return of the ransom money. What he doesn't know is that although the kidnapper wants the ransom, he truly wants revenge against Simon.

The way in which we are introduced to Simon's world and all those people around him, especially those with whom he has business relations, is so well done. The book includes an interesting cast of characters, including the secondary characters. In particular, there is Catherine, an elderly and wise widow who befriends Jane. One is confident many of these characters will appear in future books, while this book establishes them as to who they are.

This is not a drawing-room mystery. Nickson sets his books among the poor, the working class, and the criminals. Although there are wealthy characters, it is they who are corrupt and weak. Even the man whose daughter has been kidnapped is more concerned about retrieving the ransom money than he is his daughter. However, the wealthy are not the focus of his books.

The story is filled with red herrings

and false endings. It makes the story very interesting. There is plenty of suspense, danger, and tension. This is offset by the relationship Simon has with his family.

What is so well done is the roles the principal characters play. Simon is the moral investigator who often runs on emotion, his wife Rose is the sensible thinker, and Jane is the enforcer willing to use violence. In some ways, Jane is the standout character of the book. There are scenes with her that are painful to read but important to understand who she is. I don't know how true these characters would have been to the time, but they are appealing and keep one involved in the story. They come to life; you get a real sense of them and their relationships.



**THE HANGING PSALM** paints a vivid description of this time. There are hard and violent scenes in the book, but this was a hard and violent time. The author is an excellent writer. This is a series that makes you want to read more.

## SUSPECT

by Robert Crais

G.P. Putnam's Sons, Oct 2014, 416 pp

Protagonist: Officer Scott James

**Rating: B**

*First Sentence: They were on that particular street at that specific T-intersection at that crazy hour because Scott James was hungry.*

Maggie is a German Shephard bomb dog working in Afghanistan. Tragedy brings her to Los Angeles and the kennels of the Los Angeles police department. Scott James is a radio-car, uniform cop working the streets with his partner, Stephanie. A seemingly peaceful night explodes with violence, leaving Stephanie dead and Scott gravely injured. Ultimately assigned to the K-9 division, he meets Maggie. While both man and dog suffer from PTSD, they join forces to help one another, and to find who was responsible for Stephanie's death.

The first thing one needs to know is that this is not a Joe Pike book. That said, palpable tension follows an initial moment of "oh no!" thanks to one of the most powerful prologs one will ever read. It's not often a book can make one cry, but this one does, not just once, but twice.

One of the best aspects was the interesting transition of the dog Maggie from being a military police dog in Afghanistan, to being a police K-9 dog. Learning the differences between the two disciplines and seeing Maggie's training is what keeps one reading. Even following Maggie's perspective from her internal dialogue, was interesting, albeit a bit repetitive. Learning the difference of crowd and military work is well done. By far, the best aspect of the story is Maggie. The police procedure itself wasn't that engaging.

# Lookin' For A Few Good Books

*Larry Gandle*



## ALL THE SINNERS BLED

by S.A. Cosby  
Flatiron Books, \$27.99

**Rating: A-**

Sheriff Titus Crown is the first black sheriff of Charon County. A school shooting calls attention to the fact that there is a serial killer on the loose. To discover who the killer is Titus must invest his entire staff and all of his energy and possibly his life.

Once again S.A. Cosby has written a superior crime fiction novel. What sets this story apart from other crime fiction novels is his superb writing. There is no need for me to quote a sample. Just pick up the book and turn to any page and any line. The writing is so beautiful that it almost demands to be reread. Characters are superb creations and the locale is depicted so realistically. A couple of criticisms- the deductive sequence of discovering the killer's identity is a bit of a stretch and the ending is somewhat contrived. Nonetheless, this book is highly recommended.

## CROOK MANIFESTO

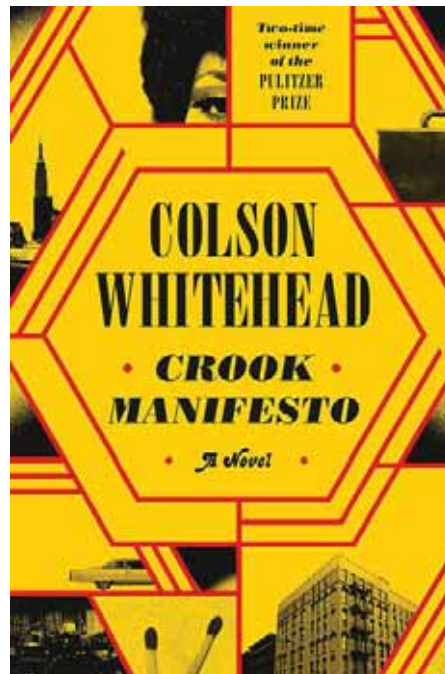
by Colson Whitehead  
Doubleday, \$29.00

**Rating: A**

In 1971, Harlem, Ray Carney, our protagonist from **HARLEM SHUFFLE**, has kept on the straight and narrow path of legitimacy. He has given up moving stolen goods. His daughter desperately wants tickets to the Jackson 5 concert but they are impossible to find. He decides to go to his old police contact, Munson, to ask him to get the tickets from his old contacts. This soon leads to a wild ride around the city full of death and destruction.

In 1973, Carney's old criminal associate, Pepper, takes a security job with a movie company filming a Blaxploitation film in Harlem. The Starlet disappears and Pepper is tasked with finding her so filming can resume. His investigation takes us to the very dangerous and deadly criminal underside of the city.

In 1976, fires are being lit throughout Harlem. An abandoned building is burned across the street from Ray's furniture store. A young boy is in the building and is injured. The boy is the son of one of Ray's tenants. Angered, he asks Pepper to look into who started the fire. This, again will lead to death and destruction.



Colson Whitehead is a master at evoking and time and place. Harlem in the 1970s comes vividly to life in his hands. The characters are incredibly lifelike. The plot is compelling but the pacing does occasionally lag. This is

one of those books that can fit in both the literary and crime fiction genres quite comfortably. Apparently, this is Book 2 of a trilogy. It is beautifully written and highly recommended.

## THE COLLECTOR

by Dan Silva  
Harper, \$32.00

**Rating: B-**

Gabriel Allon, The former spy and art restorer, is asked to find a very rare painting. He elicits the help of a beautiful master thief and the two of them go on the trail to find the stolen work. They soon find themselves embroiled in the Russian Ukrainian war and the fate of the world rests on their shoulders.

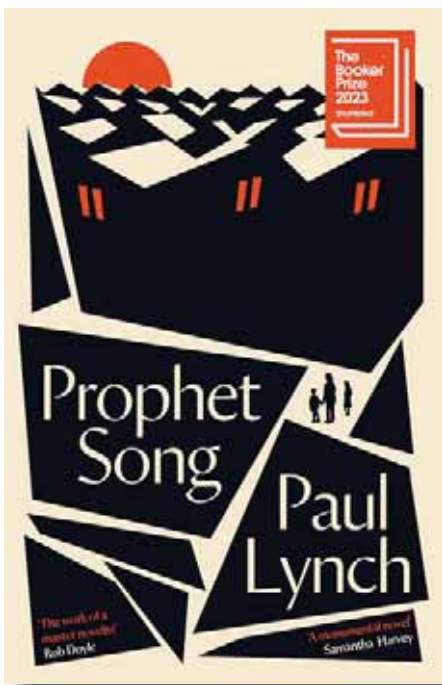
This is a totally silly plot that manages to push the envelope of reality. Dan Silva's books are becoming both redundant and predictable. I just wish Gabriel can live his idyllic life with his beautiful wife and children in the magical city of Venice. Just when he begins to settle in there, they pull him back into espionage. The book is entertaining but I am well past beginning to get over these books. A mild recommendation.

## PROPHET SONG

by Paul Lynch  
Atlantic Monthly, \$26.00

**Rating: A+**

In an Ireland turning to tyranny, Eilish Stack, mother of four, answers the doorbell one night and is confronted by two police officers who ask her husband, a union organizer, to come to the police station for some questioning. What ensues is a nightmare scenario



of a society completely collapsing as a mysterious entity increasingly takes over the military and the police. Eilish must do everything she can to keep her family together as it becomes increasingly dangerous and difficult to survive. Escape might be the only way out.

This book is shortlisted for the Booker Prize. In my opinion, it should easily win. The plot is totally compelling as the country increasingly falls apart. The character of Eilish is so sympathetic to the reader and her mistakes are heartfelt. I would classify this book as a suspense novel and eventually thriller but it is so much more. It is a critique of the totalitarian societies around the world and the fact that it could happen anywhere. This is a superb novel and one of the best I have read in years. Highly recommended.

#### **GOING ZERO**

by Anthony McCarten  
Harper, \$30.00

**Rating: B**

Ten Americans have been selected to Beta test a new piece of spyware that is supposed to find anyone, anywhere. The winner will get a huge amount of cash. The contestants have two days to disappear and thirty days to remain

hidden. As one by one, the contestants fail, there is a Boston librarian who continues to elude them. Who is she and why is she so good? Things get increasingly hostile as the clock winds down.

This is a clever and entertaining thriller with a propulsive plot. It does get increasingly silly and totally improbable as we approach the end. For lightweight entertainment it is recommended.

#### **THE HEAVEN AND EARTH GROCERY STORE**

by James McBride  
Riverhead Books, \$28.00

**Rating: B+**

In 1972, Pottsdam, Pennsylvania, workers constructing a new development, discover the remains of a skeleton at the bottom of a well. Who is it and how did it get there? The location of the well is on Chicken Hill where the Blacks and immigrant Jews lived in the 1930s and forties. These two different types of people lived harmoniously away from the Christian White population. Moshe and Chona Ludlow live above a grocery store that Chona runs. She is beloved by the community. When the authorities want to institutionalize a deaf young black boy, Chona and Nate Timblin, leader of the Black community, come together to shield him. Things do come to a head at the grocery store which sets in motion the eventual conclusion and solution to the puzzle of the skeleton.

Strong characterizations highlight this latest novel by James McBride. The plot revolves around the marginalized communities of Pottsdam which get along just fine without the White Christians. The author provides a strong sense of place. I might not consider this book to be purely a mystery novel but, perhaps, more literary. Recommended.

#### **RESURRECTION WALK**

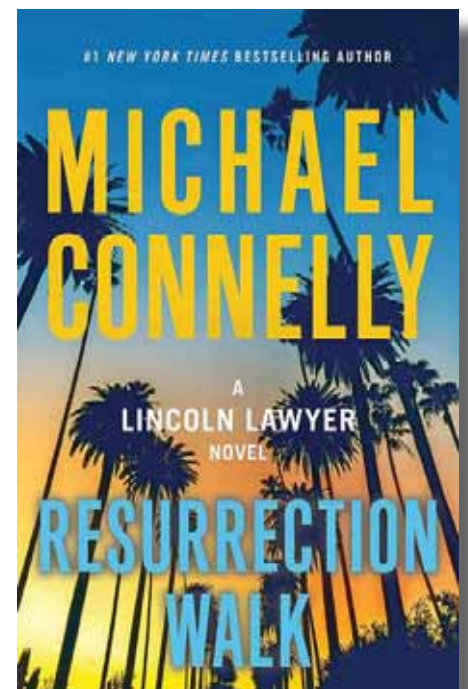
by Michael Connelly  
Little, Brown, \$30.00

Lincoln Lawyer #7

**Rating: A**

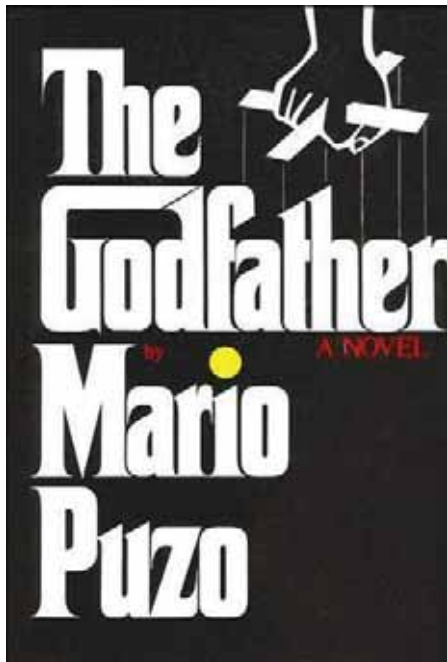
Resurrection walk is the term for the release of a falsely convicted felon. Mickey Haller, the Lincoln lawyer, has hired his half-brother, Harry Bosch, to look into cases that potentially confirm the innocence of the convicted individuals. Bosch sorts through them looking for any that might be interesting. He discovers a case involving Lucinda Sanz who claims she was forced to plead guilty to avoid a life sentence. As Bosch looks into it, he thinks she might be telling the truth. Mickey eventually takes on the case but must go against the attorney general of Los Angeles and his team of hundreds. It is a true David vs Goliath situation. Eventually, as Mickey and Harry get closer to the truth, things turn deadly.

Michael Connelly's books all run the gamut from very good to excellent to superb. This one is of the last category. Almost the entire book takes place in a courtroom. The suspense rests on whether the judge will allow



pieces of evidence that can make or break the case. The conclusion is, as usual, very clever. I will admit that even after watching two full seasons of The

Lincoln Lawyer, Mickey Haller is still Matthew McConaughey in my mind. The television show really does not feel true to the books. Highly recommended.



**THE GODFATHER**

by Mario Puzo  
Putnam, \$30.00, 1969  
**Rating: A**

This is the iconic classic story of the Corleone family and one of the most seminal and definitive novels of the Mafia underworld and crime fiction in general. The characters are familiar to just about everybody and the reason I read this is to see how it stands up to time.

I remember being an adolescent and seeing this book every week in the New York Times Book Review and at the top of their best seller list for over a year. When I read it, initially, it read like a Harold Robbins novel -- sort of forgettable, sex-filled trash. Yes, it was a popular novel and not one I would call true literature. The story, however, is so compelling and filled with surprises. The characters were realistic. The fact that it was made into one of the greatest films of all time, certainly did not diminish its reputation. The film is better than the book -- no doubt. There

is a long segment about Frank Fontaine which was never covered in the film. It is not really that interesting. Also, the early life of Don Corleone is covered in the second movie. The iconic lines in the film are not in the book. I will say it is a wonderful read and definitely holds up after all these years.

**A HAUNTING ON THE HILL**

by Elizabeth Hand  
Mulholland, \$30.00  
**Rating: C**

Holly Sherwin is a struggling playwright who is putting together her latest effort called **Witching Night**. On a weekend trip with her girlfriend, Nisa, she discovers an old mansion that looks eerie. She decides the place is perfect to rehearse and work on her play. After receiving numerous warnings to avoid the house, she predictably ignores them all and invites a few of the future cast of the play to join them. The result is a predictable haunted house story.

A comedian once said that if he enters a house and hears a voice say, "Get out!", he does. That pretty much sums up the idiocy of this novel. Holly listens to nobody after numerous warnings. The housekeeper and cook will not stay past dark! They hear voices, see giant black hares, feel the presence of supernatural beings but still Holly stays until literally all hell breaks loose. The writing is good. The characters well developed. The plot is interesting. However, the premise of the story is beyond stupid. The supernatural happenings are really not that scary. The end result definitely requires reality to be suspended. I would avoid.

