

Deadly Pleasures

Mystery Magazine



The Best of the Best 2023

Critics' Choice



The Quest to Find the Best of the Best for 2023

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

This year I was able to accumulate 113 "Best" lists (compared with 85 such lists last year). Not all lists are equal. I personally give most credence to the lists generated by the *Deadly Pleasures* (Barry Award Committee) Staff. Their expertise is unparalleled.

After their lists, I am always anxious to see the following lists by:

1. Oline Cogdill
2. amazon.com
3. British reviewers such as Barry Forshaw, Laura Wilson & Jake Kerridge
4. British newspapers such as *The Times*
5. American Reviewers such as Sarah Weinman and Tom Nolan
6. The library journals such as *Kirkus* and *Publisher's Weekly*
7. Various websites -- too many to single out. But I might mention that a new list appeared this year from the readers' site *tertuliala* which I thought was quite good and comprehensive.

The best lists from the British seem to come out earlier in the process than many of the others and that gives me time to read some of the titles appearing on those lists that I was previously unaware of or hadn't gotten around to reading. I read *THE TRIAL* by Rob Rinder, *MURDER IN THE FAMILY*

by Cara Hunter and *THE SCARLET PAPERS* by Matthew Richardson, all of which ended up on my own best of the year list. And just recently I read another -- *THE BROKEN AFTER-NOON* by Simon Mason and I have added that to the list as well. See my reviews of these herein. I hope you take advantage of the lists you will find in subsequent pages to find books that fit your interests and tastes -- and have a similar experience to what I have had.

The list that appears on page 21 is the result of my efforts -- the Best of the Best of 2023. Once again S. A. Cosby (*ALL THE SINNERS BLEED*) was the clear winner of the best mystery of the year (third time out of the last four years). My choice for best mystery of the year, *SMALL MERCIES* by Dennis Lehane, came in second. The top psychological suspense novels are *BRIGHT YOUNG WOMEN* by Jessica Knoll and *NONE OF THIS IS TRUE* by Lisa Jewell. The best cozy appears to be *VERA WONG'S UNSOLICITED ADVICE FOR MURDERERS* by Jesse Q. Sutanto.

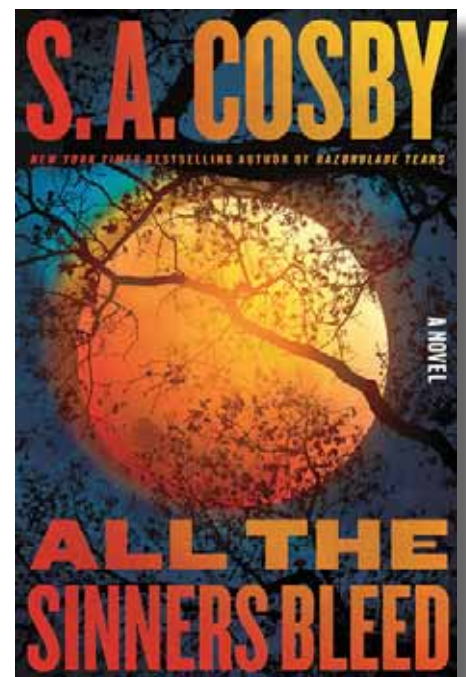
It is self evident that the two biggest factors of a book getting on a best list are: 1. the critic read the book, and 2. the book was good. Unfortunately all the critics posting best of the year lists of crime fiction and thrillers have not read all of the books listed on the Best of the Best list (myself included). In many cases, I suspect that the critic has only read a handful of them. But it is not a perfect world and one works with what one has.

This process provides great input to the Barry Award Nominating committees.

A problem that crops up every year is when an excellent mystery is published in the U.K. in one year, but doesn't come out in the U.S. until the next year. Examples of this are: *KILL FOR ME KILL FOR YOU* by Steve Cavanagh, *THE SCARLET PAPERS*, Matthew Richardson, *ASSASSIN EIGHTEEN* by John Brownlow, and *THE TRANSLATOR* by Harriet Crawley. All these came out in the U.K. in 2023 and will appear in the U.S. in 2024. It is in 2024 that they will be considered for Barry Award nominations. Most of our readers live in the U.S. so we like to nominate books in the year that the U.S. readers have the greatest access to them.

Sadly, all of the good British crime novels and thrillers don't make it to our shores. But the good news is that they are readily available in the U.S. if you're willing to purchase them.

The Best of the Best list on page can be a valuable resource in your own reading and a great resource for book clubs.



Experts' Lists

Best Mysteries of 2023

Deadly Pleasures Staff

Ali Karim

Crime

THE TURNGLASS, Gareth Rubin
RESURRECTION WALK,
Michael Connelly
SMALL MERCIES, Dennis Lehane
EVERYBODY KNOWS, Jordan Harper
KILL FOR ME KILL FOR YOU,
Steve Cavanagh

LYING BESIDE YOU,
Michael Robotham

HOLLY, Stephen King

Thrillers

THE SCARLET PAPERS,
Matthew Richardson
THE SECRET, Lee and Andrew Child

Non-Fiction

WORD MONKEY, Christopher Fowler

Jeff Popple

Crime

EVERYBODY KNOWS, Jordan Harper
I AM ALREADY DEAD, David
Whish-Wilson
RESURRECTION WALK,
Michael Connelly
THE DETECTIVE UP LATE,
Adrian McKinty

THE CARETAKER, Gabriel Bergmoser
THE KIND WORTH SAVING,
Peter Swanson

THE LAST DEVIL YOU DIE,
Richard Osman

Thriller

THE SCARLET PAPERS,
Matthew Richardson
THE SECRET HOURS, Mick Herron
THE RUSH, Michelle Prak
(April, 2024 in U.S.)

MOSCOW EXILE, John Lawton
A LINE IN THE SAND, Kevin Powers
INDEPENDENCE SQUARE,
Martin Cruz Smith

Debut

THE RUSH, Michelle Prak
BETTER THE BLOOD,
Michael Bennett
IN THE BLINK OF AN EYE,
Jo Callaghan
THE DIVE, Sara Ochs
HEADLAND, John Byrnes
HOW TO KILL A CLIENT,
Joanna Jenkins
A DISAPPEARANCE IN FIJI,
Nilima Rao

Meredith Anthony

Mystery

EVERYBODY KNOWS, Jordan Harper
THE MIMICKING OF KNOWN SUC-
CESSES, Malka Older
THE MOTION PICTURE TELLER,
Colin Cotterill

OUT OF THE ASHES, Kara Thomas
THE CLIFF EDGE, Charles Todd
SMALL MERCIES, Dennis Lehane
ALL THE SINNERS BLEED,
S. A. Cosby

MALIBU BURNING, Lee Goldberg
THE RUNNING GRAVE,
Robert Galbraith
THE LAST DEVIL TO DIE,
Richard Osman

Thriller

THE SECRET HOURS, Mick Herron
BURNER, Mark Greaney
MY FATHER'S HOUSE,
Joseph O'Connor
THE TRAITOR, Ava Glass
DROWNING, T. J. Newman
DEADLOCK, James Byrne
THE SPY COAST, Tess Gerritsen
THE HELSINKI AFFAIR,
Anna Pitoniak
THE SECRET, Lee Child
and Andrew Child

Debut

CITY UNDER ONE ROOF,
Iris Yamashita
THE PEACOCK AND THE SPARROW,
I. S. Berry

THE CLEMENTINE COMPLEX,
Bob Mortimer

Larry Gandle

Crime and Thriller Novels

SMALL MERCIES, Dennis Lehane
KILL FOR ME KILL FOR YOU, Steve
Cavanagh (U.S. in 2024)

DROWNING, T. J. Newman
RED QUEEN, Juan Gomez-Jurado
ALL THE SINNERS BLEED,
S. A. Cosby

RESURRECTION WALK,
Michael Connelly
THE RIVER WE REMEMBER,
William Kent Krueger

Literary Novels with Crime Fiction or Thriller Elements

AGE OF VICE, Deepti Kapoor
CROOK MANIFESTO,
Colson Whitehead

PROPHET SONG, Paul Lynch
THE VASTER WILDS, Laura Groff

"Mystery" Mike Bursaw

(Barry Award Nominating Committee)
ALL THE SINNERS BLEED,
S. A. Cosby

THE LONGMIRE DEFENSE,
Craig Johnson

MY FATHER'S HOUSE,
Joseph O'Connor
GOING ZERO, Anthony McCarten
ASSASSIN EIGHTEEN, John Brownlow
RESURRECTION WALK,
Michael Connelly

ONLY THE DEAD, Jack Carr
ALLIGATOR ALLEY, Mike Lawson
UPPERCUT, Mark Dawson
NO RESERVE, Felix Francis
THE VICAR, A. J. Chambers
BURNER, Mark Greaney
THE BITTER PAST, Bruce Borgos

Mike Dillman

(Barry Award Nominating Committee)
LYING BESIDE YOU,
Michael Robotham

DARK CORNERS, Megan Goldin
SLEEPLESS CITY, Reed Farrel Coleman
NO SECRETS, David Jackson
ONLY THE DEAD, Jack Carr
WHAT WE HAVE DONE, Alex Finlay
DROWNING, T. J. Newman
GOING ZERO, Anthony McCarten

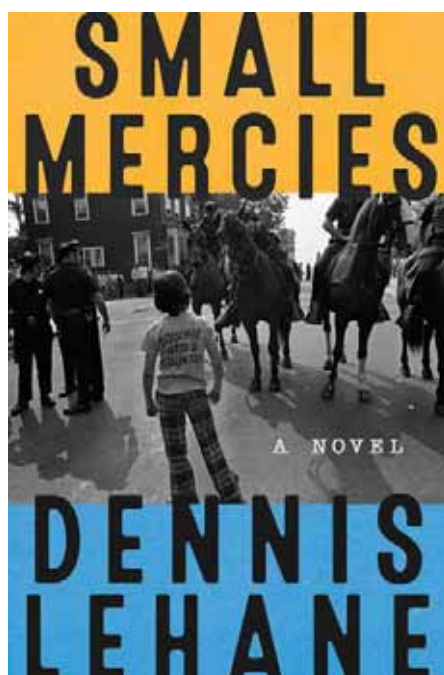
THE RIVER WE REMEMBER,
William Kent Krueger
ASSASSIN EIGHTEEN, John Brownlow
(U.S. title in 2024)
SECOND SHOT, Cindy Dees
LION & LAMB, Duane Swierczynski &
James Patterson
THE PEACOCK AND THE SPARROW,
I. S. Berry
RESURRECTION WALK,
Michael Connelly
EVERY THING SHE FEARED,
Rick Mofina

Ayo Onatade

(Barry Award Nominating Committee)
ALL THE SINNERS BLEED,
S. A. Cosby
THE SECRET HOURS, Mick Herron
THE SECOND MURDERER,
Denise Mina
THE TURNGLASS, Gareth Rubin
(£16.99, UK only)
VIPER'S DREAM, Jake Lamar
THE MCMASTER'S GUIDE TO HO-
MICIDE, Rupert Holmes
EVERYBODY KNOWS, Jordan Harper
OZARK DOGS, Eli Cranor
SMALL MERCIES, Dennis Lehane
THE LAND OF LOST THINGS,
John Connolly
THE LOST DIARY OF SAMUEL
PEPYS, Jack Jewers (2022 title in U.S.)
THE SQUARE OF SEVENS,
Laura Shepherd Robinson
Honorable Mentions
MOSCOW EXILE, John Lawton
PROM MOM, Laura Lippman
RESURRECTION WALK,
Michael Connelly
FLAGS ON THE BAYOU,
James Lee Burke
PALACE OF SHADOWS, Ray Celestin
THE MANTIS, Kotaro Isaka

Steele Curry

ALL THE SINNERS BLEED,
S. A. Cosby
THE BLOOD OF OTHERS,
Graham Hurley
THE SCARLET PAPERS,
Matthew Richardson
MY FATHER'S HOUSE ,
Joseph O'Connor
EVERYBODY KNOWS, Jordan Harper



SMALL MERCIES, Dennis Lehane
MOSCOW EXILE, John Lawton
INDEPENDENCE SQUARE,
Martin Cruz Smith
TRIBES, John Clarkson
MIDDLEMEN, Scott Thornley
THE BURNING TIME,
Peter Hanington
THE COLLECTOR, Daniel Silva
THE DETECTIVE UP LATE,
Adrian McKinty
THE SECRET HOURS, Mick Herron
THE CITY OF GOD, Michael Russell
A PATIENT DEATH, John Farrow
DARK RIDE, Lou Berney
WHO THE HELL IS HARRY BLACK?,
Jake Needham

Ted Hertel

ALL THE SINNERS BLEED,
S. A. Cosby
HER DEADLY GAME, Robert Dugoni
EVIL INTENTIONS COME,
Timothy J. Lockhart
OZARK DOGS, Eli Cranor
WHAT LIES IN THE WOODS,
Kate Alice Marshall
THE RIVER WE REMEMBER,
William Kent Krueger
LOWDOWN ROAD, Scott Von Doviak
SMALL MERCIES, Dennis Lehane
DARK RIDE, Lou Berney
TOO MANY BULLETS by
Max Allan Collins

HERE IN THE DARK by Alexis Soloski

George Easter

Crime Novels

SMALL MERCIES, Dennis Lehane
RESURRECTION WALK,
Michael Connelly
EVERYBODY KNOWS, Jordan Harper
HOLLY, Stephen King
LYING BESIDE YOU,
Michael Robotham
RED QUEEN, Juan Gomez-Jurado
THE DETECTIVE UP LATE,
Adrian McKinty
THE RIVER WE REMEMBER,
William Kent Krueger
EXPECTANT, Vanda Symon
THE RUNNING GRAVE,
Robert Galbraith
MURDER IN THE FAMILY,
Cara Hunter

Crime and Thriller Debuts

THE BITTER PAST, Bruce Borgos
BETTER THE BLOOD,
Michael Bennett
CITY UNDER ONE ROOF, I
ris Yamashita
THE GOLDEN GATE, Amy Chua
THE PEACOCK AND THE SPARROW,
I. S. Berry
GOING ZERO, Anthony McCarten
THE TRIAL, Rob Rinder (U.K. only)

Thrillers

THE SCARLET PAPERS, Matthew
Richardson (2024 title in U.S.)
THE SECRET HOURS, Mick Herron
BURNER, Mark Greaney
ASSASSIN EIGHTEEN, John Brownlow
(2024 title in U.S.)
THE BROKEN AFTERNOON, Simon
Mason (U.K. only)

Robin Agnew

Best Cozy

A FATAL GROOVE, Olivia Blacke
BETWEEN A WOK AND A DEAD
PLACE, Leslie Budewitz
HOT POT MURDER, Jennifer J. Chow
A WEALTH OF DECEPTION,
Trish Esden
THE SOCIALITE'S GUIDE TO
DEATH AND DATING, S.K. Golden
WRONG POISON, Nikki Knight
MURDER AND MAMON,
Mia P. Manasala

HOP SCOT, Catriona McPherson
REHEARSED TO DEATH,
Frank Anthony Polito
VERA WONG'S UNSOLICITED AD-
VICE FOR MURDERERS,

Jesse Q. Sutanto

Best Historical

A COLD HIGHLAND WIND,

Tasha Alexander

PROUD SORROW, James R. Benn

PICTURE IN THE SAND,

Peter Blauner

ACT LIKE A LADY, THINK LIKE A

LORD, Celeste Connally

I HEARD A FLY BUZZ WHEN I DIED,

Amanda Flower

A TRAITOR IN WHITEHALL,

Julia Kelly

THE MISTRESS OF BHATIA HOUSE,

Sujata Massey

THE LADY FROM BURMA,

Allison Montclair

MURDER UNDER A RED MOON,

Harini Nengendra

A DISAPPEARANCE IN FIJI,

Nilima Rao

Best of the Year

GLORY BE, Danielle Arceneaux

MURDER MOST ROYAL, S.J. Bennett

THE RAGING STORM, Ann Cleeves.

THE MOTION PICTURE TELLER,

Colin Cotterill

A KILLING OF INNOCENTS,

Deborah Crombie

THE BONES OF THE STORY,

Carol Goodman

THE LAST REMAINS, Elly Griffiths

BLOOD BETRAYAL,

Ausma Zehanat Khan

BLOOD SISTERS, Vanessa Lillie

A STOLEN CHILD,

Sarah Stewart Taylor

Kevin Burton Smith

Crime Novels

HOLLY, by Stephen King

THE SECOND MURDERER,

Denise Mina

THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF MAT-

THEW SCUDDER, Lawrence Block

THE RUNNING GRAVE,

Robert Galbraith

LAST SEEN IN LAPAZ, Kwei Quartey

A DEATH IN DENMARK,

Amulya Maladi

DEATH OF A DANCING QUEEN,

Kimberly G. Garrantano

BAD INFLUENCE, Alison Gaylin

ODYSSEY'S END, Matt Coyle

TOO MANY BULLETS,

Max Allan Collins

Graphic Novel and Comic

HOMICIDE: THE GRAPHIC NOVEL,

PARTS 1 & 2, David Simon and Philippe

Squarzonei

GOTHAM CITY: YEAR ONE, Tom

King & Philip Hester

Craig Sisterson

ALL THE SINNERS BLEED, S.A. Cosby

DARK RIDE, Lou Berney

DEATH OF A LESSER GOD,

Vaseem Khan

EVERYBODY KNOWS, Jordan Harper

OZARK DOGS by Eli Cranor

PROM MOM by Laura Lippman

SING HER DOWN by Ivy Pochoda

SMALL MERCIES by Dennis Lehane

STRANGE SALLY DIAMOND,

Liz Nugent

THE DETECTIVE UP LATE,

Adrian McKinty

THE LAST DANCE,

Mark Billingham

THE SECOND MURDERER,

Denise Mina

Mike Ripley

MOSCOW EXILE, John Lawton

SMALL MERCIES, Dennis Lehane

ALL THE SINNERS BLEED, S.A. Cosby

OZARK DOGS, Eli Cranor

A LINE IN THE SAND, Kevin Powers

VIPER'S DREAM, Jake Lamar

Hank Wagner

ALL THE SINNERS BLEED,

S. A. Cosby

THE RIVER WE REMEMBER,

William Kent Krueger

HOLLY, Stephen King

BREAKNECK, Marc Cameron

SISTERS OF THE LOST NATION,

Nick Medina

THE WILD ADVENTURES OF SHER-

LOCK HOLMES, Vol. 2, Will Murray

THE DONUT LEGION, Joe R. Lansdale

LOWDOWN ROAD, Scott Von Doviak

TOO MANY BULLETS,

Max Allan Collins

CITY UNDER ONE ROOF,

Iris Yamashita

AN HONEST MAN, Michael Koryta

Other Experts

Oline Cogdill

Nationally Syndicated Reviewer

Florida Sun Sentinel

SING HER DOWN, Ivy Pochoda

TIME'S UNDOING, Cheryl A. Head

EVERYBODY KNOWS, Jordan Harper

SMALL MERCIES, Dennis Lehane

ALL THE SINNERS BLEED,

S. A. Cosby

RESURRECTION WALK,

Michael Connelly

THE RIVER WE REMEMBER, Wil-

liam Kent Krueger

AN HONEST MAN, Michael Koryta

DARK RIDE, Lou Berney

PROM MOM, Laura Lippman

TO CATCH A STORM, Mindy Mejia

THE LAST WORD, Taylor Adams

DISTANT SONS, Tim Johnston

BLOOD SISTERS, Vanessa Lillie

EVERYONE IN MY FAMILY HAS

KILLED SOMEONE,

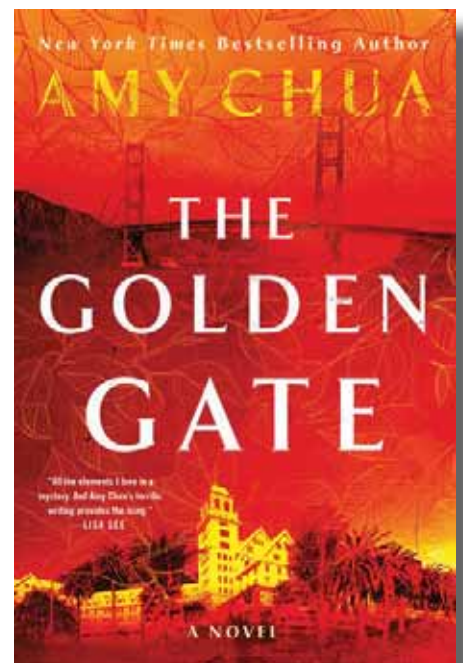
Benjamin Stevenson

BEWARE THE WOMAN,

Megan Abbott

THE ONLY ONE LEFT, Riley Sager

THE GOLDEN GATE, Amy Chua



Debut

THE CURSE OF PENRYTH HALL,
Jess Armstrong
THE HUNTER, Jennifer Herrera
FADEAWAY JOE, Hugh Lessig
A FLAW IN THE DESIGN,
Nathan Oates
MOTHER-DAUGHTER MURDER
NIGHT, Nina Simon
CITY UNDER ONE ROOF,
Iris Yamashita

Sarah Weinman

Mystery Reviewer

The New York Times

ALL THE SINNERS BLEED,
S. A. Cosby
EVERYBODY KNOWS, Jordan Harper
OZARK DOGS, Eli Cranor
SCORCHED GRACE, Margot Douaihy
THE QUIET TENANT,
Clémence Michallon
MY MEN, Victoria Kielland
BLAZE ME A SUN,
Christoffer Carlsson
REYKJAVIK, Ragnar Jonasson &
Katrín Jakobsdóttir
THE LAST DEVIL TO DIE,
Richard Osman
GLORY BE, Danielle Arceneaux

Sarah Lyall

The New York Times

Best Thrillers

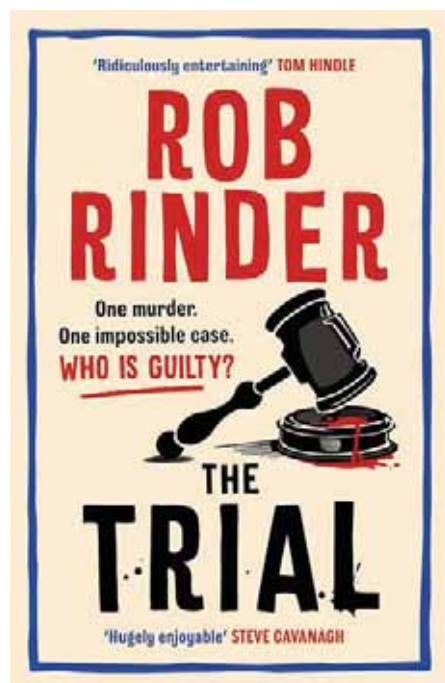
WHALEFALL, Daniel Kraus
THE PLINKO BOUNCE, Martin Clark
GOING ZERO, Anthony McCarten
THE SOULMATE, Sally Hepworth
HOW CAN I HELP YOU, Laura Sims
THE SECRET HOURS, Mick Herron

Laura Wilson

Crime Fiction Reviewer

The Guardian (U.K.)

THE LAST DEVIL TO DIE,
Richard Osman
THE MYSTERIOUS CASE OF THE
ALPERTON ANGELS, Janice Hallett
THE CHRISTMAS APPEAL,
Janice Hallett
MURDER IN THE FAMILY,
Cara Hunter
THE TURNGLASS, Gareth Rubin
DEATH AND THE CONJUROR,
Tom Mead



SQUEAKY CLEAN, Callum McSorley
SCORCHED GRACE, Margot Douaihy
THIRTY DAYS OF DARKNESS,
Jenny Lund Madsen
CASE SENSITIVE, A.K. Turner
THE WHEEL OF DOLL,
Jonathan Ames
OZARK DOGS, Eli Cranor
ALL THE SINNERS BLEED, S.A. Cosby
BEWARE THE WOMAN,
Megan Abbott
I HAVE SOME QUESTIONS FOR YOU,
Rebecca Makkai
EVERYBODY KNOWS, Jordan Harper
THE SECOND MURDERER,
Denise Mina
THE SECRET HOURS, Mick Herron
THE SCARLET PAPERS,
Matthew Richardson
MOSCOW EXILE, John Lawton
THE TRANSLATOR, Harriet Crawley
OTHER WOMEN, Emma Flint
THE SQUARE OF SEVENS, Laura
Shepherd-Robinson
THE WINTER LIST, S.G. MacLean
VIPER'S DREAM, Jake Lamar
PALACE OF SHADOWS, Ray Celestin
DEATH OF A LESSER GOD,
Vaseem Khan
AGE OF VICE, Deepti Kapoor
THE BANDIT QUEENS, Parini Shroff
STRANGE SALLY DIAMOND,
Liz Nugent
BLACK THORN, Sarah Hilary

UNCLE PAUL, Celia Fremlin
(reprint of 1959 novel)
THE MAN WHO LIVED UNDER-
GROUND, Richard Wright

Jake Kerridge

The Telegraph (U.K.)

AGE OF VICE, Deepti Kapoor
THE TRIAL, Rob Rinder
THE END OF US, Olivia Kiernan
THE MURDER WHEEL, Tom Mead
THE RUNNING GRAVE,
Robert Galbraith
THE RISE (a novella), Ian Rankin
SMALL MERCIES, Dennis Lehane
INDEPENDENCE DAY,
Martin Cruz Smith
THE SECRET HOURS, Mick Herron
THE SCARLET PAPERS,
Matthew Richardson
THE WINTER LIST, S. G. MacLean
ACT OF OBLIVION, Robert Harris
SCARLET TOWN, Leonora Natrass

Barry Forshaw

Financial Times

SMALL MERCIES, Dennis Lehane
MURDER IN THE FAMILY,
Cara Hunter
THE WIDOW COUDERC,
Georges Simenon
RESURRECTION WALK,
Michael Connelly
ALL THE SINNERS BLEED,
S. A. Cosby
THE SQUARE OF SEVENS,
Laura Shepherd-Robinson
VIPER'S DREAM, Jake Lamar
THE SECRET HOURS, Mick Herron
SINS OF OUR FATHERS, Åsa Larsson
THE SECOND MURDERER,
Denise Mina

Adam LeBor

Financial Times

Best Thrillers

THE YEAR OF THE LOCUST,
Terry Hayes
KENNEDY 35, Charles Cumming
RED QUEEN, Juan Gomez-Jurado
A LINE IN THE SAND, Kevin Powers
WHITE FOX, Owen Matthews

Joan Smith and

Mark Sanderson

The Times (U.K.)

DEAD MAN'S CREEK,

Chris Hammer – *The Times*

Crime Book of the Year

THE RUNNING GRAVE, Robert Galbraith – *The Sunday Times* Best Crime Book of the Year

SQUEAKY CLEAN, Callum McSorley
THE BROKEN AFTERNOON,
Simon Mason

THE CLOSE, Jane Casey

EVERYBODY KNOWS, Jordan Harper

THE LOCK-UP, John Banville
THIRTY DAYS OF DARKNESS,

Jenny Lund Madsen

THE PREY, Yrsa Sigurdardottir

KILLING MOON, Jo Nesbo

BLACK RIVER, Nilanjana Roy

THE DETECTIVE, Ajay Chowdhury

A LINE IN THE SAND, Kevin Powers

THE MYSTERY OF YEW TREE

HOUSE, Lesley Thomson

John Dugdale and

James Owen

The Times (U.K.)

Best Thrillers

DAMASCUS STATION, David McCloskey – *The Times* Thriller of the Year (a 2021 book in the U.S.)

THE SCARLET PAPERS, Matthew Richardson – *The Sunday Times* Thriller of the Year

CUT ADRIFT, Jane Jesmond

THE BEAVER THEORY,

Antti Tuomainen

THE TRANSLATOR, Harriet Crawley

SMALL MERCIES, Dennis Lehane

THE TRAP, Catherine Ryan Howard

THE END OF THE GAME, Holly Watt

HOLLY, Stephen King

WHITE RIOT, Joe Thomas

THE SECRET HOURS, Mick Herron

THE YEAR OF THE LOCUST,

Terry Hayes

Maxim Jakubowski

Crime Reviewer (U.K.)

Crime Time

DEATH AND THE CONJUROR,
Tom Mead

MOSCOW EXILE, John Lawton

SMALL MERCIES, Dennis Lehane

THE DEVIL'S PLAYGROUND,

Craig Russell

STRANGE SALLY DIAMOND,

Liz Nugent

WORD MONKEY, Christopher Fowler
(non-fiction)

THE SECRET HOURS, Mick Herron

THE MESSENGER, Megan Davis

THE KINGDOMS OF SAVANNAH,

George Dawes Green (2022 title in U.S.)

AGE OF VICE, Deepti Kapoor

Victoria Selman

Crime Time (U.K.)

THE QUIET TENNANT,

Clemence Michallon

THE MAIDEN, Kate Foster

MURDER IN THE FAMILY,

Cara Hunter

STRANGE SALLY DIAMOND,

Liz Nugent

THE MYSTERIOUS CASE OF THE

ALPERTON ANGELS, Janice Hallett

OBSESSED, Liza North

THE GOOD DAUGHTER,

Laure Van Rensberg

DUPLICITY, Donna Freed

THE NEW WIFE, J P Delaney

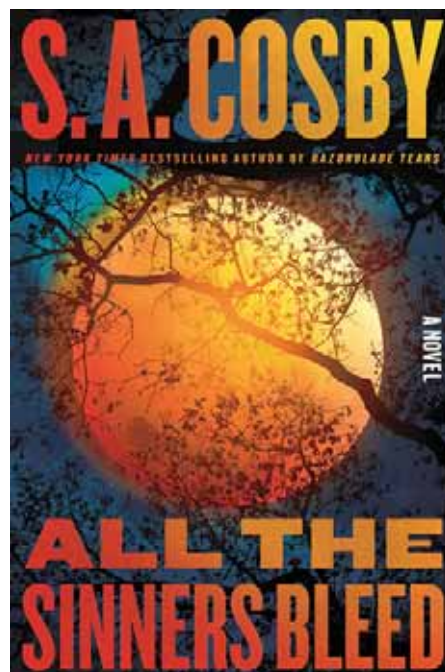
ZERO DAYS, Ruth Ware

Jon Coates

Sunday Express (U.K.)

PALACE OF SHADOWS, Ray Celestin

THE SECRET HOURS, Mick Herron



OTHER WOMEN, Emma Flint

KILLING MOON, Jo Nesbo

RESURRECTION WALK,

Michael Connelly

A WINTER GRAVE, Peter May

JUST BETWEEN US, Adele Parks

I WILL FIND YOU, Harlan Coben

A MURDER IN THE FAMILY,

Cara Hunter

THE SINS OF OUR FATHERS, Asa

Larsson, trans. Frank Perry

Declan Burke

Author and Crime Reviewer (U.K.)

WHITE RIOT, Joe Thomas

SMALL MERCIES, Dennis Lehane

BLACK RIVER, Nilanjana Roy

THE END OF US, Olivia Kiernan

YELLOWFACE, R. F. Kuang

TELL ME WHAT I AM, Una Mannion

THE SECRET HOURS, Mick Herron

Natasha Cooper

Literary Review (U.K.)

THE TRANSLATOR, Harriet Crawley

THE END OF THE GAME, Holly Watt

THE LAST DANCE, Mark Billingham

DEEP DARK BLUE, Seraina Kobler

THE SCARLET PAPERS,

Matthew Richardson

ALL OF US ARE BROKEN,

Fiona Cummins

BETWEEN THE LIES, Louise Tickle

Tom Nolan

Wall Street Journal

SMALL MERCIES, Dennis Lehane

PROM MOM, Laura Lippman

THE LOCK-UP, John Banville

BIRNAM WOOD, Eleanor Catton

THE LATE MRS. WILLOUGHBY,

Claudia Gray

MY MEN, Victoria Kielland

THE LAST DEVIL TO DIE,

Richard Osman

THE KIND WORTH SAVING,

Peter Swanson

I HAVE SOME QUESTION FOR YOU,

Rebecca Makkai

FIXIT, Joe Ide

BIRNAM WOOD, Eleanor Catton

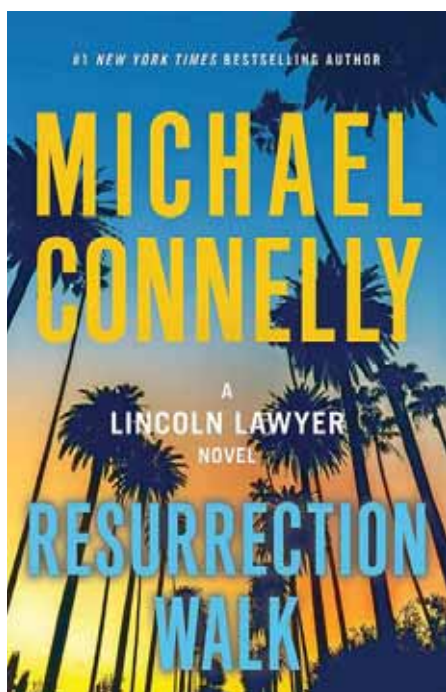
Booksellers' Lists

Best Mysteries of 2023

Amazon

(www.amazon.com)

SMALL MERCIES, Dennis Lehane
BRIGHT YOUNG WOMEN,
Jessica Knoll
ALL THE SINNERS BLEED, S.A. Cosby
HAPPINESS FALLS, Angie Kim
SYMPHONY OF SECRETS,
Brendan Slocumb
MURDER YOUR EMPLOYER,
Rupert Holmes
MOTHER-DAUGHTER MURDER
NIGHT, Nina Simon
AGE OF VICE, Deepti Kapoor
THE GOLDEN GATE, Amy Chua
DROWNING, T.J. Newman
STRANGE SALLY DIAMOND,
Liz Nugent
PET, Catherine Chidgey
THOSE EMPTY EYES, Charlie Donlea
THE ONLY ONE LEFT, Riley Sager
GOING ZERO, Anthony McCarten
THE QUIET TENANT,
Clémence Michallon



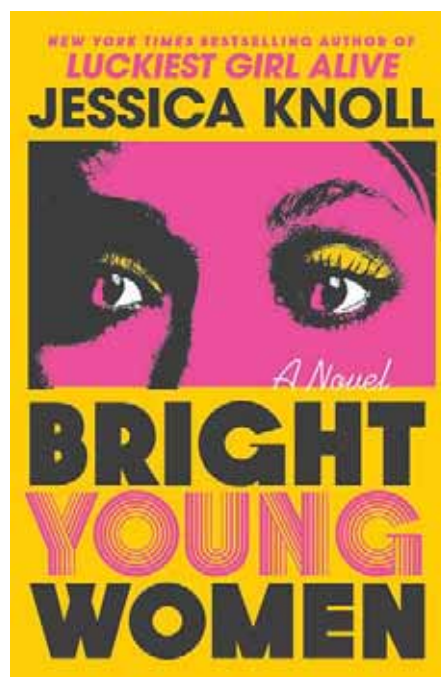
A HOUSE WITH GOOD BONES,
T. Kingfisher
ALL THAT IS MINE I CARRY WITH
ME, William Landay
KILL SHOW, Daniel Sweren-Becker
THE WHITE LADY,
Jacqueline Winspear
THE MYSTERY GUEST, Nita Prose
THE LAST DEVIL TO DIE,
Richard Osman
RESURRECTION WALK,
Michael Connelly
CITY OF DREAMS, Don Winslow
THE SPY COAST, Tess Gerritsen
BLOOD SISTERS, Vanessa Lillie
GLORY BE, Danielle Arceneaux
ACT LIKE A LADY, THINK LIKE A
LORD, Celeste Connally
EXILES, Jane Harper
RED QUEEN, Juan Gómez-Jurado
LYING BESIDE YOU,
Michael Robotham
THE BENEVOLENT SOCIETY OF
ILL-MANNERED LADIES,
Alison Goodman
THE BELL IN THE FOG, Lev AC Rosen
MY FATHER'S HOUSE,
Joseph O'Connor
COLD-BLOODED LIAR, Karen Rose
DEATH COMES TO MARLOW,
Robert Thorogood
GANGSTERS DON'T DIE,
Tod Goldberg
DARK ANGEL, John Sandford
VERA WONG'S UNSOLICITED AD-
VICE FOR MURDERERS,
Jesse Q. Sutanto
AFTER THAT NIGHT, Karin Slaughter

Barnes & Noble

(www.barnesandnoble.com)

THE LAST DEVIL TO DIE,
Richard Osman
THE RIVER WE REMEMBER,
William Kent Krueger
AFTER THAT NIGHT, Karin Slaughter

ZERO DAYS, Ruth Ware
THE RAGING STORM, Ann Cleeves
THE ONLY ONE LEFT, Riley Sager
SMALL MERCIES, Dennis Lehane
ALL THE SINNERS BLEED,
S. A. Cosby
YOU SHOULDN'T HAVE COME
HERE, Jeneva Rose
MURDER YOUR EMPLOYER,
Rupert Holmes
BRIGHT YOUNG WOMEN,
Jessica Knoll
I HAVE SOME QUESTIONS FOR YOU,
Rebecca Makkai



Booktopia

Australian Bookstore

(www.booktopia.com.au)

RESURRECTION WALK, Michael
Connelly
THE SECRET, Lee Child & Andrew
Child
EVERYONE ON THIS TRAIN IS A
SUSPECT, Benjamin Stevenson
NONE OF THIS IS TRUE, Lisa Jewell
THE LAST DEVIL TO DIE, Richard
Osman
THE DROWNING, Bryan Brown
DARLING GIRLS, Sally Hepworth
THE SEVEN (COVER THE BONES),
Chris Hammer
MOTHER-DAUGHTER MURDER
NIGHT, Nina Simon
THE COLLECTOR, Daniel Silva

THE CARETAKER, Gabriel Bergmoser
 HOLLY, Stephen King
 RIPPER, Shelley Burr
 BROKEN BAY, Margaret Hickey
 TAKEN, Dinuka McKenzie
 THE TEA LADIES, Amanda Hampson
 EVERYONE HERE IS LYING, Shari
 Lapena
 DARK MODE, Ashley Kalagian Blunt
 FIRE WITH FIRE, Candice Fox
 CROOK MANIFESTO, Colson White-
 head
 YELLOWFACE, R. F. Kuang
 BIRNAM WOOD, Eleanor Catton

Waterstones

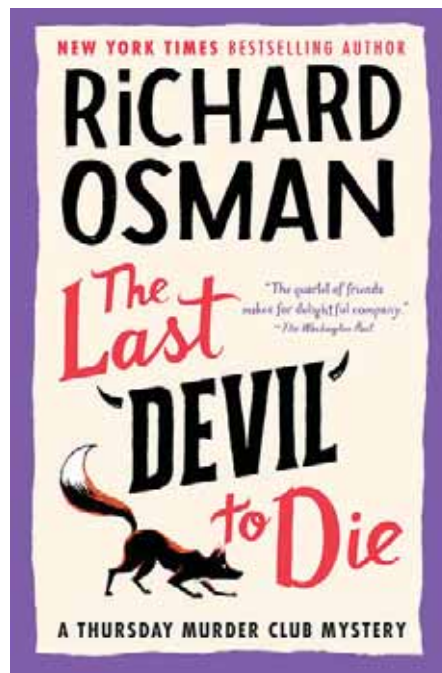
U.K. Bookstore Chain

Cosy

THE LAST DEVIL TO DIE,
 Richard Osman
 A DEATH IN THE PARISH,
 Reverend Richard Coles
 THE CHRISTMAS APPEAL,
 Janice Hallett
 WEST HEART KILL, Dann McDorman
 DEATH AT THE CHATEAU,
 Ian Moore
 THE CAT WHO SOLVED THREE
 MURDERS, L. T. Shearer
 HERULE POIROT'S SILENT NIGHT,
 Sophie Hannah
 THE CHRISTMAS JIGSAW MUR-
 DERS, Alexandra Benedict
 A VERY LIVELY MURDER,
 Katy Watson
 MURDER AT HOLLY HOUSE,
 Denzil Meyrick

Detectives

THE RUNNING GRAVE,
 Robert Galbraith
 THE SECRET, Lee & Andrew Child
 HOLLY, Stephen King
 KILLING MOON, Jo Nesbo
 THE SHADOWS OF LONDON,
 Andrew Taylor
 DEADLY GAME, Michael Caine
 THE RAGING STORM, Ann Cleeves
 TRAITORS GATE, Jeffrey Archer
 THE GREAT DECEIVER, Elly Griffiths
 STOP THEM DEAD, Peter James
 THE LOCK-UP, John Banville
 PAST LYING, Val McDermid
 THE GOLDEN GATE, Amy Chua
 A GAME OF LIES, Claire Mackintosh
 THE ENCHANTERS, James Ellroy



CAST A COLD EYE, Robbie Morrison
 SCARLET TOWN, Leonora Nattrass
 THE EDGE, David Baldacci
 THE WATCHMAKER'S HAND,
 Jeffrey Deaver
 RESURRECTION WALK,
 Michael Connelly
 GASLIGHT, Femi Kayode
 UNNATURAL DEATH,
 Patricia Cornwell
 STANDING IN THE SHADOWS,
 Peter Robinson

Thrillers

THE YEAR OF THE LOCUST, Terry
 Hayes (2024 title in the U.S.)
 KALA, Colin Walsh
 THE EXCHANGE, John Grisham
 GENEVA, Richard Armitage
 SPEAK OF THE DEVIL, Rose Wilding
 PENANCE, Eliza Clark
 DEATH OF A BOOKSELLER,
 Alice Slater
 THE CLOISTERS, Katy Hays
 NONE OF THIS IS TRUE, Lisa Jewell
 THE MAIDEN, Kate Foster
 THE GIRL WITH THE EAGLE'S TAL-
 ONS, Karin Smirnoff
 THE SQUARE OF SEVENS,
 Laura Shepherd-Robinson
 BROKEN LIGHT, Joanne Harris
 LOYALTY, Martina Cole
 HOMECOMING, Kate Morton
 DROWNING, T. J. Newman
 LOOKING GLASS SOUND,

Catriona Ward
 CONVICTION, Jack Jordan
 THE TRIAL, Rob Rinder
 KILL FOR ME, KILL FOR YOU, Steve
 Cavanagh (2024 title in the U.S.)
 CENTRAL PARK WEST, James Comey
 THE PEOPLE WATCHER, Sam Lloyd
 THE CRASH, Robert Preston
 CITY OF DREAMS, Don Winslow
 FOR YOU AND ONLY YOU,
 Caroline Kepnes
 THE GAME, Martin Kemp
 THE WHISPERS, Ashley Audrain
 73 DOVE STREET, Julie Owen Moylan
 MURDER IN THE FAMILY,
 Cara Hunter

Espionage

THE DEFECTOR, Chris Hadfield
 THE SECRET HOURS, Mick Herron
 ON HIS MAJESTY'S SECRET SER-
 VICE, Charlie Higson
 TOMÁS NEVINSON, Javier Marias,
 Margaret Juli Costa
 KENNEDY 35, Charles Cumming

Rakuten Kobo

(<http://www.kobo.com>)

EVERYONE IN MY FAMILY HAS
 KILLED SOMEONE,
 Benjamin Stevenson
 NONE OF THIS IS TRUE, Lisa Jewell
 THE RIVER WE REMEMBER,
 William Kent Krueger
 MIDNIGHT IS THE DARKEST HOUR,
 Ashley Winstead
 THE LAST DEVIL TO DIE,
 Richard Osman
 ALL THE SINNERS BLEED,
 S. A. Cosby
 HAPPINESS FALLS, Angie Kim
 ALL THE DANGEROUS THINGS,
 Stacy Willingham
 BRIGHT YOUNG WOMEN,
 Jessica Knoll
 THE WRITING RETREAT, Julia Bartz
 HOLLY, Stephen King
 YELLOWFACE, R. F. Kuang
 SIMPLY LIES, David Baldacci
 ONLY THE DEAD, Jack Carr
 BIRNAM WOOD, Eleanor Catton
 CROOK MANIFESTO,
 Colson Whitehead

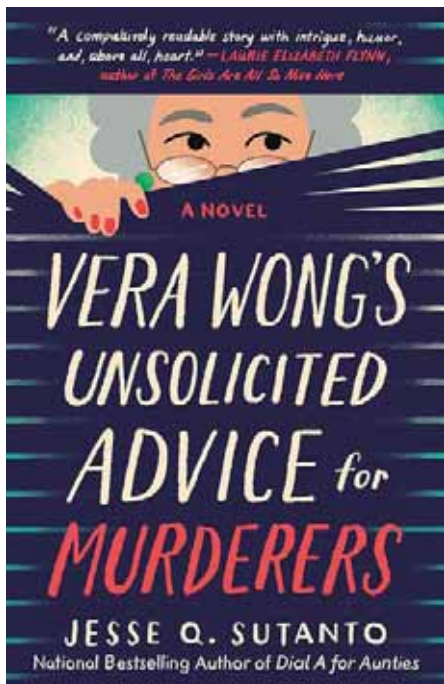
Publications' Lists

Best Mysteries of 2023

The Washington Post

by Karen MacPherson

THE BENEVOLENT SOCIETY OF
ILL-MANNERED LADIES,
Alison Goodman
BLOOD SISTERS, Vanessa Lillie
THE BODY BY THE SEA, J
ean-Luc Bannalec
GLORY B, Danielle Arceneaux
HOLLOW BEASTS, Alisa Lynn Valdes
THE LAST DEVIL TO DIE,
Richard Osman
THE LAST REMAINS, Elly Griffiths
THE SUNSET YEARS OF AGNES
SHARP, Leonie Swann
SYMPHONY OF SECRETS,
Brendan Slocumb
VERA WONG'S UNSOLICITED AD-
VICE FOR MURDERERS,
Jesse Q. Sutanto



Kirkus

THE LOST AMERICANS,
Christopher Bollen
GREEN FOR DANGER, Christianna

Brand – reprint
BLAZE ME A SUN,
Christoffer Carlsson
ONE LAST KILL, Robert Dugoni
NIGHT WILL FIND YOU,
Julia Heaberlin
REYKJAVIK, Ragnar Jonasson &
Katrín Jakobsdóttir
EVERY MAN A KING, Walter Mosley
BRIGHT YOU WOMEN, Jessica Knoll
THE STOLEN COAST, Dwyer Murphy
CODE OF THE HILLS, Chris Offutt
A LINE IN THE SAND, Kevin Powers
CROOK MANIFESTO,
Colson Whitehead
HAPPINESS FALLS, Angie Kim

Publishers Weekly

ALL THE SINNERS BLEED, S.A. Cosby
BRIGHT YOUNG WOMEN,
Jessica Knoll
THE DEVIL'S PLAYGROUND,
Craig Russell
THE EDEN TEST, Adam Sternbergh
EVERYBODY KNOWS, Jordan Harper
EXCAVATIONS, Hannah Michell
FLAGS ON THE BAYOU,
James Lee Burke
HOW CAN I HELP YOU, Laura Sims
A MOST AGREEABLE MURDER,
Julia Seales
THE MOST SECRET MEMORY OF
MEN, Mohamed Mbougar Sarr
STRANGE SALLY DIAMOND,
Liz Nugent
TELL ME WHAT I AM, Una Mannion
AGE OF VICE, Deepti Kapoor
I HAVE SOME QUESTIONS FOR YOU,
Rebecca Makkai

Library Journal

by Liz French & Lesa Holstine
THE GOLDEN GATE, Amy Chua
FALL, Tracy Clark
ALL THE SINNERS BLEED,
S. A. Cosby

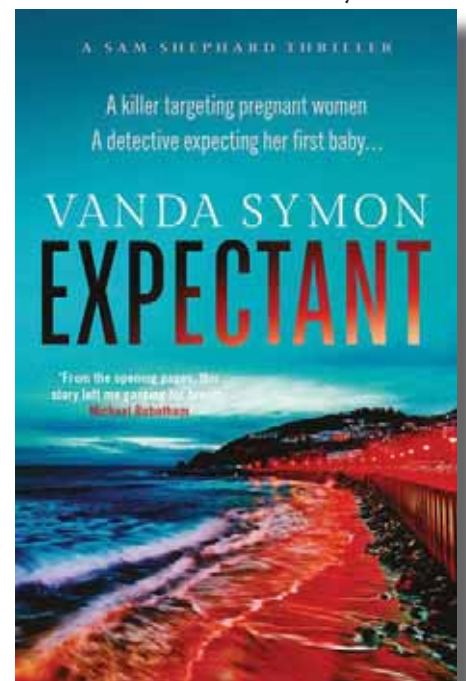
THE SECRET HOURS, Mick Herron
AGE OF VICE, Deepti Kapoor
SMALL MERCIES, Dennis Lehane
A DISAPPEARANCE IN FIJI,
Nilima Rao
GUILT STRIKES AT GRANGER'S
STORE, Terry Shames
MOTHER-DAUGHTER MURDER
NIGHT, Nina Simon
CITY UNDER ONE ROOF,
Iris Yamashita

Booklist

BRIGHT YOUNG WOMEN,
Jessica Knoll
THE ENCHANTERS, James Ellroy
THE GOLDEN GATE, Amy Chua
THE REFORMATORY, Tananarive Due
HAPPINESS FALLS, Angie Kim
THE HEAVEN & EARTH GROCERY
STORE, James McBride
I HAVE SOME QUESTIONS FOR YOU,
Rebecca Makkai
THE LEFTOVER WOMAN, Jean Kwok
THE VASTER WILDS, Lauren Groff

New Zealand's LISTENER Magazine

ALL THE SINNERS BLEED, S.A. Cosby
DARK RIDE, Lou Berney
DICE, Claire Baylis*
(legal thriller only published in Austra-
lia & NZ so far)
EXPECTANT, Vanda Symon



THE LOCK-UP, John Banville
 THE SECRET HOURS, Mick Herron
 THE RUNNING GRAVE,
 Robert Galbraith, aka JK Rowling
 THE SECOND MURDERER,
 Denise Mina
 SMALL MERCIES, Dennis Lehane
 STRANGE SALLY DIAMOND,
 Liz Nugent
 BIRNAM WOOD, Eleanor Catton
 PET, Catherine Chidgey
 YELLOWFACE, Rebecca F Kuang

Dayton Daily News

by Vick Mickunas
 DARK RIDE, Lou Berney
 ALL THE SINNERS BLEED,
 S. A. Cosby
 PROM MOM, Laura Lippman
 THE DETECTIVE UP LATE,
 Adrian McKinty
 FLAGS ON THE BAYOU,
 James Lee Burke
 THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF MAT-
 THEW SCUDDER, Lawrence Block

Men's Journal

Best Mystery/Thrillers
 AN HONEST MAN, Michael Koryta
Other Top Mystery/Thriller
Books of the Year
 ALL THE SINNERS BLEED,
 S. A. Cosby
 THE ONLY ONE LEFT, Riley Sager
 THE HEAVEN & EARTH GROCERY
 STORE, James McBride
 LIGHTS OUT, Elise Hart Kipness

Everand

NONE OF THIS IS TRUE, Lisa Jewell
 THE MANOR HOUSE,
 Gilly Macmillan
 ZERO DAYS, Ruth Ware
 ALL THE SINNERS BLEED,
 S. A. Cosby
 THE VILLA, Rachel Hawkins
 BAD SUMMER PEOPLE,
 Emma Rosenblum
 ALL THE DANGEROUS THINGS,
 Stacy Willingham
 A DISAPPEARANCE IN FIJI,
 Nilima Rao
 BRIGHT YOUNG WOMEN,
 Jessica Knoll

EXILE, Jane Harper
 GOOD BAD GIRL, Alice Feeney
 GOING ZERO, Anthony McCarten
 THE WOMAN INSIDE,
 M. T. Edvardsson
 THE PLINKO BOUNCE, Martin Clark
 THE SOULMATE, Sally Hepworth
 THE SECRET HOURS, Mick Her-



HELLO! India Magazine

(<https://in.hellomagazine.com>)
Mystery Novels
 BAD SUMMER PEOPLE,
 Emma Rosenblum
 UNTAMED SHORE,
 Silvia Moreno-Garcia
 THIS IS HOW WE END THINGS,
 R. J. Jacobs
 BRIGHT YOUNG WOMEN,
 Jessica Knoll
 THE OTHER HALF, Charlotte Vassell
 THE MYSTERY GUEST, Nita Prose
 MURDER AND MAMON,
 Mia P. Manansala
 MURDER BY DEGREES, Ritu Mukerji
 CHRISTMAS PRESENTS, Lisa Unger
Thriller Novels
 THE STRANGER UPSTAIRS,
 Lisa M. Matlin
 DELICATE CONDITION,
 Danielle Valentine
 HOLLY, Stephen King
 NONE OF THIS IS TRUE, Lisa Jewell
 THE LAST ONE, Will Dean
 GOOD BAD GIRL, Alice Feeney
 I DID IT FOR YOU, Amy Engel

Reader's Digest

by Leandra Beabout
 AGE OF VICE, Deepti Kapoor
 CITY UNDER ONE ROOF,
 Iris Yamashita
 A DEATH AT THE PARTY, Amy Stuart
 HOMECOMING, Kate Morton
 SYMPHONY OF SECRETS,
 Brendan Slocumb
 YELLOWFACE, R. F. Kuang
 CROOK MANIFESTO,
 Colson Whitehead
 EVERYONE HERE IS LYING,
 Shari Lapena
 GONE TONIGHT, Sarah Pekkanen

The Scotsman

PAST LYING, Val McDermid
 SQUEAKY CLEAN, Callum McSorley
 THE MAIDEN, Kate Foster
 THE SECOND MURDERER,
 Denise Mina
 VOICES OF THE DEAD,
 Ambrose Parry

The Globe and Mail

(<https://www.theglobeandmail.com/>)
 ALL THE SINNERS BLEED,
 S. A. Cosby
 MURDER AT HAVEN'S ROCK,
 Kelley Armstrong
 BRIGHT YOUNG WOMEN, J
 essica Knoll
 ZERO DAYS, Ruth Ware
 THE EDEN TEST, Adam Sternbergh
 THE GIRL BY THE BRIDGE,
 Arnaldur Indridason
 CROOK MANIFESTO,
 Colson Whitehead
 NONE OF THIS IS TRUE, Lisa Jewell
 A DEATH AT THE PARTY, Amy Stuart
 RED QUEEN, Juan Gomez-Jurado
 PROPHET SONG, Paul Lynch
 YELLOWFACE, R. F. Kuang
 BIRNAM WOOD, Eleanor Catton

The Toronto Star

SUNSET AND JERICHO, Sam Wiebe
 THE QUIET TENANT,
 Clemence Michallon
 PET, Catherine Chidgey
 ALL THE SINNERS BLEED,
 S. A. Cosby
 AGE OF VICE, Deepti Kapoor

Websites' Lists

Best Mysteries of 2023

The Rap Sheet

(therapsheet.blogspot.com)

