

Deadly Pleasures *Mystery Magazine*

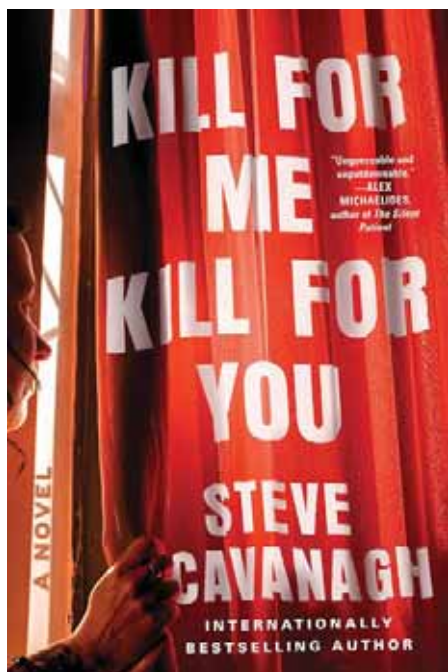


Steve Cavanagh's
Remarkable
KILL FOR YOU KILL FOR ME

The Talent of Steve Cavanagh

by Larry Gandle

Before considering the work of Steve Cavanagh, I want to call to your attention his latest book now published in the United States, a standalone entitled **KILL FOR ME KILL FOR YOU**. We will give it the Mini-Reviewed to Death treatment with my full review followed by mini-reviews from Jeff Popple, Ali Karim and George Easter. It has garnered a starred review in *Publishers Weekly* and an Editors' Pick at amazon.



KILL FOR ME, KILL FOR YOU
by Steve Cavanaugh
Atria, \$27.99, March
Rating: A

Amanda and Wendy meet at a support group in New York City. Both of

them have suffered a traumatic incident due to men that they have identified as the individuals responsible for their individual tragedies. They begin to spend time together and then, after one night of heavy drinking, they make a pact that they will kill for each other -- similar to Patricia Highsmith's **STRANGERS ON A TRAIN**, which Wendy recently read. The result is totally unexpected as nobody appears to be who they seem to be. The suspense continues to ratchet itself up.

This is a standalone thriller by Steve Cavanaugh. His Eddie Flynn legal thrillers are nonstop thrillers and this one follows a similar path. There are multiple twists and turns which most readers will never see coming. It is totally entertaining. At the end, the suspense was so ratcheted up that I could not read it sitting down. I really don't want to say anything else for fear of giving away too much of the plot. All I will say is that it is one of the best thrillers I have read in years.

Jeff Popple

The story zips along at a brisk pace and Cavanaugh's short sharp chapters always end in such a way that you have to keep on reading. Some clever misdirection is revealed by Cavanaugh at the midpoint of the book, and the tension notches up significantly in the second half. The characters are neatly crafted, especially Amanda who drives much of the book, and she is quite sympathetic, despite some of her actions.

It is difficult to successfully pull off new variation on Patricia Highsmith's **STRANGERS ON A TRAIN**, but Cavanaugh does it with aplomb, and **KILL FOR ME KILL FOR YOU** is a fine piece of entertainment. A few moments strain credibility, but not enough to dampen enjoyment of the book, and the final pages deliver some good surprises. In all, the perfect weekend read. **Rating: A**

Ali Karim

This latest from the master of legal thrillers, comes with a really twisty tale. Taking a sideways glance from Patricia Highsmith's debut novel [and the Hitchcock / Chandler film adaptation], we get a contemporary twist of some power, because when it comes to gender, the female of the species is the deadlier. Protagonists / Antagonists Amanda and Ruth give Bruno and Guy a run for their money. But in the hands of author Cavanaugh matters are far more complex as in the shadows lurks a hidden agenda. In a word extraordinary. **Rating: A**

George Easter

The similarity to the plot of **STRANGERS ON A TRAIN** initially caused me to harbor some skepticism, but the plot soon took off on its own trajectory leaving the **TRAIN** in the dust. This novel appeared on quite a few Best of the Year lists when it came out last year in the U.K. It should be featured on many Best of the Year lists this year as it gets a wider readership in the U.S. Cavanaugh's ability to surprise the reader is second to none. **Rating: A**

The Works of Steve Cavanagh

My favorite crime fiction subgenre novel is the legal thriller. Novels that center around a courtroom trial have the ability to ratchet up the suspense to an incredibly high level. A lot of the action also occurs outside the courthouse, especially with investigations and trial prep. Some of the best writers of these novels include John Grisham, Michael Connelly, Scott Turow, Greg Iles, Paul Levine among

many others. Steve Cavanaugh does not believe he writes legal thrillers. As he discusses below, there is less trial and more psychological suspense. He likes to think what he writes is more of a thriller and downplays the trial. Personally, I see his books as thrillers centered around a trial. His law background provides a sense of tradecraft reality.

I first became aware of the books of Steve Cavanaugh as he was starting to get shortlisted for the CWA Dagger Awards. His book, **THE LIAR**, in fact won the prestigious CWA Gold Dagger Award. His novel, **THIRTEEN**, gained him widespread renown as he won the Theakston Old Peculiar Crime Novel of the Year along with a Barry Award nomination for Best Crime Novel. Also, **THE DEVIL'S ADVOCATE** won the CWA Steel Dagger for best thriller.

The one thing all of his books have in common for me is that I could not stop reading them once started and if I had to put it down, I could not wait to get back to reading them. After having read and reviewed all of his books, there are certain characteristics common to all of them. Steve is a lawyer so there is much discussion of the trial process which reads and feels authentic. However, the plots can be outlandish and reality must often be suspended. Characters are reasonably well done but there are some in each book that appear to be cardboard stock figures -- especially the villains. This is not a negative criticism. Thrillers do not do well with deep, rich characters. You need them to be just realistic enough to be sympathetic to the reader or the opposite in the case of the villains. Otherwise, the plot will often screech to a standstill. Every book he has written has multiple twists and turns and some of them quite dramatic. Some will totally surprise the reader. The books might appear to be long but they read like much shorter books.

In the following reviews, please note that they were not read sequentially. They were read randomly over several years. What is interesting are my grades of the books. No, I am not getting soft on my ratings. I'm still stingy with my A ratings. The books are just that good. I also have noticed that the last four

books he wrote I have rated them all with an "A" and I almost rated **KILL FOR ME** an A+. I cannot recommend his books highly enough for sheer entertainment. Read him. You will thank me.

THE CROSS

by Steve Cavanagh

Orion

Rating: B

This novella was written as a prequel to **THE DEFENSE**. Eddie Flynn, the defense attorney working in Manhattan is defending a woman whose husband was killed by NYPD in a chokehold. The victim's wife fully believes in his innocence in spite of the fact that he was a hardened criminal in the past. As Eddie works the case, people begin to die and it soon becomes apparent Eddie is putting his own life in mortal danger if he continues with the case. He will have to use all of his experience as a con-man, to fool enough people and get his client a very large settlement. That is -- if he survives.

THE CROSS was written in 2014-15 in response to the NYPD killing of Eric Gardner. Steve wanted Eddie to cross examine some of those NYPD brass. The pacing of the story is swift. Many of the characters are stock stereotypes reflecting the author's early career. He gets much better in the later novels. The plot, though the pacing never wavers, does stretch incredulity. For a first novella, it is very entertaining and a relatively easy read in one sitting.

[**Warning:** this novella is hard to find. It was only published in the U.K. and is out of print. I was able to read it because the author sent it to me in pdf form. It's good enough that it deserves to be in print.]

THE DEFENSE

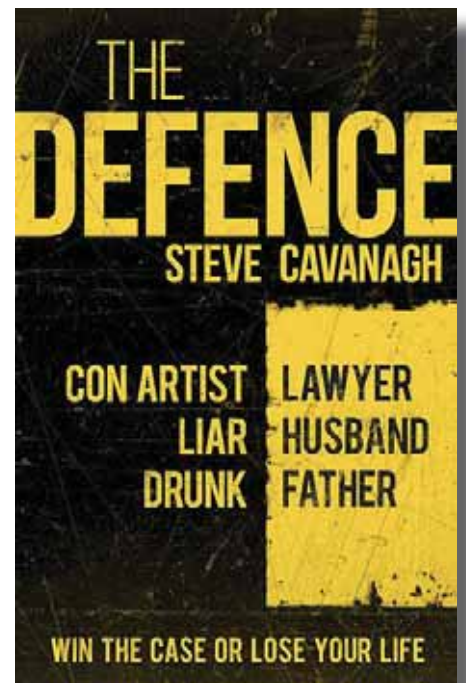
by Steve Cavanagh

Flatiron, \$25.75

Eddie Flynn #1

Rating: A-

In the first novel by Steve Cavanaugh, Eddie Flynn, the defense lawyer and former con artist, is placed into an impossible position. He must defend Olek Volchek, a Russian mafia kingpin or lose both his life and the life of his



ten-year-old daughter. To add another level of complexity, he must plant a bomb in the courtroom to kill the main witness against Volchek which will certainly throw Eddie into prison or very well cost him his life. With the stakes so high, Eddie must figure out how to outsmart the Russians against all odds.

THE DEFENSE is a superb first novel. Steve quickly establishes himself as an author capable of writing a propulsive legal thriller where the action and suspense rarely wane. Reality must be suspended from page one but once the characters are established, the book is impossible to put down. Steve is a lawyer and manages to intersperse legal tradecraft in a courtroom setting throughout the book. The fact that Eddie is a former con man is emphasized and is key to the plot- more so than in subsequent novels. In spite of the improbable plot, Steve makes Eddie a well-rounded character and one the reader will not hesitate to root for. Forget literary, this book is pure entertainment and a great start to the Eddie Flynn series.

THE PLEA

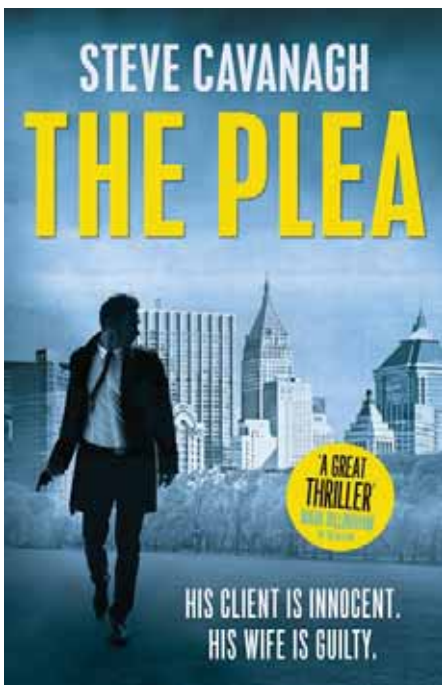
by Steve Cavanagh

Flatiron Books, \$26.99

Eddie Flynn #2

Rating: B+

David Child is a dot com billionaire



who is accused of killing his girlfriend. The evidence is overwhelming including the fact that the security video reveals he is the only one who entered and left the apartment. Defense lawyer, Eddie Flynn, is blackmailed by federal agents into taking the case and is given the job of persuading David to plead guilty, in spite of, his insistence that he is innocent. If Eddie fails, his wife will be arrested and sent to jail. Eddie believes in David's innocence and decides to defy the feds and defend him anyway. This places himself, his wife and David into harm's way. Violence will be the only way out.

What is interesting about any book by Steve Cavanagh is that there is a lot of legal tradecraft interspersed with the thrilling plot. These books are legal THRILLERS -- the plot rockets along. Reality must often be suspended and characters can be stereotypes. Nonetheless, these books are solidly entertaining and highly recommended.

THE LIAR

by Steve Cavanagh

Orion, £8.99

Eddie Flynn #3

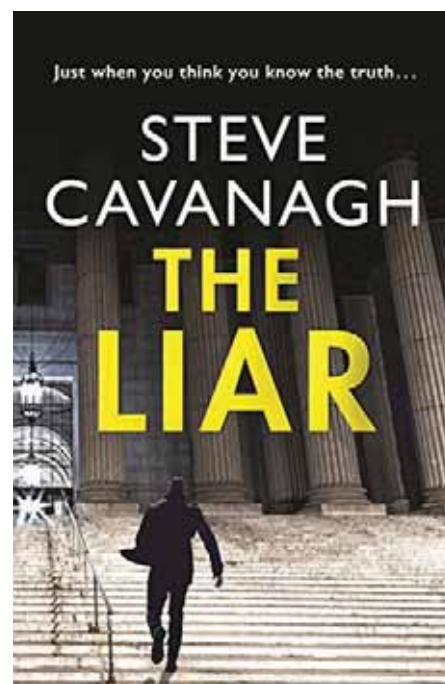
Rating: A-

Leonard Howell runs a company that negotiates for hostages and handles kidnappings all over the world. Things

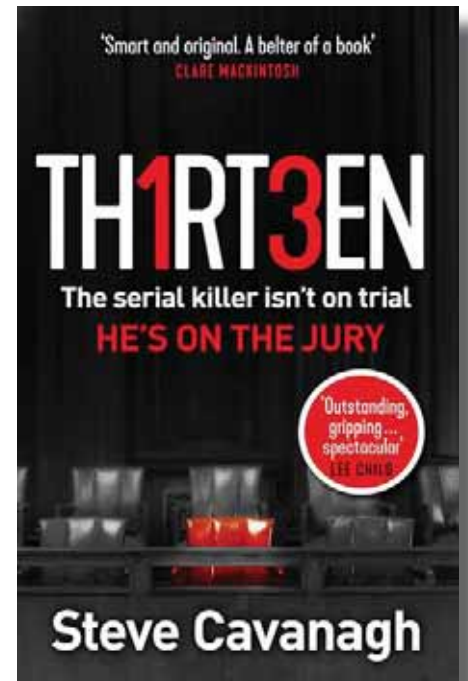
get personal when his own nineteen-year-old daughter is kidnapped and he needs Eddie Flynn, the defense attorney to help get her back. Howell wants Flynn to help with the negotiation. As would be expected, since this occurs at the beginning of a relatively long novel, things break down quickly and Howell gets blamed for his daughter's kidnapping.

At the same time, Flynn's close friend and judge, Harry Ford, is in trouble from an old case, that still haunts him. He defended a woman accused of killing her daughter and is now accused by an unscrupulous lawyer, Max Copeland, of negligence in his defense of the woman. This could ruin Harry. These two seemingly random events eventually intertwine into another explosive ending full of twists and turns.

This book won the Crime Writers Association's (Great Britain) Gold Dagger Award as best novel of the year in 2018. It is written in the same fashion as Steve Cavanagh's other excellent books. Short chapters- each with a cliffhanger ending to keep the plot propulsive. It does take some time for the author to set up the story but once things become increasingly clear, the pages fly by. Characters are certainly good enough for a thriller novel. As always, the courtroom scenes remain at the heart of the story with the out of courtroom



scenes complimenting the trial until it takes over the book. I will admit that the book did go on a bit too long and there is some excessive exposition at the end but there are surprises galore. This is one of the best of Steve Cavanagh -- at least to this point in his career. Highly recommended.



THIRTEEN

by Steve Cavanagh

Flatiron Books, \$26.99

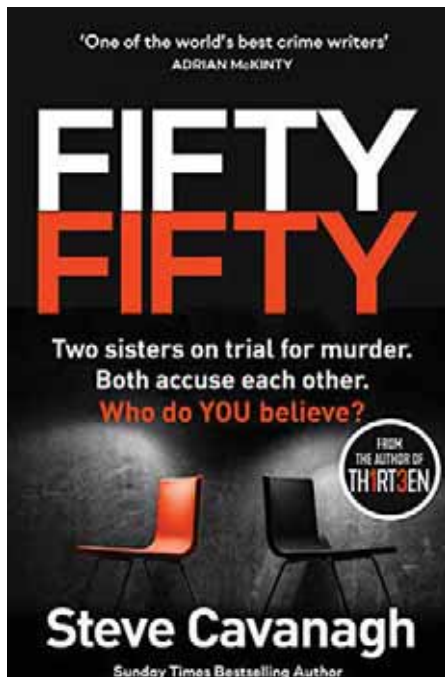
Eddie Flynn #4

Rating: B+

Joshua Kane is a serial killer who actually puts himself on the jury after killing his victims and framing someone close to them. He has succeeded in doing this almost a dozen times. Now, he has framed Bobby Solomon, a film actor big on the blog sites. Bobby is on trial for his life. Kane is putting himself into a position to influence the other jurors. It is up to Eddie Flynn to defend Bobby and his investigators are picking up the fact that Bobby is being framed. Eddie places himself increasingly in danger as he gets closer to the truth.

This is a fun book with lots of twists and turns. Characters are well developed for a thriller. The plot moves along swiftly and the story is never dull. The ending is both satisfying and surprising. The premise of the plot is quite clever

but reality must certainly be suspended as the plot gets increasingly outlandish. It is a fun book nevertheless. Isn't that the point? Recommended for plane or beach.



FIFTY-FIFTY

by Steve Cavanagh

Orion, £ 8.99

Eddie Flynn #5

Rating: A

Frank Avellino, the ex-mayor of New York City, is found dead in his home-viciously stabbed by one or both of his daughters, Sofia and Alexandra. Both of the daughters called 911 emergency to report the other was killing her father. Both daughters are arrested and charged with murder. Eddie Flynn is hired to defend Sofia and a large law firm is hired by Alexandra. Which sister killed her father. Eddie fully believes he is in the right defending the innocent sister. People are killed and witnesses disappear as we move onto the trial. The hope is that the correct killer is put behind bars but it is increasingly difficult to determine who that is.

This is another brilliant novel by Steve Cavanagh. The book is long but the plot so compelling that the reader doesn't really notice. The main characters are well created but the more minor characters can tend to be stereotypes. The pacing never wavers as most of the

action takes place in the courtroom but there are certainly elements of suspense outside, as well. The book is written in alternating character chapter form. Eddie Flynn is always in first person narrative, the unknown killer identified as 'She' and Kate, a lawyer helping to defend Alexandra, are third person narration. This keeps the suspense unwavering throughout. There is another Cavanaugh twist at the end- a brilliant one. This is one of Steve's best works to that point of his career. It is a lot of fun and highly recommended.

THE DEVIL'S ADVOCATE

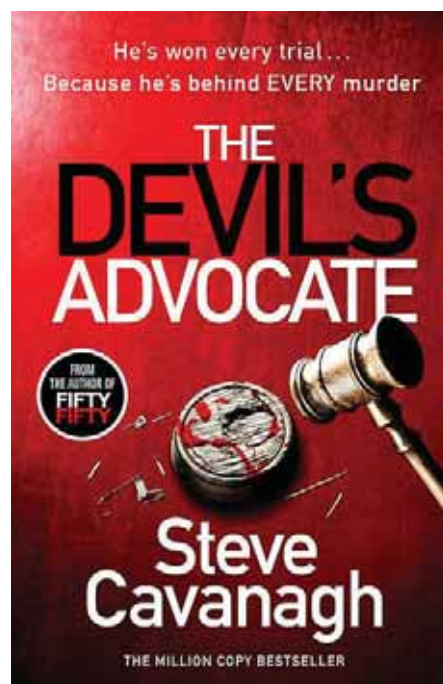
by Steve Cavanagh

Orion, £8.99

Eddie Flynn #6

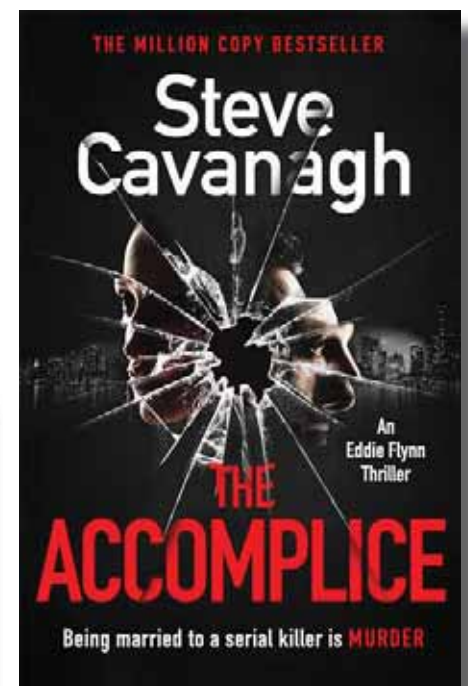
Rating: A

Randal Korn is the DA in a small Alabama town. He loves the death penalty and the power it gives him over individual's lives. He doesn't care if a prisoner is guilty or not. He just wants to see them die and he will stop at nothing to accomplish that goal. Now, Andy Dubois, an innocent man, is facing a trial that could determine his fate. When his lawyer disappears, New York Lawyer, Eddie Flynn, is asked to take the case by Alexander Berlin, a mysterious government fixer. Flynn and his team agree and travel down to small



town Alabama. They are immediately placed into danger as Korn has the local police chief and the local politicians in his hip pocket. Can Flynn and his crew save Andy?

This book is a wonderful legal thriller that takes place in small town America but written by an Irishman. The town is quite a stereotype but works fine for the purposes of the compelling and propulsive plot. The book is not great literature but is supremely entertaining. There are numerous subplots which all eventually coalesce at the end. The characters are, overall, a well created bunch but the villains come off as unidimensional comic book figures. It still works well with this book. It is truly great to read a book I could not wait to get back to. It is a long book- perhaps longer than it needs to be but it is so much fun that it reads as a much shorter work. Highly recommended.



THE ACCOMPLICE

by Steve Cavanagh

Orion, £12.99

Eddie Flynn #7

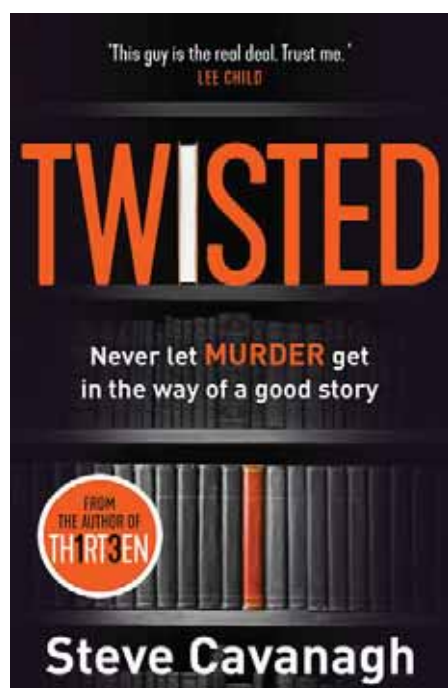
Rating: A

The Sandman is terrorizing NYC. He is Daniel Miller, a serial killer who has already killed fourteen people. He keeps their eyes as mementos. He is pure evil. It is felt that his wife, Carrie, aids him

on his killing spree. She is on trial for murder as her husband continues killing while in hiding. Eddie Flynn and his team are defending her and they are the only ones who believe in her innocence. By getting involved, Eddie unknowingly places his whole team in potential danger.

This book is another example of Steve bringing very high stakes to the trial. The suspense gets increasingly ratcheted up and never lags. This is trademark Cavanagh at his best. Characters are stereotypes but, again, deep characterizations are not necessary in thriller writing. Is the writing literary? No way. But I guarantee you will have a very enjoyable and fully entertaining few hours.

Standalone Novel



TWISTED

by Steve Cavanagh
Orion, £8.99

Rating: B+

Paul Cooper has a secret to hide. It is the type of secret that he cannot tell his wife. He has recently gotten married and has moved himself and his wife, Maria, to a small town named Port Lonely. It is there that he hopes to escape his past life. Maria understands

that but she is feeling neglected as Paul leaves the house to work. Eventually his past catches up to him with dire consequences. To reveal any more of the plot would be criminal.

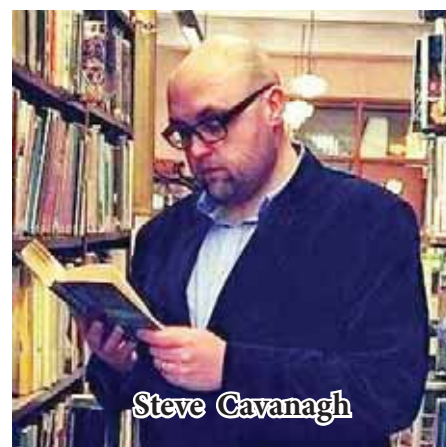
This is another fully entertaining novel by Steve Cavanagh. It is not an Eddie Flynn novel but rather a standalone. It is amusing when Maria visits a lawyer and she is told by him that he is a very good lawyer but no Eddie Flynn. (Maria has no idea who that is.) As you would imagine, the story is full of twists- quite clever ones. The plot moves swiftly for the most part but the story is a bit too long and, at times, feels it. Characters are well portrayed without a lot of depth but they work fine for this roller coaster thrill ride. As you might imagine, with a name like **TWISTED**, there is one major twist at the end which I guarantee you won't see coming. Very entertaining and highly recommended.

Steve Cavanagh Interview by Larry Gandle

You have a background in law. Can you tell us about that?

I was a lawyer for nearly twenty years in Northern Ireland. Mostly civil rights but I had wide practice that included a fair amount of criminal law as well. It was hard but largely emotionally rewarding work. Mostly I helped people who fell beneath the cracks, who were discriminated against, or hurt, or who had something terrible happen to them. That was a heavy weight of responsibility but I was very glad to be able to help people.

I don't think I write legal thrillers, even the Eddie Flynn series isn't really a legal thriller. There's a lot more going on. Mostly I'm interested in suspense and the psychological battles that happen in court. These are not procedural books, I really want the reader to feel all of the thrills and suspense you get from the very best thrillers. I use my knowledge of how to cross-examine a witness, and the war of words that happen in courtrooms and how that really plays out. I retired from the law in 2019, and



it was the best decision I ever made. I was writing at night, working full time as a lawyer and trying to raise a family so it was really tough to try and keep all of those plates spinning. Now I have a much better life balance.

Tell us about Eddie Flynn. How did you come up with that character?

I was cross-examining a witness in court one day and I kind of conned him into revealing that he had invented something, or lied, I can't quite remember the exact details, but basically I set a trap for him and he walked into it. It hit me then that good trial lawyers and good con artists have exactly the same skills - persuasion, misdirection, distraction, etc.

An Irishman who sets his books in the United States including New York City. Why?

I always loved American crime fiction, and when it came time to try and write my first novel I didn't want to write about lawyers in Northern Ireland or the U.K. at all -- it just wasn't the right world for the story. I think people have the impression that anything can happen in New York City, it's just one of those cities. Also, the pace and the feel of the city suited the story I wanted to tell so it had to be New York. I wrote my first three novels without ever having visited the United States and managed to get away with it -- so I've been getting away with it ever since. Fingers crossed.

Also, you used the location of Alabama in THE DEVIL'S ADVOCATE.

What led to that location choice?

I wanted to write a book about the death penalty and how it really works in the U.S. -- it's driven by personality not politics. There's a moratorium on the death penalty in New York so I had to look elsewhere. I had been to Alabama and found it as great, and warm and as frightening as any place I'd ever been to, so I thought that would be a good place to set that particular book.

You've written two standalone novels. Which do you prefer to write? Does writing a standalone refresh you as a writer and make it better when you go back to writing your series?

I think it does. But in a way, all of my books are standalones. When I began writing I thought about this a lot. Do I write a series or a high-concept standalone, and I couldn't decide -- so I eventually decided to do both. All of the Eddie Flynn novels are written as standalone so the reader who picks up the fourth or seventh book will hopefully have just as full and enjoyable a reading experience as someone who has read the books in order of publication. Plus, all the Eddie Flynn books have high-concept hooks, and these are the selling points for the books. Most people read the books out of order of publication because they pick one up not knowing it's a series, they read it and then hopefully they like Eddie Flynn and come back for more.

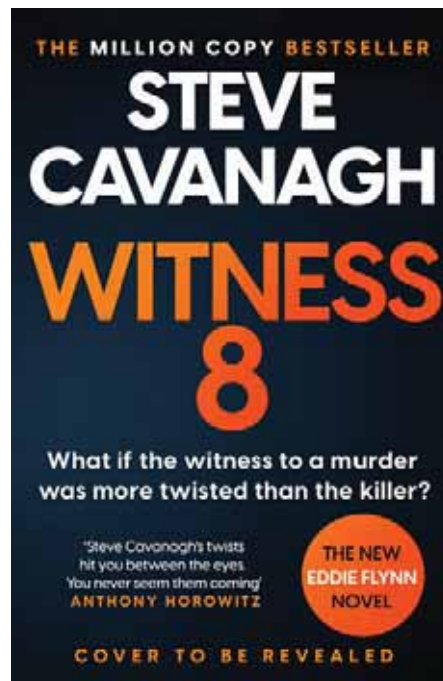
I understand that your wife is influential in coming up with the initial ideas for some of your novels. Could you explain her role in your writing?

We think about a basic idea for a book together and talk about it, sometimes it's Tracy's idea or mine, much like John Grisham. I then go away, with a basic one line question or premise and I write the book and Tracy reads the second draft. She gives me notes, comes up with ideas for additional twists or points out what's not working, and then I do another draft and then it goes to the publisher.

Tell us a little bit about your next

book WITNESS 8 and when we can expect to see it in the U.S.

WITNESS 8 will be out next year. The basic premise is who would be the worst person to witness a murder. That was the initial idea and then I built on it. The book is about a woman called Ruby Johnson who is a nanny and maid for different families in a street on the Upper West Side of New York. One night she sees a murder. One of the residents is killed, and Ruby saw it all. She knows who the killer is and who the



victim is. But there's something wrong with Ruby Johnson. Soon the reader realises that Ruby is a lot more twisted and dangerous than the actual killer.

What writers do you most admire and which ones influenced you the most?

Right now I think Lisa Jewel and Shari Lapena are setting the bar high for knock-out psychological suspense novels. Their books are so good – so well written. I recently enjoyed Alex Michalides **THE FURY**, as well. I always take inspiration from great writing, so apart from these authors, James Lee Burke, John Connolly, Lee Child, Patricia Highsmith and Michael Connelly are huge influences.

Agatha Award Winners 2024

The Malice Domestic mystery convention that celebrates traditional and cozy crime fiction announced the winners of this year's Agatha Awards

Best Contemporary Mystery Novel
THE WEEKEND RETREAT,
Tara Laskowski – Winner

Also Nominated
WINED AND DIED IN NEW ORLEANS, Ellen Byron
HELPLESS, Annette Dashofy
A CASE OF THE BLEUS, Korina Moss
THE RAVEN THIEF, Gigi Pandian

Best Historical Mystery Novel
THE MISTRESS OF BHATIA HOUSE, Sujata Massey – Winner

Also Nominated
DEATH AMONG THE RUINS, Susanna Calkins
ACT LIKE A LADY, THINK LIKE A LORD, Celeste Connally
I HEARD A FLY BUZZ WHEN I DIED, Amanda Flower
TIME'S UNDOING, Cheryl A. Head

Best First Mystery Novel
CRIME AND PARCHMENT,
Daphne Silver – Winner

Also Nominated
GLORY BE, Danielle Arceneaux
THE HINT OF LIGHT, Kristin Kisska
DUTCH TREAT, Josh Pachter
MOTHER-DAUGHTER MURDER NIGHT, Nina Simon



Barry Award Nominees 2024

The winners in each category will be announced at the Opening Ceremonies of the Nashville Bouchercon on August 29, 2024. All readers of *Deadly Pleasures* are qualified to vote. Please submit votes to george@deadlypleasures.com by July 15, 2024. One vote per category.

The novels in each category are arranged in alphabetical order based on the author's last name.

Best Mystery or Crime Novel



Lou Berney, *DARK RIDE* (Morrow)

S. A. Cosby, *ALL THE SINNERS BLEED* (Flatiron)

Eli Cranor, *OZARK DOGS* (Soho Crime)

Jordan Harper, *EVERYBODY KNOWS* (Mulholland)

Dennis Lehane, *SMALL MERCIES* (Harper)

Adrian McKinty, *THE DETECTIVE UP LATE* (Blackstone)

Best First Mystery or Crime Novel



Michael Bennett, *BETTER THE BLOOD* (Atlantic Monthly Press)

I.S. Berry, *THE PEACOCK AND THE SPARROW* (Atria)

Bruce Borgos, *THE BITTER PAST* (Minotaur)

Amy Chua, *THE GOLDEN GATE* (Minotaur)

Deepti Kapoor, *AGE OF VICE* (Riverhead)

Nina Simon, *MOTHER-DAUGHTER MURDER NIGHT* (Morrow)

Iris Yamashita, *CITY UNDER ONE ROOF* (Berkley)

Best Paperback Original Mystery or Crime Novel



Mia P. Manansala, MURDER AND MAMON (Berkley)

Rick Mofina, EVERY THING SHE FEARED (MIRA)

Jake Needham, WHO THE HELL IS HARRY BLACK? (Half Penny)

Jesse Sutanto, VERA WONG'S UNSOLICITED ADVICE FOR MURDERERS (Berkley)

Vanda Symon, EXPECTANT (Orenda)

Scott Von Doviak, LOWDOWN ROAD (Hard Case Crime)

Best Thriller



Mark Greaney, BURNER (Berkley)

Mick Herron, THE SECRET HOURS (Soho Crime)

John Lawton, MOSCOW EXILE (Atlantic Monthly)

Anthony McCarten, GOING ZERO (Harper)

T. J. Newman, DROWNING (Avid Reader Press)

Ruth Ware, ZERO DAYS (Gallery/Scout Press)

A special thanks to Anthony Award nominee Gabriel Valjan for creating the stunning graphics.

As always I'm most grateful to our nominating committee members who put a lot of time (reading and evaluating) and then nominating. They are: Larry Gandle, Maggie Mason, Ali Karim, Jeff Popple, Oline Cogdill, "Mystery" Mike Bursaw, Steele Curry, Ted Hertel, Donus Roberts, Mike Dillman, Don Longmuir, Meredith Anthony, Robin Agnew, Hank Wagner, Ayo Onatade and Craig Sisterson.

It's a good idea to vote right now while its on your mind. We look forward to seeing which books and authors you choose as the winners. Please email your votes to george@deadlypleasures.com.

VOTE NOW

Larry Gandle Critiques

TheEdgars



This year, the Best Novel Edgar committee managed to compile a list of some very good books. Four of them are on my personal Best of the Year List. The list contains seven books while it normally has five. Two of these books, **FLAGS ON THE BAYOU** and **THE MADWOMEN OF PARIS**, though very good to excellent novels, are not really crime fiction novels. They are historical fiction. For that reason, I did not choose **FLAGS** as my choice as the winner.

BEST NOVEL

CROOK MANIFESTO

by Colson Whitehead
Doubleday, \$29.00

Rating: A

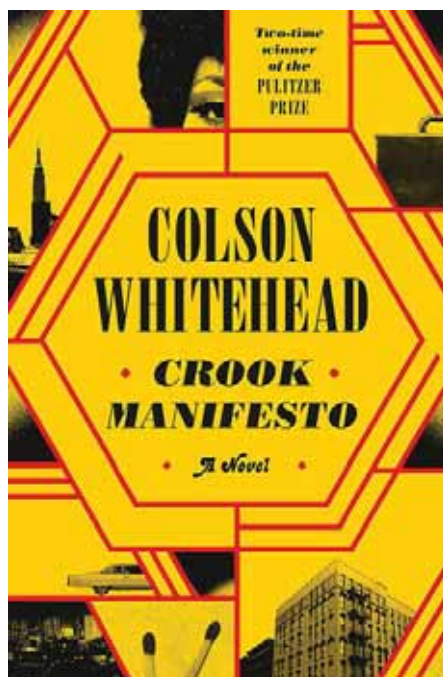
In 1971, Harlem, Ray Carney, our protagonist from **HARLEM SHUFFLE**, has kept on the straight and narrow path of legitimacy. He has given up moving stolen goods. His daughter desperately wants tickets to the Jackson 5 concert but they are impossible to find. He decides to go to his old police contact,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

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

In 1976, fires are being lit throughout Harlem. An abandoned building is burned across the street from Ray's furniture store. A young boy is in the building and is injured. The boy is the

son of one of Ray's tenants. Angered, he asks Pepper to look into who started the fire. This, again will lead to death and destruction.

Colson Whitehead is a master at evoking time and place. Harlem in the 1970s comes vividly to life in his hands. The characters are incredibly lifelike. The plot is compelling but the pacing does occasionally lag. This is one of those books that can fit in both the literary and crime fiction genres quite comfortably. Apparently, this is Book 2 of a trilogy. It is beautifully written and highly recommended. It is also my pick for the Best Novel Edgar Award.



FLAGS ON THE BAYOU

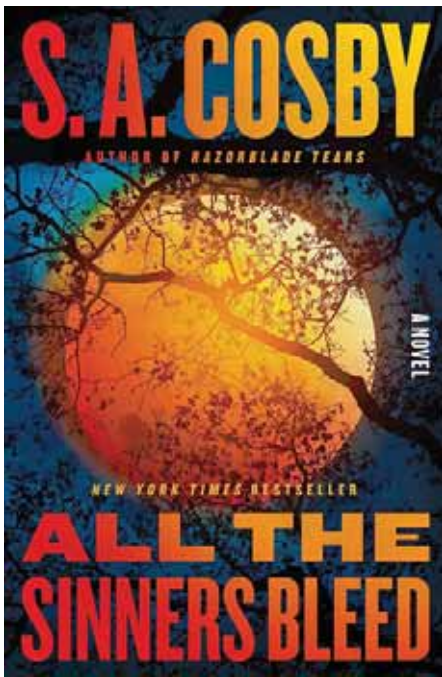
by James Lee Burke
Atlantic Monthly, \$28.00

Rating: A

In 1863, the Union Army has defeated Louisiana and occupies New

Orleans to Baton Rouge including the plantations in between them. On the Lufkin plantation, Hannah Laveau, a black slave flees when she is accused of murder. With her, travels Florence Milton, an abolitionist worker from New England. They must battle the lowest elements of society such as slave catchers and unsavory Union soldiers as they fight for their lives. Other characters include a local constable, Pierre Cauchon, who has little regard for the Union soldiers and has a forbidden love. Col. Carleton Hayes leads an army of seven hundred Confederate troops. He appears to be syphilitic and his insanity and cruelty leads to problems with the other characters. These characters and others help to create a rich tapestry depicting the time and place of the New Iberia region that the author has written so often about.

This work by one of the preeminent crime fiction writers working today might well be his best one yet. His incredibly lyrical writing style is on every page. His characters appear so alive and their dialogue is spot on perfect. The setting is evoked through his descriptions of the landscape including the mist, the foliage and the bayou. The reader seriously feels they are there. The story is truly compelling and it is fascinating to watch the harm these very varied characters do to each other. This book would easily be rated an A+ by me but I would not call it a crime fiction novel. It is definitely not a mystery. It might be called a thriller but it is really a superb Civil War novel. Category aside, it is one of my favorite works of the Best Novels shortlist and I recommend it highly. Easily one of the best books of the last year in any category.



ALL THE SINNERS BLEED

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

Rating: A-

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

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

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.

BRIGHT YOUNG WOMEN

by Jessica Knoll
Simon & Schuster, \$27.99

Rating: B+

On a Saturday night in January, 1978, in a sorority house at FSU, Pamela Schumacher, President of the sorority is woken and hears a thump from upstairs. As she is walking to the stairs, she sees a man descending quickly. He looks around, giving Pam a good look at him. But he doesn't see her. Then he exits. She will never forget that face or that nose. The result of his visit is two women dead and two cut up and left for dead. One of the dead is Pamela's best friend. She wants justice. Meanwhile, out west, Tina Cannon is convinced her girlfriend was killed by a serial killer – the same one who was in Florida. Pam and Tina team up to bring The Defendant to justice.

Though he is never named, it is obvious this is a story about Ted Bundy. The press seems to have fallen in love with him praising, not only his looks, but his supposedly brilliant legal acumen. This is a book about the women seeking justice- not necessarily centered around the crime itself. Pam and Tina are front and center. Their stories are told in alternate chapter form going back to the 70s and today. It is a fascinating look at how the press can almost subvert justice by their characterizations of criminals. Reporters and writers can seek per-

sonal fortune and fame by attempting to humanize these killers. I would not characterize this book as a pure crime novel. The writing is quite excellent in depicting the setting and the characters. Recommended.

THE MADWOMEN OF PARIS

by Jennifer Cody Epstein
Ballantine Books, \$28.00

Rating: B+

In Paris in the late nineteenth century, a woman arrives in the Salpetriere asylum for women. She is screaming and covered in blood. The woman, Josephine, was found about to throw herself off the Pont Neuf. She is said to be an hysteric- an affliction of women at that time. It is up to Dr. Jean-Martin Charcot, the famous director of the asylum to treat this woman. Assigned to her care is Laure, a ward attendant, who recently suffered from a similar diagnosis but has since recovered.

As Laure spends time with Josephine, she witnesses Josephine's memory returning. It seems she is convinced she killed someone. Using hypnosis, Dr Charcot, attempts to discover her secret past. She also soon becomes a star at Charcot's hypnosis demonstrations to the public. Both of the women realize the asylum is a very dangerous place to be and they must escape before it is too late.

This is a very long historical novel. It is a fascinating look at the medical treatment of psychiatric illnesses at that time. Charcot was a pioneer in treating hysterics. Sigmund Freud was one of his disciples and even makes an appearance in the story. The characters are fairly well rounded, but some are stock figures. The novel's main asset is the rich historical detail of the medical profession. The plot often meanders into a needless direction increasing the length at least one hundred pages longer than it needed to be. The writing is solid and my interest never wavered for long. I am not sure I would call this book a true mystery novel. It is more of a suspense novel with mysterious elements. Recommended.

AN HONEST MAN

by Michael Koryta
Mulholland Books, \$29.00

Rating: B-

Israel Pike killed his father a decade ago and has served much of the last ten years in prison. He grew up on Salvation Point Island off the Maine coast. One day while fishing, he discovers a luxurious yacht floating aimlessly out to sea and boards the boat from his skiff. Onboard he discovers seven dead people including two rival Senator candidates. Obviously, he will be considered a prime suspect by the police including his evil uncle, Sterling Pike, a local police officer.

In the meantime, Lyman Rankin, a twelve-year-old, is terrorized by his father Corey— an abusive alcoholic. He comes across a bloody woman with a hatchet who threatens him if he makes a sound. All of these characters and events get intertwined in this entertaining suspense novel.

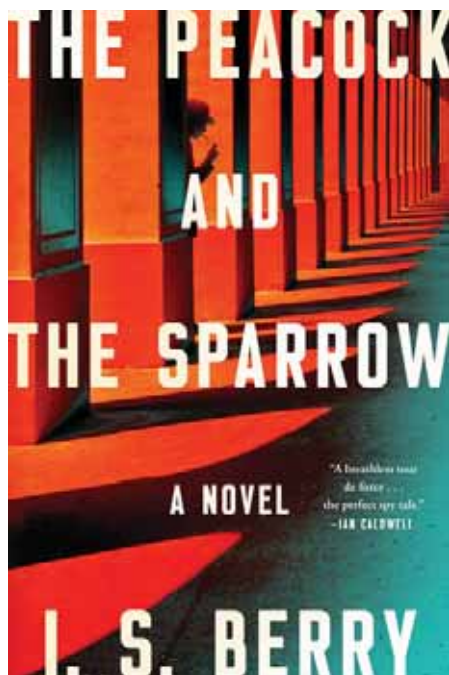
Michael Koryta is a very talented writer but this is not his best work. Ironically, it is shortlisted for the Edgar Award for Best Novel. His depiction of the locale is exceptional with the reader feeling the cold. The characters are well rounded but some are quite stereotypic. The pacing is reasonably rapid. However, the plot is a bit convoluted. Multiple expositions are required to explain what happened and why. The conversation required to explain the course of events lacked realism. Much of the plot especially near the end feels too contrived and, at times, downright silly. It is entertaining and would, therefore, recommend the book for relatively mindless entertainment.

MY PICK: CROOK MANIFESTO
by Colson Whitehead

**WINNER: FLAGS ON THE BAY-
OU**

**BEST FIRST NOVEL
BY AN
AMERICAN AUTHOR**

This is, overall, a weaker list than usual. There are, however, a couple of exceptional novels included.



**THE PEACOCK AND
THE SPARROW**

by I.S. Berry (Atria, \$28.00)

Rating: A

Shane Collins is a very experienced CIA spy working in Bahrain during the Arab Spring. His mission is to uncover Iranian support for the insurgency against the monarchy. Rashid, his informant inside the opposition, passes on enough information to keep the both of them busy and valuable to the CIA station chief. Shane is an alcoholic whose life seems to be on a downward spiral. Things get increasingly complicated for him when he falls for Almada, a beautiful and mysterious local artist. Things begin to unwind rapidly as the revolution begins. Will Shane make it out alive?

This is a brilliant debut novel. The author has spent considerable time in Bahrain and, as a result, the locale is depicted with such exquisite detail that the reader will feel like they are there. The story is loosely based on historical events, overall, so the plot feels quite feasible. The depiction of the characters are truly remarkable for a first time author. The writing style is actually quite literary as her descriptive phrases are often so beautifully written. In my opinion, I feel quite strongly that this

book should win the Edgar Award for Best First novel. No other book on the shortlist comes close.

THE GOLDEN GATE

by Amy Chua
Minotaur, \$28.00

Rating: A-

In Berkeley, California, in 1944, Homicide Detective Al Sullivan must solve the murder of Walter Wilkinson, a presidential candidate, who was shot dead in a hotel room at the upscale Claremont Hotel. His investigation leads him to suspect a link from the death of a seven-year-old child, Iris Stafford, ten years before. It appears that her cousins Cassie and Nicole, as well as, her sister Isabella might have something to do with the murder of Wilkinson. They are all wealthy heiresses to the Bainbridge family fortune. Amidst the investigation, there are discussions of racial strife such as Japanese internment camps and the deportation of Mexican immigrants.