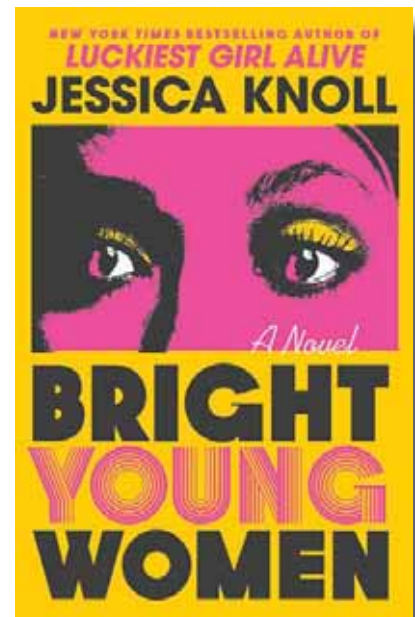
**BRIGHT YOUNG WOMEN**

by Jessica Knoll  
Simon & Schuster, \$27.99  
**Rating: B+**

On a Saturday night in January, 1978, in a sorority house at FSU, Pamela Schumacher, President of the sorority is woken and hears a thump from upstairs. As she is walking to the stairs,

she sees a man descending quickly. He looks around, giving Pam a good look at him. But he doesn't see her. Then he exits. She will never forget that face or that nose. The result of his visit is two women dead and two cut up and left for dead. One of the dead is Pamela's best friend. She wants justice. Meanwhile, out west, Tina Cannon is convinced her girlfriend was killed by a serial killer -- the same one who was in Florida. Pam and Tina team up to bring The Defendant to justice.

Though he is never named, it is obvious this is a story about Ted Bundy. The press seems to have fallen in love with him praising, not only his looks, but his supposedly brilliant legal acuity.



men. This is a book about the women seeking justice- not necessarily centered around the crime itself. Pam and Tina are front and center. Their stories are told in alternate chapter form going back to the 70s and today. It is a fascinating look at how the press can almost subvert justice by their characterizations of criminals. Reporters and writers can seek personal fortune and fame by attempting to humanize these killers. I would not characterize this book as a pure crime novel. The writing is quite excellent in depicting the setting and the characters. Recommended.

# Down Under Crime



## Jeff Pople Reviews

### RIPPER

by Shelley Burr  
Hachette, \$A16.00

Rating: A-

Shelley Burr's **WAKE** was one of my favourite Australian crime novels of 2022, and recently won the 2023 Ned Kelly Award for best Debut Crime Novel.

Now, Shelley has followed it up with a good second novel, **RIPPER**, that centres around a series of murders in the small town of Rainer, halfway between Sydney and Melbourne. The once thriving town is now best known as being the site of three murders committed by the 'Rainer Ripper' seventeen years ago. Gemma Guillory has lived in Rainer all her life, and her innocuous little tea-shop was the last stop on the Ripper's trail of death. Although in custody, the Ripper's night of carnage still has repercussions in the town. When a tour operator, who is trying to cash in on the town's dark history, is killed by a Ripper copycat on Gemma's steps again, she fears that the old days are back.

**RIPPER** is different in style from **WAKE**, but has the same compulsive feel. The story proceeds at a good pace and the plot weaves its way through an enjoyable series of twists and surprises. True crime investigator and private eye Lane Holland from **WAKE** also makes a welcomed appearance in the book, and his interventions add some interesting elements to the story. The other characters are also richly developed and engaging, especially Gemma, and the descriptions of Rainer and its milieu ring true.

Importantly, the murder mystery elements are well handled and there is

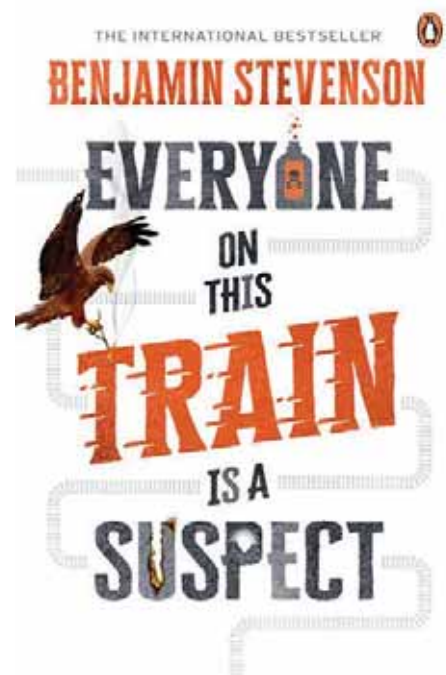
a freshness to the story telling. On the negative side, the cast list is very long, and some readers will struggle to keep the various characters and relationships clear in their heads. However, this is a minor quibble and overall **RIPPER** is another impressive effort by Shelley.

### EVERYONE ON THIS TRAIN IS A SUSPECT

by Benjamin Stevenson  
Penguin, \$A32.99

Ernest Cunningham #2

Rating: A



Benjamin Stevenson's **EVERYONE IN MY FAMILY HAS KILLED SOMEONE** was the wittiest and most original crime novel I read last year. It was a very clever and funny read, that played enjoyable homage to the classic British murder mystery in a very unique way.

Now Stevenson has brought back the central character from that novel,

Ernest Cunningham, in a new novel featuring a locked room murder mystery set on board a train. In **EVERYONE ON THIS TRAIN IS A SUSPECT** Cunningham has been invited by the Australian Mystery Writers' Society to join a crime festival on board the Ghan, the famous train that travels between Darwin and Adelaide. Also on the train are five other authors covering the spectrum of crime fiction, including an arrogant literary author and a very popular Scottish writer. Cunningham is there as the debut, non-fiction author, having written a reasonably popular account of the events from the first book. He is also trying to write that difficult second book, and is hoping that inspiration will strike while he is on the train. Fortunately he is in luck when somebody on the train is murdered during the night, and Cunningham, using his trusty rules of crime fiction, sets out to solve the crime, and hopefully write a new bestseller.

To go into more detail about the plot would do the book a disservice, as there are plenty of twists and turns, unexpected developments and a good deal of humour. After a slowish start, the book moves at a good pace, and Stevenson enlivens the telling with plenty of wry comments by Cunningham on authors, crime writing and the publishing industry. As with the first book, he frequently talks directly to the reader as he outlines the possible suspects and rates their likelihood of having committed the murder.

There is an abundance of witty comments and a couple of laugh-out-loud moments, as Cunningham navigates his way through the machinations of egoistic authors and tries to identify the murderer before they can strike again. Underneath the humour there is a good

mystery plot, and the various surprises will keep ardent crime fans happy as they try to separate the real clues from the red herrings. Some of the twists are easy to guess, but the rest are well hidden, and the book builds to a tense and very unexpected conclusion and a clever last page surprise.

Highly entertaining.

**THE SEVEN**

(COVER THE BONES in the UK)

by Chris Hammer

Allen & Unwin \$A32.99

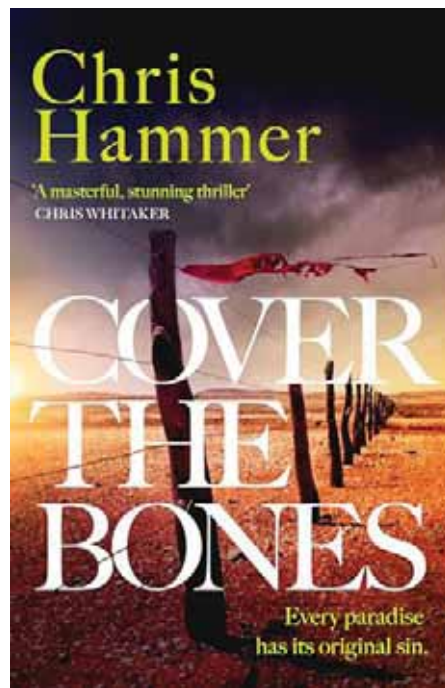
Detective Nell Buchanan #3

**Rating: A-**

**THE SEVEN** is sixth novel by Chris Hammer, author of **SCRUBLANDS**, and brings back his popular pairing of Detective Sergeant Ivan Lucic and Detective Constable Nell Buchanan.

This time around they are called in to investigate the discovery of a body in a canal in the country town of Yuwonderie, which lies at the centre of the fictional Yuwonderie Irrigation Area. The town is the result of a major private irrigation project that brought the water of the Murrumbidgee River to a previously arid landscape in the 1920s. In the process the scheme generated huge wealth for the seven founding families known colloquially as The Seven. The body in the canal is that of the local accountant, Athol Hasluck, who was a minor member of The Seven. As Lucic and Nell investigate, they become tangled in local and state politics, corruption, scams and an unsolved killing from 1994.

As with his previous book, **THE TILT**, Hammer tells the story through three distinct timelines. The first, starting in 1913, is a series of letters from Bessie, a young part-Aboriginal woman sent to work for the Titchfields, a family that will be one of the key players in the formation of the irrigation scheme and The Seven. The second, set in 1993/94, is the story of Davis Heartwood, the young heir apparent to one of the families, who is doing research into the establishment of the town and the role of The Seven. While in the present, Lucic and Nell struggle to untangle the



web of family and small connections and the relevance of the earlier murder, while dodging the attention of a determined killer.

As the narrative switches between the three gradually merging timelines, Hammer delivers some good surprises and creates an interesting historical narrative of the local area. Each of the timelines are convincing and credible, and Hammer accurately portrays the feel of the very different historical periods. Despite its length, the book mainly moves along at a good pace, and the final hundred pages, or so, make for compelling and surprising reading. Keeping track of the various members of The Seven down the years, and their links to the various crimes, requires some concentration, but it is well worth the effort.

An enjoyable crime tale with a strong sense of place and history.

**KILL YOUR HUSBANDS**

by Jack Heath

Allen & Unwin \$A32.99

**Rating: A-**

With **KILL YOUR HUSBANDS**, Jack Heath revitalises the familiar plot device of taking a group of old friends and isolating them in a remote rural location with a killer, by adding his own unique style and some very good twists.

Three couples, friends since high school, rent a luxurious house in the mountains for an unplugged weekend of drinking and bushwalking. No internet, no phones, no stress. On the first night, the topic of partner-swapping comes up. Not everyone is keen, but an agreement is made. The lights will be turned out. The three women will go into the three bedrooms. The three men will each pick a room at random. It won't be awkward later, because they won't know who they've slept with, or can pretend they don't. But when the lights come back on, one of the men is dead. No one will admit to being his partner. The phones still don't work, and now the car key is missing. They are stranded. And the killer is just getting started.

Alternating between the events of the night and the subsequent police investigation, **KILL YOUR HUSBANDS** is a fast moving tale that smoothly glides its way through frequent twists and some very dark moments. The three couples are nicely limned and the police detective, Senior Constable Kiara Lui, is a marvellous creation, full of uncertainty and astute reasoning.

Heath is very good at creating a creepy atmosphere and the book certainly grips attention from the opening pages and keeps a tight hold until the end. The changing nature of the couples under pressure, and as their secrets are revealed, is well done and the shifting perspective really helps to build the mystery. Kiara's personal life is also skilfully woven into story, adding its own degree of mystery and suspense.

In all, a first rate thriller that will surprise and delight to the end.

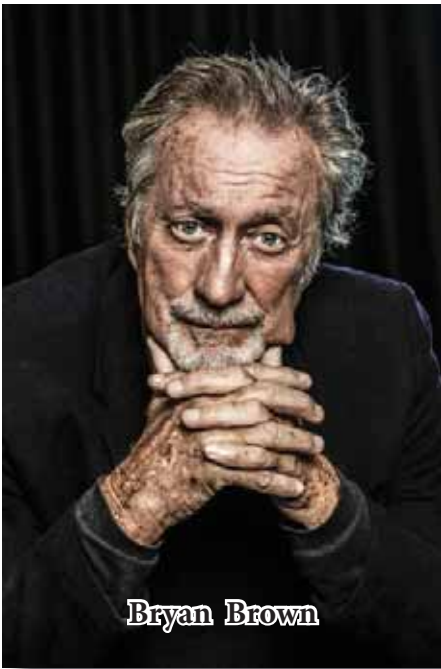
**THE DROWNING**

by Bryan Brown

Allen & Unwin \$A32.99

**Rating: B+**

Iconic Australian actor Bryan Brown made a promising start as a crime writer with his gritty collection of short stories, **SWEET JIMMY**, in 2021. He has now followed it up with an even better novel, **THE DROWNING**, which displays the same stripped down, unadorned writing style and a good cast of down-to-earth



**Bryan Brown**

characters.

The story is set in a small coastal town on the northern coast of New South Wales, and opens with the discovery of the body of a local Indigenous teenage boy on the beach. The assumption is that the boy went swimming at night and got into trouble. The local police sergeant, Tommy Gallagher, is not so sure, but he has other problems on his mind, including the disappearance of a young European backpacker and the movement of drugs through the town. Meanwhile ex-cop Adrian is helping the local café owner out with a lucrative sideline, but what is his real aim? And in the backblocks outside of town, a bikie gang is gearing up for a large consignment from South America.

Brown smoothly brings these various elements together in an always interesting story that builds to a tense and exciting climax in the local bushland. The inhabitants of the town, and those passing through, are marvellously crafted and very credible, and eschew the usual clichés to be found in crime fiction. The depiction of the rhythm of the local town is also very well done and will be recognisable to anyone familiar with the New South Wales.

Moderately paced, but very engaging, **THE DROWNING**, is one of the most authentically Australian crime novels I

have read for some time.

## Craig Sистерson Review

### **RIPPER**

by Shelley Burr

Hachette Australia, \$A32.99, August

Grade: A-

Fresh off winning a Ned Kelly Award for her terrific first novel **WAKE** – which meshed true crime obsession with rural noir, and had previously won a CWA Dagger as an unpublished manuscript – Australian author Shelley Burr plunges readers into another twisting small-town mystery with **RIPPER** (which will be published in the northern hemisphere as **MURDER TOWN** next year).

Gemma Guillory is a lifelong resident of Rainier, a tiny rural town that like many across Australia and around the world is now struggling as industries and economies evolve. Seventeen years ago a teenaged Gemma stared down a serial killer, and now a big city business backed by some desperate locals wants to cash in, offering tours of Rainier for true crime fans. Residents are understandably split on resurrecting the town's past notoriety, but is it the town's only chance of survival?

When the tour operator is the victim of a copycat-style slaying near Gemma's store, she must battle fears present and past. Could someone she knows, even loves, have committed murder? While Gemma is drawn into the investigation, so too is Lane Holland, an unusual private eye whose sleuthing must take a different tack, now he's behind bars (following the events of *Wake*). Holland is conscripted by a warden with his own agenda to elicit information from the original Rainier Ripper. Could there be a copycat, or did he have a partner? What happened with an unidentified victim?

Burr cements herself as a terrific new voice in Australian, and global, crime writing while avoiding any sophomore

slump and proving she's no one-hit wonder. **RIPPER** is a terrific second effort that delivers tension and humanity, and deftly blends page-turning crime story with explorations of people, place, and trauma.