J. Kingston Pierce – Editor

THE GOLDEN GATE, Amy Chua
UNNATURAL ENDS,
Christopher Huang
ASHES IN THE SNOW,
Oriana Ramunno
THE BROKEN AFTERNOON,
Simon Mason
THE SECOND MURDERER,
Denise Mina

DEAD OF NIGHT, Simon Scarrow
THE SQUARE OF SEVENS,
Laura Shepherd-Robinson
THE NIGHTINGALE AFFAIR,
Tim Mason

SING HER DOWN, Ivy Pochoda
TOO MANY BULLETS,
Max Allan Collins
EVERGREEN, Naomi Hirahara

Kevin Burton Smith

(see under DP Contributors' lists)

Ali Karim

(see under DP Contributors' lists)

Jim Thomsen

SMALL TOWN SINS, Ken Jaworowski
SMALL MERCIES, Dennis Lehane
AN HONEST MAN, Michael Koryta
THE GUEST, Emma Cline
LAY YOUR BODY DOWN, Amy Suiter
THE END OF THE ROAD,
Andrew Welsh-Huggins
DARK RIDE, Lou Berney

Fraser Massey

THE LAST DANCE, Mark Billingham
OZARK DOGS, Eli Cranor
PAST LYING, Val McDermid
RED QUEEN, Juan Gomez-Jurado
DEAD OF NIGHT, Simon Scarrow
SMALL MERCIES, Dennis Lehane
ALL THE SINNERS BLEED,

S. A. Cosby

THE SECRET HOURS, Mick Herron
SCORCHED GRACE, Margot Douaihy
CITY OF DREAMS, Don Winslow
Steven Nester

TOO MANY BULLETS,

Max Allan Collins

DARK RIDE, Lou Berney

BLOODY MARTINI,

William Kotzwinkle

THE LOST AMERICANS,

Christopher Bollen

HARD COUNTRY, Reavis Z. Wortham

BLOOD SISTERS, Vanessa Lillie

DEVICE FREE WEEKEND,

Sean Doolittle

Audible

(audible.com)

ALL THE SINNERS BLEED,

S. A. Cosby

NONE OF THIS IS TRUE, Lisa Jewell

SMALL MERCIES, Dennis Lehane

GONE TONIGHT, Sarah Pekkanen

THE MYSTERY GUEST, Nita Prose

TOO LATE, Colleen Hoover

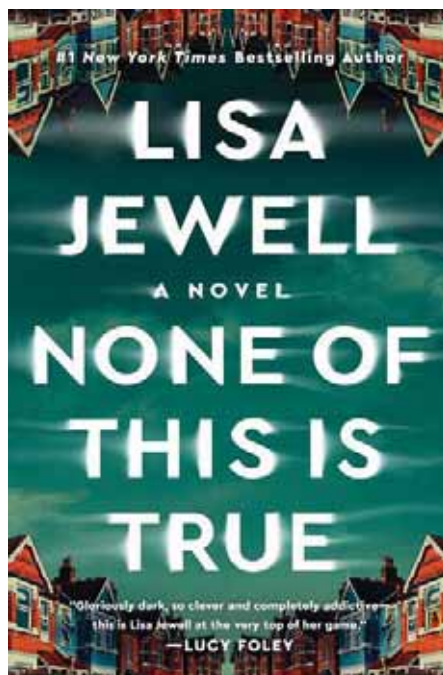
SYMPHONY OF SECRETS,

Brendan Slocumb

MURDER YOUR EMPLOYER,

Rupert Holmes

BRIGHT YOUNG WOMEN,



Jessica Knoll

JUST THE NICEST COUPLE,

Mary Kubica

VERA WONG'S UNSOLICITED AD-
VICE FOR MURDERERS,

Jesse Q. Sutanto

THE VILLA, Rachel Hawkins

THE SENATOR'S WIFE,

Liv Constantine

THE SILENT BRIDE, Shalini Bolland

Audible Originals

STRANGER, Ben H. Winters

I THINK YOU'RE PROJECTING,

Cora Frazier

ZERO TOLERANCE, James Patterson,

Duane Swierczynski

MORIARTY: THE SILENT ORDER,

Charles Kindinger

Tertulia

(tertulia.com)

HAPPINESS FALLS, Angie Kim

NONE OF THIS IS TRUE, Lisa Jewell

HOT SPRINGS DRIVE, Lindsay Hunter

PENANCE, Eliza Clark

WEST HEART KILL, Dann McDorman

BRIGHT YOUNG WOMEN,

Jessica Knoll

THE ENCHANTERS, James Ellroy

REYKJAVIK, Ragnar Jonasson &

Katrin Jakobsdottir

BROOKLYN CRIME NOVEL,

Jonathan Lethem

THE BERRY PICKERS, Amanda Peters

DEVIL MAKES THREE, Ben Fountain

THE PROFESSOR, Lauren Nossett

THE HELSINKI AFFAIR,

Anna Pitoniak

THERE SHOULD HAVE BEEN EIGHT,

Nalini Singh

GOOD GIRLS DON'T DIE,

Christina Henry

THE WATCHMAKER'S HAND,

Jeffrey Deaver

BEWARE THE WOMAN,

Megan Abbott

ALL THE SINNERS BLEED,

S. A. Cosby

CROOK MANIFESTO,

Colson Whitehead

THE EDEN TEST, Adam Sternbergh

SMALL MERCIES, Dennis Lehane

SING HER DOWN, Ivy Pochoda

THE STOLEN COAST, Dwyer Murphy

CITY OF DREAMS, Don Winslow

THE SPARE ROOM, Andrea Bartz
 BIRNAM WOOD, Eleanor Catton
 YOU KNOW HER, Meagan Jennett
 THE WRITING RETREAT, Julia Bartz
 PANTHER GAP, James A. McLaughlin
 OZARK DOGS, Eli Cranor
 RED QUEEN, Juan Gomez-Jurado
 THE KIND WORTH SAVING,
 Peter Swanson
 STONE COLD FOX, Rachel Koller Croft
 48 CLUES INTO THE
 DISAPPEARANCE OF MY SISTER,
 Joyce Carol Oates
 THE SOULMATE, Sally Hepworth
 DECENT PEOPLE,
 De'shawn Charles Winslow
 THE VILLA, Rachel Hawkins
 UP WITH THE SUN, Thomas Mallon
 THE HOUSE OF PINES, Ana Reyes
 EVERYBODY KNOWS, Jordan Harper
 WHAT LIES IN THE WOODS,
 Kate Alice Marshall
 EXILES, Jane Harper
 THE SHARDS, Bret Easton Ellis
 THE THING IN THE SNOW,
 Sean Adams
 CITY UNDER ONE ROOF,
 Iris Yamashita

Goodreads Choice Awards

(www.goodreads.com)

THE HOUSEMAID'S SECRET, Freida
 McFadden – Winner
 THE RIVER WE REMEMBER, Wil-
 liam Kent Krueger
 AFTER THAT NIGHT, Karin Slaughter
 THE VILLA, Rachel Hawkins
 I HAVE SOME QUESTIONS FOR YOU,
 Rebecca Makkai
 GOOD BAD GIRL, Alice Feeney
 ALL THE SINNERS BLEED,
 S. A. Cosby
 THE COWORKER, Freida McFadden
 THE MAID'S DIARY,
 Loreth Anne White
 VERA WONG'S UNSOLICITED AD-
 VICE FOR MURDERERS,
 Jesse. Q. Sutanto
 DON'T LET HER STAY, Nicola Sanders
 THE ONLY ONE LEFT, Riley Sager
 HOMECOMING, Kate Morton
 BRIGHT YOUNG WOMEN,
 Jessica Knoll
 NONE OF THIS IS TRUE, Lisa Jewell
 WHAT LIES IN THE WOODS,

Kate Alice Marshall
 ALL THE DANGEROUS THINGS,
 Stacy Willingham
 THE LEFTOVER WOMAN, Jean Kwok
 HAPPINESS FALLS, Angie Kim
 THE LAST DEVIL TO DIE,
 Richard Osman

NPR

(www.npr.org)

SMALL MERCIES, Dennis Lehane
 SYMPHONY OF SECRETS,
 Brendan Slocumb
 KALA, Colin Walsh
 I HAVE SOME QUESTIONS FOR YOU,
 Rebecca Makkai
 THE PEACOCK AND THE SPARROW,
 I. S. Berry



CROOK MANIFESTO,
 Colson Whitehead
 WARRIOR GIRL UNEARTHED,
 Angeline Boulley
 THE SECRET HOURS, Mick Herron
 BEWARE THE WOMAN,
 Megan Abbott
 HOLLY, Stephen King
 ALL THE SINNERS BLEED,
 S. A. Cosby
 THERE'S NO WAY I'D DIE FIRST,
 Lisa Springer
 BROOKLYN CRIME NOVEL,
 Jonathan Lethem
 THE LAST DEVIL TO DIE,

Richard Osman
 THE ENCHANTERS, James Ellroy
 VERA WONG'S UNSOLICITED AD-
 VICE FOR MURDERERS,
 Jesse Q. Sutanto
 VAMPIRES OF EL NORTE,
 Isabel Canas
 EDITH HOLLER, Edward Carey
 THE END OF DRUM-TIME,
 Hanna Pylvainen
 BRUTES, Dizz Tate
 THE STOLEN COAST, Dwyer Murphy
 THE GOLDEN SPOON, Jessa Maxwell
 A HAUNTING IN HIALEAH
 GARDENS, Raul Palma
 THE REFORMATORY, Tananarive Due
 HOUSE OF COTTON,
 Monica Brashears
 MY MURDER, Katie Williams
 THE FROZEN RIVER, Ariel Lawhon
 OUR SHARE OF NIGHT,
 Mariana Enriquez
 SING HER DOWN, Ivy Pochoda
 THE CENTRE, Ayesha Manazir Siddiqi
 AGE OF VICE, Deepti Kapoor
 BIRNAM WOOD, Eleanor Catton
 STOLEN, Ann-Helen Laestadius
 NONE OF THIS IS TRUE, Lisa Jewell
 THE MONA LISA VANISHES,
 Nicholas Day
 PROM MOM, Laura Lippman
 THE CUBAN HEIRESS,
 Chanel Cleeton
 OLD GOD'S TIME, Sebastian Barry
 BETTER THE BLOOD,
 Michael Bennett
 HOW TO SELL A HAUNTED HOUSE,
 Grady Hendrix
 BRIGHT YOUNG WOMEN,
 Jessica Knoll
 WHALEFALL, Daniel Kraus
 INVISIBLE SON, Kim Johnson

BookPage

(www.bookpage.com)

ALL THE SINNERS BLEED,
 S. A. Cosby
 BRIGHT YOUNG WOMEN,
 Jessica Knoll
 EXILES, Jane Harper
 THE FROZEN RIVER, Ariel Lawhon
 THE LAST DEVIL TO DIE,
 Richard Osman
 THE MOTION PICTURE TELLER,
 Colin Cotterill

THE RIVER WE REMEMBER, William Kent Krueger
 THE SECRET HOURS, Mick Herron
 VERA WONG'S UNSOLICITED ADVICE FOR MURDERERS, Jesse. Q. Sutanto
 ZERO DAYS, Ruth Ware
BookPage Reader's Choice
 SCORCHED GRACE, Margot Douaihy
 THE WHITE LADY, Jacqueline Winspear
 HOMECOMING, Kate Morton
 DEATH COMES TO MARLOW, Robert Thorogood
 ZERO DAYS, Ruth Ware
 THE RIVER WE REMEMBER, William Kent Krueger
 THE SUNSET YEARS OF AGNES SHARP, Leonie Swann
 HERCULE POIROT'S SILENT NIGHT, Sophie Hannah
 THE HOUSEKEEPERS, Alex Hay
 VERA WONG'S UNSOLICITED ADVICE FOR MURDERERS, Jesse Q. Sutanto
 A SINISTER REVENGE, Deanna Raybourn

Booklist Queen Best of 2023

www.booklistqueen.com

Best Psychological Thrillers

THE LAST WORD, Taylor Adams – Top Pick

THE ONLY SURVIVORS,

Megan Miranda

WHAT LIES IN THE WOODS,

Kate Alice Marshall

BEFORE WE WERE INNOCENT,

Ella Berman

HOLLY, Stephen King

NONE OF THIS IS TRUE, Lisa Jewell

Best Mystery Thrillers

THE RIVER WE REMEMBER, William Kent Krueger – Top Pick

DARK CORNERS, Megan Goldin

JUST ANOTHER MISSING PERSON,

Gillian McAllister

AFTER THAT NIGHT, Karin Slaughter

THE EXCHANGE, John Grisham

Best Domestic Thrillers

THE WHISPERS, Ashley Audrain – Top Pick

ALL THE DANGEROUS THINGS,

Stacy Willingham

THE LIST, Yomi Adegoke
 EVERYONE HERE IS LYING, Shari Lapena
 THE SENATOR'S WIFE, Liv Constantine

Celebrity Book Club Picks

MOTHER-DAUGHTER MURDER

NIGHT, Nina Simon

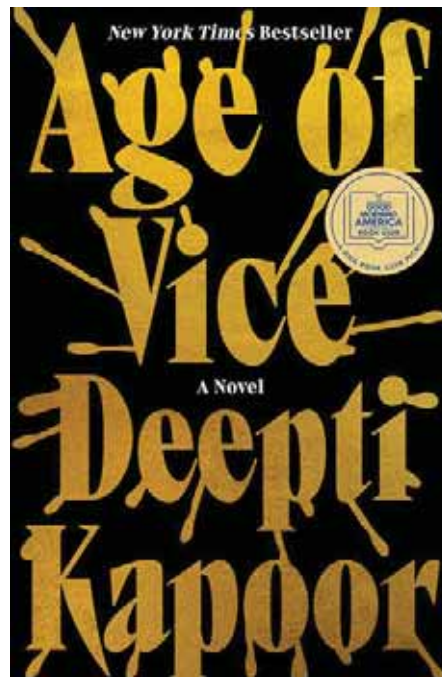
THE NIGERWIFE, Vanessa Walters

THE HOUSE IN THE PINES,

Ana Reyes

AGE OF VICE, Deepti Kapoor

DIRTY LAUNDRY, Disha Bose



CrimeReads

(<https://crimereads.com>)

Best Crime Novels

BRIGHT YOUNG WOMEN,

Jessica Knoll

CROOK MANIFESTO,

Colson Whitehead

BEWARE THE WOMAN,

Megan Abbott

EXCAVATIONS, Hannah Michell

PET, Catherine Chidgey

AGE OF VICE, Deepti Kapoor

EVERYBODY KNOWS, Jordan Harper

ALL THE SINNERS BLEED, S.A. Cosby

PENANCE, Eliza Clark

I HAVE SOME QUESTIONS FOR YOU,

Rebecca Makkai

I'M NOT DONE WITH YOU YET,

Jesse Q. Sutanto

THE REFORMATORY, Tananarive Due

THE EDEN TEST, Adam Sternbergh
 EVERY MAN A KING, Walter Mosley
 SING HER DOWN, Ivy Pochoda
 THE SHARDS, Bret Easton Ellis
 THE STOLEN COAST, Dwyer Murphy
 CONFIDENCE, Rafael Frumkin
 OZARK DOGS, Eli Cranor
 HOT SPRINGS DRIVE, Lindsay Hunter

Best Espionage Novels

TOMAS NEVINSON, Javier Marias

HOPE YOU ARE SATISFIED,

Tania Malik

BEIRUT STATION, Paul Vidich

RED LONDON, Alma Katsu

THE HELSINKI AFFAIR,

Anna Pitoniak

Best Psychological Thrillers

ABYSS, Pilar Quintana

YOU CAN TRUST ME, Wendy Heard

THE LEFTOVER WOMAN, Jean Kwok

TELL ME WHAT I AM, Una Mannion

KALA, Colin Walsh

THE LIST, Yomi Adegoke

MIDNIGHT IS THE DARKEST HOUR,

Ashley Winstead

HOUSE WOMAN, Adorah Nworah

A TWISTED LOVE STORY,

Samantha Downing

MY HUSBAND, Maud Ventura

HAPPINESS FALLS, Angie Kim

BAD SUMMER PEOPLE,

Emma Rosenblum

LOCUST LANE, Stephen Amidon

SPEAK OF THE DEVIL, Rose Wilding

THE SECOND WOMAN, Louise Mey

Best Noir Fiction

SCORCHED GRACE, Margot Douaihy

DARK RIDE, Lou Berney

LOWDOWN ROAD, Scott Von Doviack

HOW CAN I HELP YOU, Laura Sims

NOTHING IS LOST, Chloe' Mehdi

THE BERRY PICKERS, Amanda Peters

ALL THE SINNERS BLEED,

S. A. Cosby

EVERYBODY KNOWS, Jordan Harper

AGE OF VICE, Deepti Kapoor

OZARK DOGS, Eli Cranor

Best Traditional Mysteries

THE LAST DEVIL TO DIE,

Richard Osman

WEST HEART KILL, Dann McDorman

VERA WONG'S UNSOLICITED AD-

VICE FOR MURDERERS,

Jesse Q. Sutanto

THE TWYFORD CODE, Janice Hallett

GASLIGHT, Femi Kayode

THE SUNSET YEARS OF AGNES
SHARP, Leonie Swann
THE MYSTERY GUEST, Nita Prose
THE MURDER WHEEL, Tom Mead
EVERYONE IN MY FAMILY HAS
KILLED SOMEONE,
Benjamin Stevenson
SYMPHONY OF SECRETS,
Brendan Slocumb
THE LONDON SEANCE SOCIETY,
Sarah Penner
THE WRITING RETREAT, Julia Bartz
THE PUZZLE MASTER,
Danielle Trussoni

Best International Crime Novels

MY MEN, Victoria Kielland
VENGEANCE IS MINE, Marie Ndiaye
NOTHING IS LOST, Chloe Mehdi
OUR SHARE OF NIGHT,
Mariana Enriquez (Horror)
MY HUSBAND, Maud Ventura
URGENT MATTERS, Paula Rodriguez
TINA, MAFIA SOLDIER,
Maria Rosa Cutrufelli
BAD KIDS, Zijin Chen
ABYSS, Pilar Quintana
KIDS RUN THE SHOW,
Delphine de Vigan
SCENE OF THE CRIME, P
atrick Modiano
THE SECOND WOMAN, Louise Mey
THE OWL CRIES, Sora Kim-Russell
THE CITY OF THE LIVING,
Nicola Lagioia
BLAZE ME A SUN,
Christopher Carlsson

Best Debut Crime Novels

THE SHAMSHINE BLIND, Paz Pardo
SCORCHED GRACE, Margot Douaihy
THE QUIET TENANT,
Clémence Michallon
BETTER THE BLOOD,
Michael Bennett
THE GOOD ONES, Polly Stewart
THE HOUSE IN THE PINES,
Ana Reyes
MOTHER-DAUGHTER MURDER
NIGHT, Nina Simon
DEATH OF A BOOKSELLER,
Alice Slater
THE GULF, Rachel Cochran
OUR BEST INTENTIONS, Vibhuti Jain

Marilyn's Mystery Reads
(www.marilynsmysteryreads.com)

THE FAVOR, Nicci French
THE MURDER BOOK,
Thomas Perry
A DEATH IN TOKYO,
Keigo Higashino
THE DARK EDGE OF NIGHT,
Mark Pryor
SMALL MERCIES, Dennis Lehane
DEADLOCK, James Byrne
THE BITTER PAST, Bruce Borgos
THE LONGMIRE DEFENSE,
Craig Johnson
EVERYONE HERE IS LYING,
Shari Lapena
ASHES IN THE SNOW,
Oriana Ramunno
RED QUEEN, Juan Gómez-Jurado



REYKJAVÍK, Ragnar Jónasson and
Katrín Jakobsdóttir
AN HONEST MAN, Michael Koryta
ALL THE SINNERS BLEED,
S. A. Cosby

Dead Good Books

(www.deadgoodbooks.co.uk)

Best Crime Books

I WILL FIND YOU, Harlan Coben
THE LAST DEVIL TO DIE,
Richard Osman
THE SECRET, Lee Child and
Andrew Child
SO SHALL YOU REAP, Donna Leon
THE LAST GOODBYE, Tim Weaver

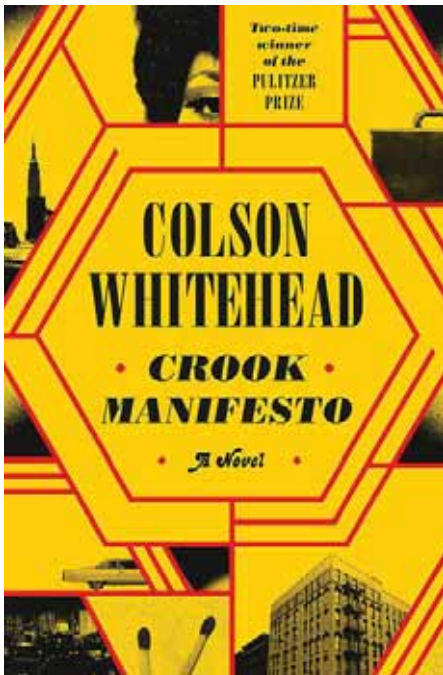
THE YEAR OF THE LOCUST,
Terry Hayes
THE WOLF, Samuel Bjork
THE TRIAL, Rob Rinder
THE DEAD OF WINTER,
Stuart MacBride
STRANGE SALLY DIAMOND,
Liz Nugent
Best Psychological Thrillers
NONE OF THIS IS TRUE, Lisa Jewell
THE WOMAN WHO LIED,
Claire Douglas
MY OTHER HUSBAND,
Dorothy Koomson
EVERYONE HERE IS LYING,
Shari Lapena
THE BEACH PARTY, Nikki Smith
THE TRAP, Catherine Ryan Howard
MURDER IN THE FAMILY,
Cara Hunter
NO ONE SAW A THING, Andrea Mara

Chicago Public Library

(<https://chipublib.bibliocommons.com>)

AGE OF VICE, Deepti Kapoor
ALL THE SINNERS BLEED,
S. A. Cosby
THE BENEVOLENT SOCIETY OF
ILL-MANNERED LADIES,
Alison Goodman
BIRNAM WOOD, Eleanor Catton
BRIGHT YOUNG WOMEN,
Jessica Knoll
DROWNING, T. J. Newman
THE GOLDEN GATE, Amy Chua
HAPPINESS FALLS, Angie Kim
THE LAST DEVIL TO DIE,
Richard Osman
THE LAST REMAINS, Elly Griffith
MY FATHER'S HOUSE,
Joseph O'Connor
THE MYSTERY GUEST, Nita Prose
NIGHT WILL FIND YOU,
Julia Heaberlin
THE ONLY ONE LEFT, Riley Sager
PET, Catherine Chidgey
THE QUIET TENANT,
Clemence Michallon
REYKJAVIK, Ragnar Jonasson
THE SECRET HOURS, Mick Herron
SMALL MERCIES, Dennis Lehane
STRANGE SALLY DIAMOND,
Liz Nugent
SYMPHONY OF SECRETS,

Brendan Slocumb
 VERA WONG'S UNSOLICITED AD-
 VICE FOR MURDERERS,
 Jesse Q. Sutanto
 WHALEFALL, Daniel Kraus
 THE WHITE LADY,
 Jacqueline Winspear
 CROOK MANIFESTO,
 Colson Whitehead
 THE GUEST, Emma Cline
 I HAVE SOME QUESTIONS FOR YOU,
 Rebecca Makkai
 THE VASTER WILDS, Lauren Groff
 YELLOWFACE, R. F. Kuang



New York Public Library

(www.nypl.org)
 AGAINST THE CURRANT,
 Olivia Matthews
 BAD KIDS, Zijin Chen
 EVERYONE IN MY FAMILY HAS
 KILLED SOMEONE,
 Benjamin Stevenson
 THE LAST ONE, Will Dean
 MY MURDER, Katie Williams
 THE NIGERWIFE, Vanessa Walters
 THE QUIET TENANT,
 Clémence Michallon
 RED QUEEN, Juan Gomez-Jurado
 THE TRAP, Catherine Ryan Howard
 VERA WONG'S UNSOLICITED AD-
 VICE FOR MURDERERS,
 Jesse Q. Sutanto
 AGE OF VICE, Deepti Kapoor

Jen Ryland

(www.jenryland.com)
 ALL THE SINNERS BLEED,
 S. A. Cosby
 THE TAKEN ONES, Jess Lourey
 THE LAST DEVIL TO DIE,
 Richard Osman
 STRANGE SALLY DIAMOND,
 Liz Nugent
 HAPPINESS FALLS, Angie Kim
 BRIGHT YOUNG WOMEN,
 Jessica Knoll
 NONE OF THIS IS TRUE, Lisa Jewell
 THE TRAP, Catherine Ryan Howard
 THE ONLY ONE LEFT, Riley Sager

Shereads

(shereads.com)
 ALL THE SINNERS BLEED,
 S. A. Cosby
 BLOOD SISTERS, Vanessa Lillie
 BRIGHT YOUNG WOMEN,
 Jessica Knoll
 DON'T LET HER STAY, Nicola Sanders
 I HAVE SOME QUESTIONS FOR YOU,
 Rebecca Makkai
 JUST ANOTHER MISSING PERSON,
 Gillian McAllister
 NONE OF THIS IS TRUE, Lisa Jewell
 STONE COLD FOX, Rachel Koller Croft
 THE ONLY ONE LEFT, Riley Sager
 THE TRAITOR, Ava Glass
 VERA WONG'S UNSOLICITED AD-
 VICE FOR MURDERERS,
 Jesse Q. Sutanto
 WHAT NEVER HAPPENED,
 Rachel Howzell Hall
 THE RIVER WE REMEMBER, Wil-
 liam Kent Krueger
 BIRNAM WOOD, Eleanor Catton
 THE VASTER WILDS, Lauren Groff
 THE LEFTOVER WOMAN, Jean Kwok
 STONE COLD FOX, Rachel Koller Croft
 THE QUIET TENANT,
 Clemence Michallon
 HOW I'LL KILL YOU, Ren DeStefano
 DON'T FORGET THE GIRL,
 Rebecca McKanna
 THE BANDIT QUEENS, Parini Shroff

Crime Fiction Lover Awards

(<https://crimefictionlover.com>)
Crime Novel of the Year

THE LAST REMAINS, Elly Griffiths
Crime Novel of the Year –
Editor's Choice

STRANGE SALLY DIAMOND,
Liz Nugent
 ALL THE SINNERS BLEED, S.A. Cosby
 EVERYBODY KNOWS, Jordan Harper
 KILL FOR ME, KILL FOR YOU, Steve
 Cavanagh
 THE MYSTERIOUS CASE OF THE
 ALPERTON ANGELS, Janice Hallett
Best Debut Crime Novel
YOU'D LOOK BETTER AS A GHOST,
Joanna Wallace

Best Debut Novel – Editor's Choice
CITY UNDER ONE ROOF,
Iris Yamashita

LIES AFTER DEATH, KJ Dando
 SQUEAKY CLEAN, Callum McSorley
 THE PEACOCK AND THE SPARROW
 I. S. Berry
 THE TRIAL, Rob Rinder

Best in Translation
THIRTY DAYS OF DARKNESS,
Jenny Lund Madsen

Best in Translation – Editor's Choice
THE SINS OF OUR FATHERS,
Asa Larsson

MURDER AT THE RESIDENCE,
 Stella Blómkvist
 RED QUEEN, Juan Gómez-Jurado
 THE COLLECTOR,
 Anne Mette Hancock
 THE MILL HOUSE MURDERS ,
 Yukito Ayatsuji
Best Indie Novel

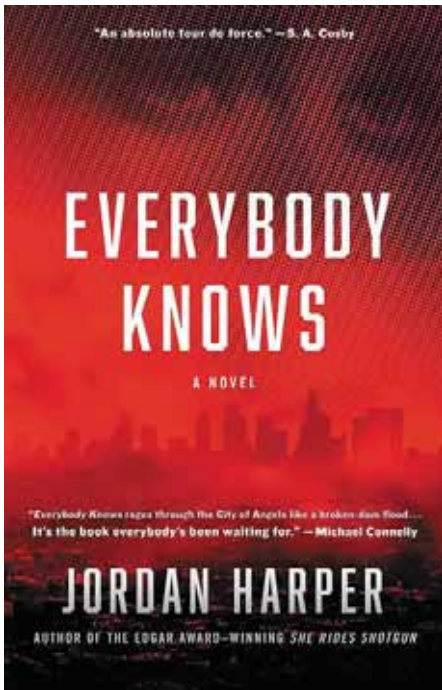
SCRATCHING THE FLINT,
Vern Smith

Best Indie Novel – Editor's Choice
THE ASSOCIATE, Victoria Goldman
 SUNSET AND JERICHO, Sam Weibe
 THE FORCING, Paul E Hardisty
 THE MAN IN THE CORDUROY SUIT
 James Wolff

Beyond the Bookends

(beyondthebookends.com)
 MOTHER-DAUGHTER MURDER
 CLUB, Nina Simon
 DEATH COMES TO MARLOW,
 Robert Thorogood
 VERA WONG'S UNSOLICITED AD-
 VICE FOR MURDERERS,
 Jesse Q. Sutanto
 THE TWYFORD CODE, Janice Hallett

THE ONLY ONE LEFT, Riley Sager
HAPPINESS FALLS, Angie Kim



Air Mail

(airmail.news/books)
by Lisa Henricksson

EVERYBODY KNOWS, Jordan Harper
THE TWYFORD CODE, Janice Hallett
DARK RIDE, Lou Berney
THE LAST DEVIL TO DIE,
Richard Osman
ALL THE SINNERS BLEED,
S. A. Cosby
THE SECRET HOURS, Mick Herron
SYMPHONY OF SECRETS,
Brendan Slocumb
SMALL MERCIES, Dennis Lehane
THE LOCK-UP, John Banville
THE QUIET TENANT,
Clémence Michallon
THE DEVIL'S PLAYGROUND,
Craig Russell
PAST LYING, Val McDermid

Bibliolifestyle

(<https://bibliolifestyle.com>)

Thrillers, Suspense & Mysteries

THE BLACKHOUSE, Carole Johnstone
THE VILLA, Rachel Hawkins
BLAZE ME A SUN,
Christoffer Carlsson
WHAT LIES IN THE WOODS,
Kate Alice Marshall

EXILES, Jane Harper
THE TWYFORD CODE,
Janice Hallett
THE WRITING RETREAT, Julia Bartz
HOW I'LL KILL YOU, Ren DeStefano
A DEATH AT THE PARTY,
Amy Stuart
BIRNAM WOOD, Eleanor Catton
WHAT HAVE WE DONE, Alex Finlay
I LOVE IT WHEN YOU LIE,
Kristen Bird
THE LAST WORD, Taylor Adams
THE EDEN TEST, Adam Sternbergh
THE STOLEN COAST, Dwyer Murphy
BEWARE THE WOMAN,
Megan Abbott
ALL THE SINNERS BLEED,
S. A. Cosby
BAD SUMMER PEOPLE,
Emma Rosenblum
DROWNING, T. J. Newman
THE QUIET TENANT,
Clémence Michallon
BEFORE SHE FINDS ME,
Heather Chavez
THE BONES OF THE STORY,
Carol Goodman
I DID IT FOR YOU, Amy Engel
TELL ME WHAT I AM, Una Mannion
ASHES IN THE SNOW,
Oriana Ramunno
THE INTERPRETER,
Brooke Robinson
BRIGHT YOUNG WOMEN,
Jessica Knoll
THE CHRISTMAS GUEST,
Peter Swanson
THE PROFESSOR, Lauren Nossett
Cozy Mysteries
SIX SWEETS UNDER, Sarah Fox
OF MANNERS AND MURDER,
Anastasia Hastings
THE GOLDEN SPOON, Jessa Maxwell
THE RAVEN THIEF, Gigi Pandian
MURDER IN POSTSCRIPT,
Mary Winters
MASTERING THE ART OF FRENCH
MURDER, Colleen Cambridge
VERA WONG'S UNSOLICITED AD-
VICE FOR MURDERERS,
Jesse Q. Sutanto
NONNA MARIA AND THE CASE
OF THE STOLEN NECKLACE,
Lorenzo Carcaterra
THE LATE MRS. WILLOUGHBY,
Claudia Gray

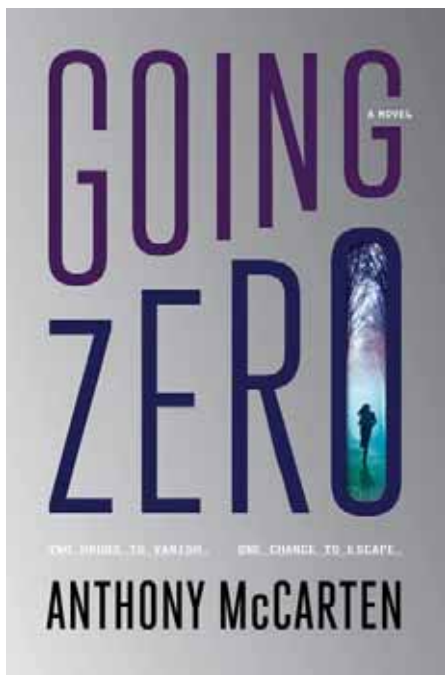
MURDER ON MUSTANG BEACH,
Alicia Besette
A NOVEL DISGUISE,
Samantha Larsen
CHARLOTTE ILLES IS NOT A DE-
TECTIVE, Katie Siegel
A MOST AGREEABLE MURDER,
Julia Seales
MRS. PLANSKY'S REVENGE,
Spencer Quinn
REHEARSED TO DEATH,
Frank Anthony Polito
FINAL CUT, Marjorie McCown
TAKE THE HONEY AND RUN,
Jennie Marts
MURDER AND MAMON,
Mia P. Manansala
MURDER BY INVITATION ONLY,
Colleen Cambridge
MURDER IN AN ITALIAN VIL-
LAGE, Michael Falco
BAKING SPIRITS BRIGHT, Sarah Fox

Bookreporter Reviewers' Best

(bookreporter.com)

Kate Ayers

KALA, Colin Walsh
THE MYSTERY GUEST, Nita Prose
THE LAST DEVIL TO DIE,
Richard Osman
THE COLLECTOR, Daniel Silva
BLOOD LINES, Nelson DeMille &
Alex DeMille
THE EDGE, David Baldacci
ALL THAT IS MINE I CARRY WITH
ME, William Landay
THE LAST DROP OF HEMLOCK,
Katherine Schellman
BETRAYAL, Phillip Margolin
Megan Elliott
THE LAST SONGBIRD,
Daniel Weizmann
I HAVE SOME QUESTIONS FOR
YOU, Rebecca Makkai
THE GUEST, Emma Cline
Pamela Kramer
A TRAITOR IN WHITEHALL,
Julia Kelly
THE SPY COAST, Tess Gerritsen
THE SQUARE OF SEVENS,
Laura Shepherd-Robinson
THE WHITE LADY,
Jacqueline Winspear
MRS. PLANSKY'S REVENGE,



Spencer Quinn
GOING ZERO, Anthony McCarten
CODE SIX, James Grippando
Bronwyn Miller
YELLOWFACE, R. F. Kuang
BRIGHT YOUNG WOMEN,
Jessica Knoll
THE ONLY ONE LEFT, Riley Sager
L. Dean Murphy
RUMOR OF EVIL, Gary Braver
ODYSSEY'S END, Matt Coyle
DEATH WRITES, Andrea Carter
GUMSHOE ON THE RUN,
Rob Leininger
NIGHT CANDY, Max Tomlinson
FACE OF GREED, James L'Etiolle
INCENTIVE FOR DEATH,
James Spoonhour
BONES UNDER THE ICE,
Mary Ann Miller
BURNING DISTANCE,
Joanne Leedom-Ackerman
SAVING MILES, Carl Vonderau
CULTURED, D. P. Lyle
A LONESOME BLOOD-RED SUN,
David Putnam
THE BLOOD OF PATRIOTS AND
TRAITORS, James A. Scott
Ray Paylen
ALL THE SINNERS BLEED,
S. A. Cosby
SMALL MERCIES, Dennis Lehane
THE EDGE, David Baldacci
HOLLY, Stephen King

HERCULE POIROT'S SILENT
NIGHT, Sophie Hannah
PAST LYING, Val McDermid
THE LIE MAKER, Linwood Barclay
MY DARLING GIRL,
Jennifer McMahon
DEAD MOUNTAIN, Preston & Child
THE LAST DANCE, Mark Billingham
THE KIND WORTH SAVING,
Peter Swanson
SLEEPLESS CITY,
Reed Farrel Coleman
THE TAKEN ONES, Jess Lourey
MY MURDER, Katie Williams
ROBERT LUDLUM'S THE BOURNE
DEFIANCE, Brian Freeman
THE CABINET OF DR. LENG,
Preston & Child
NIGHT WILL FIND YOU,
Julia Heaberlin
RELENTLESS MELT,
Jeremy P. Bushnell
Nora Piehl
BRIGHT YOUNG WOMEN,
Jessica Knoll
BIRNAM WOOD, Eleanor Catton
CITY UNDER ONE ROOF,
Iris Yamashita
Stuart Shiffman
THE STOLEN COAST, Dwyer Murphy
THE PUZZLE MASTER,
Danielle Trussoni

CBC

(<https://www.cbc.ca>)

by Angela Misri and Sam Wiebe
THE VILLAGE HALL VENDETTA,
Jonathan Whitelaw
CODE OF THE HILLS, Chris Offutt
THE GOLDEN GATE, Amy Chua
HARD RAIN, Samantha Jayne Allen
THAT OTHERS MAY LIVE,
Sara Driscoll
DOUBLE EAGLE, Thomas King
GULL ISLAND, Anna Porter
DEUS X, Stephen Mack Jones

Dozen Best Books

([DozenBestBooks.com](https://dozenbestbooks.com))

HOLLY, Stephen King
THE LONGMIRE DEFENSE,
Craig Johnson
PAYBACK IN DEATH, J. D. Robb
THE RIVER WE REMEMBER,
William Kent Krueger

AFTER THAT NIGHT,
Karin Slaughter
THE DONUT LEGION, Joe R. Lansdale
EVERGREEN, Naomi Hirahara
THE RUNNING GRAVE,
Robert Galbraith
THE EXCHANGE, John Grisham
THE TURN OF THE KEY, Ruth Ware
(2020 title ??)
STORM WATCH, C. J. Box
RESURRECTION WALK,
Michael Connelly
THE LAST DEVIL TO DIE,
Richard Osman
FIXIT, Joe Ide
DEAD FALL, Brad Thor
THE FERRYMAN, Justin Cronin (sci-fi)
THE GIRL WHO SURVIVED,
Lisa Jackson
THE SECRET, Andrew Child/Lee Child
THE COLLECTOR, Daniel Silva
THE HOUSE GUEST,
Hank Phillippi Ryan
THE WAY OF THE BEAR,
Anne Hillerman
JUDGMENT PREY, John Sandford
THE GIRL IN THE EAGLE'S TALONS,
Karin Smirnoff
NONE OF THIS IS TRUE, Lisa Jewell
THE SPY COAST, Tess Gerritsen

Five Books

(<https://fivebooks.com>)

THE RUNNING GRAVE,
Robert Galbraith
NONE OF THIS IS TRUE, Lisa Jewell
LIKE A SISTER, Kellye Garrett
EXILES, Jane Harper
VERA WONG'S UNSOLICITED AD-
VICE TO MURDERERS,
Jesse Q. Sutanto
MURDER IN THE FAMILY,
Cara Hunter

Indigo

(indigo.ca)

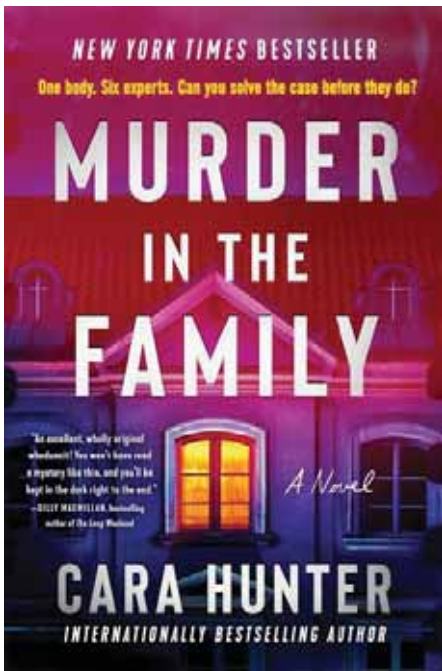
Thrillers

THE LEFTOVER WOMAN, Jean Kwok
THE MANOR HOUSE,
Gilly Macmillan
EVERYONE HERE IS LYING,
Shari Lapena
JUST ANOTHER MISSING PERSON,
Gillian McAllister
HUGE, Brent Butt

THE WHISPERS, Ashley Audrain
 NONE OF THIS IS TRUE, Lisa Jewell
 THE ONLY ONE LEFT, Riley Sager
 THE COWORKER, Freida McFadden
 AGE OF VICE, Deepit Kapoor

Mystery Books

EVERYONE IN MY FAMILY HAS
 KILLED SOMEONE,
 Benjamin Stevenson
 MURDER IN THE FAMILY,
 Cara Hunter



MOTHER-DAUGHTER MURDER
 NIGHT, Nina Simon
 WARRIOR GIRL UNEARTHED,
 Angeline Boulley
 CHARLOTTE ILLES IS NOT A DE-
 TECTIVE, Katie Siegel
 MURDER YOUR EMPLOYER,
 Rupert Holmes
 RESURRECTION WALK,
 Michael Connelly
 THE RAGING STORM, Ann Cleeves
 THE LAST DEVIL TO DIE,
 Richard Osman
 I ONLY READ MURDER, Ian Ferguson

Lesa's Book Critiques

by Lesa Holstine

(<https://lesasbookcritiques.com>)

ALL THE SINNERS BLEED,
 S. A. Cosby
 DEUS X, Stephen Mack Jones
 SMALL MERCIES, Dennis Lehane
 HANGING THE DEVIL, Tim Maleeny

HOME AT NIGHT, Paula Munier
 THE LAST DEVIL TO DIE,
 Richard Osman
 INHERITANCE, Nora Roberts

OverDrive

(<https://www.overdrive.com>)

HOLLY, Stephen King
 BIRNHAM WOOD, Eleanor Catton
 THE MYSTERY GUEST, Nita Prose
 AGE OF VICE, Deepiti Kapoor
 YOU SHOULDN'T HAVE COME
 HERE, Jeneva Rose
 BRIGHT YOUNG WOMEN,
 Jessica Knoll
 YELLOWFACE, R. F. Kuang
 I HAVE SOME QUESTIONS FOR YOU,
 Rebecca Makkai
 A MOST AGREEABLE MURDER,
 Julia Searles
 CROOK MANIFESTO,
 Colson Whitehead
 THE REFORMATORY, Tananarive Due
 THE EDEN TEST, Adam Sternbergh
 SYMPHONY OF SECRETS,
 Brendan Slocumb
 ALL THE SINNERS BLEED,
 S. A. Cosby
 TO HAVE AND TO HEIST, Sara Desai
 CAN I HELP YOU, Laura Sims
 THE LAST DEVIL TO DIE,
 Richard Osman
 THE VASTER WILDS, Lauren Groff

SteveReads

by Steve Donoghue on

Open Letters Review

(<https://openlettersreview.com/posts/category/SteveReads>)

Mysteries

THE LAST SONGBIRD,
 Daniel Weizmann
 NOT THE ONES DEAD,
 Dana Stabenow
 THE LADY FROM BURMA,
 Allison Montclair
 THE MISTRESS OF BHATIA HOUSE,
 Sujata Massey
 PLAYING IT SAFE, Ashley Weaver
 CODE OF THE HILLS, Chris Offutt
 CITY UNDER ONE ROOF,
 Iris Yamashita
 MURDER UNDER A RED MOON,
 Harini Nagendra
 SO SHALL YOU REAP, Donna Leon

THE MITFORD SECRET, J
 essica Fellowes

Thrillers

SEA CASTLE, Andrew Mayne
 FORGOTTEN WAR, Don Bentley
 SLEEPLESS CITY,
 Reed Farrell Coleman
 YOU WILL NEVER BE FOUND,
 Tove Alsterdal
 ALL THE DANGEROUS THINGS,
 Stacy Willingham
 RED RIVER SEVEN, A. J. Ryan
 GOING ZERO, Anthony McCarten
 BURNER, Mark Greaney
 CODE 6, James Grippando
 EXILES, Jane Harper

Stop, You're Killing Me!

by Lucinda Surber

(<http://www.stopyourekillingme.com>)

Best Debuts

THE DANCE OF THE DOLLS,
 Lucy Ashe
 BETTER THE BLOOD,
 Michael Bennett
 THE PEACOCK AND THE SPARROW,
 I. S. Berry
 LIAR, DREAMER, THIEF, Maria Dong
 SCORCHED GRACE, Margot Douaihy
 THE HOUSEKEEPERS, Alex Hay
 THE HUNTER, Jennifer Herrera
 SMALL TOWN SINS, Ken Jaworowski
 YOU KNOW HER, Meagan Jennett
 THE GOLDEN SPOON, Jessa Maxwell
 MURDER BY DEGREES, Ritu Mukerji
 CITIZEN ORLOV, Jonathan Payne
 A DISAPPEARANCE IN FIJI,
 Nilima Rao
 THE INTERPRETER, Brooke Robinson
 A MOST AGREEABLE MURDER,
 Julia Seales
 MOTHER-DAUGHTER MURDER
 NIGHT, Nina Simon
 CAMP ZERO, Michelle Min Sterling
 THE PARTISAN, Patrick Worrall

Bolobooks

(www.bolobooks.com)

by Kristopher Zgorski

HAPPINESS FALLS, Angie Kim
 BEWARE THE WOMAN,
 Megan Abbott
 PENANCE, Eliza Clark
 HIDE, Tracy Clark

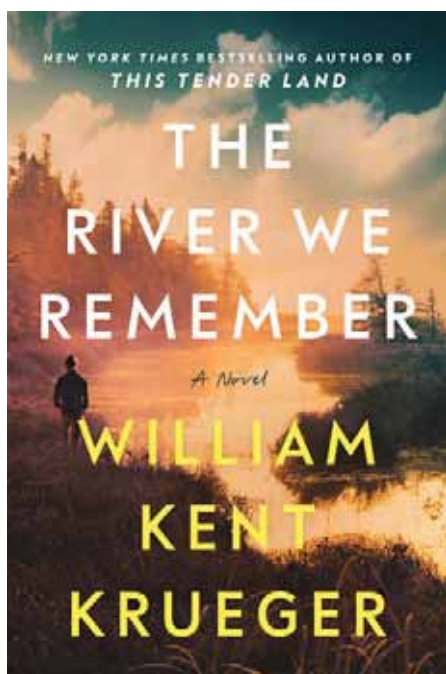
ALL THE SINNERS BLEED,
S. A. Cosby
TIME'S UNDOING, Cheryl A. Head
MURDER YOUR EMPLOYER,
Rupert Holmes
THE TAKEN, Jess Lourey
EVERYONE IN MY FAMILY HAS
KILLED SOMEONE,
Benjamin Stevenson
MIDNIGHT IS THE DARKEST HOUR,
Ashley Winstead
THE HOUSE KEEPERS, Alex Hay
MOTHER-DAUGHTER MURDER
NIGHT, Nina Simon
SPEAK OF THE DEVIL, Rose Wilding

Novel Suspects

(www.novelsuspects.com)

Novels

EVERYBODY KNOWS, Jordan Harper
ALL THE SINNERS BLEED,
S. A. Cosby
A LINE IN THE SAND, Kevin Powers
AGE OF VICE, Deepti Kapoor
THE QUIET TENANT,
Clémence Michallon
THE RIVER WE REMEMBER,
William Kent Krueger



A HAUNTING ON THE HILL,
Elizabeth Hand
THE LEFTOVER WOMAN, Jean Kwok
SMALL MERCIES, Dennis Lehane
SCORCHED GRACE, Margot Douaihy

Honorable Mentions

EVERY MAN IS KING, Walter Mosley
SING HER DOWN, Ivy Pochoda
NONE OF THIS IS TRUE, Lisa Jewell
THE SECOND MURDERER,
Denise Mina
HOMECOMING, Kate Morton

Debuts

LIAR, DREAMER, THIEF, Maria Dong
HOW TO FIND A MISSING GIRL,
Victoria Wlosok
THE WRITING RETREAT, Julia Bartz
THE THINGS WE DO TO OUR
FRIENDS, Heather Darwent
HOW I'LL KILL YOU, Ren DeStefano
THE HOUSE IN THE PINES,
Ana Reyes
THE PERFECT ONES, Nicole Hackett
THE CLOISTERS, Katy Hays

Tolstoy Therapy

(tolstoytherapy.com)

NONE OF THIS IS TRUE, Lisa Jewell
BRIGHT YOUR WOMEN, Jessica Knoll
THE HOUSEMAID'S SECRET,
Freida McFadden
KALA, Colin Walsh
HAPPINESS FALLS, Angie Kim
STONE COLD FOX, Rachel Koller Croft
ON THE SAVAGE SIDE,
Tiffany McDaniel
UNNATURAL HISTORY,
Jonathan Kellerman
HOLLY, Stephen King
PENANCE, Eliza Clark
THE MAID'S DIARY,
Loreth Anne White
THE VILLA, Rachel Hawkins
WHAT LIES IN THE WOODS,
Kate Alice Marshall
BIRNAM WOOD, Eleanor Catton

Paul French

(www.chinarhyming.com)

THE DETECTIVE UP LATE,
Adrian McKinty
THE ENCHANTERS, James Ellroy
INDEPENDENCE SQUARE,
Martin Cruz Smith
CITY OF DREAMS, Don Winslow
AGE OF VICE, Deepti Kapoor
THE SECRET HOURS, Mick Herron
CODE OF THE HILLS, Chris Offutt
PARADISE, Patricia Wolf
ALL THE SINNERS BLEED, S.A. Cosby

THE SECOND MURDERER,
Denise Mina
MALIBU BURNING, Lee Goldberg
THE WHEEL OF DOLL,
Jonathan Ames
NEEDLESS ALLEY, Natalie Marlow
THE LOCK-UP, John Banville
MOSCOW EXILE, John Lawton
THE DARKER THE NIGHT,
Martin Patience
THE PARTISAN, Patrick Worrall

Authors' Favorites

Abir Mukherjee

PAST LYING, Val McDermid
THE LAST DANCE, Mark Billingham
THE SQUARE OF SEVENS, Laura
Shepherd-Robinson
THE SECRET HOURS, Mick Herron

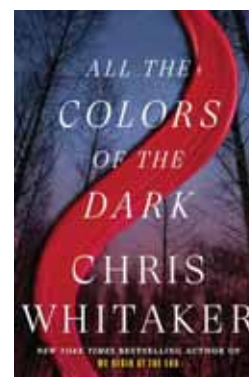
M. W. Craven

ALL THE SINNERS BLEED, S.A. Cosby
SMALL MERCIES, Dennis Lehane
KILL FOR ME KILL FOR YOU,
Steve Cavanagh

And a 2024 title:

ALL THE COLOURS OF THE DARK
by Chris Whitaker.

"Chris, the award-winning author of WE BEGIN AT THE END, has smashed it out of the park again. Expect this book to clean up come the awards season." [Editor's Note: *I have been fortunate to have read an advance copy of ALL THE COLORS OF THE DARK and I agree with Mike's assessment. It will be the first title on my 2024 Best of the Year list.*]



The Best of the Best

2023



No one compiling these 113 “Best” lists has read every mystery, crime novel and thriller written in 2023. Hence, the lists are opinions based on the limited number of books each expert has read this past year, combined with personal tastes. In other words, these lists are very subjective. So where can we find objectivity?

The more agreement (consensus) we can find among the lists, the more objective conclusions can be drawn about which novels are the Best of 2023.

So the following is a list of the number of appearances particular novels made on the 113 “Best” Lists, most of which you find on the preceding pages. These are the Best of the Best.

There were a lot of mainstream fiction titles with crime fiction elements this year so I also compiled a list of these crossover novels for those who like literary crime fiction. Look at the end of the column for that list.