This is a superbly readable and compelling book filled with realistic and complex characters. It is a pleasure spending time with Detective Al Sullivan. The plot is easy to follow and the resolution evades the traditional long discussion and discourse between the hero and villain. For a first novel, it is skillfully written and the reason is that the author has already written multiple bestselling nonfiction works. She really is no beginner. I highly recommend this exceptional work which easily could have held its own on the Edgar Best Novel shortlist.

SMALL TOWN SINS

by Ken Jaworowski
Henry Holt, \$27.99

Rating: B+

In Locksburg, Pennsylvania, a dying coal and steel town, three people have their lives upended. Callie is a nurse who works in a local hospital who has bonded with a terminally ill sixteen-year-old whose dying wish is to see the ocean. Her fundamentalist parents will have none of it. There is Nathan, a volunteer fireman who rescues a man from a burning building after discovering something that could turn his life

around. This leads to a possible breakup of his marriage and possibly jail. Last is Andy- a drug addict who is desperate to stop a serial child molester even if it costs him his life. These three stories reflect the desperation of life in this small rural town as they intertwine around each other.

The plot of this debut novel is totally compelling. It is also a bit contrived as we go down multiple blind pathways in the plot that are used to develop character further, as well as, bulk up the book. The characters are well rounded but the dialogue is stilted. Gabriella, the dying sixteen-year-old, seems a bit too precocious given her circumstances- I never bought into her character. I both read and listened to the book. The narration by three separate readers is quite excellent. Yet, hearing the dialogue read to me, it confirmed my view that it needs help. Given the fact that this is a first novel, it is a very promising work. I am interested to see what this author has in store next. Recommended.

MURDER BY DEGREES

by Ritu Mukerji
Simon & Schuster, \$27.99
Rating: C-

In Philadelphia of 1875, Lydia Weston is a rarity- a woman physician. Lydia sees patients in her clinics, teaches anatomy at the Woman's Medical College of Pennsylvania, as well as, medicine at the hospital. When a patient of hers, Anna Ward, is found dead in the Schuylkill River, it is declared a suicide. Lydia is skeptical and decides to investigate the death. This investigation will lead to the unraveling of secrets and will bring danger and potential death to Lydia, of course.

The basic premise of the book is an immediate nonstarter for me. I have been a physician for over thirty years and know dozens and dozens of physicians. I could emphatically state that not one physician investigated crimes alone or in conjunction with the police. This is considered a traditional mystery so reality must be suspended. In the Edgar shortlist, in my opinion, the very best mysteries should be shortlisted. This is certainly not one of them. I will

admit it is a debut novel and with such stereotypic characters and truly awful dialogue, this is readily apparent. The plot, though not riveting, moves along swiftly and the book is relatively short. The best thing about the book are the multiple descriptions of medical procedures and the prejudices female physicians had to endure at that time. The historical details appear to be spot on. Multiple exposition scenes are endless and stereotypic- villains feel the need to explain themselves in great detail. It is truly maddening. This is a surprising inclusion of the Edgar shortlist. It is forgettable. I would avoid.

THE LAST RUSSIAN DOLL

by Kristen Loesch
Berkley, \$27.00
Rating: DNF

Rosie, a recent Oxford grad, wants to go back to Moscow to investigate her past. Her mother fled Russia with Rosie and has drunk herself to death. Rosie goes back to search for her past with only tales her mother has told her and a mysterious key.

Parallel to this story is the tale of Tonya, a noblewoman who falls for a peasant writer just about the time of the Russian Revolution in 1917. These two stories will eventually come together presumably with answers for Rosie.

This is a very long epic style novel which might very well be interesting. I found the plot too slow and, after over one hundred pages, it never succeeded in drawing me in. The evocation of the past and the settings both old and modern appear to be well written. Dialogue is a bit stilted. I felt like I was reading an historical romance novel which would not really interest me. After persisting for twenty five percent of the book- well over my fifty page rule, no crime was yet committed. Hence, I put it down. Personally, I cannot recommend the book but if you like historical romances, this might very well be a book to consider reading. But not for me!

My pick: THE PEACOCK AND THE SPARROW by I.S. Berry -- by far and away! -- and it won!

Edgar Award Winners 2024

The winners of the 78th Annual Edgar® Awards were presented on May 1, 2024, at the New York Marriott Marquis Times Square.

Best Novel

FLAGS ON THE BAYOU
by James Lee Burke

Best First Novel by an American Author

THE PEACOCK AND THE SPARROW by I. S. Berry

Best Paperback Original

**VERA WONG'S UNSOLICITED
ADVICE FOR MURDERERS**
by Jesse Q. Sutanto

The Simon & Schuster Mary Higgins Clark Award

PLAY THE FOOL by Lina Chern

The G. P. Putnam\Sue Grafton Memorial Award

AN EVIL HEART by Linda Castillo

The Lilian Jackson Braun Memorial Award

GLORY BE by Danielle Arceneaux



Editor's Message



Which Reviewer's Opinions Do You Trust the Most? Book reviews are highly subjective and long-time readers of *Deadly Pleasures* have learned the value of experimenting with our reviews to see which reviewer's tastes most mirror their own. Over the years Larry Gandle and I have playfully disagreed on the merits of many books (we enjoy the heck out of doing that), but I always take notice when, on the rare occasion, he raves about a book. The subject of this issue's cover article is one example which finds us in complete agreement. Steve Cavanagh is a great writer.

Lately Larry and I have been on the same page regarding several excellent books as evidenced by our Best of the Year lists, which often contain some of the same titles. I have made two comments in Larry's review column in this issue, which illustrate our agreement and disagreement.

I have never had a problem finding intriguing books to read on my own, but I also like to dabble with recommendations from our excellent DP reviewers' columns. If I were to choose one reviewer whose tastes seem closest to mine it would be Jeff Popple. I especially appreciate his recommendations of the Australian, New Zealand and British writers Jeff has introduced me to over the years. Another whose opinions I pay a lot of attention to is Steele Curry who writes an annual "Greek Feast" column for us.

Our reviewers represent a wide variety of tastes, so there should be at least one reviewer, if not more, whose opinions are close to yours. I hope you appreciate our seasoned reviewers as much as I do. Each represents decades of reading and/or reviewing experience. If you feel so inspired, please drop me a note at george@deadlypleasures.com and let me know which reviewers you appreciate the most and why.

Larry Gandle's Efforts. Larry Gandle has served as the Associate Editor of *Deadly Pleasures* for a number of years (since Issue 49, 2006). I highly value his input and I frequently use him as a sounding board. He not only provides two columns per issue (a review column and an Associate Editor's opinion column), but also reviews each year's major Edgar Award nominees and the major CWA Dagger short lists for us. For this issue, Larry has outdone himself by providing not only his regular two columns, but also his Edgar nominee column and the excellent cover article. Thanks, pal. You're the best!

Nostalgia. I've noticed a trend among my mystery reading friends. They all seem to reach a point in their lives when they stop reading as much of the current mystery titles coming from publishers and read more of the books from yesteryear that they enjoyed reading decades ago or perhaps the "good ol' stuff" that they never got around to reading. I think I've reached that point as well because over the last year or so I've done just that, except my major focus is still on reading current books. Recently I was granted access to a audio book review site of a major publisher. I am able to download audio books to my phone and listed to them while driving, or working in the yard or even sometimes as I fall asleep in bed (that doesn't work so well because a couple of times I've fallen asleep without stopping the book). Over the last year or so I've listened to the Peter May's Chinese series of six books featuring Chinese detective Yan and Margaret Campbell, an American forensic pathologist. I had read a few in the series but I knew I hadn't read the first, **THE FIREMAKER**. But after listening to it there was such a strong underlying storyline I just had to listen to the second, and then the third.... And so it went until I finished the series with

a surprise at the end – a seventh entry in the series that I did not know existed – **THE GHOST MARRIAGE**, a novella, that caught us up on what the main characters were doing with their lives. This was a great listening experience for me.

If I ever have a reading slump (rare), I pick up an old Dick Francis mystery and find myself reinvigorated by the stories of that legendary writer. A couple of weeks ago I re-read his **FLYING FINISH** and was once again amazed by his storytelling talent.

Another venerated writer whose works I've read lately is Richard Stark (Donald E. Westlake). There were four books in the middle of the series featuring professional thief Parker that I had not read, so I knocked them off in short order. And then there are the Charlie Muffin books by Brian Freemantle, my favorite spy series. I've recently re-read the first seven with gusto.

Each year there are always good books that I never got around to reading and with the constant influx of "good stuff," it's hard to carve out time to go back and catch up. That was the case with Stephen King's **MR MERCEDES** (2014), which won the Edgar Best Novel Award. I recently listened to an audio version and was blown away by the author's talent. I have no inclination to read his (or anyone else's) horror novels and only hope King will write more outstanding mysteries such as **BILLY SUMMERS** and **HOLLY**.

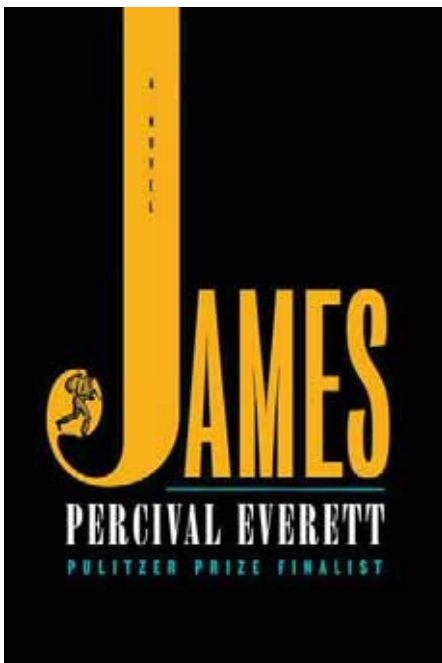
So what's next for me? John Mortimer's Rumpole of the Bailey seems to be calling my name the loudest. How about you? Have you reached that point yet, and if so, what are you reading or re-reading? Send me an email at george@deadlypleasures.com

Everything Back to Normal. The last issue was missing some of its regular features for reasons I explained in that issue. We've got everything back to normal with this issue – except Reviewed to Death. But there is a mini-reviewed to death in the cover article. Enjoy.

Associate Editor's Message



Recently I joined an online book club run by someone who puts up video blogs of the books he reads. His name is Eric Carl Anderson and he is very much tied into literary book awards, as I am. His videos provide brilliant analysis of the books. The name of the book club is The Lonesome Reader's Book Club. It is truly an international membership. We have read some really exceptional literary novels. Some I have put into my column if I think their element of suspense will fit into the tastes of the readers of this magazine. For example, this issue I have reviewed **JAMES** by Percival Everett which is quite suspenseful and will prove to be both compelling and, at times, quite humorous.



The questions we so often ponder are what is literary fiction and does it

sometimes fit into the crime fiction/thriller category? I think the answer is a resounding yes. What I expect out of a literary mystery is the writing to be a cut above the ordinary. The descriptions of the locale can be written in a way to make the setting fully come alive. Characters are full, rich creations and the dialogue is spot-on perfect. Often, in crime fiction, not all of these elements are well thought out by the author as their primary purpose is to write an interesting plot that will draw us into the book and keep the pages turning.

I explained to the membership of this book club that I primarily read and review crime fiction. I look for books that have compelling plots that make me want to keep turning the pages. I expect what I delineated above, i.e., well-written, compelling characters etc. The plots can be riveting without outright crimes being committed. If they are boring books or any of that experimental stuff, I am gone. However, make no mistake, going back to crime fiction is always going back to my comfort zone.



The Crime Writers Association of Great Britain just announced their Dag-ger longlists. As usual, most of them are

unfamiliar to both George and myself. This is definitely not a bad thing. Every year I am surprised by some of the books written by authors I never heard of. They can be some amazingly powerful works. As long as their shortlists are a reasonable length, ie. no more than six books, I will plan on getting to them by the next issue.



In response to George's column -- consider us the poor man's Siskel and Ebert of crime fiction reviewing. You remember the PBS movie review show so popular in the 1980s. If both reviewers hated a movie -- you avoided it. If they split on a movie, you would go at your own risk. But if they both agreed then it is a movie worth seeing. Well, in those instances when George and I agree that a book is excellent -- just read it! If we both hate it -- avoid it. This is especially rare because we usually don't finish reading books we hate. If we split in our opinions, go with whose reviews you generally agree with more. This year the book that we are most in agreement on is the recent Edgar-winning **THE PEACOCK AND THE SPARROW** by I. S. Berry. Other 2023 crime novels we agreed on are **SMALL MERCIES** by Dennis Lehane, **RESURRECTION WALK** by Michael Connelly, **RED QUEEN** by Juan Gomez-Jurado and **THE RIVER WE REMEMBER** by William Kent Krueger. You can't miss with any of these. We dramatically disagreed on Mick Herron's **THE SECRET HOURS** and, of course, I was in the right.

Introducing ...

Cara Hunter

by George Easter

I had heard the name Cara Hunter bandied about in British crime fiction circles and erroneously assumed she was one of the legion of psychological/domestic suspense authors currently flooding the market – so I paid her no attention. But then at the end of 2023, as I was compiling the “best lists” of mystery fiction, I noticed that her standalone novel, **MURDER IN THE FAMILY**, was appearing on a lot of the British lists – and serendipitously it had just come out in the U.S. as a paperback original. So I got a copy, read it and was so impressed with it that it was a late addition to my personal best of the year list.

I then went looking for other books by Cara Hunter and found that, at that time, she had six books in a British detective series featuring Detective Inspector Adam Fawley and his team. I got a hold of them, read them in quick order and had one of my best reading experiences of 2024.

These crime novels have everything that I look for in a good mystery: clever plotting, engaging characters, excellent writing and lots of surprises.

The Adam Fawley Series

The Setting

Oxford and its surrounding areas

The Continuing Characters

DI Adam Fawley is the detective leading the CID in Oxford, England. Fawley is intelligent and sharp. Adam is married to Alex, a lawyer, whom he met during an early case. They are still mourning the death of their son, who committed suicide when he was ten.

DS Chris Gislingham is a detective in Fawley’s team. He is forty-two, married and has a son. Gislingham is well-liked by his colleagues.

DC Erica Somer is a young police-woman, initially assigned meaningless tasks. Erica is very attractive, which in some cases proves to be an obstacle to prove her worth, but she is also clever and intuitive. She eventually gets into a relationship with Giles Saumarez, a detective in another locale.

DC Verity Everett is one of Fawley’s best officers. She is a dedicated and good detective. Verity lives alone with her cat.

DC Andrew Baxter is another officer in Fawley’s unit. He is quiet and usually deals with the computers and social media.

DS Gareth Quinn is the brash detective of the unit. He can sometimes be arrogant because of his good looks, but is a good detective. In a later book he is demoted for improper relations with a witness in a case.

Alan Challow is the head of the forensics department.

Nina Mukerjee is a forensics officer.

Bryan Gow is the police profiler.

Anna Philips works for Fawley. She is not a police officer but an expert in technology.

Superintendent Harrison is Fawley’s boss.

Ray Goodwin is a pathologist

Summing up this police unit of interesting individuals: they are people I want to spend time with and get to know better with each book. I admire their diligence, intelligence and caring.



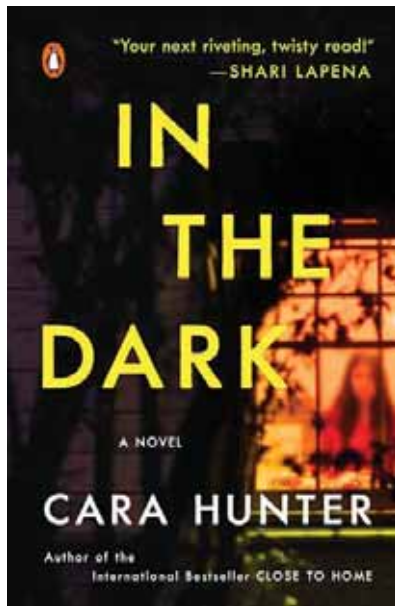
The Books

The Fawley series has been hugely successful in the U.K. and around the world, selling more than 1 million copies. The first two in the series were published as trade paperback originals by Penguin in the U.S. in 2018 and 2019. Then Morrow took over the series in the U.S. and published a paperback original of the third at the end of 2023. 2024 has seen (and will see) the trade paperback publications of the fourth (February), the fifth (April), the sixth (June) and the seventh (November). I’m glad that Morrow has gotten behind this series as it deserves wide readership. With four of them coming out in the U.S. this year, don’t be surprised if at least one of them is nominated for a Barry Best Paperback Original Award – that is, if I can get the nominating committee members to read them.

CLOSE TO HOME (2017)

When eight-year-old Daisy Mason disappeared from her family’s party no one in the quiet Oxford street saw anything—or at least that’s what they’re saying. DI Adam Fawley is trying to keep an open mind. But he knows that the nine times out of ten, it’s someone the victim knew.

That means someone is lying. And Daisy’s time is running out.

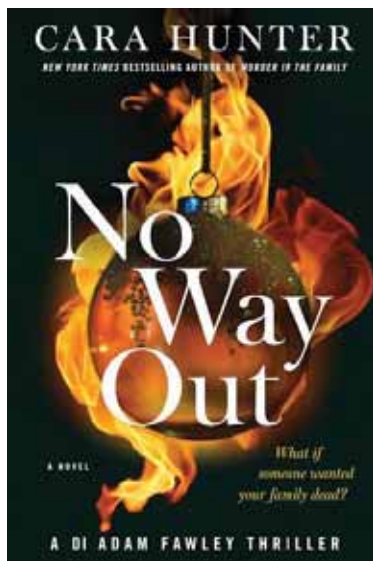


IN THE DARK (2018)

A woman and child are found locked in a basement room, barely alive. No one knows who she is – the woman can't speak, and the elderly man who owns the house claims he has never seen her before. The inhabitants of the quiet Oxford street are in shock. How could this happen right under their noses? But DI Adam Fawley knows that nothing is impossible. And that no one is as innocent as they seem.

NO WAY OUT (2019)

It's the Christmas holidays, and two children have just been pulled from the wreckage of their burning home in North Oxford. The toddler is dead, and



his brother is fighting for his life. Why were they left in the house alone? Where is their mother, and why is their father not answering his phone? Then new evidence is discovered, and DI Adam Fawley's worst nightmare comes true. Because this fire wasn't an accident. It was murder.

ALL THE RAGE (2019)

A teenager is taken from the streets of Oxford in broad daylight. It's unlike any abduction DI Fawley has seen before. How did the girl manage to escape,



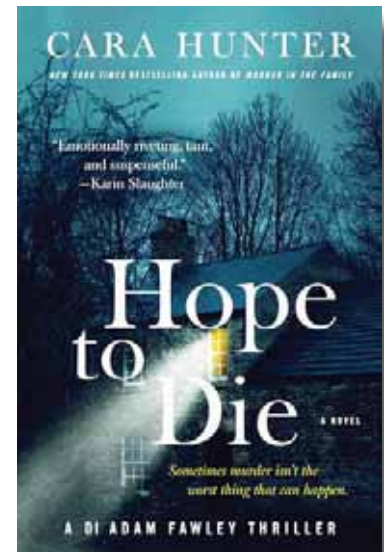
and why won't she press charges?

The police suspect she knows who did this, but without more evidence, there's little they can do.

But then the attacker strikes again, and this girl may not be so lucky.

THE WHOLE TRUTH (2021)

When an Oxford student accuses one of the university's professors of sexual assault, DI Adam Fawley's team think they've heard it all before. But they couldn't be more wrong. Because this time, the alleged predator is a prominent female academic, and the student a six-foot male rugby player. Soon Fawley and his team are up against the clock to figure out the truth. But what they don't realise is that someone is watching. And they have a plan to put Fawley out of action for good.



HOPE TO DIE (2022)

A call out to an isolated farm on the outskirts of Oxford, and a dead man shot at point-blank range. It looks like a burglary gone wrong, but DI Adam Fawley suspects there's a lot more to it than that. When the police discover a connection to a high-profile child murder and an alleged miscarriage of justice, the press go wild. Fawley and his team are suddenly under more scrutiny than ever before. And when you dig up the past, you're sure to find a few skeletons.

MAKING A KILLING (2024). Also seen this title as YOU KNOW WHO

When Nick Vincent, producer of the true-crime show Infamous, hears about an explosive new angle on a high-profile case – the murder of an eight-year-old girl in Oxford in 2016 – he leaps at the chance to send a researcher to verify the claims. Two months later, a dog walker discovers a woman's body, bound and buried in a shallow grave in the woods. Forensic evidence links it to the disappearance of that same child. DCI Adam Fawley, the original investigating officer, is called in to run the enquiry. And he remembers the case well – he arrested the child's mother for murder. A murder he now knows she didn't commit.

I would give an overall rating to the series from A to A-. I hope this short article has inspired you to give Cara Hunter a try. Best read in order.

Deadly Pleasures Best of 2024



Titles listed garnered starred reviews in the four library journals (*Publisher's Weekly*, *Kirkus*, *Booklist* and *Library Journal*), An Amazon Editors' Choice, and/or a glowing review in *Deadly Pleasures* as indicated. These books are the best of the best for 2024. I hope you make good use of this list to guide your reading. Many of these titles will appear on year end "Best of 2024" lists.

Best Mystery/Crime Novel

****RETURN TO BLOOD**, Michael Bennett (Atlantic Monthly, \$27.00, May). 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 WRONG HANDS**, Mark Billingham (Atlantic Monthly, \$27.00, July). 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**



****ANNA O**, Matthew Blake (Harper, \$30.00, January). 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. But he must be careful treating such a high-profile suspect—he's got career secrets and a complicated personal life of his own. As Anna shows the first signs of stirring, Benedict must determine what really happened and whether Anna should be held responsible for her crimes. Only Anna knows the truth about that night, but only Benedict knows how to discover it. And they're both in danger from what they find out. **Kirkus, PW & AZ**

****KILL FOR ME KILL FOR YOU**, Steve Cavanagh (Atria, \$27.99, March). 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, AZ & DP**

****ONE OF US KNOWS**, Alyssa Cole (Morrow, \$28.99). Years after a breakdown and a diagnosis of dissociative identity disorder derailed her historical preservationist career, Kenetria Nash and her alters have been given a second chance they can't refuse: a position as resident caretaker of a historic home. Having been dormant for years, Ken has no idea what led them to this isolated Hudson River island, but she's determined not to ruin their opportunity. Then a surprise visit from the home's

conservation trust just as a Nor'easter bears down on the island disrupts her newfound life, leaving Ken trapped with a group of possibly dangerous strangers—including the man who brought her life tumbling down years earlier. When he turns up dead, Ken is the prime suspect. **BL, LJ & AZ**

****THE INSTRUMENTS OF DARKNESS**, John Connolly (Atria, \$29.99, May). 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. **DP**

****THE NIGHT IN QUESTION**, Susan Fletcher (Union Square, \$28.99, April). Florrie Butterfield—eighty-seven, one-legged, and of cheerful disposition—believes there can't be any more adventures or surprises in life to experience. Yet one midsummer's evening, there's an accident at Babbington Hall—the adult residence where she lives—so shocking and strange that Florrie is suspicious; is this really an accident? Or is she being lied to? Is she, in fact, living alongside a potential murderer? In her efforts to learn the truth, Florrie is forced to look back on her own life, with all its passions and regrets; she must confront her own bloody secret—and, at last, forgive herself. Above all, Florrie learns, through the help of her new friend, Stanhope, that you're never too old to have the life you've always dreamed of. When it comes to love, it's never too late. **BL, PW & AZ**

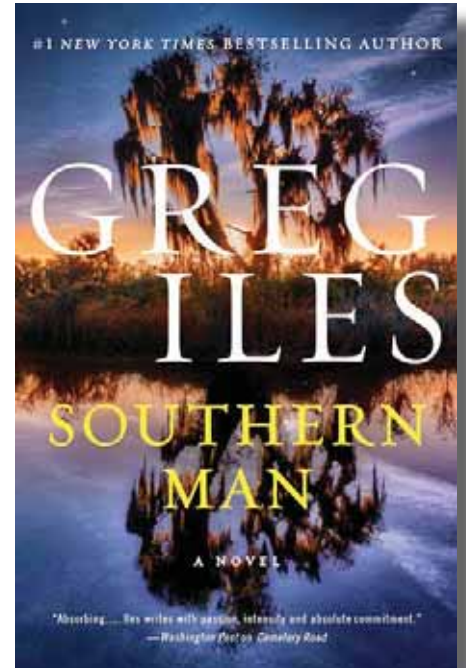
****THE HUNTER**, Tana French (Viking, \$32.00, March). Cal Hooper

took early retirement from Chicago PD and moved to rural Ireland looking for peace. He's found it, more or less: he's built a relationship with a local woman, Lena, and he's gradually turning Trey Reddy from a half-feral teenager into a good kid going good places. But then Trey's long-absent father reappears, bringing along an English millionaire and a scheme to find gold in the townland, and suddenly everything the three of them have been building is under threat. Cal and Lena are both ready to do whatever it takes to protect Trey, but Trey doesn't want protecting. What she wants is revenge. **AZ & DP**

****BLACK WOLF**, Juan Gomez-Jurado (Minotaur, \$28.00, March). 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. **AZ & DP**

****CLOSE TO DEATH**, Anthony Horowitz (Harper, \$30.00, April). 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. **Kirkus, AZ, BL & DP**



****SOUTHERN MAN**, Greg Iles (Morrow, \$36.00, May). 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. As the stunned cities of Natchez and Bienville reel, antebellum plantation homes continue to burn and the deadly attacks are claimed by a Black radical group as historic acts of justice. Panic sweeps through the tourist communities, driving them inexorably toward a race war. But what might have been only a regional sideshow of the 2024 Presidential election explodes into national prominence, thanks to the stunning ascent of Robert E. Lee White, a Southern war hero who seizes the public imagination as a third-party candidate. Dubbed "the Tik-Tok Man," and funded by an eccentric Mississippi billionaire, Bobby

White rides the glory of his Special Forces record to an unprecedented run at the White House—one unseen since the campaign of H. Ross Perot. **Kirkus & BL**

****SPIRIT CROSSING**, William Kent Krueger (Atria, \$27.99, August). 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.

****THE MOUNTAIN KING**, Anders de la Motte (Atria, \$29.99, January). Detective Leonore Asker seems to have the leading position at Malmö's Major Crime Division within reach. But things go awry when, in the middle of a high profile kidnapping case, management relegates her to the so-called Department of Lost Souls—the unit for odd, cold cases banished to the basement of the police station. Despite the humiliation, Asker is drawn into one of the more peculiar cases. Someone is secretly placing small ominous figures in a huge model train displays and one of the figures seems to represent the missing woman from the kidnapping case. As Asker's investigation leads her into the world of the abandoned and forgotten, she reaches out to her old friend and urban explorer Martin Hill. Together they discover that an unusual kind of evil lurks—at the heart of a mountain, deep down in the darkness. **PW, AZ & DP**

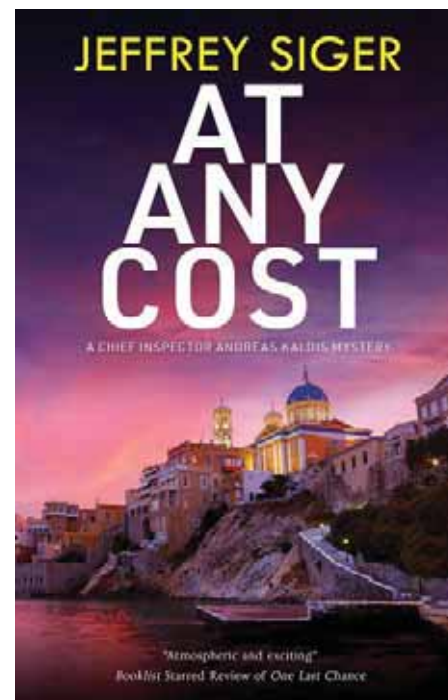
****THE RUMOR GAME**, Thomas Mullen (Minotaur, \$29.00, February 29). Reporter Anne Lemire writes the Rumor Clinic, a newspaper column that disproves the many harmful rumors floating around town, some of them spread by Axis spies and others just

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 –one that implicates their own tangled pasts and threatens to engulf the city in violence. **BL & AZ**

****THE SICILIAN INHERITANCE**, Jo Piazza (Dutton, \$28.00, April). Sara Marsala barely knows who she is anymore after the failure of her business and marriage. On top of that, her beloved great-aunt Rosie passes away, leaving Sara bereft with grief. But Aunt Rosie's death also opens an escape from her life and a window into the past by way of a plane ticket to Sicily, a deed to a possibly valuable plot of land, and a bombshell family secret. Rosie believes Sara's great-grandmother Serafina, the family matriarch who was left behind while her husband worked in America, didn't die of illness as family lore has it . . . she was murdered. Thus begins a twist-filled adventure that takes Sara all over the picturesque Italian countryside as she races to solve a mystery and learn the story of Serafina—a feisty and headstrong young woman in the early 1900s thrust into motherhood in her teens, who fought for a better life not just for herself but for all the women of her small village. Unsurprisingly the more she challenges the status quo, the more she finds herself in danger. **Kirkus, BL & AZ**

****THE MURDER OF MR. MA**, S. J. Rozan & John Shen Yen Nee (Soho Crime, \$25.95, April). London, 1924. When shy academic Lao She meets larger-than-life Judge Dee Ren Jie, his quiet life abruptly turns from books and

lectures to daring chases and narrow escapes. Dee has come to London to investigate the murder of a man he'd known during World War I when serving with the Chinese Labour Corps. No sooner has Dee interviewed the grieving widow than another dead body turns up. Then another. All stabbed to death with a butterfly sword. Will Dee and Lao be able to connect the threads of the murders—or are they next in line as victims? **PW, LJ, AZ & DP**



****AT ANY COST**, Jeffrey Siger (Severn House, February 6). 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. **BL & DP**

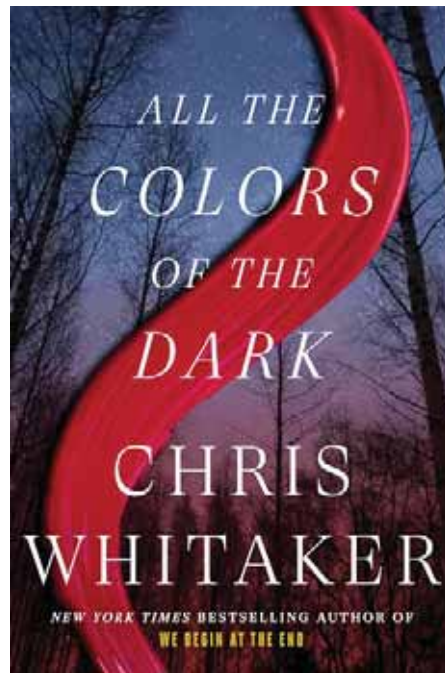
****EVERYONE ON THIS TRAIN IS**

SUSPECT, Benjamin Stevenson (Mariner Books, \$30.00, January) "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." AZ, Kirkus & DP

****CALIFORNIA BEAR**, Duane Swierczynski (Mullholland Books, \$29.00, January). 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(2)

****THE LAST MURDER AT THE END OF THE WORLD**, Stuart Turton (Sourcebooks Landmark, \$27.99, May). 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. And then they learn that the murder has triggered a lowering of the security system around the island, the only thing that was keeping the fog at bay. If the murder isn't solved within 107 hours, the fog will smother the island?and everyone on it. PW, BL, AZ and LJ

****ALL THE COLORS OF THE DARK**, Chris Whitaker (Crown, \$30.00, June). 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(2)

****CITY IN RUINS**, Don Winslow (Morrow, \$32.00, April). 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. PW, AZ & DP

****VILLAGE IN THE DARK**, Iris Yamashita (Berkley, \$28.00, February). On a frigid February day, Anchorage 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. Somehow tied to the mystery is Mia Upash, who grew up in an isolated village called Unity, a community of women and children in hiding from abusive men. Mia never imagined the trouble she would find herself in when she left home to live in Man's World. Although she remains haunted by the tragedy of what happened to the man and the boy in the woods, she has her own reasons for keeping quiet. LJ, AZ & DP

Best Debut Mystery/ Crime Novel

****PAPER CAGE**, Tom Baragwanath (Knopf, \$28.00, February). Lorraine Henry is generally content to keep her head down and get on with her work as a records clerk at the Masterton police station. But when children start going missing in her small town, Lo can't help but pay attention. After all, she has Bradley, her young nephew, to worry about, and the cops don't seem to be putting much effort into finding the kids. And then the unthinkable happens: Bradley disappears. Distraught but determined, Lorraine vows to bring him home no matter what. And, together with a detective from Wellington, she embarks on a dangerous mission, one that will illuminate all the good and all the bad in Masterton. Kirkus & DP

****RADIANT HEAT**, Sarah-Jane Collins (Berkley, \$27.00, January). The blaze came out of nowhere one summer afternoon, a wall of fire fed by blustering wind. Yet, somehow, Alison is alive. She rode out the fire on the damp tiles of her bathroom, her entire body swaddled in a wet woolen blanket. As flames crackled around her, the bitter char of eucalyptus settled in the back of her throat, each breath more desperate than the last. The wildfire that devastated the Victoria countryside Alison calls home sets in

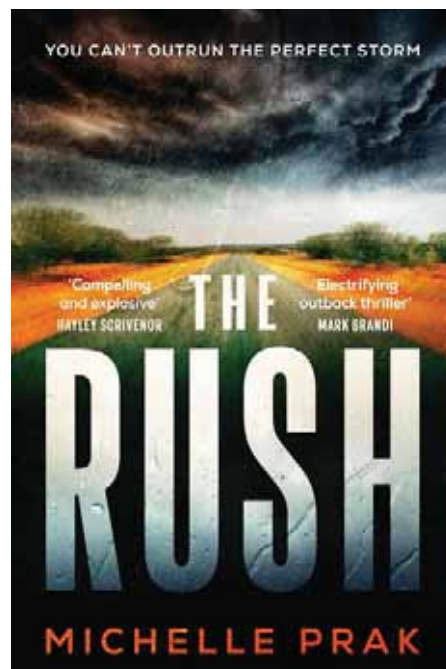
motion a chain of events that threatens to obliterate the carefully constructed life she is living. When Alison emerges from her sheltering place, she spots a soot-covered cherry red car in her driveway, and in it, a dead woman. Alison has never met Simone Arnold in her life . . . or so she thinks. So what is she doing here? **AZ & LJ**

****WHEN WE WERE SILENT**, Fiona McPhillips (Flatiron, \$28.99, May). Louise Manson is the newest student at Highfield Manor, Dublin's most exclusive private school. At first, Lou's working-class status makes her the consummate outsider, though all that changes when she is befriended by the beautiful and wealthy Shauna Power. But Lou finds out that even Shauna is caught up in Highfield's web, and her time there ends with a lifeless body sprawled at her feet. Thirty years later, Lou has rebuilt her life after the harrowing events of the so-called "Highfield Affair," when she gets a shocking phone call. Ronan Power, Shauna's brother, is a high-profile lawyer bringing a lawsuit against the school. And he needs Lou to testify. Now with a daughter and career to protect, the last thing Lou wants is for Highfield Manor to be back in her life. But to finally free herself and others, she has to confront her past, go to battle once more, and discover, for once and for all, what really happened at Highfield. **PW & DP**

****NORTHWOODS**, Amy Pease (Atria/Emily Bestler Books, \$27.00, January). Eli North is not okay. His drinking is getting worse by the day, his emotional wounds after a deployment to Afghanistan are as raw as ever, his marriage and career are over, and the only job he can hold down is with the local sheriff's department. And that's only because the sheriff is his mother—and she's overwhelmed with small town Shaky Lake's dwindling budget and the fallout from the opioid epidemic. The Northwoods of Wisconsin may be a vacationer's paradise, but amidst the fishing trips and campfires and Paul Bunyan festivals, something sinister

is taking shape. When the body of a teenage boy is found in the lake, it sets in motion an investigation that leads Eli to a wealthy enclave with a violent past, a pharmaceutical salesman, and a missing teenage girl. Soon, Eli and his mother, along with a young FBI agent, are on the hunt for more than just a killer. **PW & AZ**

****THE ASCENT**, Adam Plantinga (Grand Central, \$30.00, January). 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 RUSH**, Michelle Prak (Crooked Lane, \$29.99, April). 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. Alone, angry, and afraid in unfamiliar surroundings, flooding isn't the only threat bearing down on them. **DP**

****NIGHTWATCHING**, Tracy Sierra (Viking: Pamela Dorman Books, \$29.00, February). Home alone with her young children during a blizzard, a mother tucks her son back into bed in the middle of the night. She hears a noise—old houses are always making some kind of noise. But this sound is disturbingly familiar: it's the tread of footsteps, unusually heavy and slow, coming up the stairs. She sees the figure of a man appear down the hallway, shrouded in the shadows. Terrified, she quietly wakes her children and hustles them into the oldest part of the house, a tiny, secret room concealed behind a wall. There they hide as the man searches for them, trying to tempt the children out with promises and scare the mother into surrender. **PW, AZ & Kirkus**

Best Paperback Original Mystery/ Crime Novel

****NO ONE DIES YET**, Kobby Ben Ben (Europa, \$18.00, February). It is 2019, The Year of Return. Ghana is inviting Black diasporans to return and get to know the land of their enslaved ancestors. Elton, Vincent, and Scott arrive from America to explore Ghana's colonial past, and to experience the country's underground queer scene. Their visit and activities are narrated by two very different Ghanians: the exuberant and rebellious Kobby, who is their guide to Accra's privileged and queer circles; and Nana, the voice

of tradition and religious principle. Neither is very trustworthy and the tense relationship between them sets the tone for what turns into a gripping, energetically told, and often funny tale of murder reminiscent of the novels of Patricia Highsmith, Graham Greene, Chinua Achebe, and Alain Mabanckou. **PW & BL**

****THE TRANSLATOR**, Harriet Crawley (Bitter Lemon Press, \$17.95, April). 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**

****A FONDNESS FOR TRUTH**, Kim Hays (Seventh Street, \$19.95, April). 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**

****ALL THE RAGE**, Cara Hunter (Morrow, \$18.99, February). After being abducted and assaulted, a teenage girl somehow managed to escape from her



captor. She is traumatized and needs to heal, but the police need her help to catch her assailant—information she clearly knows, but is unwilling to give. Without the girl's assistance, DI Adam Fawley's investigation is at a dead end. When another girl vanishes under the same circumstances, he recognizes a disturbing pattern—and a link to something long buried in his past. **DP & AZ**

****SMOKE KINGS**, Jahmal Mayfield (Melville House, \$18.99, February). Nate Evers, a young black political activist, struggles with rage as his people are still being killed in the streets 62 years after Emmett Till. When his little cousin is murdered, Nate shuns the graffiti murals, candlelight vigils, and Twitter hashtags that are commonplace after these senseless deaths. Instead, he leads 3 grief-stricken friends on a mission of retribution, kidnapping the descendants of long-ago perpetrators of hate crimes, confronting the targets with their racist lineages, and forcing them to pay reparations to a community fund. For 3 of the group members, the results mean justice; for Nate – pure revenge. Not all targets go quietly into the night, though, and Nate and his friends' world spirals out of control when they confront the wrong man. Now the leader of a white supremacist group is hot

on their tail as is a jaded lawman with some disturbingly racist views of his own. As the 4 vigilantes fight to thwart their ruthless pursuers, they're forced to accept an age-old truth: "Before you embark on a journey of revenge, dig two graves." **Kirkus, AZ & PW**

****CAST A COLD EYE**, Robbie Morrison (Bantam, \$18.00, April). Glasgow, 1933. Murder is nothing new in the Depression-era city, especially to war veterans Inspector Jimmy Dreghorn 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. **AZ**

****TO DIE IN JUNE**, Alan Parks (Canongate, \$18.00, May). A woman enters a Glasgow police station to report her son missing, but no record can be found of the boy. When Detective Harry McCoy, seconded from the cop shop across town, discovers the family is part of the cultish Church of Christ's Suffering, he suspects there is more to Michael's disappearance than meets the eye. Meanwhile reports arrive of a string of poisonings of down-and-outs across the city. The dead are men who few barely notice, let alone care about – but, as McCoy is painfully aware, among this desperate community is his own father. Even as McCoy searches for the missing boy, he must conceal from his colleagues the real reason for his presence – to investigate corruption in the station. **DP**

****THE SCARLET PAPERS**, Matthew Richardson (Penguin, \$16.99, May). 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(3)**

Best Thrillers

****TRUST HER**, Flynn Berry (Viking, \$30.00, June). Three years after they narrowly escaped the IRA's worst punishment for informing, Tessa and Marian 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. **Kirkus & BL**

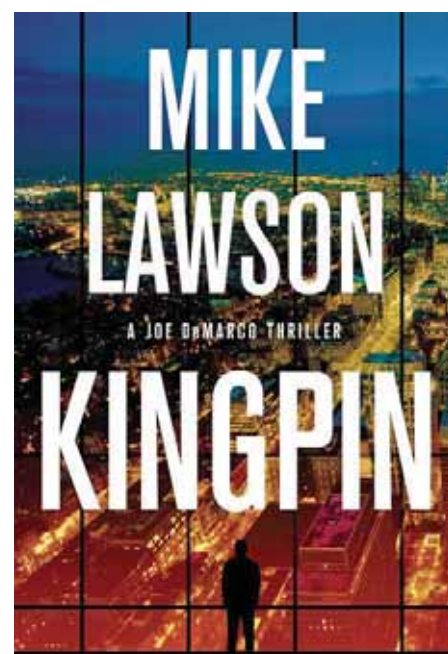


****ASSASSIN EIGHTEEN**, John Brownlow (Hanover Square, \$30.00, April). Agent Seventeen, the most infamous hitman in the world, has quit. But whoever wants to become Assassin Eighteen must track him down and kill him first. So when a bullet hits the glass inches from his face, he knows who fired it - 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 instruc-

tions 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(3)**

****ILIUM**, Lea Carpenter (Knopf, \$27.00, January). The young English narrator of Lea Carpenter's dazzling new novel has grown up unhappily in London, dreaming of escape, pretending to be someone else and obsessed with a locked private garden. On the eve of her twenty-first birthday, at a party near that garden, she meets its charismatic and mysterious new owner, Marcus, thirty-three years older, who sweeps her off her feet. Before long they are married at his finca in Mallorca, and at last she has escaped into a new role - but at what price? On their honeymoon in Croatia, Marcus reveals there is something she can do for him—a plan is in place and she can help with “a favor.” This turns out to be posing as an art advisor to a family on Cap Ferret, where Marcus asks her to simply “listen.” A helicopter deposits her at a remote, highly guarded and lavishly appointed compound on a spit of land in the Atlantic. It's presided over by an enigmatic, charming patriarch Edouard, along with his wife Dasha, children Nikki and Felix, and populated by a revolving cast of other guests—some suspicious, some intriguing, perhaps none, like her, what they seem. **BL & Kirkus**

****KINGPIN**, Mike Lawson (Atlantic Monthly, \$27.00, February). 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**

****HERO**, Thomas Perry (Mysterious Press, \$27.95, January). 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**

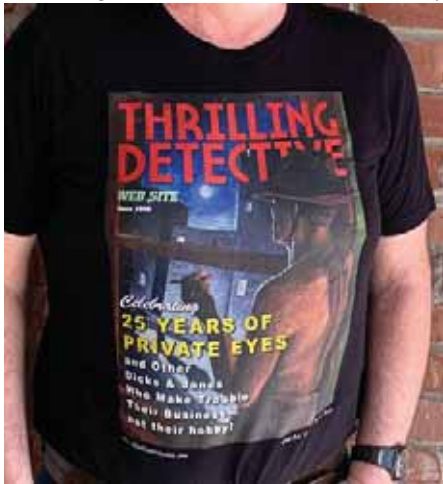
****THE PRICE YOU PAY**, Nick Petrie (Putnam, \$29.00, February). Lewis has helped Peter Ash out of more trouble than Peter cares to remember. So he doesn't hesitate when Lewis asks a favor in return. Lewis has left his criminal past behind, but a former associate may be in trouble, and he and Peter 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**

Neither Tarnished Nor Afraid

Kevin Burton Smith



Last year's Bouchercon in San Diego left me pretty optimistic over the future of the Shamus Game—I was part of a great panel on that very topic, reconnected with several P.I. writers, attended the Shamus Awards dinner, where a couple of my picks won, and generally had a grand old time meeting some old friends and making a few new ones (I hope). Plus I got to dish out a slew of T-shirts commemorating Thrilling Detective's 25th anniversary.



And just to underline that optimism, a few truly great private eye novels were waiting for me when I returned. Unfortunately, I was also greeted by a heaping pile of problems in waiting, and I've been one poor correspondent lately, missing a few issues. But better late than never...

Before there was AI, there were "legacy authors"—writers hired by assorted "literary estates" to dredge up beloved series characters once their original creators had shuffled off this mortal coil, and put them through

their paces once again. All the biggies (Gardner, Hammett, Fleming, Spillane, Larssen, Christie, etc.) have been so "honoured," and results have ranged from sublimely respectful to Ka-ching! Ka-ching! ridiculous. And now it's Raymond Chandler's turn.

Again.