## The 2023 Shamus Award Winners

### Best PI Novel

**THE WHEEL OF DOLL,**  
Jonathan Ames – Winner

**THE BIG BUNDLE,**  
Max Allan Collins  
**THE GOODBYE COAST,**  
Joe Ide

**HOLMES COMING,**  
Kenneth Johnson  
**THE BLACKMAIL,** M. Ravenel

### Best First PI Novel

**THE GOLDENACRE,** Philip  
Miller – Winner

**BIG FAT F@!K-UP,**  
Lawrence Allan  
**PAY DIRT ROAD,**  
Samantha Jayne Allen  
**FOOTE,** Tom Bredehoft  
**WHAT MEETS THE EYE,**  
Alex Kenna

### Best PI Paperback Original

**DEAD-BANG FALL,**  
J.R. Sanders – Winner

**QUARRY'S BLOOD,**  
Max Allan Collins  
**DOUBLEBLIND,**  
Libby Fischer Hellmann  
**CANARY IN A COAL MINE,**  
Charles Salzberg  
**HUSH HUSH,** Gabriel Valjan



# DP Calendar



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/>



April 11-14, 2024

**Left Coast Crime 2024**  
**Seattle Shakedown**  
Seattle, Washington

Guests of Honor: Megan Abbott, Robert Dugoni and Wanda M. Morris

Website: <https://leftcoastcrime.org/2024/>

THE INTERNATIONAL CRIME FICTION CONVENTION



Guests of Honor: Mark Billingham, Elly Griffiths, Peter Guttridge

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



May 28 - June 1, 2024

**Thrillerfest XIX**

New York City, NY

Guests of Honor: Tess Gerritsen, Dennis Lehane, Steph Cha, Ruth Ware, Louise Penny, Ayo Onatade

Website: [thrillerfest.com](http://thrillerfest.com)



September 13-15, 2024

**Bloody Scotland**

Stirling, Scotland

Guests of Honor: TBA

Website: [bloodyscotland.com](http://bloodyscotland.com)



April 26-28, 2024

**Malice Domestic 36**

Bethesda, Maryland

Guests of Honor: Sujata Massey, Elaine Viets, Lori Rader-Day, Krisopher Zgorzki and Lucy Worsley

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



July 18-21, 2024

**Theakston Old Peculier Crime Festival**

Harrogate, England

Guests of Honor: TBA

Website: <https://harrogateinternationalfestivals.com/crime-writing-festival/>

May 9-12, 2024

**Crimefest**

Bristol, England



September 3-7, 2025

**Bouchercon**

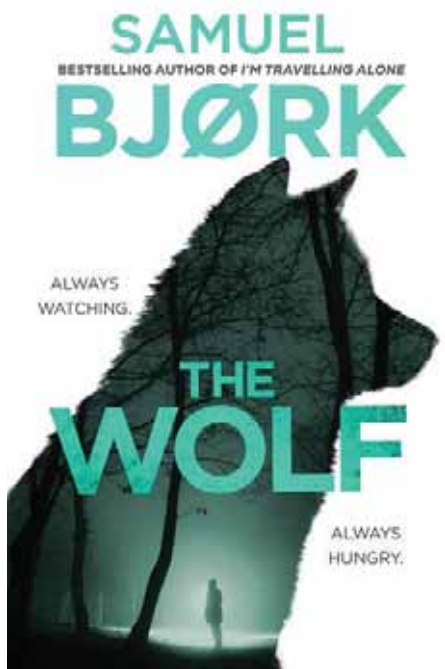
**Blood on the Bayou: Case Closed**  
New Orleans, Louisiana

Guests of Honor: Michael Connelly, Steph Cha, Craig Johnson, Charles Todd, Jonathan Maberry, Alafair Burke and Ali Karim

## What's New In the U.K.

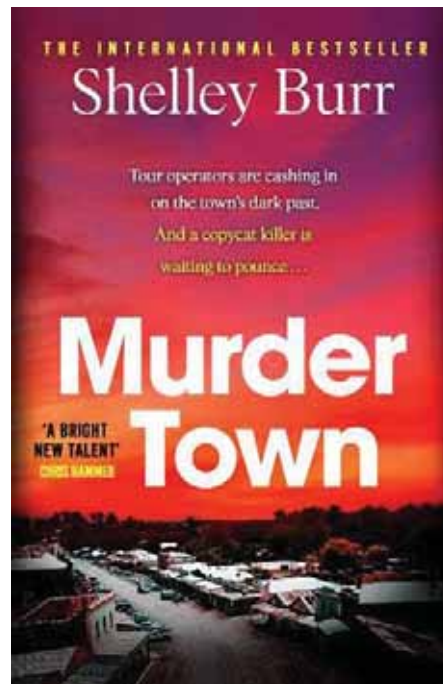


**THE WOLF**, Samuel Bjork (Bantam Press, £18.99, November). It was one of Sweden's most notorious unsolved cases: two young boys abducted and murdered, their bodies brutally, artistically arranged. But eight years later, when two other boys are found in similar circumstances, it looks like the killer might be back - this time in neighbouring Norway. Led by veteran detective Holger Munch, the investigating police are baffled. There are no clues, no leads to follow. In desperation, Munch drafts in a trainee from the Police Academy, Mia Kruger, a young woman with an uncanny ability to see beyond the facts. Little does he know that Mia is battling her own demons and will soon find that her life and that of the case are entwined in ways no one could have imagined.



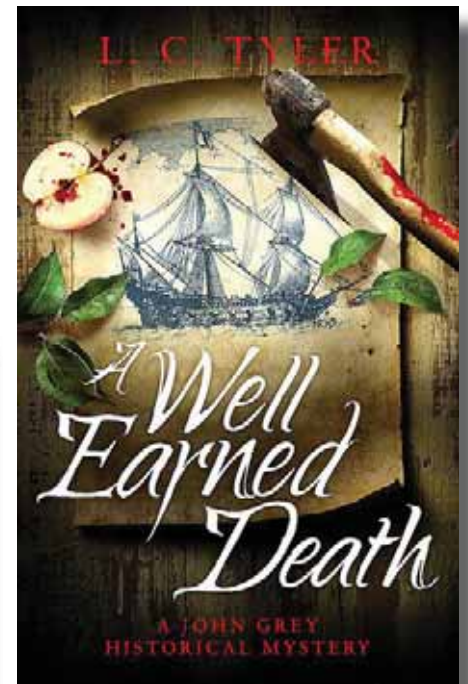
**THE FAKE WIFE**, Sharon Bolton (Orion, £20.00, November). Olive Anderson is dining alone at a hotel when

a glamorous stranger joins her table, pretending to be her wife. What starts as a thrilling game quickly turns into something dangerous. But as much as the fake wife has her secrets, Olive just might have more.



**MURDER TOWN**, Shelley Burr (Hodder & Stoughton, £20.00, December). Gemma Guillory knows her once charming town is now remembered for one reason, and one reason only. That three innocent people died. That the last stop on the Rainier Ripper's trail of deaths fifteen years ago was her innocuous little tea shop. She knows that the consequences of catching the Ripper still haunt her policeman husband and their marriage to this day and that some of her neighbours are desperate - desperate enough to welcome a dark tourism company keen to cash in on Rainier's reputation as the murder

town. When the tour operator is killed by a Ripper copycat on Gemma's doorstep, the unease that has lurked quietly in the original killer's wake turns to foreboding, and she's drawn into the investigation. Unbeknownst to her, so is a prisoner named Lane Holland.



**A WELL EARNED DEATH**, L.C. Tyler (Constable, £21.99, November). In 1671 there are fortunes to be made in Barbados, owning slaves and planting sugar cane. But drought, floods, locusts and his own incompetence have brought Hubert Umfraville down and caused him to flee the island in the most humiliating fashion. Now back in England, he hopes to restore his fortunes through extortion. In Barbados he has discovered a secret that people here may pay him to keep quiet about. When his body is found in the orchard of the house he has just rented in Essex, there is no shortage of suspects. Has his intended blackmail victim preempted him? Or has one or other of his old crimes caught up with the failed plantation owner? John Grey, Essex magistrate and husband of a famous London playwright, finds himself investigating what seems to be the well-merited death of a former slave owner.

U.K.

Reviews



Jeff Popple Reviews



**PAST LYING**

by Val McDermid  
Sphere, £22.00 ;

in U.S, Atlantic Monthly, \$27.00

Karen Pirie #7

**Rating: A**

Val McDermid’s popular cold case detective, DCI Karen Pirie, makes a welcomed return in **PAST LYING**, the seventh book in the highly entertaining series.

Set in Edinburgh during the peak of the COVID lockdowns in early 2020, it is a very engaging mystery that features an interesting ‘story within a story’ plot and some great atmospheric writing.

Karen is initially sceptical when an author’s manuscript appears to be a blueprint for an actual crime, but she cannot ignore the plot’s chilling similarities to the unsolved case of an Edinburgh University student who vanished. The manuscript seems to be the key to unlocking what happened to Lara Hardie, but there’s a problem, the author, a disgraced well-known Scottish crime writer, died before he finished it.

As Karen digs deeper, she uncovers a

spiralling game of betrayal and revenge, while around her the pandemic wreaks havoc and causes some tragic outcomes.

I think that **PAST LYING** is probably Val’s best novel for some time. The plotting is clever, and I enjoyed the dual storylines of the author’s novel and the ongoing police investigation. As always, the mechanics of the cold case ring true, and in the process Val introduces the reader to an interesting cast of auxiliary characters. The central mystery is a good one and it unfolds in very unexpected ways. The story is also helped by an interesting secondary storyline, which adds some good suspense and action.

As well, there are some not unexpected developments in Karen’s personal life, which regular readers will find interesting.

Val is always very good at creating vivid and compelling scenes that make the most of Scotland’s history and

scenery, and in **PAST LYING** she ably brings back the horror and uncertainty of the pandemic: “It was like the zombie apocalypse, withOUT the zombies.”

Scottish crime writing features heavily in the novel, as Karen tries to separate fact from fiction and has to get a crash course in vagaries of authors and publishers. It gives Val plenty of opportunity for ‘tongue-in-cheek’ reflections and plenty of inside comments and wry observations about contemporary crime writing, which adds to the pleasure.

In all, **PAST LYING** is a very good novel that once more showcases Val’s immense talent.

**George’s Take:** Amen. **Rating:** A-

**KILLING WATERS**

by Adrian Magson

Amazon, £2.99 – Kindle only

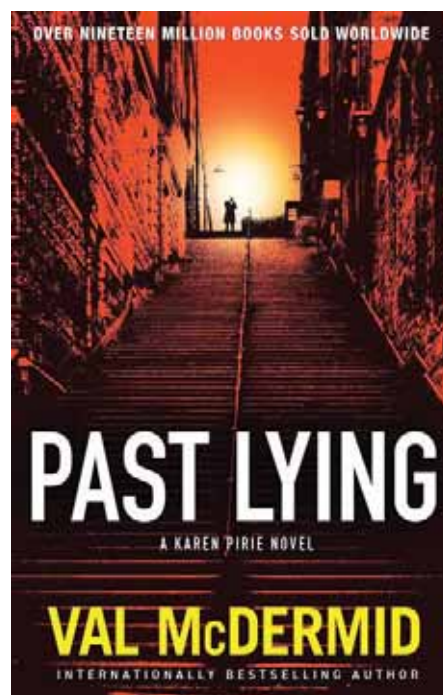
**Rating: B+**

I always enjoy Adrian Magson’s novels, especially those that move between spy and thriller fiction.

For his latest book, **KILLING WATERS**, Magson leaves behind his two popular series featuring MI5 agent Harry Tate and personal protection agent Marc Portman, for a new hero in the form of ex-soldier and former undercover HM Customs investigator Isaac Jackson.

After being pushed out of his job as an undercover agent by political pressure, Jackson is looking for a change of direction. As a temporary measure, he agrees to look after a gym and canal boat owned by an army buddy. He is enjoying the change of pace teaching fitness and self-defence, but when a friend in the tight-knit canal boat community is murdered he is pushed into investigating. He soon finds himself caught up in a web of intrigue involving people trafficking, corruption, forced labour and murder.

This is a good, straight forward crime thriller with a well sketched cast of characters and a briskly moving plot that quickly draws you in. The action is frequent enough to keep it interesting, and there is a good sense of mystery around what is happening. Some of the villains are easy to spot, but others are



well disguised. There also is a strong contemporary feel to the plot and the story unfolds in a credible way.

Adding pleasure is Magson's depiction of life on the English canals, and he creates a clear sense of place around the waterways and the local community. I also quite liked the low-key Jackson, who is an engaging and capable hero with none of the arrogance of some action heroes.

There are probably too many coincidences and close escapes, but overall it is a very enjoyable read.

### STOP THEM DEAD

by Peter James

Macmillan, £22.00

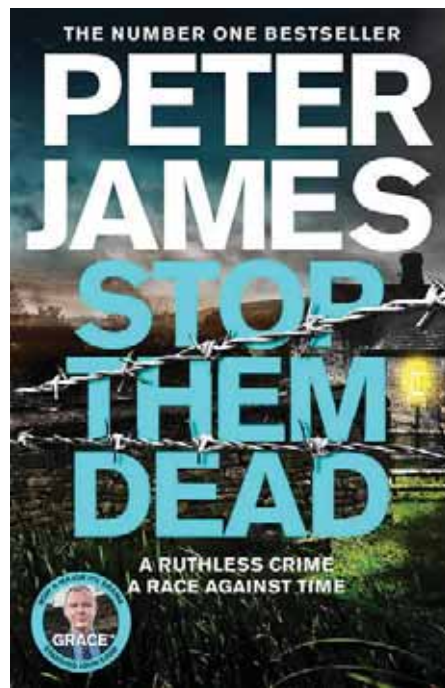
Roy Grace #19

Rating: B+

Peter James' series about Brighton police detective Roy Grace has become a mainstay of the British crime scene, both in books and on television, over the past decade or so, and the latest entry, **STOP THEM DEAD**, is another smoothly written tale of murder, greed and mayhem.

**STOP THEM DEAD** opens in horrific fashion with a farmer being murdered by intruders, who have come to steal his dogs and a new litter of puppies. The crime leads Grace and the team into the murky depths of the world of puppy farms, illegal dog trading and the theft of dogs from their owners, plus much more. The crooks involved are a nasty lot and will stop at nothing to get rich.

James is a skilled practitioner of the crime writer's dark arts, and he quickly puts the various elements of the tale in place, and steadily ratchets up the emotional tension as the plot unfolds. The details of the investigation are credible and absorbing, and James smoothly weaves them into the story. As usual, he also skilfully moves the viewpoint between a variety of characters, and this frequent shifting of perspective heightens the interest and builds the suspense. There are some slow patches, and probably too much personal detail, but the book builds to a good, tough, and bloody climax that will have readers



eagerly turning the pages. Be warned though, there are scenes that dog owners will find disturbing. James never exploits the treatment of the dogs, but it is hard not to feel anger and sadness at how people use animals, especially during the COVID period.

In all, this is another finely structured tale that will appeal to James' many fans.

### Ali Karim Reviews



Ali & His Minder, Lee Child

### THE TURNGLASS

by Gareth Rubin

Simon & Schuster UK, £16.99, August

Rating: A

Book reviewers are frequently overheard saying, 'I'm looking for something

new, something different from the same old, same old'. This work is just that, something very different. It's not a novel per se, but rather two novellas printed head-to-tail. The technique has been termed a *tête-bêche*, an association with stamp-collecting ["*philatélie*"]. I recall the closing line to my review of the author's 2019 Novel "Gareth Rubin is name to watch for" which years later is proven to be so very true.

The two historical novellas that make up this narrative, are set in two periods of time, upon two continents and written in two very different writing styles. The publishers indicate that The Turnglass's two novellas can be read in any order, though perhaps it is best sampled by chronology.

#### 1880s, Essex Coast. England.

Dr Simeon Lee of London ventures to the Essex Coast in order to investigate the mysterious illness that has befallen his relative, the former soldier – turned clergyman - Oliver Hawes. Lee's relative lives in Turnglass House, the sole abode on the island of Ray. Cut off from the mainland at high tide, but linked to the neighbouring island of Mersea, the atmosphere is oppressive and claustrophobic for the young doctor. Smuggling operations by the local *fisherman* and *ne'er-do-wells* provide a dangerous backdrop as does the presence of the mysterious 'Florence', a murderess imprisoned in a glass-walled cell within Turnglass House. As the Parson's health deteriorates, Dr Hawes tries to uncover what is causing the illness especially as his relative believes he is being poisoned. There's also Parson Hawes' journal written in the back of a chapbook / novelette *The Gold Field* by O. Tooke about a journey to America set several decades in the future.