Compilation of Best Lists of 2023 Appearances

51 Mentions

S. A. Cosby, ALL THE SINNERS
BLEED

35 Mentions

Dennis Lehane, SMALL MERCIES

29 Mentions

Mick Herron, THE SECRET HOURS

27 Mentions

Jessica Knoll,
BRIGHT YOUNG WOMEN

24 Mentions

Richard Osman,
THE LAST DEVIL TO DIE
Deepti Kapoor, AGE OF VICE

22 Mentions

Lisa Jewell, NONE OF THIS IS TRUE

20 Mentions

Stephen King, HOLLY

18 Mentions

Jordan Harper, EVERYBODY KNOWS

Jesse Sutanto, VERA WONG’S UNSOLICITED ADVICE FOR MURDERERS

16 Mentions

Michael Connelly,
RESURRECTION WALK
William Kent Krueger,
THE RIVER WE REMEMBER

14 Mentions

Riley Sager, THE ONLY ONE LEFT

13 Mentions

Cara Hunter,
MURDER IN THE FAMILY
Liz Nugent,
STRANGE SALLY DIAMOND
Jane Harper, EXILES

12 Mentions

Juan Gomez-Jurado, RED QUEEN
Matthew Richardson, THE SCARLET PAPERS (U.S. in 2024)
Clemence Michallon,
THE QUIET TENANT

11 Mentions

Robert Galbraith,
THE RUNNING GRAVE
Iris Yamashita,
CITY UNDER ONE ROOF
T. J. Newman, DROWNING

Amy Chua, GOLDEN GATE
Eli Cranor, OZARK DOGS
Denise Mina,
THE SECOND MURDERER

10 Mentions

Lou Berney, DARK RIDE
Nina Simon, MOTHER-DAUGHTER
MURDER NIGHT
Brendan Slocumb,
SYMPHONY OF SECRETS

9 Mentions

Anthony McCarten, GOING ZERO
Megan Abbott,
BEWARE THE WOMAN
Laura Shepherd-Robinson, THE
SQUARE OF SEVENS

8 Mentions

I. S. Berry,
THE PEACOCK AND THE SPARROW
John Lawton, MOSCOW EXILE
Margot Douaihy, SCORCHED GRACE
Joseph O’Connor,
MY FATHER’S HOUSE
Kate Morton, HOMECOMING
Shari Lapena,
EVERYONE HERE IS LYING

7 Mentions

Michael Robotham,
LYING BESIDE YOU
Adrian McKinty,
THE DETECTIVE UP LATE
Lee & Andrew Child, THE SECRET
Terry Hayes, THE YEAR OF THE
LOCUST (U.S. in 2024)
Rupert Holmes, THE MCMASTER’S
GUIDE TO HOMICIDE
Val McDermid, PAST LYING
Ivy Pochoda, SING HER DOWN
Nita Prose, THE MYSTERY GUEST
Benjamin Stevenson, EVERYONE IN
MY FAMILY HAS KILLED SOMEONE
Adrian Sternbergh, THE EDEN TEST

6 Mentions

Laura Lippman, PROM MOM
Rob Rinder, THE TRIAL (U.K. only)
Ragnar Jonasson, REYKJAVIK
John Banville, THE LOCK-UP
Steve Cavanagh, KILL FOR ME KILL
FOR YOU (U.S. in 2024)

Ann Cleeves, *THE RAGING STORM*
 Stacy Willingham,
ALL THE DANGEROUS THINGS
 Kevin Powers, *A LINE IN THE SAND*
 Karin Slaughter, *AFTER THAT NIGHT*
 Jean Kwok, *THE LEFTOVER WOMAN*
 Catherine Ryan Howard, *THE TRAP*
 Vanessa Lillie, *BLOOD SISTERS*
 Rachel Hawkins, *THE VILLA*
 Dwyer Murphy, *THE STOLEN COAST*
 Ruth Ware, *ZERO DAYS*
 Don Winslow, *CITY OF DREAMS*

5 Mentions

Elly Griffiths, *THE LAST REMAINS*
 Michael Bennett,
BETTER THE BLOOD
 Charles Cumming, *KENNEDY 35*
 Jacqueline Winspear,
THE WHITE LADY
 James Ellroy, *THE ENCHANTERS*
 Nilima Rao,
A DISAPPEARANCE IN FIJI
 Emma Rosenblum,
BAD SUMMER PEOPLE
 Mark Billingham, *THE LAST DANCE*
 Max Allan Collins,
TOO MANY BULLETS

Literary/Crime Fiction

These titles appeared on both Best Fiction and Best Crime Fiction lists

19 Mentions

Eleanor Catton, *BIRNAM WOOD*

18 Mentions

R. F. Kuang, *YELLOWFACE*

17 Mentions

Rebecca Makkai,
I HAVE SOME QUESTIONS FOR YOU

16 Mentions

Colson Whitehead,
CROOK MANIFESTO

10 Mentions

James McBride, *THE HEAVEN &*

EARTH GROCERY STORE
 Angie Kim, *HAPPINESS FALLS*

8 Mentions

Emma Cline, *THE GUEST*

7 Mentions

Lauren Groff, *THE VASTER WILDS*

6 Mentions

Tananarive Due,
THE REFORMATORY
 Catherine Chidgey, *PET*

Best Debut Mysteries 2023

Deepti Kapoor, *AGE OF VICE* (21)
 Iris Yamashita,
CITY UNDER ONE ROOF (11)
 Amy Chua, *THE GOLDEN GATE* (10)
 Clemence Michallon,
THE QUIET TENANT (10)
 Nina Simon, *MOTHER-DAUGHTER MURDER NIGHT* (9)
 Anthony McCarten, *GOING ZERO* (8)
 I.S. Berry, *THE PEACOCK AND THE SPARROW* (6)
 Rachel Koller Croft,
STONE COLD FOX (4)
 Margot Douaihy,
SCORCHED GRACE (4)
 Michael Bennett,
BETTER THE BLOOD (4)
 Nilima Rao,
A DISAPPEARANCE IN FIJI (4)
 Parini Shroff,
THE BANDIT QUEENS (4)
 Danielle Arceneaux, *GLORY BE* (3)
 Bruce Borgos, *THE BITTER PAST* (3)
 Dann McDorman,
WEST HEART KILL (3)
 Ana Reyes,
THE HOUSE IN THE PINES (3)
 Jo Callaghan, *BLINK OF AN EYE* (2)
 Ren DeStefano,
HOW I'LL KILL YOU (2)
 Julia Bartz,
THE WRITING RETREAT (2)

Edgar Award Nominees on Best of the Best 2023 Lists

Larry Gandle asked me to report on how many mentions on the best of the year lists that the Edgar Award nominees got. Here's that report:

Best Novel

FLAGS ON THE BAYOU,
 James Lee Burke – 3
 ALL THE SINNERS BLEED,
 S.A. Cosby – 51
 THE MADWOMEN OF PARIS,
 Jennifer Cody Epstein – 0
 BRIGHT YOUNG WOMEN,
 Jessica Knoll – 27
 AN HONEST MAN,
 Michael Koryta – 4
 THE RIVER WE REMEMBER,
 William Kent Krueger – 16
 CROOK MANIFESTO,
 Colson Whitehead – 16

Best First Novel by an American Author

THE PEACOCK AND THE SPARROW,
 I.S. Berry – 8
 THE GOLDEN GATE, Amy Chua – 11
 SMALL TOWN SINS,
 Ken Jaworowski – 2
 THE LAST RUSSIAN DOLL,
 Kristen Loesch – 0
 MURDER BY DEGREES,
 Ritu Mukerji – 2

Best Paperback Original

BOOMTOWN, A.F. Carter – 0
 HIDE, Tracy Clark – 1
 THE TAKEN ONES, Jess Lourey – 2
 VERA WONG'S UNSOLICITED
 ADVICE FOR MURDERERS,
 Jesse Q. Sutanto – 18



Reviewed to Death

THE YEAR OF THE LOCUST

by Terry Hayes

In the U.K., Bantam, £22.00,

November, 2023

In the U.S., Atria/Emily Bester Books,

\$32.00, February, 2024

In 2013 Terry Hayes came out with his blockbuster debut novel **I AM PILGRIM**. It garnered great critical acclaim and fans clamored for a sequel. One was promised but publication kept getting pushed back until ten years passed. **THE YEAR OF THE LOCUST** promises to be one of the “big” books of 2024 and also one of the most controversial. As you will see, most of the **DP** contributors’ thoughts on the book are lukewarm at best. So I added a couple of British reviewer critiques to balance out the column.

Plot Summary

by Jeff Popple

I am not going to ruin the many surprises contained in the plot of **THE YEAR OF THE LOCUST** and will mainly repeat the description that comes from the publishers:

“If, like Kane, you’re a Denied Access Area spy for the CIA, then boundaries have no meaning. Your function is to go in, do whatever is required, and get out again – by whatever means necessary. You know when to run, when to hide – and when to shoot.

But some places don’t play by the rules. Some places are too dangerous, even for a man of Kane’s experience. The badlands where the borders of Pakistan, Iran and Afghanistan meet are such a place – a place where violence is the only way to survive.

Kane travels there to exfiltrate a man with vital information for the safety of the West – but instead he meets an

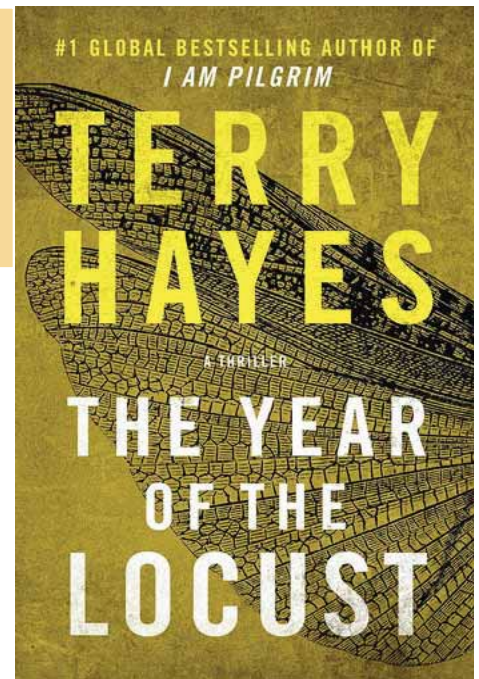
adversary who will take the world to the brink of extinction. A frightening, clever, vicious man with blood on his hands and vengeance in his heart.”

Jeff Popple

The lengthy opening section set in the ‘badlands’ is superb, and keeps the reader on edge as Kane desperately makes his way through the vividly described landscape, as both hunter and prey. It also nicely sets up the rest of the book, which finds its way into other dangerous locales.

As to the story itself, it has the features that readers of the author’s previous mega-seller **I AM PILGRIM** will expect. At over 660 pages **THE YEAR OF THE LOCUST** is very long, although it does move at a better pace than *I Am Pilgrim*. The plotting is tightly wound, and seemingly minor episodes and internal stories frequently come back many pages later to have a major impact on the story. The spycraft is very up-to-date and convincing, and Hayes’ has the same ability as Tom Clancy early in his career, to be able to render complex details of military technology in a readable manner. The violence is also detailed and graphic, and there are some well crafted action scenes that will stick in the mind.

The highlight is Hayes’ ability to create evocative visual images of places and the people that inhabit some of the most extreme locations in the world, and make you feel the dust and smell the smells. It is also filled with interesting side stories from hunting mammoth tusks in the frozen tundra to the dramatic fall of Saigon to the treachery of a German spy in Iran, all of which play an important part in the story. As well as advancing the plot, Hayes uses these stories to flesh out his characters and



reveal their many sides and make them interesting. There are also some very moving moments in the book.

THE YEAR OF THE LOCUST also features an amazing twist towards the end of the book, which no one will see coming and which, I suspect, will divide readers.

On the negative side, it is a long book, probably unnecessarily so. There are also too many stretches of coincidence and a generous suspension of disbelief is required at times. However, this is balanced by some good moments of foreshadowing, and there is a nice touch towards the end involving a minor villain known as The Magus. And that twist!

Is **THE YEAR OF THE LOCUST** better than **I AM PILGRIM**? I have to confess to not sharing the unbridled enthusiasm for earlier book that many readers have, and for me **THE YEAR OF THE LOCUST** was a more compelling novel, especially the opening 200 pages, or so. In all, it kept me highly entertained.

George Easter

This is a tricky thriller to review. There are so many twists and turns in the epic narrative that a full plot summary is impossible to achieve without giving away the surprises that await.

To me, **THE YEAR OF THE LOCUST** seems like the author wrote three books and melded them together with a central character. The first book is a pure action thriller (there are action scenes later in the book, especially at the end of it) that reads like a Mark Greaney-Gray Man thriller. The second book is a Tom Clancy techno-thriller highlighted by the latest developments in drone, guided missile and nuclear submarine technology. The third book – well, that would be a spoiler – you’ll have to read the book to find out. Initially, I was disappointed with the “third book,” but I quickly overcame my disbelief and got into the flow of the story and enjoyed my ride to the end. **THE YEAR OF THE LOCUST** is far from a perfect thriller. It has too many coincidences and quite a few things that don’t make sense and stretch credulity. But, am I glad that I read it? Yes. The size of the book (786 pages) is daunting, but the first 2/3 of the book made it worthwhile. My rating is an average of what I consider the three books in one are worth.

Rating: B-

Maxim Jakubowski

(From Crime Time website)

It’s been well over a decade since Australian journalist and movie screenwriter Terry Hayes (Mad Max 2 and others) made a momentous debut with *I, PILGRIM* and this gigantic follow-up has been announced and delayed many times. So was it worth the wait? Yes and no. On one hand, once again he demonstrates a bravura for meticulous chase thrillers in the breath-taking tale of a CIA special operative on a dangerous mission into the Pakistan Badlands, in a bid to gather information about a dreadful Islamist plot against the West. The result is totally immersive in the way it blends thrills and suspense with all the technical apparatus of modern espionage. There is no way you can’t but root for Kane, the experienced spy, on a mission that appears impossible and where peril is behind every stone mound. The book is long but it races along, all the satellite and weaponry software involved smoothly integrated into the storytelling



with no feeling of infodump overload. But, and there is a major but, there is an element introduced 2/3rds of the way through the book that many readers and critics have taken offense to and that it would be foolish to reveal here, apart from indicating that it turns the novel upside down and pulls it, screaming and bloody, into another genre altogether and will require a strong suspension of disbelief! I could personally live with it and the explanations provided as it makes for something different and the novel more than just a fast-paced thriller, and the plot then keeps you guessing wildly until the finale. A Marmite twist, then! An added reservation is also the fact that the hero is suspiciously indestructible, undergoing stabbings, bullets and torture throughout and returning to the fray pages later with unlikely ease; we expect that from James Bond or Jason Bourne, but this didn’t quite jell with the realistic nature of the rest of the book. Overall, though, massive fun.

Steele Curry

It Should Have Been a Trilogy

In 1972, the *NY Times* journalist David Halberstam’s non-fiction book on the Vietnam War, **THE BEST AND THE BRIGHTEST**, was published and became such a huge best seller that from that point onward little editing was done on any of his subsequent books as a result of his “great author” reputation. Most of these books ended up being packed, or should I say, padded with much more information than readers needed to know and twice as long as they should be. I refer to this as Halberstam’s Editing Syndrome (“*HES*”).

In 2013, Terry Hayes’ debut novel, **I AM PILGRIM**, was published to great acclaim, fast becoming a mega-seller. After a hiatus of eleven years, the author’s second novel, **THE YEAR OF THE LOCUST**, is scheduled for publication in 2024. According to the ARC, it clocks in at 786 pages long. Despite the author’s obvious writing talent as a gifted storyteller, I found reading this lengthy book a grind to read and doubt it received any editing of consequence, probably as a result of *HES* at full play. To say that **THE YEAR OF THE LOCUST** has a rambling, disjointed, over-the-top, implausible plot is an un-

derstatement. It also seemed to me as if the author was trying to jam more than a dozen storylines into one book while describing every technique in the CIA's operating manual.

Despite **THE YEAR OF THE LOCUST** being divided into four internal "Parts," Hayes would have been much better served by his publisher if it had gone to the effort of editing down this novel into a trilogy with say the first book titled *The Courier*, the second *The Russian* and the third *The End Game – Riders on the Storm*. Speaking subjectively, this would have made for a much improved reading experience and likely produced greater sales and income for Hayes than just the one book **THE YEAR OF THE LOCUST**. **Rating: B**

Meredith Anthony

First line: I once went to kill a man.

Terry Hayes' **THE YEAR OF THE LOCUST** is a big fat mess of a book. Actually, it is three books. Divided into four parts, the first two function as a conventional stop-the-terrorist thriller, complete with a lone spy with mad skills, a ticking clock, implacable enemies, minutely described atrocities, near misses, and hot pursuit. Very well-written, but I found it a bit tedious in its long chain of escalating events, as if the author were constantly looking to top himself. But, on balance, I liked it and would have given it a **B**.

The second novel (the book's third part) is a shorter and more linear story about an experimental submarine's first mission and our embedded spy who has a mission of his own. The boat's technology is unproven. When the test goes badly wrong, the spy is the only survivor. Novella length and a little under-baked, I'd have given it a **C**.

But **THE YEAR OF THE LOCUST** really goes off the rails in its fourth and final part. **[SPOILER ALERT]** Suddenly the author, who is publishing again ten years after his successful thriller, **I AM PILGRIM** (which I did not read), suddenly veers off into the cheesiest sci fi plot ever. Our intrepid spy now faces new difficulties, including time travel, spores from outer space, humans who

have morphed into angry, lethal aliens, and the human race facing extinction. I have never seen a book go so wrong.

And let me say that I like a good cross-over sci fi thriller. Malka Old-er's **THE MIMICKING OF KNOWN SUCCESSES**, a procedural set in a colony on Jupiter, is on my list of the 2023's best mysteries. But cross-over is one thing. Bait-and-switch is something else. And to go from a reality-based spy vs. terrorist thriller set in the area where Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan meet (which the author assures us with tiresome regularity is the most dangerous area in the world) to a bad Buck Rogers encounter with spores from outer space... No, I'd give that an **F**.

I am almost never very conflicted about reviewing mysteries and thrillers, but in this case, I had to weigh the very good writing, generally engaging characters, and well-developed plot of the first three parts of this overly long novel against the egregious final part. I can only assume that the author meant to engage the reader and prepare the ground for the crazy developments in the sci-fi section, but, for me, it didn't work. You can't start out with le Carré and end up with L. Ron Hubbard. It's just wrong. **Overall Rating: D**

Larry Gandle

This is one of the longest spy thrillers I have ever read. It is totally compelling for the first 550 pages. The book actually reads like several separate novels. Ridley or Kane is a superhero and manages to get out of certain death situations again and again. The plot already stretches reality when it suddenly veers off into science fiction. I cannot explain why the author did that. The last 25% of the book I found unreadable and the ending so totally predictable and disappointing. The reason I did not give it a **D-** is that the first two thirds of the book is excellent as a thriller. Then it hits a wall and self implodes. I have no recollection of that ever happening in a book I read before. The book is recommended until Part 4 then please close it and discard it. **Rating: C-**

Mike Dillman

This is a long book and halfway through it I was thinking that it might turn out to be one of my favorite books of the year. When you get to about 200 pages remaining, the book takes an unexpected left turn.

I thought it was well written and kept my interest. The story was very good. It continued to be well written, but the premise of the last part of the book was too much to buy. I thought it continued to be interesting but "off the rails" compared with the first ¾ of the book. I would rate the first part of the book **A** but not even rate the last part. Overall I could not recommend the book. Everyone has better books to read than these 700 pages, which in the end, turned out to be disappointing.

Rating: C.

Laura Wilson

Reviewer for The Guardian (U.K.)

It has been a decade since screen-writer Hayes's first novel, the critically acclaimed bestseller **I AM PILGRIM**: now, after many delays, comes his second. **THE YEAR OF THE LOCUST** starts promisingly, as CIA agent Ridley Kane is tasked with entering Iran by stealth in order to obtain a heads-up about a spectacular act of global terrorism. With vivid descriptions, some terrific action sequences and lashings of suspense, the book ticks all the boxes necessary for a superior geopolitical thriller – and, although it seems vanishingly unlikely that any halfway-decent CIA agent would fail to recognise an obvious reference to the world's worst industrial accident, leaving readers hanging for more than 100 pages until the characters figure out the likely nature of the attack, there is plenty to entertain and distract you while you drum your fingers. But around three-quarters of the way through and with no prior warning, the plot takes a sideways leap and lands in an entirely different genre, which may leave you not so much intrigued as utterly bewildered.

Editor's Message



Temporary Changes. One of my challenges, as I start a new year, is coming up with an initial list of best books for the Deadly Pleasures Best of the Year list. So instead of publishing a short list in this issue, I've decided to hold off until the next issue. In its place I'm including in this issue the Most Anticipated Mysteries of 2024 list that I posted on the website. That will also take the place of our normal Sneak Previews column for this issue. Everything will return to normal in Issue 103. There are a lot of lists in this issue, but mystery readers like lists – right?

Health of DP Contributors. L. J. Roberts says that she has unfortunately not rebounded from her most recent health crisis and will have to discontinue her review column for the foreseeable future. We wish her the best in her recuperation and hope that she can rejoin us some time down the line.



About a month ago Ted Hertel called me to tell me that he had just had double-bypass surgery. He is recovering well and gets a gold star from me for submitting a column for this issue.

As you know, Ali Karim had a heart attack some months ago. (I hope that association with *Deadly Pleasures* isn't some sort of jinx.) He wrote: "Since the heart attack, I have been spending my free time reading older books, and re-reads of classics [to lift my spirits]

– comfort reads if you will. I've been re-reading George V. Higgins, Richard Stark and catching up on books and films for my youth. I might sound like a grumpy old man, but much of what is being published [now] is 'so-so' in my opinion -- many 'same old – same old' tropes.

"I will definitely be strong enough to fly the Atlantic [with robust medical insurance] for Bouchercon 2025, NOLA -- but not Nashville this year. I don't want to take the risk even though I'm getting stronger with strict regime of medication, diet and exercise [daily walking]. I would not be as confident this year -- BUT 2025 NEW ORLEANS!!" [Ed. Note: *New Orleans is where Ali will be the Fan Guest of Honor. Alas, it doesn't look like Ali will be providing reviews of current books for awhile. If he were here in person I would debate him over his comment about new crime fiction being 'same old – same old.'* But I understand the pull of great works of yesteryear. I've been feeling that pull as of late and have been re-reading Brian Freemantle, Richard Stark and Peter May.]

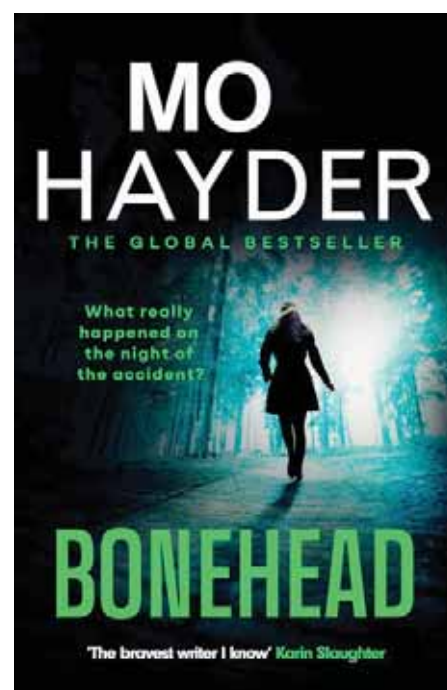
News just in: Ali Karim and Mike Stotter have been chosen to judge crime fiction for the 2024 British Book Awards. I hope he finds some current crime novels that aren't just "so-so."

Mike Ripley Column. As you may recall, Mike's column in the last issue was his final column. But he has come up with something to fill his passion for writing (in addition to the Champion novels he continues to pen). He is calling his new column Ripster's Revivals, featuring authors and books which may have been "unjustly forgotten, ignored or discarded." First up is an essay on Gold-Dagger winner Peter Dickinson and his works. I will be publishing

these in each issue as I applaud what he is doing and want to give this effort wider readership. The essays are so well done that it wouldn't surprise me if he turned them into a book someday -- once he has written enough of them.

Rising From the Dead. A new novel featuring the iconic character George Smiley is scheduled to be published later this year by Viking. It is being written by John le Carre's son, Nick Harkaway, himself a known novelist. I hope that Nick does his father proud.

Also a new novel by Mo Hayder, who passed away in 2021, is coming out



in the U.K. in May, 2024. It is called **BONEHEAD**. Plot: Alex Mullins knows she is one of the lucky ones. When a fatal coach crash at her school reunion killed several of her classmates, she was saved from a grisly fate. She is haunted by what she thinks she saw that night — a vision of a skeletal woman, known by the locals as the Bonehead – a woman who brings bad luck to all that see her. Now a police officer in Gloucestershire, Alex fights to overcome the past by helping other people. But when her path crosses with someone who was there that fateful night, her new life begins to unravel at the seams.

Associate Editor's Message



I want to spend a few moments discussing endings -- book endings. Recently, I have had the misfortune of reading a few books that I feel were spoiled by the endings the author chose. Two of these books went from A to C ratings because of the way they concluded.

THE YEAR OF THE LOCUST by Terry Hayes started out as a riveting spy thriller. It is very clever and full of modern-day technology. It is truly fascinating how it is possible to achieve incredibly accurate surveillance from satellites. The book is full of tradecraft. The plot races along making it difficult to put down and the characters are so very sympathetic. However, Part 4 begins a pseudosci-fi time travel nonsense with no roots in reality. It completely destroys the compelling narrative that already took up over 500 pages. It is a sad shame. The lesson to be learned is to stay in your genre. Those of us who like action thrillers, may not like sci-fi time travel to be part of the storyline. In my review, I recommend readers to stay away from this overall waste of your precious time.

The next book is **ANNA O** by Matthew Blake. In this case, the author takes a fascinating premise of a young woman sleeping for years after supposedly killing a couple of her friends. He strings the reader along developing the character's backstory then in the last thirty to forty pages writes one of the most confusing expositions I have ever read. If I wasn't reading a Kindle, I would have taken great satisfaction in ripping up the book or burning it in a fireplace. If multiple complex expositions are required, then perhaps this is a sign of a lazy author. Again, I advise readers to stay away from this book.

The next book would fall under the category of literary fiction. It is called **THE BEE STING** by Paul Murray. This very long book was shortlisted for the Booker Award. I loved the writing and

the depiction of the characters. Alternate character point of view chapter form keeps the 630 pages moving swiftly. Eventually, as we finally near the end, the author places the characters into a situation where someone might very well die. As he builds the suspense, it is impossible to put the book down. Then he ends it with no resolution -- nothing. I was furious! Yes, the literary elitists love the idea of the reader drawing their own conclusions but I thought it was a huge letdown. After spending weeks with these characters, give us an ending! Yet, the book is so well written and the characters are so complex, that I still feel this is a book worth reading. I do highly recommend it but just expect the let down I told you about.

This year, I was strongly considering ending my annual review of the Edgar Award shortlist. As you know, George Easter spends the last two months of the year collecting and sorting through 'Best of the Year' lists from over one hundred crime fiction reviewers from all over the world. From this impossibly large number, George culls a 'Best of the Best' list based on the number of times a book is mentioned. This is undoubtedly one of the best sources a reader can go to in order to discover which books were truly the best of the year. As I have complained many times, I feel like the Edgar committees often live under a rock. How could they not know what books the world already considers the best?

The Edgar shortlists were announced today. It appears, on first glance, that the Best Novel committee were able to cull out some of the best books of the year. I'm shocked! For some reason, they expanded the list to seven books. Four of them I read and rated among the best of the year. Two others were written by authors whose works I have extensively read and admired but missed their books from last year. The last one I am clueless about. Therefore, I will commit

to reading the three books I have not yet read that round out that list.

The Best First Novel by an American Author (should actually say 'an author who lives in the United States' as the category should include Latin American authors as it now reads) I have not heard of any of these titles except for one that George praised. This is not surprising as I do not typically read first novels. I will read the five books if I like them and I have time.

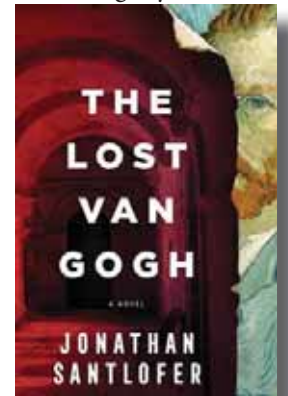
So, count me in on Best Novel and probably Best First Novel. Past that I will not go.

On a positive note -- recently I have had the pleasure of seeing my friend

Jonathan Santlofer discussing his latest art thriller, **THE LOST VAN GOGH**, here in Tampa, Florida. He is a fascinating individual -- he is not only an excellent

thriller writer, but, also an artist and a very accomplished one. One thing that particularly struck me is that he is a 'legal forger' meaning he can duplicate a painting perfectly but will use modern materials so his work can never be sold as original. So often I would go to the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York and see artists with easels placed in front of paintings and, on examination, notice that they never come close to the original. Jon must, therefore, be very talented and that becomes quite evident by the multiple sketches scattered throughout the book. It is an excellent thriller, by the way.

Jon told me that he was traveling the next day to New Orleans, which is my second home. I told my brother who lives there to see him the next night and he did so. One of my daughters just left Houston or I would have had her go to his signing as well. Our family would have covered him three nights in a row half way across the country!



Most Anticipated Mysteries of 2024



There's something here for everyone's taste. Of course, many, many 2024 titles have yet to be announced by publishers – books by such authors as Michael Connelly and Robert Galbraith. Some authors' books have publication dates but no titles – Robert Crais (August 6) and Daniel Silva (July 16). There was no Louise Penny title released in 2023 so her legion of fans must be getting very anxious. They'll have to wait a bit more. Louise says that the manuscript has been submitted, but the book is still untitled and not due out until late in 2024.

Some observations:

There are still a lot of great mysteries being published in the U.K. that don't make it to our shores. See titles below that are marked "U.K. only" in red. Fortunately two of my U.K. favorites from 2023 will be published here in the States in 2024: **ASSASSIN EIGHTEEN** by John Brownlow and **SCARLET PAPERS** by Matthew Richardson.

I have read 19 of the 2024 titles already and you can expect to see reviews of them in this issue and subsequent issues of *Deadly Pleasures*.

Pleasant surprises (for me) on the list:

There is a new Mo Hayder book being published in the U.K. in 2024. She passed away in 2021. ???

A new Chris Whitaker book (**ALL THE COLORS OF THE DARK**) after a 2-3 year hiatus since the wonderful **WE BEGIN AT THE END**.

There will be two new M. W. Craven books in 2024 – continuations of his two series.

A new Easy Rawlins book by Walter Mosley (**FAREWELL, AMETHYSTINE**) coming in June. Every time I

read a new Easy Rawlins I think it is the last of the series, but he keeps coming back – which is a good thing.

The new Peter May title (**THE BLACK LOCH**) brings back one of my favorite characters -- Fin MacLeod from **THE BLACK HOUSE** – Lewis Trilogy.

Titles in bold are titles that will most likely appear on the *Deadly Pleasures* Best of 2024 List beginning with the next issue of *DP*.

2024 Titles

(In order of publication dates)

THE ASCENT, Adam Plantinga
(January 2)
Debut Thriller

When a high security prison fails, a down-on-his luck ex-cop and the governor's daughter are going to have to team up if they're going to escape. **Kirkus**, **PW & AZ**

THE LOST VAN GOGH, Jonathan Santlofer (January 2)
Luke Perrone #2

For years, there have been whispers that, before his death, Van Gogh completed a final self-portrait. When Luke Perrone, artist and great-grandson of the man who stole the Mona Lisa, and Alexis Verde, daughter of a notorious art thief, discover what may be the missing portrait, they are drawn into an epic art puzzle.

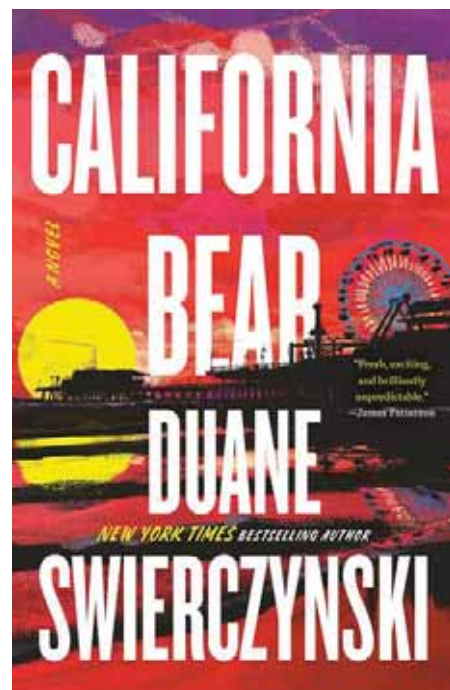
RABBIT HOLE, Kate Brody (January 2)
Debut Mystery

Ten years ago, Theodora "Teddy" Angstrom's older sister, Angie, went missing. Her case remains unsolved. Now Teddy's father, Mark, has killed himself. Unbeknownst to Mark's family,

he had been active in a Reddit community fixated on Angie, and Teddy can't help but fall down the same rabbit hole.

ANNA O, Matthew Blake (January 2)
Psychological Suspense

Anna Ogilvy was a budding twenty-five-year-old writer with a bright future. Then, one night, she stabbed two people to death with no apparent motive—and hasn't woken up since. Dubbed "Sleeping Beauty" by the tabloids, Anna's condition is a rare psychosomatic disorder known to neurologists as "resignation syndrome." Dr. Benedict Prince is a forensic psychologist and an expert in the field of sleep-related homicides. His methods are the last hope of solving the infamous "Anna O" case and waking Anna up so she can stand trial. **Kirkus**, **PW & AZ**



CALIFORNIA BEAR, Duane Swierczynski (January 9)
Standalone Crime Novel

Four unlikely vigilantes pit themselves against the villain behind California's coldest case when they decide to take justice into their own hands. **LJ, BL, PW & DP**

THE HEIRESS, Rachel Hawkins (January 9)
Gothic Suspense

When Ruby McTavish Callahan Woodward Miller Kenmore dies, she's not only North Carolina's richest woman, she's also its most notorious. The victim of a famous kidnapping as a child and a widow four times over, Ruby ruled the tiny town of Tavistock from Ashby House, her family's estate high in the Blue Ridge Mountains. But in the aftermath of her death, her adopted son, Camden, wants little to do with the house or the money – and even less to do with the surviving McTavishes. Instead, he rejects his inheritance, settling into a normal life as an English teacher in Colorado and marrying Jules, a woman just as eager to escape her own messy past. Ten years later, his uncle's death pulls Cam and Jules back into the family fold at Ashby House.

ARGYLLE, Elly Conway (January 9)
Debut Spy Novel

A luxury train speeding towards Moscow and a date with destiny. A CIA plane downed in the jungles of the Golden Triangle. A Nazi hoard entombed in the remote mountains of South-West Poland. A missing treasure, the eighth wonder of the world, lost for seven decades. One Russian magnate's dream of restoring a nation to greatness has set in motion a chain of events which will take the world to the brink of chaos. Only Frances Coffey, the CIA's most legendary spymaster, can prevent it. But to do so, she needs someone special. Enter Argylle, a troubled agent with a tarnished past.

DREAM TOWN, Lee Goldberg (January 16)
Eve Ronin #5
Hidden Hills is a dream town for the

mega-rich. But when reality superstar Kitty Winslow is killed within their gates and corpses are found in the vast state park outside them, LASD detective Eve Ronin realizes that the dream town has turned into a nightmare.

HERO, Thomas Perry (January 16)
Standalone Crime Novel

Justine Poole takes her job seriously providing security for wealthy and high-profile Hollywood stars. When she prevents a brazen robbery at the Beverly Hills home of two of her clients – killing two of the five armed robbers in the process – she is initially lauded in the media as a local hero. But the spotlight soon puts her in the crosshairs of the crime kingpin behind the burglaries. **Kirkus, BL & DP**

ONLY IF YOU'RE LUCKY, Stacy Willingham (January 16)
Psychological Suspense

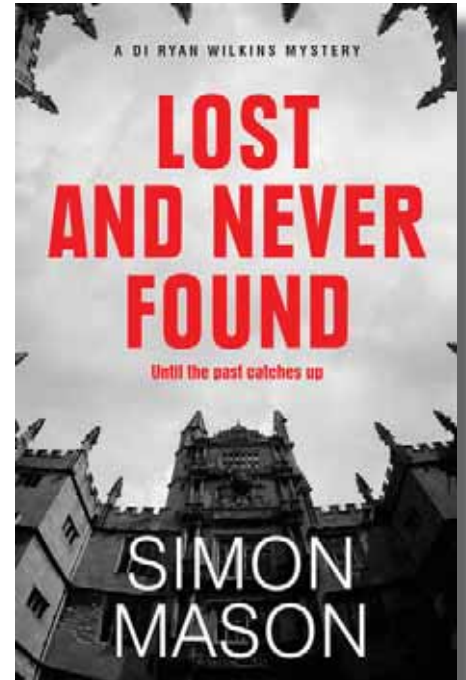
Margot may be shy and quiet, but things might be turning around for her when the popular and enigmatic Lucy asks Margot to room together at the liberal arts college they go to. Soon, Margot finds herself living off campus with the center of attention Lucy, the sarcastic Sloane, and the nice Nicole. Right as Margot feels like she's coming out of her shell, the unthinkable happens. A fraternity boy is found murdered and Lucy is missing.

THE FURY, Alex Michaelides (January 16)

Standalone Psychological Suspense
Lana Farrar is a reclusive ex-movie star and one of the most famous women in the world. Every year, she invites her closest friends to escape the English weather and spend Easter on her idyllic private Greek island. You probably read about it at the time? it caused a real stir in the tabloids, if you remember. It had all the necessary ingredients for a press sensation: a celebrity; a private island cut off by the wind...and a murder.

THE TEACHER, Tim Sullivan (January 18 – **U.K. only**)
DS George Cross #6
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 is investigating the death of an unpleasant 80-year-old retired headmaster.



LOST AND NEVER FOUND, Simon Mason (January 18 – U.K. only)
DI Wilkins #3

When celebrity Zara Fanshawe goes missing, suave, Oxford-educated DI Ray Wilkins is passed over in favour of his partner, gobby, trailer-park-educated DI Ryan Wilkins (no relation). You wouldn't think Ray would be happy. He isn't. You wouldn't think Ryan would be any good at national press presentations. He isn't.

FRONT SIGHT, Stephen Hunter (January 23 --Swagger Novellas)

This collection of three interconnected novellas follows each generation of the iconic Swagger family—grandfather Charles, father Earl, and fan favorite hero Bob Lee.

THE MYSTERIOUS CASE OF THE ALPERTON ANGELS, Janice Hallett (January 23)
Standalone Crime Novel

A true crime journalist revives a long-buried case about a cult—and finds

herself too close to the story.

THE WHARTON PLOT,
Mariah Fredericks (January 23)

Historical Mystery
featuring Edith Wharton

New York City, 1911. Edith Wharton, almost equally famed for her novels and her sharp tongue, is bone-tired of Manhattan. Finding herself at a crossroads with both her marriage and her writing, she makes the decision to leave America, her publisher, and her loveless marriage. And then, dashing novelist David Graham Phillips, a writer with often notorious ideas about society and women's place in it – is shot to death outside the Princeton Club. Edith herself met the man only once, when the two formed a mutual distaste. However, Edith looks into the murder at the behest of Graham's sister.

RADIANT HEAT,
Sarah-Jane Collins (January 23)
Debut Australian Thriller

When a catastrophic wildfire suddenly rips through a woman's hometown, she thinks she is lucky to have survived . . . until she finds a dead woman in her driveway, clutching a piece of paper with her name on it.

DEAD MAN'S HAND, Brad Taylor
(January 23)
Pike Logan #18

To finally end the war between their nations, a rogue band of Ukrainian partisans known as the Wolves teams up with members of Russia's military intelligence to assassinate Vladimir Putin.

But Putin is aware of the traitors in his midst and assigns the loyal commander of the Russian National Guard to root them out. It's a mission Victor Petrov is expected to undertake after he prevents Sweden from joining NATO—by assassinating a deputy minister of foreign affairs.

After receiving intelligence about the threat in Sweden, the United States sends Pike Logan to identify Petrov's target—only for him to get caught in the crossfire between Putin's agents and the Wolves.

EVERYONE ON THIS TRAIN
IS SUSPECT, Benjamin Stevenson
(January 30)

Ernest Cunningham #2

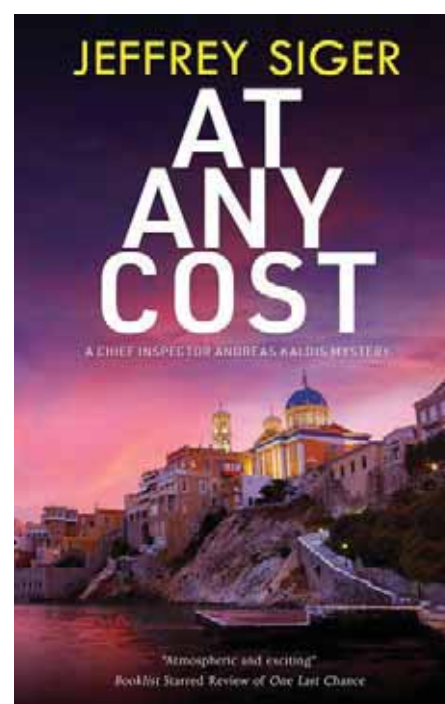
"When the Australian Mystery Writers' Society invited me to their crime-writing festival aboard the Ghan, the famous train between Darwin and Adelaide, I was hoping for some inspiration for my second book. Fiction, this time: I needed a break from real people killing each other. Obviously, that didn't pan out."

THE PRICE YOU PAY, Nick Petrie
(February 6)
Peter Ash #8

Lewis has helped Peter Ash out of more trouble than Peter cares to remember. So he doesn't hesitate when Lewis asks a favor in return. Lewis has left his criminal past behind, but a former associate may be in trouble, and he and Peter must drive into the teeth of a blizzard to find him. When they discover blood in the snow and a smoldering cabin, both men know things are bad. Then they learn that someone has stolen notebooks full of incriminating secrets about Lewis's long-ago crimes, and realize the situation is much worse than they'd thought. **DP**

KINGPIN, Mike Lawson (February 6)
Joe DeMarco #17

Carson Newman doesn't think of himself as a gangster. He doesn't have a consigliere or operate out of the back room of a bar. No, Carson's a different sort of gangster, a billionaire Boston real estate developer, who only breaks the law when necessary—and he doesn't usually get his hands dirty. Joe DeMarco, on the other hand, is paid to get his hands dirty. So, when John Mahoney, the former Speaker of the House, calls, DeMarco knows it's time to get to work. Brian Lewis, an intern who worked for Mahoney, has been found dead, seemingly from a drug overdose. But Brian didn't seem like a drug user, and even more concerning, he seemed to be on the cusp of releasing a report that identified a group of politicians who had taken bribes. **DP**



AT ANY COST, Jeffrey Siger
(February 6)

Chief Inspector Andreas Kaldis #13

Kaldis is initially dismayed to be asked to investigate a series of suspicious forest fires that took place last summer. In Greece, forest fires are an inevitability, and he fears he and his team are being set up to take the political blame for this year's blazes. He quickly becomes suspicious, though, that the forests were torched for profit – and for a project on a far grander scale than the usual low-level business corruption. There are whispers on the wind that shadowy foreign powers intend to establish a surreptitious mega-internet presence on the island of Syros, with the intent to weaponize the digital world to their own dark ends.

UNION STATION, David Downing
(February 6)
John Russell #8

It's now 1953, and Russell and his family—his long-time partner, Effi Koenen, a burgeoning star on an American sitcom, and their daughter, Rosa, a young artist on the cusp of adulthood—live a life of relative comfort in Los Angeles. Feeling somewhat adrift, Russell has just begun work on a book investigating American firms that

continued doing business with Germany during Nazi occupation. Then he notices someone is tailing him around Los Angeles. Has someone not taken kindly to his research? Or could it be that the deal Russell struck all those years ago has left him with unfinished business?

OWNING UP, George Pelecanos
(February 6)
Four Novellas

When the son of the Carusos is involved in a hold up, the family home comes under siege in the form of a no-knock warrant. Months after the cops destroyed their home, the Carusos struggle to return to normal. Elsewhere, two former inmates reunite by chance on the set of a TV production. Both have found their way on the straight and narrow path, that is, until one sees the potential for an easy grift. A teenage boy must step into the man he'd like to be as a hostage crisis grips his hometown. A woman adrift meets a man tied to her grandmother's past, an encounter that awakens her to a bloody history that undergirds the place she grew up.

THE YEAR OF THE LOCUST,
Terry Hayes (February 6)
Action Thriller

See Reviewed to Death column herein.

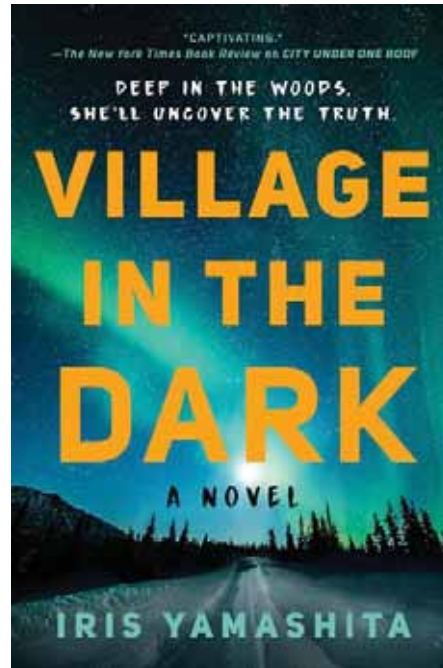
LETHAL VENGEANCE,
Robert Bryndza (February 8)
Detective Erica Foster #8

When Detective Erika Foster finds politician Neville Lomas naked, hog-tied, and dead in his own bed, skittish higher-ups at the Met quickly rule the death from natural causes. Case closed . . . until two months later when a well-known casting director and a star footballer are found murdered and tied with the same knots. The Met can no longer ignore what's staring them in the face: there's a serial killer loose in London, and they're out to settle a score.

VILLAGE IN THE DARK,
Iris Yamashita (February 13)
Detective Cara Kennedy #2

On a frigid February day, Anchor-age Detective Cara Kennedy stands by the graves of her husband and son,

watching as their caskets are raised from the earth. It feels sacrilegious, but she has no choice. Aaron and Dylan disappeared on a hike a year ago, their bones eventually found and buried. But shocking clues have emerged that foul play was involved, potentially connecting them to a string of other deaths and disappearances. . LJ & DP



THE LANTERN'S DANCE,
Laurie R. King (February 13)
Mary Russell & Sherlock Holmes #18

After their recent adventures in Transylvania, Russell and Holmes look forward to spending time with Holmes' son, the famous artist Damian Adler, and his family. But when they arrive at Damian's house, they discover that the Adlers have fled from a mysterious threat.

THE CHAOS AGENT, Mark Greaney
(February 20)
Gray Man #13

Someone is killing the world's leading experts on robotics and AI. A desperate Russian scientist approaches Court Gentry and Zoya Zakharova to ask for their protection, but before they can help, they are attacked by a team of professional assassins. They escape, but wherever they turn, it's clear that whoever's tracking them is always going to be one step ahead. With a danger of

this level, there's no choice but to attack into the threat.

END OF STORY, A. J. Finn
(February 20)

Standalone Crime Novel.

"I'll be dead in three months. Come tell my story." So writes Sebastian Trapp, reclusive mystery novelist, to his longtime correspondent Nicky Hunter, an expert in detective fiction. With mere months to live, Trapp invites Nicky to his spectacular San Francisco mansion to help draft his life story . . . while living alongside his beautiful second wife, Diana; his wayward nephew, Freddy; and his protective daughter, Madeleine. Soon Nicky finds herself caught in an irresistible case of real-life "detective fever." "You and I might even solve an old mystery or two." Twenty years earlier—on New Year's Eve 1999—Sebastian's first wife and teenaged son vanished from different locations, never to be seen again. Did the perfect crime writer commit the perfect crime? And why has he emerged from seclusion, two decades later, to allow a stranger to dig into his past?

DARK ARENA, Jack Beaumont
(February 27)

The Frenchman #2

February 2022. An officer of the Directorate-General for External Security (DGSE), the French foreign intelligence agency, delivers a package of top secret Russian military information from Prague to Paris, and is subsequently assassinated. So begins a cat and mouse game across Europe as DGSE agent Alec de Payns races to find the source of what has become regular "drops" of highly sensitive information regarding Russian military operations. De Payns infiltrates the clandestine meeting of a Russian private military company, follows the trail of a shady individual codenamed Starkand, and nearly gets assassinated himself.

THREE-INCH TEETH, C. J. Box
(February 27)
Joe Pickett #24

A rogue grizzly bear has gone on a rampage—killing, among others, the

potential fiancé of Joe's daughter. At the same time, Dallas Cates, who Joe helped lock up years ago, is released from prison with a special list tattooed on his skin. He wants revenge on the people who sent him away: the six people he blames for the deaths of his entire family and the loss of his reputation and property.

THE RUMOR GAME,

Thomas Mullen (February 27)

WWII Boston Novel of Detection

Reporter Anne Lemire writes the Rumor Clinic, a newspaper column that disproves the many harmful rumors floating around town, some of them spread by Axis spies and others just gossip mixed with fear and ignorance. Tired of chasing silly rumors about Rosie Riveters' safety on the job, she wants to write about something bigger. Special Agent Devon Mulvey, one of the few Catholics at the FBI, spends his weekdays preventing industrial sabotage and his Sundays spying on clerics with suspect loyalties and he spends his evenings wooing the many lonely women whose husbands are off at war. When Anne's story about Nazi propaganda intersects with Devon's investigation into the death of a factory worker, the two are led down a dangerous trail of espionage, organized crime, and domestic fascism.

THE DREAM HOME, T. M. Logan (February 29 – in U.K. only)

Standalone Domestic Thriller

Adam and Jess move into a new house with their three young children: a rambling Victorian villa in a nice neighbourhood.. Before long Adam discovers a door hidden behind a fitted wardrobe, concealing a secret room. Inside Adam discovers a collection of forgotten items: a wallet, an expensive watch and an old mobile phone. Jess thinks they should simply throw them away. But Adam resists. He is fascinated by these items and how they came to be inside the hidden room.

Soon Adam will find himself setting in motion a series of events that will place his family in terrible danger.

THE HUNTER, Tana French

(March 5)

Cal Hooper #2

Cal Hooper was a Chicago detective, till he moved to the West of Ireland looking for peace. He's found it, more or less – in his relationship with local woman Lena, and the bond he's formed with half-wild teenager Trey. So when two men turn up with a money-making scheme to find gold in the townland, Cal gets ready to do whatever it takes to protect Trey. Because one of the men is no stranger: he's Trey's father.

GALWAY CONFIDENTIAL,

Ken Bruen (March 5)

Jack Taylor #17

Jack Taylor wakes up from a coma to discover that much of the world has changed since he last walked the streets of Galway. The pandemic had hit while he was under, devastating the lives of many in his beloved city and beyond. Now, as Jack tries to recover from the attack that put him in the hospital and absorb the incredible changes in the world around him, a woman approaches him with a distressing case: two local nuns have been bludgeoned by a mysterious man wielding a hammer, and more are sure to follow. As the police fail to act while the violence against the Sisters escalates, Jack seems like their only hope.

FINLAY DONOVAN ROLLS THE DICE, Elle Cosimano (March 5)

Finlay Donovan #4

Finlay Donovan and her nanny/partner-in-crime Vero are in sore need of a girls' weekend away. They plan a trip to Atlantic City, but odds are – seeing as it's actually a cover story to negotiate a deal with a dangerous loan shark, save Vero's childhood crush Javi, and hunt down a stolen car – it won't be all fun and games.

WHAT HAPPENED TO NINA?,

Dervla McTiernan (March 5)

Novel of Suspense

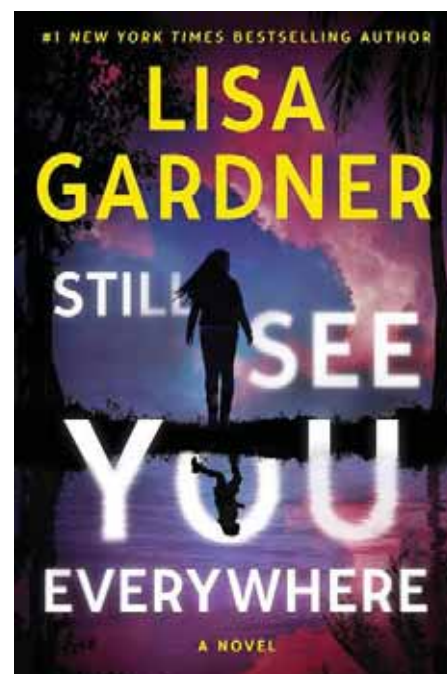
Nina and Simon are the perfect couple. Young, fun and deeply in love. Until they leave for a weekend at his family's cabin in Vermont, and only Simon comes home. What happened to Nina?

Nobody knows. Simon's explanation about what happened in their last hours together doesn't add up. Nina's parents push the police for answers, and Simon's parents rush to protect him. They hire expensive lawyers and a PR firm that quickly ramps up a vicious, nothing-is-off-limits media campaign.

THE NEW COUPLE IN 5B, Lisa Unger (March 5)

Standalone Psychological Suspense

Rosie and Chad Lowan are barely making ends meet in New York City when they receive life-changing news: Chad's late uncle has left them his luxury apartment at the historic Windermere in glamorous Murray Hill. With its prewar elegance and impeccably uniformed doorman, the building is the epitome of old New York charm. One would almost never suspect the dark history lurking behind its perfectly maintained facade. At first, the building and its eclectic tenants couldn't feel more welcoming. But as the Lowans settle into their new home, Rosie starts to suspect that there's more to the Windermere than meets the eye. Why is the doorman ever-present? Why are there cameras everywhere? And why have so many gruesome crimes occurred there throughout the years?



STILL SEE YOU EVERYWHERE,

Lisa Gardner (March 12)
Frankie Elkin #3

The case was sensational. Kaylee Pierson had confessed from the very beginning, waived all appeals. She had called herself “death,” but people called her the devil. Despite the media’s chronicling of her tragic circumstances—the childhood spent with a violent father—no one could find sympathy for “the Beautiful Butcher” who had led eighteen men home from bars before viciously slitting their throats. Now, with only twenty-one days left to live, Pierson has finally received a lead on the whereabouts of the sister who was kidnapped over a decade ago, and she needs Frankie’s help to find her. The Beautiful Butcher’s offer: When was the last time your search ended with finding the living? Unable to resist the chance for a rescue, Frankie takes on Pierson’s request.

BLACK WOLF, Juan Gomez-Jurado
(March 12)

Antonia Scott & Jon Gutierrez #2
Antonia Scott is the lynchpin of the Red Queen project, created to work behind the scenes to solve the most dark, devious and dangerous crimes. In southern Spain, in the Costa del Sol, a key mafia figure is found brutally murdered in his villa, his pregnant wife, Lola Moreno, barely escapes an attempt to kill her and is on the run. An unusual shipping container arrives from St Petersburg in Spain with the corpses of nine women. Now Antonia, with the help of her protector, Jon Gutierrez, must track down the missing Lola. But they aren’t the only ones – a dangerous hitman, known as the Black Wolf, is also on her trail. And Antonia Scott, still plagued by her personal demons, must outwit, out-manuever, and, ultimately, face this terrible, mysterious killer. **DP**

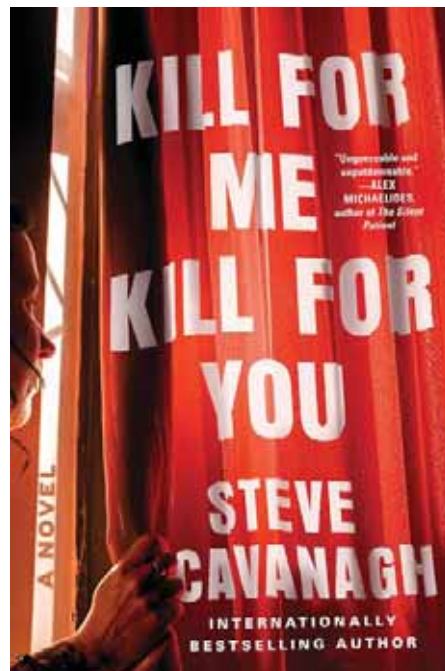
DARK DIVE, Andrew Mayne
(March 12)

Underwater Investigation Unit #5
Longtime family friend Fred Stafford has disappeared. Left behind: his abandoned truck in the vicinity of an unmarked sinkhole and new findings that have Sloan second-guessing

everything she thought she knew about the man. There are his gambling debts, his association with a treasure-hunting band of underwater cavern junkies called the Dive Rats, and most alarming of all, a discovery in Stafford’s storage shed that raises the stakes even higher and plunges Sloan into an unfathomable mystery.

BLESSED WATER, Margot Douaihy
(March 12)
Sister Holiday #2

Tattooed from her neck to her toes and sporting a gold tooth as sharp as her wisecracks, Sister Holiday struggles to stay on the righteous path. Never one to make things easy for herself, she’s committed to taking her permanent vows with the Sisters of the Sublime Blood and joining former fire inspector Magnolia Riveaux’s latest venture, Redemption Detective Agency – both in service of satisfying her eternal quest for answers. When Sister Holiday and Riveaux set out to bust a philandering husband, they instead find the body of a priest floating in the swollen Mississippi River, and with it, Redemption’s next case.