By my count, Scottish author Denise Mina's **THE SECOND MURDERER** is the eighth novel to be written by someone other than Chandler, who only managed seven featuring his iconic Los Angeles private eye Philip Marlowe in his entire career.

The increasing frequency (Ka-ching! Ka-ching!) of these "tributes" to Marlowe is troubling. The last one (an epic fail) was only a year or so ago. Somehow, however, Mina has beaten the odds. She may not have nailed Chandler's style (Who could? Really?), but she's certainly nailed Marlowe. She digs in deep, working through the caustic cynicism, the sardonic wisecracks and the drinking; prying off that hard-boiled shell, exposing the bruised romanticism and gooey center.

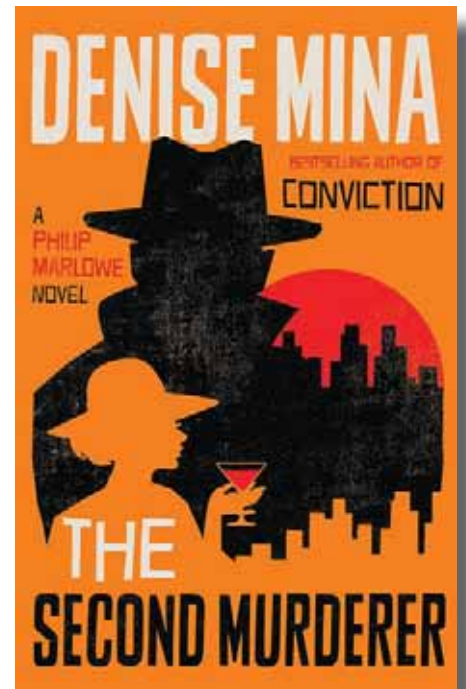
It's a staggering achievement; Mina not only "gets" Marlowe, but the sweltering Los Angeles of the 1940s, thanks to an astounding amount of research (bitching about the heat while riding the open elevator in the un-air-conditioned Bradbury Building? Brilliant!), and an almost supernatural understanding of a time and a place.

Marlowe is hired to find runaway socialite Chrissie Montgomery, but he's not the only one. Also on the case? Former lover Anne Riordan (last seen in Chandler's **FAREWELL, MY LOVELY** from 1940), now also a private investigator, who's also seeking

the missing heiress.

The forced partnership is uneasy, and the former lovers frequently at odds—over the case, their methods and their past, as they crisscross the City of Angels, bouncing from the lowly flophouses and the dive bars of Skid Row (and even a "kitten's only" lesbian joint) to the lofty heights of the Montgomery family estate, and back again.

It's all so Chandleresque: the heart-



break, the melancholy, the misunderstandings, the lies, the vividly drawn characters, the bitter taste of truth and the inevitable acknowledgment that even more than 80 years after Marlowe made his debut, it still isn't a game for knights.

Mina may not "speak" Chandler, but Marlowe? She nails that poor son of a bitch. I just loved it.



What a f***ing book. Since his career began, Stephen King has teased us with promises of a straight-up crime novel, one utterly devoid of any hint of woo-woo. Finally, after more than a few entertaining shucks and jives, he's delivered **HOLLY**, in what may one of his finest works ever. There are no vampires, sewer-dwelling killer clowns or haunted Plymouths, but oh Lord, there are monsters.

The only catch? The monsters are us, or more precisely Rodney and Emily Harris, a couple of utterly unremarkable elderly professors. The kind of folks you might run into at the supermarket or the library. But monsters they are, and the evil they inflict on the snoozy college town they call home is almost too disturbing to stomach.

Enter private investigator Holly Gibney, of the Finders Keepers Detective Agency, one of King's most enduring and endearing characters, having appeared in four previous novels and a novella. She's been hired to track down single mom Penny Dahl's missing daughter. As COVID rages and the Trump presidency staggers its way through its final wearying months, odd-ball Holly is on her own, having recently buried her own mother. Still emotionally fragile, with more issues than a

magazine stand (OCD, synesthesia, sensory processing disorder, and she's somewhere out there on the spectrum), she's also blessed with a keen intelligence, a savant-like memory, and some pretty savvy detective chops.

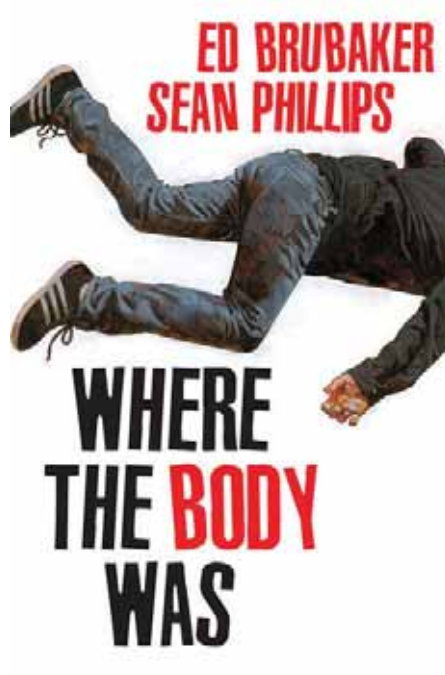
But as she digs into the case, she discovers more people missing, and that real evil, the real deep down dark stuff, just may come from within.

It may just be King's ultimate report on human nature... being what it is. He pulls no punches here, and digs right into the guts of who we are as a people right now. Those with delicate sensibilities might shy away, but this is a major work, no matter how you slice it.

My favorite book of 2023.

A late Christmas gift to us this year (it was released in January) was **WHERE THE BODY WAS**, a clever and engaging standalone hardcover graphic novel from the Eisner-winning team of writer Ed Brubaker and artist Sean Phillips, my go-to guys when it comes to crime fiction comics. According to Brubaker, it's "a crime story is about a bunch of characters who live on the same street, told through a bunch of overlapping perspectives."

Far from the dark, hard-boiled world



of most of their comic work (Criminals, Reckless, etc.), it all takes place in a sleepy 1980s American suburban neighborhood of tree-lined streets, with an old boarding house, well-tended lawns (mostly), cul-de-sacs, a tree house, a slew of seemingly comfy bungalows and, as presented in the helpful "Cast of Characters" (another nod to Dell), a closed circle of suspects. They include a couple of ne'er do well wild kids, a loner with a badge and a rich fantasy life, a horny housewife, a workaholic psychiatrist, a homeless Vietnam vet, Lila Nguyen, a precocious ten-year old fangirl who's appointed herself the neighborhood's super-hero, and Jack Foster, an outsider private eye hunting for a runaway girl who plays a small but pivotal role. And of course a murder that rocks their little world.

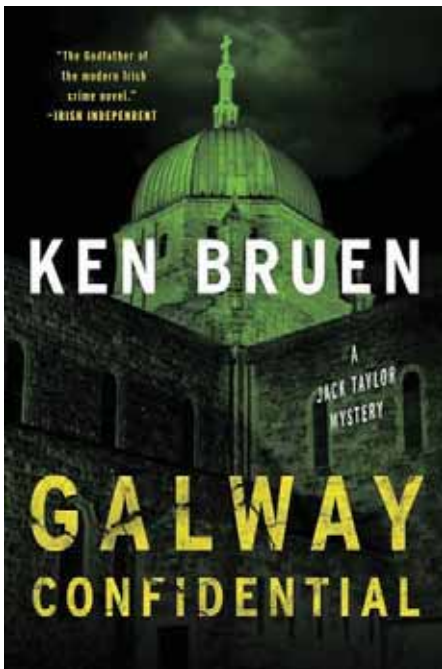
It's all drawn with a nuanced and empathetic hand by Phillips, and as the viewpoint slides back and forth between multiple viewpoints and timeframes, it feels almost as cozy as a cup of Earl Grey, poured by Agatha herself. At first, anyway, because Brubaker and Phillips can't help but slide in a deliciously dark if-not-quite-noir sucker punch at the end. As the pieces slowly come together, clicking into place in a fashion that, frankly, knocked me for a loop, and left me – once I realized I'd been played – applauding it.

Of course. How else could it end?

Well played, gentlemen, well played.

There are all kinds of tough, and the private eye genre has had more than its fair share of candidates. It all started back in the pulps when bullet wounds, knife wounds, the ever-popular knock-out blows and ever other sort of bodily misfortune could be miraculously cured by a shot of hooch from the office bottle, a Lucky or two, a good night's sleep, or maybe a therapeutic roll in the hay.

And in some ways that hasn't changed much. Ken Bruen's latest, **GALWAY CONFIDENTIAL**, allegedly the penultimate novel to feature his trouble-prone gumshoe Jack Taylor, carries on the tradition in grand old



fashion. His first instinct, after emerging in a Galway hospital bed from an almost two-year coma (thus missing the entire pandemic), is to reach for a drink, offered by a poetry-spouting stranger, Rafferty. It's revealed, soon enough, that not only had Rafferty been a regular visitor, but that it was Rafferty, allegedly an ex-Marine (among other things), who had saved Jack from the knife attack that had sent him to the hospital.

It's a whole new Galway in which Jack finds himself (Masks! Reduced hours in the bars!), and as he tries to rebuild his life, he's approached by a woman who wants him to find out who the man was who assaulted two local nuns with a hammer, convinced there will be more. Reluctant at first to take the case (Jack's no fan of the Catholic Church), he eventually relents, and so, wearing his beloved all-weather Guarda coat and carrying his weapon of choice, his beloved hurly, he sets out to do what must be done.

Simple enough, maybe, but fans know that Bruen, one of the most distinct stylists in crime fiction, only makes it look simple—in the hands of Bruen, Taylor contains multitudes. He's loyal and steadfast and Irish as a pint of the black, but he's also an angry, bitter alcoholic and drug abuser, scarred, broken, battered, tattered and scarred

inside and out. Prone to violence, and not even much of a detective at times. "Cases get solved around me," he admits, "very rarely did I actually find the solution."

But try turning away. Somehow, despite numerous betrayals and failures, Jack perseveres. And really, how can anyone turn their back on a man whom even the nuns, he tells us, were "no longer praying for"?

Meanwhile, over on this side of the pond, another beloved series character, Sara Paretsky's V.I. Warshawski, is also on the mend in the darkly effective **PAY DIRT**, which finds the Chicago gumshoe—arguably the most woke in the world—waking up to a world of pain, not just physically but emotionally and psychologically battered, after a previous case turned tragic. A weekend off with her god-daughter Bernie and her college-age buddies to catch a basketball tournament in Lawrence, Kansas seems like just the ticket. Plus, it'll take her mind off the fact that her lover, Peter, isn't answering her calls.

But then Sabrina, one of Angela's roommates, disappears while pub-crawling, and V.I., against her better judgement, reluctantly agrees to

try to find her. Despite having worked a case in Lawrence a few years earlier, V.I. is still an outsider, with few contacts, or resources. Or friends, for that matter.

Somehow, though, she soon finds the almost-dead Sabrina, victim of a drug overdose, in a deserted house way out in the sticks—a house regularly being used by drug parties. It's a discovery that doesn't go well with the suspicious local cops, and so, hoping to wrap things up quickly and get back to Chicago, she re-visits the house—only to find a body in the basement. The police are not amused.

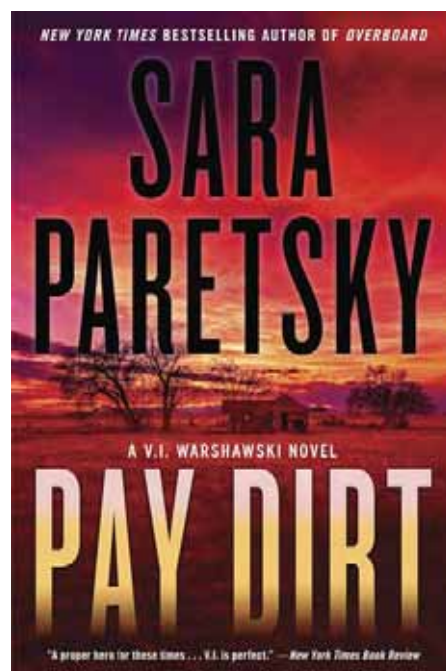
From there, she's forced to run the gauntlet of local cops, an obnoxious FBI agent, drug dealers, hostile frat members, a powerful corporation with plans for Lawrence, and a slew of nasty little secrets about the city's past, going back to the Civil War.

Oh, and a few more murders.

Not that V.I., uncharacteristically cranky, wanted any of it. Bitter, frustrated, at loose ends and starting to fray at the ends, all she wants to do is go home, but the cops insist she stick around. That won't happen, however, until after the detective—in true V.I. fashion—gets threatened, followed, kicked out of her hotel room, and beat up and assaulted a few more times. Not that that's going to stop her.

Certainly not the most jaunty book in the series, but I found it one of the most engaging.

Though I do think V.I. could definitely use some well-deserved rest.



Given the carnage both Jack and V.I., two of the genre's most enduring characters, have gone through lately, it was a relief (and a pleasant surprise) to have George Pelicanos' novella **Buster** come sailing over the transom. One of the Shamus Game's most respected authors, Pelicanos has made nation's capital his turf—not the vaunted Halls of Power, but the Washington, D.C. of the people who actually live, work and occasionally die there, regardless of who's won the last election. In an acclaimed string of vital, often interconnected crime

novels, Pelecanos has chronicled the lives of the bar flies, waiters, drunks, shoe salesmen, backyard mechanics, dealers, waiters, hot rod angels, private eyes, social workers, thieves, short order cooks, dreamers, schemers and killers—those are George’s people, and he’s carried his gifts for portraying them into a lucrative career writing for television (*The Wire*, *The Pacific*, etc.), which is why it’s so great to have anything from him in print. It’s been a while. But this time he’s gone to the dogs.

Literally.

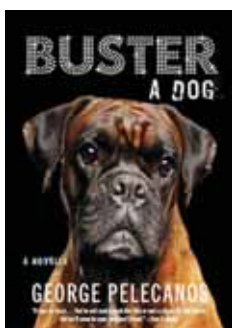
Get this straight. *Buster* is not a private eye story; it’s not even a crime novel. But D.C.’s mean streets are somehow never far away, as we follow the life and times of a feisty but proud boxer named Buster who narrates his own story.

Yep. A dog.

The novella follows *Buster* as he’s bounced from home to home, and one master to another, moving on up/down and sideways, from public housing and shelters to “good” neighborhoods, always with a sharp-edged matter of factness that recalls such other classics of doggie lit as Albert Terhune’s *LAD: A DOG*, and Jack London’s *THE CALL OF THE WILD*. Without once descending into saccharine pet porn (the term “fur baby” is mercifully never used), Pelicans offers a clear-eyed, surprisingly moving (and even occasionally funny) view of not just a dog’s life but of America itself, for better or worse, and as the novel draws to its inevitable conclusion, even the hardest of the hard may feel a little something.

Good boy, George. [Editor’s Comment: I hope Kevin isn’t referring to me]

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



ITW Thriller Award

Nominees 2024

The winners will be announced at ThrillerFest XIX (May 28-June 1).

Best Hardcover Novel

S.A. Cosby – *ALL THE SINNERS BLEED* (Flatiron Books)
 Robert Dugoni – *HER DEADLY GAME* (Thomas & Mercer)
 J.T. Ellison – *IT’S ONE OF US* (Harlequin – MIRA Books)
 Mick Herron – *THE SECRET HOURS* (Soho Crime)
 Joe Ide – *FIXIT* (Mulholland Books)
 C.J. Tudor – *THE DRIFT* (Ballantine Books)

Best Audiobook

I.S. Berry – *THE PEACOCK AND THE SPARROW* (Atria)
 Narrated by Pete Simonelli
 Gregg Hurwitz – *THE LAST ORPHAN* (Macmillan)
 Narrated by Scott Brick
 Freida McFadden – *THE HOUSEMAID’S SECRET* (Bookouture)
 Narrated by Lauryn Allman
 James Patterson, Mike Lupica – *THE HOUSE OF WOLVES* (Hachette Audio)
 Narrated by Ellen Archer
 Emma Rosenblum – *BAD SUMMER PEOPLE* (Macmillan)
 Narrated by January LaVoy

Best First Novel

I.S. Berry – *THE PEACOCK AND THE SPARROW* (Atria)
 Amy Chua – *THE GOLDEN GATE* (Minotaur)
 Margot Douaihy – *SCORCHED GRACE* (Zando)
 Kerryn Mayne – *LENNY MARKS GETS AWAY WITH MURDER* (Bantam Books)
 Steve Urszenyi – *PERFECT SHOT: A THRILLER* (Minotaur)

Best Paperback Original Novel

Tracy Clark – *HIDE* (Thomas & Mercer)
 Luke Dumas – *THE PALEONTOLOGIST* (Atria)
 Tess Gerritsen – *THE SPY COAST* (Thomas & Mercer)
 Lisa Gray – *TO DIE FOR* (Thomas & Mercer)
 Jonathan Maberry – *CAVE 13: A JOE LEDGER AND ROGUE TEAM INTERNATIONAL NOVEL* (St. Martin’s Griffin)
 J. Todd Scott – *CALL THE DARK* (Thomas & Mercer)

A Visit From the Book Broad

Meredith Anthony



HERE IN THE DARK

by Alexis Soloski

Flatiron; \$27.99, December, 2023

Rating: A

First line: I am seven years old.

Alexis Soloski's debut mystery, **HERE IN THE DARK**, is a delicious slice of contemporary New York noir. Told in the first person, it is the story of a troubled theater critic, a woman in her thirties who eats too little, drinks too much, has too much casual sex, and only feels alive in the dark, in the theater, watching a performance onstage.

Vivian Parry reviews plays for a New York magazine and her specialty is snarky take-downs of most of the shows she sees. The chief critic's job is open, but her boss seems reluctant to promote her. A former actress herself, Vivian's only friend is a lively actress whose life-style is as risky as her own.

When a graduate student, David Adler, asks to interview her for a paper he's writing, promising her a spot on an upcoming panel, Vivian agrees. They meet in a lower East Side coffee shop and their chat, which he records, seems only a little odd. Vivian watches him walk away through Tompkins Square park, then dismisses the incident until a couple months later when a woman calls her to ask about it. It seems that David Adler was the caller's fiancé and he disappeared the day he talked to Vivian. The police won't help. She isn't a relative. But Vivian believes her and decides to investigate. It involves playing a part and her theatrical instincts kick in. She doesn't stop even when it gets dangerous. And personal.

The writing is excellent, dry and precise. The humor is sporadic and acid

sharp. Pitch perfect. Vivian's boss acknowledges her for giving him a 12-year old Scotch for Christmas: "How can I ever thank you?" Vivian shoots back: "Assign me fewer O'Neill revivals."

Highly recommended.

THE SECOND MURDERER

by Denise Mina

Mulholland, \$28.00, August, 2023

Rating: A

First line: I was in my office, feet up, making use of a bottle of mood-straightener I kept in the desk.

A great detective, Raymond Chandler's Philip Marlowe, as re-imagined by a great author, Denise Mina, **THE SECOND MURDERER** is a sensational mystery set in 1940's Los Angeles that manages to feel both updated and period-accurate at the same time. Issues

touched on include sexual identity, racism, the generation gap, the wealth gap, women's rights, and more.

A study in contrasts: the wealthy and famous; the impoverished and invisible; the entitled abusers; the gay outcasts. Los Angeles has never been so thoroughly and dispassionately on display.

Written in the first person, Marlowe reluctantly takes on a missing person case for an extremely wealthy client. The only daughter of an uber-rich man has gone missing. Was she kidnapped, killed, or did she just run away? The complicated answer is satisfying, but the magic is in the atmosphere Mina creates as Marlowe gets there.

Mina's treatment of 1940's LA and the details of place and people warrants special mention. The book's Montgomery Mansion is probably based on either the Doheny Mansion or the Greystone Mansion, both connected to the family of oil magnate Edward Doheny. Edward's son, Ned, was murdered by his gay lover at the Greystone Mansion. The mysterious tycoon in **THE SECOND MURDERER** was possibly based on him, or maybe Colonel Harrison Gray Otis, who was also the model for Noah Cross, the rich perverted patriarch in *Chinatown*, or his son-in-law Harry Chandler. They amassed large fortunes in oil, water, and real estate. At least one character, a wealthy, Jewish, lesbian art-lover, seems sure to have been patterned after Peggy Guggenheim.

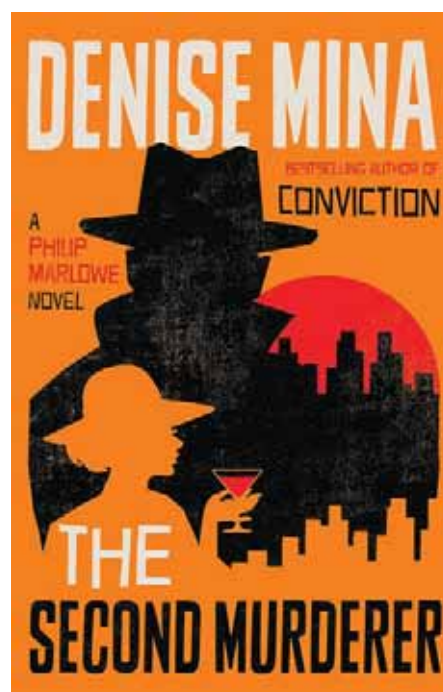
THE EXCITEMENTS

by C.J. Wray

Morrow Books, \$19.99, January

Rating: B+

First line: John Betjeman was right.



C.J. Wray's **THE EXCITEMENTS** is a delightful mystery set in present day London with copious flashbacks to WWII. Two elderly sisters, both of whom served in the war, are due to be honored for their services to France with the *Légion d'honneur* and their beloved great-nephew Archie is escorting them to Paris for the occasion. Both sisters have secrets from the world and from each other. Both have skills no one would suspect.

The sisters' history and war-time experiences are told with brio. Love affairs, marriages, friendships have all been interrupted by the ravages of the war. The present day is full of incident as the two ninety-something women are consistently underestimated by the clueless young people who run the world. Recreational shoplifting morphs into a serious heist as the story progresses. The wrongs of the past might be righted if a certain large emerald is taken from its glittering perch and redirected. Think *Ocean's Eleven*, with elderly women.

Who doesn't love to see little old ladies kick ass and take names and hide lethal skills and murderous secrets? A little bit **KILLERS OF A CERTAIN AGE**, a little bit **THURSDAY MURDER CLUB**, with Nazis. Fun!

THE IMPOSITION OF UNNECESSARY OBSTACLES

by Malka Older
Tor, \$20.99, February
Rating: A

First line: People went missing on Giant.

THE IMPOSITION OF UNNECESSARY OBSTACLES, Malka Older's much-anticipated sequel to the brilliant **THE MIMICKING OF KNOWN SUCCESSES**, is equally wonderful. It's a great read in what promises to be the best sci-fi, mystery crossover series of our time.

The setting is Giant and Io, moons of Jupiter where the human race has re-established itself after making the earth uninhabitable. Giant, where most of humanity lives, is a thriving colony with manufacturing, agriculture, and

important universities.

A missing person case, the disappearance of a student at Valdegeld University, is being investigated by Mossa, a detective. She enlists the help of Pleiti, her academic lover, and they travel to Io, the moon where Mossa was born, to meet with the student's family. As the case progresses, they discover that there are many people missing that have not been reported or looked into. Clearly something is going on.

As in **THE MIMICKING OF KNOWN SUCCESSES**, Older explores the culture of a refugee population, forced to emigrate when Earth is rendered uninhabitable by overpopulation, climate change, pollution and other man-made catastrophes. In some ways, humans seem to have learned from their disastrous history. In other cases, not so much. Greed, anger, impatience, self-delusion and other ills plague the inhabitants of the moons of Jupiter nearly as much as they did on earth.

Meanwhile, Mossa and Pleiti navigate their relationship as two accomplished professional women whose careers sometimes get in the way of their affection.

I love this series. Highly recommended.

MATTERHORN

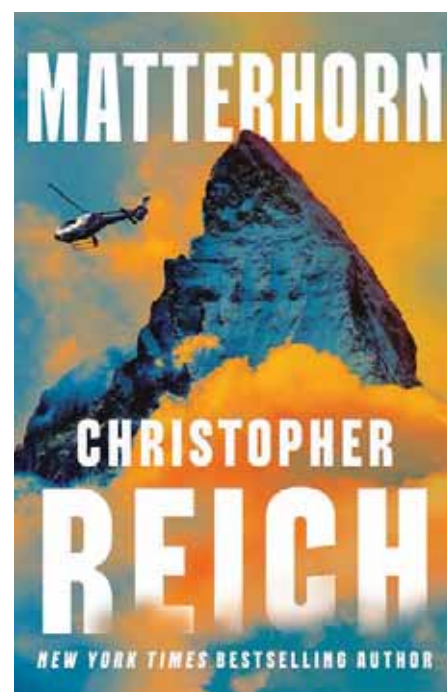
by Christopher Reich
Thomas & Mercer, \$28.99, May
Rating: A

First line: "So, it's true?"

Christopher Reich's new thriller, **MATTERHORN**, is a perfectly paced spy novel, with high stakes and non-stop action.

Two spies, on opposite sides, meet on a desolate ridge near the summit of the Matterhorn. Secrets are exchanged. Kisses are stolen. Neither will leave the mountain alive, but the secrets remain there.

Soon, in a tiny, remote Swiss village, an older British spy, Mac, comes out of hiding, looking for answers and for the missing secret information. The man who died on the mountain was his son.



Mac's Russian counterpart, Ilya, a man who had once been Mac's best friend, is also on the hunt. The winner will either enable or prevent a catastrophic event, an act of terror that will kill thousands.

The prose is spare and clean. The descriptions of mountaineering have the ring of authenticity. The characters are less fully realized than in many comparable thrillers but the pace of the action more than makes up for the personality quirks and tics we're used to.

An all-round great thriller in a brilliant and evocative setting. A must for action lovers and espionage junkies.

George's Take: I was a fan of thrillers before I was a fan of mystery/crime fiction. **MATTERHORN** takes me back to the thrillers by Desmond Bagley and Alastair MacLean that I devoured decades ago. There is fast pacing, characters you care about (even if they aren't totally believable) and action, action, action. Great for a beach vacation, or even better, a ski retreat. **Rating: A-**

NOTHING WITHOUT ME

by Helen Monks Takhar
Random House, \$18.00, February
Rating: D

First Line: My body floats facedown in my pool at Lotus Lodge.

Helen Monks Takhar's **NOTHING WITHOUT ME** is a terrible, terrible book, horribly overwritten, lifeless and bloated like a dead body. It is the story of two young women: Essie Lay, a beautiful actress, and April Eden, a smart, talented film director. Both women are unhappy, unloved, and self-pitying. Both come from terrible families. Both are friendless. Both have made poor choices with bad outcomes. Both wallow in depression and despair.

Told in alternate first person chapters, April and Essie Lay (Essie Lay? Seriously?) each detail their suffering as the action jumps back and forth detailing the history of their relationship, from the incipient friendship, to the rift between them, to the ambiguous present day. Events are described again and again. Damning details emerge. Slowly.

The opening scene is almost pathologically annoying. A woman finds her friend and colleague face down in her swimming pool and gets distracted and doesn't check to see if she's still alive. It goes downhill from there. The plot itself is muddled. Much is made of the fact that a number of people in Essie's circle have names that begin with the letter "J." Which one of them wrote an important message signed with only the initial "J"? Who cares? Some other plot points turn on Essie and April's physical similarities, body size and shape, hair and features, with the only difference being that one is much better looking. How long before one starts impersonating the other?

The exposition goes on forever. The details about each woman's individual misery are hammered home over and over, relentless in their repetitive wretchedness. Men abuse them. Women mistreat them. Friendless and alone, they find success elusive. The patriarchy has much to answer for.

It's a shame. Takhar is taking on important themes. Women's roles. Inequality. Social pressures. Family failures. Workplace unfairness. Competition instead of support from one's peers. The impossibility of self-determination. The death of hope. Maybe she's writing for the male audience who might need a lot of convincing about the

full extent of the gender gap. But for an enlightened feminist reader, it's a bath in it. She could have sketched this issue with a few sentences. We get the point. We don't need to have our faces rubbed in it. Hundreds of pages of tedious repetitive despair, followed by a few pages of qualified redemption. Women don't need this kind of a downer. Ugh. But...

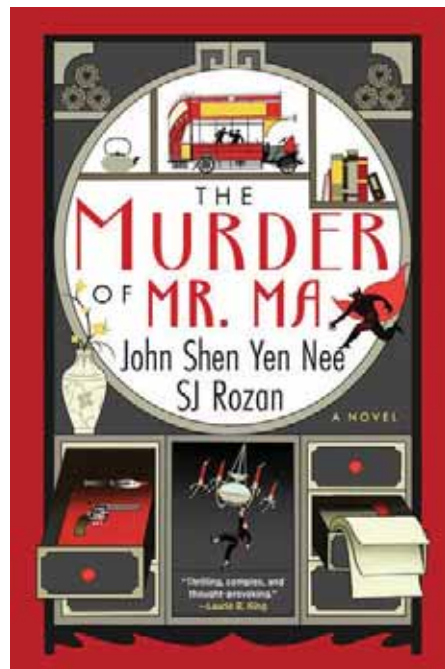
My advice? Buy this book. Tie a man to a chair and force him to read it. Repeat.

THE MURDER OF MR. MA

by John Shen Yenn Nee and S.J. Rozan
Soho Crime; \$25.95, April

Rating: B+

First line: Every story connects to all stories.



Bestselling and award-winning author S.J. Rozan has teamed with a Chinese-Scottish media guy, John Shen Yenn Nee, to write the first of what is surely a new series of period mysteries. **THE MURDER OF MR. MA** is set in London after World War I, and explores the thriving Chinese subculture there. Chinese academic Lao She reluctantly teams up with the brilliant and eccentric Judge Dee Ren Jie to solve the mystery of several murders in the Chinese community, starting with the killing of war veteran Mr. Ma.

Judge Dee is a super-smart action hero, clearly modeled after Sherlock Holmes, complete with an opium habit. Lao She is his Watson, with acute powers of observation and quiet skills of his own. For a while they even room together and Lao chronicles Dee's exploits, his phenomenal martial arts skills, and his deductive acumen.

Together they unearth the common features in a series of murders using a rare butterfly sword, which leaves a distinctive wound pattern. All the victims served in the same unit during the war. All kept in close touch and formed a tontine. A tontine? (Now, some readers will say, "Oh boy, a tontine!" But I suspect I'm not alone in muttering, "Is there a more dated and annoying excuse for a series of murders in the history of crime fiction?") A tontine, for those who haven't watched old Cary Grant movies recently, is a kind of morbid Christmas Club. Each member puts up money and a bank invests it. The pooled money is only accessed by the survivor after every other member has died. Thus it provides the perfect motive for murder. Actually, a version of it is still legal in some states. Go figure.

The investigation consists of tracking down the other members of the tontine, each of whom dies, thus eliminating themselves as suspects. The police aren't much of a problem since deaths in the Chinese community go largely unsolved, although one particularly nosy copper seems bent on thwarting the duo, who are assisted by a world-weary Chinese man and a Dickensian lad who's too young to be bigoted.

The writing is excellent and the action sequences are fun, filled with named references to a variety of martial arts maneuvers: the broken row palm, the piercing heart kick, a tiger-claw strike to the groin, and many more.

Ezra Pound and Bertrand Russell each make a cameo appearance, as does Spring-heel Jack, an urban legend of the Victorian era. The period is rendered with care and seeming authenticity. The xenophobic politics, of course, resonate today.

I don't happen to have much of a taste for Sherlockian pastiches, so I

didn't love it, but for those who can't get enough of the brilliant detective and his loyal friend, it's worth adding to the collection.

DYING TO GO

by Tess Rafferty

\$13.99, November, 2023

Rating: A

First line: I had murder in my heart.

It's official: Tess Rafferty's Kat Kelly is my favorite contemporary amateur sleuth. And **DYING TO GO** is a great addition to this excellent series. This time, TV writer Kat and her husband Mike (aka, The Husband) are back in Italy, staying at a villa on a vineyard near the Tuscan-Umbrian border. Kat's friend Adam, getting over the loss of his mother and a painful breakup with his ex, had rounded up a group of acquaintances to rent the five-bedroom guest house for a much-needed getaway from the pressures of L.A.

Kat's fellow guests include Adam's loud, boorish, hard-drinking boss, Dimitri and his disaffected girlfriend, Zoë, a financial analyst; Lyric, a cranky chronic complainer; and Magda, a salty older woman who works as a movie stuntwoman. The villa owner, Giulio, their tour guide and driver, Ciro, and local restaurant owner Andreas are also introduced. Wine is poured, meals are eaten, a rain storm begins, then Dimitri is found dead in the pool. The local *polizia* are inclined to write it off as an accident but Kat knows a murder when she sees one. No one had liked Dimitri, so suspects abound. But who had disliked him enough to kill him? That's the problem.

Rafferty has a way of engaging you in the drama of Americans abroad, their behavior, their quirks, their hidden secrets. She uses the backdrop to advantage and allows a spotlight to shine on gender issues and politics as Kat, who can't resist a puzzle, struggles to solve the mystery of Dimitri's death. When Adam becomes the prime suspect, Kat redoubles her efforts, but other murders ensue.

If you love food, wine, sightseeing,

and murder (and, let's face it, who doesn't?), the Kat Kelly series is for you. If you're looking for a 40-something woman who navigates her life, her work, her friendships, and her marriage with aplomb, even as she solves crimes with intelligence, hard work, and intuition, then the Tess Rafferty series is your jam. Highly recommended.

MURDER AT LA VILLETTE

by Cara Black

Soho Crime, \$27.95, March

Rating: A

First line: *APRIL IN PARIS* rarely feels like the song, thought Aimée Leduc, shivering as she buttoned her leather jacket.

Cara Black's compelling Aimée Leduc series continues with **MURDER AT LA VILLETTE**, set, as always, in a single district of Paris that we get to know very well through the book. This one starts with a murder in the La Villette neighborhood of the 19th *arrondissement*, the Butte-Chaumont, in the northeast corner of Paris.

Aimée, a private detective, gets a call from her contentious ex, Melac, the father of Aimée's very young daughter. He wants to meet her late at night by a canal near her office, but when she gets there he is dying, stabbed. As she goes

to help him, she is knocked unconscious and the bloody knife is pressed into her hand.

On the run and determined to find the real murderer, Aimée painstakingly tracks down the few clues she has. Aided by her partner, René, and a variety of contacts on both sides of the law, Aimée's search leads her to a cold case, an unsolved murder with reverberations in the present. Melac had been a *flic*, a policeman who had been following a lead in a case concerning a long-dormant serial killer who just might be active again.

The characters are well-drawn and vivid, the settings are beautifully rendered. The writing is polished and well-paced. There's lots of action, danger, and suspense. It's also full of Parisian charm. Cara Black just keeps writing wonderful books. I love them. *Vraiment*.

THE DEEPEST LAKE

by Andromeda Romano-Lax

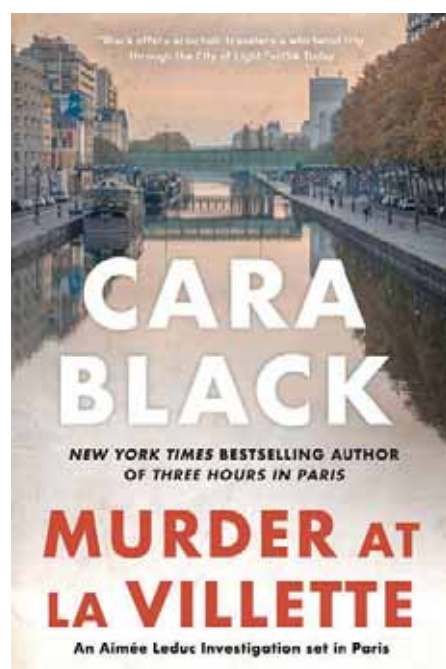
Soho Crime, \$26.95, May

Rating: C-

First line: I should be terrified stepping into the rowboat, but for the first adrenaline-spiked moment, I'm not.

Andromeda Romano-Lax's psychological suspense novel, **THE DEEPEST LAKE**, is the deepest disappointment for this reader. A long, tedious meditation on the maternal bond, the book hammers away at its theme like the pounding of a dull migraine. It has to be the "feel bad" book of the year.

A child is missing. (Ugh. Are there any four words more disheartening for a book critic?) Jules is a feckless, twenty-something woman who travelled to Guatemala to find herself. Rose is her scatter-brained mother who goes to Guatemala a month later to find Jules. Jules has gone missing, presumed drowned. Eva is a renowned writer who lives there, hosting luxurious writing workshops for aspiring memoir writers on the shores of remote and scenic Lake Atitlán. Jules had become her adoring assistant. The chapters are devoted to Jules' and Rose's separate experiences and feature their interactions with the



charismatic author.

Unfortunately, the two main characters are so dislikeable that I would have cheerfully drowned both of them to escape the dreariness of reading this book. Jules is a clueless, whiny child-woman who makes poor choices. Rose is inept and self-pitying, driven only by a strong, smothering parental bond. The same bond that drove Jules to escape to Central America.

Romano-Lax seems to think she has invented the maternal instinct. She pounds at this concept again and again, producing a crushing boredom that drove me to wish both of them at the bottom of that very deep lake. At one point she even resorts to the tired invisible-cord metaphor. Rose imagines she heard her daughter's voice saying, "Mama."

The plot advances with pathological slowness. Many, but not all, of the twists could be spotted well in advance by the alert reader. None of them generate enough interest to overcome the dreary tone. And the ending is strangely unsatisfying. What little suspense has been built up is squandered. The opportunity to provide a big, satisfying finish is wasted.

My advice? Cut the invisible cord. Throw the book into the very deep lake. Look elsewhere.

BETTER THE BLOOD

by Michael Bennett
Atlantic Monthly, \$27.00, 2022
Rating: B+

First line: His hands move quickly as he polishes the sheet of silver-plated copper to a perfect mirror finish.

Michael Bennett's New Zealand-based police procedural is a stunning debut. It follows the standard procedural playbook, but manages to stay fresh and moving and suspenseful as it does so. It's written with a sure hand.

Hana Westerman is a tough, principled Auckland cop, a divorced woman raising her rebellious teenage daughter, aided by her ex-husband, who is also her

boss. She is also Māori, the oppressed indigenous people who were overrun when New Zealand was colonized by the British and others more than a century ago. Her background gives her an intuitive understanding of the crimes and the perpetrator.

Hana's daughter, Addison, is a singer/rapper who strongly identifies with her Māori ancestry. She longs to make a mark, to show support for her oppressed people. Poata Raki, a charismatic activist and former college professor, galvanizes her and strengthens her sense of purpose.

But a madman is stalking Auckland, a serial killer who seems to have an historical grudge of his own as the pattern emerges among his victims. That pattern resonates in a specific way with Hana herself.

As the novel hits all the standard marks—the crimes, the emerging links behind the seemingly random series, the race against time to stop the carnage, the history that ties everything together, the personal involvement of the protagonist—Hana finds herself reexamining her own past for clues to the gruesome present.

With perfect pacing and characters that gain detail and focus, **BETTER THE BLOOD** is an excellent read. The careful inclusion of the back story of New Zealand's colonization and the Māori culture add a layer of importance to this complex tale of crime and punishment.

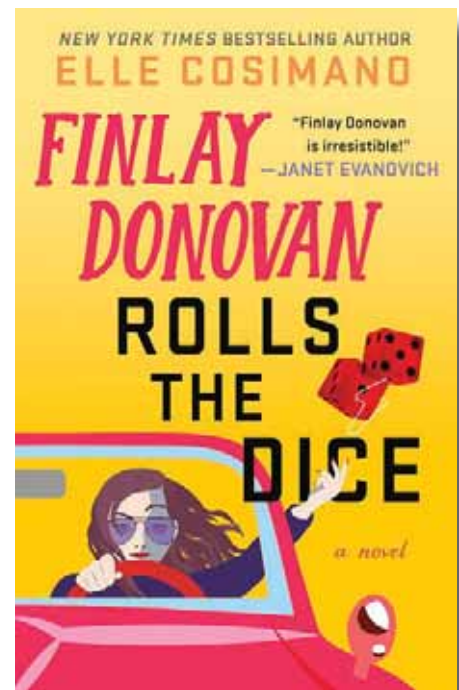
This is the beginning of a series to watch by a writer to savor.

FINLAY DONOVAN ROLLS THE DICE

by Elle Cosimano
Minotaur Books, \$28.00, March
Rating: B+

First line: "I can't look," I said, clapping a hand over my eyes.

Elle Cosimano's newest entry in the deeply enjoyable Finlay Donovan series is a great amateur sleuth, chick lit read. Full of charm and humor to offset the menace and danger, divorced writer Finlay Donovan takes her two young



children, her nanny, her cop boyfriend, her ex-husband and her mother on a road trip to Atlantic City. What could go wrong?

Finlay Donovan lives with her kids and their nanny, Vero, who is also Finlay's friend and partner-in-crime. When Vero's boyfriend is kidnapped by some mobsters and held for ransom, Finn and Vero have to try to save him. There is also the matter of a stolen Aston Martin, a luxury car that belongs to one of the mobsters. The rescue involves that road trip to Atlantic City and, of course, they have to bring the kids. When Finn's mother and her ex-husband, Steven, insist on tagging along, the plan starts to go sideways. When Finn's boyfriend, hot cop Nick, and three of his colleagues show up, things get very tricky.

Matters are further complicated when they find the key mobster, Marco, already dead in the jacuzzi at his suite at a casino. Using all the hotel's ice to keep his body from decomposing while they hid it, Finn and Vero go on the hunt. From the buffet, to the craps tables, to the club with the male strippers, the action gets pretty silly.

Cosimano's signature dry humor and witty dialogue are on full display. The plot is murderously complex. The outcome satisfying.

I love this series.

THE CHAOS AGENT

by Mark Greaney
Berkley, \$30.00, February
Rating: C

First line: Morning sun warmed the rain-slick tin roofs, forming blankets of steam that rose in perceptible waves as they buffeted the sixteen-ounce quadcopter drone buzzing over the little town.

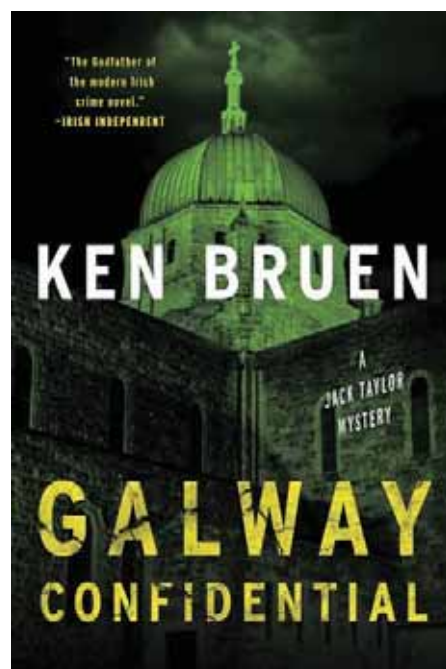
I love Mark Greaney's Gray Man series but the latest one, **THE CHAOS AGENT**, is seriously disappointing. I was particularly looking forward to this one, since the topic is weaponized artificial intelligence and robotics and it seemed even more timely than ever. But the execution is not up to Greaney's usual high standard.

Court Gentry, the Gray Man, and his Russian lover, Zoya, are living a quiet life in Central America when trouble finds them. An old friend of Zoya's asks for their help guarding a Russian scientist who works in AI. It seems that someone is systematically killing the world's AI experts. Suddenly, Court and Zoya are themselves on the kill list. And Court realizes that he knows the skilled assassin, a military-trained operative, much like Gentry himself, has been skillfully dispatching the targets. Code-named Lancer, the assassin is a psychotic neo-Nazi and a ruthless adversary. New Zealand billionaire, Anton Hinton, is also a likely target and he's already escaped one attempt on his life. Court and Zoya rush to protect Hinton and find out who's behind the killings. Is it the Chinese? The Americans? Who? Hinton has a huge scientific installation in Cuba and the action culminates in a pitched battle there, involving trained, combat-hardened soldiers versus drones and (wait for it) armed robot dogs.

Greaney references many precursors: from the early 1980's movies *Wargames* and *The Terminator*, to your smart home's Alexa.

The plot is surprisingly predictable, the fight scenes pro forma. But worst of all, now that Court and Zoya are a team, they fight shoulder to shoulder and have each other's backs. I thought I would

love having a kick-ass woman who is every bit the Gray Man's match. But Greaney doesn't depict her convincingly and he's not very good at describing their relationship. Gentry has stronger bonds to the men who fight alongside him than he seems to have with Zoya. There is zero chemistry. Let's face it: the Gray Man is a solo sort of guy.

**GALWAY CONFIDENTIAL**

by Ken Bruen
Mysterious Press, \$26.95, March
Rating: A

First line: The man looked down at the woman.

The latest book by the great Ken Bruen, **GALWAY CONFIDENTIAL**, is a brilliant addition to the long-running Jack Taylor series, arguably the best of Irish noir and, for me, one of the best mystery series ever.

Jack Taylor, ex-Garda, ex-drunk, ex-Catholic, has been in a coma. For a year and a half. When he wakes in a hospital, the man visiting him, named Raferty, gives him a drink of whiskey. Jack doesn't remember him. But he has been Jack's most frequent visitor and helps him through his recovery. In fact, it was Raferty who saved his life when he was attacked.

On his first visit to a pub, newly

opened after the COVID lockdown, a woman named Sheila Winston, a former nun, approaches Jack and asks for his help. It seems that nuns are being attacked. The Guards are baffled. Reluctantly, with Raferty's help, Jack agrees to investigate. He gets nowhere. More nuns are attacked. Some of them die. Jack gets nowhere. The plot unravels slowly and the twists are heartbreaking. Murders are committed. Jameson is drunk. A conclusion is reached.