The Doctor discovers a body, hidden in the marsh on the edge of the Strood [the pathway that at low tide links the islands of Ray and Mersea to the Essex mainland]. Deftly etched characters add to the mystery, such as [the imprisoned] Florence's father, the magistrate Watkins and the unfriendly people living on Mersea such as the [alleged] child murderer Mary Fen.

The Doctor must solve the family



mysteries which centre on Turnglass House, as well as project into the future, like that of the novelette that his relative, Parson Hawes was using as a journal.

**1930s, Los Angeles, California. America.**

The second novella is less of a Victorian gothic mystery, but more of an American Noir narrative set in the late 1930s. Ken Kourian, is a struggling Hollywood actor who befriends the mysterious Gloria. As success in 'Hollywood-land' [Hollywood's original name] is all about connections, Gloria introduces Ken to the successful author Oliver Tooke, who lives with his sister, the mysterious Coraline in their glass-walled home, The Turnglass situated on the Californian beach-front. Ken and Oliver become friends.

When Oliver Tooke is discovered dead from an apparent suicide, Ken does not believe his friend took his own life, so he decides to investigate. He uncovers intrigue in pre-World War Two America, politics and dark family histories of the powerful and wealthy in California. Though the revelations in Oliver Tooke's short novel **THE TURNGLASS**, a narrative about a certain Dr Simeon Lee prove to be most enlightening, not just for Ken Kourian's investigation into his friend's death, but equally revelatory for the reader.

When the second novella [set 1930s California, America] closes, the reader is compelled to go back to the first [1880s Essex, England] and then see how this intricate mesh of metafiction, was structured.

Gareth Rubin's two novellas that form **THE TURNGLASS** is a narrative of mysterious beauty, locking two very different writing styles to tell two very different stories that are linked so, so very elegantly.

Less of a novel, more a unique reading experience.

### **WORD MONKEY**

by Christopher Fowler

Doubleday UK, £18.99, August

**Rating: A**

The final part of the author's recollections about his own life, landscaped against the backdrop of novels and films - has arrived. As much as Film Freak and Paperboy were evocative, this final volume is a joyous celebration as much as it is sad.

Christopher Fowler though best known for his Bryant and May Peculiar Crimes Unit tales, was a bibliophile who co-managed a London based Film Marketing business, wrote horror and weird fiction, reviewed books and was basically a wonderful rampart in London's literary scene. This makes his diagnosis of terminal cancer in early 2020 all the more troubling. Instead of anger and resentment at why he had such little time left - he set off to conclude his life as he started it - with a celebration of books.

The title 'word monkey' is an allusion to what one of his early bosses unkindly referred to his career choice, in lieu of the term 'writer'. Fowler never had an unkind word in his canon - instead he rejoiced at the world of books, and when faced with unkindness he would shrug it off, and laugh at the absurdity of it all. He barely touches upon the awards and plaudits that peppered his career nor reflect upon life's great injustices - instead he focuses upon gratitude and modesty.

The magic of **WORD MONKEY** is that it can make you roar with laughter, smile in agreement as well as find your eyes are getting wet, all in the space of

a single chapter. The recollections and absurdity of these recollections and observations are life affirming, as well as reflective. They also provide some context and comfort to not only his readers, but also to bibliophiles in general.

His nonfiction also included explorations of the so-called Forgotten Authors, a term that will never apply to him.

Remember, in the silence of the Library, no one can hear you read.

Highly recommended.

### **EVERYBODY KNOWS**

by Jordan Harper

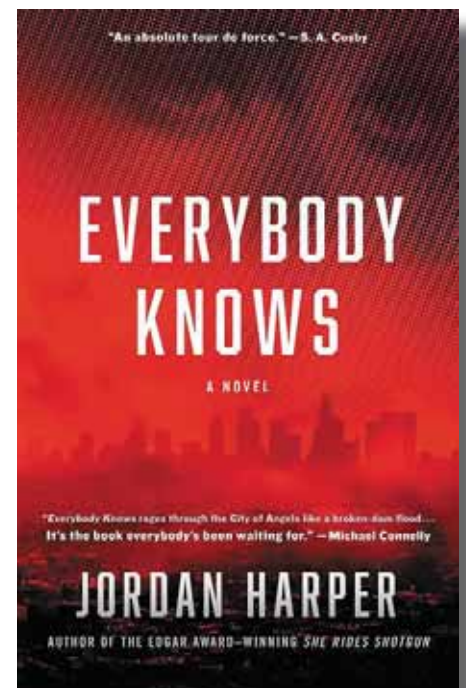
In U.S., Mulholland Books,  
In U.K., Faber & Faber. £8.99

**Rating: A**

The motif for this novel is curiously apt "Nobody Talks, but Everybody Whispers" because it comes from the pen of Hollywood Screenwriter Jordan Harper - the award-winning crime writer of this extraordinary book.

Thanks to the efforts of Faber and Faber London, it finally comes to the UK after its furious release in North America earlier this year.

Written in a terse staccato style like the work of James Ellroy; it plays like a knowingly-real thriller; a Hollywood Babylon expose that mixes the excesses of Los Angeles with the darkest edges of



human nature.

The narrative details the collision of Mae Pruett, a public relations player with Mitnick and Mitnick Associates who keep Hollywood's 'bad news' out of the fingers of the media, [both legacy journalism as well as the new arenas of TikTok, Instagram et al] -- with that of her friend, former cop-turned private enforcer Chris Tamburro of BlackGuard Security.

When Mae's boss Dan is murdered in what appears to be a carjacking outside a Hollywood Hotel, the PR Professional is tasked to take over her boss's workload -- which Mae believes led to his demise. But before the reader can utter 'me too', Chris Tamburro is assigned to investigate the carjacking that claimed not only the life of Mae Pruett's boss, but also the murderer.

Unresolved mysteries start to coil, to coagulate. A murdered star, a Hollywood actress turned diva, drugs, brutality and of course the draw of fame for the young, dazzled by the promise of wealth and fame from *The Beast* that is 'Hollywood'.

Are Mitnick and Mitnick Associates working in-concert with BlackGuard Security to conceal the unthinkable? And what lengths are they prepared to go to, to ensure the horrors of LA LA Land remain hidden.

Mae starts to question her own value system in working for *The Beast*, and the cost to her sanity and warping of her morality, because everybody talks about how actresses are crazy, but nobody talks about how they got that way.

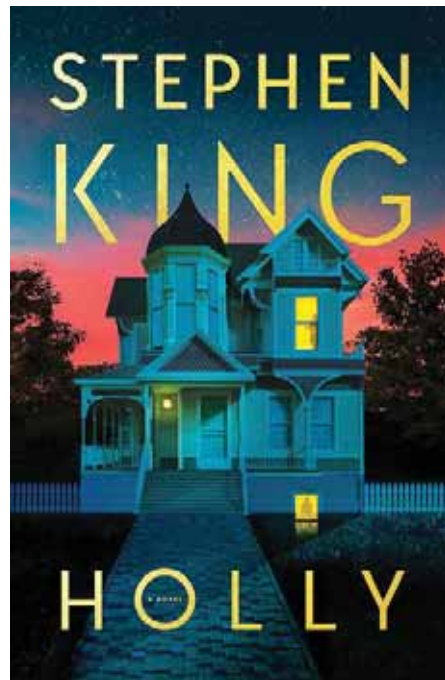
Jordan Harper's **EVERYBODY KNOWS** is the most energetic and most unsettling novel I've read this year.

The horror that is hidden Hollywood is on full display, beyond the whispers outside of casting rooms, or the support services that feed the beast, exposing us to what lurks in the shadows. Prescient and unmissable.

**George's Take:** On the surface a public relations firm will tell you that its mission is to place its clientele's actions in the best light possible. It's all a matter of spin and in some cases creating fake news. But if the vision we see in **EVERYBODY KNOWS** is what often

goes on behind the scenes, pr firms can sometimes be downright amoral and criminal in their cover-ups of the actions of prominent clients.

Aside from a gritty plot and fascinating characters, we experience outstanding prose filled with human insight. I would characterize the journey of the two main protagonists as one of "breaking good." As we first encounter Mae and Chris they pretty horrible human beings, but as they proceed through the book, they encounter a chance to redeem themselves from all their past behavior, which results in a bitter sweet ending. Clearly one of the best crime novels of the year.



### HOLLY

by Stephen King

In UK, Hodder & Stoughton, £25.00, September

In US, Scribner, \$30.00, September

**Rating: A**

'Sometimes the Universe throws you a fine read.' And King's narrative is just that, a deliciously warped crime fiction novel, devoid of the supernatural, but one of his finest thrillers.

This latest work, eponymously titled after a minor character from his 2014 work **MR MERCEDES** -- Holly Gibney, who would return in **FINDERS KEEPERS**, **END OF WATCH** and in the

novella **If It Bleeds** is centre stage.

Recovering from her mother's death from Covid, Holly Gibney Private Eye, takes on the case of missing librarian Bonnie Dahl against the wishes of her partner the ex-Cop Pete, who is suffering from Covid.

Perhaps it's the aftermath of her own mother's funeral [held on-line] that makes the missing woman's mother, Penny Dahl's plea for help that forces Holly to take on this missing person's case.

King switches timelines between the kidnapping of Bonnie Dahl, with other abductions all carried out in close range of the local college, but not linked by the police as serial abductions.

The novel is a dark affair, highlighting the divisions in America exacerbated by the emergence of the virus, the proliferation of conspiracy theories, with those of the issues of racial politics that defined the Trump era.

---

## George Easter Review

### ASSASSIN EIGHTEEN

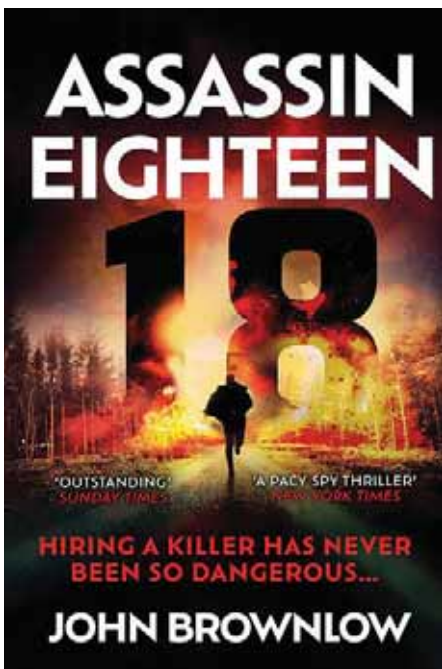
by John Brownlow

Hodder & Stoughton, £20.00, August  
Assassin #2

**Rating: A**

Who knew there was a pecking order among world-class assassins? It seems that to be considered the best in the world by your peers, one must successfully eliminate the current holder of the title "Best Assassin in the World." There have been seventeen professional killers who have reached this pinnacle of professional success. The current holder, known as Seventeen, has decided to retire in the fortress-like home of his predecessor Sixteen. But he knows it will be just a matter of time before someone comes along to try and take his place.

So Seventeen isn't too surprised when a sniper's bullet hits the bullet-proof glass window just inches from his face. He quickly finds the person who attempted to kill him and is



shocked to find that it's a 9-year-old girl named Mireille. He's not a child killer so he decides to find out who Mireille is and why she was instructed to fire the bullet. In the meantime, he knows his safe haven is no longer safe and goes on the run. Along the way he picks up his former lover the multi-talented Kat (daughter of Sixteen).

Not everyone will like all aspects of the denouement but all should agree that the ending was inevitable.

Brownlow has mastered the art of short chapters, many of which end with cliff-hangers. The action-packed novel is 467 pages with 190 chapters. That's roughly 2-1/2 pages per chapter.

The author won the CWA Steel Dagger for Best Thriller in the U.K. last year for **SEVENTEEN** (quickly renamed **AGENT SEVENTEEN**) and deservedly so. **SEVENTEEN** is a dynamite thriller and **ASSASSIN EIGHTEEN** is its match. Action thriller fans should flock to this series.

**ASSASSIN EIGHTEEN** will be published in the U.S. in April, 2024.

### THE CONSPIRATORS

by G. W. Shaw (William Shaw)  
Riverrun, £18.99, July

Rating: A-

This novel follows a long tradition of

thrillers with naive and innocent protagonists drawn into highly dangerous situations, which bring out courage and survival skills they didn't know they had.

Translator Jacob Meaney is just such a protagonist. He is a struggling translator who is being pressured by his beautiful girlfriend to find a way to make more money so they can move out of his dingy apartment in London. Along comes a lucrative offer for him to act as a translator and before he knows what the job is all about, Jacob is whisked away to a stunning Austrian lakeside villa, where he is asked to use his language skills to help negotiate deals.

Before too long Jacob finds himself a prisoner in the villa, doing the bidding of Myroslav, a brutish millionaire, who appears to be mixed up in a dodgy pharmaceutical scam.

There are not a lot of thrills and chills in the first half of the book which still manages to breeze along at a goodly pace. But the second half is chock full of danger, excitement and surprises. I read this over the period of a day and found it a very easy read because of Shaw's fluid prose. Shaw is one of those authors who is incapable of writing a mediocre or bad book. However, **THE CONSPIRATORS** is a book that will require some suspension of disbelief, so be forewarned.

### THE TEACHER

by Tim Sullivan

Head of Zeus, £20.00, January, 2024

DS Cross #6

Rating: A-

DS George Cross is on the autism spectrum and could be described as a cross (no pun intended) between Monk and Sheldon Cooper of *The Big Bang Theory*. He's very bright (an excellent detective) but has no social skills and often comes off as rude, difficult or awkward to people he comes in contact with. Those close to him in the police force make allowances for his idiosyncrasies because he solves crimes at the highest rate on the police force.

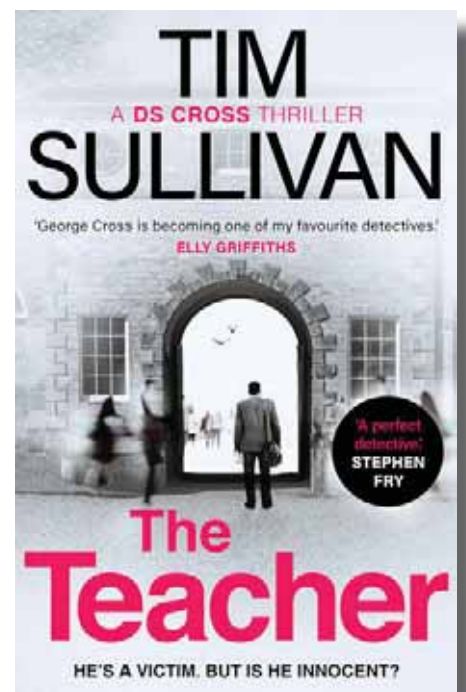
When the stabbed body of 80-year-old retired headmaster Alistair Moreton

is found in his home, Cross goes to work on the case, but DI Bobby Warner, a superior officer from a neighboring force, is brought in to take the helm. They immediately clash. Warner seeks a simple solution to the crime, but Cross thinks that Warner is overlooking avenues of investigation that should be pursued.

A neighbor of the deceased is arrested for the murder, but Cross and his sidekick, DS Josie Ottey, continue to investigate to make sure the right person is going to be tried for Moreton's murder. Complicating the investigation is the reveal that Moreton was a sadistic headmaster of a prestigious boys school and he would systematically beat all of the students with a cane – "six good ones" which would almost always draw blood. There must be hundreds of his former students that wished him ill.

This is my first sampling of Tim Sullivan's work and I confess that I am impressed with the complexity of the plot and the depth of the characters he has created. There are two that the reader almost instantly loves to hate: the odious DI Bobby Warner and the victim's son, ex-MP Alexander Moreton, who comes off as an officious, publicity seeking bore. They are both a bit over the top, but it was still fun to witness their comeuppance.