KILL FOR ME KILL FOR YOU,
Steve Cavanagh (March 19)
Standalone Thriller
One dark evening in New York City,

two strangers meet by chance. Over drinks, Amanda and Wendy realise they have so much in common. They both feel alone. They both drink alone.

And they both desperately want revenge against the two men who destroyed their families.

Together, they have the perfect plan. If you kill for me, I’ll kill for you. **PW & DP**

THE BEST WAY TO BURY YOUR HUSBAND, Alexia Casale (March 19)
Dark Comedy Crime Novel

When Sally kills her husband with a cast-iron skillet, she’s more fearful of losing her kids than of disposing of a fresh corpse. That just wouldn’t be fair—not after twenty years of marriage to a truly terrible man. But Sally isn’t the only woman in town reaching the brink. Soon, Sally finds herself leading an extremely unusual self-help group, and among them there are four bodies to hide. Can they all figure out the perfect way to bury their husbands . . . and get away with it?

First to join is former nurse, Ruth, who met her husband as a single mom. Now her son is grown and her husband’s violence builds by the day until an attack on the stairs leads to a fatal accident—for him.

THE MYSTERY WRITER,
Sulari Gentill (March 19)
Literary Thriller

An aspiring writer meets and falls in love with her literary idol – only to find him murdered the day after she gave him her manuscript to read.

THE GOOD, THE BAD, AND THE AUNTIES, Jesse Q. Sutanto (March 26)
Aunties #3

After an ultra-romantic honeymoon across Europe, Meddy Chan and her husband Nathan have landed in Jakarta to spend Chinese New Year with her entire extended family. Chinese New Year, already the biggest celebration of the Lunar calendar, gets even more festive when a former beau of Second Aunt’s shows up at the Chan residence bearing extravagant gifts—he’s determined to rekindle his romance with Second Aunt

and the gifts are his way of announcing his courtship. His grand gesture goes awry however, when it's discovered that not all the gifts were meant for Second Aunt and the Chans—one particular gift was intended for a business rival to cement their alliance and included by accident. Of course the Aunties agree that it's only right to return the gift—after all, anyone would forgive an honest mistake, right? But what should have been a simple retrieval turns disastrous and suddenly Meddy and the Aunties are helpless pawns in a decades-long war between Jakarta's most powerful business factions.

THE TRUTH ABOUT THE DEVLINS,
Lisa Scottoline (March 26).

Standalone Legal Thriller

TJ Devlin is the charming disappointment in the prominent Devlin family, all of whom are lawyers at their highly successful firm—except him. After a stint in prison and rehab for alcoholism, TJ can't get hired anywhere except at the firm, in a make-work job with the title of investigator. But one night, TJ's world turns upside down after his older brother John confesses that he just murdered one of the clients, an accountant he'd confronted with proof of embezzlement. It seems impossible coming from John, the firstborn son and Most Valuable Devlin. TJ plunges into the investigation, seizing the chance to prove his worth and save his brother. But in no time, TJ and John find themselves entangled in a lethal web of deception and murder.

HOW TO SOLVE YOUR OWN MURDER, Kristen Perrin (March 26).

Traditional Murder Mystery

It's 1965 and teenage Frances Adams is at an English country fair with her two best friends. But Frances's night takes a hairpin turn when a fortune-teller makes a bone-chilling prediction: One day, Frances will be murdered. Frances spends a lifetime trying to solve a crime that hasn't happened yet, compiling dirt on every person who crosses her path in an effort to prevent her own demise. For decades, no one takes Frances seriously, until nearly sixty years

later, when Frances is found murdered, like she always said she would be. Now it's up to her great-niece to catch the killer.

A FORGOTTEN KILL,
Isabella Maldonado (March 26)

Daniela Vega #2

FBI Special Agent Daniela "Dani" Vega was seventeen when her mother murdered her father. Ten years after Dani's own damning eyewitness testimony sealed her mother's fate, she's starting to have doubts. What if she got it all wrong? A veteran NYPD homicide detective agrees to reopen the closed case on one condition: Dani must help him find a serial killer who's been operating throughout New York City for the past decade. If anyone can decipher his patterns, and his riddles, it's a trained codebreaker like Dani.



CLOSE TO DEATH,

Anthony Horowitz (April 2)

Hawthorne & Horowitz #5

Riverside Close is a picture-perfect community. The six exclusive and attractive houses are tucked far away from the noise and grime of city life, allowing the residents to enjoy beautiful gardens, pleasant birdsong, and tranquility from behind the security of a locked gate. It is the perfect idyll, until the Kentworthy family arrives, with their four giant,

gas-guzzling cars, gaggle of shrieking children, and plans for a garish swimming pool in the backyard. Obvious outsiders, the Kentworthys do not belong in Riverside Close, and quickly offend every last one of the neighbors. When Charles Kentworthy is found dead on his own doorstep, a crossbow bolt sticking out of his chest, Detective Hawthorne is the only investigator they can call to solve the case.

CITY IN RUINS, Don Winslow
(April 2)

Danny Ryan #3

Danny Ryan is rich. Beyond his wildest dreams rich. The former dock worker, Irish mob soldier and fugitive from the law is now a respected businessman – a Las Vegas casino mogul and billionaire silent partner in a group that owns two lavish hotels. Finally, Danny has it all: a beautiful house, a child he adores, a woman he might even fall in love with. Life is good. But then Danny reaches too far. When he tries to buy an old hotel on a prime piece of real estate with plans to build his dream resort, he triggers a war against Las Vegas power brokers, a powerful FBI agent bent on revenge and a rival casino owner with dark connections of his own.

MURDER ON THE DODDER,
Keith Bruton (April 2)

The Lemon Man #2

TO-DO List: Get Gun, Kill Doyle, Save Jack

Patrick Callen is a bike-riding hitman with mild OCD trying to save his crumbling relationship with his live-in girlfriend while racing through Dublin to save his kidnapped mentor from execution. The ransom: ticking off a to-do list of murders that will make Patrick a target of the police, the mob, and his closest friends...and doom his romance... if it doesn't get him killed first.

SHE'S NOT SORRY, Mary Kubica
(April 2)

Standalone Psychological Suspense

Meghan Michaels is trying to find balance between being a single mom to a teenage daughter and working as a full time nurse. While on duty at the hos-

pital one day, a patient named Caitlin arrives in a coma with a traumatic brain injury, having jumped from a bridge and plunging over twenty feet to the train tracks below. But when a witness comes forward with shocking details about the fall, it calls everything they know into question. Was Caitlin pushed and if so, by whom and why?

THE SPY, Ajay Chowdhury
(April 4 – **UK only**)

Detective Kamil Rahman #4

Detective Kamil Rahman is working for the Met Police when he gets the call from MI5.

They've received intelligence of a terrorist plot, and it's Kamil they need. Posing as a disaffected cop and working in his friend Anjoli's restaurant on Brick Lane, Kamil attempts to infiltrate the cell. What he uncovers leads him half-way across the world to Kashmir, and face to face with an old nemesis.

A BETTER WORLD, Sarah Langan
(April 9)
Thriller

A family's escape to an ultrawealthy enclave designed to shelter its residents from contemporary social ills goes wrong when they come to suspect the "charity" running the community is more sinister than it seems.

CAST A COLD EYE, Robbie Morrison
(April 9)

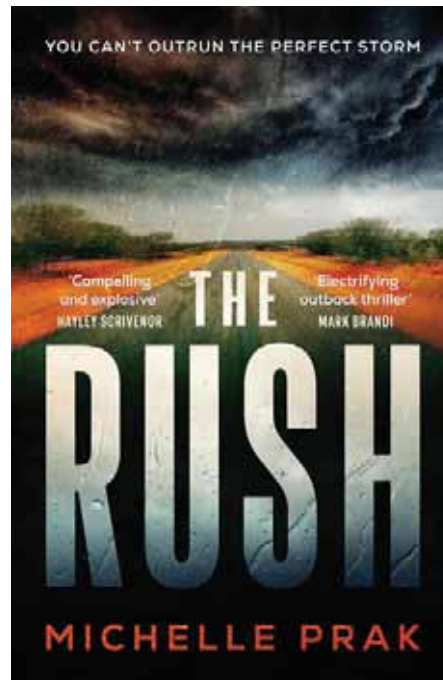
Jimmy Dregghorn #2

Glasgow, 1933. Murder is nothing new in the Depression-era city, especially to war veterans Inspector Jimmy Dregghorn and his partner, "Bonnie" Archie McDaid. But the dead man found in a narrowboat on the Forth and Clyde Canal, executed with a single shot to the back of the head, is no ordinary killing.

A KILLING ON THE HILL,
Robert Dugoni (April 9)
History Mystery set during
Great Depression

Seattle, 1933. The city is in the grips of the Great Depression, Prohibition, and vice. Cutting his teeth on a small-time beat, hungry and ambitious young reporter William "Shoe" Shumacher

gets a tip that could change his career. There's been a murder at a social club on Profanity Hill?an underworld magnet for vice crimes only a privileged few can afford. The story is going to be front-page news, and Shoe is the first reporter on the scene.



THE RUSH, Michelle Prak (April 9)
Standalone Psychological Suspense –
Debut Novel

With a massive downpour and flash floods predicted, Quinn Durand leaves work and races for the safety of home. The first drops start to fall as she spots something strange on the familiar bush route. With no reception and nothing but an empty road for miles in either direction, she investigates and discovers it's a body, dumped by the side of the road. When she approaches to check for signs of life, an arm reaches out and grabs her. Back at the country pub where Quinn lives, her boss Andrea has prepared for the torrential downpour. She's bunkered down with her toddler son sleeping in the back room when she's startled by a banging at the door. It's a biker, seeking shelter from the punishing storm. Meanwhile, out on the roads, two young couples on their way across the country struggle against the lashing rains. Tensions rise as they realize that they don't really know each other, nor are they remotely prepared

for the storm. **DP**

DAUGHTER OF MINE,
Megan Miranda (April 9)

Domestic/Psychological Suspense

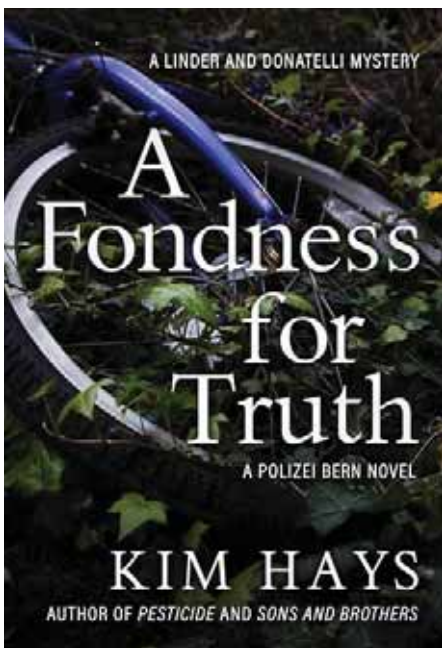
When Hazel Sharp, daughter of Mirror Lake's longtime local detective, unexpectedly inherits her childhood home, she's warily drawn back to the town—and people—she left behind almost a decade earlier. But Hazel's not the only relic of the past to return: a drought has descended on the region, and as the water level in the lake drops, long-hidden secrets begin to emerge... including evidence that may help finally explain the mystery of her mother's disappearance.

TOXIC PREY, John Sandford (April 9)
Lucas Davenport #34

Gaia is dying. That, at least, is what Dr. Lionel Scott believes. Society as it exists is untenable, and the direct link to Earth's death spiral; population levels are out of control and people have allowed disarray and disorder to run rampant. While most are concerned about deadly disease, Scott knows that it is truly humanity itself that will destroy Gaia. It's only by removing the threat then the planet can continue to prosper, and luckily, Scott is just the right man for the job. When Scott then disappears without a trace, Letty Davenport is tasked with tracking down any and all leads. Scott's connections to sensitive research into virus and pathogen spread has multiple national and international organizations on high alert, and his shockingly high clearance levels at various institutions, including the Los Alamos National Laboratory, make him the last person they'd like to go missing. As the web around Scott becomes more tangled, Letty calls in her father, Lucas, help her lead a group of specialists to find Scott as soon as possible.

THE GATHERING, C. J. Tudor
(April 9)
Standalone

A detective investigating a grisly crime in rural Alaska finds herself caught up in the dark secrets and superstitions of a small town.

**A FONDNESS FOR TRUTH,**

Kim Hays (April 16)

Swiss Police Procedural #3

Andi Eberhart is riding her bicycle home on an icy winter night when she is killed in a hit-and-run. Her devastated partner, Nisha, is convinced the death was no accident. Andi had been receiving homophobic hate mail for several years, and the letters grew uglier after the couple's baby was born. Bern homicide Detective Giuliana Linder is assigned to investigate what happened to Andi. As she pieces together the details of Andi and Nisha's lives, her assistant Renzo Donatelli looks into Andi's job advising young men drafted into Switzerland's civilian service. Working closely together, Giuliana and Renzo are again tempted to become more than just friendly colleagues. **DP**

A CALAMITY OF SOULS,

David Baldacci (April 16)

Standalone Thriller

Jack Lee is a white lawyer from Free-man County, Virginia, who has never done anything to push back against racism, until he decides to represent Jerome Washington, a Black man charged with brutally killing an elderly and wealthy white couple. Doubting his decision, Lee fears that his legal skills may not be enough to prevail in a case where the odds are already stacked against both

him and his client. And he quickly finds himself out of his depth when he realizes that what is at stake is far greater than the outcome of a murder trial.

NOTHING BUT THE BONES,

Brian Panowich (April 16)

Bull Mountain #4

In McFalls County, local crime boss Gareth Burroughs runs everything on the mountain. And Nelson "Nails" McKenna has been his enforcer since he was a teenager, though his heart's not really in the dirty work. Then one night in a local roadhouse, Nails goes too far, defending a woman, and even Burroughs's reach can't get him out of this one. With a dead body and countless witnesses, Nails and the woman become fugitives on the run, and unlikely partners.

WHAT CANNOT BE SAID,

C. S. Harris (April 16)

Sebastian St. Cyr #19

July 1815: The Prince Regent's grandiose plans to celebrate Napoléon's recent defeat at Waterloo are thrown into turmoil when Lady McInnis and her daughter Emma are found brutally murdered in Richmond Park, their bodies posed in a chilling imitation of the stone effigies once found atop medieval tombs. Bow Street magistrate Sir Henry Lovejoy immediately turns to his friend Sebastian St. Cyr, Viscount Devlin, for help with the investigation

PAY DIRT, Sara Paretsky (April 16)

V. I. Warshawski #22

V.I. needs to mend from the fallout from her last case so she goes to Kansas for a weekend of college basketball; Angela, one of her protégées, is a Northwestern star. And that's when V.I.'s troubles really begin. Sabrina, one of Angela's roommates, disappears and V.I. agrees to stay behind to try to find her. Finding a missing person in a town where she doesn't know anyone and has no snitches is hard, but not as hard as the local reaction to the detective. When V.I. finds Sabrina close to death in a drug house, the mother's gratitude quickly turns to suspicion. V.I. finds herself in the FBI's crosshairs, and the

young men running the county's opioid distribution are not happy.

LOST BIRDS, Anne Hillerman

(April 16)

Leaphorn Chee & Manuelito #9

Joe Leaphorn may be long retired from the Navajo Tribal Police, but his detective skills are still sharp, honed by his work as a private detective. His experience will be essential to solve a compelling new case: finding the birth parents of a woman who was raised by a bilagáana family but believes she is Diné based on one solid clue, an old photograph with a classic Navajo child's blanket. Leaphorn discovers that his client's adoption was questionable, and her adoptive family not what they seem.

DEATH AND GLORY, Will Thomas

(April 23)

Barker & Llewelyn #16

Private Enquiry agent Cyrus Barker, along with his partner Thomas Llewelyn, has a long, accomplished history - he's taken on cases for Scotland Yard, the Foreign Office, and even the crown itself, fulfilling them all with great skill and discretion. None of those cases, however, are as delicate and complicated as the one laid before him by a delegation of men who, thirty years before, fought for the Confederacy during the American Civil War. These men want to revive the Confederacy with a warship promised to the Rebels from the British Government in 1865. To get it now, they're threatening to reveal the long-secret treaty with the Confederacy. Barker is hired to use his connections to discreetly bring their threats to the Prime Minister.

ASSASSIN EIGHTEEN,

John Brownlow (April 23)

Assassins #2

Agent Seventeen, the most infamous hitman 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? But 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 must protect Mireille, and discover who sent her to kill him, and why. **DP**



THE TRANSLATOR, Harriet Crawley
(April 23)

Standalone Spy Thriller

Clive Franklin, a Russian language expert in the Foreign Office, is summoned unexpectedly to Moscow to act as translator for the British Prime Minister. His life is turned on its head when, after more than a decade, he discovers that his former lover, Marina Volina, is now the interpreter to the Russian President. At the embassy, Clive learns of a Russian plot to cut the undersea cables linking the US to the UK which would paralyse communications and collapse the Western economy. Marina stuns Clive with the news that she's ready to help stop the attack, betraying her country for a new identity and a new life. **DP**

CIRCLE IN THE WATER,
Marcia Muller (April 23)
Sharon McCone #35

San Francisco is home to more than 200 privately owned streets. Most are alleyways, but a select few look torn straight from the pages of a magazine. Lined with mansions and elaborate gardens, the properties are luxurious and

perfectly maintained; security guards patrol the grounds to keep the curious at bay. Few know of these exclusive enclaves, but those who do prowl for availability, ready to make a grab for the precious real estate if opportunity strikes. When several such streets are targeted in a series of so-called pranks, Sharon is hired by a coalition of concerned owners to investigate. But as things escalate—an attempt on Sharon's life, an explosion at a meth lab, and a shocking murder,

THE LAST WORD, Elly Griffiths
(April 23)
Novel of Detection

Natalka and Edwin are perfect if improbable partners in a detective agency. At eighty-four, Edwin regularly claims that he's the oldest detective in England. He is a master at surveillance, deploying his age as a cloak of invisibility. Natalka, Ukrainian-born and more than fifty years his junior, is a math whizz, who takes any cases concerning fraud or deception. Despite a steady stream of minor cases, Natalka is frustrated. She loves a murder, as she's fond of saying, and none have come the agency's way. That is until local writer Melody Chambers dies. Melody's daughters are convinced that their mother was murdered. Edwin thinks that Melody's death is linked to that of an obituary writer who predeceased many of his subjects.

NEXT OF KIN, Samantha Jayne Allen
(April 23)

Annie McIntyre #3

At a gathering for her cousin's wedding party, newly-licensed PI Annie McIntyre gets asked an age-old question: what really makes us who we are, nature or nurture? Clint Marshall, an up-and-coming musician and an adoptee at a personal crossroads, wants to hire Annie to find his biological parents, and that question is on his mind. Annie accepts his case, not knowing then that she, too, must decide if she really believes what she tells him that night? In essence, that people are in charge of their destinies. That people can change. When Annie discovers her client's father is a bank robber who her granddad, Le-

roy, arrested back when he was sheriff, reverberations sound between the past and the present, igniting old flames and rivalries.

MISSING WHITE WOMAN,
Kellye Garrett (April 30)
Domestic Suspense

Breanna's boyfriend, Ty, has just taken her on a romantic getaway to New York City and Ty has taken care of everything, including the four-story townhouse in Jersey City that he rented. On the last day of their trip, Bree comes downstairs to find Ty missing and Janelle Beckett dead on the floor. Janelle is the missing white woman that the internet is obsessed with and before she knows it, Bree is in the middle of a murder investigation with the cops and the internet wondering about her involvement. The only person that Bree can turn to for help is her ex-best friend, a lawyer she has a complicated past with.

SOMEONE SAW SOMETHING,
Rick Mofina (April 30)
Missing Person Thriller

When six-year-old Gabriel vanishes from Central Park, his mother, news anchor Corina Corado, is desperate for answers. Who would take her son—and why? Detectives suspect there's a connection to the barrage of hate mail Corina's received over the years. In her line of work, it's not unusual for agitated conspiracy theorists to send messages that threaten violence...or worse. But as the investigation deepens, the secrets that Corina, her husband, Robert, and her stepdaughter, Charlotte, have kept start to unravel.

A NEST OF VIPERS,
Harini Nagendra (May 2)

Amateur Sleuth Historical Mystery #3

When Prince Edward begins a 1921 tour of a number of Indian cities, he encounters passionate crowds demanding independence from Britain, with rioting on the streets of Bombay in November 1921. The mood of the prince's subsequent trip to Bangalore and Mysore in January 1922 appears, at first glance, very different and is made to large, welcoming crowds. But perhaps

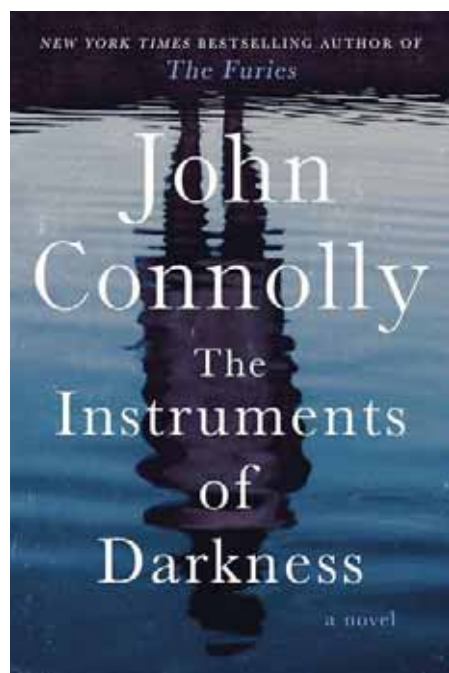
all is not what it seems to be. While exploring another (seemingly unrelated) crime scene, Kaveri Murthy and Ramu become tangled in a complex web of intrigue, getting pulled into a potentially dangerous plan that could endanger the life of the visiting prince.

HUNTED, Abir Mukherjee (May 7)

Standalone Terrorism Thriller

It's a week before the presidential elections when a bomb goes off in an LA shopping mall.

In London, armed police storm Heathrow Airport and arrest Sajid Khan. His daughter Aliyah entered the USA with the suicide bomber, and now she's missing, potentially plotting another attack. But then a woman called Carrie turns up at Sajid's door after travelling halfway across the world. She claims Aliyah is with her son Greg, and she knows where they could be. Back in the US, Agent Shreya Mistry is closing in on the two fugitives. But the more she investigates, the more she realises there is more to this case than meets the eye and suspects a wider conspiracy.



THE INSTRUMENTS OF DARK-

NESS, John Connolly (May 7)

Charlie Parker #21

In Maine, Colleen Clark stands accused of the worst crime a mother can commit: the abduction and possible

murder of her child. Everyone—ambitious politicians in an election season, hardened police, ordinary folk—has an opinion on the case, and most believe she is guilty. But most is not all. Defending Colleen is the lawyer Moxie Castin, and working alongside him is the private investigator Charlie Parker, who senses the tale has another twist, one involving a husband too eager to accept his wife's guilt, a group of fascists arming for war, a disgraced psychic seeking redemption, and an old twisted house deep in the Maine woods, a house that should never have been built.

MATTERHORN, Christopher Reich

(May 7)

International Thriller

Robbie Steinhardt lives a peaceful life. A fixture of his small alpine village, he tends cattle, minds his own business, and doesn't dwell on his former life and the family and lover he left behind – back when he was Mac Dekker, CIA. But when he learns his son Will died following in his footsteps, he needs answers. What mission took Will up into the alpine heights, and why is Ilya Ivashka on the same trail? Ilya – his close friend, his rival in love. Ilya, who framed Mac for treason and sent him into hiding.

I WILL RUIN YOU, Linwood Barclay

(May 7)

Standalone Thriller

How would you react in a life-or-death situation? It's a question everyone asks themselves, but few have to face in real life. English teacher Richard Boyle certainly never thought he would find himself talking down a former student intent on harming others, but when Mark LeDrew shows up at Richard's school with a bomb strapped to his chest, Richard immediately jumps into action. Thanks to some quick thinking, he averts a major tragedy and is hailed as a hero, but not all the attention focused on him is positive. Richard's brief moment in the spotlight puts him in the sights of a deranged blackmailer with a score to settle.

PHANTOM ORBIT, David Ignatius

(May 7)

National Security Thriller

The story follows Ivan Volkov, a Russian student in Beijing, who discovers an unsolved puzzle in the writings of the 17th century astronomer Johannes Kepler. The puzzle holds untold consequences for space warfare. Volkov continues his secret work back home in Moscow. The years pass, and they are not kind. After the loss of his son, a prosecutor who'd been too tough on corruption, and Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Volkov makes the fraught decision to contact the CIA. He writes: Satellites are your enemies, especially your own.... Hidden codes can make time stop and turn north into south. If you are smart, you will find me.

THEY THOUGHT I WAS DEAD, Peter

James (May 9 in U.K.; July 2 in U.S.)

British Police Detective Novel

Her name is Sandy. You might know her as the loving wife of Detective Superintendent Roy Grace. But there's more to her than meets the eye. A woman with a dubious past, a complicated present and an uncertain future. Then she was gone. Her disappearance caused a nationwide search. Even the best detective on the force couldn't find her. They thought she was dead. Where did she go? Why did she run? What would cause a woman to leave her whole life behind and simply vanish?

BONEHEAD, Mo Hayder

(May 9 in U.K. only)

Standalone Crime Novel

Alex Mullins knows she is one of the lucky ones. When a fatal coach crash at her school reunion killed several of her classmates, she was saved from a grisly fate. She is haunted by what she thinks she saw that night -- a vision of a skeletal woman, known by the locals as the Bonehead - a woman who brings bad luck to all that see her. Now a police officer in Gloucestershire, Alex fights to overcome the past by helping other people. But when her path crosses with someone who was there that fateful night, her new life begins to unravel at the seams.

THINK TWICE, Harlan Coben
(May 14)

Myron Bolitar #12

Three years ago, sports agent Myron Bolitar gave a eulogy at the funeral of his client, renowned basketball coach Greg Downing. Myron and Greg had history: initially as deeply personal rivals, and later as unexpected business associates. Myron made peace and moved on – until now, when two federal agents walked into his office, demanding to know where Greg Downing is. According to the agents, Greg is still alive—and has been placed at the scene of a double homicide, making him their main suspect.

LOCKED IN PURSUIT,
Ashley Weaver (May 14)

Electra McDonnell #4

Safecracker Ellie McDonnell hasn't seen Major Ramsey – her handsome but aloof handler in the British government – since their tumultuous mission together three months before, but when she hears about a suspicious robbery in London she feels compelled to contact him. Together they discover that a rash of burglaries in the city all lead back to a hotbed of spies in the neutral city Lisbon, Portugal, and an unknown object brought to London by a mysterious courier.

RED SKY MOURNING, Jack Carr
(May 14)

Terminal List #7

A storm is on the horizon. America's days are numbered. A Chinese submarine has gone rogue and is navigating towards the continental United States, putting its nuclear missiles within striking distance of the West Coast. A rising Silicon Valley tech mogul with unknown allegiances is at the forefront of a revolution in quantum computing and Artificial Intelligence.

A politician controlled by a foreign power is a breath away from the Oval Office. Three seemingly disconnected events are on a collision course to ignite a power grab unlike anything the world has ever seen. The country's only hope is a quantum computer that has gone dark, retreating to the deepest levels of the

internet, learning at a rate inconceivable at her inception.

VERY BAD COMPANY,
Emma Rosenblum (May 14)

Psychological Suspense

In this satirical mystery, a tech executive disappears during a buzzy start-up's company retreat, and the other employees must juggle their search for him with their obligation to project confidence for the market.

LONG TIME GONE,
Charlie Donlea (May 21)

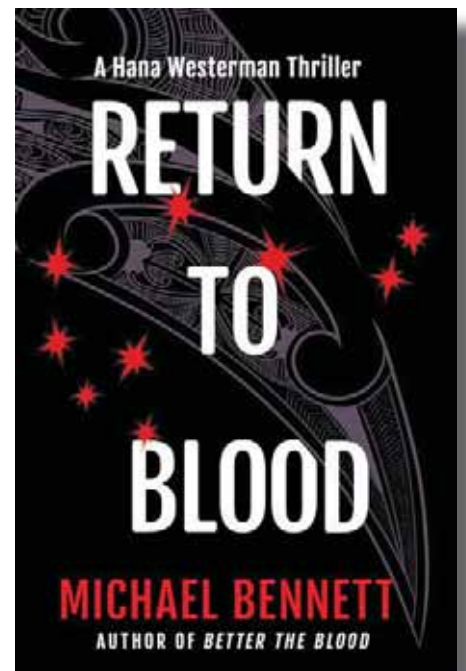
Forensic Mystery

When Dr. Sloan Hastings submits her DNA to an online genealogy site for a research assignment, her goal is to better understand the treasure-trove of genetic information contained on ancestry websites. Brilliant and driven, Sloan is embarking on a fellowship in forensic pathology, training under the renowned Dr. Livia Cutty. Sloan has one reservation about involving herself in the experiment: she's adopted. Grateful for a loving home, she's never considered tracking down her biological parents. The results of her search are shocking. Sloan's DNA profile suggests her true identity is that of Charlotte Margolis, aka "Baby Charlotte", who captured the nation's attention when she mysteriously disappeared, along with her parents, in July 1995. Despite an exhaustive search, the family was never seen again, and no suspects were named in the case.

RETURN TO BLOOD,
Michael Bennett (May 21)

Hannah Westerman #2

After the perils of a case that landed much too close to home, Hana Westerman turned in her badge and abandoned her career as a detective in the Auckland CIB. Hoping that civilian life will offer her the opportunity to rest and recalibrate, she returns to her hometown of Tata Bay, where she moves back in with her beloved father, Eru. Yet the memories of the past are everywhere, and as she goes for her daily run on the beach, Hana passes a local monument to Grace, a high school classmate who was murdered more than twenty years ago



and hidden in the dunes overlooking the sea. A Maori man with a previous record was convicted of the crime, although Eru never believed he was guilty. When her daughter finds another young woman's skeleton in the sands, Hana soon finds herself awkwardly involved.
DP

THE LAST MURDER
AT THE END OF THE WORLD,

Stuart Turton (May 21)

Standalone Murder Mystery

Solve the murder to save what's left of the world. Outside the island there is nothing: the world was destroyed by a fog that swept the planet, killing anyone it touched. On the island: it is idyllic. One hundred and twenty-two villagers and three scientists, living in peaceful harmony. The villagers are content to fish, farm and feast, to obey their nightly curfew, to do what they're told by the scientists. Until, to the horror of the islanders, one of their beloved scientists is found brutally stabbed to death.

DOUBLE TAP, Cindy Dees (May 21)
Helen Warwick #2

As an elite assassin for the CIA, Helen Warwick was trained to keep a low profile. But now that she's retired, Helen is forced to take on a very different, and very public, role—as the proud mother

of a rising young politician. At a DC press conference for her son's campaign, she sees the ominous green light of a gun laser fixed on her son's head—and her CIA training kicks in. She jumps into action, pushes her son down, and saves him from a sniper's bullet. In that moment, Helen realizes she will never escape the secrets of her past—or the deranged man she thought she killed.

THE LAST HOPE,

Susan Elia MacNeal (May 21)

Maggie Hope #11

Maggie Hope has come a long way since she was Mr. Churchill's secretary. In the face of tremendous danger, she's learned espionage, sabotage, and reconnaissance. But things are different now that she has so much to lose, including the possibility of a family with John Sterling, the man who's long held her heart. British Intelligence has ordered Maggie to assassinate Werner Heisenberg, the physicist who may deliver a world-ending fission bomb for Germany: she's shaken by the assignment. An assassination is unlike anything she's ever done. How can the Allies even be sure Nazi Germany has a bomb? Determined to gather more information, Maggie travels to Madrid, where Heisenberg is visiting for a lecture.

ONE PERFECT COUPLE,

Ruth Ware (May 21)

Standalone Domestic Thriller/
Murder Mystery

Lyla is in a bit of a rut. Her post-doctoral research has fizzled out, she's pretty sure they won't extend her contract, and things with her boyfriend, Nico, an aspiring actor, aren't going great. When the opportunity arises for Nico to join the cast of a new reality TV show, One Perfect Couple, she decides to try out with him. A whirlwind audition process later, Lyla finds herself whisked off to a tropical paradise with Nico, boating through the Indian Ocean towards Ever After Island, where the two of them will compete against four other couples—Bayer and Angel, Dan and Santana, Joel and Romi, and Conor and Zana—in order to win a cash prize. But not long after they arrive on the deserted island,

things start to go wrong.

THE WILD SWIMMERS,

William Shaw (May 23 in **U.K. only**)

DS Alexandra Cupidi #5

The body of a local woman is found washed up on the Folkstone shoreline. Cupidi must find the missing link between a group of wild swimmers, an online dating profile and a slippery killer who feels remarkably close to home.

THE CUCKOO,

Camilla Lackberg (May 23)

Patrik Hestrom #11

As a heavy mist rolls into the Swedish coastal town of Fjällbacka, shocking violence shakes the small community to its core. Rolf Stenklo, a famous photographer, is found murdered in his gallery. Two days later, a brutal tragedy on a private island leaves the prestigious Bauer family devastated.

IF SOMETHING HAPPENS TO ME,

Alex Finlay (May 28)

Harlan Coben-like Thriller

For the past five years, Ryan Richardson has relived that terrible night. The car door ripping open. The crushing blow to the head. The hands yanking him from the vehicle. His girlfriend Ali's piercing scream as she is taken. With no trace of Ali or the car, a cloud of suspicion hangs over Ryan. But with no proof and a good lawyer, he's never charged, though that doesn't matter to the podcasters and internet trolls. Now, Ryan has changed his last name, and entered law school. He's put his past behind him. Until, on a summer trip abroad to Italy with his law-school classmates, Ryan gets a call from his father: Ali's car has finally been found, submerged in a lake in his hometown. Inside are two dead men and a cryptic note with five words written on the envelope in Ali's handwriting: If something happens to me.

THE SCARLET PAPERS, Matthew

Richardson (May 28)

Standalone Spy Thriller

Historian Max Archer is invited to a clandestine meeting with legendary Cold War spymaster, Scarlet King. Her

offer to share the explosive secrets born of over half a century at the heart of global espionage would be life-changing. Soon he is on the wrong side of the law and on the run. As the net closes tighter around him he must somehow discover the truth. **DP**

FIRST FROST, Craig Johnson

(May 28)

Walt Longmire #20

Sheriff Walt Longmire has to navigate his own increasingly complicated personal life with the ever-changing and often violent underworld that encroaches on what was once referred to as the Old West. This time, he is up against a sinister plot that could hurt the people closest to him and forever change the way he sees his beloved Wyoming.

SOUTHERN MAN, Greg Iles

(May 28)

Penn Cage #7

Fifteen years after the events of the Natchez Burning trilogy, Penn Cage is alone. Nearly all his loved ones are dead, his old allies gone, and he carries a mortal secret that separates him from the world. But Penn's exile comes to an end when a brawl at a Mississippi rap festival triggers a bloody mass shooting – one that nearly takes the life of his daughter Annie.

CAMINO GHOSTS,

John Grisham (May 28)

Camino #3

Popular bookseller Bruce Cable tells Mercer Mann an irresistible tale that might be her next novel. A giant resort developer is using its political muscle and deep pockets to claim ownership of a deserted island between Florida and Georgia. Only the last living inhabitant of the island, Lovely Jackson, stands in its way. What the developer doesn't know is that the island has a remarkable history, and locals believe it is cursed.

FAREWELL, AMETHYSTINE,

Walter Mosley (June 4)

Easy Rawlins #16

January 1970 finds Ezekiel "Easy" Rawlins, LA's premier Black detective,

at 50 years of age despite all expectations. He has a loving family, a beautiful home, and a thriving investigation agency. All is right with the world... and then Amethystine Stoller, his own personal Helen of Troy, arrives. Her ex-husband is missing. A simple enough case. The missing ex, a young white man named Curt Fields, is found dead. Easy's only real friend in the LAPD, Melvin Suggs, has gone into hiding rather than allow his femme fatale wife to go to the gas chamber. And that's only the beginning.

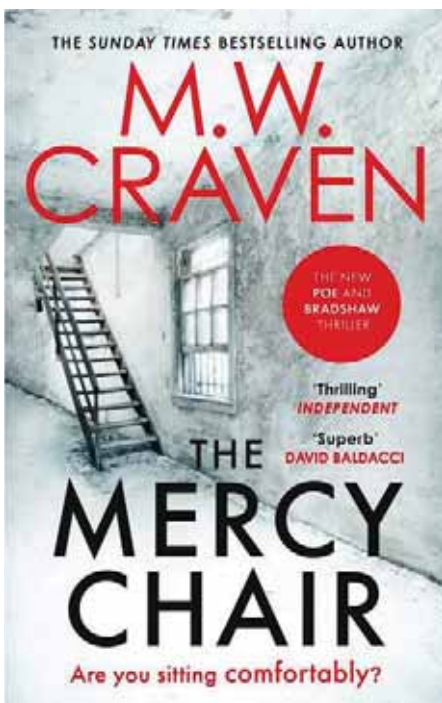
THE COMFORT OF GHOSTS,
Jacqueline Winspear (June 4)
Maisie Dobbs #18

Maisie is trying to find new homes for a mysterious group of WWII orphans. One of their life stories leads Dobbs to reexamine her late husband's mysterious death.

THE LAST NOTE OF WARNING,
Katharine Schellman (June 4)
Nightingale #3

The latest in Schellman's Nightingale series finds New York City dress shop assistant Vivian Kelly wanted for the murder of a wealthy client's husband.

THE MERCY CHAIR, M. W. Craven
(Poe/Tilly, June 6 in **U.K. only**)



Washington Poe & Tilly Bradshaw #6

Washington Poe will tell you about a man who was tied to a tree and stoned to death, a man who had tattooed himself with a code so obscure, even the gifted analyst Tilly Bradshaw struggled to break it. He'll tell you how the man's murder was connected to a tragedy that happened fifteen years earlier when a young girl massacred her entire family. And finally, he'll tell you about the mercy chair. And why people would rather kill themselves than talk about it.

CLETE, James Lee Burke (June 11)
Dave Robicheaux #23

Clete Purcel – private investigator, ex-member of the New Orleans Police Department, and war veteran with a hard shell and just a few soft spots – is Dave Robicheaux's longtime friend and partner in detective work. But he has a troubled past. When Clete leaves his car at the local car wash, only to return to find it ransacked by a group of thugs tied to the drug trade from Mexican cartels to Louisiana, it feels personal – his grandniece died of a fentanyl overdose, and his fists curl when he thinks of the dealers who sold it. Just as Clete starts to trail the culprits, Clara Bow, a woman with a dark past hires Clete as a detective to investigate her scheming, slippery ex-husband, and a string of brutal deaths all link back to a heavily tattooed man who seems to lurk around every corner.

ASSASSINS ANONYMOUS,
Rob Hart (June 11)
Action Thriller

Mark was the most dangerous killer-for-hire in the world. But after learning the hard way that his life's work made him more monster than man, he left all of that behind, and joined a twelve-step group for reformed killers. When Mark is viciously attacked by an unknown assailant, he is forced on the run. From New York to Singapore to London, he chases after clues while dodging attacks and trying to solve the puzzle of who's after him. All without killing anyone. Or getting killed himself. For an assassin, Mark learns, nonviolence is a real

hassle.

A TALENT FOR MURDER,
Peter Swanson (June 11)
Domestic Suspense

Martha Ratliff conceded long ago that she'd likely spend her life alone. She was fine with it, happy with her solo existence, stimulated by her job as an archival librarian. But then she met Alan, a charming and sweet-natured divorcee with a job that took him on the road for half the year. When he asked her to marry him, she said yes, even though he still felt a little bit like a stranger.

A year in and the marriage was good, except for that strange blood streak on the back of one of his shirts he'd worn to a conference in Denver. Her curiosity turning to suspicion, Martha investigates the cities Alan visited over the past year and uncovers a disturbing pattern—five unsolved cases of murdered women.

A STRANGER IN THE FAMILY,
Jane Casey (June 11)
Maeve Kerrigan #11

When nine-year-old Rosalie Marshall vanished from her bed one summer night, her disappearance tore her family apart. Now, sixteen years later, her mother Helena is found dead, her husband by her side. It looks like a straightforward murder-suicide but DS Maeve Kerrigan and DI Josh Derwent soon discover nothing about this case is straightforward.

MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT,
Riley Sager (June 18)

Psychological Suspense Standalone
The worst thing to ever happen on Hemlock Circle occurred in Ethan Marsh's backyard. One July night, ten-year-old Ethan and his best friend Billy fell asleep together in a tent set up on a manicured lawn in the quiet New Jersey cul de sac. In the morning, Ethan woke up alone. The tent was sliced open, and Billy was gone. He was never seen again.

THE PERILS OF LADY CATHERINE
DE BOURGH, Claudia Gray (June 18)
Mr. Darcy & Miss Tilney #3
Someone is trying to kill Lady Cath-

erine de Bourgh. Esteemed aunt of Mr. Fitzwilliam Darcy, generous patroness of Mr. William Collins, a woman of rank who rules over the estate of Rosings Park with an unimpeachable sense of propriety—who would dare? Lady Catherine summons her grand-nephew, Mr. Jonathan Darcy, and his investigative companion, Miss Juliet Tilney, to find out.

THE NEXT MRS. PARRISH,
Liv Constantine (June 18)
Last Mrs. Parrish #2

Amber Patterson Parrish has come a long way from being an invisible wall-flower. Her hard work and immaculate planning have paid off now that she's a prominent socialite, but that doesn't mean she's had it easy along the way. Less than a year since her husband Jackson's tax evasion scandal, Amber is still at the top of the Bishops Harbor community pecking order, free to do as she wishes while Jackson sits in prison. But that freedom is quickly coming to an end. With Jackson getting released from prison, Amber's time—and money—is vanishing.

THE MIDNIGHT FEAST,
Lucy Foley (June 18)
Standalone Locked Room
Murder Mystery

Welcome to the opening weekend of The Manor. A luxury resort built on top of old secrets in an ancient wood. The following are gathered: THE FOUNDER, THE LOVER, THE MYSTERY GUEST, THE KITCHEN HELP, THE DETECTIVE. All have an agenda. All have a past. But not everyone will survive.

WHAT YOU LEAVE BEHIND,
Wanda M. Morris (June 18)
Standalone Thriller

Deena Wood's life has fallen apart in the aftermath of losing her beloved mother, her marriage, and her prestigious job at an Atlanta law firm. She needs what the Geechee people of coastal Georgia call a "dayclean," a fresh start. She returns to her childhood home in Brunswick, Georgia, to heal. But her return is anything but the respite she

thought it might be. To make peace with all her loss, she often drives through the city. One day, she unwittingly finds herself on the oceanfront property of a loner widower who is fighting to keep land that has been in his family since the end of the Civil War. He threatens her and warns her to never return. But shortly after, he disappears, and his very expensive property is quickly put up for sale. Curious about what has happened to the man, Deena digs into his disappearance and finds a family legacy at risk.

A DIVINE FURY,
D. V. Bishop (June 20 in **U.K. only**)
Cesare Aldo #4
Florence. Autumn, 1539.

Cesare Aldo was once an officer for the city's most feared criminal court. Following a period of exile, he is back – but demoted to night patrol, when only the drunk and the dangerous roam the streets. Chasing a suspect in the rain, Aldo discovers a horrifying scene beneath Michelangelo's statue of David. Lifeless eyes gaze from the face of a man whose body has been posed as if crucified. It's clear the killer had religious motives.

THE SUSPECT, Rob Rinder
(June 20 in **U.K. only**)
Adam Green #2

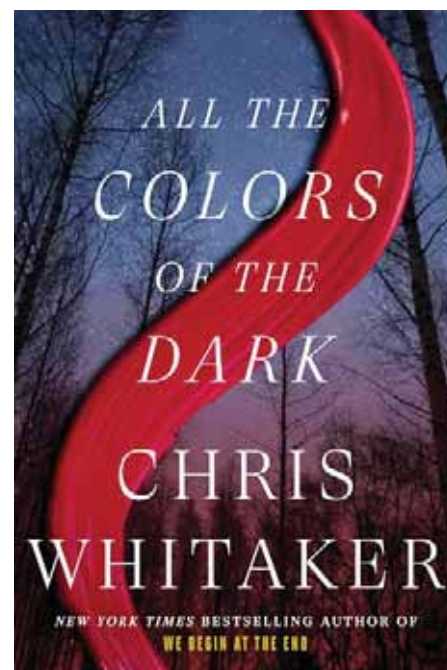
When the UK's favourite breakfast TV presenter dies live on air in front of millions of viewers, the nation is left devastated. The evidence points to one culprit: celebrity chef Sebastian Brooks. But junior barrister Adam Green is about to discover that the case is not as open-and-shut as it first seemed.

YOU'LL NEVER FIND ME,
Allison Brennan (June 25)
Private Eye Novel

Working alone as a private investigator is tough. Estranged from her PI family, Margo Angelhart does what she must to get by—including taking on sordid cases that pay the bills, even if she'd rather be helping those the justice system has failed. That is, until a cheating husband case she's working intersects with her siblings' corporate

espionage investigation, forcing Margo to cooperate with the Angelhart firm. Now, as the siblings compare notes, it's clear they need to work together before a white-collar crime escalates to murder. With far more questions than answers and a key suspect on the run, they'll need the whole family to pitch in.

ALL THE COLORS OF THE DARK,
Chris Whitaker (June 25)
Standalone Mystery



Late one summer, the town of Monta Clare is shattered by the abduction of local teenager Joseph 'Patch' Macauley. Nobody more so than Saint Brown, who is broken by her best friend's disappearance. Soon, she will eat, sleep, breathe, only to find him. But when she does: it will break her heart. Patch lies in a pitch-black room - all alone - for days or maybe weeks. Until he feels a hand in his. Her name is Grace and, though they cannot see each other, she takes him from the darkness and paints their world with her words. In this hopeless place, they fall in love. But when he escapes: there is no sign she ever even existed. To find her again, Patch charts an epic search across the country. And, to set him free, Saint will shadow his journey: on a darker path to hunt down the man who took them. **DP**

DON'T LET THE DEVIL RIDE,

Ace Atkins (June 25)

Addison McKellar isn't clueless—she knows she and her husband Dean don't have the perfect marriage—but she's still shocked when he completely vanishes from her life. At first Addison is annoyed, but as days stretch into a week and she's repeatedly stonewalled by Dean's friends and associates, her frustration turns into genuine alarm. When even the police seem dismissive of her concerns, Addison turns to her father's old friend, legendary Memphis PI Porter Hayes.

PITCH DARK,

Paul Doiron (June 25)

Mike Bowditch #15

Legendary bush pilot Josie Jonson can't believe her luck when a skilled builder just happens to show up after she purchases land near Prentiss Pond. All Mark Redmond asks in return for building Josie's dream cabin is that he be left alone to homeschool his 12-year-old daughter, Cady. For Maine game warden investigator Mike Bowditch, the intensity of Redmond's secretiveness is troubling, especially in light of suspicious criminal activity being reported around the area—including rumors of an armed man offering large sums of money in exchange for the location of Redmond and Cady. Josie, though hesitant to violate the trust of her prized builder, eventually agrees to fly Mike and his father-in-law Charley Stevens to the secluded pond in an attempt to protect Redmond and Cady. But hours after landing, the trip takes a dark turn when they witness a horrific murder and are taken captive themselves.

TRUST HER, Flynn Berry (June 25)

Tessa Daly #2

Three years after they narrowly escaped the IRA's worst punishment for informing, Northern Irish sisters Tessa and Marian Daly have built a new life in Dublin with their young children. Though Tessa is haunted by the abrupt and violent end to her old life, she does her best to immerse herself in the joys of Finn's childhood and the rhythms of her new job at the Irish Observer. It's a small island, though, and just as quickly

as they disappeared, figures from the sisters' past surface to drag them back into the conflict. Tessa is told she must track down her old handler from MI5, Eamonn, and attempt to turn him into an IRA informant, or lose everything.

A RUSE OF SHADOWS,

Sherry Thomas (June 25)

Lady Sherlock #8

Charlotte's success on the RMS Provence has afforded her a certain measure of time and assurance. Taking advantage of that, she has been busy, plotting to prise the man her sister loves from Moriarty's iron grip. Disruption, however, comes from an unexpected quarter. Lord Bancroft Ashburton, disgraced and imprisoned as a result of Charlotte's prior investigations, nevertheless manages to press Charlotte into service: Underwood, his most loyal henchman, is missing and Lord Bancroft wants Charlotte to find Underwood, dead or alive. But then Lord Bancroft himself turns up dead and Charlotte, more than anyone else, meets the trifecta criteria of motive, means, and opportunity.

STORM CHILD,

Michael Robotham (July 2)

Cyrus Haven & Evie Cormac #4

The most painful of Evie Cormac's memories have been locked away, ever



since she was held prisoner as a child - a child whose rescue captured hearts and headlines. Forensic psychologist Cyrus Haven's mission is to guide her to something near normality. But today, on a Lincolnshire beach, seventeen bodies wash up in front of them. There is only one survivor, with two women still missing. And Evie's nightmares come roaring back.

BREAKING THE DARK,

Lisa Jewell (July 2)

Jessica Jones #1

Lisa Jewell launches the Marvel Crime program with an original story of Jessica Jones investigating a case about a mother who fears her children have been replaced.

BROILER, Eli Cranor (July 2)

Crime Noir

Gabriela Menchaca and Edwin Saucedo are hardworking, undocumented employees at the Detmer Foods chicken plant in Springdale, Arkansas, just a stone's throw away from the trailer park where they've lived together for seven years. While dealing with personal tragedies of their own, the young couple endures the brutal, dehumanizing conditions at the plant in exchange for barebones pay. When the plant manager, Luke Jackson, fires Edwin to set an example for the rest of the workers—and to show the higher-ups that he's ready for a major promotion—Edwin is determined to get revenge on Luke and his wife, Mimi, a new mother who stays at home with her six-month-old son.

THE MISSING FAMILY, Tim Weaver

(July 4 in U.K. only)

David Raker #13

On a beautiful summer's day, at a remote lake in the middle of Dartmoor, three members of the Fowler family take a dinghy out onto the water, leaving mother Sarah at the shore. Less than sixty seconds later, she checks to see where they are. The boat is drifting in the middle of the lake. It's empty. Sarah's family have completely vanished. David Raker investigates.

THE RELUCTANT SHERIFF,

Chris Offutt (July 4)

Mick Hardin #4

No plot summary available

THE BURNING, Linda Castillo (July 9)

Kate Burkholder #16

Newlywed Chief of Police Kate Burkholder is awakened by an urgent midnight call summoning her to a suspicious fire in the woods. When she arrives at the scene, she discovers a charred body. According to the coroner, the deceased, an Amish man named Milan Swanz, was chained to a stake and burned alive. It is an appalling and eerily symbolic crime against an upstanding husband and father.

A REFINER'S FIRE,

Donna Leon (July 9)

Commissario Guido Brunetti #33

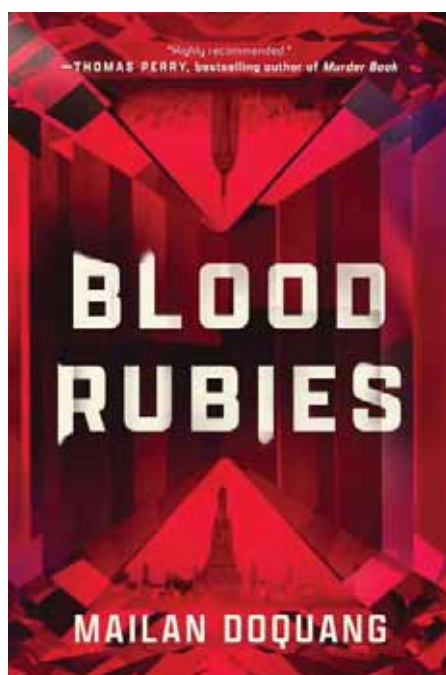
Around one AM on an early spring morning, two teenage gangs are arrested after clashing violently in one of Venice's squares. Commissario Claudia Griffoni, on duty that night, perhaps ill-advisedly walks the last of the boys home because his father, Dario Monforte, failed to pick him up at the Questura. Coincidentally, Guido Brunetti is asked by a wealthy friend of Vice-Questore Patta to vet Monforte for a job, triggering Brunetti's memory that twenty years earlier Monforte had been publicly celebrated as the hero of a devastating bombing of the Italian military compound in Iraq. Yet Monforte had never been awarded a medal either by the Carabinieri, his service branch, or by the Italian government. That seeming contradiction, and the brutal attack on one of Brunetti's colleagues, Enzo Bocchese, by a possible gang member, concentrate Brunetti's attentions.

BLOOD RUBIES,

Mailan Doquang (July 11)

Debut Crime Novel

Seven days are all it takes for Rune Sarasin's life to completely derail. It starts with a typical heist: lifting a pouch of rubies from the Bangkok hotel room of wealthy smuggler Charles Lemaire. Rune nearly gets caught and Lemaire's goons give chase, but they are no match for the clever motorbike



maneuvers of Rune and her boyfriend Kit. As the high of the chase wears off, Kit delivers some terrifying news: his teenage sister Madee has gone missing.

DESPERATION REEF,

T. Jefferson Parker (July 16)

Standalone Thriller

Jen Stonebreaker hasn't entered into a big-wave surfing competition since witnessing her husband's tragic death twenty-five years ago at the Monsters of the Mavericks. Now, Jen is ready to tackle those same Monsters with her twin sons Casey and Brock, who have become competitive surfers in a perilous sport. When he's not riding waves, modeling for surfing magazines, or posting viral content for his many fans, Casey Stonebreaker spends his days helping with the family restaurant ? catching fish in the morning and bartending at night. Casey's love for the ocean and his willingness to expose illegal poachers on his platforms puts him on a collision course with a crime syndicate eager to destroy anyone threatening their business.

THE WILDS, Sarah Pearse (July 16)

Detective Elin Warner #3

A perpetual drifter, Kier Templer lives her life on the road. Dubbed "the monster's daughter" after her mother's infamous crime, Kier has left her

hometown and twin behind. Kier is haunted by the past, but one thing has always bound her to her brother, Penn: the distinctive maps she designs of the places she's explored. When Kier abruptly goes off-grid without sending him her latest, Penn knows something is seriously wrong. Elin Warner is on vacation with her brother Isaac in a rugged national park in Portugal—the last place Kier was seen. It's supposed to be a time for the siblings to reconnect, but when Elin discovers Kier's disturbing final map, it seems the park—especially the inhabitants of a camp buried deep in the forest—holds clues to what happened to Kier, and a lot more besides.