Bruen has always been a great stylist. The Irish lilt, the sly humor, the compact action are all hallmarks. But in his latest few novels, the Galway books, he has further refined his approach. He has pared away all non-essentials, leaving behind a kind of poetry. The characters are still well-drawn, the plot expertly delineated, the action vivid, the humor intact, but the prose itself is sparse and mannered and so beautiful it hurts your eyes to read it.

Bruen is absolutely essential reading. Highly recommended.

ALL THE COLORS OF THE DARK

by Chris Whitaker
Crown, \$38.88, June
Rating: A-

First line: From the flat roof of the kitchen Patch looked out through serried pin oaks and white pine to the loom of St. Francois Mountains that pressed the small town of Monta Clare into its shade no matter the season.

Chris Whitaker's **ALL THE COLORS OF THE DARK** is by turns brilliant, heartbreaking, exasperating, captivating, and infuriating. It has a gripping beginning, a ridiculously long midsection, and a somewhat perfunctory finish that makes you want more. It also has absolutely indelible characters, many of them, and follows them from childhood to maturity, with enough skillful plot twists to make your head spin.

Patch, a 13-year-old with one eye who styles himself a pirate to deflect the bullying of his peers, saves Misty Myers, a pretty classmate, from a predator. She

gets away but Patch is kidnapped and held hostage for most of a year.

Patch's best friend, Saint, a small, nondescript girl, but very smart, vows to find him. The impact of the crime on the three of them, their families, and on the town, are explored minutely. The ups and downs of their lives play out in memorable detail. Part procedural, part amateur sleuth, part psychological suspense, **ALL THE COLORS OF THE DARK** serves up an intricate slice of small town life.

Chris Whitaker is like Tana French on steroids. Or LSD. He takes the same elements: the small town, the gawky adolescent struggling to grow up, the adults who alternately help and thwart. The family secrets. The town's buried past. The crime that defines them all. French's approach is more naturalistic, more rooted in the real. Whitaker goes big. Big complications, big twists, big special effects.

Typically, action thrillers run longer than crime novels. The advance reader's copy (ARC) of **ALL THE COLORS OF THE DARK** that I was sent runs very close to 600 pages. Although I never stopped reading, the middle definitely sagged and, on reflection, I think the book is more than 100 pages too long. Maybe 200. That said, the writing is interesting, if a bit florid, and the characters compelling. The plot is complex and the end satisfying.

Like Whitaker's brilliant previous book, **WE BEGIN AT THE END**, this is a novel you'll obsess over.

THE HUNTER
by Tana French
Viking, \$32.00, March
Rating: A

First line: Trey comes over the mountain carrying a broken chair.

The terrific Tana French has written a terrific new novel, **THE HUNTER**, which focuses again on Cal Hooper, Trey Reddy, and Ardnakelty, the small town in Western Ireland where Cal has come after he left Chicago and his job as a police detective behind. **THE HUNTER** shares characters and setting with



her fine novel, **THE SEARCHER**, but I hesitate to call it a sequel. It exists on its own as very much a fully realized novel in its own right.

Cal, the American ex-cop, has settled into village life in remote Ardnakelty where he repairs furniture along with Trey Reddy, a troubled teenager he has taken under his wing. He has also started a relationship with a self-possessed local woman, Lena, and has come to terms with most of his wary neighbors. His tranquility, and that of the entire village, is disrupted when Johnny Reddy, Trey's errant father, suddenly comes home. He brings with him a sketchy Brit and a wild, get-rich-quick scheme that soon unsettles the entire local population.

The local responses to Johnny Reddy range from wildly comic to complicated to lethally dangerous. The locals all play a part in the ultimate fate of the scheme.

One of the finest literary mystery writers, Tana French, has an easy, evocative style and her sense of character and place are unmatched. She also has a sly, oblique way with plot. For instance, in both **THE SEARCHER** and now **THE HUNTER**, the central character seems to be Cal Hooper, the outsider who stands in for the reader in trying to understand the strange dynamics of rural Ireland. My experience was that when I was nearly through **THE HUNTER**, I realized, quite abruptly, that the protagonist is actually Trey Reddy, the lonely and quietly rebellious teenage girl whose search for her brother and his fate ac-

tually propel the action in both. Trey IS the searcher. She IS the hunter. And her dedication, her fierce intelligence, and her relentless quest for answers give the books their special impact.

KILL FOR ME, KILL FOR YOU
by Steve Cavanagh
Atria, \$27.99, March
Rating: B

First line: Amanda White lifted the lid from the electric baby bottle sterilizer and stared inside at the .22-caliber revolver.

KILL FOR ME, KILL FOR YOU is a psychological thriller from the brilliant Steve Cavanagh, a master of twisty, plot-driven thrillers. Character is not Cavanagh's strong suit and the exposition here, introducing the various characters, is awkward and off-putting. Victimized women who have survived attacks on themselves and/or loss of their loved ones are over-described with relentless, textbook depictions of misery. Ok. We get it.

Amanda's six-year-old daughter was abducted, abused, and murdered. A week later, her grieving husband committed suicide. The perpetrator, a known sex offender, got off on a technicality. Now, all Amanda can think of is revenge.

When she meets a woman with a similar story at a bereavement group, they strike a bargain. They will each kill the man who has ruined their lives. Like Hitchcock's *Strangers on a Train*, which is referenced here, each woman will kill the other's nemesis, making sure the other has a solid alibi.

When the tiresome exposition is done and the action finally kicks in, Cavanagh is in his element. Propulsive and suspenseful and perfectly paced, **KILL FOR ME, KILL FOR YOU** delivers.

THE MOUNTAIN KING
by Anders de la Motte, translated from the Swedish by Alex Fleming
Atria, \$29.99, January
Rating: A-

First line: One spring evening when

he was eight years old he ran away.

Anders de la Motte's **THE MOUNTAIN KING** is an excellent Scandi-noir procedural thriller, with a compelling protagonist, Leo Asker, who ticks all the boxes but remains unique and memorable. A dash of Steig Larrson's Lisbet Salander, a smidgeon of Mick Herron's **SLOW HORSES**, a sprinkling of Michael Connelly's Rene Ballard, Leo Asker is a driven cop, at odds with her superiors and with her family, wedded to her work.

Leo is involved in an important kidnapping case when she is suddenly replaced by her ex, a bitter rival, and relegated to heading up a cold case unit, housed in the police department basement and populated by misfits and losers.

But as Leo looks over the cold cases, she becomes intrigued by one detail: someone has been planting tiny figures in a hobby club's museum-quality model railroad display, figures that relate to dead or missing persons.

Absolutely absorbing, the plot unwinds as Leo seeks help from a historian she used to date. Together they immerse themselves in the cold cases until they discover a link to a present day crime.

THE MOUNTAIN KING is the first in a series about Leo Asker. Get in on the ground floor of what is going to be the next Nordic noir sensation.

THE VACANCY IN ROOM 10

by Seraphina Nova Glass
Graydon House, \$18.99, April PBO
Rating: B+

First line: There's a Shell gas station across the street.

Seraphina Nova Glass' **THE VACANCY IN ROOM 10** is an excellent slice of feminist noir.

It is set outside of Santa Fe in The Sycamore, a seedy apartment complex converted from a seedy motel. Glass assembles a cast of misfits who are predominantly female and one hundred percent sad and bitter. Cass, whose perfect life upended when her wealthy not-quite-husband kicked her to the

curb in favor of a young barista, is now scraping by as the resident manager and handyman (she prefers handy ma'am). Anna, whose wonderful artist husband has committed suicide, is living there while she sorts through the unit that he used as a painting studio, sifting for clues to his fate. Rosa, married to a long-haul trucker, has discovered his secrets and suffers his abuse in silence. Callum, one of the few men in residence, lost his home and all his money to his wife's cancer treatments in the last months before she died. Together with a smattering of drinking, smoking, trash-talking single moms, the crew of down-and-out losers make their home at The Sycamore.

Glass skillfully navigates the complex plot skipping back and forth from Cass to Anna as they pursue their various investigations and look for answers among their fellow residents, although some of the secrets are clumsily withheld to heighten the tension.

All in all, I liked this twisty slice of female noir.

ONE OF US KNOWS

by Alyssa Cole
William Morrow, \$28.99, April
Rating: B-

First line: My name is Keke.

Alyssa Cole's dark psychological horror novel, **ONE OF US KNOWS**, features a protagonist with dissociative identity disorder (DID) and skillfully introduces us to the eight-plus alter-egos of Kenetria Nash, known as Ken, a 37-year-old Black woman juggling her own abrasive personality with her headmates who come in assorted genders, races, ages and skill-sets. Ken abruptly returns to consciousness (called fronting, meaning becoming the dominant personality) after a long dormant period, to find herself on a dock in the Hudson River, waiting for a launch to take her to a new job she has no memory of applying for. She will be the new caretaker of a castle-like historic home on a remote island in upstate New York. She does not know that the island is owned by the family of her abusive

ex-boyfriend, a wealthy clan with *Succession*-style privilege and sick twisted kinks. Then one of Ken's alter-egos goes missing. And pretty soon there is a murder. Oh, and a storm is coming.

Crammed with more Gothic features than Ken has personalities, **ONE OF US KNOWS** is a little too baroque for my taste, and the middle section gets a little muddled with the large population of real/not real characters and issues that include wealthy entitlement, racism, misogyny and abuse. But if you like psycho-horror-mystery cross-overs you might give it a try.

MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT

by Riley Sager
Dutton, \$30.00, June
Rating: A

First line: Morning sunlight seeps into the tent like a water leak, dripping onto the boy in a muted glow.

A perfect domestic thriller, Riley Sager's **MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT** is breathtaking. Beautifully written, perfectly paced, expertly plotted, Sager's tale of a boy's disappearance from his placid suburban neighborhood is a knockout!

As a critic, the descriptor I dread the most is: "a child is missing." It usually triggers the most maudlin, sentimental, gushing as parents and siblings weep and moan and obsess. Not Sager. Alternating chapters toggle between the present and the past, thirty years ago, when ten-year-old Ethan Marsh and his neighbor and best friend Billy Barringer camped out in a tent in the back yard of Ethan's upper-middle-class Princeton-area home, and Ethan wakes up alone. Sager focuses on the six houses on Hemlock Circle, a cul-de-sac that abuts a deeply wooded area. The parents all socialize and the children of various ages all know each other. As it develops, all the residents also have secrets and no one is above suspicion.

MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT takes place deep in Harlan Coben territory. Fast-paced and compelling, prepare to stay up all night!

From The Waterfront

Ted Hertel



WHEN WE WERE SILENT

by Fiona McPhillips

Flatiron Books, \$28.99, May

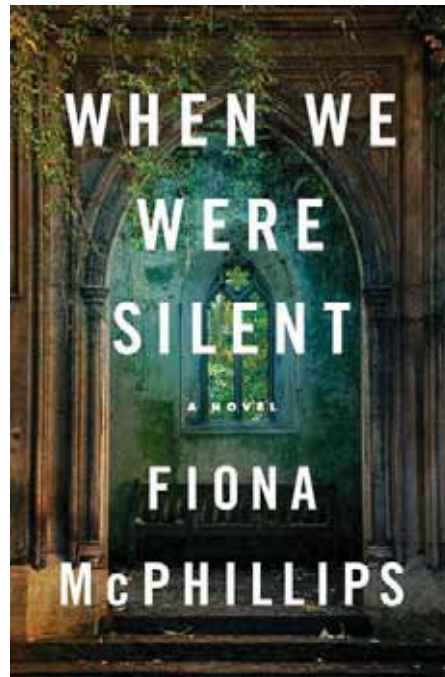
Rating: A

Highfield Manor, Dublin, school to the wealthy and home of deadly secrets. Louise Manson reflects back thirty years to her time at the school. She had come there then seeking revenge, to explore the suicide of Tina, a friend of hers, who may have been abused by one of the teachers at the school. But Lou's efforts back in the day end tragically, changing her life. The novel alternates between the events of the past and the current day. Lou has now been contacted by an attorney who represents another student at the school who has been abused. Her testimony, however, could expose her to the serious consequences of what she did in the past. If that comes to light, it would ruin her happily married life.

This is a dark debut novel set in an academic world filled with privileged and mostly unlikable people. Fiona McPhillips has created a chilling psychological character study of a woman driven deep into her tragic history and how it has affected not only her but those around her, as well. The story switches forth and back smoothly between the two time periods, with the past being more intense than the present. It explores the effects of character assassination, "yellow journalism" and the misuse of social media among people who have a casual relationship with the truth. It is a look at true-crime junkies with their alternative facts dressed up as critical thinking. Ask yourself what is worse: The truth that can be suppressed or the lies that cannot? Maybe it doesn't matter what the answer is, since there are disastrous

consequences all around either way. We all have to live with the stories we tell ourselves and this is an excellent story being told.

This is a strongly written, compelling, and dramatic debut by a very promising new author. I look forward to seeing what she does next.



THE UNQUIET BONES

by Loreth Anne White

Montlake, HC \$28.99/TP \$16.99/eBook

\$5.99, March

Rating: A-

One night forty-seven years ago two teens disappeared from their respective homes. Now the body of one of them, Annaliese Jansen, may have been discovered when an old chapel in the woods is being moved. Pregnant homicide detective Jane Munro, who had been assigned to the cold case squad, undertakes the investigation, hoping to

bring closure to the Jansen family. As word of the dead girl spreads, a group of her childhood friends known as the Shoreview Six begin to worry about which secrets of theirs from that long-ago night might rise to the surface – and how their lives could be forever altered by the girl's discovery. Can the group stick together or will one of them crack? What story will those bones tell as the investigation widens?

This is the first in a new series from Loreth Anne White, one that will focus on Jane Munro and forensic anthropologist Dr. Ella Quinn. Munro has her own concerns. Not only is she pregnant but her lover (and the father of her unborn child) vanished several months earlier while on a wilderness hike. Her grief allows her to empathize with the families of the teenagers. This is used as a springboard for the trauma that surrounds a family that comes to realize that they may never get an answer to what happened to their missing or murdered loved one. It gives her added determination to see this case to a successful conclusion, no matter who stands in her way.

This novel really consists of two parts, the determined cop and anthropologist with their methodical investigation and the slow psychological breakdown of the Shoreview Six, as well as several other potential suspects. Mixed in with these two themes is a third: the clash of the public's right to know versus the needs of the police to keep details under wraps.

Several things slowed the book for me. As one who reads for plot, I found that some of the characterizations were padded beyond what was necessary. But those who prefer character over plot (and many do) will find their reading enhanced. Also there were a lot of casual comments like *is it her?*, *After all these years?*, or *If only Jill had been half as self-assured . . . She might not have lied to the police*. A few of those speculations are fine but there were just so many of them here that it took me out of the story. Your mileage may differ.

In spite of those very minor complaints, this is a book that should hold the reader's attention throughout. It is

a portrait of people grieving, of others who are scared out of their wits and reacting badly, willing to throw their friends under the bus in order to save themselves. It is a tale of dedicated police who will move heaven and earth in order to achieve justice for those left behind, to bring closure to the grieving. It is an examination of the ripple effects of a crime, from the stone dropped in the water forty-seven years earlier, to the lives down the years that were destroyed by the waves from that stone. It just goes to prove that nothing is ever truly over.

LAKE COUNTY

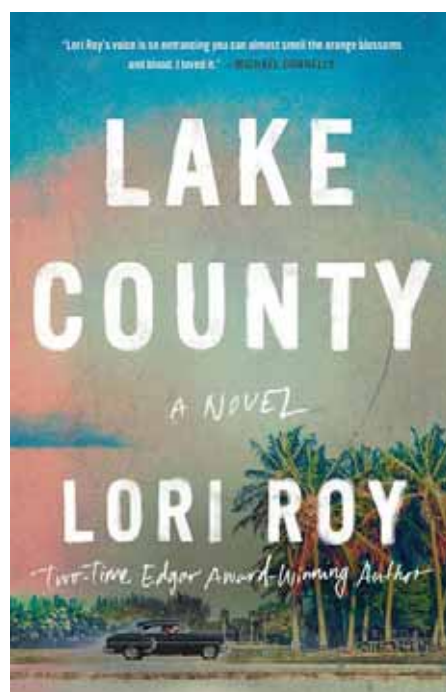
by Lori Roy

Thomas & Mercer, \$28.99/TBO \$16.99/
eBook \$3.99, June

Rating: A

Lake County, Florida. 1955. Addie Anne Buckley is looking forward to celebrating her 18th birthday in just two days. She and her Aunt Jean are planning to travel by train to Hollywood and then on to New York City. But while shopping, Addie Anne gets distracted by her boyfriend Truitt, losing track of her aunt in the store. As a result things spin off in an unforeseen direction. For her Aunt Jean is none other than Norma Jean Baker, known to the rest of the world as Marilyn Monroe. Her obsessed photographer, Siebert Rix, is out to get her to go back to Hollywood with him since he is nothing without her as his subject. Meanwhile the mob is after Truitt because he is running an illegal gambling game without cutting the gangsters in on the take. When they show up, death rides into small town Hockta with them. Addie Anne and Truitt have set wheels in motion that will ultimately go off the rails in spectacularly awful fashion.

Two-time Edgar Award winner Lori Roy has concocted one of this year's most gripping novels. With foreshadowing creating non-stop suspense, enhanced by short chapters with alternating points of view, this is one of the best books I've read recently. The story is filled with cleverly crafted characters that the reader will care about from early on. Whether it's the young Addie



Anne, so enamored with her gorgeous aunt, or her slightly shady boyfriend Truitt, you will root for them and their families through every tension soaked page.

Of course this is a major reimagining of the early life of Marilyn Monroe, but author Roy has made her come to life as a believable character, in her clothes with their plunging necklines, her breathy speech (when she wants to use it to her advantage), the way she stands and walks, as Aunt Jean changes into Marilyn before Addie Anne's eyes. No wonder the young girl wants to emulate her aunt and get into the movies, before she realizes that the crack in that perfect life is Marilyn's loneliness. It's a fascinating portrait. But Roy is also adept at creating villains such as Rix and mafia head Santo Giordano, menacing in their every scene.

By the end Addie Anne will come to learn that life is not like the movies. One does not get to have a second take.

LOST TO DUNE ROAD

by Kara Thomas

Thomas & Mercer, TPO \$16.99/eBook
\$4.99

Rating: B-

Jenna Mackey disappeared from the Hamptons in 2019 and was later found

dead. *Vanity Fair* journalist Natalee Ellerin published an article about the disappearance without vetting her source who had failed to reveal background information detrimental to her story. Five years later, Ellerin's career in ruins, she now does occasional private investigation work. The mother of a pregnant young woman, Amanda Hartley, contacts Ellerin. Amanda is hospitalized, comatose following a suicide attempt. The mother called because Amanda had the P.I.'s name on a receipt in her backpack. She refuses to believe that her daughter would try to kill herself and wants Ellerin to investigate. When Ellerin reluctantly takes the case (she has to eat and pay rent, after all), she finds that there are startling similarities to Mackey's disappearance. Amanda was last seen on Dune Road in the Hamptons, exactly where Jenna Mackey had disappeared. That case was still unsolved. Will unearthing the secrets behind Amanda's circumstances allow Ellerin to bring closure to her earlier failure?

This novel is strong on character. The points of view of both Ellerin and Amanda give us insight into their not always likeable characters and motivations. However, the plot itself is overly complicated, often stretching into incredulity. The linking of the two crimes is a bit far-fetched, but if one can accept that, the book makes for a suspenseful few hours. However, it was not always easy to keep the two threads separate, nor was it easy to keep track of the many (too many?) characters. Additionally, the romance between several of the characters was rather immature for two people who were supposedly adults.

Author Kara Thomas tackles several difficult issues, with varying degrees of success. When Ellerin is fired from *Vanity Fair*, she observes that "when men go wrong, they go on to become FBI agents instead of being cancelled on Twitter and blackballed from their entire industry." But after that observation, the idea just lies there undeveloped. Stronger, though, are topics like the inability to obtain an abortion in many states and the power of wealthy people to avoid prosecution. These were

well-handled and propelled the novel forward enough for me to keep reading, although there were some loose threads left hanging by the end.

INTO THE NIGHT

by Cornell Woolrich,
completed by Lawrence Block
Hard Case Crime, \$15.95, May

Rating: B+

Madeline puts a gun to her head and pulls the trigger, but happily (she immediately decides) the hammer falls on an empty chamber. She drops the gun – and this time it fires a bullet straight out her open window. It hits and kills Starr Bartlett, a woman who just happened to be walking past the window at that very moment. Horrified, Madeline concludes that Starr died in her place and that Madeline would therefore live for Starr. She finagles her way into the life of Starr's mother. There she learns that Starr had been happily married – until one day Starr got a phone call from a woman telling her a horrible secret that destroyed Starr's life, to the point where she set out to take her revenge. That decision was, of course, upended with Starr's untimely death. So Madeline creates a very short list of things to do on behalf of Starr: 1. *To get even with a woman.* 2. *To kill a man.*

Madeline's life, following her unsuccessful suicide attempt, has suddenly taken on new meaning. The story is told through her confused and often nearly incoherent thought process. Her old life now in the rearview mirror, she decides to track down Starr's husband and the woman who threw the figurative bomb into their happy married life. But things take turns Madeline (and the reader) often could not see coming.

This short and absorbing noir novel was started by one of the masters of dark tales, Cornell Woolrich, author (under the name William Irish) of such classics as **PHANTOM LADY** and **REAR WINDOW**. When I say "started," I mean that he wrote most of the book. It was his final novel, uncompleted at the time of his death in 1968. There is a beginning and an ending, along with a few interior "missing pag-

es" that were written by MWA Grand Master Lawrence Block. However, the meshing of the two authors work is seamless, creating a short and fast-moving novel of suspense with a shattering (even by today's standards) conclusion that leads to a noir ending that I found not to be completely convincing. Was this the direction that Woolrich intended? Whether it was or not, this is still a most entertaining mashup between two of the finest writers of noir fiction. Fans of either one of them will find this to be a very worthwhile reading experience.

THE LAST NOTE OF WARNING

by Katharine Schellman
Minotaur Books, \$29.00, June
Nightingale #3

Rating: B

Vivian Kelly works hard at getting her act together in Prohibition Era New York City. She's a dress shop assistant during the day while at night she serves up both drinks and dances at the Nightingale speakeasy. But one day she delivers a dress to the home of the wealthy Buchanan family. While Vivian is waiting in another room for the lady of the house to arrive, Mr. Buchanan is brutally murdered in his office. Vivian immediately becomes the number one suspect and is arrested. Fortunately, her bootlegger lover is also the nephew of the police commissioner. Leo arranges for her release but the commissioner tells her that if the police can't come up with proof of the real killer, she'll go back to jail and stand trial for the murder. Vivian must use all her resources in order to save herself and find a murderer.

This is Katharine Schellman's third novel in her well-received queer *Nightingale* series. Set in 1925, the heart of the Jazz Age, her setting rings true. The novel is rife with illegal speakeasies and their free-flowing booze, dance hall girls, cops taking the easy way out, organized crime flourishing, and the struggles of poor in the land of the wealthy.

The racially diverse cast is one of the highlights of the book. Vivian's sister is married to a Chinese man. Her Night-

ingale boss, Honor, is attracted to Vivian and the feeling is mutual, although she also has feelings for Leo. But Honor, even with all her criminal connections and in spite of her desire for Vivian, refuses to help her. She must rely on her own wits to save herself.

The Nightingale atmosphere perfectly captures the illicit smoking, dancing, and drinking that are the order of the day in this atmospheric novel. The book recreates Harlem's evening entertainment, including the Hamilton Lodge Balls, drag balls that were a cornerstone of queer nightlife culture in the 1920s. Other historical aspects of this era add dimension to this tale.

On the negative side, there were one or two legal points that I found to be inaccurate, taking me out of the story for a few minutes, but that is a mere quibble to anyone other than an attorney.

So spend a few hours back in the days of the three-course dinner (plus coffee!) for a mere twenty-five cents and enjoy this entertaining novel.

BLOOD IN THE CUT

by Alejandro Nodarse
Flatiron Books, \$28.99, June

Rating: B

Ignacio Guerra, fresh out of prison, returns to his Miami home. His mother has just died and Armando, his father, is deeply in debt, on the verge of losing his butcher shop. There is a rival business ready to open just down the street. "Iggy" and his dad do not get along but he starts working at the butcher shop anyway, trying to get it back on track. He quickly learns that not all is aboveboard there. Some rough people are selling horse meat to the shop, the books of the business do not add up, and Armando is disappearing at night. Things take a turn for the worse when Armando is arrested. It's up to Iggy to dig deep down into the problems and save his dad and the business without getting killed himself.

Iggy is a solid character, buried in grief about his mother's death and filled with rage over his father's involvement with hunters bringing in suspicious meat. By the end of the novel Iggy

is faced with a real moral dilemma, one that was not resolved in the way I thought it would be. His agonizing over what he must do in order to save his family and their livelihood is one of the high points of the novel. Not all the characters are as well-drawn as Iggy, however. Sophie, the love of Iggy's life, for example, struck me as pretty much a cardboard figure. She was entitled to more development than she got.

The author has a real knack for description. We get solid views of the Everglades, with its fascinating wildlife and waters. The Miami area is handled realistically, as is the Cuban culture. At times though the details of butchering became more graphic than necessary, to the point that I think some readers would be turned off by it. I am not sure why we needed to see so much gruesome detail about meat cutting. Further, the ending seemed a bit abrupt and needed a bit more closure to satisfy me.

This dark drama of a family in turmoil will not be for everyone, but overall it is still a well-written and absorbing debut novel from an author worth watching.

THE INNS (AND OUTS) OF COURT

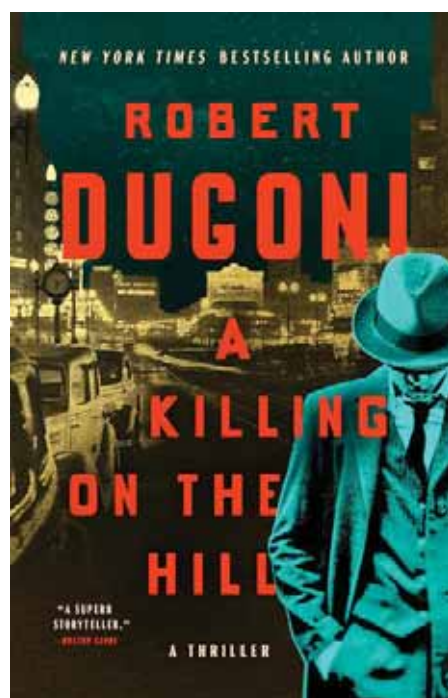
A KILLING ON THE HILL

by Robert Dugoni

Thomas & Mercer, \$28.99/Trade Paperback \$16.99, eBook \$5.99

Rating: B

Seattle. 1933. Newly minted nineteen-year-old reporter William Shumacher receives a call from the Chief Detective of the homicide squad advising that there has been a gangster shooting at a "social club" on Profanity Hill. Windows blackened for privacy, this was a place where the wealthy came to play, whether it was to dance to an orchestra or shoot dice at the craps tables, all sport during the Great Depression and the end of prohibition. Boxer Frankie Lee was shot twice and it isn't long until the club's proprietor, local mobster George Miller, is arrested for the murder. Miller



er claims self-defense and has plenty of witnesses to back him up. This is front page news for the young reporter and he makes the best of it, riding high on the information he continues to receive from the Chief Detective. But is he heading for a fall as Miller goes on trial, the trial Shumacher's newspaper headlines scream "The Trial of the Century"? However, the killing isn't finished yet. As the naïve Shumacher continues to dig, he finds that he may be among the targets.

Robert Dugoni was a full-time civil litigator in San Francisco and Seattle until he came to his senses and returned to writing as his career. He has put his legal knowledge to good use in constructing the trial that is at the center of this novel. In this, his first historical novel, Dugoni highlights the contrast between the underworld and the prominent citizenry who spoke out against the sins of alcohol, prostitution, and gambling during the day, but then at night donned their finery, jewelry, and furs to inhabit the speakeasies that called out to the wealthy.

The author made Seattle itself an important character in the story. Its clear blue waters and majestic mountains stand in contrast to the city's underbelly, dark and dirty as the waterfront at night. All of this is a convincing

portrait of a city we today seldom think of as the Wild West it was in the 1930s. Further, his other characters all have lives of their own, well-drawn and interesting. The plot itself moves along rather quickly, the trial alternating its advantage between the prosecution and the defense exactly as often happens in real life. This thoroughly researched story has its basis in fact, as the author explains at the end of the book.

The best stories are those often not constrained by the truth. But digging around to find the answers could get a fellow killed. The truth here wasn't simple. In fact it often became suspect. Dugoni manages to sort everything out by the end, even if Shumacher made a number of unconvincing leaps to conclusions along the way.

WHEN CICADAS CRY

by Caroline Cleveland

Union Square & Co., \$17.99, May

Rating: B-

The murders of two young women on a South Carolina beach have gone unsolved for thirty-four years. But now another white woman is beaten to death with an altar cross in a rural church. Sam Jenkins, a Black man, is discovered kneeling over the body and covered in blood. Attorney Zach Stander takes on what appears to be a hopeless defense. But suspicions grow that these long-separated murders might actually be connected. Stander has to rely on help from his private detective lover, Addie Stone, and Colleton Burns, a well-respected but long-retired attorney, in order to delve deep into the two seemingly disparate cases and unearth secrets others would prefer remain buried.

On the surface this debut novel sounds like a lot of other "Southern noir" tales – and to a large extent it is. But debut author Caroline Cleveland manages to wring an interesting story out of these familiar threads. Set in 2017 South Carolina, where several real life high profile racial shootings had recently taken place, Cleveland sets the tension bar high. Racism and prejudice play a large part in the telling of the story, setting up the potential for an ex-

plosion that could tear the county apart. Defendant Jenkins doesn't need just a good lawyer. As a black man discovered with the dead body of a white woman, he needs a good *white* lawyer to present his side of the story. But is the once disgraced Zander up to handling this powder keg of a case? Maybe it's just what he needs to redeem his own career and life.

The story switches between the third-person point of view of the attorney and the first-person view of the unnamed killer. Along the way the killer drops hints of involvement in both the church killing and the years-old beach murders. Of course the lawyer is also faced with a client who won't reveal information that the attorney desperately needs. Zander unfortunately acts like a jerk, treating his lover Addie shabbily, relying more on help from Burns, driving her away. Frankly, he's lucky that she doesn't slap him silly and take her of leave him. Meanwhile, the efforts of the legal team to prepare for trial seem to consist of nothing but sitting around *doing* nothing, which is one of the book's flaws. Still, the book should hold the reader's attention through to the suspenseful conclusion.

THE SHORT CIRCUIT

REFLECTIONS ON MURDER: Selected Short Stories of Nedra Tyre

Bill Kelly editor
Stark House, \$15.95, May

Rating: B+

Georgia born Nedra Tyre published six mystery novels during her lifetime (1912-1990), but when she found herself without a publisher after 1971, she returned to the short story form. Her numerous short tales were primarily found in *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine* or its companion, *Alfred Hitchcock Mystery Magazine*. It was her belief that "the greatest prejudice you will find is against the short detective story. And that is a pity. Because the most precious gems in the field are short stories." This volume, containing sixteen shorts, proves her right.

Each "gem" (Tyre's word) is a character study of one or two individuals whose lives are caught up in murder and its effects on both perpetrators and victims. Questions of what is right or wrong, good or evil, ethical or not, legal or otherwise, are wrapped around cautionary snippets of the human condition. This is perhaps most clear in the introspective title story, *Reflections on Murder*, which poses the question "does the victim choose the killer even more than the killer chooses the victim?" Or perhaps lessons learned too late in the "heartwarming" story of spouses who each plot to kill the other (*Killed by Kindness*). Friendship apparently knows no bounds when a group of women unknowingly pass around a deadly box of chocolates (*Laughter Before Dying*).

Perhaps my favorite story in the collection is *Murder at the Poe Shrine*, with its detailed look at what is now the Poe Museum in Richmond, Virginia. The Shrine's curator uses Poe's own methods (as detailed in his stories) to solve the murder of a man as The Raven looks upon him. A close second to *Poe Shrine* requires one to ask oneself whether *The Gentle Miss Bluebeard* was born to kill.

All of these collected stories are easily worth your time. There is a very informative introduction to the book by Bill Kelly and a complete bibliography of Tyre's novels and short stories at the end. This is a solid collection of a too soon forgotten author, one who is fully deserving of Stark House's resurrection.

DEATH COMES TOO LATE

by Charles Ardai
Hard Case Crime, \$18.99, March
Rating: A

Hard Case Crime was founded twenty years ago. To celebrate that anniversary its founding editor and Edgar and Shamus Awards winner Charles Ardai has compiled twenty of his best short stories in this excellent anthology.

Ardai received a well-deserved Edgar for the first story in the collection, *The Home Front*, in which a down on his luck P.I., a fatal accident, and a twist of fate lead to a tragic love story and

murder. In the Shamus-nominated *Nobody Wins*, a different P.I.'s search for a missing fiancé ranges from deep in the underworld to the very wealthy.

But far from all stories are about private eyes. For example, in *Game Over* no good deed goes unpunished when a birthday gift of a handful of quarters leads to tragedy. It's not a birthday gift that causes problems for a young boy but rather the Christmas gift of a trip to the circus in *The Day After Tomorrow*, only three pages long but packed with chills. Or a traveling salesman gets more than just a drink or two when several guys show up with guns in their hands on a rainy night in *A Bar Called Charley's*. Then there's the woman who haunts Times Square looking for information about her mother, only to have her world turned upside down by a single word (*Mother of Pearl*).

These are just a few examples of the sort of tales you'll find here. Tales of crime, private eyes, ordinary people in dire circumstances, and the human condition. Each of these twenty stories is different in character and situations but all have one thing in common: a dark look into the soul of men and women on the edge of a precipice, a decision that means life or death either for themselves or others.



The Cozy - Traditional Mystery Cafe'



Robin Agnew Reviews

THE LAST WORD

By Elly Griffiths

Mariner Books, \$27.99, April

Harbinder Kaur #4

Rating: A

Every time I crack open an Elly Griffiths book, I am newly surprised by her skill at telling a story. A writer I treasure once told me she loved Agatha Christie because “she’s so organic” and Griffiths has this same quality. Each part of her story unfolds from the next in a seemingly effortless fashion, making the completed book a sound structure that holds together in every way. This novel is the fourth book in her Harbinder Kaur series, though Detective Kaur is only the loose tie binding the novels together, all of which have been very different from one another. This book bears the strongest resemblance to *THE POSTSCRIPT MURDERS* (2020) because the delightful cast of characters she introduced in that novel re-appear here. It’s really their book, Harbinder just gives them a little guiding nudge now and then.

They are three of the most distinctively different characters who somehow work together I’ve ever seen. There’s the

80+ year old Edwin, lover of libraries, crossword puzzles, and wordle. There’s Benedict, a former monk who now runs a coffee bar on the shore; and there’s Ukrainian Natalka, Benedict’s girlfriend and the most practical thinker of the bunch. She and Benedict share a tiny apartment with Natalka’s mother, Valentyn, and both women have an ongoing thread of worry: Natalka’s brother, Dmytro, has returned to Ukraine to defend his country. While Griffiths often addresses current events – she had an entire novel about COVID (*THE LOCKED ROOM*) – I am sure this one presented itself to her and she had to include it. She has a light yet sensitive hand with a topic that is ongoing.

This book, however, is primarily a book about words and their importance. It opens with Edwin’s and Benedict’s ongoing wordle competition and progresses to a story about writers. The three of them are now working as private eyes,

and a woman brings them a case, insisting that her dead mother’s much younger husband has killed her for her money, her house, and her dog. The trail leads to a writer’s retreat and Edwin is all in – he can’t wait to go undercover, posing as a writer. Benedict, who really wants to be a writer and has a novel already written, is more reluctant but the two of them set out despite his misgivings.

The retreat house seems sinister and in keeping with Griffiths’ taste, appropriately goth, down to a stained statue of a drowning woman near the brackish body of water where a former member of the retreat killed themselves. Or did they? Suspicious deaths that can easily be explained away are tied together, all paths leading to the retreat and its offshoots: a book club and even a WhatsApp group chat. When one of their number is discovered dead over the weekend the three newly minted private eyes are on the case, much to the annoyance of the police in charge. The lead detective worships Harbinder and ultimately takes some cues from her, reluctantly admitting that the three amateurs are actually helpful.

Griffiths’ sly, witty, yet loving take on writers, on the writers retreat and on the book club meeting included in the story make this book sparkle. She’s always alert to any diss on genre fiction and is quick to defend it. As a mystery reader I can only silently applaud this while reading. The story itself is appropriately clever and the ultimate resolution is courtesy of a decoded word puzzle. Somehow this detail is not twee, only delightful. There’s also an emotional thread involving Natalka’s brother. If I were ever to finish a Griffiths’ book without my heart in my throat, accompanied by well earned tears, I would be very surprised. I am very much hoping this trio of characters – who populate a series within a series – returns.

CLOSE TO DEATH

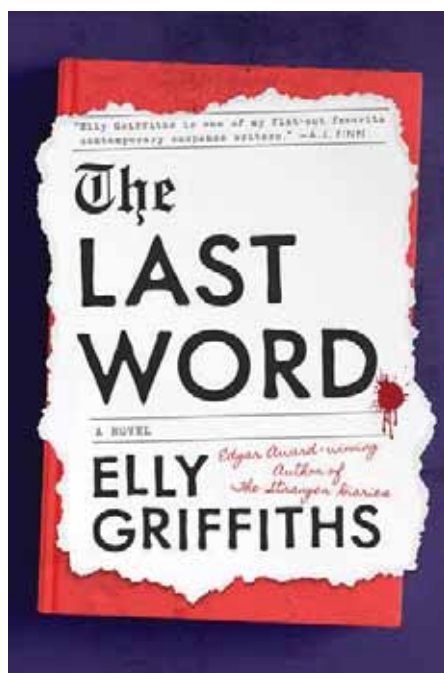
By Anthony Horowitz

Harper Collins, \$30, April

Hawthorne & Horowitz #5

Rating: A-

Anthony Horowitz is simply a

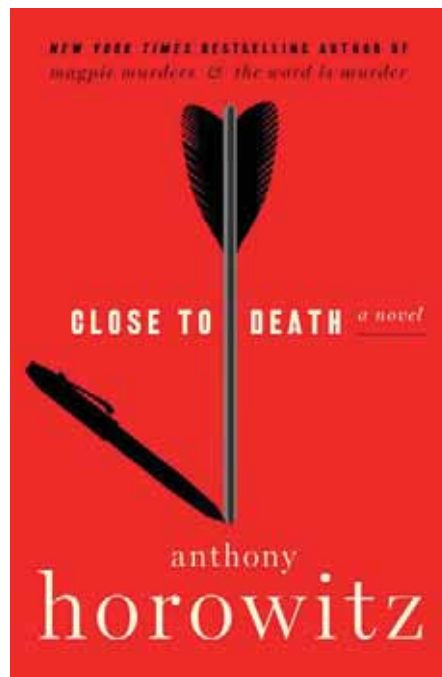


plotting genius, with a brain that must that must be constantly constructing puzzles, and fortunately for us, he's nice enough to share a few. His latest gem is an instalment in his very meta Hawthorne and Horowitz series, where Horowitz himself takes the almost Hastings-esque form of a writer who follows genius detective Hawthorne around, writing down his actions, thus creating the novel we hold in our hands. As this outing begins Horowitz is working on a new book under a deadline, but unfortunately Hawthorne hasn't caught anything interesting for a while. Horowitz decides to revisit an old case, and as Hawthorne doles the story out to him in portions he writes, using case notes as his guide, creating personas for the people involved in the story.

In a very Horowitz fashion, we are introduced to a very golden-age style set up. The most unpopular member of a tight little community (or close) on the edge of the Thames is one Giles Kenworthy, and as the book opens, chess master Adam Strauss loses an online match due to Giles's late and loud arrival. The doctor who lives next door hates him because they share a driveway, and he sometimes is blocked in and unable to get to work. The two blameless old ladies who own a mystery bookshop are on the warpath because he hates their dog, who, to be fair, gets into their garden and leaves his mark. Other neighbors are in an uproar because Giles is about to build a swimming pool which will obstruct their view, one of the few pleasures of an invalid woman resident, as well as necessitating the cutting down of the magnolia she most treasures. Their roiling mob mentality is held in check by the barrister who lives at the foot of the close, who tells them (weirdly) that legal action is not a solution.

In true Golden Age fashion, there's even a map of the neighborhood.

Horowitz wisely concentrates on the characters of the neighbors, leaving Giles to the imagination of the reader. Of course, it's the guy everybody has a motive to kill who is murdered, and when Giles is cut down by a crossbow from one of the garages in the neighborhood, the police descend, questioning



everyone. They're accompanied by Hawthorne, who works, much like Detective Monk, as a private advisor to the police. He deals with the cast of characters in his own way, often several steps ahead of the preening narcissist cop who is running the official investigation, and even has his own second in command, a man named Dudley, who Horowitz is extremely curious about.

When Hawthorne and Horowitz meet to discuss the first chapters (which the reader has also seen) Hawthorne tells Horowitz to give it up – he won't like how the story ends. Horowitz plows ahead, however, going his own way when Hawthorne becomes reluctant to share more details of the crime.

As this is an Anthony Horowitz novel there's no small event that isn't relevant to the plot, and it's keeping track of all the meaningful clues that's tricky. When there's a literal locked room death about three quarters of the way through, the whole story is upended, and much like Horowitz the character, I had no idea where it was heading.

At about this point, Horowitz the character/writer of the book decrees: "The real problem of the locked room mystery is that the mechanics are often so complicated...the emotions of the story can disappear." I applied this to my reading of this novel which is indeed

a locked room mystery, and found that I was moved by the characters, many of whom are hiding secrets from their pasts. More to the point, both the plot and the ultimate solution to the crime credibly emerges from their personalities.

There are revelations and emotions a plenty, as well as an extremely clever ending. While perhaps not as glorious an achievement as *Magpie Murders*, it's very, very good.

George Easter's Take: **CLOSE TO DEATH** is Anthony Horowitz's most recent example of his brilliant plotting-skills. This is one of those novels which is difficult to describe plot-wise, but is very easy to read. Horowitz is a master of the modern day puzzle mystery.

Rating: A

A DEADLY WALK IN DEVON

By Nicholas George
Kensington, \$27, April
Debut

Rating: B+

This charming cozy is set in Devon, but features a group of Americans who have gathered there for a walking tour of England. Our hero, Rick Chasen, or "Chase", is a recently retired, recently widowed police detective. The loss of his husband, Doug, has caused him to re-think his life and search for things that will keep him active and engaged. He's meeting up with his friend Billie for the trip, who is an optimistic soul and knits with enthusiasm.

The rest of their tour group – or shall we call them the suspect pool? – is nicely varied and interesting. There's a wealthy man and his trophy wife; there's a couple who create environments for the elderly (who are dissatisfied with their room décor); there's a sister and brother who are fulfilling the sister's life long dream of a trip to England; and there's the required curmudgeon, rounded off by the tour guide and driver.

While I really enjoyed this novel my enjoyment would have been heightened by the traditional cast of characters at the beginning of the book. This book seemed well suited for that kind of

thing.

From the start, it's obvious that the wealthy man is going to be the bane of their trip – he's unpleasant and complains about everything. Once he susses out that Chase is a retired cop he confides in him that he's sure someone is looking to kill him and begs Chase to take on the job of protection. Chase begs off, saying he's on vacation, but soon various things begin to happen, coupled with threatening notes that the man has shared with Chase. He does keep his eyes open but of course, he cannot prevent the man's death on a foggy day as the group skirts the edge of a cliff.

Chase is – or was – apparently a good cop, and it's not long before he's invited to sit in with the Inspector who's taken on the case. He refuses to make assumptions and gently guides the Inspector's thinking without being overbearing (in short, he's the perfect co-worker or boss).

As the pasts of the various members of the group are revealed, providing possible motives for the murder of a man none of them had met before, the past and emotional life of Chase is also gently uncovered.

I'm not sure what the "secret sauce" is for books. In every way this is a standard traditional detective story, with an amateur/not quite amateur at the center of things. Even the fact that Chase is a widower is not unexpected. But there's some kind of magical algorithm that a good book simply possesses. This novel, while traditional and even expected, unfolds beautifully, is paced well, and is full of interesting characters who, in the best Agatha Christie fashion, seem familiar. They could be people you've met or encountered yourself.

Chase himself is appealing but not too plain vanilla to be dull. He's simply a nice guy, trying to do what's right, and he obviously is a careful thinker and intelligent discerner of secrets and lies. There's nothing not to like, and the whole book is enhanced by the Devon setting – I felt I was on the walk with the group. The trip, though sadly truncated for the book's characters, sounded wonderful, and the Devon countryside, as brought to life by the author, is beauti-

ful. All in all a nice debut.

A MIDNIGHT PUZZLE

By Gigi Pandian
Minotaur, \$28, March
Secret Staircase #3

Rating: B+

In the third book in Gigi Pandian's locked room series her heroine, magician Tempest Raj, seeks the answer to a devastating question: who killed her mother? A supposed "curse" decrees that the eldest born child in the family will die while performing magic. It may sound ridiculous but Tempest's aunt and mother both passed that way, and Tempest herself has already suffered a narrow escape. The killing that opens the book is that of the wealthy bully who has been suing Tempest's family construction company, insisting that the staircase that collapsed and put his wife in a coma was the result of shoddy construction.