Another prime example of a British



author who should be published in the U.S. Fortunately all of his books are available on amazon.com for American readers to buy.

## Craig Sisterson Reviews



### DEATH OF A LESSER GOD

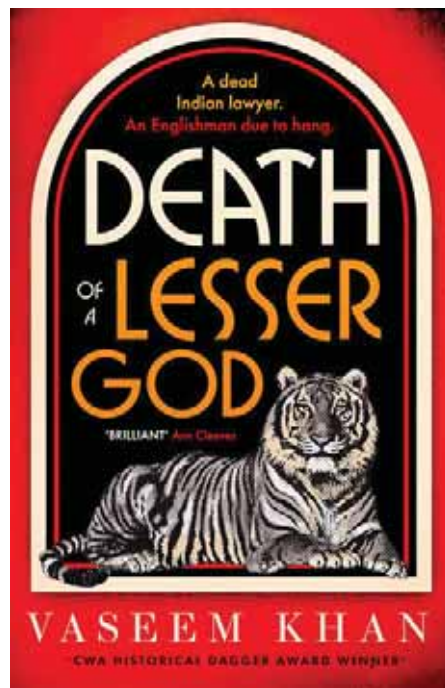
by Vaseem Khan

Hodder & Stoughton, £16.99, November

**Rating: A**

Award-winning British crime writer Vaseem Khan, who earlier this year became the first non-white Chair in the 70-year history of the famed Crime Writers' Association, soaks readers in the politics and prejudice of post-independence India in his latest 'Malabar House' historical mystery. As well as a sumptuously written page-whirrer, **DEATH OF A LESSER GOD** explores what one man's fate can say about a new nation's soul. It's 1950 and India is sort of like a newborn, taking its first stuttering steps after finally breaking the shackles of the British Raj and having to deal with the horrors of partition.

Persis Waida, Bombay's first female police detective, is handed a poisoned chalice by her superiors when she's ordered to review the case of James Whitby, who is set to hang in a fortnight for the murder of noted Indian lawyer and former Quit India activist Fareed Mazumdar. While Whitby is Indian-born himself, as a white man and the son of an arch-colonialist, he's seen by many as a symbol of the oppressive British Raj



which ruled for these lands for centuries. So Whitby's claims of innocence receive short shrift by most, and Persis Waida is stuck reviewing a case many of her colleagues as well as millions of citizens want to see end with a taut rope and swinging white man.

Khan adroitly tightropes history and mystery, texturing a superb novel with vivid, fascinating renditions of its time and place, while never veering towards lecture or textbook. As Persis Waida tries to navigate a way through powerbroking and literal swamps of India, readers are treated to a terrific crime tale that meshes personal and political. While it's the fourth instalment in an addictive series, **DEATH OF A LESSER GOD** can also easily be read and thoroughly enjoyed as a standalone.

### PAST LYING

by Val McDermid

Sphere, £11.00, October;  
in U.S., Atlantic Monthly, \$27.00

Karen Pirie #7

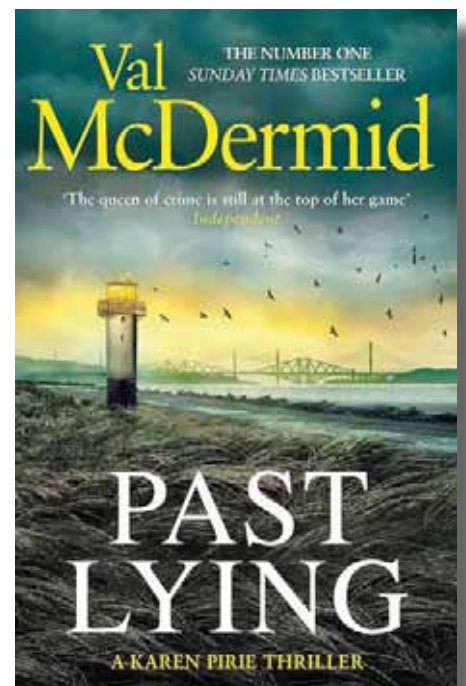
**Rating: A-**

Two years ago Scottish author Val McDermid, modern-day crime writing royalty, introduced readers to her first new series lead in some time, Glasgow journalist Allie Burns. In 1979 and last year's 1989, two terrific novels, Burns

uncovered secrets and crimes in the UK and across Europe while battling news-room and societal prejudice, growing into herself, and living through intense eras of change.

With three novels still to come in that decade-leaping historical series, McDermid now takes a breather by returning to the (near) present, revisiting her popular cold case heroine Karen Pirie, portrayed by Outlander's Laura Lyle in a cracking new TV adaptation (available on BritBox). In **PAST LYING**, 'KP Nuts' and her team are struggling through the early days of 2020's strict lockdowns when a tip from a national library source alerts them to a fiction manuscript possibly linked to a real-life crime. Did fallen-from-grace author and chess fan Jake Stein really abduct and kill a young woman to see if he could commit the perfect crime, before dying of natural causes himself? Or are the parallels merely the 'cabin fever' imaginings of those stuck inside as COVID threatens lives everywhere?

McDermid soaks readers in the uneasy atmosphere of those early COVID days, when work and personal lives were upturned, and city streets were ghost towns. It's a tricky case for Pirie and her colleagues, and McDermid keeps things fresh with some epistolary and even meta touches, as a crime writer's manu-



script and life are examined as potential evidence. There's lots to enjoy here, from an engrossing mystery to key character developments.

McDermid is on a very short list of crime writers in the modern era (along with the likes of Michael Connelly and Ian Rankin) who've been consistently entertaining readers old and new for 30+ years of publishing, while continuing to raise the bar and deftly mix in freshness with familiarity, rather than resting on their many laurels or past accolades. In the 13 years since McDermid earned the Cartier Diamond Dagger, a lifetime achievement honor for "outstanding achievement in the field of crime writing", she's produced an oeuvre that would be an enviable entire career for most others. *PAST LYING* gives readers an engrossing mystery tale alongside key character developments. Very good.

## And Now Craig Sisterson's Reviews of Some Popular American Titles

### RESURRECTION WALK

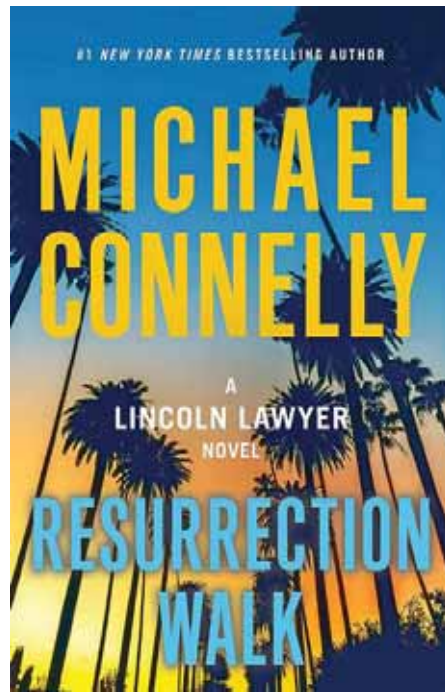
by Michael Connelly

Little, Brown, \$30.00, November

**Rating: A-**

The modern maestro of California crime fiction, Michael Connelly once again brings together bruised heroes and half-brothers Mickey Haller and Harry Bosch, two of the greatest characters in contemporary crime fiction, for another struggle for justice in *Resurrection Walk*. More than thirty years in, Connelly continues to set a high standard for both detective novels and legal thrillers, as he juggles multiple series on page and screen (the advantage for readers being the greater crossover possibilities in the novels, sans production companies). This time around defense attorney and former drug addict Haller is chasing a new kind of high; freeing the wrongly incarcerated. After a recent success, he's looking for other long-shot, hard-luck cases that pay his soul more than pocket.

Meanwhile aging former LAPD de-



tective Bosch is downing his own drug cocktails, as he battles blood cancer. Haller gives him a job as a driver so Bosch has insurance and can get into a promising drug trial, then enlists Bosch to review cases and find possibilities among all the requests for help 'the Lincoln Lawyer' now receives. Trying to free a cop killer isn't what Bosch had in mind, but when something doesn't add up in the investigation into a woman convicted four years ago for murdering her ex-husband, a sheriff's deputy, Bosch finds himself uncomfortably 'across the aisle' from old colleagues and the life he's known for decades. He may be retired, but he's a cop through and through. A witness for the prosecution, not the defence. But what if the Lucinda Sanz is innocent, and the real killer is still out there? If so, why did she plead nolo contendere, accepting a conviction?

The seventh novel with Haller as the lead (and the 37th in the overall 'Bosch universe'), *RESURRECTION WALK* is a compelling tale which alternates between the viewpoints – and differing perspectives – of Haller and Bosch. Connelly once again showcases his masterful touch for well-rounded crime storytelling: fascinating mysteries, great characters, thematic undercurrents, and a strong sense of time and place. Somehow there's a kind of timelessness to

Connelly's writing, even as he keeps his tales abreast of evolutions in technology, current affairs, and the changing face – warts and all – of contemporary Los Angeles. This is another fine instalment in an outstanding series.

### DARK RIDE

by Lou Berney

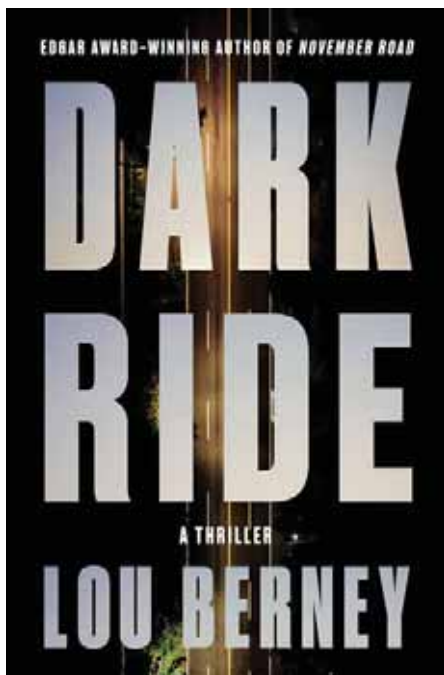
William Morrow, \$26.99, September

**Rating: A+**

After two highly entertaining crime novels starring former getaway driver "Shake" Bouchon trying to outrun crime bosses and fend off drug lords in Latin America, Oklahoma author elbowed his way to the frontlines of crime and thriller writing with 2015's *THE LONG AND FARAWAY GONE*. An outstanding thriller examining the ongoing impact of two unsolved crimes, Berney's third novel earned him Edgar, Anthony, and Barry Awards among a fistful of honors. He may have had to expand his mantlepiece after the next doubled down. Barry Award winner, *NOVEMBER ROAD*, set tangentially against the JFK assassination, scooped some of the same prizes while adding the likes of the CWA Ian Fleming Steel Dagger and the Hammett Prize for 'literary excellence' in crime writing. And then, we waited...

Five years between books is a bit of a stretch for readers used to book-a-year pacing in this genre. Good things come to those who wait, my Mum used to tell me, but in this case that's not quite true. Lou Berney's long-awaited fifth novel, *DARK RIDE*, isn't just good, it's superb. Another sublime standalone thriller from a master storyteller, full of heartache and humanity, darkness and light.

Hardy "Hardly" Reed spends his evenings as a zombie-battling sheriff at the local amusement park. A college dropout, he strolls through a care-free life in a herbal haze. He's hardly who you'd turn to in a crisis. But when Hardly spies cigarette burns on two young kids while dallying on a fine at the local municipal building, something unexpected stirs in him. After notifying an overwhelmed CPS, Hardly can't let it go, so he begins investigating the family



and the kids' father, a tax lawyer in a strip mall who keeps very dangerous company. Lassoing in some eclectic helpers along the way.

Berney cajoles with an unlikely hero in *Hardly* – a young man who can barely take care of himself yet finds himself deeply caring for others; a stumbling sleuth learning on the go – and a fascinating, rag-tag wider cast, while taking us on a thrilling and emotional ride. Nuanced, brilliant writing.

Well worth the wait, for me **DARK RIDE** is a strong best of the year contender.

#### PROM MOM

by Laura Lippman  
HarperCollins, \$30, July  
**Rating: A**

After establishing herself as terrific, award-winning voice in modern crime writing with her excellent, long-running series starring Baltimore reporter turned private eye Tess Monaghan, in recent years *New York Times* bestseller Laura Lippman has continually challenged herself and delighted readers and critics with a string of very different standalones. From multi-layered **WILDE LAKE** exploring family secrets, changing smalltown mores and stories we tell ourselves, to the extraordinary,

multi-narrated **LADY IN THE LAKE** exploring racial tensions and many forms of bigotry in 1960s Baltimore, to 2021's claustrophobic suspense **DREAM GIRL**, with its nod to Stephen King, Lippman's been masterful.

Now, she plunges us into a slow-burn thriller that digs into a 'whatever happened to?' scenario, decades after a tabloid headlines style scandal. Amber Glass desperately wants to escape her tragic past but is compulsively drawn back to her hometown and Joe, the now-middle-aged man who was Amber's prom date one fateful night that changed her life forever, destroying her teenage dreams.

Amber fears she'll always wear the tabloid moniker 'Prom Mom' like a scarlet letter – the teenager who gave birth on Prom night then allegedly killed her newborn after her date abandoned her for another girl. So Baltimore is the last place she wants to be, until circumstances draw her home. Could she have a second chance? Regardless, she really should avoid Joe, now a successful commercial real estate developer married to a plastic surgeon, but it's a small city, and there still seems a strange connection between them. As the world plunges into uncertainty, Amber and Joe find themselves circling each other before crossing lines – but how much will Amber sacrifice?

Lippman lures readers in and takes us on a suspenseful ride that flows so smoothly it perhaps obscures her mastery. Like watching a talented musician onstage – or perhaps a special athlete on the field of play – Lippman makes things that are difficult look so deceptively easy that we perhaps underappreciate the brilliance on show. There's a fluidity, flow, and ease; mastery at a high level.

**PROM MOM** is another jewel in the crown of a modern-day Empress of the crime genre.

#### DROWNING

by TJ Newman  
Simon & Schuster, \$28.00, 25 May  
**Rating: B+**

Former Virgin flight attendant and Arizona bookseller TJ Newman's

thriller writing career was launched into the stratosphere two years ago with the publication of her smash-hit debut **FALLING**. In an era overflowing with domestic noir, that was a very different tale of a family man under pressure. High-stakes thrills and action as an airline captain's family was kidnapped, awful ransom demands were made, and he and his aircrew faced their worst nightmares on a cross-country redeye flight.

That was a rip-snorter of a read, but it left a question: what next?

Like a rollercoaster, Newman takes readers from great heights to suffocating depths, ratcheting up even greater tension in **DROWNING**, which is another white-knuckle thrill ride that unfolds like a big screen movie on a page. We're still in the world of commercial aviation, and this time, mechanical failure cascades into freak tragedy, as mere minutes after take-off Flight 1421 plunges into the waters off Hawaii. Some passengers die on impact, many evacuate onto life rafts floating on choppy seas. But a dozen survivors end up trapped inside the fuselage as it sinks onto an undersea cliff.

This time, those outside the airliner aren't trying to solve a kidnapping and stop an even greater crime, but are battling nature and the limits of human ingenuity to prevent a tragedy. As the Coast Guard, Navy, and a private diving crew led by Chris Kent wrestle with the weather, near-impossible odds, and each other to attempt a rescue, the trapped passengers have only a few hours of air left. Failure isn't an option for Chris, though, as her young daughter and her ex-husband are still onboard Flight 1421, with time dwindling and a volatile situation building inside and outside the fuselage.