SUGAR ON THE BONES,

Joe R. Lansdale (July 16)

Hap and Leonard #13

Minnie Polson is dead. Burned to a crisp in a fire so big and bad it had to be deliberate. The only thing worse is that Hap and Leonard could have prevented it. Maybe. Minnie had a feeling she was being targeted, shaken down by some shadowy force. However, when she'd solicited Hap & Leonard, all it took was one off color joke to turn her sour and she'd called them off the investigation. Wracked with a guilty conscience, the two PIs—along with Hap's fleet-footed wife, Brett—tuck in to the case.

SHANGHAI, Joseph Kanon (July 16)

International Thriller

Daniel Lohr, a European Jew who fled the Nazis to live with his uncle in Shanghai after Kristallnacht, is sucked into the Chinese city's vice and violence.

SHADES OF MERCY,

Bruce Borgos (July 16)

Porter Beck #2

In the usually quiet high desert of Nevada, Sheriff Porter Beck faces one of his greatest challenges—a series of unlikely, disturbing and increasingly deadly events of unknown origins.

THE WRONG HANDS,

Mark Billingham (July 23)

Detective Miller #2

Unconventional Detective Declan



Miller has a problem. Well, two problems. First, there's his dead wife and her yet-to-be-solved murder. He really should stop talking to her ghosts... Second, and most pressing, a young man has just appeared on his doorstep with a briefcase . . . containing a pair of severed hands. Miller knows this case is proof of a contract killing commissioned by local ne'er do well Wayne Cutler—a man he suspects might also be responsible for his wife's death. Now Miller has leverage, but unfortunately, he also has something that both Cutler and a villainous fast-food kingpin are desperate to get hold of. **DP**

BAD RIVER, Marc Cameron (July 23)
Arliss Cutter #6

From a remote village perched on Arctic permafrost to the Badlands of South Dakota, searching for answers about his brother sets Arliss Cutter on an icy trail of murder and madness into the darkest heart of the Alaskan wilderness.

DEATH ON THE TIBER,
Lindsey Davis (July 23)
Flavia Albia #12

Ibia and Tiberius spot that a dredger has pulled a corpse out of the river, a corpse that bears evidence of foul play, although that fails to excite the author-

ities. A boatload of tourists of a well-heeled type has come and gone, leaving a mystery behind; it happens at a crucial time in the ever-warring gangster community. Albia will have to consider not only Rome's endemic violence but the failings of the various public bodies who are supposed to tackle crime and threats to the community.

WHAT HAVE YOU DONE?,
Shari Lapena (July 30)
Domestic Suspense Novel

Nothing ever happens in sleepy little Fairhill, Vermont. The teenagers get their kicks telling ghost stories in the old graveyard. The parents trust their kids will arrive home safe from school. Everyone knows everyone. Curtains rarely twitch. Front doors are left unlocked. But this morning all of that will change. Because Diana Brewer isn't lying safely in her bed where she belongs. Instead she lies in a hayfield, circled by vultures, discovered by a local farmer.

RETURN TO WYLDCLIFFE HEIGHTS, Carol Goodman (July 30)
Psychological Suspense

Agnes Corey, a junior editor at a small independent publisher, has been hired by enigmatic author Veronica St. Clair to transcribe the sequel to her 1993 hit phenomenon, *The Secret of Wyldcliffe Heights*. St. Clair has been a recluse since the publication of the Jane Eyre-esque book, which coincided with a terrible fire that blinded and scarred her. Arriving in the Hudson Valley at St. Clair's crumbling estate, which was once a psychiatric hospital for "wayward women," Agnes is eager to ensure St. Clair's devoted fans will get the sequel they've been anticipating for the past thirty years.

LOOK IN THE MIRROR,
Catherine Steadman (July 30)
Domestic/Psychological Suspense
Nina, still grieving from the loss of her father, discovers that she has inherited property in the British Virgin Islands—a vacation home she had no idea existed, until now. The house is extraordinary: state-of-the-art, all glass and marble. How did her sensible father

come into enough money for this? Why did he keep it from her? And what else was he hiding?

BLOOD LIKE MINE,
Stuart Neville (August 6)
Standalone Thriller

On a snowy December night, single mother Rebecca Carter drives her van into a snowbank to avoid hitting an elk on a desolate mountain highway. She is at the end of her rope, out of money and food. Still, she refuses help from a man in a pickup truck—Rebecca's adolescent daughter, Moonflower, is on the run from a grisly secret, and the last thing they can afford is to be remembered by anyone they meet. Meanwhile, Special Agent Marc Donner of the FBI has spent the better part of two years hunting down a gruesome serial killer who drains victims of blood before severing their spinal cords, leaving a trail of bodies throughout the American West. As Agent Donner's investigation brings him closer and closer to where Rebecca and Moonflower are hiding out, in the foothills of Colorado, the life that Rebecca has fought so hard to hold together for her daughter becomes increasingly imperiled.

BETWEEN A FLOCK AND A HARD PLACE, Donna Andrews (August 6)
Meg Langslow #35

Meg's neighbors, the Smetkamps', have won a makeover for their old home from *Marvelous Mansions*, a flashy, yet dubious company, focused on making historic homes more "modern." The company already several days into its makeover of the Smetkamps' house, and tensions are running high - not only between the officious, demanding Mrs. Smetkamp and her neighbors, but also between her and the renovation crew. Meg, who is trying to keep the peace and prevent the makeover crew from trampling on every clause of the county's building code, arrives at the Smetkamps to find that Caerphilly's resident flock of feral turkeys has moved into their yard - or been relocated there by someone who wanted to cause them trouble. Meg does what she can to calm

down the irate neighbors and help the makeover crew make progress in spite of the turkeys. She comes up with a plan to gather a group of turkey wranglers to snatch them early in the morning. But when they arrive, they find the body of Mrs. Smetkamp in her backyard.

A WORLD OF HURT,
Mindy Mejia (August 6)
Standalone Thriller

Kara Johnson always knew she'd die young and violently. It didn't matter who delivered the final blow, she would deserve it—her years spent running drugs and spreading violence would guarantee it. But death doesn't always go as planned. When her girlfriend sacrifices herself to save Kara's life, Kara is left grieving and adrift. She doesn't know why she's alive until the DEA shows up and offers her a choice: go to prison or turn informant to lure out the last of the drug trafficking ring that murdered her girlfriend.

FIRE AND BONES,
Kathy Reichs (August 6)
Temperance Brennan #23

It's never easy working fire scenes, Tempe thinks. Called to Washington, DC, to analyze the victims of a building set ablaze amid mysterious circumstances, she sees all her misgivings justified. The building site is in Foggy Bottom, a neighborhood with a colorful past and present, and the property's ownership becomes even more suspicious when Tempe delves into its past.

The pieces start falling into place strangely and quickly, and, sensing a good story, Tempe teams with a new ally, telejournalist Ivy Doyle. Soon the duo learns that back in the thirties and forties the home was the hangout of a group of bootleggers and racketeers known as the Foggy Bottom Gang. Though interesting, this fact seems irrelevant—until the son of a Foggy Bottom gang member is shot dead at his farm in Fairfax County.

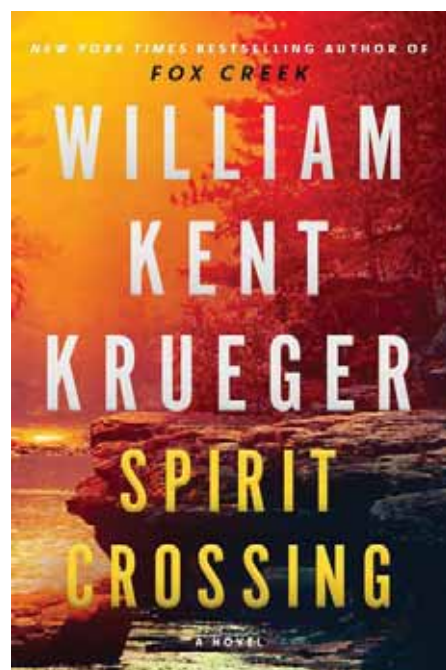
BANQUET OF BEGGARS,
Chris Lloyd (August 15)
Detective Eddie Giral #3

In Paris 1940, survival means sacrifice. Like most in the city, Detective Eddie Giral has already lost so much under Occupation: the people he once loved, the job he once believed in. And his latest investigation into the murder of a black-marketeer has made it clearer than ever: Eddie is no longer just catching criminals. He's working for them. Because when a German trader is the next to die, the authorities decide it's innocent civilians who will pay the price - unless Eddie can find the killer in time.

FIRST STRIKE, Stephen Leather
(August 20 *in U.K. only*)
Spider Shepherd #21
No plot summary available

SPIRIT CROSSING, William Kent
Krueger (August 20)
Cork O'Connor #20

The disappearance of a local politician's teenaged daughter is major news in Minnesota. As a huge manhunt is launched to find her, Cork O'Connor's grandson stumbles across the shallow grave of a young Ojibwe woman—but nobody seems that interested. Nobody, that is, except Cork and the newly formed Iron Lake Ojibwe Tribal Police. As Cork and the tribal officers dig into the circumstances of this mysterious



and grim discovery, they uncover a connection to the missing teenager. And soon, it's clear that Cork's grandson is in danger of being the killer's next victim.

A GRAVE IN THE WOODS,
Martin Walker (August 20)
Bruno, Chief of Police #17

When Abby, an American archeologist, arrives in St. Denis on the heels of her divorce, she hopes to make a new life for herself as a specialist guide for visiting tourists. So when a local British couple discover a World War II-era grave on their property, Abby is able to put her training to good use. As it turns out, in the grave are the remains of two German women and an Italian submarine officer who had a big secret to hide. The women are suspected of having had links to the German garri-son in Bordeaux during the war. It's up to Bruno, just recovered from a gunshot wound earlier in the year, to unravel the mystery.

CITY OF SECRETS,
P. J. Tracy (August 20)
Detective Margaret Nolan #4

Los Angeles Police Detective Margaret Nolan and her partner have worked a lot of different cases, ones where things aren't always as they appear. When they're called to the scene of what looks like a fatal car-jacking, Nolan soon realizes her victim was a founder of a company about to sell for millions, and within a day of his death, his partner's wife is abducted. As Nolan learns more about the victim and his life, she gets pulled into a disturbing world of sex, violence, and big business

SANCTUARY,
Garry Disher (August 22 *in U.K. only*)
Standalone Thriller

Grace is a thief -- a good one. But she's always on the move, always looking over her shoulder, always alone. It's not the life she wants. Then a run-in with an old associate forces her to lie low in a small rural town, where she happens across an antiques shop. The owner Erin is timid but friendly, and has a room to rent. And Grace glimpses a different life, and perhaps a home. But there are

dangerous men watching her, and Grace should know better than to let her guard slip.

THE DARK WIVES, Ann Cleeves
(August 27)

Vera Stanhope #11

The man's body is found in the early morning light by a local dog walker in the park outside Rosebank, a care home for troubled teens in the coastal village of Longwater. The victim is Josh, a staff member, who was due to work the previous night but never showed up. DI Vera Stanhope is called out to investigate the death, with her only clue being the disappearance of one of the home's residents, fourteen year old Chloe Spence. Vera can't bring herself to believe that a teenager is responsible for the murder, but even she can't dismiss the possibility. Vera, Joe and new team member Rosie Bell, are soon embroiled in the case, and when a second connected body is found.

DEATH AT THE SIGN OF THE ROOK, Kate Atkinson (September 3)
Jackson Brodie #6

Marooned overnight by a snowstorm is a cast of characters and a setting that even Agatha Christie might recognize – a vicar, an Army major, a Dowager, a sleuth and his sidekick - except that the sleuth is Jackson Brodie, and the 'sidekick' is DC Reggie Chase.

THE REAPING,
Jess Lourey (September 3)
Steinbeck & Reed #2

Unorthodox BCA agent Evangeline "Van" Reed and by-the-book forensic scientist Harry Steinbeck are reunited to catch a cold case killer who's back, abducting a small town's children one by one.

PRECIPICE, Robert Harris
(September 3)

Standalone Historical Thriller
Summer 1914. A world on the brink of catastrophe. In London, 26-year-old Venetia Stanley – aristocratic, clever, bored, reckless – is having a love affair with the Prime Minister, H. H. Asquith, a man more than twice her age. He

writes to her obsessively, sharing the most sensitive matters of state. As Asquith reluctantly leads the country into war with Germany, a young intelligence officer is assigned to investigate a leak of top secret documents – and suddenly what was a sexual intrigue becomes a matter of national security

LEO, Deon Meyer
(September 5 in U.K.; in U.S. ?)
Griessel & Cupido,
South African Police Procedural

THE BLACK LOCH,
Peter May (September 12)
Fin Macleod #4
The body of eighteen-year-old TV



personality Kathleen is found abandoned on a remote beach at the head of An Loch Dubh - the Black Loch - on the west coast of the Isle of Lewis. A swimmer and canoeist, it is inconceivable that she could have drowned. Fin Macleod left the island ten years earlier to escape its memories. When he learns that his married son Fionnlagh had been having a clandestine affair with the dead girl and is suspected of her murder, he and Marsaili return to try and clear his name.

MURDER TOWN,
Shelley Burr (September 17)

Standalone Crime Novel

Gemma Guillory has lived in the Australian Outback enclave of Rainier her entire life. She knows the tiny, red-dust town's ins and outs by heart, the people like they are her family, their quirks as if they were her own. She also knows her once charming town is now remembered for one reason and one reason only: three innocent people died there at the hands of a serial killer. The last stop on the Rainier Ripper's trail of deaths fifteen years ago was her picturesque little tea shop. She knows that the consequences of catching the Ripper still haunt her policeman husband and their marriage to this day, and some of her neighbours are desperate enough to welcome a dark tourism company keen to cash in on Rainier's notoriety as the "murder town."

I DREAMED OF FALLING,
Julia Dahl (September 17)
Standalone Crime Novel

Roman Grady is the sole reporter for the local newspaper in a tiny Hudson Valley town - a town so small that every store opening and DUI is considered newsworthy. But when Roman's long-time girlfriend, Ashley, the mother of his four-year-old son, is found dead, he realizes he had no idea what was really going on in her life. And when he starts asking questions, he's not prepared for the answers. What was Ashley doing at the cliffside home of her troubled ex-girlfriend? How did no one in a house full of people see what happened to her? And why does it seem like everyone in town suddenly has something to hide? As Roman and his mother dig into Ashley's last few months, the truths they uncover threaten to expose painful secrets.

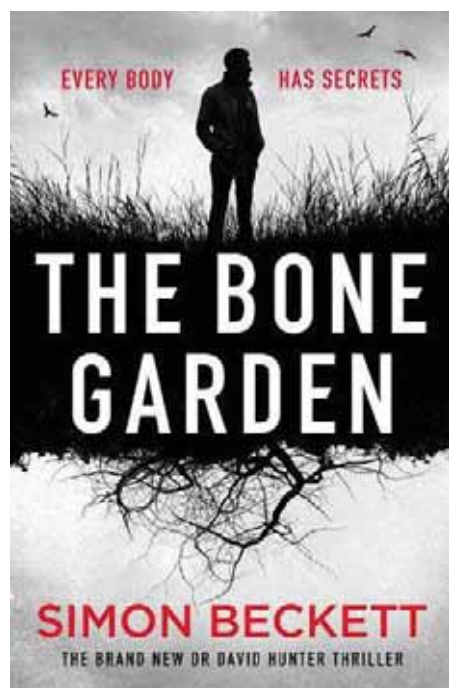
ASHES NEVER LIE,
Lee Goldberg (September 24)
Sharpe & Walker #2 (Also Eve Ronin)

Vacant homes in a new housing development are erupting into flames in broad daylight with no apparent cause. It's a perplexing mystery for dogged arson investigator Walter Sharpe and his restless new partner Andrew Walker, an ex-U.S. Marshal who craves action. But

as they puzzle over the blaze, another home miles away burns to the ground, leaving a man's corpse in the ashes and homicide detectives Eve Ronin and Duncan Pavone demanding answers. The burn patterns and the charred body tell Sharpe a bizarre story that only creates more questions for Eve. So the four detectives team up to find the answers. Their investigation into the two, unrelated cases leads to one shocking discovery after another.

THE BONE GARDEN, Simon Beckett
(October 3 in U.K. only)
Dr. David Hunter #7

Driving back through Wales in a fierce winter storm, forensic anthro-



pologist David Hunter is forced to seek shelter at a remote village in the Eryri mountains. But a one-night stop-over becomes something very different after a gruesome discovery in depths of the local forest. With communications down and the only road washed out by the storm, Hunter is unsure who - if anyone - he can trust. And as long-buried secrets begin to emerge, he's knows that, whatever dark past the isolated community might be hiding, there's no one he can call on for help.

DEAD GROUND,
Graham Hurley (October 8 in U.K. only)

Spoils of War #9
Set in the Spanish Civil War

THE SERPENT UNDER,
Bonnie MacBird (October 15)
Sherlock Holmes #6
Murder, jealousy, and deceit underscore three interlocking mysteries as Holmes and Watson take on a high profile case at Windsor Castle, a boy drowned in the Serpentine, and a crusading women's rights activist who suspects a traitor in her organisation

NOBODY'S HERO,
M. W. Craven (October 15)
Ben Koenig #2

The reappearance of a woman thought long dead results in a safe in Langley being opened for the first time in ten years. Inside there is a letter. On it is written, 'The Acacia Avenue Protocol has been initiated.' Four names are listed underneath. Three of the people on the list are dead. The fourth name is Ben Koenig. Koenig doesn't know why he's on the list and he doesn't know what the Acacia Avenue Protocol is. But he does know the woman who has reappeared. One of the bravest women Koenig has ever met, ten years ago he was asked by a senior intelligence officer to help her fake her own death. Koenig didn't ask why she had to die but he knows one thing for sure: if she's resurfaced then something is very wrong. **DP**

IN TOO DEEP, Lee & Andrew Child
(October 21)
Jack Reacher #29

Reacher had no idea where he was. No idea how he had got there. But someone must have brought him. And shackled him. And whoever had done those things was going to rue the day.

ICE TOWN, Will Dean
(November 7 in the U.K. only)
Journalist Tuva Moodyson #6
Deaf teenager goes missing in Esseberg. Mountain rescue are launching a search party but conditions hinder their efforts. V The tunnel is being kept open all night as an exception. When journalist Tuva Moodyson reads this news alert she knows she must join the search. If

this teenager is found, she will be able to communicate with him in a way no one else can.

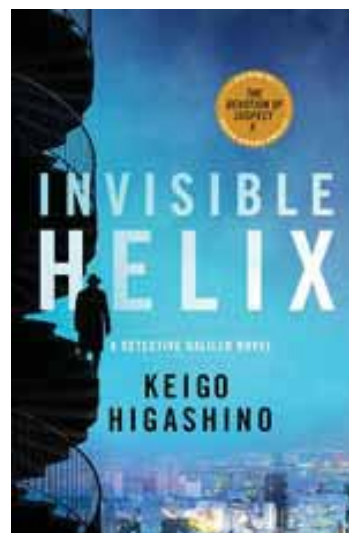
OUT IN THE COLD, Steve Urszenyi
(November 12)
Alexandra Martel #2

Special Agent Alex Martel is thrown back into a deadly world of deception when a series of attacks threaten to incite World War III in this action-packed thriller.

AGAINST THE GRAIN,
Peter Lovesey (November 14)
Peter Diamond #22

When his former deputy, Julie, invites Detective Peter Diamond and his partner Paloma to spend a week at her home in the depths of rural Somerset, Diamond is horrified. What could be worse than seven days in the back end of nowhere with nothing to do? But it turns out that Julie has an ulterior motive. A local woman is doing time for manslaughter after a wild party ended in a tragic accident: a man suffocated in a silo of grain. Nobody in the village has much sympathy for Claudia, the unruly daughter of a wealthy local farmer. Nobody that is, except Julie, who is convinced there's more to this case than there appears, and wants her former boss to investigate.

INVISIBLE HELIX, Keigo Higashino
(December 17)
Detective Galileo #5
No plot summary available



A Visit From the Book Broad

Meredith Anthony



ARGYLLE

by Elly Conway
Ballantine; \$28.99, January
Debut Novel
Rating: H (for Hilarious)

First line: There are few places on earth more desolate than southeastern Siberia at dawn on a biting cold March morning.

Elly Conway's **ARGYLLE** arrived in my mail and I read it as if it were a legitimate debut thriller. My conclusion was that it was a near miss, like reading the Classics comic book version of DR. NO. It's enjoyable enough, but it skims the surface like a movie treatment (which it is; the film and the book are being released in tandem in the U.S.).

What I didn't know is that **ARGYLLE**, the novel, is evidently a silly secret marketing project, like the **CASTLE** book series—made to augment an entertainment phenomenon. As such, it is inspired nonsense. Case in point, some are speculating that Elly Conway is actually a pseudonym for Taylor Swift or maybe J.K. Rowling!

But, for what it's worth, here's my review of the book.

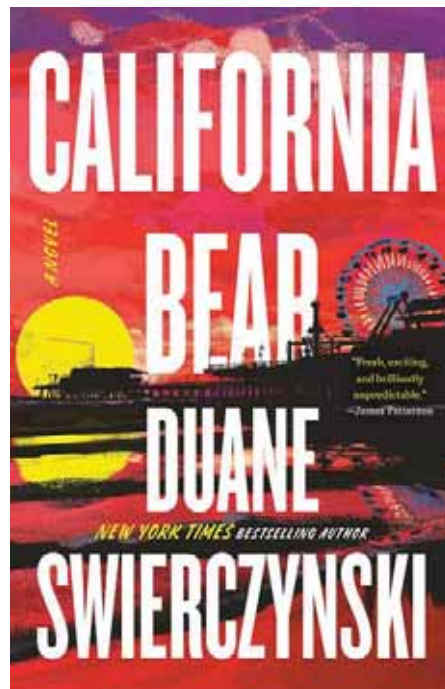
Aubrey Argyle, an orphan and outcast, is living in Thailand and minding his own business. One day, he impulsively saves the lives of two victims of a plane crash, sparing them a terrible fate at the hands of ruthless Thai drug smugglers. The people he saved were in the CIA. As a result, the CIA recruits the reluctant Argyle and assigns him to a team tasked with stopping Vasily Federov, a super-wealthy Russian madman who aspires to become president (a kind of Boleshevik Donald Trump).

The action moves from a luxe Monte

Carlo ballroom to the treacherous mountains of southwest Poland, with the obligatory stops in Manhattan, London and Paris. The first MacGuffin is a bracelet with a coded message. The second MacGuffin is the legendary Amber Room, an architectural masterpiece lost during WW II. This cultural treasure, when found, will evidently unite Russian voters in support of the right-wing, neo-nazi Federov. The trained CIA team reluctantly makes room for the outsider, Argyle, with his mad skills and moral compass. But someone is leaking their plans to the Russians who anticipate their every move.

The movie, reportedly, leverages the book by contending that the author of a series of fictional thrillers is being pursued when the books start coming true.

Read it if you like being ahead of the cultural curve. Also, it's fun.



CALIFORNIA BEAR

by Duane Swierczynski
Mulholland Books; \$29.00, January
Rating: A

First line: The California Bear, a serial torturer-murderer who had eluded justice for close to four decades, wanted a cookie.

Duane Swierczynski's thoroughly delightful **CALIFORNIA BEAR** is a must read for fans of humorous mysteries. For fans of mysteries, period, for that matter.

A serial killer, a fifteen-year-old girl, an ex-con, and an ex-cop all collide in Los Angeles. Each has a secret agenda. Jack Queen, who has just been released from prison after being exonerated, just wants to reconnect with his daughter. Matilda, fifteen and very smart, has recently been diagnosed with leukemia. She wants to clear her father's name and finish her freshman year of high school. Ex-cop Hightower wants a share of the financial reparations due to Jack. And The Bear wants to return to his murderous heyday. What could go wrong?

Long one of the best stylists in the business, Duane Swierczynski has written some of the most indelible characters and most memorable comedic scenes in mystery history. Who can forget the dying man who finds the circumstances of his death so ironic that he dies laughing?

Swierczynski's early books were set in his native Philadelphia. His recent ones are set in L.A., where he lives now. He may have had to work harder to wring comedy out of the City of Brotherly Love, but L.A. is comedy gold with cult figures like Angelyne, who predated the Kardashians in being famous for

being famous and is name-checked here.

Highly recommended.

PAST LYING

by Val McDermid

Atlantic Monthly Press; \$27.00,

November, 2023

Karen Pirie #7

Rating: B

First line: He really believed it was a madcap game.

Val McDermid's latest Karen Pirie novel is set in Edinburgh during the 2020 Covid lockdown and the police, like everyone else, are hampered in what they can do and how they can do it. DCI Pirie is living in her boyfriend's apartment, but not with her boyfriend who is stuck miles away. She is sharing it with Daisy Mortimer, a member of her Historic Cases squad. When another member of her squad gets a call from a librarian about something odd she noticed in a dead mystery writer's archives, Karen and Daisy begin to unravel a cold case of a missing girl.

Mystery books about writers of mystery books are tricky. Frequently, writers write them gleefully but for readers it's less of a treat. They are often too precious, too smug, and too annoying to be really good. That is a little bit the case here. The beginning of the book, where the housebound cops are reading a dead writer's manuscript is so off-putting that I nearly gave up. Luckily, my trust in Val McDermid as a terrific writer kept me going. And after the first few chapters, the book swings into gear and you settle in for the ride.

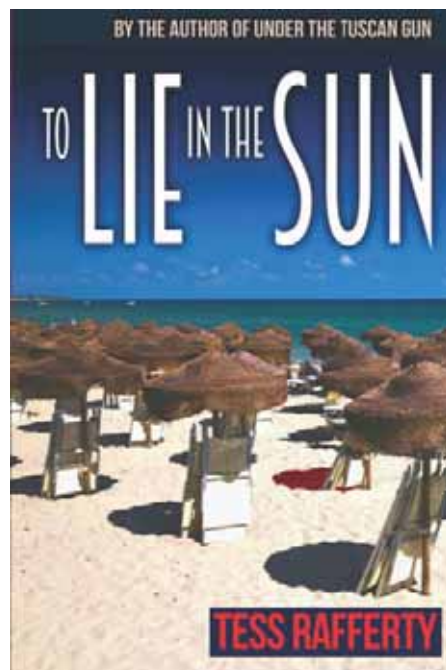
But for mystery writers and die-hard mystery fans, there is something a little cringey about the description of a cliquish group of top writers whose friendship is laced with jealousy and whose camaraderie has a quid pro quo aspect as they jockey for fans and sales and contracts and money.

The plot concentrates on two writers, one whose brilliant career is on the downswing and the other who is a rising star. The two play chess regularly and their games are not their only form of

rivalry. One of them dies suddenly of an aneurism while the rising star becomes ever more successful. But why does a manuscript left behind seem to outline a murder that seems designed to implicate an author whose search for the perfect crime has gotten a little out of hand?

The twisty plot is unraveled by detectives who have strict lockdown rules and must do more cerebral work than leg-work on a case that, luckily, needs more thought than action.

The personal lives of Karen and her two colleagues are also tangled and have to be sorted out. *PAST LYING* (worst title ever?) strikes me as a book that McDermid dared herself to write—a crime during lockdown that has to be solved by detectives whose personal lives are also affected by the disease. Not McDermid's best effort by a long shot, but an interesting twisty puzzle book.



TO LIE IN THE SUN

by Tess Rafferty

\$13.99, 2022

Kat Kelly #3

Rating: A

First line: We were all about to die.

My favorite new amateur sleuth series, Tess Rafferty's Kat Kelly mysteries, has a great third entry with *TO LIE IN THE SUN*. Once more, married TV

writers, Kat and Mike (also known as The Husband), go to Italy to stay in a resort on the island of Ischia, off Naples. Covid prevents Kat's friend Sunny and her family from joining them, but Kat meets the glamorous former actress who runs the resort and takes an interest in her fellow guests, one of whom is quickly murdered.

The resort's guests are an interesting bunch, many of them in Ischia for a local film festival. An elderly cinematographer and his wife, a stylish Black photographer; a strange British couple; a wealthy Italian family complete with gorgeous young people; a French mother and daughter who barely speak to one another. The numerous staff is equally complicated and equally mysterious.

When a member of the wealthy Gianni family is found dead—in fact, Kat actually stumbles over the body on her way to retrieve her cell phone from the beach—Kat's vacation is perfect. Her husband's hobby is photography, but Kat's is murder. And soon her old nemesis, Inspector Patti, shows up.

Updating a template reminiscent of Donald Bain and Renée Paley-Bain's beloved *MURDER SHE WROTE* series, the Kat Kelly mysteries always involve travel and murder. But Kat is totally of the moment, smart and hip, wry and charming. Relatable but more than a little effortlessly glamorous, Kat loves a good meal, a good wine, and a good mystery. She also cannot resist a nearby case of murder. And they always take place in Italy.

Join me in celebrating a woman amateur sleuth who cares about clothes, shoes, food, and wine with the same fervor she brings to seeking justice for those who suffer xenophobia, misogyny, and racism. Join me on Team Tess. Do not dismiss these books as fluff or chick lit. They are full of brains and heart. They rock!

Highly recommended.

SECOND SHOT

by Cindy Dees

Kensington; \$27.00, May 2023

Rating: C

First line: Helen Warwick stared at

the glossy black door with its period-accurate brass knocker and kickplate.

Cindy Dees' **SECOND SHOT** is a good but ultimately flawed spy thriller.

Helen Warwick, a newly retired CIA assassin, is trying to reconnect with her family. Her husband, a scientist, is traveling but her sons both live near her in Washington, D.C. Her eldest son is busy preparing for his political future. Her younger son, a successful art dealer with a partner who works for the government, is especially resentful of his mother's frequent absences and lack of parenting skills. She wants to make it up to him and offers to dog-sit for their new puppy on New Year's Eve.

When a four-man team of killers starts shooting up her son's impeccably decorated townhouse, Helen manages to kill three of them and save the puppy. But why is Helen being targeted?

In a parallel story line, a serial killer stalks the area. Known as the DaVinci Killer, he specializes in artistic thrill kills, reconstructions of famous paintings with fresh bodies that he positions to mimic familiar art. He photographs the results to post on the dark web. There is also a copycat, styling himself The Real DaVinci Killer, who videos his process as he also reconstructs paintings from bodies and body parts.

Eventually, of course, the two story lines intersect.

The book is engaging and well-written and Helen is a likeable protagonist. But the flaw, and it is a big one, is that **SECOND SHOT** violates one of the primary rules for series thrillers. Each thriller must have a story with a satisfying ending, while also leaving a door open for the sequel. **SECOND SHOT** does not resolve the story at all. It leaves the reader hanging, and not in a good way. The predominant feeling at the end is annoyance with the author for the long set-up and no conclusion. It's a shame. Until the end, it was a very good thriller, with a good central series character.

What is it with older, often retired spies these days? They're having a moment. And many of them are women. In the past year or so we've had **KILLERS**

OF A CERTAIN AGE by Deanna Raybourn, **THE SPY COAST** by Tess Gerritsen, **THE TRAITOR** by Ava Glass, **THE HELSINKI AFFAIR** from Anna Pitoniak, along with Richard Osman's Thursday Murder Club novels and Mick Herron's brilliant Slough House books. All of them excellent. All of them with satisfying endings.

EVERYONE ON THIS TRAIN IS A SUSPECT

by Benjamin Stevenson
Mariner Books; \$30.00, January, 2024

Rating: D

First line: The AMWF extends a very special welcome to our guest of honour: Henry McTavish.

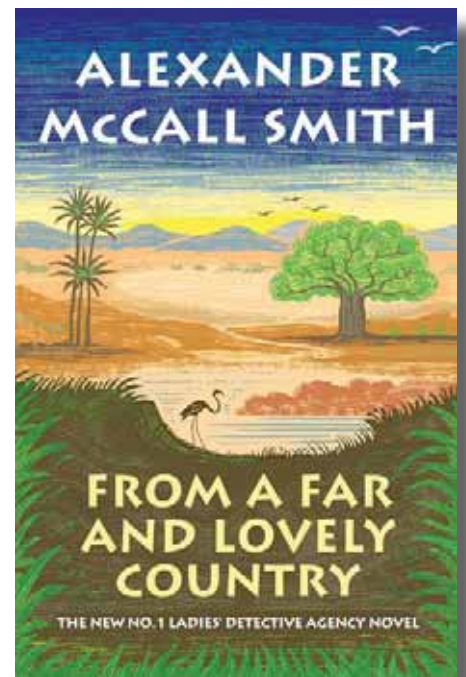
Benjamin Stevenson's **EVERYONE ON THIS TRAIN IS A SUSPECT** is the tiresome sequel to **EVERYONE IN MY FAMILY HAS KILLED SOMEONE**, which had the dubious merit of freshness.

By rights, these books should be among my favorites: interesting locations, twists galore, cheeky humor. But I just find them flat and annoying. Like certain silly movies that take farce too far (I'm looking at you, **Knives Out** and **Clue**), the tongue-in-cheek conceit of a mystery writer writing in the first person about a mystery he's involved in, sounds better than it plays.

The story takes place in Australia, on a train going the length the country from Darwin to Adelaide. The train is the locale for a mystery writer's conference where the narrator, Ernst Cunningham, author of the true-crime book, (wait for it...) **EVERYONE IN MY FAMILY HAS KILLED SOMEONE** and author of the unfolding narrative here, is joined by five relatively successful mystery authors, along with a publisher, an agent, and some die-hard (pun intended) fans. Very soon the very famous guest of honor is dead. Mayhem ensues. Yawn.

FROM A FAR AND LOVELY COUNTRY

by Alexander McCall Smith
Pantheon; \$28.00, October, 2023



Rating: A

First line: Precious Ramotswe, daughter of the last Obed Ramotswe of Mochudi, near Gaborone, in Botswana, near Heaven, wife of Mr. J.L.B. Matekoni, *garagiste*; friend to so many, but particularly to Mma Silvia Potokwane, and of course Grace Makutsi, formerly of Bobonong, who was, in turn, wife of Mr. Phuti Radiphuti and a graduate of the Botswana Secretarial College—with ninety-seven per cent in the final examinations; *that* Precious Ramotswe lay in her bed, opening first one eye, then the other, and subsequently, after only a few short seconds, closing both once more.

Alexander McCall Smith's latest entry in his long-running and beloved No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency novels, has given us a lovely story in **FROM A FAR AND LOVELY COUNTRY**. Mma Ramotswe, the founder of the No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency, not only solves mysteries for her clients but also acts as a fixer when needed.

One of the women who works for her friend Mma Potokwane at the Orphan's Farm describes a problem at a new local club, the Cool Singles Evening Club, which promises singles the opportunity to meet singles, but actually allows married men to prey on unsuspecting

single women. A second case involves an American woman looking for her relatives in Botswana.

As Mma Ramotswe pursues the cases, she has time to ruminate on her life and accomplishments. As is usual in this lovely series, we find ourselves ruminating on ours, as well. Among the many pleasures of these books are the life lessons found in them.

If you're new to them, binge on the entire series. You'll be a better person for it!

HOW TO SOLVE YOUR OWN MURDER

by Kristen Perrin
Dutton; \$28.00, March, 2024
Rating: D

First line: Your future contains dry bones.

The best thing about **HOW TO SOLVE YOUR OWN MURDER** is the title. This is a debut adult mystery by children's book author Kristin Perrin and it's terrible. Crammed with too many characters, two timelines, various limp romances, and a murder or two, Perrin was clearly throwing in everything to try to create and sustain a sense of mystery that eludes her.

Would-be writer Annie Adams is summoned from her home in London to visit her estranged great-aunt Frances Adams, a wealthy and paranoid recluse. When she gets there Frances is dead, murdered. And her will challenges Annie to solve her killing and, as a reward, inherit her sizable estate. When Frances was young she and two best friends, Rose and Emily, had been inseparable and shared everything including their boyfriends. But Emily disappears and Frances believes she is cursed and... well, mayhem ensues.

None of the time frames feel real in this mess of a novel. 1965, when Frances was a young woman and Emily was her mean-girl best friend, is bland and flavorless. Ditto the present when her great-niece Annie is a young woman. The English countryside feels similarly flat. The setting could easily have been upstate New York or small-town

Massachusetts. Frances' diaries contain clues and the action plods from chapter to chapter with Annie asking questions and blundering around the stately home. A generically handsome local policeman is, of course, on hand. As was the generically handsome young aristocrat that provided a love interest for Frances two generations previously.

Save your money and reread Agatha Christie instead.

THE FRAMED WOMEN OF ARDEMORE HOUSE

by Brandy Schillace
Hanover Square, \$30.00, February, 2024
Debut Novel
Rating: B

First line: The house was *enormous*.

Brandy Schillace's debut novel, **THE FRAMED WOMEN OF ARDEMORE HOUSE**, features an autistic American woman, the last in her family, who inherits a run-down stately home in England. Mayhem ensues.

There is a trend, right now, to write central characters who are on the spectrum. Arguably, the trend began with Sherlock Holmes. In any case, sleuths with Asberger's or autism abound. However, whether or not the author has personal experience with autism, the task of making the character both believable and likeable is very difficult. Jo Jones is the least believable autistic heroine in recent memory, her symptoms and tics becoming less pronounced, and her social awkwardness equally variable. Her special skills of fast reading and a near photographic memory come in handy but do not seem integral to the plot.

Jo arrives in England where an uncle she had never met has died and she meets the solicitor who manages the estate she inherits. He shows her the property and introduces her to the local groundskeeper who instantly annoys her. She moves into the cottage on the property. When a painting she had glimpsed vanishes from the main house, she fires the groundskeeper. When he is found murdered, she is instantly a suspect. But the local detective believes her and soon they team up to solve

the crime, despite the interference of a judgmental higher-ranking detective who arrives on the scene. Many secrets are unearthed. A local historian and a Welsh antiques dealer are consulted. Books are read, maps are studied, dreams are dreamed. Slow-moving and tedious, the crime eventually gets solved. An astute reader would be way ahead of them.

MURDER IN THE FAMILY

by Cara Hunter
Morrow; \$19.99, September, 2023
Rating: B-



Cara Hunter's **MURDER IN THE FAMILY** is a gimmick book that, like many gimmick books, kind of works. Written as the chronicle of an 8-part British true crime TV series, it consists of publicity materials, bios, call-sheets, episode shooting scripts, emails, texts and chats. It also has newspaper clippings, photos, maps, autopsy reports, diagrams, and other ancillary materials.

Filmmaker Guy Howard is directing the project which examines a cold case from his own past. Guy was 10 years old when his stepfather was murdered. The killer's identity is still a mystery now, 30 years later. Hoping for answers and closure, Guy has enlisted a police detective, a journalist, a criminal prosecutor, a crime scene investigator, a forensic psychologist and a retired New York cop, along with a producer and a crew, to review the original investigation and where possible talk to witnesses and members of his own family.

From the epistolary novels like Samuel Richardson's **PAMELA** to the video log of Andy Weir's **THE MARTIAN**

and Catie Disabato's texts in **U UP?**, writers have been playing with switching up the narrative to new forms with varying degrees of success.

Cleverly constructed and full of interesting developments, the plot in **MURDER IN THE FAMILY** still suffers from the tricky format and overly complicated delivery. But if you don't mind the annoyance (or actually seek out the innovative structure), you might like it.

THE SECRET HOURS

by Mick Herron

Soho Press; \$27.95, September, 2023

Rating: A

First line: The worst smell in the world is a dead badger.

THE SECRET HOURS, an exceptional spy thriller by the exceptional Mick Herron, is both stand-alone and prequel to the Slough House (**SLOW HORSES**) books. And it is a spy thriller that actually acts like a spy thriller: a burst of action followed by a long, slow, careful build-up, a belated introduction to the central figures, a gradual unpacking of the plot, secrets galore, and a finish that is both satisfying and heart-breaking on so many levels. A dense, complex British spy thriller that is note perfect. The beginning vets the reader



and tests their stamina. The withholding of the central character is proof that you have earned it. The connections to the Slough House books are yours to discover and links are yours to decode. You must actually be a spy to read this outstanding thriller.

Retired spy Max Janacek has been living quietly for twenty years in a small cottage in a remote village when thugs break in during the night and try to abduct him. Or worse. He barely gets away. The attack had to have been triggered by new attention to events in Berlin that have never been brought to light.

In London, a committee has been set up to examine some details of the Intelligence Service, earning the wrath of First Desk, the head of the spy agency. When the committee is formed, First Desk stipulates rules that make the committee's work impossible to perform. But when the committee receives a document that should never have left the archives, the two hapless agents in charge of the impossible work of the committee suddenly grow a backbone and mayhem ensues.

One adorable note: reviewers are often sent a pre-publication ARC or Advance Readers Copy, and in the one from Soho Press there is a letter from the publisher inviting the reader to take a look and hinting at interesting revelations. But the letter itself is full of redactions! Perfect! Adorable!

THE SECRET HOURS is a spy book that must be read by actual spies. So, go to your safe house, sharpen up your tradecraft, keep your wits about you, and approach with your mission with caution. Enjoy!

THE LAST DEVIL TO DIE

by Richard Osman

Viking; \$29.00, September, 2023

Rating: A

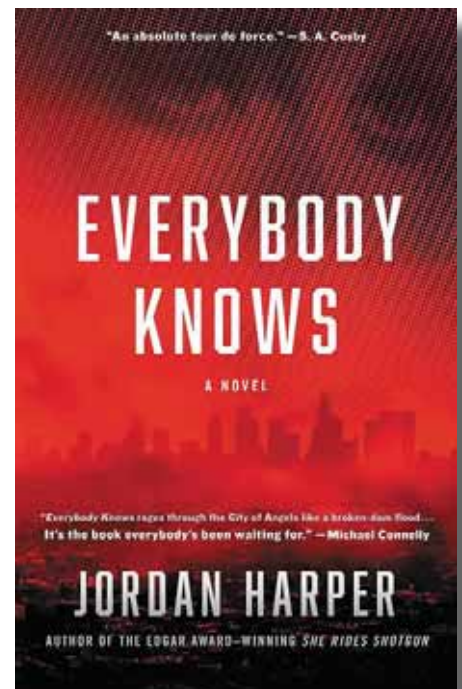
First line: Kuldesch Sharma hopes he's in the right place.

Another great entry in the immensely appealing Thursday Murder Club series, Richard Osman's **THE LAST DEVIL TO DIE** has thrills, puzzles, charm, laughs, and life lessons, all rolled

up together.

In a retirement community in Kent, four friends meet regularly to solve murders. It's a hobby, like golf or pickle ball. When a friend, an antiques dealer who lives nearby, is found murdered, the four launch their own investigation. When ex-spy Elizabeth is distracted by issues at home, her friend and side-kick Joyce steps up and leads the team. Another supporting player, Ibriham, a retired psychiatrist who still practices a little, plays a major role since his best client is an incarcerated drug lord who can help connect a hapless antiques dealer with a major underworld kingpin.

But perhaps the most affecting story line, told without sentimentality or embellishment, concerns end of life issues and decisions. Delineated with deliberation and clarity, this is as good a depiction of how intelligent people make important personal decisions as you'll find.



EVERYBODY KNOWS

by Jordan Harper

Mulholland; \$28.00, January, 2023

Rating: A

First line: Los Angeles burns.

Jordan Harper's **EVERYBODY KNOWS** is an updated example of LA

noir, conjuring up a sense of pervasive malice that slowly morphs into palpable evil. This is as dark as noir gets.

Mae is a publicist, a black bag girl who handles bad situations for her firm's celebrity clients and spins a new narrative that everybody can live with. She is very good at what she does.

Chris, Mae's onetime lover, is a "muscle," a fist who metes out punishment for the unwise or unlucky who have crossed his firm's elite clients. He, too, is very good at what he does.

Both Mae and Chris are beginning to tire of their roles. What was once exciting is now routine, even disgusting. They are separately beginning to hate themselves.

But Mae's charismatic boss and mentor, Dan, meets with her off-site to talk to her about an off-books job, a dangerous mission of the utmost secrecy and importance. He gives Mae a day to decide if she's in or out. Before she can tell him she's in, Dan is killed in a seemingly random car-jacking gone wrong. Mae knows there was nothing random about it.

Chris and Mae team up, trying to ignore their obvious chemistry, to unravel the plot, save the next victim, and punish the untouchable kingpin behind it. Bodies pile up as they pursue the slenderest of leads. And they're pretty sure they're next.

The bad guys? Imagine putting Harvey Weinstein, Jeffrey Epstein, Elon Musk and maybe Kanye West in a blender (and who hasn't imagined doing that?) and pressing puree. Add some kale and you have **EVERYBODY KNOWS**. Drink it in.

Darker than dark, the writing is fresh and new, without the fustiness that most neo-noirs bring with them. Deeply affecting. Breathtaking. Heart-breaking. Gorgeous.

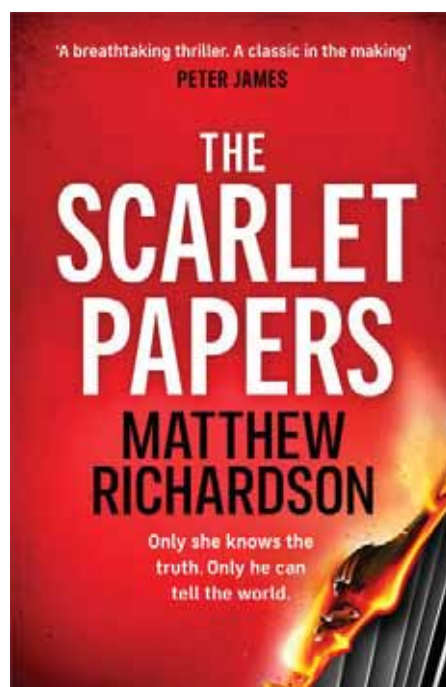
A must read.

THE SCARLET PAPERS

by Matthew Richardson

Michael Joseph/Penguin; \$29.99

Rating: C



First line: It all started with the card.

Matthew Richardson's **THE SCARLET PAPERS** is a long, tedious slog of a spy story, padded, repetitive and glum. From the country that brought us James Bond, George Smiley, Bernard Samson, and, most recently, Jackson Lamb, we now have the forgettable Scarlet King and Max Archer. The mighty, indeed, have fallen.

Max Archer, broke, divorced and a failure by almost any standard, is a professor of intelligence history – the history of spying – at the London School of Economics. His wife has left him, his books aren't selling, his job is in jeopardy. When he gets a note from a famous spy asking for a secret meeting, he jumps at the chance. A real-life scoop might reinvigorate his flagging career. When the legendary Scarlet King says she will allow him to publish her memoir, he knows it will change his life. Soon, however, Scarlet is dead, he is a suspect and on the run from the British intelligence services who want to stop and perhaps kill him, rather than let him reveal their longest held secrets.

Poorly written and clumsily constructed, **THE SCARLET PAPERS**

drags out Max's adventures and goes back in time to crucial periods in Scarlet's life: the end of World War II in the 1940s, the cold war in the '60s, the '90s, and today.

The book name-checks the usual trappings of British spy fiction: joes and handlers, double and triple agents, legends and covers, sleepers and moles. Although Richardson lists pages of reference books at the end of this novel, it seems he learned most of his lore the way we all do, from thrillers and movies.

The plot is weak. The book's various surprises are telegraphed long in advance and will fail to stun even a moderately attentive reader of spy fiction.

The author tells us (over and over and over) how the secrets Scarlet can reveal would shake the world and rewrite history. I assume that this insistence and its repetition are designed to disguise the fact that the stakes here are actually the lowest in espionage history. The revelation of Scarlet's closely held secrets would, at best, mildly embarrass a few elderly Brits. Big yawn. In fact, the book notes that Americans already lived through a similar revelation with no visible effect.

If you're looking for a new spy series and have already discovered the amazing Mick Herron, try **THE SPY COAST**, the first in a new series by Tess Gerritsen. Or pick up **THE PEACOCK AND THE SPARROW**, an excellent debut novel by I.S. Berry. Unless you are an espionage completist, I'd give this one a pass.

[Editor's Note: George Easter, Jeff Popple and Steele Curry strongly disagree with this assessment. We all picked **THE SCARLET PAPERS** as one of the best thrillers of 2023. Different strokes for different folks.]

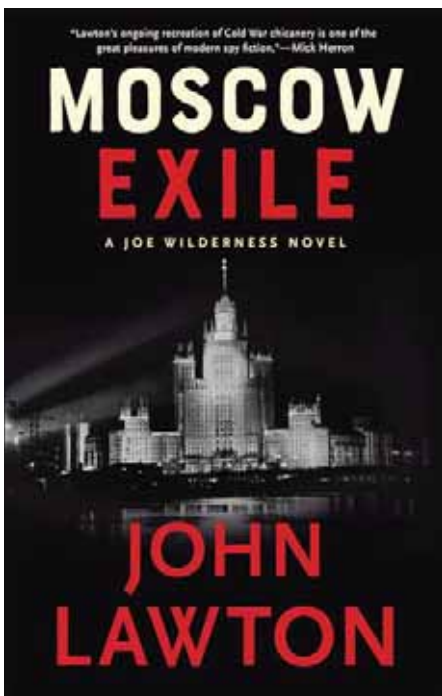
MOSCOW EXILE

by John Lawton

Atlantic Monthly, \$28.00, April, 2023

Rating: B

First line: Frank was wondering if



he should buy shares in the Glienicke Bridge.

John Lawton's **MOSCOW EXILE** is the latest entry in the Joe Wilderness series. It is a gorgeous and baffling novel about the chaos of war and the complexity of world politics. Set in the Cold War that came out of World War II, it scrambles to follow the destinies of nations and individuals and the shifting loyalties of both. Colorful and complex, it follows a disparate group of characters through a maze of time and place as circumstances change and allegiances shift with the political landscape.

Charlotte, an English woman whose husband is an advisor to Winston Churchill, is Churchill's distant cousin and sometimes chess partner. She is privy to his ramblings and he sometimes seeks her opinion and advice. Charlotte is a brilliant woman and a sexual adventuress, who carries on numerous affairs and marries several times, changing her name, her base of operations, and her persona to suit. One of her conquests is Charlie Leigh-Hunt, who catches up with her in Washington where she is a sought-after hostess and confidante of men in power. Meanwhile, Joe Wilderness is

languishing in a KGB prison and his friends are trying to arrange a complicated trade to release him.

MOSCOW EXILE is the fourth in Lawton's Joe Wilderness series and the first one I've read. I assume fans of the first three don't need my guidance, but for first time readers, like me, I have to advise you to prepare for a wild ride. The number of characters, the span of time covered, and the twists and turns of the plot(s) are hard to follow for a first time reader. It is customary in series fiction that each book be able to stand alone. You might miss the larger arc of the action or the emotional buildup of the characters, but you should be able to read each book as a self-contained unit. Not so much here. You might just want to read it for the excellent writing and let it flow over you. Or start with the first installment, **THEN WE TAKE BERLIN**.

AN HONEST MAN

by Michael Koryta

Mulholland Books; \$29.00, July, 2023

Rating: B+

First line: The yacht appeared nine weeks after Israel returned to his father's house, and even from a distance and under the squeezed red sun of dawn, he could see that the vessel was in trouble.

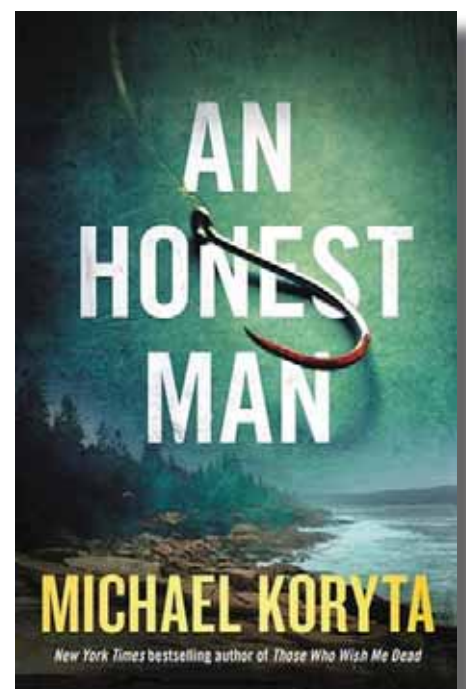
Michael Koryta's **AN HONEST MAN** is New England noir and delivers a finely etched portrait of men, good and bad, in extremis. It unpacks its themes slowly and the methodical build is an example of the finest craftsmanship a thriller writer can produce. Koryta, a brilliant stylist, is at the top of his game.

Israel Pike has just returned to the isolated island off the coast of Maine where he was born and raised. He knows the best thing he can do is keep his head down and not attract attention, but like all men raised on the water, he cannot ignore a vessel in trouble. When he discovers a luxury yacht full of dead bodies, his life of

quiet anonymity is no longer possible. The fate of the dead men and Israel's own history are scrutinized mercilessly. Revelations about Israel's past are dredged up along with the mystery of the important men who died on the foundering ship.

The themes of fathers and sons, loyalty and betrayal, community and loneliness, and good and evil are all explored as a slice of the American dream is found curdled like milk gone sour. Koryta is a master at peeling back the scabs and revealing the putrid rot underneath.

He only falters when it comes to the women and the crimes themselves. As an author, he keeps himself apart from the female sensibility much like the male characters do. One woman's story is filtered, cleverly, by the necessity of recounting it in front of a child. It's the author's way of shielding himself from the criticism of not being able to tell certain truths directly. He may be afraid of inauthenticity. Or of sensationalism. Or of insensitivity. Although the scene works in narrative terms, I can't help but wish Koryta had chosen a different story if he didn't have the courage to fully tell this one. The book, while excellent, suffers a bit from the loss.



From The Waterfront

Ted Hertel



THE PRICE YOU PAY

by Nick Petrie

Putnam, \$29.00, February 2024

Rating: A

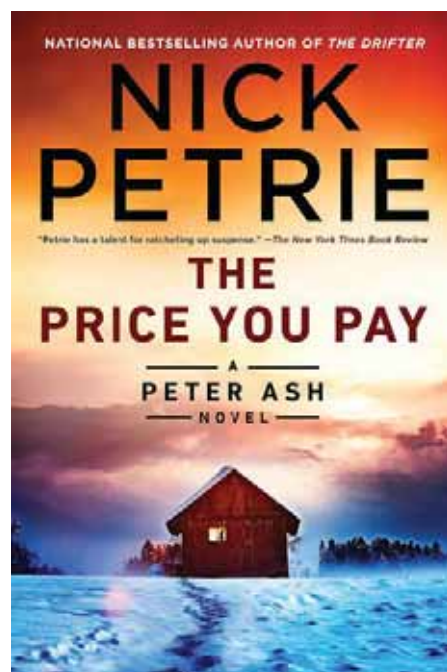
Peter Ash gets an early morning phone call from his friend Lewis, whose former partner Teddy needs help urgently. The two rush off to northern Wisconsin, where they find Teddy's farm buildings ablaze, his dogs killed, and Teddy himself nearly frozen in the subzero temperatures. He has no idea who attacked him or why, until he discovers that his numerous notebooks filled with his exploits with the Heavy Lifters are gone. Teddy had created the notebooks as therapy to help him overcome severe injuries he had suffered on the group's last mission. The books contain details of the group's drug busts and killings (all in the effort to keep drugs off the street), along with information identifying the participants, putting their lives and the lives of their families in danger. The three follow the trail of the notebooks up the chain in an effort to recover them and keep their secrets hidden.