The litigant tells Tempest to meet him at midnight in the deserted theater she's rented for her farewell show, but when she heads over she finds him skewered with a sword on the front door. The booby trap that killed him somehow seems to be spreading, nicking a paramedic and injuring another person in Tempest's orbit, and the inter-

net is soon seething with the idea that Tempest's mother has come back from the dead to seek revenge.

The book is grounded in Tempest's rich family and friend group, and she herself is a novel mix of Indian and Scottish. Her grandfather, who cooks for everyone, provides mash ups of traditional recipes and several are shared at the end for the reader to try. The family runs a construction company that adds magical architectural details to their restoration of old homes.

Tempest's own home is on the family compound where each member has their own little unit, outfitted with unique secret architectural details. Her grandparents, for instance, live in a treehouse which is the de facto family kitchen.

Working for a "Locked Room Library" that caters to readers of classic mysteries, Tempest's buddy Ivy has the ideal job for a mystery reading book lover. Her "crew" includes librarian Ivy, magician Sanjay, and the woodworking artist Gideon. All of them use their various skills to help Tempest unravel the mystery, which includes a sealed hidden stage at the theater and a body that has materialized in a way that seems impossible.

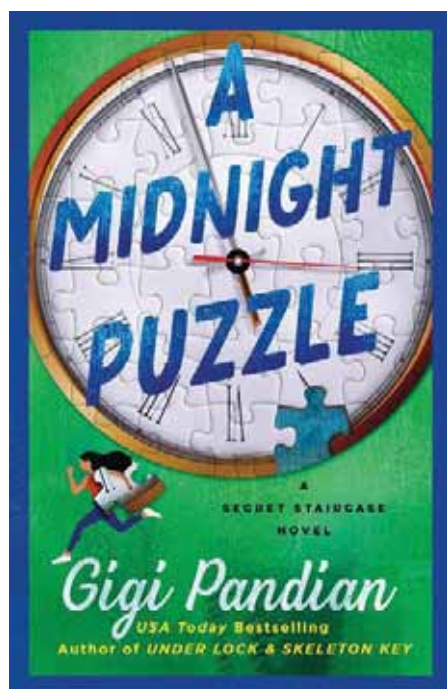
Pandian freshens the many classic tropes she employs with her use of young, interesting and diverse characters, most especially Tempest herself, and her family's company allows some fantastical elements to be included in more traditional plot lines. These books are not what you would call fantasies but they have an almost otherworldly, fey feel to them that makes them utterly charming.

HANGING WITH HUGO

By Katherine Bolger Hyde
Severn House, \$29.99, March
Crime with the Classics #6

Rating: B

Set on the Oregon coast, this charming series features B & B owner Emily, a former professor, and her sheriff husband Luke. In this outing they've just returned from their honeymoon and are getting set to host the



wedding of Emily's half-brother Oscar. They feel prepared for the tsunami of family and general chaos brought on by a wedding, but when they return home they find the church where it is to take place has been hit by an actual storm, with massive damage to the roof as well as a beautiful rose window in the nave. The squishy floor and holes in the roof aren't exactly conducive to the perfect wedding, so Emily, an heiress, donates some money of her own and arranges further financing through the town to get repairs started.

Their first B & B guests are the stained-glass restorer and family. Baby Raphael scorns clothes and pees just about everywhere and soon the entire household is literally holding their breath until one of the guest cottages opens up so the family have their own space. The next guests – or rather refugees – are more heartbreaking. Emily's priest has asked her to take in Moses and his soon to be adopted daughter, Charlotte, who are fleeing the shelter Moses runs in Portland. A social worker seems to have it in for them, holding up Charlotte's adoption in favor of the stepfather who abused her and beat her mother. Events have so traumatized her that she cannot speak.

Emily and Luke reserve judgment about the pair, but when they actually meet gentle Moses, a massive black man, and sweet Charlotte, a budding artist, their doubts evaporate. When it turns out that both baby Raphael's family and the parents of Emily's soon to be sister-in-law, Lauren, have had bad encounters with the very same problematic social worker, there is -- by all the laws of the mystery novel -- an immediate target on the woman's back. In classic fashion the person everyone has a motive to kill is indeed killed, and this time the suspect pool all seems to be residing in the sheriff's home. As Luke sets out to check everyone's alibis, he learns that the errant stepfather has also turned up in town, adding yet another possible murderer.

The wedding details are fun – Lauren's family is Chinese and so there's a church wedding followed by a Chinese banquet at the house, which makes for a

fine finale. The wrap of the story is suspenseful, but gently so, and does involve some solid detective work on the part of Luke and his small team.

This is a nicely told tale with some great details like cats named Kitty and Levin. The 'Hugo' of the title is Victor Hugo, the author Emily's friend Marguerite is reading as she waits for the wedding at the B & B. One of the nicer bits of the book is Emily's bonding with Charlotte throughout the story – they are truly drawn together when she teaches the girl to knit and Charlotte takes to it like she was born to do it. I really liked the characters and setting, and it did bring a tear to my eye when Moses and Charlotte's situation was eventually resolved. If the story was slight, the characters felt real to me and I was glad to have met them.

Maggie Mason Reviews



I ONLY READ MURDER

by Ian & Will Ferguson.

Mira Books, trade paperback, \$18.99

Rating: B+

Miranda Abbott had a great career as an actress. She was the lead character in a TV mystery series, Pastor Fran Investigates. But that was many years ago, and now her prospects are few & far between. She was not even selected to be on *The Real Housewives of Beverly Hills*. She no longer lives in luxury, and her assistant has been helping her out financially, something she is blissfully unaware of. Her long time agent even fires her. Things change when she gets a cryptic postcard.

Certain her life is going to improve, she goes by bus, imagine that, to Happy

Rock, Oregon where her husband Edgar lives. She was married to a writer in the business, but when the tv show was cancelled, he moved back to the small town of Happy Rock. Fran kept hoping things would turn around, but finally decided to return to her roots. Fran somehow contrives to have the Chief of Police drive her around. She finds her husband is the owner of a bookstore, **I ONLY READ MURDER**.

She finds a place to stay at a local B&B, but expects service as if she were staying at the Ritz. Miranda is blissfully ignorant of how dire her financial situation is, and the locals seem to accept that. While she and Edgar are figuring out what is to become of their marriage, Fran is cast in a small role in a local play.

The small town is like a microcosm of a big city, and there are issues and feuds, and just generally some bad people. There's a murder and Miranda put on her sleuthing cap to see if she can figure whodunnit. She worked with a local, and I was sure I had figured it out and was gobsmacked at the final solution.

This book took me a bit to get adjusted to Miranda and her oblivious ways, but at the end, she was a more sympathetic person. Every thing will hopefully work out for her, and if there's another book, I'll be rooting for her.

DOG DAY AFTERNOON

by David Rosenfelt

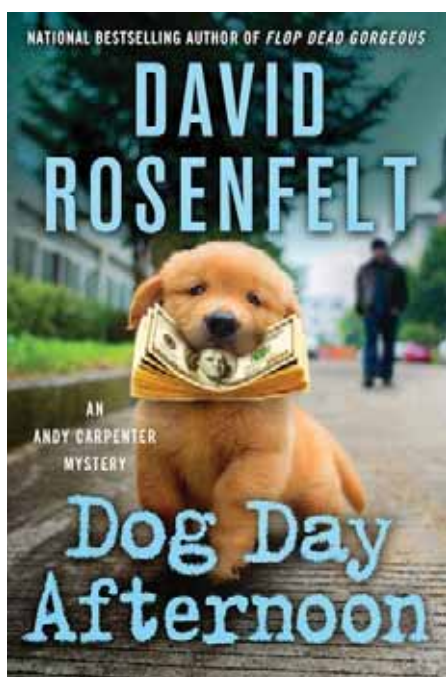
Minotaur, \$28.00

Andy Carpenter #29

Rating: A

Retirement is elusive for Attorney Andy Carpenter. He wants to retire, as he's very comfortable financially, and lives a good wife with his family and canine members of the family. What keeps dragging him back are cases he can't say no to, usually with a wonderful dog involved. This case is no exception.

One of Andy's team is Marcus Clark, a mountain of a man who has saved Andy's life numerous times, and is always ready to help however he's needed. Marcus brings this case to Andy, who can't refuse. A young man who Marcus



is helping better his life is accused of a mass murder at his place of employment, a law firm. Marcus is sure Nick Williams is being framed.

Prior to the shooting, Nick had been abducted and kept in chains in a darkened room, with meals brought twice a day by masked men. The shooter moved like Nick, and had distinctive shoes like Nick work. He even called a survivor by her nickname. All of this is called into question when the team discovers the location Nick had been held. There is more to this than meets the eye. Nick has no reason for the crime, though

he was rejected when he asked for a raise. The rejection was due to a company policy of waiting a year to give a raise to new employees.

Andy and his team, against all odds, find the reason for the shooting, and boy is it amazing that they did. Computer whiz Sam, and others are

to be commended for proving once again, a man is innocent.

This is a series I love. I love the dynamics of the team, and how Andy is willing to help people who might otherwise be convicted of a crime they didn't commit. I hope Andy NEVER retires, and I'm sure the residents of Paterson NJ feel the same way. I'm waiting for the next one, which can't come soon enough.

EVERYTIME I GO ON VACATION, SOMEONE DIES

by Catherine Mack

Minotaur, \$28.00, first in series

Rating: D+

Eleanor Dash is a very successful mystery writer, specializing in fabulous vacation settings. She has one problem with her success: she based her protagonist on a real person, her ex Connor Smith. She wants to end the series, because Connor gets a healthy cut of her earnings. She and her sister, Harper, who manages her complicated life, are on a book tour to Italy most people would love, but as Connor is on the tour, Eleanor is a very unhappy camper. Also on the tour is the "one that got away" Oliver Forrest. The tour has various other mystery writers and fans.

Connor is sure someone is out to kill him, perhaps as payback for dirty deeds in his past. Eleanor would in a way be happy, because with Connor dead, she wouldn't have to end the series. Soon, Eleanor learns Connor did seem to be a target of an attempt on his life, and later she is also a target, though they both escape.

There is a totally obnoxious police detective who is intent on proving Eleanor guilty of a murder. There is also an obnoxious fan who is making things even more unpleasant. The scenery is breathtaking, but that's not enough to make this a truly wonderful tour.

I enjoyed some of the book, but Eleanor was too much for this reader. The excessive footnotes were very intrusive, and unnecessary. I've read and enjoyed books with footnotes in the past, John Connolly & Lisa Lutz come to mind. There were wayyy too many in this book. In a mystery novel footnotes are rarely pertinent, in my opinion. If the footnotes were limited to a reasonable number, or non existent, I'd rate this book a C+ or B-.

Now a more hardboiled review:

ASH DARK AS NIGHT

by Gary Phillips

Soho, \$27.95)

Harry Ingram #2

Rating: A

Harry Ingram is a photographer/private detective working in Los Angeles. While working out of his garage Harry Ingram manages to follow burglary rings, bank robberies, looted cash, clandestine agendas under the watchful eye of LAPD.

He captures photographic evidence of police brutality in 1960's Watts. Doing so caused him to be arrested and beaten. Harry realized the picture he took of police shooting an unarmed man had to be protected even though he had managed to give some pictures to a trusted reporter, and one picture was selected for publication. Harry had managed to throw his camera with additional pictures into a looted building through a broken window.

While he was lying in bed in the jail hospital ward sobbing after 2 days of worrying how some of his most incriminating and best pictures were in a looted building, where he had taken a beating, he knew he needed his girlfriend to get them. After some negotiating with a looter, she recovered the film, and after his release from the jail hospital he sold the pictures to the press.

When the first picture was published in the newspaper, LAPD tried to cover it up. They were exposed and public pressure mounted leading to lip service rather than drastic change.

ASH DARK AS NIGHT hooked me. I vividly remember watching the L.A. riots on T.V. in 1963. To have a first-person view through the eyes of a Photographer/Private eye who knew he was in mortal danger and continued to charge into the middle of the fray carried me into the danger he was facing. I was intrigued by the complex relationship with members of the civil rights movement.

Philips takes you into the skin of a black man in a police car with white officers laughing "Man, I ain't wailed on a sambo like that in a month of Sundays," and reading about it chilled my soul.

Harry Ingram, took me on an adventure that intrigued me. And I look forward to the next book in the series.

Deadly Pleasures

George Easter



CALIFORNIA BEAR

by Duane Swierczynski
Mulholland Books, \$29.00, January

Rating: A

If you are in a mystery reading rut and everything seems “same-old, same-old,” then pick up a Duane Swierczynski novel. He doesn’t write to any set formula and his plots and characters are always infused with ingenuity and surprise. **CALIFORNIA BEAR** is a stellar example of this.

The plot is revealed from the perspectives of the following characters:

“KILLER”: Jack Queen has been exonerated and freed from prison thanks to retired LAPD officer Cato Hightower. But when guilt gnaws at Jack, he admits: “I actually did it.” To which Hightower responds: “Yeah, no kidding.” You see, the ex-cop has a special job in mind for the ex-con...

THE GIRL DETECTIVE: Fifteen-year-old Matilda Finnerty has been handed a potential death sentence in the form of a leukemia diagnosis. But that’s not going to stop her from tackling the most important mystery of her life: Is her father Jack guilty of murder?

GENE JEANIE: Jeanie Hightower mends family trees for a living, but the genealogist is unable to repair her own marriage. And her soon-to-be ex may have entangled her in a scheme that has drawn the bloody wrath of...

THE BEAR: A prolific serial killer who disappeared forty years ago, who is only now emerging from hibernation when the conditions are just right. And this time, the California Bear is not content to hunt in the shadows...

One of the best mysteries of 2024.

THE MOUNTAIN KING

by Anders de la Motte
Atria/Emily Bester Books,

\$29.99, January

Leonore Asker #1

Rating: A

Malmo, Sweden. Current day. Leonore (“Leo”) Asker is heading up a high profile investigation into the disappearance of two young adults. Without any warning, the higher-ups bring in her old nemesis Jonas Hellman to replace her as the head of the team. Meanwhile, Leo has been relegated to the basement and the Department of Lost Souls, a gathering of misfits who don’t seem to have any initiative to solve the cold cases they are “working” on. She is to replace the leader of the team, Bengt Sandgren, who has suffered a heart attack and is in a coma.

In cleaning up Sandgren’s office, Leo discovers that he has been working on



a very strange case. Someone has been placing miniature human figures in a huge model train display. Certainly not a crime that would demand a detective’s time. But Sandgren had discovered that the little figures are very life-like representations of people who have disappeared over the last few years. To follow up on that is worth police time. When Leo notices that one of the figures represents the missing young woman in the case she was formerly leading, her detective instincts go into hyperdrive.

Leo’s investigation brings her into close contact with a childhood friend, urban explorer Martin Hill, who helps her get to the bottom of things.

The translation by Alex Fleming flows very smoothly and is eminently readable. The characters of Asker and Hill are quite likeable. It remains to be seen, however, whether the quirky cast of the Department of Lost Souls will work their way into our hearts. I’m guessing that they will. What cannot be questioned is that Anders de la Motte has written one of the best crime novels of 2024.

If I were to compare this novel (first in a series) to another author’s work, it would be **THE KEEPER OF LOST CAUSES** by Jussi Adler-Olson, which was the first in the series to feature Department Q, quite similar to the Department of Lost Souls. It should be noted that **THE KEEPER OF LOST CAUSES** won the 2012 Barry Award for Best Mystery/Crime Novel. If you liked that one, you should certainly like **THE MOUNTAIN KING**.

PAPER CAGE,

by Tom Baragwanath
Knopf, \$28.00, February

Debut

Rating: A-

Lorraine Henry is a 35-year veteran policewoman in the provincial town of Masterton, New Zealand. She has been under-utilized as a records clerk, relegated to the basement of the police station. But then two local children go missing and Justin Hayes, a more experienced detective from a larger police force, is called in to help on the

case. Justin immediately recognizes Lorraine's superior knowledge of the local population, her ability to make connections and her excellent memory, and insists that she be included in the daily briefings – much to the chagrin of her sexist boss.

Then Lorraine's beloved grand-nephew Bradley goes missing and her search for the missing children gets personal.

PAPER CAGE is as much a deep character study of Lorraine Henry and the town she lives in, as it is an excellent crime novel. Tom Baragwanath's beautiful prose and gift for tantalizing description greatly enhances what is already a compelling story. I read this all in one day. I hope there is a sequel.

FINDING SOPHIE

by Imran Mahmood

Bantam, \$28.00, March

Standalone

Rating: A-

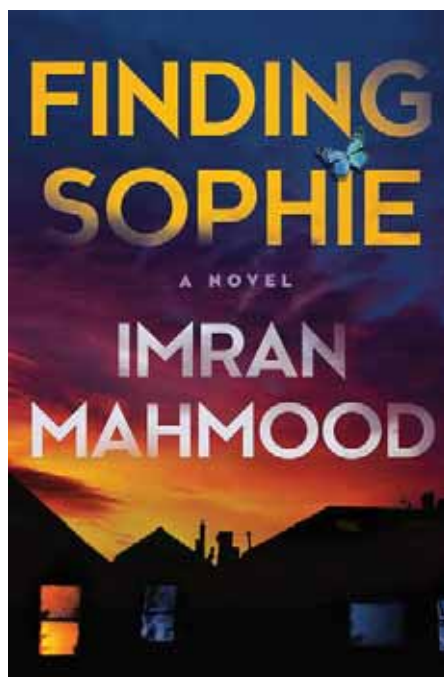
Some might call **FINDING SOPHIE** a legal thriller, others a psychological suspense novel. I call it a suspenseful and engaging great read.

Harry and Zara King are the doting parents of their only child Sophie and are understandably devastated when their beloved seventeen-year-old daughter disappears. The police make little progress in the case so Harry canvasses all the homes in their neighborhood to see if anyone saw anything. One reclusive neighbor in the walled-off unit #210 refuses to answer the door and this immediately raises Harry's suspicions.

Time passes as the parents become more and more desperate. But before any resolution is reached, the time frame of the narrative jumps ahead a year or so to a trial in which Harry stands accused of murder.

Through a series of flashbacks, the author reveals a much more complex situation than is initially suspected.

This is Imran Mahmood's third novel, but the first that I have read. His first novel, **YOU DON'T KNOW ME**, was made into a gut-wrenching and highly praised TV series, which can be found on Netflix. I watched it and was mesmerized – especially by the lead



actor Samuel Adewunmi.

In **FINDING SOPHIE**, the author did such an exceptional job in describing the parents' anguish that at times I had to put the book down because of how much I empathized with them. Imran Mahmood is a barrister by trade, and a talented writer by choice. He is someone to keep in mind when looking for your next read.

TWICE THE TROUBLE

by Ash Clifton

Crooked Lane, \$29.99, March

Noland Twice #1

Rating: B+

I must have been hankering for an old fashioned male p.i. novel when **TWICE THE TROUBLE** landed on my doorstep because I immediately started reading it and finished it the same day.

Nolan Twice was once a star college football player who suffered a career-ending injury. He then became a cop and a pretty good one until the local drug lord planted drugs on him and he wound up serving a couple of years in prison. After Twice is exonerated and the new governor releases him from prison, Twice goes into business as a private investigator with mixed results – especially lately. There haven't been

enough good-paying cases to keep him afloat.

So when attorney Faith Carlton asks him to find missing executive Arthur Valkenburg, who seems to have run off with millions of his company's money, things are looking up. But like the best laid plans of mice and men, things go dangerously awry on the way to the promised big payday.

Clifton writes with clarity and excellent pacing. There are a few plot holes and some required suspension of disbelief, but overall **TWICE THE TROUBLE** was a fun and exciting read.

STILL SEE YOU EVERYWHERE

by Lisa Gardner

Grand Central, \$30.00, March

Frankie Elkin #3

Rating: B-

Frankie Elkin is a woman with a compulsion for finding missing persons and she does it for free. Her searches are generally without family permission or requests and most of them result in her finding a body. She just wants to give families closure. But her latest "case" is quite different. It is to locate the long-lost younger sister of Kaylee Pierson, a female serial killer facing execution in three weeks' time.

At first Frankie refuses to help the convict known as "the Beautiful Butcher," but soon is persuaded by the possibility of rescuing a living person – a young, innocent woman purported to have been kidnapped many years ago.

Her quest takes her to a remote atoll in the Pacific which is being turned into billionaire Sanders MacManus's remote getaway.

I've enjoyed the previous books in this series and consider Lisa Gardner a fine writer. But I found the plot of **STILL SEE YOU EVERYWHERE** too contrived for me to accept it as anything near realistic. Also the pacing seemed off. About 3/4 of the book is setup before anything of note happens. I like the character of Frankie Elkin and I will continue reading the series and hope for more in the next installment.

DARK DIVE

by Andrew Mayne
Thomas & Mercer, \$16.99, March
Sloan McPherson #5
Rating: B+

Public demand and outcry has caused the State of Florida to reinstate its Underwater Investigation Unit so Sloan McPherson is back doing what she's best at doing. With her are George Solar, the leader of the unit, Scott Hughes, fellow diver and investigator, and new member Gwen Wylder, a seasoned researcher.

Sloan's first case upon returning hits close to home. A longtime family friend and fellow diver, Fred Stafford, is missing. His truck has been discovered near the site of an unmarked sinkhole. As Sloan dives deeper into the eccentric Stafford's life she discovers sizeable gambling debts, an association with a band of treasure-hunting divers and an alarming discovery in Stafford's storage shed.

I have read all the entries in this series and will continue to read them as new ones come forth. Why? Because they are highly entertaining and have characters I relate to and admire.

TOP SECRET KILL

by James P. Cody
Brash Books, \$16.99, March
(Reprint of 1975 title)
The D. C. Man (Brian Petersen) #1
Rating: B

Brash Books (Lee Goldberg) takes great pride in resurrecting well-written book series from the past that didn't get the attention they deserved when first published. The latest "discovery" is the James P. Cody series of four action-packed novels written by James P. Cody. They were published in cheap paperback form in the 1970s and soon found themselves in the Library of Forgotten Books. Fortunately Lee Goldberg, is a frequent visitor to that Library.

After the tragic death of his family, Brian Petersen has let his D.C. lobbyist business slide. But he finally pulls himself together enough to get back in the game and his game is being a "fixer" for the Washington, D. C. elite.

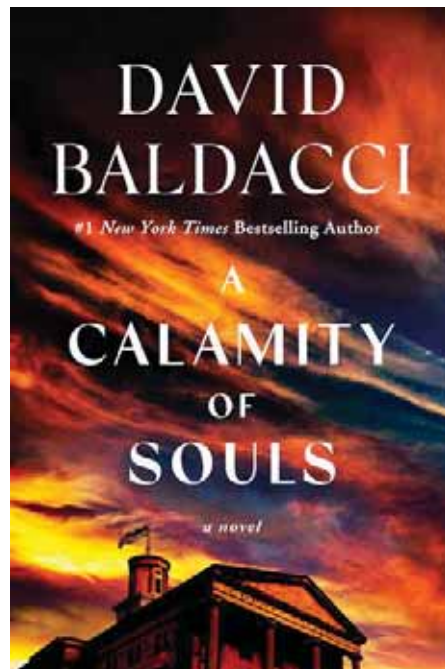
A congressman hires Petersen on the q.t. to find out who is leaking classified material from an important congressional subcommittee hearing. Using his wide range of contacts and his well-developed investigatory skills, Petersen eventually gets results – but not before there are some deaths. Petersen is not a perfect investigator and his methods prove to be somewhat hit or miss. But persistence wins in the end.

TOP SECRET KILL proved to be an enjoyable and easy read, but there is nothing about it that leads me to believe it is "exceptional."

A CALAMITY OF SOULS

by David Baldacci
Grand Central, \$30.00, April
Standalone
Rating: A-

This is not your ordinary David Baldacci mystery. For one thing, it is not an entry in one of Baldacci's various ongoing series. It is a standalone and one that packs quite an emotional punch. Blatant racial injustice has a way of raising my dander and there are heaps of racial injustice in **A CALAMITY OF SOULS**. Baldacci covers ground that has been covered before, most notably by Harper Lee's **TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD**, which will forever be the gold standard for such stories.



But that doesn't mean that **A CALAMITY OF SOULS** is a pale imitation of **MOCKINGBIRD**. It is a worthy story to sit side by side with that classic tale.

1968 Virginia. Vietnam vet Jerome Washington is a black family man and a gentle giant who works as a handyman for the wealthy Leslie and Anne Randolph. On Fridays Mr. Randolph usually comes outside and pays Jerome in cash for the work done that week. But on this particular Friday, there was no sign of Mr. Randolph so Jerome timidly enters the house to get his pay. He discovers the brutally murdered bodies of the Randolphs on the kitchen floor. His immediate reaction is to arrange Mrs. Randolph's body in a more dignified position, but he is interrupted in so doing by two policemen who barge in and immediately arrest him for the murders of the Randolphs. They throw in a brutal beating at no extra charge.

Jack Lee is a local white lawyer who agrees to represent Jerome despite never having had a murder case before. He believes in Jerome's innocence and is soon joined by Desiree DuBose, an experienced black trial lawyer out of Chicago who works for the Legal Defense Fund. They know the deck is stacked against them: a handpicked judge and the state's attorney general as prosecutor. Their only hope is to find out who really killed the Randolphs.

As a loyal and proud American it deeply saddens me that our black citizens have been so wrongfully mistreated for so long. It is an aspect of our history that we should feel great shame about. (On the other hand, I am proud of the many great and laudable things that Americans have also accomplished.) **A CALAMITY OF SOULS** is a stark reminder that we can do better – much better. It is quite possibly David Baldacci's best book and one that we should all read and reflect upon.

CLOSE TO DEATH

by Anthony Horowitz
Harper, \$30.00, April
Hawthorne & Horowitz #5, April
Rating: A

This is the fifth entry in the series

that features the author as one of the main characters. I know that sounds gimmicky but it turns out to be quite clever. Anthony Horowitz teams up with the former policeman Hawthorne in solving crimes and writing bestselling crime novels.

Horowitz's publisher is clamoring for another book, but Hawthorne has no current case that he is investigating. So it's decided that he will go back several years to one he worked on as a police consultant with his sidekick John Dudley. He provides Horowitz with his case notes and recordings on a piece-meal basis. These Horowitz writes up as chapters as he goes along and we readers are privy to these chapters and to the arc of the investigation as it unfolds.

The case involved a murder in a small gated community – Riverside Close – in Richmond (Greater London). It is comprised of six homes which feature lawns, flowers and quiet privacy. Everything is peaceful until the Kentworthy family arrives. Within a short period of time, the husband manages to aggravate everyone in the Close with his selfish and entitled behavior.

It comes as no surprise to the reader that Mr. Kentworthy winds up dead with a crossbow bolt in his throat.

What does come as a surprise is who did it and how justice is eventually meted out.

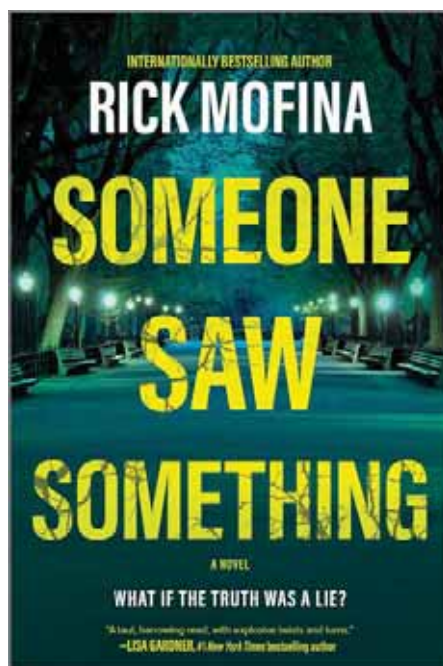
The Golden Age puzzle mystery is alive and well in the confident hands of Anthony Horowitz. This was a delight to read.

SOMEONE SAW SOMETHING

by Rick Mofina
MIRA, \$18.99, April
Standalone
Rating: A

Barry-Award winning Rick Mofina has done it again – a mesmerizing tale of a child who goes missing in Central Park (NYC) under the eyes of many potential witnesses. How could Gabriel have disappeared without someone seeing? CCTV is no help. All police resources are called in, but to no avail.

The parents are beyond distraught. Then the dark side of social media kicks



in with false and vicious attacks against the mother, Corina Corado, a well-known TV reporter.

The parents have closely-held secrets that, once revealed, may provide possible motives for the crime.

Surprises abound in this meticulously detailed narrative with a high level of suspense that never wanes.

SOMEONE SAW SOMETHING is on my list of Best Books of 2024 So Far.

Rick's **EVERY THING SHE FEARED** is deservedly nominated for this year's Barry Award for Best Paperback Original.

DOUBLE TAP

by Cindy Dees
Kensington, \$28.00, May
Helen Warwick #2
Rating: B+

DOUBLE TAP is a rollicking follow-up to one of my favorite thrillers of 2023 – **SECOND SHOT**.

Helen Warwick is a 55-year-old assassin recently retired from the CIA (against her will) and now her main focus in life is to mend strained relationships with her children and other family members. But she keeps getting drawn back into her former life.

This thriller opens with an attempt on the life of her son who is running for District Attorney in Washington, D.C.

She foils this attempt and seeks to find out who was behind it.

But simultaneously some of the CIA top people are dying under suspicious circumstances. The head of the CIA James Wagner attributes these deaths to a Russian mole (code name Scorpius) within the higher ranks of the organization. Wagner wants Ruth to come back to work and head up a team of mole searchers to finally get rid of this traitor. She accepts, but soon is dismayed to find that some of her team members have divided loyalties.

The story line ends quite abruptly, leaving several plot lines unresolved. I know this is a method to get the reader to be anxious to read the next installment, but it left an unsatisfactory taste. Great actions scenes, but several plot holes make this a mixed bag – but a lot of fun nevertheless.

HUNTED

by Abir Mukherjee
Mulholland, \$30.00, May
Standalone
Rating: B+

British father Sajid Khan finds himself flying to the U.S. to find his daughter Aliyah, who was last seen on CCTV with a known suicide bomber just before the bomb goes off in an L.A. retail mall.

Meanwhile Carrie, mother of veteran Greg, fears that he has been radicalized by terrorists and is using his bomb-making skills for bad purposes.

Eventually Sajid and Carrie join forces to find their children.

A parallel investigation by FBI Special Agent Shreya Mistry takes her down paths not authorized by her boss. But she persists even though her job is at risk.

This is quite a departure for Abir Mukherjee. He is most known for his award-winning historical mystery series set in India, which feature British policeman Sam Wyndham. I liked **HUNTED**. It has a well-conceived plot and exciting thriller elements. For me, however, it was hard to warm up to any of the characters. I prefer the Sam Wyndham novels, which I highly

recommend to those who haven't read them yet.

RETURN TO BLOOD

by Michael Bennett
Atlantic Monthly, \$27.00, May
Hana Westerman #2
Rating: A-

The first book in this series (**BETTER THE BLOOD**) ends with Hana Westerman turning in her badge and leaving her profession as a homicide detective in Auckland, New Zealand.

Hana returns to her roots in her rural hometown of Tata Bay. She now lives with her beloved and widowed father Eru. Her 18-year-old daughter Addison lives close by.

When Addison discovers the skeleton of a young woman in the local sand dunes, memories of a similar case some 20 years ago come flooding back into Hana's mind. Paige Meadows' body was found in the same sand dunes and a local Maori man was convicted of the crime. But Hana discovers that her wise father never believed that the Maori man was guilty. Could the long-dormant killer still be on the loose? Hana can't resist using her detective skills to pursue the investigation.

Bennett deftly weaves the culture and environment of small-town New Zealand into the plot and it proves to be one of the highlights of the book (and the series). **BETTER THE BLOOD** won the Ngaio Marsh Award For Best First Crime Novel and is also nominated for a Barry Award for Best First Mystery.

IF SOMETHING HAPPENS TO ME

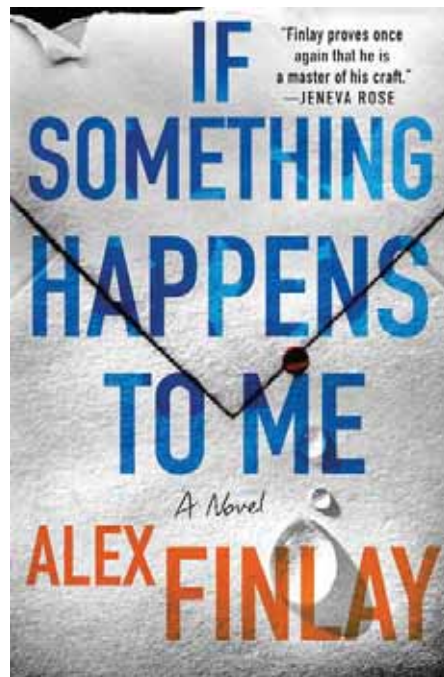
by Alex Finlay
Minotaur, \$28.00, May
Standalone
Rating: A-

High school is over and college beckons Ryan and his girlfriend Ali. They are going to different schools so they plan to spend their last evening together in each others arms at a remote lovers lane. Suddenly they are attacked. Ryan is left unconscious and Ali is kidnapped. The car and Ali are never seen again.

The cloud of suspicion that hangs over Ryan causes him such trauma that he moves away and changes his name. Five years pass and Ryan is now in law school.

Ryan's father calls with the news that the missing car has been found in a nearby lake – with the bodies of two unidentified men. Also found is Ali's purse with a cryptic envelope and note in it (in a waterproof bag). The envelope has five words written on it: "If Something Happens to Me." The note is in some sort of code which proves quite difficult for the police to decipher. But once it is decoded, Ryan knows exactly what it means and goes in search of Ali – if she's still alive.

IF SOMETHING HAPPENS TO ME is plotted in Harlan Coben-esque mode – a little over-the-top "impossible situation." This is one of those page-turners that keep you up late into the night. Alex Finlay is carving himself out a nice reputation for gripping,



suspenseful reads.

THE INSTRUMENTS OF DARKNESS

by John Connolly
Atria/Emily Bester Books, \$29.99, May
Charlie Parker #21
Rating: A-

Someone has abducted the young son of Colleen Clark and she is desperate to get him back. But when a blanket with her son's blood is found in her car, the attention of the police turn to her and she is arrested for the alleged murder of her son -- even though no body has been found. Colleen immediately hires the renowned attorney Moxie Castin to defend her. In turn, Moxie engages private investigator Charlie Parker to find the boy and/or any proof of Colleen's innocence.

Reading a John Connolly novel is like getting in the saddle on a maverick horse that just takes off to parts unknown. The journey is always interesting, always exciting, and always better than one might expect. On this particular dark journey we encounter a psychic seeking redemption, a group of fascists arming for war, and a creepy family that will do anything to appease the supernatural force that inhabits a neighboring house.

Ordinarily I don't like anything supernatural in a crime story, but I make an exception for John Connolly because he does it so well. And in this case it doesn't affect the detection and the outcome of the story.

Fans of John Connolly and of dark crime fiction will not be disappointed.

THINK TWICE

by Harlan Coben
Grand Central, \$30.00, May
Myron Bolitar #12
Rating: B+

When sports agent Myron Bolitar is approached by the FBI demanding to know the whereabouts of his client Greg Downing, Myron is justifiably puzzled. Surely the FBI knows that Greg Downing died three years ago? Myron even spoke at this funeral. But the agents insist that Downing is alive. So Myron begins to investigate. What if Greg isn't really dead? What could be the reason for such subterfuge?

Enlisting the aid of Win and other friends, Myron uncovers multiple unsolved murders and bad personal relationships.

The twisty plot is something that

we've come to expect from Harlan Coben. We should coin the word "Coben-esque."

I have to admit that I prefer Harlan's stand-alones over his series work. For me, Myron Bolitar is hard to warm up to. Nevertheless, **THINK TWICE** is still quite entertaining and a good, fast read.

THE JUDGE

by Peter Colt

Severn House, \$29.99, May

Andy Roark #5

Rating: C+

Vietnam Vet Andy Roark returned home to Boston and took a job with the Boston police department. He later quit because he wanted to be independent with no more bosses. So he becomes a private investigator.

It's 1985 and Roark is approached by a married judge who is being blackmailed over his homosexual dalliances. The blackmailers aren't trying to extort money. They want the judge to throw a trial involving a company which has polluted nearby waters with chemical waste.

Roark is hired to find the blackmailers and retrieve the revealing photos.

This is a P.I. novel written to a standard formula. If you are a fan of private eye fiction there are much better P.I. novels than this to read.

ALL THE COLORS OF THE DARK

by Chris Whitaker

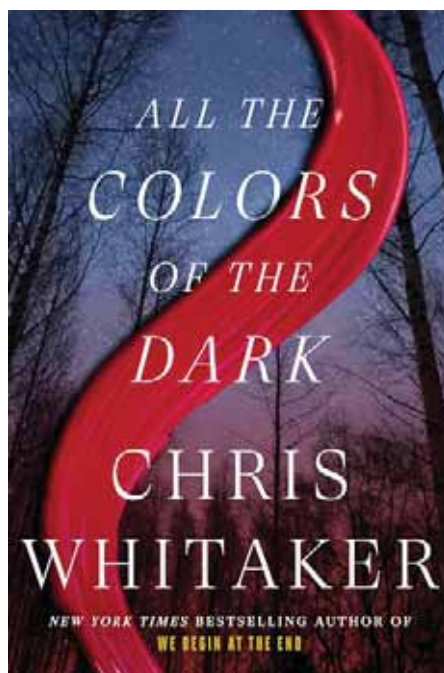
Crown, \$30.00, June

Standalone

Rating: A

1975. Montclair, Missouri. Two geeky, misfit teens find each other and a fast friendship is formed. Saint is being raised by her school-bus-driving grandmother and loves her beekeeping. Patch is a one-eyed boy being raised (poorly) by his alcoholic mother and loves stories about pirates to the point he considers himself one.

Young girls in the surrounding area are disappearing. And when town beauty Misty becomes the target of an abduction, Patch steps in, thwarts it and



winds up being kidnapped in her place. Saint finds his absence intolerable and conducts her own tireless investigation until he returns home some 13 months later.

But Patch is not the same person Saint previously knew. While in captivity, he shared a dark space with a young girl named Grace who kept him mentally and physically alive. She painted such vivid pictures in the dark with her words that he bonded with her – much like he had bonded previously with Saint. The thought that Grace was somewhere still out there alive and waiting to be rescued becomes the driving force in Patch's life.

This epic tale evolves with many twists and turns for the main characters as their lives play out over the next 25 years or so. If you think at any point you know where the story is going you will be proved wrong. The characters are so well defined they virtually jump off the page and the author's lyrical prose makes the 600+ pages fly by.

ALL THE COLORS OF THE DARK is my early pick for the best crime novel of the year.

PITCH DARK

by Paul Doiron

Minotaur, \$29.00, June

Mike Bowditch #15

Rating: A-

Maine Game Warden Investigator Mike Bowditch learns of a man named Hammond Pratt who has apparently gone missing in the woods. Pratt took off on an ATV during a rainy patch and may have gotten bogged down somewhere. He had been offering locals \$100 if they could provide him with information about a man with a young daughter who could be living somewhere in the vicinity. "What is that all about," wonders Mike?

There is such a man named Mark Redmond who has a 12-year-old daughter and who is building a cabin for bush pilot Josie Jonson in a remote area of the woods.

Josie reluctantly agrees to fly Mike to the cabin site so he can find out what is going on. Shortly upon meeting the Redmonds, Mike is drugged and wakes up to find the Redmonds have fled the scene. He is tied to a tree and it takes a while to get free. Then the chase is on – one filled with danger, suspense, and surprise.

What are the Redmonds trying to escape from? And will they reach the border with Canada before Mike can catch them?

Another good combination of a mystery and a thriller by Paul Doiron.

NOWHERE TO HIDE

by Max Luther

Canelo Action, \$16.49, 2023;

Kindle \$0.99

Alex Drayce #1

Rating: A-

Setting: England

Sarah Bennett is a prime witness in a case against the Marlowe brothers, an organized crime group, and she has been placed in the witness protection program until she can testify at an upcoming trial.

Someone leaks the location of the safe house where Sarah is staying and it is attacked. With her protectors killed, Sarah luckily escapes and is on the run.

Julie Adler, Sarah's contact with witness protection realizes that her agency has been compromised and the only way to protect Sarah is to hire outside help.

So she hires a private bodyguard – Alex Drayce, a six-foot, six-inch, 285-pound ex-policeman who used to guard members of the Royal Family. Soon Sarah and Alex are on the run

I read this well-written thriller based on Jeff Popple's recommendation. I popped \$0.99 for the Kindle edition and found it to be the bargain of the year. Boy, did I get my money's worth and then some!

ON THE RUN

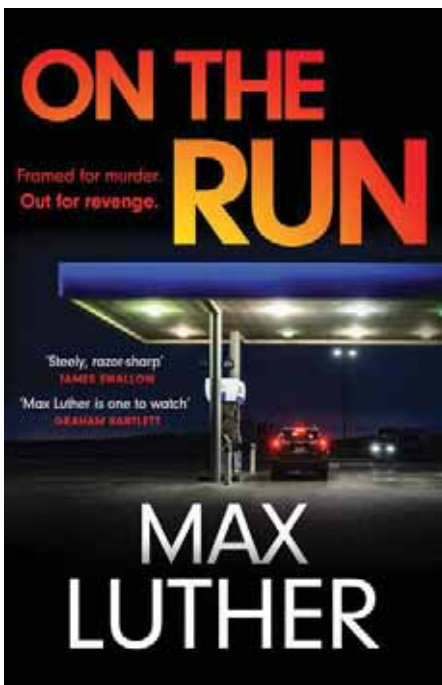
by Max Luther

Canelo Action, \$16.49, March;

Kindle \$2.99

Alex Drayce #2

Rating: A-



Settings: Los Angeles and Las Vegas
Professional bodyguard Alex Drayce gets a well-paid gig as a member of a three-man protection team guarding a corporate executive in Los Angeles. The scene where they are attacked really got my heart pumping. It was the best such action scene I can remember reading in quite a while – very realistic and well-described. He finishes that job to everyone's satisfaction.

But Alex still has a week or so before he's due back in England and he is presented with the opportunity to make some quick cash for a week's work,

aiding one Carlos Garcia in finding his daughter, who has gone missing in Las Vegas. A seemingly simple task but one that results in his being chased by a Mexican cartel and the Las Vegas police.

Another excellent thriller. I read this Max Luther book first and then read the first in the series. It doesn't matter in which order you read them as there is little, if any, continuing story line in the series. The third in the series, **WORTH KILLING FOR** will be out August 15 on Kindle for \$2.99, another great bargain.

TO DIE IN JUNE

by Alan Parks

World Noir, \$18.00, June

Harry McCoy #6

Rating: B+

Glasgow Detective Harry McCoy has a lot on his plate right now. He and his partner Wattie have been assigned to Possil Station, a precinct that his boss thinks is rife with corruption. Harry's job is to get close enough to the malefactors to expose their illegal activities.

Harry is also concerned about the rising number of homeless deaths in the

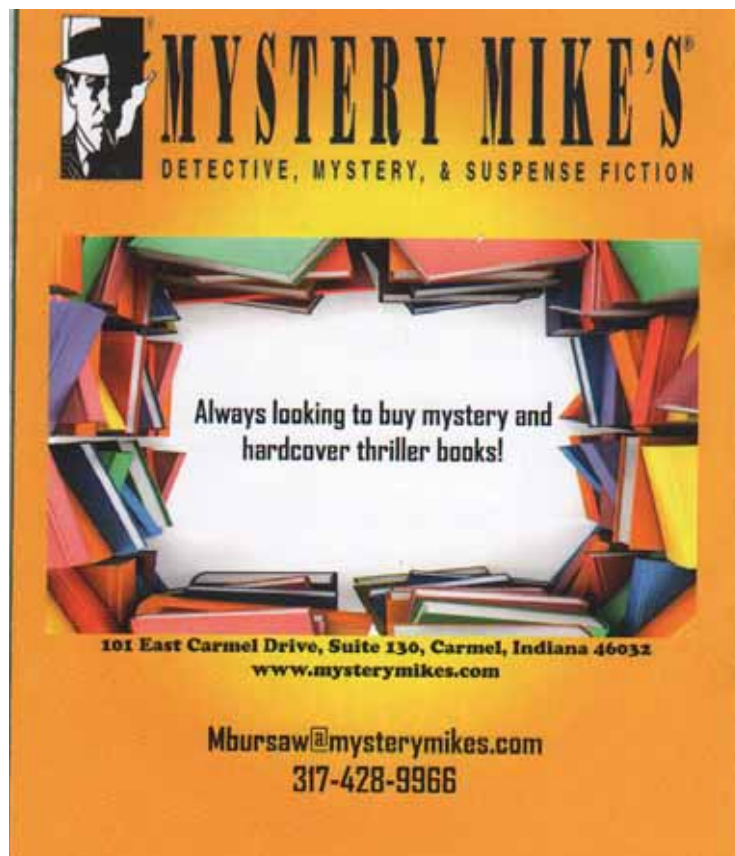
city due to poisoning – especially since his long-estranged father is among that endangered group. No one seems to care – except him.