Overall, Newman has successfully crafted another edge-of-your-seat adrenaline ride. While there are a few moments or coincidences that require some reader generosity in terms of suspension of disbelief, **DROWNING** is another taut, one-sitting read threaded with plenty of emotional impact to match the action and tension. Strap yourself in and enjoy the ride.

# Getting Away With Murder

*Mike Ripley*



This is the last Mike Ripley regular column as he is retiring from writing it to pursue more fun endeavors. On behalf of all of us who have enjoyed his wit and expertise, I wish to thank you Mike for his endeavors on our behalf. We will miss you. But if you are struck by whimsy (or Lord Peter Wimsey) to write something else, I hope you will share it with us. God Speed! George

## CrimeFesting

It has been announced that the 2024 CrimeFest will take place in Bristol from the 9th to 12th of May, slightly earlier than usual, and the news reminded me that, in my final regular column, I should pay tribute to my colleagues on Shots, which after all, started life as a print magazine launched at the Shot In The Dark convention in Nottingham in June 1994.

Therefore I will name and shame them using pictures taken at a recent CrimeFest, one of the few remaining public locations where we are allowed to be in the same room together.



Mike, Ayo & Mike

Editor Mike Stotter, Blogspot maven Ayo Onatade and I always presented a discrete and professional approach when rubbing shoulders with the great and good, even with crime writers. With the fourth horseman of the Shots apocalypse, Prince Ali Karim, however, things

tended to be more relaxed.



Mike & Prince Ali

## Happy New Year

I have already received a proof of 'the biggest thriller of 2024' (it says here) which is published next February by Michael Joseph. Naturally, I could not resist a peek inside **THE FURY** by Alex Michaelides.

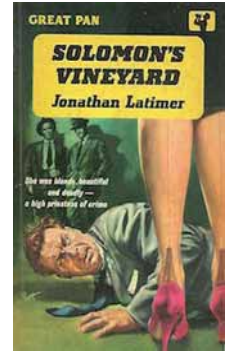
The Prologue begins: Never open a book with the weather. Who was it said that? I can't remember – some famous writer, I expect.

I am sure the question was rhetorical as it is well-known that the 'famous writer' in question was Elmore Leonard who, I suspect, was having a gentle dig at his chum Ed McBain's habit of starting his 87th Precinct books with the weather. Alex Michaelides probably knew this all along, just as he knew that Elmore Leonard also advised writers never to use a Prologue. (Do I not know what rhetorical means?)

## Unexpurgated

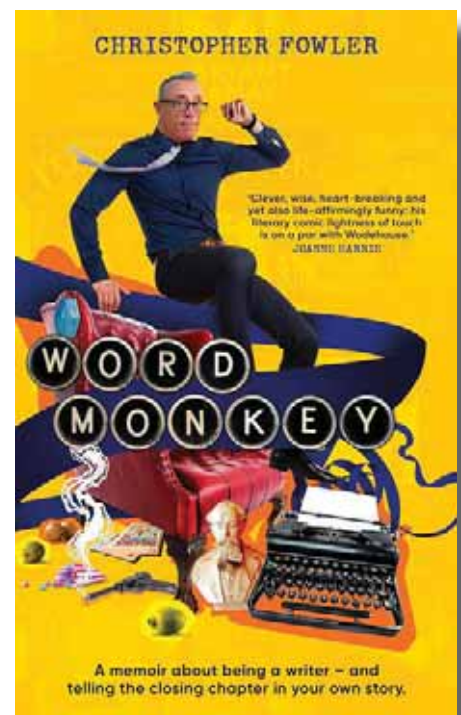
Some crime novels achieve notoriety, some have notoriety thrust upon them. One such was Jonathan Latimer's hard-boiled private eye story known here as **SOLOMON'S VINEYARD** when published in 1941 after, it is said,

being banned in America. Ironically, it became very well-known by young American males who discovered it whilst serving in US forces stationed here during the war. The novel, much censored, eventually appeared in America in 1950 under the author's preferred title **THE FIFTH GRAVE**.



Now those dedicated hard-boildistas at Stark House Press have published – for the first time – an unexpurgated edition in their infamous Black Gat imprint. One of the many blurbs for the original, by John Grant (though probably not the author of the Lovejoy books) calls it 'a down and dirty tale' full of 'hard-boiled swagger' and claims that Latimer 'is a rougher Chandler and a funnier Cain or Spillane.'

## Word Monkey



A memoir about being a writer – and telling the closing chapter in your own story.

I did not know the late Christopher Fowler well. We met only four or five times I think and appeared in public together only once, on a festival panel with M.C. Beaton – so neither of us got much of a word in, though we did get a chance to swap war stories later in the pub after Marion had been whisked away by her chauffeur.

I was familiar with his writing, both his highly imaginative, almost magical, fiction and his regular appreciations of ‘Forgotten Writers’ where I often demanded to be included. Above all, I loved his autobiographical **FILM FREAK** about his career in advertising and promoting films; an industry where no-one can hear you scream.

Having been diagnosed with terminal cancer in 2020, Christopher died in March this year but he has left us a deeply moving memorial in the shape of **WORD MONKEY** [Doubleday], his reflections on a literary life written knowing that life was coming to an end. This is no ‘misery memoir’ in fact it could not be less of one, cut through with wit, humanity and an obvious love of books.

The scale and the pain of Christopher’s medical misfortunes are not shirked and he clearly found respite in reading a good (or at least familiar) book. He avoided most painkillers other than paracetamol as he reacted to their side-effects because: with blurred vision and a warm fuzz in your head it’s too easy to overdose, drop boiling drinks over yourself, walk into bedroom doors or accidentally read Richard Osman novels...

That one of the epigraphs for the book is a quote from Nigel Molesworth in **How To Be Topp** says it all.

## Size Matters

In his **WORD MONKEY** memoir Christopher Fowler, a man who always kept a book handy, makes a forlorn plea for a return to the once common smaller form of paperback which would fit snugly into a jacket pocket without ruining the cut of a gentleman’s jib.

As an experiment, I took half-a-dozen paperbacks purely at random from my shelves to try and chart how they have grown over time. And this is only fiction titles. Non-fiction titles can vary much more.



## Cameo

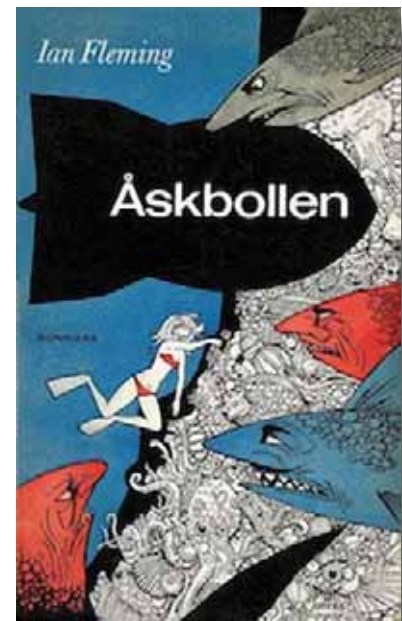
Having seen Christopher Nolan’s superb film **Oppenheimer** and being thoroughly impressed with Gary Oldman’s cameo as President Harry S. Truman, the thought occurs that as we know Oldman can do Churchill and he’s so good he could surely do Stalin, it would be possible to make a film about the 1945 Potsdam Conference with only one actor.



It is an idea I will put to Mr Spielberg should I ever meet him, immediately after pitching the idea of a remake of Sam Peckinpah’s **Ride The High Country** starring Tom Hanks and George Clooney in the original Joel McCrea/Randolph Scott roles.

## Åskbollen

One of the many treats of being a member of the Spybrary Facebook group is that dedicated fans of spy fiction get to share their enthusiasm for their favourite books and their cover



art. Until a recent post there, I had never seen the eye-catching covers of Swedish editions of the James Bond novels.

This cover of **THUNDERBALL** and other equally striking ones was by ‘horror artist’ (as he was known) Hans Arnold, who was born in Switzerland but lived and worked for most of his life in Sweden. Arnold (1925-2010) was also responsible for the artwork on ABBA’s Greatest Hits LP, which I’m sure everyone knew.

## Gossip from the Forest

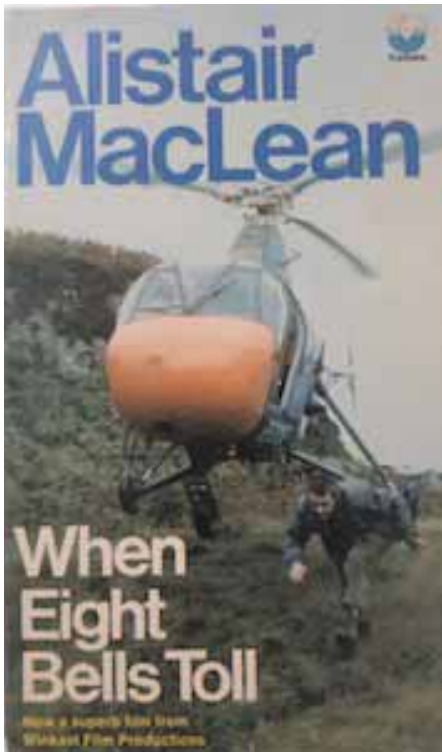
In July I mentioned the origin story of the Getting Away With Murder column at a Sherlock Holmes convention in Crowbridge back in the last century. The multi-award winning author Andrew Taylor (who has more Historical Daggers than **Game of Thrones**) got in touch to remind me that he too was at that prestigious event and that I gave him, and Harry Keating, a lift to the nearest station when the time came to make our escape. I should have remembered as for months afterwards I would tell all my passengers that I’d had that Andrew Taylor in the back of my cab.

## MacLean Double Bill

A double bill of films based on

thrillers by Alistair MacLean came to my attention this month; not, of course, an actual double bill which, for younger readers, was once the standard practice in cinemas.

I did not know, though perhaps I should have, until I read in *The Times* that the 1971 film of Alistair MacLean's *When Eight Bells Toll* starring Anthony Hopkins, was intended as the first in a planned series of 14 (yes, fourteen) films to feature secret agent Philip Calvert. It was an attempt to rival the Bond franchise, but fell at the first fence.



I also discovered that the 1961 film *The Secret Ways* is available free to watch on something called YouTube. It is a crisp and clear black-and-white print of a film starring (and produced by) Richard Widmark and I just wish it had been better!

Based on Alistair MacLean's 1959 thriller *THE LAST FRONTIER*, which I remember as being jolly exciting, though it is over fifty years since I read it, the spy thriller *Secret Ways* was released in the UK two months after *The Guns of Navarone* which overshadowed it to say the least. Nonetheless, the film has some fine shots of 1960 Vienna and the luscious Senta Berger wasted in a minor role. It is probably best remem-



bered for having one of the first film scores to be written by John Williams, plus the fact that the title of the MacLean novel was changed to avoid confusion with the historical novel *THE LAST FRONTIER* by Howard Fast, which was clearly one of the sources for the 1964 western *Cheyenne Autumn*, which also starred Richard Widmark.

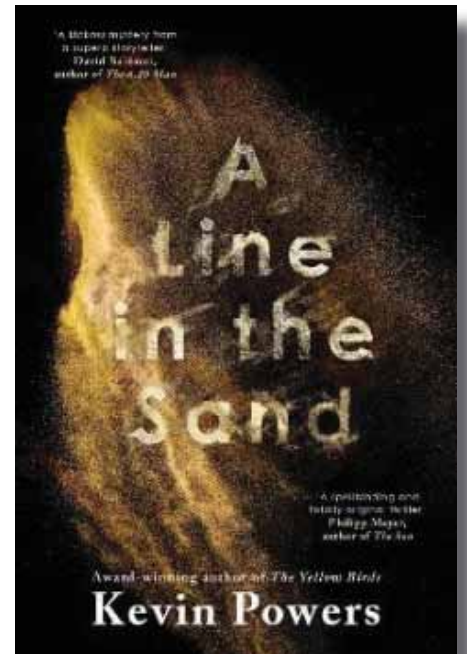
When I pointed this out in a column some years ago, I received a message from the widow of Howard Fast (1914-2003) -- an author blacklisted in the McCarthy era for his left-wing views who had to self-publish his novel *SPARTACUS* and who wrote good crime fiction as E.V. Cunningham. The producers of *Cheyenne Autumn*, it seems, decided that there was so much actual history in Fast's 1941 novel, that it was information in the public domain and therefore refused to buy the rights to *The Last Frontier*. So the MacLean film could have kept the original title, not, I suspect, that Alistair lost much sleep over the matter as after *Navarone* just about anything he wrote, even a note to the milkman, would have the film rights snapped up.

## Endgame

As I am retiring from this usually upstanding column, I am resigned to the fact that the postman may now only ring once, if at all, to deliver the latest crime fiction. I have already sorted two shelves of books into a To-Be-Read pile, to insure I will not be short of something to read.

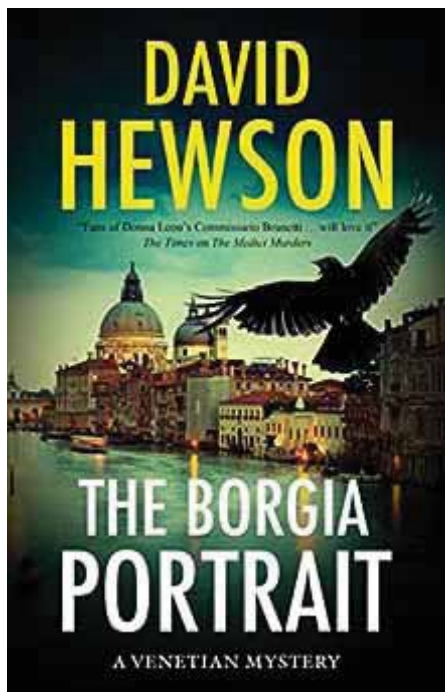


## Books of the Month



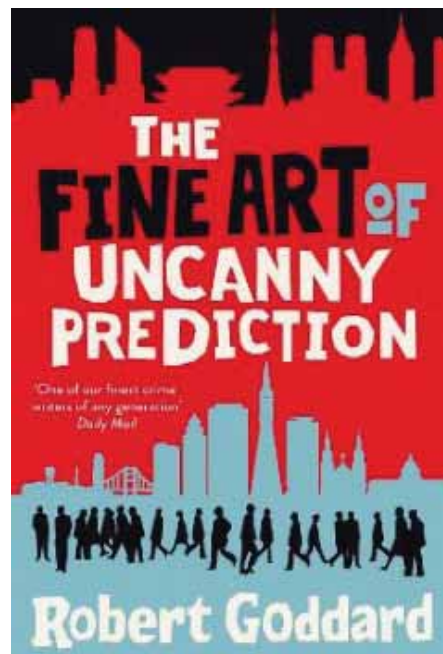
When I see the words 'literary thriller' promoting a book, I immediately reach for my pistol, but if it is simply meant to mean well-written, then it certainly applies to *A LINE IN THE SAND* by Kevin Powers [Sceptre], an absolutely cracking thriller, even if it contains (a few) Americanisms which may distract a British reader, though it won't be for long. An Iraqi translator with US forces now living an anonymous second life in Virginia finds himself the target of spies and hit-men working for the independent military contractors (think 'Wagner Group') be-

cause he witnessed atrocities committed by them during the war against Saddam Hussein. As the mercenaries are about to receive a billion-dollar contract from the US Senate, witnesses to past misdeeds have to be eliminated. Standing against them are a washed-up journalist, a splendid career policewoman and a couple of concerned (and well-armed) veterans who all have to draw a line in the sand. Gripping stuff.