This is the eighth novel in Nick Petrie's consistently entertaining Peter Ash series. It is exactly the sort of thriller I enjoy: a small group of men and women with special skills taking on a narrow threat, one that does not involve some megalomaniac attempting unrealistically to conquer the world *ala* James Bond. Here Peter and Lewis go up against other people with their own special skills (and weaponry), making the matchups significantly more believable.

Almost since the beginning of the series, fans have been asking for more background on Lewis. Well, here

are the answers they've been waiting for. Much of the book centers around the past exploits of the Heavy Lifters (known to the criminals they pursued as the "Ghost Killers") in their efforts to reduce the flow of drugs and wipe the criminals behind them off the face of the earth. Lewis had two basic rules he insisted his men follow: "Don't steal from nobody can't afford it; don't hurt nobody don't deserve it." But after the attack on Teddy, will Lewis slip from justice to vengeance as they seek to reach the people behind the attacks, the ones at the top of the chain?

This is edge-of-the-seat suspense from beginning to end as the protagonists must ensure the safety of their friends and families while pursuing the information in the notebooks from Wisconsin to Chicago to the East Coast and back again. As Peter's lover June says, "The pain and fear are just the price you pay for doing the right thing." But will



that price ultimately be too high?

TOO MANY BULLETS

by Max Allan Collins

Hard Case Crime, \$26.99, October 2023

Rating: A

Nathan Heller is body-guarding Robert ("Bob! Not 'Bobby!'") Kennedy on June 5, 1968, the night he won the California Democratic primary. As they walk through the crowded Pantry in L.A.'s Ambassador Hotel, a dozen or more shots ring out. Kennedy falls, as do five others, but he is the only one to die. A dazed Sirhan Sirhan, gun in hand, is slammed down by Roosevelt Grier, Rafer Johnson, and Heller. The LAPD muscles the FBI out of the investigation of the assassination, since it's clearly an open-and-shut case against Sirhan. But months later, a now skeptical Heller undertakes his own investigation, first at the behest of columnist Drew Pearson, then *Time/Life* after Pearson's death. After all, there weren't enough guns and there were too many bullets in that room. And what of the mysterious woman in the polka-dot dress that several witnesses saw fleeing the scene?

Mystery Writers of America Grand Master and Private Eye Writers of America's Lifetime Achievement "Eye" Award recipient Max Allan Collins' first Nathan Heller novel, **TRUE DETECTIVE**, was published in 1983. This latest novel marks forty years of some of the very best and most cohesive historical detective fiction ever written. Each book in the series has been meticulously researched, down to the smallest factual details, then tied together with a cleverly plotted and convincing fictional re-examination of events surrounding a murder, a kidnapping, a disappearance, extortion, assassination or other well-known crime. What's more, there is a well-reasoned solution to previously unsolved or questionable cases. Collins uses real names whenever possible, adding to the authenticity. Each book also contains a wrap up of what happened to characters after the story has concluded.

TOO MANY BULLETS follows that established pattern. Collins presents

little known facts gathered from autopsy and police records, things that were conveniently overlooked in a rush to judgment. But it is the reasoned conjecture that he wraps around those facts that make for fascinating reading. Further, he faithfully recreates the politics of the late 1960s. Readers will almost come to believe that they were caught up in the panic in the hotel's Pantry, so realistic is the writing. In today's world, with crazy conspiracy theories abounding, this novel takes a deep dive into one that just might not be so crazy.

The author has previously explored other Kennedy family assassination (and near assassination) stories, but this may just be one of his best. No need to have read any of the previous novels in the series, since Collins doesn't write them in chronological order anyway. The final two sentence paragraph sums up Heller's dedication to the job perfectly. If this is the final Heller (and I sincerely hope it is not), the detective goes out on a very high note.

DARK RIDE

by Lou Berney

Morrow, \$30.00, September 2023

Rating: A

Twenty-three-year-old stoner Hardy "Hardly" Reed is getting an extension to pay a parking ticket when he notices two young children, a boy and a girl, sitting alone on a bench in the DMV offices. He goes to check on them and notices that each has been burned by cigarettes. Before he can do anything, their mom comes and swoops them away. Through a bit of finagling with Eleanor, the goth clerk all too willing to help, he discovers the mom's name and sets out to try to rescue the children from what he comes to believe is an abusive father. When Child Protective Services proves to be completely incompetent, he seeks out the help of Salvador, an equally useless sixteen-year-old, and his new friend Eleanor. But he soon discovers that the task is not as simple as he naively thought. This is driven home to him in a dark warehouse district by two thugs, but it eventually makes him realize that he cannot desert the two children, no



matter the danger to himself.

Lou Berney is the recipient of the Edgar Award for Best Paperback Novel for the outstanding **THE LONG AND FAR AWAY GONE**. Berney never writes the same book twice. In **DARK RIDE** he has created a protagonist who is unsure of himself, basically directionless, but is a wonderfully written individual that the reader will come to care about as he sets out on his quixotic quest to rescue two children from the clutches of an abuser. Hardy has "hardly" an idea of where to start, so he enlists whatever help he can get. A sympathetic private investigator gives him some advice, along with a little bit of loving, to get him started. His two "helpers" are also fully fleshed out.

The story gives the reader all-too-true insights into the problems faced by an overworked and often under-caring CPS. When case workers are flooded with so many children to protect, no one can be protected at all. Children just slip away through the yawning cracks in the system. So Hardly feels that it is his job, whether he wants it or not, to get Jack and Pearl to safety. What could possibly go wrong with that plan? Everything, of course.

The suspense builds quickly in this short, heartbreaking, and dark novel. Still, it is leavened with veins of humor, much of it at the expense of Hardly's two assistants. In the end he finds that if he wants things done right, then Hardly will just have to do them

himself. Sometimes the hero you least expect will manage to come through. This thought provoking tale of tragedy and triumph cannot be recommended highly enough.

DEUS X

by Stephen Mack Jones

Soho Crime, \$27.95, November 2023

August Snow #4

Rating: C

Detroit ex-cop August Snow sets himself a very large task when he takes on the might of the Catholic Church. When his life-long Mexicantown friend Father Michael Grabowski suddenly retires, Snow senses that something is amiss. Another priest has seemingly committed suicide, although Snow finds the circumstances surrounding the death to be suspicious. But when an apparent Vatican assassin turns up, Snow knows that he will have to dig deeper than he ever has before to protect his friend and get to the truth behind crimes committed in the name of faith. All the while he must contend with his own beliefs and what he perceives as justice.

This is Stephen Mack Jones fourth August Snow novel and frankly it requires a huge suspension of disbelief. Previous novels in this series, while also dark and violent, were grounded in more of what one might consider realistic plotting. Yes, while there are elements here that work (child abuse in the Catholic Church), there are others that simply do not. A group of modern day Knights Templar that want to return the Church to its dark and foreboding past seems out of step with reality, no matter how many people they might have to send to Hell in order to accomplish it. Deals with the metaphorical Devil? Okay, it's fiction, but I was hard-pressed to accept it. That, and a few other things I can't mention without spoiling the plot, took me almost entirely out of the story.

But offsetting that is Snow himself. He is a man of extreme loyalty to his friends and is willing to take enormous risks for their sakes. After all, as a former Marine and cop, he is no stranger

to dangerous situations. He's tenacious, like a dog with a bone, and he'll see his mission through to the end no matter what. As his girlfriend told him in a previous novel, "There's an old German saying. ... A hero is just a dumbass who doesn't know when to quit." That's the positive thing about August Snow: he won't quit. I enjoyed the earlier novels and would still read another one due to Snow's character and the cast Jones has created around him. I would just prefer a more realistic plot.

HERE IN THE DARK

by Alexis Soloski

Flatiron, \$27.99, December 2023

Rating: A-

Theater critic Vivian Parry loves her work, getting her into the Broadway shows she loves, even if her critiques are often very harsh ("Industrial solvents have nothing on me"). She responds to a request for an interview with media studies master's student David Adler, who wants her input for his thesis on the influence and preferences of critics. She reluctantly agrees to meet with him. But two weeks afterward she receives a worried call from his fiancée that Adler has vanished and Vivian was the last person to see him. For reasons of her own, she undertakes a mission to find him, but instead encounters more mysteries, threats, and a murder.

"Has anybody ever seen a dramatic critic in the daytime? Of course not. They come out after dark, up to no good." -- P.G. Wodehouse, on critics as creatures of the night. Yikes, I hope he doesn't mean book reviewers, as well. Okay, let's just assume he's actually only talking about theater critics. Alexis Soloski's debut novel is a brutal examination of the theater and those who write about it. She should know since Soloski is herself a theater critic.

Those who can't act become critics, which is why Vivian Parry claims she left the stage and took up the wicked pen. When David Adler disappears, Vivian turns into a grown-up Nancy Drew, if Nancy Drew grew up to be a pill-popping alcoholic. So she does what any self-respecting journalist turned

would-be detective would do and goes into the nearest bar. Vivian realizes she shouldn't involve herself further for a man she really didn't know, but that doesn't stop this plucky "girl detective" (the character's words, not mine!), even after receiving threatening notes.

The author has a real knack for quick down-and-dirty personal descriptions ("his features squashed in the middle of his face as if they're on the run from his ears;" "a man's voice, thick and harsh, like a barbed-wire milkshake"). The intriguing investigation is enhanced by frequent literary references to numerous plays and playwrights (Chekhov, Shaw, *Guys and Dolls*, and many more), as well as theater humor ("the actor's nightmare. Every critic's terror").

But it is the plot and characters which will move the reader rapidly along to the surprising conclusion, all wrapped up in the theater world. "All the world's a stage and all the men and women merely players." After all, "the play's the thing." And this one is very good.

THE SECOND MURDERER

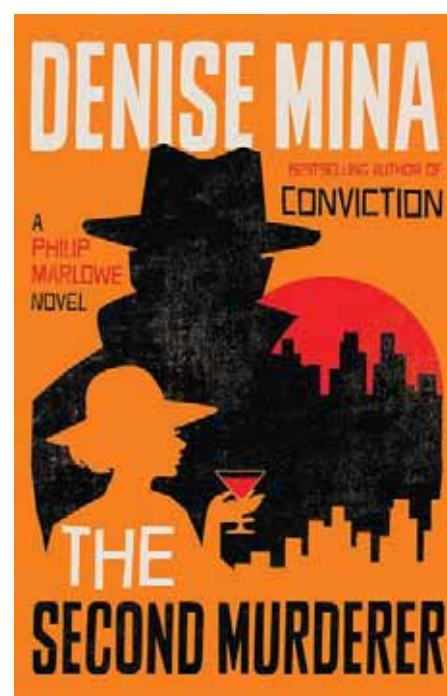
by Denise Mina

Mulholland, \$28.00, August, 2023

Rating: B+

1939. Los Angeles. Philip Marlowe (yes, *that* Philip Marlowe) gets a call to come to the Montgomery estate, high up in Beverly Hills. It seems like wealthy, young, and naïve Chrissie Montgomery has disappeared. Her father wants to hire Marlowe to find her. If this sounds like the beginning of just about every Marlowe or other Golden Age P.I. novel and short story, well, that's because it is. But there's a bit of a twist: The old man has also hired Marlowe's more-than-mere-acquaintance and private investigator Anne Riordan, to search for her as well.

My first question out of the box is "Why?" Why take such a well-known character as Marlowe and write a novel about him? Granted, Raymond Chandler only wrote seven novels Marlowe tales, along with some short stories. But what's up with this? Of course others have written Marlowe tales, starting



with Robert B. Parker after Chandler had died. Perhaps not ironically Ace Atkins, Reed Farrel Coleman and others returned the favor after Parker's death and kept *his* characters alive. The latest attempt until now of which I am aware was last year's rather unsuccessful *THE GOODBYE COAST* by Joe Ide, in which Marlowe was updated to present day L.A. at age 29 with his cop father. Say what?

Mina answered my question in her *New York Times* article (August 26, 2023) when she states: "My Marlowe novel features something few Chandler novels ever did: women with inner lives and ambitions that go beyond getting a boyfriend. In my version of Chandler's 1930s Los Angeles, there's a rich Hispanic community and a vibrant gay subculture. That's my prerogative."

So my second question is: how does this work in the context of this particular novel? It works fairly well. So, we have a female private eye on the same investigation. Marlowe and Riordan each have their own methods, occasionally working the same paths as they investigate a man who was murdered twice. The novel is still primarily Marlowe's. He gets into the seedier side of L.A. with its dive bars and Skid Row. There's a body along the way, vivid descriptions, with plenty of wise-cracking

(“The Mansion was a nice family home if your family was everybody in Kansas”) and metaphors (“His hands sat on the desk like unemployed hams”).

Trouble is Marlowe’s business, along with fighting and adventures. Maybe it will be Anne Riordan’s, as well, since Mina has a three-book contract for the series. This book could have been written about any two private eyes. It didn’t have to be about a guy named Philip Marlowe and it would have been just as entertaining. But Mina is making a point here, so more power to her.

One thing did take me out of the book each time I came across it, so I need to mention it. For whatever reason, Mulholland Books published the *British version*, so words like tyre, kerb, and neighbour kept popping up. What’s up with that? Usually, that wouldn’t bother me, but in Chandler, Marlowe, and LA noir, you have the quintessential American author, hero, and genre, and so it just didn’t feel right. It was distracting and totally unnecessary. Who needs that when engrossed in a book?

NOBODY’S ANGEL

by Jack Clark
Hard Case Crime, \$15.95,
February 2024
Rating: B

Windy City cab driver Eddie Miles knows his city like the back of his hand. One night while making a “convenience stop” in an alley, he stumbles upon a mutilated but still alive prostitute who has been dumped there. The cops don’t necessarily believe that he had nothing to do with the young woman, but have no evidence to hold him, either. And when a cab driver he knows ends up murdered in the Cabrini-Green housing project, Eddie begins to undertake the dangerous role of detective, cruising the streets, looking for anything suspicious.

NOBODY’S ANGEL was written before the author actually sold a book for publication, in this case the 2003 Shamus Award finalist **Westerfield’s Chain**. Interestingly enough, when Jack Clark could not sell this book to a publisher, he had copies printed anyway and sold them out of his cab for five dol-

lars. This is a pretty well written novel. Its primary problem is that it is very slight on plot. Basically, nighttime cab driver Miles drives around looking for suspicious people, all the while picking up others who could be the very person or persons he is seeking. So there is not much in the plot department here.

However, what is here is still engrossing. It is an extremely interesting character study, not only of people but also of the heavily urban area where he drives, as Eddie meets up with just about every unusual and, occasionally, fascinating type of passenger. The reader gets a good look at the city of Chicago, from its nicer areas to the slums of the infamous Cabrini-Green. Every sort of person gets into Eddie’s cab and they are all distinctive. We learn their stories, just as we get caught up in Eddie’s problems with a bitter ex-wife, a reluctant girlfriend, the cops, and fellow cabbies. Each unnumbered chapter opens with a quote from the cab driver rules of the city of Chicago, lending authenticity and giving background into the difficulties of operating a taxi.

Hitching a ride in Eddie Miles’ cab is a rewarding experience. And it’s less than sixteen bucks – cheaper than most cab rides you’d otherwise get in Chicago.

THE MURDER OF MR. MA

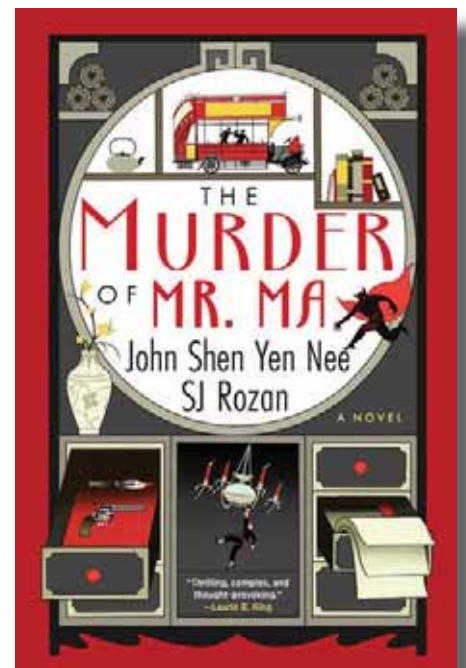
by John Shen Yen Nee and S. J. Rozan
Soho Crime, \$25.95, April, 2024
Rating: A-

London 1924. One by one Chinese immigrants are being murdered and the prejudiced British cops don’t really care. After all, it’s just one “Chinaman” killing another. But when the young scholar Lao She is summoned by Bertrand Russell, he is introduced to Dee Ren Jie, better known as Judge Dee. Dee is in town to investigate the killing of a man he had known during the Great War. After Dee and Lao interview the dead man’s widow, more men Dee knew from the Chinese Labour Corps are murdered, all with the same butterfly sword. Who is after them and why? Will the two investigators be next on the death list?

Welcome back, Judge Dee! For those who are not familiar with this ancient character, he is based on the historical figure Di Renji, a country magistrate (c.630 – c. 700) in the Tang Dynasty court. The detective appeared in an 18th-Century crime novel, *Di Gong An*, translated by Dutch writer Robert van Gulik as **CELEBRATED CASES OF JUDGE DEE**. Van Gulik continued writing tales of the judge, and others also added their own take on the character’s investigations.

Media executive (with credentials at both DC and Marvel Comics) John Shen Yen Nee and prolific novel and short story author S. J. Rozan (the award-winning Lydia Chin and Bill Smith mysteries) have combined to reimagine Judge Dee (and let’s face it, he’s a truly timeless character) in 20th-Century London. Along the way the occasional Chinese proverb is mixed with together with expertly constructed fight scenes (the authors retained the assistance of a kung fu consultant to add authenticity). London’s Chinatown in post-War ‘20s, with its cuisine, culture and opium dens with drug-induced visions is faithfully recreated.

With its interesting cast of characters, including Ezra Pound, as well as ordinary people caught in the dangers that surround Dee and Lao, the compel-



ling plot moves along swiftly. Further, it's filled with booby-trapped buildings, masterful disguises (including Springheel Jack), the click of mah-jongg tiles, and the awful prejudice that pervaded the times in which the novel is set. Forget the time anomaly: take a journey back a hundred years with a 1,300-year-old character. You won't regret it.

NO ONE CAN KNOW

by Kate Alice Marshall

Flatiron Books, \$28.99, January, 2024

Rating: B+

The brutal murders of the Palmers, parents of Juliette, Emma, and Daphne, horrify the residents of Arden Hills. Why is Juliette wearing the clothes of a stranger? Why are Daphne's sleeves covered in blood as she whispers to Emma, "*No one can know.*" Emma's efforts to protect the siblings send the three sisters in different directions, vowing never to return to their childhood home where their parents died. Emma and her boyfriend bear the brunt of the town's suspicions, though the police are unable to make a case against them or anyone else. But fourteen years later, negative financial circumstances force pregnant Emma and her husband to return to the still unoccupied house. Her two sisters also return, which threatens to expose long-buried secrets, including the truth behind the deaths. Just how far will the three go to protect their actions on that long ago night?

Kate Alice Marshall previous novel was the twisty and well-received **WHAT LIES IN THE WOODS**. As in that book Marshall keeps the tension ratcheted up here. This is a book for people who love those twists to come with little let up in suspense. Some might think that perhaps there are a few too many turns in this book to make the story totally believable, but for most that would be a minor quibble.

Each of the siblings has her own set of dysfunctional problems growing out of their lives with abusive parents. As memories come back to Emma, she begins to wonder what really did happen



fourteen years earlier. Had she shielded a killer instead of protecting her sisters?

There are six distinct points of view in the novel, two from each of the sisters fourteen years apart. Each of the viewpoints hints at secrets told by the three unreliable narrators. The story is slowly peeled back as trust issues drive everyone further apart before another shocking murder sends the investigation in new directions. The problem with secrets is that if people would just talk to each other, things might work out fine. But what fun would that be when a talented author can weave a compelling story around those lies and hidden truths?

THE FLOODS OF FEAR

by John and Ward Hawkins

Black Gat Books, \$12.99, February, 2024

Rating: B+

When the summer floods come fast and furious, the dikes holding the river back need to be fortified. Convict labor is sent to the most dangerous areas to do the job. Among the worst of the worst are the murderer Donovan, the thief Peebles, and others, all under the watchful eye of armed sergeant Sharkey. But as the storm rises in violence, the dikes crumble, sending many

to their deaths. Donovan, a strong swimmer, is able to rescue Peebles and Sharkey, along with Elizabeth, a woman trapped in the flood herself. Together the four of them begin a treacherous journey in an effort to reach the safety of dry land.

Heavily character driven, each person with their own motives, this short but very suspenseful novel moves along as swiftly as the current carrying the four survivors. Danger awaits around every bend, some from the raging water, some of the human kind. Peebles wants to have Elizabeth for himself and her only possible protection comes at the hands of a murderer out for revenge, once Sharkey has vanished. There are convicts to be recaptured and vengeance to be taken before the novel reaches its violent conclusion.

Originally published in hardcover 1956, the book was also serialized that year in the *Saturday Evening Post*. Brothers John and Ward Hawkins started their writing careers as so many did in the so-called Golden Age, first for the pulps and then "graduating" to the slicks. They did other *Saturday Evening Post* thrillers, as well as crime stories for *Ellery Queen Mystery Magazine* and *The Saint*. They moved on to Hollywood, earning writing and producing credits for film and TV shows such as *Bonanza*, *Burke's Law*, *Cannon*, and many others. John passed away in 1978, while Ward died in 1990.

RABBIT HOLE

by Kate Brody

Soho Crime, \$25.95, January, 2024

Rating: B+

Angie Angstrom vanished ten years before this novel opens. On the tenth anniversary of that disappearance, her father Mark committed suicide. After his death, Angie's sister "Teddy" discovers that Mark had been active in a Reddit community fixated on Angie and theories surrounding her disappearance. It isn't long before Teddy gets caught up in it herself, much to the detriment of her own relationships and her high school teaching job. Along

the way she hooks up with Mickey who tries to help her investigate. As Teddy begins to go down the same rabbit hole (or should one say “Reddit hole”?) that engulfed her father, she begins to lose her grip on what is real and what is not.

This debut novel is a stunning indictment of social media, the paths to which it can (and does) lead, and the ease with which it can absorb one human’s life. As Teddy becomes obsessed with her search for truth, she is simply spun further away from reality, sent down one crazy path after another, just like the rabbit holes in Angie and Teddy’s backyard when they were kids. Frequent excerpts from various platforms lend a touch of authenticity to this character study of “whatever can go wrong, will go wrong” until the horrors of “anti-social media” become all too apparent.

The characters in this novel, particularly including Teddy, do not come across as very nice people. They are generally not out to help anyone other than themselves. Stated motives cannot always be trusted. Besides, people have an entire Internet to hide behind, so they can be as nasty as they want to be. This story is one of examined grief and sorrow, told against a backdrop of obsession. Will Teddy throw her life away? Or will she be able to stop the insanity in time? This is a devastating portrait of a young woman on the very edge of her life.

The Short Circuit

THE CHRONICLES OF OWEN KEANE

by Terence Faherty

The Gisbourne Press, \$12.99,
September 2023

Rating: A

This volume of six short stories and one novella combines all of the previously uncollected short fiction about Owen Keane, Terence Faherty’s failed seminarian turned metaphysical sleuth. In addition to the previous short story collection, **THE CONFESSIONS OF OWEN KEANE**, there are eight full-

length novels in the series. The cases here cover twenty-five years of Keane’s career, ranging from the late 1970s into the current millennium. There is a list at the end of the book putting all the novels and stories into chronological order. As the author points out in his introduction, “Keane . . . sees the small, human mysteries he encounters as possible clues to the larger mysteries of this life.”

So the clues in these stories might be meted out in biblical terms, as for example the dying words of a murdered woman, “the sin of Judas.” (*The Judas Clue*) Or in the Shamus-nominated *After Cana*, when a couple is murdered on their honeymoon, an ancient crime is accounted for in the present. Religious symbols also provide impetus for Keane’s explorations, whether it’s a rosary laid on the body of a murdered soldier (the Barry-nominated *The Seven Sorrows*) or a hand-drawn cross on the wall of a home that had been broken into (*Ghost Town*). Sometimes guidance even comes to Keane in the form of reflections on cause and effect from the theologian Thomas Aquinas (the novella, *The First Proof*).

If those ideas seem like they might make for stuffy reading, they most definitely do not. These stories are filled with fascinating mysteries, leavened with Faherty’s dry humor. There are frequent mentions of other authors and detectives, from Chandler to Wolfe and even the Hardy Boys! There is also an impossible crime, with a murder method only Dorothy L. Sayers could have concocted (the Edgar- and Anthony-nominated, Macavity-winning *The Widow of Slain*).

Each of these cleverly constructed stories is concerned with the human condition and the meaning of life. Keane believes that by solving the small mysteries of life he might find clues to the universe’s own secrets. He is a man willing to investigate things that go bump in the dark night of the soul. I look forward to more of these tales.

The Old Timer in the Corner

SEED ON THE WIND

by Rex Stout

Hard Case Crime, \$15.95,
November 2023

Rating: C

It’s 1930. Very independent New York City woman Lora Winter has had four children by a succession of wealthy men. When one of those men shows up at her doorstep with a fifth man in tow, why does she run and hide from that man? Yet Lora is so independent that when a man wants to pay child support for his offspring, she refuses to take it. Her theory is that unless the man is her husband, he has no rights at all just because he helped make the baby. Lora looks back on her life, starting with her latest partner and his child, then moving back to each previous father and his child until the identity of the “fifth man” is finally made clear.

This is much more of a psychological/sociological character driven novel than what one today might consider a crime novel, though there are some elements of kidnapping and blackmail along with way. This novel, published in 1930 and then “lost” until now, appeared four years before Rex Stout’s first Nero Wolfe novel, **FER-DE-LANCE**, appeared and the two books could not be further apart. However, as a glimpse at 1930 New York, its atmosphere, social mores, and the rich characters of the times, this story is one that those interested in these elements and historical details will find entertaining and enlightening. It is also fun to read a very early work by an author who will become one of the finest mystery novelists of all time. Thanks to Hard Case Crime for “finding” it again.

An interesting historical note: The late United States Supreme Court Associate Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr., was an avid mystery reader. “This fellow is the best of them all,” he wrote on a copy of one of Stout’s Nero Wolfe novels. Asked whether he’d read any Supreme Court decisions after his retirement, he replied “Not a damn one.”

Novels of Sensation and Other Stuff

Hank Wagner



My happiest reading experience in the last quarter of 2023 was Michael Koryta's **AN HONEST MAN** (Mulholland, July 2023, 384 pages, \$29.00). There, Koryta tells the story of one Israel Pike, a man whose troubled past comes back to haunt him when he is the first to discover seven bodies on a yacht adrift of the coast of his hometown in Maine. Koryta expertly spins a tale of murder, mayhem, and human trafficking, peeling back the layers slowly and surely, revealing key bits of history only when they will have the maximum impact. He is a surefooted storyteller, who, in my mind, evokes the best of Stephen King (especially since this tale is set in Maine), and Peter Straub. I also thought of Scott Smith's **A SIMPLE PLAN**, not because of any similarity in plot, but because of how well Koryta knows his characters, and how willing he is to place them in jeopardy. It is a great book—I honestly would not have found it pretentious if Koryta had opened the book with the sentence, "Call me Israel." **Rating: A**

Another pleasant surprise was **Nobody's Angel**, by Jack Clark (Hard Case Crime, February 2024, \$15.95). Weighing in at a slim 224 pages, it is a thoroughly satisfying journey into early 1970s Chicago, with the Windy City and its dark environs rising to the level of a living, breathing, vital character. Here, cabbie Eddie Miles narrates in classic first-person noir style, telling a tale of murder, sorrow, love, hate, and, oddly hope; his quest to find a friend's killer is both touching, and harrowing, as he expertly depicts the life of a cabbie, whose existence may be disastrously altered by merely picking up the wrong fare. Published as part of Hard Case Crime's

20th anniversary, it more than lives up to Quentin Tarantino's effusive blurb, which, among other things, called it "a terrific story and character study."

Rating: A

THE SECRET by Lee Child and Andrew Child (Delacorte, October 2023, 304 pages, \$28.99) is the fourth collaboration between the two brothers. Set in 1992, *The Secret* finds Reacher, still in the Army, asked to join an interagency task force charged with finding the killers of a small group of US citizens who are seemingly connected by a secret project they participated in a couple of decades prior. It is a race against time, as the highly proficient killers seem to be working from a list, one with a rapidly dwindling number of potential victims. Reacher and his team hurry to catch up with those killers, who are hellbent on revenge. The fourth collaboration between the brothers Child is highly entertaining, delivering everything Reacher fans have come to expect, and providing some glimpses into his activities prior to the events depicted in **KILLING FLOOR**.

Reacher fans may also be interested in **THE REACHER GUY**, by Heather Martin (Pegasus, Sept. 2020, 352 pages, \$29.95). Thorough and informative, it provides numerous insights into the life, and the mind, of the estimable Lee Child. I was not aware of this book when it was first published in 2020—it was a happy, last-minute discovery in the bargain bin of a grocery store, circa last summer. I got plenty of value for a minimal investment.

Ratings:

THE SECRET: B

THE REACHER GUY: B

Besides Reacher, another long run-

ning series character I have enjoyed for literally decades is the late Mickey Spillane's Mike Hammer, who definitely is part of Jack's literary DNA. Besides the original series by Spillane, Titan Books has published several posthumous collaborations between the venerated author and his number one fan, Max Allan Collins, creator of the critically acclaimed Max Heller series, and the brains and talent behind **THE ROAD TO PERDITION**.

Since 2006, Collins has been lovingly fleshing out uncompleted Spillane novels and synopses, setting the composite works squarely within Spillane's canonical works. **DIG TWO GRAVES** ((Titan, Sept. 2023, 208 pages, \$25.95) is the fourteenth team up between the two authors, and should please most Spillane aficionados. While Collins' Hammer is less formidable, and less cocksure, he is also more relatable, and admirable, as he has been able to absorb all that life has thrown at him. Readers will also enjoy Collins' portrayal of Velda Sterling; it's a thorough updating, as Velda is Hammer's equal, in every important way.

Readers who enjoy the modern portrayal of the admirable Ms. Sterling will also no doubt thrill to the adventures of another Collins creation, lethal lady Ms. Micheal Tree. Titan Comics continues collecting her adventures in **MS. TREE VOL. 5: HEROINE WITHDRAWAL** (December 2023, 272 pages, \$34.99), a compilation of Ms. Tree issues 18 through 27, and 29 through 31 (from Renegade Press). What makes this hard-boiled series stand out was the fact that there was fallout from her exploits: Tree would have her adventures, and Collins (and artist Terry Beatty) would explore the ramifications of those actions, with Tree going to prison, Tree

getting committed to a mental institution, or Tree being released from said institution, but on meds. It was heady stuff, even for 1985.

Ratings:

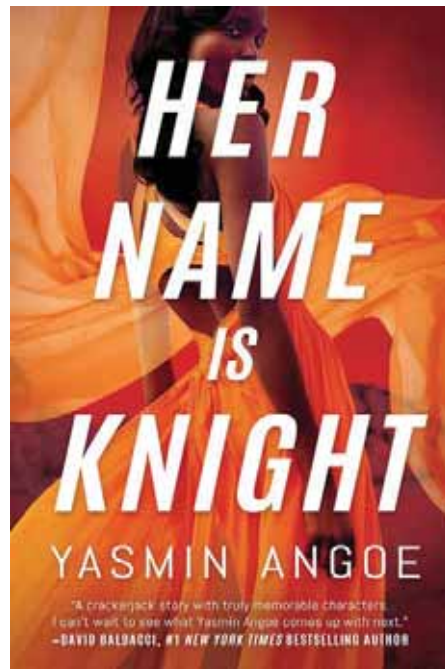
DIG TWO GRAVES: B

MS. TREE VOL. 5: HEROINE

WITHDRAWAL: B+

Yasmin Angoe's Nena Knight trilogy was published over a two-year span, with the first installment arriving in November, 2021, and the last in September, 2023. It tells the origin story of the professional assassin codenamed Echo, a.k.a Nena Knight, a.k.a Aninyeh. In **HER NAME IS KNIGHT** (Thomas & Mercer, 418 pages, \$24.95), Angoe alternates between the past and present in chapters labeled "After" and "Before", she relates the tale of a young girl ripped from her Ghanaian village and biological family and subjected to the horror of human trafficking, who later defies the odds by escaping captivity. Afterward, she begins to reclaim her life by establishing a new identity and devoting herself to the causes championed by a powerful business organization known as the Tribe, placing herself at their disposal. She's satisfied with her choices until the day she is accidentally injected into the life of one of her targets, whose job and family cause her to take a step back and examine her life. Her reappraisal of her existence comes at a challenging time, however as figures from her troubled and turbulent past reappear to threaten all she now holds dear.

Impressive for any novel, let alone a debut novel, **HER NAME IS KNIGHT** is a fast paced, thoroughly engaging piece of work, crammed with action and pathos, and a winning main character in Nena Knight. Obviously influenced by pop culture, the narrative evokes men's action-adventure series like **The Destroyer** and **The Executioner**; Angoe borrows what she needs from those, mixes in comics (how can you not think of Marvel Comics' Misty Knight) and movies (think Foxy Brown, plus add in direct references to Wakanda and Zamuda), and throws in her own experiences as a Ghanaian American



and delivers a savory gumbo of action and suspense. Besides being a crackjack adventure story/thriller, it's also an enthralling treatise about identity, and the fluidity of the same, as Nena moves from child to woman, victim to heroine, automaton to someone who lets herself experience emotions she's been forced to keep under wraps her entire life. A story of great depth and range, the excellence of the initial entry in a proposed series boded well for future installments.

And, Angoe did not disappoint, following up with **THEY COME AT KNIGHT** ((366 pages, \$24.95) in 2022, and, more recently, with **IT ENDS WITH KNIGHT** (416 pages, \$28.99), in 2023. Although they lack the impact of her impressive debut, they are still good, solid books, highly entertaining, and highly readable; Angoe definitely knows how to get you to turn the next page. These are good, solid books, which chronicle Knight's ongoing struggles as she throws herself more deeply into the business of The Tribe, dealing with pressures exerted from without, and, insidiously, from within. I had a few moments when I felt uneasy with the concept of The Tribe, and their merciless approach to "business," but took comfort in the fact that the big bads are in fact really, bad, and my previous

willingness to accept, without question, another government's willingness to grant licenses to kill in another, older fictional oeuvre.

Ratings:

HER NAME IS KNIGHT: A-

THEY COME AT KNIGHT: B+

IT ENDS WITH KNIGHT: B

Let's wind things up with two supernatural thrillers, **THE HOUSE OF LAST RESORT**, by Christopher Golden (St. Martin's, Jan. 2024, 304 pages, \$29.00), and **ANGEL FALLS** by Julia Rust and David Surface (YAP Books, October 2022, 314 pages, \$25.95). Golden's latest follows the adventures of an American couple who try to make a go of it in a small, economically depressed Italian town, taking advantage of a special program to attract new residents by selling centuries old edifices for a minimal investment. The expats learn that you get what you pay for, as their new home harbors many dark secrets. Golden successfully updates tales of haunted houses and demonic possession, marrying those tropes to the fear all homeowners share, that of having purchased a money trap. His portrayal of the marital tensions which arise are also chilling, since readers have to watch a marriage fall apart while being sympathetic to both parties.

ANGEL FALLS is a gripping update of W. W. Jacob's "The Monkey's Paw," in that its main message is to be careful what you wish for. Here, two teenagers learn that they possess a special gift; working together, in a special locale, they can make their wishes come true. At first, this power seems benign, but, as the days go by, it seems more sinister, as their wishes have unintended consequences, some depressing, others horrific. Authors Rust and Surface tell a compelling story, which evokes the tragedy of the Salem Witch trials, and channels Stephen King's **PET SEMETARY**, creating a feeling of disquiet and uneasiness which lingers long after you turn the last page.

Ratings:

THE HOUSE OF LAST RESORT:

B+

ANGEL FALLS: B+

The Cozy - Traditional Mystery Cafe'



Robin Agnew Reviews

THE BUSY BODY

by Kemper Donovan

John Scognamiglio Books/Kensington,
\$27.00, January, 2024

Rating: A -

This yummy book is centered on a ghostwriter (never named) who gets a dream assignment: she's to collaborate with Dorothy Gibson, a Hilary Clinton-esque figure who has just lost a presidential election and has retreated to her home in Maine. The ghostwriter informs the reader that meeting a subject has to involve some chemistry or it just won't work, but she means to accept this assignment before she steps foot in the door, and the two women in fact hit it off.

This is a plot-driven book that's governed by character. The author obviously has a love for golden age mysteries and makes frequent references to Poirot, Marple, and Inspector Alleyn, but it's the budding friendship between the two women that powers the novel. As the ghostwriter accompanies Dorothy around town, Dorothy is frequently met by voters/fans who don't quite know

how to react but want to make sure she knows they voted for her. It's poignant. The way Dorothy reacts is matter of fact and friendly, and you only see the cracks when she's alone with the ghostwriter or her assistant. She also works nonstop, to the exhaustion of the writer, who cannot believe her energy.

While at the liquor store buying wine one night, they encounter a woman who talks Dorothy's ear off and insists on a selfie. Dorothy is gracious but a bit annoyed. She thinks no more of it until the news of the woman's suicide hits the local news. Dorothy and the ghostwriter decide to head to the funeral, held at the woman's rental home, known as the "Crystal Palace," which apparently looks like an ice cube in the middle of the forest. It's straight out of *Knives Out*.

As Dorothy and the ghostwriter work the party, the writer is begged by the widower's assistant to ask Dorothy to speed up the medical examiner's report. Dorothy indeed does and what

emerges is that the woman's death was not a suicide, but a murder. She also decides, to the intense annoyance of the local police – who have a bit of a problem trying to control the behavior of a former presidential candidate – to investigate.

The investigation itself is completely golden age, and while the clues are there, it's an astute reader who will catch them all and solve the crime along with Dorothy. I loved Dorothy's intelligence and the way she gets to the heart of things in her investigation. The ghostwriter is often a step or two behind. The social observations in this novel are funny, astute, well observed, and memorable, which is also very golden age. To me Agatha Christie was a great observer of social milieu and status with a humorous and cutting edge, and Donovan shares this quality with her.

This book was a full on reading love fest as far as this reader was concerned, with a slight caveat when it came to the ending. I wasn't sure about the writer's ultimate choice at the end of the novel. This is the work of a witty and intelligent writer, however, and I can't recommend it more highly.

EVERYONE ON THIS TRAIN IS A SUSPECT

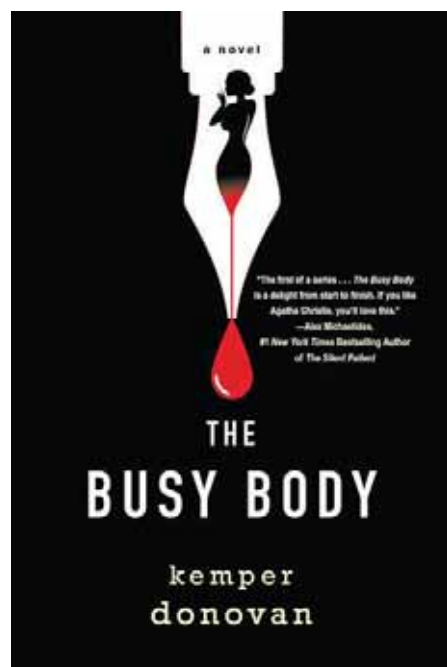
by Benjamin Stevenson

Mariner, \$30.00, January, 2024

Ernest Cunningham #2

Rating: B+

If you are a fan of *Knives Out* or *Poker Face*, this is the book for you. Clever but still human, it's very meta, yet appealingly compelling. Protagonist Ernest Cunningham is a writer who achieved a sensation with his first book, *EVERYONE IN MY FAMILY HAS KILLED SOMEONE*, and now finds himself a guest at a writer's conference taking place on an ultra-luxe train traveling through the center of Australia. There are several other varieties of mystery writers attending – with the blockbuster, "literary," legal, psychological thriller, and forensic subgenres all represented. Also joining Ernest on the train is his girlfriend, Juliette, as well as the usual assortment of editors, agents



and fans.

Ernest and Juliette lived through the actual events of his last book, and everyone on the train is a bit nervous that real murders may inevitably follow Ernest as he sits back and smugly records the results. As it turns out, they are quite right to be worried, as the trip turns into the scene of several murders and a number of revealed betrayals, small and large.

The festival headliner is Henry McTavish, who writes a bestselling series featuring a traditional police detective. In person he turns out to be a fairly unpleasant drunk, with many sinister undercurrents swirling around him.

As the trip proceeds, there's a murder – or is it just a heart attack? – before the first stop. The train staff allows Ernest and the writer with a forensic background to examine the body and make a determination as to the cause of death. Their summation turns out to be mostly correct but the police inspector who joins them discounts their attempted assistance.

This is a well-paced and laid out story, and the next death, gorier and more upsetting than the first, takes place before the next train stop. Ernest helpfully gives clues and heads up to his readers, but to be honest, this was such a clever story I don't think I could have put it all together. Much like reading an Anthony Horowitz novel, it made me want to revisit the story the minute I finished the last page.

For a narrative like this, the reader must enter into a double suspension of disbelief as Ernest is supposedly relaying “real” events and he is himself a “real” person. As you read, this suspension of disbelief becomes easier and easier, as twist follows twist and the snarky relationships between the writers (who after all have their own careers to consider) complicate matters. Everything is perceived through a veil of egotism which Ernest must pierce to see clearly, and he ultimately needs to take his own ego down a peg in order to arrive at a solution.

This has a very golden age feel – there's a closed circle of suspects, a detective on site who eventually draws

everyone together for a summation and a reveal of whodunnit, and it's not too upsetting. The puzzle is almost all. Almost, as Ernest is quite an appealing character and narrator, and I'd love to see where he ends up next. I might warn the people around him, though, to be on their toes.

THE EXPECTANT DETECTIVES

by Kat Ailes

Minotaur, \$28.00. January, 2024

Expectant Detectives #1

Rating: B+

This charmingly goofy, messy, funny mystery follows a very pregnant Alice and her partner Joe as they forsake the busy (and expensive) chaos of London for “the country.” They've chosen the tiny village of Penton in the Cotswolds on the theory that a “posh hippy” community will be a good fit. They bring along their gorgeous, if stupid, dog, Helen, who makes the move to Penton extra nightmarish by vomiting all over the car.

Upon arrival, Alice and Joe jam their things into their cute, tiny rental cottage, and collapse on their air mattress beds. They seem to have mixed emotions about their upcoming blessed arrival and make a stab at joining their new community (and reality) by attending a prenatal class, where they meet other pregnant mums in the vicinity.

Their first class takes off with a bang as one of the attendees gives birth during class and the owner of the herbal remedy shop downstairs is found dead over his tea. Ailes introduces her cast of characters via the class: the grumpy, partnerless Aisla, Hen and her partner Antoni, who seem pretty together (it's Hen who gives birth in class), and Poppy and Lin, an LGBTQ couple who appear to be the sanest and most loving of the bunch.

The women form a loose detection group, focusing their suspicion on the local commune which has had its share of mysterious disappearances and deaths through the years. The dead man was a former member of the commune but had cut off all contact with its members years ago. There's also a young man



named Rowan hanging around who seems to be conducting private inquiries of his own, and the two investigations conflict with one another, though Alice likes Rowan despite his prickly secrecy.

Ailes draws her characters well: the precise Hen, the loving couple of Poppy and Lin, and the super hippy-eco girl Aisla who is very judgy and also happens to be the sister of the cop investigating the case. Most of all she details a portrait of Alice, Joe and Helen (a hilarious dog whose terrible behavior assures that she is welcome nowhere), and their marriage, which appears to be foundering a bit as they await the birth of their child.

This is a very “young” book, as it's about women expecting babies and dealing with them when they do arrive. It's also an almost universal experience and if you have ever spent the night with an infant who won't sleep, not an unfamiliar one. Ailes brings quite a bit of humor to her narrative – Alice evaluates her new community with a jaded Londoner's eye and does not always see her place in it, finding that sometimes she would rather be eating a cheeseburger in a McDonald's parking lot than drinking rhubarb tea and eating zucchini bread.

The mystery part is a bit slippery. I wasn't quite sure this group of new friends and fledgling detectives were

going to be able to arrive at a solution to the crime, but after a couple of wrong deductions, they managed it. This is a sweet book if a tad long, with the humor and the characters making it a worthwhile read.

Maggie Mason Reviews



THE MURDER OF MR. MA

by John Shen Yen Nee & SJ Rozan.

Soho Crime, \$25.95

Rating: A

In 1929 London, life is getting back to normal for most people. China town is a busy area, filled with immigrants, many survivors of WWI. There is even a historical figure, Judge Dee, who has been transported to this era. Future novelist and playwright, Lao She meets the judge when Dee is trying to solve the murder of a man he knew during the war.

The investigation is not connected to the police as the murder of an immigrant isn't given high priority. When another immigrant, another man who served in the same WWI Chinese Labour Corps, is murdered, Dee enlists Lao She to assist.

They find that both men were members of a tontine. Tontines are a type of insurance policy where each member invests a specific sum of money, and the last member living invests it all. Members are often unaware of who is involved, to prevent someone purposely causing deaths of the other members.

Dee and Lao She conduct an investigation with the help of Bertrand

Russell and others, both Chinese and British residents. When Dee discovers the tontine, he realizes that even though the members are supposed to be secret, one has discovered the others and is murdering them to gain the funds. Sadly, the police are uninterested in this series of deaths until Dee steps in.

The action takes place throughout London, visiting stores, banks, churches, restaurants and even opium dens. Dee shows many skills, fighting among them. He dons a disguise of a noted criminal, Springheel Jack, and enlists the aid of a young man of the streets to help solve the murders and bring justice to his countrymen.

All in all, this was a rollicking adventure I was happy to read. I enjoyed the local flair and historical perspective of life in that era. The book also brought out the humiliation and poor treatment of immigrants in that era. I'm looking forward to the next in what I hope will be a long series.

On a side note, a dog friend of mine, Golden Lab Blondie Isom, also "enjoyed" the book. Blondie likes paper, and has previously "enjoyed" a book left someplace she was able to reach. The first time she "enjoyed" the last 4 or 5 pages of a book. This time

she "enjoyed" the front cover, so I was thankfully able to read the book.

THE CHRISTMAS GUEST

by Peter Swanson

William Morrow, \$19.99

Rating B+

What seems like a wonderful opportunity might not turn out to be so wonderful for Ashley Smith, an American art student in London for a year of studies abroad. Ashley had meant to stay in London during the Christmas holidays, away from her family. Fellow student Emma Chapman invites her to go home with her for the holiday. The Chapmans live in the Cotswolds in Starview Hall.

Ashley is happy to be invited and looks forward to seeing the charming area of Britain. What she didn't expect is to meet and fall for Emma's brother Adam. Adam is handsome, and knows it. He's being investigated for a murder of a village girl, and the family is concerned. Emma is sometimes friendly, sometimes stand-offish, and Ashley wonders what she has gotten herself into.

I can't really say too much else for fear of giving away the ending I never saw coming. I enjoyed the book, and was imagining what I'd do in similar circumstances. The ending was a shock to me. I'd like to see more holiday themed books by Mr. Swanson, wondering what he'd do for Valentines Day.

LET IT CROW, LET IT CROW, LET IT CROW

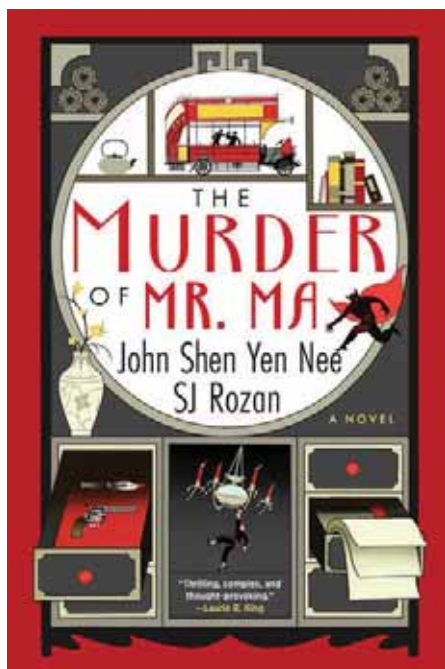
by Donna Andrews

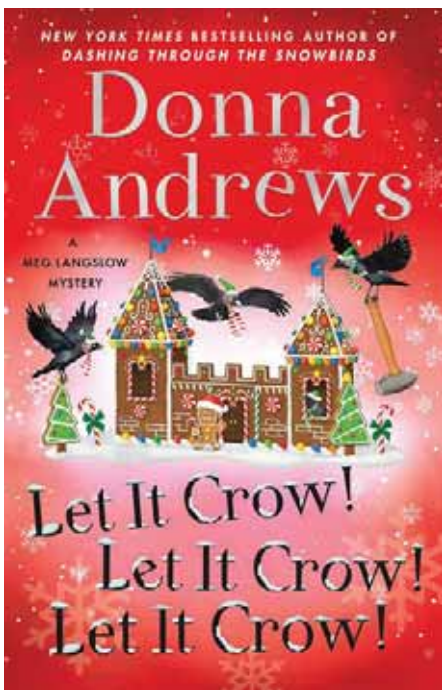
Minotaur, \$27.00

Meg Langslow #34

Rating: A

Christmas time in Caerphilly VA is always celebrated enthusiastically by all residents, and enchanted tourists. This year is a bit different for Meg. She's been asked to fill a vacancy in a weaponsmithing competition.





Her skills as a blacksmith will be on display as the organizers are hoping it will be seen as a good fit for television broadcast. Meg passed on it, but with one contestant injured, she was asked to join to keep the project going.

The one positive thing about the competition is that it's taking place at Ragnarsholm, the local estate owned by her friend, Ragnar, a retired heavy metal drummer. Ragnar is providing a place for the competition on his massive property, and even giving room and board to the staff and competitors.

As in any filmed competition there are nice and not so nice folks trying to win. The same is true here, though with people making weapons, the risk is higher for danger. To make things more difficult, there is grumbling from some about a woman entering the competition, even one as skilled and respected as Meg.

Sure enough, there is sabotage and other dirty deeds going on. Meg wins the first challenge, and as Meg is no stranger to misbehavior and is instrumental in getting the competition working smoothly. She discovers the culprit, with help of some of the usual local folks, and even helps in other ways to make this a worthy event.

The setting, Ragnarsholm is one reason I truly wish Caerphilly were a real place. A mansion with hiding places, secret passages, and room for lots of stuff would be heaven for me. Sadly, it's not real, but I luckily get to "visit" it a couple of times a year, if only in this wonderful series I highly recommend

#CRIME TIME

by Jeneva Rose & Drew Pine
Audio book, Simon & Schuster, \$29.99

Rating: B

Imagine a successful novelist as a very private person, suddenly finding out she has a younger half brother. That's what happens to Nadiya. She lives fairly modestly in a nice condo when Chase enters her life. He's in need of a place to stay, so she opens her home to him.

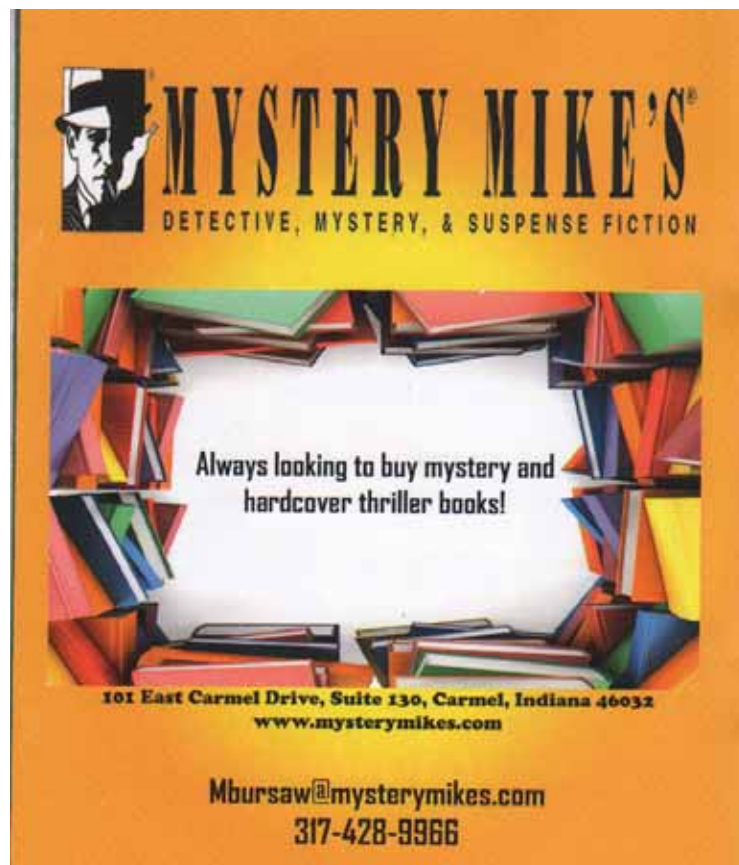
Chase is young, and eager to be a tiktok star. Sadly, he's also pretty irresponsible, and over estimates his ability to grasp reality. A burglary

is happening in an upstairs condo, and Chase decides to film it. Being young, he doesn't consider that the burglars may not want their activities broadcast. What makes his actions more reckless is that it's not a simple burglary, but a large scale criminal operation.

The videos go viral, but sadly the crooks are aware of them. Things get very dangerous for Nadiya and Chase, though Chase is unconcerned. Luckily a neighbor is able to help, but even that is not what it seems to be. Things might turn out for the best, and they do, despite Chase.

I liked the story and felt Nadiya's frustration with Chase. I guess I'm too old to want to be an influencer and too old to remember that when you're in your teens and early twenties you feel immortal.

One thing that I didn't like about the audio portion of the book, was very believable sirens. I was often looking in my rear view mirror for the source of the sirens.



Deadly Pleasures

George Easter



MURDER IN THE FAMILY

by Cara Hunter

Morrow, \$19.99, September, 2023

Rating: A

This title jumped out at me from a lot of the British “Best” lists and since it had been published in the U.S. and was easy to get, I decided to read it.

In December 2003, Luke Ryder, the stepfather of acclaimed filmmaker Guy Howard (then aged 10), was found dead in the garden of their suburban family home. Luke Ryder’s murder has never been solved. Guy Howard’s mother and two sisters were in the house at the time of the murder—but all swear they saw nothing. Despite a high-profile police investigation and endless media attention, no suspect was ever charged.