Then there is Judith West who comes to the police station to report her son missing, but Harry can find no record of the boy ever existing. She is the wife of the head of the cultish Church of Christ's Suffering, and upon investigation, he smells that something is distinctly off.

McCoy's relationship with childhood friend Stevie Cooper, a Glasgow crime boss, is always testing McCoy's moral compass and in **TO DIE IN JUNE**, McCoy is severely tested.

I found this packed plot sometimes confusing to follow – probably my fault for not buckling down and reading the book straight through. Harry McCoy is a maverick, with a sense of fairness and justice. I like to read about such characters to see how they handle difficult situations.

Edgar Award-winning Alan Parks knows how to craft an engaging police procedural and has done so here. I will continue to read this series in the future.



HISTORICAL EMPORIUM

Robin Agnew



A DEADLY ENDEAVOR

by Jenny Adams
Crooked Lane, \$29.99, March
Debut
Rating: A

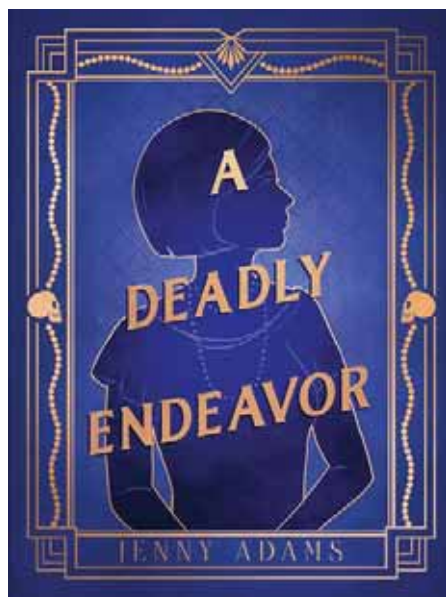
Set in 1921 Philly, this lively series debut finds its characters affected by both the war and the influenza pandemic. Heroine Edie Shippen returns home after suffering through the flu and nursing her San Francisco aunt just in time for her twin sister Frances' engagement party to Edie's former beau, Theo. She isn't even planning to attend until her maid Jenny convinces, telling her she looks too good to miss it. Edie, who seems remarkably unaware of her own charms, does agree, but for her the occasion is only saved by an encounter with her rebellious cousin, Rebecca.

Adams initiates a complex and layered tableau for the reader, and I was all in. Then she introduces us to another traumatized figure, Dr. Gideon Lawless, who suffers from a severe case of what we now know as PTSD. Hardly understood in 1921, Gideon suffers mightily from the syndrome, administering morphine as needed to get through what he thinks of as "fits." Because he can no longer deal with the living, he now works in the county morgue, where he's beginning to see a spate of cases involving murdered and mutilated young women.

The killer victimizes both the high society Shippen family (a revolutionary war Shippen was married to Benedict Arnold) and the Irish working-class Lawless family. Gideon is a widower, having lost his wife in childbirth, the one happy remnant of their marriage being his daughter Penny, who must live with her grandparents, as he is too over-

whelmed to care for her himself. As you may imagine, Gideon and Edie's paths happen to intersect as Edie, suffering as she watches her sister prepare to marry her ex, searches for a new and modern way forward in her own life. Adams has a good sense of pace and her plot and set up here are first rate. The Philly setting is refreshingly different from New York, though in the case of the Shippens, the blood is just as old and blue.

While this is a traditional mystery in many ways, in others it's the product of our traumatic contemporary world. Even through the 2000s I think there was a fixity in novels, the assumption of a settled universe, the surface of which was only temporarily ruffled by crime, wide as its consequences may be. All that certainty has evaporated, and it seems to me that the works of younger writers tend more to reflect a perilous era of flux. The sense that resolving the crime restores harmony is absent as Edie and Gideon, both strong and admirable characters, are still painfully trying to



discern their place in the universe as they work through myriad problems.

This is a terrific debut. I was captivated by both the story and the characters and raced through to the end, left with a desire to revisit both Edie and Gideon in the next installment.

A GRAVE ROBBERY

by Deanna Raybourn
Berkley, \$28, March
Veronica Speedwell #9
Rating: B+

Whether she's writing suspense or historical fiction, Deanna Raybourn is never anything less than completely entertaining. There's a magic to the storytelling in her long-running Veronica Speedwell series that suspends time for the reader. In case you don't know, Veronica is a lepidopterist (studies butterflies), and her partner, Stoker, is a gifted naturalist and expert taxidermist. There are mysteries involved, of course, but these are more adventure stories in the vein of Mrs. Pollifax or Elizabeth Peters' Amelia Peabody books, and you, dear reader, can't help but enjoy the ride.

Veronica and Stoker are relaxing at home as this outing begins – they live on the grounds of Lord Rosemorran's estate, pursuing their paying gig of cataloging his extensive collection of artifacts, art, and just plain oddities. As the book opens, a glass coffin containing a waxwork woman is delivered to their studio. It's soon followed by Lord Rosemorran's daughter, Rose, who has requested a wax figure like the "breathing" Sleeping Beauty she's seen at Madame Tussaud's. At the turn of the 20th century, Madame Tussaud's was a unique and magical place – and the clockwork gears inside the sleeping beauty seemed miraculous to young Rose.

On inspection, however, Veronica and Stoker conjecture that the waxwork is probably an anatomical "Beauty." In the absence of scarce human corpses, such figures were used to teach anatomy and the figures contained a complete set of organs. They send Rose away as they begin their examination, only to find to their horror that the wax beauty is ac-

tually a real woman who has somehow been preserved. Naturally, this upsetting discovery only spurs Veronica and Stoker to try and learn who the woman might have been.

They need reinforcements for such a search, and they call in their old cohorts Mornaday, a policeman, and J.J., an aspiring reporter. As a female reporter J.J. resents being relegated to the fashion beat and Veronica and Stoker have provided many meaty stories for her in past adventures, this book proving to be no exception.

One of the many joys of these books is the relationship between Veronica and Stoker, which is a truly loving one, ignited by the former's fearless personality. Despite being a woman in Victorian London, she goes where she wants and does what she pleases, which not surprisingly often leads to trouble. Her present investigation includes a trip on the Necropolis Railway – a Victorian notion to relieve overcrowded cemeteries. Coffins and the mourners traveled on an underground train to resting places a bit out of London proper, providing quite the atmospheric setting for this adventure.

The detective work undertaken by Veronica and Stoker is clever and intelligent and requires the couple to call upon and grill a variety of colorful supporting characters. A tale like this needs both a compelling villain and a sympathetic victim, and Raybourn provides them.

She's equally great at pacing a story and builds a relentless momentum that propels her heroic couple forward. As the two of them race ahead to a solution, Veronica thinks to herself: "We were forty centuries removed from the days when it was necessary to take up a spear to stalk one's dinner, and yet all the thrill of that atavistic hunt thrummed in my veins."

It may thrum in your veins as well, dear reader, as Veronica arms herself with a stiletto and goes forth to Victorian London to settle scores. As she would say, Excelsior!

SPECULATIONS IN SIN

by Jennifer Ashley
Berkley, \$18, March

Below Stairs #7

Rating: B+

Why haven't I heard of this series before? Though it's the seventh one, I was almost immediately taken in by this latest instalment, as well as being inspired to read the other six as soon as possible. There was only a slight amount of catching up as I encountered main character, Mrs. Kat Holloway (the "Mrs" is an honorary title), a cook for a wealthy London household in 1883. She has a 12-year-old daughter her employers aren't aware of, placed in a friend's household.

As the book opens, she discovers that her friend's husband, Sam, a bank clerk, is under suspicion for embezzling, and things quickly go downhill from there.

On an investigative mission with her employer's daughter, Kat gains access to the bank to see if she can discover anything fishy. While the two women are there a body is found in one of the bank's storage rooms and Sam is arrested for murder. Devastated, Kat rushes to her friend's side.

It doesn't help that being a cook for a large household is exhausting with only one afternoon out a week. There's even uproar in the household as the butler has disappeared. She's not sure if she can figure out how to investigate this crime or if her friend will be able to afford a lawyer.

As it turns out, Kat finds plenty of allies, including a possible romantic partner, Daniel, who has very high up connections at Scotland Yard despite, like Sam, emerging from the rough and tumble of the London Streets. Toughs are circling Kat, Sam's wife, to offer "help" and Daniel is forced to set up protection for both Joanna and Kat. It seems obvious to Kat that Sam is being set up by the bank to take the fall for both crimes, tying everything with a neat bow that might double as a hangman's noose.

This is a really strong read for several reasons. I had a hard time putting it down because Ashley is so excellent with pacing, providing red herrings and plot twists at frequent intervals. The characters and set up are also really well done. Mrs. Holloway is an interesting

woman with many selves – an employee, a mother who misses her daughter, a friend, and an investigator. It's unusual for an historical mystery to focus on the servants in the house but it's certainly to the book's advantage. It adds texture to the narrative and it's interesting to read about the nuts and bolts functioning of a historical household.

The relationships within the book are also interesting and layered, the relationship between Mrs. Holloway and the butler being just one example, but all the relationships have the true to life quality of not being entirely good or bad. We're all in with Kat as she figures out the solution to the crime and join her in celebrating her ingenuity. She's earned it! And so has author Ashley with this incredibly fun read.

THE RUMOR GAME

by Thomas Mullen
Minotaur Books, \$27, February
Rating: B-

I loved the premise of this novel, and thought the main characters were interestingly delineated, but somehow for me those elements never coalesced into a truly satisfying read.

It's set during WWII and reporter Anne Lemire writes "The Rumor Clinic," an offshoot of the wartime effort Office of Wartime Information (OWI), working to debunk the many destructive rumors that are floating around. We follow Anne in Boston as she debunks the rumor that women who are serving in the military are getting pregnant at an alarming rate and disposing of the pregnancies. There are other whoppers such as the one that claimed women with a perm couldn't work in a factory (they could).

Personally she is more focused on the recent beat down of her teenage brother by some older anti-semitic, probably Irish, Bostonites, part of an unfortunate trend. Anne's family is Jewish, and anti-semitism was never confined to Germany. America had a huge swath of anti-semitism, and the working class Irish neighborhoods of Boston were one of the swaths. Some of it was tied to isolationism and the reluctance some felt

about getting involved in another world war, but as this book opens, Pearl Harbor has already happened and the U.S. is already all in. When you read about WWII from a distant historical point of view, it's easy to think that the country was completely unified in the war effort, but as Mullen makes clear, this was not the case.

The other central character is FBI Special Agent Devon Mulvey, a free-wheeling ladies man who loves his nice clothes, and seems, from the point of view of his more hardscrabble factory working brothers and cousins, to skate through life. Of course, no one manages that, and Devon is no exception, as he chases down some missing rifles from a munitions plant, as well as looking into the mysterious death of one of the workers. His path leads him to some mob connections and brings him into Anne's orbit.

Despite the fact that he's Catholic and she's Jewish, the two of them are massively attracted, and their romance adds a complex layer to the story. They want to trust each other, yet neither can manage to be completely open. With the help of a reporter from a bigger paper,

Anne follows the story of the beating of the Jewish boys while Devon's investigation takes him in search of the source of the hate literature being distributed throughout Boston. It's sad that both the disinformation and racism seem so very topical.

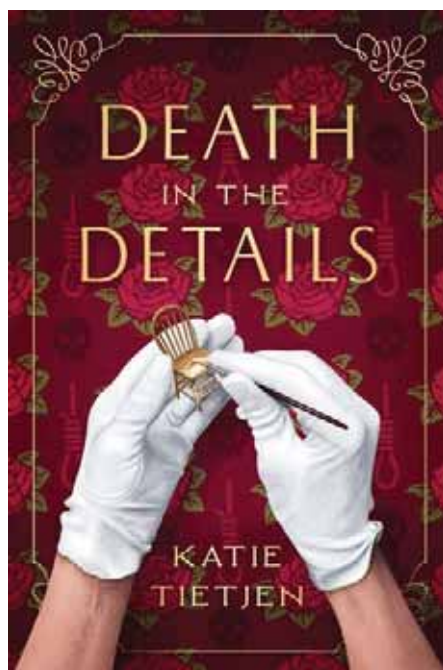
This is a well plotted book with well thought out characters, and a compelling depiction of the class and racial divisions that can fracture a wartime effort. It's also a good portrait of the wartime conditions of working class Boston where Anne and her mother share a bed in a small, hot apartment, gas and sugar are rationed, and everyone works different shifts, passing one another at the breakfast table or on the way to bed. Devon's visits to his rowdy Irish family find him torn, as he loves them, but is offended by many of the things they are loudest about, like isolationism and anti-Semitism.

Despite Mullen's skill, however, I never found myself completely engaged with either the story or the characters.

I usually enjoy a feisty lady heroine, but in this case I preferred the slicker Devon, conflicted at work and at home. The ending was just plain sad, and, as we know from our many years of perspective, only too realistic. Courtesy of the war, death is coming soon to every family Mullen is writing about. This was a worthy read if not exactly an enjoyable one.

DEATH IN THE DETAILS

By Katie Tietjen
Crooked Lane, \$29, April
Debut
Rating: A-



This ingenious historical novel begins in post WWII Vermont, where Maple Bishop is enduring a tidal wave of loss – she's lost her brother, her mother and her husband, and, as the insurance company informs her in the opening chapter, most of her money. She has \$12 to her name, no way to pay her mortgage and, since they donated its tires to the war effort, a car she can neither drive nor sell.

What keeps her (and the book) going is her obsession with building dollhouses. She can't stop herself, and her garage workshop is full of the things, complete with idealized dolls living idealized doll lives. When she goes into the hardware store to purchase supplies, the owner,

sensing a promotional opportunity, offers her a corner to set up shop, in order to bring in customers and spice up his window display.

She agrees and wheelbarrows her things over the next day. Business starts with a bang when a couple wants to commission a house made to look like a miniature version of the wife's childhood home. Maple agrees, even as she notes the bruises on the wife's arm and the bullying manner of the husband. When she goes to deliver it a few days later she finds the man hanging by his neck in the barn and the wife nowhere to be found. Shaken, she calls the police, but even as she's waiting to be questioned her mind is already troubled by details that don't quite add up.

While Maple's dollhouses might keep her occupied, they don't bring her much joy. Weirdly, where she does find her bliss is in the small-scale re-construction of the crime scene she witnessed. When she shows her "nutshell" creation to the sheriff, however, he says the case is closed and the death has been conclusively ruled an accident. His young deputy offers a more sympathetic ear, however, and the two of them begin to investigate together.

Unfortunately there's not too many people who will give credence to a dollhouse lady and a rookie deputy, but Maple's single minded determination to "find what's big in what's small" won't let her give in. She's a wonderful character who has discovered a desperately needed purpose despite all her losses. I also liked the relationship between her and the deputy, who has his own family wartime sorrows to deal with.

It's a brilliant concept for a mystery. Maple is based on the real Frances Glessner Lee, who did in fact create crime scene dollhouses and is considered the mother of crime scene investigation. I liked the fierce energy of this book and its protagonist, who manages to reclaim a glimpse of joy through the shadows of her loss by the end of the book. **DEATH IN THE DETAILS** is a unique combination of a craft-based cozy and a police novel, and the result is a truly wonderful debut.

Lookin' For A Few Good Books

Larry Gandle



THE SILVER BONE

by Andrey Kurkov
HarperVia, \$28.00

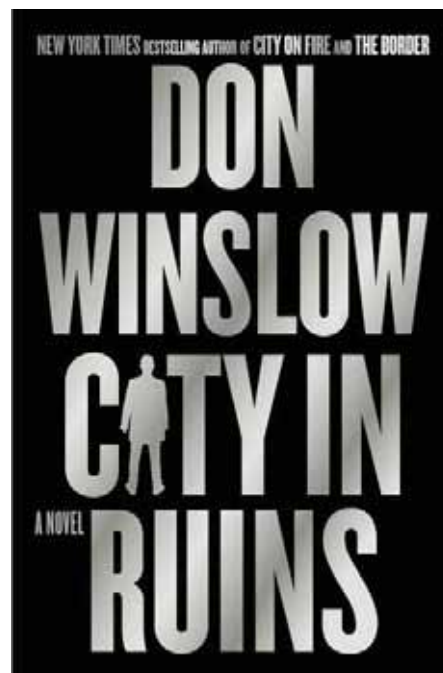
Rating: B

In Kyiv, 1919, the war has ended and various factions are fighting for control of the Ukraine. Samson Kolec-hko is an engineering student. His life changes at the very beginning of the book when a Red Army patrol rides by him and his father instantly killing his father by splitting his skull and slicing off the ear of Samson. (The ear is kept by Samson and he soon discovers that he can still hear from it- a bit of magical realism). Two members of the army are sequestered in his home potentially threatening his life. When Samson complains to the police, they recruit him into their service as an investigator. He soon finds himself investigating a double murder.

The strength of this book is the depiction of Kyiv at the tumultuous time when the ruling body keeps changing. Life is unsettled and dangerous. The characters are engaging. The book is longlisted for the prestigious International Booker Award for a novel translated into English. As a crime fiction reader, I would say the book is nothing special. There are many historical mysteries that are just as good and often better. I have a feeling politics played a role as to the selection of this book on the International Booker list as it takes place in the Ukraine and can be contrasted with the unrest in the country during the war today. Recommended.

George's Comment: I whole-heartedly agree. **THE SILVER BONE** is a

ho-hum mystery. I am surprised that it got a starred review in Publishers Weekly and was an Amazon Editors' Pick.]



CITY IN RUINS

by Don Winslow
Morrow, \$32.00

Danny Ryan #3

Rating: A-

This is the final book in the Danny Ryan Trilogy and, apparently, the last book Don Winslow will write. Danny Ryan, the Irish gangster from Rhode Island is now a mogul in the Las Vegas hotel empire. There are people from his past that want to take him down. When he wants to buy an old hotel on prime real estate property on the strip to raze it and build an incredibly luxurious hotel, nefarious forces will work

against him driving him to the brink and causing death and destruction in its wake.

Unlike **CITY OF DREAMS**, the second book in the trilogy, there is a definite sense of an ending. The plot moves along at a brisk pace filled with the characters we know so well from the previous two books. The plot is supposed to reflect the plot of **THE AENIUS**. However, on comparing the two stories, this one is a bit of a stretch to reflect the original. The ending is quite satisfying but totally unrealistic. Overall, an entertaining work on its own but as a trilogy it is brilliantly done. Highly recommended.

THE SECRET HOURS

by Mick Herron
Soho, \$27.95

Rating: DNF

The Monochrome Inquiry is launched by a British Prime Minister to examine any misdeeds of the MI5 secret service. Two civil servants, Malcolm Kyle and Griselda Fleet are assigned to work the Monochrome Inquiry. They come up with nothing and just as the inquiry is about to be shut down, Kyle is delivered a file that reveals misdeeds in Berlin during the year 1994. It turns out to be a major coverup.

An exciting first chapter gives way to the usual Mick Herron character-driven, excessively slow, dull, dreary spy novel.

This is the last book I will ever read by this author. He is right up there with Sara Paretsky, another very popular writer who also writes such

slow, dismally overwritten books. The dialogue, though well done and realistic is, overall, so banal -- so ordinary, that the pacing of the book becomes glacial. It is simply too much work to get through a Mick Herron book.

There are so many characters, the reader must actively concentrate in an attempt to remember them. Remember, George actually wrote a cover article on Mick Herron in which he felt the need to describe each character in the Slough House series just so the reader can recall who they are. Should that really be necessary?

I made it through forty percent of this book then gave up. I understand the ending got exciting and so it is nominated for the Barry Award for Best Thriller. If it wins, I will resign from the Barry Award Thriller Committee as apparently, I don't know what a thriller is. At the very least a book on the Barry Thriller shortlist should be an exciting book the reader cannot wait to get back to. This one I dreaded picking up. Bottom line -- Mick Herron is not for everyone!

[George's Comment: Larry, Larry, Larry. I couldn't disagree more with your review. In my review of **THE SECRET HOURS** in *DP* Issue #100, I rated it an **A** and stated the following opinions: "All of Mick's books start slow for me and gradually build with surprising revelations until I reach my inevitable "Wow" exclamation as I turn the last page. His witty and sarcastic prose and dialogue continue to delight me at every turn. He is a master in his prime." As to your resigning from the Barry Thriller Nominating Committee, I won't accept your resignation if this great book wins.]

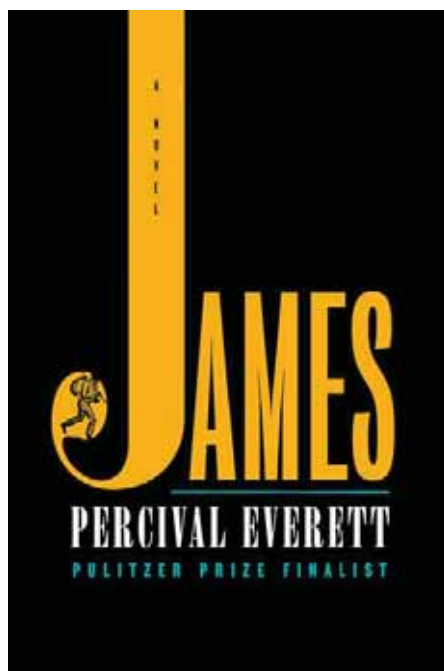
JAMES

by Percival Everett

Doubleday, \$28.00

Rating: A

Jim, the slave from **HUCKLEBERRY FINN**, is reimagined in this new novel. In reading the original source



from Mark Twain prior to reading *James*, makes the contrasting points of view quite brilliant. Jim discovers that he is about to be sold to a man in New Orleans. He decides to run in an effort to possibly see his wife and daughter again. He flees to Jackson Island where he meets up with Huck. They proceed down the Mississippi and eventually encounter the two scoundrels known as the Duke and the King. This is all reflected in the Mark Twain classic. However, about one third into the book, the plot takes a new twist. The Duke and King become much crueler characters. There is little humor and the story becomes darker. Improbable coincidences, similar to the Twain work, set up the conclusion which is ultimately quite satisfying.

Percival Everett has written another superb novel. As is reminiscent of his work, the blacks act dumb but are actually much smarter than the white race. For example, in *JAMES*, there is slave talk which makes the blacks sound uneducated and of inferior intelligence. However, when they are alone they are quite erudite with their speech. It is quite humorous. In his novel, *THE TREES*, two black detectives in Mississippi have to deal with some incredibly stupid white

residents in order to solve the crime. In *ERASURE*, a struggling black midlist author writes a novel which is a parody of the black experience. He never expects to get it published but it is submitted to a publisher and goes on to become a huge success as the white public consider it profound and authentic. In all three books, the effect is quite comic.

The story is most effective when it directly follows the original novel playing out scenes from Jim's viewpoint. The characters the reader has grown to love in Tom Sawyer and reappearing in *Huckleberry Finn* take on a whole different dimension when looked at from the eyes of a slave. They are much more ominous and untrustworthy. It is interesting that *Huckleberry Finn* was written in 1885 but takes place "forty to fifty years" before that. So, the Civil War was in the distant future but in *JAMES* it is occurring at the end of the novel. This is a strange transposition of time for the sake of the plot. Nonetheless, this is a superb novel by one of my favorite authors.

BLACK WOLF

by Juan Gomez-Jurado

Minotaur, \$28.00

Antonia Scott #2



Rating: B+

Antonia Scott has a unique talent. She can see things in crime scenes that others simply could not. She is part of the Red Queen division that was created in an effort to solve difficult crimes. Antonia, with Jon Gutierrez, her co-investigator and protector, are called down to the Cosa Del Sol in southern Spain from Madrid to find a missing woman. The Russian Mafia runs that part of the country and one of their important members is brutally killed while his pregnant wife, Lola, manages to escape her killers in a shopping mall. Antonia is sent there to find Lola before her assassins get to her. Also, on Lola's trail is a contract killer known as The Black Wolf. Will Antonia and Jon get to Lola first? Lives depend on it.

This is the second book of the Red Queen trilogy. So, after the neatly tied up ending of this book, an event occurs that reminds us there is more to come. The character of Antonia is unique while others are stock figures. The plot moves with some speed and the story is rarely dull. Therefore, the pages do turn relatively quickly. As a thriller, it works, but, reality must often be suspended with the multiple silly situations. The book is entertaining but nothing too weighty. Perfect for the plane or the beach.

A CALAMITY OF SOULS

by David Baldacci

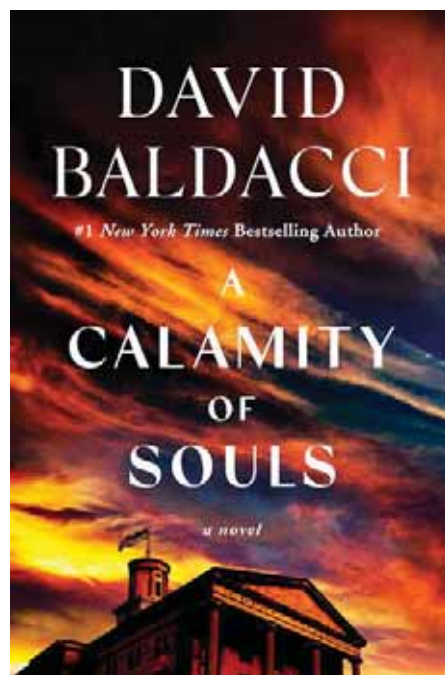
Grand Central, \$30.00

Rating: B+

In Virginia, 1968, an elderly white couple is found viciously stabbed and their black handyman, Jerome Robinson, is in the room with them when the police arrive. He is immediately arrested and charged with murder. Yet, he doesn't have a drop of blood on him. Jack Lee, a local white lawyer decides to fight against racism and defend Jerome. He is not an experienced trial lawyer and this case is starting to

get national attention. Desiree DuBose is a black lawyer from Chicago who takes on these cases all over the country in an effort to provide justice to the black people in the South. Jack and Desiree join together and hope to accomplish the near impossible-get Jerome a fair trial in the heart of Virginia.

I do not typically read or review David Baldacci as he is, in a sense, 'critic proof'. Yet this book has been getting a lot of buzz for its topical story and is said to be one of the best books he has ever written. It is a solid legal thriller. The author makes a point of fully developing his major characters and some of the more minor ones. This does not prevent him from writing a whole host of stereotypical bigots in the town. The story is slow going at times as the author provides backstory to these characters. The plot does not take off until the trial begins in the last third of the book. Given the fact that the author is an attorney, there is a sense of realism in the courtroom. A couple of twists occur in the end which are clever. Overall, it is an entertaining read that does get preachy at times. It is recommended for the plane or the pool as I assume most of David Baldacci's novels are.



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 issue closest to the publication date.

ORDINARY BEAR,

C. B. Bernard

MURDER TOWN,

Shelley Burr

THE BLIND DEVOTION OF

IMOGENE, David Putnam

GUIDE ME HOME,

Attica Locke

BLOOD RUBIES,

Mailan Doqang

BOYSTOWN,

John Shannon

A NEST OF VIPERS,

Harini Nagendra

Already read for the next two issues--

NO SAFE PLACE,

Michael Ledwidge

MAY THE WOLF DIE,

Elizabeth Heider

NOBODY'S HERO, M. W. Craven**THE WRONG HANDS,**

Mark Billingham

SHADES OF MERCY,

Bruce Borgos

STORM CHILD,

Michael Robotham

STOP THEM DEAD,

Peter James

THE HOUSE ON GRAVEYARD

LANE, Martin Edwards

ASHES NEVER LIE,

Lee Goldberg

BREAK EVERY RULE,

Brian Freeman

THE SEVENTH FLOOR,

David McCloskey

GATHERING MIST,

Margaret Mizushima

AGAINST THE GRAIN,

Peter Lovesey

Novels of Sensation and Other Stuff

Hank Wagner



I don't like to start these pieces on a somber note, but I would be remiss if I did not mention the passing of three authors who have provided me with many hours of thrills and chills. They worked primarily in the horror genre, but to me, horror is just another label for thriller, so *Deadly Pleasures* readers may enjoy them as well.

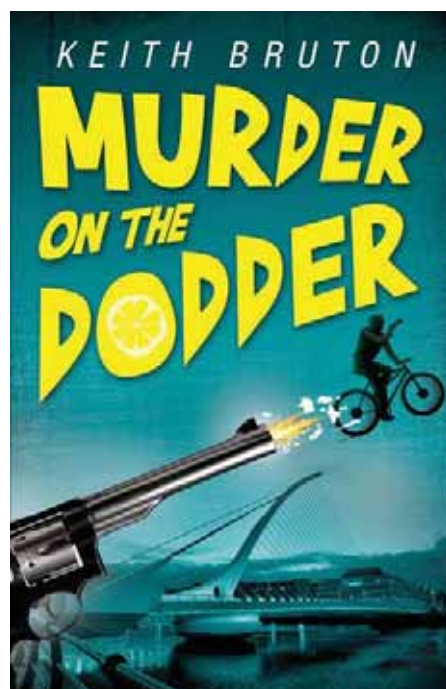
The first is Weston Ochse, who left us late last year, on November 18th, at the age of 58. He won the Bram Stoker Award for Best First Novel right out of the gate (for *SCARECROW GODS*), and was nominated for the Pushcart Prize for his short fiction. He also wrote a barn burner of a horror/action thriller called *SEAL TEAM 666* (2012). Author Kevin Anderson blurbed it on the front cover, saying "*SEAL TEAM 666* is like the X-Files written by Tom Clancy."

The second is James A. Moore, who passed on March 27, 2024, also at the age of 58. He was a productive, creative, and solid writer's writer who loved his work. Although closely identified with horror, his books defied genre, in that you'd find smatterings of all genres in every book. My favorites of his novels were the dark fantasy *UNDER THE OVERTREE* (Meisha Merlin, 2000) and his horror western, *BOOMTOWN* (Twisted Publishing, 2019).

And finally, something I heard about only hours ago as I write this, is the passing of the talented and prolific Ray Garton, 61, who published one of the finest horror novels it has been my pleasure to read, *LIVE GIRLS*, way, way back in 1987. A cult classic that posited vampire prostitutes working the pre-Disneyfied Times Square area,

it's a book that's guaranteed to raise goosebumps, even upon re-reading.

Reflecting on the untimely deaths of these talents, one realizes how important certain writers can become to you, making it important to appreciate them and the work they do while they are still with us.



Hitman Patrick Callen furiously bicycles back and forth across Dublin in an effort to save his kidnapped mentor's life in *MURDER ON THE DODDER* (Brash Books, March 2024, 236 pages, \$18.99), the much anticipated (at least for this reader) sequel to Keith Bruton's most excellent debut, 2022's *THE LEMON MAN*. It's a great follow-up, as Bruton once again gives us a peek into the day-to-day existence of his obsessive, compulsive, list making hit man, this time out also delving into the support system that bolsters

his unique way of making a living. Its quick pacing and short length bring back the days when I was discovering that Fawcett Gold Medal had published myriad novels by authors besides the legendary John D. MacDonald (to be pronounced in the same awed, hushed tones the cast of *Blazing Saddles* used to utter "Randolph Scott.")

Rating: A-

Rio Youers's *THE BANG BANG SISTERS* (Morrow, July 2024, 400 pages, \$32.00) tells the tale of two natural sisters, and a friend who rises to that level through their shared history, who supplement their income as musicians by accepting side gigs as assassins who take out the dregs of society for a fee. This novel describes a hit that goes wildly wrong, as the trio is lured into a situation few could reasonably hope to survive. They find themselves pitted against each other, for revenge, and for the entertainment of their captors, with the lives of their loved ones at stake. It's a fast, clever, violent, but often humorous update of Richard Connell's "The Most Dangerous Game," but with Quentin Tarantino at the helm.

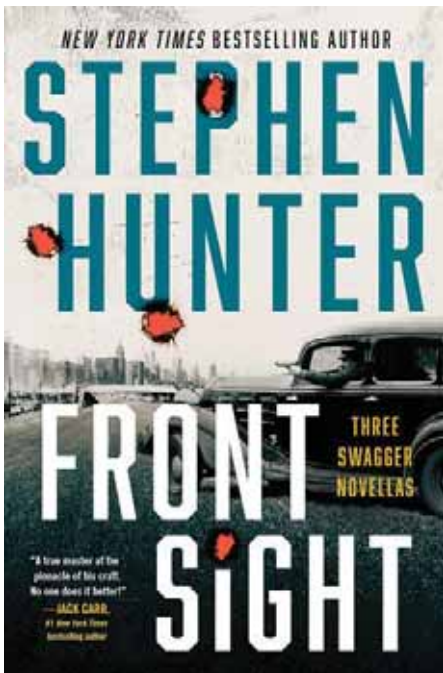
Rating: B+

If you like Youers' work in *THE BANG BANG SISTERS*, you might also like 2022's *NO SECOND CHANCES*, or *LOLA ON FIRE*, from 2021. He also has done work in comics, adapting Stephen and Owen King's *SLEEPING BEAUTIES*, a ten-issue updating of the classic fairy tale, *Sleeping Beauty*, and, as I realized just now, the senior King's epic *THE STAND*. Youers does a great job of pairing down the novel to its essential beats, deliv-

ering a leaner, and thus faster paced, adaptation. Alison Sampson does a stellar job of illustrating same.

Rating: Sleeping Beauty, the Novel: B

Rating: Sleeping Beauty, the Comic: B+



FRONT SIGHT, by the esteemed Stephen Hunter, is a collection of three novellas featuring three members of the legendary Swagger clan, those being, in reverse order, Marine sniper Bob Lee, a.k.a. Bob the Nailer (hero of Hunter's iconic thriller **POINT BLANK**), his father Earl, and his grandfather, Charles. Charles hunts for Baby Face Nelson in the Chicago stockyards in "City of Meat," circa 1934; Earl takes on the alias of modern gunslinger Johnny Tuesday, in the novella of the same name, circa 1945; and Bob Lee takes on a serial killer (before they were even *called* serial killers) in a prequel to **POINT BLANK** in "Five Dolls for the Gut Hook," circa 1978. Hunter junkies like me will revel in the three novellas, which again make the argument that great detectives/hunters/gunmen are born, not made. As to those coming to the Swagger saga for the first time, well, I envy you.

Rating: A-

A quick mention of John Grisham's **THE EXCHANGE** (Doubleday, October 2023, 352 pages, \$29.95), a direct sequel to **THE FIRM**, which picks up on the story of Mitch and Abby Deere some fifteen years after the close of that classic legal thriller. For me, it was good Grisham, but not great Grisham; my expectations were (perhaps unreasonably) high, but they were not met. Anyone else have the same reaction?

Rating: B

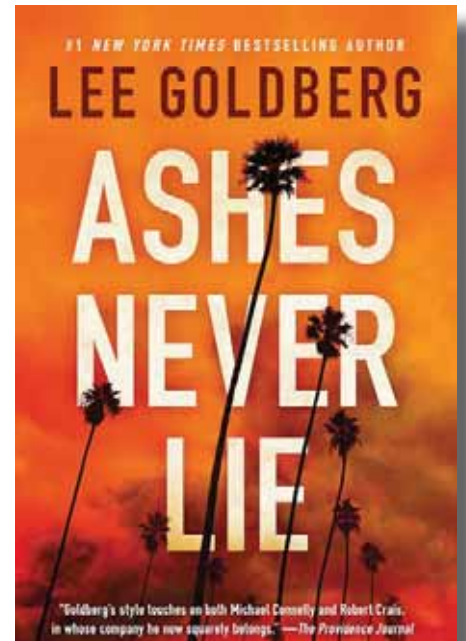
Lee Goldberg's **DREAM TOWN** (Thomas & Mercer, January 2024, 300 pages, \$28.99) is the fifth novel to feature LASD Detective Eve Ronin, whose name tells you most everything you need to know about the character. As the series has progressed, the books have become increasingly "Meta," appropriate since many members of the public believe Eve owes a big part of her career to a bust that went viral on social media. Now, Eve finds herself working cases while acting as a consultant to a television show based on her exploits, where the pilot episode recreates the very events that propelled her to internet fame. She's also called on to investigate a crime involving a Kardashian type family, further muddying the waters between reality, reality shows, and fiction, enabling Goldberg to overtly offer sly, knowing commentary on the state of today's media, even as he spins an engaging and exciting police procedural.

Eve and her partner will also be appearing in the second novel in Goldberg's Sharpe & Walker series this Fall in **ASHES NEVER LIE** (Thomas & Mercer, September 2024, 288 pages, \$28.99), wherein they team with arson investigators Walter Sharpe and Andrew Walker to investigate a seeming suicide followed by an apparent house fire. The circumstances of the case causes alarm bells to ring in all their heads, and they embark on an investigation which uncovers larger conspiracies. Goldberg is especially good at portraying the dynamics of partner-

ships in each of his books, and **ASHES NEVER LIE** is no exception, as he delivers insights into all the relationships involved, exploring the dynamics of each duo even as he explores a new professional pairing of Ronin and Walker.

Rating: DREAM TOWN B+

Rating: ASHES NEVER LIE: B+



I'm more than happy to recommend the eco-thriller **AMONG THE LIVING** (Titan Books, February 2024, 271 pages, \$16.99). Tim Lebbon's latest has a little bit of everything: ancient evil, crypts, caves, a race against time, gunplay, chases, pseudo zombies, friends, allies, enemies, climate change, eco terrorism, tested loyalties, and sentient fungi. I could add to the list, but it occurs to me that this terrific novel is an excellent homage to and update of John Campbell's "Who Goes There," in that the antagonists are facing off against a relentless menace, seeking to survive and thrive, that can take myriad shapes, turning all living creatures into potential adversaries. It's spellbinding, and makes hours go by like minutes. It's a perfect introduction to Lebbon's work; seek out 2020's **EDEN** and 2015's **THE SILENCE** if you're interested in sampling his backlist.

Rating: B+

Down Under Crime



Jeff Popple Reviews

SANCTUARY

by Garry Disher

Text, \$A34.99

Rating: A

Garry Disher is a veteran of the Australian crime fiction scene. I always enjoy his books and the quality of his yearly offerings has rarely faltered over the past twenty five years, or more. Best known for his Wyatt, Hal Challis and, more recently, the Paul 'Hirsch' Hirschhausen series, Disher heads off in new direction with **SANCTUARY**.

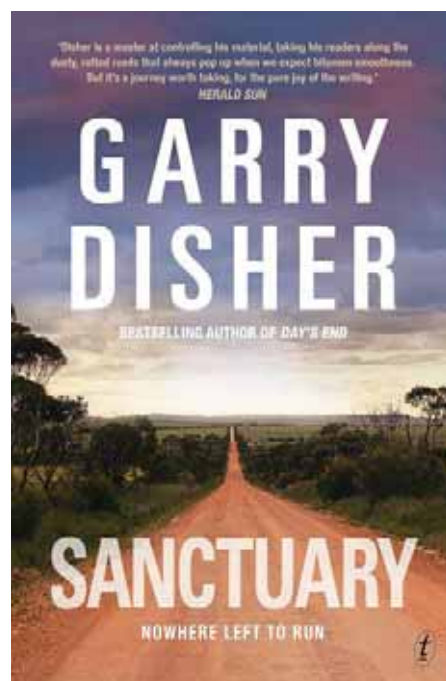
The woman now known as Grace is a thief, a good one. She was taught by experts, and she has been practising since she was a kid. She specialises in small, high-value items, such as stamps and watches, and she knows her Jaeger-Le-Coultres from her Patek Philippes. It is a solitary, watchful life, but it is one that she has become used to. When a job goes wrong in Brisbane, and she encounters a dangerous old associate with a grudge, Grace hits the road looking for new opportunities. While scouting out jobs in the Adelaide Hills she walks into Erin Mandel's rural antiques shop and sees a chance for something different. A normal life. But Erin also has her secrets, and she too is on the run from someone, and that person is getting closer. Meanwhile, rummaging around in the background is an old local cop who is looking for one last arrest before he retires.

This is a finely constructed novel that unfolds with precision and care as the tension mounts and the various main characters move towards the bloody climax. There is not a lot of action in the opening sections, but Disher expertly

keeps the reader interested, and on edge. The characters are first rate and the story darts down some unforeseen paths and introduces some good surprises. The alternating points of view between Erin, Grace, and a selection of bad guys, keeps the suspense high and the ending is unexpected and exciting.

Some well-choreographed acts of thievery help propel the plot along, and mixed in with the story are the usual interesting asides. In addition to information on how to fake antiques and smuggle guns, there are the usual evocative descriptions of everyday life in a small rural town that we have come to expect from Disher.

In all, **SANCTUARY** is a highly enjoyable read and one of my favourite books of the year so far.



THE CALL

by Gavin Strawhan

Allen & Unwin, \$A32.99

Rating: A-

Gavin Strawhan joins the growing list of outstanding New Zealand crime writers with his debut novel, **THE CALL**.

After surviving a brutal attack, Auckland detective DS Honey Chambers returns to her hometown of Waitutū on a remote part of the New Zealand coastline to care for her mother. Waitutū holds some unpleasant memories for Honey, especially around her sister's suicide, but it does give her the time to recover. Her troubles from Auckland, however, follow her home, and she finds herself in a deadly battle with a dangerous gang and her own past.

This is a very impressive debut. Strawhan ably swings the action between the present and the events leading up to Honey's attack, and skilfully shifts the perspective between the various participants, including Kloe the drug addicted gang informant at the centre of the book.

The characters are well developed and interesting, and the location of Waitutū is vividly described and credible. There is plenty of tension throughout, and the book builds to an exciting and bloody climax that will have you tearing through the final fifty pages or so. There is also a good, tough, cynical coda.

Fleshing out the book are sharp-eyed observations on New Zealand society, and timely reflections on policing, crime, mental health issues and ageing.

A first class crime novel that marks Strawhan as an author to look out for.

TIPPING POINT

by Dinuka McKenzie

Harper Collins, \$A32.99

Rating: A-

Dinuka McKenzie is developing into a crime writer of real substance. Her debut novel, **THE TORRENT**, was one of the best Australian crime debuts of 2022, and her follow-up book, **TAKEN** (2023), was just as good. Now she has further solidified her position as a leading figure on the Australian crime writing scene with **TIPPING POINT**.

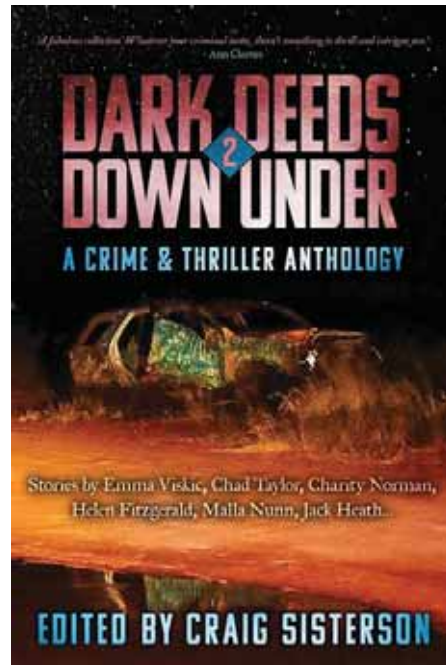
TIPPING POINT returns us to the rural town of Esserton in northern New South Wales, and local police detective Kate Miles. It is only weeks from Christmas in the sweltering heat of summer, and Kate's estranged brother, Luke Grayling, returns home to Esserton to farewell a childhood friend, Ant Reed, who committed suicide. Within days of the funeral, another young man, Marcus Rowntree, is found shot dead in the back paddock of his property.

Almost twenty years ago, Luke, Ant and Marcus were best mates in high school, and now two of the three friends are dead. When Luke is identified as a person of interest in Marcus's death, Kate once again finds herself in the middle of a media storm, sidelined from the case and battling accusations of conflict of interest. As press attention deepens, and uncomfortable truths about Luke's personal life and past events come to light, Kate is forced to balance loyalty to the police force with the bonds of friendship and blood.

This is a very well written and compelling story that combines the best parts of a detective novel with the tense drama of a thriller. The opening sections quickly and effectively set the scene, and Dinuka wastes little time in getting the main thrust of the story underway. The plotting is interesting and credible, and there are enough unexpected developments to keep it interesting. As the story progresses there is good suspense, and some nicely timed flashes of violence keep the tension high and the blood pounding. The conclusion is also suitably tense and surprising, and there is a good coda that suggests interesting new directions for the series.

As with the earlier books, the characters are well developed and interesting, and the vivid descriptions of

semi-rural Australia and the inhabitants of the small fictional Northern Rivers town of Esserton add to the pleasure. In all, another strong novel by Dinuka..



DARK DEEDS DOWN UNDER 2

Edited by Craig Susteron
Clan Destine Press, \$A36.95

Rating: A

Australian and New Zealand crime fiction, also known as Southern Cross Crime, is going through something of a golden period at the moment.

Australian authors, such as Chris Hammer, Jane Harper and Michael Robotham, are now prominent figures on the international crime fiction scene, and increasingly New Zealand authors, including Vanda Symons, Michael Bennett and Anthony McCarten, are beginning to receive the attention that they richly deserve.

Craig Susteron has been a strong advocate for Australian and New Zealand crime fiction for several years now. His **SOUTHERN CROSS CRIME** is the 'go to' book for anyone interested in down under crime fiction, and the first volume of his **DARK DEEDS DOWN UNDER** series showcased a good selection of short crime writing by Australian and New Zealand authors. Now with **DARK DEEDS DOWN UNDER 2** he provides an equally enjoyable second volume.

DARK DEEDS DOWN UNDER 2 contains the same smorgasbord of Aussie and Kiwi writers as the first volume, with a good mix of old stories from legendary authors, such as Peter Corris, new fiction from established stars, including Emma Viskic and Jack Heath, and some fresh new voices.