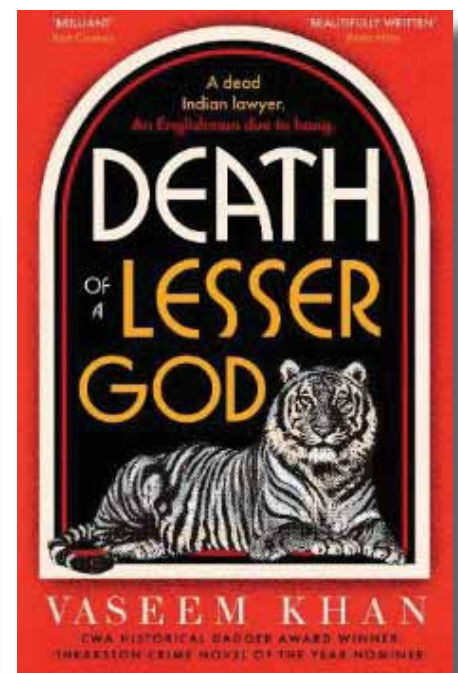
Arnold Clover is not your typical fictional detective. In fact he is not a detective at all, rather a retired British archivist living in Venice. Nonetheless, in **THE BORGIA PORTRAIT** by David Hewson [Severn House] the discovery of a thirty-year-old corpse in a ramshackle palazzo sets him off on a treasure hunt across Venice for a legendary erotic portrait of Lucrezia Borgia, which just might have inspired the equally legendary Casanova. Pursuit of the elusive, extremely valuable if genuine, painting involves solving a series of riddles and clues based on the city's historic churches, two of which, unusually for Venice where the streets seem permanently flooded, have crypts (though not the one Indiana Jones was in). Clearly, Hewson knows his Venice. He has written about La Serenissima before, but this seems to be a genuine love letter to the parts

most tourists never see. If you've never been there, take this as a guide book and don't worry about getting lost in the warren of narrow streets and alleys; that's half the joy.



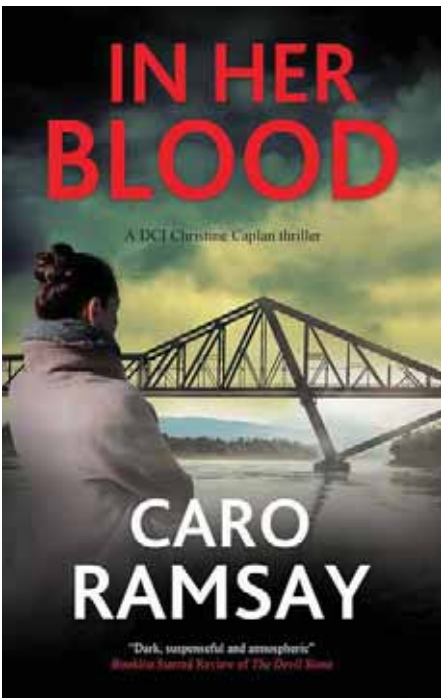
Umiko Wada never set out to be a private detective but as 'a small, plainly dressed, middle-aged woman with no distinguishing features' her appearance 'was a guarantee of total anonymity in a city (Tokyo) where thousands like her could be seen – and ignored – at every turn'. Given the useful advantage of being constantly under-estimated and an iron spine of stubbornness, Umiko actually makes a pretty good detective. In **THE FINE ART OF UNCANNY PREDICTION** [Bantam], Robert Goddard gives us a labyrinthine plot involving two inter-connected investigations twenty-five years apart and in fact dating back to the American occupation of Japan after WWII. The 'uncanny prediction' of the title refers to the search for 'the Kobe Sensitive' – a woman with the knack of predicting earthquakes – a highly prized skill in places prone to them, such as Japan and California, where Umiko's investigation eventually leads her. Complex, sensitive and finely written; an impressive and totally satisfying crime novel.

The first female police inspector in the recently independent India, Per-

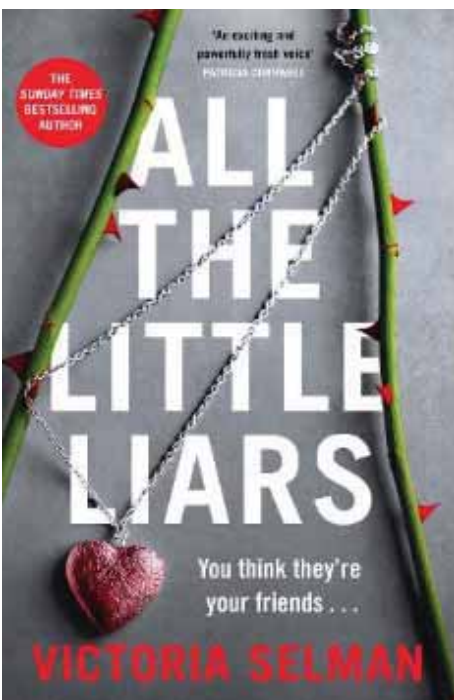


sis Wadia has enough trouble coping with sexism and religious bigotry in her daily duties at Malabar House, the branch of Bombay's CID known for being an elephant grave yard for police officers – a place where investigations and careers go to die. In **DEATH OF A LESSER GOD** by Vaseem Khan [Hodder] she gets a break from routine, though hardly one she wanted, re-evaluating the murder of an Indian lawyer for which a white Englishman, the son of a rich arch-colonialist has been convicted and is due to hang. The case takes Persis back in time to an unsolved double murder and to Calcutta, where gangsters, tigers and crocodiles make Bombay seem positively idyllic. Persis Wadia is a wonderful character, 1950 India is colourfully evoked and there are fascinating nuggets of history, such as the presence of 150,000 American troops in Bengal during WWII and the story of India's Jewish community, all of which make the novel educational as well as extremely entertaining.

**IN HER BLOOD** by Caro Ramsay [Severn House] is the second outing for new series heroine DCI Christine Caplan, who comes with enough domestic problems of her own that policing the wild bits of Scotland might come as something of a relief. Not, however, in this case where the main suspect in a



murder case is a child-murderer and by that I mean a child who has murdered other children, possibly more than once. Being a minor and although no longer in protective custody, all details of 'Girl A' are kept very much under wraps, even from the police working the current murder case. Caplan's investigation is physically hindered by the desolate local geography but however remote the location, invidious social media nastiness still seems to get through.



The most reliable thing about crime fiction these days is that the narrator will be unreliable. In **ALL THE LITTLE LIARS** [Quercus] Victoria Selman cunningly pulls the wool over the reader's eyes as to what actually happened in 2003 when three teenage American girls went to a party out in the woods, but only two returned. There's a creepy feeling of an 'I Know What You Did Last Summer Twenty Years Ago' scenario and there's a belter of a revelation about half-way through. Then the narrative, now twenty years on and moved to London, does eventually provide a solution to what happened to the missing girl, but after that major sucker-punch falls slightly flat.

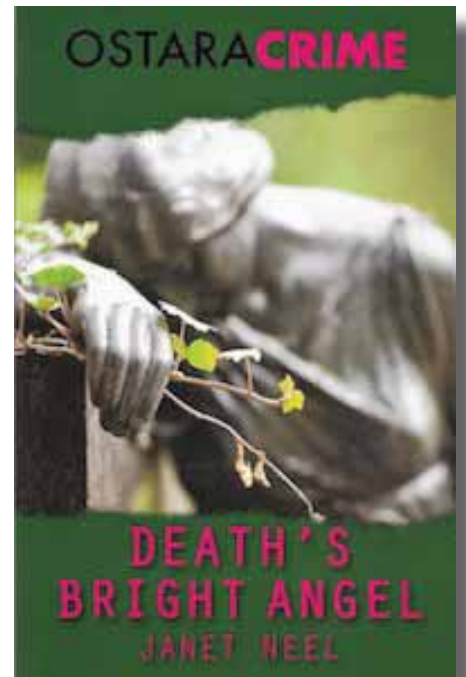
### Re-issues of the Month



Twenty-five years ago I discovered the pacy, wonderfully seedy and often very funny crime thrillers of Doug J. Swanson and looked forward to many more adventures of his hero, the lawyer-turned-investigator, Jack Flippo. I remember recommending the books to fellow (British) crime writers and even though Swanson's first novel won the CWA's John Creasey Award in 1994, I cannot recall any who said they had read him. And after five novels, that seemed to be it.

But now those bumptious enthusiasts at Brash Books have done a great service by producing new editions of all five Swanson books and once more I will recommend them and tell anyone who will listen that you heard it here first – again.

Another reissue at the end of the



month brings back some very personal memories. Back in 1988, a first novel entitled **JUST ANOTHER ANGEL** was beaten to the CWA's John Creasey Award by another debutant, **DEATH'S BRIGHT ANGEL** by Janet Neel.

Strangely enough, I became (and remain) good friends with Janet Neel, now Baroness Cohen of Pimlico, edited new editions of her crime novels for the Ostara Crime imprint and even dedicated my new novel (out in September; just thought I'd mention it) to her.

Now Joffe Books are reissuing all seven of her novels to feature her sleuthing duo of Inspector McLeish and Fran Wilson, initially as a 'box set' of ebooks.

### Museum Muse





This is not the famous Gun Room at Ripster Hall. That, as is well-known, contains the famous collection of 18th-century muskets which are still kept in readiness to be issued to the local Yeomanry in the event of a peasant uprising.

In fact this is a very small part of the display of militaria at the Combined Services Museum in Maldon, Essex where exhibits range from a sword dating to the battle of Maldon (Anglo-Saxons v. Vikings in 991) through to the tools-of-the-trade of SOE agents during WWII and spies of all sides in the Cold War. There is, spookily, a KGB map from the 1960s of East Anglia which even shows Ripster Hall, just one of many plot ideas garnered from my visit.

Cross-overs into the world of fiction occur with exhibits featuring Ian Fleming's wartime career and a cache of white £5 notes forged by the Nazis in an attempt to undermine the British economy, discovered after the war. It was a plot predicted by Margery Allingham in **TRAITOR'S PURSE**, which she began writing in 1939, long before the German Operation Bernhard became public knowledge.

## Parting Shots

After two hundred columns, it really is time to thank some of the many people who have helped; or who should at least share the blame.

First and foremost must be Fiona Messenger who, many years ago, was blackmailed into being a sub-editor for

**Getting Away With Murder** and who has worked diligently correcting spelling and grammar and avoiding legal disputes.

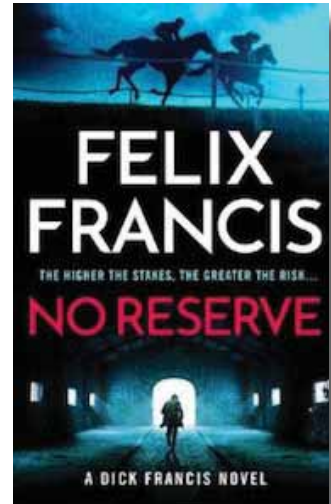
Within publishing there are certain publicists who have been both polite and helpful, among them: Patsy Irwin, Ana and Lisa (the Quercus dynamic duo), Felicia Hu, Steven Cooper, Henry Lord, Sophie Portas, Felicity Denham, Alex Hippisley-Cox, Henry Lord, Sophie Ransome, Sally Wray, Sriya Varadhara-jan, Milly Reid and others I have no doubt forgotten.

There are some I have deliberately forgotten, mainly those who ask me several times a month, for my "best address". I have tried to persuade them that my best address is the Palazzo Medici Riccardi on the Via Camillio Cavour in Florence. Sadly, I don't live there.

I will certainly not miss the 'Zoom meetings' and 'online launches' which seem to have replaced the traditional publishers' parties in the best of London's fleshpots since the Covid lockdowns. I even hear that CWA supremo Vaseem Khan (see Books of the Month) had something called 'a soft launch' for his new novel, though I wasn't invited to that either.

I do have one party to look forward to and that has the distinction of being the longest-running celebration for a particular author in crime fiction history. The launch of a new 'Dick Francis' novel has been a stand-out event in the social calendar for more than thirty years and I have been privileged to attend most of them. Originally hosted

by Dick, and latterly Felix Francis, the September party will see the launch of **NO RESERVE** and yet another chance for the worlds of horse racing and crime fiction to mingle, but without the associated jeopardy and violence found on the printed page.



Given that this is my final regular column, I was touched to receive an invitation from Felix which came with the message: Glad you can come as a retired gentleman!!! I will greatly miss your monthly **Getting Away with Murder** amusement.

I am proud to report that Felix Francis is not the only one who will miss **Getting Away With Murder**. I long since became immune to complaints that the column was resulting in massive credit card debt, possibly even divorce, due to recommending so many good books, though it has been heart-warming to receive valedictory messages from such fellow scribblers as: Len Deighton, Ian Rankin (Sir/He), Andrew Taylor, Ken Bruen, Jeremy Cameron, Peter Morfoot, Alex Shaw and John Lawton ('Oh fuck...you were serious!').

And of course I will miss it, but with an estimated 600 new crime novels and thrillers conventionally published this year, plus possibly an equal number appearing as ebooks or self-published, keeping tabs on them is very much a young man's game.

**When the fun stops, stop.  
Ripster.**

# Sneak Previews

## Upcoming Mysteries

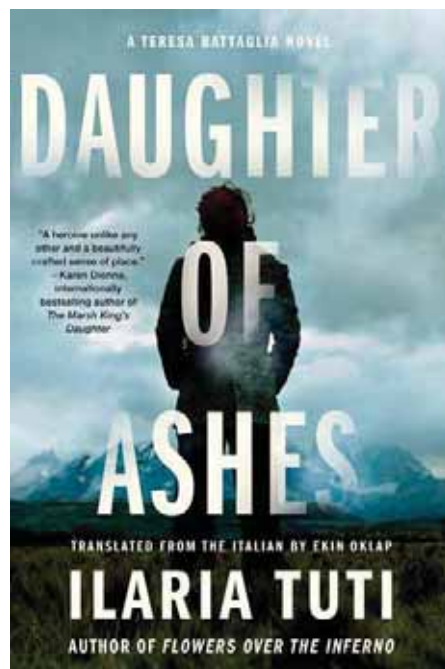


### November, 2023

- 7 Michael Connelly, **RESURRECTION WALK** (Haller & Bosch)
- 7 Charles Cumming, **KENNEDY 35** (Lachlan Kite)
- 7 David Swinson, **SWEET THING**
- 7 James L'Etoile, **FACE OF GREED** (Emily Hunter)
- 7 Phillip Margolin, **BETRAYAL** (Robin Lockwood)
- 7 Janet Evanovich, **DIRTY THIRTY** (Stephanie Plum)
- 7 Stephen Mack Jones, **DEUS X** (August Snow)
- 7 Ausma Zehanat Khan, **BLOOD BETRAYAL** (Blackwater Falls)
- 7 Kerry Greenwood, **MURDER IN WILLIAMSTOWN** (Phryne Fisher)
- 7 Gilly Macmillan, **THE MANOR HOUSE**
- 7 Rhys Bowen, **THE PROOF OF THE PUDDING** (Royal Spyness)
- 7 Dirk Cussler, **Clive Cussler's THE CORSICAN SHADOW** (Dirk Pitt)
- 7 Chris Brookmyre, **THE CLIFF HOUSE**
- 7 Loren D. Estleman, **VAMP** (Valentino)
- 7 Peggy Townsend, **THE BEAUTIFUL AND THE WILD**
- 7 Paul Doherty, **MURDER MOST TREASONABLE** (Brother Athelstan)
- 14 Matt Coyle, **ODYSSEY'S END** (Rick Cahill)
- 14 Amanda Flower, **I HEARD A FLY BUZZ WHEN I DIED** (Emily Dickinson)
- 14 Steve Urszenyi, **THE PERFECT SHOT** (Alexandra Martel)
- 14 Anna Pitoniak, **THE HELSINKI AFFAIR**
- 14 Lauren Nossett, **THE PROFESSOR**
- 14 Cleo Coyle, **BULLETPROOF BARISTA**
- 14 Val McDermid, **PAST LYING** (Karen Pirie)
- 14 Tim Maleeny, **HANGING THE DEVIL** (Cape Weathers)
- 14 David Baldacci, **THE EDGE** (6:20 Man)
- 21 Femi Kayode, **GASLIGHT** (Philip Taiwo)
- 21 Marc Cameron, **COMMAND AND CONTROL** (Jack Ryan)
- 28 Mike Lupica, **Robert B. Parker's BROKEN TRUST** (Spenser)
- 28 Jeffery Deaver, **THE WATCHMAKER'S HAND** (Lincoln Rhyme)
- 28 Nita Prose, **THE MYSTERY GUEST** (Molly Gray)
- 28 Brendan DuBois, **PRIMARY STORM** (Lewis Cole)