Now in the midst of the true-crime podcast craze, comes *Infamous*, which seeks to re-open this case at the behest of its producer – Guy Howard.

The story is ingeniously told through transcripts of the podcast with attending news columns, photos, maps and crime reports. Shocking revelations that no one could have expected come from the team of experts banded together to solve the crime.

Cara Hunter is a new author to me and one that I will follow from now on. I just read two of her police procedural series and liked them a lot (see reviews later in this column). She has very strong plotting skills.

WHO THE HELL IS HARRY BLACK?

by Jake Needham

Half Penny, \$18.99, November, 2023

Inspector Samuel Tay #7

Rating: B+

Harry Black is shot by a sniper rifle

while walking on a beach near his home in Thailand. Who is this man that someone would go to that much trouble to shoot?

Here’s what we soon learn about Harry Black. He was 86 years old and had lived a quiet, uneventful life in obscurity for the last 30 years. But recently Harry had surreptitiously contacted Tilly Talbot, a best-selling British true crime writer to enlist her skill to write his life story. Tilly is skeptical at first but the snippets of information that Harry feeds her eventually convince Tilly that he is telling the truth about his former life as a premier league hitman. But before she can even start on her writing, Harry is murdered.

Enter Samuel Tay, now retired from the Singapore police force, who is asked by Mr. Jones, a Triad boss (to whom he owes a debt), to look into Harry Black’s death.

Tay is joined in his private investi-

gation by Renny, Harry Black’s granddaughter, who was unaware of his existence until recently. And if you’ve been reading this series all along, you can expect a late-night visit by Tay’s deceased mother, who in this case, offers sage advice to drop the case and get out of town. Of course, Tay dismisses the nocturnal visit as a vivid dream, but there’s just a little bit of him that thinks it could be a real experience. These “visits” are always highlights of the Samuel Tay book for me. The mother-son interaction is priceless.

As his investigation progresses and more secrets are uncovered, Tay is entering more and more dangerous waters.

I have enjoyed all of the Jake Needham novels that I’ve read over the years. He has a smooth and facile writing style and he always manages to engage my interest in the plot from the get-go. That is certainly the case with **WHO THE HELL IS HARRY BLACK?** However, the resolution left me somewhat flat. I understand why Needham ended the book the way he did, but it still left me with an unresolved feeling.

A DISAPPEARANCE IN FIJI

by Nilima Rao

Soho Crime, \$25.95, June, 2023

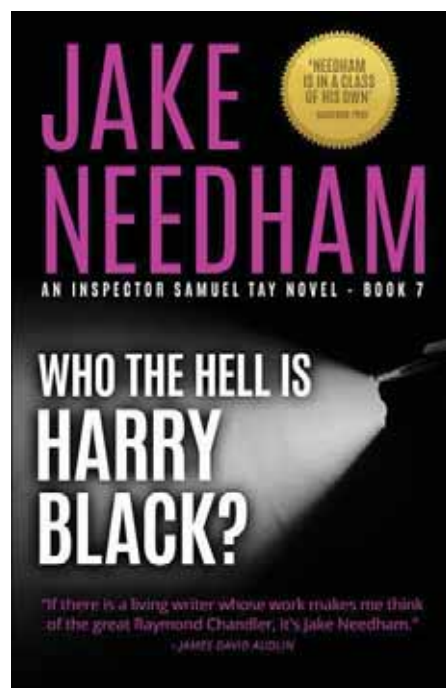
Debut Novel

Rating: B-

It’s 1914 and Akal Singh has seen his once promising career in the Hong Kong police force end in a humiliating professional mistake. So off he goes to Fiji to try to rehabilitate his career. But the inspector general there only assigns him menial tasks, unbefitting his experience. 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, finds more than he bargained for.

Through Akal’s interrogations of the white plantation owners, Indian indentured laborers, and native Fijians, we get a glimpse of the stark realities and



inequities of colonialism.

I appreciated the historical aspects of **A DISAPPEARANCE IN FIJI**, but I found the mystery elements quite weak. There was a very small pool of suspects and the guilty party turned out to be the most obvious one.

PERFECT SHOT

by Steve Urszenyi

Minotaur, \$28.00, November, 2023

Debut Thriller

Rating: B+

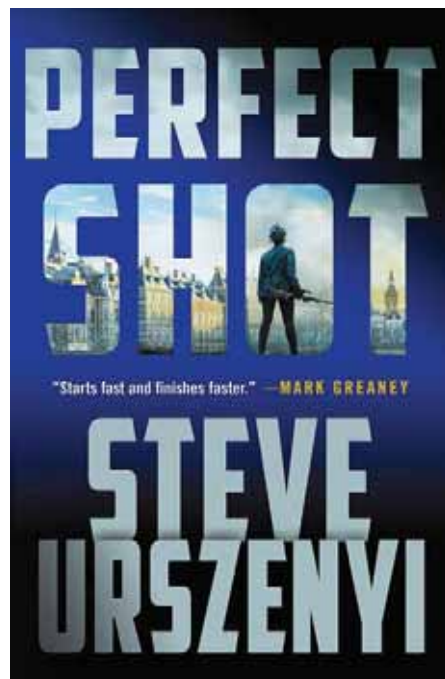
Special Agent Alexandra Martel is a former military sniper of some renown, now an FBI Special Agent on loan to Interpol. This debut thriller opens with an exciting scene as Alex uses her sniper skills to thwart the sale of fissile nuclear material to a terrorist group. The attending chase by helicopter is one of the best scenes in **PERFECT SHOT**.

Back on firm ground, Alex hears about the suspicious death of an old friend, an MI5 agent, and heads to London to look into the matter. But before she can delve deeply into the matter, she's called away to Turkey to investigate the disappearance of a nuclear missile from a U.S. airbase.

I know that all action thrillers demand a certain amount of suspension of disbelief. But it defies logic that all the bad guys are bad shots and that the hero (or in this case heroine) can survive one death-defying crisis after another. Despite this, I do enjoy a thriller that has somewhat realistic action scenes.

What troubled me a bit with **PERFECT SHOT** is that there were two scenes where the villain has a gun trained on Alex with an intent of killing her, but then seemed more interested in carrying on a conversation explaining what he was doing than in shooting her dead. The way she got out of these situations didn't ring true to me. If I were the villain, she would have been dead part way through the book.

There is a sequel coming out in November, 2024. I'll give Steve another chance, because he does have talent and his protagonist is admirable and likeable.



THE ASCENT

by Adam Plantiga

Grand Central, \$30, January, 2024

Debut novel

Rating: B

Kurt Argento is a widower and an ex-Detroit street cop who seems to wander into a Jack Reacher-like situation when he rescues a young girl from a sexual predator, whom he brutally beats up. It just so happens that the sexual predator is the brother of the corrupt local sheriff who arrests Argento before he can get out of town.

Argento is sent to the local Missouri prison to await his trial on trumped up charges.

Julie Wakefield, a grad student who happens to be the governor's daughter, is about to take a tour of the prison, accompanied by two of her father's security staff. But when a malfunction in the security system releases a horde of prisoners, a fierce struggle for survival ensues.

Communication with the outside world is cut off. No cell phones will work until someone can get to the roof and call for help.

Argento is called on to help a small band of staff and civilians, including Julie and her two state trooper handlers, make their way from the bottom floor

through the intervening floors to the roof. Problem: some of the cell doors are open on each floor and there are dangerous people afoot.

There is a lot of action and violence (sometimes too much violence) along the way, some of it over the top. It reminded me a little bit of the old Alistair MacLean novels (a traitor in their midst). In the right hands, this could make a good action-packed movie. As a thriller I found it to be mediocre.

THE SILENCE IN HER EYES

by Armando Lucas Correa

Atria, \$27.00, January, 2024

Standalone

Rating: C+

I'll admit right off the bat that this is not my kind of book. Fans of psychological suspense will undoubtedly rate it higher than I do.

There are some interesting aspects to it, however. One being the main character's handicap. Leah suffers from akinetopsia, or motion blindness, due to a head injury when she was eight years old. People see her with a walking stick and think she's totally blind, but she can see things as if they were snapshots when she blinks her eyes, and if people and objects are still, she can see them just fine.

Fortunately her parents left her very well off, living in an upper-class section of Manhattan.

Leah is quite reclusive except for occasional trips to a local bookstore and has only a very small circle of friends. So her interest is piqued when a new neighbor moves in. Alice is apparently going through a difficult divorce. Leah comes to accept her role in a developing relationship with Alice as a protector and friend.

By the middle of the book, the plot seemed to meander and go nowhere. Quite confusing. I started to wonder if a crime was ever going to be committed. Nevertheless, I persevered to the end, which was quite surprising, but even that surprise didn't redeem the book for me. Not recommended.

THE FURY OF BEIJING

by Ian Hamilton

Spiderline, \$15.99, January, 2024

Ava Lee #16

Rating: B

This is a novel of revenge – pure and simple. Two of Ava Lee’s closest friends, Lau Lau and Chen, are brutally murdered and Ava gathers her comrades in arms (Sonny Kwon, Jimmy Li, Lop, and Xu, the mountain master of Shanghai) to revenge their deaths. Just one problem. Ava’s search for those responsible eventually leads to some very powerful people – in mainland China.

But Ava finds out it is one thing to execute a planned assassination, but quite another to get away with it.

Although well written, **THE FURY OF BEIJING**, lacked a certain energy and pacing that I found in earlier novels in the series.

I’ve heard some rumblings that this is the end of the series. I agree that it may be time for Ian Hamilton to move on to another character.

HERO

by Thomas Perry

Mysterious Press, \$27.95, January, 2024

Rating: A-

In his standalone novels such as **HERO**, Thomas Perry creates some of his best characters. Leah Hawkins in **A SMALL TOWN**, Ed and Nicole Hoyt in **FORTY THIEVES**, and Elle Stowall in **THE BURGLAR** come quickly to mind. They are so likeable, interesting and finely crafted that one hopes Perry will bring them back in other novels. But in most cases, he just moves on to another outstanding standalone character. I don’t know whether to laud him or criticize him for this practice, so I just choose to read him – everything he writes – and enjoy my journey.

When security guard Justine Poole prevents a home invasion of a Beverly Hills home, she is lauded in the news media as a “hero.” She doesn’t think so. She was just doing her job.

But unbeknownst to her, a crime boss behind the caper is seriously offended and seeks revenge, first by having

Justine’s boss killed and then coming after her. Justine proves to be resourceful and illusive. It appears that hitman Leo Sealy has met his match.

It’s always a joy to read Thomas Perry’s smooth and fast-paced prose. Long may he write.

DREAM TOWN

by Lee Goldberg

Thomas & Mercer, \$28.99; \$16.99,

January, 2024

Eve Ronin #5

Rating: B

Police detective Eve Ronin is called to the private celebrity enclave called Hidden Hills to investigate the murder of reality show superstar Kitty Winslow. This will involve looking deeply into the lives of the members of her particularly dysfunctional family.

This is all happening while in the background her personal life is in turmoil due to the filming in the same general area the television show based on Eve’s own professional life story. The show is being directed by her estranged father and even features cameos by her failed-actress mother. Eve is a very private person and resents the show’s intrusion into her privacy. She only agreed to its making because of an almost impossible situation she found herself in that required a substantial amount of money to fix.

The murder is followed by the discovery of corpses in the state park just outside the walls of Hidden Hills.

I’m a fan of this series and of the author’s plotting and writing skills. But I have to admit that **DREAM TOWN** is my least favorite of the series so far. Except for the series continuing characters, the story was filled with such unlikeable people that I frequently put it down and had to force myself to finish it.

AT ANY COST

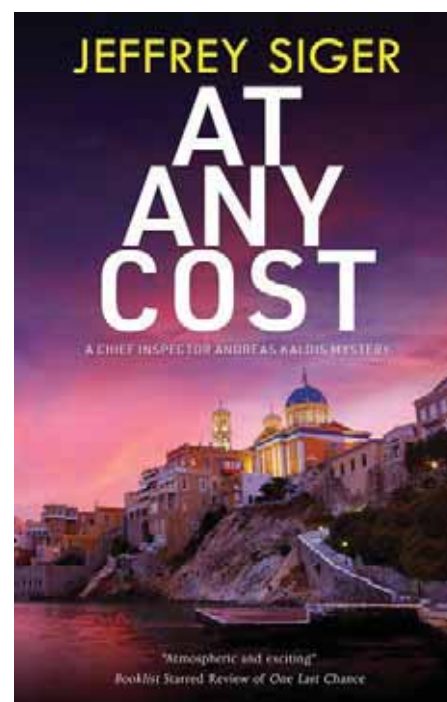
by Jeffrey Siger

Severn House, \$29.99, February, 2024

Chief Inspector Andreas Kaldis #13

Rating: B+

What starts as an investigation into whom has set some of the forest fires



in Greece during the previous summer, turns into much more. As Chief Inspector Kaldis and his staff dig deeper into the arson cases, they begin to suspect that more is going on than mere arson for pleasure.

Large foreign interests represented by a local attorney are gobbling up the burnt acreage with development in mind. Could they be responsible for some of the fires?

There are whispers in the wind that shadowy foreign powers intend to establish a surreptitious mega-internet presence on the island of Syros, with the intent to weaponize the digital world to their own dark ends. To figure out what is really going on behind the scenes, Kaldis enlists the skills of his future nephew-in-law to unravel the mysteries surrounding his investigation, especially those of a leading edge, hi-tech nature..

This is one of the best in the series. It gives us a vivid pictures of the Greek landscape, an exciting police procedural, and presents a cautionary tale for this day when forces are trying to pervert the uses of AI and the internet to their pernicious goals. The ending may not be to everyone’s liking, but the author may be portending things to come.

THREE-INCH TEETH

by C. J. Box
Putnam, \$30.00, February, 2024
Joe Pickett #24
Rating: C

This novel doesn't live up to Box's reputation and the clever title.

The opening scene depicts a gruesome attack by a grizzly bear on a person close to Joe Pickett's family.

The grizzly bear's attack gives recently-released convict Dallas Cates an idea of a method to carry out his planned revenge on those who put him in prison. Cates steals a stuffed grizzly bear's head from a local museum and weaponizes its teeth with the help of his weird mechanical genius friend.

Unfortunately some very nice and good people fall victim to Cates' plan. Their injuries resemble those sustained in a grizzly bear attack so, at least for awhile, no one suspects they are caused by humans.

It takes some time for Joe Pickett to get the news of Dallas Cates' release and by the time he figures things out it is too late for some.

I was disturbed by the violence and death in this novel. I don't like to see admirable continuing characters killed in any series that I read. It's understandable that an author of a long-standing series needs to shake up the underlying story from time to time, but I would prefer the author choose another way to do it than this.

Not recommended for anyone except die-hard C. J. Box fans.

THE CHAOS AGENT

by Mark Greaney
Berkley, \$30.00, February, 2024
Gray Man #13
Rating: B+

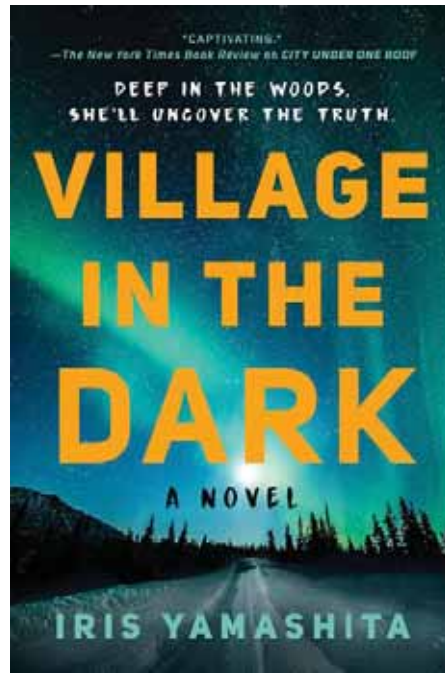
While Court Gentry and his lover Zoya Zakharova are trying to live a quiet life with new identities in Central America, someone is killing off all of the world's leading experts in Artificial Intelligence.

Their help is enlisted and before they know it Court and Zoya are being targeted themselves by humans, drones and robotic soldiers.

I read this series to see what's happening in Court Gentry's life and to experience the thrill of Mark Greaney's action scenes. The ratings I give Greaney's novels generally range between A and A-. But **THE CHAOS AGENT** didn't have the same tension and realism that his prior novels have had – at least not for me. The premise of an AI-operated robotic army just didn't seem realistic to me. It may be realistic in a decade or two, but not now.

VILLAGE IN THE DARK

by Iris Yamashita
Berkley, \$28.00, February, 2024
Cara Kennedy #2
Rating: A-



In the first in the series, **CITY UNDER ONE ROOF**, Detective Cara Kennedy goes to the remote Point Mettier, Alaska in hopes of finding some clues that would help her make sense of the disappearance of her husband and son some months before. While there, she helps solve a murder and runs across a criminal gang. Near the end of the narrative of that book, the cell phone of one of the gang members comes into her possession and on it she sees a photo of her husband and son. Even though the bones of her loved ones are eventually discovered and identified, she still has questions, the primary one being, "Why

was there a photo of her family on the phone of a known criminal?"

So at the beginning of **VILLAGE IN THE DARK**, Kennedy is back on the trail to find answers. And that trail takes her first back to Point Mettier and its delightful, rag-tag, misfit inhabitants.

Simultaneously we are being told the story of Mia Upash, who grew up in an isolated village in a community of women and children hiding from abusive men (not too different in that regard than Point Mettier). Upon reaching adulthood, Mia leaves the village and goes to find her way in Man's World. It is not an easy transition and eventually her story intersects with Cara Kennedy's story with shocking results.

This is a strong follow-up to the much-acclaimed debut **CITY UNDER ONE ROOF**, which I would recommend that you read first before reading **VILLAGE IN THE DARK**. When I started reading the second book I was already familiar with names and places and felt quite at home right from the get-go.

For someone who reads a lot of crime fiction like I do, it is always nice to read something that is refreshingly different from the rest. Good, clear storytelling at its best.

KINGPIN

by Mike Lawson
Atlantic Monthly Press, \$27.00,
February, 2024
Joe DeMarco #17
Rating: A-

Every year when a new Mike Lawson/Joe DeMarco thriller comes out it is a banner day in the Easter household. I have read and greatly enjoyed all 21 of Lawson's novels. They are all characterized by smooth writing, exceptional storytelling and consistently high quality.

In his latest, **KINGPIN**, we see Joe DeMarco, the fix-it man for John Mahoney, the former Speaker of the House, investigate the death by drug overdose of Brian Lewis, a bright and dedicated intern for Mahoney. But Brian's girlfriend insists that Brian never took drugs. Brian's mom is convinced that her son was murdered because of what he was working on – an expose' of

a group of corrupt politicians who had taken large bribes to “kill” a legislative bill in Congress. DeMarco quickly comes to the same conclusion. And he goes in search of the kingpin of the corruption, a Boston businessman by the name of Carson Newman, who is no friend of John Mahoney.

There is some irony in this story. Here you have the former Speaker of the House, who has been known to participate in all sorts of political misconduct, sending his fixer after corrupt politicians and businesses who aren’t aligned with the Mahoney machine. No wonder why people call the politics of Washington, D. C. a swamp.

DeMarco brings the story to a satisfying conclusion in an unexpected way. Another great thriller by Mike Lawson. If you haven’t read him you are in for a treat.

THE PRICE YOU PAY

by Nick Petrie
Putnam, \$29.00, February
Peter Ash #8
Rating: A-

Most good characters in mystery fiction are enhanced by an interesting sidekick. In the case of the Peter Ash series that sidekick is Lewis, who has a colorful background, but in recent years has gone straight because of the influence of his family. Lewis’ skill set was learned on the streets, while Peter Ash’s mostly comes from his military service.

The storyline of **THE PRICE YOU PAY** centers on Lewis’ prior life and how it has come back to haunt him. In this one, Ash plays the supportive sidekick. Years ago Lewis ran a team which only went after the assets of criminals who seemed to be above the law. They kept their members’ identity secret and that secret has kept them safe – until now.

So Lewis and Ash have to find out who is after Lewis and his gang members – and how to stop them.

It’s quite a ride – but one has come to expect such thrills and chills from Nick Petrie – one of the best action thriller writers around today.



BLACK WOLF

by Juan Gomez-Jurado
Minotaur, \$28.00, March, 2024
Antonia Scott#2
Rating: A

This is the middle book of a trilogy and middle books have to bridge the characters and events of the first book with the characters and events of the third. Middle books are often the weakest book of a trilogy, but not in this case.

Antonia Scott, with her brilliant mind, is a vital part of the Red Queen project, created to work sub rosa in solving some of the most puzzling and dangerous crimes in Europe. But Antonia is a psychological mess and she requires pharmaceutical assistance for her mind to work at peak efficiency. Antonia is to be admired, but not necessarily liked. And now she is addicted and trying to hide that fact from her partner, Jon Gutierrez, who acts as her helper and protector. Jon is both liked and admired.

Their boss, known only as Mentor, has a new mission for them. But Antonia is reluctant to even temporarily call off her search for Sandra Fajardo, a villain who escaped justice in **RED QUEEN**. But something has come up that is more urgent.

A member of the Russian Mafia

has been murdered and an attempt to do the same to his wife was thwarted. Lola Moreno is pregnant, penniless and a diabetic, and she’s now on the run from Yuri Volontin, the Russian crime boss on the Costa del Sol who ordered her husband’s murder. Mentor wants Antonia and Jon to find Lola before she winds up dead.

We readers follow Lola’s harrowing escapes from disaster with a growing appreciation for the character and her resourcefulness.

Another great entry in this short series. **WHITE KING** will finish the story arc in 2025. Can’t wait to read it.

ALL THE RAGE

by Cara Hunter
Morrow, \$18.99, February, 2024
DI Adam Fawley #4
Rating: A-

Teenager Faith Appleyard is on her way to school one morning when an unseen assailant places a plastic bag over her head, ties her hands with cable ties and dumps her in the back of a van. She is taken to an allotment shed where there is an apparent rape attempt. But the attacker is frightened off by the sudden sound of police sirens close by. Faith is later found on the side of the road by a Good Samaritan passerby. When the police talk to her, she doesn’t want to talk about the experience. But DI Adam Fawley’s team doesn’t give up and eventually a story emerges with some surprising revelations.

Another abduction follows in short order and the police search for evidence that will tie the two crimes together and point to one perpetrator.

The modus operandi of the crimes brings to mind the similar tactics of Gavin Parry, *The Roadside Rapist*, who is serving a life sentence for his crimes. It was DI Adam Fawley who put him away. Some are questioning whether Parry was wrongly convicted and if the real Roadside Rapist is still at large. (This plot continues on into the next book. See the next review below).

Cara Hunter’s complex and compelling plots keep me turning the pages as fast as I can. Good stuff – especially for

fans of British police procedurals.

THE WHOLE TRUTH

by Cara Hunter

Morrow, \$18.99, April, 2024

DI Adam Fawley #5

Rating: A-

The investigations described in **THE WHOLE TRUTH** are team efforts led by DI Adam Fawley and others. Mercifully, the author has provided a cast of characters, with fairly detailed descriptions of each one, at the front of the book – or I would have been confused because this is the first of the series that I have read. There are more characters than in a normal police procedural and otherwise the reader might be left bewildered.

The first case that comes up is that of a Oxford professor accused of inappropriate sexual contact with a student. The twist is that the professor is a 40-ish female of slight build and the student is a big brute of a fellow. Fawley doesn't think there is much to this case, but his bosses insist that there be a thorough investigation. The author is adept at showing how a "he says/she says" case is fraught with difficulty in arriving at "the whole truth."

But it is the other case that appears part way into the book that I found more interesting. It is the murder of a woman, who turns out to be a long-time friend of Fawley's pregnant wife. [SPOILER ALERT]. Several pieces of damaging evidence are found that implicate Fawley himself and he can't figure out how to prove his innocence.

This is the third Cara Hunter book I've read in the last two months and I've become quite a fan. Her six mysteries are available in the U.S. in trade paperback and Kindle editions. She's a very creative plotter and keeps the reader on his/her toes. Expect more reviews of her books from me.

THE TRANSLATOR

by Harriet Crawley

Bitter Lemon Press, \$17.95, April, 2024

Rating: A-

Clive Franklin, a Russian language expert in the Foreign Office, is enjoying an idyll hiking in the wilds of Scotland when he receives an emergency call which requires him to translate for the British Prime Minister on her visit to Moscow. When he arrives there he is shocked to see his former (secret) lover Marina Volina serving as the Russian President's interpreter.

As events transpire, it turns out that Marina would like to defect to the West and that information is passed on to the British Intelligence Service, which is aware of a Russian plot to cut vital undersea cables that link the U.K. with the U.S. The price for aiding in Volina's defection is that she find more specific information as to the where and when of the Russian plot. This is quite a difficult task because Marina's translating skills aren't needed in meetings where such things are discussed.

Meanwhile, Clive and Marina rekindle their love affair and that gives Clive added incentive to help.

As Marina digs deeper, General Varlamov becomes suspicious and suspects that Marina may be a traitor.

As well-made plans go awry, Clive and Marina must improvise on the fly. The ending is nothing like what I was expecting and is a nice set-up for a sequel.

THE TRANSLATOR is well written and plotted. My only quibble is that, at 412 pages, it's a bit too long. It seemed that some scenes served only to flesh-out the characters and didn't advance the plot. And that effected the pacing that was, at times, quite slow. This book came out in the U.K. in 2023 and was on a few of their best of the year lists.

A FONDNESS FOR TRUTH

by Kim Hays

Seventh Street Books, \$18.95,

April, 2024

Linder & Donatelli #3

Rating: A-

Andi Eberhart is a well-liked civil servant, who has a happy same-sex relationship and a new baby daughter. Things are going quite well for her

until one night, while riding her bicycle home, she is killed by a hit-and-run driver.

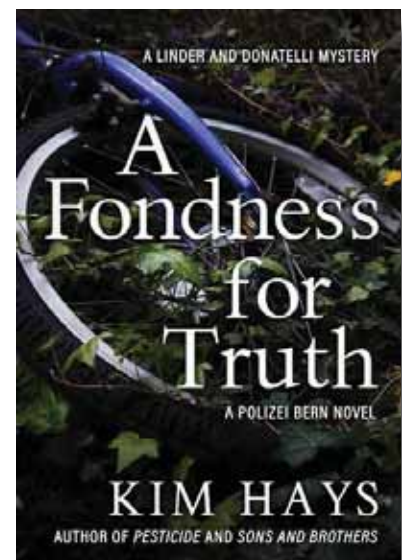
Bern homicide Detective Giuliana Linder and her sometime assistant Renzo Donatelli are assigned to the team investigating this incident. It is quickly determined that this incident wasn't an accident, but an intentional homicide.

Potential suspects abound. Was it the person sending Andi homophobic hate mail for the last few years? Was it someone offended by Andi's outspoken honesty? Or could it be someone connected to her job advising young men drafted into Switzerland's civilian service?

While the investigation plays out, the author also gives us a glimpse of the family life of the main characters. Things are going well with Linder's husband and two children (with a minor blip with her son), but not so well with Donatelli's wife, who resents the long hours his job requires him to work, leaving her "stuck" with two small children day after day with little help from him. There is also a recent cancer scare with Linder's mother-in-law that reveals some cracks in her family's solidarity.

The case is resolved in surprising fashion.

Kim Hays writes a heck-of-a-good police procedural at the same time giving us insight into Switzerland's unique society. This is a series that everyone should be reading if you like well-written mysteries.



HISTORICAL EMPORIUM

Robin Agnew



THE TWILIGHT QUEEN

By Jeri Westerson

Severn House, \$29.99, January

King's Fool #2

Rating B+

I'm a hardcore Tudor fan, in part because of those long ago '70s TV series *The Six Wives of Henry VIII* and *Elizabeth R*. I inhaled everything Tudor during high school and went on to major in history in college. So when Jeri Westerson asked me if I'd care to read her book about Will Somers, Henry VIII's jester, it wasn't hard to say yes.

The story begins one evening when Will is called to an agitated Queen Anne Boleyn's presence to learn that she's discovered a corpse under her bed. She has no idea who the man is, but knowing that a dead body in her chamber would cause a major scandal, asks Will to move it. He reluctantly agrees and transports the remains to the garden.

I've of course read Hilary Mantel's **WOLF HALL** trilogy which traces Henry's Chief Minister Thomas Cromwell's path to power as he places two women on the throne, Anne Boleyn and Jane Seymour, followed by his ultimate downfall. Westerson has a different focus, centering her story from the point of view of a servant instead of a member of Henry's administration, Will Somers was a real person, but Westerson embellishes his life, adding a wife (with handy ties to the nobility) and a gay sex life that his wife tolerates. Both help round out Will's character and allow him more range in his investigations, as his clandestine lover is also a member of the nobility.

I thought one of the strongest elements of the book was the vividness of Westerson's portrayal of the court, a

city in itself, with nobles and servants having rooms and apartments within the castle, with everything revolving around Henry. In this period – 1536 – Anne had already given birth to Elizabeth, who is three, and is becoming increasingly apprehensive about Henry's apparent infatuation with Jane Seymour. Quiet, meek, and godly, Jane is Anne's polar opposite, and her own apartment in court is next door to her brother and his wife, connecting to the King's chambers.

Westerson dissects the intricacies of court politics clearly, and for this reader, truly demonstrates how a fake plot accusing Anne of multiple lovers could have been orchestrated. Through her portrayal of Will, his loving marriage, and his relationship with Henry, whom he calls "Uncle," Westerson brings real humanity to her story. Pleasing everyone at court is never possible, and

because he's one of the few who can tweak the King, Will often finds himself caught between a rock and a hard place. One of the most trenchant illustrations of this was Will's playing with the toddler Elizabeth and then reluctantly catching sight of Mary, Henry's first child and now a lady in waiting to her usurper, standing at the periphery. He tries to give her some sign of understanding but must conceal it.

The mystery element is fairly straightforward, and Will's investigation is somewhat hampered by his status at court, though, as the King's Fool, he can come and go almost anywhere he pleases. He is Henry's *servant* in the end though, and Westerson is also excellent at conveying Henry's complete assumption of royalty.

I enjoyed the details of daily life in the palace – the food, the clothes, and even the description of the man in the stables who makes the saddles. I really loved Will himself and Westerson's imagining of him, and appreciated the way she was able to further illuminate Tudor court life through her clever story. Westerson also has a good historical afterword at the end that highlights and explains Anne's upcoming fate. Although I always hope Anne's story will have a different ending, sadly, it never does. If you are a fan of the Tudors, don't miss this read.

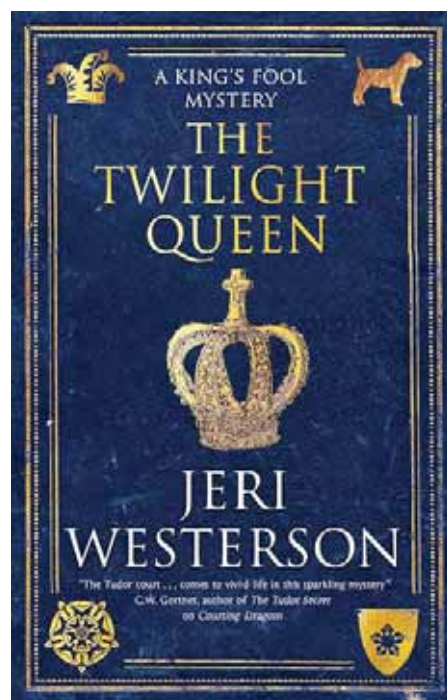
THE WHARTON PLOT

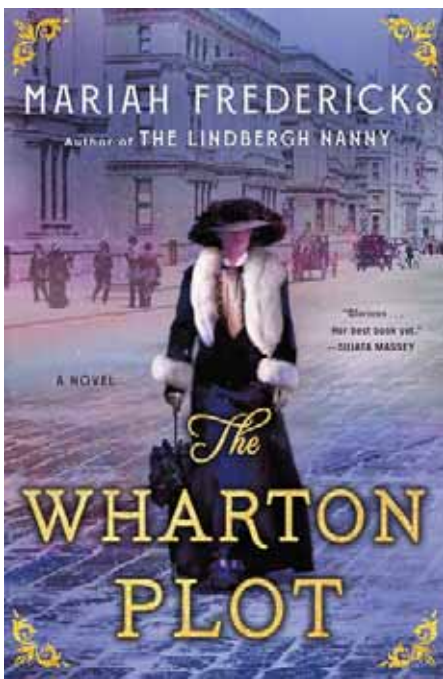
By Mariah Fredericks

Minotaur, \$28, January

Rating: B+

I am a big fan of Mariah Fredericks' vivid historical fiction. I adore her Jane Prescott series, featuring a lady's maid in 1910 New York, in which Jane ends up investigating crimes with the blessing of the family she works for, often with the help of a friendly investigative reporter. Mariah's now moved toward standalone historical novels – in 2022's **THE LINDBERGH NANNY** she followed the kidnapping through the eyes of the nursemaid to the baby. In **THE WHARTON PLOT**, Edith Wharton herself takes on the true murder of a well known (at the time) author, David





Graham Phillips.

Set in her comfort zone – 1911, gilded age New York – Fredericks brings alive Wharton's life and channels her thoughts. As the book opens, Edith is having lunch with her publisher when they are joined by Phillips, who she finds rude and dismissive. How could Wharton understand the modern American woman? Phillips asks, as he describes his forthcoming novel, which he says will expose the true life of American womanhood. (In 1911 Wharton was the well known author of *The House of Mirth*.)

Edith is in a funny liminal place in her life – fed up with her marriage, unsure of a former flame's affections, between books and just beginning to ponder the next one. Having recently turned 50, she's starting to feel used up and, as many women feel after age 40, a bit invisible. When Mr. Phillips is shot to death the day after she meets him in front of the Princeton club she feels compelled to discover why.

Accompanied by her ambivalent beau, she agrees to attend the funeral and subsequent reception at the deceased's apartment. At the urging of his widow, she finds herself agreeing to read the manuscript of his new book, promising she will do what she can to support it. But what Edith really wants is to get

back to Paris, mainly using the book as an excuse to avoid her husband, who is suffering from early dementia.

She must read the manuscript at the publisher's office and as she delves into it, she begins to understand the murdered man a bit more. It's an enlightening view for her as Phillips was known as a muckraker of the lower depths while Wharton, of course, chronicled the lives of the higher echelons of society. Before he was killed, he received scary, threatening notes, and now she is receiving them as well.

This is a very New York book, clearly written by a New Yorker. As Edith and her friends bemoan the changes or loss of this building or that business, it's the constant state of change that remains quintessentially New York, then and now. Even as Edith participates in seemingly already antiquated social events with Vanderbilts and Astor she too is evolving, moving toward a decision on her marriage, a break with her beau, and thoughts of a new masterpiece.

Her investigation takes her to the upper echelons of politics and society and through the realm of literary New York. It's a bit of a discursive investigation but she ultimately uncovers the killer. What I most enjoyed was the visit inside the mind of one of America's greatest writers – it's hard to say if Wharton had some kind of existential crisis as she turned 50, but as rendered by Fredericks, it certainly seems believable. This was an interesting and unexpected read that also accomplished what I thought was impossible: a desire to re-read *Ethan Frome*.

THE DIAMOND OF LONDON

By Andrea Penrose

Kensington, \$17.95, January

Rating: B

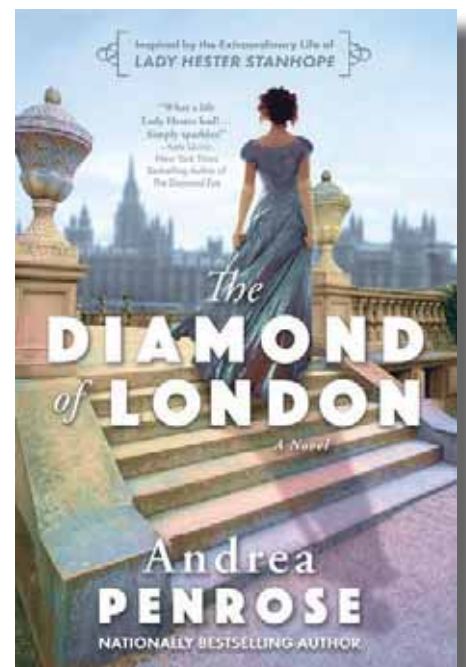
Andrea Penrose has a long series of historical mysteries, but here she pivots to straight historical fiction, illuminating the life of Lady Hester Stanhope, who lived during the Regency period in England. After her mother, who was related to the powerful Pitt family, died young, she was left with an eccentric father and the responsibility for three

stepbrothers. Hester spent much of her young adult life with her grandmother, Lady Chatham, and a bit later served as hostess and secretary to her uncle, William Pitt, who served as Prime Minister.

One of the things I truly enjoy about historical fiction is "meeting" a real person who I would have otherwise known nothing about, most of them women. Hester was fated to be an outlier in her own family story, eternally scrambling for a place to live and a means to live her life. Instrumental in supporting and championing her, her uncle was more like a father to her than her actual one.

As portrayed by Penrose (and backed up by history), Hester was a strong, fearless character who wanted to live life on her own terms and chafed at the restrictions placed on women, particularly in the form of marriage. While she was associated with some famous and well placed men, including Beau Brummel, she resisted the legal snare of matrimony. Adding to her anxieties is her social enemy, Georgina Spencer, the infamous Duchess of Devonshire.

Penrose does a wonderful job of portraying both politics and society and is especially adept at recreating the atmosphere of balls and the kind of malicious backstage gossip that was traded at similar social events. The cast remained



the same in most instances, so these were people who both encountered one another often and were uncomfortably familiar with each other's backgrounds and family history.

Hester's involvement with her rakish and scandalous cousin Thomas Pitt, Baron Camelford, a man who matches Hester's lust for life and embrace of danger and adventure, leads to some low level scandal and gossip. The two together were, as this book suggests, a flammable combination, and they were both singed by it. As she eases out of this toxic relationship and finds herself enjoying her work for her uncle, she strikes up another relationship with the more acceptable Earl of Granville, known as the "most beautiful man in London."

While this connection is documented, as well as Hester's reaction to their breakup, her relationship with the most acceptable of all General Moore is not as well verified. Although from their correspondence it appears they were considering marriage, the General was killed before that could happen. Penrose takes slightly anachronistic liberty with her portrayal of Hester as sexually active, unremarkable in the world of today, but not a socially acceptable form of behavior for a woman in her own time.

After her many life losses, Hester's life breaks apart and she heads to the continent, becoming a well-known adventurer, traveler, and scholar. Penrose is more concerned with her journey to reach that point, fleshing out the bare facts with her portrayal of Hester's emotional life. I enjoyed meeting this woman and appreciated a look at an unknown (to me) slice of history.

MURDER BY LAMPLIGHT

By Patrice McDonough
Kensington, \$27, February
Debut

Rating: A

If I were a magic eight ball, I'd say that all signs point to this satisfying

and enjoyable debut setting up a series with a long, long run. Set in London in 1866, the central character is Dr. Julia Lewis, an American educated physician (it was not possible for women to get a degree in England at the time) who is running her grandfather's practice. But because he is ill, when the office gets the order to attend to a murder victim, it's Julia who must take the call.

The dead man is a priest, found mutilated and naked, and though the police on the scene are initially a bit shocked at Julia's gender, they eventually accept her expertise. Inspector Tennant is controlled and quiet, and he and the doctor begin awkwardly,



but gradually smooth things out.

The priest is the first in a string of deaths that are certainly related – sharing certain features as well as a specific clue left with each body – but exactly *how* is the question. They could be tied to the workhouse, or a cholera outbreak, or perhaps even to a “Molly” house, a place for gay men.

One of the many reasons why this is such a great set up for a series is its time period. It was highly unusual for a woman to be a doctor at the time, so Julia's status and the way she fights

for her place in the world reveal her feisty, fearless and practical character. Mirroring Julia is well born Inspector Tennant, who, after an army discharge, has had to find a place with the police, and then only through the patronage of a well-placed godfather. He's uncomfortable with his status and can sympathize with Julia's frustrations as he struggles to establish himself in his own way.

A second reason is the way McDonough delineates different parts of Victorian London (it sounds very un-delicious), as she looks at workhouses, cholera and the general status of children who have been abandoned or orphaned, forced to make some kind of living on the streets. Because McDonough relates the conditions and illuminates the lives of the characters who are living through these dire situations in a very straightforward and matter of fact manner, their stories resonate.

A third reason is that she's created not just two very solid central characters in Julia and Tennant, but also a memorable family for Julia (her grandfather and a nosy aunt), a colorful and intelligent Irish cop who works with Tennant, and a boy that Julia takes in to work at her clinic, all who seem poised to become series regulars.

The final reason is that this is quite a fine mystery, all on its own. The serial killer story can be a bit overdone, but McDonough's made it less thriller than whodunnit (though there is a thrilling scene toward the end), and the clues are uncovered by the solid police work of Tennant's crew as well as intelligent deductions on Julia's part. Because the author has also made the reader actually care about these characters, the resolution gains emotional resonance and you find yourself rooting for Julia and whatever her relationship with Tennant will bring. This is simply the best series kick-off I've read since Victoria Thompson's **MURDER ON ASTOR PLACE**.

Lookin' For A Few Good Books

Larry Gandle



THE LAST MONA LISA

by Jonathan Santlofer
Sourcebooks, \$27.99, 2021

Rating: B+

In August, 1911, Vincent Peruggia, an employee of the Louvre, stole the Mona Lisa. He wanted to sell it and had gotten involved with forgers. In the present day, Vincent's great grandson, Luke Perrone, an artist and art history professor, is invited to Florence to examine Vincent's journal. It is kept in the Laurentian Library safe from interlopers. Luke travels there to learn the truth about his relative but there are some people who will kill to get their hands on the journal. It may hold the key as to whether the painting in the Louvre is real or a forgery. Luke befriends a beautiful young woman, Alexis Verde, who helps in his search and also attracts the interest of an Interpol detective named, John Washington Smith, who wants to make a name for himself. Luke must delve into the dangerous world of art forgery to discover the truth about the Mona Lisa.

This is a fun and fast novel that plays loosely with facts in order to create a compelling narrative. Much of Vincent Peruggia's life is totally fictitious and it is often difficult to distinguish what is real and what is not. The information on forgeries is generally quite accurate and fits one of the theories on what happened with the painting. The characters of Luke, Alexis and Smith are reasonably complete creations. The story never flounders in pacing or interest. The author, Jonathan Santlofer, is an acclaimed artist and a 'legal forger'. He can create paintings indistinguishable from the originals but he uses modern day materials so there will never

be a question that the painting can be considered original. This talent lends a certain degree of authenticity to the passages describing painting technique. This is a clever and original work. It is also highly recommended.

THE LOST VAN GOGH

by Jonathan Santlofer
Sourcebooks, \$34.99, January, 2024

Rating: B

Luke Perrone, artist and art history professor and his girlfriend, Alexis Verde, purchase a painting of a clown. When they get home, they notice an edge looks off. As they peel back the paint, before them is a self portrait of Vincent Van Gogh. Alexis contacts a friend who owns an art gallery. While taking it to show her, Alexis is robbed of the painting and it disappears into the hands of nefarious art dealers. Luke and Alexis contact John Washington Smith,

the Interpol agent to discover where the painting has disappeared to. As they get closer to the painting, people begin to die.

This is another fast-paced thriller written by Jonathan Santlofer concerning a painting from a famous artist. The story is entertaining but often reality must be stretched as unlikely coincidences abound. The book is full of interesting facts about the world of art history and the existence of this unknown self portrait does appear to be plausible. This is a perfect book for the plane, pool or beach. Recommended.

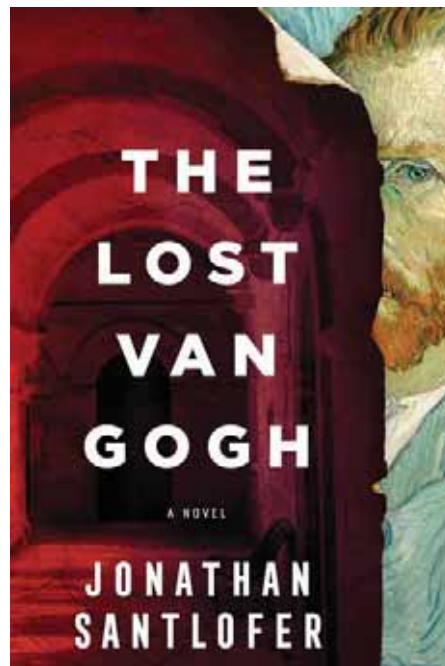
THE VASTER WILDS

by Lauren Groff
Riverhead, \$28.00

Rating: A

A servant girl escapes from a colonial settlement in a fort. Something terrible has happened to make her flee. She must now battle the wintry climate as her survival will require her to use whatever wit and skills she has. This becomes a straightforward survival story interspersed with episodes from her past slowly giving clues as to how she got placed into the predicament she is in.

This is an incredibly clever adventure story and thriller. It is impossible to put down. Lauren Groff, with her lyrical writing skills and superior storytelling ability, manages to straddle the line between literary novel and pop thriller. Her character is so very realistic and the plot is totally compelling. Though the writing is so beautifully rendered, I have little doubt that it is the storytelling that makes this author and this particular book so popular. The conclusion is both inevitable and satisfying. Highly recommended.



THE RIVER WE REMEMBER

by William Kent Krueger

Atria, \$28.99

Rating: B+

In 1958, in a small town in Minnesota, the body of Jimmy Quinn is found floating in the Alabaster River. Enough people in the town hated him so the suspect list is long. Nonetheless, it is up to the local Sheriff, Brody Dern, to solve the death. To do so, he must confront racism, local suspicions and accusations without merit. As he gets closer to the truth, things get increasingly deadly.

William Kent Krueger has written a beautifully lyrical novel – a portrait of small-town life in the 1950s. Characters are thoughtfully rendered and most are so very realistically complex. The plot moves at a languid pace until the last quarter of the book. The locale including the river is a major player in the story and is carefully described throughout. The reader will get to know these characters so well. Personally, I found the book to be a bit slow going but if the reader stays with it, they will be amply rewarded in the end. Recommended.

RESURRECTION WALK

by Michael Connelly

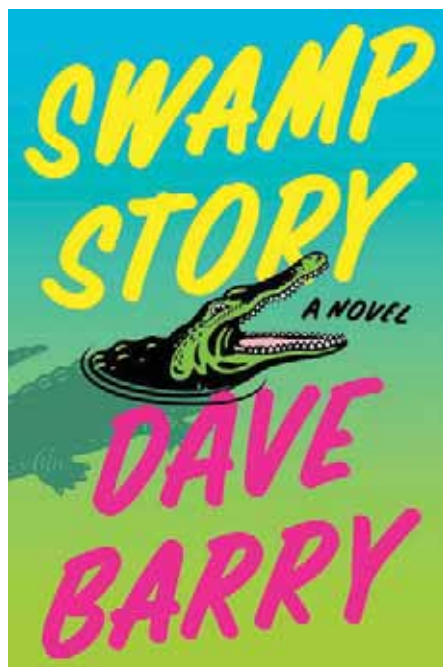
Little Brown, \$30.00

Rating: A

Defense attorney Mickey Haller has taken up the job of getting innocent people out of prison. He is getting requests from prisoners for his help after succeeding in freeing a wrongly convicted man. The walk from the prison gate to the waiting car is called the Resurrection Walk. Mickey enlists his half brother, Harry Bosch, to look into the multiple cases in order to find a possibly innocent prisoner. He finds one that does not add up. A woman is convicted of killing her husband who is a sheriff's deputy. There are enough questions that Mickey decides to take on the case. He is up against the vast resources of the federal department of justice. Of course, danger is just around the corner.

Michael Connelly has written one of his best books in years. That is very high praise in that all of his books are

excellent. Personally, I love courtroom dramas and this one is riveting. Characters, pacing, depiction of the locale are all up to his usual standards. Highly recommended.

**SWAMP STORY**

by Dave Barry

Simon & Schuster, \$27.99

Rating: B

Jesse Braddock is a young mother living with her deadbeat boyfriend and their infant daughter deep in the Everglades. She discovers a treasure that will easily get her enough money to totally change her circumstance. Unfortunately, a couple of unsavory types also want the treasure and will think nothing of killing Jesse to get it.

In the same region of the swamp, Ken Bortles of the usually deserted Bortle Brothers Bait and Beer shop, wants to make viral videos about a supposedly mythic creature called the Everglades Melon Monster which is actually an alcoholic newsman wearing a Dora the Explorer head. It goes viral as thousands travel there to see the monster. These two plots eventually collide into hilarious fun.

This is easily one of the funniest books I have read in years and the first few chapters are funniest I have ever read. The characters are all wacky yet

there is a sense of realism as it takes place in this crazy state I call home. Dave Barry is a newspaper columnist but this book reads exactly as a Carl Hiaassen novel. Crazy criminals are a trademark of their books. This one is totally enjoyable and there is a definite sense of suspense throughout to see how Jesse gets out of this very dangerous situation. Recommended.

STRANGE SALLY DIAMOND

by Liz Nugent

Gallery, \$27.99

Rating: B+

Sally Diamond is very odd. Something in her past has caused her to be a recluse from society. When she incinerates her dead father, the media come to haunt her. She felt that if he is dead, shouldn't you dispose of him with all the other waste? Slowly we learn the true story of her past and it is actually quite terrifying.

This is a very clever novel and one that doesn't hold back on surprises with almost every chapter. Alternate chapter form with another character keeps the plot always interesting and the pages turning. There is nothing ordinary about this novel and in an effort to not give anything away, I will only say it is highly recommended.

HOLLY

by Stephen King

Scribner, \$30.00

Rating: B+

Holly Gibney, owner of the Finders Keepers Detective Agency, is called by a mother whose daughter is missing. As she investigates, the evidence eventually points to an elderly couple of married professors. As she discovers others who have disappeared, she must use all of her resources of deduction to discover what is going on and why.

Holly is a very well-rounded character in the skilled hands of Stephen King. He is a master at characterizations, as well as, compelling plots. The villain(s) are incredibly clever creations. So much of this book is character driven. We hear about every aspect of Holly's life as we



eventually get to the climactic scenes. The author had to spend time justifying why Holly was going to place herself into harm's way without any backup. It is a silly plot device and hard to overlook. The book is ultimately entertaining though unrealistic. Recommended.

ANNA O

by Matthew Blake

Harper, \$30.00, January, 2024

Rating: C-

Anna Ogilvy, a twenty-five-year-old writer, has apparently killed two of her friends in her sleep. There appears to be no clear motive and she went back to sleep and hasn't woken in four years. The government wants to place her on trial but needs to have her back to a conscious state in order to do so. They secretly enlist Benedict Prince, a forensic psychologist who has written articles on other killers who have defended themselves using sleep as an excuse. It is called the 'resignation syndrome'. He takes it upon himself to awaken the so-called Sleeping Beauty. Little does he know, he will be awakening a whole lot of danger to himself, his divorced wife, Cara and his young daughter.

The premise of this book is a great concept. The plot generally moves swiftly but there are multiple times

when the excessive explanations of the psychology gets in the way of the plot. The characters do not generate a lot of sympathy as nobody appears to be who we think they are. Unfortunately, as the reader approaches the last fifty pages, the plot gets increasingly convoluted and two separate exposition scenes are required to explain what has happened. Personally, I was still confused as I completed the last page. This totally ruined the book for me and, as such, I do not recommend it.

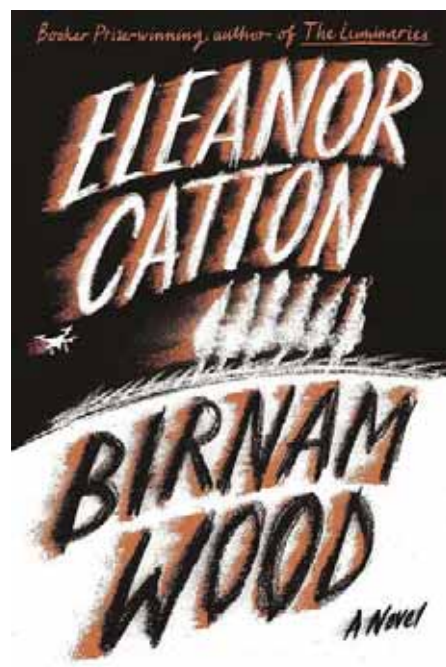
BIRNAM WOOD

by Eleanor Catton

FSG, \$28.00

Rating: B+

A landslide has closed the road to a small town on New Zealand's South Island. There is a farm abandoned as a result. Birnam Wood is a gardening collective that grows crops on land that does not belong to them. Mira, the founder of the group, wants them to go to the farm, grow crops and potentially make the group able to support itself. Robert Lemoine, an American billionaire, has an offer to buy the farm and is quite willing to have Birnam Wood work the land after he discovers Mira there. He wants to build an end times bunker on the land but there may more to it than that. As the book rolls to a



conclusion, an event occurs that sets the plot into a dangerous and potentially fatal conclusion.

This is an interesting character driven novel that eventually earns the title 'thriller.' The plot is unique. The author won the Booker Prize for her previous book, **THE LUMINARIES**. This book is considerably different. It is contemporary as opposed to historical. The plot is quite compelling and the characters well rounded. The pacing quickens in the last quarter of the book. Overall, an entertaining and worthwhile read.

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.

RADIANT HEAT,

Sara-Jane Collins

TAKEN, Dinuka McKenzie

THE INSTRUMENTS OF

DARKNESS, John Connolly

THE MOUNTAIN KING,

Anders de la Motte

A CALAMITY OF SOULS,

David Baldacci

YOU'D LOOK BETTER AS A

GHOST, Joanna Wallace

Already read for the next issue --

NO SAFE PLACE,

Michael Ledwidge

MAY THE WOLF DIE,

Elizabeth Heider

THE FURY OF BEIJING,

Ian Hamilton

NOBODY'S HERO, M. W. Craven

RETURN TO BLOOD,

Michael Bennett

HUNTED, Abir Mukherjee

ALL THE COLORS OF THE

DARK, Chris Whitaker

THE WRONG HANDS,

Mark Billingham

Down Under Crime



Jeff Poppo Reviews

DARK ARENA

by Jack Beaumont

Allen & Unwin, \$A32.99; In U.S.,
Blackstone, \$17.99, February, 2024

Rating: A-

Jack Beaumont is purportedly the pseudonym of a former operative of the clandestine operations branch of the French foreign secret service, the DGSE, who now lives in Australia. His first novel, **THE FRENCHMAN**, was a solid thriller with plenty of seemingly authentic spy detail and he ably repeats that formula with **DARK ARENA**.