All the stories hit the mark, but a few stood out for me. Natalie Conyer is an author whose output has been frustratingly limited. Her African based police novel from 2020, **PRESENT TENSE**, was outstanding, and here she provides a gritty tale about a young Sydney policewoman who learns a tough lesson about policing. New Zealander Charity Norman contributes a clever story about a seaside confession, and Robert Gott's 'Spike', is a poignant teenage prequel to his popular Will Power series. A highlight is Emma Viskic's 'Web Design', which started life as a deleted scene from her first novel, **RESURRECTION BAY**, but has been reworked here into a memorable, short, sharp story. Finally, podcaster and author Dani Vee contributes one of the book's strongest entries with her dark debut crime story about a mother who would do anything to save her children.

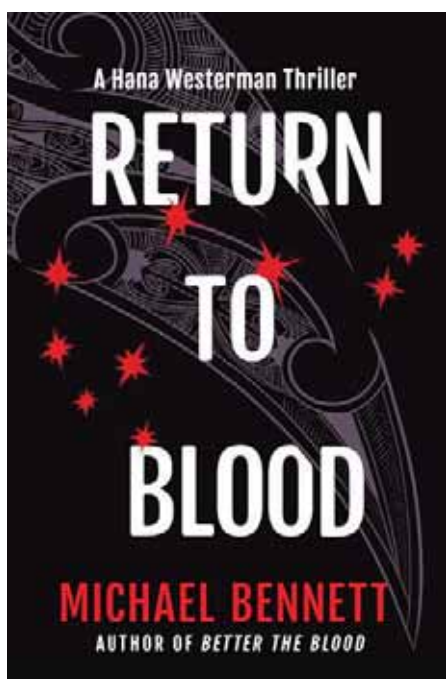
It is also good to see 'classic' stories from Peter Corris, Jean Bedford and Dorothy Porter reproduced here. Finally, the concluding story in the book is by legendary New Zealand playwright and novelist Renée, who passed away in December 2023.

In all, a terrific collection that provides a good introduction to the breadth and quality of crime writing being produced by Australian and New Zealand writers.

George's Take: I've become quite a fan of "Down Under" fiction of late so I was excited to sample some stories by authors previously unknown to me. However, I found myself most enjoying the short fiction of past favorites such as Peter Corris, Emma Viskic and Natalie Conyer. **Rating: A-**

RETURN TO BLOOD

by Michael Bennett
Simon & Schuster, \$34.99



Rating: A

Michael Bennett's **BETTER THE BLOOD** was one of my favourite crime debuts of last year. Featuring Auckland detective Hana Westerman, it was a richly described crime novel that encompassed the tropes of a serial killer thriller and the legacy of New Zealand's colonial past.

In Bennett's second novel, **RETURN TO BLOOD**, Hana has left Auckland and her career as a detective and has settled for a quieter life in a small coastal town. Her hopes of a more peaceful existence are shattered, however, when a skeleton is discovered in the dunes near her house. The remains are those of a young Māori woman who went missing five years before. Hana has a connection to the case and to another similar death. Twenty years ago, a schoolfriend of hers was found buried in the exact same spot. Her killer died in prison, but did the police get the wrong man? And if he was innocent, then why did he plead guilty? No longer part of the Criminal Investigation Branch, Hana turns to her former colleagues for assistance, but soon realises that she will have to find the answers that she needs on her own.

RETURN TO BLOOD is a great second novel by Bennett. The plotting is clever, and the characters are fully fleshed out and interesting. The pacing is a little slow at times, but the story has real depth to it, and the cultural commentary and reflections on modern society are fascinating. A side story involving a young relation of Hana is also compelling and the novel builds to a powerful conclusion that grips and surprises. There is also a good final reveal that comes as a real shock.

Supplementing Hana's investigation are reflections by the second dead girl, Kiri, which add an extra dimension to the story and plenty of poignancy. They also provide a sad reflection on the impact of drugs and tragedy on lives.

RETURN TO BLOOD is a powerful novel that stays in the mind long after it is finished.

Craig Sистерson Reviews

PAPER CAGE

by Tom Baragwanath
Knopf, \$28, 13 February 2024

Rating: A

While there are some familiar elements to Paris-based Kiwi author Tom Baragwanath's debut crime novel – a rural small-town setting, missing children, police superiors who are antagonists rather than supporters of our hero – there's also many layers of freshness and some beautiful writing that put **PAPER CAGE** firmly on the top shelf among recent debuts. Baragwanath is a writer to watch, already.

Lorraine Henry is a middle-aged records clerk at the police station in Masterton, a town that serves as the hub for a region of sheep farms, forests and now wineries, separated from New Zealand's capital city of Wellington by an hour and more's drive, and the Remutaka mountain range. Lorraine's Māori husband Frank used to be a police officer in the town, until he died

due to a tragic workplace accident. Now she lives alone, and is both relied on and overlooked by the other police and staff. Among others in the community, Lorraine sneaks rent money to her niece, Sheena, who she raised after her sister and brother-in-law died in an accident. Sheena's her own woman now, though, complete with young son, a gang member boyfriend, and a drug habit. One night Lorraine witnesses her niece's son Bradley playing with friends, catching eels in the local neighbourhood. The next morning one of Bradley's friends, eight-year-old Hemi, is missing. A few weeks ago, Precious Kingi, a young Māori girl, also vanished from her home. While she married into a Māori family, and her sister did too, Lorraine has never really felt part of the extended *whanau* (family), or the neighbourhood. Though her new neighbour Patty has proven a godsend; a supportive new friend, if a nosy one.

The local police are moving slowly on finding the missing children, so a detective from Wellington is sent to get the case going. While Lorraine's colleagues overlook her value, Detective Justin Hayes quickly sees her talents for observation and organisation, and brings her in on the case. But when



things go badly wrong during a stand-off between the police and some gang members, Lorraine is placed on leave, and told by her local boss that her position is likely to be downsized before she returns. While the police blame the missing kids on local gangs, Lorraine is sure something else is going on, and with the help of Detective Hayes and her local knowledge, keeps digging for the horrifying truth.

Baragwanath has written an exceptional, stylish debut (that has unsurprisingly won and been shortlisted for multiple awards in New Zealand and Australia before being published internationally in 2024). There's an understated quality to his storytelling – while there's some beautifully poetic descriptions and paragraphs, it's not 'in your face'. Stylistic yet subtle. **PAPER CAGE** flows wonderfully, drawing us in by prose, characters, and sense of place along with the mystery storyline.

Like Lorraine herself, Baragwanath has great observational skills, crafting a clear and nuanced portrait of small-town life in modern New Zealand, and exploring issues current and historic, from racial division to the insidious impact of drugs and alcohol, gangs, and widening inequality.

Baragwanath has a great touch for bringing such issues into his overall story in **PAPER CAGE** in a subtler, nuanced way, without having to force-feed readers to ensure they understand. Overall **PAPER CAGE** is a stylish, multi-layered debut that introduces a fascinating and rather fresh heroine, and bodes well for hopefully plenty more tales from a talented new voice in the mystery genre.

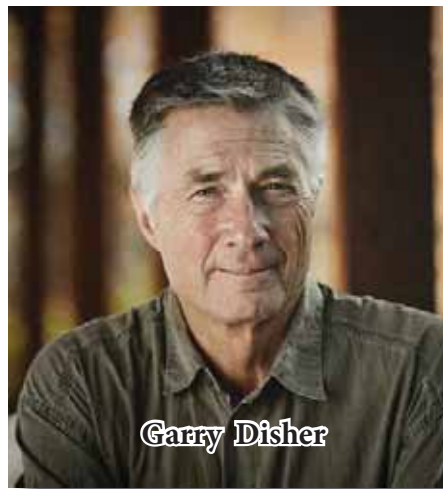
SANCTUARY

by Garry Disher

Text Publishing, \$34.99 AUD, 3 April 2024

Rating: A

The quiet King of Australian crime writing returns with another absorbing tale, as Garry Disher masterfully lures us into the world of a small-time thief



looking for a normal life, the owner of a rural shop looking for safety, and the dangerous men looking for each of them. A rich, character-driven story, **SANCTUARY** is an apt title; it's what various characters crave.

Grace is a woman of many names who's used to passing through. She passes through cities and towns, through windows and locked houses, pilfering small, highly valuable items. An expert thief, 13 years ago she even passed through a prior Disher novel, **WHISPERING DEATH** (sixth in his Challis and Destry series). Now Grace is the heart of this tale, looking to lie low in the Adelaide Hills after a run-in with an old associate. Could Erin Mandel's antiques store be a perfect haven? But Erin has her own secrets, local cop Les Liddington wants to slap the handcuffs on someone again before he retires, and the past is inescapable for everyone.

Disher draws readers in not with explosive intros or blurb-worthy hooks or high concepts, but the quality of his writing. He crafts a rich portrait of small-town life and various characters, steadily building intrigue. Disher doesn't serve literary fast food, but marinated slow-cooked delights. Layers of flavour. While the likes of Jane Harper and Chris Hammer – whose smash-hit debuts **THE DRY** and **SANCTUARY** have both been adapted for the screen in recent years – sparked a fast-growing global appetite for 'Outback Noir', and even fresher talents like

Hayley Scrivenor, Emma Styles, and Shelley Burr fanned the flames, Garry Disher is the giant on whose shoulders they're standing.

A gold standard, for decades, Disher remains top of the game.

IT TAKES A TOWN

by Aoife Clifford

Ultimo Press, \$34.99 AUD, 3 April 2024

Rating: B+

Melbourne novelist and award-winning short story writer Aoife Clifford has veered across the crime and mystery landscape in her first three books, all standalones, and a variety of short stories. Her debut, **ALL THESE PERFECT STRANGERS**, was a twisty psychological suspense set at an Australian university with an unreliable narrator that explored questions of guilt and innocence. Her terrific sophomore effort, **SECOND SIGHT**, starred an ambitious and gutsy corporate lawyer who returns to her small home town, on the wrong side of a bushfire lawsuit, where a past mystery reignites. The prodigal daughter returns setup was echoed in **WHEN WE FALL**, a tense rural crime tale laced with big issues (eg climate change). But while Clifford's latest once again revels in its small-town setting, the tone of *It Takes a Town* is now more akin to the modern 'cosies' of Richard Osman or Janice Hallett.

Quirky and engaging characters, a few more laughs and lighter moments among the dark deeds.

Glamorous Vanessa Walton was a fish far too big for her small pond of Welcome, a country community from which she launched decades ago as a child star thanks to a famous commercial then a TV talent show, *Shining Stars*. But now Vanessa is back in town working at the local high school and giving her name to the family dance academy, at least that is until she's found dead at the bottom of her stairs after a terrible storm. A simple accident, as most believe, or something more sinister? When threatening

letters are discovered, and 16-year-old Jasmine Landridge – daughter of local politician and property developer Barton Landridge – claims Vanessa was murdered, only for Jasmine to go missing, official and unofficial investigations swerve.

Sergeant Carole Duffy, flown into town after the storm, is not the only one asking questions. Nosy neighbours, curious high schoolers who aren't afraid of a bit of activism, and friends and frenemies of Vanessa's all abound by the bushel in Welcome. Which isn't quite as welcoming to everyone.

Unlike Vanessa, Frankie Birnam never left Welcome. She settled down with husband Joe and their two kids, and her job at the school along with growing responsibility to check in on her father in the countryside. But Frankie was pleased to reconnect with her old classmate and childhood friend when Vanessa returned. Even if not everyone felt the same about the return of their very big fish to their small pond, including Frankie's best friend Mer, a single mother and former swim champ.

Clifford creates a fascinating portrait of a small town full of intriguing characters, a place where everyone thinks they know their neighbours but plenty of secrets are kept behind closed doors. It's quite a large cast, which provides ample opportunity for a range of suspects and red herrings as relationships are tested and squabbles petty and serious threaten to upturn the community. As secrets are revealed and the fabric – real or imagined – of the town is torn, it may take the town to find out what's really going on. Clifford writes an engaging small-town crime tale with cosy leanings that keeps readers entertained on several fronts, through to its interesting conclusion.

IN HER BLOOD

by Nikki Crutchley

Harlequin, \$9.99, 25 June 2024

Rating: B

After starting out by writing some very good small-town murder mys-

teries that earned her accolades and awards nominations (eg **NOTHING BAD HAPPENS HERE, THE MURDER CLUB**), New Zealand librarian turned crime writer Nikki Crutchley side-stepped into psychological thrillers.

Her fifth novel, **IN HER BLOOD**, conjures a delightfully creepy vibe as the troubled stories of two sets of sisters entwine in an historic rural hotel. Jac Morgan never wanted to return to her hometown in rural New Zealand, a place where her alcoholic mess of a father lives in a caravan with her teenage sister Charlie, and locals remember Jac as the girl who sparked the house fire that killed her mother.

But Charlie's vanished, and Jac's father and the local cops are of no use. Frustrated, she stumbles into a role cleaning the once-splendid Gilmore Hotel ahead of its annual Open Day, giving her a chance to stay local and snoop around town. But is the 'haunted house' of Jac's childhood cursed? How much has the terror of wounded soldiers recuperating during the war leached into the walls? Or the disappearance 20 years ago of eccentric matriarch Iris's beloved daughter Paige?

Spanning two timelines and multiple perspectives, Crutchley crafts a disturbing tale laced with rural Gothic, a good sense of place, and full of flawed, dysfunctional characters that keep readers on edge.

Overall, **IN HER BLOOD** is a good read from a talented storyteller, and well worth a look for US readers looking to explore some rural noir meets psychological suspense from other parts of the world.

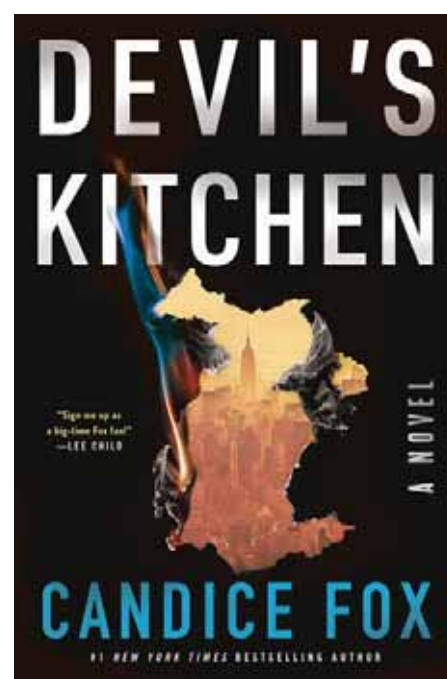
DEVIL'S KITCHEN

by Candice Fox

Forge Books, \$28.99, 28 June 2024

Rating: A-

Candice Fox burst onto the Australian crime writing scene ten years ago with **HADES**, a darkly sparkling debut about a Sydney detective hunting a brutal killer, newly partnered with the



enigmatic Eden Archer, who's half of a spooky sister-brother duo of homicide cops raised by a master criminal. That debut won Fox the first of three Ned Kelly Awards, among many accolades the prolific Sydney author has earned. One of the modern Queens of Aussie Crime, Fox has written multiple series and standalones, teamed with James Patterson on *New York Times* bestsellers, and seen her terrific 'Crimson Lake' trilogy set in Far North Queensland turned into hit crime drama, *Troppo*, starring Thomas Jane and Nicole Chamoun (filming on Season 2 was completed just before Christmas).

Fox has storytelling talent to burn, and that's again on show in **DEVIL'S KITCHEN**, a page-whirring tale of a freelance undercover officer infiltrating a close-knit NYFD firehouse, and a group of 'New York's Bravest' who among dragging people from burning buildings and performing other heroic acts in the face of raging infernos, have stolen millions from banks, jewellery stores, and art galleries.

When Ben, one of the firefighters, suspects his comrades may be responsible for his girlfriend and her young son vanishing without a trace, he reaches out to the authorities, willing to give up himself and his crew in order to find

them, and save their lives. If they're still alive. Enter Andy (Andrea) Nearland, a badass undercover operative who works for various law enforcement agencies, and has the chameleon-like ability of Jarod in *The Pretender* to rapidly get up to speed with portraying someone new, even highly skilled people operating in fields that require years of training. Together and apart, Andy and Ben try to find out what's happened to his girlfriend and her son, before the crew builds up to its biggest and most dangerous heist yet. Meanwhile an FBI Agent ghost from Andy's past is keeping too-close tabs on her and the operation, potentially putting everyone at risk.

Fox does a terrific job dropping readers straight into an incendiary storyline, even if the life-or-death prologue then leap back to learn 'how did we get there' setup isn't really necessary to hook us, given her storytelling talents overall. Andy is a unique and fascinating crime fiction character, with action-thriller skills, plenty of smarts, and a mysterious past that goes beyond the usual tropes. As a good man who's done bad things but is willing to sacrifice himself for others, Ben is also an intriguing viewpoint character. Fox switches readers between Andy and Ben, as they try to find out the truth, while trying to hide their own truths from Andy's firefighter colleagues, and each other.

I tore through **DEVIL'S KITCHEN** in one sitting; it's a ripshorter of a read that still has plenty of meat on the bones in terms of character and quality writing. Fox will get your adrenalin going, but also make you think with the dilemmas and issues the characters' face. She brings some depth and understanding to the actions of even the key antagonists and 'villains', along the way, and makes you care about many involved, despite their dark deeds. While barely ever taking her foot of the gas.

A recommended read.



TAKEN
by Dinuka McKenzie
Canelo, £9.99, January
DS Kate Miles #2
Rating: A-

Detective Sergeant Kate Miles is fighting an up-hill battle at home and at work. She has just had her second baby and is exhausted. Her husband has lost his consultancy job and the family finances are shaky. But she is determined to regain her place at the police station. Her junior partner Josh had assumed her position while she was on maternity leave, and is quite reluctant to again play second fiddle to her lead.

Elissa Ricci reports her four-month-old daughter Sienna missing. Josh suspects the absent father (purportedly on a business trip). Kate is suspicious of the violent drug-dealing ex-boyfriend. So much for teamwork.

Kate Miles is my kind of fictional detective – smart and relentless in the pursuit of truth. The writing is smooth, the investigation fascinating and the characters memorable. Add Dinuka McKenzie to my list of favorite “must-read” authors.

DEAD MAN'S CREEK

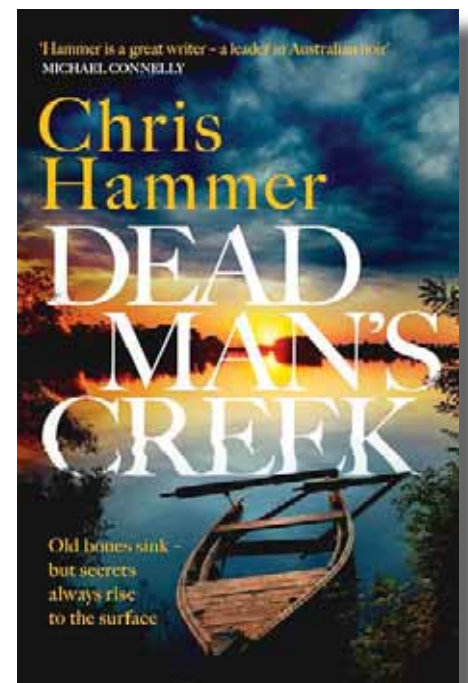
Chris Hammer
Wildfire, £18.99, 2023
Detective Nell Buchanan #2
Rating: A-

An eco-terrorist blows up some water regulators so that the nearby ancient forest can once again be flooded by the Murray river. The skeletal remains of a body is found near the wreckage of the regulators and newly-appointed homicide detective Nell Buchanan is assigned the case. But for her, it means returning to her home town of Tulong and her family with whom she has strained relations. Could the body be that of her long-lost uncle Tycho?

Then another body is found near the site of the first body.

Nell's investigation takes her back to World War II times when there was a prisoner of war camp nearby. And she eventually discovers that members of her family have been hiding secrets for decades.

I was greatly impressed with Chris Hammer's storytelling skills. Although the plot is quite complex, my interest in it never waned. **DEAD MAN'S CREEK** is a prime example of the excellence in crime fiction coming from Australia nowadays.



George Easter Reviews

Michael Bennett Interview

by Craig Sisterson



Michael Bennett (Ngāti Pikiao, Ngāti Whakauae) is an award-winning screenwriter, director, and author whose films have been selections at major international festivals, including Cannes, Berlin, Toronto, and New York. His first crime novel, **BETTER THE BLOOD**, introduced Māori detective and single mother Hana Westerman, who must solve a puzzling series of killings entwined with colonial atrocities and her own ethnicity. That book became the first detective novel ever shortlisted (or longlisted) for the Acorn Prize for Fiction, the premier literary award in New Zealand. It has also won or been shortlisted for several other book awards on three continents, including being a 2024 Barry Award nominee for Best First Novel. The sequel, **RETURN TO BLOOD**, is published in the United States on 21 May. Michael has also written a true crime book, **IN DARK PLACES**, about the fight to overturn the conviction of a wrongly convicted Māori man who spent 21 years in prison. Michael is intending to be at Bouchercon Nashville this year, and talks with *Deadly Pleasures* about his writing and life.

Deadly Pleasures: What was the acorn for **BETTER THE BLOOD**? Was it Hana's character, the mystery storyline or set-up, or particular issues you wanted to explore through a novel? What was the starting point where you went 'yeah, this is potentially a book' rather than a different story form?

Michael Bennett: All three of the above, really. I think the heart of any crime storytelling is the unravelling and peeling away of the onion skin of a mystery, and I've always loved that kind of storytelling. So when I thought

about writing my first novel, it was natural the genre I loved most was what I was drawn to. But beyond that, in all my work I guess what I'm drawn to is looking to find a way to take something that's audience-friendly, exciting and thrilling, and explore things I'm passionate about. And with *Better the Blood*, I'm exploring some big fundamental issues I think face a whole lot of people, societies, and cultures around the world. Many cultures in many countries have been colonised, but specifically in New Zealand we were colonised by the British, and 200 years later there's still many raw scars that haven't been healed. So that was one of the things I'm passionate about in my storytelling that I really wanted to explore in my first crime novel.

Then there's character as well, and it's incredibly exciting to have a brilliant, modern Māori female detective at the heart of the story. I can't think of many comparisons. Hana as a character comes from a whole bunch of things; there's many strong Māori women in my history and in my family, and from generations before. But also, I'm the father

of two strong, brilliant young Māori women who blow me away every day I look at them. Being able to put a character on the page that I hadn't seen before in crime fiction, and bring her face-to-face with the issues I'm exploring and the questions I want to raise about where we are as a society, just felt like an incredibly unique opportunity.

DP: Given you've been involved in screen storytelling for 25 years, what would the 'elevator pitch' be for your Barry-nominated debut crime novel, **BETTER THE BLOOD**?

MB: Wow, okay, so a Māori detective in New Zealand today discovers two previously unconnected killings are connected, that each of the victims is a descendant of a member of an English troop who 200 years earlier executed a Māori chief in the bloody New Zealand Land Wars. She learns there were six members of the troop, two descendants have been killed, and there's another four to go...

DP: You're different to many debut crime novelists in that you're already a very experienced storyteller, with decades in the screen industry, including some crime dramas and true crime stories. What has the transition been like for you, from writing screenplays to writing books?

MB: That's a great question. I think the big difference moving from the screen to books is the ability to go far and deep with it, which was the thrill for me when I first wrote prose with a non-fiction book. I came to prose late - I'd already had a 15-year-long career in film and TV before I wrote **IN DARK PLACES**, about Teina Pora, a young man who was wrongly imprisoned for



21 years in New Zealand for a crime he didn't commit. That was the first time I'd written prose.

Back then, I'd already made a documentary about Teina [*The Confessions of Prisoner T*], and what writing the book allowed me to do was something you can never do on screen, which is take a moment in time, like when his daughter came to visit him in prison, after he's already been in there for 12 years. And the events of that 20-minute visit allow you in a book, in a way you can't do in film, to spend time with both the characters but also go into their thoughts on both sides of the relationship, to them thinking back on moments, for example him remembering when she was three years' old. Writing **IN DARK PLACES** I had this revelation, and I'm so grateful now that I get to write in this form, crime novels, that allow you to spend the time to really go deeply into a character's psychology without having the constant burden of onward movement that film and TV has.

Onscreen, you've got to get to the next plot point, then the next. The audience has paid their money, they've got their popcorn, and they're wanting to be continuously entertained, which is great. That's why I go to the movies too, I understand it. But with a book, there's a different kind of experience, with your relationship with the audience, the reader has bought into a more contemplative experience. I felt that very much with having written **BETTER THE BLOOD**. While there's absolutely the commitment and responsibility to give the reader a pacy, thrilling storyline, there's also the opportunity to spend a whole chapter where the plot doesn't move forward much, but your understanding of the character becomes so much deeper. So for me, writing prose is more exploratory, it's almost a freer way of writing than screenwriting, to be removed from that burden of hitting the next narrative point and allowed to explore your character much more deeply.

DP: Your debut crime novel threads in many Māori perspectives and concepts among the serial killer storyline, including that of 'utu', which is a

word that some think of as 'revenge' or justice, but doesn't really have an English-language equivalent. Could you tell us more about 'utu'?

MB: Well, utu isn't really about vengeance, but instead about putting things back into balance. It seeks to heal wounds that have been made. Colonisation caused wounds to indigenous peoples that are still being felt in modern society. It's important that we don't ignore the wound, and seek to heal. The sort of stories that I admire often tackle issues surrounding pain, and humanity, and I've been really humbled that the story I've written about my specific culture here in New Zealand has connected with readers all around the world, being translated into several European languages and published in the United States. **BETTER THE BLOOD** is a specific story, but it also has some amount of universality in terms of other cultures around the world, and humanity more generally.

DP: You mentioned you've always loved crime and mystery – what were some of the books or authors you loved growing up, and who are some of the authors you've been reading recently?

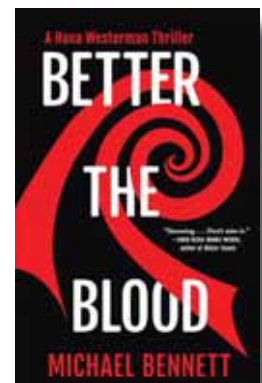
MB: Yeah, so the first books I truly fell in love with were kind of unusual. I was ten years old, and my brother Bruce came back from university for Christmas with his girlfriend, who'd later become his wife. He was studying psychology, and his girlfriend was doing English Lit. They had a textbook on abnormal psychology and Truman Capote's **IN COLD BLOOD** with them. I started to browse through these two books, and they blew my mind. It was a peek into the dark areas of the human mind. Previously I was reading **MAD** magazine and Archie comics. So I read as much of these books as possible, and hid them when they went back to university. I guess they gave me an absolute passion to try to figure out how human beings can go to both the wonderful and extraordinary places that we can go to, but also the very dark places that we can go to. What forms people in their journeys, especially into trauma and darkness? **IN COLD BLOOD** is about

the ordinariness of evil, the banality of evil, in a way like any person you're passing down the street could under certain circumstances, do extraordinary or awful things. The way Capote wrote really grabbed me, in a very present way, like the reader absolutely felt they were walking alongside the victims and the perpetrators through the crime and the aftermath. Capote's writing influenced me in terms of both that present-ness of writing, and the visceral-ness, but also the sense you're wanting to make the audience or reader feel like they're in the room in the moment of what's happening, not just looking from distance.

In recent years I've really loved the work of S.A. Cosby, the author of **BLACKTOP WASTELAND**. David Heska Wanbli Weiden wrote a great indigenous noir, **WINTER COUNTS**. This year I've been reading **THE TALENTED MR RIPLEY**. It took me far too long to get to Patricia Highsmith's work, but it was worth the wait. I've also been reading **ALL THE SINNERS BLEED** by S.A. Cosby. I'm a slow reader, but I love to read.

DP: Thank you, Michael, for chatting with us. What can we expect from you next?

MB: I'm currently working on season 2 of *The Gone*, an Irish-Kiwi crime drama that screens on BBC in the UK. Hopefully it will come to the U.S. too. I'm also writing the third Hana Westerman novel, **ETCHED IN BLOOD**. The second, **RETURN TO BLOOD**, will be out very soon in the United States, on 21 May, and I hope to be over your way later this year for Bouchercon and to meet lots of U.S. booklovers.



DP Calendar



Todd, Jonathan Maberry, Alafair Burke
and Ali Karim

Website: www.bouchercon2025.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

Herron, V. M. Burns, Brad Thor,
Kelli Stanley, Rachel Howzell Hall,
J. T. Ellison

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



September 13-15, 2024

Bloody Scotland

Stirling, Scotland

Guests of Honor: TBA

Website: bloodyscotland.com



July 18-21, 2024

Theakston Old Peculier Crime Festival

Harrogate, England

Guests of Honor: TBA

Website: <https://harrogateinternationalfestivals.com/crime-writing-festival/>



March 13-16, 2025

Left Coast Crime 2025

Denver, Colorado

Guests of Honor: Sara Paretsky,
Manuel Ramos, John Copenhaver
and Grace Koshida

Website: leftcoastcrime.org/2025/



August 28 - September 1, 2024

Bouchercon

Murder and Mayhem in Music City

Nashville, Tennessee

Guests of Honor: Harlan Coben, Heath-
er Graham, Anthony Horowitz, Mick

September 3-7, 2025

Bouchercon

Blood on the Bayou: Case Closed

New Orleans, Louisiana

Guests of Honor: Michael Connelly,
Steph Cha, Craig Johnson, Charles

Lefty Awards 2024

These awards were recently
awarded at the Left Coast Crime
Convention in Seattle, Washington.
Congratulations to the winners.

Best Humorous Mystery Novel

Wendall Thomas, **CHEAP TRILLS**

**Best Historical Mystery(Bill
Gottfried Memorial)**

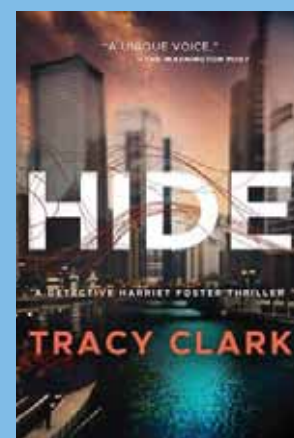
Naomi Hirahara, **EVERGREEN**

Best Debut Mystery Novel

Nina Simon, **MOTHER-DAUGH-
TER MURDER NIGHT**

Best Mystery Novel

Tracy Clark, **HIDE**



55TH ANNUAL BOUCHERCON

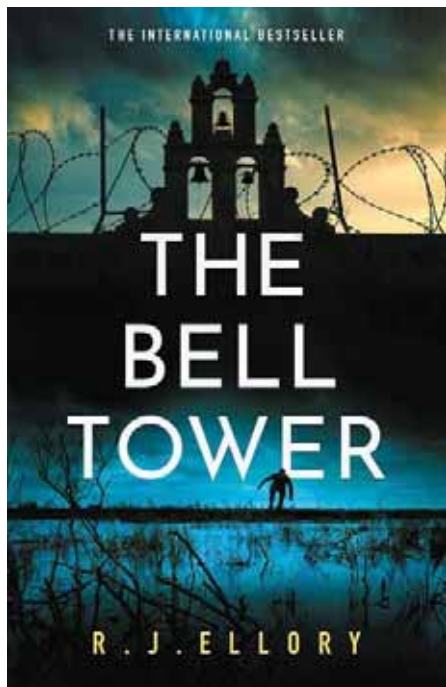


BOUCHERCON 2024 NASHVILLE
MURDER AND MAYHEM IN MUSIC CITY
AUGUST 28 - SEPTEMBER 1

What's New In the U.K.



THE SPY, Ajay Chowdhury (Harvill Secker, £18.99, April). 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 halfway across the world to Kashmir, and face to face with an old nemesis.



THE BELL TOWER, R. J. Ellory (Orion, £22.00, March). Injured during a drug bust, Deputy Garrett Nelson finds himself out of the Sheriff's Department. Uncertain of his future, he takes a job at a Florida Penitentiary. Situated on the grounds of an old Spanish mission, the bell tower is now an execution chamber. After a dangerous manhunt for escaped convicts through

the Everglades, Nelson's belief in the justice system is tested to the limit. In a heartbreaking conflict of duty versus conscience, he must decide whether he's willing to let the State execute an innocent man, or risk his own life and family in order to find the truth.

TEN SECONDS, Robert Gold (Sphere, £16.99, March). After a tense birthday celebration in Haddley, journalist Ben Harper watches his boss, Madeline, get into the car that has come to collect her. He walks home, never imagining that by the next morning, Madeline will be missing.

To find Madeline, Ben will have to return to the now infamous murder case that made her journalism career over a decade ago. A case which, Ben quickly discovers, was never as simple as it seemed.

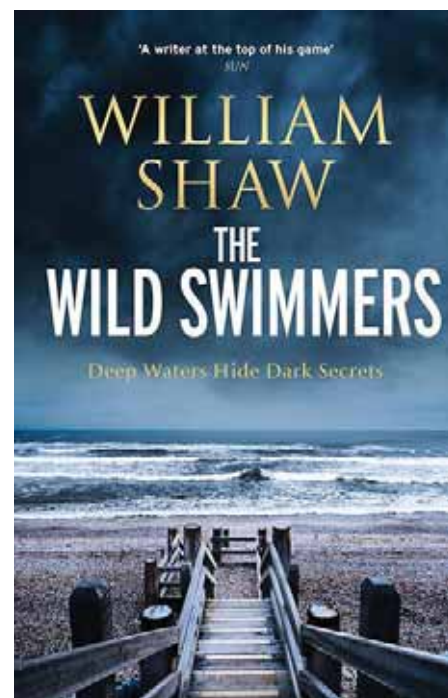
BONEHEAD, Mo Hayder (Hodder & Stoughton, £22.00, May). A terrifying accident . . .

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.

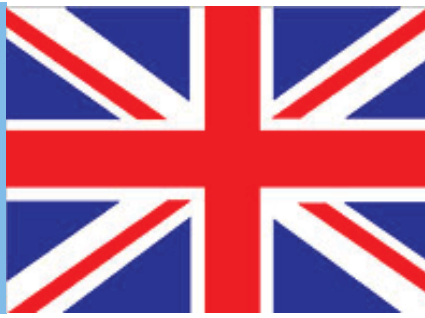
SEVEN DAYS, Robert Rutherford, (Hodder & Stoughton, £16.99, April).

Your father is on death row. You have seven days to save him. But do you want to? Alice knows her father is guilty of many things. He's guilty of abandoning her. He's guilty of being unfaithful to her mother. But is he guilty of murder? Now on Death Row, he has seven days to live. Some people want him released. Others will kill to keep him just where he is. Alice has only one chance to save him. But should she?

THE WILD SWIMMERS, William Shaw (Riverrun, £20.00, May). Convinced the report of a body on the beach is a false alarm, D S Cupidi darts to Folkstone with her daughter Zoe in tow to scan the area. But this time her instincts are off and it is Zoe who discovers Mimi Greene's body on the shoreline. A regular wild swimmer with her friends, it is perplexing that she would have been out swimming alone, especially in bad weather. Putting aside her daughter's traumatised state, D S Cupidi must find the truth behind Mimi's death. Meanwhile, Jill Ferriter receives a letter from a man named Stephen Dowles. Convicted of murder in the 90's, he's been in prison for more than twenty years. In the letter he claims to be her father.



U.K. Reviews



Jeff Poppo Reviews



DEATH IN A LONELY PLACE

by Stig Abell
Hemlock Press, £16.99
Rating: B+

Stig Abell's debut crime novel, **DEATH UNDER A LITTLE SKY**, was well received when it appeared last year, and now his semi-retired police detective, Jake Jackson, makes a second appearance in **DEATH IN A LONELY PLACE**.

The book is again set in a quaint English village, with more than its share of death. Detective Jake Jackson moved to the countryside for a quieter life. And he finally seems to have his wish, spending his days immersed in nature, and his evenings lazing by the fire with his new love Livia. But the return of an old case shatters the calm, and pulls him into the shadowy world of a secretive group serving the extravagant whims of the elite. As the web around Jake tightens, he must determine who he can really trust in his small community. Or else he will learn just how far the elite will go to protect their secrets.

The book opens at a leisurely pace, which reflects Jake's easy going life-

style and his routines of country rambling and cold lake swimming, but picks up as the story progresses. This time around the basic plot is more of a thriller than a local murder mystery, with references to cartels and conspiracies in high places. However, the rich descriptions of the countryside and the local inhabitants are still there, and the book has the sort of twists and turn you would expect. Overall, it is an entertaining read, although it becomes a little farfetched towards the end. Enjoyable reading.

THE GIRL IN THE DARK

by Zoe Sharp
Bookoutre, £10.99
Rating: B+

Zoë Sharp is probably best known for her high octane novels about former soldier and professional bodyguard Charlie Fox. In their heyday, the Charlie



Fox novels were 'must reads', but tapered off in appeal towards the end, and Zoë's post-Fox books were also a little lacklustre.

However, Zoë's last novel, **THE LAST TIME SHE DIED**, was a ripper. Introducing the pairing of policeman Detective John Byron and maverick street girl Blake Claremont, it held attention from the beginning to the exciting conclusion.

With **THE GIRL IN THE DARK**, Zoë returns to Blake and Byron, with a tough crime novel set on the dark streets of London. Shannon was a woman who went out of her way to help the homeless of the city. A tragic hit and run, however, leaves her dead on the side of the road. Before she died, Shannon was searching for answers. She knew that people were going missing, never to be seen again. Blake owes her survival on the streets to Shannon, and when she hears of her death, she sets off to find out where Shannon had been before her death and why she was so frightened. With Byron's assistance she is determined to extract vengeance on the ruthless men and women who prey on the homeless.

THE GIRL IN THE DARK is a good, exciting crime thriller that showcases Zoë's skills for brisk pacing, twisty plotting, edgy characters and a leavening of social conscience. The story quickly reels the reader in and keeps them engrossed all the way to the abrupt ending. Blake and Byron are a good pair, with different styles and strategies, and their divergent approaches enables Zoë to keep the tension and the suspense at a high level. Most of the action is viewed from Blake's perspective, but Zoë also shifts the viewpoint to other characters, which works well.

An enjoyable read.

LONG TIME DEAD

by T. M. Payne
Thomas and Mercer, £8.99
Rating: B+

T. M. Payne makes a promising entry into Britain's crime writing ranks with her first novel, **LONG TIME DEAD**.

The book opens in dramatic fashion

with the gunning down of two women on the streets of Liverpool.

The story then jumps forward in time with the discovery of a decayed corpse in the wrong grave at a local cemetery. The body is of a small-time drug dealer, John Lively, who was the prime suspect in the shooting of the two women seven years ago. One of the women was a police officer and it was always suspected that Lively had killed her out of revenge for an earlier arrest.

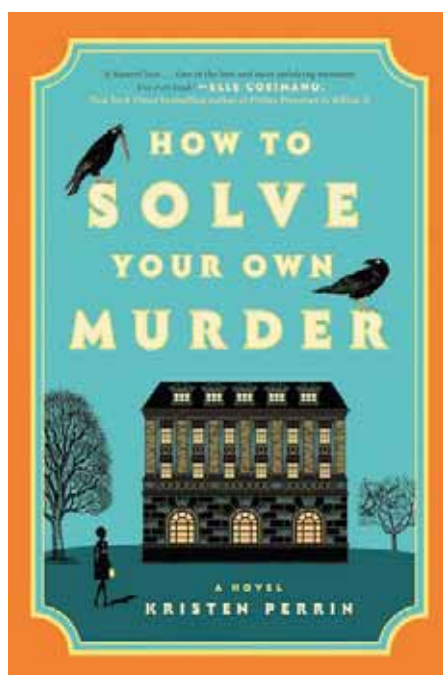
DI Sheridan Holler is given the case of Lively's death to solve, which also involves re-investigating the original shooting. Sheridan needs to work out if Lively was killed out of revenge, or was just a victim of the criminal world he inhabited. When shocking evidence is revealed about the murder weapon, Sheridan's cold case starts to look hopeless once more.

This is a very engaging and easy flowing police detective yarn. The story moves along at a good pace, and there are enough early twists and turns to keep it interesting. There is a largish cast of characters, including the surviving victim of the original shooting who is now totally incapacitated and seemingly unable to tell what happened, and it takes a little while to sort out where they all fit into the plot. However, as the story unfolds it all becomes very clear, and Ms Payne's light writing style makes it easy to follow the 'ins and outs' of the investigation.

There are some good twists, and plenty of red herrings, and the book builds to a very tense and unexpected conclusion, with some neat stings in the tale.

I enjoyed **LONG TIME DEAD**, which was a really quick and engaging read. My only reservation was that the book built to a good climax, and then Payne spent several unnecessary chapters explaining what happened in detail through flashbacks, and following up on the characters. I thought that a sharper ending might have been a bit more effective.

HOW TO SOLVE YOUR OWN MURDER



by Kristen Perry
Quercus, £16.99

Rating: A-

Kristen Perrin's debut novel **HOW TO SOLVE YOUR OWN MURDER** is a delightful murder mystery with an engaging cast of characters.

In 1965, seventeen-year-old Frances Adams was told by a fortune teller that one day she would be murdered. Frances spent the next sixty years trying to prevent the crime that would be her eventual demise. Of course, no one took her seriously – until she was dead.

For Frances, being the village busybody was a form of insurance. She'd spent a lifetime compiling dirt on every person she met, just in case they might turn out to be her killer. In the heart of her sprawling country estate lies an eccentric library of detective work, where the right person could step in and use her findings to solve her murder.

When her great-niece Annie arrives from London and discovers that Frances' worst fear has come true, she is thrust into her great-aunt's last act of revenge against her sceptical friends and family. Frances' will stipulates that the person who solves her murder will inherit her millions. Can Annie unravel the mystery and find justice for Frances, or will digging up the past lead her

into the path of the killer?

This is a well-crafted murder mystery. Annie is an engaging and witty narrator who ably steers the reader through the nicely convoluted plot, and her frequent references to classical mystery novels and television will delight regular readers of the genre. The tone is mainly light, although the frequent flashbacks, via Frances' diaries, to the 1960s and an earlier crime, add a touch more seriousness to the story and some poignancy.

Overall, there is a nice flow to the story, and it is very easy to settle back and read large chunks of the book at one time. A strong debut from a promising new author.

ON THE RUN

by Max Luther
Canelo, £9.99

Rating: B+

Max Luther's **ON THE RUN** will appeal to fans of the Jack Reacher books.

British Special Ops bodyguard Alex Drayce has just finished a successful, but violent, job in Los Angeles when he is presented with the opportunity to make some quick cash for a week's work. All he has to do is to help Carlos Garcia find his daughter, who has gone missing in Las Vegas. It is a seemingly simple task, but things quickly spiral out of control and Drayce finds himself on the run. Wanted by the police for murder and chased by a Mexican cartel out for vengeance, Drayce has to use all of his skills to just stay alive.

This is an action-packed, no-holds-barred read. The story zips along like a Reacher novel, full of well-choreographed fight scenes and plenty of suspense. The characters are capably sketched, and the plot has enough twists and turns to keep things interesting. The descriptions of Las Vegas and elsewhere are evocative and there is a good gritty feel to the story.

Alex Drayce is a great character and **ON THE RUN** is a very satisfying action thriller. I am looking forward to the next instalment in the series.

Craig Sisterson Review



THE SHADOW NETWORK

by Tony Kent

Elliott Thompson, \$16.99, 15 February

Rating: A-

A massacre in a popular tourist destination masking a targeted hit, shadowy networks and conspiracies, a near-mythical foreign agent that's been pulling global strings for decades; British barrister and former boxing champion Tony Kent's latest thriller certainly packs a wallop.

The fifth instalment in his very good series starring Northern Irish-born lawyer Michael Devlin and deadly United Nations intelligence agent Joe Dempsey, *The Shadow Network* sees the

pair called to action for personal reasons after a mass shooting at the Grote Markt in the heart of The Hague, where lawyers for an alleged war criminal are gunned down as part of a massacre. Devlin and Dempsey become further entwined in conspiracy and international intrigue as they try to find the mystery man the lawyers were meeting, while protecting his stateside wife – Dempsey's long-ago lover – from deadly assassins doing the bidding of 'the Monk', a foreign agent who has been operating in the shadows for decades, and many believe is more rumour than reality.

Things get complicated by the various agencies who try to get in on the action, including the CIA.

Kent maintains a high tempo throughout **THE SHADOW NETWORK**, while providing some fascinating characters and set pieces. The pages whirl by on a litany of secrets and lies, double-crosses and cover-ups, and some excellent fight scenes and action. Readers who love action-packed crime ala Lee Child or the globe-trotting spy thrills of the likes of Ludlum and Forsyth really should give Tony Kent's books a whirl. There's lots to savour; like any great boxer, a nice blend of brawn and brains.