### December, 2023

- 5 Caz Frear, **FIVE BAD DEEDS**
- 5 Ilaria Tuti, **DAUGHTER OF ASHES** (Teresa Battaglia)

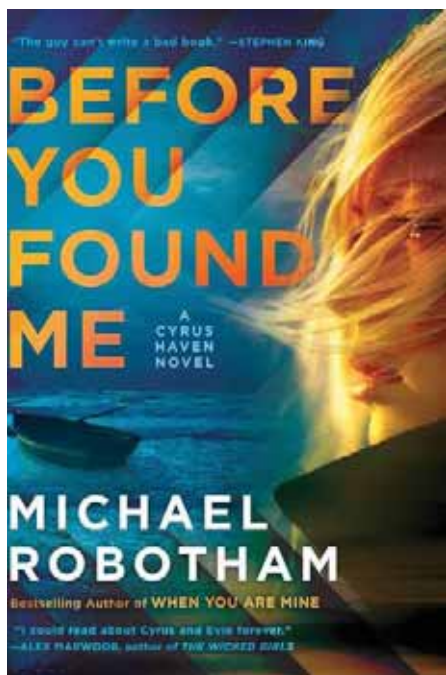


- 5 Chris McKinney, **SUNSET, WATER CITY**
- 5 Victoria Thompson, **CITY OF BETRAYAL**
- 5 Jon Talton, **THE NURSE MURDERS** (Gene Hammons)
- 5 Robin Cook, **MANNER OF DEATH**
- 5 Stephen Spotswood, **MURDER CROSSED HER MIND** (Pentecost & Parker)
- 5 Paige Shelton, **LOST HOURS** (Alaska Wild)
- 5 S. J. Rozan, **THE MAYORS OF NEW YORK** (Chin/Smith)
- 5 Jeff Lindsay, **THE FOURTH RULE**
- 5 Peter Steiner, **THE NEW DETECTIVE** (Willi Geismeyer)
- 5 David Mark, **THE BURNING TIME** (DS McAvoy)
- 5 Cora Harrison, **MURDER IN THE MIST** (Wilkie Collins & Charles Dickens)
- 12 Keigo Higashino, **THE FINAL CURTAIN** (Kyoichiro)
- 12 Cara Hunter, **NO WAY OUT** (DI Fawley)
- 26 Simon Scarrow, **DEAD OF NIGHT**

### January, 2024

- 2 Jonathan Santlofer, **THE LOST VAN GOGH**
- 2 Adam Plantinga, **THE ASCENT**
- 2 Barbara Hambly, **THE NUBIAN'S CURSE** (Benjamin January)
- 2 Jeri Westerson, **THE TWILIGHT QUEEN** (Will Somers)
- 8 James Patterson & Brian Sitts, **HOLMES, MARPLE & POE**
- 9 Rachel Hawkins, **THE HEIRESS**
- 9 Kat Ailes, **THE EXPECTANT DETECTIVES**
- 9 Araminta Hall, **ONE OF THE GOOD GUYS**
- 9 Amy Pease, **NORTHWOODS**
- 9 James Grippando, **GOODBYE GIRL** (Jack Swyteck)
- 9 Victor Methos, **THE DECEIVING LOOK** (Shepard & Gray)
- 16 Thomas Perry, **HERO**
- 16 Lee Goldberg, **DREAM TOWN** (Eve Ronin)
- 16 Lea Carpenter, **ILIUM**
- 16 Otho Eskin, **FIRETRAP** (Marko Zorn)

- 16 Alex Michaelides, **THE FURY**  
 16 Armando Lucas Correa, **THE SILENCE IN HER EYES**  
 16 Stacy Willingham, **ONLY IF YOU'RE LUCKY**  
 23 Nicolas Ferraro, **MY FAVORITE SCAR**  
 23 Janice Hallett, **THE MYSTERIOUS CASE OF THE ALPERTON ANGELS**  
 23 Kate Alice Marshall, **NO ONE CAN KNOW**  
 23 Mariah Fredericks, **THE WHARTON PLOT** (Edith Wharton)  
 23 James Lee Burke, **HARBOR LIGHTS** (Sh. St.)  
 23 Brad Taylor, **DEAD MAN'S HAND** (Pike Logan)  
 23 Allison Brennan, **THE MISSING WITNESS** (Quinn & Costa)  
 23 Stephen Hunter, **FRONT SIGHT** (Swagger Novellas)  
 30 Michael Robotham, **BEFORE YOU FOUND ME** (Cyrus Haven)



- 30 Anastasia Hastings, **OF HOAXES AND HOMICIDE** (Dear Miss Hermione)  
 30 Anders de la Motte, **THE MOUNTAIN KING** (Asker)  
 30 Linda Keir, **THE ROYAL GAME**

## February, 2024

- 6 Nick Petrie, **THE PRICE YOU PAY**

- (Peter Ash)  
 6 Mike Lawson, **KINGPIN** (Joe Demarco)  
 6 Jeffrey Siger, **AT ANY COST** (Andreas Kaldis)  
 6 Jenny Hollander, **EVERYONE WHO CAN FORGIVE ME IS DEAD**  
 6 David Downing, **UNION STATION** (John Russell)  
 6 Teresa Dovalpage, **LAST SEEN IN HAVANA**  
 6 Matt Hilton, **THE GIRL IN THE SMOKE**  
 6 Robert Littell, **A PLAGUE ON BOTH YOUR HOUSES**  
 6 Terry Hayes, **THE YEAR OF THE LOCUST**  
 6 Jon Lindstrom, **HOLLYWOOD HUSTLE**  
 6 C. L. Miller, **THE ANTIQUE HUNTER'S GUIDE TO MURDER**  
 6 David Putnam, **THE DIABOLICAL** (Bruno Johnson)  
 6 Jonathan Kellerman, **THE GHOST ORCHID** (Alex Delaware)  
 6 Jason Pinter, **PAST CRIMES**  
 6 Hank Phillippi Ryan, **ONE WRONG WORD**  
 13 Erin Young, **ORIGINAL SINS**  
 13 Greff Hurwitz, **LONE WOLF** (Orphan X)  
 13 Jenn McKinlay, **FATAL FIRST EDITION** (Library Lover's)  
 13 Iris Yamashita, **VILLAGE IN THE DARK** (Cara Kennedy)  
 13 Kit Frick, **THE SPLIT**  
 13 Laurie R. King, **THE LANTERN'S DANCE** (Mary Russell)  
 20 Mark Greaney, **THE CHAOS AGENT** (Gray Man)  
 20 B. A. Paris, **THE GUEST**  
 20 Leah Konen, **KEEP YOUR FRIENDS CLOSE**  
 20 Kelley Armstrong, **THE BOY WHO CRIED BEAR** (Haven's Rock)  
 20 J. Robert Lennon, **HARD GIRLS**  
 20 Abigail Dean, **DAY ONE**  
 20 J. Robert Lennon, **HARD GIRLS**  
 20 Vera Kurian, **A STEP PAST DARKNESS**  
 27 Thomas Mullen, **THE RUMOR GAME**  
 27 C. J. Box, **THREE-INCH TEETH** (Joe Pickett)  
 27 A. J. Tata, **THE PHALANX CODE** (Garrett Sinclair)

- 27 Robert Rotenberg, **WHAT WE BURIED**  
 27 Christoffer Carlsson, **UNDER THE STORM**

## March, 2024

- 5 Cara Black, **MURDER AT LA VILLETTE** (Aimee Leduc)  
 5 Camilla Trinchieri, **THE ROAD TO MURDER**  
 5 Tana French, **THE HUNTER**  
 5 Lisa Unger, **THE NEW COUPLE IN 5B**  
 5 Elle Cosmano, **FINLAY DONOVAN ROLLS THE DICE**  
 5 Dervla McTiernan, **WHAT HAPPENED TO NINA?**  
 5 Rob Osler, **CIRQUE DU SLAY**, Rob Osler  
 5 Jennifer Ashley, **SPECULATIONS IN SIN** (Kat Holloway)  
 5 Imran Mahmood, **FINDING SOPHIE**  
 12 Juan Gomez-Jurado, **BLACK WOLF** (Antonia Scott)



- 12 Rhys Bowen & Clare Broyles, **IN SUNSHINE AND IN SHADOWS** (Molly Murphy Sullivan)  
 12 Tamron Hall, **WATCH WHERE THEY HIDE** (Jordan Manning)  
 12 Deanna Raybourn, **A GRAVE ROBBERY** (Veronica Speedwell)

**May, 2024**

- 12 Andrew Mayne, **DARK DIVE** (Sloan McPherson)
- 18 James Patterson & Nancy Allen, **THE #1 LAWYER**
- 19 Don Winslow, **CITY IN RUINS** (Danny Ryan)
- 19 Sulari Gentill, **THE MYSTERY WRITER**
- 19 Steve Cavanagh, **KILL FOR ME KILL FOR YOU**
- 19 Gigi Pandian, **A MIDNIGHT PUZZLE** (Secret Staircase)
- 19 Alexia Casale, **THE BEST WAY TO BURY YOUR HUSBAND**
- 19 Nicci French, **HAS ANYONE SEEN CHARLOTTE SALTER?**
- 26 Kristen Perrin, **HOW TO SOLVE YOUR OWN MURDER**
- 26 Isabella Maldonado, **A FORGOTTEN KILL** (Dani Vega)
- 26 Heather Gudenkauf, **EVERYONE IS WATCHING**
- 26 Bridget Walsh, **THE INNOCENTS** (Variety Palace)
- 26 Rene Denfeld, **SLEEPING GIANTS**
- 26 Lisa Scottoline, **THE TRUTH ABOUT THE DEVLINS**

- SAID** (Sebastian St. Cyr)
- 16 Sara Koffi, **WHILE WE WERE BURNING**
- 16 Rita Mae Brown, **FELINE FATALE** (Sneaky Pie Brown)
- 16 Alisa Lynn Valdes, **BLOOD MOUNTAIN** (Jodi Luna)
- 16 Kara Thomas, **LOST TO DUNE ROAD**
- 23 John Brownlow, **ASSASSIN EIGHTEEN**
- 23 D.V. Bishop, **RITUAL OF FIRE** (Cesare Aldo)
- 23 Laura McHugh, **SAFE AND SOUND**
- 23 Anne Hillerman, **LOST BIRDS** (Leaphorn Chee & Manuelito)
- 23 Clare Mackintosh, **A GAME OF LIES**
- 30 Kellye Garrett, **MISSING WHITE WOMAN**
- 30 Jean-Luc Bannalec, **DEATH OF A MASTER CHEF** (Brittany)
- 30 Catherine Mack, **EVERY TIME I GO ON VACATION SOMEONE DIES**
- 30 Rick Mofina, **SOMEONE SAW SOMETHING**

- 7 Lorenzo Carcaterra, **NONNA MARIA AND THE CASE OF THE LOST TREASURE**
- 7 Marcie R. Rendon, **WHERE THEY LAST SAW HER**
- 7 Andromeda Romano-Lax, **THE DEEPEST LAKE**
- 7 Abir Mukherjee, **HUNTED**
- 14 Ashley Weaver, **LOCKED IN PURSUIT** (Ellie McDonnell)
- 14 Harlan Coben, **THINK TWICE** (Simon Bolitar)
- 21 Misha Popp, **THE LAST TO PIE** (Pies Before Guys)
- 21 Carolyn Haines, **LIGHTS, CAMERA, BONES** (Sarah Booth Delaney)
- 21 Stuart Turton, **THE LAST MURDER AT THE END OF THE WORLD**
- 21 Michael Bennett, **RETURN TO BLOOD** (Hana Westerman)
- 28 Alex Finlay, **IF SOMETHING HAPPENS TO ME**

**April, 2024**

- 2 Philip Miller, **THE HOLLOW TREE**
- 2 Harry Dolan, **DON'T TURN AROUND**
- 2 Gary Phillips, **ASH DARK AS NIGHT** (Harry Ingram)
- 2 Joe Hart, **NEVER COME BACK**
- 9 Robbie Morrison, **CAST A COLD EYE** (Jimmy Dreghorn)
- 9 Douglas Westerbeke, **A SHORT WALK THROUGH A WIDE WORLD**
- 9 Michelle Prak, **THE RUSH**
- 9 C. J. Tudor, **THE GATHERING**
- 9 Steven James, **FATAL DOMAIN** (Travis Brock)
- 16 Kim Hays, **A FONDNESS FOR TRUTH** (Linder & Donatelli)
- 16 Brian Panowich, **NOTHING BUT THE BONES** (McFalls County)
- 16 Sara Koffi, **WHILE WE WERE BURNING**
- 16 Alyssa Cole, **ONE OF US KNOWS**
- 16 K. T. Nguyen, **YOU KNOW WHAT YOU DID**
- 16 C. S. Harris, **WHAT CANNOT BE**

**MYSTERY MIKE'S**  
DETECTIVE, MYSTERY, & SUSPENSE FICTION

Always looking to buy mystery and hardcover thriller books!

101 East Carmel Drive, Suite 130, Carmel, Indiana 46032  
www.mysterymikes.com

Mbursaw@mysterymikes.com  
317-428-9966

## Table of Contents

Robert Galbraith Series	2
Marv Lachman R.I.P	9
Mini-Reviewed to Death	10
My Greek Reading Feast by Steele Curry	11
Letters	18
Anthony Award Winners	19
Deadly Pleasures Best of 2023	20
Editor's Message	36
Associate Editor's Message	38
Reviews	
Meredith Anthony	39
Ted Hertel	47
Hank Wagner	54
Cozy/Traditonal Cafe'	56
George Easter	60
Robin Agnew	64
LJ Roberts	68
Larry Gandle	69
Down Under Crime	72
Barry Award Winners	53
Macavity Award Winners	59
Shamus Award Winners	74
DP Calendar	75
News and Reviews From the U.K.	
New Books	76
Reviews	77
Mike Ripley Column	85
Sneak Previews	91



**Editor/Publisher**  
**George A. Easter**  
[george@deadlypleasures.com](mailto:george@deadlypleasures.com)

**Associate Editor**  
**Larry Gandle**  
[LGandle@aol.com](mailto:LGandle@aol.com)

**Contributors**  
 Mary Mason  
 Jeff Popple  
 Mike Ripley  
 Ted Hertel, Jr.  
 L J Roberts  
 Ali Karim  
 Steele Curry  
 Meredith Anthony  
 Robin Agnew  
 Hank Wagner  
 Craig Sisterson



### Subscription Rates

Sample Free (see website)  
 1 year digital (four issues) \$10.00

Make checks (U.S. funds only)  
 payable to George Easter or  
 Deadly Pleasures and send to  
 George Easter -- DP  
 1718 Ridge Point Dr.  
 Bountiful, UT 84010  
 PayPal payment is also accepted  
 at [george@deadlypleasures.com](mailto:george@deadlypleasures.com)