DARK ARENA continues the adventures of DGSE agent Alec de Payns, who is tasked with tracking down an agent of influence who is sending highly classified material against the Kremlin to embassies all over Europe. A deadly conspiracy is aligning the West against Russia. But who is behind it? And to what end? As de Payns, and the other agents in the secretive Y Division of the DGSE, manipulate various sources, and even go undercover themselves, they become aware that a major operation is also being planned using Middle Eastern terrorist units.

DARK ARENA is an intricate, but generally quick moving spy novel, that provides an interesting new perspective on events in Europe in early 2022. The plot unfolds in a credible way, with secretive meetings and nicely observed moments of action. After some good tension, it builds to gripping climaxes in Turkey and the Mediterranean, and a coldly

observed final conclusion. As with **THE FRENCHMAN**, it excels in its detailed descriptions of spycraft, the politics of French Intelligence operations and the relationships with other intelligence agencies.

There is plenty of technical detail and Beaumont's seemingly insider grasp of spy techniques, especially around organising secret meetings, gives the novel a convincing shine of credibility. The broader geo-political background is also well described and interesting, and Beaumont is very good at capturing the essence of the various locations through which de Payns passes.

Beaumont's characters are also well crafted, and are not the one dimensional, gun-toting superheroes to be found in some spy fiction. There are a couple of slow moments, but overall I really enjoyed **DARK ARENA**



THE GOOD DOG

by Simon Rowell,

Text Publishing, \$A34.99.

Zoe Mayer #3

Rating: A-

Simon Rowell's series about Detective Sergeant Zoe Mayer of the Victorian Police Force and her trusty service dog, Harry, is an underappreciated gem of Australian crime writing.

THE GOOD DOG is the third book in the series and opens with Zoe and Harry being called to the Victorian rural area of Mount Macedon. Following reports of gunshots, the bodies of fraudster Piers Johnson and his lawyer Antony Peterson have been found in a carpark. Both are dead from bullet wounds and the gun is found nearby. It seems like a grisly murder-suicide, but something about the scene does not stack up for Zoe. Regardless, she is under pressure to wrap up the case quickly, but things become complicated when the daughter of one of the men is kidnapped.

This is another very accomplished, but understated novel by Rowell. The pacing is good, and the story is well supported by an engaging cast of credible characters. The plotting is smart and believable, and the mystery unfolds in an interesting manner with some good twists.

The plotting and the characters are well supported by Rowell's fine ear for local dialogue, and his evocative descriptions of the small towns in the Mount Macedon area. Zoe's connection with Harry once more forms the core of the book, but it is nicely complemented by the uncertain relationship between Zoe and her new partner Ben. After some good twists, the book

builds to an exciting, and unexpected, climax in the bushland, and is probably the most intense ending of the series so far.

In all, **THE GOOD DOG** is a well plotted and very enjoyable police mystery that will keep you keenly turning the pages all the way to the end.

George's Take: I agree with Jeff. Good mystery. Harry is a "good dog," who helps Zoe deal with her PTSD issues. He doesn't play a major role in this book so dog lovers should understand that before investing in the book expecting it to be all about Harry.

I've read two of this series and wish the books were more available in the U.S. Kindle versions are accessible here for \$9.99-\$12.99. Worth the price.

THE STRIP

by Iain Ryan

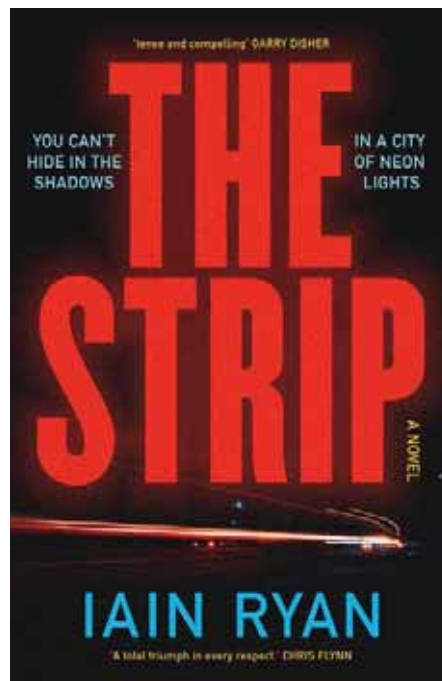
Ultimo Press, \$A34.99.

Rating: A

THE STRIP by Iain Ryan is a tough, no-holds barred tale of corruption, crime, and a particularly nasty killer, set against a vivid background of Queensland's Gold Coast, known as the Strip, in 1980.

When a local doctor is brutally murdered, Detective Constable Lana Cohen joins the notorious Strike Force Diablo, which is filled with corrupt and inept cops seemingly incapable of solving the string of murders they have been assigned to. Carefully navigating a sea of corruption and politics, Lana teams up with the tarnished Henry Loch as they search for a killer in the dark recesses of the glitzy Gold Coast.

The characters are gritty and credible, and Ryan skilfully captures the mood of the early 1980s, and the flood of corruption and unregulated policing that was overwhelming Queensland at the time. The plotting is mature, and the story is well constructed and very twisty. It all unfolds at a brisk pace, and there are some



strong scenes along the way to a tough climax.

THE STRIP is not one for the idealists among us, and Ryan does not censor the attitudes and behaviours from the time. It is a tough story told well, and is a superior piece of Aussie noir. Highly recommended.

George Easter Review

THE TORRENT

by Dinuka McKenzie

Canelo, £9.99, 2022

Detective Kate Miles #1

Rating: A-

Detective Kate Miles has a lot on her plate. She is 36-weeks pregnant, just days away from her maternity leave and she is breaking in her new partner Josh, who has his own ideas as to how things should be run. Three teenaged boys, dressed in Marvel costumes have been robbing local businesses. Their most recent crime resulted in the daughter of a local politician being hospitalized with injuries. So the pressure is on to solve this one quickly.

And Kate's superior has asked her to look into the death by drowning of

a young married man who was caught in the massive floods that plagued the area in the year prior. All of the q.t. Apparently the victim's mother has been making loud complaints to the police officials at the top of the chain and they want to assure the mother that every avenue of investigation was followed.

Kate Miles is a good person, a good wife and a good mother. And she is the type of character it is easy for a reader to relate to. We've all known and liked people like Kate. But most importantly for mystery fans like me, is that Kate is a good and persistent detective.

This excellent novel is eminently readable. I've already ordered the second in the series. My thanks to Jeff Popple for recommending it to me. Another excellent Aussie writer to add to my growing list of favorites.

Craig Sisterson Reviews

THE MURDER CLUB

by Nikki Crutchley

Harlequin World Suspense, \$9.99

USD, 26 March 2024

Rating: B+

The ongoing impact of violent death on those left behind, not just its investigation to find a killer, simmers throughout New Zealand author Nikki Crutchley's third novel, **THE MURDER CLUB**, affecting several characters in a variety of ways. Logan Dodds has grown into a true crime obsessive, after this sister was murdered thirty years ago, and now steers a True Crime Enthusiasts Club along with offering True Crime Tours. Cassie Hughes has vowed to find the man who murdered her mother.

Meanwhile journalist Miller Hatcher's once promising career and big-time media dreams have fizzled into a community newspaper gig in a rural small-town she never expected to return to. Miller's profile skyrocketed after she faced down a killer in a bu-

colic coastal hamlet, and lived to write about it (in Crutchley's very promising debut **NOTHING BAD HAPPENS HERE**, which was a Ngaio Marsh Awards finalist). But rather than kicking on to bigger and better, Miller's life fell apart in several ways, and now she's living in her dead mother's house in Lentford, a small town surrounded by farmland, and spends her days penning run-of-the-mill pieces on the home renovations of successful townsfolk and high schoolers helping pensioners. All while counting the days since she last had a drink.

Then a cryptic letter arrives. "Tonight it begins." Miller ignores it, only for a local woman to be murdered in her own home, strangled and discovered with a scarf around her neck. Another letter arrives for Miller; another dead local. Could the recovering journo be caught in a game with a killer desperate for attention and infamy? Why has 'the Scarf Killer' targeted Miller, of all people?

As Miller's friend DS Kahu Parata struggles to find any leads, Miller meets Logan Dodds and Cassie Hughes, two troubled souls who are finding very different ways to try to cope with the long-ago murders of their own loved ones. Cassie convinces Miller to bring her dead mother's cold case back into the public eye as well, but will 'the Murder Club' and its enthusiasts be a help or hindrance?

Crutchley, who self-published her earliest books before picking up international publishing deals, crafts an engaging portrait of small-town life, and keeps the pages turning with the interesting lives and struggles of her characters as much as with the intrigue of her whodunnit storyline.

A good solid read from an author on the rise.

THE SEVEN

by Chris Hammer

Allen & Unwin, \$32.99 AUD,

October 2023

Rating: A

Last summer at the famed Theakston Old Peculier Crime Writing Festival in Yorkshire, Australian author Chris Hammer sat onstage with Virginia author SA Cosby as featured guests in front of an audience of several hundred keen readers; two shining stars of our genre in recent years who, as they said in their fascinating conversation, 'may have struggled to sneak in the back of the tent' only a few years ago. While Cosby has brought fresh voice to Southern noir, Hammer has likewise helped refresh and elevate Australian crime writing globally (alongside the likes of Jane Harper, Emma Viskic, and others). His outstanding debut **SCRUBLANDS**, recently adapted into a very good limited series that has screened on BBC in the UK and is tabbed for Sundance Now in the US, demonstrated the variety of stories that could be told in the heat-struck Australian Outback. While it may have somewhat shared a drought-stricken setting with Harper's **THE DRY**, it was a very different tale.

In his sixth and latest novel, **THE SEVEN (COVER THE BONES** in the UK), Hammer continues to explore different aspects of the Australian landscape, and the collision between nature and man, land and commerce. And he laces plenty of richness and nuance into his settings, characters, and storylines.

This time, detectives Ivan Lucic and Nell Buchanan investigate a death in Yuwonderie, a small town in western NSW, where seven affluent families have reigned for a century; fortunes built on an ambitious irrigation scheme that changed landscapes and lives. Now the body of Athol Hasluck, from one of the Seven dynasties, has washed up in an irrigation ditch – stabbed and electrocuted. Is someone targeting this land's self-appointed aristocracy? Hammer masterfully weaves his tale across diverse timeframes and perspectives, including letters from a First Nations employ-

ee from before and during the First World War, and the events that led to the unsolved murder of another of the Seven families' own forty years ago. Secrets and lies, resources and wealth. Lucic and Buchanan dig into the past, the corruption and taint beneath the founders white-washed history.

Hammer masterfully hauls readers along with a narrative full of intrigue, depth, and a rich sense of place, blending a tasty concoction of history and mystery (and thrills). The Seven is another excellent tale from a storyteller who's skipped from the back of the tent to among the head of the class.

THE PIT

by Peter Papathanasiou

Maclehose Press, £20 GBP,

14 September 2023

Rating: A-

I was not alone in being mightily impressed by Canberra author Peter Papathanasiou's hard-hitting 2021 debut **THE STONING**, where the brutal death of a rural schoolteacher incited a terrific Outback Noir that delivered a fascinating storyline while exploring Australia's treatment of refugees alongside a clear-eyed look at hypocrisies old and new and the uglier side of modern life in 'the Lucky Country'.

That book also introduced Detective Sergeant Georgias 'George' Manolis, a big city cop sent to his childhood hometown to help the locals investigate the death and douse escalating reprisals, and local Aboriginal constable 'Sparrow'. In Papathanasiou's third and latest novel, **THE PIT**, Manolis is on leave in Greece, so it is Sparrow that receives a call from a killer that wants to turn himself in.

Bob wants to make a deal. In his mid-sixties, he's relatively young compared to some of his fellow residents in a Perth nursing home. Though he's not the youngest there. Maybe Bob's paying for past sins. Decades ago he killed someone in the remote mining region of north Kimberley. He offers to show

Sparrow where the body is, saying he's unable to find it without going there himself.

Sparrow isn't sure, while thinking the juice may be worth the squeeze. But there are a couple of hitches: Sparrow must pretend to be Bob's carer as they travel north, and they're joined on the road trip by another nursing home resident: Luke, a 30-year-old who was paralysed in a motorbike crash. What is Bob's real motivation to take Sparrow deep into the dusty backblocks of Western Australia, and why is the surly Luke along for the ride? What secrets may come to light, if they ever reach their destination and somehow manage to survive a series of misadventures and dangerous encounters?

Papathanasiou delivers a kinetic, fascinating tale that may divide readers when it comes to whether it surpasses or falls short of his excellent debut. Australian social history and harsh landscapes provide a stark backdrop to the mystery of Bob's quest, his past, and his intentions. As well as the action sparked by clashes the trio face, and sometimes instigate, with an array of humanity that roams the lonely roadways of Western Australia, eking out a living in various ways.

A very good read that centres an indigenous character while exploring varying prejudices and their real-world impact in times present and past. I'm curious to see what Papathanasiou delivers next.

EVERYONE ON THIS TRAIN IS A SUSPECT

by Benjamin Stevenson
HarperCollins, \$30 USD,
30 January 2024

Rating: A+

After a couple of solid mysteries to begin his oeuvre, Australian author and stand-up comedian Benjamin Stevenson hit an absolute grand slam with his startlingly clever and absolutely delightful third at-bat, **EVERY-**

ONE IN MY FAMILY HAS KILLED SOMEONE. Stevenson gave himself a high degree of difficulty too, setting up his homage to classic mysteries with the narrator Ernie Cunningham, a 'how-to' writer turned recorder of events, outlining the fair play rules and Golden Age 'Ten Commandments' at the off, while even telling us on what pages deaths will occur. Like Houdini, Stevenson tied himself up, then proceeded to dazzle us with his sleight of hand and storytelling.

How do you follow-up a book like that, which delighted in longstanding tropes and genre 'rules', danced with meta while being brilliantly structured and told, and was both timeless and fresh?

Somehow, Stevenson has done it again with **EVERYONE ON THIS TRAIN IS A SUSPECT**, a superb mystery that manages to surprise and delight even when we think we know how the game is played now. This time around Ernie has been invited to a unique crime writing festival, which will take place aboard the famous Ghan train from Darwin to Adelaide, slicing through the iconic Red Centre of Australia. A trip to celebrate 50 years of the Australian Mystery Writers' Society. Rubbing shoulders with mystery writers, agents, editors, and keen readers, Ernie hope he may be inspired in some way for his stalled second book. It's not so easy, he finds, to come up with fictional murders rather than just retelling the true stories from behind the scenes of his own family's headline-grabbing violence.

He really doesn't want to have to return his advance for an unwritten novel.

Ernie, the debut writer, is joined on the programme by authors of forensic science mysteries, legal thrillers, blockbuster bestsellers, psychological suspense, and even a noted literary author. A combustible mix. But when one of the writers is killed (obviously not Ernie, or how would he tell the tale? Fair play, after all), the other five

turn into detectives trying to solve the crime.

Then again, with a whole group of people gathered who know lots of ways to commit and hide crimes, and how to get away with murder (at least fictionally), where does the danger truly lie?

Put simply, **EVERYONE ON THIS TRAIN IS A SUSPECT** is sublime. It's ridonkulously clever and brilliantly structured, with Stevenson demonstrating a Penn and Teller level of storytelling magic – giving away some of the secrets, showing you how a trick is done, yet still managing to surprise and amaze. There are lots of twists and turns, both in the mystery storyline and the relationships between characters, including Ernie and his amour Juliette, the former owner of the resort where the Cunningham family killings occurred. Juliette also wrote a book on those events, but chose to accompany Ernie on the Ghan trip even though she's not on the festival programme herself.

There's an unabashed playfulness, almost tongue in cheek, to Stevenson's storyline and storytelling, where he's both honouring and parodying classic Golden Age mysteries. Ernie offers clues along the way, such as the number of times he'll mention the killer or killers' name, updating the count at times for our benefit, and things once again get a little meta, while also being dosed with some high-octane action reminiscent of Western movies as the Ghan chugs through the Australian desert.

Along the way Stevenson seems to show us and his protagonist that death is not just a clever puzzle to solve - it has far greater impact than that. He does this via an extraordinarily clever puzzle, of course. It's early on in the year, but **EVERYONE ON THIS TRAIN IS A SUSPECT** may very well end up one of the best mystery reads of the year; a smile-inducing, brain-whirling magic trick, with heart.

55TH ANNUAL BOUCHERCON



BOUCHERCON 2024 NASHVILLE
MURDER AND MAYHEM IN MUSIC CITY
AUGUST 28 - SEPTEMBER 1

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/>



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



September 13-15, 2024

Bloody Scotland

Stirling, Scotland

Guests of Honor: TBA

Website: 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/>

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



May 9-12, 2024

Crimefest

Bristol, England

Ripster's Revivals

by Mike Ripley

Introduction to this New Column

"Fair enough, this is a bit of a vanity project, but the Editor of *Shots* agreed to it months ago in order to keep me quiet and off the streets after my retirement from the Getting Away With Murder column. It is not a 'bucket list' rather an occasional series of essays featuring books – crime novels and thrillers – which I have been meaning to read, or re-read for, though I hate to say it, up to fifty years or more. Finally, without the pressure of having to consider the hundreds of new crime novels being churned out week after week, I have the time and the incentive and I know I will become reacquainted with some favourite authors and almost certainly discover new ones.

"I expect there to be surprises and disappointments along the way, but if I can bring one forgotten author to the attention of a new audience, or convince a single reader that good thrillers existed before mobile phones, then it will have been worthwhile." – Mike Ripley

Peter Dickinson

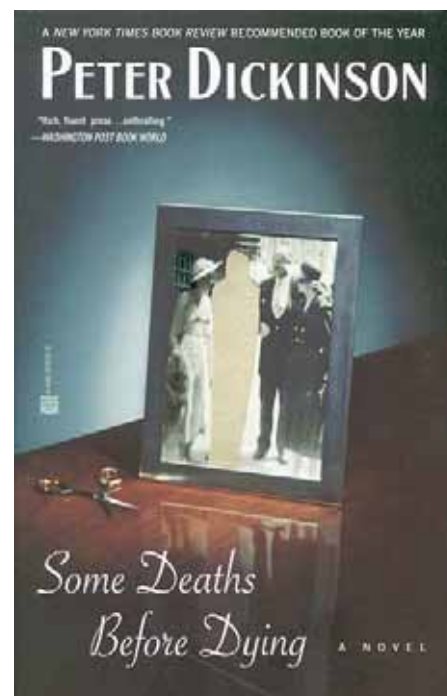
I had heard of Peter Dickinson long before I ever read one of his award-winning crime novels, because the author was, if anything, more famous for the awards he had won rather than the books which won them.

Back in the late 1980s, as an innocently enthusiastic new member of the Crime Writers' Association and the freshly-appointed crime fiction critic for the Daily Telegraph, I began to take an interest in the CWA's famous 'Dagger'

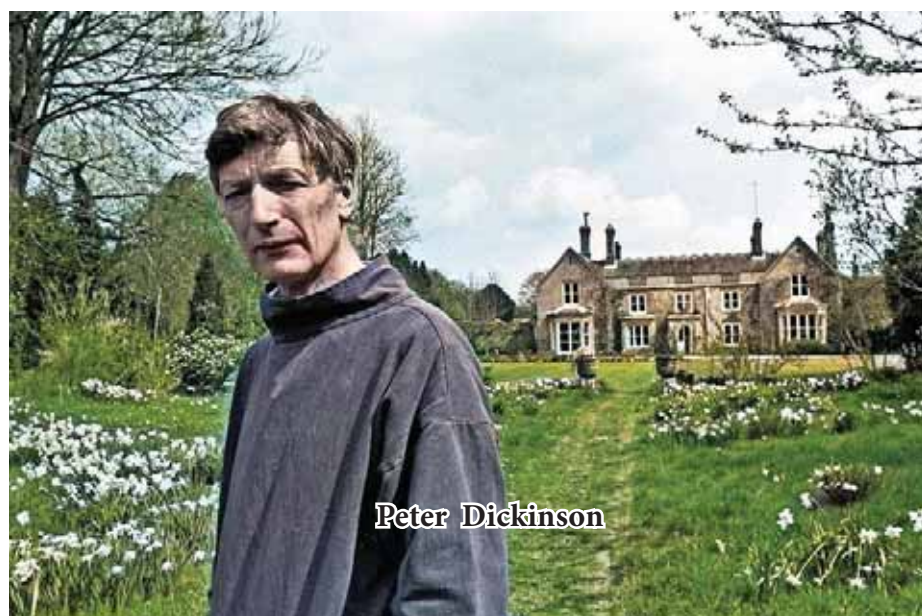
awards – a purely academic interest of course as I was never likely to be in contention for one and it was to be more than ten years before I was asked to be a judge.

The name Peter Dickinson cropped up when I read somewhere that he had won the coveted Gold Dagger with his first crime novel, *SKIN DEEP*, in 1968. Even more impressive was the fact that his second novel, *A PRIDE OF HEROES*, also struck gold in 1969, a success rate no other writer had managed two years running before and was only repeated later by Ruth Rendell and her alter ego Barbara Vine. As I say, I was young and impressionable and having a great time meeting some of my crime-writer heroes and this Peter Dickinson seemed to be a chap worthy of a bit of hero-worship.

Yet when I innocently enquired whether Peter Dickinson was likely to



show up at one of the monthly CWA meetings (held, in those days, in The Groucho Club), I was told in hushed, confidential tones that it was unlikely as the general membership had taken a dim view, twenty years before, of the same writer winning the top award two years running. I got the impression, rightly or wrongly, that Dickinson had been snubbed if not shunned and as far as I am aware none of his subsequent considerable output of crime novels over the following forty years were considered for a CWA award, although

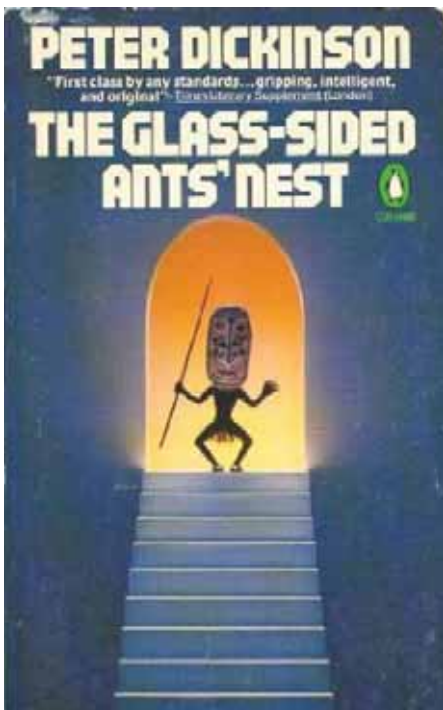


his 1999 **SOME DEATHS BEFORE DYING** would have been a favourite for a third Gold Dagger according to some critics, me included.

Whether Dickinson was snubbed by the crime-writing establishment or not, it did not dent his simultaneous second literary career as an author of what today would be called Young Adult fiction, much of it steeped in fantasy and history. That career brought him multiple further awards, including the prestigious Carnegie Medal, which he won twice in successive years, 1980 and 1981, repeating his Gold Dagger achievement.

There was a fantasy element in much of his crime-writing, the ability to take the essence of a traditional English murder mystery and then add a fantastic or surreal element. It was a unique, unclassifiable approach which made Dickinson difficult to compare with any other crime-writer – perhaps Michael Innes at his zaniest comes closest – and one distinguished student of crime fiction, Mike Ashley, labelled him ‘the 20th century’s Lewis Carroll of mystery.’

His debut crime novel, **SKIN DEEP**, which is a very appropriate title but



nowadays the book is much better known for its American edition as **THE GLASS-SIDED ANTS' NEST**, launched the career of Dickinson's series hero Detective Superintendent Jimmy Pibble.

Pibble is not the conventional policeman, or perhaps he is, it's just his cases tend to be unconventional. He refers to himself as 'the ex-coming man' and even a minor local crook recognises in **ANTS' NEST** that it is a 'kinky little case' and that Scotland Yard 'wouldn't send one of their big boys out on it – too much to lose, nuffing to gain'. Pibble privately agrees with the sentiment; 'kinky and little' being just his line and suited to his talents 'whatever Mrs Pibble might say' though Mrs Pibble seems to be a mental distraction for our gentle copper hero and rarely a physical presence.

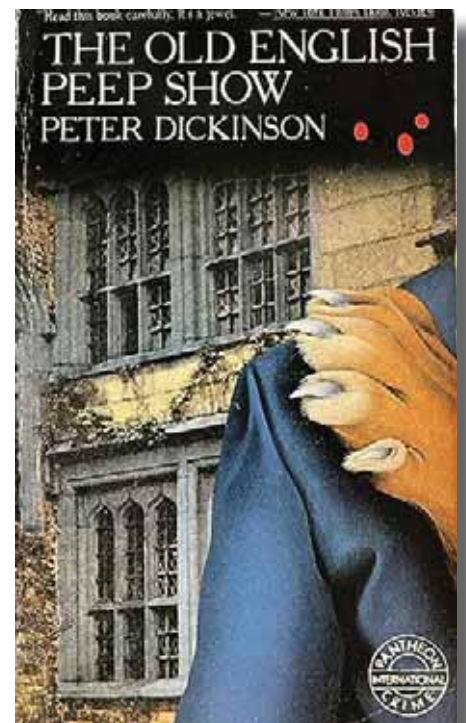
On the surface his first case provides so many distractions, domestic ones hardly matter as there's quite enough going on a it is. A man is murdered in a London terraced house and Pibble does not even raise an eyebrow when he is told that the murder weapon was an owl (a wooden one), as that is the least strange thing about the house.

The murder victim is an elder of the survivors of a tribe of New Guinea natives who fled from the Japanese during World War II and thanks to the anthropologist who wishes to study them, are now encamped in the top floors of a suburban house – the glass-sided ants' nest of the title – following their traditional rituals and ceremonies although a couple of the men have had to take jobs with London Transport. To simplify matters, they're all called Ku, as is the tribe, even the tribe's mentor who shows her commitment by agreeing to a homosexual marriage. (Not what you think.) There are rituals including bowls of blood and constant drumming and the tribe takes a joyful delight in misleading Pibble at every turn in his enquiries. There is also a brutish, philandering neighbour with distinctly shady connections to the tribe, whom Pibble really hopes is the murderer but

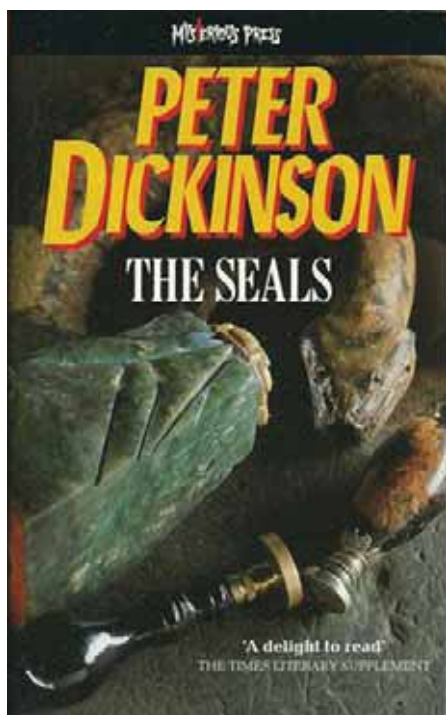
isn't (not a spoiler).

On several occasions, Pibble enjoys becoming distracted from the meat of his investigation. Always a bit deficient in the hunting instinct – more of a herbivore than a carnivore, as detectives go – this time he simply didn't care whether anyone was arrested or not. Interesting setup, of course; curious people. That was part of the trouble: it was only a sort of scholarly inquisitiveness that kept him asking questions and nosing about; the purpose behind the questions seemed increasingly irrelevant, the murder-hunt a distraction from the real thing.

Life, and police work, does not get any easier for Pibble in his following cases, **A PRIDE OF HEROES** (1968) and **THE SEALS** (1970)



In **PRIDE OF HEROES** (also known as **THE OLD ENGLISH PEEP SHOW**), Pibble finds himself wandering around a Georgian mansion with a bucket of animal dung trying to avoid a man-eating lion almost as if it is all in a day's work. In **THE SEALS** (aka **THE SINFUL STONES**) he finds himself isolated on a remote Hebridean island where a 92-year-old Nobel prize-winning scientist is being held against his will by



a militant religious community attempting to build a new Jerusalem.

Critics on both side of the Atlantic drooled over Dickinson's imagination and distinctive style putting him 'streets ahead of others for interest and ingenuity'. In America, his novels were endorsed by both Ross Macdonald and Ross Thomas, whilst in England he was described by Francis Iles as 'the most original crime novelist to appear for a long, long time', by Anthony Price as 'hard to beat for [a] remarkable combination of elegance, whackiness and excitement', and Edmund Crispin made the obvious comparison 'the best thing that has happened to serious, sophisticated, witty crime fiction since Michael Innes'.

Peter Malcolm De Brissac Dickinson, O.B.E. (1922 -2015) no doubt honed his sense of humour working for *Punch* magazine, contributing poems and reviews of crime novels, before becoming a full-time author. From his writing (not always an accurate character guide), I suspect he was good company. Certainly, he was much admired by the critics and popular with his multiple audiences and today is probably best remembered as an author of Children's books or

Young Adult fiction and his reputation as a crime writer may have faded.

Dickinson's highly imaginative style and highbrow humour might not be to everyone's taste and certainly his debut novel would raise a politically-correct eyebrow or two among today's young editors for whom 1968 is an undiscovered country. Several words beginning with 'N' would no doubt be redacted along with references to western oriental gentlemen.

Re-discovering Peter Dickinson and Detective Superintendent Jimmy Pibble was, for me, a treat. In an output of more than fifty novels over several genres, only half-a-dozen were Jimmy Pibble adventures, so re-reading them has not been too difficult. My problem is that it has given me an overwhelming urge to re-read all the Inspector Appleby novels of Michael Innes, and I think I have twenty-three of those...



James Pibble Series

SKIN DEEP (1968)

(aka **THE GLASS-SIDED ANT'S NEST**)

A PRIDE OF HEROES (1969)

(aka **THE OLD ENGLISH PEEP SHOW**)

THE SEALS (1970)

(aka **THE SINFUL STONES**)

SLEEP AND HIS BROTHER (1971)

THE LIZARD AND THE CUP (1972)

ONE FOOT IN THE GRAVE (1979)

Re-published by permission of the author and *Shots Magazine* (www.shotsmag.co.uk).

Edgar Award Nominations 2024

The 78th Annual Edgar® Awards will be celebrated on Wednesday, May 1, 2024, at the New York Marriott Marquis Times Square.

Best Novel

FLAGS ON THE BAYOU,
James Lee Burke
ALL THE SINNERS BLEED, S.A.
Cosby
THE MADWOMEN OF PARIS,
Jennifer Cody Epstein
BRIGHT YOUNG WOMEN,
Jessica Knoll
AN HONEST MAN,
Michael Koryta
THE RIVER WE REMEMBER,
William Kent Krueger
CROOK MANIFESTO, Colson
Whitehead

Best First Novel by an American Author

THE PEACOCK AND THE
SPARROW, I. S. Berry
THE GOLDEN GATE,
Amy Chua
SMALL TOWN SINS,
Ken Jaworowski
THE LAST RUSSIAN DOLL,
Kristen Loesch
MURDER BY DEGREES,
Ritu Mukerji

Best Paperback Original

BOOMTOWN, A.F. Carter
HIDE, Tracy Clark
THE TAKEN ONES, Jess Lourey
VERA WONG'S UNSOLICITED
ADVICE FOR MURDERERS,
Jesse Q. Sutanto
LOWDOWN ROAD, Scott Von
Doviak



U.K. Reviews



Jeff Popple Reviews



LETHAL VENGEANCE

by Robert Bryndza

Raven Street, £9.99, February, 2024.

Rating: B+

Robert Bryndza first gained attention with his series of books about London detective Erika Foster, before shifting his attention in recent years to a new lead character in the form of former police detective Kate Marshall, who is eking out an existence as a PI and lecturer at a small coastal English university.

With **LETHAL VEBGEANCE** Bryndza turns once more to Erika Foster, in what turns out to be a very entertaining tale.

In order to avoid an awkward moment at a restaurant, Erika takes charge at a recently established, nearby murder scene. What she discovers shocks her. Prominent, notorious politician Neville Lomas is found naked and hog-tied, with some incriminating photographs, in his own bed in an exclusive residential apartment. Erika's skittish superiors, and some shadowy civil servant types, quickly move to take Erika off the case and arrange for the death to be classified

as being from natural causes. The case is closed, until two months later when a star footballer is found murdered and tied with the same knots in his apartment, and there is also a link to another recent death. Erika is pulled back onto the case, and as her team investigate, things take a strange turn when CCTV footage turns up five female suspects, and they're all identical.

Amid rumours of a vigilante sex worker with an incriminating file of evidence against prominent figures, including policemen, Erika has to battle her senior officers and angered family members of the victims in order to unmask the killer before they can strike again.

This is a well plotted and very enjoyable detective novel. The pacing is good, and Erika is a very engaging character who has grown and matured with the series, and is now a leading figure in the British crime fiction scene. Her private life is complex, but it does not interfere too much with the flow of the story, and Erika ably guides the reader through the various twists and turns. The other characters are also well crafted and credible, particularly the killer, and add good depth to the story. The plot goes down some interesting avenues, and builds to a spurt of bloody excitement at a lonely farm. The tension wanes a little in the end, but not enough to undermine what is a very good crime thriller.

A TREACHERY OF FRIENDS

by C. J. Carver

Bloodhound Books, £11.99.

Rating: B+

C. J. Carver is in good form with her latest novel, **A TREACHERY OF FRIENDS**.

It opens with a late night phone call drawing Sidney Scott back into the mystery surrounding the disappearance of her father fourteen years ago. A man has been found dead alongside a road in Gloucestershire. Inside his clothing is a postcard from Sid's father dated the day he disappeared. Desperate to find out the secret about her father's disappearance, and his connection to the dead man, Sid embarks on her own investigation that leads to her father's old friends from university. One is the head of a religious cult. The other is an ambitious politician. And both have secrets they want to stay buried, secrets that Sid will have to uncover before a killer strikes again.

A TREACHERY OF FRIENDS is a fast moving and engaging thriller that goes down some unexpected paths, as Sid narrows in on what happened to her father. The political elements of the book will probably resonant more with British readers than those elsewhere, although there is a universal truth to Caroline's predictions. Regardless, Caroline keeps the interest level high and there are some genuine shocks as the book twists its way to the final bloody outcome.

Sid is a well sketched and interesting character, who has more than her share of flaws, but is also a kind-hearted and determined young woman. Her job as a researcher and debunker of paranormal scams gives good texture to the story and adds some interesting asides. There is also considerable poignancy in Carver's portrayal of the children caught up in the conspiracy at the core of the story.

In all, it is a very entertaining crime thriller that casts a sharp light on how easy it is to subvert democracy and bring about worrying change.

THE SEARCH PARTY

by Hannah Richell,

Simon & Schuster, £16.99.

Rating: B

Fans of crime novels with a strong domestic suspense underlay to them, will enjoy **THE SEARCH PARTY** by Hannah Richell.

Destination thrillers, wherein a small group of friends become stranded in a

remote location with a deadly killer, are currently one of the hottest trends in crime fiction. It is a genre that Hannah Richell, dives wholeheartedly into with **THE SEARCH PARTY**.

Five old friends reunite for an idyllic glamping holiday on the rugged Cornwall coast, but tensions soon rise arise between them, especially over the behaviour of one of the older children. Things escalate when a storm leaves them stranded and someone goes missing.

Hannah ably uses multiple points of view and shifting timelines to generate a sense of suspense and uncertainty. After a brief introduction, the book skilfully alternates between the subsequent police investigation, the recollections of the survivors, and the lead up to the catastrophic weekend.

An enjoyable read that will appeal to those that enjoy heavy doses of family drama and well-drawn characters.

THE BEST REVENGE

by Gerald Seymour
Hodder & Stoughton, £22.

Rating: A-

From the start of his career way back in 1975, with **HARRY'S GAME**, Gerald Seymour's novels have always had a gritty, topical realism to them, and a focus on the foot soldiers of the espionage and crime fighting worlds.

THE BEST REVENGE is the fourth entry in his series about the nondescript MI5 agent Jonas Merrick. Generally despised and overlooked by his superiors and flasher younger colleagues, and not really forgiven for previously unmasking a Russian spy, Merrick has been banished to the Chinese desk with instructions not to ruffle feathers. But while Merrick seems to be a harmless old fellow waiting for retirement, underneath he is very astute and quite ruthless in his determination. When he stumbles upon a Chinese network, which is targeting a young naive expert in GPS-free missile guidance systems, he sets in place a devious operation that has the potential to strike a blow to Chi-



na's espionage network in the UK.

One thing that Merrick is unaware of, however, is an operation against himself by the Russians who have been given the instruction from Putin to 'bring me his head'.

This is a slow burn of a thriller, that steadily builds its way to a series of tense moments and a bloody climax in England and in far-off Russia. The pace may be slow at times, but the tension is high throughout, and as with most of Seymour's novels, the outcome is never clear until the final moment.

The details of the operation are credible and interesting, and the various foot soldiers on both sides are well crafted and believable. There are some terrific little vignettes, including an amusing incident involving a tea trolley, and Merrick's clever efforts to outwit both his foreign enemies and his superiors is fondly reminiscent of Brian Freemantle's Charlie Muffin books.

An outstanding spy novel for those readers with patience and a love of well executed plots.

THE GIRL IN THE SMOKE

by Matt Hilton,
Severn House, £21.99.

Rating: B+

Matt Hilton is probably best known

for his series about American trouble-shooters Tess Grey and her partner Po Villere, but I have always tended to prefer his standalone British thrillers, like **THE GIRL ON SHATTERED ROCK** from a few years ago.

THE GIRL IN THE SMOKE is also a standalone novel and revolves around a young, adopted girl called Danni. The sole survivor of a motorway pile-up which took her mother's life, the eight year old is now safe and thriving with her adoptive family. Things seem to be improving for Danni, until the day that some bad people come knocking. They want Danni to remember exactly what happened the day of her accident. In truth Danni has very little memory of when her mother died, but the intruders are hell-bent on extracting what memories she has.

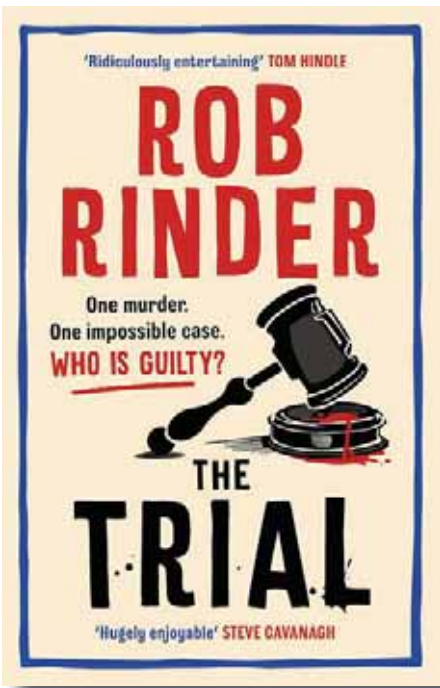
Danni's new mother, Josie, desperately tries to keep her daughter safe and has to outwit the three violent kidnappers in order to keep Danni alive. Meanwhile, Josie's sister, Grace, is devastated when she arrives at her big sister's house to find signs of violence and her sister and niece taken. Josie has been her protector her entire life, but now Grace needs to be the strong one. Enlisting the help of a friend with combat experience and skills, she sets out to get her family back home.

This is a great, high voltage read. Hilton quickly puts in place the basic premise of his story and then sets the story running at a quick pace. The perspective smoothly shifts between the main protagonists, and the suspense is kept at a high level throughout. The characters are credible, and Hilton keeps the reader guessing for a long time as to what is happening. The violence is gritty and believable, and there are a couple of good shocks along the way. There are some quibbles about aspects of the story, but it is very easy to just settle back and enjoy the ride. A good read.

George Easter Reviews

THE TRIAL

by Rob Rinder



Century, £20.00, 2023

Adam Green #1

Rating: A

Steve Cavanagh writes that **THE TRIAL** "is in the best tradition of John Mortimer's Rumpole series." That was enough of a hook for me to try it. I didn't find much Rumpolian about it except for the Old Bailey setting and the protagonist defending a hopeless case. But any disappointment I may have initially felt was overcome by the engaging storyline.

Media darling Detective Inspector Grant Cliveden is considered a hero for saving the late queen from assassination. When he shows up one day at the Old Bailey to testify he suddenly dies in the courtroom as he is about to take the oath. Poisoning is the official cause of death. Suspicion falls on Jimmy Knight, an ex-con Cliveden put in jail who was released just a couple of weeks before. An encounter between Cliveden and Knight in a bar that is caught on CCTV proves to be especially damaging evidence.

Experienced barrister Jonathan Taylor-Cameron is asked to represent Jimmy Knight, which he is very reluctant to do because, in his opinion, the case is "an absolute loser." But there is a tradition at the bar that a barrister has

to take a case referred to him if he/she is free to do so.

So saddled with this "loser," Taylor-Cameron sluffs all of the work on the case onto his pupil-barrister Adam Green, so he can work for his high-paying clients. Though Taylor-Cameron is leaning toward establishing reasonable doubt, Adam becomes convinced of Jimmy's innocence and tries to gather evidence that would prove the same – often attracting the ire of Taylor-Cameron and risking his career in chambers.

As the case progresses it becomes quite evident that the deceased wasn't the embodiment of police rectitude that the public believes.

Along the way a number of surprising facts are revealed, which lead to a satisfying conclusion. I was thoroughly entertained by this debut effort and look forward to reading the sequel, **THE SUSPECT**, coming out in the U.K. in June, 2024.

A KILLING IN NOVEMBER

by Simon Mason

Riverrun, £16.99, January, 2022

D.I. Ryan Wilkins #1

Rating: A-

Mismatched detectives thrown together with a blind eye as to whether they will get along or not are entertaining in and of themselves. Think of Reginald Hill's Dalziel and Pascoe or Elizabeth George's Inspector Lynley and DS Barbara Havers, for example. Then add good writing and engaging mysteries and you have a winner of a formula. That is what Simon Mason has done with his new series (now three books long).

His two detectives have surprisingly similar names and hold equal rank. That is where the similarity ends. DI Ray Wilkins is of wealthy Nigerian descent and is a graduate of Oxford. He is good looking, well dressed and plays within the lines. DI Ryan Wilkins is his opposite. Ryan dresses in trackies and wears a baseball cap backwards. He grew up in a nearby trailer park and was raised by an alcoholic and abusive father. He has no education to speak of, is outlandishly frank with his speech,

and has a particular dislike for the wealthy and privileged. If Ryan were a spy his name would be Charlie Muffin. When Ray Wilkins' wife asks him to describe his new partner, he says that Ryan is "obstructive, obnoxious, rude, sexist, misogynist, hyper and out of control." So what redeems Ryan Wilkins as a character? He is a loving father to his 2-year-old son whom he is raising on his own. And, Ryan is an especially perceptive and determined detective, willing to go outside the lines to reach his objective, often ignoring physical and occupational dangers.

The first case the Wilkins are tasked with is a murder of a young woman in the offices of the Provost of an Oxford college. No one seems to know who she is or how she came to be where she died.

The Oxford setting is well utilized and the reader gets some understanding of how a college there operates – which I found informative and interesting.

As one might expect, as the story progresses, both characters grow on each other and gradually learn to appreciate each others' talents and strengths. And they grow on the reader as well. I found this a highly entertaining read and have ordered the next two books in the series to read and review. If you like Mark Billingham's new Inspector Miller series, I think you will enjoy this one as well.

THE BROKEN AFTERNOON

by Simon Mason

Riverrun, £16.99, February, 2023

D.I. Ryan Wilkins #2

Rating: A

Poppy Clarke is a delightful four-year-old girl who goes missing at her nursery in Oxford. The mother was inside talking to one of the staff while the girl wandered off and went outside. Then Poof! She was gone. Suspicion falls on the divorced father who is nowhere to be found.

DI Ray Wilkins, whose wife is having a very difficult time being pregnant with twins, heads up the team to find Poppy. But Ray is without his perceptive partner DI Ryan Wilkins (no relation), who was suspended from the force at the end

of the first book in the series (**A KILL-ING IN NOVEMBER**). Now Ryan is wiling away the late hours as a night watchman at a van rental property. That very night Ryan catches an intruder who has evaded the security cameras and has gotten into a van. He turns out to be Mick Dick, an old school mate of Ryan's, who is down on his luck and looking for a place to sleep – or so he claims. Ryan lets him go for old times sake and is shocked to find out later that Mick is killed by a car about ½ hour after they parted ways. That doesn't feel right to Ryan so he starts investigating.

Meanwhile, there is the new Superintendent Dave Wallace who is striving to incorporate new diversity regulations into the Oxford police force. One of the areas of emphasis is that of hiring "white boys from low socio-economic backgrounds." Wallace is reviewing Ryan Wilkins suspension with a mind to reverse it instead of getting a new candidate and spending 5-7 years bringing him up to speed. It helps that Wallace came from poverty himself. So Ryan Wilkins is brought in and told to be on his best behavior while his reinstatement is being considered. Also he is required to take anger management counseling. (Good luck with that!) Ryan is overjoyed with the unexpected chance to get back into the police force but finds towing the line as difficult as its ever been.

It seems like every time the police are stymied, Ryan shows up with valuable information he has obtained on this own. A suspect is eventually identified but arresting him proves quite problematic.

Top-notch police detective work, surprising plotting and fascinating characters are hallmarks of this impressive new series. I have a new favorite writer – Simon Mason.

LOST AND NEVER FOUND

by Simon Mason

Riverrun, £16.99, January, 2024

D.I. Ryan Wilkins #3

Rating: A

DI Ray Wilkins' nose is bent out of shape when his boss Superinten-

dent 'Barko' Wallace appoints DI Ryan Wilkins (no relation) to lead the investigation into the disappearance of socialite Zara Fanshawe. Ryan can't help himself when he requires Ray to perform seemingly menial tasks. I think in England this is referred to as "taking the piss."

As the two detectives dig deeper into Zara's life, they find that for the last few months she has been acting quite erratically, abandoning her life of leisure for that of poverty and penance.

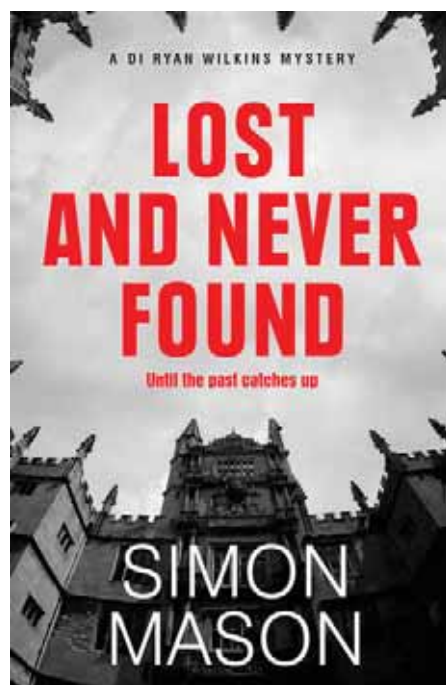
She returned to Oxford, where she had been a student years before, and appeared to have been in search of a homeless man who goes by the name of Waitrose.

There are a couple of side stories. One involves Ray being invited to join a national team in what would be PR work for the police force. Another is Ryan's new romantic relationship with Carol, who may not be all she appears to be.

When Zara's body is found in an empty house belonging to her ex-husband, the investigation enters a new phase. Answers come only when Ryan and Ray take a deep dive into Zara's college life.

Ryan supplies much-needed comic relief with his antics to what would otherwise be a dark and dreary story.

Once again, Simon Mason has come



up with a cracker of a story and manages to entertain us on every page. Can't wait to read the next one when it comes out in early 2025.

CLEAN KILL

by Stephen Leather

Hodder & Stoughton, £16.99, July, 2023

Spider Shepherd #20

Rating: A-

My annual fix of Stephen Leather was a satisfying as ever. Leather manages to keep this series fresh with inventive plots and evolving characters.

In the last few books Spider has been working as an MI 5 agent and in this one he is working undercover as a bent prison guard in HMP Bradford high security prison. His mission is to find out what is being planned by the jihadist prisoners.

Unfortunately Spider is interrupted during this mission with news that his son Liam's UN peacekeeping helicopter has been shot down in Mali and he has been taken prisoner by some bad actors. Spider takes leave from his prison job to join an SAS rescue team. A lot of action follows and the team is ultimately successful.

Spider returns in timely fashion to complete his initial mission at the prison, but not before a lot of lives are put in danger, including Spider's.

I know exactly what I'm going to get when I pick up one of Stephen Leather's books – believable plots and propulsive, page-turning excitement. Always a deadly pleasure.

Craig Sisterson Reviews



THE LAST DANCE

by Mark Billingham

Grove Atlantic, \$28 USD, 4 July 2023

Rating: A

I still remember the day I first discovered (for me) the crime storytelling of British author Mark Billingham. It was a little over 20 years ago, and I was a young attorney browsing the crime and thriller section of a downtown bookshop in New Zealand's biggest city on my lunch break. Unable to resist, I walked out of the store having bought a copy of **SLEEPYHEAD** (along with Michael Connelly's **THE POET** and James Lee Burke's **PURPLE CANE ROAD** – a rather successful book buying day!).

While Connelly and Burke were already well established and highly regarded by then, Billingham fair burst onto the scene with his cracking debut **SLEEPYHEAD**, a twisting and dark British police procedural that remains, for me, one of the very best series-starters of the modern era. So good in fact that its premise was later filched for a key episode of *CSI: New York*, along with kick-starting a terrific, long-running series starring country music loving, kinda-curmudgeon DI Tom Thorne.

But now, something new, and for Billingham something of a return – or at least nod to and greater inclusion of – his pre-**SLEEPYHEAD** days when he was most well-known in Britain as a stand-up comedian and an actor who popped up in minor roles in police dramas, as the human face of political puppet show *Spitting Image*, or as bumbling henchman Gary, a castle guard for the Sheriff of Nottingham in late 1980s-early 1990s kids' comedy TV show *Maid Marian and her Merry Men*.

In his first series-starter in two decades, Billingham returns to his comedic roots with the brilliant **THE LAST DANCE**, a hilarious yet heartfelt crime novel that introduces one-of-a-kind sleuth DS Declan Miller. Back at work following the murder of his wife – a fellow detective and his ballroom dance partner – moped riding Miller is looking to re-find his feet alongside contrasting new partner, in the professional sense, DS Sara Xiu (an enthusiast

of motorcycles, heavy metal music, and casual sex).

The duo are tabbed to investigate a bizarre double-killing at a seedy seaside hotel in Blackpool. A local crime family's eldest son is dead in one room, and an IT consultant is equally sans heartbeat in the adjacent one. Is this a clumsily executed professional hit? As they try to run down leads without making too many missteps, Miller and Xiu quickstep into all sorts of misadventures, while the shadow of his wife's unsolved murder hovers. Just as she does, appearing regularly in their home.

Where the Thorne series was salted with gallows humour, DS Miller's investigations have a very different tone; lots of laughs among the dark deeds. The zingy dialogue and Miller's perspective and quips will have readers smiling, chuckling, even laughing out loud. But this is no one-man show. Other characters, from Xiu to Miller's eclectic group of ballroom dance buddies, bring much to this highly engaging, well-constructed crime novel. **THE LAST DANCE** is a vibrant read that still explores some serious topics, from grief to gangsters to various prejudices in our communities.

Billingham is dancing a tricky line, but he nails all the steps with aplomb. If crime writing were *Dancing with the Stars*, this budding new series would sail through to the next round on a string of 9s and 10s from the judges. And we'd all be left full of anticipation for what's to come next time the music hits. Thankfully, another DS Miller tale is on the way; **THE WRONG HANDS** drops this summer.

THE LAST WORD

by Elly Griffiths

Quercus Books, £22 GBP,

30 January 2024

Rating: A-

While prolific British author Elly Griffiths has been delighting readers all over the world with her bestselling Ruth Galloway mysteries over the past fifteen years, she hasn't been afraid to stray from the coastal Norwich setting or her beloved forensic archaeologist heroine. It was a then-standalone tale, **THE**

STRANGER DIARIES, which scooped the Edgar Award for Best Novel in 2020.

That book introduced DS Harbinder Kaur as a supporting character. Then in between further Ruth Galloway Mysteries, and some of Griffiths other series of Brighton Mysteries, Kaur returned in **THE POSTSCRIPT MURDERS**, a novel that was shortlisted for the Gold Dagger and saw the introduction of an unusual investigative trio: octogenarian Edwin, former monk Benedict, and carer Nataalka, who is originally from the Ukraine. The amateurs help and hinder Kaur as she tries to uncover the truth behind the death of Nataalka's neighbour, and a potential spate of dying writers.

Now, **THE LAST WORD** sees a welcome encore for the crew. After the events of the previous book, Benedict, now Nataalka's live-in beau, runs his coffee shop on the southern coast of England, while Nataalka and elderly Edwin have opened an agency and dabble in minor investigations day-to-day. But with Nataalka's mother Valentyna having moved into their tiny flat from war-torn Ukraine, while her brother fights the Russians, tensions are high. What they need is a good murder to solve!

When local writer Melody Chambers is found dead and her family suspect foul play, the game is afoot. Especially after Edwin notices strange connections in the obituary pages. When Edwin and Benedict go undercover at a rural writers' retreat, the body count rises. Are the clues on the page as well as off? Griffiths expertly reels us in, delivering a fabulous tale full of wit, intrigue, and wonderful characters. A thoroughly enjoyable read in a growing series, from a masterful storyteller.

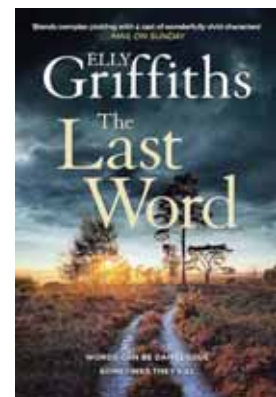


Table of Contents

Quest for Best Mysteries	2
Best of 2023	
Experts' Lists	3
Booksellers' Lists	8
Publications' Lists	10
Websites' Lists	12
Best of the Best 2023	21
Reviewed to Death	23
Editor's Message	26
Associate Editor's Message	27
Most Anticipated Mysteries 2024	28
Reviews	
Meredith Anthony	49
Ted Hertel	56
Hank Wagner	62
Cozy/Traditonal Cafe'	64
George Easter	68
Robin Agnew	74
Larry Gandle	77
Down Under Crime	80
On George's Nightstand	79
Bouchercon 2024	84
DP Calendar	85
Reviews From the U.K.	
Ripster's Revivals	86
Reviews	89
Edgar Award Nominations	88



Editor/Publisher
George A. Easter
george@deadlypleasures.com

Associate Editor
Larry Gandle
LGandle@aol.com

Contributors
Mary Mason
Jeff Popple
Mike Ripley
Ted Hertel, Jr.
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