George Easter Reviews

THE SPY

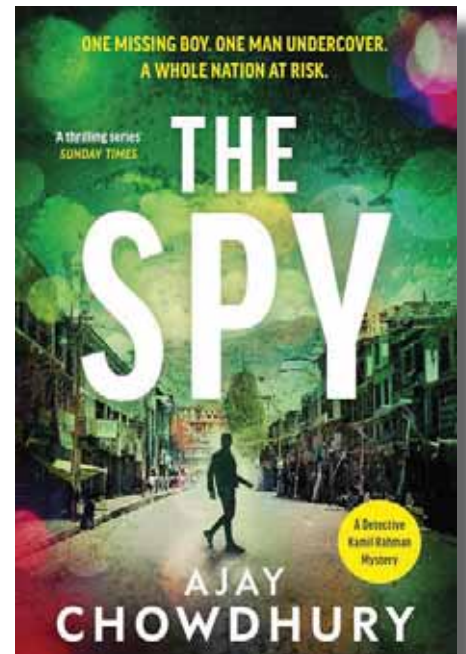
by Ajay Chowdhury

Harvill Secker, £18.99, April

Kamil Rahman #4

Rating: A-

Those who have been reading this series have seen Kamil Rahman cycle through a number of jobs. He first arrives in London after having been unjustly fired from his job as a police detective in Kolkata, India. A friend of the family hires Kamil as a waiter in his Indian restaurant (**THE WAITER**, 2021). In the next book Kamil is promoted to the position of cook (**THE COOK**, 2022). Finally in the third book, Kamil is hired by the Met as a policeman (**THE DETECTIVE**, 2023). And in the latest

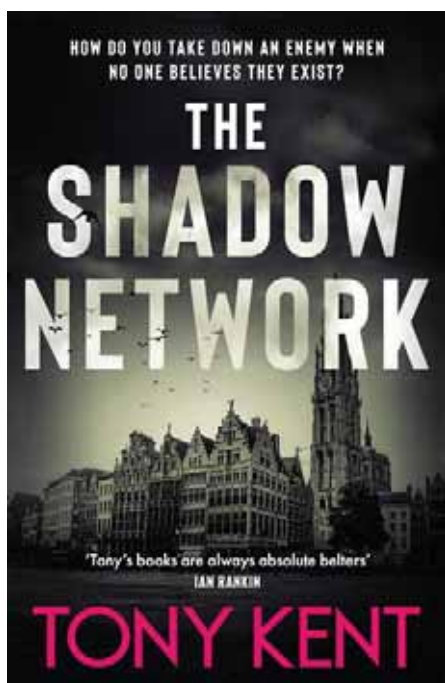


book, **THE SPY**, Kamil is asked by MI5 to go undercover in a London mosque to investigate possible terrorist activities. In all the books, he gets involved with solving crimes.

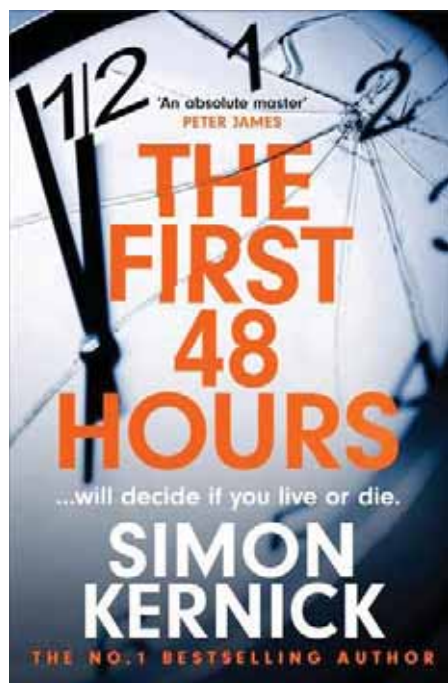
Kamil is charged with getting close to a group of Muslims who are upset with what is happening to their fellow Muslims in India and particularly in the Kashmir region of the country. They are being treated similar to how the Jews were treated under Hitler. At one point Kamil goes to Kashmir as a courier for the group and what he sees and experiences there makes him quite sympathetic to their cause. Nevertheless, he cannot condone any terrorist violence.

A parallel story involves the kidnapping of a young boy, whose parents are friends of Anjoli, now the owner of the Indian restaurant where Kamil worked – and a love interest of Kamil. The parents of the boy are warned against contacting the police, but the mother confides in Anjoli, who fancies herself a pretty good amateur detective. The boy is allowed to text his parents every once in awhile and the texts contain references to his beloved Harry Potters stories. These references provide clues to Anjoli as to the boy's whereabouts.

This series has a lot going for it. For me, the endearing characters and the strong story lines are quite appealing. Ajay Chowdhury is one of several suc-



successful British crime writers with roots in the Indian Subcontinent. Others whom I've read and admire are Abir Mukherjee, Vaseem Khan, and Imran Mahmood.



THE FIRST 48 HOURS

by Simon Kernick

Headline, £20.00, November, 2023

Rating: B+

A kidnapping team known as the Vanishers is operating a successful scheme made possible by bitcoin. A child is kidnapped, the parents contacted with a ransom demand and an admonition to NOT call the police or else they will never see their child alive again. The ransom is paid and the child is returned safely to the parents. Done and dusted. All runs smoothly until eighteen-year-old Henry Day is kidnapped. The police are informed and take great pains to keep their presence a secret. The ransom is paid in bitcoin (with the eyes of the police on the transaction). But when the parents go to pick up Henry, he is found dead. A communication from the kidnappers says, "You shouldn't have involved the police."

The ensuing story of a barrister mother trying to save her kidnapped daughter by unwillingly defending a murderer (no bitcoin this time) is told

from three viewpoints: those of a bent cop, the mother and the Vanishers.

Simon Kernick's thrillers are often full of moral ambiguity as they race along to their satisfying conclusions. **THE FIRST 48 HOURS** isn't as good as some of his others, but it still managed to entertain me. I've read every one of his books and still wonder why he doesn't have an American publisher. Fortunately most of his books are available in the U.S. on Kindle for \$5.99.

TWELVE SECRETS

by Robert Gold

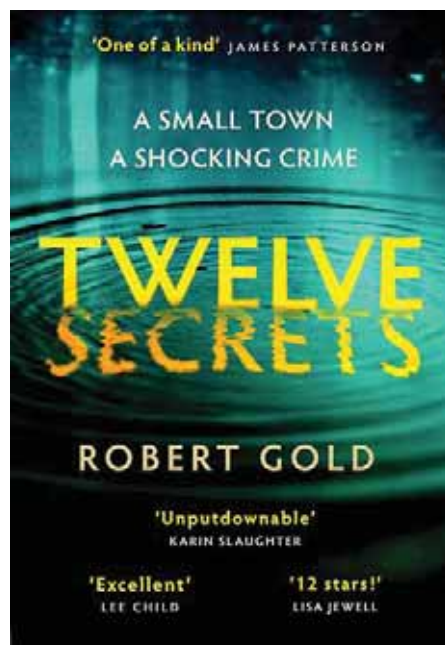
Sphere, £12.99, 2021

Ben Harper #1

Rating: B

Ben Harper was eight years old when he sees his brother Nick and his brother's best friend Simon go into the Haddley woods accompanied by two schoolmates, Abigail Langdon and Josie Fairchild. It is Ben who later finds the brutally murdered bodies of Nick and Simon. The girls are arrested and ultimately convicted. The whole story causes a national news sensation. Years later Ben's mother dies from an apparent suicide – not long after the two girls (now women) have been released from prison and given new identities.

Ben is now a nationally-revered



crime reporter for a prominent London newspaper. His hard-charging editor Madeline Wilson wants him to write a story about his brother's death and its aftermath for an upcoming anniversary of the event. Initially he refuses, not wanting to relive those days of trauma. But then Ben hears about a woman murdered in the same way that his brother was. And the woman turns out to be Abigail Langdon, living under her assumed name.

Giving in to his editor's wishes, Ben agrees to write the story and begins to suspect that his mother may not have committed suicide and that the two girls may have only been accessories to his brother's murder.

There are a lot of characters to keep track of in this multilayered tale. A cast of characters at the front of the book would have been helpful. And they all have their secrets – perhaps as many as twelve – I lost count. To me the plot seemed somewhat contrived and unrealistic. However, the main character was likeable and intriguing, so I may give another in the series a try.

R. I. P.

Diamond Dagger winner C. J. Sansom has passed away at age 71 due to the effects of the incurable disease of multiple myeloma, with which he was diagnosed in 2012. At his death he was known as one of the premiere historical crime fiction writers of our time. The seven-book series features the hump-back lawyer Matthew Shardlake, who is often used as a detective and fixer by the nobility class of Henry VIII's Tudor England. Ironically, Sansom died just days before the TV adaptation of his series called *Shardlake* was released. It will be available in the U.S. on Disney+ as of May 1.

Ripster's Revivals

by Mike Ripley

Introduction

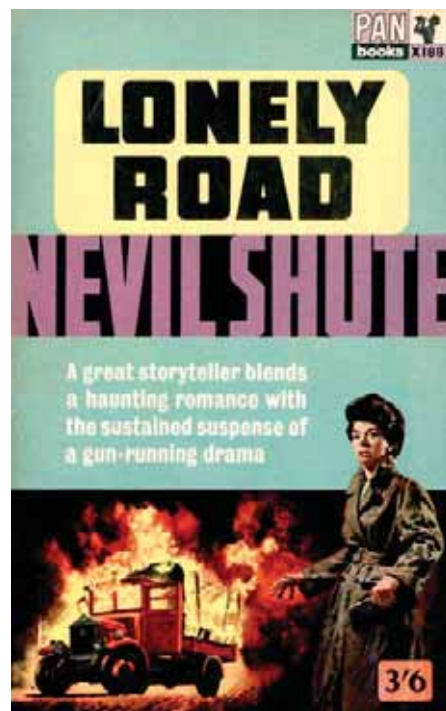
In this new column Mike Ripley expounds on the life and works of authors who some may consider “forgotten.” “I expect there to be surprises and disappointments along the way, but if I can bring one forgotten author to the attention of a new audience, or convince a single reader that good thrillers existed before mobile phones, then it will have been worthwhile.” – Mike Ripley

Nevil Shute



I have never seen Nevil Shute described as a crime writer and in the lists of a publisher's ‘other titles’ advertised in the last pages of old style paperbacks; his novels are invariably listed under General Fiction. Yet Shute himself was to admit that in his first three novels he was “obsessed with police action as a source of drama” involving, as they did,

drug smuggling (**MARAZAN**), Soviet spies (**SO DISDAINED**) and in **LONE- LY ROAD**, gun running into England to subvert the pending General Election.

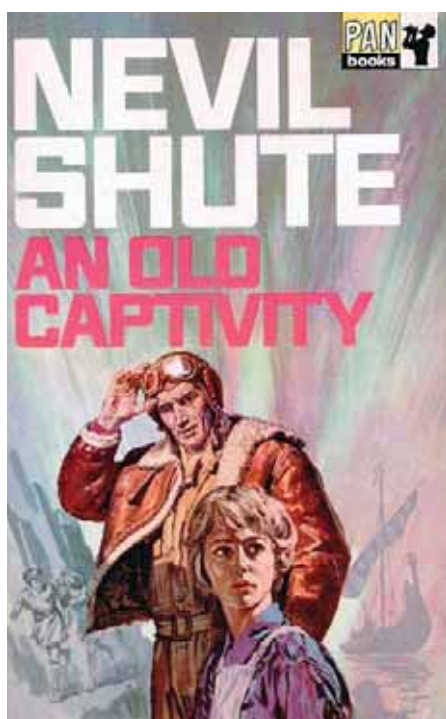


Nor is he usually classed as a thriller writer, though several of his books are outstanding thrillers and he was a dab-hand at creating thrilling scenes, especially whenever boats or aeroplanes were concerned. His work was sometimes labelled as ‘prophetic’, which it certainly was, and occasionally ‘fantastical’ or ‘dream-like’ or simply ‘romantic’ – all of which would be fair comment – but the one label most readers and reviewers seem to agree on was that he was a damned good story-teller.

Nevil Shute Norway (1899-1960) was born in Ealing, the son of Arthur Hamilton Norway, a senior civil ser-

vant in the General Post Office who, in 1916, was Secretary of the Post Office of Ireland in Dublin. In the Easter Rising the 16-year-old Nevil volunteered as a stretcher-bearer for the Red Cross during the fighting around the city centre. After failing to gain a commission in the Royal Flying Corps, he served in the British army at the tail-end of World War I and then studied engineering at Oxford, graduating in 1922. Using a shortened version of his name as a pseudonym, he began writing fiction whilst working as an aeronautical engineer for Vickers, publishing his first novel **MAZARAN** in 1926. His second and third novels were written as he worked on the design and construction of the R100 airship, on which he made a successful (return) journey to Canada. When the airship R101 (which Shute had nothing to do with) crashed in France on its maiden voyage to India, British involvement in airships ended and Shute turned his hand, and business brain, to designing aircraft, although the film version of **LONELY ROAD**, released in 1936, made him financially comfortable enough to give up the day job, though the thought probably never occurred to him. He honed his skills as a pilot and aeronautical engineer, establishing the company Airspeed Ltd which was to build the Airspeed Oxford, an aeroplane widely used by the RAF during World War II.

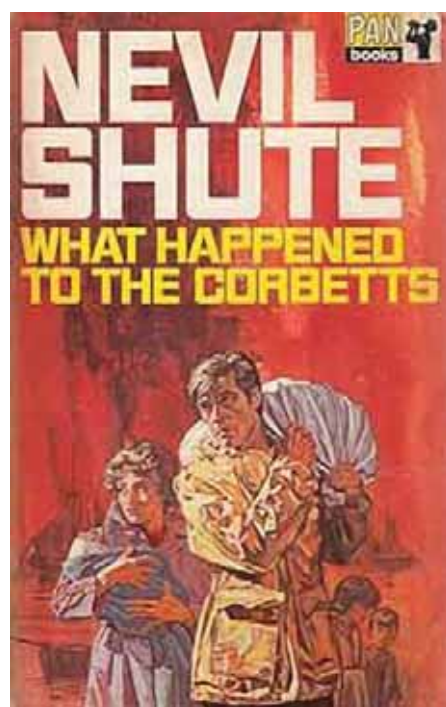
In the run up to the war, Shute produced three novels which certainly could not be classed as crime novels or thrillers and which reflected Shute's experiences in aviation, as a conservative (sometimes very conservative) businessman and his growing interest in a spiritual or mystical outlook. In **RUINED CITY** (1938), the head of a small London banking house escapes a disastrous marriage by going walkabout in the wild north of England (having been driven north by his chauffeur). He eventually ends up, wrongly identified as a vagrant, in hospital in the town of Sharples, a former ship-building town ruined by the Depression, where he is treated kindly and resolves to help the town recover by providing employment,



convinced that the only way out of poverty was the dignity of work ('without work men are utterly undone') – a theme which was to pervade many of his stories. His passion for flying combined with a mystical interpretation of history and folklore were at the heart of **AN OLD CAPTIVITY** (published in 1940), one of Shute's most fantastical and romantic novels. An archaeological expedition to Greenland by seaplane stirs up hallucinations and dreams of the early Viking inhabitants of 'Vinland' – the east coast of North America – a subject which was to fascinate Shute and which he makes fascinating by contrasting the gruelling hardships of those early explorers with those of the pioneer aviators following a thousand years later.

In between these two novels, Shute produced a remarkable piece of work which brought him the label of 'modern prophet' for the first, but not the last, time. **WHAT HAPPENED TO THE CORBETTS** was written in 1938 and published in April 1939, five months before the outbreak of WWII. In it, Shute predicted with terrifying accuracy the effects of aerial bombing on an English city, in this case Southampton. Shute's concern was that 'air raid precautions' such as they were had concentrated on

the use of a gas attack (memories of WWI being still fresh) and overlooked or underestimated the effects on a civilian population robbed overnight of shelter, water, electricity, telephones and fuel. The story follows the fortunes of the bombed-out Corbett family as they struggle through the chaos and their search for something as 'normal' as fresh milk for their children becomes a soul-destroying obsession. In an afterword to the book Shute wrote that whilst his story was fiction, he had set it in a real city in order to make his 'forecasts' as real as possible, although he fully expected to be in trouble with the Civil Defence and municipal authorities of Southampton.



When the war started for real, Shute was commissioned in the Royal Navy Volunteer Reserve – he was a keen sailor as well as a pilot – but this did not put a dent in his output of fiction, rather it provided the inspiration for stories published during hostilities and for ten years after.

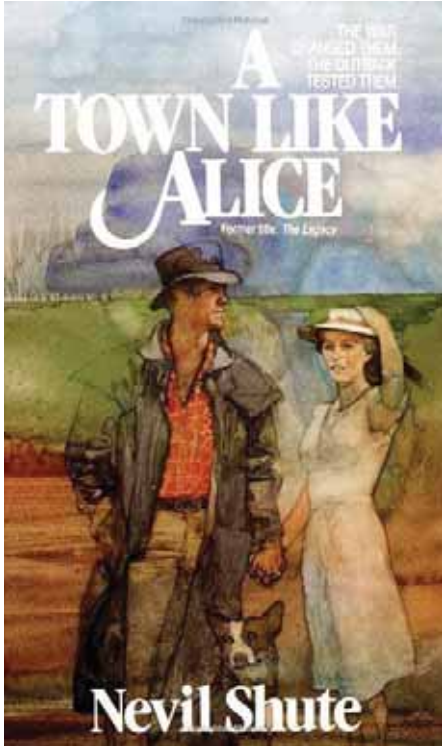
LANDFALL (1940) follows the plight of a young Coastal Command pilot who thinks he has attacked and sunk a German U-boat in the Channel, but was it in fact the British submarine which has gone missing in the same sea area?



PIED PIPER (1942), which many regard as his most moving novel, is the story of a retired English solicitor caught on holiday in France during the German invasion of 1940. Against all his better instincts he is persuaded to escort two English children on a perilous journey across a collapsing France. Never was an upper lip more stiff, nor, at the same time, more endearing. **PASTORAL** (1944) is nothing more nor less than what the title suggests, a gentle love story set on an RAF bomber station which is also a hymn to the English countryside and everything those brave chaps and chapesses were fighting for.

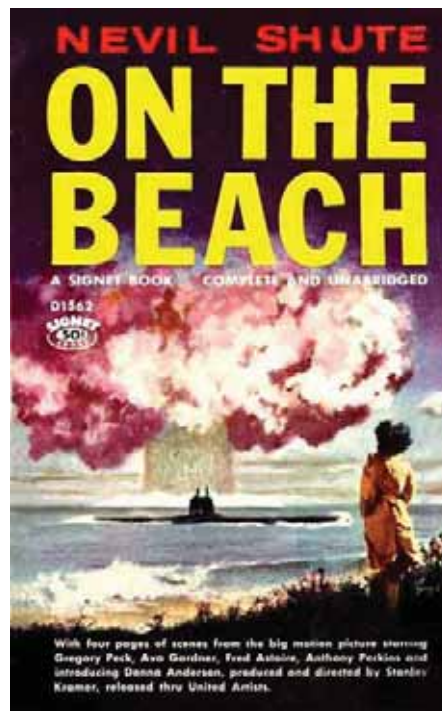
Probably Shute's best – certainly the most gripping – wartime thriller, **MOST SECRET** was said to have been written in 1941 but for 'reasons of nation security' not published until 1945, much to the author's annoyance. It almost certainly drew on Shute's wartime experience working in special weapons research for the Royal Navy and centres on a small-scale raid using a disguised fishing boat armed with a flame-thrower, to destroy German E-boats guarding the fishing fleet of a small port in Brittany. The story is packed with the back stories of the commandos involved, frightening

technical expertise (they develop a sort of primitive napalm) and a touch of mysticism as an old French priest insists that fire is the only weapon to combat the Nazis: "Before that power of fire all powers of heresy, idolatry, and witchcraft must recoil."



The aftermath of the war and its lingering effects on people affected by it were clearly on Shute's mind when he wrote **THE CHEQUER BOARD** (1947), possibly his most famous novel **A TOWN LIKE ALICE** (1950) and **REQUIEM FOR A WREN** (1955) by which time Shute had discovered, and fallen in love with, Australia. He had flown himself there and quickly decided to relocate his family. He died there in 1960.

Many of his post-war novels were to have Australian characters or settings, including his late masterpiece **ON THE BEACH** (1957) which envisaged a nuclear war in the northern hemisphere and Australia as the last, if temporary, sanctuary from the approaching radiation. Stanley Kramer's film of the book – starring Gregory Peck, Ava Gardner and (a non-dancing) Fred Astaire – was only one of Shute's novels to make the transition into successful movies, start-



ing with *Lonely Road* back in 1936. The 1942 film of *Pied Piper* was Oscar nominated for Best Picture but lost out to that other patriotic romance *Mrs Miniver*; Michael Denison was the dashing RAF pilot in the war story *Landfall* in 1947; and James Stewart starred in a Hollywood version of Shute's flying novel *No Highway* (in the sky) in 1951.

But the one film which wormed its way firmly into the post-war British psyche thanks to the involvement of

National Treasure Virginia McKenna and heart-throb Peter Finch, was *A Town Like Alice*. Released in 1956, it is often reprised on British television and was, arguably, partly responsible for the hugely popular BBC series *Tenko* in the 1980s.

Through all Shute's books there is the thread of men and women who are basically good, trying to do good things in awful situations created by crime, economic depression or war, and war, probably the most common theme, is never glorified. Indeed Shute highlights the dreadful mistakes made during wartime, particularly in **LANDFALL** and **REQUIEM FOR A WREN** (which puts a brilliant twist on a seemingly heroic act). He is also convincing when describing the loneliness and isolation of ordinary people involved in extraordinary events, often taking comfort by caring for pet dogs or, in one case, a rabbit.

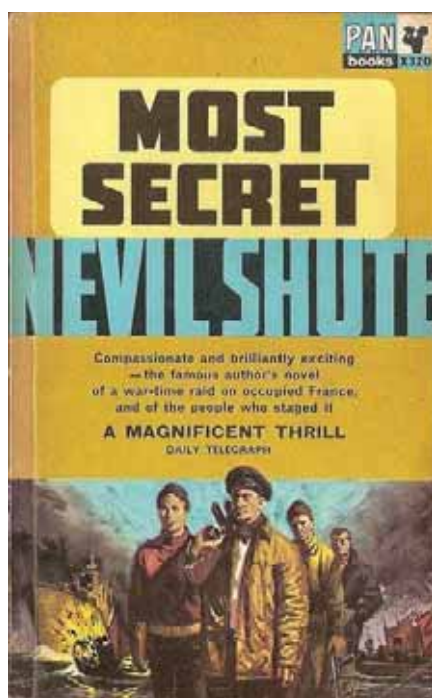
Yes, he could be sentimental and the relationships between his young male heroes (invariably officers) and Other Ranks females (often Wrens) were always very proper for the time he was writing. That would also be a consideration for a modern, politically-correct editor who would recoil at Shute's casual dismissal of several female characters as 'not attractive' or as 'popsies' not to



mention a character's motive being explained because 'he was a Jew' or a terrible attempt at a joke confusing semantic with semitic. Yet all Shute's novels were reissued in 2007 and I am not aware that any were redacted or 'revised' to meet modern sensibilities.

They are undoubtedly old fashioned – but so are the novels of John Buchan and Ian Fleming, who 'book-ended' Shute's writing career. We read them still, but probably not, or not so much, Nevil Shute, and yet we should – and for the same reason – they told bloody good stories and Shute was a particularly clever story teller.

He always had an interesting way of drawing the reader into a story. **LONE-
LY ROAD** is introduced by a London solicitor who vouches for it to be the work, published posthumously, of the late Malcolm Stevenson and contains vital clues to the narrator's war experiences which have shaped his psychology and explains his ruthless actions in the finale. So *Disdained* has a Preface claiming that the book is 'based upon my (the narrator's) written statement to the Foreign Secretary... [and] Reference to the official notes of my evidence before the Italian Secret Police...' as well as to statements and documents provided by two characters who turn out to have links with the British secret service.



AN OLD CAPTIVITY begins with a chance meeting during an interrupted train journey to Italy between a psychiatrist and pilot who admits to having strange dreams.

The story behind **PIED PIPER** is told by a man 'in my club' in 'did you hear about...?' style, whereas **REQUIEM FOR A WREN** is put together like a detective story, the hero tracking down witnesses and taking statements to explain the suicide of his dead brother's fiancée. **MOST SECRET** is told through the voice of a naval officer observing events, both military and very personal, dispassionately from afar, though never far enough to be unaffected by the heroic acts of defiance he has enabled.

The way Shute draws the reader into his stories is very clever. He rarely adopts the omniscient narrator approach, rather he has a character letting the reader into a secret – 'I heard this story the other day, you might find it interesting...' It invariably was.

A born engineer and successful businessman, his fiction reflected his background and whilst his advocacy of liberal capitalism might grate on a cynical modern readership, no-one can

doubt the authenticity of his dramatic flying sequences, particularly in his early books. With all things aeronautical (and small boats too), Shute was always in command of his material, which is hardly surprising as he was closely involved in all things aeronautical from the days of fragile biplanes, their pilots exposed to the elements, through giant airships and heavy bombers to jet passenger planes. In his novels he regularly uses the word 'machine' for aeroplane unless talking about a specific type, carrying this hangover from the early days of military aircraft right up to the nuclear age. But then, given his experience, he was allowed to.

Yet his obvious technical expertise is never allowed to swamp the main themes of his novels which are human rather than mechanical and reflect the tenderness and courage of his very human characters. Sometimes, however, his themes extended beyond normal human experience and dream sequences, often associated with pilots on long, lonely solo flights, push characters into the distant past or even the future, giving a fantastical flavour to his story.

Shute was said to have an interest in things paranormal and organised seances on Hayling Island in Hampshire during 1942, where he was working on secret weapons for the Royal Navy, including flame-throwers and ship-mounted rocket launchers. As there had been a trial under the 1735 Witchcraft Act that year following a séance where it was thought secret military information was being passed to enemy agents, sparking a minor media storm, it was likely that Shute – then a serving officer in a very sensitive research unit – would have been investigated by MI5 and warned off hosting any more dinner party seances.



Sneak Previews

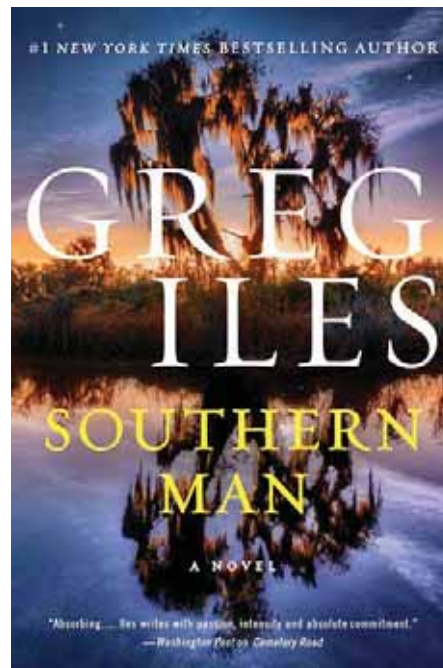
Upcoming Mysteries



May, 2024

- 2 Harini Nagendra, **A NEST OF VIPERS** (Kaveri Murthy)
- 7 Lorenzo Carcaterra, **NONNA MARIA AND THE CASE OF THE LOST TREASURE**
- 7 Marcie R. Rendon, **WHERE THEY LAST SAW HER**
- 7 Andromeda Romano-Lax, **THE DEEPEST LAKE**
- 7 Abir Mukherjee, **HUNTED**
- 7 Clive Cussler & Jack Du Brul, **THE HEIST** (Isaac Bell)
- 7 John Connolly, **THE INSTRUMENTS OF DARKNESS** (Charlie Parker)
- 7 Linwood Barclay, **I WILL RUIN YOU**
- 7 David Ignatius, **PHANTOM ORBIT**
- 14 Ashley Weaver, **LOCKED IN PURSUIT** (Ellie McDonnell)
- 14 Harlan Coben, **THINK TWICE** (Simon Bolitar)
- 14 Emma Rosenblum, **VERY BAD COMPANY**
- 14 Jack Carr, **RED SKY MOURNING** (Terminal List)
- 14 Cara Hunter, **HOPE TO DIE** (DI Fawley)
- 21 Cindy Dees, **DOUBLE TAP** (Helen Warwick)
- 21 Charlie Donlea, **LONG TIME GONE**
- 21 James Comey, **WESTPORT**
- 21 Misha Popp, **THE LAST TO PIE** (Pies Before Guys)
- 21 Carolyn Haines, **LIGHTS, CAMERA, BONES** (Sarah Booth Delaney)
- 21 Stuart Turton, **THE LAST MURDER AT THE END OF THE WORLD**
- 21 Michael Bennett, **RETURN TO BLOOD** (Hana Westerman)
- 21 Susan Elia MacNeal, **THE LAST HOPE** (Maggie Hope)

- 21 Ruth Ware, **ONE PERFECT COUPLE**
- 21 Daniel Weizmann, **CINNAMON GIRL** (Pacific Coast Hwy)
- 23 Camilla Lackberg, **THE CUCKOO** (Patrik Hestrom)
- 28 Alex Finlay, **IF SOMETHING HAPPENS TO ME**
- 28 John Grisham, **CAMINO GHOSTS** (Bruce Cable)
- 28 Maureen Marshall, **THE PARIS AFFAIR**
- 28 Matthew Richardson, **SCARLET PAPERS**
- 28 Craig Johnson, **FIRST FROST** (Longmire)
- 28 Greg Iles, **SOUTHERN MAN** (Penn Cage)
- 28 William Deverell, **THE LONG-SHOT TRIAL** (Arthur Beauchamp)
- 28 John Katzenbach, **JACK'S BOYS**



June, 2024

- 4 Jacqueline Winspear, **THE COMFORT OF GHOSTS** (Maisie Dobbs)
- 4 Henry Wise, **HOLY CITY**
- 4 Kat Ailes, **DEAD TIRED** (Expectant Detectives)
- 4 Candice Fox, **DEVIL'S KITCHEN**
- 4 Katharine Schellman, **THE LAST NOTE OF WARNING** (Nightingale)
- 4 Alejandro Nodarse, **BLOOD IN THE CUT**
- 4 Liv Constantine, **THE NEXT MRS. PARRISH**
- 4 Walter Mosley, **FAREWELL, AMETHYSTINE** (Easy Rawlins)
- 4 Alan Parks, **TO DIE IN JUNE** (Harry McCoy)
- 4 Randy Wayne White, **ONE DEADLY EYE** (Doc Ford)
- 4 Catriona McPherson, **DEEP BENEATH US**
- 4 David Mark, **WHEN THE BOUGH BREAKS** (Sal Delaney)
- 4 Robert Thorogood, **THE QUEEN OF POISONS** (Marlow Murder Club)
- 4 John Copenhaver, **HALL OF MIRRORS** (Nightingale & Watson)
- 4 Rex Stout, **HOW LIKE A GOD**
- 11 James Lee Burke, **CLETE** (Dave Robicheaux)
- 11 Peter Swanson, **A TALENT FOR MURDER** (Lily Kintner)
- 11 Rob Hart, **ASSASSINS ANONYMOUS**
- 11 Jane Casey, **A STRANGER IN THE FAMILY** (Maeve Kerrigan)
- 11 Cara Hunter, **HOPE TO DIE** (DI Fawley)
- 11 Rathel Howzell Hall, **WHAT FIRE BRINGS**
- 11 Callum McSorley, **SQUEAKY CLEAN**
- 18 Wanda M. Morris, **WHAT YOU LEAVE BEHIND**
- 18 Claudia Gray, **THE PERILS OF LADY CATHERINE DE BOURGH** (Darcy & Tilney)
- 18 Riley Sager, **MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT**
- 18 Meg Gardiner, **SHADOWHEART** (Unsub)
- 18 Liv Constantine, **THE NEXT MRS. PARRISH**
- 18 Lucy Foley, **THE MIDNIGHT FEAST**
- 18 Ram Murali, **DEATH IN THE AIR**

- 25 Andrew Cartmel, **ASHRAM ASSASSIN** (Paperback Sleuth)
 25 Allison Brennan, **YOU'LL NEVER FIND ME**
 25 Chris Whitaker, **ALL THE COLORS OF THE DARK**
 25 Paul Doiron, **PITCH DARK** (Mike Bowditch)
 25 Ace Atkins, **DON'T LET THE DEVIL RIDE**
 25 Flynn Berry, **TRUST HER** (Tessa Daly)
 25 Sherry Thomas, **A RUSE OF SHADOWS** (Lady Sherlock)
 25 Ben Pastor, **THE VENUS OF SALO** (Martin Bora)
 25 Shan Serafin, **THE PARIS VENDETTA**
 25 Stig Abell, **DEATH IN A LONELY PLACE** (Jake Jackson)
 25 Robert Rotstein, **THE OUT-OF-TOWN LAWYER**
 25 Mark Greaney, **SENTINEL** (Joshua Duffy)
 25 David Housewright, **MAN IN THE WATER** (McKenzie)

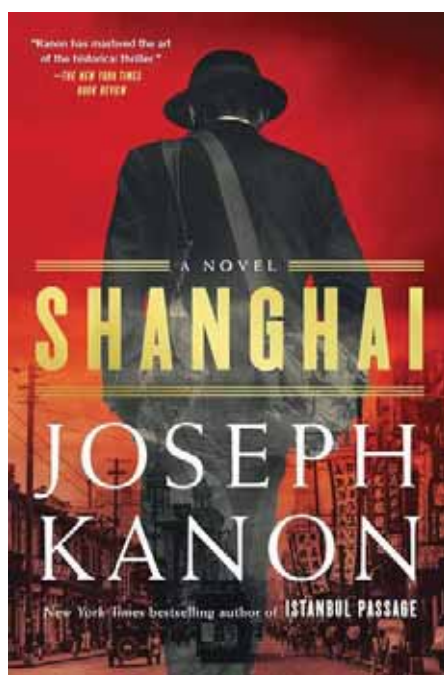
July, 2024

- 2 Michael Robotham, **STORM CHILD** (Cyrus Haven)
 2 David Rosenfelt, **DOG DAY AFTERNOON** (Andy Carpenter)
 2 Lisa Jewell, **BREAKING THE DARK**
 2 Eli Cranor, **BROILER**
 2 Jeri Westerson, **THE MUMMY OF MAYFAIR** (Irregular Detective)
 4 Chris Offutt, **THE RELUCTANT SHERIFF** (Mick Hardin)
 9 Linda Castillo, **THE BURNING** (Kate Burkholder)
 9 Donna Leon, **A REFINER'S FIRE** (Brunetti)
 9 Kate Quinn, **THE BRIAR CLUB**
 9 Daniel Silva, **A DEATH IN CORN WALL** (Gabriel Allon)
 11 Mailan Doquang, **BLOOD RUBIES**
 16 T. Jefferson Parker, **DESPERATION REEF**
 16 Sarah Pearse, **THE WILDS** (Elin Warner)
 16 Joseph Kanon, **SHANGHAI**
 16 Brian Freeman, **Robert Ludlum's THE BOURNE SHADOW**
 16 Joe R. Lansdale, **SUGAR ON THE**

- BONES** (Hap and Leonard)
 16 Bruce Borgos, **SHADES OF MERCY** (Porter Beck)
 16 Tom Mead, **CABARET MACABRE** (Joseph Spector)
 23 Mark Billingham, **THE WRONG HANDS** (Miller)
 23 Marc Cameron, **BAD RIVER** (Arliss Cutter)
 23 Lindsey Davis, **DEATH ON THE TIBER** (Flavia Albia)
 23 David Ellis, **THE BEST LIES**
 23 Peter James, **STOP THEM DEAD** (Roy Grace)
 23 Vivien Chien, **PEKING DUCK AND COVER** (Noodle Shope)
 30 Allison Montclair, **MURDER AT THE WHITE PALACE** (Sparks & Bainbridge)
 30 Catherine Steadman, **LOOK IN THE MIRROR**
 30 Shari Lapena, **WHAT HAVE YOU DONE?**
 30 Carol Goodman, **RETURN TO WYLDCLIFFE HEIGHTS**

August, 2024

- 1 Steve Cavanagh, **WITNESS 8** (Eddie Flynn) U.K. only
 6 Kathy Reichs, **FIRE AND BONES** (Temperance Brennan)
 6 Stuart Neville, **BLOOD LIKE MINE**
 6 Donna Andrews, **BETWEEN A**



- FLOCK AND A HARD PLACE** (Meg Langslow)
 6 Mindy Mejia, **A WORLD OF HURT**
 6 Nadine Matheson, **THE KILL LIST** (Inspector Anjelica Henley)
 6 Sarah Stewart Taylor, **AGONY HILL**
 6 Kwei Quartey, **THE WHITE WASHED TOMBS** (Emma Djan)
 6 Ian K. Smith, **EAGLE ROCK** (Ashe Cayne)
 6 James Rollins, **ARKANGEL** (Sigma Force)
 6 Rhys Bowen, **THE ROSE ARBOR**
 6 Scott Phillips, **THE DEVIL RAISES HIS OWN**
 6 Gordon McAlpine, **AFTER OZ**
 6 Will Dean, **THE CHAMBER**
 6 Brian Freeman, **BREAK EVERY RULE**
 13 Joanna Schaffhausen, **ALL THE WAY GONE** (Annalisa Vega)
 13 Mark Pryor, **A BLOOD RED MORNING** (Henri Lefort)
 13 Snowden Wright, **THE QUEEN CITY DETECTIVE AGENCY**
 13 Preston & Childs, **ANGEL OF VENGEANCE** (Pendergast)
 15 Chris Lloyd, **BANQUET OF BEGGARS** (Eddie Giral)
 20 William Kent Krueger, **SPIRIT CROSSING** (Cork O'Connor)
 20 Karin Slaughter, **THIS IS WHY WE LIED** (Will Trent)
 20 Martin Walker, **A GRAVE IN THE WOODS** (Bruno)
 20 P.J. Tracy, **CITY OF SECRETS** (Margaret Nolan)
 20 Michael Ledwidge, **NO SAFE PLACE** (Mike Gannon)
 20 Rachel Koller Croft, **WE LOVE THE NIGHTLIFE**
 20 Jesse Q. Sutanto, **YOU WILL NEVER BE ME**
 20 M. P. Woodward, **TOM CLANCY'S SHADOW STATE** (Jack Ryan, Jr.)
 20 Katharine Schellman, **A SCANDAL IN MAYFAIR** (Lily Adler)
 27 Steve Hamilton, **AN HONORABLE ASSASSIN** (Nick Mason)
 27 Ann Cleeves, **THE DARK WIVES** (Vera)
 27 Anna Downes, **RED RIVER ROAD**
 27 Nicholas Meyer, **SHERLOCK HOLMES AND THE TELEGRAM FROM HELL**
 27 Fiona Barton, **TALKING TO**

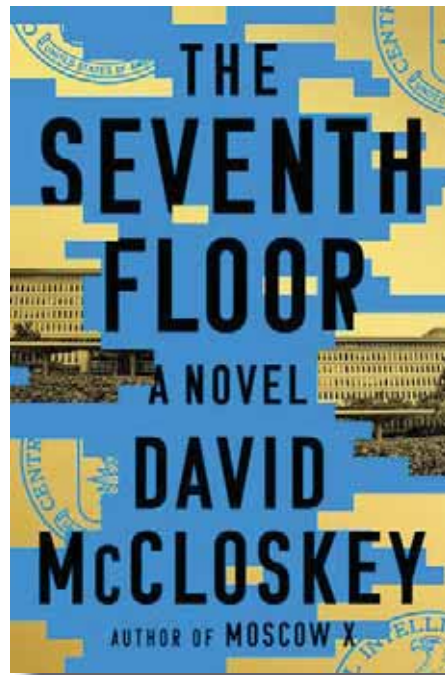
STRANGERS

September, 2024

- 3 Kate Atkinson, DEATH AT THE SIGN OF THE ROOK (Jackson Brodie)
- 3 Attica Locke, GUIDE ME HOME (Darren Mathews)
- 3 Jess Lourey, THE REAPING (Steinbeck & Reed)
- 3 Robert Harris, PRECIPICE
- 3 Lee Child, SAFE ENOUGH (short stories)
- 3 Kwei Quartey, THE WHITE WASHED TOMBS (Emma Djan)
- 3 Don Bentley, CAPTURE OR KILL (Mitch Rapp)
- 3 Leonie Swann, AGNES SHARP AND THE TRIP OF A LIFETIME
- 3 James R. Benn, THE PHANTOM PATROL (Billy Boyle)
- 3 Marcie R. Rendon, WHERE THEY LAST SAW HER
- 3 Alan Bradley, WHAT TIME THE SEXTON'S SPADE DOTH RUST (Flavia de Luce)
- 10 Ragnar Jonasson, DEATH AT THE SANATORIUM
- 10 J. A. Jance, DEN OF INIQUITY (J. P. Beaumont)
- 10 Janice Hallett, THE EXAMINER
- 12 Peter May, THE BLACK LOCH (Fin Macleod)
- 17 Taylor Moore, COLD TRAIL (Garrett Kohl)
- 17 Shelley Burr, MURDER TOWN
- 17 Julia Dahl, I DREAMED OF FALLING
- 17 Laura Dave, THE NIGHT WE LOST HIM
- 24 Lee Goldberg, ASHES NEVER LIE (Sharpe & Walker)
- 24 Michelle Chouinard, THE SERIAL KILLER GUIDE TO SAN FRANCISCO
- 24 Tasha Alexander, DEATH BY MISADVENTURE (Lady Emily)
- 24 Tammy Hoag, BAD LIAR
- 24 Val McDermid, QUEEN MACBETH

October, 2024

- 1 John Banville, THE DROWNED (Quirke)



- 1 David McCloskey, THE SEVENTH FLOOR
- 1 Julia Kelly, BETRAYAL AT BLACK THORN PARK (Evelyn Redfern)
- 1 Harry Hunsicker, THE LIFE AND DEATH OF ROSE DOUCETTE
- 1 Rose Carlyle, NO ONE WILL KNOW
- 1 Jean Hanff Korelitz, THE SEQUEL
- 8 J. A. Jance, DEN OF INIQUITY (Beaumont)
- 8 M. C. Beaton & R. W. Green, KILLING TIME (Agatha Raisin)
- 8 Paula Munier, NIGHT WOODS (Mercy Carr)
- 8 Danielle Trussori, THE PUZZLE BOX (Mike Brink)
- 8 Lawrence Robbins, THE PRESIDENT'S LAWYER
- 8 Maxie Dara, A GRIM REAPER'S GUIDE TO CATCHING A KILLER
- 8 Paula Hawkins, THE BLUE HOUR
- 15 Ian Rankin, MIDNIGHT AND BLUE (Rebus)
- 15 Bonnie MacBird, THE SERPENT UNDER (Sherlock Holmes)
- 15 Carolyn Haines, BLUE CHRISTMAS BONES (Delaney)
- 15 David Rosenfelt, THE MORE THE TERRIER (Andy Carpenter)
- 15 Donna Andrews, ROCKIN' AROUND THE CHICKADEE (Meg Langslow)
- 22 Lee & Andrew Child, IN TOO DEEP (Reacher)

- 22 Benjamin Stevenson, EVERYONE THIS CHRISTMAS HAS A SECRET (Ernest Cunningham)
- 29 Gareth Rubin, THE TURNGLASS

November, 2024

- 5 Michael Connelly, THE WAITING (Renee Ballard/Maddie Bosch/Harry Bosch)
- 5 Philip Margolin, AN INSIGNIFICANT CASE
- 5 Brad Parks, THE BOUNDARIES WE CROSS
- 5 Beatriz Williams, Lauren Willig, 5Karen White, THE AUTHOR'S GUIDE TO MURDER
- 5 Shelley Burr, MURDER TOWN
- 12 Steve Urszenyi, OUT IN THE COLD (Alex Martel)
- 12 Jesse DeRoy, SAFECRACKER
- 14 Peter Lovesey, AGAINST THE GRAIN (Peter Diamond)

December, 2024

- 3 Jess Armstrong, THE SECRET OF THREE FATES (Ruby Vaughn)
- 3 M. W. Craven, NOBODY'S HERO (Ben Koenig)
- 3 Paige Shelton, PERFECT STORM (Alaska Wild)
- 3 John Shannon, BOYSTOWN (Jack Liffey)
- 3 Alex Segura, ALTER EGO
- 17 Keigo Higashino, INVISIBLE HELIX (Galileo)

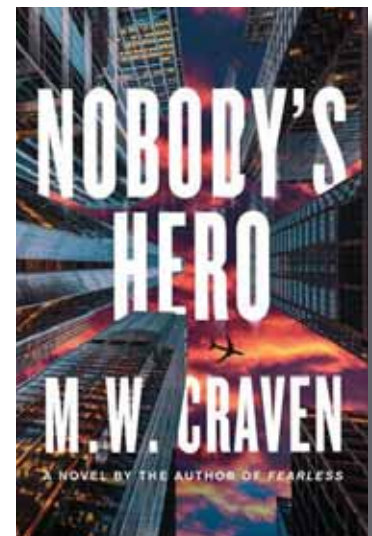


Table of Contents

The Talent of Steve Cavanagh, by Larry Gandle	2
Agatha Award Winners 2024	7
Barry Award Nominations 2024	8
Larry Gandle Critiques The Edgars	10
Edgar Award Winners 2024	13
Editor's Message	14
Associate Editor's Message	15
Introducing ... Cara Hunter by George Easter	16
Deadly Pleasures Best of 2024	18
Reviews	
Kevin Burton Smith	25
Meredith Anthony	29
Ted Hertel, Jr.	37
Cozy/Traditional Cafe'	42
George Easter	47
Robin Agnew History Mystery	54
Larry Gandle	57
Hank Wagner	60
Down Under Crime	62
ITW Thriller Award Nominations 2024	28
On George's Nightstand	59
Michael Bennett Interview by Craig Sisterson	68
DP Calendar	70
Bouchercon 55 -- 2024 Nashville	71
News and Reviews From the U.K.	
New Books	72
Reviews	73
Ripster's Revivals -- Nevil Shute	77
R.I.P.	76
Sneak Previews	81



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